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ĐẶNG NGHIỆM VẠN - CHU THÁI SƠN - LƯU HÙNG

# Ethnic minorities in Vietnam



THẾ GIỚI Publishers  
Hanoi - 2000

Đặng Nghiêm Vạn - Chu Thái Sơn - Lưu Hùng

# *Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam*

(New Edition)

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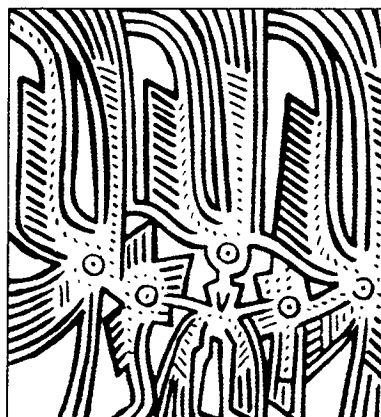
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## Introduction

Situated in the eastern part of Southeast Asia, Vietnam is a tropical country subject to monsoons. It is a point of convergence of various ethnic groups and a crossroads of different civilizations. Its rather diverse topography, with mountains, plains and coastal areas, is also a factor accounting for its complex ethnic composition.

Fifty-four ethnic groups have been identified; of them the *Kinh (Việt)* account for 87% of the population. Some groups, for instance the *Tày*, *Thái*, *Mường*, *Hoa* and *Khmer*, number about one million each, but others have only a few hundred, including the *Ơ đù* and *Rơ măm*. The languages of the 54 groups belong to almost all the language families of Southeast Asia, south of the Yangzi River, as indicated in the following table (in decreasing order of population; see page 2).

The *List of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam* made known by the General Department of Statistics on March 2, 1979 recognizes that the Vietnamese nation officially comprises 54 ethnic groups.



Given the state of development of our ethnology 20 years ago, the shortcomings and errors in this List are justifiable. Some conclusions raised disputes, being inconsistent with realities. For example, the *Cao Lan* and *Sán Chí* (in the North Vietnam mountain region) were grouped under the name *Sán Chay*, the *Gié* and *Triêng* (in the North of Tây Nguyên) under the name *Gié-Triêng*; the *Bru* and the *Vân Kiều* (in the West of *Quảng Trị*) under the name *Bru-Vân Kiều*, etc. Many problems exposed in this nomenclature should be further discussed. There should be an up-to-date, more scientifically grounded and documented list of the ethnic groups in Vietnam.

However, due to lack of such a work at present, the author of this book has to use the List mentioned above.

Thus, the 54 ethnic groups of Vietnam may be classified as pertaining to the following eight language groups of five language families

<b>I. Nam-Á (Autroasiatic)</b>		
<b>a) Viet-Muong groups</b>		
1. Việt (Kinh)	18. Mảng	<b>b) Kadai group</b>
2. Mường	19. Rơ-măm	
3. Thổ	20. Brâu	
4. Chứt	21. O-đu	
<b>b) Môn Khơ-me</b>		
1. Khơ-me	<div><b>II. Nam Đảo</b> <b>(Austronesien)</b> <b>Malayo-Polynesian</b>  1. Gia-rai 2. Ê-đê 3. Chăm (Cham) 4. Ra-glai 5. Chu-ru  <b>III. Thai-Kadai</b> <b>a) Thai group</b> 1. Tày 2. Thái 3. Nùng 4. Sán Chay 5. Giáy 6. Lào 7. Lự 8. Bố Y</div>	
2. Ba-na		
3. Xơ-dăng		
4. H'rê		
5. Cơ-ho		
6. Mnông		
7. Xtiêng		
8. Khơ-mú		
9. Bru-Vân Kiều		
10. Cơ-tu		
11. Gié-Triêng		
12. Ta-ôi		
13. Mạ		
14. Cò		
15. Chơ-ro		
16. Xinh-mun		
17. Kháng		

1. La Chí	
2. Cơ Lao	
3. La Ha	
4. Pu Péo	
<b>IV. Sino-Tibetan</b>	
<b>a) Sinitic group</b>	
1. Hoa	
2. Sán Diu	
3. Ngái	
<b>b) Tibetan- Burman group</b>	
1. Hà Nhì	
2. Phù Lá	
3. La Hủ	
4. Lô Lô	
5. Cống	
6. Si La	
<b>V. Hmông - Dao</b>	
1. Hmông	
2. Dao	
3. Pà thên	

Hundreds of small local groups with different dialects are incorporated into these 54 ethnic groups under different names. The *Việt*, who have long occupied the central region of the Indochina peninsula, settled mainly on the plains of North Vietnam (Bắc Bộ) and the Northern part of Central Vietnam (Trung Bộ). A substratum of *Môn-Khmer* can be found among the *Việt*, in addition to tribes speaking *Tày-Thái*, *Malayo-Polynesian*, *Sino-Tibetan* and others. The *Mường*, *Thổ*, *Chứt*, in whom traces of Chinese influence are not remarkable, live in the highland regions of Sơn La, Yên Bái, Hòa Bình, Hà Tây, Thanh Hóa, and Nghệ An provinces. Almost all the *Môn-Khmer* ethnic groups settled in an area extending from the Northeast to the Tây Nguyên (Central Highlands) and to the Mekong delta, through the Trường Sơn Range. The *Tày-Thái* ethnic groups living in the eastern part of Việt Bắc have been in Vietnam since before the beginning of our era and contributed to the development of the first states. Others in the Northwest and the mountainous regions of Nghệ An province migrated in large numbers only in the 13th and 14th centuries. The first members of the Tibeto-Burman ethnic group probably arrived in Vietnam around the 17th-19th centuries of our era. The ancestors of the Malayo-Polynesian ethnic group lived in the central part of Tây Nguyên and founded the State of Champa. Since the beginning of our era, therefore, these ethnic groups have existed in their present areas of habitation.

Other ethnic groups (*Hoa*, *Nùng*, *Sán Chay*, *Gié Triêng*, *Cơ Tu*, *Ta Ôi* and *Vân Kiều*) came either en masse or in small groups to Vietnam in different historical periods, particularly in this millennium, driven out by bloody repression by the Chinese feudal court, the Siamese invaders, revolts, famines, and epidemics.

The arrival of people with different languages and cultures sometimes completely changed the ethnic composition of a region (the *Việt* in South Vietnam, the *Hoa* and the *Thai* for example) Linguistic, racial, and cultural relations between immigrants and indigenous people gradually developed and resulted in such complete integration that sometimes no vestiges of certain groups can be identified nowadays.

This mixing and cohabitation would have eradicated the dividing lines that existed between the various areas of habitation of ethnicities which now

often live in separate groups in different localities. Contacts between them brought about widespread bilingualism or multilingualism. It may happen that the mother tongue of an ethnicity became a dead language spoken only within the family, so did their lifestyle and cultures. The ethnic characteristics are no longer expressed clearly but only in a few cultural details in the memory of the primitive name of the group of their remote native land which is, sometimes, also legendary, or of emigrations bathed in blood and tears.

For a long time, the economy of Vietnam was a self-sufficient one dependent largely on nature, and villages were closed units of social organization. Each family cultivated a meagre plot of arable land or milpa and could hardly meet its own needs; surplus produce, if any, was used for local barter and occasionally for inter-regional trade. In fact, production was not homogeneous; no village or ethnic group could live totally separate from others. As a rule, mountain dwellers needed salt, iron tools, jars, silver ornaments, copper items and coloured thread. For their part, the plain population bought from highland regions buffaloes, oxen, bamboo, wood, medicinal plants and forest produce. Coastal fishermen exchanged their surplus of fish, salt, and *nước mắm* (fish sauce) with farmers for rice, bamboo, and the wood needed for the construction of boats. These traditional exchanges were the origins of the long-standing tradition of "sworn brotherhood" not only among the communes of the same region or within an ethnic group but also among different regions or ethnic groups. Even nowadays, mutual aid is always provided between them in the event of natural calamities, war, or social upheaval.

Moreover, natural conditions may be favorable and may become extremely harsh. Great effort is required from humans, the effort that can be produced only by unity of the peoples of one region or several in the struggle against natural disasters. It is the key factor in the linguistic and cultural integration of different ethnic groups, indigenous people and newcomers who form the *Vietnamese community*. The core of that community is naturally made up of the *Việt* plainsmen - the majority who have highly-developed production techniques.

The unity of the Vietnamese nation has been consolidated as the country endured numerous invasions from foreign feudalist or imperialist powers

that were blinded by the desire to occupy its geographical position and natural resources. Having settled in Vietnam, all the ethnic groups realized the necessity of unity in order to safeguard the country and their own existence. Thus, the history of the Vietnamese nation is full of glorious victories over foreign aggressions since ancient times; for example, those of Sisters Trưng (40-43 AD), Lý Bôn (542), Mai Hắc Đế (722), Ngô Quyền (930), Lê Hoàn (989), Lý Thường Kiệt (1075-1077), Trần Hưng Đạo (13th century), Lê Lợi (15th century), Quang Trung (1789) and Hồ Chí Minh era.

All the ethnic groups in Vietnam, can be regarded as belonging to the same historical and ethnographic category or the same historical and cultural horizon of the past which spread from south of the Yangtze River to the islands of Southeast Asia. They have their own cultures different from that of the Hwang Ho River (Chinese) and that of India. It is an Austro-Asian culture which reached its peak in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age with the Đông Sơn period<sup>(\*)</sup> — to reach the threshold of civilization — with densely-populated economic and political regions, specific cultural features, and advanced technical skills. These are demonstrated in the construction of defensive walls, dams, barrages, houses-on stilts with curved roofs and covered bridges, domestication of elephants and buffaloes, knowledge of metallurgy, the use of boats with raised ends for ocean and river navigation, the manufacture of farming tools (axes, ploughs and hoes), weapons (tomahawks, crossbows and spears), domestic utensils (earthenware), ornaments (on bronze drums and flutes), the cultivation of food crops (rice and other grains), and the production of foodstuffs and beverages (rice cakes, salted fish, fish sauce, rice alcohol and so on).

Regarding cultural traditions, one can mention the custom of people filing their teeth, stretching their earlobes, painting their teeth, tattooing, chewing betel and the practice of regarding as units of currency bronze drums, stone bracelets, shell, and other items of equal value (cloth, bronze objects, buffaloes, elephants and earthenware).

(\*) The first vestiges of this culture were discovered at Đông Sơn, Thanh Hóa province.

In the spiritual field we should mention the cult of ancestors, the matrilineal family (or matriliney co-existing with patriliney); oral traditions include tales about the origins of ethnic groups (for example, legends about the pumpkin, the birth of earth and water, of Mother Âu and Father Lạc, of the woman marrying a dog, of the marriage of Dame Drum), about the constant struggle against natural calamities (the Mountain Genie and Water Genie); the notion of the *yin* and *yang* principles; animist beliefs (Mother Rice or the soul of rice); totemic practices (the worship of stones, of symbolic trees of longevity, the banyan-tree, the kapok tree, and so on); the cult of genies (heaven, earth, thunder, and lightning); and the agricultural calendar which divided the year into two seasons from the day when thunder rumbles (beginning of spring) to harvest time including the period of rest and other activities. Also, there is a popular medicine and a unique art (stone and wood carvings, alternate chants, conventional and water puppetry and popular games (wrestling, pirogue races, walking on stilts and others), etc.

This culture has been enriched throughout the nation's history by the selective assimilation of the best elements from other cultures. It is characterized by common Vietnamese features along with the peculiarities contributed by each ethnic group. For example, during 16th - 18th centuries while literature flowered in the plains, Tày-Nùng poetry in Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn also experienced a new development, with anonymous novels in verse and with such authors as Quỳnh Văn and Quán Nhạc. In the Northwest great works appeared such as *Farewell and Recommendation to Lovers*, *Khun Lú* and *Nàng Ủa*.

There are common elements of the material and spiritual life of various ethnic groups in different regions, sometimes very distant from one another. They concern the types of dwelling adapted to local conditions, clothes (designs, patterns), farming tools, customs, cosmological concepts, religious beliefs embodied in numerous rites and rituals, festivals, entertainments, folklore, etc. They, to some extent, testify to the process of acculturation which took place during the course of national development.

A superficial study might not reveal this "signal content", the variants of which seem to have stemmed from the particular way of life of each ethnic group adapted to the surrounding conditions, from the uneven social

development and the mentality of each people. This apparently great diversity further underlines the unique nature of the superstratum which becomes visible when we strip it of the flowery details that over the centuries have accumulated on its surface.

Based on the historical relationships, economic exchanges, and cultural contacts, the trend of ethnic groups towards integration is more and more strengthened. The process of mixing takes place without upheavals in mountain regions, which is facilitated by the peaceful cohabitation of various ethnic groups and by their common efforts in production. Therefore, while deeply conscious of their ethnic identity, all of them also have kept in the bottom of their hearts consciousness, no less intense, that they belong to the Vietnamese nation.

This reference book uses exclusively the information gathered by Vietnamese scholars from their field-work studies. The year 1945 has been chosen as the "point of departure", when Vietnam recovered its independence and the People's Democratic State was established. In fact, since this date, and especially since the liberation of the South in 1975 the lives of the ethnic groups in Vietnam have greatly changed in all respects.

They have become citizens with full rights; they elect their own representatives at all levels and to all positions in the Party and the administration. The 9th legislature of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam had 16.7% of deputies from ethnic against the 10% in the first. The Council of Ethnic Minority under the National Assembly oversees the implementation of policies relevant to nationalities. In the people's councils at all levels - provincial, district and commune - the proportion of ethnic minority representatives to their numbers in the population is always higher than the average figure. Equality between ethnic groups is respected and guaranteed by the Constitution. On the basis of political and social equality, mutual aid is being promoted throughout the country to eradicate the socio-economic and educational gaps between plains and mountains. Many officials from the Party and the Government, primarily technicians and managers, have settled in the highland in order to contribute to local development. However, almost all the responsible people in regional and local administrations are members of ethnic minorities.



A great number of *Việt* from the plains have gone to live in the highland regions to help the indigenous population with the establishment of industrial areas, factories, State farms and plantations. In the Tây Nguyên region alone, there are 600,000 *Việt* who have moved to set up here new economic zones over the past 10 years. Mention should be made of some farms and factories such as those for: tea and cardamom in Yên Bái, Hà Giang, and Sơn La; anise, *mu* oil tree, and tobacco in Cao Bằng, and Lạng Sơn; hevea, and coffee in the Tây Nguyên and in eastern Nam Bộ; cinnamon in Quảng Ninh, Yên Bái and in the former provinces of Quảng Nam and Quảng Ngãi; coal in Quảng Ninh; apatite in Lào Cai, steel in Thái Nguyên, and also huge hydro-power stations on the Đà river, at Thác Bà, and at Đa Nhim. Some of these enterprises employ a large number of managers, technicians, and workers (70 - 80% of the total number) who are from ethnic minorities.

The communications network is being developed. Over 80% of the communes are already provided with roads accessible to motor vehicles. Even the most remote hamlet has macadam roads to facilitate transport by rudimentary means, primarily carts drawn by animals.

All district towns and a large number of communes, villages, and hamlets in the highlands now have electric lighting.

In agriculture, much progress has been made in land reclamation, the campaign to stimulate the adoption of the settled life-style, promotion of forms of collective production (mutual aid groups, small-scale cooperatives and so on), the construction of irrigation projects, and the application of advanced farming. The output of rice and other food crops has thus risen: from one tonne per hectare to three and even to five in Hoà An (Cao Bằng), Trảng Định (Lạng Sơn), and Phủ Thông (Bắc Thái). The chronic food shortages, has now been almost eliminated.

General and further education has developed markedly. A large number of primary schools and further education courses have been set up in communes, and secondary and vocational schools in districts and provincial centres. Illiteracy has been virtually wiped out. A new curriculum for primary schools has been made compulsory in many provinces. The commune of Ngổ Luông (Hoà Bình) is well known for its achievements in this field. After four years of introduction, the second level of education has now

become compulsory for the whole population, and the third level (secondary education completed) for all officials.

Young people from ethnic minorities attend regional or central colleges and universities. Some even pursue their studies abroad. Over 100 Ph.D and MSc degrees holders come from the highlands; many are professors at universities. In primary and secondary schools (including further education classes) the mother tongues of the ethnic groups are taught along with Vietnamese, the national language, and have an important status. For this purpose, many writing systems have been invented. *Tày-Nùng*, *Hmông*, *Thái*, *Êđê* and *Gia Rai* manuals have been compiled and teachers trained.

Continued attention is paid to promoting new lifestyles and public health services by the authorities. Infant mortality, which was very high in mountain regions, has been considerably reduced and average life expectancy is now over 60. Epidemics have been checked. Particularly, malaria is kept under control. A public health network covers all the highland regions; each commune has a medical station which is at the same time a maternity home, and each district has a polyclinic or a hospital. In 1945, there were only 51 doctors, 212 assistant doctors and 36 pharmacists. Now, in the 11 highland provinces, there are over 1,700 doctors, 4,300 assistant doctors, and a large number of nurses and nurses' aides. They constitute the forces in struggling the superstitious practice of treatment with exorcism.

The cultural heritage of each ethnic group is being rediscovered. Attention is given to the preservation of fine customs and traditions. Tales, legends, sayings and popular songs, which have been orally transmitted from generation to generation, are being published or translated into Vietnamese for wider dissemination. Many songs, popular tunes and traditional dances have been successfully brought to the stage at home and abroad. The revitalization of traditional culture and the raising of general education standards among minority ethnic groups, enable writers, artists, and film-makers to make known the folklore passed down from their ancestors, thus contributing to the better understanding between nationalities and consolidating their unity.

In national construction and defence, all the ethnic groups in Vietnam struggled against foreign aggression. Many heroes of ethnic minorities are

honoured by the whole nation: Pu Côm Bô (*Khmer*), Hà Văn Mao (*Mường*), Hoàng Văn Thụ, Hoàng Đình Kinh and Hoàng Đình Dong (*Tày*), Cầm Bá Thước, Lương Bảo Định (*Thái*), Phùng Chí Kiên (*Nùng*), Giàng Tả Chay (*Hmông*), Nơ Trang Long (*Mnông*), Xăm Brăm Châm, Núp (*Ba Na*) and others. The names of a number of places in the highlands are associated with great victories: Việt Bắc, and Điện Biên Phủ — during the resistance against the French; Bẫy Núi, U Minh, Playme, Tu mơ rông, Đắc Tô - Tân Cảnh, A So, A Lưới, and Khe Sanh — during the resistance against the Americans. The triumph in 1975 began in Tây Nguyên with our attack on Buôn Mê Thuột, the main town of Ê Đê territory.

Due to the consequences left by history, especially the last 30-year war, and the mistakes committed by us in the implementation of the policies towards ethnic minorities, many regions, particularly remote ones, remain under-developed. The gap in the living standards of various ethnic groups is still obvious. However, the *đổi mới* (renovation) line put forward by the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party serves as the basis for working out measures to deal with the difficulties facing the mountain areas. The complex relationship between ethnic minorities call for greater attention from the concerned authorities. Many problems can be settled only with the patience and competence and with the efforts of the local populations themselves. We should create conditions for all ethnic groups to integrate into the national community while able to retain their identities.

This book has been compiled as a reference. Researchers and other readers will find here much interesting information about the origins, areas of habitation, material and spiritual life of each of the ethnic groups present on Vietnamese territory.

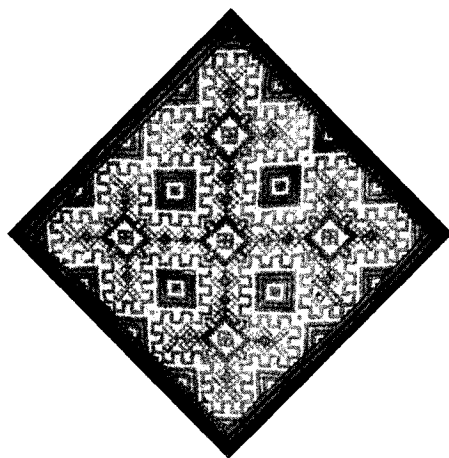
Appendices are also provided. Unless otherwise indicated, all books and articles in the bibliographic notes are in Vietnamese.

*The authors*



## Abbreviations used in Bibliographic notes

1. Rev. DTH: *Tạp chí Dân tộc học* (Ethnological Review)
2. Rev. NCLS: *Tạp chí nghiên cứu lịch sử* (Historical Studies Review)
3. Bulletin DT: *Tập san dân tộc* (Ethnological Bulletin)
4. Inst. DTH: *Viện dân tộc học* (Ethnological Institute)
5. Ed. VH: *Nhà xuất bản Văn hoá dân tộc* (Ethnic Minority Culture Publishing House)
6. Ed. KH: *Nhà xuất bản Khoa học* (Science Publishing House)
7. Ed. KHXH: *Nhà xuất bản Khoa học xã hội* (Social Sciences Publishing House)
8. Ed. GD: *Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục* (Education Publishing House)
9. Inf. DTH: *Thông báo dân tộc học* (Ethnological Information)



## *Austro-Asiatic Language Family*





## Việt-Mường group

### Mường

▣ **Denomination:** Mường.

*Other names:* Mol, Mual, Mọi

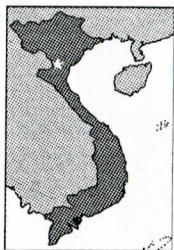
▣ **Local small groups:** Mọi Bì, Ao Tá  
(or Au Tá)

▣ **Population:** Over 914,000

▣ **Language:** Việt-Mường

#### ▣ Area of habitation

The Mường live in an area extending from Nghĩa Lộ (Yên Bái province) to Thanh Hoá, passing through Phú Thọ, Sơn La, Hoà Bình and Hà Nam (between the lower section of the Đà river and the upper section of the Mã river), but above all in Hoà Bình province. They are descendants of a pre-Việt-Mường community from which they split off to form a separate ethnic group around the first few centuries of our era. While the present-day Việt moved to the plains and came under the



VIỆT-MUỖNG GROUP



1. Gong dance (the Mường in Hòa Bình).
2. Fixing the bow-string (the Chút, Mò O hamlet, ổ ồ, Thượng Hóa, Minh Hóa, Quảng Bình).
3. Cooking rice (the Thổ, Tân Hợp commune, Tân Kỳ, Nghệ An).







1. Rice sifting (the *Thổ*, Tân Hợp hamlet, Tân Kỳ, Nghệ An).
2. "Threshing" rice with feet (the *Mường*, Bà hamlet, Định Giáo commune, Tân Lạc district, Hòa Bình).
3. Mother carrying her child (the *Chứt*, Hamlet N°39, Tân Trạch commune, Bồ Trạch district, Quảng Bình).

influence of Chinese culture, the ancient *Mường* remained in mountains and developed relatively independently. They exerted a certain influence on the *Thái* ethnic group from which they borrowed various elements. Thus the *Mường* are close to the *Việt* in origin, and to the *Thái* from the social and cultural point of view.

## Material life

The *Mường* family lives in houses-on-stilts, the architecture of which is similar to the house of neighbouring ethnic groups, the *Thái* in particular.

*Mường* men dress almost the same way as the *Việt* of the plains. Their garments comprise trousers and a type of pyjamas. By contrast, women's attire retains its traditional design and has particular decorations added by each woman herself. The scarf, the short vest and the black skirt are underlined by a very large belt embroidered with various motifs; the belt hugs the body, up to the middle of the woman's chest. Jewellery articles include bracelets and necklaces made of silver in simple but attractive designs. On their heads, *Mường* women wear squares of white cloth tied at the nape of the neck.

In the regions along the both banks of the *Đà* river and on certain mountain slopes, the *Mường* continue slash-and-burn cultivation. In other areas, they grow rice in irrigated fields as the *Thái*, using the *Thái*-designed system of canals, trenches and barrages. Formerly, sticky rice was widely grown, with one crop per year. Nowadays, ordinary rice is preferred, and two, even three crops can be produced each year. In certain regions, the rice output may reach 5 tonnes per hectare. Irrigation by means of bucket-chains is now quite popular.

Having vast regions at their disposal, the *Mường*, besides rice cultivation, also grow cereals, gourd-like plants and vegetables, using irrigation. They plant cash crops (bamboo, cotton, hemp, jute, diccocas, etc.), and set up plantations of fruit trees and medicinal plants, of which cinnamon is the most important. Sylviculture is also a major source of income for the household economy. Horticulture is, however, uncommon or at most practised only in small areas of land close to houses.

The *Mường* let their cattle roam virtually at will. Domestic livestock serve as draught-animals in agriculture and forest utilisation, or as items bartered with people from the plains. They also supply meat for ritual ceremonies. A poultry pen is always considered very important and so are pigsties.

Hunting as men's activity is aimed primarily at protecting crops, and the game is used as a supplement to daily meals.

Fishing plays a more important role than hunting for, apart from the indispensable rice and vegetables, fish is a food much preferred by the *Mường*. Fishing equipment is varied, including nets and various kinds of eel-pots. The *Mường* go fishing at any time in the year and this is their common practice.

Forest produce, fragrant mushrooms, honey, rattan and medicinal plants, provide the *Mường* with goods for exchange and considerable extra incomes.

Handicrafts are an integral part of the agricultural economy and techniques are fairly unsophisticated. Certain manual occupations such as ceramics, iron-working and particularly, gold-work are unknown to the *Mường*, possibly for the reason that they are supplied with all their needs by the *Việt*. Weaving produces materials for clothes, blankets and particularly carpets using geometrical designs in different colours, is quite important. The *Mường* belts are truly art-works, with beautiful ornamental patterns reminiscent of the Đông Sơn culture.

## ■ Social and family relationships

The *Mường* live in villages or hamlets, formerly called *quêl* or *quê*. Each *quê* may comprise three to five households (small hamlets) and several dozens (large village). The area of each village is well-defined and arranged in an orderly pattern: the residential area is surrounded by mountains and forests and considered as common property along with rice-fields, water sources and cemeteries. The members of a village do not necessarily belong to the same male lineage, so a *Mường* village represents a so-called "community of neighbours."

Several villages form a *mường*. A large *mường* includes 20-30 villages, such as *mường Bi*, *mường Vàng*, *mường Thảng*, *mường Động* and *mường*

*Lang Chánh*; a smaller one has 3-5 villages. In the past, the head of each *mường* was the *lang cun* who was assisted by an administrative body. *Mường* were in principle independent of one another but it was customary for smaller *mường* to respect larger ones. A *mường* was always under the protection of a "noble" family, for instance the *Đinh*, *Quách*, *Bạch*, or *Hà*. The members of these families were called *Thổ lang* or *Quan lang*. The *Lang cun* was the oldest member of the oldest branch of the family. As chief of the *mường*, he only governed the *làng chiềng*, the largest and the richest hamlet in the area; the smaller ones were entrusted to his younger brothers or to the eldest members of the lower branches called *lang xóm* or *đạo*. According to customs, the *Thổ lang* had the right to manage and distribute communal lands, demand corvée and receive tributes. Each *lang* family had its own drums and bronze vessels, symbols of power. They lived their own lives, separated from others, and devised strict rules to protect their privileges. If the chief of a *mường* died without a male heir, his position must be offered to a *lang* from another lineage. By the time of the August 1945 Revolution, the *lang đạo* system had fallen into decline, the rivalry between different lineages of *lang* becoming more and more acute and provoking frequent bloody clashes. From the social point of view, by contrast to the *lang* class, the masses were considered so inferior that all of them were given the same name *Bùi*. Each of them were allotted a piece of the communal land. But in return, they had to share part of administrative expenditure of the *mường* or hamlet, or more precisely, to pay tribute to the *lang* in the form of corvée, offerings (natural produce), foodstuffs or precious objects. The *Mường* in poor hamlets, who earn a meager livelihood from agriculture, were regarded as "immigrants" (*từ roong*), a status similar to that of *công nhóc* (servants) among the *Thái*. In exchange for the right to live in the hamlet and to clear land, they were subject to a system of corvée, most often to the benefit of the *lang* for whom the poorest must work as servants.

A very small number of people, including peasants, were involved in the administrative apparatus of the *lang*. They were called *ậu* and won the confidence of the *lang*; their position was hereditary.

The system of *xâu, nỡ*, or corvée required by the *lang* to their own benefit is worthy of particular study. Each year, the entire population of a *mường* must



cultivate together a plot of land, which was in fact a kind of collective corvée (called *xâu*). Certainly, the efficiency was low, but this was intended to assert the authority of the *lang*. At the same time, the inhabitants shared the work (*nỗ*) of cultivating the fields of the *lang*, from ploughing to harvest.

The Mường family is characterized by a patriarchal regime: the father exercises authority over all the members of his own family. If the parents have died without a male heir, the family property will be passed automatically to the oldest male relative, even if their daughters are still living. This custom is called *thu lựt*. Young girls cannot choose their husbands but “accept their parents’ arrangement “. Although the woman has a defined role in the family, she is allowed to discuss common affairs with her husband.

## ▣ Spiritual life

To cement unity and maintain order in society, each *mường* worships a local *mường* genie, and each hamlet, its titular genie, and the ancestor of the *lang* or the person who reclaimed land and founded the *mường* or the hamlet. Ancestor worship is practised within the family.

Moreover, worshipping the soil genie is widespread, particularly the genie of Mount Tản Viên (also known as Mount Ba Vì).

Mường folk literature is rich. Quite a few poems and stories in verse have been collected and published, including *The Birth of Earth and Waters (or the Native Land)*; *Út Lót Hồ Liêu*; *Nàng Nga-Hai Mối*; *Nàng Ỗm, Chàng Bồng Hương*; *Vườn hoa - núi Cối* and *Đang Vắn Va* and so forth. Some of them tell love stories and criticize old practices ( for example, the custom of marriage arranged by the parents without the agreement of the girl).

Mường songs extol labour, fine tradition, or express men’s feelings. The *Ví đúm* – alternately sung dialogue made of 6-8 distich verses – is very popular.

The *Xắc bùa* is particularly wide-spread at festivals and weddings. Five to 20 singers form a group called a *phường bùa*. They go from one house to another, each member holding a gong which is beaten each time when the song is finished. The words and the music of *xắc bùa* songs vary according to rhythms.

Mường tales and legends are also numerous and rich in content.

Mường ritual songs (called *mo*) are sung by the *Thầy mo* at ceremonies such as funerals, spirits-provoking, making sacrifices to the spirits, etc. They are historical or literary stories which reflex the life and aspirations of the working masses. The *mo* “*The Birth of Earth and Waters*” presents the Mường cosmology. The *mo* about bronze drums, customs and lifestyles, etc. constitute a treasury worthy of research.

The Mường have always been side by side with the Việt in national building and defence. Through history, Mường land has served as bases for the resistances of national heroes for example Lê Đại Hành, Lê Lợi, and other local chieftains. It contributed human and material resources to the insurgents against foreign domination.



Sifting rice

## Thổ

▣ **Denomination:** Thổ

▣ **Local small group:** Kẹo, Mọn, Cuối, Họ, Đan Lai-Ly Hà, Tày Poọng (Con Kha, Xá Lá Vàng)

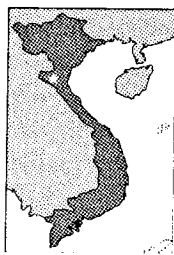
▣ **Population:** Over 51,000

▣ **Language:** Việt-Mường. There are several dialects, but native speakers have no difficulty in communication.

▣ **Area of habitation:**

The Western highland region of Nghệ An and Thanh Hoá provinces.

Around the end of the 17th century, Vietnam experienced numerous social upheavals. The Việt in the low-lying districts of Thanh Chương, Quỳnh Lưu and Diễn Châu (now in Nghệ An province) and some Việt and Mường groups from the mountain districts of Như Xuân and Thiệu Hoá (in present-day Thanh Hoá province) moved to settle in the regions of ethnic minorities. They were mixed through intermarriages with the local *Cuối* to form a new community, which after a long



VIỆT-MƯỜNG GROUP

period of evolution, was given the name Thổ. This community is very heterogeneous, with many small groups of them. The most important are the *Kẹo*, *Mọn*, and *Cuối*. This ethnic transformation took place on the background of Việt culture with regional peculiarities. This culture has been enriched by the elements of Mường culture and at a later period, added by those of *Thái* culture.

▣ **Material life**

There are two types of dwelling: houses on stilts and houses on the ground. However, the latter are getting more and more popular. Houses on stilts are rudimentary; they have a rectangular shape with rooms at one end and open at the other (this end often facing the east). There are no ornaments on the balustrades or windows as in *Thái* houses. Houses on the ground are similar in architecture to those of the *Việt* in mountain regions.

Men's attire is similar to that of the *Việt* before 1945. Women's clothes vary from region to region, but in general, they wear skirts which they put on over their heads, and short vests with close fitting sleeves, buttoning at the front and split on the hips. They are similar to the traditional vest worn by Việt women. Square white cloths are used for headgear worn in the same manner as the *Mường*.

To complete the outfit, nets are attached to the shoulder, which serves as bags.

The *Thổ* prefer to live at low altitudes and on gentle slopes running north-east or southeast between the plains and mountains. The soil formed from thick layers of ferrolithic origin, covers a basalt substratum. Given this topography, despite their sedentary lifestyle, the *Thổ* rarely engage in wet-rice cultivation. Their economy is based mainly on slash-and-burn farming. However, the fertility of soil allows the *Thổ* to practise a special kind of farming, more or less in fixed areas of dry ricefields. It is well-known that milpas are abandoned after three or four crops. In the first crops, seeds are sown with a digging stick on the land cleared of all vegetation through slashing and burning. In subsequent crops, the soil is ploughed and then seeds are

scattered all over the field. The *Thổ* plough is the same as that of the *Việt* which is often called *chìa vôi* (lime spatula) <sup>(1)</sup>

Other food crops, including maize, potato, and cassava, play a complementary role. Hemp is grown primarily for making net-like bags, hammocks, hunting and fishing nets. Some of these products are exchanged with neighbouring communities for cloth, garments, oil, salt and agricultural implements.

Although living near fairly great rivers, the *Thổ* are not in a position to utilize them with irrigation systems. However, these rivers supply an important source of food to them. Fishing techniques may be very primitive by hand or are fairly complicated (eelpots, nets of various kinds, scoops and square drop-nets). In addition, there is a collective form of fishing called *Chăm*: all tools are used (square and conical nets and others).

Being good hunters, the *Thổ* have various kinds of hunting equipment: nets, different traps (pits, cages, slip knots and cross-bows). Collective hunting in traditional *Thổ* society had detailed rules for the sharing out of the game. However, hunting is no longer common among the *Thổ* as wild animals have become scarcer in the wake of certain ecological changes. But the main reason is also that the *Thổ* are shifting their economy towards agriculture.

The gathering of forest produce plays an equally important role in the livelihood of the *Thổ*. It provides vegetables and fruit for them to survive between harvests and in time of crop failure.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Traditionally, land was collective property of the village, which included forests, hills, streams or plains. The same was true for all natural resources. Each *Thổ* was free to utilize them to the maximum and to enjoy the fruits of his/her labour. However, the plot of land where a family had its house and adjoining garden was considered private property which was sometimes

(1) It is called so because the handle of the plough resembles the lime spatula used by women who chew betel.

donated to others but almost never sold. In most areas, each family had only a few *sào* of submerged rice-field (one *sào* is 360m<sup>2</sup>). Few owned one hectare of land. Therefore, social differentiation – though seen in wealth, living standards and social conditions – was not very obvious..

The head of a *Thổ* village (*trùm*) was elected annually by the villagers. He took charge of the village administration and other public affairs. He judged violations of the village's conventions, resolved conflicts among the villagers, represented the inhabitants in contact with higher echelons authority, and appointed the chief-officiant for the yearly "start-of-rice-field-work" ceremony. Responsible to the *trùm* are the *câu* (secretary in charge of clerical work) and a number of young men maintaining public order. In certain localities there was a *chủ sắc* who was responsible for religious affairs. He had the right to utilize the *hương hỏa* field which was the collective property of the village and reserved for religious cults. It should be noted that before 1945 this structure was applied to all villages throughout the country and was integrated into the feudal-colonial administration with various levels: commune, canton, district and so on. In such conditions, in general the relationship between the *chức dịch* (administrative functionaries) and ordinary villagers was necessarily that between the "oppressed and oppressors". However, among the *Thổ* this situation was often overridden by the community customs.

The *Thổ* family is small and under the authority of the father. Nevertheless, young boys and girls enjoy considerable freedom as evident from the custom of *ngủ mái* (literal meaning: woman sleeping). During night-time parties, boys and girls can find their sweethearts. And then, go-between begins her work; the betrothal ceremony is conducted, and the relations between the two families become cemented with the monthly visits regularly paid by the would-be bridegroom to his would-be parents-in-law. One failure to do so will be enough for the engagement to be broken. Prior to the wedding, he has to perform numerous rituals required by the local customs, and to work many days, primarily in the rice-fields, for his parents-in-law. In certain villages, the young man must devote half of his time to this task. Finally, at the wedding ceremony, he must present the bride's family with an offering composed of a buffalo, a pig, 100 silver piastres and 30

squares pieces of cloth; it is symbolical payment to his parents-in-law for bringing up his wife.

The *Thổ* bury the dead. Before 1945, the body was kept in the family from one week to month and the funeral rituals required dozens of buffaloes as sacrifices. The coffin was a hollowed-out tree trunk and the body was buried lying in a direction parallel to the nearest stream. Other rites were performed on the 100th day after the burial.

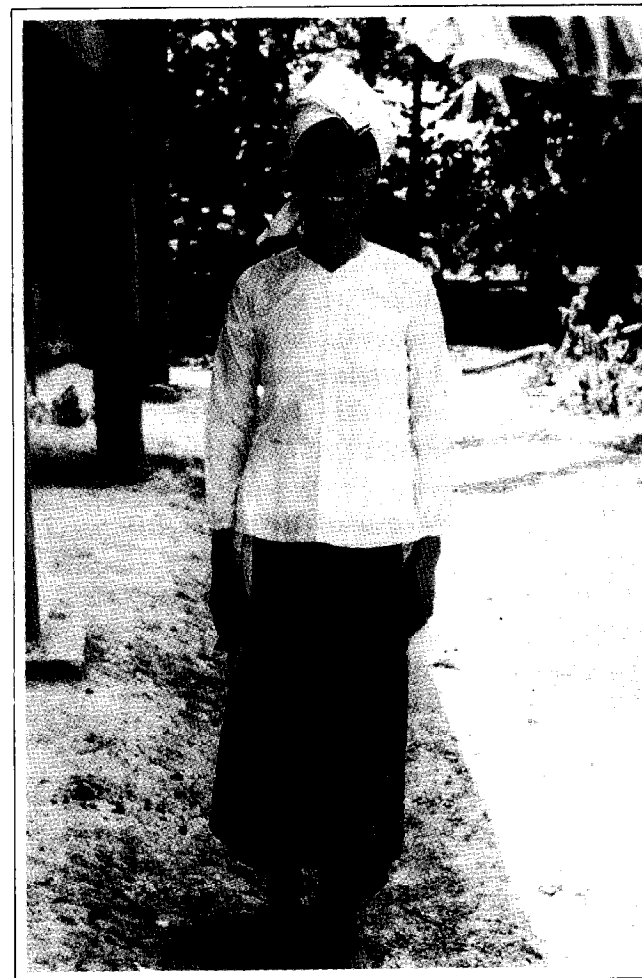
Nowadays, matrimonial and funeral rituals have been simplified as the *Thổ* have adopted a simpler and more practical lifestyle.

### Spiritual life

Besides ancestor worship practised by every family, there are other forms of religious beliefs related to agriculture and animism. Each village has places of worship for different deities, for example the genies of mountain, earth, water, fire, or war heroes and the first reclamer of the local land. However, each year the prescribed rituals are performed in only one of the available small temples. The ceremony of *xin âm dương* (tossing two coins simultaneously in a plate) is conducted to “consult the deities” about the temple for worshiping and sacrifice making services to take place in the following year.

The *Thổ* also worship innumerable spirits including the guardian genies of buffaloes and mountain goats. The most important is the annual ceremony “start-of-rice-field-work”, during which a *chủ lúa* (chief of rice) is designated with the genies’ agreement obtained by means of *xin âm dương*.

It can be said that folk literature and arts are very significant for the spiritual life of the *Thổ*. There are many riddles, proverbs, folk songs and stories, and all of them having an educational content. A very popular genre is the story with a well-structured plot and more or less fictional characters. Also notable is the *mo* recited by sorcerers, reflecting the popular cosmological concepts.



Portrait of a woman

## Chứt

▣ **Denomination:** Chứt. *Other names:* Tu Vang, Pa Leng, Chà Cùi (Tắc Cùi) Xá Lá Vàng.

▣ **Local small groups:** Arem, Mày, Sách, Rục, Mã Liềng, Xơ Lang, Umo.

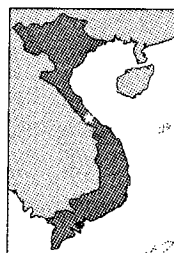
▣ **Language:** Việt-Mường

▣ **Population:** Over 2,400

▣ **Area of habitation:** In the valleys of two districts, Minh Hoá and Tuyên Hoá (present-day Quảng Bình province). Very close to the *Việt*, *Mường* and *Thổ* with regard to origins; only in 1954 the *Chứt* were identified.

### ▣ Material life

Before adopting a sedentary lifestyle, the *Chứt* used to live in temporary dwellings, very simply constructed huts; sometimes they took refuge in open shacks or grottoes. In their language, *Chứt* means "mountain" or "rocky cliff". Of late, the *Mày* have begun to construct houses similar to those of the *Bru*, while the *Sách* and *Mã Liềng*



VIỆT-MƯỜNG GROUP

have adopted the *Việt* model. The *Rục* and *Arem* did not leave their grottoes until the middle of the 20th century. Today, all the *Chứt*, irrespective of group, live in solid and comfortable houses, which is perhaps an indication of the settled lifestyle.

Unfamiliar with the growing of cotton, sewing or weaving, they purchased clothes from the *Việt* and *Lao*. They also bought necessary tools and equipment such as axes, knives and copper pots. In summer men wore only loincloths and women simple coverings. In winter the upper part of the body was covered with a *kché*, a kind of poncho made up of pieces of tree bark beaten with a mallet, dried, and sewn together.

Before 1945, only the *Sách* were involved in agriculture; the *Rục* and the *Arem* lived mainly on hunting and gathering forest produce. Submerged fields have appeared but the *Chứt* cultivate mostly on milpas, with paddy, corn, cassava, vegetables, beans and tobacco. Milpas are used to grow cassava for four consecutive years; but those used to grow rice and corn are abandoned after two years of exploitation. The work on milpas is the same as everywhere else: clearing and burning bushes and grass, and then putting the seeds into the soil - all done with the same tools: axes, knives, and digging sticks. Since they adopted a sedentary lifestyle, the *Chứt* have begun raising animals and using ploughs.

The *Chứt* hunt small animals (birds and small quadrupeds) with traps and cross-bows (the arrows are sometimes poisoned). Dogs are used only in collective hunting. The *Chứt* gather fruit, vegetables, and mushrooms; fell trees with knives and axes, and dig up edible roots with knives or pointed sticks. They catch fish in several ways: with hands, using fish lines without hooks or plant poisons, or draining a section of streams. Nets are new technique that the *Chứt* have learnt.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

Ignored by the colonial administration, before 1954, the *Chứt* led isolated lives in *cavên* (villages) in the forest. These were autonomous villages, each occupied a defined area of territory including mountains, forests and

streams. The village chief, together with the oldest members of the group, decided on all the affairs of the community such as public worship, festivities celebrating good harvests, settlement of conflicts, and admission of new members. The chief presided over all ritual ceremonies. Given these responsibilities, he had to meet certain criteria: old age, comprehensive knowledge of the customs and practices of the group, good morality, and quick-wittedness.

One *cavên* has some family clans. Blood ties are naturally acknowledged between families of the same origin. However, to survive in difficult conditions, members of the same village are united, thus displaying a strong tradition of solidarity manifested in collective activities, agrarian rites, the sharing out of game and mutual assistance and shared labour.

Even before adopting the sedentary lifestyle, the *Chứt* had had nuclear families, each couple and their children forming an independent economic unit with its own dwelling place. Young married women followed their husbands and the couples try to rapidly set up their own households. Monogamy is the rule in the *Chứt* family life. Despite the patriarchal and patrilocal regime, the young wife plays a role equal to that of her husband. All decisions are discussed and agreed upon by both the husband and wife. Labour division is based on sex and age. In the field men cut bushes and grass and handles the digging stick, while women put seeds in the holes and do the main work at harvest time. In forests, men hunt, while women, accompanied by children under 12 years of age, gather fruits and vegetables.

## ☐ Spiritual life

Ancestor worship is not practised in every home as most other ethnic groups, but by the lineage chief. Animism plays an important role in the spiritual life of the *Chứt* who believe in the existence of genies protecting the earth, forest, humans and animals. The *Sách*, *Mày* and *Rục* perform agrarian rituals on fixed dates – before and after the time of sowing, after harvest time and so on. Sorcery is also widespread. A bite by a bear, snake or tiger may cause great fear; in such cases, the wounded is forbidden to immediately return to his house. He must live in a hut deep in the forest for two or three months.

A mother, for the first months after giving birth must also live with her new-born outside the house, in three consecutive huts before she is allowed to return to her own home. Each move and the return home are marked by the rite of purification, which is aimed at “driving away ill fate”.

Cultural activities occupy an important place in the life of the *Chứt*, who like playing the flute, the harp-like musical instrument and the *trơ bon*, a kind of monocord with a bamboo sound-box. Folksongs (sung to *cà tùm* and *cà lênh* tunes) are very popular. Stories and legends, especially the history of the Mụ Giạ Pass and the myth of Creation, are particularly valued and their recitation constitutes the main entertainment of folkloric events.

As farmers “forgotten” in forests and isolated for a long time from the outside world, the living condition of the *Chứt* are extremely harsh. Their population is decreasing alarmingly, and their agriculture is on the verge of disappearing. Certain members of this ethnic group have returned to life in caves. The plight is at such a point that a young man would have nothing but a blunt knife to offer to his parents-in-laws at his wedding.



House-on-stilts

## Môn-Khmer group

### Khmer

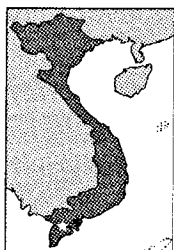
▣ **Denomination:** Khmer.

*Other names:* Khmer Krôm, Cur, Cul, Thổ, Việt of Khmer origin, Miên.

▣ **Population:** Over 895,000

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mainly in Hậu Giang, Trà Vinh, Vĩnh Long, Kiên Giang, An Giang, Bạc Liêu, and Cà Mau provinces along with the Việt and the Hoa. A number of them have settled in Ho Chi Minh City, others in Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu, Bình Phước and Tây Ninh; these people are native to the delta of the Cửu Long (Mekong) river on the present-day territories of Vietnam and Cambodia.



MÔN-KHMER GROUP

▣ **Material life**

*Khmer* families are grouped in *phum* or hamlets or in *srok*, the unit more important than Việt

villages, on elevated alluvial land (*giồng*). The center (top) and immediate surroundings of the *giồng* are reserved for houses, orchards, and milpas for food crops. The terrain slopes gently towards submerged water rice fields. Besides this traditional type of dwelling, the *Khmer* today set up their hamlets along main roads or rivers, canals and arroyoes. Many peasant families have settled in urban or semi-rural areas.

The *Khmer* live in large houses-on stilts with rectangular roofs and two doors on their both sides; one door is designed for visitors, the other for the females of the family. These houses are found mostly in the regions bordering Cambodia and are seen less and less as one moves further into the Nam Bộ delta.

In general, the *Khmer* house is built on the ground and is architecturally similar to that of the Việt in the same region. The interior is lengthwise divided into halves by a wooden beam. The front section is further divided into three compartments: the middle one serves as the living room and the other two, as men's bedrooms. The back section is partitioned to form two bedrooms for women.

The *Khmer* almost always wear a pyjama-style garment made out of black cloth. Most women knot their hair, some have it cut short and covered in checkered kerchiefs. At home or while working on milpas, men have the upper part of their torso naked and wear trousers which reach down to the knees. Nowadays shorts are preferred as they are convenient. In certain regions, *Khmer* people still wear the *sà rông*, a piece of colourful silk rolled around the waist like a loin-cloth. The ceremonial attire of *Khmer* women consists of loose trousers, a white scarf, and a split dress reaching down to the knees, which is put on like a pullover. Today young people often dress in European style but young women still retain black trousers.

The *Khmer* have much experience in wet-rice cultivation. They choose seeds appropriate to the soil, the terrain and the meteorological conditions of each region. They are also skillful at using different techniques for each type of field and seed.

*Khmer* peasants are experts in irrigation. Besides rain water, they also use water from wells dug in the middle of rice-fields or from ponds on milpas. Water is brought to the fields by a variety of means: buckets hung on shoulder-poles, chains of buckets used as scoops and long handled-buckets hung

on a tripod. In some places, people make use of tidal flows and construct small barrages.

The *Khmer* cut grass with the *phảng* (a kind of long knife) and gather it into heaps with rakes. For transplanting rice they use the *nọc* (a planting tool). Their plough has a longer ploughshare and their harrow, longer spikes than those of the *Việt* in Southern Vietnam. The plowed ground is levelled with rollers.

There are in *Khmer* hamlets work exchange groups called *dôk dầy* or *dôk dầy pevah knea*. These groups help the peasants in house-building, weddings or funerals, apart from working in rice-fields.

The *Khmer* also grow vegetables, beans, maize, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, onions, and sometimes the longan, watermelon and mango.

Livestock rearing is still associated with agriculture. Oxen and buffaloes are kept as draught-animals; chickens, ducks, geese are bred for food. In certain localities, poultry and animal rearing has become an essential economic activity.

In the coastal areas, fishing is considered an important sideline. Thanks to off-shore fishing, even on a small scale, several families can earn much money to purchase nets and boats. Fish in large rivers such as the Tiền, Hậu, Cái Lớn, and Cửa Lớn, are caught with nets or fishing-lines; in small rivers and submerged fields, people use harpoons, eel-pots, square drop-nets, or locally-designed "baskets" called *xu neng*.

Fish are prepared in different ways with brine in an oven, smoked or dried for preservation. Sometimes, they are pickled with salt to make *prahóc*, a traditional *Khmer* dish. Only the surplus is sold in markets.

Traditional handicrafts (weaving, producing silk for *sà rông*, and blankets, which are dyed with the juice of the *mặc nưa* fruit, pottery, making basket-from bamboo, rattan, rushes and water willow, etc.) are very famous.

Pottery has developed in Tri Tôn (An Giang) and Sóc Xoài (Kiên Giang). The techniques are still rudimentary: objects are moulded by hand, dried in the sun, then burnt in kilns. Decorative motifs are printed on the clay by means of matrices.

Sericulture is developed in Lương Hoá, Nguyệt Hoá, Cầu Ngang, Trà Cú (Trà Vinh) and Dự Tâm (An Giang), which are famous for fine long-lasting

silk. Woven blankets, scarves and bath towels in Tịnh Biên and Tri Tôn are popularized by *Việt* clients.

Beautifully decorated bowls with lids, mats, carpets, open baskets and pouches made of natural or dyed rushes in Hà Tiên, Rạch Giá (Kiên Giang), Vĩnh Châu (Hậu Giang), An Giang and Cà Mau are highly appreciated.

In a village, some *Khmer* would work as carpenters or masons, while others produce palm sugar or keep beehives for honey. The urban *Khmer* are involved in trade or services. There are many mixed (*Việt-Khmer* or *Hoà-Khmer*) marriages.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

*Khmer* society has changed since the 18th and 19th centuries. In the countryside, few vestiges of the old system of communal property are found. About 90 percent of land is now privately owned. Only unutilized plots of land, alluvial islets and mangrove forests belong to the village and are periodically divided up among the inhabitants who in return must give part of their produce to the communal stores.

Formerly, in the Mekong delta, landowners, more or less overtly supported by feudalist authorities, usurped the land reclaimed by both the *Khmer* and the *Việt*. The colonial government also provided opportunities for their functionaries to do the same. Therefore the *Khmer* landowners were small- or medium-sized. There were, however, some large estates of between 700 and 1,000 ha. In general, the class of *Khmer* landowners was not very significant, representing only 3 percent of the population, but controlling no less than 50 to 60 percent (even 70 percent in certain localities) of cultivated land.

*Khmer* society is deeply influenced by intellectuals – Buddhist monks who do not directly participate in governance but wield power in spirituality and education. In fact, they are spiritual leaders of society.

The village (*sróc*) or the hamlet (*phum*) has well-defined borders and the chief known as *mê sróc* or *mê phum*. In each administrative division, there is at least one pagoda which operates as the centre for religious, cultural and



educational activities. Once a year, the villagers gather to conduct the "rites of peace" (*bon komxan*) and to honour their titular genie. Marriages between young people of the village are encouraged on such an occasions to be held.

