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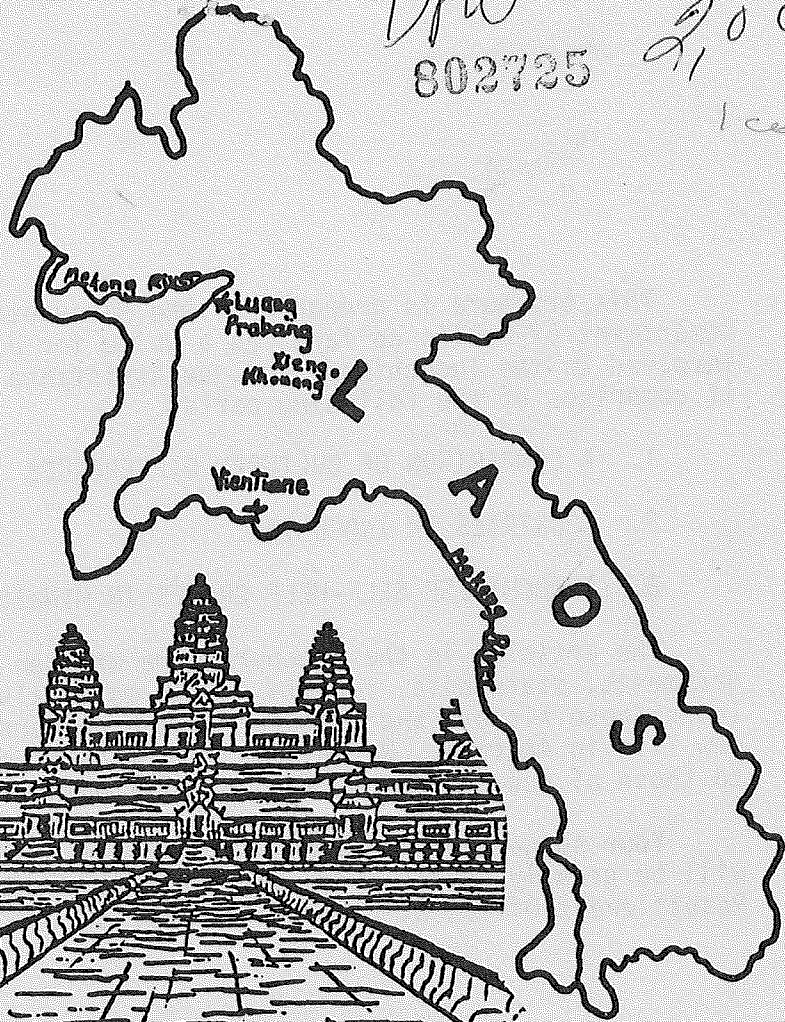
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VIETNAM



CAMBODIA

A guide to 3 cultures Indochinese ...

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Published By:
Minnesota Refugee Resettlement Office
Department of Public Welfare,
2nd Fl Space Center Building
444 LaFayette Rd
St. Paul, MN 55101

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\$34 p.

Minorities

This brochure is prepared by the Minnesota Refugee Resettlement Office, Department of Public Welfare, as a guide for U.S. personnel and sponsors who are involved in the Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program in the State of Minnesota. It comprises of the following parts:

1. A COMPARISON OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
2. COUNTRIES IN INDOCHINA
3. INDOCHINESE SELF-HELP GROUPS IN MINNESOTA

The articles in the brochure were written and/or compiled from different documents, statements, reports, study materials and facts which show the Indochinese history and culture and the cultural problems they have in their new life in America. We believe that this brochure is helpful and informative to those of you who are working or will work with refugees in the future.

Your suggestions or ideas to make this cultural guidebook more informative will be greatly appreciated. For more information, call the Minnesota Refugee Resettlement Office at 612-296-8145 during working hours Monday thru Friday.

NOTE: This booklet is free. If you need it or have a friend or co-worker who needs it, please fill out the following slip and send it to the:

Minnesota Refugee Resettlement Office
Department of Public Welfare
Space Center Building - 2nd Floor
444 LaFayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155

Please send me a copy of CULTURAL GUIDEBOOK

My address is.....City.....State.....Zip.....

Date.....

Signature.....

America is the home of immigrants who came from different countries of the world. Your ancestors, your parents or you may be an immigrant. You are a sponsor, an employer, a friend...of an immigrant refugee from Indochina. What do you need to know to cope on day-to-day basis with this person who may be different than you in attitudes, opinions and behavior? What does he need to know to get him through the difficulties of an American day?

The following discussion of a number of cultural differences will hopefully help you solve any problems that arise while working with the Indochinese refugees.

The Indochinese prize politeness before progress; therefore, this is the only way to proceed, despite temporary frustrations: you are a Westerner, he does not expect you to conform to his customs. He will be much more tolerant of your lapses in etiquette than he would be with a fellow Indochinese steeped in customs and traditions of Indochinese. The proper understanding of Indochinese customs and traditions can save endless hours spent talking to people too polite to disagree openly and who seem to respond to any suggestion one makes. Indochinese shyness, and reluctance to be a "bother", mainly among the women, will make him refuse help even though he really wants and needs it. He may be afraid to ask questions, even about important matters such as education for his children, or for him. A letter to his sponsor, case worker, or employer - written by him, or if his English is not good enough, by someone else - may be the easiest way to express himself.

YES AND NO. If you ask an Indochinese "Do you want to go?". He will answer "Yes". Yes here means both negative and affirmative. In Indochina, the word "Yes" is a symbol of politeness. Every reply usually starts with "Yes" although sometimes it is a negative answer. "Yes, I don't want to go" or "Yes, I want to go". Make sure you can see the difference in each case.

VISITING. The Indochinese live in a society where every one feels very close to one another. They can visit their friends or neighbors at any time even without notice. Here, you always visit people with a notice or a telephone call. Many Indochinese make this mistake during their first year in America. Some of them stop by their sponsors' houses even at dinner time without calling them first.

NAMES. Indochinese are usually called by rank of birth: the eldest child is the "First" (Anh Cả), and so on. Their given names are written in a different order, and this may cause confusion in the America computerized world. In Vietnam, the name is written in this order: Nguyen Viet Nam -- He is called Mr. Nam. His friends call him Nam. But, they never call him Mr. Nguyen or Nguyen.

The wife's name may be different because she usually does not take her husband's name. For example, Mr. Nguyen Viet Nam's wife is Nguyen thi Hong -- she is called Hong. On her wedding certificate, she is still Nguyen thi Hong. The children usually but not always, take their father's name. The middle name Van indicates that the bearer is a male, and Thi indicates a female. Vietnamese from the central part of Vietnam usually have two-word name, such as Le Loi.

Pronunciation is occasionally difficult, but approximations are usually acceptable. The sound most Americans have trouble with is "ng", something alien to our tongue, but not that hard once you get used to it. One way to practice the sound is by pronouncing the English word sing and holding on to the final sound.

Then, start adding a second syllable to it (e.g., sing-ngo). Finally, say the ng- with the desired second syllable, without using sing. There, that wasn't so bad, was it?

Here are some Vietnamese common family names and appropriate pronounciations:

Nguyen	(Wyan)	Truong	(Trueung)
Le	(Lay)	Do	(Doe)
Tran	(Tren)	Cao	(Cow)
Ngo	(Noe)	Pho	(Faw)
Doan	(Dwon)	Luu	(Lou)
Pham	(Fam)	Vu	(Voo)
Phan	(Fan)	Duong	(Zooung)
Ho	(Ho)	Ha	(Ha)
Dinh	(Ding)	Mac	(Mak)
Ly	(Lee)		

Most of the Vietnamese refugees in the United States have their original names on their identification card, such as the I-94 Certificate (issued by Immigration & Naturalization Service). On their Social Security Card, their names are usually written in the American name system. Cambodians and Laotians use this same order, but they usually do not have a middle name. The Laotians have long names. Example: Bophasavanh Nhotsavang.

MINNESOTA CLIMATE. With Minnesota's weather of 10 to 20 degrees below zero in the Winter, most Indochinese are in trouble. Yes, it is very difficult for a refugee who settles in this state, mainly the older people who used to live almost all their life in warm weather (80 degrees or above) in their homeland. Your Indochinese family may choose to live in Minnesota because of a job opportunity, but he fears and dreads the first winter. Try to help them to acquire proper clothing and teach them to dress for the weather.

BANKS & CREDIT. Indochinese are afraid of debt, whereas Americans see it as a way to afford comforts in their every day life. Most Indochinese usually buy cars and other items in cash. They pay for the entire amount at one time. This has surprised a number of American merchants. Credit cards and charge accounts can be an American tragedy. Caution your Indochinese so that it does not become his, especially when it is close to their New Year time. Unlike American people, the Indochinese rarely traveled for vacation, nor did they often go to the restaurant during the weekend, nor did they purchase expensive seasonal recreation equipment. Most of the working Indochinese families saved money in their accounts. It is likely they work more than they relax in the United States.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS. The largest religion in Indochina is Buddhism. Almost 80% of the population of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos are Buddhists. The main place of worship in this religion is a pagoda. Catholicism is the second largest and a very influential religion in Vietnam. The lack of Buddhist pagodas in the United States is a problem for refugees. A number of them have followed their American sponsors to churches on Sunday. This has made them comfortable by the fact that they have a religion to worship despite the discrepancies between Buddhism and Catholicism.

