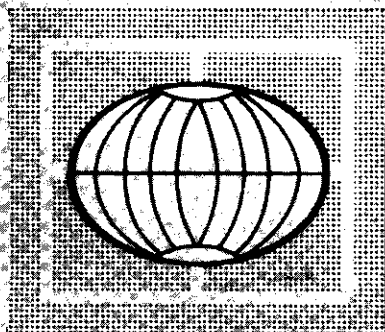


**S
O
R
O**

**CUSTOMS AND TABOOS
OF
SELECTED TRIBES
RESIDING ALONG THE
WESTERN BORDER
OF
THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM**

**THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR THE USE OF THE
U.S. LIMITED WAR LABORATORY
ABERDEEN PROVING GROUNDS
ABERDEEN, MARYLAND.**

**THE REPORT HAS NOT BEEN APPROVED FOR PUBLICATION;
IT MAY NOT BE QUOTED, REPRODUCED OR DISSEMINATED
IN ANY FORM WITHOUT THE SPECIFIC PERMISSION OF
THE DIRECTOR, SPECIAL OPERATIONS RESEARCH OFFICE.**



**S O R O
C I N F A C**

R-0426

**SPECIAL OPERATIONS RESEARCH OFFICE
THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, D.C., 20016**

**OPERATING UNDER CONTRACT WITH THE
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**

[REDACTED]

The Special Operations Research Office (SORO) of the American University, a nongovernmental agency operating under contract with the Department of the Army, conducts research on military problems in support of requirements stated by the Department of the Army.

SORO's Counterinsurgency Information Analysis Center (CINFAC) is a Department of Defense facility for the collection, maintenance and dissemination of analyzed social science information pertinent to counterinsurgency problems and other functions specified in DOD Instruction 5100.45. Under this direction, CINFAC provides analyzed information in response to requests to DOD agencies, their contractors and, as directed, other governmental departments and agencies. These CINFAC responses are prepared from available information and designed to meet specific interested agency inquiries. However when appropriate they may be made available to other interested agencies. The contents of CINFAC responses are not to be construed as an official Department of the Army position unless so designated by other authorized documents.

Using agencies are encouraged to submit additional questions and/or comments which will lead to clarification or correction of errors of fact and opinion; which will fill gaps of information; or which suggest other changes as may be appropriate. Comments should be addressed to:

Chief of Research and Development
ATTN: CRD/Q
Department of the Army
Washington, D. C. 20310

or

Director, Special Operations Research Office
The American University
5010 Wisconsin Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20016

CUSTOMS AND TABOOS OF SELECTED
TRIBES RESIDING ALONG THE WESTERN
BORDER OF THE REPUBLIC
OF VIETNAM

Compiled by
Skaidrite Fallah

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SORO/CINFAC/0426
SPECIAL OPERATIONS RESEARCH OFFICE
The American University
COUNTERINSURGENCY INFORMATION ANALYSIS CENTER
5010 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
21 April 1966

PREFACE

SORO, in response to a request from the Evaluation and Analysis Branch of the U. S. Army Limited War Laboratory, has prepared these brief notes on the customs and taboos of the tribes residing along selected trails leading into the Republic of Vietnam.

Nine tribes were selected, primarily for their size, prominence, and their location along the common border of the Republic of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The order of presentation of the tribes in this report is along geographic lines, running from north to south, beginning with the 17th parallel and continuing down the entire length of the western border of the Republic of Vietnam. Maps of each tribal area have been included. An overall map showing area coverage follows on the next page.

Generally, information on Montagnard customs and taboos is fragmentary and limited in scope, based primarily on a few available published sources. Consequently, no attempt has been made to present customs and taboos solely related to the trails themselves but included as well are folk beliefs related to eating and drinking, animals, warfare, non-tribal members, and villages and houses. Separate sections have also been included on psychological characteristics and religious beliefs of the individual tribes since they are so closely integrated with the main theme. The conclusion briefly indicates several areas with potential for the development of materiel devices utilizing concepts of tribal customs and taboos.

