Laos and Ethnic Minority Cultures: Promoting Heritage

Edited by **Yves Goudineau**

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Foreword

YVES GOUDINEAU

It is quite clear to every observer that Laos owes part of its cultural wealth to the unique diversity which resides in the bosom of the different populations that have settled on its present territory down the ages, bringing with them a mix of languages, beliefs and aesthetic traditions. Side by side with Lao culture as such, the very many 'ethnic minorities' that are an important part – close on half – of the population of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (numbering some 5 million persons living in an area comparable to that of the United Kingdom) have engendered a considerable number of local cultures that have retained their vigour despite the vagaries that the region has known throughout its history.

This wealth, however, is growing ever more fragile. So it was that, in order to study ways and means of protecting these cultural minorities, an 'International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Ethnic Minority Groups of the Lao People's Democratic Republic' was held in Vientiane from 7 to 12 October 1996. Coming very shortly after a similar meeting in Hanoi in March 1994, it was prepared by UNESCO at the request of the Lao Commission for UNESCO. The organizers had it in mind to assess the opportunity created by this multi-ethnicity, to make it better known and appreciated and, considering the very real danger of degradation or depreciation of these local

and sometimes very ancient heritages, to propose practical measures for their protection. The present work consists of the papers that were addressed to that conference by the participants.

The matter of safeguarding minority cultures calls for collective awareness, not only of a scientific nature, but of a moral and political nature too; hence the participation at the meeting of actors from a variety of fields. These included, on the one hand, researchers, specialists in certain ethnic groups, and experts in the protection of intangible cultural heritage from Laos and other Asian or Western countries who came to share their experience; on the other hand, Lao officials from the culture and education sectors and mass organizations (including the Lao Front for National Construction, the Women's Union, the Youth Movement) were present in order to trace their vision of the integration of cultural diversity into a national setting. The occasion resulted in a wide variety of approaches and opinions, some of them contradictory, all of which may be found here. Several speakers voiced the need for an inventory of the impressive cultural wealth that is scattered throughout the country (plurality of languages, diversity of oral literature and of musical or architectural forms, and variety of ritual practices) and for a presentation of the preliminary results of projects to this end. Others chose to examine the threat hanging over very many cultures, in particular those of groups whose numbers had fallen. Yet others made the point that the protection of cultural plurality should not put a brake on development policies nor hinder the government's priority aim of achieving a national culture belonging to all.

Thanks to the quality of the specialists at the meeting, the present work contains a good deal of data, some of them new, on certain aspects of the minority cultures being considered. The reader should, however, bear in mind that this is not a scientific synthesis of the different cultures of Laos, nor yet an inventory. The dearth of reliable data on very many ethnic groups, not to say entire regions – a fact that was regretted again and again throughout the proceedings – also contributes to the hazardous nature of this type of project. The ethnolinguistic data, for instance – albeit uncertain at the best of times – are still so incomplete in the case of Laos that it has so far proved impossible to draw up ethnonymic maps that meet with the approval of specialists. It should also be noted that, in addition to the diversity of standpoints referred to above, the levels of analysis in these papers vary considerably: they reflect different academic traditions and contrasting criteria of appraisal depending on whether they come from academics or international experts striving for objectivity, or from local administrators facing immediate difficulties. In line with the wishes of the Lao authorities, we have left the texts in their original contrastive state rather than make arbitrary cuts: hence the authors alone are responsible for the content of their papers. These contrasts mirror the terms of the dialogue and are a reminder that, on the one hand, it is both necessary and urgent to generate local skills in regard to research or management of minority heritage and that, on the other, the task ahead is not an easy one and calls for national effort and international co-operation. The Vientiane Declaration, given in annex to the present work, was adopted at the closure of the meeting and may be regarded as the charter of this collective scientific and political commitment to safeguarding and promoting the ethnic minority cultures of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR).

The more than thirty contributions to this work are grouped in four parts. An introductory section gives a picture of the minority cultures of the Lao PDR and the urgent tasks that have to be carried out in order to save them. Part Two deals with the various dimensions of the intangible cultural heritage: languages and literatures, forms of musical expression, architectural types and weaving skills. Several case-studies bear out the diversity of local cultures (Brou, Katu, Tai Dam and so forth) or indicate the importance of urban minorities. Part Three then presents the experience of neighbouring countries (Cambodia, China, Thailand and Viet Nam) as regards maintaining cultural diversity, while Part Four recalls a number of national initiatives or co-operation projects already carried out in the field in Laos. Several contributions report on similar research or projects that were under way or planned in Laos itself at the time of the 1996 meeting, some of which have come to an end in the meantime and have resulted in publications. Yet others were the direct result of the meeting – the first of its kind in the Lao PDR – which was intended to spark off the promotion of the cultural heritage of minorities and pave the way for new co-operation: such initiatives included the setting-up of an ethnographic data and photo bank which is intended in due course to take in all the ethnic minorities in the country.

It has been no easy task to group these texts which were drafted in several languages, and which took considerable time in rewriting and translation. We wish to thank all those who contributed to this burdensome task: firstly, Georges Condominas, an advocate of the Vientiane meeting

who kindly agreed to review the texts as a whole and give them his seal of approval, and, secondly, Houmphanh Rattanavong and all his colleagues at the Lao Institute for Cultural Research (IRC) for checking and finalizing the texts of the Lao researchers and officials. Nor should we forget the members of the UNESCO Secretariat who were involved in this project. The collection of photographs was put together by Marion Dejean and benefited from her excellent knowledge of the Lao provinces. A word of thanks too to all those, including Vat Daokham, David Oconnor and Nicolas Menut, whose patience in building bridges helped us to move things forward between English, French, Lao and Vietnamese. May the surge to protect and promote the cultural heritage of the ethnic minorities of Laos, as described in this book, remain not merely an expression of intent but take the form of action research out of respect for populations that carry 'other' cultures so that these may be better understood.

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DISTRIBUTION OF LAO POPULATION BY ETHNOLINGUISTIC GROUP (1995 CENSUS)

Overall population 1995: 4,574,848 (2002: 5,400,000)

The four major ethnolinguistic families (% of overall population)

Lao-Tai: 66.2%
Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer): 22.7%
Hmong-Yao: 7.4%
Tibeto-Burman: 2.9%

Principal ethnic groups (% of overall population)

Lao: 52.5%; Khmu': 11%; Phutai: 10.3%; Hmong: 6.9%;
Lü: 2.6%.
Katang: 2.1%; Makong: 2%; Akha: 1.4%.
All other groups are less than 1% of the population.

The 47 official ethnolinguistic groups in Laos (1995)

(Brackets: other names in use)
[Square brackets: principal sub-groups]

Lao-Tai (Lao-Thay/Lao-Thai)

Lao [Phouan, Kaleung, Nyo]
Lü (Lue)
Nyouan (Yuan, Nyouan, Nhuane, Meuang)
Phutai (Phoutai, Phou Thay) [Tai Dam or Black Tai; Tai Deng or Red Tai; Tai Khao or White Tai; Tai Neua; Phou Thai]
Sek (Saek, Xek, Thraek)
Yang

Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer)

Kmhmu' (Khmou', Khmu', Kammu, Khamu) [Ou; Rok; Kouen; Yuan]
Katang (Kataang, Katteng)
Makong (Mangkong)
Suei (Souei, Souay, Xouay, Kuay)
Laven (Loven, Jru)
Ta-Oi (Ta-Oy, Taoey, Ta'oy, Ta Hoi, Tau-oi)
Thin (T'in, Htin, Phray, Phay, Mal)
Talieng (Taliang, Ta'lieng)
Phong
Tri (Brou)
Lavè (Brao, Kravet)
Katu (Katou, Kantou, Kontou, Khatu)
Lamet
Alak (Hrlaak)
Oi (Oy, Ooy)
Pacoh (Pako, Paco') [KaDo, Kanai]
Nge (Ngeh, Ngé', Nghae, Ngkriang)
Cheng (Chieng)
Jeh (Ye, Die)
Sing Moun (Xing Moun, Ksing Moul, Xingmuul)
Nha Hoen (Nyaheun, Nya Hön)
Toum
Khmer (Khmè)
Samtao (Sam Tao, Thou Mok)
Bit
Ngouan
Sedang (Sadang, Sehdang)
Mone (Mouay, Mu'ong)
Lavi (Lawi)
Kri
(Mlabri, Yumbri)

Hmong-Yao (Miao-Yao)

Hmong (Miao)
Yao [Yao Mien; Yao Moun or Lanten]

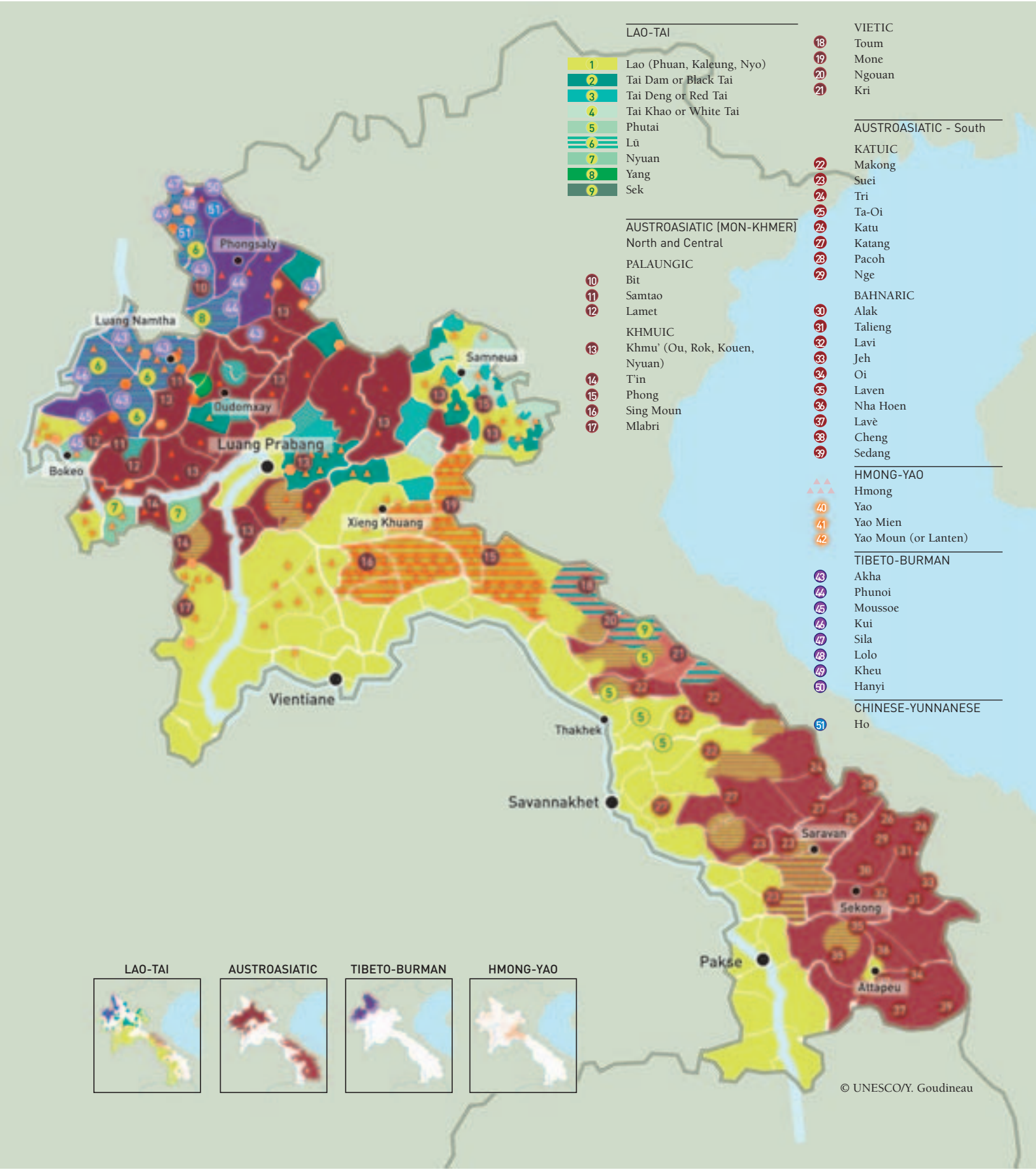
Tibeto-Burman

Akha (Ko, Kor, Iko, Ikaw)
Phunoi (Phounoi, Phounoy, Phu Noi, Phu Noy, Sinsali, Bisu, Seng Sali Ba)
Moussoe (Mouxoe, Mousseu, Musir, Lahou, Lahu, Laho)
Kuy (Kui, Koui, Kouy)
Sy La (Sila, Sida)
Lo Lo (Lô Lô, Yi) [Alou, Alu]
Kheu (Khoe)
Ha Nhy (Hani, Hanyi, Rayi, Hayi, Woni)

Chinese-Yunnanese

Ho (Hor)

Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Lao PDR



PART ONE
Introduction

Safeguarding and Promoting the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Lao Minority Groups

GEORGES CONDOMINAS

The safeguarding and restoration of vast and impressive monuments and sites such as the temples of Nubia or the giant stupa of Borobudur have unquestionably contributed to a great extent to UNESCO's renown. These gigantic undertakings, each of which constitutes a scientific and technical achievement, reflect a widespread concern for the protection of the wonderful works belonging to the visible heritage of humanity. Their scale and their beauty, and the often perceptible technical feats which created them, impress anyone who has an opportunity to contemplate them, either in reality, or simply via the many reproductions of them spread far and wide in the form of drawings, photographs and documentary films.

With the restoration of Vat Phu, Laos has benefited from UNESCO's action on behalf of cultural heritage. Furthermore, UNESCO announced in December 1995 the inclusion in the World Heritage List of the former Lao capital, Luang Prabang, with its indefinable charm. All the friends of Laos hope that, bearing in mind the excellent reputation of the local crafts and the close co-operation customary between the minority populations and the Lao Loum on this highly inspiring site, the Lao Government will be eager to go ahead with the safeguarding of the ancient monuments simultaneously with that of the intangible culture of present-day minority and majority populations. The success of such an undertaking will serve as an example for other projects around the world.

Of course a great many monuments have been destroyed as a result of war or natural disasters. Yet through succeeding civilizations people have tried to spare them and save those already damaged, a fact which holds true for other works of art. Be they imposing buildings, sculptures or paintings, the fact that they are visible and tangible makes them intellectually and aesthetically perceptible straight away and leaves a lasting impression. We notice them, they take on importance by their existence, and, for different reasons, many people, wish to preserve them.

The written word, which makes it possible to collect, reproduce and transmit oral works, is devoted in the beginning to sacred texts, especially myths, and also to epics, then to technical and legal formulas and secular literature. It soon calls for specialists in writing. Then, with a wider dissemination of knowledge, it spreads to a larger number of connoisseurs, while remaining restricted to the professional and leisured classes. As a rule, the lettered class ultimately provides the basis of the political and religious authority, for whom the written word is an effective means of domination, in the fields of legitimation and communication in particular. At the same time, in the intellectual field, after some practical experience, the possessors of the written word lay down rules and standards to structure the works deemed worthy to be transmitted to future generations. Music and the performing arts (dance, mime,

puppetry, theatre, etc.), while more or less consciously following set codes, were late in acquiring systems of notation for their transmission, and perpetuated their techniques and their themes throughout the centuries mainly by means of performances given in training schools, or even by occasional troupes.

The construction of imposing monuments, usually occurring in civilizations with a writing system, mobilizes a large work force. They are thus the prerogative of large social areas. Such civilizations acknowledge as works of art only those complying with a set of models and rules established as a veritable aesthetic and ethical canon. Their élites treat popular creations as negligible because those rules are ignored. Such popular creations emanate not only from underprivileged classes of the majority population, but also from regional populations made up more often than not of ethnic minorities.

The case of oral literature clearly illustrates the situation of these non-academic creations: it covers a set of works that are collective, anonymous and, what is more, dialectal, hence vulgar to the ears of the élite, who ignore them and consider them unworthy of being written down. However, should a writer of renown, Charles Perrault for instance, completely recast and publish a folk-tale under his name, this tiny sample of oral literature from his people then becomes an acceptable work for well-read and cultivated people, once it has been given a seal of respectability.

Whereas written literature has constantly been the subject of comments over the centuries, indeed millennia in the case of the oldest examples, the collection and writing down of oral literature only began with the nineteenth century. Although the collection movement gained momentum, in Western countries first, then throughout the world, interest in it remained for a long time confined to specialists, folklorists and ethnographers. Children's stories took on importance over the decades that followed, being at first considered as an entirely secondary field.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, ethnologists drew attention to the visual arts, mainly those of Africa and Oceania at first; but the revelation of their importance as evidence of human creativity was due to avant-garde artists such as Pablo Picasso or Georges Braque, who were sensitive to a variety of sources of inspiration. They were soon backed up by the surrealist poets, who had just discovered the wealth of invention of the poetry of peoples without any writing system. This series of studies and discoveries has clearly shown that these popular works – oral literature, visual arts, music and the performing arts – whether they flourished in developing countries or in minority ethnic groups in the industrialized states, undoubtedly belong to the common heritage of humanity.

However, as we have progressed with the study of the traditional and popular culture, referred to as intangible culture, we note that this culture is extremely fragile and that we run the risk of seeing a great part of it disappear very shortly. Indeed the situation is very different from that of classical culture and monuments: written works are saved by their multiplication and monuments by the solidity of their materials. Besides, the movement which supported their safeguarding very quickly received unanimous backing because of the fact that monuments attract the attention of ordinary people, whereas the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage does not appear so necessary to the public at large.

Intangible cultural heritage receives less attention because of its ephemeral character – it is not embodied in stone or set down in writing. It has no permanence, it exists only for a set time and dies with the last note or the last line - its existence is fleeting. Thus poetry, sung or more seldom recited, survives only in memory unless someone writes it down. Its existence is captured only during the time of singing or recitation. The same applies to music and the theatre. Even the materials used in visual folk arts often do not resist damage caused by the climate. Folk architecture is affected by the prestige of constructions borrowed from foreign civilizations. This can be seen not only among the majority population but also among the minority populations, which copy and borrow. Soundly constructed works of great beauty, reflecting the aesthetic sense and skill of earlier generations of a group, are disappearing as a result of passing fashions – or simply for considerations of economic profitability, which are almost always ill-founded. Instead buildings in modern materials are being built, which are just as uncomfortable as the old buildings and remarkably ugly – the more so at times owing to the ostentation of their promoters.

Knowledge of new fashions has spread with considerable speed and effect, even in what were, until recently, remote parts of the world. This is due to the development of communication facilities that were unknown, or in their infancy, less than a century ago: cinema, radio and television. These media propose models which are rarely in good taste but which are blindly imitated because they are put

forward by such powerful media to which access is so expensive.

In addition to the osmotic effects of these media systems, there is the influence of factors outside the groups concerned: national and international tourism, religious and political ideologies. Some, ignorant of the real treasures specific to these intangible cultures, wish to reshape them to make them more accessible to the leisure demands of other populations and so increase profits from them. Others, better informed, disregard these treasures and use their influence to facilitate the expansion of ideologies, and hence their power.

Owing to the extreme fragility of the intangible cultural heritage, due to its means of transmission (verbal – poetry, myths, stories, and/or bodily action – music and performing arts, including rituals), its works are threatened with destruction or with evolving towards a standardized international production. These transient arts are in danger of losing all originality. Yet we must not dismiss entirely the hybrid culture which is developing: it exists and constitutes a re-creation and, as such it too deserves to be observed and studied. Nevertheless, traditional culture must be given priority.

Heeding the warning sounded by researchers, UNESCO has organized several expert meetings to decide what should be done to safeguard the world's intangible cultural heritage, in other words, traditional and popular culture (or folklore) as defined in the recommendation adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its 25th session in November 1989: 'the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts'.

Following several expert meetings and the studies to which they gave rise, UNESCO organized a major International Consultation on New Perspectives for its Intangible Cultural Heritage programme in 1993. This led to a symposium in Hanoi in March 1994 on the Pilot Project proposed by Viet Nam, and subsequently to the meeting on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups of the Lao People's Democratic Republic which was held in Vientiane in 1996.

The intangible cultural heritage of the minority groups in national populations

The intangible cultural heritage has been taken into consideration in every country only very recently, in other words far behind the monumental and classical heritage. Since the subject here is the traditional culture of ethnic minorities, there is a further lag, this time in relation to the traditional culture of the national majority.

As minority groups are often behind technically and economically and have little political influence, the majority groups tend to consider them somewhat condescendingly as 'backward' or 'primitive'. Many states take administrative action to combat this tendency, which is born out of the position of strength occupied by the majority group. For historical reasons and through their demographic and economic weight, technological head-start and cohesion, the majority groups manage over centuries to impose their political authority on the States they dominate. The trend increasingly represents an extension of the town/country divide which has emerged within the majority group and which is found all over the world.

It is said that power leads to blindness. It could be added that, for peoples, it reinforces the ethnocentric tendency inherent in every group, however small (it is worth remembering that many of them call themselves by the word that means 'man/human' in their language). When a group becomes important, all the others are seen only as an indistinct mass - *oi barbaroi*, the barbarians, *kha*, people one has a duty to 'civilize'. The colonial era provides many examples. For most colonials, there was the mother country and the colonies, and in the colonies, the colonized mass.

Counteracting the negative aspects of such a collective attitude, there have been researchers and intellectuals taking an interest in the languages and cultures of the country, identifying and appreciating their diversity and endeavouring to safeguard this treasure. Of course, the power of attraction of the majority group, the abundance of its written works among other things, has made the study of its civilization a priority. One has only to think of Charles Archaimbault's remarkable work on the different aspects of the Lao-speaking populations.

However, other ethnic groups, far less important in terms of numbers and works transmitted in writing, and others still, in a restricted social area and without a writing system, eventually attracted attention, revealing unknown

fields and testifying to the coexistence of cultures that were varied and rich in their diversity. Considerable wealth was discovered in the ephemeral, material in which little regard is paid to the following of norms – language and 'transient' arts such as music, oral literature, mythology and rituals.

How is the problem perceived nowadays in modern, independent states? It is no longer solely a scientific question of general interest, but more selfishly concerns the duty to safeguard and pass on to future generations the riches of the nation's cultural heritage. What is more, language and the kind of arts mentioned above, in addition to their intrinsic value, make possible a more detailed study and closer understanding of the linguistic and creative development of the majority, since the majority, in the same way as all other ethnic groups, draws lessons about itself from information derived from the study of others. Lastly, studies carried out without preconceptions, without ethnocentric blinkers and covering all the groups making up the nation without exception, will, if widely disseminated, enable them to know and understand each other better and in turn ensure stronger national cohesion. It is the basic precept 'Know thyself', considered by the Greek philosopher to be essential for the harmonious development of the individual, extended to the nation as a whole.

Laos, a multi-ethnic State of South-East Asia

Laos occupies a special place in the northern part of South-East Asia (including southern China) which is remarkable for its ethno-linguistic wealth. Before the outbreak of the war in eastern Indo-China, there was a relative demographic balance in the country between the ethnic Lao, or Lao Loum, and the minorities as a group. On the other hand, the majority ethnic group was to be found in far greater numbers in the neighbouring state than in Laos itself, which facilitated movements of population between the two banks of the Mekong. The war hit the habitat of the minority groups particularly hard.

Apart from the Austronesian family, all the language families of South-East Asia are to be found in Laos: Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Miao-Yao, and of course Tai-Kadai (very close linguistically to the majority ethnic group). The same variety is to be found in agricultural and culinary techniques, with rice as the staple crop; there is also a wealth of craft techniques, with weaving and basketry having deservedly made the reputation of both the majority group and the ethnic minorities. Lastly, types of family and social organization are also highly diverse.

Objectives

It is only for the sake of clarity that I have differentiated the various objectives. In fact, they are interconnected and held together by a fourfold link: safeguarding, protection, respect and promotion.

The first objective is to alert the entire nation to the importance of the traditional cultures of the minority groups, which constitute one of the treasures of the national heritage, and even a treasure for humanity as a whole. This being the case, they deserve respect and not derision, and there is an urgent duty and a need to safeguard them. Indeed, over a few decades we have seen a large number of intangible cultures deteriorate, either as a result of international tourism, which is developing at breakneck speed and offering an increasingly numerous clientele cheap imitations of local craftwork and exotic travesties of local rites, or on the pretext of a so-called progressive ideology. It is claimed that 'backward' cultures are being 'civilized' when works are presented in watered-down versions easily assimilated by persons unfamiliar with the culture in question.

Secondly, a traditional and popular culture must be considered at the level of the group which created it and through which it continues to live. The culture in its turn keeps the group alive. It is not a question of creating reserves, but of preventing ethnocide and its traumas, of restoring the group's pride in its identity. Otherwise its members, through victimization and despoilment, will lose their self-respect and inevitably become a group of second-rate citizens. Proud of their traditional culture, they will be proud of being Lao.

Language, as the vehicle for the intangible culture, is the first element to be safeguarded. This does not in any way run counter to national unity, for a multiplicity of languages is no obstacle to unity. Switzerland, for instance, with its four national languages, has over the centuries managed to thwart the appetites of its potential conquerors. On the other hand, unity of language did not preclude the terrible internal conflicts which have ravaged the former Yugoslavia. It is not enough to publish the texts of the various ethnic groups only in translation into Lao; they must be issued first in their original language. Translation into the language of the national majority is a subsidiary task of making the texts available to others - very useful no doubt, but not urgent for the safeguarding of this endangered heritage.

Finally, respect for people's dignity must go hand in hand with respect for their works. All too often the works of minorities are held to be mere curiosities, of little importance, to be mutilated at will. This is a reprehensible and dangerous attitude, since if, through lack of respect, their presentation to the nation as a whole is skewed, the nation is likely to get a very false idea of the culture in question. The works of minority groups should not, for instance, be systematically transformed into folklore performances for tourists, or corrected according to the changing standards of the majority group, or those of the prevailing ideology – also subject to considerable fluctuation. Respect for works means collecting them correctly in their varying forms, not only to safeguard them in their entirety (including if possible local variations and the stages of their evolution), but also as a reservoir and source of inspiration for national artists. Supplying only adaptations of a few artists would mean depriving present and future generations of artists of authentic sources (generally far richer than approximate interpretations).

Means of promotion

In order to ensure that such a project is carried out under the best conditions, it is necessary first of all to make a thorough assessment of the present situation. With the two volumes of the *Bibliographie du Laos*, by Pierre-Bernard Lafont, we have the basic work for such an undertaking. It is necessary to continue to list books and articles dealing with the different ethnic groups of Laos and to aim at being equally exhaustive, and include of course books and articles written not only in Lao but also in other languages. A judicious selection of the most important works would be the first stage in this preparatory work, which will be complemented by a discography and a filmography of the same kind, and should provide the basis for a future research library. It is beyond question that such an undertaking can be carried out only by researchers (including ethnologists, linguists and ecologists) and experienced documentalists, in close co-operation with the Lao Institute of Research on lao Culture.

Means of promotion. It is up to these two institutions to give a generous place to the intangible culture of the country's various minority groups in order to make the nation as a whole aware of its wealth and its belonging to the common cultural heritage. They will also have the difficult task of ridding the general public of the tendentious or even negative stereotypes current with reference to minority groups.

Giving a considerable place to the country's cultural diversity in school curricula from primary school upwards will enable pupils to learn about the customs of their fellow citizens of different ethnic origin and thus understand them better. It will also enable them to derive more benefit from newspaper articles and radio and television programmes on the subject, addressed in the main to adults. In other words, close co-operation seems necessary between the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Ministry of Education, in association with researchers, if the project is to succeed. This broad coverage should start pending the successful carrying out of the Pilot Project, so that the importance of the latter will be grasped. Subsequent dissemination of the best results obtained by it will supplement the documentation used by the media and schools.

Peoples belonging to the minority groups. With the no doubt necessary development of school attendance, children today spend much of their time away from their homes, where their elders memorize and effortlessly transmit traditional works and skills. It is suggested that if minority peoples are to be invigorated, or their intangible culture merely kept up, they, and in particular the languages that convey their cultures, should be given their proper place in their schools and in the media available there. This would mean that when immigrants come from the lowlands, their fellow citizens, the Lao Loum, would be able to understand better and appreciate the intangible culture of their neighbours.

Museums and festivals. One can only encourage the efforts of a minority group to set up a museum in an attempt to assemble the most elaborate works of its traditional crafts, which, under the impact of modernization and the increasing introduction of manufactured products, are tending to decline or disappear. As well as supplying information, the museum would by its very existence become a centre of attraction, which could be strengthened by the creation of annual or occasional festivals. In this way cultural workers sent into remote areas would break the monotony of provincial life by devoting themselves to the safeguarding of traditional cultures. A course at the training centre set up for the Pilot Project would help them to appreciate these forms of expression, previously incomprehensible to them.

Legal and administrative protection. It would be completely illusory to think that a programme like this can be introduced and run smoothly without the effective legal

and administrative protection of the majority groups. This alone, by reassuring the bearers of a culture about their rights and shielding them from victimization arising from incomprehension, will enable them to keep up and invigorate their intangible culture. If local authorities, unfamiliar with their customs, are prevented from interfering with their forms of expression or innovations, the minority groups will be enabled to feel that they are fully integrated members of the national community.

The carrying out and circulation of careful studies of customary law and their circulation should inspire the harmonious regulation of protection of this kind and strengthen cohesion within the state. Here too cultural workers will have an important and stimulating role to play. Protection of the works presupposes that of the people who transmit the intangible culture which gives them their identity. Training in the observation and safeguarding of the intangible cultures of minority groups will also be necessary.

Suggestions for a Pilot Project. The Project could be based on a centre for courses or training designed in principle for people interested in the culture or cultures among which they have lived for a certain time owing to their profession (such as schoolteachers, educators, priests or monks of various religions, doctors, nurses and engineers) or their leisure activities. However, another category of people will have to follow these training courses, not on a voluntary basis, but as a part of their duties – the cultural workers. This would prepare them well for the functions they will have to assume in the regions where minority groups live, not to mention the enormous benefit they would derive from it for their work in their own culture.

When the first courses are under way we plan to develop an accompanying handbook which should be able to serve as a reference resource for field surveys for non-academic staff enrolled in the training centres attached or not to a pilot project. Suggestions for further reading will be supplied for those who would like to learn more about anthropology and folklore. Like the course given at the centre, the handbook will have to be practical (and thus illustrated) and clearly and simply worded. It will include a glossary explaining without superfluous jargon the technical terms that have to be used.

The main features of the course (and, as we have just seen, the handbook) are to be both practical and thorough. It is therefore necessary to entrust it to experienced researchers, especially field-workers, be they nationals or foreigners. They alone have the training and experience to teach in a knowledgeable and relevant way the methods of observation and recording, and also of collecting material in its ethno-sociological context.

A special effort must be made in regard to the interviewer's equipment, and its full use, from the transcript board and measuring instruments to video equipment. Recourse to professionals in the various techniques seems to be essential. Given the importance of the language of the group being studied and the obligation to record in it not only the names of objects and living things or actions (in particular, rituals), but also concepts and texts of oral literature, instruction will be provided in the recording of languages, the principles of the International Phonetic Association being adapted to the local situation. Whereas the Lao writing system is perfectly suited to the notation of the Lao language, it cannot be wholly satisfactory for that of many other languages in the region. A botanist with practical experience of ethnobotany will also be useful to show how to make a herbarium to identify the various plants used for food, medicines and crafts.

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A Multi-Ethnic Culture

HOUMPHANH RATTANAVONG

Situated in the centre of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, at the heart of the vast, rich Mekong Basin, Laos occupies an exceptional position which is matched by its ethnic composition and cultural diversity. Throughout history wars and conquests, population pressure and discoveries have been at the root of social changes in South-East Asia. Mass movements of population, emigration and immigration of various peoples and ethnic groups, have been a recurrent phenomenon. In the vast region of Asia the Mekong Bbasin has always been a hospitable land, offering asylum to emigrants and nomads fleeing their native countries.

Our region was gradually settled by Austro-Asiatic populations (sometimes referred to as proto-Indo-Chinese or Mon-Khmer), and also by Ai Lao or Lao Tai, followed a little later by Sino-Tibetans and Hmong-Yao. These groups formed multi-ethnic communities, constituting numerous *muang* (principalities) and states which eventually united to form Lan Xang, or the Kingdom of Laos. Khun Chuang was without doubt the first hero to unite the various ethnic groups living in the pre-Lan Xang Kkingdom at the end of the eleventh century, a kingdom in which Muang Swa was an important centre. The name of Khun Chuang is still respected among certain Austro-Asiatic groups and is associated with the image of a divine and mythical king.

At the beginning of the twelfth century Khun Lo, of the Khun Bolom Dynasty in Muang Theng,[1] captured Muang Swa (Luang Prabang), thus putting an end to the Khun Chuang Dynasty. At the time, Muang Swa was ruled by Khun Kanhang, great-grandson of Khun Chuang. When he founded the Kingdom of Lan Xang, Khun Lo continued to apply the unifying egalitarian policy in regard to ethnic groups which had been introduced by his father, Khun Bolom: 'We came out of one and the same gourd. Those with white skins came out through the hole made with a chisel; those with brown skins through the one made with a red hot iron.'[2]

King Fa Ngum, a great warrior who reunified the Kingdom of Lan Xang in the fourteenth century, did justice to all his subjects when he proclaimed at his coronation in Phay Nam (Vientiane), before his army and his people, who came along all the rivers of the land:

In this country there are rich people and poor people; all must accept their situation so that we may never be obliged to punish by death. You are to observe the customs and keep the law in Lan Xang. See that the masters are good to the slaves, that they do not strike them, but forgive them their misdeeds. If chiefs or their children behave or judge wrongly, the chief who arrests them shall have their offences examined by other judges, so that there may be no suspicion of injustice. Offenders shall be punished

according to their offences and released from prison on the day set by the judge so that they can return to their families and endeavour to resume their lives.

King Fa Ngum also said that the people of the kingdom should never be reduced to slavery, that offences should not be dealt with severely, and that murderers must not be killed, because one death was enough and committing a second murder was an offence.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the great kings of Lan Xang continued to apply the same policy of national unity, while preserving the cultural diversity of the people.

The people of Lan Xang took advantage of the natural resources of their country to declare war and refuse obedience. With the help of some other peoples living in the mountains whom they persuaded to defend their interests, they kept that freedom and independence which they now enjoy.[3]

This brief history demonstrates that the multi-ethnic unity of the Lao people has always been a tradition and an inalienable right. It is an essential part of Lao culture which makes possible the existence and development of the country's various populations.

The Lao Government and its multi-ethnic policy

As the above brief historical review shows, the freedom and very existence of our people has been maintained thanks to unity. This is true in spite of the terrible disasters experienced by the Lao people during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a result of internal disputes and divisions. The values of union and solidarity seem more necessary than ever in our country today.

However, it should be noted that the Lao PDR was founded under tragic circumstances. Two-thirds of its territory had been devastated by a long war during which millions of tons of bombs rained down on it, wiping out towns, villages and cultural institutions, and killing countless innocent people from various ethnic groups. This small republic had scarcely been founded when it was faced with a new regional and international situation, which I would term 'cultural decline' or 'social deculturation'. The working people, the masses, were intoxicated by vulgar commercial programmes broadcast by sophisticated electronic communications media. They became so addicted to these consumer products that they gradually became a captive audience at the mercy of the big consortiums.

The main political lines of the Lao PDR concerning its multi-ethnic population are to be found in the country's Constitution. The Declaration of the Congress of People's Deputies on 2 December 1975, on the occasion of the founding of the Lao PDR, states:

The construction of our country, to set it on the road to peace, independence, democracy, unity, prosperity and social progress, is the grandiose and noble task of our pluri-ethnic people as a whole. Our pluri-ethnic people will have to intensify their patriotism, become more closely knit, eradicate all prejudice and discrimination inherited from the former society, be mutually supportive and help the disabled, so that all efforts may be devoted to the construction of our beloved country.

It is noteworthy that the term 'pluri-ethnic' is always associated with Lao society and is never used disparagingly. The very first chapter of the Constitution of the Lao PDR states:

The Lao PDR is a sovereign independent country enjoying its territorial integrity, comprising territorial land, waters and airspace. It is a unitary and indivisible country… The Lao PDR is a people's democracy. All power shall belong to the people and be used by the people in the interests of the pluri-ethnic populations of all social strata, of which the workers, the peasants and the intellectuals form the pivot.

The text goes on to say:

The State shall apply a policy of solidarity and equality in regard to different ethnic groups. All ethnic groups shall have the right to preserve and develop their fine customs, traditions and cultures as well as those of the nation. All forms of division or discrimination in regard to ethnic groups shall be prohibited. The State shall take all necessary steps continually to improve and raise the economic and social levels of all the ethnic groups.

The Constitution later refers to culture again:

The State shall develop the national culture and its traditions, while adopting a progressive and universal cultural policy. The State shall encourage activities in the fields of culture, the arts, literature and information, including in the mountain regions. The State shall protect the monuments, historic objects and sites venerated by the nation.

Finally, Chapter 3 of the Constitution stipulates that: 'All Lao citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of sex, social status, educational level, beliefs or ethnic origin.'

In 1978, three years after the founding of the Lao PDR, a general conference on culture was held. A resolution adopted at that conference contained the following passage:

> Our people has its own cultural traditions and ancestral civilization. It is made up of various ethnic groups, each of which speaks its own language, has its own ways and customs, and also has its own art works and literature, thus adding to the wealth and diversity of our nation's cultural traditions. Our culture is therefore that of the workers of the different ethnic groups.

In 1992 the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party adopted a resolution concerning the tasks to be carried out in regard to the ethnic groups in the new period of development of the country. One of these tasks was 'to promote all traditional forms of art and culture of each ethnic group in order to restore its spiritual life and contribute to the enrichment of our national culture'. This policy was upheld in a resolution adopted in October 1994.

> Our Lao nation is a nation possessed of and founded on an ancient civilization, a fine ancestral culture. It is made up of a number of ethnic groups with their own ways and customs, habits and traditions, which have become, on the one hand, a cultural identity peculiar to each ethnic group, and, on the other, a constituent of the national culture, an invaluable treasure and a spiritual and moral foundation of our society. These ethnic groups are an important element guaranteeing the very existence of our nation.

Yet another resolution reflects the position of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party regarding the importance of culture:

> Our Party recognizes that culture is the basis of the nation's existence, for it unites the people and binds them together… Our Party recognizes culture as the driving force in the development of society and also as a source of pride that reassures and encourages the people… It also recognizes that culture is at the same time the goal towards which the construction of society is directed. All members of society must therefore assume responsibility for culture and regard themselves in honour bound to safeguard, promote and develop it in parallel with economic development.

This extremely just policy not only corresponded with the aspirations and vital interests of the whole of our people; it also reflects the long and arduous struggle for national independence and the construction of the country. Although the implementation of this policy has met with some preliminary successes, much remains to be done. Unfortunately, practical reality obliges us to advance only slowly in this direction.

Practical measures and activities

Main institutions created

In 1983 an Institute of Research on Literature and the Arts, which later became the present Institute of Research on Lao Culture (IRC), was set up under the Ministry of Information and Culture. This institute, unique in Laos, plays a leading role in the preservation and promotion of the national multi-ethnic culture. Action to safeguard and promote Lao multi-ethnic culture was adopted at the outset, starting with popular skills and knowledge, oral traditions, everyday practices and so forth. The vulnerability of these traditions has been well stressed – by Professor Condominas in particular – at this International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in the Lao PDR.

Since these cultures and their heritages tend to die out with time, or as a result of wilful or unwitting human destruction, a number of projects were approved. An ethnographic museum has been established in the province of Phongsali with the help of UNESCO. This museum now has a very fine collection of the traditional costumes worn by more than twenty ethnic subgroups living in the far north of Laos. An audiovisual documentation centre has been set up at the IRC with the assistance of the Japanese Government. This centre has so far collected more than 4,000 photographs, 400 hours of video film and 350 hours of music and oral traditions. A laboratory of traditional and antique fabrics is also installed at the IRC with the participation of the Japanese firm JVC. It stores more than 100 types of Mi pattern,[4] as well as hundreds of other patterns from all over the country. At the Lao Women's Federation there is now a room for the conservation of fabrics, also coming from different parts of the country and different weaving units.

Conferences

The first national conference was held for the preservation of the Bailan and Chia Sa manuscripts, with the participation of the head bonzes from all the provinces of the country, as well as the heads of the provincial cultural services (IRC and

Toyota Foundation, 1987). This conference was the starting-point of all the projects for manuscript research, inventorying and preservation at present under way in Laos.

The first national meeting for the preservation and promotion of traditional music and musical instruments took place at the IRC in 1987. The meeting, in which the heads of the cultural services of all the provinces participated, resolved to make a serious effort at preservation and to encourage the population to keep up and develop its musical traditions.

The national conference for the preservation and promotion of Lao weaving traditions and antique fabrics, followed by a large exhibition of antique and restored fabrics (the first in Laos), with the participation of Lao and foreign specialists (IRC and JVC), was held in 1990. This conference gave great impetus to the preservation, and above all the promotion, of Lao weaving traditions, thus creating more employment openings for women, and even for men in a number of regions.

The first international conference on 'Etudes Lao', organized jointly by the IRC and the URA 1075 of the CNRS (French organization for scientific research) took place in 1995, making possible a recapitulation of research on Laos worldwide.

The present International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in the Lao PDR (Ministry of Information and Culture, and UNESCO) is intended for the preparation of the Vientiane Declaration and recommendations advocating urgent and indispensable measures to safeguard and promote the intangible cultural heritage of the Lao ethnic minorities.

Exhibitions

Two major exhibitions on weaving traditions, the first in Laos, were organized by the IRC, with the help of JVC, in Vientiane in 1991 and 1992. A permanent exhibition of antique and modern fabrics was set up by the Lao Women's Federation in 1994 following the conference on weaving traditions and the exhibitions organized by the IRC.

Festivals

Major national festivals of traditional songs and music were held in Vientiane in 1984, 1986 and 1988. The best performers in the folk arts from the various ethnic groups took part. Art festivals at regional level have been held regularly at regional level in different provinces, with the best artists from all the ethnic groups taking part. The traditional festivals and ceremonies of the ethnic groups are always encouraged. They are organized several times a year by the people themselves.

Research, publications and periodicals

Four books of tales and legends from different ethnic groups have been published by the IRC, and several more by other bodies. At present, some 300 titles consisting of tales and legends are awaiting publication. The IRC issues a biannual journal, Lan Xang Heritage, containing articles in Lao, French and English on all aspects of research on Laos, including the human sciences, history, ethnography, literature, ethno-musicology, the arts, and traditions and beliefs.

Vannasia, a review on art and culture issued by the Ministry of Information and Culture, along with other reviews, regularly publishes tales and legends and articles on the cultural works of the ethnic minorities. Two Kmhmu'-Lao dictionaries and a Katu-Lao dictionary have been published by the IRC with the help of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and foreign researchers. A book on the traditional way of life of the Kmhmu', another on the traditional way of life of the Katu, and a third on the oral literature of the Katu have been published with the help of Swiss and Australian researchers.

A catalogue of traditional fabrics, a book on the home-building rites of the Lu, another on the traditions of the Lolo, a collection of children's swing songs and a book on the Luang Prabang courting song have also been published by the IRC.

A catalogue of old photographs and an illustrated book on the Laos of old have been published by the IRC with the participation of the French team of the Association Culturelle des Routes de la Soie (ACRS).

Projects under way

An ethno-musical encyclopaedia is currently being compiled. Two IRC researchers are being trained in Viet Nam and Japan to carry out this project. A number of musical traditions have already been collected. The compiling of an anthology of tales and legends is also under way: a collection of Hmong tales and legends is at present being edited by a Japanese researcher.

Language studies and anthropological surveys are being carried out, in collaboration with Thai and French

researchers, on Austro-Asiatic groups in the Se Kong Valley. Other studies are under way with Japanese researchers on a few Tibeto-Burman subgroups and a small number of Lao-Tai dialects. A projected study on the *Mlabri* ('the leaves fall') is in preparation and will be launched soon, while studies on the Lamet, the Katu (Austro-Asiatic) and the Hmong are being prepared with researchers from Münster University (Germany). A data collection and inventorying project is being implemented by the IRC data bank team and French specialists.

Context of the preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of the ethnic minorities

As mentioned earlier, when the Lao people emerged from the war they found themselves in a new regional and international context, and were faced with the invasion of imported consumer goods which swamped all the country's markets, even in the most remote regions. The advent of foreign commercials and vulgar programmes broadcast by the new media changed people's ways of thinking and lifestyles, even among the ethnic minorities.

Our society is becoming a consumer society, and this is beginning to affect territories where original, authentic and noble cultures have persisted until now. Children are less and less concerned with acquiring the skills of their elders, they rarely wish to sing the traditional songs or wear the traditional costumes worn by their parents. On the contrary, increasing numbers of young people listen to and sing pop music, mainly Thai. They wear jeans and modern dress and many of them sell off family antiques in order to buy consumer goods.

The successful implementation of the policies pursued by the government is much impeded by the great physical heterogeneity of the country and its population, as well as the natural and rudimentary production methods, especially in the rugged mountainous regions, and the lack of a coherent infrastructure and competent management in certain sectors. Addressing the National Conference on Culture (1993), which brought together the representatives of the culture departments of all the provinces, the then President of the Republic made the following critical comments:

> Until now, we have not been able to work out a political line and programme for the nationwide development of culture. We continue to remain passive while our country is changing over to a market economy. That is the cause of our unsuccessful cultural administration. … We still lack competent and capable senior personnel. … The foundations of cultural life are deteriorating…and social vices are becoming more widespread… and gradually subverting the nation's wealth of fine cultural traditions. The important role culture plays in the economic and social construction of the country is still not clear to some of the cultural administrators in charge. Of course, our cultural heritage is inexhaustible, but it has not yet been properly exploited and developed to the advantage of the nation.

Prospects

In the year 2000, the Lao PDR set about organizing a number of meetings, conferences and seminars at various levels to take stock of the country's situation in every field and to try to forecast and prepare for the future. A number of expert meetings were held at governmental and ministerial levels to discuss the country's development strategy up to the year 2020. In the cultural field, an important problem raised was the preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of our multi-ethnic people. Several main points were outlined in the cultural field.

The administrative apparatus of the Ministry of Information and Culture will be reviewed and improved, by eliminating some superfluous bodies and establishing certain necessary facilities. The research capacities of the Institute of Research on Lao Culture will be broadened. Alongside the existing schools, a school for comprehensive training in culture and the arts will be created, as well as a law governing culture.

Other measures will include the encouragement of the professional activities of various associations concerned with culture and the creation of the requisite conditions, and the carrying out of a serious ethnographical survey to determine once and for all the exact number of ethnic groups making up the Lao people.

An ethnographic museum should be established for research purposes (following a recommendation by this International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in the Lao PDR), as well as a cultural centre in each province and a polyvalent cultural circle in each district.

In each district one or more authentic traditional villages will be preserved, and the living conditions of their inhabitants improved. In co-ordination with the Ministry of Education, a rudimentary ethnography of Laos and other material concerning the cultural identities of each ethnic group will be incorporated into school curricula.

CONCLUSION

It is without doubt because of the great upheavals that have marked Asia's pluri-millennial history combined with the humanist ethics and philosophy of Buddhism, which reached Lan Xang in the first centuries of the present era, that the Lao people have become a united and peaceful multi-ethnic people. They are naturally hospitable and generous, free from any harmful ambition, devoted to social justice, tolerant and respectful of others. Were it not for the value attached to this philosophy by the Lao people, it would have disappeared during the more difficult periods in our history.

Culture is precisely the fruit of humanity's long and arduous labour to further its own welfare. It is culture which in turn shapes human beings and makes them increasingly humane. Without culture, human beings would have become more barbaric than the most ferocious beasts. The inestimable value of cultural heritage is something that the Lao people feel intuitively. It is a treasure to be safeguarded and promoted, without any form of discrimination, not only by the Lao themselves, but also by the international community and all peoples. It is a shared wealth, which is part of the universal heritage, and its reckless or unwitting destruction should be the responsibility of everyone. Alone, the Lao, a disadvantaged people, among the poorest in the world, cannot stem the global tide of deculturation that is tending to submerge our fine ancestral traditions, as it is doing almost everywhere.

NOTES

1. Muang Theng is the old name of the town of Dien Bien Phu, which lies some 300 km from the city of Hanoi (Viet Nam). It was also known as Na Noi-Oinu and Muang Loum (the land below), as opposed to Muang Then (Tien, Tian, Dian), an old kingdom in what is now the Yunnan region. According to the Khun Borom annals, the King of the *Then* Kingdom (kingdom of higher divinities) sent his son Khun Borom to earth to govern Muang Theng. It was from there that Khun Borom in turn sent his seven sons to govern his federated states. His eldest son, Khun Lo, took over from the Khun Chuang Dynasty, governed Muang Swa (Luang Prabang) and founded the Kingdom of Lan Xang there.

2. L. Finot, 'Origines Légendaires', *France-Asie*, 1956, Vol. XII, Nos. 118–119, pp. 1047–49.

3. G. F. de Marini, *Relation nouvelle et curieuse du Royaume de Lao,* Vientiane, Institute of Research on Lao Culture, p. 366. (New edition, 1990.)

4. The Mi is a special weaving technique which produces a great variety of patterns of a high aesthetic standard. It is widespread in what was the Kingdom of Lan Xang, in Laos in particular.

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Managing the Intangible Cultural Heritage

YVES GOUDINEAU

THE QUESTION OF THE PRESERVATION OF LAO CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Before anything else, attention should be drawn to the extent to which the diversity of cultural practices is still a living reality among the populations of the Lao PDR today. Far removed from any artifice, this diversity has nothing in common with the production of pseudo indigenous traditions to be found in so many parts of the world, including nearby regions, which, while seeking to meet a more or less correctly perceived tourist demand, is aimed chiefly at disguising the impoverishment of the local cultures. Here, on the contrary, one is immediately struck by the multiplicity of Lao cultures and the fact that, even if a certain decline is to be observed, their dynamics still operate spontaneously; a rarity in the present-day world, and hence valuable. One might be tempted to see in it a 'natural' wealth, were it not obvious that it is a purely historical product.

The perpetuation, here more real than elsewhere, of the cultural heritage of in some cases tiny ethnic minorities – it is true that nearly half of the population is made up of 'minorities' – can in every case be explained by geographical or historical circumstances. Generally speaking, the hilly terrain of a large part of the country has favoured the independent development of minorities. This certainly does not mean that the various groups led autarkic existences, for there is evidence everywhere of long contacts. History too, even over the modern period with the tragedy of the wars, while it caused large-scale population movements and brutal contacts, paradoxically in some cases enabled a multitude of small groups and original forms of civilization to survive. Mutual tolerance remained for a long time the best protection of the minority cultures.

Does this diversity of heritages which has been handed down to us intact really need to be protected? Why should it be more in jeopardy now than it was in the past? The reason is that it also reflects another reality, an economic and social one, whose effects can be interpreted negatively at national level: the inaccessibility of a part of the country. In almost every province at present, one or more districts are cut off from the rest of the world a good part of the year, and many villages can be reached only on foot, taking several days. Isolation, even if it favours cultural conservatism, can not be encouraged per se – especially as the conditions of a well-balanced life are often no longer met in these remote regions, partly because of the consequences of war, of the intensive bombing in particular, but also due to degradation of the soils, malnutrition, a health situation that gives cause for concern, etc. The Lao PDR, like many modern States, is anxious to link remote districts with the rest of the country and integrate isolated populations into the nation.

Thus development projects, governmental or carried out with the help of international or non-governmental organizations, have been on the increase in recent years. Many of them are designed primarily for districts or regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. One of the crucial questions that must be raised in connection with these projects is: 'How do you intend to integrate these populations and get them to participate in the development of the country without their cultural specificity being affected or questioned?' This is a real challenge, which is not easy to take up in practice, if we are to go by experience gained elsewhere in the world. Besides, specialists in the social sciences can show but modest results of their interventions, for they have often run up against opposition on fundamentals, when their advice has not simply been ignored.

If it is recognized that the main part of the culture of the minority groups is intangible, inasmuch as the idea of permanent conservation of monuments or written works is usually alien to them, the theme of our meeting actually boils down to the examination of means of safeguarding and promoting Lao cultural diversity in general. How can development and national integration objectives be reconciled with the safeguarding of cultural diversity? It is very much to UNESCO's credit to bring this question into the open and to see that an attempt is made to examine it seriously. It is not, however, a matter of claiming to have all the answers. The Lao PDR, owing to cautious management of its 'opening up' and to effective control of the rising tourism industry, has for a long time preserved the nation's local balances. Now, however, that the development of regions with ethnic minorities is deemed necessary, we have to give thought, with the national authorities, to the means to be employed to ensure that the minority skills are effectively kept up and passed on in this new context, and, if possible, advise and train the personnel in charge of the projects at local level with this in mind.

DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASED VULNERABILITY OF MINORITY HERITAGES – EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

My experience in the field in the Lao PDR, as that of the team I have set up locally in recent years, has been gained in the course of expert appraisals of development projects. It is for us to produce anthropological knowledge of intrinsic value to the discipline, but also of relevance to development issues. Going to see development projects is also one of the best ways of approaching some particularly remote regions, of studying instances of abrupt cultural changes and trying to provide protection against them.

Through health or education projects or the relocation of villages, I have followed the dialogue – in some cases the controversy – carried on all over the country between the various social integration officials and the villagers, for whom acceptance of such integration sometimes means forsaking for ever practices inherited from the distant past. I should like, with the help of three examples, to emphasize the fact that for many small groups the fate of a good part of their intangible cultural heritage is often at stake in those moments, in those exchanges, depending, in particular, on the understanding and respect shown to them by those locally in charge of 'development'.

First, I had to conduct a series of surveys for the Ministry of Health, over more than a year, in the south of the country, in the upper Saravan region where I was residing, in particular on the Ta-Oi Plateau situated in the Annamese Cordillera, then on the foothills of the Bolovens Plateau. These regions with Austro-Asiatic populations (Ta-Oi, Katang, Pacoh, etc.) had remained shut in, as it were, until then. Regarded as 'unsubdued' zones during the colonial period, then at the height of the wars almost annihilated by air raids, these areas were for the most part little known, even to many provincial authorities, when I went there. Although no detailed information was available, the general state of health in these remote districts was a matter of serious concern to the provincial authorities, and one of the aims of the survey conducted along with the Lao health workers was to think up a strategy for health coverage acceptable to these populations.

While undertaking an ethnographical study that I would term 'extensive' because it comprised many villages in a region that had never been studied before, I was accompanying the health workers in their negotiations with the villagers concerning the possibility of adapting local therapeutic practices. Although modern medicines, known because they were widely distributed in wartime, were accepted without difficulty (but without any idea of dosages) by the local populations and readily incorporated into their various curative methods, the provincial health workers maintained, on the contrary, that their use was incompatible with certain traditional curative practices, sacrifices in particular.

Indigenous phytotherapy was encouraged in theory, despite there being no recognition of the value of handing on

village lore in connection with plants or roots, but everything was done to discourage the performance of the various rituals for curative purposes. I was thus able to observe how a whole segment of the intangible culture, mainly ritual, was being negated without any real justification. The district authorities, descended from the populations concerned, were divided as to the attitude to take, but the provincial authorities insisted on the abandonment of the traditional therapeutic practices as a prerequisite for any health intervention, often owing to a lack of information on, or interest in, the local cultures.

The second example concerns non-formal education projects for ethnic minorities carried out by the Ministry of Education with support from UNESCO and UNDP. I have been involved since 1994 as a consultant, with my team, in these projects, a fundamental principle of which is to devise an education adapted to the needs expressed by the villagers, but also to set up courses taking the local skills, and techniques in particular, into account as far as possible. Within this framework we were asked to carry out an expert appraisal in Sekong, in districts bordering or near those of Saravan where I had worked (Katu, Ngkriang and Talieng populations), which gave our work in the southern provinces of Laos geographical continuity and cultural consistency. We were also asked to go and conduct a survey in the north of the country, in Oudomxay and Luang Namtha.

The villages concerned by these projects were mainly 'new villages', set along the roadside and thus permanently exposed to a variety of contacts and the flow of traffic. On this account they are looked on as pilot villages in a perspective of economic integration. A study of them is particularly interesting if it can be combined with a preliminary survey in the districts of origin. This is what we undertook on a long-term basis, in particular at Kalum in the Katu region in Sekong Province, and at Nalè, among the Khmu' Roc in Luang Namtha Province.

In these new villages, changes in social practices and the evolution of certain technical skills (especially in crop production) are noticeable. At the same time, inroads into the cultural heritage of the minority group under consideration, or crosses with the dominant Lao culture or other local cultures, are readily apparent. It is quite clear, moreover, that the stronger a village's link with its region of origin, the better its heritage resists. At all events, the removal and relocation of villages, when they are not spontaneously motivated, seem to be one of the chief factors involved in a cultural hiatus.[1]

It is worth noting in connection with these projects that an ethnological opinion was sought by the non-formal education authorities to guide them in their undertaking. The linking of traditional lore and modern knowledge, to put it in a nutshell, is recognized here as one of the stakes of educational projects. We thus have an assurance that thought is being given to the question by some of the authorities who want to bring about a well-considered integration of previously excluded populations, taking their specificities into account. Here too, however, the lack of local personnel prepared to adopt this approach is cruelly felt.

The third example of a survey concerns precisely removals of villages, which are taking place at present all over the country on an unprecedented scale. This time we have conducted our survey widely, for it covers six provinces – Attapeu, Saravan, Sekong, Xiengkhuang, Oudomxay and Luang Namtha. With a view to working out education policies for the integration of these resettled populations, some of which come from very isolated areas, UNESCO and the Ministry of Education ministry wanted to have information on the forms of breakdown occasioned by such moves and the resulting demands expressed by the villagers.

This is not the place to go into the reasons for the moves – infrastructure projects, the combating of slash-and-burn cultivation, of poppy – farming and so on. Each of them would involve the consideration of issues that have been widely discussed already in the international community. The reader is referred in this connection to the report we made for UNESCO and the UNDP, the second volume of which contains all the field studies carried out.[2]

On completing the survey, however, one has to admit the fact that moves are perhaps one of the main causes of cultural change in many populations belonging to minority groups. Whether in terms of architecture, farming practices, rituals, land use, or of course language, moving leads to the rapid dismantling of a large part of the cultural heritage of the groups concerned and their going over to the dominant culture. In cases in which the local authorities consider the moves unavoidable, and it has first been ascertained that the populations have agreed to them, it is no doubt necessary to insist here on the urgency of at least examining with the local authorities ways of restoring the disrupted skills that result, for if the split is too abrupt it will be prejudicial to integration as well.

I have presented these three examples of surveys because they are representative of a part of my experience as an

anthropologist and expert in the Lao PDR, but also because I think that they show to what extent one can not safeguard and promote the minority cultural heritages without analysing in detail the social, political or economic factors that can make them more vulnerable. Dialogues are being initiated with the local authorities responsible for development, and they are recognizing the need for such safeguarding. In the Lao PDR the local authorities are generally far from impervious to these considerations, and in many cases even ask for documentation on certain remote villages or groups they have not been able to visit. Besides, respect for the specificity of the culture of each group figures prominently in the Constitution.

INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF THE AUSTRO-ASIATIC GROUPS

These expert appraisals also afforded us an opportunity of continuing certain studies concerning the intangible heritage. In the south, repeated missions over several years in the upper part of the Sekong Valley are making it possible to outline the social and cultural history of this small region – relations among the different groups (Ta-Oi, Pacoh, Katu, Ngkriang, etc.) which participate, across the Sekong, in a system of economic and symbolic exchanges. We have seen the evolution of the rituals, funeral rituals in particular, with more or less importance attached to second funerals according to the group concerned, and the revival of extravagant sacrifices of buffaloes. We have also noted the evolution of social structures, through a comparative study of the structure of longhouses in particular. We have noted down or recorded myths and songs, inventoried statuary and so on.[3] In the north, at Nalè, O. Evrard dealt with the representation of space and traditional systems of land ownership among the Kmhmu' Roc.[4]

A comparative ethnology of certain Austro-Asiatic societies in the Lao PDR is thus taking shape in co-operation with the IRC. In view of the state of ignorance in which we all find ourselves concerning a number of Austro-Asiatic populations, priority should doubtless be given to drawing up an inventory, to systematic identification, with the help of linguists and of the minority ethnic groups by province and by district. However, typological studies should also be conducted in different fields in which cultural production is still alive but already at risk.

This is the case first of all with the habitat. A remarkably varied architecture is still to be found especially in southern Laos, from the very long houses, which afford the last evidence of housing of the kind in this part of Asia, to individual homes. Great diversity in the shape and size of houses and building techniques is still to be observed. The layout of the interior, related to social structure, varies considerably as well: long Pacoh houses (some housing more than 150 people) entirely compartmentalized with a central corridor, or large Katu houses without any compartmentalization in which families are just gathered around hearths in a single common room, and between these two extremes a multitude of variations.

The same is true of rituals and festivals in South Laos. A systematic inventory should be made showing how from one village to another an almost common religious substratum can give rise to highly diversified rituals. All the instances of buffalo sacrifices in particular should be documented with details of the ceremony. Kinship systems should also be noted more systematically. These are generally patrilineal and patrilocal, with a preferential marriage with the daughter of the mother's brother among the Katuic populations. In this connection we have begun to study a generalized exchange system with a particularly sophisticated hierarchy of exchanging clans among the Katang.

Consideration should also be given to an inventory of forms of therapeutic intervention (and of the specialists involved – plant therapists, mediums, shamans, etc.), which might be based on ethnobotanical data too. The collection of oral literature, which has been started (by Nancy Costello among the Katu, for example), should be continued, with the help of local collaborators trained for this purpose. The same should be done for the songs – with their typically syncopated passages (Ta-Oi, Ngkriang, etc). These inventories should, during the Ta-Oi first stage, make it possible to prepare a kind of small ethnological monograph for each province, and later serve as a basis for a comparative study.

FIELDWORK AND TRAINING

There are, however, two essential prerequisites for the success of such undertakings: research and fieldwork must be recognized; and courses for local personnel must take place. Research, particularly in the social sciences (ethnology, linguistics, sociology, etc.) should be better accepted in the Lao PDR, indeed should be encouraged. This is not the case at present. At provincial level above all, observers who expect to work for a long time in villages

are still regarded with great suspicion, and at present it is exceptional to be able to do field work in the same place over an extended period. (For a long time I was the single exception in southern Laos, where I repeatedly stayed in a village for several months at a time.) This situation, not very favourable to ethnography for instance, discourages many foreign researchers who would otherwise be prepared to collaborate. A real awareness campaign is required to make it less of a drama and explain how a scientific contribution which provides a better knowledge of local contexts can be useful to the country.

As for training courses, these are obviously the key to future scientific research and to the capacity for autonomy of quality Lao research. They should be provided at different levels. On one level there should be training for researchers and research assistants in ethnology (or linguistics), possibly with supplementary training in foreign institutions. On the other level there should be training for local personnel in certain collecting techniques (and in the use of the equipment required). District level (schoolteachers, nurses, etc.) seems the most appropriate for this kind of training, since district personnel remain close to the minority populations to which they generally belong. My experience goes to show that in the districts it is easy to find enthusiastic collaborators, who are only too anxious to be better trained. In the absence of the necessary training courses, research is likely to escape the Lao PDR and the ethnic minorities and will always be in the hands of people from abroad who will continue to arouse a certain suspicion locally.

Above all, the intangible cultural heritage of the minority groups must be properly managed, in the same way as any individual heritage is managed. In this connection, its preservation and enhancement depend chiefly on the presence on the spot of competent, well-trained and recognized researchers, capable of identifying this heritage, of negotiating its handing-down to development workers, and of helping to turn it to advantage on the national scene.

NOTES

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PART TWO

Dimensions of the Cultural Heritage

A. Languages and literatures

Some Vulnerable Languages in the Lao PDR

THONGPHET KINGSADA

There is for the moment no answer to the apparently simple question, 'How many languages are spoken in the Lao PDR?' Firstly because exact data are lacking for several areas, especially those difficult of access; often we have no more than a few lexicons put together by amateurs, in some cases many years ago. Moreover, these data are as a rule extremely vague and sometimes downright inaccurate; this is particularly true of several Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic) languages spoken in the south. In other cases we have only lists of ethnic groups – Thai Hat, Kha Bit, Oi, Thai Pao and Mla Bri, for example – with no information on the languages they speak.

There are also parts of Laos – Savannakhet, Champassak, Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu, for instance – where ethnonyms pose a particularly thorny problem. The names of ethnic groups in these areas vary considerably and do not necessarily correspond to communities as such or to specific languages. While the languages concerned are stable and readily distinguishable, the names are subject to variation. Given this situation, published material on these areas cannot be trusted unless it has been preceded by rigorous anthropological and linguistic investigation. Especially untrustworthy is the now common kind of book whose author – typically a journalist, agronomist or photographer with no linguistic or ethnological training and no interest in verification – throws together a hodgepodge of far-fetched information, dubious terminology and errors of fact. Often pretentiously titled, these supposed introductions to the ethnic background in Laos can only mislead and are worthless as a basis for a serious ethnological or linguistic approach. Yet because entire areas of our country have never been investigated, even specialists find it difficult to provide a clear outline of the different ethnic groups.

It is here that linguistics can furnish a simple, practical solution. No society can function without a vernacular that is not at the same time vehicular. Without language, communication is reduced to rudimentary gestures no human society can settle for. This basic fact – so obvious that it sometimes seems to escape non-linguists – makes it possible to identify a community once we know in detail what language it speaks. The linguist is equipped with specific techniques that allow for an exact, methodical inventory of languages and dialects and consequently an appropriate system of classification. For example, such ethnonyms as Samtao, Thai Bo, Bru and even Thai Sam Neua, Thai Neua, Katang and Ta-Oi, while not necessarily inaccurate, cannot be trusted as long as we lack sufficient linguistic data on the languages and dialects spoken by the people in question.

There is little point in an abstract statistical indication of a supposed number of ethnic groups. Figures settle nothing,

especially in linguistics, if they are not based on an exhaustive scientific inventory. Worthwhile quantitative data depend on prior acquaintance with the overall etymological context, which alone allows for definition of the shape of a language, its complex ramifications, the components of its grammatical system and so on. Only then, working via vocabulary, phonology, syntax, etc., can we begin to identify groups and subgroups as linguistic entities with specific interrelationships based on proximity or filiation. Once this initial work has been done, linguistic groups and dialectal subgroups can be inventoried. It should be pointed out that while for a linguist all languages are equally interesting, countries vary widely in their level of linguistic diversity. In this respect the Lao PDR is exceptionally rich in terms of the number, variety and complexity of its languages.

It should also be noted that there exist differences between languages which are not purely linguistic, but sociolinguistic. Many factors can influence the practice, evolution and transmission of a language. Its chances of survival, for example, are directly related to the number of its speakers, but the degree of isolation of the user communities is also a factor. Certain 'small' languages preserved by geographical distance can quickly die out once they come into contact with a more widely spoken tongue. A monolingual context is obviously different from one in which multilingualism is the rule: lexical borrowings, pidgins and rapid syntactic change are more likely to appear in the latter case. Social contacts in different language venues are equally decisive: there is a language for the home, for school, for the market place and so on. Linguistic practice can also be graded according to the age pyramid. And lastly the existence or non-existence of a written form, and thus of documents in the language, is another major feature of linguistic dynamics. Simply noting a language down cannot bring an appreciation of what makes it function; we must also understand its contexts and social usages. Some of the many languages in Laos, for reasons to do with the factors mentioned above, are in a relatively unfavourable situation where transmission is concerned. Some are even in danger of extinction in the fairly short term, having too few speakers, a restricted social range, or no written form.

The clear principle stated above – that a society cannot function without a shared language – also applies at national level. Laos is extremely well-placed in this respect, in that the Lao language is used and understood throughout the country, even by members of ethnic minorities who also speak their own specific language. This bilingualism ensures social cohesion and means that efforts to preserve local languages constitute no threat to national unity. The ideal situation, then, is stable bilingualism. The danger would be unstable bilingualism, with the national language, whose usefulness is beyond question, overwhelming local languages.

Must the extinction of the little-spoken minority languages be accepted as natural and inevitable? Some observers see this as highly desirable, while others take the opposite view. In the author's opinion the disappearance of any language is an irreversible disaster, and one which should, and generally can, be avoided. Why a disaster? Because a language constitutes a unique cultural treasure. As a vehicle for the history and experience of an entire people it codifies, preserves and communicates distinctive bodies of knowledge in such fields as ethnobotany and the expressions and proverbs of oral literature. Thus it has irreplaceable value not only for the user group but for the society as a whole. Obviously, a language's speakers are those most directly affected and the loss of a language almost always leads to major problems for individuals and communities. Examples can be found all over the world of the damaging consequences of language death.