HEALTH. Ordinarily, when a member of an Indochinese family is ill, his/her dependents rarely send for a doctor, except in a serious illness or emergency.

Illnesses like flu, headache, pink eye, fever, depression and the like are usually treated at home. For instance, when a child has a cold or flu, the parents implement the traditional method using a piece of round metal or a coin to scratch the back of the child. They believe this will relieve the cold and help the child regain his/her normal health. In fact, this was somewhat helpful in most cases of the cold or flu. It was not effective against fever, tuberculosis, malaria and depression. A way of treating headaches is to use fingers and pinch the forehead many times, thus leaving black and blue marks on it. This method is believed to kill the headache immediately by picking the pain out of the head through the pinching. A way to cure pink eye is to use salt and mix it in a cup of hot water and wash the eye several times a day. Malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid fever usually begin with a high temperature, headache, insomnia and loss of appetite. The aforementioned methods of self-treatment against common diseases were popular in Vietnam because it saved both time and money also it was likely due to the condition of a war-torn country where financial crisis existed.

"When in Rome, do as the Romans do", is an old proverb. During the first year that the Indochinese refugees were in the United States, things were very complicated for them, mostly due to cultural misunderstandings and unfamiliar and different life styles in this country. Many times schools found Indochinese children to have bruises on their foreheads and backs, due to the result of the aforementioned method of self-treatment against cold and flu. This astonished their friends and teachers. In many cases, the child was suspected to have been abused or beaten. These misunderstandings are really cultural problems encountered by the Indochinese.

LANGUAGES. Vietnamese use the Roman alphabet in spelling, but Cambodians and Laotians write in characters like the Chinese. The tribal Hmongs did not have a written language until recently (See pages 16, 27, 28). French is commonly spoken by learned Indochinese professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers and other professionals. The main problem of most Indochinese is that he/she cannot yet fully express himself in English. Most of the young do speak and write English, but the older people usually encounter this language barrier. Many efforts have been made to provide training in English either on a part-time or full-time basis. This will ease their transition into a new culture and pave the way for employment. While the refugees use their ability to learn English, a number of American sponsors and resettlement workers register for Vietnamese classes. They hope this study of the Indochinese languages and cultures will facilitate them in their role with the refugees.

FAMILY LIFE. In normal circumstances, the Indochinese see their family as the most important thing, their first loyalty before their allegiance to religion. The family is a unit which ties their religious, social, economic and political activities together. The American people have health insurance, unemployment benefits, social security, welfare, orphanages, nursing homes and psychiatrists. The Indochinese have their family. In Vietnam, it is an "extended family" three generations in depth: The senior couple, married sons with wives and children and the unmarried children. In the Cambodian family, both sons and daughters leave the household when they marry, so the average household is five members. There can be a "lesser" (immediate) family and a "greater" family including cousins, great aunts and so on. The family consists not

only of the living, but of the spirits of the dead as well as those who have not yet been born. Here in America, when the children are around twenty years of age, they move out and live separately. When the parents are around sixty the children talk about taking their parents to a nursing home because nobody can take care of them. It is the Indochinese custom that children live together with their parents as long as they can. When parents are old, the children will take care of them in turn. There were almost no nursing homes in Indochinese countries. The government took care of those old people who have no children and who cannot take care of themselves.

LOVE. Indochinese children often marry young, mainly those in the countrysides. At 16 to 17 years of age, an Indochinese boy may marry a girl in his village. Children of wealthy families usually marry later because they go to school. Farmers' children have less chance to go to college. Divorce was very rare but polygamy was usually tolerated in some cases as long as the husband could afford it. Indochinese do not kiss in public or as a form of greeting, as Americans do.

DRESS. There were various ways of dressing in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos; all these countries followed their own traditional fashion of dressing. European style dressing came to Indochina in early 18th century and was very attractive to the learned people and the high social class. During national holidays, the Indochinese, from private citizens to government officials, prefer to wear their traditional clothes. The Vietnamese traditional dress is called "Ao dai".

PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE. Every person who was born in Indochina believes that every man has a destiny. One comes to this life with certain credits and debits from the last. These dictate one's position and level in this life; each person is responsible for his own actions in this life which will establish his status in the next (The Indochinese believe in reincarnation). Since "bad luck" is a necessary payment for past bad actions, Indochinese do not seem to feel much personal responsibility for others. This suggests the reason for the traditional lack of interest in social service. Fortunately, American sponsors and social workers in this country do not feel this way.

JOBS. Manual labor is considered beneath the dignity of refined people. You might explain that is not true in America, and some Americans even enjoy it, because they have less responsibility and they can sleep soundly at night. Employee-employer relations is a vast potential for hurt feelings. In Vietnam, the employer is more the "patron" in the French sense - the protector and the guardian, if the employee is ill, he continues to provide assistance; if he terminates the employment he provides at least one month's salary. So, in a sense, the employee does have insurance. American employers are different. They try to be helpful and straight but they also want their employees to have insurance on their own.

PERSONAL DIGNITY. In the traditionally patriarchal society of Indochina great respect is given to men, especially to older men. A traditional Indochinese woman must obey first, her father (before marriage); second, her husband; third, her oldest son, if she is a widow. Indochinese women are noted for their gentleness and for deferring to men. They respect older persons and serve their husbands to the maximum. But they should not be underestimated.

They frequently control these men, the home, and the economic power of their community. Politics, which is usually classified as men's domain, is often strongly influenced by women though they often work thru men. But the men are always the head of the household. He usually decides in important matters. An observer said: "If a woman is traditional, she is very much so even while retaining traditional ways, she may be very independent, especially the Vietnam woman. Vietnam has a history of almost constant war, the women have become accustomed to being alone, perhaps taking over the family business and the household while the men are in the military.

SOME CULTURAL POINTS RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING.

In Indochina, the concept of vocational training was different. There were almost no schools to teach technical classes to young people who want a technical career. For instance, no carpenter, plumber, barber or mechanic was required to have a basic diploma from a certain vocational training institute to be able to find a job. Most of the Indochinese technical personnel learned their career by doing. An employer with a need usually found someone who had been in the job for a long time, or a person with experience. Vocational schools existed in these countries only in the last two decades.

There were some private vocational training schools in Indochina, chiefly in Vietnam but they simply taught mechanic, drafting and design, the most needed techniques. Most of the higher level technical personnel such as engineer and government cadre, had to attend higher technical institutes (equivalent to a university). In most countries in Indochina, the government fixed a limit of 55 years of age for retirement. All personnel must retire at 55 years of age. But, an extension of service may be given in case a need can be proven by the supervisor.

Vocational institutes (higher level) usually does not receive students who are older than 45 years of age. Male students outnumbered female students. These institutes are government-ruled agencies which exclusively trained people for government's needs. Since there was no computerized job code in the Indochinese labor system, all technical personnel often received wages thru different pay rates, usually according to their skills and length of service. Usually, a term of apprenticeship was set to determine whether or not the new employee is able to handle the job. An employer who hired a mechanic, or a carpenter, never asked to see his/her diploma, but he asked how long the person has been in this job, and how did he/she learn it. As it was mentioned above, only higher technical personnel must have a diploma from the university or superior technical vocational training schools to be able to apply for a job.

Retraining was very rare in Indochina, so was in-service training. The Indochinese technicians, once they had been on their job for a long time, acquired experience and they were considered well trained thru practice. Apparently, techniques in Indochinese countries were more practical than fundamental.

In upgrading employment for Indochinese, two major problems have been identified:

- a. Most of Indochinese do not have technical skills because they (the males) were either military personnel or they did not have a chance to learn techniques in a vocational school in their home country.

The majority of Indochinese heads of household who want a vocational career fall in the above category. They are males and range from 21 to 38 years of age.

- b. The second problem is the language barrier. Most of the new speak and write English in a very limited degree. They need more English skills to be able to participate in technical classes, particularly in the technical terminology. Job-related or pre-vocational English is a need for them.

THE TRADITIONAL CELEBRATION OF TET (Vietnamese New Year)

TET, the Feast of the First Morning, is traditionally the most important and picturesque Vietnamese holiday. The celebration begins on the first day of the first month of the lunar year and continues for three days. The Vietnamese people welcome their New Year and the birth of Spring and the promise of the future by honoring the gifts of heaven and earth.

For the Vietnamese who live abroad, TET remains a feast of the sounds, perfumes, and color in their memory. In Vietnam, the warmest and liveliest colors are displayed in shop windows, homes, and in the new clothes made for the occasion: blood red banners, creamy-white chrysanthemums, saffron yellow tangerines, bright green juicy grapefruits, vivid orange slices of watermelon, garnet red roasted pigs, and the gay multicolored robes of the women. Accompanying the profusion of colors, are the sounds of sweet music and the noise of firecrackers, as well as aromas varying from the perfume of flowers to the pungent odor of incense. All combine to reveal the splendor of nature and the intense joy of living.

