Editorial

This edition of the Thai-Yunnan Bulletin is dedicated to the memory of Peter Hinton who died last month. Peter, who retired recently after a long career in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, was the person who first stimulated my interest in the Thai-Yunnan region. As an undergraduate at Sydney University in the early 1980s I took a course with Peter on Buddhism and politics in Burma and Thailand. My enthusiasm for this course prompted me to work with Peter during my Honours year, in which I wrote an appropriately Marxist account of “ideology and consciousness in Thai peasant culture.” I still have Peter’s typewritten comments on an early draft of my thesis, posted from the Tribal Research Institute in Chiang Mai in July 1983 during a brief break from a research trip to the “wet and muddy” Karen hills during which he was struck by “how little had changed” since his original fieldwork in the 1960s. Responding to my ideologically enthusiastic account of structural tensions in Thai rural society, he warned me not to “take anything for granted” referring to one of his colleagues at Sydney (and a likely examiner!) who was, apparently “very critical of studies of ‘groaning peasants’” and for whom, in Peter’s colourful terms, “nothing short of actual slavery constitutes exploitation.” After graduating I maintained intermittent contact with Peter—and I still feel a tinge of guilt about the review I never submitted on Turton and Tanabe’s History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia—and in 1992 it was Peter who encouraged me to do research on cross-border trade between Thailand and Laos when I sounded him out on the possibility of undertaking a PhD. Peter was a tad annoyed when I decided to study at the ANU but we maintained regular

continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2. Lao Hits: Music, Identity and the Internet by Adam Chapman

7. “Black” skin “white” skin: riches and beauty in Lao women’s bodies by Holly High

10. An interpretation of yearly animal flags (Tua Paung): The preparations for welcoming a new spirit and a change in fortune in Laos by Thararat Chararonthikdai

13. Conservation practice in Laos by Sarinda Singh

14. NEW PUBLICATIONS

14 Biodiversity, Local Knowledge and Sustainable Development; A Review of Yin Shaoting’s People and Forests by Harold Brookfield.

16 Extract from Yin Shaoting’s People and Forests.

19 Book Notes by Aranya Siriphon

21. CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENTS
contact over the following years. My wife and I have fond
fieldwork memories of Peter’s visit to the Mekong river port
of Chiang Khong where he sat one evening in the riverside hut
of the local boat operators, commenting on the paucity of the
offering they made to their resident territorial spirit. The offering
may have been modest, but the accompanying whisky was not
and I still remember our somewhat meandering foot-slapping
walk up the road to our favourite restaurant where we dined on
tom yam plaa and entertained the waitress with what we thought
was quite witty repartee.

Peter’s visit to Chiang Khong came at the end (or beginning?)
of one of his research trips to Laos, a country that engaged
his research interest in the latter years of his career. It is more
than fitting, then, that this issue of the Bulletin is devoted
predominantly to Laos, and includes an article by Holly High,
who Peter supervised before ill-health forced his retirement. The
various articles reflect the growing diversity of research in Laos,
a diversity that Peter would no doubt have applauded. This issue
also contains an extract (and review by Harold Brookfield) from
Yin Shaoting’s People and Forests, which deals with swidden
agriculture in Yunnan. Again, this resonates with Peter’s work
both in relation to his recent interest in examining the various
linkages between Yunnan and Southeast Asia and his original
research among the Karen which is crucial for those seeking to
understand the transformation of swidden systems in Thailand.

Our sympathies are extended to Peter’s family and friends. He
will be missed!

Andrew Walker

---

**Lao Hits: Music, Identity and the Internet**

**Adam Chapman**

**Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, The Australian National University**

**Background**

Lao music and the performing arts have been overlooked. For all
the recent scholarly activity covering many aspects of Lao culture
and society it seems incredible that music and the performing arts
have generated such underwhelming interest. Grant Evans’ timely
volume *Laos: Culture and Society* (1999) with its insightful essays
exploring contemporary issues in Lao language, literature, politics,
history, ethnography, religion and ritual, migration, and geography
held one major disappointment: no essay on Lao performing arts,
neither traditional nor popular forms. Given that by 1999 only
two or three music specialists had had the opportunity to conduct
field research in Laos since the end of 1975 this omission can be
understood. Unfortunately, the situation has improved little in
the intervening five years with, to the best of my knowledge, only
two articles on Lao music published in that time (Chapman 2001;
2003).

Leaving the past behind, I will focus upon presents and futures,
using this short article to provide a sample of the dynamic and
vibrant Lao music being made among migrant Lao communities
in the West and to highlight how this mode of cultural expression
is fertile ground for understanding generational change in migrant
Lao communities, the evolving relationship between Lao migrants
and the Lao homeland, and for tracking shifting notions of Lao-
ness, khwm pên laaw.

**Transnational Lao Communities**

The huge exodus of the Lao population in the years leading up to
and following the 1975 overthrow of the Royal Lao Government
has been well documented. Around 400,000 people left Laos
between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s fleeing war, reprisals
from the new communist government, and economic hardship
caused by hastily implemented socialist planning. People of
different ethnic groups such as Khmu, Hmong, and Tai Dam
as well as lowland Lao were amongst the refugees who fled to
refugee camps in Thailand and then made new lives in far away
Western countries such as the United States of America, Australia,
France and Canada. Approximately 225,000 refugees from Laos
settled in the USA, almost 50,000 in France, 17,000 in Canada,
and 10,000 made Australia their new home. In 2004, almost thirty
years after their exile began, these former refugees are firmly
ensconced in their adopted countries as new familial ties, and
sometimes political necessity, keep them from returning to Laos
(Si-ambhaivan 1999). This article focuses upon the lowland Lao
communities across the globe.

Members of migrant Lao communities often classify the Lao
living in Laos as lâaw nâu ‘internal Lao (people)’ and those living

---

*Peter Hinton in Chiang Khong, 1994.*
abroad (i.e. themselves) as laow nîiêk `external Lao (people)’, a taxonomy that speaks to the social and conceptual differences that have evolved across the diaspora during the past twenty-five years. This distinction not only marks out differences of place but also ones of economic and educational opportunity, politics and physical and social mobility. As the younger generation of migrant Lao, almost all of whom have grown up and received a Western education, steadily increase their influence within their migrant communities, these differences between migrant Lao and the Lao homeland will continue to grow. Unlike their parents, this younger generation is able to enjoy the benefits of less restrictive communications with the Lao homeland that have been facilitated by the easing of political, social and economic controls in Laos during the 1990s and technological developments. Migrant Lao are now free to journey to Laos in order to visit relatives, find a Lao wife (but seldom to find a husband), or to seek out investment/business opportunities; a situation once unthinkable to the older generation of migrant Lao.

**Transnationalism and Technoculture**

Migrant Lao communities around the world are clearly transnational in their behaviours, operating in varying degrees across Appadurai’s five, much cited, –scapes: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes (Appadurai 1990:11). Musicologist Timothy Taylor adds a sixth –scape to the list: the ‘infoscape’ which is the atmosphere within which the other five –scapes exist and is made possible by digital technologies, computers and the Internet (2003:64). In the contemporary Laos context the interdependence of the infoscape and the other five scapes is exemplified in the multitude of websites listed on the links page of www.vientianetimes.com where Lao and Hmong politics, religion, ethnicity, commerce, news/media, and technology are all represented. Instantaneous access to such a vast array of information was impossible less than a decade ago when transnational communication and information exchange relied upon long-established modes like the postal service, telephones, telegrams and mass media broadcasting.

Exponential growth of digital technologies and the Internet has given small, widely dispersed migrant communities such as the Lao a virtual place where they can meet to discuss ideas, culture, religion, migrant life, ethnic identity and their relationship with their homelands (if they have one). The term ‘technoculture’ can be applied to this integration of social behaviour with technology wherein the use of technology is viewed as a fully cultural process which only makes sense in the context of familiar kinds of behaviour (Ross 1991:3). Deriving from the premise “that technologies become imbedded in cultural systems and social institutions, which, in turn, are reconfigured by those same technologies” (Lysloff & Gay 2003:8) this view sees meaning conferred upon technologies through human agency and declines to accept that technology is inherently destructive to ‘traditional’ cultures. As the Lao online community expands, the binary opposition between ‘global’ and ‘local’ becomes increasingly difficult to maintain evoking Robertson’s (1994) term ‘glocalisation’ because it:

…emphasizes the extent to which the local and global are no longer distinct – indeed, never were – but are inextricably intertwined, with one infiltrating and implicating the other. Indeed, it may be difficult or impossible to speak of one or the other. Older forms and problems of globalization are increasingly compromised, challenged, and augmented by this newer phenomenon of glocalization. (Taylor 2003:67)

In the context of the Lao diaspora the local and global merge in acts such as building temples in Lao architectural style and remembering sensual experiences through the making and consumption of food, ritual practices and music performance and production.

**Transnational Lao Music**

My interest in transnational Lao music was sparked during 1998 while in Laos conducting field research on the vocal music traditions of the lowland Lao. One cool-season evening in Vientiane I attended a concert performance given by the female Lao-American singer Ketsana Vilaylack. Although my recollection of that event is somewhat hazy I remember realising that I was witnessing an intriguing cross-cultural exchange as Ketsana’s on stage banter, while conducted in Lao, reflected a Western pop musician’s approach to performance and appeared to leave her audience somewhat bemused. I didn’t know it at the time, but this event was the threshold of far-reaching changes in the transnational dialogue between the communities of the Lao diaspora and the Lao homeland; changes triggered by the relaxation of political and economic policies in Laos and the explosion of Internet and digital technologies.