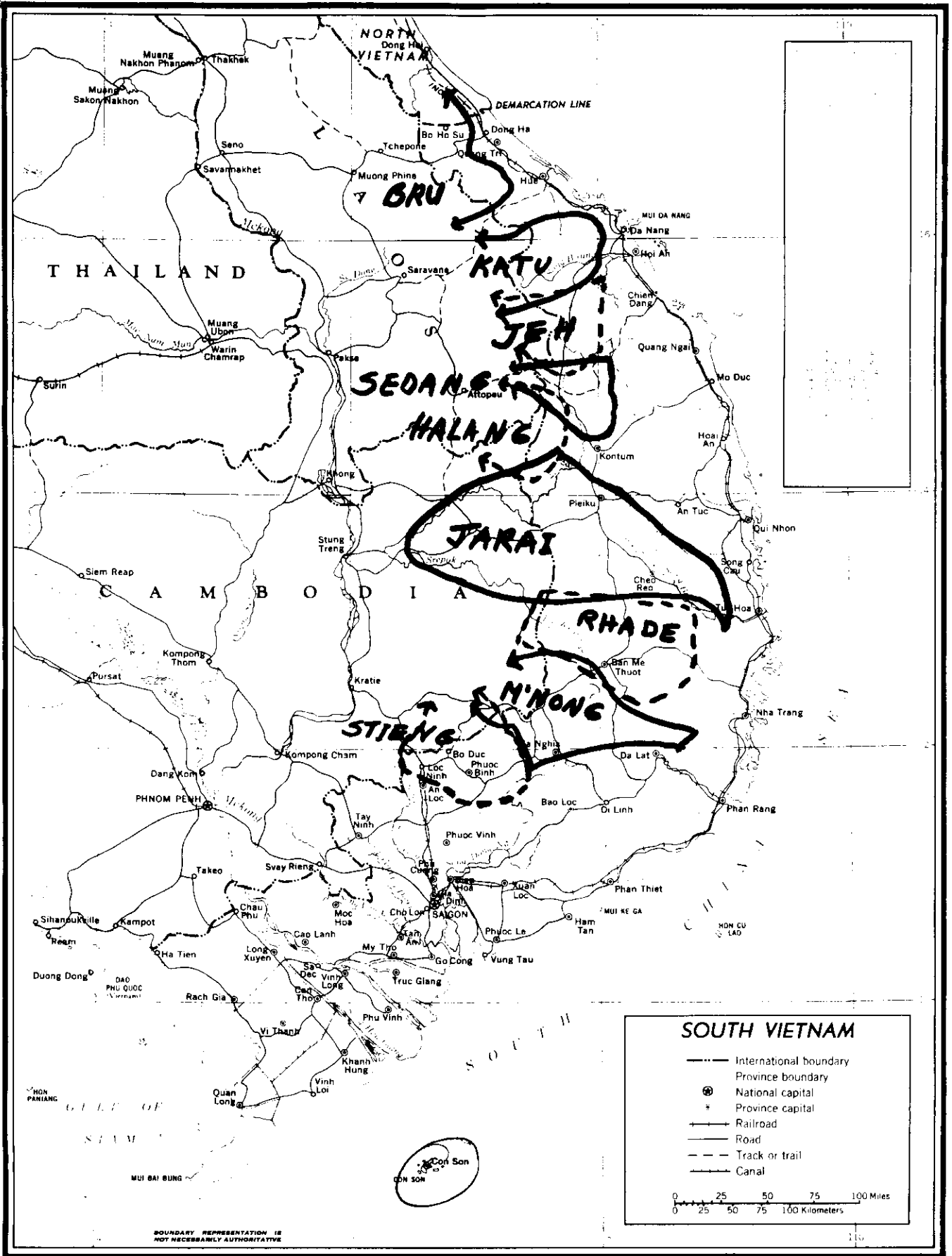
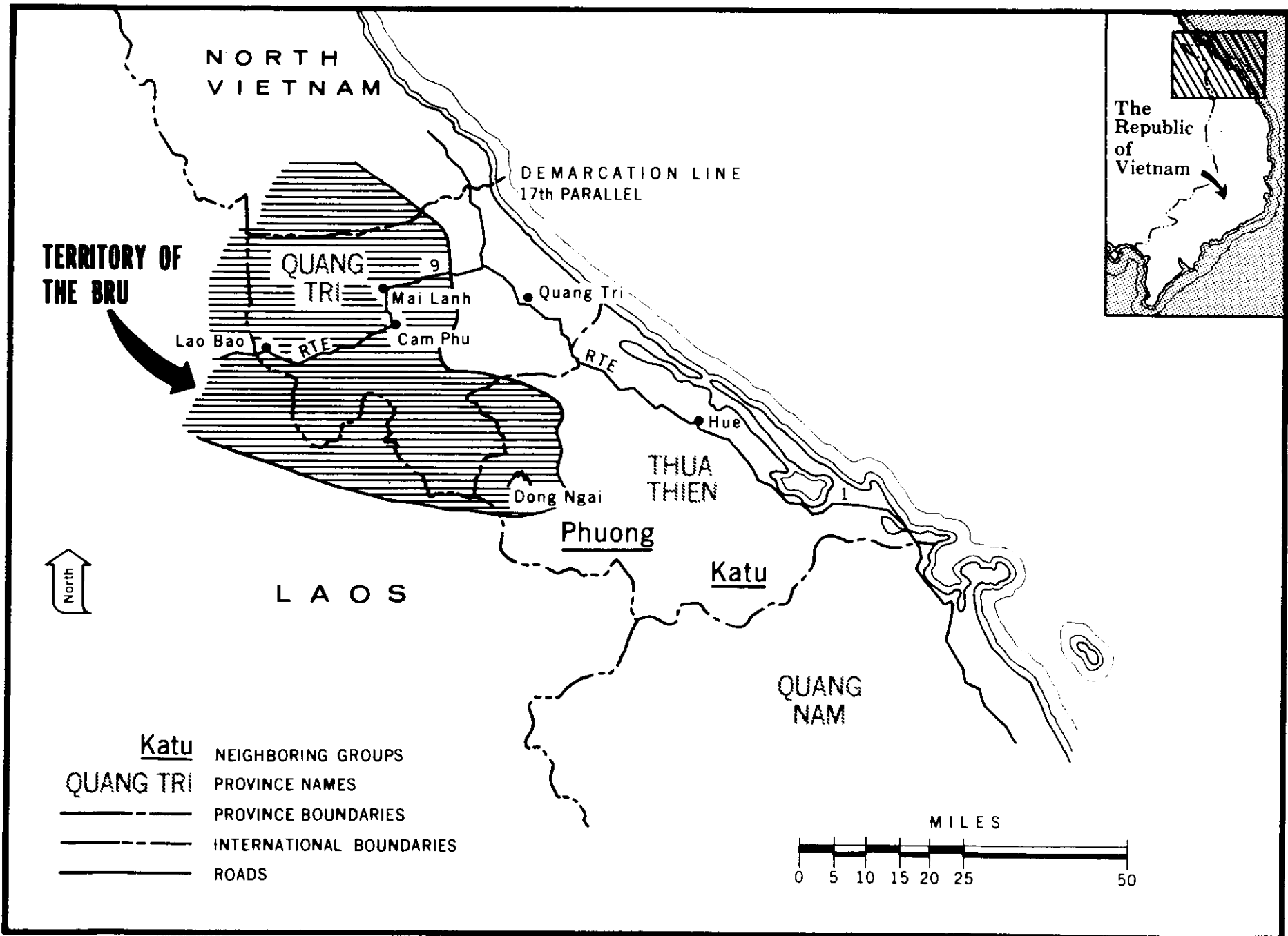