The Nguyễn court (19th century) "conferred" on the *Khmer* five family names - *Danh*, *Kiên*, *Sơn*, *Kim* and *Thạch*. Before, the *Khmer* names had included only one word with a particle indicating the sex. This traditional practice may be evident from certain *Khmer* names found in An Giang. Later on, with increasing intermarriage with the *Việt* and the *Hoa*, other family names have been adopted such as *Trần*, *Nguyễn*, *Dương*, *Mã*, *Lý*, *Lâm*, etc.

The *Khmer* family is bilinear. However, in spite of the increasing patrilineal tendency, matrilineal vestiges remain visible in *Khmer* customs, practices and mode of thinking.

The *Khmer* adhere to the nuclear family. After marriage, the newlyweds prefer to live in a separate home. Matrilocality is still widespread. The term *mêkhlôt*, ("head of the house") designates the wife, but in reality, the husband has an important place in the family.

The children, regardless of age and sex are all entitled to inherit the family's property.

In principle, the *Khmer* adopt monogamy. Polygamy exists, however, mostly in higher social strata.

The matrimonial tradition permits marriage between cousins, rarely, even first cousins. Incest is severely punished. Sororate and levirate are still practised even when matrilocality has not been common for four decades now.

Funeral ceremonies are not the same for all social strata. The rich dead are cremated; the ashes put in an urns which is placed in a stupa built in front of the local pagoda.

The poor bury the deceased first. If conditions permit, funeral rites can be held three year after. The remains are burned; the ashes are then kept in the house or at the pagoda. After the funeral, according to Hinayana Buddhist conceptions, the children and grandchildren of the deceased go to the pagoda for some time in order to meditate on the latter's merits. Death anniversaries of grandparents and other relatives are occasions for the *Khmer* to get together and present offerings to the souls of the defunct.

## Spiritual life

Before the introduction of Buddhism into the south of Indochina, the ancestors of the *Khmer* had already developed indigenous culture, the vestiges of which can still be seen in their religious beliefs.

The local totemic elements are found in the tattooing of the human body and the veneration of the *néak* – the terrestrial dragon considered as the ancestor of the *Khmer*. The roofs of religious constructions are adorned with the image of this sacred sickle-handle-shaped animal.

The primitive agricultural beliefs of rice-growers are reflected in many customs, rituals, annual festivals, games and entertainments, for example the cult of fertility, the rites of evoking rice spirits, making offerings to the genies of the rice-fields and animals, the full-moon festival, release of flying lanterns, regattas, making "mountains" of paddy or sand, and the washing of Buddha statues. The veneration of the guardian genies - *arák* and *néak tà* is practised in all *Khmer* villages. Hinayana Buddhism, introduced in the 13th century, has always been the principal religion of the *Khmer*. In the Mekong delta alone, there are 400 pagodas or, on average, one pagoda per 1,600 inhabitants. The number of Buddhist monks in 1980 totalled 10,620. As inheritors of a brilliant civilization, the *Khmer* have made important contributions to the national culture of Vietnam. *Khmer* popular literature is rich in genres: legends, myths, epic poems, proverbs, fables, humorous stories, folk songs and improvised dramas.

The *Khmer* have numerous dicta and proverbs of a philosophical character. Fables or commandments are conveyed in unique folk songs for educational purposes.

The numerous legends and stories very often refer to the names and the formation of localities inhabited by the *Khmer* in Southern Vietnam, or to the customs and practices of each locality.

Humorous stories criticize feudal society, for instance the tales of *A Lêu*, of *Chắc Xomóc*, and particularly those of *Thmênh Chêy*, a popular hero similar to *Dr. Quỳnh (Trạng Quỳnh)* of the *Việt*. The *Khmer* also have a great deal of folk songs including lullabies, songs about work in the rice-field, fishing, spinning and weaving, and songs related to rites and ceremonies. Singing is always accompanied by music.

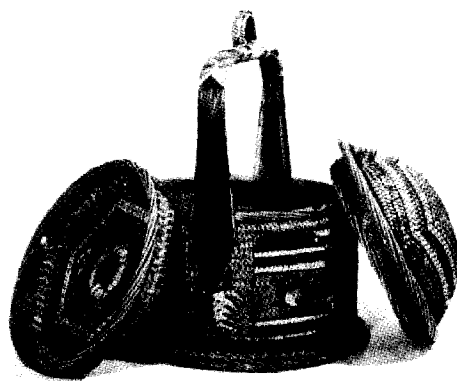
Traditional *Khmer* music has undergone different influences but its identity remains. There are 5-note and 7-note musical scales. The orchestra includes bronze gongs, leather drums, tambourines, wooden flutes, stringed instruments, and a boat-shaped zither called *rônéat*.

In general, the *Khmer* love dancing. Many traditional dances reflecting the people's daily life are close to reality and thus wide-spread throughout the community.

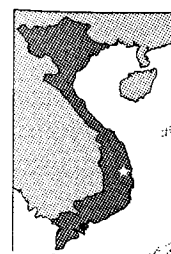
*Khmer* written literature has existed since ancient times. The first works were recorded on leaves called *xá tra* and preserved at pagodas. Distinction is made between *xá tra rương* (stories), *xá tra tét* (sacred history of the Buddha and the *sûtras*), and *xá tra lbeng* (tales about morals influenced by the Buddhist metempsychosis).

The unique architectural style of magnificent temples and pagodas testifies to the talent of the *Khmer* people.

The *Khmer* have a long-standing tradition of struggle against oppression. Shoulder to shoulder with the *Việt*, they waged several revolts against the feudalist regime, particularly those at the beginning of the 19th century under the leadership of Chauvai Kuy (1820) and Te Va Sôm (1841) in Trà Cú. During the French occupation of South Vietnam, the *Khmer* joined the liberation movement led by Trương Quyền, and after the fall of this patriot, they actively participated in other anti-colonialist movements.



Rattan basket with several compartments for carrying offerings to the pagoda



MÔN-KHMER GROUP

## Ba-na

▣ **Denomination:** Ba-na.

*Other names:* Bơ-nâm, Roh, Kon Kde, Ala-công, Kpang Công.

▣ **Local small groups:** Tơ-lô, Giơ-long (Y -long), Gơ-lar, Rơ-ngao, Krem

▣ **Population:** 137,000

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Kon-tum, Bình Định and Phú Yên provinces

### ▣ **Material life**

In the remote past, the Ba-na occupied the coastal area of present-day Quảng Ngãi and Bình Định provinces, as evidenced from the Chăm inscriptions where they appear with the name *Mada*; they settled afterwards in the western mountain regions.

The Ba-na live in wooden houses-on stilts with thatched or tiled roofs. In each village, there is a communal house called *rông*, whose remarkable roof has two steeply rising surfaces, front and back. It is the centre of the village's cultural activity.

*Ba-na* men wear loincloths and leave their upper torso naked when it is warm. In cool weather, they put on over the head short vests made in the same way as those of the Ê-đê and the Mông of Đắc Lắc. When it is very cold, they cover themselves with blankets. Women also wear loin-cloths which reach down to the knees, and vests similar to men's. These garments are made from dark-blue-dyed cotton which can be ornamented with traditional motifs, realistic figures reflecting certain aspects of the material life of this ethnic group. Their jewellery comprises copper or silver earrings, necklaces and armbands. Sometimes, they wear chains of multicoloured glass beads.

Since the *Ba-na* inhabit at different altitudes, there are different paces of economic and social development of localities. Besides milpas, terraced – and more recently in certain localities, submerged – fields are also found.

Slash-and-burn cultivation constitutes a continuous cycle with hoes as the main agricultural implement. Dry fields where intensive farming is practised lie in general along streams and rivers. The farming techniques are the same as for swidden fields; land is never left fallow. Cultivation in unploughed submerged fields began around the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th.

The *Ba-na* are good at horticulture. Some gardens grow several crops in rotation; others are used for growing just one subsidiary cereal crop, (corn, sweet potatoes or millet), or cash crops (cotton, hemp, indigo or tobacco). The life of the *Ba-na* is governed by a traditional cycle: ten months of agricultural production and two months for festivals and various activities (marriages, repair or construction of houses, making clothes, or visits to one's parents and friends).

Animal husbandry is rather developed. The herd of animals and poultry had been large in the past. But it fell into decline in wartime and now has been restored considerably. On the contrary, crafts, pottery, metal-work, basketry, weaving and so on) have never played a major role in the people's life. The *Ba-na* exchange goods with Châm or Việt pedlars or use caravans to carry forest products to the market of the delta.

In the traditional *Ba-na* society, all valuable articles such as gongs, jars, buffaloes, oxen, elephants and horses were used as barter. As a result, under the French domination, the piastre had little significance.

## Social and family relationships

The administrative and, at the same time, residential unit is the village where the community life still retains certain features of the ancient tribal commune. Each village is established on a defined territory and the land is common property. The members of the village community are bound by social institutions, traditional rights, customs, rituals and beliefs under the supervision of the *Tom plây* (chief of village) and the *Krạ plây* (council of elders) acting in accordance with the principles of ancient military democracy. The centre of all activities is the communal house, which is also the meeting place of young men who are in charge of village defence, and a venue for festivals, ceremonies, games and entertainments.

In *Ba-na* villages, there are some rich families. In most cases, wealth is created through the good organization of work and labour rather than through exploitation. There is a relatively clear differentiation revealed in the hiring of work forces, the practice of usury, and the existence in the past of "servants and slaves". It is to be noted that "servants and slaves" were treated as the equals of family members. There were *dích* or war prisoners who, through negotiation, had to renounce their villages and families and adopt those of the master who had bought them; there were also *dăm*, debtors unable to pay their debts and obliged to work for their creditors until the arrears had been paid. Under French domination, some influential people enriched themselves through the exploitation of their compatriots.

But in *Ba-na* society, social differentiation is not deep enough to bring about antagonistic relations. Furthermore, the community spirits has never been weakened, and the tradition of mutual aid is perpetuated by the practice of village "twinning" to safeguard order and develop production. The ceremony of twinning is conducted with solemn swear and believed to be witnessed by genies.

In traditional villages, the *Ba-na* lived in the extended family: the nuclear family stemming from the same ancestors, men and women; they all lived under the same roof. With the passage of time, this type of family has split into smaller families, which remain close to the founder of the family. Each

family has its own home, but it may share with three or five others of the same lineage in a traditional long house. The proper name of an individual rhymes with that of his direct ancestor. It has no particle indicating sex or the name of the lineage, but it is associated with the name of the village to distinguish it from other homonyms so as to avoid namesakes in the same village.

The *Ba-na* family is bilinear, as married couples do not adhere to either patrilocality or matrilocality; the choice of the former or the latter is merely a question of convenience. There is also a certain division of work: the husband represents the family in all village affairs while the wife takes charge of housework.

A young people can take the initiative in marriage. The involvement of parents only is to ensure that the traditional principles are respected. For instance, the prohibition against marriage between descendants of the same grandfather, grandmother or ancestor. The *Ba-na* adopt monogamy. Rape, incest and adultery are strictly condemned, and the fines go to the communal funds. Widows and widowers must wear mourning attire for one year, and if they wish to get re-married, they must perform the "grave-abandoning" rituals with regard to their deceased spouses.

Children are the object of general concern. When a newborn is one month old, it is customary to hold a ceremony called *hlôm don*, during which the child's earlobes are pierced. If this is not done, in the event of death the child will, according to popular beliefs, be driven away by the "evil genies of monkeys' land". Once the earlobes are pierced, the child is considered as a "full member" of the community. This rite can be compared to the Viet's ritual of "presentation of a child to the village". No ceremony is held for children who die with unpierced earlobes.

The *Ba-na* bury the dead in pirogue-shaped coffins made in advance and kept under the floor of the house. Funerals are held in the house. In some places, the dead body is placed upright and tied to a corner of the house; but generally, it is laid on the floor, covered with a blanket. Rice and other food are offered to the dead for one or two days. To alleviate their pain and grief, the close relatives of the deceased hurt themselves with knives or fire or hit their heads against the columns of the house, sometimes killing themselves unintentionally.

On the mound marking the grave, the *Ba-na* build a hut with a hedge. The grave-abandoning ceremony is accompanied by a great festival. The funeral house is later rebuilt and decorated with motifs and wooden statues. On this occasion, the dead receive part of the family property (gongs, jars, weapons and household utensils). For the *Ba-na*, however, the funeral house is far less important than for the *Gia-rai*.

## Spiritual life

The religions beliefs and some myths of the *Ba-na* are similar to those of the other ethnic groups of Vietnam. In their animist universe, the banyan and mango trees in pagodas are objects of cult. The kapok tree is considered as a guardian and serves as a pole of sacrifice in the course of the performance of rites and ceremonies. Each river, water source, mountain and forest has its own genie. Around the middle of the 19th century Christianity was introduced into the *Ba-na* community. Taking advantage of the tensions between the *Ba-na*, the *Xơ-dăng* and the *Gia-rai*, the missionaries succeeded in converting up to 1,000 people Christianity. Even *Ba-na* myths were falsified for corroborating the Bible. But the *Ba-na* Christians in fact remain faithful to their animist beliefs to such an extent that Christianity has finally been more or less assimilated by the latter.

The *Ba-na* possess a rich literary and artistic treasure which reflects the aspects of a society with developing class differentiation. Their collection of myths and epics, which has not yet been fully studied, is particularly important. The small part we have revealed shows a plethora of genies who, though not making up an elaborate pantheon, testify to the dimensions of a *Ba-na* cosmological concepts from the most remote antiquity. It also contains many historical figures who, through oral tradition, have become legendary personages. Stories, folksongs, traditional music and unique dances all express the age-old conceptions of life and the joy of living. The rudimentary musical instruments made from stone or bamboo, can be vitalized through the hands of *Ba-na* musicians to produce delightful melodies. *Ba-na* dances and the decorative motifs on their fabrics in geometric patterns

are stylized images of natural phenomena and the activities of a society of hunters, which is completely different from that of the farmers on the plain. The aesthetic sense of the *Ba-na* is also expressed in their unique wood carvings, in the extraordinary decorations on their communal houses, and on bamboo or rattan implements.

As one of the principal ethnic groups in the Tây Nguyên, the Ba-na enjoy the respect and trust of their neighbours.



On the way to a stream

## Xơ-đăng

**Denomination:** Xơ-đăng.

**Other names:** Hđăng, Kmrâng, Conlan, Brila.

**Small local groups:** Xơ-teng (Hđăng), Mơ-nâm, Tơ-đrá (Tơ-trá), Ca-dong, Hà-lăng, Châu, Ta Trẽ (Tà Trĩ)

**Population:** 97,000

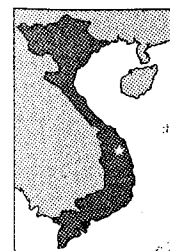
**Language:** Môn-Khmer

**Area of habitation:** Kontum, Quảng Nam, Quảng Ngãi provinces.

The Xơ-đăng are an indigenous people, some having settled in Cambodia and Laos. According to oral tradition, in the past, the Xơ-đăng inhabited in a region further to the north before moving to their present area of habitation.

**Material life**

The Xơ-đăng live in long large houses-on-stilts made of wood or bamboo, with rectangular thatched roofs. The floor is about one metre above the ground. The principal door opens upwards like a blind window, in the centre of the front of the house. There is an elevated drying yard outside



MÔN-KHMER GROUP

the door. The ladder to the door is a tree trunk with steps cut into it. Houses are built around a communal house located in the middle of the village. Men wear loincloths and turbans on their heads, with the ends of the turbans touching down to their necks. When it is cold, they keep themselves warm with blankets. Women wear pagnes, often high enough to cover their chests. They also leave the upper part of their bodies naked at times, but wear short vests when it is cold. Only ten years ago women dressed like men.

The *Xơ-dăng* mainly practise swidden cultivation, except those who settled in the Eastern area and now cultivate rice-fields. It should be noted that the *Mơ-nâm* are not familiar with swidden farming and they practise "cultivation by fire and water". Their work involves mainly turning over the soil with hoes, then having it trampled by buffaloes after watering with gutters and rudimentary "barrages", which are sometimes just a rock placed in the middle of the stream to divert the flow. Rice-growing in submerged fields has been developing among the *Xơ-dăng* for some time.

Horticulture plays an important role, having a wide range of extensively cultivated species and constituting a major source of food. It also reduces the time spent on food-gathering. Livestock-raising is also well-developed, with sizeable herds of cattle. Hunting remains however, a popular occupation which provides some variation in the people's daily diet.

Handicrafts are rudimentary. Woven cloth and bamboo objects are intended primarily for family use. Only the *Tơ-drá* group has skilled blacksmiths thanks to the ores available in the locality. And they can produce even steel. In general, 40 to 50 villages of the *Tơ-drá* have 60-70 forges which turn out farming implements to meet local requirements and large inter-regional markets.

There is practically no trade. Barter is an essential form of exchange.

## Social and family relationships

At the end of the 19th century, when social classes were appearing in *Xơ-dăng* community, foreign invasions upset the traditional organization of society. The unit of settlement was the village (*ploi*), a population centre

comprising many houses and comparable to the hamlet of the Việt. Granaries, water storage facilities, the communal house, cemetery, hunting areas, and sections of rivers or streams were also part of the village. A village was generally surrounded by forest and is separated from neighbouring villages by a kind of no-man's land which belonged to no one.

The *ploi*, or at least the residential area, was protected by a hedge riddled with traps, spears, stakes, and with only one entry gate. Adults were grouped into military units. Unmarried young men often stayed in the communal house with their arms, always ready to fight and defend the village against enemy attack.

The village chief and the council of elders settle all village affairs in accordance with custom based on the principle of democratic centralism. In the case of an important matter, a meeting of all villagers, both male and female, is held to discuss it to reach unanimity in the decision. The village chief is entrusted with the task of taking charge of the implementation.

Members of the village have the right to ownership and utilisation of slash-and-burn land, and arable gardens and ricefields – following the principle "each person has the right to enjoy the fruits of their labour". Ricefields are in any case negotiable among the members of the same village; anyone who leaves the village must give back all their land, for the right to ownership is granted only to the members of the community.

In the village, the rich, poor, and very poor co-habit on an equal footing. Labour exploitation does not exist; loans are granted without interest, and daily workers earn reasonable wages. The rich are respected as they have a considerable labour force and can conduct frequent ceremonies of sacrifices and organize feasts for the whole village. On these occasions, the rich families hold a display of their gongs, jars, buffaloes and so on. They also have servants and slaves who are, however, treated as members of the family. And, when old enough and having the required aptitude, the latter may themselves become village chiefs or military commanders.

In inter-village relations, equality prevails. Whether rich or poor, large or small, one village never imposes its will on others and never wipes out either friendly or enemy villages. Inter-village wars were frequent in *Xơ-dăng* society in the past and almost caused the disintegration of the early com-

munity. Wars were further aggravated by the trade in slaves, which was practised by the Siamese. In fact, these wars were motivated at the beginning by a "spiritual" need – the need to capture a prisoner and make him a sacrifice to the genies in the hope of achieving prosperity and health. Gradually they acquired a more mercantile purpose: to take more prisoners for cross-border sale. Those bloody conflicts could eradicate hundreds of village names during about 100 years.

In the village, each long house is intended for an extended family, (sometimes, including several generations). There may be parents on the both sides, widows, orphans, swear-bound "brothers" and old friends. The family head is designated as "chief of the roof" (or of the house). Small families living under the same roof work together and enjoy together the fruit of their labour. Paddy is kept in a common pool, then distributed to families according to their needs. Besides such provisions and animals reared jointly by the community, each family has small livestock and a plot of land in the garden or of slash-and-burn land cultivated mainly for daily necessities. The nuclear family may leave the extended one to form a household.

The *Xơ-dăng* family is bilinear, a form of family organization characterized by the absence of a family name. A *Xơ-dăng* proper name consists of only one word with a prefix indicating the sex (*A* for men, *Y* for women). Among the *Ca-dong* in Sa Thầy, marriage is forbidden between people observing the same taboo.

Equality between men and women is respected. Likewise, there is no distinction between the children of a couple and step-children, between the children of a family and adopted children, or between boy cousins and girl cousins. Fraternization through swearing is a common custom of namesakes, of the people of the same age, or in the same situation. The persons concerned consider themselves brothers of the same bloodline and marriage between their descendants is prohibited.

The matrimonial tradition of the *Xơ-dăng* reflects the change from the dual to the triple matrimonial system. Young people of the same generation and are not descended from the same ancestor can marry each other. They form the *nhong oh* or *dá oh* (matrimonial groups) and consider themselves "brothers and sisters". Two allied families are inclined to strengthen their

ties with other unions, which leads to frequent marriages by exchange, unless they are not earnestly desired. On the other hand, if two or more families have matrimonial relations with a third one, marriage between their descendants is forbidden. Due to the small population of each village and the fact that each family is often allied to several others (obligations required by custom arise therefrom), it happens that a young man or woman can remain single until 30 or 40 years of age. Here, we can see another motive for inter-village coupling which allows matrimonial exchanges.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The spiritual life of the *Xơ-dăng* adheres to the cycle of agricultural production. Rituals of a religious nature are concentrated in two periods: the time of land working and allotment of slash-and-burn land, and harvest time. Other ceremonies and festivities such as weddings, construction of a new house, sacrificing of a buffalo and so on are held during the two months between two agricultural cycles. The annual rituals of the cult of Mother Rice are observed by the chief of the roof.

The idea of a God-Creator does not exist among the *Xơ-dăng*. However, they believe in the existence of genies, who perform each specific function. The importance of the functions varies but they are independent from one another. Other customs stem from superstition: abandonment of graves, allocation of property to the dead, outdoor childbirth and others.

The artistic and literary heritage of the *Xơ-dăng* is abundant. The oral literary traditions have been published in collections while folk songs and dances have been brought to the stage. During festivities, various games and entertainments take place.





"Nô" - a weapon for hunting

## Hrê

▣ **Denomination:** Hrê.

*Other names:* Mọi Đá Vách, Chăm-rê, Mọi Luỹ, Thạch Bích, Mọi Sơn Phòng.

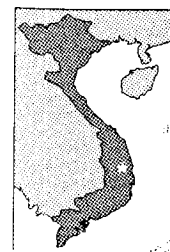
▣ **Population:** Over 94,000

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Quảng Ngãi and Bình Định provinces

### ▣ **Material life**

The *Hrê* live in houses-on-stilts, the floors being about 1m above the ground. The stilts made of wood are roughly cut and planted directly in the ground. Each end of the top of the house is decorated with a *kì nê*m (horns of the house) which is actually an extension of the main rafter. The house is divided into three parts: the left-hand section is reserved for men and also serves as a sitting-room (called *inh chin*). Eating and other family activities such as basket making, knife-sharpening and so on take place there. The right-hand section (*inh doong*) is reserved for women and housework. Different ladders lead to the *inh chin* and the *inh doong* which often have no walls but are separated



MÔN-KHMER GROUP



from the central part or interior of the house *ta nê*m by partitions with communicating doors (*măk*) through the middle. In the *ta nê*m, the hearth, the mortar for rice-husking and the family's other property are kept. It is also the common bedroom for all the family members.

The garments of the *Hrê* (ornaments included) are reminiscent of those of their neighbouring groups except for women's headgear and skirts. *Hrê* women cover their heads with white kerchiefs in the *Chăm* manner. They wear dark indigo skirts with very detailed embroidered decorations. The skirt is made of two strips of cloth sewn together lengthwise. The horizontal seam rounds the legs, making it look as if they wore two overlapping skirts.

The staple food of the *Hrê* is rice grown with the same techniques and tools as the *Việt* on the plains. They also practise slash-and-burn cultivation, fishing, animal husbandry, fruit gathering, hunting, basketry and weaving. They adopted a sedentary lifestyle very early.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

The village of the *Hrê*, an autonomous social unit, is important, and sometimes includes up to 100 families. The village chief, elected by the villagers, must be of a certain age, and have not only the required moral virtues but also the necessary knowledge and considerable wealth. In all villages, one can find a fortune-teller who takes charge of the performance of rituals and ceremonies, a reconciliation judge responsible for the settlement of disputes within the community and external relations, plus a number of courageous and strong young people skilled in handling traditional weapons for village defence.

The village controls fallow lands, forests, rivers, roads, sand dunes and water sources. Private property is a well-accepted concept. The purchase and sale of fields and slash-and-burn land takes place among the inhabitants of the village and with strangers.

Social differentiation is clearly seen among the *Hrê*, creating more or less separate strata: the *proong* or *kan* are rich, the *láp ká* have an easy life, the *pa* are poor, and the *poong* or *đích* are insolvent debtors obliged to work for their creditors; the *proong* and *láp ká* possess servants and exploit them.

In *Hrê* society, the nuclear family is becoming more popular, but vestiges of the extended family still remain and the change to patrilineage is not yet complete, which is evident from various aspects of family life. Parents are treated on the same footing whether they are on the paternal or maternal side. When the inherited property is divided, no account is taken of the sex of the children, but a larger share is allocated to the child who takes care of the parents (generally the youngest). After marriage, a young couple can live with either the husband's or wife's family, unless they prefer to have their own separate home. It should be noted that patrilocality (at least during the first years after marriage) is becoming more popular. The *Hrê* are monogamous. Adultery, incest, divorce and so on are condemned by customs which, instead, encourage leviratical and sororatical practices. Early marriage, very common in the past, has now yet been abandoned. The *Hrê* accept inter-marriage with other ethnic groups. For them, marriage never has the nature of a purchase as with some other ethnic groups. The role of the go-between is very important in marriage, although young people prefer now to choose for themselves their future partners, generally with the concurrence of their parents. The wedding ceremony is held either at the bride's and the bridegroom's (for convenience) with the ritual of tying a thread round the heads of the couple, which is believed to be able to cement their union. The exchange of a betel quid and a bowl of alcohol by the young couple in the presence of the two families has the same significance.

## ▣ Spiritual life

*Ka chôi* and *ka lêu* are two popular tunes that the *Hrê* sing during both leisure and work, or at meetings between young men and women. They sometimes have a moral content. *Hrê* musical instruments include drums, string instruments, the longitudinal flute (*taliá*), the transversal flute (*linglá*), the *khên ravai*, the *Hrê* harp *ràng ngói*, the *bhút* (a dual bamboo tube which is sounded with the air produced by hands clapping), and the *ching kala* (literally meaning a bamboo gong) which gives metallic sounds.

The *Hrê* have a long history of patriotic struggle. They participated in the Tây Sơn movement (late 18th century), and in the anti-colonialist resistance (late 19th century). The Ba Tơ uprising, an important stage in the Vietnamese revolution took place on the *Hrê* territory.

The *Hrê* entrust supernatural forces with the protection against calamities and epidemics, and offer them sacrifices for this purpose. They also rely on the ancestors and genies, and perform the rituals of praying for good harvests, peace and prosperity.



Drinking *cần* alcohol

## Cơ-ho

▣ **Denomination:** Cơ-ho

▣ **Small local groups:** Xrê, Nốp (Tu Nốp), Cơ-don, Chil, Tơ-ring, Lát (Lách)

▣ **Population:** over 92,000

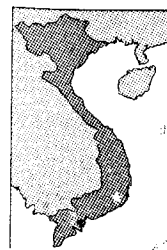
▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mainly the highland of Lâm Đồng and several other areas of Bình Thuận, Ninh Thuận and Khánh Hoà provinces.

The *Cơ-ho* settled long ago in their present area of habitation and they have close historical relations with other ethnic groups speaking Malayo-Polynesian languages - the *Chăm*, *Chu-ru*, *Ra-glai* and others. The traces of *Cơ-ho* habitation are found along National Road No 20, from the Bảo Lộc to Di Linh plateaux, then on the slopes leading to the Lang Biang plateaux.

▣ **Material life**

The *Cơ-ho* house is rectangular, built on stilts and inhabited by a large family. Some are 20-30m long and 3-3.5m wide with floors 1-1.5m above



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the ground. The framework is made of wood, the roof of thatch, partitions and walls of bamboo, and the floor of flattened bamboo. It is held together in an upright position thanks to bolts and ties. The *Xrê* have recently adopted new techniques of assembly, nailing, and bolting; they also use tenons and mortise joints. Of late, houses made of bricks, roofed with corrugated iron-sheets or with tiles and built level with the ground have come into being.

Cơ-ho women wear pagnes and have very tight, short vests on like a pullover; as jewellery, they wear earrings, earlobe rings, bracelets and copper or tin necklaces. Glass bead necklaces and ivory pieces (sometimes quite large) cut into earlobe rings are also popular.

Men wear loincloths and long vests reaching down to mid-thigh which they slip on over the head. In summer, they leave their torso naked, in winter they cover themselves with blankets.

The Cơ-ho cultivate rice on slash-and-burn land, (one harvest per year), using traditional techniques – clearing the land, burning the bushes, and putting seeds into holes. After two harvests, the land is left fallow for ten years. The cultivation of rice in submerged fields is common among the *Xrê* and the *Lách*. The latter has a system of canals and ditches to bring water to the fields which they look after carefully. They also use the method of “direct sowing”, the seeds being scattered directly onto the fields without passing by the seedbeds and without the need for transplanting. The *Chil* lead a nomadic life and practise swidden farming. But they have begun to gradually adopt the sedentary or semi-sedentary mode of life thanks to their cultivating submerged fields. The Cơ-ho who follow slash-and-burn farming, pick the ears of paddy with their hands while those who cultivate fields cut them with sickles and beat them on the spot.

In many localities, the Cơ-ho have succeeded in swidden farming, cultivating several successive crops. Meanwhile, the *Mạ*, for instance, have to prepare new cultivable land every year. Harrows have been introduced in some places instead of clearing land by burning. This shows that the Cơ-ho are accepting the method of dry-crop cultivation.

Gathered forest products constitute a good source of income, in addition to hunting and fishing as the main ways of supplementing the people's diet. Gardening is not a strong point of the Cơ-ho.

Besides rice, corn, beans, gourds and watermelons, cotton and tobacco are also grown; such fruit trees as papaya, banana, jackfruit and pineapple are becoming more common.

Cottage industry (basketry, weaving and so on) keeps the Cơ-ho busy during the intervals of the agricultural cycle. Pottery has reached a remarkable level of technical development among the *Xrê*, while the *Nốp* offer excellent blacksmiths.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

The *Chil* often live in small groups on mountain slopes; each group is composed of families bound by matrilineal ties. Several groups form a *bon* (village). The *Xrê* and *Lách* are rice growers and live in fixed areas of habitation in relatively stable villages on the Di Linh and the Lang Biang plateaux. Most Cơ-ho villages are neighbour communities.

A long house is shared by an extended family which includes several nuclear ones. Each of the latter has its own production equipment, land and rice granaries, but these are all under the authority of an elderly person known as the *kun pang*. The long house is the basic unit of organization of the traditional society.

The head of *bon* is a *kuang bon* (elected by the council of *kun pang*) who handles all village affairs. The colonial administration made good use of this traditional social organization: the *kuang bon* (renamed the *khoa bon*) was put in charge of tax collection of corvée.

Relations between the nuclear families living under the same roof are governed by the spirit of community. Even when the stores of grain are kept separately, any family member may always have access to any of them.

The *Xrê*, *Nốp* and *Chil*, maintain a direct line of communication; the right to private property is given according to considerations which helps the rise of social differentiation.

When a young Cơ-ho girl has found the man she wants to marry, she informs her parents of the fact. The latter call on a go-between without forgetting to obtain the agreement of the maternal uncle. A copper bracelet and a glass bead necklace are offered to the family of the young man at the mar-

riage proposal ceremony. The acceptance of these offerings is synonymous with agreement. After the wedding, the bridegroom stays with his wife's family whose name will be given to their children. If the wife dies young, the husband may take her younger sister in replacement, not necessarily waiting until the end of the mourning period.

The body of the deceased member of the family is washed and put in a coffin – a hollowed-out tree trunk. It is kept in the house for a few days with rice as offering and then is transported into the forest for burial. The defunct of the same family are often buried in a large common grave. Five or six years after the burial, the ritual of “grave abandoning” is conducted and a funeral house is built atop the mound.

## ☐ Spiritual life

The *Cơ-ho* are animists who believe in the existence of *Nđư*, both the God Creator of the universe and the protector of human beings. Under him is the whole pantheon of *yang* genies, each of them representing a natural force or object (the sun, the moon, mountains, rice-wine jars and rice stores, etc.). Each *Cơ-ho* family choses a *yang* for worshipping as its guardian genie. The *Cơ-ho* also practise the cult of ancestors whose spirits are represented by a finely carved board, (*cơ-nao*) placed above the entrance door to the house. In colonial times, many *Cơ-ho* living in or near urban areas were converted to Catholicism or Protestantism, but they did not completely renounce their ancient beliefs.

The Catholic missionaries invented a romanised *Cơ-ho* script to facilitate their evangelization as early as the beginning of the 20th century. But their impact on the masses was insignificant. Orally transmitted from generation to generation, the folk culture of the *Cơ-ho* has been preserved to date. Particularly, the lyrical poems *tam pla*, are very famous for the internal music of their verses. Moreover, the *Cơ-ho* are one of the ethnic groups in the Vietnam's Western plateaux, whose traditional dances are an integral part of their rituals and ceremonies. Their musical instruments include copper gongs, trumpets, bamboo flutes, buffalo horns, and stringed instruments.



Old woman carrying a rake to the *rây*

## Mnông

▣ **Denomination:** Mnông

▣ **Small local groups:** Gar, Nong, Chil, Kuênh, Đíp, Biêt, Prâng, Preh, Rlâm, Si-tô, Bu-dâng, Bu-Đêh

▣ **Population:** 67,000

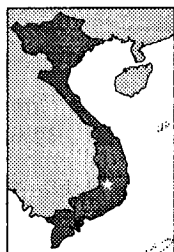
▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Đắc Lắc and Lâm Đồng provinces. The *Mnông* settled very early in the Tây Nguyên Highland. Their congeners also live in Cambodia.

### ▣ Material life

The *Mnông* village is generally established at the foot of a mountain, by a river, a stream, or a lake which supplies water for daily use.

Many *Mnông* groups live in houses built level with the ground (the *Nông*, *Gar*, *Prâng*, *Preh* and *Si-tô*) and retain a great many traditional characteristics. Meanwhile, the houses-on-stilts of the *Rlâm* and the *Chil* are more or less faithful reproductions of those of the *Ê-đê*, their closest neighbours. The interior arrangement is also the same.



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In general, the *Mnông* house is mostly 20 to 30m (sometimes, 40m) long. Houses built level with the ground are wider, with the entrance door in the longest side. Houses-on-stilts are longer; the entrance and exit doors opening to the front.

Even in houses built level with the ground, the rice store is situated just above the hearth – place for family gatherings. The houses of the *Mnông Gar* have thatched roofs reaching almost to the ground, and vaulted doorways.

Until recently, the *Mnông* in remote regions still ate with hands, the food contained in bamboo tubes. Nowadays plates and bowls are widely used. At noon, the *Mnông Gar* eat rice cooked in earthen pots, generally with sour soup. When they are working on milpas, this soup is carried with them in gourds. Their ordinary diet includes salt, dried fish, small game and all kinds of wild vegetables. They rear certain animals (buffaloes, pigs, chickens and ducks) but mainly, the sacrifice-making purpose.

Alcohol is a drink of primary necessity. Tobacco is also smoked widely.

The *Mnông* have their incisors filed and their earlobes stretched for wearing ornaments, (mortar-shaped objects made of ivory; short pieces of shiny yellow bamboo, pieces of valuable wood, and so on). They also have their teeth painted black for chewing betel.

*Mnông* men generally wear loincloths and leave their upper torso naked; women wear capes which reach down to their ankles. For both men and women, vests are slipped on like pullovers, but those worn by men fall to mid-thighs while those worn by women are short and well-fitting. Loincloths and vests are made of bands all embroidered or woven in traditional patterns on a dark indigo background.

The *Mnông* are fond of jewellery: necklaces, earrings and bracelets made of copper, tin or silver. Women particularly like necklaces of glass beads. The copper bracelets seen on the wrists of almost all *Mnông* are reminders of the ritual of sacrifice or swear-bound friendship. Sometimes, they symbolize a prayer to a genie or a promise between lovers. The back-basket carried everywhere by the *Mnông*, whether going to work or visiting friends, contains everything they need. Buffaloes are used as draught-animals; in some richer families, elephants and horses are employed instead. Pirogues constitute to be the only means of transport on rivers and streams which are often abundant in rapids.

The *Mnông* are also those high-landers who use hoes for agricultural production. The slash-and-burn method is predominant in their farming. Submerged fields are cultivated only by people living near rivers, streams, and lakes. Sticky rice is rarely grown whereas the staple food is ordinary rice. Corn, sweet potatoes and cassava are grown as subsidiary crops.

Living in a region of basaltic soil, the *Mnông* create milpas on hills-lobes or at the foot of mountains. These "sloping" clearings require less preparation for cultivation than those on level terrain.

Each year, the choice of land for cultivation is decided by the village chief and also by the heads of family.

After turning up the soil and burning off the grass, the *Mnông* put seeds into the holes and pray for propitious weather. Since there is plenty of land and the population is small, the *Mnông* are in the main self-sufficient in food.

Agricultural implements are few, including the *viêh* (long curved knife) for cutting grass, the axe for felling trees, the hoe with a convex edge for turning up the soil, the iron-tipped stick for digging holes, the rake for uprooting weeds, and the sickle for harvesting. Seeds are kept in large bamboo tubes. The ears of paddy are picked by hands and the grain stored in the house, the yard, or on milpas. The *Mnông* make maximum use of buffaloes not as draught-animals but to tread the soil in submerged fields before transplanting. Seed beds are prepared one month before transplanting; the pruning of rice plants to stimulate growth is still an unfamiliar technique.

On milpas, paddy is grown in rotation with corn, sweet potatoes, gourds, and watermelons.

Each village works certain areas of land within its boundaries. Handicrafts are not well-developed, intended chiefly for family needs. The *Mnông* are real artists in weaving, embroidery, the printing of decorative patterns on cloth, basketry and some others. Iron-work serves to produce agricultural implements.

The hunting and domestication of elephants is well-developed among the *Mnông*, especially in Easúp and Bả Đôn, for ivory transportation and trade.

Until very recently, the principal mode of trade of the *Mnông* in the areas far away from communication routes had been barter.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

*Mnông* society is still matrilineal in many aspects. After marriage, the married couple can live with the husband's or wife's family, however, matrilocality is preferable. The side which receives the couple after their wedding must incur the greater part of the cost of the marriage. Children take the family name of the mother. Vestiges of levirate and sororate can still be seen. The nucleus of society is the family or the matrilineal family commune. Its members belong to two or three (rarely more than three) clans and form what is known as a "community of neighbours". The village chief is called *Rnút* who handles all community affairs. The village has its water source, cemetery, arable land and residential area.

The process of differentiation between the rich and the poor has begun. But no sign of exploitation has as yet been recorded.

The dead are buried. The coffin has the approximate shape of a buffalo. The *Mnông* do not organize funerals and they abandon the graves one year after the burial. They build a funeral house on the mound and decorate it with carved wooden figures or varied patterns painted in black, red or white.

## ▣ Spritual life

The *Mnông* believe in deities which are generally associated with agriculture. They also worship the elephant genie, but the "Mother of Rice" remains the most often invoked deity.

The life and sentiments of the *Mnông* are vividly reflected in the rich treasure of tales, proverbs, folk songs and traditional music. The musical instruments are mostly made of bamboo with varied designs showing great artistic skill. Other instruments include sets of gongs, and large skin drums. The famous lithophone discovered in 1949 on the Đắc Lắc plateau in a *Mnông* village is considered as a valued property.

The *Mnông* are characterized by their desire for independence which is clearly demonstrated in the resistant wars against foreign invasion.



Domesticated elephants used as means of transport.  
Pole for tying the sacrificial buffalo

## Xtiêng

**Denomination:** *Xtiêng*.

**Other names:** Xa-diêng, Tà-mun, Mọi

**Population:** Over 50,000

**Language:** Môn-Khmer

**Area of habitation:** Mainly in Phước Long, Bình Long, Đồng Phú districts, Bình Phước province. A small number live in Lâm Đồng province. The *Xiêng* are considered as indigenous to these regions and as possibly having the same origin as the *Mnông*.

### Material life

The traditional house of the *Xiêng* is long, built level with the ground, and shared by an extended family or several small families (a family commune). Rice stores are set up on the floor. The main door is on one of the lateral sides of the house, and another vaulted one is at the front. The house is covered on all sides by horizontally-arranged reeds, and looks like a large cage. The dual-framed thatched roof reaches down to 40 cm above the ground. The length of the house



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depends on the number of families: 30-40 m for three to four. House 50-60 m long with five to six families have become rare.

*Xiêng* men wear loincloths and women pagnes. They leave the upper torso naked. In cold seasons, they cover themselves with blankets. It should be noted that before the pagne was introduced, women had also worn, loincloths. Some of them covered their upper torso with vests slipped on over the head like pullovers and falling to their waist.

On solemn occasions, men of a certain rank wear vests with four long flaps reaching to the mid-thigh and slipped on over the head.

Over the last few decades, due to frequent contacts with other ethnic groups especially with the *Việt*, *Xiêng* attire has undergone major changes.

Teeth filing and earlobe stretching are a common custom of the *Xiêng*. Teeth filed back almost as far as the gums, and earlobes almost touching shoulders are indications of the "noble" background worthy of respect by other people. Other ornaments such as glass bead necklaces, copper bracelets, and body tattooing were formerly very popular.

The economy of the *Xiêng* is mainly based on the cultivation of ordinary rice on milpas which is abandoned after a few years. The farming methods, production cycles, and agricultural tools are similar to those of the neighbouring ethnic groups such as the *Mạ*, *Mnông* and *Cơ-ho*. The *Xiêng* practise multiple-cropping on their swidden land; sesame is sown at the same time as paddy. Corn, sometimes melons, pumpkins, gourds and beans are also grown. Fallowed milpas are cultivated again after nine to ten years. Sweet potatoes, cassava and other tuber plants often help the population overcome food shortages in the interval between two harvests.

The *Xiêng* go hunting and gathering for supplementary foods as rice production is difficult and largely dependent on natural conditions. The *Xiêng* are masters in the art of fishing and hunting. Fishing is an intensive activity in the rainy season; fish are killed with knives or pointed sticks, or shot at with poisoned arrows. The *Xiêng* also catch fish by damming streams, using nets or traps, snares or poisoned arrows. Fruit gathering is an important activity between harvests.

The *Xiêng* do not breed a lot of animals. Pigs are the most popular; oxen, buffaloes are very rare. The majority of their poultry are chickens, which are used as sacrifices or food offered to guests.

Their only handicraft is basketry which provides them with items for daily use such as bags, baskets, fishing nets, etc.

The *Xiêng* are fond of alcohol which they produce by themselves.

## Social and family relationships

The nucleus of society for the *Xiêng* is the village, which is at the same time the basic unit of population.

Each village comprises a few long houses (never more than ten) occupied by families (*kắt*) with a population of up to 100. It has its own residential area and agricultural lands, including forests, mountains, streams and swamps, the boundaries of which are recognized and respected by neighbouring villages. The village land is considered as communal property.

Each small family represented by a hearth is an independent socio-economic unit; families sharing the same long house are bound by blood ties (on both the maternal and paternal sides); they make up an alliance. The head of each house is the oldest family member who is given the title "elder". He has an assistant, another member of the house, who should be a good orator and experienced in dealing with the community's affairs; and these capabilities qualify him to be a "knowledgeable" man in the house. The "elders" and "knowledgeable men" form a village council responsible for handling the community's affairs and electing the village chief (*tôm-bon*).

Among the *Xiêng*, whose economy is based on underdeveloped swift cultivation, social differentiation is only just beginning.

In the early 20th century, when conflicts among highland villages were common, there was a social stratum of slaves composed mainly of war prisoners, and those (in a small number) which were bought or transferred as payment of debts. They depended on their masters and were not allowed to leave the latter's family. They were, however, treated as equals by other members of the family. They worked according to their capacity, ate at the family table, and could get married and have children. They could be freed as soon as they had something to pay their masters. It, therefore, cannot be



said that they were exploited. Moreover, the conception of property of the *Xiêng* did not facilitate social differentiation. For them, property consists of gongs, earthen jars (for fermenting alcohol), oxen and buffaloes for sacrifices, elephants, slaves and children. Most of these things are considered as having no economic character and thus cannot be means of exploitation.

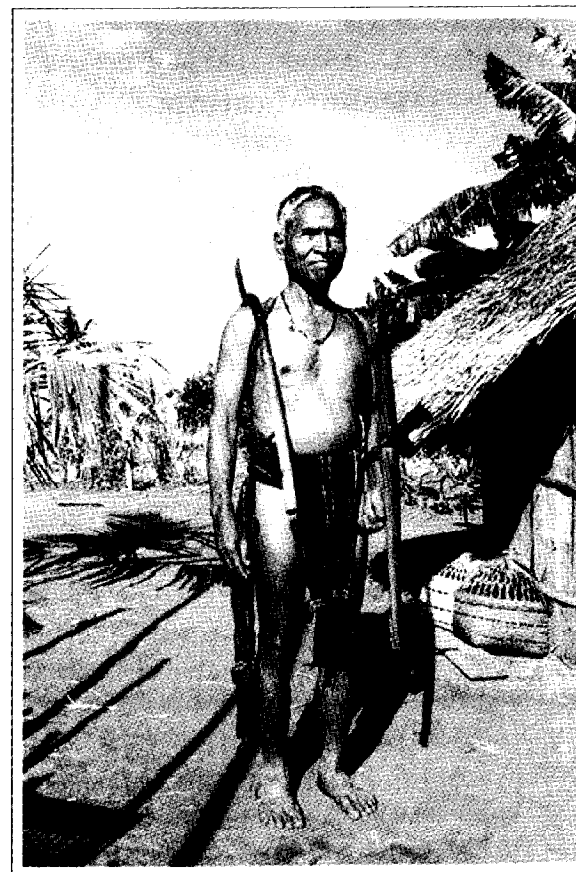
In principle, the *Xiêng* are monogamous but polygamy is acceptable. When a young man wants to get married, his family calls on an intermediary to ask for the hand of the chosen woman. After the wedding — the celebration of which is always accompanied with offerings to the bride's family, the bride goes to live at her husband's. It is customary that when a man dies, the widow will marry one of his brothers but not the eldest brother. If all of them are already married, she will become the concubine of one of them.

The grave of the *Xiêng* is decorated with a funeral house containing those items believed to be needed by the deceased as part of the family inheritance. Some of these objects are burnt but not regarded as votive offerings. Possible, the *Xiêng* wish to show that these objects have been definitively offered to the dead and thus they belong to the other world.

## Spiritual life

*Xiêng's* primitive animist beliefs are still widespread. The *Xiêng* believe in the existence of deities, genies and spirits, which is manifested in annual rituals and the observance of some taboos. Perhaps owing to the influence of the Khmer, the *Xiêng* also worship the guardian genie (*Néak tà* or *Nét tà*) whose effigy, often made of wood, is put in the small temple built outside the village or in the forest near the residential area. The cult of *Néak tà* is somewhat comparable to that of the God of Soil of the *Việt*. The worship rituals are conducted every year on the onset of the rainy season. Family heads bring offerings to the temple and, after the ceremony, organize a feast on the spot, believing that the *Néak tà* will be satisfied and give them a year of peace and prosperity.

The *Xiêng* think that some persons may be haunted by spirits; bloodshed conflicts sometimes take place as the consequence of this superstition.



Tools for working in forest

## Khơ-mú

▣ **Denomination:** *Khơ-mú*.

**Other names:** Xá Cầu, Khá Klậu, Tênh, Pu Thênh, Tày Hạy, Việt Cang.

▣ **Small local group:** Quảng Lâm

▣ **Population:** 43,000

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Along the Vietnam-Laos borders in Lai Châu, Nghệ An and Sơn La provinces. Some have settled in Văn Chấn (Yên Bái). Their fellow countrymen live in number in Laos, forming the group *Lào Thênh*.

### ▣ Material life

The *Khơ-mú* practise shifting cultivation. Their villages and hamlets are, therefore, generally quite small, and the houses temporary and rudimentary. Their house-on-stilts has a frame made of bamboo or small pieces of wood. The floor is one metre above the ground and made of flattened bamboo stems. The roof is thatched. Bamboo is grown around the house. These dwelling houses are



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dismantled every three or four years and moved to other places whenever the milpas have become exhausted.

The *Khơ-mú* grow cotton and weave cloth intended for garments, using rudimentary looms. They can only produce a kind of cloth, narrow and just enough to make loin cloths for men and slings carried across the back as bags. This cloth is exchanged for wider fabric woven by the *Thái* and used for skirts and vests. Nowadays, *Khơ-mú* men have adopted long trousers and short vests open at the front and fastened with finely carved silver buttons. A square cape covers the head and falls to their shoulders. They wear silver earrings and often necklaces made of shells.

The *Khơ-mú* have an agricultural calendar based on the phases of the moon. This calendar is two months ahead of the *Việt* lunar-solar calendar. According to this calendar, the working year ends in the first month after harvest. During the following months, festivals are held, houses repaired and family affairs settled.

Living on mountain slopes, the *Khơ-mú* clear the terrain and prepare milpas, not preoccupation with slopes or altitudes. The cycle of cultivation is strictly planned. The soil that rapidly loses its fertility has to be left fallow after one or two harvests. Agricultural implements are rudimentary, the work is strenuous and output variable. Farming can supply food for six to nine months only. Therefore, hunting and gathering are needed to ensure daily survival needs.

Shifting cultivation forces the *Khơ-mú* to undertake frequent house removals.

They have passed through three stages of socio-economic development:

- Nomadic lifestyle and shifting cultivation without any set cycle.
- Nomadic lifestyle and shifting cultivation but according to a closed cycle of 10 to 15 years, or semi-nomadic life and semi-shifting cultivation.
- Sedentary lifestyle but farming remains shifting because fields and milpas for intensive farming are still inadequate.

Given the continual removals, agricultural implements are rudimentary and handicrafts remain undeveloped. Basketry and food gathering allow the *Khơ-mú* to acquire daily necessities through exchange of goods: salt, cloth, ornaments and iron objects. These exchanges are a kind of barter and are generally to the disadvantage of the *Khơ-mú*. Banknotes have been used for

only a few decades. The shelles commonly used as money in the early history are now regarded as ornaments or charms. At the wedding ceremony, the family of the bridegroom must offer to that of the bride a certain quantity of this antique currency.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Before 1945, the social organization of the *Khơ-mú* depended on that of the *Thái*; families were not grouped into a *prông* (village) as in Laos but were associated with different *Mường* governed by a *nha Thái*. In *Tương Dương*, *Kỳ Sơn* and *Điện Biên* districts, there were *Khơ-mú* hamlets controlled by the *A nha Khơ-mú*, but remaining under the direct authority of the local landowners. The whole *Khơ-mú* ethnic group has thus assimilated as a stratum of the *Thái* peasantry: "dependent peasants" (*pụa*) who must (the hamlet being considered as a unit) perform *corvée* together and pay tribute to the overlords, suffering severe racial discrimination. In "autonomous" *Khơ-mú* hamlets, the representative who should handle daily affairs in accordance with customs and practices must be approved by the *Thái* overlord. Here, one can note a primitive accumulation of property concretized in buffaloes, gongs, jars, bronze drums and *shell money*. Mutual aid in work is a common practice within a hamlet or village.

The inhabitants of the village live in an atmosphere of concord, loyalty, and joy. The guest of one house is that of all the village.

Family names often represent animals, birds, plants, even objects, for instance *Rvai* (tiger), *Tmoong* (fox), *Ti ác* (deer), *Thrăng* (phoenix), *Ôm* (a kind of bird), *Rivi* (wagtail) or *Ôm lít praga* (lime spatula). Each lineage is divided into elder and younger branches, which can be viewed as a reflection of the division of tribes into clans. Matrimonial relations between clans are governed by principles which go back to the era of the triple alliance, marriage being performed from clan to clan in one way only.

Each lineage is composed of several nuclear families. Responsibilities are shared between the family members and work is divided according to sex. The head of the family represents it in external relations.

The principles governing marriage among the *Khơ-mú* are very strict. The young are "free" to choose their partners from a certain group. Monogamy is stringently observed. The wife has an equal standing as her husband, in spite of the shift from a matrilineal to patrilineal system. When the husband lives with his wife's family, he must take her family name but keeps his totem. Likewise, the child who lives in its mother's house takes the mother's family name, and will change it for the father's lineage name only when its parents set up a separate home. The wife who takes up residence at her husband's house adopts his family name but keeps her totem.