TET is a time for giving. It is also a time for paying off all debts, correcting all faults, forgetting past mistakes, forgiving others and no longer having enemies. All Vietnamese want to pay off their debts before the end of the Lunar Year as it is bad luck to owe money during TET. Employers give their employees bonuses. Friends give gifts to each other. Parents give money and gifts to their children. All the busy activities involved in preparing for TET stop at noon on the day preceding the beginning of the holiday and everyone heads for home. Religiously, TET is an event for praying and recalling deceased loved ones. On TET's eve, in a special ceremony, a sacrifice is offered to the deceased relatives, and their souls are invited to come back for a few days and share the festivities with the living members of the family. Vietnamese Buddhists go to pagodas and Christians go to churches for worship on TET days.

In most of the Vietnamese families, at midnight on NEW YEAR's eve, a ceremony is held in which a sacrifice for the spirits and the ancestors are made. At exactly midnight, the firecrackers welcome in the New Year. People listen for the first cry of an animal.

The next morning the family dresses in their new clothes. Dishes of special food such as watermelon, mandarins, bananas, Banh Chung and Banh tet*, are placed on the altar. Everyone offers each other New Year wishes, and the children are given lucky red packets of money to buy toys, candies, firecrackers, and to play the six-beast game for luck. Great importance is attached to the first visitor.

He/she is believed to influence the happiness, well-being, and prosperity of the family during the whole year. As the Vietnamese do not leave anything to chance, they often invite their first guest for the occasion. Gambling is also a popular game among the Vietnamese to challenge luck for their New Year. The Dragon Show takes place in every town and city of Vietnam.

On the third day of TET, the Vietnamese believe that their ancestors return to their heavenly abode. The stores and markets begin to re-open and life returns to its normalcy. In the old time, TET lasted as long as ten days.

*BANH CHUNG, BANH TET, are made of glutinous rice (resembling white dough, soft and sticky). Banh Chung is square and Banh Tet is round and long in shape. They are wrapped in banana leaves and tied with lacings of flexible bamboo slivers. The interior contains a lovely filling of bean paste with small jewels of pork lean and bacon. This amply seasoned filling is pressed between layers of glutinous rice. Both Banh Chung and Banh Tet are traditional cakes for TET.

THE LAOTIAN NEW YEAR (PI MAI)

In an effort to maintain their customs, culture and traditions, all the Lao Community Groups in Minnesota, such as the Hmong Association, Inc., and the Lao Association of Mutual Assistance have joined together sharing funds to celebrate the Lao New Year (PI MAI). In the month of April, both Laotians and Cambodians celebrate the beginning of a new year. The first day of the year will fall on April 13th of the western calendar, but instead of being 1978, it will be 2522 according to the Buddhist Calendar.

According to a Mahayana Buddhist legend, on a certain New Year's day, ages ago, Buddha called all the animals of the world to him. He promised that those who came to pay him homage would receive a gift for their loyalty. A year would be named for them. Twelve animals came, and they came in this order: mouse, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, cock, dog, and wild boar. These 12 make up the Oriental Zodiac.

In our homeland (Laos) the new year is called Pi Mai. It is usually celebrated for three or four days. In some regions of the country celebrations go on for a longer period of time. The following practices are generally observed throughout the country.

On the last day of the old year, each house is beautifully decorated, so as to banish evil spirits and disasters. Lao boys and girls gather together to pick flower to decorate the houses, they walk, sing songs, and exchange love poems. The girls return home in the evening to prepare the perfumed water essential to the New Year celebration.

Perfumed water is used as a symbol of love and good will and is sprinkled liberally on all visitors during the New Year. On New Year's Day, most of the people go to the pagoda. Food and small offerings are taken to the monks, who are asked to chant prayers for the souls of ancestors. Then everyone, young and old, all make small stupas (buddhist shrines) out of sand that they have carried to the pagoda grounds. Every grain of the sand is believed to wash away a sin and cause a wish to be fulfilled.

The stupas are topped with paper flags, and their builders pray to the new deity to grant them the favor of a long life, of days filled with happiness, and of wealth as numerous as the grains of sand.

In Vietnam, the holidays and festivals are based on the Lunar Calendar in which the months are regulated by the moon. Therefore, the dates of the Vietnamese holidays may come on a different date each year.

The Lunar Calendar has 12 months of 29 or 30 days and there are 355 days in a year. Approximately every 4 years, an extra month is added, (this corresponds to the leap year of the Gregorian Calendar) so that all calendar years will begin during the specified period. The 15th of the month always coincides with a full moon. In their everyday life, the Vietnamese use the Gregorian Calendar.

In the Lunar Calendar, years are named after a 12-animal zodiac. The horse is the 7th in the zodiac which begins with the Mouse and is followed by the Water Buffalo, Tiger, Cat, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. For instance, 1977 was the Year of the Snake and 1978, the Year of the Horse. This follows down the line each year. The year of the Snake will not return for a period of 12 years. Personal decisions, such as the most auspicious hour and day for a wedding, funeral, opening of a business, etc., are largely tied in with this Lunar Calendar.

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION IN INDOCHINA

In South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, Christmas was usually celebrated by the Westerners who lived there. But, during the last two decades the Indochinese people also celebrated Christmas as much as their western friends did. The Indochinese consider Christmas as a great holiday, second to their traditional lunar-year TET holidays.

During the recent war, the Vietnamese kept celebrating Christmas joyfully. During the last few years, Christmas was a peaceful day; the two parties involved in the war implemented and observed a 24-hour truce throughout Vietnam on Christmas Day. In towns and cities people went shopping for food, gifts and clothes in crowded stores downtown to prepare for their Noel celebrations. Toys, gifts, and other luxuries were displayed on sale along the pavements in downtown Saigon.

On Christmas Eve, people rushed to church to attend Midnight Mass. Both Christians and Buddhists go to church on Christmas night. The Catholic people observed Christmas as one of the major religious holidays during the year. In every Catholic home and church, there is a Christmas tree and a creche. The Vietnamese people often send their greeting cards and gifts to their friends and relatives on Christmas.

Traditionally, after Mass they go home to eat their midnight supper called "Réveillons", a French word meaning "Rise up", spoken to the shepherd by the angels. Most of the Vietnamese people, rich or poor, would celebrate Christmas; but the rich people often opened parties and banquets to extend hospitality to their friends who came to eat, drink and dance.

A typical Christmas dinner menu includes roasted turkey and chicken, salad with French dressing, red wine, Christmas cake, French croissant, grapes and apples. In the countryside, the farmers rarely celebrated Christmas. In the field, since gunfire stopped temporarily, the troops could celebrate Christmas right there. A Midnight Mass was usually organized in the open air in each outpost. The troops' favorite foods for Christmas were farm ducks, chickens, canned meat and the traditional white wine called "Ba-xi-de".

In Vietnam, Christmas is a great holiday for children, also. The children are given toys and other gifts by their parents and friends on Christmas Day. The name of Santa Claus is familiar among the Vietnamese children. Schools, public services and other activities are closed during the day.

THE CAMBODIAN NEW YEAR (CHOL CHHNAM)

The Cambodian New Year usually comes in April. According to the old Khmer customs, Chol Chhnam is the most important and formal holiday of the year. Everyone, from young to old, celebrates this New Year very solemnly.

In Cambodia, during the New Year season, all Cambodians have a three day holiday. Some days before this holiday comes, all Cambodians clean their houses, furniture and their altars. Most of the houses in the city area were decorated with electric lamps or candle lights, and natural and artificial flowers. They also clean the yard around their houses. Food is made in great quantity for friends and relatives who come to visit the family during the holiday. On the Chol Chhnam days, they all wear new clothes with different colors. A great number of them go to pagodas in their community.

Nevertheless, only older people go to pagodas to pray for their happiness and well-being or to listen to prayer. Young people go to pagodas to enjoy the popular games and other traditional dances and singing. Throughout the country during the New Year season, in every village or pagoda or tribe, in every hamlet, one can hear songs, music and happy cries. After the 3-day holiday is over, many people continue to enjoy celebrating, but only at night, as many work during the day. The night popular games can last from one month to longer.

VIETNAM

I- Historical highlights

1) Origin.

The Vietnamese originated from a Branch of the "Bach Viet" race whose domain was the "Thien San" Mountain chain in the Northern part of the Himalaya. They migrated into South East Asia and formed a country, while many others still lived as nomadic shepherds.

2) The Settlement.

According to Mythology, the Hong Bang dynasty with 18 successors (Hung Vuong) named the country Van Lang - the boundaries of which covered the area of Southern China and the Hong Ha River Delta (2,879 B.C.). Up to the present day, Vietnam has been settled for 4,854 years.

Historically more than 1,000 years dominated by the Chinese and one century colonized by the French, the Vietnamese have struggled and, despite tremendous difficulties, found it possible to maintain their own origin and cultural heritage.

3) Population.

According to the most recent demographic data, Vietnam has some 60 million people. Of those 7% are ethnic Chinese and 1% of other minorities.

4) Terrain.

In the North, there are 61,294 square miles and 65,987 square miles in the South. The whole Vietnam is shaped in the form of an S letter.

5) Religion.

The country is influenced by Buddhism. About 80% of the Vietnamese are Buddhists and venerate their ancestors. Other religions such as Roman Catholic, Protestants, Confuciusims, Mosle, Caodaism, Hoahaoism, B'ahai, etc...., are highly respected.

