

OBSERVATIONS ON THE MOVEMENT OF KHMU? INTO NORTH THAILAND¹

by

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Khmu[?] is a Mon-Khmer language spoken chiefly in the hills of northern Laos. Speakers of Khmu[?], relatively unknown to ethnography,² are linguistically and culturally related to swidden-farming hilltribesmen who in Laos are called by the generic term 'Kha' and in Vietnam by the term 'Moi.' Remnant Mon-Khmer groups in Thailand include some immigrant Khmu[?] from Laos, as well as Lua[?] (Lawa), T'in, Yumbri, Chaobon and Kui. Linguistically related

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- 1) I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the National Research Council in carrying out research on interethnic contact and assimilation in North Thailand, with special reference to the Khmu[?], during the period August 1, 1964 through April 30, 1965. I am also indebted to the Public Welfare Department and to Nai Prasit Disavat, Director of the Hilltribes Division. Various officials in Chiangmai, in particular the Governor and Major Pairojn of the Border Police, have helped me with letters of introduction and in other ways. I have profited from discussions with various members of the faculty of the University of Chiangmai and with Dr. William Geddes and the staff of the Tribal Research Center. I wish also to acknowledge the help of Nai Kraisi Nimmanahaeminda, William A. Smalley, Garland Bare and Laurence C. Judd, all of whom have firsthand knowledge of Khmu[?] and share an interest in this group.

My field work was conducted under the auspices of the Human Relations Area Files, Inc., an inter-university research organization centered in Yale University and engaged in the compilation of organized data on a broad sample of the world's known cultures for purposes of cross-cultural and areal research. My informants were chiefly immigrant male Khmu[?] who had come to Thailand during the days of the European teak industry; I managed to interview over 50 such individuals in a variety of situations and locations throughout North Thailand. I also worked for brief periods in Khmu[?] and mixed Khmu[?]-Thai villages in northern Nan Province and in one or two villages south of Chiangkhong.

- 2) The language and culture of the Khmu[?] around Luang Prabang have been studied by Smalley, W.A., 'Outline of Khmu[?] Structure,' *American Oriental Society, American Oriental Series Essay No 2*, 1961; 'The Khmu[?],' pp. 112-17 in Frank M. LeBar *et al*, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* Human Relations Area Files Press 1964; and 'Cyang: Khmu[?] Culture Hero,' pp. 41-55 in *Felicitations Volumes of Southeast Asian Studies Presented to His*

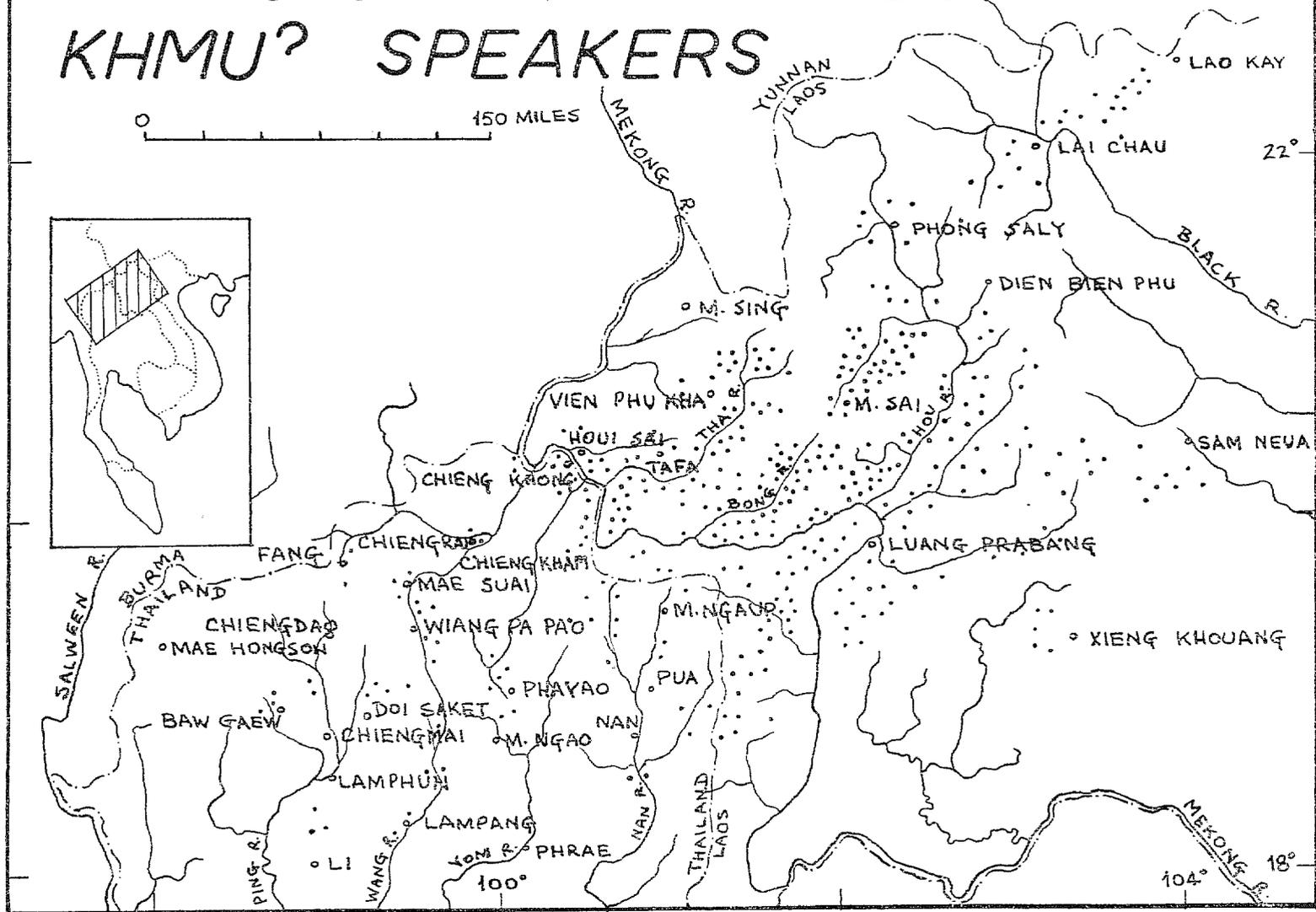
groups in Burma include the Palaung and Wa.³ The Mon-Khmer stratum is generally regarded as relatively old in this part of Southeast Asia, predating the arrival of Tai speakers and more recent arrivals such as Miao, Yao, Lahu and Lisu. Most Mon-Khmer groups at present occupy a foothill zone, intermediate between lowland wet rice growers and groups at higher altitudes such as Miao and Yao, where they engage primarily in swidden farming with supplementary wet rice fields in some cases. A long history of acculturation and assimilation to dominant lowland populations is characteristic, for example, of Khmu?, Lua? and Kui, and the traditional cultural pattern has in some instances changed beyond recognition. Many Northern Thai (Yuan), as well as lowland Lao in the vicinity of Luang Prabang, are descendants of assimilated Lua? and Khmu?.