## ▣ Spiritual life

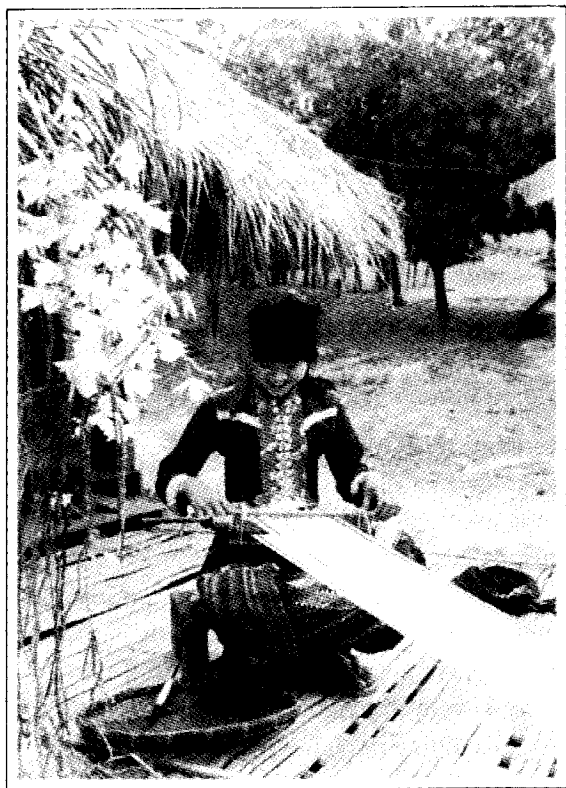
The *Khơ-mú* believe that their actions in daily life are controlled by supernatural forces (*hrôi* — spirits, deities). Notable are the *hrôi Ivang* (God of heaven), assisted by *chum drai* (God of thunder), *hrôi plê* (God of earth), *prư đồng* (water snake symbolizing the power of water) and *rvai* (tiger symbolising the power of forest).

Also significant are *hrôi ta dạ* (ancestors' spirits) and the *hrôi gang* (spirit of the house). They are benevolent forces protecting men but they can also get angry and punish them. Malevolent spirits are numerous and comparable to the *phi* of the *Thái*.

Vestiges of totemism are apparent in the *Khơ-mú* family names. Each lineage observes its specific rites of worshipping ancestors, including among others, the so-called ritual of imitation: the head of the family and his relatives reproduce a feat of their totems, to assert themselves as tigers, birds and so on. Vestiges of totemism are also found in the disguise as totems at the moment of presentation of offerings, in abstention from killing and eating the animal or plant which represent the totem, in myths about family names and their origin, and in the belief that man will return to his totemic state after death.

Living on rice cultivation, the *Khơ-mú* believe in the existence of the soul of rice symbolized by Mother-Rice which ensures the good growth of rice and bumper crops.

The *Khơ-mú* have a rich collection of myths about family names in relation with the history of the ethnic group in prehistoric times, and legends on the primitive man, which reflect their cosmogonic conception. Ancient tales tell of their fierce struggle against natural calamities and the yoke of the *Thái phỉa* and *tạo* for freedom and independence. The story of the Youngster *Lú* and the Spinster *Ưa* is a well-known *Khơ-mú* folk-tale. Many folk-songs have been published in Vietnamese translation.



Cloth-weaving

## Bru-Vân Kiều

▣ **Denomination:** *Bru-Vân Kiều*

▣ **Small local groups:** Bru, Vân Kiều, Măng Coong, Trì, Khùa.

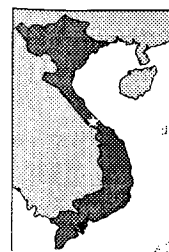
▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Population:** Over 40,000

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mainly in Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, Đắc Lắc provinces and in Laos

### ▣ **Material life**

The houses in a *Bru-Vân Kiều* village are arranged either along rivers and streams or in more or less regular circles around a communal house. They are built on stilts. Sometimes they have a four-sided roof, the lateral sides of which take the shape of a turtle carapace as in the houses of the *Cơ-tu* and *Giế-triêng* of Quảng Nam province. However, roofs with double slopes are far more common. A wooden bird or two crossed wooden pikes resembling two horns serve as an antefix. The interior design is the same in all houses. Each house is divided by partitions



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lengthwise into four compartments. The first compartment is used for receiving guests, containing the "sacred" column for ancestor worship; the second is reserved for the old members of the family; the third for young couples and their children, and the fourth is for storing wealth. Each house has only one hearth, but in winter, a second one is installed in the sitting room. Cotton growing and weaving are unknown to the *Bru-Vân Kiều*, who still use dyed fibres made from the crushed bark of the *sui* to make loin-cloths and vests for both men and women. However, they tend to be adopting the costume of the *Việt* or *Lào*.

The *Bru-Vân Kiều* retain the custom of painting their teeth. Even young boys and girls like to have their teeth filed and their faces tattooed. All women wear their hair in a knot; for young girls, the knot is on the left side, and for married women it is on the top of the head. Nowadays, women cover their heads with a square of white cloth.

Cultivating fields and slash-and-burn land is the principal mode of agriculture. Apart from those who live in the highland region of Quảng Trị where conditions are relatively favourable for wet-rice growing, the *Bru-Vân Kiều* are essentially swidden farmers. Nevertheless, techniques for the cultivation of rice in well-watered areas are relatively advanced in certain regions. Hunting and fishing are additional productive activities. Exchanges of goods take place mainly among co-villagers, in their homes. Some *Bru-Vân Kiều* have become truly traders who act as intermediaries between the plain and mountain regions.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

*Bru-Vân Kiều* society has experienced rather marked social differentiation. Landowners, besides their wealth, exercised a great deal of power because very often they assume the function of the chief of village or region, a function which, according to tradition, was handed down within the family, to a son or brother. They enjoyed many privileges and considered the region under their control to be their own real estate and the inhabitants their own people.

The *Bru-Vân Kiều* call their villages *vil*. Each *vil* has one or more *mu* (or *da* or *muí*), i.e. groups whose members come from the same paternal stock. These blood ties explain why the tradition of solidarity among the families of the same *mu* is always very strong, despite the increasing significance of neighbourliness.

The *Bru-Vân Kiều* family is small and patriarchal, where boys are given greater consideration; girls have no rights to inheritance or can receive only an insignificant part of it. Monogamy and patrilocality are firmly-established traditions. Young people who intend to get married meet one another in the communal house or in small huts built far from the village to express their affection and discuss their future. The family of the fiancé must meet the requirements of that of the fiancée with regard to wedding offerings, and even after the wedding ceremony. The bride becomes a member of her husband's *mu* only after an expensive ceremony (*takol*) whose costs are covered by the husband's family. During this ceremony, the offerings are presented to the bride's parents and to her uncle. It should be noted that the opinion of the latter and of the bride's brothers are decisive in concluding a marriage. The principle of the tribal triple alliance is absolute; if young men from *mu* A marry young women from *mu* B, then young men from *mu* B must marry young women from *mu* C. Levirate and sororate are accepted. Likewise are marriages between cousins, provided they are not first cousins.

### ▣ Spiritual life

Ancestor worship is the most important religious activity of the *Bru-Vân Kiều*. Each family has its own altar, and each lineage has a common altar. On the altar are displayed, for each of the dead, a fragment of a bowl, a fragment of a cooking pot, a tube of uncooked rice, a tube of water and a package of cooked rice. The spirits of the "wife's family", the deity of rice and others are also worshipped. Vestiges of totemism are still found; each *mu* has its taboos and its totem which may be an animal or plant (for instance, the squirrel, a tuber of sarsaparilla or a banana flower). There is some evidence of worshipping tutelary genie, gods of prosperity and of earth. Some people have converted to Buddhism.



The treasury of folk art and literature of the *Bru-Vân Kiều* is very rich. Musical instruments are numerous: drums, gongs, wind instruments (*amam*, *ta riền*, *pi* and *kho-lui*) and string instruments (*achung*, *pơ lư* and *ta lư*). Folk singing is popular, particularly alternate chants (*pro-giong*) between young men and women, and sung stories (*chà chấp*). The language of the *Bru-Vân Kiều* is full of images, proverbs and maxims. The abundant collection of legends and narratives reflects the conceptions of the *Bru-Vân Kiều* about the origins of mankind, customs and practices, and retraces the emigrations of the remote past.



Clothing made of bark

## Cơ-tu

▣ **Denomination:** *Cơ-tu*.

*Other names:* Cà-tu, Cao, Hạ, Ca-tang, Mọi

▣ **Small local groups:** Phương, Kan-tua

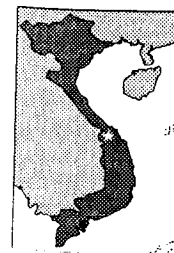
▣ **Population:** 37,000

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Hiên and Giàng districts (Quảng Nam province), Phú Lộc and A Lưới districts (Thừa Thiên- Huế province).

### ▣ Material life

*Cơ-tu* villages are located generally quite far from one another. The residential area is surrounded by a hedge with two gates. Houses built on flat land are arranged in the form of an ellipse. In the middle of the village is the communal house. It is this large building, which towers over all the other dwellings, that reception of guests, meetings, cultural performances, sacrifice rites, and displays of hunting trophies are held. It is also the place where the elders spend most of their time recounting their memories and making



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plaited baskets and boxes. *Cơ-tu* houses are on stilts like those of other ethnic groups living in the Trường Sơn range and on high plateaux. They are recognizable by the two lateral sides (out of four sides) that look like turtle carapaces.

Generally speaking, *Cơ-tu* attire is simple. Men wear loin-cloths and leave their upper torsos naked. But they are tending to adopt the *Việt* costume. Women wear long tube-shaped skirts that reach up to cover their chests. Patterned bands woven with red-coloured threads decorate the hems and stand out against the dark indigo back-ground of the cloth. A close fitting sleeveless vest, with a V-shaped collar completes a woman's costume. The *Cơ-tu* file their teeth, partly for cosmetic purposes, but also as evidence of maturity. They like ornaments. Especially, women are fond of glass-bead necklaces, bracelets, earrings and so on.

The *Cơ-tu* practise slash-and-burn cultivation. Besides rice (the staple food) they grow corn, beans, sweet potatoes, cassava, melons, other vegetables and bananas. After a harvest, the plot of land is left fallow; rotation is also practised. The techniques of slash-and-burn farming are virtually the same as those of the *Cơ-tu*'s neighbouring ethnic groups. For years now, famine has constantly threatened the survival of these people who live on shifting, unstable agriculture. That is why the *Cơ-tu* are now tending to adopt a sedentary lifestyle. About 10,000 *Cơ-tu* have settled permanently in Hiên district and 2,000 others in Giàng district. Here they have been acquainted with wet-rice cultivation using buffaloes, ploughs, new strains of seeds, fertilizers and small irrigational constructions. The per capita food production thereby can double that of slash-and-burn farming.

The *Cơ-tu* are also engaged in animal husbandry. The buffalo receives particular consideration; it is part of the heritage, the animal for the ritual of sacrifice, and the draught power in agriculture. Those who live on the Vietnam-Laos frontier grow jute and are skilled in weaving. The men are talented hunters, using crossbows (with poisoned arrows), spears and rifles. They show great skill in handling rudimentary weapons (traps, snares and poles). Food gathering and fishing are very common. Barter is the main form of goods exchange, but for some time now, the *Cơ-tu* have been accustomed to using money.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

The *Cơ-tu* village has well-defined boundaries. It is a community of neighbours with an autonomous administrative unit operating in accordance with traditional institutions. The village chief is selected from among the elderly the most capable of managing the community. Differentiation between the rich and poor is becoming obvious.

The patrilineal nature of *Cơ-tu* society is manifested in the role of men in marriage and family life. As marriage by purchase is a common practice, the rich often take several wives and choose them from among the young and beautiful women. Unions between cross-cousins are allowed. Levirate and sororate are compulsory. The exogamous union (*ca bu*) brings together people bound by common blood ties on the maternal side. Moreover, the choice of a husband or wife must be made only in one direction, in accordance with the principle of the tribal triple alliance.

The *Cơ-tu* live in the nuclear family of five to seven members on average. The father or eldest son holds all rights, including the right to the ownership of the family heritage. In certain localities, especially in highland regions, families composed of several generations with 15 to 20 members are fairly common. In these large families, production is joint work. But each couple with their children have their own home.

The members of a *ca bu* descended from a common ancestor are tightly bound to one another, even if they do not live in the same village. Placed under the authority of a common family head, they have the same family name related to a myth or a taboo connected with an animal or plant totem.

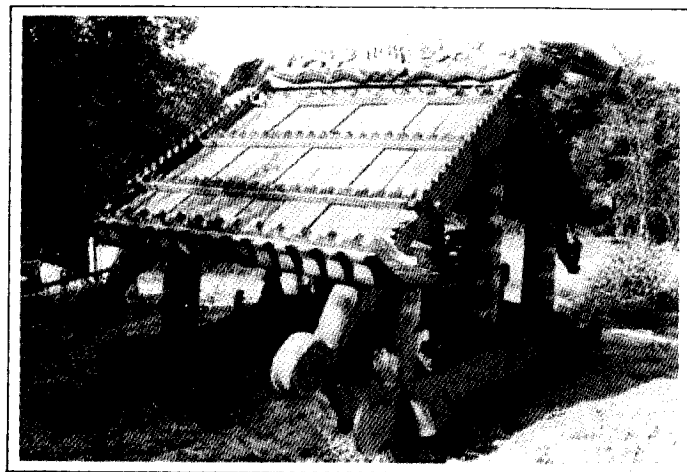
## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Cơ-tu* are animists. The impact of animist concepts on their daily life is obvious, particularly in the rites relating to the "soul" of rice, which occupy an important place in their religious activities. Until the 1950s' the *Cơ-tu* had practised human sacrifice in the rites of praying to deities for a good

harvest or for peace and happiness. The treasury of *Cơ-tu* popular knowledge is fairly rich, including medicine, astronomy and other sciences. The *Cơ-tu* agricultural calendar is based on the observations made over centuries in combination with the local climatic and soil conditions. This calendar built on the phases of the moon is very remarkable: the days when the moon has the same shape are given the same name. Folk art and literature is also abundant in genres. Many *Cơ-tu* tales have been collected and published. To express their feelings, young people sing the *tơ-len* (romance) while the *cơ-lau* (marching song) is intended to encourage people in struggle against enemies. *Cơ-tu* dances have recorded great success on the stage. Musical instruments are numerous, including gongs, guitars and flutes. The *Cơ-tu* are skilful builders, as evident from their communal houses, which are majestic and elegant structures, decorated in detail with animal motifs. Their talent is also manifested in the pikes used for the ritual of buffalo sacrificing, which can be seen in all villages. Their decorations reflect the bravery and sobriety of the *Cơ-tu*.

Also significant are *Cơ-tu* wood sculptures — lively figures which serve as ornaments for funeral houses.

A romanised script has been created recently for recording the *Cơ-tu* language.



Tomb-house

## Gié-Triêng

▣ **Denomination:** *Gié-Triêng*.

**Other names:** Brila, Cà-tang, Giang Rầy, Doãn, Mọi

▣ **Small local groups:** Triêng (Treng, Tơ-riêng), Gié (Dgiêh, Tareh), Ve (La-ve), Pa-noong (Bơ-noong)

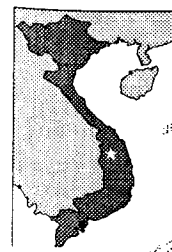
▣ **Population:** 27,000

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mainly in Đắc Glây district, Kon Tum province, and in Giăng and Phước Sơn districts, Quảng Nam province. The ancestors of the *Gié-Triêng* lived in the populous areas of Laos, and some time, in present-day Quảng Nam province. Then they emigrated to the basin of the Secamang (Laos) and finally settled in the northern part of Kon Tum province.

▣ **Material life**

The structure of the *Gié-Triêng* village exposes its clearly defensive nature. A solid hedge separates the residential area from the outside, and houses are arranged in a definite order. In the



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middle of the village is the communal house, the tallest building with its roof in the shape of a turtle carapace. The floor is 0.5 - 0.6m above the ground which is accessible by two ladders on the lateral sides of the house. A corridor, running from one end to the other, divides the house into two. One half is reserved for unmarried boys, the other for unmarried girls. The communal house also serves as the place for village meetings and receptions. The *Gié-Triêng* live in houses-on-stilts. It should be noted that only one of these houses may be enough to constitute a village. In this case, the house is made longer and is divided into several compartments, each for one family. However, the middle compartment is reserved for village gatherings and receiving guests. Such houses are found in Đắc Môn and Xóp Ngét (Đắc Glây district) and also in Phước Sơn.

*Gié-Triêng* men wear loincloths and cover themselves with blankets in cold weather. Women wear skirts that are long enough to cover their chest, like the *Cơ-tu*. Some have adopted bras sewn into their skirts. Young girls have hair cropped short and falling to their shoulders; when married, they plait it into a knot on the top of their heads, in accordance with Lào custom. The *Gié-Triêng* are fond of necklaces and other ornaments made of copper, silver, and glass-beads. Rich women prefer earrings made of ivory, like the *Brau* and *Gia Rai*.

Their economic activity is chiefly swidden farming. Until very recently, the *Gié-Triêng* have led a nomadic or semi-nomadic life. Besides rice, they grow corn, sweet potatoes, cassava, fruit trees and vegetables, generally in rotation. Food productivity is meagre and unstable, and therefore they have to undertake other activities such as food gathering, fishing and hunting for additional foodstuffs. Animals are raised to serve mainly religious purposes.

Every *Gié-Triêng* knows how to make objects from bamboo and rattan. The weaving of cotton or jute and metal work are less popular. The *Gié-Triêng* of Đắc Pét can extract gold by washing gold-bearing sand. Certain villages specialize in pottery, but the technique is still rudimentary. However, jars, cooking pots, and earthenware made in Đắc Lắc are used by all the population of Northern Kon Tum. Handicrafts and products of animal husbandry, agriculture and forestry are often exchanged for salt, matches, and iron items from the plain.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Social differentiation was only at its initial stage in *Gié-Triêng* traditional society. Four strata could be identified by the extent of wealth: the rich; those who had something to live on; the poor; the slaves who were either prisoners of war, purchased slaves, or those who had failed to pay debts, and helpless orphans.

One among the village founders or a man from a respected family is elected to handle the village's affairs. If conflicts are frequent, another man, the bravest one, will be chosen to act as the village's military chief. A few decades ago, strangers could be captured and used as sacrifices to genies. This practice was eliminated after the August 1945 Revolution which advocated the creation of solidarity among different ethnic groups. Thus the village gradually lost its defensive character.

The conception of lineage is well-established. Each lineage has a name which is always related to an animal or a plant, an object or a natural phenomenon. Moreover, it has its own history which often has a mythical character and is transmitted from generation to generation. We should note that there are vestiges of totemism, which are different for men and women.

Besides the nuclear family, the *Gié-Triêng* also live in the extended family. Life is organized in two distinctive ways; people live and work together but meals are taken either together or in the nuclear family. The head of each extended family is the oldest man; his wife, according to popular belief, maintains mystical relations with the "soul of rice". This couple decide on the expenditure and monitor the production work of the family, representing it in external relations. The division of work within each group is made according to age and sex.

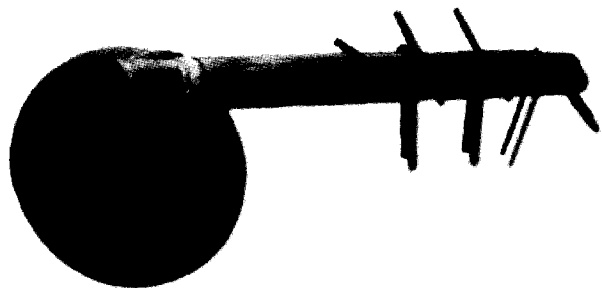
Marriage between people of the same lineage is strictly forbidden, but levirate and sororate are obligatory. The principles governing the choice in marriage are the same as those of the *Xơ-dăng*. The bilocality or plurilocality that prevailed in the past has gradually given way to either patrilocality or matrilocality, depending on convenience.

It is a matter of custom that women must give birth in a hut built by their husbands at the edge of the forest. After 10 days, the baby is brought home and a feast is held for recognizing the new family member. Some time later,

the ceremony *kít pot* (piercing earlobes) is conducted. Boys of 15-16 and girls of 13-14 years have their teeth filed and are then considered "full citizens" of the village.

## ☐ Spiritual life

For the *Gié-Triêng*, the soul of each person resides inside his/her ears. After death, it changes into a spirit which, in turn, is embodied in the bird *téc* or the bird *kìng kang* which flies to the forefathers in grottoes, the domain of the *Giăng*. That is why, when a person falls ill, the family organizes, without delay, a ceremony of invocation with large chickens or goats as sacrifices. Sorcery is a widespread practice. The *Gié-Triêng* observe many taboos and prohibitions and often act in accordance with good or bad omens. Their religious activities are related to agriculture and there is a whole series of rituals in the course of an agricultural cycle, from the choice of land to the harvest. The sacrifice of a buffalo every two or three years is also a rite of the cult of fertility. In the folk art and literature of the *Gié-Triêng*, songs hold an important place, with different genres (lullabies, eulogies, narratives, ritual and love songs). Ancient tales are numerous and rich in descriptive events. Musical instruments include gongs, drums, bamboo guitars and several others. The motifs for decorating coffins and mortars are realistic in their inspiration.



*Tinh-ninh* musical instrument, rattle for warding off beasts

## Ta-ôi

☐ **Denomination:** *Ta-ôi*.

**Other names:** *Tôi-ôi*, *Ta-ôi*h, *Tả-hoi*, *Tà-uất* (Atuất).

☐ **Small local groups:** *Pa-cô*, *Can-tua* and *Ba-hi*.

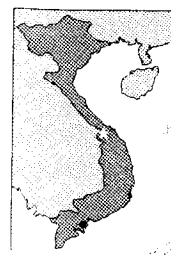
☐ **Population:** 26,000

☐ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

☐ **Area of habitation:** A Lưới district (Thừa Thiên-Huế province) and Hương Hóa district (Quảng Trị province). Some of their congeners also live in Laos.

## ☐ Material life

The Ta-ôi live in houses-on-stilts. Ten houses are grouped into a village called 'vel'. Each house is shared by a number of families; each of them has its own lifestyle. The village territory for the inhabitants to live and to work is delimited clearly. The communal house, built with the contributions from all the villagers, is the place for village meetings and for receiving guests passing by. Gongs, jars, and hunting trophies are exhibited there.



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Except for the *Can-tua*, the *Ta-ôi* do not know how to weave. They buy clothes from other ethnic groups and dress like the *Lào*. Custom dictates that young people, having come of age, file their teeth and wear heavy earrings to stretch the earlobes. Other ornaments (rings and necklaces) are also popular.

The *Ta-ôi* practise slash-and-burn farming and produce one crop per year. But the *Ba-hi* cultivate submerged ricefields. For some time now, the growing of wet rice has been rapidly developing. Besides rice as the staple food, corn, cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, tobacco and hemp are also planted. The farming implements are still rudimentary, and the techniques still unsophisticated. Cultivation depends largely on natural conditions and therefore, the yield is poor. Hunting, rather developed, is a common activity aimed at safeguarding crops and supplementing the daily diet. Formerly, the *Ta-ôi* used to hunt and domesticate even elephants. They exchange their produce (tobacco, hemp, and so on) for clothes and metal tools.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

Though not great, differentiation has come into view in *Ta-ôi* society. However, the spirit of mutual assistance within the community always prevails in village activities.

Vestiges of the triple alliance system are still visible in matrimonial relation, always established in a "one-way direction" as among the *Cơ-tu*. The exogamous group (called *yã*) bears the name of the totemic animal or plant and any aspersion on this totem is prohibited. Its members claim to have a common mythical or real ancestor. The *Ta-ôi* family is always united. It may be small or extended, comprising three or four generations who may live in the same village or scattered in several ones.

The maternal uncle is highly respected. He participates in the organization of the weddings of his nieces, offering food and drink, and providing the costume for the bride to wear at the ceremony. Above all, he is the guarantor of the alliance, and witness to the expenses incurred by the family of the bridegroom. He is the adviser to his nieces in family matters. The maternal uncle and his group also have to help his nephews. He often takes one

nephew as son-in-law by an alliance with his sister, and in such cases, he demands "a high price".

The power of the father in *Ta-ôi* society is obvious. However, women, who formerly were in an inferior position are now respected as the result of the changes in tradition. Nowadays, they take part in social activities on the same footing as men.

### ▣ Spiritual life

The system of beliefs of the *Ta-ôi* is absolutely identical to that of the *Bru-Vân Kiều* and the *Cơ-tu*.

The *Ta-ôi* have a series of songs called *oất*. They sing them to express their joys and sorrows and, to declare their love. The singing is accompanied with the *khèn* and wind instruments such as the *a mam* and the *a rui*, and the *ta-lư* zither. Their sets of gongs resemble those of the *Cơ-tu* but the manner of playing during the ceremony of buffalo sacrifice is quite different.



Making rattan wattle for house-roof



## Mạ

▣ **Denomination:** Mạ

▣ **Small local groups:** Châu Mạ, Chô Mạ, Mội

▣ **Population:** Over 25,000

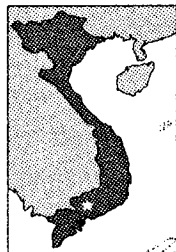
▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mainly in Lâm Đồng province. A number have settled in Đồng Nai province.

### ▣ **Material life**

The traditional dwelling of the Mạ is the long house-on stilts remarkable for its length. At the beginning of this century, houses some hundred metres long could still be found. But now the length is only several dozen metres, sometimes even less than ten. Houses built level with the ground and having four-sided roofs (similar to those of the *Việt*) are becoming wide-spread.

Mạ men and women dress like the *Mnông* and *Cơ-ho*. They file their teeth likewise and



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stretch earlobes to insert in each of them a large ivory ring or short piece of bamboo. Besides, women wear glass-bead necklaces and a pair of copper neckrings. Copper rings worn at the wrists and ankles are also popular.

The Mạ practise slash-and-burn farming which can meet totally their need for food whereas livestock rearing is under-developed. Milpas for the first year are devoted to rice growing only, but from the second year on they are considered as old land. They are exploited for cultivating rice a second time or subsidiary crops for a few more years, and then left fallow. Besides rice — mainly an ordinary variety called "mother rice" — sticky rice is grown on small unimportant plots; the Mạ also grow corn, melons, gourds, pumpkins, cotton, pepper and other crops.

The Mạ avoid clearing primitive forests which are considered as "sacred" or the seat of the God *K'Bông*, the creator of greenery, according to local belief.

Submerged fields account for a very small percentage of the cultivated land. Only low-lying land and submerged meadows in the rainy season are used for growing wet rice. The farming techniques are not very different from those used in the highlands. Everything is done by hand with rudimentary instruments: hoes, toothless rakes for levelling soil (instead of harrows). Then, the soil is left for water to evaporate, and cultivation is carried out as on milpas.

Each Mạ house has a garden where tobacco, jack-fruit, papaya and sugar cane are grown. Cotton, mulberry bush and Job's tears are less common. Coffee and tea have been introduced not long ago.

Animal husbandry is under-developed, although chickens, pigs, goats and buffaloes are raised. Oxen are bred only for the ritual of sacrifice. Some families possess horses and each village keeps some elephants for transporting heavy loads.

Handicraft is a family job, especially basketry and weaving. Textile products testify to the existence of sophisticated weaving techniques as evident from the cloth with decorative patterns. In many villages there is a forge who repairs farming tools. The Mạ make pirogues with oars for water-way transport and communications.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Around the beginning of this century, *Mạ* society witnessed the disintegration of the consanguine community and the advent of a class society. Today, it comprises villages scattered over a large area, each village containing a few long houses, the owners of which have the same ancestors. These houses are either grouped in a small area or dispersed within the boundaries of a village which constitutes a more or less autonomous socio-economic unit. The villagers, bound to one another by blood ties or by alliance, exercise their co-ownership of the land through an intermediary, their representative, who is the village chief and at the same time chief of the forest and the land. In addition, each village designates one or two persons to take charge of the utilization of the forest and the orientation of agriculture with the assistance of the heads of family.

Differentiation between the rich and the poor is noted but there is no exploitation. The rich rely on their experience in production and their own labour, and their wealth is manifested above all in the large number of gongs and jars they have accumulated.

Each family works separately and has its own granary. But when necessary, it can take grain from another family's granary and this action is not regarded as borrowing or lending.

The *Mạ* family is patrilineal. The extended family is gradually disappearing, giving way to nuclear families. In general, newly-weds adopt patrilocality but the vestiges of matrilocality are still found. So are vestiges of the matriarchal system and group marriage. Custom encourages levirate, sororate and marriages between cousins by alliance. The avuncular system is obligatory. The oldest son has the right to inheritance. A person's proper name is not associated with the lineage name but rhymes with that of a dead relative of the preceding generation in the family. The names of boys and girls also rhyme with one another.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The beliefs of the *Mạ* are associated with agriculture.

Before setting fire to bushes, the rituals of the cult of Fire God are performed; other ceremonies of thanking the Mother Rice are held at the moment of sowing and when paddy ears begin to grow. Many taboos and prohibitions are grounded by the same mode of thinking.

The beliefs and myths of the *Mạ* are linked to the earth, mountains and rivers. Folk-songs, folk-tales and epics express the people's attachment to their native land, faithfulness and loyalty, and relate the creation of the world. Musical instruments include flat or convex copper gongs and bamboo flutes. The ritual of buffalo sacrifice, the celebration of harvests and other biggest festivals are accompanied with specific traditional musical tunes. On such solemn occasions, men decorate their hair knots with a tuft of bird feathers and carry weapons (spears or knives) as symbol of courage.



Hunting with a crossbow

## Co

▣ **Denomination:** Co. **Other names:** Cor, Col, Cù, Trầu, Khùa, Mọi.

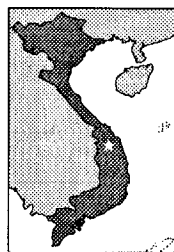
▣ **Population:** 23,000

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Trà Bồng and Sơn Hà districts (Quảng Ngãi province), and Trà My district (Quảng Nam province)

### ▣ Material life

The Co village often lies in the middle of a mountain slope near its milpas and gardens of tea, betel leaves and cinnamon. For some time now, the Co have more chosen for their residence the flat land at the bottom of valleys or along rivers. They live in houses-on-stilts, 70-80m long. Often, just a few houses of such a kind are large enough to accommodate a whole village. Houses built level with ground have been making their appearance for about ten years now; small houses are for one single family; larger ones for five or more. A long house is divided lengthwise into two parts by a corridor (*truôk*). The *tum* is the rear part of the house, divided into compartments: each com-



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partment for one family with a hearth, storage area, and bedrooms for women and so on. The *tum* opens to the *truôk* which runs the length of the house and is led outside by two doors in the lateral sides of the house. The front part is the *gul*, with a partition reserved for men: here one has siesta, receives guests, drinks alcohol and plays the gong. A long house was formerly defended by a thick and very high hedge. Today, such hedge is still set up but is much simpler and used only to keep the house away from animals.

The Co do not know how to weave. They have to buy cloth and garments from the *Việt* or *Xơ-dăng*. Men and women wear their hair in a knot fixed with a comb at the nape. Women wear pagnes, bras and short vests. Men leave the upper part of the torso naked while covering the lower part with loincloths or, in winter, with short vests. They keep their body warm with blankets. Nowadays, more Co people dress like the *Việt*, except elderly women who still retain the pagne. As ornaments, they wear bracelets and glass bead-necklaces.

The Co live mainly on slash-and-burn agriculture. But for some time now, they have started growing rice on submerged land. However, the area is still limited due to unfavourable soil conditions. Food, vegetables and fruit are produced on milpas. Cinnamon and betel leaves constitute an item of wealth for the Co. Food gathering, hunting, fishing and basketry offer goods for exchange for other necessities of life.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

Tradition requires that a village should be composed of people by the same consanguinity. The most esteemed elderly man performs the functions of village chief. Warriors take charge of village defence and retaliation in accordance with primitive law. "Vendetta" was still a common practice some decades ago. The boundaries of the village are respected and defended by all the villagers, who are entitled to utilise the communal land. However, once a plot of land is cultivated, it belongs legitimately to the cultivator. Land negotiations have recently appeared, but only in low-lying

regions adjoining the lands of the *Việt*. Crops may be bought or sold unharvested right in the field. Land is hired out to tenants with a high rent which sometime equals up to two-thirds of the harvest; this practice is, however, rarely found nowadays. *Co* society is not yet markedly differentiated; there are two noticeable strata: the rich minority and poor majority. Families possessing a great number of gongs, jars, buffaloes, copper cooking pots, loin-cloths, skirts and cinnamon form the first stratum.

The *Co* practise shifting cultivation. The constant need to prepare new milpas, epidemics, and superstitions compel them to move frequently, but always within the limits of their village. However, they are tending to adopt a sedentary lifestyle.

Within the family, patrilineal ties override those of the maternal side. The descendants of two brothers can marry each other only at the fourth generation, whereas those of two sisters or of one brother and one sister can get married after the third generation.

Monogamy and patrilocality are well-established customs, as are also levirate, sororate. When a couple have no children, the husband may take a concubine but only with the consent of his wife.

Together with the patriarchal nuclear family, vestiges of the extended family can still be observed. The family is an integral economic unit. The *Co* prefer sons to daughters, and often the second son takes care of the parents in their old age.

Relationships within the village community are reflected by cohabitation in the same house, mutual assistance and the custom of "vendettas".

## Spiritual life

The *Co* are animists. They believe that a man has 18 *phol* and a woman has 19. The *phol* or *phutok* is a rather vague concept which might be compared to the *vía* (soul) of the *Việt*. The *Co* believe in the beneficial effect of cults and in divination. The ritual of buffalo sacrifice is the most important, the most expensive and time-consuming. The pike for sacrifice is a fine and unique artwork which constitutes a valuable source for ethnographic studies.

At festivals, the *Co* like singing, beating gongs, and narrating ancient stories. Gongs are both musical instruments and valuable artefacts. They are generally played in sets of three associated with drums. The *xru* and *agiói* songs have a lyrical content and their form is similar to that of narratives. Some ancient *Co* stories have been published.



A festival drummer in traditional ornaments

## Chơ-ro

▣ **Denomination:** *Chơ-ro*.

**Other names:** Châu-ro, Dơ-ro, Mọi.

▣ **Population:** 15,000

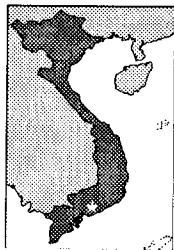
▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer. Besides Chơ-ro, Vietnamese is also used widely

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mainly in Xuân Lộc (Đồng Nai province) and Châu Thành (Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu province), near Ho Chi Minh City

### ▣ **Material life**

Some decades ago, the *Chơ-ro* lived in houses-on-stilts, the floor of which was about 2 m above the ground and accessible by a ladder placed at one end of the house. The enclosure for animals was just under the floor and the family's granary was behind the main house. When a member of the family died, custom required that all the family had to change their place of residence after burning the house to "flee" from the spirit of the deceased.

Today, more people build their houses on the ground. However, some traditional features are



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still kept: the floor is raised and made of bamboo — a kind of bed — which extends for the full width of the three compartments and occupies the rear half of the house.

In certain hamlets, rich families build concrete houses, which testifies to their preference for a sedentary life-style.

*Chơ-ro* men wear loincloths and leave their upper torso naked. Women cover themselves with pagnes. But of late, they have adopted the *Việt* style of dress. They are easily recognized, however, thanks to the numerous ornaments worn by women — glass-bead necklaces and bracelets made of copper or silver. They retain the habit of carrying on their backs baskets of different sizes and shapes in all their daily tasks.

The *Chơ-ro* practise the traditional slash-and-burn cultivation: seeds are put in the holes dug in cleared land. The fields used for multiple-cropping are left fallow after three years of utilization.. For the first two years, they are surrounded by two belts, the first reserved for creeping plants, calabash, dishcloth gourd, cucurbit, various beans, canavalias, and others; the second for cassava. These two belts protect the centre of the milpa where dry paddy is planted in rotation with sesame. During the second year, corn is also grown in alternation with these two crops. Finally, the creeping plants are taken from it to be transplanted in gardens. The milpa is from then on divided into three sections for rice, cassava and corn respectively.

Adhering to a sedentary life-style, the *Chơ-ro* do not have to prepare burnt-beating land periodically. They cultivate the milpas already transformed into dry fields where rice, cassava, corn, and beans can grow thanks to seasonal rains.

The cycle of cultivation on milpas begins with the rite of invoking the God of rice around the third month of the lunar year. From the fourth to the sixth month, corn is grown, and from the fourth to the tenth month, rice.

Agricultural implements comprise axes, knives, digging sticks, rakes, hoes and sickles. Simple ploughs are used in irrigated fields.

During the farmwork slacks according to the agricultural calendar, the *Chơ-ro* are involved in hunting, fishing or gathering forest produce.

Gardening and animal husbandry are still under-developed; cattle and poultry are reared on a family scale.

Handicrafts are family jobs. Basketry supplies bamboo household utensils (hods, winnowing baskets, panniers, etc.) to meet the requirements mostly of the locals. In each village there are blacksmiths repairing metal farming tools, and carpenters making mortars and coffins and building houses. Direct person-to-person barter is the main form of exchange.

Most vestiges of traditional *Cho-ro* society had disappeared by the end of the 19th century. Possibly, the only form of ownership in the past was that of the village or the population unit the head of which was generally chosen from among the elders of the local great families.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

Differentiation of *Cho-ro* society is not well-marked. Each individual practises thrift to build up their property composed primarily of gongs, jars, and rarely, oxen and buffaloes to be used exclusively for sacrifices to genies. All the inhabitants of the village are equal members of a community, the economy of which is still in the stage of self-sufficiency; conditions are therefore unfavourable for a significant gap in wealth and living standard. Under the colonial regime, the elite was composed of the officials of administration, military-men, and owners of fertile lands and means of production (especially buffaloes). Some forms of exploitation were noted: usury, the purchase of unharvested rice and hiring of landless tillers.

The *Cho-ro* family is small and bilinear. It comprises the parents and their children. They live in a separate house. When a young man has found a girl-friend, his family will take the initiative with the help of an intermediary in proposing marriage. However, the family of the girl may also take the first step. The wedding is always held at the bride's house. The right to inheritance is still reserved for women, although the matrilineal system is no longer in existence. Patrilineal customs are far from being predominant in *Cho-ro* family life.

### ▣ Spiritual life

The *Cho-ro* bury the dead. Paper votive offerings are burned at the funeral. The grave is topped by a semi-circular tumulus. Three days after the burial, at each meal, the soul of the dead person is invoked with some rice dropped on the ground. After another three days, the ceremony of "opening the grave" takes place. The offering of rice continues until the 100th day. Visits to the grave are paid every year on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month.

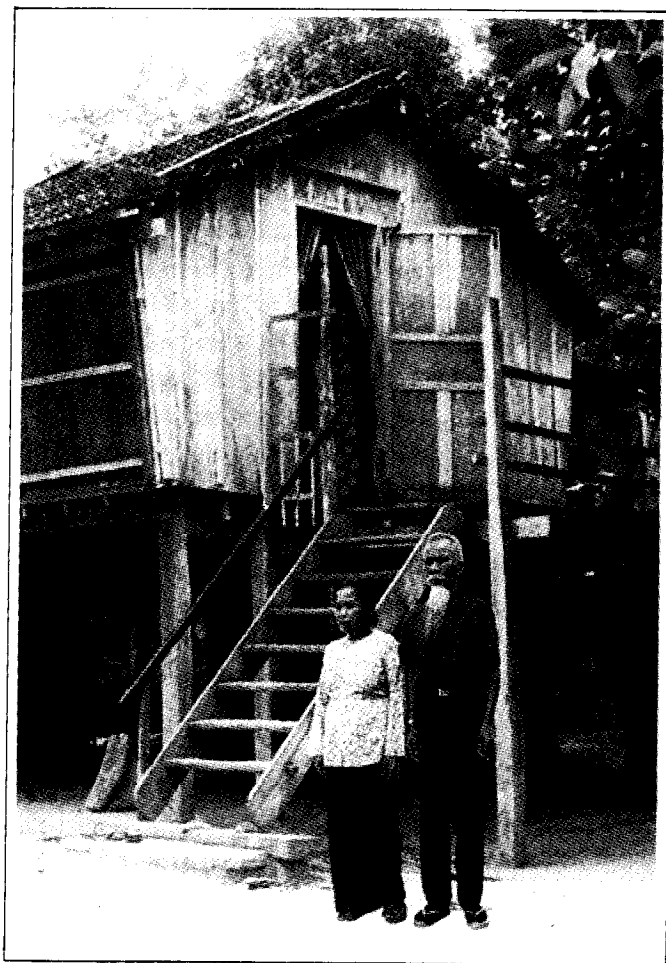
The vestiges of primitive beliefs are still found in the spiritual life of the *Cho-ro*, especially in animist practices, agricultural rites and ancestor worship.

The village's land is community-owned. A ceremony with the participation of all the villagers is held every year to honour the genie of the forest which is part of the communal territory. This may be regarded as vestige of the cult of fertility. The chief officiant is called *kuãng nom tom bri*. Each family brings offerings with them to the ceremony, and at the end, all the participants feast together on the spot. Often, the party ends with a meeting where joint decisions are made on regulations concerning production, security, and other principles which govern the life of the community.

The community life can be sensed, to some extent, in feasts and ceremonies. The most important of them is the yearly celebration of the "soul of rice" which involves the majority of the population and is held by each family after the harvest. The ceremony thus "moves" from house to house, lasting two or three consecutive days.

Regarding *Cho-ro* folk literature, so far only alternate songs of liturgical type have been collected. They are sung during ceremonies dedicated to deities. As for musical instruments, besides the set of seven bronze gongs already mentioned, other instruments made of bamboo tubes are found in the mountainous regions of Châu Thành.





House-on-stilts

## Xinh-mun

▣ **Denomination:** Xinh-mun.

*Other names:* Xá, Puộc, Pụa

▣ **Small local groups:** Dạ, Nghệt

▣ **Population:** 11,000

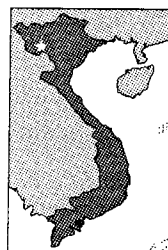
▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Sơn La and Lai Châu provinces.

The *Xinh-mun*, who have long settled in their present area of habitation in Vietnam, are congeners of those living in the neighbouring regions of central and upper Laos.

### ▣ Material life

They are grouped in hamlets alternating with those of the *Thái*. Their houses-on-stilts with vaulted tortoise carapace-shaped roofs are rather rudimentary constructions suited to the semi-nomadic life-style. Both ends of the house have elevated extensions accessible by ladders. The interior design is always the same; the house is divided into two parts: the *plâng* (consisting of



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one bay) is reserved for unmarried men or guests and the worship of "spirits"; the *xia* (consisting of two bays, or more if the house is larger) is the family's living space where people sleep, prepare meals, eat, and store their property.

There are two hearths in the house: that in the *plâng* is for heating in winter and that in the *xia* for cooking meals.

The *Xinh-mun* grow cotton and weave all the cloth they need. Men wear turbans, vests and indigo blue pyjama-type trousers. On ceremonial days, they wear over other garments long dresses of the same colour which fall to the knees. Female dress is the same as *Thái* women's: a turban, a black skirt and a short vest with a row of silver buttons in the shape of butterfly wings. As ornaments, they wear necklaces, bracelets and rings bought from the *Thái* and the *Hmông*.

They cultivate on milpas corn and rice, mostly sticky rice. The digging stick or hoe is chosen depending on the incline of the slope. For flat land, a simple plough is used. Rice is harvested ear by ear with a special scythe and separated from the straw by hand. In some areas, wet rice is also grown.

Women and children undertake food gathering, while men go hunting to improve their daily meals. Animal rearing supplies sacrificial offerings to deities and contributes to production. Oxen and buffaloes are generally allowed to wander at will, except the time of ploughing. Barter is the main form of goods exchange: basketry articles, rice, opium and others for cloth, salt, matches and fire-arms.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Differentiation between the rich and the poor is obvious. So are certain forms of exploitation such as usury and the hiring out of buffaloes, especially in lowland regions, which causes destitution for some groups of *Xinh-mun*. They can survive on wild tubers and game. They live in huts covered with leaves. For this reason, they are often called — like several other ethnic groups — "yellow-leaf *Xá*" (*Xá Toong Luong*). *Xinh-mun* notables exploit their congeners as the *Phià* and *Tạo* of the *Thái*. They include the

*Quan xíp* (or *Tạo bản*, *Nại bản*) — hamlet chiefs generally appointed by the *Phià tạo*; the *Chá* as assistants to them and the *Thiếp* as liaison agents.

The *Xinh-mun* people having the family names *Vi* and *Lô* are the most numerous. Namesakes observe the same taboos but the whole ethnic group has a common taboo (the bird *de de*). The patrilineal nuclear family is the most common form; sons are rightful heirs. The extended family is also found, sometimes with three generations living under the same roof; their means of production are common property; rice is kept in a common store, but meals are always taken separately, within each nuclear family.

The *Xinh-mun* are monogamous and, in general, have attachment to matrimony. According to an old custom, after marriage the bridegroom comes to live with the bride's family for eight to twelve years, or for ever if the latter has no male children. When the period of matrilocality is over, the married couple will have their own house or live with the husband's family. Marriage between cross-cousins or parallel cousins is allowed, as are levirate and sororate. In the course of the ritual of their presentation, the newly-weds choose a new name for themselves to replace their respective family names.

Women give birth in a squatting position in their houses, beside the fireplace. The umbilical cord is put in a bamboo tube and hung on a large tree in a secluded place. When the baby is about one year old the parents request the sorcerer to name it. Most *Xinh-mun* are given a *Thái* name. If the child is frequently ill, a ceremony of sin-washing will be organized and the child will be given a new name.

When a person dies, his or her body is kept in the house for four or five days, or even a week, before being buried. The event is made known to the whole hamlet with a special signal: a rifle-shot. Then a boy from the family of the deceased throws three stones from the hearth on to the altar of ancestors. This symbolic gesture, according to local belief, is expression of the anger of the "House spirit" at the loss of one of its "subjects". At each meal, the son or son-in-law offers the defunct rice, water and tobacco. Before the body is put into a coffin, it is carefully washed with a decoction of fragrant leaves; some money coins are put in the mouth while the thumbs and big toes are tied together.

## Spiritual life

The *Xinh-mun* believe in the existence of a principal "soul" in the head of each person and several auxiliary "souls" scattered all over his/her body. Dead parents and grandparents are objects of the cult of ancestors; the spirits of great grandparents and upwards are also considered as the "spirits of milpas" or "spirits of hamlets". In addition to the altar to ancestors located in the house, the *Xing-mun* venerate as well the "spirits" of their parents-in-law in a hut-on-stilts built nearby. Moreover, as the hamlet of the *Xinh-mun* is part of the *Mường* of the *Thái*, each year in spring they participate in the *Xên Mường* of the *Thái* to honour the "spirits" of the *Mường*. Sorcery practices aimed at curing diseases, vanquishing enemies and winning lovers are popular. Agrarian rites of a religious character, conducted at the moment of sowing and harvesting, are determined by the belief that to have a good crop, the blessing of the soul of rice, of the "spirit of milpas" or the "spirit of fields" must be obtained.




Playing gongs and cymbals in a festival

## Kháng


 **Denomination:** Kháng.

*Other names:* Xá Khao, Xá Đón, Xá Tú Lãng...

 **Small local groups:** Kháng Dảng, Kháng Hốc, Kháng Đón, Kháng Xúa, Kháng ái, Kháng Bung, Kháng Quảng Lâm

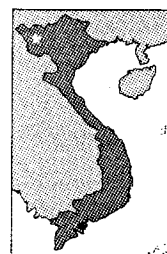
 **Population:** about 4,000

 **Language:** Môn-Khmer

 **Area of habitation:** in Thuận Châu, Quỳnh Nhai and Mường La districts (Sơn La province), and Phong Thổ, Mường Lay, Mường Tè and Tuần Giáo districts (Lai Châu province).

 **Material life**

The *Kháng* have long settled in the north-west of Vietnam. They live mostly in houses-on-stilts; those who lead a sedentary life-style construct solid houses with three compartments and two-sided roofs, the ends of which are shaped like tortoise carapaces.



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The *Kháng* grow cotton but are not familiar with weaving. They exchange raw cotton for cloth or garments made by the *Thái*. Married women wear their hair in a knot atop their head. Men let their hair fall freely to the shoulders or wear it in a knot at the back of the neck.

Sticky rice is their staple food; supplemented by plain rice, corn, sweet potatoes, cassava root, peanuts, gourds, plans, sesame and millet. The sedentary groups cultivate rice in submerged fields but they do not give up slash-and-burn farming entirely. Non-sedentary groups practise only swidden cultivation. Like other ethnic groups, they use sticks to dig holes for seeds. Mutual assistance in work is a tradition which is manifested in different forms and to different degrees. In small hamlets at harvest time, the crop is brought in for one family after another. Each family sends some of its members to help another and is repaid in the same way. In larger hamlets mutual aid teams are often formed.

The *Kháng* rear chickens, ducks, pigs and goats for meat, and buffaloes as draught-animals. Until recently, horses were raised as a means of transport. Food gathering has become less important thanks to developed cultivation.

Fishing with rods and nets is widespread. Along the Đà River the *Kháng* practise both fish-rearing and catching. They are skilled at making traps, snares, tree-trunk canoes; they also use cross bows and flintlocks for hunting.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Formerly, the *Kháng* lived under the *phìa-tạo* regime of the *Thái* and they were peasants subject to the *Thái* feudalists. Except for hamlet chiefs and sorcerers who lived a relatively decent life, the great majority were poor and lived in misery. The hamlet chief was designated by *Thái* notables in exchange for a certain amount of silver. He had two assistants, the *Quan tang* who was in charge of levying corvée and preparing tributes, and the *Quan tề* or liaison agent.

The *Kháng* family is small and patrilineal but it has some matrilineal vestiges. While a man is alive, his children take the family name of their mother, or his sons adopt that of the father, and the daughters, that of the

mother. The maternal uncles of both father and mother play an important role in marriage. After marriage, the husband comes to live with his wife's family for eight to twelve years. Generally, after two or three years, the husband's family organizes the *tu bày hạp* ceremony. When the matrilineal period ends, it has to hold the *plót ún nhá* ("return to the house") to welcome the bride. When a person dies, all the hamlet participate in the funeral. The body is wrapped in a piece of cloth or in a mat and taken to the cemetery where it is placed in a coffin and buried. The funeral house constructed afterwards has six frail columns supporting a two-flapped roof. The construction materials are taken from the house of the deceased. It is where common utensils, food and water are placed for his/her use. The ancestral altar is set up in the dwelling house near the bed of the head of the family. The ceremony of worshipping is performed once every three years.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Kháng* believe that each person has five souls. The principal soul is located in the head and the others in the limbs. After death, the principal soul remains in the house to look after its descendants; the soul of the right arm becomes the spirit of milpas; that of the left arm, the spirit of the tree used to make the coffin; that of the right foot the spirit of the funeral house, and that of the left foot, the spirit of Heaven. Likewise, each object also has its spirit (forests, streamings, hamlets and so on). In case of illness, sacrifices to deities are made. Every year, all the hamlet celebrate together the cult of the spirits of earth and heaven in order to pray for good health and a bumper crop. Believing in the existence of the soul of rice, they observe several taboos and perform rites on some occasions: when land is selected; at sowing time, when the rice begins to ripen, and before the harvest.

Popular literature is fairly rich. Folk-songs reflect love for life, noble sentiments and, at the same time, the sufferings of the oppressed people living under the *phìa-tạo* regime. Noteworthy are the novels in verse such as *Khun Phai Nàng Muong* and *Khun Lú Nàng Ủa* praising faithful love, and the legend of *Khun Cọ*, a typical popular hero struggling for freedom and happiness.

Great lovers of music, the *Kháng* produce simple but imaginative musical instruments, the most popular of which is *dàn hum*, a kind of zither. The tunes for dances with gongs and swords have a martial character for stimulating courage. *Kháng* folksongs are melodious and gentle.



House-on-stilts

## Mảng

▣ **Denomination:** Mảng.

*Other names:* Mảng ư, Xá Mãng, Xá Lá Vàng, Xá Cang Lai, Niềng O

▣ **Small local groups:** Mảng Gúng and Mảng Hê

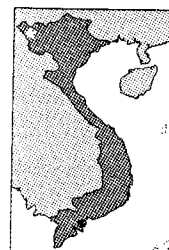
▣ **Population:** 2,300

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mountainous region between the Đà and Nậm Na rivers in Lai Châu province.

### ▣ **Material life**

The *Mảng* live in bamboo houses on stilts with thatched roofs about 7m long and 5m wide. The roof has two flaps; and the entrance doors are at the ends of the house. On the roof are found two antefixes, the (*phổng nhua*), slightly curved in the shape of dragons, which are a common motif among the Austro-Asian peoples. Inside the house, a clear separation is made between the *cô* (bed room) and *choong* (place for receiving guests).



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Female garments comprise a long skirt, a short vest open at the front, leggings, and a piece of white cloth decorated with various patterns, rolled around the body and falling to the knees. Women's hair is cut short, combed up and tied into a bun. When reaching the age of puberty, young girls are tattooed round their mouths for adornment and to show that they have come of age.

The *Mảng* are shifting cultivators and use the techniques of swidden farming with rudimentary home-made tools such as axes to fell trees, long knives to cut branches, digging sticks, and simple ploughs. Fire is made by striking together pebbles gathered on the spot.

