



# Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden

Newsletter Nr. 1 - July 2010

## PHA TAD KE - THE CLIFF TO UNTIE AND RESOLVE

Who would have thought that a one-week holiday in Laos would lead to me moving to the other side of the world, to a country I had never visited, a culture I did not know, to take up a fascinating challenge in a discipline totally new to me. And here I am, in Luang Prabang, one of the most enchanting places one can have the privilege to live, working with great people to discover and chart a fascinating flora, to build the first Botanical Garden of Laos. We want to share with this first newsletter of the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden some of these wonders and the fun we are having, and we hope that you will be able to contribute to our adventure, and help us to plant the seeds for a better future, for Laos and for all our children.

Rik Gadella, General Director Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden



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Big thanks to our volunteer collaborators, and if anyone is interested to write  
articles or help us with occasional translations please let us know.  
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## **Dear Friends,**

*We are happy to present you with the first Newsletter of the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden in Luang Prabang, Laos. For those of you who don't know our project yet please allow me to introduce ourselves in these pages to you. We hope that our project will interest you and we will bring in our future Newsletters updates about the progress in the Garden and articles about the Flora as well as the Culture & Arts of Laos.*

## **Our Mission**

To create the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden, the first botanical garden in Lao PDR. A regional research centre capable of collaborating with existing botanical institutions in Southeast Asia, Europe and the USA to install the first comprehensive collection of living Lao PDR plants in- and ex-situ for research, educational and leisure purposes.

## **Our Objectives**

- To collect, research and conserve a comprehensive collection of Lao plants
- To create and maintain a botanical garden with in and ex situ collections of Lao plants for the general public as well as research facilities and logistical support for visiting scientists
- To promote sustainable ecological preservation and development in Lao PDR and internationally through extensive research, education, communication and resource building

- To assist NGO's in the planning and development of their activities and to act as an intermediary with Lao PDR governmental agencies
- Capacity building by financing education of Lao students in horticulture and botanic studies

## **Schedule**

2008 Launch of Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden Project on our site outside Luang Prabang

2010 Beginning of the collaboration with Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh on the training and practice of Horticultural staff and the fieldwork collecting programme

2011 When the staff accommodation and research facilities are finished, we will open the Garden for special research projects and receive in situ researchers and work students

2011 Opening education centre with special training courses on botany, horticulture etc.

2012 We will start to receive groups with school children as well as special interest tours

2014 Fully open to the general public with our Garden and all Guest Facilities

## **Location**

Since its inscription in 1995 on the UNESCO World Heritage list, the city of Luang Prabang, the old capital of Laos, has seen its number of visitors grow from 20.000 to over 200.000 a year.

Luang Prabang is a unique example of Southeast Asian

traditional urban settlement and the need to preserve its cultural heritage, historical monuments and social structure has captured international attention. With the creation of the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden, situated on the Mekong River, fifteen minutes by boat from the city centre, we want to add another element to this exceptional site. Formerly the hunting grounds for the Vice-Roy of Luang Prabang, our Botanical Garden is situated at the foot of the Pha Tad Ke cliff.

## **Visit**

Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden will offer the visitor the possibility to discover the botanical riches of Lao PDR in a setting conceived for tranquillity and a moment of relaxation. The botanical, cultural, symbolic and medical properties possessed by these plants and trees will be featured in a beautifully landscaped setting. Specialized publications, general information and a restaurant will be available for the visitor. Our own boat will take you from Luang Prabang to the garden for a visit that can be done in a few hours, up to a whole day.

Internationally acclaimed artists and architects will be invited to collaborate with Pha Tad Ke in order to create unique works. These will serve to re-enforce the Garden's visual identity in all of its communications and fundraising endeavours.

## **Research and Grants**

During the first five years of its creation and installation when the garden will not yet be open to the general public

we will organize multi-disciplinary international meetings: plant research, horticultural training, ethno-botany, conservation and environmental education will be the featured subjects to train local staff as well as promote cooperation with other institutions.

### Scientific Staff

The general objective is to create an open structured research facility under the direction of our own scientific staff and the heading of well-established botanists. A very important part of our budget is dedicated to capacity building and we wish that Pha Tad Ke will train and employ local staff and in the future be run by Lao staff entirely. We see that as "mission critical"

### Collections

An extensive collection and conservation programme in collaboration with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh will enable botanists to do research in situ. The garden will feature several special interest collections of endemic plants and conduct research on wild plant reintroduction and habitat restoration. We want to focus attention in our collection on endemic plants as well as their traditional use in medicine, ceremonies, vernacular building, cooking and handicraft etc. Rapid urbanization threatens the loss of a large body of traditional knowledge and in close cooperation with ethno-botanists we want to make an index of amongst others local medicinal plants and their usage before this knowledge is lost forever.

### Education and Publishing Programs

With our staff we will develop programs for visiting school children to make them aware of the ecological problems and how on a very practical level they can contribute. They will spend an entire day in our garden and at the end of the day receive a book to take home.

Collaborations and education programs with horticultural schools and universities will be developed as well as study grants made available for Lao graduate students to study abroad.

Our own publication department will develop books for children and the general public as well as scientific publications, study material and information material for ecological consciousness.

### Community Outreach

Pha Tad Ke will create for the local population new employment opportunities, and increased visitor revenues.

Further more 2% of our budget has been designated for social outreach programs for the surrounding villages such as school building and healthcare.

For further information: [contact@amis-pha-tad-ke.com](mailto:contact@amis-pha-tad-ke.com)

Launched in January 2010, the Association of Friends of Pha Tad Ke (a French non profit organization) was founded to support the creation of the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden. The garden is currently in the creation phase and will open its doors in five years. In order to support us during this phase we would like to invite you to become a Friend of the Garden.

We have set up a sponsoring system so that Friends can contribute to specific projects that are close to their hearts.

Sponsoring Pha Tad Ke will allow you to follow the day-to-day evolution of the garden, look behind the scenes of its operations and participate in the Pha Tad Ke adventure.

*Hugues de Saint Simon, President  
Albane de Chatellus, Treasurer  
Rik Gadella, Secretary*

**To become a Friend of Pha Tad Ke, send your subscription via our website [www.amis-pha-tad-ke.com](http://www.amis-pha-tad-ke.com):**

Using Paypal online payment or a bankcard.

By bank transfer: HSBC-France Code BIC: CCFRFRPP  
Payable to 'Amis de Pha Tad Ke'

Account N°: FR76 3005 6009 4909 4900 0885 363

By French check, payable to 'Amis de Pha Tad Ke' and sent to: Amis de Pha Tad Ke: 22, rue Barrault, 75003 Paris.

**Amis de Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden**  
(Association Loi 1901)  
Office: 22, rue Barrault, 75013 Paris, France

**Launched in 2010, the Friends of Pha Tad Ke Association was founded to support the creation of Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden.**

**When you become a member for the creation phase, your 5-year (2010-2014) membership will entitle you to:**

**Member - € 100:**

- Our newsletter (3 times a year, english/french) contains news about the garden, on-going work and actions, and articles about the flora, arts and culture of Laos.

**Friend Member - € 300:**

- Private visit to PTK, including boat trip and picnic (for 2 pax, booking required)
- A 30% reduction on the garden's publications and products (except Folies)
- Access to our favored travel agent in Laos, reductions on hotels and restaurants etc. (see list of the partners of the Friends)
- Mention of your name on our website
- An invitation for two people to the official opening.

**Support Member - Institutions & Companies - € 2,000:**

- Mention of your name on our website with your logo
- Discount of 10% on one of our editions « Folies »
- A private reception at the pre-opening for a group from your institution/company.

**Donor Member - € 5,000 €, or more:**

- Discount of 10% on two of our editions « Folies »
- Inclusion of your name on the donor plaque at the entrance to the garden.

**Members can increase their involvement in the creation of Pha Tad Ke by supporting one or more of our individual projects:**

**• Adopt a tree: from € 50 to € 2,000**

Buying and planting a tree is only a beginning. It must then be fed, cared for and pruned. This takes time, money and care. Love your tree and adopt a seedling or a mature tree.