The present fragmented distribution of Mon-Khmer peoples would indicate that they were once more numerous and that they perhaps occupied a larger area than at present. The Lua? of northwestern Thailand say they were once plains dwellers, the original inhabitants of Chiangmai and the builders of Wat Chedi

Highness Prince Dhaninivat vol 1, The Siam Society 1965. Khmu? in the Lai Chau -Phong Saly area have been briefly described by Roux, H., and Tran-Van-Chu, 'Quelques minorités ethniques du Nord-Indochine,' *France Asie*. vol 10 nos 92-93, 1954 pp 294-357 (Reprinted from an earlier paper dated 1927). There are numerous references to Khmu? in a study of the Lamet, a 'Kha' group in Nam Tha Province of Laos (Izicowitz, K.G., 'Lamet: Hill Peasants in French Indochina,' *Etnologiska Studier* no 17, Göteborg: Etnografiska Museet 1951) and Halpern provides useful information on the contemporary status of Khmu? in Laos (Halpern, J.M., 'Trade Patterns in Northern Laos,' *Proceedings, Ninth Pacific Science Congress, 1957* vol 3, 1963 pp. 242-45; 'Government, Politics, and Social Structure in Laos: A Study of Tradition and Innovation,' *Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series* no 4, 1964; and 'Economy and Society of Laos: A Brief Survey,' *Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series* no 5, 1964). Young (*The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand* The Siam Society 1962 pp. 56-64) includes Khmu? in his survey of the tribes of northern Thailand.

- 3) For cultural summaries and bibliographic references to many of these Mon-Khmer groups see LeBar, F.M., Hickey, G.C. & Musgrave J.K., *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* Human Relations Area Files Press 1964. LeBar, 'The Ethnography of Mainland Southeast Asia: A Bibliographic Survey,' *Behavior Science Notes* vol 1 no 1, 1966 pp. 14-43, provides some additional bibliographic coverage.

APPROXIMATE DISTRIBUTION of KHMU² SPEAKERS



Luang.⁴ According to Seidenfaden⁵ the Khmu[?] have vague traditions of a former 'Kha empire,' and like the Lua[?] they tell stories of having once founded a great city.⁶ The Eastern Lao regard the Khmu[?] as the original inhabitants of the area, and as having great power over the indigenous spirits. Ceremonies at the Luang Prabang court have utilized Khmu[?] in this capacity, and they played a similar role in the old principality of Nan.⁷ The legend of the *lak muang* within the ancient walled city of Chiangmai likewise portrays the Lua[?] in the role of indigenous proprietors.⁸ Whatever the basis in actual fact of such traditions and legends, it is my impression that the content of Khmu[?] culture was formerly richer than would appear from an examination of contemporary remnant groups.

