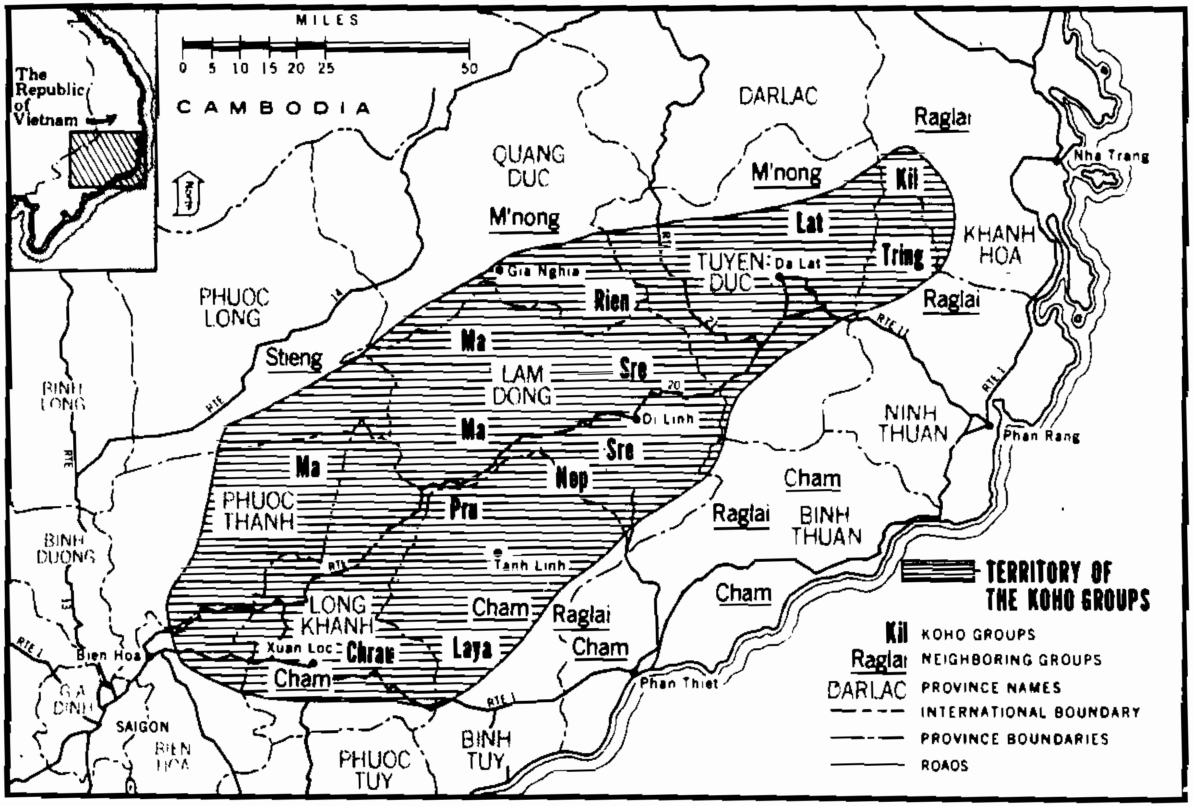
MILES
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The Republic of Vietnam
CAMBODIA
North
DARLAC
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KHANH HOA
Nha Trang
TUYEN DUC
Da Lat
Gia Nghia
Rien
Raglai
PHUOC LONG
Stieng
Ma
Sre
LAM DONG
Ma
Di Linh
Sre
NINH THUAN
Phan Rang
Ma
Nop
Cham
PHUOC THANH
Pru
Raglai
BINH THUAN
BINH LONG
BINH DUONG
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LONG KHANH
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Raglai
Xuan Loc
Chrau
Laya
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Cham
Bien Hoa
GIA DINH
SAIGON
BIEN HOA
PHUOC TUY
BINH TUY
Phan Thiet
RTE 1
RTE 11
RTE 20
RTE 21
RTE 14
RTE 13
TERRITORY OF THE KOHO GROUPS
Kil KOHO GROUPS
Raglai NEIGHBORING GROUPS
DARLAC PROVINCE NAMES
INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
ROADS

The Koho Groups

CHAPTER 10. THE KOHO

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

The Koho-speaking peoples, composed of several distinct groups—the Chrau, Kil, Lat, Laya, Ma,* Nop, Pru, Rien, Sre, and Tring—are one of the larger Montagnard groups of the Republic of Vietnam. The Koho inhabit an extensive mountainous area extending from Saigon in the south to Da Lat in the north. Despite their proximity to two major cities of the Republic of Vietnam, and despite the size of the area they inhabit, information concerning all of the Koho groups is meager.

The Koho language, spoken by all the groups with only minor variations, is Mon-Khmer in origin and is related to the languages of the Bahnar, Stieng, M'nong, and other important tribal groups. With the exception of the Ma, the Koho groups are matrilineal and live in village units of varying size. The village forms the highest permanent political organization attained by these groups.

Name and Size of Group

The Koho groups, also called Coho, Kohov, and Cohov, number approximately 90,000 persons.[1]

The Kil, also known as the Cil or Chil, call themselves Kou N'Ho (Children of the Pines).[2] The Laya are sometimes identified as Rion or Riong, but the Laya and the Rion or Rien are usually considered two separate groups. The Sre are also called Cau Sre, which means "People of the Rice."[3]

A North Vietnamese source reported a total of 10,000 for the Lat, Nop, Laya, Co Don (unknown affiliation) and To-La (unknown affiliation) combined.[4] Population figures are not available for the Chrau, Kil, Pru, and Rien groupings. The Ma number between 20,000 and 30,000 persons; the Sre, about 30,000.[5]

One Koho group, the Chrau, is believed to have several subgroups: Ro, Bajieng, Mru, Jre, Buham, Bu-Preng, and Bla.[6]

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* Because the Ma is the one group which substantially diverges from the general Koho cultural pattern, a separate chapter in this volume treats the Ma group. See chapter 11, p. 437.

The Koho territory extends from just north of Saigon to the area of Da Lat. In the northern part of the Koho area the Lang Bian Mountains rise to about 6,000 feet and overlook the Da Lat Plateau. Made up of rolling hills, the Da Lat Plateau is separated from the Bao Loc or Djiring Plateau by the wide alluvial valley of the Da Dung River. Northwest of the Bao Loc Plateau, near the great bend in the Da Dung River, there are sharp mountains rising as high as 4,500 feet. On both sides of the Da Dung River is *dang* terrain, consisting of steep ridges reaching a height of approximately 2,000 feet. A chain of mountain peaks 3,000 feet high lies south of the Djiring Plateau, reaching as far south as Saigon, and continuing to the area between the coast and the lower Da Dung River.

Much of the Koho land is covered with secondary forest growth, the result of reforestation of cleared land. This type of forest is abundant with vines and brush interlaced with a new growth of closely spaced trees. Such tangled thicket makes travel through these areas very difficult. The Sre, for example, live in U-shaped river valleys and are surrounded by secondary forest growth.[7]

In some areas of the Koho territory, the higher mountain ridges and peaks still retain a growth of primary rain forest, which has three levels. The highest level is a canopy formed by trees 75 to 90 feet high; some very old trees are 125-150 feet high and are especially venerated by tribesmen as the abode of spirits. The middle level has shorter trees and vines, while the lowest level consists of seedlings and saplings.[8] Northeast of Da Lat, in the area inhabited by the Kil, are pine forests.

The climate of the Koho area is affected by two monsoon winds, one coming from the southwest in the summer, May to mid-September, and the other from the northeast in the winter, November to March. Agriculture is greatly dependent on the summer monsoons, which brings up to 150 inches of annual rainfall. Temperatures in the Koho regions are at least 15 degrees lower at all times of the year than in the coastal regions. Da Lat, in the Koho area, was a French summer resort because of its cool mountain climate.[9]

National Route 14 passes slightly to the west of the Koho area, while Route 20 runs through the area across the Bao Loc Plateau from Saigon to Da Lat. Other roads link Di Linh with Gia Nghia, Phan Thiet with Di Linh, Phan Rang with Da Lat, and Duc Trong with Ban Me Thuot.

SECTION II

TRIBAL BACKGROUND

Ethnic and Racial Origin

All the highland groups of the Republic of Vietnam are part of two large ethnic groups: The Malayo-Polynesian and the Mon-Khmer. In terms of language, customs, and physical appearance, the Koho belong to the Mon-Khmer grouping. Indochina has been a migratory corridor from time immemorial, and the movement of the Mon-Khmer peoples into what is now the Republic of Vietnam probably started centuries ago. The Mon-Khmer peoples are generally believed to have originated in the upper Mekong Valleys, whence they migrated through Indochina.[1] The Koho peoples are descendants of these ancient migrants and are related to the Stieng, Bahnar, and M'nong in terms of customs, language, and agricultural techniques.[2]

Language

The term Koho refers to a number of tribal groups, such as the Kil, Lat, Tring, Sre, Rien, and Nop, that have very closely related dialects. The dialects of the various groups called Koho peoples are so similar that communication is possible among them. Since no language barrier exists among the Koho, anthropologists use the linguistic term Koho as the generic name for all these tribes.

The various Koho dialects stem from the Bahnaric subgroup of the Mon-Khmer language stock and consist primarily of short monosyllabic words.

The Koho groups have no written form for their dialects, although phonetic dictionaries and textbooks of their dialects do exist, thanks to the work of the French and, more recently, American missionaries who lived among these peoples. In the 1950's, American missionaries reported some success in teaching a number of Koho, primarily among the Sre group, to read and write their own dialect; however, no detailed information is available concerning the number of Koho who have acquired literacy. One source states that most Koho are still virtually illiterate.[3]

Under French colonial rule, little contact was permitted between the Vietnamese and the various Montagnard groups; thus, few Koho reaching maturity during the colonial period can speak Vietnamese, although some do speak French. Koho knowledge of Vietnamese depends largely upon proximity: Koho in the south, or near the towns of Di Linh or Da Lat, probably have some knowledge of Vietnamese gained through trading or other contacts, although it is doubtful that many have achieved fluency. The more isolated Koho, seldom in contact with the Vietnamese, have little if any knowledge of the language.[4] Most Koho groups are mobile, and in their travels, either for hunting or trading, they have acquired an understanding of the languages of neighboring tribes, such as the Stieng and the M'nong.[5] The Kil, living within communities of other Koho groups, may be familiar with several of the Koho dialects; Kil men speak the dialect of the local area, but the women speak only their own dialect.*,[6] The dialects of some Koho groups are also understood by the neighboring Raglai.

Legendary History

The following legend of the Koho in the vicinity of Di Linh describes their origin. In the beginning of time, a bird (a kite) and a crab quarreled; the bird pierced the crab's shell with his beak. To revenge itself on the bird, who had flown away, the crab caused the oceans and rivers to swell to the sky. All the creatures of the earth perished in the water except for two humans—a man and a woman—who, accompanied by a pair of every animal and bird, took refuge in a wooden chest.

The flood lasted 7 days and 7 nights. Then the man and the woman heard a chicken clucking outside of the chest. Sent by the spirits (*yang*), the chicken told those in the chest that they could come out.

Soon the couple had no more rice and were on the verge of starvation, when they heard a sound from the earth: it was an ant holding in its mandibles a gift from the spirits, two grains of rice. The man, destined to become the grandfather of the Koho group, planted the grains, and the next day a crop of gigantic rice covered the plain.

Some years later, the grandfather drank rice wine and fell into a stupor. When his eldest son saw him asleep naked, he began to mock his father. A younger son reproached his brother and covered his father with a banana leaf.

The grandfather awoke; and learning what had happened, he took away his eldest son's clothes and chased him into the forest. This eldest son founded the race of Montagnards (the Koho included) who have no clothes. The old man's other two sons became the ancestors of the Annamese and the Laotians.[7]

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* See "Economic Organization," p. 412.

Factual History

Specific information on the factual history of the Koho peoples is scanty. For centuries, more highly organized peoples, by pressure and exploitation, gradually pushed the Koho out of the lush coastal areas into the more rugged country they presently inhabit. Some groups, such as the isolated Kil, retreated into the high mountains to preserve their traditional independence. Others, such as the Sre, traded with, worked for, and occasionally intermarried with stronger neighbors like the Cham or Annamese (ethnic Vietnamese), although not to the extent of assimilation.[8]

Between the 11th and 15th centuries, the general area of the mountainous upper Donnai region and the rugged but lower and more fertile country surrounding Di Linh and Da Lat served as a bloody battleground in the wars between the Khmer and Cham peoples. The Cham, the Annamese (ethnic Vietnamese), and eventually the French all exerted their influence in the Koho area. In 1699, the Annamese brought troops and settlers into the Donnai Delta and began to encroach upon the southernmost groups of the Koho. During this period, the Annamese considered the Montagnards generally too savage to become subjects of the royal Annamese court at Hue. The Annamese were primarily interested in keeping the Koho tranquil and away from the good irrigated ricelands. A few Montagnards were allowed into Annamese territory to barter.[9]

In 1880, after the French pacification of the Koho area, a Frechman reported that Koho villagers were astounded when he paid for what he took and when he did not burn their village. He ascribed this as the reason for the Koho decision to ask the French governor in Saigon for help against the Annamese and for Koho willingness to trade with the French.[10]

Settlement Patterns

Koho settlement patterns vary according to the geographic location. The Koho groups of the low hills and plain country live in fairly permanent villages, while the nomadic inhabitants of the mountainous region of the upper Donnai River reside in isolated and generally temporary encampments.

The majority of the Koho peoples inhabit the lower, more fertile lands. Their villages are composed of several longhouses, 60 to 80 meters in length, which lodge several nuclear families. The houses built of bamboo are slightly elevated on numerous short piles. Bamboo balconies—entrance platforms—are built on the front of the house, and wide ladders, sometimes ornamented or sculptured, provide the only means of ascent. Entrance to the house is through two low doors. There are no windows or chimneys, so that smoke from the cooking fires remains in the longhouses.

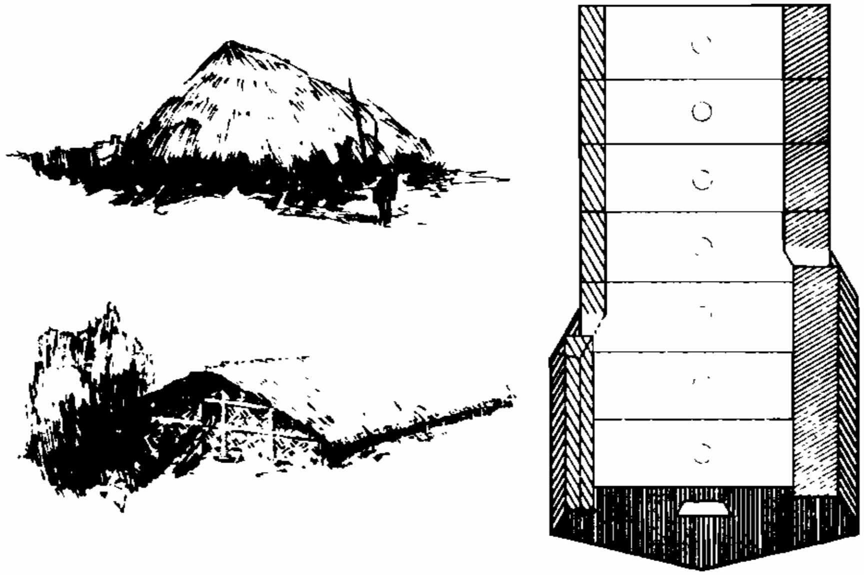


Figure 23. Typical Koho houses.