**• Sponsor a Bookparty: € 400**

Guided visits to the gardens for groups of children or students, who will spend a day learning about Pha Tad Ke's work and plants. The package includes transport to the garden and lunch. At the end of the day, every participant will receive a copy of our specially published books.

**• Sponsor a student: € 4,400 for 4 years**

In conjunction with three institutions, PTK has set up a grant for the best first-year student. At the end of the first year of study, the winning student will be offered a scholarship that will allow him or her to continue his or her studies. In exchange, the recipient will be required to do a two-month work placement at the garden during summer recesses and to work at the garden for one year at the end of his/her studies.

**• Sponsor a research post: € 1,800 for one year**

Given the heavy workload at the university and the very low salaries in Laos, there is little time left for building research projects. With this grant PTK will enable a post doc to do a year's research on a topic chosen in consultation with PTK.

**• Sponsor a field trip: € 10,000**

In conjunction with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, we have set up a three-year partnership to train our horticultural team and to carry out an ambitious program of monthly field trips to gather specimens for a collection of living plants that will be unique in Laos. At the same time we will collect specimens for a herbarium. Each trip will require a substantial investment in time and money but this work is imperative as it will form the very foundations of our garden and its collections.

**• Sponsor a building: from € 15,000**

Several buildings will be required to house our collections and staff, and provide facilities for visitors.

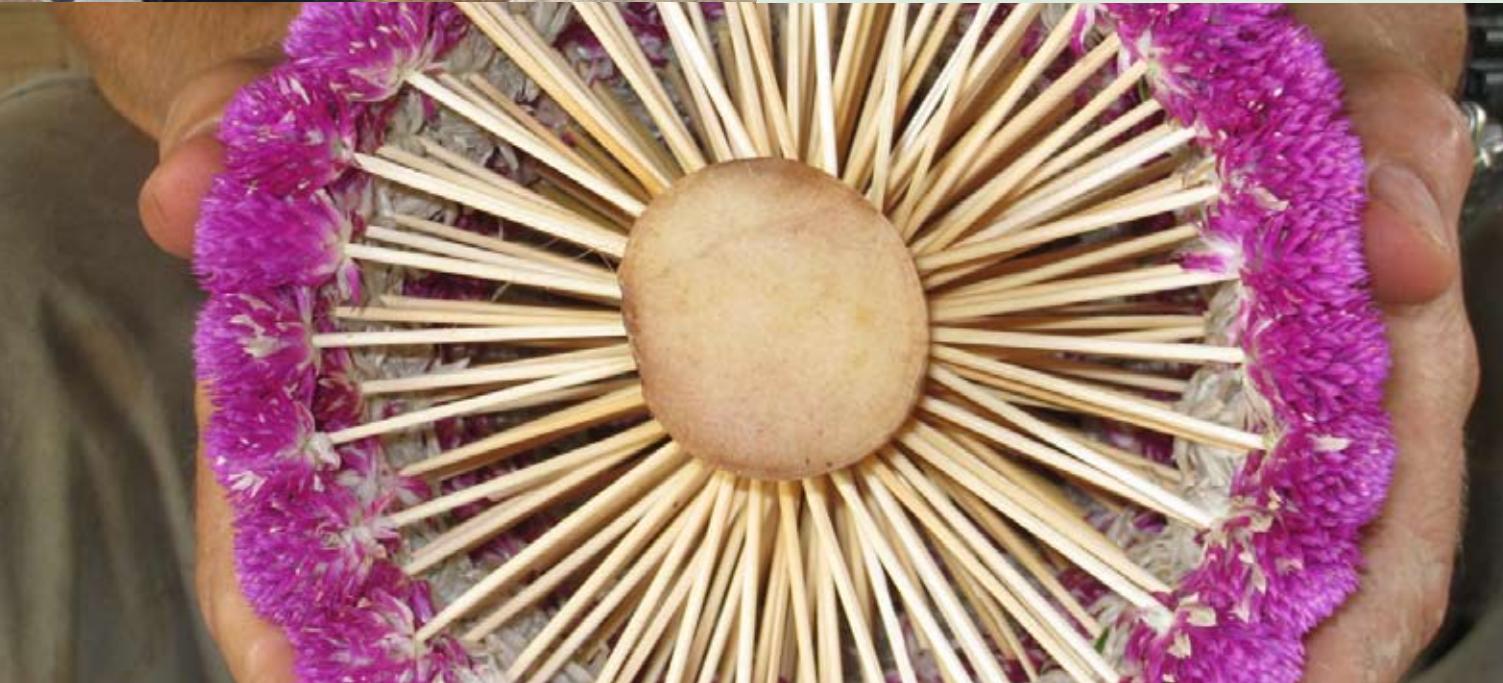
These buildings will include: Nurseries (€ 15,000), Orchid House (€ 27,000), Butterfly Farm (€ 32,000), Reception area (€95,000), Restaurant (€ 95,000), offices for research staff (€ 130,000), Traditional Medicines House (€ 135,000) and Library and Herbarium (€ 190,000).



Traditional flower arrangements with the  
Dok Sampi (*Gomphrena globosa*).  
Made for the Amantaka Hotel by Pha Tad Ke Staff,  
concept and training by Nithakhong Somsanith.

Each bouquet has over 1200 flowers,  
and takes 3 to 4 hours to make.

Traditionally they were presented by students  
at the beginning of the new year to  
honour their teachers.





Construction of the new school in  
Ban Chan Village with financial support from  
Pha Tad Ke, and the children and parents of the  
Kingma School in the Netherlands.



With the generous support of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, two of their staff, Leigh Morris & Steve Scott, visited for one month to consult and give the first introduction course on Practical Horticulture. Teachers from the Northern Agricultural College were invited to participate as well.

April/May 2010

Signing of the first  
Memorandum of Understanding concerning  
the Pha Tad Ke Scholarship  
with NUoL - The National University of Laos.  
Vientiane, January 2010



Fieldtrip for collecting plant material  
with Steve Scott from RBGE.

In 2011 a three year collecting program will start  
to constitute the living collections and Herbarium  
of the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden.

May 2010



Training on Orchid Propagation  
by Prof. Dr. Bouakhaykhone Svengsouka,  
scientific advisor of Pha Tad Ke.  
May 2010



Fieldtrip to the Hmong village Longlan  
to study the medicinal plants.  
One of the important special themes in  
Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden will be dedicated  
to medicinal plants.  
We would like to start an extensive ethno botanic  
research program in 2011 on their usage.  
January & May 2010