Although they are found primarily in Laos there are Khmu[?] villages across the border in Nan dating back possibly 150 years. There is a history of immigrant labor (males) into Thailand during at least the last 80 years, much of it artificially stimulated by the requirements of European teak firms. But even this contrived immigration took advantage of what seems to have been an existing pattern of cultural fragmentation and psychocultural subordination to more dominant groups—in part the result of a long history of contact with Tai-speaking Lao.⁹

Ethnicity in Laos

Khmu[?] speakers are found at present in the provinces of Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Sayaboury, Nam Tha and Phong Saly. They also inhabit the Lai Chau area of North Vietnam and have been reported as far east as upper Thanh Hoa Province. Smalley estimates

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- 4) Kunstadter, P., 'The Lua? (Lawa) of Northern Thailand: Aspects of Social Structure, Agriculture, and Religion,' *Center of International Studies, Research Monograph* no 21, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs 1965 pp. 1-2.
 - 5) Seidenfaden, E., *The Thai Peoples* The Siam Society 1958 p. 119.
 - 6) Garland Bare, personal communication 1964.
 - 7) Smalley, 'The Khmu?' *op. cit.* p. 113.
 - 8) Chotsukharat, S., *Thiao muang nua lae wathanatham prapheni khong muang nua* [Tour of the North: Culture and Customs of the North] Odeon 1962 pp. 129-36.
 - 9) A concise summary, in English, of Lao history is contained in LeBar, F.M., and Suddard, A. (eds) *Laos: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture* Human Relations Area Files Press 1960.

as many as 100,000 Khmu[?] in northern Laos,¹⁰ which would make them the largest 'Kha' group in the area. According to Smalley¹¹ the name is derived from the indigenous *kymhmu*[?], meaning 'people.' There is evidence that Khmu[?] as used at present, may refer to a variety of named groups which differ somewhat as to degree of linguistic and cultural relationship. My data on this point are incomplete; additional field research in Laos would be needed to arrive at any real understanding of the meaning, in cultural terms, of the convenient category label Khmu[?]. My data do indicate, however, that this term and others such as Pru[?] and Rook, take on different connotations according to the speaker's perception of self, and the relative status accorded these terms in different cultural settings. Identification with evolving indigenous politico-religious systems, in a manner analogous to the northern Burma situation described by Leach,¹² may be a factor here also. The present rather wide distribution of Khmu[?] speakers indicates an original prototype subsequently in contact with a variety of languages and cultures, with resulting differential acculturation and the evolution of subgroups which the Thai and Lao nowadays lump together as Khamuk or Kha Khamu[?]. When they come to Thailand members of the various subgroups use only the name Khmu[?], in this respect apparently conforming to prevalent Thai usage.

According to Smalley the Khmu[?] term for subgroupings of this kind is *tmɔɔy*.¹³ Around Luang Prabang and in Sayaboury the Tmɔɔy Mee are most numerous, while the Tmɔɔy Ksak are a smaller subgroup southeast of Luang Prabang. North of the Nam Hou (generally between the Nam Hou and the Nam Tha) Khmu[?] speakers are reportedly known as Tmɔɔy Rook (in Lao, Hok or Kha Hok). My Thailand informants at times used *tmɔɔy rook*, *tmɔɔy mee*, *tmɔɔy khrong* in opposition to *tay-haem*, i.e., 'strangers' or 'outsiders'

10) Smalley, 'The Khmu?', *op. cit.* p. 113. This figure agrees closely with the total of various provincial population figures for Khmu[?] in Halpern, J.M., 'Population Statistics and Associated Data,' *Laos Project Paper* no 3, Los Angeles, University of California (mimeographed) 1961.

11) Smalley, 'The Khmu?', *op. cit.* p. 113.

12) Leach, E.R., *Political Systems of Highland Burma* Harvard University Press 1954.

13) Smalley, 'The Khmu?', *op. cit.* p. 113.

(members of an ethnic category or inhabitants of a specific locality) as opposed to 'relative' or 'insider.' The terms *tay* ('elder brother') and *haem* ('younger brother') in this context express oneness or in-group solidarity. They can refer to members of the same or related lineages, and probably by extension to those persons who sacrifice to related ancestral spirits. In a still more extended sense they appear to encompass the idea of 'those who follow the same customs,' i.e., participate in a common ritual tradition. The actual category or group labeled *tmooy* this-or-that as opposed to *tay-haem* seems to depend on the circumstances and self-identification of the speaker at the time. I frequently encountered the term *Pru*², used interchangeably with *Khmu*² as a self-identifier—presumably another somewhat broader term expressive, like *tay-haem*, of 'selfness' or in-group sentiment.