Normal furnishings consist of jars, baskets, and mats. Goats and pigs are sheltered under the house.[11]

The term village does not apply to the nomadic groups of the Koho, especially the Kil, because they live in temporary, often only one-house, encampments, frequently located considerable distances from each other. Their poor land, primitively cultivated, is quickly exhausted, requiring them to move frequently. The Kil are said to have the poorest and filthiest houses of any Montagnard group —reportedly sharing them with their goats and pigs.[12]

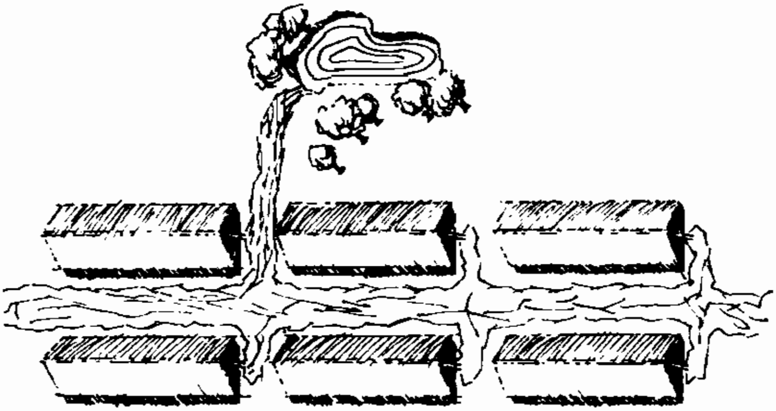
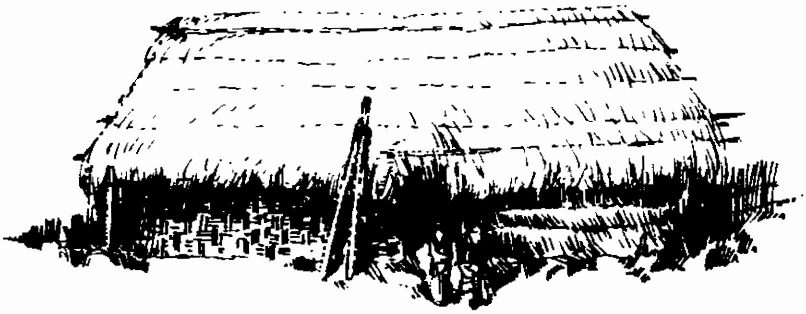
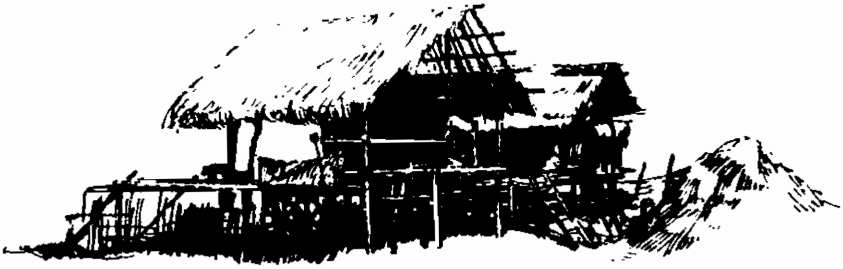


Figure 24. Layout of typical Koho village.



Lat house



Sre houses

Figure 25.

SECTION III

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical Characteristics

In general, the Koho are short, sturdy people with smooth brown or reddish-brown skin. Their normal height ranges from 5 feet 2 inches to 5 feet 5 inches with an average weight of about 115 pounds for the adult male. Dwarfs or malformed individuals are reportedly rare.

Like other Montagnard groups, many Koho people file down the incisor and canine teeth of their children at puberty. They also wear their coarse, straight black hair coiled in a knot at the back of the head, with a crude wooden comb or hairpin inserted in the knot. Men and women stretch their earlobes by inserting various wooden or ivory plugs in them; in some extreme cases, the enormous earlobes hang down to the shoulders.[1]

The available information gave no indication that the Koho groups practice tattooing; however, some specific reports state the Sre do not use tattoos.[2] Neither do the Sre file their teeth or stretch their earlobes. Their women, however, do occasionally blacken their teeth with a substance extracted from various plants. The Sre have thick black or brown hair, frequently wavy and highlighted by tawny streaks. The Sre shift the customary hair knot from the back of the head to one side when carrying a basket on the head. The Mongolian spot (a bluish mark at the base of the spine) is common to the newborn babies of the Sre.[3]

Health

Many diseases in the Koho area are carried by insects, such as the anopheles mosquito, the rat flea, and the louse. Some diseases are caused by worms, other diseases result from poor sanitary conditions and bad sexual hygiene practices.[4]

Malaria is a common disease in the area, with most of the people having contracted it at least once in their lifetime. Two of the most common types of malaria in the area are the benign tertian malaria, causing high fever with relapses over a period of time, but usually not fatal, and the malignant tertian malaria, which is fatal to both infants and adults.[5]

Three types of typhus in the Republic of Vietnam are carried by lice, rat fleas, and mites. Mite-borne typhus is reportedly especially frequent among the tribes.[6] Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, yaws, leprosy, and respiratory and skin diseases are common among the Koho peoples. Dysentery and yaws are responsible for many infant deaths.[7] Among the Koho, lepers are isolated in the forest and when they die an old man of the village buries them and burns their houses.[8]

A study of birth and death dates in one Koho village revealed that one-fifth of the adult women gave birth during the year; one-quarter of the children born to these women died within their first year. Despite the high infant mortality rate, the study indicated a slight annual population increase.[9]

Sanitary practices, at best primitive, are practically nonexistent. The Kil and Sre subgroups rarely wash their clothing or bathe, although they do swim in the rivers for pleasure.[10]

The Koho share with other highland groups the belief that evil spirits cause illnesses and that only properly invoked spirits can cure the sick. Yang Chi, the spirit of the waters, is the particular evil spirit attacking man and making him ill.

When a Koho is ill, a sorcerer (*be gio*) or a sorceress is called to determine the spirit to be invoked and the sacrifices necessary to restore health. Among the spirits called upon for cures are those of the earth, fire, forest, air, stone, or rice. The rice spirit is the most difficult to appease, requiring the sacrifice of a buffalo.

If after the invocation of a spirit the patient's condition does not improve, the process is repeated, and other spirits are summoned. When the patient's family is wealthy, spirit after spirit may be invoked until the repeated sacrifices have exhausted the family's wealth. A long illness can ruin a family: sometimes 20 or 30 sorcerers are used; and if the patient is cured each sorcerer receives a buffalo. However, if the patient dies the sorcerers must place items such as a blanket, belt, turban, bead necklace, or brass bracelet in the coffin with the deceased patient.[11] Reportedly a sorcerer may occasionally beat the patient to drive the evil spirit from his body.[12]

The Koho frequently run out of rice prior to the next harvest. Although they also grow corn, it is not highly esteemed as a food and Koho villagers will reportedly trade corn for rice during food shortages. How the periods of food scarcity affect the general health of the Koho is naturally contingent on the duration of the shortage; prolonged periods, due often to successive crop failures, result in malnutrition.[13]

The Koho seem to respond favorably to modern medical treatment. Koho who have had contact with outsiders recognize the superiority of Western medical techniques and have communicated this to their fellow villagers. An individual who has worked among the Koho reported that they remained so close to the local hospital that they often became a nuisance.[14]

Endurance

The Koho are a strong, hardy people accustomed to the hardships of outdoor living. Among the Koho, the Kil are especially noted for their endurance. They inhabit the most rugged areas of the Koho territory and are the most nomadic. Their stamina on a long march is legendary. The one-house encampments of the Kil are far apart; hence, if they wish to visit each other, they must be able to travel for hours over high mountains, through thick forests, and across deep ravines.[15]

Although no specific information is available concerning the endurance of the other groups of the Koho, the fact that hunting is their normal occupation would indicate their ability to cover considerable distances in a short time.

Psychological Characteristics

Within the context of their culture, the Koho are generally an industrious and intelligent people. They work in sustained bursts of effort. When they plant or harvest the rice and corn crops, they will toil long hours; however, this sustained activity is often followed by periods of idleness.

The Koho are reported to be honest and reliable in their dealings with outsiders; however, absence from the family unit over a long period of time diminishes the reliability of the individual Koho.[16]

Christian missionaries report the Koho have a strong desire to learn. The missionaries also noticed that when a few Koho learned the basic rudiments of reading and writing, other Koho immediately clamored to be taught. Reportedly, several Koho youths advanced far enough to enter a Vietnamese high school.[17]

SECTION IV

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The degree of complexity and sophistication of Koho social organization varies among the Koho subgroups. For example, the more advanced and permanently settled Sre in the southern portion of the Koho area have a relatively well-organized social system with classes from slaves to the very wealthy, but the Kil—less advanced and more nomadic—have little formal organization.[*] In general, however, Koho society is matrilineal and matrilocal[†] with the extended family and the village as the two most important social units.[1]

Place of Men, Women, and Children in the Society

In all Koho groups, the extended family is the most important social unit. The importance of the individual is subordinate to that of the family; the family is responsible for misdemeanors or transgressions committed by an individual.[2] With the exception of sorcerers, considered to be especially favored by the spirits, positions of power and authority are obtained largely as a result of their family relationships. Chiefs and notables are the most respected male family heads with an extensive knowledge of traditions, customs, and laws.[3]

In the Koho society, women own and inherit most property, initiate marriage, and transmit the family name. After marriage the husband normally resides with his wife and her family. However, deviations from the matrilocal residence pattern do occur, especially when the bride's family is very poor or, in the rare case of polygamous marriage, when the bride will reside either in the groom's home or in the home of the groom's first wife.[4]

Several families—husband, wife, and offspring—reside together in each of the several longhouses constituting a Koho village. Although women own and inherit family property, the husband can acquire wealth and is, to some extent, the head of his nuclear family unit, making many of the basic decisions, disciplining children, and eventually supervising work of his sons-in-law.[5]

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[*] One reliable source stated that the Sre have a well-organized social system, but no further information was available.

[†] As mentioned earlier, the one Koho group diverging significantly from this pattern—the Ma—are the subject of a separate chapter.

The husband, however, is subordinate to the authority of his wife's family. The family authority is usually exercised by the eldest male of the woman's kin group. A husband cannot achieve an influential position in his wife's family, although he can do so in his sister's family—eventually even becoming the head of her extended family.[6]

Men are generally assigned the tasks of clearing the land, harvesting, hunting, fishing, and basketmaking; and the women, tasks of preparation of meals and rice wine, and caring for the children. During the winter, hunting and fishing occupy much of the men's time, while during the spring and summer, the primary activity is agriculture.[7]

Children are well liked and well cared for in Koho society; female children are preferred over male children, as a female child will eventually bring into the nuclear family unit a son-in-law to assist the father in his work.[8]

Daily Routine

The daily routine of the Koho begins early in the morning, when the Koho women arise to prepare the first meal of rice cooked with other vegetables, meat, or fish. Men attend to the routine chores of feeding the livestock. After the meal, the Koho women and men go to their respective tasks, as required by the season and the day of the lunar month (the Koho designate particular days for particular activities*).

Late in the afternoon the men return to the village; the women put aside their tasks and prepare a moderately large meal. After the meal, the Koho generally entertain themselves with discussion, singing, and storytelling around the hearth until about 10 o'clock when they retire for the night.

A feast, funeral, sacrifice, or ceremony will alter the daily Koho routine.[9]

Marriage

Koho marriage is usually monogamous and is initiated by the women. Polygamy is permitted but is rare and seemingly restricted to the most wealthy and influential of the village chiefs and nobles. Marriage between persons with the same family name is deemed incestuous and is strictly forbidden.[10]

Customarily, the Koho woman selects her husband from among the available men of her own or neighboring villages. After the man and his family have been approached and an agreement reached between the two families, the couple are considered engaged. The marriage is usually celebrated after an engagement period of unreported duration.[11] Customarily, the bridegroom's parents are compensated for the loss of their son by the bride's family prior to the marriage ceremony.[12]

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* See "Customs and Taboos," p. 405.

At the marriage ceremony a sorcerer, or in his absence the bride's mother, invokes the blessings of the spirits on the young couple. During the ritual, animals are sacrificed—buffaloes, pigs, or chickens, depending upon the wealth of the bride's family—and the sacrificial blood, mixed with rice wine, is used to anoint the newly married couple's feet. During the ensuing celebration much rice wine is consumed. The newly wedded couple immediately set up housekeeping in the longhouse of the bride's family. Unlike other Mon-Khmer peoples—such as the Bahnar—a waiting period before the consummation of the marriage is not mandatory.[13]

The bridegroom resides with his wife's family, tilling their fields and working with his bride's family under the direction of his in-laws. Any property or wealth he accumulates during his marriage will be inherited by his daughters: he is allowed to give little or nothing to his own parents. At the death of the wife, should her family fail to supply a replacement, the husband will return to his own family's house; however, children will remain with his wife's family.

The Koho consider adultery a serious crime and punish it severely. The guilty must pay fines to their spouses, to the families of their spouses, and to the village headman and elders. The culprits must also offer sacrifices for purification.[14] The severity of the punishment is contingent upon the actions of the spouses of the guilty parties: fines are higher if the spouse of one of the guilty parties repudiates or divorces his or her wife or husband.[15]

Divorce and Second Marriages

Divorce and second marriages are permissible among the Koho, as is polygamy; however, divorce and second marriages are the exception rather than the rule. Divorce must be for cause, must follow the procedures governed by traditional customs and law, and must be sanctioned by the village headman and elders. The procedures for acquiring second and third wives are regulated by traditional law and custom; in any case, polygamy is probably rare because the Koho society is matrilineal and matrilocal.

Should a spouse desert the family, his or her parents must pay a fine to the parents of the deserted spouse and sacrifice one buffalo. The deserted spouse may divorce the absent husband or wife. If one of the marriage partners justly accuses the other of impotence, laziness, or incompatibility, divorce is pronounced by a council of the two families and the village notables without indemnity or sacrifice. Usually, however, a man cannot obtain a divorce unless it is proven he has remonstrated with his wife several times and that the wife has continued to misbehave or refuse to work despite the repeated exhortations of her husband and the members of his family. Once divorce is sanctioned by the village elders, the couple cannot continue living together.[16]

Polygamy is generally restricted to a few wealthy chiefs or elders. A man cannot marry a second or third time without the permission of his first wife. In reality, the role of second and third wives is that of a servant. In a polygamous marriage, the husband usually maintains his residence in the house of his first wife.[17]

Birth

When a pregnant Koho woman feels the first labor pains, the midwife (*mo boai*) is summoned and usually stays in the house for 3 days after the birth to nurse the mother and the child. After a normal birth, the midwife and the father offer a sacrifice of a chicken and a jar of wine. Payment to the midwife is a bead necklace, a brass bracelet, and a blanket.

If labor is difficult, a second midwife may be summoned. If she cannot deliver the child, a third, more expert midwife or *mo boai giac* will assist. Mo boai giac are very rare; there may be only one for every five or six villages. There are also some skillful male midwifes or *xe boai*. The tribesmen believe that skilled midwives have received their expertise from heaven.[15]

Although it is known that the birth of abnormal children is accompanied by numerous sacrifices of pigs, goats, buffaloes, and jars of wine to appease the spirits, no information was available concerning the Koho treatment of stillborn or malformed children or Koho attitudes toward abortion.[19]

Childhood and Child-Rearing Practices

The Koho like large families and rear their children with great care. Children are never abandoned; orphans are usually cared for by the mother's family, although occasionally they are cared for by neighbors who adopt them and treat them like their own children. Girls are particularly valued by the Koho.[20]

Instructed by their parents and by their mother's relatives in the family and village customs, children are assigned tasks to prepare them for the responsibilities of adulthood. Boys are taught agricultural techniques and hunting and fishing skills, while girls learn the usual tasks of the village women—cooking, weaving, and the care of small children.