A language is also a means of communication that allows a culture to express itself, be handed on and continue to flourish. If the language vanishes, the culture is in a sense suffocated and condemned to die in turn. What can be done? The linguistic project as a whole relates directly to people as producers of culture. It is, then, a project belonging to society in its entirety; but as a specialist in this field, the linguist has the duty of facilitating inputs of an appropriately high standard.[10]

NOTE

1. In terms of basic projects the most urgent tasks are: to inventory the languages spoken in the Lao PDR, in numerically decreasing order of the ethnic groups concerned, and thus establish a scientific ethnic index for the country; to complete the survey and description of languages and dialects in immediate danger of extinction; to back training for linguistic research personnel; to develop international co-operation via exchange of information and researchers; to expand facilities for analysis and conservation of documentary material, notably via a linguistic research laboratory and a specialized language and dialect library equipped with reference books, Internet access, etc.

Language and Culture of Minority Groups

DAVID BRADLEY

Various staff of La Trobe University have worked on minority issues in the Lao PDR.[1] In linguistics, I have been working extensively on the Tibeto-Burman and other minority languages of the Lao PDR and the surrounding countries for many years. This research includes descriptive studies of several minority languages of the Lao PDR among others, language atlases covering all the languages of Laos, historical linguistic comparison and cultural reconstruction of these and closely related languages elsewhere, and a variety of sociolinguistic studies of language loss, and educational and other policy issues related to these languages. I have also collected extensive data on the various kinds of Lahu spoken in Laos.

LINGUISTIC STUDIES OF MINORITY LANGUAGES OF LAOS

I am very glad to acknowledge the hospitality and co-operation of speakers of many languages during fieldwork since 1971. Without their understanding and hard work, few of the following studies would have been possible. Descriptive linguistic studies include work on Phu Noy or Sinsali (Bradley, 1977a), Mou Xoe and Kuy (Lahu, Bradley, 1979a), and Ko (Akha, Bradley, 1977b), based on fieldwork in Lao PDR and adjacent countries from 1971 to the present. Other descriptive studies are on languages closely related to the minority languages of Laos, for example Bisu in Thailand, which is closely related to Phu Noy (Bradley 1985c, 1988a, 1989).

The language atlases by Wurm and Hattori (1983) and Moseley (1994) include population estimates and discussion of the various names for minority groups in Laos, as well as dialect and historical linguistic classification, with extensive references on descriptive linguistic studies in this area. I contributed to several other atlas projects which relate to the minority languages of Laos, such as the Wurm, T'sou and Bradley Language Atlas of China (1991), which gives details of the situation in adjacent areas of China; the Wurm, Mühlhäusler and Tryon atlas on contact languages and language contact (1996); the Bradley atlas on the Tibeto-Burman languages; and the Wurm UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (2001).

The historical linguistic studies include a general overview (Bradley, 1979b) which briefly describes most of the Tibeto-Burman minority languages of Laos and surrounding areas, then compares an extensive vocabulary, to produce a reconstruction of the earlier language of the Burmese-Lolo groups. Many other studies have clarified a variety of areas of earlier society, such as musical instruments (Bradley, 1979c), grain crops (Bradley, 1996b), and convergence across linguistic boundaries (Bradley, 1980), among many others.

The sociolinguistic studies are especially concerned with the problem of language loss. I have been observing and documenting the process of language death among the Ugong in Thailand since 1977, and have made various contributions to the general literature on language death (Bradley, 1985b, 1988b, 1992b). The process of language death is well under way among some of the smaller groups in Laos, and urgent work is needed before these languages disappear.

Another focus of the sociolinguistic studies is the policy and planning actions for minority languages that governments in South-East and East Asia have pursued over the last fifty years, and their effects on the minority languages concerned. I have looked into (Bradley 1983) the general issue of minority group identity in South-East Asia, and have described and discussed the details of language and educational policy for minorities in various South-East and East Asian countries including Laos (Bradley, 1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1992a, 1994a).

Sociolinguistic studies of second-language English as spoken by South-East Asians and the educational, cultural and linguistic problems that they encounter in using English are another area of relevant research. Two such studies (Bradley and Bradley, 1984, 1985) investigated the spoken English of South-East Asian students, and described the English language needs of young South-East Asian refugees in Australia (Rado, Foster and Bradley, 1986).

A final area of language work has been aimed at facilitating tourism to various South-East Asian destinations by providing phrasebooks for tourists in co-operation with the Melbourne publisher Lonely Planet. Along with three colleagues, I have written a phrasebook which includes four of the large minority languages of Laos: Mong, Ko, Mou Xoe (Lahu) and Yao, (Bradley, Lewis, Court and Jarkey, 1991).

The minorities of Laos in surrounding countries

The 1985 Census and the classification used in the 1995 Census show that many of the minorities of the Lao PDR also live in surrounding countries. In some cases the classification is different. Elsewhere, especially in China, there is a tendency to merge smaller groups into larger nationalities. There are also major differences in the names used to refer to these groups, which has sometimes led to confusion. The following table illustrates some of these terminological differences for the Tibeto-Burman groups of Laos.

TABLE 1. NAMES FOR MINORITY GROUPS IN LAOS AND ELSEWHERE

Lao	Autonym	China	Thailand	Viet Nam	Myanmar
Ko	Akha	Aini	Ikaw	—	Kaw
Sinsali	Phunoi	Bisu	Bisu	Công	Pyen
Mou Xoe	Laho	Lahu	Museu	Lahu/Cosung	Muhso
Kuy	Lahoshi	Lahu	Museu	—	Muhso
Sy La	Sila	—	—	Sila	—
Lo Lo	Alu	Yi	—	Lô Lô	—
Ha Nhy	Hani	Hani	—	Ha Nhi	—
Ka Do	Katu	Kaduo	—	—	—

The table below gives comparable population information for these Tibeto-Burman groups.

TABLE 2. TIBETO-BURMAN GROUPS IN LAOS AND ADJACENT COUNTRIES

Official name (Autonym)	Laos 1985 est.	Thailand 1992	Viet Nam 1993	China 1990	Myanmar est.
Ko (Akha)	58,500	32,041	0	250,000	200,000
Sinsali (Phunoi)	23,618	(400)	(1,300)	(6,000)	(?)
Mou Xoe/Kuy (Laho)	15,693	57,144	(5,400)	411,476	200,000
Sy La (Sila)	1,518	0	600	0	0
Lo Lo (Alu)	842	0	3,200	6,572,173	0
Ha Nhy (Hani)	727	0	12,500	700,000	0
Ka Do (Khatu)	200?	0	0	80,000	0

In China the Ko (Akha) and Ha Nhy (Hani) are grouped together, along with the Ka Do (Khatu) and other groups, within the Hani nationality. Included within the Ko group in Laos are a few smaller groups speaking closely related languages, such as Pa Na. The population composition of the Hani nationality in China is not exactly known, but my estimates are given in the above table. The total Hani population there including several other subgroups was 1,253,952 in 1990.

The Phu Noy or Sinsali are found only in Laos, but two very similar groups live elsewhere. The Bisu live in China, Myanmar and Thailand. Bisu is dying in Thailand and may be dead in Myanmar, where the last report was over a century ago. In China the Bisu are also classified as members of the Hani nationality, and in Thailand they are included in the general category of Lawa (Thai) or Lua (Northern Thai), which also includes a variety of other small groups. Bisu and Phu Noy are not mutually intelligible, but are very closely related. Công, spoken in Viet Nam to the east of the Phu Noy area, is linguistically closer to Phu Noy or Sinsali.

The Lahu are divided into two ethnic groups in Laos: the Mou Xoe who are mainly White Lahu (with a few Red Lahu and Black Lahu); and the Kuy (a Shan word) who are the Yellow Lahu. A very similar variety of Yellow Lahu is also spoken in the Eastern Shan State of Myanmar and in Thailand, where there are far more Black and Red Lahu than in Laos. There are no separate population statistics on the subgroups of the Lahu other than in Laos; for more details, see Bradley (1979a). These varieties of Lahu are mutually intelligible. More distinct is the Eastern Cosung (Viet Nam) or Kucong (China) subgroup, who comprise all of the Lahu in Viet Nam and about 50,000 of those in China. They were amalgamated into the Lahu nationality in China in 1987, and none live in Laos.

The Sy La are sometimes also referred to under the more general term Kha Pai. This small group is also found in Viet Nam, but is not known elsewhere. The language is almost completely undescribed.

The term Lolo has gone out of use in China, where the post-1950 term Yi is used instead. In China the Yi nationality includes a large number of very distinct languages. In Viet Nam, two of the Southern Yi groups are recognized as separate nationalities, the Lô Lô and the Phú Là. As there are no linguistic data available, it is not clear to what Lolo/Yi subgroup the Lo Lo (Alu) in Laos belong.

Some of the smallest groups in Laos are transnational minorities (Bradley, 1983) with much larger numbers elsewhere, like the Ha Nhy and Ka Do. Hence these languages are not at risk worldwide, though they may be within Laos. Others, like the Sy La, Lo Lo and Pa Na, are very much at risk, and may tend to be absorbed into other minorities such as the Ko.

This pattern is repeated for the more numerous Mon-Khmer minorities elsewhere in Laos, many of whose languages are also at risk, including even some transnational ones which are also spoken in Thailand, China or Viet Nam. The Miao-Yao and some of the Lao-Thay minorities are very large and transnational, and their languages are not in immediate danger. However some Lao-Thay minority languages are also at risk; in particular, Yang and Xèk, as well as quite a few of the numerous sub-varieties within Phou Thay.

MINORITY LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE: SOME GENERAL ISSUES

In studies of language maintenance (LM) and language shift, a variety of factors have been identified. These can be classified as demographic and geographical, attitudinal, political, socio-economic, and linguistic. Another research focus has been the identification of domains of language use in bilingual and multilingual societies. A third factor, less frequently considered, relates to the characteristics of the social networks of speakers. The nature of language contact, both traditional and modern, also varies in different parts of the world. In light of these factors and experience elsewhere, the concluding sections outline some overall strategies for LM, and how they might be implemented in Laos.

Factors in language maintenance

The main demographic and geographical factors in LM are population (size of group), concentration (proportion of a group concentrated in particular areas; and proportion of the total population of these areas) and territory (whether there is a specific area identified with the group; and whether they are autochthonous or migrants). Other geographical factors include communication networks: roads and transport, and access to radio, television and print media. Naturally, smaller groups who are less concentrated, lack a defined territory, and are not autochthonous, are likely to have greater difficulty in LM. Improvements in communication networks may also threaten LM.

The overall attitudinal factors in LM are ethnolinguistic vitality (the group's attitude about itself as a separate entity) as well as language as a core value (how crucial the group's language is seen to be for the group's identity). More specific beliefs about languages held by the minority groups and by the majority group are relevant (whether bilingualism is accepted and valued; how public use of minority languages in the presence of monolingual majority speakers is viewed; and whether minority group members view their language as 'difficult' or 'hard to maintain'). This also relates to the attitudes to linguistic boundary maintenance, which ranges along a continuum from purism (extreme conservatism and rejection of any effect from language contact) to acceptance. This in turn affects the source of lexical enrichment (loan-words from a majority language, from a high culture language, or internal coinage of new words) as well as the degree of code switching and code mixing between the majority and minority languages. At the micro level, attitude factors are crucial in decisions about intergenerational transmission of languages (whether parents choose to speak only the majority language in the presence of children, 'to help them get ahead' in the majority society, or support and approve of their children's minority language skills).

The main political factors in LM are official policy on language, ethnicity and education; both in the country and in adjacent countries. For example, some minorities in Laos can listen to radio programmes in their languages from China, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. They may be aware of writing systems used elsewhere for their language. Another factor in most countries is how well the actual policy follows the nominal official policy. Another major political factor concerns the leadership of the minority group (whether there are strong traditional or modern political leaders, how they view the LM issue, and how people view this leadership).

There is a vast range of socio-economic factors which affect LM. The main economic factors are the degree of integration into a national economy (whether people grow only subsistence crops or also cash crops; how much wage labour is performed; whether there is work migration to towns and cities, and if so whether people stay away or return) and the degree of prosperity achieved by a group. Some major social factors include the degree of difference in material culture between the minority group and majority group, religion (whether traditional or externally introduced), liturgical languages (and how these are disseminated) and marriage patterns (what the proportion of endogamy and exogamy is, with whom exogamy is likely, and where mixed couples tend to live). Many other social and economic factors can also be relevant, depending on local conditions. LM can be hindered by greater integration into national society, lesser cultural distance, the same religion and liturgical language, and frequent exogamy with residence elsewhere.

Some linguistic factors in LM are mainly the result of long-term or short-term historical linguistic characteristics. One is whether (and how closely) the minority language is genetically related to the majority language. In Laos, the Lao-Thay languages are closest to Lao, but some are closer than others. Another is the degree of structural similarity to the majority language. Naturally, groups which have been in contact for longer may develop greater similarity, thus leading to the well-known Sprachbund phenomenon (newly developed structural similarities between unrelated or distantly related languages in an area). For example, in Laos the Tibeto-Burman languages are syntactically more distinct, being verb-final, while all other languages, including Lao-Thay, Mon-Khmer and Miao-Yao as well as Ho (Chinese), are verb-medial.

There are also many sociolinguistic factors which have a strong effect on LM. One is the historicity of the minority language (whether it has an orthography or orthographies, how widespread literacy is in these orthographies, how much and what kind of literature exists, and how long its written history is). A further factor is the degree of internal difference within the minority language. Many of the languages of the area have undergone rapid and substantial internal diversification in the absence of a literary or spoken standard, and because speakers of some languages do not see the need for everyone within the group to speak the same. This is the case for Ko and Phu Noy. Some other groups have a more purist attitude and may have a traditional internal standard dialect, as in the case of the Mou Xoe and Kuy, who tend to agree that Black Lahu is the standard, with speakers of other dialects also able to understand and willing to adjust their speech towards this dialect. A final factor, which is of course also related to attitudinal factors, is the degree of traditional bilingualism and use of a majority group language as lingua franca. In some cases in and around Laos there are several different levels of lingua franca – the local market language (which is usually a Lao-Thay language but not Lao in the north of Laos and adjacent areas of China, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam) and then the national language. Many members of some transnational minorities, especially those who

Tibeto-Burman family

1. Akha woman sweeping ground, Luang Namtha Province
© Angus Mac Donald

2. Akha woman and child, Phongsaly Province
© KT/IRC

3. Akha village, Luang Namtha Province
© Angus Mac Donald

4. Akha woman gathering poppies, Luang Namtha Province
© Angus Mac Donald

5. Akha Kheu women dancing, Phongsaly Province
© François Greck

6. Akha woman spinning cotton, Luang Namtha Province
© Angus Mac Donald

7. Akha woman sifting rice, Luang Namtha Province
© Georges Cortez

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8. Hani village, Phongsaly Province
© Angus Mac Donald

9. Young Akha girl spinning cotton, Luang Namtha Province
© Georges Cortez

10. Hani women sewing, Phongsaly Province
© Angus Mac Donald

11. Lahu village, Luang Namtha Province
© Olivier Evrard

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12. Sila dwelling, Phongsaly Province
© François Greck

13. Akha ritual swing, Luang Namtha Province
© Georges Cortez

14. Sila village, Phongsaly Province
© Georges Cortez

15. Akha woman transporting corn cobs,
Luang Namtha Province
© Georges Cortez

16. Local transport, Luang Namtha Province
© Angus Mac Donald

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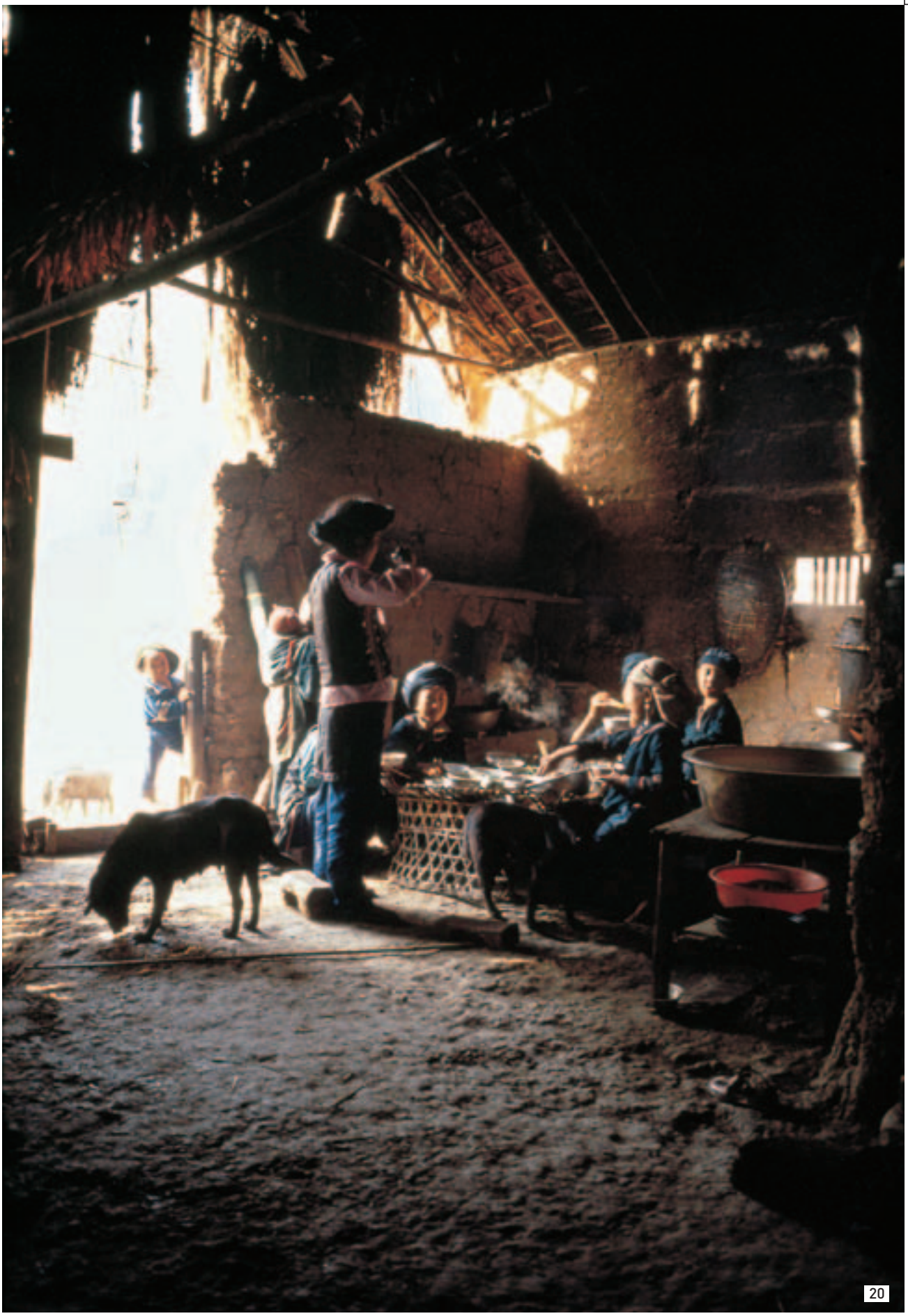
17. Alu village, Phongsaly Province
© François Greck

18. Inside an Alu dwelling, Phongsaly Province
© François Greck

19. Old Poussang woman, Oudomxay Province
© Marion Dejean

20. Inside an Alu dwelling, Phongsaly Province
© Georges Cortez



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21. Akha women working in the field, Phongsaly Province
© KT/Lao Institute of Research on Culture (IRC)

22. Sila woman with headdress, Phongsaly Province
© François Greck

23. Lolo Pho women, Phongsaly Province
© HR/IRC

24. Lahu ceremony (White Moussoe), Oudomxay Province
© François Greck

25. Entrance gate to Ko Puli (Akha family) village, Phongsaly Province
© KT/IRC

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26. Akha man smoking, Luang Namtha Province
© Angus Mac Donald

27. Old Phunoy woman sifting rice, Phongsaly Province
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maintain cross-border contacts or who have recently arrived, also speak another national language or a regional variety of it (such as the use of Yunnanese Chinese or Ho as another lingua franca by non-ethnic Chinese in the northernmost parts of Laos).

Domains of language use

Another way of viewing LM is from the point of view of use in specific types of domain or situation. As language shift gathers pace, the number of domains for the minority language may decrease, and the proportion of the time it is used in the remaining domains may also decrease. This may lead to a reduction in stylistic range and lexical richness, even if the language is maintained in some domains. One also needs to distinguish between spoken domains and written domains, at least for those languages which have a written form.

For spoken domains, there is a normal hierarchy of likelihood for LM. The most solid domain for minority LM is usually the home and family; though of course, depending on attitudes within the family and the degree of exogamy, this domain may also be weakened. Other likely domains for strong LM are within the local community (again, if it is homogeneous and language-solidary) and in cultural activities. In Laos, the Buddhist religion is mainly a domain of Lao-Thay language use. For those minority groups who are Buddhist but not Lao-Thay this is a negative domain for LM; but for other groups religion may also be a strong positive LM domain.

In sociolinguistic discussion in developed societies, the work and transactional domains may be less positive for LM, especially when the workplace, shops and so on are ethnically mixed. In Laos, for those minorities who stay in their traditional areas, the work domain is mainly positive for LM, as work is carried out with family and community members. Of course, for those who work in contact with the government or outside their areas, these domains tend to favour Lao. The language of transactions depends on where the transaction is taking place and what kind of transaction it is. A local Lao-Thay or other lingua franca may be most widely used in small markets, while Lao would be used in towns and official settings.

The domain of education is both spoken and written. In some surrounding countries, such as Myanmar and Thailand, this is nominally an exclusive domain for the national language. In practice, some local teachers speak a regional lingua franca or local minority language part of the time in the early stages, for things which otherwise may not be understood in the national language. In other countries such as China, in designated minority areas, the first few years of primary school are officially bilingual, but the actual situation depends on the ability of the teacher to speak the minority language. Considerable efforts are made to send teachers from a minority background to their local areas, so that genuine bilingual education can take place. In many such bilingual schools there is also some attempt to teach literacy in the minority language. Massive efforts have been made to develop orthographies, textbooks and literature in many minority languages, including some which are also found in Laos, such as Mong, Leu, Ko, Yao, Mou Xoe, Lo Lo and Ha Nhy. Similar efforts have also been made for some of the larger minority groups in Viet Nam, such as the Hmông (Mong) and Dao (Yao). There it is also possible to use the minority languages in written form in schools. However, in both countries, the use of these minority spoken and written languages is intended to facilitate the transition to study of the national language, and usually stops after just a few years.

Government is usually a major and expanding domain for national language use, as government services reach more minority areas. Political activity is normally also conducted in the national language, but at the local level some of it may be in minority languages, as long as all participants are speakers of the relevant minority language. In such a case, much of the majority language lexicon of politics is borrowed into the minority language. The use of the majority language is even more widespread in the written domain. In China, however, there is a substantial attempt to use public insignias of minority languages in written form, often bilingually with the national language but occasionally only in the minority language, in signs for government buildings, public notices, letterheads and banners carried in parades.

The media are one domain where there is fairly widespread exposure to spoken minority language use and, where possible (mainly in China), some written use as well. The broadcast media (radio, television, film) are mainly spoken, while of course print media are written. This includes literacy primers and textbooks, other literature including Christian religious books, newsletters, and even magazines and newspapers for some minorities in China. Another factor in this domain is the degree of exposure to media. Until recently most minorities only had access to radios, but with the spread of electricity more and more

people can also watch television and videos. While there is a substantial amount of minority language use on the radio from various countries which can be heard in Laos, there is almost none on television or in videos and films. Thus the spread of electricity and with it television is another negative factor for minority languages, though of course it may be very positive for national integration. Exposure to written media in minority languages is mainly in the early years of school for people in China and Viet Nam. Conversely, for some groups, especially Christians, literacy in a missionary-devised orthography may be widespread and disseminated by the churches. This is true in Thailand and Myanmar for several of the minorities who also live in Laos, such as the Ko and Mou Xoe/Kuy. Much more widespread is exposure to written media in the national language, which is the main goal of the education system in minority areas, with much greater resources available and a nationwide market. Spoken media, especially short wave radio, videos and films, may also increase minority exposure to foreign languages, including those of nearby countries as well as English and other world languages.

Networks and language maintenance

The social network (the patterns of contact and interaction between people) is another major factor in LM. Some ethnic groups have more closed, in-group interaction patterns, with a high density and multiplexity of network (that is, the same people talk to each other all the time, in a variety of domains). Others have a more open network (that is, greater contact with out-group members more of the time in more domains).

If the local network includes out-group members or younger non-speakers of the group language, this poses difficulties for LM. Exogamy, in-migration and the extension of government and other services such as schools and dispensaries may gradually lead to a higher proportion of outsiders in a minority community. The earliest arrivals in a minority community, such as isolated spouses or a local shopkeeper, may learn the ethnic language; but as the proportion of out-group speakers increases, this becomes less likely.

One of the basic principles of human interaction is that there is accommodation to the interlocutor. One adjusts to the speech abilities and patterns of the people one is speaking with. Thus more and more of the speech within a community will cease to be in the minority language as more outsiders move in. Speakers may also begin to choose not to transmit their language to children. In large families where children are largely cared for and socialized by their elder siblings, minority language ability may be restricted to the eldest children, with gradually decreasing or no ability among younger ones.

Many studies of language death have observed the same patterns of network effect: some families and communities have more language-solidarity, and a minority language may survive longer among them while disappearing from other villages and households. Thus one often observes a range of stages of language death. For example, the Bisu and Ugong languages in Thailand are completely dead in some former villages; people may even not know, or may deny, their former ethnicity. In other villages there are some older semi-speakers (with incomplete and imperfect knowledge of the language, but usually with good comprehension skills). In some villages there may be older fluent speakers and some middle-aged or younger semi-speakers, but the language is no longer spoken or even understood by the young. Elsewhere, the same language may be spoken by the young, but only as semi-speakers. In most such cases there are no monolingual speakers; everyone is bilingual in the majority language, with progressively younger people having less and less ability in the minority language.

Schmidt (1990), working in an Australian Aboriginal setting, noted that often the recognition of language loss is delayed; that is, speakers may feel that their language is healthy enough within the in-group network until the remaining fluent speakers are all old, while the younger people may have only very limited ability, and may speak a rather different version of the language. By the time a community becomes aware of the impending language loss, it may be very difficult to reverse the process.

In such cases, as Dorian (1994) has recently pointed out, and as is often noted in Australian Aboriginal settings, purism and a lack of acceptance of the semi-speaker version of the language by older fluent speakers may further hasten the death of the language if young people become ashamed to speak their version of the language. Conversely, if the semi-speaker version of the language is accepted among the whole community, the effect will be relatively rapid linguistic change – a simplification of the structure of the language, which may also become more similar to the structure of the majority language. At the same time loan-words may become even more prevalent, and may spread beyond nouns and verbs into all parts of the lexicon, including grammatical words.

Alternatively, the majority language may take over completely, perhaps leaving a substratum, consisting of vestiges of the structure of the former minority language in the variety spoken by them, often with some remaining words from the minority language, but used within the structure of the majority language.

Language contact and socio-political change

Language loss is only one aspect of cultural change in response to contact with outsiders. However, language is usually a key aspect of culture, and it is largely through language that culture is maintained and transmitted. Thus a gradual transition to majority language use will also have profound consequences for the culture. In such a case bilingualism in the majority language is transitional to monolingualism in that language. It is also possible for minority groups to maintain their identity, language and culture while becoming integrated into the larger society and becoming bilingual and bicultural. The development of such stable bilingualism also depends on the history and nature of the contact and the attitude of the majority group to minorities.

Traditional Asian political systems can be characterized as a centre-periphery model. The core of the state was a capital where the ruler lived, and the degree of control decreased towards the periphery of the state, with indirect rule through local chiefs, who in the most remote areas were members of minorities. The cultural influence of the majority and the spread of its language was substantial, but relatively superficial at the periphery. At most, some chiefs, other leaders, functionaries, and traders among the more remote minority groups would have been bilingual in the distant majority language.

When the ruler at the core wanted to increase his economic power and the labour pool he could draw on, there were two methods: sending an army and allowing migrants to occupy and eventually assimilate a minority area (which is what has happened in much of south-western China gradually over the last 2,000 years), or sending an army to bring back large numbers of captives and resettle them in areas already controlled by the ruler (the procedure followed by Lao, Thai and other rulers in South-East Asia over the last millennium or so).

In the case of invasion, a small army might settle down and assimilate into the local minority population, losing most of its language, as in the case of the Mongol army at Tonghai in central Yunnan. Larger numbers of migrants would eventually lead to the sinicization of the minority population in agriculturally desirable lowland areas, forcing some minority speakers to move and leaving the remaining minority language speakers further out on the new periphery. The result of a relatively non-centralized government until 1950 was stable bilingualism with gradual minority language death in residual lowland areas and limited knowledge of Chinese in more remote areas. Since 1950, with increasing national unity, there has been a greater tendency to language death in less remote areas of south-western China.

With resettlement of war captives as widely practised by Lao and Thai rulers, the resettled populations were often left to their own devices in their new villages, as long as they paid taxes and provided labour for the rulers. Thus stable bilingualism developed, which has persisted until now in many parts of Laos and Thailand. In Thailand, it was only with the development of centralizing nationalism from the 1930s that this stable bilingualism started to break down, and groups such as the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Bisu, Ugong and Mpi, the various Lao-Thay groups scattered around north-eastern, central and southern Thailand, and the numerous smaller Mon-Khmer groups in the north-east and north, have moved towards assimilation and language death.

In the last few centuries, centralized monocultural nation-states have developed throughout the world. They have a defined territory with clear borders, and often a single majority group which may define national life in terms of its language and culture. Economic and social integration of everyone within these borders, including minorities, is viewed as a national priority. One of the main instruments of integration is the education system, whose primary goal is often the dissemination of the national language. These school systems often exclude and denigrate minority languages. Such a focus on the national language usually leads to transitional bilingualism and eventual language death among those minorities or portions of minorities who participate fully in national life.

An alternative model is the multicultural nation-state. Some, like Belgium, India and Switzerland, have no dominant group, so several different groups and their languages each achieve recognition at the national level. In some such cases, these groups are also majorities in adjacent countries (France and the Netherlands for Belgium; France, Germany and Italy for Switzerland). In other, often post-colonial nation-states, with boundaries established more or

less arbitrarily by a European colonizer, the different large groups each have a specific territory within the nation (such as India, with eighteen languages listed in the Constitution, most of which have one or more states where they have local official status).

There are also some multicultural nation-states which have a single dominant majority, but which have nevertheless given recognition to minority groups and devoted extensive resources to linguistic and cultural maintenance. The originator of this pattern was the Soviet Union under Lenin, and it later spread to other nations with similar political systems, such as China, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam. As is well known, this minority policy may have been a substantial factor in the break-up of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. To preserve national unity there must be effective efforts to achieve economic and social development and a positive attitude to the nation among minorities. Most other such countries have been more successful in this area.

Some nations which formerly had a single dominant majority language have also started to give recognition and special status to certain minority groups. In a number of European and other English-dominant nations, such as Australia, Canada and the United States, minority rights, especially the linguistic rights of indigenous minorities, have made large gains over the last twenty years. Substantial funds have been used for LM and other activities, with very good results in many areas. Unfortunately many of these are language revival or cultural heritage programmes, as language death was already very far advanced by the time communities saw the need to work for the establishment of language programmes. Other nations can perhaps learn from this, and start LM activities earlier, when they have more chance of success and are easier and less expensive to implement.

One also needs to be aware that LM needs of the same minority may be different in different places. The same language may be dead in some areas, dying in others, but still widely used elsewhere. There may also be greater or lesser internal dialect differences within the language, with or without an established standard dialect. Also, some minority languages already have well-established written forms, but these may not be universally used, and may be associated with a particular religious subgroup within the minority. These are problems which need to be overcome by appropriate LM strategies designed and implemented in consultation with all parts of each minority group.

Strategies for language maintenance

In Myanmar and Thailand, until recently, much of the language work for minorities was carried out by foreign Christian missionaries and their local counterparts, who created writing systems in the early twentieth century for some languages that are also spoken in Laos. The main books available are Christian scriptures and hymn books, but some other literature such as newsletters has also started to appear. This language work has now become mainly indigenous, but is still largely restricted to the Christian parts of these groups. For example, there is a Catholic orthography for Akha (Ko), another for Lahu (Mou Xoe), and one for Yellow Lahu (Kuy). The Ko orthography is now fairly widely used in Myanmar. There is a Baptist orthography for Lahu (Mou Xoe), now quite widely used in Myanmar, Thailand and even China. A similar Akha (Ko) orthography is also in use.

In China since 1950, and with renewed impetus since 1975, there has been a massive effort to document minority languages and cultures, to devise or reform writing systems for them, and to train minority group members both as teachers for their own groups and as researchers to work on their own languages. The basic principle in China is that these new orthographies use the alphabet and follow the phonetic values of the Chinese *pinyin* system. The Lahu (Mou Xoe) system used in China is a blend between the Baptist orthography used in Myanmar and Thailand and the *pinyin* system, but the systems for Ko and Ha Nhy are pure *pinyin*. In Australia, a great deal of work has been done to document Aboriginal languages, and more recently these efforts have shifted focus to helping Aboriginal communities to maintain or revive their languages and cultures. Studies such as those conducted by Schmidt (1990), the Australian House of Representatives (1992) and McKay (1996) provide extensive details of these activities.

The universal finding is that the local community must want to keep its language and needs to be deeply involved in, and preferably in control of, LM activities. LM work also requires the assistance of linguists and teachers, so that appropriate materials can be developed. The crucial participants are the older fluent speakers of the language, and the crucial domains for LM are the family and community, with a focus on traditional activities and knowledge. Literacy in the minority language is usually a community expectation, so orthographies may need to be created or revised; but one must be aware that the spoken language is the basic form of the language, and so foster speech as well.

The school is a domain which may intimidate and disempower community elders, who are the main source of strength for LM, but who may be illiterate and have lesser skills in the majority language. One of the most effective learning strategies in Australia has been to send groups of children away from the school with elders who can explain traditional knowledge using the group's language.

One strategy for LM that has succeeded in Australia and in China is to create local language and culture centres where minority group elders can work with minority group teachers, other local teachers, and linguists, to document the language and culture and prepare materials. These materials should be not just dictionaries and grammars, but good textbooks and traditional literature which people want to read; and not just written materials, but also audio and video, so that spoken language, music, dance and other traditional cultural activities are also preserved. Such language and culture centres must work closely with the speakers of the local languages to be certain that all materials are in an acceptable form and contain information which is accurate and which the community wants its children to have.

Language policy and language maintenance in the Lao PDR

I believe that Laos would derive major benefits in cultural richness and minority development if language and culture centres were established in minority areas. They would require some initial assistance from linguists. Later, when minority people are ready, such centres would become completely indigenous, as they are in China. They would also provide a focus for raising the self-esteem of these groups, improving their educational level, and integrating them more effectively into the nation.

Presumably the Lao Government would prefer to have some consistency in the new orthographies developed for the minority languages of the Lao PDR. In cases where there are established orthographies, as for the Mong, it may be logical to leave them in place. In cases where there is an established orthography for the same group in an adjacent country, it may be logical to use that in Laos as well, so that books already prepared elsewhere can also be used. This may be the case for Mou Xoe; Laos could choose either the Baptist orthography widely used in Myanmar and Thailand, or the orthography used in China. The latter has the advantage that there is a lot of material already published in it; but it contains many Chinese loan-words. For minority languages which lack an accepted writing system, or where the existing systems are not found to be suitable, it should be possible to use a modified version of the Lao orthography. If such scripts are well designed, they can also help minority children to learn Lao more quickly.

This and other language issues require policy and planning, which should be consistent and centralized, not spread piecemeal among a number of different ministries. A single language planning body like this exists in a number of countries including Australia, France and Malaysia. Another model is to have one body in control of minority language matters and another with responsibility for the national language. This is the pattern in China. In any case linguists who pay attention to the views of the people and are effective in promoting the national language policy should be undertaking this work.

TOURISM AND THE MAINTENANCE OF MINORITY LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

On the one hand, minorities are a valuable tourism asset. They are exotic, and most live in remote regions which are also attractive to eco-tourists. On the other hand, minorities may be at risk if tourism development is uncontrolled, as has been seen in Nepal and Thailand. It is often suggested that tourism is a 'clean' industry, but in fact the impacts of sex tourism, uncontrolled hill tribe trekking, and new resort developments in hill areas, have been anything but 'clean' in Thailand.

Mass-market tourists may spend a few hours in Disneyland-style minority tourism centres, like the long-established Old Chiangmai Cultural Centre in Thailand or the relatively new minority villages near Yangon in Myanmar and near Kunming in China. Some will make a day trip to a single minority location, like the Golden Triangle resort in northern Thailand or the Stone Forest south-east of Kunming. However, many tourists may be dissatisfied with this kind of short, sanitized, packaged minority experience, and some will stay much longer if they can travel into more remote areas and have a more authentic experience.

The challenge is to make this possible without undesirable impacts on minority life. Tourists have money, and so can buy handicrafts; but they also compete for all other local resources, thus potentially driving up the cost of food and everything else, decimating the local edible livestock, and

leaving their waste behind. Communications infrastructure (airports, roads, buses) needs to be justified on the basis of internal needs, not just to open up new tourism destinations. Luxury hotels are not for local people, and the jobs in them are more likely to go to majority-group members or outsiders with better foreign language skills, not to local minorities.

Should minority festivals and other cultural activities be co-opted into the service of tourism? If so, how authentic will they remain? Should a New Year song be performed daily, and if so, can it be shortened to fit into a programme? Should the dancers and singers be professional? Do they then need special training which may take them away from their group for an extended period? Do they even need to be members of the minority at all? The same goes for clothing and other handicrafts: many of the 'hill tribe' handicrafts in Thailand and China are made by majority people in factories, and much of what is available is non-traditional (the Sani knapsacks in Yunnan) or has taken major deviations from tradition (the Ko clothes embroidered on sewing machines, using store-bought cloth and thread). Such issues need to be considered, and members of the minorities should be happy with the outcomes. The rights of minorities to control the representation and dissemination of their culture must be stronger than they have been up to now.

While it is not possible to freeze a culture, the impacts of tourism can be rapid and profound. Anthroplogists speak of the 'museumification' of culture, but what we are seeing now is the 'touristification' of minority culture in many places around the world, including several countries neighbouring Laos. It is often not a pretty sight. If tourism is properly managed, it can be a source of substantial revenue without major social or ecological impacts. In Bhutan, for example, strict controls have maintained a low-volume, high-value tourist intake. These tourists are carefully packaged and escorted, and must often accept local living standards rather than climate-controlled private bedrooms and bathrooms with twenty-four-hour hot water. A genuine local experience may not be for every tourist, but it is for many.

I believe that one way to assist minorities in the Lao PDR is to involve them closely in the provision of a traditional minority experience for visitors. The minorities themselves should derive a substantial part of the benefit, unlike in Thailand where the tour companies and guides keep almost all the money and are usually not knowledgeable about the groups to whom they bring tourists. I also believe that minority group members who have worked on the preservation and documentation of their language and culture are in an ideal position to facilitate and lead the development of culturally sensitive tourism. They are familiar with outsiders, but have shown that they are committed to their own group. They can explain their own culture most effectively and maximize the understanding that tourists gain of it, while also protecting their group and optimizing the benefits for them.

CONCLUSION

La Trobe University has conducted a variety of work with the minorities of Laos, especially related to language and linguistics, as well as education, sociology, anthropology, ethnomedicine and tourism. I believe there is great potential for future joint efforts, both to document and preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage of these groups and to assist them in language development and cultural maintenance. In particular I would like to suggest a small-scale programme of work by Lao and Australian colleagues, which might start with the minorities of a particular province such as Phongsaly as a pilot study. This would bring minority leaders, teachers and elders together with language and culture experts in programmes leading to the development of writing systems and the recording of literature, then produce appropriate textbooks and other literature, audio and video materials for minority language and culture maintenance as well as more effective learning of Lao and fuller integration within Laos. Most of the costs of such a programme could be recovered if this work also assisted the development of carefully controlled cultural tourism.

NOTE

1. While working in the Sociology Department at La Trobe University, Dr Grant Evans did extensive fieldwork in the Lao PDR. Relevant publications include Evans, 1983, 1984, 1988 and 1990. In the Anthropology Department, Dr Martha Macintyre carried out various research on minority women's issues in the Lao PDR. In the Department of Biochemistry, Gideon Polya is conducting research on traditional herbal medicine used by various groups in the Lao PDR.

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Preserving and Promoting Language and Script: The Case of Thai

CAM TRONG

It is the duty of intellectuals to contribute to the preservation and development of the culture of ethnic groups around the world. This could be perceived as a relatively easy task, because of the belief that as a nation exists and develops, its language and scripts are bound to exist and develop. The facts in Viet Nam, and in areas inhabited by the Thai ethnic group there, show that it is actually no simple matter.

Like neighbouring Laos, Viet Nam is a country with many ethnic groups – it is a community of ethnic groups. Each group has its own language and seven of them, including the Thai group, have their own script.[1] These ethnic groups do not live separately in distinct areas, but together in various types of human settlement down to the commune, the lowest administrative unit of the country. As a result it is common for people to use several languages in their day-to-day lives. For example, the Thai people usually speak both Thai and Vietnamese, while the Kmhmu', LaHa, Xinh Mun and Khang people speak their own language, as well as the Thai and the Vietnamese languages. This phenomenon has been described by some as bilingualism.

At first sight it is a phenomenon which seems to be quite positive. At a very young age a child can speak several local languages, and this may help him or her to take up foreign languages, a prerequisite for wider knowledge. Yet things have turned out differently in the areas inhabited by the Thai ethnic group. Many Thai children and adults now speak 'loose' Thai and Vietnamese, and being able to speak several local languages as part of daily life has led to the erosion of people's original languages. The absence of due corrective measures may well, in my view, destroy these languages. What has been done to overcome this negative development? At the state and legal levels, the present Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam states: 'Every nationality has the right to use its own language and system of writing, to preserve its national identity, and to promote its fine customs, habits, traditions and culture.'[2] While guarantees have been secured for this, scientific and practical measures must be worked out to solve two important issues: consensus on the use of the mother tongue in all social relations; and official inclusion of the mother tongue in the school curriculum.

In August 1996 the Education Centre for Nationalities, under the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, held a workshop 'to prepare the conditions and organization, on a pilot basis, for a number of primary classes where education is imparted through the medium of the native languages of ethnic groups, including the Thai language and script.'[3] The workshop was held under the direction of Dr Tran Si Nguyen, Director of the Education Centre for Nationalities, and benefited from the teaching of

two Australian experts. The consensus reached at this important workshop was that members of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam should start learning through their own native language. To have a thorough understanding of one's own native language is a pre-condition for preserving and developing one's culture, and for each person to become a genuine member of his or her ethnic group. For a member of the Thai ethnic group in Viet Nam, this would require several conditions.

A GOOD GRASP OF THE ESSENCE OF THE THAI LANGUAGE AND ITS CORRECT USE

In relation to this, I propose an account of the basic features of the Thai language in Viet Nam. The Thai language, as a unified entity, is called in Viet Nam the Tay-Thai language; in Laos it is referred to as the Lao-Tai language and in Thailand as the Thai language; in China it is called the Zhuang-Dong language. It comprises numerous dialects, but if a person can speak, read and write fluently one of the Thai dialects, he or she can converse on non-academic subjects with all those in the north-western parts of Viet Nam, and with Thai-speaking people in Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, India and China.

The Thai language is monosyllabic and has a number of tones which provide different meanings to a word. For example, the one word ma has six possible meanings, depending on the tone. *Ma* can mean dog, to immerse in water (as with rice), gun cartridge, to come or to return, river and horse. While being monosyllabic, the Thai language also involves combinations at the beginning of a word, between a consonant and a vowel or vice versa: for example, p combined with l in *platlom* (to slip and fall); x with t in *lakxtoc* (to pull strongly); x with a in *x'au* (a vegetable which grows on the banks of brooks).

Thai sentences usually have the following grammatical order: subject-predicate-object. When combined into sentences, the words have no declination: for example, *Khoi pay Muong Lao* (I go to Laos), or *Man non dap di* (He sleeps soundly). The Thai language is a developed one with a literary component, and is able to describe various natural and social phenomena. For the sake of development, the Thai language borrows extensively from the Vietnamese language, which now accounts for a large proportion of Thai vocabulary.

However, in Viet Nam, our Thai language has not been intensively researched with a view to codifying the grammatical rules and compiling dictionaries, and as a result it remains a folk language, an expression of folk culture, and is far from becoming an academic language. Consequently, learning the Thai language in Viet Nam has so far been done through dealing and conversing with persons of the Thai ethnic group, and does not involve textbooks. In accordance with a project carried out by the Education Centre for Nationalities, the Thai language was taught on a pilot basis in the 1997–99 school years, in a number of primary classes. This is the first step in the Vietnamese Government's programme which we hope might help turn the Thai language into an academic one.[4]

A GOOD GRASP OF THE THAI SCRIPT AND THE ABILITY TO USE IT CORRECTLY

The Thai people have both a language and an old script

According to Quam To Muong (Tales about our Ban [villages] and Muong [chiefdoms]), a manuscript in the Thai language, ever since the Thai tribes appeared in Muong Om, Muong Ai (upper reaches of the Nam U and Nam Khong rivers) they have been in calendars.[5] *Quam To Muong* also says that the time when the two brothers Tao Xuong and Tao Ngon led the Black Thais in their migration from Muong Om, Muong Ai to Muomg Lo roughly coincided with the Ly Dynasty of Viet Nam (eleventh century A.D.). This indicates that the Thai script came into being before that time.

But folk-tales assert that Lo Let, a Thai ruler of Muong Luong-Muong Muoi (a centre of the Thai people in the north-western part of Viet Nam during the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries) assumed for some time the function of Xen-Xa, a high post, in the court of the Lao King Souvanna Khamphong (also called Thao Pipha or Phakphongeam) and brought the script from Laos to the Thai people in Muong Muoi and other places. As is known, Lo Let directly ruled over Muong Muoi, but was a famous Black Thai leader in Viet Nam. Thus, most Thai people give credit to this story.

It is also known that the Thai script originated from Sanskrit, a script used on a widespread basis in India from the fifth century B.C.[6] It is assumed that the Thai people living in various parts of South-East Asia adopted Sanskrit. It is reported that King Rama Khamheng of Siam reconstructed the Thai script in the thirteenth century, while

Chao Fa Ngum did the same in Laos in the fourteenth century. Thus, there is a grain of truth in stories which purport that Lo Let, almost at the same time, systematized the Thai script and diffused it to his people. Either way, one can say that the Thai script came into being in Viet Nam 500–600 years ago or, at the most, about 1,000 years ago.

In Viet Nam there are seven different ways of writing the Thai script which is, however, quite uniform in structural principles. The seven ways of writing are the alphabet of the Black Thai, the alphabet of the White Thai in Muong Lay, Muong So, Muong Sang and Muong Tac, and the alphabet of two Black and White Thai groups in Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces. Only the seventh is similar to the Chinese vertical way of writing, from top to bottom (in Chau Quy district, Nghe An province, and in the western part of the same province).

The script has a unity of structure. As it originates in the Sanskrit, the Thai script is phonetic and not pictographic. It has nineteen pairs of consonants (that is To, in Thai language), nineteen with a low tone and nineteen with a high tone, thus a total of thirty-eight consonants. If this practice is applied to Latin words, consonants b and n would involve low tone b and high tone b, low tone n and high tone n. Consonants are pronounced with the addition of o, for example, bo-bo, ko-ko etc. Apart from special combinations as mentioned earlier, Thai consonants do not form combinations as seen in Latin alphabets such as ch, ph, tr, nh, ng.

The old script does not have symbols denoting accents, but each consonant can have an ordinary, low or high accent. In order to overcome this complication, each person must strive to pronounce very accurately and be able to pronounce each consonant with three accents: ordinary, low and high. For example a word which is written as *ban* can be pronounced in three ways and can mean: to harrow the land; to be jagged, cracked (a cracked knife); or a Thai village. Another word which is also written as *ban* can be pronounced in three ways and have three other meanings: to discuss affairs; swift (flowing waters in a river); or friends.

The old script has seventeen vowels, which in speaking are usually preceded by consonants. For example, consonant k: ka (a), ke (e), kê (ê), ki (i), kô (ô), kó (ó), ku (u), kù (ù), kau (au), kaù (aù), kay (ay), kam (am), kan (an), kang (ang), kua (ua or uô), kia (ia or iê), kua (ua or úò). O is not included in the vowel system, and therefore there is no combination ko. That is because o plays the role of a vowel and the role of a false consonant, as seen in the following combinations: op, oc, ok, oi, ot, on, om, ong.

In terms of syllabification and rhyming, the Thai script has only eight consonants to be put at the end of each word: b, k, d, n, m, n, g and v. Some example combinations are *oa* = *a* which means aunt; *ac* means cruel; *ar* means to hit (when dealing with infants); *ai* means smell and taste; *at* means threat; *an* means saddle (for a horse); *am* means cooking (rice); *ang* means vessel, container; *ao* means uncle. In order to allow o, as vowel and consonant, to become a word with meaning, a symbol is used called *may khit*. For example, d is usually pronounced do, and when we call early rice *khau do* it is necessary to write d.

In most cases, letter combinations for forming words in the Thai script are in the following pattern: preceding consonant plus vowel plus ending consonant. Therefore, in general, Thai script requires three letters to form a meaningful word. There are also cases when four letters combine with rhyme formations like oa, ur, uye, uya, oe. Thanks to all this, one finds it quite easy to learn the letters and their combinations and remember them.

UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE AND READING THE SCRIPT

Preserving the culture of an ethnic group is inseparable from the preservation and classification of its old books. The Thai popular saying 'use palm leaves as paper for writing' and folk-tales suggest to us that a long time ago the Thai people wrote on sheets of palm leaves which were then tied together. Writing implements were thorns from plants or pointed sticks. After writing on the palm leaves *(bau lan)*, people rubbed a certain red fruit *(nho)* against the leaves and beautiful lines of red words appeared. Indeed, writing on palm leaves was quite widespread in Laos and Thailand, but in the case of the Thai people in Viet Nam no specimens of such writing have been found. Therefore, palm-leaf books are still just assumptions as far as the Thai people in Viet Nam are concerned. What is more obvious and widespread was the practice of writing with brushes, Chinese ink and paper as in the case of the Kinh (Vietnamese) ethnic group.

Under French rule, schools teaching French and Vietnamese were established in regions inhabited by the Thai ethnic group. The Thai language and script were not taught in these schools, but the Thai script was preserved

thanks to learned persons who continued to write it with modern pen, ink and paper. It is obvious that the practice of writing with brush, Chinese ink, and thin paper was borrowed by the Thai from the Kinh (Vietnamese) ethnic group who learned from China the Han calligraphy and invented their own demotic script. The Thai people brought thin paper from the Red River Delta region, and also had their own paper made from a certain plant called *khat mon*.

By the end of the 1950s and all through the 1960s, the Culture Service of the former North-Western Autonomous Area was engaged in finding and collecting old Thai manuscripts. I also took part in the work of that team and we were able to locate a valuable store of Thai cultural heritage. I am also aware that the library of the Société Asiatique de Paris keeps several dozen old Thai manuscripts collected by Henri Maspero. In April 1996 I found a valuable manuscript on the Laws of Ban Muong. It is my hope that in the not too distant future I will have the opportunity to co-operate with French experts in deciphering these manuscripts. For researchers on the Thai ethnic group in Viet Nam, reading these old Thai manuscripts is indeed a 'must' if proper credence is to be lent to their research papers. The main features of those texts are outlined below.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL RECORDS

Historical records

Of the many Thai manuscripts already collected, several hundred have basically similar contents with some slight variations. Most outstanding among these manuscripts is *Quam To Muong* (Tales of our Ban and Muong), variants of which were collected, studied, annotated and selected for translation into Vietnamese. The first translation was made by Cam Quynh and myself and was published in 1960.[7] A revised translation was made by Professor Dang Nghiem Van and myself, for a publication in 1977 called *Materials on the history of Thai society*.[8] Mention should also be made of *Quam Tay Pu Xoc* (Epic Stories of our Ancestors), *Quam Muong* (Story of the Formation of our Muong), *Quam Piet Muong* (Sacred Words of our Muong), and *Genealogy of the Ha Cong Family* (the Ha Cong family was associated with the emergence of Muong Ha, Muong Mum), which were translated into Vietnamese and incorporated into the *Materials on the History of Thai society*. Then there are *Pheng Muong Noi* (on the disputes between aristocratic families in the Chau Muong), *Xoc Han Co Luong* (story of the fight against the Yellow Banner rebels at the end of the nineteenth century), and many tomes of poems on the rebellions staged by the Thai people against French colonial rule (1881–1930).

Records on customs and habits

There are several manuscripts worth mentioning in this respect. *Hit Khong Ban Muong* (Laws of Ban Muong) has been studied, annotated and translated into Vietnamese by Dang Nghiem Van and Kha Van Tien, and included in the *Materials on the History of Thai Society. Hit Khong Tay Dam Muong Muoi* (Laws of the Black Thai in Thuan Chau)[9] was compiled by Luong Van Hon, a famous shaman of Thuan Chau Province, in 1930. The manuscript was studied and translated by Dang Nghiem Van and Tong Kim An and included in the publication *Materials on the History of Thai society*.[10]

Other interesting manuscripts are *Quam Xon Con* (Advice to People) and the songs and sayings on the occasion of weddings, inauguration of new houses, and *Lam Tang* (showing the way to the souls of the dead) recited during funeral ceremonies of the White Thais. There are several hundred manuscripts on worship rites devoted to the Ban and Muong spirit. Manuscripts for use by shamans also exist, as do manuscripts giving guidance on propitious or adverse days. Other interesting documents are *Pap Mu* (Thai calendars).[11]

Narrative poems, an important theme of old Thai manuscripts

This theme is the subject of dozens of old Thai manuscripts. Many persons are still engaged in collecting such poems and it may be a very long time before this work can be completed. In view of the large number of such poems, many say that they constitute the bulk of Thai literature.

The manuscript best known for its style and rich contents which brings out prominently the Thai identity is the epic poem *Song Chu Son Sao* (Bidding Farewell to the Beloved). It was translated into Vietnamese by the writer Mac Phi, and the published translation also contains an introduction, annotations and comparisons with variants. The manuscript was given a high assessment by Vietnamese academic circles and has been included in the curriculum of the philology faculties of universities, along with *Dam San* of the Ede ethnic group and *Giving Birth to Land and Water* of the Muong ethnic group.

As there are very many Thai poems, and no list can be exhaustive, I would confine myself to mentioning two groups. The first group consists of oral stories and tales of the ancient period, which were subsequently turned into poems. Most outstanding is *Chuong Han* (The Heroic Chuong), which was also known in Laos and Thailand as *Thao Hung Thao Chuong*. Together with *Song Chu Son Sao, Chuong Han* raised the old literary Thai language to a new artistic level and reflected social psychology with a deep imprint of Thai identity. In this respect, mention must be made of the narrative poem *Khun Lu Nang Ua*, also an outstanding literary work of the Thai people.

The second group consists of adaptations from literary works of other nations. These adaptations came mainly from three sources. The first is adaptations of anonymous literary works of Viet Nam. These include *Chang Nghien*, a narrative Thai poem based on the Vietnamese poem *Tong Tran Cuc Hoa*; and *Chang Tu*, a narrative Thai poem based on the Vietnamese poem *Pham Tai Ngoc Hoa*. The second source is adaptations of Chinese literary works, such as the *Story of the Three Warring Kingdoms; Luong Son Ba and Chuc Anh Dai* (the story of two unfortunate but faithful lovers); and *Chieu Quan Cong Ho* (about an imperial Han royal maid given in marriage to a Tartar king). The third source is adaptations of Lao literary works such as *Thithon, Si That Sila, U Then*.

This brief review has, I hope, given an idea of the rich cultural heritage of the Thai ethnic group in Viet Nam, which commands the deep sentimental commitment of our people, and brings into further prominence our duty to preserve and develop it.[12]

NOTES

1. Seven ethnic groups have scripts: Kinh (Vietnamese), Thai, Cham, Khmer, Tay, Nung and Yao. The Kinh (Vietnamese) ethnic group has a Latin alphabet; the Thai, Cham and Khmer groups have scripts patterned on the Indian script; the Tay, Nung and Yao groups have scripts patterned on Chinese characters.
2. *Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam*, Hanoi, Publishing House and Legal Publishing House, 1992, p. 14.
3. Documents of the workshop *Bringing Ethnic Languages and Scripts into the Curriculum of Primary Schools* (1996), Centre of Education for Nationalities, Ministry of Education and Training, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.
4. Cam Trong and Phan Huu Dat, *Thai-Vietnamese Culture*, Hanoi, National Culture Publishing House, 1995, pp. 350–3.
5. *Quam to Muong*, variants of a Thai manuscript collected in Muong La, Muong Muoi, Muong Pieng, Muong Sai, Muong Lo, Muong Thanh, and Muong Quai. (In Vietnamese.)
6. L. Finot, 'Annales du Lane Xang', in 'Présence du Royaume Lao', *France-Asie*, Vols. 118–19, 1956.
7. Cam Trong and Cam Quynh, Vietnamese translation of *Quam To Muong* (Tales about our Ban and Muong), Hanoi, History Publishing House, 1960.
8. Dang Nghiem Van, Cam Trong, Kha Vanm Tien and Tong Kim An, *Materials on the History of Thai Society*, Hanoi, Social Sciences Publishing House, 1977.
9. Cf. ibid.
10. Cf. ibid.
11. Cam Trong and Phan Huu Dat, ibid., pp. 369–95.
12. *See also The Thai in North-Western Viet Nam*, Hanoi, Social Sciences Publishing House, 1967.

The Literature of Lao and Tai Minority Groups in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula

ANATOLE PELTIER

The name 'Tai' designates the ethnic groups related to the Thai who live in and outside Thailand. Among them might be mentioned the Lao, the Yuan of Lan Na (the former Kingdom of Chiang Mai), the Lu of Sipsong Panna (Yunnan, People's Republic of China) and the Khun of Chieng Tung (Shan State of Myanmar). While the Lao form the majority in their country, which comprises more than sixty different ethnic groups, they form a large, not to say dominant, minority in a neighbouring country – Thailand. In fact the sixteen provinces in the north-east of Thailand, known by the Thai as Isan provinces, are inhabited by an ethnic group which still speaks Lao and keeps up Lao customs and traditions. History has ordained that there are more Lao in Thailand than in Laos itself.

In the study of the Lao and Tai literatures of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, it is difficult to draw a distinction between oral and written works. The adoption of writing did not have the effect of definitively fixing the form of the various literary works, of classical novels in particular. The fact that these novels exist in several versions in writing, the copyists correcting or altering the original text when copying, does not prevent them from circulating orally. So we have two traditions, one in writing, the other oral, coexisting and complementary. Neither can be regarded as an independent tradition. As I have worked chiefly on manuscripts, I propose in this chapter to give a general view of the Lao and Tai literatures and to explain the close relationships existing between them, as much in respect of the content of the texts as the forms of versification and the writing systems used to note them down. I shall then present the studies that have been carried out on these literatures and the forthcoming publication projects, in the hope that they will contribute in their way to the safe-guarding and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage of the minority groups not only of Laos, but also of the Tai minority groups of South-East Asia.

LAO LITERATURE IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Lao and Tai literatures have attracted very few researchers so far, no doubt owing to the language barrier. As soon as Lao literature is mentioned, Louis Finot's work comes to mind. *His Recherches sur la littérature laotienne*[1] is still the reference, despite its lacunae. It has to be admitted that this almost centenary work was written at a time when a knowledge of the vernacular languages was less developed than it is nowadays. I make a point, nevertheless, of paying tribute to this great scholar, former head of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, who is recognized by researchers as the pioneer in Lao studies, and then also to Henri Deydier, whose accidental death was a great loss to Lao studies.

Lao literature probably goes back to the earliest times of Lan Xang, the old name of the Lao kingdom which was founded in the thirteenth century. This was the period which saw the flourishing of Tai kingdoms and principalities in the Indo-Chinese peninsula. The texts regarded as the oldest are *Khun Burom*, which relates the legendary origin of the Lao and the Tai and the establishment of the first Lao and Tai kingdoms in South-East Asia, and *Thao Hung-Thao Chuang*, which relates the exploits of a Lao hero, and then of his son, in defence of the Lao country. It is very likely that these two epics existed in an oral form before later being noted down with the advent of writing.

An early collection of literature was probably constructed under the reign of Sam Sen Thai. His predecessor, Fa Ngum, had a stormy reign, taken up as he was by the organization of the country and its unification under the name of Lan Xang (country of the million elephants). It was only under the reign of Pothisarath (1520–47), with the sending from Lan Na to Lan Xang in 1523 of sixty fascicles of the Tripitaka that Dham writing, in which the Buddhist texts are noted down, came into current use in Laos. Pothisarath's son, Setthathirath, reigned for one year over Chiang Mai and, on his return to Luang Prabang in 1548, must have brought many manuscripts with him, which explains why many texts of the Yuan literature of Chiang Mai are to be found in Lan Xang. Lao literature was not to assert its identity until a century later. Lao historians and scholars are agreed in thinking that the most fruitful literary period was in the seventeenth century under the reign of Souligna Vongsa. The great classics as we know them today, including *Sin Xay, Nang Teng One, Usabarot, Kalaket* and *Champa si Ton*, date back to this period, which coincided with Lan Xang's heyday. The death of Souligna Vongsa in 1694 was followed by a period of internecine struggles which put an end to Lao unity. Lan Xang found itself divided once more into three rival states: Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champassak. Over two centuries, which saw the ravages of wars and deportations of populations towards the right bank of the Mekong, Lao literature lost its creativity and entered a period of lethargy. This cultural vacuum enabled Siamese literature to establish itself in Lao territory, especially from the nineteenth century onwards.

SOURCES AND THEMES COMMON TO LAO AND TAI LITERATURES

If you read Lao classical novels, you notice that many of them have themes common or similar to those of other Tai ethnic groups, such as the Yuan, the Khun, the Lu or the Shan. A few titles of works common to the Lao and the Tai are given below as an example:

LAO		YUAN
Champa Si Ton ຈຳປາສີ່ຕົ້ນ	=	Champa Si Ton [illegible]
Thao Kam Ka Dam ທ້າວກ່ຳກາດຳ	=	Kam Ka Dam [illegible]
Thao Gatdanam ທ້າວກັດທະນາມ	=	Gaddhana [illegible]
Candagat ຈັນທະຄາດ	=	Candagha [illegible]
Nithan Nok Chok ນິທານນົກຈອກ	=	Nok Kracap [illegible]

Some Yuan titles are twice as long because they include the name of the hero and the name of the heroine, as for example:

Thao Sovat ທ້າວໄສວັດ	=	Chao Suvat - Nang Buakham [illegible]
Thao Surivong ທ້າວສຸຣິວົງ	=	Suriyavong - Klaison [illegible]
Nang Teng One ນາງແຕງອ່ອນ	=	Mahavong - Teng One [illegible]

In some cases, different titles refer to the same story, as, for instance:

LAO		YUAN
Thao Lin Thong ທ້າວລິ້ນທອງ	=	Jivhā Lin Gam [illegible]
Sièosavat ສຽວສວາດ	=	Chalièo - Chalat [illegible]
Nang Oraphim ນາງອໍລະພິມ	=	Pacit [illegible]

Some Lao works are to be found among the Khun too, either with the same title, or under another, but telling the same story, with in some cases slight variations:

LAO		KHÜN
Sièosavat ສຽວສວາດ	=	Sièosavat [illegible]
Kampha Kai Kèo ກ່ຳພ້າໄກ່ແກ້ວ	=	Nang Phom Hom [illegible]
Khun Lu - Nang Ua ຂຸນລຸນາງອົ້ວ	=	Nang Rungrai [illegible]
Bua Hong-Bua Hièo ບົວຮອງບົວຮຽວ	=	Khièo Song Mon [illegible]

Among the above-mentioned classics, some are known among the Burmese Shans, also called Tai Yai, either with the same title, or with a different title, but relating the same story, as, for example:

LAO		SHAN
Kampha Kai Kèo ກ່ຳພ້າໄກ່ແກ້ວ	=	Nang Phom Hom [illegible]
Khun Lu - Nang Ua ຂຸນລຸນາງອົ້ວ	=	Along Chao Sam Lo [illegible]
Pa Bu Thong ປາບູ່ທອງ	=	Nang Ye Sengko [illegible]

Mention must also be made of the Lu, who make up a not inconsiderable ethnic group in China, Myanmar and Thailand but who are regarded as Lao in Laos. The following are titles of some of their works:

LAO			LÜ	
Nang Teng One	ນາງແຕງອ່ອນ	=	Nang Teng One	[illegible]
Kampha Phi Noy	ກຳພ້າຜີນ້ອຍ	=	Siëo Phi Siëo Khon	[illegible]
Bua Rong - Bua Riëo	ບົວຮອງບົວຮຽວ	=	Lè Kham Sam To	[illegible]

The above examples show that the Lao and Tai literatures are very close to one another. There are several reasons for this. The first is that most of the texts have a common origin, having been adapted directly from the *Pannasa Jataka*, a collection of apocryphal Jataka stories, probably of Mon origin, known in Laos as *Ha Sip Sat*. When King Mangrai seized the kingdom of Haripunjay towards the end of the thirteenth century, he took possession of the whole Mon cultural heritage, which he and his successors spread first to Chiang Mai and then to the bordering territories. Among the classics adapted directly from the *Pannasa Jataka* might be mentioned *Nok Krachap* or *Nok Chok*, from the *Sabbasiddhi Jataka, Nang Oraphim* from the *Pacitta Jataka*, and *Suthon-Manora* from the *Sudhana Jataka*, to mention only the best-known. Other classics such as *Sin Xay, Thao Sovat or Kalaket* also drew their inspiration more or less directly from these Jataka stories.

When Chiang Mai was conquered by the Burmese in 1556, the Kingdom of Lan Na entered a period of lethargy which lasted more than two centuries. All literary activity seems to have ceased. Almost at the same time, Lan Xang attained its peak, both politically and culturally. This is the period of the great classics, some of which, for instance *Sin Xay* and *Kalaket*, are considered masterpieces of Lao literature. The momentum, which for a time had come from Lan Na, was then reversed. That is why works of Lao origin are to be found in the territories once known as 'Western Laos', that is, Lan Na, the Shan State of Burma and the Lu State of the Chinese Sipsong Panna.

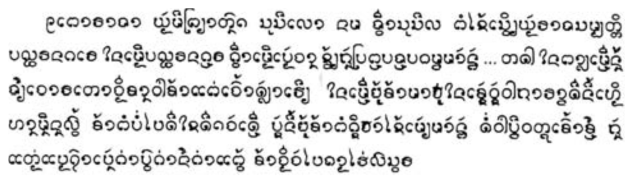
At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Vientiane was razed to the ground by the Bangkok army, Siam's influence became preponderant, especially in the cultural sphere. That is why works of Siamese origin, such as *Kai Thong, Keo Hna Ma* and *Inhao*, are to be found in Lao literature. That being granted, the Lao and Tai literatures, which are anonymous folk literatures, cannot be assimilated with Siamese literature, which is basically a court literature, even though some of its works are inspired by the *Pannasa Jataka*, as in the cases of *Sang Thong* and *Sombhamit*, adapted respectively from the *Suvannasankha Jataka* and the *Sumbhamitta Jataka*.

THE LAO AND TAI WRITING SYSTEMS

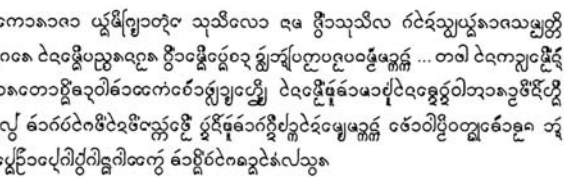
If the Lao and Tai literatures show close relationships, it is mainly owing to the writing systems used by each, which are very alike since they have a common origin. As mentioned earlier, Mangrai, the first king of Lan Na, took over the Mon cultural heritage when he gained possession of Haripunjaya. The Yuan script of Chiang Mai, which is a fairly faithful adaptation of the Mon script, then spread to the neighbouring territories and gave rise to scripts which differ only in insignificant respects. The script known as 'Dham' by the Lao and the Tai, or 'Dham Phra Chao' by the Khun, that is, 'the script of the Buddha', served originally to propagate Buddhist teachings. If you are able to read one of these scripts, for instance Dham Lao, it will not be very difficult to decipher, then read, Dham Yuan, Dham Khun or Dham Lu. As both the scripts and the languages were roughly the same, the Lao and Tai peoples of the Indo-Chinese peninsula were able to correspond over the centuries, and texts were circulated from one region to another. For the benefit of the uninitiated it should be noted that the literary language of the texts is practically the same from one Tai ethnic group to another, apart from a few particularities peculiar to each dialect. This similarity explains too why it is often difficult to determine accurately the origin of this or that classical work.