The appellation *Rook* or *Hok* can be used broadly to mean 'backwoods' *Khmu*², i.e., less acculturated *Khmu*² speakers wherever they may be; thus acculturated *Khmu*² living in mixed Lue-*Khmu*² villages in the middle Yao river valley in Nan Province refer to those on the upper Yao as *Tmooy Rook*, saying that the latter live higher in the hills and retain more of the old customs including the men's loincloth.¹⁴ In this sense *Rook* appears to be a generic term or category; I lack the necessary data at present to judge whether there is indeed a specific *Rook* subgroup inhabiting a definable territory. My data do indicate, however, that *Khmu*² speakers in the region between the Nam Hou and the Nam Tha are generally called *Hok* and that this seems to be a rather distinctive culture area. *Khmu*² in Thailand expressed a feeling of relatively close relationship to *Kha Hok*; although the *Hok* have somewhat distinctive customs (possibly customs no longer shared by other *Khmu*², particularly those subject to much acculturation) and a slightly different dialect, it was felt that 'we were once probably the same people.' They did not appear to have this feeling about the *Lamet*.

14) I never met a *Khmu*² speaker in Thailand who would identify himself as *Rook* or *Hok*. Although many individuals were pointed out to me as such by other *Khmu*², later questioning invariably produced a flat denial. This tends to confirm the supposition that in some circumstances the term carries a pejorative connotation.

North of the Nam Tha, in the region of Vien Phu Kha, Muang Sing, Muang Nam Tha and Muang Sai, Khmu[?] speakers refer to themselves generically as Khmu[?] or Pru[?], but also distinguish categories such as Khmu[?] Lü (Lue), Khmu[?] Yuan and Khwaen (possibly Khuen). These names apparently reflect culture contact with a variety of Tai-speaking immigrant groups from the Sip Song Panna and northern Thailand. Here the Khmu[?] by all accounts live in closer contact with a lowland environment and with Buddhist lowlanders. Immigrants into Thailand from this area appear generally more successful (in Thai terms) than those who have come in from south of the Nam Tha, that is from the Rook (Kha Hok) area, the apparent center nowadays of a socio-economic ritual complex involving status mobility through acquisition of wealth, and the consumption and display of wealth at periodic sacrifices to ancestral spirits. Here wealth, in the form of bronze drums, buffaloes and silver, confers a kind of ritual endowment and without it a man cannot perform the proper sacrifices.

My data indicate a marked similarity between this Rook or Hok culture type and the Lamet (Khamet or Rümet) in the mountains south of Tafa on the lower Nam Tha, described by Izikowitz.¹⁵ The cultural parallels are so many, and so detailed, that one wonders whether, in fact, the Lamet and Khmu[?] should not be considered as originally belonging to the same culture type. Either this, or there has been extensive borrowing by Lamet from Khmu[?] or vice versa.¹⁶ The two languages, although related, are not mutually intelligible—at

15) Izikowitz *op. cit.*

16) Izikowitz (*op. cit.* table 5 pp. 119-25) presents detailed data on household composition in the Lower Lamet village of Mokala Panghay. Analysis of these data reveals that nine out of a total of 21 households, accounting for 36 percent of the village population, were headed by Khmu[?] who had immigrated into and married within the village. These Khmu[?] households were extremely well connected through intermarriage with the families of the village chief, the chief priest and the most powerful of the class of wealthy men, *lem*. Mokala Panghay is stated by Izikowitz to have been one of the more conservative villages among the Lower Lamet—who in turn are said to be less subject to Khmu[?] influence than the Upper Lamet to the northeast. In light of the above facts the description of Mokala Panghay might be interpreted as a point in time within an evolving situation wherein a surrounding Khmu[?] population is gradually expanding and 'Khmuizing' a Lamet minority.

least the Khmu² maintain that they cannot understand Lamet. Izikowitz quotes his Lamet as saying that they and the Khmu² are brothers; my informants in Thailand, however, expressed considerably less feeling of relationship vis-a-vis the Lamet.

I interviewed and gathered data on over 50 Khmu² immigrant males in various parts of northern Thailand, eighty percent of whom had come originally from the area encompassed between the watersheds of the Nam Tha and Nam Hou. The reason for this may lie simply in the fact that recruitment for the old teak industry could most conveniently draw on this area; but it also appears that this distribution reflects cultural patterns characteristic of the Nam Tha-Nam Hou area, i.e., the ritual importance of wealth, mentioned above, and the emigration of young men to Thailand in order to earn money for the brideprice. In this way the young man is enabled to found a family, the first step toward the cultural goal of becoming a wealthy man able to sacrifice properly to the ancestral spirits. A similar pattern, with emigration of bachelors to Thailand, was observed 30 years ago among the Lamet by Izikowitz.¹⁷

The legend of the gourd—an origin legend accounting for the peopling of the earth by Khmu², Meo, Lao and so on, and containing a deluge motif as well as brother-sister incest—is similar in outline to the same myth as recounted by the Lao.¹⁸ Although versions I have collected vary in detail, they are also remarkably similar to the origin legend of the Lamet reported by Izikowitz.¹⁹ The Khmu² also tell stories featuring a culture hero, *cyang*,²⁰ some of which account for culture traits such as the custom of swiddening on the hillsides.

