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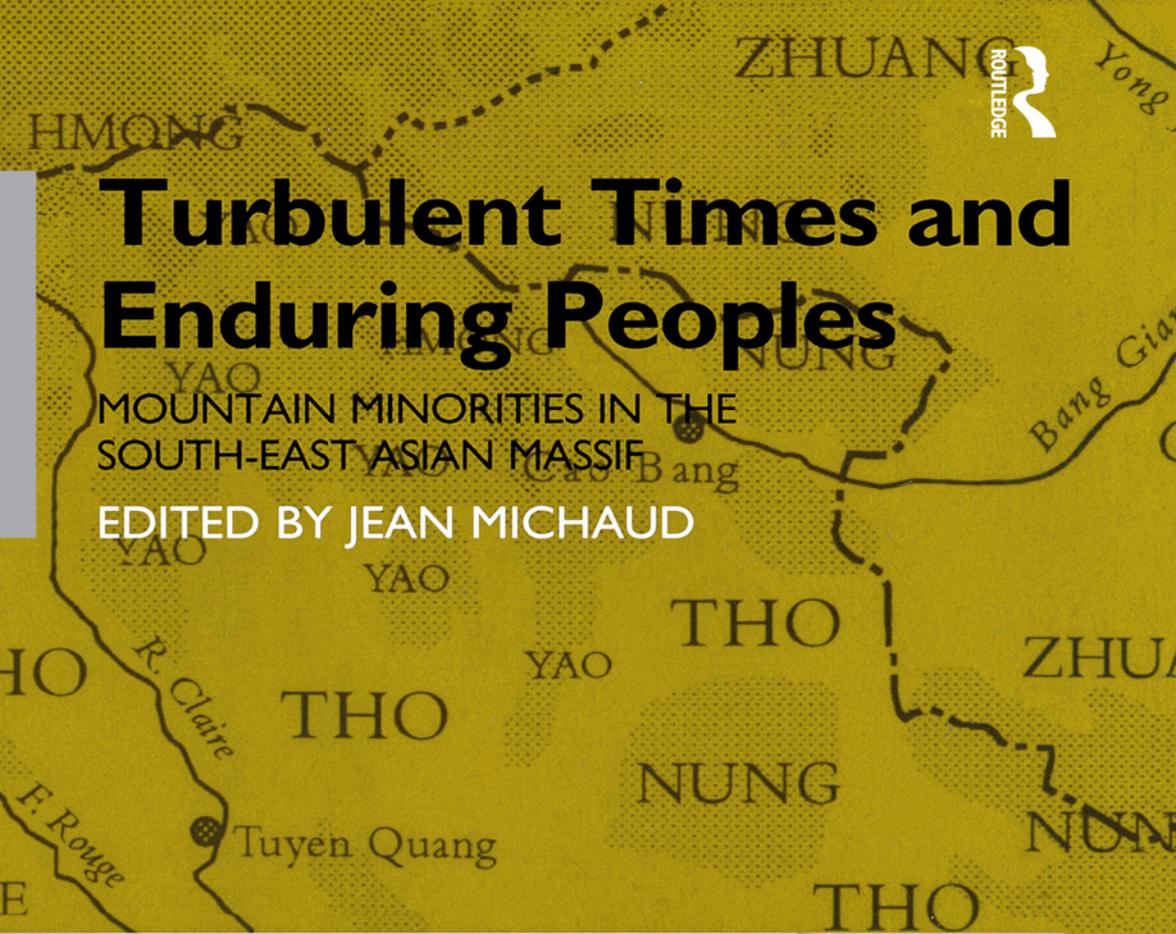
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# Turbulent Times and Enduring Peoples

MOUNTAIN MINORITIES IN THE SOUTH-EAST ASIAN MASSIF

EDITED BY JEAN MICHAUD



TURBULENT TIMES  
AND  
ENDURING PEOPLES

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TURBULENT TIMES  
AND  
ENDURING PEOPLES

Mountain Minorities  
in the  
South-East Asian Massif

edited by

*Jean Michaud*

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## Preface

As is the case for most edited books, the starting point for this one was an academic conference, the 1997 annual meeting of the *Association for South-East Asian Studies in the United Kingdom* held at the University of Hull, with the Centre for South-East Asian Studies as its host.

Allow me to recall that moment through an anecdote. When, one year earlier, the conference organiser decided on the overall title for the event, 'South-East Asia Between the Local and the Global', it was in relation to the current debates centered on the notions of globalization, security and development for which contributions were being specifically requested. Trained as a rather classical social anthropologist, I must say that I was feeling only moderately at ease on such grounds, and I initially thought that there was no room left in that theme for my main research interest, the ethnology of highland societies in Mainland South-East Asia.

In a slightly provocative mood I confess, I nevertheless offered to convene a panel I mischievously called 'Shattered Mountain Societies? When the Global Crushes the Local', an indirect homage to Gerald Hickey's *Shattered world: adaptation and survival among Vietnam's highland peoples during the Vietnam War*. On a more serious note, I should explain that over the years, I had come to realise how the various ethnic groups in the remote highlands of Mainland South-East Asia I had visited and studied were invariably kept at the bottom of the list of genuine beneficiaries of the countless development projects that have been implemented in the region since the late 1950s. I felt here, as often before, that it was my personal and professional duty to make room for serious discussions about this persistent inequity.

With my agenda so nakedly spelled out, it did not really come as a surprise when a solicitous conference organiser warned me that this panel, at best, would attract two or three participants, myself included. Did I want to start considering which of the more important sessions it would eventually have to be merged with? . . .

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As things turned out, the 'Shattered Mountain Societies? . . .' panel was one of the most successful of the conference, with the number of international participants larger than in any other panel. Dizzy with this success – so to speak – panellists did not want to part empty handed and enthusiastically voiced a will to have an edited book put together. To provide it with as clear a focus as possible under the circumstances, it was collectively decided that the cultural area for this publication should be Mainland South-East Asia. From the initial seven panellists, as a matter of consequence, the three who did not join in this publication project were Raymond Bryant, Tim Forsyth and Terry King. I would like here to thank them sincerely for their invaluable contribution to the success of the conference.

Henry Bartsch, Christian Culas, Alison Lewis, Jan Ovesen and myself were on board together. It was assessed that the scope of the book should be increased, in particular due to the fact that none of the initial contributors were even remotely touching on Burma. Additional authors were solicited. Oscar Saleminck, Leif Jonnson, Peter Kunstadter, Clive Christie and François Robinne liked the project, cheerfully took up the writing and contributed each an original piece based on their ongoing research. To consolidate the book, John McKinnon was patient enough to co-write the introduction with me from several thousand miles and twelve time zones away; to all, my warmest thanks.

Despite the fact that he sadly had to withdraw from the project, Jan Ovesen's support and encouragement has been instrumental in the completion of this book. I should also mention the strong commitment to see this book succeed by the Curzon Press chief editor, Jonathan Price. On a more personal note, I would also like to thank Lewis Hill for his support, as well as Sarah Turner for helping me to keep faith during the two years over which this project was on my agenda.

In the end, it is hoped that this book will contribute, in its own modest way, to ensure that in the future, the study of the mountain minorities of Mainland South-East Asia will less easily be labelled an unpromising topic.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FOR THE MAPS

Maps 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 in this book as well as the initial jacket project have been produced by myself using Macromedia Freehand, and the responsibility for any defect in relation to these maps lies entirely with me. The starting point for this cartographic output is a package of original computerised maps of South-East Asia conceived and produced by Rodolphe De Koninck, Professor of Geography at Université Laval (Québec, Canada), and his team of cartographers and postgraduate students (see De Koninck, R. 1994 *L'Asie du Sud-Est*. Paris: Masson). Professor De Koninck has been kind enough as to grant the Centre for

## *Preface*

South-East Asian Studies at the University of Hull special permission to use his original material. I would like here to express my sincere gratitude for this privilege. Yann Roche, lecturer of Geography at Université du Québec à Montréal, is also to be thanked for his competent and patient teaching on how to make the best use of that mapping system.

Maps 2 to 5 have previously been published in John McKinnon's chapter 'Ethnicity, Geography, History and Nationalism: A future of ethnic strife for the inland border peoples of mainland Southeast Asia?', In R.F. Watters and T.G. McGee (eds) *Asia Pacific: New Geographies Of the Pacific Rim* Hurst and Company, London pp. 283–301.

Map 13 has been produced by François Robinne.

*Jean Michaud*

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Marseille. He is coeditor, together with P. Pichard, of *Études birmanes en hommage à Denise Bernot* (Paris, EFEO, 1998), author of *Savoirs et saveurs. L'identité culinaire des Birmans* (Paris, EFEO, 1994) and of *Fils et maîtres du lac. Relations interethniques dans l'État Shan de Birmanie* (Paris, CNRS).

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Map 1 Locations of the 9 case studies



## Introduction

# Montagnard Domain in the South-East Asian Massif

*John McKinnon and Jean Michaud*

### PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK

There are precious few books devoted to the range of highland societies that flourish in the particular eco-system – or social space, to adopt Georges Condominas' notion – that forms the Mainland South-East Asian Massif.

It is with studies such as Lim's *Territorial Power Domains, South-East Asia, and China. The Geo-Strategy of an Overarching Massif* (1984) that the Massif has started to be considered a geographical and political entity, and to some extent, a meaningful social space. To those who have had the opportunity to visit these mountains and high valleys in one or several of the countries sharing the Massif, some similarities among the populations dwelling there are unmistakable. As will be explained later in this chapter, it is not so much an internal cultural unity that gives the Massif its interest as a study area, but rather its shared geographical characteristics, and the adaptive responses to it and the unavoidable fact that its inhabitants have in common to be profoundly distinct from the lowland majorities surrounding them. Research in ethnolinguistic and history also underline the interest of refocusing from a political sub-division of the region to a cultural one. In recent years, Wijeyewardene's *Ethnic Groups Across National Boundaries in Mainland South-East Asia* (1989) as well as the conference titled 'South China and Mainland South-East Asia: Cross Border Relation in the Post-Socialist Age' (U. of Hong Kong, December 1996), exemplarily spelled out this trend. This book is based on similar assumptions.

However, when country-based, the volume of the literature on mountain minorities in the region can take surprising large proportions. Let us consider Thailand, one of the better researched countries in the region. For particular historical and political reasons, it is the Mainland South-East Asian country which has seen the greatest number of studies published on its 'Hill tribes' (as Highlanders are known there). This, despite Thailand being the State where the smallest number and proportion of highland

## *Montagnard Domain in the South-East Asian Massif*

minorities live compared to its neighbours. (see the demographic tables at the end of this chapter) Over the last 40 years, important authors such as Young (1962), Schrock et al. (1970), McKinnon & Bruksasri (1983), Walker (1986), and McKinnon & Vienne (1989) contributed to draw a fairly solid overall portrait of the mountain minority cultures of Thailand. In addition, a great many studies have been conducted and published on individual groups in that country, they are far too numerous to be specifically accounted for here. If one considers also the hundreds of academic journal articles, theses and dissertations, development agencies and administrative reports – all these in Thai or in one of the major Western languages, plus Japanese – the overall amount of scientific information for such a small demographic entity, about half a million people, is impressive. Indeed, countries, as political bodies, can offer a suitable and convenient basis to conduct research focusing on what often gets to be called, accordingly, ‘national minorities’.

But when addressing more than one mountain society of the Massif and giving the latter the status of a coherent supra-national spatial and social unit, numbers plummet. There are good reasons for this. First, with physical and political obstacles limiting the access to remote highland areas in South-East Asia and South China, conducting field research there has long been a difficult task. The ruggedness of the terrain comes first to mind. But also, when isolated mountains and high valleys are under the political control of a country at war – either an international or a civil one – or when a specific regime does not welcome outside observers nor holds ethnographic research in the highest esteem, much less can be done in the field, and much less of it can ultimately find its way into a publication.

But perhaps the most important limitation to general academic surveys of the minorities in the Massif relates to the sheer scale and complexity of that social space and its turbulent history. 65 million people belonging to more than 50 different ethnic denominations spreading over three main linguistic Superstocks, are scattered across a rugged space shared by five countries with different and, sometimes, antagonised national majorities. Each of these highland society is in a minority position in each of these countries and therefore, over the past centuries and until fairly recent times, very little has been written about them that can be considered a reliable source of information. No easy account can be made for such diversity in such a state of information scarcity. Only the fool could envisage writing a book that would endeavour to thoroughly cover it all; only fragmentary accounts are possible. This publication is no exception to the rule.

To situate this book in the line of intellectual filiation to which it belongs, let us briefly review the works of those who once embarked on a similar journey. When Frank Lebar et al. (1964) were commissioned with the monumental task of taking stock of each and every ethnic group to be found in South-East Asia at the time of the Second Indochina War, they

were left with no choice but to produce a catalogue trying to objectify each group and present its main characteristics in a 'neutral' and informative way, or so was it meant to be. The result, although useful as a typology, leaves too many questions unanswered as to which criteria were used to draw the frontiers between each groups, or how the authors could manage to merge accounts from quite different sources such as, say, French military ethnographers from the turn of the century and American missionary accounts of the 1950s.

When, a few years later, Peter Kunstadter (1967) picked up a comparable challenge but from a more academic angle this time, he opted for a less exhaustive though more analytical stance, putting together a selection of studies on political, economic and historical issues discussed in the context of one given country, covering each country of the Peninsula plus South China. A general introduction in addition to a shorter introduction per country provided with essential political and historical background along with useful facts and figures. To this day, in our opinion, his two volumes still constitute the most serious attempt to examine the larger region and its inhabitants as a whole, while making space available for competent accounts of the cultural diversity.<sup>1</sup>

After an eclipse of nearly twenty years<sup>2</sup> – not unrelated to the departure of the French and Americans followed by the installation of politically sensitive socialist regimes in the Peninsula – came the next contribution when the Cultural Survival Association published in 1987 a report grouping fifteen academics dealing with issues in the cultural, political and economic arena. The aim of the book was to deal with various situations on both Mainland and Maritime South-East Asia and the analytical/critical dimension was given priority, much as in Kunstadter's case. But here the comparison stops for the weight of the former publication can not compare with the latter. When editing his relatively short book focusing on the transnationality of the highlands groups Wijeyewardene (1989) opted for an anthropological viewpoint. He did not aim at a thorough cultural and regional coverage, most papers in that book somehow relating to Thailand and touching on lowland as well as highland situations, and although the end result is informative, it remains fairly narrowly focused.

Anthony Walker's edited book (1992), in spite of a title suggesting a broad scope, *The Highland Heritage*, focuses mainly on Thailand and again more justly belongs to the body of national rather than regional studies. Finally, to our knowledge, the last academic publication on the Massif and its societies prior to this one is a special issue of the journal *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* edited by John McKinnon (1997), containing four articles and three research notes whose coverage, understandably, remains modest.

In order to enrich this filiation of scholarly publications without unduly overlapping with what has been done before, the editorial strategy chosen for this book was to give it an original focus, one that had only occasionally

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caught the attention of those earlier authors. One that we believe is of fundamental importance, without which the appreciation of today's social, economic and political balance can only be incomplete. In many ways neglected, the historical process relating to highland societies in the Massif formed the chief preoccupation to direct the collection and the commissioning of case studies for *Turbulent Times and Enduring Peoples* . . . Although the consultation of secondary sources and archives was certainly of crucial importance at one point or the other for most authors, the ethnographical method was the main toolbox used to collect first hand data and analyze it, a necessary step into putting historical knowledge in its rightful cultural context. On such an intellectual journey, we would gladly have labelled this book a contribution to the ethnohistory of the highland societies in the region. But because the ethnohistorical discipline is still strongly associated with the particular context of the anthropological study of American Indians, and has developed an original methodology that is intimately connected to that specific context, it seemed preferable here to avoid inserting the term in the title.

Seven of the contributors to the book, the majority, are social anthropologists. Two are human geographers, one is a development specialist and one an historian. The latter, Clive Christie, has produced a typical history from secondary sources without collecting field data from the population he writes about. The historical method allows for this, and the result is enlightening because it provides invaluable historical background for those who may wish to trace the roots of the ongoing conflict between the Karen and the state in Burma. At the other end of the spectrum, Henry Bartsch, François Robinne and Leif Jonsson each present a case study at grassroots level and discuss the social change process on the basis of their own field observations. Local history here is used as a canvass to support the intricacies of recent social and economic development. Between these two poles indicating different disciplinary traditions, six more case studies blend first hand data with secondary sources in different proportions, always showing a concern for the historical foundations on which the situations they reconstruct are built and analyzed. Christian Culas, Jean Michaud, Peter Kunstadter and Alison Lewis, all specialists of the Hmong and their parent group, the Miao, and Oscar Saleminck discuss the recent past in the light of their first hand knowledge of the populations they study. Alison Lewis, in particular, was born and lived as a child in Yunnan within a British missionary family, a personal heritage that allows her to understand the situation from the vantage viewpoint of the insider.

Following this short presentation, the book opens with a general presentation of the region and its populations aiming at introducing the non-specialist to the geographical and cultural complexity of the Massif as well as providing recent demographic data. The layout of the subsequent

case studies follows a diachronic order, with studies on more ancient issues first. As we progress towards present time, the focus of the book gradually shifts to current issues. It seemed important to ultimately take the reader through to empirical studies of today's Massif, in order to observe actual outcomes of historical trends and processes. The state, whose agency bears crucial importance in bringing isolated highland societies into the World system (or in inserting the Local into the Global, to use current terminology in vogue), boldly appears in the last chapters as an agent of cultural transformation whilst, in earlier times, its role might have appeared less decisive. But this is probably an illusion. The distance in time separating us from the nineteenth and early twentieth century situations has dulled the abrasive effect of the standardisation of 'national minorities' along the lines of the lowland majorities on the march, a concrete expression of state hegemony. Highlighting the state's decisive role, more easily visible to us in recent years, helps to re-assess retroactively the part it took in the past and suggests that it has long had a significant influence in the highlands of the South-East Asian Massif which will continue for a long time to come.

### **MONTAGNARDS AND THEIR DOMAIN**

The purpose of this presentation of the Montagnards and their domain in greater mainland South-East Asia is to situate them in wide context with reference to the geographical environment, the historical milieu and the current conditions in which they live.

The 65 million minority peoples of greater mainland South-East Asia who are also mountain dwellers, are scattered over a transnational domain of approximately 2.5 million km<sup>2</sup> which includes south-west China, northern and eastern Burma, northern Thailand, eastern Cambodia, northern and central Vietnam, and nearly all of Laos, live in a land of remarkable physical, climatic, and ethnolinguistic diversity. Stretching from the Yangtze river system which roughly demarcates the northern boundary, and moving south to encompass southern Sichuan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Yunnan and the high country which flanks the upper reaches of the southward flowing Irrawaddy, Salween, Chao Phraya, Mekong and Red Rivers, live people who belong to more than fifty officially defined ethnic groups, many of whom can be called Montagnards.

But who exactly are these people? This name, 'Montagnard', to start with, is controversial. To most in an English speaking audience, *montagnard* is a foreign and meaningless word. To a small number though, this French designation used unaltered in English over the last 40 years or so has come to refer to a very precise group of people. During the Second Indochina War, or the 'American Vietnam War' which officially spanned the period from 1963 to 1975, American troops in South Vietnam

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wanted to ally with the inhabitants of the Central Highlands bordering eastern Cambodia and south-eastern Laos, to fight the North Vietnamese and their allies in the South. American and South Vietnamese intelligence, when trying to gather strategic information on these highland dwellers, used French colonial ethnography in which these people were called, *Montagnards*, mountain people. History having unfolded as is now well known, American post-war mythology produced a dominant discourse that came to exclusively associate the French-word-made-English with these particular people, oblivious of the more ancient and general use the French had made of the word since at least the 1890s, when referring to highland dwellers in their Indochina domain and its periphery (see for instance Diguët's *Les Montagnards du Tonkin*, 1908). In this book, one will find both positions, contrasted in the two chapters by Michaud and Saleminck. In this chapter, our choice has been to use indifferently 'Highland Minorities', 'Highlanders' and 'Montagnards'. But our heart follows a preference chosen by a growing number of English language authors (for instance SarDesai 1996: 121), for whom 'Montagnards' is felt to be both appropriate and historically accurate in designating all the mountain people in the region.

#### Cultural Variety and Issues

Montagnards of Mainland South-East Asia are anything but a homogenous group. Those called Montagnard by ethnographers are most likely to meet one another as total strangers who neither speak the same language, share the same culture, nor claim citizenship of the same country. Within their country of origin they are most likely to speak to one another in Southern Mandarin, Burmese, one of the Tai languages, or Vietnamese. If they meet at an international conference outside their home country as members of a privileged scholarly or political elite they are most likely to address each other in English or increasingly less likely, in French. If they meet as members of specific ethnolinguistic groups like the Yao and Miao scattered even more widely by the wars of the second half of the twentieth century to the USA, France, Canada, and Australia they are likely to convene their own international study conference as foreign scholars who specialise in the study of their culture and society. Depending on who convenes them Yao/Mien, Hmong/Miao and Akha/Hani conferences usually attract as many indigenous as exogenous social scientists. Those given to essentialising ethnicity are often surprised to learn that these meetings are not used to provide a nationalist springboard for political action. When Montagnards meet they are often faced with stronger divergent than unifying interests and are unlikely to consider building anything stronger than loose associations of common interest. The formation of a strong, united, transnational ethnic political party made up for example by the world's

9 million or so Hmong/Miao is unlikely to come about in either the near or distant future.

This is not to say Montagnards have nothing in common. If given the chance to talk even individuals from isolated areas soon discover that they share a similar background. For instance that they can each claim a specific geographical place as home within a broad but highly fragmented cultural milieu. They will not be surprised to learn that the families of their new acquaintances still live in scattered, relatively isolated highland communities in close proximity to one or two neighbouring villages in which live people who are most likely to both speak a different language and follow a different religion. Most men and many women will speak at least three languages: their natal tongue; the language of the people in at least one of the neighbouring villages; and, the national and/or regional language of the nation state in which they live. It will come as no surprise that in the country of their birth they are considered to belong to an ethnic or national minority group.

As the conversation moves to more formal matters the specific conditions of the countries in which they live may begin to play a part in their conversation. Those from the socialist states in the Montagnard domain such as China, Vietnam and Laos will learn that even though they are clearly out numbered, fragmented and politically subordinate, they enjoy the rights of full citizenship and the dignity of some measure of self government. Those from Burma may have very little of a positive nature to report on the role of the state with which many of them have been at war either since independence, in 1948, or 1962 when the military took over. The Montagnards of Cambodia – an extremely small number it must be said – have also benefitted very little from the many governments which are supposed to have represented them in international forums. Even to this day many so called hill tribes of Thailand find it difficult to secure legal citizenship in the country of their birth. The Montagnards of mainland South-East Asia live in a world dominated by Han Chinese, Tai Lao, Tai Thai, Burman Burmese, Khmer Cambodians and Kinh Vietnamese.

Stereotypes have long been used by lowland powers-that-be to prove the backwardness of Montagnards. It is often stated that most Highlander households secure a livelihood from an agricultural system rather dramatically, pejoratively and misleadingly described as 'slash and burn'. Without going into the complex question of the nature of shifting cultivation or swiddening, such a summary dismissal of Highlander agricultural practices does not stand up to examination. A journey into mountainous Hani country at the headwaters of the Red River quickly puts to rest any such simplistic assertion. Irrigated terraces that dwarf the pyramids of Egypt demonstrate a level of both engineering skill and hydrological knowledge that most lowland rice farmers would be hard put to match.

## *Montagnard Domain in the South-East Asian Massif*

Montagnards are often stereotyped as illiterate. It is true that many highland societies have not produced indigenous scripts, and some are not using any at all. But many also use one or more scripts they borrowed from their neighbours. The popular Taoism of the Yao may sometimes make eccentric use of written Mandarin (Lemoine, 1983) but its use has been an integral part of Yao religious practice for a very long time. Several Tai groups in Vietnam use a variety of scripts derived from Thailand's. The pictographic script of the Naxi of Lijiang in Yunnan, which also includes syllabic characters, most probably of Tibetan origin, is an entirely indigenous invention.

The game of measuring degrees of sophistication and civilisation against cultural skills common in the context of politically dominant groups is far from satisfactory. The cultural and agricultural practices of groups like the Hani, Yao and Naxi are of course influenced by contact, but contact and information transfer in such a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous place as mainland South-East Asia has itself always been complex, much more than a one or two way process. What does it matter when the transfer also involves a transformation? As Matisoff writes about borrowing language while paraphrasing an observation from Benedict (1975): 'borrowing language takes a 'Procrustean' approach to the foreign material, lopping off here and stretching there, until the alien stuff is totally assimilated to a native pattern' (Matisoff, 1983: 63)

The Yao and Naxi like the majority of Montagnards have been influenced by Chinese culture but then what does it mean in a very specific sense to be Han? The Han do not constitute a homogeneous population, only two of the nine spoken Chinese languages are widely used in southern China. In a challenging and important book *Austro-Thai Language and Culture*, the linguist Paul Benedict (1975) makes a strong case for many of the earliest cultural borrowings in South China to have been made from Tai into Chinese rather than the other way around. But to pursue the significance of this too far can also become a game. No single ethnic group can claim to have invented the accumulated knowledge of its region and all living cultures are constantly learning and transferring, borrowing and giving, stealing and inheriting information to and from somewhere else. No one dominant culture owns the history of the world, however this might be defined and argued by its learned representatives.

There are many challenges that can be levelled at the editor and authors contributing to a book which uses the terms Montagnard, Mountain Minorities and Highlander as the centre of their focus. Literally the terms define people living in a specific type of landscape, the geography of which can be described as mountainous or hilly, upland, tableland which could just as easily be an elevated plateau. The overriding concern lies more with the sense of remoteness, a state of marginality, distance from the seat of power. Then geographical isolation becomes a metaphor for political

isolation, subordination, a way of referring to ethnic minorities, those who are most likely to have been classified as Other by the more powerful peoples amongst whom they live.

The term Montagnard, to address the term again from yet another angle, is used here as an academic construct to refer to a wide range of mountain peoples in mainland South-East Asia who can be characterised by their minority status and membership of distinct ethnolinguistic groups. Montagnards are increasingly likely to be born in an urban environment as in the relatively isolated, rural settlements of previous generations. Typically, in both rural and urban situations the people with whom they share both a culture and common ethnolinguistic identity may live in communities with a distinct territory within a complex geographical and sociocultural milieu in which they are obliged to live in close political and economic proximity with significant groups of people who belong to other cultures. Cultural and ethnic plurality is an enduring feature of the region.

### **Ecological Conditions**

The agricultural cycle of the whole Montagnard region is dominated by the Monsoon, a seasonally wet then extremely dry tropical environment which is quite different from the humid tropics in which temperatures remain consistently high and the amount of rainfall exceeds evaporation throughout the year.

Under Monsoon conditions there is a distinct break between the wet and dry seasons. The wet season begins in the south in May with prevailing southwest winds bringing moist, humid air from the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Siam. Precipitation is heaviest where high country forms a barrier to the advancing, saturated air masses. On the western side of the ranges 2000mm of rain falls over a period of five to six months. On the eastern and northern side of the ranges, well inland, the rainshadow effect can bring precipitation down under 1000mm. The dry season is caused by the advance of cool dry continental air from Central East Asia. When it arrives in late October or early November highland temperatures drop quickly. This high pressure system remains in place until the cool dry season gives way to the hot dry summer of March, April and May.

This simple representation of the impact the Monsoon has on the highlands is broken by the complexity imposed by relief, latitude and in the case of central and south Vietnam, proximity to the sea. Relief and latitude greatly influence temperature. The eastern extension of the Himalyan mountain system into western Yunnan provides Tali with a backdrop of snow covered peaks and winter temperatures averaging 5C. The weather may deliver a distinct dry and wet season which is definitely Monsoonal but at over 2000 metres above sea level the climate is temperate rather than tropical. The dry season is broken in the high

## *Montagnard Domain in the South-East Asian Massif*

country of central and south Vietnam by precipitation gathered by the continental air mass moving in from the northwest over the South China Sea on to the coast.

The climatic complexity of the region provides a multiplicity of what Holdridge (1967) has called 'life zones'. As those with an interest in the prehistory of the region such as the geographer Sauer (1952), botanist Li (1970) and the archaeologists Solheim (1972) and White (1982) have pointed out, South-East Asia most probably provided an important site for the early domestication of a wide range of plants and animals. Dry tropical conditions provide relatively more plant food for human consumption and the list of plants which may well have been domesticated includes 'over twenty species of plants . . . (such as) . . . rice, yams, and taro' (White, 1982: 25). More speculatively Sauer includes among the 'animals domesticated in South-East Asia – dog, pig, fowl, duck and goose.' (Sauer, 1952: 28)

From the prehistoric record it is evident that early tool makers lived in the region a million years ago (Pent, 1994) and that from 10,000 BC settlements were well established. The definitive prehistory of South-East Asia has yet to be written but the potential for the early development of agriculture is clear. The repetitive cycle of the weather lends itself to careful observation of the reproductive cycle of plant life, both human and non human life is bound to the ecological round: that people constructed forward thinking strategies on the basis of this knowledge is not surprising.

### **People**

Until comparatively recent historical times it is unlikely that population densities in the South-East Asian Massif were at all high. From the Thai record alone it is apparent that in the nineteenth century, although there was plenty of land available to farm, there were rarely enough people to do the work at hand. There is a long history of sorties into and government led settlement in the region by Han. The Chinese 'march towards the tropics' (Weins, 1954) from the Han Dynasty at the beginning of the Christian era continued into the late twentieth century following Liberation when the People's Republic moved Chinese settlers into the southern Tai border region of Sip Song Phan Na (Xishuangbanna) to both secure the area and establish rubber plantations. Historically, this ancient settlement process displaced the indigenous peoples, in a very real sense made Montagnards of many by pushing them off better agricultural land and forcing them into the hills.

To the south where Burmese, Thai and Vietnamese battled for hegemony the Monsoon cycle of warfare under which rice was grown in the rainy season and war made, or at least military colours and hardware displayed in the dry season was established fairly early. Highland people could not

help but be engaged in someway in the military adventures of their dominant lowland neighbours. Over the past 2000 years South China has been transformed by the settlement of Han and the acculturation, displacement of indigenous groups, miscegenation, linguistic and identity changes which followed. In the south when the direct control of Han faltered following the collapse of the Tang Dynasty in the early tenth century, a Lolo group centred on Tali formed the Nan Chao kingdom made up of a plurality of Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples, mounted frequent raids on adjacent communities. The weakening of the Tang Dynasty also gave the Vietnamese the opportunity to assert a greater degree of independence but strong periodic surges of Chinese influence as late as the Ming Dynasty (1368–1664 AD) kept the Vietnamese within a cultural world in which the influence of Chinese practices and belief systems remained strong. This influence had the effect of tying the Vietnamese to the north where their Tai and Burman lowland neighbours aligned themselves more closely to the religious and intellectual discourses of Sanscrit and Pali which originated on the Indian subcontinent. It was over the first quarter of the present millennium that the dominant groups of the immediate precolonial and post colonial world established their hegemony. The Burmans displaced the Mon, the Tai displaced the Khmer, a task in which they were assisted by the Vietnamese who also displaced the Cham and so it went.

To some extent Montagnards can be seen as refugees displaced by war and choosing to remain beyond the direct control of state authorities who sought to control labour, tax productive resources, and secure access to populations from which they could recruit soldiers, servants, concubines and slaves. This implies that Montagnards have always been on the run and while to some extent this may be true, it was clearly not always the case. At one time or another just as various Chinese dynasties negotiated political understandings with Burman and Tai kingdoms, so did the Chinese negotiate understandings with peoples like the Yao and Miao who ran their own principalities and were to become Montagnards only later as a consequence of Han settlement and subordination.

From very early times there were connections between the Chinese empire and people who did not consider themselves to be Han. Amongst the outsiders – the ‘barbarians’ as Chinese historiography labelled them – some were happy to accept Chinese legitimization. The Yao Mien take pride from a tradition which makes a dynastic connection to their ancestors through the Yao Charter in which there is reference to an emperor (528–516 B.C.) who in an imperial edict gave a Yao leader the right to call himself king, exempted his descendants from all taxations and levies and allowed them the ‘freedom to cultivate swidden rice in all the mountains of the empire’ (Lemoine, 1983: 197).

From equally early times trade was also important. For example the jade for which China is famous came mostly from Burma. Isolated passes had to

### *Montagnard Domain in the South-East Asian Massif*

be secured from attack. Outposts set up to police trade became towns, trading centres in which people from a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds came together to exchange goods and information, offer themselves as mercenaries for service with caravans and so forth. The role Montagnards played in this early intercourse is not known but where their special knowledge of the forest was of use and where they could provide advanced warning of the movement of large numbers of soldiers their cooperation would have been valued. In historical times the Karen were marginally incorporated into the state of Siam as guardians of the forest (Renard, 1988). Clearly they were in a position to provide advanced warning of Burman attacks on Siamese towns.

Where settlement and displacement were the principal objectives of outsiders and this intrusion was contested, the mutual benefits of cooperation were most probably ignored. Relationships marred by a history of violence were less likely to inspire trust and mutual respect. Until the Chinese Communist Party declared the practice to be demeaning, the dog radical was used in all references to Montagnards living in China. The implication was that all those living in the highlands were black, hairy, wild, uncivilised and their behaviour unpredictable. As recorded elsewhere (McKinnon, 1997: 290) the historical records refer again and again to dirty people who 'worshipped devils, and ate unclean foods' (Reid, 1994: 269). Reid quotes an early Chinese visitor to South-East Asia being told that Montagnards,

. . . constitute a race apart . . . these people are despised by other men . . . If by chance a Chinese arrives and, after his long enforced celibacy, should inadvertently have intercourse just once with these women, and the master finds out, then the next day the latter will refuse to sit down in the new comers's company, because he has had intercourse with a savage. (Chou Ta-kuan quoted by Reid, *Ibid.*)

Renard paraphrases the words of the rishi (hermit) Vasudeva, the founder of the city of Lamphun in North Thailand when he invited the Mon princess Jam Thewi to become the first ruler over the Mon Khmer speaking Lua or Lawa as being unable to rule themselves

. . . the inferiority of the Lua came from their having been born in the footprints of elephants, rhinoceroses, buffaloes, other animals and phantom creatures of the forest . . . (these) 'wildmen' lacked the ability to distinguish right from wrong and although called men, were incapable of holding royal power . . . (they were in fact) . . . 'forest creatures of the race of fools'. (Renard, 1988: 79 and 83)

Although the descriptions are harsh, Montagnards were not classified by rigid, fixed racial and ethnic characteristics. The historical record provides

plenty of examples of movement between the binaries of civilised and uncivilised, domesticated and wild, even 'cooked' and 'raw' (Culas & Michaud 1997:213). If a person from the hills was prepared to adopt the language, religion, behaviour and other distinguishing characteristics of the dominant political and cultural group, that person immediately became a more respectable human being. In a domain of remarkable ethnic complexity pluralism was a fact of life and the exact identification of outsiders was not considered to be a matter of great importance.

### **Ethnolinguistic Groups**

Han form the single most populous group in both the greater region of mainland South-East Asia referred to earlier in this Introduction as well as in the border region shown on the accompanying maps. Even though a representative population of Han have been in residence for longer than 1000 years it can be argued that as invading settlers, they do not qualify as indigenous people.

There are problems with arbitrarily imposing a judgement like this. It can then legitimately be asked why should the Miao and Yao be described as indigenes in countries to the south such as Laos and Thailand into which they have migrated over the past two hundred years? Rather than enter this argument the maps presented here have been prepared not to exclude Han but to more clearly show the distribution of people of other than Han descent, quite simply because this makes it easier to see where they are.

The ethnolinguistic map indicates the location of people classified as part of a more general grouping than their specific ethnic identity might justify. Without meticulously going through all available data on the location of Montagnards, much of which is less than satisfactory, these broader groups offer the best data available with which to construct a reliable map of their general distribution.

Rather than attempt the difficult task of constructing a map for the whole Montagnard region, we have chosen to focus on the border country, exclude the Han but include other dominant lowland peoples such as the Burman, Thai and Kinh Vietnamese. Few representatives of these groups are Montagnards but neither can they be entirely precluded from consideration. For instance the Tai make up an extremely diverse group and isolated communities of Black, White and Red Tai living in a manner consistent with the demands of a highland environment, can for all intents and purposes be called Montagnards. In this part of the world the temptation to impose an essentialist interpretation and argue a case in support of a view under which a people maintain their ethnolinguistic identity along with distinct genetic characteristics is soon undermined by the evidence. Just as the Han themselves are the product of centuries of

## *Montagnard Domain in the South-East Asian Massif*

assimilation of many autochthonous populations, so the Chinese use of Tai elites has produced Tai through a process of Tai-ization under which autonomous peoples have been assimilated and acculturated (Wiens, 1954: 120 and Lebar et al. 1964: 187).

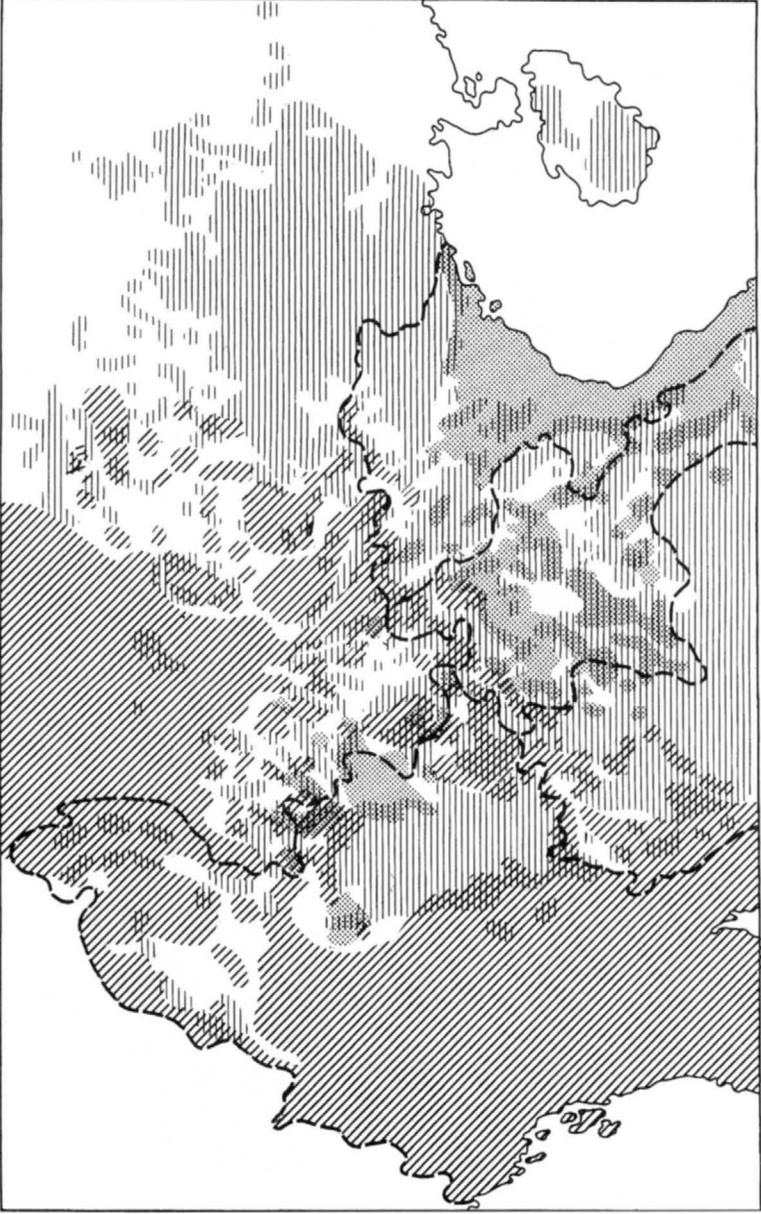
Map 2 shows the distribution of the three principal ethnolinguistic families, the Tibeto-Burman family (Tibeto-Karen according to Matisoff, 1983: 65) which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan Superstock; the Austro-Thai which Matisoff classifies as a Superstock in its own right (Matisoff, 1983); and Mon-Khmer, a family of the Austro-Asiatic Superstock. As appears clear in Maps 3, 4 and 5, the distribution shows a western sector focus for Tibeto-Burman groups, a south-eastern concentration of Austro-Thai and a central north-west, south-east axis for Mon-Khmer.

### **Demography**

To complete this presentation, some recent demographic figures are useful. It is a difficult task to gather accurate and reliable information on the exact numbers of Montagnards in Mainland South-East Asia. Ethnonyms, for one, differ not only from one national space to another, but also over time within the same country. The other snag is that due to their loose social organization, a large proportion of Highlanders in the region live in small dwellings, their 'domain' often scattered over a very large area straddling several international borders. In addition, a large proportion of communities lie in remote areas that are not easily visited by census enumerators and as a consequence traditional census techniques are not reliable. 'Remote Census' techniques are then used, from which no count can be taken as totally accurate.

It must be said also that nearly all of the five countries sharing the Mainland South-East Asian Massif have a variety of political motives to withhold, even conceal, accurate demographic information. Burma, for instance, has been fighting an internal war with several of its own national minorities for decades now, and census figures, if any were ever produced since independence, are considered sensitive. In China and in Vietnam, belonging to one of the National Minorities entails the right to claim a series of privileges that the State does not want to make available to too many; in Vietnam in particular, between 1979 and 1989, the official number of National Minorities has been reduced from 53 to 48 (not counting the Kinh). In spite of these limitations, the following tables have been put together in an effort to represent at least a proportion of the national populations the Montagnards represent. We have used official figures on a national basis. The Burmese case though, is unique. No census has officially been released there since the last one conducted by the British in 1931 and published in 1933. For this particular case, the 1931 figures have been taken as a starting point and augmented

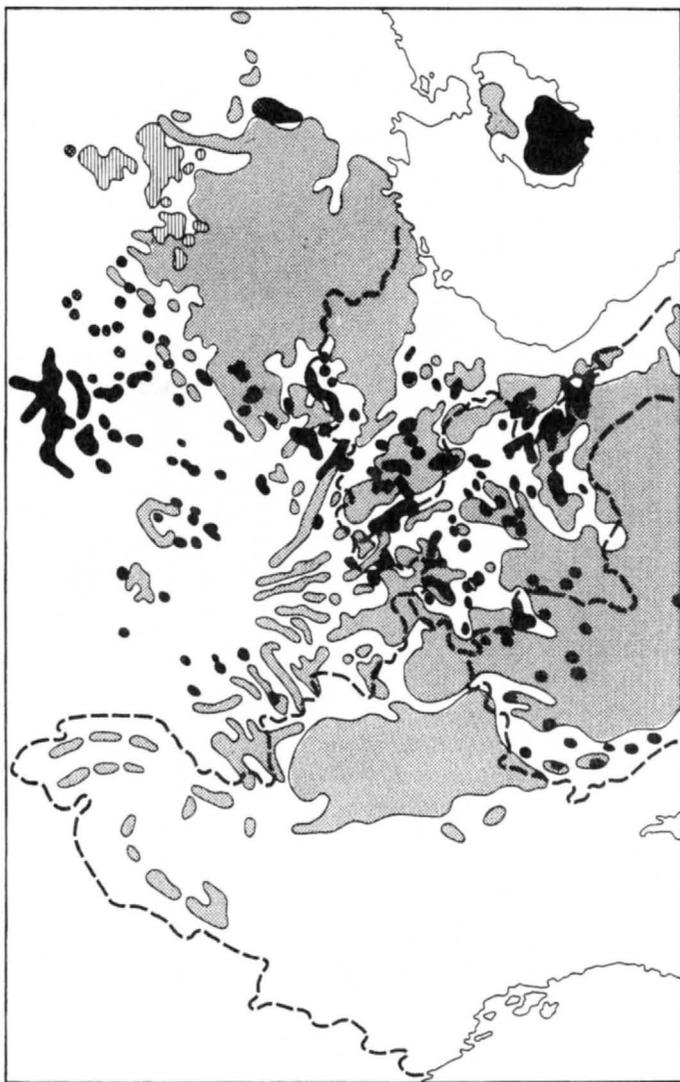
Map 2 Ethno-Linguistic Families



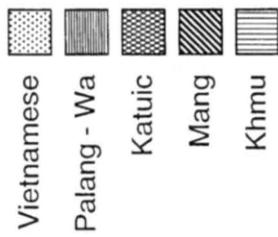
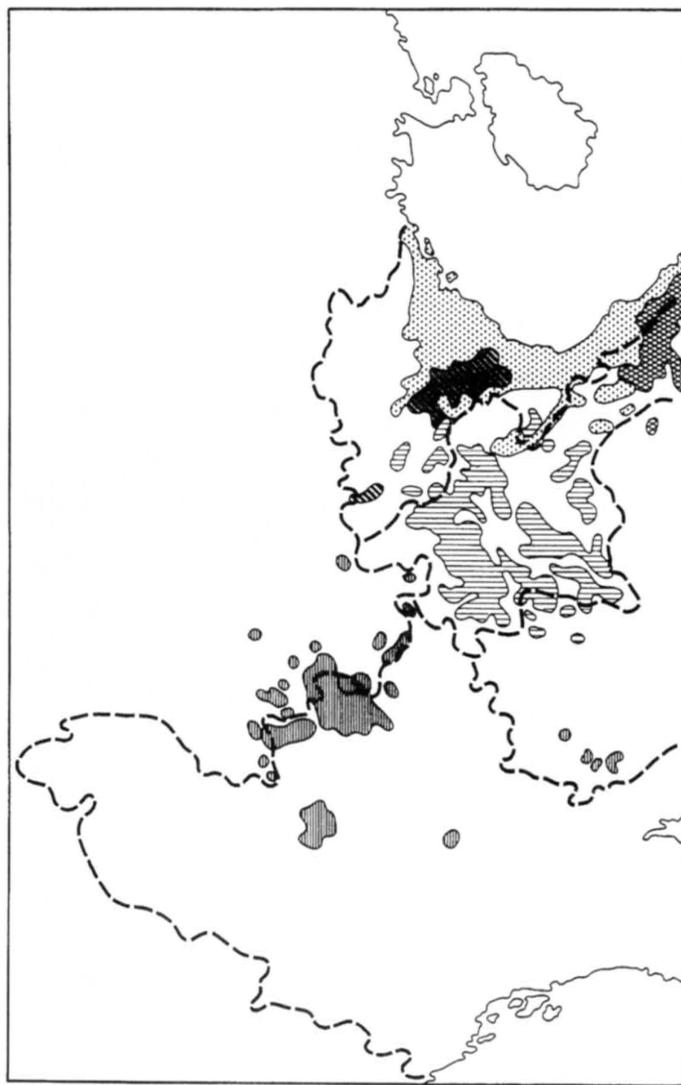
Map 3 Tibeto-Burman Ethno-Linguistic Groups



Map 4 Austro-Thai Ethno-Linguistic Groups



Map 5 Mon-Khmer Ethno-Linguistic Groups



**CHINA**

**National Minorities of Southern China 1990**

27 National Minorities (N.M.) in the South (49 837 224 persons) not including the Tibetan periphery (Tibetan, Monba, Lhoba, Gaoshan) and Hainan Island (Li), out of a total of 58 N.M. in the country (91 200 314) not counting the Han (1 042 482 187); total national population of 1 133 682 501.

| <i>Chinese ethnonym</i>  | <i>N</i>          | <i>Rank /58</i> | <i>% of N.M. in the South</i> | <i>% of total of N.M.</i> | <i>% of country</i> |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Zhuang   | 15 489 630        | 1               | 31,08%                        | 16,98%                    | 1,37%               |
| Miao   | 7 398 035         | 4               | 14,84%                        | 8,11%                     | 0,65%               |
| Yi   | 6 572 173         | 6               | 13,19%                        | 7,21%                     | 0,58%               |
| Tujia  | 5 704 223         | 7               | 11,45%                        | 6,25%                     | 0,50%               |
| Bouyei   | 2 545 059         | 10              | 5,11%                         | 2,79%                     | 0,22%               |
| Dong   | 2 514 014         | 11              | 5,04%                         | 2,76%                     | 0,22%               |
| Yao  | 2 134 013         | 12              | 4,28%                         | 2,34%                     | 0,19%               |
| Bai  | 1 594 827         | 14              | 3,20%                         | 1,75%                     | 0,14%               |
| Hani   | 1 253 952         | 15              | 2,52%                         | 1,37%                     | 0,11%               |
| Dai  | 1 025 128         | 18              | 2,06%                         | 1,12%                     | 0,09%               |
| She  | 630 378           | 19              | 1,26%                         | 0,69%                     | 0,06%               |
| Lisu   | 574 856           | 20              | 1,15%                         | 0,63%                     | 0,05%               |
| Gelao  | 437 997           | 21              | 0,88%                         | 0,48%                     | 0,04%               |
| Lahu   | 411 476           | 22              | 0,83%                         | 0,45%                     | 0,04%               |
| Va   | 351 974           | 24              | 0,71%                         | 0,39%                     | 0,03%               |
| Shui   | 345 993           | 25              | 0,69%                         | 0,38%                     | 0,03%               |
| Naxi   | 278 009           | 26              | 0,56%                         | 0,30%                     | 0,02%               |
| Mulam  | 159 328           | 30              | 0,32%                         | 0,17%                     | 0,01%               |
| Jingpo   | 119 209           | 33              | 0,24%                         | 0,13%                     | 0,01%               |
| Blang; Maonan; Primi;<br>Achang; Nu; Gin; Jino;<br>Deang; Derung | 296 950           | 35-51           | 0,60%                         | 0,33%                     | 0,03%               |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>49 837 224</b> | <b>—</b>        | <b>100,00%</b>                | <b>54,65%</b>             | <b>4,40%</b>        |

*Sources:* Ma Yin 1989; *State Statistical Bureau Population Statistics Section 1990*, Beijing 1991, in MacKerras 1994, pp. 238-40.

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VIETNAM

National Minorities of Vietnam 1989

48 National Minorities in the country (8 475 538), not counting the Kinh (55 900 224); total national population of 64 375 762.

| <i>Vietnamese ethnonym<br/>(other names)</i> | <i>N</i>         | <i>% of<br/>N.M.</i> | <i>% of<br/>country</i> |
|--|------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Tay (Tho)                                    | 1 190 342        | 14,04                | 1,85                    |
| Thai (White, Black ,Red, Lu)                 | 1 040 549        | 12,28                | 1,62                    |
| Muong  | 914 596          | 10,79                | 1,42                    |
| Hoa  | 900 185          | 10,62                | 1,40                    |
| Kho me                                       | 895 299          | 10,56                | 1,39                    |
| Nung   | 705 709          | 8,33                 | 1,10                    |
| Hmong (Miao, Meo, H'mong)                    | 558 053          | 6,58                 | 0,87                    |
| Dao (Dzao, Yao, Man, Mien)                   | 473 945          | 5,59                 | 0,74                    |
| Gia rai (Jarai)                              | 242 291          | 2,86                 | 0,38                    |
| E De (Edê)                                   | 194 710          | 2,30                 | 0,30                    |
| Ba Na (Bahnar)                               | 136 859          | 1,61                 | 0,21                    |
| San Chay                                     | 114 012          | 1,35                 | 0,18                    |
| Cham   | 98 971           | 1,17                 | 0,15                    |
| Xo Dang                                      | 96 766           | 1,14                 | 0,15                    |
| San Diu                                      | 94 630           | 1,12                 | 0,15                    |
| Hre  | 94 259           | 1,11                 | 0,15                    |
| Co Ho  | 92 190           | 1,11                 | 0,15                    |
| Raglai                                       | 71 696           | 0,85                 | 0,11                    |
| Mnong  | 67 340           | 0,79                 | 0,10                    |
| Tho  | 51 274           | 0,60                 | 0,08                    |
| Xtieng                                       | 50 194           | 0,60                 | 0,08                    |
| Kho Mu (Khmu, Khamu)                         | 42 853           | 0,51                 | 0,07                    |
| Bru Van Kieu                                 | 40 132           | 0,47                 | 0,06                    |
| Giay   | 37 974           | 0,45                 | 0,06                    |
| Co Tu  | 36 967           | 0,44                 | 0,06                    |
| Gie-Trieng                                   | 26 924           | 0,33                 | 0,04                    |
| Ta Oi  | 26 044           | 0,31                 | 0,03                    |
| 20 other groups                              | 180 784          | 2,13                 | 0,28                    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                 | <b>8 475 538</b> | <b>100</b>           | <b>13,17</b>            |

Source: Khong Dien 1995, pp. 305-7.

THAILAND

Mountain Minorities of Northern Thailand 1995

9 official 'Hill Tribes' (H.T.) (694 620 persons) and two additional groups (667); total national population of approximately 60 200 000 in 1995.

| <i>Thailand's ethnonym<br/>(other names)</i> | <i>N</i>       | <i>% of<br/>H.T.</i> | <i>% of<br/>country</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Karen (Kariang, Yang)                        | 321 900        | 46,30                | 0,53                    |
| Meo (Hmong)                                  | 124 211        | 17,86                | 0,21                    |
| Lahu (Musur)                                 | 73 252         | 10,54                | 0,12                    |
| Akha (Kaw, E-kaw)                            | 48 468         | 6,97                 | 0,08                    |
| Yao (Mien)                                   | 40 371         | 5,81                 | 0,07                    |
| H'tin (Tin, Mal, Prai)                       | 32 655         | 4,70                 | 0,05                    |
| Lisu (Lisaw)                                 | 27 899         | 4,01                 | 0,05                    |
| Lua (Lawa)                                   | 15 711         | 2,26                 | 0,03                    |
| Khamu (K'hmu)                                | 10 153         | 1,46                 | 0,02                    |
| Palong (Padaung)                             | 485            | 0,07                 | 0,00                    |
| Mlabri (Yumbri, Phi Tong Luang)              | 182            | 0,03                 | 0,00                    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                 | <b>695 287</b> | <b>100</b>           | <b>1,15</b>             |

Source: Tribal Research Institute (TRI), 1995.

proportionally to the national population increase between 1931 and now. This of course can not account for possible massive migrations or, possibly, ethnocides.

These tables indicate that the proportion of Montagnard population in the five countries spans from little more than 1% in Thailand to 42% in Laos, while the population numbers by country spread from 695,287 only in Thailand, to 49,837,224 in China, understandably the strongest contender in demographic terms.

Overall, it is not possible to calculate the exact number within each ethnic – or ethnolinguistic – group irrespective to national boundaries because ethnonyms are simply not consistent from one country to another. However, one can safely assume that the various groups belonging to the Tai linguistic stock form the most important cluster, well over 20 million, while the Hmong-Miao group comes second with approximately 9 million. Both groups are represented in the five countries sharing the Massif (excluding Cambodia).

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LAOS

Mountain Minorities of Laos 1995

46 ethnic groups ( $\pm 2\ 050\ 440$ ) not including the Lao ( $\pm 2\ 831\ 560$ ), for a total national population of approximately 4 882 000 (1985).

| <i>Laotian ethnonym<br/>(other names)</i> | <i>N</i>          | <i>% of<br/>M.M.</i> | <i>% of<br/>country</i> |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Phouthai                                  | 565 336           | 27,57                | 11,58                   |
| Khammou (Khmu)                            | 475 019           | 23,17                | 9,73                    |
| Mong (Hmong)                              | 296 826           | 14,48                | 6,08                    |
| Katang                                    | 123 515           | 6,02                 | 2,53                    |
| Koh                                       | 107 892           | 5,26                 | 2,21                    |
| Xouay                                     | 93 246            | 4,55                 | 1,91                    |
| Laven                                     | 47 355            | 2,31                 | 0,97                    |
| Phounoi                                   | 44 426            | 2,17                 | 0,91                    |
| Ta Oi                                     | 44 426            | 2,17                 | 0,91                    |
| Thin                                      | 31 733            | 1,55                 | 0,65                    |
| Katou                                     | 29 780            | 1,45                 | 0,61                    |
| Yao                                       | 29 292            | 1,45                 | 0,60                    |
| Lavae                                     | 29 292            | 1,45                 | 0,60                    |
| Talieng                                   | 29 292            | 1,45                 | 0,60                    |
| Tree                                      | 29 292            | 1,45                 | 0,60                    |
| Yoan                                      | 22 457            | 1,10                 | 0,46                    |
| Lamet                                     | 14 646            | 0,71                 | 0,30                    |
| Alak                                      | 14 646            | 0,71                 | 0,30                    |
| Ngae                                      | 14 646            | 0,71                 | 0,30                    |
| Makong                                    | 14 646            | 0,71                 | 0,30                    |
| Kamae                                     | 14 646            | 0,71                 | 0,30                    |
| 25 other groups                           | $\pm 97\ 000$     | $\pm 4,73$           | $\div \pm 2,0$          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                              | $\pm 2\ 050\ 440$ | $\pm 100$            | $\pm 42,0$              |

*Source:* Lao Government, internal source stating percentages without figures, 1997. (our source has requested to remain anonymous)

BURMA

Mountain Minorities of Highland Burma 1993

Projection based on 1931 figures with a national population of 14 667 000, augmented proportionally to 1993; factor 3.2 based on a total national population of 46 527 000 in 1993.

| <i>Language group – main sub-groups</i> | <i>N in 1931</i> | <i>N in 1993 (1931 pop. × 3.2)</i> | <i>% of M.M.</i> | <i>% of country</i> |
|---|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Karen</b>                            | 1 341 066        | 4 291 411                          | 42,12            | 9,22                |
| – Sgaw:                                 |                  | 1 599 325                          |                  |                     |
| – Pwo:                                  |                  | 1 515 904                          |                  |                     |
| – Taungthu:                             |                  | 712 685                            |                  |                     |
| – Karenni:                              |                  | 100 979                            |                  |                     |
| <b>Tai</b>                              | 1 021 917        | 3 270 134                          | 32,10            | 7,03                |
| – Shan:                                 |                  | 2 926 013                          |                  |                     |
| – Hkun:                                 |                  | 99 949                             |                  |                     |
| – Lu:                                   |                  | 96 099                             |                  |                     |
| <b>Kuki-Chin</b>                        | 343 854          | 1 100 333                          | 10,80            | 2,36                |
| – Chin:                                 |                  | 285 267                            |                  |                     |
| – Khami:                                |                  | 98 822                             |                  |                     |
| – Lai:                                  |                  | 77 306                             |                  |                     |
| – Chinbok:                              |                  | 64 624                             |                  |                     |
| – Kamhow:                               |                  | 63 341                             |                  |                     |
| <b>Palaung-Wa</b>                       | 176 024          | 563 277                            | 5,53             | 1,21                |
| – Palaung/Pale:                         |                  | 443 699                            |                  |                     |
| <b>Kachin</b>                           | 153 897          | 492 470                            | 4,83             | 1,06                |
| <b>Lolo-Muhso</b>                       | 93 052           | 297 766                            | 2,92             | 0,64                |
| – Kaw:                                  |                  | 129 302                            |                  |                     |
| – Lahu:                                 |                  | 85 965                             |                  |                     |
| – Lisaw:                                |                  | 63 034                             |                  |                     |
| <b>Sak</b>                              | 35 237           | 112 758                            | 1,10             | 0,24                |
| – Kadu:                                 |                  | 64 976                             |                  |                     |
| <b>Mro</b>                              | 14 094           | 45 101                             | 0,44             | 0,10                |
| <b>Naga</b>                             | 4 201            | 13 443                             | 0,13             | 0,03                |
| <b>Man</b>                              | 947              | 3 030                              | 0,03             | 0,01                |
| – Miao:                                 |                  | 2 656                              |                  |                     |
| – Yao:                                  |                  | 374                                |                  |                     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                            | 3 184 289        | 10 189 725                         | 100              | 21,90               |

Source: Bennison J.J., 1933, pp. 198–200.