The following is a quotation from *Xieng Noi Corato*, a Lao classic written in Dham on a manuscript from Savannakhet (central Laos), transcribed here in the Dham Lao, Khun, Lu and Yuan scripts:

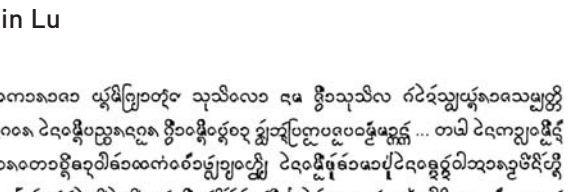
Text in Dham Lao



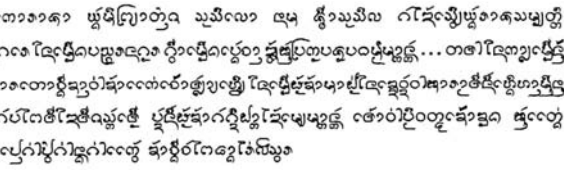
Text in Khun



Text in Lu



Text in Yuan



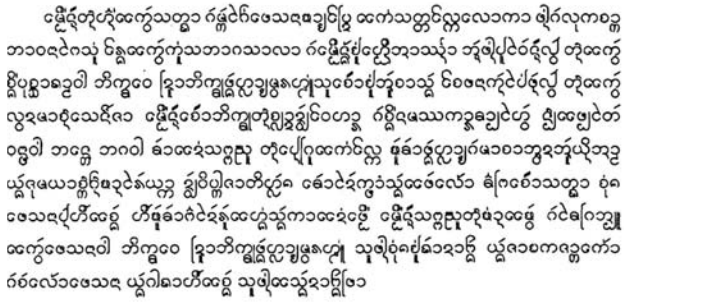
The English translation is as follows:

Once upon a time there was a king known by the name of Susira. He reigned in accordance with the law over Panchara Nagara… Thereupon Xieng Noy Corato said: 'Hear me! For a long time I have remained confined in the precincts of the monastery. Not once have I been elsewhere. Now I am taken by a great desire to have a wife, but I do not have the wherewithal to keep her. So I am going to work the land.'

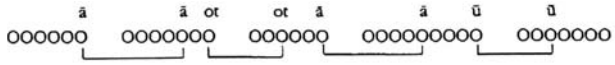
As can be seen, the differences from one script to another are slight. The text is drafted in a style called 'Nissaya', a style to be found in most of the edifying texts. It contains words or phrases in Pali, which are then glossed in vernacular languages. It appears that the first Buddhist texts noted down in writing were written in Nissaya. These texts were later reworked and put into verse in accordance with forms of versification adopted by the Lao and the Tai.

PROSODIC FORMS IN USE AMONG THE LAO AND THE TAI

Apart from the Nissaya, which appears to be the earliest prosodic form known to date, the verse form mainly used in the Lao and Tai classics is a form referred to as 'Ray' by the Siamese, 'Hay' by the Lao, 'Dham Yoy' by the Khun, 'Kham Khap' by the Lu and 'Khuam Hlom' by the Shan. It consists in rhyming the last foot of a line with one of the first five feet of the next line, which may comprise from five to ten feet. The following is an example taken from a Khun classic entitled *Pet Leng Ok Yot*:

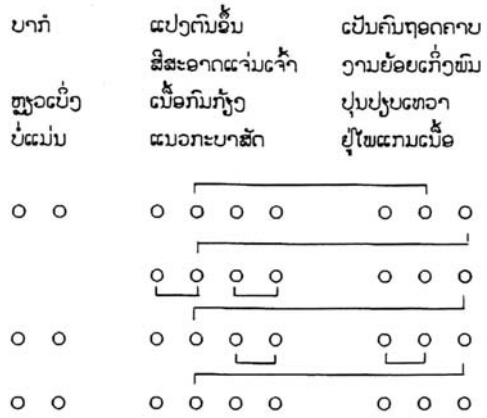


Represented schematically below are the first five lines with their rhymes. A translation of the passage follows.



Whereupon the eminent master, who loved to bestow his teachings on the World, emerged from his meditation and headed for the great Jewel Room. He sat down on a mat laid out by some of his disciples and asked: 'Oh, monks, what were you talking about when I arrived?' A monk renowned for his intelligence and his eloquence bowed low and replied, 'Oh, Omniscient Master of the World, we were asking one another, with amazement, what misdeeds a beggar could have committed in previous lives to be reborn in such a condition. Oh, Lord, please explain this to us so that we can be freed from doubt'. The Buddha then spoke and said, 'Oh, monks, prepare to hear this Jataka, which relates what happened in a previous life'.

The form of versification which we have just shown is common to all the Tai ethnic groups of the Indo-Chinese peninsula and undoubtedly belongs to the great oral tradition. It is in this form that the great epics have come down to us. Although there are texts transcribed in Hay, as, for example, the *Vessantara Jataka*, the Lao prefer the 'Kon An'(reading verse), which can be either spoken or sung by the *mo lam*, those minstrels of modern times. Kon An is more sophisticated than Hay, for it has rhymes within the same line as well as from one line to the next, as shown by these lines taken from a Lao classical novel entitled *Thao Nok Kaba Phuak (The White Nightjar)*:



In the above rhyme scheme it will be observed that assonance, or the recurrence of the same vowel sound, occurs from one line to another, as in Western poetry, and that rhymes within a line may be produced by repeating the same vowel sound or the same consonantal sound. Here is an English translation:

Whereupon he took off his wrap to become a human being.

The glorious and most serene prince glistened with beauty like Brahmaz.

Consider his good condition, like unto a god!

This is no nightjar, creature of forests peopled with wild beasts.

My intention here is not to make a study of prosody, but to give some idea of the forms of versification used by the Lao and the Tai, forms which have many points in common. The *Lao Kon An*, for example, is very close to the *Glong Ha* of Ayutthaya. Rhymes within the same line as well as from one line to the next are also used in the Fhun and Yuan *Gao Jo*. This shows that it is not possible at present to make a serious study of one Tai minority group while ignoring the others. I propose in the following section to describe the methods I used and the action I took to safeguard the Lao and Tai cultural heritage.

PUBLICATION OF LAO AND TAI TEXTS

I settled in Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand some fifteen years ago with a view to studying the Yuan literature of Lan Na, which I thought was an extension of Lao literature. One day, by chance, I stumbled on a Khun manuscript, *Maha Vipaka Luang*, which describes the tortures inflicted in hell on beings who have committed misdeeds during their stay on earth. At the time, few people knew who the Khun were, for this word, pronounced *Khœn* in Thai, was applied to everything connected with silverware. Now, there is a district in Chiang Mai specializing in silversmithing, which is in the hands of Khun who came from Chieng Tung and who have been living there for several generations. This ignorance of the Khun was due to the fact that the Shan State of Burma had been closed to foreigners for half a century. One thing leading to another, I got in touch with some Khun monks who had come to Thailand to study at Buddhist institutes. The manuscripts they had brought from Burma, and lent me little by little, enabled me as time went by to gain some idea of their rich culture. I soon realized that this culture fitted into the vast Tai culture and often complemented it. Thus began my cooperation with the Khun monks, which enabled me to bring out a number of publications.

The first Khun classic to appear was entitled *Along Chao Sam Lo*. Its theme was a love thwarted for family reasons, which is rather reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet, a theme to be found to a greater or lesser degree in all the Tai literatures, mainly in oral form. *La literature tai khoeun* was the second publication, and gave a summary in three languages (English, French and Thai) of 271 Khun manuscripts, which had come to me in the form of copies made on paper mulberry.

The third publication, entitled *Padumamukha-Sumangala*, brought together two texts, one in Khun, the other in Lu, both developing the theme of the orphan at odds with a king and ascending the throne after overthrowing his adversary. This theme, which figures in a great many Lao classics, clearly belongs to the great oral tradition. A Khun classical novel with the title *Kalasa Grua Dok* was the fourth publication. The mawkishness of the anti-hero Bodhisattva appeals to the Khun, who recognize in him the failings and weaknesses so deeply ingrained in human nature.

The fifth publication to appear contrasted strongly with the first three. It was not related to any popular Khun Jataka but to a treaty on cosmogony. Its title was *Pathamamulamuli,* or *L'origine du monde selon la tradition du Lan Na*. In this text, imbued with Buddhist doctrine, is to be found the theme of Pu Sangkasa-Ya Sangkasi, the first man and the first woman living on earth, a universal theme stemming in most cases from oral tradition.

The sixth publication related the adventures of *Chao Bun Hlong*, a hero with golden speech. According to tradition,

those who listened attentively to the story would live in plenty. This is a belief which goes back no doubt to a time when such stories were not noted down in writing. Entitled *Sujavanna*, the seventh publication tells the story of a Bodhisattva who makes the supreme gift, the gift of his eyes, his flesh and his blood. The central character of this classical novel is not the hero himself, but his wife Ummadanti, who is the daughter of the king of the bulls. At the folk festivals, the poets and minstrels laud the qualities of virtues of this ideal daughter, whom parents are inclined to hold up as an example to their children.

The eighth publication is concerned not with a Khun text but with a Lao classical work entitled *Nang Phom Hom*, or *La femme aux cheveux parfumés*. It tells the story of a girl whose father is the king of the elephants. Several variant versions of this tale are known in their oral form.

A Lao classic, dating back in all likelihood to the nineteenth century, was the ninth publication. It related the adventures of a Bodhisattva born in the shape of a white nightjar, hence the title, *Thao Nok Kaba phuak*. The author, probably a nineteenth-century monk, would appear, in the composition of this long poem, to have been inspired by a story which he had memorized or which had been to told him by a storyteller.

My tenth publication was not that of an existing text, but a reader entitled *Khun Reader*. Ten thousand copies were printed for distribution mainly in the Shan State of Burma and the Lu region of the Chinese Sipsong Panna.

Three other publications are planned. The first, *Pet Leng Ok Yot*, a classic eagerly awaited by the Khun, gives the reason for certain practices observed among the Tai. The second, *Xieng Noy Corato*, is a Lao classic relating the adventures of a novice who unfrocks himself (Xieng) and is rather reminiscent of Xieng Mieng, the king's jester. Many tales having a 'Xieng' as the central character circulate orally. The third and last publication is a reader in Dham Lao script, suitable both for young novices in the pagodas and for adults.

CHOICE AND PREPARATION OF TEXTS FOR PUBLICATION

Generally speaking, I publish only unpublished works, in fact works which are very popular with the inhabitants in their oral form but which have never been published. Texts are chosen on the basis of several criteria. The publication of the text of an old manuscript, often very badly written, demands lengthy preparation and painstaking work.

First of all, the text must be of interest to students, researchers and the local population. After choosing a text, one must see whether or not the manuscript has been changed too much by the copyists, and whether it is publishable. According to Tai tradition, Buddhists acquire merits by having manuscripts recopied on fan-palm leaves or paper mulberry. With each copy there were omissions, intentional or unintentional, innovations and interpolations, considerable in some cases, for the copyist did not scrupulously respect the text he was given to copy. This is particularly serious in the case of verse. A change of one word suffices to destroy the harmony of a line. Although a Tai manuscript was as a whole regarded as sacred, its sacredness did not unfortunately extend to matters of detail.

To bring out a valid edition of a text, that is, one bearing even the slightest resemblance to the original version, one has to make a reconstitution on the basis of manuscripts from different sources, for texts copied in the same region often show the same mistakes. Once the text has been reconstituted and is relatively comprehensible, I transcribe it in a language easily accessible to a wide public. For the Khun and the Lu, I decided to transcribe the text in Thai; whereas, for the Dham, it has to be transcribed in modern Lao. Both Thai and Lao have a complete tone system. Each is a lingua franca, and to have no knowledge of one or other is definitely a handicap for anyone wanting to take up Tai studies.

The transcription of Khun and Lu texts in Thai has a twofold advantage. It enables the Thai to become acquainted with the content of the text and at the same time learn to read the languages of the Tai minority groups, for the text in Thai, on the odd-numbered pages, faces the text in the original language, which it follows line by line. It also gives the Khun and Lu an opportunity of reading their works while learning Thai. As for the Lao, with this system of transcription they will soon become familiar with the Dham script, which until now has been regarded as difficult to learn.

To facilitate the reading of the Tai texts, a glossary running to several hundred words is given at the end of the work. A glossary of this kind may also prove useful to lexicographers participating in the elaboration of dictionaries, or

ethnologists working on ethnic minorities. In the Thai transcription which follows the original text line by line, the words included in the glossary are underlined in black. A brief translation of each word is also given in the right-hand margin.

Those who read neither Thai nor Lao, not to mention the vernacular languages, can always fall back on the English or French versions. Our editions generally comprise four languages in one and the same volume. The two versions in Western languages, that is, English and French, may be unabridged translations, if the original text is short enough, or summary translations if the text is long. In either case, an introduction gives a general view of the work and the place it occupies in the literatures of South-East Asia. A brief comparative study on the basis of Tai manuscripts having some connection or other with the subject enables those who so desire to take the research further, and even prepare theses or dissertations, as has repeatedly been done.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SAFEGUARDING THE LAO AND TAI CULTURAL HERITAGE

The foregoing gives an overall view of the Lao and Tai literatures which, despite their apparent diversity, are actually very close to one another. They can even be said to belong to one and the same family, that of the Ai Lao, whose existence since the beginning of our era is established. Furthermore, I have indicated a method to follow when editing classical texts while respecting the original form of the text. This kind of work is of interest both to students and researchers and to the ordinary reader desirous of reading aloud poems whose sound patterns are pleasing to the ear. It also enables them to get hold of works which existed only in manuscript form and were thus rare and difficult to find. I have been told that our publications were read publicly in monasteries in Thailand and Myanmar during the Buddhist Lent, which usually lasts four months. They are also used as textbooks for the teaching of the old literatures and scripts in universities in both Laos and Thailand. One publication, *Along Chao Sam Lo*, has even been adapted for the theatre.

I should like to draw attention to the Khun, who live mainly in Chieng Tung (Keng Tung) in the Shan State of Myanmar. As already mentioned, they belong to the large Lao and Tai ethnolinguistic family. In earlier times they made up the Kingdom of Tussgapuri, over which reigned a dynasty descending from King Mangrai right up to the founding of the Union of Burma. King Mangrai was the founder of the city of Chiang Mai, whose 700th anniversary was celebrated in 1996. Unlike Chiang Mai and Vientiane, which knew many vicissitudes in the course of their history, their populations being dispersed owing to epidemics or deported during wars with neighbouring countries, Chieng Tung enjoyed a stability which lasted more than seven centuries. This enabled it to retain its cultural identity. Many Lao and Tai texts which had been lost for a long time have been rediscovered in this former capital of the Shan State. So anyone wishing to make a proper study of Lao and Tai literature must look into Khun literature too. Take, for example, *Sieosavat*, which the Lao consider to be one of the key works in their literature. The Khun text, which I have read, is twice as long as the Lao versions published by the Comité Littéraire Lao and the Palais Royal of Luang Prabang in the 1960s, and hence more complete. One can assert, without fear of going too far wrong, that the Khun literature is at present the best preserved of the Lao and Tai literatures and that steps should be taken right away to safeguard this cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this paper I said that it was difficult to make a clear distinction between written works, which belong to the 'tangible' cultural heritage, and oral works, which belong to the 'intangible' one. I believe that the two are complementary and that oral tradition is fixed and preserved by its notation in writing. The circulation of both will undoubtedly contribute to the safeguarding and promotion of the cultural heritage of the Lao and Tai minority groups of the Indo-Chinese peninsula.

NOTE

1 Louis Finot, *Recherches sur la littérature laotienne*, Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1917, Vol. 17, No. 5.

Role of the Media in Cultural Extension

NENG SAYVANG

Laos, as any observer will confirm, is a country of astonishing cultural richness, with vivid customs and a wealth of creative art and literature. What is more, it has the advantage of being inhabited by numerous ethnic groups whose cultural diversity stretches from north to south, mainly in the mountains, yet also in the valleys and along the rivers and tributaries.

EGALITARIANISM AND A NATIONAL POLICY TO ENHANCE LAO CULTURE

An egalitarian approach towards the various ethnic groups within the multi-ethnic Lao population constitutes a cornerstone of the nation's culture, society, economy and development. Continuing the historic trend set by the Lao PDR, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party adhered to this cause and established a policy of ethnic equality aimed at forging a new Lao nation where no man or woman would be exploited by others. It began by founding a 'front' designed to bring all ethnic groups together into a single people. At first known as the Lao Issara Front, it then evolved into the Patriotic Front before becoming the present-day Laos Front for National Construction (FLEN).

The Lao Issara Front set out to crystallize ethnic equality by winning over the various ethnic groups neglected by history. It then strengthened the nation's internal unity by increasing the level of political and ideological awareness. It also developed culture, health, education and productivity, thereby improving living conditions for ethnic groups, especially those inhabiting remote areas. The results of these initiatives are that people have been saved from imperialist and feudal exploitation and have learnt how to improve their current lives and future prospects. In addition the ethnic groups' cultures and traditions have been safeguarded and gradually developed, as can be seen in the enthusiasm still surrounding their traditional and religious festivals, for example.

The policy of enhancing Lao culture has enabled the creation of a system of transcription for certain ethnic groups with a view to helping them gain a clearer understanding of the national – as well as their own – culture. It is an unquestionable asset for the country's culture. Hmong and Kmhmu' transcriptions were first introduced on the Lao National Radio station in 1965.

Since the Lao PDR was established in 1975, the party and state have developed equality and unity among ethnic minorities. At a meeting held in June 1981, a policy was established to enhance the cultural life of ethnic minorities, and areas populated by the Hmong were selected for field tests: Muong Hom in the province of Vientiane, and

Nong Het in the province of Xieng Khouang. This trend is now spreading to other areas already benefiting from the assistance of international organizations: the village of Km 20, with its mixed population of Hmong, and Meui, the Yao village of Phiahom in the province of Huaphan. Luang Prabang, Xayabury and other parts of central and southern Laos also have projects of their own.

In 1992, the party sought to make a fresh breakthrough in national construction by adopting a resolution stressing the need to educate ethnic minority children, so that they might go to school like those on the plains and in the cities. The institutions concerned were called upon to speed up ongoing efforts to adapt the Hmong and Kmhmu' transcription systems already in use in the former liberated zones, in order to develop education for children in the ethnic groups' schools. As well as teaching the Lao language, it was also a matter of promoting art, literature and the national culture, not to mention developing different forms of information and propaganda, for example broadcasting programmes in those dialects on the radio.

Over the past few years the party and state have focused their efforts on enhancing national culture. The resolutions of the Fifth Party Congress have defined a cultural policy favouring the integration of ethnic heritages into the heritage of the Lao community. The party's resolution on the development of human resources recalled the need to protect and develop the national culture and the specific features of ethnic cultures through projects designed to preserve traditions, foster extension and cultural intercommunication, and so on.

The ninth resolution following the Fifth Party Congress underlined the need for education and extensive awareness-raising 'in several forms, using a variety of means, in a systematic and consistent manner' about the precious cultural traditions both of Laos as a nation and of its different ethnic groups. The Congress placed culture high on the agenda. 'The traditions and cultural heritage – both of the nation and of ethnic groups – must be safeguarded and developed along with excellence and world progress, and culture must assume a nature that is redolent of the nation, the masses and progress.' Martin Stuart-Fox, in his book Kaysome Phomvihane, Child Of The People, had this to say about the policy of equality and cultural enhancement: 'Government policy towards the ethnic minorities is right and proper, its aim being not to force the latter to accept Lao culture as their own, but to work together to create a new Lao culture and to call upon them to join it.'

The Lao media are playing an increasingly important role in response to the government's policy of enhancing ethnic culture. Currently there are twenty-three newspapers and magazines in Laos. Radio stations are proliferating from north to south, broadcasting some twenty hours' programming per day. Television stations (two in Vientiane and nine in the provinces) are on the air for similar lengths of time. The Lao media, having immersed themselves in the cultural policy of the party and government, are playing their part in carrying the message to the most remote areas of the country.

FIGURES ON THE PROTECTION, EXTENSION AND PROMOTION OF ETHNIC CULTURE

Many traditional Kmhmu', Tai Dam and Hmong stories and narratives have been printed in newspapers and magazines (see Annex), as well as research papers on births, marriages, burials and traditional literature among the Sô, Alak, Slang (yellow banana leaf) Ko, Kli, Hmong, Lu, Phou Noi, Phong Sek, Liso, Kah So, Len, Kmhmu', Tai Dam, Tai Meui, Kuy, Yao, Ta-Oi and Ko Oma. The broadcast media have disseminated 1,400 to 2,000 Hmong and Kmhmu' items a year in variety programmes; more than ten programmes are shown on television and more than seventy photographs are published each year.

EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS AND PROBLEMS FOR THE PRESERVATION AND EXTENSION OF ETHNIC CULTURES

The broadcasting of information on radio and television has been extended and promoted, with nationwide coverage encouraging the multi-ethnic population and arousing its enthusiasm. Publishing books as a means of preserving, protecting and raising awareness of local customs is also an efficient and sustainable programme for exploiting newly emerging data. However, agents still lack efficient means to gather and protect that data (there are no ancient texts left in some places), so the gathering of detailed data in rural areas remains underdeveloped due to a lack of staff and funds.

Work geared to the extension and promotion of ethnic culture in Laos is as crucial as the very existence of the nation. In addition to what has already been done, programmes still need strengthening with, *inter alia*, more teaching in some schools to highlight the specific nature of

the culture and literature of each ethnic group. More meetings need to be arranged for the sake of full and diversified education. This work can be improved through training courses in data gathering and analysis. Data gathering projects require investment, and publishing books in Lao and a range of dialects needs to be encouraged so that such books may be widely distributed.

B. Handicrafts and art forms (weaving, music and architecture)

Textiles for the Preservation of the Lao Intangible Cultural Heritage

H. LEEDOM LEFFERTS JR.

INTRODUCTION

While many people might think that textiles are not important in preserving a group's cultural heritage, I would like to show here that, at least in Laos, as well as elsewhere in the 'cloth cultures' of South-East Asia, textiles are perhaps the single most vital element by which cultural preservation can be facilitated and change expressed. As a matter of fact, taking these textiles out of their active, formative contexts deprives them of much of their meaning. I hold that it is for this reason – as well as the predisposition of observers not of these cultures themselves – that the powerful role of one of the most expressive of Lao art forms is not recognized.

I will suggest statements on the impacts and meanings of textiles as vital mechanisms for the safeguarding and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage of the minority groups of the Lao PDR. From 1989 until 1991, with the help of the Lao Committee for Social Sciences, I undertook fieldwork in this country concerning textile production and materials produced by members of the Tai language family, with modest forays into textiles of neighbouring groups. My project was not ethereal research, but was meant to lead to active steps for cultural preservation. As such, I trust that it adds to the valuable work presented in the 1993 volume commemorating the 1991 exhibition 'Lao Women and Textiles'.[1]

The intangible cultural heritages of the minority groups of the Lao PDR consist of a near infinite variety of artefacts and thoughts. In the past these objects and ideas interacted to produce more or less coherent ways of life: ways by which people not only survived but attempted to live together in reasonable harmony given their aspirations. Today these ways of life are under severe pressure. This pressure comes from outsiders, tourists and 'agents of development and change', and the sheer numbers of new and 'improved' objects which leave many members of minority – as well as majority – populations ready to give up current ways of life and move as rapidly as possible to adopt new, modern, possibly more 'successful' cultural frameworks. Often, however, 'success' is not available; thus Laos and the world are left with anomic groups of individuals who are unable to lead fulfilling lives. Moreover, as individuals desert their indigenous cultures to attempt to move towards externally constructed lifestyles, Laos and the world lose significant amounts of information and contributions to human diversity.

The history of the peoples of Laos does, however, make it apparent that members of the country's ethnic groups are resourceful people who have developed accomplished mechanisms to survive in a changing world. In the past, new and potentially deleterious – as well as positive – external ideas and objects arrived in the geographic loca-

tion named Laos. Some of these ideas and objects brought about drastic, horrific change. Others provided vehicles for constructive change and new, expanded lives. It is part of our task to try to decipher what kinds of inputs produced relatively positive results, and in what way.

WHY TEXTILES?

Because I am not Lao, but a 'fan' of Lao culture, of both the majority and minority peoples, I have spent most of my time working with relatively tangible, more material aspects of the Lao intangible cultural heritage. This does not mean that the objects with which I am concerned are any more durable than words, poetry and myth, but at least these items consist of things which can be dealt with as objects by my Lao friends and myself. At the same time, these objects, while they are produced by members of minority populations, are also produced by members of the majority people. In other words, the category of items with which we deal crosses the usual linguistic boundaries used to define minority and majority peoples. Moreover, these objects are produced by segments of these populations which have, historically, tended to be neglected in terms of power and authority.

As the title of this chapter notes, I write of textiles, items constructed in daily life by women in many South-East Asian cultures who sometimes share, across ethnic boundaries, common technologies, techniques, designs, consumption patterns and meanings. A most important characteristic shared by these cultural groups is that most Lao textiles are the products of women. One reason to consider women as a minority group is that, certainly in a world context as well as in most development models stemming from Europe and America, they have been relatively excluded by men and overt controlling systems of political power from full participation in cultural action.[2]

Thus, by taking what might be called a sectoral approach to cultural preservation – one which specifically highlights women and items under their control – I propose that we may be able to highlight issues not usually addressed during discussions of cultural preservation. I also propose that textiles, because of the ways they link minority social organizations together through frameworks established by women, who are usually neglected in development studies, uniquely permit us to address significant covert and overt organizing principles in minority cultural systems.

TEXTILES IN LAO LIFE

While always the products of women in Lao cultures, textiles have not in the past been – nor are they now – solely of interest to Lao women. Some people not familiar with Lao cultures might think that textiles are ephemeral objects, mere items of clothing. That is not the case and certainly does not hold true for textiles from Laos and other South-East Asian cultures.[3] Textiles have been of supreme interest to both women and men, élite and lay, in political and religious contexts as well as in daily life in Laos. Who made cloth, where it came from, what its quality and design was, whether, indeed, it was whole or in scraps, have been issues of the greatest importance.

Following O'Connor,[4] it is reasonable to call Lao cultures what he calls South-East Asian cultures generally – 'cloth cultures'. By this he does not simply mean that much beautiful cloth is woven in South-East Asia and Laos but also, and more importantly, that cloth is of vital significance across several pivotal cultural domains. Textiles seep across boundaries of interest; they are essential in signifying and codifying the workings of Lao cultures at the most ethereal levels as well as in the seemingly more mundane but just as important contexts of household and person. In so doing, textiles present us with ways to understand and analyse these systems. Textiles weave indigenous cultures together; they thus provide strands of meaning and action which can be picked up by observers to understand cultures and assist them in coping with the pressures of modern life.

Analytically, it is possible to see that textiles enter the indigenous life of Lao minority groups from two directions: domestic production and external sources. The uses indigenous systems have for each of these kinds of textiles tell us much about minority group responses to external inputs and their abilities to cope with external threats to existence.

Domestic textile production

Domestic production of textiles – from production of yarns through to completing the final products – involves the most complex pre-industrial knowledge system in Laos, not excepting rice agriculture. Equally significantly, knowledge of textile production was wholly 'owned' by women, as opposed, for instance, to knowledge of rice production, which was shared by both women and men.

This command of the knowledge and implements of textile production gave women power in indigenous cultures

unavailable to men and which men could not usurp. Textiles reinforced and codified the power and meanings of women and the structures stemming from the disposal of textiles in indigenous Lao populations. Therefore, preservation of household textile production is essential and can be a key for assisting in the preservation of indigenous Lao groups.

The power of women was codified not only in textile production; it was also exercised through patterns of textile distribution and consumption. Since women owned the knowledge and means of textile production, they became the original grantors of domestically produced textiles, for whatever purposes. Thus, the distribution and consumption of domestically produced textiles reinforced the commanding presence of women. Women, in giving textiles to others, brought coherence as well as separation to the members of the cultures in which these textiles were used. Thus, textiles not only codified the roles of women, but also their distribution at particular times and places, and their uses in particular ceremonies as well as in daily life solidified relationships among the peoples of indigenous groups so as to produce reasonably coherent structures of meaning. Additionally, of course, textiles permitted women as individuals to exercise their ambitions and desires to use their powers through kin and associate relationships. Although we have few records of this, I am sure that disagreements between individuals and groups in indigenous cultures were often expressed through textiles.

Imported cloth of the pre-industrial era

Imported cloth from both China and India, in pre-industrial and early industrial times, was of extreme importance in Laos. Contact and trade with Chinese populations was a significant part of the Lao cultural heritage. Discussion of a land silk road is as reasonable as an oceanic one.[5] Additionally, we know that foreign cloth was a significant factor used by élite groups to adorn and set themselves apart from the other members of the local populations. Sumptuary rules were never simply a matter of better dress; foreign cloth denoted power, prestige and access to non-native resources, an other-worldly attainment that ordinary folk could not command and that reinforced the rights and privileges of élites.[6]

However, certain aspects of non-Lao style certainly affected everyday, domestically produced wear. Perhaps the most startling adoption from outside Laos was the clothing regimen of Theravada Buddhist monks, a style of dress which originates in the cloth cultures of South Asia. Today cut, sewn and saffron-dyed ciiwaun used by Theravada Buddhist monks are accepted as integral in many Lao people's daily lives. It appears to be as indispensable to these lives as the air the people breathe. However, the costume that these monks and novices wear is exceedingly strange to the Lao repertoire.[7]

Records of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relate that trade in yarn and finished textiles with China was of great importance. Silk came south while cotton went north. Indian hand-woven textiles also came to Laos. But the point is that this material and these textiles seemed to fit into Lao systems; these foreign textiles did not displace local weaving and weavers. Indeed, imported textiles may have been central to the economy of locally produced textiles, since the élite used local production to help with bargaining for imported textiles.

Interactions between domestic and imported textiles

In general it appears that there is good reason to suppose that many Lao weaving techniques and technology as well as styles and designs are indigenous to Lao populations. To the extent that we can know about them, ancestral Lao populations seem always to have had relatively sophisticated ways of weaving.[8] Where supposedly less advanced weaving techniques were present, these probably represented ethnic – or other – differences symbolized and codified through weaving or cloth elaboration, such as embroidery.

However, it is also clear that some techniques and technology and probably some styles and designs were imported or dramatically influenced by external sources. We can talk of clear overlaps and adaptations of non-Lao techniques, technology, styles and designs with indigenously produced Lao textiles. Many of these outside influences were probably mediated through Lao élite structures, both in the acquisition of textiles from external sources and to upgrade indigenous textiles to meet foreign competition.

Thus, nineteenth-century records make clear that early Siamese (Rattanakosin) kings exacted tribute, often in cloth, from populations living in the area that is currently Laos. In turn, these kings used the proceeds from this tribute to support their own international trade.[9] Comprehension of this information reinforces our understanding of the close relationships between the élite and the governed, perhaps extending to what we may think were, at the time, the remotest areas.[10] From this we can understand that concerns

of pre-modern statecraft brought about élite interference in the most basic dynamics of household production. The work of women in household and village tasks, including but not limited to weaving, was appropriated to produce cloth that would support élites in their self-aggrandizement.[11] Thus we see a close and necessary symbiosis between Lao villagers and Lao (and other) rulers which added to the stamina of the villagers in the perpetuation of their cultural forms.

To summarize, by situating ourselves in time prior to the massive onslaught of Euro-American technology and resources, we begin to get a sense of mechanisms for the perpetuation of Lao cultures. This perspective also permits us to understand better the nature of the current onslaught and how issues today are similar and yet different from what has gone before. Prior to the present crisis we discover a reciprocal interaction between foreign and domestic textiles. We can talk about foreign textiles connoting power, prestige, wealth, as well as newness (fashion), but not displacing locally produced textiles. We can discuss trade in these foreign textiles as supported by production of local textiles, with, at the same time, foreign textiles affecting designs, styles and relationships of authority codified through local textiles.

However, in looking at the past we cannot talk about the massive replacement of half a population's – the women's – rationales and symbols for life by outside forces, be they mechanical or human. Local textiles maintained their importance and the producers of these textiles retained their significance in their households and villages.

THE IMPACTS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND MASSIVE TRADE

Today we see the severe disarray of Lao populations, and not only through massive disruption of the landscape for the building of dams, interference with local resource bases, diseases and the advertisement of better lives in cities and foreign nations. Indigenous lives are disturbed no less fundamentally and even more insidiously by the substitution and replacement of locally made products by 'better' materials from the outside.[12] This comes about not simply because of the replacement of the object itself, but more importantly because this replacement deprives local producers of their role and, as we have seen in the case of textiles, their status and power in indigenous contexts. There are similar stories for locally produced ox-carts, baskets, paper, wood-cutting, house-building and so on.

However, in the case of textiles, this replacement may be even more subversive because it involves the essential and formative role and status of the major players – women – in perpetuating indigenous cultures. To reiterate, textiles are not ephemeral 'art objects' in the Euro-American sense, expressing only the unique psychological desires of an individual. Home-produced textiles deploy the art and skills of a weaver and her support group in the context and for the good of a group. Textiles are active elements in indigenous Lao cultures and probably were never simply put on and discarded after wearing.[13]

It would appear that the impact of massive amounts of industrially produced textiles on Lao populations – all of whom are minorities when depicted against the backdrop of the rest of the world – have, over the years, led to potentially serious disruptions of indigenous cultures. The first imports were white cloth and indigo, analine dyes (Prussian blue). The impact of mass-produced white cloth may have led to a comparative relaxation of élite interest in household textile production and thus in the roles of women in the household. But the shift from cloth to cash (cloth denoted cash in the past) probably shifted the burden of support for the élite from the shoulders of women to those of men, for forest products, agricultural production and so forth.

I have hypothesized elsewhere that the appearance of cheap white cotton relieved women of the necessity of producing such utilitarian cloth and much of the white cloth that is presented as monks' robes, and possibly led to a 'cloth-mad' world in rural villages, with women having more free time to produce fine, intricate textiles.[14] What we see today, with mass-produced textiles imitating intricate hand-woven designs, is simply a continuation of the abilities of capitalist commodification to turn technology to the production of material which imitates and thus supplants the most beautiful objects in Laos. How do we defend against this, preserving not only the abilities to produce the objects, but also the structural meanings such production gives to the lives of a significant portion of each minority group?

TOWARDS SURVIVAL

The Lao PDR has been fortunate. From the beginning its leaders recognized the importance of women to the success of its project. This recognition carried over into Lao research as well as daily life. That Lao women continue to wear domestically produced textiles reaffirms their unique contributions to the concept of a Lao nation and, more importantly,

Hmong-Yao family

28. Young Hmong men at a wedding, Luang Prabang
© Angus Mac Donald

29. Hmong woman carrying her child, Luang Prabang
© Angus Mac Donald

30. Hmong women embroidering, Luang Prabang market
© Angus Mac Donald

31. Hmong girls dressed for a wedding, Luang Prabang
© Angus Mac Donald

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32. Hmong men bargaining, Luang Prabang
© Angus Mac Donald

33. Hmong embroideries, Luang Prabang
© Angus Mac Donald

34. Detail of Hmong ceremonial garments, Luang Prabang
© Angus Mac Donald

35. Lanten woman crushing rice, Oudomxay Province
© Marion Dejean

36. Preparation of rice paper in a village, Oudomxay Province
© Olivier Evrard

37. Detail of a Lanten ceremonial garment, Oudomxay Province
© Marion Dejean

38. Hmong shaman, Oudomxay Province
© Olivier Evrard

39. Lanten woman embroidering, Luang Namtha Province
© Angus Mac Donald

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40. Hmong house, Oudomxay Province
© Marion Dejean

41. Lanten women at a wedding, Luang Namtha
© KT/IRC

42. Old Yao woman sorting cotton, Phongsaly Province
© Georges Cortez

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43. Timberwork of a Lanten house, Oudomxay Province
© Marion Dejean

44. Yao altar to the spirits, Luang Namtha
© Marion Dejean

45. Cotton-spinning in a Lanten house, Luang Namtha
© KT/IRC

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46. Lanten house, Oudomxay Province
© Marion Dejean

47. Yao men dancing, Phongsaly Province
© François Greck

48. Yao villagers, Phongsaly Province
© Georges Cortez

49. Lanten woman transporting foliage for the roof of a house, Luang Namtha
© Angus Mac Donald

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50. Yao girl, Phongsaly Province
© Georges Cortez

51. Hmong man with children, Luang Prabang Province
© Olivier Ducourtieux

52. Young Yao, Phongsaly Province
© François Greck

53. Hmong people at a petrol station, Oudomxay
© Olivier Evrard

54. Yao man reading a text in Chinese characters, Luang Namtha
© Olivier Evrard

perpetuates the strong and distinctive roles of women in both the capital and producing village. The formation of a strong Lao Women's Union meant that women had a structured way in which they could pay attention to their plights and strengthen their roles in the emerging Lao system. Because much of this effort was itself accomplished by women, recognition of the role of textiles became important and is today solidified in the important museum and sales shop.

However, simply having the material available is not sufficient. Today one needs to educate the consumer to appreciate, understand and support the goals embodied in women's production of textiles. This requires ensuring that the message as well as the beauty of these textiles continues to be exported and explained. In other words, a demand for excellence, produced in the appropriate manner, must be cultivated in a discerning audience.

The appropriation of textiles simply for fanciful use by people unaware of the meaning of such work cannot continue. In turn, this means co-operating in the mounting of advertising and exhibitions which show textiles and their many meanings. Over time, this can produce dramatic changes. The question remains, though, how does this effort ramify throughout the nation? One would hope that, as interest is sparked, the benefits could be spread. In this way, attention to women continues, while permitting them to construct their own bases of power.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROPOSALS

I support the initiative of the Lao Government and UNESCO in convening such a meeting about ethnic minority cultures and I agree with the initiative of Professor Condominas in suggesting a bi-modal approach to the preservation and continuation of indigenous groups. This may be summed up as follows: 'The entire nation should be made aware of the importance of the traditional culture of the minority groups' and 'Traditional and popular culture should be studied at the level of the group which created it and through which it continues to exist'.

With this goal in mind – and this is especially the case with textiles – should come the recognition that material culture changes. Individuals, those of indigenous minorities as well as those whom we may know better, differ. Therefore, production differs – in quality, style, design and use. Indigenous people know those differences and reward appropriately. Our systems of rewards must not neglect the range of variation, nor reward it inappropriately. I agree that the first step in this endeavour is to develop understanding of textile production and its social and cultural conditions. We know too little about a vitally important segment of production of any indigenous group.

These women must receive applause and be proud of their production. Weaving must be given recognition as a living art which others – children, other adults, members of the world community – become aware of with an appreciation of the various meanings behind these items. A museum may be appropriate, but a museum, as with a hospital, is too often a place for things – or people – to go to die. Indeed, I am not clear that we know how to create the appropriate administrative, legal or cultural contexts for the perpetuation and change of indigenous cultural minorities in Laos or anywhere else. How to perpetuate the role of women and textiles is a matter of power and politics. Power can be something that people assume, as long as they have the abilities and provided that the contexts are there. Is it possible for us to empower them? People empower themselves; women, as an indigenous minority, have been and are doing so. I wish them good fortune and will do my utmost to find the appropriate contexts and assist as best I can.

Textiles are constructed in a social context. A loom is only an implement; the loom, the material for weaving and the weaver exist and operate in social space. The loom, weaving and the power of women cannot be removed from that context and still command the power and prestige of weaving that they used to have. Otherwise, the production and the producer fall into a stagnant trap, fit only for tourists or to be 'regarded as insignificant curiosities which may be disfigured at will (or used as desired)'.

NOTES

1. JIVC (Japan International Volunteer Center), 'Lao Women and Textiles' (English Title), Vientiane, Institute of Art, Literature and Languages, 1993.
2. Of course this paper recognizes the innovative stance of the Lao PDR concerning the status of women. However, we are concerned here with understanding issues of development and empowerment stemming from the impact of external forces on the minority groups of Laos.
3. This statement is probably not an adequate indication in any culture for whatever it calls 'dress' (Turner, 1980). However, casual views of cloth and attire often take this attitude.

4. Stanley J. O'Connor, 'Critics, Connoisseurs, and Collectors in the Southeast Asian Rain Forest', *Asian Art*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 51–67, 1991; 'Memory and discovery in Southeast Asian art', *Asian Art and Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 2–6.

5. See Anthony Reid, 'Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680', in *The Lands Below the Winds,* Vol. 1, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988; H. Leedom Lefferts Jr., 'Continuity, change and 'development': The Case of Thai Textiles', in M. J. G. Parnwell (ed.), *Uneven Development in Thailand*, Aldershot, Avebury, 1996, pp. 146–60. See also by Lefferts: 'The Kings as Gods: Textiles in the Thai state', in *Textiles as Primary Sources*: *Proceedings of the First Symposium of the Textile Society of America*, co-ordinated by J. E. Vollmer (Minneapolis Art Institute, 16–18 September, 1988), 1989, pp. 78–85; 'Contexts and Meanings in Tai Textiles', Chapter 2 in M. Gittinger and H. L. Lefferts, *Textiles and the Tai Experiences in Southeast Asia*, Washington D.C., 1992, pp. 58–91; 'Textiles in the Service of Tai Buddhism', Chapter 3 in Gittinger and Lefferts, op.cit., pp. 94–141; 'Women's Work', Lecture presented at The Textile Museum, October 1992; 'The Power of Women' Decisions: Textiles in Tai Dam and Thai-Lao Theravada Buddhist Funerals', *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1993, pp. 111–29; 'The ritual importance of the mundane: White Cloth Among the Tai of Southeast Asia', *Expedition*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 1996, pp. 37–50.

6. Lefferts, 'The Kings as Gods: Textiles in the Thai state', op cit.; Mattiebelle Gittinger, 'Textiles in the service of kings', Chapter 4 in Gittinger and Lefferts, op cit., 1992, pp. 142–76.

7. We now live some twenty-six centuries after the birth of the Buddha and many centuries after the coming of Theravada Buddhism to Laos. It is reasonable to suggest that, while monks' robes may have been, at their initial introduction, strange to the Lao costume repertory, over time this attire has affected Lao attire and, reciprocally, brought aspects of the attire of some Lao groups into dialectical relationships with it. As far as I know, this topic has yet to be explored (Lefferts, 'Contexts and Meanings in Tai Textiles', op cit., 1992). However, I have worked at understanding the possible impacts and reasons for acceptance – particularly by women – of Theravada Buddhism. I hypothesize that Theravada Buddhism may have been embraced by Tai women – who would otherwise have been subject to the patrilineal authority structure we see in the household and local religions of Black and White Tai peoples – precisely to provide them with ways of asserting themselves, including through the production and donation of textiles (Lefferts, 'The Power of Women's Decisions', 1993, op cit.). This is in contrast with the thesis of Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, *Lao Women Yesterday and Today*, Vientiane, 1995, pp. 20–2.

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9. Junko Koizumi, 'The Commutation of Suai from Northeast Siam in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 1992, Vol. 23, No 2, pp. 276–307.

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Some Characteristics of Lao Fabrics

KHAMPHÈNG KETAVONG

CLASSIFICATION OF LAO FABRICS

The first part of this chapter consists of a description of Lao fabrics that will provide a greater understanding of their distinctive character and their value. I shall then outline some of the measures taken by the IRC to preserve and promote fabrics and weaving methods. However I should like to begin by looking at the definition of the term 'Lao' and the classification of Lao ethnic groups.

It should be noted that the designation 'Lao' can vary in meaning according to context. In the expression 'the multi-ethnic Lao people', the term, according to the classification criteria used, can include from forty-seven to sixty-eight different ethnic groups. The first figure was used as the basis for the 1995 Census and became the de facto official figure for defining Lao multi-ethnicity. However 'Lao' can also have a more restricted use, as indicated by formulations used in the two most recent censuses, in 1985 and 1995. Firstly, in general terms, both the names of the different ethnic groups and the classifications vary from one census to the other. This is particularly true of the 'Lao' category. In 1985 the name 'Lao' was given to populations belonging to the 'Lao ethnic group': the Phuan, White Tai, Black Tai, Red Tai, Tai Neua and so on. In 1995 it was decided to introduce additional distinctions: within the 'Lao'group, the Lao ethnic group as such (often called 'Lao Loum') was given individual status and with it were associated the Phuan, Kaleung, Oi and Nho subgroups. However, there also appeared the Phu Tai subgroup, which included the Black Tai, Red Tai, White Tai, Tai Meuy and others. Overall the range of names implicitly designates twenty-seven groups as Lao sub-ethnic groups.

It should be pointed out that the list of ethnic groups included a forty-eighth entry marked 'other', in case new ethnic groups were discovered during the census and had to be added. The census-takers made considerable use of this forty-eighth slot, which allowed for the inclusion of all autonyms. And so, as might have been expected, the 1995 Census features a number of new ethnonyms – some 108 in all – more or less equivalent to the data gathered in the previous census. In 1985 the Institute of Ethnology opted for reducing the number of principal ethnonyms to forty-seven, a figure adopted for the 1995 Census and still the basis for the creation of our own ethnic indexes. This process illustrates the difficulties involved in classifying ethnic groups. Classification of costumes is at least as complex, given that variations and subsets must also be taken into account.

DEFINITION OF FABRICS AND ATTEMPTED TYPOLOGY OF WEAVING METHODS

The term 'fabrics' can have two different meanings: it can mean ethnic apparel or everything relating to textiles, that is to say fibres, dyes, weaving equipment, weaving techniques, patterns, types of clothing and certain textile-related beliefs. For various reasons I shall limit myself to the first meaning here and so give priority to Lao fabrics considered first and foremost as traditional ethnic dress. Immediately the list of the forty-seven ethnic groups springs to mind, tempting us to think in terms of forty-seven different traditional garbs. But in fact some ethnic groups have no distinctive costume in respect of cut, while others have several, and within groups sharing the same cut the actual clothing can vary in terms of use of colour and decorative patterns.

Colour variation is but one example here: the Austro-Asiatic groups favour two basic colours, red and black, but while one subgroup will use red more than black, another will do the opposite. Turning to the variations of patterns or cut, we find eight subgroups among the Tibeto-Burman Ko (Akha), each having its own cut for the skirt and trousers. Thus the forty-seven ethnic groups do not represent as many different costumes, unless we disregard the available data and proceed to arbitrary groupings that take no account of the subtle variations to be found in the different dress practices.

Another characteristic of even the most 'traditional' clothing is its capacity for sometimes rapid change. This emerges very clearly from comparisons between some current costumes and sketches or photos from before the 1950s. While making no claim here to an exhaustive diachronic study of multi-ethnic Lao traditional garb, I should like to undertake a comparative examination of certain costumes past and present. This will spare me lengthy and tedious commentary. I shall use the definitions mentioned above in regard to the second meaning of 'fabrics'.

FIBRES

In respect of techniques dating from prehistoric times (Ban Chiang, 1500 B.C.), fibre remains and old pattern-printing rollers provide evidence of continuity in methods of making skirts and shirts still attested among various ethnic groups at the beginning of the twentieth century. Our fathers described these methods to us. The discovery of the peuark nong barks is further evidence of certain ancient techniques: these garments made of finely worked bark figure in the symbolic apparel of Pu Nheu and Nha Nheu, the legendary Lao ancestors whose story is re-staged every New Year at Luang Prabang. In addition, documents dating from the early Lan Xang Kingdom (mid-fourteenth century) mention the silk tributes exacted by King Fa Ngum. Such is the symbolic potency of silkworms that they have taken on human characteristics and even near-divine status.

Especially famous silkworms are: Nang Keo (Miss Jewel); Nang Khao or Nang Don (Miss White or Miss Albino, respectively); Nang Lay (Miss Speckled); and Nang Dok (Miss Flower). The provinces of Huaphan, Xieng Khuang and Bolikhamxay are home to the great silkworm Nang Fa (Miss Heaven). Cotton is not scorned, however. Etymological links with the Pali and Sanskrit *chandra* are to be found here. Dara is unquestionably of foreign origin, as opposed to the local names for cotton, rath (common) and noy (small). *Faychan* is thought to mean 'imported cotton', the vernacular names being *kapeh, kapoh*, *kapas* and *kasa*. A study of the composition of 300 items of clothing yielded the following proportions: 45 per cent silk, 45 per cent cotton, 5 per cent kapok and 5 per cent jute, ramie and others.

Also worthy of mention here is an old tradition relating to the cotton thread used for the baci, a Laotian ritual for 'recalling the souls' in which a white cotton thread is tied around the wrists of those one wishes to protect. Many ethnic groups use cotton fabric in their everyday life for obvious reasons of convenience and economy, but on the symbolic plane silk is more highly charged and the historic Silk Routes are evidence of the value attached to it. The existence of the Silk Routes has cast doubt on the antiquity of the mulberry tree in our subtropical zone, but this is a question I prefer to leave to biobotanists.

Two observations are necessary regarding silkworms and mulberry trees. The first is that various studies have put forward a host of philological references indicating that the use of silk antedates that of cotton, while others indicate the contrary. Cotton has been part of Indian civilization since 2200 B.C., reaching Indonesia about the seventeenth century under the name *kapok* (*kape* in the Philippines and *kapas* in Cambodia and China). However, in the Lan Xang manuscripts the terms *kasavaphas* and *phe kasa* designate a scarf rather than Indian cotton as such. In the documentary material kasa would seem to be a light silk, similar to kapok, but unfortunately further evidence is lacking both

concerning its composition and the seventeenth-century date. We can, however, compare the written record with the analyses of Peter Bellwood and other writers on the subject, who have pointed out that there was more than one variety of cotton in Indonesia and that there existed, for example, a local variety of *kapok* known as binan. Laos itself has two varieties of cotton, one known as *fay noy* (little cotton) or *fay lat* (commoner's cotton), and the second as *fay chanh* (moon cotton, in reference to the royal 'moon' lineage) or *fay thep* (God's cotton), the latter being an imported luxury variety restricted to the nobility.

Only the White Hmong have always made their skirts from ramie, using the dyeing and decoration techniques known as batik. Use of bark is mainly a Ko (Akha) practice. Among the Lao Loum, bark remains only in symbolic form as already noted in respect of the apparel of the legendary ancestors Pu Nheu and Nha Nheu.

DYES

The colours are obtained from vegetable and animal matter, minerals, fruit, bark, tuber roots, leaves, creepers and other sources. Some thirty colours can still be identified, the commonest being red, yellow and purple obtained from lac *(bixa orella)*, whose vernacular name varies from region to region: xati in the south, sed or nomphu in the north and khamsat in Isarn. Greenish-blue, blue and black are mainly obtained from ebony *(mark keua)* and beuark *(marsedia tinctoria)*, from indigo in the south and from indigo and *strobilanthus* north of Vientiane. Utilization of purple/violet remains a subject of debate. For many commentators its use is recent, yet we have the direct testimony of our grandmothers concerning *phak pang*, the leaves of the mahaliar night creeper, now used only as a vegetable in pork soup. Further back in history reliable literary evidence is to be found in the celebrated South-East Asian epic, the *Thao Hung – Khun Cheuang*, dating from the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

WEAVING EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES

These vary, but our main concern here is the loom, of which there are three types: the back track tension loom; the vertical loom, as used by the Sedang and the Lavi; and the horizontal loom, as used by the Lao Loum. Technologically superior, this loom is now so widely used that it has all but supplanted the other types. There are several different kinds of weaving, dyeing and decoration methods: *tam* weaving; *nhok dork* (plaited weaving); *khid or khwid* (continuous warp); *chok* (broken weft); *muk* (additional warp); *kor; pak; thak; sève* (sewn); and *mi* (ikat).

PATTERNS

These also vary, especially among the Lao Loum. We have collected samples in the north and north-east (Sam Neua, Xieng Khuang), the centre (Khammuane, Bolikhamxay, Savannakhet) and the south (Saravane, Attapeu and especially Champassak). One hundred or so names were noted in each area, some of them general and others specific. Naturally the three kingdoms – animal (zoomorphic subjects), vegetable and mineral (pythonomorphic subjects) – are represented, as are human beings (anthropomorphic subjects). Some subjects draw on mythical beliefs: the lion *(mum)*, the elephant-god Ganesh, the pelican-elephant *(hatsdiling)* and the dragon *(luang)*, while others relate to totemic classifications: lion, tiger, dragon and gibbon *(sing vork)*, or geometrical prehistoric references: sawteeth and such others as *saphao* (sapan).

TYPES OF GARMENT

The most common garments made with kheunang nung fabrics are langoutis, skirts, shifts, loincloths, sarongs and trousers.

Skirts or 'sinh'

Of the various articles of clothing, the most important are clearly the skirts or sinh. These warrant three preliminary observations: firstly, the stress on the monosyllable sinh in Lao indicates that it is not an Indo-European word; secondly, given its simplicity the skirt would seem to be characteristic of hot climates; thirdly, there exist two historical references: a description of various cotton garments left by Kang Tai, a Chinese missionary visiting Funan and Lin Yi in the mid-third century; and the statue of Laksami at Sambor, dating from the Chenla period (fourth to seventh century).

Both testify to the tubular, although formerly unsewn, shape that still characterizes today's straight skirt. The Angkor period saw the coming of the upper band with its decorative fastener, but the lower band had yet to appear. This was a later addition dictated by climatic circumstances. The wearing of *sinh* is currently spreading to all

ethnic groups in Laos: it is now a normal part of feminine apparel among the Lao Thai (with the exception of a branch of that group, the Tai Neua of Phongsaly Province whose women wear trousers), the Austro-Asiatic groups (without exception) and even certain Tibeto-Burman groups such as the Musseu, Kuy, Phunoi, Sila, Sida, Kheu, Luma, Phuma and Phuxang.

This item of clothing bears a different name according to the type and arrangement of patterns that vary from one ethnic group or region to another; over 100 patterns have been recorded. The name also varies according to the weaving technique, colour, overall shape and structure. More than twenty such names are given in Table 1 below.

Especially common is a range of skirts with horizontal stripes. Outside the extreme north and south this general type is widely designated by the term *sinh muk*. Among the Lü of the north-west the generic term is *sinh Mane* (the Manes's skirt); for the Austro-Asiatic language

TABLE 1. NAMES GIVEN TO THE SINH GARMENT

Name	Area	Observations
1. *Sinh Mane*	North-east	Named after the Mane ethnic group
2. *Sinh Kane*	North-west	Named after the arrangement of the patterns
3. *Sinh Mi* (Ikat)	Widespread	Weaving technique
4. *Sinh Muk*	Widespread	Weaving technique
5. *Sinh Chok*	Widespread	Weaving technique
6. *Sinh Kor*	Widespread	Weaving technique
7. *Sinh Xat*	Vientiane	Weaving technique
8. *Sinh Chuk*	Vientiane	Weaving technique
9. *Sinh Pak*	Luang Prabang, Champassak North-east	Xam Teu (Tai Muong)
10. *Sinh Thive*	Widespread	Sinh Thlan (Red Tai, Tai Khao)
11. *Sinh Hua Buan*	North-east	Tai Dèng and Tai Muong (upper band of the skirt)
12. *Sinh Hua Khuay*	North-east, Xam Neua	*Khuay*: 'crossed over'
13. *Sinh Hua Pong Deua*	Champassak	Alternations of red and black, as on the serpent *Ngu Mark Deua*
14. *Sinh Ta Teup*	Xieng Khuang	Ta: weave
15. *Sinh Ta Mud*	Central and south	Phu Thai, Lao Vieng
16. *Sinh Tako*	Kham Keut	Tai Meuy
17. *Sinh Kado* (Kalo)	South	Austro-Asiatic
18. *Sinh Khanh*	Widespread	*Khanh* (vertical alternations)
19. *Sinh Duang*	Muang Xai	Name used in Oudomxay Province; also called *Muong Ngeun, Sinh Xaya* (in Xayabury), *Hong Sa*
20. *Sinh Hun* (Khalang)	Muang Hun (Xieng Hung)	Also called *Hunh Khana* (front paws)
21. *Sinh Hun Khana*	Muang Khua (Phongsaly)	*Khalang* (back paw) or *Hunh Xieng Hung* (Yunnan) near Muang Sing
22. *Sinh* (Muang) *Phong*	Laotian-Chinese border	Near Muang Sing
23. *Sinh Mat* (Sinh Khay)	Xieng Khuang	Named after the Tai Mat ethnic group and the Nam Mat River
24. *Sinh Lê* (Tamlê or Nam Nê or Tê)	Widespread	Also called Tinh Tam
25. *Sinh Tinh Ha May* (five sticks)	Vientiane	Similar to Tamlê
26. *Sinh Kalom*	Talieng (Stieng)	Nkriang, Sekong

groups of the south, it is *sinh kado* (or *kalo*), while for the peoples of Khamkeut-Xepone this type of skirt is called *sinh muk* (additional warp skirt). The most sophisticated weavings come from Muang Et and Xieng Kho in Houaphanh Province, at least two of which are famous: the *muk fa-sadeuang-muong*, a skirt worn by the most beautiful girl – often the daughter of the *Chao Muang* – at the ceremonies dedicated to the spirit of the city (*Phimuang*); and the muk nam tha (*muk* of the dew), featuring a pattern of white rosettes creating the illusion of sparkling crystals or dew.

Another characteristic type of skirt is now spreading throughout the country under a variety of names: in the south it is called sinh thive, for the Red Tai of the north-east it is sinh thalchan and the Phuan call it sinh tateup. The commonest and best known are the sinh mi ('ikat' skirt), the sinh chok (broken weft skirt) and the sinh khid, whose name comes from its principal pattern. However, the best known of the original models is the sinh-mi-hoy, with some 100 patterns – and a totally misleading name. This type also goes under the names of tobep (specimen) and totang (representative). In the case of (Nark) ngu-tai-khang or 'crawling serpent', for instance, we have an excellent illustration of the thorny question of the process of transmission of prehistoric patterns down to our own time in a country so internally partitioned in geographical, cultural and ethnic terms.

Trousers

Trousers are generally worn by men of all groups, but may also form part of the feminine wardrobe. This is true of the Austro-Asiatic and certain Lao Tai groups, one example being the Phongsaly branch of the Tai Neua.

Shifts

These are typical of women's dress in the Sino-Tibetan group: the Hmong, Yao and Akha. Shifts figure on bronze Dongson drums from around 300 B.C. and also, perhaps, on Ban Chiang painted pottery.

Sarongs

A kind of skirt for men, the sarong is characterized by a sober check pattern. From the historical and etymological point of view the term could have its origin in the word song (trousers), an everyday word bearing a non-Indo-European stress.

Langoutis

The langoutis is a kind of belt-apron of great simplicity. Much worn until the time of our grandparents – especially among the ethnic minority groups – *the langoutis* is an indispensable part of traditional ceremonies. Research reveals a broad geographical spread and a long history, the langoutis figuring in prehistoric paintings from the Mekong valley and on painted pottery dating from around 1500 B.C. Moreover, it bears an astonishing resemblance to an item of dress found on the other side of the world – in the Amazon area and elsewhere – and to representations of clothing from very ancient times, certain types of *langoutis* having been dated to 6000 B.C. In India it was worn by commoners, kings and gods alike.

Phami or phasikot, and chong kabeng (term of Khmer origin)

Although the earliest descriptions – noted by the Chinese missionary Kang Tai during his time in Funan – date from the mid-third century, this item of clothing is still in everyday use in many areas. In Laos it became the ceremonial garb of important personages, notably the king. Generally called *phahang* (garment with a tail), it also goes under such other names as phahang hene (garment with a fox's tail), pha nhao (long) and pha mi. When a lower band is added, as also happened with the sinh (skirt), it is called *phasikhot*.

Jackets

Certain details and symbolic ornaments can make a jacket a specific ethnic marker. This is true of Yao dress and can also be typical of larger groups sometimes comprising several ethnic components. Thus the *sua xê* jacket worn by the Austro-Asiatics of the south is common to the Alak, Laven, Ta Oi, Oi and others. Other examples include the sua vok of the Meuy, Thèng and Xam, the *sua pao* (*khuap*) of the Khamkeut Phu Thai and the *yo*. Some jackets are worn over a very wide area: in southern Laos the *sua xê* is to be found in the provinces of Saravan, Sekong, Champassak and Attapeu. In almost all ethnic groups there is a clear differentiation between men's and women's jackets. Symbolic ornaments and decorations serve to distinguish garments with a ritual character – the *xeut* worn by the bonzes among the Phuan and the Phatoy (Black Tai, Red Tai, etc.), for example – or signal differences in age and social status, as among young girls, married women and old women of the Makong. Some ethnic costumes – those of Pao and Bit women, for

example – have changed markedly in terms of cut and colour, while the Black Tai have remained relatively faithful to their traditional costume. Numerous paintings and engravings show women bare to the waist, suggesting that jackets are a recent arrival; however, the presence of expressions such as *kheuang nung hom* (upper body garment) and veste in the ancient *Khun Borom* chronicle would seem to indicate the contrary.

Scarves

With the variety of light head-coverings, including turbans, bonnets, hats, diadems, fontanges and *phalo hua xang* (elephant headdresses), it could be said that each ethnic group has its own turbans or scarves, varying their use according to ritual requirements. Scarves range from simple strips of fabric to items of variable widths and up to 5–6 m long, as among the Yao-Mane. In the interests of simplicity I shall divide the scarves and turbans into the following broad groups: *pha toum* (varieties of cape), light coverings; *pha bing* (Phakiel), scarves (Phabieng); pha pieo, worn by the Black Tai and Khan Tai (other Tai: *Pok kal hok*); trunk and coffin covers of the Red Tai (*poklong*), the phachong of the Phuthai and Phuan, the *pha khop* of the north-east region and the *pha houn* of the south.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LAO FABRICS

Having thus established what is meant by 'Lao fabrics', I should like to move on to their general characteristics. These are of several kinds, revelatory details marking the identity of an ethnic group or subgroup.

Ethnic characteristics

As classification markers, dress and housing are more concrete and thus more readily identifiable than relatively abstract criteria such as language. Clothing allows for instant recognition of the differences between one ethnic group or subgroup and another and thus for the creation of typologies.

Exchange or imitation characteristics

Sometimes similarities between the dress of two or more groups are immediately apparent, the presence of highly distinctive elements making it clear that exchanges have taken place. Everything has to have a starting point, but it is sometimes difficult to tell who was the first to innovate. Adoption of a particular style of dress leads to propagation of identity criteria among other groups, the observable result being that two ethnic groups living in the same area often exhibit similarities in terms of types of garments, cut or decoration.

Regional characteristics

One example here is the ease of identification of the sinh kado skirt worn by the Austro-Asiatic language groups of the south and characterized by horizontal stripes resembling those of the sinh mane worn by the Lü in the north-west. The similarity of colour and placement of the bands is very likely coincidental in this case, imitation between two regions in the extreme north and south of the country – separated by almost 1,000 km, mountains, rivers and other ethnic groups – seeming a somewhat doubtful hypothesis.

Jackets too can be classified according to region: the *sua pat* and *sua kone bung* come from the north-west and the *sua mark pem* from the north-east, while the *sua hi* and *sua pao* are less uniform but distributed over a wider area. The *sua xê* is the exclusive privilege of the Austro-Asiatic women of the south. In the same way there is no difficulty in identifying the general characteristics of scarves: red, yellow and purple scarves first appear in Xieng Khuang and are a feature from Borikhamxay, Khammuan and Savannakhet through to Saravan, Champassak and Attapeu. The skirt can also be described as regional, in that it covers an entire zone of South-East Asia, including southern China.

Gender differences

As elsewhere in the world, clothing shows a universal gender split, confirmed and continued up to the present day by our own ethnic groups.

Everyday and ceremonial characteristics

The division between everyday and ceremonial wear is universal. Lao ethnic costumes have their own identities, but in some cases this identity is only occasionally manifested: for example, certain garments may only be worn, or even touched, on certain ritually designated days of the year.

Rite of passage characteristics

Distinct articles of clothing are worn for births, marriages and burials. The Tai Deng wear a special skirt, the *sinh hua buan*, for funerals, and use a very elaborate coffin curtain

up to 12 m in length. The Makong of central Laos have a skirt and jacket suit for the young, another for married women and a third for the aged; thus rites of passage are specifically indicated.

CONCLUSION

It is no secret that if a culture is to be preserved and promoted, one must first know it in real depth. Only when the value of something is known is it considered interesting, taken up and preserved. The IRC [1] can pride itself on playing a leading role in Laos in terms of textile data collection. Even if such data remain far from exhaustive, they at least provide a basis for preservation and mean that part of the cultural heritage will be saved. To take an example: the sua pao, the jackets typical of the north-east – especially among the Phuan, who call them sua phuan – are still remembered by those over 50 years of age, yet quite unknown to younger people. Moreover, the Tai Haat (Iduh) village of Ban Nakhap, where these jackets are still attested, is at a distance of three days' march for anyone wishing to make a photographic record of this item.

Many data now depend entirely on the memory of the elderly, and if collection is not carried out urgently the heritage could easily be lost forever. We still lack data – photos and samples – on the traditional costume of some ten ethnic groups. On the other hand, in addition to mosquito nets, baby-carriers, curtains, mattresses and cushions, we already have in our possession over sixty jackets, everyday ensembles, ceremonial costumes and rite-of-passage garments for puberty, weddings and funerals. Given that our country is opening up politically, notably with its membership of ASEAN, the IRC's mission is the preservation not only of its textiles, but also of its other arts and cultural traditions, both tangible and intangible.

And so the creation of a centre for research, preservation and promotion on a national scale seems to us to be an excellent thing. Up until the present it has been a case of 'cutting the suit to fit the cloth' and the IRC's work so far reflects this constraint. As a result, many see a research institute such as ours as a desk operation involving neither basic research nor fieldwork. The admirable definition of culture in the latest official documents contains the words 'national, scientific and vernacular'. Right now we are being questioned about the criteria for this 'national' culture and we have to expect requests for definitions of what constitutes 'scientific and vernacular'. Whatever the case, culture as a national activity can go nowhere on inadequate budgets; nor can it develop without exchanges of data and co-operative projects with other countries. Since this kind of collaboration is vital to the safeguarding of our ethnic traditions, it is a mistake to see research as the domain of a privileged few – those with leisure time to devote to it – and to imagine that all the requirements have been met. The fruits of research ripen slowly and demand constant attention. In this field, as everywhere, basic and applied research is, in our opinion, the *sine qua non* for cultural preservation and promotion.

NOTE

1. Regarding the work of the IRC, I should like to mention here some of its recent activities, beginning with conferences: the IRC organized two conferences designed to increase public awareness of the extent and urgency of problems of preservation, one in 1991, accompanied by a major exhibition of textile items, and the other in 1992. Concrete public-sector measures have been limited to a few donations of valuable items, promises and words of encouragement. However, the IRC took advantage of the conferences to ask the authorities for premises or publicly owned land for its future research, preservation and promotion centres. Vacant land in downtown Vientiane was proposed, but the area was too small for future needs. The possibility of land on the edge of the Vientiane prefecture was raised, but then the Social Sciences Committee was dissolved and at the end of 1993 the IRC was transferred elsewhere. The vital matter of where to set up must now be solved once and for all if we are to pursue the IRC's extended mission, which now involves not only linguistic, artistic and literary research, but also the entire, enormous field of culture and heritage preservation. Secondly, there are the publications: the two documents on fabrics so far published are the report of the 1991 Conference and the catalogue of the items in the accompanying exhibition. There also exist two technical documents on Lao fabrics among the thirty or so publications issued by the IRC since its creation in 1983. An evaluation of the IRC's work was published in the report of the international conference of social science researchers devoted to Laos in late 1993. All things considered, our work in the preservation and promotion fields reveals the need for co-operative research projects, both in the country and abroad as a means of increasing the number of Lao researchers. We have also seen the usefulness of a permanent, but not too solemn, exhibition of Lao fabrics. There is also a pressing need to acquire new, representative samples of ethnic clothing and to carry out long-term basic and applied research into Lao fabrics.

Traditional Hmong Weaving and Embroidery

LYTOU BOUAPAO

SITUATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HMONG

The Hmong constitute one of the minority groups in the Lao PDR, living in the mountainous, strategically important regions of northern Laos. The features of the areas of Hmong settlement have been shaped by political events and geographical and psychological factors. Road, telecommunications and transport networks are not yet fully developed throughout these regions.

In 1992 there were 236,000 Hmong in the Lao PDR, divided into four subgroups: White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb), Green Hmong (Hmoob Ntsuab), Black Hmong (Hmoob Dub) and Red Hmong (Hmoob Liab). Each subgroup had its own traditional dress and dialect. However, as is the case with other ethnic groups throughout the world, clothing habits have changed, and it is only in remote regions that the Hmong – especially the women – still wear traditional dress.

Traditional Hmong society has its own culture, organizational structure and philosophy of life. It is divided into patrilineal clans, of which there are twenty-one in the Lao PDR. They are, in alphabetical order: the Chang, Cheng, Chou, Chue, Hang, Heu, Kong, Kue, Lao, Ly, Moua, Phang, Phoua, Tang, Thao, Tsue, Vang, Vu, Xê, Xiong and Yang Dao. Boys remain in their father's clan and adopt the clan name, while girls join their husband's clan when they marry. Each clan is characterized by a male ancestor and membership of a clan is strictly defined, the most distant relative always being considered a member of the same unit. This structure provides the Hmong with a remarkable organizational system. Members of the same clan cannot marry, since they consider themselves to be brothers and sisters.

Under the old regime, the Hmong was one of the most oppressed and exploited minority groups, and its members were for the most part illiterate. Today, they continue to practise their animist beliefs and live by means of shifting cultivation and cattle breeding. They are deeply imbued with a sense of independence, a love of justice, peace and liberty, and a sense of solidarity with other ethnic groups to combat exploitation and natural disasters.