Entry into Thailand

The entry of Khmu² into Thailand in relatively large numbers appears to date from about 1880 or 1890, when increasing demands of the European teak firms for forest labor stimulated the annual recruitment of young men from their villages in Laos. Prior to this

17) Izikowitz, *op. cit.*

18) LeBar and Suddard, *op. cit.* p. 8.

19) Izikowitz, *op. cit.* p. 22.

20) Smalley, 'Cyang: Khmu² Culture Hero' *op. cit.*

Burmese foresters had for some decades been working the teak forests of North Thailand under concessions granted by the local princes. I have been unable to determine to what extent they might have utilized Khmu[?] labor. It is reasonable to suppose that the early Lao kingdoms, such as Lanna Thai in the north, made use of 'Kha' tribal peoples as labor in the construction of city walls and as bearers and auxiliary forces during warfare, and that they were obtained during population raids on surrounding territories. There is some evidence that the prince of Nan about 1830 raided up toward the Sip Song Panna, bringing back prisoners of war. And it is said that Khmu[?] and T'in helped to build the old city walls of Nan. But refugee villages in northern Nan are relatively recent and it is impossible to date the entry of other Khmu[?] into Nan Province much earlier than about 150 years ago.

Recruitment for the Teak Industry

By the 1890's, and continuing into the 1930's, recruitment of teak labor was well organized and on a relatively large scale. During the height of this recruitment period an estimated 300-400 Khmu[?] entered Chiangmai annually. World War II interrupted this pattern, but it was renewed on a lesser scale in the years immediately following. With the gradual phasing out of European concessions and the emergence of the government-controlled Forest Industry Association, the old role of the Khmu[?] as forest labor and *mahout* has largely been taken over by Northern Thai and Karens. Until the closing of the Lao border in recent years Khmu[?] continued to come into Thailand in relatively large numbers, chiefly as seasonal hired labor in connection with the tobacco industry. Despite recent restrictions on illegal entry, Khmu[?] still cross the border and those resident in Thailand have little difficulty communicating with their relatives back in Laos.

Recruitment for the teak industry was carried on by *naaj hooj* (Thai *naaj rɔɔj*, Lao *naaj hooj*, 'leader of 100's'). These men were themselves Khmu[?] who had worked in Thailand and knew the routes from Laos to such places as Chiangmai and Lampang. Young bachelors (average age about 17) were recruited in groups of 15 to 30 or more, chiefly in the Nam Beng-Nam Tha area and to the north as far as

Phong Saly. Usual routes were either *via* Chiengsaen to Chiengrai and thence south to Chiengmai *via* Doi Saket, or else *via* Chiengkong or Chiengkham and thence south to Lampang. The *naaj hɔɔj* was by agreement responsible to a boy's parents to get him safely to Thailand, find him employment, and at the end of a two or three year period, to bring him back safely to Laos. For this he received a sizeable commission, taken as an advance against the boy's annual wage at time of employment. Having disposed of a group in this fashion, the *naaj hɔɔj* returned to Laos where he spent the following season recruiting. These men usually operated within a limited area where they were known and trusted. Their return from this business was not inconsiderable, and some retired with their savings and set themselves up in Thailand as small merchants or traders. On occasion their recruiting activities took them through portions of Burma and it was not uncommon to set oneself up as a trader in Burmese goods, traveling back and forth periodically to Burma for the purpose. As a result, there are Khmu[?] now resident in Thailand who have some knowledge of Burma or possess contacts there. Some have married Shan or Haw women and are able to speak Burmese, Shan or Haw.

In Chiengmai and Lampang, centers for the European teak firms, there developed the institution of the *naaj hɔɔj nyaaj* (the 'big' *naaj hɔɔj*). These were Khmu[?] who had 'made good' in Thailand—owners of shops and men of considerable prestige among their fellows—to the extent of being well known back in Laos as owners of many bronze drums and other goods so dear to the Khmu[?]. They acted as 'clearing houses' for new arrivals seeking employment; these were assured a place to stay in the compound of the *naaj hɔɔj nyaaj* until they found jobs. In Chiengmai, the original *naaj hɔɔj nyaaj* has been dead for some years but another Khmu[?] shop owner has inherited this position, and although teak labor recruitment and the organization that went with it have long since disappeared, this man's shop is still a clearing house for news, and for Khmu[?] moving in and out of Chiengmai.

Khmu[?] who came to Thailand to work received a small annual wage plus housing and rice. Those who managed to save some money used it for the purchase of gongs, drums, cloth or silver and returned

to their home villages, where many presumably concluded successful marriages and rose to the status of rich man, *akamool* ('to have silver'). Others, less fortunate, lost their money in gambling and drinking and these for the most part never returned to Laos. A good proportion of these 'failures' (in Khmu[?] terms) married Thai women and their descendants are today in the process of 'becoming Thai.'