The main staple foods include dry rice and corn, and secondary food comes from cassava, sweet potatoes and pumpkins. For some decades now, the *Mảng* have been using hoes to work milpas and grow rice in irrigated terraced fields in the *Thái* manner. Gardening, animal rearing and handicrafts are relatively under-developed, and as a result, so is commerce.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

A few houses form a *muy* (village), a small community, where many vestiges of the ancient tribal commune can be found. Differentiation between classes does not exist and the sense of community still prevails in daily life.

Each *Mảng* individual has one of the five family names, and namesakes claim to have a common animal totem. The chief of lineage — *mon đằm* takes full responsibility for his group's affairs including economic, cultural, social, educational and religious activities.

In *Mảng* traditional society, marriage is exogamic. Young people are free to choose their own partners. They are monogamous and live in the patrilineal nuclear family, but vestiges of the extended family are still found in many localities.

As a marriage rite, a sham struggle between the two families is organized on the day when the bride is bought from her family, and people believe that the harder the struggle, the better the union. This is another vestige of the ancient marriage-by-kidnapping custom.

A woman does not give birth in her house but in a temporary hut rigged up some distance away. She has to cut the umbilical cord herself and prepare her own meals for about three weeks, then may bring the baby home.

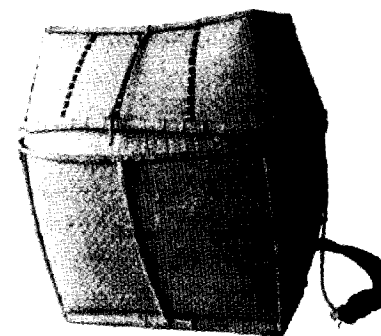
Formerly, the dead were cremated but are now buried. Once the grave is filled in, it is immediately "abandoned" and no other rite is required according to custom.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Mảng* are animists and worship their ancestors. In their cosmogonic concepts, the universe and human beings were created by *Môn Ten* (God-Creator), and the universe is divided into four "strata", the uppermost being the *Môn Phỉnh*, (country of deities), on earth is the *Môn Lom* (country of human beings), underground is the *Môn Lò* (country of demons), and in water is the *Môn Chang* (country of dragons). These concepts are very close to those of the *Thái*.

Each year, many rites and ceremonies are performed, most of them related to the "soul of rice" and to the guardian genii of crops. These rites are conducted by a woman and her brothers (in the absence of the husband). This is probably a custom that goes back to a time of matriarchy.

The *Mảng* do not make up a large community. They carefully guard their literary and artistic heritage: poems, folk-songs, traditional tunes, ancient tales and, above all, long epics, for instance, the *soồng muồng* (allotment of land).



Bamboo or rattan basket with lid for containing clothes

## Brâu

▣ **Denomination:** Brâu. *Other name:* Brao

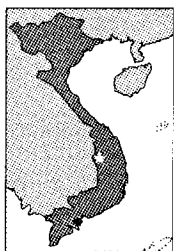
▣ **Population:** 240

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Đắc Mế village, Bờ Y commune, Ngọc Hồi district, Kon Tum province. There are many Brâu in Southeast Laos and Northeast Cambodia.

### ▣ Material life

Đắc Mế village is located on highlands. The communal house is built in the centre of the village; all village activities take place there and all the houses are built on stilts and facing it. They have steeply-pitched two-sided roofs; the ridge of the roof is decorated with sculptures representing a bird's head or the sun. The front of the house, which looks out onto the communal house, is the shortest side of the dwelling where the entrance door is located. Secondary houses or outbuildings are linked to the main house by stairs and serve as rooms for the elderly, granaries for corn and paddy, and stores for family property. The *Brâu* dress like the Ca-dong (a small group belonging



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to the Xơ-đăng) who live nearby. They have their teeth filed and their faces and bodies tattooed. Women wear earrings made from pieces of bamboo or ivory shaped like mortars, and as large as possible.

The *Brâu* practise slash-and-burn cultivation. Rice, including sticky rice, is their staple food. In addition, they eat cassava, pumpkins, sesame, sugarcane, bananas and mustard. They choose an area in the bamboo grove where the ground is covered with thick humus and the soil is crumble. Bushes are cleared with axes or knives in the third month, and seeds are put in holes around the fifth. A man with a 2-3 m long digging stick in each hand makes holes first; a woman behind him drops seeds in them without filling them up with earth.

Besides agriculture and animal rearing, they also have traditional sidelines such as basketry, metal work and forest produce gathering. They often go to the regions of the Lào, Việt, Xơ-đăng and Ba-na to exchange products. Hunting and fishing also supplement their daily diets.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

In the *Brâu* village differentiation between the rich and the poor is noted. The former possess paddy in large quantity, cattle, gongs, jars, copper pots, jewellery, clothes and so on. The latter (the majority) are free peasants. Some of the poorest work as servants for rich and influential families.

Given the fact that the *Brâu* live in the nuclear patrilineal family, marriage by couple, patrilocality, and sororate are customs which are observed strictly. However, after marriage, the husband comes to live with his wife's family for four to five years before taking her back to his parents' family.

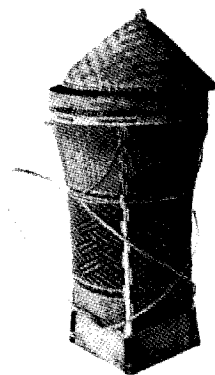
Within the village, all live on good terms with one another. When someone dies, all the village come to help his/her family. First of all, they build a mortuary chapel beside the house of the dead person. The funeral assistants surround the coffin, drink alcohol, sing, dance and beat gongs. The burial takes place two or five days after death. The coffin is a hollowed tree trunk. The grave is just deep enough to contain the coffin. A funeral house is built atop the tomb and provided with items that are believed to be needed by the deceased in the other world.

## Spiritual life

The *Brâu* believe that the universe, the earth, houses and everything else are the work of the Creator *Pa Xây*. Moreover, genies are omnipresent in forests, waters and trees. There is also the "genie of sky", the "genie of water" and a "guardian genie" of every individual. In the course of rites or ceremonies in honour of these genies, the chief officiant is the head of the family or village shaman. Agrarian rituals are conducted in accordance with the agricultural cycle.

Folksongs (*mát muôi*) comprise wedding songs, lullabies and lyrical works. Ancient tales tell about the courage of youths, the beauty and diligence of girls, and about orphans and animals which by their intelligence manage to vanquish wicked men and ferocious beasts.

Young girls play the *klông pút*, a musical instrument very popular in the Northern Tây Nguyên; The instrument that the *Brâu* call *táp đình bô* is a set of bamboo tubes of graded lengths; sounds come when air is blown into them by hands clapping. Young boys prefer playing the gongs which include three types: *tha*, *mam* and *coong*. The *coong* set is composed of three to seven pieces, the value of each is equivalent to one or two buffaloes. The *mam*, more valuable, is worth 10 - 15 buffaloes. The *tha* made of a metal alloy, including some precious metals, is rare; a set of two *tha* costs 30-50 buffaloes. It seems that this musical instrument is known only among the *Brâu*.




Bamboo rucksack with lid

## Rơ-măm

 **Denomination:** Rơ-măm

 **Population:** 280

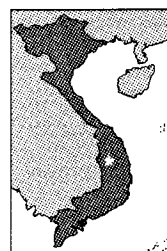
 **Language:** Môn-Khmer

 **Area of habitation:** Le village, Mo Rai commune, Sa Thầy district (Kontum province)

## Material life

The village of the *Rơ-măm* (called *dê*), is surrounded by a solid hedge and has well-defined boundaries. The village chief is an old man who enjoys the trust of all the villagers. The *Rơ-măm* live in houses-on-stilts arranged in a square or rectangle, opening onto the central area in the middle of which is the communal house. The interior design is that for a long house; each couple occupy a compartment surrounded by partitions made of plaited bamboo and opening onto a corridor running the whole length of the house. Each house is thus inhabited by several nuclear families. The central part of the house is reserved for accepting guests.

Men wear loincloths and women pagnes which fall to below their knees. The loincloths and pagnes



MÔN-KHMER GROUP



have no decoration whatsoever. Everyone wears a short sleeveless vest which is also totally plain. Young people have four to six of their upper teeth filed for aesthetic reasons. Women like wearing large, heavy earrings; some have the holes in their earlobes enlarged with an ivory ring 5-6 cm in diameter.

The *Rơ-măm* practise mainly slash-and-burn cultivation. Sticky rice is their staple food, then comes plain rice, corn and cassava. The farming techniques are similar to those of the Gia-rai. Hunting and gathering play a fairly important role. Fishing with nets, poisonous leaves or by hand is well-developed. The *Rơ-măm* weave cloth for their clothes, but industrially-produced goods are causing the traditional fabrics to disappear. The *Rơ-măm* regularly exchange tobacco and forest products with the *Lào*, *Ba-na* and *Xơ-dăng* for salt, iron tools, ivory earrings and other goods.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

For the *Rơ-măm*, it is a rule that the descendants of the same couple live under the same roof. But each nuclear family forms its own economic unit, cultivates its own milpas, rears its own animals, and eats separately. Sometimes, sons and their families live with their parents; all the family works together, paddy is stored in the same granary, but each nuclear family eats separately.

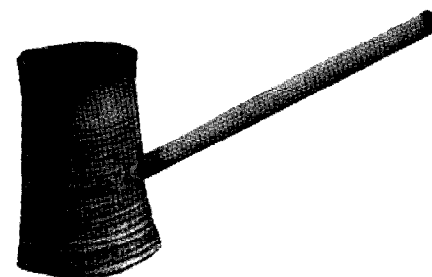
Although some *Rơ-măm* men may take a second wife, monogamy is the general rule. After their wedding, the young couple live with the wife's family for four-five years, then move to the husband's family, and return again to the wife's after another four-five years. This alternating habitation will last until the death of either partner's parents. Leviratic and sororatic practices, though not compulsory, are still observed. According to custom, marriage between first cousins, parallel cousins, and cross-cousins is forbidden, but cross-marriages between two families are allowed. Divorce is possible only when the couple have no children. Matrimonial rites are performed in two steps: engagement and wedding. In the past the *Rơ-măm* married only within their ethnic group; now sons-in-law and daughters-in-law of *Brâu*, *Xơ-dăng*, Gia-rai origin are seen in *Rơ-măm* villages.

During childbirth, the woman is confined in a closed-off room at the rear of the house and is assisted by a village midwife. Once the umbilical cord is cut off, the baby will be given a name which must not coincide with that of any other villager.

According to *Rơ-măm* custom, when someone dies, his/her body is taken out of the house and placed in front of it with the head turned towards it. At the burial, the face of the deceased is turned in the direction away from the village. The cemetery is often located to the west of the village and the tombs are arranged in a certain order. Sometimes, two or three people from the same family, who have died within a year, are buried in the same grave.

### ▣ Spiritual life

The *Rơ-măm* believe in the existence of the soul (*phgết*) which becomes a spirit (*đrô*) after death. Among the *Rơ-măm* rites, those related to slash-and-burn cultivation are the most important, above all the veneration of the "God of Rice" (*Yang Sri*). The *choi xic* ritual is performed immediately after the burning off of bushes, which includes offerings to *Yang Sri*. The *ét choi may* rite is the symbolic putting of seeds into holes at the entrance to the milpas. The *gah* rite is performed when paddy ears begin to rise, and the *xet* rite takes place before harvest. The same rites are observed for each crop. In the event of illness, the *Rơ-măm* also make offerings to deities and genies but the ceremony is generally simple and not expensive.



Carved bamboo pipe

## Ơ-đu

▣ **Denomination:** Ơ-đu.

*Other name:* Tày Hát

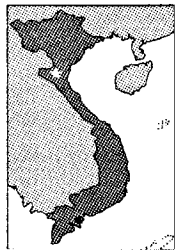
▣ **Population:** 200

▣ **Language:** Môn-Khmer

▣ **Area of habitation:** Tương Dương district, Nghệ An province where the Ơ-đu live along with the Thái, Khơ-mú, Hmông and others. The Ơ-đu also live in Samnua province (Laos), under the name Tày Poọng.

### ▣ Material life

The houses of the Ơ-đu are on stilts, but are often low and small. Frail columns support a thatched roof. Partitions are made of plaited bamboo. There are two hearths inside the house, one for cooking daily meals, the other for religious purposes. The parents' compartment is separated from that of the children by a partition. At one end of the house, then is a mortar held up by supports planted in the ground.



MÔN-KHMER GROUP

The Ơ-đu grow cotton and weave cloth, and some also rear silkworms. Men and women dress like the Thái in the same region.

In the past, the Ơ-đu had to work for Thái notables who usurped all the land, forests and mountains. Their work was regarded as *corvée* in addition to a tribute in kind; in return they were given the right of residence, and allowed to reclaim land and cultivate milpas. In spite of these miserable living conditions, the Ơ-đu, unlike some other Việt-Mường ethnic groups in Nghệ An and Quảng Bình provinces, did not fall back to the stage of semi-food-gathering and semi-cultivation or being just food-gatherers. They had no doubt passed a certain level of social development.

They are actually sedentary farmers who cultivate both ricefields and milpas using relatively complex techniques. They know how to weave, embroider, and make objects from wood and plaited bamboo.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

Living in small numbers and widely scattered - only a few families in a village - the Ơ-đu are being intergated into more populous communities. They are no less conscious of their own ethnic identity and have their own way of designating the neighbouring ethnic groups. However the majority have forgotten their mother tongue and those who still know it are highly respected. At a certain age, Ơ-đu often feel a need to learn their language again in the hope of "returning to the source". This desire is manifested in the people's habit of recalling the ways followed by their ancestors, and of relating the legends connected with the names of villages, rivers, streams and other vestiges in forest. It is also revealed in the habit of old women carefully preserving a traditional garment that they will put on at their death "to present themselves to their ancestors"; in the type of house facing mountains called *dinh luông tằng*, and in certain rituals relating to milpas.

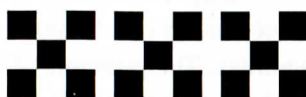
The Ơ-đu used to have no family names. But they have adopted the family names of the Lao and Thái, such as *Lò Khăm*, *Lò Mạy* and *Lò Văn*. They live in small matrilineal families. The principle of one-way marriage determines matrimonial relationships. Patriliney is far more marked among the Ơ-

*du* than in several other ethnic groups in the region. The husband decides all family affairs. Women have no right of inheritance. Patrilocality is a strict custom, but a young bridegroom has to live at his wife's house for some time; this period may reduce to one year if his family is in a position to pay the total "price of his head" (*klây glây*). For the *Ơ-đu*, the new year begins in spring, on the day when first thunder rolls are heard. This is a common practice of many ethnic groups of cultivators in continental Southeast Asia. A widow (or a widower) wishing to remarry must wait for the first thunder which marks the definitive departure of the late spouse, lest he or she takes revenge out of jealousy.

In the past, the day of the first thunder rolls was the occasion for the greatest feast of the year: *chăm phtroong trmây*, i.e. the *Ơ-đu* New Year's Day. On that day, the great square of Xốp Pốt hamlet, in Huổi Xan, Huổi Pông would welcome *Ơ-đu* from various localities who came to perform the rituals of the cult of Heaven and Earth. Pigs and buffaloes were sacrifices and festivities were organized.

## ☐ Spiritual life

The *Ơ-đu* religious beliefs are close to those of the *Thái*. They call the soul *mee*, the spirit *bua*. The spirit of the house (*bua dinh*) watches over all family activity and subject to reincarnation. For this purpose, it is believed to have to make one member of the family die. Therefore, when an *Ơ-đu* falls ill, his relatives make offerings to the *bua dinh* and pray that it should remain in the other world. If the offerings prove to be ineffective, they will call on the sorcerer, who will request a more powerful spirit (*xum or*) to help in preventing the *bua dinh*'s incarnation.



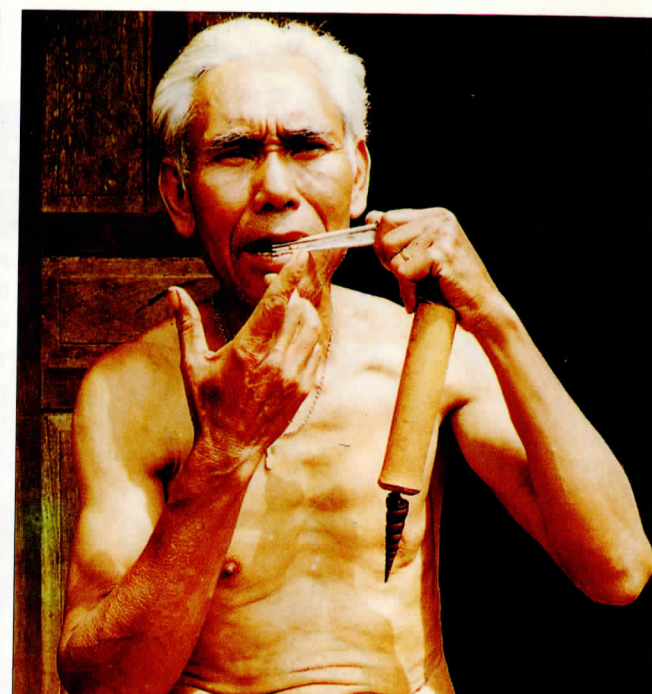
1. Khmer traditional wedding costume (Hòn Đất hamlet, Thổ Sơn commune, Hòn Đất district, Kiên Giang).

2. Main sanctuary of Cái Giã Pagoda (the Khmer, Cái Giã hamlet, Hung Hội commune, Vĩnh Lợi district, Bạc Liêu).

3. Preparing for a "ngo" pirogue race (the Khmer, Cầu Quay river, Sóc Trăng commune, Sóc Trăng).







1. A ritual conducted in the "Rông" house (the Ba-na, Chup village, Lo Pang, Mang Yang, Gia Lai).

2. House with horn-shaped figures on the roof (the Ba-na, An Khê, Gia Lai).

3. "Rông" house in Đắc Hro village (the Xo-dăng, Văn Lem commune, Đắc Tô, Kon Tum).

4. Gong performance (the Xo-dăng, Ea Hring hamlet, Cu Mgar district, Đắc Lắc).



1. A Co-ho girl in traditional costume (Đà Đòn commune, Lâm Hà district, Lâm Đồng).

2. Mr. K'Briu playing a musical instrument (the Co-ho, Gun Ré commune, Di Linh district, Lâm Đồng).

3. House on stilts (the Hré, Sơn Hạ commune, Sơn Hà district, Quảng Ngãi).

4. Cloth weaving (the Hré, Ba Thành commune, Ba Tơ, Quảng Ngãi).







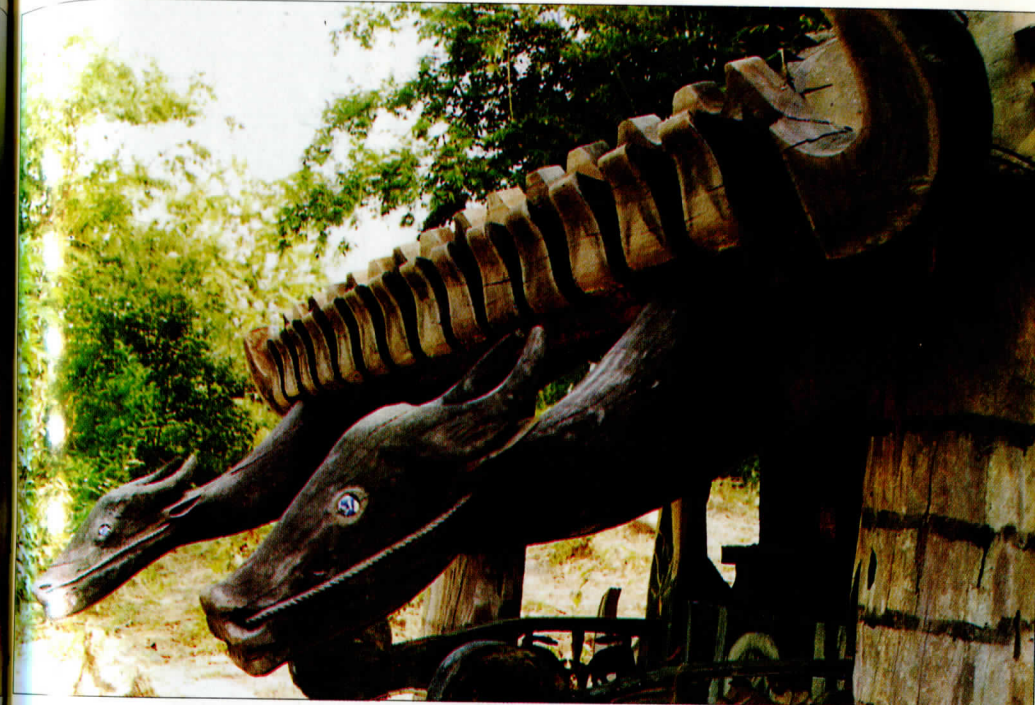
1. Popular artist Y Kran playing the "Ri" musical instrument (the Mnông, Nhân commune, Đăk Rlăp district, Đăk Lăc).
2. Bem (plum): A kind of basket for contain women's valuables considered as the dowries (the Kho-mú, Nghệ An).
3. Mnông vaulted house (Quảng Trục commune, Đăk Rlăp district, Đăk Lăc).
4. Xtiêng house with roof close to the ground and door opened in the middle of the gable (Bù Rên hamlet, Đăk Ô commune, Phước Long, Bình Phước).
5. Ceremony of praying for the elephant health (the Mnông, Yun village, Lăk Lăc commune, Lăk district, Đăk Lăc).
6. A Xtiêng woman wearing cườm necklace, ivory earrings, with her filed teeth (Bù Rên hamlet, Đăk Ô commune, Phước Long, Bình Phước).
7. Dance with the "Hun may" musical instrument (the Kho-mú, Sơn La).







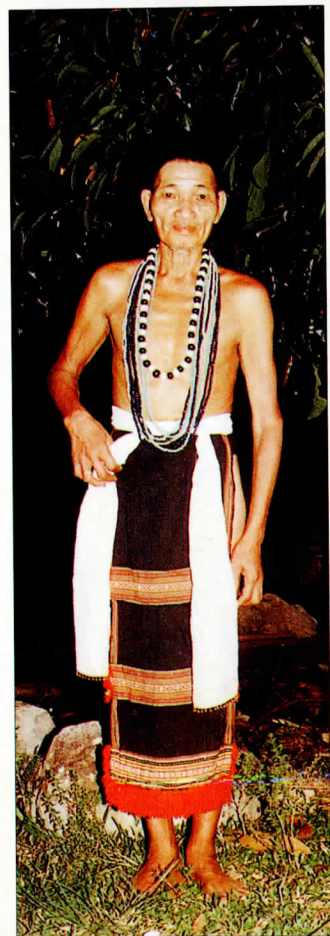
1. A Bru-Vân Kiều woman in traditional costume (Rừng, Húc, Hương Hòa, Quảng Trị).
2. Tô Tung Da dance in a festival (the Co-tu, trict, Quảng Nam).
3. Weaving a basket for transporting firewood (Vân Kiều, Tà Rùng, Húc, Hương Hòa, Quảng Trị).



1. Sculptured buffalo heads for decorating tomb-houses (the Co-tu, Hiên district, Quảng Nam).
2. Giê-Triêng house on stilts (Đak Pek commune, Đak Glei district, Kon Tum).
3. Giê-Triêng girls' festival costume (Đak Rong commune, Đak Glei district, Kon Tum).







1. Playing the "Kor buat" musical instrument (the Mạ, Đà Tê Town, Đà Tê district, Lâm Đồng).

2. A Co man in traditional costume (Nguyên hamlet, Trà Hiệp, Trà Bồng, Quảng Ngãi).

3. Mạ long house (Đà Tê, Lâm Đồng).

4. Ta-ôi long house (Ta Rụt, Hương Hòa, Quảng Trị).

5. Bamboo-woven basket for catching (the Chơ-ơ, Biên Hòa Đồng Nai).

6. Kitchen and the ladder connect to the living house (the Chơ-ơ Lịch hamlet, Phú Lý commune, Cửu, Đồng Nai).

7. Weaving patterned cloth (the A Đót, A Lưới, Thừa Thiên-Huế).

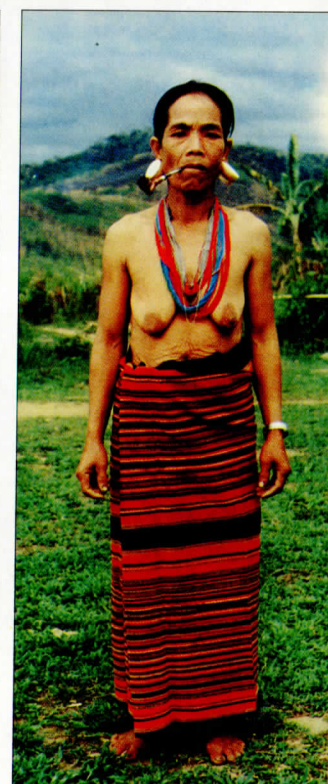
8. A Co man with earrings and a w en pipe (Củ hamlet, Trà Hiệp Bồng, Quảng Ngãi).







1. Traditional costume (the Kháng, Chiềng Bôm, Thôn Châu, Sơn La).
2. "Bé" basket for containing or transporting rice, maize, cassava, vegetables, etc. (the Mảng, Lai Châu).
3. "Aug gắc" knife for men to clear land or to fell trees (the Brâu, Ngọc Hồi, Kon Tum).
4. House with tortoise shell-shaped gable (the Xinh-mun, Chiềng Xơ commune, Điện Biên Đông district, Lai Châu).
5. Playing the flute (the Kháng, Nà Khung hamlet, Bả Lũng commune, Phong Thổ district, Lai Châu).
6. A Xinh-mun woman in Chiềng Xơ commune, Điện Biên district, Lai Châu.
7. A Mảng woman in traditional costume (Bum Nua commune, Mường Tè district, Lai Châu).
8. A Brâu woman in traditional costume (Đắc Mế, Ngọc Hồi, Kon Tum).







1. A Ro-mâm girl with a bamboo rucksack (Le village, Mo Rai commune, Sa Thầy, Kon Tum).
2. Playing the "Tinh Ninh" musical instrument (the Ro-mâm, Le village, Mo Rai commune, Sa Thầy, Kon Tum).
3. Putting seeds in holes (the O-đu, Xốp hamlet, Kim Đa commune, Tương Dương, Nghệ An).
4. Carrying water to the house (the O-đu, Pốt hamlet, Kim Đa commune, Nghệ An).



1. Spinning (the Lào, Na Sang hamlet, Núa Ngam commune, Điện Biên district, Lai Châu).
2. Giáy women at a market (in Sa Pa, Lào Cai).

3. Carving bracelets (the Giáy, Bát Xát hamlet, Lào Cai).
4. Cooling boiled sticky rice (the Lào, Mường Và, Sông Mã, Sơn La).



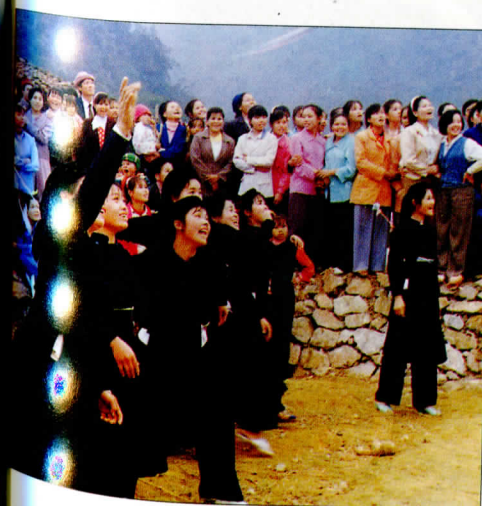




1. "Xòe" dance (the Lự, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu).
2. Blacking teeth (the Lự, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu).
3. Harrow with wooden spikes (the Bó Y, Quyết Tiến commune, Quân Bạ, Hà Giang).
4. Bó Y traditional costume (Quyết Tiến commune, Quân Bạ, Hà Giang).



1. Sorcerer performing rituals at a funeral (the Tây, Tân Lang commune, Văn Lãng district, Lạng Sơn).
2. Cờn-tossing game in "Lồng tồng" festival (the Tây, Hồng Định commune, Quảng Hòa, Cao Bằng).
3. Dancing around "bồng" tree (the Thái, Yên Mỹ hamlet, Lượn Khê, Thường Xuân, Thanh Hóa).







1. A Nùng girl (in Mường Khương, Lào Cai).
2. Selling "chàm" ointment (the Nùng, Quảng Yên market, Quảng Hòa, Cao Bằng).
3. Burning paper funeral house (the Sán Chay, Cẩm Đan, Sơn Động, Bắc Giang).
4. Cloth weaving (the Sán Chay, Quý Kỳ commune, Định Hóa, Thái Nguyên).



## Thái-Ka Đai Language Family

### Tày

▣ **Denomination:** Tày. *Other name:* Thổ

▣ **Small local group:** Phén, Thu Lao, Pa Dí, Ngạn

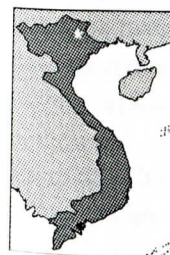
▣ **Population:** Over 1,190,000

▣ **Language:** Tày-Thái

▣ **Area of habitation:** Along the belt from Quảng Ninh to Lào Cai and Yên Bái via Cao Bằng, Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên, Tuyên Quang, Hà Giang and also scattered at Điện Biên Phủ (Lai Châu), and in Lâm Đồng and Đắk Lắk. The Tày are indigenous to their present area of habitation.

### ▣ Material life

A Tày village (*bản*) has on average 40-50 houses (100 as maximum) built at the foot of a mountain or hill or near a river or stream. The



TÀY-THÁI GROUP

*bản* in the upper region of Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn are generally surrounded by bamboo hedges shaped in the same way as that of the *Việt*. The houses of borderland *bản* are often protected against intruders by a stone wall along with a ditch.

The houses are on stilts with a two-flap or four-flap roof of palm leaves, tiles or thatch. The inside is divided into two by a partition. The rear section serves as a bedroom and kitchen, the front one as guest reception area and study room for children. The altar to ancestors is also set up there. The columns are made of tree trunks and supported by blocks of stone. The wooden floor extends outwards from the four sides of the house, forming a kind of balcony enclosed with a railing. Houses of clay with tiled roofs are becoming common.

Men's clothes are dyed with indigo and are similar to those of the neighbouring ethnic groups. Women generally wear scarves knotted in a way to form "crow's bills" on the forehead, four-panelled dresses split at the sides up to the armpits, and silk belts knotted at the back with ends hanging down. Women of the Phén group wear indigo skirts and short vests like the *Nùng*, but in white. The vests of young Pa Dí women are decorated at the front by beehive-shaped silver buttons. Women like wearing silver earrings, necklaces and bracelets around their wrists and ankles.

The *Tày* grow mainly wet rice which is their staple food. The techniques are fairly advanced and catching up with those of the *Việt*, including an effective irrigation system. Market-gardening is a recent innovation, but from time immemorial the *Tày* have engaged in producing specialized crops: anise (in Lạng Sơn), soya bean (in Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn), cinnamon (Yên Bái), valuable timber species and tea (Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên and Hà Giang), and tobacco (Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn). Also grown are cotton, indigo plant, fruit trees (pear, apricot, peach, tangerine), chestnut, and other crops. The *Tày* have long experience in growing bamboo used in construction and basketry.

Aminal rearing is quite developed. Farmyards are crowded with poultry and pigs; oxen and buffaloes are left to wander in valleys, and are brought back only at ploughing time. The Nước Hai horse (Cao Bằng), Thắt Khê duck (Lạng Sơn) and Trùng Khánh duck (Cao Bằng), Bảo Lạc ox (Cao

Bằng) and pigs from Lạng Sơn are known throughout the country. Fish-rearing in ponds and lakes is also a special job of the *Tày* as well as of the *Thái*.

Handicrafts are fairly refined and can fully meet local requirements. Surplus goods are used for exchange. Brocade (Cao Bằng) is an article popular on domestic markets and is becoming an important export item. Barter is practised mainly on border markets.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Before the August 1945 Revolution, *Tày* society had already developed, but not uniformly. In the basins of the Gầm, Lô, Chảy and Hồng (Red) rivers, the *Thổ ty* system existed until 1954; these functionaries were appointed by the Vietnamese feudal court to assume the administration of the *muòng* or large villages in highland regions. These *Thổ ty* (or *Quảng*) were hereditary; they expropriated all the land and turned the peasants into serfs. The people were divided into two categories: free peasants who cultivated communal lands but had to fulfil obligations towards the village, to pay dues to the lords and perform corvée; and the semi-free peasants who had to perform corvée and offer tribute to the lords in return for the right of residence and the benefits from a piece of land. In the past, exploitation was ruthless. The "droit de cuissage" (the right of a feudal lord to abuse a bride before her husband) was maintained as well as the custom of burying alive the notables who had served the lord upon the latter's death. In other regions, class differentiation evolved in the same way as on the plain; its influence was much remarkable: there were land owners (minority), a stratum of rich peasants, a larger stratum of middle peasants, and poor peasants (majority), but practically no landless peasants. The area of land in private ownership is larger than that of communal land.

The patriarchal, monogamous family constitutes the basic unit of *Tày* traditional society, but kinship is respected in the cult of ancestors, in customs and practices, and in the settlement of disputes among the members of the same line. The father decides all family matters. The eldest son is his designated successor. Women play a secondary role and are taken into account only in the domain of romantic sentiments.

However, vestiges of matriliney such as respect for the members of the wife's family and for maternal uncles, the practice of a married couple living with the wife's family are still seen in Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Bắc Cạn and Thái Nguyên provinces. Exogamy is the rule, but marriage is often a matter of trading and must be in accordance with convention. The greater part of the family inheritance is given to the eldest son. The latter's children, irrespective of age, are always accorded greater consideration than those of his younger brothers.

The rituals of marriage, funerals and naming new-borns follow Confucian prescriptions. Except for a few details, they are similar to those of the *Việt*. The *Tày* family live in harmony, parents not being very strict with their children. Divorce is rare.

The *Tày* live separately in their communes and villages, among their own ethnic group. Nowadays, they mix more with other populations of the village or hamlet and earn their living in remote regions. Some are married to the members of other ethnic groups.

Funeral rituals are similar to those of the *Việt* in many respects.

## Spiritual life

Like the *Việt*, the *Tày* are influenced by Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Genies of earth and hearth are venerated. The earth genie is worshipped in a sanctuary or at the foot of a banyan tree. Local deities are worshipped in a secluded forest area or on the top of a mountain considered sacred and called "the forest or the mount of gods". In their temples, the *Tày* worship all the deities of the three religions, the spirits of the rivers, the mountains and others. The ancestral altars of many families also include the cult of Confucius, the Buddha, and Kwan Yin (Goddess of Compassion). Ceremonies and rites are inspired by the *Thọ mai gia lễ*, a guide book to the rituals of marriage, funeral and childbirth, which were followed by the ancient *Việt*. The agrarian rites of the *Tày* are performed mainly at the beginning of spring, when the agricultural cycle starts. In some regions, ceremonies and feasts are held on different occasions: "going to the fields", cel-

ebating the moon, working on the mountain, or hens laying eggs, etc. They are intended to express the people's gratitude, and pray to the genies for fertility, prosperity, happiness, health and luck. They are also the opportunity for young people to show their feelings before a new cycle of production starts.

The culture of the *Tày* has been deeply influenced by that of the *Việt* due to their long-standing co-existence. Art and literature early flowered with the birth of the *Nôm-Tày* script (based on Chinese characters) and the rise of such authors as Quãn Nhạc and Quỳnh Văn (16th and 17th centuries). The poems by Đỗ Hậu criticized the society of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many works in *Nôm-Tày* are masterpieces: long poems (*Nam Kim-Thị Đan*, *Lương Quân-Bioóc Róm* and others); stories adapted from those of the *Việt* or the Chinese (*Tống Trân-Cúc Hoa*, *Phạm Tải-Ngọc Hoa*, *Kim Vân Kiều*, *Lương Sơn Bá-Chúc Anh Đài*); legends (*Nùng Chí Cao* and *Nùng Văn Vân*) - *Tày* heroes who led uprisings against Chinese feudalists and aggressors) and myths (*Pú Luông-Già Cải* — the first two ancestors of humankind, and *The Dispute Over the Royal Throne by Nine Princes*). Particular mention should be made of humorous tales and fables which have an educational value.

The *Tày lượn* — alternate songs between lovers — may be comparable to the *hát đúm* of the *Việt* or the *sli* and *khắp* of the *Nùng* and *Thái*. This folk art-form comprises several tunes: *lượn then*, *nâng hai*, *lượn sương* of Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn, *lượn cọi* of Hà Tuyên and Bắc Cạn, and *lượn khắp* of Lào Cai and Yên Bái. It has rules and codes of singing like the *quan họ* Bắc Ninh of the *Việt* or the *hạn khuống* of the *Thái*.

There are also a kind of stories in verse the contents of which are similar to the *lượn*; they are recited in the same manner as *Việt* poems.

The *then* (nuptial song) is a very rich and popular genre.



## Thái

▣ **Denomination:** Thái.

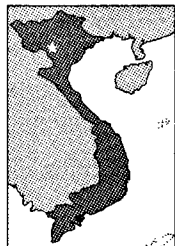
*Other name:* Táy

▣ **Small local groups:** Táy Khao, (White *Thái*), Táy Đăm (Black *Thái*), Táy Chiềng or Táy Mường (Hàng Tổng), Táy Thanh (Man Thanh), Táy Muời, Pu Thay, Thổ Đà Bắc<sup>(1)</sup>, Táy Mộc Châu (Táy Đeng)

▣ **Population:** Over 1,040,000

▣ **Language:** Tày-Thái

▣ **Area of habitation:** Northwest Vietnam, in the territory extending from the Red River to the Lam River, across the Đà and Mã rivers



TÀY-THÁI GROUP

(1) Recently, some ethnologists have attempted to classify this group as belonging to the Tày ethnicity without any scientific grounds. This classification is erroneous and runs counter to the "List of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam" published on 2nd March 1979 by the General Department of Statistics.

The ancestors of the *Thái* settled in Vietnam very early, particularly in the northwest region. The White *Thái* first then the Black *Thái* arrived to settle en masse in their present area of habitation, constituting the majority of the population. They are also present in Laos, Thailand and Southern China.

### ▣ Material life

The *Thái* live in houses on bamboo or wooden stilts with wattle and daub. The house is in general spacious and built with a clear sense of elegance. The roof of the Black *Thái* house is shaped like a tortoise carapace with antefixes (called *khau cút*) at each end of the ridge. That of the White *Thái* house is rectangular and provided with a balcony at the front or all round. The houses of the *Thái* in Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An resemble those of the Mường. Only houses-on-stilts of the *Thái* in Mường Lò (Yên Bái province) retain the traditional architectural features, with a single stairway as access.

In the past, the interior of the *Thái* house was plain: there were some rattan stools, mats, blankets, and baskets. As the people's living standards have risen, now we can see also tables, chairs, beds, wardrobes, lanterns, bicycles, radios and so on.

Small *Thái* groups dress in almost the same way, although they live in widely-scattered villages. Women wear long black skirts like *sarongs*, and short vests fastened at the front with a row of finely worked silver buttons. It can be said that *Thái* culture is obviously expressed in the traditional attire and adornments of women. Today young *Thái* girls in Thanh Hóa and Nghệ An provinces are tending to replace their short vests with more modern-style blouses.

The *Thái* have been rice growers since time immemorial. Settled in fertile valleys, river basins and beside streams, they can achieve an output of five tonnes per hectare and two crops a year thanks to their small irrigation works. They also grow corn, cassava, sweet potato, cotton, indigo, gourd plants and beans in terraced fields.

They gather in forests building material, other items and even foodstuffs to overcome the period of food shortage before harvest. Gathering and fish-



ing have always played an important role in their livelihood. Forest produce constitutes a significant source of additional foodstuffs. Although developed, handicrafts have not yet got out of the frame of a household-based occupation. According to custom, the bride brings to her husband's house blankets, mosquito nets, and bed sheets for all members of the family. *Thái* patterned hand-made cloth is very beautiful, with various floral and animal motifs.

There is, in fact, no real market in the *Thái* regions. Barter takes place with other ethnic groups in highland and upland regions, or with salesmen coming from the plains of Laos. Commerce developed in a very small scale in colonial times and was monopolised by local lords.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

The *Thái* village (*bản*) comprises on average 40-50 and sometimes up to 100 houses on stilts. It has well-defined boundaries and often an expanse of forest for its members to go hunting, gather produce, tend their cattle and bury the dead. The *bản*, as the nucleus of *Thái* society, is in fact a rural commune comprising patrilineal and multilineal, extended and nuclear families. Several *bản* form a *mường*, which in the past was placed under the authority of a feudal lord.

The lord and notables ensured administration, land allotment, and determined the obligations of the members of the commune. The lord expropriated the greater part of the fields (known as "seigneurial fields"). His relatives also received land without any obligation. The areas allocated to the notables were more or less extensive, depending on their positions.

At the beginning, the land areas owned by lords and notables were insignificant. But as time passed, they were much expanded, up to 20 and even 30 times the area allotted to an ordinary peasant. Hence, class differentiation in *Thái* society which comprised:

- The class of rulers and exploiters: the feudal lord, his relatives and the notables;
- The oppressed classes: free peasants, new settlers coming from other regions and deprived of their civic rights (such as *cuông*, *nhốc* and

*puà*), servants (*côn hươn*), and peasants who had no means of livelihood and depended on the lord.

In each *Thái* region, there were families of commoners (*Lò, Vi, Lự, Quàng* and *Khà*) and those of the nobility: *Đèo, Sầm, Cầm, Xa, Bạc* and others. Each *Thái* family retains the vestiges of its totem which is often represented by a taboo object. In general, the *Thái* have three kinds of family relations. Men of a bloodline who have got married to the girls of another bloodline are *ả noọng*. Men of the line whose daughters are daughters-in-law of another line (that of *ả noọng*) are *lúng ta*. Men of the line whose sons are sons-in-law of the same line (that of *ả noọng*) are *nhính xao*. These are vestiges of matrimonial practices known as "direct way", dating back to the era of the tribal triple alliance.

The number of large patriarchal families has decreased in favour of small ones. Although patriarchy remains the foundation of society, the *Thái* family is marked by its harmony. Hospitality, mutual assistance and community spirit are good features of the *Thái* village.

Before 1945, marriage had been made with great class considerations. A young peasant could not marry the daughter of a mandarin. A peasant woman married to the son of a mandarin was never considered his legitimate wife. Men's dominance over women was the rule in marriage and family life. Daughters were like strangers, and among the White *Thái*, had to sleep in the room normally reserved for visitors. The wife took the name of her husband. Even in love, young people had to take class and social status into consideration. Sometimes, in order to live together, they had to resort to marriage by kidnapping. And then they had to live with the girl's family (i.e. to adopt matrilocality, though patrilocality was the rule) or to become a servant (*côn hươn*) for a noble.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Thái* script based on Sanskrit came into being probably in the 5th century. Besides, this ethnic group may boast their rich cultural and spiritu-

al heritage which comprises two parts: one was created by the common people, the other by the upper classes. Many valuable legacies have been discovered: historical books of thousands of pages, folk songs, writings on morality, religion, customs and practices, legends, stories and other literary and genres.

Many epics have been collected and published, including the *Quấm tổ mường* (History of the *Thái* Country), *Quấm tây pú sắc* (History of Battles Conducted by the *Thái*), *Xống chụ xôn xao* (Farewell to His Lover), and *Khun Lú Nàng Ủa* (*Lú and Ủa*).

The *Thái* arts are rich and unique. Mention should be made of patterns on woven cloth, folk dances such as *xòe vòng* performed by young people on festival nights, the dances of reapers, of rowers, the dances with shields, and more recently, with conical hats, and with bamboo sticks (*múa sạp*), which are very popular.

*Thái* literature and art are partly influenced by those of the *Việt* and, to a lesser extent, by those of the *Lào* and *Hán*.



Ritual of dowry presentation

## Nùng

**Denomination:** Nùng

**Small local group:** *Nùng Khèn Lài*, *Nùng Giang*, *Nùng An*, *Nùng Inh*, *Nùng Lòì*, *Nùng Phần Sinh*, *Nùng Cháo*, *Nùng Quý Rịn*, *Nùng Xường*, *Nùng Dín*, *Nùng Tùng Slin*

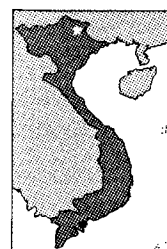
**Population:** Approx. 706,000

**Language:** Tày-Thái

**Area of habitation:** Mainly in Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn provinces. The *Nùng* live together with the *Tày*. A number of *Nùng* now live in Hồ Chí Minh City, Đồng Nai, Lâm Đồng and Đắk Lắk.

**Material life**

Depending on the group and locality, the *Nùng* house may be built either level with the ground or half on stilts with clay walls and a tiled roof. In the past, people lived on the floor (if the house was on stilts), while cattle and poultry were kept below, on the ground, and



TÀY-THÁI GROUP

agricultural produce and tools in the storage compartment near the roof (a kind of attic). Today, the house is larger and well-ventilated while the space under the floor is reserved for farming implements and wood. Cattle are kept in sheds built some distance from the main house.

The *Nùng* house, by contrast with that of the *Thái*, is divided into two parts widthwise. The front part is designed for the ancestral altar, and for receiving guests. The back part is used as bedroom and kitchen.

In general, the *Nùng*, especially women, all dress in the same way, with only slight differences depending on locality. Men wear indigo vests with military collars, buttoned at the front like their neighbouring ethnic groups in the highland regions of North Vietnam. Only the *Nùng An* adopt the five-panelled vest buttoned on the right side. *Nùng* women also wear a five-panelled vests buttoned on one side. This kind of vest is shorter than that of the *Tày*, trimmed with pieces of cloth in different colours at the sleeves, and hemmed differently depending on the group. A small round or oval cushion protects the vest when something heavy is to be carried on the shoulder, and an apron is attached to the front when the woman is working. Today, young people prefer European-style shirts and trousers. Elderly people still cling to the traditional costume.

The *Nùng*, long-standing cultivators, utilize submerged fields with the intensive farming method. But due to land shortage, they also cultivate terraced fields and milpas. The farming techniques are more advanced than those of neighbouring ethnic groups. Manure particularly that of animal origin is used. The *Nùng* do not transplant rice seedlings or grow other crops in winter. They build low walls, 1m in height, round their terraced fields. The crops grown in turn throughout the year on milpas and in gardens are quite varied: corn, canary-seed, peanuts, vegetables, and sweet potatoes. They help the people overcome the pre-harvest period of food shortage. All kinds of vegetables are used for family meals throughout the year. Bamboo, anise, lacquer and fruit trees grow in many gardens. The *Nùng* are considered as the best gardeners in Vietnam.

Animal rearing (cattle and poultry), though only a secondary activity, is well-developed. Each family has its own poultry yard with chickens, ducks, geese, pigs and buffaloes. The *Nùng* also rear fish in submerged ricefields.

Handicraft, particularly weaving, is a common activity for meeting local needs. Each woman has her own loom and plot of land to grow cotton and indigo. The produced cloth is dyed several times and then beaten until its surface becomes glossy. Old clothes are often re-dyed. Carpentry, production of bricks, tiles, jars, jugs, paper and cotton thread, silver-work, basketry, and so on are seen in many villages.

Except for salt, all vitally-important items are produced in sufficient quantity for local consumption and exchange. Artisanal activities flourish, particularly during the farm-slack according to the agricultural calendar. Blacksmiths are busy all year round. The *Nùng An* are famous blacksmiths in Cao Bằng and Tuyên Quang provinces.

Food gathering, hunting and fishing do not play an important role in the economy. However, tigers, monkeys, deers and mountain goats are in great demand as their bones are used to produce an excellent medicine for fortifying one's health.

For some decades now, the *Nùng* have been transforming milpas into terraced fields and reconstructed their submerged fields by means of small- and medium-sized irrigational works.

## Social and family relationships

In the past, the *Nùng* lived in scattered hamlets and villages. They are now tending to get together into larger population centres. In the village, houses are not built in accordance with any particular plan; their arrangement varies with local topography. The pathways are narrow and winding. Surrounding the house is generally a garden where fruit trees are grown including the pear, plum, orange, grapefruit and banana. Recently, people have begun building huts for handicrafts such as basketry, iron-work and carpentry, as well as for sheltering cattle and pigs.

The *Nùng* have a deeply-felt sense of ethnic identity and great loyalty to local chiefs and elders. Their society has experienced some class differentiation. There are no communal land, and private land is the result of individual land reclamation. In the past, local notables and landowners ruthlessly exploited the peasants.

The patriarchal nuclear family forms the basic unit of *Nùng* society. Problems of inheritance and marriage are regarded as men's matters. Marriage has a commercial character is costly. Once married, the woman is completely dependent on her husband and parents-in-law. Confucianism demands the rigorous maintaining of some distance between a woman and her father-in-law and brothers-in-law.

### ☐ Spiritual life

The *Nùng* are close to the *Tày* with regard to ancestor worship, festival rituals and annual ceremonies. Buddhist adherents, they worship also Kwan Yin. In the house, the altar to the Buddha is placed above that to ancestor, which are the most sacred places. They pray to the Buddha for protection from natural calamities threatening their crops or when someone falls ill. They refrain from eating beef, buffalo meat and dog meat. Belief in the existence of the genie of earth is still so strong that there is an altar dedicated to it, which is set up outside every house.

Some superstitious practices persist, particularly among the poor who appeal, for instance, to the *thầy mo* (sorcerer) to perform exorcisms in the event of illness or accidents. *Thầy mo* are among few people who can use the *Nùng* demotic script for compiling prayer books.

The *Nùng* have a rich literary and artistic heritage. Very popular are alternate songs (*sli*) and marriage songs (*cò lầu*). Their melodies and lyrics vary from one group to another. They extol nature and tell of the people's sufferings from oppression and injustice in the traditional society. *Sli* express love and hope for a better future. Singing *sli* is a tradition that is particularly popular: all people, young and old, men and women may sing *sli*, especially on market days.

In many aspects, the *Nùng* arts are very close to those of the *Tày*.



Girls' clothing in indigo

## Sán Chay

▣ **Denomination:** Sán Chay.

**Other names:** Mán, Cao Lan-Sán Chỉ, Sơn Tử, Hồn Bạ, Hồn Chùng

▣ **Small local group:** Cao Lan and Sán Chỉ

▣ **Population:** 114,000

▣ **Language:** Tày-Thái

▣ **Area of habitation:**

The *Sán Chay* are mainly concentrated in Tuyên Quang, Bắc Cạn and Thái Nguyên provinces. They are also found in scattered groups in certain areas of Yên Bái, Vĩnh Phúc, Phú Thọ, Bắc Giang and Quảng Ninh provinces.

The Sán Chỉ and Cao Lan speak different languages, but they can, to some extent, understand each other. The language of the Cao Lan is close to that of the *Tày-Thái* linguistic group, but their love songs (*sinh ca*) and prayers are in Sán Chỉ, a Cantonese dialect. By contrast, in some regions of Sơn Động district (Bắc Giang province) the Sán Chỉ use Cao Lan for many rites and ceremonies.



TÀY-THÁI GROUP

## ▣ Material life

Wet rice growers, the *Sán Chay* adopted a sedentary lifestyle in upland regions. They live in relatively sizeable villages comprising 20-30 families or more. In the past, their houses were mostly on stilts, but they have now begun to build houses level with the ground.

The *Sán Chay* house is divided into three compartments with two pent-houses. Close to the principal column near the entrance, a basket of bran with some joss sticks is placed as dedication to the Genie Trạch Vương (*Chiệc Vung*) who is believed to take charge of animal husbandry and look after cattle. Beside the column supporting the roof under the rafters of the last bay is the ancestral altar. In a corner of the penthouse adjoining that bay is the altar to the Boddhisattva, the Jade Emperor or the genie of hearth in accordance with each family's custom.

Regarding attire, the *Sán Chay* tend to imitate the *Việt* or *Tày* living in the same region. In many areas, old women still wear the five-panelled dress, embroidered on the collar with eight-pointed stars or horizontal lines on a plain background, and long skirts dyed in indigo. On special occasions, they wear the *uyên ương* dress, magnificently embroidered and decorated at the waist with three or four silk bands in different colours. The costume is completed with a belt knotted at the front, its ends falling to the knees. On ordinary days, *Sán Chay* women wear belts woven from threads of various colours instead of the silk belt, with knives in their sheath attached.

The *Sán Chay* have reached a technical level in wet-rice cultivation which is not far behind that of the neighbouring *Tày*, *Nùng*, *Hoa* and *Ngái* ethnic groups.

Besides wet rice, the *Sán Chay* also grow dry crops through slash-and-burn cultivation: corn, potatoes, beans, peanuts, sesame and vegetables. The raising of cattle and poultry is well-developed, supplying the *Sán Chay* with

meat which is also used as offerings in ceremonies. They also gather forest produce such as bamboo, rattan and mushrooms, and raise fish in rivers, plus hunting and fishing. Handicrafts, for example, basketry, carpentry and iron-work are in general only secondary activities.