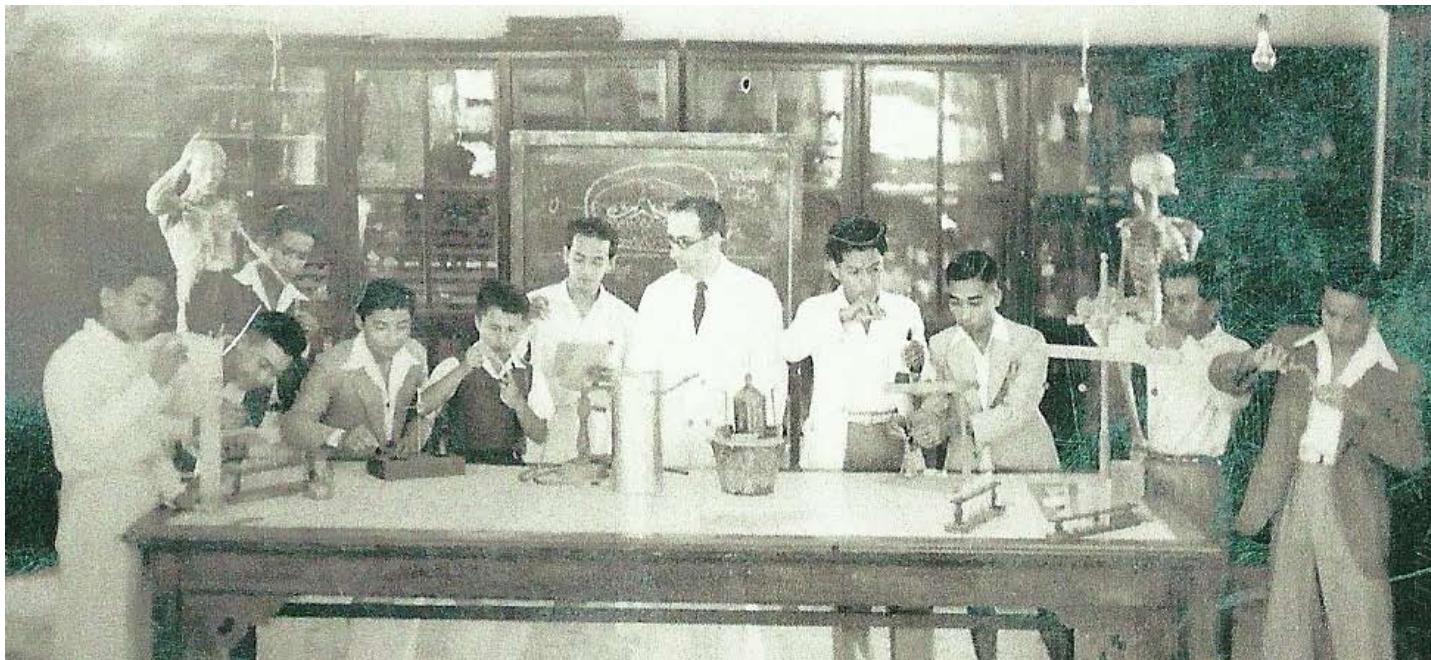


## FOR LAOS, YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW

I arrived in February 1948 to take up a position as professor in Vientiane at the Lycee Pavie (actually the School of Medicine). I had already had some experience of Indochina, having taught at the Lycee Khai Dinh in Hue, Viet Nam from 1939 to 1945 and I began to take an interest in the local flora and vegetation.

During this period, I also spent nearly six months in Laos during the French-Siamese War, from January to June 1941. Recalled to military life, I was assigned to Camp Sepone after Muang Phalane, and I went twice a week in a truck to re-provision advance posts along the Mekong. It was there that

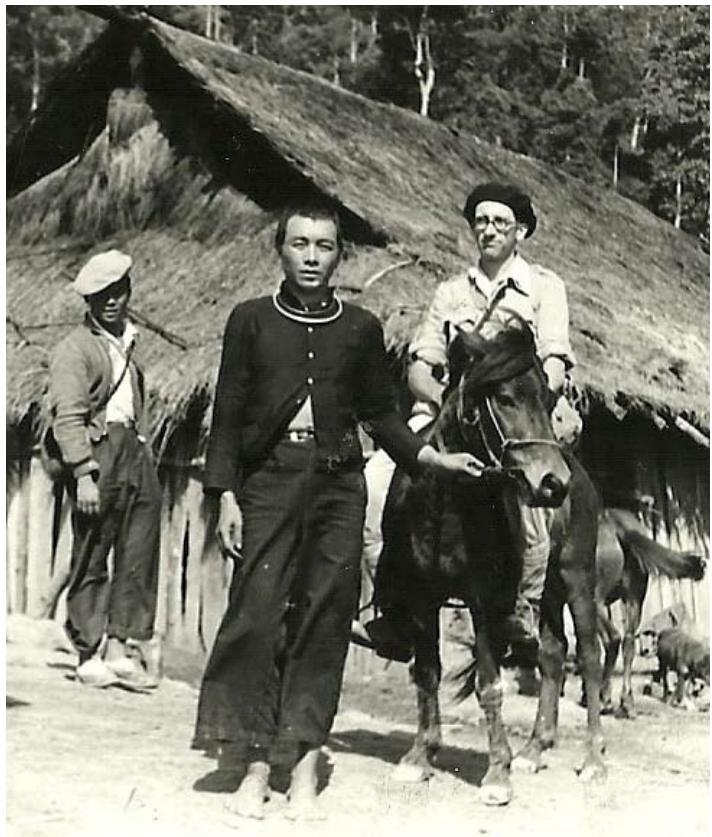
I first discovered the vast extent of the open Dipterocarpus forests and also, closer to the Mekong, between Savannakhet and Thakhek, the dark, dense, wet jungles. I could not simply admire the vegetation without knowing more about it, but I did my utmost therefore to find the time to have a closer look and the chance to record my observations with drawings, not having a camera. At the start of the rainy season the floor of the forest became verdant and covered with flowers of many colours, which did not fail to attract my attention and spark my interest. The Japanese invasion on the 9 March 1945, succeeded in putting an end to this long Indochinese sojourn.



In the forest around Nam Ngum, 1974  
Lycée Pavie in Vientiane, November 1948

When I returned to Saigon in January 1948, after a long period of study in France, I hoped to convince the Institute for Agronomic Research to let me undertake a study of the botany of Indochina, but the necessities of teaching in Laos did not allow for this assignment and took my career in another direction.

Hmong village in Ban Diay, on the road to Phou Bia, April 1949



At this time, an assignment in Laos was considered hardly desirable and appeared to be somewhat adventurous compared to the comfort of the towns of Vietnam or Cambodia.

After an uncomfortable trip in a Junker military aircraft, I landed in a charming small town dotted with gardens and surrounded by villages of wooden houses on poles, drowned in the green of coconut and betel nut palms. There was almost no motorized traffic; only bicycles and samlors moved silently along the shady roads. For a lover of exotic plants, this first contact was promising. Naturally the accommodation was far from luxurious - two or three sparsely furnished rooms on the ground floor of a large house occupied by the other professors, situated across from an old generator, powered, I believe, only by charcoal that gave us a pale, flickering light at the end of the day.

My teaching duties were made easier by the classes, which were relatively small but included many bright and attentive students. For Natural Science I fastened on the idea of choosing examples from the flora and fauna or the rocks of the surrounding countryside, and, for physics, I enlivened my lessons with experiments, which were often rather enjoyable and even dangerous. Some of the older students can still remember a violent explosion following a synthesis of water in an eudiometer where I had made a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen which exploded at the first spark. Another time the creation of and work with suffocating gases like chlorine, sulphurous anhydride or nauseating sulphuric gases meant the temporary abandonment of the classroom.

During my free time I drove around the countryside on my bicycle, most often with my interpreter and friend Maurice

Camsing. During the Christmas and Easter holidays, I extended my explorations to the north (the region of Luang Prabang, Xieng Khuang) and to the south, (Thakhek, Savannaket, Pakse). Thus, after a 30-month stay, I had gathered enough materials and herbarium specimens for a university doctoral thesis, which I presented in Toulouse in 1951 during my regular leave in France, which was titled "Some Aspects of the Vegetation of Laos".

But I still had to pursue more research with an eye to writing a State Thesis. That is why, during my second stay in Laos from October 1951 to May 1954, I completed my documentation and my exploration of the land. Once back in France, I was able to be transferred to the National Centre for Scientific Research to draft my State Thesis, which I presented in 1958. Since then, my career as a researcher was defined and confirmed by my appointment to the Museum of Natural History in Paris to contribute to the compilation of the flora of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam and to take over in 1970 as the head. Laos, in the form of the herbarium, was there before me, so I did not have as much need to return there. So I made only short research trips there in 1965, 1971, 1974, and 1994.

My observations of the ecology, vegetation and flora of Laos have mainly been reported in my State Thesis "Vegetation of Laos", in "Useful Plants of Laos", and in "Common Names of Plants in Use in Laos".

These basic works had to be revised once they were completed. I busied myself with preparing a third edition of "Common Names", a work which turned out to be much appreciated in Laos since it allowed for the identification of a great number of plants even though the identification would never be really



Ethnobotanic interview with Mrs. Bouakhaykhone, 1994

certain without the careful examination of the plant and consultation with flora specialists.