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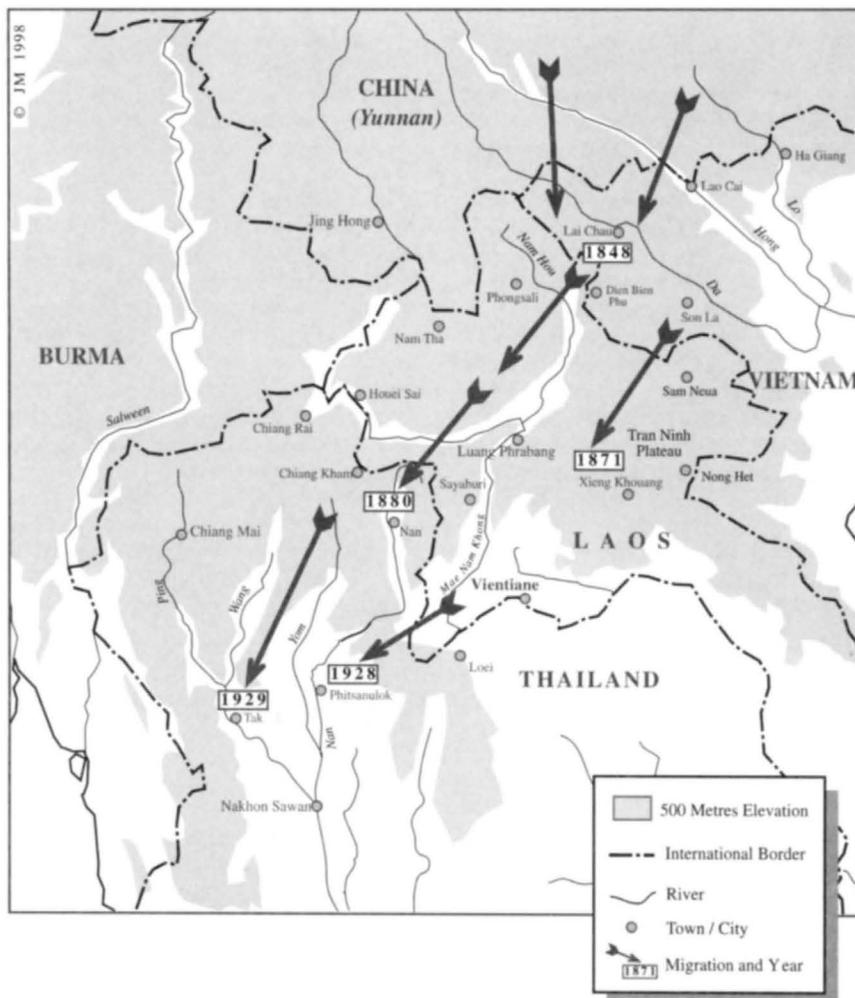
## NOTES

- 1 The fact that Peter Kunstadter has accepted to participate in this book gives us the opportunity to pay him a well deserved homage for his long term scholarly contribution to the study of highland societies in South-East Asia.
- 2 It is voluntarily that we do not include here the two volumes on minority groups in Thailand (1970) and Northern Vietnam (1972) by Joann Schrok et al. We consider these to be part of the country based publications, although it could also be argued that together, they cover a large portion of the Massif. But not quite the whole of it.

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# Chapter One

Map 6 Hmong Migrations in the 19th and 20th Centuries



## Chapter One

# Migrants, Runaways and Opium Growers: Origins of the Hmong in Laos and Siam in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

*Christian Culas*

This paper is a contribution to more extensive research on the history of the Hmong migrations in South-East Asia,<sup>1</sup> and deals with the Hmong migrations from China to Laos and Thailand, particularly between Luang Phrabang (Laos) and Muang Nan (Siam) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

First, I will give some relevant information on the historical and political background in this area. Then, I will discuss the first recorded evidence of Hmong settlements in Laos Kingdom and in Nan Principality. I will conclude with what is the most likely motivation for these migrations.

The purpose of this paper is not to deal with 'micro-migrations' such as local searches for new fields, regular new settlements of the village or hunting places in the neighbourhood (i.e. under the same administrative and political ruler); rather it deals with the study of Hmong 'macro-migrations' towards the South and South-West, with a local level focus. I would like to underline the various reasons which led the Hmong to move between Laos and Thailand (formerly Siam), and go on to discuss the motivations for this move from Luang Phrabang to Nan province; while other Hmong and Montagnards got used to new ways of life and new patterns of agricultural production in the country during a period of economical and cultural change. This research is directed toward economic, political and social conditions, for it is through a study of the unity and the divisions among the highland minorities that we will be able to understand the history of their relationships with Thai and Lao principalities and governments.

The Hmong are a Miao-Yao ethnic group scattered through South-West China,<sup>2</sup> Vietnam, Laos and Thailand with a very small number in Myanmar (Burma), especially in the Shan States. Today about 124,000 Hmong live in the highlands of northern Thailand, in some 230 villages<sup>3</sup> which sometimes are interspersed with Yao people. In 1993-4, between 231,000<sup>4</sup> and 260,000<sup>5</sup> Hmong lived in North Laos, in an unknown number of villages.

*Migrants, Runaways and Opium Growers*

**Miao/Hmong Population in Asia (1968–1995)**

| <i>Country</i>        | <i>Persons<br/>(thousands)</i> | <i>% of National<br/>Tribal Minorities</i> | <i>% of National<br/>Population</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Thailand <sup>1</sup> | 124                            | 17.8%                                      | 0.21%                               |
| Laos – a <sup>2</sup> | 300–500                        | ?  | 10 to 20%                           |
| – b                   | 205 <sup>3</sup>               | 50.7% <sup>4</sup>                         | 4.92%                               |
| – c                   | 231 <sup>5</sup>               | 57.1% <sup>4</sup>                         | 5.54%                               |
| – d                   | 260 <sup>6</sup>               | 64.3% <sup>4</sup>                         | 6.23%                               |
| Vietnam – a           | 411 <sup>7</sup>               | ?  | 0.64% <sup>8</sup>                  |
| – b <sup>9</sup>      | 558                            | 6.6%                                       | 0.87%                               |
| China <sup>10</sup>   | 7 350                          | 8.1%                                       | 0.65%                               |

Sources:

1. Tribal Research Institute 1995: 59.
2. 1971 figure, Whitaker et al 1985.
3. Estimation based on the figure of 293,000 (1968 census in Taillard 1989: 74) minus one third. Taillard estimates that around 30% of the Hmong in Laos have left the country after 1975 (ibid.: 97).
4. Approximation based on the national percentage of *Lao Soung* (Hmong and Yao), 9.7%, as declared by the Laotian government in 1990.
5. Kossikov and Egorounin 1993: 5.
6. Observations of various sources gathered by Chazec 1995: 111.
7. 1979 figures, Cima 1989: 314.
8. Based on a national population of 64,411,668 in 1989 (ibid.: xxiv).
9. 1989 census, Nguyen 1995: 103.
10. Tabulation on the 1990 Population Census of the P. R. of China 1993.

The Hmong are generally described as mountain dwellers and as swidden, or slash-and-burn, agriculturists, especially in South-East Asia.

**WHERE DO THE NORTHERN INDOCHINESE HMONG  
COME FROM?**

It was in the first half of the nineteenth century that Hmong settlers migrating from the North (Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan) penetrated the Peninsula and rapidly reached as far south as the seventeenth parallel near Tak in Thailand, following roughly a North-East/South-West route from Tonkin. Father François-Marie Savina, one of the first scholars of the Hmong, noted that in the early twentieth century, at the time when he was writing on the Hmong:

All the Hmong/Miao inhabitants in Tonkin came from Yunnan, and those in Laos came from Tonkin. And the latter have kept moving

Southwards, reaching nowadays as far as the twentieth parallel in the Annamitic range. Savina 1924a: VIII. (my translation)<sup>6</sup>

These migrations took the form of small waves of pioneering households grouping together to clear the forest in order to grow dry rice, maize and, often, opium. When social, economic, political and sometimes ritual problems appeared, or when the soil was no longer capable of sustaining good crops, (usually after only a few years), the local groups split, and the lineages went further on joining together with others in order to clear new patches of empty forests.

If we consider the current density of the Miao/Hmong population in Asia, one can notice that a minority only chose to move towards the South. No more than ten to fifteen per cent left China to find new conditions and security in North Indochina (Mottin 1980: 37). Supporting this observation is the decreasing density of Miao/Hmong as one leaves Guizhou province and moves down towards central Thailand through Northern Vietnam and Laos (see Table of the Miao/Hmong Population in Asia).

### HMONG, UPRISINGS AND 'TROOPS OF FLAGS'

On the mainland in China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, the most important form of the Hmong/Miao migrations was flight from uprisings and wars and associated massacres, lootings and famine. One of the first recorded upheavals in nineteenth century South-West China occurred in 1818 when Muslims violently opposed the Peking armies. However, it was not until 1850 and the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1872), supported by a messianic ideology partly borrowed from Christian religion, that the Imperial troops were actually defeated, with most of the large cities in the South being captured by the rebels. In 1854, during that same period of intense social and political turmoil, another important rebellion flared up, wrongly named after the Miao and centred in south-east Guizhou (Lombard-Salmon 1972; Jenks 1994). Rebels, entrenched in 'their' mountains, attacked Manchu garrisons, mandarins as well as Chinese merchants and landlords, and allied themselves with local Secret Societies, in particular that of the White Lotus.

The Muslim Rebellion (1855–1873) began as a dispute over mining concessions between Chinese Muslims and Han Chinese in Yunnan. It was roughly coincident with other rebellions which broke out as the central authority of the Manchus declined, e.g., the Taiping, and Miao rebellions. Maxwell Hill 1983: 125.

The Muslim<sup>7</sup> insurrection in the South-West grew to such an extent that it led the rebels to proclaim an independent Sultanate in Dali (Yunnan) within a few years.<sup>8</sup> Rebels were provided with arms by the British through Burma, while the Imperial representative in Yunnan and Guizhou obtained his from

the French, through Tonkin. For their part, the colonial powers were hoping to take advantage of the ongoing turmoil and create an opening to gain access to the south of the Chinese Empire, without having to deal with the complex political situation on the China Sea front.

This turmoil affected the whole of southern China, resulting in a number of famines and epidemics in the region during most of the second half of the nineteenth century. This turmoil contributed significantly to pushing a number of Montagnards of various origins to look for better opportunities further south, as far as into the north of the Indochina Peninsula. Among these communities, there was a substantial element of the Hmong subgroup of the Miao minority.

In 1874 runaway troops from China who called themselves 'Black Flags' were called on by the king of Annam in order to suppress the revolt of the Lé dynasty partisans. After these operations some of the Black Flag troops settled in Tran-Ninh<sup>9</sup> in Laos, while Muslim Chinese also came to this area fleeing from the repression of the Yunnan insurrection. In the kingdom of Luang Phrabang, the first Hmong arrival coincided with the flight from Yunnan of different such irregular Chinese troops (White, Red, Black, Yellow and Striped Flags). Was there any particular relationship between White Flag troops in particular and Hmong in Yunnan, and later on in Indochina? Near Luang Phrabang, Laotian people said that the Hmong migrating there around 1850 were part of the White Flags. Some also remembered being told by their elders that a century earlier, in 1734, on the Lao-Chinese border, the escort of the king of Luang Phrabang, when sending his tribute to the Chinese governor at Yunnan-Sen (today Kunming), was intercepted by White Flags. As a matter of fact, it is now suspected that a few years before in 1726-7, the 'Mousseux Montagnards' had been newcomers near Luang Phrabang, although their ethnic identity still remains doubtful. Could some of them be Hmong?

According to the French *Chancelier de Résidence*, Delineau, who travelled and surveyed in Tran-Ninh in 1894, Lao and members of the Khamu minority stated that the first Hmong arrivals there dated from the incursions of Chinese troops. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hmong, as active poppy growers, had struck commercial deals and were sometimes payed in advance for their opium harvest by Chinese Haw<sup>10</sup> caravaneers. Many Haw traders married Hmong and Yao women.

Here [in Luang Phrabang] as in other towns in North Laos there is a division of labor among the Chinese community; those from Swatow, Hainan, Canton and of Hakka origin run shops or engage in the import business, most Yunnanese travel in the highlands and trade with the Meo [Hmong] and Yao.<sup>11</sup> This is facilitated by the fact that many of the people in both tribal groups, but particularly the Yao, speak Yunnanese. Halpern 1961: 31-2.<sup>12</sup>

It has been noted by ethnologists that thirty years ago, Hmong elders in Laos and Vietnam still remembered their travels with the Haw caravaners in the late nineteenth century. They quite often served as grooms<sup>13</sup> for the horses and mules loaded with cloth, silk, salt and opium. Some state that they thus could explore new and unpopulated fertile regions, such as the Tran Ninh plateau in Laos and the mountains north of Nan in Thailand. There were possibilities offered to those who wanted to move on and settle down. Clearly, the Hmong migration towards the south-west was not made blindly. The long relationship between the Hmong and the Chinese Haw was a significant factor in selecting a new territory and in the decision to migrate. A blend of fertile and available forest land with proximity to a Haw caravan route was perfectly suited both to escaping the Han wrath, and to trying one's luck further away.

### THE FIRST HMONG SETTLEMENTS IN NORTH INDOCHINA

French anthropologist Jacques Lemoine collected from Vietnamese ethnologists this version of the first arrival of Hmong in Vietnam:

Near Dong Van and Méo Vac, North of Ha Giang province, some Hmong say they arrived at this place first with 80 families, and have been living here for fifteen generations, i.e. at the end of the Ming dynasty or in the beginning of the Manchu conquest (ca. 1660). Lemoine 1995: 28 (my translation)<sup>14</sup>

Supporting this hypothesis, Émile Lunet de Lajonquière (1904: 223), a French officer and ethnographer, refers to the construction by Hmong migrants around 1750–1800, i.e. during the Chinese Qing dynasty, of an important village called «Muong Tuong»<sup>15</sup> in the far north of French Tonkin.

But the first Western records of a Hmong presence in the Indochina Peninsula date from 1860, when several thousand *Hei Miao*<sup>16</sup> 'soldiers' were seen entering North Vietnam from Yunnan (Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 295–7; Abadie 1924: 149 note). Annamites remembered, and told Bonifacy (1904: 8), about the violence of the clashes with earlier settlers around 1850 in the upper Clear River<sup>17</sup> valley. Lemoine states with some precision:

The greatest influx happened in 1868 after the Taiping defeat, when more than 10,000 Hmong from Guizhou rushed to Vietnam via Yunnan and Guangxi. These people settled in the north Vietnamese provinces of Ha Giang, Lao Cai, Lai Chau, Son La, Nghia Lo. Not long afterwards, certain groups came as far as Hoa Ninh, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An in North Annam. Lemoine 1995: 28.<sup>18</sup>

Another informant is the White Tai leader in Tonkin, Deo Van Tri, who declared to Raquez and Cam (1904: 257) that around 1848, when he was

fifteen, he witnessed the passage of Hmong belonging to the White Flags from Sichuan through the Sip Song Chau Tai, on their way to Laos.

### THE HMONG IN LAOS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first important invasion of the irregular Chinese troops from Yunnan to Laos dates from 1864. Xieng Khouang (Tran-Ninh) region inhabitants, in Laos, saw soldiers belonging to the various 'Flags' troops fighting their way through the mountain ranges when fleeing from China. With these wandering troops came people from several different Montagnard ethnic denominations, including scores of Hmong, Yao and Lahu. Among these Montagnards, many chose to settle on the fertile Xieng Khouang plateau.

In 1872, the king of Luang Phrabang and the governor of Nong Khay called on the Siamese for help: Yellow Flags had already invaded the Sip Song Chau Tai (north-west Tonkin) and had reached the gates of Luang Phrabang. The Siamese troops met with no resistance, enemy soldiers having escaped to the forest<sup>19</sup> to avoid frontal attacks.

In neighbouring north Tonkin (especially in Ha Giang province), some Hmong had risen up against the Chinese invaders and looters, but also against the local Tai lords who exploited and taxed them; a messianic revolt led by a Hmong leader called Xiong begun in 1862 and was crushed in 1896. Near Luang Phrabang and Muang Sing no direct information has come down to us about the opposition between the Hmong and the Chinese bandits and/or the Siamese armies, but clashes with the new invaders are very likely to have occurred. For instance, at that time, Hmong used arrows for their crossbows when hunting and fighting. They generally dipped them in a poison made from a tree-gum.<sup>20</sup> Men hit by such an arrow would perish if an antidote was not used at once. A Siamese General, Chao Phraya Surisak Montri, reported that this same antidote was used by Siamese soldiers to heal wounds inflicted by poisonous arrows during the fighting in the Luang Phrabang district in 1885-7.<sup>21</sup>

Following the July 12, 1891 Franco-Siamese Pak Nam incident near Bangkok Harbour, a treaty was signed on the Eastern banks of the Mekong River, on October 3, 1891.

Just after the Siamese troops left Luang Phrabang, on October 1893, a French administrator, Mr. Lugan, sent out a mercantile broker, Mr. Garanger, to occupy the city of Nan along with a Laotian prince and ten militiamen. A few months later, Mr. Garanger and the French vice-consul were in Muang Nan.<sup>22</sup> This official installation of the French vice-consul was ratified by the October 3, 1893 Franco-Siamese treaty.<sup>23</sup>

The Franco-Siamese rivalry (secretly fanned by Britain) over the eastern and western banks of the Mekong River, especially near Luang Phrabang, led to many treaties and conventions<sup>24</sup> between 1886 and 1904. On

February 13, 1904, a new Franco-Siamese Convention, far more favourable to the French than the one of October 1902, was signed.

In penal matters French judicial authority would be competent only if the defendant was protected by France. In other cases Siamese judicial authority would have jurisdiction. In February 1904, in the provinces in the North, including Nan, the Hague Tribunal would have competence with a right of removal from French consular jurisdiction, between 1896 and 1904.<sup>25</sup>

### FIRST HMONG SETTLEMENTS IN THE KINGDOM OF LAOS

In the far north of Laos, in Phong Saly and Luang NamTha provinces, no relevant information has been recorded about Hmong routes or settlements, maybe because Western travellers and observers were less numerous there than around Tran-Ninh or Luang Phrabang at the same time.

#### Muang Xieng Khouang

A Hmong born in Laos and a French trained anthropologist, Yang Dao (1975: 7), estimated that the Hmong first moved into Xieng Khouang province in 1810–20. However, the oral information he used was gathered in the 1970s in Hmong villages, and these estimates vary noticeably in time depending on the informant. In fact, the Hmong are not concerned with accurate calculations of time and a great lack of precision can be noted in several recently collected stories. Some more ancient ones, however, involve first hand witnesses. In Laos, the father of the notorious Hmong leader in Laos, Touby Ly Foung, is said to have arrived in Nong Het (Xieng Khouang Province) in 1875 where he joined his aunt, who had already been living there for several years.

In 1871–72, Xieng Kham and Xieng Khouang were stormed by the 2000 Red Flag ‘pirates’ who had been driven back from the Black River<sup>26</sup> valley by the Yellow Flags associated with the French to fight the Taiping armies. All Xieng Khouang was invaded and devastated. Most villages were burnt down and people forced to enlist in military troops where they were ill-treated.<sup>27</sup> This violent invasion in Xieng Khouang could be the cause for the Hmong flight toward the West, on the right bank of the Mekong River towards Sayabury, Nan and Chiang Mai, while other Hmong groups rushed south-west, towards Loei and Phitsanulok. Densely forested mountains covered these areas close to Laos and provided a good place for slash and burn agriculture as well as a refuge when necessary. In 1894, some Hmong declared to a Western observer that they came to the Tran-Ninh plateau, in Xieng Khouang Province, directly from China and had settled down there in 1860 (Anonymous 1894: 41).

### *Migrants, Runaways and Opium Growers*

In the early 1900 census, according to Colonel Tournier, *Résident Supérieur au Laos*, the total population of Tran-Ninh rose to around 40,000 people and included 4,000 Hmong and Yao. This number is certainly underestimated because in 1903, 1,200 Hmong household chiefs were registered as opium producers in the Tran-Ninh plateau.<sup>28</sup> We know that one Hmong household is on average composed of six to nine members, and that a portion of the Hmong opium producers were not registered by the colonial administration. Moreover, as some of them didn't grow poppies, we can estimate that at the beginning of this century the Hmong population in Tran-Ninh could be between 9,000 and 12,000. Then in 1920, north of Tran-Ninh, the Hmong population was estimated at 30,000.

It seems that the first Hmong arrivals in 1860 numbered only several hundred or maybe a few thousand, but the most important migration could be dated to between 1890 and 1900. By the early twentieth century, French census figures showed several thousand Hmong living around Xieng Khouang.

#### **Kingdom of Luang Phrabang<sup>29</sup>**

Montagnards called 'Mousseux'<sup>30</sup> ran away from Yunnan owing to Muslim rebellions. They arrived in the Nam Hou valley (North Laos) around 1726–27. One of the exiled Luang Phrabang princes, Intha-Som, joined these Mousseux to try to recapture Luang Phrabang city.<sup>31</sup> During the eighteenth century, ethnic designation was often rough and lacking in precision, so maybe there were some Hmong among these Montagnard groups. Nobody knows exactly who these 'Mousseux' were, but deeper research in the Annals of Luang Phrabang could provide better information.

The French administrator Paul Le Boulanger collected information from Laotians living near Luang Phrabang: 'Large groups of Hmong migrated in this region around 1847–1850, and they were called White Flags.' (Le Boulanger 1931: 212, my translation) He noticed that Hmong were farmers and caravaneers, and that their settlement was generally peaceful, which sets them apart from the other Flags. They were pushed from Sichuan and Yunnan to find forest territories, but at the same time they couldn't bear Chinese mandarin authority.

When the king of Luang Phrabang, Souka-Seum, died in 1850, the Hmong had already established many isolated villages with some trading contacts with Laotian, Chinese and Shan caravaneers. Small groups of Hmong cut down the forest to grow poppies, and more contacts with other ethnic groups were needed to sell opium.

At the same time, around 1850, Yao Montagnards, culturally close to Hmong, first settled in Laos.<sup>32</sup> In 1891, the Hmong population in the north of Laos (including the kingdom of Luang Phrabang, Houa Phan and Tran-Ninh areas) was estimated<sup>33</sup> at ten per cent of the total population, with

Yao representing another five per cent and Lao only twenty per cent. In the 1896 census of the kingdom of Luang Phrabang, the total registered population was 152,576, including only 1,655 Hmong.<sup>34</sup>

Between 1850 and 1893, the kingdom of Luang Phrabang was invaded and looted several times, first by two different floods of irregular Chinese troops, and between 1885 to 1893 by the Siamese. The relationship between Luang Phrabang and Nan was very ancient, and some people simply crossed to the west of the Mekong river when the situation became too difficult. For instance, before the Siamese occupation, the small permanent army of the king of Luang Phrabang was recruited from the refugees from Chiang Mai (Xieng Mai) and Nan. These 'Yuan' (Northern Siamese) soldiers settled in villages distinct from the Lao villages in the north of Luang Phrabang city. After 1886, it was from among these people that the Siamese recruited policemen and guardians for market, city and prison supervision.<sup>35</sup>

## NINETEENTH CENTURY HMONG MIGRATIONS FROM LAOS TO SIAM

### First Hmong settlements in the Principality of Nan<sup>36</sup>

In the kingdom of Siam, the presence of Hmong settlements was not recorded in Western texts before the last years of the nineteenth century. An anonymous English traveller, today identified as John MacCarthy, a geographer working for the Siamese court, wrote what he saw in 1880 in Nan Province:

There are thousands of emigrants from Sip Sawng Panna [in Burma and Yunnan<sup>37</sup>], and Khamus from Luang Phrabang, and a growing population of Meo [Hmong] and Yao for Nan is popular, and their government has been just. Anonymous 1895: 71

The presence of Khamu, Hmong and Yao from Luang Phrabang near Nan can be explained by the important looting during the multiple intrusions from China since 1864.

Another source suggests that the Hmong arrival in Northern Siam dates back to 1885 (Geddes 1976: 29), while Michael Moerman stated that: 'Before Yao and then Miao (Hmong) tribesmen came to Chiangkham (about 1900), the Haw (Chinese traders) also have provided the villagers with a little opium.' (1975: 155).

Afterwards, their dispersal in that region was confirmed around Phitsanulok and Lomsak by J. L. Robbins (1928), who saw two such settlements in the mountains there in January 1928. In 1929, Hmong settlements were also recorded in Tak region, 300 km north-west of Bangkok.<sup>38</sup> In 1992, Michaud gathered information from several Hmong

informants from three different clans in a settlement in Doi Luang Chiang Dao area (Chiang Mai Province) who stated that their fathers and grandfathers had already been in the region 85 years before, possibly dating their arrival as far back as 1908 (Michaud 1994a: §4).

In 1993, in the north of Nan province (Thung Chang district), I came upon the ruins of a small brick building. Old Hmong living in the neighbouring village told me that it was the 'the French house' (*tus Fab Kis tsev* in Hmong<sup>39</sup>). It seems likely to me that this ruin was a French observation post, some 20 km inside actual Thai territory. This border was defined by the 1893 and 1904 treaties between Siam and France, and the French presence in Nan province dated back to the same time. If today old Hmong people can remember that this post was built by French men, it was probably because at the turn of this century the Hmong had some relationship with French soldiers, newcomers in this area.

#### **From Siamese help for Luang Phrabang to North Laos military occupation**

Beginning in 1885–86, Siamese troops invaded all Northern Laos – except the far north-west part held by their Shan opponents – with a special emphasis on the Luang Phrabang Kingdom. Rapidly, this invasion resulted in great tax increases (sometimes multiplied by two or three), in forced labour, and the recruitment of soldiers and coolies from among the Laotian population. All these measures, taken to support the Siamese invasion, were very unpopular among both upper and lower class Laotians, and the first 'Siamese help' in North Laos turned into a virtual colonial exploitation of the area under Siamese control. At this time, the caravan trade was in the hands of Shan (or Pong) and Chinese from Yunnan and Guangxi, who often were also Muslim. But the Shan had been waging a war against the Siamese for several decades at the border north of Chiang Mai, Fang and Chiang Rai, and the Yunnanese traders often joined forces with Chinese Flags. With these double military oppositions, between Siamese and Shan, and between Siamese and Chinese Flags, the itinerant trade became very difficult in Northern Laos, where the impoverished Luang Phrabang Kingdom lived principally on long distance commercial transactions and on local business with the Montagnards. Rice for this city usually came from *Sip Song Chau Tai* (north-west of Vietnam). War against different Flags significantly imperiled rice and opium transport, and with the looting and destruction of many Hmong and Yao villages, local opium production declined rapidly.

#### **The political attitude of the Prince of Nan: some questions**

Facing great economic and political pressure, some of the families in Luang Phrabang area preferred to move on. In 1891 for instance, we know that

500 such families took refuge in Nan Principality,<sup>40</sup> where the local prince supplied land, seeds, and assistance until the next harvest, free of charge. Others migrated toward the north-west in *Sip Song Phanna* (China).

Why did the prince of Nan welcome the migrants from Luang Phrabang so favourably in 1891? Who were these newcomers to Siam?

At first we notice that the ethnic composition of these migrants is unspecified; of course the majority was certainly from Tai Lao, and Tai Lue and Tai Yuan groups, but probably many of them were Khamu, Yao and Hmong. Yao and Hmong were major opium producers, and opium was the primary item traded in the Luang Phrabang market. Beginning in 1889, French observers noticed the variety of agricultural and mineral produce sold at Luang Phrabang: the most important, measured by total cost, was opium,<sup>41</sup> followed by benzoin, cardamom and red gum lac.<sup>42</sup> The total commercial transactions at Luang Phrabang were impossible to estimate because the majority of these were not declared to the administration.

In the mountainous areas, opium is an ideal cash crop, because it is easily transported and is of high value, relative to bulk or weight. In Luang Phrabang Kingdom and Nan Principality items for commercial transactions were similar, in spite of the low trade flux on the Menam Nan river compared with the Mekong river. Therefore the main reason for welcoming the migrants to Nan Principality was their capacity to produce opium, and in this way increase the caravan circulation and local trade.

There is no information about the relationship between Nan Principality and the Hmong, but some transactions with the Yao are recorded. Indeed, around 1880 certain Yao groups had a good relationship with the Prince of Nan:

The first group of Yao Migrants was led by Phaya Khiri Srisombat, who came from north-west Laos. 'Phaya' is a title, Khiri was given by the Prince of Nan, and before this he was known for forty years as a great priest (*tom tao mian*) in the area of Luang Phrabang. Kacha-Ananda 1983: 212.

The presence of opium producers among the migrants from Luang Phrabang was an important factor in welcoming them in Nan territory. But did the Hmong and the Yao from Luang Phrabang know that the prince of Nan would make it easier for them to grow opium? If they did not, their migration is likely to have been similar to others from the North and the North-East, precipitated by stress and, essentially, push factors. If they did, it would then be possible to say for the first time perhaps, that the Hmong and Yao arrival near Nan was motivated by an important pull factor. Given present knowledge, it is not possible to maintain that Hmong had information on the opportunity to grow opium freely near Nan. It seems to me that it is necessary to distinguish migrations before 1880 and migrations around 1890, since the first are directly connected to the

## *Migrants, Runaways and Opium Growers*

invasion of troops from China in 1864, and the need to escape from the war.

But we know that the freedom to produce opium was an important factor motivating later Hmong reverse migrations from Thailand to Laos. In 1909, Major Eric Seidenfaden reported:

Personally I have only met with Meo [Hmong] on one occasion, and that was in the Dansai district [north-west of Loei province] in 1909. About 150 Meo had settled on the ridge of a range of hill called Kha Hin Songga, and their favorite crop was clearly seen to be opium. I several times sent gendarmerie patrols to compel them to root up the opium plants. Not long afterwards they left our territory [Siam] and returned to Luang Phrabang in the French Lao States. Seidenfaden 1923: 192.

Several decades later, the ‘. . . Thai Government legislated against opium growing or trafficking opium and use. Opium cultivation was first banned in 1929.’ (Geddes 1973: 215). The ban was applied to the Hmong producers in the mountains near Nan and, in town, to the Chinese Haw traders and smokers. The primary purpose of these campaigns was to show the English and French officials residing at Nan that the Siamese laws against opium were effective. The Siamese government hoped that this confrontation with the opium trade would place them a in good position at the International Conference against Opium held at Bangkok in 1931.

In 1929–1930, many Hmong from Phrae and Nan Provinces again reversed the historical migration flow and went back to Laos. At that time, opium was the only cash crop for the Hmong in Southeast Asia, and when opium production and trade became forbidden or difficult on account of the Siamese laws against opium, the Hmong sought other places to live, sometimes just across the border.<sup>43</sup>

Insurrections and wars and the ban on opium production were the most important incentives to move, but other events could have pushed the Hmong towards Nan and further into Siamese territory.

*Corvées* and taxes levied by the Siamese and French central administrations and the local landlords could have been hard enough to push the Hmong and other people outside the territory where the abusive tax proved too crushing. In Northern Indochina for several centuries, when a kingdom or principality tried to collect too high taxes, many people left the territory. In this respect, the Hmong dwelling between Luang Phrabang and Nan behaved like Khamu, Laotians and Tai, the traditional populations of this area. In 1891, during the hot season, a cholera epidemic ravaged Luang Phrabang. The scourge was so virulent that the inhabitants of the region did not dare enter the city. French *Résident* Massie reported that the market, usually so lively and crowded, was almost deserted.<sup>44</sup> At village level, it is possible to note the same repulsion for epidemic and epizootic; usually

Hmong villages were abandoned and their inhabitants looked for new settlements further away.

### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON HMONG MIGRATIONS

In summary, the Hmong are likely to have moved to Tran-Ninh in two large waves. The 1850 wave was not caused by military action but by the need for new land to cultivate, the forests in Southern China waving became rather bare. This migration probably consisted of a few thousand people at most, some of them belonging to the White Hmong subgroup.<sup>45</sup> The second wave may have started with the invasion of Chinese Flags<sup>46</sup> in 1871, and continued into the early twentieth century. Some of the Hmong who were already settled in Tran-Ninh and on the east bank of the Mekong River between Vang Vieng et Luang Phrabang were then pushed west and south-west by the troops from China. The first Hmong settlements established near Nan and the north of Loei in Siam around 1875–1880 must have been formed by these migrants that way. It is only with the Siamese invasion of Luang Phrabang in 1885 that a great number of inhabitants from Laos (Lao, Khmu, Hmong and Yao) migrated towards new lands more favourable to cultivation and trade, mostly in the plains and mountains around Nan.

When the Hmong suffered from land scarcity, lack of forest, excessive or unjust tax levies, and various official or landlord abuses, the majority tried to adapt to the new situation. Some rose up and were ready to fight, while others chose to move on to another administrative area or to another country. These migrations only concerned part of the Hmong population, the vast majority choosing to stay put and to adjust to the situation in a more or less peaceful way.

This is a synthetic view. On the micro-social scale of Hmong society, at family and household level, these migrations must have spread gradually and continuously towards where some Hmong had already settled successfully. Rarely in the history of the Hmong are there mentions of Hmong wars to conquer new countries, except perhaps when some Hmong took part in invasions under Chinese Flags. Besides, in Laos and Thailand, traditional Hmong villages were always set at the top of mountain ranges, out of reach of Khamu or Lao and Tai populations. In regional history before the first Indochina War, fighting between Hmong and their neighbours was always caused by theft, excessive taxes or some brutal action. Traditionally the Hmong took arms only to defend their fields, never to conquer new ones.<sup>47</sup>

Those observations lead us to a question concerning the anthropology of migration. If the first Hmong to settle in a country are real pioneers, those who follow them take advantage of their predecessors' experiences of geography and cultivation as well as dealing with local ethnic groups.

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Exchanging information among Hmong who are geographically separated amounts to going out to meet one another. In Hmong society, there are four main ways of reaching other Hmong, whether they are relatives or friends.

The most common way is generally associated with young people. A small group belonging to one clan leaves for some near or distant villages, looking for marriageable girls. This sort of 'explorative journey' may take several days or weeks, usually in the hot season. The wedding ceremony means a great gathering at the bride's home. People sing and drink, and it is a great opportunity to exchange views on trade, available fields and possibilities of help and alliances in case of a possible change of domicile.

Funerals are also a great opportunity for this sort of exchange. All the more so as guests are usually more numerous than at weddings, and they come from many villages – some of them very distant – and the ceremonies go on for three days. The guests remain together night and day, and many histories and stories are told on this occasion.

The third way is not as well-known, possibly because it is now almost obsolete,<sup>48</sup> whereas the first two ways remain very common. This third way is linked with transactions which are not always legal, such as dealing in opium or arms, i.e. the active part played by the Hmong in the caravan trade between Yunnan, Burma, Siam, Laos and Tonkin. This easy and efficient way to explore new places must have been fairly common in the nineteenth century, since most of the large Hmong settlements in Laos and Thailand were along the caravan trails.

The fourth way is even less known than the third. It consists of 'initiating journeys', by fairly young men, sometimes married, going from village to village, staying in the homes of clan relatives or allies. They come back home after several months or years, having gained technical and ritual knowledge from craftsmen and shamans. Though marginal compared to the other ways of spreading and obtaining information, this is the only way based on a personal quest and without any direct economic objective, which is well worth noting in a society where the group figures so heavily.

Hmong religion is not ritually tied to a particular territory and such segmentary social structure is quite consistent with long-distance migrations and small, relatively isolated village groups, so long as there are enough members of other clans to marry. Hmong clans are based on patrilinearity and exogamy. From 1950–1960 in Laos and 1970 in Thailand, a number of Hmong have settled in towns,<sup>49</sup> Few studies have been carried out on this shift. Such studies would tell us a lot about what attracted these Hmong into town. As I have personally observed in several Hmong villages in the provinces of Nan, Phrae and Phitsanulok, it seems that the attractiveness of town life (a paid job, and being able to live a more modern and comfortable life) appeals only to few individuals, such as men who have broken with their family group, and women hoping to marry Hmong from town to improve their social status. Most young people seem

still to prefer to stay in their villages where they are free workers and where solidarity and social pressure still counts.

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## NOTES

- 1 For a general view see my paper in collaboration with Jean Michaud: 'A Contribution to the Study of Hmong (Miao) Migrations and History' in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, 1997, 153 (II): 211–243.
- 2 More than 80 per cent live in three provinces: Guizhou, Hunan and Yunnan.
- 3 Tribal Reserach Institute 1995: 59.
- 4 Kossikov & Ergorounin 1993: 5.
- 5 Chazee 1995: 143–4.
- 6 'Les Miao [Hmong] du Tonkin sont tous originaires du Yun-Nan, et ceux du Laos sont originaires du Tonkin. Ces derniers poursuivent toujours leur marche vers le Sud, et ils ont atteint aujourd'hui le 20e parallèle, sur la chaîne annamitique.' Savina 1924a: VIII.
- 7 Called *Hui* in Chinese.
- 8 On the relationship between the Miao and the Taiping and Muslim rebels, one can refer to Teng (1971: 366–371), Jenks (1985, 1994) and Radley (1986: 45–56); details of the association of the Miao and Yao with the Taiping upheaval can be found in Schurmann and Orville (1972: 172 sq.).
- 9 Vietnamese name of the plateau in Xieng Khouang province.
- 10 Called *Chin Ho* or *Chin Haw* in Thai and Lao.
- 11 'It is presumed that a considerable portion of this trade involves opium, but, of course, such facts are hard to chek precisely.' Halpern 1961: 32 n. 12.

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- 12 I can personally confirm from fieldwork observation that in 1993, older Hmong in the Lao-Thai border area whose family used to sell opium to the Chinese Haw caravaneers could still speak Yunnanese, a dialect of Mandarin Chinese.
- 13 Called *Ma fou* in Chinese.
- 14 'Selon les ethnologues vietnamiens, les clans Lau et Yang de Dong Van et Meo Vac dans la province de Ha Giang préservent la tradition d'être venus en premier du Guizhou à 80 familles il y a une quinzaine de générations, c'est-à-dire à la fin des Ming ou au début de la conquête mandchoue (ca. 1660).' Lemoine 1995: 28.
- 15 Region of Tu-Long, at the border the Thanh-Thuy and Hoang-Su-Phi areas, between Lao Cai and Ha Giang, in the 3rd Military Territory.
- 16 Black Hmong, probably cultural sub-group Hmu.
- 17 *Song Lô* in Vietnamese, *Rivière Claire* in French.
- 18 'La plus grande vague de migration se produisit en 1868, après l'écrasement des Tai Ping, lorsque plus de 10,000 Hmong du Guizhou affluèrent au Viêt-nam par le Yunnan et le Guangxi à la fois, pour s'établir dans les provinces de Ha Giang, Lao Cai, Lai Chau, Son La, Nghia Lo, leurs éléments avancés ne tardant pas à atteindre Hoa Ninh, Thanh Hoa et Nghe An.' (Lemoine 1995: 28).
- 19 Le Boulanger (1931: 244).
- 20 *Yang nong*: a Lao word for a kind of poisonous tree gum.
- 21 Seidenfaden 1923: 166-7.
- 22 Anonymous 1893: 116.
- 23 Article VIII of this treaty says: 'Le gouvernement français se réserve le droit d'établir des consuls où il jugera convenable dans l'intérêt de ses ressortissants, et notamment à Korat, à Muong Nan.'
- 24 1886 and 1889 first and second Franco-Siamese Convention of 'Luang Phrabang'.
- 25 Delcasse to Boissonnas (1904, vol. 4) quoted by Goldman 1972: 225.
- 26 *Song Bo* in Vietnamese, *Rivière Noire* in French.
- 27 Le Boulanger 1931: 242-3.
- 28 Pidance 1903: 781.
- 29 Formerly Muang Swa.
- 30 Since the nineteenth century, this term refers to the Lahu populations in Thailand, Laos and Burma (written *Mubsö* there, for which 'Mousseux' is the French version).
- 31 Le Boulanger 1931: 183.
- 32 Osborn 1967: 261; Beauclair 1970: 9-10.
- 33 Anonymous 1893: 106.
- 34 Grand 1899: 223.
- 35 Anonymous 1893: 107.
- 36 Traditionally called 'Muang Nan' in Thai.
- 37 Especially Shan people captured by the prince of Nan with Siamese support in the first decades of the nineteenth century.
- 38 Credner 1935: 289 in Crooker 1986.
- 39 For transcription of the Hmong terms, I use the Barney-Smalley system (also called *Romanized Popular Alphabet*, RPA), created in 1953 in Laos. This is the more diffused in South-East Asian and Western countries. The final consonant marks one of the eighth tones of the Green Hmong language.
- 40 Anonymous 1893: 111.
- 41 There are three opium varieties called «Xieng Toung» (Keng Tung in the Shan States, Burma) the best, «Meo» (Hmong) good quality, and «Yunnan» the more rough.

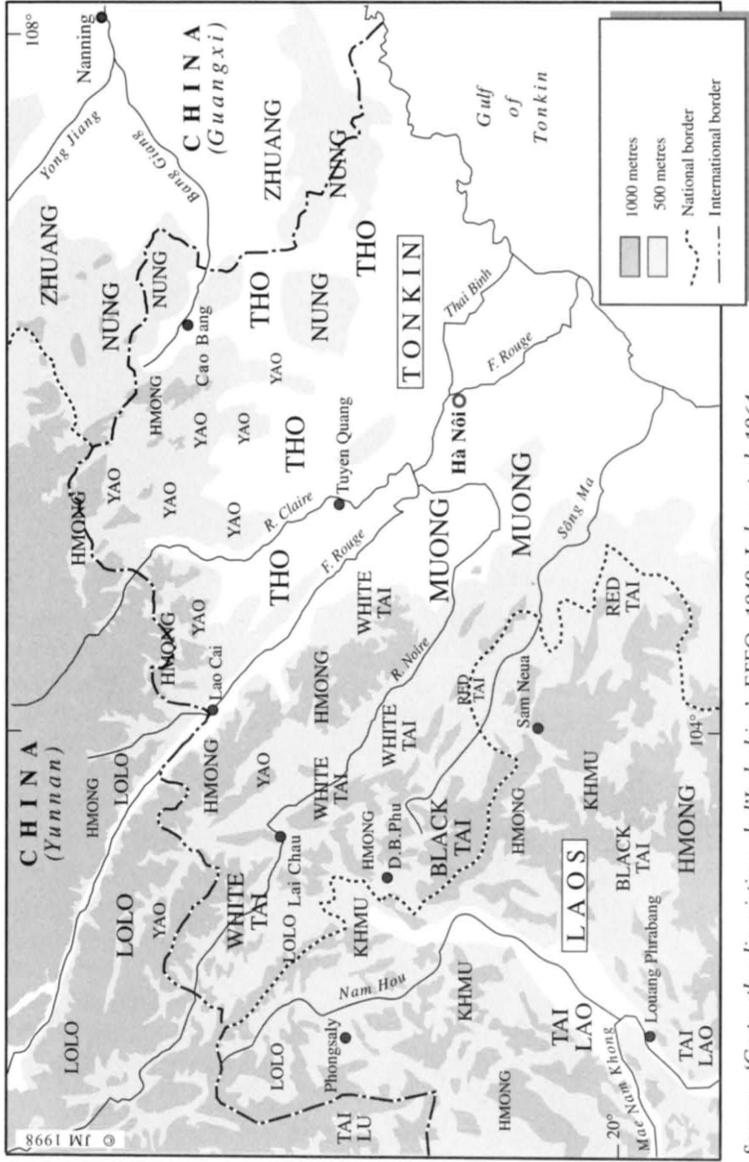
*Christian Culas*

- 42 Anonymous 1893: 99–110.
- 43 An important (though not very often referred to) migration of the Hmong began in 1967 from Thailand to Laos; if opium was a important reason, the violence of the local guerrilla was also an important contributing factor.
- 44 Anonymous 1893: 99.
- 45 In South-East Asia, there are three important Hmong subgroups: White Hmong, Green Hmong and Embroidered Hmong, and other less numerous as Striped Hmong, 'Flowery Hmong' and 'Red Hmong'.
- 46 See McAleavy (1968) *Black Flags in Vietnam: The Story of Chinese Intervention*.
- 47 Exceptionally, after 1960, many Hmong joined pro-American troops in Laos or Communist armies (Pathet Lao and Viet Minh). In these situation, they didn't fight for themselves, but under modern military command in the special context of the Cold War confrontation.
- 48 However, at present in Thailand, Hmong men and women from town can be seen going out during the dry season, to mountain villages, selling haberdashery, such as material, needles and dyes, buying traditional batik on hemp material and handmade embroidery. This new sort of pedlars can be a good way of spreading information between remote villages and towns.
- 49 Probably less than ten per cent of the total Hmong population in Thailand.

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# Chapter Two

Map 7 Localization of the main non-kinh ethnic denominations under French rule. (size of name indicates relative demographic importance)



Sources: 'Carte ethnolinguistique de l'Indochine', EFEO, 1949; Lebar et al. 1964.

## Chapter Two

# A Historical Panorama of the Montagnards in Northern Vietnam under French Rule<sup>1</sup>

*Jean Michaud*

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a land of human diversity. Today ethnic Kinh, the lowland Vietnamese majority, account for approximately 85 per cent of the national population. The remaining 15 per cent belong to one or another of the other forty-eight official ethnic denominations registered in the country for the 1989 census. (Khong Dien 1995) These are grouped under the appellation of National Minorities. Of these National Minorities, twenty-four are found in the north of Vietnam, amounting to 62 per cent of the National Minority population and 8 per cent of the national population. (see Table 1) Their habitat is part of the northern reaches of the Annam Cordillera and includes a large portion of the southern part of the mainland South-East Asian Massif. (See Map 7)

This paper presents a panorama of the history of Montagnards<sup>2</sup> in northern Vietnam under French colonial rule, officially spanning from 1885 to 1954. However, to understand correctly that period, an introduction to the years immediately preceding it is necessary. As a result, the historical period covered here spans from the mid-nineteenth century up to the end of the First Indochina War in 1954. The documentation used comes from secondary sources, written either in French or English, or translated into one of these languages, chiefly from Vietnamese and Chinese. These are in the form of archives and public reports, monographs and studies including several rarely cited documents published in French during colonial times.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN NINETEENTH CENTURY VIETNAM

Prior to the late 19th century, very little is known about the Montagnards in the Vietnamese part of the South-East Asian Massif. Studies of Vietnamese and Chinese archives<sup>3</sup> – or what is left of them – show very few traces of these ‘politically unimportant’ peoples, except when addressing *ad hoc* administrative or trade problems, whilst historians such as Lê or Ngo

*A Historical Panorama of the Montagnards in Northern Vietnam*

**Table 1 Montagnards of Northern Vietnam  
Cited in this Text, 1989 Census**

24 National Minorities (N.M.) in the north (5 238 286 persons) out of a total 48 N.M. in the country (8 475 538), not counting the Kinh (55 900 224), for a national population of 64 375 762.

| <i>Ethnonyms used in this text</i> | <i>Modern Vietnamese Ethnonyms</i>   | <i>N</i>         | <i>Rank/48</i> | <i>% of N.M. in the North</i> | <i>% of total N.M.</i> | <i>% of the country</i> |
|------------------------------------|--|------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Tho                                | Tày  | 1 190 342        | 1              | 22,7                          | 14,0                   | 1,8                     |
| Tai (White, Black, Red, Lue)       | Thái   | 1 040 549        | 2              | 19,9                          | 12,3                   | 1,6                     |
| Muong                              | Muông  | 914 596          | 3              | 17,5                          | 10,8                   | 1,4                     |
| Nung                               | Nùng   | 705 709          | 6              | 13,5                          | 8,3                    | 1,1                     |
| Hmong (Meo)                        | Méo, Hmông, H'mông   | 558 053          | 7              | 10,7                          | 6,6                    | 0,9                     |
| Yao (Mien, Man)                    | Dao  | 473 945          | 8              | 9,0                           | 5,6                    | 0,7                     |
| Khmu                               | Kho Mù   | 42 853           | 22             | 0,8                           | 0,5                    | ~0,1                    |
| Hani                               | Hà Nhi   | 12 489           | 31             | 0,2                           | 0,1                    | ~0,0                    |
| Lolo                               | Lô Lô  | 3 134            | 40             | ~0,0                          | ~0,0                   | ~0,0                    |
| <i>not cited</i>                   | Sán Chay; Sán Dìu; Giáy; Xinh Mun; Lão; La Chí; La Hu; Kháng; Lu; Pá Thèn; Co Lao; Bô Y; Công; Si La; Pu Péo | 296 716          | —              | 5,7                           | 3,5                    | 0,5                     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                       |  | <b>5 238 286</b> | <b>—</b>       | <b>100</b>                    | <b>61,8</b>            | <b>8,1</b>              |

*Source: Khong Dien, Demography of the national minorities of Vietnam, 305-7.*

barely touch on them. (Lê 1981:40-7; Ngo 1996) Many of the Montagnards themselves have no script (with the notable exceptions of the Yao and some of the Tai groups) and keep no written records. Accordingly, what is left of their early history in Vietnam is scarce. For Western scholars, it was only through European testimonies that the existence of Montagnard groups in the Massif began to be suspected and, to a certain extent, acknowledged. Spearheading the French takeover of northern Vietnam in the second half of the 19th century, occasional explorers like Francis Garnier and Doudart de Lagrée in the 1860s, and

Jean Dupuis and Émile Rocher in the 1870s, while rowing their way upstream into Yunnan, reported seeing tribal peoples who were generally described as fairly primitive, colourful enough to be portrayed<sup>4</sup> . . . and without much commercial interest.

After Emperor Gia Long consolidated his power over all of Vietnam in 1802, the mountainous areas in the north of the empire fell into the court of Hue's political domain. Although it could be regularly raided by looters from Yunnan and Guangxi, the high region of *Bac Bo* or *Bac Ky* (the Northern Region), Tonkin,<sup>5</sup> as it was to be officially named by the French, was generally recognised by neighbouring powers as being under Hue's administration, itself a tributary of Imperial China. Woodside (1971) states that soon after his instalment, Emperor Gia Long published a list of 13 'countries' in a tributary relationship with Hue. These included Luang Phrabang and the Tran Ninh plateau in eastern Laos, but no principality in the upper reaches of the northern country. One of the rare, if not the only historians to mention the issue, Woodside stated broadly that 'in the northern provinces the Tho, the Nung, the Man, and the Mèo highlanders all lived under their own local chiefs. On occasion, these chiefs presented tribute to Huê.' (Woodside 1971:244) Supporting this statement, the provincial division of imperial Vietnam in the mid-19th century, as Woodside described it, did not include any of the highlands north and west of the foothills of the upper Red River Delta.

Dang (1969) offers additional evidence. In his study of Vietnamese public institutions in the 18th century, he stresses that at the time the northern frontier and the peoples inhabiting it were – at least nominally – the responsibility of the Vietnamese Ministry of Armies (*Binh Bộ*). The peripheral and mountainous districts they inhabited bore a specific name (*Châu*) to differentiate them from the standard districts (*Huyện*). In theory, both were administered by Kinh mandarins sent to live on location, called respectively *Tri-huyện* and *Tri-châu*. In the northern region, there were 44 such *Châu* for 163 *Huyện*, which indicates a fairly large proportion of the territory actually classified as 'remote'. This administrative network was becoming only marginally operational as one moved away from the lowlands. Owing to the larger proportion of the Kinh population in the *Huyện*, it can be assumed that the system worked more smoothly in these districts than in the more remote *Châu*. Ultimately, at its maximum extension, its only remaining purpose was to locate existing villages, install a representative, administer the census, and try to tax the population accordingly. Consequently, closer to the Delta, more stable groups like the Tai<sup>6</sup> – particularly the Tho and the Nung – and the Muong were quite heavily burdened while all the remoter and more mobile groups in the mountains largely escaped direct control.

In the north-western highlands for example, more precisely, in the upper valley of the Black River (*Sông Đà*), the Tai town of Muang Lai, today's Lai

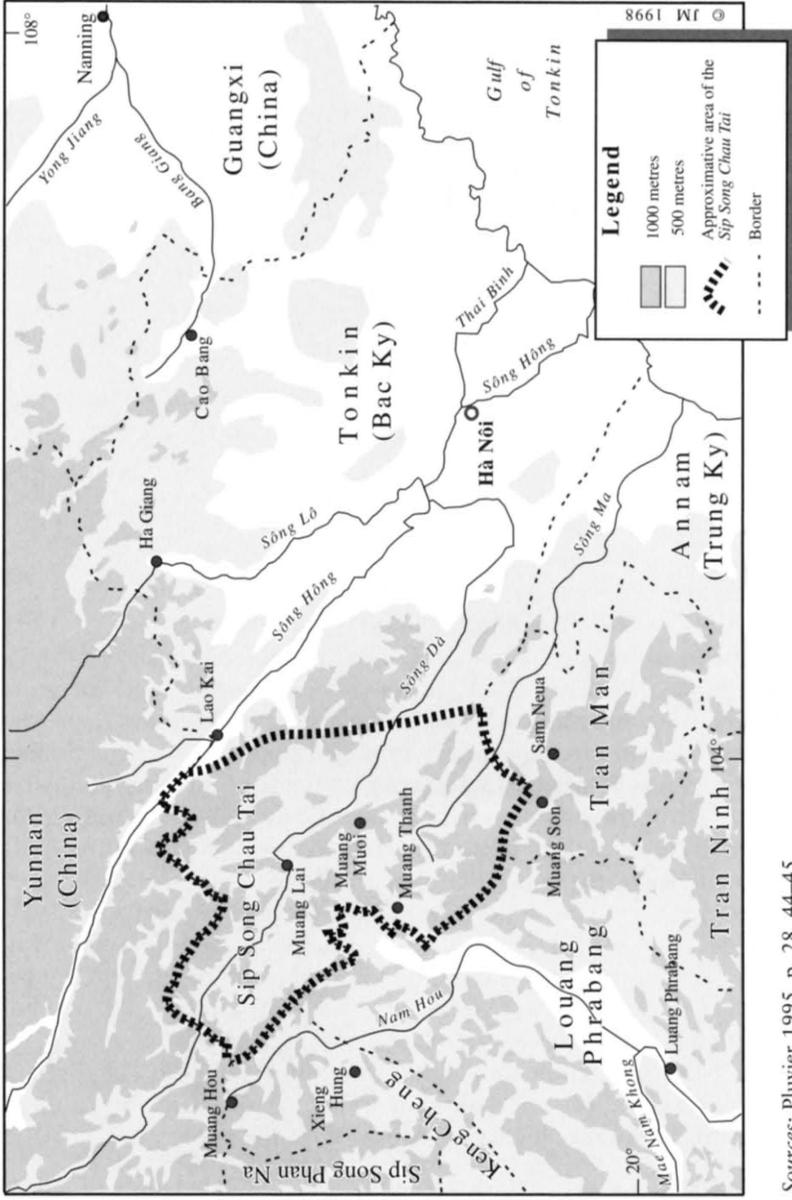
Chau, is known to have existed since at least the Mongol invasions in the late 13th century, while the loose federation of *Sip Song Chau Tai*, the Twelve Tai Cantons, had been formalised around it since at least the 17th century. Paying tribute to Luang Phrabang at certain times, to Burma and to China at other times, it eventually came under Hue's influence. When he visited in 1887, French diplomat and explorer Auguste Pavie briefly described the ancient feudal society there, and stated that he had no doubt that the Sip Song Chau Tai were then dependent on Annam. (Pavie 1947:125) (see Map 8) It is thus fairly certain that not only the Tho in the Clear River (*Sông Lô*) area closer to the Delta, but also the Tai of the Black River valley were paying tribute to Hue.

Whatever the exact situation might have been, it has been confirmed by all historians that by the 19th century imperial Vietnamese military parties were occasionally sent into the northern mountains to restore order when caravans and trading posts were threatened by rampant banditry. This occurred especially in the second half of the century when wandering rebel groups appeared en masse, pushed out of the Chinese periphery by insurrectional movements in Yunnan and Guangxi.