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	iii
MAP	iv
BRU	
Map of Bru Tribal Area	1
Psychological Characteristics	2
Religious Beliefs	2
Customs and Taboos	4
Footnotes	9
KATU	
Map of Katu Tribal Area	10
Psychological Characteristics	11
Religious Beliefs	11
Customs and Taboos	12
Footnotes	15
JEH	
Map of Jeh Tribal Area	16
Psychological Characteristics	17
Religious Beliefs	17
Customs and Taboos	18
Footnotes	20
SEDANG	
Map of Sedang Tribal Area	21
Psychological Characteristics	22
Religious Beliefs	22
Customs and Taboos	24
Footnotes	27
HALANG	
Map of Halang Tribal Area	28
Psychological Characteristics	29
Religious Beliefs	29
Customs and Taboos	29
Footnotes	31
JARAI	
Map of Jarai Tribal Area	32
Psychological Characteristics	33
Religious Beliefs	33
Customs and Taboos	34
Footnotes	39

	Page
RHADE	
Map of Rhade Tribal Area	40
Psychological Characteristics	41
Religious Beliefs	41
Customs and Taboos	44
Footnotes	47
M'NONG	
Map of M'nong Tribal Area	48
Psychological Characteristics	49
Religious Beliefs	49
Customs and Taboos	50
Footnotes	53
STIENG	
Map of Stieng Tribal Area	54
Psychological Characteristics	55
Religious Beliefs	55
Customs and Taboos	56
Footnotes	60
CONCLUSIONS	62
BIBLIOGRAPHY	65