Retirement has not interrupted the interest I have in the knowledge of the flora of Indochina and its applications. I continue to spend time at the laboratory of Phanerogamie at the Museum of Paris where I maintain a voluntary position of advisor and organizer for the publication in instalments of the Flora of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, work that comprises a fundamental basis of botanical, ecological and ethno-botanical and economic data. Thanks to the collections gathered at the Herbarium of Paris, it is possible to continue this work, but it is to be hoped that now, contributors from Indochina will become involved in the collection of specimens on the ground as well as for the compilation at the laboratory. I work with those French organizations which are able to financially

support this work to make them aware of this kind of bilateral cooperation, but it is necessary also that competent bodies in each of these three countries show their interest in this scientific inventory of the vegetation resources of the Indochinese peninsula.

For those with an interest in Laos, one can rejoice that a scientific Lao lady, Mme. Svengsuksa, has been able, after many periods of stay in France at the Museum of natural History, and ecological research in the countryside under the auspices of Lao authorities, to undertake a doctoral thesis of a very high quality, which is published by the Committee of Cooperation with Laos.

In terms of the general, forest and medicinal botany there is still much to be done. That is why, after having dedicated a part of my life to the scientific education of the youth of Laos, and make my contribution to a better understanding of ecological conditions, flora and vegetation of Laos, I can only strive to ensure that this will continue and, for this, to dedicate my experience and my efforts to this common scientific endeavour.

*Prof. J. E. Vidal*

*Translation by Suzy Young*

*Professor Vidal is an honorary member of the Friends of Pha Tad Ke*

The flora of Lao PDR is one of the least known in Asia. Although it was revised in the *Flore générale de l'Indochine* (Lecomte 1907–1950) and is being revised again in the *Flore du Cambodge, du Laos et du Viêtnam* (Aubréville 1960–present), neither of these projects has treated Laos independently. Both these studies group the flora of Laos with that of its neighbours, and the great majority of specimens cited are from Vietnam where botanical collecting has always been more intensive. The earliest botanical collectors in Laos were French. Clovis Thorel was the first to make a significant contribution, collecting along the Mekong in southern and central Laos from 1866–1868. He was followed by Jules Harmand who also worked mainly in the south in the 1870s. These pioneers were followed by Henri D'Orléans (1892, in northern Laos), Clément Dupuy (1900, around Luang Prabang) and Jean-Baptiste Counillon (1909, along the Mekong). The most prolific collector in the 20th century was Eugène Poilane who worked in various provinces of Laos from the 1920s–40s. At the same time Camille Joseph Spire was collecting in Xiengkhouang. In the 50's and 60's collections were made by Jules Vidal, Pierre Tixier and Allen D. Kerr. Starting around 1990, Lao botanists began to intensify their study of the flora, often in cooperation with foreign scientists. They have contributed to accounts of families for the *Flore du Cambodge, du Laos et du Viêtnam* and several broadly based forestry projects with a taxonomic component, such as the DANIDA funded *Lao Tree Seed Project* (LTSP).

## CHRONIQUES PAR CATHERINE CHORON-BAIX

Compte-rendu de : Richard Pottier

Yû dî mî hêng, « être bien, avoir de la force »

Essai sur les pratiques thérapeutiques Lao.

Paris, EFEQ, Monographie 192.

En rassemblant dans cet essai des données recueillies à la fin des années 1960 au Laos, Richard Pottier se livre à un exercice peu banal. L'essentiel de la matière de son ouvrage fut en effet collecté entre 1967 et 1970, alors qu'il séjournait à Luang Prabang et se formait auprès de spécialistes des pratiques médicinales de l'ancienne capitale royale. Entre l'enquête et le travail d'écriture, trente ans se sont écoulés. Trente ans de profonds changements dans un pays passé, en avril 1975, de la monarchie à l'instauration d'une république démocratique populaire et engagé depuis peu dans l'économie de marché mondiale. Trente ans, aussi, d'une lente maturation pour l'auteur, qui s'interroge tout au long de ce livre sur les temporalités et les finalités de l'entreprise ethnographique.

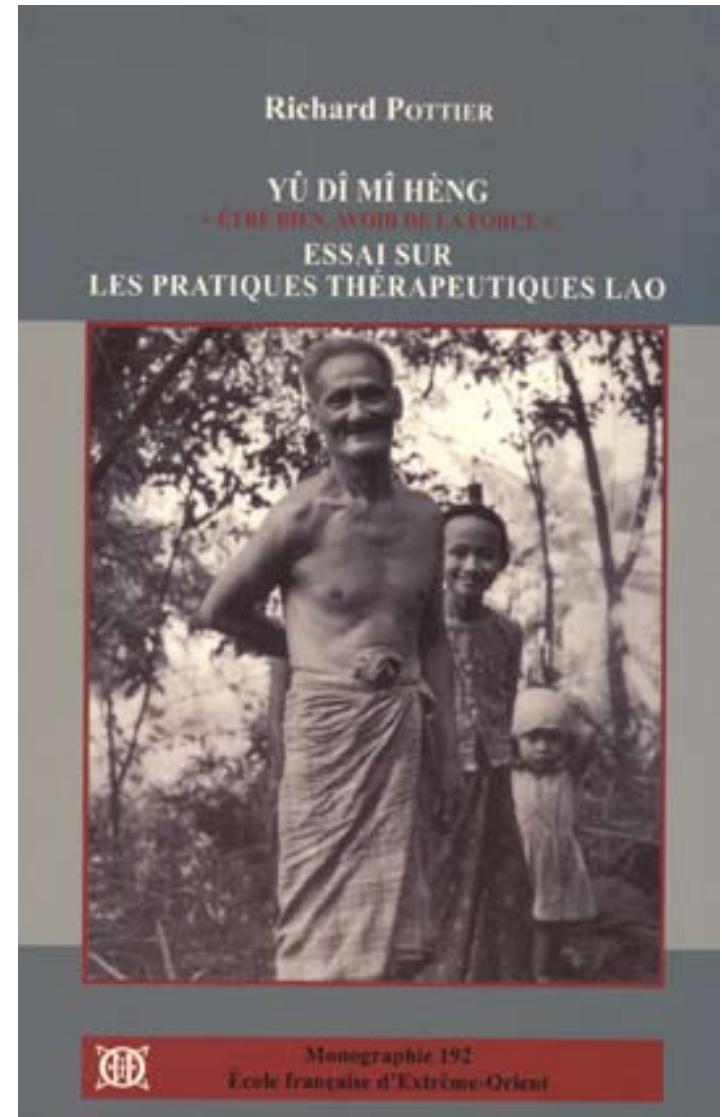
Tous les mo ya, ces maîtres auprès desquels il s'était initié, ont aujourd'hui disparu, et aucun ethnologue travaillant de nos jours au Laos ne verra ce qu'il a vu, note Richard Pottier (page 101). Les matériaux ethnographiques sont datés, rappelle-t-il, et ceux qu'il expose ici tout particulièrement. Ils doivent, pour cette raison, être précisément restitués dans l'espace-temps de leur collecte, son journal de terrain constituant, bien sûr, la source première à laquelle il puise.

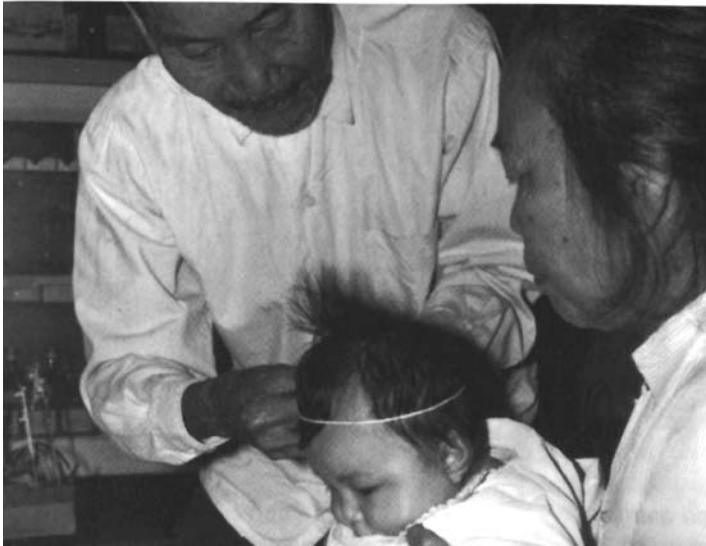
Retour sur le passé, le livre est aussi un retour sur soi de l'ethnologue, qui s'efforce de justifier et discuter ses modes de

recueil et d'analyse des données. Dans cette perspective, et afin que le lecteur découvre en même temps que les faits observés la manière dont ils l'ont été, celui-ci se met lui-même en scène, et prend en compte sa propre subjectivité dans la conduite de l'enquête puis dans la phase d'interprétation. Considérant par ailleurs que toute description se prête à une généralisation potentiellement abusive, il prend soin de toujours définir le contexte des faits commentés, et privilégie les études de cas – notamment au chapitre Deux – pour construire son argumentation. Ces choix de narration, conjugués à l'usage du présent ethnographique, donnent aux situations relatées un regain de réalité et à l'ouvrage un rythme soutenu, fait de rebondissements et d'effets de suspense qui en rendent la lecture particulièrement captivante.