6) Social Institutions.

The village: a highly organized institution. There was a popular proverb "The Kings' order stops at the village's gate". The village forms the social and political background of the people. Within the framework of the village, the inhabitants are also bounded together in an intricate network of private society. In this fundamental unit, the learned men and the notable villagers have always been highly esteemed. Administratively, the village is in the jurisdiction of the district and the province. Politically, it is more independent. The villagers elect their village chief and his staff to lead the village. Under late President Diem's regime, the village and the hamlet were viewed as the most important infrastructure of the Republic of Vietnam in terms of local administration.

7) Economic.

Vietnam is rich in natural resources but lacks modern technology to develop those resources: mines, petroleum, rubber plantation, etc...80% of the national production is agriculture and light handicraft.

II- Cultural highlights.

1) Languages.

Except for the few dialects of different ethnic groups and regional differences in intonation and pronunciation, the Vietnamese language is uniform. Even though it is only classified as 24th among popular languages in the world, and the 15th one among those countries that have their own languages, the Vietnamese language is very rich and descriptive. Before the 11th century, Vietnamese written language bore the stamps of Central Asian language which was employed as the "Scholar Script".

According to Philologists - Chinese, Tibetan, Korean, Mongolian, Manchourian, Japanese and Vietnamese, share the same original written language, classified as the Austro-Asiatic group.

Since the 11th century, the Vietnamese written language has been different from her neighboring countries. It is called "Chữ Nôm". At the end of the 16th century, Catholic Missionaries succeeded in converting the old Vietnamese written system into a Romanized version which rapidly achieved popularity throughout the country and became the present national written language of Vietnam (Quốc Ngữ) today.

2) Traditions.

The Vietnamese people still maintain their own original traditions and heritage of culture, in arts, in Philosophy, many of the traditional concepts have been brought up into the way of life and moral obligation of a human being such as:

- The obligation between parents and children
- The moral life between husband and wife
- The sense of responsibility of the King and his People.
- The justice of self-dignity

Located in an area geographically exposed to constant threat of foreign domination, the Vietnamese preserved their own culture thru literature, folklore and in common household crafts.

Over the centuries, Vietnamese philosophy was absorbed by the most ignorant peasant by verbal means...Minstrels retraced songs, the history of the nation, poetry with profound thoughts and feelings. The extreme prosperity of Vietnamese Folk Poetry corresponds to the essentially musical tone of the spoken language: each word has many tones, each tone gives the word a different meaning. The language, thus, provides a harmonious expression for poetical ideas and imagination...there was a saying that "All Vietnamese culture could be found in one single poem, the "KIM VAN KIEU" which is considered the National poem.

The Vietnamese were not great builders like the Khmer of neighboring Cambodia who constructed the Ankor-Wat Temple or like the Egyptians, who built the Pyramids.

Vietnamese's heritage cannot be found in material things, but spiritual.

The concept of Visual Arts in Vietnam is based on the saying "Architecture should not constitute a struggle against nature - but must instead be, in common with her...".

Vietnamese culture does not reflect ostentation for pride of adventure of glory - but moderation and simplicity - stemming from a profound sense of humility and consciousness of human destiny, whose material works fade, whose only grandeur resides in the spirit of man. In that spirit, the Vietnamese have preserved their culture intact over centuries, ceaselessly fighting against the Chinese. They have defeated the best army of Mongols three times, while others fall....

The Vietnamese (with the exception of Vietnamese Communists) believe, like the American - in God, in Justice and in Humanity...

CAMBODIA

Cambodia is one of the smaller nations in Southeast Asia. Geographically, in the East, North and West, Cambodia is bordered by South Vietnam, Laos and Thailand; in the South it is bordered by the Gulf of Siam. Its boundaries represent all the remains from the former land of Cham who became a larger Khmer Empire of today. For centuries, Cambodia has been a monarchy, with the king the top of the power. The actual power of the sovereign was interrupted for almost 100 years during the French domination (1863-1953), but during that period the people of Cambodia always considered their king as their temporal and spiritual leader.

Cambodia has 66,000 square miles, approximately the size of Washington State. The seasonal alternation of winds called monsoons determines both the rainfall and temperature throughout the country during the year. The Southwest or rainy monsoon which reaches Cambodia in May and lasts until October, brings heavy rainfall throughout the country. The Northwest or dry monsoon blows in from October to April and brings the dry season. The normal temperature is 80 degrees F.

About half of the country is filled with forests and woods and, of the 24,000 square miles of arable land, only one-third is under cultivation. Near the center of the country is the Tonle Sap, the largest fresh-water lake in Southeast Asia; the Mekong River traverses through Cambodia from North to South. The central portion is the plainland where most people live. There are rivers and tributaries in this area. Mountain ranges exist in the East, Northeast and Southwest of the country.

Cambodia has a population of 7 million. The numerically dominant ethnic group is the Khmer with 85% of the total population. Chinese and Vietnamese each make up 7%, and the remaining 8% includes the Khmer Loeu tribal groups, Cam-Malays, Thai, Laotians and Filipinos.

Khmer is the national language, spoken by over 90% of the population but French is the accepted language in the intellectual and professional circles. Most of the secondary and post-secondary education programs were conducted in French. Members of the various minority groups speak their native language but they can speak Khmer as well. The Khmer Loeu Tribal groups speak a number of languages, some of them were distantly related to Khmer, although they are not mutually intelligible.

Religion in Cambodia is very important. The Theravada Buddhism is the official national religion and is practiced by at least 85% of the population. Other religions such as Moslems, Mahayana, Buddhism and Roman Catholic were also practiced by different small groups of people. The Khmer Loeu practices a variety of animist beliefs.

The economy of Cambodia is agrarian with rice, a popular product of Cambodia. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy and employes 4/5 of the male population. The soils are fertile and the climate is well suited to intensive growing of crops, vegetables and fruits. The harvest is used mainly for rural household subsistence. Rice and corn surpluses are exported, and rubber is grown on large state-owned plantations, also for export. Industry is small in scale with considerable state participation. Industry is confined largely to the processing of agriculture products particularly rice, fish, and rubber and making a few consumer items.

THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

In the public school system, education is free at all levels. To proceed from one level of education to another, it is necessary only to pass the required examination and to find a place in an institution. Neither of these requirements is easy, however, since only a minority pass the difficult examinations, and qualified applicants for entrance in institutions greatly exceed vacancies.

Children are nominally required by law to attend school through the sixth grade, but more than one-fourth of all children appeared to drop out at the end of the first grade, and there were five times as many first graders as sixth graders. These apparent dropout figures are misleading, however, since the extraordinary growth of the primary school system during recent years accounts in considerable part for the higher registrations in lower grades. About half of the students completing the primary cycles were going on to some form of secondary education.

VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS.

The Vocational School Training system is in the process of such rapid development that the manner in which it is administered, the courses of study emphasized and the number of schools and students involved have recently undergone radical change from year to year. This increase does not appear to have been a response to popular demand on the part of the students who, after completing primary school or even the first cycle of secondary school, would usually prefer to obtain further classical education and enjoy the prestige accompanying it. They have proved willing, however, to attend a vocational school rather than accept premature termination of their school careers.

The regular secondary school is being revised to place much greater weight on vocational studies, and vocational education at higher levels is being emphasized. Whereas the few students formerly in vocational institutions usually entered after completing both levels of primary school, the completion of the first cycle of secondary school 10 years of schooling was becoming the new standard of entry in specialized technical education in the university system was increasing rapidly. The training in agronomy and related subjects at the secondary level was being offered by the national school of agriculture, Animal Husbandry and forestry in Phnom Penh city and the other provinces of the country.

The national school of arts and crafts has met the growing industries' need for trained workers. It recruits students over 18 years of age who have completed the 6 years of primary education. It is designed primarily to produce skilled workers in such fields as general mechanics, carpentry, electricity, radio, television, electronics and metalworking. In addition, a more advanced type of study at this school emphasizes science and mathematics in order to furnish preparation for university engineering studies.

The Student's University is a vocational school which offers a more informal practical curriculum to young people and adults of both sexes. Training is furnished in radio, electricity, electronics, dress making, embroidery and other useful subjects. Evening courses are available for adults, and the school participates actively in the country.

CAMBODIAN FAMILY

The family pattern which predominates throughout most of the country is that of the rural Khmer. Many characteristics of the typical family are part of a general pattern that exists throughout Southeast Asia. The major variations from the general pattern occur among the hill peoples, the Khmer Loeu, who often differ in the manner of tracing descent, in the size and composition of the household or family unit and in the relative status of the sexes in marriage.

The typical family consists of a single independent, self-supporting married couple and their unmarried children. It is the primary kin unit both in terms of affection and in terms of function. The Khmer, unlike the Chinese, the Vietnamese and some of the Khmer-Loeu, are little concerned with complex kinship structures, genealogy, lineage or kin ties beyond the family. The main responsibility of the family is not veneration of the past but rearing the new generation. Its obligations to the older generations are narrowly defined in space, in time and in the closeness of family ties. Ties between related families tend to be loose and informal and shaped more by circumstance and personal preference than by rule.