The youngest daughter is required to remain with her parents to care for them in their old age. However, if an elder daughter lives with her parents, her youngest sister is free to leave her family. Should the elder daughter die before the parents, however, the youngest daughter must return to care for the parents. Never are Koho parents abandoned by their daughters.[21]

Missionary groups report that some Koho peoples exhibit a great interest in learning and are eager to have their children educated.[22]

Death and Burial

The Koho divide death into two types—natural deaths and deaths considered calamities—occurring because of accidents, violance, or during childbirth. The second type of death, the violent death, is believed to be caused by evil spirits. The Koho peoples, particularly the Kil, react strongly to death.[23] The Kil are reportedly so affected by death that they flee their house when someone dies, returning only to sleep. On the day of the funeral, the Kil leave the burying ground to rush into the village, crying out loudly to frighten off any evil spirits.[24] The fear of dying away from their own villages is common among the Koho groups, as well as among other Montagnard tribes.[25]

The Koho treat death as an occasion of great significance: death is accompanied by ceremonies, sacrifices, fixed mourning periods, and special procedures for the survivors, established by traditional law and custom. The rites connected with death and burial actually commence early—when an individual appears to be dying. The dying tribesman is bathed and dressed in his finest clothes; as soon as he dies, all sacrifices for his recovery are suspended. Should he die in the evening or at night, a buffalo, a pig, and a chicken are sacrificed at sunrise. If he dies at about 6 o'clock in the morning, the sacrifices are offered immediately; if he dies during the day, the sacrifices take place at sunset. The method of the animal sacrifices is standardized: the buffalo must be pierced through the heart with lances; the pig and chicken must be killed with a burning brand, which is later placed in the tomb. Following the sacrifices, a jar and a cup are broken at the feet of the corpse, and the pieces are placed in a basket left near the tomb. Offerings of food are made to the spirits, who are invoked to come for the deceased. A village feast follows, with the men eating first, then the young people, and finally the women. Some food is taken to the woodcutters who are fashioning a casket from a tree trunk. During the entire ceremony, friends and relatives of the deceased continue to arrive bringing buffaloes, pigs, chickens, and jars of rice wine with them. Huge quantities of food and rice wine are consumed by all the villagers.

The actual burial normally takes place on the third or fourth day after death, although some wealthy families among the Sre keep a dead parent in the home for 7 days. The food offerings are put in the same basket as the fragments of the broken jar and cup, and then the basket is placed near the tomb. When the coffin is placed in the tomb, any other caskets that might be inside are removed and replaced atop the new coffin, the oldest one occupying the very top position.[26] The burial ceremony may last several days.

After the death of his wife, a Koho tribesman generally returns to the home of his own family, but his children remain in their mother's household.[27]

Generally both men and women observe a mourning period of 1 year for the death of a spouse. A man, however, may be exempt from this practice and may remarry before the full mourning period, if he obtains permission from his deceased wife's family or if he marries a sister of his deceased wife.[28]

Inheritance Customs

Among the Koho peoples, property is inherited by women. In a family of three daughters, the inheritance is divided in the following manner: the eldest receives three-tenths, the second eldest two-tenths, and the youngest, one-half. This is the formula for division, because the youngest daughter is responsible for all the expenses of her parents' death such as ritual sacrifices and maintenance of the tomb. All other family expenses are divided among the heiresses in proportion to their inheritance shares. If all three girls live at home, thus all being responsible for the parents' funeral arrangements, the inheritance and all other expenses are divided equally among them.

After the death of a wealthy Koho tribesman, a few buffaloes will be given to his mother and sisters, his other blood relatives will receive a present worth 2 or 3 piastres, and jars and any other valuable objects become the property of the widow. When a widower dies, his daughters inherit the portion of his property that would have gone to his wife.[29]

SECTION V

CUSTOMS AND TABOOS

All aspects of Koho life are governed by custom. Virtually every act is influenced by the ritualistic traditions passed on from generation to generation. Houses are built according to specific rules, and fields are cultivated during the same time each year in the same traditional manner. A tribesman whose actions conflict with these traditions is subjected to great disapproval from his fellows. Maintenance of their traditional customs, not the creation of new ways, is the chief objective of Koho life.

Dress

Dress is quite simple among the Koho; ordinarily, the men wear a loincloth, and the women wear a skirt wrapped around their waist. During their annual trading trips to the coast, the tribesmen obtain Vietnamese and Western garments with which they supplement their traditional dress. Some tribesmen wear army surplus clothing.[1]

The Kil, considered to be the least advanced of the Koho groups, wear clothing made from tree bark.[2]

For ceremonial occasions the tribesmen wear decorated cotton tunics embroidered with geometric designs and decorated with colored strings and balls. For great buffalo sacrifices, the men offering the prayers—the house chiefs and elders—wear red garments, for red is associated with power, joy, and magnificence.[3]

Koho women wear large ivory discs in their earlobes; in time the earlobes may be stretched to reach their shoulders. They wear glass necklaces and brass rings on their ankles and wrists. Many items are worn both for their decorative effect and for the pleasing sound they produce.

Children wear necklaces and bracelets with tiny bells attached to them.

Tribal Folklore

The Koho have a strong oral tradition of proverbs, riddles, legends, and humorous stories transmitted in rhythmic, poetic form. The following are samples of Koho proverbs:[4]

> If the stars are green at night, it will be dry tomorrow: if they are sparkling, it will rain tomorrow.

> If you see a snake on your path, you will find what you are looking for.
>
> If a dog gives birth to three puppies, they will be good for hunting deer.
>
> If a dog gives birth to two puppies, they will be good for chasing rats.

Tribal folklore reinforces and perpetuates the customs and traditions of the tribe. Many proverbs cover aspects of behavior, establishing the traditional norms, or interpret natural events.

Sometimes the Koho speak obliquely; for example, if a tribesman says he is going to look for wood on the mountain, he may really mean he is going to hunt deer. Or if he says, "You must cut something, the bamboo is ready to cut, slice it," he may mean the rice wine is ready to drink, and the time has come to drink it. This oblique speech is related to a customary dislike of saying certain things directly. Also, these oblique phrases are traditional, and their meanings are known by all the tribesmen.[5]

The Koho groups also have many riddles, which they enjoy in their leisure time. Some are the following:[6]

> What torch is strong enough to illuminate the universe?
> Answer: The moon.
>
> What is the red fruit which one cannot touch or take in his hands?
> Answer: Fire.
>
> Who moves his lips when his body doesn't move anymore?
> Answer: The exhausted sorcerer who is still murmuring incantations.

Koho legends, often recounted as long, drawn-out stories to entertain the tribespeople in the evening, may be divided into five types: tales about the origin of things and the universe; stories dealing with an age of legendary heroes, who may be equated with the yang, or spirits; stories with human heroes who performed prodigious feats; narratives about the activities of the evil spirits known as *caa* and the tiger men, the *somri* (men who the tribesmen believe can turn into tigers); and stories dealing with the forest and jungle animals, who are treated as if they were human (as in Aesop's fables).[7]

Folk Beliefs

Taboos or interdictions among the Koho peoples comprise three groups: taboos called *abany*, forbidding a person to say certain things; taboos called *wer*, violations of which require sacrifices; and taboos called *chong*, prohibitions against mixing specified items together.[8] Chong taboos or prohibitions probably vary from village to village; no specific information was available.

The following examples are given to indicate some types of Koho taboos. A Koho must not use the real name of his parents when addressing them, nor should he say he is thirsty, because this may mean he will not find anything to drink. A Koho should never say that his ricefield is growing well, because this would put it in grave danger of failing. Other lesser taboos of this kind include the prohibition against placing the drinking straw for rice wine jars toward the entrance of the house. Also, Koho custom decrees that a tribesman should never disturb an anthill.[9]

According to the Koho, there are lucky and unlucky days. Odd days of the lunar month are considered lucky and even days unlucky. Cutting bamboo to be used in the house must be done on odd days. The best time to sow rice is the first or third day of the first quarter of the moon, or on the first, third, fifth, seventh or ninth day of the second quarter. A trading trip or a trip for personal affairs should begin on an odd day; fishing and hunting are most productive on odd days. On the last day of the lunar month, no one may work in the fields.[10]

Months are also lucky and unlucky. Months are counted beginning with the feast of the New Year, Lir Bong, which comes about 1 month after the Vietnamese celebrate their New Year, Tet. The fifth month of the year is judged the best for sowing, and the eighth is the worst for all farming.[11]

Members of the Sre group believe if certain prohibitions are broken, the guilty will be struck by lightning. The prohibitions include eating mango, silver-colored fish, or meat and fish combined; allowing a lizard to climb to the top of the house; putting a lizard on the back of a buffalo (the buffalo will be struck by lightning); using a deerskin lash to tie a buffalo to a yoke; blowing a horn inside the house; attaching a bell to a cat's neck; getting on a billy goat while holding a sword; and committing incest.[12]

Eating and Drinking Customs

The Koho believe that rice, the staple of their diet, was a gift of the gods, who taught them to cultivate and eat it. The Koho diet also includes wild herbs, vegetables, and meats.

According to Koho belief, the great spirit Ndu taught men to eat meat: To satisfy their hunger, Ndu told men they could eat chicken, pork, buffalo, and deer with rice.

Food preparation is subject to custom, and methods vary from village to village. For example, in one Koho village the preparation of spinach involves cooking over a roaring fire, amid complete silence—not a word to be spoken. Meanwhile the cook must remain in the same position during the entire cooking operation. Violation of these instructions is believed to result in bitter spinach.[13] Preparation of rice is controlled by customs regulating the quality of the cooking fire.

A Koho legend relates that the porcupine taught the tribesmen the technique for the fermentation of rice wine. The porcupine told them not to ferment wine from berries, fruits, or roots but only to use rice. Rice is fermented in particular jars with herbs for flavor.[14]

Originally two tribal women were taught the process of making wine: hence, this is always the duty of the women. When a jar of rice wine is opened, the first cupful is always offered to the spirits to thank them for having taught man how to make rice wine and to eat certain foods.[15]

The Koho personalize unhusked rice (paddy), believing that rice wine is the liver of the paddy, and cooked rice, the flesh of the paddy.[16]

Customs Relating to Animals

The Koho raise chickens, pigs, and buffaloes, primarily as sacrificial animals. In addition, the Sre group uses the buffalo for cultivation of their rice fields. The buffalo is considered the prime sacrificial animal, while pigs and chickens are used for secondary sacrifices. To the spirits, the sacrificial buffalo is believed to represent man; in fact, prior to their slaughter buffaloes are named and deemed part of the village. The sacrificial buffalo represents the grievances or desires of the family or house offering the sacrifices. Once sacrificed, the flesh of the buffalo, divided among the spirits, family, and villagers, represents a kind of communion uniting them all.[17]

The Koho are forbidden to raise any goat which has managed to get to the roof of a house and walk upon it; nor may they raise a litter of three piglets. To raise white and black pigs together is forbidden, as this will cause lightning to strike.[18]

Customs Relating to Houses and Villages

At certain times a house may be considered taboo; that is, no one may then enter except those who live in it. The Koho believe a great misfortune would befall them if a nonresident were to enter a house under taboo. Houses are taboo for 7 days after the birth of a child. After certain sacrifices, a house may be taboo from 3 to 7 days. When a sick person in the house is taking certain remedies, or when the family's daughter-in-law gives birth, the house may also be declared taboo for a number of days. Among the Sre, a house is taboo after the family participates in a ceremony of washing the feet of the family buffaloes after the rice planting.[19]

Entrance into rice storehouses is forbidden, unless a sacrifice has been made. Among the Sre, no one may work inside a house for 3 or 7 days after a burial.

Each Koho village has a small stand of sacred trees called *yang bri*, which the Koho believe are inhabited by spirits. To cut even a twig from the sacred trees is forbidden because the spirits inflict their vengeance by bringing sickness and death upon all the villagers. Consequently, when the village has an epidemic, the sorcerers and tribesmen believe the cause is a violation of sacred trees.[20]

Customs Relating to Outsiders

Early reports indicate that formerly the Koho were extremely suspicious of strangers, refusing to aid them in any way. Occasionally, suspicion became outright hostility, resulting in the setting of traps and barriers along village paths.[21] More recent information shows a change due to increased contact with the outside world. Now many Koho villages offer food, drink, and lodging to visiting strangers.[22] Although the Koho are still too reserved to accord sincere generosity to any except proven friends, they do extend hospitalities to any powerful alien group because of their fear of reprisal.[23]

SECTION VI

RELIGION

Religion dominates the lives of the Koho. The beliefs of the tribesmen are animistic, involving absolute faith in a vast pantheon of spirits.[1] Tradition encompasses the requirements for successful interaction with the spirits through appropriate rituals, ceremonies, taboos, interdictions, and sacrifices. The basic beliefs and practices are similar throughout the Koho area, with specific details varying from village to village.

Principal Spirits

In the pantheon of spirits sacred to the Koho are the supreme being (Ndu) and innumerable other spirits, including those of the sun (Yang Tongai), moon (Yang Konghai), earth (Yang Tioh), sky (Yang Truu), and thunder (Yang Dong Rong). Multitudes of spirits inhabit various terrain features such as mountains, patches of forest, and prominent rocks. The Koho people believe spirits inhabit certain animals, such as tigers, and objects in the village—rice wine jars, the village gate, and tools. Although no temples, pagodas, or other religious structures are built in honor of these spirits, the tribesmen do designate patches of forest or particular rocks as sacred areas.[2] In addition to the good spirits, or yang, the Koho have a group of evil spirits, or caa, believed to cause misfortunes such as accidents, illness, and death.

Spirits especially important to the Sre are the spirit of the mountain and the spirit of the waters. The spirit of the mountain is awesome, pictured as a tiger, a serpent, or a dragon; the spirit of the waters is evil, attacking men and causing them to fall ill. The *yang che* or spirits of the plants are benevolent and responsible for all the rice the tribesmen eat, all the cotton used for clothing, and all the materials used for building.[3]

Religious Ceremonies

The principal religious ceremonies and sacrifices of the Koho are related to the agricultural cycle and the life cycle (birth, marriage, and death) The most important agricultural ceremony is the Feast of the New Year, Lir Bong, a celebration traditionally coinciding with the annual planting. The date of this ritual varies from village to village, but it generally occurs in the spring, between the end of March and the beginning of May. This ritual and its ceremonial feast invoke the spirit of rice and include a ceremonial blessing of the unhusked rice to be planted at seeding time. The participants in this ritual anoint the pillars and doors of the granary, the rice pile, the house, and their own chests with a mixture composed of water, termite earth (similar to an anthill), and a few plants. The Koho believe this mixture regenerates the vital spiritual forces in both the unplanted rice and in themselves.[4]

The Feast of the New Year is essentially a family celebration. With the head of the household presiding over all the assembled relatives, the ritual is conducted in the family granary. All farm implements are laid out. A small jar of rice wine is opened and prepared for drinking, and a pig is sacrificed and grilled over a fire. The pig's entrails are placed in a bowl as an offering to the spirits. Then the household head offers a long prayer to the spirit of rice, invoking by name the spirit for every mountain, hill, ricefield, sacred wood, pond, prominent rock, and forest clearing in the tribal area. Next, everyone present drinks from the jar of rice wine; then everyone shares the meat of the sacrificed animals.[5]

Other ceremonies related to the agricultural cycle include sacrifices when fields are cleared and burned, when rice is planted, during the growing phase (to assist growth), and at harvest.[6]

Religious Practitioners

The ceremonies of the agricultural cycle are conducted by heads of households and villages, who occupy an almost sacred position, for the tribesmen believe these men embody the traditions and practices of their people.

Ceremonies to heal the sick are conducted by specialists called *bojou*. Among the Sre, Nop, and Kil, a bojou may be either male or female. Usually one bojou serves a group of villages in his immediate area. Through divination, the bojou determines the nature of illness, identifies the evil spirits responsible, and decides the sacrifices required to induce the spirits to take away the illness. Herbal medicines are used in conjunction with the sacrifices in healing ceremonies.[7]

SECTION VII

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The Koho economy is based primarily upon rice cultivation and secondarily upon the home production of baskets, pottery, cloth, and other items. Except for the Sre subgroup, which grows wet rice on permanent irrigated fields or paddies, the Koho use the slash-and-burn technique of cultivation, which involves clearing the forested areas, burning the vegetation during the dry winter season, raising dry rice in the field until the soil nutrients are depleted, and then moving to a new area.

The Sre cultivate irrigated ricefields in valley bottomlands and along the slopes of valleys. Fields on slopes are constructed in tiers or terraces. Sre ricefields are divided into small units separated by dikes, which often consist of two mud walls forming a channel for the irrigation water. Rivers and streams in the area are dammed and diverted into the irrigation channels, some of which are several kilometers long.

After the first spring rains have soaked the earth, the villagers prepare the dikes and channels. Soon the streams carry sufficient water to permit irrigation of the fields. Then the fields are harrowed with wooden-toothed rakes drawn by buffalo, flooded, and harrowed again until the soil has the consistency of fine liquid mud. The soil is then kneaded and flattened by passing a large board over it.

