

Kevin Stuart has had the benefit of working for some years as a teacher in Xining, Qinghai and of being in close contact with scholars in China's Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Unfortunately, the thirty-two tales in this book, for which he gives credit to six Mongol researchers, are condensed to the utmost brevity, being more summaries than translations. The introduction, consisting of eighteen lines, states only that "these folktales provide rare insights into the culture and traditions of the ancient nomadic culture — folk heroes and tricksters, monsters and ghosts, humorous tales, and moral and practical instruction thinly disguised as fables." After reading the short collection of tales on ninety-eight small pages (of which eleven are illustrations) the question remains as to whether these presentations, lacking notes and commentaries, further our understanding of the tales. Does the book's highly generalized approach really make it unnecessary to explain certain selections? How will readers from Southeast Asia, for example, know that the "Origin of the Buryat Tribe" tale, with its description of the theft of the clothes of a bathing girl, is a version of the famous "Swan-maiden" story found all over Eurasia and Northern Europe, as so aptly explained by Arthur T. HATTO (1980, 267–97)? Furthermore, there are no remarks about origin of the tales; most of them are found in variants in many areas of Inner Mongolia, a fact pointed out by nearly all Mongolian editions of folktales because of the great variations that exist. Important international collections of fairy tales, like the *Märchen der Weltliteratur* in Germany or the *Skazki i mify narodov vostoka* in Russia add, for quite sound reasons, exhaustive commentaries on the tales, an approach followed in the recently published volume of Tuwinian tales by Erika Taube. The above-mentioned shortcomings impede this well-meant little book.

REFERENCES CITED:

HATTO, A.T.

1980 The Swan Maiden: A folktale of Eurasian origin? In *Essays on medieval German and other poetry*, 267–97. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

TAUBE, Erika

1994 *Skazki i predanija altajskich Tuincev*. Moscow: Vostocnaja literatura RAN.
Walther HEISSIG
University of Bonn
Bonn, Germany

LAOS

YANG DAO, edited by JEANNE L. BLAKE. *Hmong at the Turning Point*. Minneapolis: Worldbridge Associates, 1993. xvi + 168 pages. Maps, figures, photographic plates, bibliography, index. Hard cover US\$29.99; ISBN 0-9632149-93.

Readers who feel more comfortable with English than with French will surely welcome this new English-language version of Dr. Yang's book *Les Hmong du Laos face au développement* (1975), and will want to thank editor Jeanne Blake for her contribution to this work. The book is an invaluable source of information on the Hmong, a mountain people of the Southeast Asia-Southwest China border regions. Moreover, all who are interested in the Hmong will want to read part 4, "Hmong in a Shattered Nation," newly written for this edition of the book; though it is doubtless too short (a mere fourteen pages) to cover a very complex era in the history of the Laotian Hmong, it nevertheless gives an interesting account by Yang of the story his people of from 1973 to 1990. I only regret that enthusiasm for translation has led to the removal of all the original French titles from the bibliography. The English translations (which, if required at all, ought to be in brackets after the original French titles) will scarcely

assist those who wish to locate these valuable bibliographic sources.

This book is especially important within the Hmong corpus (now exceeding 750 volumes, according to the Online Computer Library Center's "Worldcat") in that it is the work of a Hmong intellectual himself; Yang, if I am not mistaken, is the first Hmong ever to write a scholarly work on his people in a Western language.

Yang's book, containing useful descriptions of Hmong society within its environmental and historical contexts (part 1), Hmong socioeconomic patterns (part 2), and prospects for economic and social development (part 3), is frequently cited in the modern ethnographic literature (e.g., COOPER 1984, TAPP 1989). The bulk of the work addresses an issue that is now past, though still painfully remembered: the situation of the Hmong in the former, war-torn Kingdom of Laos, particularly during 1969-70, when Dr. Yang assembled his field data. Nevertheless, the work clearly remains an important resource for anthropologists, economists, development specialists, political scientists, and, indeed, all who are interested in the Hmong people and in the history of modern Laos. It contains, though the title offers no hint of this, significant data on the Kammu people as well.