It was only after the founding of the Lao PDR and under the enlightened leadership of its government with its fair, modern ethnic policy aimed at promoting national awareness, ensuring equality and reinforcing inter-ethnic solidarity, that the living conditions of ethnic groups gradually improved. The state is constantly taking measures for the economic and social development and uplifting of all ethnic groups. In parallel with the development of the

nation, ethnic groups have the right to safeguard and develop their customs, traditions and cultures.

TRADITIONAL WEAVING AND EMBROIDERY

Features of traditional weaving and embroidery

In accordance with Hmong tradition, embroidery and weaving are tasks that are specifically assigned to women for the sole purpose of clothing the family. All Hmong women know how to embroider, spin, tailor and sew. They also know how to weave – unlike men, who simply enjoy the fruits of their labours.

Raw material: hemp

Hemp is a fibre-yielding plant with a straight stem, growing to an average height of 3 m. It grows in fertile red or black soil at an altitude of between 1,200 and 2,000 m. According to Pidance, the hemp grown by the Hmong is the *cannabis gigantea*. Hemp sowing starts in April after clearing and burning. Hemp seeds must be sown very close together so that the stems grow straight, with few leaves. After three months, when the hemp has flowered, the Hmong women cut it and dry it in the sun for a week, during which time it must be turned every two or three days to make sure it dries properly.

LYTOU BOUAPAO

Thread-making techniques

Savina notes: 'As Hmong women have no instrument to crush the hemp, when it is sufficiently dry they have to cut it by hand, breaking the stems one by one'.[1] This is traditionally done at the evening gathering. In general, threads are of similar thickness, but when they are too thick the women skilfully split them with their nails or teeth. They then tie the threads together, gradually winding the resulting thread around their wrists, eventually producing a rough yellowish spool. Hmong women spend every spare minute they have adding to this spool. When they go out to work they take a handful of thread, attach the middle of it to the top of their aprons, and carry on working the thread as they walk. They sometimes use a mortar to give a textured look to the textile. A large flat stone and a wide wooden board are used as a millstone to soften the fibre, with the stone being rolled over the fibre until it becomes supple. The thread is then white-washed, boiled in wax and hung over a large, horizontal, cross-shaped winding-reel, or *tus khqub lig*, which because of its size is usually kept outside the house.

Looms

According to Jacques Lemoine, the Hmong use two types of looms, a batik loom, modelled on those used by Laotians (this is the most common type), and a traditional non-batik, single-warp loom. The loom is fastened to the woman's hip. The weaver works sitting down, and in the case of the less common loom the other end is fastened to a pillar.[2]

From the thread-making and weaving techniques used, it is clear that Hmong traditional textile-working takes up most of a woman's free time, throughout the year. It takes one year for an active, skilful Hmong woman to make a single skirt; as it is always pleated, this requires three arm spans or 4–5 m of fabric. This represents a bar of silver, or approximately 60,000 to 70,000 kips. This is why, as trade develops, Hmong women living near towns no longer make their own clothes but buy material at the market to make their skirts or trousers. Instead of wearing skirts, women increasingly wear trousers to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. Besides, bought, industrially made fabrics are more attractive and less expensive.

Embroidery

Traditional embroidery on Hmong garments – especially women's garments – is rich in complex designs. Hmong women use two methods of embroidery. The first consists in embroidering stylized designs directly on to their clothing using needles and brightly coloured threads (red, green, yellow, white and black). The second consists in embroidering in red, white, black or another colour, rectangular, square or triangular-shaped pieces of material, which are then sewn on to an item of clothing or on to decorative cloths in accordance with the specific customs of each subgroup or region.

Today, Hmong embroidery has kept pace with socio-economic development: Hmong women embroider attractive decorative designs not only on clothes but also on sheets, aprons, pillow-cases, bags and rugs. In general these designs illustrate the lives of the Hmong people. Since 'domestic' trade has opened up, the skills of hemp-growing and traditional weaving are slowly disappearing. Embroidery, for its part, is gradually becoming a profit-making activity done by women at home and is exported to Japan, the United States and elsewhere.

Dyeing techniques

Hmong women are skilled at making natural dyes. The indigo plant, which is grown close to the villages and houses, is the one most often used for making dyes. In general, in September, Hmong women gather basket loads of indigo, which they leave to soak in large wooden troughs. They check the decomposition of the plant daily, adding water as necessary. Then they add new leaves, followed by lime which serves to precipitate the dye, which forms on the sides of the trough in the form of an unpleasant-smelling paste. The women then remove all the residue formed by the leaves and stems, mix the dye and transfer it into a bucket in order to carry it home. It is then left to stand for a few days, during which time it thickens and turns a dark, almost black, colour. The next operation consists in putting the batik-prepared material to soak in this paste three times in three days, drying it in the sun after each immersion. Finally, the material is soaked in hot water to melt the wax, thus revealing the designs.

Action to be taken to safeguard traditional Hmong weaving and embroidery

The safeguarding of the intangible heritage of ethnic groups in general, and minority groups in particular, must be ensured by a just, equitable policy consistent with their wishes. However, as the country has opened up to the outside world and to scientific and technological progress, it has become necessary for the Lao Government, the relevant organizations and the minority groups themselves to take certain steps without delay. It is recommended that young people be trained and educated, along with multi-ethnic Lao society as a whole, to make people aware of their intangible multi-ethnic heritage. Another recommendation is the carrying out of research and the collecting of information on traditional weaving and embroidery, and on the craft-working potential of ethnic and minority groups, in order to learn about the subject, promote their skills and fill in the gaps in their knowledge. The practice of hemp growing, for example, could be revived and appropriate modern technologies used to make thread, fabric and clothing.

The manufacture of Hmong women's traditional garments should also be promoted, for there is demand for these products both inside and outside the country; and women's interest in safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage should be promoted and stimulated. Tourism in the villages of ethnic and minority groups can be developed so that these groups can sell their craft products in a manner they can control, and regular local craft fairs and inter-ethnic cultural festivals can be organized.

PRINCIPLES FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

The history of humanity shows that traditional intangible cultural heritage is often swamped by more powerful forces. In order for a policy on the safeguarding and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage of ethnic and minority groups in Laos to be effective, the government and organizations concerned could adopt bills on the safeguarding and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage of ethnic groups in order to bring about conditions conducive to the development of these fine traditions. Mobile training units in weaving and embroidery at regional level could be created, and the granting of loans facilitated to the weavers and embroiderers according to their production capacity. Another proposal is the development of weaving and embroidery programmes for pupils and students in primary, secondary and vocational schools, particularly in rural areas, to enable them to perpetuate the Lao intangible cultural heritage.

NOTES

1. F. M. Savina, *Histoire des Miao* [History of the Miao], Hong Kong, 1930.
2. J. Lemoine, *Un village Hmong vert du Haut Laos* [A Green Hmong village in Northern Laos], Paris, CNRS, 1972.

Kmhmu' Music and Musical Instruments

SUKSAVANG SIMANA AND ELISABETH PREISIG

INTRODUCTION TO THE KMHMU' PEOPLE

The Kmhmu' call themselves Kam-hmu', Kwm-hmu' or, more generally, K-mu' (Khmu').[1] In the past the Kmhmu' were called Khoom,[2] which was used for ethnic groups belonging to what are now ethnolinguistically classified as Mon-Khmer groups. During the reign of Cao Fa Ngum,[3] the Kmhmu' were called Kha Kao.[4] Several centuries later new names came into use. At various points in history they were called Phu-Théng, Thai Théng, and at other times Lao Kaang or Lao May. Finally they were referred to as Lao Theung,[5] a name which continues into be used.

The Kmhmu' are one of the major ethnic groups living in Laos, with a population of over half a million. They are an ancient people who have pursued their livelihood in this area or in what is commonly referred to as northern Indo-China from ages past up to the present day – their long and complex history encompasses various historical and cultural eras.[6] Kmhmu' history has all along been closely connected with that of the Lao nation, but in the distant past the Kmhmu' people were established on the land and exercised self-rule in the various areas where they resided, for example in Xieng Sèèn, Meuang Sva, and Meuang Pa-kan.[7]

Most of the Kmhmu' still make their living by planting mountain fields with rice, corn, cotton, tubers and root vegetables, and by raising animals, hunting, and gathering food from the mountain forests of the various provinces of northern Laos (Bolikhamsay, Xieng Khouang, Hua Phanh, Phongsaly, Oudomxay, Luang Namtha, Bokeo, Sayabury, Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Vientiane Municipality). There are also Kmhmu' living in Viet Nam,[8] Thailand,[9] China and Myanmar

The Kmhmu' can be considered as a single ethnic group in terms of language, customs, culture and beliefs,[10] dress, livelihood and ways of thinking. Nevertheless, on the basis of distinct ways of speaking or on regional distribution, we are able to distinguish two major regional subgroups. The Kmhmu' U or Kmhmu' Cwang[11] for the most part reside and are self-sufficient in the south-eastern part of northern Laos. This group includes the subgroups sometimes referred to as tmooy[12] U, tmooy Cwang, tmooy Khat, tmooy Beng, tmooy Am, and so forth. The second subgroup is the Kmhmu' Khroong[13] including also the tmooy Rook, the tmooy Khvèèn, the tmooy Yuan and the tmooy Lw. This subgroup of the Kmhmu' has established its villages and fields in the north-western part of northern Laos and in the adjacent parts of northern Thailand.

In terms of livelihood the Kmhmu' have a special expertise in upland rice-culture, besides growing various other crops. They possess special methods and devices for trap-

ping various forest animals for food. Moreover they are very skilled at weaving a variety of baskets, and at producing household items from bamboo and wood. In some areas the Kmhmu' continue to preserve their own special clothing and typical ways of adorning their bodies (scarves, jewellery, hairstyle, etc.).[14]

Regarding the 'heart-related' or 'non-material' culture, the Kmhmu' have a rich treasure of unique forms of oral expression. According to the scientific, ethnolinguistic classification, Kmhmu' belongs to the K-hmuic subdivision of the Mon-Khmer branch of the larger Austro-Asiatic language family. Generally speaking, Kmhmu' is an old language, with no tones,[15] but to English or Lao speakers it does have many unusual sounds: trilled or trembled (such as 'r'), retained and stopped (such as glottals), unusual finals (such as final 'h'), as well as many clustered consonants and vowels (br, hr, wa, etc.). In its structure Kmhmu' is similar to Lao. Kmhmu' verbal arts include legends and folk-tales (trdoh), chanting of traditional poetry (teem)[16] and riddles. This whole complex of oral poetry and story-telling represents not only food for our souls but also our historical and social knowledge and records. At the same time, the verbal arts constitute the basis and centrepiece of musical art.

The Kmhmu' social structure and the traditional system of belief are characterized by the ancestral lineage and its intricate network of relationships of exchange, expressed through co-operation and mutual love and support. The ancestors are respected and revered as a source of spiritual strength and special powers. The Kmhmu' also pay respect to natural phenomena and the powers of the universe that may hinder or facilitate their daily life and struggle for survival.

KMHMU' MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Kmhmu' musical instruments represent a rich diversity of types, styles, shapes and construction. Many can be made from ordinary natural materials such as freshly cut green bamboo. Even a simple fresh leaf may be used to make music. Kmhmu' musical instruments (*khrwang prgap siang*, literally 'instruments for combining [or rhyming] sounds') are made of wood, bamboo or metal depending on their ethno-specific purpose and practice. In addition, the Kmhmu' have certain instruments that are reserved for men and others for women, or for special purposes.

Some instruments such as the stamped (and stamping) bamboo tubes *(tông)*, various reed pipes *(pi)* or flutes *(toot)*, the bamboo tube dulcimer *(tmhéék tam)* (Fig. 1), the bamboo humming-fork (Fig. 2) or resonator-fork *(daav daav)*[17] that is played by beating on the wrist, bamboo cluster-pipes *(hôr)* (Fig. 3), or the chime and other sets of tuned bamboo tube instruments called kldoong can easily be made on the spot using fresh green bamboo. So for some *toot* (flute) models the only material required is a thinly walled type of bamboo tube with three holes, one of them in the middle to blow in, and one at each end. That is all it takes to make an instrument, ready to play the most astonishing melodies according to the different regional ways of playing. *Pi* (reed pipes) and end-blown *toot* (flutes) generally have three finger holes in the middle-section, which for the *pi* is a separate part referred to as 'mother' *(ma')*. Some toot flute models may also have an additional finger hole at the back of the instrument.

A variety of Kmhmu' instruments such as cymbals *(chèèng)*, button-gongs *(rbaang)*, kettlegongs *(yaan)*[18] or mouth-harps *(hrôông)* (Fig. 4) are made from metal or bronze. The crafting of these instruments requires training and the

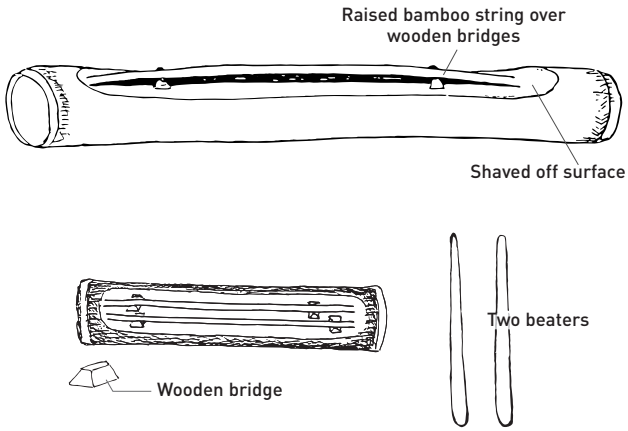


Fig. 1 Bamboo tube dulcimer, or zither

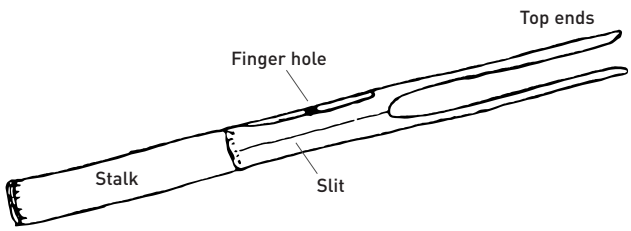


Fig. 2 Bamboo humming fork

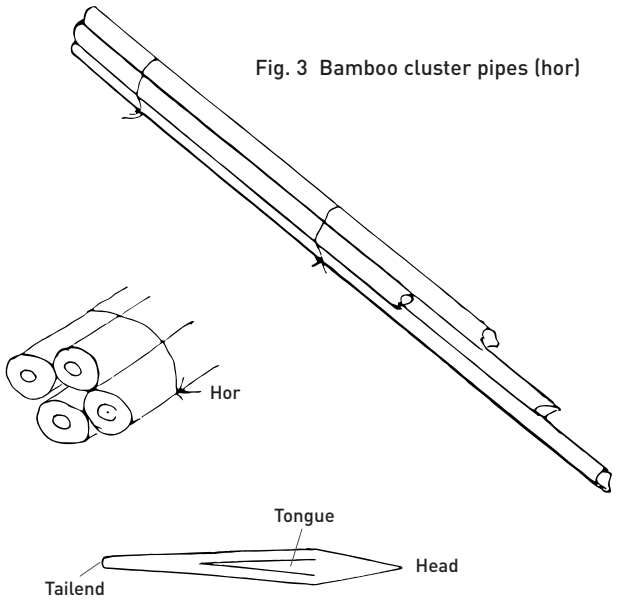


Fig. 3 Bamboo cluster pipes (hor)

Fig. 4 Mouthharp (metal)

special knowledge and skills of metal handling. Finally, there are instruments for which metal and bamboo or wood is combined. Such is the case for the well-known bamboo mouth-organ khene (khèèn or sngkuul), and for the shaman's horn *(tbu')*, which all contain metal reeds *(hntaak)*.

Flutes and reed pipes vary in styles and materials from region to region (Figs. 5, 6, 7 and 8). For example, the pi of the Kmhmu' living in Xieng Khouang are different from those used in Phongsaly (Fig. 9). The *pi-Xieng Khouang* (Fig. 10) is composed of four separate parts: a mouthpiece with the reed (*hntaak*, which means tongue), followed by three (lengthening and widening) pieces (*koon* meaning 'child'), and a main part (*ma*' meaning 'mother') containing the sound holes. If necessary the main part can be prolonged by a tailpiece *(dông pi)*. The flutes that men play are different to those played by women. Melodies and sound production techniques also too differ from place to place. Regional differences also exist as well over what instruments are considered best to use for each given occasion.

The Kmhmu' use various techniques to get their instruments to sound: blowing through blow holes from a little distance *(hur)*, blowing directly through a blow hole *(pung)*, beating, striking, tapping *(tam)*, bowing *(paat)*, rubbing and pulling *(rmpoot)*, plucking *(plih)* or twanging *(pat)*, jabbing, poking, stamping *(sntiik)*. Some wind instruments are played continuously with the player breathing through his nose or mouth while at the same

Fig. 5 Flute (without reed)

Toot of women in Phongsali

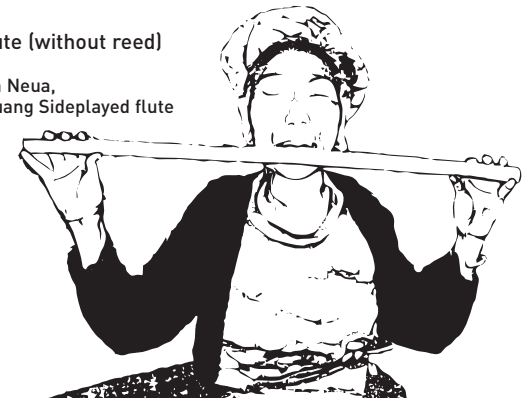


Fig. 6 Flute (without reed)

Model Sam Neua,
Xieng Khouang Sideplayed flute

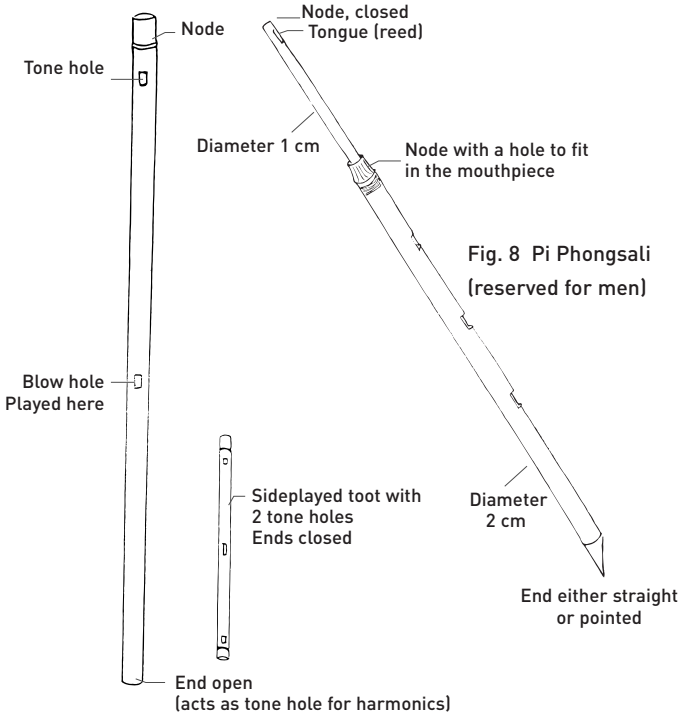


Fig. 8 Pi Phongsali
(reserved for men)

Fig. 7 Flute (without reed)

Fig. 9 Pi Phongsali (reserved for men)

Fig. 10 Reed-flute of Xieng Khouang

time playing without an audible break. Several instruments are played in combination with a variety of rhythms produced using hands or feet or both (clapping or stamping, for example).

THE USE OF KMHMU' MUSIC

If you have ever had contact with Kmhmu' society or listened to national radio broadcasts in Kmhmu', you may notice that the music of the Kmhmu' has many different rhythms, styles and sound qualities that evoke feelings of intimacy, stir memories and provide relief. The musical sounds of the Kmhmu' are vibrations of the mouth, the throat and the lips combined with those of various instruments. The rhythms

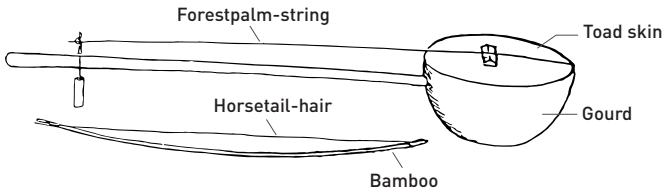


Fig. 11 Gourd fiddle

and speed of the music vary, as do the lengths of the tones or melodies, which are vivacious or melancholic, all for the general enjoyment of both the musicians and the audience. The longer you listen and become immersed in the music the more amazed you are by the naturalness and freshness of the melancholic, gentle or sad sounds.

Kmhmu' music arises from and reflects the real lives of the people, which it simultaneously pervades. This is another reason why Kmhmu' music blends so well with different situations or moods, be they joyous and prosperous, or sorrowful, lonely and miserable. Beliefs and customs lead to a culture and tradition with rituals and festivals which are also occasions for the performance and display of traditional music and other artistic expression. The perfection and freshness of nature, as seen in a breathtaking panorama or heard in the rustling of the wind, the roaring of a waterfall, the singing of the birds or the chattering of the gibbons, evokes deep feelings of fulfilment. All this is reflected in Kmhmu' music, which at times imitates nature. In fact, nature with its sounds and atmosphere is one of its main sources of inspiration.

The traditional chanted folk poetry *(teem)* with its abundance of themes, rhythms and melodies provides another rich source of inspiration for Kmhmu' music. Indeed Kmhmu' music, which in general is deeply anchored in *teem*. Most musical instruments and musical sounds are made to blend and complement the poetic verbal art of the ethnic Kmhmu'. Kmhmu' music sheds light on the attitudes and on the daily life of the people, as well as on their way of thinking, their aspirations, loves, likes or strong dislikes. In certain situations music may even replace words, especially when expressing feelings between young men and women, but also between people of other age groups.

Music that is pleasurable to heart and soul

As mentioned above, the Kmhmu' people combine music with their rich chanted folk poetry. There are as many regional musical styles and rhythms as there are types of

teem. At various cultural ceremonies and festivals the Kmhmu' like to drink rice wine from a jar. This is when they have people sing or chant a variety of folk-poetry called *teem seh phoong*[19] and at the same time the sounds of the khene mouth-organ, of reed pipes and flutes start up and blend together with the *teem*. This particular joyous, fresh and intense atmosphere is typical of the Kmhmu'.

A recital of music and poetry usually follows the evening meal and the day's chores, after people have settled for the night. At this time one may hear the lustrous sounds of flutes sounding through the night from somewhere in the distance, causing those who are about to drift off to sleep to feel refreshed again in a certain way. Sometimes it is the sound of the khene mouth-organ played by young men as they are walking near the houses trying to awaken the young women and girls for a chat. At other times it is the quiet twanging sounds of a mouth-harp *(hrôông)* used by young men, or the gentle wind-like, rhythmic blowing sounds of the cluster-pipes *(hôr)* of young women as they communicate through music what is in their hearts.

The sounds of the flutes can often be heard in the very early, still, chilly morning hours when they are used to awaken the young people to do their household chores such as fetching water, pounding rice and preparing for the tasks of the new day. As they walk to the fields together and return home again, the Kmhmu' are able to select the appropriate pieces of bamboo or wood for making various pipes and flutes, so they can play them as they walk along to lessen the weariness, and to create a fresh atmosphere as they work. The instruments that have a pleasant sound to them are kept for playing back at home. Others that do not sound as good are simply tossed aside, as whenever anyone feels like playing, new ones can easily be made.

Music played to the rhythm of the work

The Kmhmu' people's daily work requires the use of much physical effort for hauling, carrying and lifting heavy loads and for chopping and slashing wood. Many tasks call for the united energy of several people. When heavy labour is performed together as a group it is necessary to have loud and distinct sounds to set the pace. Music can be used to give unifying signals for the rhythm of the physical work and at the same time encourage willpower and concentration. An example of an instrument for such a purpose is the sounding dibble stick *(groong wyh)* which is normally used as a tool for poking seed holes into the fields. It is made from selected *tla* or *rhaang* bamboo (for the stick) and a type of hardwood (for the poking-head). Besides its simple utility as a working tool, the *groong wyh* functions as a musical instrument of the field that can be employed to set the rhythm of work while at the same time creating a pleasant and happy working atmosphere. The *groong wyh* has become a musical instrument employed on special occasions, such as the end of harvest and New Year ceremony *(greh)*, to play the rhythm and accompany dancing.

Another instrument with its origins in the fields is the kldoong. It is made of larger or smaller *tla* or *rhaang* bamboo tubes of varying lengths. When the tubes are struck, various sounds are produced from low to high pitches and of different timbres from loud to soft and clear to dull clapping sounds. At first the *kldoong* was simply a wind-chime of bamboo tubes of uneven lengths that was hung up in the middle of the fields. As the wind moved the bamboo tubes they would strike each other, producing sounds which frightened away the forest animals, so that they would not eat the rice. Later the *kldoong* was adapted until it became a musical instrument that could be used in combination with other instruments, such as drums *(briing)* *(Fig. 12)*, gongs *(rbaang)* *(Fig. 13)*, cymbals *(chèèng)* and bamboo humming-forks or buzzing-forks *(daav daav)*, to add to the mighty, rhythmic and expressive percussion instruments used to accompany a performance of the famous, traditional Kmhmu' sword-dance, or to accompany modern dances.

Music used in rituals or in religious ceremonies

As mentioned earlier, Kmhmu' society exists within a sphere of ancient beliefs and customs that are intricately linked with nature. Facts of life, the imaginary and religious beliefs are all inextricably intertwined. This begins with the belief that humans and spirits live similar lives. The Kmhmu' believe that the spirits eat, that they live and have dwelling places comparable to cities and countries, and that they need to have fun just as humans do. For this reason the Kmhmu' also have a special set of instruments and type of music that can be enjoyed by the people as well as being used in ritual performances and ceremonies. Instruments belonging to this category are the button-gongs *(rbaang)*, the cymbals *(chèèng)*, the bronze kettlegongs *(yaan)* and the shaman's horns *(tbu')*.[20]

Kmhmu' people play these particular instruments in important ceremonies, during sacred and solemn rituals of respect, such as the end of harvest and turn-of-year turning ceremony *(mun greh)*,[21] or the ceremony and ritual that is performed when a new family ritual-house *(gaang tè')* or an addition to

it is built and moved into,[22] and in rituals performed by a specialist in magic powers *(mo môn)*.[23]

The playing of this type of music requires special rhythmic co-ordination between the gongs, cymbals, kettlegongs, stamping tubes and humming-forks in order to create a powerful, voluminous concert of vibrating, resonating, intense sounds, as a demonstration of influence, vitality and courage over adversities, negative powers and enemies. Moreover the sounds of the various drums and gongs reveal something of the player's social status and their role in relation to their own household and extended family and to strangers, and give a glimpse of the basic values such as the need to love and be loyal. Finally, they mark the sacred character of the event and are a demonstration of respect to the forefathers and to other important sources of special power.

The Kmhmu' call this kind of ceremonial feast or ritual happening filled with music, poetry and dancing *séép ngan*, in contrast to rituals that are performed without festive character. Such ceremonial gatherings see many people contributing spontaneously to the pleasure, some by striking the gongs, others by playing cymbals or beating the kettlegong. Still others stamp the rhythm with bamboo tubes or sound the humming-fork by beating it on their wrist. This spontaneous and participatory music makes a loud and powerful-sounding concert of percussion instruments, arousing people to so they feel like getting up and become involved in the dancing and swinging. The atmosphere thus created leads the participants to become totally immersed in the pleasure of sounds and rhythms and abandon themselves to the vibrations flowing through body and soul and the inner being with all its beliefs and hopes.

Certain instruments, however, have only one specific role assigned to them. Such is the case for the 'plaintive stalk' *(groong wwt)*, which is a kind of rope-played (or stalk-played) friction-earth-drum.[24] When the stalk-rope is rubbed *(rmpoot)* upward, a vibrating thunderous sound is produced, rising to the heavens in order to bring down moisture to the seedling fields to permit the seed to sprout and grow up and flourish. This sound does not make you feel festive, but the people nevertheless look forward to hearing it because it only occurs on the occasion of calling for rain, which in turn means food, and if the rain comes they feel once more confirmed in their beliefs.

The sound of the Kmhmu' ritual instrument *tbu*' (shaman's horn) also has its special quality and tone colour as well as

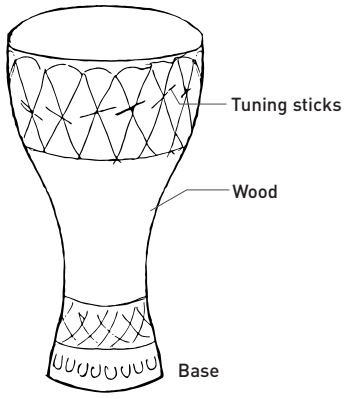


Fig. 12 Drum

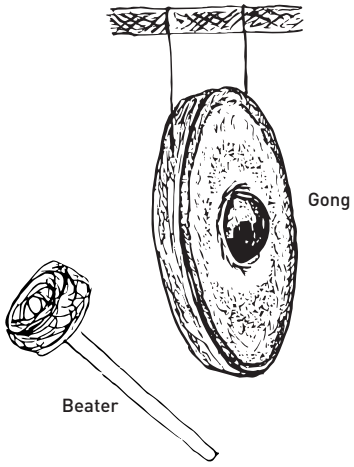


Fig. 13 Gong

connotation and is able to calm and bring quiet to the inner being. It reminds one of all that is powerful, sacred and intimidating, and of taboos and the spiritual world. The *tbu*' is used only during rituals for the spirit of magical powers. Its sound indicates a searching and calling for the spirit or power of magic *(hrôôy môn)* to come down and perform his responsibilities of redeeming and delivering the whole of humanity from death. The *tbu*' may also call on the spirit of various negative powers, temptations or deceptions *(maan)*.

HOW TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THE MUSIC OF VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS

Music and musical instruments are a unique element of the cultural heritage of each ethnic group or nationality. It would be impossible for us to take the musical instruments of one group and try to use them to replace those of another, or to try and take what is enjoyed and appreciated

by one ethnic group and bring it to another. Hence the preservation and promotion of the music and musical instruments of each and every ethnic group is a most praiseworthy effort that is highly appreciated.

Although the Kmhmu' instruments seem as though they can be made easily, there is actually a wide range of models which are able to meet both the needs of the heart for enjoyment and the needs of the body for refreshment and recreation. Musical instruments are also connected with the co-operative work which they enhance, and with the rituals and religious ceremonies in which they play their role and serve the community. The various musical instruments and types of musical expression are not only unique symbols of the Kmhmu' people, but are also enjoyed and appreciated by whoever else listens to them. Traditional musical instruments such as, for example, kettlegongs, gongs and cymbals represent a fundamental treasure of cultural heritage not only for the Kmhmu' and for the Lao nation but also for humanity as a whole. Some instruments, however, and more especially the knowledge to play them, is not found among other ethnic groups in the world, and even among the Kmhmu' this knowledge is on the wane and may soon become extinct.

In the past the music and instruments of the Kmhmu' were only used only in the Kmhmu' social context. Both musicians and instrument makers developed naturally and taught themselves by watching others. The styles of those who volunteered to preserve the music through their use became the models and set the norms. There was no intentional propagation or teaching of knowledge in an organized fashion or based on a definite foundation. For this reason and due to the rapid expansion of modern influences, economic developments, scientific progress, new thinking and various other social factors, the development of the Kmhmu' musical tradition has not moved in a positive direction.

None of us, whether old or young, have any reason to reject or neglect the use of traditional music or the instruments of other ethnic groups, because these traditions were born out of the wise efforts of the ancestors over thousands of years. Today we must preserve, promote and use the traditional musical instruments of the various ethnic groups. In this new atmosphere it is of utmost importance to show love and interest, to care for, to treasure and preserve the musical arts of the different ethnic groups and to regard them as a fundamental part of the heritage of the whole nation.

The preservation of beautiful customs, of culture and traditions depends largely on the preservation of the natural environment and the social life of each ethnic group. This is an important factor for the continuation of the traditional music and musical instruments of a given ethnic group. The promotion of a movement for popular art and literature includes the presentation of folk art and literature of the various ethnic groups, and this is also a way to preserve and promote traditional ethnic music.

International organizations play the important role of assisting the various ethnic groups to preserve and promote their music and instruments. Thus, we would like to make several propositions. Firstly, I would like to support the idea of a centre for the conservation, research and promotion of the culture of the ethnic groups of the Lao PDR. Secondly, I also wish tto propose the creation of a school for the traditional musical arts and dance of the different ethnic groups in the important areas of ethnic presence in the country. Lastly there should be a project for the collection of data concerning ethnic music and musical instruments. This is very urgent because more and more of the traditions are disappearing with every passing day.

This chapter, which has focused only on the music and musical instruments of the Kmhmu', has given a general impression of the diversity and richness of the various types of traditional musical instruments and the methods of playing them, as well as an explanation of the role and use of music and musical instruments of the Kmhmu', and how they differ from those of other ethnic groups. Based on this we may have a clearer and more accurate understanding as we make plans and find new concepts to preserve and promote the use and creation of Kmhmu' music and musical instruments in this ever-expanding economic, social and scientific age.

NOTES

1. Meaning 'person', or 'human being' (as distinct from things and animals). 'Kmhmu' is also the term the people themselves use to refer to their own ethnic group.

2. In Pali *Khoom* means south, downstream, further down or underneath. (In former times the Lao and the Thai referred to the ancient Khmer as *Khoom*.)

3. Cao Fa Ngum reigned in the fourteen century (from 1353). In historical records and legends he is described as the one who established the Lane Xang Lao Kingdom with independent rule both in terms of land and peoples.

4. According to the feudal perception of the past, the Mon-Khmer groups were referred to as 'the slaves'. *Kha' Kao* means 'the original/old slaves', in other words, *Kha'*, the slaves who were here first, to distinguish them from more recently arrived slaves. . The word *Kha'* in Lao actually means slave, to kill or to destroy: hence, the various ethnic groups strongly dislike being called *Kha'*.

5. These other names mean Lao living above, in the middle-altitude-mountains or upland areas. This was in order to replace the previous derogatory terms, but the terminology is still not correct according to scientific and ethnolinguistic studies. The best waysolution would be to call the people by the name they have for themselves (endonym or autonym) such as Kwm-hmu', Hmong or Kataang.

6. The Kmhmu' people have customs and beliefs, folk-tales and traditional poetry which speak of and shed light on the oldest cultural eras of Lao history including, for example, legends about cutting stones for buildings, and for boundary markers of countries, states or territorial entities. These also speak of bringing stones, making stone jars (on the Plain of Jars) and production of metal ceremonial kettlegongs.

7. The names of these places appear in the Khun Cwang legends of the Kmhmu', the legend of King Cwang Haan, and the *Mahaakaap* (epic of) *Thao Hung Thao Cwang* which focus almost exclusively in a most enthralling way on the wars between Khun Cwang and various meuang (small countries or states with a city), and on the turmoil that occurred there.

8. According to the writings of Dang Nghieêm Van, professor of ethnic studies at the Institute of Religious Studies in Viet Nam.

9. Professor Suwilai Premsrirat, Mahidol University, Bangkok, has written about the language, customs and beliefs, as well as traditional healing practices, of the Kmhmu' living in Thailand.

10. Generally, in the past the Kmhmu' respected and fed their ancestors.

11. Based on the dialect and on whether they live along the U and Mekong Rrivers.

12. *Tmooy* means stranger or guest and is used by the Kmhmu' to refer to other Kmhmu' living in a different area, or belonging to a different subgroup from that of the speaker.

13. *Kmhmu' Khroong* does not just mean Kmhmu' living along the Mekong but is used here to include also the Kmhmu' Rook, the Kmhmu' Khvèèn, the Kmhmu' Yuan and the Kmhmu' Lw.

14. At present it is quite difficult to find Kmhmu' who still dress and adorn their bodies in a typical Kmhmu' fashion. This has caused many people to think that the Kmhmu' don''t have their own original heritage of clothing and ways of making cloth and weaving. In fact in the past the Kmhmu' did have their own clothing, but due to cultural, social and historical factors, the intensity of the work in the fields work for subsistence, and readily available clothing manufactured by others, the traditional Kmhmu' clothing has been lost or has changed to the extent of being absorbed by other groups.

15. Kmhmu' dialects, such as *Yuan and Khvèèn*, have developed a tonal contrast, while others mentioned under the *Kmhmu' Khroong* group have a register contrast, that may or may not include a pitch contrast.

16. The Kmhmu' art of chanting poetry (*teeum)* is an ancient tradition. The Kmhmu' do not have their own writing system. Thus all forms of traditional verbal art and literature are necessarily oral, but they are very rich and widespread. *Teem* is regarded as food for the soul which the Kmhmu' cannot live without.

17. *Daav daav* is the name of a Kmhmu' instrument made of *t-la* or *r-haang* bamboo. It is used to accompany other musical instruments. In Laos, to our knowledge, only the Kmhmu' have the *daav daav*, but it is also found among other groups in Indonesia.

18. The kettlegong (also referred to in the literature as bronze drum – *yaan*) is a valuable instrument in terms of technique, art and historical and cultural meaning. It is also linked to respect for the forefathers and parents. In the legend of 'The Lazy Ñi' (Khun Cwang's name when he was a child), Ñi took wax and formed a *yaan*. When he beat it, it sounded like this:

> Dum dum dreey yeey, klung
> tam yaan do srô' do doong, klung, (beat kettlegong-pick food)
> tam yaan tô 'maan tô mwang, klung (beat kettlegong-target, get town, county)

19. When drinking together from the rice-wine jars at weddings or house dedications, or end of agricultural year ceremonies, the Kmhmu' have a tradition of inviting young unmarried women to come forward and chant good wishes and blessings in poetry form to those who are drinking *teem seh phoong* while pouring water into the wine jar. This tradition shows something of the love and respect the Kmhmu' have for each other.

20. The shaman's horn *(tbu')* of the Kmhmu' people is made either with a buffalo horn or from a quite large double-section of bamboo tube (with a closed node in the middle). The reed or tongue *(hntaak)* is made from a copper-silver alloy or from silver. The only occasions the horn *(tbu')* is played is at spirit-rituals when the spirit -priest or shaman blows into it at certain points of his incantations to the spirits, with the purpose of calling on their power to descend.

21. With the *greh* festival or ritual event, the Kmhmu' leave the old (agricultural) year behind to begin a new one. This ritual was already in existence at the time of our earliest historical records. *Greh* is focused on respect for our ancestors and the value of labour and raising livestock.

22. One kind of spacious and pleasant kmhmu' family house is called *gaang tè*', meaning literally dance-house. It is built at the request of the house-spirit *(hrôôy gaang)*. On the day of dedication of such a house, a water buffalo is killed for the house-spirit and there is dancing *(tè')* and playing of stamping tubes *(tông)*, gongs *(rbaang)* and cymbals *(chèèng)* for the lively festivities lasting for three days and three nights, and involving the whole community.

23. *Môn* in Kmhmu' culture stands for magical powers that some specialists *(mo môn)* are believed to possess and which they use to heal sickness, enter into contact with the spirit world, and even put an end to the lives of enemies.

24. For this instrument a hole is dug in the ground, or a termite hole can be used. A fine bamboo screen is woven to cover the hole (in some areas a buffalo skin is used). Then a stalk from large leaves (*hla' dru'* – from Latin, *Phrynium capitatum*), that are also used as fragrant wrappers of rice cakes, is used as a smooth and slippery rope which is run through the middle of the screen and attached inside. The woven screen-membrane is attached tightly over the hole. Water is poured on it to seal the holes. Then the stalk-rope is rubbed between the hands causing a loud and continuous complaining sound to emerge, somewhat resembling the roar of thunder. This was believed to awaken and remind the heavens to send rains, to water and soak the fields.

The Tunglung: An Alak Musical Instrument

BOUNTHÈNG SOUKSAVAT

While its actual meaning is unknown, the term 'Alak' designates an ethnic group in southern Laos that speaks a Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic) language of the same name. This group has its own distinctive music and makes such stringed, percussion and wind instruments as the *koreding*, the *pepalè*, the *longleui*, the *chuchu* and the *tunglung*. At the time of the last census in 1995, the IRC listed the Alak group as comprising 13,217 persons or 0.37 per cent of the Lao population.

In the music sphere, especially that of instrument making, we have noted similarities between this group and two other Austro-Asiatic groups in southern Laos: the Lavè and the Ta-Oi. Historically the Ta-Oi live off slash-and-burn rice farming, moving their fields (ray) from mountain to mountain in an area extending from eastern Saravan to the province of Sekong. At the end of a harvest season covering December, January and February, one often hears in these mountain areas sounds that, according to the style of playing, may be crude or delicate, dull or harmonious. This is the music of the tunglung, an instrument long made by the Alak and played by them to drive away birds and wild animals which have come to prey on the rice in their fields (Fig. 1).

Some Alak call the instrument tungling, while the neighbouring Ngè (Ngkriang) and Kantou call it tington. The

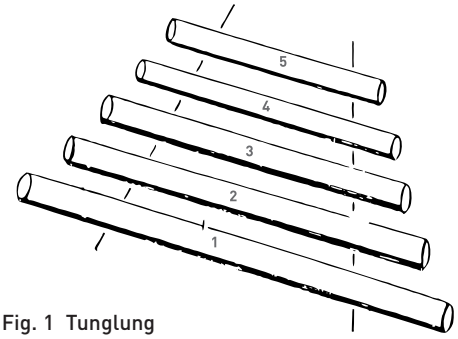


Fig. 1 Tunglung

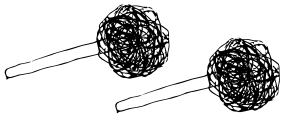


Fig. 2 Beaters

tunglung comes in several sizes, depending on the quality of the wood used and the size of the rice field in question. The larger the field, the more imposing the instrument. The three basic categories indicate this variation in size: the small tunglung, used in a rice field of approximately 3,200 m^2, the medium and the large.[1]

CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

The *tunglung* is composed of five wooden bars, each producing a distinctive sound. Thus there are five sounds. The ideal material is hardwood that is not yet dead, with the ends of each bar being slightly blunt. Unlike the xylophone, the *tunglung* has no stand; instead it is suspended by its two ends, between trees in the forest or posts in a courtyard. The wooden bars emit their notes when struck, the *tunglung* being played with two hardwood sticks like those of a xylophone, but with tips that are thinner and three times as long (Fig. 2).

PLAYING TECHNIQUES

The *tunglung* is easy to play. The wooden bars are struck *tremolo* with two sticks, giving the sound characteristic of the instrument. The Alak often add a base note played by an extra musician. There are no intermediate tones, as the vibration does not persist in the manner of a violin or a wind instrument. Each note of the *tunglung* is thus independent and dynamic.

The leading note of the *tunglung* is E, the fundamental note being the third unlike the case of modern instruments. The Alak people uses sevenths, a distinctive feature of the instrument (Figs. 3, 4 and 5).

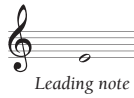


Fig. 3

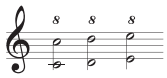


Fig. 4

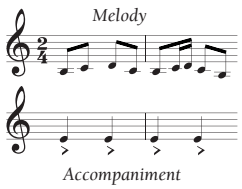


Fig. 5

Intonation of the *tunglung*

Because sounds are obtained from natural wood, the *tunglung* is an idiophone, an instrument made of naurally sonorous material not needing additional tension to create sound. This classification matches those of well-known experts such as Horst Bortel (Sweden), Kurtzjach (Holland) and P. Garbuzob Varboudor (Russia).

Notation

The sounds of the *tunglung* can be measured by ear and with the aid of the modern Korg AT-12 calibration system (Figs 6 and 7).

Fig. 6

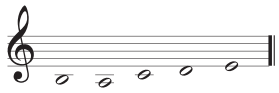
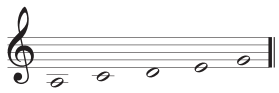


Fig. 7



Ancient and modern *tunglungs* sound at diatonic intervals unlike those of the chromatic scale, and do not have notes B and F (Fig. 8).

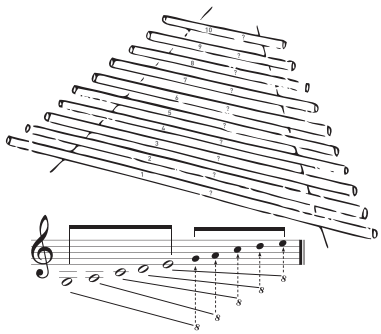


Fig. 8

It is interesting to compare the ambit of the ancient tunglung with that of the modern instrument in order to appreciate the difference.

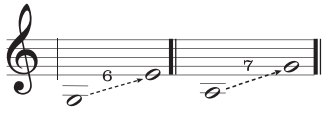


Fig. 9

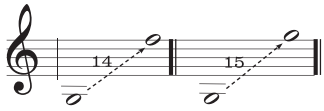


Fig. 10

USE OF THE TUNGLUNG

In the past the tunglung was played only in the fields and there was no interest in the instrument itself, which served solely as an accompaniment to work. Since the 1970s, however, and especially since the liberation of the country and the proclamation of the Lao PDR, the government has

begun to pay increasing attention to the protection, promotion and popularization of the national cultural tradition, with special emphasis on folk music. This explains why the tunglung is now studied and figures in concerts featuring other national instruments. The Alak have gradually improved the quality of the instrument, which can now be played solo, in trios or as part of larger orchestras, notably alongside the papalè and the longleui. Its presence gives the orchestra a distinctive rural touch.

It was once customary to make a *tunglung* every year, but now, to save wood, the Alak readily re-employ the previous year's model. The instrument is easy to make and demands no more than one hour of a good craftsman's time. The future is looking bright for the tunglung, which seems likely to enjoy in Laos the role played elsewhere by the xylophone (Fig. 11). Any further modernization must depend largely on the work of researchers.

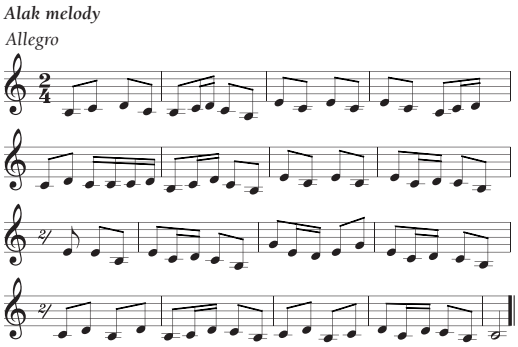


Fig. 11

CONCLUSION

As ethnic musical instruments reflect the thinking and ideology both of individuals and the nation, the Lao PDR can be justly proud of its wealth of traditional music. In addition to its songs and musical forms, the country also possesses a host of different instruments. In 1995, over eighty-seven were listed in the provinces of Louang Prabang, Oudomxay, Savannakhet, Champassak and Attapeu alone. Given that Laos comprises eighteen provinces, only five of which have been surveyed, the total is bound to be much higher. It can be said with certainty that many other instruments in the Lao PDR remain 'undiscovered' to this day.

However, there are obstacles to carrying out a survey as quickly as might be hoped. Firstly, on account of the overall research situation: Laos lacks the basic documents and data needed to develop its research. The most important material should be housed in the National Library or the Archives Department, but unfortunately it remains in rural areas. Laos also lacks research personnel, having for the moment only a few specialist researchers and a budget too limited for the ethnomusicological research project launched less than three years ago. Moreover, the situation in certain regions means that many Lao musical instruments have been lost or destroyed, only their names or history remaining. Commerce is doubtless the principal factor here. Furthermore, there are no successors for the craftspeople of old. The young do not appreciate the value of this heritage and prefer modern music. Improvement of this situation will necessitate rapid implementation of two projects: the first is the creation of an encyclopaedia of Lao classical music instruments; and the second is the creation of a collection of ethnic musical instruments to be housed in a museum.

As the example of the Alak *tunglung* demonstrates, the heritage of traditional musical instruments is potentially very rich. If we can match our achievements to our ambitions, the outcome should be the establishment of a solid ethnomusicological database allowing for scientific preservation of the music of the Lao PDR. This would represent an undeniable success for the protection and promotion of the non-material heritage of our country's different ethnic cultures.

NOTES

1. Small *tunglung*: from 50 cm long and 5 cm in diameter to 80 cm long and 8 cm in diameter; medium *tunglung*: from 80 cm long and 7 cm in diameter to 115 cm long and 9.5 cm in diameter; large *tunglung*: from 80 cm long and 8 cm in diameter to 120 cm long and 12 cm in diameter.

Architecture as an Expression of Minority Culture

SOPHIE AND PIERRE CLÉMENT

RESEARCH AS A MEANS OF IDENTIFYING HERITAGE

The CeDRASEMI (Documentation and Research Centre for South-East Asia and the Indian Archipelago), a laboratory attached to the EHESS (French Institute of Higher Studies in the Social Sciences) and the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research), was set up by Georges Condominas, Lucien Bernot, André-Georges Haudricourt and Denys Lombard with a view to making a survey of the different populations of this region of the world. The aim was to identify, study and take censuses of the various ethnic groups from the twofold standpoint of the ethnolinguist, that is, of the ethnologist and the linguist (associated and inseparable), to contribute to the preparation of monographs on each of these populations and carry out comparative studies, step by step, on the basis of the linguistic groups to which they belonged.

In this context, Laos soon emerged as an ideal field of investigation owing to its ethnic diversity, which is an exceptional human treasure. Many of the participants in the 1996 International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Cultural Heritage of the Minority Groups in the Lao PDR began their research at the CeDRASEMI with Lao populations, with those of the Tai-speaking group, or Tibeto-Burmans, Miao and Yao, Kmhmu', the Mon-Khmer populations of the Austro-Asiatic group, and finally the Austronesians. For our part, we have worked mainly with the Lao, and we extended our research to the various Tai-speaking ethnic groups, thus going beyond the country's borders.

Within the framework of the CeDRASEMI's ethnotechnological team, comparative studies have been carried out on the theme of habitat and housing. These formed the basis for the publication of two special issues of *ASEMI (Asie du Sud-Est et le Monde Insulindien)*, the bulletin of the CeDRASEMI.

ARCHITECTURE AS A LANGUAGE

What architecture expresses, if one distinguishes it from building, is something of an intangible and impalpable nature. Over and above the material presence of the construction, it owes its existence to the meanings with which it is charged and to the fact that it speaks, it expresses a culture, and it reveals a social structure. Housing thus appears as the primary means of differentiating and identifying ethnic groups.

It was K. G. Izikowitz[1] who pointed out that architecture is a language of forms by means of which a society expresses

itself. He did pioneering work as an ethnologist with the ethnic minorities in the north of Laos and, in 1937, studied the architecture of the Lamets in Luang Namtha Province, who lived on mountain peaks at an altitude of 1,000 m, surrounded by some twenty-five different ethnic groups, making up a veritable mosaic of peoples.[2] This ethnic diversity is a valuable resource of Laos, and one of the remarkable features of its heritage. As Izikowitz puts it,[3] the different elements we observe in a village are generally allusions, symbols or signs which give us references or connotations. These quotations of a sort are in a way mnemonic devices reminiscent of the old religious imagery in which a figure might represent a whole story from the scriptures, or at least a passage from them. In short, in order to interpret these signals and symbols, we must first know the social context.

Housing, technology apart, has thus to be understood in terms of the ways of conceiving space that gave it being, the social structures that justify its composition, the spatial practices that shaped it, its symbolic representations. One is struck by the permanence of the housing models faithfully recomposed and rebuilt from generation to generation over very long periods, minutely elaborated so that each occupant finds his or her ritual place, and also so that each piece of furniture, each utensil, may be put just where it will answer its purpose. No human creation corresponds more closely to the idea of structure, an internal functional organization governing the relations existing between each of the elements in accordance with a pre-existing conceptual model. It is this organic web that society spins around itself and its environment, the landscape, the universe, the 'other world', to which architecture gives concrete shape by means of its spatial organization, which is another form of language.

Again according to Izikowitz,[4] architecture can be regarded as the outer wrapping of society. The wrapping is made up of several different layers – one consisting of idioms, another of a bulwark against the climate, enemies, evil spirits and so on. Spatial organization may be regarded as a veritable language; expressed physically, it is immediately visible and apprehensible. For the researcher it is therefore the first, easily accessible representation for analysing, understanding and describing a society and getting some idea of its organization. In addition to this field of representations, architecture also reflects the field of skills – production and building techniques revealing long apprenticeships, and gestures methodically and ritually repeated with a view to domesticating the universe in efforts demanding the co-operation of all members of the community.

THE HOUSE, HOUSING STYLES AND SKILLS

Houses are the most significant visible trace of the intangible cultural heritage of a society and the first clear indicator of its authenticity. Beyond their material presence, they represent in miniature and in concentrated form the society itself. They are the tangible expression of its choices, its skills, in short, of its culture. They express these choices in their way of relating with the universe, in the way their social space is organized, in the rules governing the organization of family and domestic space, in the way in which they are intended to appear to others, and finally in the capacity of their builders to master technology. Owing to the multiplicity of their meanings, the wealth of interpretations, they appear as an all-embracing social fact, and decoding their polysemy is then the only means of arriving at the understanding of a society. As the visible form of its intangible heritage, they are the most conspicuous indicator of its authenticity. On all these counts they deserve safeguarding and protection.

The study of its houses is a good starting-point for the study of a specific ethnic group, and careful attention should be given to their protection and the maintenance of the choices and skills they illustrate. In fact, as a technical tool for sheltering the family unit, the home is not solely a matter of functional or technical exigencies; it depends on cultural choices made from a wide field of possible solutions and conditioned by a number of constraints, which can lead to opposite solutions in the choice of forms, materials and the technical or artistic uses made of them.

To illustrate the foregoing with a major cultural choice, let us take the fundamental opposition between a stilt-dwelling and a house built on the ground. Of course one can legitimately maintain that the stilt-dwelling is a way of adapting the habitat to flooded regions with a humid tropical climate. This functional, climatic and geographical determinism is not enough, however. It fails as an explanation when populations living in houses on the ground are to be observed in flooded delta regions, for example. In this case, the house is kept from being flooded by being built on hillocks, on embankments, or again behind protective dykes. Various technical solutions may be envisaged, so the adoption of this or that particular one is indeed a matter of cultural choice and of techniques peculiar to each ethnic group.

TYPES OF DWELLING AND ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

- *ruon mi ran haan mi sao*
- *suoy lao*
- *ruon bo mi ran bo mi sao*
- *ku moi son khao*
- *pen den ti bo mi ran suoy kêo*
- [A house with porch and piles
- is Lao property
- A house with neither porch nor piles
- belongs to the white-trousered Moï.][5]

In Laos more than elsewhere, ethnic identification by means of a specific type of dwelling stems from the founding myth of the population. This is the sense of the text wherein Khun Borom, son of the King of the *Then*, or higher divinities, who came down from on high to be the king of this world, gave each of his seven children one of the Indo-Chinese kingdoms. Khun Lo, who received the Kingdom of Luang Prabang as his share, could thus differentiate it by means of the characteristic Lao stilt-dwelling from the neighbouring Kingdom of Annam, where the houses stood on the ground. Here, the type of dwelling is the indicator of the border between ethnic groups and enables a frontier to be established between the two countries.

The founding myth became a reality in the course of history, on the occasion of the agreements concerning the demarcation of the frontier between the Kingdom of Lane Xang of King Souligna-Vongsa (1637–94) and that of Annam of King Lêduy-Ky: 'It was decided that all the populations living in 'houses on piles with porches' would be recognized as subjects of the King of Vientiane and that those who lived, on the contrary, in houses 'without either piles or porches' would belong to Annam'.[6]

Thus we see the importance housing assumes as a material and physical feature in ethnic identification. This material wrapping is the expression of an infinity of cultural traits with a wealth of meanings, characteristic of an identity, of specific ways of life, of a social context in which people recognize each other, and in which family and village life are shaped and organized.

Incidentally, the stilt-dwelling has proved to be one of the main features in the cultural identification of the populations of South-East Asia, as opposed to Sinicized populations or those with a Chinese tradition. It has been demonstrated by the earliest archaeological excavations in the region and is engraved on the bronze drums. What is more, it illustrates a whole way of life, creating an artificial floor, at one remove from the natural world, affording the family unit the advantages of a safe area for its development in the forest or in hostile environments. The geographer Pierre Gourou even saw in it an explanation of the considerable development of the regional civilization, and contrasted it with other societies in humid tropical climates which had not adopted this type of building.

In addition to its artificially elevated floor, this type of house has a whole range of characteristic utensils, other objects and furnishings – wood or bamboo floors, a clay hearth, mats, holders for torches and so on. Along with a particular type of house go characteristic forms of behaviour – ways of sitting, dressing, putting on one's shoes, washing oneself and so forth. This is why it is sometimes risky to introduce changes and innovations. Although a technical solution may have proved successful in other societies, to introduce it would be destructive in a society in which it called into question a whole set of determining features that distinguish the ethnic group.

The Miao and Yao can be distinguished from populations in the Tai-speaking group by their houses which are built directly on the ground, for Chinese civilization is based on the idea that beneficial influences are transmitted to human beings by the flows of energy in the ground. In the same way as energy flows through the body and has to be concentrated at strategic points, according to the theory on which acupuncture is based, currents of energy are supposed to flow through the earth, and the points at which energy is concentrated have to be determined when houses are to be sited. So the contact with the ground is an important factor, and the myth and ritual attached to it reveal, beneath the superficial aspect of a mere superstition, a fund of knowledge and meaningful practices.

As well as the contrast between stilt-dwellings and houses built on the ground, South-East Asia has another notable characteristic, namely, the existence of longhouses. These must, of course, be distinguished from the very large houses, which may also be very long, to be found, for instance, among certain Tai minorities in the north – the Tai Dam (Black Tai) or the Tai Deng (Red Tai) – and which belong to a single important family in the village. What ethnologists call 'longhouses' are continuous structures housing several separate family units. In such cases, one house alone may constitute a village. This was mentioned by J. H. Hoffet in 1933 in connection with the Die (Jeh).

As he described it, Die villages had just one house, two at the most, from 150 to 200 m long. At the centre of the house was a communal room identical to the communal house of the other tribes. A long corridor divided the house in two. On either side of the corridor there was a row of compartments for the families.[7]

It would be of the greatest interest today to be able to identify and safeguard these fine large houses mentioned in the literature concerning the Tai minorities of the north of the country, as also the communal longhouses calling to mind the presence of Austro-Asiatic populations on the high plateaux of the south. Here, too, research should be undertaken, in the footsteps of Hoffet, who made known this cultural wealth in the Annamese Cordillera.

Transcending the models, types, forms and materials used in their construction, which belong to the tangible heritage, houses ideally express and convey many significant aspects of the intangible cultural heritage peculiar to each ethnic group. Hence what Jacques Lemoine has to say about the housing of the Hmong in Laos. He notes that despite a daily life spent partly in the village and partly in the fields under cultivation at the time, for the Hmong the home is the only real centre of all activity, the human conquest in the universe, the spiritual bastion and basic social unit.[8]

A FIXED POINT IN THE UNIVERSE

The choice of a site on which to build a village, or dwelling-places for the living, or again resting-places for the dead, is based on ancestral lore ritually handed down and applied. The Hmong, for instance, have inherited the theories of Chinese geomancy,[9] which are based on the assumption that there is a causal relationship between a place and the lives of those residing there. Thus, every place is supposed to be charged with energies that directly influence the inhabitants. As a result of this belief, particular attention is paid to elements composing the landscape, which are regarded as presages of a propitious location. From such theories have developed a fund of knowledge and techniques for observing and analysing the landscape and an art of adapting buildings to a site which, over and above the superstitions attached to them, look very much like the beginnings of a real landscape science – ecology before the term was invented. Chinese geomancy has played a role in many ethnic groups which came from China or which were exposed to Chinese influences.

However, while knowledge of landscape is expressed differently among the various minorities, the quality of the sites selected, or of the techniques employed for siting and laying out villages, testify to the wealth of the heritage in this field too. It is a field in which particular attention is given first of all to the problem of the aspect of villages and houses.

THE SYSTEM OF POSITIONING

In fact it is apparent that the home is the fixed point in relation to which people organize themselves in space and find their bearings in the universe; it enables them to settle, put down roots, and establish networks of relations with the physical world and the social space in which it stands.

All architectural forms are made to face in a specified direction, and the siting of a house is an important act that cannot be left to chance, so it is often ritualized. Rituals for siting and orienting in the universe reveal the slow accumulation of a fund of knowledge built up over a very long period. Careful observation of this teaches us a great deal concerning the relationship with the ground, the way to domesticate its energy, to dig and prepare the site, to fix and mark the boundaries, and then to excavate and lay and level the foundations; positioning in relation to the natural physical features – plains and mountains, slopes, altitude, rivers and streams, banks and currents, upstream/downstream, eastern aspects and the passage of the sun; positioning in relation to the human universe: the home, the village, the bank of the stream, the fields under cultivation, the paddy fields or the freshly cleared lands; the opposing relations maintained between the natural world and the human world, the forest and the village, the country and the town; the interplay of different systems of positioning buildings in accordance with the purpose and scale of the territory or area taken into account – the physical system based on factors of proximity, the system which refers back to a wider territorial geography of the region or country, the universal system based on observation of the heavens, the sun, the stars or constellations, and the symbolic or mythical systems stemming from the great civilizations of India or China or great religions which set store by this or that aspect; finally there is the symbolic representation of these successive worlds, fitted together like a nest of Russian dolls, or, on the country of superimposed universes in a hierarchy of tiers rising from the earth to the heavens.

Austro-Asiatic family (1)

55. Ngè tomb, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

56. Katu sculpture in a community house, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

Next pages:
57. After the sacrifice, Katu village, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

58. Prior to buffalo sacrifice in a Katu village, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

59. Talieng exorcistic ritual, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau/Vat Daokham

60. Buffalo sacrifice in a Katu village, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

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61

62

61. Katu house, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

62. Horns on a roof-tree in Katu, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

63. Katu village, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

64. Preparation of hemp fibres to make a bag, Kmhmu' village, Oudomxay Province
© Olivier Evrard

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65. Katang longhouse, Saravan Province
© Yves Goudineau

66. Katu women around the field house, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

67. Interior of a Katu community house, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

68. Sculpted granary, Kmhmu' village, Oudomxay Province
© Olivier Evrard

Next page:
69. Ngè (Ngkriang) village, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

70. Group of Katu children, Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

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SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF THE WORLD

It is thus apparent that the home and the village are organizational systems reflecting the wealth of relations established with the surrounding world. Their form and their appearance are often determined by the representation of the world, which they reproduce in miniature. And each of the types of home peculiar to each ethnic group constitutes a sum of knowledge conerning the way of conceiving and organizing the world.

In the territorial organization of the villages of the Tai-speaking ethnic groups, there is a symbolic representation of the world in the form of a lak ban or sao man – a post marking the symbolic centre of the community, from which the community takes its bearings. This post symbolizes and relates the tiered worlds from the earth to the heavens, including the human world, as illustrated also by the stilt-dwelling.[10]

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

The organization of space is also an expression of the relations between the living and the dead, as shown by the separation of burial places from the world of the living, with which they are contrasted, and the establishment of places of worship devoted to the dead. These are to be found away from the home, at specific points in the village territory, but also inside the home near the shrine of the ancestors, or again on the altars devoted to the Buddha or auxiliary spirits. So the home may often be regarded as a temple, its organization reflecting the beliefs of its occupants.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE TERRITORY, SPACE AND TIME

Above all, the home shows us how interpersonal relations are codified for the smooth running of social life: organization of the territory, on the one hand, and internal organization of the space and its sharing among the occupants, on the other. House types, patterns and regulations for the grouping of houses, and forms of village are thus the symbolic expression of the organization of the society's territory. Boundaries are fixed for the family's living area, as are thresholds and transitions from private to public areas, forms of public area, and the facilities contained by the latter. The cultural and social importance of this hidden structure which can be discerned underlying the physical space needs no further proof, since we know that its destruction was often a means of penetration used by colonial or evangelizing powers.

PATTERNS OF GROUPS AND VILLAGES

Houses are not placed at random on the territory: they reflect social hierarchies, proximity and affinities, kinship between houses in the neighbourhood and forms of codification of what is shown and what is hidden. Their distribution gives meaning to the public area, while at the same time distancing and segregating. The plan of the group of houses and the plan of the village also tell the history of the community, its founding and its development. Houses are points in space, but they also punctuate time – the community's long history in some cases or, on the contrary, its ephemeral or temporary aspects in the case of those who ritually 'devour the forest', moving through space in search of new land to exploit, or those who change territory for other reasons.

BUILDING IN THE LIFE CYCLE

The establishment of the home in a time scheme may also be connected with personal histories, the passage through the different ages of life in a ritualized cycle. Among the Nha Hoen in the Boloven Plateau in southern Laos, the building of a house is always associated with a wedding. Barbara Wall[11] wrote that it was the symbol and seat of the nuclear family. If the latter was dissolved by divorce or the death of one of the spouses, the house was often abandoned, and in the case of remarriage another one had to be built. A frequent occurrence was that a man, after living with his wife's family, had to set up house when the birth of the first child was due. The marriage, she writes,[12] represents above all a contract to ensure progeny. The technical act and the ritual act are so strongly related that the term for marriage is duk nung hnraam, which means literally 'to go up into the house'. Anyone who wishes to divorce must leave their house and children to the other spouse.

PRIVATE AREAS, LIMITS, THRESHOLDS, TRANSITIONS

Over and above its material aspects, the home confirms its role in economic and social organization and in the relations it establishes among individuals as a microcosm of

society. It is the ideal place for the mediation of relations between individuals, and relations between insiders and outsiders. A subtle interplay occurs according to the occasion: visits, festivities and so forth. In this situation the home establishes a series of boundaries, enclosures, prohibitions, thresholds, crossing places and transition places, partitions and screens, transparent areas, views or openings. It thus expresses the subtle interplay of relations among the members of a family or the inhabitants of a village.

Among the Mien (Yao), Annie Hubert tells us,[13] the home is the heart of the extended family, a larger sociological unit than the village, which appears to be but a more or less heterogeneous aggregate of households. The Mien home is not an open house. The contrast with the Tai houses in the plain, with their open terraces on which the whole family settles and lives in full view of everybody, is striking. The Mien house, windowless, without any space opening on to the outside, shelters and hides its occupants. Rather like the Chinese, the Mien live retired within their families, in a tightly closed large house, a place of worship, proof against all outside evil influences.

PUBLIC AREAS, COMMUNITY PLACES

A characteristic feature of the indigenous populations of South-East Asia is the existence in each village of a communal house for the men, which can take in the youths. It is replaced by the monastery among populations converted to Buddhism. Thus, in every Lamet village, the communal house serves as a meeting-place for the men and a residence for boys once they reach puberty. It is the central point of the village. Around it, the symbolic and ritual posts are situated and public ceremonies take place.

The foregoing considerations in regard to space go to show that every siting has a wealth of different meanings and that particular attention must be given in the future to the choice of sites for new buildings.

BUILDING: SKILLS, MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

Inextricably bound up with the heritage represented by the dwelling-house as a construction is the field of technical skills, acts and practices. Paradoxical though it may seem, the more temporary the construction, the more effectively the technical skills are passed on. Dwellings made of perishable plant materials – wood, bamboo, grass thatch or leaves – require regular maintenance and renewal. So everyone has sooner or later to maintain, build or rebuild a house, and techniques are handed down without a break from generation to generation over very long periods. These skills also constitute a valuable component of the intangible heritage in their own right.

In some cases, impermanence, the provisional aspect, is a feature of the way of life – such as when a temporary house is built pending the possibility of settling permanently in a large house made of more durable materials, or in the case of seasonal migrations when people reside partly in the villages, partly in the fields, or again when a village has become too big or is too far from the fields and has to be split up or moved. As Izikowitz explains,[14] the Lamet therefore live in two different places, which gives their lives two separate backgrounds. During the dry season they are in their villages, and during the rainy season they are in their fields, where they are housed in mere huts.

The transitory character of buildings means that everyone has a chance to take part in the construction of a number of buildings in the course of their lives. Although everybody participates, however, some, more experienced and more skilled, act as master-builders. These experts, sometimes very old, should be systematically sought out. Many of the techniques are a part of very ancient lore and deserve to be carefully studied and handed down. Methodically recording skills and making them available to the younger generations at experimental workshops would ensure the maintenance and safekeeping of the existing heritage and keep alive building models that, slowly worked out and perfected over the centuries, have stood the test of time.

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5. Sophie Clément-Charpentier and Pierre Clément, *L'habitation Lao dans les régions de Vientiane et de Louang Prabang. Réunir les bois, réunir les mains*, Paris, Peeters, 1990, p.13, quoting Louis Finot, 'Recherches sur la littérature laotienne', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*, Vol. XVIII, No. 5, 1917.

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11. Barbara Wall, *Les Nya Hön: Étude ethnographique d'une population du Plateau des Bolovens (Sud Laos)*, Vientiane, Vithagna, 1975, p. 67.