Relationships between the family of parents and children, however, are precisely defined by tradition and law. Tradition, supported by Buddhist precept, places great emphasis on formality and on the respect paid to those of senior age or generation. Law, supported by tradition, affirms, the mutual obligations of parents and children for maintenance and support. The legal aspect of these family relationships is incorporated in numerous articles of the Civil Code. The Code covers marriage, divorce, the legal rights of wives, the status of plural wives, adoption, guardianship, parental authority and inheritance.

Within this framework of religious precept, secular tradition and national law, the Khmer family is a relatively conservative and stable institution. Nevertheless, it is feeling the impact of changing times, particularly in urban areas where the influence of a modernizing economy and society is most apparent. The alternatives formerly open to the individual are limited and easily defined; and the family, both urban and rural, is the institution best able to establish the individual's role in the larger society. Other institutions, such as the national school system and government-sponsored youth movements, were assuming an increasingly larger responsibility for socialization of the new generation.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

The ideal family consists of a married couple and their unmarried children. It is not always possible, however, for a newly married couple to establish immediately their own separate residence, either for financial or for other reasons. Under these circumstances it is not unusual for the couple to reside temporarily with either the husband's or the wife's parents. In some villages it is customary for a married daughter and her husband to live with her parents until the birth of the first child. The parents occasionally may request that a married child remain in the household to care for them in their old age. This is with the understanding that the house will belong to the young couple when the parents die.

Polygamy is legally sanctioned; but polygamous marriages are rare; and in the rural areas almost nonexistent. Few village men have the money to support more than one wife. Polygamous marriage is socially acceptable and constitutes a status symbol for a wealthy man.

Opposition to the custom is voiced primarily by a small group of well-educated urban women. The rural woman sometimes is also reluctant to allow polygamy and may thwart her husband's attempts to take a second wife.

Concubinage occurs more frequently than second-rank marriage (marriage to a second and succeeding wives). Concubinage is recognition of the fact of union and can be broken without divorce. The concubine has no legal contract and does not have the right to receive alimony after separation.

A family of five or seven children, with more boys than girls, is considered ideal. Children may be adopted, and according to law the adopted child has the same rights and obligations as children born into the family. The legal restrictions governing adoption are incorporated in the Civil Code.

The Khmer have a bilateral kinship system and trace descent equally through the father's and the mother's lines. There is normally no difference in the relationship with relatives on either side of the family, and no distinctions are made in the terms used to refer to them. In general, the ties between generations and between related households are loose and informal. Individuals have little interest in their remote ancestors and rarely remember them beyond a few generations. A married couple expects to give aid or financial assistance to needy parents, brothers or sisters of either spouse. But there is often a conscious effort to avoid involvement with more remote relatives. Friction among kin is not sanctioned by society, and in some rural areas it is believed to be punished by supernatural beings.

An official decree made it mandatory for children and wives to take the same of the head of the family as their family name, but the practice never gained wide acceptance except among the educated, who sometimes use the family name preceding their given name.

Death of one of the spouses does not automatically cause the dissolution of the family. If the first-rank wife survives her husband she assumes his duties as head of the family and administers the family property as long as the children remain within the household. It is only when she renounces her position or dies that the estate is divided, and the children receive their share.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

A modern courtship may begin when a young man remarks on the beauty of the sky or of a banyan tree. To speak directly of a girl's beauty would be considered very poor taste. The relatively sophisticated young man may next turn to writing love letters. Finally, if his intentions are serious and the girl seems to return his affections, he may visit her home and begin formal courtship procedures.

The search for a potential spouse is a major preoccupation of most adolescents. Young people of the same village see each other often in a variety of situations and have many chances to become acquainted. Premarital sex is apparently unusual in the informal relationships which may develop between adolescent boys and girls. Village morality emphasizes the importance of premarital chastity for girls. A pregnant bride brings great shame to her family.

Ideally, a young man who has decided upon a particular girl asks his parents to begin marriage arrangements. His family selects a go-between who makes inquiries and conducts negotiations with the girl's family. Each family carefully searches out the good and bad points concerning the character, relative social status and financial position of the other. The girl herself has the right to veto any proposed marriage.

In reality, children often have little choice in the selection of their future marriage partner. It is common for the parents to select a spouse for their son or daughter, since they feel that it is their responsibility to arrange a suitable match. The strength of family ties, plus the respect and obedience which are owed to elders, usually cause young people to acquiesce to their parents' wishes.

The engagement period may be short or last up to 2 years. During the engagement, the boy's family presents the girl's family with a number of small gifts of betel nut, fruit, food and clothing. Shortly before the marriage, the young man may also present them with a substantial gift of money, the amount having been agreed upon in the engagement negotiations. In some villages this is called "the price of mother's milk," or repayment for the mother's early care. It was once customary for the young man to "service" for his future bride's family, helping them with various farm and household tasks, in order to prove his worth. This practice is no longer common, perhaps because the future bride and bridegroom now often come from different villages and live a considerable distance apart. A man usually marries between the ages of 20 and 25, and a girl between 18 and 22. According to law, the minimum age for marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys, though special exceptions to this are sometimes allowed. Minors below the age of 18 cannot marry without the consent of their parents.

Marriages within the circle of blood relatives are forbidden, but first cousin marriages occasionally occur. Sexual relations and marriage are prohibited between aunts and nephews, uncles and nieces, brothers and sisters, and half brothers and half sisters. There is some historical evidence that these taboos against incest did not always apply in the case of royalty. One ruler is known to have had a child by aunt, and brother-sister relations appear in old legends.

The meaning of the Khmer marriage ceremony is essentially the establishment of a new family and the information of new relationships involving the family members of the bride and bridegroom. In present day society this can be most easily accomplished through a civil marriage. This involves the declaration of the marriage to the civil court officer of the area in which the bride resides and the presentation to him of the young couple and their families and is the most common form of marriage.

The date of the wedding is determined by consulting the horoscopes of the engaged couple. Both the propitious time for the ceremony and the success of the marriage are believed to be determined by the astrological signs under which the participants were born.

The traditional wedding is a lavish and elaborate affair lasting for 3 days. It is accompanied by feasts for the invited guests and much celebration. In rural area, several days before the wedding date, the bridegroom and his family construct a large shed, which they decorate lavishly, and another smaller one to serve as a kitchen. For the first 2 days of the wedding ceremony the bride and bridegroom and the guests gather in the large shed and are feasted.

When the bride's relatives arrive, the gobetweens go back and forth between the two groups. The families exchange small gifts, one of which is a scarf, "to fix the words and tie the hearts" of the young couple. Buddhist monks are invited to participate with their prayers, but the achar plays the principal role and directs the ceremony. In the most important part of the ritual a helper encircles the couple with a cotton thread. He then passes from one hand to the other a candleholder with three lighted candles, fanning the flames toward the couple. Taking the end of the bride's scarf, the bridegroom follows her into another room where she offers him a set of new clothes and invites him to their first meal. Each eats a banana and a cake, the bride serving her new husband first as a symbol of her new role. After this ritual is completed, the bride and bridegroom return to the main room to serve the wedding guests.

In the city, marriage patterns have been greatly modified by Chinese, Vietnamese and French influences. Traditional ceremonies, one marked by ancient symbolism, have become much simpler. Marriage banquets, which formerly were prepared by the parents of the bride and bridegroom, are now often held in a restaurant. Sometimes the invited guests number between 200 and 1,200 people, each one bringing a gift of money. Part of this money is used to defray the costly wedding expenses, and the rest is given to the young couple to help them get established.

DIVORCE.

Divorce is legal and relatively easy to obtain, but it is not particularly common. A married couple may be divorced in cases of incompatibility, prolonged absence without good reason, failure to provide or adultery on the part of the wife but not the husband. Some grounds apply equally to both husband and wife. Divorce is legalized by a letter endorsed by the magistrate and is granted without difficulty. This is accomplished by a declaration before a civil court officer in the presence of two witnesses. A divorced woman and man cannot remarry for 6 months after the date of their divorce. Each spouse retains whatever property he and she brought to the marriage, and anything gained through common effort is divided equally. But they also have the right to receive alimony for subsistence if they were not the cause of the divorce. The case of divorce the civil code gives the court the power to grant custody of the children to either parent, in accordance with what they judge to be in the children's best interests. Usually the child is given to the mother until he is 15 years of age. There-after, a girl lives with the mother and a boy with the father until age of 16 is reached, at which time the child may live with the parent of his choice. The parent who does not receive custody of the child has the obligation to pay the costs of education and rearing.

DEATH

According to the Buddhist belief of the Khmer, death does not represent the end of life but an alternate aspect of existence. After death the Khmer expects to be reborn in another life. The traditional death rites are believed to aid the deceased by paving the way to a better incarnation. It is an obligation of the survivors to perform these rites to the best of their ability. Funerals, next to weddings, are the second most elaborate life cycle ceremonies and often entail large expenditures of money.

If death seems imminent, an image of Buddha is placed before the dying person, and worldly possessions and objects are hidden from his sight so that his soul may easily take leave of its earthly attachments. Monks are invited to come and recite prayers, together with relatives and friends. They joint in chanting "arahan, arahan" (one who has achieved enlightenment), in the hope that it will help the dying individual to turn his thoughts to holy matters and thus help to prevent his rebirth in an inferior state.