Sans en être le centre, les considérations épistémologiques et méthodologiques traversent donc de part en part ce livre, témoin, il est vrai, d'une expérience singulière, due à cet important décalage entre le temps de l'enquête et celui de la restitution, d'écriture de l'ethnologie.

Richard Pottier ne cède cependant jamais aux aspects convenus du débat sur cette question. Loin du discours postmoderne et de ses dérives, son approche est d'abord pragmatique, et d'une sobriété qui est la marque de son rapport à son objet. Sa démarche se veut explicite, et le compte-rendu de ses observations des plus rigoureux, concourant par là à démythifier un monde souvent fantasmé dans l'imaginaire collectif, celui des guérisseurs, médiums, chamanes et autres « tradi-thérapeutes ». La recension minutieuse des rituels thérapeutiques, des compo-





sitions et prescriptions des remèdes, des procédures d'initiation, dont le détail figure systématiquement en annexe des chapitres, dans des textes en version bilingue lao-français, offre une somme de données empiriques unique sur un domaine très méconnu de la société lao. Les matériaux consignés sont considérables. Ils revêtent, pour une communauté dotée de savoirs thérapeutiques d'une grande complexité et appelée à composer de plus en plus avec la biomédecine importée d'Occident, une authentique valeur patrimoniale. Ils ont aussi une portée anthropologique qui va bien au-delà des frontières lao.

Dans un premier chapitre qui campe l'arrière-plan religieux auquel se rattache la tradition médicale lao, Richard Pottier rappelle les modalités de coexistence du fonds animiste propre aux populations T'ai et du bouddhisme theravadin officiellement adopté au XIVème siècle au Laos par une monarchie désormais centralisée. Il analyse le rapport des hommes aux différentes catégories de génies, les phi, sur le modèle des relations sociales (pages 19 et 20), puis, afin de s'acheminer vers la question de l'interprétation de la maladie, s'attache à décrypter les notions de sujet et de destin, dans un bouddhisme « ordinaire » où se mêlent la croyance en la métémpsychose, une « ontologie récusant la notion de substance » et un poly-psychisme issu du « substrat autochtone » commun à l'ensemble des sociétés d'Asie du Sud-est. Cette partie introductive reprend de la sorte l'analyse classique du système religieux lao composé de différentes strates, concluant un peu

Thit Sut measures the head of the baby to cut the *thién vien hua* candle  
The *kathong* that contains the offerings for the spirits

hâtivement à « un syncrétisme entre la culture indo-khmère et l'ancienne culture t'ai qui s'est plus souvent traduit par une juxtaposition des notions et des croyances que par une véritable synthèse » (page 50). Un examen critique des processus d'acculturation dans l'aire sud-est asiatique et une discussion de concepts aussi généraux et vagues que ceux de substrat ou de syncrétisme auraient ici été bienvenus, tout comme l'aurait été l'éclairage d'auteurs plus contemporains que R.H. Lowie sur l'hétérogénéité et l'interpénétration des composantes culturelles et religieuses à travers le monde et l'histoire. Il reste que l'argument du politique et de la polarisation public/privé des rites lao invoqué par Richard Pottier pour expliquer l'acceptation par le bouddhisme de croyances qui lui sont antérieures est tout à fait convaincant et apporte un certain nombre de clés pour appréhender la suite de sa démonstration.

Le chapitre Deux entre dans le vif du sujet en reconstituant un parcours thérapeutique individuel qui permet d'explorer l'explication indigène de « l'événement-maladie », et de suivre différentes séquences du traitement. Dans l'itinéraire de soins de Thit Can Dî, ce patient gravement atteint qui finalement décède de son mal, plusieurs ordres de pensée sont mobilisés, où se côtoient les apports pré-bouddhiques et bouddhiques. Parmi les diagnostics posés par les thérapeutes consultés, le « karma de rancune » kam ven, qui renvoie au ressentiment de l'esprit d'un défunt offensé devenu potentiel auteur de la maladie, est sans doute l'une des manifestations les plus évidentes de ce complexe interprétatif. A travers cette étude de cas, Richard Pottier met à jour la diversité et la complémentarité plus que la concurrence des recours thérapeutiques et leur possible

compatibilité avec la biomédecine. Il fait en outre la démonstration du « pouvoir » très relatif des mo et de la plasticité de la relation au sacré et au rituel des Lao, patients et thérapeutes. Pour ceux-ci, écrit-il, « l'important est de cumuler toutes les chances possibles de guérison, et non pas de déterminer quel est le « vrai » diagnostic » (page 452).

S'engageant ensuite dans l'analyse systématique des pratiques lao, il étudie tour à tour les catégories nosologiques et les différentes classes de spécialistes, depuis les mo ya, maîtres-ès remèdes, et les mo mōn, maîtres-ès formules, jusqu'aux mo ke khao, exorciseurs de la malchance, dont il décrit les modalités d'initiation. La richesse et la précision de sa documentation soulignent l'extrême sophistication des savoirs de ces thérapeutes, dont la connaissance des simples, par exemple, comprend jusqu'à la prescription des jours de la semaine, voire des moments de la journée, favorables à leur collecte.

Suit une réflexion sur la conception lao du pouvoir thérapeutique, placé sous la protection des Trois Joyaux du bouddhisme, mais également lié à l'efficace des incantations et des talismans et nourri de la relation avec des génies auxiliaires régulièrement honorés.

Les chapitres V et VI sont respectivement consacrés à la médecine des remèdes, celle des mo ya, puis à celle des rituels, celle des mo mōn, que Richard Pottier distingue en raison de leurs représentations divergentes des causes de la maladie tout en montrant les recoulements. Pour les mo ya, la maladie résulte d'un désordre organique et se traite par l'administration de remèdes, tandis que les autres mo la comprennent comme le produit d'une infortune, d'une agression ou d'une faute né-

cessitant l'effectuation de rituels de formes diverses, propitiattoires, exorcistes, faisant appel à des références multiples, t'ai et bouddhiques, indo-khmères, astrologiques.

En une sorte de synthèse conclusive, le dernier chapitre revient sur la question du sens de la maladie, inscrite cette fois dans une vue anthropologique large. Après un tour d'horizon de la littérature ethnologique sur le savoir médical, Richard Pottier revient sur la double dimension, subjective et sociale, de la maladie, et propose, en prenant pour critère la nature de l'agent causal, une typologie des schémas étiologiques retenus par les thérapeutes lao. Pour ces derniers, la maladie peut être sanction, effet du karma, agression, marque du destin ou désordre organique, ces différentes catégories pouvant se chevaucher ou se cumuler, signe de la profusion des ressources symboliques et cognitives dont ils disposent pour interpréter les troubles dont ils ont à connaître. Chacun de ces schémas étiologiques assigne à la maladie une signification axiologique et au malade une position de coupable ou de victime qui déterminent la nature de la cure et des rites à accomplir et peuvent, selon l'auteur, se lire en termes psychanalytiques. La maladie est expression d'une névrose, manifestation d'un conflit intérieur, expression de la culpabilité du patient comme de son entourage. A l'intérieur de cette typologie, la distinction entre la médecine des remèdes et celle des rituels demeure toutefois essentielle. La première, en effet, s'intéresse au corps et au vécu du malade, la seconde, à l'inverse, vise à restaurer l'unité du sujet et à réaffirmer la norme. « Dans les thérapies symboliques, écrit R. Pottier, aucune attention n'est plus prêtée aux symptômes, et le corps devient un pur signifiant du moi » (page 475). La maladie est

conçue comme une « menace narcissique » dont l'origine est une remise en question de l'axiologie collective à laquelle les pratiques thérapeutiques cherchent à mettre fin en agissant à la fois sur la reconstruction du moi et la réinsertion du sujet dans son groupe d'appartenance.