12. Ibid.

13. Annie Hubert, 'La maison des Mien', *ASEMI*, Vol. 2, 1974, pp. 89–145.

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Bamboo in Lao Daily Life: The Case of the Ethnic Minorities

BOUNTHIENG SIRIPAPHANH

BAMBOO IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

No other part of the world is home to a greater concentration and variety of bamboo than South-East Asia. Some studies put the number of species identified as high as 700,[1] two-thirds of them from Asia.[2] Together with its neighbours in mainland South-East Asia, Laos is situated at the centre of the distribution map for bamboo in Asia, midway between India and Japan, southern China and the Indo-Chinese peninsula. Bamboo would provide an excellent focus for a botanical study of the region, its role in the landscape and the life of the inhabitants being quite astonishing. Statistics show that the greater part of world bamboo production comes from Asia – mainly China – while India is the largest consumer, followed in descending order of importance by Burma, Japan, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos.

THE ROLE OF BAMBOO IN LAOS

Bamboo is an exceptional natural material, unrivalled in terms of its properties and the sheer number and variety of its uses. The various species can be found in very different settings: mountains, lowland areas, wooded and deforested hill country, foothills, on the banks of forest streams and in villages and pagodas.[3] As both a food plant and a building material, bamboo combines the assets of grass and wood. Spanning the spectrum between the two, it serves as an across-the-board stimulus to the technological imagination: protection for people, dwellings and villages; means of transport by land and water; industries using fire; fishing and hunting; basketry and the making of agricultural and domestic tools and furniture; civil engineering work, decoration and musical instruments. It also figures in many items from the traditional pharmacopoeia.

THE USES OF BAMBOO IN LAOS

It would seem that all Laotian houses have for a long time been made entirely of bamboo, the only exceptions being religious edifices made of brick and the hardwood dwellings of the nobility and the rich. Bamboo use in Laos is extremely varied. The plant is the basic element of many different tools, being used in combination with other materials for making handles for machetes, knives, saws and so on. It is also used on its own: as the rod for drawing the bucket from the well, the crosspiece of the yoke, the basket maker's rapping iron, the comb for leaves used for roofing, the carpenter's spirit level, the body of an ingenious pump used in salt-mining, the blacksmith's bellows; and honed, it provides the blade for cutting the umbilical cord.

Bamboo is the preferred material for everyday items from furniture to kitchen utensils including mats, baskets, containers, winnowing baskets, trays, boxes, cases, sticks, tubes for carrying water or cooking rice, low tables, stools, partitions, etc. Bamboo is also used for lighting and making fires. It can be lit by friction or percussion, and bundles of stems are used as torches when travelling or hunting and fishing at night.

Bamboo is also an indispensable building material, being ideal for ephemeral structures: street stalls, market stands, temporary shelters for celebrations and ceremonies, scaffolding, launch pads for skyrockets and temporary shelters in the fields. It is used, too, for all rural outbuildings – cattle shelters, enclosures, chicken runs, cages, granaries, hedges, fences and gates – and has its place in the creation of such major construction facilities as bridges, dams for fish factories and piping systems.

Last but not least bamboo provides every single item necessary for the building of a house. The basic structure (framework and joists, posts, ridgebeams, tie beams, purlins, rafters and laths) is made from bamboo stems *(mai bong, mai phai pa, mai phai ban)*, as is the flooring (joists, bearers and floor coverings) and joinery (door and window frames, doors, shutters). Separations (partitions, balustrades, framework for mud walls) are made from *mai sang* bamboo, which is split and flattened. Roofs (framework, plain, interlocking and double thickness tiles and shingles, plaited roofing), ties, cord and pegs for packing, and various other items (guttering, ridge covers, ladders) are made from split bamboo *(mai hye, bai bong, mai sang, mai phang)*. Bamboo strips are extensively used in all aspects of building. They allow for ready assembling of frameworks, securing of roofing and flooring components, fixing of partitions to their supports and so on. Offering a quick and easy means of fastening, they lend themselves perfectly to the building of temporary structures not requiring meticulous workmanship. Bamboo is a readily available, rapidly replenished supply of building materials right on the doorstep.

In addition Laotians employ bamboo to make boats, rafts, floats, the roofs of floating houses, and for fishing and hunting. Nor should we forget music and the bamboo *khène*, a small pan pipe. Bamboo also protects villages against unwelcome human and animal visitors and the rigours of the sun. Lastly, it represents a source of food.

USEFUL SPECIES

Botanically bamboo is classed as a grass (often described as 'giant') and not as a tree. The many species to be found around the world are mainly distinguishable by their size, some of them being barely a few cm high while others can reach a height of 40 m and a diameter of 20 cm. Like cereals, which have a similar growth period, bamboo is a graminaceous plant, but it differs from the former in that it is a perennial and reproduces asexually. Generally bamboo reproduces by self-sowing – a slow, natural process – but it can also be grown from transplanted rhizome segments or cuttings. Thus there is little or no need for human intervention.

The study of Laotian bamboo began in 1903 with 'Les bambous du Laos'. A useful study was also made by Jules Vidal in 1962, and in 1963 the French Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle named forty Lao bamboos, although only ten species can be identified with any certainty.[4]

The Laotians also use habitat as a means of identifying and describing the various wild bamboos and the cultivated species they care for and water from the very beginning. They recognize two basic kinds of bamboo, male and female. The former, *mai phay pa* (*Bambusa arundinacea,* 'giant thorny bamboo') and *mai kok* (*Dendrocalamus brandsii*, the world's tallest bamboo), are mainly used for their stems, while the latter, *mai hye* (*Schizostachyzum zollingeri)* are split, flattened and unrolled and can then be folded or plaited. A male bamboo must be 4 years old before being cut, while for the females 2 years is sufficient.

For several decades now the traditional use of bamboo for such everyday objects as kitchen utensils has been declining among city people, with modern materials like plastic taking over. In the countryside bamboo houses are being more and more often replaced by structures using brick, concrete, metal or plastic. The craft of working in bamboo is now changing in everyday life in Laos, being limited, in Vientiane and other big cities, to a few workshops and retail outlets providing handicrafts for tourists. A few years ago, as part of an international co-operation scheme, a group of architects used bamboo as a local product to build a primary school in the Vientiane suburbs.

A number of factors have contributed to the declining use of bamboo in building, the main one being the fragility of the material itself. In the tropical Laotian climate bamboo has only a short life-span if it is of inferior quality and

workmanship is not up to the necessary standard. Moreover there now remain very few trade schools or workshops specializing in bamboo. The craft is one that has always been passed on from father to son and unfortunately the move towards modernity means that its appeal for young Laotians is steadily diminishing. The Laotian authorities are making an effort, but given the lack of specialists and a serious shortage of funds, the protection and promotion of traditional bamboo craftsmanship is hardly feasible.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTIVE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF BAMBOO-RELATED CRAFTS IN THE CONTEXT OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH INTERNATIONAL BODIES

Given the danger of the disappearance of traditional bamboo skills among ethnic minority groups in Laos, the need for protective measures is becoming more and more urgent. This will necessitate the creation, with UNESCO backing, in Vientiane or another large city, of a centre for the teaching of traditional Laotian bamboo skills and basic marketing techniques. Such a centre would comprise workshops and a design studio charged with listing all relevant aspects of the study and creation of traditional bamboo work. This venture should be accompanied by the opening of a craft promotion centre and a shop. The promotion centre would include pilot workshops producing copies of traditional items with a view to ensuring the survival of bamboo craftsmanship. This kind of structure would help students graduating from the centre to produce their own work and sell it in the shop. The centre could also function as an advanced training facility for craftsmen from other parts of the country. Graduates could in turn set up their own workshops, using their personal talents and traditional skills to draw international attention to Laotian bamboo arts.

With UNESCO backing it should be possible to organize international contacts, festivals and educational events aimed at protecting and promoting the traditional bamboo arts. This would enable craftsmen to display and exchange local techniques and products. What is also needed is an international foundation for the preservation and promotion of traditional bamboo culture. Such a body could contribute to the organization of meetings, seminars, exhibitions, professional gatherings and the establishment of bamboo centres and museums. In the light of the current threat to the traditional bamboo arts in Laos, the most urgent necessity is a museum of traditional arts. Modelled on the typical Laotian house as found in the major cities, this establishment would be home to the craft output of Laos's different ethnic minorities. A venture on this scale will be impossible, however, without co-operation between the Lao Government and other Asian countries.

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C. Cultural Diversity and Social Contexts

The Bru: A Minority Straddling Laos and Viet Nam

GÁBOR VARGYAS

ETHNOLOGY OF THE POPULATIONS OF THE ANNAMESE CORDILLERA

Any serious study of ways and means of preserving and promoting the intangible traditional culture of the minorities of the Lao PDR has to take geographical, demographic, historical and cultural factors into account, not to mention the more technical or material problems (funding, logistics, the role of the media and national policy). Above all, I should like here to lay particular stress on the geographical factors and draw attention to a situation which all too often tends to be forgotten or overlooked. I refer to the fact that many minority groups live in a border region overlapping two countries. To take a well-known example, the border between Viet Nam and Laos is formed by the Annamese Cordillera, which extends all the way along the middle and lower part of Laos (with central Viet Nam on the other side) for about 1,000 km. The Cordillera is a region inhabited by many ethnic minorities, whose populations are often divided by the border. Here I shall refer only to those minorities of which I have firsthand knowledge, in other words the Bru, the Taoih and the Katu. As we know of course, this border, like all others, is the result of historical circumstances, colonization in particular, and constitutes a largely artificial division. Why mention this? Because I consider that in the case of groups such as the ones referred to here, the problems transcend frontiers, and it may be advisable to ignore them and not confine ourselves strictly to Laos.

I will now present a border case of this kind. I have never worked in Laos, but I have wide experience of one of Viet Nam's sixty minorities, the Bru, who straddle the border. In Laos, the Bru (whose numbers are not known with certainty) live in the province of Savannakhet in the region of Sepone, to the north of Road No. 9, which links Savannakhet to Dong Ha in Viet Nam. Their way of life, based on shifting slash-and-burn cultivation, their tangible and intangible culture, and also the problems connected with the preservation and promotion of their intangible heritage, seem to be exactly the same as those of their counterparts over the border, in Viet Nam. So it seems to me that I am not mistaken in thinking that my experience in Viet Nam can be applied without too many difficulties to the situation in Laos. First of all, however, I should like to present briefly the context of that experience, that is, Vietnamese-Hungarian co-operation in the field of ethnology, the links between the Hanoi and Budapest institutes of ethnology, my fieldwork with the Bru, and, above all, the findings and our future projects.

Our co-operation dates back to 1984, when the late lamented Professor Tibor Bodrogi, Director of the Institute of Ethnology at the time, visited Viet Nam. Following that

visit an agreement was concluded between the two institutes, the one under the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the other under the Vietnamese Committee of Social Sciences, according to which they would carry out joint research in the field on a mountain minority. The aim was twofold: on the one hand, to extend ethnological knowledge of Vietnamese minorities by means of methods recognized in cultural anthropology (long-term fieldwork, participatory research, surveys carried out in the vernacular, etc.); on the other hand, to introduce young Vietnamese researchers to these methods, often new to them, and thus contribute to their training. To that end, the Hungarian party to the agreement provided six-month training courses for young Vietnamese researchers at the Budapest Institute of Ethnology, while the Vietnamese party agreed to give the project researchers access to the field and facilitate their fieldwork over a period of one year.

For scientific and organizational reasons, the Bru living around Khe Sanh (Huyen Huong Hoa) in what was then the province of Bin Tri Thien were the minority chosen. The research was carried out during an eighteen-month period spanning five consecutive years, between 1985 and 1989 – two months in 1985, two in 1986, ten in 1987–8, and four in 1989. (It should be noted that, owing to various financial, organizational and personal problems, it was not until the third year that we actually managed to achieve our aim and make a field survey over a really long period.) Our survey was centred in the canton of Huong Linh, where we lived first in the village of Hoong, then in the villages of Dong Cho and Coc. (These two villages were originally at some distance from each other, but now there are only about 50 m separating them.) We also visited a score of other villages in three neighbouring cantons. The fieldwork was carried out by a Hungarian anthropologist (myself) and, contrary to the original plan, in collaboration with several young Vietnamese researchers. Our aim was to make a survey of a holistic type with a view to producing a 'tribal monograph', that is, to study and record all aspects of the traditional and modern life of the Bru. In fact the region deserves special attention, for it was one of the most severely affected by the Viet Nam War but, despite all that it underwent, only relatively slight cultural changes are to be observed.

Our results, expressed in figures, were as follows: 18 months in the field; 6,000 colour slides; about 2,000 photos in black and white; some 100 hours of tape recordings; 38 hours of video tape. All of these are now in the archives of the Institute of Ethnology (and partly at the Institute of Ethnomusicology) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. A good selection is also held by the Institute of Ethnology of the Committee of Social Sciences in Hanoi.

The most interesting material, from our standpoint, is above all the recordings of different types of folklore (stories, songs, music, riddles, etc.) and the analysis thereof. So I propose now to review briefly the different kinds of Bru folklore.

BRIEF SURVEY OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURE OF THE BRU

Epic songs

If asked to name the most famous and representative genre of Bru folklore, one would undoubtedly say *sanot*. Every ceremonial and solemn occasion, on which the traditional beverage, rice beer (made in jars and drunk with straws), is consumed, concludes with *sanot* songs. This is the most popular genre with the old men, who can spend whole nights singing them. Ideally, *sanot* is a kind of epic song sung alternately by two men with a flute accompaniment. One of the two launches the story by asking a question, then the other replies and tells a part of it. The former then resumes, and they take turns in this way for hours on end. The themes vary, covering subjects as widely different as the evoking of parents or events that occurred during the Viet Nam War. The favourite themes of *sanot*, however, are those relating to the history, known by all, of the origin of the world after the deluge, or of the origin of rice, of alcohol and the flute – what anthropologists would call 'myths of origin'. One of the features of the sanot, apart from its musical form, is that it is sung in Lao rather than Bru, or at least in a mixture of the two languages. This raises many questions on which, for lack of space, I cannot dwell here.

Courting songs

All over South-East Asia, many folklore genres are connected with love. 'Love songs' is not really the correct term in these cases for, as a rule, they are sung solely during courtship. Their explicit aim is to attract a member of the opposite sex and win his or her affections, so once this period is over and the marriage is concluded, the wife may never sing them again. If she did, it would mean that she wanted to have someone else – which would be an insult to her husband and his clan and would lead to divorce. Since a strictly patrilineal system and polygyny are

practised in Bru society, the case of men is different. They are free to sing these courting songs until they die.

These songs, full of poetic images, are usually sung alternately by a boy or man and a girl or woman, with or without instrumental accompaniment. The Bru have three different types of such songs. The kind most popular with young people nowadays is *taq owai*. The melody is not unlike a certain type of Lao courting song, though it is sung only in Bru. It is a fairly recent type and is accompanied by a sort of three-stringed lute. The older generation is more familiar with an earlier type of courting song, *oat*. The melody is quite different from that of *taq owai* and is sung unaccompanied.

The most unusual and interesting type from the musical standpoint is undoubtedly oui-amam. Here, vocal and mouth-organ techniques are combined and the performers sing and play in unison. One of the partners plays on a bamboo cylinder about 20 cm long, with a hole and a specially prepared reed. The other takes the other end of the instrument *(amam)* in his or her mouth and, keeping it there, begins to sing. The mouth cavity serves as a resonator for the amam, but the voice, that is, the voice part, is also changed by the sound of the instrument. In this way the two sounds are simultaneously transformed, producing an eerie effect. The physical proximity of the participants, contrasting with the distance fixed by the length of the instrument, creates a tense and sensual atmosphere.

Funeral songs

Other important folklore genres are connected with death. In the course of very elaborate, periodical 'funeral' or commemorative rites kept up over three generations, the Bru sing two types of song: *aroueï* and *paryong*. The former relate the actual funeral ceremony and the fate of the deceased in a symbolic and poetical way – how he or she was brought down from the house and carried to the temporary enclosure where the ceremonies take place, and how a buffalo was sacrificed for the deceased. The songs then describe the procession to the cemetery.

The main theme of the *paryong* is the sacrificial buffalo and its fate – how and where it was born, how big it was, who its owner was, under what circumstances and at what price it was purchased, and so on. Two groups of men circle around the deceased in opposite directions singing the *paryong* songs. One group symbolizes the living, the other group the dead. At the culminating point in the ceremony the two groups meet, stop and exchange food and an alcoholic beverage. In this way, the living try to secure the good will of the dead.

Space is lacking for the description of other folklore genres. Here, only the songs have been reviewed, and even those incompletely. No mention has been made of the shamanist songs connected with healing, for instance. Any full review of the genres of the intangible culture of the Bru would also have to include the tales, riddles, prayers and vows, go on to deal with the different musical instruments and their uses, and conclude with the role of dancing (though this is in fact very limited).

What is important, however, is to understand that all these genres are connected with the different events of social life and accompany them. Thus, in addition to having an obvious aesthetic function and providing entertainment, it will be seen that they fulfil very specific functions in village life. The conditions under which they are performed are very clearly defined, and many prohibitions and taboos are attached to them. The preservation, or conservation, of the intangible culture of the Bru is therefore dependent on the continuation of the traditional social events to which the different folklore genres are attached. If the intangible culture is to be preserved, one must first of all preserve the society that created it.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

The starting-point, the sine *qua non*, of any initiative is a correct knowledge and evaluation of the present situation. So the first point to stress is the importance and urgency of scientific collecting and cataloguing *before or during* the preservation and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage. In order to know what we want to preserve and promote, we must first know what exists. In this connection it should be borne in mind that the region of the former Indo-China, that is, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos, is, ethnographically speaking, one of the least-known regions in the world. In Laos alone there are about sixty ethnic minorities, and at least half of them have never been the subject of a serious ethnographical study. This is true above all of central Laos, which seems to me to be particularly unexplored. It is inhabited by many ethnic groups known only by name, or of which we have no anthropological description. This is all the more scandalous in that

some of these groups consist of sizeable populations – for instance, the Phu Tai or the So (130,000 according to David Bradley). As regards the intangible culture, although we have a number of publications, our knowledge is almost always confined to a few specific groups. Kristina Lindell's numerous publications on the Kmhmu' are an instance of this. So it seems obvious that in view of the state of affairs explained above, the whole initiative should begin with a systematic survey to provide an overall knowledge of the intangible culture of the minority groups.

The crucial role of the media in the preservation and protection of the intangible culture of the minorities and the reassertion of its values must be stressed. Radio, in particular, is extremely important, for it is the only medium that reaches the minorities themselves. It should not be forgotten that many minorities have a very poor knowledge of the language of the majority and, what is more, they usually cannot read or write. Nor should it be forgotten that in many regions where the minorities live there is still no electricity, so they have no access to television. All they have is radio – battery sets – and even these are often a luxury they cannot afford. I therefore suggest that we concentrate our efforts on radio to begin with.

With this in mind, the most important step to take, in my opinion, would be to establish local radio stations broadcasting at regular times in the local languages in the regions where the minorities live. To begin with, programmes including a great deal of local music would be desirable. All those who have worked in the field in Viet Nam know how quickly the traditional music of the minorities can decline as a result of the devastating effects of loudspeakers blaring out popular Vietnamese music. I suppose the situation is much the same in Laos. On the other hand, as we have seen, most of the Bru folklore genres are musical genres. Broadcasting their music could restore the pride and self-esteem of the group concerned and convince the villagers that their culture is not inferior to that of the majority group. In this way there would be some hope of counteracting the tendency to uniformity, resulting from the increasing influence of the majority culture.

In regard to schools, the main question is whether or not tuition is given in the local language at primary level. If it is not, the minorities are likely to lose their culture, while becoming second-rate Lao citizens. This question gives rise to many difficulties at present. First of all, it must be borne in mind that many of the minority languages still have no established writing system on which primary education could be based. In such cases, the contributions of linguists would have to precede any practical measure. There are other cases, however, in which a writing system exists but is not used for one reason or another. A case in point is the alphabet established for the Bru (Van Kieu) living around Khe Sanh by Mr and Mrs Miller, then revised by a group of linguists in Hanoi under the direction of Hoang Tué. It could be used also without giving rise to major problems by all the other Bru, and the Tri, and perhaps even by the Mangkong in Laos. It would be extremely important to bring these scripts back into use and introduce tuition in the local languages at the primary level. A project of this kind would obviously fail, however, unless it were backed by a state programme for publications such as school textbooks. It would also be advisable for primary school teachers from the group concerned to be trained – at least for the local schools. They alone can teach in what is, after all, their mother tongue; they alone hold in due esteem their own culture – esteem which is essential if the intangible heritage is to be sustained.

The local radio stations mentioned earlier and educational centres could be housed in regional centres of minority culture. Such cultural centres could play an extremely important role in the conservation and protection of the intangible culture of the minorities and, above all, in the reassertion of its values. At the same time they could serve as meeting places and forums in which problems concerning the minorities could be discussed, where key personnel and trainees could be trained in the preservation of traditional culture, and traditional art festivals and regional competitions could be organized as well. In this way, the centres could help strengthen community life and contribute to the transmission of traditional cultural values. As many regions are inhabited by several ethnic groups, the centres could also serve as pluri-ethnic or inter-ethnic centres. The various minorities could get to know and appreciate the cultural values of other minorities, which could thus be preserved and integrated more effectively into the multi-ethnic culture of Laos.

The final and perhaps most fundamental question concerns the legal and administrative protection of the minorities. Here I would stress above all territorial rights. The most violent reactions, the most divergent interests, the most serious misunderstandings are bound up with them. There is no doubt that the quickest way of destroying a society is to violate the territorial rights of the local groups. So if the intangible culture of the minorities is to be preserved, the individuals and societies serving as vehicles for that culture must also be preserved.

Katu Society: A Harmonious Way of Life

NANCY A. COSTELLO

The Katu are an isolated group numbering approximately 52,000, of whom 15,000 live in the Lao PDR. The Katu belong linguistically to the Katuic branch of the Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic) language family, those in Laos living mainly in the mountainous areas of the Kalum district of Sekong Province, with a number in the Saravan and Champassak provinces. In Viet Nam they are in Quang Nam and Thua Thien provinces. The Katu have a wealth of interesting customs, traditions, knowledge and folklore about astrology, medicine and other sciences.[1] The whole fabric of Katu society is intermeshed with the environment. The Katu must live in harmony with the world around them, which includes other people, animals, birds, trees, stones, water, traditions and the many spirits. When this harmony is disrupted, through the breaking of taboos and traditions, which displeases the many spirits, the correct relationship must be restored through ritual and sacrifice *(pikre loom)*.

At the beginning of time there was only the moon, not yet a sun, stones were soft, and animals and birds could converse with people. There was no danger, sickness, death, or weeds, showing that the world was in perfect harmony. The *dyaang* spirits came to earth and ate with people, and people could go up to the sky. *Dyaang* spirits and people intermarried and some people went to live in the sky. In ancient times the Katu had a mirror to see *brau* spirits and to kill them so they could not harm people, but the *brau* spirits managed to steal the mirror, and then they were able to cause illness and could eat and kill people.

In the beginning, the moon was a beautiful young woman. People, animals and birds argued, and a great fire and flood occurred, which the Katu call 'the yellow shrimp catastrophe' (so called because it took only the time it takes to cook shrimps until they turn yellow). At that time, a flame appeared, which was a young man who burned the earth and killed animals. After that the *dyaang Abom* spirit took the young man to the sky, past the moon, and the young man stayed there and became the sun. The sun had important *dyaang* spirits which people obeyed. The sun was called the father and the moon was the mother. After that animals and birds could not talk any more, and the harmony between people and nature was lost. The Katu are always working to maintain a harmonious relationship with the spirits who surround them in the forest, in water, in the village and in houses. Since harmony between people and the spirits was broken in ancient times, people have access to the spirits only through the shamaness.

KATU TRADITIONS, BELIEFS AND TABOOS

Since ancient time the Katu have believed in a well-ordered arrangement of the universe, with three main layers. There

is the sky, the earth and under the earth. When one layer had light the sun appeared, and the other two layers were in darkness. The sun moved from one layer to the next in a rotation.

In the sky there is a hierarchy of four ascending levels where important *dyaang* spirits dwell. The first level closest to the earth has a *dyaang Abom* spirit who controls the weather, the seasons, light and dark. He is a giant, and when he stamps his foot, he makes thunder. *Abom* and his sister *Abat* came down to earth in ancient times and *Abom* told his sister to take a husband on the earth. Abat stayed on the earth while Abom returned to the sky. The second level has a *dyaang Apool* spirit who gives people corn and rice. In the third level is another *dyaang Apool* spirit who watches over aspects of people's lives on earth.

In the fourth and highest level there is the chief *dyaang Apool* spirit. The Katu say 'The *dyaang* made the earth and sky and the things which exist on them, so we fear and obey them'. The *dyaang* spirits watch over people on the earth and provide everything necessary for their well-being. They see who obeys the customs and traditions, and the bad or good deeds of people. They see if the *saq* local spirits and *brau* spirits do wrong to people, and can protect people from them. If people do not kill animals in sacrifice (to give to the *dyaang* spirits to eat), the *dyaang* do not watch over them.

There are other *dyaang* spirits who live on the earth, the second layer of the universe, near to people so that they understand them. There are *dyaang* spirits in the forest, in trees, water, houses and villages. Each person also has a *dyaang* spirit on his head, which helps him to live properly and to have a conscience. On the earth there are also *saq* local spirits which inhabit individual trees, parts of rivers, trees with animals' souls, graves, the village shrine, the stone pillar in the village. The *brau* spirits dwell in all places where there are *saq* spirits. There are general brau spirits and the spirits of dead people *(brau kamoch)*. Both these kinds of spirits are displeased (not right in their liver – *kah kre loom*). When people break taboos or traditions, for example by going near to a place where spirits dwell, their soul will be captured by the spirits and they will fall ill. In this case the person is not in a right relationship with the spirits, so he or she must restore harmony through sacrifice. The *dyaang* spirits have authority over the *saq* and *brau* spirits and can order them to return a person's soul.

Daily work in the village and fields must be conducted in such a way as to please the *dyaang, saq* and *brau* spirits, whose domain people enter when they go to the forest. When starting a new field, a small area of land is cultivated experimentally. People ask the *saq* local spirits and *dyaang* spirits to allow them to clear the field and to give good rice and good dreams. If they do indeed have good dreams, they proceed to cultivate the rest of the field. If they have a bad dream, then the *dyaang* spirits are clearly not happy for them to proceed, so they abandon that piece of land, to avoid illness caused by unhappy spirits.

The Katu are very careful to clear a fire-break around a field because they are afraid of fire spreading and burning the forest where there are spirit houses, local spirits in trees, and *dyaang* spirits. If they disturb the dwelling-places of the spirits and kill them by burning the forest, it would mean losing a lot of wealth and animals such as water buffalo in sacrifices. People must please *dyaang Abom*, the spirit of weather, and *dyaang Apool* who gives good crops. If people have bad dreams, they have to appease the spirits they dreamt about. After burning fields, the Katu perform a ritual to restore a good relationship with the *dyaang* of the sky and the *dyaang* of the ground. Each household scatters rice, brings a fire-stand, and steams bamboo tubes of sticky rice which is offered to *dyaang Apool* to eat.

There are many taboos for the Katu to observe when cultivating. After planting rice, people call on the rice to grow well and not to become twisted. They make a bamboo arch in the fields and a wooden image of the *dyaang* spirits of the forest, ground and water. They hold bamboo in the left hand, saying 'Everything bad go away'. They hold the bamboo in the right hand and say 'Everything alive and good, give good corn and rice and no sickness. Allow people to speak kindly to each other and to the rice and corn.' They call this the ceremony for blessing the fields. At the end of the harvest the whole village joins in a ceremony to bless that year and to call on the spirit of the rice (mother of the rice – *akan aro*) to return to the rice storage house in the village. Mature rice stalks are offered to *dyaang Apool*, and people eat sticky rice cakes.

All illness is a result of disharmony with the spirits. The Katu say of traditions, 'They are like medicines which cure symptoms so that people will have good hearts and quiet words'. A person offends the spirits when he or she breaks traditions, taboos or social obligations, so the *saq* and *brau* spirits capture the soul from the top of the head, and the person becomes ill. Often the person may not know which taboo or tradition he or she has broken; only the shamaness can communicate with the spirits, so people call

Austro-Asiatic family (2)

71. Katu girl smoking a 'hookah', Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

72. Kmhmu' ornaments, Oudomxay Province
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Next pages:
73. Ta-Oi woman, Saravan Province
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74. Detail of Kmhmu' village entrance gate,
Luang Namtha Province
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75. Kmhmu' village, Oudomxay Province
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76. Main altar in a Kmhmu' village
(three statues for three spirits), Oudomxay Province
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77. Lamet women, Oudomxay Province
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78. Old Lamet man smoking a pipe
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79. Kmhmu' man playing the Khon (Jew's harp), Oudomxay Province
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80. Lao Bit woman, Phongsaly Province
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81. Kmhmu' man playing the Yaan (bronze drum), Oudomxay
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82. Detail of the Yaan (Kmhmu' bronze drum)
© Souksavang Simana

83. Kmhmu' medium healing a child, Oudomxay Province
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84. Woman playing a Kmhmu' flute, Oudomxay Province
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Next page:
85. Kaseng woman at a weaving loom, Attopeu Province
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86. Makong ceremony to call up the spirits, Savannakhet Province
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on her to determine which sacrifices are necessary. She is possessed by the *dyaang* spirits and so is able to ask them. There are a number of spirits and people who may be offended; for example the *saq* or *brau*, or a witch person *(tamok takuui)*, a witch spirit *(brau tamok)*, a vampire spirit *(brau phanah)*, a vampire person *(phanah takuui)*, or spirits of the dead *(brau kamoch)*. There are six different methods of divination the shamaness may use to determine the cause of an illness. Sometimes the shamaness chants to call back a soul wandering around aimlessly.

Sometimes sorcery may have been worked on a person by *saq* or *brau* spirits, witches or vampires. This can mean objects such as a white stone or a chicken bone being wrapped and buried, sorcery being 'blown' on someone, or the singeing of tiger hair under the house so that the fumes will affect the person. The person then falls ill and calls on the shamaness to determine what kind of sorcery it was. Sometimes the shamaness rubs and pushes on a person to send the sorcery out of the body. When someone is cured the expression used is 'to set free *(leh)* from the sickness or the tradition or the bad luck'.

THE KATU STRIVE FOR HARMONY

Breakdowns in social relationships cause disharmony resulting in illness. This can only be cured by restoring harmony between people and with the spirits. A dispute between two people or two villages can only be put right with a ritual to restore a right relationship with the spirits. The shamaness is once again called upon. Often the wrong is connected with the way of visiting *(kalang tamooi)* which is a significant aspect of social interaction in Katu society, involving obligations to certain relatives. Not to carry out the required exchange of gifts is to break the tradition. As the Katu say, 'Katu society must make things right *(pikre loom)* with people and the *dyaang* spirits so that words about the way of visiting will not be broken and people can have a wide open way with no problems'. The way of visiting is a relationship between relatives, which needs to be maintained, and neglecting these obligations is a wrong which must be put right *(pikre tamiang)*. Parents think about their daughters and sons-in-law all year and put aside taro, tubers and manioc flour for them. At the end of harvest, people are happy to go and visit relatives and take them leftover rice and corn. They like to have a good crop so that they can share this with their relatives. Women give gifts to male relatives, and men give to female relatives. People feel bad if they do not have enough food left to take to others, or if there is not enough alcohol to give to visitors. The importance of maintaining the tradition of visiting relatives is felt when there is a problem between two villages, and it is necessary to make peace.

There are rituals for bad luck in relationships between individuals or villages. The two opposing sides touch each other with water to set free the bad luck *(leh pharos)*. They can use a chicken egg, a dish, a tray, black thread, alcohol, a sword, or a bush knife. Each person dips his or her fingers in water and touches the right side of the other person, saying 'May you be relaxed and happy and not have pain or taboos'. They may tie strings on each other's wrists and say, '*Dyaang* spirits pity and help us'. Immorality is cured by the shamaness ritually chasing away the wrong by hitting the steps of the house with chicken wings. The curing is referred to as 'freeing the immorality' *(leh tarniin)*. Sometimes the whole village has to pay a fine, not just the individual, so people are constantly aware of the obligation to be morally upright.

Harmony in Katu society is also maintained through the principle of dominance and compliance as expressed through 'fire' and 'water'. Since the beginning of time, once people had tamed animals, the animals have been referred to as 'water' and the people as 'fire'. In ancient times during the era of the Koom (Mon-Khmer) group, there were two leaders called Kunmeng and Kunchuong. Another group disagreed with them, which led to the time of the 'yellow shrimp disaster' *(arngi saal asuam)*, when the Koom group fled to the mountains. The Katu refer to the disagreement as a great fire and flood when the fire overcame the floodwaters. In Katu society when one group behaves like 'fire', the other group must behave like 'water' whenever there is disagreement. The Katu like to maintain a harmonious relationship with others, and disagreement is to be avoided. They adopt the fire and water principle to ensure this harmony.

In the middle of every Katu village there is a stone pillar, consisting of a large stone with a pointed top. When a village is founded, people kill a chicken and a pig and place them on top of the pillar. The meat is given to the *saq* of the stone pillar, then the *dyaang* spirit of the pillar will be happy and allow people to make a village. Dreams also show people if it is a good place to establish a village. In another ritual, a gold bracelet, bamboo and medicine are placed on the stone pillar, and the *dyaang* spirits are asked to allow long life for the village, without harm and accidents, a life in harmonious relationship with the spirits.

One fascinating aspect of Katu beliefs is that people can cause local spirits *(saq)* to exist in trees by offering them the souls of animals caught while hunting in the forest. The animal's soul *(arviing)* enters the tree and becomes a *saq*, but people say *pasaq* 'causes the saq to exist'. If people did not send the animals' souls into trees, the souls would cause problems and illness. If people disturb the *saq* local spirits in trees, a whole village may have to flee *(saq kalaam)*.

There is a shrine at the edge of each village where the protecting *dyaang* spirits dwell, with a woven bamboo frond with fringes on which they rub blood, and the spirits have a sword, a spear and a shield.

AN IMPORTANT LINGUISTIC HERITAGE

The Lao people possess a rich linguistic heritage from different language families. One of these is the Mon-Khmer language family, with seven branches, which is found in Laos, Viet Nam, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar. Laos and Viet Nam have the largest number of Mon-Khmer languages. In Laos there are thirty-three Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic) languages spread throughout the country, with the largest concentration being a number of small groups in the southern provinces. Three branches of Mon-Khmer languages are represented – Khmuic, Palaungic and Katuic – and these languages are important for linguistic research since some of them are found only in Laos. The Katuic branch includes languages in the Saravan, Savannakhet, Sekong, and Champassak provinces. The Katuic languages include So, Mangkong, Suai, Tri and Kataang, which form one or two sub-branches (linguists differ on this point). It is important for more research to be done to preserve these languages and cultures. Further south in the Saravan and Sekong provinces are the East Katuic languages of Katu, Nge (sometimes called Ngkriang or Angkriang), and Ta-Oi. In the Champassak and Sekong provinces there are the Bahnaric languages of Alak, Chatoong (Jatong), Chaliang (Taliang), and Loven. Further south, in Champassak and Attapeu provinces, are the Loven, Oi, Nhaheun, Lave (Laveh) and Cheng languages.

Several languages such as Kmhmu', Bru and Katu are found in both Viet Nam and Laos, sometimes under a different name. Questions arise such as whether Bru in Viet Nam the same as So or Suai in Laos? Is Pacoh in Viet Nam the same as Ta-Oi in Laos? Further comparative research needs to be done by linguists working together in Laos and Viet Nam. I have found that Katu in Viet Nam and Laos are quite different, partly due to geographic inaccessibility at the border, and in future they may need to be listed as two languages. We cannot assume that languages which are adjacent at the border are linguistically the same. At present, I am carrying out comparative research on Katu in Viet Nam and Laos. An article on comparative phonology has been published,[2] and articles on a comparison of affixes in Katu Viet Nam and Katu Lao, borrowed words in Katu in both countries, and 'Dialect Differences for Katu Prepositional Phrases' have been submitted for publication. There has been little linguistic research done on the Mon-Khmer languages in the south of Laos so it is important for them to be recorded before any disappear, because they are an important part of the linguistic pattern in South-East Asia. In my own country of Australia, some Aboriginal languages have become extinct because they were not recorded. This is a great pity.

Katu, for example, is a language which is an isolate because of geographic inaccessibility, so it is an important language for linguists studying etymology. Katu has not been much influenced by surrounding languages, there are few borrowed words from Lao and Vietnamese, and some borrowed words are made into Katu words by the use of prefixes and infixes. An example of this is *hian*, 'to study', which becomes the noun *pharhian*, 'study'. The Lao word *chut* ('comma') becomes the Katu word *pharchut*. There are a number of other examples. The Katu language already has words for terms used in education because they have legends about writing on water buffalo skins in ancient times. There are Katu words for book *(rooq)*, consonant *(phanong)*, vowel *(phoong phanoong)*, grammar *(aphaar beng)*, sentence *(karloh)*, open (live) syllables *(phartaanh)* and closed (dead) syllables *(phartaanh chet)*, and for punctuation. In ancient times the Katu made paper, pens, chalk and ink.

The Katu realize that Lao is the national language, which they must learn if they are to take their place in Lao society. But they do not want to forget their own language because it helps them to maintain their identity and distinct traditions. Their own language is also important because it helps to maintain harmony between people and the spirits. The Katu must be careful about their speech so as not to offend the spirits, and they must use words guardedly so taboos are not broken, nor spirits offended. When people speak well, it is as if their words have *dyaang* spirits. There are Katu elders who can advise and judge wrongs with special words called *ara* or *tara*, which last for several days. This could not be done in another language, and it is a way of uniting Katu society.

Since language is closely tied to a people's customs and traditions, the Katu do not want their children to forget their own language, because this would lead to the loss of traditional practices which bind the society together. The Katu say, 'When our people lose their language, they become different people'. When some Katu have moved to other areas, they have had to mix with other ethnic groups. This has led to the breakdown of their own language, and some have given up their Katu traditions. This leads to the lowering of moral standards, especially among the young people when they do not follow moral Katu traditions. The Katu want their young people to maintain high moral standards so that they will be worthy members of Lao society.

Some may think that the loss of one's language and culture is inevitable in a changing world to which minorities must adjust, but language and culture are an integral part of a delicate balance and intermeshing between people, the spirits and the environment. It is like a chain with many links – if too many links are weakened, the whole chain breaks. The Katu are afraid that the loss of their language and culture could lead to the break-up of their whole social structure because the harmonious relationship with the world around them would be disrupted and out of balance. It is essential that the languages and cultures of people like the Katu are preserved and recorded while there is still time. The Katu like to have a harmonious relationship with others, and dislike disagreement – they will adopt the fire and water principle to ensure harmony. They desire a good relationship with the Lao people in order that they can all live together in unity or 'one liver' *(mui loom)*, as the Katu would say.

NOTES

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2. *Mon-Khmer Studies*, Vol. 26.

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Project for the Regeneration of Kassak Traditions

AMPHAY DORÉ

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF KASSAK TERRITORY

Situated some 40 km south-south-east of Luang Prabang, the territory of the Kassak people is a polygon of some 120 square km bounded by the rocky Mount Phou Hin Salik and the rivers Nam Sanan, Nam Ming and Nam Khan, up to and including the district of Xieng Ngeun. The territory includes six Kassak villages, the capital being Kiu Tia Luang. In 1970, and since the coming of the new regime, several Kmhmu' and Hmong villages have been added to this number; their inhabitants are considered by the Kassak as their subjects, which means they are required to participate in local rites.

TANGIBLE IDENTITY MARKERS

The Kassak have lost all specificity in terms of material culture: there is nothing distinctive about their clothing, which they buy in Luang Prabang, they do not weave and they have no typical medicinal practices. In their use of slash-and-burn farming and houses built on stilts they may be compared to the Kmhmu', one of the ethnic minorities once subsumed by the Lao under the pejorative term *kha*. *Kha* or not, the Kassak have not forgotten their ethnic specificity and claim the status of *kha sam liem*, another Lao designation. *Sam liem* means 'three ridges', in reference to the ridges of a house, the perfect number of which is four. Thus popular tradition makes a distinction between fully fledged *kha* and the Kassak, who possess three-quarters of *kha* characteristics while retaining one-quarter of ethnic distinctiveness. This distinctiveness, as we shall see, is mainly evident at the linguistic and ritual levels. Generally speaking, the Kassak language is close to Lao. However, in addition to being atonal, it includes a number of preglottals (m', n', y') linking some of its words to Lao loan-words used in Kmhmu'.

INTANGIBLE MARKERS: MYTHS AND RITES OF CONSENSUS

The Kassak once enjoyed privileged status among the region's ethnic minorities by virtue of a mythic precedence over the Lao. Tradition had it that they occupied Luang Prabang before the Lao, leaving for their present territory after a jousting competition during which the Kassak elder prince, an honest but simple-minded man, lost his land, pirogue, elephant and gong to his cunning Lao younger brother. Thus defeated, he withdrew into his mountain stronghold to live by slash-and-burn farming. Nonetheless, every three years he had to guarantee the prosperity of the Kingdom of Lan Xang by providing his younger brother with the 'strength and longevity gourds' (*mak man mak*

gnün) whose cultivation was his prerogative; in exchange, he was granted privileged status and received subsidies in the form of material goods.

On his death the Kassak prince, known as *Phya Khul* (the hairy prince) because of his hirsuteness, became the *Phi Kassak*, the Kassak genie, supreme protector of the Kassak lands and, by extension, of the entire Kingdom of Lan Xang. His descendants governed through the male line and he was the focus of all major Kassak rites. These were celebrated on a wooded hill south of the capital, Kiu Tia Luang, the two points being linked by a broad path called *thang luang*, the 'great road'.

In the twelfth month of the Lao calendar, a silk shirt made to the measurements of the reigning prince – and thus renewed annually[1] – was used in the course of the *viek muang*,[2] an end-of-harvest divinatory rite providing omens for the Kingdom of Lan Xang. After the ceremony the Kassak dignitaries went down to Luang Prabang to pass on the omens obtained via the shirt and to offer the king and the four Lao princely lines breadfruit bark,[3] tobacco, newly hulled rice and rice-beer jars. Each prince received one sample of each, and the king received two. In addition to these gifts, every three years on New Year's Day (March-April), the Kassak offered the sovereign four 'strength and longevity gourds' to be set at the four corners of the royal palace. This was the sole occasion on which the Kassak prince, accompanied by his dignitaries, visited Luang Prabang: borne along in a palanquin, he was showered with perfume by the local people to the sound of gongs and drums. On his arrival he reminded the sovereign that the year of the double sacrifice – a black and a white buffalo – had come. The sacrifice was paid for by the king. According to their needs the Kassak asked for tools, clothes, blankets, salt, drums and banners which the king duly provided. The Kassak also enjoyed immunity from taxation and from forced labour for the king and the district. These entitlements were inscribed on a length of bamboo known as *bang aigna*, 'the privilege rod'.

Analysis of the exchanges between Kassak and Lao reveals that, as the myth recounts,[4] the former came bearing produce of the forest (breadfruit bark) and the fields (rice and tobacco, classed as secondary forest products),[5] but above all the highly, mythically charged strength and longevity gourds, the underpinning and talisman of the kingdom as a whole. In return the Lao provided material goods (money, tools, clothes, etc.) and symbols of prestige (drums, banners, flags and parasols).

The myths and rites mentioned here point to a historical consensus by which the elder brother, keeper of the land and the people's mythical heritage, is exiled – but only relatively so – as a means of perpetuating ancestral rites vital to the prosperity of the younger brother and the country as a whole. He is then compensated with prestige and material goods that ensure his complete independence.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

When I first visited Kassak territory in 1965 I was struck by the inner pain expressed in the improvised laments sung to the strains of the khène.[6] The recurring theme was the forgetting of the ancient rites and the indifference shown by the younger Lao towards their Kassak elders. According to the latter, the social breakdown and warfare marking the period were the inevitable outcome of this situation.

What has happened is that the age-old exchanges had stopped in 1944, during the Second World War, and after resuming in 1966 were again suspended with the coming of the new regime in 1975. When I visited them again recently, after an absence of twenty years, the Kassak were bitter about what the future held for them: while modern infrastructures were being created all over the country, they remained shut away in their mountain fastness, with neither running water nor electricity and, moreover, lacking the official authorization for ancestral religious activities enjoyed by other ethnic groups.[7]

Implementation of a UNESCO-backed project for regeneration of Kassak traditions can be advocated on the grounds that during the last twenty years most of the bearers of those traditions have died, leaving an entire generation culturally stranded. If the Kassak traditions are not quickly revived, they will be lost forever. An aggravating factor is that, unlike some ethnic groups, the Kassak feel very keenly this inability to keep their traditions alive. What is more, these highly distinctive traditions affect not only the Kassak territory but also Luang Prabang, the former Lao capital, because Kassak dignitaries used to figure in the Lao New Year and twelfth-month celebrations, high points of the Luang Prabang ceremonial cycle. Regeneration could thus enrich the non-material patrimony of a city recently added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

NOTES

1. The cloth was provided by the king.
2. Literally 'rite for the principality'.
3. Used in the preparation of betel quids.
4. After settling on the mountain, the elder prince felt the need to see his younger brother and went down to the lowlands bearing the following gifts: two lengths of bamboo full of crabs, two rolls of rattan, two lengths of bamboo full of honey and two melons *(Curcumis melo)*.
5. Analysis of the agrarian rites shows that the *ray*, or slash-and-burn field, constitutes an invasion of the forest, the abode of the spirits, by mere humans.
6. Pan-pipe.
7. The Hmong and Kmhmu' living on Kassak territory have official permission to organize their traditional harvest festivals, known respectively as *kin tiang* and *pot pi*.

Overview of the Ko Ethnic Group

PHÉNG LASOUKANH

No country in the world has a population made up of a single ethnic group. Every country has a number of ethnic groups with different languages, customs and beliefs. Owing to their proximity and mutual relations (at work in particular), each ethnic group undergoes cultural changes with time and borrows traditions from neighbouring groups. In most cases, however, a part of its culture remains specific to each group – its language, its way of life, its ancestral beliefs.

Laos is one of the countries with the largest number of different ethnic groups in the world. The history of these ethnic groups extends beyond human memory. They have experienced many upheavals, but they continue to develop, although some of them evolve less quickly than others. Ethnic groups are dispersed throughout Laos and they usually maintain friendly relations – there is a long tradition of mutual aid within the national community. They have a common economic and social basis and realize that no ethnic group can live in isolation. However, the level of economic, political, cultural and social knowledge differs from one group to another.

According to the 1985 Census figures, the populations of the broad ethnolinguistic families, as a percentage of the total population of the country, are as follows. The Tai-Lao make up 68.10 per cent of the population, the Austro-Asiatic 22.35 per cent, the Hmong-Yao 6.89 per cent, the Tibeto-Burman 2.52 per cent, the Ho 0.09 per cent and the Viet-Muong 0.05 per cent.

Over the past century many ethnic groups have contributed to the liberation struggles and fought for the nation. Even now they are participating in national construction and defence. The Ko ethnic group has a reputation for being particularly patient and long-suffering in the face of difficulties.

NAME AND LANGUAGE OF THE KO GROUP

Members of the Ko ethnic group call themselves 'Akha', but the other groups in Laos call them 'Ko' or 'Iko'. The Ko group has no writing system for its language, Yi, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. The Yi spoken by the Ko living in Laos is the same as that spoken by those living in China, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand. This ethnic group has managed to preserve the names of its ancestors and the explanation of their origin. According to legend, the first man was the son of Bexum. His name was Xummio and he was the father of men. After thirteen generations came Xatapa, the first ancestor of the Ko ethnic group, which consisted at the time of a total of sixty descendants, founders of clans. According to tradition, a man and a woman could not marry if they or their ancestors over seven generations belonged to the same clan.

SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

The Ko generally live on mountain slopes, but they are also to be found in valleys or along rice fields. They are dispersed in small groups in villages of from ten to thirty houses. The houses are usually made of bamboo with thatched roofs. In former times the Ko were nomads, moving frequently to another site because of the illnesses caused by the spirit of the house. The Ko live on slash-and-burn cultivation, hunting and gathering so that when crops are poor or game scarce, they do not hesitate to move on.

The villages are connected by tracks and each village has two gates. Ko houses are not fenced in. Wood and agricultural tools are kept underneath the house, which is raised on piles. Each house has an altar and is divided into two compartments, one for the man, the other for the woman, and the two compartments are separated by a partition. The veranda serves as a living and work room and the altar is to be found in the woman's compartment. Each house has two hearths for cooking: the hearth in the man's compartment is used for cooking meat and making tea, whereas the one in the woman's compartment is used for cooking vegetables and food for the pig.

When you are invited by a Ko family, you cannot simply pass through the house, entering by one door and exiting by the other. Similarly, visitors are not permitted to pass through the village without stopping: they must at least have a word with a villager or drink the glass of water offered to them. Any visitor breaking this rule would be regarded as an aggressor or a thief. This should be borne in mind by all those who have occasion to visit a Ko village.

ECONOMY AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Ko live chiefly on rice growing on land cleared by burning, with subsidiary crops which are often alternated. They breed pigs and farm chickens. The agricultural tools used are the axe, the knife, the machete, the pick, the adze and so on.

The social organization of the Ko group is based on patrilineal descent. The male line is regarded as all-important, and comprises the father, uncle, the uncle's son and the brothers. When a man marries, he and his wife will live with his father's family. The couple may also live in an independent house, which will be built close by that of the husband's father. In the event of divorce, all the children will automatically go to live with their father, the mother having no say in the matter. The head of the family is the man with the most authority, then come his eldest son and his younger son. All the children take the father's name.

Men and women eat their meals separately. They also sleep separately – the man in his compartment, the woman in her compartment. The only exception is when the husband wants to sleep with his wife. The wife, however, cannot choose to go and sleep with her husband in his compartment.

FESTIVALS AND RITUAL CEREMONIES

The Ko are profoundly animist and it is difficult for them to change their beliefs. They believe that there are beneficent and malevolent spirits. The beneficent spirits are the spirits of the house, of the father and of the mother. They are the souls of the ancestors who are always there to protect their children. The malevolent spirits are those of the trees, rivers, mountains and the like, and who cause illnesses and death. The most dangerous spirit is the spirit of the rice field. In every village there is a big collective altar for offerings and sacrifices to the beneficent spirits, who watch over the fortunes of the villagers and protect them from evil. Every village, according to its size, possesses one or more individuals, known as pima or piya, with special knowledge of the spirits. The Ko hold several annual festivals and perform many rituals. Two kinds of ritual will be described here – one for selecting the site for the building of a village and one connected with the village gates.

To select the site for a settlement, the priest places three grains of rice in a hole dug in the earth and leaves them there overnight. If the grains are still in the hole the following morning, the village will be built on this site, for the spirits of the place have signified their agreement. On the other hand, if the grains of rice have disappeared or been moved, it means that the village cannot be built here and another site must be found. In some subgroups, grains of silver, drops of water or eggs are sometimes used. The priest throws an egg into a hole that has been prepared to receive one of the main uprights of a house. If the egg breaks in the hole, the site is favourable, provided there is no blood. If there is blood and the house is built anyway, the family runs the risk of suffering many disappointments in the future.

The building and maintenance of the village gates are also the occasion for rituals and are surrounded by many taboos. The Ko, as we have seen, respect their ancestors

and heed the spirits. In this connection they build two big gates to each village. These gates prevent the malevolent spirits from coming and harming the villagers. Some fervent villagers always pass through one of the two gates to drive the malevolent spirits away with their bodies. These gates are regarded as highly sacred to the village, and rules are laid down concerning them which everyone must observe. There are various penalties for anyone breaking such rules. The gates are repaired every year, and a wooden sculpture of a gun or some other weapon is often fixed to the gates to scare off spirits. No one passing through has the right to touch the gates, or even the figures fixed to them. A wooden statue of a couple is usually set up at the gates, the man being taller than the woman to indicate his superiority. In fact such gates are meant to show that the village is the realm of the living and not spirits.

RICE GROWING

It is the belief of the Ko that all rice seedlings have souls, so they must be carefully tended, especially when very young. They must be well protected lest they lose their souls. Otherwise, a ceremony has to be held to bring back the souls of these seedlings, as is done when a person falls ill. At the time when sowing begins, the village makes a ritual sacrifice to the spirits. The specialist first asks the villagers to go and dig a channel and to bring back bamboo stalks, which are split in two and hollowed out to make water pipes. The priest places a basket of paddy under the bamboo pipe and says, 'Spirits, I invite you to come and eat the rooster and the hen I am offering you. By your powers make the sacred water carry away everything that is harmful to the crops and make our rice field prosper.' After the ceremony, the specialist takes the paddy back to its *ray* (a field cleared by burning) to give it a soul again.

This paddy will be grown in nine holes made in the ground (the Ko regard three and nine as lucky numbers). Each of the villagers takes away a little sacred rice, which will be mixed with their paddy then planted in their *ray*. When the reaping season comes, the priest places six ears of paddy on the village altar and on the altar of the *ray*. This is the villagers' way of expressing their gratitude to the spirits. This done, they begin to harvest their rice.

BIRTH OF A CHILD

A pregnant woman is regarded by the Ko as a lucky woman. During the pregnancy the husband and wife must not commit any of the offences proscribed by their ancestors. Among the Ko, expectant mothers continue working without rest right up to the day of birth, which therefore takes place more often than not in the *rays*. The Ko do not touch their newborn baby until it has cried three times, a sign of good fortune and longevity. The midwife who delivers the child immediately gives it a false name so that malevolent spirits will not take its life. The family subsequently give the child its real name at a special naming ceremony. The father and mother ask a village elder to inform the ancestors of the birth. The child can then take the suffix of the father's name. For example, if the father's name is Bioxé the child may be called Xéxe or Xéxa. This way of forming names makes it easy to recognize filiation and identify ancestors.

A death in childbirth is a violent death regarded by the Ko as particularly disastrous. The soul of the deceased will not be reincarnated and may therefore haunt the village and harm the villagers. To prevent this, they hold a ceremony to take leave of the soul. There are also cases when parents must strangle babies at birth and bury them a long way off from the other village dead: this happens in the case of twins, a baby with a hare lip, six fingers or some other abnormality. After the burial, when the parents return to the village, they have to sacrifice a pig, buffalo or ox to obtain the forgiveness of the other villagers and be accepted once more.

MARRIAGE

Young Ko are free to marry whom they please, but it has to be someone from another village. So at the time of year when they have no work, especially in the dry season, or just before the rainy season, the young men go off in groups to other villages to look for marriage partners. During this period their parents make fine clothes for them so that they will attract the attention of the girls. As the villages are at some distance from one another, the young men stay with their cousins so as to be able to spend more time with the girls in the village they are visiting.

The couples usually meet in the evenings after dinner in specially prepared grounds at the edge of the village. This site is called *Lane Kotsao*, which means a 'court for kissing

the girls'. Here, seated in the shadows, the girls wait for the young men. When the young men arrive, they go to the girls they love. A girl may refuse if she does not love the young man, but she will yield readily if she reciprocates. When a couple have agreed to marry, the young man asks his father or his brother to discuss the matter with the girl's parents. During the discussion, both parties drink to the betrothal of their children. The amount of the dowry is not fixed; it depends on the economic circumstances of the young man's family.

The wedding may take place within a period of about six months, usually during the dry season, once harvesting is finished, or between the rainy season and the cold season. The bridegroom's family, after fixing the wedding day, prepare ritual dishes and an alcoholic beverage for the occasion. The wedding takes place at the bridegroom's home. Since the couple's villages are distant from one another, the bride will first stay with someone in the bridegroom's village, often a cousin of the bridegroom's family. The following day, his family will bring her to their home. As she climbs the steps, an elderly member of the family will strike the rooftop three times with a bamboo cane and everyone will shout 'Xo, xo, xo'. These words indicate that the bride has left her maiden name and is ready to assume her husband's name. Inside the bridegroom's house, the bride sits beside him near the hearth in the woman's compartment. Then they offer each other three boiled eggs. The old people then put these eggs in the mouths of the bridal couple, as well as boiled chicken. This rite means that they are now man and wife.

The wedding may last as long as two days, in the course of which the bridegroom's family will kill a pig, an ox or a buffalo. At meals the men eat separately from the women, the men in the male compartment, the women in the female compartment. The bridal couple sit in the female compartment under the altar of the house, where they are given advice by the old people. The bridegroom serves the guests with drinks, putting the glass to their lips as a sign of respect. A group of villagers bring pork to the person presiding over the ceremony, in order to honour him.

DEATH

The Ko think that death is but a change of body. The dead person's soul departs to join the world of the ancestors' souls. In order that the dead person's soul may become a benevolent soul that will watch over the fortunes of the living, a ceremony must be performed. Prayers are said for the dead person before the burial. The relatives weep and sing during the funeral. The dead are always buried with their feet facing east, and in the case of someone important, the family sacrifices a buffalo. After the burial, all the members of the family eat together at a ceremony called the 'send-off of the dead person's soul'. The purpose of this ceremony is once again to ask the dead person not to come back to the village and harm the living. A year later, however, the same people hold another ceremony which is intended, on the contrary, to call back the dead person's soul and ask it to take its place in the house and watch over the fortunes of the family.

THE SWING RITUAL AND HOLIDAYS

The swing ceremony is one of the most important in the Ko culture. It takes place once every three years in September. At this time of year the villagers have no work, for they are waiting to be able to harvest. Meanwhile they make clothes, especially the women. Married women dress differently from the unmarried. Girls of 16 or 17 years old put on their finest clothes and vie with each other on the big village swing.

As already mentioned, the Ko strictly observe the rules laid down by their ancestors in order to avoid misfortune. For this reason they do not work (and often close the village to outsiders) whenever there are important rituals, a wedding or a death, on days when rites relating to the agricultural cycle or the building of a house are performed, or on the occasion of hunting ceremonies or of rites for the reparation of violations of various rules. All these holidays and rituals afford the villagers opportunities of meeting and expressing their belief in the unity of the community, and also their collective sorrow or gladness – a factor which contributes to the moral strength of the group.

CONCLUSION

The question of ethnic groups is one of the major problems of national development. The government should attach considerable importance to the cohesion and solidarity of the various ethnic groups within the national community. With this in mind, it accordingly supervises the protection and development of the different ethnic groups and encourages the study and preservation of their beliefs, as well as their various languages, lifestyles, costumes, musical instruments, and dances and songs.

Research on the Tai Cultural Area

TADAHIKO L. A. SHINTANI

THE GOLDEN QUADRANGLE AS THE TAI CULTURAL AREA

Our research work is concerned with the safeguarding of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in northern Laos, in a region encompassing what we shall call the 'Tai cultural area'. The Golden Triangle has become famous as the name given to the area where the borders of Thailand, Burma (present-day Myanmar) and Laos meet. It is usually referred to in connection with sensational events occurring there in a context of lawlessness over which there is no state control, such as drug trafficking, young girls forced into prostitution, rebel armies or dissident ethnic groups, but there is seldom any mention of the region's culture or history. This is hardly surprising, in fact, since this border region has no real cultural or historical unity; the term used to describe it – the Golden Triangle – was coined purely for political and media purposes. If we look at the cultural and historical background of the region, we find that it in fact extends to the south and south-west of Yunnan Province in China. It would therefore be more accurate to call this larger region the 'Golden Quadrangle'.

The vast area of settlement around the Golden Quadrangle is home to a number of different Tai ethnic groups: it is this area that we may call the Tai cultural area.[1] Four different language groups – Tai, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman and Chinese – coexist in this multilingual and multicultural area. A system of order governs inter-ethnic relations, and there is often a hierarchy among the groups living there. Between the thirteenth and the twentieth centuries various polities came into being in the region and subsequently vanished, all of them ultimately absorbed by Thailand, Burma and China in the process of their nation-state building. These political and historical facts have contributed to the lack of research carried out in the area, despite its role of mediator between the continental super-power of China and the countries of South-East Asia.

FIELD RESEARCH

Because this Tai cultural area was for a long time difficult to access owing to geographical constraints and the political situation, there was a serious lack of basic scientific data that were of the utmost importance for our research. For this reason when we started our field research in 1996 we pursued two aims. Firstly we decided to approach this cultural area from 'within' instead of considering it – as is the traditional view – to be an extension of China or trying to explain it in terms of the nation-state theory. We therefore consider Thailand, Burma, Laos and also China to be peripheral to this Tai cultural area. Secondly, we set out to collect a large body of scientific data on the Tai languages and cultures on which information was lacking.

Our research team was composed of specialists in three fields: linguistics, history and ethnology. After three years of field research we obtained very encouraging results in these fields,[2] which we shall now look at in detail.

Linguistics

In the area of linguistics we discovered the existence of a tonal language belonging to the Wa group of the Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic) language family. It is a language called 'Siam' (no relation to the former name of Thailand), previously recorded only once – as 'Hsem' by J. G. Scott in 1900.[3] Scott did not give much information on this ethnic group except to say that it was Buddhist and that its population numbered about 100 persons. He gave no information about the language. Of the languages in the Wa group, only the Plang and Loi languages have been known as tonal until now. However, our research has shown that another tonal language exists – Siam. It has two tones: high (55) and low (22). The tonal difference cannot be interpreted as a difference of register or vowel quality, which is often found in the Mon-Khmer languages. This tonal opposition can be demonstrated by the following examples (H stands for high tone and B stands for low tone): kaH – to undress/kaB – to grill; numH – young/numB – year; langH – high/langB – long; puiB siamH – the Shan/puiB siamB – the Siamese.

In order to try and understand the origin of these tones, it is useful to compare the Baqianke dialect of the Wa language. Some examples are given in Table 1.[4]

It is clear from these examples that the high tone of Siam corresponds to the initial aspirated sounds of the Wa language, which means that the initial aspirated/non-aspirated opposition of the Wa language was transphonologized to the tonal high/low opposition in Siam. The Siam language has lost a range of aspirated consonants.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF WA AND BAQIANKE DIALECTS

	SIAM / WA
Skin	HakH/hak
Blood	NamH/nham
Tooth	GangH/rhang
Shoulder	KlapH/khlip
To break wind	PoanH/phum
Five	PoanH/phuan
To be afraid	Lath/lhat
To go	HuH/huî

We conducted several surveys on the Khabit, En and Danaw languages of the Mon-Khmer group. We also collected linguistic data on the peripheral languages of the Karen group such as the Padaung, the Kayo, the Kaya, the Bwe and the Geba which should facilitate a comparative study of Karen languages. The Sida (Sila), the Pala and the other languages of the different Phunoi groups belong to the Lolo-Burmese group, which we also studied.

Historical research

Our historical research focused on two aspects: investigation of various written documents in the Tai language such as *bailaan* (latanier-leaf books) and *papsaa* (books made of *broussonetia* paper), and the history of the caravan trade routes that once existed within this cultural area.

With regard to the written texts, we tried to analyse the *tham* texts on the history of the Lan Na and Lan Xang. Our research has shown that many texts on the non-Tai ethnic groups were omitted when the *Chiang Mai Chronicle* was drawn up. We would suggest that some of the ethnic minority groups existing today played an important role in the history of the region. We also tried to find Shan texts which recount the history of the Tai *muang*, or polities, and succeeded in finding a considerable number of historical documents written in ancient Shan which will need to be analysed at a later stage. The fact is that there are not many people left who can read texts in ancient Shan and, as the writing system is linguistically imperfect, information on these texts has only become available very recently. As we make headway in our analysis of the texts, we hope to open up new avenues in the study of the history of the Tai and the Tai cultural area.

Our work on the caravan routes was based on interviews with old people to obtain information on trade routes, the goods that were traded, the price of the goods, the traders themselves and, for instance, the time it took to travel to such and such a place. We hope to be able to use this information to retrace the trade routes and shed light on the economic and political structure of the *muang*. The results of these interviews already suggest that the *muang* rulers were not directly involved in this kind of trading except in Luang Phrabang, and that the Prince – or *chao phen din* (master of the land) – of Cheng Hung did not have as much political power as was thought.

Material culture and technology

Our research also looked at the variety of technologies used in the Tai cultural area, including detailed investigation of methods of slash-and-burn agriculture and flooded rice cultivation. We also studied domestic tools such as sugar cane presses, spools and oil presses.

One interesting feature of the flooded rice cultivation practised by the Tai people is that the technology used is not very different from that used for dryland rice cultivation. Replacing water seeding by dry seeding is a common practice among Tai people, who generally make use of natural water flow instead of a system of artificial irrigation. The equipment used for flooded rice cultivation is fairly similar to that used for dryland rice cultivation. All our observations of Tai rice growing suggest that Tai people practised slash-and-burn farming in the past. This is borne out by Chinese documents which do not refer to any use of the plough in the region before the end of the fifteenth century. Most of the tools and machines used in the Tai cultural area are of Chinese origin, modified to a certain extent to adapt them to geographical conditions, but the ploughs found in the region are identical to the Chinese plough.

It could be said of the Tai, broadly speaking, that they put their energy into making the most of other ethnic groups. For example, a common feature was whole villages made up of particular occupational groups (blacksmiths, potters, weavers and so on) located around the centre of political power. The role played by other ethnic groups in the life of the court was officially regulated. The Tai had an army but do not appear to have won many victories. Tai groups that do not share these features may have been subject to some external influence.

We now know that the Tai living in this cultural area did not possess the advanced technology of flooded rice cultivation, and that in general their leaders were not directly involved in trading activities. Another matter of interest is what constituted the basis of the Lan Xang Kingdom's political and economic power. There was less arable land in Louang Phrabang than in Cheng Tung (Kentung). We believe that Louang Phrabang was a trading crossroads and that the court did in fact take part in these trading activities. Since the court was not involved in trade in other Tai *muang*, our subsequent research will have to produce strong evidence to substantiate this hypothesis.

Inter-ethnic relations in the Golden Quadrangle

Our ethnological research was concerned with inter-ethnic relations and ethnic identity. Our studies focused on Chinese people living in the Tai cultural area and the Shan in Burma. As regards the Chinese, the accepted wisdom is that Chinese immigrants are not assimilated by the indigenous culture. However, our research has shown that this idea is in fact completely false and unfounded. In this Tai cultural area, most Chinese speak languages other than Chinese and dress like Tai. Some of them let their sons enter monasteries as monks – something that is completely inadmissible in traditional Chinese culture. There are Chinese from Yunnan called Ho, in the three countries concerned, but there are a number of differences between the Ho in Laos and Ho in the two other countries. First, from a linguistic point of view, the Ho in Laos tend to drop the final nasal consonants 'n' and 'ng', while the Ho in the two other countries pronounce them quite distinctly. Historically speaking, the Ho migrated to Laos long before they did to the other countries. The immigration of Ho to Thailand and Burma was bound up with the Kuomintang movement (Chinese nationalist party led by Chiang Kai-shek), while there is no connection between the Ho in Laos and the Kuomintang. On a social level, some Ho in Thailand and Myanmar are Muslim, but not in Laos.

We tried to understand the 'Burmanization' and 'Thailandization' of the Shan, and to determine their ethnic identity through their ritual practices. The difference between the languages of these two cultures does not necessarily reflect the cultural difference felt by the speakers of the two languages. The Khün language, for example, is linguistically closer to the Shan language than the Tai spoken in Sipsongpanna or Lan-Na. The Khün themselves, however, believe that their language is closer to the Tai spoken in Sipsongpanna or Lan-Na than to the Shan language. The Tai ethnic groups in Burma known as Shan are traditionally divided into two groups separated by the Salween River: *cis-Salween and trans-Salween*.

Our research findings lead us to suggest, however, that they should be classified according to the river they are closest to, that is, the Mekong or the Salween. Under this classification, the Khün and the Tai of Sipsongpanna and Lan-Na 'belong' to the Mekong River, and the Shan to the Salween River, the dividing line between the two groups being located near Cheng Tung. We believe this classification is more consistent with historical and cultural reality, since it

was essential for Tai ethnic groups to live near a source of water.

These are our findings concerning the Tai cultural area. As we carried out our research without taking borders into account, our activities are not limited to Laos, but cover the four countries concerned: Thailand, Burma, Laos and China.

INVESTIGATION IN LAOS

In Laos we carried out linguistic and historical investigations in Phongxaly and Louang Phrabang. In Phongxaly, in order to obtain an overview of the linguistic situation, we set out to gather rapidly 300 basic words for all the languages in the province, and in 1998 collected information on seventeen languages and dialects, including Sida, Pala, Khabit and a number of Phunoi dialects.[5]

Phongxaly is distinctive for its lack of Laotian features. Most of the population does not belong to the Lao ethnic group. As regards agriculture, the main type remains slash-and-burn farming, but flooded rice cultivation is also practised in suitable places. We investigated the technologies used in the villages inhabited by the different ethnic groups. The use of the plough is limited in this region, and all those we found were of Chinese origin, as was the case for most of the implements. The Phunoi are gifted at trade, and in a sense they are comparable with the Chinese in this way.

Louang Phrabang, unlike Phongxaly, is a Lao region. We investigated the technologies used there for rice growing in particular, and our findings suggest that the Tai originally cultivated rice using slash-and-burn methods. In view of its geographical situation and the farming technology common in the region, the economic prosperity and political power of the court of Louang Phrabang cannot be explained by income from agriculture alone. Our hyphothesis is that Louang Phrabang was above all a trading centre, and that this trade was promoted by the court.

Aside from the work carried out in Phongxaly and Louang Phrabang, we have been conducting our research on the Lao dialects and the bailaan (documents written in tham) for about ten years.