Since 2000 a rapid growth in Lao music production has been taking place across the Lao diaspora. It is a music industry in the making distributing its products through online marketing methods, personal contacts and Lao-owned general goods stores serving the communities of the diaspora. The music is intimately linked to the virtual spaces of the online Lao community with almost every Lao-related website containing links to at least one Lao music site. Those sites dedicated to music alone are run by fans (e.g. www.laomusicians.vze.com), small businesses acting as distributors (e.g. www.wattay-pro.com), music companies operated by Lao migrants (e.g. www.lskproduction.com) or by the musicians themselves (e.g. www.ketsana.com). Sites come and go. In the last few months of 2003 two popular fan sites, www.laowaves.com and www.listen.to/laoamp3 closed down without forewarning but other sites such as the Australian based music distributor www.laoexport.com consolidated their position. Complementing these music sites are others catering to the general online Lao community like www.laohub.com (a recent entry, opening in January 2004), www.buclao.com and www.laotian.info that are mainly patronised by young Lao under the age of thirty-five. Using the web as a marketing, promotion and distribution tool allows Lao musicians to overcome the wide dispersal of the migrant Lao community, both within a single country and across
the diaspora as a whole. However, the Lao online community is relatively small and, like the diaspora itself, is scattered across the virtual world. For example, younger users in their teens and early twenties prefer Asian-American sites with chat rooms such as www.asianavenue.com whereas the first generation of migrants have little interest in online activities, the major exception in this group being the politically active community opposing the government of the Lao PDR.1

In Laos the local music industry is experiencing a boom led by recording companies such as Lao Art Media and Valentine Music producing the current batch of stars such as Alexandra (a teenager of Lao-Bulgarian descent) and Virus (a rock band). Until very recently Lao pop and rock music was viewed as uncool by trendy Vientiane youth who preferred the more sophisticated Thai music easily obtained on shopping trips to neighbouring Nong Khai in Thailand or through the ever-present Thai mass media so widely consumed in the Mekong valley towns of Laos (cf. Enfield 1999). Locating the precise reasons for the local music industry's present boom is an imprecise exercise at best, however, a number of factors can be identified. Firstly, the influx of migrant Lao musicians and music products from the late 1990s on almost certainly helped to raise the status of Lao music and, by extension, the amount of social capital that could be gained by listening to it. Secondly, increased affluence in the Vientiane area and the absorption of musical influences from neighbouring Thailand also helped to expand the potential market and develop performers.

Locally produced Lao music is also making an impact in the Lao speaking Isan region of Thailand and beyond. A recent Vientiane Times article reports that Thai students from Udon Thani and Nong Khai are now phoning in to Lao FM stations to request songs (Souknilundon 2004). Lao performers, most notably Alexandra, are also undertaking concert tours to France and the United States to perform for the migrant Lao communities, consolidating and reciprocating the transnational exchange across the diaspora. Unlike their Western-based counterparts, musicians and recording companies based in Laos have not yet fully established a presence on the Internet, instead relying upon migrant Lao run sites to take care of their overseas distribution. A number of these businesses (for example Wattay Productions)2 have representatives in several countries. In Laos the Internet is not yet viable as a business tool because Internet usage there is the lowest in ASEAN (Phongsavanh 2003). Consequently, artists and recording companies rely upon established marketing and distribution methods like retail shops and broadcasting to achieve sales in Laos.

Lao identity is articulated in music and musical activities which are a “particularly poignant locale for understanding roots versus rootlessness [and] homogenisation versus heterogenisation” (Feld 1994:269). The following career summaries of two Lao-American performers, Ketsana Vilayack and Noy Sydanon, sheds light on the ways these oppositions are articulated.

---

Noy Sydanon

Noy Sydanon is a singer/guitarist based in Anaheim, California. Born in Vientiane, he has lived in the USA for most of his life and began playing music at the age of fourteen while living in Tuscon, Arizona. After commencing his music career playing cover versions of Lao songs Noy began to write and record his own music. His style is guitar based pop/rock tending toward a heavy, hard sound with lyrics sung in Lao, rather than Thai. In doing so Noy is pushing the boundaries of Lao popular music which centres upon an ‘easy listening’ aesthetic, and by singing in Lao he challenges widely-held beliefs that the Lao language is not suited to rock music.3 Noy’s profile on his website establishes his aesthetic territory:

Noy has created a new kind of rock (lyrics in Lao) a new trend for younger Lao musicians and for everyone who is ready to move on with a new kind of taste. It’s an exciting time for Lao music. Hope you’re ready for it.4

So far Noy Sydanon has produced three album length CDs; Ko Pen Lao (kho pan lao), ‘May I be Lao’, in 2000, The Great Distance in 2002, and Ta Laek Ta (taa leek taa), ‘An Eye for An Eye’ in 2003. These titles clearly reflect the sense of pride in being Lao and feelings of estrangement from Laos felt amongst migrant Lao communities. Such themes are mentioned in an interview with Noy Sydanon on the Lao Musicians fan site:

LAO MUSICIANS: I noticed some Lao Musicians are very proud of our homeland Lao. For example The Exile called their album “Our Home Land”, BB Gun called their album “Lao Town”, Chitpanya “Dek Lao” [Lao Child], The Metal Kid (Kirk Phaysith) had one of his songs called “Sticky Rice Fingers”, and there’s Lao Damage Inc, and so on...and your first CD called “Kaw Pen Lao” [I’d like to be Lao] and most of the songs on there has to do with our people or culture, are the songs from your coming CD about our homeland or people?

NOY SYDANON: Definitely most of my writings are for our people, here in US but more for Lao people in Lao. I want them to know and understand what we’re feeling. My second album is called The Great Distance...in my view we’re million miles a way from home, but home is lying here in the heart. It just won’t go away. I won’t cry about the how much I miss home or wanting to go home. Life here in the US is sweet, so sweet that I wanted to share with our people, people whom are living in poverty, hunger and being cheated by the high power back home. I figured hey if I can’t make a dime selling my song, I’m gonna speak my mind.5

---

1 continued from page 3

2 Internet usage there is the lowest in ASEAN (Phonsavanh 2003).

3 Noy has created a new kind of rock (lyrics in Lao) a new trend for younger Lao musicians and for everyone who is ready to move on with a new kind of taste. It’s an exciting time for Lao music. Hope you’re ready for it.

4 So far Noy Sydanon has produced three album length CDs; Ko Pen Lao (kho pan lao), ‘May I be Lao’, in 2000, The Great Distance in 2002, and Ta Laek Ta (taa leek taa), ‘An Eye for An Eye’ in 2003. These titles clearly reflect the sense of pride in being Lao and feelings of estrangement from Laos felt amongst migrant Lao communities. Such themes are mentioned in an interview with Noy Sydanon on the Lao Musicians fan site:

LAO MUSICIANS: I noticed some Lao Musicians are very proud of our homeland Lao. For example The Exile called their album “Our Home Land”, BB Gun called their album “Lao Town”, Chitpanya “Dek Lao” [Lao Child], The Metal Kid (Kirk Phaysith) had one of his songs called “Sticky Rice Fingers”, and there’s Lao Damage Inc, and so on...and your first CD called “Kaw Pen Lao” [I’d like to be Lao] and most of the songs on there has to do with our people or culture, are the songs from your coming CD about our homeland or people?

NOY SYDANON: Definitely most of my writings are for our people, here in US but more for Lao people in Lao. I want them to know and understand what we’re feeling. My second album is called The Great Distance...in my view we’re million miles a way from home, but home is lying here in the heart. It just won’t go away. I won’t cry about the how much I miss home or wanting to go home. Life here in the US is sweet, so sweet that I wanted to share with our people, people whom are living in poverty, hunger and being cheated by the high power back home. I figured hey if I can’t make a dime selling my song, I’m gonna speak my mind.

5 continued on page 5
In another interview, this time with his Australian-based
distributor Lao Press Entertainment, Noy responded to a
question about which of his songs “sum him up”, saying that:

Champa Vientiane, well it does not sum up me, but songs
like Kaw Pen Lao [khòò pên laaw, ‘May I be Lao’], Kaw
Sa Barn [khòò sabaan, ‘Please Swear’] and Parb Luang Ta
[phaap luang taa, ‘Deception’] (from the first CD) describe
me the most. I care deeply for our
people, our culture and our innocence.
As little as I have and I am trying to
give back as much as I can if whatever
I am saying in my songs make any
differences to someone or something then I’m happy with that.

Ketsana Vilayack
Ketsana Vilayack is a female singer now
based in Los Angeles and has recorded six albums. She has just completed a five year
sojourn in Southeast Asia which began in 1998 when she took the master tapes of
a self-financed album to Warner Chappell Asia in Bangkok who subsequently signed
her to a publishing and recording contract. Operating out of Bangkok Ketsana gave
concert performances throughout mainland Southeast Asia. These tours began as
part of the Warner’s strategy to promote Ketsana as a pan-Asia Pacific star with the
intention to release albums in Malaysia, Taiwan, China, Singapore, Hong Kong
and the Philippines. Unfortunately, shortly after Ketsana signed the contract, AOL
and Time Warner merged, closing down ten branches of Warner Chappell Asia,
including the branch in Thailand which had signed her. The master tapes for the two already completed
albums (in English) which had been planned for release were returned to Ketsana who is now searching for a distribution or
record deal in the USA.

Unlike other most other Lao performers Ketsana writes and
records her songs in English as often as she does in Lao. Of the six
albums recorded to date, four of them are in English; her
current single ‘Dream’ has an English and a Lao version. On
her website Ketsana highlights her Lao ethnicity while making
a pitch to the world music and pan Asia-Pacific market. This
strategy appears designed to retain her Lao community fan base,
while also promoting her exotic “East meets West” otherness to
audiences beyond.

Her remarkable journey in life began in Savannakhet, Laos and has taken her around the world including tours of the United
States, Canada, France, and her motherland, Laos singing in her
native tongue, Laotian, and English.

Her stunning soulful voice, sounding at times like Madonna
and Kate Bush, has reached and touched the homes, hearts,
and ears of Lao people throughout the world. Her music is an
exquisitely crafted brand of eccentric electronic rock-inflected
pop combining and blending a twist of exotic sounds of her
motherland’s traditional instruments with the Western world’s
groove and sounds. Something like East meets West.

Of the gratification that comes from being a role model and a
positive force through her music and musicianship in Lao people’s
lives, she says, I blush, I smile, I thank, and I pray that forever I
can make a difference in people’s lives thru my music. Either in
the studio, on or off stage, I feel so right, so powerful, and so
good to hear people’s responses, inputs, praises, and claps that
there’s hardly any joy comparable.

Ketsana is not the only Lao musician seeking to expand her
horizons and enter mainstream markets. A young Lao R n’ B star
Willy Denzy (through EMC Records) and female pop singer
Sophie Nithada (through Warner Music) have achieved high
record sales in France’s mainstream music industry, both singing
in French.

Conclusion
The communities of the Lao diaspora have entered a new phase of
transnational encounters. While established channels of
communication persist, the new spaces created by the Internet
continued on page 6
and digital media technologies are altering the nature of Lao transnational transactions, intensifying and reconstructing ideas of ethnic and cultural identity. For the diaspora’s online community, Lao-related websites act as a parallel reality “almost interchangeable with the physical places they represent” (Lysloff 2003:40). Websites, particularly music sites, appeal to the senses allowing Lao migrant musicians to project memories of Laos and the meaning of being Lao to their audience.