## **▣ Social and family relationships**

Ricefields of the *Sán Chay* are the result of individual land reclamation. Only a small part is acquired through barter. The fields are intensively farmed, with rotation of crops. Forests, rivers, streams, fallow lands and other natural resources are considered communal property. The area of communal land is decreasing in favour of private property.

In certain regions of Hà Tuyên and Bắc Cạn provinces, the French colonialists expropriated large expanses of land in order to set up plantations, thereby turning a number of *Sán Chay* people into tenants. Social differentiation became more apparent and brought about various classes: landowners, rich peasants and other strata of working peasants.

The upper-class, most of them having abandoned production work, tried to win the confidence of the colonial and feudal authorities to be appointed by the latter as local administrators of villages, communes or cantons (called *Chánh phó nhiều*, *Chánh phó lý*, *Chánh phó tổng*), or as persons in charge of regional security (*Xã đoàn*, *Tổng đoàn*). There were also councils of notables and councils of people's representatives. Some *Sán Chay* managed to secure the post of *Bang tá*, a rank lower than the *Tri châu* and *Tri phủ* (district chiefs) which were assumed by people from other ethnic groups.

*Sán Chay* society, in spite of differentiation, retains the vestiges of a rural commune, which are manifested first and foremost in the autonomy of the village.

The *Sán Chay* village is a population unit whose members may belong to different lineages, each lineage having several branches. In many cases, members of other ethnic groups reside in the village as well. Formerly, each village had a headman (*Khán thủ*), designated by the villagers. He had the task of handling community affairs, and ensuring unity and harmony in the

village. He represented the village in external relations, including the communication with the administrative authorities. This person, who enjoyed great prestige and was regarded as competent in all respects, had however no rights or special privileges; generally he was far from rich. In certain regions, the *Khán thủ* was the principal officiant at communal feasts and religious ceremonies which were all opportunities for the village to strengthen their cohesion and community spirit.

The *Sán Chay* family is patrilineal and nuclear. Monogamy and patrilocality are the rule. The most popular family names are *Hoàng*, *Trần*, *Lã*, *Lý*, *Minh*, *Chu*, *Tiêu*, *Hà*, *Liêu* and *Dương*. Marriage between people of the same lineage is absolutely prohibited, even people who have lived for a long time far from each other. Those from the same branch worship the same deities (Nam Hoa, Táo Quân, Kwan Yin and so on), and observe the same rites and taboos. Each believes it to be his or her duty to give support and assistance to other members of the same lineage, even if they are not acquainted.

Feudal morality has exerted a profound impact on the lifestyle of the *Sán Chay*. Women must observe strict customary rules. In the past they had to hide behind a bamboo screen each time they encountered a man superior to their husband. Today, they still observe this custom but only in a symbolic form: the bamboo screen may be replaced by any object within their reach (a bamboo pipe used to stoke up the fire, a piece of wood, a pan or even a broom). This custom is surely related to a sexual taboo which the feudalists tried to perpetuate as part of the patriarchal system. However, the matrilineal family has not definitively been eliminated in community relationships.

Although her parents have the last word in her marriage, a young girl has some freedom in the choice of her life's companion, which is testified by the "betel leaves" rite. *Sán Chay* women do not chew betel leaves and areca nuts, but all marriages must begin with this rite. To make their nuptial proposal official, the family of the young man come and put eight betel leaves on the ancestral altar of the young girl's family. If these leaves are put aside within seven days, this means the answer is positive; if not, the proposal has been rejected. In general, parents and children exchange views on the choice and, very often, parents take the will of their daughter into consideration.

In the *Sán Chay* wedding ceremony, particular importance is given to the role of the brides-maid (*Bá mệ* or *Bá chip* in the *Cao Lan* language) who accompanies and guides the bride. She holds a bush-knife and strikes out energetically at all obstacles on the way such as blocks of stone, tree trunks and branches (the rite of "clearing the way"). The bride must spend a night at her husband's. The next day, before returning to her parents', she and her *Bá mệ* go to fetch water at a stream to fill up two bamboo sections (used as water containers), and to find a log; these acts are intended to affirm the role of the married woman in her new family. Although matrilocality is the rule, it often happens that the young couple live at the wife's family for two or three years before removing to the husband's family.

The dead are buried. When the body is put in the coffin, it is customary to add seven coins (if it is a man) or nine (if it is a woman) threaded in such a way as to correspond to the orifices of the body (eyes, nose, mouth, ears and so on). It is believed that the coins symbolize the *Khuê* star which will guide the dead person towards his or her ancestors in the other world. Funeral rites are deeply influenced by Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. There are rites of "destroying the prison" to "liberate the soul of the deceased", praying to the Buddha, and a ceremony dedicated to Laozi where a sorcerer is the chief officiant. During the rituals, prayers are said, and paper votive offerings burned.

## Spiritual life

Apart from religious and superstitious practices, as well as popular knowledge of agriculture and medicine, the *Sán Chay* cultural heritage has been built up, through exchanges, with the assimilation of neighbouring cultures. There are stories about the origins of human beings, the struggle against natural calamities and wrongdoings.

Knowledge about nature, production experience, moral precepts, and code of daily conduct are generally presented in proverbs, folksongs and stories in verse.

Noteworthy are the alternate love songs performed by groups of young men and women (called *sinh ca*) at evening parties throughout the night. This form of folk singing is very attractive to singers, musicians, and people of all ages.

The most popular musical instruments are castanets, small copper bells, cymbals, clarinets, flutes, drums with wooden sound-boxes, particularly, drums with sandstone sound-boxes.

The *Sán Chay* ritual dances reflect community life, for instance the drum dance, bird dance, farewell dance, lamp dance, road-repairing dance, harpoon-fishing dance, and shrimp-catching dance. Some have been adapted to stage performance.



House-on-stilts

## Giáy

▣ **Denomination:** Giáy.

**Other names:** Nhắng, Giăng, Sa Nhân, Pư-Năm, Chủng Chá, Pầu Thỉn.

▣ **Small local group:** Pư Nà (Cùi Chu or Quý Châu)

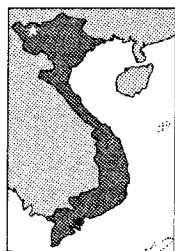
▣ **Population:** 38,000.

▣ **Language:** Tày-Thái

▣ **Area of habitation:**

Mainly in Bát Xát, Bảo Thắng and Mường Khương districts (Lào Cai province), Yên Ninh and Đồng Văn districts (Hà Giang province), and Phong Thổ and Mường Tè districts (Lai Châu province).

About 200 years ago, a number of *Giáy* families left China, their native place, to settle in the northern regions of Vietnam. Others followed them several decades later. The *Giáy* are also present in China in the community of Bồ Y. The *Giáy* have many similarities with the Tày, Nùng, Thái and Bồ Y in many aspects (mode of life, dressing,



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language, customs). Some *Giáy* villages are extremely similar to those of the said ethnic groups.

### ▣ Material life

In general the *Giáy* live in houses-on-stilts. However those in Hoàng Liên Sơn and Lai Châu provinces have moved to houses built level with the ground, but with a raised drying space. Each family has, moreover, a secondary house constructed on the milpa, which serves as a dwelling for elderly persons who assume the task of looking after crops, and rearing poultry and other domestic animals. The traditional attire of *Giáy* women is the knee-length skirt, very different from their modern-day wear which is simpler and has less embroidery. Modern *Giáy* women wear trousers dyed in dark indigo with a red cloth band at the waist, and a five-panelled vest open on the side and buttoned under the right armpit. Around the collar and at the wrists, bands of brightly-coloured cloth are sewn and contrast with the indigo-coloured background. *Giáy* men wear large trousers with a belt to keep them in place and a vest buttoned at the front. Women have their hair wound round the head with rose-coloured threads, and left falling freely in a long plait. When going out, they like to take with them linen sacks decorated with embroidered stars.

Each year, the *Giáy* organize the *Roóng pơc* ceremony which marks the start of work in rice fields, similar to the Tày ceremony of "going to the field". Ordinary rice is their staple food. The *Giáy* are well-versed in the techniques of cultivating rice in irrigated terraced fields. There is also a very efficient traditional system of mutual assistance. Besides rice-growing, slash-and-burn cultivation supplies corn, potatoes, cassava, gourd and vegetables. The *Giáy* rear buffaloes as draught animals, horses as pack-animals and for transport, and pigs and poultry which supply meat and ritual sacrifices. Buffaloes are allowed to wander half-freely in forest within an enclosure, when there is no agricultural work.

Handicrafts are under-developed among the *Giáy*, except for basketry. The *Giáy* make bamboo objects for family use. They weave cotton and pat-



terned cloth with varied geometrical motifs, exclusively for family needs. A few artisans make ploughshares and silver jewellery.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

In the *Giáy* community, class differentiation was fairly marked in the past. The head of the administrative unit equivalent to the commune was the *Lý trưởng* assisted by the *Phó lý*. Being in charge of the administration of several hamlets, they had many privileges. The income from cultivation of the communal land by different groups of population belonged to them. Services at the *Lý trưởng*'s house were provided by regional soldiers; other people were assigned with the growing of cardamom, the proceeds from which were vital for covering the expenditure on marriages and funerals. Some *Lý trưởng* maintained groups of dancers (*xòe*) to entertain guests at banquets and festivities held in honour of their superiors. Some hamlets comprised only five or six households governed by a *Thôn trưởng* (hamlet chief).

Peasants and other strata of the working population were subject to *corvée* and had to pay taxes (which were generally very heavy) and other tribute to the higher classes.

In *Giáy* regions, most of the fields constitute communal property. Private land is not important. This feature contributes greatly to giving the *Giáy* village the tightly-knit organization of a rural commune.

Each village has a "forbidden" forest called *doong xía* (holy forest), where the biggest tree is also considered as sacred. The rituals of worshipping the village tutelary genie are conducted twice a year at the foot of this tree. The chief officiant is called *pau cau*. The costs are covered with the income from part of the communal lands. During this ceremony, access to the village is forbidden to strangers. A bamboo is planted at the village entrance with a wattle where parts of the sacrificed animals are hung (ears of pigs or buffaloes, feet of chicken, or tufts of animal hair).

The *Giáy* live in the patrilineal and nuclear family. The husband decides all family affairs. The wife must obey the rule of "three obediences" (unmarried, she must obey her father; married, her husband, and widowed,

her sons). Marriage is based on the principle of purchase; it requires complex and costly rites to be performed at the families of both bridegroom and bride. Therefore, formerly marriage by "kidnapping" was common.

*Giáy* women give birth in a squatting position, in a room where there is an altar set up specifically for the delivery. The placenta is buried under the woman's bed. When the baby is a month of age, a ceremony is held to "inform" the ancestors about the birth, and to give it a name. The chief officiant writes on a piece of red cloth the horoscope of the new-born with the hour, day, month and year of its birth, according to the lunar calendar. (Horoscopes are consulted to ensure "age concordance" in choosing spouses and determining the moment of putting the dead into the coffin, and of burial). If the child is fragile, it is customary that a female sponsor or god-mother be chosen. The latter should be good-hearted and have a happy life. The *Giáy* believe that the souls of children who die young will be reincarnated. To prevent the reincarnation that no one wants, a mark should be made behind the child's ear.

Custom requires that the dead should be kept in the house for three to five days before burial. The participants in the funeral procession walk rapidly, and sometimes even run for fear that the body of the deceased might be forcibly taken away, (although this can never occur!). Those who die a violent death are buried immediately. The *Giáy* refrain from cutting their hair and shaving within 90 days in mourning for the father and 120 days for the mother. The ceremony to end the mourning period is always held before the Lunar New Year festival, irrespective of the date of death.

According to the *Giáy* cosmogonic conceptions, the universe is composed of three layers; human beings live in the middle one. The upper layer - heaven - is also a paradise where beauty and glory prevail. The underground layer is considered the world of evils and sins.

## ▣ Spiritual life

On the ancestral altar located in the central bay of the *Giáy* house, there are usually many incense sticks vases, each intended for the worship of a

deity (such as that of heaven, of earth, or the spirits of ancestors, the genie of hearth, of soil, and others).

The abundant cultural heritage of the *Giáy* reflects various aspects of traditional life. Numerous proverbs and maxims constitute a kind of moral code followed by everyone at will and appealed to whenever there is a dispute to be settled or anger to be appeased.

There are many legends, humorous tales, stories in verse and riddles, all rich in content. Folk-songs are popular with such genres as the *viton ná lấu*, *viton chãng hằm* (alternate songs) and *viton sroổng răn* (farewell songs).



Men's traditional costume

## Lào

▣ **Denomination:** Lào.

*Other names:* Lào Bốc, Lào Nội

▣ **Population:** Approx. 10,000

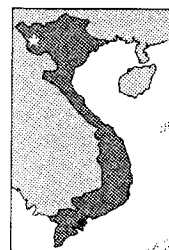
▣ **Language:** Tày-Thái

▣ **Area of habitation:** Along the Vietnam-Laos borders; in some districts such as Sông Mã (Sơn La province), Điện Biên and Phong Thổ (Lai Châu province).

### ▣ **Material life**

The *Lào* living in Vietnam belong to the *Lào Bốc* group (or *Lào Nội*) and are closer to the *Thái* than to their congeners in Laos.

The *Lào* live in houses on stilts with roofs shaped like tortoise carapaces. They look similar to those of the *Black Thái*. But there is a difference: the principal column of the *Lào* house is not set up beside the hearth reserved for guests but in front of the family hearth where daily meals are prepared. The interior design, the techniques of assembling the frame work, the decorative patterns and the extended dwelling space are all



TÀY-THÁI GROUP

elements showing similarities between the houses of the *Lào* in Vietnam and those in Laos. The ancestral altar is another vital element of any *Lào* house.

*Lào* women's attire is very close to that of their *Thái* counterparts. Only the women in Sông Mã wear scarves (*piêu*) knotted in such a way as to form a "peaks" above the forehead or wound around the head (like *Lự* women) with one end falling freely to the shoulder. When wearing no scarf, *Lào* women like to decorate their hair with elaborately wrought pins. They wear black skirts knotted at the front and coming up to their chests; the hems are decorated with two bands embroidered with motifs in different colours. *Lào* women follow the custom of tattooing their palms with images of insects. Men prefer the tattoos of a Buddhist swastika on the wrist and of animals on the thighs. The *Lào* smoke tobacco using finely carved pipes.

The *Lào* grow rice in submerged fields with complex techniques which are similar to those of the *Thái*. Family sidelines are quite sophisticated, including the production of large pottery wheels, fine ceramics, jars, urns, cooking pots, woven patterned cloth and other high-quality fabrics.

Sedentary and skilled rice growers and artisans, the *Lào* give an appearance of comfort and wealth to their hamlets which sometimes comprise up to 100 households each.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

Formerly, the *Lào* lived under the feudal regime of the *Thái*. But the administrative authorities of each village were selected from among the inhabitants themselves, and they enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. Family lines and the particular taboos of each line have features in common with those of the *Thái*. Families, both extended and nuclear, are patrilineal, but women continue to occupy an important place. Harmony prevails in most families, and disputes are rare; children are educated in the same manner without sex discrimination.

Marriage is based on free consent. The *Lào* do not observe sororate nor levirate. Monogamy is the rule; cases of polygamy, divorce and adultery are rare. In the past, there were few marriages between people of different clans.

On the birth of a child, the ceremony *ba xi* is held to wish the mother and the child good health. This practice, however, is disappearing.

Cremation is applied when the deceased is the chief of a *mường* (*Chầu mường*) or village (*Chầu bản*). The principal officiant is the *Chầu hua* who performs very complex rituals based on Buddhist dogmas.

### ▣ Spiritual life

Buddhist influence is not marked among the *Lào* in Vietnam. For them, the village pagoda has the same significance and role as the communal house of the *Việt* in the delta, or the column of the *Thái mường* and *bản* where rituals and ceremonies are performed. The people often appeal, however, to the *Chầu hua*, the shaman who plays the same role as the *Mường* sorcerer among the *Thái*. Buddhist code requires that offerings should be made only of fruits and flowers, and animal sacrifices are never permitted. On the 15th and 30th of the lunar month, the *Lào* make offerings to pagodas. This practice is disappearing, whereas other rites and ceremonies similar to those of the *Thái* are retained. Likewise, the *Lào* tend to appeal less and less to the shaman who cures diseases by means of sorcery and amulets.

The *Lào* have a rich cultural and artistic heritage. The village shaman is at the same time a healer and a scholar who knows many folk-tales and folk-songs which prove the interaction of *Lào* and *Thái* cultures. There are well-known books made of palm leaves and intended for containing *Lào* tales, songs (*khắp*) and lyrical poems. *Lào* women are in general good singers and dancers. At evening parties or cultural activities, the *Thái xòe* is always followed by the *Lào lăm vông*. Besides, the *Lào* have assimilated the elements of other cultures through acculturation.





Dyeing cloth

## Lự

**Denomination:** Lự.

*Other names:* Nhuồn, Duồn, Lừ

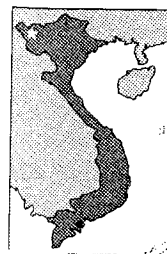
**Population:** 3,700

**Language:** Tày-Thái

**Area of habitation:**

Phong Thổ and Sìn Hồ districts (Lai Châu province)

Probably native to Xíp Xoong Pan Na region of China, the *Lự* emigrated to Vietnam long ago. They first occupied the region now called Điện Biên and lived among the *Bạch Y* community who had settled in Vietnam as early as the first century of our era. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the *Black Thái* as new-comers could already note the existence of the famous citadel of Xam Mứn (*Tam Vạn*) constructed by the *Lự*. Around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *Lự* were attacked by the *Phẻ* from Burma and driven out of Mường Thanh and Tuần Giáo (Lai Châu province). Some groups arrived to settle in the districts of Phong Thổ and Sìn Hồ.



TÀY-THÁI GROUP

Some *Lự* are now living in China, Myanmar and Laos. In Laos, they are classified as part of the *Lào Lùm* group, in China as part of the *Thái* community, and in Myanmar, as belonging to the *Nhuôn*.

## ▣ Material life

The *Lự* village is attractively designed and proper.

It comprises 40-60 houses, the fronts of which look out over a valley crossed by a stream. The *Lự* house is generally spacious and well-ventilated. It differs from that of the *Thái* only in this detail: the stairway is used as both entrance and exit.

The staple food of the *Lự* is sticky rice served with fish and vegetables.

*Lự* women's attire is different from that of the *Thái*. It comprises a short, richly decorated vest opening at the front, and an embroidered skirt. Men wear embroidered trousers and bracelets. In the past they had long hair, tattooed their bodies, pierced the lobes of their ears and painted their teeth black.

The *Lự* cultivate submerged fields criss-crossed by streams that supply water for irrigation. The fields are carefully ploughed and weeded. Paddy seeds are first sowed in seed-beds, and then the seedlings are transplanted. Some fields are fertilized with manure of both animal and plant origin. The *Lự* also grow corn, cassava, indigo and cotton with the techniques of slash-and-burn farming. Vegetables, gourd plants and fruit trees are grown in gardens.

Animal husbandry is a family activity. Domestic animals are reared for meat needed for the *Lự* on special occasions: receptions, religious ceremonies, funerals, weddings and so on. Hunting is becoming less popular and with less skilled hunters than in the past.

Weaving is the most widespread occupation. Each family has several looms, and *Lự* woven patterned cloth with various motifs are equal in quality to those of the *Lào*, and even surpass those of the *Thái* in beauty.

The *Lự* have led a sedentary lifestyle for a long time now, in a well-organized system which is testified by the construction of the *Tam Vạn* citadel. But given their small population and their life dependence on the *White Thái*, the *Lự* have experienced some gradual decline. However, their

agricultural techniques and handicrafts show that the *Lự* have reached a high level of development in culture.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Formerly, each *Lự* village was governed by a *Nài bản* who had the task of collecting tribute and supervising corvée in the rice fields of *Thái* feudal lords. The *Lự* were merely semi-free peasants (*nhố*); the *Nài bản*, being in general members of large rich families, tried to strengthen their position by matrimonial alliances so as to monopolize the right to the post of village chief, which would then be inherited by their descendants. *Nài bản* possessed their own fields and did not cultivate those belonging to *Thái* feudal lords. They had begun to levy corvée for their own benefit and demand presents but only in a timid way. The only sign of social distinction was manifested in the size of personal property. Mutual assistance and cooperation is a spirit characteristic of the social relationship of the *Lự*.

The *Lự* have adopted the model of small patrilineal nuclear family. Marriage depends on the parents' approval, but the last word will be given to the *Chầu hô*, a bonze from a Buddhist sect in the region, after the horoscopes of the young requestors have been read. This bonze, as the highest religious dignitary, also presides over all village ceremonies combining Buddhist rites with various superstitious practices. In *Lự* society, the *Chầu hô* plays the same role as the *Thày mo* among the *Thái* or the *Thày cúng* among the *Tày*.

## ▣ Spiritual life

Like other members of the same ethnic group, the *Lự* believe in the existence of spirits of the house, of the village, of fields and mountains. Although no longer followed by the *Lự*, Buddhism has left many traces in this community such as pagodas, the *Chầu hô* who has the same status as a bonze among the Lao and the Cambodians, and the concept of *bun* (good omen).

*Lự* folklore includes popular tales, proverbs and historical poems. Other aspects of their culture are close to those of the *Thái*, including the well-known *xòe Lự* (dances) and *khắp Lự* (songs).



Playing the *khèn* musical instrument

## Bố Y

▣ **Denomination:** Bố Y.

*Other names:* Pầu Y, Pủ Dí, Chủng Chá, Trung Gia.

▣ **Small local groups:** Tù Dí, Bố Y.

▣ **Population:** 1,450

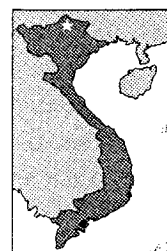
▣ **Language:** Tày-Thái

▣ **Area of habitation:** Quận Bạ district (Hà Giang province), and Mường Khương district (Lào Cai province).

The *Bố Y* of Hà Giang have their own language, which, as a *Tày-Thái* dialect, is still used in communication between themselves.

By contrast, the *Bố Y* of Lào Cai use Mandarin Chinese. Their ancestors left their country of origin Guizhou (China) to emigrate to Vietnam about 250 years ago.

There are families of the same ethnic group still living in their native province in China.



TÀY-THÁI GROUP

▣ **Material life**

The *Bố Y* house is built level with the ground in accordance with a defined plan: clay walls,

three bays, a frame with four supports, and a facade preceded by a verandah with the entrance door in the centre. In the house, there is always an extra room made of wooden boards and set up on the main beams, which serves as bedroom and storage space.

In the past, *Bố Y* women wore wide skirts like those of the *Hmông Hoa*. But for about half a century now, the *Bố Y* women from Hà Giang have been dressing in the *Nùng* fashion while the *Tu Dí* from *Lào Cai* have adopted *Hán* women's costume. However, they all wear the apron (called *váy zao*) with detachable sleeves (*dí sítu*) and decorated with several coloured bands like those on the vest worn by the *Hmông* and *Lô Lô*.

*Bố Y* women like wearing silver jewellery including earrings, necklaces and bracelets. Among the *Tu Dí* in particular, women prefer silver chains with charms (called *vùi xéo xỏ* and *già xẻ*), attached to their aprons at chest level.

Originally, the *Bố Y* were skilled wet-rice growers. However, settling in an area of less fertile land, they have adopted the method of slash-and-burn cultivation. This yields only one rice crop per year, and as the arable land is limited, corn is being made the principal food crop.

Many *Bố Y* are good artisans whose sidelines include carpentry, pottery, stone-carving iron-work and jewellery. Women grow cotton, and are acquainted with such skills as spinning, weaving, indigo-dyeing, sewing, and embroidery for their attire.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

*Bố Y* society has experienced class differentiation but the process is not yet very marked. These people had been driven away from their native country by the oppression and exploitation of *Hán* landowners and notables. Since their arrival in Vietnam, they have been united by ties of solidarity in production and in the defence of their villages. Every family in the village has the obligation to assist their neighbours on various occasions such as house building, marriages and funerals.

The *Bố Y* village is often located by a stream from where water is transported to each dwelling house by means of a system of bamboo pipes.

Houses in the village are constructed side by side with no hedge or fence. Each house has a kitchen-garden. Some families have small ponds for raising fish.

The patrilineal family system is the rule among the *Bố Y*. Each family line has a series of five, seven or nine words which are added to the name of a person to indicate his/her rank in the line.

Matrimonial custom requires that a young man go and ask the family of his girl-friend for her hand in marriage. The newly-married woman goes to her husband's house on horseback in a procession where the presence of the bridegroom is not compulsory. Polygamy is a rare phenomenon. The old practice of levirate and early marriage has gradually disappeared.

When a woman is going to give birth, a tree branch is planted before the door to prevent strangers' access. The placenta is buried under the woman's bed. In the room, an altar is set up in honour of the delivery. Thirty days after birth, the baby is given a name in the course of a ceremony; this name will be replaced by a new one when the child comes of age.

Funeral rites require children to observe strictly the practice of abstinence within 90 days in mourning for their mother and 120 days for their father. One year after the funeral, a ceremony is held to mark the end of the mourning period. However, children must then wait three years before they can get married.

## ▣ Spiritual life

Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism exert a strong influence on the spiritual life and every activity of *Bố Y* society. Vestiges of primitive superstitions such as animism and polytheism can still be found. They are expressed in quite a few rituals and forms of worship, and in the conceptions of life and death. The *Bố Y* worship heaven, earth, ancestors, the genies of mountains, soil and forest, Kwan Yin, *Hà Bá* (Emperor of Waters), and the spirits of streams, milpas and fire. In the domain of culture and arts, many elements have been assimilated by the *Bố Y* from other ethnic groups living in the same natural and social environment.



Portrait of a woman

## Group named as Kădai (or Cờ Lao)

### La Chí

▣ **Denomination:** La Chí.

*Other names:* Cù Tê, La Ti, Thổ Đen (Black Thổ), Mán Chí, Xá and others.

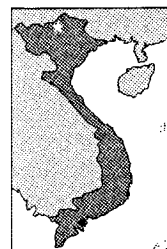
▣ **Population:** 8,000

▣ **Language:** Ka-dai<sup>(\*)</sup> or Cờ Lao

▣ **Area of habitation:** Bản Phùng, Bản Dú, Bản Páng, Bản Máy communes (Xín Mần district, Hà Giang province).

#### ▣ **Material life**

An indigenous population of the region, the *La Chí* settle on the slopes of mountains, forming hamlets of between five and ten houses. Only the Nà Lống hamlet is relatively more populous, being on a flat land at medium-altitude on the side of a high mountain.



GROUP NAMED AS KADAI  
(OR CỜ LAO)

(\*) Composite language formed with *Tày-Thái*, *Môn-Khmer* and Malayo-Polynesian elements.



The *La Chí* house is built half-on-stilts and half-on-ground, on a slope, with a two-sectioned-roof on different levels. There is only one stairway providing access to the floor on stilts. The house is surrounded by a thick clay wall almost as high as the roof. Access to the house is through the only door which serves as both entrance and exit. This style of architecture is typical of the fortified houses so appropriate to the living conditions of the border-land regions in North Vietnam where security is a matter of concern.

The *La Chí* costume is simple and elegant. Most women wear trousers, while some still have skirts like those of the *Tày*. They usually wear a four-panelled dress without buttons, opening at the front. The flaps are held in a belt, falling to the knees. *La Chí* women wear bras under their dress. The hems of the dress and bra are edged with a band of coloured cloth which stands out against the dark indigo background.

*La Chí* male attire is composed of wide trousers and a robe worn over them. The robe falls to the knees and is buttoned on the left side. Men wear their long hair covered with a turban wound around the head many times.

Cropping irrigated and terraced fields on hillsides is the principal method of the traditional cultivation of the *La Chí*.

In lower fields, the *La Chí* practise transplantation of paddy seedlings. In dry fields, seeds are sown by broadcasting, then covered with a thin layer of earth. Manure is used in two different ways, either spread on the field at ploughing time or by impregnating the roots of paddy seedlings before replanting.

To overcome the shortage of land, the *La Chí* also cultivate dry land which includes fields where sowing is done with digging sticks, where soil is prepared with picks, and where ploughs are used. Rice, corn, sweet potatoes, cassava, and other food crops are grown there. The soil in these fields is also enriched with manure. Certain fertile lands are reserved for the planting of cotton and indigo.

Most *La Chí* women are good at threading, weaving, dyeing and embroidery. Men are excellent house-builders and makers of household utensils from rattan and bamboo. Some are blacksmiths and carpenters, but they take up these occupations only on a seasonal basis.



1. *La Chí* women's traditional costume (*Tân Quang commune, Bắc Quang district, Hà Giang*).

2. A funeral procession (*the Cờ Lao, Hà Giang*).

3. Mr. Nông Quang Chàng weaving baskets intended for containing 'brides' valuables' (*the La Chí, Diu hamlet, Xin Mần, Hà Giang*).

4. Going to market (*the Cờ Lao, Hà Giang*).







1. "Đầy" bamboo rucksack (the La Ha, Son La).
2. Spinning (the La Ha, Thuận Châu, Mường Son La).
3. Pu Péo girls in traditional costume (Phố Lả commune, Đông Văn, Hà Giang).
4. Cooking "mền mền" (the Pu Péo, Phố Lả commune, Đông Văn, Hà Giang).



## ▣ Social and family relationships

*La Chí* society has undergone a process of profound differentiation. The communal land system has disappeared in favour of private property. The sale, purchase and mortgaging of fields and agricultural produce, hire of labour, and usurious loans payable in kind were in the past common practices.

Under the colonial regime, the whole Xín Mân region and part of the Hoàng Su Phì region were governed by a canton chief of *La Chí* origin. The colonial and feudal administration granted some rights and privileges to the authorities from richer classes.

Each year, *La Chí* peasants had to pay tribute and furnish unpaid labour to the chief of canton or village. Many fields and other lands were expropriated by the minority in power. The number of impoverished peasants increased, especially in the pre-harvest time and in years fraught with natural calamities.

The *La Chí* maintain the patrilineal nuclear family. A house may be shared by three generations at the most.

The spirit of lineage cohesion has weakened. Members of the fifth generation of the same family can marry each other. The only tie binding those of the same lineage together is the veneration of common ancestors whose cult is honoured in the seventh moon of the year. This is the greatest festival of the *La Chí*. The votive offerings comprise a skin drum and some bronze drums. The person representing the whole lineage (*pô mìa nhu*) presides over the ceremony. He is not necessarily the chief of the lineage or the oldest person but should know how to conduct the ceremony.

## ▣ Spiritual life

Besides ancestor worship, the *La Chí*, essentially being farmers, observe the rituals of the agricultural cycle, which are related to the function of the buffalo and to the soul of rice.

Each village has its rigorous rules for the performance of these rites in the "communal house". Each lineage appoints two representatives for this purpose. The "communal house" is built on eight stilts with a two-layered roof, under which are hung buffalo and ox skulls as remains of sacrifices. This is the place for worshipping the soul of rice, the spirits of ancestors and Hoàng Dìn Thùng<sup>(1)</sup> whom the *La Chí* consider one of their common ancestors. In the past the rituals of worshipping them took place every year, which was regarded as a major event; now such a function is held only once every 10 or 15 years.

The *La Chí* have a very rich heritage of folk literature. It includes legends and tales about the creation of man (such as *Pủ Lô Tô*), the origins of this ethnic group (such as the history of Hoàng Dìn Thùng and that of Bản Phùng), natural phenomena, the origins of the ritual of sacrificing buffaloes and oxen at funerals, and that of fishes, birds, rats and "paddy soul". Young people enjoy listening to legends related by old people in festivals or leisure time.

Musical instruments comprise skin drums, bronze drums, *dàn tính* (zither), and that resembling the harp.

In seasonal festivities, young men and women express their love through *nỉ cô* songs (similar to the *lượn* of the *Tày*). Some traditional dances, e.g. the dances with handkerchiefs, fans, belts or buffalo horns, are still performed, especially in the course of buffalo sacrifices. The most popular game is the *còn* (small ball thrown through a circle tied at the top of a mast).

(1) Or Hoàng Văn Đồng, a notability of Tụ Long commune (former Tuyên Quang province), who stood up against the local feudal regime (1773). The *La Chí*, the *Cờ Lao*, the *Hmông*, the *Hoa* in Tả Chải-Hoàng Su Phì commune have set up temples dedicated to this hero.



Foot-washing ritual for the bride before her going to the in-laws'

## Cờ Lao

▣ **Denomination:** Cờ Lao

▣ **Small local groups:** Cờ Lao Đỏ (Red Cờ Lao), Cờ Lao Trắng ( White Cờ Lao) Cờ Lao Xanh (Blue Cờ Lao).

▣ **Population:** 1,500

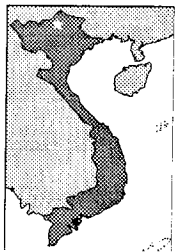
▣ **Language:** Ka-dai or Cờ-lao

▣ **Area of habitation:** Hà Giang province, along the Vietnam-China border.

### ▣ **Material life**

In Hà Giang, the *Cờ Lao* adopted a sedentary lifestyle quite early in mountain regions, and formed villages with relatively large populations (about 20 households). Their houses are built level with the ground on mountain slopes where the land is dotted with large rocks. Each house has three bays, sometimes flanked by two lean-tos. A verandah runs the length of the façade.

*Cờ Lao* women's attire is mainly composed of a pair of ankle-length trousers and a five-panelled



GROUP NAMED AS KADAI  
(OR CỜ LAO)

dress. The dress is split up to the hip, and buttons under the left armpit. All garments are dyed in indigo. Around the neck and hems of the sleeves are bands of brightly coloured cloth. *Cờ Lao* women also wear belts, scarves on their heads, and leggings.

*Cờ Lao* grow different crops depending on the character of the soil and other natural conditions. In Đồng Văn district, where arable land is limited and streams are rare, *Cờ Lao* cultivate milpas or small plots of land between rocks. Corn has become the principal food crop. Also grown are rye, beans, green peas and other vegetables. Intensive farming is practiced, with the utilization of manure of animal origin. But for about 20 years now, manure of plant and human origin has also been introduced.

By contrast, in the region of Hoàng Su Phì, where the mountains are covered with soil up to quite high altitudes, the climate is hot and humid and streams numerous, conditions are favourable for the cultivation of rice in terraced fields. *Cờ Lao* agricultural techniques are similar to those of the *Dao* and *Hoa* of the same region.

The *Cờ Lao* of Hoàng Su Phì grow tea plants on hills, which constitutes a considerable source of extra income.

Regarding handicraft, the *Cờ Lao* are engaged in basketry, carpentry and iron-work. They often make household utensils from bamboo. Metal-work is done in leisure times, between working seasons, especially in order to repair agricultural implements.

### ▣ **Social and family relationships**

The cell of *Cờ Lao* society is the patrilineal family. Members of the same family live under the same roof and may belong to two or three generations, each of which forms an independent socio-economic unit. For the *Cờ Lao*, monogamy is the rule, and families are generally stable. Cases of polygamy or divorce are rare. Apart from the ties between the members of the same lineage, mutual assistance within the community is constantly maintained and clearly demonstrated on such occasions as the building of a new house, wedding, childbirth, and funerals. Members of the same lineage, like all



other villagers, are therefore duty-bound to make contributions in kind or in the form of unpaid labour.

Before their emigration, the *Cờ Lao* had lived in a profoundly differentiated society. Arriving in Vietnam as exiles, they felt the need to unite and assist one another in building a new life. This spirit of solidarity put an end to the process of social differentiation. In each village, despite some discrepancy in the population's income and living standards, inequality is not marked, and arises mainly from the amount of work done by each family.

### **Spiritual life**

The *Cờ Lao* practise the worship of ancestors, of spirits and genies, for example, the soul of paddy, the spirit of milpas and the guardian genie of domestic animals. Offerings are made on certain days, at festivals and at annual ceremonies.

The *Cờ Lao* have accumulated a literary heritage comprising oral stories, legends, humorous tales, maxims, proverbs, and parallel sentences.



Women's traditional costume

## La Ha

 **Denomination:** La Ha.

*Other names:* Xá Cha, Xá La Nga, Xá Khao.

 **Small local groups:** La Ha ừng and Khlá Phlào

 **Population:** 1,400

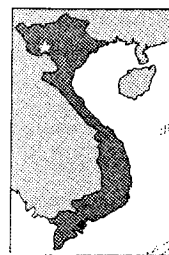
 **Language:** Ka đai or Cờ lao

 **Area of habitation:** Yên Bái and Sơn La province.

### **Material life**

The *La Ha* are indigenous to the region of Northwest Vietnam; their presence was noted very early, but ethnographic studies have only been undertaken since the 1960s.

The *La Ha* live in small concentrations of a dozen households in houses on stilts. In the past, they were itinerant farmers with a precarious mode of life. They have already changed to a sedentary lifestyle and now dwell in houses made of stone. The roof of the *La Ha* house in Thuận



GROUP NAMED AS KADAI  
(OR CỜ LAO)

Châu and Mường La is shaped like the tortoise carapace. In Than Uyên, the *La Ha* house differs from that of the *Thái* and *Kháng* in interior design. Part of the floor is supported by stilts and is reserved for guests; it occupies half the total area of the house, while the remaining part is for family life. The altar to ancestors is not located in a corner as in a *Thái*, *Kháng* or *Xinh-mun* house, but in a more visible place.

The *La Ha* have their own specific customs. For instance, it is forbidden to bring green leaves, green objects or raw meat into the house through the door giving direct access to the family section; this must be done through the door reserved for guests. And when meals are prepared, the handle of the pan or pot must be turned in a direction parallel to the bed of the head of the family.

The *La Ha* grow cotton but are not familiar with weaving. They barter cotton for cloth woven by the *Thái*. *La Ha* women dress in the same fashion as the *Black Thái*.

In the past, the *La Ha* lived on milpa rice, and in some regions, they practised rotational cropping or shifting cultivation. They now follow a production calendar identical to that of the *Thái*. Farming techniques are rudimentary; the farming implements comprise knives, digging sticks and rakes. Digging sticks are now used only for the planting of cotton; rice-fields are prepared with ploughs and harrows. Irrigated fields are being developed at the same time as submerged fields to prevent soil erosion.

In addition to agriculture, the *La Ha* are engaged in hunting, fishing, food gathering, animal rearing, and handicrafts (particularly, basketry). Pigs and poultry used to serve mainly as ritual offerings. Nowadays, animal husbandry has become an important additional source of foodstuffs: buffaloes, oxen, and also cochineal insects for dye.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Under the feudal regime, the *La Ha* were exploited. Every year, each *La Ha* was obliged to work without pay for 100-200 days for a *Thái* seigneur. He also had to pay tribute or offer presents to the latter.

For the *La Ha*, the patrilineal nuclear family is the norm. The wife must obey her husband and take his name immediately after marriage. If the husband dies, the widow must live with her eldest son or the late husband's family. She can remarry, but according to custom, she will always belong to the first husband who alone is considered legitimate. Property of the defunct is inherited by the eldest son or his brothers.

Wedding presents offered by the family of the bridegroom to that of the bride are generally expensive. After four or five years of living with his wife's family, the husband must still offer three and a half taels of silver to his parents-in-law as "the price of purchasing" the bride. While marriage between a widow and her brother-in-law is prohibited by custom, a widow is permitted however to marry his sister-in-law.

Marriages between close cousins are also allowed. For some decades now, marriage has no longer been seen from a pecuniary point of view, and the obligatory matrilocate period has been reduced to two or three years.

According to *La Ha* custom, the body of a dead person is put into a coffin, a large hollowed tree trunk, at the moment of burial. In the rudimentary funeral hut set up around the tomb, offerings are displayed: baskets of sticky rice, boxes of clothes, a plate of food and other items. In the four corners of the hut, four white and yellow flags are planted. After the burial, before stepping onto the floor of the house, the relatives of the deceased strike noisily a mortar with a pestle to "chase away malevolent spirits".

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *La Ha* believe in the existence of supernatural forces, including the spirits of rivers, streams and mountains. They hold that these forces affect the souls of human beings, causing diseases and death. Therefore prayer sessions are often organized to invoke divine protection. The *La Ha* worship only the manes of the dead father as the spirit of the house; those of the dead mother and grandparents are not the subject of veneration. Every year when spring comes, they organize a ceremony in memory of the father and invite all the inhabitants of the village to come and participate in this event. They



also believe that every person, when dying, becomes a different spirit in accordance with how his life has been.

As the *La Ha* live together with the *Thái* and the *Việt*, they speak the latter's languages fluently. Many of them can also use the *Thái* script.

Their folklore is very rich and unique. The popular songs of the Black River (Đà) region are remarkable for their lyricism and melodies. Folk dances are lively and captivating. *La Ha* poetry is above all satirical, striking at the *phìa tạo* regime, and sympathising the people oppressed by *Thái* seigneurs.



Transporting water to the house

## Pu Péo

▣ **Denomination:** Pu Péo.

*Other names:* La Quả, Ka Bẻo, Pen Ti Lô Lô, Mán.

▣ **Population:** 400

▣ **Language:** Ka-dai or Cờ Lao

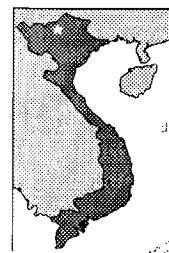
▣ **Area of habitation:** The seven communes of Đồng Văn district (Hà Giang province).

### ▣ **Material life**

The *Pu Péo* adopted a sedentary mode of life long ago. They live in small hamlets on the slopes of rocky mountains. Each population centre comprises four or five houses in a large area.

In the past the *Pu Péo* lived in houses on stilts. But since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they have built clay houses right on the ground like those of their *Hoa* and *Hmông* neighbours. In the house, the altar to ancestors, hearth and beds are located in accordance with ancient tradition.

*Pu Péo* women's attire comprises an ankle-length skirt which has a flap at the front. Formerly, *Pu Péo* women wore two vests, one over



GROUP NAMED AS KADAI  
(OR CỜ LAO)

the other. Nowadays, they are tending to abandon the outer vest (*bok cá*) and retain only the underneath one (*bok tằm*).

The *bok tằm* is a five-panelled vest which buttons under the right armpit. To the hems round the neck and round the wrists are sewn bands of coloured cloth similar to those adorning the garments of the *Giáy* and *Cờ Lao*.

The outer vest falls to the belt. Split at the front and with no buttons, it is fastened by means of two small laces. The sleeve hems are decorated with bands of brightly coloured cloth which stand out against the dark indigo background of the garment. The collar and lower hem are decorated with a 5-cm-wide band made from small pieces of cloth in geometrical forms. *Pu Péo* women wear their hair drawn to the front and held by a comb. They cover the head with a square scarf decorated with a fringe of multicoloured threads falling to the shoulders. They like trimmings, silver necklaces, bracelets, small chains and drop earrings.

The *Pu Péo* economy is based on the cultivation of milpas and terraced fields. Besides rice, such crops as rye, corn and beans are grown in rotation depending on soil conditions. In recent years, they have started growing cabbage, kolhrabi and medicinal herbs such as *Gynura japonica* and *Colioselmium Unvittatum* which are highly marketable. Cattle are raised for agricultural work. Great attention is paid to soil preparing, weeding, and manure used for intensive farming. At harvest time, the *Pu Péo* use a small scythe (*ta cáy piê*) similar to that of the *Dao* and *Kháng* for cutting sticky rice-ears one by one. However, ordinary rice is harvested with sickles.

Many *Pu Péo* men are very skilled at carpentry. They build their houses by themselves and make almost all their own household utensils from wood, rattan and bamboo. For some decades now, they have produced bricks and tiles for their own need and for sale in regional markets.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

*Pu Péo* society has long been marked by class differentiation. Under the old regime, administrative functions were delegated to the rich upper classes. The great majority of people were peasants living in poverty.

The *Pu Péo* family follows the patrilineal pattern. The father makes decisions in family affairs. Monogamy is the strict rule, and the wife lives with her husband's family. In the matrimonial aspect, the vestiges of marriage in direct lines as in the ancient time of the tribal triple alliance are still found: if a young man of clan A marries a young girl of clan B, then a young man of clan B is obliged to marry a young girl of clan C. Marriage between persons not belonging to the same generation is strictly forbidden. Sororate and levirate practices still exist but only on condition that the couple in question agree to the union.

The *Pu Péo* believe in the existence of manes (or souls). They hold that a person has eight souls and nine spirits. Souls and spirits belong to the non-corporeal part of man and govern his existence and all his activities. The entire life of a *Pu Péo* is regulated by this belief, which is preserved with many traditions and customs.

The most honourable place inside the house is reserved for the altar to three generations of ancestors. Each generation is symbolized by a small sandstone jar (*loong ten*). A dried pumpkin and a bundle of ox tail hair attached to a stick are the only ritual objects, believed to enable the ancestors to recognize their descendants.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Pu Péo* are one of those ethnic groups who still follow the tradition of using bronze drums at grand ceremonies. They are also used in rituals dedicated to dead parents to show children's gratefulness to them and call their manes to return to their country of origin. In the past, it was a very common practice that the lineages organized a banquet where rice alcohol was drunk and prayers made to the manes.

Ceremonies are held after the harvest is brought in. The texts read at funerals reflect the *Pu Péo* conceptions of the universe, of mankind, and the mythical history of the community. The origins of a number of customs and practices are presented in some legends, such as that of the deluge, the pumpkin and the banyan tree. Besides tales and legends, the oral literature of the *Pu Péo* comprises popular poems about nature and the people's lives.



Girl's traditional costume

## Hmông-Dao Language Group

### Hmông

▣ **Denomination:** Hmông.

*Other names:* Miêu Tộc, Mèo or Mèo, Mán Trắng.

▣ **Small local group:** Hmông Xanh (Green Hmông), Hmông Đỏ (Red Hmông), Hmông Hoa (Variegated Hmông), Hmông Đen (Black Hmông), and Ná Miêu.

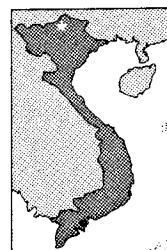
▣ **Population:** 558,000

▣ **Language:** Hmông-Dao

▣ **Area of habitation:**

The highland region of such provinces as Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên, Hà Giang, Lào Cai, Yên Bái, Sơn La, Lai Châu, Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An, and Hòa Bình. Their congeners are also present in China, Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.

The *Hmông* are part of the *San Miao* (Tam Miêu) of South China. Around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they emigrated



HMÔNG-DAO LANGUAGE GROUP



to Vietnam and built hamlets in the highland regions of Hà Giang and Lào Cai provinces. The history of this emigration is closely linked to that of the *Hmông* struggle against Chinese feudal lords.

## Material life

The *Hmông* house is often rudimentary in architecture, comprising three bays and two lean-tos. The altar to ancestors is located in the central bay. The lateral bays serve as kitchen and bedrooms. Only the *Ná Miể* group which live near the *Tày* have adopted the *Tày* house-on-stilts.

The traditional female attire comprises a knee-length skirt and a blouse opening at the front.

The skirt of the *White Hmông* is made of unbleached fabric while that of other groups such as the *Variegated Hmông*, *Green Hmông*, and *Black Hmông* is dyed indigo. The lower hem of the skirt worn by the *Variegated Hmông* is decorated with a band of spiral patterns and geometrical figures.

With a blouse worn open at the front and unbuttoned, the *Hmông* woman wears a kind of white brassiere as underwear. The blouse has a very low neck and its hem is decorated with fabric bands in various colours. The sleeves are also trimmed in the same way.

The *Hmông* woman wears in addition a pad on her back, an apron to cover the skirt at the front, and a long belt wound several times around the waist and tied loosely at the back. She walks barefoot and wears leggings. Only the *Ná Miể* group have adopted *Nùng* female attire.

The *White Hmông* woman has a distinctive hairstyle; she shaves her hair round the head, leaving a tuft of hair on the top of the skull wrapped in a large turban. The *Variegated Hmông* woman keeps her hair long wound round her head, adding some false locks to make it longer. Young *Green Hmông* girls let their hair fall freely to the shoulders. Once married, they wear it in a chignon on top of the head, which is inclined a little towards the front.

*Hmông* women decorate themselves with several bracelets and large necklaces. Quite a few wear earrings.



1. A *Hmông* girl in traditional costume.
2. Playing the "lá" (leaf) musical instrument (the *Hmông*, *Sa Pa* town).
3. House of the *Hmông* in mountain area (*Son La*).
4. Virgins in "Cấp sắc" ceremony (the *Dao*, *Tân Dân*, *Hoành Bồ*, *Quảng Ninh*).







1. A Dao girl (Việt Bắc).

2. Procession to bring the bride to her in-laws' house (the Pà Thên, Nậm O hamlet, Tân Trính commune, Bắc Quang, Hà Giang).

3. A Pà Thên girl in traditional costume (Nậm O hamlet, Tân Trính commune, Bắc Quang, Hà Giang).



*Hmông* men wear wide trousers knotted at the waist and a short vest with full sleeves. They let their hair fall loosely to the shoulders or shave it round the head leaving a tuft on top, and cover the head with a large turban. They also like wearing necklaces and bracelets made of bronze or silver.

The principal food crop grown by the *Hmông* is corn, while rice takes second place. Besides irrigated fields, the *Hmông* also grow rice on terraces. Milpas are used for corn or rice, which are most often grown in rotation. Even in the fields on steep mountain sides scattered with big rocks, the *Hmông* always plough and harrow carefully before sowing. In the corn fields, they alternately plant various leguminous species such as green beans and peas. During the period of their growth, weeding is done twice or three times. Rice seeds are put into holes or by throwing over milpas, which is grown in rotation with various gourd plants and vegetables. In many places, the fields are surrounded by hedges.

The principal fibre plant is hemp. The *Hmông* and the *Nà Miếu* grow cotton and are good weavers.

The most wide-spread plant of the *Hmông* is the poppy which formerly occupied an important place in their economy. The *Gynure saponica*, the *Conioselinum unvittatum*, and Job's tears are valuable medicinal herbs planted on an increasing scale nowadays. The peach, plum and apple are famous fruit specialities in *Hmông* areas but their sales are still limited due to poor transportation.

Poultry and cattle rearing is relatively well-developed. Most *Hmông* families have buffaloes, oxen and horses as draught-, pack-, and saddle-animals. Each family raises at least five pigs; some have up to a dozen. Chickens are the most popular type of poultry. Each family possesses 30-40 chickens on average; some have hundreds.

The utilisation of forest produce such as *Stick lac*, *Polygonum melliflorum*, *Cardamom*, *Cyperus rotundus* and gentians constitute an important additional source of income for the family economy.

*Hmông* hunters use flintlocks or traps to catch foxes, red deer, wild boars, and even tigers.

Handicrafts are quite developed: weaving; cloth dyeing with indigo; the making of paper, agricultural implements, flintlocks and silver jewellery;



leather tanning; the production of items from horse skin; basketry including baskets for carrying children on the back, bags and the lids of cooking pots; and carpentry (spoons, troughs, basins, and small bath tubs). However, these occupations are taken up only during the farm-slacks in the agricultural cycle. Art-works and forest products are sold in the market that is held once a week in certain regional centres.

In the past, the *Hmông* lived in considerable poverty, practising shifting cultivation on the slopes of rocky mountains. They have now adopted a sedentary lifestyle, constructing hydraulic systems to develop irrigated or terraced fields, and growing crops on plots of land surrounded by stone borders.

### Social and family relationships

The feudal-colonial authorities turned the *Hmông* autonomous administrative system into a mechanism of repression for their own benefit. This mechanism comprised the *Seo phải* and the *Mã phải* at the head of the smallest administrative unit, the *Tráng trưởng* who governed a hamlet, the *Thống lý* and the *Tổng giáp* who administered a whole region.

All the land, fields, mountains and forests belonged to the State which was represented by the above-mentioned authorities. Moreover, the heads of the great families also had powerful influence in the region. It can be said that, together with the administrative authorities, they constituted an upper class in *Hmông* society. The rest section of population formed a class of working peasants who had to pay taxes and perform corvée in order to gain the right to cultivate their lands. In general, social differentiation was not the same among the sedentary *Hmông* and shifting *Hmông*.

Among the former, social differentiation was already quite marked; private property had appeared, but the proprietors had in return to pay taxes and furnish unpaid labour. Land was often a subject of transaction and dispute. Some landowners took up to one third of the cultivable lands in their locality. Land tenancy, the hiring of work hands and buffaloes, usury, requisition of labour, and the monopolised sale of opium were all the forms of exploitation by local landowners and notables. In addition, the peasants were subjected to heavy taxes on their milpas, houses, markets, and sale of opium.

Regarding the shifting *Hmông*, when someone finds an area of cultivable land, he will mark it with some personal sign, and his temporary propriety rights are recognized by the community. If he leaves the region, and does not cede the plot to his relatives or friends for a generally modest sum, it will be returned to its "natural" state and can be marked again by someone else. In the old time, the rich or well-to-do were thus those who had access to abundant labour and more opportunities to find good land. They were also good artisans and animal breeders or members of the administration, who had enriched themselves thanks to gifts from their subjects or to the free labour supplied by divorced and condemned people who had come to live under their protection. Although they were rich, they also participated in production like other peasants.