In this reviewer's mind, the enduring value of Yang's work lies particularly in its three-fold treatment of the Hmong economy: "traditional," "transitional," and "wartime." The traditional village economy, based on rice and opium production in highland swiddens, is the subject of chapter 4 (45-86). Yang characterizes this traditional economy as based on "conservatism, insularity and inertia" (46). True, in comparison with what was to come such villages were far from markets and from the centers of economic innovation. But it would be difficult for this reviewer to characterize communities that produced so important a cash crop as opium as having purely subsistence economies (47). In any event, Yang certainly makes his point that such traditional villages are a far cry from those that began to develop after the end of WWII, communities thoroughly integrated into local market systems (91-93), actively involved in commerce, and, wherever the terrain and water resources permitted, engaged in the substitution of irrigated rice paddies for the dry rice swiddens of the past (93). The sociocultural concomitants of such developments were huge, especially in the fields of education and political integration (97-101).

Regrettably, however, this orderly socioeconomic and cultural evolution was frequently interrupted by political events related to the wider ideological struggle between communists and conservatives that was to engulf the country in years of violence. Rice fields were abandoned, cattle herds wiped out, and tens of thousands of Hmong forced to flee their homes. By the early 1970s war had made one in every three Laotian Hmong a refugee (104). Many sought refuge near military establishments, where, owing to the large concentrations of people, normal agricultural activity was difficult and the people depended for survival on outside assistance. (In passing we may note that, although the Hmong in neighboring Thailand have not had to face the horrors of war, there are at least two published books on Hmong economic life in Thailand that help to generalize Dr. Yao's particular observations concerning Laotian Hmong. These are, for the traditional economy, GEDDES 1976 and, for the transitional economy, COOPER 1984).

Ever the optimist despite all that his people have had to suffer, Yang Dao offers a coherent plan for the economic and social development of the Hmong in the mountains of their Laotian homeland. Though impossible to implement during the two decades since they were written, Yang's ideas concerning the future of the Hmong as sedentary upland farmers in a peaceful and ethnically integrated modern Laos have much to recommend them to those who now hold political power in Vientiane.

Finally, although the book is marred by the use of endnotes rather than the much more convenient footnotes, it has numerous helpful maps and figures as well as several monochrome plates, some of considerable historical interest. The text contains many an ethnographic datum omitted in other introductory works on the Hmong (Yang tells us, for example, that in China the Hmong were essentially irrigated rice farmers, that in the early years of their settlement in Laos it was maize, not rice, that was their staple crop, and that they

actually learned the technique of dry rice cultivation in Laos itself, apparently from Lao and Kammu neighbors [53]).

Author, translator, and publisher are all to be thanked for ensuring the continued availability of this important work.

REFERENCES CITED

COOPER, Robert

1984 *Resource scarcity and the Hmong response*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.

GEDDES, William R.

1976 *Migrants of the mountains: The cultural ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

TAPP, Nicholas

1989 *Sovereignty and rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

YANG, Dao

1975 *Les Hmong du Laos face au développement*. Vientiane: Edition Siasavath.

Anthony R. WALKER
The Ohio State University
Columbus

THAILAND

PREMCHIT, SOMMAI and AMPHAY DORE. *The Lan Na Twelve-Month Traditions*. Chiang Mai: Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, 1992. xx + 339 pages. Maps, figures, photographic plates, bibliography. Soft cover Baht 375.00.

This is a useful, though poorly edited, work on the annual ritual cycle of the Tai Yuan (Khon Muang), or Northern Thai, people, with special reference to the ritual observances within the city of Chiang Mai, and with some comparative materials from the Burmese Shan State, Laos, Sipsong Panna, and Northeast Thailand. Thai specialists will probably want to own a copy of this book, particularly for reference purposes, though they will doubtless regret the absence of an index.

The book begins with a couple of introductory chapters on, respectively, the history and the culture of the Tai Yuan, then delves into the details of the annual ritual cycle in the following twelve chapters, one for each month of the year. Here the reader will find a wealth of historical and ethnographic documentation, but very limited analysis.

Overall the book is a difficult read, precisely because of the lack of an explanatory framework and a very inadequate background to the sociology and worldview of the Yuan people. There is a mass of historical detail, with many paragraphs reading like this:

From 1292, under Mangrai's reign, Mongolian influence increased: Northern Lan Na and Sip Song Panna formed the Cheli; and from 1315 through 1382, the Ba Bai (Lan Na) became a Mongolian tributary. It is believed that during this period and despite the unprecedented development of the Sinhalese Buddhism from 1369, Mahayana had been reactive in Lan Na.

But nowhere is there an adequate treatment of the socioreligious (Buddhist, animist, Brahmanic) and economic (mostly irrigated rice farming) context of the ritual observances that are being described.