References


Notes

1. An example of this is the Lao government in exile which opened in 2003 http://www.laogov.org/

2. See www.wattay-pro.com

3. The Exile, a successful Canada-based Lao band, sing in Thai which resulted in them being signed by the large Thai recording label Grammy Entertainment. Noy is not the only Lao artist singing rock songs in Lao.

4. A couple of grammatical errors have been corrected. See www.ksonex.com/noysydanon/profile.html

5. This interview can be read in full at www.laomusicians.vze.com

6. Champa is the frangipani flower, the national flower of Laos. This flower is a recurring theme in Lao song titles.

7. This interview can be read in full at www.laopress.com.au

8. See http://www.ketsana.com/insideKetsana.html

9. See www.willydenzy.com

10. See www.nithada-online.com

An offering to the village spirit, southern Laos.
Each break in the skewer-lime bamboo sticks enumerates household members and their livestock.

Holly High
“Black” skin “white” skin: riches and beauty in Lao women’s bodies

Holly High

Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies, The Australian National University

“You are white, beautiful. I am black, not beautiful,” Phet said. I was shocked, again – Phet uttered such sentiments many times each day I was with her. It made me intensely uncomfortable to hear what I thought was a racially self-denigrating remark. Those words, ‘white’ and ‘black,’ denoted for me race. When I heard “you are white,” I heard “you are Caucasian, your pigmentation is fair, due to your genetic make-up, which you inherited.” What I heard was a comment about my race. And when I heard “I am black” I understood that Phet was making a comment on her own inherited, genetic make-up, her race.

What I heard and understood at this juncture was framed by the widely-accepted meanings which circulated at my home in Australia. In that discursive environment, race had long since been dropped from everyday polite usage. People no longer talked about difference in terms of ‘black’ or ‘white’. This is not to say that there is now no discourse of difference, but this is framed now in terms of national or ethnic origin (“Croatian”, “Thai”) each with their matching “culture.” This is evident in an official policy of “multiculturalism”. There has been a proliferation of “multi-cultural” festivals and fairs, where food and dance form the acceptable and required modes of expressing difference, each culture displayed in their distinct, cordoned off stalls and performances.

Race, however, seemed almost unmentionable. It implied racism. Against racism, Martin Luther King expressed the dream that people “not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character”. In Dr King's statement, we see a strong correlation between race and body – race is associated with the physical nature one is granted at birth, and is thus more or less powerless over. In this sense, race seemed only skin deep, an accident of birth, not an indicator of a person's worth. Race, then, was bodily, natural.

In contrast, the new discourse of difference in Australia was not about bodies but about culture. Its site of inscription was the mind. In terms of the classic Cartesian split of Western philosophy, ‘race’ located in the body is opposed to ‘culture’ located in the mind. Race and body, furthermore, were associated with nature, the animal part of humanity. Culture and mind, meanwhile, were associated with humanity in distinction from animals.

Race, body and nature were furthermore seen as basically immutable. They were the given parameters bestowed at birth, while culture was acquired. Thus nature is depicted as passive, inert and fixed. Culture is depicted as active and adaptable. The split, then, can be summarised as race/body/nature as immutable and passive, against culture/mind/humanity as adaptable and active.

Anthropology played no small part in the assertion of culture over race as the acceptable discourse of difference. The concept of ‘culture’ at the end of the 19th century implied quite a different notion from that of today. For Tylor, culture was famously “that complex whole,” but was singular, the progressive attainment of a civilisation which ‘savages’ lacked. This concept of culture was revolutionised by anthropologists such as Boas, who wished to confront the racist notions of non-Western peoples as inferior, ridiculous and without culture. Boas relativised the notion of ‘culture,’ so that it was possible to think of cultures as plural, and of all cultures as valuable. Culture, then, in its contemporary relativised sense, was advanced as a liberal notion against the disparagements of racism. In advancing a ‘culture’ of this sense, the radical split between the ‘natural’ body and the ‘social’ mind was confirmed. Culture and society became the acceptable means of articulating difference, while race receded from use.

Phet’s comment confronted these sensibilities. She bluntly held that white skin was beautiful, black was not.

She was happily rummaging through my possessions, trying on my clothes and cosmetics with an absorbed but light-hearted curiosity. I had recently arrived in Muang Gow, the District capital, with all my equipment and personal affects, en route to the field. Phet, a District civil servant, had been assigned as my friend and companion for my stay in the capital.

My collection of sunscreens, moisturizers, and skin care products evoked particular interest. “What is this cream for?” she asked of each one, before applying a little. “For my eyes,” “to make my skin soft,” and “to stop the sun burning me,” I replied to her queries.

“Oh,” came Phet’s satisfied reply. “This is why your skin is so white and beautiful. You can afford to buy all of these creams and stay inside all day. You have money.”

“My skin is white because my parent’s skin is white,” I replied, taken aback at the implication that my skin was the result of manufacture rather than nature.

“You wait until you have lived in Laos for one year,” said Phet, smirking, “you will be as black as me. Maybe more black, because you are going out to live in the countryside with the very poor people. If you harvest rice, you will be black.”

Phet’s use of ‘black’ and ‘white’ skin here challenged the dichotomous categorisation of race/body/nature versus culture/mind/humanity. Her notion of body and race, or at least pigmentation, delineated them as inherently malleable. Pigmentation, in Phet’s discourse, was not a granted, immutable fact of race, body and nature, but a variable, manipulable indicator of particular contingencies. My skin, for Phet, was not an indicator of my parentage or genetic make-up, but of my wealth and privilege. Pale skin was a result of access to money, the

continued on page 8
There is, in short, an image of the rural impoverished body, and this image is lived and experienced, to various degrees, by rural women.

Further, poverty is inscribed on the body. Rural poverty is associated with certain activities and necessities. The work of transplanting and harvesting rice is often referred to, and associated with causing black skin. Rural women comment on the lack of ability to afford or access cosmetics such as effective whitening creams, moisturizers and hair tonics to combat the effects of exposure to weather. The rural woman's gait – barefooted or in flip-flops, feet splayed and strides long and fast – is noticeably distinct from the urban middle-class woman's gait – hobbled and muddied in ungainly platform shoes. Rural women's feet become flattened and hard against the soil of their rice paddies. Rural hands become rough and strong, adept with machete and hoe. Rural feminine mouths are stained red with betel nut, teeth stained black. Rural impoverished life writes itself onto the physical being of these women.

It should come as no surprise, then, that aspirations and wealth are often directed towards the physical – apparel and cosmetics. Small luxuries crowd the shelves of regional stores, urban markets and the baskets of travelling vendors – skin whitening creams, nail polish, lipstick and powder. At 1 000 to 15 000 kip (1 – 3 USD), these miniature items offer a popular choice for the expenditure of small sums of disposable income.

Gold jewellery – either *tiew* (real) or *farang* (foreign, fake) – are a coveted investment for larger sums of money. A young rural woman described her aspirations to me in these terms: "I want to be covered in gold – gold on every part of my body, my throat, my ears, my arms, my waist, in my hair. I like it so much." While its resale value is an important factor in the desire for gold, so is its symbolic, cosmetic value. This young woman mused: "The festival will be fun, won't it? But I won't dance. I don't have anything to wear, I don't have a *sinh* (traditional Lao skirt) or a beautiful shirt. I don't have any gold. I'm too shy to go." The following day she left to work as a seasonal labourer in the coffee fields of Paksong, with the stated aim of earning enough money to buy gold to wear at the festival.

This physical dimension to wealth and aspiration is an important modification to prevalent notions of ‘development’ and ‘poverty’. In the international bureaucracy of development assistance, ‘development’ and ‘poverty’ are increasingly defined in communal terms. In official statistics, poverty is defined as a lack of communal services – schools, roads, medical centres and water supply. It is by counting and comparing these communal deficiencies that villages are defined as ‘poor’ or ‘not poor’. Awareness of the experience of poverty as a physical state alerts us, however, to the fundamentally personal nature of poverty. Lived definitions of poverty speak of black-skinned, thin and hardened bodies, while official discourses speak of communal lacks. The disparity is between the intensely personal and the resolutely generalising.
Likewise, contemporary development solutions offered are also frequently communal. In Laos, the government’s National Poverty Eradication Programme and the related Poverty Reduction Fund both emphasise participation, community ownership and empowerment, not only as the means to ‘development’ but as ends in themselves. Such an approach asks the poor to act communally for communal ends – to work together to build common infrastructure such as schools, roads and water supplies. How does the aspiration for white skin, nail polish and gold relate to such a communal definition of development? While the international aid bureaucracy presents development as a communal issue, actual aspirations are overwhelmingly personal.

Khan's and Phet's associations of wealth, beauty, poverty and bodies destabilise the Cartesian dualisms which underlie much Western thought, including anthropology and development. Their discourse portrayed bodies as malleable, as socially constituted and open to adaptation. Poverty and development apprehended through an attention to body emerge as intensely personal. This points to the need to move away from either/or distinctions toward both/and encompassments in discussions of culture, beauty, bodies, wealth and poverty. Such a move could further the endeavour of including bodily praxis and knowledge in anthropological investigations, and revise the notions of poverty and development used in contemporary aid practice.

References


An interpretation of yearly animal flags (Tua Paung): the preparations for welcoming a new spirit and a change in fortune in Laos.

Thararat Charoensthitichai
Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies, The Australian National University

Songkran is the traditional New Year Festival of Tai ethnic groups. It falls in mid-April annually. Songkran in Sanskrit means a move, in reference to the significant movement of the sun into the sign of Aries, leading into a New Year. In ancient astrology, Aries is the first sign of the zodiac in relation to the solar circulation. When the sun moves to Aries, or mid-April, it signifies the change of the year. Thus, the New Year starts.

In Luang Prabang the Songkran festival lasts approximately 10 days, from April 10-19. April 13 is the last day of the year or Sang Khan Long, meaning the spirit of the last year is passing by. At this time the people of Luang Prabang engage in the preparations for receiving a new spirit who comes to live with them for the New Year. The end of the year is combined with the beginning of a new spirit. In an astrological sense, human fate relies upon the movement of the stars, the sun and the moon. Our destiny changes each year when the stars, the sun and the moon start a new journey in the zodiac.

On this day the people of Luang Prabang gather at Don Sai Mongkol, a bank of the Mae Khong River, to set free captured animals bought in the morning, and to build a sand pagoda. The sand pagoda originates from a Buddhist belief. It is said that in ancient times people carried sand into their local temple to build a pagoda at Songkran as a means of making merit, as it is expressed in a local proverb “Khon Sai Kao Wat.” Today, in most temples there is already a pagoda. The construction of another one is unnecessary. However, people still follow their traditions by building a miniature sand pagoda as a dedication to the Buddha. At the end of the day, hundreds of sand pagodas decorated with candles, flowers, powder and flags with the symbol of the yearly animals stand along the Mae Khong River as silent witnesses to the merit of the believers.