NOTES

1. Cf. Tadahiko L. A. Shintani (ed.), *Ougon no Yonkakuchitai – Shan Bunkaken no Rekishi, Gengo, Minzoku* [Golden Quadrangle – History, Languages and Ethnic Groups of the Tai Cultural Area], Tokyo, Keiyuusha, 1988.
2. Tadahiko L. A. Shintani (ed.), *Linguistic and Anthropological Study on the Shan Culture Area*, Tokyo, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999.
3. J. G. Scott, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*, Rangoon, 1900-01, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 418–19.
4. The Wa language data are taken from Zhou Zhizhi and Yan Qixiang, *Wayu jianzhi*, Minzuchubanshe, 1982. The vocal laryngealization is not shown in the table, however.
5. See Kingsada Thongphet and Tadahiko L. A. Shintani (eds.), *Basic Vocabularies of the Languages Spoken in Phongxaly*, Lao PDR, Tokyo, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999.

Austro-Asiatic family (3)

87. Lavè Khong La player, Attopeu Province
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Next pages:
88. Lavè gong ensemble, Attopeu Province
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89. Lavè tunic, Attopeu Province
© KT/IRC

90. Talieng house, Dakchung, Sekong Province
© KM/IRC

91. Ngè musician, Sekong Province
© KT/IRC

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93

92. Oi house,
Attopeu Province
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93. Detail of a Lavi house,
Sekong Province
© Olivier Evrard

94. Lavè woman,
Attopeu Province
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95. Ta-Oi village,
Saravan Province
© Yves Goudineau

96. Katu woman planting rice,
Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

97. Sculpture inside
a Katu dwelling,
Sekong Province
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Next page:
98. Katu child with blowpipe,
Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

99. Katu mask,
Sekong Province
© Yves Goudineau

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The Ancient Beliefs of the Tai Dam

KHAMPHÈNG THIPMOUNTALY

FOREWORD

The Tai Dam (Black Tai) are thought by some to be descended from an ethnic group formerly called Ai Lao who migrated from the highlands in the north-east of present-day Laos to the banks of the Nam Dam River in northern Vietnam. They settled mainly in the village of Muang Theng, the birthplace of Khun Lo. Ancient Chinese documents refer to the ancestors of the Tai Dam, who lived in Laos and northern Vietnam, as 'Menglao'. When Khounlo followed the Nam Ou River downstream to the town of Louang Phrabang, the Menglao settled there, alongside the already established Ai Lao and other ethnic communities. Perhaps one day research into the Tai Dam, or other Tai or Ai Lao ethnic groups, will bring to light alternative versions of the origins of the Lao nation.

At different moments in history every human society has had its system of beliefs and religion. The dominant class formerly used religion as an instrument of rule and to deprive the people of their rightful inheritance. Until the liberation of Laos, Tai Dam society lived under a feudal farming-based regime, in which the nobility exploited the common peasantry. Religious organization was based on the worship of heaven and earth, the village or town, the clan chiefs and the ancestors, and the performance of farming-related rites.[1] Tai Dam society also bears traces of animism, with beliefs about ways of curing illnesses, ideas about birth and death, etc. This article will deal with some of these beliefs (in particular those held in the region of Xieng Kho, in the province of Huaphan).

WORSHIP OF THE EARTH, THE VILLAGE, THE TOWN AND THE NOBILITY

Religious beliefs strengthened bonds within rural communities and maintained the prestige of the ruling class, the land-owning nobility. The latter masterminded and supervised numerous religious services that served their own interests. The Tai Dam's livelihoods depended both on nature and, they thought, the goodwill of the spirits. They believed in an all-powerful king who had engendered heaven and the earth, human beings and animals, and all else, and who commanded the heavenly spirits (of whom eleven were seated and twenty-three standing), each of whom had a specific role to play in life on earth.

Another Tai Dam belief was that tutelary spirits were hidden in the mountains, forests and rivers. When they wanted to build a village, make hai (slash and burn for cultivation), clear the paddy field, or go fishing or hunting, they first had to seek the spirits' opinion. The angels in heaven and the spirits in nature were all protectors of

human beings. The spirits had different origins, land spirits preferring to live in giant trees or rocks, while the spirits of fire, the village, the town, the paddy field, the mountain and the water (the dragon) had different habitats. The veneration of the land-owning nobility also played an important role, as the Tai Dam believed that the nobles' ancestors had been sent by the angels to protect them. Harming a lord in any way was punishable with death, as the land-owning nobility represented civilization and behaved as if their ancestors' spirits were still alive.

In religious practice, the nobles' prestige depended on 'shrines' set up when they acceded to power (or the 'throne'). The spirits of the land-owning nobility held the rope tied to the city's foundation pillars in readiness for war or other hardships. If the lords' spirits were not strong enough to keep the rope taut, the shrines would topple over and ill fortune could undermine the town's foundations. As a result, the Tai Dam believed that the lords not only represented the law but also played a protective role. On the basis of these superstitions, the nobles bound the commoners to their own interests. Every year, at the onset of spring, they organized a great ceremony, Sén Muang, to perform the rites concerned with heaven and earth, the village and the land-owning nobility all at once. The purpose of the ceremony was to invite the heavenly and underground beings, the spirits of the ancestors and the others, and it was used by the nobility to show their interest in the community and society.

The ceremony was also associated with the worship of the Chao Sua and was organized at Ming Muong, where the ancestors' souls dwelt along with the nobles' spirits and those of the commoners, whereas Vang Muong was the abode of the dragons. During the ceremony, the townspeople would have to make offerings of black and white buffalo (the latter described as 'pink' in the Tai Dam language). During the seven days and seven nights of festivities it was strictly forbidden for the villagers to leave or for outsiders to enter the town. After the ceremony, entertainments such as throwing cloth balls would take place. Then it was the other villages' turn to organize similar ceremonies. At the end of each ceremony, each family in the village would visit the nobles. Afterwards the peasants and workers would organize the Sén Heuan, a family festival. The cult of heaven and earth, the village and town and the nobility did much to maintain and strengthen the feudal regime. Accordingly, after the national liberation led by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, the Tai Dam abandoned some of their former, profane rites.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Whereas the purpose of the cult of heaven and earth, of the town and of the land-owning nobility was to increase the prestige of the feudal rulers, ancestor worship concerned individuals and their families and helped to strengthen family ties. The Tai Dam would laud the past and their ancestors' good deeds. The nobility often kept genealogical registers tracing their family history. A special place was set aside in the Tai Dam community for the ancestors' spirits, in a forbidden area of the forest, at the foot of a tall tree, or on a rock, a place called Phidam. People of the same origin shared places of worship. Each family also worshipped a household spirit. The cult of the ancestors directly affected the whole family's material and moral life. The head of the family played the most important role and was the only person empowered to represent the rest of the family when ceremonies were organized.

During the yearly ritual ceremony, the head of the family would relate the family situation to the spirits of the ancestors and pray for them to protect each family member. A shrine was installed in the head of the family's bedroom and, every five to ten days, a ceremony would take place. The wife would prepare a meal on a tray for her husband to take into his room. On the day of the ceremony the bedroom door would be shut so that the spirit was not disturbed, and entering the forest or building a house was forbidden, along with all entertainments.

If a member of the family were to fall ill, a sorcerer was asked to say whether some wrongdoing had been committed. If it had, the wrong had to be put right to appease the spirits, so that they would continue to protect the family. If the spirits asked for something and received no answer, they would go and see other spirits whom they asked to punish the family. Only if the illness persisted, despite everything being done according to the rules, could the head of the family become angry with the spirits.

The spirits of the ancestors living in the cemetery or in heaven received offerings after burials. The Tai Dam believed that, after burial, relations with the spirits came to an end, and that the life of the ancestors in the kingdom of the spirits was different from theirs on earth. The kingdom of the spirits was a remote, cold and dirty place, with no singing or music, no boys or girls, and with a muddy river running through it. The only occupation was growing rice, and the souls of the dead were assembled by family and lived together.

This belief explains why the Tai Dam would often clean tombs following a burial.[2] They believed that once in heaven their ancestors could intervene as protectors to communicate with those of the land-owning nobles. Yet class separation was duplicated in heaven. The peasant-workers' souls met in a place called Dam Doi or Lian Pannoi, while those of the nobles met in another place, called Lian Pan Luang. Souls lived in heaven for 100 years and, although they did not suffer like souls on earth, the feudal exploitation continued. The souls in heaven had to die once more to become spirits and return to earth in the form of insects or caterpillars, only to die a third time and become algae growing in damp places. The algae were jealous of people and made them slip over and fall.

The nobles, meanwhile, lived happily ever after in the kingdom of heaven, did not work in the paddy field, and spent all their time playing and eating. Whenever the rice was ready they would collect it, and when the fish was cooked they would help themselves; when they were hungry the rice would grow in the paddy field and the fruit would ripen on the branches. This conception of life in heaven was a fabrication to justify feudalism. Regardless of the cost, children would organize their parents' funeral ceremonies because they believed that cremation could take them up to heaven. According to a Tai Dam proverb, children born of the same parents will drink bitter alcohol together and breathe in the smoke of their parents' ashes.

Neither in heaven nor in the graveyard did the ancestors' spirits affect the Tai Dam's day-to-day lives. During ceremonies such as the household festival, weddings or the ceremony for the completion of a new house, children would think of their grandparents and would often invite them to take part in the festivities. They would offer them rice cooked in bamboo and the flesh of birds, mice, frogs and fish laid out on a tray lined with banana leaves. The plates and bowls were made of bamboo. During the ceremony, it was the duty of the daughters-in-law to serve the food, wearing the traditional costume, and to dance and sing as a sign of respectful greeting. The Tai Dam still perform these ceremonies, but less often than before. Their belief in the celestial kingdom of spirits and in the harmful role of spirits upon their children's lives is gradually waning.

FARMING-RELATED RITES

These rites used to be very numerous since the Tai Dam lived mainly from agriculture, and they believed that heaven and earth helped their crops to grow. Since the rains augured whether the season would be good or not, during the rainy season the Tai Dam would organize a ceremony to celebrate the rumbling of thunder. The head of the family would wake up early and stroke the sacks of rice to awaken the rice soul, called Khuan Khao. Then he would plant a piece of wood decorated with artificial rice flowers and a plaited bamboo stem. He would light a fire and wash the piece of wood used to steam the rice, while the other family members would go to the stream to wash their face, feet and hands. Back at the house, they would perform a ceremony dedicated to the mother earth, the spirit of the oven and the spirit of the ancestors, and say prayers for a good harvest.

In the spring the Tai Dam would organize the town or village feast, in which certain spirits such as the dragon, the water spirit, played a more important role than the others. Each village had a holy palace, the Vang Sak Sit, for the dragons, which controlled the farmers' water supplies. They were regarded as the kings of the fish, which they supplied people with, and also as the protectors of navigators. During the major festivals – the Tai Dam's many traditional festivals were all of a religious nature – they were offered buffalo, especially 'pink' buffalo. One of their rites consisted of a jousting match sung by young men and young women, a traditional courting ritual. Another rite took place in front of the fire, a prayer of hope in which the family head asked for many children. The Tai Dam have now abandoned this tradition in substance, retaining only its artistic trappings.

During the rice-growing season, the Tai Dam would often perform a ceremony to call up the rice soul, especially at the beginning of the harvest. The head of the family would invite the ancestors' spirits to a meal with the freshly harvested rice, which he would place on the shrine and at the foot of the post opposite the fire. After the harvest, the Tai Dam from the Nam Ma region would organize a ceremony to thank the rice soul. As an offering they would prepare a meal and deposit it in the harvested paddy field. They would make a man of straw, representing the rice soul, bring it home, and place it in the granary. It would remain there until the following season when the head of the family would have to reawaken it.

The Tai Dam also had a rite for calling up rain. When the time came, the young people would strike a gong and beat a drum and various utensils such as saucepans, spoons and plates to invite the thunder to rumble, announcing to the

angels that the sowing season was coming and that the farmers needed water. Every family would go bathing in the river and return to the village centre, singing and dancing to show how much they needed water. These rites differed from one region to another. The Tai Dam once performed other specific rites for raising livestock, fishing and hunting but have now abandoned many of them, with their increasing recognition of the importance of physical strength and intelligence in successful farming.

OTHER BELIEFS

Many other beliefs are held in Tai Dam society, including age-old notions such as the belief in good and evil spirits and the existence of a paradise. The *phi pob*, or evil spirits, are said to be always ready to provoke people and turn good into evil, make the well sick, turn good harvests into poor ones, and so forth. Similarly, the Tai Dam long believed that the *phi pob* killed young mothers and newborn babies by drinking their blood. The most cunning among them – the *mo mo*, reputed to be highly intelligent – exploited this credulity, provoking others in order to hoodwink them and make them believe that they had been poisoned. The Tai Dam called anyone who had been poisoned *tonkhuang kuan*, and only the *mo mo* could cure them. The dominant class was particularly clever at using this credulity in order to exploit or trick people.

This belief in spirits, especially for treating illness, still exists among the Tai Dam. In the wet tropical area where they live medical infrastructures are poorly developed and numerous diseases, both endemic and epidemic, are a constant threat. Some of these diseases can be cured by traditional medicine while others cannot. In the latter case the Tai Dam think that the diseases can be treated only by magic. They believe that people may fall ill and die if their *khouan* (souls) leave their bodies, either momentarily or permanently. When the *khouan* disappear, a sick person will feel scared or start shaking. Only the hardiest spirits or souls will survive, sometimes by contemplating a supernatural vision.

To find out whether they are truly ill, people must go and consult the *mo mo* who are said to have the gift of communicating with the celestial spirits and summoning the *khouan*. They believe in an ancient instrument for chasing away spirits: a celestial axe made of copper or stone. The *mo mo* are thought to use it to fight against spirits, for example hacking at the toenail of the *Phi Luang* (giant spirit); in fact the toenail in question is really an elephant's, the *Phi Kong Koi*'s tooth is that of a wild boar and the *yalom* or *yabay* hair is women's hair that falls out 'when they bleed' and is found by the riverside.

The Tai Dam believe that people possess eighty *khouan*, fifty at the front of the body and thirty at the back. The *khouan* command people's activities; there is the *khouan* of the head, the forehead, the liver and so forth, and all these *khouan* are gathered together at the top of the head (*chom khouan*). The *khouan* sometimes leave the body to go and ask a spirit what it wants. The *mo mo* are the only people able to chase the *khouan* or spirit away or recall it. There are several ways of looking for the causes of illness, for example by calling on the Shirt *Mo*, or the Eggs and Money *Mo*. The *mo mo* also establish principles of action that differ according to the illness. Stomach ache is caused by the water spirit, headaches by the *phi pob*, and so on. The *mo mo* may consult the patient and find out their financial situation, before saying what the spirit wants to eat. For example, the water spirit eats duck and the forest spirit eats dog. In reality, these offerings often end up in the *mo mo*'s own bag.

In Tai Dam society, people resorted to various ways of preventing spirits from harming people. They used fairly common holy objects, such as plaited bamboo or van, a particular species of grass, in the belief that it protected them from nature's hidden forces. They often planted bamboo stakes around the house of newborn children to stop the spirit coming and disturbing them. Anyone suspected of being possessed by the *phi pob* would be left to the mercy of a sparrow hawk's claws and would have to confess and beg forgiveness. Other items used for combating the spirits included wooden spoons, bamboo, ashes or even green branches.

CONCLUSION

Since the country's liberation in 1975, the Tai Dam have steadily become more politically and culturally aware. Medicine and modern science have helped to improve their quality of life. Consequently, they now see that their ancient beliefs are superstitions and they are increasingly abandoning the rites invented by sorcerers. Nonetheless, some individuals, especially those living in remote rural areas, still hold these beliefs. Some elderly people do not believe in science or medicine and continue to practise the healing rites. It will take time for these beliefs to disappear

completely and they will only do so once the members of this society are convinced that science and culture are the keys to greater productivity and a better quality of life.

NOTES

1. See Kim Trong, *Thay Dam à Tay Bac Vietnam*, Hanoi, Scientific and Social Publishing, 1978, pp. 378–402; and *Bref aperçu de l'ethnie Tay Nung Thai VN*, Hanoi, Scientific and Social Publishing, 1968, pp. 276–92.
2. See Grant Evans, 'Reform or Revolution in Heaven? Funerals among Upland Tai', *Australian Journal of Anthropology* (formerly *Mankind*), Vol. 2, No. 1, 1991.

Urban Minorities

GRANT EVANS

Most of the papers in this collection are concerned with the minorities living in the mountains and rural areas of Laos. However there are some minorities who have been living in the cities for a long time and have contributed to Lao heritage in very tangible ways. Here I have in mind the role played by Vietnamese builders and architects in Vientiane or Luang Prabang. But many of the rural-based minorities are beginning to drift towards the cities and we need also to understand the impact that this drift will have on their cultural heritage, tangible as well as intangible.

The following paper will mainly focus on Vientiane Municipality because relatively detailed information on ethnic distribution is available only for that city. Further studies of other urban centres in Laos, particularly of Luang Prabang, Savannakhet and Pakse, are necessary if we are to gain a clear understanding of urban minorities in Laos. Nevertheless, because Vientiane is the capital of Laos, it is the largest city (524,000 persons in 1995). Being the centre of government attracts individuals from all over the country, just as its importance for commerce also draws migrants from all provinces; we can therefore learn much from looking at it.

The two most important ethnic 'minorities' in Vientiane historically have been the Chinese and the Vietnamese. They established themselves there during the French colonial period where they functioned as merchants (mainly Chinese)[1] or as part of the French colonial administration (Vietnamese). Indeed, in the 1940s it was claimed that over 50 per cent of Vientiane's population was made up of Vietnamese and Chinese. The decline of French colonialism in the post-1945 period meant that many Vietnamese returned home, but others replaced them when refugees fled from North Viet Nam in the early 1950s. Until 1975 both the Chinese and the Vietnamese populations of Vientiane were relatively large. According to Rosetti, the Chinese population in Laos fell from around 100,000 before 1975 to around 10,000 in the mid-1990s, while the 1995 Census indicates that only 1,932 Chinese nationals live in Vientiane. Similarly, the Vietnamese population of Vientiane before 1975 was thought to be numbered in the tens of thousands, while after 1975 these numbers fell dramatically as many fled to Thailand or beyond, and the 1995 Census registers only 3,460 Vietnamese nationals as residents of Vientiane.

The census categories, however, conceal the large number of people who are of Vietnamese or Chinese origin in Vientiane and who are either bicultural or at least share practices drawn from both cultures. The Social Survey Project of Vientiane Municipality (conducted over 1997) attempted to shed light on this issue in its survey of 2,003 households in the six most urbanized districts of the

municipality.[2] However the ethnic distribution of the city is not immediately clear from this survey either. For example, while 99.9 per cent of people reported that their nationality was Lao, when asked about the 'race' of father or mother only 2.3 per cent of the former and 1.1 per cent of the latter were reported as being Vietnamese.[3] While the latter is closer to the official number of ethnic Vietnamese in the city, it underestimates the importance of people of Vietnamese descent in the city's population, and their cultural heritage. The official census does not help very much here either; out of the forty-four options given for ethnicity, Chinese or Vietnamese were not specified (nor Thai nor Indian).

If, however, we look at the distribution of ethnic groups as described in the census we can gain or surmise further information concerning the ethnic composition of the city. The categories sought by the census were contained in a list of forty-seven specific ethnic groups (including Lao, but as noted above, not Indians, Thai, Chinese or Vietnamese, categories which were only included under a question on nationality). In addition there was a residual category, 'other', and another category of 'do not know'.[4] In some villages of Vientiane Municipality these last two categories were sometimes quite large. If one agrees with the argument presented above concerning Vietnamese and Chinese ambiguity when faced with the category 'ethnicity', then we can interpret these responses as giving some indication of the distribution of this population in the city. For example, if we look more closely at several of the villages in Muang Chantabouli, such as Kua Luang Neua, the 'other' makes up 28 per cent of the population, Kua Luang Tai comprising 15 per cent. Of the adjacent villages, Susawat Neua has 12 per cent, Sisawat Gang 15 per cent, Tong Kan Kham Neua 15 per cent, Tong Kan Kham Tai 22 per cent, Anou 25 per cent and Haysok 25 per cent. All of these villages are well known for their historic connections with either Chinese or Vietnamese populations, and so our supposition that the residual categories in the census point to this ethnic background seems to be confirmed. What this reveals, of course, is significant concentrations of particular ethnic groups in some parts of the city. This can be mapped in more detail, but this is not the place to do so. For example, we can also find concentrations of Phu Tai in Ban Hong Saeng, where they comprise 29 per cent of the population.

As for ethnicity more generally, all the ethnic groups from Laos are represented in Vientiane, even if only by one or two persons. In the official census 92.6 per cent of the population of Vientiane report their ethnicity as Lao, with the next largest category being Phu Tai at 3.1 per cent (both so-called 'Lao Loum'). In other words, only approximately 4 per cent of the city's population is made up of other ethnic groups. The Vientiane Social Survey produced a roughly similar distribution, although in this people were asked to nominate their ethnicity and were not supplied with a list to choose from. Thus, several categories emerge which were not in the census, such as Ho, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and Indian. The Ho/Chinese made up not quite 2 per cent, Vietnamese not quite 3 per cent (this distribution is confirmed by yet another question used for cross-checking which was to enquire into who celebrated the Chinese/Vietnamese New Year, the response being 5.3 per cent) and Thai and Indian not even 1 per cent. Eight other categories were specified, besides Lao, but they were all very small, and of course, given the very small numbers of some groups in Vientiane anyway the survey could not have picked up all groups.

Despite its limitations the Vientiane Social Survey also provides some interesting information on ethnic patterns of marriage. Some 98 per cent of Lao marry Lao, 62 per cent of Phu Tai marry Phu Tai while the remaining Phu Tai marry only Lao, thereby giving some credence to the category 'Lao Loum' for these two groups. A similar statement could be made for the small number of Tai Lue in Vientiane who only marry either Lao or Lue. The Kmhmu' men in the survey overwhelmingly married Lao or Phu Tai women, while only 15 per cent of them had Kmhmu' wives.[5] Chinese men married mainly Lao or Phu Tai (75 per cent), or other Chinese. Vietnamese men mainly married other Vietnamese (60 per cent), or only Lao women. Other groups in this survey, such as Hmong or Phu Noy or Katang, who represented only very small numbers, mainly tend to marry within their group, but around 30 per cent of Hmong men marry either Phu Tai or Lue women, while around 50 per cent of Phu Noy marry either Lao or Lue.

Within this configuration it is mainly 'Lao Loum' women who are being 'transacted' and they are therefore key agents in drawing other ethnic groups into a Lao cultural orbit. In the case of Chinese or Vietnamese, however, the transaction is likely to be two-way, at least for the first generation. We know relatively little about the ritual and religious practices of either the Chinese or the Vietnamese community in Vientiane. Both communities maintain separate temples, but a shared Buddhist tradition also allows some easy overlap into the Lao temples that follow Theravada

Buddhism. Similarly, there appears to be considerable ritual syncretism when either of these groups marries ethnic Lao, though once again this has not been studied.

Both the Vietnamese and the Chinese maintain separate schools, though since 1975 both have been tied tightly to the central curriculum. Nevertheless, within these schools Vietnamese and Chinese languages are taught. In its enquiries on language use in the home, the Vientiane Social Survey found that while a small proportion of Vietnamese or people of Vietnamese descent use Vietnamese in the home, no one of Chinese descent reported using Chinese. This is an unbelievable situation, and is probably a product of the repression and surveillance the Chinese population was subject to from the late 1970s up until the late 1980s. These people, therefore, are more reluctant to reveal their Chinese identity despite the fact that it had begun to emerge again in the 1990s, as reported by Rosetti. Further studies are required of both the Vietnamese and Chinese populations and their influence in Vientiane. For example, the high value placed on literacy in countries with Confucian heritages, such as China and Viet Nam, is well known. How this value is transmitted over time in families who have undergone cultural conversion into ethnic Lao, for example, is less well understood. Similar studies are required of the Chinese community. This is important because the Vientiane Social Survey revealed that among the small proportion of the Lao population of Vientiane who actually read books, a high percentage of those books are written in Vietnamese.

The so-called hill tribe minorities are not as institutionally visible as the above two groups (and here one should also mention the small south Indian Muslim minority in Vientiane who have their mosque in the city centre). In terms of institutional religion, they tend to gravitate towards either Catholicism or towards one of the various Christian churches in Vientiane. There are no formal schools where any of these minority languages are taught. A certain amount of ritual syncretism can also been seen among them when marriages occur between any of these groups and the Lao but, like so many other aspects of urban minority culture, this has not been carefully studied.

Cities, as we know, are extremely complex social and cultural arenas that allow for highly diverse ethnic interactions and processes of ethnic change. Capitals like Vientiane are also among the fastest changing areas of the country and therefore minorities who reside in them or migrate to them are subject to greater pressure towards cultural change and perhaps conformity with the dominant culture – which, one should add, is also in the process of change. If one wishes to understand the processes by which ethnic heritage is either preserved or destroyed, one can do well to look to the lifestyles of minorities in cities. And for those minorities who have migrated to the countryside, one may also wish to see how the urban residents have an impact on their still rural relatives. Like so much to do with minorities in Laos, we understand little about ethnic cultural change in Vientiane or in the other urban centres of Laos. While many researchers understandably have their sights set on the minorities in the mountains or the hinterland, some of them would also do well to look at the cities. The future ineluctably lies there.

NOTES

1. On the Chinese minority, see Florence Rossetti, 'The Chinese in Laos', *China Perspectives*, No. 13, September/October 1997.

2. This project was carried out under the auspices of the Institute of Research on Culture in the Ministry of Culture, Vientiane. It was financially assisted in this by AUSAID, SIDA and the University of Hong Kong (see 'Vientiane Social Survey Project 1997–98', Institute for Cultural Research, Vientiane, 1999).

3. The category 'race' is often more immediately intelligible to both Vietnamese and Chinese populations because of the way they conceptualize descent (see Frank Dickotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, Hong Kong University Press, 1992, for example). We also asked about 'ethnicity' and this achieved an even lower rating, associated as it is with so-called 'uncivilized' minorities.

4. A note to the census-takers tells them to look in their handbook for advice on various names that people may supply for their ethnic group and to put the people into the larger category supplied by the census if possible. Only when that is not possible are they placed in the category of 'other' or 'do not know'.

5. The complete absence of Kmhmu' women marrying Lao or any other group would suggest that they are deterred from marrying out because they would have to give up completely their ethnic identification with the Kmhmu'.

PART THREE

Promoting the Minority Heritage: Experience of Neighbouring Countries

The Intangible Cultural Heritage of Viet Nam's Highland Ethnic Minorities

DANG NGHIÊM VAN

Viet Nam, with its northern highlands making it a part of continental South-East Asia, and its long Pacific coastline, is, in the words of Olov Janse, a veritable 'crossroads of peoples and civilizations'. Indeed, it has been a multi-ethnic, multicultural nation since its beginnings, a fact that is undoubtedly the key to its historical strength.

As far back as the semi-legendary kingdoms of Van Lang and, more recently, Au Lac (257–208 B.C.) – the ruins of whose capital, Co Loa, have been discovered in the Dong Anh suburb of Hanoi – these lands were already populated by two large groups: the Lac and the Au. The monarch of Van Lang, an ethnic Lac, could well have been a proto-Viet, whereas Thuc Phan, An Duong King of Au Lac, was an ethnic Au, most probably of proto-Tay descent.[1] There followed 1,000 years of Chinese domination, during which uprisings were organized and led by rebel chieftains and troops whose ethnic origins remain unclear. What is certain is that they were not just proto-Viet or Viet-Muong, but members of what was already a multi-ethnic population.[2]

Until its independence and self-rule, the centralized state was governed by kings, princes, lords and other feudal figures who were clearly the ancestors of the latter-day Vietnamese. Under their leadership, whole peoples became established across a vast area that was capable of satisfying the needs of a highly dense population. First they settled in central parts and across the Tonkin plains, then they moved up into northern Annam.[3] Over time, this fledgling state spread southwards to form what could be said to be the shape of Viet Nam as it is today.

The Viet (or Kinh) began life as an indigenous ethnic group that went on to attract ever-increasing numbers of people from other groups in the region – Ly, Lao, Man, Lieu and so on – thus absorbing some of their social and cultural traits. Later, groups appeared from China, Laos, Cambodia and further afield. The various societies taking shape in that period provided the makings of present-day Viet Nam's fifty-four officially recognized ethnic communities, which themselves divide into over 100 local subgroups belonging to three main linguistic families: Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer, Viet-Muong, Tay-Thai, Co Lao or Kadai, Hmong-Yao languages), Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) and Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Burman and Chinese).

VIET NAM'S HIGHLANDS – RICH IN HISTORY, RESOURCES AND DIVERSITY

Two-thirds of Viet Nam consists of sparsely populated highlands covered in tropical forest, rich in natural resources (minerals, hydroelectricity, local forestry and agricultural products), and where the only communication routes are

dirt tracks. These areas have provided shelter from despots and served as a theatre of war in the country's struggles against powerful enemies. They have also, over the course of history, become home to the ethnic minorities who, on account of their nomadic lifestyle, had previously been especially vulnerable to the effects of war, disease and famine. The fate of the Tibeto-Burman groups, for example, was closely linked to the fall of the Nan Tchao and Ta Ly Kingdoms (tenth–eleventh centuries A.D.); the break-up of the Thai principalities spurred their migration to South-East Asia between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries; while the dispersal of the Yao groups was connected to their movements from the eleventh and thirteenth centuries through to the present day. Other such examples include the migrations of the Nung (between the eleventh and twentieth centuries), Chinese (sixteenth century to the present day), Hmong (eighteenth century to the present day), Kmhmu' (nineteenth century), the Mon-Khmer from central Annam from the seventeenth century, and so on.[4] Nowadays, just as our coastal areas (islands and archipelagos included) are making genuine progress towards greater prosperity, so too are the highlands, whose riches are attracting an ever-growing number of settlers.

The Vietnamese highlands are currently populated by some fifty ethnic groups, each speaking its own language or dialect. Population sizes range from over one million, through tens of thousands, to several thousand (if not hundred) individuals. The level of socio-economic development was different before liberation, when customs reflected a wide variety of lifestyles. Some inhabited the valleys, while others lived the lives of nomads in relatively inaccessible mountainous areas. Today, though their roots may differ, the ethnic minorities have come to recognize the need to unite around a central authority, and have accepted the idea that they belong to the same nation as the rest of the Vietnamese people. As such, they have developed a dual sense of identity: members of an ethnic group as well as citizens of Viet Nam. This mindset is neatly encapsulated in a popular song:

Between marrows and pumpkins there must be love and support,

Our branches may differ, we share the same furrow.

It is also conveyed by a quite astonishing legend relating how ethnic groups share a common background and how they must each remain true to their own distinctive nature, 'together with yet not assimilated by/with others'.[5] Ethnic minority awareness of an underlying unity is strengthened still further by the fact that there are so many different ethnic communities living side by side within a social space that once formed the cradle of a very ancient culture: what archaeologists call the Dongsonian, and linguists and ethnographers the Austro-Asiatic, or Austric, culture.

Viet Nam, by virtue of its geopolitical situation, has often been seen as a tempting prize by generally more powerful invaders. Its ethnic minorities have played a by no means inconsiderable role in struggles to defend the homeland. They have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Viet (Kinh) through uprisings led, *inter alia*, by the Trung Sisters (40–43 A.D.), Trieu Thi Trinh (248), Mai Hac De (722) and Phung Hung (766–91). They have joined the resistance movements fighting for independence under the leadership of Ngo Quyen (930–44), Le Hoan (980–1005) Ly Thuong Kiet (eleventh century), Tran Quoc Tuan (thirteenth century), Le Loi (fifteenth century), Quang Trung (eighteenth century), not to mention the wars with France and the United States from 1945 to 1975. For many years the highlands, having become areas of resistance and key strategic fallback positions, endured a deluge of bombs dropped by America's B52s, and saw a large share of their soil poisoned by the intensive use of defoliants such as the notorious agent orange (dioxin).

Foreign experts studying the history of Viet Nam have been able to note how loyal the ethnic minorities have remained to our homeland and fought for it, even on far-away battlefields. They must also recognize that rather than side with the strong, they have preferred, on the contrary, to join with the weak, laying down their lives for independence and the liberty of the nation. Through their ordeals in the heat of battle, the highland minorities have earned the right to be respected, and have proved themselves worthy of honour in the eyes of the whole country.

This is the very reason why the central authorities have, since the first independence (tenth century), believed it necessary to unite the highland minorities into a national community. No ethnic group in Viet Nam can expect to become a nation unto itself, and the country must remain a multi-ethnic nation-state. Vietnamese policy towards the ethnic minorities has scarcely changed since, in the aftermath of Chinese domination, the feudal dynasties adopted the *nhu vien* approach of showing flexibility towards those living far from the capital. Indeed, it is still the watchword today, as can be seen in the special advantages granted to ethnic minorities according to their economic, political and cultural circumstances, and based on respect for the rights of every citizen.

So the centralized state adhered to a policy that bore little resemblance to that of other pre-capitalist era countries in its assertion that all people, regardless of their ethnic origins, were citizens of a single nation and, hence, had equal rights and duties. The laws known as the Penal Codes of the Kingdom,[6] for instance, declared that every individual, irrespective of his or her ethnic background, must obey none other than the law of the nation. In addition to the general clauses, however, King Le Thanh Tong promulgated further articles that took account of the specific characteristics of the Man Lieu (ethnic minorities of northern Viet Nam). A wrongdoer belonging to an ethnic majority was, according to the codes, liable to face more severe punishment than a member of an ethnic minority found guilty of committing a similar offence. The codes ultimately encouraged ethnic groups to reconsider their customary laws in the light of the common laws of the nation.

The central authorities took responsibility for every area of the highlanders' lives, including security and national defence. They, in return, were expected to perform their duties as far as their abilities and circumstances permitted. The regional mandarinate – the local authority in charge of highland minorities – remained in place until the Nguyen Dynasty. The king established bonds of kinship with the mountain chieftains by offering them his daughters' hands in marriage, appointed them to positions of authority (for which they were at times underqualified), and granted them certain favours and advantages. A regional headman named by the king governed each ethnic group. If ever he flouted royal authority, the king in person, or one of his ministers, would travel to the region to re-establish order. On the whole, the king ruled peacefully thanks to his reputation and high moral standing. He rarely needed to resort to repressive measures and, even when forced to drive out rebels, showed no reluctance to restore their heirs to the same posts.

Our party and state have inherited and developed that policy to the highest possible level. The basic principles of the revolution and resistance have been established in the highlands. Many high-ranking officials, army generals and heroes have belonged to ethnic minorities. Our homeland is grateful for the exploits and contributions of their fighters. Victory at Dien Bien Phu marked the defeat of the French colonizers; Buon Ma Thuot paved the way for the successful campaign of Ho Chi Minh who, having finally won the day, put an end to the country's division. The vital Ho Chi Minh Trail ran the length of the Annamese Cordillera, through the heart of a region populated by ethnic minorities.

Since reunification, the highlands and islands (not to mention the role of ethnic minority compatriots) have come to occupy a place of increasing importance. Our enemies have sought to destabilize these areas, not least because that is where we have been developing the economic hubs that are so crucial to our modernization. Keen to show its appreciation to our minority compatriots for their sacrifices during the conflicts, the state has endeavoured to close the socio-economic gap separating them from the Kinh majority – a legacy of former regimes. Difficulties, however, have emerged due to the region's topography, the incompetence of some officials and underfunding. This said, the people of the highlands have, to this day, managed to preserve precious indigenous cultural values.

Indigenous cultural identity in the highlands comprises characteristic features relating to ethnic groups both within Viet Nam and, more broadly, across South-East Asia. Neither Chinese nor Indian in nature, those features provide a source of the vital energy needed to resist assimilation by the industrialized world. Assimilation, as J. M. Auzias points out, is where genocide ends and ethnocide begins.[7]

AID AND SUPPORT FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

Fighting ethnocide is in itself a means to safeguard and enhance the cultural heritage, especially the intangible cultural heritage, of minority groups. First and foremost, it is important to foster a sense of self-confidence among the ethnic minorities, so that they can become conscious of their duties in the defence and construction of the homeland and gain access to a politico-economic life akin to what other peoples are able to enjoy. This is why the state, since 1945, has striven to eliminate inequalities between ethnic minorities and majorities within the economic, political, cultural and educational spheres. There is not the slightest distinction between races or discrimination for or against any particular ethnic group: a fact enshrined in both the 1946 and 1992 Constitutions of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. Despite the considerable amount of progress made in this field, however, some difficulties still remain. Many researchers have explored the issues involved, as statistics published by the state and by Vietnamese and foreign scientists make apparent.[8]

In spite of continuing difficulties, the economic life of highlanders has considerably improved in areas that are

conducive to economic development: county towns, valley and high plateau villages, mining districts, areas suited to industrial manufacturing. Famine has ceased to be a cause of mortality. But special attention still needs to be devoted to the living conditions of people in mountain peak districts and other isolated areas that are difficult to reach. A decision passed by the government in 1995 enabled considerable sums of money to be released for the fight to eradicate famine and poverty. It established an aid package designed to meet the five basic needs of food, salt, fuel, clothing and medicines: a particularly crucial measure for the 25.2 per cent of the population living – according to 1993 figures – below the poverty line.[9]

Each and every citizen of Viet Nam, irrespective of his or her ethnic roots, has the right to apply for a position of authority. Almost every high-ranking party or government cadre in highland towns and villages comes from an ethnic minority. The proportion of ethnic minority members in the Party Central Committee, the government and the National Assembly outweighs that of ethnic majority members. Nup, Hang Van Thu and others now regarded as national heroes are of ethnic minority descent. Nong Duc Manh, the current President of the National Assembly, is an ethnic Tay. Countless ministers, members of parliament, professors, poets, painters and other artists also belong to ethnic minorities. Our land, it seems, has dispensed with distinctions of ethnic origins.

Before 1945 no more than two or three ethnic minority individuals had ever reached university. The highlands had just four or five primary schools and nearly every member of an ethnic minority was illiterate. Today, the education system covers virtually the whole of the highlands: a primary school in every village; secondary schools in the districts; colleges, universities and institutes in the cities and provinces. By 1985 ethnic minorities had 72,389 individuals attending secondary school, 20,934 enrolled at a university and 186 with a Ph.D. Some 70.9 per cent of the population could read and write, although most lived in the valleys and high plateaux. Schooling in the highlands is still hindered by many difficulties.[10]

Health care services have helped bring the infant mortality rate down to acceptable levels. Population growth among highland groups now exceeds the national average. Back in the years 1943 to 1944, however, B. Roussel feared that the E-de (Rhade) people, the largest ethnic minority in the high plateaux, would vanish within a matter of fifty years.[11] And before the liberation in 1975, two-thirds of the highland villages in Quang Nam-Da Nang Province and the northern high plateaux had disappeared within the space of a few generations.[12] Only one of the twelve Rman villages listed by H. Maitre in 1912 had survived.[13] The situation is rather different today, with the re-emergence of the Ruc and 'yellow leaf' spirits (that is, groups of 100 or so hunter-gatherers in isolated and relatively inaccessible parts of the country), as well as the Laha and O Du. The government, alarmed at the prospect of a population explosion and problems caused by deforestation, is introducing a family planning programme. Although an average-sized highland family usually extends to six or seven persons, some couples have ten or more offspring. Over the coming years, it will be necessary to limit the number of children per couple to three or four at most.

The difficulties encountered in our country's socio-economic development are still enormous as regards raising standards of living here to approaching the kinds of levels found in developed countries. And the situation is two to three times more serious in the highlands, where three-quarters of the population are living below the poverty line. It is vital to improve their levels of education, and to supply them with electricity and scientific and technical knowledge in order to be able to gradually close the gap separating them from the lowlands. Between 300,000 and 500,000 people in the least accessible parts of the country have been struck by natural disasters and epidemics (some 10,000 of them members of ethnic minorities or local communities of 100 to 1,000 inhabitants). Life in these areas is extremely precarious, even with the government's provisions of food and clothing. A host of difficulties can sometimes conspire to prevent delivery of fresh supplies. Infrastructure investment is the key to improving the situation, because roads and electricity are the prerequisites for regional development.[14] This is yet another thorny problem for a country that is very well aware of the need to reward all who shared in the dangers, who fought side by side, through the fiercest of wars. Having the will does not necessarily amount to having the ability, and it is very hard for us to help some of our people find their own way out of their hardships. We believe this to be a common problem in the developing world. The international organizations are committed to protecting rare species: in its own fashion UNESCO is assisting in the protection of dwindling and endangered ethnic groups (of 100 to 1,000 members), not just in Viet Nam, but in Laos and many other countries. This is helping to curb the killing of rare animals and ease problems of deforestation.

A rich cultural heritage

The safeguarding and enhancement of the cultural heritage in general, and the intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in particular, hinges, as suggested above, on efforts to assist those minorities and to raise their standards of living. They themselves might not appreciate the value of analysing and promoting their cultural heritage, but such work is very useful in that it allows them to understand and take pride in their culture. Hence the need for appropriate policy making on the part of the government, and a considerable effort on the part of groups of social scientists working above all in the fields of ethnology, linguistics, folklore and so on. Books published by Vietnamese authors prior to – and by French and Vietnamese during – the French occupation offer significant insight into the ethnic highlanders. Take, for instance, the writings of Le Quy Don, Hoang Binh Chinh, Pham Than Duat, Bui Duong Lich, Nguyen Thong, and Be Huynh; or later publications by Nguyên Van Huyên, Trân Van Giap, Dao Duy Anh, Nguyên Thiên Lau and Nguyên Van Tô; and works by French authors such as A. Pavie, D. de Lagrée, R. R. J. B. Guerlach, P. Dourisboure, A. Bonifacy, H. Maitre, F. M. Savina, C. Robequain, J. Dournes, J. Cuisinier, J. Boulbet, P. Guilleminet and, last but not least, A. G. Haudricourt and G. Condominas, both of them great writers and friends of Viet Nam from the times of anti-American resistance through to the present day.

Given the circumstances in the period leading up to post-1954, only Ho Chi Minh could have ordered scientists to begin working on a systematic study of the highland communities of Viet Nam.[15] This work was entrusted to the Institute of Ethnography, a number of university ethnographical research groups, the Institute of Folklore, the Institute of Literature and the Institute of Cultural and Artistic Research, among others.

The result, after more than twenty years of research, was a system classifying ethnic peoples and local subgroups according to sound ethnolinguistic criteria. Scientists appreciate the system because it presents a reliable account of the characteristics found in specific regions. Every pejorative name referring to an ethnic minority in scornful or inaccurate terms was discarded. Every group, from the largest (1,000,000) to the smallest (100), had been scientifically identified.[16] Each was presented by a Vietnamese author, in varying depths of detail, of course. The wealth of ethnic cultural diversity has since been presented in hundreds of books – including dozens of bilingual editions – and provided the bases for scientific analysis. Much of it has quickly and naturally come to be counted among the cultural treasures of Viet Nam. Highlanders mostly have their own, quite unique, cultural characteristics, which is not necessarily so in the case of the Kinh. Their folk-songs, dances, sagas, statues, sculptures, musical instruments and decorations have enriched our common heritage, and become integral to the art and literature of the entire Vietnamese people.

The reach of ethnic cultural heritage now extends beyond the confines of individual groups, to people throughout the land and even abroad. We find startling examples of an ethnic group's artefacts gaining wider acceptance: bamboo instruments like the t'*rưng* and the *krongput* (Hmong pan-pipes) now figuring with the other traditional instruments played by the Vietnamese National Orchestra; the stone xylophone (lithophone) being regarded as just as precious as the bronze drum; lowlanders playing cymbals from the high plateaux; and Muong gongs during festivals down on the plains.

A melding together of various influences

Viet Nam's ethnic communities all have common – Austric or Austro-Asiatic – cultural origins, but these have become covered, over time, by influences from China, beyond the northern mountains, then from India. So their cultures are composed of endogenous (indigenous) and exogenous (Chinese, Indian and, more recently, Western) elements. Their people, though, have become neither Sinicized nor Indianized, most decisively because they have acculturated elements of exogenous cultures and fused them with the bedrock indigenous one. This was noted, among others, by C. V. Bishop,[17] H. G. Creel,[18] and D. J. E. Hall,[19] none of whom went into very great detail. Vietnamese and foreign archaeologists have uncovered convincing evidence of a continuous thread back through the Neolithic to the Palaeolithic age.

To study a culture already cloaked in the dusts of time, we need to embrace the ethnic minorities inhabiting out of the way places, beyond the effective reach of exogenous cultures, for that is where to find preserved the last living elements of indigenous culture. The safeguarding and extension of the highland ethnic minorities' cultural heritage will restore the local culture of a whole glorious age of history. Then those minorities can proudly face down any threat of ethnocide and prove La Fontaine wrong when he says that 'the stronger man's argument is always the best'. (Fables I.10.)

Indigenous cultures in South-East-Asia, by – among other things – their sheer vitality, have attracted the attention of a good many researchers. One eminent expert, George Coèdes, towards the end of his life, recognized that a number of his earlier theories had been ill-founded, and declared Viet Nam to have once been a region with its own civilization, which was eventually covered over with cultural influences from China and India.[20] Meanwhile, others have claimed that this civilization could have shared features in common with the Siberian Far East and parts of eastern Africa, especially Madagascar.[21] It is true that such an Austro-Asiatic civilization exists, and today it faces the threat of extinction.

In 1978 the author of this article and his colleagues chanced upon an astonishing find during a visit to a Sedang-Todra settlement: an open-air forge with two goatskins opened at the top, bellows of a kind not usually seen in the region, and capable of inducing temperatures of 1,000 to 1,200 °C.[22] Where did that forge come from? In 1989 the author made another chance discovery when, on a visit to Cornell University Library in Ithaca (New York State), he came across an anonymous drawing showing a cross-section of a quite similar looking forge used by the Kuy of Compong Soai (Cambodia) for smelting iron ore.[23] The Todra and Kuy both belong to the same Mon-Khmer linguistic family. Seventy Todra villages in northern Kontum have since abandoned their traditional furnaces in favour of modern steel-producing technologies. When cultural features such as these are 'unfashionable', they should be conserved in a museum and described in books. Otherwise, future generations will never know about the furnaces that, 100 years ago, were used to forge goods which were supplied to the whole of the northern high plateaux and parts of southern Laos; or that just thirty to fifty years ago, they served to forge weapons for the patriots engaged in struggles against the country's aggressors.

A wealth of scientific information

In the 1940s and 1950s scientists inspired by the early works of the above-mentioned authors began turning their attention to studying elements of indigenous cultures preserved underground. These included such typical Austro-Asiatic features as: single and dual spiralling ramparts (Tam Van in Dien Bien, Co Loa in Hanoi); irrigation dikes and other terrain-specific waterworks (suited to foothills, valleys, delta areas, etc.); signs of domesticated animals (elephants, buffalo, pigs, hens, dogs); evidence of metallurgical workmanship; junks with curved prows and bamboo rafts for inland and coastal navigation; chewing betel and black lacquer to protect the teeth; houses built on piles and shaped like boats – wide at the top and narrow at the bottom; ponchos and straight-cut open tunics, clothing made from tree bark (*tapa*), manual looms with twin warp beams; typical farming tools such as the high plateaux axe (*sa gac*), the machete, the swing plough, the pair of sticks and harvesting blade; arms and armour (axes, crossbows, shields, etc.); everyday domestic items (vases, jars, fine pottery) and jewellery (necklaces, bracelets, earrings with stones to stretch the lobe to shoulder level, etc.); geometric designs used in weaving and basketwork; musical instruments such as gongs, cymbals, bronze drums, pan-pipes (*khene*), flutes and others made from bamboo, wood, and stone (lithophone); *objets d'art* (wooden statuettes of people, birds, animals).

Investigation also turned up items revealing facets of social organization: in some cases a matrilineal system, with women holding the predominant place in society and religious life, and in others a patrilineal context, with the enduring importance of the village or hamlet as a unit, customary law, and so on; legends relating an ethnic group's origins, homogeneity and diversity, such as the legends of the first man and woman emerging from a marrow, the woman and the dog, or the brother and sister; beliefs, religions, agricultural festivals and rites, worship of protectors (angels, spirits of nature, ancestors), stones, plants and trees, especially the banyan and the silk cotton tree (symbol of longevity for people and the community), etc.; unique forms of literature and art, including fine and modest architecture, stone and wood carvings, water puppetry, dances, love songs, sagas, etc.; coins and objects of barter (buffalo, bronze drums, marble bracelets, cowrie shells, fabrics, etc.); original customs and means of bonding between two or more communities, families or individuals (quan hă singing among the Ktu and other highlanders, for example); means of communication; fire lighting techniques; objects symbolizing peace or war, and so on.

A strong core of tradition

Indigenous cultures have, to this day, conserved their essential traits, but in evolved forms incorporating features from Chinese, Indian and Western cultures. Chinese influences first appeared in the north of the country, before gradually spreading southwards; Indian influences began in central and southern parts, before they spread northwards, with Buddhism. Western influences used to be

concentrated in big cities, but now they have begun gaining ground in the countryside and up in the highlands. Indigenous cultures have, over thousands of years of historical evolution, managed to synthesize some or all of these influences. All cultural components have features in common, but each ethnic community has its own, unique way of expressing itself, stemming from its living conditions and level of development, its members' mentalities and the region's physical characteristics. Each has a distinct identity most visibly expressed in its folklore and arts, especially when it has its own system of writing.

Inter-ethnic cultural osmosis was remarkably widespread in the pre-industrial age, when the strength of an autochthonous culture hinged on its ability to blend endogenous and exogenous influences. Northern-style houses with a ground floor have not displaced traditional houses built on piles. Mongolian-style coats (with overflaps) are worn, but so are Austric ponchos and tunics. Though exact dates may have differed for festivals such as New Year and so on, every ethnic minority still uses the lunar calendar. Ethnic groups have – for the family, community (village, hamlet) and nation – kept intact their unique traditions in terms of cuisine and belief systems (ancestor worship, a diversity of agricultural festivals and rites, etc.). Aesthetic sensitivities manifest themselves in many different ways: through cultural activities, but also in beautifully decorated backpacks carried with flails, for instance, or the graceful sails adorning a diverse array of boats, rafts and so on. Folklore has been preserved in popular dances, songs and music.

Vietnamese scientists have accumulated a significant pool of finds. Hundreds have been collected, analysed and made public.[22] Cultural activities, publishing and museums could be said to have been responsible for safeguarding and rendering accessible the tangible and intangible culture of every ethnic group. The cultural heritage, of highland groups in particular, is better protected now that it has been taken stock of and classified as a national treasure. The safeguarding and extension of – especially the intangible – cultural heritage of ethnic communities has in fact become an issue to which the authorities devote as much attention as they do to improving material and cultural standards of living. Administrators and scientific research establishments are firmly committed to the task, but results so far have been limited due to material and budgetary constraints.

VITAL DIVERSITY IN A MODERN WORLD

Preventing cultural assimilation has become a priority issue to all involved in the struggle to conserve and promote ethnic cultural identity. Ethnic people today have a duty to act as members of their community, citizens of the nation and members of the human race. What could be drearier than life in a society whose architect had been inspired by international airports and luxury villas? It would eventually come to be like living in an army barracks, with a never-ending succession of orders to apply in an identical fashion each time – a cheerless prospect, but the likely outcome if ever the protective dike of national culture fails to shield the ethnic minorities from the forces of a modern world where some still take La Fontaine's maxim for granted, and where the influence of exogenous cultures can filter in through trade channels and the mass media. Industrialized, developed countries like France, for example, strive to protect their age-old cultures and languages by remaining vigilant, and find the necessary measures to prevent cultural assimilation. It is vitally important that the achievements of the modern world be studied and inherited. But that does not mean that a superpower today does not have to rely on other countries. Indeed, ours is an age of independence and interdependence rolled into one.

Industry is obviously going to have a negative impact on some forms of tangible and intangible culture, particularly the most archaic, even though these happen to be of considerable importance to the country. The scale of the phenomenon is likely to grow in some countries if the most destitute groups come to regard their cultural heritage as expendable in light of the material hardships that they face. Some, dazzled by scientific and technological successes, believe that they are far better off than the kings who never knew the wonders of aircraft, motor cars and television. But they fail to see that the industrialized world has another side to it that drives people to self-centredness.

It is important to specify that the blending of exogenous and endogenous cultural features in Viet Nam was already happening in the pre-industrial age. It takes time to construct a modern, new way of life rooted in national traditions and to come up with the means to absorb selectively and coexist with Western civilization. Tolerance and openness in cultural exchanges are traditional Vietnamese qualities. Respecting its ethnic minorities and their cultures is also becoming traditional in Viet Nam. The first difficul-

ties encountered in the age of openness inevitably disorientated and generated misconceptions among cadres and the population. Part of the problem was that Viet Nam could not become as industrialized a country as it might have liked within such a short space of time.

Today, after forty years of country-wide solidarity between all the ethnic groups, the disgrace of slavery has disappeared. But with this disgrace eliminated, a new form of ignominy is now emerging: poverty and underdevelopment. Viet Nam is just as well-equipped to eliminate this new scourge, to conserve its identity in the world and bring the waters of its rivers to the ocean of humanity. Vietnamese scientists have been surprised to find that the people – even under threat of economic dependence – are concerned for the safeguarding, extension and enhancement of the cultural traditions of the Vietnamese nation as a whole and, in particular, its different ethnic groups. That concern has been picked up and amplified by those in charge of scientific and cultural research.

Efforts have been under way across the plains regions to generate a monograph of every hamlet, district and province. This has led to the reconstruction of cultural and religious sites, including ancestral tombs. Progress has been somewhat slower in the highlands, but an agenda has been set to create a system of writing for minority languages, to publish indigenous literature, in original language or bilingual editions, and to construct museums of local culture.

Another requirement is that research be undertaken in order to protect national and ethnic cultural features through objects – images, books, museums, and so on – and to make them a part of everyday as much as of literary and artistic life. Efforts to achieve this require an adequate budget and training for the experts. It is essential for every member of the Vietnamese population, of every ethnic group, to have faith in the strength of the traditional culture. One day the Vietnamese people, born of a multi-ethnic nation, is certain to stand among the civilized nations of our age, with its own cultural identity formed by pooling the knowledge of each ethnic group, down to the very smallest. Acting as protector of ethnic minorities living on its soil, Viet Nam is perfectly ready to welcome other ethnic groups, as it has done throughout its history.

In conclusion, it should be said that safeguarding and enhancing the identity of Vietnamese culture goes hand in hand with the will to protect and promote the Austric or Austro-Asiatic heritage of a tropical, monsoonal, rice-growing region. Our goal is to shed fresh light on the existence of an ancient culture with a distinct identity and a creditable claim to worldwide recognition. For the sake of absolute clarity, co-operation will need to be established between regional scientists and foreign researchers.

In this campaign to gain recognition for the traditions of the Vietnamese people, UNESCO – particularly the Intangible Heritage Section – must be thanked for all its efforts. It offers a marvellous opportunity for Vietnamese and Lao collectively to consider the fact that they have to be the protectors of their own cultural heritage. If they are not conscious enough of this, then the same things may happen as in the tale from Vietnamese folklore where a man is given the body of an erudite scholar (Trang Ba), while his soul is that of a pork butcher.

NOTES

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5. Dang Nghiêm Van, 'The Flood Myth and the Origin of Ethnic Groups in Southeast Asia', *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 106 (421), Summer 1993, pp. 304–337.
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8. See the following recent publications: Dang Nghiêm Van (ed.), *Development in the High Plateaux*, Hanoi, Social Science Publications, 1989 (in Vietnamese); Bê Viêt Dang (ed.), *The Ethnic Minorities of Vietnam: Fifty Years On*, Hanoi, Social Science Publications, 1995 (in Vietnamese); Bê Viêt Dang (ed.), *The Ethnic Minorities in Highland Socio-economic Development*, Hanoi, Social Science Publications, 1995 (in Vietnamese).
9. Op cit.

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11. B. Y. Jouin, 'Enquête démographique au Darlac 1943–1944', *B.S.E.I.*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1950.

12. Dang Nghiêm Van, *Some Essential and Urgent Socio-economic Problems in the Highlands of Quang Nam-Da Nang*, QNDN Ethnic Affairs Section, 1987. (In Vietnamese.)

13. H. Maitre, *Les Jungles Moi*, Paris, Larose, 1912. Only one of the ninety-two villages inventoried still stands in its original place, and the only group is the *Rma who* were moved to Kontum by the Americans and ultimately became akin to the *Bana*.

14. Dang Nghiêm Van, 'Some Essential and Urgent Socio-economic Problems in the High Plateaux', in *Socio-economic Problems in the High Plateaux*, Hanoi, Social Science Publications, 1986, p. 74. (In Vietnamese.)

15. During the French occupation, many of the people living in the mountains were non-indigenous migrants, making it impossible for scientists to study highland ethnic groups.

16. See 'L'Identification ethnique au Vietnam', a paper delivered by Dang Nghiêm Van at CeDRASEMI, Paris, 1982.

17. A. Bishop, 'The Beginnings of North and South of China', *Pacific Affairs*, No. 7, 1934, pp. 292–325.

18. H. G. Creel, *The Birth of China*, 1937.

19. D. J. E. Hall, *A History of South East Asia*, Moscow, 1958. (Russian-language edition.)

20. Cf. G. Coedès, *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, Paris, 1948; P. and G. Coèdès, *Les peuples de la péninsule indochinoise* (1962). In the latter, G. Coedès criticizes his earlier view (expressed in the former) that Indo-China was a semi-Indianized, semi-Sinicized region.

21. P. Boiteau, *Contribution à l'histoire de la nation malgache: Madagascar*, Paris, 1958.

22. Dang Nghiêm Van et al., *Ethnic Groups in Gia Lai-Kon Tum Province*, Hanoi, Social Science Publications, 1981, pp. 177–9. (In Vietnamese.)

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Protecting the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in Viet Nam

TO NGOC THANH

COLLECTION AND RESEARCH ON MINORITY CULTURES IN VIET NAM

Like Laos and some other South-East Asian countries, Viet Nam is a multi-ethnic country, with fifty-four ethnic groups. Each ethnicity has its own rich culture whose unique and strong characteristics are reflected in spiritual activities, lifestyles, customs, artistic performances, handicrafts, medicinal plant knowledge, abilities in astronomic forecasting, and so on.

Throughout the thousands of years of national history, there has been contact between the ethnic cultures and the culture of the majority so that the ethnic cultures have a distinct and unique identity on the one hand, and common Vietnamese characteristics on the other. In Viet Nam, the culture of each ethnicity is also the public property of all fifty-four Vietnamese ethnicities. Thus, if a dance of Thai ethnicity from the north of the country or an idiophonic percussion T'rung of the Bahnar wins a gold medal at an international festival of dance, music and song, that gold medal is conferred upon the culture of Viet Nam.

The languages of the Vietnamese ethnicities belong to the great linguistic families in South-East Asia, the Austro-Asiatic, Austronesian, Chino-Tibeto-Burmese and Thai-Tay. Many Vietnamese ethnic groups share an ancestry with other South-East Asian countries. The Kho Mu people of Viet Nam can understand the language and customs of the Khamu of Laos as well as those of the Khamu people living in north-eastern Thailand.

Aware of the importance of ethnic cultures in the preservation and promotion of national cultural identity, the Vietnamese Government has issued proposals and policies in this field. Collection and research related to culture has been carried out since 1955 in the north, and throughout the whole country since 1975. Under the direction of the Ministry of Culture, the research divisions of music, dance, theatre and culture were established in 1956. In 1977 these became research institutes – institutes of culture, musicology and choreography, theatre and of the fine arts. These specialized institutes are parts of a larger institute, the Viet Nam National Institute of Culture and Arts Studies.

These research institutes have been at work for over forty years, even during wartime, and a large collection of documents on ethnic music, dance, fine arts and customs has been assembled. A group of collectors and researchers of ethnic cultures and arts has grown up, many of whom are themselves members of minority groups, and their achievements have been significant. However, looking back over what has been done, we are also aware of shortcomings and mistakes.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN COLLECTION: FAILINGS DUE TO THE DESIRE TO MODERNIZE

Each collection has been carried out within the limits of a narrow specialization. For example, musicologists have only collected songs, musical pieces and musical instruments. Dance researchers have only been concerned with gesture and movement. Theatre researchers have collected what concerns the performance of theatrical plays, such as make-up, costume, scenery and performance techniques. Meanwhile, the organic relationship between artistic genres as components of an artistic entity seems to have been overlooked – a cross-disciplinary view is lacking. Judgements on artistic values are made mainly from artistic or technological aspects, and lack a cultural viewpoint. Consequently, research has evaluated only external manifestations, without delving into the nature and characteristics of artistic phenomena.

Collection and research activity has sought only materials from which new artistic items may be created. Musicians have looked for folk melodies to use in the composition of new songs. Choreographers have collected gestures and movements to make new dances. This method means that their creations show the bold colours of the national arts, but do not help research into and appreciation of the national arts themselves. The danger is that this method crushes traditional aesthetic and cultural values into a 'powder' with which contemporary creators can make new 'cakes'. It destroys the complete structures that comprise a lively social entity with its own developmental rules; and of course, the cultural values lose social and human significance and function, becoming 'elements', as in chemistry. Through research we have understood only separate parts of an organism but have learnt nothing of its totality. Unfortunately, we have been satisfied with this approach for a long time, believing that it was leading to a better understanding of ethnic culture.

In order to promote traditional artistic and cultural values, we have thought that it is essential to 'modernize' them. This modernization presupposes that Western-type works ought to be created from the 'powder' of traditional culture. For example, in order to modernize national music, the 'powder' of national music has been used to compose musical pieces in concerto or sonata form. To modernize national musical instruments, a Western symphony orchestra pattern has been used to design a symphonic orchestra of national instruments. Because the chordophonic instruments of a symphony orchestra are of different sizes (for example the violin, viola, cello and bass), the two-stringed fiddle (nhi) has been redesigned in these different sizes. However, since the large-sized nhi does not emit a sufficiently bass sound, the Western bass is used in the so-called 'national' orchestra. Again, quan ho is a traditional style of singing, alternating between male and female. In order to modernize *quan ho*, the accompaniment was written first on the accordion, later on the electric organ, and now on traditional instruments. However, this is quite dangerous and counter-productive, because the accompaniment has been written according to the principles of harmony and orchestration of European classical music, whereas *quan ho* melodies are based on the pentatonic scale. A similar modernization is seen in every artistic genre, replacing unique values of traditional aesthetic thought with the aesthetic of the European classical period, and destroying the more particular features of the local artistic genre. Such 'modernization' presupposes that the masses – the cultural creators – are sources and 'powder' to be exploited. Cultural creation is no longer their task, but belongs to 'experts' – professional creators from the élite class. The masses are only the receivers. This professionalization process in culture and the arts is regarded as social progress and as an excellent manifestation of modern society.

In addition to this modernization, we teach the younger generation only what is 'modified' or 'modernized'. In Viet Nam, conservatoires are faculties of traditional instruments; that is to say, in these faculties students are taught to play traditional instruments. However, most newly composed pieces use European forms. Thus, students learn to play traditional instruments, but do not learn traditional music, and this leads to a break in the tradition. To use a metaphor: the totality of the traditional culture is a mass of gold, many tons in weight. We take a few kilograms from that mass and make rings to a Western design. We give these rings to the younger generation and say that they comprise the whole national cultural tradition. The younger generation will know nothing of the huge mass of gold, which will be sunk deep in the past, or even destroyed by the younger generation in the mistaken belief that it is only a mass of common clay.

It seems that we have made no protest, and have even encouraged the study of foreign cultural values. We know that cultural exchange is a part of the development of every national culture. Vietnamese culture has absorbed a great many values from the cultures of China, France, India and Russia. So new creations with European influence ('modern-

ized' and 'modified' creations) are accepted if they are considered of the necessary quality. The concern is that we have inadequately understood the term 'modernization'. The term refers not only to external factors, but more importantly to an internal modification of the national culture. Although we should have taught the younger generation the whole range of national cultural values, we have actually taught them only modernized and modified values.

These achievements, shortcomings and mistakes affect the cultures of both majority and minority Vietnamese groups. From past experience, we would like to alert everyone to some problems in safeguarding and promoting the intangible culture of minority groups in particular, and of national culture in general.

AWARENESS

It is essential to reaffirm that the culture of minority groups is an inseparable component of national culture in a multi-ethnic country. The factor of the state must be considered decisive for the role, position and cultural identity of each minority group. Each state has its own historical, economic, social and cultural processes. Although they have the same Thai-Tay origin, Thai people in Viet Nam do not claim the same relationship with Buddhism as their ancestors in Laos or Thailand, which makes it possible to speak of a Thai culture in Viet Nam, or a Thai-Tay culture in Laos or in Thailand. On the other hand, the factor of the state also shows that cultural processes differ between groups within an ethnicity, but are linked to the histories of various states, creating a distinct cultural identity for each group.

Cultures of the minority groups within a state are not only the property, the cultural identity, of that ethnicity, but are also the property and cultural identity of the whole national culture. This is of importance because it calls for and regulates necessary responsibilities. On the part of the government, attention must be paid to the preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of minority groups as an essential part of the protection of national culture. Each ethnicity should see that its culture is respected and encouraged by the government to develop in its own right, and that it is also an element of the national culture. Therefore, in safeguarding and promoting national identity, the ethnic cultures contribute to the development of the national culture. Researchers and artists collect, study, conserve and disseminate cultural identity both through formal state channels and through informal channels. Ethnic people are the ones who preserve, teach and integrate traditional cultural values in their everyday cultural life. All manifestations of chauvinism harm the development of ethnic culture.

Ethnicities in the same country may have an unequal level of social development. They may be at different stages of human civilization. However, stages of civilization do not always correspond to cultural values. The culture of each ethnicity, despite any perceived lower civilization level, has a value which ought to be properly appreciated and respected. Some ethnicities in the highlands of central Viet Nam have a level of development not considered high, but their gong music is astonishingly developed and is part of one of Viet Nam's uniquely valuable cultures. To appreciate this situation is to avoid any discrimination prompted by judgements of culture using the standards of the prevailing civilization.

METHODOLOGY AND POLICIES

In order to achieve the best results in safeguarding and promoting the intangible cultural heritage of minority groups and to arrive at appropriate policies, according to our experience, a sound methodology is essential. The intangible culture of almost every ethnicity is folk culture. It owes its existence to the memory of generations. It has been materialized and taught through practice and performance. If these activities fail, for whatever reason, the intangible culture exists only in the memory of the ageing, as a memory of the past, and will die when those who remember it die. The government and cultural management institutions must therefore have policies to encourage ethnic people to preserve and organize intangible cultural activities in their everyday life. This is the best way to safeguard and promote intangible cultural heritage.

The intangible culture of each ethnicity is the result of creative generations of that ethnicity. In each generation there are persons with a talent for implementing, organizing and deeply understanding national cultural values. They are excellent representatives of national culture, and they themselves will be able to pass on the values of culture and teach the younger generation. Some, due to their social situation, also play an important role in religious activity, which is why in many cases they are not respected by the present authorities. The government should offer privileged treatment and show respect to these persons.

Through them we can understand more about national cultural values and organize traditional cultural activities for the people, recording those activities with modern audiovisual equipment.

Collectors, researchers, artists, teachers in arts colleges and local cultural personnel all play an important and decisive role in the safeguarding and promoting of intangible cultural heritage. They should have a knowledge of the cultural genre of the ethnic culture that they research. It is even better if they can speak the language of that ethnicity. They should also get to know their research field objectively, avoiding judgements that are subject to individual prejudice. They need to be versed in the processes of collection, research, dissemination and teaching, and should benefit from preferential government policies and training plans.

The government should issue a series of policies in this field; policy declarations are immediately needed in some areas. It is necessary to promulgate laws to safeguard and promote cultural heritage in general, and intangible cultural heritage in particular in order to encourage ethnic people to carry out intangible cultural activities in their everyday life. It is necessary to recognize the collection, research, dissemination and teaching of intangible cultural heritage as ongoing activities in the annual socio-economic plans, with appropriate budgeting.

Situation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ethnic Minority Groups in China (Yunnan Province)

LU HUI

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese province of Yunnan is known for the diversity of its ethnic groups. In fact twenty-five of the fifty-five ethnic groups officially recognized since 1949 as *minzu* or 'national minorities' by the Chinese Government live in Yunnan. Another two groups, the Kucong and the Kmhmu', do not have national minority status. Most of these minorities live grouped together in three-quarters of the area of Yunnan, especially in the south along the border with Viet Nam, Laos and Myanmar. A few other groups are scattered in the mountainous regions of the province. These ethnic groups number 12,350,000,[1] representing 40 per cent of the total population of Yunnan Province, the other 60 per cent being Han or Chinese proper.

The Han of Yunnan have for the most part come from the other provinces in the interior of China. Their ancestors settled in Yunnan, either as peasant-soldiers seeking land under various Court migration schemes from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries to people this distant province, or as prisoners convicted and transported to this wild mountain area, isolated from the rest of the Chinese. Other Han came to Yunnan in more recent times, during the Second World War. Within a few centuries the Han population exceeded that of the autochthonous inhabitants and now constitutes the majority population in Yunnan.

The ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province speak languages belonging to different language families. The official 1990 Census gives the following population figures for Yunnan's ethnic minorities: the Austro-Asiatic family there consists of less than 10,000 Benglong, 82,000 Bulang and less than 10,000 Kmhmu'; the Tibeto-Burman family includes 15,000 Achang, 1,600,000 Bai, 6,000 Dulong, 1,250,000 Hani, 182,000 Jino, 411,000 Lahu, 580,000 Lisu, 278,000 Moso[2] and Naxi, 27,000 Nu, 30,000 Pumi, 100,000 Tibetans and 3,500,000 Yi; the Zhuang-Tai family consists of 800,000 Zhuang and 1,000,000 Tai; and the Miao-Yao family of 380,000 Miao and 20,000 Yao.

The case of two groups, the Hui and the Mongols, is exceptional. The Hui are a Muslim minority who use written Arabic in the practice of their religion and speak Chinese for everyday purposes. There are between 80,000 and 90,000 of them in Yunnan. As for the Mongols, there are 4,800,000 in China – in inner Mongolia in particular – but a few thousand came and settled in a district in the centre of Yunnan in the thirteenth century. They speak Yi and Chinese, the languages of their neighbours.

CHINESE LEGISLATION IN REGARD TO NATIONAL MINORITIES

In 1984 the National People's Congress (NPC) promulgated a law on the autonomous regions of national minorities, subsequently amended in 2001.The NPC is made up of representatives belonging to fifty-five national minorities and the Han, the majority group. This law is the first since 1949 to mention the rights of national minorities. It provides for the introduction of a system of representation for civil service recruitment in all autonomous districts or regions having one or more minorities. This system is intended to ensure that national minorities have access to posts of responsibility at local level. At present there are in Yunnan some eight autonomous regions and nineteen autonomous districts of different minorities. Together these regions and districts represent 69 per cent of the total area of the province.

The law also guarantees the right of the minorities, within their regions, to use their languages in the printed press, radio and television, publishing and in public places. Books in Chinese have thus been translated into some of the minority languages, and films have been dubbed in them. Furthermore, the national minorities are entitled to holidays on the occasion of traditional festivals. The celebration of their traditional rituals is again authorized in the context of the preservation of the traditional cultures of the minorities.

EDUCATION SYSTEM

Right into the 1980s the language of tuition for children belonging to the ethnic minorities was Chinese from primary level. Chinese is essential for integration into working life, since practically all the competitive examinations for civil service employment or university entrance are conducted solely in Chinese. However, since 1984, changes have been observed in the field of education. In the case of ethnic minorities using their own languages and scripts, tuition is given in the mother tongue for the first three years of primary school, then in bilingual classes (the mother tongue and Chinese) up to the end of primary school. In fact, from what I have seen, in certain remote Yi villages tuition is given in Yi alone during the five years of primary school, since Han teachers do not want to go and work in these mountain regions where life is considered difficult.

In the case of ethnic groups having no writing system, or speaking in addition to their own language those of neighbouring groups outnumbering them as, for example, the Bulang or the Jino who speak Thai, and the Mongols who speak Yi or Chinese, things are far more complicated. In most cases basic education is given in the vernacular and in Chinese.

For secondary education there are two types of school: the Chinese school in which tuition is given exclusively in Chinese, and the 'national minorities' school in which tuition is bilingual, in Chinese and in the students' mother tongue, which may be Tai, Yi, Miao, Tibetan or any other language, according to the region. Many students are boarders, the state and the local authorities sharing the cost of their schooling and board. Students contribute to the cost of their meals, though the poorest of them may receive grants. On successfully completing the course at a secondary school for national minorities, students are expected to return to work in their home villages as primary school teachers or key personnel.

For higher education, a competitive national examination is organized by the state every year. Only candidates obtaining certain marks are accepted for enrolment in the universities. These entrance marks vary from one province to another, and from one university to another, according to the prestige of the university and the number of places available and of candidates for entrance. As well as foreign languages, among which candidates have a choice of English, French, German or Japanese, they can enter for other subjects in Chinese, Korean, Mongolian, Uighur or Tibetan, according to choice. However, candidates from other ethnic minorities have to sit the exam in Chinese, which is a great handicap, especially for those who completed their secondary education in a school for national minorities.

In this competitive system, even if students from ethnic minorities were to be granted certain favours in regard to university entrance marks, they would nevertheless have great difficulty in passing the examination owing to their generally inadequate command of Chinese. Institutes and universities reserved for students from the ethnic minorities have therefore been set up to facilitate their access to higher education in Chinese. The first of these date back more than thirty years. Young people from the ethnic minorities can enter this type of university more easily since the marks required are not so high.

For about twelve years now, hundreds of secondary school pupils selected from the different ethnic groups have been

sent to board in the cities, often in the capital of the province, far from their homes, to attend preparatory courses for the university entrance examination. The rare candidates to be admitted to the best universities in the country are regarded as the 'élite' of their ethnic group, being the first graduates and the only ones to have really overcome the language barrier to the extent of undertaking higher studies such as Han. However, these preferential admission marks for candidates from ethnic minorities are not granted to those who live in towns, or to the Bai or the Hui in Yunnan, for they are all regarded as sinicized and 'culturally developed' to a point which renders assistance unnecessary.

FAMILY PLANNING IN RESPECT OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

Under Chinese law, in regard to 'ethnic' filiation, any child with one parent from a minority and the other a Han is entitled, on attaining the age of 18 (the majority), to choose to be a Han or to belong to that minority. A child born of parents of different minorities may choose to belong to the mother's or the father's; it is not possible to belong to both minorities. As over the past twelve years or so government policy has been more favourable to the minorities than to the Han in matters of education and other social advantages (housing, promotion, etc.), children of 'mixed' marriages tend to choose to belong to the minority in order to benefit from these privileges, so they retain their ethnic and cultural identity. This concern for ethnic identity is another reason for the demographic growth to be observed in a number of ethnic groups, such as the Russians and the Mongolians living in the north and north-west of China. There was a time when they claimed to belong to the Han, but now they prefer to exchange Han nationality for that of the minority from which they came.

In regard to family planning, except in the case of Muslim Han, and Bai and Yi living in towns, who are regarded as the most sinicized and the most numerous after the Han, ethnic minorities should enjoy a more favourable policy than that applying to the Han, who can have only one child. If one of the spouses is from a minority, a couple may have two children, whether they live in the country or in a town. Until 1989 couples who had a fourth child were fined from 150 to 400 Yuan. Very often, however, members of ethnic minorities were unable to pay these fines and the local Family Planning Commission as a rule was not empowered to enforce payment.

INSTITUTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

At provincial level, there are two state-funded ethnological research institutes in Yunnan, one of which comes under the Academy of Social Sciences of Yunnan, and the other under the Provincial Commission for Minority Affairs, in addition th the department of anthropology of the University of Yunnan. Within the university and institutes of history, literature or religion, many researchers, either Han or members of ethnic minorities, take part in studies on the ethnic minorities. As a result, Yunnan is one of the most important centres of ethnological research, particularly in ethnohistory and ethnobotany. Studies cover religion, history, economic and political systems, development and so forth. All these institutions are public and are therefore financed by the state and the provincial authorities.

In Yunnan, the publishing house Minzu, established in Kunming, specializes in publications in a number of minority languages, Yi, Bai, Tai, Miao and Jingpo in particular. It comes under the Provincial Commission for Minority Affairs. Furthermore, the Yunnan Provincial Radio broadcasts its programmes in a dozen ethnic minority languages.

As well as the public research institutes, there are a number of associations of specialists involved in the study of specific ethnic groups. These interdisciplinary associations organize seminars and symposia and publish journals devoted to their members' studies. Then there is the all-powerful Association for Studies of the Ethnic Minorities of South-West China whose members meet regularly every two years to discuss different themes, pool their findings and consider new research projects. This association groups nearly all the Chinese specialists of repute in the study of the ethnic minorities of the south-west of the country. The chairperson is always a specialist or professor famous for research in this field.

THE EFFORTS OF THE ETHNIC MINORITIES TO PRESERVE THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE

The new policy of reforms and the recent laws in regard to ethnic minorities has also spurred members of the minorities to enter the competition introduced by the market economy like everyone else, while arousing a renewed awareness of their identity. The more they succeed in life, the more worried they are by seeing their children tending more and

more towards sinicization, speaking their languages less and less, ignoring the importance of the traditional rituals, abandoning tradition, tempted by another way of life. Such is the case of the Yi in Chuxiong in the west of Yunnan.

To safeguard its heritage, the Yi Autonomous District of Chuxiong, with a population of almost one million Yi, set up its own Institute for Research on Yi Culture in 1984. Here young Yi graduates work on their culture, under the direction of a Yi researcher, Liu Yaohan. The work of the institute consists in filming rituals, collecting oral traditions, organizing symposia and so on. Many publications have already been issued by this institute, the first of its kind in China.

In contrast with the Yi festivals and folk performances organized annually by the local and provincial authorities for the benefit of visitors from diverse backgrounds, this new institute founded and run by the Yi themselves represents a big step forward in the preservation of the Yi cultural identity, and sets an example for others. Following the example of Chuxiong, the Hani in the south of Yunnan founded an Institute for Research on Akha Hani Culture in Honghe, while international conferences on the Akha/Hani were organize in Yunnan and Thailand, this year. Then, at the beginning of the 1990s, an Institute for Research on the Dongba Script[3] was set up in Lijiang in Naxi country in the north-west of Yunnan.

PRESERVATION OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE MINORITIES – WHAT IS AT ISSUE

With the transformation of the economic system, the local authorities in the ethnic minorities' autonomous regions realized that including traditional festivals in trips organized for tourists could be a source of money. Whereas the minorities had until then been regarded as the recipients of benefits, costing the state money, it was understood that they could yield profits. In a very short time, festivals of the minorities were organized annually all over Yunnan in order to draw tourists and investors.

In Kunming, the capital of the province, the new provincial museum, the Museum of the Minorities of Yunnan, was opened three years ago. Han visitors have sometimes been astounded on discovering in this museum the beauty and remarkable creativity of the costumes of the minorities, for they had in many cases sincerely believed that the cultural level and development of these populations was far inferior to those of the Han, the sole and eternal reference.

Alongside the museum there is also the Village of the Minorities of Yunnan which gives great pleasure to Han visitors. It was built recently as part of the effort to preserve the traditional culture of minorities. Mentioned in tourist guides as being 'worth the detour', it has met with great success and continues to attract hundreds of thousands of Han tourists every year. Masses of tourists, on paying an entrance fee, can stroll through the twenty-five villages of twenty-five Yunnan minorities and take in the performances of the young people of each ethnic group, including singing, dance and weaving. In the houses, built in the style of each group, visitors can taste gastronomic specialities and buy goods produced by the ethnic minorities.

This preservation of culture raises questions inasmuch as the authorities are determined to draw the minorities into an accelerated social transformation, which is also supposed to favour integration. One concern is whether it is not for the populations to decide what form of development they want and what role their culture is to play? But, in practice, how can the minorities be involved in these decisions? Another question is how can traditional values and socio-economic transformation be reconciled? What role can ethnologists play?

In the face of acculturation, the ethnic minorities in China are aware of their situation, in the same way as all ethnic minorities around the world, or other types of minority groups trying to preserve their differences in a country with a great tradition of assimilation. By trying to hold on to their cultural heritage they are defending an identity, but they know that they have a long way to go yet.

NOTES

1. The 2000 Census.

2. The Moso, numbering about 30,000, live around Lake Lugu, astride Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. Known for their matrilineal kinship system, they have been classified as a subgroup of the Naxi. This classification is contested by the Moso, who claim separate identity.

3. The Dongba script is a pictographic writing system used by the Naxi for sacred texts. Only older Dongba, sacrificers or specialists can read it. The Dongba elders are now very old and the young people would have to be trained; the transcription and translation of Dongba have become urgent if the language is to be preserved. Moreover, the Naxi town of Lijiang was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997.

Protecting the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in Cambodia

NOUTH NARANG

The question of minorities is very much in vogue at present and is attracting attention from many different bodies. In the Cambodian situation some of these bodies are going into it headlong, with no real understanding of the specific character of a phenomenon that reflects not a contemporary population shift, but a mechanism functioning within a certain geographical area. The various ethnic groups concerned very largely share the same Austro-Asiatic – and most often Mon-Khmer – origins.

In its generally accepted sense the minority question is a very real issue, but one that is recent and limited in scope. The two most substantial minorities, the Vietnamese and the Chinese, are in large part an offshoot of colonization by the French. The problem in Cambodia thus needs to be posed in other terms. Cambodian society as a whole is currently in great difficulty, and the first question we must ask ourselves concerns the process needed to regenerate a community whose difficulties are a direct cause of the minority problem. The problem hinges not so much on ethnic groups as such, but on a situation specific to an undeveloped, culturally and socially shattered region. My initial intention, then, is to define the minority question in Cambodia before looking at government approaches to the integration of these groups into the national community as a whole.

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The ethnic groups living on the north-eastern plateaux and those of the Cardamoms are in the vast majority 'proto-Indo-Chinese' of the Austro-Asiatic Mon-Khmer family and thus of the same ethnic origin as the lowlanders. Over time, for historical, geographical and economic reasons, they were ignored and lost from view in the modern economic scene. They remain, however, an integral part of Cambodian society, an essential element in national unity; not as minorities, but on the contrary as full members of an extended community.

These are all, then, proto-Indo-Chinese peoples with many shared characteristics. Their languages are as a rule toneless and make extensive use of derivation, and women and matrilineal filiation often play a significant social role. Their religions are characterized by the cult of the ancestors and the god of the soil, places of worship situated on high ground and a mythology whose cosmological dualism is based on the opposition of sea and mountain, water and earth and masculine and feminine. Thus, since Cambodia's population groups cannot be considered as being of different nationalities, a multicultural approach would be unscientific and could have serious consequences. The differences between these groups are geographic rather than ethnic, having their origins mainly in the divergent ways of life of highlanders and lowlanders.

In South-East Asia the sole means of obtaining the cereal yield necessary to feed a growing population is rice-paddy agriculture. This practice led to the settlement of the once nomadic communities of the lowlands and delta flood plains, whose demographic expansion was made possible by the improvements that came with cultivation. Moreover, the need for large-scale collective ventures – drainage and irrigation in particular – favoured the formation of groups around a strong central authority. By contrast, the arid mountains and plateaux lend themselves to cultivation only after slash-and-burn clearance, a type of agriculture not conducive to communication with the outside. Thus cut off from Chinese and Indian civilizing influences, the minorities living in these areas were little affected by external developments.

On the other hand the Khmers, described by Georges Coedès as 'a fully fledged late Neolithic civilization when they came into contact with the Brahman-Buddhist culture of India', were in a context favourable to marked progress. Yet neither this nor their distinct forms of social organization excluded extensive contacts between the different population groups during the period of the Angkor Empire; the Angkor temple bas-reliefs show the mountain dwellers wearing the same clothes as the Khmer soldiers and also portray buffalo sacrifices, a specifically mountain practice. Interestingly, during a visit to the temples of Angkor sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts last year, members of folk troupes from the north-eastern plateaux saw bas-reliefs of their religious ceremonies and spontaneously launched into ritual songs and dances. There is food for thought here regarding the integration issue in Cambodia: over and above identity differences that certainly warrant special emphasis, these people are unquestionably part of the extended community.

The cultural gap widened with the fall of Angkor. As the country fragmented and territory was lost, contact became much more difficult and there was no longer a powerful central authority capable of overall geographical organization. However the definitive blow was struck by French colonization. The French abolished the notion of cultural borders, replacing it with an administrative concept that took little account of sociological reality. The outcome was that many minority groups found themselves scattered over different districts. The case of the Cham community is slightly different. Settled in the central part of what is now Viet Nam, this group was broken up during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and found refuge in Cambodia. Their history and a long existence together as neighbours means that the two communities, Cham and Vietnamese, share the same sociocultural heritage. Cambodia has never denied this and has always respected specific Cham ways and customs.

Cambodia is and has always been a country open to people from elsewhere and one that believes in the human value of work. Khmer culture underlies this tolerant attitude – the 'Mé/Ba' principle guaranteeing a welcome for all those ready to contribute to the way of life and the building of the community. The principle remains evident in such cultural survivals as inter-village co-operation and the tolerance and hospitality towards foreigners so frequently attested by Arab, Chinese, Dutch and Portuguese chronicles. No foreign community settled in Cambodia has ever been the victim of xenophobia. While there have always been derogatory popular sayings regarding others' shortcomings, these are never more than harmless remarks – Cambodians have never felt aggressive urges in this respect. It is true that recent times have seen acts of barbarism, but this is because the soul of Khmer society has been destroyed by a process, now more marked than ever, of deculturation.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR 'MINORITY' INTEGRATION

As we have seen, Cambodian society is going through a period of major crisis. Conflicts, economic problems and a lack of foreign aid exacerbated by the too abrupt impact of the West have contributed to the destruction of its basic equilibrium. At state level this rupture has affected both traditional approaches and modern infrastructures. In terms of social structure, the guarantors both of tradition (craftspeople, musicians, the clergy, poets – those who 'know') and of modernity (teachers, engineers, doctors, technicians – those who 'manage') are dead or in forced exile. For ordinary people the very basis of Cambodian society has been destroyed, with whole populations displaced, territories reshaped, families dispersed and a generation gap methodically organized. This situation is aggravated by a process of acculturation, itself reinforced by a sudden massive influx of Westerners with which Cambodians, still uncertain of their identity, are unable to cope. Added to this is an ongoing deculturation: the erosion of cultural values and the extinction of entire facets of the Cambodian heritage.

The phenomenon of social break-up and cultural distortion is culminating in a disorder profoundly harmful to the destiny of the kingdom as whole. Many people have lost the

Lao-Tai family

100. Tai Dam woman at the fire, Oudomxay Province
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101. Tai Dam woman drawing water, Oudomxay Province
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102. Tai Dam man ploughing a rice paddy, Oudomxay Province
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103. Tai Dam village, Oudomxay Province
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104. Tai Yang woman at her weaving loom, Oudomxay Province
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105. Old Tai Yang man sharpening his harrow, Oudomxay Province
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106. Entrance gate to a Lü village,
Oudomxay Province
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107. Entrance gate to a Tai Yang village,
Oudomxay Province
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108. Tai Neua men sacrificing a pig,
Phongsaly Province
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109. Interior of a monastry in a Tai Yang village,
Oudomxay Province
© Marion Dejean

110. Meal in a Tai Neua house, Phongsaly Province
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Next pages:
111. Tai Neua musicians, Phongsaly Province
© François Greck

112. Lü fisherwomen, Nam Ou,
Luang Prabang Province
© KT/IRC

113. Tai Deng house, Sam Neua
© KP/IRC

114. Tai Neua woman making paper pulp,
Phongsaly Province
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reference points and the roots needed to assimilate the past, the framework needed to deal with the present and the wherewithal to cope with modernism and the future. What is now needed above all is a sustained effort in favour of the regeneration of Cambodian society and the re-establishment of a broadly united community. Within such a community there must be recognition of specific local characteristics. Respect for local identity helps reinforce the feeling of belonging to a clearly defined group, while favouring overall integration into the extended community. With this aim in mind the Ministry of Culture and the Arts has drawn up a national programme of cultural rehabilitation centring on social regeneration and integration.

We have already seen that the minority phenomenon in Cambodia is basically tied to the geographical context, that is to say to isolated mountain areas. Thus our programme focuses on the need to open up these areas as a means of rectifying developmental imbalances. The mountain provinces have been declared priority development zones and a 'spatial strategy' prepared. The solutions chosen for the north-east of the country, home to a large proportion of the mountain dwellers, are of particular interest. The pilot province of Ratannakiri, for example, is noted as a montagnard area where each ethnic group has its own culture and villages with specific social structures. The province can thus readily be divided into culturally specific units, while its capital is the place where all groups will be represented and will have to learn to live together.

Each of the five cultural regions possesses three intervention levels, with action being taken via a new institution called the 'Sala Vapathor', or sociocultural centre. The base level is that of the hamlets (*phum*) and villages (*khum*) and is vitally important in a country whose component societies are geographically fragmented. Small and simply constructed, the sociocultural centres fulfil an indispensable all-round function at the most critical level of a society totally lacking in such facilities. Their role in the reinstatement of the arts and as a social driving force is coupled with ensuring regeneration via a deliberate, culturally appropriate transition from tradition to modernity.

At the intermediate level of the districts (*srok*), the Sala Vapathor embody the same principle of providing a venue for discovery, teaching of cultural and artistic activities and general cultural organization. However, teaching is more sophisticated and the institution has been adapted to an urban scene in which promotion of authentic traditional culture is more difficult.

The upper level is that of the provinces (*khet*). Five pilot provinces have been chosen to host a large-scale Sala Vapathor or cultural complex. These complexes will provide not only an educational and a cultural structure, but also the vital pairing of a museum and a library, in the interests of remembrance and instruction.

There is also a fourth, central level, located in the capital, Phnom Penh. Here the goal is ongoing cultural rehabilitation through the creation of specialized museums, especially in the fields of the arts and popular traditions. There is also an urgent need for a scientific research institute filling the same functions as the former Commission for Customs and Practices and responsible for ethnographic research within Cambodia, and a Khmer culture documentation and research centre.

At the same time as they contribute to social regeneration, the Sala Vapathor are an active factor in social integration, embodying and encouraging application of the five basic principles underlying the work of the Ministry of Culture and the Arts. First, they help to halt the erosion of cultural values, the main enemy of the affirmation of cultural identity. In structural terms they both enable and stimulate the transmission of traditional knowledge and non-material culture. This is becoming increasingly urgent given the way unbridled technical progress in a dangerously fragile context is irremediably destroying human values in Cambodia.

Second, the Sala Vapathor represent a means of preserving and promoting the cultural heritage, especially in its intangible forms. This is a vital aspect of the regeneration of Cambodian society, since a people's vitality is in direct proportion to its patrimony. Third, the Sala Vapathor are also a factor in the restoration of the standards and values whose assimilation is essential to the ability to fight acculturation. Fourth, they will also engender creativity by making people aware of their capacities. Thus Cambodian civilization will rediscover its distinctive modes of expression. And finally, as instruments for change, they will aid the dissemination of culture. Contact with the unknown brings out the true meaning and depth of a given culture. Active support for cultural pluralism is an assertion of the value of intercultural dialogue in the affirmation of a people's identity.

At the instigation of the Ministry of Culture and the Arts, a number of pilot centres have already gone into operation. These are, so far, only experiments that have helped us

hone our approach. They run on very limited resources, but they have provided some particularly promising information. The existing centres have turned out to be a way of combating enforced idleness and have facilitated the integration of local populations into their immediate context. Moreover, the dazzling results of children attending the centres are proof that they have regained their confidence in the future. After beginning with nothing in their favour, they are now blossoming in full awareness of their culture and traditions.

And so, with cultural centres such as the Sala Vapathor, it is possible to re-create close-knit groups with a true community spirit. In addition, the centres will be all the more capable of carrying out their duties in that they will be managed by the community itself. At the same time it would be self-defeating to impose them out of hand, since this would naturally generate rejection. Thus the village communities themselves have to be brought to organize the life of the Sala Vapathor, our intention being to use specially trained youth co-ordinators for this. Charged with the difficult task of guiding villagers and the Administrative Council in the management of the centre, each co-ordinator will be the communication channel between tradition and modernity, walking the fine line between excessive emphasis on the past and a too hasty advance towards the future. In the interests of maximum effectiveness, the Sala Vapathor will need to be multi-functional and linked to such other bodies as the state education system or the departments of health, rural development, agriculture and so on. It is essential that people regain the natural stability provided by community life.

On the other hand, we must avoid anything likely to render an already damaged society even more fragile. To take one example, compulsory assimilation in the name of integration is harmful, whether the instrument be a dominant religion or a level of ideological organization likely to undermine basic social units and community ways. Situations conducive to this kind of disruption – the French colonial income tax system, Catholic proselytizing and outright attempts at forced assimilation – are not new in Cambodia. What is now needed is advancement for the mountain dwellers as practised since 1980, but without the ideological 'national rights' aspect. Preservation approaches must take account of their social and cultural systems if these groups are to join the extended community while still retaining their specific characteristics. National unity combined with acknowledgement of local singularities: such is the path Cambodia has decided to follow.

Protecting the Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in the Mekong Quadrangle Area

LEO A. VON GEUSAU

Having lived and worked in northern Thailand for a long time, particularly with the Akha people, who number about 70,000 in that country, I am happy to be able to come to Laos and share some of my experiences. As a result of continuous efforts over twenty years, six non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been formed to preserve Akha culture and adapt it to modern life and education. One of my conclusions has been that only the people and leaders of a minority group themselves are able to preserve and adapt their own cultural values.[1] Governments and other outsiders, including anthropologists, can only respect this effort made by the people themselves. We are thus very grateful that in 1989 the Thai Government, after much hesitation, allowed mountain minority groups to set up their own independent associations and foundations.

Understandably the Thai Government was reluctant to deal with situations that have arisen in Myanmar or perhaps Laos where about 50 per cent of the population consists of minority peoples. In Myanmar, however, some of the mountain minorities are territorial minorities, controlling certain areas and resources with local armies. This is not so in Thailand, where the Akha and other minorities are non-territorial, which means that they are mixed with other populations and have no intention of setting up their own province, chiefdom or mini-state. We are aware that in Laos, the wars in Indo-China, including the war in Viet Nam in the wake of decolonization, created many deplorable conflicts between majority and minority groups, and even inside certain minority groups like the Hmong. The Lao PDR Government, however, is certainly also aware that most mountain minority peoples, and among them the Akha, have no territorial pretensions, either inside Laos nor in the Mekong Quadrangle, which covers the border areas of five states.

At the recent Second International Hani/Akha Culture Studies Conference held in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, it was clearly stated that Hani/Akha, a non-territorial group of at least 2.5 million people in Asia, want to keep and adapt their cultural values. This includes their traditional ecological and medical knowledge, their skills in handicraft and embroidery, their educational systems and their rituals, which can all contribute to the development of the states in which they live.[2] It seems very important economically for the five nations of the Mekong Quadrangle, including Laos, to encourage Hani/Akha and other non-territorial, peaceful, minority groups to keep and adapt their cultural values, and particularly their ecological knowledge, for a sustainable development of the area.

It seems also desirable that mountain minorities, who make up a high percentage of the Mekong Quadrangle area,

including Laos, have a voice in the development of their ancestral land, and be seen – with their cultures – as part of the resources of the area, and not as harmful to these resources (as the Asian Development Bank tends to think, based upon incorrect data regarding deforestation). Let us elaborate some of these points by explaining what the Akha in Thailand mean when they say 'culture and development'.

INTANGIBLE CULTURE AND THE AKHA MINORITY

UNESCO sees several aspects of culture as 'intangible'. It is true that the roots of cultures and cultural experiences, history, moral values, traditional knowledge, customary law systems, spiritual strength and skills, are held mainly in the minds and souls of individuals, and are invisible. This is especially true among more egalitarian minority peoples like the Hani/Akha, more than among the majority groups with their palaces, temples and visible signs of beauty and power. However, minority peoples, often considered to have a low culture or no culture, do create visible artistic manifestations, in their music, dances, dress, and incredibly sophisticated handicraft. In addition, their ritual systems and lengthy oral texts are often of great poetic beauty and sophistication, indicating a civilization deeply rooted in history and interiorized in each person through elaborate educational systems.

What became clear recently was that Hani and Akha people are spread over different areas in the Mekong Quadrangle and that many of their subgroups have not been in contact with each other for many centuries. Yet they often share the same language, and are part of a same genealogical system. Moreover they have the same rituals, songs, moral and social laws, which reveal great strength and a long history. Hani/Akha culture, or zang, including art, is always functional and is never art for its own sake. Its functionality lies in its capacity as a support for the coherence of the group and the continuation of the lines of genealogy, leadership and traditional knowledge. This also means that in the Akha concept of culture, like in cultural anthropology (in contrast to ethnography), all levels of culture are interlinked with each other and with the politico-economic basis. *Zang* thus encompasses customary law as well as morality, kinship, socio-political structures, traditional knowledge and skills in all fields of life. Hani/Akha oral historical records are also a part of *zang*. Rituals, songs, texts and the art of embroidery are just the more tangible surface of this cultural complex.

ECOLOGY

The ecological aspect of the Hani/Akha cultural complex is extremely important, as it is for most mountain minority cultures in the area.[3] It is, unfortunately, also subject to mystification in dominant majority lowland areas. It has the following components: biodiversity, knowledge about food, medicine, handicraft and technology; soil and water-source knowledge; agricultural knowledge and skills; and conservation and sustainability knowledge, including quite strict conservationist laws for the stability of the ecosystem. Recent studies in Thailand have proved that, in spite of massive legal and illegal logging by outsiders, the amount of forest left in 'tribal areas' (in the north and western border areas) is much higher than in the north-eastern and southern parts of Thailand.

It became clear at the Hani/Akha culture studies conference that the considerable deforestation in Hani/Akha areas in Thailand, Myanmar and Yunnan/China cannot be blamed on them and that their conservationist laws in all these areas, even when some swiddening still exists, are quite similar. In Thailand statistics indicate that in spite of some swiddening, tribal people can be blamed for only 5 per cent of deforestation. The basic reason for conservationist laws is clear. Mountain peoples appreciate stability, and are not – as is so often said – nomadic or semi-nomadic. Forests are their equivalent of the supermarket and destroying them would mean destroying their livelihood and stability.

In all these areas the Hani/Akha and most other groups use stable terracing already many centuries old (for the Hani, fifteen centuries, and for the Akha in Sipsongpanna, eight centuries or so), and forests are mainly a reserve for food, medicine, construction-materials (although most houses are in clay) and sustainable hunting. These groups have a vast knowledge of agricultural produce, and cultivate twenty-five different species of rice and up to fifty plants in the average herb garden, besides having a knowledge of 500 or more plant species in the forest.

An intangible aspect of the Hani/Akha ecology and other aspects of *zang* is what could be called the 'spiritual ideology' of their conservationist laws which allow for sustainability of economic systems. Their creeds and rituals – all that has been called their 'animism', including ancestor-service – have been distorted and vilified quite strongly by outsiders, especially by the Christian missions. It has been underestimated, equally, by a too materialistic 'cultural revolution' in China. For the Hani/Akha, rice, trees, plants, forests, animals

and even land and water, are not just objects for consumption or economic profit, but are growing and directed by invisible 'owners' and life forces which must be respected, ritually, in some way. This does not mean that they are inhabited by 'spirits and spokes', as Western writers have seemed to suggest. Humans are not the only living beings in the universe, and destroying the basic harmony between humans and their natural environment, of which they are a part, leads to disasters, as we have already seen.

Ancestors are not demons, spirits, saints or gods, but people who have handed life down to the next generations with their experience and knowledge, often also based on mistakes made. Knowing lines of ancestors and how they come together like the branches of a tree, related to roots, gives coherence to social groups, even if differences, including class conflicts, exist. In the case of marginalized minority groups it is often their only system of coherence. In a situation of extremely capitalistic and dangerous class stratification, over the last fifteen years, a tribal system has been seen as a force which keeps their people together and provides for them.

SAFEGUARDING THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

There are three main trends in regard to mountain minority cultures, particularly in regard to their 'intangible' aspects: the romantic trend, the absorption/abolition trend and – midway between the two – the pragmatic culture and development trend.

The romantic trend to be found in some anthropologists' works, and which in Europe goes back to the French philosopher Rousseau, idealizes mountain minority cultures as those of 'noble primitives', who have kept some of the original purity of primitive mankind. Maybe even Marx was somewhat influenced by this thinking, as he also believed (incorrectly) that primitive societies had no private property but only communal property, in which everyone had an equal share.

The romantic trend has the tendency to think and hope that the cultures of mountain peoples and similar tribal minorities are static, and are not, or should not be, subject to change. Proponents of this trend are shocked to see Akha or Hmong in blue jeans, on motorbikes or in pick-up trucks, trying to adapt to modern life. They do not recognize that minority tribal cultures have a history at all, an example of this being British functionalist anthropology. They forget that any culture which does not grow, change and adapt is a culture that is dying, if it is not already dead.

The romantic trend and its interest in 'exotic people' is part of a colonial complex not aware of the fact that some cultures have been encapsulated and somewhat alienated, for some time, in colonial 'resource-areas'. As exploited groups they adapted to this ecological and political situation in their own unique way, in fact developing some intangible spiritual strength, which majority and colonial systems lost quite some time ago.[4]

The opposite trend is that of absorption and abolition. This trend basically does not believe that mountain minority people have a culture, or an 'intangible spiritual and cultural heritage'. They can only see economic and technological underdevelopment, non-school education, superstitions and so forth. Historically most majority class systems of the area have placed the mountain minority peoples at the bottom of their systems, as slaves (*kha, kaw/ko, ekaw/iko*). Or they have identified them with nature, as (somewhat harmful) animals such as insects or bush-cats. In the case of Thailand, this point of view led in the 1950s to the trend of absorption of mountain peoples into Thai culture, as the only way to 'civilize' them.

In a way, even more dangerous for the intangible spiritual heritage of mountain minority peoples, have been the Christian missions and especially the fundamentalists. Starting from the presupposition that the intangible spiritual and cultural heritage, as present in Akha zang, was inspired by the devil, missionaries asked the Akha and other mountain peoples to throw away their ancestor-service and *zang*, and to be saved through baptism. This can be called the abolition trend. Some French missionaries working out of Laos at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Père Vial, were more enlightened, as they were impressed by the poverty as well as the intangible spiritual heritage of the Lolo and related people like the Akha.

The pragmatic culture and development trend – that is, the middle way – developed in northern Thailand at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s. A group of progressive headmen and Akha women clearly saw the need to educate Akha youngsters in modern Thai lowland institutions which were not available in the mountains. They saw the increasing development gap between mountains and lowlands and first turned to missionary educational insti-

tutions for help. Discovering that this was leading to a destruction of *zang*, customary law, moral systems and traditional knowledge and culture, they opted for a third way.

Building up a modern Akha leadership which would also be faithful to and acceptable in Thai society would only be possible through educational systems guided and directed by Akha cultural specialists themselves. Youngsters would enter Thai educational institutions but at the same time receive education adapted to Akha intangible spiritual and cultural heritage. This would also create a generation of Akha who would themselves be able to educate and develop a new generation, starting from and based upon those elements of Akha culture which had made them strong in the past, but adapting them to modern times and needs.

It was also reasoned that many elements of Akha *zang*, among others traditional knowledge, customary law and morality, and ancestor-service ceremonies, had to be taught to the young and taken as the base for development, not so much because they are ancient practices, but because they are useful for the future, including the economic future, and social coherence of the Akha. This is the context of the six mountain peoples' non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Thailand, their names and their roles played by Golden Triangle, Abaw Buseu Dzoebaw and Deuleu/Darunee Dzoebaw.

We want to emphasize that the several NGOs emerging from the culture and development movement in Thailand are not a luxury or a hobby for a group of conservative older people. They came out of bitter economic necessity and an increasing deterioration of the economic and political situation in the mountains, including problems of land rights, deforestation by outsiders and destruction of intangible cultural values by the missions.

We have seen during our conferences with Hani and Akha from surrounding countries that in Yunnan/China and Myanmar similar movements and groups have come about. Also, and this is clear from the Hani/Akha conferences, these movements want to integrate intangible cultural values and knowledge in development and are not conservative or static. They are extremely progressive and flexible, and seek to adapt their cultural customs and habits to modern life as soon as a younger generation, through equal access to education and the modes of production, has a chance.The easy assumption, on the part of the majority peoples, that tribal peoples have a problem with change and adaptation is, to my mind, quite unfounded. I have never seen people more adaptable than the Hani/Akha with whom I lived. Indeed they are much more adaptable than the Western people I know, or the contemporary Thai urban élite which I am able to observe now. As for the Hani/Akha in Myanmar, Thailand and Yunnan/China, they have been able, in one generation only, to produce better researchers than the foreigners who studied them in the past, to the great amazement of the Thais, who still believe in the backwardness of the mountain peoples.

For the future of the Mekong Quadrangle including northern Laos, I thus humbly advise a look into the culture and development model. It is called in modern jargon human 'cultural and ecological sustainable resource-development'. Infrastructure developments in the area are proceeding with great speed; there will eventually be roads, dams, resorts and industrial centres in the quadrangle. The choice might well be between an impoverished, unhappy, addicted and maybe even rebellious mountain sub-proletariat in a destroyed mountain/highland ecology, and a self-developing group of motivated highlanders with their own modernized intangible cultural values. The latter would include very tangible economic progress and sustainable use of the still so abundant ecology.

NOTES

1. This brief paper should be attributed also to my wife Deuleu Dzoebaw, her father Abaw Buseu Dzoebaw, and all those Akha specialists who were my teachers in *Akha-zang* (Akha culture). They were also, with their friends, those who asked me from 1977 to help to preserve Akha-zang culture, customary law and traditional knowledge.

2. See L. von Geusau, 'The Akha, Ten Years After', in R. Lawrence, P. Morrison, J. McKinnon (eds.), *Marginalisation in Thailand*: *Pacific Viewpoint*, 33:2, New Zealand Department of Geography in association with Victoria University of Wellington, 1992, pp. 178–84; 'Swinging for Freedom', *Focus of Nation Daily Sunday edition*, November 8, 1987, pp. 1–2; 'Ethnic Minorities and the State, paper delivered on the occasion of the Yearly Social Scientists of Thailand Meeting, Chiang Mai, 1987; and the forthcoming 'The Hani/Akha Ethnic Alliance System' in *Civility and Savagery*, London, SOAS.

3. See L. von Geusau, 'Studies on Akha Customary Law' (research report No. 0408/05081), 2529–33, submitted to the National Research Council of Thailand, Bankeng, Bangkok (ms., 1986–90, 310 pp.); 'Regional Development in Northern Thailand: its Impact on Highlanders', in M. Johnson (ed.), Lore: *Capturing Environmental Knowledge*, IDRC, Ottawa, Canada and Dene Cultural Institute, 1992, pp. 141–63; 'Documenting and Applying Traditional Environmental Knowledge in Northern Thailand', ibid., 1992, pp. 164–73; 'Eco-systems in the Quadrangle Area: Property, Stress, Sustainable Management?', paper presented at the Fourth Annual Common Property Conference of IASP, Manila, 16–19 June, 1993; forthcoming publication by Trent University, Canada, Native Studies Program.

4. See L. von Geusau, 'Dialectics of Akha Zang: The Interiorisations of a Perennial Minority Group', in McKinnon, John and Bruksasri (eds.), *Highlanders of Thailand*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 243–77; and 'The Interiorisations of a Perennial Minority Group', in J. G. Taylor and A. Turton (eds.), *Sociology of 'Developing Society', Southeast Asia*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1983, pp. 215–29.

PART FOUR

National Action and International Co-operation

Survey of Preservation and Promotion of Minority Cultures in the Lao PDR

BOUABANE VORAKHOUN

In former times the country of Lan Xang, which gave birth to the Lao PDR, was the location of one of the major civilizations of the region and of the world. It was home to many ethnic groups with their own lineage, their own customs and traditions, and their own unique cultures. The richness of this heritage is a source of great strength for Laos. Realizing the importance of these cultures, the government is devoted to preserving, promoting and building upon them. They are considered to be the foundation and the soul of the country, and a major factor in assuring the stability of the nation as a whole.

THE MEANING OF CULTURE

Historical linguists tell us that the word 'culture' in French and English derives from the Indo-European root **kwel* – meaning to revolve, to dwell – and is thus closely related to such words as cult, colony and cultivate. The Sanskrit derivation from this root which was introduced into the Lao language through Pali is *chakra* meaning circle, or wheel. There are two usual meanings associated with the term 'culture'. The first is a common meaning and refers to intellectual or artistic attainment, or the development of the intellect through training and education. It is frequently used in the sense of refinement, good manners or aesthetic sensitivity.

Within the human sciences, such as anthropology, linguistics or sociology, 'culture' is a technical term, the definition of which has been the subject of many books and papers. In its technical aspect, culture refers to the totality of social, artistic and institutional behaviour which is encoded in human language. Under this definition, anthropologists speak of the culture of the Yao, and so on, without evaluative judgement on the way of life, in the way that human sciences use the term culture.

ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLES

There are many definitions of ethnic minorities that have been used in the technical discourse of the social sciences. These definitions have become important in developing countries, where special consideration is now being accorded to ethnic groups whose values and traditions are being threatened by the development projects for which they have been given funding. Thus more and more attention is being given to meeting the needs of minority ethnic groups around the world and to the preservation of their unique cultures.

The World Bank defines indigenous peoples (also called indigenous ethnic minorities, tribal groups, or scheduled tribes) as 'social groups with a social and cultural identity

distinct from the dominant society that makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the development process'. They have a close attachment to ancestral territories and to the area's natural resources, and are identified by themselves and others as members of a distinct cultural group. They have an indigenous language, often different from the national language, and their production is primarily of the subsistence-oriented kind.

The World Bank requires information and research on the legal framework of the country as it relates to minorities; social and physical conditions; land tenure; local participation in the development plan; institutional capacity; and methods of evaluation of the particular situations of individual ethnic groups in sharing in the benefits of the project.

CULTURE AND MINORITIES IN THE LAO PDR

Policy

At the Fifth Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party in 1994, it was resolved that 'Culture is the foundation of stability for the nation, the force which moves society forward, and is the goal of socio-economic development'. Therefore, in the preservation and promotion of the national cultural legacy, attention must be devoted to issues such as the continued formation of a culture which reflects national character, the character of the people and the character of progress. Other important issues are the preservation and promotion of the heritage and value of the nation's culture through the opening of international co-operative cultural relationships, and the protection against cultural and other influences which erode the virtuous and beauteous culture of the nation. The various ethnic minorities should be encouraged and assisted in the maintenance of their artistic and cultural legacies, which take on many colours and forms, in order that they may be transformed into a combined national culture.

This position was reiterated at the Sixth Party Congress the following year. Looking at the details of state and party policies towards ethnic minorities, four salient features emerge. The first is that a portion of every party decree will be devoted specifically to ethnic minorities, including methods and principles for their strengthening. Secondly, apart from general considerations, party decrees are also devoted to individual minorities and the fabric of policy, for example the ethnic specific decree of 1981 on the Hmong which formed the basis for the Constitution of 1991 and the substance of various articles therein, especially Article 8 which emphasizes the importance of ethnic minorities.

Thirdly, the 1994 party decree specifically addresses minorities in the new age. And, finally, a party decree of 1996 again gives importance to minorities, emphasizing conditions for minority children to enter schools, and become civil servants and intellectuals in their own right. It also emphasizes the promotion of cultural legacies, traditions and customs which form the basis of ethnic identity, and improvement of the quality of life, both materially and culturally.

Administrative structure

The priority given to the minority problem depended upon existing conditions in several periods of administration, from the central level to regional, to the extent that every minority had a representative. This aided the implementation of equality and the increasing of the level of unity between the ethnic groups throughout the country to allow for development and progress.

In 1980 a meeting was convened in Vientiane concerning the Hmong ethnic group, and problems associated with other groups were also investigated. A minorities committee was formed, with ministry rank, and given two tasks. The first was to carry out pilot development projects for ethnic minorities The second was to gather information on ethnic minorities, focusing on language, daily life, sustenance, customs and traditions.

Another important change of policy in the Constitution was the abandonment of the 'racial' terms Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Soung used prior to 1991, in favour of the present ethnonym for each group. In addition, a standing committee on minorities was established in the National Assembly.

Implementation

The actual implementation of projects has also moved ahead. In addition to the normal tasks of ratifying legislation, the National Assembly established an Ethnic Minorities Committee, under the Supreme Policy Institute, responsible for following up the clauses in the Constitution which concern minorities; namely Article 1 – on being a state where there is 'unity among all ethnic groups' – and

Articles 1, 8 and 19, which have to do with equality between all ethnic groups.

The Ministry of Education is now carrying out various projects for ethnic minorities in both formal and non-formal education. In the domain of formal education there is a policy to the effect that, in provinces where there are enough minority students, a minority school will be established for the training of teachers to return and set up school in their home village. In addition, there has been since 1995 an experiment, in co-operation with Viet Nam, to try non-graded lower and upper secondary education specifically for minorities. The extent to which this has succeeded is unknown, pending evaluation. Finally, to solve the language problem, a methodology for Lao and a second language is under development, but is still in the research stages.

In the area of non-formal education there are also several projects under way, including literacy and the promotion of education in minority areas (a UNESCO project), non-formal education (UNDP), literacy for women and children (UNICEF), and the Ethnic Minority Development Project for south-eastern Laos (UNDP).

Others projects in collaboration with NGOs are the education project in Meuang Sing (ESF), the World Education project in Salavanh and Attapeu, Norwegian Church Aid, Louang Namtha, Bokeo (opium eradication) and rural development in Savannakhet. Also under way is a survey of six provinces by UNESCO, UNDP, IRD (ex-ORSTOM), and a study of ethnic minority movements, in preparation for a future national non-formal education programme.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (rural development) has undertaken forty-nine projects nationwide, amounting to 22 per cent of all aid money. One of the most important projects, which directly affects many ethnic minorities, is the land allocation project, established to reduce shifting cultivation. It is estimated that forest destruction will be reduced by 300,000 to 400,000 hectares per year under this programme. Without such measures, the Lao forest cover will be gone within seventy to eighty years.

The Ministry of Information and Culture is involved in six projects, in which 16 per cent of funding is directed towards issues concerning ethnic minorities. Radio broadcasts are made in Hmong in Xieng Khwang, Sam Neua, and Vientiane; in Kmhmu' for Vientiane and Luang Prabang; and in Laven (Jru) in Champassak. Contests for music, singing and traditional costume have been held in almost every province. Television programmes on various aspects of ethnic minorities have been produced. The Fine Arts Department has a national school for art, music and dance and a 'Culture Garden' has been built in Vientiane. The IRC was established to study ethnic minorities, directly and indirectly, in the areas of history and civilization, linguistics, literature, arts and handicrafts, music and performance, traditions, customs and beliefs, and comprises a documentation centre.

The validity of the efforts put forth in policy making, administration and implementation can be measured by the performance of the various projects that actually affect minority groups. Although the success rate is still low, these are only our first attempts, and we will try and make improvements step by step.

We hope, too, that the information in this conference will help us to improve. In order to accomplish this we have two areas on which to focus our discussions. The first is classification – the focus should be on culture criteria (as opposed to genetic criteria), that is, language and culture. The second area is freedom and equality in religion and beliefs. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and furthermore specifies that (organized) religion shall not take advantage of systems of belief that are not of the same magnitude. This point, from the Lao perspective, also demonstrates ethical and aesthetic principles, which reside within the powers of each country in the future, to preserve and encourage minority cultures of the Lao PDR as a stabilizing and long-lasting part of the Lao nation.

In the coming years, in both the long and short term, our Ministry of Information and Culture will establish a research centre to preserve and promote minority cultures, in particular cultural technology and handicrafts, textiles and weaving, ethnomusicology, rites and ceremonies. Techniques of data collection will also come under scrutiny. The ministry will also carry out a number of sub-projects to be presented in detail later in the programme.

Therefore we view the ethnic minority question as a fabric of three interwoven components: policy framework, administration and implementation. This we feel is only the first step, and we hope that in this conference many ideas will be added which will lead to improvements in the future.

The Ethnic Minorities and Education

PHANSY ABHAY

The general objective we are pursuing as a priority is to facilitate the participation of the minorities in national development by raising their educational level. Better educated, they will be able to benefit more from the fruits of development and assume more responsibilities in the national community. Two forms of education have been designed for the ethnic minorities in Laos: on the one hand, specific types of education within the framework of general education, and, on the other, non-formal education programmes designed chiefly for the training of adults.

GENERAL EDUCATION

As early as 1975 ethnic minority schools were set up in all the provinces in which there were large ethnic minority populations. The object was to provide the children of minority villages with basic education (literacy and primary education), partly in order for some of them to be trained subsequently to serve as primary-school teachers in their home districts. The state covered the cost of board and lodging for the students. Since 1995 lower secondary education has been provided for the minorities by schools in a few provinces on an experimental basis, in co-operation with Viet Nam. That this education encounters difficulties should not be concealed. First, the ethnic minorities often do not understand the utility of schooling for their children, and the children drop out before the end of the course. Then, the teachers find it more difficult to work with the minorities and many are reluctant to go to remote areas. Certain advantages are thus envisaged for those who accept (special bonuses, faster promotion, and so forth).

Finally, there is the language problem. It is not possible to teach in the minority languages and dialects in Laos, for there are too many of them, some little known, and almost all without a writing system. If the minorities are to play a role in the national community, the Lao language must be developed among them as a 'second' spoken language, properly mastered, and as a 'first' written language. At present certain minorities are still very weak in Lao, so literacy teaching in Lao will have to be intensified.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Another form of education is non-formal education (NFE). This involves not only contributing to the general literacy effort, but giving adults the rudiments of 'productive training', that is, giving them knowledge which can be put to use immediately to raise the standard of living in the villages. This is a form of education widely promoted all over the world by international organizations (UNESCO, UNICEF, etc.). In Laos the Ministry of Education has set

up a special Department of Non-Formal Education, whose projects are designed especially for the ethnic minorities.

Literacy and post-literacy training for women and ethnic minorities in Laos

First concentrated in two districts in Luang Namtha Province (Muong Sing and Namtha), this project – backed by UNESCO – now extends over seven provinces (Luang Prabang, Xayaburi, Luang Namtha, Xieng Khuang, Vientiane, Champassak and Saravan). In addition to the provision of basic literacy training, it involves the setting up and running of centres where women from ethnic minorities can engage in activities such as weaving, dressmaking and cooking. The aim is to help these women improve their living conditions and earn some income that will make them less dependent. Some twenty-three centres are to be opened in Laos over a period of five years, with the idea of training some 3,200 women in the course of five- to six-monthly sessions. This project has received the assistance of experts from UNESCO, IRD and the non-governmental organization, Schools Without Frontiers.

PHANSY ABHAY

Non-Formal Education for ethnic minorities

This UNDP project concerns two pilot provinces, Xekong (six villages) and Oudomxay (seven villages). All the villages in the project are ethnic minority villages which have been resettled in the plains and which are trying to take a more active part in the development of their provinces. The object is to help the villagers solve the difficulties they encounter by providing them with the knowledge they consider of value to them in various fields – agricultural extension, irrigation techniques, and health and hygiene. In each village a centre is set up with an extension worker who follows these training activities and proposes certain initiatives financed under the project (rice bank, poultry farming under supervision, etc.). A participatory approach is adopted with a constant exchange with the villagers to develop their decision-making capacities.

In relation to this project, regional community centres (Champassak and Louang Phrabang) provide post-literacy education and serve as training centres for the project's extension workers. Another aim of this project is to help the villagers, while taking their place in the provincial economy, to preserve their specific cultures, and also to encourage them to keep up certain traditional crafts, such as weaving and basketry, from which the products can be sold. The project is supported by experts from UNESCO, UNDP, Schools Without Frontiers (for the education component), and IRD (for the ethnological information component).

Literacy teaching for mother and child

This project – backed by UNICEF – concerns five provinces (Champassak, Saravan, Vientiane, Xayaburi and Xieng Khuang). It is centred on non-formal basic education with a participatory approach for the village women. Addressed mainly to women of the ethnic minorities, it is carried out with experts from UNICEF and a non-governmental organization, World Education, in co-operation with the Lao Federation of Women's Unions.

Ethnic minorities and development in the countries of the Indo-Chinese peninsula

This is a UNDP regional project designed to aid the countries of the Indo-Chinese peninsula (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam) to combine their efforts and their policies to involve the ethnic minorities more actively in the development process, while respecting their specific cultures. In Laos a pilot project is being carried out in two remote districts in Xekong Province in co-operation with the Department of Non-Formal Education. UNDP and IRD consultants are participating in this project.

A UNESCO/UNDP/IRD study

This is a study of the resettlement of villages of ethnic minorities in six provinces. The survey seeks to identify the problems encountered in the new villages. It is to serve as a basis for the analysis of the problems connected with the resettlement in the plains of villages of mountain minorities. It should be of use when decisions are taken concerning a nationwide extension of NFE programmes. The report of the survey has appeared under the title *Resettlement and Social Characteristics of New Villages in the Lao PDR*.[1]

Other projects

Several other NFE projects are being carried out in Laos, in particular with Schools Without Frontiers (Muang Sing project), World Education (NFE and community development projects in Saravan and Attapu) and Norwegian Church Aid (a NFE and opium eradication project in Luang Namtha and Bokeo, and a NFE and rural development project in Savannakhet).

CONCLUSION

Non-formal education has also set itself the goal of promoting mutual understanding and respect for each other's traditions among the different ethnic groups in Laos. In this connection, an ethnological information effort is being made by IRD in several provinces in which NFE projects are under way with a view to contributing further knowledge concerning certain groups and having their traditions taken into account in the preparation of development projects. With the same end in mind, a series of strip cartoons on the minorities in each province has been produced and published with the participation of Schools Without Frontiers. These strip cartoons are distributed in all the provinces to promote mutual knowledge of the various Lao cultures.

NOTES

1. Y. Goudineau (ed.), Bangkok, 1997.

The Lao Front for National Construction and Minority Cultural Heritage

SIHO BANNAVONG

Our country comprises many different ethnic groups, each with its own cultural identity, habits and customs, and its own language or dialect. Over and above their specific features, however, all these groups share the same tradition of hard work and endurance in the face of adversity; they can show great solidarity with one another and a will to be mutually supportive within the national community. The Lao Communist Party since its founding, and likewise the government since coming to power, have been closely involved in the question of minority groups. The first concern was to ensure, for every ethnic group, equality in the political, economic, educational and sociocultural fields, and to guarantee them equivalent status in regard to defence and security. Hence the adoption of an irreversible strategy of aid to minorities and a policy to guide the work of the Lao Front for National Construction (FLEN) in this field. The FLEN is one of the mass organizations of the Lao PDR, and was proud to inherit the historic role of the Free Laos Movement (Neo Lao Issara) and the experience of the Lao Patriotic Front (Neo Lao Hak Sat). It is the symbol of the political unity of the people and the union of all classes, social strata, ethnic groups and religions, including Lao residing abroad and foreigners living in the country.

PROGRESS, EQUALITY AND POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG ETHNIC MINORITIES

Application of the principle of the right to equality of ethnic groups has been constantly strengthened in recent years. As a result, political awareness has gradually developed among the different ethnic populations, who have in turn implemented programmes in the villages for both cultural preservation and rural development. All these initiatives are commendable, particularly those made at the instigation of the elders, the chiefs of clans and the different categories of local personnel, who have made every effort to educate, train and motivate the minority populations as they educate their own children and grandchildren. This policy has also enabled many rural communities to become more aware of their attachment to their country, their native soil, the new regime and their own ethnic group, and has thus contributed to the strengthening of inter-ethnic solidarity. The problems of discrimination among ethnic groups have been solved as a result of this zealous policy, and a stop has been put to the incessant quarrels between villages or communities. Nowadays, the Lao multi-ethnic population lives as a happy family in an atmosphere of solidarity and mutual support.

Emphasis should be laid on the admirable way in which the Lao multi-ethnic population has managed to put aside

retrograde traditions and an outdated way of life, and, making positive use of its traditional tenacity, turn to a more modern system facilitating the improvement of living standards. This is due in the first place to the policy and support of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, but also to the regional administrative authorities and the will of the Lao people as a whole. Rural development projects have been undertaken in a number of regions inhabited by ethnic minorities, mountain regions in particular, and living standards have noticeably improved as productivity has increased.

EDUCATION FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

The cultural level of the various ethnic populations has improved little by little. The number of members of these populations who have received an education, and the number of intellectuals in particular, has increased. Most of the children are now enrolled in school, which means that the traditions not conducive to progress can be counteracted. At the same time efforts have been made to preserve and promote traditions specific to the various ethnic groups, from the fine arts to literature. Everything connected with cultural heritage, a symbol of the identities of our ethnic groups and an integral part of the pride of the nation, has been encouraged.

Some of the FLEN's energies are devoted to furthering the education and training of people who already have a good educational background. It undertakes this essential task so as to enable the intellectuals to find their bearings in the sphere of political ideas, thus making sure that they are in tune with the spirit of the nation. It also takes care of the education and edification of young people of both sexes so that they will uphold the revolutionary tradition and cause of their elders. The mass organizations concerned and the FLEN, at various levels, are bringing the younger generations together in a number of groups mobilized around an idea which serves the national interest. The FLEN must combine its efforts with those of organizations working heart and soul for the welfare of the country and the people.

ROLE OF THE FLEN

In view of the multi-ethnicity of our country, the party and government considered that the protection and development of culture were of the utmost importance. Indeed, culture must be regarded as an effective weapon in the assertion of our identity. The FLEN has an essential role to play in this area. It participates in this thrust and co-ordinates the efforts of the organizations concerned with education. It educates the multi-ethnic populations in the promotion and strengthening of their particular cultures.

The FLEN's mission is to strengthen the traditional love of country and arouse national pride. It is committed to disseminating ideas of national autonomy and of the solidarity of all the Lao, including those residing abroad or those who do not belong to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Its role consists also in defending and promoting the nation, thus enabling it to accede to a lasting peace, independence, democracy, unity and prosperity.

It is the political basis of the people's administrative power, the organization of the alliance of workers, peasants, educated people and intellectuals. It brings the masses together in an organization led by the party, which is endeavouring to strengthen the solidarity of the people, to maintain unity in the political field, and to participate in the building up and improvement of governance. The FLEN collaborates with the government in the defence of the rights and legitimate interests of the multi-ethnic people, in promoting self-management, in applying the Constitution and the law, and finally, with the members of the National Assembly elected by universal suffrage, in monitoring the activities of the state apparatus.

THE FLEN POLITICAL PROGRAMME

In order to further the development of the multi-ethnic populations and the preservation of their traditions, the Central Committee of the FLEN, at the third congress of its national representatives, drew up a detailed programme to include the strengthening of education and the raising of political awareness among the multi-ethnic populations, whatever their religion or social stratum, and continually heightening their attachment to the country.

Next in line is the strengthening of the foundations of national solidarity on the basis of a worker-peasant alliance, with the educated and the intellectuals as pillars. These measures are directed at everyone, regardless of sex or age, so that all may take part in the country's recovery and combine their efforts to help individual families and the whole nation to escape from underdevelopment. They should also enable the multi-ethnic population to accede to

a higher standard of living, give the nation more authority, and enable society to enjoy justice and civilization. The chief objective is stability. This can be attained by making an effort to enable all the Lao to enjoy the legitimate advantages, publicly owned property and treasures of the nation, namely the land itself, the rivers and their tributaries, the habits and customs, and the victories and gains we have won against all the odds in the course of history. The fate of our nation depends on this, and we all have our share of responsibility.

A third element is the application and development of authority over the people at large so as to promote the role of the state in socio-economic management. It is above all a matter of applying a policy that will make possible equality between men and women and between ethnic groups. Our aim is to build together a sound and powerful state truly elected by and for the people: a state which administers the country, which manages the economy and society by progressive laws and decrees guaranteeing freedom and people's democracy, and commanding respect for justice in accordance with the Constitution and the law. Activities prejudicial to the legitimate interests of the workers must be combated energetically, as must all forms of bureaucracy, corruption and social injustice. The workers and peasants have every right to participate in the socio-economic management of the state, in its control and in that of the mass organizations, in such a way as to be able to express their views on state bodies and officials.

The FLEN is a place where the people give advice and exchange views, and where at all times there is a heart and mind open to the authentic struggles of the people. It has always made a point of grasping the people's divergences and aspirations in order to report them to the party and the state. It has created favourable conditions allowing everyone to study culture, science and technology, to acquire vocational skills, and also to benefit from the laws of the country. The FLEN enables everyone to develop their abilities, sharpen their minds and free their initiative in the interests of economic development. In addition, it strengthens culture, promotes perseverance in study and encourages the entrepreneurial spirit in trade and in everyday life.

The FLEN explores and develops national potential; it endeavours to muster human resources and manage them effectively. Its role is to ensure that everybody has work and to protect the rights and health of the workers. It assumes the task of setting an example and informing the workers and peasants, the basic force of production, so that they involve themselves more fully in the socio-economic development of the nation. This means raising the level of political awareness, encouraging love of country, and also making people understand the need to save money. The FLEN helps to improve the standard of vocational skills and abilities so that everybody can take an active part in the collective work of the nation, whose watchword is increasing productivity, a factor of prosperity.

The FLEN maintains close relations on all sides with the most highly respected local figures, such as revolutionary veterans, patriarchs and tribal chiefs of the various ethnic groups. It helps them in their activities and in their daily lives; it supports them in their active role in education, training and the management of affairs, whether regarding their children and grandchildren or the villagers, thus strengthening the bonds of solidarity while ensuring the defence and security of the village precincts.

The FLEN also attaches importance to the role of business people and shopkeepers in the building and development of our country; it is imperative to educate and train them so that they are imbued with the political line, the laws and regulations of the party and the state. In this way they will go about their business openly and honestly, devoted to the cause of our country. The FLEN is also in favour of exchanges with Lao expatriates. Through this body, they too can contribute to the construction of their country. The FLEN also enables foreign residents in our country to understand the political line of the state, to live honestly in conformity with the country's laws and regulations, and to honour their commitments to the state.

A fourth element of the FLEN's programme is the continuing enforcement of the just political line of the party and the state in regard to religion, on the basis of our country's Constitution. This means implementing a policy of alliance with religious authorities so that faith may contribute to the development of human resources in accordance with the prevailing political line. Finally, the programme promotes solidarity and friendship between the FLEN and friendly sister countries, as our nation needs the support of a range of other nations for its development.

SOME CAUSES FOR CELEBRATION

For some years now, whereas the region and the world have been the theatre of violent upheavals, our country, though faced with difficulties, has managed to remain united. This is a result of the clear-sighted political line of

our party, our army and our people, who have stuck together through thick and thin in their progress towards an all-embracing victory worthy of celebration.

With the help of other associations, the FLEN has managed to create favourable conditions affording the different ethnic groups opportunities to express their opinions, ideas, aspirations and even divergences. The object of this is to enable the multi-ethnic people to assume, with full knowledge of the facts, the role that devolves on them in the development of the various political lines and to submit their proposals and suggestions.

The FLEN firmly believes that everything must be done for the welfare of the multi-ethnic people. For this reason, it has made a point of encouraging and revitalizing the rural cultural movements, creating conditions that will enable them to make the most of their fine traditions. Every year the FLEN lays down directives as to the political programme for the preservation, building and promotion of culture, while engaging in the organization, supervision and management of events. To its credit might be mentioned the organization of the Lao New Year (Pimay Lao) festival, the Hmong New Year (Kin Chieng Hmong) festival, and that of the Kmhmu' New Year, as well as traditional festivals in rural regions, such as Khab Thum in Louang Phrabang or Khab Samneua in Houaphan. These festivities include music, dance, theatre and opera. They reflect the everyday life of each ethnic group and are invaluable symbols of great spiritual significance. It is very important to safeguard them, for they contribute to self-development, purity, well-being and self-esteem.

SOME PROBLEMS TO BE RESOLVED

The FLEN, representing as it does the right of multi-ethnic populations to self-determination, is counting on a vast mobilization of the people to ensure that everyone is aware of the importance of culture today (the symbol of the education and training of a whole people), and that everyone combats the elements that are polluting the national culture. A tendency for young people to be frivolous and extravagant, and to follow the latest fashion, is emerging. This is due, among other factors, to the establishment of shops, restaurants and places of entertainment which do not always respect Lao traditions and which propagate a degenerate culture encouraging prostitution, gambling and other vices. This leads to serious psychoses in young people, which have repercussions on family and social life.

The FLEN has not remained unconcerned by these problems. In answer to the appeals of the multi-ethnic people, it has sought to take on and put a stop to these social evils. The FLEN considers that the solution lies in the dissemination of culture through education and training. It also depends on law-abiding conduct and freedom of belief and tradition for multi-ethnic peoples. In addition, it is necessary to carry out research and study the spirit of the Lao multi-ethnic cultures, and also of carefully selected world traditions.

Although the FLEN has been working for many years now on establishing the party line, many problems nevertheless remain to be solved. The FLEN personnel have not yet realized the magnitude of the role and the tasks devolving on them in this new period. They have even fallen behind to some extent. The activities aimed at mobilizing the multi-ethnic people, the different social strata and all sectors of the economy, with a view to creating a united national conscience, real solidarity and favourable conditions for carrying out the strategic tasks of the revolution still leave something to be desired. As a result, a good many of our multi-ethnic compatriots fail to understand the political line of the party and the state. We have not yet managed to exchange views with certain multi-ethnic compatriots, particularly those living in rural areas that are difficult and dangerous to reach, remote from the areas in which the revolution is based, so as to organize production and raise their standard of living. Nor have we succeeded in mobilizing the different sectors of the economy so that they may play an active part in overcoming the difficulties in the above-mentioned areas.

The achievement of an Allied Front of workers, peasants, educated people, intellectuals and various other categories is still a weak link in our chain of activities. We have not yet found effective ways and means of raising political awareness, boosting patriotism and broadening people's knowledge and abilities. We have not yet done enough to mobilize revolutionaries held in esteem, pensioners, patriarchs and tribal chiefs in the various areas, to enlist their help in disseminating our ideas and giving advice to the country's children and grandchildren so as to strengthen the fellowship of solidarity. We therefore consider that we have not yet employed all the collective forces of society in the building and development of the country.

Solidarity between the FLEN and the various mass organizations and other social organizations has not yet been achieved. As a result, there is a certain disorder, with

everyone running their projects in their own way. The FLEN has not yet got down to carrying out in-depth research on the party's policy with regard to religion and culture. The defence and development of the country's culture and that of the various ethnic groups have not been sufficiently taken up by the people at large. A number of instances of social defeatism have become evident, and no measures have been enacted to counteract them so far.

There is also an organizational problem in the FLEN for orders do not seem to pass down from the centre to the grass roots, owing to a lack of authorized representatives. No real research is being conducted in the sociocultural field at present. The collaboration of the services concerned has not yet been secured, and there are administrative and management problems to solve if these projects are to be carried through successfully.

CULTURE IS OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE

When a country loses its independence, its culture loses its lustre. When its culture dies, a country loses the substance of its heritage and, in the end, derives its culture from other countries. In order to advance the culture of the various ethnic groups, the FLEN must henceforth devote its attention to the political programme outlined above. It must find some way of working with the various bodies and other departments with a view to implementing the programme of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the party concerning the development of human resources.

We are all Lao and must be proud to be so. It is time to put aside ulterior motives and quarrels and be honest and sincere, mutually supportive in every respect; we must eschew the narrow-mindedness of the minority groups which contributes to inferiority and defeatism. Unanimous in our support of the party line and programme, we must have confidence in the party and together make the efforts required to reach the same level as other countries. It is imperative to apply a policy of alliance with the mass organizations and the various social organizations such as the Federation of Trade Unions, the Federation of Women, the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Committee and the various associations that represent the strength of the party and the state at different levels. The FLEN intends to pursue its activities until they take shape. It wishes to call on the national services concerned, and also to appeal to international organizations to grant their moral and financial support and facilitate cultural exchanges while strengthening international friendship.

In conclusion, it may be said that culture is of the utmost importance. It is the foundation of social ethics, and at the same time it is evidence of the perpetuation and full flowering of the national spirit. It is of vital importance to humanity and is the main criterion of social development. So support must be forthcoming for an organization that seeks to encourage works of the mind and, in particular, safeguard, preserve and promote the cultures of ethnic groups and their various forms of artistic expression. For these have been the symbol and the quintessence of the cultures of humanity from time immemorial.

Research on Textile Traditions[1]

YOSHIKUNI YANAGI

THE TEXTILES RESEARCH PROJECT IN LAOS

The Institute attached to the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts in Japan began research on Lao minority group cultures in 1991, and signed an agreement of co-operation in 1993[2] to perform joint academic research into areas of arts and crafts, ethnomusicology, ethnography, linguistics, dance, theatre, literature and folklore of both Okinawa and Laos. It supports not only research activities and research institutions of Laos, but also promotes the exchange of researchers from both countries on a project basis. There were five research trips to Lao sites, starting in 1991, investigating approximately sixteen minority groups. They included the Lao, Tai Dam, Tai Khao, Tai Lu, Kmhmu', Hmong, Ngkriang and Katu. The research was to identify, on site, where, how and what kind of textiles each ethnic group was weaving.

The sizes, dimensions, construction and operation of the looms, structure of the textiles, variety of dyes, technical methods of dyeing the fibre, fibre materials and threads were all examined. We interviewed people regarding their textile traditions, including costumes, usage, design names and meanings, in each of the minority groups. In certain villages, we surveyed the textile activities in each and every home in the village. We also compiled a comparative list of textile terms in the Lao (using the international phonetic alphabet) and Japanese languages.

TEXTILES OF EACH MINORITY GROUP

Lao

I first saw a characteristic Lao loom in Phonsavan in l991. The most distinctive feature of this loom is the long draw heddle. By operating this draw heddle and shed sticks with full control, beautiful textiles such as *chok* and *khit* may be woven. Another distinctive feature is the loom structure which is assembled into a cube with bamboo or wooden parts and a stationary cloth beam. On the outskirts of Phonsavan we found a woman weaving a decorative fabric using a draw heddle. She said that before 1969 she had used a separate extra heddle for each unit of design instead of the long draw heddle. During the late 1960s she began using the existing long draw heddle. She also mentioned that for patterns with large repeated designs she used more than thirty extra heddles.