Sans doute cette lecture psychanalytique tend-elle à nous ramener à nos propres catégories et à faire de cette dernière partie de l'ouvrage un essai d'anthropologie de la maladie qui dépasse le seul cadre lao. Le mérite de ce livre demeure cependant ethnographique avant tout, en ce qu'il propose une véritable plongée au coeur des logiques lao et constitue par là-même une oeuvre de référence pour la connaissance du Laos et de l'Asie du Sud-est. Assurément Richard Pottier atteint pleinement son but : « rendre intelligibles des pratiques thérapeutiques qui cessent de paraître étranges dès lors qu'on les a comprises » (page 486). Il s'acquitte ainsi magistralement de la tâche de traducteur qui est à ses yeux celle de l'ethnologue (page 485). Montrant une fidélité sans failles à ses sources, il réalise bien ce transfert « de monde à monde » qu'opère la traduction lorsqu'elle est accomplie avec passion et loyauté.

Catherine Choron-Baix

CNRS - Laboratoire d'anthropologie urbaine

Cet article est paru dans : *L'homme* N° 190, avril/juin 2009

## BOTANICA OF LAOS BY ELISABETH VILAYLECK

*"The relationship between humans and nature is more important than the shape of their heads or the colour of their skins in explaining their behaviour and their social history."*

A.-G. Haundcourt (1962)

A botanical garden has several functions; to be a conservatory of plant species, to allow different kinds of research, both the so-called "hard" sciences of classification systems, morphology, biology, the physiology of plants, and the "soft" science of ethno-botany.

Ethno-botany is a social science, which is concerned with the relationship that the people of a given culture



Curtis's Botanical Magazine, volume 56 plate 3884

have with the plants in their environment. This relationship is determined by the physical, conditions of the given environment; climate, geography, and is a reflection of the individual culture. It must be remembered

that for thousands of years humans have depended on plants for food, medicines, magic substances, implements, construction materials for buildings and transport, weapons, games and of course, decoration. Every culture, though its language has a particular way of ordering the world in which it is immersed; according to its environment and its own special spirit it develops customs, it builds its systems of ideas, symbols, which once decoded give access to its body of knowledge.

From this specific interaction with plants, their smells and colours and tastes, learned from infancy, as a child learns from its mother, there emerges a semantic reflection of these phenomena in the language of the culture. If the knowledge disappears, the words continue to hold the imagination and reveal the intrinsic influence of plants on our history. We plan in these newsletters to present to you a plant or a group of plants with their botanical names so you can learn to identify each plant and get to know something of its significance in Lao culture.

We start this collection with the Poinciana or Flame tree, because there is still some debate about the old names for Luang Prabang connected with this plant.

Effectively the capital of northern Laos, Luang Prabang in the

13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, was called Xieng Dong Xieng Thong, translated by most people as "the village of Dong (a river) a city of flamboyant's", but Thong is also the name of another legume with very lovely red flowers (*Erythrina indica*) but not that of the Poinciana which in Lao is called Fang.

The Lao language distinguishes among three trees called Fang.

Fang: Poinciana, *Delonix regia*

Fang noy: Small Poinciana,  
*Caesalpinia pulcherrima* SW

Fang deng: Red Poinciana, Sappan,  
*Caesalpinia sappan*.

The first, originally from Madagascar, is generally held to be one of the most beautiful trees there is. Its "flamboyance" is clearly the origin of its name in Lao, which means to "dazzle". It is also called Haang ngiou or mosquito tail, or Nok gnuoung flang or French Peacock.

Fang noy is far less decorative, the Lao humorously also call it Thai Peacock. It propagates easily and the small shrubs with their orange and yellow flowers are found in many gardens. A tea made from the flowers is good for the flu.

The third one is known in Europe a Brazil wood. Indeed, many Asian species of the genus *Caesalpinia* were found in the Old World before the discovery of America and supplied a red



Fang : Pongamia, *Delonix regia*



Fang noy : Small Poinciana, *C. pulcherrima* SW.



Fang deng : Red Poinciana, *C. sappan* L.

pigment, the colour of glowing embers.

(The word “bresil” appeared in the French language in 1190, formed from the root “bra” or “bre” which meant embers.). But since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish and the Portuguese got brazil wood (always the leguminous types) from South America, which they called Brazil.

Our Lao Brazil wood is a prickly bush of 5 to 7 metres, which has spread all over the Indo-Malayan region. Its flowers, in lateral terminal clusters, are yellow and its seedpods are recognizable by their trapezoidal shape.

Its wood and its bark produce a red dye, which is used in food production, but mainly for textiles; the roots give a yellow pigment. For use as a dye, the roots and the heartwood are boiled

in water until it turns dark brown and, with the addition of alum, this turns red. Mixed with other caustic ingredients it is used for dyeing fabrics (silk, cotton) and can produce many varied tones from a deep maroon to a pale pink, the clearest colours being reds and purples. Small bright red pieces of the wood of fang Deng, sold in the markets are reputed to be good for the blood, the analogous colour probably being the basis for this prescription. In addition, as with many “red plants”, Fang deng is considered a “warm” medicine.

For internal haemorrhaging, or heavy periods the Institute of Traditional Medicine recommends boiling 4 or 5 small pieces of this wood in a litre of water for 30 minutes and then drinking this decoction throughout the day.

ELIZABETH VILAYLECK

DR. OF ETHNO-LINGUISTICS

Translation by Suzy Young

A substantial part of the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden consist of woodlands on the hill, for which a reforestation program has been put in place, over 900 trees have been planted this year. Amongst them *Delonix regia* and *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*. For more information on our tree planting program [Adopt a Tree](#), see our website: [www.amis-pha-tad-ke.com](http://www.amis-pha-tad-ke.com)

## INTERVIEW WITH PROF. DR. BOUAKHAYKHONE SVENG SUKSA, SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR PHA TAD KE

Because Dr. Bouakhaykhone Svengsuksa believes they make the best fruit shakes in town, we met at Kop Chai Deu in Vientiane. She was expecting someone much older; I didn't exactly know what to expect and, after having done some research, felt a bit daunted at the prospect of interviewing someone who has managed to do so much in only one lifetime. I needn't have been concerned. I was met by a diminutive, charming, bubbly woman, with an obvious love for her work and her country and an enthusiasm for orchids that would (with great difficulty) be squeezed into someone twice her size.

Born in Savannakhet in 1948, after completing her high school education in Laos, she went to Bordeaux, France, where she received her B.Sc. degree in 1974. She returned to Laos and in 1975 took up a position at the Pedagogical Institute of Vientiane (PUV) as Lecturer in the Department of Biology & Chemistry. This was one of a very small number of higher education institutions existing in Lao PDR at the time. She was responsible, not only for the education of her students, but also for training of the secondary school teachers for the whole country.

During her years of lecturing, she continued to do research for the Museum of Natural History in Paris, France which led to the discovery of two new plant species - 1. *Styrax ru-fopilosus* B.Svengsuksa; 2. *Styrax agrestis* var. *curvirostratus* B. Svengsuksa. She is author and co-author of various papers and in 2000 translated *Orchid Genera of Thailand, Laos,*

Cambodia and Vietnam, by A. Schuiteman and E.F. de Vogel from English to Lao. In 1998 she was awarded an equivalent M.Sc. degree by the Museum of Natural History, France, which enabled her to apply for and receive her Ph.D. in 2003.