An interpretation of Tua Paung:

Tua Paung is a flag with the signs of eight animals on it. Once I had seen the flag, I was intrigued by these animals printed on it. In this paper I will explore the meanings of the eight animals drawn upon the flag.

Looking at the flag, it can be seen that the animals are printed in vertical order. The top animal is a lion, followed by a cat, a Garuda, a cow, an elephant, a rat, a Naga and a tiger respectively. My interpretations of these animals are as follows:

Based upon Brahman astrology, these animals may symbolize the gods who take turns to protect each day of the week. Each god has its own unique vehicle of transportation. The god of Sunday has a lion as his transportation. The Monday god mounts a horse, Tuesday rides a buffalo, Wednesday has an elephant, Thursday a deer, Friday a cow, and Saturday a tiger. These gods also form part of the nine gods of the planets with the addition of Ketu and Rahu. Likewise, these two gods have their own particular animal vehicle. Ketu rides a Naga, and Rahu a Garuda.

In Hindu mythology, Rahu and Ketu are demons causing eclipses. In a famous mythological scene called the Churning of...
the Sea of Milk, Rahu disguised himself as a god to steal the elixir of immortality from the gods, and drank it. But he was soon recognized by the Solar and Lunar gods who reported his misdeeds to Visnu, the Hindu Supreme God. The God did not want any demons to be immortal so he used his weapon to cut off the head of Rahu. However, it was too late because the elixir had already passed into his throat. Even though his head and body were separated, the elixir made him immortal. Thereafter, Rahu has been portrayed as a serpent’s head with a wide open mouth ready to swallow the sun and moon in revenge. His body turned into that of a serpent called Ketu. Since then, Rahu and Ketu have always floated opposite each other in space. They chase the sun and moon across the sky, trying to swallow them. If they should be successful, an eclipse will occur.

In Hindu horoscopes, Rahu and Ketu are called shadow planets in reference to the natural causes of eclipses by the shadow of the moon when passing in front of the sun, and in relation to their mythical characters. When one’s destiny falls in the constellation of Rahu or Ketu, it is often considered as a period of bad luck in human life. Many believe that these planets are related to sudden changes, separations, anger, anxiety, losses, death, and other things which make us feel as if we were beheaded when we nearly got what we wanted.

In Hindu astrological terms the positions of Ketu, Rahu and the other seven planets have a direct influence on our decision-making and behavior causing the ill or good fortune in the future of each individual. On the other hand, the nine gods of the planets are associated with nine directions. The solar god governs the northeast, the lunar god governs the east, Mars governs the southeast, Mercury the south, Jupiter the west, Venus the north, Saturn the southwest, Rahu the northwest, and Ketu the center as depicted in the diagram below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rahu</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Solar God Northeast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>(Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td>Ketu</td>
<td>Lunar God East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Thursday)</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturn</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>Mars (Tuesday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Saturday)</td>
<td>(Wednesday)</td>
<td>South (Southwest)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brahman astrologers consult this diagram, a duplication of the universe, to read horoscopes and to determine the auspicious times of the year.

### Tua Paung compared to Brahman Astrology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tua Phaung</th>
<th>Brahman Astrology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>Lion (Solar God)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>Horse (Lunar God)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garuda</td>
<td>Buffalo (Mars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow</td>
<td>Elephant (Mercury)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>Deer (Jupiter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rat</td>
<td>Cow (Venus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naga</td>
<td>Tiger (Saturn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>Naga (Neptune)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garuda (Pluto)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By comparing Tua Paung with the universal diagram of ancient Brahman astrology, we can see that there are six identical animals. This should not be merely a coincidence. Rather, it is positive to say that Tua Paung is a sign of the Lao horoscope, adopted from India, but has developed to some extent to suit the Lao purview. This is a remarkable example of the Indianization in Southeast Asia. The Southeast Asian ancestors adopted the Indian civilization to a great extent, but have also adapted the foreign cultural contexts to fit their own values and worldview.

The Lao recite the animals printed in order on the Tua Paung, the flag with the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope, in the form of a verse, also found in the Sieng Mien folktales (John Li. Interview. April 18 2001). It can be vertically recited as follows:

The term “Paung” itself means “to depend upon.” In this case the Lao "depend upon" a particular animal presented on the flag of fortune. To calculate which animal one will rely upon each year one needs to consult the circle of animals below. Women will start at the cow, then count counterclockwise, and stop at their age. Men will do the same, but they will start at the tiger, and count clockwise. The animal sign in which they fall is the yearly animal upon which they will depend. “Tua Paung” can thus be understood as a symbol of the annual animals of the Lao horoscope.

Believing that their fortune relates to their animal of the year, the Lao write their names, surnames and birthdays on that animal sign, and place flags, or Tua Paungs, around a sand pagoda they build at Don Sai Mun Kun on April 13th—the last day of the year. Some people put the flags in front of their houses. They believe that they will bring them good luck.

Ordinary people do not have much knowledge of how to consult these animal signs of the horoscope to read their fortunes. In trying to read the animal signs, most people make a basic prediction referring to the personality of the animals. For example, if one’s own age falls on the cow sign, this year is said to be a year of success. But he/she must work very hard, as a cow does in the field, or even confront some important obstacles in order to achieve success.

---

continued from page 10

---

continued on page 12
Generally speaking, it seems that very few people understand the meanings hidden behind these eight animals. Today, to read one’s fortune, most fortune-tellers, including some local monks, would rather consult the 12-year cycle with associated animals, widely used in Thai and Chinese cultures, than the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope. The cycle of twelve animal signs starts with the rat, and is followed by the cow, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, cockerel, dog and pig (or elephant).

Like the twelve animal signs in Lanna (Northern Thai Kingdom origin) astrology, the elephant is placed instead of the pig in the Lao twelve-year cycle. However, both Lanna and Lao astrology with these yearly animals is similarly ordered and pronounced. No matter in which languages the cycle is recited, this 12-year cycle with associated animals is in conjunction with the astrological signs of the zodiac, and could thus, have a direct impact on a human life as believed by its followers.

The association between the eight (or nine) and the twelve animals in horoscope is found in the story of the mythical origin of the universe (เทพ สาริกบุตร 2521: 105-119).

The myth tells that after creating the world, including men, women, plants and animals, the Supreme god, Brahma, created the twelve yearly animals, associated with the fortune of the individuals born in each year. Together with the twelve animals, he created the nine gods of the planets made up of nine animals.

Each god has a different complexion and a unique animal mount. The nine gods of the planets are associated with the nine directions. Their positions in the birth diagram reveal predisposed characteristics of the individuals. Considering their positions in the diagram with the yearly animal to which one belongs, the astrologer is able to read the fortune of each individual.

The structure of many old temples built in Southeast Asia had an astrological base to their design and construction. These temples, including all the state mountain temples of Angkor, were built to represent the universe and its astronomical bodies. Like most Southeast Asian countries, the Lao adopted these Brahman astrological and cosmological concepts from the ancient Khmer. The aspect of the position of the sun and its movement into Aries as well as the 12-year cycle in conjunction with the 12 astrological signs of the zodiac are hidden in the construction, design and motifs of Lao local temples. On the western bank of the Mae Khong River opposite the famous cave of Tam Ting is Wat Pak Ou. Its mural paintings illustrate the signs of the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope and the 12-year cycle with associated animals.

Even though the meanings of the yearly animal signs of the Lao horoscope seem to have disappeared through time, and remain secret to many people in general, these astrological signs have never lost their sacredness. The astrological sense has been transmitted through time into the blood of everyone calling himself Ai-Lao, a man belonging to the Lao ethnic groups. Today the Lao still consult horoscopes to find auspicious days and times for the arrangement of their wedding ceremonies and when moving into a new residence. Some consult the gods of direction in horoscopes to ask for directions in which they would find their fortunes. On April 13, thousands of flags with the signs of the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope wave over the sand pagodas on the Mae Klong River bank proving the continuity of their sacredness in the long-lasting culture of the Ai-Lao.

Bibliography
เทพ สาริกบุตร, บาง เสพเสริมสุข และ อุระคินทร์ วิริยะบูรณะ 2521 พรหมชาติ: ฉบับราษฎร์ ประจำบ้าน ดูด้วยตนเอง. กรุงเทพ: สำนักพิมพ์ลูก ส.ธรรมภักดี.

The mural painting of Wat Pak Ou

The structure of many old temples built in Southeast Asia had an astrological base to their design and construction. These temples, including all the state mountain temples of Angkor, were built to represent the universe and its astronomical bodies. Like most Southeast Asian countries, the Lao adopted these Brahman astrological and cosmological concepts from the ancient Khmer. The aspect of the position of the sun and its movement into Aries as well as the 12-year cycle in conjunction with the 12 astrological signs of the zodiac are hidden in the construction, design and motifs of Lao local temples. On the western bank of the Mae Khong River opposite the famous cave of Tam Ting is Wat Pak Ou. Its mural paintings illustrate the signs of the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope and the 12-year cycle with associated animals.

Even though the meanings of the yearly animal signs of the Lao horoscope seem to have disappeared through time, and remain secret to many people in general, these astrological signs have never lost their sacredness. The astrological sense has been transmitted through time into the blood of everyone calling himself Ai-Lao, a man belonging to the Lao ethnic groups. Today the Lao still consult horoscopes to find auspicious days and times for the arrangement of their wedding ceremonies and when moving into a new residence. Some consult the gods of direction in horoscopes to ask for directions in which they would find their fortunes. On April 13, thousands of flags with the signs of the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope wave over the sand pagodas on the Mae Klong River bank proving the continuity of their sacredness in the long-lasting culture of the Ai-Lao.

Bibliography
เทพ สาริกบุตร, บาง เสพเสริมสุข และ อุระคินทร์ วิริยะบูรณะ 2521 พรหมชาติ: ฉบับราษฎร์ ประจำบ้าน ดูด้วยตนเอง. กรุงเทพ: สำนักพิมพ์ลูก ส.ธรรมภักดี.

The mural painting of Wat Pak Ou

The structure of many old temples built in Southeast Asia had an astrological base to their design and construction. These temples, including all the state mountain temples of Angkor, were built to represent the universe and its astronomical bodies. Like most Southeast Asian countries, the Lao adopted these Brahman astrological and cosmological concepts from the ancient Khmer. The aspect of the position of the sun and its movement into Aries as well as the 12-year cycle in conjunction with the 12 astrological signs of the zodiac are hidden in the construction, design and motifs of Lao local temples. On the western bank of the Mae Khong River opposite the famous cave of Tam Ting is Wat Pak Ou. Its mural paintings illustrate the signs of the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope and the 12-year cycle with associated animals.