The few administrative ventures under the Nguyen dynasty that had succeeded in the mountains had targeted above all the upper valley of the Clear River and its tributaries, while the other valleys further to the north and the north-west were by and large left outside this influence. (Lunet de Lajonquière 1904:133) Among the Montagnards occupying the Clear River Valley were the Tho (often called Tay by the French, a name the Socialist Republic of Vietnam made official in 1978, while the term 'Thô' has been reallocated to a small Austronesian group), the largest non-Kinh ethnic group in the region, belonging to the Tai language family and whose elite (called *Thô-ti*<sup>7</sup>) were half vietnamized. The Tho were in regular trading contact with the lowland Kinh in the Delta. The White and Black Tai, west of the Red River (*Sông Hồng*), were more loosely connected to the central administration, less acculturated and had less regular contacts with the Kinh, while the Hmong (also named Meo, Miao, H'mong), the Yao (Man, Mien, Dao, Zao, Dzao,) the Khmu (Khamu) and the Lolo, to name but a few of the principal upland dwellers on either side of the Red River, were largely ignored or left to themselves higher in the mountains.<sup>8</sup>

For the specific purpose of this article, the ethnic diversity of the northern region, which amounts to more than thirty different ethnic groups and sub-groups according to some authors, is simplified along the broad ethnic categories that are found most often in French literature from the colonial period. For instance, French authors tended to confuse the Nung, an important Tai speaking group on the Guangxi border, with the Tho, their more numerous cousins and neighbours closer to the Delta. Most of the time the Red Tai and the Tai Lue on the Laotian border were mixed up with the more numerous Black Tai, their close relatives, while some Lolo sub-groups

Map 8 The Sip Song Chau Tai circa 1888



Sources: Pluvier 1995, p. 28, 44–45.

were wrongly classified in the Tai family. The Muong, often registered as Tai speakers, actually belonged to the Viet-Muong linguistic branch. This early confusion of identities cannot easily be solved. It would be a hazardous enterprise with little scientific grounding and a high risk of error to try to decide *a posteriori* to which categories the groups these authors were mentioning should belong to in today's ethnolinguistic classification. It therefore seemed wiser to bear with this imprecision and its colonial tone, and work with the five or six principal categories most often found in the official French literature of the time. (See Table 1 and Map 7)

The rivers dividing mountains ranges in the Massif, principally the Red, Clear and Black Rivers, have long been used as commercial and military routes between Yunnan, Guangxi, and the Red River Delta. It is known that the Red River Valley in particular offered a passage to the invading Nan Chao troops in the ninth century, and to the Yuan Mongols armies in the thirteenth century, and then to other invaders from the north in the eighteenth century. Since at least the early years of this millennium, it was also used as a trading route. (Pluvier 1995) Although the Hue government was using these routes for commerce with the hinterland, it did not actually control them up-river. Lao Cai (meaning 'old market'), a rudimentary settlement and trading post conveniently located on the banks of the upper Red River on the Yunnan border and which is known to have existed since at least the 17th century, was not under direct Vietnamese control. It was observed by the adventurer Dupuis that armed groups of Cantonese merchants were installed in Lao Cai in the 1860s. (McAleavy 1968:5,107) Even though such merchant parties conducted some local trade with the neighbouring Montagnard dwellers (essentially providing them with salt and metals bartered for forest products and, since the mid-nineteenth century, raw opium), this local trade could only be marginal compared with the long haul circulation of merchandise between Yunnan and the Delta. It is not likely that their influence reached very far outside the immediate surroundings of the upper Red River Valley.

What was the Hue policy towards the Montagnards exactly? Was it any different from the general political and economic dependency in which the Hue court, its mandarins and their local representatives, kept the peasants of the Red River Delta? We know that Hue's rulers did not hold the highlanders in the highest esteem, maintaining a pejorative attitude towards those 'primitives' in the mountains. The Muong and the Tho, because they had, with time, become culturally closer to the Kinh, were considered superior to the other highland groups. With the latter,

'it generally was believed that familiarity held the danger of polluting the superior Vietnamese way' (Hickey 1984a:154),

Marriage between state functionaries or employees with the Kinh, for instance, was declared punishable in the 15th century Lê code.

### **Freebooters and migrants from the north**

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, due to an intensification of social unrest among factions opposed to the Chinese state in southern China,<sup>9</sup> organised armed parties from various allegiances continued, to fight each other fiercely, roam and loot on a large scale in Guizhou, Yunnan and Guangxi, for fifty years or so. Numerous troops, associated until then with local Warlords, seized this opportunity to run away and enter the mountains of Vietnam and Laos. (McAleavy 1968) Their purpose? Escaping severe military punishment in China certainly, since most of these freebooters once belonged to southern armies heavily involved in ill-fated anti-Han rebellions. The largest of these runaway bands had adorned themselves with names such as Black, Yellow and Red Flags.

However, pull factors were also involved in their coming into Vietnam in particular. The recent penetration of French missionaries and the arrival of the first French colonial troops had alarmed the Court at Hue and for the mandarins, any help was welcome in the north to oppose the French penetration, including rebels from China. Band leaders in the north were potential allies and were discretely approached several times, the most notorious occasion being when Black Flag troops rescued the Vietnamese by fighting the French entrenched in Hanoi in 1873, killing Francis Garnier.

In agreeing to 'help' the Vietnamese authorities, the marauders were also hoping to carve out for themselves, by force if necessary, a territory where they could set up and control profitable banditry operations. The high region surrounding the Red River Delta was a perfect setting for their bases from where harassing the lowland settlements was an easy venture. Most operations took care to avoid head on confrontation with the Vietnamese authorities, and attacking peasant settlements newly converted to Christianity was a useful alternative agreeable to both sides.<sup>10</sup> But at other times, the riches of the numerous trading posts, hamlets and cities, and when circumstances and alliances permitted, even capitals like Luang Phrabang, sacked in 1887, were looted and the Vietnamese authorities could not really discipline these uneasy allies. Taking control over trading routes throughout the Massif in order to levy taxes on the circulation of goods was also seen as a profitable activity by the marauders, especially in those remote areas where lowland state representatives rarely ventured. Before the opium trade became a major economic activity in the region (see below), most local Montagnards did not present much to attract that kind of organised banditry being nomads possessing only the odd silver ingots and jewellery while the settled ones like the Tho were in majority peasants. Runaway looters from the north could nevertheless attack these less promising targets when incapable of catching a better prey. At first then, it is likely that the rapport between freebooters and local mountain dwellers was predominantly conflictual.

*A Historical Panorama of the Montagnards in Northern Vietnam*

McAlevy (1968) states that records exist depicting armed resistance against these invaders by the Tho minority dwelling between the upper Red River and the Guangxi border. Having arrived more than a millenary earlier from that same Guangxi province and stemming from the non-Han Zhuang minority, these long sedentarised agriculturists took these invasions as a major threat and reacted accordingly in numbers, although not with much military efficiency or success. The Vietnamese, to whom the Tho were paying tribute, were called on for help and provided some troops and diplomatic support. Runaway Black and Yellow Flag troops, incapable of forcing a profitable deal on the Tho, eventually left that region and reached the upper Red River Valley, their ultimate target and the most important and potentially profitable of trading routes towards Yunnan. Their leader, Guangxi born Liu Yin Fu, installed his headquarters in the trading post of Lao Cai.

It is known that some Montagnards from the southern Chinese fringes fleeing famine, unrest, deadly struggles over the control of the opium trade there or Han wrath did travel with some of the bands, seizing the opportunity to escape and enter Indochina to settle in vacant highlands they discovered on their way. (Bonifacy 1904) Indeed it is very unlikely that the thousands of 'soldiers' coming from the north, whose principal penetrations into northern Vietnam were recorded both by the Chinese and the Vietnamese in the late 1860s (right after the Taiping rebellion was crushed), and again around 1878 (at the end of the Panthai rebellion), did not include a certain proportion of mountain minorities. The Hmong for instance, according to accounts given to French colonial administrators by ancient inhabitants in northern Vietnam, are said to have migrated en masse into these highlands while accompanying Black Flag parties around 1860. (Raquez and Cam 1904:256–275)<sup>11</sup> It has also been recorded by French interviewers (Bonifacy 1904:813–28) when questioning the Tho in the Clear River valley, that some among ancient Montagnards in the region were seen leaving their villages to join with the looting bands. If, as we will see next, numerous Tai did actually join forces with bandits to raid the neighbouring areas, evidence is still lacking to decide whether this statement can apply to other Montagnards dwelling at higher levels in the mountains.

Some collaborative actions between long installed highlanders and occasional rebels from the north are well documented. One of the most notorious example involves Kam-Oum, the White Tai leader of Sip Song Chau Tai in north-western Vietnam and his fellow countrymen of the upper Black River Valley. The family of Kam-Oum's father Kam-Seng was originally from Guangxi and had migrated into this valley in the first half of the 18th century to settle and assimilate with the White Tai uplanders installed there for centuries. (Deporte 1940:65–94) In the late 1880s, the Kam family seized an opportunity to associate with the Black Flag rebels of

Liu Yin Fu based in Lao Cai. The Tai troops of old Kam-Seng, under the command of the more vigorous Kam-Oum, thus grew powerful enough to take personal revenge on the Siamese who had recently taken away the four younger sons of Kam-Seng as part of a strategy to force the Sip Song Chau Tai rulers into paying tribute to the Chakri monarch in Krung Thep (Bangkok). A party of approximately 270 Tai and 300 Yunnanese Black Flags went on to successfully sack Luang Phrabang in 1887 (Pavie 1947:99) though without succeeding in recovering the four prisoners. On their way back, the Kam family used their new strength to take over several extra White and Black Tai principalities and attach them to the Twelve Tai Cantons. The Kam family was thus at the head of a large territory lying between the upper Red River Valley and the Laotian border, revolving around the towns of Muang Lai (Lai Chau) and Muang Thanh (Dien Bien Phu), and secured stronger independence from the lowland Vietnamese.

As Winichakul summarises, such a course of events was not unusual in those places and times:

On many occasions, Ho [Panthai Chinese, or Hui, the bulk of the Black and Yellow Flag bands] were merely a mercenary force helping one chief to attack another. In some circumstances they collaborated with a local chief to fight another alliance of Ho and local chief. The forces of the Ho and those of local chiefdoms became mingled. Many Ho Leaders became rulers and officials of local chiefdoms. (Winichakul 1994:103)

In the following years, having become a strong contender west of the Red River, but having also somehow lost the support he had long enjoyed from fellowmen in Guangxi, Kam Oum skilfully managed to earn respect and obtain privileges from another anti-Vietnamese and anti-Siamese party, the freshly arrived French colonists. He achieved this through a personal relationship with diplomat Auguste Pavie, who had indeed been able to witness the Kam family's military capacities when he himself was driven out of Luang Phrabang together with its monarch during the sack of 1887.<sup>12</sup> To win over this powerful foe to the French cause, Pavie negotiated with Siam the liberation of the four imprisoned Kam brothers and took himself two of them back to Muang Thanh. There he signed with Deo Van Tri (as Kam Oum was thereafter to be known) a Protectorate treaty on 7 April 1889 (Pavie 1947:26), a shrewd strategic move that was to procure long lasting dividends for both sides. The hereditary leader of the Sip Song Chau Tai was from now on to be referred to in French official documents<sup>13</sup> as the *Seigneur de Lai Chau*, the Lord of Lai Chau, after the name of the town lying at the heart of his domain.

At this stage in our narrative, it is also useful to keep in mind that other Tai dwellers east of the Red River, namely the Tho and the Nung, as well as the less numerous Black and Red Tai straddling the Laotian border, were

left outside this treaty. Consequently, despite their cultural closeness to the Tai of the Sip Song Chau Tai, they did not join in with this French-Tai collaboration. The same is also true of most other Montagnards dwelling at higher altitudes in most of the high region.

## FRENCH INDOCHINA

Politically speaking, the French colonial grip on the northern highlands where the Montagnards lived was first officially marked in 1883 when the Hue treaty made Tonkin and Annam French protectorates. The following year, a treaty was agreed upon with Imperial China that was signed only in July 1885 at Tiensin after a one year war. Suzerainty over Tonkin, as for the whole of the Vietnamese Empire, was thus transferred from China, Hue's long time overlord, to France. The treaty also gave the latter the upper hand over other European powers to build a commercial presence in Yunnan. Controlling the area from the Delta to the Chinese hinterland became the next priority for the newly installed French *Résident Supérieur au Tonkin* in Hanoi. Throughout the rest of the 1880s and for most of the 1890s, France took military action and firmly occupied the Red River Basin and its principal adjacent valleys through numerous – and violent – *missions de pacification*. All opponents were fiercely repressed, and submissive populations rewarded. For many of the Montagnards, no resistance was conceivable in the face of such a powerful foe and in fact some, such as the White Tai of Sip Song Chau Tai, in connection with the Pavie episode, opportunistically helped the French take over the Massif as an act of rebellion against the lowland Kinh.

For the French during the last decade of the nineteenth century, the mountainous region of Tonkin was above all home to dangerous *pirates* from various origins. About the Montagnards living there prior to the French pacification, very little was known; more than often these were assimilated to the roaming pirate bands. For the colonial military establishment, the northern mountains could only shelter either rebels hostile to the French occupation who were more or less organised looters harrassing the local population, or massive groups of organised bandits involved in large scale looting and trafficking. (Nguyen 1993:182) With this portrait in mind, in 1891 Colonel Frey decided to divide:

... Tonkin territory in three broad zones corresponding to the various modes of organisation and grouping of bands: 1) the central Delta zone with Annamite [Kinh] bands only (around 250 bands); 2) the Delta's outskirts with mixed Annamite and Chinese bands; 3) the Highlands zone with permanent Chinese bands or occasional raiding bands of Chinese pirates. (Frey 1892:41, in Nguyen 1993:182, my translation)

Until the end of the nineteenth century, only *Annamites* and *Chinois* were acknowledged by the French as important ethnic identities in the high region, while 'primitive' tribals were known to be there but were either not worth being taken into account or were put in the same bag as the looters and bandits. Moreover, in that same year of 1891, to avoid what military authorities described as a possible 'contamination' from the highlands into the lowlands – clearly indicating that it was not so much mere *pirates* that were feared, but also political opponents to the colonial project – the complete separation of the mountainous region from the Delta was promulgated and a demarcation line was installed separating the two, adorned with blockhaus and permanent troops. The high region was subdivided into four *Territoires Militaires*, along the main sectors of pirate activities, and these were given to the military high command to administrate. From outposts installed in the mountains French influence spread, through strategies such as organising local Montagnards as counter-guerillas to fight the *pirates*. (Nguyen 1993:183) At last, some Montagnards had been identified and studied and this strategic information put to use by the military commanders.

### The opium factor

Here, one particular economic and political factor in the region deserves to be paid some attention as it helps to understand a large part of the specific relationship the French set up and maintained with Tonkin's Montagnards, as opposed to the Central Highlanders. At the time when the French asserted their domination over Tonkin, many of the highland minorities of south-western China and the upper reaches of northern Vietnam were opium producers. They had been induced into growing this cash crop by the Chinese in the 19th century in order to help the Middle Empire compete with the Europeans who controlled the massive trade of opium from India into China. This uneven trade caused for the latter a huge deficit in its international commercial balance, to say nothing of the adverse effects of having millions of its subjects addicted to eating and opium smoking. (Wang 1933, Gernet 1982:534–42, McCoy 1989) Ironically though, the South China Montagnards were also being pushed into opium cultivation by the recently installed French and British, who were able to reach the southern parts of the Massif through valleys leading north from Burma and French Indochina. The French-built Yunnan-Tonkin railway connecting Haiphong in the Red River Delta to Yunnan Foo (Kunming) in Yunnan completed in 1910, was one transportation infrastructure of major importance in this scheme. In French Indochina, the legal and state-owned *Régie Générale de l'Opium de l'Indochine* was in charge of a highly profitable trade and transformation industry.<sup>14</sup> Its representatives needed and managed to maintain good relationships with the mountain dwellers in

the upper Massif, the main producers, and with the various Tai groups in the high valleys, the middlemen in the opium trade with the Delta. So profitable was this trade and so important the sums it entailed, that the control over opium production and circulation was in itself an issue worth fighting for. To help appreciate the size of the stakes, Descours-Gatin has recently shown that between 1898 and 1922, the contribution from the opium industry to the total gross income of the colony's budget in French Indochina fluctuated between 25% and 42%.<sup>15</sup> To translate this contribution into practical terms, it has been estimated that at the time of the First Indochina War, if all the opium produced in one year in Tonkin had fallen into the Viet Minh's hands, it would have been sufficient to equip its entire regular army forces in 1952 (6 divisions) with arms supplied through barter with southern Chinese arms dealers. (McAlister 1967)

### **French agency and the Montagnards in Tonkin**

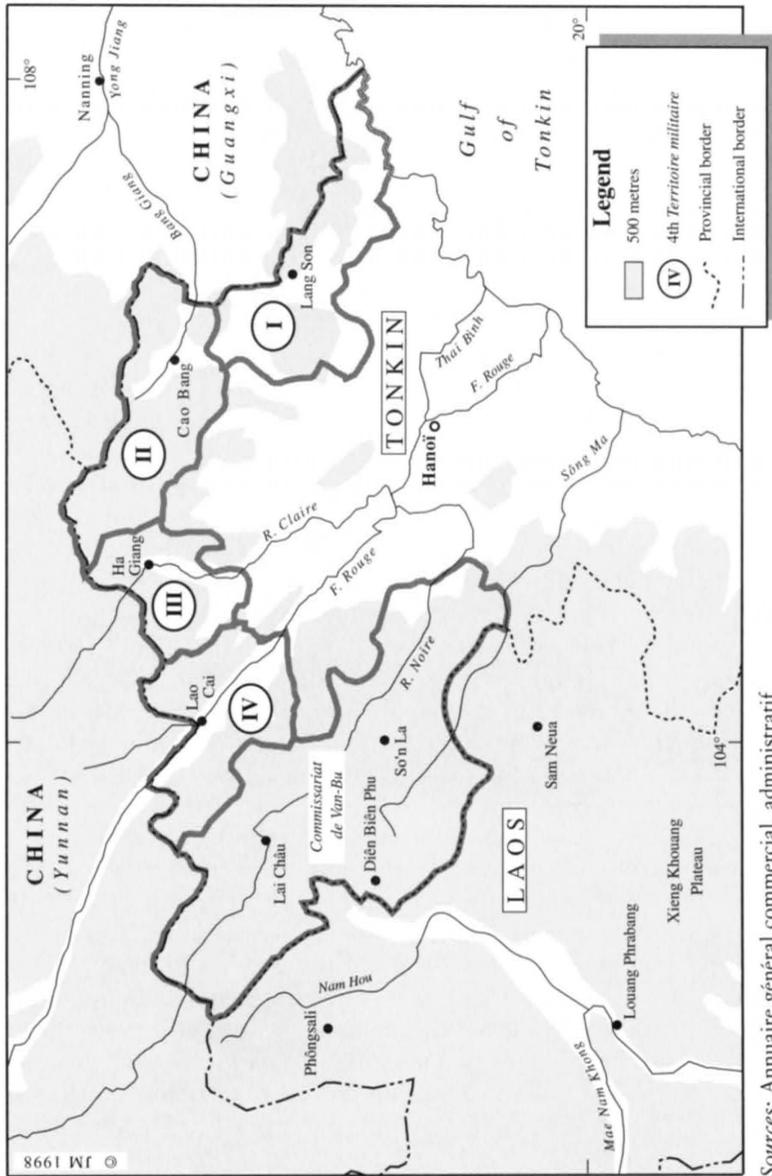
Most observers have described French minority policy for the mountainous regions of French Indochina as a colonial divide-and-rule policy guided by *ad hoc* considerations (Salemink 1995:262), aimed at protecting metropolitan economic interests and keeping the highlands and their populations under loose but steady control. As Christie sees it, France's policy towards the Montagnards of Indochina was dependent on their global colonial policy.

France's policy towards the Montagnards depended on their policy towards Vietnam. If France decided to negotiate with the forces of Vietnamese nationalism, then its special relationship with the Montagnards would necessarily be sacrificed. If, on the other hand, the French strategy was based on a denial of Vietnamese national unity and an attempt to encourage the political fragmentation of Vietnam, then the special relationship with the Montagnards would become a key part of that strategy. (Christie 1996:90.)

Here, as under the Hue rulers, the French did not have any definite policy in particular, regarding the Montagnards of Tonkin apart, perhaps, from making circumstances favourable for the growing of poppies and the production and trade of opium. From 6 August 1891 onwards, as mentioned earlier, most of the Montagnards in the north were living under the strict jurisdiction of the Military Territories spread along the Chinese border<sup>16</sup> – and, after 1908, into north-eastern Laos – where they were subject to civil and military administration under an *officier supérieur* reporting directly to the *Résident Supérieur au Tonkin*.

It was considered at that time that the pacification of the mountainous regions of Tonkin could not be achieved unless civil and military powers were united. In this regard again, French colonial administration of the

Map 9 The Territoires militaires in 1903



Sources: Annuaire général commercial, administratif et industriel de l'Indo-Chine française, 1903.

frontiers and their inhabitants resembled that of the *Châu* by its predecessors, the Nguyen. If a dispute occurred between Montagnards and lowlanders, or between Montagnards and French citizens, the French officer in charge of that particular Military Territory, generally with the grade of *commandant*, would act as a judge and his decision would be enforced by the troops whenever it was deemed necessary. He would be invested with all the normal administrative and judicial powers of a civil *Résident* and he would report to the *Général Commandant Supérieur* for military affairs. (Teston and Percheron 1932:254–5) In disputes between Montagnards, if ever the case was to be taken outside the village scene, the *commandant* would deal with it in the least intrusive way possible in order to become only minimally involved. Therefore, the social peace in any specific region depended a lot on the personal relationships between local officers and administrators, the Kinh – if any in the vicinity – and the local Montagnard leaders or elders.

For these same French rulers, as alluded to earlier, political control of the highlands and the Highlanders also required gaining knowledge of their traditions and forms of social organisation. In the 1890s and the 1900s, French military troops based in garrisons and outposts in each of the Military Territories began to collect massive amounts of data on Montagnard traditions and social organization. Major figures like diplomat Pierre Lefèvre-Pontalis (1892), Commandant and later Lieutenant-Colonel L.-M. Auguste Bonifacy (1919), Commandant Étienne-Edmond Lunet de Lajonquière and his colleagues Lieutenant-Colonel Diguët, Commandant Révérony and Capitaine Fesch (Lunet de Lajonquière 1904) produced detailed ethnographies of the populations inhabiting the vast areas under their command. It must be emphasised that despite the military background of these early observers and the obvious issue of security lying behind these ethnographic investigations, the writings of these officers are remarkably free from the excessive ethnocentrism and blatant racism that characterised Western *mission civilisatrice* at the time. On the contrary, a tireless ethnographer and writer such as Bonifacy went as far as learning vernacular languages and systematically investigating customs, religion and rituals, providing a unique set of reliable first hand data on Montagnard cultures, including numerous interviews, translations, sketches and photographs. To France's credit, it must be said that colonial archives also show, through the routine correspondence between officers in outposts and their regional authorities, that French administrators were at times siding with the 'underdog' when judging a local dispute between French residents or *Annamites* (Kinh) on one side and Montagnards on the other.<sup>17</sup> Whether this favourable attitude was merely a symptom of France's policy of division among the Indochinese population as suggested by Christie or Saleminck, in this case supporting Montagnards against Vietnamese, broadly speaking cannot be doubted. However, the proof of French colonial

representatives' humanity towards highland populations in the north often seemed to go beyond the normal requirements of their administrative duty. It might also simply reflect a sympathy that perhaps tended to develop between largely peaceful and welcoming 'primitives' and their new masters, who for some time had to share with them the hardships of highland climate and isolation.<sup>18</sup>

The other main colonial contribution to the knowledge of Montagnards in French Tonkin comes from the Catholic missionaries affiliated to the *Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris*. Since the early seventeenth century catholic missionaries from various denominations had been present in Vietnam, though on a small scale. It was during the nineteenth century and the colonial instalment that their presence was to become more important. Spearheading, it has been said, the French take-over of Vietnam, Catholic *vicariats* headed by bishops nominated by the *Office de la propagande* in Rome founded numerous missions in the Delta first (carved out of the old Tonkin vicariate, creating the *Tonkin Méridional* and *Tonkin Occidental* vicariates in 1846), then in the high region (*Haut-Tonkin* in 1895) and finally on the coastal area (*Tonkin Maritime* in 1901), the last two vicariates born from the sub-division of *Tonkin Occidental*. Of these, the *Haut-Tonkin* vicariate, with its headquarters at Hung-hoa, is the one where most of the Montagnards were located, with the exception of the western foothills where the Muong lived and the highlands of Nghe-an province along the Laotian border.

Prior to the establishment of the *Haut-Tonkin* vicariate in 1895, only a few missionaries had ventured into the mountains to scout for potential converts, most of whom were still branded *tribus sauvages* and lived in the lower Clear and Black River valleys. Their field reports are short and fairly factual but can hardly support ethnological analysis.<sup>19</sup> In the 1880s in particular, the French conquest of Vietnam caused many mandarins faithful to Hue to stimulate resistance and rebellion in the northern mountains. Mgr Puginier, then bishop of *Tonkin Occidental* and quite involved in colonial politics, had understood how mandarins in the hills managed to use wandering troops from China to fight the French and harrass the few Christian settlements his congregation had founded beyond the Delta. A skilled diplomat, he knew how to convince the colonial authorities to support his missionary efforts: he actively promoted the development of permanent missionary outposts in the mountains as the best way to avoid collusion between *Annamite* local chiefs, Chinese bandits, and local Montagnards.<sup>20</sup> Within 15 years, by 1910, the *Haut-Tonkin* vicariate included 115 Christian settlements scattered in the mid and high regions. A few dozen French missionaries were permanently fixed in these missions where they prioritised learning the vernacular languages and studying the local customs. They left an important body of correspondence that still waits to be analysed. Some among these missionaries also published their

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observations and several produced language dictionaries for their younger colleagues to follow them in the field. The most famous among them, was perhaps François Marie Savina who, over 30 years wrote several dictionaries, a major ethnography of the Miao (Hmong) whom he observed for several years in his Chapa mission as well as in Guizhou, and a number of reports to the colonial authorities concerning specific security issues.

In terms of state services throughout the French period, and especially with regard to education and health facilities administered respectively under the *Direction de l'instruction publique* and the *Services sanitaires et médicaux*, it is generally true that the services reaching even remote villages in the lowlands did not really go beyond the foothills. The Montagnards received only a tiny fraction of the overall budget for education, most of which was directed at the Tai groups in the locations closest to the Kinh settlements. (Direction des Affaires Économiques et Administratives 1935:61) A 1931 map showing the density of school students across French Indochina bears the mention *sans école*, 'no school', for most of the higher region of Tonkin, while the immediately lower region was rated 'less than 1 pupil per 10 square km', as opposed to more than 50 times that density in the Delta. (Direction Générale de l'Instruction Publique 1931) The language barrier, certainly, was a major obstacle, but here again, the peoples at the periphery were receiving more military and missionary attention than anything else.

For the rest of the first half of the twentieth century, a period interspersed with one world war and a major economic crisis with repercussions in the colonies, and with the First Indochina War starting in 1946, a detailed study of the French administration in Indochina that had an impact on the Montagnards of Tonkin has yet to be conducted. But even if this research was carried out, the results might well be meagre. Outside moments of crisis like the open war with the Viet Minh forces, which we will now examine, Montagnards were not paid much attention between 1920 and 1945<sup>21</sup> and the scarcity of information in official archives reflects this.

### **Wartime imperatives: 1946–1954**

As mentioned earlier, in addition to controlling opium transformation and trade, political issues in the mountains of Tonkin eventually came down to tackling the growing Vietnamese Nationalist and Communist unrest. Dwelling at lower altitudes than the more recent Montagnard migrants like the Hmong and the Yao, the various Tai groups were more susceptible than their upland neighbours to political influence from the lowlands. The Tho and the Nung, east of the Red River, were among the most important highland minority groups in northern Vietnam. In the case of the Tho of the Clear River area in particular, as a consequence of their more advanced 'kinhization', the majority took a stance of resistance to the French invaders and sided with the

Vietnamese Nationalists and later, with the Communists. On the other hand, the French, as we saw, succeeded in allying firmly with the White and to some extent, the Black Tai in Sip Song Chau Tai. Several of these long sedentarised Tai groups had a stratified social and political organisation, with landlords and peasants. For the French then, as for the Vietnamese rulers at Hue before, that traditionally stable structure served as a chain of command for the lowland central institutions, thanks to the close relationship with leader Deo Van Tri and several of his sons established in the 1880s.<sup>22</sup>

From 1946 onwards, the Tho were to be the chief Montagnard enemy of the French throughout the First Indochina War, as a Tho revolt in 1940 had indicated would be the case, whilst the White Tai were their main Montagnard ally. The latter had recently given proof of their loyalty by helping French runaway troops under Général Alessandri flee into Yunnan when pursued by the Japanese in Spring 1945. This plurality of tendencies between linguistically and historically related Tai groups was possible not only because of cultural differences between various Tai sub-groups, but also because of the particular political organisation of Tai society, traditionally divided into fairly independent *muang*, or principalities, each one with its own rightful leader.<sup>23</sup> Owing to this close relationship with the White Tai, and in reaction to the proclamation of independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by the Viet Minh in September 1945, swiftly followed by the take-over of a large chunk of the mountainous part of eastern Tonkin in Tho territory, a French-Tai temporary accord was quickly worked out and enforced. Discussions about the eventual creation of an autonomous *Moi* territory in the Central Highlands were also being conducted, for much the same strategic motives. (Christie 1996:90–1) In an attempt to cling onto the highlands, an accord was finally promulgated in July 1948, creating an independent Tai Federation inside the *Union française*, a Federation grouping together the provinces of Lai Chau, Phong Tho and Son La under the presidency of the White Tai leader Deo Van Long, the heir of Deo Van Tri. At the same time,

‘while the White and Black Tai were welcoming the French Colonial Army on its return from Chinese exile in 1945–46, Tho guerrilla units were helping the Viet Minh to take over Hanoi’ (McAlister 1967:795–6),

and by the end of the 1940s, the Tho were giving unlimited support to the Viet Minh.

The legal status of what was called the *sous-minorités*, the sub-minorities, inside the Tai Federation, essentially the Hmong and the Yao but also significant numbers of Austronesian Khmu and Tibeto-Burman Lolo, was claimed to be one of *adhésion de fait*, or de facto inclusion. (Nollet 1953:43) Historically in a dominant position long before the French arrived, the White Tai of the Black River, despite being outnumbered by fifty per cent by the

Hmong alone inside the borders of the Federation (McAlister 1967:817), took advantage of French support to exploit those sub-minorities landlocked in the upper reaches of the territory even further (McAlister 1967:782), particularly in taking control over the highly profitable opium trade. Quickly, more benefits than ever before were being returned to the Tai in the Federation: modern European arms flowed in, local military recruits were regularly paid, Lai Chau was built a small fortress, and the teaching of the White Tai language and script was swiftly organised from Hanoi with the help of the *Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*. No other minority population in the region enjoyed such privileges, and feelings of bitterness grew accordingly among neighbours. With the rapid development of Viet Minh activities in upper Tonkin at the end of the 1940s came a clear crystallisation: the federated Tai drew closer to the French while, understandably, other Montagnards, exploited by the former, sided with the Communists and challenged the might of the Tai rulers from within their own Federation. For those reasons mentioned earlier, the Tho around the Upper Clear River Valley also opposed the French. There, some of the Yao Montagnards followed the Tho in this choice while others, using much the same reasoning as their cousins landlocked in the Tai Federation, but the other way around this time, opted for the French instead. In short, as McAlister has summarised,

Because of their traditional antagonism toward the Tho, the Meo [Hmong] east of the Red River fought tenaciously against the Viet Minh. [. . .] In contrast to this situation east of the Red River, the Viet Minh in the northwest were not allied with the traditional enemies of the Meo but were fighting them. This was the initial advantage to Viet Minh ambitions for receiving Meo support. McAlister 1967:819.

Numerous Hmong and Yao east of the Upper Red River, particularly around Ha Giang and Pa Kha (today Bac Ha), helped by others in Than Uyen and Chapa (today Sa Pa) west of the River, thus opposed the Viet Minh and supported the French in guerrilla operations against Viet Minh bases in upper Tonkin. A number of pro-French Hmong and Yao had, in 1950, been formalised into the GCMA scheme (*Groupement de Commandos Mixtes Aéroportés*, Composite Airborne Commando Group)<sup>24</sup> by the French *Service Action* under Colonel Trinquier with some help from the American Central Intelligence Agency, and subsequently GCMA guerillas repeatedly harassed Viet Minh positions in the mountains. Between December 1952 and July 1954, twenty-five such military operations were conducted, most of which involved Montagnard guerillas.<sup>25</sup> Some of the better organised commando operations of 1953, such as a successful attack launched on the twin towns of Coc-Leu and Lao Cai in October of that year, eventually made it necessary for the Viet Minh to ask Communist Chinese troops to cross the border from Yunnan and help crush the 'rebels'. They did so successfully more than once. (Gras 1992:478)

The Dien Bien Phu plateau and town had been recognised by the French as part of the Tai Federation and therefore as falling into White Tai Deo Van Long's domain. The upland valleys that the plateau controlled were a strategic gateway to the valley of the Nam Hou River in Laos, the most direct route to Luang Phrabang. The area was also the most agriculturally productive of the Federation, both in rice and opium. Nonetheless, traditional sovereignty over Dien Bien Phu and its riches was claimed by Black Tai leaders long installed in its surroundings as well as in the Son La area, on which the Lord of Lai Chau's supremacy had been imposed by the colonial power. Deo Van Long thus quite simply removed the local Black Tai leader Lo Van Hac and installed his own son in his place. The staunch French support of this sort of White Tai hegemonic power over Dien Bien Phu proved an insensitive attitude and alienated the Black Tai to the colonial cause. Their main leaders joined Lo Van Hac and retaliated by defecting to the Viet Minh in the early 1950s. (Fall 1967:24) The French committed still another blunder in their frantic preparations for what they rightly thought – although tragically for the wrong reasons – would be the ultimate confrontation with the Vietnamese Communists. After the French High Command in Hanoi had chosen the coveted Dien Bien Phu plateau for their final showdown and swiftly invested it back from the Viet Minh late in 1953 (this was to be known as the 'Castor' operation), then they decided to abandon the less well defended Lai Chau and to repatriate its inhabitants to Dien Bien Phu (this was the 'Pollux' operation which, as its name indicates, could not be dissociated from 'Castor'). As a token of respect for their long time ally, Général Cogny went in person to summon Deo Van Long and the White Tai to abandon their traditional capital and settle where the battle was to be fought. The majority of the regular troops were airlifted from Lai Chau to Dien Bien Phu while the Tai irregulars had to fight their way through Viet Minh controlled jungle. Meeting with fierce opposition there, most of these irregulars and their French non-commissioned officers never made it to the plateau. Deo Van Long himself was flown to Hanoi with his court and all the wealth he could carry and he was never again to see his 'kingdom', which had thus come to an abrupt and disgraceful end.

This poor political decision for which the French High Command must bear responsibility can only be explained in terms of sheer ignorance of local cultures on the part of the freshly arrived 'top brass'. It alienated most Federated Tai, who quite rightly took this forced relocation as a humiliation and who, as a consequence, were to support the French war effort only half-heartedly whilst nevertheless providing, along with a few representatives of other Montagnard groups, nearly one quarter of the French troops on location when the battle of Dien Bien Phu started. Many retreated to the mountains, or worse, plainly defected to the Viet Minh which was 'adept at exploiting the ethnic and clan tensions that lay beneath the surface of the apparent harmony of the T'ai Federation.' (Christie 1996:94)<sup>26</sup> This was to

be a fatal mistake, to be added, it must be said, to a few other equally fatal decisions made by French military strategists in this particular venture. When the battle of Dien Bien Phu finally took place in Spring 1954, numerous Black Tai from Son La and many White Tai, Hmong, Yao and Khmu from Sip Song Chau Tai, not counting the Tho and other Montagnards from east of the Red River enrolled in the Viet Minh's forces, had made themselves available to the Communists. They helped to build and support this massive and totally unpredicted artillery pounding by the thousands, encircling and undermining the French entrenched camp, and were finally to be a decisive factor in making the balance lean in favour of Giap's armies.

As De Harting stated when analyzing Viet Minh success, neither the independence of 1945 nor the Dien Bien Phu victory would have been possible without support from the minorities. (De Harting 1996:415) However, it is surprising that despite the fact that the Montagnard contribution to the battle is attested by numerous observers – Fall, for instance, mentions ‘the Trung-Doan Doc-Lap (Independent Regiment) 148, a crack unit of the Viet-Nam Peoples Army specializing in mountain warfare and recruited from extremely well trained tribesmen from the area’ (Fall 1967:6–7) –, official Vietnamese historiography only reluctantly acknowledges this contribution. General Giap's published account of the battle, for example, barely mentions the ethnonym ‘Tai’, and this is by no means an isolated example. A General Staff Colonel who took part in the battle whom I interviewed in summer 1997, against all logic, vehemently negated any non-Kinh participation to the battle. As this kind of rhetoric indicates, Viet Minh fighters at Dien Bien Phu had, above all, to be Vietnamese.

## **CONCLUSION: PERSPECTIVES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This panorama of the history of the Montagnards in northern Vietnam during the French period is incomplete. In the field of ethnohistory, as obvious gaps left in this text illustrate, much remains to be done. What is known of the history of particular groups with some certainty, essentially what has been collected using proper ethnographic methodology, is limited to the early 1900s military collections of information (with the notable exception of Bonifacy's deeper and longer involvement). Even important later contributions such as Abadie (1924) and Roux (1954), in spite of making use of their author's experience of several years in the field, rely heavily on what has been gathered and written by Lunet de La Jonquière and his colleagues (1904, 1906). Moreover, we must keep in mind the potentially invaluable contribution from the missionary archives when they are properly and thoroughly searched. As Father François-Marie Savina's (1924) work exemplifies, the long term involvement of missionaries with local populations

very usefully complements the less extensive – though often better organised and somewhat less biased – observations by military personnel on tour.

Thus it can be considered that the less well known moments of Montagnard history during the French period in Vietnam will be better understood with a thorough investigation of archives. Combined with the study of more widely diffused administrative documents such as those produced by the *Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine*, the prospects for further research are promising.

More precisely, the French Indochina Colonial Archives, held at both the *Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (CAOM)* in Aix-en-Provence and the *Centre no.1 des Archives Nationales* in Hanoi, contain a large number of references to several administrative and military actions on the Montagnards that are still largely unexplored. The Military Archives at *Château de Vincennes* in the eastern periphery of Paris holds interesting unpublicised documents written by military personnel posted in *Haut-Tonkin*. The military outposts there have been active for more than 50 years and idleness often drove more educated officers to try their hand at vernacular languages and ethnography, a fairly common activity for French and British colonial officers at the time. On the missionary side, the seminary of the *Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris* holds a large proportion of the documents produced by its missionaries whilst in Indochina as well as a precise list of who was active at which location, and at what time. Official decisions about every possible issue are attested in documents. It appears also that personal diaries kept by missionaries whilst at their posts can be traced. Exploring these diaries could be a fruitful venture in the cases of priests who stayed for long periods in the high region.

However, the most interesting source of information still untapped might not be in written form. In northern Vietnam's mountainous region, first hand oral accounts can still be collected for events going as far back as the 1910s. Second-hand information passed on from generation to generation could highlight little known ancient historical events, some of which might prove to be of crucial importance. Many are likely to have escaped the attention of outside observers, let alone being recorded in documents. In the remote highlands secrecy was a wise choice and much of the oral record has never left the village scene. The organised collection of local history as transmitted through the oral tradition there is still in its infancy. With time and the use of the appropriate methodology, it should grow into an invaluable source of information to cross-check historical overviews based on exogenous sources.

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### NOTES

- 1 This chapter is an offspring from a related article published in *Ethnohistory*: 'The Montagnards in Northern Vietnam from 1802 to 1975. A Historical Overview.' (Michaud 2000).
- 2 In my opinion unnecessarily restricted to the Central Highlands minority populations in most of American literature since the 1950s, the term 'Montagnard' is given back here its original French meaning, mountain people. In early French literature on Indochina as well as in a growing number of recent English language publications, it is understood as encompassing the minority populations living in all of the Indochinese mountainous areas, the *montagnes* in French. Terms such as Highlanders or Uplanders are also acceptable; Montagnards is given preference here.
- 3 For an account of the preserved pre-19th century Vietnamese archives, see Dang Phuong-Nghi, *Les institutions publiques du Viêt-Nam au XVIIIe siècle* (1969), 23–31. See also an early Chinese account in Ma Touan Lin, *Ethnographie des peuples étrangers à la Chine* (1883), a 13th century text translated from Chinese and annotated by Marquis d'Hervey de Saint-Denys.
- 4 See the colour sketches from the Garnier – Doudart de Lagrée expedition to Yunnan.
- 5 'L'origine du nom de Tonkin est Dong-Kinh, Cour royale de l'Orient. Lorsque les Européens abordèrent en Cochinchine pour la première fois vers la fin du XVe siècle, la capitale d'Annam devait porter indifféremment les noms de Kecho ou de Dong-kinh. Comme ils ne comprenaient qu'imparfaitement la langue annamite, ils employèrent le nom qui s'appliquait seulement au lieu de la résidence royale, pour désigner tout le pays compris entre la vice-royauté naissante de Cochinchine et la Chine.' Lesserteur 'Étude sur le Tong-King'. *Les missions catholiques*, (1876), p. 148.

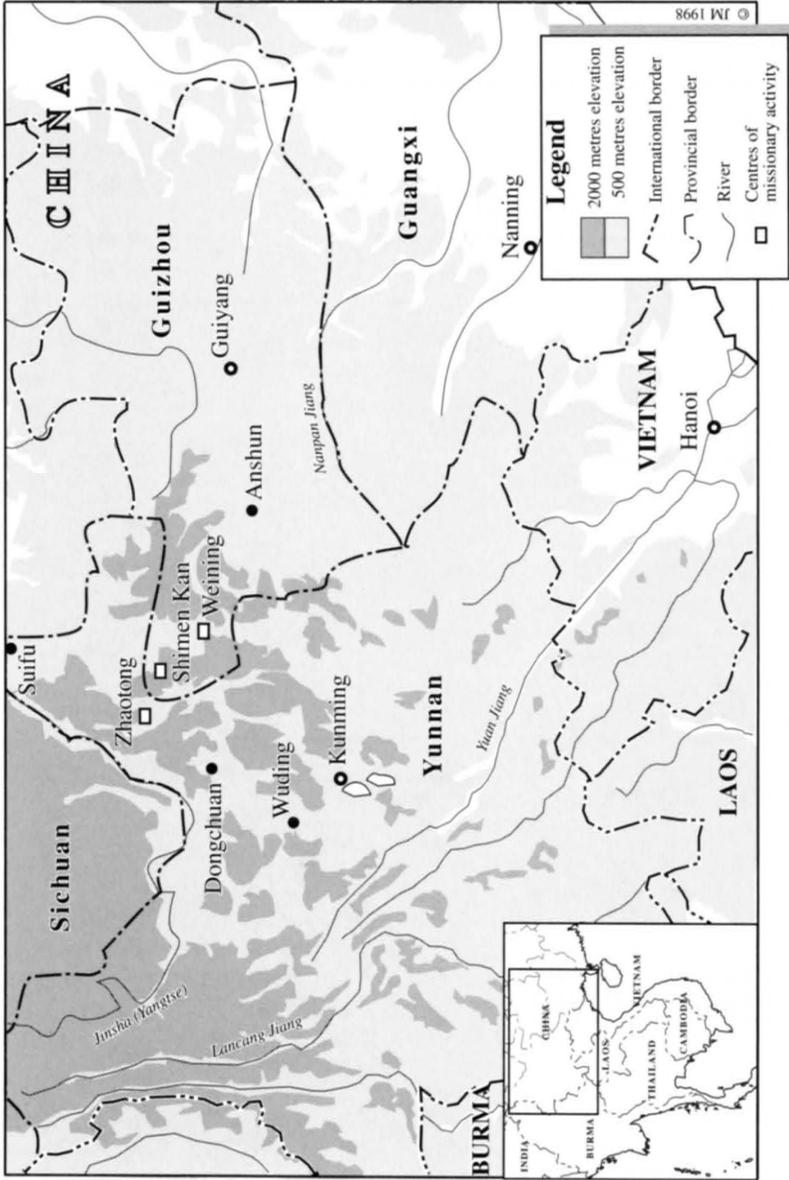
- 6 Unlike the official 'National Minorities' listing in Vietnam today, but in accordance with the official Vietnamese linguistic classification of national minorities, all the groups belonging to the Tai language sub-family, when addressed collectively, will be named Tai in this text.
- 7 *Thô-ti* is actually the name given to the descendants of such Kinh mandarins described earlier who were sent to live with the Tho and represent the imperial authority there. Their mixed blood assured them of a higher status within the Tho society. See Henry McAleavy, *Black Flags in Vietnam. The story of a Chinese intervention* (1968).
- 8 For a more complete ethnographic panorama of the northern highlands, see Emile Lunet de Lajonquière, op.cit., and *Ethnographie du Tonkin Septentrional* (1906); Maurice Abadie, *Les races du Haut Tonkin de Phong Tho à Lang-Son* (1924); F.M. Lebar, G.H. Hickey and J.K. Musgrave, eds, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (1964); chapters 1 and 18 to 20 in Peter Kunstader, ed., *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations* (1967); and Joann L. Schrock et al., *Minority Groups in North Vietnam, Ethnographic Study Series* (1972).
- 9 See Robert Darrah Jenks, *Insurgency and Social Disorder in Guizhou. The 'Miao' Rebellion, 1854-1873* (1994). On social unrest in the south prior to the nineteenth century, see Claudine Lombard-Salmon, *Un exemple d'acculturation chinoise: la province du Guizhou au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1972).
- 10 Puginier gives a vivid account of such an attack on a newly converted Catholic hamlet in Tonkin where over 200 christians were killed. '8 Novembre 1884. Détail d'un raid chinois sur une mission du Tonkin', Vol. 816, no. 35, Archives of the *Société des Missions étrangères de Paris*.
- 11 The 1860s is also precisely the time when Hmong elders in Vietnam today declare that their ancestors arrived to the Dong Van and Meo Vac districts on the Chinese border, allegedly the first Hmong settlements in Vietnam according to Vietnamese ethnologists (personal communication with Vietnamese researchers, Institute of Ethnology, Hanoi, 1997). It is almost certain, though, that Hmong migrants have arrived earlier and remained, perhaps, unnoticed for several years; for an overview of Hmong migrations from China into Indochina, see Culas and Michaud (1997).
- 12 See the vibrant account of the invasion and the *in extremis* escape by Pavie and the King in chapters 3 to 5 in Pavie (1947).
- 13 See archives at the *Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer* in France under the *Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin* series, numbers 56453 to 56480.
- 14 The extension of French involvement in the opium trade both in China and in French Indochina, and the particular importance of this rail link with Yunnan where huge opium crops were collected, is clearly illustrated in many economic publications of the early 20th century such as Henri Brenier and W. Lichtenfelder's 'Appendice I: note sur la production et le commerce de l'opium en Chine', *Bulletin économique, 6ème année* (1909), 763-76.
- 15 More precisely, this proportion was 25% of the gross general budget in average between 1899 and 1906, and 21% between 1907 and 1913. Then, because of the First World War and its advert effects on the transfer of capital from the metropole, it went up to 30% in 1914 to reach a maximum of 42% in 1918. Year in year out, opium provided 15% to 20% of the net revenues in French Indochina. Descours-Gatin, *Quand l'opium finançait la colonisation en Indochine* (1992), pp. 222-5. See also Le Failler (1993).
- 16 On the subject of the Military Territories, see the (no author) *Annuaire général, commercial, administratif et industriel de l'Indo-Chine française* (1903),

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- pp. 1039–80, where the origin and the legal frame of the *Territoires Militaires* are explained.
- 17 See an interesting example of this in the *Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin* fund at the *Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer*, 5952 'Concession de terrains appartenant aux Meos à Chapa (1941).'
  - 18 As an illustration, Abadie (1924:167) mentions free exchanges of sexual services between some Meo and Lolo young girls and Europeans, including French troops and officers, just outside the post at Dong-Van in Ha Giang region (Third Military Territory).
  - 19 See for instance correspondance on early – and rather short lived – tentatives called *Mission des sauvages* in 1854 and 1881–83 narrated respectively in Vol. 709 (no. 90, 99, 100, 103, 112, 113, 114) and Vol. 710 (no. 2, 3, 4, 11, 21) at the archives of the *Société des Missions étrangères de Paris*.
  - 20 See several letters from Puginier to the French colonial authorities in Vol. 816 of the archives of the *Société des Missions étrangères de Paris*, in particular no. 58: '11 juin 1886, Mgr Puginier à M le Résident Général Paul Bert. – Nécessité d'entrer en relation avec les tribus demi-sauvages habitant les montagnes du Tonkin et de l'Annam.'
  - 21 To the exception of a few localised 'Meo rebellions' about which military reports exist, and a few ad hoc issues linked to the White Tai suzerainty over the Black River valley.
  - 22 In the years preceding the death of the White Tai leader in 1909, the issue of the hereditary transmission of power to his sons was raised. Pavie had included this right in the 1889 treaty but ageing Deo and his sons had to argue before the clause was finally implemented. See the correspondance in the *Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin* fund at the *Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer*, 56476, 1903–1911, 'Succession politique de Deo Van Tri. Constitution de la province de Lai Chau'.
  - 23 On the *muang*-based political organisation of the Tai, see the short but very clear account by David K. Wyatt, *Thailand, A Short History*. (1984), chap. 1. See also Condominas (1976).
  - 24 Bernard Fall (1964:275) states that by 1954, GCMA guerrillas in north-eastern Laos and adjoining north-western Vietnam numbered about 5000; he does not mention how many were active elsewhere in northern Vietnam. Colonel Trinquier (1976:143) states that by the end of 1953, troops in the GMI, successor of the GCMA, had increased from 5000 to 14000, inclusive of various Tai Montagnards.
  - 25 See several detailed counter-guerrilla operations presented from the point of view of their French commander in Trinquier (1976).
  - 26 It is also interesting to note that in his analysis of the causes for several Tai soldiers to desert at Dien Bien Phu only 2 days into the battle, Bernard Fall (1967:163–65) overlooked the causes we just saw and retained only the efficiency of communist propaganda as a plausible explanation.

# Chapter Three

Map 10 Part of the Methodist South-Western China District



## Chapter Three

# The Western Protestant Missionaries and the Miao in Yunnan and Guizhou, Southwest China

*Alison Lewis*

### INTRODUCTION

The encounter between Western Protestant missionaries and the mountain peoples in western China in the early twentieth century is one of extreme cultural contrasts. This perception is confirmed by evidence from an emerging collection of diaries, photographs and correspondence which focus on the contacts between particular missionaries and the Hua Miao of Northeast Yunnan and Northwest Guizhou provinces. Because of the remarkably detailed cameos of daily life and personal reflections these sources enrich what can only be a fragmented understanding of the encounter.

However, despite the inevitable differences, the available details suggest that exceptional individuals, particular circumstances and shared experiences were sufficiently powerful to override some formidable barriers to cultural exchange. The encounter was not only between Western Protestant missionaries and the Miao. Initially it was mediated by a few Han Chinese who stepped beyond their own cultural confines. Later the Western missionary encounter was superseded by Miao converts who became missionaries in their own right. The encounter was but one part of a much wider story.

That it was the Hua Miao who were the subject of the encounter with Western Protestant missionaries may or may not have been coincidence. Moreover, the missionaries were few and lived among them only intermittently and only from between 1888 and 1950. Despite these limited contacts, the nature of this particular encounter and the distinctive records that survive offer unusual insights. The impact of the missionaries has been studied in detail through analysis of the Miao languages and the unique script of the Hua Miao but as yet there has been only limited study of the encounter itself. (Diamond 1995, Enwall 1993)

## YUNNAN AND GUIZHOU PROVINCES

Yunnan was, from the perspective of the Imperial court, 'South of the Clouds', beyond the fertile, damp and densely populated province of Sichuan and across the Yangtze River. Guizhou, one of China's poorest provinces, is similarly overcast, but mountainous and infertile, contrasting with the dry and warm sub-tropical climate of Southern Yunnan, with moderate winters and abundant permanent rivers. Positive as this image of Yunnan is, it belies the hostility of the topography. Yunnan is on a plateau which extends beyond its borders, north-west into Tibet, east into Guizhou and south west into the Thai-Burma region. The valleys are narrow, deep and unsuitable for cultivation other than the most marginal. The plateau and wider valleys to the east are more accessible and fertile, but still, with a climate moderated by altitude, constitute a hostile environment, particularly in the north of the province. The landscape is deeply dissected and has imposed its limitations on the economy and peoples of the region.

Communications have been constrained by the topography. Routes east-west across Yunnan cut across the grain of the terrain and construction projects face formidable difficulties whether the Burma Road (Fitzgerald 1940), the Haiphong railway of 1910 or the electrified railway from Nanning to Kunming of 1997. In addition to these major constraints, the incentives to provide effective communication to and within the Province have been few. Economic resources were limited, with the exception of minerals and energy. Agricultural surpluses, if available, were bulky to transport and the Chinese central governments saw this region as one to be controlled, rather than to contribute towards the culture of the various dynasties. Military routes into Yunnan were, conjecturally, similar to those taken by settlers and traders.

Guizhou province was politically turbulent until the Qing emperors conquered it in the mid eighteenth century, and again in the mid nineteenth century, so although it gave better access to the head of navigation on the Yangtze, travel was unreliable. (Jenks 1994) Communications between Yunnan and its neighbours were vulnerable to dislocation from local landowners, banditry and civil strife. The problem, particularly in Yunnan, was compounded by local hostilities, among a diverse population of indigenous peoples, most of whom were hierarchically stratified. Some survived at extreme levels of poverty and were subject to periodic incursions of invaders and settlers. Movement of people and goods within the mountain areas depended on local knowledge of accessible routes and safe passage, familiarity with the social and cultural constraints of different people, and a physical stamina, most likely acquired from childhood. At a national level, Yunnan and Guizhou were isolated and inaccessible; in 1907 Anshun was two and a half months travel from Shanghai. (Clarke 1911: 224) At a local scale, however, some indigenous communities depended for

their survival and security on the same remoteness from advancing settlers with their demands for land.

The rugged rural environment and the perpetual threat of banditry impacted on Westerner and highlander alike. The Western Protestant missionaries who lived among the Miao penetrated these mountain strongholds, leaving the relative safety of fortified cities and travelling extensively in the mountains, often for weeks on end. Such was the nature of the terrain, particularly around Zhaotong in an area of 10,000 square miles, that distances were recorded not as miles but as days of travel at twenty five to thirty miles per day. The missionaries travelled for weeks with Miao companions, dependent on them for survival and companionship. They negotiated their way between landlords' demesnes, living in the poorest of conditions and subject to flood and famine. 'There is no chance of any privacy or comfort such as health demands', yet in these shared privations and the entertainment of mutually good company, the Westerners earned the respect and affection of many people and confronted dangers together (Pollard 1907).

Yunnan is a Chinese province at the frontier with South East Asia. Chinese political penetration and direct rule of Southwest China interchanged with periods of independent control despite its distance from the centres of Imperial power. Yunnan has been influenced by Chinese political power, art and culture and trade yet it is also at the meeting point of many cultures. In the region are many non-Han Chinese peoples in varying states of assimilation. The province is large and the political boundaries dissect communities who also live in neighbouring countries, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand and Tibet. Throughout history there have been shifts of these groups across borders, although details of migration patterns are elusive. Favoured land for settlement was the fertile valley bottoms, but as more powerful incomers arrived, so previous settlers would be pushed out and up the hillsides and would have to modify their agricultural techniques to a poorer environment. Such settlement in turn displaced other groups further into the least hospitable environments, on the hill tops and to the most isolated locations. By the nineteenth century, the non-Han Chinese were in some cases in regionally distinct groups but were generally mixed, occupying pockets of land in exclusive groups but at a larger scale appearing as a melee. Any map which attempts to illustrate the distribution of these groups demonstrates their complexity and necessarily summarises the situation.

In addition to the admix of indigenous peoples, Yunnan also was at the point of convergence of major religions. Buddhist influence came overland from India via Burma and is distinct from Buddhist practices elsewhere in China, brought later by sea to the eastern coasts. Islam arrived with the Mongols and remained as soldiers settled, traded and migrated in the region. The Moslems became Chinese in all but religion but were involved in periodic brutal conflicts such as the Hui Rebellions between 1857 and

## *The Western Protestant Missionaries and the Miao*

1872. A major incursion of settlers from the Yangtze valley arrived in Yunnan with the Ming armies after 1382 bringing with them mainstream Chinese culture, technology and improved communications. Yunnan has a long history of convergence of cultures yet components of various past civilisations had disappeared or had been assimilated, peoples had adjusted to influxes of newcomers but were dominated throughout by the constraints of topography and economic conditions. The Western missionaries were no different. Seen as but one component in a long history of assimilation in a culturally rich and complex region, their actions in a very limited period of history need to be seen in perspective. 'Chinese policy . . . was based on the conviction that time would bring all the peoples of Yunnan within the full pale of Chinese civilisation; a century this way or that did not matter.' (Fitzgerald 1972: 75)

### THE ARRIVAL OF WESTERNERS

When Westerners arrived in this region in the nineteenth century then, the picture was one of convergence and competition. They were established mainly in the cities such as Kunming and Guiyang for consular and trading purposes and from which general surveys had been undertaken by French and British engineers for technical and political purposes. (Stout 1912, Vassal 1922) Roman Catholic missionaries had been in the region from 1692 but in limited numbers and isolated centres, and Protestant missionaries arrived only in 1877 as members of the China Inland Mission. (Latourette 1929) In China at the turn of the century the Qing dynasty was disintegrating, Western powers and Japan were using the situation opportunistically for mercantile and political ends. The intrusion into China of Protestant missionaries escalated, particularly into the interior with the China Inland Mission, and reinforced the humiliation of China. The Protestant missionaries were therefore perceived as colluders in this humiliation and upheaval of political power.

Western understanding of the region was fragmented and partial, but it is probable that the periodic civil unrest was well known, that anti-Christian and anti-foreign persecution was anticipated and that the missionary activities and security fluctuated according to relations between the European and Chinese governments and the effectiveness of central administration. The determination of many Western missionaries to reach their unknown destinations, despite intense opposition, is remarkable. (Latourette 1929, Barr 1972) They arrived with clear objectives, from diverse backgrounds but with a very limited understanding of the places to which they were destined. (Davies 1901) Their evangelical mission opened their world but may also have limited their vision.