Rice is sown in this fine flat mud covered by a thin film of water. About the fifth day after planting, the water is drained from the fields. Once the shoots have grown a little, the paddy is again flooded and remains under water for the duration of the growing season.[1]

Slash-and-burn agriculture is practiced by the other Koho groups. The fields are used for about 3 years, then allowed to remain fallow for a period as long as 20 years. During this period, forest growth re-covers the plot and revitalizes the soil.

Among the Koho, the land under cultivation by this technique is called a *mir*. The mir is sown shortly after the beginning of the rainy season; the rice seeds are planted in holes made with pointed dibble sticks. During the growing period the mirs are watered by the rainfall of the summer monsoons. The field is weeded by the tribesmen; fences and watchtowers are erected to prevent marauding animals from destroying the crop. The rice is harvested in the fall.

Normally, Koho families cultivate mirs within an area designated by tradition. Thus, the cycle of changing from one mir to another is established by custom. The tribesmen know where each village has its particular area and where each family traditionally has established its mirs.

The Sre, although they themselves maintain permanent wet-rice fields, allow other groups to use areas in their forest land. The Kil, in particular, because of the poverty of their own lands, often cultivate mirs on Sre land. Thus, in the Sre area, lands held by one village may be cultivated by two entirely different Koho groups: the Sre villagers work the paddies, and another group cultivates the fields in the higher forest by the slash-and-burn method.[2]

To supplement their diet, the Koho hunt, fish, and plant small gardens of beans, corn, and other vegetables.

Koho arts and crafts include weaving, basketweaving, pottery making and ironworking. Basketmaking is particularly important among the Koho: baskets are designed to serve many practical needs of storage and transportation. The design and shape of baskets vary from village to village. Villages located near good deposits of clay engage in pottery making. Only women are permitted to make pottery.[3] The value of a pot is determined by the amount of rice or salt it will hold.

Trade

During the dry season, when agricultural tasks have ceased for the year, members of some Koho groups take an annual trip to the coast to pay taxes to the Vietnamese Government and to trade in the coastal towns. They exchange blankets, animal skins, and pigs for clothing, salt, and jars. The coastal trading centers are Phan Thiet, Phan Rang, and Nha Trang. The expedition to the sea takes several weeks because of the heavy burdens. Experiences on these trips become the subject of long evening storytelling sessions.[5]

Tribesmen probably also trade in highland towns, and they may deal with Vietnamese peddlers who pass through the tribal areas.

For any important commercial transaction, the Koho use an intermediary *(lam gong)*, who receives a commission of about 10 percent. For example, for hiring a servant, the intermediary receives a cow buffalo, a silk blanket, a silver bracelet, and a bead necklace. For the sale of jars worth three or four servants, the seller may employ as many intermediaries as he wishes, and the intermediaries divide the commission. The commission for jar sales is the same number of buffaloes as the number of servants designating the value of the jar. Each intermediary receives a brass bracelet and a bead necklace in addition to his share of the buffaloes. After a sacrificial ceremony, the purchaser, seller, and intermediary share a jar of rice wine and a chicken.

An intermediary is always responsible for payments for transactions he concludes. If his client is insolvent, the intermediary himself must make the payment, even if this means that his own children must help him to meet his obligation.

For the sale of a servant, the intermediary cannot collect his fee for 1 year; should the servant die within the year, he receives nothing. If the servant runs away during the year, the intermediary must obtain restitution from the seller or personally pay the buyer. At the end of the year, the intermediary and seller are no longer held accountable.

If, on the day of purchase, an animal dies in transit to the buyer's house, the seller must relinquish half of the price received; however, if the animal dies the next day, the transaction is considered closed, and neither the seller nor the intermediary is obliged to give the buyer a refund.[6]

The tribesman willingly buys on credit and will then meet his obligation as tardily as possible.[7]

Property System

Among the Koho, the women control the disposal of all property. Before an item can be sold, the permission of the women must be obtained. Property is inherited through the female descendants of the family.[8]

SECTION VIII

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

General Political Organization

The village is the most important political unit among the Koho, although occasionally villages related by marriage will cooperate in a loose alliance. There is no political organization at the tribal level.

Political authority within the village is exercised by a village chief (*poa*), chosen not because he is a man of physical strength but because of his knowledge of tribal tradition. The chief is the symbolic representation of custom and is the guardian of the village tradition. There is also an informal council of elders, composed of household heads (*po hiu*) and the heads of extended families living in separate houses (*kumy*). This council apparently meets only to assist the chief in reaching decisions on particularly serious issues.[1]

Several Koho villages may cooperate on events or issues of common interest. In such cases, the loose alliance is led by a headman (*roklong*) chosen from one of the participating villages.

Under the French colonial administration, a French-appointed functionary selected from the village acted as the liaison between the French and the tribesmen, in addition to the chief chosen by the villagers. He was responsible for the initiation of French tribal programs, tax collection, and the communication of French decrees to the villagers.

Following the departure of the French, the Diem regime attempted to politically and socially integrate the tribal people into the Republic of Vietnam. Officially, the Central Government handles relations between tribal villages, Government representatives deal with groups of seven or eight villages; while the villages themselves are represented by their village chiefs.[2]

Legal System

Koho law, part of the oral tradition passed from generation to generation, is expressed by taboos and prohibitions known and respected by all tribesmen. These oral laws, called the *nri*, describe various crimes in poetic and symbolic terms and state the penalties for nonobservance.[3] The Koho believe every crime upsets the harmony of the world by disturbing the spirits. The angry spirits punish offenders so that harmony is restored only when the guilty make a twofold restitution of offering a sacrifice to the spirits and paying a fine. Under the traditional Koho laws, there is no imprisonment or death penalty.[4]

Examples of some specific Koho laws are listed below. Among the Sre, incest is the worst possible offense. Reparations must be made to the offended spirits and to all the villagers. To appease the spirit of the sun, the sacrifice and feast take place in an open field. The sacrificial animals must be of the same color and type; for example, white chickens, white pigs, or white buffaloes.[5]

For the involuntary homicide or any accidental death such as death by being caught in a trap, payment is exacted from the person responsible—payment in the form of servants valued at the same level as the deceased. However, if the fatal accident occurs in spite of due precautions—for example, precautions taken by the owner of a trap to mark its location—then the payment is nine bull buffaloes.[6]

When an animal left in the care of another person dies or disappears due to negligence of the custodian, reimbursement must be made to the owner. In case of injury or accidental death of the animal, the custodian must immediately advise the owner, presenting him with the horns and the freshly cut ears. Failure to fulfill this formality requires the custodian to reimburse the owner.[7]

When a Koho commits suicide, his family must notify the village elders, who immediately institute an inquiry. Failure to notify authorities results in a penalty of fines, or possible accusation of murder; in the latter case, the penalty is heavy—three times the normal fee.[8] The family must also sacrifice a male buffalo and offer a jar of rice wine to the spirits of the rice paddy or forest at the site of the suicide. If the site is on another family's property, payment must be made to that family: one male buffalo, one jar worth four piastres, two bead bracelets, and a silver bracelet.[9]

On the village, district, and provincial levels, a special system of courts was established under the French to adjudicate matters concerning the various tribal groups. In the village, a village court decided the sentences, which could be reviewed on the district level. Three members of the district court were assigned to each ethnic group in a district jurisdiction and handled only tribal matters. The district court officials selected a president to preside over the district court, which met in the house of the district chief.[10]

Under the French, those cases that could not be resolved on the village level were sent to the Tribunal Coutumier, which convened for the first 7 days of every month. In judging the cases, brought before the tribunal, the chief judge relied on traditional tribal law and customs.[11] The tribunal dealt only with cases in which both parties were tribespeople. Cases involving Vietnamese and tribespeople were the responsibility of the province chief, but provincial authorities tried not to interfere with the operation of the tribunal.

The legal system instituted by the French still governs the Montagnard tribes, but steps have been taken by the Vietnamese Government to revise the legislative code in the tribal areas. Under the Diem regime, an attempt was made to substitute Vietnamese laws for the tribal practices. This attempt was connected with Vietnamese efforts to integrate the tribespeople politically into the Republic of Vietnam.

In March 1965, the Vietnamese Government has since promulgated a decree restoring the legal status of the tribal laws and tribunals. Under this new decree, there will be courts at the village, district, and province levels which will be responsible for civil affairs, Montagnard affairs, and penal offenses when all parties involved are Montagnards.[12]

Village customs law courts, consisting of the village administrative committee chief aided by two Montagnard assistants, will conduct weekly court sessions.[13] When a case is reviewed and a decision reached by this court, it will be recorded and signed by the parties involved. This procedure will eliminate the right to appeal to another court. If settlement cannot be determined, the case can be referred to a higher court.[14]

District courts, governed by the president of the court (the district chief) aided by two Montagnard assistants, will hold bimonthly court sessions. Cases to be tried by the district court include those appealed by the village court and cases which are adjudged serious according to tribal customs.[15]

At the province level, a Montagnard Affairs Section will be established as part of the National Court. This section, under the jurisdiction of a Montagnard Presiding Judge and two assistants, will handle cases appealed from the Montagnard district courts and cases beyond the jurisdiction of the village or district courts. It will convene once or twice a month depending upon the requirements.[16]

Subversive Influences

The main objective of Viet Cong subversive activity is to win the allegiance of the Koho and to turn the tribesmen into an active, hostile force against the Republic of Vietnam. Another important

Viet Cong objective is to maintain their supply lines through the Koho area.

Subversive elements generally infiltrate tribal villages and attempt to win the confidence of the whole village or its key members. The subversive elements identify themselves with the villagers by providing assistance for village and family projects and by giving medical aid. A thorough knowledge and observance of tribal customs aid the Viet Cong in their effort to win the confidence of the tribespeople.

After the villagers' suspicions have been allayed and their confidence won, the Viet Cong proceed with an intense propaganda program directed against the Vietnamese Government. Individuals within the tribe are recruited, trained, and then used for various support or combat missions with the Viet Cong.

Occasionally, if propaganda and cajolery are not effective, the Viet Cong will resort to extortion and terror. The Koho are sometimes coerced into refusing to cooperate with the Vietnamese Government. The Viet Cong may also oblige the villagers to supply labor and materiel.[17]

SECTION IX

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

The principal means of disseminating information in the Koho area is by word of mouth. No information was available at this writing concerning the number of radios or Koho familiarity with them. However, radios are probably no less rare among the Koho than among other tribal groups of the Republic of Vietnam. Any radios in operation in the Koho area could pick up broadcasts from Saigon and provincial radio stations.

Where feasible, short movies covering simple subjects and using the Koho dialect might be effective in communicating with the tribesmen.

Written communications might have some effect on the Koho. Although most Koho are illiterate, the tribe does have a written language developed for them by missionaries in the 1950's.[1] Although only a few Koho tribesmen can read this language, they are reportedly very eager to learn to read and write.[2] Other Koho may be able to read French and Vietnamese; they could communicate information in written materials to the remainder of the tribesmen. Data about the successful use of printed materials is not available at this time.

Information themes to be used among the Koho should be oriented around the principle of improving the condition of the villagers. The control of disease, the improvement of agriculture, and protection against Viet Cong harassment are some possible themes for information programs.

SECTION X

CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

Any proposed civic action should take into account the religious, social, and cultural traditions of the specific Koho group. Initial contacts in villages should be made only with the tribal elders in order to show respect for the tribal political structure. The Koho tribespeople should also be psychologically prepared to accept the proposed changes. This requires detailed consultation with village leaders, careful assurance of results, and a relatively slow pace in implementing programs.

The degree of responsiveness to innovation varies considerably among the Koho groups. For example, although the Kil remain almost completely isolated and wish only to preserve their traditional way of life, the groups near Di Linh and Da Lat (the Sre, Lat, and Tring) are reportedly anxious to gain an education and willing to accept change. These latter groups, likewise, are more accustomed to outside influences; some of their members have been educated in Vietnamese schools and hold positions with the Government.[1]

Most Koho groups would probably respond favorably to ideas for change presented in terms of local community betterment. Civic action proposals should stress the resulting improvement of village life rather than emphasize ethnic or cultural pride, nationalism, or political ideology. The reasons for innovations should be thoroughly explained: the Koho resent interference in their normal routine if they do not understand the reason for it.

Civic action programs of the Vietnamese Government have included the resettlement of some Koho groups into new and larger villages, the control of malaria and other medical aid programs, agricultural assistance, and the provision of education facilities.

The following civic action guidelines may be useful in the planning and implementation of projects or programs.

1. Projects originating in the local village are more desirable than suggestions imposed by a remote Central Government or by outsiders.
2. Projects should be designed to be challenging but should not be on such a scale as to intimidate the villagers by size or

strangeness. This consideration would limit activities among the Kil, while it would be less important among the Sre.

3. Projects should have fairly short completion dates or should have phases that provide frequent opportunities to evaluate effectiveness.
4. Results should, as far as possible, be observable, measurable, or tangible.
5. Projects should, ideally, lend themselves to emulation by other villages or groups.

Civic Action Projects

The civic action possibilities for personnel working with the Koho groups encompass all aspects of tribal life. Examples of possible projects are listed below. They should be considered representative but not all inclusive and not in the order of priority.

1. Agriculture and animal husbandry
   a. Improvement of livestock quality through introduction of better breeds.
   b. Instruction in elementary veterinary techniques to improve health of animals.
   c. Introduction of improved seeds and new vegetables.
   d. Introduction of techniques to improve quality and yields of farmland.
   e. Insect and rodent control.
   f. Construction of simple irrigation and drainage systems.
2. Transportation and communication
   a. Roadbuilding and clearing of trails.
   b. Installation, operation, and maintenance of electric power generators and village electric light systems.
   c. Construction of motion-picture facilities.
   d. Construction of radio broadcast and receiving stations and public-speaker systems.
3. Health and Sanitation
   a. Improve village sanitation.
   b. Provide safe water-supply systems.
   c. Eradicate disease-carrying insects.
   d. Organize dispensary facilities for outpatient treatment.
   e. Teach sanitation, personal hygiene, and first aid.
4. Education
   a. Provide basic literacy training.
   b. Provide rudimentary vocational training.
   c. Present information about the outside world of interest to the tribesmen.
   d. Provide basic citizenship training.

SECTION XI

PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

Given the incentive and motivation and provided with the necessary training, leadership, and support, the Koho can become an effective force against the Viet Cong. The tribesmen are potential trackers, guides, interpreters, and intelligence agents. With intensive training and support, the Koho can be organized to defend their villages against the Viet Cong; with good leadership they can be organized into an effective counterguerrilla combat force.

In the past, the Koho were considered capable fighters, whether fighting offensively in raids against other groups or defensively within fortified villages.[1] Some Koho had military training with the French and are capable of sophisticated combat operations. Recently some Koho have been trained by U.S. personnel and are familiar with U S. operational techniques as well as modern American equipment.

Weapons Utilized by the Tribe

In the past, the Koho relied upon crossbows, spears, lances, swords, and knives and were very skillful in their use. Their relatively small stature limits the weapons the Koho can use, but they are proficient in handling light weapons such as the AR.15 rifle, the Thompson submachinegun and the carbine. The tribesmen are less proficient in the use of the M-1 or the Browning Automatic Rifle, although they can handle larger weapons which can be disassembled and quickly reassembled.

The Koho pride themselves upon their hunting skill and their mastery of traditional weapons; they are equally as proud of their skill and marksmanship with modern weapons. If a Koho can carry and handle a weapon conveniently, he will use it well.

The Koho cannot handle sophisticated devices, such as mortars, explosives, and mines, as proficiently as hand weapons. They cannot absorb the more abstract and technical aspects—such as timing trajectories—of such weapons.

Ability to Absorb Military Instruction

The Koho can absorb basic military training and concepts. Their natural habitat gives them an excellent background for tracking and ambush activities; they are resourceful and adaptable in the jungle.

The Koho learn techniques and procedures readily from actual demonstration, using the weapon itself as a teaching aid. They do not learn as well from blackboard demonstrations, an approach which is too abstract for them.

Some Koho are veterans of service with the French and are invaluable in training the younger tribesmen.