Even though the meanings of the yearly animal signs of the Lao horoscope seem to have disappeared through time, and remain secret to many people in general, these astrological signs have never lost their sacredness. The astrological sense has been transmitted through time into the blood of everyone calling himself Ai-Lao, a man belonging to the Lao ethnic groups. Today the Lao still consult horoscopes to find auspicious days and times for the arrangement of their wedding ceremonies and when moving into a new residence. Some consult the gods of direction in horoscopes to ask for directions in which they would find their fortunes. On April 13, thousands of flags with the signs of the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope wave over the sand pagodas on the Mae Klong River bank proving the continuity of their sacredness in the long-lasting culture of the Ai-Lao.

Bibliography
เทพ สาริกบุตร, บาง เสพเสริมสุข และ อุระคินทร์ วิริยะบูรณะ 2521 พรหมชาติ: ฉบับราษฎร์ ประจำบ้าน ดูด้วยตนเอง. กรุงเทพ: สำนักพิมพ์ลูก ส.ธรรมภักดี.

The mural painting of Wat Pak Ou

The structure of many old temples built in Southeast Asia had an astrological base to their design and construction. These temples, including all the state mountain temples of Angkor, were built to represent the universe and its astronomical bodies. Like most Southeast Asian countries, the Lao adopted these Brahman astrological and cosmological concepts from the ancient Khmer. The aspect of the position of the sun and its movement into Aries as well as the 12-year cycle in conjunction with the 12 astrological signs of the zodiac are hidden in the construction, design and motifs of Lao local temples. On the western bank of the Mae Khong River opposite the famous cave of Tam Ting is Wat Pak Ou. Its mural paintings illustrate the signs of the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope and the 12-year cycle with associated animals.

Even though the meanings of the yearly animal signs of the Lao horoscope seem to have disappeared through time, and remain secret to many people in general, these astrological signs have never lost their sacredness. The astrological sense has been transmitted through time into the blood of everyone calling himself Ai-Lao, a man belonging to the Lao ethnic groups. Today the Lao still consult horoscopes to find auspicious days and times for the arrangement of their wedding ceremonies and when moving into a new residence. Some consult the gods of direction in horoscopes to ask for directions in which they would find their fortunes. On April 13, thousands of flags with the signs of the yearly animals of the Lao horoscope wave over the sand pagodas on the Mae Klong River bank proving the continuity of their sacredness in the long-lasting culture of the Ai-Lao.
Conservation practice in Laos

Sarinda Singh

Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies, The Australian National University

In Laos' current socio-political environment, melding of conservation and development priorities is regarded as a key concern. This is largely due to the dependence of much of its population on natural resources and the increasing emphasis of development efforts on the rural poor for whom this dependence is greatest.

This concern is reflected in the Government of Laos' (GoL) National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP) which identifies strengthened environmental management as one of the main pillars supporting socio-economic development. Thus, the GoL explicitly conceives of conservation as one vehicle by which it can further its aims to build Laos "as a country of peace, independence, democracy, unity and prosperity" (National Constitution 1991).

In representing the GoL's policy framework for poverty alleviation, the NPEP also fulfils the government's dual responsibilities of presenting its poverty eradication strategies to the UNDP and international donor community. Thus, whether conservation is regarded as an ultimate goal in itself or primarily as a means for achieving development (e.g. through accessing international funding or promoting business ventures such as ecotourism) is less clear.

While the drivers operating within the GoL are somewhat ambiguous it does appear that Lao peoples' active involvement with conservation is a reflection of the opportunities that are made available to them through such engagements. The enforced absence of domestic non-government organisations (NGOs) effectively limits conservation organisations to the international arena and thus to an area where resources are relatively greater than in the corresponding GoL sector. For instance, some of the lowest paid conservation NGO employees still earn more than double the income of the average government employee (US$75 per month compared to US$30 per month).

Employment with conservation NGOs automatically transposes one into a bubble of 'foreign' office systems where English language and computer technology abounds in some contrast to the offices of government counterparts. In stepping into such an environment one often meets highly skilled and motivated Lao employees. Interestingly, when discussing their actual interests relating to their work, key motivators are usually desires to learn or improve English skills, to gain 'international' experience by working with foreigners and foreign office systems, or to experience forums where leadership is valued, besides further aspirations for training and studies in Laos and abroad, and the hope that their work will help poorer rural communities.

International organisations and NGOs do not have exclusive rights to such opportunities and they are also available within the government or private sectors. In addition, NGOs may not always be in a position to pick and choose; a fairly limited base of skilled Lao nationals ensures that those with the prerequisite abilities will always be in demand. So the main difference between the various sectors may lie in the selection criteria that are applied in determining whom these opportunities are actually offered to. The relative importance of family connections, education, English proficiency, work ethic, computer skills and so on to an organisation is the key determinant of the opportunities open to an individual in a particular setting.

For example, one employee in a conservation NGO told me she had never applied for a government position because it was too difficult; without family connections she would have to work in a provincial area or even as an unpaid volunteer for quite some time, which she could not afford to do. In comparison, a small project as a university student had introduced her to a conservation NGO where she later received employment and was also the recipient of a grant to support her English studies from an American biologist wishing to promote women in science in developing countries. Though she also regards improvement of her English as critical for her career her personal aspirations differ from that of the grantee in that she wishes to be an office manager and not a scientist.

While people working in conservation organisations do speak of the importance of ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources, conservation of biodiversity for aesthetic, scientific, spiritual or moral concerns is rarely mentioned as a motivating factor in determining people's career or employment choices. One Lao employee in a conservation NGO explained his plans to link his ongoing research on tigers with other research components such as protected area management as "...there are not many tigers left so there are not many jobs!". Another had to carefully balance his work at a conservation NGO with his commitments to his family's various businesses. Similarly, his familial obligations were the main concern for the NGO in deciding whether to recommend him for an international scholarship. Thus, practical and personalised considerations appear to be the main factors determining people's engagement with conservation organisations.

This does not mean an absence of concerns about conservation; one worker revealed quite a shift from setting his traps to catch...
wildlife as a teenager, to his current relief that he did not catch much since there is little wildlife left and it should be protected. That sentiment however did not cause him to deviate in his career aspirations to gain employment in a successful business – for him the conservation organisation he volunteered for provided him with "free education" that he wished to use to further his career ambitions. Thus, it appears that conservation of biodiversity is not really an internalised aim of many Lao people who engage with conservation; rather it is one of a variety of means that may be employed in order to achieve their personal ambitions for ‘prosperity’. Whether similar motivations are found to be influential in determining GoL policy and national goals is still open to debate.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

**Biodiversity, Local Knowledge and Sustainable Development; A Review of Yin Shaoting’s People and Forests.**

Harold Brookfield

*Senior Adviser, People, Land Management and Ecosystem Conservation (PLEC) Project, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies, The Australian National University*


Not many readers outside China will find this splendidly produced and (in China) inexpensive book easy to locate. Yet it is an abundantly worthwhile read for all concerned with land-rotational agriculture and the people who practice it. Yin Shaoting is professor of anthropology at Yunnan University in Kunming, and has spent twenty years on the study of ethnic minority people in Yunnan, their history, livelihood, culture and agriculture. This book, completed first in Chinese and then translated, brings together not only two decades of work, but a substantial amount of historical material as well. It also offers important discussion on policy issues in relation to the future of the minority peoples. From the outset, Yin rejects views that shifting cultivation is ‘backward’ or ‘primitive’: it is the farming culture of the forest, created by the forest-dwelling people.

A detailed historical section traces the migrations of the minority people through several centuries, bringing most of them into the uplands along Yunnan’s borders with Vietnam, Laos and Burma. By the period of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) the record becomes sufficient to understand their livelihood. In earlier times, many were principally hunter-gatherers or pastoralists, but some had practised quite intensive forms of agriculture and became shifting cultivators only when they were driven into the forests by aggressive newcomers, especially Dai and some others, including Han Chinese.

This section of the book is followed by a discussion of the typology of shifting cultivation in modern Yunnan. Distinctions are drawn between systems in which only a single crop is taken after fallow clearance (described as farming ‘without continuous cultivation’), systems in which swiddens are cropped for two or three years, usually with hoeing and/or ploughing after the first year (called ‘swiddening with short-term continuous cultivation’), and systems in which cropping continues for several years (‘swiddening with long-term continuous cultivation’, but not usually fixed-field farming). Widely, this has the consequence that forest fails to recover in the fallow years, so that the systems become grassland farming, depending on crop rotations and livestock. It has also led to creation of large degraded areas which would take many years to recover.

Following this, those systems which depend on naturally regenerating fallow are distinguished from a minority in which there is active tree planting, especially of the alder (Alnus nepalensis) which fixes nitrogen and, by heavy littering, provides rapid soil restoration. The majority of shifting cultivators live in permanent villages and farm defined territories, but there has been an important minority who move readily from place to place, a practice increasingly unviable as little unoccupied land remains. However, it has continued even in modern times and there is an interesting account of a community which settled in a state forest in the 1980s and have only been enticed out of it by the offer of land which could be irrigated and which had good access to the market.

The core of the book is in five detailed accounts of the agriculture, society and beliefs of selected and contrasted people among whom Yin has worked (Jingpo, Bulang, Wa, Jinuo, Dulong), followed by comparative chapters drawing lessons both from these studies and from less intensive inquiries among other groups. The key to successful forest swidden farming has been the division of village territories into blocks which are cultivated by the concentrated efforts of all farmers, and then fallowed as wholes for as long as is necessary. Where this system operates, and where cultivation is restricted to a single year, the weed problem is small, there is no need for ploughing, and little for hoeing, and both production and ecology are sustainable. It is continued only by a minority, and in most cases did not survive either the planning directives of the collectivization period nor the very substantial growth in population that has taken place since the 1950s. Even among people of the same ethnic group there has been much contrast in the systems put in operation.

continued from page 13
Among the frequently migrating Hani, for example, some practice shifting cultivation with only one crop, some grow a series of crops, and yet others have developed what is arguably China's most elaborate terracing, with irrigation, for permanent cultivation. Some Hani develop complex home gardens on the model of their Dai neighbours, while others do not. This reviewer has seen a patchwork of methods in use in the territory of a single Hani village in southern Yunnan.