Thus, the picture is a palimpsest of geography, politics and cultures, one layer erased and replaced by another. It reflects an already long and

complex history in the region, which has subsequently been supplemented by the turbulent events of the twentieth century. In the overall scheme of a powerful nation state, increasingly involved in the international arena and global markets, the short period of missionary encounter with a small national minority groups may be irrelevant. However, events in China did affect the relationship between missionaries and Chinese peoples. The Boxer revolt in 1900, defeats by the French and British navies, and wars with Japan had repercussions throughout China. Despite the transformation of the Chinese national government after 1911, locally, among the Miao, as missionary accounts show, official power remained in the hands of the existing administration. In reality, local power was wielded by the Yi landowners, the Han and periodically by bandits and warlords. It has been suggested that Western Protestant missionaries were politically advantaged but this requires qualification. They did have recourse to consuls to uphold the international treaties, and they used them, but they were also subject to local power structures in ways similar to the mountain people. However, the missionaries had the opportunity to remain apart from both local and national political systems by virtue of their religious convictions. By appealing to a higher authority, 'God', they perceived themselves as independent. However, these missionaries were not ascetics. Their gospel was strongly social and based on principles of human justice and equity. At times, therefore, they became interlocutors between the oppressed, the mountain peoples, and the various local political hierarchies.

In the encounter between missionaries and the Miao groups, there was a meeting, not just of significantly different cultures but also of minorities from within each culture. The missionaries based in Anshun and Guiyang were Scots from a Free Church tradition and those working around Zhaotong were intensely Cornish and Devonian, ardently committed to a particular evangelical expression arising from their Bible Christian upbringing and conscious of being from a marginal areas within Britain.<sup>1</sup> These were people who were alien in inhospitable territory but with an overwhelming commitment to a cause. The Miao highlanders were resident but marginalised by the Han, subservient to the Yi and diverse within themselves. Both westerners and Miao were relatively poor, but the Miao peoples lived with extreme poverty under oppressive social conditions.

### THE HIGHLAND PEOPLES

Within the mountain ranges are marginal living conditions, refuges in times of threat and oppression, but which isolate and fragment communities. The southward spread of Chinese civilisation throughout the centuries followed migration, exile and military expansion and displaced indigenous communities. It is possible that even prior to the arrival of the Chinese these groups had displaced each other as populations changed, natural disasters occurred

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and economic resources declined. Displacement and migration is likely to have been a continual feature of life. There is little documented evidence of these changes, as material finds are scarce in archaeological reports, literary sources are generally non-existent, and Chinese accounts concerned themselves with Chinese affairs rather than the 'barbarians' beyond the pale.

In addition to the Han Chinese, the region of Northeast Yunnan and Northwest Guizhou was inhabited by two branches of the Yi (the Nosu around Zhaotong, and the Gopu between Dong Chuan and Kunming) and many groups belonging to the Miao. Although the distribution of Miao groups was widespread and intermingled, concentrations of Miao clans meant, for example, that the Hua Miao lived mainly between Zhaotong and Anshun, the Chuan Miao in the southern area of Sichuan, south of the Yangtze River, and the Heh Miao south and east of Anshun.<sup>2</sup>

Both Jenks (1994) and Diamond (1996) discuss Miao diversity and ethnic identity, its contradictions and place in China's nation-building. The initial distinction between the Miao is based on dress, but significant linguistic differences mean that some groups are mutually unintelligible. Although some Miao became acculturated into Chinese society by dress, language and behaviour, others remained in isolated groups in the mountains, certainly until the 1950's. (Barnett 1993) Use of the collective 'Miao' might seem to follow the western Orientalist habit, discussed by Schein (1989), of disregarding the considerable differences between various peoples and grouping them under a single accessible name. Yet the People's Republic of China, in officially designating as Miao one of its fifty six National Minorities, similarly overrides the differences between people. (Dikotter 1996).

The diverse tribal groups were assimilated into Chinese cultures in varying degrees, some hardly distinguishable by appearance and language, others apparently completely separate and with virtually no direct contact with Han. These distinctions were not necessarily demarcated by tribal groups, for within one group there might be representatives at different stages of acculturation. In Samuel Clarke's account of missionary encounters with Miao people in 1889 in Southeast Guizhou province, near P'anghai, contact was made with Heh Miao who joined with Han in persecuting other, more traditional Heh Miao. (Clarke 1911: 163) That one group was urban and the other rural suggests that the conflict may have been economic and local as much as anti-Miao and 'anti-foreign'.

The resultant mix of groups of different indigenous people with varying degrees of Han identity sets a context for the missionary stories that remain. Careful scrutiny of the missionaries' diaries and accounts indicates the complex tribal mix even in areas where the published stories focus on one particular group, the Hua Miao. Away from the towns there was an identifiable social hierarchy. The Yi, (Nosu was their tribal name used in

missionary sources) held fiefdoms under Han officials (Parsons 1974), were authorised to extract rent in kind or cash from the local population and to keep slaves, mostly non-Han, and to fortify their mountain houses. Some were wealthy, a few were generous, and many abused their power but were protected within an Empire that was hierarchical and which needed relative peace on its margins. One missionary's verdict was that 'the Nosu are an indolent and pastoral people who depend on land and flocks for wealth and slaves for work.' (Dymond 1929) Another 'The Lo's were immensely wealthy, drawing rents from a very large estate. They were ruthless and cruel (and) maintained what amounted to a small private army. (Parsons 1974: 29) The Yi landlords feature frequently in the accounts as the lives and livelihoods of the Miao depended on workable co-existence with their feudal masters. The activities of the Miao Christian converts challenged established allegiances and authority, and the missionaries were required to negotiate with the landlords over dues and duties. The foreigner had recourse to authorities beyond the Chinese which offered protection yet increased the antagonism with local officials and residents. The presence of the missionaries alone was in some areas a provocation to hostility. In anticipation of trouble, one was told that any journeys beyond the limited areas permitted by the local magistrate were at his own risk.

### THE CHINA INLAND MISSION AND THE BIBLE CHRISTIANS

The first Western Protestant missionaries to live among the Miao in Yunnan and Guizhou all arrived in the area under the auspices of the China Inland Mission (CIM). The CIM was a 'faith mission' directed to preach to as many Han Chinese as could be reached, to offer salvation to 'China's millions'. Its emphasis was firmly conservative and its organisation was under an 'autocratic system of foreign control'. It attempted to reduce the derision of the missionary in dress, travel and buildings, much to the derision of other missionary organisations. Funded mainly by voluntary donations, the CIM was largely dependent on maintaining its profile in Britain, Australia and North America in order to service its activities in China. By 1921 it was the largest Protestant missionary group there with over 1,000 missionaries from different countries and church organisations, spread wide throughout China and particularly in the peripheral provinces. (Yates 1994)

The CIM stations among the mountain peoples in Yunnan and Guizhou were initially at Zhaotong and Anshun. Even though they were relatively close, at five days walk, the missionaries would have reached their destinations by different routes, via Suifu (Yibin) or via Chungking on the Yangtze. There would have been little need for Zhaotong and Anshun to be in communication. Normally these missionaries would not work in close co-operation, even when from the same missionary society and in relatively

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close proximity. The CIM attracted men and women from a wide range of social and national backgrounds. Their commitment was expected to be simple and single-minded with the prime purpose of converting the people in China to Christianity. How this was achieved reflected the traditions of the individual missionaries as much as the organisation of the mission. (Alvyn 1986)

Samuel Clarke, W.S. Fleming and James Adam, from a Scottish Free Church tradition, were based in Guiyang and Anshun, whereas the Bible Christians from Cornwall and Devon, Frank Dymond, Samuel Pollard, Dr. Savin and Harry and Annie Parsons were sent to Zhaotong in Northeast Yunnan. Later Arthur Nicholls, a South Australian, went to Wuding to work among the Hua Miao. Originating in Devon, Cornwall and the Isle of Wight, among rural and mining communities, the Bible Christians movement was strongly independent and familiar with resistance and hostility. The administration was locally based, the ministry was itinerant and men and women were equally accepted at all levels of the organisation. As well as evangelisation for personal faith, they put emphasis on teaching and medical care. (Shaw 1965) The western missionaries were from close rural families, as adept at building and cultivation as at preaching. In 1907 the Bible Christians were incorporated into the United Methodist Church and missionaries from this larger and less fundamentalist organisation arrived in the area. Thus the early encounters with the Miao was largely between three independent missionary groups. After 1935 the Seventh Day Adventist mission evangelised among the Hua Miao competing for school students and teachers by financial incentives and adding division into a diverse society (Diamond 1996). It is probable that the differences between the Western missionaries were as great as between some of the Miao.

### THE ENCOUNTER

The actual encounter with the early missionaries might have been by chance, (Clarke 1911: 183, Pollard 1928: 22) and political conditions might also have been propitious. (Jenks 1994, Cheung 1995) But this must be set against the local conditions. Guizhou province had a turbulent history, being the centre of a drawn out civil war between 1859 and 1873. It was still recovering from the destruction to urban and rural areas, from the human losses from attacks and retribution, and from the renewed demand for land from the militia who had remained and settled in the area. Jenks and Cheung argue that there was a predisposition among the Miao of Guizhou to search out leaders, even military leaders, who apparently presented 'millennial' alternatives to their existing poverty. But in the light of events at P'anghai and later in Northeast Yunnan the changes in behaviour claimed by the Christian converts suggest differently, 'The men spoke of having been delivered from a great fear. In their old life the terror

of evil spirits and the consciousness of guilt gave them no peace and they were without strength and courage.’ (Pollard 1909: 71) It was into this area that the CIM missionaries ventured in the 1880s. No wonder that they had difficulties in establishing working locations, despite the legal support given to foreigners. The Han Chinese were hostile.

The first groups of Miao to be evangelised, the Heh-Miao, were not deliberately selected. In 1888 Samuel Clarke initiated a mission to ‘the aborigines’ from Anshun, an outpost of the mission to the Han Chinese in Guiyang, but only after the approval of the CIM. Permission was sought because the CIM’s principal aim was to evangelise the Han: the ‘aborigines’ had not come into their reckoning. The CIM missionaries in the Han cities of Guiyang and in Zhaotong had spent sixteen years evangelising with meagre results. When the non-Han responded positively to the foreigners’ message, this must have given a new vitality to a struggling mission. During this time Pollard had ventured among the Yi (Nosu) and travelled along the trade route between Zhaotong and Suifu, as had other travellers and explorers. (D’Ollone 1912) Missionary activity was then not possible among the hostile Yi, but Pollard had already considered the possibilities of work among non-Han peoples. This was, to some degree perhaps, fantasy, or a good yarn for readers in Britain: ‘Nosu-land was to me a kind of fairy-land in the far beyond, and I longed to make a trip into my Wonderland’ (Pollard 1909a); he was a missionary adventurer as well as evangelist.

As the missionaries travelled so they encountered different peoples, recorded various details about the groups and attempted to learn the languages of some. The mission centre at Shimenkan in northeast Guizhou, became the focus of contact with the Hua Miao, and from the centres at Ko’pu and Anshun the missionaries travelled among the Heh Miao and Chuan Miao. In the records of these journeys there are references to other groups, but because the Miao predominate, theirs has become the name which embraces all the mountain people in the encounter between missionary and highlander. It has become locked onto the ‘success’ stories of the mission, thereby creating the image, although the illustrations in Kendall (1949, 1954) include only six of Miao people and locations, the other eighteen are of Han people and landscapes and three are of Gopu.

The first Western Protestant missionaries in attempting to learn, write and translate the Miao languages as a means of proselytising, depended on Chinese-speaking Miao. One P’an Sheo-shan, a Heh Miao, assisted Clarke in Guizhou province until his murder in 1899. Other early contacts with the Hua Miao were through the Chinese converts, who were breaking from established Han tradition, not only by working with foreigners, but also by teaching the non-Han peoples. Stephen Li and his brother John, a literary graduate, established with Pollard a relationship whereby ‘the Western teacher looked upon my brother and me as his hands and feet. We loved each other with virtue and courtesy’ (Grist 1920: 109) and both were fully

acknowledged by Pollard as undertaking the lion's share of the translation of the New Testament, hymns and religious tracts. If not unique, these contacts were exceptional.

## THE NON-WESTERN MISSIONARIES AMONG THE HIGHLANDERS

Emerging from the detailed accounts of missionary lives among the Hua Miao are the stories of Chinese and Hua Miao who became missionaries in their own right, not only to the scattered Miao communities but also to other groups, Yi and Lisu. Their stories are as yet untold, but are equally part of the missionary interface with the highlanders. Han Chinese from Zhaotong were pivotal in the development of and translation to the Hua Miao language. They were acknowledged '... for the valuable assistance the Chinese brethren have given. In fact they have done the greater part of the work, the missionary being the overseers and assistants.' (Pollard 1905)

The missionary encounter was mediated by some Han Chinese, but it was also initiated by Miao themselves. The account of evangelisation in 1906 based in Sapushan, near Wuding in Yunnan, demonstrates that the Miao were great travellers over considerable distances and missionaries in their own right. Clarke describes how Hua Miao who had migrated to Wuding from a village near Shimenkan, since 1905 the main missionary centre near Zhaotong, heard of the social and religious transformations that had taken place among their kin. They wanted missionaries for themselves. Their requests for teachers and leaders were met by Hua Miao Christians, missionaries to their own people. In 1906, four Shimenkan Hua Miao went to Sapushan, with an Australian missionary who had learned some Hua Miao. This encounter was therefore principally between indigenous people. In 1910 Pollard wrote in a letter to London, 'make the Miao feel that the work is theirs and not a business run merely by foreigners,' and in 1907 'It is still our endeavour to make the whole church a missionary church with work done by the natives.' (Pollard 1907) There are many mentions in the diaries and books of villages where individuals were 'eager and unwearied' in teaching others prior to any contact with the Westerner. Clarke suggests that 'interest had spread beyond the control of the (Western) missionary' and there is ample evidence of indigenous evangelisation among all the mountain peoples. (1911: 191) The village chapels were self-financing, not an inconsiderable feat given the poverty of the communities. At the end of one gathering for baptism, 50,000 cash was given, equivalent to £100 in Britain of 1908. (Clarke 1911: 245) A detailed analysis of the available resources shows that the success of the Protestant missions to the Miao, Yi (Nosu) and later the Gopu was as much the result of the indigenous missionary and teaching activities as that of the foreigner. The texts which were available in Britain present the image of the missionary heroes. (Pyke 1915, Hayes 1930) However, the personal records from the missionaries

themselves stress the importance of the local leaders and Chinese scholars, which is lost in the stories for the Western readers.

Rather later, one such leader was Chu Huan Chang who started at Shimenkan primary school in 1915, who went on to Zhaotong middle school until 1925 and subsequently graduated from West China University in 1935. He represented the 'Aborigine Tribes of Kweichow' at China's First National Assembly in 1946, one of 1,747 delegates. (Hudspeth 1947) After the Western missionaries left in 1949, he continued as Headmaster of Sha Men Middle School at Shimenkan until he died during confinement. (personal correspondence 1995) 'In everything he not only shows sympathy with their great needs but also urges them to greater self-respect . . . There is now a great movement of social and spiritual uplift among the Miao and the fine resolutions concerning the emancipation of women are due to the high ideals of their leader.' (Hudspeth 1947)

In the 1940's a Western missionary in the Gopu area, west of Dong Chuan, came across Christian communities which had had no missionary contact for twenty five years. Adam was surprised at the existence of converts in villages never visited by westerners. Noteworthy too is the recent revival of Christianity in isolated communities after almost fifty years (Unger 1997). In unleashing such energies, the missionaries may have been more responsible for the emergence of indigenous identities, immediately or later, a matter discussed in depth by Diamond (1996). Similarly, the few accounts of events in the area of Shimenkan after 1950 suggest that the Miao leaders experienced great hardship as a result of their leadership (Parsons 1996).

The Bible Christian missionaries went to China under the auspices of the CIM. Although it was founded on the principles of voluntary funding and self-finance, the approach was also deeply rooted in the traditions of the Bible Christians, an independent, proselytising and conservative church. We may never know the connections between the growth of the indigenous Miao Christian movement and Bible Christian tradition; suffice it to say that the two were not alien. Pollard's summary in 1906 was indicative of the changing situation. 'There is no longer a tribal movement but a movement in a tribe which leads people to take sides. One part is on the side of Jesus Christ, the other sticks up for the old tribal customs in which drunkenness and immorality, twin demons, play such a large part . . . The success of the scholars in the schools has not failed to impress the heathen Miao who can neither read nor write'. The Christians had brought yet more division into an already fragmented society. One function of the Western missionary was as negotiator and mediator, with Yi landlords, with Han landowners and Han authorities, a necessary and practical role in a litigious society. Another was to challenge the *status quo*, turbulent as that was.

The residence and activities of these 'foreigners' attracted many people to the villages where chapels had been built. Curiosity to see the 'magic

lantern', an early slide projector, brought hundreds of highlanders together, which was perceived as a threat by the Yi landlords who were concerned at the movement of so many people. (Clarke 1911: 188) The pictures shown by the 'magic lantern' are not extant, but if they resembled the illustrations in the religious tracts, they were Western and focused on the dramatic events in the life of Jesus including betrayal and crucifixion. Although this is a speculation, the significance of these images for a people who lived with the aftermath of chronic unrest in Guizhou and of wanton banditry might have been more than the Westerner anticipated. Similarly, a favourite hymn for Miao Christians was 'There is a fountain filled with blood', language of significance in that society, particularly when converts were beheaded for their beliefs. (Clarke 1911: 196)

The extent to which the Miao were 'Westernised' by missionaries is difficult to identify, as no known records exist, but from sermons and diaries it is possible to identify the nature of some of the teaching they received from the Western missionaries. A sermon of 1911 discusses the need to adapt to their ways of life to gain respect from the Miao. There should be 'No Europeanising of the people but Christianising of them in their own environment.' (Pollard 1911) The Li brothers, the first translators, were educated within the traditional Chinese system, and John Li was a literary scholar in his own right. The first Miao graduates from Shimenkan school went to the West China University in Chengdu, a Quaker foundation, and returned to the area, Dr. Wu to Zhaotong hospital and Chu Huan Chang as headmaster of Shimenkan school. By 1949 approximately thirty Hua Miao students had graduated from university and many others had graduated from middle schools. Not all continued their association with the church as Christian belief was not a condition for progress in education. The contribution made by these Miao and Han leaders to the development of the Hua Miao script and subsequent translations of documents for Christian teaching has been acknowledged, but their impact on the encounter between Westerners and highlanders has been overlooked. This may say more about the Orientalist focus of the West than about the reality of the circumstances where different groups of peoples coexisted.

Literacy was central to the interests of the Hua Miao. At their first encounter with missionaries in 1904 they are reputed to have asked 'Who is this Jesu?' and 'Teach us to read'. The account of the development of the Pollard script for the Hua Miao language is well recorded, as is its revival since 1980. (Enwall 1993, Parsons 1996) A distinctive script which was easy to read became the catalyst for part of the Hua Miao encounter. The establishment of schools was central to the missionary enterprise, funded by the Miao themselves and staffed by Han and Miao. Secondary pupils studied both Hua Miao and Mandarin, the latter necessary to provide long-term opportunities for individuals and families. The success of the schools

was affected by the communities' well being, suffering severely during famines and conflict, yet many survived. After the Hui rebellion in Yunnan in the 1930's only five out of thirty schools remained in the Nosu area. (May 1954) Christian communities continued without any contact with western missionaries for 25 years and Miao Christians were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution yet in 1995, old hymn books in the Pollard script were carried to Miao churches by surviving men and women. The repercussions of the encounter persist. The survival and perhaps revival of the Pollard script is a case in point. Attempts to revise, disgrace and remove it since 1949 have been partially successful, but it persists. (Diamond 1996, Enwall 1993)

### **PERSISTING IMAGES FROM THE MISSIONARY RECORDS**

The representation of the Miao of Northeast Yunnan and Northwest Guizhou as presented in the known records are diverse and contradictory. Those who lived and worked among the people present a different impression from those who comment from the West. Broomhall prefaces Clarke's account for the British readership with such sentiments as 'God is pleased to reveal to babes things hidden from the wise and prudent'; and 'the Gospel among the humbler races of that great Continent', 'communities which a few years ago were ignorant, degraded and immoral, are now pure and Christian.' (Clarke 1911: v, vii) These contrast with Clarke's first-hand accounts which record the strength, stoicism and loyalty of the Miao, and with Pollard's

That these tribespeople have retained their separate existence for all these centuries refusing to be absorbed by the Chinese and quite free from cruel footbinding shows that under their meek subdued exterior there rest qualities . . . It is no discredit to them that they are landless any more than it is an honour to a millionaire to have bought and devastated a whole county for sporting purposes. (Pollard 1905)

Although these descriptions are couched in religious terms, they reveal underlying attitudes. Broomhall's preface reached the Western CIM audience, Pollard's was included in an internal report at the beginning of his life among the mountain peoples but later widely available through books and in later biographies. Similarly, the image presented of the Miao in Clarke's accounts record their strengths, stoicism and loyalties. When the early missionaries were travelling among the mountains, their lives depended on the knowledge, skills and hospitality of the mountain peoples. In contrast, the lives of the Miao were often threatened by their activities with the missionaries. Pollard's diaries describe the humiliation, torture and death meted out to the baptised and enquirers alike from Yi landlords who were afraid that 'they might learn more than was good for them.'

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(Clarke 1911: 272) There emerges a picture of mutual respect between Miao and missionary, risks being taken on both sides, but greater for the Miao. During the persecutions in Yunnan in 1900, the western missionaries were evacuated, the Miao remained, a pattern to be repeated in 1910 and 1950.

The images of the Hua Miao presented by Pollard differ from his personal experiences. 'We sat under the shade of the bank and ate cold turnip pasty washed down by cups of hot refreshing tea. Any Cornishman who has lived ten thousand miles away from home will know what my thoughts were as I sat by the river side eating my lunch and thinking.' (Pollard 1910) The ability to travel over rough ground on foot or by pony for long itineraries earned the westerners respect from the hardy Miao who are recorded as travelling for many days to a meeting place, and for miles for a single Sunday service. Physical stamina was a necessary part of life for all in the mountains and the missionaries had to measure up to the demands in order to work, particularly as itinerant preachers. Living with the dangers, and succumbing to them, earned them respect. (Grist 1920: 216) There were conflicts between the missionaries, not unexpected in such work, arising from their own traditions and perceptions. One might be scornful of poor scholarship among his peers, but did not fully recognise the contributions made by those missionaries of a more practical bent, such as footpath construction, water supply and building.

Anecdotes demonstrate the respect for some Hua Miao. The diaries recognise the skills of the Miao. 'Mr Peach . . . is a tenant farmer and a bee keeper. What he does not know about bees very few people in China know' (Pollard 1909) then recounts a story of his expertise. Similarly there is an understanding of the poverty and the subtle social patterns of their communities: 'There is a sturdy important race of people here in whose homes there are no forms, no chairs, no tables. The seat of honour is a bearskin on the earth floor.' (Pollard 1909) Yet he is not afraid to speak out against practices which contravene the moral codes of the new faith. The taking of a second wife (Grist. p. 217), the building of a brothel, a 'Magdalena's house' (Pollard 1909), and the use of alcohol and opium are all rejected as inappropriate for the new way of life.

## CONCLUSION

Pollard, Waters (Clarke 1911), Parsons and Adam record the lives of the mountain peoples in all its harshness. But to the western readers these generally unglamourised images may positively have embellished the images of the missionaries as heroes. Pollard's *Tight Corners in China* parades his adventures, in which the hardships are only softened by some touches such as 'a delicious cup of tea and tasty Devonshire cake were set before us by kind Mrs. Parsons' (Pollard 1909: 40). It was written for the

British audience and demonstrates Pollard's versatility as a writer. The readers see Yunnan and Guizhou as the backdrop for their heroes' escapades. Little did they know that Mrs Parsons was an eminently competent speaker of Hua Miao, was responsible for primary health care in the area around Shimenkan and her sense, sensitivities and good humour added immeasurably to the social welfare of women and families. (Parsons 1996)

The CIM pioneered the involvement of single women as missionaries who, with the missionary wives, made a contribution to changing the profile of women in China. The Han were suspicious of single women. However, the different social structure of the Hua Miao included the missionary women and enabled them to develop education and health care. When the Hua Miao themselves became missionaries to others, they went with their wives, who maintained their local identity through hair styles. This practice reflects the acceptance of women preachers in the Bible Christian tradition and highlights the subtle relationships between missionary society and tribal peoples. Similarly, the relationship was affected by the presence of the missionary families. Thus Pollard shares their human anguish and joys: at the death of the fourth baby of a Miao woman he comments, 'Even an aborigine woman in far west China knows what it is to ache with love for her children.' (Pollard 1910) When a football was introduced to a group of schoolboys he records the fun, the entertainment and the good humour, comparing it with 'tea fights' in his Cornish childhood. (Pollard 1910)

The connection between the Western Protestant missionaries and the Hua Miao, the place of Shimenkan, its schools, its leper hospital and eventually its graves has persisted. The most intensive period of engagement in Northeast Yunnan and Northwest Guizhou was limited however, to a mere twenty years after 1904. Samuel Pollard and James Adam died within a few months of each other in 1915 and Samuel Clarke in 1916, all within the region, all the pioneers of contacts with the Miao peoples of the region. Prior to Pollard's involvement with the Hua Miao his commitment was the evangelisation of the Han, based in Zhaotong, Yunnan. However, at the end of his life in 1914, Pollard stated categorically that 'the Chinese are the people we are among all the time and by means of the Miao or other tribes we shall reach them before too long.' (Pollard n.d.1:7) Despite eleven years of intensive living among the tribes, he persisted in the aim of converting Chinese. Pollard's commitment to the mountain people, and to the Miao in particular, is hardly in doubt; yet if his primary concern was for the Han, how might it have affected his relations with the Miao? In practice Pollard, Clarke and later W. Hudspeth were capable linguists and they agreed that 'Chinese is the pivot on which all hangs'. Not only was this language important for all residents in China, but co-operation with Han converts also gave the 'power of attracting the Chinese workers without whom the future

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of our work is insecure.’ (Pollard n.d:2) Underlying this theme is the suspicion that Pollard contributed to the process of sinicization. Yet his respect for Hua Miao qualities, and his contribution to the Hua Miao identity through devising a script, is evident throughout his diaries. If the focus is on the Hua Miao, it should not be forgotten that they were but one of many mountain peoples. And if the missionaries stories have evolved around a particular individual, almost to the point of hagiography, it should not be forgotten that he was but one of many missionaries from many places.

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**NOTES.**

- 1 Detailed accounts of individual missionary's lives are available in Grist (1920), Covell (1995) and Clarke (1911).
- 2 Diamond (1995) and Enwall (1993), among others have discussed the issue of identity of the Miao people in the region.

# Chapter Four



# Chapter Four

## The Karens: Loyalism and Self-Determination

*Clive Christie*

### COLONIALISM AND ANTI-COLONIALISM

When, after the Second World War, the Karen people of Burma put forward a claim for the creation of an autonomous Karen state separate from the rest of Burma, the then secretary of state for India and Burma, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, dismissed any such idea as ‘wholly contrary to (the) general world trend, and too retrograde to contemplate’.<sup>1</sup> The ‘general world trend’ referred to by the Secretary of State was the trend towards decolonization and the replacement of colonial by nationalist regimes. Nothing could illuminate more succinctly the reason why the British failed to take seriously the Karen demand for self-determination.



For those studying former colonial regimes, it has been customary to make a distinction between broadly-defined ‘colonial’ and ‘post-colonial’ eras, each with its dominating, all-pervading ‘world-view’. With the benefit of hindsight, however, it might perhaps make more sense to distinguish three rather than two eras: the colonial era; the anti-colonial era; and the post-colonial era. During the colonial era, colonial rule was so firmly embedded as an ineluctable part of the ‘order of things’ that even those who were intellectually opposed to colonialism found it difficult to imagine an alternative world-system. In the succeeding anti-colonial era, on the other hand, the process of decolonization was seen as inevitable – even, ultimately, by those who deplored the end of colonial rule and gloomily predicted a new dark age of anarchy and despotism. The post-colonial era is only just beginning to emerge, and its dominating world-view cannot be predicted.

In Southeast Asia, the dramatic transition from the colonial to the anti-colonial age took place during and immediately after the Second World War. Within a very short space of time after the end of the Second World

War, the colonial powers themselves accepted that decolonization was an inevitable historical process. Once this realization took root, it was only a matter of time before the colonial state was handed over to its nationalist inheritors. The main victims of this traumatic shift in the historical tide were the loyalist communities – such as the Karens of Burma – who had provided a mainstay for colonial rule in the previous era.

### LOYALISM AND COLONIAL RULE

Any colonial system depends on some form of indigenous ‘collaboration’. Collaboration, therefore, was an ubiquitous phenomenon of the colonial era. Whether through conviction, ambition, or force of circumstance, elements of the indigenous society lent support to colonial rule in a number of different ways. Village headmen, lower level officials, policemen, opinion formers in the press, trading middle-men and others all played an essential role in sustaining the colonial project.

‘Loyalism’ is an aspect of the general phenomenon of collaboration, but requires a more specific description. In essence, ‘loyalism’ is the adherence of a clearly-defined community in indigenous society to the colonial power, and the evolution of a special relationship between that community and the colonial power. In Southeast Asia, special relationships of this kind were formed in the colonial era for a number of reasons. In some cases, loyalist communities were created by the impact of colonial rule itself. The Eurasian communities throughout colonial Southeast Asia are an obvious example: while individual Eurasians may have adopted a range of political stances, Eurasians as communities supported, and indeed depended on, the maintenance of colonial power. Likewise, the so-called ‘Straits Chinese’ communities of the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang were created and sustained by the dynamic relationship between immigrant Chinese enterprise and British colonial rule.

Other loyalist communities were formed by groups in indigenous society who – for one reason or another – were persecuted by pre-colonial states. In this category can be placed the Christian community in Vietnam, and the small group of Karen Christians who converted to Christianity in the early part of the nineteenth century. The same inclination to affiliate with the incoming colonial power can be seen among many – though by no means all – of the peripheral minority groups at the edge of pre-colonial states, who were often despised, exploited and occasionally persecuted by those states. It is from this background that loyalist relationships developed between the French and the so-called Montagnards (hill-people) of the central regions of Indochina, and between the peripheral minorities of Burma and the British colonial government.

It can be seen, therefore, that loyalist communities ranged from the most advanced sections of colonial society to the most ‘primitive’.

These special relationships between loyalist communities and the colonial power were subsequently often reinforced in the colonial period by continuing missionary activity and, through the agency of this missionary activity, access to modern education. Over time, loyalist communities filled certain specific niches in colonial society – both in the economy and the administration – and often occupied what amounted to reserved jobs. Christian villages in the Dutch East Indies island of Ambon, for example, played a key role by providing recruits for the colonial army. In ‘primitive’ areas, the link between loyalist communities and the colonial power was further strengthened in many cases by the creation of special administrative regimes – the special French administrative regime in the Montagnard regions of Indochina, for instance, – which had the effect of insulating these regions from the rest of colonial society. More advanced loyalist communities would often be given special representation on advisory bodies in the colonial administration – as in the case of the Straits Chinese.

Colonial societies were rigidly stratified, with different communities playing separate and well-defined roles. The maintenance of separate identities and cultures in colonial society was, in fact, a vital part of the whole colonial project. Indeed, it could be argued that colonial societies were ‘multicultural societies’ *par excellence*, where diversity in the society concerned was controlled and orchestrated by an imported colonial administration. Clearly, loyalist communities were a vital part of this hierarchical structure.

### LOYALISM AND NATIONALISM

Almost without exception, the anti-colonial nationalist movements used the colonial state as the basis for their nationalist aspirations. In the case of Burma and Vietnam, this meant the reassertion of pre-colonial indigenous state identities. In the case of Malaya and Indonesia, however, it involved the creation of a new identity that was ultimately defined by the shape of the colonial state. In all cases, however, the colonial assertion of the *diversity* of colonial society was confronted by the nationalist assertion of an essential *unity* in this society. The nationalists, in other words, strove to overcome the divisions of colonial society and create a unified national identity that transcended race, class, religion or caste.

The rhetoric and the reality of nationalism threatened loyalist communities in two crucial ways. Clearly, it fundamentally threatened the exclusive and privileged relationship between themselves and the colonial powers. The rhetoric of nationalism, however, – which depended on the notion that it represented the whole colonial society – masked the fact that Southeast Asian nationalist movements generally were dominated by, and represented the viewpoint of, the majority ethnic group and the majority

religion in the respective colonial states. There could be little doubt, for example, that the Indonesian nationalist movement was dominated in ethnic terms by the Javanese, and in religious terms by Islam; or that the Burmese nationalist movement was dominated by the ethnic Burmese. For the loyalist communities, therefore, the victory of nationalism could only mean a transition from the status of a privileged to a subordinate minority.

Up until the beginning of the Second World War, however, the colonial system in Southeast Asia remained intact. It was the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia in December 1941 that began the fateful transition from the colonial to the anti-colonial era. The speed with which Japan smashed through British and Dutch defences showed once and for all that the European nations were no longer able to maintain their global imperial networks. Moreover, it was during the period of Japanese dominance in Southeast Asia – from early 1942 to mid-1945 – that the various nationalist movements of the region were able to take root in their various countries and build an ineradicable mass base. Not least significant was the fact that it was during the war that the concept of a new world order, based on the global right to national self-determination, became an international aspiration expressed in the Charter of the newly-created United Nations Organization.

In Southeast Asia, the Second World War saw the emergence in some areas of a confrontation between nationalist movements and loyalist communities: between the Karens and the Burmese nationalists, for example, and Christian Ambonese communities in Java and the Indonesian nationalists. While on the one hand the Japanese armed and trained nationalist military formations, many loyalist minority groups lent military support to the colonial powers: this is particularly true of the minorities of Burma, but also of the highland minorities of Indochina.

After the surrender of Japan, the stage was therefore set for a power-struggle between the nationalist movements and the returning colonial powers. Generally-speaking, – though to different degrees – the colonial powers *were* aware of the changed international mood, and accepted at least the principle of national self-determination. But they were nevertheless determined to control the political agenda, and the pace of moves to self-government. Once again, therefore, the colonial powers set out to emphasize the diversity of their colonial states, and the need therefore to evolve federal solutions that could take into account regional differences and separate communal rights: this is particularly evident in the post-war political plans of the French in Vietnam, and the Dutch in Indonesia. Protection of minorities, therefore, – including loyalist communities – became a key part of the immediate post-1945 colonial strategy.

After varying periods of confrontation – in Burma, the confrontation between Britain and the Burmese nationalists effectively lasted till mid-1946; in Vietnam, the French held out till 1954 – the colonial powers

realised that they were not only bound to concede self-government, but that they would have to accept a transfer of power on the nationalists' terms. Put simply, the nationalist movements were too deeply dug-in to be uprooted, except at a cost that was beyond the means or the inclination of European states that had been gravely weakened by war, and that had lost faith in themselves and in the colonial project as a whole.

With varying degrees of reluctance, the colonial powers now found themselves forced to negotiate with the nationalist movements. In effect, this negotiation took the form of a collaboration between the outgoing colonial power and the nationalist movements where, in return for the smooth transition of power in an intact colonial state, the colonial powers were able to retain residual influence and protect their residual interests. Although half-hearted attempts were made by the colonial powers to protect the interests of minorities – including loyalist communities – ‘realism’ was now the order of the day. The loyalist communities were left stranded by what appeared to be the inevitable tide of ‘progress’. The loyalists were left to their own devices: either to make an accommodation with the prevailing nationalist movement (the Straits Chinese of Malaya); or to assert their rights by rebellion (the Karens of Burma, and the Christian Ambonese of the South Moluccas); or to enter into a twilight world of semi-dissidence (the Montagnards of Vietnam).

#### **THE KARENS: FORMATION OF A LOYALIST RELATIONSHIP**

‘Karens’ is a general name given to a dispersed but linguistically related people living in the southeastern corner of Burma, and in the adjacent rugged region lying between Burma and Thailand, and across the border in Thailand itself. Linguistically, their languages have been defined as part of the Sino-Tibetan language family.<sup>2</sup> The Karens are divided into distinctive groupings, the largest of which are the Sgaw Karens (approximately half a million according to the 1931 census) and the Pwo Karens (approximately 400,000 according to the 1931 census), who mainly inhabit the plains areas in Southeastern Burma.<sup>3</sup> More difficult to classify exactly are the Karen communities living in the remote hill regions: in the colonial period, they were generally known as ‘Hill Karens’ or ‘Red Karens’ (Karen-ni).

Before the arrival of the British, the Karens lived dispersed in autonomous villages: there is little evidence to suggest that sustained political organization reached beyond the village level. The Karen nationalists’ view of their history is that the pre-colonial relationship between themselves and the Burmese kingdoms was one of unrelenting persecution, oppression and mutual hostility.<sup>4</sup> The close relations that the Karens speedily forged with the incoming British suggest that this assessment is substantially correct.

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The status of the Karens was transformed by two crucial developments in the nineteenth century. In the decade of the 1820s, the American Baptist Mission established itself in the Karen region, and was subsequently able to develop a highly successful religious and educational network in the Karen community.<sup>5</sup> In the same decade, border hostility erupted between the British in Bengal and the Burmese monarchy, and a war ensued that was ended in 1826 with a peace treaty in which Burma ceded the Tenasserim region to the British. With the British annexation of Tenasserim, the British came into direct contact with the Karens. In the ensuing wars between the British and the Burmese monarchy in 1852 and 1885, the Karen community lent vital support to the British war effort, and helped in the progressive consolidation of British rule. By the time that Burma as a whole was annexed by Britain as a province of British India in 1886, the special relationship between Britain and the Karens had been fully established.

Through this period and in the years to follow, missionary-based educational institutions helped to create a Christian Karen elite distinct from the Buddhist Burmese. In the classic pattern of loyalism, the Karen community as a whole filled a specialized and privileged niche in the colonial state. Karens formed the backbone of the locally-recruited Burma Rifles, and also played a major role in the police force. For their part, Karen women were concentrated in the areas of teaching, nursing and midwifery.<sup>6</sup> This sense of distinctiveness within the colonial state was reinforced by the establishment of writing systems for the two main Karen dialects – Sgaw and Pwo Karen – and the publication of dictionaries, grammars, Christian classics in translation, and periodicals.<sup>7</sup>

The Karens, however, could not be easily pigeon-holed as a community. In part, this was a result of the impact of colonialism itself. The new economic opportunities offered by the colonial economy acted as a magnet, both for the ethnic Burmese of Upper Burma as well as the Karens. As a consequence, there was a general population influx into the fertile region of the Irrawaddy Delta and the environs of Rangoon, where Karen settlements were interspersed with ethnic Burmese. While some of these Karen settlements (around 25 percent of the whole Karen population) retained their distinctiveness through their adherence to Christianity, others converted to Buddhism and – to a degree – assimilated into Burmese society. The core Karen area, however, remained the remote hill regions of Salween and Tenasserim, where the prevailing religion was animist. More remote still were the Karenni ('Red Karen') statelets wedged between British Burma and Siam (now Thailand). These Karenni statelets were technically not part of the Burmese state at all, but autonomous chiefdoms under the protection of Britain.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, despite the geographical dispersal of the Karen population and their divergencies of language, religion and levels of development, a distinct and self-conscious Karen identity emerged in the late nineteenth century. The most obvious

manifestation of this is the formation in 1881 of the Karen National Association, which was specifically designed to draw the 'whole race' (*Daw k'lu*) together, and at the same time promote and protect Karen interests within the colonial state.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the decades before the First World War saw the creation of the ingredients of a Karen national consciousness. Although the Karen National Association was specifically designed to link together all ethnic Karens irrespective of religious affiliation, it is clear that Christianity played a key role in defining Karen national identity. Not only was the newly-created Karen literature largely Christian in content, but Christian values served to distinguish the Karen people *morally* from the ethnic Burmese. The sense of a distinct Karen 'moral character' or 'national virtue' based on Christian ethics constantly recurs in Karen nationalism.<sup>10</sup>

This assertion of a Karen national identity was encouraged by some British officials and missionaries close to the Karens, particularly an Indian Civil Servant called Donald Mackenzie Smeaton. In his book *The Loyal Karens of Burma*, published in 1887, Smeaton not only emphasized the distinctive identity of the Karen people and their potential to become a powerful regional bulwark for the British Empire, but advocated the creation of a self-governing Karen region within Burma. Though this book and its ideas did not influence subsequent British policy, it had a significant impact on the Karen nationalist leaders of the twentieth century.

### THE KARENS AND BURMESE NATIONALISM

With the imposition of British rule, the ethnic Burmese lost their independence, their dynasty and even – since Burma was incorporated as a province into British India – their state. The modern Burmese nationalist movement that emerged at the end of the First World War, therefore, was not concerned – as were the nationalists of India and Indonesia – with forging a new national identity within the boundaries of the colonial state, but with the resuscitation of Burmese identity, along with its state, religion and culture. Burmese nationalism had a strongly ethnic tinge, and manifestations of Burmese nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s were directed against ethnic minorities in Burma as well as the British. It was not until the latter part of the Second World War that Burmese nationalism consciously tried to be inclusive, and appeal to all the peoples of Burma.

The fortunes of Burmese nationalism were, however, greatly aided by the link to British India. When, at the end of the First World War, the British responded to Indian political pressure by instituting elected provincial legislative councils, Burma – as a province of India – was belatedly included in this reform. Between 1923 and 1937, therefore, Burmese nationalist organizations were able to operate openly and legitimately within the

admittedly limited confines of a legislative council. Even after Burma was separated from India in the course of the 1930s, the 1935 Government of Burma Act created what could be described as a semi self-governing state, with an elected indigenous legislature, prime minister and cabinet, and with increasing opportunities for Burmese to participate in the civil administration. Ultimate sovereignty, however, and direct authority over 'reserved' matters such as defence and foreign policy, remained in the hands of the British-appointed governor beholden to the government in London. This system of government operated between 1937 and 1940.

Among the areas of government that were 'roped off' from the newly-created Burmese government – 'Ministerial Burma', as it was called – was the administration of the hill regions and minority areas. These regions were run by a separate Burma Frontier Service directly under the authority of the governor.<sup>11</sup> Under the 1935 Government of Burma Act referred to above, these minority regions were still kept separate from Ministerial Burma as 'Scheduled Areas'. Certain peripheral but slightly more economically developed minority areas were included in Ministerial Burma, but came under what was called the 'responsibility' of the governor: in effect, the governor's authority could override that of the Burmese ministers in these designated regions. It is clear that the colonial authorities had in mind some very long-term kind of evolution where, as the Scheduled Areas developed economically and matured politically, so they would gradually and step-by-step be integrated into mainstream Ministerial Burma.<sup>12</sup>

The problem for the Karens was that neither of these political developments – the creation of a semi self-governing Ministerial Burma, or the maintenance of 'Scheduled' minority areas – worked to their benefit. As has already been seen, the Karen population was widely dispersed. Leaving aside the remote Karenni states that were separately administered, the only Karen region that came within the Scheduled Areas administration was the relatively small Salween district. The bulk of the Karen population – including its educated leadership – lived in Ministerial Burma.

The Karens, therefore, found themselves trapped in a colonial state which was moving towards a system of self-government that would inevitably be dominated by the majority ethnic-Burmese. British attempts to allay Karen fears by creating a handful of 'special constituencies' that would represent the special interests of the Karen community in Ministerial Burma did nothing to stem the alarm of the Karen leadership. The fears of these leaders were succinctly expressed in a Memorial presented to the British government by the Karens in 1917. Burma, they argued, was being pushed towards a self-government for which it was not ready; creating self-governing institutions would merely mean the devolution of increasing measures of power to an ethnic-Burmese nationalist movement that had not had the time to evolve into a broadly-defined nationalist organization that

could represent the interests of the minorities. The Karens and other minorities would thereby be denied the right to their own political development, and would once again – as in the pre-colonial period – revert to the position of persecuted minorities in a ‘Burmese’ Burma.<sup>13</sup>

In a seminal book called *Burma under the Karens*, published in 1928, Dr. San C. Po (1885–1946), a leading spokesman for the Karen community, outlined the national aspirations of that community. He pointed out that the Karens had, under the welcome tutelage of British rule, developed a fully-fledged national consciousness. British political reforms and the creation of self-governing institutions in Burma had, therefore, had the inevitable effect of opening up an era of ethnic political competition between the Burmese and the Karens. San C. Po argued that, in these circumstances, the notion of a unitary state could not be maintained. Repeating the earlier advocacy of Donald Smeaton, San C. Po argued that growing inter-ethnic conflict could only be averted by the creation of a special Karen state within a federalized ‘United States of Burma’ that would reserve special homelands for the Arakanese and the Shans as well as the Karens. San C. Po pointed to the Tenasserim peninsula as the ideal base for this Karen homeland, where the Karens could establish regional autonomy, a privileged position in the administration, and the ability to develop politically at their own pace and without threat. Mutual agreements between the various states of the ‘United States of Burma’ over the treatment of their respective minorities would ensure the security of these minorities, but the final guarantee of stability would be provided by the umbrella of British rule.<sup>14</sup>

What San C. Po’s political programme illustrates very clearly is that, by the time of the Second World War, the Karens should not be seen merely as a loyalist group clinging to the skirts of British colonialism, but as a community with an educated leadership, a national consciousness and a national agenda.

### KARENS AND BURMESE: THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, Burma was on the road to self-government, but within the constraints of a programme and timetable that was firmly controlled by the British. In the years 1939–1940, however, a broad Burmese patriotic front was created that rejected any form of gradual transition to self-government, and demanded immediate independence from Britain. It is at this stage that the basis of a mass nationalist movement was formed that subsequently took root in Burma during the course of the Second World War.

Despite British efforts to suppress this manifest threat, not only to colonial rule, but also to the war effort, a small group of young and radical

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Burmese nationalists – which included Aung San – was able to establish contact with Japan. The Japanese military seized the opportunity to use this group as the nucleus of a so-called Burma Independence Army (BIA), which entered Burma with the invading Japanese army in early 1942, and which was entrusted by the Japanese with the tasks of ‘mopping up’ and providing the grass-roots basis for a Japanese military administration.

It is at this stage – in early 1942 – that ethnic hostility between the Burmese and the Karens reached its fateful climax. Karen units in the Burma Rifles had played an important role in the defence of Burma against the Japanese. After the comprehensive British defeat in Burma, however, many Karen troops returned to their villages. Here they and their Karen compatriots confronted the incoming Burma Independence Army – undisciplined, flushed with victory, and vengeful. There then followed a series of prolonged pogroms directed against the Karen community in areas as far apart as Myaungmya in the western Irrawaddy Delta and the Salween district (especially the town of Papun) on the eastern frontier.<sup>15</sup> This savage period of inter-ethnic hostility, which was in the end brought to a halt by the Japanese army itself, gave the Karens all the evidence they needed of what life would be like in a Burma where Burmese nationalism had unrestricted control.

Thereafter, between mid-1942 to mid-1943, the Burmese moved towards a limited independence, where Burmese government institutions were established, but where in fact the Japanese military retained a large measure of control. Although much of the rhetoric of this new independent regime was emphatically ethnic Burmese in tone, a belated effort was at least made to patch up relations between the Burmese and the Karens. Ethnic Karens were appointed to administrative positions in Karen majority areas, and Karen units under Karen leadership were incorporated into the army of the independent Burmese state, now called the Burma National Army (BNA), and headed by Aung San.<sup>16</sup>

These belated moves of conciliation, however, could not alter the catastrophic deterioration in Karen-Burmese relations brought about by the events of the Second World War. Moreover, at the very time that Karen-Burmese hostility was deepening, the war was forging ever closer bonds between the British and the Karens. Some Karen units of the Burma Rifles had retreated with the British across the border into India, and were subsequently to play a vital part in the so-called ‘Chindit’ guerilla operations behind Japanese lines in Burma in 1943 and 1944.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, gallant if ultimately unsuccessful attempts were made from India to establish guerilla networks in Karen areas in the remote hill country of southeastern Burma.<sup>18</sup> Finally, when the British in 1945 were completing their counter-attack against the Japanese in Burma by a campaign designed to take Rangoon, they used ‘Karen Levies’, hastily recruited in the hill areas between the south Shan region and Tenasserim, to

block any attempt by the Japanese to bring reinforcements from the east into Lower Burma.<sup>19</sup>

While this close military bond was flourishing between the Karens and the British, however, a mass nationalist movement was taking root throughout Burma. Through 1944 and early 1945, Aung San headed the Burma National Army (BNA), which was ostensibly committed to supporting the Japanese war effort: at the same time, he secretly patched together an anti-Japanese political movement which was eventually called the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (AFPFL). In the spring of 1945, Aung San turned the BNA against the Japanese, and provided useful military aid for the invading British Empire troops of Southeast Asia Command. After the reconquest of Burma, the new British Military Administration (BMA) strongly distrusted Aung San; but it soon discovered that the Burma National Army and the AFPFL were the key to peace and order in the Burmese hinterland, and that the effectiveness of its administration depended heavily on Aung San's support.

#### **BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS BURMA: MAY 1945 TO END 1946**

Generally speaking, the year 1945 was for Britain the vital transitional year in Asia between the 'colonial' and the 'anti-colonial' eras. There were a number of contributing factors to explain this sudden transformation. At the global level, as has already been noted, 'self-determination' was accepted – however vaguely – as a universally applicable principle. Even if empires continued to exist, therefore, they had effectively lost legitimacy as permanent institutions. At the regional level of Southeast Asia, the United States made clear by its policies in Indochina and Thailand in particular that its vision of the post-war world was essentially anti-colonial. At the national level, Labour's victory over the Conservatives in July 1945 opened the way for a more radical policy towards the Empire that would accommodate the anti-colonial ethos. In Burma itself, the practicalities of administering a war-torn, anarchic region forced many in the British Military Administration to conclude that Burma would simply be ungovernable without nationalist cooperation: and that, therefore, like it or not, the British would have to reach some kind of deal with Burmese nationalism.

If fundamental change was ultimately required in Burma, however, Britain was at this stage determined to maintain control over the political agenda and the timetable of that change. Britain's policy for post-war Burma was embodied in a White Paper published in May 1945. This provided for the suspension of the pre-war 1935 constitution for a period of three years, during which time the governor would administer Burma directly. After this period, the 1935 constitutional provisions would again operate a system of self-government under British tutelage. At the same

time, however, gradual steps would be taken to move towards 'full and complete self-government within the British Commonwealth'; Burma, in other words, would ultimately become a 'Dominion' like Canada or Australia.<sup>20</sup>

As far as the minority regions or 'Scheduled Areas' were concerned, British policy-makers made clear towards the end of the war that the minorities had earned a 'double claim' to special consideration: because of the invaluable help that they had lent the British during the war, and because of their backward conditions. The new policy therefore ensured the continuation of a special British administrative regime in the hill areas 'until such time as they (the minorities) are in a position to associate on more equal terms and until their people are willing to accept some suitable form of incorporation into that wider Burma polity, which is their natural ultimate destiny'.<sup>21</sup> It was clear, therefore, that while the British wished to give Burma's peripheral minorities the right to choose the *mode* and the *timing* of their eventual full incorporation into Burma, they were ultimately committed to the policy of merger between the ethnic Burmese regions and the minority regions.<sup>22</sup>

In October 1945, the governor, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, set about the task of implementing British policy. What rapidly became apparent thereafter, however, was that Britain no longer had the means or perhaps even the will to control the political agenda in Burma. In the first place, Aung San could neither be ignored nor by-passed: he dominated a huge mass nationalist movement – the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League – and what amounted to a private militia: the Peoples' Volunteer Organization (PVO), formed from the former Burma National Army. The PVO was well-armed and, in conjunction with the AFPFL, controlled nearly every facet of Burmese life. The only way that the nationalist challenge from Aung San could have been dealt with would have been the use of massive military force: given the fact that India itself was moving towards independence, the Indian Army was now no longer available for its traditional task of policing the British Empire. In any case, the imminent independence of India raised the whole question of the desirability of trying to cling on to Burma – with all the potential cost and loss of life that this might have involved – given the fact that the main value of Burma for Britain had been as a strategic adjunct to India.

Dorman-Smith's inability to implement British policy had become clear by the spring of 1946. In the summer of 1946, he was replaced by the more flexible Major-General Sir Hubert Rance. Rance quickly realized that no political programme could progress without the cooperation of Aung San and his AFPFL movement. The price that Aung San demanded for his cooperation, however, was the abandonment of the whole White Paper policy of 1945 – with its plan for a gradual evolution from governor's rule to semi self-government and, finally, full self-government – and its

replacement by a British commitment to grant virtually immediate independence to Burma in a context that would effectively ensure AFPFL political dominance in the transitional period from colonial rule to independence.

By the end of 1946, Britain was coming round to the realization that it really had no option but to accept Aung San's terms. From this period on, we see a dramatic turnaround in British policy. Whereas beforehand the British had tried to by-pass Aung San's movement, we now see what is in effect a collaboration between Britain and Aung San to ensure a smooth transition of power, where on the one side residual British interests would be protected, and where on the other more radical anti-Western Burmese nationalists – the communists in particular – would, by mutual consent between the British and Burmese leaders, be edged out of the political process.

#### THE NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF THE KARENS: MAY 1945 TO END 1946

The anti-Karen pogroms of 1942 created a lasting mistrust between the Karen and ethnic Burmese communities in Burma. This state of tension was heightened at the end of the war by the fact that Burma – as a front line in the Second World War – was awash with arms, and that the normal constraints of law and order had broken down. The months immediately after the end of the war saw a state of continuing high tension between the two ethnic groups, particularly between Burmese villagers and Karen police.<sup>23</sup>

Given this background, it is not surprising to find that the Karen reaction to Britain's Burma policy as outlined in May 1945 was unenthusiastic. In the first place, most Karens lived in Ministerial Burma, as defined by the 1935 Government of Burma Act: they were therefore still to be included within a Burma that was destined to eventual self-government. More profoundly, however, there was now – as a consequence of the events of the war – an overwhelming desire on the part of the Karen community to have the protection of their own self-governing state, and a refusal to consider a prospective future as a minority in an ethnic Burmese-dominated Burma.

Between 30 June and 5 July 1945, a mass meeting of Karens was held in newly-liberated Rangoon. Its principal demand was for the creation of a new political entity to be called the 'United Karen Frontier States', which would include the whole of Tenasserim, Salween District, adjacent parts of Ministerial Burma where there was a substantial Karen population – and even the Karen-populated parts of the border regions of eastern Thailand.<sup>24</sup> (The question of the relationship of these 'United Karen Frontier States' and the Karenni states was, for the time being, left in abeyance.) This new Karen region was to be administered separately under the direct authority of the

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governor 'until our people are willing to accept some form of incorporation (into Ministerial Burma)'.<sup>25</sup>

These demands were embodied in a 'Humble Memorial of the Karens of Burma' that was sent to the British secretary of state for Burma on 26 September 1945. In effect, it was an assertion of the right to national self-determination within the context of a loyalist polity. This national strategy combined a desire to maintain the British imperial link with a determination to create a Karen homeland administratively separate from what might be called 'Burmese Burma'. The kind of constitutional link that this Karen homeland could develop with a self-governing Burmese Burma was to be a matter for future negotiation: the immediate concern of the Karen leadership was to secure a right to self-determination so that they could 'peacefully develop as a separate independent people' and realize their 'national ideals'.<sup>26</sup>

This demand for a separate Karen homeland was reiterated by a mass meeting of Karens held at Toungoo between 25 and 27 April 1946, where it was further requested that the 'form of government' granted to the Karens should not be 'lower than that given to the Burmese'. This, then, was not so much a demand that the Karens should be put under a special protective regime by the British in the manner of their administration of the other minority areas: rather, it was the assertion of an equal but distinctive national and political status to that of the ethnic Burmese. Its fundamental premiss was that ethnic hostility made it impossible for the Karen people as a whole to share a self-governing state with the Burmese: the only way to prevent ethnic conflict, therefore, was if 'the Karens and Burmans are given distinct separated territories'.<sup>27</sup>

In essence, this plan followed the policy advocated by Donald Smeaton in 1887 in his book entitled, *The Loyal Karens of Burma*, and by Dr. San C. Po in 1928 in his book, *Burma and the Karens*. Indeed, in December 1945, the elder statesman Dr. (now Sir) San C. Po himself wrote to the governor, urging the creation of an autonomous Karen state, within the context of a loosely-federated 'United States of Burma'.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that the Karen leadership advocating a Karen self-governing state were fully aware that such a state could not include all the Karens of Burma, and that a substantial Karen minority would be left in the ethnic Burmese majority regions. Their principle aim was to create a legitimate, self-governing and viable homeland: only under such circumstances could the Karens have the security and the self-confidence to negotiate a political settlement with the Burmese.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the objectives of the Karens were ultimately perfectly clear, their timing and their tactics were at fault. They promoted these demands through the period mid-1945 to mid-1946: precisely the time that the British were gradually coming to the realization that they had lost control of the political agenda in Burma. Despite the fact

that the Karen demand for self-determination was entirely in keeping with the 'anti-colonial' ethos of the times, their political tactics remained essentially loyalist. In July 1946, a Karen delegation was sent to London to press their case: but their 'good manners' and reliance on traditional links simply meant that their voice was ignored.<sup>29</sup> Put crudely, what the new politics of the anti-colonial period really required was a credible threat by the Karens that any attempt to force them into a united Burma would have involved a level of disruption and violence that neither the British nor the new Burmese state would have been able to handle. In other words, it would have involved a Karen confrontation with Britain: something that was – given the loyalist relationship – unthinkable for the Karen leaders.

### THE MOMENT OF TRANSITION IN BURMA: DECEMBER 1946 TO JANUARY 1947

By the time that a Burmese nationalist delegation arrived in London in January 1947 to negotiate the terms of Burmese independence, the British had already abandoned their previous policy of gradual moves to self-government.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the talks between the Burmese nationalist leaders and the British government, Britain had effectively handed over power to Aung San and the AFPFL. Burma was to become independent within a year, and Aung San and the AFPFL were to govern Burma in the interim via their dominance of the governor's Executive Council. In this interim period, an elected Constituent Assembly would decide the shape of the future independent Burma.