An areca (Asian palm) leaf is placed between the person's fingers, and a fig leaf on which the achar has written a verse is placed on his lips. A candle is placed near the head of the bed, and a rice-filled basket and several other ritual objects are arranged near the foot. A flag with a long white streamer is stuck into the basket of rice. Immediately after death the achar lights the candle, which is later used to kindle the funeral pyre. Death placed the household in danger of harmful spirits. Breath is closely associated with the spirits of a person, and in case of death the breath spirit must be placated lest it return to haunt the living. When a person dies, an achar is consulted, and his recommendations are followed scrupulously so that evil can be avoided.

The corpse is washed and dressed in certain accouterments by relatives and close friends. It is then wrapped in a white sheet; the legs are bound together with cotton thread; and another thread is placed around the neck. This thread is wrapped around the body and is allowed to extend outside the coffin. The members of the immediate family of the deceased shave their heads and dress in white mourning clothes.

The funeral takes place as soon as possible after death, usually the following day. The coffin is escorted to the funeral pyre by a procession of monks, relatives, friends and neighbors. When the procession leaves the house, two bamboo poles are raised over it, and the achar performs a series of rites to prevent evil spirits from returning to haunt the family.

Cremation is the usual culmination of the death rites, though in some rural areas suicides are buried hastily with little or no ceremony. Occasionally, burial is specially requested. The funeral pyre is built in a field in or in a cleared area in the village. The procession is announced by the music of an orchestra and is led by a monk from the village temple. Following the monks are the achar, the family of the deceased, friends and neighbors. The coffin is carried on a cart decorated with flowers and escorted by several monks. Some of the more elaborate funeral processions in the cities may appear as celebrations rather than mourning, but to the Khmer every part of such a procession is meaningful for the dead and for the living. The splendor of the procession is not an attempt to display one's wealth or social status; instead, it is an expression of concern for the welfare of the deceased.

When the procession reaches the area where the cremation is to take place, the achar raises the lid of the coffin and shakes coconut water on the dead person's face. He lights a torch with the candle brought from the house and then ignites the pyre. If the cremation fire burns quickly, it is taken as a sign that the departed leaves the world without sorrow, to be reborn in his new existence.

If the fire is slow to consume the pyre, however, it is believed that there has been some omission or lack of respect by a number of the family and that misfortune may result.

After the cremation the monks throw water on the ashes. Any remaining bits of bone are collected and put into an urn, which may be placed next to the household statue of Buddha or in a tomb at the village temple.

The following article was written by Mrs. Tipawan Truong Quang Reed, Illinois Office of Education, and Tou Fu Vang of Governor's Center for Asian Assistance, Chicago, Illinois.

THE LAOTIANS AND THE HMONGS

Approximately 40,000 Indochinese refugees presently in the U.S. are from Laos. The three distinct ethnic groups comprising the Laotian refugees are: the Lao lowlanders, the Tribal Tai Dam (Black Tai), and the Hmong* hilltribe.

Given the fact that the largest ethnic group awaiting relocation is Hmong, and that the general populace knows very little about this unique target population, this paper attempts to provide a general socio-cultural overview of the Hmong of Laos. It should be noted that available literature on the Hmong is limited, incomplete and outdated. This problem is further exacerbated by conflicting facts and unreliable statistical data. This paper is effectively a brief comparative and contrastive analysis of some of the more salient socio-cultural features of the Hmong and the Lao.

*The Hmong are also referred to in the literature as the Meo or Mias. However, the more complimentary term, Hmong, is used throughout this paper. Hmong means "Freedom". As of January 1980, Minnesota has some 4,000 Hmong.

ALTITUDINAL STRATIFICATION

Hmong and Yao Villages

Mountaintop (3,000 ft. to 6,000 ft.)

Akha Villages

Khmu Villages

Tribal Tai Villages
Upland Valley

Lao Villages
The Mekong River Valley, at sea level

INTRODUCTION:

ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Laos is the intriguing land of a Million Elephants and White Parasols; it evokes images of Dr. Tom Dooley, the Golden Triangle and the "inscrutable" hilltribes. Sandwiched among China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma, Laos historically has been a victim of the hegemonious designs of both its more powerful neighbors and French colonialists. It is not surprising, then, that Halpern, a Lao Specialist, writes (1961:3):

The country is neither a geographic nor an ethnic unit, and it does not constitute a viable economic entity. If it be postulated that among the essential characteristics of a modern national state are ethnic homogeneity, shared traditions, geographic unity, effective internal administration, economic viability, borders accepted by other nations, diplomatic recognition by neighboring states, representation in the United Nations, and the positive support of its inhabitants, it must be said that Laos lacks most of these characteristics.

The most striking characteristic regarding Laos is its ethnic diversity. While the dominant group is the Lao lowlanders, clearly one half of the population is hilltribes of varying linguistic and cultural affiliations. Unlike the Lao, who form a continuous settlement along the Mekong River valley and the alluvial plains of its main tributaries, the numerous ethnic minorities are scattered throughout the upper river valleys and the mountainous regions. The three major minority groups can be categorized according to their ethnolinguistic origins (LeBar et al 1964). (Whitaker et al 1972):

- (1) The MonKhmer language family consists of the Khmu, Tin, Lamet and Loven.
- (2) The Thai language family includes the Lu, Tai Nua, Tai Yuan, Black Tai, Red Tai and White Tai.
- (3) The Meo-Yao language family encompasses the Black Hmong, White Hmong, the Flowered Hmong and the Yao.

THE HIGHLANDERS AND THE LOWLANDERS

Little is recorded about the ancient history of Laos. Even more dependent upon legends and myths are the origins of the ethnic minorities, more specifically the Hmong. Like the Lao, the Hmong migrated from the southern provinces of China. The Lao, originating from the Thai stock, appeared in history around the late thirteenth century. The Hmong, however, are among the most recent immigrants, having settled in Laos in the nineteenth century (LeBar & Suddard 1960).

Politically, socially and economically, the Lao are the dominant group, while the Hmong maintain a lower level of social stratification. While the Hmong have been greatly influenced by the Chinese culture.

Chart 1 delineates major differences and similarities between the Hmong highlanders and the Lao lowlanders.

CHART 1

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE HMONG HIGHLANDERS AND LAO LOWLANDERS

CHARACTERISTICS

HMONG

LAO

Ethnic Identification & Location

The Hmong are found not only in Northern Laos, but also in the Southern provinces of China, Northern Vietnam and Thailand. The Hmong of Laos are concentrated in Xieng Khouang province (Barney 1961:10-11). The total Hmong population of Laos was estimated at between 300,000 to 500,000 in 1971. (Whitaker, et al. 1972: 54), (Garrett 1974: 80).

The Lao, numbering over 1.5 million are linguistically and culturally most closely related to the Northeastern Thai. "There are eight times as many Lao living on the Thailand side of the Mekong river as live in all of Laos" (Whitaker, et al. 1972:41).

Linguistic Affiliation

The Hmong language is classified as a separate branch of Sino-Tibetan (LeBar, et al. 1964). It is monosyllabic and tonal (7 tones). While differences exist in the word order and phonemes, the syntax is similar to that of Chinese. Many lexical items are directly borrowed from Chinese. The written language has only recently been developed through missionary efforts (Lemoine 1972: 2).

The Lao language is classified under the Thai branch. It is predominantly monosyllabic and tonal (6 tones). The written form is derived from the same sources as the Thai languages, Pali-Sanskrit.

Settlement Pattern & Housing

The Hmong occupy the mountainous regions of Laos at an altitude of between 3,000 feet to 6,000 feet. Hmong houses are rectangular in shape with two doors and generally no windows.

The Lao settle along the Mekong River and the alluvial plains of its tributaries. Unlike the Hmong, who build their houses next to the ground, the typical Lao dwelling is raised on stilts three to seven feet off the ground.

CHART 1 (continued)

CHARACTERISTICS

HMONG

Economy

The Hmong of Laos are mainly slash-and-burn cultivators, although some have adopted wet-rice agriculture (Barney 1961). Until 1971, when the cultivation of opium was declared illegal, opium had been the major cash crop for the Hmong (Garrett 1974). Raising of livestock, such as pigs, poultry and goats, is essential to their economy. The Hmong are celebrated horse breeders and trainers. They are also active traders.

Division of Labor

Men prepare the field, care for the crops and raise the livestock. At harvest time, every member of the family participates. Women are more active than men in the production of opium. Women are responsible for all domestic chores with the exception of the preparation of special rice cakes, which is reserved exclusively for the young men (Berney 1961). When not engaging in cultivating their farms the men derive additional income through hunting and trading. The Hmong men are excellent hunters.

Family

The household (an extended family based on a patrilineal clan system) is the most significant unit in the Hmong culture. One household may house as many as 35 people under the same roof (Barney 1961: 10).

LAO

The Lao lowlanders are predominantly wet-rice agriculturalists. Like the Hmong, they raise livestock, cultivate minor cash crops and grow vegetables.

