

REFERENCE CITED:

SOMERA, Rene D.

1986 Pamumuwesto of Mt. Banahaw. *Philippine Studies*, 34: 436-451.Peter Knecht
Nanzan University
Nagoya/Japan

LAOS

JOHNS, BRENDA and DAVID STRECKER, editors. *The Hmong World 1*. New Haven: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, 1986. ii+258 pages. Illustrations, bibliographies, sketches, maps. Paper US\$6.00; ISSN 0890-6335.

This premier issue of a new series, *The Hmong World*, deserves to be called to the attention of all Southeast Asian specialists. The editors, Brenda Johns and David Strecker, have demonstrated good common sense in selecting articles that come together in a smoothly integrated volume, a kind of verbal *pandau* (Hmong appliqué), where one article informs those that follow. All of the colorful threads and intricate pieces are brought together in the final article, "My Life," a first-person narrative of what it was like for a young Hmong girl, May Xiong, to grow up during the "secret war" in Laos, to survive a two-year exodus of starvation, disease and death with three young children in tow, escape into Thailand and participate in one of the truly remarkable diaspora of a minority people in modern times. At the absolute nadir of their trials in the jungle, May drily tells of how some of the band of survivors cut up their clothes and ate them just to have something to put into their stomachs. And this is the people best known to us as weavers and wearers of fine, hand-fashioned pieces of cloth!

A healthy departure from much of the earlier publication on ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, the twelve articles are mostly by Hmong themselves—in some instances with an American collaborator-translator. Thus we have an inside view of the Hmong world as it was and never will be again. The unusual tenacity of the Hmong, labeled by the Chinese as "barbarian" and laughed at by American kids as "Chinese," can be understood in the article on "White Hmong Kinship Terminology" by Gary Lee and "Hmong Customs on Marriage, Divorce and the Rights of Married Women" by T. Christopher Thao, the first Hmong to earn a law degree in the U.S.

Dwight Conquergood, a specialist in the ethnography of performance at Northwestern University, collaborated with Paja Thao and the latter's son, Xa Thao, to produce "I Am A Shaman," part of the script to a video-documentary, "Between Two Worlds: The Hmong Shaman in America" that won the Silver Plaque Award at the Chicago International Film and Video Festival. This evocative first-person narrative account of shamanistic rituals encompassing the Hmong epistemology of birth, disease, and death touches as well upon the poignant feelings of the shaman himself experiencing the slow but inevitable extinction of his priesthood, religion, and a large portion of Hmong culture in the new world of the U.S. midlands. The reader is veritably transported to the Hmong vision of heaven, step-by-step up the shaman's trance-induced ladder to the skies.

Articles on "White Hmong Sung Poetry" by Brenda Johns and Megan McNamer's "Musical Change and Change in Music" inform us about the uniqueness

of the role of music and sung poetry in shaping Hmong identity, transforming the drab tapestry of life into an object of beauty born of the joys of love or the laments and sorrows of separation, death and the dreaded fate of being orphaned, an experience twice-doomed because one not only has no parents in the real world to give love and shelter and to help negotiate and pay a future "bride price," but also no opportunity to feel good about "feeding" the homeless spirits of one's own unknown parents and ancestors. "The Story of the Orphan Mu Hu," told originally in Hmong by Xia Long Mua, is but one tale among many of the genre of orphan stories so common to all Southeast Asian cultures. This one is delightfully picaresque, filled with talking otters and crabs, flying tigresses and multi-headed dragons. Anything becomes possible in the imagined and real Hmong world and is made entertaining and believable through magic and transformations between the human and animal world. The middle article is an annotated translation of excerpts from an "Outline of Marriage Rites" by Yay Txooy Tsawb and David Strecker. One of the rites is "marriage by abduction," which is not quite as awful as it sounds, and actually and "logically" occurred in the life of May Xiong, transmitter of the last and most dramatic piece in the collection of articles.

The publication *The Hmong World* is auspicious in many regards. It is solid scholarship of an area and a people that have been neglected, misunderstood, mistreated, and misused for military ends. Through this series, we will continue to be better informed and inspired by a remarkable and resilient people. The publisher, Yale Southeast Asia Studies, would do well to print subsequent volumes with proportional spacing to improve the esthetics and ease of reading. The editors should likewise consider including an appendix giving some instruction in how to pronounce the opaque romanized spellings of Hmong dialects, White, Green or other hues. Otherwise, the publisher and editors have shown themselves to be true connoisseurs of detail and quality. Several of the authors have been supported in their work, which might not have been fundable elsewhere, by grants from the Indochina Studies Program of the Social Science Research Council. Likewise, the Luce Foundation is to be commended for its support in the actual publication. *The Hmong World* can be ordered directly from Yale Southeast Asia Studies, Box 13A Yale Station, New Haven, CT 06520.

John F. Hartmann
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois

THAILAND

MILLER, TERRY E. *Traditional Music of the Lao: Kaen Playing and Mawlum Singing in Northeast Thailand*. Contributions in Intercultural and Comparative Studies, No. 13. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. Xxii+333 pages. Photographs, maps, appendix, glossary, select bibliography, discography, and index. Hardcover US\$47.50; ISBN 0-313-24765-X.

This book is the first major work in English or any other language on the traditional singing and mouth organ playing of the Lao. This music has until now only been treated in shorter articles, and therefore this book is a most welcome contribution to the understanding of one of the interesting musical cultures of Southeast Asia, of equal