So far as the minority regions were concerned, the all-important point was that they now no longer had the option of deciding *when* or, indeed, *whether* to join in with Ministerial Burma. The framework of an independent and unified Burma had already been agreed in advance between the Burmese and the British in January 1947. The wording of this agreement talked of the need 'to achieve the early unification of the Frontier Areas and Ministerial Burma *with the free consent of the inhabitants of those areas*'.<sup>31</sup> Given the fact that the wishes of the minorities did not have to be met before Britain finally gave independence to Burma, the term 'free consent' was, of course, misleading and mendacious. The Kachin, Shan and Chin minority leaders quickly realized that they would have to use the interim period before independence to get what deal they could from the Burmese nationalists, and that they would now have to rely on the statesmanship of the Burmese leaders rather than on the protection of the British.<sup>32</sup>

Luckily for the minorities (and, indeed, for the British), the Burmese leaders were at this crucial stage anxious to be as accommodating as possible to the wishes of the minorities – within the limit of preserving the unity of the Burmese state. With encouragement from the British, an

agreement was reached at a meeting in Panglong in February 1947 between minority and Burmese leaders, which included the statement that 'full autonomy in internal affairs for the Frontier Areas is accepted in principle'. With some territorial adjustments, provision was made for the creation of autonomous Shan and Kachin regions 'within a unified Burma'.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, in the constitution of Burma that was finally hammered out before independence in January 1948, these Shan and Kachin states were granted internal autonomy, and were given guaranteed representation in the legislative and executive branches of the Burmese government. In a further concession, the Shan State was given the right to secede from the Union of Burma after the elapse of ten years.

### THE KARENS FROM 1947 ONWARDS: LOYALISM, SELF-DETERMINATION AND ETHNIC POLITICS

For the Karens, the January 1947 agreement between Burma and Britain was a decisive blow to their demand for self-determination. From the outset they vigorously challenged the new independence agreement. In the course of January and February 1947, both the Karen Central Organization – the main political voice of the Karens, to be superseded later in the year by the Karen National Union – and the Karens of the Salween region made it clear that they would not accept any agreement that had been reached over the heads of the Karen community.<sup>34</sup> In the period after the conclusion of the January 1947 independence agreement, the Karen nationalist leaders generally followed a policy of abstentionism. They refused to participate in the Panglong Conference (referred to above) of February 1947, or the subsequent Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry of March-April 1947, which had been set up to examine the question of ensuring proper minority representation in the Constituent Assembly that was imminently to be elected. Such a policy of abstentionism is the classic tactic of political or ethnic groupings which feel that the tide of events is running inexorably against them. As has so often proved to be the case elsewhere, this policy was counterproductive, since it merely made it easier for the British and Burmese policy-makers to by-pass Karen protests and claims.

At this crucial stage, Karen difficulties were magnified by an implacable problem that had always confronted Karen demands for self-determination. This was the fact that the Karen population was widely scattered: indeed, a majority of Karens lived outside the Karen heartland area in and around the Karenni states and Salween district. Although the Karen political leaders were more than ever determined in 1947 to push forward for the creation of an autonomous or even fully independent state, they were acutely aware of the fact that any such state could never include the large Karen minority in 'Burmese Burma'.

As a result of this fundamental dilemma, Karen demands in 1947 tended inevitably to dither between the assertion of Karen independence, and a more complex arrangement that would protect the Karen minority in Burma proper. In late February 1947, a Karen plan was put forward that was intended to satisfy Karen aspirations for self-government, while at the same time protecting Karen minorities in a future independent Burmese state. This would have involved the creation of an autonomous Karen state, but one that would be anchored in a united Burma; it would also, however, have ensured a guaranteed level of Karen representation in the central legislative and executive bodies of independent Burma, and – most significantly – the maintenance of separate Karen units in the independent Burmese army. This latter stipulation was, of course, ultimately the most effective guarantee of Karen security and interests in a future independent Burma.<sup>35</sup>

The Karens of the Salween region, on the other hand, were mainly concerned to ensure at all costs the right to Karen sovereignty in their own state. A Karen plan of June 1947 – put forward by the Karens of the Shwegyin region near Salween – called for the creation of an autonomous Karen state with only very loose links to a Federal Burma; a guarantee that this Karen state could maintain a direct link with Britain; and the option, after a ‘trial period’, of complete separation from Burma – in other words, the partition of Burma.<sup>36</sup>

The apparent diversity and inconsistency in the Karen position in early to mid-1947 suggested to outsiders that the Karen community was divided over its national objectives. This appearance of Karen confusion was, of course, used by those who opposed Karen national aspirations – or wished to minimize the importance of those aspirations – to suggest that the Karens as a whole did not know their own minds, and were politically naive and immature. This made it all the more easy for both Burmese and British leaders to stall Karen demands in the months before independence.

Perhaps because of this, through June, July and August 1947, as the date for independence inexorably approached, Karen militancy significantly increased. During this period, the Karen leadership of the main organization – the Karen National Union – appeared to be moving towards a demand for what would have amounted to de facto partition between a Burmese Burma and what was colloquially called – based on the Pakistan model – ‘Karenistan’. This Karenistan would have been fully self-governing, though there was at this stage some debate as to whether it should retain some residual federal links with Burma.<sup>37</sup> It was also evident at this time that the Karens were preparing, if need be, to back up their demands with force. The fact that the Karen villages were well-armed, and that the Karens still dominated the armed forces of Burma, meant that this was no idle threat.

In the autumn of 1947, however, the Karen crisis, which had seemed in the summer to be drifting towards outright civil war, gradually cooled off.

## *The Karens*

This was in large part due to the belated, last-minute exercise of British influence. Crucially, the Karen leadership were reluctant even at this late stage of British rule, to confront the British, and were moreover prepared to accept British mediation and advice.<sup>38</sup>

For their part, British officials – even those who were sympathetic to the aspirations of the Karens – had since the end of the Second World War consistently rejected the idea of any ‘Karenistan’. While some felt that the idea of a separate Karen state was simply not a pragmatic possibility, given the territorial and economic intermingling between Karens and ethnic Burmese,<sup>39</sup> the main British objection to any such idea was the enormous disruption that the implementation of partition would cause to the otherwise relatively smooth transfer of power from the colonial state to the Burmese nationalists. British officials, therefore, bent all their efforts to persuading the Karens to accept the idea of an autonomous but not independent Karen state that would include the Karenni states, Salween, and adjacent areas of Ministerial Burma that had a Karen majority.<sup>40</sup>

Given the influence that Britain could still command over the Karens, and the fact that the Karens themselves ultimately flinched from the desperate step of disrupting Burma by using the armed force that they had to hand, some form of last-minute settlement between the Karens and the Burmese was inevitable. The first clear sign of this came in September 1947 when the Karenni chieftains, who had up till then been waiting to see the outcome of Karen demands for self-government, agreed to join the Union of Burma as an autonomous ‘Karenni State’ with roughly the same rights that had been gained by the Shan State.<sup>41</sup> During this period, it was also agreed that the constitution of the Union of Burma should provide for a temporary arrangement, which would involve the installation of a special Karen region with limited powers of autonomy called ‘Kaw-thu-lay’, along with a Karen Affairs Council, headed by a Minister for Karen Affairs, which would oversee the interests of both the Karen region and the Karen community in Burma generally. This temporary arrangement was to remain in place while a Special Commission would examine the question of creating a proper Karen State along the lines of the Shan State: the scope of the territory, powers and rights of this Karen State was to be determined by the Commission.<sup>42</sup>

These temporary arrangements hastily patched together before Burmese independence in January 1948 meant that the unresolved Karen question was temporarily ‘kicked into touch’. This, and the crucial fact that the Karens still retained a commanding position in the Burmese army, ensured that the Karen community did not cross the line into rebellion in late 1947 and early 1948. Moreover, the fact that these Karen units in the Burmese army played a decisive role in containing a whole range of rebellions, ethnic and communist, that broke out almost immediately after Burma became independent, served to delay – for a while at least – the unfinished matter of Karen-Burmese relations.

But the inter-ethnic conflict between the Karens and Burmese had only been delayed, not resolved. With the removal of the British presence, Karen rebellion was only a matter of time. At the grass-roots level, in the hinterland of Lower Burma, inter-ethnic hostility and violence seethed beneath the surface in 1947 and 1948, and eventually burst out into the open in late 1948. In early 1949, the Karen rebellion began: a rebellion against ethnic Burmese rule that has effectively continued ever since.

### THE ANTI-COLONIAL ERA AND THE VOICE OF THE KARENS

In January 1946, the Governor of Burma, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, suggested that the logic of the new anti-colonial era should, in justice, be applied to the Karens as well as the ethnic Burmese:

It is argued (by the Karens) that the Burmese have no greater claim to dominance over the Karens than we have to dominance over the Burmese. The case is precisely similar – the Burmese conquered the Karens and we have conquered the Burmese. If, therefore, modern internationalism demands that we give the conquered Burmese their freedom, by the same token Burmese must grant the conquered Karens their freedom.<sup>43</sup>

The reason why such an inherently logical position was not, and could not be implemented, was not simply because of the demographic dispersal of the Karens: there was, after all, a clearly-defined Karen homeland that could have been given self-government by the British, and could have formed a haven of last resort for the Karens in 'Burmese Burma'. Far more compelling was the implicit pact formed in this new anti-colonial era between the outgoing colonial power and the incoming nationalist movement that was determined at all costs to inherit the colonial state intact.

As has already been seen, pacts of this kind were made throughout Southeast Asia after 1945. They were made all the more firm in the 1940s and 1950s by the mutual interest of the West as a whole and the nationalist movements of Southeast Asia to prevent communist infiltration of the region. During the Cold War era of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, it became a received wisdom of the United States and the West that the disintegration of the states of Southeast Asia would almost certainly be successfully exploited by international communism, particularly those communist movements that were influenced by 'Red' China.

In this new anti-colonial era, the Karen community, a loyalist pillar of the former colonial era, became something of an embarrassment, and their stated aspirations were seen as an anachronism and a nuisance. As Burmese independence approached in late 1947, even the British Conservatives, who opposed the idea of granting immediate independence to Burma, tended to

see the Karens, not as a people whose rights to self-determination should be supported, but as the inevitable victims of an era of headlong change which, though it would bring to Burma 'dictatorship, armed struggle for power, financial difficulties (and) revolt by minorities', could not in the end be halted.<sup>44</sup>

In face of the wider world situation, and of Britain's own 'realpolitical' determination to accommodate to the new international climate, the voice of the Karens was ignored.

When a colonial state – or indeed any other state – wishes to prescribe for a dependent people a political future that is directly opposed to that people's wishes, it is always highly convenient to suggest that those people are not sufficiently politically developed to know their own 'real' interests. This is generally the line that the British took with the Karens in 1947. It was in order to counter this patronising viewpoint that the main Karen nationalist organization, the Karen National Union, sent a revealing message to Reuters Newsagency on 25 June 1947. In this, the KNU sought to refute the convenient notion that the Karens were hopelessly divided – between language groups, religious affiliations, or the 'advanced' Karens of Lower Burma and the 'primitive' hills-people in the Salween region. The message to Reuters pointed out that the hill-country Karens had fought during the Second World War, not just for the British, but for themselves and their own rights: in other words, 'they knew what they were fighting for'. They, and the rest of the Karen community, were not 'stupid, disinterested spectators of (their) own destiny', nor were the Karens 'a tangled disunited aimless minority divided and sub-divided into dissenting sections':

. . . no matter whether a Karen lives in the mountain or in the plains, whether Animist, Buddhist, Christian or otherwise, whether from whatsoever tribe, Sgaw, or Pwo, White, Red or Black Karen – A KAREN IS A KAREN: one in blood brotherhood; one in sentiment; one in adversity and one mass of a Karen nationhood.<sup>45</sup>

Despite obvious practical difficulties, the aspirations of the Karens were in fact perfectly coherent. They were best embodied in a pamphlet written by the Karen barrister Saw Po Chit, and entitled *Karens and the Karen State*.<sup>46</sup> In this, Saw Po Chit elaborates on the fundamental points in favour of Karen self-determination made in succession by Donald Smeaton, San C. Po and the Karen Memorial of September 1945. He argued that the geographical shape of the colonial state should not, in justice, be allowed to pre-determine the geographical shape of the post-colonial polities that would emerge in the process of decolonization. While the Karens had been prepared to share a state with Burma so long as that state was dominated by the British, they could not tolerate the idea of existing as a minority under Burmese rule.<sup>47</sup>

From a different perspective, but making essentially the same fundamental point, Saw Po Chit argued that democracy – which, along with nationalism, formed the basis of the new anti-colonial era of self-determination – could not operate in a state dominated by ethnic confrontation. In the context of Burma, such ethnic confrontation would simply mean that the interests and aspirations of the ethnic majority – the Burmese – would permanently suppress the interests and aspirations of the minority Karens.<sup>48</sup> It was for this basic reason that the Karens required their own independent state ‘with full control finally of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Communications, Customs, Currency and Exchange’.<sup>49</sup> This state would be prepared to consider some form of constitutional federation with ‘Burmese Burma’; but only *after* Karen sovereignty had been assured, with appropriate reciprocal arrangements protecting the minorities of both states.<sup>50</sup>

In essence, ‘Karenistan’ would have been no more capable of including all Karens within its borders than Pakistan was capable of containing all South Asian Muslims. But this was not the point. The primary role of a Karenistan would have been as a haven, a ‘homeland’ for Karens, where guaranteed Karen sovereignty could have assured ultimate safety for the Karen people.

In the light of the manifest failure of the Burmese state since independence, and the abysmal fate of the Karen people under Burmese rule, speculation about the ‘viability’ of an independent Karen state must seem absurd. But – strangely enough – the ‘anti-colonial’ mentality still continues to dominate thinking about the Karens and Burma. In 1987, in the most authoritative book on the politics of modern Burma, *The State in Burma*, Robert Taylor virtually suggests that ‘Karen’ identity was a convenient myth created by the colonial state. This is a classic line of thinking of the anti-colonial era, and it is scarcely helpful in explaining why the ‘Karens’ have for decades fought and suffered so doggedly for what is apparently a purely hypothetical identity.<sup>51</sup> Even in 1997, a piece of ‘investigative’ journalism which appeared on 19 July on BBC 2, entitled ‘Who Really Killed Aung San?’, echoed the traditional prejudices of the anti-colonial period. One of the central assumptions of this programme, and of the accompanying article written by Fergal Keane in *The Guardian* on the same date, was that the Karens had somehow been deliberately ‘detached’ from their natural links with the ethnic Burmese by a colonial conspiracy. Such a notion that Karen aspirations were ‘manipulated’ by the colonial power takes no account whatever of the viewpoint – clearly expressed over the decades – of the Karens themselves.<sup>52</sup>

Clearly, we will have to wait for the genuine emergence of a ‘post-colonial’ era before a true evaluation of Karen history and aspirations can be made.

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# Chapter Five

Map 12 The Central Highlands in Vietnam



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## Chapter Five

# Sedentarization and Selective Preservation among the Montagnards in the Vietnamese Central Highlands<sup>1</sup>

*Oscar Salemink*<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

In December 1990 I arrived in Vietnam to do ethnographic fieldwork in the Central Highlands, after years of mainly historical research. The research took place in the provinces of Gialai-Kontum and Lam Dong. I held formal interviews with high-ranking provincial cadres within the State, the Party and the mass organizations, as well as with private persons, mainly of ethnic minority descent. After some waiting and negotiating I was permitted to work in villages in the districts of Kontum and Ayun Pa in Gialai province, and in the districts of Di Linh and Bao Loc in Lam Dong province, and conduct interviews with villagers.

In this paper I describe some of the research results. In particular, I focus on two of the key aspects of Vietnam's ethnic policy in the Highlands, i.e. the sedentarization policy and the policy of selective preservation. Thus, this paper is at the intersection of a number of related, sometimes conflicting discourses and policies concerning Vietnam's Montagnards.<sup>3</sup> It is about 'New Economic Zones' and traditional landrights. It is about sedentarization of 'semi-nomadic' people. It is about feasting and wasting valuable resources. It is about religious freedom and eradication of superstition. It is about culture and folklorization of culture. It is about 'ethnic solidarity' (*đoàn kết dân tộc*) and paternalism.

The Central Highlands of Vietnam have been ravaged by three Indochina Wars and have known armed resistance against the communist regime until 1992.<sup>4</sup> It is also an area which was linked to Vietnam, disjoined and again linked to Vietnam in colonial times as a result of conflicting claims and strategic considerations, resulting in different conceptions of ethnic and national identity.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I shall use the 'official' ethnic labels used by the present government. This does not mean that I take ethnic labels for granted; indeed, in my previous publications I have used the terms tribalization and ethnicization to denote the processes by which culturally

and linguistically heterogeneous, indigenous populations were identified and made to identify themselves as tribes and ethnic groups. Nor do I take the 'perennial antagonism' for granted that mostly French and American anthropologists have assumed to exist between Kinh (ethnic Vietnamese) and Montagnards; this was to some extent a (neo-)colonial creation which was partly realized through decades of foreign intervention (see Salemink 1991a; Salemink 1995a). In other words, my definition of ethnicity would be situationalist rather than primordialist, to borrow the terms used by David Brown (1994: xi–xxi). Official Vietnamese ethnic classification, however, is definitely primordialist; and because it is in a position to impose its ethnic categories on the Highland population, it is sufficiently relevant to take into account.

Whereas the analysis offered here is critical of certain aspects of Vietnamese policy in the Central Highlands, I do not claim that it differs much from ethnic policies in other countries of Asia, Africa, the Americas, or Europe. This in itself is remarkable, given the history of violence and foreign intervention in Vietnam, and the Central Highlands in particular. In this sense, Vietnam's record may not be better, but certainly not worse than any country in, for example, Europe or Asia.

#### THE OFFICIAL DISCOURSE ON SEDENTARIZATION

Most of the post-1975 foreign literature on the Central Highlands deals with the issues of sedentarization and immigration. In his 1980 rewriting of the Minority Rights Group report no. 18 on Vietnam's Montagnards, Jacques Dournes points out the continuity of preconceived ideas concerning the Montagnards (as 'savages', 'nomads', 'starving', 'superstitious', 'illiterate' and 'backward') from colonial times up to the present, and argues that these crude notions are being used to justify sedentarization and colonization policies by the various successive powers in southern Vietnam (Dournes 1980: 12–16). In his 'Primitives to Peasants' (1985), Ron Hill makes a similar observation, namely that the sedentarization of 'nomadic tribes' 'is seen as an altruistic measure of social progress' (Hill 1985: 449). He added that the results of the 'sedentarization' policy were not clear from the figures provided by Vietnamese sources, partly because the figures concerning 'sedentarization' of minorities were not kept apart from the figures of lowlander immigrants turning to wet-rice cultivation in the Highlands (Ib.: 454). In his assessment of Vietnamese population policy from 1975 to 1985, Nguyễn Duc Nhuận links the sedentarization issue to the massive migration of *Kinh* from the plains to the so-called New Economic Zones (NEZ) in the highlands and to the ongoing deforestation of Vietnam. Thus, the population of Gialai-Kontum province rose from 432,000 in 1976 to 596,000 in 1979, a rise of 38% which is mostly due to the in-migration of *Kinh* settlers (Nguyễn Duc Nhuận 1987: 22–30, 200–208).

One problem, noted by Grant Evans and other non-Vietnamese scholars, is the scarcity of trustworthy data on the Central Highlands. Until recently, foreign researchers were not allowed to do any substantial research in the Highlands, whereas both the official statistical data and the accounts by Vietnamese researchers were considered unreliable. This is not the place to rectify the statistics concerning Vietnamese policy in the Highlands; rather, this essay is an attempt to go beyond such figures and observe the effects of the policy (or better: policies) in terms of human experience. Still, it is useful to note that the figures given me on virtually every topic contradict with figures given by other institutions on central or local levels. Many statistical data characteristically bear the stamp of planning objectives rather than actual results of government policy.<sup>6</sup> Also, there is a lot of confusion in defining the policy terms themselves. Let me give one telling example of this.

In Vietnamese, the sedentarization programme is called *Dinh canh dinh cu* [fixed cultivation and settlement], implying that among minorities both cultivation and residence are not fixed (*du canh – du cu*). As far as cultivation is concerned, the implication is partly correct, as a good deal of the highland population practises shifting cultivation. In the Central Highlands, traditional shifting cultivation was by no means at random, but was very much adapted to the natural conditions, in that the fields rotated within a delineated territory following an extended agricultural cycle of varying length. Erosion was prevented by the traditional use of a dibble stick instead of a plough – thus leaving the structure of the soil intact – while the soil fertility was enhanced by the manure of cattle grazing on the fields left to fallow (Boulbet 1966; Condominas 1982; Lafont 1967; Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983).<sup>7</sup> While seemingly ‘primitive’, these agricultural and livestock breeding techniques allowed for the regeneration of the forest cover and of the fertility of the soil, given a sufficiently long fallowing period. The indigenous populations of the Central Highlands have practised this shifting cultivation for centuries, maybe even millennia, without serious damage to the forests.

As elsewhere, however, the indigenous peoples of Vietnam are blamed for the deforestation occurring in their environment. In colloquial Vietnamese, the word for dry rice farming/swiddening (*làm rẫy*) is normally preceded by the words *phá rừng*, ‘clearing’, but literally meaning ‘destroying the forest’. The term *phá rừng* is also used to denote the process of deforestation. Thus, shifting cultivation is etymologically and analytically linked to deforestation. During my interviews with both central and local agriculture and forestry officials, most of them conceded after some probing that it was not really the indigenous peoples who were to blame. The deforestation after 1975 was rather a result of unfettered logging by state forest enterprises and cooperatives, of slash-and-burn practice by new in-migrants from the lowlands who mostly had no agricultural experience

### *Sedentarization and Selective Preservation*

in mountainous areas, and of the steep increase in population density which led to land scarcity, conflicts over land and shortening fallowing cycles.

The incrimination of minorities for their alleged part in the deforestation process may be seen as an instance of blaming the victims, because their natural environment is deteriorating rapidly due to processes beyond their control. Combined with the rapidly increasing land scarcity, this results in diminishing agricultural yields. Sometimes, the effects of present conditions in the highlands are quite unexpected. For example, since 1985 malaria is on the rise again in Gialai province, as elsewhere in the Highlands. This may be explicable for the *Kinh* population, which now makes up about half of the provincial population and which had not built up immunity for the local malaria varieties. However, the new (imported or mutant, but resistant) strains of malaria do not respect the immunity of local Jarai people; not only children and elderly, but even adult Jarai are being seriously affected again, leading to increasing numbers of casualties that are hardly reflected in medical statistics for want of an effective local health system. Since 1989, many villagers in Ayun Pa district do not dare to enter the forested mountains anymore to cut firewood or construction wood, collect non-timber products or dig for gold, or even to work and stay at their dry rice fields anymore, because they are sure to contract the feared fever.<sup>8</sup> Thus, their resources are increasingly limited to the irrigated rice fields in the valleys, which they share with in-migrants from the lowlands. The yield of these fields do not suffice to feed the population, rendering hunger and malnutrition endemic. Whereas the authorities legitimate the sedentarization with reference to the hunger which they associate with 'backward' (*lac hâu*) shifting cultivation, the net result of this policy is that indigenous populations are cut off from forest resources which formerly kept hunger at bay.

The second term in the Fixed Cultivation and Settlement Program defines minority populations as 'nomads' (*du cu*). This term is often employed in official documents to describe local settlement patterns, implying that villages are abandoned when the soil is exhausted. This concords perfectly with the official view of shifting cultivation as an irrational, backward agricultural technology. However, the norm among many groups in the Central Highlands is that villages stay at one place, while the village community claims a definite territory as their land, which is used for the rotating rice fields.<sup>9</sup> Historically, villages would only be abandoned because of natural calamities, war, violence, and, of course, forced resettlement, conditions of which the Vietnamese Highlands have had more than their share in the past decades. During the Second Indochina War (1960–1975) alone, the number of Montagnard casualties is estimated at 200,000, while more than 85% of the population was forced to flee or resettle at one time (cf. Hickey 1982b: 290). Other causes for moving villages traditionally

included splitting up of existing villages and the belief that a locality was haunted by evil spirits, often following natural disasters and epidemics. In peaceful times, then, settlement patterns would be fairly stable.

In more recent ethnographic work, notably by Dang Nghiêu Van, it is acknowledged that the Montagnards are not nomads, but – as Grant Evans noted (1992: 290) – the attitude of Vietnamese anthropologists is often not representative of the official view. Some of the Jarai province officials in Gialai-Kontum whom I interviewed, adamantly denied that the Jarai were nomads, a view which apparently did not qualify the necessity of the sedentarization program. In interviews with officials of both central and provincial organizations, two other definitions for nomadism came up. One was, that villages may remain located at the same spot, but that the population lived half of the year on the fields, far away from the village, in order to work the fields, to weed, tend the cattle, keep wild animals from the fields, etc. During that season, they are barred from the amenities of normal, ‘civilized’ life, like schools, health care, and any of the other services and controls of the state. The second definition of nomadism or semi-nomadism developed the latter point: every village where the state is not present in whatever form, is considered as not fixed.

In the modern world, states have strived to extend their sovereignty to all the territories within their recognized or claimed borders, and to control the populations residing within their borders. As with ethnic minorities all over the world, the real issue is the degree of control over all populations within the territory of the state, including ethnic or indigenous minorities. A state which, because of its history of foreign intervention, is so preoccupied by questions of sovereignty, security and territorial integrity as Vietnam is, cannot but conceive of its subjects through the prism of governmentality (cf. Foucault 1979), simultaneously aiming at the well-being and the ‘improvement’ of its population by making its subjects into proper citizens of the state through various disciplining tactics. The Montagnards, too, must be made into civilized citizens of Vietnam, which necessitates their subjection to state surveillance and discipline. The program to achieve that in the highland areas is called Fixed Cultivation and Settlement, which permits the governmentalization of the Montagnard way of life. From the perspective of governmentality, then, the ‘truth’ of official discourse concerning their ‘nomadic’ way of life and their ‘backward’ agricultural practices is not relevant.

According to Michel Foucault, in 18th century Europe a shift took place from the art of government to a science of government, which gave rise to the formation of a whole series of state apparatuses and to the development of a whole body of governmental knowledge, related to the various disciplines – a science which has since spread all over the world. In Vietnam, we see that such knowledge is embodied in the various institutions related to the state and Party both on central and local levels,

and phrased in Marxist idiom. During wartime, Hồ Chí Minh launched the idea of 'ethnic solidarity' (*đoàn kết dân tộc*) by using a family metaphor which competed with the family metaphor employed by the French: the various ethnic groups were Vietnam's children, and within that family the elder brother (*Kinh* majority) had the duty to simultaneously respect and develop the minorities (see Salemink 1995a: 280). With the establishment of a regular government, this idea was increasingly compounded by different, economic and political, considerations, necessitating a further refinement of this crude basis. The difficult security situation in the Central Highlands and the economic prospects offered by the region's natural resources gave rise to what was called the Tây Nguyên Research Programme (I: 48-09 & II: 48C), comprising scientists of various disciplines and officials. The results were presented at three major seminars in 1983, 1985 and 1988, the proceedings of which were published, along with special studies of the 'ethnic problem' in all the provinces concerned.<sup>10</sup>

When Grant Evans (1992) noted the 'acceptable' critique voiced by Dang Nghiêm Van (1989), this critique was the outcome of the huge government-sponsored research program, and was already becoming the basis for policy in the Highlands. In November, 1989, the Politbureau issued Resolution no. 22, which criticizes past mistakes concerning the establishment of New Economic Zones, state farms and cooperatives in the mountain areas. Instead, it pleads for a concerted development effort on the basis of respect for local cultures and of the 'family economy'. However, nothing was said about the sedentarization program. This Party decision was followed up in March, 1990, by Decree no. 72 of the Council of Ministers, which specified that land had to be given back to families of minority origin and to the newer lowlander settlers, who all should have the right to profit from their own production. Fixed cultivation and settlement, which already was executed by the Ministry of Forestry, should be combined with forest protection. In September of the same year, the Council of Ministers installed the Committee of Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (later promoted to the status of ministry) in order to execute the policy transformation, aided by UNDP. Finally, in July 1993, a new Law on the Nationalities was passed by the Vietnamese National Assembly, instituting the Nationalities Council as a standing body of the National Assembly, which controls and prepares minorities policy in Vietnam. (Bô Chính trị 1989; Hôi Đông Bô Trung 1990; Gammelgaard 1990; Quốc Hôi 1993).<sup>11</sup>

#### **SEDENTARIZATION IN PRACTICE: GIALAI-KONTUM AND LÂM ĐÔNG**

Despite the impressive legislative activity in the political center, locally few actual changes took place. Contrary to its appearance of centralization,

Vietnam is a decentralized state, where much power is concentrated in the provinces which are virtually autonomous and self-financing. Many of the province and district officials I interviewed in 1991, let alone local cadres, were not aware of the changes in policy which had emanated from the political centre. Those officials who were aware of the changes, assumed the authority to interpret the new measures almost at will. Their viewpoint still was that they knew what was good for minority peoples, who simply had to give up backward and harmful practices and would be induced to do so by the living example of cadres and lowland settlers who selflessly came to live among the minorities in order to help spread civilization. This ideal was maintained, despite a contrarious reality which had it that in-migrants might settle in the same commune (*xa*) but hardly ever in the same hamlet (*thôn, plei, buôn*); that hardly any lowlander cadres (teachers, health workers, agricultural extension workers, even ethnographers!) were prepared to literally risk their lives for an insufficient salary in malaria-ridden areas; that a recent wave of immigrants looking for gold, precious stones, and easy profits in fashionable crops like coffee and pepper, had resulted in violent Wild West scenes, land grabbing and inter-ethnic conflict beyond the control of local authorities.<sup>12</sup>

Still, the results of the sedentarization program varied widely. In some places, notably on the fertile red soil plateaux in the provinces of Dak Lak, Lâm Đông and around Pleiku (the capital of Gialai province), the program worked out more or less according to the plan. In such areas, many villages grew rich through the cultivation of industrial crops (coffee, tea, rubber, pepper) or due to sericulture. Seedlings, credit, and technical assistance were provided by the cooperative, but the plantation plots were family-owned and worked. Many families also planted such crops in the home gardens surrounding the new houses, and gradually stopped cultivating mountain rice, because they could afford to buy food on the market. Successful households showed their wealth by building Vietnamese-style, concrete houses on the ground – often next to the traditional wooden pile-house – filled with the tokens of modernity: furniture, videos, and motorcycles. Rich hamlets financed their own schools and primary health care stations. This wealth, however, is dependent on the caprice of the world market price for their crops, and at times families were forced to turn to dry rice and tuber farming again because the price of coffee or pepper was not sufficient to feed them – or even had to sell off their land.

In other places, like Kontum and Ayun Pa, many local Bahnar and Jarai already practised wet rice cultivation in the river valleys, often combined with dry rice cultivation on swiddens or permanent, rain-fed fields. For them, the sedentarization program meant that their land was taken over by cooperatives, in which the newly arrived in-migrant settlers participated, too. This implied that an already limited area, suitable for wet rice cultivation, now had to nourish a far greater population. Portions of land

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that had not been confiscated, had been leased out to lowlanders for want of cash, but the rent was not enough to compensate for the loss in subsistence. In Ayun Pa district, the government tried to improve the situation through a major irrigation project, called Ayun Ha. In 1991, the only visible result of the project was a shiny headquarters along the road; the project was planned to reach Ayun Pa by 2003, at the earliest. According to the estimates of commune authorities, the projected increase in production would be scarcely sufficient to keep up with the natural population increase. Besides, elsewhere in Vietnam it has been observed that irrigation projects in tribal areas (often funded by international development organizations) tend to attract newcomers hoping to take over the irrigated land while the local minority communities – often the designated target group – tend to move further up the mountains. In the Kontum area, land scarcity might be aggravated by a planned series of no less than nine hydropower dams as part of the Upper Sesane Development Project of the Mekong Committee. If fully executed, a large surface of the fertile valley bottoms will be inundated, further limiting the wet rice acreage and necessitating the resettlement of at least thirteen villages (Electrowatt Engineering Services 1993; Lang 1994).

Whatever may be the outcome of these major projects, already the produce of wet rice cultivation is not sufficient to feed the local populations, while no additional income is to be generated from industrial crops in these locations. Additional swiddening, cattle breeding, the collection of timber and non-timber products and handicrafts provide a necessary supplementary income, but meet with a number of problems. Swiddening, for one, is not only strongly discouraged by the authorities, but traditional landrights are not recognized by the authorities, who consider all the land to be state property. Thus, many tracts of land which were left to fallow and regenerate according to the traditional *rây* (swidden) system, were portioned out to new settlers. One Bahnar village near Kontum thus lost 30 hectares of valuable agricultural land between 1975 and 1985. From 1987 on, the authorities began to acknowledge the traditional land rights of the Bahnar, but there was no compensation for the land lost in the previous period. Simultaneously, the transition to cash crop production needs, besides extension of new agricultural techniques, investments without returns for a number of years. As hardly anybody is able to make such an investment, Bahnar families turn to the cultivation of tubers, which they consider a step backward – and therefore a failure of government policy – because upland rice is appreciated for its taste, nutritional value and for its ritual qualities. For the authorities that organized agricultural extension projects, the failure of their program simply indicates the ‘backwardness’ of the minorities.

Cattle breeding has become difficult, too. Traditionally, the Bahnar and Jarai let all livestock roam in the village, under the houses, on the fallows,

and in the nearby woods. This has changed with the arrival of in-migrants who do not allow cattle belonging to others on their fields. On several occasions, cattle belonging to Bahnar families was confiscated or simply shot by new settlers, with tacit consent of the authorities. One Bahnar informant expressed it as follows:

The authorities do nothing, they put the Kinh in the right. The Kinh are never punished for their conflicts with the Bahnar, only the Bahnar are punished. We are very often punished, since 1975 every family in our village has been fined at least once.<sup>13</sup>

One of the results is an acute shortage of cattle and buffaloes, both among the Bahnar and Jarai, which again has negative effects on agriculture (lack of manure and draught animals), nutrition and social life (feasting, animal sacrifices during rituals).

Logging – officially the monopoly of the state at the time – and the collection of non-timber forest products has become increasingly difficult because of the rapid deforestation since 1975. Traditionally, the forest was an invaluable source of wood and bamboo, of wild foodstuff and game, of grazing ground, and in general of fertility restoration. One informant stated that the indigenous people had a traditional method of preserving the forest, which was linked to the agricultural cycle of shifting cultivation. Each village had rights to the produce of certain portions of forest, and made sure that the forest was more or less kept intact. These traditional rights were not acknowledged by the authorities nor by the new settlers who high-handedly started to cut trees for their own use or for sale. In response, many Bahnar also started to cut the taller trees, in order not to be left empty-handed. The result is a quickened pace of deforestation, affecting the fertility and humidity of the soil and the natural resources associated with it. The present scarcity of wood is exemplified by one Bahnar village which wished to reconstruct its traditional communal men's house (*nhà rông*), but lacked the means to do so. Formerly, it had been a matter of collecting the necessary materials, organizing the labor needed for its construction, and performing the appropriate rituals; nowadays, the tall tree stems needed for construction were no longer available nearby, and had to be bought for big money from far away.

The net result of these developments is a deterioration of the economic situation of many highlanders. Local authorities in Kontum and Ayun Pa mentioned that 90 percent of the indigenous population suffers from hunger or severe malnutrition. The restrictive policy on swiddening seriously curtailed the dietary diversity while it simultaneously diminished the consumption of dry upland rice, to which the French anthropologist P.B. Lafont ascribes immunizing elements against malaria (personal communication). In Ayun Pa, the famous rice alcohol, common to all local, indigenous groups and traditionally made of upland rice, was now made of

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corn instead of rice, giving it a sour flavour which adversely affected my stomach. Besides agriculture, the region offers little opportunity for earning extra incomes. Ironically, the end of the war in 1975 had also ended the opportunities to bring in extra incomes through an army career. In fact, the majority of the older men whom I interviewed had served in one of both sides during the conflict. Even those elderly men who had served in the former South Vietnamese army or with the American Special Forces, and who had spent time in the 're-education camps', were still highly respected in the villages, even by the local (village and commune) cadres, themselves mostly younger Jarai and Bahnar. The elder men of the village formed an informal, traditional hierarchy alongside the formal hierarchy of Party and State cadres within the villages. Youngsters with positions in the formal hierarchy generally sought the consent and cooperation of the elderly in their exercise of power.

The fixed cultivation and settlement program aimed at amelioration of the worsening economic situation while simultaneously making an eluding population more accessible for the various disciplining strategies of state power. The official slogan of the program was *đường - vườn - rừng* [roads - gardens - forests], indicating the three basic elements of the program: accessibility, economic viability and exploitation of the natural resources. Concerning the latter, only in the late 1980s the idea of sustainable development took root among the central authorities, partly due to foreign influence. At the village level, sedentarization implied that the old village structure was abandoned, and a new site was selected for habitation (resettlement). Generally, the new village had a rectangular lay-out, with yards of 2000 m<sup>2</sup>. The idea was to have home gardens around the house, where fruit trees and vegetables could be planted and small livestock could be held for immediate use, so that people would not need to fetch these on the far away swiddens. On the fertile high plateaux, such gardens were often used to cultivate industrial crops, but elsewhere the soil was not always suitable for permanent cultivation.

Contrary to the traditional village lay-out, the plots were fenced, and the houses far apart. Ideally, each house would have a well or fresh water source, but in actual practice a village was lucky to have one source in common; many households adopted the lowland practice to catch rainwater from the roofs in huge jars, which form exquisite breeding ground for malaria and dengue mosquitoes. In theory, the authorities would aid the construction of the new villages by providing building materials and services in the fields of agricultural extension, education and primary health care, but the means for implementing that policy generally lacked. If the commune or village had no means of its own, schools were ramshackle, teachers were absent or earning additional incomes, and medical workers had no medicine. One commune in Ayun Pa was in 1977 provided with a brand new primary health care center, donated by UNICEF; after one year

it ran out of medicine, became useless and was abandoned. By 1991, it was completely in ruins.

For the villagers concerned, the resettlement implied a completely new lifestyle. One of the aims – and results – of the program is the breaking up of the longhouses. Traditionally, most Montagnards lived in longhouses. In precolonial days, longhouses of up to fifty to one hundred meters could be found, containing many households belonging to one lineage and their dependents. A long longhouse was a token of wealth. Under colonial rule, the length of the longhouses had gradually diminished. This process was speeded up under the former South Vietnamese regime, which waged an assimilation policy forcing nuclear families to live separately from each other. The present regime also has a policy of breaking up the longhouses, considered a survival of ‘the familial communes [. . .] of the primitive society’ (Mac Duong 1993: 7). Thus, breaking up the longhouses is conceived of as a necessary and progressive step toward socialist development. According to one ethnographer, the construction of a new culture and new socialist man in the Central Highlands depended on the construction of a new type of family, which ‘is the splitting of families from the longhouse, with each family possessing its own house, its own garden, its own means of production, its own labour power’ (Hô Lê 1984: 64). Thus, the policy of breaking up the longhouses, justified as a precondition for economic development, is simultaneously a deliberate attempt to change the minorities’ lifestyle.

Although all the longhouses I visited were not inhabited by entire lineages anymore – at most by an extended family spanning three generations – informants reported that many Montagnards resent being forced to give up their houses, let alone being forced to build Vietnamese-style houses on the ground. Coupled to the practice of storing rainwater in large jars along the house, the initial prescription and present-day fashion of building Vietnamese-style houses on the ground aggravated the occurrence of malaria and dengue epidemics, because mosquitoes tend to avoid the smoky atmosphere and the height of houses on stilts. But what is resented even more, is the new village lay-out. This implies a great distance between the houses, now surrounded by fenced gardens. Many informants complained about the decline in sociability and communality in the new village, and professed to regard the sedentarization program as an attempt to make them live like lowlanders. Consequently, these informants don’t make much of the official policy line of ‘ethnic/national solidarity’ (*đoàn kết dân tộc*), which they tend to see as a cosmetic slogan obscuring the fact that most cadres above hamlet level are lowlanders. In reality, many fear and distrust their Kinh compatriots.

Recently, this has been implicitly or explicitly acknowledged by Vietnamese anthropologists like Dang Nghiêm Van, Lò Giang Páo and Mac Duong. The latter, for example, spoke of ‘inappropriate economic

policies of our government [which] have led to new difficulties for ethnic minorities', and a 'contradiction [. . .] between other ethnic minorities and the Kinh'; this was due to 'impatience' in policy implementation, 'negating specific ethnic traits' and 'wishing for a rapid agglomeration into the Kinh society' (Mac Duong 1993: 9). This critique, however, applied to the implementation of sedentarization through large-scale agricultural cooperatives and state-farms, rather than to the sedentarization process as such, which would now enable the minorities to 'develop a peasant individual household economy' (Ib.: 10).

### 'SELECTIVE PRESERVATION' OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Many publications by Vietnamese anthropologists and policy makers extol the multiethnic character of Vietnamese culture, and the – mostly aesthetic – value of minority cultures. The former vice-minister of in charge of minority culture in Vietnam, Nông Quốc Chân, compared a plural Vietnamese culture to a garden of scented, colourful flowers (Nông Quốc Chân 1977). However, Mr. Chân might not have realized to what ends his metaphor might be used. For, though beautiful flowers are a gift of nature, beautiful gardens seldom grow by themselves. In gardens, flowers are sown or planted, cultivated, manured, weeded, tended, arranged and presented in a careful manner; some people – among them many British, Japanese and Vietnamese – would even say that gardening is not a skill, but an art. Thus, the idea of Vietnamese culture as a garden of flowers presupposes a subject cultivating, arranging and presenting the flowers in the desired fashion. And this is exactly what happens in Vietnam, where the Party and state decide which aspects of minority cultures are valuable enough to retain, which aspects should disappear, and which aspects should be transformed.<sup>14</sup>

Culture (*van hóa*) in Vietnam is taken to mean the immaterial aspects of life, like language, religion, education, and manners and customs. In the socialist transformation of society, not all of that can be retained. After all, the cultural 'level' of Vietnam's minorities is seen as 'lower' than that of the Kinh, and, according to the guiding principle of mutual assistance, the latter should help the former in 'catching up' with the latter to assimilate into a new Vietnamese culture (see Nong Quoc Chan 1978a and 1978b, and Pham Nhu Cuong et. al. 1987). Fortunately, the Party cadres know exactly what is to be preserved as valuable, and what is to be abandoned. Valuable are folklore, dances, music, handicrafts, and these are renovated for presentation for the 'masses'. Grant Evans described this policy of 'selective preservation' as a 'peculiar process of dissolution/ preservation of traditional cultural forms (1985: 142).

Today, selective preservation is still an integral part of Vietnamese ethnic policy, as was clear from a number of Vietnamese contributions (e.g., the address by Nông Quốc Chân) to a UNESCO-sponsored international

conference on the safeguarding of Vietnam's minorities' cultural heritage, held in Hanoi in 1994 (see Salemink/UNESCO 1994: 5). While Vietnam's cultural diversity was celebrated by all participants and politicians, the rapid cultural transformation among Vietnam's minority groups was deplored. With 'international tourism' and the 'mass media' singled out as scapegoats for the alleged cultural disintegration among the minorities, hardly any effort was made to contextualize the process of cultural change by linking it to the pervasive policies concerning migration and sedentarization. Probably, most of the projects which come out of the conference will concern the collection of artefacts, music, choreographies, literature, and other aesthetic cultural expressions, for the purpose of conservation and display. Thus, UNESCO may salvage for the world a sterile cultural diversity which seems no longer feasible in present-day Vietnam.

In the process of selective preservation, various cultural expressions are transformed to fit the new socialist ethic; the Department of Culture of Gialai-Kontum province, for example, saw it as its job to change the lyrics of traditional folksongs, and teach these at schools.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, there are 'out-moded habits' and 'obsolete and backward practices' (Nong Quoc Chan 1978a: 53) which are to be 'wiped out' and 'eradicated'. Usually, such 'bad habits' refer to religious practices – superstition, 'groundless taboos', (accusations of) sorcery, which are considered to be contrary to modern science – and feasts and sacrifices accompanying life cycle rituals – such as burials and marriages, deemed unhygienic or wasteful. In the words of Nong Quoc Chan, 'priests' are 'unmasked' and made to sign an agreement to the effect that they will subject themselves to disciplinary punishment if they relapse to backward practices; the quantity of wedding gifts is fixed by cadres who 'advise' the families involved.

This attempt to discipline the population goes hand in hand with a folklorization of culture, by stressing the expressive and aesthetic aspects of culture while denying the related cognitive and ethical aspects. This amounts to what Miles and Eipper have termed a state-imposed reification of minority culture, which is celebrated as an artefact symbolized by the display of certain distinctive insignia – a process which is by no means exclusive for Vietnam under Communist rule (Miles and Eipper 1985: 1–2).<sup>16</sup> One significant characteristic of the process of folklorization is the decontextualization of cultural phenomena, which are considered and valued separately and detached from each other. Thus, while dancing and music are appreciated and promoted by the authorities, the ritual occasions for performing are being suppressed, causing the valued cultural traditions to disappear. One of the standard solutions of the authorities, then, is to establish (semi-)professional groups which perform music and dances in a different context, for a different audience of 'socialist workers, collective farmers and socialist intellectuals' (Nong Quoc Chan 1978b: 59, 61), and – so we may add – increasingly of tourists.

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Many highlanders in the Central Highlands find themselves in the paradoxical situation that they are made to perform certain valuable, expressive aspects of their culture for a national and international audience, while the basis for these cultural expressions is eroding. Thus, while they are not allowed to perform rituals entailing the sacrifice of buffaloes – that is, if they would have any cattle left after 1975, the dances and music that used to accompany such rituals are performed for tourists. While traditional sociability is rendered impossible in the new, resettled villages, the disappearing oral literature is being collected by ethnographers and cultural cadres and published in Vietnamese. And while the characteristic, high-roofed communal men's houses of the Bahnar and Jarai (*nhà rông*) are falling apart for want of repair or are demolished in the process of resettlement, Kinh peddlers in the towns sell small-scale *nhà rông*, produced by Kinh craftsmen, to tourists as signs of the province's special architecture.

Even the one domain where Vietnam boasts of its success, minority education, is less successful than often claimed. Official policy has it that 'each ethnic group has the right to [. . .] use its own speech and script' (from the Constitution of 1960, quoted in Nong Quoc Chan 1978b: 59). However, in 1991 education in the vernacular language was the exception rather than the rule in the Central Highlands. Since the pre-1975 school primers were politically suspect, these were not used in school. In 1990, the first primers in vernacular languages were produced, and experimentally used in a limited number of schools, but the project had no high priority. As a number of officials pointed out to me in interviews, the aim of the new primers was not to teach the vernacular languages and scripts; rather, the primers in vernacular were seen as a vehicle to better learn Vietnamese, the national language. Other officials, however, maintained that it was necessary to learn read and write Vietnamese first, before turning to learning vernacular scripts. Indeed, locally it was accepted policy that the rate of minority school teachers should never be more than 50 percent. In short, teaching in vernacular languages was seen as a luxury, a viewpoint which concurred with the observation of officials in the Ministry of Education in Hanoi, that only language communities of over 500,000 had a chance of survival as a separate language community, and hence were entitled to education in the vernacular script.

### MONTAGNARD RESPONSES

There was non-conformity and even resistance among some Montagnards against the degree and direction of the discipline forced upon them. Of course, the overt political and military resistance by FULRO never had a chance, and slowly petered out in the late 1980s until the surrender of the last armed group in 1992 (see Salemink 1995a: 293). Another way of escaping state control, oft-noted in official documents, is by moving villages

to remote areas, out of reach of state cadres. At a more covert level, many Montagnards try to maintain some degree of autonomy within their villages. Although mixed marriages and mixed residence in villages became more and more common among several Montagnard groups, this generally was not true for lowlanders. A commune (*xa*) may consist of Montagnard and Kinh hamlets, but one rarely finds the two groups living in the same hamlet, and the same goes for marriages between Kinh and Montagnards – although I have been privy to sexual fantasies by Kinh males about the alleged libertinism and libidinity of Edê girls in Buôn Ma Thuôt. While by no means generalized or officially endorsed, such popular fantasies qualify the semi-official discourse on the status of women in the ‘feudal’ societies of Vietnam’s minorities, such as pronounced by the influential Women’s Union, for instance. Contrary to the common assumption among many lowlanders and foreigners, women in Montagnard societies may lead wretched lives but are able to maintain a degree of autonomy that many Kinh women can only dream of. This is all the more true for the matrilineal societies of Jarai and Edê, where women wield considerable power as keepers of the family heritage – despite decades of ‘male emancipation’, as one French colonial official described it (Maurice 1956; Hautecloque-Howe 1985). Indeed, one of the aims of the policy of breaking up the longhouses is to combat the so-called ‘matriarchy’ in the matrilineal Edê and Jarai societies, with detrimental consequences for the social position and (family) resources of women.

One domain which has hardly been touched by the present regime is Montagnard customary law, essentially a system of reconciliation between families and between this world and the world inhabited by spirits, rather than a system of punishment. Of course, customary law has changed considerably during one century of foreign intervention in Montagnards’ lives (see Dournes 1988; and Salemink 1991a: 248–255). While the French codified and modified the customs, and respected a reified version thereof, the former South Vietnamese regime tried to suppress customary law altogether, thus inspiring a nostalgia for ‘benevolent’ colonial rule among many Montagnards. In their own words, they like to stick to the old customs, even if these may seem harsher than Vietnamese laws. The present-day authorities tolerate the customs insofar as these are not considered economically wasteful. According to common opinion the ‘fines’ (reconciliation sacrifices) are not so burdensome anymore, and thus more in line with Vietnamese discourse on law, superstition, and waste of valuable resources. Although the lavish sacrifices and feasts of the old days are gone now, the established customs are maintained by a council of respected village elders. Generally, villagers – including younger cadres – abide by their verdicts, even if these are contrary to Vietnamese law. Thus, they are able to maintain some degree of autonomy within their own villages.

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Nowadays, the most conspicuous act of covert resistance is in the field of religion. With their traditional religious practices branded as superstition and outlawed, many Montagnards turn to Christianity as an act of protest. Before 1975, many Bahnar around Kontum had been converted to Catholicism by French missionaries, while American Protestants of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CAMA), the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Worldwide Evangelical Mission had met with some success among the Edê, Jarai, Churu, Koho and Lat. Often, the converts were to be found among Montagnard soldiers recruited by American Special Forces, among residents of strategic hamlets and other resettlement schemes, and most of all among those most dependent on outside support then: the highlander refugees. After 1975, Protestantism has become a success story of religious conversion. Oskar Weggel claims that its numbers rose from 200,000 in 1975 to 400,000 in 1987, despite repression by the Communist authorities (Weggel 1993: 466–7).<sup>17</sup> American missionaries, fluent in the vernacular languages, continued to broadcast from their base in the Philippines (the Far Eastern Broadcasting Corporation), and apparently reached a particularly receptive audience, partly made up of FULRO guerrilla fighters and other discontents. When, for example, the last guerrilla group of FULRO arrived in the United States in late 1992, they were welcomed in the Special Forces camp of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and celebrated a Christmas mass served by a former CAMA missionary in the presence of then vice-president Dan Quayle.<sup>18</sup>

In the current era of increased religious freedom, religious revival, religious legitimation by the state and – simultaneously – religious dissent, religion can be an avenue for political protest where other forms of political protest have been rendered impossible. Elsewhere, I have described this process in greater detail with reference to political Buddhism in Vietnam (Salemink 1995b). Thus, although Protestantism may have been embraced by most of the Montagnard diasporic community in the U.S., as I found out during my stay in North Carolina in 1990, it is by no means confined to this politicized expatriate community. Many of the Montagnards I interviewed during my visits to Vietnam, foremost Jarai and Edê, told me that they had turned to Protestantism after 1975, despite official harassment and confiscation of churches and church property. Among these minorities, Protestantism has a reputation of fierce anti-Communism since American missionaries tended to conceive of their mission in Vietnam as a crusade – not simply against paganism, but against ‘Communist atheism’. In the eyes of the Vietnamese authorities, then, Protestantism is ideologically feeding the FULRO movement, and hence a fifth column of American imperialism among Vietnam’s minorities (see, for instance, Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa 1989).

But although the reputation of Protestantism both among minorities and Kinh seems to corroborate a politicized interpretation, I have not come across any Montagnard counterdiscourse relating Protestantism to political

opposition. What Protestantism does provide, however, is an organizational and ideological autonomy which allows space for a separate Montagnard (Jarai, Edê) ethnic identity in a context of increasing discipline, surveillance and governmentalization. This ethnic identity is not maintained because Protestantism has much in common with the traditional Jarai and Edê religions and cultures. In fact, missionary activity attempted to transform Montagnard lifestyles to conform modernity as much as any foreign interference, as Jacques Dournes (1980) – himself a former missionary – complained of. In line with the observation that the essence of ethnicity does not lie in its cultural substance, Protestantism reconstructs a sense of Montagnard ethnicity by redrawing ethnic boundaries along religious lines. By redrawing the boundary between the *Yuan* (Kinh) and themselves (*Dega*, Montagnards) in the one field where the current regime leaves some space in the form of freedom of religion, Montagnards reclaim agency after their political defeat in the construction of a Montagnard homeland with a fixed territory and self-governance (Saleminck 1995a: 291–293).

## CONCLUSION

In this article I have traced Vietnamese ethnic policy in the Central Highlands, and its effects on the Montagnard populations living there. In particular, I have analyzed the discourses on sedentarization and selective preservation, and their effects on Montagnard lifestyles in the provinces of Gialai-Kontum and Lâm Đông. Based on erroneous and often contradictory notions of Upland agricultural and residential practices, sedentarization policy is both precondition and result of Kinh immigration to the Highlands, rendering traditional agricultural practices inadequate due to growing pressure on the land. In the various research locations, the sedentarization program has mixed effects, economically speaking. On the fertile high plateaux sedentarization is feasible and partially successful, depending on the harvests and the prices of industrial crops on the world market. In other places, sedentarization and Kinh in-migration has resulted in a growing scarcity and degradation.

The cultural policy of the Vietnamese state is dominated by the concept of selective preservation, which implies that the state is entitled and able to decide which aspects of a culture are sufficiently valuable to retain. Following an essentialized notion of culture, certain cultural practices are singled out for preservation and presentation, resulting in a folklorization of culture while simultaneously eroding the ritual and economic basis for these practices. Both sedentarization and selective preservation are cornerstones of a policy of subjecting Vietnam's minorities to the disciplining and surveiling gaze of the Vietnamese state. The resulting governmentalization of Montagnards' lives is legitimized with reference to the central concept of 'ethnic solidarity'. On their part, many Montagnards

have resisted such overtly, by joining the FULRO movement or by 'voting with their feet', and covertly, by maintaining their system of customary law or by converting to Protestantism, in an attempt to reclaim agency.

Characterized by state intervention in Montagnards' lifestyles, Vietnamese ethnic policy is predicated on notions of Kinh paternalism. In assessing the ethnic policy in Vietnam, however, it is good to bear in mind that despite decades of extremely violent warfare in Indochina, the level of state violence is comparatively low in Vietnam. Vietnam's minorities are considered an integral part of its population – the various 'nationalities' being Vietnam's 'children'. This might help explain the policy of (albeit discriminatory) governmentalization rather than outright repression, as in neighbouring countries dealing with national movements like China (Tibet), Indonesia (Timor) and Myanmar (Karen) – or even ethnic cleansing, as in Europe and Africa. Still, as many Montagnard interlocutors maintained, the ethnic solidarity propagated by Uncle Hô still has a long way to go.

## EPILOGUE

This paper is based on research conducted in 1991. Since 1991 much has happened which changed the overall situation in the Central Highlands. First of all, the strategic importance of the Central Highlands has lessened, due to the normalization of relations with Cambodia (collapse of Khmer Rouge) and China, and in general to the peaceful integration of Vietnam into the world community, as evidenced through its membership of ASEAN.

Second, Vietnam has considerably changed its economic policies during the *Doi Moi* period. The introduction of the household economy and the land allocation (of both agricultural and forest land) has created more space for households to benefit from the market. However, many minority households have not benefited, having no experience with a household-based economy. The official land allocation does not recognize common property regimes that traditionally governed access to natural resources among many Tay Nguyen minorities. On the other hand, twenty years of Fixed Cultivation and Settlement have had very limited results, except on those soils where cash crops like coffee and rubber can be grown profitably.

Third, the continuing in-migration – organized or spontaneous – has dramatically changed the population composition in the Central Highlands, and simultaneously increased the population density. This implies an intensified competition for scarce (natural) resources. In most areas this means that the fallowing period in the shifting cultivation systems of indigenous groups has decreased. In many places newcomers have also resorted to 'slash-and-burn' methods. There are many examples of indigenous villages that have moved further into the forest, or have simply sold off (fallow) land to other groups, unfamiliar as they are with the

concept of private ownership of land. Often times, households are forced to sell off their officially obtained land, having no alternative source of income when they leave their 'official' land to fallow.

Fourth, there has been a deterioration of the environment, most dramatically visible in the rapid deforestation, and in the lowering of the ground water tables in the Central Highlands, increasing the risks of both desertification and of flash floods. Until 1996, indigenous minorities were often blamed for the deforestation, because of their 'backward' agricultural practices. Since the visit by former Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet to Tay Nguyen in Spring, 1997, however, migration has been singled out as the most important factor in the deforestation and the degradation of the environment. Currently, local authorities seek to curb the ongoing immigration, often times of northern minority households.

In sum, the situation has become more complex than it was before. The waiting is now for new, good research that probes fixed notions and that attempts to understand current Montagnard lifestyles more thoroughly. At the moment of writing this paper, Vietnamese researchers are doing research on issues like customary law in relation to natural resource management; indigenous knowledge and indigenous strategies for improved fallow management; community-based forest management institutions, etc. It is hoped that the knowledge and understanding generated by such research will contribute to greater understanding about ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, and will positively inform policies affecting local people's lives.