*Hmông* society is now characterized by great solidarity of the members of the same family or the same village.

The village (*giao*) is the smallest administrative unit comprising from just a few households up to hundreds, the population density depending on the agricultural situation in the region. The inhabitants are grouped in families of different importance. A few villages are inhabited by members of one family only. Each village has its own territory, titular genie, and village conventions which are respected strictly; any violators can be severely punished. These conventions are revised each year in the course of a ceremony in veneration of the titular genie; the rites are always followed by a collective meal (*nào sổng*) which, in the eyes of the villagers, officially confirms the amendments, in the presence of the genie. The village chief is known as the *Lùng thần* or *Sống thần* whose responsibilities are often shared between two persons. In some places there is a kind of rural commune (*giống*) which is at a higher level than the *giao*. They both have almost the same characteristics; the only difference is that the chief of a *giống* is not designated by the inhabitants; this function held concurrently by the region's highest administrative authority.

The best-known family lineages of the *Hmông* are the *Giàng*, *Sùng*, *Ly*, *Vàng*, *Tráng*, *Tần*, *Lù*, *Thào* and *Thèn*. The given name is often a word indicating an animal, a natural phenomenon, or a taboo. Marriages are absolutely forbidden between men and women of the same lineage. Each lineage has conventions relating to the worship of its common ancestors; the head of the

lineage is a person enjoying great respect of other members for his prestige while age and status are secondary considerations. The members of the same lineage always maintain very close relationships between themselves even when they live far away from one another or separated by a national frontier. It is general belief that persons of the same patronymic can live and die together in the same house, and must help and support one another even at the price of their lives if need be.

The patrilineal nuclear family is the rule in *Hmông* society; men occupy a position of absolute superiority, and polygamy is common. A young woman, after crossing the threshold of her husband's house and a ceremony in memory of the ancestors, no longer has the right to return to her parents' unless she has explicit permission from her parents-in-law and is accompanied by her husband. Levirate custom requires that, on the death of her husband, the widow should marry the husband's younger brother; she will be considered as a second-rank wife if the latter is already married. If the dead husband has no younger brother, she will marry one of his cousins. In the event of divorce, the wife returns to her parents' but requests the protection of a notable; she will leave the house of the latter only when she gets remarried. To regain her freedom, the widow has to pay a certain sum to her in-laws as "compensation".

Marriage by "kidnapping" is still fairly common in *Hmông* society. The young man who takes away a young woman with the assistance of his friends, and forces her to cross the threshold of his house will inform his future in-laws only two days after the kidnap and demand a wedding. In accordance with custom, the young girl's family must not reject the demand. This type of forcible marriage has been the cause of a great deal of unhappiness.

Marriage between quite distant cousins, direct or cross, preferably between the son of the maternal uncle and the daughter of the paternal aunt, are encouraged by tradition.

The *Hmông* woman gives birth in a squatting position. The placenta is buried under the bed if the baby is a girl, and at the foot of the principal column of the house (place reserved for the altar to ancestors) if a boy.

The dead are buried. The body is put on a board which is hung before the ancestral altar or on a bench placed across the door. In certain lineages, the

dead body is exposed to the open air for a few days before burial (may be this is the vestige of the old practice of leaving a corpse disposed of by birds. It is still found among the *Dao Tiên*). Before putting the defunct into a coffin, holes are made in his/her clothes. This act of "symbolic destruction" is to connote that these things belong now to the world of the dead.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Hmông* worship spirits of the house, the door, and cattle. A formerly widespread belief attributed spirits even to the living (for examples the malevolent spirit *Ngũ hái* which affects human beings and cattle). In this case, exorcism could entail a person's death. Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism have also left their mark on a number of *Hmông* conceptions and social institutions, on the practice of magic, the belief in reincarnation, and the innate superiority of men over women. At the beginning of the 20th century, Catholic missionaries attempted to convert the *Hmông*. Churches were built in Sa Pa (Lào Cai) and Nghĩa Lộ.

The *Hmông* have a unique, rich and varied artistic and cultural heritage. It reflects their popular knowledge about nature and society; expresses noble feelings, aspirations for liberty, justice and charity; extols labour and virtue, and condemns bad habits and vices (laziness, meanness, cruelty, hypocrisy and lying).

In the past, the *Hmông* had no script. Literary works were preserved and disseminated orally, based only on memory. This oral literature included legends, folk-songs, riddles, and proverbs, etc.

The *Hmông* possess remarkable arts, especially dance and music. The traditional motifs of embroidery of *Hmông* women are worthy of mention. Musical instruments comprises skin drums, *khèn* and harps. The drum and *khèn* are played at funerals and in a number of other rituals and ceremonies. Boys and girls play the *khèn* and harp to express their feelings. These instruments also provide rhythms for folk-dances, and accompany the songs performed in ceremonies, weddings and receptions.



Portrait of girls

## Dao

▣ **Denomination:** Dao.

*Other names:* Mán, Trại, Động, Dìu Miên, Kiềm Miên, Kim Mùn.

▣ **Small local groups:** Dao Lô Gang, Dao Đỏ (Red Dao), Dao Tiền (Coin Dao), Dao Làn Tiền, Dao Quần Chẹt (Dao with tight trousers), Dao áo Dài (Dao with long dress), Dao Đại Bản, Dao Cóc Ngáng, Dao Cóc Mùn, Dao Tam Đảo, Dao Quần Trắng (Dao with white trousers), etc.

▣ **Population:** 474,000

▣ **Language:** Hmông-Dao

▣ **Area of habitation:**

The highland regions of North Vietnam. The *Dao* occupy land at all altitudes and live on good terms with other ethnic groups such as the Hmông, Tày, Thái, Mường, Việt and Hoa. They are also found in China, Thailand and Laos. The emigration of the *Dao* from their native provinces (Fujian, Guangdong and Guangxi in China) took place between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.



HMÔNG-DAO LANGUAGE GROUP

## ▣ Material life

The *Dao* live in populous villages or in small, isolated hamlets. Those who cultivate irrigated fields or practise rotational cropping on milpas lead a sedentary lifestyle and form villages on the slopes of hills or at the foot of mountains near streams.

*Dao* dwellings are built either level with the ground, on stilts, or half on stilts half on the ground. The house on the ground is preferred, especially by the sedentary *Dao* who find it an appropriate place for the veneration of *Bàn Vítong*, their ancestor.

Houses on stilts are also often found among the sedentary *Dao* who grow wet rice and live in the neighbourhood of the *Tày*, *Nùng*, and *Việt*, or among the small groups of "green dress", "long dress", *Sán Chỉ* (Bắc Cạn)<sup>(1)</sup> who practise slash-and-burn cultivation.

Houses half-on-stilts and half-on-ground have taken shape in the hamlets of *Dao* shifting cultivators. They are built on the steep slopes of mountains, and thanks to the stilts, the ground does not need to be levelled. The techniques used to assemble the house frame are rudimentary, the pieces being tied together with lianas.

The interior of every house is designed in the same way. At the back of the principal bay is a small compartment where jars of alcohol and pickled meat are kept. A partition at a certain distance from the rear wall separates this compartment from the rest of the bay. In front of the partition is the altar to ancestors; this interior arrangement is not noted among any other ethnic group living in North Vietnam.

*Dao* male attire is the same as that of all other small groups: cotton trousers dyed in indigo and held up by a large belt of unbleached cotton or sometimes also dyed in indigo. Unusually the *Dao* wear short vests, over

(1) The *Sán Chỉ* from Bắc Cạn (Bắc Cạn province) and Bảo Lạc (Cao Bằng province) are not classified as belonging to the community of *Sán Cháy*. They form a small regional group of the *Dao* ethnicity.

which they put on dresses on grand occasions. The dark-indigo dress falls down to the knees and buttons at the front. The hair is worn in a chignon on the nape of the neck or shaved round the head, except for a tuft on the top of the skull, in the *Hmông* fashion. The *Dao* often wear long turbans knotted at the front.

In general, women wear trousers and long dresses slit at the front. Only *Dao Tiên* women wear pagnes wound round their bodies. Trousers or pagnes are all made of cotton dyed in dark indigo. *Dao Quần Trắng* women, as shown by their name, wear white trousers on their wedding day. The trousers are kept in place by a belt and have particularly close-fitting legs. *Dao Quần Chẹt* women wear close-fitting trousers. The *Dao* trousers are decorated with a patterned band, but as an exception, the *Dao áo Dài* trousers are only dyed in indigo.

*Dao* women's attire is characterized by a long dress open at the chest which they cover with a bra or other underwear. The flaps of their dress are knotted at the front or held in at the waist with a belt as with the *Dao Làn Tiên*. The dress has a stand-up indigo collar. *Red Dao* women embroider the symbolic image of *Bàn Vương* on the shoulders of their dress. To the same place, the *Dao Tiên* tie seven or nine coins. The attire of "green-dress" *Dao* women is the longest and has floating sleeves, the hem of which is decorated with a band of red cloth.

*Dao* women arrange their hair in different ways: long hair wound round the head in the fashion of the *Red Dao*; hair with a parting in the middle and combed up into a chignon at the nape of the neck like the *Dao Quần Trắng* and the *Dao áo Dài*, or hair cut short and waxed (bees-wax) like the *Dao Tiên*, *Dao Lô Gang*, and *Dao Quần Chẹt*.

The *Dao* rarely go out without headgear. Women wear indigo scarves, except for the *Dao Tiên* in Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Bắc Thái and Hà Tuyên who wear white turbans.

In addition to the turban, the *Dao* customarily wear square or round conical hats. The frame of the hat is made from waxed hair or dried pumpkin fibres sewn together, the whole thing then covered with an embroidered square piece of cloth decorated with silver. *Dao Làn Tiên* old women wear flat disc-shaped hats. For the *Red Dao* and *Dao Quần Trắng*, only married women

wear conical hats. For the *Dao Tiền*, the hat is the rule at ceremonies and on other special occasions. The *Dao Áo Dài* always wear hats evoking tiles. The daily attire of *Red Dao* women also includes a red scarf. And the upper right and left edges of their dresses are adorned with bright red floral motifs.

The bra of the *Red Dao*, *Dao Quần Chẹt* and *Dao Quần Trắng* is a pad decorated with embroidered and silver patterns.

*Dao Làn Tiễn*, *Dao Lô Gang* and *Red Dao* women wear white leggings; those of the *Dao Lô Gang* are adorned with traditional motifs.

The *Dao* people, both men and women, like to adorn themselves with silver and copper jewellery including rings, earrings, necklaces and bracelets.

Corresponding to the three types of dwelling, there are three modes of production.

In rocky mountainous regions, the sedentary *Dao* cultivate permanent fields or farms in rotation on small mountain plots surrounded by rocks. Here, the principal crop is corn, then come millet, cassava and rye. They do not use manure to fertilize their fields, except for the *Dao* in the region of Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Bắc Cạn, Hà Giang, and Tuyên Quang. Owing to the steep mountain slopes, water cannot be retained in the soil, and the annual output from farming is so low that food shortages are a constant threat.

The strip of land at a medium altitude is the most densely-populated by the *Dao* who cultivate milpas and often change their place of residence. They grow rice and corn. The land for swidden cultivation deteriorates after two or three crops; then, it is left fallow and new land will be reclaimed elsewhere.

The agricultural implements of the *Dao* in this region comprise axes to fell trees, knives to clear bushes, digging sticks, rakes, and small knives to cut rice at harvest time. Seeding is done in two ways; either the seeds are put into holes dug with a stick or they are thrown in handfuls. In general, multiple cropping is practised, with rice grown besides other crops: corn, millet, leguminous and gourd plants. Cassava is planted separately, but in corn fields, sweet potato, taro and yams are also grown.

At low altitudes, the *Dao* live in precipitous valleys or along communication routes, on good terms with the *Tày*, *Nùng* and *Việt*. Agriculture is carried out in submerged or terraced fields, or fixed milpas. The farming techniques are the same as those of the neighbouring ethnic groups. The area of

irrigated fields is increasing constantly as many *Dao* have come down, from high mountains, to adopt a sedentary lifestyle and new production methods.

Among the sedentary *Dao*, animal rearing is developing fast, supplying them with meat to improve their daily diet, and manure to fertilize the soil. Many families have up to dozens of large domestic animals; in certain villages there are several hundred heads of cattle. Goats are also raised for meat, while horses are kept as pack- and saddle-animals. The *Dao* rear a large number of dogs, some families having up to several dozens. In their poultry yards, chickens prevail, then come ducks, geese, and pigeons.

Handicrafts are only sidelines undertaken during the farm-slacks of the agricultural cycle. Women grow cotton, make thread and weave cloth themselves. They are very skilled at embroidering beautiful motifs and printing patterns on cloth. A characteristic of the embroidery is that it is done on the wrong side of the cloth to set in relief the motifs on the right side. Women of the *Dao Tiền* apply wax to the drawings before dyeing the cloth in indigo. As a result, the motifs appear in a lighter colour on the dark background.

*Dao* men are excellent in making household objects from bamboo or rattan. They make agricultural implements themselves, including axes, hammers, knives and ploughshares. They also make flintlocks and pig-iron bullets. They have long produced paper from straw and the bark of certain trees. The product is of high quality, thin, smooth, off-white, ink-proof and durable. It is used for writing genealogical records, official documents and religious books. Some *Dao* people practise trades transmitted from generation to generation, such as the making of silver and copper jewellery.

They also gather forest produce and grow medicinal plants such as tea, betel leaves, caryota, oleaginous plants and anise. They go hunting and fishing, and raise fish in ponds and submerged fields.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Formerly, in large *Dao* population centres, administrative functions were assumed by the *Dao* themselves, from the *châu* (district) down to hamlet level, through a system which existed along with the colonial administrative



apparatus. Villages and communes were headed by the *Động trưởng* and the *Giáp trưởng* respectively. The canton chief was called *Man mục*; the function equivalent to that of the *Tri châu* (district chief) was performed by the *Quản chiêu*. These different authorities were granted certain rights and privileges in return for their loyalty and devotion to the colonio-feudal administration whose strategy was to oppress and exploit the *Dao* and to sow discord between them and other ethnic groups. These were also sorcerers who claimed divine authority to exert a malevolent influence on the people. The rest of the population was subject to oppression and exploitation. In the areas where the *Dao* were relatively few in number, they were under the yoke of the ruling classes (*Thổ ty*, *Phìa tạo* and *Lang đạo*) of other ethnic groups.

According to some ancient documents, the *Dao* were originally composed of 12 lineages, of which the *Bản* is "the eldest". Each lineage was divided into branches, which in turn were subdivided into several great families. Each great family has now a *Tộc trưởng* (chief) responsible for the veneration of ancestors. His house is called "the great house" to distinguish from the small houses of other member families. The *Tộc trưởng* plays an important role in the community life.

The cell of *Dao* society is the patrilineal nuclear family. Monogamy and patrilocate are the rule.

*Dao* matrimonial customs differ from group to group. To be allowed to marry, a young couple must not only obtain the approval of their parents, but their birth dates should be in "concord". The young man may request the girl's family to allow him to live here and work without pay for three or four days. One or two months later, he returns to the girl's house again for a second stay. But this time, he is permitted to talk to his fiancée and to share a bed with her. After two or three days, the man will come back to his parents to prepare for the wedding, if the family of his would-be wife agrees. He must above all bring the required wedding presents to the latter's family. When he cannot fulfil this obligation for lack of means, the wedding can take place any way, but in the form of a "temporary wedding". It is not uncommon for a couple to have grown up children before the celebration of their "definitive" wedding. In such cases, if the couple have a daughter who is going to get married, the husband must make offerings to the ancestors'

spirits, and invite his parents-in-law to a feast where the latter will remind him of the wedding presents that have not yet been offered. Thus, the value of the presents demanded for the marriage of the young girl must be equivalent to those already mentioned and must be rightfully returned to the parents-in-law.

Due to poverty, the rate of child mortality among the *Dao* stands high; so the population number is going down alarmingly. A pregnant *Dao* woman is obliged to obey a series of unreasonable taboos and abstinences as she is believed to cause woes and harm to the environment.

The *Dao* woman gives birth in a squatting position. Three or four days after childbirth, a ceremony is held to "inform" the dead ancestors of the event. When the child is 30 days old, another ceremony is needed to honour the *bà Mụ* (a kind of fairy matrons) and to name the baby after a guardian genie. Only when the child is ten years old, does he/she receive the true name. In addition to the surname, the personal name has a particle chosen in a strict order from among a system of words unique to his family group. This important baptismal ceremony of Taoist origin is sometimes performed at the same time as the *cấp sắc* at the age of 15 or 20, marking the maturity of the boy. From then on, he is considered by society and deities as a full member of the community.

Young *Dao* women follow the custom of cutting short and waxing their hair; the hair-waxing ceremony (putting hot wax onto the hair and rolling it up in a turban) takes place when a girl is 13 years old, and has the same importance as the *cấp sắc* rite for a boy.

As the *Dao* believe in the existence of souls, their funerals include special rites to "accompany" the soul of the deceased back to his/her original country known as "Đương Châu".

According to *Dao* custom, there are three types of funerals: inhumation (burial), cremation and "aerial" funerals. The place for the cremation is chosen by the *Thầy tào*. The coffin is put on top of nine layers of dry wood arranged in the shape of a cage, then the *Thầy tào* sets fire to it. This custom is observed mainly by the *Dao áo Dài*, and less frequently by the *Dao Quần Trắng*. Aerial funerals are reserved for people who die at an inauspicious hour. The coffin is made of wooden boards or bamboo and placed on a shelf

2 metres above the ground. After a year, the bones are collected, put in a jar and buried. This custom is often followed by the *Dao Tiễn*.

If for the *Dao áo Dài* and *Dao Quần Trắng*, funeral houses should be built, the tomb of the *Dao* is generally marked only by some white stones piled up on the side of the deceased's head and as a small dolmen on the side of his feet.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Dao* practise the cult of ancestors who are worshipped at home or at the house of the lineage chief. They also worship *Bàn Vương (Chầu Đàng)*, the mythical common ancestor of their ethnic group.

In the spiritual life of the *Dao*, the influence of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism is very marked. Particularly, Taoist traces are clearly manifested in the *Dao* seasonal festivals and in their pray sessions to invoke divinities' protection in illness, childbirth, funerals, or natural calamities.

Folk arts and literature enrich the intellectual life of the population. The *Dao* have long used Chinese writing (but pronounced in the *Dao* way) for religious books, genealogical records, and to transcribe stories in verse, and other oral traditions. The principal genres are ancient tales, humorous tales, fables, riddles, and folk-songs, which have rich and evocative contents. The most popular folk-song is *pả dung*, a kind of lyrical alternate chants. Many *Dao* stories have been published.

Decorations on cloth testify to the skill and taste of *Dao* women – embroiderers. Realistic motifs (animals, plants, agricultural implements and human activities) are presented with coloured threads.



Children's traditional costume and ornaments

## Pà Thến

▣ **Denomination:** Pà Thến.

*Other names:* Pà Hung, Mán Pa Teng, Tống.

▣ **Small local groups:** Tống, Mèo Lài.

▣ **Population:** 3,700

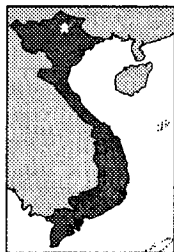
▣ **Language:** Hmông-Dao

▣ **Area of habitation:** Bắc Quang district (Hà Giang province); Chiêm Hóa and Yên Sơn districts (Tuyên Quang province).

Native to China, the *Pà Thến* emigrated to Vietnam in the early 18<sup>th</sup> and late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### ▣ **Material life**

The *Pà Thến* prefer to settle near rivers, from which water is brought by pipes up to their dwellings. The villages on the left bank of the Gâm River seem to be the richest and most populous, each having 30-40 houses. In other regions, the number of population is smaller. Their houses are scattered at the foot of a mountain or beside large streams.



HMÔNG-DAO LANGUAGE GROUP

*Pà Thến* houses are built either on stilts, level with the ground, or half-on-stilts and half-on-beaten-earth. Those who have long been sedentary have spacious houses built on the ground with large wooden columns standing on stone blocks. In the past, when they were leading a shifting lifestyle, their temporary houses were often rudimentary.

*Pà Thến* female attire comprises a long skirt and dress. *Pà Thến* women have their hair wound in a turban which is covered by another turban. Skirts and dresses are decorated with different motifs similar to those of *Dao* attire. Their most preferable jewellery includes large earrings and necklaces forming a three-piece set.

In the past, the *Pà Thến* grew rice or corn on milpas. They are now familiar with different varieties of ordinary rice and sticky rice, and can choose for themselves the most appropriate species. The timing of cultivation is defined carefully. Cleared and slightly sloping lands covered with humus constitute excellent ricefields. Fields of lower quality, often stony, are reserved for the cultivation of corn. Apart from rice and corn, sweet potatoes and beans are also grown. The main implement used for harvesting is a small pincer which cuts paddy ears one by one. The latter are tied into bundles, dried in the field, and then brought home to be put on shelves over the hearth.

This type of agriculture entirely dependent on natural conditions made the lives of the *Pà Thến* precarious and dominated by superstitious practices. However, for some decades now, the *Pà Thến* have been leading a sedentary life. They now practise intensive farming and animal husbandry. Cattle, formerly kept only for meat, serve now as draught-animals.

To improve their daily diet, the *Pà Thến* go hunting, fishing and gather forest products in their spare time.

*Pà Thến* women are traditionally good weavers. Their products are very much sought after by traders, serving as items for exchange.

*Pà Thến* men are skilled at making household articles from bamboo or rattan.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

*Pà Thén* society has gone through a process of class differentiation. Under the French colonial regime, the *Pà Thén* were governed by a chief native to another ethnic group. Now they are masters of their villages administered by *Pà Thén* authorities who ensure efficient economic, social and cultural development of the community.

In general, there are in each village several lineages, But one of them will prevail, probably the one which established the village. The *Pà Thén* consider themselves the descendants of eight ancient clans, which fact is evident from the name of their group (*Pà* = eight, *Thén* = clans). The number of families is now certainly much larger. The vestiges of consanguinity and totemism are still apparent in the relationships between different *Pà Thén* lineages, and even between the members of the same lineage. Marriage between them is prohibited, and their behaviour towards one another is regulated by a number of taboos.

The *Pà Thén* family is patrilineal and nuclear with monogamy being the rule. After the wedding, the wife lives with the family of her parents-in-law. Children are given the name of their father. The eldest son is the inheritor of the parents' legacies. In the event of divorce, children remain with their father. The divorced woman has to return empty-handed to her parents' house, except for some modest personal belongings. In some cases, but more and more rarely, the young husband has to live with his parents-in-law for 12 years, as required by ancient custom. But after the sixth year, he may return to his home with the consent of his wife's family, having paid a symbolic sum in compensation.

The *Pà Thén* do not name a baby at birth but call it by the number corresponding to its rank in the family. When a boy comes of age, he receives his true name in the course of a ceremony introducing him to his ancestors.

The *Pà Thén* believe that each person has 12 souls. When a dead body is placed in a coffin made of a hollowed tree trunk of hard wood, it is sprinkled with 12 measures of grilled rice, and 12 sandstone bowls are put in along with the rice.

## ▣ Spiritual life

Besides ancestor worship, the primitive beliefs of rice-growers exert the most remarkable influence on the spiritual and cultural life of the *Pà Thén*. Vestiges of the worship of water and fire, considered originally as the female and male principles of Oriental philosophy (*Yin*, *-Yang*) can still be discerned. On the altar of every family, there is always a covered bowl of water and a joss-sticks urn beside it. To the front of the altar is stuck a piece of red paper with drawings of paddy ears, flowers and animals which symbolize the souls of rice, plants, and animals. When settling in a new house, the head of the family brings in some ash taken from the hearth of his old dwelling, the altar to ancestors, and a number of symbolic objects such as rice, corn and domestic animals.

Before the moment of seeding, a ceremony is held to honour the genie of soil. In addition, another ceremony is required to celebrate "new rice" in accordance with the production cycle. The offerings include, among other things, coloured sticky rice, pumpkins, gourds, tubers and other vegetables found in forest. These are the vestiges of the rites relating to primitive agricultural beliefs.

The *Pà Thén* preserve a heritage of oral culture. Lyrical folksongs and alternate songs (*pá dung*, similar to the *hát ví* of the Việt) can always be heard at weddings and on other special occasions.

The folk tales tell of the emigration of the *Pà Thén*'s ancestors. And the legends and fables reveal the close relationship and cultural exchanges between this ethnic group and the *Dao* and *Tày* over the course of history.

*Pà Thén* popular art is characterized by realism. It reflects nature, agricultural implements, and daily life; the lively motifs are used in decorative embroidery for women's clothes.







Drying paddy

## *Austronesian Language Family*



## Malayo-Polynesian group

### Gia-rai

▣ **Denomination:** Gia-rai.

*Other names:* Chơ-rai, Giơ-rai, Mọi

▣ **Small local groups:** Chor, Hđrưng, Aráp, Mdhur (Mthur), Tbuăn

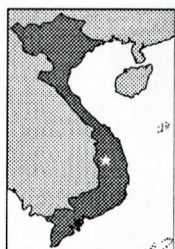
▣ **Population:** over 242,000

▣ **Language:** Malayo-Polynesian

▣ **Area of habitation:**

Mainly in Gia Lai and Kontum provinces, some in Đắk Lắk

The Gia-rai came from the coast to settle in the high plateaux of Tây Nguyên (Central Vietnam) during the last few centuries before our era, in the Môn-Khmer speaking communities who had been living there long before their arrival. On the plateaux, along with the Ê-Đê, they split the Môn-Khmer community into two groups to occupy the fertile red soil plateau and where, influenced by the Chăm language, they founded primitive



MALAYO-POLYNESIAN GROUP



1. A Gia Rai girl (Gia Lai).
2. Ê-đê long house (Ea Tul commune, Cu Mgar district, Đắk Lắk).
3. Rice-storehouse with a horn-shaped figure on the roof (the Gia-rai, Gia Lai).
4. A Gia-rai artisan carving statues for decorating tomb-houses (Gia Lai).





1. A Ê-dê girl (*Đắc Lắc*).
2. Ceremony of receiving the king's robe and crown in Ka-tê festival (*the Chăm, Ninh Thuận*).
3. Bride's wedding room (*the Chăm, Ninh Thuận*).
4. Container of valuables (*the Ê-dê, Đắc Lắc*).
5. Chăm tower (*Phan Rang*).





1. Mr. Yon Long Ya Plan, 46, in traditional costume (the Chu-ru, Prôh Trong village, Prôh commune, Đơn Dương, Lâm Đồng).

2. A Chu-ru girl in traditional costume (Prôngó, Prô, Đơn Dương, Lâm Đồng).

3. Going to work on milpas (the Ra-glai, Ma Oai hamlet, Phước Thắng, Ninh Sơn, Ninh Thuận).

4. Forging tools (the Ra-glai, Ma Oai hamlet, Phước Thắng, Ninh Sơn, Ninh Thuận).

matrilineal states. The Kings of Fire (*Pơ-tao Pui*) and Water (*Pơ-tao Ia*) of the *Gia-rai* in Pleiku were mentioned in historical records as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Their existence exerted great influence on the *Ê-dê* and *Ba-na*.

## Material life

The *Gia-rai* are sedentary people. Their village is called *plor* or *bôn*, each comprising about 50 houses on average. Village names are often related to those of rivers, streams or ancient village chiefs. In the past, each village was surrounded by a hedge for the defence purposes. The communal house (*nhà rông*) is built in the middle of the village, being the venue for community activities. Only the villages of the *Chor* have no communal house.

The houses of the *Gia-rai* are built on stilts and they face the north. There are two types of dwelling: short houses and long houses. The long house of the Ia Yun Pa region is typical. It has features similar to that of the *Ê-dê* house in Đắc Lắc and reflects in many aspects, the matriarchal regime. The short house is built on stilts with a door which can be opened by lifting it up. It is found mainly in Pleiku and seems to have come into being after the long house of Ia Yun Pa.

Women's attire comprises an indigo-coloured *pagne* and a short close-fitting vest put on over the head. Men wear loincloths and long vests. Vests, *pagnes*, and loincloths are all decorated with traditional embroidered patterns.

The cultivated land is called *hma* which includes three categories:

- *hma mnai*: the milpa for multiple cropping; it is generally situated by a river or a stream and used for growing cereals, fruit trees, and beans.
- *hma rừng* or *hma rô* is the rice-milpa (cleared by burning) used for only two crops then is left fallow for ten years.
- *hma đnao* and *hma ia* are submerged rice-fields reserved exclusively for the cultivation of rice; *hma đnao* is the marshy rice-field, and *hma ia*, the “field waiting for rain”, cultivable thanks to rainwater.

There are also gardens (*dang*). In the suburbs of Pleiku, there are particularly many houses surrounded by gardens (*dang gá sang*).

The *Gia-rai* use hoes for farming. There are different types of hoe, each used for a specific category of land and specific kind of production work.

Buffaloes, goats, poultry and pigs are reared above all for the rituals of making sacrifices to genies; oxen, elephants, horses are used as draught animals. Horses are also made the saddle animal for hunting boars which abound in the region. In the past, the rearing of buffaloes was more developed as buffaloes were used as a "currency".

Handicrafts include basketry, which turn out objects remarkable for their ornamental patterns, and the weaving of loincloths, blankets and fabric decorated with colourful traditional patterns.

Addition occupations include food gathering, hunting and fishing. Particularly, the first activity involves mainly women and children. The game from hunting is varied: tigers, panthers, elephants, rhinoceros, but mostly boars and wild bulls.

The *Gia-rai* village is a community composed of small matrilineal families. Each family is a separate socio-economic unit. The village is governed by a council of elders, which elects the village chief who should take charge of all communal affairs. The organization of mutual aid in production is called a *nham*.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Each village is an administrative unit divided into several hamlets. The village chief often takes on the function of hamlet chief as well.

Members of the village are bound by the fact that the land they occupy (which ownership is respected by everybody) has clearly defined boundaries, and also by customs, practices and age-old cultural traditions. All violations of village custom are judged by a customary tribunal.

In the *Gia-rai* region there was in the past *to-ring*, a unit of social organization, which was superior to the village. Comprising several villages, each *to-ring* was headed by a *Ptao*. This form probably grew out of the broadened village alliance (*hrom bit ploi*) required for the purpose of defence.

The *Gia-rai* family names reveal the vestiges of totemism, taboos observed by the persons with the same family name, and the legends rele-

vant to totems and taboos. The most popular family names are *Siu*, *Rchom*, *Nây*, *Ksor*, *Kpa* and *Rmah*. The Kings of Fire and Water come from the lineage of *Siu* whose men only marry women of the *Rchom* considered as the *Gia-rai* aristocracy and call *Rchom min hbia*.

Marriage is allowed only between persons with different family names. The couple live with the wife's family, and their children take the name of the mother. The daughter who is the inheritor to her parents, whom she takes care of, will also be in charge of the worship of the ancestors.

The *Gia-rai* perforate their ear-lobes at the age of one or two, and file their teeth at 15 or 16. This practice is needed certainly for beauty's sake, but also for marking their coming into being and then, their coming of age.

Young girls take the initiative in marriage proposals through a go-between, and the agreement is sealed with a bronze bracelet. The following nuptial rites are performed:

- The exchange of bracelets between the young man and the young girl in the presence of the two families and the go-between.
- *Chua hpiêu* or the interpretation of the dreams the young man and his girl-friend have had. This permits to predict the couple's future, thus having a decisive influence on the final decision.
- *Vi sang ami* or "return to the mother's house", which includes the welcome to the bridegroom at his wife's family and the visit by the bride to her husband's family one day after the wedding.

Some time after the marriage, the couple may live apart.

The funeral rituals of the *Gia-rai* are very complex and costly, particularly in the construction of the funeral house. Proceeding from the concept that the deceased are transformed into manes and enter another world to join their ancestors, the *Gia-rai* conduct a whole series of rites to express love, regret, respect for the defunct and to mark their final departure.

In the past, it was a practice that close relatives and people of the same maternal lineage were buried in the same grave. Later, sons-in-law were also admitted. When the grave was full, it was built up on all sides around with boards to make room for other coffins before it was covered entirely with earth, and the ceremony of "giving up the tomb" was held. This custom is now disappearing.



On the tomb they place a cracked jar with a hole in the bottom to contain food and drink, plus a basket to hold a few of the dead person's belongings.

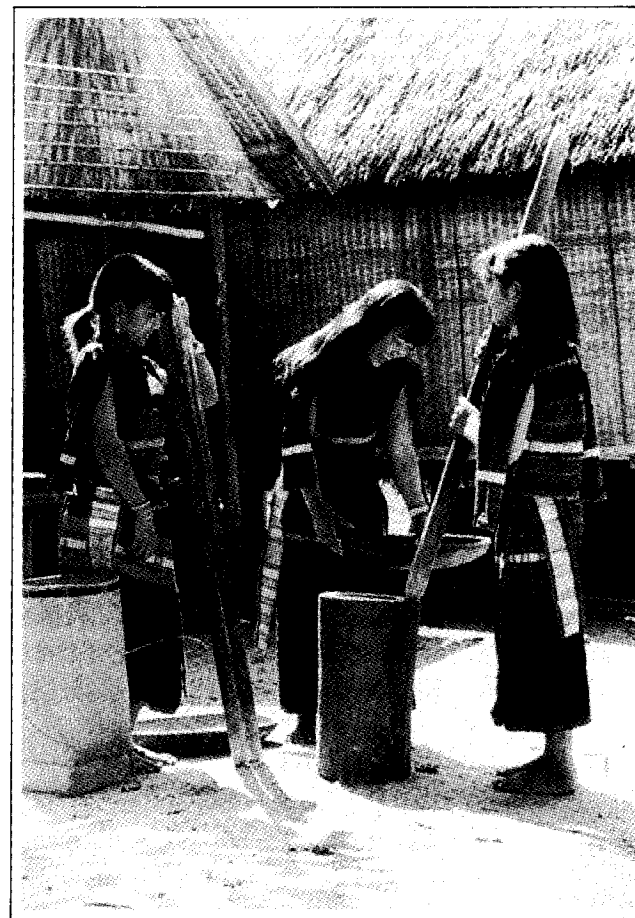
The funeral house of the *Gia-rai* is thoroughly built and surrounded by a wooden hedge. Inside are wooden sculptures representing men, women, birds and gourds. These art works demonstrate the praise-worthy talent and aesthetic sense of local artists.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Gia-rai* are animists who also believe in the existence of an invisible world of the *yang* (genies). These supernatural forces governing nature and society includes a variety of genii of mountains (*yang chur*), water sources (*yang pên ia*), villages (*yang ala hôn*), houses (*yang sang*), rice (*yang hri*), ancestors (*yang pên tha*), chiefs (*yang ptao*), and war (*yang bla*), etc.

This region is where primitive agricultural beliefs and the matrilineal regime still prevail. It is also the only *Gia-rai* area where one can encounter the King of Water (at Ploi Ot, Chư Athai commune, Ia Yun Pa district) and the King of Fire (at Ploi Ptao, Ya Lốp commune, Chư Prông district). At Ploi Mang, Chư Atua commune, there is still the King of Wind (*Ptao Angin*). Nowadays, these kings are simply shamans who perform rituals at the ceremonies of invoking rain. The sphere of their influence is limited only in Ia Yun Pa and Chư Prông valleys.

*Gia-rai* folklore is rich and varied. Their musical tradition – the cradle of which is Ia Yun Pa – is particularly remarkable. The principal musical instrument is the gong which exerts a great influence on the neighbouring ethnic groups. In addition, one can note the *tơ rưng* (a kind of xylophone), the *dìng pút* made of large bamboo tubes (the sound is produced by the air blown in through hands clapping), and the *dìng năm* formed by several flagelets (stuck to a dried gourd serving as a sound-box). The ancient music of *Cheo Reo* has a seven-note scale. The *Gia-rai* are skilled at expressing their feelings through the sounds of bronze gongs, long poems, and unique traditional dances. Funeral sculptures, which constitute the most important part of *Gia-rai* plastic arts, are particularly noteworthy.



Pounding rice

## Ê-dê

▣ **Denomination:** Ê-dê.

*Other names:* Rha- đê, Anăk Ê-dê, Đê, Êdê-Êgar, Mội, Ra-đê.

▣ **Small local groups:** Kpă, Mđhur, Adham, Blô, Ktul, Bih, Krung, Êpan, Hwing, Dong Kay, Dong Măk, Dliê, Arul, Kdrao and so on.

▣ **Population:** Approx. 195,000

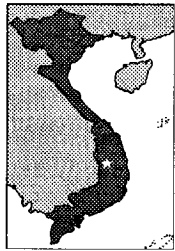
▣ **Language:** Malayo-Polynesian

▣ **Area of habitation:** Đắk Lắk province and a small area in the west of Phú Yên and Khánh Hoà provinces

▣ **Material life**

The Ê-dê always live in houses on stilts. This is a kind of long boat-shaped houses with the entrance door on one of the longer sides. The whole structure is supported by wooden columns, with no visible framework.

The length of the house depends on the number of the inhabitants. In the past, it might be hundreds of metres. Today, the house 30-40 m long is



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common and people tend to divide it into smaller constructions. The structured framework has begun to be introduced as well as the house built on the ground. The interior is divided into two parts. About one third of the area is reserved for receiving guests and for family activities; the rest is sub-divided into compartments, each for one couple.

Animals are kept under the floor while the granary is located some distance away.

At home or at work, the Ê-dê man wears only a loincloth. He goes bare-foot and ties his hair in a turban. When he goes out or receives a guest, he puts on a special loincloth with a long flap embroidered with decorative bands, the number and beauty of which enhance the value of the garment. The two ends of the loincloth are adorned with rows of white glass beads and long frills. Ê-dê vests vary in design with long sleeves, short sleeves or no sleeves at all; but all vests are put on over the head; they are low-necked, split at the sides and have thigh-length flaps. On the chest, there are buttons and button-holes made of red thread.

The whole vest constitutes a decorative garment in the shape of a trapezoid, the smallest side at the base and called *kier-boh-nút*. Some say it is the image of a flying eagle, a very common motif in Ê-dê decorative art. In cold weather, a blanket is used to cover the body.

Ê-dê women wear pagnes and vests reaching to the belt. Their long hair is tied in a chignon. The pagne is trimmed with horizontal decorative bands.

Dark indigo is the traditional colour of Ê-dê clothing; this background colour makes the patterns mostly woven into the fabric stand out. Men and women always wear copper bracelets, which are symbols of marriage, of oaths made at ceremonies and of sacrifices to genies.

Ê-dê villages are large and their houses form close-knit clusters. The principal food crop is ordinary rice, grown in rotational cropping on milpas or in dry fields.

Ê-dê milpas are generally situated on expanses of gently sloping forest land where grass is taken for thatching. Each milpa can be used for 10-15 years, then it will be left fallow for the same duration. This period depends on the area of cultivable land for rotational cropping that each family has been able to reclaim.

The Ê-dê practise traditional farming methods: felling trees, burning the plot off, turning up the soil with picks, and putting seeds into holes with a digging stick. Around the milpa, a ditch is dug to keep out wild animals and prevent weeds from spreading.

The techniques of multiple cropping are used on milpas. The seeds of pumpkins, gourds, melons, cotton and other plants are often mixed with grains of paddy and put in the same hole. Corn and sweet potatoes are also grown.

In the regions surrounding Lắc lake and the basins of the Krông Knô and Krông Ana rivers, submerged rice fields are set up, the soil trodden by buffaloes.

The principal agricultural implements are the hoe, long bush knife, pick, wooden rake, bamboo broom, digging stick, basket and pannier.

Animals and poultry (buffaloes, oxen, goats, pigs, chickens and ducks) are reared for rituals of making sacrifices and other annual festivals. The additional occupation common to all families is basketry.

In almost all villages, there is a forge operating during harvest time for the repair of farming tools.

Wherever clay is available, the Ê-dê make jars, cooking pots and bowls for their own use. But this type of pottery using rudimentary techniques is on the verge of disappearing.

Weaving on simple looms is still a popular handicraft producing fine and durable materials.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

The Ê-dê *buôn* is equivalent to the *Việt* village: about 20 houses for a small *buôn* and 50-70 for a large one. Each *buôn* is a socio-cultural unit. But in certain localities, there still exist smaller population units called *alú* (hamlets). Each *buôn* has its own land called *ala buôn* (village land), the common property of the community.

From the societal point of view, the Ê-dê *buôn* is essentially a community of neighbours including houses linked to one another by relationships of

alliance of neighbourhood. Each long house accommodates a matrilineal extended family or a matrilineal family commune under the authority of a *Khoa sang*. The *Khoa sang* is the oldest and most respected woman who conducts communal affairs and settles internal conflicts. She is responsible for the safeguarding of communal property, including the ancestors' legacy: set of bronze gongs, antique jars for the preparation of rice alcohol, the large armchair made from a single block of wood and reserved for the *Khoa sang*, and stools for guests and musicians.

In the past, the autonomous *buôn* was administered by the *Pô pin ea*, the person who had found the water source, and determined the location of the *buôn*. He was assisted, under the colonial regime, by an administrative agent called the *Khoa buôn*. Each year, in spring, the *Pô pin ea* presided over the ceremony honouring the local genie of waters. When there was a serious violation of the customs, or conflict among the villagers, the *Pô pin ea* would convene a customary tribunal headed by a *Pô phát kdi* (village customary judge) who was responsible for pronouncing the sentence based on the proverbs and sayings concerning social relationships and community organization. These "instructions" were called *Klei đuê bhiăn kdi* (customs having juridical value). Today, the *Pô pin ea* no longer exists; he is replaced by the village chief elected by the villagers.

The inhabitants of the *buôn* are bound to each other by the tradition of mutual aid and labour exchange on various occasions: funerals, weddings, construction of houses, making chairs and so on.

The *Khoa djuê* (head of lineage) always looks after the arrangements between the families in the same bloodline to facilitate their mutual assistance.

The *Pô lăn* (chief of land) is in charge of organizing the yearly ceremony to honour the God of Earth, to make offerings to other deities and genies, and to invoke their pardon for the incest or infractions of customs which have been committed on the territory under his authority. This territory generally extends beyond the limits of a *buôn* to cover the area equivalent to a commune, formerly called a *k'ring* or *sous-k'ring*.

In the past, some chiefs availed themselves of conflicts between villages to become rich and powerful; their authority even spread over a whole *k'ring*

(including several *buôn*). They were called *M'tao* or tribal chiefs, often owing a large number of slaves.

Tribal chiefs, military chiefs, chiefs of water sources, village headmen, land chiefs, judges, fortune-tellers, sorcerers and councillors at customary tribunals formed the upper class. Free peasants and slaves (prisoners of war; criminals unable to pay their fines to the village; and insolvent debtors) constituted the lower classes. It should be noted that the slaves of *Ê-dê* chiefs were treated on an equal footing with the members of the family to which they belonged. They could regain their freedom as soon as they were in a position to pay to the village the fines imposed on them. These slaves could get married, build a house and live apart but they remained subordinate to their masters and could not return to their parents' homes as free citizens.

Thus, social differentiation among the *Ê-dê* was not particularly marked.

Although there are several family lineages, the *Ê-dê* consider themselves as coming from two family lines, the *Niê* and *Mlô*. In this society, the family of the girl who "asks for the hand" of the young man chosen by her should bring presents to the latter's family. After marriage, the man comes to live at his wife's house. The children take the family name of the mother. The right of inheritance is reserved for daughters, primarily the youngest daughter. The pregnant woman should stay under the floor in a temporary room built for her delivery assisted by a midwife (*buê*). The new-born will be given a name chosen from among those of the deceased relatives on the mother's side after a rite performed by the mother herself or midwife.

At the age of 14-15, boys and girls should go through a ritual marking their maturity: their upper incisors are filed, and their ear-lobes perforated and the holes will be gradually enlarged. Formerly, for cosmetic purposes the ear-lobes might be stretched to the shoulders.

The dead are buried with part of their property as funeral objects. A funeral house or a miniature model of the boat-shaped house is built on the tomb, where rice is put as a votive offering. Some time after the burial, the ceremony of "grave abandoning" is held if the family of the dead person can afford it.

## ▣ Spiritual life

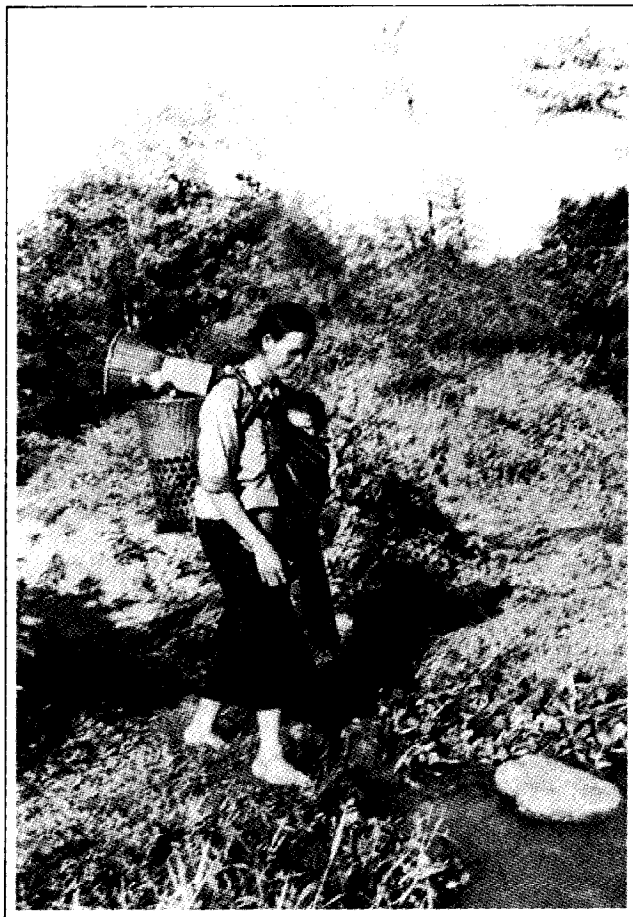
The *Ê-dê* practise primitive polytheism. In their pantheon, *Aê Adiê* and *Aê Du* are deities the most venerated. Annual festivals are held to honour the soul of rice, and the Genies of Soil, Waters and Fire. The *Ê-dê* also worship the King of Fire and the King of Waters. This practice has no connections with the Court or the State but reflects some of the *Ê-dê* conceptions of the world.

The folk literature and arts of the *Ê-dê* are rich and unique. Their myths, legends, lyrical songs, proverbs, sayings, epics and stories are remarkable. Noteworthy are the legends about the arrival of the *Ê-dê* at the Đắc Lắc plateau (*The Origin of Bãng Adrênh*, *The Origin of Yang Sing Mountain*), sayings and proverbs relating to custom (*Klei đuê bhiăn kdi*). Such epics (*khan*) as *Đam San*, *Trăng Quảng* (*Đăm Kteh Mlan*), *Sing Nhã*, *Đam Di*, *Khing Juh* and *Đăm Thih* have been published. The *mmuinh* and *kitt kdjă* are popular folk-songs. Musical instruments comprise flat gongs, round gongs, big drums, flutes, flageolets, horns and a stinged-instrument whose sound-box is a hollowed pumpkin.

The *Ê-dê* plastic arts is renowned for the ornamental patterns in coloured thread on cloth and for the wood carvings as part of the house architecture and as decorations of funeral houses.







On the way to a stream

## Chăm

▣ **Denomination:** Chăm.

*Other names:* Chiêm or Chiêm Thành, Chàm, Chăm-pa, Hời.

▣ **Small local groups:** Chăm Hroi, Chăm Pông, Chà Và Ku, Chăm Châu Đốc.

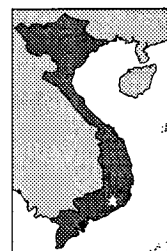
▣ **Population:** 99,000

▣ **Language:** Malayo-Polynesian.

▣ **Area of habitation:** Bình Định, Phú Yên, and Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận provinces; An Giang, Đồng Nai, Tây Ninh provinces and Hồ Chí Minh City.

### ▣ **Material life**

In Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận, the *Chăm* live in villages along the coast. Each village comprises several hundred inhabitants, sometimes up to a thousand. The houses are orderly arranged in rows, surrounded by a garden with a wall or a hedge. The doors open to the south, the west or between. The house is constructed in the *Việt* manner, with walls made of brick or a mixture of



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lime and shells; the roof is made of tiles, corrugated iron or thatch. Houses of more than one storey are rare. In certain localities, houses on stilts are found but the floor is some 30 cm above the ground.

In some *Chăm* villages in Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận, inside the perimeter of the living area, each family may possess several houses built side by side in a certain order: a house for receiving guests, one for parents and young children, one for married daughters, a kitchen, one for storing paddy, a nuptial room and the residence of the youngest daughter and her family.

This arrangement reflects the break-up of the matrilineal extended family system among the *Chăm*.

The *Chăm* in Bình Định and Phú Yên provinces settle in grasslands. Their small houses on stilts have the floors one metre above the ground and the door on one longer side. At each end of the ridge of the roof, the extensions of the two main rafters form a letter V (called: *chke vang* – “horns of the house”). The houses of the *Chăm Hroi* group are smaller (about 8m long and 4m wide), adapted to their traditional nomadic way of life and shifting cultivation.

The *Chăm* dress in the traditional manner of the *Việt* on the plain, except for women, whose garments are put on over the head. *Chăm Hroi* women wear pagnes with square pieces of cloth sewn behind (as on the skirt of the *Ba-na*), and cover their heads with black hoods resembling the mourning veil of *Việt* women. Elderly men in Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận wear their long hair wound in turbans, and cover themselves with blankets similar to women's *pagne*.

The *Chăm* grow wet rice and fruit trees. Agriculture and gardening provide the main income for the *Chăm* in Central Vietnam. Based on the nature and topography of soil, they divide cultivated land into three categories with different crops:

1. *Submerged rice fields of first quality*: They are low-lying rice-fields in fertile valleys reserved for the cultivation of 10th-month rice. Seeds are sown more densely over the edges than the centre. Seedlings on the areas having too densely sown with seeds are taken to be replanted in other fields; wherever the plant density is acceptable, this area will be left untouched.

2. *Submerged fields of second quality* are left immersed all the year round. Nursery seedlings are transplanted there. Seeds are not sown intensively in these fields.
3. *Mountain rice fields* (dry fields on mountain slopes): one crop per year can be produced here. Thanks to rainwater, seeds are easily put in holes with a digging stick or on ploughed lands. Only the *Chăm Hroi* in “dry-land” regions practise swidden farming and their food crops account for half the cultivated area.

By contrast with their fellow *Chăm* in Central Vietnam, *Chăm* in the South live mainly on fishing, weaving and small-scale trade. For them, agriculture is only of secondary importance.

The *Chăm* use carts drawn by buffaloes or oxen. *Chăm* weaving is developed, producing silk and the *sà rông* highly appreciated on regional markets. The potter's wheel is not always in use and pottery is dried in the open air but not in a kiln as is done elsewhere. The *Chăm* have some knowledge of metallurgy, and from their jewellers come finely-wrought objects in gold and silver.

The *Chăm* have for long maintained contact with the ethnic groups on the West high plateaux, and with the *Việt*, *Lào* and *Khmer*.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Before their integration into the Vietnamese community, the *Chăm* lived in a feudal society marked by the vestiges of the matriarchal system.

According to a stele in Mỹ Sơn temple, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, *Chăm* society was divided into four castes as in India: priests, warriors, common people, and out-castes. A few decades ago the vestiges of this social differentiation were still visible through the four strata which made up the then society:

- 1) brahman priests were considered as constituting the principal family line;
- 2) nobles as descendants of the royal family;
- 3) the common people made up of farmers; and
- 4) serfs and servants who were looked down upon.

Society is also divided into two clans: that of the “areca palm” and that of the “coconut palm”.

Under the clans are family lineages, each identified with the cult of a specific *kut* in the cemetery. A *kut* is a tombstone placed in front of the tomb of an ancestor on the maternal side. At the head of each lineage is a *Mụ raya*, a woman from the youngest branch who is in charge of the honouring of ancestors in the cemetery at a grand festivity of the ethnic group, which takes place every 2-3 years. Each lineage is divided into several branches placed under the authority of a woman called *Mua parô* and comprising 10-15 families of the matrilineal lineage. In general, about 100 families of the same lineage share a certain locality within the living area of the village.

The cell of the *Chăm* society in Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận is the matrilineal nuclear family. On the other hand, the *Chăm* society in Châu Đốc (An Giang province), which is under the influence of orthodox Islam is shifting to the patrilineal family system but the vestiges of matriliney are still obvious.

In both Central and South Vietnam the *Chăm* adhere to matrilocal principles.

The dead are either buried or cremated. The Brahmanic group cremate the dead, except for children below 15 years of age and people of the lowest caste. Funeral rites depend on the age, caste, religion and wealth of the deceased. They are very complicated and last sometimes as long as 15 days, being very costly in terms of garments, rice and meat used.