SECTION XII

SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH THE KOHO

Every action of the Koho tribesman has specific significance in terms of his culture. One must be careful to realize that the Koho may not react as outsiders do. The outsider should remember that a relatively simple course of action may, for the tribesman, require not only divination but also a sacrifice.

A few suggestions for personnel working with the Koho are listed below:

Official Activities

1. The initial visit to a Koho village should be formal. Also it is advisable when visiting a strange village to be accompanied by a guide from a nearby village. He will be held responsible for any infraction of customs and taboos and therefore will be careful to see that none are committed. There have been cases reported where persons have been denied entrance to a Koho village if unaccompanied by a person from another village.[1] A visitor should speak first to the village chief and elders, who will then introduce him to other principal village figures.
2. Sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness are essential in dealing with the Koho. Promises and predictions should not be made unless the result is assured. The tribespeople usually expect a new group of personnel to fulfill the promises of the previous group.
3. Outsiders cannot gain the confidence of Koho tribesmen quickly. Developing a sense of trust is a slow process requiring great understanding, tact, patience, and personal integrity.
4. An attitude of good-natured willingness and limitless patience must be maintained, even when confronted with resentment or apathy.
5. Whenever possible avoid projects or operations which give the tribesmen the impression they are being forced to change their ways.
6. Tribal elders and the village chief should receive some of the

credit for projects and for improved administration. Efforts should never undermine or discredit the position or influence of the local leaders.

Social Relationships

1. The Koho should be treated with respect and courtesy at all times.
2. The term *moi* should not be used because it means savage and is offensive to the tribesmen.
3. Outside personnel should not refuse an offer of food or drink, especially at a religious ceremony. Once involved in a ceremony, one must eat or drink whatever is offered.
4. A gift, an invitation to a ceremony, or an invitation to enter a Koho house may be refused by an outsider, as long as consistency and impartiality are shown. However, receiving gifts, participating in ceremonies, and visiting houses will serve to establish good relations with the tribespeople.
5. Outsiders should request permission to attend a Koho ceremony, festival, or meeting from the village elders or other responsible persons.
6. An outsider should never enter a Koho house unless accompanied by a member of that house; this is a matter of good taste and cautious behavior. If anything is later missing from that house, unpleasant and unnecessary complications may arise.
7. Outsiders should not get involved with Koho women. This could create distrust and dissension.
8. Teachers should be careful to avoid seriously disrupting cultural patterns.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

1. Do not touch or otherwise tamper with Koho tombs.
2. Do not enter a village where a religious ceremony is taking place or a religious taboo is in effect. Watch for the warning signs placed at the village entrances; when in doubt, do not enter.
3. Do not mock Koho religious beliefs in any way; these beliefs are the cornerstone of Koho life.

Living Standards and Routines

1. Outsiders should treat all Koho property and village animals with respect. Any damage to property or fields should be promptly repaired and/or paid for. An outsider should avoid borrowing from the tribesmen. Animals should not be treated brutally or taken without the owner's permission.
2. Learn simple phrases in the Koho language. A desire to

learn and speak their language makes a favorable impression on the Koho.

Health and Welfare

1. The Koho are becoming aware of the benefits of medical care and will request medical assistance. Outside groups in Koho areas should try to provide medical assistance whenever possible.
2. Medical teams should be prepared to handle and should have adequate supplies for extensive treatment of malaria, dysentery, yaws, trachoma, venereal diseases, intestinal parasites, and various skin diseases.

FOOTNOTES

I. INTRODUCTION

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2. Frank M. LeBar, *et al.*, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Human Relations Areas Files Press, 1964), pp. 152–53; Marcel Ner, "Les Moi du Haut-Donnai," *Extrême-Asie*, LXXIX (August 1933), p. 338; Henri Maitre, *Les Jungles moi* (Paris: Émile Larose, 1912), pp. 406–407.
3. The Koho Kil are not to be confused with the M'nong subgroup called the Kil. The M'nong Kil are discussed strictly as a M'nong group by Pierre Huard and A. Maurice in their "Les Mnong du Plateau Central Indochinois," *Bulletins et Travaux de l'Institut Indochinois pour l'Étude de l'Homme*, II (1939), p. 128. Several authors refer to a Kil group related to the Koho tribes: Ner, *op. cit.*, p. 338; Quequiner, "Notes sur une peuplade moi de la Chaine Annamitique Sud: Les Cau S're," *Bulletins et Travaux de l'Institut Indochinois pour l'Étude de l'Homme*, VI (1943); p. 396; David Thomas, "Mon-Khmer Subgroupings in Vietnam" (University of North Dakota: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1962), p. 4.
4. Nhom Nghien Cuu Dan Toc (Cua Uy-Ban Dan-Toc) [Minority People's Study Group (of the Committee of Minority Peoples)], *Cac Dan Toc Thieu So O Viet-Nam* [*Minority Peoples of Vietnam*] (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Van Hoa, 1959), m.p.
5. LaBar, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–56.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
7. H. C. Darby (ed.), *Indo-China* (Cambridge, England: Geographical Handbook Series, 1943), p. 21.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–84; Ner, *op. cit.*, pp. 335–37.
9. Darby, *op. cit.*, pp. 47–71.

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2. *Ibid.*
3. Peggy Bowen, "Literacy Multiplied and Glorified" *Jungle Frontiers*, XVII (Winter 1963), pp. 6–7; Willie Merkerson, "Returnee Response to Questionnaire on the Montagnard Tribal Study" (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, January 1965); François Martini, "Notes et mélanges de la transcription du Sre (Koho)," *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises* (1952), pp. 99–109.
4. E. H. Adkins, *A Study of Montagnard Names in Vietnam* (East Lansing, Mich.: Vietnam Advisory Group, Michigan State

University, February 1962), p. 7; Irving Kopf, Personal Communication, September 1965. [Ph.D. candidate, Columbia University; extensive U.S. Government service in tribal areas of Vietnam.]

5. Merkerson, *op. cit.;* Martini, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–104; Hugh E. Early, "Returnee Response to Questionnaire on the Montagnard Tribal Study" (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, January 1965).
6. Ner, *op. cit.*, pp. 335–38; P. Bertrand, "Les Conditions de la culture du riz dans le Haut-Donnai (Viet-Nam)." *L'Agronomie Tropicale*, VII (May-June 1952), p. 266.
7. Jean Cassaigne, "Les Mois de la région de Djiring," *Indochine*, IV (January-June 1943), No. 131, p. 12.
8. Quequiner, *op. cit.*, p. 396.
9. Bernard Bourotte, "Essai d'histoire des populations montagnardes du Sud-Indochinois jusqu'à 1945," *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, XXX (1955), pp. 17, 19, 40–44; Ner, *op. cit.*, p. 341; Maitre, *op. cit.*, pp. 461–64.
10. Paul Neis, "Explorations chez les sauvages de l'Indo-Chine à l'est du Mekong," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, Septième Série, IV (1883), p. 492.
11. Quequiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 396–97; Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13.
12. Dam Bo [Jacques Dournes], "Les Populations montagnardes du Sud-Indochinois," *France-Asie* (Special Number, Spring 1950), pp. 1003–1004.

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2. Quequiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 395–97.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Darby, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–31.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 110–14.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 114–16.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–24.
8. Jules Canivey, "Notice sur les moeurs et coutumes des Moi de la région de Dalat," *Revue d'Ethnographie et de Sociologie*, IV (1913), p. 14.
9. Quequiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 395–97.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 396–97; Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 1004.
11. Canivey, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
12. Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 131, p. 11.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Merkerson, *op. cit.*
15. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 1004.
16. Merkerson, *op. cit.*
17. Bowen, *op. cit.*

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3. Canivey, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
4. Georges Condominas, "The Mnong Gar of Central Vietnam,"

Social Structure in Southeast Asia, edited by G. P. Murdock (New York: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, No. 29, 1960), p. 15.

5. Canivey, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Guilleminet, *op. cit.*, pp. 468–69.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 465.
9. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, pp. 944–1017.
10. Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13; Ner, *op cit.*, p. 346; Quequiner, *op. cit.*, p. 397.
11. Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 133, p. 13.
12. Quequiner, *op. cit.*, p. 398; Merkerson, *op. cit.*; Guilleminet, *op. cit.*, p. 481.
13. Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13.
14. Canivey, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
17. Kopf, *op. cit.*
18. Canivey, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13.
21. Canivey, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9.
22. Bowen, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7.
23. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 1171.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13; Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, pp. 1159–62.
26. Canivey, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–13.
27. Guilleminet, *op. cit.*, p. 478; Quequiner, *op. cit.*, p. 399; Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13.
28. Guilleminet, *op. cit.*, p. 478; Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13.
29. Canivey, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9.

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4. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 1047.
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7. *Ibid.*, pp. 1046–52.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 1023.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 1023–24.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 1024.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 1146–47.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 1150–51.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 1150.
20. Canivey, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
21. Alexandre Yersin, "De Nhatrang à Tourane par les pays mois," *Indochine*, IV (April-July 1943), No. 137, pp. 3–8.

22. Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13.
23. Kopf, *op. cit.*

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2. *Ibid.*
3. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, pp. 1130–32.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 1154–59.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 1172–77.

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2. Ner, *op. cit.*, pp. 335–38; Bertrand, *op. cit.*, p. 266.
3. Ner, *op. cit.*, p. 342.
4. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, pp. 1011–20.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 974.
6. Canivey, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Ner, *op. cit.*, p. 346; Cassaigne, *op. cit.*, No. 132, p. 13.

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1. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, pp. 1095–96.
2. Gerald C. Hickey, "Comments on Recent GVN Legislation Concerning Montagnard Common Law Courts in the Central Vietnamese Highlands (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation Memorandum, June 8, 1965), p. 2.
3. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, pp. 1099–1105.
4. Dournes, "Nri," p. 1234.
5. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 1106.
6. Canivey, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
9. Dournes, "Nri," p. 1236.
10. John D. Donoghue, Daniel D. Whitney, and Iwao Ishina, *People in the Middle: The Rhade of South Vietnam* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1962), pp. 69–70.
11. Gerald C. Hickey, *Preliminary Research Report on the High Plateau.* Saigon: Vietnam Advisory Group, Michigan State University, 1957.
12. Hickey, "Comments," *op. cit.*, p. 1.
13. *Ibid.*
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16. *Ibid.*
17. Malcolm W. Browne, *The New Face of War* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. 121–43.

IX. COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

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2. *Ibid.*

X. CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Kopf, *op. cit.;* Early, *op. cit.;* Merkerson, *op. cit.*

XI. PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

1. Ner, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

XII. SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH THE KOHO

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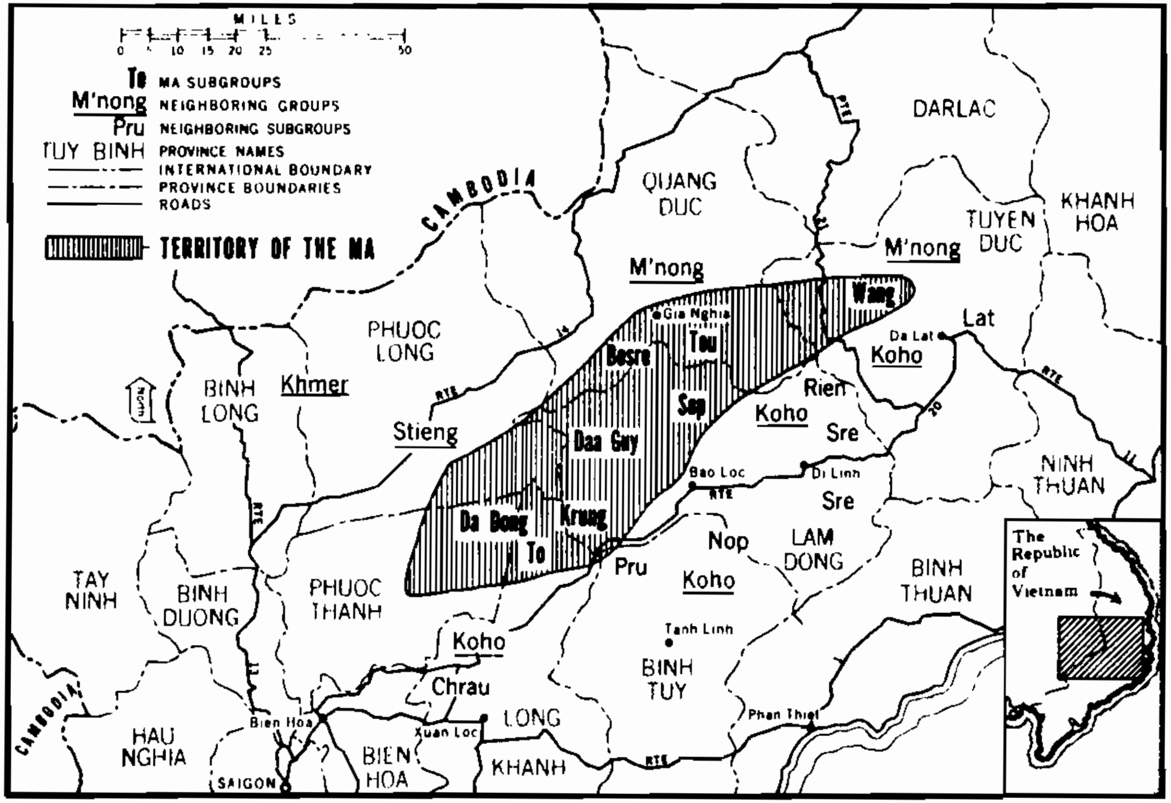
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TUYEN DUC
KHANH HOA
Wang
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Daa Guy
Da Dong
Krung
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Tanh Linh
BINH TUY
Phan Thiet
HAU NGHIA
Bien Hoa
SAIGON
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CAMBODIA
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The Republic of Vietnam

The Ma Subgroups

CHAPTER 11. THE MA

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

The Ma are one of several distinct groups which comprise the Koho-speaking peoples—an important grouping of Montagnards speaking mutually intelligible languages in the Republic of Vietnam.*

The Ma speak one of the several closely related Koho dialects. These dialects all stem from the Bahnaric subgroup of the Mon-Khmer language stock. Although linguistically related, the Ma and the other Koho groups do not share the same type of social structure.† Ma society is based upon patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal organization. However, like the other Koho groups, the Ma extended family and village form the most important social and political units.

The Ma inhabit the rough, mountainous terrain and alluvial plains of the Da Dung River region. Due to the variation in terrain the principal crop, rice, is cultivated by both dry and wet methods.

Name and Size of Group

Sometimes referred to as the Cau Ma, the Ma consist of several subgroups: To (Cho To), Ro (Cho Ro), ‡ Sop (Cho Sop), Borse, Tou, Da Dong, Wang, Daa Guy, and the Krung.[1] According to a North Vietnamese source the Ma group numbers approximately 30,000; a South Vietnamese source estimates the population at 21,500.[2]

Location

The Ma tribesmen inhabit a sparsely populated strip of land bordering both banks of the upper Da Dung River. Their territory includes the northeastern portion of Phuoc Thanh Province, the northern tip of Long Khanh Province, a southeastern portion of Phuoc Long Province, the western half of Lam Dong Province, the southern portion of Quang Duc Province, and extends into the eastern portion of Tuyen Duc Province. Scattered villages are also found in a northern border area of Binh Tuy Province.

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* In addition to the Ma, the Koho-speaking peoples are composed of the following groups: Chru, Kil, Lat, Laya, Nop, Pru, Rien, Sre, and Tring.

† The general Koho social structure pattern is matrilineal and matrilocal.

‡ The geographic location of the Ro subgroup has not been determined as of this writing.

The tribespeople neighboring the Ma are the M'nong to the north, various Koho groups to the east and south, and the Stieng to the West.

Terrain Analysis of Tribal Area

The left bank of the Da Dung River includes Bao Loc Plateau, which has moderate relief rising to approximately 3,000 feet, sharp mountains with an elevation of about 1,500 feet, the typical terrain of the area—the *dang*—which consists of sharp mountain ridges rising to about 2,000 feet; and the alluvial plains along the Da Dung River and other watercourses of the area. The right bank of the Da Dung River is also dang terrain.