Information on these different systems in modern times draws not only from field work in the 1980s and 1990s. In about 1950, the new Chinese government sought information on the minority people within its jurisdiction, and in particular on their systems of agriculture, social organization and land tenure, with the object of developing distinctive policies that would be sensitive to their cultures and needs. The resulting reports, though they have been criticized as colonial documents, had an intendedly benign purpose. Most were published in the 1980s. In practice, chiefly systems of local organization were quickly swept away, and cadres took their place. The collectivization of the 'great leap forward' in 1958 was applied in all parts of China, the remotest hills and valleys of the borders in the southwest included. Most villages, or parts of villages, became production brigades (dadui).

The old land tenure systems were swept away, and livelihood came to depend on the acquisition of work points, based principally on days of work. This was imposed from above, without the preparatory eight years or more of mutual aid teams and local production cooperatives that paved the way to collectivization in much of central and northern China. Land quality was allowed to deteriorate, and harvests declined, leading to the opening of large new areas of forest mainly for grain monoculture. At the same time, state farms were established in the lowlands and on the lower slopes, staffed mainly by Han immigrant workers, growing mainly rubber in the lower country of southern Yunnan, and sugar cane in the west. One former immigrant workers, growing mainly rubber in the lower country of southern Yunnan, and sugar cane in the west. One former cash crop, opium, important since the late 19th century, and grown in permanent fields by some south-western groups, was eliminated in a very few years.

'Reform and opening', reversing 20 years of collectivization, began in the late 1970s in central China, and reached the minority group lands of the southwest in the early 1980s. After a period during which there was great uncertainty over the directions of future policy, leading to further extensive forest clearance in order to establish claims to land, this settled in the 1990s into a tenure system often not unlike that of pre-communist times. Land still belonged to the collective and the state, as it did to the clan in most of these societies before the 1950s, and it could still be redistributed, but households had increasingly secure rights of cultivation and decision-making.

For good reasons, but with rather insensitive implementation, the reforms were accompanied by increasing regulation of forest use, and the declaration of substantial areas as state forest and nature reserves. For the Jinuo people of Xishuangbanna, in southern Yunnan, these changes reduced the available arable area by more than half causing considerable problems for certain villages. One such, Baka, was a study site of Professor Yin in the 1980s; it was also a study and development-aid site for the PLEC China group in the period after 1993 (Dao et al. 2003). In 1999 some Yunnan University anthropology students joined PLEC in both southern and western Yunnan, but until then there was little contact. Both reports recount the manner in which Baka village divided after 1960, with progressive concentration into the lower-altitude site, as also happened elsewhere. Yin describes these relocations as largely voluntary; although in the presence of no small degree of persuasion; he does, however, emphasize the growing attractions of the lower-lying sites for the Jinuo people, with greater access to education, market and assistance.

During the collective period, and for some years after it, the thrust of development policy in these marginal areas of southern China has been in two directions. First was in provision of infrastructure, especially roads, schooling medical aid, and assistance in development of irrigation and cash crops; the last of these has continued to increase into the most recent period. Second was a less successful persuasion to adopt modern fixed-field farming, using chemical fertilizers and pesticides -- ‘having two chemicals come up the mountain’ to deal the death blow to swidden fallowing. Most of the mountain farmers tried these innovations, but found them costly and far from wholly satisfactory.

With the rise of ecological awareness in the later 1980s and 1990s, the drive for chemicalisation has given way to a renewed emphasis on ecologically sound management, including re-adoption (or discovery by the authorities) of old practices now brought together collectively as ‘agroforestry’. It includes re-discovery of the use of Alnus nepalensis for soil improvement, and recovery of commercial tea cultivation under trees which has been practised for several hundred years. Yin finds this trend encouraging, and with it also an increasing emphasis on growing ‘green’ products for the market, the term ‘green’ in China referring to low external-input systems, rather than disciplined, fully organic systems which are nowadays uncommon in the country. PLEC’s own efforts in southern and western Yunnan were also in these directions (Dao et al. 2003).

This review covers only a small part of the rich fund of material in Yin’s book. Among other topics he offers a detailed discussion of the highly-skilled agriculture of the valley-dwelling Dai people, and provides a great deal of information on the hunting practices of all the people studied, and on their rituals and beliefs, pre-1950s’s social organization and land tenure. There are many descriptive vignettes among the analysis. There are many excellent and informative photographs. If the book has a fault, it lies in the lack of reference to a wider literature, including that on people of the same ethnic groups elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Some of the discussion on ecological aspects of particular practices and cultivated plants could have been improved by such wider search. The maps are valuable, even if the method of simply listing in pinyin names which on the maps appear only in characters is not always easy to follow for those unable to read on page 16.
Swidden Agriculture in Yunnan


The typology of Yunnan swidden agriculture

Swidden agriculture does not fit any singular pattern. The actual practice typically varies among different areas and different peoples. It is essential that researchers in this field classify types of swidden agriculture according to the research data, and that they make their comparisons on the basis of such classifications (taxonomies). The cultural-ecological contents of swidden agriculture is much richer, if you will, than in the case of irrigated agriculture, and for this reason students of swidden agriculture will also naturally come up with many more different classifications, all made from different viewpoints and with different methods. We note that students of Southeast Asian swidden agriculture have classified it according to the following different criteria:

A. Classifications based on the relationship between the length of cultivation and the length of fallow. Usually this translates into three categories: 1) short cultivation and short fallow; 2) short cultivation and long fallow; and 3) long cultivation and long fallow.

B. Classifications based on the historical origins of the cultivators themselves. These can again be divided into three different categories: 1) itinerant, pioneer farmers; 2) permanently settled farmers who rotate their fields, alternating between active cultivation and fallow; and 3) new farmers who also practice swidden agriculture.

C. Classifications based on the degree of reliance on swidden agriculture. These can be divided into 1) those who rely entirely on swiddening; 2) those who rely on it to a high degree; 3) those who only rely on it for certain periods of time; and 4) those who rely on it only to a minor extent.

D. Classification based on the nature of the swiddens. This translates into 1) simple itinerant (nomadic) farming (yaoxing); 2) seasonal itinerant (semi-itinerant farming; 3) seasonal itinerant farming coexisting with minor areas of permanent farmland; and 4) permanent farming.

The Japanese scholar Sasaki Komei, in his studies of the swidden agriculture of the tropical region, divided it into two main classes, the first type is "swidden agriculture centering on the cultivation of roots" originating in and prevalent in the natural environment of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforests; and the second type is "swidden agriculture centering on the cultivation of various grains," originating in and prevalent in the natural environment of the tropical grasslands of Africa and India." In Japan in the 1950s, swidden agriculture was still relatively common. It was practiced from Okinawa to the northeast, on all of the Japanese islands except Hokkaido. Professor Sasaki proposed further taxonomies based on the degree of reliance on swidden agriculture; on the type of village settlements practicing it; on the organization of fallow cycles; on the type of land utilized; as well as on the distribution of different regimes deployed on different kinds of land. He produced a very thorough and detailed study of Japanese swidden agriculture. The present work on Yunnan swidden agriculture, too, is an attempt to study swiddening by way of comparing and exploring it with the aid of classifications that are made on the basis of different criteria.

I. Classification based on the length of cultivation

Elsewhere, I have presented a classification of Yunnan swidden agriculture based on the length of cultivation (before fallow), dividing it into two main types: swidden agriculture without continuous cultivation, or cropping (e.g. lan huo ci), and swidden agriculture with continuous cultivation. This taxonomy allows for a fairly clear division between the two types, but I feel that each type also comes to encompass far too much, and so I would like to add the type "short-term continuous cultivation" here, a type of swiddening which is to be considered as distinct from extended continuous cultivation, so that we instead have three types, as follows:

A. Swidden agriculture without continuous cultivation

In swidden agriculture without continuous cultivation the use of each field is limited to only one season. The field is not re-used consecutively, but instead immediately left fallow for at least seven or eight years or up to a decade or longer. Many of the peoples who practice swidden agriculture without continuous cultivation call their fields "lazy-work fields" (lan huo di). This refers to the fact that this type of swidden fields require little investment of labor (thus the explanation that "even if we go about the work in a lazy manner, we will still get a harvest"). Practically all the peoples who practice swidden agriculture in Yunnan at some
time in the past relied almost entirely on this type of swiddening, without continuous cultivation. The situation has since changed, and some people have taken up continuous cultivation either in part, or completely. At present, only the Jingpo of Kachang in Yingjiang County and the Bulang of the area around Xiding and Bada in Menghai County practice swiddening without continuous cultivation.

B. Swidden agriculture with short-term continuous cultivation

I use this term to refer to a type of swidden agriculture where the fields are used consecutively over two years, and then left fallow for seven or eight years, or up to ten years or more. In the past, certain peoples have exclusively practiced this type of swidden agriculture, such as the Hani of Menghai County. At present, because land has become increasingly scarce, there are also some people who have been forced to replace their swidden farming system with continuous cultivation. These include the Wa of Daluo in Ximeng County, the Kemu of Huiji in Mengla County, the Hani of the village of Suoluo, the Kemu of Manbo in Jinghong County, and so on.

C. Swidden agriculture with long-term continuous cultivation

This refers to a type of swidden agriculture where fields are used continuously over three to five years, and then left fallow for ten or more years, or even up to twenty years. There are a few examples of systems where the cultivation continues consecutively for up to seven or eight years or even ten years, but in these cases, by necessity, the longer the period of continuous cultivation is, the longer the fallow must also become.

Some people practice all three types (that is: swiddening without continuous cultivation; swiddening with short-term continuous cultivation; and swiddening with long-term continuous cultivation). They include the Dulong, the De’ang, as well as some of the Jingpo, the Wa, the Lahu, the Hani, the Yao, the Miao, the Jinuo, and others.

As for the land used in the three different types of swidden agriculture listed here: Swiddening without continuous cultivation can be practiced on any type of land (on either fertile or poor soils, on level ground or on steep slopes). Swiddening with short-term continuous cultivation cannot be practiced where soils are too poor or the mountain slopes too steep. Finally, swiddening with long-term continuous cultivation requires relatively fertile soils, and fairly level ground.