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## NOTES

- 1 The research for this article has been made possible by Grant No. W52–456 of the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Science (WOTRO). This article is a revised version of my ‘The King of Fire and Vietnamese Ethnic Policy in the Central Highlands’, which appeared in Don McCaskill and Ken Kampe (eds.), *Development or Domestication? Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia*. Chiang Mai 1997: Silkworm Books, pp. 488–535.
- 2 The author is currently working as program officer for the Ford Foundation in Vietnam. The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the Ford Foundation.
- 3 ‘Montagnard’ is the French generic term to denote the people of the Highlands. Initially, peoples of the Central Highlands were known by the old Vietnamese term ‘moi’, meaning ‘savage’ – or alternatively by the Lao word ‘kha’ or the Khmer word ‘phnong’, both meaning ‘slave’. The French missionaries, explorers and administrators would adopt those terms, or else they would simply call them ‘sauvages’. In French Indochina, it is my understanding that the use of the term ‘Montagnard’ became fashionable in the 1940s only, when the cooptation of mountain minorities became politically and militarily expedient for colonial rule (see Salemink 1991 and 1995a). When after the Geneva Agreements of 1954 Western influence and hence colonial categories were excluded from the Northern half of Vietnam, the term ‘Montagnard’ came to be applied to the indigenous groups inhabiting the Central Highlands only. The Americans usually used the term ‘highlander’, Montagnard, or - in Special Forces idiom – ‘Yard’. The South-Vietnamese regime referred to its mountain minorities as ‘đông bào thuong’ (highland compatriots). Significantly, the present regime has no generic name for the mountain minorities in the Tây Nguyên (Western Highlands) region. Traditionally, the various groups in the Highlands had no common name to distinguish themselves from others, although they employed generic terms to denote the Kinh, Khmer and Lao. Recently, (former) activists of the FULRO autonomy movement have begun to use the term ‘Dega’ to refer to themselves. In this paper, I shall use the term Montagnard or highlander without distinction.
- 4 In August, 1992 the last remnants of the FULRO movement surrendered to UNTAC forces in Cambodia. This Montagnard autonomy movement started in 1964 in the ranks of the U.S. Army Special Forces in Vietnam (See, for instance, Hickey 1982B, Thayer 1992). This was only one of various political movements of Montagnards.
- 5 See Salemink 1994 and 1995a.
- 6 See, for example, the report by Hoàng Lê (1990), which attributes failures in meeting the planning objectives to the propaganda by FULRO.

- 7 What follows is a gross generalization about traditional farming systems in the Central Highlands, simply because there is no space to do justice to the wide variety of agricultural techniques. Suffice here to mention that traditional systems include wet rice cultivation and dry rice cultivation on permanent fields, while more recent innovations include gardening and plantation farming.
- 8 In many regions in Asia and Africa malaria is on the rise again, Vietnam not excepted. For the Central Highlands the statistics show a sharp upward curve since 1985, although many more casualties are not reported and remain out of the statistics. The official statistics of Gialai-Kontum province as a whole counted eight malaria victims for Ayun Pa district in 1990, whereas the district figures counted 13. Within that district, the commune authorities of Ia Trök mentioned two dead for 1990, while in three hamlets alone resp. 3, 6 and 20 (!) dead from malaria were counted in 1990. In a report on malaria in Gialai-Kontum I identified a number of probable causes (Salemink 1991b). The parasite is increasingly resistant to prophylactic and curative medication. The mosquitoes do not have to fear DDT from the Soviet Union anymore once these shipments stopped, but there are not sufficient resources to buy other insecticides. The massive immigration of lowlanders without specific immunity must have increased the occurrence of malaria in the Highlands. Other human-inspired changes might have played a role, like deforestation, the cultivation of and semi-permanent residence on distant fields for want of nearby fields, and the construction of houses on the ground. Changes in the diet might have decreased immunity, while the run down health care system is not in a position to alleviate the situation.
- 9 Among other highland groups in less fertile areas, villages would move each seven or eight years following the rotating fields within the territorial limits of its land claims, but always returning to the same sites again after some time.
- 10 The proceedings of these conferences are published in a special issue of the journal *Nghiên cứu Kinh tế* [Economic Studies], 1(137), 1984; in a special issue of *Tạp chí Dân Tộc Học* [Ethnographic Magazine], 1 (1984); in a number of agronomical publications edited by Nguyen Van Chien; and in the volumes *Một số vấn đề kinh tế-xã hội Tây Nguyên* [Some socio-economic problems of Tây Nguyên] (1986) and *Tây Nguyên trên đường phát triển* [Tây Nguyên on the road to development] (1989). Other results of the research programs were published separately in various journals and volumes.
- 11 The new ethnic policy lines were discussed in special issues of *Tạp chí Dân Tộc Học* [Ethnographic Magazine]: no. 1 (1990); no. 3 (1990); and no. 3/79 (1993).
- 12 In 1991 rumour had it that almost one hundred gold diggers had died in the course of mutual conflicts while panning for gold in the north of Kontum province. Although the rumours probably were highly exaggerated, it is significant that such rumours went around anyway.
- 13 For reasons of protection, the name of this informant cannot be made public. Elsewhere in this paper, I have been deliberately vague about localities and names.
- 14 After writing this essay in 1994, I found that Terry Rambo had made a similar observation on this metaphor: 'The Vietnamese national community may constitute, as one Kinh ethnologist has written, a garden in which a hundred flowers of different colors and perfume bloom, but the overall plan for the garden is exclusively determined by the head gardener (i.e. the state).' (Rambo 1995: xvii) Although Rambo did not reference this observation, it presumably refers to the same book by Nong Quốc Chân - not a Kinh ethnologist, but the former Vice-Minister of culture, himself of minority descent.

### *Sedentarization and Selective Preservation*

- 15 One special way of adapting old songs to new uses was embodied in the Edê troubadour Y Dol, who toured the villages with songs calling for reconciliation under the present regime. While the authorities considered this to be effective propaganda against FULRO, the latter organization left the troubadour alone because of his popularity (Dang Nghiêm Van, personal communication). Changing the lyrics of existing songs for political reasons had already been tried by the French and the South-Vietnamese regimes.
- 16 I have described a similar process of folklorization and reification of Montagnard culture during the last decades of French rule over the Vietnamese Highlands (Salemink 1987: 119–123; see also Salemink 1991a).
- 17 These figures are contested by Nguyn Xuân Nghia (1989: 62), who claims that the 1979 census counted 45,059 Protestants in the Central Highlands.
- 18 This information is to be found in the newsletter ('After action report' no. 8, 1993) of the General Cooperative Montagnard Association (GCMA), a Montagnard-Special Forces friendship association based in Tampa, Florida.

# Chapter Six

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## Chapter Six

# Emergence of a Leading Group: A Case Study of the Inter-Ethnic Relationships in the Southern Shan State

*François Robinne*

### MIEN, MRAMMA, BRAMMA, BURMA

The seven administrative Divisions of the so-called Union of Myanmar are situated along the Irrawaddy River, in the delta and along the Mergui archipelago. They are mostly occupied by the Burman as ethnic group, even if Môn and Karen minorities are also representative. But nothing to do with the seven peripheric and mountainous States where the minorities are the majority. All of them recognise themselves as Burmese, it means as inhabitants of Burma or Myanmar with their own ethnonyms which can differ from that one used by the Burman. Despite the names given to the Arakanese, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Kayah, Karen or Môn States, the administrative demarcations do not correspond to the linguistic distribution. In the Southern Shan State on which this article is focused, the Shan are a minority among the minorities. Most of them use two main ethnonyms with which they design the Burman specifically: Bu(r)ma and Mien on which it is not useless to recall some precisions.

Myanmar is the designation by which the Burman design officially the Union since the State Law and Order Restoration Council took the decision to change the name few years ago. According to this official denomination, Myanmar is reserved to the country and Myanma to the ethnic group. Whatever the particular circumstances which imposed that appellation, Myanma(r) has its historical justification. It is under the form *mranma* or *mramma* that the ethnonym was written in the inscriptions (Luce, 1959: 53; Than Tun, 1990, X: 1), before to be changed for the current *myanma*. According to Luce, the change from the dental *n* to the labial *m* by which the final syllab ends is attested from 1341 A.D., but it is as soon as 1190 that *mramma* appears for the first time on a burmese inscription. It is most probably from that word that the ethnonym Marma, a Tibeto-Burmese group of Arakan, is derived. It is under this designation, transliterated *marama* or *mran ma* that the Marma call the Burman (Lucien Bernot, 1967: 9).

### *Emergence of a Leading Group*

Interpreting a myth contained in the Abhidamma, some authors – Shway Yoe (1963: 96), Max and Bertha Ferrars (1900: 111), Phayre (1967: 2) – have suggested that *Mranma* is derived from *s*, written also *Byammâ* or *Bamâ*, by reference to the cast of the Brahmans in India. This explanation is wrong, at least for two reasons.

If the word is a traveller one, it is not from West that we can follow its peregrination. The origin of the ethnonym is to be found in a Chinese etymology. The Chinese called the Burman *Mien* also pronounced *Man* or *Myin* (Hanson, 1954: 448). This ethnonym appears relatively late in the inscriptions, in 1271 only, after the Chinese expeditions to the doors of Pagan (Luce, 1959: 53). Marco Polo himself describes the war which opposed the Great Khan to the King of Mien, it means the Burmese Pagan Kingdom (1980: 309–318). We find this word among some Tibeto-Burmese groups: *Myen* – or *Myen ga* – for the Kachin or Jingpo (Hanson, 1954: 448), *Myen(-waw)* for the Maru (Clerk, 1911: 70). If the exact etymology of *Mranma* remains uncertain, it appears that the first syllab *Mran* is most probably derived from the Chinese designation *Mien*: people inhabiting originally the Nan-Chao, a meridional part of the Yunnan (Luce, 1959: 53).

According to Luce and Pe Maung Tin, the Chinese of the IXth century included the Mien into the Mang tribes – localised between the ‘Nam Hka’ and the Salwen rivers in the Shan State – whose kings were called *mang* or *mang-chao*. These authors specify that the name of Aniruddha [Anawratha], the first historical king of the Pagan dynasty, was preceded by such a half burmese half shan title (Luce, 1959: 77, Luce & Pe Maung Tin, 1960: 394). But it was later established that the combination Mang-Chao correspond in fact to the shan title ‘Min-saw’ (Maung Htin Aung, 1970: 12). We find this first syllab in the *Mân* by which both the Pao-Karen of the Nyaung-Shwe District in Southern Shan State and the Khamti of Kachin State (J.F. Needham, 1894: 139), as well as others Tai sub-groups of the Shan State, call the Burman.

We know the influence of the Môn civilisation towards the Burmese civilisation. Luce (1959: 53) mentions a môn inscription in honour of a Kyanzittha palace where it is question of ‘*mirma* (Burmese) songs, *rmen* (Môn) songs, and *tircul* (Pyu) songs’. But a distinction has to be made between the written form and the pronunciation. It is probable that the change from Myanma to Burma occurred through the Môn established in the Irrawaddy delta. The pronunciation of the toponym /bye’/ written *mrit*, a city localised in the Tenasserim, is an example of such a môn influence, and it is to a similar phonetic corruption of a labial written *m* pronounced *b* that *Mirma* became *Birma*, *Burma* and so on.

With the arrival of the Portuguese in the delta during the XVIth century, the appellations derived from Burma knew a rapid diffusion. Berma is mentioned for the first time in 1516, in the travel account due to Duarte Barbosa (J.S. Furnivall, 1960: 61–62; Yule and Burnell, 1989: 131). Bamâ,

Biamma, Byammâ etc., appeared afterwards in the Western literature; the library of the Oriental Civilizations and Languages in Paris have an *Alphabetum Barmanorum* published in Roma in 1776 and 1787 (Christina Cramerotti, 1998: 396). During the colonial period, the British form 'Burma' became the norm. The designation is still adopted by some Tibeto-Burmese ethnic groups: the Cak say *Bama*<sup>2</sup> (Luce, 1985: chart L 133), and it is like this that the Tibeto-Burmese minorities still call the Burman. We will follow them in the development below.

### THE NETWORKS' HIERARCHY

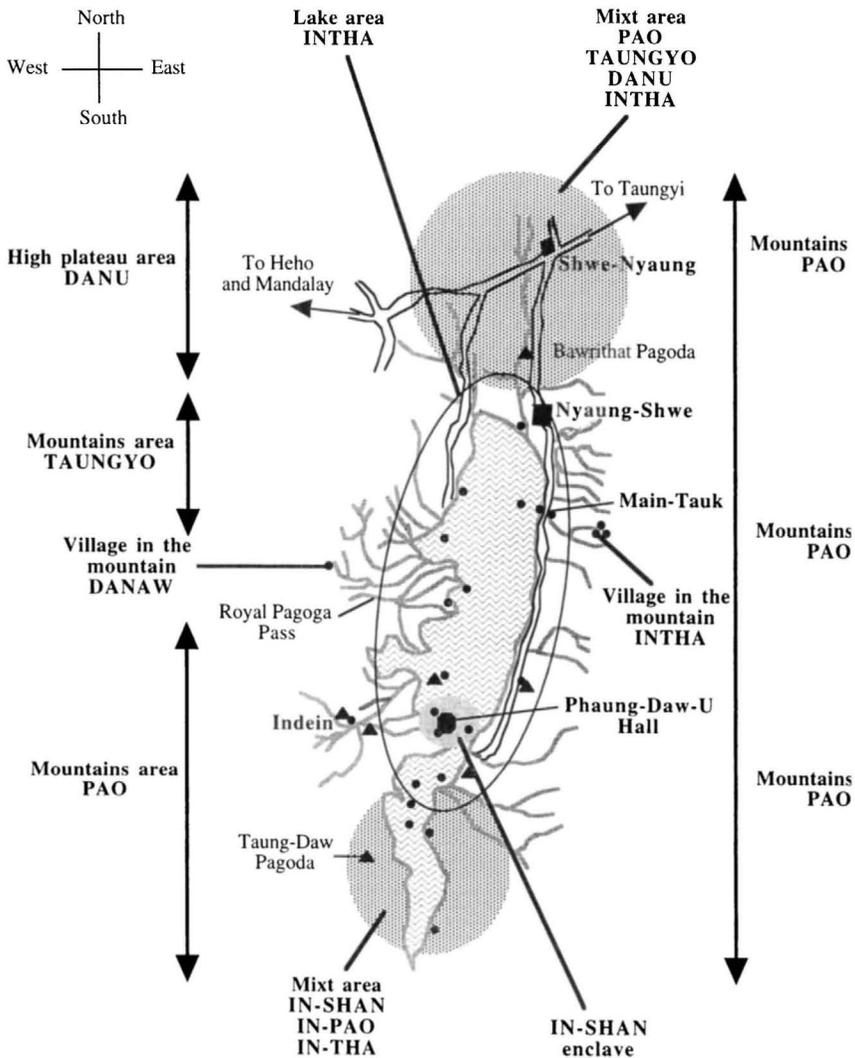
The Nyaung-Shwe district, with the Inle Lake running from North to South between two steep mountains, is characterized by an important ethno-linguistic complexity (map 1). The Sino-Burmese family is represented by the so-called (Matisoff, 1991) LoLo-Burmese branch with the Intha, the Taungyo and the Danu, and by its Karennic branch with the Pao; The Austro-Asiatic family is represented by the Danaw and few decades ago by the Yin people; The Austro-Tai family and its Tai-Kadai branch is represented by the Shan, whose transliteration form *shyam*: links straight with the words Assam and Siam (Gait, 1933). To be complete, we should add the Indo-Muslim community for its interference in the commercial road with Mandalay, and also the increasing number of tourists whose presence is not without repercussions, among them the 'importation' of some Padaung women to hold a museographic role. The historical and social comprehension of the Region cannot avoid this complexity and the subsequent inter-ethnic relationships. The minorities operate as a whole, and each identity is dealing with the others.

My aim is not to identify the relations of the Burma central power towards these minorities, as did historians like Victor Lieberman (1984), Michael Aung-Thwin (1985) or Pierre Fistié (1985), nor to understand how the minorities 'come to terms with more than one state civilization' as suggested by Peter Hinton (1967 & 1978). My intention is to analyse the interactions of these neighbouring minorities and to understand the process by which one becomes leader in social terms.

The last fifty years place the Nyaung-Shwe District as a very significative field of analyse, since the decline of the Shan administration left a vacant place to be provided by one of the local ethnic groups in accordance with the Burma administration. Based on my field works which started in this part of the Southern Shan State in 1994, this paper is in line with two previous works to be published in French language. (See list of references)

The emergence of a leading group and the inter-ethnic relations and hierarchical organization process are recurrent questions in Burma and in Southeast Asia generally speaking. I agree with Edmund Leach (1954) when

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Ethnic minorities distribution in Nyaung-Shwe District

he writes in his *Political Systems of Highland Burma* that some 'unstable balances' situations are always set up. But I am leading away from his structural demonstration when the unstable balance is reduced to one model extracted from a diachronic dimension. The studies of F.K. Lehman (1963) about the Chin Society and that one of Pascal Bouchery (1988) about the Naga have pointed out some important variations compared with the socio-political systems of the Kachin. Furthermore, following Fredrik

Barth's proposition (1969) by which the structure gives place to the process, it is a social process I will speak about.

The situation of Inle shows that the emergence of one leading group appears to be an appropriated social construction among many other possible, according to the ethnics representation, to the Buddhist norms and to the historical context. The social landscape's appropriation process of the Nyaung-Shwe District by the Intha is different from the one used by the Shan when they imposed themselves in Nyaung-Shwe area after the fall of Pagan. While the emergence of the Intha as a leading group is built on the basis of a same Buddhist conceptual norms, shared in common by the Pao and the Taungyo, the Intha community developed it in a form original enough – original in the Nyaung-Shwe District – to give its economic and social supremacy a symbolic settlement.

The 1962 events ended six centuries of an almost undivided power of the Shan administration in this area. As Lieberman (1984) showed, the Burma monarchy had only a distant control in 'the tributaries zone', and although the colonial administration played an important part in the sawbwa's decline, the British leaned on sawbwa's power over the other minorities of this area. The disintegration of the Shan administration made the Intha able to assert their social supremacy, giving a symbolic extension to their economic dynamism. Several historical assertions favored the Intha for that, among them the legitimacy acquired during the first Burma historical monarchy and perpetuated by the oral tradition ever since.

The relative isolation in which the minorities live is broken by the cyclic rhythm of pagoda's festivals as well as by the cyclic rhythm of the markets. In the mountains, the succession of the pagoda festivals create a discontinuous network which ends with the third festival: after the fourth one, anyone participating to the first pagoda festival is no more present. On the contrary, the Phaung-Daw-U festival on the lake establish a continuous network inside the Intha community, while mountaineers are kept away in any officiant functions: rawers, trustees and even monks. Concerning the moving markets which take place on the lake once every five days, the Pao, Taungyo, and Danaw mountain people make a one-day trip to sell the raw material and to buy manufactured products from the top to the bottom. When the exchanges are made from the bottom to the top, the established balance is even more evident: school masters, iron masters and art masters are called from time to time in the mountains on Pao and on Taungyo request. Only the buffalos' transhumance reverse a little bit the process. Buffaloes are partly in the hands of Pao, but following the phenomenon of sedentarization and a consecutive specialisation in *Cordia* leaves, oranges and garlic, the cattle becomes mostly the property of Taungyo and Danu who still need it on their open-fields. The Intha are depending on this cattle which they rent or borrow depending to the dry or rainy season for their rice crops twice a year. Anyway, it is far from restoring the balance. Both,

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these vertical and horizontal inter-ethnic networks introduce a hierarchic dimension turned to the advantage of the Intha.

Strengthened by an economic dynamism which, from the beginning, gave advantage to them in the Shan administration struggle, the Intha have started a real symbolic appropriation of the landscape since the 1960's. The process is directly linked to the development of the annual 'circumnavigation' of the Phaung-Daw-U Buddha images. The increase in population, associated with the Shan power struggle evolution, makes way for a whole new configuration the structure and the extent of which were never seen before.

The institution of the first Shan administration during the 14th Century, the British colony which precipitated the sawbwa decline, and the eradication of the Shan administration due to the 1962 events, each one of these three main transitional periods – to which we should add the internal guerillas warfares which occurred at that time and the consecutive dissensions between the Myoza of Indein and the sawbwa of Nyaung-Shwe – had direct repercussions on the annual ceremony on the lake. The structural adaptations were gradually made, each new adaptation being marked by a manifestation of the five Buddha images: storms, shipwrecks and other natural events were interpreted as signs of supernatural reprisals. The subsequent adaptations were made possible only because they came within the same conceptual norm, unless being exposed to new manifestations. This conceptual field is based on the notion of a vital principle, and on the Buddhist notion of four points around a center contained both in the Phaung-Daw-U processional ritual. The concomitance and the combination of this vital principle and of this cosmogonic model confer to the Intha process the dimension of a social strategy to affirm their leadership.

#### THE VITAL PRINCIPLE OF A DYNAMIC IDENTITY IN THE PHAUNG-DAW-U PROCESSION

The Buddhist concept of a soul, *wiñña* is different from the vital principle concept contains in the *lipprā* or butterfly spirit. If Buddhism recognizes a soul, it is in its negation, the concept of non existence of ego, *anattā*, or 'doctrine of nonself' (Spiro, 1971: 84). Nevertheless, this vital principle is closely associated with the initiation rituals which are the ceremony of a name, the novicehood ceremony or shinbyu and the funeral performances. The analysis of these three rituals show that the vital principle occurs at two levels, individual and collective. During the post-native rituals, the white cotton threads divide the butterfly spirit by sticking it both on the mother and on the baby: the baby got its own *lipprā*. During a shinbyu, the white cotton threads make, in a first step, a distinction between the teen-agers and the laic community, and, in a second step, they identify the teen-agers as sangha members. During a funeral ceremony, the white

cotton threads mark the separation of the dead's spirit and of the familial environment.

From one ritual to another, these white cotton threads belong to different categories depending on the level of analysis and on the rituals in their particularities. At a micro level in each initiation ritual, the white cotton threads sanction a new state. During the Intha shinbyu ceremony, the threads occur at two successive steps: running along the shoulders of the Sangha, novices and monks, the threads have in this time step power to transmit the initiatic message – a Tai influence –, while the threads sanction in a second step the novicehood status when untied and stuck around the neck as an individual property, exactly like for a birth or a death. In all cases, each step of these initiatic rituals 'stick' – *kap tay* in Burma – or restick the butterfly spirit to the new status. At a macro level, the white cotton threads participate to a social construction always reaffirmed and precised; they seal a new karmic destiny which is going on wider and wider, from mother to son, from a laic community to a Buddhist community, from an alive world to a dead world along the process of reincarnation cycle.

The initiatic rituals have not the exclusive property of vital principle's concept. As soon as a double function of animation and identification occurs, the same vital principle can be applied in other social spheres. For example, we find such cotton threads in the aspect of a white cotton strip – together with a red one about which I will not elaborate here – stuck by the carpenter and then by the owner of a new house on the top of the main six piles of Intha, Taungyo or Pao houses. Then this recurrence of a vital principle is common to all Buddhist ethnic minorities of Nyaung-Shwe without exception. The Intha people extend this vital principle to the community as a whole, pushing so the logic at end through the Phaung-Daw-U procession. In that way, I agree with the historian Jacques Revel (1996) when he affirms that 'level variation show versions nor attenuated or partial or mutilated, but different versions of social realities'. To stay in its inseparable functions of animation and identification as defined by Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière (1989), the vital principle has, at a domestic level, the same role which it holds at the collective level of the Phaung-Daw-U procession: the vital principle is contained in the structure of the cortège, in the structure of the circular process around the lake as well as in the ethnic appropriation of the processional ritual.

In its linear configuration, the cortège is entity. It consists of a succession of pirogues attached to each other by a rope, and it is the succession of pirogues that pulls the two sacral barges. The way of fixation is specific: the pirogues are not attached from prow to stern but from stern to stern, the ropes running along each pirogue from the end of the first one to the end of the second one and so on. This way of fixation gives its cohesion to the cortège. It is expressly like this that it is conceptualized, and it is on such a principle that the rowers organize themselves to accompany the four images

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from village to village. The rowers from a new staging village reach the previous village where the Phaung-Daw-U images are used to stay one night, and then, they go back in a processional cortège up to their village. All the pirogues – from three to thirteen or more – come from one village group depending on the same monastery. At each new stage correspond a new rowing team. In its different components, the cortège is organized as a continuous entity.

Linear in the structure of the cortège, the procession ritual is circular in the configuration as a global entity, reproducing at an ethnic level the inalienable entity formed by the Phaung-Daw-U images. This configuration given to the processional ritual around the lake took place step by step. Briefly speaking, we can distinct in the diachrony four main steps which are:

- 1 From its origin, after Alaungsithu trip in the region and up to the colonial period, a small pagoda festival was probably limited to the South of the lake, starting in a cave near Indein and moving towards Phaung-Daw-U.
- 2 In 1886, after the British pression on sawbwa administration, we can read in the short chronicle written by the In-Shan trustees of the Nam-Hu village that two barges met each other near the village of Lin-Kin, on the Northeast side of the lake, one barge starting from Phaung-Daw-U with the images on board and one barge starting from Nyaung-Shwe with the sawbwa and its Court on board. At that time the procession was limited to six villages.
- 3 Around the Second World War and the following years, the procession crossed the lake right through without a real coherence. But it was a first decisive step by which the lake became an homogeneous and pertinent entity. This means that a break was introduced compared to the sawbwa organization in different Myo-Za, and, mostly, compared to the fragmented Intha community in a multitude of quasi-autonomous villages, each one with its own monastery, its own cimetry, its own Nat altar and its own pagoda festival. Nevertheless, a tight identity was enlarged to the whole Intha community and annually reaffirmed.
- 4 The fourth and last step – last for the moment – occurred after 1962 and the subsequent dissolution of the sawbwa administration. From that time on, the processional ritual all around the lake became organized in a cardinal configuration.

These transformations in the structure of the cortege as well as in the cardinal organization of the procession were accompanied by an evolution of the ethnic appropriation of the ritual. The ethnic dimension of the procession is not a new fact. Up to the sixties, if we remove an uncertain Pao or Taungyo episode due to the presence of two Phaung-Daw-U images – an original and a copy – in the Min-Khyaung monastery, the ceremony was the prerogative of the Shan. The Phaung-Daw-U trustees in charge of

the transfer of the images from one barge to another, then from a staging monastery or staging hall to another one, these trustees were Shan or In-Shan, which means Shan of the lake. This ethnic appropriation does not go on any more. Since the sixties, the ethnic representation evolved from In-Shan to In-Tha. Meanwhile the sawbwa administration collapsed, the traditional hereditary function of the trustees was substituted with an elective function. Only half of the In-Shan trustees take place in the smallest of the two barges, while Intha trustees take place in the great one where stand the Phaung-Daw-U images.

The coherence of the lake was realized in concomitance with the Intha community construction. The principles of animation and of identification of the procession were superimposed on a cosmogonic principle of a social order.

### THE MODEL OF FOUR POINTS AROUND A CENTER

As I said, the Phaung-Daw-U procession was most probably originally a simple pagoda festival. The five images were located on the Western slopes of the mountains in the current Pao area. While the procession spread right through the lake, important changes occurred in the social organization of space. Traditionally situated outside of a village, upstream or downstream, the monasteries are moving to a central position as fast as their architectural renovations or reconstructions. Exogeneous reasons can explain this tendency. Among them the demographic pressure by which the number of villages increases, while the number of the monasteries is stagnant or do not increase in the same ratio.

This tendency towards a central position can be observed not only among the Intha villages, but also among the Taungyo and Pao villages. Nevertheless, by spreading this tendency to different stratum of spacial organization, Intha people turn it into a structural artefact of their social organization.

Traditional Intha, Taungyo and Pao monasteries keep the numerous Buddha images along one of the gables, i.e. along the wall opposite to the entrance. The modern Intha monasteries develop an architectural structure totally different, by placing the Buddha images towards the center. The number of the central images are consecutively reduced to five, exactly like the Phaung-Daw-U images. In Nyaung-Shwe as well as in a quasi systematic manner in the villages of the Inle lake, the new monasteries are built on such an axial structure, and such adaptations can be observed on more traditional monasteries.

This architectural evolution of the Intha monasteries develops along the social organization of the village space. In its current development, spatial organization of the Intha groupments of villages are based on a Mandala model. The social order fits in with the cosmic order. As soon as it does not go outside or against the Buddhist cosmogonic order, the social artefact

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knows a universe of possibilities. The outlying or non axial position of the monasteries is one of the possible alternative which differ in Intha, Taungyo and Pao spatial organization. By giving their monasteries an axial position, and by spreading the paradigmatic ratio to other social spheres, Intha people go beyond the proposition according to which social organization emerges. For Intha community, social order is cosmic order. In other words, if the Intha, the Pao and the Taungyo, all Buddhist, operate on a same relationship towards a cosmogonic order, Intha distinguish themselves from their neighbours by elaborating a social order understood as universal and as an absolute principle.

This sketch is becoming the norm at any social level among the Intha community. At an individual level, it is the model on which tattoo representations are based. At the family level, it is on this model that piles of a house are erected. At a level of villages groupment, the monasteries move from an outside to an axial position. And last, at the level of the lake and of the District, the great Phaung-Daw-U hall holds the central position. As all the pagodas, the Phaung-Daw-U hall is by itself a representation of the world, one more in this multitude of stupas. But the evolution of Phaung-Daw-U differs from the general tendency. This is due to the presence of the five Buddha images understood as a powerful and inalienable entity. Gathered in the central altar of Phaung-Daw-U, it is in this homogeneous shape that they were transferred from one barge to another one.

After barges capsized for a first time, 'a long time ago', it was decided that Maitreya, the future Buddha, would not anymore be taken on board for the circumnavigation. A supernatural interpretation was eventually given to the accident. It was said that the new developments applied to the procession and the increase in the number of participant villages did not suit the cosmic order. After a memorable night during which seven lightnings flashed the lake, the trustees decided to turn back after the first stopping place at Indein and to cancel the festival. From that time on, the disorganized procession was replaced by a circular one, moving from West to East and keeping the axial hall of Phaung-Daw-U on the right hand side. By giving to the circumnavigation the aspect of an organized and significant *pradakshina* conform to the cosmic order, nothing was going to stop the ritual process anymore whatever the increasing number of staging villages and the consecutive duration. From six in 1886, the number of staging villages climbed to 19 between the World War II and the 1960s, and up to 21 now, while the duration of the circumnavigation increased from six days to 15, and to 21.

In the same manner, an explanation was given to the enlargement of the circumnavigation when, after in fell in the lake and 'drowned' a few decades ago, one of the five images mysteriously reappeared at the center of its Phaung-Daw-U altar. In consequence, the Maitreya image was kept later

on in its axial position, four other images were temporarily placed around her, while the originals were embarked all along the duration of the circumnavigation. Two levels can be pointed out: a traditional local level with the five Buddha images in the center of Phaung-Daw-U, and a regional level with an enlarged formation of four original Buddha Phaung-Daw-U images turning around the fifth one. (Such an enlargement is not specific to Nyaung-Shwe, and it would be interesting for example to compare the development of the Phaung-Daw-U festival and the evolution given to the festival which still occurs in a reduced form in Thibaw, a City of the Northern Shan State) In present time Phaung-Daw-U, it appears that the evolution from a localised pagoda festival to a regional circumnavigation was possible on condition that the socio-spatial development conformed to the cosmic order.

Nowadays, the enlargement of the procession is accompanied by a recomposition of the lake built on a model of a Mandala as defined by Adrian Snodgrass in his comparative study on *The symbolism of the Stupa* (1992). The situation of Phaung-Daw-U in the center of the lake is the result of the successive movements from the top of the Western mountains to the middle of the lake. Then the four surrounding cardinal points found their place: Nyaung-Shwe to the North probably from the end of the XIXth century, Kyain-Kham to the South around the first half of the XXth century, Insein and Naung-Daw for the Western and Eastern ends whatever the difficulties to reach these two archaeological sites (because of the narrowness of the Bilu River in one case, because of the draining of the small canal in the other case).

Started by the first historical Shan sawbwa of Nyaung-Shwe, developed after the colonial period and accentuated since by the combined efforts of the Burma and the Intha, the tendency has known for a few years a further acceleration. On the South-East portion of the lake, the development given to the Wak-Ta-Kin pagoda reflects such an evolution. Built on the ruined foundation of thirty-two older pagodas, the new structure differs radically from any other in the region by its reproduction of a specific Mandala structure. Inaugurated on the eleventh day of *ta-poñ* month of the Burma year 1356 (1995 A.D.), the new pagoda has the shape of a golden dome divided by four corridors, on which stand four Buddha images surrounding a fifth one. Contributing to distinguishing this pagoda from the other ones in the region, two cosmic flagpoles are erected on each site of the dome: unusual for the region, they accentuate the Burma influence. This tendency through the centuries finds here an abrupt but significant short cut to the general level of elaboration. While the previous and successive developments occurred after empiric adaptations and supernatural reprisals, from now on the organization of space becomes conceptualized: through the Intha community as a whole, the Inle lake is conceived as the representation of a cosmic order.

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While such a case study is by definition limited to a context and cannot be generalized, the evolution of an empiric construction towards a conceptualized strategy belongs to a more global problematique. By substituting a diachronic process to a structural analysis, it becomes possible to understand how one group is able to build a leading position on neighbouring minorities with which it shares a closed political and social organization, and whose worshipping system involves the same conceptual field. In that perspective, as initiated by Charles F. Keyes and Peter Kunstadter (1979), the analysis could be enlarged to a more comparative study wherever the inter-ethnic relationships are similar in Southeast Asia.

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# Chapter Seven

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## Chapter Seven

# Changing Patterns of Economics among Hmong in Northern Thailand 1960–1990<sup>1</sup>

*Peter Kunstadter*

### HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Highlanders in northern Thailand, including Hmong, experienced many economic changes in the period between the early 1960s and late 1980s as a result of both government intervention and spontaneous local responses to changes in lowland society. This was also a period of rapid population growth among Hmong as a result of high fertility and relatively low and declining mortality. Changes imposed by the government included controls on cutting of the forest (the traditional Hmong source of land for agriculture), suppression of opium poppy cultivation and sale of opium (the major traditional Hmong cash crop and source of cash income), restriction of population movement (the traditional Hmong method of balancing population and movement), and development of infrastructure, especially roads, schools and health services.

The major motive for government intervention in the highlands at the beginning of this period was ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of the highlanders in order to prevent the Cold War spread of communism and insurgency. This was important for Hmong because of their involvement on both sides of the ‘secret war’ in Laos, and the Thai government’s fear that communism and insurgency would spread among Hmong in Thailand.

Starting in the 1950s the government began a series of economic development programs, usually staffed by Border Patrol Police, often including schools teaching in the Central Thai language, introducing new crops and providing some preventive and curative health services.

Hmong villages in Thailand were occasionally attacked either by the Government or communist insurgents. In order to increase control and isolate Hmong villagers from communist influence the government relocated a number of Hmong villages to more accessible sites in the highlands and lowlands, starting in the mid-1960s and continuing into the 1980s. This often gave relocated villagers access to more government

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services, but also changed their relationship with the environment, and made it impossible for many relocated villages to continue traditional patterns of shifting cultivation.

By the early 1960s most highland communities were incorporated in national malaria control programs, eliminating or greatly reducing illness from malaria. Along with control of infectious diseases such as smallpox (last seen in northern Thailand in the late 1940s), malaria control was followed by rapid decline in death rates and increase in the rate and volume of population growth. This increased pressure on land resources.

Concern with potential communist insurgency was maintained for several years after the end of the Indochina wars in 1975, but had already been supplemented in the mid-1960s (as a result of US and international pressure) with the desire to control opium production. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Royal Projects as well as bilateral and internationally sponsored projects were established in many highland communities to stimulate economic development and replace poppies with non-narcotic cash crops. These projects introduced new crops and technology in the highlands, but sometimes lacked the technical and infrastructure support (e.g., development of and access to markets for sale of the new cash crops, control of crop pests) to accomplish their objectives of providing an adequate economic substitute for income from opium, or of raising the income of the villagers.

A third major motive for the government, the desire for access to and control over highland forest and watershed resources, came to prominence by the end of the 1970s. Meanwhile the policy of assimilation of highland minorities into Thai society was implemented by substituting normal activities of government ministries for the special activities of agencies such as the Border Patrol. The lead agency was the Public Welfare Department of the Ministry of the Interior in the 1960s, but other ministries such as Education, Public Health and Agriculture took on increasing responsibilities in the 1970s and 1980s in more secure areas. The military which was active on the Lao border throughout the cold war especially along the Myanmar border maintained and extended its control over highland populations into the 1990s.

Construction of an extensive road network in the highlands in the 1970s and 1980s was a major factor allowing the government to enforce and maintain control and deliver administrative and other government services in what had been relatively inaccessible highland communities. Controls included increased enforcement of government regulations on the use of Royal Forest land, restriction of population movement and enforcement of laws against production of opium. These restrictions had a particularly heavy impact on the traditional economy of Hmong, who practiced 'nomadic' slash and burn cultivation of rice and maize as their major subsistence crops and opium as their major cash crop. At the same time the

roads greatly improved access to markets. This was also period during which Hmong farmers experimented with many new cash crops and began to use new farming methods including use of chemicals, machinery and irrigation. Without roads many of these changes would have been impossible or economically impractical.

Opium production is very labor intensive and need for family labor was an important motive for high fertility and large family size. Large and rapidly growing families required increasing amounts of land. Traditional Hmong farming methods resulted in soil exhaustion and weed growth. Along with the desire to increase income by expanding land under cultivation, this led to cutting and cultivating more forest and abandoning more exhausted or weedy areas. In turn this led to the breakup and reformulation of highland communities as families looked for uncut forest land to clear. Population movement was the traditional Hmong solution to balancing population and land resources while allowing production to increase and population to grow. Thus the government regulations struck directly at underlying principles of traditional Hmong economy.

This chapter describes the situation of Hmong villages at the end of the 1980s. It considers some of the consequences of increased government control over traditional Hmong economic activities along with the new economic opportunities related to infrastructure developments, especially roads, and new crops and farming methods, and increased familiarity with Thai language and lowland Thai society. Comparison of relationships between innovations and roads may suggest the importance of spontaneous adoption of innovations as constraints of access to markets were removed or decreased.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Most of the data in this chapter are derived from a community level survey of 198 communities with Hmong residents in 1987–88, plus data from an intensive household survey in 26 predominantly Hmong communities in 1987–88. Hmong interviewers conducted the surveys in the Hmong language, translated the interview results into Thai, and coded the results for computerized data analysis. The community level survey covered virtually all of the Hmong communities in northern Thailand that were not under military jurisdiction. Distribution of surveyed Hmong communities is shown in Table 1.

Variables discussed in this paper are shown in Table 2.

## **ANALYTIC METHODS**

Roads, travel time and location of governmental facilities (development projects, hospitals, health stations) and markets are considered as

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**Table 1** Number of Hmong Communities Surveyed, by Province<sup>1</sup>

| <i>Province</i> | <i>Number of Surveyed Communities</i> |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Chiang Rai      | 38                                    |
| Chiang Mai      | 67                                    |
| Tak             | 30                                    |
| Nan             | 19                                    |
| Petchabun       | 10                                    |
| Phayao          | 9                                     |
| Phrae           | 4                                     |
| Mae Hongson     | 14                                    |
| Lampang         | 6                                     |
| Loei            | 1                                     |
| Total           | 198                                   |

<sup>1</sup>Source: Village level survey.

independent variables. Access to these facilities is assumed to influence dependent variables including agricultural and family planning innovations. For simplicity in analysis the variables have been dichotomized and are presented as the results of 2 by 2 tables of association. One-tailed Fisher's exact tests were used to determine probabilities. Strengths of association are stated in terms of Cramer's V. Computerized analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows, Release 7.0.

Roads and motorized transportation decrease travel time and increase the ability to transport heavy, bulky and perishable goods to market, as well as to bring heavy and bulky materials, such as fertilizers to the village. Thus they can be expected to play an important role in the availability and timing of the introduction of agricultural innovations, including use of agricultural chemicals and machinery and the adoption of bulky, heavy or perishable crops Distance and travel time to the nearest first class hospital are measures of access to the highest level of health modern care. Because first class hospitals are located in provincial capitals or (rarely) in large and important district towns, distance and time to first class hospital also indicate access to (and from) various important administrative services. Presence of a development project, health station or health personnel in a community represent deliberate attempts to introduce services and influence behavior consistent with government policies. We have used three kinds of independent variables to examine the relationship between access to the world outside the villages and changes in village characteristics: *Minimum*

**Table 2 Major Variables in the Analysis of Changes in Hmong Villages**

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*Roads*

- Type of road (all season, dry season)
- Date road was constructed
- Distance from community to nearest road
- Minimum dry-season travel time from community to nearest road

*Access to markets*

- Distance to nearest market
- Minimum dry-season travel time from community to nearest market

*Access to health facilities*

- Minimum dry-season travel time from community to nearest first class hospital

*Development projects located in the community*

- Number of projects in the community
- Sponsoring agency
- Year project began
- Presence of health facility in community

*Agricultural innovations*

- Agricultural chemicals
  - Fertilizer
  - Insecticide
  - Herbicides
  - Saltwater as a pesticide
- Agricultural machinery
  - Hand-held tractors
  - Large tractors
- Irrigation
  - Rain fed wet rice fields
  - Ditch irrigation
  - Sprinkler irrigation
- Cash crops
  - Opium
  - Non-opium crops
  - Improved crop varieties
    - Rice
    - Maize
    - Other crops

*Health Services*

- Government health worker in village
- Government health station in village
- Village Health Volunteer in village

*Family Planning Innovations*

- Modern reversible family planning methods (pill, shot, implant, IUD, condom)
  - Sterilization (female, male)
-

*Dry Season Travel Time to the Nearest Market or First Class Hospital, Year of Construction of the Road Nearest to the Village, and Presence of a Development Project or Health Facility or Health Personnel in the Community.*

## CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEYED COMMUNITIES

### Size, location and access

Surveyed communities ranged in size from 1 to 737 Hmong households. Locations ranged from resettled communities in lowland valleys adjacent to district towns to remote highland villages.

Most of the communities were directly accessible by road. Distance to road ranged from under half a km to 28 km, median under half a km. Travel time from the village to the nearest road ranged from under 1 minute to 600 minutes, median travel time under 1 minute. The nearest road to the community varied in quality (38.4% all-season road, 2.5% all seasons except on days of heavy rain, 59.1% dry season road) (Table 3). Distance and travel time from the village to the nearest market affect access to the outside world. Distance to the nearest market ranged from 0.5 km to 113 km, median 28 km. Minimum dry season travel time to the nearest market is a summary measure that results from the combination of distance from village to road, distance to market and quality of road. Minimum dry season travel time from community to market ranged from 0–5 minutes (where the road passes through village) to over 12 hours, median one hour. One-quarter (25%) of the villages were within 30 minutes travel time to market, while one-fourth of the villages were two or more hours from market. Distance to the nearest first class hospital ranged from 0.5 km to 226 km, median 40 km; minimum dry season travel time to nearest first class hospital ranged from 3 minutes to 13 hours, median 90 minutes. Minimum dry season travel time to nearest market is highly and significantly correlated travel time to first class hospital ( $r^2 = .735$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

Nearest road used by Hmong villagers varied in date of construction, ranging from 1957 to 1987. Half the roads were built in 1978 or later. The distribution of dates of road construction implies that access to the outside world has increased substantially for many villages since the mid- to late 1970s (Table 3).

## POPULATION MOVEMENTS

In the past, Hmong villages in Southeast Asia have often been temporary agglomerations of households dependent on the availability of farm land within walking distance. Because Hmong agriculture has generally resulted

Table 3 Roads and Travel Time<sup>1</sup>

|   | Range     | Median   |
|---|-----------|----------|
| Year nearest road was built   | 1957–1987 | 1978     |
| Distance to nearest road (km) <sup>a</sup>                                    | < 0.5–28  | < 0.5 km |
| When nearest road can be used (%)   |           |          |
| In all seasons  | 38.4%     |          |
| Except days when it rains heavily   | 2.5%      |          |
| Only in dry season  | 59.1%     |          |
| Minimum dry-season walk to nearest road (minutes) <sup>b</sup>                | < 1–600   | < 1 min  |
| Distance to nearest market (km) <sup>c</sup>                                  | < 0.5–113 | 28 km    |
| Minimum dry-season travel time to market (minutes) <sup>d</sup>               | < 1–720   | 60 min   |
| Distance to nearest 1 <sup>st</sup> class hospital (km) <sup>c</sup>          | < 0.5–226 | 40 km    |
| Minimum dry-season travel time to first class hospital (minutes) <sup>f</sup> | 3–780     | 90 min   |

<sup>1</sup> Source: Village level survey.

<sup>a</sup> Proportion > 0.5 km = 8.6%; > 7.5 km = 3.5%.

<sup>b</sup> Proportion > 1 minute = 9.6%; > 1 hour = 4.5%.

<sup>c</sup> Proportion > 10 km = 80.3%; > 20 km = 64.6%; > 30 km = 41.9%; > 40 km = 25.8%

<sup>d</sup> Proportion > 1 hour = 59.4%; > 2 hours = 14.1%; > 3 hours = 9.6%

<sup>e</sup> Proportion > 10 km = 96.0%; > 20 km = 83.7%; > 30 km = 67.7%; > 40 km = 46.0%

<sup>f</sup> Proportion > 1 hour = 56.6%; > 2 hours = 29.8%; > 3 hours = 17.2%

in soil exhaustion, and because population was increasing in size, villages often split up as households left to look for land, and reformed, or new villages were established where land was available. Village leaders in the 198 surveyed villages reported a total of 318 ‘founding groups’ that had made a total of 1188 moves prior to settling in the places where they lived in 1987–88. Range in year of reported movement was from before 1730 to 1988. Median date of movements for which date was remembered was 1957. Dates of 236 moves could not be remembered. The vast majority of movements was related to search for more land or fertile land. The reasons for movements away from the old site are shown in Table 4. Explanations for selecting new locations are similar to those for leaving the old site. Starting in the early 1960s reasons for movement increasingly reflected the involvement of Hmong and the Thai government in Cold War politics and desires related to economic development and infrastructure (Table 5). Government policies to ‘stabilize’ the settlements and agriculture of highland communities have been implemented through regulations designed to prevent or limit population movements. Hmong farmers have

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**Table 4 First and Second Reasons for Movement of Village Founding Groups (All Years)<sup>1</sup>**

| <i>Reason</i>   | <i>Reason for Move from Old Location</i> |               |                |          |
|---|--|---------------|----------------|----------|
|   | <i>First</i>                             | <i>Second</i> | <i>Total N</i> | <i>%</i> |
| <b>Land and other natural resources</b> (soil fertility, water, weather, etc.)                              | 840                                      | 40            | 880            | 72.1     |
| <b>Political</b> (fled communists, rallied to government, relocated by government, joined communists, etc.) | 151                                      | 10            | 161            | 13.2     |
| <b>Kinship, friendship</b> (moved with relatives, invited by friends, etc.)                                 | 85                                       | 15            | 100            | 8.2      |
| <b>Development and infrastructure</b> (no road, no health services, etc.)                                   | 28                                       | 10            | 38             | 3.1      |
| <b>Other</b> (local disputes, etc.)   | 33                                       | 9             | 42             | 3.4      |
| <b>Total</b>  | 1137                                     | 84            | 1221           | 100.0    |

<sup>1</sup>Source: Village level survey.

**Table 5 Year of Earliest Move for Various Reasons<sup>1</sup>**

| <i>Reason for Move</i>             | <i>Year of Earliest Move for this Reason</i> |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Political</b>                   |  |
| Government ordered move            | 1964   |
| Moved to join communists           | 1965   |
| Rally to Government side           | 1968   |
| Accused of being communist         | 1968   |
| Fled from Burma                    | 1984   |
| <b>Development, Infrastructure</b> |  |
| No road in old place               | 1957   |
| Close to town, can sell things     | 1957   |
| No school in old place             | 1974   |
| No medicine in old place           | 1974   |

<sup>1</sup> Source: Village level survey.

sometimes circumvented these policies by 'commuting' to farms up to 400 km from their registered place of residence.

### DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Development projects were located in over half (54.5%) the Hmong villages covered in the survey. They were intended to introduce technological innovations, especially new crops, as a substitute for opium poppy cultivation, as well as to provide various governmental services to the communities. Projects were started between 1961 and 1988, median year 1982 (Table 6). Most of the development projects (44, 51.2% of all projects) were sponsored by the Public Welfare Department, the agency with the major responsibility for highland populations not under military control. The next most common sponsor was the Royal Project (22 projects, 25.6% of all projects) (see Table 7).

Development projects are more likely to be present in villages with minimum dry season travel time to nearest market 0–60 minutes than in villages further from markets (one-tailed Fisher's exact test  $p = .009$ , Cramer's  $V = .177$ ). They are also more likely to be located in villages where the nearest road was built before 1977, rather than those where the nearest road was built more recently ( $p = .025$ , Cramer's  $V = .153$ ).

### AGRICULTURE – SUBSISTENCE CROPS

Traditionally the chief crops of Hmong farmers were upland rice and maize as subsistence crops, and opium as a cash and subsistence crop. The predominant economic activity of Hmong villages in the late 1980s was a mixture of subsistence and cash crop farming. Most of the villages reported growing a very wide variety of subsistence crops. Rice was grown as the

Table 6 Development Projects in Surveyed Communities, 1986–87<sup>1</sup>

| Number of projects per community | Number and percent of communities |       |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------|
|                                  | N                                 | %     |
| None                             | 90                                | 45.5  |
| 1                                | 86                                | 43.4  |
| 2                                | 17                                | 8.6   |
| 3                                | 1                                 | 0.5   |
| 4                                | 0                                 | 0.0   |
| 5                                | 3                                 | 1.5   |
| 6                                | 1                                 | 0.5   |
| Total                            | 198                               | 100.0 |

<sup>1</sup>Source: Village level survey, 1987–88.

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**Table 7 Sponsoring Agencies for First Development Project in Community<sup>1</sup>**

| <i>Agency</i>              | <i>Number of Projects</i> | <i>Percent of Projects</i> |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Public Welfare Department  | 44                        | 51.2                       |
| Royal Project              | 22                        | 25.6                       |
| Military Unit              | 8                         | 9.3                        |
| Royal Forestry Department  | 2                         | 2.3                        |
| Military + Land Department | 2                         | 2.3                        |
| Other <sup>2</sup>         | 8                         | 9.3                        |

<sup>1</sup> Source: Village level survey, 1987–88.

<sup>2</sup> Other sponsoring agencies (one project each): Community Education Project, Cooperative Self-Help Settlement, Mae Chaem Development Project, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Ministry of Public Health, Royal Irrigation Department, Thai-German Project, Thai-Norway Project.

most important subsistence crop in 172 of the villages (86.9%) of the villages, and maize was grown as the second most important subsistence crop in 148 (74.7%) of the villages. Opium was reported to be grown by most households in 8 villages (4.0%), by a few households in 74 villages (37.4%), and not grown or grown only in the past in 114 villages (57.6%). The question related to subsistence opium production was not answered in 2 villages.

None of the villages reported that they grew no subsistence crops, but several villages reported they had abandoned some traditional subsistence crops within the 10 years prior to survey. Two villages reported that they no longer planted rice, and two villages also reported that they no longer planted white maize (the traditional Hmong variety). The subsistence crops most commonly reported to have been abandoned were opium, no longer planted in 33 (16.7%) villages, and non-narcotic hemp, abandoned by 50 (25.3%) of the villages during this period, mostly as a result of government pressure.

Opium as a subsistence crop was traditionally used as a medicine and recreational drug, hemp was traditionally used for weaving skirt cloth. Toward the end of the 1980s the government ordered villages to reduce their production of opium both for sale and for local use by one-third in each of three successive years. This was followed by a major increase in sale of opium and heroin (mostly produced in Burma) for local consumption in the 1990s. During this period the government also ordered villagers to stop growing hemp, perhaps under the mistaken belief that it was a closely related species of *Cannabis* being used as a narcotic. Suppression of hemp growing resulted in dependence of the villagers on the market for cloth. This resulted in loss of a minor source of cash for Thai Hmong villagers who had sold hemp cloth and skirts in the market, and major increases in

the importation of Hmong hemp cloth from China and Laos (mostly for sale to tourists) in the 1990s.

Many Hmong villages reported they had added many new varieties of fruits and vegetables as subsistence crops in the 10 years prior to the survey. The most common of these was cabbage, reported for 34 villages. Cotton (a replacement for hemp) was reported as a new subsistence crop in only one village.

### **AGRICULTURE – CASH CROPS**

The varieties and extent of the commonest current and new cash crops, and the abandonment of traditional cash crops indicate the extent to which Hmong agriculture changed from the traditional pattern especially in the ten years prior to survey. At least 61 different varieties of cash crops were grown in 191 (96.5%) of the surveyed villages. Only seven villages (3.5%) reported they grew no cash crops. The fact that so many different cash crops were being grown suggests widespread experimentation by Hmong to determine what crops were suitable for their environment and for the market. The ten most common cash crops are shown in Table 8. Most of these are not traditional Hmong subsistence or cash crops.

Most villages (89.4%) reported growing one or more of 56 new varieties of cash crops within the 10 years prior to the survey. Reasons mentioned for adding new varieties of cash crops include price or profit from the new crop (69.8%), legality of the new crop or illegality of opium (17.0%), or suitability of the new crop to the soil or climate (13.2%). The major new crops and numbers of villages reporting starting to grow them are also shown in Table 8.

Village leaders in 123 villages reported that one or more cash crops had been abandoned in the 10 years prior to survey. By far the most important cash crop discontinued was opium, abandoned as a cash crop in 117 villages (59.1%) of the villages. Other cash crops that were abandoned included hemp (6 villages), maize (5 villages) and white potatoes (2 villages).

### **AGRICULTURE – FARMING METHODS**

Hmong in Southeast Asia have traditionally been highland swidden farmers using a long cultivation – very long fallow system of cultivation. Between 1977 and 1987 the number of villages reporting that they were not planting swidden rice increased from 6 to 12. During the same period the number of villages reporting that their swidden rice fields were being cultivated continuously, without fallow, increased from 4 to 23. These are indications of increasing land shortage.

Use of various forms of irrigation is an indication of the intensification of agriculture. Ditch fed, rain fed and sprinkler irrigation were used in many of the surveyed Hmong villages. The first use of ditch fed irrigated rice fields was

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**Table 8 Ten Most Common Cash Crops Currently Grown and Ten Most Common New Cash Crops Grown in Hmong Villages in 1986–87<sup>1</sup>**

| <i>Most Common Current Cash Crop</i> | <i>Number of Villages</i> | <i>Most Common New Crop in Past 10 Years</i> | <i>Number of Villages</i> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Maize                                | 103                       | Cabbage                                      | 57                        |
| Cabbage                              | 84                        | Red bean                                     | 29                        |
| Red bean                             | 49                        | Yellow maize                                 | 25                        |
| Chilli                               | 29                        | Ginger                                       | 18                        |
| Ginger                               | 27                        | Carrot                                       | 17                        |
| Opium                                | 27                        | Leaf lettuce                                 | 14                        |
| Leaf lettuce                         | 24                        | Job's tears                                  | 11                        |
| Carrot                               | 23                        | Linchee                                      | 9                         |
| Castor bean                          | 20                        | Chilli                                       | 8                         |
| Cotton                               | 20                        | Cotton                                       | 7                         |
|                                      |                           | Hang hong                                    | 7                         |

<sup>1</sup> Source: Village level survey.

reported in 1965. By 1977, 34 villages reported use of ditch fed irrigated fields. By 1987 the number reporting use of ditch fed irrigated fields reached 104 (52.5% of villages). The first use of rain fed irrigated fields was reported in 1967, but by 1987 only 14 villages (7.1%) reported use of rain fed paddies. Median year of first use was 1978. The total number of villages using ditch or rain fed irrigated rice fields was 112 by 1987: only ditch fed = 96 (48.5%), only rain fed = 8 (4.0%), both ditch fed and rain fed 8 (4.0%).

Sprinklers were used primarily for irrigating cash crops, mostly cabbage (49 villages) usually in combination with other crops (30 villages). The first use of sprinklers for irrigation of crops was reported in 1969. At least 54 villages (36.2%) were using sprinklers by 1987 (questions about sprinklers were not asked in the 49 surveyed villages in Nan or Tak provinces). Median year of first use was 1981.

#### AGRICULTURE – IMPROVED SEED

Hmong farmers have traditionally selected seed of crops in order to encourage desired qualities in their produce. Although 'miracle rice' varieties have become very widespread in Asia, improved rice varieties have not been very popular with Hmong farmers. First use was reported in 1975, but by 1987 improved rice seed was being used in only 9.1% of the villages. This may be because Hmong grow a large proportion of their rice

in swiddens, and no dry field improved varieties were available, and because Hmong grow rice primarily for subsistence, not sale, and thus taste and environmental suitability are major reasons for selection of the variety grown. Hmong grow maize for both subsistence and sale. First reported use of improved varieties of maize was in 1970. By 1987 improved maize seed was reported in 40.1% of the villages. Hmong farmers in 109 villages also begun using improved seed for at least 44 other varieties of other crops, mostly for sale, not subsistence. These included cabbage (72 villages), red beans, lettuce, linchee, Job's Tears and carrots (grown by 18, 17, 15, 14, and 10 villages respectively). Use of improved seed, which must be purchased, is a further indication of involvement in the market economy.

### **AGRICULTURE – FARM CHEMICALS**

Traditional Hmong farming made no use of farm chemicals. Village leaders report the first use of herbicides in 1967. By 1987 they reported that herbicides were in use in 64.6 percent of the villages. First reported uses of chemical fertilizers and insecticides were in 1969. By 1987 they were in use in 61.6% and 63.6% of the villages respectively. Salt water spray as a pesticide was first reported in 1971, and by 1987 35.9% of the villages were using it. Agricultural chemicals increase yields per unit of land and per unit of labor. They increase the monetary cost of production, and thus are a further indication of participation in the market.