The high and relatively evenly distributed precipitation gives this area rain forest vegetation of two distinct belts. At the higher elevations is the primary rain forest where the trees average 75 to 90 feet in height, forming a continuous canopy. Below this canopy are smaller trees of 45 to 60 feet in height, and below this second layer is a fair abundance of seedlings and saplings. Orchids, other herbaceous plants, epiphytes, and woody climbing plants known as lianas are profuse. Little light penetrates this type of forest, and there is not much ground growth. During the dry season, this forest can usually be penetrated on foot with little difficulty.

The second belt or secondary rain forest which develops after land in the primary rain forest has been cleared and then left uncultivated, is more extensive in this area. In this forest the trees are small and close together, and there is an abundance of ground growth, lianas, and herbaceous climbers. Penetration is difficult without the constant use of the machete.

The summer monsoon (April to mid-September) and the winter monsoon (November to March) provide a regular seasonal alternation of wind. In the summer these winds come mainly from the southwest, in the winter from the northeast. Agriculture is greatly dependent upon the monsoon-borne rain. Precipitation is high—averaging more than 80 inches in the lower elevation and more than 150 inches in the higher areas. Temperatures in the Ma region are as much as 15 degrees lower than those of the coastal regions.[3]

National Route 14 passes slightly to the west of the Ma area. Route 20 passes through the area across the Bao Loc Plateau, and a secondary road runs through the northeastern part of the area from Di Linh to Gia Nghia.

SECTION II

TRIBAL BACKGROUND

Ethnic and Racial Origin

All the highland groups of the Republic of Vietnam are part of two large ethnic groups: the Malayo-Polynesian and the Mon-Khmer. In terms of language, customs, and physical appearance, the Ma, as one of the Koho groups, belong to the Mon-Khmer grouping. Indochina has been a migratory corridor from time immemorial, and the movement of the Mon-Khmer peoples into what is now the Republic of Vietnam probably started centuries ago. The Mon-Khmer peoples are generally believed to have originated in the Upper Mekong Valleys, from whence they migrated through Indochina.[1]

Language

The term Koho refers to a number of tribal groups, including the Ma, Kil Lat, Tring, Sre, Rien, and Nop, that have very closely related dialects. The dialects of the various groups called Koho peoples are so similar that communication is possible among them. Since no language barrier exists among the Koho, anthropologists use the linguistic term Koho as the generic name for all these tribes.

The various Koho dialects stem from the Bahnaric subgroup of the Mon-Khmer language stock and consist primarily of short monosyllabic words.

The Koho groups have no written form for their dialects, although phonetic dictionaries and textbooks of their dialects do exist, thanks to the work of French and, more recently, American missionaries who lived among these people. In the 1950's, American missionaries reported some success in teaching a number of Koho to read and write their own dialect; however, no detailed information is available concerning the number of Koho who have acquired literacy. One source states that most Koho are still virtually illiterate.[2]

Under French colonial rule, little contact was permitted between the Vietnamese and the various Montagnard groups; thus, few Koho reaching maturity during the colonial period can speak Vietnamese, although some do speak French. Koho knowledge of Vietnamese depends largely upon proximity: Koho in the south, or near the towns of Di Linh or Da Lat, probably have some knowledge of Vietnamese gained through trading or other contacts, although it is doubtful that many have achieved fluency. Some members of Prong subgroup of the M'nong tribe are believed to understand some Koho dialects.

Legendary History

Like many of the highland groups of the Republic of Vietnam, the Ma have legends reflecting a belief that they were the original inhabitants of the world, existing at the beginning of time, with few skills and clothed only in leaves of the wild banana tree. However, the great spirit N'duh and good spirits *yang*, who watched over the Ma, were concerned with the welfare of these people. N'duh and the good spirits sent to the Ma legendary heroes, four of whom are K'bung, K'yae, K'hum, and K'tam, to teach the ancestors of the Ma useful techniques for farming, hunting, iron forging, and house construction, as well as to give the tribesmen a code of laws.[3]

Factual History

There is little material about the political and social history of the Ma people. Reportedly, the Ma tribesmen were once unified in the area stretching westward from the central Vietnamese coastline to the mountainous course of the Da Dung River. Under the pressure of successive invasions by the Cham, Chinese, Vietnamese, and later the French, the Ma moved westward away from the fertile coastal areas into the rugged mountain terrain, where they could maintain their isolation. A restless, belligerent, and warlike people, the Ma were not pacified by the French until 1937. The Ma have been considered one of the highland groups of the Republic of Vietnam who have most consistently resisted or ignored efforts to "civilize" them.[4]

Settlement Patterns

Ma villages are usually located near watercourses; however, the surrounding terrain determines the pattern of the villages. Upland or hillside villages comprise scattered farmsteads with their dry-rice fields nearby. These villages change location every 10 to 15 years as exhausted fields are abandoned in favor of new land.

On bottom land, some Ma settlements cluster around wet-rice paddy fields. The more permanent villages along the bottom land comprise 4 to 30 longhouses and generally form a rectangular or square pattern.

Within and adjacent to the Ma villages are small storehouses, small houses for the sick, grazing land, and plots of tobacco. No large communal houses were reported among the Ma.[5]

Although some Ma longhouses are built upon the ground, the

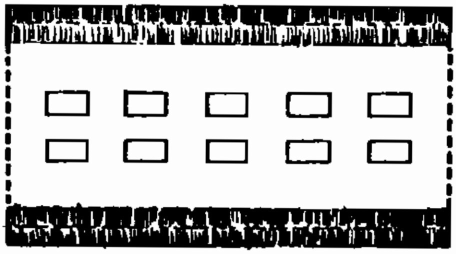

Figure 26. Layout of Ma village.

majority rest on pilings. Each longhouse, averaging approximately 40 meters in length, provides living quarters for 10 to 20 families.[6] The houses are constructed of hardwood beams and pillars, with sides of palm fronds and thatching and roofs made of palm branches. For the animals, an enclosure of bamboo and rattan is built adjacent to the house.[7]

The longhouse has a main entrance at one end. Facing the entrance to the house is an altar to the spirit of the hearth, *conao* or *nao*, made of painted or engraved planks ending in crosses of ferns and sprays of frayed bamboo fibers. Above the altar, from the smoke-blackened roof the Ma hang objects which symbolize every important event.[8] Every household birth is recorded in this manner, a small bamboo bow for a boy and a little bamboo fishing basket for a girl. Among the upland villages, before a new field is cleared, a branch, a leaf, or creeper is picked from the selected location and added to the collection hanging above the altar.[9]

In the front area of the house the Ma designate a hearth to be used only for lighting the pipes of guests. Weapons and tools are also stored in the front part of the house, and fishing gear is placed nearest the entrance. Toward the rear of the house are located the cooking hearths and compartments for the nuclear families. Rice is stored on shelves under the roof; jars of rice wine are placed near the hearths to hasten the fermentation process.[10]

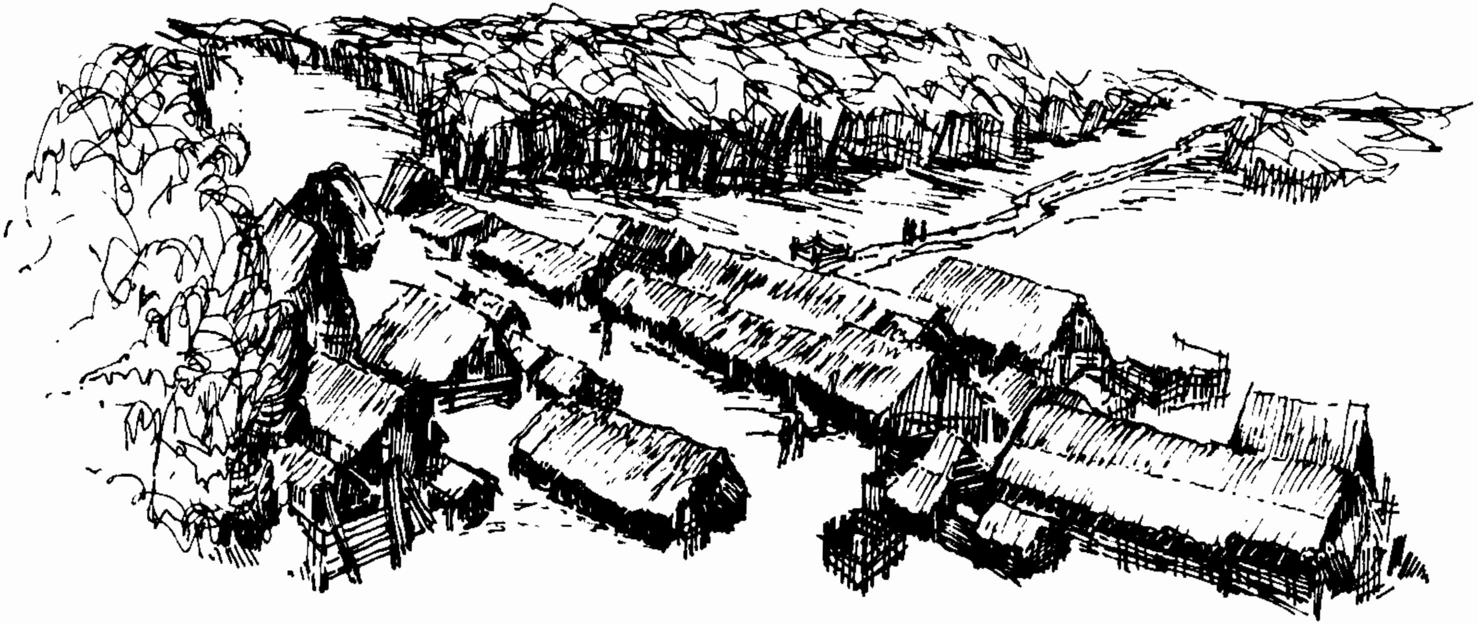

Figure 27. Layout of To village.

SECTION III

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical Characteristics

The Ma tribesman is generally short—5 feet 2 inches to 5 feet 5 inches—sturdy, and well proportioned.[1] His skin is smooth and reddish brown. Both sexes have broad faces and dark brown eyes, and wear their coarse, straight, black hair coiled in a bun at the nape of the neck. Various ornamental objects such as knives, pipes, various feathers, and wooden combs are inserted in the bun. The upper incisor teeth of the Ma are filed down to the gumline, resulting in a sibilance in their speech. Tribespeople stretch their earlobes with large ivory loops or thick ivory plugs.[2]

Health

The health of the Ma who reach adulthood may be described as good, since they have survived in spite of a very high infant mortality rate and exposure to many endemic diseases. Village sanitation and the tribesmen's personal hygiene practices are rudimentary.

The principal disease among the Ma is malaria—most tribespeople contract it at least once during their lifetime. Two common types of malaria are found in the tribal area. One, benign tertian malaria, causes high fever with relapses over a period of time but is usually not fatal. The other, malignant tertian malaria, is fatal to both infants and adults.[3]

The three types of typhus found in the Ma area are carried by lice, rat fleas, and mites. Mite-borne typhus is reportedly rampant among all the Montagnard tribes.[4]

Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, yaws, leprosy, venereal disease, tuberculosis, and various parasitic infestations are also found in the area.[5] In addition, many of the women in the southern parts of the Ma area are reportedly afflicted with goiters.[6]

Disease in the tribal area is spread by insects, including the anopheles mosquito, rat flea, and louse; some diseases are caused by worms, including hookworms; and some diseases are associated with poor sanitation and lack of sexual hygiene.[7]

The Ma believe that disease is caused by evil spirits as punishment for offenses committed by an individual, a family, or a village. When a person becomes ill, a healer or good sorcerer, *canang*, is summoned. With a talisman or *dek* to which the Ma attribute great spiritual powers, the canang determines the nature of the disease and its probable cause; then he prescribes the appropriate sacrifice necessary to appease the spirits and relieve the illness. The canang recites incantations and administers medicines extracted from herbs and plants. Under pain of punishment prescribed by traditional Ma law, the canang must respond when called to heal the sick.[8]

Ma villages have a special small house for isolated family care of very sick persons. In some villages, the sick person is left alone; the villagers check from time to time to see if he is still alive. When the sick person dies, he is buried, and the small house is burned.[9] Lepers are usually isolated in the forest far from the villages. When they fail to eat the food left for them, they are presumed to be dead and are burned in their houses. The tribesmen's fear of the disease-causing evil spirits, rather than any fear of contagion, is responsible for the isolation of lepers and the very sick.

Psychological Characteristics

Although normally gregarious, talkative, and fond of mischief-making, the tribesmen are excitable, argumentative, and belligerent. Not completely pacified by the French until 1937, the Ma are reserved with strangers and resent any intrusion upon their traditional way of life. The Ma make positive judgments and voice strong opinions without hesitation.[10] One observer noted that some Ma tribesmen stated that were it not for the law and order maintained by the presence of outsiders, the Ma might well have killed each other off due to their inclination to fight among themselves.[11] Like other highland groups in the Republic of Vietnam, the Ma live in constant fear of the evil spirits and become greatly agitated when confronted by omens believed to be evil. They are somewhat fatalistic, believing their lives are subject to the whims of the spirits.[12] Industrious and comparatively hard-working people, the Ma have a reputation for being wily, skilled traders, and bargainers.[13]

SECTION IV

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Ma have a patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal social organization which centers around the family and village. Men play the dominant role, filling principal positions of status such as village chief, sorcerer, judge (usually a village elder), ironsmith, or canoemaker. Ma women are generally subservient to their men. although traditional laws allow them some freedom in selecting a husband. Their duties include motherhood, weaving, cooking, and assisting the men in agricultural chores.

Ultimate authority within the longhouse customarily rests with the oldest male member of the family line. Secondary authority among the member family units is held by the husband of each separate family. When an individual cannot discharge his responsibilities, his family is obligated to do so.[1]

The Ma patrilineal kinship system determines that the family name and property be passed down through the male line. If a father dies before his son is old enough to assume responsibilities as head of the family, the father's holdings are managed by his brother or, if he has no brother, by his first cousin. However, when the eldest son reaches adulthood, all of his father's property and prerogatives are transferred to him.

The Ma residency pattern is patrilocal. A daughter is considered only a temporary member of her father's family, for upon marriage she generally moves to the home of her husband and his family.[2]

Among the Ma group no social structure seems to exist at the clan or tribal level; the family and village form the main units of organization.

Family units are the extended type with many nuclear families (husband, wife, children) living in one longhouse. Villages comprise several longhouses, each containing as many as 10 to 20 nuclear families of the same patrilineal line.[3]

Daily Routine

In most highland villages the women rise at dawn to prepare the first meal of the day. Then the men arise and release the animals from the pens where they are kept overnight.

The men perform their early morning chores unhurriedly and deliberately; little work is undertaken before the first meal—the main meal of the day.

After the morning meal the family group separates, each member going about his individual task, having a light snack at midday. At sundown the family returns to the longhouse for an evening meal of leftovers. By ten o'clock the villagers usually retire for the night.

In addition to working in the fields and hunting, the men make canoes, work with iron, gather clay, and fish. The Ma women make pottery, cloth, and baskets.[4]

During the winter, no work is done in the fields, and the men wander about the village or occupy themselves with repairing their tools, homes, and weapons.

During a festival, ceremony, or period of deliberation by village elders, the tribespeople engage in activities associated with the special event, thus altering their daily routine.

Marriage

The Ma ordinarily marry at the age of 15 or 16; by then the girls have reached puberty and the young men are old enough to work full time alongside their elders. Marriage between persons related by blood is prohibited.[5]

Formal engagements occur only among prosperous and influential Ma families who wish to conserve their wealth or strengthen family alliances. When a young Ma becomes formally engaged he gives his future in-laws a jar as a bride price. He also sacrifices a chicken and a jar of rice wine to his fiancée and gives her a necklace, bells, a comb, and other small ornaments. If the girl breaks the engagement, she must give the young man two jars and a pig as compensation for the bride price.[6]

Women may, if the opportunity arises, also initiate marriage proposals. A young girl or widow approaches the man she desires through an intermediary and her family, who offer the man's family a brass bracelet and a necklace of beads; if they accept these gifts, a wedding date is set.