Similarly, the Lao men do most of the heavy work in the preparation of the paddy fields. At harvest time, every able-bodied member participates. Like the Hmong men, the Lao men fish and hunt while the women tend to domestic tasks (LeBar & Suddard 1960: 63). The Lao women, however, often engage in trade and manage the financial affairs of the household (Halpern 1961: 114-115). It should be noted that in many cases the division of labor is not clearly defined, since Lao men and women share many tasks.

The basic unit of the Lao society, like the Hmong, is the household, which consists of the nuclear family. The extended family is, however, not uncommon.

CHARACTERISTICS

HMONG

Marriage
 There is considerable freedom in courtship and marital choice. (Barney 1961: 14). Marriage is strictly exogamous. Customary law prohibits marrying members of the same clan. With an intermediary, who procures an agreeable bride price for the female's parents, a wedding is arranged. The residential pattern after marriage is patrilocal. Polygamy, although not uncommon, is usually the result of the levirate (Barney 1961), (LeBar, *et al.* 1964). The wives stay together in the same household. In fact, the Hmong are very strict about promiscuous sex activities of unmarried people. A woman who is promiscuous loses her worthiness and dignity.

Descent
 The Hmong trace their descent patrilineally.

Inheritance
 The customary practice of primogeniture has been influenced somewhat by the Lao pattern. As a consequence, land and property are divided equally among the sons (Barney 1961), (Whitaker, *et al.* 1972).

Child Rearing
 The child is cared for by members of the nuclear family. Children are nursed as long as the mother has milk. Weaning, then, is not a traumatic experience for the Hmong child. There seems to be little toilet training. The Hmong children learn to share responsibility at an early age. Although of the parents, everyone in the household takes part in the informal training of the child.

LAO

Marriage is generally confined to members of the same village. Ayabe (1961) reported cases of bilateral cross-cousin marriages. Like the Hmong, the Lao enjoy relative freedom in courtship and marital choice. Although trial marriage is unknown, the use of an intermediary and bride wealth is common among the Lao as well. Although polygamy has been practiced, only a few can afford this luxury. Unlike the Hmong wives, the Lao wives live in separate households.

The Lao, unlike the Hmong, distinguish relatives bilaterally.

In principle, land and property are evenly distributed among sons and daughters. In practice, however, the son usually inherits the land while the daughter inherits the house and the house site (LeBar & Suddard 1960).

Like the Hmong, the Lao child is cared for by the mother, father and the siblings. There is a lack of overt guidance by the parents to acquire any skills. Parental permissiveness continues throughout childhood. The Lao child, in contrast to the Hmong child, is not pushed to perform household and farm tasks or accept any responsibility.

CHARACTERISTICS

HMONG

Social Structure

Historically, the Hmong have had a tradition of a highly organized socio-political structure with a king and chiefdoms (Whitaker, et al. 1972). However, the Lao Hmong socio-political system does not extend beyond the village. Nevertheless, the Hmong were the only tribe that was represented in the Royal Laotian Government.

The Hmong village consists of extended households based on the patrilineal clan. The number of households ranges from 8 to 40. The number of clans within one village, on the other hands, varies from one to four. The Hmong headman, usually the eldest head of a clan, commands great respect and authority from those under him. Besides the headman, the Tu ua neng or "shaman" (male or female) plays an essential role in the supernatural realm (Barney 1961).

Religion

The majority of Hmong are animists with a strong cult of ancestral worship. They have an elaborate pantheon of tlan "spirits-deities". Related to the tradition of kingship, the Hmong believe that one day a Hmong king will arise as a liberator and lead the Hmong against their oppressors (Whitaker, et al. 1972: 57). However, half of the Hmong who came to the U.S. are Christians through the Missionary Alliance Denomination.

LAO

The second most significant social unit is the village. With an average population of over 200, Lao village inhabitants are related to one another by blood or marriage. Unlike the Hmong headman, the Lao counterpart holds limited power and influence. His authority and influence are measured by the amount of wealth he possesses. Other significant figures in the Lao village are the Buddhist monk, the Mo phi or "shaman" (generally a male) and the village teacher.

Although Theravada Buddhists, the Lao also believe in "spirits" phi. Young men are encouraged to enter the monastery for at least three months.

CHART 1 (continued)

CHARACTERISTICS

HMONG

Character Traits

The Hmong are described by Bernatzik (1970: 619) as "healthy, honest, sincere, cheerful and conscientious." They have a "deep love for freedom" (625). They "prize hard work and ambition" (Garrett 1974: 80). They are ruggedly independent (74). The Hmong stand out for "their drive and energy... as well as for their incurable optimism" (85). They are "inquisitive and adaptive" (Barney 1961: 46). They are, finally, known for their courage as fighters and their ability to organize.

LAO

The Lao value "doing things in a pleasant way" (Halpern 1961: 39). They place great emphasis on recreation, pleasure, *joie de vivre*, and spontaneity. They are lovers of music and art. "There is a lack of compulsion, striving and urgency" (67), as well as "the lack of regularity, discipline and regimentation" (71). The Lao, furthermore, value the avoidance of conflict and respect for elders. "Manners, hospitality and generosity" (LeBar & Suddard 1960: 100) are also cherished traits. "There is also a strong element of fatalism in Lao character" (Halpern 1961: 67). They are "willing to work hard--but only as hard as necessary" (LeBar & Suddard 1960: 101).

COMMENTS

This paper, thus far, has presented a greater contrast than similarity between the two ethnic groups, the Lao and the Hmong. It should be pointed out that these people have experienced greater cultural changes in the last thirty years than in the previous century. Although the Hmong are a distinct ethnic group, they are still Laotian in nationality, and Laotian, the lingua-franca, is spoken by the majority of the Hmong. Increased inter-cultural communication resulting from their symbiotic relationship has been facilitated by such factors as the increase in labor wages, especially among the Hmong, improved transportation and, most importantly, the participation of the Hmong in the Lao educational process.

The Civil War of 1960 - 1975 had a great impact on the inter-cultural contact of the Hmong enmasse to the lowland. Because of their ability as jungle fighters and their courage, along with their strategic location, almost the whole tribe was mobilized to defend the whole sensitive Northeastern part of the country. As a result of the necessity of both official and unofficial communications, inter-cultural contacts bloomed.

Perhaps a more relevant question to prove at this point is how successful the Lao and the Hmong will be in adjusting to the American way of living. The Hmong, accustomed to the freedom of the mountains, the sky and the virgin land, may have more acute problems than the Lao in adjusting to the altitudinal change and the urban environment. The Lao, with their flexibility, lack of discipline and carefree attitude towards life, may find it extremely difficult to adjust to the more regimented way of life which characterizes America. The Hmong, on the other hand, seem to exhibit qualities which are valued by Americans; they are hard working, ambitious, independent and organized.

The Hmong refugees, more than the Lao, consciously attempt to preserve their own cultural identity. Bonded by tribal, village and clan ties, the Hmong who recently settled in Kankakee, Illinois, attest to this cultural colidarity. Another important characteristic worth mentioning is their deep respect for charismatic leaders such as Touby, the Supreme Head of Xieng Khouang province, Laos, and General Vang Pao, the assumed leader of the Hmong refugees in the United States. His veneration is perhaps related to their traditional messianic belief in the coming of the new Hmong king.

Further studies of the cultural adjustment process of the Indochinese refugees including reasearch on the oral history of the Hmong, would not only assist in the preservation of the cultural heritage of these intriguing people, but also provide insight with respect to the multifarious problems which the Indochinese refugees face in assimilating into the American cultural milieu.

INDOCHINESE SELF-HELP GROUPS IN THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

INTRODUCTION. As of today, Minnesota has 14 Indochinese Self-Help Groups, most of them are located in the Twin Cities. These groups have been approved and registered under Minnesota State Law to operate as non-profit corporations.

BACKGROUND. In the Spring of 1976, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) in Washington, D.C., issued a directive and asked the states with higher concentrations of Indochinese to assist the refugees to establish community self-help groups, as one effort to make them self-sustaining.

To meet this need, the Governor's Indochinese Refugee Task Force, State of Minnesota, held a general meeting in February of 1976 in the State Capitol with all the voluntary agencies and the Indochinese community leaders. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the rationale and strategy of creating self-help groups.

DEVELOPMENT. After several other meetings with Indochinese leaders and the resettlement officials in the state, the first self-help group was organized. The group was named "The Vietnamese League of Minnesota", and is led by a former high-ranking labor official of the South Vietnamese Government. Most of the group's members are former military officers and professionals such as university professors, school teachers, engineers, business, technicians, etc.

Within four months of operation, the group's 300 members began to contribute money and time to make the group function. As a result, they bought furniture, a filing cabinet and a typewriter, and they rented a small office in Minneapolis where they hold their meetings and other activities.

The community activities were especially attractive to most of the Indochinese refugees at that time, as antidotes to their acute homesickness and social isolation. These two mental related problems require appropriate treatment. They welcome the opportunity to get together and socialize in the way they did in their homeland; e.g., to celebrate their traditional New Year (TET) and other traditional religious events. Therefore, in the Fall of 1976, another Indochinese self-help group was born: "The Vietnamese Alliance". This group was organized by a number of professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers, university professors, politicians, economists, and some former high-ranking government officials. The Vietnamese Alliance is led by a Vietnamese lawyer, and is located in Bloomington. Today, the Vietnamese Alliance has approximately 250 members who live around the state. Most of them are employed in the white collar field. This group has been functioning independently, and has been supported financially by its members.