## Spiritual life

While retaining their traditional beliefs, the *Chăm* in South Vietnam have adopted Islam. The *Chăm* in Central Vietnam are divided into two groups; about two-thirds of them (called *Chăm Kaphia* or *Chăm Chuh*) are adherents of Brahmanism (the Hindu sect which venerates Siva), which has exerted a profound impact on their social structure and customs. The others follow the Bani and are considered to be traditional Islamists.

Buddhism introduced into the *Chăm* regions before Hinduism has also left its imprint on certain local social institutions.

These religions of Indian origin have been grafted onto the foundation of popular creeds, which is manifested in the veneration of divinities symbolizing natural forces, such as the genies of mountains, thunder, lightning, waters, rice, the rat and earth; the genies teaching cultivation, transplantation and construction of irrigational works, and even the genie of waves. There is in addition a system of rites, prohibitions and customs connected with production, for instance the cult of *linga*, the custom of ploughing rice-fields in secret, the rituals of building a hut for storing rice, or invoking the soul of rice when rice ears begin to rise.

*Chăm* architecture once experienced a particularly brilliant period of development, which is testified by the many red-bricks constructions that have survived to this date. They comprise palaces, temples and multi-layer towers built on hillocks in the middle of the plains of Central Vietnam.

Folk songs, sayings and proverbs reflect popular wisdom and daily life, Folk tales, didactic poems, novels in verse, such as the *Song of Cham Bri*, the *Song of Ta Tha Va* and the *Song of Ka Lin Parang* are well-known even to the younger generation. *Chăm* popular tunes and traditional music have exerted a strong influence on those of the *Việt* in Central Vietnam, something one can discern when listening to the songs and the tunes of Huế boat-women. Traditional dances, plastic arts, especially stone and wood carvings, terra-cotta moulds and bas-reliefs on monuments all show the high level of *Chăm* culture.

The *Chăm* invented long ago a script based on Sanskrit. This has facilitated the development of *Chăm* literature and promoted acculturation. The tale *Tám Cám* of the *Việt* has been transcribed in the *Chăm* script; such Indian epics as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and the Arabic story *A Thousand and One Nights* have also come to the *Chăm* this way.





Katé festival at Po-klong-ga-ra Tower

## Ra-glai

▣ **Denomination:** Ra-glai. *Other names:* Orăng-glai, Rô-glai, Ra-dlai, Mội

▣ **Small local groups:** Ra-crây (Rai), Noong (La-oang)

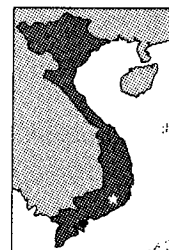
▣ **Population:** Approx. 72,000

▣ **Language:** Malayo-Polynesian

▣ **Area of habitation:** Ninh Thuận, Bình Thuận, Khánh Hòa and Lâm Đồng provinces. The ancestors of the *Ra-glai* were probably the native speakers of the Malayo-Polynesian language group.

### ▣ Material life

The *Ra-glai* live in houses on stilts set apart from each other. The floor is one metre above the ground and the roof made of thatch. Those living in the vicinity of Việt settlements for example, in the districts of An Sơn (Bình Thuận) and Khánh Sơn (Khánh Hòa) have adopted houses level with the ground and assembly techniques using tenon and mortise joints.



MALAYO-POLYNESIAN GROUP



Traditional *Ra-glai* attire has almost entirely disappeared. Women now wear pagnes and vests in the *Chăm* fashion.

According to oral tradition, the *Ra-glai* learned early about cultivation in submerged fields by means of irrigation. Later, having begun to settle in mountainous regions, they undertook the method of slash-and-burn cultivation with rice as the staple food crop and corn as secondary. However, rice is often grown alternately with other food crops. Their farming techniques are the same as those of the *Chăm*.

Basketry, iron-work, carpentry, weaving, hat making and sugar production are sidelines taken up only in certain regions during the farm-slacks in the agricultural calendar.

Gardening has come into being, with many different plants. Animals and poultry are reared for meat and sacrifices.

Food gathering occupies an important place in the livelihood of the *Ra-glai*.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

For the *Ra-glai*, the matrilineal family is the rule. The right to inheritance and veneration of ancestors belongs to the youngest daughter. The *Ra-glai* community is made up of many family lineages in the maternal bloodline, designated by a very ancient term, *patek* (sack). Each *patek* (there are eight of them) has a specific name and is divided into several branches with different names. Also, each *patek* is identified with a "history" in which traces of totemism can be sensed. It has its "house of origin" where the ancestral property is kept (copper gongs, jars and so on). Called "objects in memory of the ancestors", they are generally entrusted to a woman from the youngest branch. Once every three or five years, the members of the same *patek* must make offerings to the ancestors in the "house of origin". If the last woman of the lineage dies without a female descendant, these objects passed on from generation to generation must be buried with her. In this case, the lineage is regarded as extinguished. However, this phenomenon is rarely seen as the woman would adopt some cross cousin or niece as her heir.

Marriage between the members of the same *patek* is prohibited. As an exception, the members of two different *pateks* (collateral) are allowed to get married on condition that the rite of purification should be performed first to "wash them off incestuous sin". Endogamous marriage between remote members of the same lineage among the *Ra-glai* has thus begun to disappear.

Before marriage, the young man can live temporarily at his would-be wife's house to get to know her better, to demonstrate his talent and virtue, and work for the family of his future parents-in-law. After the wedding, the couple should settle permanently at the wife's. If she dies young, one of her cousins will take her place.

The dead are buried at the village cemetery. The body is dressed in new garments, wrapped in a shroud, and placed in a coffin made of a tree trunk on which a shaman has drawn the moon, the sun, birds, animals, flowers and leaves. Before the start of the funeral procession, the rite of rice offerings is performed. It is customary to bury a dead person with part of his property; but the funeral objects should be damaged beforehand. After the burial, the grave is piled with earth to form a mound. Then comes the moment of "recovery of the tomb" when various rites are performed to present offerings to the soul of the deceased. And the ceremony of "abandoning the tomb" is held to mark the definitive separation. This ceremony, the most important and costliest of all the funeral rites, takes place as soon as the family can afford it. Then a minutely decorated funeral house is built over the tomb, and the ritual of making sacrifices is conducted right in the cemetery. The event is accompanied by dances and songs performed to the sounds of bronze gongs. It lasts for many days, attended by all the villagers.

## ▣ Spiritual life

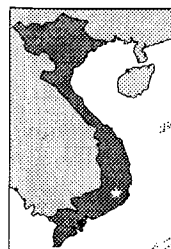
The *Ra-glai* have a system of popular beliefs and agricultural rites very similar to those of their neighbouring ethnic groups. They also practise worship of ancestors.

*Ra-glai* folklore is a rich treasury of sayings, popular songs, and historical tales.

The gamut of musical instruments is large. Particularly remarkable are the sets of nine bronze gongs, the sounds of which animate all traditional festivals taking place between the 12<sup>th</sup> moon and the third moon following. Different sets of lithophones have already discovered.



Pounding rice



MALAYO-POLYNESIAN GROUP

## Chu-ru

▣ **Denomination:** Chu-ru.

*Other names:* Chơ-ru, Kru, Mọi

▣ **Population:** Approx. 11,000

▣ **Language:** Malayo-polynesian (a subgroup of Chu-ru speaks the Môn-Khmer language)

▣ **Area of habitation:** Đơn Dương, Đức Trọng and Di Linh districts (Lâm Đồng), An Sơn and Đức Linh districts (Bình Thuận).

The ancestors of the *Chu-ru* were part of the *Chăm* community living on the coast of Central Vietnam. They moved to mountainous regions where they were given the name *Cru* ("earth nibbling people"). They brought with them the techniques of cultivating submerged fields to their present area of habitation in Đơn Dương district, as shown by the terrain of the region.

▣ **Material life**

The *Chu-ru* live in thatched houses on stilts made of wood and bamboo. Their dimensions depend on the number of inhabitants.

Women generally wear pagnes and vests like their *Chăm* counterparts. Men wear trousers and European-style shirts.

The *Chu-ru* adopted a sedentary lifestyle very early and have since long been engaged in agriculture. Besides rice, their staple food crop, they also grow corn, sweet potatoes, cassava, pumpkins, vegetables, and beans on milpas or in gardens. There are two categories of rice-field: submerged or swampy (*hama gluh*) and dry (*ham khác*).

The farming techniques are rudimentary, but the *Chu-ru* are excellent constructors of small irrigational works, and regulators of water in accordance with the phases of rice growth.

They rear buffaloes, oxen, hogs, horses and poultry. Oxen and buffaloes are used as draught-animals in agriculture. Buffaloes are more numerous, however, for they also serve as sacrifices and as a form of currency. Horses are raised first and foremost as pack-animals.

Food gathering is an activity of women and children. Men go hunting and fishing in rivers, lakes and swamps to supplement their daily meals and have something for exchange with the inhabitants of the plain.

The most widespread additional occupations are basketry and the making of common utensils from rattan and bamboo; iron-work turns out rudimentary tools such as knives, sickles and picks. Weaving is under-developed, but pottery from Đon Dương district, especially the villages of Bkang Krang Gõ and Krang Chó, is famous for its fine technique.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

The village (plây) is the basic *Chu-ru* population unit. Sometimes, a village covers several square kilometres, and is separated from neighbouring villages with natural boundaries recognized by the village chiefs and respected in accordance with tradition. In principle, village land is common property, but each lineage, each extended or nuclear family has their residential area and cultivable land. Transactions are often done in accordance with village customs. The person acquiring land must pay for the cost of a ceremony of sacrifice conducted on the plot itself in the presence

of all villagers, including children who are considered the "witnesses of the future".

The organization of the village is that of a rural commune. Blood relations often live next door to one another. The function of the head of family is still very important and is assumed by the eldest daughter who, in some cases, may have her brothers to replace her. As cultivable land belongs to the family, all transaction must be decided by the head of family in person.

In each village, two or three family lineages constitute the majority of the population; there are often members of other ethnic groups such as *Cơ-ho* and *Ra-glai*. Elected by the inhabitants, the village chief is in charge of looking after the village's lands, directing production, organizing community life, and managing external relations. He must also work to earn his own family's livelihood. In the village, there is the shaman who plays an important role in the people's spiritual life and irrigational works (*pô ea*). One or two midwives (*mô boai*) help women in childbirth.

*Chu-ru* society includes both the rich and the poor, but the differentiation is the result of labour but not of exploitation. A family is considered rich not because of its possession of great means of production but thanks to the objects which enhance its prestige in the eyes of the villagers such as gongs, jars, drums, elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns and animals for ceremonial sacrifices.

The matrilineal extended family of the *Chu-ru* is in the process of total disintegration, and the number of nuclear families is going up. Within the family, women occupy a privileged position, and the right of inheritance goes to the daughter. The role of the maternal uncle is very important. Under the extended family system, three or four generations descended from the same ancestors often live together in a long house, forming an economic and social community; they keep a common granary, eat together and recognize the authority of the same and unique chief - the husband of the oldest woman. A nuclear family is permitted by custom to live apart in a small house on stilts. But it is preferable that this family cohabits with several other nuclear families descended from the same ancestor in a long house on stilts, while keeping a separate granary, eating separately and working for its own benefit.

Monogamy is the rule for the *Chu-ru*. Matrimonial relationships are established on the initiative of the girl, who asks the help of a go-between

in arranging the alliance. After the rite of "introduction of the chosen young man", a betrothal is organized in the course of which a silver ring and a glass-bead necklace are offered to the would-be bridegroom. The last step is the wedding ceremony itself. Marriage presents consist of costumes for the husband's parents and brothers, rice alcohol and animals for the feast. After the wedding, the newly-married woman lives as daughter-in-law for about two weeks with the family of her husband. At the end of this period, a ceremony is organized to welcome the young man to his wife's family with whom the couple will live from then on.

Before marriage, young men and girls can love each other freely without affecting in any way their future conjugal life. Custom encourages marriages between cross cousins of both sides. The *Chu-ru* are not opposed to marriage with members of the neighbouring ethnic groups - the *Cơ-ho*, *Ra-glai* and more recently, the *Việt*.

### **Spiritual life**

The *Chu-ru* are polytheists, and also worship their ancestors. However, in their houses, there are no altar or tablets dedicated to the latter, the rituals actually being carried out in the cemetery (*kốt atâu*) once every two or three years. The *Chu-ru* also believe in the existence of genies of agriculture, who are honoured twice a year, at the beginning and the end of the rice cultivation cycle.

The *Chu-ru* have no script. An attempt to transcribe their language into the Latin alphabet was made by Catholic missionaries without great success. However, they have preserved a rich treasury of oral literature composed of popular songs, stories in verse, poems and narratives that elderly people recite in the evening.

Musical instruments include bronze gongs, drums, flageolets, and typically *Chu-ru* instruments such as the *kwao*, *r'tông*, and *terlia*. Festive days, with popular dances (*tamga*) accompanied by music are occasions which involve the cheerful participation of all.

## Sino-Tibetan Language Family





## Hán group

### Hoa

▣ **Denomination:** *Hoa*.

*Other names:* Hán, Tàu, Khách

▣ **Small local groups:** Triều Châu, Phúc Kiến, Quảng Đông, Quảng Tây, Hải Nam, Xạ Phang, Thòong Nhần, Hẹ

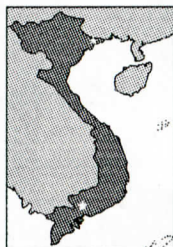
▣ **Population:** over 900,000

▣ **Language:** Sino-Tibetan

▣ **Area of habitation:**

Across Vietnam; but in the South, mainly in Hồ Chí Minh City, Đồng Nai, Cửu Long, Sóc Trăng, Cần Thơ, Kiên Giang and Bạc Liêu, Cà Mau; in the North, mainly in Hanoi, Hải Phòng, Nam Định and various localities along the China-Vietnam frontier.

The ancestors of the present-day *Hoa* came from China during different historical periods since the beginning of our era, particularly before and after the World War II. Most of them are native to South Chinese provinces such as Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, Chekiang and Taiwan.



HÁN GROUP



1. Ông Bồn pagoda on the 15th day of 6th lunar month, 1996 (the *Hoa*, District №5, Hồ Chí Minh City).
2. Bride and bridegroom (the *Hoa*, District №5, Hồ Chí Minh City).
3. Ancestral altar (the Ngái, Quý Sơn commune, Lục Ngạn district, Bắc Giang).





1. A Ngái woman in traditional costume (Đồng Giao, Quý Sơn, Lục Ngạn, Bắc Giang).

2. Initiation ritual of "Cấp sắc" ceremony (the Sán Diu, Hồng Giang, Lục Ngạn, Bắc Giang).

3. Sán Diu traditional costume (Gốc Thị, Nam Hòa, Đồng Hỷ, Bắc Thái).



## Material life

In rural areas, the *Hoa* concentrate in villages of several dozen to several hundred houses. The villages are established near water sources, on hill slopes, at the foot of mountains, in valleys or along rivers and the sea-coast. Within each region, they never live too far from one another.

The residential area of the *Hoa* comprises several houses arranged in the form of a rectangle around a courtyard to facilitate defence. The houses are made of clay and have three compartments to which two lean-tos are often added. A single door opens in the centre of the facade in the thick wall which surrounds the house. On the lateral walls, sometimes there are two skylights to let sunlight into the interior which is always dim. The architecture of the traditional *Hoa* house evokes the image of a citadel.

In many areas the *Hoa* have adopted the architecture of the *Việt* house, having less compartments but more doors and windows.

*Hoa* male attire is indigo in colour, which is composed of wide trousers and a four-panelled vest which extends below the belt. The vest opens at the front and has two flaps, each of which has a pocket fastened by buttons, and the button holes are made of plaited strips of cloth. In the past, men wore their long hair knotted into chignons — a style still seen among older people.

Women's attire consist of a pair of trousers and five-panelled vest which falls to the mid-thigh. The vest has a stand-up collar and a line of cloth buttons and button-holes from the neck to the left armpit. Vests and trousers are generally made from cloth of different colours or of patterned cotton fabric. Nowadays, black trousers and shirts in different styles and colours are becoming common.

The *Hoa* have a long tradition of cultivating submerged fields and are highly experienced in all phases of production: choice of seeds, designing of tools suited to local conditions, setting of the agricultural calendar, use of oxen and buffaloes as draught-animals, use of manure, regulation of water, weeding and insect control.

The principal agricultural implements are ploughs and harrows drawn by buffaloes, picks, hoes, weeding knives and scythes. The principal food crop is ordinary rice. Corn, sweet potatoes and cassava supplement the diet, par-



ticularly in the pre-harvest period. Houses are often surrounded by kitchen-gardens where vegetables and beans are grown.

Crafts have since long gone beyond the scope of sidelines to become for the *Hoa* an important area of their economy. Particularly noteworthy are ceramics (mainly from Móng Cái), the production of cloth and silk, boat making and metal work.

In cities, most of the *Hoa* are small business people; some are artisans (hairdressers, tailors, shoe-makers and so on) or workers.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Among the *Hoa*, social differentiation is marked. Under the colonial regime, in rural areas the great majority of the *Hoa* were peasants exploited by a small stratum of rich peasants and landowners whose interests were tied in with those of the rulers. In cities, particularly in the South, there was a comprador bourgeoisie prevailed over the working class, the stratum of the poor including the great majority of people and a number of small proprietors. This group controlled the means of production, banks, and large-scale trade. They also controlled the market and sought to enrich themselves to the detriment of labourers.

The *Hoa* village is made up of many different lineages, each having a lineage chief in charge of ancestor worship and the handling of important internal affairs. Each village has a number of communal buildings such as pagodas, temples, and altars to the genie of earth, national heroes and village founders.

In cities and certain urban centres, the *Hoa* are organized into congregations, having each its own chief and statutes. In addition, there are mass organizations, each placed under the direction of a council; they all have become known as the *Hoa* Association.

The *Hoa* adhere to the patriarchal family where women occupy a secondary position. In principle daughters are not entitled to inherit the family's property; after marriage they have to follow their husbands, and the children take the father's family name. Parents decide the marriage of their

children, and early marriage is a common practice. The choice of a husband or a wife is often dictated by commercial considerations, above all by the strong desire to have for alliance a family equal in social standing.

Given the belief that after burial, a dead person returns to his ancestors in the other world, some of his daily objects are buried along with him.

Upon the death of a man, according to ancient custom, the widow will cut a shoulder-piece into two parts: one is buried with the body, and the other kept to put into her own coffin later. The shoulder-piece serves as a signal for recognition in the "country of the Buddha in the West". The *Hoa* mark the tombs of their relatives with a stone, which, for well-to-do families, is a stele whose text relates the major episodes of the life of the deceased, and praises his/her merits.

## ▣ Spiritual life

Ancestor worship is a main feature of the spiritual life of the *Hoa* who are also profoundly influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. In rural areas, vestiges of animism and the practice of sorcery are numerous and seen in the ceremonies venerating various genies (of mountains, rivers, trees, stone and so on), and in certain abstinences and prohibitions.

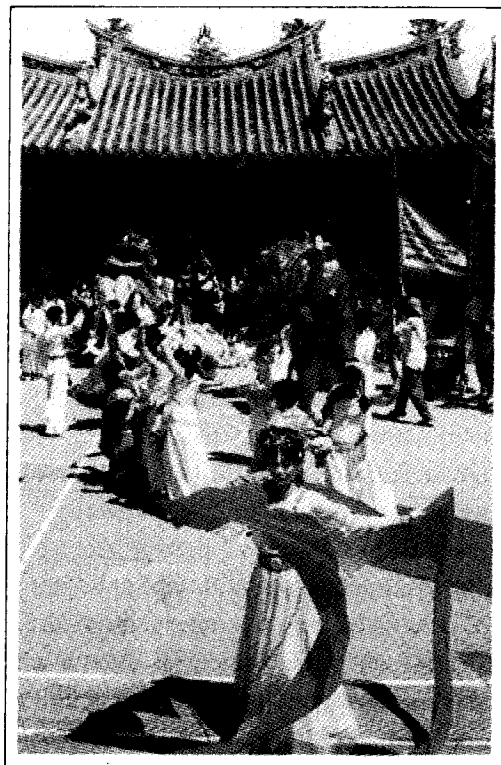
Art and literature include many different genres, varied in expression and rich in content.

At weddings, spring festivals, or receptions of friends from afar, the *Hoa* often sing the *sán cớ* ("mountain songs") similar to the alternate songs of the *Việt*. In each specific situation, the singer may modify the conventional text by adding or leaving out some sentences, even a whole stanza. These performances may last for three or four consecutive nights, attracting all the village.

*Hoa* theatre is also a unique art-form; a historical event or love story is related in verse and songs accompanied by movements and gestures.

The most common musical instruments are the bamboo flute, trumpet, skin drum, castanets, and string instruments such as the two- or three-stringed violins, the 16-stringed and 36-stringed zithers.

The *Hoa* frequently organize ensembles for theatrical performances (including Chinese martial arts, lion, unicorn and dragon dances) at festivals and ceremonies such as *Tết* (New Year's Day). Some dances (for example, the rower's dance, butterfly dance and tea-gathering dance) are ritual in nature and are performed only at traditional ceremonies.



Spring festival at a pagoda

## Sán Dìu

▣ **Denomination:** *Sán Dìu*.

**Other names:** Sán Dẻo, Mán Quần Cộc (Mán in shorts), Mán Váy Xẻ (Mán in split skirts), Trại Đất (Trại on ground), Trại

▣ **Population:** Approx. 94,000

▣ **Language:** Sino-Tibetan

▣ **Area of habitation:** Quảng Ninh, Bắc Giang, Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên, Vĩnh Phúc, Tuyên Quang, Hải Dương provinces. The *Sán Dìu* came from Guangdong (China) to Vietnam around the middle of the 17th century.

### ▣ **Material life**

The *Sán Dìu* generally live in densely-populated villages at the foot of mountains or in upland regions. Their houses are scattered, with few gardens or large trees around them. Water for daily use is taken from rivers and streams; the *Sán Dìu* do not dig wells for fear of "hitting the veins of the dragon" and offending the genies. But over the last few decades, many changes have



HÁN GROUP



occurred, including the appearance of bamboo hedges round the village, fruit trees in gardens, ponds for fish rearing, kitchen-gardens, rice-drying yards and wells. Villages as large as those on the Northern plains can be found; for instance, in Đạo Trù commune, Lập Thạch district, Vĩnh Phúc province, each village is inhabited by over 200 households.

The *Sán Dìu* live in houses built level with the ground; the roofs are supported by columns or walls.

In many areas, *Sán Dìu* women retain their traditional costume: a *pagne* comprising several pieces falling down to the calf, and a long dress open at the chest, over a bra. The *pagne* and dress are of a dark indigo colour. A long belt hugs the waist and falls to the knee as ornamentation in addition to a black turban and leggings. Their jewelry includes silver necklaces, bracelets, earrings and chains.

Men's ceremonial clothes are composed of a pair of white trousers, a black dress, a muslin turban holding the hair in a chignon, and shoes.

The staple food crop is ordinary rice grown in submerged fields. The *Sán Dìu* also grow corn and sweet potatoes on milpas. Wet rice growing techniques are as complex as those of the *Việt* and *Tày-Nùng* in the same region; different kinds of fertilizer are used such as manure of both plant and animal origin and pond mud.

*Sán Dìu* peasants are skilled at exploiting and fertilizing fallow land, thus transforming infertile and hill slopes into milpas suitable for the cultivation of cereals.

They also grow mulberry and cotton, and raise silkworms for weaving. Cloth is dyed with indigo.

Such forest products as bamboo, rattan and wood are gathered for utilization.

Fish are reared in ponds and lakes, or caught in rivers and streams. The *Sán Dìu* of Quảng Ninh are engaged in off-shore fishing and salt production.

Handicrafts in general are expanding beyond the frame of family sidelines. They include production of bamboo or rattan household utensils, carpentry, iron-work, the making of boats, lime and tiles. Some *Sán Dìu* also work as masons and tailors.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

The communal land system is unknown to the *Sán Dìu*. Each family offers a small part of its private land to the village chief and the Taoshi who takes care of the places of communal worship. The village chief cannot, however, possess more than two mẫu Bắc Bộ (1 mẫu = 3,600 m<sup>2</sup>) and the Taoshi can enjoy the full right of utilizing his allotment only during his term of office.

In the past, exploitation in the form of usury, tenancy, and the hiring of labour was widespread. In many regions, the peasants had to sell their land dirt cheap to landowners and notables to become tenants or agricultural labourers. Some of the rich managed to secure for them such administrative posts as chiefs of village, commune or canton, who were under the authority of the chief of district. With the council of notables or village council, the village chief — an elderly person well-versed in the customs of his ethnic group — handled community affairs and played the role of judge in settling conflicts among villagers.

The *Sán Dìu* want their sons to become Tao — professional Taoist shamans on reaching adulthood. This stems from the Taoist conception that the shaman who enjoys the protection of genies is capable of looking after his family and property and will be worshipped after death.

The most popular family names are *Ninh*, *Diệp*, *Lê*, *Từ*, *Trương* and *Lý*. Each family adopts a series of 7-12 words to be inserted between the family name and proper name. Those who bear the same family name consider themselves related to one another, and base themselves on this particle to determine their respective places in the family hierarchy. In the same generation, age has priority over social rank.

The *Sán Dìu* maintain the patriarchal nuclear family. They are monogamous but a man may have a second wife if the first does not give him an heir. Marriage between two persons of the same family name is forbidden. From the fifth generation onward such marriages are tolerated, but a ceremony must be held beforehand to ask the ancestors' pardon. The final decision is made by the parents but it still depends on the "examination of age" of the

future couple. Presents sent to the betrothed girl by the family of the young man are relatively expensive. If the couple are late in having children, a "second marriage" is organized. After the winter solstice, the husband pretends to get angry and drives his wife back to her parents. Then, through the mediation of a go-between, he "re-asks" the hand of the woman and celebrates a new wedding, which is expected to "give the couple many offspring".

Three years after burial, the dead are exhumed. The remains are washed, dried, and placed in a sitting position in a terracotta jar (or in a lying position in a small sandstone coffin), then buried again. This custom is similar to that of the *Việt*.

During the burial ceremony, children of the deceased person crawl around the grave, starting from his feet. Daughters crawl clockwise, sons anti-clockwise, while throwing earth into the grave. Before standing up, each should take a handful of earth, then run to their house without looking back, and throw the earth into the stables or poultry yard, in the hope of successful animal rearing. They then come into the house and sit down on a basket of paddy. The more paddy sticks to their clothes, the happier they will be. To end the burial ceremony, with their fingers, they eat a boiled chicken placed where the coffin was located the preceding day.

## Spiritual life

Worship of ancestors and genies occupies the most important position in the religious practices of the *Sán Dìu*. On the family altar there are two joss-stick containers: one for the ancestors, and the other for the Genie of Earth. Each village has a temple dedicated to this genie and a *dinh* (communal house) where the village worships the Titular Genie to invoke its protection.

Within the family, the Genie of Hearth is still honoured.

*Sán Dìu* folklore is fairly rich in legends, stories, humorous tales, narratives, popular songs, dictums, puzzles, fables, and lyrical and wedding songs. Festivals, weddings and meetings of old friends are occasions for young people to perform the *soọng cô* (alternate songs) which may last for several consecutive nights.

The most common musical instruments of the *Sán Dìu* are trumpets, bamboo flutes, skin drums and cymbals. At religious ceremonies, various dances are performed such as the lantern dance, stick dance, way-opening dance, and "daunting-spirits" dance. Traditional dances and music are intended above all for religious purposes.



Portrait of a woman

## Ngái\*

▣ **Denomination:** *Ngái*.

*Other name:* Sán Ngái

▣ **Small local group:** Xín, Hắc Cá (Xéc), Đản, Khách Gia, Lê

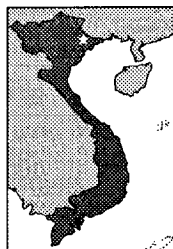
▣ **Population:** 1,200

▣ **Language:** Sino-Tibetan

▣ **Area of habitation:**

Mainly in the island and coastal regions of Quảng Ninh, Haiphong and Hồ Chí Minh City

The present-day *Ngái* make up a community comprising elements of several ethnic groups which formerly lived in South China. They came to settle in Vietnam at different periods of history. *Việt sử thông giám cương mục* (Annals of the History of the Việt Land) in the 10<sup>th</sup> century recorded the long-standing presence of the *Đản* along the coast of Vietnam. In fact, the *Ngái* have



HAN GROUP

\* In ethnographic description, the *Ngái* are often identified with the *Hoa*.

lived for centuries in Quảng Ninh to which they claim *to be indigenous*. The *Hắc Cá* group arrived around the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After 1954, many *Ngái* moved to Hồ Chí Minh City.

## ▣ Material life

The *Ngái* live either in boats along the coast (especially the *Ngái lùi nằm*), engaged in fishing, or on dry coastal land and practice agriculture.

Those *Ngái* who live on fishing do not form villages or hamlets. In the daytime, they go out to the sea; at night they lie at anchor and stay near the shore. Often, a few boats — families bound by family ties or by friendship form a group, and only one boat is at anchor while the others are tied to it.

The *Ngái* boat is made of wood, 5-6 m long and about 2 m wide, divided into three parts. In the middle, a kind of one-metre high hut is constructed as a bedroom. Fishing equipment is kept near the bow, and the hearth is at the stern. Under the front and rear bridges, household articles and food are kept in partitioned compartments. The roof of the hut is the place where the host receives guests.

For some time now, the *Đản* living on land have been settling in hamlets close to the sea at a high water mark. Their houses are either on stilts or built level with the ground. In the house-on-stilts, the floor is generally one metre above the water surface. Other houses are built on mountain slopes facing the sea, the architecture similar to that of *Ngái* farmers' houses.

The *Xín*, the *Hắc Cá* on the coast of Quảng Ninh province, and other *Ngái* from highland regions live in hamlets. Their house has the external appearance of a blockhouse. It comprises one single block on a flat rectangular piece of ground, or three buildings in the shape of the letter U. There is only one door in the middle of the front, sometimes having two skylights set in the lateral walls.

The garments worn by *Ngái* women comprise a pair of wide trousers and a long five-panelled vest opening on the right. *Ngái* men, particularly the young, often wear European trousers and shirts. Only a few old men still wear wide trousers and four-panelled vests with stand-up collars.

Fishing is the *Đán's* principal means of livelihood, carried out with nets or lines at sea. Women and children also gather shell-fish and crabs. Turtles are sometimes reared in water and tied to the boat, while chickens are kept in cages.

The *Đán* are now organized into fishing cooperatives with large vessels and nets capable of catching between ten and 50 tonnes of fish. Some families have sidelines such as gardening and animal rearing. They live in hamlets and only put out to sea for the purpose of fishing.

The *Xin* and *Hắc Cá*, along with other groups of *Ngái*, live chiefly on agriculture, except for a few traders. In the northern mountains, they grow rice, cassava, sweet potatoes, and other crops on milpas. On the coast, they build sea-walls to reclaim more cultivable land for rice. Agricultural implements and methods are the same as those of the *Hoa* and other local ethnic groups. They also grow a number of industrial crops such as cinnamon and flax. Poultry and cattle rearing is well-developed, particularly, the Móng Cái hog is very famous. Other occupations include metal-work, pottery, weaving, construction of boats, and drying fish and shrimp. Móng Cái porcelain (Quảng Ninh) and Cát Hải fish sauce (Haiphong) have for long gained reputation.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

In the past, early marriages and child betrothals were common. As soon as a boy was one or two years old, his parents called on a go-between to find for him a "spouse" of the same age or some years older. The intermediary brought to the girl's house, as a present, a packet of sugar wrapped in red paper, and borrowed the "talisman of the future bride" to submit to the *Taoshi* for examination. This talisman was a rectangle of cloth 20 cm by 30 cm on which were inscribed in Chinese characters the name of the girl, the date and the hour of her birth. If the *taoshi* found that the ages of the two children were "compatible", the boy's family would bring presents to the girl's, and from then on, the two families were allied. When the girl was 13 or 14 years old, the wedding was held, the couple then living at the husband's home.

The *Ngái* live in the patrilineal nuclear family.

The body of a dead person is placed in a wooden coffin and buried after a ceremony dedicated to his soul. At the head of the tomb is a tombstone and, sometimes, a stele engraved with the origin and name of the dead person in Chinese characters.

### ▣ Spiritual life

Among the *Đán*, the manifestations of primitive polytheist beliefs are relatively obvious. They believe in the Genies of Sea, Whales, Lightning, Rivers, Wind and Rain, who exert influence on their lives. However, ancestors worship occupies the central place. Apart from Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism have also exerted a strong impact on their custom, mode of thinking and the organization of their traditional society.

Being deep-sea fishermen, the *Ngái* have gained valuable knowledge of meteorology and oceanography: routes of navigation, maritime fauna, climate changes, observation of stars, the colours and movements of clouds, and of currents. This knowledge is presented in their proverbs, sayings and folk-tales. There are stories about their battles against nature and struggles for justice. *Sán cổ* is the most widespread form of alternate song performed by young people at festivals and weddings.



House with  
tiled roof



## Tibeto-Burman group

### Hà Nhì

▣ **Denomination:** Hà Nhì.

*Other names:* Hà Nhì Già, U Ní, Xá U Ní

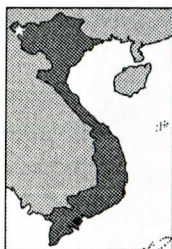
▣ **Small local groups:** Hà Nhì Cồ Chồ, Hà Nhì La Mí and Hà Nhì Đen (Black Hà Nhì)

▣ **Population:** 12,500

▣ **Language:** Tibeto-Burman

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mường Tè district (Lai Châu province), Bát Xát district (Lào Cai province)

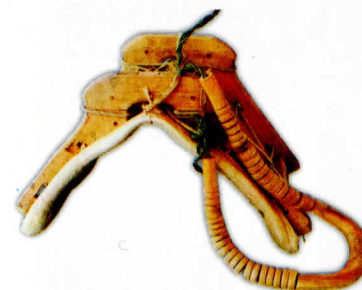
The Hà Nhì emigrated to Vietnam from Yunnan (China) in different times. Those who now live in Lai Châu were the first settlers (two or three centuries ago), long before those in Lào Cai (over 150 years ago). This ethnic group is still present in China.



TIBETO-BURMAN GROUP

#### ▣ Material life

The Hà Nhì generally build their houses level with the ground while houses-on-stilts influ



1. Costumes of the bride and bridegroom (the Hà Nhì, Thung Lũng commune, Mường Tè district, Lai Châu).

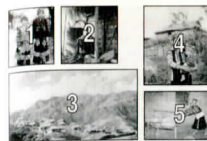
2. Harness (the Phù Lá, Lào Cai).

3. Phù Lá traditional costume (Báo Thắng, Lào Cai).

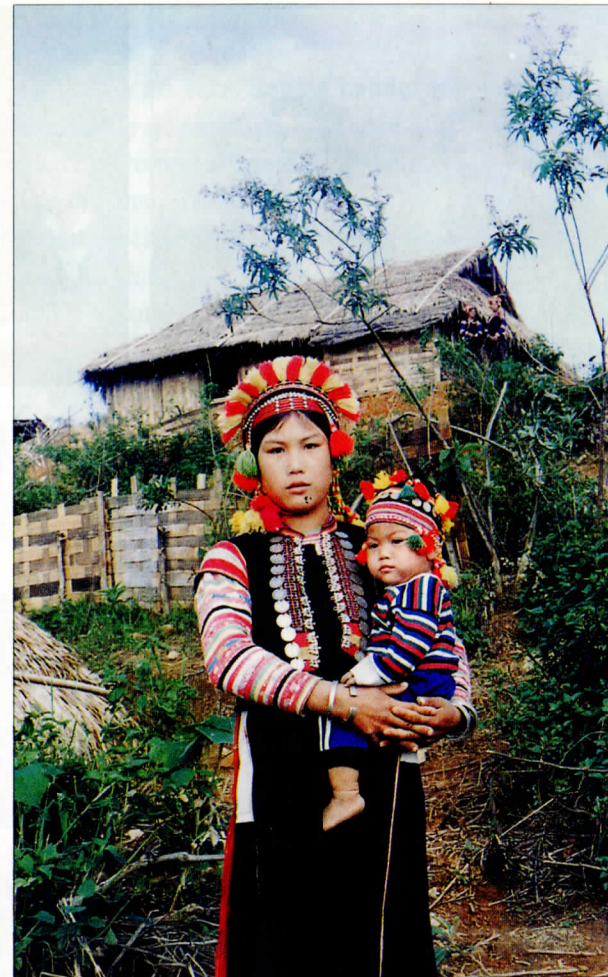
4. "Xòe" dance (the Hà Nhì, Mù Cà commune, Mường Tè district, Lai Châu).







1. Lô Lô traditional costume (Xăm Pá hamlet, Mèo Vạc commune, Mèo Vạc district, Hà Giang).
2. Set of tools for distilling alcohol (the La Hủ, Huổi Hân, Bum Tờ, Mường Tè, Lai Châu).
3. Nậm Xé hamlet (the La Hủ, Nậm Xé, Bum Tờ, Mường Tè, Lai Châu).
4. Mother and child (the La Hủ, Nậm Xé, Bum Tờ, Mường Tè, Lai Châu).
5. Grinding maize (the Lô Lô, Lũng Cú commune, Đồng Văn, Hà Giang).







1. Cống traditional costume (Bô Lếch commune, Mường Tè district, Lai Châu).

2. Rafting on the Đà river (the Si La, Con Hò commune, Mường Tè district, Lai Châu).

3. Bride's parents toasting the bride and bridegroom (the Cống, Nậm Khao, Mường Tè, Lai Châu).

4. Bamboo rucksack (the Si La, Lai Châu).



enced by the *Thái* architectural style are rare. Settled hamlets contain each as many as 50-60 families. By contrast, temporary villages comprise small scattered groups of houses distant from one another; but now they tend to settle to form hamlets of some dozens of families.

The *Hà Nhì* paint their teeth black, but dress differently depending on the region. The women of Lai Châu have adopted the *La Hủ* mode of dressing: a decorated dress in natural colours, buttoning under the right armpit. But the dress of Lào Cai women is shorter and plain.

The *Hà Nhì* live on rice grown in milpas or terraced fields. They are highly experienced in preparing terraced fields on mountain sides, digging canals, and building small dams. In soil preparation, they use hoes, picks, shovels, ploughs and harrows pulled by buffaloes. Cattle and buffalo rearing is relatively under-developed. Animal manure is carefully gathered for use. Weaving, dyeing, and basketry are occupations undertaken in the farm-slacks of the agricultural calendar.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

In the past, social differentiation was quite marked. Hiring of labour and buffaloes, and usury were common practices, as was tenancy. Communal production as well as the tradition of mutual assistance were abolished. Rice fields were private property. Each hamlet was placed under the authority of a *Tạo bản*; more important bản (village) were governed by the *Thống quán* appointed by the *Lý trưởng* (mayor) of *Thái* origin. At Bát Xát, these administrative functionaries were called *Bình đầu* or *Seo phải*.

Each lineage (*Ly, Phà, Cồ, Bờ* and so on) comprises two to four branches, each branch designated by a particular name taken after the name of the ancestor. Worship of parents is assumed by brothers at the house of the eldest brother. On the eve of Tết (New Year's Day), children of the family get together to listen to an elderly person's tales about the ancestors. This is the way of the *Hà Nhì* to enhance the cohesion of the members of the lineage, and perpetuate family tradition. For the same purpose, the father's name is attached to that of the child, which allows the genealogy of the lineage to be traced far back.

The *Hà Nhi* family is patriarchal. In certain cases, the parents live with all the married sons, who will separate into households only after the death of the former. The father and the eldest son handle all family affairs. The eldest son has the right to maintain the paternal house and is responsible for the worship of the parents, but he may be replaced by one of his younger brothers.

In certain localities, marriage between members of the same branch is tolerated from the seventh generation on. Custom requires that a man live with his wife's family and work for them for three or four years, in replacement of the sum he should have paid for the purchase of the "head" (the wife). In *Bát Xát*, old men with no male descendants may adopt sons-in-law. Marriage rituals vary from region to region. They are more complex in *Bát Xát*, where the wife is not obliged to adopt the family name of her husband, which is unlike the custom in *Mường Tè*.

When the father or mother dies, the altar to ancestors — normally located in the central bay — is dismantled together with the partition marking off the bedroom of the deceased. The dead body is washed and placed on a bed in the middle bay, with the head nearest to the altar. The coffin is made from a hollowed tree-trunk. To determine the place of burial, an egg is tossed in the air and the grave will be dug where the egg hits the ground and breaks. Around the grave, stones are piled up instead of a funeral house. In *Lai Châu*, if a person dies in the rainy season (between the sixth and ninth lunar months), a mound is set up in the forest atop which is placed the coffin. Or one may hang the coffin over the pit to wait for the end of the rainy season.

### **Spiritual life**

Besides the cult of patrilineal ancestors, the *Hà Nhi* also worship the spirits of their parents-in-law. On the second moon of every year, a communal ceremony is held by the hamlet's inhabitants to make offerings to the spirits and pray for health of humans and animals, and for bumper crops. Other beliefs are related to agriculture, especially with regard to slash-and-burn cultivators, including the worship of the genies of thunder and wind, and the new rice festival.



Going to market



## Phù Lá

▣ **Denomination:** Phù Lá

▣ **Small local groups:** Phù Lá Hán, Bò Khô Pạ (Xá Phó), Phù Lá Hoa (Variegated Phú Lá), Phù Lá Đen (Black Phù Lá), Phù Lá Trắng (White Phù Lá), and Chù Lá Phù Lá

▣ **Population:** 6,500

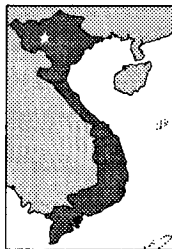
▣ **Language:** Tibeto-Burman

▣ **Area of habitation:** Lai Châu, Lào Cai, Hà Giang and Sơn La provinces.

The *Phù Lá* arrived very early in the far North of Vietnam. The book *Kiến Văn Tiểu Lục* (*Things Seen and Heard*) by Lê Quý Đôn, written in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, mentioned them under the name *Phổ*.

### ▣ Material life

The *Phù Lá* lead a settled mode of living on mountain slopes in the highland region. Each hamlet is made up of a few houses lying far away from milpas so that cattle and poultry, when released, cannot destroy crops. In Bắc Hà district



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(Lào Cai), the *Phù Lá* are grouped in clusters of hamlets next to the *Hmông*, *Dao* and *Hoa*.

Their houses are built either on stilts or on the ground. The *Phù Lá Hoa* and *Xá Phó* prefer houses-on-stilts, mostly in Bát Xát district (Lào Cai). The houses on the ground belong mainly to the *Phù Lá Hán* in the districts of Bắc Hà, Mường Khương and Xi Ma Cai (Lào Cai). The entrance door to a house-on-stilts opens on one of the lateral sides, while that of a house level with the ground is in the centre of the front wall.

The altar to ancestors is located in the central bay of the house. On the side nearest to it is a narrow door about 20cm wide called the "door of spirits" which is opened only during the performance of worshipping rituals.

The granary is a small house built on the milpa some metres distant from the main house. The *Phù Lá* keep food in their houses only for one or two days.

The *Phù Lá* woman wears a long skirt held up to her waist by a belt, and decorated at the kncc-level with a colourful patterned band. Only *Phú Lá Đen* women wear trousers.

Most women, especially the *Xá Phó* and *Phù Lá Hoa*, wear low-necked square-shaped vests put on over the head and reaching to the waist. The decorative motifs (geometric figures, for example, triangles, squares, or juxtaposed diamonds, pine-trees, harrow teeth, swastikas and stylized human beings) cover the lower half of both front and back, while crowns made of glass beads are sewn to the upper half. The two sleeves are made of bands of a belt 1m long and 10 cm wide, decorated with 30-40 shells attached in a straight line around the waist.

The ordinary vests worn by *Phù Lá Hoa* and *Xá Phó* men open at the front and have no collar. They are adorned with tiny glass beads fixed in the shape of a cross.

Whenever they go out, *Phù Lá* people always carry cloth bags. Each bag has two fringes in coloured threads at its lower corners and is remarkably beautiful. It is often made more attractive with painted drawings and multi-coloured grains of resin.

The *Phù Lá* grow mainly rice and corn on milpas in addition to vegetables and beans. In Bắc Hà and Bát Xát districts, the *Phù Lá Hán*, *Phù Lá Hoa* and *Phù Lá Đen* have long cultivated terraced fields. Poultry and

domestic animals (hogs and goats) are reared for meat and ritual sacrifices. In places where wet rice is grown, oxen, buffaloes and horses are kept as draught-, and pack-animals. *Phù Lá* men are good hunters who make excellent crossbows and poisoned arrows in the traditional manner.

## ▣ Social and family relationships

Social differentiation among the *Phù Lá* is not marked. The sorcerer — generally an elderly person — is the most respected in the village. As the village representative, he makes decisions on all community affairs.

Under the old regime, *Phù Lá* peasants were compelled to perform *corvée* in the interests of the local authorities.

The *Phù Lá* have the tradition of mutual assistance in agricultural work. Any person who comes to help his neighbour will eat only dinner at the latter's.

Usually, a village comprises one or two lineages. Each lineage is divided into several branches, the obligations of which vary according to their importance, especially in the course of the performance of worshipping rituals; some must offer fresh meat, others merely salted meat. Marriage is allowed between members of the same lineage, who should belong to different branches, however.

The *Phù Lá* live in the patriarchal nuclear family. Children take the name of the father, and after marriage, the couple live at the husband's.

Young people should inform their parents about their decision to get married. The approval may be obtained from the parents, uncles and aunts after a feast. The wedding ceremony may be held immediately afterwards or delayed for some years, depending on the possibilities of the young man's family. The dowry comprises necessary household utensils such as knives, axes, seeds, hogs, chickens, blankets, mats, cooking pots and pottery. Wedding presents from the bridegroom to his in-laws may include new garments, a silver neck-lace, dozens of kilos of pork, and two or three jars of alcohol. The rituals are simple and short.

The body of the deceased is left in the house for two or three days before inhumation. In the course of the burial, a part of the meat from the sacrificed ani-

mals is retained to be salted and put on the grave later. The main funeral rite is conducted 13 days after burial and lasts for a whole day, thus ending the period of mourning for parents. The tomb is cleaned and sacrifices made to the soul of the dead for three consecutive years after the burial, on the *Tết* occasion (New Year's Day). In the third year, the rite of "abandoning the grave" is performed.

## ▣ Spiritual life

The *Phù Lá* honour the cult of their ancestors at annual festivals and ceremonies such as *Tết*, the festivals on the second moon, on the fifth day of the fifth moon, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh moon. Offerings comprise chicken, fish, shrimps, crabs and pumpkins. A sheet of paper is dipped in the blood of the sacrificed animal, then folded in the shape of a boat and placed on the altar.

*Phù Lá* folk art is characterized by the traditional decoration of clothes and daily bamboo or rattan utensils with various motifs. The folklore includes tales and lyrical songs performed at festivals and weddings, and numerous popular sayings which constitute a wealth of knowledge of production, and a code of conduct. The *txín chí bá* dance is often performed by young people on the first and second months before sowing time.



Pounding rice

## La Hủ

▣ **Denomination:** La Hủ.

**Other names:** Xá Toong Lương or Xá with Yellow Leaves, Xá Pươi, Khạ Quy (Xá Quỷ), Khù Sung or Cò Sung.

▣ **Small local groups:** La Hủ Sủ (Yellow La Hủ), La Hủ Na (Black La Hủ), La Hủ Phung (White La Hủ).

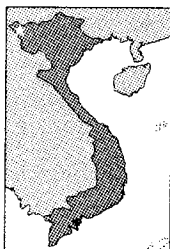
▣ **Population:** 5,400

▣ **Language:** Tibeto-Burman

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mường Tè district, Lai Châu province. The same ethnic group is also found in China.

### ▣ **Material life**

The *La Hủ* live in scattered hamlets on hill slopes. Each hamlet comprises a group of three or four families. However, they have adopted a sedentary lifestyle and begun to build more and more house on the ground, with partitions and sides made of plaited bamboo. Some houses have clay walls like those of the neighbouring *Hà Nhì*. The interior design does not follow any conven-



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tional order but there is always a hearth serving as the kitchen and “heating” for the family. The hearth is located in the part of the house where the head of the family sleeps. The altar to ancestors is fixed to the partition at the head of the latter’s bed.

*La Hủ* women usually wear knee-length or dark indigo dresses, buttoned on the right and decorated at the neck and chest level with pieces of cloth in different colours and a band of green, red, white and black cloth sewn together. On special occasions, they put over them white sleeveless vests, closed at the front and adorned with motifs of butterflies, pieces of silver or alluminium money, and fringes made of red thread.

The *La Hủ* live mainly on slash-and-burn cultivation, hunting and gathering. Corn is the principal food crop grown beside gourd plants, beans, vegetables and others. Work on milpas is done with knives, small picks and especially, the digging sticks with ends and “hardened” by fire. Each plot of land is cultivated for one or two years, then left fallow for two or three years. The cycle may be renewed three or four times, and the land then is abandoned for good. The *La Hủ* have to eat various tubers, roots, wild fruits and vegetables, and starchy plants during the pre-harvest time. Agricultural output is very low. Besides the crossbow as the usual weapon for hunting, they also use flintlocks and traps. Fishing is carried out with bow-nets and more recently, with nets, or by hand at the moment when the fish or frogs lay their eggs in ponds or streams. The *La Hủ* are skilled in basketry and ironwork. The products are primarily used in the community; some are exchanged with the *Thái*, *Hà Nhì* and other groups for salt and agricultural implements.

### ▣ **Social and family relationships**

The *La Hủ* lead a very difficult life. Under the feudal-colonial regime, *Súng quán* (hamlet chief) was the highest post a *La Hủ* could aspire to. The *Súng quán* was responsible for collecting taxes and the handling of hamlet affairs in accordance with custom; he was assisted by the *Tạo bản* and the *Seo phải*.

The inhabitants of a *La Hủ* hamlet may belong to several lineages. Each lineage comprises a certain number of branches, each bearing the name of a bird or a quadruped. Such family names as *Pờ*, *Vàng*, *Phản* and *Giàng* found among the *La Hủ* are actually borrowings from other ethnic groups as a result of intermarriage.

The *La Hủ* family has six to eight members on average. Its patrilineal nature is obvious, but women enjoy equality in family life. Young people are free to choose their partners. The *La Hủ* are monogamous. Marriage between members of the same branch is prohibited, but is tolerated between parallel matrilineal cousins and cross-cousins. According to custom, brothers of the husband refrain from marrying his wife's sisters. The duration of matrilocality used to be seven to eight years, but it has now been reduced to two or three.

Women give birth in their own rooms. Three days after birth, they invite old people to a small banquet at the end of which a name is given to the child. As an exception, the unexpected guest to the banquet will be entitled to the honour of naming the newborn. If the baby is often ill, its name will be replaced with another to "drive away the ill fortune".

When a person dies, three shots are fired to "chase away the spirits" and announce the event to the village. Before burial, the body is placed on a mat on the ground. Ritual offerings are made while men dance around to the sound of trumpets. To make a coffin, the following rite is performed: an egg is thrown to the ground and the tree is chosen from where the egg has broken. The tree-trunk is cut in half lengthwise, then hollowed out; the upper end is the head of the coffin. Grave location is also determined by the egg-throwing rite. The *La Hủ* do not build a funeral house.

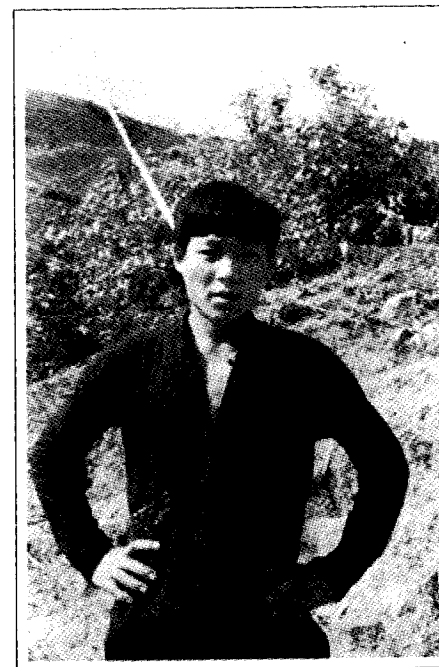
## Spiritual life

For the *La Hủ*, the cult of ancestors is important but it is often not extended beyond the parents' generation. The three previous generations may be worshipped but only when a family member suffers serious illness.

Every year, after harvest time, a ceremony is held on the "day of the tiger" in the fourth moon to honour the genie of earth and to pray for pro-

tection and prosperity. During the production cycle, rites are also performed in honour of the soul of rice and corn. Blacksmiths honour the Saint-patron of their trade on the day of the horse in the tenth month.<sup>(1)</sup>

The *Tết* (New Year) festival does not take place on a fixed date but at the end of the harvest. Through three or four days, everyone amuse themselves with songs, dances and music. The songs are performed in *Hà Nhì* language with its characteristic rhythm. The *khèn* with the sound-box made of a calabash, and five bamboo tubes of different length, is the most popular musical instrument and has a five-note scale.