On the wedding day the bride carries a basket of firewood to the groom's house; there she is met by the groom's mother and led into the house to deposit her basket.

During the marriage rites sacrifices are offered. The intermediary offers the groom a handful of cooked rice six times followed by a cup of rice wine. The groom drinks half of the wine, giving the rest to his bride.

The wedding night is spent drinking and celebrating to the accompaniment of gongs and drums. The couple spend the following night in the nuptial chamber, while the festivities continue for 4 or 5 days with wine and foodstuffs provided by the groom's parents.[7]

In marriages among the less prosperous Ma families, the young boy will often go to live in the house of a 5- or 6-year-old girl whose family wishes them to marry later. When the girl reaches puberty, the marriage is consummated without any ceremony except the ritual sacrifice of a chicken and a jar of rice wine. Ten or fifteen days later, the girl visits the home of her husband's parents and a similar sacrifice is performed. Intermediaries at these weddings are paid only a bead necklace and a brass bracelet of little value.[8]

After the marriage and the payment of the bride price, the couple normally move into the longhouse of the husband's family. Exceptions occur when the prospective groom is too poor to pay the bride price. He then usually resides with his future parents-in-law, working their fields until the debt is paid. When a man marries a girl from a family wealthier than his, he may be adopted into her family with the dowry then given to his family.[9]

Incest and Adultery

Incest is considered the most serious offense a Ma can commit. According to generations-old Ma tradition, all routine activity ceases in the village where the incest occurred. This interdiction, known as *bar poh*, lasts 14 days, suspending all farming, forging, and weaving activities during this period. In addition, the two guilty individuals must sacrifice a buffalo to the local spirits *(yang logar)*, a goat at the trail to water, a duck at the trail to the paddy, a goat at the trail to the taboo woods, and a pig to the spirits of the two homes that have been shamed, as reparation to all persons—intermediaries, chiefs, and master of the land and forest—who have been defiled.[10]

Adultery is also considered unlawful behavior and the traditional Ma law requires the interdiction bar poh. If both the offending parties are married, the male must pay reparation both to his wife and to the husband of the girl. If a husband has betrayed his wife with a young, unmarried girl, both he and the girl must make amends to the wife. When a wife has wronged her husband with a bachelor, both must pay compensation to the husband.[11]

Divorce and Second Marriage

By Ma custom divorce is permitted if the marriage is not consummated because of physical reasons or unwillingness by either partner. In cases of proven adultery or mutual consent, divorce may be granted only after the village elders have failed to reconcile the couple.[12]

The partner judged guilty of causing the divorce must give 15 old jars to his or her partner and must offer a sacrifice—usually a pig and a jar—to the intermediaries who negotiated the divorce with the village elders. According to Ma custom, the intermediaries must be strangers to both families of the couple to be divorced.

After the divorce the father must still partially support the children until they are about 6 years old.[13] Custody of the eldest male child is granted to the father, although the child may remain with the mother while very young.[14]

Polygamy is limited to chiefs and other wealthy Ma. A husband must first obtain the permission of his first wife, then an intermediary takes his proposal to the prospective second wife. If she accepts, the husband goes to her house and sacrifices a jar of rice wine and a chicken, and they may consummate the marriage that night. After a period of 2 days to a month the husband returns to his first wife, and for several months he resides alternately between the two wives. Then the second wife visits the house of the first wife, performs a symbolic act of submission, and offers her services in case of illness. The following day the first wife returns the visit to indicate her good wishes. The second wife washes the face, hands, and feet of the first wife and at nightfall offers a sacrifice consisting of a pig, a chicken, and a jar of wine. Subsequently, the wives exchange gifts, a ritual which signifies that the villagers may begin to celebrate, and that the two wives may now live together with their husband and share his sleeping mat for a few months or indefinitely. If, however, they live in separate quarters, the husband customarily resides 3 months with his second wife and 1 month with his first wife; should he spend more than 1 month in 4 with the first wife, she must pay the second wife a fine.[15]

Death and Burial

Like other Montagnard groups, the Ma attach great significance to funeral rites. A complete ritual—chants, prayers, sacrifices, interdictions, and abstentions—accompanies the burial.

A common Ma belief involves an afterlife where the soul of the deceased continues to lead a lifelike existence. When a death occurs, members of the family handle the body with great care and respect, since they believe that the living soul of the corpse is carefully observing how they treat its earthly form.

Normally the deceased is placed in a coffin during the evening of the second day after death, although actual burial does not occur for another 1 to 7 days. During this interval, the living entertain the dead in a specific and important ritual known as the Boh Chot.[16] A small house and a reproduction of a rice granary, erected at the burial site, serve as a depository for offerings and a place of communication between the living and the souls of the dead. Offerings include goods belonging to the deceased—such as clothing and jewelry—as well as food, cooked rice for immediate consumption, and uncooked rice to sustain the soul in its new home. Specific lamentations and prayers accompany every phase of the funeral ceremony.[17]

Completion of the funeral rite requires a buffalo, pig, or chicken sacrifice. Later the meat is eaten by the living, who believe that numerous spirits and souls of the dead share their feast. Presumably, the soul of the sacrificial animal follows the soul of the deceased into the netherworld.

Variations in the basic funeral ceremony exist among some subgroups of the Ma, who reportedly keep the coffin in the family house for a month, rather than the usual 1 to 7 days. A bamboo tube attached to a jar is inserted into a hole under the coffin; the jar is emptied regularly. When nothing more runs into the jar from the coffin, the body is buried.[18]

Traditionally the Ma feared dying far away from their village, reportedly because the family of the deceased could not recover the body for proper burial.[19]

SECTION V

CUSTOMS AND TABOOS

Almost all Ma activities are regulated by numerous customs and taboos. There are prescribed methods and procedures governing everything from dress to the construction of houses, from the settlement of disputes to patterns of individual behavior. The Ma have passed down these prescriptions from generation to generation until they have attained the force of customary law. Believing that the world around them abounds in both good and evil spirits, the Ma are constantly trying to avoid actions, activities, and contacts with objects or animals that they believe might displease the spirits. Tribesmen who are in regular contact with outsiders may not observe their customs and taboos as closely as tribesmen living in greater isolation.

Dress

During the performance of their everyday tasks, the Ma tribesmen generally wear a simple loincloth; but for ceremonial or festive occasions more ornamental clothing is worn.[1] Then, the men wear indigo-colored belts from which dangle red pompons and bells; however, the main item is a white, sleeveless vest with colorfully embroidered borders. Woven into the vest are elaborate patterns representing the scales of pythons, the mouths of leeches, the footprints of monkeys, the feathering of arrows, the teeth of tigers, flowers, palm leaves, peacocks, chickens, turtle shells, and other objects familiar to the tribesmen.

Ma women usually wear a knee- or calf-length skirt of coarse, blanket-like material. A thin belt holds the skirt in place. Generally, the women are barebreasted, but occasionally they may wear a blanket or cloth draped tunic-like around the upper torso.[2]

In addition, both men and women wear glass bead necklaces draped over brass and pewter neck rings, plus earrings and numerous bracelets. Around their legs the women also wear brass wire rings which sometimes extend from the ankle to the upper calf.[3]

Folk Beliefs

Customarily, the Ma designate as sacred certain prominent geographical features, such as nearby patches of forest, waterfalls, mountain tops, or large rocks. These sacred areas are inhabited by the spirits Bri Krong and Bri Yang. Any stranger who may be in Ma territory is responsible and punished if he—even unwittingly—profanes these sacred or taboo areas.[4]

The following incident, witnessed by a missionary who visited a Ma village, is indicative of the way Ma villagers may associate evil with a seemingly harmless object. One night the missionary was awakened by yelling and screaming villagers outside his house. The reason for this demonstration, he learned, was the appearance of a peculiar bird in a tree near the village. Two years earlier, on that same day, a similar bird had been sighted, and five villagers had died of a mysterious disease. Thereafter the villages associated the bird with death. Whenever the bird reappeared the villagers began a ceremony of sacrifices and drinking. The yells and screams, which awakened the missionary, concluded the ceremony intended to drive away the death-bringing spirits embodied in the bird.[5]

The Ma warned another missionary and his relatives to avoid at all times any contact with a wild chicken, for even the accidental touching of its feather or its droppings would result in horrible illness and death. The power of evil spirits was illustrated by another Ma, who related that his father had unwisely used the forbidden great bamboo in building a house; the evil spirits retaliated by taking the lives of the father and three of his children.[6]

Customs Relating to Outsiders

The Ma are reported to be more reserved than some of the other Montagnard groups.[7] Although contacts with other tribes have become more frequent in recent years, with the probable decrease of Ma suspicion regarding strangers, it is doubtful that they trust any stranger prior to a period of careful evaluation. Apparently a meal of pork liver shared between a Ma chief and a stranger (and possibly with other members of the village) is part of a ritual designed officially to elevate the stranger to the status of friend or ally of the chief and, therefore, of the village itself.[8]

There was no indication in the available information of recent attacks on strangers by Ma tribesmen. Nevertheless, past experience would indicate that, when provoked, the Ma might resort to violence if the odds and omens were favorable. In addition to direct attack, the Ma can be provoked by the violation of a taboo, or by the profanation of a sacred place—accidental or deliberate.

Customs Relating to Animals

In addition to the specific taboos against eating the flesh of particular animals which apply to an individual, family, or village, there are reportedly many distinctive customs relating to animals. Like other tribes in the Republic of Vietnam, the Ma regard the tiger (more common to the Ma area than to other areas) with awe and trepidation, believing it has special powers.

The domestic animals kept by the Ma--buffaloes, goats, pigs, chickens--are raised primarily for ceremonial or sacrifical purposes, rather than for food, although during a ceremony or sacrifice, the sacrificial animal is eaten.

A Ma's wealth is measured by the number of buffaloes he owns or has sacrificed.

Traditionally, one tribesman was usually designated to guard the village animals. If an animal died or disappeared due to negligence while under his care he reimbursed the owner. If, however, the animal's death was due to another cause, the guard presented the horns and freshly cut ears to the owner. Failure to perform this formality would require the guard to reimburse the owner for the dead animal.[9]

SECTION VI

RELIGION

The Ma religion is animistic and involves the belief that good spirits, yang, and evil spirits, *ca*, inhabit the lands, animals, trees, and objects. According to Ma tradition, a supreme spirit, N'duh, created all things.[1]

The Ma have a concept of life after death. The soul of the deceased person is said to enter a "country of the dead," or netherworld, where all things are opposite to existence in the real world. For example, in the netherworld night is day, broken jars are used for drinking, and dull wooden knives are used for cutting.[2]

Principal Religious Holidays

The seasonal rituals associated with clearing fields, planting rice. and harvesting crops are based upon Ma religious beliefs and practices. The New Year in the spring, probably their most important religious holiday, includes a ritual marking the beginning of the annual agricultural cycle.[3] During this ritual each family sacrifices a chicken in the family granary. Then the paddy, the pillars and doors of the granary, and the house are anointed with a mixture of the chicken blood, scraps of banyan bark and lianas, earth from a termite mound, and rice wine. This anointing mixture is also rubbed on the chest of each member of the family. For three nights the villagers drink and celebrate, and each is presented with a New Year's gift of a small package of rice.

Religious Ceremonies

Sacrifice is the principal religious ritual among the Ma; its purpose is to calm offended spirits and to appeal to the spirits for a good crop.

Choosing the time for a sacrifice is a ritual in itself. Villagers go to the sacred forest, pick pieces of rattan, and count every fold or crease, each of which represents one night. Thus they learn from the spirits the date for the next sacrifice.[4]

A ritual sacrifice is a colorful spectacle which may last several days. The men don feather headdresses and loincloths decorated with red pompons and carry gracefully curved machetes or scythes; the women wear bright skirts with elaborate patterns and glittering brass hairpins.[5] Each family is represented by a *pua*, or holy man, who acts as intermediary between the family and the spirits.[6] Before the ceremonies begin, buffaloes—the principal sacrificial offering—are tied to stakes. The pua gather around a jar secured to one of the hearth posts to invoke the spirits.[7] They then go into the heart of the forest to visit the *krong* spirits who live there. During this ritual the pua sprinkle chicken blood and several drops of fermented rice wine on the stump of a large tree. Brandishing their machetes and waving their drinking straws, they summon the krong and the yang to participate in the village ceremony. The pua return to the village, each carrying over his head a shrub which is then attached to the hindquarters of a buffalo.

Meanwhile in the village the people make final preparations for the rites. Through divination and by the use of a knotted string, they choose a girl to greet the spirit guests. The first guests, the krong spirits, are welcomed by fifes, gongs, and horns; later the yang are greeted by essence of sandalwood perfume.

At sunrise the next morning, the sacrifice is performed. Drums and gongs are sounded, and a cock is sacrificed on the veranda of each house. Then the buffaloes are stabbed with knives and a spear is thrust into their right side. When a buffalo breaks loose and is killed trying to escape, the omens are considered to be unfavorable; hence the supplemental sacrifice of pigs is necessary to assuage the krong.[8]

Whenever a ricefield is opened for cultivation, a buffalo is sacrificed. First, the animal is led through the field to bless it, then the *po u* or master of the land wounds the beast repeatedly with his machete; finally, the liturgical posts are anointed with buffalo blood and the villagers commence feasting.[9]

An agreement between two villages for the division of a forest area is another important occasion calling for a sacrifice.[10]

Religious Practitioners

The Ma recognize both good and evil sorcerers. They believe good sorcerers (canang) can cure illness with incantations and herbal medicines, while bad sorcerers *(cau* or *caa)* eat the soul *(sa soan)* of the person they wish to harm.[11]

The Ma believe they can differentiate between a good and a bad sorcerer. When a sorcerer makes strange incantations, or acts in an unusual way, or possesses strange talismans, he is suspected of being an evil sorcerer. If a Ma becomes ill or dies after having been threatened by a sorcerer, or if a well-known healer extracts strange objects from the body of a suspected evil sorcerer, the sorcerer is completely incriminated. Reportedly a person suspected of witchcraft or evil sorcery must undergo a trial by ordeal to prove his innocence.[12]

SECTION VII

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The Ma economy is based on rice cultivation, supplemented by fishing, hunting, ironworking, cloth and basket weaving, pottery making, canoe making, and trade. In the bottom land along the riverbanks, rice is cultivated by the wet-rice method (irrigated paddies) ; on the slopes, the slash-and-burn method is used.[1]

Common to all the highland groups of the Republic of Vietnam, the slash-and-burn method of cultivation involves cutting down, during the winter months, all vegetation in the new area and burning it to clear the fields. The ashes produced serve as fertilizer, which permits crops to be grown for 3 to 4 years. When the fields no longer support a crop, the village moves to a new area, allowing the old fields to return to jungle; then the village repeats the slash-and-burn clearing process in the new area.[2]

Rice sowing, in both the dry fields and the wet paddies, starts shortly before the rainy season. The men walk through the cleared field making holes at regular intervals with one or two pointed sticks; then the women follow, dropping a few grains of rice into each hole.[3] Cotton is planted among the clusters of rice paddies in the dry fields.