### **AGRICULTURE – FARM MACHINERY**

Tractors greatly increase the speed of work, and decrease the amount of labor required for field preparation and tasks such as weeding. Because they are able to plow deeply they make the soil softer and increase productivity. They can increase the amount of land that can be cultivated, but in general Hmong farmers have not been able to increase the amount of land under cultivation because of government restrictions. Large tractors are suitable only for relatively large and relatively level fields that are accessible to roads. Because they are expensive either to rent or buy they are generally appropriate only for cash crops. Hmong farmers first began to use large tractors in 1969, and by 1987 they were in use in 29.8% of villages. Large tractors were usually contracted for work in the village (53 villages) or rented (13 villages) rather than owned (only 8 villages). Small tractors ('iron buffalos') can be used on smaller fields and steeper terrain. Because they cost less, they can be used with either cash or subsistence crops. First reported use was in 1977, and by ten years later they were reported in use in 29.4% of villages. Small tractors were usually owned by villagers (53 villages) rather than being contracted (22 villages) or rented (14 villages) for work in the village. Use and ownership of tractors indicate further

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participation in the market economy. Along with use of farm chemicals, they imply an increase in the capital and a decrease in the amount of household labor necessary for farming.

### **FARM LABOR AND WAGE WORK**

Traditionally Hmong households supplied their own labor, exchanged labor with other households, or hired laborers, but did not do wage labor themselves. Traditionally workers who were hired were often opium addicts from other ethnic groups. At the time of survey, most Hmong farm labor was supplied by the villagers themselves. There were 136 villages that reported that some member of every household did some farm work, and there were only 4 villages that reported that one-third or more of the households did no farm work.

Wage workers were hired in 102 villages (56.6%). Workers came into the villages from a total of 105 localities, ranging from 0 to 450 km (median 12 km). The majority of villages with wage workers from outside hired ethnic Karen. Other highlanders accounted for most of the rest of the workers (total 29.5% of villages hiring outside workers). Lowland ethnic groups (Northern Thai, Shan, Bangladeshi, Burmese, Chinese and Mon) comprised only 13.6%, as shown in Table 9.

About two-thirds of the villages reported payments for workers coming into the villages were in cash, but a sizeable portion of the payments were also made in kind, especially in opium (about one-quarter). These results suggest that the traditional patterns of hiring highlanders rather than other ethnic groups, and paying them in opium rather than cash persisted at the same time that wage work was proliferating in the Hmong population.

Villagers in 103 villages (52% of all villages) earned income from wage labor; in 85 villages (42.9% of all villages) some of the villagers were reported to earn income from wage labor inside their own village. Location of work ranged from 1 km to 250 km outside the village in a total of 40 localities. This suggests a major change from the traditional pattern with regard to Hmong doing wage work for others.

### **RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INNOVATIONS, ACCESS TO MARKET AND GOVERNMENT PROJECTS**

In general there are statistically significant relationships between access to market or presence of development projects in the villages and use of agricultural innovations or family planning. Results of the statistical analyses are summarized in Table 10. Unless otherwise specified, in the following description probabilities (p) are given for single-tailed Fisher's exact tests, and strength of association (V) are given for Cramer's V. Relationships referred to as 'significant' are those with a  $p < .05$ . 'Travel time' refers to

**Table 9** Ethnicity of Workers Reported Hired into Hmong Villages  
(Multiple answers from 102 villages where outside workers were hired)<sup>1</sup>

| Ethnicity             | Villages Reporting |         |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|
|                       | Number             | Percent |
| Karen                 | 125                | 56.8    |
| Lua'                  | 17                 | 7.7     |
| Northern Thai         | 13                 | 5.9     |
| Htin                  | 10                 | 4.5     |
| Musser (Lahu)         | 10                 | 4.5     |
| Hmong                 | 9                  | 4.1     |
| Thai                  | 9                  | 4.1     |
| Khmu'                 | 7                  | 3.2     |
| Akha                  | 6                  | 2.7     |
| NE Thai               | 5                  | 2.3     |
| Shan (Tai Yai)        | 3                  | 1.4     |
| Bangladeshi ('Islam') | 2                  | 0.9     |
| Burmese               | 1                  | 0.5     |
| Chinese, Haw          | 1                  | 0.5     |
| Lisu                  | 1                  | 0.5     |
| Mon                   | 1                  | 0.5     |
| Total                 | 220                | 100.0   |

<sup>1</sup> Source: Village level survey.

minimal dry season travel time to market, 'road' refers to construction date of the nearest road to the village before 1977, 'project' refers to presence of one or more development projects in the village. These are considered to be independent variables in this analysis.

### USE OF FARM CHEMICALS

Use of fertilizers is significantly associated with travel time ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .341$ ), road ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .258$ ) and project ( $p = .001$ ,  $V = .239$ ).

Insecticides are significantly associated with travel time ( $p = .003$ ,  $V = .207$ ) and project ( $p = .001$ ,  $V = .322$ ) but the relationship with road is not quite significant ( $p = .069$ ,  $V = .118$ ).

Herbicides are significantly related to travel time to market (one-tailed Fisher's exact test  $p = .019$ ,  $V = .157$ ), but not to road or project.

Use of salt water as a pesticide is significantly related to travel time ( $p = .008$ ,  $V = .157$ ) and project ( $p = .022$ ,  $V = .154$ ) but not quite significantly to road ( $p = .073$ ,  $V = .117$ ).

These results suggest that the use of farm chemicals responded differently to different independent variables. Travel time was the most consistently associated, followed by project.

*Table 10a Statistical Analyses of Community Level Changes – Agricultural Technology*

| <i>Type of Change</i>             | <i>Villages Using</i> |             | <i>First Use</i> |             | <i>Median First Use</i> |                   | <i>Minimum Dry Season Time to Nearest Market</i> |                   | <i>Nearest Road Was Built Before 1977</i> |                   | <i>Development Project in Village</i> |                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
|                                   | <i>%</i>              | <i>Year</i> | <i>Year</i>      | <i>Year</i> | <i>P</i>                | <i>Cramer's V</i> | <i>P</i>   | <i>Cramer's V</i> | <i>P</i>                                  | <i>Cramer's V</i> | <i>P</i>                              | <i>Cramer's V</i> |
| <b>Chemicals</b>                  |                       |             |                  |             |                         |                   |  |                   |   |                   |                                       |                   |
| Fertilizer <sup>2</sup>           | 61.6                  | 1969        | 1984             | .000        | .341                    | .000              | .258   | .001              | .239                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Insecticide <sup>2</sup>          | 63.6                  | 1969        | 1985             | .003        | .207                    | .069              | .118   | .001              | .322                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Herbicide <sup>1</sup>            | 64.6                  | 1967        | 1985             | .019        | .157                    | .379              | .033   | .308              | .046                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Salt water pesticide <sup>1</sup> | 35.9                  | 1971        | 1983             | .008        | .181                    | .073              | .117   | .022              | .154                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| <b>Improved Seed</b>              |                       |             |                  |             |                         |                   |  |                   |   |                   |                                       |                   |
| Rice <sup>3</sup>                 | 9.1                   | 1975        | 1982             | .005        | .218                    | .144              | .095   | .031              | .148                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Maize <sup>2</sup>                | 40.1                  | 1970        | 1982             | .083        | .111                    | .221              | .068   | .055              | .126                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Other crops <sup>2</sup>          | 54.4                  | 1977        | 1985             | .010        | .179                    | .446              | .021   | .016              | .165                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| <b>Tractors</b>                   |                       |             |                  |             |                         |                   |  |                   |   |                   |                                       |                   |
| Small tractors <sup>2</sup>       | 29.4                  | 1977        | 1983             | .001        | .228                    | .028              | .153   | .000              | .263                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Large tractors <sup>3</sup>       | 29.8                  | 1969        | 1982             | .001        | .227                    | .514              | .009   | .299              | .049                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Any size tractors <sup>2</sup>    | 51.0                  | 1969        | -                | .000        | .326                    | .092              | .107   | .004              | .201                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| <b>Irrigation</b>                 |                       |             |                  |             |                         |                   |  |                   |   |                   |                                       |                   |
| Rain fed paddies <sup>2</sup>     | 7.1                   | 1967        | 1979             | .017        | .163                    | .009              | .192   | .004              | .196                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Ditch fed paddies <sup>3</sup>    | 52.0                  | 1965        | 1980             | .031        | .144                    | .016              | .166   | .001              | .229                                      |                   |                                       |                   |
| Sprinkler irrigation <sup>2</sup> | 36.2                  | 1969        | 1985             | .036        | .161                    | .079              | .134   | .002              | .242                                      |                   |                                       |                   |

*Table 10b* Statistical Analyses of Community Level Changes – Opium Cultivation

| <i>Type of Change</i>   | <i>Villages Using</i> | <i>First Use</i> | <i>Median First Use</i> | <i>Minimum Dry Season Time to Nearest Market</i> | <i>Nearest Road Was Built Before 1977</i> |          | <i>Development Project in Village</i> |          |      |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|--|---|----------|---------------------------------------|----------|------|
|   |                       |                  |                         |  | <i>Cramer's V</i>                         | <i>P</i> | <i>Cramer's V</i>                     | <i>P</i> |      |
| <b>Opium as cash crop – All Villages (N = 198)</b>                        |                       |                  |                         |  |   |          |                                       |          |      |
| Continued planting <sup>2</sup>   | 13.6                  | -                | -                       | .354   | .041                                      | .007     | .186                                  | .015     | .169 |
| Stopped planting <sup>2</sup>   | 59.1                  | -                | -                       | .000   | .254                                      | .513     | .008                                  | .006     | .189 |
| <b>Opium for own use – All Villages (N = 198)</b>                         |                       |                  |                         |  |   |          |                                       |          |      |
| Stopped planting <sup>1</sup>   | 16.7                  | -                | -                       | .181   | .079                                      | .044     | .139                                  | .426     | .027 |
| <b>Opium as cash crop – Villages with Development Projects (N = 108)</b>  |                       |                  |                         |  |   |          |                                       |          |      |
| Continued planting <sup>2</sup>   | 8.3                   | -                | -                       | .299   | .084                                      | .285     | .092                                  | -        | -    |
| Stopped planting <sup>2</sup>   | 67.6                  | -                | -                       | .025   | .212                                      | .478     | .027                                  | -        | -    |
| <b>Opium for own use – Villages with Development Projects (N = 108)</b>   |                       |                  |                         |  |   |          |                                       |          |      |
| Stopped planting <sup>1</sup>   | 17.6                  | -                | -                       | .161   | .120                                      | .022     | .224                                  | -        | -    |
| <b>Opium as cash crop – Villages with No Development Project (N = 90)</b> |                       |                  |                         |  |   |          |                                       |          |      |
| Continued planting <sup>2</sup>   | 20.0                  | -                | -                       | .438   | .044                                      | .022     | .236                                  | -        | -    |
| Stopped planting <sup>2</sup>   | 48.9                  | -                | -                       | .017   | .245                                      | .381     | .057                                  | -        | -    |
| <b>Opium for own use – Villages with No Development Project (N = 90)</b>  |                       |                  |                         |  |   |          |                                       |          |      |
| Stopped planting <sup>2</sup>   | 15.6                  | -                | -                       | .085   | .174                                      | .518     | .026                                  | -        | -    |

*Table 10b* Statistical Analyses of Community Level Changes – Opium Cultivation (continued)

| <i>Type of Change</i>   | <i>Government Health Worker<br/>in Village</i> |                   | <i>Government Health Station<br/>in Village</i> |                   | <i>Village Health<br/>Volunteer</i> |                   |
|---|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
|   | <i>P</i>                                       | <i>Cramer's V</i> | <i>P</i>  | <i>Cramer's V</i> | <i>P</i>                            | <i>Cramer's V</i> |
| <b>Opium as cash crop – All Villages (N = 198)</b>                        |  |                   |   |                   |                                     |                   |
| Continued planting <sup>2</sup>   | .610   | .002              | .504  | .015              | .495                                | .015              |
| Stopped planting <sup>2</sup>   | .024   | .155              | .003  | .209              | .276                                | .053              |
| <b>Opium for own use – All Villages (N = 198)</b>                         |  |                   |   |                   |                                     |                   |
| Stopped planting <sup>1</sup>   | .211   | .075              | .272  | .061              | .149                                | .088              |
| <b>Opium as cash crop – Villages with Development Projects (N = 108)</b>  |  |                   |   |                   |                                     |                   |
| Continued planting <sup>2</sup>   | .246   | .107              | .574  | .025              | .324                                | .078              |
| Stopped planting <sup>2</sup>   | .010   | .250              | .002  | .313              | .242                                | .087              |
| <b>Opium as cash crop – Villages with No Development Project (N = 90)</b> |  |                   |   |                   |                                     |                   |
| Stopped planting <sup>1</sup>   | .182   | .115              | .209  | .107              | .257                                | .088              |
| <b>Opium as cash crop – Villages with No Development Project (N = 90)</b> |  |                   |   |                   |                                     |                   |
| Continued planting <sup>2</sup>   | .048   | .234              | .241  | .111              | .315                                | .082              |
| Stopped planting <sup>2</sup>   | .148   | .149              | .133  | .149              | .074                                | .179              |
| <b>Opium for own use – Villages with No Development Project (N = 90)</b>  |  |                   |   |                   |                                     |                   |
| Stopped planting <sup>2</sup>   | .638   | .026              | .674  | .002              | .335                                | .078              |

**Table 10c Statistical Analyses of Community Level Changes – Family Planning**

| Type of Change                    | Villages Using  |            | First Use                 | Median First Use | Minimum Dry Season Time to Nearest Market | Nearest Road Was Built Before 1977 |                                     | Development Project in Village |            |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------|---------------------------|------------------|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
|                                   | %   | Year       | Year                      | P                | Cramer's V                                | P                                  | Cramer's V                          | P                              | Cramer's V |
| <b>Family Planning</b>            |   |            |                           |                  |   |                                    |                                     |                                |            |
| Temporary method <sup>2,5</sup>   | 78.3  | 1967       | 1984                      | .000             | .340                                      | .122                               | .097                                | .013                           | .292       |
| Male sterilization <sup>2</sup>   | 15.2  | 1972       | 1980                      | .216             | .071                                      | .573                               | .003                                | .553                           | .005       |
| Female sterilization <sup>2</sup> | 57.1  | 1968       | 1981                      | .004             | .199                                      | .043                               | .135                                | .024                           | .151       |
| <hr/>                             |   |            |                           |                  |   |                                    |                                     |                                |            |
| Type of Change                    | Minimum Dry Season Time to Nearest First Class Hospital |            | Health Station in Village |                  | Government Health Worker in Village       |                                    | Village Health Volunteer in Village |                                |            |
|                                   | P   | Cramer's V | P                         | Cramer's V       | P   | Cramer's V                         | P                                   | Cramer's V                     |            |
| Temporary method <sup>4,5</sup>   | .005  | .193       | .000                      | .281             | .010                                      | .172                               | .005                                | .194                           |            |
| Male sterilization <sup>4</sup>   | .278  | .061       | .110                      | .106             | .280                                      | .058                               | .042                                | .138                           |            |
| Female sterilization <sup>4</sup> | .100  | .101       | .229                      | .065             | .446                                      | .023                               | .000                                | .252                           |            |

Footnotes for Table 10a, 10b and 10c.

<sup>1</sup> Minimum dry season travel time to nearest market 0–59 minutes vs. 60–720 minutes

<sup>2</sup> Minimum dry season travel time to nearest market 0–60 minutes vs. 61–720 minutes

<sup>3</sup> Minimum dry season travel time to nearest market 0–30 minutes vs. 31–720 minutes

<sup>4</sup> Minimum dry season travel time to nearest hospital 0–60 minutes vs. 61–720 minutes

<sup>5</sup> Temporary methods include one or more of the following: pill, shot, condom, IUD and implant

### **IMPROVED CROP VARIETIES**

Improved rice varieties are significantly associated with travel time ( $p = .005$ ,  $V = .218$ ) and project ( $p = .031$ ,  $V = .148$ ), but not with road.

There is a similar but nonsignificant pattern of relationships between use of improved maize seed the independent variables.

Improved seed for other crops (e.g., cabbage, red beans, lettuce, linchee, Job's Tears, carrots) is significantly associated with travel time ( $p = .010$ ,  $V = .179$ ) and project ( $p = .016$ ,  $V = .165$ ), but not with road.

### **USE OF FARM MACHINERY**

Small tractors are significantly associated with travel time ( $p = .001$ ,  $V = .228$ ), road ( $p = .028$ ,  $V = .153$ ) and project ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .263$ ).

Large tractors are significantly associated with travel time ( $p = .001$ ,  $V = .227$ ) but not with road or project.

Use of any tractors (large or small) is significantly associated with travel time ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .326$ ) and project ( $p = .004$ ,  $V = .201$ ), but not significantly with road ( $p = .092$ ,  $V = .107$ ).

### **IRRIGATION**

Rain fed paddies are associated with travel time ( $p = .017$ ,  $V = .163$ ), road ( $p = .009$ ,  $V = .192$ ) and project ( $p = .004$ ,  $V = .196$ ).

Ditch fed paddies are significantly associated with travel time ( $p = .031$ ,  $V = .144$ , road ( $p = .016$ ,  $V = .166$ ) and project ( $p = .001$ ,  $V = .229$ ).

Sprinkler irrigation in villages is significantly associated with travel time ( $p = .036$ ,  $V = .161$ ) and project ( $p = .002$ ,  $V = .242$ ), but not significantly with road ( $p = .079$ ,  $V = .134$ ).

### **DISCONTINUATION OF OPIUM CULTIVATION**

For the last 100 years or so opium has been the major cash crop for Hmong. Poppy is well suited to cultivation in highland areas, especially on limestone-based soils. The advantages of opium as a cash crop were high value, a ready market, easy transportability and the fact that it was not perishable. Opium was also important as a medicine as well as a recreational drug. The importance of opium in the Hmong economy was greatly reduced in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the enforcement of government anti-narcotic policies. By the time of survey in 1987–88, a total of only 27 villages reported that opium was among their eight most important cash crops, while a total of 117 villages reported that they had stopped growing opium as a cash crop in the previous 10 years. Almost all (96.6%) of the reasons cited by village leaders for discontinuing opium

growing were related to government actions (government forbids planting poppy, planting opium poppy is illegal, etc.).

### **CULTIVATION AND CESSATION OF OPIUM, ACCESS TO MARKETS AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

One of the major objectives of government policy for many years prior to the late 1980s was to stop opium cultivation both as a cash crop and for the use of the villagers. Success of the policy can be judged both by the number of villages in which opium cultivation continued, and by the number in which it stopped. When all 198 villages are considered together there are significant and strong relationships between stopping planting as a cash crop and travel time ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .254$ ), and project ( $p = .015$ ,  $V = .169$ ). Stopping is not significantly related to date of road construction, but continued planting is ( $p = .007$ ,  $V = .186$ ). Stopping planting of opium produced for own use is more strongly associated with travel time and road in villages without projects, but is only significant for date of road construction ( $p = .044$ ,  $V = .139$ ), not to for travel time or project (Table 10b).

The role of access to markets vs. development projects can be compared in villages with and without development projects. Villages with development projects had lower proportions continuing to grow opium as a cash crop than did villages where there was no development project (8.3% vs. 20%). Villages with development projects had a higher proportion that had stopped growing opium as a cash crop within the 10 years prior to survey (67.6% vs. 48.9%), but there was little difference in the proportion that had stopped growing opium for their own use (17.6% vs. 15.6%). Among villages with development projects, the only significant relationship is for cash crop opium. Shorter travel time is associated with more villages stopping ( $p = .025$ ,  $V = .212$ ). Among villages with no development project, there are significant relationships for stopping for travel time ( $p = .017$ ,  $V = .245$ ), and roads ( $p = .022$ ,  $V = .236$ ). The relationship between shorter travel time to market and stopping is almost significant ( $p = .085$ ,  $V = .174$ ). These comparisons suggest that both access to markets and development projects were associated with an increase in the proportions of villages that stopped growing opium. Presence of development projects in the villages was neither necessary nor sufficient to cause the decrease in opium cultivation by itself.

### **CULTIVATION AND CESSATION OF OPIUM, HEALTH SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

First use of opium among Hmong is most commonly related to use of opium as a medicine (Table 11). Thus it has been hypothesized that the success of attempts to stop production and addiction will require

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**Table 11 Reasons for Use of Opium<sup>1</sup>**

| <i>Reasons</i>                    | <i>Reasons for Use</i> |      |               |      |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|------|---------------|------|
|                                   | <i>Male</i>            |      | <i>Female</i> |      |
|                                   | N                      | %    | N             | %    |
| Health, medical <sup>2</sup>      | 160                    | 58.4 | 79            | 66.4 |
| Social, recreational <sup>3</sup> | 114                    | 41.6 | 40            | 33.6 |
| Never Used Opium                  | 1438                   | –    | 1900          | –    |

<sup>1</sup>Source: Explanations given by 1431 ever-married men and 2019 ever-married women respondents in household level survey in 26 Hmong communities, 1987–88,

<sup>2</sup> Stomach problem, diarrhea, pain, injury, wound, sick, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Used with spouse or parent, just liked to use it, saw others using it, etc.

substitution of modern health services for medicinal use of opium as well as the introduction of non-narcotic crops to substitute for income generated by sale of opium. The hypothesis can be tested by comparing discontinuation of opium cultivation in villages with and villages without development projects. Results of all comparisons are shown in Table 10b. Statistically significant results are as follows.

When all 198 villages are considered together, discontinuation of opium as a cash crop is associated with presence of government health worker in the village ( $p = .024$ ,  $V = .155$ ) and with presence of a health station ( $p = .003$ ,  $V = .209$ ).

When only villages with projects are considered, these relationships are also statistically significant (health worker  $p = .010$ ,  $V = .250$ ; health station  $p = .002$ ,  $V = .313$ ).

In villages without development projects the presence of a government health worker is associated with not growing opium as a cash crop ( $p = .048$ ,  $V = .234$ ). Presence of a village health volunteer in villages with no development project is not quite statistically significant ( $p = .074$ ,  $V = .179$ ).

These results give some support to the hypothesis that health services contribute to successful attempts to stop opium production.

### FAMILY PLANNING

Analysis of data from a demographic survey of 26 Hmong communities showed a substantial and rapid decline in fertility beginning in the early 1980s. Motives for reducing fertility included a perception of land shortages, declining need for household labor associated with suppression of opium cultivation and the introduction of less labor-intensive techniques,

and the increased costs of children associated with requirements for education which was needed for non-agricultural jobs. Fertility reduction was associated with use of modern family planning techniques, including both temporary methods (pill, shot, implant, IUD) and sterilization. By the time of survey one or more temporary methods were used in 151 villages (76.8%). The most commonly reported reversible methods were pill (used in 92 villages), shot (82 villages), condom (24 villages), IUD (10 villages), and implant (5 villages). Female sterilization was used in 113 villages (57.1%), and male sterilization was used in 30 villages (15.2%).

Table 10c shows relationships between use of temporary family planning and independent variables. Shorter travel time to market was associated with more villages using temporary methods ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .327$ ) and with female sterilization ( $p = .004$ ,  $V = .199$ ) but not with male sterilization. Road building before 1977 was associated with more villages using temporary methods ( $p = .018$ ,  $V = .206$ ) and female sterilization ( $p = .043$ ,  $V = .135$ ), but not with male sterilization. More villages with development projects used temporary methods ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .292$ ) and female sterilization ( $p = .024$ ,  $V = .151$ ), but development project was not associated with on male sterilization. Shorter travel time to first class hospital was associated with more villages using temporary methods ( $p = .007$ ,  $V = .224$ ), but the relationship with both female and male sterilization was not significant. Health station in the village was associated with temporary methods with ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .313$ ) but not with sterilization. Village health volunteer in village was association with temporary methods ( $p = .004$ ,  $V = .238$ ), female sterilization ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .252$ ), and male sterilization ( $p = .042$ ,  $V = .138$ ). These results suggest the importance of the presence of health personnel in the community, as well as the importance of access to market. Access to market appears to be more important than travel time to the nearest first class hospital. This is consistent with the availability of all family planning services at most health facilities. The importance of village health volunteers in promoting the acceptance of family planning is suggested by the fact that this is the only independent variable to be significantly associated with all family planning including male sterilization. Presence of village health volunteers in the village is also significantly associated with the first year in which sterilization was reported in the community ( $p < .000$ ,  $V = .317$ ).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The period from the 1960s onward has seen many rapid changes in the economy and demography of Hmong in northern Thailand. Most of the innovations discussed in this paper were first used in one or more Hmong villages in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Median year of first use, however, was not until the early 1980s. This suggests that the pace of accepting

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innovations accelerated in the early 1980s, after construction of the highland road network was well under way, and after development projects had been established in a number of villages.

Basic agricultural techniques have changed with the introduction of chemicals, machinery and new crops. Many new cash and subsistence crops were introduced while several important cash and subsistence crops have been abandoned. These changes have generally resulted in decline of demands for household labor and more intensive use of the land.

Development and health service projects in the highlands are significantly associated with many of the changes. The presence of government personnel in the villages and village volunteers trained by the government, for example, is clearly associated with adoption of modern family planning methods, and the presence of development projects is clearly associated with the introduction of numerous innovations in farming practices. Although many of the changes are consistent with government policies, the changes were not necessarily deliberately induced by government projects. Building of the network of highland roads was initially conducted for national security, but the roads also served to greatly increase access to markets. Control over highland land resources was implemented primarily to protect watersheds and other highland resources, but the resulting land shortage also was a major motive for fertility control and for increasing parental investment in quality not just quantity of children. The net result of the changes in the 1960s–1980s was to make Hmong much more directly dependent on the world economy both for purchase of goods that are now essential to them (e.g., fertilizer, pesticides, seeds, farm machinery) and for sale of a variety of new farm products which they cannot consume themselves.

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### NOTES

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# Chapter Eight

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## Chapter Eight

# The Impact of Trekking Tourism in a Changing Society: A Karen Village in Northern Thailand

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### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to examine the role of tourism in the economy of Ban Chaidee,<sup>1</sup> a Karen village in Northern Thailand. I will discuss the factors causing the deeper involvement of the villagers in the trekking tour business and explain the effects of tourism on the village. Furthermore I will show that tourism caused the villagers to become more firmly involved in a market economy dominated by Thai and foreign enterprises. I shall argue, by putting the data into the model proposed by Stephen Britton in 1982 that this entry into a market economy in turn caused the villagers to become more integrated into Thai society.

The study presented here is based on research which I conducted in Thailand between mid-May and the end of October 1996. During this time I spent six weeks in Ban Chaidee village researching the socio-economic role and the specific effects of trekking tourism. Different categories of informants were interviewed, using several Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques such as mapping, welfare rankings, historical profile and seasonal calendars. The data thus collected covers roughly the period from the mid 1970s up to 1996.<sup>2</sup>

I will start by describing the research village and the organisation of its economy. Then I shall explain briefly why the villagers are so keen to become involved in tourism by looking at the history of the village and the important socio-economic changes which have recently taken place there. Thirdly, I will concentrate specifically on the weight of trekking tourism in the village economy, considering issues such as how many families are involved in this activity, which kind of tourist activities the villagers are involved in, how tourism fits in with other household economic activities, what tourism means in a family's economy, who in the village is really profiting from tourism, and how tourism affects the community both in a positive and negative way.

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Fourthly, I will look at the structural organisation of the tourist industry from the hotel sector to the small scale providers in Ban Chaidee. Given that this article focuses on tourism at the village level the organisation of tourism in Ban Chaidee receives more attention than the large scale sectors. Explaining the power relations in the large scale tourist sector is of importance for the fifth section of this paper, in which I will place the data concerning the Karen village in Britton's model.

### **BAN CHAIDEE**

Thirty years ago, the Karen village of Ban Chaidee was established at its present location. Situated at an altitude of approximately 900 meters, it is connected with the nearest Thai village by a 9 kilometre long dirt road. During the rainy season the road becomes impassable for cars and motorbikes. Owing to a migration from another settlement named Kwang,<sup>3</sup> combined with natural population growth, Ban Chaidee eventually developed from a hamlet into a village with a population of 212 people spread over forty-one households.

Although proforma Catholic or Protestant, the villagers are actually convinced animists as are other Karen in upland areas. Their animistic beliefs are strongly connected to a very important part of their economy, agriculture.<sup>4</sup> To earn a living, the people of Ban Chaidee traditionally engage in several economic activities. One of the most important ones is swidden agriculture, in which all the households of the village take part. Although paddy fields are highly valued,<sup>5</sup> the villagers do not have the opportunity to cultivate much paddy because of the lack of suitable land. Land is scarce and almost all of it is already in use. If the yields of their fields are not high enough to guarantee a decent living, the Karen of Ban Chaidee traditionally go to the nearby Thai villages to work for wages or engage in trade. When selling their labour, they are employed to harvest longan, onions or soya beans, cut weeds or plough the fields. The products they trade, such as chestnuts and bamboo shoots, are gathered in the forest. These products are traded in exchange for money or bartered for rice, fish, chilli and tobacco. If the forest products do not find their way onto the market, they are then consumed by the villagers themselves. In addition to paid labour, gathering and trading, the villagers hunt for food, mainly small animals such as crabs, fish and squirrels.

Villagers also make baskets and weave clothes and bags for their own use. Husbandry is also common with every household in the village keeping animals such as chickens, cows, buffalo and pigs. Most animals are not for sale as these Karen do not consider it worthwhile to sell for a low price after sometimes years of feeding and care. However cows and buffalo can be sold if a household is in need of cash, for example when buying additional rice or constructing a house. Finally, every family also

has a garden in which fruit and vegetables are cultivated for household consumption.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND TOURISM

According to the Royal Forestry Department of Thailand, deforestation in the country has become a severe problem over the last thirty years. In 1961, more than 68 million acres of land were covered with forest, 53 per cent of the total area of Thailand. In 1989 this figure was only 35.6 million acres (28.03 per cent). By 1989 the forested area had decreased to 27.95 per cent of the total national landscape. According to Leungaramsri and Rajesh (1992), this deforestation was caused mainly by excessive logging by wood processing industries.<sup>6</sup> By 1989, the severe problem of deforestation and the popular movement against commercial logging forced the Thai government to implement a logging ban which amounted to a major restraint on commercial logging. Leungaramsri and Rajesh (1992) however found that illegal logging continued (Leungaramsri, Rajesh 1992: 21–2). In addition to a restraint on commercial logging, the 1989 logging ban also prohibited swidden cultivation, a measure which directly affected the people of Ban Chaidee. Since the ban was implemented, the Karen villagers have not been allowed to clear and burn new fields for cultivation which resulted in shorter fallow periods for the existing swidden fields. As a consequence, the fields cannot recover sufficiently between crops and their fertility has declined. Furthermore, the deterioration of their swiddens forces the villagers to burn vegetation which is not yet fully grown and the consequent shorter duration of burning does not kill all small pests. These uncontrolled pests and the decline in land fertility have caused a decrease in the yields of crucial subsistence crops. Switching from shifting cultivation to paddy cultivation – a means of cultivation permitted by the government – is difficult for the villagers of Ban Chaidee because nearly all land suitable for paddy fields is already owned and in use. Neither the government nor international agencies have managed to offer alternative forms of agriculture to the villagers of Ban Chaidee, for instance by introducing new crops or new agricultural techniques, in spite of the fact that such help has been offered in many other areas of Northern Thailand.<sup>7</sup>

Another factor in the increase in the scarcity of the resources needed for the villagers' subsistence is the disappearance of wildlife. Before the Second World War when nearly two thirds of the total surface of Thailand was covered with forest there was no particular need to protect wildlife. However, the growing demand for timber and accompanying deforestation, the increased availability of fire arms, and rapid population growth led to a decline in the wildlife of Thailand. This problem has been recognised by the government and protective measures have been taken. (Arbhabhirama 1988: 199–200) These measures have reached Ban Chaidee: the villagers

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stated that for 7 years now, hunting has been prohibited in the area. (It must be said that many people in Ban Chaidee were aware of the problem long before the prohibition hunting and most families had stopped hunting large animals). Smaller animals, such as fish and crabs, as well as foods such as mushrooms have also declined in the surrounding area of Ban Chaidee. According to the villagers this decrease in wildlife and forest food began 15 to 20 years ago, and has been worsening ever since.

The resulting scarcity of resources has made it more difficult than ever for the villagers to make a living in the traditional way. The only solution was to seek other sources of income, and this is precisely what has happened in Ban Chaidee. After the logging ban was implemented in 1989 and the prohibition on hunting wildlife was introduced the villagers started to venture further away from their village community to trade and to work as paid labourers for Thai farmers. Then came tourism, another alternative source of income in which many villagers took an interest.

#### **TREKKING TOURISM AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS IN BAN CHAIDEE**

Trekking tours in Ban Chaidee area are very similar to those described by Michaud (1997) in his research village in Chiang Dao area. In our case, the tourists book a tour in Chiang Mai for two to four days, very often from the guest-house where they stay. The group, usually made up of six to eight people, is then taken from the tour agency or the guest-house to the trekking area by truck. From where the truck drops them they go on foot with a guide, to visit a few hill tribe villages, in each of which they usually stay for a night. During the first couple of days they go on a sightseeing tour to the waterfall near Ban Chaidee. On the last day they walk back to the nearby Thai village where they can eat and drink at a restaurant. Here the group will be picked up by the agency's car to be taken to the starting point of the river leg of the trip. After bamboo rafting downstream for approximately one hour, they reach an elephant camp where the group can take a one and a half hour elephant ride, before finally being driven back to Chiang Mai by truck.

Tourism began in Ban Chaidee around 1987, and during the first two years there was only one household who were active in tourism. This household provided accommodation for the tourists, but was not involved in any other tourist activities. By 1990, the number of tourists visiting the village had increased noticeably. Some households looking for extra income took advantage of this opportunity and began to offer accommodation to tourists. Approximately two years after the introduction of the logging ban many villagers had started to work as porters for the trekking tour guides, which involves helping with the carrying of food during the trek and helping the guide to cook for the tourists. Other households started to sell

woven products such as sarongs and bags to visitors. By 1995, at the time of my fieldwork, there were ten households providing accommodation for tourists. Furthermore, seventeen households were engaged in porter work and twenty-one households sold woven products to tourists. One household also offered massage to visitors. A total of thirty-one households out of forty-one in the village had become involved in one or more tourist activities.

There are three main sorts of tourist activities in which the villagers of Ban Chaidee are engaged. These are the selling of handicrafts woven by women (bags, sarongs and shirts), porter work for which men go to the nearest Thai village to contact the tour guide and offer their services, and offering accommodation to tourists, which includes selling soft drinks and whisky. Accommodation for tourists is provided on two sites, one in the village itself and the other at a waterfall situated downhill from Ban Chaidee, 25 minutes walk away. Out of the ten households which accommodate tourists, eight do so at the waterfall and four in the village, two households offering accommodation at both places. Providing accommodation in the village and porter work are carried out on an individual basis, by which I mean that in relation to these activities, there is no co-operation between households and each works independently. However, in relation to the selling of handcrafted goods and the provision of accommodation for tourists at the waterfall there is co-operation between households, some producers giving their woven products to a household which accommodates tourists. The latter sells these to the visitors and for payment, receives a share of the profit. In this way, households which are not involved in housing tourists are able to take advantage of the contact between providers of tourist accommodation and the tourists in order to sell their products. The producers of these goods are also able to save on labour since they do not have to engage actively in the selling of their products.

At the waterfall, one 'guesthouse' has been constructed on each side of the river and in each house four households co-operate with each other. The households split the costs and profits, and each provides one person to stay at the waterfall and look after the tourists. In this way there are almost always four people present at any one house at the waterfall.

There are four reasons why these eight households work together. Firstly, there is not enough space at the waterfall to build eight houses to offer accommodation to tourists. Secondly, if the various households operated on their own, the competition would become too strong, and for many households it would no longer be worthwhile to provide tourist accommodation. Thirdly, each household on its own does not have the capital to make the required initial investments, i.e. buying items such as blankets, mats, knives and pans. Fourthly, a household operating on its own does not have enough extra labour available to combine providing

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accommodation at the waterfall with other economic activities. Furthermore, if one of the four families has other urgent work to do, it is easier for it to spread its labour because three other people remain at the waterfall who can do the work. Lack of labour and capital did also play a significant role in Forsyth's (1992, 1995) research village, Pha Dua. In Pha Dua, a Yao settlement, the villagers sell goods and services to day trippers stopping by on chartered bus rides. According to Forsyth's findings, the main constraints on setting up stalls in order to sell goods to tourists were shortages of money and available labour. (Forsyth, 1995: 883, 888-9)

In Ban Chaidee all the households involved in hosting tourists, in selling handcrafted goods, and/or in porter work combine tourism with a number of other economic activities. Figure 1 gives only a broad overview of the economic activities of a household active in tourism, the situation not being identical for every household in the village. For instance, some households are less involved in paid labour or do not have paddy fields. Nevertheless it provides a good portrait of the economic activities of an 'average' family.

All households in Ban Chaidee are active in other economic activities alongside tourism, such as rice cultivation (swidden and paddy), trading, gathering, weaving, or working in wage labour. This corresponds with the findings of Michaud (1997) – who conducted a similar research in 1992-93, at least in the initial stages of the development of tourism in his study village. During the first years of tourism there, Michaud noted that only three households were actively engaged in tourism. As in Ban Chaidee, these households were still engaged in their traditional means of production and networks of co-operation and were wealthy enough to be able to make spare labour available for tourism related activities. But things started to change in Michaud's research village a few years later, when the number of visiting tourists increased beyond a certain threshold. As a result, the families active in tourism were required to spend more time at home and less in the fields, and were to be more regularly in contact with the visitors. This meant a change in their lives which they did not like. These families also became reluctant to sell larger amounts of opium to tourists – a regular tourist demand in Michaud's Ban Suay – because of the potential risks they ran with the Thai authorities. As a result these 'first wave' households started to withdraw from the tourist business and simply reverted to their more traditional economic activities. Since Ban Suay was deemed to be a suitable and profitable location for trekking tourism, the Thai guides started to look for other households who could provide the required services. Several poorer households saw their chance and replaced the initial wealthier families. These newcomers to the business now had to spend a lot of time servicing the tourists which meant that they were not in a position to work their fields regularly. But in fact the majority of these 'second wave' hosts were opium addicts and had already been cut off from their traditional means of production. Furthermore, because most adults from

| Economic activities          | Jan. | Feb. | March | April | May | June | July | Aug. | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-----|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|
| working in tourism           |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| hunting                      |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| gathering                    |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| basketry                     |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| weaving                      |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| trading in Thai village      |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| working in wage labour       |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| working in the paddy field   |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| working in the swidden field |      |      |       |       |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |

Figure 1 A seasonal calendar of the economic activities of a household active in tourism

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these households were addicted to opium, they could not maintain strong interclan ties through profitable and productive marriages, and as a consequence, they did not have enough children to work the land effectively. All this resulted in their near total separation from co-operative links with the community. (Michaud 1997: 139–141) While the Ban Chaidee situation clearly reflects the first stage of the development of tourism in Ban Suay, it remains to be seen whether a similar shift of households active in tourism will ever take place there.

For some households in Ban Chaidee it is difficult to combine tourism with other activities because the high season of tourism – as the figure above shows – coincides with agricultural activities, trading and working in paid labour. The villagers have tried to solve this problem by establishing co-operation between households, as already mentioned. Providing accommodation for tourists in the village does not cause a great many problems. Everyone in the household helps, but it is mainly the female head of the household who looks after the tourists: she routinely organises most of the domestic work and it is easier for her to combine this work with tourism. For example, when urgent work has to be done in the fields the mother looks after the tourists until they leave before going to the fields to help her family. However, for a few households it is impossible to be involved in tourism at all because they do not have enough family labour.

Providing accommodation for tourists is the most profitable tourist activity for the Karen in Ban Chaidee. Two households out of a total of thirty-one earn the most important part of their revenues from tourism. One of these households accommodates tourists in the village only and the father does porter work. This household has been accommodating tourists for nine years and was the first family in Ban Chaidee to become active in tourism. Because they have been involved for so long they have established in tourism good contacts with the tour guides, through which they are able to attract a large number of visitors. The other household makes significant profits out of accommodating tourists both in the village and at the waterfall. The remaining eight households involved in providing accommodation earn less either because they started only recently and therefore have not yet established good contacts with the tour guides, or because they only provide accommodation at the waterfall. The households who accommodate tourists at the waterfall must split between themselves the earnings derived by the group, which leaves less profit per household. In general porter work and selling woven products are less profitable than providing tourist accommodation. The sale of woven products in particular is not very profitable because tourists are not often willing to buy these products.

The money earned from tourism is spent on different sorts of products. Table 1 gives an overview of the products on which the households active in tourism spent the money which they earned.

**Table 1** Products bought with the money earned from tourism

| <i>Products that are bought with the money earned from tourism</i> | <i>Households involved in tourism</i>                   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <i>Households which offer accommodation</i><br>(N = 10) | <i>Households which do not offer accommodation</i><br>(N = 21) |
| - Rice   | 9   | 20   |
| - Other food than rice   | 7   | 10   |
| - Clothes/Cotton in order to make clothes                          | 5   | 12   |
| - Health-care  | 1   | 2  |
| - Tools for agriculture  | 2   | -  |
| - House construction   | 6   | 1  |
| - Construct/Buying paddy field                                     | 3   | -  |
| - Motorcycle   | 3   | -  |
| - Other  | 2   | 2  |

Total N = 31

Table 1 shows that almost all households involved in tourism – regardless of whether they accommodate tourists or not – spend tourism money on rice or other food. A lot of households also spend part of that money on clothes or cotton fabric. These are all products needed to meet human basic needs. Products which are more expensive, such as a (new) house, paddy fields, or a motorcycle, are only bought by the households which provide accommodations to tourists.

Considering the high proportion of households which buy food and clothes, and the fact that all the households active in tourism combine this with several other economic activities, it is clear that tourism in Ban Chaidee is an activity which only supplements other sources of income. Because of tourism some family members trade or work less in paid labour than they used to, as tourism takes place at or nearby their homes and requires less work. However tourism has not replaced other activities, especially agriculture, which is still regarded by the villagers as their most important economic activity. Nevertheless tourism now provides an important part of these households' income. It enables people to earn money to buy the goods necessary to their economic health and as I have already made clear, this money has become very important for the many Highlanders who cannot grow enough produce of their own anymore as a result of policies implemented by the government within the last 10 years or so.

However tourism does not bring benefits only, it also has a cost. Authors who have studied the impact of trekking tourism on hill tribe communities include Michaud (1994, 1997), Toyota (1993, 1996), Dearden (1996) and

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Kesmanee and Charoensri (1994). Most of these authors point out the positive as well the negative effects of trekking tourism. One of these effects, deemed negative by Kesmanee and Charoensri for instance while Michaud takes a neutral stance on the issue, is the selling and smoking of opium. Smoking opium often occurs on trekking tours because the guides promote this activity (Michaud 1997) and tourists find it exciting and adventurous. The hosts who prepare the opium pipe often smoke together with the tourists. For the tourists smoking opium is a one-off experience, but for the hosts, who are in contact with tourists on a regular basis, it is a more regular activity and if they were not already addicted before tourism developed, they may easily become so. Several respondents in Ban Chaidee mentioned the drug issue. According to them the smoking of opium started some time after the first trekkers visited the village. The drug problem became more severe five years ago, and the respondents said that as a reaction some villagers had organised themselves and banned drugs in the village. The respondents claimed not to know whether or not opium is smoked by tourists at the accommodations at the waterfall though. Only one respondent who accommodates tourists there said that he once saw a tour guide bring drugs in, which would support the claim that the Karen themselves have withdrawn from this activity. Because my stay at Ban Chaidee was relatively short, it was difficult for me to find out much about such a sensitive issue as the smoking of opium, and I cannot ascertain whether or not opium is or was smoked on any regular basis by tourists there.

Another negative effect of tourism on the village community and its surroundings has been pollution. Throughout the village, by the side of the road and at the waterfall, one can find plastic bags and wrappings, paper and bottles. However it is important to note that tourists are not the sole culprits of this pollution. There is no organised rubbish collection in the village, and hence the villagers do not know where to leave the waste from the products which they have bought at the market or at the small shop managed by some of the villagers. The villagers dump their garbage anywhere in the village or bury it. In addition to the problem of pollution, several respondents complained about the noise tourists make when they drink and sing late at night, and some villagers said that they found being photographed by tourists a nuisance. The customs of the villagers are also being ignored: many tourists publicly bathe naked or in their underwear or walk around the village in shorts. This would be unthinkable for Karen men and women, particularly the latter.

In Karen tradition, there is a strong solidarity among village dwellers and products can easily be borrowed or shared between villagers. Because of the strong market influences at present, this custom is disappearing of the population in Ban Chaidee. In the past the villagers charged each other lower prices than they asked from Thai people or from tourists. This

corresponds with the findings of Hamilton's study (1965) about the economy in a Karen society. However this separation has also started to disappear in Ban Chaidee, especially between the households who accommodate tourists and those who do not. Nowadays for example, if villagers want to buy a bottle of water from a family involved in accommodating tourists, they must pay the same price as the tourists, i.e. 10 baht, compared to half this price a few years ago. Several respondents mentioned that many people involved in accommodating tourists are more concerned with earning money from tourism than with the problems which the community faces. When there is a community meeting in which problems are discussed, many local tourist 'entrepreneurs' are not really committed, and participate very little in the discussion. Some others who are not involved in accommodating tourists see this attitude and the high prices which they have to pay for products, as evidence of selfishness, an attitude they judge incompatible with a long tradition of co-operation between kinsmen and neighbours. These issues cause tensions between the villagers. Supporting this observation in Ban Chaidee, Michaud (1997) has noted a very similar social fracture in his Hmong village, where what he calls the 'second wave' of local tourist hosts ended up being marginalised in their own community for similar reasons.

### **THE ORGANISATION OF THE TOURIST INDUSTRY AND THE POWER RELATIONS WITHIN IT**

The trekking tour business in Northern Thailand is connected to the international tourist industry. The tourists who visit the hill tribes on trekking tours are mostly foreigners, the Thai themselves having little interest in going on trekking tours. The hotel chains, the airline companies and the large scale tour operators enjoy the strongest position in the tourist industry. These are owned by foreign transnational corporations, the Thai nobility, the Thai government and a handful of economically and politically powerful Thai families. They have the expertise and the capital to control the flow of tourists in Bangkok and other ports of entry, and to all major destinations within the country.

Down at the provincial level, tourism in Chiang Mai is similarly structured: the tourist business in this city is mainly controlled by a group of 30 powerful families who have close kinship and business ties with each other. (Meyer 1988: 113-52, 457-8) Regarding trekking tourism, the next most powerful players in the tourist industry are the jungle tour operators and the guest house owners in Chiang Mai which offer trekking tours to visitors. These operators sell their tours as an exciting trip in the labyrinthine mountains inhabited by hospitable and colourfully costumed tribal people. (Cohen 1983) The tours mostly take place in an area called the Golden Triangle, an area which is surrounded by mystery and where

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opium is illegally cultivated (Michaud 1995: 89). The tour operators are dependent upon the larger companies described above and their business is directly affected when fewer tourists visit Chiang Mai. Not only the jungle tour operators, but also the hill tribe people involved in the trekking tour business will be affected by a reduction in the number of tourists visiting Chiang Mai. The hill tribes are the least powerful and least influential of all the players involved in the tourist industry. However this does not mean that they are passive players in the game. With the means they have, the hill tribes try to secure as good a position as possible in the trekking tour industry. The whole structure of the trekking tourist industry with the hill tribes as the weakest players in the business and the large national and multinational firms as the strongest, corresponds with the findings of Michaud (1993:24).

Cohen (1983), Michaud (1995) and Dearden (1994; 1996) point out that it is not the hill tribes, but the jungle tour operators who initiate the trekking tours. This is also the case in Ban Chaidee. The tour operators in Chiang Mai organise the tours, and it is the tour guides who will contact a family in Ban Chaidee in order to organise accommodation for the night. As I have already pointed out, most villagers are eager to become involved in providing accommodations for tourists, and the tour guide can choose from a large number of families. The villagers are thus in a position of dependency: the business agreement is not put in writing, and if the tour guide is not satisfied with the course of business he can switch to another family or group of families. The villagers are not only dependent on the tour guide in an economic sense, but also as regards to communication with the tourists. A language barrier exists between the hosts and the tourists and both sides are dependent on the tour guide, who acts as an interpreter for the parties. Many tour guides do not feel obliged to translate faithfully the conversations between hosts and tourists, and Thai guides who often know little about hill tribe society and culture frequently give biased or plainly wrong answers to the questions posed by the tourists. The image which tourists form of Ban Chaidee and its people is for a major part determined by the tour guides. (see also Cohen and Cooper 1986, Kesmanee and Charoensri 1994, Michaud 1997)

As was mentioned earlier, besides visits to Ban Chaidee and other hill tribe villages, the main activities on a trekking tour are bamboo rafting and elephant riding. These activities take place in a valley about 15 kilometres from Ban Chaidee, and are organised by Karen as well as non-Karen from the Thai village of Sya, 9 kilometres away from Ban Chaidee. Three families from Ban Sya control bamboo rafting and another three families hire Thai people for rafting because they are easier to contact than the hill tribe people. For elephant riding, Karen people are hired because, as is well known, they are more skilled and experienced in looking after and guiding elephants than Thai people. Some of the elephants are owned by the

families in Ban Sya and some are owned by the Karen guides themselves. None of these Karen people originate from the area near Ban Chaidee, but come instead from another district in Northern Thailand.

It is difficult for the villagers of Ban Chaidee to find to work in these tourist activities. The villagers first have to walk for about an hour and a half to Sya village and from there they must wait for a truck or bus to take them to the actual location where these activities take place. Accessibility becomes even more difficult in the rainy season when the only road between Ban Chaidee and Ban Sya becomes muddy, making it difficult even to walk on. In addition, the villagers are only offered work at the bamboo raft station when some regular worker is ill, or sometimes in the high season when extra tourists visit the area. At the elephant camp, it is only possible to find work if an elephant guide quits and the owners look for someone else to replace him. But at the end of the day, the villagers of Ban Chaidee have never set up their own business to offer these activities quite simply because they do not have enough money to do so.

In his study village, Michaud (1997) calculated that nearly 98% per cent of the money spent by tourists on and during a trekking tour never reaches Ban Suay; it goes for the most part to the Thai operators and middlemen. The tour operators have to spend money on hiring a truck, buying food for the tourists, on hiring two or three rafts and elephants, and on the wages of the trekking tour guides. Based on data collected over one full year in 1992–1993, a little more than 2 per cent of the money spent by tourists visiting Ban Suay was found to reach the Hmong villagers. Based on an annual average of eight trekkers per group, Michaud calculated that the income earned by one family from one such group would then be 260 baht per night. In a hypothetical calculation of the annual income of a household active in tourism, assuming that one family would host one group of tourists per day throughout the year, a family involved in providing tourist accommodation could then earn up to 94,900 baht per annum. However, the highest revenue actually found by Michaud was much lower, namely 68,940 baht (Michaud, 1994: 348-A), and this for one only household out of 6 involved in hosting tourists there. My data show lower figures: The average size of a tourist group in Ban Chaidee is seven people; the two households which earn most from tourism in Ban Chaidee have approximately six tourist group per week visiting them in the high season; the income received from such a group is about 210 baht, 140 baht for accommodation and 70 baht for beverages. The flow of tourists in Ban Chaidee is not constant throughout the year because trekking tourism here is subject to seasonal influences. The high season, shown at Figure 1, takes place in the months of July, August, November, December and January, which amounts to a maximum 154 days in total, or 22 weeks. On an annual basis this would mean an income of 27,720 baht, not counting the additional odd group outside that period. Nevertheless, this is much less

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than the 68,940 baht of Michaud, who included all sources of income inclusive of opium selling, for which he produced detailed figures.

Here it must be noted that the income figure I calculated for Ban Chaidee is merely an estimate<sup>8</sup> based on a household which is one of the top earners in tourism in Ban Chaidee. There are only two households which manage to earn such a high income. The other households earn much less because they mostly provide accommodation at the waterfall where they have to split their earnings among four households. In particular the households which are only involved in selling handcrafted goods earn much less. Toyota (1996) and Michaud (1997) point out that in their case studies, selling handcrafted goods provides only a small amount of income, if any at all. This is also the case in Ban Chaidee: several households have stopped selling woven products because it is no longer profitable. The tourists showed no interest in their products. I personally saw no-one selling handcrafted goods during my stay in the village.

#### **TREKKING TOURISM IN BAN CHAIDEE IN A MODEL OF DEPENDENCY**

In this section it is my intention to put the data discussed above into a model developed by Stephen Britton (1982). Britton looked at the workings of international tourism and the relations of power and dependency between its various sectors. Britton argues that businesses in underdeveloped countries lack capital and expertise and therefore rely heavily on foreign capital. Privileged groups in underdeveloped countries can take advantage of tourism at the expense of less privileged people. According to Britton, large foreign and national companies use dominant mechanisms to protect their interests. These dominant mechanisms consist of control over technology, expertise, bargaining power and product pricing and design. All participants at all levels of the tourist industry profit to a certain degree. However because of the dominant mechanisms, the large foreign and national companies (i.e. those at the top of the hierarchy) are able to extract the economic surplus and to accumulate capital. Furthermore, Britton argues that the large corporations control the flow of tourists to the various destinations in the country. From these destinations or resort enclaves the tourists make short trips into the urban and rural subsistence sectors for sightseeing, entertainment and shopping (Britton 1996: 155–72).

Britton presented his ideas in a scheme, which is shown in Figure 2. I have slightly modified Britton's scheme to allow it to better reflect what happens in my research area. It shows the villagers of Ban Chaidee active in tourism and their position in the tourist industry. The jungle tour agencies and Thai middlemen in the trekking tour business are dependent on airline, train and bus companies, large tour operators and hotel chains. They regulate the flow of tourists to Thailand and to various destinations in the

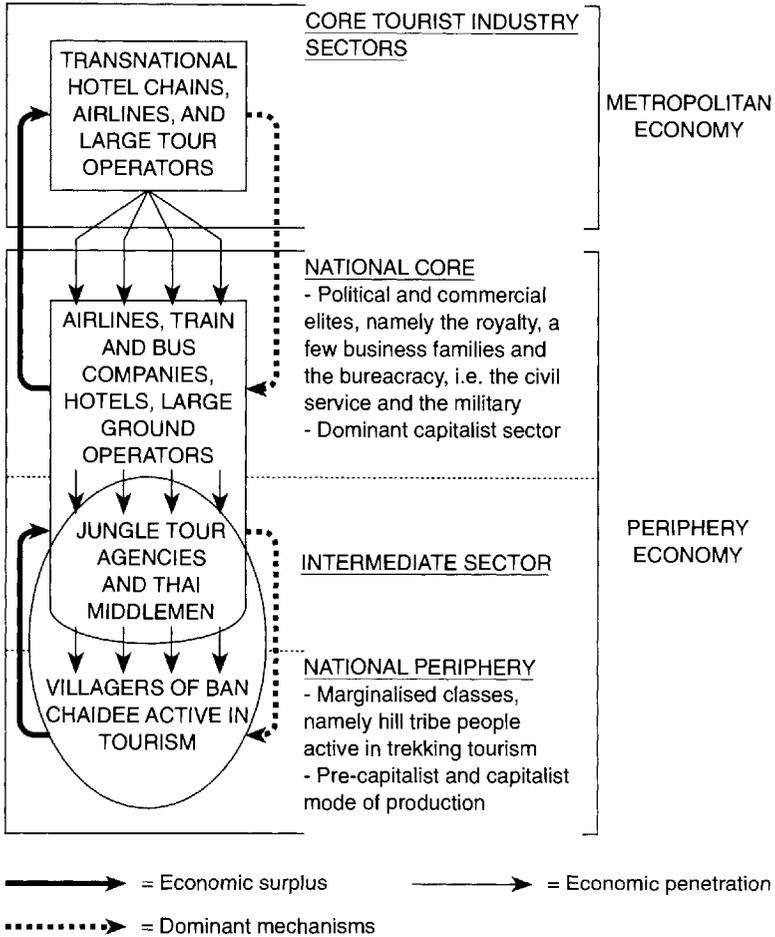


Figure 2 Linkages of power and dependency between sectors in the tourism industry

Source: Britton, S., 'Tourism, Dependency and Development: A Mode of Analysis', In: *The Sociology of Tourism: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, London – New York: Routledge, 1996.

country, such as Chiang Mai. If the number of tourists visiting Chiang Mai was to decline, this would seriously affect the business of the jungle tour agencies, the Thai middlemen and the hill tribes active in tourism. A decline in the number of visiting tourists could occur for example occur if new tourist destinations were offered by the large companies to their clients. I cannot elaborate on how the relations of power and dependency between jungle tour agencies and the large national companies work in practice since

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this issue would need further research. As I have explained above, the main focus here is on the relations between the jungle tour agencies, the Thai middlemen and the villagers of Ban Chaidee involved in the trekking tour business. The jungle tour agencies and the Thai middlemen also use dominant mechanisms to protect their interests: Trekking tours are organised by tour operators, and they also determine the price of the tours. The tour operators have an office in Chiang Mai, where tourists from Bangkok arrive, and this gives them a good opportunity to attract customers by advertising their 'exciting' and 'adventurous' treks (Cohen 1983). The supplementary activities on a trekking tour, such as elephant riding and bamboo rafting, are organised in the main by Thai middlemen in the area around Ban Chaidee. A major part of the money spent by tourists on a trek flows to these middlemen, as Michaud (1997) has already shown.

As already explained, it is difficult for the villagers of Ban Chaidee to find employment in the activities controlled by the Thai middlemen, nor do they have the capability to establish their own tour agency in Chiang Mai or, indeed, anywhere else. The people of Ban Chaidee can only earn an income from the specific activities of accommodating tourists, porter work, or selling handcrafted goods. And even this is not guaranteed; the tour guide selects a family before the villagers can provide accommodation for tourists and thereby to earn income from the most profitable tourist activity in the village. This results in a flow of profit to jungle tour operators and to the Thai middlemen, which is illustrated in Figure 2 by the black arrow leading towards the intermediate sector. Only a very small share of the money goes to the villagers of Ban Chaidee. Since environmental problems have become worse and the Thai government has forbidden the traditional alternatives such as hunting of wildlife and clearing of land for swidden cultivation, it has become increasingly difficult for the villagers in Ban Chaidee to make a living. Hence tourism is a very attractive alternative, although with unavoidable pitfalls.