Young people's casual clothing

- (1) The *La Hủ* group days and years into cycles; each cycle has 12 units bearing the names of 12 animals: tiger, rabbit, dragon, louse, horse, sheep, monkey, cock, dog, pig, squirrel and buffalo.



## Lô Lô

▣ **Denomination:** Lô Lô.

*Other names:* Ô Man, Lu Lọc Mần, Qua La, Dí, Man Di, Mùn Di, La La...

▣ **Small local groups:** Lô Lô Đen (Black Lô Lô), Lô Lô Hoa (Variegated Lô Lô)

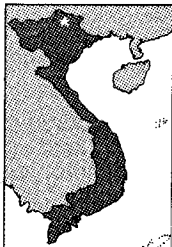
▣ **Population:** 3,200

▣ **Language:** Tibeto-Burman

▣ **Area of habitation:** Đồng Văn and Mèo Vạc districts (Hà Giang province), Bảo Lạc (Cao Bằng province), Mường Khương (Lào Cai province). The *Lô Lô* came from Yunnan (China) to Vietnam in two migratory flows: in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### ▣ Material life

The *Lô Lô* are grouped in hamlets and live in houses either on stilts or half-on-stilts and half-on-ground. The interior is designed according to a fixed plan; the altar to the "spirits of the house" stands against the rear partition of the central bay; the right bay serves as a bedroom with a fireplace



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for heating; the left bay contains another hearth serving as a kitchen, the altar to ancestors, and other household utensils and tools. Houses are built in high, dry, well-ventilated areas overlooking valleys, preferably in the vicinity of a thick forest. Forests and streams are considered as the dwelling-places of the Genie of Earth, and *Lô Lô* custom strictly condemns any wanton destruction of forests.

Women still wear their traditional attire. Men dress like the *Hmông* and the *Tày* of the same region. A *Lô Lô Đen* woman wears a black dress put on over the head, with large sleeves made of bands of cloth in different colours, and a long, full black skirt, tight at the waist and at the knee. To complete the outfit there is an indigo turban decorated with multicoloured fringes and embroidered motifs, a belt, and leggings. *Lô Lô Hoa* women wear low-necked vests opening at the front and decorated with triangles of cloth in different colours assembled to form squares trimmed with glass beads, indigo trousers with similar ornamentation, leggings like those of the *Hmông*, and finally, belts and turbans made from pieces of cloth sewn together.

The *Lô Lô* grow rice and corn as their principal food crops. They practise sedentary farming in fields, and on milpas in the highland region of Đồng Văn and Mèo Vạc districts; they have long experience in rotational and multiple cropping. In Bảo Lạc district, they use terraced fields apart from permanent milpas which are always given some significance.

Animal husbandry meets their daily requirements and provides sacrificial offerings. Hunting as an economic activity still plays a certain role. Handicrafts, still fairly under-developed, including mainly basketry, the making of bamboo and rattan household utensils, and weaving for family need.

### ▣ Social and family relationships

*Lô Lô* society has undergone profound differentiation between the exploiter and the exploited, a process exacerbated by the oppression and discriminatory treatment of the colonialists.

A *Lô Lô* family lineage comprises a number of branches; the member families of each branch maintain very close ties and often live in the same

hamlet and worship their common ancestors. The eldest person of the branch assumes the position of its head. The maternal uncle plays an important role only when the mother is alive. Relationship in the maternal family line loosens as from the second generation on.

The *Lô Lô* are monogamous, the wife living with her husband's family. Early marriage at the age of 13 or 14, common in the past, is no longer preferred. Adultery is condemned by custom. In principle, when the eldest brother dies, his younger brother can marry the widowed sister-in-law (a sort of levirate). A son of a paternal aunt can marry a daughter of a maternal uncle, but such marriage is allowed only for one time between the descendants of a certain uncle and aunt.

The patriarchal nuclear family is the general rule. The husband decides everything in the family. Daughters inherit their mothers' jewellery and receive a dowry when they get married; the rest of the inheritance goes to the male children.

When a person dies, his family organizes, during 3-5 days, the "dance of spirits" to lead his soul to the ancestors. His son-in-law, who directs the dance, carries on his shoulders a bag containing a cloth ball representing the head of the deceased. In the funeral procession, this son-in-law must carry one end of the coffin. It is also he and the brothers of the widow who throw the first handfuls of earth into the grave.

## Spiritual life

The *Lô Lô* make out differences between "close" and "remote" ancestors. The first are the dead going back to the fifth generation the second, those from the sixth generation upwards. All the rituals of worshipping ancestors are conducted at the house of the head of the branch, although each family has its own altar to ancestors.

Each year, the whole hamlet honours the cult of the Genie of Earth to pray for bumper crops. After ploughing, each family makes offerings to the genie of the field. Other rites of lesser importance related to agriculture are occasionally performed.

For the *Lô Lô*, Mít Dơ and Kết Dơ are the genies that govern the world. Kết Dơ governs the universe and creates human beings, while Mít Dơ governs the earth and protects them. The *Lô Lô* also believe in the existence of other deities and offer sacrifices to them on any occasion. The many abstinences observed by the *Lô Lô* are vestiges of out-dated custom.

*Lô Lô* culture has experienced significant periods of development. The *Lô Lô* script has existed for a long time, as shown by documents preserved in certain families, but few are now able to read them.

A pair of bronze drums - one "male" and one "female" - are the main set of traditional musical instruments which also constitute a family treasure. They are used at funerals to maintain rhythms for ritual dances.

The ancient tales of the *Lô Lô* reflect their material and spiritual life and their conceptions of the universe. Popular songs tell of the struggle against natural calamities and oppression, extol labour and victory of justice over injustice. They are sung on moonlit nights, at weddings, and at funerals. Young people prefer alternate songs with lyrical content. Songs often have the form of five-word verses.



Portrait of a girl

## Cống

▣ **Denomination:** Cống.

**Other names:** Xám Khốong, Xá Xeng, Xá Cống, Xá

▣ **Population:** 1,300

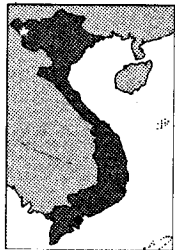
▣ **Language:** Tibeto-Burman

▣ **Area of habitation:** Several communes in Mường Tè district (Lai Châu province) along the Vietnam-Laos-China borders

### ▣ **Material life**

Formerly, the *Cống* established themselves on mountain slopes in the highland region. Nowadays, they prefer to settle on the banks of the Đà River in houses on stilts overlooking the water, or at the foot of mountain.

The *Cống* house comprises three or four bays separated by partitions. The central bay is reserved for receiving guests, and the next bay for the eldest son and his wife. The bay on the opposite side serves as a bedroom for the parents. It is where the family hearth and altar to ancestors are found. If a son-in-law lives in the house, he and



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his wife will occupy the front part of the central bay, near the entrance door. This is the only door to the house, however large the house is.

The *Cống* are not familiar with weaving. They grow cotton to be exchanged with other ethnic groups, mainly the *Thái*, for cloth. Women wear ankle-length pagnes, trimmed with small silver bells tied to the belt. Their short vests do not reach the upper edge of the pagne; the sleeves are adorned with two or three narrow bands of cloth in different colours that contrast with the dark indigo background. Men wear wide trousers and short vests.

The *Cống* practise slash-and-burn cultivation, using knives and fire. After three or four crops, the land is left fallow. Recently, ricefields have come into being. Besides agriculture, food gathering also plays an important role, particularly in the pre-harvest months. The *Cống* catch fish by hand or with poisonous plants. Nowadays, boats are acquired from the *Thái* for fishing on the Đà river.

### ▣ **Social and family relationships**

Under the old regime, *Tạo bản* and *Sa quạ* were the posts occupied by the *Cống* in the local administrative apparatus under the direction of *Thái* seigneurs. The *Tạo bản* governed a hamlet, the *Sa quạ* several. They were directly dependent on the *Thái* village chief. The *Cống* commoners were forced to work as *nhóc*, or *cuông* (servants) for the *Phìa tạo* and *Thái* chiefs, and as such they were despised.

Each *Cống* lineage (for example, *Lò*, *Ly*, *Chảo* and *Hù*) has its own manner of worshipping their ancestors, locating the altar, choosing taboos, and abstaining from eating certain animals. In one hamlet there are often some lineages, each comprising several branches. The head of each branch handles community affairs and assists its members in organizing betrothals, weddings, funerals and so on. The patriarchal nuclear family is the cell of society. Divorce and polygamy are very rare practices. Marriage between persons of direct descent is allowed only from the seventh generation on, whereas that between cross-cousins is encouraged. Matrimonial relation-

ships between the members of allied families are condemned. Of late, the *Cống* have begun to adopt inter-marriage with other ethnic groups (such as the *Thái*, *Hà Nhì* and *Si La*).

Married women wear their hair knotted in a chignon as from the day of their betrothal. After the betrothal, the fiancé lives at his future wife's for eight to 12 years, or offers to her parents five pieces of silver money and a certain amount of other cash. The wedding is celebrated at the end of the year, after the harvest and when the period of matrilocality finishes. Often the couple have children during this period.

Women give birth near the hearth. The placenta is placed in a bamboo tube and buried under the bed. Six or seven days after the umbilical cord is cut off, the paternal grandfather, maternal grandfather, or maternal uncle ties threads around the wrist of the baby and gives it a name. If the child is often sick, he will be given another name.

The body of a dead parent is placed in the bedroom, but that of a dead baby or child is placed in the middle of the house. Eggs are thrown to determine the location of grave. The coffin is made from a tree trunk split lengthwise and hollowed out. Children have to mourn their parents; the eldest son should have his hair shaved by his brothers-in-law, and put on a white turban which is worn until the next new-rice festival.

## Spiritual life

The third-generation ancestors are worshipped and this responsibility is assigned to the head of family, or his wife after his death. The cult of dead parents is conducted jointly by sons until they live separately. Each will then have an altar in his new house. A ritual of making sacrifices to the souls of ancestors is performed several times a year — on New Year's Day (*Tết*), after harvest, at weddings, child-birth, upon the death of a relative or in the event of illness. The "spirits" of the parents-in-law are also the objects of cult.

On the third month of the lunar calendar, before sowing time, a communal ceremony is held in the hamlet to honour the genie of the village (*gà ma thú*), with the shaman as the chief officiate. During the sowing period, the

head of family makes sacrifices to the spirit of milpa, a rite that can be performed together by the whole hamlet. At harvest time, the rites dedicated to the soul of rice are conducted.

In *Cống* folk literature, there are proverbs about behaviour in the family and society, the division of the year, cultivation and hunting. Tales and fables are popular, having a highly educational content and criticizing wrong-doings and certain vices. At *Tết* and at weddings, young people like singing alternate songs to express their feelings and affection.



Women's traditional costume  
and *tinh tau* musical instrument



## Si La

▣ **Denomination:** Si La.

*Other name:* Cù Dề Xừ

▣ **Population:** 600

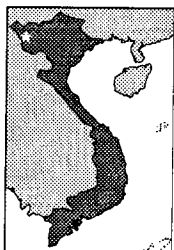
▣ **Language:** Tibeto-Burman

▣ **Area of habitation:** Mường Tè district, Lai Châu province.

The *Si La* once lived in Phong Sa Ly (Laos). Around 150 years ago, to escape Lao feudal oppression, seven families crossed the border to settle in Vietnam.

### ▣ **Material life**

The *Si La* used to live in small hamlets on mountain sides, and to move to other places every 10-20 years, after exhausting their milpas. But for some time now, they have been settling along the banks of the Đà River. Their houses are built on the ground with an entrance door, two bays and two lean-tos. The altar to ancestors is never placed in the bay where the door is located. The head of family takes over a partitioned room and installs there the altar to his parents. Each house



TIBETO-BURMAN GROUP

has two hearths, the principal one placed in the middle of the house; the three stones forming this hearth are considered to be the dwellings of ancestors.

Women wear short skirts, dyed black or indigo, like that of *Thái* women, and dresses buttoned under the right armpit, the upper front part being a different colour from the rest and decorated with silver or tin coins. The collar and sleeves are made from bands of cloth in different colours. Their hairstyles vary according to age; adolescents wear hats or turbans, while young girls and married women wear different turbans to allow immediate recognition of marital status. When travelling, they always carry woven handbags with red fringes attached to the hems. In the past, men's teeth were painted red and women's black. This custom is no longer observed by young people today.

The *Si La* live mainly on rice and corn grown on milpas with hoes. Settled, they have begun to use fields and rear buffaloes as draught-animals. Hunting is under-developed. Gathering provides vegetables, tubers, bamboo shoots and so on for daily meals.

### ▣ **Social and family relationships**

Formerly, the social organization of the *Si La* was largely dependent on that of the *Thái* in the region. Each hamlet had a *Tạo bản* (hamlet chief) and a *Sa quạ* who was in charge of tax collection, designation of men for corvée, and handling of affairs in accordance with local custom. Both officials were *Si La*, placed under the authority of a *Thái* village chief.

*Hù* and *Pồ* are the two great lineages of the *Si La*. Though the cat is the taboo animal for all *Si La*, the *Hù* lineage also refrain from eating tiger meat. In each lineage, the oldest man assumes the function of *Lu lu* (judge) taking charge of internal affairs; he plays an important role in marriages and funerals. After his death, his successor must continue the cult of ancestors of the lineage, and refrain from removing the altar. After three years, he builds a new house and can transfer to it the votive objects arranged according to custom on an altar placed beside the central column. The cult of ancestors requires that ancestors be honoured at Tết and the new-rice festival; the offerings

include squirrel meat, crabs, fish, yam, rice ears, bundles of leaves, grains of resin, and rice alcohol. On such occasions, bee wax candles are lighted.

The patriarchal nuclear family constitutes the cell of society, and includes the grandparents.

Marriage between members of the same lineage (even if they belong to different branches), or between members of two allied families, is forbidden. A union between parallel cousins or cross-cousins is tolerated on the condition that the persons concerned do not have the same family name. The wedding is celebrated in two stages, with an one-year interval. After the first rite of presentation, the couple go to live at the husband's house. The second rite, more important, consists of the bridegroom handing wedding presents to the bride's family to whom the couple will go after the ceremony.

During her pregnancy, a woman must observe a complex system of abstinences regarding eating and drinking. She gives birth at her house. After two or three days, an old woman in the hamlet is invited to name the child. If it is a boy, his name (placed after the family name) is always preceded by the word *Chà*; if a girl, the preceding word is *Có* or *Cô*.

Members of the same family are buried beside each other in the cemetery. On some nights before burial, when the dead person is still kept in the house, a ceremony is held, as the *Si La* believe, to show the soul of the deceased the way to its native land in *Mô U* (Mường U, Phong Sa Ly province, upper Laos).

When the place for burial has been chosen, the inhabitants of the hamlet help the family of the defunct dig a grave and build a funeral house. While in mourning for their parents, sons comb their hair up from the nape of the neck to the top of the head, and daughters refrain from wearing necklaces, bracelets and earrings. Children can only get married three years after the death of their parents.

## Spiritual life

Ancestor worship is the rule. Each family has an altar dedicated to deceased parents whereas the cult of grandfathers and other ancestors takes

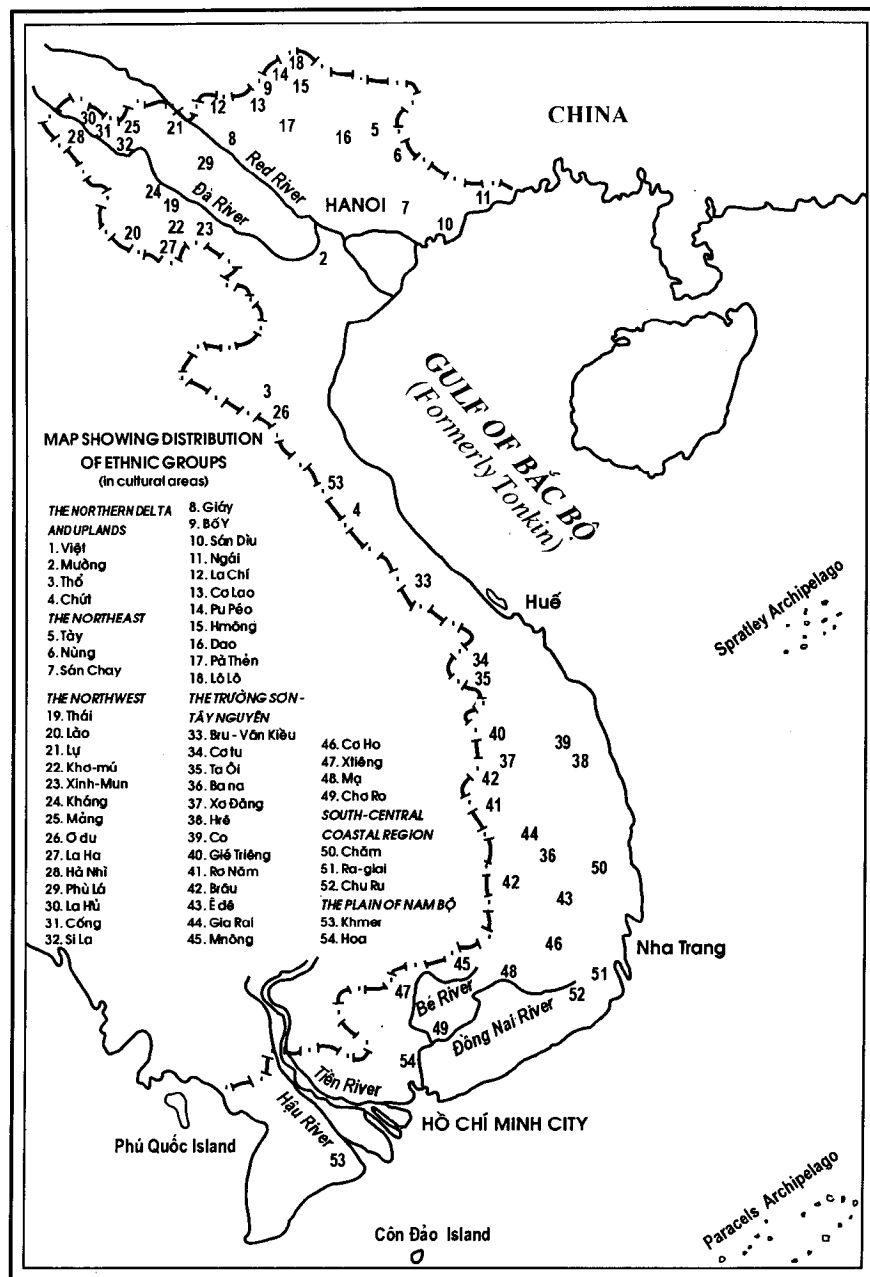
place in the house of the head of the family branch. At the end of the first and beginning of the second lunar month, the hamlet jointly organizes a ceremony to pray to deities for protection and prosperity. The officiate (*mù phé*) is appointed each year by the inhabitants of the hamlet. If the preceding year has proved to be a good one, the former *mù phé* will continue his role.

As an agrarian rite, offerings to the soul of rice are made first on the milpa and then in the house. Meanwhile, certain abstinences are observed before and after sowing.

*Si La* folklore is well-known for historical songs sung at *Tết*, folksongs, proverbs and legends. Alternate songs very popular among the young, exalt faithfulness, love and natural beauty.



Portrait of Sila people



## LIST OF ETHNIC GROUPS IN VIETNAM (IN ORDER OF POPULATION SIZE)

- |              |                |             |
|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1- Việt      | 19- Ra-glai    | 37- Phù Lã  |
| 2- Tày       | 20- M'nông     | 38- La Hủ   |
| 3- Thái      | 21- Thổ        | 39- Kháng   |
| 4- Mường     | 22- Xtiêng     | 40- Lự      |
| 5- Hoa       | 23- Khơ-mú     | 41- Pà Thẻn |
| 6- Khmer     | 24- Vân Kiều   | 42- Lô Lô   |
| 7- Nùng      | 25- Giáy       | 43- Chứt    |
| 8- Hmông     | 26- Că-tu      | 44- Mảng    |
| 9- Dao       | 27- Giẻ-triêng | 45- Cờ Lao  |
| 10- Gia-rai  | 28- Tà-ôi      | 46- B'ô     |
| 11- Ê-đê     | 29- Mạ         | 47- La Ha   |
| 12- Ba-na    | 30- Co         | 48- Cống    |
| 13- Sán Chay | 31- Chơ-ro     | 49- Ngái    |
| 14- Chăm     | 32- Hà Nhì     | 50- Si La   |
| 15- Xơ-dăng  | 33- Xinh-mun   | 51- Pù Pêo  |
| 16- Sán Dìu  | 34- Chu-ru     | 52- Brâu    |
| 17- H're     | 35- Lào        | 53- Rơ-măm  |
| 18- Cơ-ho    | 36- La Chí     | 54- Ô-đu    |

# ETHNIC COMPOSITION AND DISTRIBUTION

Order	Official name	Approximate population size	Other names	Principal small local groups	Area of distribution (province)
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Kinh (Việt)	55,900,000			All over the country
2	Tày	1,190,000	Thổ	Ngạn, Phén, Thu Lao, Pa Dí	Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Lao Cai, Yên Bái, Cao Bằng, Lai Châu, Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên, Bắc Giang...
3	Thái	1,040,000	Táy	Táy Khao (Thái Trắng/White Thái), Táy Đăm (Thái Đen/Black Thái), Táy Chiêng or Táy Mường (Hàng Tổng), Táy Thanh (Man Thanh), Táy Mười, Pu Thay, Thổ Đà Bắc, Táy Mộc Châu (Táy Đeng)	Sơn La, Lai Châu, Nghệ An, Thanh Hoá, Lào Cai, Yên Bái, Hoà Bình, Lâm Đồng...

1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Mường	914,000	Mol, Mọi	Mọi Bi, Ao Tá (Aụ Tá)	Hòa Bình, Thanh Hoá, Vĩnh Phú, Yên Bái, Sơn La, Ninh Bình
5	Hoa	900,000	Khách, Tày, Hán	Triều Châu, Phúc Kiến, Quảng Đông, Quảng Tây, Hải Nam, Xạ Phang, Thờng Nhân, Hẹ	Kiên Giang, Hải Phòng, Vĩnh Long, Trà Vinh, Quảng Ninh, Đồng Nai, Sóc Trăng, Cần Thơ, Kiên Giang, Bạc Liêu, Cà Mau, Hồ Chí Minh City
6	Khmer	895,000	Miên, Cù, Cùl, Thổ, Việt of Khmer origin, Khmer Krôm		Sóc Trăng, Cần Thơ, Vĩnh Long, Trà Vinh, Kiên Giang, Cà Mau, Bạc Liêu, Tây Ninh, Hồ Chí Minh City, Bình Phước, An Giang
7	Nùng	705,000		Nùng Xường, Nùng Giang, Nùng An, Nùng Phan Sinh, Nùng Lôi, Nùng Tùng Slin, Nùng Cháo, Nùng Quý Rịn, Nùng Khèn Lài, Nùng Dín, Nùng Inh...	Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên, Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Bắc Giang, Quảng Ninh, Hồ Chí Minh City, Lâm Đồng, Đắk Lắk, Lào Cai



1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Hmông	558,000	Mèo, Mèo, Mán Trắng, Miêu Tộc	Mèo Hoa (Variegated Mèo), Mèo Xanh (Green Mèo), Mèo Đỏ (Red Mèo), Mèo Đen (Black Mèo), Nà Miêu, Mèo Trắng (White Mèo)	Hà Giang, Yên Bái, Lào Cai, Lai Châu, Sơn La, Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Nghệ An, Thanh Hóa, Hòa Bình, Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên
9	Dao	474,000	Mán, Động, Trai, Diu Miền, Kiềm Miền, Kim Mùn	Dao Đại Bản, Dao Đỏ (Red Dao), Cóc Ngáng, Dao Cóc Mùn, Dao Lô Gang Dao Quần Chết (Dao with tight trousers), Dao Tam Đảo Dao Tiền (Dao with coins) Dao Quần Trắng Sơn La, Vĩnh Phúc, Dao Làn Tiên Áo Dài (Dao with dress)	Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Lào Cai, Yên Bái, Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên, Lai Châu, Sơn La, Vĩnh Phúc, Phú Thọ, Bắc Giang, Thanh Hóa, Quảng Ninh, Hoà Bình, Hà Tây.
10	Gia-rai	242,000	Giơ-rai, Mọi, Chơ-rai	Chor, Hdrung, Aráp, Mdhur (Mthur), Tbuân	Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Đắk Lắk

1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Ê-đê	195,000	Ra-đê, Ê-đê, Moi, Rha-đê, Êđê-Êgar, Anăk Êđê	Kpă, Adham, Krung, Ktul, Diê, Blô, Êpan, Mdhur, Bih, Kdrao Dong Kay, Dong Măk, Êning, Arul, Hwng	Đắk Lắk, Phú Yên, Khánh Hòa
12	Ba-na	137,000	Bơ-năm, Roh, Kon Kde, Ala Công, Kpang Công	Tơ-lô, Gơ-lar, Rơ-ngao, Krem, Giơ-long (Y-long)	Kon Tum, Bình Định, Phú Yên
13	Sán Chay	114,000	Mán, Cao Lan -Sán Chỉ, Hồn Bản, Hồn Chùng, Sơn Tú	Cao Lan, Sán Chỉ	Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên, Tuyên Quang, Quảng Ninh, Bắc Giang, Lạng Sơn, Vĩnh Phú, Phú Thọ, Yên Bái
14	Chăm	99,000	Chiêm Thành, Chăm Pa, Hời, Chăm	Chăm Hroi, Chăm Châu Đốc, Chà Và Ku, Chăm Pông	Ninh Thuận, Bình Thuận, An Giang, Hồ Chí Minh City, Bình Định, Phú Yên, Khánh Hòa

1	2	3	4	5	6
15	Xơ-đăng	97,000	Km-răng, Hđang, Con-lan, Brila	Xơ-teng (Hđang), Tơ-đrá, Mơ-nâm, Hà-lăng, Ca-dong, Châu, Ta Trế (Tà Trĩ)	Kon Tum, Quảng Nam, Quảng Ngãi
16	Sán Dìu	94,630		Trại, Trại Đất (Trại on the ground), Sán Dêo, Mán Quần Cộc (Mán in shorts), Mán Váy Xẻ (Mán with split skirt)	Quảng Ninh, Bắc Giang, Bắc Giang, Bắc Cạn, Thái Nguyên, Vĩnh Phúc, Phú Thọ, Tuyên Quang
17	Hrê	94,000		Mọi Đá Vách, Chăm-rê, Mọi Lũy, Thạch Bích, Mọi Sơn Phong	Quảng Ngãi, Bình Định
18	Cơ-ho	92,000		Xrê, Nốp (Tu Nốp), Cơ-don, Chil, Lát (Lách), Tơ-ring	Lâm Đồng, Ninh Thuận, Bình Thuận, Khánh Hòa
19	Ra-glai	72,000	O-răng Glai, Rô-glai, Radlai, Mọi	Ra-clay (Rai), Noong (La-oang)	Ninh Thuận, Bình Thuận, Khánh Hòa, Lâm Đồng
20	Mnông	67,000		Gar, Chil, Rlâm, Preh, Kuênh, Nông, Bu-dâng, Prâng, Đíp, Biết, Si Tô, Bu Đêh	Đắc Lắc, Lâm Đồng

1	2	3	4	5	6
21	Thổ	51,000		Kẹo, Mơn, Cuối, Họ, Đan Lai-Ly Hà, Tây Poong (Con Kha, Xá Lá Vàng)	Nghe An, Thanh Hóa
22	Xtiêng	50,000	Xa-diêng, Mọi, Tà-mun		Bình Phước, Bình Dương, Tây Ninh, Lâm Đồng, Đắc Lắc
23	Khơ-mú	43,000	Xá Cầu, Pu Thênh, Tây Hay, Việt Cang, Khá Klầu, Tênh	Quảng Lâm	Sơn La, Lai Châu, Nghệ An, Yên Bái
24	Bru-Vân Kiêu	40,000	Vân Kiêu, Mãng Coong, Trì, Khùa, Bru		Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, Đắc Lắc
25	Giáy	38,000	Nhắng, Giảng, Sa Nhân, Pầu Thủn, Chùng Chá, Pu Nám	Pu Nà (Cùi Chu or Quý Châu)	Lào Cai, Hà Giang, Lai Châu
26	Cơ-tu	37,000	Ca-tu, Ca-tang, Mọi, Cao, Hạ	Phương, Kan-tua	Quảng Nam, Thừa Thiên - Huế

1	2	3	4	5	6
27	Gié-Triêng	27,000	Giang Rẫy, Brila, Cà-tang, Mọi Doãn	Gié (Dgiêh, Tareh), (Tren, To-riêng), Vc (La-ve), Pa-noong (Bơ Noong)	Quảng Nam, Kon Tum
28	Ta-ôi	26,000	Tôi-ôi, Ta-hoi, Ta-ôi, Tà-uát (Atuát)	Pa-có, Ba-hi, Can-tua	Quảng Trị, Thừa Thiên-Huế
29	Mạ	25,000		Châu Ma, Chó Ma, Mọi	Lâm Đồng, Đồng Nai
30	Co	23,000	Trầu, Cù, Mọi, Coi, Cor, Khùa		Quảng Ngãi, Quảng Nam
31	Chơ-ro	15,000	Châu-ro, Dơ-ro, Mọi		Đồng Nai
32	Hà Nhì	12,500	U Ní, Xá U Ní, Hà Nhì Già	Hà Nhì Cò Chồ, Hà Nhì La Mí, Hà Nhì Đen (Black)	Lai Châu, Lào Cai
33	Xinh-mun	11,000	Puộc, Pua, Xá	Da, Nghet	Sơn La, Lai Châu
34	Chu-ru	11,000	Chơ-ru, Kru, Mọi		Lâm Đồng, Ninh Thuận, Bình Thuận
35	Lào	10,000	Lào Bốc, Lào Nọi		Lai Châu, Sơn La

1	2	3	4	5	6
36	La Chí	8,000	Thổ Đen (Black Thổ), Cù Tê, Xá, La Ti, Mán Chí		Hà Giang
37	Phù Lá	6,500		Bồ Khó Pạ (Xá Phó), Mun Di Pạ, Phù Lá Đen (Black Phù Lá), Phù Lá Hoa (Variegated Phù Lá), Phù Lá Trắng (White Phù Lá), Phù Lá Hán, Chù Lá Phù Lá	Lào Cai, Lai Châu, Sơn La, Hà Giang
38	La Hủ	5,400	Khù Sung (or Cò Sung), Khạ Quy (Xá Quy), Xá Toong Lương (or Xá Lá Vàng), Xá Pươi	La Hủ Sủ (Yellow La Hủ), La Hủ Na (Black La Hủ), La Hủ Phung (White La Hủ)	Lai Châu
39	Kháng	4,000	Xá Khao, Xá Đón, Xá Tú Lăng	Kháng Xúa, Kháng Đón, Kháng Đắng, Kháng Hốc, Kháng Ái, Kháng Bung, Kháng Quảng Lâm	Lai Châu, Sơn La
40	Lự	3,700	Lự, Dườn, Nhườn		Lai Châu

1	2	3	4	5	6
41	Pà Thẻn	3,700	Pà Hung, Mán Pa Teng, Tống	Tống, Mèo Lài	Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang
42	Lô Lô	3,200	Mùn Di, Ô Man, Lu Lọc Măn, Di, Qua La, La La, Ma Di	Lô Lô Đen (Black Lô Lô), Lô Lô Hoa (Variegated Lô Lô)	Hà Giang, Cao Bằng, Lào Cai
43	Chứt	2,400	Xá Lá Vàng, Chà Cùi (Tắc Cùi), Tu Vàng, Pa Leng	Mây, Rục, Mả Liềng, Arem, Xơ-lang, Umo	Quảng Bình
44	Mảng	2,300	Mảng U, Xá Lá Vàng, Niềng O, Xá Măng, Xá Cang Lai	Mảng Hẹ, Mảng Gừng	Lai Châu
45	Cờ Lao	1,500		Cờ Lao Trắng (White Cờ Lao), Cờ Lao Xanh (Green Cờ Lao), Cờ Lao Đỏ (Red Cờ Lao)	Hà Giang
46	Bố Y	1,450	Chùng Chá, Trung Gia, Pầu Y, Pu Dí	Bố Y, Tu Dí	Hà Giang, Lào Cai

1	2	3	4	5	6
47	La Ha	1,400	Xá Khao, Xá Cha, Xá La Nga	Khá Phlao, La Ha Ủng	Yên Bái Sơn La
48	Cống	1,300		Xám Khốong, Xá Xeng, Xá, Xá Cóong	Lai Châu
49	Ngái	1,200	Sán Ngái	Xín, Lê, Đản, Khách Gia, Hắc Cá (Xéc)	Quảng Ninh, Hồ Chí Minh City, Hải Phòng
50	Si La	600	Cú Đê Xừ		Lai Châu
51	Pu Páo	400	Ka Béo, Pen Ti Lô Lô, La Quả, Mán		Hà Giang
52	Brâu	250	Bráo		Kon Tum
53	Rơ-măm	250			Kon Tum
54	Ơ-đu	100	Tây Hát		Nghệ An





## PROPER NAMES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

<b>A</b>					
Adham	204	Brao	112	Chàm	211
Ala-công	37	Brâu	112	Châu	43
Anăk Ê-đê	204	Brila (Xơ-đăng)	43	Châu Mạ	88
Aráp	198	Brila (Giế-Triêng)	81	Châu-ro	96
Arem	26	Bru	73	Chăm	211
Arul	204	Bru-Vân Kiều	73	Chăm Châu Đốc	211
Ao Tá	14	Bu-đâng	58	Chăm Hroi	211
Atuất	85	Bu Đêh	58	Chăm-pa	211
Ậu Tá	14			Chăm Pông	211
<b>B</b>		<b>C</b>		Chăm-rê	49
Ba-hi	85	Ca-dong	43	Chiêm	211
Ba-na	37	Ca-tang	77	Chiêm Thành	211
Biết	58	Cà-tang	81	Chil (Cơ-ho)	53
Bih	204	Ca-tu	77	Chil (Mnông)	58
Blô	204	Can-tua	85	Chor	198
Bơ-nâm	37	Cao	77	Chô Mạ	88
Bơ-noong	81	Cao Lan	136	Chơ-rai	198
Bồ Khô Pạ	244	Cao Lan-Sán Chỉ	136	Chơ-ro	96
Bố Y	155	Chà Củi	26	Chơ-ru	221
		Chà Và Ku	211	Chù Lá Phù Lá	244

Chút	26	Dao Lô Gang	183	Gié	81
Cò	92	Dao Quần Chẹt	183	Gié-Triêng	81
Cờ Sung	248	Dao Tam Đảo	183	Giơ-long	37
Con Kha	20	Dao Tiên	183	Giơ-rai	198
Con-lan	43	Dgiêh	81	Gơ-lar	37
Col	92	Dí	252		
Cor	92	Dìu Miên	183		
Cổng	256	Dliê	204	<b>H</b>	
Cơ-don	53	Doăn	81	Hạ	77
Cơ-ho	53	Dong Kay	204	Hà-lăng	43
Cơ-tu	77	Dong Măk	204	Hà Nhì	240
Cờ Lao	164	Dơ-ro	96	Hà Nhì Cò Chồ	240
Cờ Lao Đỏ	164	Duôn	151	Hà Nhì Đen	240
Cờ Lao Trắng	164			Hà Nhì Già	240
Cờ Lao Xanh	164			Hà Nhì La Mí	240
Cù Dề Xừ	260	<b>Đ</b>		Hải Nam	226
Cù Tê	159	Đan Lai-Ly Hà	20	Hán	226
Cùa	92	Đản	236	Hàng Tổng	126
Cùi Chu	142	Đê	204	Hắc Cá	236
Cul	30	Đíp	58	Hđăng	43
Cuối	20	Động	183	Hđrung	198
Cur	30			Hẹ	226
		<b>E</b>		Hmông	175
		Ê-đê	204	Hmông Đen	175
		Ê-đê Êgar	204	Hmông Đỏ	175
Dạ	101	Êpan	204	Hmông Hoa	175
Dao	183			Hmông Trắng	175
Dao Áo Dài	183	<b>G</b>		Hmông Xanh	175
Dao Cóc Mùn	183	Gar	58	Họ	20
Dao Cóc Ngáng	183	Gia-rai	198	Hoa	226
Dao Đại Bản	183	Giang Rẫy	81	Hời	221
Dao Đỏ	183	Giáy	142	Hờn Bạ	136
Cao Làn Tiễn	183	Giảng	142	Hờn Chùng	136

Hrê	49	Kmrâng	43	Lu Lọc Mần	252
Hwing	204	Kon Kde	37	Lừ	151
		Kpang Công	37	Lự	151
		Kpă	204		
<b>K</b>		Krem	37	<b>M</b>	
Ka Bẻo	171	Kru	221	Mạ	88
Kan-tua	77	Krung	204	Mã Liêng	26
Kdrao	204	Ktul	204	Man Di	252
Kẹo	20	Kuênh	58	Man Thanh	126
Khá Klẩu	68			Mán (Sán Chay)	136
Khạ Quy	248			Mán (Dao)	183
Khách	226	<b>L</b>		Mán (Pu Péo)	171
Khách Gia	236	La Chí	159	Mán Chí	159
Kháng	105	La Ha	167	Mán Pa Teng	192
Kháng Ái	105	La Ha Ủng	167	Mán Quần Cộc	231
Kháng Bung	105	La Hủ	248	Mán Trắng	175
Kháng Dảng	105	La Hủ Na	248	Mán Váy Xẻ	231
Kháng Đón	105	La Hủ Phung	248	Mảng	109
Kháng Hốc	105	La Hủ Sủ	248	Mảng Gúng	109
Kháng		La La	252	Mảng Hệ	109
Quảng Lâm	105	La-oang	217	Mảng Ứ	109
Kháng Xúa	105	La Quả	171	Mày	26
Khlá Phlao	167	La ti	159	Măng Coong	73
Khmer	30	La-ve	81	Mdhur	198
Khmer		Lách	53	Mdhur	204
Krôm	30	Lào	147	Mèo	175
Khơ-mú	68	Lào Bốc	147	Mèo Lài	192
Khù Sung	248	Lào Nọi	147	Mẹo	175
Khùa		Lát	53	Miên	30
(Bru-Vân Kiều)	73	Lê	236	Miêu Tộc	175
Khùa (Co)	92	Lô Lô	252	Mnông	58
Kiểm Miên	183	Lô Lô Đen	252	Mọi (Chơ-ro)	96
Kìm Mùn	183	Lô Lô Hoa	252		

Mọi (Chu-ru)	221	Nếp	53	Phù Lá Hán	244
Mọi (Co)	92	Nùng	131	Phù Lá Hoa	244
Mọi (Cơ-tu)	77	Nùng An	131	Phù Lá Trắng	244
Mọi (Ê-đê)	204	Nùng Cháo	131	Phúc Kiến	226
Mọi (Gia-rai)	198	Nùng Dín	131	Phuong	77
Mọi (Gié-Triêng)	81	Nùng Giang	131	Prâng	58
Mọi (Mạ)	88	Nùng Inh	131	Preh	58
Mọi (Mường)	14	Nùng Khèn Lài	131	Pu Nà	142
Mọi (Ra-glai)	217	Nùng Lòi	131	Pu Nấm	142
Mọi (Xtiêng)	63	Nùng Phần Sinh	131	Pu Péo	171
Mọi Bì	14	Nùng Quý Rịn	131	Pu Thay	126
Mọi Đá Vách	49	Nùng Tùng Slin	131	Pu Thênh	68
Mọi Lũy	49	Nùng Xuồng	131	Pủ Dí	155
Mọi Sơn Phòng	49			Pụa	101
Mol	14	<b>O</b>		Puộc	101
Mọn	20	Orăng Glai	217		
Mơ-nâm	43	Ô Man	252	<b>Q</b>	
Mthur	198	Ớ-đu	118	Qua La	252
Mual	14			Quảng Đông	226
Mùn Di	252	<b>P</b>		Quảng Lâm	68
Mường	14	Pa-cô	85	Quảng Tây	226
		Pa-dí	121	Quý Châu	142
		Pa Leng	26		
<b>N</b>		Pa-noong	81	<b>R</b>	
Ná Miếu	175	Pà Hưng	192	Ra-crây	217
Ngái	236	Pà Thên	192	Ra-dlai	217
Ngạn	121	Pầu Thín	142	Ra-đê	204
Nghet	101	Pầu Y	155	Ra-glai	217
Nhắng	142	Pen Ti Lô Lô	171	Rai	217
Nhuồn	151	Phén	121	Rha-đê	204
Niêng O	109	Phù Lá	244	Rlâm	58
Noong	217	Phù Lá Đen	244	Roh	37
Nông	58				

Rô-glai	217	Táy Đăm	126	Triêng	81
Rơ-mâm	115	Táy Đeng	126	Triều Châu	226
Rơ-ngao	37	Táy Khao	126	Trung Gia	155
Rục	26	Táy Mộc	126	Tu Dí	155
		Táy Mười	126	Tu Nếp	53
<b>S</b>		Táy Mường	126	Tu Vàng	26
Sa Nhân	142	Táy Thanh	126		
Sách	26	Tắc Cùi	26	<b>U</b>	
Sán Chay	136	Tbuần	198	U Ní	240
Sán Chỉ	136	Tênh	68	Umo	26
Sán Dẻo	231	Thạch Bích	49		
Sán Diu	231	Thái	126	<b>V</b>	
Sán Ngái	236	Thoòng Nhàn	226	Ván Kiều	73
Si La	260	Thổ	20	Ve	81
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		Thổ Đà Bắc	126	Khmer origin	30
<b>T</b>		Thổ Đen	159		
Ta-hoi	85	Thu Lao	121	<b>X</b>	
Ta-ôi	85	Tôi-ôi	85	Xa-diêng	63
Ta-ôi-h	85	Tống	192	Xá (Cống)	256
Ta Trê	43	Tơ-lô	37	Xá (La Chí)	159
Tà-mun	63	Tơ-đrá	43	Xá (Xinh-mun)	101
Tà Trĩ	43	Tơ-riêng	81	Xá Cang Lài	109
Tà-uất	85	Tơ-ring	53	Xá Cầu	68
Tareh	81	Tơ-trá	43	Xá Cha	167
Tàu	226	Trại (Dao)	183	Xá Cống	256
Tày	121	Trại (Sán Diu)	231	Xá Đón	105
Tày Hạt	118	Trại Đất	231	Xá Khao (Kháng)	105
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Táy	120	Treng	81	Xá La Nga	167
Táy Chiềng	126	Tri	73	Xá Lá Vàng (Chút)	26

Xá Lá Vàng		Xá Tú Lăng	105	Xơ-dăng	43
(Mảng)	109	Xá U Ní	240	Xơ-lang	26
Xá Lá Vàng (Thổ)	20	Xá Xeng	256	Xơ-teng	43
Xá Mãng	109	Xạ Phang	226	Xrê	53
Xá Phó	244	Xám Khốống	256	Xtiêng	63
Xá Pươi	248	Xéc	236		
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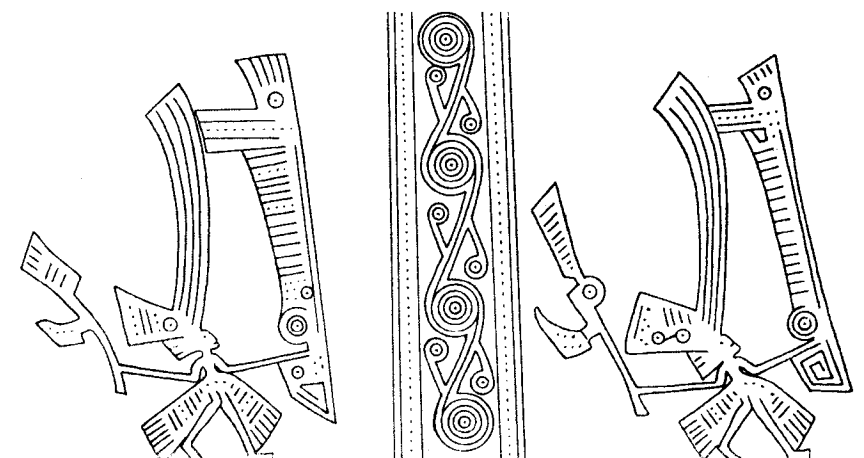
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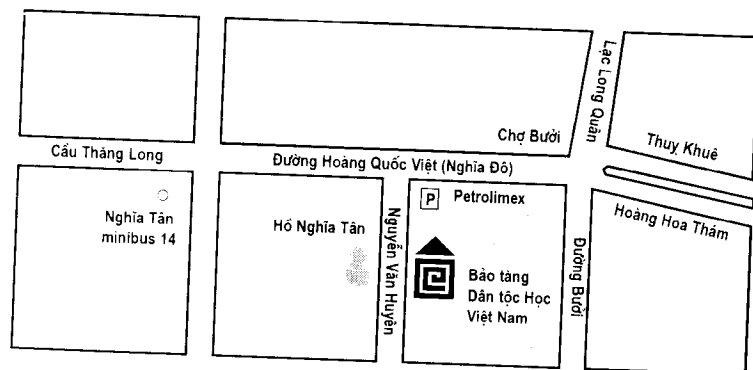
# VIETNAM MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY

Nguyen Van Huyen Road  
Cau Giay District, Hanoi, Vietnam  
Tel: (84-4) 7562193

Over the centuries, the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam have created, modified and maintained their own rich and varied cultural heritage. The Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, inaugurated in 1997, serves to enhance the visitor's understanding of Vietnam's diverse cultures through its unique presentation of objects and dress from everyday life. To date, the Museum has collected nearly 15,000 artifacts from all over Vietnam.

The exhibition area, designed with the help of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, covers 2,500 sq.meters of the Museum's spacious new building.

Maps as well as labels and texts in Vietnamese, French and English provide pertinent information. Dioramas such as those of a village market, the marking of conical hats, or a Tay shamanic ceremony present cultural scenes which are distinctive to different parts of Vietnam. Videos show the real-life context of each ethnic minority.



## PROMOTING GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF ETHNIC CULTURES

As a center for research and conservation, the Museum plays an important role in increasing the understanding of Vietnam's ethnic groups. Its staff includes ethnographers whose research on ethnic peoples of Vietnam is collected in the Museum's documentation center. The staff collaborate with scholars from Japan, France, the Netherlands, U.S.A, Canada and other countries.

**The Museum shop:** the shop serves to help producers from ethnic communities earn income by utilizing traditional skills. Associated with Craft Link ( a fair trade organization in Hanoi), the shop offers a wide variety of crafts as well as postcards, posters, books and catalogues published in Vietnamese, French, and English.  
Tel: (84-4) 7561754

**Restaurant:** located on the Museum grounds, the restaurant offers both Asian and European cuisine.

**Guided tours:** Vietnamese, French, and English speaking guides are available. Group tours may be arranged by appointment.

**Other facilities:** documentation center (including music, video, photo archive and library), an auditorium and conference hall. Easy access for wheelchairs.

**Transportation:** the # 14 minibus runs from Dinh Tien Hoang Street, north of Hoan Kiem Lake, to the Nghia Tan stop a few blocks from the Museum VND 2,500.

**Hours:** 8:30 - 12:30, 13:30 - 16:30  
Closed Mondays and the Tet holidays.

**Admission:** VND 10,000

The Museum is located in Cau Giay district, twenty minutes by taxi from the city center. An open-air museum featuring ethnic houses from all over Vietnam is planned for the Museum's spacious and peaceful grounds.

Nhà xuất bản Thế Giới  
46 Trần Hưng Đạo, Hà Nội, Việt Nam  
Tel: (84-4) 8253841  
Fax: (84-4) 8269578

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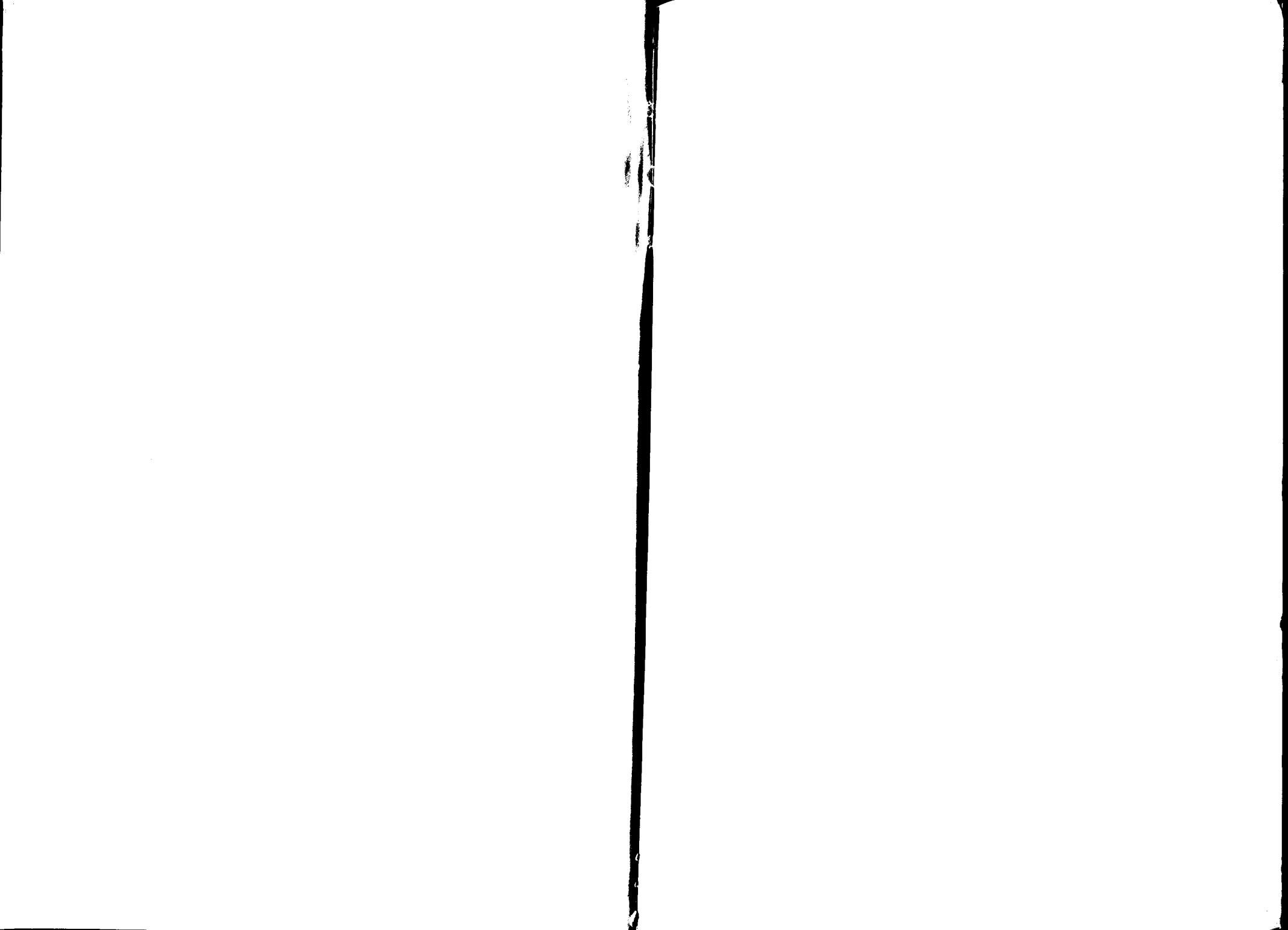
## *Các dân tộc ít người ở Việt Nam*

Chịu trách nhiệm xuất bản  
MAI LÝ QUANG

<b>Biên tập:</b>	Trần Đoàn Lâm
<b>Trình bày:</b>	Lê Văn Thao
<b>Vẽ bìa:</b>	Lê Văn Thao
<b>Sửa bản in:</b>	Trần Song Hà Phạm Bích Ngọc

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In 2.000 bản, khổ 15x20 , tại Xưởng in Mỹ thuật Trung Ương. Giấy chấp nhận đăng ký  
kế hoạch xuất bản số 111-1162/CXB - QLXB cấp ngày 19/12/1997. In xong và nộp lưu  
chiếu 1/2000.





**J**naugurated in 1997 as a center for research & conservation, the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology plays an important role in increasing the understanding of Vietnam's 54 ethnic groups about their own rich & varied cultural heritage. With a collection of nearly 25,000 artifacts from all over the country, the Museum serves to enhance the visitor's understanding of Vietnam's diverse cultures through a unique presentation of objects & clothing from everyday - life ... The Museum has a documentation center, an auditorium & conference hall (especially easy access for wheelchairs) and a souvenir shop with a wide variety of crafts. Vietnamese, French & English speaking guides are available.



Hours: 8:00 - 12:30 ; 13:30 - 16:30

Closed: Mondays and Tet holidays

Address: Nguyen Van Huyen Street - Cau Giay District - Hanoi

Tel: 7.562 193 - 8.360 352 / Fax: (84-4) 8.360 351

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