Her thesis (in French) was titled: Reconstruction of vegetation and Revaluation of land after denshering (slash-and-burn practices) in the district of Muang Fuang, Vientiane province, PDR Laos. In summary, the work focused on the traditional farming practices used by the resident ethnic groups, and on the permanent cultivation techniques now being used (flooded rice fields, and plantations of various crops for local use or for sale in markets and for export) with government encouragement in its effort progressively to replace shifting slash-and-burn agriculture with permanent settlement. This has resulted in a new way of life for the inhabitants of the study area, who have become sedentary and are now respecting the environment by progressively abandoning shifting cultivation.

She had never been very interested in orchids but after having seen some extremely rare species for sale on the Thai border, she was determined to protect the orchids of Laos. She wrote a proposal to UNESCO to establish an orchid nursery at the National University of Lao in Vientiane and they now have close to 800 different species, green house and lab. Her project to create a data base of all orchids native to Laos to be used by the Department of Customs was approved and assisted by the EU.



Interview and Survey in the Field: Prof. Dr. Bouakhaykone Svengsuksa in the middle, on the far right Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sovanmoly Hul from the Museum national d'histoire naturelle in Paris.



At a conference, she heard about a project started by Rik Gaddella in Luang Prabang to create Pha Tad Ke Garden - the first botanical garden in Laos. Some of their objectives are to create and maintain a botanical garden with in and ex situ collections of Lao plants for the general public as well as research facilities and logistical support for scientists; to collect, research and conserve a comprehensive collection of Lao plants; to promote sustainable ecological preservation and development in Laos and internationally through extensive research, education, communication and resource building. She later met with him and, although doubting that the money would ever be available for this not inconsiderable venture, decided to support the project.

Dr. Bouakhaykhone Svengsuksa's determined, goal-oriented, dedicated and non-tiring work to uplift both the environment and the people of Laos is an apt illustration of the adage that big things come in small packages.

She laughs at the fact that she is currently retired as time spent working as the Pha Tad Ke Scientific Advisor has her busier than ever. With her passion and determination the team at Pha Tad Ke would not be the same without her and her expert advice !

*Interview by Georgie Walsh*

## SOME BOOKS AND OTHER AFFAIRS WE LOVE

### Recherches nouvelles sur le Laos

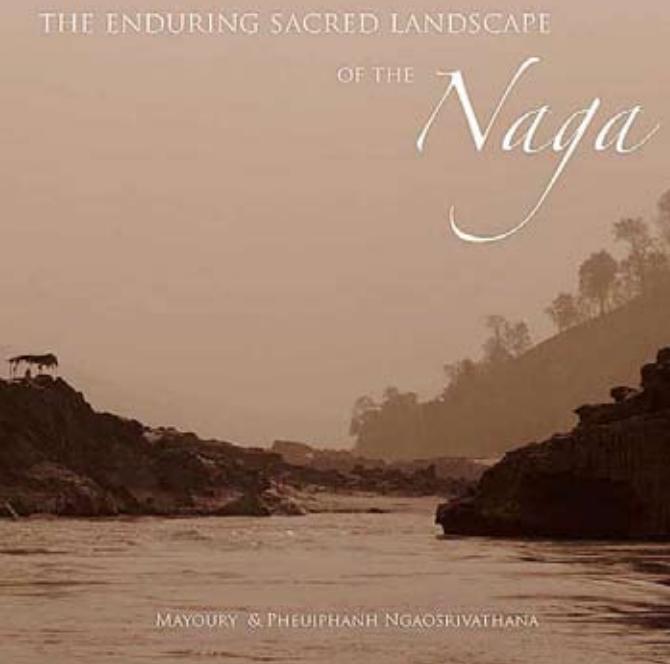
New research on Laos

*Yves Goudineau & Michel Lorillard éd.*

Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris 2008 684 p. - 48€

ISBN 978 2 85539 654 6

Après une lente et difficile gestation, longtemps entravée par les guerres, la recherche sur le Laos connaît aujourd’hui un véritable essor dans plusieurs champs des sciences humaines et sociales. C'est cet élan que le présent ouvrage entend refléter en réunissant les contributions d'un grand nombre de ceux qui y ont participé ces dernières années. Leurs approches très diversifiées sont propres à représenter l'évolution récente du champs des « études lao ». Elles font apparaître une vision élargie du Laos, non plus confiné dans des frontières géographiques, politiques et culturelles strictes, mais restitué dans le mouvement de l'histoire régionale sur la longue durée. Elles font voir, d'un autre côté, les dynamiques contemporaines auxquelles est confronté l'État-nation lao, qu'il s'agisse d'enjeux de développement aiguillonnés par la globalisation ou de questions identitaires posées par la multi-éthnicité du pays. Ce sont aussi des perspectives, des problématiques et des questionnements renouvelés que ce volume collectif veut faire mieux connaître.



### The Enduring Sacred Landscape of the Naga

*Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosrivathana*

Mekong Press, Bangkok, 156 pp, THB 595

ISBN 978-974-303-160-1

Capturing the vanishing memory of ancient rituals, recited texts, and places imbued with echoes of the past, *The Enduring Sacred Landscape of the Naga* recounts the lived texture of human experience in the Mekong River valley. The book reconstructs the history of those areas fused with legends and lore of the tutelary spirits of the region known as the

nagu (serpent), ngeuak (salt-water crocodile), and naga (supernatural beings with both snake and human attributes).

While naga iconography adorns Buddhist temples throughout Southeast Asia, particularly in Laos and northeastern Thailand, the naga's pervasive presence is slowly fading from collective memory. By recording extant oral traditions and relying on the fourteenth-century palm-leaf chronicle Urang-khathat, which many Western scholars have found to be undecipherable, the authors take the reader on a journey of the sacred sites and culture of the region, its reality and nether world, and the flesh, bone, and soul of the naga. Richly illustrated with nearly a hundred photographs, this book will serve as an evocative testament to the unique cultural traditions of the Mekong Basin.

*Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosrivathan* are two of Laos's foremost scholars of historical and contemporary developments within the central Mekong region. They have published widely on a variety of topics, including the volume *Breaking New Ground in Lao History: Essays on the Seventh to Twentieth Centuries* (Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Kennon Breazeale, eds., Silkworm Books).

## Festivals of Laos

*Martin Stuart-Fox and Somsanouk Mixay*

Photographs by Steve Northup

Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2010, 96 pp, THB 795

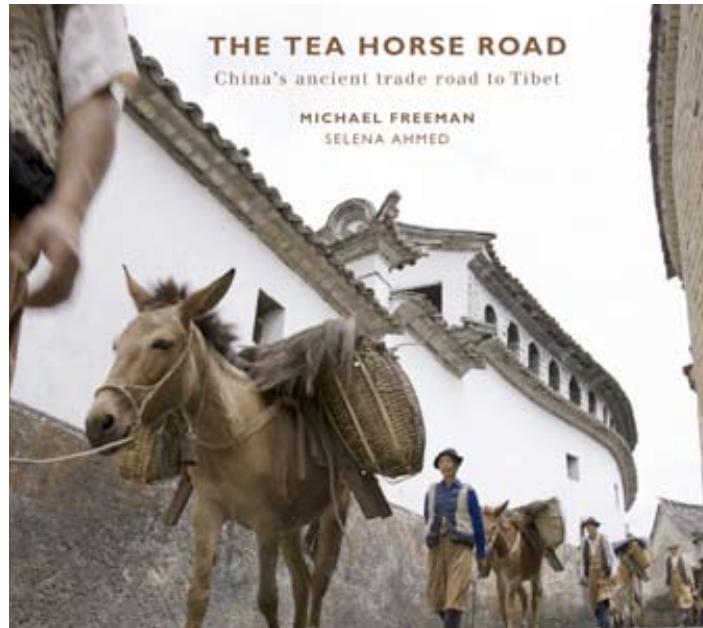
ISBN 978-974-9511-84-8

Laos is a land of festivals. Every village, every temple, and every ethnic minority not only holds its own special festivals but also joins the wider Lao community in celebrating the national ones as well. This book explores the most important festivals of Laos and offers a rare and fascinating glimpse into the spiritual and communal life of the Lao people.

Written and photographed by experts in Lao history, society, and culture, Festivals of Laos is a wonderful combination of insightful narrative and stunning photography.