Number of Khmu[?] in Thailand

During some nine months in North Thailand I was able to visit personally most of the areas where there are known to be Khmu[?]. The following figures represent an 'educated guess' as to the number of ethnic Khmu[?] (born in Laos or Thailand of Khmu[?] parents) presently living in North Thailand. These estimates, which have consciously been kept on the conservative side, do not include the south; there are said to be Khmu[?] in the Bangkok area and some around Kanchanaburi, but I have no knowledge of how many.

Changwat Chiangmai. Total 800-1000. In Chiangmai municipality alone there are an estimated 200. There are Khmu[?] living in mixed Khmu[?]-Thai hill villages and working on *miang* plantations in the Maetaeng-Chiengdao area, and at the tin mines at Baw Gaew. Some engage in trade and other pursuits in Amphur Fang. There are also Khmu[?] in mixed villages in the hills between Li and Lamphun.

Changwat Chiangrai. Total 1500-2000. This figure includes the hills between Doi Saket and Wiang Pa Pao, where there are perhaps 100 Khmu[?] living in *khon myang* villages along the road and on tea plantations and in mixed *miang* villages in the hills back from the road. There are an additional 100-200 in the Wiang Pa Pao—Mae Suai area. Chiangrai municipality contains an estimated 100, and in Amphur Chiengsaen there are between 300 and 500 Khmu[?] working on tobacco stations, hauling water, and working in hotels. In the Chiengkong area an estimated 200-300 are found in villages south of the town, on tobacco stations, and

hauling water and working at menial jobs in town. There are probably at least another 300 in the Chiengkham-Phayao area.

Changwat Nan. Total 2000-3300. There are mixed Khmu[?]-Thai villages near Saa, south of Nan town; in Commune Baw along the road between Nan and Pua; in the hills east of Pua; and along the middle Yao river valley west of Pua. Above Muang Ngaup there are refugee villages of pure Khmu[?] stock, and both mixed and pure stock villages at the headwaters of the Yao. Young²¹ reports a total of 30 villages with about 3300 persons. However, if one is counting ethnic Khmu[?], this figure may be somewhat high.

Changwat Lampang. Total 500-1000. Includes an estimated 50 or more Khmu[?] in Lampang municipality. Others in outlying areas and in the foothills of the Wang River drainage. These estimates may be too low.

Elsewhere. Total 200-300. Including Amphur Phrae, Mae Hongson and Mae Sariang areas.

The above estimates total 5000 minimum and 7600 maximum. Since these are on the conservative side, it would probably be safe to say that ethnic Khmu[?] presently in North Thailand do not exceed 10,000. Their numbers then would be less than those for Meo, Yao, Karen and Lahu; but they are probably more numerous than either Akha or Lisu. They appear to total about the same as Lua[?].²² I would estimate that of this total, between 800 and 1000 live in a city or town environment.

Assimilative Roles

The Thai stereotype of the Khmu[?] is that of a slow but steady worker, somewhat slow-witted but at the same time honest and loyal. Khmu[?] are said to make good watchmen, gardeners, 'boys' and cooks, and many, apparently content to conform to this stereotype, are found

21) Young, *op. cit.*

22) Comparative figures taken from Young, *op. cit.*

in just such positions where they may have worked years for one family. Others are employed as rent collectors in urban markets, a tribute, apparently, to their reputation for honesty. I have been told repeatedly, by Thai and Europeans alike, that Khmu[?] are easily 'trained'—that they have no self-confidence, no pride, and no initiative. Those who immigrated during the old teak days, in particular, appear at least outwardly to conform to these stereotypes, seeking situations where they can rely on a protector or employer and in which they are required to do little thinking for themselves. Individuals of this type are most often found in urban environments married to Thai women. Their children find jobs in the city, marry other Thai, and pass as *khon myang*—known as *luuk kɔ̃ng* ('half-child') only to those acquainted with their history.

Many find their way into the foothills or come directly to the hills from Laos, and in these areas they are typically employed as mine or plantation labor. Others have settled permanently in hill villages of mixed Thai and Khmu[?] ethnicity, engaged in the picking and processing of wild tea, *miang*. At least two such villages in the hills east of Wiang Pa Pao were reportedly settled first by Khmu[?] with later Thai increments. In other cases, at the Commune Baw and Yao River areas of Changwat Nan, Khmu[?] and Thai are found in mixed villages growing rice by supplementary swiddening on surrounding hillsides.²³ The Khmu[?] or part-Khmu[?] households in these villages resemble those of their Northern Thai neighbors. There is little in the way of house type, furnishings and style of living to distinguish one from the other. In mixed households the husband and wife invariably speak Northern Thai, *kam myang*; a wife of Northern Thai origin rarely knows more than a few words of Khmu[?], and the children even less. Although Khmu[?] men in these Commune Baw villages told me that they hoped to teach their children the old legends, they affirmed in the same breath that they wanted their children to grow up Thai. Among partly assimilated Khmu[?] of this type the old

23) For a detailed survey of swiddening in Commune Baw see Judd, L., 'Dry Rice Agriculture in Northern Thailand,' *Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper* no 52, 1964. Judd's Ph. D. dissertation (Cornell University 1961) contains additional information on the history and socioeconomic characteristics of mixed Khmu[?]-Thai villages in this area.