While the rice crop is ripening, the Ma subsist on fish, which abound in the Da Dung River. Ma tribesmen are said to be good fishermen, skilled in the use of fishhooks *(ndar)*, harpoons *(corah)*, and casting nets *(jaal)*.[4]

Special Arts and Skills

After the rice is harvested, the women pick the cotton, boil it in large pots, and then spread it out to dry in the sun. When the cotton is dry, it is carded on racks *(tok)*, stretched and twisted on spindles *(khong)* and finally wound on bobbins *(sonar tany brae)*. Then some cotton threads are dyed indigo or red and woven very slowly and tightly onto a frame *(bono bosa)*. By this method, approximately one yard of cloth can be woven in a month.[5]

The Ma are particularly noted for the designs and colors used in their weaving. Many other Montagnard tribes weave cloth, using designs with little contrasting color.[6] The Ma, however, like sharp, contrasting colors in intricate designs. They specialize in making blankets, some of which have alternating red and dark blue stripes, although many different styles are utilized.[7]

The Ma also embroider their white tunics with colored thread and sew red fringe on their long indigo belts.[8] The most elaborate designs in fabrics are woven in the Ma villages on the left bank of the Da Dung River.[9]

Besides cloth weaving, the Ma women also are skilled weavers of traps, fans of bamboo, and rattan.[10]

The Ma in the villages of Bun Gor, Bun Pang, and Bun Rdy collect clay from the Da Kluho River which the women then mould by hand into very evenly shaped pots. Then the pots are polished with a damp cloth, dried in the sun, and baked over glowing embers. Finally, the pots are filled with a concoction made from tree bark and boiled for 2 days—a process producing a stain that turns the pots black.[11]

The villagers on the banks of the Da Dung have learned to make strong canoes by hollowing out tree trunks with an ax. An even thickness is obtained by putting identical iron pegs in the bark for measuring guides. A fire is built in the hollow trunk until the wood is charred; then it is filled with water and left standing for several days to make the wood more pliable.[12]

The Ma also fabricate kites of forest materials for their children.[13]

The Ma on the Bao Lac Plateau have ironsmiths who make tools, weapons, and ornaments. In addition, the ironsmith has a quasi-religious role and is frequently consulted as a soothsayer.[14]

Trade With Other Groups

The prevalence of crafts among the Ma results in a good deal of local trade, as well as trade with outsiders. Blankets, tunics, and belts are woven primarily for sale to the Vietnamese for money, which the Ma promptly spend on alcohol or imported cotton goods.[15] The Ma frequently trade with the Vietnamese at the markets of Di Linh, Bao Lac, or Da Lat.[16]

Neighboring tribes with an abundance of rice trade their surpluses for Ma blankets and clothes; the villages specializing in canoe building trade their products with other river-bank dwellers for rice, blankets, jars, and occasionally piasters.[17]

SECTION VIII

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

General Political Organization

The Ma have no overall tribal political structure; their highest form of political organization is the autonomous village, which may occasionally cooperate or form an alliance with a neighboring village.[1]

The basic political unit of the Ma is the extended family, consisting of 10 to 20 nuclear families (husband, wife, and unmarried children), living in the same longhouse and presided over by the eldest male member.[2]

A chief provides the principal leadership within a Ma village. He represents the village to outsiders, leads war parties, and presides at sacrifices. To become a chief, a Ma must belong to a family of influence. Considered the guardian of Ma custom, a chief must be versed in the tradition of the Ma—the sole framework of the tribe—and must also possess potions which guarantee power and wisdom. Frequently he is skilled in a noble craft, such as making canoes or forging arms.[3]

The chief is advised and assisted by a council of elders, usually consisting of the household chiefs and family heads who are familiar with traditional law and custom. Whenever necessary, the council of elders will meet to deliberate on problems confronting the village.[4]

Under the French colonial administration, a French-appointed functionary selected from the village acted as the liaison between the French and the tribesmen, in addition to the chief chosen by the villagers. He was responsible for the initiation of French tribal programs, tax collection, and the communication of French decrees to the villagers.

Following the departure of the French, the Diem regime attempted to politically and socially integrate the tribal people into the Republic of Vietnam. Officially, the Central Government handles relations between tribal villages; Government representatives deal with groups of seven or eight villages, while the villages themselves are represented by their village chiefs.[5]

Legal System

The Ma have a very intricate legal system: laws are transmitted orally from generation to generation and are expressed by taboos and sanctions known and respected by all the tribespeople. Disputes and punishment for violations are the concern of both family and village. The household chief administers justice and arbitrates disputes among the members of the extended family. The village chief and the council of elders, however, must always be informed of his actions: in the event of a serious violation, they will assume jurisdiction. Ultimately all the members of an extended family are responsible for any misdemeanors committed by its members.

Most laws are enforced by economic sanctions, which differ according to the offense and vary from village to village. In general, an individual Ma will pay as much of a judgment against him as possible, and the remainder becomes his family's responsibility.[6]

Disputes among the Ma are settled either by discussion and deliberation or by arms. When a quarrel occurs, the two adversaries agree on a judge, who is usually a village elder. Intermediaries or advocates, men well grounded in Ma tradition, are then selected by each party. A minor dispute may be discussed at the home of one of the contending parties; however, if the matter is serious, the village chief summons the two disputants to a meeting on neutral ground in the forest. After a ritual invocation, the two parties sit on a bamboo trunk and argue their cases.[7]

When general hearings of grievances are held in Ma villages, a group of tribespeople go from house to house announcing that amicable discussions are open to those wishing to settle disputes.[8]

On the village, district, and provincial levels, a special system of courts was established by the French to adjudicate matters concerning the various tribal groups. In the village, a village court decided the sentences which could be reviewed on the district level. Three district court members were assigned to each ethnic group in a district jurisdiction, and these members handled only tribal matters. The district court officials selected a president to preside over the district court, which met in the house of the district chief.[9]

Under the French, cases which could not be resolved on the village level were sent to the Tribunal Coutumier, which convened for the first 7 days of every month. In judging the cases brought before the tribunal, the chief judge relied on traditional tribal law and customs.[10] The tribunal dealt only with cases in which both parties were tribespeople. Cases involving Vietnamese and tribespeople were the responsibility of the province chief, but provincial authorities tried not to interfere with the operation of the tribunal.

The legal system instituted by the French still governs the Montagnard tribes, but steps have been taken by the Vietnamese Government to revise the legislative code in the tribal areas.

Under the Diem regime, an attempt was made to substitute Vietnamese laws for the tribal practices. This attempt was connected with Vietnamese efforts to integrate the tribespeople politically into the Republic of Vietnam.

In March 1965, the Vietnamese Government promulgated a decree restoring the legal status of the tribal laws and tribunals. Under this new decree, there will be courts at the village, district, and province levels which will be responsible for civil affairs, Montagnard affairs, and penal offenses when all parties involved are Montagnards.[11]

Village custom law courts, consisting of the village administrative committee chief aided by two Montagnard assistants, will conduct weekly court sessions.[12] When a case is reviewed and a decision reached by this court, it will be recorded and signed by the parties involved. This procedure will eliminate the right to appeal to another court. If settlement cannot be determined, the case can be referred to a higher court.[13]

District courts, governed by the president of the court (the district chief) aided by two Montagnard assistants, will hold bimonthly court sessions. Cases to be tried by the district court include those appealed by the village court and cases which are adjudged serious according to tribal customs.[14]

At the national level, a Montagnard Affairs Section will be established as part of the National Court. This section, under the jurisdiction of a Montagnard presiding judge and two assistants, will handle cases appealed from the Montagnard district courts and cases beyond the jurisdiction of the village or district courts. It will convene once or twice a month depending upon the requirements.[15]

Subversive Influences

Their isolation and marginal subsistence make the Ma susceptible to the subversive activities of the Viet Cong. The primary objective of the subversive elements is to win the allegiance of the Ma and to turn the tribesmen into an active, hostile force against the Government of the Republic of Vietnam.

Generally, the Viet Cong infiltrate a village and work to win the confidence of either the whole village or its key individuals. Once the villagers' suspicions are allayed and their confidence won, the next phase is an intensive propaganda program directed against the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. Then individuals are recruited, trained, and assigned to various Viet Cong support or combat units.

When propaganda and cajolery are not effective, the Viet Cong resort to extortion and terror, which usually results in passive resistance to the Government or active support for the Viet Cong.[16]

SECTION IX

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

The principal means of disseminating information in the Ma area is by word of mouth. No information was available at this writing concerning Ma familiarity with or access to radios. Any radios in operation in the Ma area were probably brought in by military personnel.

Where feasible, short movies covering simple subjects and using the Ma dialect might be effective in communicating with the tribesmen.

Written communication would probably have little direct effect on the Ma, since the tribe does not have a written language and very few of the tribesmen can read French or Vietnamese. The few literate tribesmen could, however, be expected to communicate information in written materials to the rest of the tribespeople. Data about the successful use of printed materials are not available at this time.

Information themes to be used among the Ma should be oriented around the principle of improving conditions in the tribal villages. The control of disease, the improvement of agriculture, and protection against Viet Cong harassment are some possible themes for information programs.

SECTION X

CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

Any proposed civic action should take into account the religious, social, and cultural traditions of the Ma. Initial contacts in villages should be made only with the chief and tribal elders in order to show respect for the tribal political structure. The tribespeople should also be psychologically prepared to accept the proposed changes. This requires detailed consultation with village leaders, careful assurance of results, and a relatively slow pace in implementing programs.

Most Ma tribesmen would probably respond favorably to ideas for change presented in terms of local community betterment. Civic action proposals should stress improvement of village life rather than emphasize ethnic or cultural pride, nationalism, or political ideology. The reasons for innovations should be thoroughly explained; the Ma resent interference in their normal routine if they do not understand the reason for it.

Civic action programs of the Vietnamese Government have included the resettlement of some Ma tribespeople into new and larger villages, the control of malaria, medical aid programs, agricultural assistance, and the provision of educational facilities.

The following civic action guidelines may be useful in the planning and implementation of projects or programs.

1. Projects originating in the local village are more desirable than suggestions imposed by a remote central government or by outsiders.
2. Projects should be designed to be challenging but should not be on such a scale as to intimidate the villagers by size or strangeness.
3. Projects should have fairly short completion dates or should have phases that provide frequent opportunities to evaluate effectiveness.
4. Results should as far as possible, be observable, measurable, and tangible.
5. Projects should, ideally, lend themselves to emulation by other villages or groups.

Civic Action Projects

The civic action possibilities for personnel working with the Ma encompass all aspects of tribal life. Examples of possible projects are listed below. They should be considered representative but not all inclusive and not in the order of priority.

1. Agriculture and animal husbandry
   a. Improvement of livestock quality through introduction of better breeds.
   b. Instruction in elementary veterinary techniques to improve health of animals.
   c. Introduction of improved seeds and new vegetables.
   d. Introduction of techniques to improve quality and yields of farmland.
   e. Insect and rodent control.
   f. Construction of simple irrigation and drainage systems.
2. Transportation and communication
   a. Roadbuilding and clearing of trails.
   b. Installation, operation, and maintenance of electric power generators and village electric light systems.
   c. Construction of motion picture facilities.
   d. Construction of radio broadcasting and receiving stations and public speaker systems.
3. Health and sanitation
   a. Improve village sanitation.
   b. Provide safe water supply systems.
   c. Eradicate disease-carrying insects.
   d. Organize dispensary facilities for outpatient treatment.
   e. Teach sanitation, personal hygiene, and first aid.
4. Education
   a. Provide basic literacy training.
   b. Provide rudimentary vocational training.
   c. Present information about the outside world of interest to the tribesmen.
   d. Provide basic citizenship training.

SECTION XI

PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

Given the incentive and motivation and provided with the necessary training, leadership, and support, the Ma can become an effective force against the Viet Cong. The tribesmen can serve as informers, trackers and guides, intelligence agents, interpreters, and translators. With intensive training and support, the Ma can be organized to defend their villages against the Viet Cong; with good leadership, they can be organized into effective counterguerrilla combat units.

In the past, the Ma were considered capable fighters, whether fighting offensively in raids against other groups or defensively within their villages.

Hostile Activity Toward the Ma and Tribal Reaction

When psychological pressures to win Ma support fail, the Viet Cong have resorted to outright brutality and terror. Frequently, the Ma yield and cooperate with the Viet Cong; without Government training and support, they do not have the wherewithal to oppose the Viet Cong. Ma villages have no organization for defense except those equipped, trained, and organized by the Government. Ma villages with adequate training and support will defend themselves and will occasionally initiate aggressive action against the Viet Cong.

The inclination of the Ma to fight aggressively is one that must be developed and supported with modern weapons and training. They defend themselves vigorously when they, their families, or their villages are threatened and when they have adequate resources and chance for success.

Weapons Utilized by the Tribe

In the past, the Ma relied upon crossbows, spears, and long knives. Nearly every Ma tribesman is equipped with a machete, a long, iron-bladed weapon with a curved handle that fits over his shoulder so that it may be easily carried. They often carry round wooden shields or *khel*. Fashioned from a tree trunk, these shields are decorated with circles and triangles symbolizing tiger teeth, fish, and the kapok flower.[1] The Ma also are familiar with the use of traps, pits, and concealed sharpened sticks used as foot traps.

The tribesmen who received military training from the French are familiar with modern weapons.

Their relatively small stature limits the weapons the Ma can use, but they are proficient in handling light weapons such as the AR.15 rifle, the Thompson submachinegun, and the carbine. The tribesmen are less proficient in the use of the M-1 or the Browning Automatic Rifle, although they can handle larger weapons which can be disassembled, carried by two or more men, and then quickly reassembled.

The Ma pride themselves upon their hunting skill and their mastery or traditional weapons; they are equally as proud of their skill and marksmanship with modern weapons. If a Ma can carry and handle a weapon conveniently, he will use it well.

The Ma cannot handle sophisticated devices—such as mortars, explosives, and mines—as proficiently as hand weapons. They find the more abstract and technical aspects of such weapons—such as timing trajectories—difficult to absorb.

Ability To Absorb Military Instruction

The Ma can absorb basic military training and concepts. Their natural habitat gives them an excellent background for tracking and ambush activities; they are resourceful and adaptable in the jungle.

The Ma learn techniques and procedures readily from actual demonstration, using the weapon itself as a teaching aid. They do not learn as well from blackboard demonstrations, an approach which is too abstract for them.

Some Ma, veterans of service with the French, are invaluable in training the younger tribesmen.

SECTION XII

SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH THE MA

Every action of the Ma tribesman has specific significance in terms of his culture. One must be careful to realize that the Ma may not react as outsiders do. The outsider should remember that a relatively simple course of action may, for the tribesman, require not only divination but also a sacrifice.

A few suggestions for personnel working with the Ma are listed below:

Official Activities

1. The initial visit to a Ma village should be formal. A visitor should speak first to the village chief and elders who will then introduce him to other principal village figures.
2. Sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness are essential in dealing with the Ma. Promises and predictions should not be made unless the result is assured. The tribespeople usually expect a new group of personnel to fulfill the promises of the previous group.
3. Outsiders cannot gain the confidence of Ma tribesmen quickly. Developing a sense of trust is a slow process requiring great understanding, tact, patience, and personal integrity.
4. An attitude of good-natured willingness and limitless patience must be maintained, even when confronted with resentment or apathy.
5. Whenever possible, avoid projects or operations which give the tribesmen the impression they are being forced to change their ways.
6. Tribal elders and the village chief should receive some credit for civic action projects and for improved administration. Efforts should never undermine or discredit the position or influence of the local leaders.

Social Relationships

1. The Ma should be treated with respect and courtesy at all times.
2. The term *moi* should not be used because it means savage and is offensive to the tribesmen.
3. A gift, an invitation to a ceremony, or an invitation to enter

a house may be refused by an outsider, as long as consistency and impartiality are shown. However, receiving gifts, participating in ceremonies, and visiting houses will serve to establish good relations with the tribespeople.

4. Outsiders should request permission to attend a Ma ceremony, festival, or meeting from the village elders or other responsible persons.
5. An outsider should never enter a Ma house unless accompanied by a member of that house; this is a matter of good taste and cautious behavior. If anything is later missing from the house, unpleasant and unnecessary complications may arise.
6. Outsiders should not get involved with Ma women.
7. Teachers should be careful to avoid seriously disrupting cultural patterns.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

1. Do not mock Ma religious beliefs in any way; these beliefs are the cornerstone of tribal life.
2. Do not enter a village where a religious ceremony is taking place or a religious taboo is in effect. Watch for the warning signs placed at the village entrances; when in doubt, do not enter.

Living Standards and Routines

1. Outsiders should treat all Ma property and village animals with respect. Any damages to property or fields should be promptly repaired and/or paid for. An outsider should avoid borrowing from the tribesmen. Animals should not be treated brutally or taken without the owner's permission.
2. Learn simple phrases in the Ma dialect. A desire to learn and speak their language creates a favorable impression on the tribespeople.

FOOTNOTES

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5. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–24.
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7. Darby, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–13.
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9. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, pp. 1159–61.
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11. Dam Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 994.
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3. Dournes, *op. cit.*, pp. 36, 102.
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IX. COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

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X. CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

No footnotes.

XI. PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

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