**Martin Stuart-Fox** is Emeritus Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Queensland and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. A correspondent for United Press International in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, he is the author of six books and many articles on the history, politics, and culture of Laos.

**Somsanouk Mixay** was born in Vientiane, Laos. He worked as editor of the Vientiane News and deputy director-general of Lao National Radio and Television. He started the Vientiane Times and the French weekly Le Renovateur, as well as English and French news programs on Lao national television.



**Steve Northup** has spent almost half a century as a photographer. He and Prof. Stuart-Fox first worked together as a reporter/photographer team covering the war in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966 for United Press International. He later served as staff photographer for the Washington Post and Time magazine,

and was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. This is his second book with Prof. Stuart-Fox.

## The Tea Horse Road

*The Ancient Trade Route of Southwest China*

*Michael Freeman & Selena Ahmed*

River Books Press, Bangkok, 220 pp, 250 color ill., 65\$

ISBN 978 974 9863 93 0

In the seventh century, during the Chinese Tang Dynasty, Tibetans began drinking fermented black tea, a valuable addition to their restricted diet of meat and milk. Beginning as an aristocratic delicacy, it quickly became a staple, but it had to be imported, first from southern Yunnan, with a secondary route from Ya'an in Sichuan. The Chinese on the other hand, had a need for war horses and the sturdy Tibetan horses were ideal. As a result a two-way trade route arose during the Song Dynasty and became known as the Cha Ma Dao, the Tea-Horse Road, a 2,300 kilometre journey from southern Yunnan to Lhasa at its core. This well-researched and lavishly illustrated book, by renowned photographer Michael Freeman and writer and academic Dr. Selena Ahmed covers the production of tea, its history, culture and the arduous journey through some of the world's most spectacular landscapes and traditional cultures, including Yunnan, Sichuan, Tibet, northern Burma and Assam.

## The Last Century of Lao Royalty: A Documentary History

*Grant Evans*

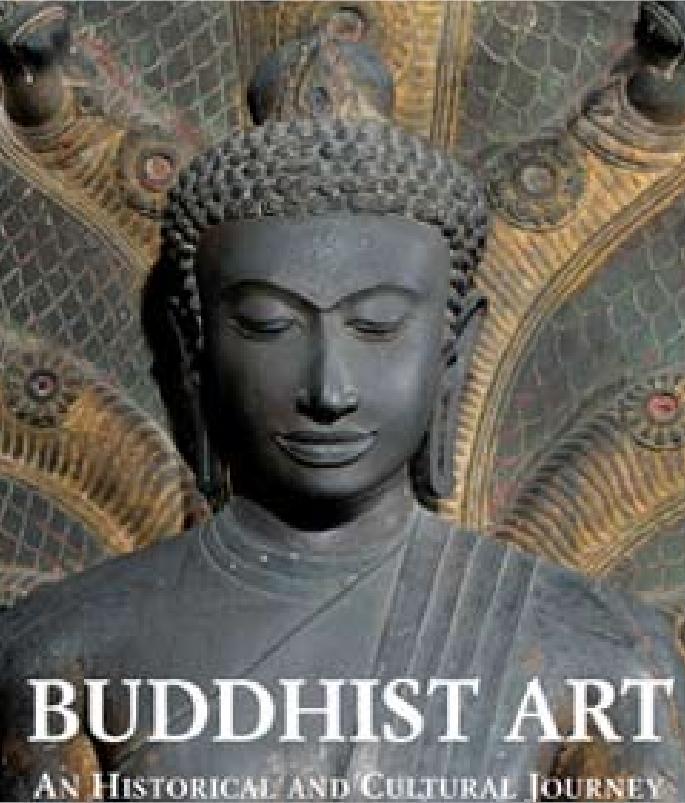
Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 2009, 443pp

498 b/w and 25 color photographs, THB 850

ISBN 978-974-9511-66-4

Lao Royalty's engagement in all the major events of the country in the last century forms a rich and complex narrative. But with the 1975 Communist revolution this history fell into oblivion and has all but disappeared from public memory. The Last Century of Lao Royalty recovers this history by presenting a wealth of rare documents and photographs that bring to life the political, social, and cultural activities of the members of the royal families. It provides a thoroughly unique perspective on the role of Lao royalty in the modern story of the nation. Royalty was, in fact, a force for moderation, modernization, and democracy during the period of the Royal Lao Government (1947–1975). The last king, King Sisavang Vatthana, for instance, refused to give his imprimatur to a military dictatorship because he was so doggedly committed to constitutional rule. Naturally, there were some aristocratic royals who remained deeply conservative, but others joined forces with radical revolutionaries.

The book begins with a comprehensive historical introduction, followed by short essays on specific topics and excerpts culled from newspapers, personal letters, official reports, and a variety of other sources. Accompanying these is a rare selection of photographs of Lao royalty and royal occasions collected from individuals and archives around the world. This is no royalist



hagiography, however. Modern Lao royal history is presented in all of its complicated convolutions, making this volume a key contribution to our understanding of modern Laos.

*Grant Evans* was a professor of anthropology at the University of Hong Kong for many years. He has published extensively on Laos and Southeast Asia, including *Lao Peasants Under Socialism* (1990), *The Politics of Ritual and Remembrance: Laos Since 1975* (1998), *A Short History of Laos* (2002), and edited *Laos: Culture and Society* (1999).

## Buddhist Art

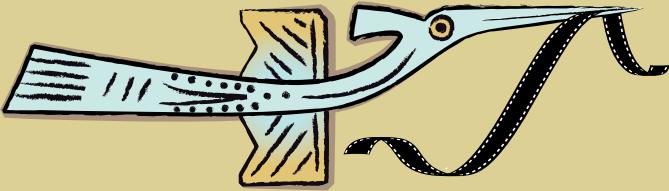
An Historical and Cultural Journey

*Gilles Béguin*

River Books Press, Bangkok, 400 pp, 680 color ill., 80\$

ISBN 978 974 9863 87 9

Buddhism and its art represents the one truly unifying factor of the entire Asian continent and has become a fundamental part of our shared world heritage. However, to draw a unique portrait of this art in a single work is a formidable undertaking due to the great plurality in traditions spanning different countries and regions over various epochs. A passionate scholar of Buddhist art, Giles Béguin has chosen to organise his synthesis in the form of an historical atlas. Together with photography, plans and reconstructions of the monuments and their artwork, this publication also contains previously unpublished cartography. The author takes the reader on an historical and cultural journey across the vast continent of Asia stretching from India, Sri Lanka and Gandhara to countries such as Thailand, Cambodia and Burma in Southeast Asia up to the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Tibet before arriving at the Far Eastern civilisations of China, Korea and Japan. Aware of the difficulties arising from jargon-laden works on Buddhist art and iconography, Giles Béguin has endeavoured to employ a more clear and concise usage of specialist terminology to allow this book to act as a starting point for those who wish to deepen their knowledge and study of the subject.



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# LUANG PRABANG FILM FESTIVAL

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CELEBRATING SOUTHEAST  
ASIAN CINEMA

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DECEMBER 4-11, 2010

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W W W . L P F I L M F E S T . O R G

The inaugural Luang Prabang Film Festival will present more than 30 films from Southeast Asia over eight nights in December, marking the 35th anniversary of the Lao PDR, and Luang Prabang's 15t year on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list. The screenings are free, and will take place in 2 outdoor venues in the old royal capital of Laos. After the festival, 4 films will tour select other provinces in Laos, with screenings held over 2-night stops in each town.

Throughout the year, the Luang Prabang Film Festival organizes screenings, as well as educational and creative projects and activities. In doing so, we work to stimulate a domestic film industry, and raise awareness about film and media literacy in Laos and throughout Southeast Asia.

We are very interested in forming more relationships with media organizations and professionals from throughout the region and around the world, and look forward to working together to promote Southeast Asian cinema.

We hope to see you at our festival at the end of the year.  
For more information about the festival, collaboration, or sponsorship, please visit our website, or contact project Founder & Director, Gabriel Kuperman, at [director@lpfilmfest.org](mailto:director@lpfilmfest.org).