Another group stems from the refugees in St. Cloud, who in the Summer of 1976, gathered some 200 members who live in Stearns County. The name of this group is "Vietnamese Community of St. Cloud".

The Laotian and Cambodian refugees also formed their own groups in this state. In June of 1976, the Cambodian refugees announced the establishment of

their community self-help group. They named it "The Association of Cambodian Refugees in Minnesota and Friends". Their headquarters are located in St. Paul. The leader is a former high-ranking civil-servant in the former government of Cambodia. The group has been functioning thanks to the contributions of both members and friends.

Two distinct groups of refugees from Laos organized their own groups. The tribal mountain people from Laos, the Hmongs, also organized their group named "The Association of Hmong, Inc." This group had some 150 members and is headquartered at Liberty Plaza in St. Paul. The group is led by a former junior military officer. Today, this group has some 1,000 members.

A second ethnic group from Laos, called Laotians, also formed their own community in late 1976. This was a small group versus a population of 800 Laotians in the state. The group was led by a Laotian who used to work for USAID in Vientiane. The headquarters of the Laotian group is located in Eagan where most Lao families reside. Today, this group has some 250 members.

Along with the above-mentioned self-help groups, three religious groups were organized in 1976 and 1977 in the Twin Cities. These groups include a great number of refugees. With their constant religious goals, these groups help the Indochinese very much in the field of belief, social service and other humanitarian work. They are led by Vietnamese priests and monks from Vietnam. Their headquarters are in St. Paul.

The most recently formed groups are:

- 1) The Laotian Association of Minnesota
 - 2) The Cambodian-American Association of Minnesota
 - 3) The Vietnamese Kung-fu Association
 - 4) The Vietnamese Cultural Association
- (See list of Self-Help Groups)

ACTIVITIES. The key goal of the Indochinese self-help groups is to organize social and cultural opportunities for refugees, like the celebration of the traditional New Year and other customs. However, to be more helpful to their countrymen in their effort to make them self-sustaining, these groups recently tented to provide bilingual/bicultural guidance, drivers' education, child care and Information and Referral services for the refugees in their jurisdiction.

Between 1975 and the present, the Vietnamese League in Minnesota had organized many TET celebrations, festivals (displays, movies, art exhibitions and other hobbies) and several picnics with nearly all Indochinese and American sponsors and friends, plus it has provided I & R services to Indochinese in finding jobs, training opportunities, mental health counseling, translation, casework, sponsorship, etc.

During almost five years of activities, the Vietnamese League in Minnesota had helped organize festivals (movies, Summer get-together), TET celebrations, recreational events (cultural entertainment, arts, music, exhibition, etc.) They have provided Information & Referral services to many Indochinese in finding jobs, welfare inquiries, clarification of cross-cultural problems,

immigration process, etc. They have published newsletters in Vietnamese which has reached Indochinese and sponsors throughout the state. The Vietnamese Alliance has been helpful and effective to the Minnesota Indochinese Resettlement Office and the Voluntary Agencies in counseling and other program developments. It has been helping refugees, also.

Since the beginning of its formation, the St. Cloud Vietnamese Community has helped organize social get-together opportunities, TET celebrations and other traditional and religious events to include entertainment, parties and recreational events. This group has also helped conduct free Vietnamese and English classes, day care and mental health counseling. The St. Cloud Vietnamese Community has published a monthly newsletter which reaches Indochinese in the area. Due to the lack of leadership, this group had disbanded in mid 1979.

The Association of Hmongs, Inc. is very effective in providing Information and Referral services and recreational opportunities to the Hmongs in Minnesota. In the past three years, it has organized many cultural events and two workshops to provide information on employment, mass meetings on vocational training and career selection for all Hmongs in the state. This group is also cooperating with the MIRO and Volag's to assist in resettling more Hmong in Minnesota.

The Lao Association of Mutual Assistance has proven to be effective in job counseling and social service to all Laotians residing in Minnesota. It has helped organize Lao New Year (Pimai) celebrations and held meetings with state agencies and voluntary services to map out plans to assist the Lao refugees mostly in driver training, babysitting, English classes, etc. Regardless of its small population, the Laotians are cooperative and progressive in terms of attaining self-sufficiency.

The two Cambodian self-help groups in Minnesota have helped organize Khmer New Year celebrations, festivals and seminars to share information about public assistance, mental health, vocational training and other resettlement resource programs. Most sponsors and friends who attended these seminars and festivals did say that the Cambodian community does very well.

Because most of the Cambodians live in the Twin Cities, they would like to have a center in St. Paul. To carry out this plan, they must rent a small office and the necessary equipment and furniture. They also need to hire a part-time secretary. The main problem of the new Cambodian refugees is the language barrier and employment. Like the Vietnamese and the Lao children, the Cambodian children adjust themselves very well in the schools.

Another group called "Minnesota Vietnamese Students' Association" was organized in the Fall of 1976 by some 200 Vietnamese students who attended academic classes at the University of Minnesota. This group helps the refugees with matters pertaining to providing information and referral service, counseling, translation and other activities such as organizing social opportunities and recreational events for Indochinese students and friends.

NEEDS OF THE GROUPS. Indochinese self-help groups are helpful to refugees in both social and cultural purposes. Presently, all the groups operate on their own financial and manpower resources. Because they plan to enlarge the scope of their activities to meet the refugees' needs, they have their own needs themselves.

With the exception of the Vietnamese League in Minnesota, all other groups need a center to work with the refugees. Financial assistance and/or contributions are a must to make the self-help groups' activities possible.

Being a large and older group of Vietnamese refugees, the Vietnamese League in Minnesota is influential among the Indochinese and it has been very helpful in the area of cultural and social services. It has been supported by American sponsors and voluntary agencies in the state and the private sector in the scale. Besides the successful marks it has won in organizing social and cultural opportunities for refugees, this group has also been assisting the sponsoring churches and voluntary agencies in bringing more Indochinese into the state of Minnesota for resettlement. As mentioned above, the Vietnamese League is well settled. It has a center with furniture and facilities they need. But, they need financing to pay their utility bills and to hire a part-time secretary, to purchase office supplies and to print their newsletter. Their activities in the past have proven that they deserve support and assistance.

The Vietnamese Alliance (VIAMIN) has won a number of members who live in the Twin Cities and in outstate localities. They have been helpful to the refugees in the area of information and referral, socio-cultural, counseling, sponsorship, etc. This group is well known for its Vietnamese classes for American sponsors and Vietnamese children as part of their culture preservation, and of its newsletter in Vietnamese. They still need a center in the Twin Cities area, preferably in Bloomington where most of its members reside. They have a plan for day care, driver's training, special Vietnamese classes for U.S. sponsors and personnel working with refugees, etc. Therefore, they also need funds to carry out these projects.

For its physical organization, the Hmong group temporarily shares the office of the Liberty Plaza apartment in St. Paul. However, they need their center to conduct their daily activity program. Since most of the Hmongs live in St. Paul, perhaps such location should be in St. Paul.

Like the other groups, both Cambodians' Associations do have a need for centers. Most of the Cambodian refugees are living in the Twin Cities. For the time being, they use their group leaders' houses to hold meetings and other activities of the members.

The Laotian groups are small in size. Throughout the years of activities, they have assisted Laotian families in information and referral, counseling, employment and English classes. Each of these groups need a center, a part-time case worker, and the necessary equipment for their group which is temporarily located in Eagan.

OBSERVATION. After almost five years of living in America, most Indochinese find this country beautiful, peaceful and they have decided to live here as long as they can, mainly due to the sense that they may not be able to repatriate. One thing which makes them envy the other citizens is that many of them are not yet able to contribute to this society as much as the native people do. The Indochinese are industrious and self-relying people. This has been proven throughout a civilization of some 4,000 years in Southeast Asia from the settlement of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Unlike the other immigrants who came to the

United States because of economic reasons, the Indochinese refugees came to this country for freedom and peace. They were evacuated by the United States Government into this country as political refugees for purpose of resettlement. Their homelands were torn by the war for many years and were finally lost to the Communists. The word "political refugee" means they have no country to go back to because of their religious, political differences. Persecution is their problem if they go back home. This knowledge has created in them the feeling that since they have no date of return and since they may have to live here for all their life, they should be equal and productive. To help them become so, one should give them the opportunity to adjust to the new life, and to become self-sufficient at least so that they can live comfortably without depending upon public assistance and/or upon their sponsors' resources.

For this reason, the Federal Government through HEW, has been awarding many social service contracts to the Voluntary Agencies and the states (where there is high concentration of Indochinese refugees) to assist the Indochinese in employment, education, acculturation, housing, transportation, mental health, career training, counseling, etc.

In terms of social services and humanitarian work, the Indochinese self-help groups in Minnesota commend highly the activities of the Voluntary Agencies and other state resettlement organizations. They also expect to share the duties of these agencies by assuming a number of responsibilities to help refugees in their jurisdiction such as providing day care, English classes, driver training, job counseling, and other information and referral services that help the refugees attain self-supporting status. In this concept, the Indochinese self-help groups should be involved directly in the state resettlement program. They should be given a chance to help their people.