## CONCLUSIONS

Tourism in Ban Chaidee is supplementary to other household economic activities. It does not replace any other activity, and agriculture, is still regarded by the villagers as their most important economic activity. In Ban Chaidee only a few households earn a sizeable income from tourism. Nevertheless, it enables family members to earn the additional income they need in this time of scarcity.

Several factors play a major role in the integration of Ban Chaidee villagers into the Thai nation state. Environmental damage and government policies have depleted the traditional resources of the villagers, forcing them to find new sources of income and to become more integrated in Thai society. Tourism is one of these new sources of income which in turn plays

an important role in the integration of the people of Ban Chaidee into the Thai nation state. Through trekking tourism the villagers become more active in the capitalist market which is part of Thai society. However this does not mean that the villagers easily give up their own lifestyles and traditional ways of production. This becomes very clear when looking at their wishes: they want to maintain shifting cultivation, a source of income which is closely related to their religious and spiritual beliefs, and which they see as their most important source of income.

Tourism does not only bring in additional income, it also has undesirable effects. These are the pollution caused by the litter dropped by tourists, noise pollution late at night, encroachment on the norms and values of the villagers, and the tensions produced amongst the people of Ban Chaidee themselves.

Tourism brings the villagers into contact with a market economy, which is strongly characterised by relations of power and dependency. The trekking tour business is organised and controlled by the jungle tour operators in Chiang Mai and the Thai middlemen in the area around Ban Chaidee. These agents have the money and the knowledge to organise the trekking tours and to control the market to the detriment of their competitors, amongst whom the villagers are the weakest. Most of the profit derived from trekking tourism goes to the jungle tour agencies and to the Thai middlemen, and only a very small share is left for the Karen of Ban Chaidee. However, this is far from stating that tourism is an insignificant source of income for households in the Karen village, nor are the villagers in Ban Chaidee passive players in the game: they try to secure as good a position as possible in the trekking tour industry by the precious little means they have. The villagers actively look for jobs as porters and maintain good contacts with the jungle guides in order to keep their positions as providers of accommodation. Furthermore, if the villagers have difficulty entering the tourist business, they set up new forms of co-operation which, for example, resulted in the provision accommodation by a waterfall situated nearby by several households. However, if the village changes significantly in future, or if too many tourists visit the village and the romantic image of 'authenticity' and 'remoteness' is lost, it is possible that tour agencies will leave and tourism will cease to exist in the village. This would mean a considerable loss of income for the households active in tourism and possibly the deterioration of the economic situation that could ultimately lead to the dissolution of the village altogether as a community (Michaud 1993). It is difficult for the villagers to change this situation of unequal power and dependency alone. On the one hand they do not have the means to do so. On the other it is difficult for them to give up the tourism business because they need the income. This need is the result of the changes to which their society has been subject during recent years.

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Michaud (1997) points out that in his research village, the first wave of households involved in tourism were still engaged in their traditional activities of production and networks of co-operation, and could actually decide to give up tourism and successfully revert to agriculture. Except for this reversion, which has not yet shown signs of occurring in Ban Chaidee, his research corresponds with the situation in my study village. From the villagers' point of view agriculture is actually the most important economic activity. In Ban Chaidee tourism does not result in the isolation of villagers from networks of co-operation, such as the exchange of labour during planting and harvesting. On the contrary, in some cases tourism actually creates new co-operative relationships.

Other similarities between my research results and previous studies exist. In Ban Chaidee tour guides play an important role in the image tourists form of the villagers, corresponding with the findings of Cohen (1982), Kesmanee and Charoensri (1994), Toyota (1996) and Michaud (1997). The negative effects of trekking tourism on this Karen community, pollution for instance, are also described in the research of Kesmanee and Charoensri (1994) and Dearden (1994, 1996). Michaud (1997) demonstrates that the Thai middlemen in particular profit from the trekking tour business. Nearly all of these authors argued that the organisation of trekking tours is not under the control of the hill tribes, but is instead operated and initiated by outsiders who are mostly of Thai origin. My research has confirmed in its own way each of these previous findings.

In this study, trekking tourism proves to be one agent of socio-economic change, one whose importance is growing, yet still only one among others. Other factors contribute to change in the community of Ban Chaidee. Environmental degradation and government policy are interconnected with tourism. Environmental degradation and government policy have made it more difficult for the villagers of Ban Chaidee to make a living in the traditional way. To compensate, the villagers had to find alternative sources of income, of which trekking tourism proved to be one. Trekking tourism in turn contributes to changing the village community further. As a result of the development of tourism the villagers of Ban Chaidee have become more firmly integrated into the national market economy. Consequently, they are also becoming more integrated into the Thai nation state.

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### NOTES

- 1 For consideration related to professional ethics, I have decided to give my research village a fictitious name. Other villages and topographical places in my research area are not cited by their real name either.
- 2 This chapter stems from my MA thesis in Development Studies. For more detailed data and explanation of research methods, see 'Trekking Tourism and its Role in a Process of Socio-economic Change: A Karen Village in Northern Thailand as an Example', published in 1997 as an occasional paper by the Third World Centre at the Catholic University Nijmegen (The Netherlands).
- 3 Ban Kwang was faced with major water shortages and infertile farming land due to which its inhabitants started to move to different areas. One of the villages they moved to was Ban Chaidee.
- 4 The agricultural cycle in Karen society is always associated with religious events, and food is offered to the spirits to please them in the hope of obtaining a better harvest. Rice is always an item among the food being offered, it is the most important agricultural product in both the economic and the cultural sense.
- 5 Paddy fields are highly valued because they yield a higher and more consistent harvest per unit than a swidden. Moreover paddy fields being privately owned by families, they can be inherited by children but not swidden land, which is community land.
- 6 Leungaramsri and Rajesh (1992) point out that 'Thailand's forests have been viewed by the state as a vast timber resource to be exploited for commercial purposes'. The food processing industry had permission from the Thai government to carry out commercial logging on a large scale, which is the main cause of the deforestation problem in Thailand. In 1968 the Thai government granted 516 logging concessions. These concessions covered an area of 60 million acres, which was almost the half of Thailand's total land area of 128.4 million acres.
- 7 Sirisambhand (1992) discusses in her work the policy towards the hill tribes in the government's National Development Plans. She points out that during the Third National Development Plan (1972–1976) the government and international agencies started to introduce agricultural development programs for the hill tribes in which cash crops were introduced to replace opium and to reduce shifting cultivation.

- 8 It is important to note that all figures derived here are estimates. My stay in Ban Chaidee was relatively short and the villagers do not keep records of their income and expenditure, which makes it impossible in this case to give accurate figures. Furthermore, the earnings of 210 baht per day can strongly fluctuate because some groups of tourists spend more on beverages than others. Exact figures could only be given if the income and expenditure of a limited number of households would be monitored carefully for at least a year. To this day, only Forsyth (1992) and Michaud (1994) have carried out such studies.

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# Chapter Nine

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## Chapter Nine

# Traditional Tribal What? Sports, Culture and the State in the Northern Hills of Thailand

*Hjorleifur Jonsson*

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I juxtapose two events, the photo-documentation of traditional tribal culture and a sub-district level fun-fair in the same village, to field questions about the identity of the people I did research with. Both events concern the upland ethnic minorities in this area (Mien and Hmong 'hill tribes'), and point to various issues of representation. Both representations concern the current context of state penetration and national integration in the hinterlands, and a reworking of culture and identity. I relate these to a national and middle-class discourse on culture in the countryside, to ways in which upland leaders construct their domains and prominence by drawing on the state, and to issues of how people, including farmers, make social entities through the projection of social visions, against the background of anthropologists finding ethnic groups.

I use the case of a rather obvious fabrication in the documentation of traditional ethnic practices to field questions about the reality of ethnic groups in the highlands of Thailand. The issue relates to an increasingly apparent crisis within anthropology regarding the projection of peoples such as the various groups of 'animist' swidden farmers in the northern hills of Thailand in terms of ethnic traditions. There are two ways to react to this crisis, other than the search for communities which are judged to be still traditional and ethnically representative. One is to deconstruct the constructions of ethnic traditions, and the other is to provide an ethnography of what people do. The former concerns the reality of texts, and the latter that of social life. I opt for the latter in this case, and describe a fun-fair that was held in the village where I centered my research, with a procession, a politician's speech, dance shows, disco, and sports, none of which appear to relate to the traditional or ethnic reality of the Mien and Hmong who participated in the event. Taking a clue from Geertz' analysis of Balinese cockfights, I propose that the event says something to these

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people, through their actions, about their reality. The event states that these people are a kind of Thai, which may invite an analysis of a loss of culture or a change from tradition to modernity, but I suggest that the way people act out their lives has always implied the projection of social visions that have been informed by their immediate context, and that local leaders have long drawn on the state to ground their prominence as much as to hold on to their followers through the benefits of such relationships.

#### ETHNIC TRADITIONS AND A REPRESENTATIONAL CRISIS

During the initial phase of my field research among Mien (Yao) uplanders in northern Thailand,<sup>1</sup> I busied myself visiting each of the households in the village where I stayed, asking survey questions about household composition and livelihood. One of those days, I sat in a kitchen and watched people pound cooked rice for New Year sweets, waiting for householders to finish and sit down so I could ask them my questions. Then a team of a Yao expert and two photographers from the Tribal Research Institute (TRI) entered the kitchen, and the expert asked the people with a mixture of shock and annoyance how come they were using a Meo (Hmong) pounder, whether they had no Yao (Mien) pounder. His reference was to the difference between a footpounder (as the Yao pounder) and a mallet pounder, which the people were using (as the Hmong version). The people said that their footpounder was broken, but that it was in the corner of the kitchen, where it served as a clothes rack of sorts. The Yao expert mobilized the household members to clean the things off the footpounder, move the bamboo tray with sweets over there, put on some 'Yao clothes,' and pose for action photos of their making of sweets. The locals obliged, the photographers documented the Yao way of making New Year sweets, and then the team left.<sup>2</sup>

Were the members of this household letting their traditions slide, and with it their ethnic identity? I asked them, and later various people in this and other villages, about the alleged ethnic division of pounding instruments. The answers, and my observations in the Mien and Hmong villages I visited, did not reveal such an ethnic division in aspects of material culture. Instead, the choice of pounding instruments came down to an investment of time and effort in the making of instruments. In the context of the history of Thailand's Mien and Hmong as migratory shifting cultivators, the choice among the two kinds of pounders comes down to the portability of people's possessions, and in that light the bulky footpounder is an indication of relative residential stability and the economic well-being of a household. What, then, is the reality of the alleged ethnic division of such instruments?

Given that I found no ethnographic basis to this distinction, I am inclined to think that it comes down to the imagination of the Yao expert.

Through his documentation of an aspect of the material culture of Thailand's Mien, he manifests something about them, and it does not matter for such documentation that the reality is based on his imagination. For the photos, he constructs a reality of Yao people (as Mien are known by authorities in China and Southeast Asia) dressed in Yao clothing (which they had not been wearing at the time), using Yao instruments (which they had not been using), and the event simultaneously constructs the Yao and the Yao expert (whose sense of what is worth documenting called for this staging of authenticity).

The event, in short, was a ritual that assumed (and constructed) a particular reality (the traditions and objects of Yao people) and simultaneously located the expert knowledge of this reality in a government institution (the TRI). As an invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), it is also the construction of knowledge, and this knowledge implies power relations between agents of the government research institute and the 'ethnic' subjects. Saleminck (1991) has described how French colonial officials encoded particular manuals of the customs of separate ethnic groups in the highlands of Vietnam earlier in this century, and invented in the process ceremonies where the leaders of the highlanders swore allegiance to these agents of the colonial power. While there is no such overt political agenda to the documentation of Yao making New Year sweets, the TRI is within a framework of governmental interventions in the livelihood and cultures of the people who have become minorities in the process of Thailand's national integration, and there is a not-uncommon connection between the increasing amount of material on the traditional practices of the upland peoples in institutes such as the TRI, and the decreasing presence of such practices in the daily lives of the peoples they supposedly typify.

This brief encounter in a Mien kitchen relates to various issues of representation. Among them are; 1) the staging of ethnically specific practices, 2) the assumption of a match between ethnic identity and material culture, 3) the separation of the documented reality from everyday practices, 4) the location of expert knowledge outside of the reality being documented, and 5) the power relations among the expert and the subjects (as well as between the male expert and his female assistants who photographed).

Each of these issues concerns aspects of a representational crisis in anthropology that is maybe particularly striking regarding the peoples once known as 'tribal' and were as such paradigmatic to anthropological practice (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; 1997; Hoebel, Currier, and Kaiser 1982; Stocking 1992; Tsing 1993). There is increasingly a sense of the truths of ethnography as being at best partial (see Clifford 1986) and at worst Orientalist concoctions that boil down to facets of oppression through Othering (Said 1978).

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Verbal statements often imply contradictions, and one example comes from a TRI handbook on the 'hill tribes' of Thailand:

The present policy of the Thai Government towards the hill tribes is based on a declaration of July 6, 1976, in which is stated the intention to integrate these people into the Thai state and give them full rights to practice their religions and maintain their cultures. The principal objective of this policy is clear. It is stated quite precisely that the Thai Government wishes to enable the hill tribes to be first-class, self-reliant Thai citizens.

There are many *hill tribe problems* as identified by the official authorities. Most of these problems are related to some aspects of the hill tribes' way of living which are considered to be inappropriate to the present socio-economic and political situation of the country (TRI 1986:1-2, emphasis original).

In adjacent paragraphs, going from the active to the passive voice, the document manages to state that uplanders will be integrated into the Thai state, with full rights to continue their ways of life, and then deny the relevance of this declaration by a reference to the many problems that derive from the various aspects of uplanders' lifeways which are incompatible with the agendas of the state.

The above representation needs to be taken alongside the effort to document the traditional practices of the traditional Yao people. Both concern ways of framing what a people are about, and they come from the same agency (the TRI). Both are in a sense fabrications. The photo-documentation constructs a traditional tribal reality that does not have an ethnic or ethnographic basis other than what the Yao expert attributes to it and choreographs. The programmatic statement about government policy regarding uplanders assumes a traditional tribal reality that will be accommodated with the incorporation of the 'hill tribes' into the Thai state, while stating that any practices of difference (those that 'are considered to be inappropriate to the present socio-economic and political situation of the country') will be eliminated.

During the course of my research, I occasionally tried to grapple with the issue of who the Mien people are, in terms of society, culture, and history. The minimal answer to this question is that, other than the staged exemplars of traditional tribal ways, they are among the ethnic minorities whose livelihood and various cultural practices have been made subject to government approval (or, more often than not, disapproval and forced change) as the Thai state has incorporated the forested hinterlands into administrative networks (Jonsson 1996a, b).

Acknowledging the impact of state expansion is one step toward understanding the upland peoples in terms of the history of the region, away from the notion of 'tribal' groups as isolates. There is still, in the

anthropological literature, a persistent reference to ethnic identity and an ethnic framework for understanding patterns in social life in the uplands of Thailand (e.g. Walker 1992; 1995).<sup>3</sup> My description of the documentation of Yao making New Year sweets provides something of a caricature of the more general impulse to account for the reality of upland populations in ethnic terms.

Given this anthropological tendency to ‘. . . introduce order into [a chaos of cultural heterogeneity in the uplands of mainland Southeast Asia] by dividing highlanders into a number of ‘tribal’ or ‘ethnic’ groups, the members of which share a distinctive language and a set of cultural traits’ (Hinton 1983:155), it is legitimate and necessary to ask if what the upland populations do is primarily manifestations of their ethnic identity, or if that is an anthropological creation along the lines of the ‘documentation’ of Yao making New Year sweets? Hinton (1983) maintains that Karen, as conventionally explained in ethnographic handbooks (e.g. LeBar, Hickey, and Musgrave 1964), do not exist, that there is no particular cultural or social uniformity to ‘Karen,’ some of the ‘distinctive’ traits turn out to be far from distinctive, but common to various upland and lowland populations. Instead, there have been multiple social entanglements which cross-cut the assumed ethnic and geographical boundaries. Hinton’s analytical solution lies in the proposition that ‘. . . the only way to understand the societies of the highlands is to regard their cultural variety as secondary to economic and political interests, which have nothing to do with supposed ‘ethnic’ boundaries.’ (1983:155)

While I agree with the move away from cultural isolationism, I disagree with the intended solution of ‘practical reason’ (economic and political interests), as the valuation of material gains is always caught up in particular cultural orderings (Sahlins 1976), a particular set of dispositions that structure the ways people engage with their worlds and act out their lives (Bourdieu 1977). But rather than attempting to solve this issue in the abstract, I want to offer an account from my encounters with Mien, in this case a two-day fun-fair in the village where I centered my research, to field questions about what social visions can be read from some of the things people do.

One of the premises of cultural anthropology is that people reveal themselves through what they do, and to the extent that this is a simple issue it suggests that people represent themselves. But there are at least three immediate problems. One is that people’s representations may be in reply to the questions of an anthropologist (or another outsider) and thus may have no other referent than the particular question. That is to say, the reality of the representation may reflect only the interview context (Keesing 1972; Frake 1981). Another is that any social reality is complex, and rarely comes down to an ‘average’ representation. Faced with this issue, an anthropologist may proceed by codifying one of many perspectives on a local

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reality as the true (or truest, most authentic) version (for a solid critique, see Herzfeld 1987). The third problem, as Malinowski (1922) pointed out, is that what people say and what they do may be quite separate, and may not match what they think, while an outside analyst will try to make inferences about what people think from what they say and do (see also Holy and Stuchlik 1983). Having made these precautionary remarks, I proceed to describe a festival among 'my people.'

#### PHULANGKA FUN-FAIR

Around New Year in 1993, there was a two-day festival in the village where I centered my research, Pangkha. A banner written in Thai, strung between two bamboo-poles above the road that lies through the village, declared in red and blue letters on white cloth:

FUN TIMES AGAIN, PHULANGKA FUN-FAIR 36, JANUARY 19-20,  
2536 [1993]. EVENINGS. DISCO, DANCE WITH BEAUTIFUL YAO  
AND MONG GIRLS. TWO EXCITING MOVIES PER NIGHT.  
SHOWS BY YAO AND MONG SCHOOLKIDS.

The event took place on the field in front of the school in Pangkha, a predominantly Mien village which is the administrative center of Phachangnoi sub-district, in Pong district of Phayao Province. Phulangka, which is the name of a nearby mountain, refers to the village the people of Pangkha lived in until 1968.<sup>4</sup> The Phulangka Fair started around 9 AM on January 19th, when people entered the field in a procession; mainly schoolkids dressed in sports-outfits, who came in teams representing some of the villages of the sub-district and carrying flags and signs, but the last group in the procession had about 25 adult villagers from Pangkha, most wearing Mien clothing. Some of the schoolkids were dressed in Mien or Hmong clothes, and as the procession entered the sports-field they formed rows facing the roofed structure where the event's guest, Witthaya Srijan, a Democracy Party Member of Parliament (MP) for Phayao Province, was seated. As the people were forming rows, a marching band of schoolkids in sports clothing, led by a Hmong boy and two Hmong girls in festive Hmong clothing, walked in front of them to the beat of marching-band drums. Then teachers from the Pangkha school, the headmaster in a Mien jacket but the others in casual sports suits, took position in front of them, also facing the MP, and led the students and 'ethnics' in a song that honors the Thai King. While not all joined in the singing, all lowered their heads during the song.

Then the lines of people dissolved, and were replaced by about 30 schoolkids wearing red t-shirts, the boys in shorts and the girls in embroidered Mien pants, who took positions in the middle of the field and performed a Mien plate-dance. A Mien band, with a double-reed oboe,

a drum, a gong, and cymbals, played Mien festival-tunes as they danced, and on and off during the day.<sup>5</sup> When the dance was over, the MP opened the event with a speech, where he told people not to destroy the forest with swidden farming. He talked mainly about democracy and participation in the country's development, and at the end of his speech the *kamnan* (sub-district headman) presented him with a red-dyed egg on a string, which he placed around his neck, and the MP sat down again.

Next there was a race among 6 year old schoolkids, and the kamnan gave medal-look-alike prizes to the three fastest ones. Then another race, and I was asked to present the next set of prizes. Thus the day continued with races, takraw, volleyball and other competitions. The teachers and small groups of villagers cheered the competitors on, and bestowed prizes after each match. People also came to stroll the area, which had small stalls where villagers sold noodles, snacks, and drinks. There were also booths outside the gate to the school, where vendors sold of clothing and household goods, and these were all traders from lowland towns.

As the day wore on there was a bit of drinking, though some of the schoolteachers had been drunk since early in the morning, and more people came to watch the events. In the evening, the activities shifted to a stage at one end of the field. On cloth that formed the back of the stage, well-wishes for the New Year were written in Thai and Mien, both in Thai characters. Schoolteachers were in charge, and they had groups of schoolkids performing Thai dances. The dances were mostly elementary 'Thai' dances, a part of the national culture that children absorb in schools.<sup>6</sup> There were prizes granted for dancing, and the kamnan, the anthropologist (I), and some of the schoolteachers were brought to the stage to hand over pencils, notebooks, and other such school-goods as prizes for exceptional performance in each category (the MP had taken off by evening).

When the schoolkids were finished, adults took over the stage, first six Pangkha men, doing a plate dance, with the Mien band performing as they danced. They all wore embroidered, conventional Mien clothing, but three of them wore women's pants with their men's jackets. One of them told me that his wife was away, working in Hong Kong, and that this was the reason he wore a woman's pants for this display. I did not see or hear any indication that this cross-dressing was a significant statement about gender. Rather, from the festivities around New Year, this had some resonance in the display of 'Mien-ness' to a generalized audience, as did the plate-dance that schoolkids performed at the beginning of the fair. While the men danced, a screen was being set up for the movies. Then a team from Huai Kok, another Mien village in the sub-district, also performed a plate-dance. As with the Pangkha performers, the Huai Kok dancers were all men, and I have not heard of women performing it, while the schoolkids' performance of this dance at the opening of the Fair had a roughly equal number of boys and girls.

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A little while before this second performance, a man from Huai Kok came up to me as I stood near the stage and tried to keep track of what went on with a camera and a notebook, and told me that the performers from Pangkha were no good, that I should watch the Huai Kok team to see how this dance was really done. After the dancing there was singing by older people from several of the villages in the area (in song-language that most younger people do not understand),<sup>7</sup> first four women and then three men, each of them performing individually, and then several sets of pairs of men and women. The audience then split, some moving to watch the films whose noise outdid the singing, others (including me) going home for the night.

The fair continued for a second day, and there were many other events that marked the New Year,<sup>8</sup> but this description is enough to open up the issue of representing the upland minorities in contemporary Thailand. How do the activities at this Fair relate to who these people are, ethnically or otherwise, what does it suggest about dimensions and dynamics of society and culture, and aspects of continuity and change among increasingly marginalized populations on the periphery of the Thai state?

This Phulangka Fair 36 (1993) can be viewed with an interpretive lens similar to the one Geertz (1973) applies to Balinese cockfights, as ‘. . . a story [people] tell themselves about themselves’ (1973:448). I view this event as quite comparable to other rituals held around this particular New Year, in the sense that each of them carries or affirms a particular definition of community or its components. But these versions of community, and, sometimes, history, do not add up to a common version, and often enough they contradict one another. The implications of that, for an anthropological description and analysis, are another matter, and draw on usually-implicit notions of the adequate units of analysis. Geertz tends to assume culture is shared, and to equate culture and society, thus he can suggest that ‘societies . . . contain their own interpretations’ (1973:453). The same holds for various accounts of ritual and social organization (and to some extent material culture) of Thailand’s upland groups, these are assumed to add up to what people’s lives are about in terms of an ethnic reference.

The Fair, with sports competition, dance shows, and other activities, shares many elements with similar events in Thai villages, and the ‘Thainess’ of the event is important. It is a motivated statement about these people, Mien and Hmong minorities in a particular subdistrict of Phayao Province, vis-a-vis the encompassing social landscape of a Thai nation-state. At the same time as this fair, villagers in Pangkha conducted various rituals which can be portrayed, from certain classical anthropological perspectives, as traditionally or authentically Mien in ways the Fair was not. In this light, I could choose to ignore the Fair as it has no bearing on these people as Mien, or I could posit dichotomies such as Thai and Mien, Modern and Traditional, and show how the people I was with are moving from one category to another. Or I could suggest that the reality was in flux

at the present, implying that a previous state of harmony has come undone as the state has penetrated the social life of its tribal minorities. In short, the event leaves various pertinent questions regarding who and what these people are, and how one describes their reality.

The Phulangka Fair is in many ways an account people tell themselves about themselves, but there is not a direct match between those who fashion the account and those it is supposedly about. The Fair took place at the school-field, and referred explicitly to Hmong and Mien (Yao) minorities<sup>9</sup> on the one hand, and to Phulangka on the other. The constituents are the people living in the sub-district, officially five Mien villages and two Hmong villages (though there are about five more villages in the sub-district, which are not officially registered or recognized), who came to compete in sports, to perform songs and dance (there were no Hmong performers, only Mien), to dance with guests who bought tickets, and/or to watch what went on. These are the people this sub-district event is about, but the ones who organized and orchestrated what went on were the school-teachers, mostly Thai but also some Mien, and the headmaster of the Pangkha school is a Mien from Pangkha. The other schools in the sub-district are branches of the Pangkha school.

The Fair is a statement about community, but far from the only one or an undisputed one. The Fair is not self-consciously an articulated statement of such sort, but one of many accounts told from particular perspectives about the community. It is a motivated account told from the schoolteachers' point of view. That might disqualify the account in some quarters, for being less authentic or less local than other such statements, but my reason to deal with it is that it did take place, it involved the participation of local people, and it implied and to some extent made statements about this community. A further reason to deal with this Fair is that it does not match the conventional notions of statements ethnic minorities make about themselves. As such, it highlights various problems of descriptive adequacy regarding the upland minorities of Thailand, where actions and/or motivations have an ethnic reference, ethnic references are stable and bounded, society and culture are two sides of the same coin, and a population is in fundamental agreement about their society, culture, and history.

## SCHOOL AND SOCIETY

As an event, the Phulangka Fair is not collectively brought about, and it manifests the ability of schoolteachers to objectify their vision of the social landscape, and to mobilize people in large numbers for that purpose. What does the Fair 'say' about these people? To begin with, it states that they are good Thai citizens. This it does on several levels. The Thai flag was hanging from a short pole at the top of the roofed structure that provided seats and

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shelter to the special guest of the event. The people involved; school-teachers, schoolkids, and the adults dressed in Mien clothing, all joined in singing in honor of the Thai King at the beginning of the event. The special guest, an MP for Phayao Province, was an embodiment of a supra-local order, primarily the government. In their sports competitions, the school-kids embody the various villages of the sub-district, and, since the only villages competing are the ones that have a school (not all do), what the schoolkids represent, as individuals and teams, are villages with a school. That is a reality taken for granted by the schoolteachers, and they are in a situation to reinforce their version of what community is about by these annual sports-meets. Villages that do not have a school cannot compete, so to speak, they do not count. 'A village with a school' is an artifact of the modern Thai nation state, but this notion becomes real locally from being activated by or through local people and then in terms of how that resonates in other local activities and imaginings.

The Fair, as a ritual of some sort, reaffirms hierarchy and order, and as such it resonates with public statements elsewhere in Thailand that in one way or another affirm allegiance to the modern Thai state. Order is produced through the initial procession of the separate teams to the field, by the lining up of teachers, schoolkids, and 'ethnics' in front of the MP, where they joined in singing the King's Anthem, and by the repeated representation of a-village-with-a-school through the sports competitions. The Fair is also about hierarchy; common respect for the King and for the government (to all the participants), the prominence of Pangkha village and its school and headmaster (to the other villages represented), the division between teachers and students through who compete and perform and who grant prizes, and so on. The particular affirmation of orderliness and hierarchy that the event implies may be most important to the teachers who are the bringers of this orderliness. But as a public statement, it may matter equally to the local people who have, for the last 30 years, been treated to anything from general disrespect to forced evacuations and large scale military attacks for being, from a Thai perspective, outside society.

The issue of upland minorities 'entering society' (*khao sangkhom*) and being good Thai citizens is thus not trivial. It is strongly political, as to some extent the official view of hill-tribes has conflated their non-Thai ethnicity with aspects of ecological demise, border security, and Thailand's position in global drug-traffic, to effect a view of uplanders as endangering national security, prosperity, and well-being. The following quote, which is rather typical of the official view, is from an introductory book on hilltribes, published by the Thai Teachers Council:

Their [the hilltribes'] society is firmly attached to their customs. They have not been willing to change in any way along the lines of the wider society. Because of this, many problems arise, for example

forest destruction, problems of [national] security, and a drug problem (Saimuang 1986:48, my translation, see also Khacadphai 1985).

This view is very general in lowland Thai society, that if only the hilltribes 'entered society' they certainly would not engage in swidden cultivation, grow opium, and have dubious or subversive political leanings. This relates back to the issue of uplanders' practices which are 'considered to be inappropriate to the present socio-economic and political situation of the country' (TRI 1986:2). The way this is phrased, the issue is a matter of hilltribes' ignorance and their 'attachment to customs,' and the problem can be alleviated if only the hilltribes open themselves to the knowledge that wider (Thai) society contains.

'Society,' in this imagining, is about order and hierarchy, and this vision has been projected on the peoples of the northern hills through meetings, schools, and various governmental and NGO projects, some domestic and others international. Various official campaigns against insurgency groups and their suspected sympathizers, and against opium cultivation and swidden (slash and burn) farming more generally, as well as efforts to move uplanders from areas intended for nature reserves and/or logging, have employed violent means to suppress practices deemed subversive for one or another reason (see Hearn 1974; McKinnon 1989). There were extensive attacks on uplanders from the late 1960s and through the 1970s, and Hmong in particular were singled out for these attacks – in the official view, Hmong were particularly subversive.<sup>10</sup> While there was no particular basis for this view of Hmong, authorities acted on their fears with conviction (see Hearn 1974; Radley 1986; Smalley 1994; Tapp 1989; Walker 1980).

The Phulangka Fair is in some ways a celebration of the upland minorities being 'in society.' The banner that announces the event in Thai to anyone coming through, with its references to dance-shows by Yao and Hmong students, and to the (disco-) '*thaek*' where there are beautiful Yao and Hmong girls to dance with, make the event comparable to the school- and temple-fairs that take place in Thai lowland villages. The statement about beautiful young women as dance-partners is clearly aimed at a generalized crowd of young lowland men who would cruise to a festival of this sort to drink and to flirt with local women. The explicit references to 'Yao' and 'Hmong' are, from what goes on at this festival, related to these people's ability to be just like other Thai – they can do the dances that schoolkids elsewhere learn to perform, and the young women are beautiful and will dance at the *thaek* with those who buy tickets. Even the explicit representations of Mien and Hmong ethnicities can be seen as statements about their Thai-ness, as it appears in the context of a school-fair that is very generally Thai, and takes the form of dress and dance which does not

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interrupt the Thai-ness of the event but adds local color to it, which is both a modern and a mainstream thing to do.

1993 was the third year the Phulangka-Fair was held, and from its organization and scope, as well as from banners that carried well-wishes for the New Year in Thai and Mien, it was a sub-district level New Year festival. There is no 'Mien' precursor to a sub-district level festival, but as Mien are incorporated into the Thai state the sub-district becomes a possible level of local action. This does not happen automatically, but takes both motivated individuals and some local resonance – it has to make some sense to get together on this level for people to participate in the event. Schools and competitive sports provide that resonance in this case, as the event was organized around the daytime games. Schools also provide a structure of the social landscape, as the teams competing can only come from villages with a school, and a hierarchic ordering of that landscape, with the Pangkha school and its headmaster at the center and top, as all the other schools are branches of that one, and all the teachers are under the headmaster.

These structures only become real from people acting on them. It is not that this collection of Mien and Hmong have not had a structure of this sort of to act on before, since they have belonged to a sub-district, with Mien *kamnan*, for about 50 years, and were recognized as a social unit when their ancestors were allowed to settle within the Nan kingdom in the late 1880s (which subsequently became a province of Siam/Thailand), their Mien leader getting a *phaya* rank from the king of Nan. Rather, patterns of action and social imagination have changed, along with changes in livelihood and social alignment.

### SPORTS AND CULTURE

The sports at the Fair bring out particular ideas about the world these people inhabit, such as the mobilization of competitors through a school and/or a village, contests between two teams or among a group of runners, and awards to the winners at a three-stepped podium after the contest. The medals were made to look like those given out at more serious competitions, but they were just look-alikes. In that sense, this was a trivial event, but I suggest that the significance of the sports, and of the Fair more generally, lies in the projection of particular social visions. Sports at the sub-district level bring these people into wider networks of sports competitions, such as at the provincial level. In this way, sports competitions provide a vehicle for social networks and integration, which is one way the nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) becomes a lived reality for its members.<sup>11</sup> To a degree, having a sports team carries similar connotations to having a Buddhist temple within lowland Thai society, in that it sets up commitments to exchanges with comparable

social units and pulls the community into a particular hierarchically ordered universe of culture, society, and politics.

It also implies financial commitments. One of my visits to another Mien village with people from Pangkha was explicitly to go to a fair they held to raise funds for their sports team, for the ninth consecutive year, which they did by selling food and drinks. These were served mainly by young women, and as with the disco at the Phulangka Fun-Fair this is an enticement to younger men who cruise around with disposable income, to drink and flirt and spend their money. And as Buddhist merit-making at temples provides an avenue for displays of wealth and power,<sup>12</sup> so can sports. The school in Pangkha received a major gift of sports equipment during my fieldwork period, from the politician who gave the opening speech at the Fair.

In his study of social dynamics in the Kachin Hills of Burma, Leach (1954) discussed repeated shifts in the political organization of upland social formations, and also how people moved between the categories of upland (Kachin) and lowland (Shan) society. For the period he was working on, and for a considerable time before that, 'uplanders' could become 'lowlanders' by becoming Buddhists and engaging in wet-rice cultivation (from being 'animist' swidden farmers). These 'religious' and 'agricultural' factors were simultaneously social and political, and implied subject-hood and tribute relations with particular Buddhist kingdoms. I suggest, in this context, that in the contemporary landscape of modern nation-states, rural communities place themselves within larger social orders (the nation, primarily) through having schools and sports teams, and that this is behind the assertion of Mien and Hmong in the sub-district of Phachangnoi as 'in society' on par with lowland villages.

Paraphrasing, it deserves mention that the cockfight that Geertz (1973) describes in his famous essay was held by villagers to raise funds for a school (1973:414). Unable to get government funds for their school, the villagers violated the official ban on cockfights to attempt to position themselves better within the national space.

Like the sports at the Fair, the 'culture' presented there implies aspects of how these people are placing themselves in the world. I have already remarked on how explicit references to ethnic identity place these Mien and Hmong in a Thai context. The Fair converts ethnic differences into variations on Thai-ness, from being markers of a separation from the lowland social and political order. This reworking of social and cultural difference toward variations on a national scheme of social and cultural identity has resonance in various recent Thai efforts to celebrate rural and regional identities/cultures.<sup>13</sup> Whereas during the nation-building process, markers of non-national identities were in many cases fiercely suppressed by the agents of unification, the current situation of increasingly-unquestioned national unity and boundedness has allowed for displays of such markers.

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A part of this celebration of 'local' diversity is a discourse on modernity and an assumed homogenization, and at the forefront of this move are academics and schoolteachers, who re-invent the countryside for displays at festivals.<sup>14</sup> The culture that is thus celebrated has very little connection to the everyday realities of the people thus displayed, and this has some bearing on the impulse to document the traditional Yao way of making sweets. I suggest that it is primarily an aspect of the discursive practices of a national middle-class, a part of the stories they tell themselves about themselves (as modern, educated, and national, vis-a-vis the traditional, ethnic, and local), and a part of how they create spatial and temporal units (such as rural vs. urban, work vs. leisure, everyday vs. festive, society vs. culture) that make the world theirs through this projection of particular social visions.

The plate-dance that was displayed in two forms at the Phulangka Fun-Fair is a case in point, regarding the reworking of culture. I saw this dance performed at weddings, where it was done by members of the host's kin-group to honor their guests. I learned that among the Mien in Huai Kok (one of whom had told me the dancers in Pangkha were no good) both the bride's and the groom's side had a team of dancers, and that there was an element of competition among them in their displays. While there is thus a shared framework for this dance in its village context, that it is performed at weddings and that it concerns honor, there is no uniformity in whether it is meant to show an appreciation of the guests or whether there is an attempt by each side to outshine the other. There was singing in the archaic song-language at the weddings I went to, and there the representatives of each side attempted to outdo each other with praise and the eloquence of their play with words.

At these weddings, then, the practice of song and dance is related to exchange and competition between two households or kin-groups, and has specific social references within the framework of marriage-exchanges. The song and dance at the Fair was, in contrast, to a generalized audience, and concerned manifestations of being Mien in a national context, through a sub-district. Neither is a natural or a passively traditional manifestation of 'culture.' Both forms concern the active construction of social units, but while at weddings the effort revolves around somewhat reciprocal and competitive displays of verbal and bodily skill that frame on-going exchanges among households and kin-groups, at the Fair the efforts contribute to the manifestation of Mien-ness within a framework of cultural displays and village fairs that assign identity on terms of the administrative units of the Thai nation-state. The difference, then, is not that the former is real tradition and the latter invented. Traditions are continually worked out, and the difference between the two is primarily in the visions they project and how these relate people to particular frameworks of culture and social life.

## BRINGING IN THE STATE

The Thai flag, the King's Anthem, and the visiting MP are similarly indications of who these people of the sub-district are. They are participants in the Thai state and nation. Their relations with the state, through these public statements, are all rather deferential, and they lend a particular order to the event (through the procession, Anthem, and MP's speech).

These markers of Thai-ness are new, and can be construed as marking a fundamental break with a previously village-based reality of farming and rituals to the ancestors. But I want to suggest that bringing the state to the village is in fact something Mien have done for quite some time, and that it has formed an important component of how would-be leaders have constructed their domains and prominence by drawing on the state in areas that were for all practical purposes beyond the state's reach.

Units of Mien social life have usually been framed through ritual contracts of an exchange of offerings for prosperity and protection.<sup>15</sup> The household, for instance, maintains relations with a set of ancestors, and the identity of the householders is linked to that of the spirits. This is rather general among the uplanders, and there is not much to say about it as such. The Thai state has taken over the forests, and outlawed migratory swidden farming, so it is not possible to set up new villages in the highlands any more. But looking at how people went about establishing new villages (based on my conversations with contemporary Mien villagers), it appears that the state was 'always' brought in.

A would-be pioneer would 'open the forest' of an area he intended for settlement, by inviting the spirit of the most powerful local lowland ruler in the area to become the guardian owner-spirit of the site. A conversion of the forest as a site of 'wild' spirits which could pose danger to people's well-being is thus achieved, to a domain where people can maintain relations with their ancestors through households, by tapping into the spirits of lowland officials. Just as people will abandon a household where they feel less than well taken care of, they can change village membership. To a degree the prosperity of a village is a reflection of the leader's ability to construct a domain, which he does in part by striking a deal with the spirit of a lowland official.

There are cases of higher level integration through such deals with spirits of the state, as in the case of the multi-village migration of Mien and Hmong who are the ancestors of, among others, the Pangkha population.<sup>16</sup> During these people's sojourn through the hinterlands between Guangdong and Nan (between approximately the 1860s and 1880s), they were confronted with an attack from an army of Chinese warlords, and the leader of the migration made an offering to the spirit of the king of the domain they were in at the time for their protection. The leader was invulnerable during the subsequent attack, which was proof of the

relationship and of his prowess, and this reinforced simultaneously his leadership position and the social identity of his followers. Later, this leader struck a deal with the king of Nan that his people might settle there, and in return he was to deliver tribute. The leader was given a *phaya* rank, spears, swords, and gongs, and his followers were to be a reserve army for the king.<sup>17</sup>

The migration group became a ritual unit, drawing its well-being from the contract between the leader and the King Spirit. The leader received a title from the king, and after he died his son replaced him as the leader of this group of people, receiving the title *Thao La*. The son had moved his residence after his father's death, which I guess was in part to establish his own claims to prominence, and his domain became the center of the sub-district of Phachangnoi when the area was brought into provincial administration in the 1940s. The great-grandson of the original leader is the current sub-district headman, and he maintains the contract with the King's Spirit.

Each of the rituals that involve spirits can be portrayed as belonging to traditional Mien religion, an assumption that implies that the things Mien people do add up to a Mien-ness. This is of course possible, and then an ethnographic account of Mien or their religion would consist of a list of what the people so identified do.<sup>18</sup> The two immediate problems are that the dimensions of Mien ritual life are not particularly distinctive nor particularly shared. There are regional differences and historical shifts in ritual and social life, and also differences by wealth and ambition in the kinds of rituals people perform and in their 'reach' into the spirit world.

In conducting their rituals, then, people are not primarily following their customs, but rather acting on particular notions that relate equally to their worldview and their immediate social and political economic context, and these actions contain social references. To the extent that such social references are reproduced, they impact the social formations that people live – these may be tenuous and/or contended, but the main point is that they are active constructs rather than passive reproductions of 'ethnic' traditions.

Much like the 'leadership landscapes' that Anna Tsing (1993:127–53) describes for Meratus Dayak of Kalimantan, Mien leaders make their prominence through drawing on the state. To come back to the Phulangka Fun-Fair, one can view the markers of the state as reflecting the prominence of the headmaster of the local school. He constructs a domain through a procession and sports by his ability to employ the markers of Thailand, and makes the population of the subdistrict into his subjects through their dance and sports that revolve, physically and symbolically, around the school that he heads.

But there is more to this bringing-in of the state than the construction of domains and leadership. As in relations with spirits, such contracts can be

used to ask special favors from the 'other side.' Two days after the MP gave his speech at the Fair, he was again in the village. This time he came with his family and relatives and with several policemen, and the occasion was a trip to the site of Phulangka village. He was joined by several locals; the headmaster and his brother, their uncle the sub-district headman, me, and a few other villagers. We stopped in a Hmong village, where members of the politicians family picked hemp and opium plants from a Hmong field to take home to their living rooms, and walked from there uphill to the site of Phulangka. The purpose was to show the politician the site as a prospective resort area, which, the headmaster hoped, would create jobs for local people.

The headman of the Hmong village had joined us, and after this walk we went back to the cars and drove further up the road, until we stopped at cotton fields and walked to a nearby waterfall. People took short walks, sat by the fall, chatted, and drank whisky and soda. A few hours later we went back to the cars, and on the way back we stopped in the same Hmong village as before, and the Hmong headman entered a long discussion with a group of villagers in a pick-up truck who looked prepared to take produce off to a market. The long and short of that discussion was that the Hmong villagers were made to come with us and barbecue dinner for the group at a hut that belongs to the Pangkha headmaster, a few kilometers from this Hmong village.

The feast, that involved much meat and several cases of liquor, has, in retrospect, much in common with how these people deal with high level spirits. They are invited, treated deferentially, feted on meat and liquor, and gracefully sent off after they have been asked particular favors. At the time I had little sense of what this was about, and it was only six months later that I found out that the event was meant to convey the wish for agricultural assistance for the Hmong in the village we had briefly visited, who were threatening to massacre a nearby settlement of workers from the Highway Department because of their current difficulties in making a living.

The Hmong in question are among the people who were fiercely attacked during the 1960s and 70s, and there were cases of whole villages being massacred. I have heard stories of how Thai soldiers would throw babies among themselves on their bayonets during such events. Now the Hmong were threatening to strike back, by wiping out a community of Thai roadworkers, unless they were provided with some means of improving their livelihood.

From being the victims of violent state-suppression of their livelihood, migratory swiddening and opium cultivation, these Hmong were aiming to turn the tables on the state. It was through networks among the Hmong and Mien village headmen and the headmaster, people in positions that draw on the administrative networks of the same state, that this violence was averted. They were able to draw on the politician who has cultivated this

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area for votes and who is in turn cultivated for beneficial links to official channels, partly because they have established themselves through their votes and such events as sub-district level fun-fairs as proper participants in the Thai state.

Contacts with the state serve to ground the prominence of would be leaders in the social life of their constituents, and simultaneously to bring benefits of this prominence to the intended followers. Links to the state have taken various forms, among them are ritual deals with the spirit of lowland officials as the guardians of settlements and larger populations, tribute deals, titles, and more recently schools, roads, elections, sports, and development projects. The kinds of relations, and the social units involved, have taken various forms, but the main analytical point is that the worlds of villagers and the state have a long history of multiple entanglements. The representational conventions that assume integrated tribal worlds that are adapted to their natural environment in opposition to the oppressive reality of state penetration fail to address the multi-stranded connections that have long made up the everyday worlds of the so-called tribal people, and how they have unevenly engaged with that reality.

### CONCLUSIONS

Acting from different perspectives, and with different social powers of objectifying their respective interpretations, people come to different conclusions and societies work out different consensuses. Social communication is as much an empirical risk as worldly reference (Sahlins 1985:x).

The Phulangka Fun Fair was not, in a strict sense, a collective representation, while it made particular statements about this collectivity of people. Instead, it was a statement from the perspective of the schoolteachers, particularly the Pangkha headmaster, through the dances and sports of the schoolkids, to the MP and the assembled villagers in the audience, about the Mien and Hmong in the sub-district as good Thai. The sports, the song and dance, and the disco all project particular social visions, aimed at a generalized audience, that convey a sense of these people as within networks of the nation state. What can be labeled invented traditions are outcomes of engagements with national space. These are engagements with aspects of modernity. I stress continuities in how upland leaders have made themselves through links to the state and how social outcomes are continually worked out in terms of such connections, in part to avoid the pitfalls of assuming in contrast traditions that have been undone. There is, in short, no 'traditional' condition to refer to that would make the world(s) of these people ethnically bounded or uniform.

One possible reaction to the case that I build around the Phulangka Fun-Fair is that the event was not typical of the upland minorities or how they are dealing with the encompassing Thai state. I agree with that assessment, to the degree that there is no typical upland case. I offer the documentation of traditional Yao practices as an example of how people's reality is made to match the expectations of outsiders in the construction of typical cases. My argument is that the anthropological construction of culture and social organization in ethnic terms is a case of what Ortner (1995) calls 'ethnographic refusal,' a failure to come to terms with the complex realities of states and the various populations within their orbits beyond simple dichotomies. In her case of resistance studies, these concern oppressors (the state) and the occasionally-resisting oppressed (the peasants). In studies of the upland groups of Thailand, these are the 'political' state and the 'ethnic' ('cultural' or 'traditional') villagers.<sup>19</sup> Part of my purpose has been to attempt to transcend the 'ghettoization' of research and writing on peoples such as Mien and Hmong as 'tribes,' 'ethnic groups,' 'minorities,' and/or 'indigenous peoples.'

The versions of culture and community that people project through their actions may not add up to a 'Mien' or any such case. This is my point with the description. My critique of the 'ethnic' slant in descriptions of the upland peoples of northern Thailand is ethnographic and historical. In contemporary Thailand, schoolteachers are in a privileged position to mobilize rural people for their versions of reality, and this is what lies behind the Phulangka Fun-Fair as a representation. This apparent manipulation of minority cultures for statements of allegiance to the Thai state/nation manifests the uneven ability of people in different positions to project their visions on the social life around them, and how local people draw on imagery of the state for their projects. Rather than viewing this as marking 'modernity' from 'tradition,' I suggest how this relates to a historical pattern of upland leaders making themselves and their domains by drawing on the state, which complicates the sense of uplanders as separate from the state on the one hand, and of them as having shared an 'uplander' perspective on the state on the other.

There are multiple social frameworks within cases such as Thailand's 'Mien,' that do not add up in any simple way. These vary internally, 'externally' – in terms on how they draw on a wider multi-ethnic and multi-societal context, and historically. The range in structurings relates to regional factors in worldview and political economy,<sup>20</sup> as much as to the varied projects of individuals and groups and how they intersect.

I did my research primarily among Mien people, lived in Mien villages, spoke Mien (the best I could), studied Mien rituals, and in other ways attempted to immerse myself in local realities as fieldworkers do. There are various dimensions to the lives of these people that relate to their identity as Mien and uplanders, but in examining the trajectories of communities and

### *Traditional Tribal What?*

histories in the area that I am familiar with, I did not find what could be called a 'Mien' project or perspective.<sup>21</sup>

Divergence in how people within the Mien category have acted on their worlds concerns among other things a range of 'subjects of action' (see Rousseau 1995); small households, extended households, villages, leaders, and migrations, and how people have attempted to advance their interests through any one such subject of action and thus project particular visions on the social landscape. These varied projects have drawn on a wider context in a range of ways, on the options and constraints of lowland political economies, and on the state in the realm of ideas and objects. There is thus no 'objective reality' beyond the level of representations, people's lived worlds are always caught up in multiple representations, not only those of outsiders, that relate attempts to frame social life from particular perspectives.

From this angle, there is an element of a fundamental continuity between the varied projects of 'animist' swidden farmers in the highlands, and the modern, educated, and rather middle-class people who mobilized schoolkids and villagers for a Fun-Fair of sports, disco, culture shows, and a politician's speech. The former are easily slipped into an ethnic category, while the latter are not, hence my concern with issues of representations and ill-fitting ethnic markers.

My critique of the ethnography of uplanders in northern Thailand is not of their descriptions as such, as I draw on these descriptions for this critique, but of the assumption that the varied local realities and intersecting trajectories added up from villages to ethnic groups or cultures. This critique is not new, nor the only way to deal with this apparent crisis in anthropology, but then, there is no reason to expect anthropologists to 'add up' any more uniformly than the people they write about.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I did research among Thailand's Mien between October 1992 and August 1994. I was based primarily in the village of Pangkha, Phachangnoi Subdistrict, Pong District, in Phayao Province. I visited Mien elsewhere, in Chiangmai and Chiangrai Provinces, and had done brief surveys in 1990 among Mien in Phayao, Chiangrai, Lampang, and Nan Provinces. My research was facilitated by a permit from the National Research Council of Thailand, and I was affiliated with the Tribal Research Institute, the Social Research Council of Chiangmai University, and Phayap University. The research was supported by grants from the National Science Foundation (DBN 9200110), the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (Grant #5516), the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, and the Walter Vella Foundation. My sincere thanks to each of these agencies for their support. Also, my thanks to all the Mien who made life easier during

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## NOTES

- 1 The research lasted from October 1992 to August 1994. Because of an accident I had, it was still in the preliminary stages during January 1993.
- 2 The expert did not acknowledge my presence during this event, while I think I was rather obvious. Maybe a Westerner was, like the 'Meo' pounder and the 'Thai' clothes the locals were wearing, something irrelevant to the real thing (that he proceeded to conjure up) and best ignored.
- 3 A part of the explanation for the persistently ethnic dimension to studies of Thailand's upland populations lies in the stated agenda of the Tribal Research Centre (now Institute) of facilitating studies of the 'six main tribal groups' (Geddes 1967:556; see also Hinton 1983:158-9). But this also has to do with the ethnic slant to 'classical' anthropology (see Kirsch 1973; 1982).

- 4 Phulangka was studied by Douglas Miles during 1966–68 (the area was then within Chiangrai Province), and his research there came to an end during the war between the Thai military and units of the Communist Party of Thailand and assumed CPT sympathizers. Villagers and the anthropologist had to leave the area, as ‘shooting, bombing, and land mines have made it impossible for sociological research to continue in the sub-district of Pha Chang Noi’ (Miles 1967–68 (8):2). For his work, see Miles 1967–68; 1972a, b; 1973a, b; 1974; 1978; 1990.
- 5 Such bands have a range of tunes to choose from for festivities (three dozen, some say), while they play variations on a single tune when the music is intended for spirits.
- 6 The dances, the accompanying music (from a tape-player), and the dancers’ outfits, went from ‘classical’ (a stereotypical portrayal of pre-twentieth-century Thai, as seen on TV) to increasingly ‘modern,’ culminating in 7th graders lip-synching to a Thai pop song. This temporal progression was paralleled in the increasing age of the students performing each of the five stages to this display.
- 7 Mien use three languages; an everyday language (*mien waa*), song language (*nzung waa*), and a ritual language (*zie waa*), see Purnell (1991). While many older people know song language, only spirit mediums know the ritual language. One of the language changes currently going on among Thailand’s Mien (aside from the increasing use of Thai and decreasing use of Chinese (Cantonese, Yunnanese, and Mandarin) as a second language) is that people have started to use everyday language for songs. This comes both from pop-musicians among Mien refugees in America (whose tapes have made their way to relatives in Thailand) and from inventive local Mien.
- 8 The New Year proper started on January 23rd. This was year 82, counting in Chinese Dynastic fashion from the first year of the Republic (1911).
- 9 It is worth noting that while Mien are labelled Yao, the Hmong are not labelled Meo, which would be the equivalent official term. It is likely that presenting Hmong as Mong, which is increasingly common in Thailand, has to do with a disassociation from the image of Meo as communist (or at least subversive and un-Thai) opium growers.
- 10 In the official Thai imagery, Hmong were known as *Meo Daeng*, ‘Red Meo,’ which was a reference to their assumed communist leanings. Among ethnographers, Thailand’s Hmong are divided into Green/Blue and White.
- 11 The sports-component constitutes a domain of study in its own right. See for instance MacClancy’s discussion of ‘the profusion of ways in which sports influence, define, and assist in the creation and contest of identities . . . at a series of levels and along a range of cultural domains’ (MacClancy 1996:17).
- 12 ‘. . . merit making is a very competitive game, the object of which is sheer one-upmanship . . . The game is largely one of trying to force others to accept one’s giving . . .’ (Lehman 1997:29), to build up social obligations.
- 13 In a way, the Fair provides a vehicle through which these Hmong and Mien ‘learn to be local’ within the Thai nation. The phrase is from Wilk’s (1995) discussion of beauty pageants in Belize, which, he maintains; ‘standardise a vocabulary for describing difference, and provide a syntax for its expression, to provide a common frame of organised distinction, in the process making wildly disparate groups of people intelligible to each other . . . They never manage to purvey true ‘false consciousness’ and conceal underlying differences in power and resources . . . The competitions are hegemonic only in the way they involve disparate groups in a common interest, and thereby limit their ranges of possible action’ (1995:130).

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- 14 In this context, consider O'Connor's (1989) case of Bangkokians going to view traditional dances upcountry, where the 'local' dance-troupe also came from Bangkok. On romantic, urbanite constructions of the rural outside of Southeast Asia, see Williams (1973). On various Southeast Asian cases of the view of modernity as homogenizing and Westernizing society and eroding culture, and the concurrent projection of tradition and culture on rural areas, see O'Connor (1983). For one Thai rendering of this dichotomy, see Chattip (1991). Meanwhile, the 'culture' that is projected in/on Bangkok concerns official markers of a royal heritage, and a rather deliberate undoing of the many local 'communities' that have made up many parts of the city (see Askew 1996; O'Connor 1990). There are various differences along such lines as region, class, and gender to how people in Thailand are dealing with 'modernity,' see Mills (1997).
- 15 For accounts of Thailand's Mien, other than Miles' work already mentioned, see for instance Akira (1995); Chob (1986); Hubert (1985); Kandre (1967; 1971; 1976; 1991); Kandre and Lej (1965); Lemoine (1983; 1991).
- 16 There were also many cases of what can be called lower level integration (or the lack of integration), in that many people did not live in villages proper. Some lived in fieldhuts, others in small hamlets. In either case, people were not in the kinds of relations assumed in village-membership. There are various social, political, and ritual dimensions to whether people 'take on' a village.
- 17 I have discussed aspects of this migration elsewhere (Jonsson 1998), where I focus on the uneven remembrance of this migration among the descendants. There I relate uneven emphasis on history to social positionings and debates, and argue from accounts of other upland groups (Luo' and Lisu) that anthropologists have generalized for villages-cum-ethnic groups from the most vocal sector in village life, which is related to the critique I raise here about the ethnic dimension to anthropological accounts of uplanders. In a separate discussion that also deals with this migration (Jonsson 1997a) I focus on historical dimensions of ritual and social life, and show that the case of Phulangka, which Miles (1973a:77; 1974:2) presents as 'typical' of Thailand's Mien, was highly specific to inflationary pressures in householding that related to the history of the migration group, tribute deals with the court in Nan, and then their position as a major supplier to the Opium Monopoly until the late 1950s.
- 18 See Chob 1976; 1986, for a rendering of Mien religion along such lines.
- 19 For some examples of the portrayal of uplanders, see the predominantly 'ethnic' and 'traditional' emphasis of the papers in McKinnon and Wanat (1983) and Walker (1992). In contrast, the papers in McKinnon and Vienne (1989) are mostly concerned with the impact of government policies, but they do not show the uplanders engaging in any active way with these policies or the state more generally.
- 20 Elsewhere (Jonsson 1996a, b) I relate a pervasive upland-lowland divide in this region (southern China and mainland Southeast Asia) to a state-culture scheme that projected civilization and order on the cleared lowlands fit for wet-rice cultivation, which in the process created the category of the 'forested wilderness' within which there were populations beyond the state's reach. Along with this rhetoric of exclusive civility, there were various relations of tribute and trade that cut across the assumed divide, and some of the most valuable prestige items used by courts were procured from uplanders. The political economic and worldview bases of this social and ecological bifurcation of the region came undone during and after the colonial period, so when

anthropologists entered the scene it appeared that upland and lowland peoples had no relations, and that uplanders can be explained in terms of migrations (within the racial framework of early anthropology, which assumed that the lowlanders were a more recent migration that pushed the earlier settlers into the hills, e.g. Izikowitz 1951), and subsequently adaptations to the forest environment (in classical anthropology, e.g. Kunstadter and Kunstadter 1992).

- 21 There may be one soon. During my time in the area, I went to the two first meetings of an emerging Mien Association. At the first meeting, older and village-based Mien were the major voice. Their concern was that people were not practicing the customary ways of Mien, and the point they emphasised was that customs (*le*) were effective and made people prosper (questioned by one of the younger women about gender differentiation and inequality, such as that women were not allowed to become spirit mediums, one of the older men told a story that related how the cleverness of a woman made her household get wealthy). At the second meeting, the younger, Thai-educated segment was more firmly in control of what went on, and their concerns were to find a logo and an acronym in Thai and English for their association, how their association would relate to a larger scheme of NGOs and minority associations, and to locate older villagers as 'resource persons' for the compilation of manuals of Mien customs and ways for younger and increasingly urban people to know their roots.

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