named, totemic patrisibs, *ta*, although known are no longer functional and the old ceremonies are fast disappearing. Even in a village such as Wang Maw in Commune Baw, in which 18 of 28 houses contain at least one Khmu[?] parent, the language is predominantly *kam myang*. This is true regardless of whether the husband or the wife is Khmu[?]. Even in some households in which both are Khmu[?] (i.e., born in Wang Maw of Khmu[?] parents) the family reportedly speak Northern Thai together. It would appear that the Khmu[?] element in such villages will disappear within another two or three generations. When children of these mixed marriages move to the town or city they may (often successfully) pass as Thai, denying entirely their non-Thai heritage.

Males who have come alone to Thailand within the past 20 years—since World War II—are most often found in urban environments as pedicab drivers or as coolie labor in ice plants, sawmills and rice mills. Those who have married typically have large families of young children. They live precariously in flimsy houses, sometimes crowded together in the compound of a 'patron,' e.g., someone who worked for the old teak firms and associated with Khmu[?]. They may seek release in alcohol and at times find themselves in trouble with the law. They are not as settled as their older compatriots, the holdovers from the old teak days, who may own their own homes or perhaps a shop and who enjoy the respect of the Khmu[?] community and are at least accepted as 'honest Khmu[?]' by the Thai.

Among the newer arrivals the youngsters of 18 or 19 and the young men of 20 or 25—resident in Thailand for a decade or less—appear the least settled of all. Frequently 'caught' in Thailand by the turn of political developments in Laos, they have few remaining ties at home and have not yet put down roots in Thailand. Relatively few are married; they live, often together in groups, on the compounds where they work—gasoline stations, tobacco stations, hotels, and the like.

The Patron Relationship

It is my impression that a good many Khmu[?] situations in northern Thailand are structured around what might be called a patron relationship, whereby an individual subordinates himself to a

person of some wealth or influence in return for a kind of paternalistic care and patronage—ranging from economic security to the making of marital arrangements and provisions for educating children. Khmu[?] of the older type, in particular, appear to seek relationships of this kind, and a single relationship may ramify to include a succession of individuals over a period of several decades. It is not infrequently the case that contemporary residence patterns among Khmu[?], as in Chiangmai, reflect the existence of patron relationships no longer active.

This pattern may represent the adaption of a somewhat similar arrangement in northern Laos, the institution of the *lam*, whereby wealthy or influential Lao acted as middlemen and protectors for populations of hilltribesmen in their trading relations with lowlanders. My informants were unable to confirm this pattern in Laos, but it is mentioned for Khmu[?] north of Luang Prabang by Halpern.²⁴ Alternatively, the patron relationship as I found it may be related to much older patterns of feudal patronage in Thai society.

Marriage

The male Khmu[?] physical type is not markedly different from that of the Northern Thai, particularly those Northern Thai who are themselves by all accounts the result of mixture with an older Austroasiatic stratum, chiefly Lua[?]. That is to say, many Khmu[?] would fall well within the range of the Northern Thai somatotype. The Khmu[?] on the whole have darker skins than the Thai, but there are Thai with skins as dark as most Khmu[?]. Khmu[?] men on the whole appear to vary in stature more than do Thai men as a whole, but again there are many who are well within the Thai average. Khmu[?] faces are characteristically somewhat 'craggy' in appearance, with prominent supraorbital ridges, deep set eyes, heavy cheek bones and rather wide nostrils. But again, these features are present, either singly or in combination, in many rural Thai faces. These considerations have probably contributed to the relative ease with which Khmu[?] and other Mon-Khmer speakers have intermarried with Thai, and the impressive number of such unions over the years. It would

24) Halpern, 'Trade Patterns in Northern Laos', *op. cit.*

also seem a reasonable supposition that the Khmu[?] genotype, when mixed with that of the Northern Thai, would produce offspring more 'Thai' in appearance than would, for example, that of a Meo-Northern Thai intermarriage.

Given this relative similarity of physical type, it follows that there are Khmu[?] who, if dressed in Thai costume, could pass on first inspection as Thai. The real test, and the one actually used by most Northern Thai, is that of language, i. e., degree of accent and knowledge of stereotyped speech patterns. Most males among Khmu[?] and other hill tribes speak some Northern Thai, but usually with an easily detectable accent. The Thai ear is keenly attuned to slight differences and nuances in speech and many of the standard ethnic jokes poke fun at the person's accent or misuse of words. The Thai enjoy playing with words and with double meanings—most of which is lost on the tribesman who knows only market Thai. But there are Khmu[?] who, if they learn *kam myang* sufficiently well, can relatively easily pass as *khon myang*. And the children of Khmu[?] men married to Northern Thai women invariably grow up speaking Northern Thai at home and with their peers—usually children of Thai or part-Thai parentage.