II. Classification based on different fallow practices

If classified according to fallow regimes, Yunnan swidden agriculture can be divided into two types:

A. Natural fallow

"Natural fallow" refers to the practice where one does not replant trees when abandoning the fields, but instead relies on the natural regeneration of the forest. In western Yunnan, and especially in the mountains of southern Yunnan, because the climate is very warm and the rainfall abundant, trees grow very quickly. They can usually grow from a tiny sapling to a tree with a diameter of over 10 cm in only ten years. One species, the so-called "short-lived tree," grows into a robust tree in only three or four years, but it may then wither and die at any time, and so has a very short life. In addition, alders and bamboo groves also both grow very quickly. Because of the speed of the recovery of trees and bamboo, it is easy to make sure that the soil receives a long enough fallow when land was plentiful and there are also relatively few people. People like the Jinuo, the Yao, the Miao, the Hani, the Bulang, the Lahu, the Yi and others never plant any trees in their fallows, but simply abandon the fields after the harvest. The vast majority of these different peoples instead focus on preserving the trees that are already present in the fields. This includes taking protective measures such as cutting only branches from larger trees in the fields, and not felling them; also, most of the trees that are felled are cut at a certain height, so that they are better able to grow back; and if and when fields are hoed or plowed, one seeks to avoid damage to any remaining tree roots; also, when the weather is particularly dry or hot, the tree stumps are covered with grass, etc. (e.g. "mulching"), so that they will not die from being exposed to the hot sun.

B. Fallow with active tree-planting

This refers to where trees are actively planted in the fallow fields. It can be done in order to regenerate a healthy forest cover; to reduce the time needed for the fallow; or with the purpose of harvesting special kinds of forest products. The trees traditionally grown for these purposes by the highland peoples of Yunnan include alder, lacquer tree, pine, etc. .

The alder is a deciduous tree which not only grows fast, but can also help increase the fertility of the soil. Where rainfall is abundant, the alder can grow from sapling to tree with ca. 10 cm in diameter in just 5 years. Because the nodule bacteria in its roots perform a very powerful nitrogen-fixing function, and the amount of leaves it sheds is also very high, the effect it has in terms of increasing soil fertility is remarkable. Even in the case of very poor or worn-out soils, if one only plants alders, the soil will always become more fertile. Peoples who have used the alder in this way in the past and continue to do so today include the

continued on page 18
During the last 40 years, because of the development of irrigated systems, several tens or even as many as one hundred varieties of hill rice. Hill rice cultivation occurs in the lands south of the lower valleys of the Nujiang and Dulongjiang rivers, where the elevation is high and the climate relatively cold. According to historical documents, during the Ming and Qing dynasties (14th - 17th centuries, and 17th - 20th centuries respectively), the Nu, Dulong and Lisu peoples of these valleys cultivated buckwheat (qian), barnyard millet (bais); millet (jia), broomcorn millet (Panicum miliaceum, 3u), wheat (mai, wheat or barley), as well as sorghum (liang or qiao). In addition they also planted yams (3u) and taro (yo). After the end of the 17th century, the cultivation of maize gradually increased, and it later became the most important grain crop. Hill rice cultivation came very late to this area, and it only began to be cultivated in the late 19th century. Hill rice cultivation became very common in the 20th century, and it later became the most important subsidiary industry. Hill rice, cotton, and tea are clearly the characteristic crops of the hill rice cultivation type of swidden agriculture.

III. Classification according to the cultivated crops
When classified according to the crops used, Yunnan swidden agriculture can be divided into two types: miscellaneous crop cultivation, and hill rice cultivation.

A. Miscellaneous crop cultivation
Miscellaneous crop cultivation occurs in the Nujiang and Dulongjiang River valleys, where the elevation is high and the climate relatively cold. According to historical documents, the Nu, Dulong and Lisu peoples of these valleys cultivated buckwheat (qian), barnyard millet (bais); millet (jia), broomcorn millet (Panicum miliaceum, 3u), wheat (mai, wheat or barley), as well as sorghum (liang or qiao). In addition they also planted yams (3u) and taro (yo). After the end of the 17th century, the cultivation of maize gradually increased, and it later became the most important grain crop. Hill rice cultivation came very late to this area, and even at present it is rare. Cultivation of irrigated rice was taken up only in the 1950s. Hemp was cultivated, and was used as the traditional material for weaving. As for cash crops, there was huanglian (Chinese goldthread, Coptis chinensis), lacquer, and beimu (bulb of fritillary, Fritillaria thunbergii). Some documents mention that the Nu and the Dulong "earn their livelihood by digging for huanglian." We can conclude that the goldthread was very important economically. Based on these observations, we could also refer to this "miscellaneous crop cultivation" type as a complex with the components of maize, hemp, and huanglian.

B. Hill rice cultivation
Hill rice cultivation occurs in the lands south of the lower portion of the Nujiang River valley. These areas have advanced hill rice cultivation, where each people traditionally maintained several tens or even as many as one hundred varieties of hill rice. During the last 40 years, because of the development of irrigated rice agriculture, and also because of the unrelenting expansion of maize cultivation, the number of varieties in use has diminished. But according to surveys carried out by government agricultural authorities, the area as a whole still features about 1,000 different varieties of hill rice. Apart from hill rice, other grains cultivated include maize, millet, sorghum, Job's tears, buckwheat, etc.

The area of hill rice cultivation also supports advanced cotton cultivation. Cotton serves as the raw material for clothes and other woven products, and it has also served as a cash crop, directly used as a medium of exchange for obtaining everyday utensils from the lowland peoples. Since the 1950s, because of the importation of cheap fabrics from central China, the amount of cotton grown in the area has been reduced drastically. Another traditional cash crop in this area is tea. The Pu'er (Pu'er tea of southern Yunnan has long been very famous throughout the world, and the Jinuo Hills, the Nan'nuo Hills, etc. have been known as "tea hills" since antiquity. Although many people have joined in developing rubber plantations in recent years, tea cultivation is still a very important subsidiary industry. Hill rice, cotton, and tea are clearly the characteristic crops of the hill rice cultivation type of swidden agriculture.

IV. Classification according to the pattern of settlement relocation
When classified according to the pattern of settlement relocation, swidden agriculture in Yunnan can be divided into three types: free-ranging nomadism, relocation within a defined area, and permanent settlement.

A. Free-ranging nomadism
Free-ranging nomadism (e.g. itinerant swidden agriculture) occurs where there are no geographical restrictions; one moves wherever one would like to move. The chief reason for moving amongst people that have traditionally practiced free nomadism has often been the degradation of the ecological environment. If the forests decline, grasses increase and soil fertility declines, productivity drops, and the resources used in hunting and gathering begin to dwindle. That is the time when these people will move away, in search of deeper mountains and richer forests. This kind of relocation is really undertaken in search of a change in the living environment, and it could also be thought of in terms of a relocation within a very large range. One abandons the land of the place where one originally lived, and brings new land under cultivation at the new site. Of course, when compared with the agriculture of people who live in permanent settlements, this system really is disorganized, wilful, even blind. Among the reasons for the frequent moves undertaken by the various peoples who practice free-ranging nomadism, apart from the ecological grounds, we also cannot overlook those that are related to religion, or to disease. The people in question, living in the depths of the forests, have very strong ideas about spirits and deities. If a drought, an earthquake, a flood, or other natural disaster occurs; or if there is a pestilence; or if people or domestic animals die suddenly and violent deaths, they will attribute this to such spirits, or say that it is because the place is haunted by evil spirits. They will then move from their original settlement, in order
to ward off evil and avoid a disaster. The move is prompted by ecological change or by beliefs of this kind, and the form that the moves take is never the same. Sometimes only a few households will move on their own, sometimes several or a dozen households will move, and sometimes the entire village. The distance moved also varies, from several hundred meters to several tens of kilometers or even up to several hundred kilometers. Before the 1980s, this type of free-ranging nomadism was very much prevalent among the Yao, the Miao, and amongst many of the Hani, Lahu and Kemu peoples. Because government authorities reaffirmed land rights in the early 1980s, and since from that moment there were no longer any forests that are not officially under someone’s management, the free nomadism of the past was effectively blocked. The vast majority of the peoples who had practiced free-ranging nomadism in the past had no choice but to give it up and settle down.

B. Settlement relocation within a limited territory
Relocation within a defined territory refers to the type where the shifting agriculturalists relocate their settlements within the limits of their agricultural lands. Many of the peoples who practice this kind of relocation will have settlements in two places. They then shift between them according to the seasons, or according to the needs of the agricultural work.

C. Permanent settlement
The permanent settlement type is one with strict land management and strict guardianship of the land of the ancestors, coupled with longterm settlement and use of the farmland in a permanent area. Settled agriculturalists are more numerous than the itinerant among all the swidden agriculturalists of Yunnan. They include the Bulang, the Wa, the Jingpo, the Jinuo, as well as large portions of the Lahu, the Lisu, the Hani, and others, all of whom are settled agriculturalists. When populations increase, settlements swell, and it becomes more difficult to make a living. The various peoples that I have mentioned will sometimes also split up, or move. This can include the branching off of a part of the population of a village to found a new village within the limits of the lands of the older village. This does not happen very often, however, and the nature of such moves is different from those described for the above two types.

In the above, I made four different kinds of classifications, each of which can be used to investigate a certain aspect of swidden cultivation. A general classification finds Yunnan swidden agriculture divided into the following main geographical types:

1. The Dulongjiang River area (Dulong): Swidden agriculture with mixed length of cultivation (includes swiddening without continuous cultivation as well as both short-term and long-term continuous cultivation); fallow with tree-planting; miscellaneous crop cultivation; settlement relocation within a defined area.

2. The Nujiang area (Nu, Lisu, Lehei): Swidden agriculture with mixed duration of the cultivation of fields (includes swiddening without continuous cultivation as well as both short-term and long-term continuous cultivation); fallow with tree-planting, or natural fallow; miscellaneous crop cultivation; permanent settlements, or settlement relocation within a defined area.

3. The Kachang area (Jingpo): Swiddening without continuous cultivation; fallow with tree-planting; hill rice cultivation; permanent settlements.

4. The Cangyuan and Ximeng area (Wa): Swidden agriculture with mixed length of the cultivation of fields (includes both swiddening with and without continuous cultivation); natural fallow; hill rice cultivation; permanent settlements.

5. The Lancang area (Lahu): Swidden agriculture with mixed duration of the cultivation of fields (includes swiddening without continuous cultivation as well as both short-term and long-term continuous cultivation); natural fallow; hill rice cultivation; permanent settlements.

6. The Bulangshan hills area (Bulang): Swiddening without continuous cultivation; natural fallow; hill rice cultivation; permanent settlements.

7. The Jinuoshan hills area (Jinuo): Swidden agriculture with mixed duration of the cultivation of fields (includes swiddening without continuous cultivation as well as both short-term and long-term continuous cultivation); natural fallow; hill rice cultivation; permanent settlements.

8. The Mengla area (Hani, Yao, Kemu): Swidden agriculture with mixed length of cultivation (includes swiddening without continuous cultivation as well as both short-term and long-term continuous cultivation); natural fallow; hill rice cultivation; free nomadism.