In Sop Mon, a tiny hamlet of 105 homes (with a population of 658) in the Xieng Kho region, we were able to see a simple warp (*mat mi*). In order to determine the extent of weaving in this village, we visited twelve homes. In them we found sixteen looms, only five of which were in use (December 1994). Various weaving methods were being employed. We observed a jar (pot) of about 30 cm in height containing natural indigo dye on the terrace of almost every home.

In Luang Phabang city we studied a traditional wedding costume of the Lao people. Laden with an abundance of gold thread, it reminded us of the opulent costumes of the dynasty period. In Sphay, 18 km north of Pakse, we found a loom with a long back, requiring two people to operate it, one to weave and the other to operate the draw heddle. Another unusual characteristic of the loom was that the warp was wound on the warp beam. The threads used were generally a combination of fine silk weft (*mat mi*) and a two-coloured twisted thread called *khit* (continuous supplementary weft technique).

Tai Khao (White Tai)

In Kwuay village in Xiengkhuang Province we were able to observe the reeling method used in obtaining silk from silkworms. The villagers culture silkworms from the Indo-Chinese peninsula which spin golden cocoons. One woman boils the cocoons and, using a very simple tool, winds golden silk threads by hand on to a basket. We also witnessed the dyeing of silk thread using only natural dyes; resist-dyeing with *mat mi* technique; and the process of fermentation and deoxidization of Ryukyu indigo, when the raw silk is transformed into a brilliant deep green. It was indeed a surprise to see that the fermented vat indigo can produce a dye of such a brilliant green hue.

In Sanrena we witnessed weaving by young girls. Most girls were using the *chok* and *khit* methods, and were weaving *shin* (tube skirts) using a draw heddle. We measured and recorded the dimensions of each part of the loom. We further examined the entire textile production procedure with the use of the draw heddle. The plane heddle consists of a pair of jointed loop heddles. The draw heddle likewise consists of jointed loop heddles and includes two warps in each loop. The plane heddle and the draw heddle were examined at all research sites.

The women of Sanrena were weaving *chok* textiles using draw heddles. While shed sticks are normally used for the draw heddle, in this case threads were used in place of shed sticks. With thread, which is finer than sticks, a weaver can use well over 100 shed sticks instead of the usual ten to forty. As a result, a design consisting of over 100 repeated patterns can be created by using over 100 shed sticks. For any design requiring over eighty shed sticks, the women were using threads. In Sam Nua we also observed the tools used to reel mat mi weft and local dyeing methods, and we were able to witness experienced weavers producing extremely intricate designs with extraordinary efficiency.

In Xieng Louang village we were able to observe the complete process of cloth weaving using a handspun cotton thread for warping. We also photographed and recorded the double-warp float-weave loom and *muk* textiles. We found the loom used to weave *muk* textile extremely interesting. With double-warp threads, they were equipped with triple heddles for float weaving. We visited twenty-five of the sixty-six homes in the village and questioned residents. We found only nine of the twenty-five involved in weaving, and only one family seemed to be producing *muk* textiles. In all, we saw six looms with the *chok* technique, one checkered cotton textile loom, and one undyed cotton textile loom. We further learned that the rest of the villagers do indeed undertake weaving activity at one time or another during the year. Unfortunately, our visit (29 December) coincided with threshing time in the village fields at the end of the busy farming season.

Tai Deng (Red Tai)

With the Tai Deng in Siengkhor district, Houaphanh Province, our focus centred on the women weavers of the village. We observed the careful culturing of silkworms that produce yellow cocoons, and the process of reeling raw silk threads from these cocoons. We examined the looms used for the figured textiles and the weaving tools. The looms were of the draw-weave variety and the weaving method used was *chok*, using six extra heddles instead of long draw heddles.

Tai Lü

In Phanom village outside Luang Prabang, we visited the Tai Lü. Their main weaving materials are silk and cotton and the weaving techniques were mostly *khit* and *chok*. We recorded the names of each weaving tool and loom part. We also examined the process of manufacturing the draw heddles.

Tai Phouan

In Nahoy village in Xieng Khouang Province we visited the Tai Puen. Of the forty-five homes in the village we observed the weaving of textiles in fifteen households with looms using *chok* and *ghot* techniques.

Tai Dam (Black Tai)

We surveyed the Tai Dam in Sod village of Siengkhor district, where we examined the weaving process known as *pha khid*. They were weaving cotton cloth with the *kie*

method using the draw heddle. We saw two types of loom. One had the draw heddle located near the weaver for easy access; in the two-person operation, the draw heddle was located at the back of the loom where it was more convenient for the person operating the draw heddle.

Tai Vad

The Tai Vad in Sae village are known to be extremely close to the Tai Dam. We observed an elderly woman weaving a narrow (7 cm) indigo-dyed cotton cloth without using a reed. While most weavers normally sit directly in front of the loom, it seemed quite unusual that this woman sat to the right of the cloth, weaving in a diagonal direction. We visited eighteen homes, containing twenty-two looms, and found that only two looms were equipped with draw heddles. Cotton cloth in solid colours was woven in most of the homes.

Kmhmu'

In Lakpaet village just outside Luang Prabang, we visited the Kmhmu'. Although we had heard that the Kmhmu' people do not practise weaving, we saw quite a number of looms, all equipped with draw heddles. The weaving of women's skirts (*shin*) was practised in this village, using mainly *khit* and *chok* techniques. We also examined bags woven with hemp (*phet*) fibre processed from the stalk of the hemp plant. For the shoulder straps, narrow, short woven tape-form textiles were used.

Hmong

We visited the Hmong in the villages of Longang and Kan Khao to observe their weaving using the back-tensioned loom. We also witnessed the unreeling of marijuana fibre used in their textiles. We recorded the measurements of the loom and names of each part of the loom.

Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic)

At the Lawi Fangdaeng village, the homes are built on a rather small scale. The longhouse style with outstanding decorative entrances is common. A totem pole called Sao Sey stands in front of each home. Here, we found tools for back-tensioned looms but unfortunately all weaving activity had ceased six or seven years previously. In Sekong city we surveyed the textile activity among the Katuic women. Here, for the first time, we examined the back-tensioned loom of the Austro-Asiatic people of Laos. We studied the warp float weave techniques, the structure of the loom and the heddle, and recorded the names of each part of the loom. We also investigated the fabric design and catalogued the names of the cloth. In Sekong city, we also analysed the warping technique used by the Katu. The warping was done in loop form by carefully lining the warp thread in the estimated finished cloth length and width.

We observed the back-tensioned looms of the Talieng in Sekong city, the Harlak in Kasangkang village outside Sekong, and Katu in Hueey Ngua village just outside Pakse. We also examined the back-tensioned loom used by the Ta-Oi in Hueey Ngua village near Saravane, where a narrow sash (about 3 cm) was woven using hemp thread. One noteworthy technique we observed was that all the warps were individually twined around one thin stick, controlling the width and tension of the warp. This method is widely used in back-tensioned looms around the world but this was the only one of its kind we saw in southern Laos.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LAO TEXTILE TRADITION

I have recorded several weaving techniques. They are *chok*: discontinuous supplementary weft technique; *khit*: continuous supplementary weft technique; *mat mi*: resist-dye technique; *ghot*: tapestry weave technique; *muck*: continuous supplementary warp technique; *mucko*: combination of *muck*, *mat mi* and *chok* techniques.

Loom characteristics

First is the long draw heddle. By freely using this with the shed sticks, *chok* and *khit* can be woven. Second is the loom structure. All looms are made of bamboo or wooden parts structured into cube form, with a stationary cloth beam. Other characteristics include the fact that the warp is not twined on the warp beam but gradually narrows towards the weaver. The end portion is bundled and tied stationary to the side of the loom. As for the long draw heddle, a similar one is used by the Thai tribe in Yunnan Province in China. However, in China, most draw heddles are movable and very few are of the stationary variety.

Structurally, all Lao looms have a fixed cloth beam except the back-tensioned looms of the Mon-Khmer and the Mon. The movable draw heddle loom of Yunnan Province is a back-tensioned loom but clearly differs from that seen in Laos. In China the draw heddle has further evolved into a

'draw loom'. The Lao draw heddle style, on the other hand, is important for being mechanically the most simple. Just by the use of a shed stick, the loom memorizes the pattern and can weave an identical pattern over and over again. A similar draw heddle is used in Indonesia, and it would be interesting to investigate any ethnological relationship between the two.

We have identified a far more primitive weaving method without draw heddle being used to produce *chok* and *khit* designs among such groups as the Tai Dam and the Tai Deng. Also, we need to collect similar examples and further investigate the method of *muk* loom weaving as well as those practised in the wats, that is, side weaving without the reed to create narrow sashes. As for the back-tensioned loom of the Mon-Khmer, it is very important to note that it exemplifies a style seen prior to the dawn of Lao culture.

Natural dye and dyeing techniques

We recorded a great number of natural dyes including kikang (red *Iocque* dye); two kinds of *horme* (Ryukyu indigo: *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* D.C.); Indian indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria L.*); *keming* (light yellow: *Curcuma Ionga L.*); *mackset* (orange: *Bixa erellana Roxb*); and *khua-heam* (yellow). We found two methods of indigo dyeing, one a fermentation method, and the other a raw leaf dye. Other dyes produced brilliant colours without the use of any mordant, convincing us that these dyes and dyeing methods are far superior to others.

CONCLUSIONS

The intangible cultural heritage of native textiles is, needless to say, sustained by techniques and by those who possess the techniques. In our extensive investigation of the Laotian textile tradition, we surveyed and recorded the facts without any preconceived ideas. It is clear that in order to study the intangible cultural heritage of the minority groups of Laos, we cannot neglect the influences of the surrounding Lao peoples as well as other powerful minority groups. Normally, textile techniques and relevant materials which belong to the materialistic culture tend to go through a transformation much more rapidly and are more easily influenced by other cultures than spiritual elements such as traditional design and their significance. However, we found that the textile heritage of Laos still maintains the important intrinsic tradition of each individual group. Thus, it is most important that we correctly record the textile heritages of every group before they are lost forever. This will in turn ensure the safeguarding and promotion of this valuable Lao heritage.

NOTES

1. A project implemented jointly by the Institute attached to the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts in Japan and the Lao Institute of Research on Culture.

2. On 28 January 1993 the agreement for academic co-operation was signed by the Institute attached to the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts and the Lao Committee for Social Sciences, the first such agreement to be made by the Lao Government with a foreign research institution. Following this agreement, four research trips were undertaken in Laos by Japanese specialists (February and December 1993, December 1994 and February 1996), while two Lao researchers (Thongphet Kingsada and Khamphèng Ketavong) visited Japan.

Safeguarding Lao Minority Traditions: Role of Ethnomusicology and Archiving

AMY CATLIN

UCLA AND RESEARCH ON LAO MINORITIES

The University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) is one of the nine research and teaching campuses of the statewide University of California system. While this campus does not support any particular programmes that concern Lao minorities directly, there are various faculty research projects and courses of study offered which do address the cultural traditions of Lao minorities, as well as resources which support research on such topics.

At UCLA, various units have provided resources to foster research, education and promulgation of the intangible heritage of Lao minorities, both within Laos as well as within the United States. These include the Department of Anthropology, the Fowler Museum of Cultural History, the Asian-American Studies Center, the Institute for American Cultures, the Pacific Rim Studies Center, the Linguistics Department, the University Research Library, and the Department of Ethnomusicology. As a scholar of Hmong music, I have been a faculty member and research associate of the Department of Ethnomusicology since 1982. This department administers the prestigious Ethnomusicology Publications Program and the exemplary Ethnomusicology Archive, both of which have provided support for the study and preservation of minority traditions from Laos.

Hmong music

In 1984 and 1986, the Asian-American Studies Center and the Institute for American Cultures provided me with funding for the transcription, translation and interpretation of recordings of Hmong *kwv txhiaj*, the sung poetry performed at New Year festivals and during courtship. This work resulted in several publications, as well as being used in the exhibition entitled *Textiles as Texts: Arts of Hmong Women from Laos*, held at the Woman's Building Gallery in Los Angeles.[1] This exhibition included the active involvement of Hmong women textile artists and singers during workshops and festival programmes. Autobiographies were written by participating women and published in the exhibit catalogue, along with a cassette tape of Hmong women's songs entitled *Virgins, Orphans, Widows, and Bards: Songs of Hmong Women*.[2]

Since 1982 I have used Hmong materials for lectures and teaching in the departments of Ethnomusicology and World Arts and Cultures, as well as outside the university for invited lectures, scholarly presentations for academic societies, and publications. Hmong musicians have been brought to the campus to demonstrate and perform their traditional songs and instrumental music. Hmong music has been incorporated into my introductory undergraduate course at UCLA entitled 'Musical Cultures of the World:

Asia'. This has includes both audio recordings of Hmong music and video recordings of Hmong community events within the United States and Laos which involve music. My graduate seminar, 'Music of Mainland South-East Asia', gives special attention to the minorities of Laos, including Iu Mien, Kmhmu', Hmong and Tai Lue. Another of my graduate seminars, 'Applied and Public Sector Ethnomusicology', addressed the theoretical basis for applied work among refugees from South-East Asia in the United States, as well as among indigenous and native peoples of mainland South-East Asia. The need for ethnomusicological projects in development was emphasized in this seminar, particularly in places such as Laos, where tourism and rapid modernization are a threat to traditional societies.

In 1984 a Symposium on Asian Music in North America was held at UCLA in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Performances by Hmong musicians enhanced an evening programme at the conference, as part of a Lao-style *baci* ceremony. In 1985 the papers from this symposium were published in a volume entitled *Asian Music in North America*, which formed volume six of the series 'Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology' published in our department.[3] The cover of the volume featured a traditional Hmong textile design, and my chapter on Hmong traditional and acculturated music in America, entitled 'Harmonizing the Generations in Hmong Musical Performance', described generational differences in Hmong-American music, and the use of song texts as an arena for discourse concerning important social problems.[4] Linguistic analysis coupled with musical analysis in another work demonstrated the loss of tone-sensitivity in Hmong-American music.[5] This introduced the notion of a diasporized minority group from Laos facing a radically changed future, and the musical responses this has engendered, including the desire for both living continuity and archival preservation of musical traditions on the part of the Hmong in the West.

A National Endowment for the Humanities Post-Doctoral Fellowship in 1984 for research on Hmong sung poetry, *kwv txhiaj*, enabled me to continue work in California begun in 1978 with Hmong refugees in the eastern United States. This involved collecting and studying audio and video documentation of Hmong events where music is featured.

Ethnomusicology of Indo-China

In 1988 the Department of Ethnomusicology hosted a three-day symposium entitled 'Text, Context and Performance in Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam', with support from UCLA's Pacific Rim Studies Center and the Indochina Studies Program of the Social Science Research Council, New York. Two scholars from Laos made presentations at this conference. Houmphanh Rattanavong, Director of the National Research Institute for Art, Literature and Linguistics of the Lao Committee for Social Sciences at that time, contributed two articles. His first article, like several others in the resulting volume, concerned lowland Lao musical tradition. The second, however, contained considerable information on musical instruments of various minority groups. Entitled 'Music and Instruments in Laos: Historical Antecedents and the Democratic Revolution', the article offers organological insights and classification information, and urges the maintenance of the authentic Lao musical voice through its own unique musical instruments.[6]

Five other scholars presented research papers on oral performance traditions of Hmong, Kmhmu', Mien and Tai Lue minorities of Laos. Four of these papers, along with Rattanavong's, were published in the aforementioned volume resulting from this symposium.

Khammanh Siphanhxay, an ethnographic filmmaker from the Audio Visual Division in the IRC in Laos, was invited as a visiting scholar to the Department of Ethnomusicology at UCLA for six months in 1998 with the support of the Asian Cultural Council, New York.

Research on minority oral literature and music traditions from Laos

The first section of *Text, Context, and Performance in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam*, the volume published from the 1988 symposium at UCLA, is entitled 'Tribal Minorities' and is dedicated to minority traditions from Laos. The first paper in the section, 'Poetic Parallelism in Kmhmu' Verbal Arts: From Texts to Performances' by linguist and folklorist Frank Proschan, gives a sophisticated analysis of oral poetry.[7] It delineates the pervasive use of parallelism in Kmhmu' verbal arts, defined by Proschan as 'the ordered interplay of repetition and variation'. Proschan finds the use of parallelism to be a playful way for Kmhmu' poets to manipulate their materials during performance. Complete Kmhmu' texts are given in the

article along with English translations and musical transcriptions. He cites the works of other scholars whose research on various Lao minorities indicates that parallelism is an important poetic device throughout the region. Proschan has continued his research with Kmhmu' oral literature and the making of traditional crafts in Laos and Viet Nam while working at the Smithsonian Institution.

The poetic texts of Tai Lue are the subject of linguist John Hartmann's 'The Context, Text and Performance of Khap Lue'.[8] His analysis of poetic devices has led him to distinguish three possible functions of Tai oral literature: to comment, to border, or to connect. Hartmann, professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Northern Illinois University, has published extensively on comparative historical Tai and oral literature and drama, including a study of a Black Tai narrative of the hero Prince Therng. *His Linguistic and Memory Structures in Tai-Lue Oral Narratives* (1984) is a major study of a minority oral tradition from Laos.

The third article concerns the oral literature of the Hmong from Laos, as preserved among refugees in the United States. Entitled 'Homo Cantens: Why Hmong Sing During Interactive Courtship Rituals', the article explores the motivations behind the preservation and continuation of one form of traditional sung poetry.[9] My other writings on the Hmong focus on acculturation in the oral literature and music of the Hmong in the United States, as well as in Thailand and Laos. I have recently produced a one-hour video entitled 'Hmong Musicians in America: Encounters with Three Generations of Hmong Americans, 1978-1996'.[10] Incorporating footage from the United States, Laos and Thailand, the narrative explores the changing functions and techniques of Hmong music.

Herbert Purnell's article, entitled 'Lexical Tone and Musical Pitch in an Iu Mien Yao Wedding Song', is an analysis of the relationship between linguistic tone and melodic pitch and contour in sung poetry.[11] It contains texts in Chinese characters, Romanization and English translation, as well as musical transcriptions from the recorded performance. Purnell is a linguist who has worked extensively in China with the Iu Mien on dictionary projects, and with Mien in Thailand and in the United States on various forms of oral literature. He is Professor and Chair of the Department of TESOL and Applied Linguistics at Biola University.

A fifth paper, also on the Mien, published elsewhere, was presented at the symposium by anthropologist Eric Crystal, Director of the Center for South-East Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, one of UCLA's sister campuses. Crystal has documented traditional Mien and Hmong religious ceremonies, cultural adaptation processes, and textiles among enclave communities in California since 1981. He visited Laos briefly in 1993 as head of the World Affairs Council of Northern California tour of Indo-China. While working with the Asia Forest Network in Son La Province, Viet Nam, in 1994 and 1995, he made brief visits to Black Tai and Hmong communities in which he documented folk music traditions through video and still photography.

ARCHIVE FOR THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF LAOS

Professor Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy (Chair of the Ethnomusicology Department at that time) and myself travelled to Laos in January 1989 at the invitation of the Ministry for Education and Culture. The purpose was to continue discussions which began during the 1988 symposium at UCLA concerning a proposed archive for the intangible cultural heritage of Laos, especially including the minority groups. Much of the design for the proposed archive was derived from the Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (ARCE) in New Delhi, India, which was conceived and begun by Professor Jairazbhoy. The ARCE was founded in 1984 through the American Institute of Indian Studies with financial support from the Smithsonian Institution and the Ford Foundation.

The major concept behind this archive was to acquire copies of materials collected by foreign scholars and taken away from India, returning the copies to the archive for access to local scholars and culture bearers. The ARCE is now in its thirteenth year of successful operation, thanks largely to continuing financial support from the Ford Foundation and the Smithsonian Institution. It publishes a newsletter and special publications, conducts seminars and workshops on documentation, and provides services to visiting scholars in India who are researching traditional and contemporary music, dance and ritual involving music. These services include the facilitation of research through technical support and the provision of access to local scholars in the region where the visiting scholar intends to work. Upon the departure of the scholars from India, duplication of all materials to be housed in the archives is provided by the ARCE at no cost to the scholar. Thus, the collections of the scholar are protected in the

event of any accident. Several other national archives have since been modelled after the ARCE.

The Lao proposal included plans for obtaining copies of materials from Laos now residing in the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, as well as collections made by American scholars in Laos. These comprise both unpublished and published materials. We also contributed funds for this trip to Laos, as well as a professional portable tape recorder for the invaluable ethnomusicological field research being conducted among minority groups by the National Research Institute for Art, Literature and Linguistics. I also deposited a number of my publications on the music of the Hmong people in the archives of the National Research Institute for Art, Literature and Linguistics of the Lao Committee for Social Sciences.

In 1996, my collection of materials concerning the music of the Hmong minority from Laos was provided to the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive for duplication, including some 120 hours of audio recordings and 75 hours of video recordings, along with supporting written documentation, transcriptions, translations and interpretative writings. These materials will be available for research to scholars and students through the archive.

The UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive was formally established in 1961 as a research unit within the academic programme in ethnomusicology. It is used by scholars all over the world. From its beginning the archive has served two purposes: to preserve sound recordings in the field of ethnomusicology and to provide materials (sound recordings and written materials) for the use of researchers in ethnomusicology. Over 12,000 non-commercial sound recordings from around the world are copies of items recorded in the field by UCLA faculty or graduate students. There are also some 12,000 commercial disc recordings, 300 compact discs, 3,000 cassettes and accompanying photographs, slides, videotapes and films representing much of the globe. The Oriental Collection of 900 written sources contains original and photocopied manuscripts, musical notations, books and articles in the Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Thai languages.

The materials in the Ethnomusicology Archive are catalogued on ORION, the UCLA library's on-line computerized catalogue, in its own database called ETHNO. This database can be accessed from the ORION computer terminal in the archive or from ORION terminals in any UCLA library. It is also possible for individuals to obtain their own ORION accounts for use on home or office computers. Searching can be done by names of collectors, authors, editors and performers; by album titles and song titles; by geographical areas and culture groups; by subjects, musical instruments and genres; and by record company names and numbers.

Original recordings are kept in air-conditioned storage areas for preservation. Archive users listen to duplicate copies or tape dubs. Facilities for listening are available in the archive, with playback machines for many recording formats.

The archive contains some recordings of minority peoples from southern China, Laos and Viet Nam, and is interested in acquiring additional recordings and related materials. There are plans for a CD publication series which will make available to the scholarly world some of the recordings housed within the archive, with explanatory notes provided by the collectors. It has already been suggested by the vice-chair and the director of the archive that music of the minority groups of Laos could be a valuable early volume in the proposed series, which could be produced in collaboration with the Lao PDR.

The Fowler Museum of Cultural History contains some examples of textiles from Laos made by minority peoples. The curator for South-East Asia, Dr Roy Hamilton, is interested in increasing the collections from mainland South-East Asia and exhibiting such items in the future. Pieces made by minority peoples from Laos are found for sale in the museum gift shop.

Other related activities have included the guidance of theses on minority languages and cultures of Laos in the linguistics and anthropology departments. Lao minorities who have entered the United States as refugees have taken part in courses taught through the Asian-American Studies Center. Numerous members of Lao minority groups who are American residents have become undergraduate students at UCLA in various departments. Several Hmong students have become active participants in the Asian-American Studies Center, which encourages the examination of tradition and acculturation among Asian-American populations, including minorities from Laos. The university research library maintains a vast collection which includes numerous volumes related to the minority groups of Laos, and is constantly updating its holdings.

In conclusion, various activities of this university and its faculty during the past fifteen years have been directed at


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Old photographs with original captions

115. Southern Laos tomb
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116. Akha women, Phongsaly Province
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117. 'Kha' warriors (Austro-Asiatic), Saravan Province
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118. Akha woman, Phongsaly Province
© Lefebvre — Musée de l'Homme/Paris

119. Phunoi women, Phongsaly Province
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120. Akha woman, Phongsaly Province
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121. "Sorcerer", Phongsaly Province
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122. Southern Laos woman
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123. Forest spirit, Phongsaly Province
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124. Men drinking laohai (rice beer), Savannakhet Province
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125. Hmong woman harvesting poppies
© Musée de l'Homme/Paris

the study, preservation and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage of minority groups of Laos, and it is anticipated that this attention will continue to grow in the coming years.

NOTES

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Creating an Ethnographical Data Bank in the Lao PDR

JACQUES LEMOINE

The recommendations made to the Lao Government in 1996 by the International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in the Lao PDR included the creation of an ethnographical data bank in Vientiane. This project received the full attention of the authorities concerned and, financed jointly by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the CACSPI[1] of the CNRS, got under way in 1997 with the official handing over of the equipment and installations of the bank to the Vice-Minister of Information and Culture.[2]

The setting up of the project was a direct result of the 1996 meeting. I have set forth here the important parts of the report relating to it and the proposals I presented, enumerating in turn the problems involved in the safeguarding of the intangible heritage and the solutions available in the specific case of the Lao PDR. Finally, I conclude with a brief account of the launching of the data bank.

INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Logically, the intangible heritage comprises everything that is not included in what anthropologists describe as 'the tangible culture' which, when it is to be preserved, finds its place more especially in ethnographical museums. This still leaves many fields to the intangible heritage.

First, there are languages, their dialects, their varieties and their literatures. Then, of course, there is the social organization: kinship systems, constitution of 'houses', methods of filiation and residence, marriage and divorce, relations among relatives by marriage and common law. Traditional political organization is also part of the intangible heritage. This includes the constitution of lineages, chieftaincies, permanent or otherwise, anarchic democracy with the council of the elders of the village and its converse, Messianism, and so on.

Another example of intangible heritage is religious expression and traditional ritual: ways of communicating with the invisible, integration of group relations in the village territory and in the time cycles, the relation of human beings to nature in their particular ecological niche through their construction of supernature, the relation of human beings to life and death and life after death for the survival of the group and, subsequently, the relation of human beings to illness through the various forms of cure – direct intervention (shamanism, mediumism) or complex ritual procedures. Finally there are the myths of origin and oral literary traditions (tales, songs, proverbs).

This list is no doubt incomplete, but even so the task is tremendous, and if we had to start from scratch it would require the contributions of several generations of researchers. It is for this reason that the experience gained

by our institutions and researchers over the past forty years is the major asset of this initiative. This research, which had been interrupted in the field in Laos and remained so even at the end of the 1970s, was continued elsewhere (in Thailand and in China, in particular) and was enriched by these – often revealing – extensions. It also reached maturity with the increasingly fine analysis of the data collected in Laos and elsewhere. I refer here to a genuine expertise which, while not covering all the minority groups in the Lao PDR for there are so many, can contribute to the assessment, preservation and even promotion of a number of cultural heritages.

THE PARTICULAR CASE OF THE LAO PDR IN THE DEFINITION OF ETHNIC AND TRIBAL IDENTITIES

As I lived there for some fifteen years between 1960 and 1976, I have arrived at a few ideas about human problems in this country, and if it were my decision alone I should be inclined to make it a huge ecomuseum – managed by UNESCO in co-ordination with its political authorities – in which human beings and nature could continue to flourish while doing each other the least possible harm. You are going to say that this is an unrealizable dream, and you will no doubt have excellent reasons for saying so. Then what remains for us to achieve? Recent lists give a fairly conservative figure of forty-seven minority groups without specifying any level of identity – ethnic identity, tribal identity? What about cultural identity, which corresponds to each of these subdivisions?

Assuming that there are indeed forty-seven ethnic entities, I note many confusing appellations among the 'ethnic' names. It is not possible nowadays to choose an ethnic label arbitrarily without paying attention to the name of these people in the neighbouring countries where they are also to be found, or to what they think their name should be. One can, of course, bring together a panel of specialists to discuss the question, but it is highly likely that the ethnonym selected will not be the one others have given to these people, but the one they chose themselves.

In the Tibeto-Burman group for instance, the name 'Ko' is a very poor ethnonym – and not only because a special phonetic symbol is required to indicate the vowel sound. In Thailand the Ko are called Akha generically, in China, Hani, and in Viet Nam, Hanhi, whereas Akha and Hani are two ethnic entities whose languages, although related, are not mutually intelligible without a laborious adjustment. My list gives Akha as an alternative name, and no fewer than thirteen, perhaps fifteen, other tribal appellations. (The last two, Ma Muang, 'Mangue', and Kong Sat, seem suspect to me, for they derive from Lao or a Tai dialect.) Further down the list, I rediscover the name Musso, humorously spelt 'Mousseu' (sparkling wine in French) by an earlier writer, a name which must derive from the Burmese mossoei (hunter) according to the late L. Bernot and which simply refers to the Lahu. That is what they are called in China and in Thailand, Laos being their easternmost point of migration. Their tribal identities are distinguished as Lahu Nyi, Lahu Shi, Lahu Na and Lahu Shehleh, according to whether their costumes are 'red', 'white' or 'black'.[3] It would not cost anything to use their language to distinguish them, rather than Lao or a Tai dialect.

Another example is the Miao-Yao group, whom I know well, having studied them for most of my life. In so far as the Lao PDR is concerned, I note two ethnonyms: Hmong and Yao. This is quite correct. Although China has thought fit to combine in a single group, Miao, three groups – the Hmong, the Hmu and the Qoxiong – with different mutually unintelligible languages belonging to the same family, it does not seem imperative to retain this ethnonym of Chinese and not indigenous origin in either Viet Nam, the Lao PDR or Thailand. In its southern pronunciation, 'Meo', it had derogatory connotations for the persons concerned. Then again, of the three Miao groups, only the Hmong are represented in these three countries. However, the change of ethnonym is still recent: it began in Laos from 1972, and in Thailand and Viet Nam after 1975. The initiative came from the people concerned, who managed to impose their own appellation in these different countries, thus showing their accession to a certain political recognition.

However, when we go into the tribal identities of the Hmong in the Lao PDR, we fall again into a faulty classification, distinguishing them from each other in Lao by colours – white, green, red, black – whereas these are but a misleading approximation. It would be more logical to use their language, for these distinctions do not necessarily correspond to the dominant colours in their apparel. For instance, the Green Hmong in Thailand were until quite recently called 'Blue' by the English-speaking missionaries, simply because the women wore predominantly indigo blue skirts – despite the fact that the people called themselves 'green' and not 'blue'. The list of tribal identities noted for the Hmong is, moreover, incomplete.

With regard to the Yao, the Lao PDR has only two tribal identities, the Yu Mien or Kim Mien[4] (Yao Mien) and the Kim Mun (Lantien Yao, often written and pronounced Lan Ten). The women of the latter group wear quite different costumes. Since when, and why, have those of Luang Namtha decided to call themselves by the Lao name Lao Huay (Mountain Stream Lao), which is highly confusing? I visited them, but was unable to get a clear answer. It is probably a matter of very local politics, for these Yao have been driven back by Tai Dam immigrants from an earlier territory in the Luang Namtha plain. By calling themselves Lao Huay, they are perhaps claiming the right to remain in their present ecological niche in the first foothills of the same plain

While it is appropriate to refer to tribal identities in the case of tribal societies such as those I have just mentioned, in the case of Tai groups a number of problems arise. For instance, the ethnonym Phuthaï. This should send linguists into fits (of laughter). They regard the Phuthaï as a particular group of central Tai to be found between Savannakhet in the Lao PDR and Nakhon Phanom in Thailand. The most suitable ethnonym for the whole of the Tai groups in the Lao PDR is Tai, which could be spelt Tay if the Vietnamese had not chosen this ethnonym for the Tay (formerly known as Tho), who are an extension of the Zhuang groups in the Guangxi region (China). The Vietnamese and the Thais call the group made up of the Tai of western Viet Nam 'Thai', but the spelling – which is etymologically incorrect – has in both Viet Nam and Thailand political connotations that are difficult to overcome. It does not seem to me to be in the interests of the Lao PDR to follow suit. So why not simply call them Tai, or even Tay?[5]

On turning to the particular identities covered by this ethnonym, one can no longer really speak of tribal identities, for they actually comprise ethnic groups as well – the Tai Dam and Tai Khao made up the segmental State of the Sip Song Chau Tai; the Tai Deng belonged to Muang Deng or the chau of Lang Chanh in Thanh Hoa Province in Viet Nam and so forth. This implies first and foremost that the Tai as an ethnic whole should be regarded as an ensemble of ethnic groups and not as an individual group.

One wonders whether it would not be better to revert to the traditional appellations, which designate real populations with a language, and their own traditional political and social structure, rather than combining all these different entities under a single generic name as the Chinese do. The justification for the Chinese practice is that the state has replaced the concept of ethnic group by that of nationality. This is not the case, however, either in Viet Nam or in the Lao PDR.[6] This simplification, which some of those concerned found exaggerated, was compensated by the institution of an entire autonomous indigenous administration. Such a solution, understandable on the scale of a huge country with a gigantic population, would, as its first effect, lead to the fragmentation of the administrative set-up if it were instituted in Viet Nam or the Lao PDR.

Incidentally, some of these groups require further research to determine whether their names designate ethnic or district identities. 'Manorial' would be the most appropriate term anyway, for what these rural populations brought with them when they emigrated was the name of the feudal lord's domain to which they initially belonged.[7] In fact, in certain cases identification is clear: the Tai Moey are Tai Dam from Muang Mui (Mai Chau); the Tai Theng, for their part, are from Muang Thanh (Dien Bien Phu); the Tai Vat are from Muang Vat (Yen Chau), and the Tai Xang are Tai (and even some Lao) from Muang Xang (Moc Chau). For it is common practice among the different Tai peoples to preserve the trace of their original *muang* (feudal domain) in their toponyms and ethnonyms when they migrate. So, in the case of the Tai, the problem of identity should be carefully handled in the light of the ethnic and local context.

Cultural identity follows from all these distinguishing characteristics, supplying the identity markers appropriate to each. The Lao PDR police, when making a census, thus have every right to take all these distinctions into account as they are given. It is up to the ethnologists and the linguists to establish the ethnic divisions and relationships between languages and dialects. This is an essential task, but cross-checking is not possible and the responsibility for it does not devolve on their two disciplines indiscriminately. The linguists, on the basis of fine analyses, tend to multiply groups which, once recognized, they regard as ethnic groups; but language is not the only factor in the definition of ethnic identity.

Other factors are involved and ethnologists are aware of their relevance. An ethnic group is the social product of a history and not, on the contrary, the starting-point of that history. It is for this reason that myths of origin are always concerned with justifying a society in its present state and not with describing a former society from which it would

appear to have stemmed.[8] Linguistic analysis allows for the differentiation of dialectal groups which may combine to form an ethnic group, or else belong to different ethnic groups. The links that their proximity suggest may reflect an earlier ethnic identity and in no way prejudge the question of the present ethnic identity, which cannot be determined on the basis of linguistic criteria alone.

However that may be, the first task in the safeguarding and promotion of the intangible heritage to be carried out in the Lao PDR is the establishment of suitable ethnonyms, which reveal the transfrontier ramifications of this or that group, while pinpointing the identity of the group in terms of its own identification and not the relatively distorted identification imposed on it by its neighbours.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY ARE ALSO TO BE DISSOCIATED

A cultural identity sometimes corresponds to an ethnic identity, but usually to an additional subdivision of the ethnic identity into tribal or local identities. Thus I noted recently in the *muang* of Xieng Kho in Houahan Province that the census recorded, apart from the Lao, no fewer than thirteen cultural identities for only four or five ethnic minorities: six or seven Tai groups, two Kmhmu', one Yao and three Hmong. The safeguarding and promotion that we want to implement should operate at this level as the police do, but the identities present should be analysed accurately, that is, the tribal cultural identity should be replaced within the ethnic cultural identity, since the former is merely a particular extension of the latter.

POSSIBLE FUTURES

The Lao PDR is now at the crossroads. As yet, no institutional attempt has been made to define ethnic and cultural identities. They can be said to be recognized constitutionally in an informal way, but not officially established. This is a major advantage, for an exact scientific assessment can still be made without running up against administrative regulations and practices. As it happens, the Lao PDR has set up a network of cultural administrators right down to the level of the muang, so the essential basic data can be collected and, in the event of a nationwide effort, the facilities indispensable for receiving external aid are available.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The following proposal is based on the assumption that it will be decided to go ahead with the safeguarding and promotion of the intangible heritage of minority groups in the Lao PDR. In my view, the first requirement is to have a clear idea of what it is advisable to preserve. As I have already explained, cultural identity markers are intended to bring out two types of identity, one of which is subordinate to the other, ethnic identity being divisible into a number of tribal or local (manorial) identities. In the eyes of the populations and of their neighbours, it is often difficult to differentiate between the two, for it is the tribal or local identity which is the most directly perceptible. And yet this division is necessary for a rational classification and an understanding of the values to be preserved. So one has to start with a detailed assessment of the heritage of each ethnic group and, within each ethnic group, of each tribal or local entity.

HOW SHOULD IT BE DONE?

First of all, a polyvalent team of specialists should be formed, based in Vientiane but touring the provinces, for a fundamental feature of all these identities is that they are located in many different places. In each province the team could hold a seminar bringing together all those responsible for culture in the different muang and explain to them how to observe and classify the various cultural identities at both the ethnic level and the tribal level. After that the team could visit the different muang and conduct experimental surveys with the participation of the members of the cultural centre of the *muang*.

Each team of specialists would include a Lao member of the IRC and, whenever possible, an expert from the CACSPI. At the level of the muang, it would systematically record every ethnographic sample selected, using sound recordings, video and digital photography. These data would then be compiled in the form of a multimedia CD-ROM and kept in Vientiane in the IRC data bank. Advances in data processing have revolutionized ethnography in that the data can now be compiled simultaneously in their entirety and communicated from a distance for international studies. The IRC can thus fulfil its purpose as an academy for the conservation of the cultures of the Lao PDR.

Such an organization has the merit of being extremely easy and inexpensive to run. The participation of judiciously chosen experts and the fact that equipment is now quite

affordable make this solution most attractive in the case of a country with slender resources such as the Lao PDR. It also has the merit of involving all the Lao institutions concerned with culture and providing training for local personnel in a rational, uniform way, so that their information and their own research are gradually refined to the point where the material is directly usable.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The aim of the project is to give the IRC a tool for the safeguarding and promotion of the minority cultures. Safeguarding will be ensured by training local cultural administrators in the collection of raw ethnographic material, including photographs, sound recordings and video, with digital equipment. This material, already computerized, is to be put together by the IRC in Vientiane on CD-ROMs with appropriate comments and explanations. It can then be used in communication with international experts or kept in this minimal form for the use of the ethnic groups themselves when, later, they wish to know more about their lost traditions.

Promotion could begin by drawing the attention of the minorities to the value of their intangible heritage, which will undoubtedly enhance it. The local cultural administrators will also have acquired a sound basis for discussion and become closer to the minorities, whose intangible heritage they will be better able to protect. This enhancing of the value of their heritage in their own eyes is the best protection against discouragement and the temptation to abandon it which may take hold of some peoples at the economic development stage, captivated by modernization and the globalization of culture.

The role of the CACSPI will be to set up the necessary equipment and to train locally the personnel already available for this purpose. Once the equipment is installed, the IRC will really be able to have a bank of essential data on the whole of the Lao PDR's intangible heritage and fulfil its safeguarding, promotion and information mission at both the national and the international levels.

BACKGROUND

The programme for co-operation between the IRC and the CACSPI for the setting up of the ethnographic data bank in Vientiane was signed shortly after the UNESCO meeting. It was favourably received by the French Ambassador who had attended the meeting, and a request for the purchase of the equipment was immediately sent by him to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which granted funds for the implementation of this project in 1997.

For my part, back in France, I recruited a young computer scientist, Mr Gilbert, for our laboratory and entrusted him with the task of finding the equipment best suited to the needs of the future bank. Together, in Paris, we built a prototype of the computer and accessories for digital photography and scanning, with the appropriate computer cards, so that the equipment could be tested beforehand. Then, in November 1997, I organized a CACSPI mission to send Mr Gilbert to Vientiane to supervise the installation of the equipment purchased in accordance with our indications,[9] and then to set up the bank structure with Mr Khambone Thirapouth, IRC researcher and technician, who was to take charge of it.

THE DATA TREE

After discussion, we decided on a tree for the organization of the data (with key words, each representing a file), it being understood that access could be had either by province, or by ethnic group or other designation of identity.

The key word 'art' gives access to information on songs and dances (religious, ritual, traditional), decorative work (such as embroidery, engraving, painting, sculpture and weaving), written and oral literature and music (instruments, orchestras). The 'costumes' file of the data tree covers men's, women's and children's costumes (mourning, festivals, weddings, everyday, religious) and their manufacture (dressmaking, threads, patterns, dyeing, fabrics).

There is a 'development' file covering innovations and relocations, and an 'economy' file with information on commerce and family economic activity such as agriculture, cottage industries, hunting, gathering, market, fishing and subsistence. The 'ecosystem' file contains information on the (conservation of the) environment, ethnobotanic relations and ethnozoological relations. The 'political organization' key word gives information concerning the traditional model (by bands, state, tribes), and traditional systems (by clans, democratic, hierarchical, stratified lineages, Messianic, royalty, manorial). 'Society' gives access to information on relationships (duties, exchanges),

customary law, divorce, filiation, inheritance, houses, marriage, kinship (roles, system, terms) and residence (matrilocal, neolocal, patrilocal).

'Health' includes general diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, and traditional healers. Under 'myths' are to be found domestic animals, Creation, the Deluge, fire, origin and cultivated plants. There is another file for 'religion', which covers subjects such as souls, ancestors, the hereafter, gods of a locality, spirits, ghosts, prohibitions, (interventions in) the invisible (shamans, mediums, exorcists), reincarnation, dreams, rites (persons responsible for ritual, agrarian rites, rites for special days, community rites, divinatory rites, ethical/political rites, funeral rites, healing rites, birth rites, private rites, rites for the calling forth of souls) and type (animism, Buddhism, Brahmanism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism).

The 'history' file covers archaeology, chronicles, migrations and oral tradition. 'Province' covers ethnic groups, geography and history. Under 'ethnic groups' comes province, identities (cultural, local, tribal), and under 'housing' there are data on houses (architecture, building, outbuildings, interior, orientation, rites, type) and villages (orientation, plan, site, type). The 'language' file has information on dialects, linguistic group and varieties. There is also a 'references' section containing texts and a bibliography, and 'portraits' (iconographical) of animals, children, women and men.

The building of a data bank is a long and exacting task. The IRC began by entering its iconographical and video reserves as the first phase of the programme, pending the second phase with which the personnel assigned to culture in each province were to be associated.

APPENDIX

A programme for co-operation between the IRC (Ministry of Information and Culture of the Lao PDR) and the Anthropological Centre for South China and the Indo-Chinese Peninsula (CNRS, Paris) for the establishment of an ethnographic data bank in Vientiane was signed jointly by Mr Houmphanh Rattanavong, Director of the IRC, and myself, as Director of the CACSPI.

Following the proceedings and recommendations of the 1996 International Expert Meeting, the IRC, together with the CACSPI of the CNRS, agreed on the establishment of an ethnographic database in Vientiane at the IRC. The groups primarily concerned by the programme are the Phai (Tin), Lamet and other Palaungics, the Kassak, Akha, Hani, Ke, Lolo, Phu Noi, Hmong, Yao, the Tai not converted to Buddhism (Tai Dam, Tai Deng, Tai Khao, Phu Tai) and the Buddhist Tai (Nyouan, Lu).

Data will be collected in accordance with the method used by the CACSPI in the course of its research project 'System and Mechanisms of Ethnic and/or Cultural Identity'. Cultural identity markers will be recorded for each group, those defining a common ethnic identity being distinguished from those indicating particular tribal identities within the same ethnic group. A detailed protocol for the survey shall be prepared in Lao for the local cultural administrators who are to take part in the collection of ethnographic data. Considering the urgency of the programme, recourse can be had to digital equipment for photography, video and sound recording, coupled with an appropriate laptop computer, for data collection. A multimedia computer with a CD-ROM recorder will eventually be installed in Vientiane in the premises provided by the IRC after due testing in France.

The work shall be organized in stages, beginning with the assessment of the intangible cultural heritage of the groups concerned. IRC researchers and the local cultural administrators will be trained in the above-mentioned methodology and the use of digital equipment. Mixed IRC-CACSPI teams will be formed to collect raw ethnographic data in the field, using digital equipment, in collaboration with the local cultural administrators.

All these data will be collated at the IRC premises in the Simuang quarter in Vientiane, which is to serve as the headquarters of the co-operation programme for the duration of its activities and subsequently become the headquarters of the data bank. Finally a CD-ROM of the materials collected will be recorded and published, with a view to distribution and utilization at a later stage.

The CACSPI and the IRC will each have a well-defined role to play. The CACSPI will find the funds and equipment required for the co-operation programme (CACSPI expert missions, travel and per diem of the IRC-CACSPI joint team, remuneration of the local cultural administrators) and train the IRC researchers and the local cultural administrators. The IRC will take care of all administrative procedures in connection with the accommodation and travel of the CACSPI experts in the Lao PDR and seek funds with a

view to the refurbishment of the premises in the Simuang quarter. The programme for co-operation will be implemented as soon as the funds and equipment have been made available. It will cover a period of three years and be renewable.

NOTES

1. Anthropological Centre for South China and the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, CNRS (French organization for scientific research), Paris, France.
2. See article of the Lao PDR National News Agency, KPL, 25 November 1997.
3. I visited three of these groups with Annie Hubert between Tang O and Muang Meung in the province of Haut Mékong in 1965 and I can testify to the fact that they indeed call themselves Lahu.
4. The Yao Mien are generally called Yu Mien in China, Thailand and the west of the Lao PDR, but in Viet Nam and in the part of the Lao PDR bordering Viet Nam (Sam Neua) they prefer the name Kim Mien (Mountain Mien). I have not yet found out why.
5. This was the spelling adopted by the missionary J. B. Desgeorges for the Tai Deng in Yen Khuong, Thanh Hoa.
6. In this connection the reader is referred to my article, 'Dialectique des ethnicités et des nationalités en Chine' [Dialectics of Ethnic Groups and Nationalities in China], *L'Homme*, Vol. 148, pp. 231–50, 1998.
7. See Cam Trong, *Ngu'oi Thai o'Tay Bac Viet Nam*, Hanoi, 1978.
8. I explained this mechanism in 'Mythes d'origine, mythes d'identification' in L'Homme, Vol. 101, pp. 58–85, 1987.
9. Additional equipment (printer, scanner) was provided by the IRD (ex-ORSTOM) as part of Yves Goudineau's programme, and a supplementary 13 gigabyte hard disk was provided by CACSPI.

Preserving Minority Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Lao PDR: Toyota Foundation Activities

TOICHI MAKITA

THE TOYOTA FOUNDATION AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA[1]

The International Grant Programme (South-East Asia Programme) of the Toyota Foundation awards grants for projects that address various cultural issues in contemporary South-East Asian society and are conducted by indigenous researchers. The South-East Asian Studies Regional Exchange Programme (SEASREP) provides grants to South-East Asian countries. The 'Know our Neighbours' Programme supports translations and publications from South-East and South Asia which describe their world views. One such study has looked into the life and social structure of Hmong traditional society through the oral traditions. The researcher himself is of Hmong origin. The results of the study will be published in both the Lao and the Hmong languages. Nowadays, Hmong people themselves need this kind of documentation as these oral traditions are disappearing rapidly. The Lao version is aimed at providing a better understanding among Lao people of Hmong culture and society.

The Toyota Foundation is interested in supporting projects for the preservation of both the tangible and the intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in South-East Asia. In other countries in the region it has been supporting a substantial number of projects – on ethnic minority cultures in Viet Nam, for example. The main problem for the foundation with Laos is that there are not enough qualified indigenous personnel to undertake the research required in the country.

ETHNIC MINORITY PROJECTS IN LAOS

Ethnic minority issues, and especially the issue of their endangered cultures in Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam (CLV), are among the major concerns of the foundation at present and will perhaps continue to be so in coming years. However, there are several constraints in addressing such matters in CLV countries: the shortage of local human resources; the political sensitivity of ethnic minority issues deriving from the negative historical legacy of the Indo-Chinese and Vietnamese wars, as well as from events before and since; the higher priority given to other developmental needs; and the transnational complexities of such questions.

Considering these problems, we think that the following factors and arrangements should be taken into consideration for planning and implementation of projects on the issues of ethnic minorities in CLV countries. Firstly, considering the shortage of local human resources, a project should involve qualified foreign researchers, espe-

cially those from neighbouring ASEAN countries. In addition, the project should contain a component of research training within the country and/or abroad for local researchers. Secondly, considering the transnational border nature of the issue, the project should be regionally structured, based on international collaboration among local institutions in the different countries in the region. Thirdly, considering the low economic and social development level of ethnic minorities in general, the project should contain both cultural and academic aspects as well as socio-economic development-oriented aspects. This implies that there should be collaboration between academic and cultural institutions and developmental NGOs working in the field. And, finally, considering the political sensitivity of the issues and the size of the project coverage, funding should preferably be also multiple and multilateral with international co-ordination.

FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES

The Toyota Foundation started awarding grants in Laos as early as 1987. In the nine years from 1987 to 1995 the foundation provided forty-eight grants worth about US$560,000 for research and other projects in Laos under the International Grant Programme. It also provided writers and institutions with several translation-publication grants under the 'Know Our Neighbours' Programme.

The foundation's programme in Laos is fairly small when compared with its programmes in other South-East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam. This results mainly from the shortage of qualified people in Laos for research and other academic activity. This is a common problem for any foreign agency that intends to engage itself in research and other academic activity in Laos. Projects are classified into nine categories: manuscript preservation and philology; language and literature; performing arts; art objects and crafts; ethnic minority studies; area studies; publication grants; conference support; and other projects. A list of the grants awarded in each of these categories is given below.

As clearly indicated in this list, the themes of manuscript preservation and philology, preservation of inscriptions, inventory compilation and philology works have benefited the most from Toyota Foundation grant activities in Laos. These palm-leaf manuscript-related projects include an inventory of manuscripts at Buddhist temples nationwide, transliteration into modern script, translation or adaptation into modern prose from verse form in ancient language, and publication and dissemination.

PRESERVING THE ETHNIC MINORITY CULTURAL HERITAGE

To date the Toyota Foundation has supported only one project in this field, which is 'A Study of Hmong Traditions in Folk Tales, Proverbs, and Songs'.[2] This project is to interview old people of the Hmong ethnic minority in order to record and document traditional folk-tales, proverbs, and songs of authorities and the ethnic minority people themselves. Recruitment and training of researchers or project implementation personnel of that ethnic origin are especially important.

THE TOYOTA FOUNDATION GRANT LIST (LAOS), 1987–95)

1. Manuscript preservation and philology of manuscripts and inscriptions, inventory, compilation of philological works.

1987: Seminar on the preservation, documentation, transliteration, inventory and microfilming of palm-leaf manuscripts.
1988: Publication of the final report of the first national seminar on palm-leaf manuscripts.
1988–93: Compilation of an inventory of palm-leaf manuscripts.
1989–90: A study of traditions and rituals in the Thao Hung Epic.
1989: Adaptation and rituals in the Thao Hung Epic.
1990–92: Epigraphic research on ancient Lao inscriptions.
1991–5: Transliteration of Lao traditional law.
1995: Adaptation of the Thao Hun-Cheuang into modern prose.

2. Language and Literature: Linguistic Studies, Compilation of Dictionary, Literature Studies, Literary Translation.

1988–90: Compilation of a dictionary of standard Lao.
1990: A study of Malaysia's national language development policies – Committee for Lao National Language Development.

3. Performing Arts: Research and Transmission of Traditional Dance, Drama, Music, Poetry Reading.

1988–9: A folk poetry collection (Laos).
1989: Research on the music, dance and songs of ethnic groups in Savannakhet Province.
1992–4: A study on Lam Sithandon singing.

4. Art Objects and Crafts: Research, Preservation and Transmission of Art Objects, Mural Paintings, Architectural Decorations and Crafts.

1988: Publication of Lao decorative arts.
1989–94: Research on Lao art history.

5. Ethnic Minority Studies.

1992–3: A study of Hmong traditions in folk-tales, proverbs, and songs.

6. Study of Other South-East Asian Countries and Regional Comparative Studies.

1989–93: Compilation of a Khmer-Lao dictionary.
1995: Translation of and research on Quy Hop documents.

7. Publication Grants.

1987: Printing of a textbook for the Fine Arts School.
1987: Printing of a textbook for the National School of Music and Dance.
1988: Publication of Lao folk-tales.

8 Grant for Organizing Conference.

1992: Seminar for research on history of Lao education.

9 Other Projects.

1987: The Lao manual of traditional medicine.
1995: A study of Japanese primary and secondary education.

NOTES

1. The Toyota Foundation, a Japanese private, non-profit, grant-aid organization dedicated to the goals of realizing greater human fulfilment and contributing to the development of a human-oriented society, was endowed in October 1974 by the Toyota Motor Corporation. Chartered by the Prime Minister's Office of the Japanese Government, the Toyota Foundation relies on its endowment income, approximately 11.4 billion yen (roughly US$114 million), and provides annually some 200 grants, totalling about 500 million yen, for research and other projects. The foundation has its own selection committee for each of its grant programmes, and its decision making, which is governed by its board of directors, is independent of the corporate policies of the subscribing corporation or of any other institution. Through various programmes the foundation provides grants for research and other projects related to human and natural environments, social welfare, education and culture and other fields. The Research Grant Programme supports projects that try to identify and solve problems faced by contemporary society and that focus on the priority areas of mutual understanding and coexistence of diverse cultures, proposals for human survival, and science and technology in the age of civil society. Programmes related to citizen activities, with the basic aim of promoting activities of Japanese NGOs and NPOs related to civil society issues, are conducted mainly domestically at present.

2. Project carried out by Mr Neng Sayvang, currently the Director of *Vannasia* magazine of the Lao Ministry of Information and Culture.

VIENTIANE DECLARATION

1. We, the participants in the International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Minority Groups of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Vientiane, 7–11 October 1996):

2. *Note* with satisfaction the constitutional and legislative provisions of the Lao PDR, a multi-ethnic country, concerning ethnic minority groups;

3. *Note* with great interest the resolutions adopted by the Fifth Congress of the Lao Revolutionary Party which defines culture 'as the basis of the nation's stability, the engine of social advancement and an objective of socio-economic development';

4. *Also note* the importance accorded by the Sixth Party Congress in March 1996 to the question of ethnic minorities, emphasizing that the state should conduct a policy of unity and equality between various ethnic minority groups;

5. *Note* the action undertaken in favour of ethnic groups by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, the Front National d'Edification et de Construction Lao, the Lao Federation of Women, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and other state bodies, in co-operation with international organizations of the United Nations system (UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR), NGOs, public and private foundations, and bilateral aid organizations;

6. *Also note* the recommendations adopted by the International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Minority Groups of the Lao PDR as regards language, traditions, customs, beliefs and ways of life, arts and music;

7. *Request* the Government, in accordance with constitutional and administrative provisions, to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations for the preservation and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage of minority groups, taking due account of the Meeting's decisions;

8. *Request* bilateral and multilateral backers, as well as NGOs and foundations, to lend their technical and financial backing to the Government in the implementation of the activities recommended by the Meeting;

9. *Invite* UNESCO, in co-operation with the Government, to continue its efforts to mobilize the necessary resources for the implementation of this Declaration.

5TH PARTY CONGRESS

Directive on Cultural Activities in the New Era: Ninth meeting of the Administrative Commission of the Party Central Committee

KAMTAY SIPHANDONE

NATIONAL CULTURE AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS IN THE COUNTRY

The Lao nation is endowed with an ancient civilization and elegant cultural traditions. Moreover, it is a nation which comprises many ethnic groups, each of which has its own unique customs, traditions and cultural legacy, which together form the greater national culture. This is an invaluable heritage, it is the spiritual foundation of our society and an important factor in guaranteeing the cultural security of our nation. Throughout history the Lao nation has zealously preserved, extended and encouraged its national culture.

During the years of revolution a culture was created that had the characteristics and the values of a national culture, together with selected cultural elements adopted from humankind at large. The arts and literature aimed to inspire nationalism, unity against the enemy, and comradeship-in-arms among officials and all ethnic people, until the country was successfully liberated. Cultural officials, artists and writers were formed in great numbers and played a major role in the victorious revolution.

Following on from this, our new system has attempted to build up a national culture. It has eliminated all traces of the former colonial culture. It has inspired and encouraged art and literature which have the national traits of progress for the masses to be the foundation of culture under the new regime. The customs and traditions of the nation and its ethnic groups have been elevated and extended. The arts, literature, handicrafts and special talents and capabilities have been reinforced, leading to a daily improvement in all these areas and enhancing their availability for the enjoyment of the people.

However, coupled with this success, many undesirable phenomena have appeared. For example, livelihoods based on the pursuit of money; repulsive fads and fashions; false beliefs which are spreading rapidly, especially among our youth who are not sufficiently familiar with traditions, customs and the elegant national culture; behaviour and practices which are contrary to the national culture. Tradition is viewed by some only as a means of making profit, and a business culture has emerged which knows only commerce and trade with no appreciation for the beneficial values of culture, a business culture which feeds off society and which the legal system of the nation has not been able to control. Antique cultural artefacts are being smuggled out of the country and foreign cultural influences are entering and having undesirable effects on the national cultural legacy. These foreign influences have led national identity and culture to become unclear or, even worse, to fade away altogether.

These undesirable phenomena have many causes, such as the rapid changes in the outside world which are taking place in our country as well; but the main cause is that the Party's cultural policy has not yet been fully applied nor manifested itself in projects by organizations or concerned government agencies. This is especially true of a deep and meaningful education and training for youth in the customs, traditions and culture of their own nation. Research is lacking in the collection of information on the various ethnic groups. The ability of government agencies, including bonzes, to disseminate and promote the national culture has not achieved its potential. The policy to promote creative activities and talent has not yet been perfected. The orders to fight against bad influences are not strictly carried out nor sufficiently encouraged. The skills of cultural officials and artists have not yet been upgraded to meet the needs of the new age. Resources for cultural promotion are lacking, and little of Lao culture has been presented to other countries.

ATTITUDE, APPROACH AND RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING CULTURE IN THE NEW ERA

Attitude towards culture

Our Party believes that culture is the foundation of national security, because culture allows all people in the nation to be unified. A country that does not preserve its cultural traditions will become extinct, be swallowed up by other nations, or be reduced to a mere shadow of another nation. Therefore, protecting national culture is a way of protecting the nation.

Culture is a force that enables society to expand, it leads to the development of a country, so that it will not hesitate to stand next to other nations. Development of the nation will occur only when cultural development is also present, when it accompanies all other development. The raising of the level of culture of the people is an important factor in the socio-economic development of any country.

Culture is an objective of social development. Thus, throughout the nation (Party organizations, State organizations, social administrations, religions, production and business units, families, people of all classes) there is a responsibility to protect, build, expand and encourage mental development, that is culture, to accompany socio-economic development.

Direction, responsibility and objectives

It is essential to continue to build a culture with the national traits of the people and of progress, by encouraging Lao people to love their country and democracy, have a sound political attitude, ethical qualities, a pure means of livelihood and sufficient education to meet new changes, and be capable of accommodating success and progressing in the current era. We must protect and promote the national cultural legacy and concentrate on assisting ethnic groups to maintain their many and varied cultural legacies as part of the national culture, together with the best selected elements of common human culture. In this way the State can safeguard itself against destructive influences. The main objective is to encourage and advocate cultural activities, the arts and literature so that they will become advanced and sufficiently diverse to meet the intellectual needs of the people.

Methods, duties and tasks for building and promoting the value and heritage of culture

The protection, preservation, construction and expansion of the national culture must go along with the new comprehensive changes in the Party as well as the two operational duties of protection and development of the nation. Therefore, all cultural activities must be subordinate to the protection of the independence and modernization of the nation, and the happiness and prosperity of all ethnic groups.

Another vital element is the creation of cultural contacts and exchanges with the outside world, adopting positive aspects of other cultures in the construction of the Lao national culture.

For the national culture to flourish it is also necessary to encourage talent and promote democracy and freedom of expression, along with the elevation of the political responsibility and moral quality of cultural officials and artists.

The development of culture must accompany the additional representative cultural characteristics of guaranteeing new factors in social life and in the values and progress of the nation and of ethnic groups. We must be critical of immoral and unethical influences in society in order to move towards correctness, morality, justice, beauty and purity.

The provision of education, training and motivation to the public is also necessary; all the people and all society must wake up, join together and take responsibility for culture.

The national cultural heritage can be protected and promoted through international cultural contacts and co-operation. We must strive to make culture the foundation of society by expanding cultural life in the mountainous areas and among ethnic groups. Other aims are the improvement of the state administration of culture, the building of new cultural families based on sound standards, the improvement and extension of cultural materials and techniques, and the construction, maintenance, upgrading, education and training of government cultural officials.

Establishment and implementation

Culture is the business of all government bodies, the Party, the State, mass organizations, religious organizations, the military, and units of production, down to the level of the family. To ensure this, an official directive should be examined and studied in detail by all the above-mentioned organs of government and administrative responsibilities designated. The Propaganda Committee of the Party Central Committee is assigned the responsibility of implementing this directive, and the Ministry of Information and Culture will provide a detailed plan for carrying it out. The Buddhist Organization, the Committee of the Lao Front for National Construction, the Lao Women's Union and the Youth Organization are all charged with the implementation of this directive at the grass-roots level. An organization should be established with well-defined regulations, procedures and activities, to provide additional support for the construction and expansion of the values and heritage of the national culture.

Address on behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO

Ms. Noriko Aikawa

Deputy Prime Minister,
Minister of Information and Culture,
Chairman of the National Commission,
Permanent Representative,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to represent the Director-General of UNESCO at this International Meeting of Experts for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Heritage of the Minority Groups of the People's Democratic Republic of Laos. On behalf of all the participants and in my own personal capacity, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the Laotian authorities, in particular the UNESCO National Commission and the Minister of Information and Culture, for their warm welcome and hospitality. Allow me to say a special word of welcome to Mr Khamphao Phonékeo who, although he left the General Secretariat of the National Commission a few months ago, continued to make preparations for this meeting, and Mr Khamliène Nhouyvanisvong, the Permanent Representative to UNESCO in Paris, who is an old colleague and a friend of long standing.

I should like, in particular, to thank the Committee which was set up two years ago to prepare today's meeting. This Committee, chaired by Mr Houmphanh Rattanavong, Director of the Lao Institute of Research on Culture, prepared six documents on the protection of the intangible heritage of this beautiful country; they are presented today by the Lao authorities. I should also like to thank the Japanese Government for its generous financial contribution towards the organization of this meeting, and the French Government which made it possible for a large number of French experts to take part. It gives me great pleasure too to greet the foreign experts who have come from far afield, and all the national participants. Most of you, and especially our friend, Professor Condominas, do us the honour of accompanying UNESCO in its task of safeguarding and promoting the intangible heritages.

You are meeting here today in Vientiane, often referred to as 'the city of the moon', on the bank of the River Mekong to reflect together on the national plan for the safeguarding and promotion of the intangible heritages of minority groups and to examine projects for co-operation to be implemented on a basis of partnership. May I say, Mr Minister, how happy we are to be here in a multicultural country whose peoples are able to enjoy their cultural diversity in a peaceful environment at a time when ethnic conflicts are proliferating before our very eyes in so many parts of the world. We are aware of the great importance attached by the Lao authorities in the matter of respect for the cultural diversity of each of the ethnic groups which together make up this Republic. From that point of view, your Constitution, written in 1991, which makes full

allowance for cultural pluralism, seems to us to be a truly pioneering document.

We live at a time of headlong globalization with ever-closer links of financial, technological and communications interdependence being established with every passing day – an era in which regional economic groupings are becoming vital to the survival of each nation and in which the phenomenon of cultural standardization is unfortunately proceeding at an accelerating pace due to mass media all over the world. In reaction to these phenomena, a determination not to be overrun by standardization and depersonalization is gaining ground everywhere: individuals and communities are expressing their desire to exist and create for themselves, and to play an active part in national and international life. Yet failure to reflect this determination effectively in a peaceful and democratic framework will allow extremist, xenophobic and even racist movements to proliferate and transform this legitimate aspiration to assert a special identity into an aggressive attitude of withdrawal into self-sufficiency and rejection of others. UNESCO therefore regards cultural pluralism as essential to the attainment of the supreme goal of the United Nations and of UNESCO itself, namely, the building of peace.

Today, the challenge facing the nations which set great store by cultural pluralism and political democracy is that of establishing the conditions without which this cultural pluralism cannot exist, for instance, institutions in which the best practices are created with a genuine determination to ensure that everyone has his or her rightful place. This presupposes true respect for the value systems of the peoples belonging to all the groups, the traditional knowledge which they have built up about their society and environment and the institutions in which their culture is rooted. We shall have an opportunity to discuss this matter in more detail during these three days when we come to consider the draft plan prepared by the Lao authorities.

However, cultural pluralism is not an end in itself. The identification of similarities and differences between the cultures of the ethnic groups is first and foremost a basis for dialogue. A far more difficult but necessary task for the maintenance of peaceful coexistence is to find the means of reconciling a new pluralism with common citizenship. In other words at the individual level, each person should not fall back on one single identity but must acknowledge his or her simultaneous sharing of several identities, in other words, ethnic, local, national and regional identity. And beyond these geographical identities, there are others of a linguistic, religious and social nature. The intangible heritages, languages, autochthonous forms of cultural expression and skills in the production of tangible cultures are, for many populations, especially the minorities and indigenous ones, the essential source of an identity that is deeply rooted in history. They are also a concrete manifestation of the specific features of each culture. UNESCO regards the safeguarding of these heritages as an urgent task for the maintenance of the diversity of cultures and the consolidation of cultural pluralism.

In its programme for the intangible heritages, the Organization is focusing particular efforts on the field of languages, very many of which are in danger of disappearing. In 1993, UNESCO launched an ambitious project: *The Red Book of Languages Whose Survival is Threatened*. In this context, the International Information Centre and Data Bases on Languages in Danger of Extinction has been set up at Tokyo University. In addition, an *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing* has recently been published to call the attention of the general public to the problem of languages that are threatened with extinction. Many dictionaries and grammar books of the autochthonous languages have been published, in particular in the framework of the International Decade of Autochthonous Peoples proclaimed in 1993. To give fresh impetus to plurilingualism and linguistic diversity at every level of education, UNESCO is pursuing a project known as LINGUAPAX.

Through normative actions, the Organization is seeking to preserve and protect traditional and popular cultures. For example, model provisions of national legislation on the protection of expressions of folklore against unlawful exploitation and other prejudicial actions were adopted in 1982 by the Committee of Government Experts convened by UNESCO and the World Intellectual Property Organization. The Recommendation on the safeguarding of traditional and popular culture was adopted by the General Conference in 1989. Since the adoption of these instruments, we have been endeavouring to ensure their more resolute implementation by the Member States. Next year UNESCO will be organizing in Bangkok, in co-operation with the World Intellectual Property Organization, an 'International Forum on the Preservation and Legal Protection of Folklore' at which matters pertaining to the international juridical protection of forms of cultural expression such as music, dance, musical instruments and handicrafts of the autochthonous peoples will be discussed. Thanks to its Living Human Treasures programme, the

Organization will promote preservation of the intangible heritages through the transmission of skills by the persons who master them.

In order to exchange information, UNESCO is also creating regional networks, such as the network of African musical institutions, the network of institutions specializing in the study of traditional cultures in Eastern and Central Europe or the network of lacquerwork masters in East Asia. The Organization helps the Member States to prepare a national plan, as in the case of the meeting today or on the occasion of the Hanoi meeting in 1994, and also to organize training courses in the collection of music and musical instruments, oral traditions and handicrafts. On this subject, UNESCO has published a *Guide to the Collection of the Musical Heritages and a Guide to the Collection of Handicrafts*. In the field of promotion of the musical heritages, it contributes to the organization of many traditional music festivals and performing arts fairs, for example in Africa. Recently, UNESCO, in co-operation with the High Commissioner for Refugees, decided to set up infrastructures to promote the traditional music and dances of refugees, for instance in the Crimea. To ensure that the intangible heritages are circulated worldwide, UNESCO has for thirty years been publishing the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World. I have pleasure in presenting you with a copy of the issue dedicated to the traditional music of Southern Laos. In co-operation with the Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation and the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, a CD-ROM publication on the minority cultures of Viet Nam is currently in preparation. We hope to publish another CD-ROM on the cultures of the Laotian minorities following this meeting.

When it comes to the safeguarding or revitalization of traditional or autochthonous cultures, a number of questions have to be answered. For example: Must all existing traditions be preserved? Must they be adapted to modern life to ensure their survival? Who is best qualified to answer these questions? Important decisions relating to the cultures concerned must surely be taken by their original exponents. Our role should be to provide them with the most effective possible training so as to enable them to reach their own decisions with full knowledge of the facts. We who are on the outside are tempted to whisper in their ears the words of an old flamenco song: 'Clutch the roots tightly, lest the wind blow all away!' It remains for me to express the hope that this meeting will prove a success.