Immigrant Khmu[?] married to Thai women tend to marry somewhat outside the normal Thai pattern. Their wives are very often girls who have left their own families or whose parents are no longer living—girls who have migrated into urban centers to find work and who live (like the Khmu[?]) within the compound of the family or firm employing them. In about 10 per cent of my cases the girl's parents (either one or both) are non-Thai, e. g., Karen, Haw Chinese, Khmu[?]. However, cases of intermarriage among descendants of Khmu[?] are relatively rare. As a result of this marriage pattern most families live neolocally, i. e., apart from the families of either the husband or wife. Moreover the wife's family is frequently poor or far away and visiting back and forth rare or completely absent. As a result the children of such marriages are not normally reared within an extended family milieu—as is the case with many Northern Thai

marriages where the couple live near or with the wife's parents. Intensive research within a sample of such households would be needed in order to state with any degree of assurance the meaning of this pattern for the psychocultural development of offspring, and whether assimilation necessarily takes place more or less rapidly under such circumstances. The influence of the Thai wife in a situation of this kind may in fact be even stronger than it is normally. Presumably a naturally strong personality, when thrown on its own in this fashion, would react with assertiveness and vigor.

The Desire to Emigrate

The fact that Khmu[?] males do leave their home villages is well established. There are probably a number of reasons, some of them undoubtedly interrelated, for this observed phenomenon. It may be, for example, that this pattern is not unrelated to the *pai thiaw* pattern among Tai-speaking lowlanders²⁵ whereby young men before marriage go off seeking wage labor or simply to have fun and 'see the world.' The desire for fun and adventure was also a motivating factor in a number of the life histories I collected among Khmu[?] immigrant males in North Thailand. From this standpoint the emigration of young men could be regarded as at least in part an expression of a cultural pattern learned in Laos by association with Lao, Lue and other lowland Tai speakers. However, I am inclined to think that there may be additional explanations for this emigrating tendency among Khmu[?]. I would mention two in particular:

Ecological and cultural correlates of intermediate zone occupation

The Laos Khmu[?], like most other Mon-Khmer tribes, occupy an intermediate zone of low forested hills, above the plains-dwelling Lao and Lue but below the mountain-dwelling Miao and Yao. This is by all accounts an ecologically disadvantageous zone, a prime breeder of malaria vectors and a poor area for agriculture due to

25) For a discussion of *pai thiaw* in northeastern Thailand, see Kirsch, A.T.: 'Development and Mobility among the Phu Thai of Northeast Thailand,' Paper read at the Annual Meeting, Association for Asian Studies, New York 1966.

dense jungle regrowth and the ravages of insect pests and animals. Culturally, it may be considered a primary contact zone—the meeting place of lowland traders going up into the hills and mountain peoples coming down to the plains. Considerable mobility and contact of diverse ethnic groups characterize this zone, particularly during the dry season; and culture contact and the need to communicate for purposes of trade fosters multi-lingualism. This diversity and intensity of outside stimuli might be supposed over time to have contributed to cultural fragmentation and a certain loss of cultural identity—thus predisposing these intermediate zone inhabitants to the adoption of alien values and to migration out of their ecologically disadvantageous habitat to the plains below—where they undergo rapid absorption by dominant lowlanders such as the Lue and Lao.

Disruption of indigenous culture patterns

The Khmu² cultural inventory was presumably at one time richer than it appears in many areas today. Judging from what informants were able to tell me, the indigenous culture pattern south of the Nam Tha resembles strongly that of the Lamet in the same general area. Prominent in both cultures is a socioeconomic ritual complex involving status mobility through acquisition of wealth and an attempt to control wealth by marriage within related families. The desire for wealth—in order to contract an advantageous marriage, achieve status as a 'wealthy man,' and honor the family ancestors in periodic sacrificial feasts and ceremonies—motivates a large segment of behavior in both Khmu² and Lamet.

It is possible that this traditional pattern was undergoing disruptive changes, or was experiencing the culmination of a series of such changes, about the time that the teak industry expanded in North Thailand with a consequent demand for immigrant labor. The gradual expansion of the Lao northward, the coming of the French, increasing contacts with Thailand, the gradual introduction of a money economy, changes in traditional trading patterns, new markets and lessened demand for traditional products from the hills—all these could have had a disruptive effect on the old patterns whereby new wealth was brought into the system. As a result young men, in

particular, were motivated to go outside in search of new sources of wealth with which to return and participate effectively in the traditional and expected fashion. Certain it is that in the 1930's Izikowitz found Lamet young men eager to go to Thailand to earn money with which to purchase bronze drums and other forms of wealth; and my Khmu² life histories collected in Thailand contain many references to precisely this same behavior, similarly motivated.

In summary, the study of Khmu² culture presents a number of challenging problems—in the field of ethnohistory as well as the dynamics of culture contact and acculturation—meriting more attention from ethnographers and ethnologists than it has thus far received. Their scattered and marginal situation in a war-torn land would certainly place the Khmu² high on the list of 'fast disappearing cultures' deserving of more intensive field work.