Booknotes by Aranya Siriphon

The main aim of this book is to analyze the economic systems and networks of the Lanchang kingdom and examine its relationships with other neighboring kingdoms of Southeast Asia. It examines the economic development of Lanchang from its establishment in the 14th century to the “civilizing and development” period of the 17th century. During this period, Lanchang was established and developed as a ‘trading state’ within the region. As a trading state Lanchang was influenced economically by the neighboring kingdom from the north, for example the Tai kingdom which had Yunnan as a main economic center by that time. In the 16th century, Lanchang extended its economic and trade relationship to the neighboring kingdoms in the south, for example Ayudhaya and Cambodia. With this trade expansion, Vientiane became a new trade center, replacing the more remote Luang Phrabang. The most developed period of Langchhang was the earlier part of the 17th century—the so called ‘golden era’—but by the end of the 17th century it was greatly weakened.
This book is a interesting collection of articles written by many prominent Thai academics, for example Prawet Wasi, Sanae Jammarik, Amara Pongsaphit and Pasuk Phongpajit. The theme is corruption in Thailand, especially in relation to government officials and politicians who take advantage of their powerful positions. Corruption has become so widespread within the Thai bureaucracy that it has been likened to a cancer in Thai society. Several academic groups have proposed ideas to help solve this social problem. This book sets out some current thinking on bureaucratic corruption and means of combating corruption. To fight the problem of corruption, the writers propose ‘good governance’ and strengthened civil society. Articles consider, for example, the role of the new constitution, the impact of the economic crisis and the effect of globalization.

This book is a very impressive revision of a Masters thesis from the Anthropology Department at Thammasat University, Thailand. The book is divided into six chapters dealing with, for example, concepts relating to homeless people, myths of homeless people as dangerous, and the literature about homeless people in the United States. The book argues that Thai government authorities have a biased perspective that always views these people as a cause of social problems. Having made these assumptions, the authorities feel they need to solve the social problems by ‘giving’ homeless people money or keeping them in a ‘help career centre’. The aim of the authorities’ activities is to give homeless people training and let them back into society to find work. But this book also illustrates the society of homeless people, their social structure and daily lives. With an ethnographic writing style, the author examines the world of homeless people, their lives, social class, interaction among themselves etc in order to understand the complex situation of this group.

This book is a product of a conference held in January 2003, organized by the Knowledge Management Institute. Several articles in the book focus on how to learn and manage local knowledge in order to get the most benefit for people in Thai society. It proposes some strategies to conserve local knowledge, which is seen as being different from general technical knowledge. This book seeks to conserve and maintain the local knowledge of Thailand by looking for the best methods of knowledge management.

All the articles in this book are about stories of the belief in a sacred world. Various local communities in Thailand are described: the ‘Phu Tai’ of northern Thailand and their local traditional dance; local musicians and singers in Chiang Mai; ‘Nora’ dancing or southern dancing style and the sacred ceremony to pay respect to teachers; a legend about grandfather in Sriracha district in eastern Thailand; and Lao fortune telling. All writers apply ethnographic approaches to collect data and to understand cultural meanings and ritual values in local communities. All articles seek to demonstrate an understanding of the day-to-day relationship between the sacred world and the human world.
Background: The ethnic minorities of Southeast Asia and Yunnan are among the poorest, most isolated and most marginalized in the world. At the same time forces of globalization, regionalism and nationalism are reaching into the most remote areas and have resulted in significant economic, political and cultural changes in the lives of these groups. In many cases they are not in a position to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by globalization and are facing serious challenges of poverty and cultural loss. A major research project has been initiated to study the impacts of globalization on ethnic minorities in four countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand, Laos P.D.R, Vietnam and Yunnan province in China. It is funded primarily by an agrant from the Rockefeller Foundation. The study involves cooperation of a number of academic institutions in four countries including: the Social Research Institute of Chiang Mai University, Yunnan Nationalities University in Kunming, the Institute of Anthropology in Hanoi and the Department of Native Studies at Trent University in Canada. The study is conducting fieldwork in 10 ethnic minority villages in the four countries.

In addition, ethnic minorities are often neglected as a topic of study in the curricula of Southeast Asian Studies programs. It is anticipated that papers presented at the conference will provide scholar resources that can be used in Southeast Asian Studies.

Chiang Mai University will be celebrating its 40th anniversary with a mandate as a regional university in Southeast Asia and this conference is being held to mark this significant occasion.

Aims of the Conference: This conference will address broad range of issues as they affect ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia within the context of Southeast Asian Studies. The specific aims of the conference are:

- To present the research findings of the 10 ethnic minority villages in the four countries where field work has taken place
- To contribute to the development of ethnic minority studies as a sub-field of the discipline of Southeast Asian studies
- To provide the content for a book on ethnic minorities of Southeast Asia to be published by an international press
- To contribute to the development of a network of Southeast Asian scholars and academic institutions with a view to academic exchanges future collaborative research and other scholarly activities
- To afford graduate students and members of ethnic minorities an opportunity to make presentations on aspects of ethnic minority cultures and participate in an international academic conference
- To present a number of multimedia materials (e.g. photographic exhibits, poster displays, video presentations, oral histories etc) that can contribute to a popular understanding of the indigenous knowledge and impacts of globalization on ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia.

Call for Papers: Thailand's Social Research Institute of Chiang Mai University with Canada's Trent University and China's Yunnan Nationalities University wish to call for scholar papers to be presented at an international conference on ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia to be held at Chiang Mai University.

The conference entitled "Impact of Globalization, Regionalism and Nationalism on Minority People in Southeast Asia" will examine a broad range of issues as they affect ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia. Themes of the conference include: cultural change among ethnic minorities, the emergence of new identities as a result of globalization and nationalism in southeast Asia, the preservation and enhancement of indigenous knowledge, biodiversity in traditional knowledge systems, language and linguistic change, inter-group relations and religious change. Specific topics include; tourism, effects of technology and information systems, impacts of development, education, integration into the market economy, environmental protection, grassroots democracy and religion.

The conference will be held at Chiang Mai University on 15-17 November 2004. Abstracts of papers should be submitted to "Dr. Prasit Leepreecha" by June 15 2004. Papers submitted will be adjudicated by a committee of scholars.

Participants will be informed about the status of their papers by May 1, 2004.

Please include:
- Name
- Institutional affiliation
- Abstract of paper (maximum 250-words)
- Brief personal biography
- Contact details (postal address, e-mail address, telephone nd fax)

It is anticipated that approximately 8-12 papers presented at the conference will be published in a book on ethnic minorities of Southeast Asia.

Complete papers will be expected by June 15, 2004.

Contact details:
Coordinator
Social Research Institute
Chiang Mai University
Chiang Mai, 50200, Thailand
Telephone: + 66 53 942559
Facsimile: + 66 53 892649
E-mail: Leesia@chiangmai.ac.th
Snxxo012@chiangmai.ac.th
The Center for Southeast Asian Studies of Northern Illinois University is pleased to announce the First International Conference on Lao Studies (ICLS) to be held on Friday-Sunday, May 20-22, 2005 in DeKalb, Illinois, USA.

The main objective of this conference is to provide an international forum for scholars to present and discuss various aspects of Lao studies.

Call for Papers

The Lao PDR today has a population of roughly five million people, comprising an amazing complex of ethnolinguistic groups. Moreover, the number of people in the Lao “diaspora” numbers as many as twenty-five million. In recent years there has been an increased interest in Laos and its peoples as subjects of serious discussion by scholars and the interested public alike. Indeed, there has been a flowering of scholarly publications on topics pertaining to Laos in the last several decades and a growing interest cultivated by the international media with its global reach. The First Lao History Symposium (http://www.muanglao.com/laohistory/index.htm), held in the Spring of 2003 at the University of California-Berkeley, heralded the burgeoning of a growing interest in Lao studies among a new generation of scholars. This conference will build on that momentum. The 2005 conference will feature papers on any topic concerning Lao Studies. The First ICLS will create special panels for individuals, groups or organizations that have three or more presenters. Topics include all ethno linguistic groups of Laos, the Isan Lao and other ethnic Lao groups in Thailand, cross-border ethnic groups in Thailand, Vietnam, China, Burma, and Cambodia (e.g., Akha, Hmong, Kammu, Mien, Lao Phuan, Tai Lue, Tai Dam), and overseas Laotians. Topics are provisionally divided into the following broad categories: (1) languages and linguistics; (2) folk wisdom and literature; (3) belief, ritual, and religions; (4) history; (5) politics; (6) economics and environment; (7) ethno-cultural contact and exchange; (8) architecture, arts, music, and handicrafts; (9) archaeology; (10) science and medicine; (11) information technology; (12) the media and popular culture; (13) health, medicine and HIV/AIDS; and (14) others. Please feel free to contact us with additional topics and we will add them.

Program

Invited speakers, plenary sessions, parallel sessions, paper presentations, slides, posters, film festival, performances, and cultural activities. Presentation will be 20 minutes in length, with 10 minutes for questions.

Languages

The languages to be used in the conference will be English, French and Lao, with translators provided when available and deemed necessary.

Abstract and Paper (Author’s Guidelines)

Abstracts are invited for the conference. By March 1, 2005, please submit a one-page abstract by postal mail or e-mail MS-Word attached file. Abstracts must be typed, camera ready, and contain the following information: title of abstract, author name(s), author affiliation, and content. If you are submitting the abstract as part of a group or organization, please indicate this as well. Send abstracts to John Hartmann. See this website for further details.

Papers to be distributed at the conference must be submitted before April 1, 2005. Vetted papers will be published in the First ICLS Proceedings using Author’s Guidelines developed by the NIU Center for Southeast Asian Studies Publications Program. To ensure inclusion in the volume, submit a camera-ready copy of your paper by September 1, 2005. Papers should be no longer than 20 pages in the final format described in Author’s Guidelines.

For more information, please contact:

Center for Southeast Asian Studies Outreach Coordinator Julia Lamb: jlamb@niu.edu
Professor Catherine Raymond: craymond@niu.edu
Professor John Hartmann: jhartman@niu.edu
Vinya Sysamouth: laolanxang@yahoo.com

Contact Address:
Center for Southeast Asian Studies
412 Adams Hall
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115 USA
Phone: 1-815-753-1771
FAX: 1-815-753-1776
E-mail: cseas@niu.edu
Webpage: www.niu.edu/cseas

Performing Phralak Phraram ... Musicians and actors at the Songkran festival, Luang Prabang, Laos.

Thararat Charconsonthichai