TERRITORY OF THE BRU

NORTH VIETNAM

DEMARICATION LINE
17th PARALLEL

QUANG TRI

Mai Lanh
Cam Phu

Quang Tri

Lao Bao

Hue

THUA THIEN

Dong Ngai

Phuong

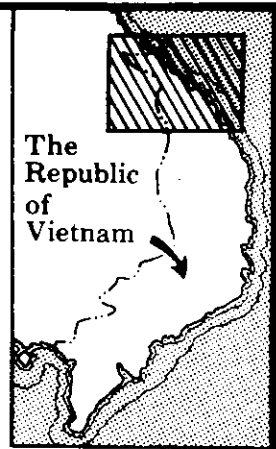
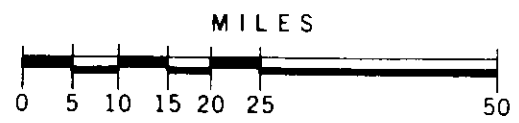
Katu

LAOS

QUANG NAM



- Katu NEIGHBORING GROUPS
- QUANG TRI** PROVINCE NAMES
- PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
- - - INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES
- ROADS



THE BRU

CUSTOMS AND TABOOS OF SELECTED TRIBES
RESIDING ALONG THE WESTERN BORDER OF THE
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

BRU

Psychological Characteristics

The Bru, like other Montagnard tribes, are psychologically enmeshed in a strong tradition of specific rules which govern all aspects of human behavior. From earliest childhood the tribesmen are reared according to these customs and taboos.

The belief that the spirits will punish any violation of the customary rules provides the necessary sanctions to the code of behavior. The Bru live in constant fear of punishment by the spirits.¹ In their marginal existence, each potentially fatal catastrophe -- such as crop failure or an epidemic -- is regarded as punitive. Consequently, during every moment of their lives, the Bru are alert to particular omens from the spirits.

Religious Beliefs

Religion plays a dominant role in the lives of the Bru. Their animistic religion involves belief in a host of good and evil spirits. Although details of the religious tradition may vary from village to village, the fundamental beliefs and practices are similar throughout the Bru area.

The most important spirits are the spirit of the sky, the spirit of the paddy, and the spirit of the village (phi). Other spirits are associated with the sun, moon, earth, thunder, and such terrain features as mountains, patches of forest, and prominent rocks. The Bru believe spirits also inhabit animals, rice wine jars, the family hearth, tools, and household objects.² The communal house located in the center of the village is sacred to the spirit of the village.

If offended by a villager violating a law or taboo, all spirits, good or evil, are believed able to cause misfortune in the form of accidents, illness, or death.³

The principal religious ritual is the sacrifice of animals. To gain favor with a particular spirit, thus obtaining more benefits from him; to placate spirits after a law or taboo has been broken, thus preventing crop failure, epidemics, and other misfortunes for the village -- these are the principal purposes of the sacrifice.

Religious sacrifices vary from offering an egg to slaying a buffalo. Village elders conduct sacrifices affecting the village as a whole, while family and personal rites are the responsibility of the family or the individual concerned.

The sacrifices themselves involve a number of rites: an invocational prayer intended as an invitation to the relevant spirits to attend the sacrificial ceremony and as an expression of the wishes of the person making the sacrifice; the ceremonial slaying of an animal (chicken, pig, or buffalo); the offering to the spirits of the blood and flesh of the slain animal by displaying them in bowls, along with rice and other foods; and the drinking of rice wine and the eating of the sacrificial animal. The Bru believe that the spirits partake of the offering in the bowls, the rice wine, and the cooked meat.⁴

Major Bru sacrifices are associated with the agricultural cycle -- clearing the forest, planting the rice, and harvesting the crops. Of these, the most important are the harvest sacrifice and the feast of the third month.

The harvest sacrifice is held in October after the rice has been gathered and marks a special period of ceremonies. The village is declared taboo. All its inhabitants must spend two days and two nights in their houses, and while they remain indoors, they must eat previously sacrificed chickens and buffalo.

The special period of ceremonies continues until the feast of the third month in February. During this entire period no one may collect debts, obtain damages from taboo violations, or give rice from his granary to any other person. The sacrifice of the third month, which honors the spirit of the village, phi, involves chickens and a buffalo and lasts for about 10 days. This celebration occurs just prior to the planting season.⁵

Every Bru participates actively in sacrifices. Apparently there are no special practitioners or sorcerers. Invocations or prayers to the spirits are usually made by the elders of the village or elders of the family.

Customs and Taboos

Almost all Bru activities are regulated by numerous customs and taboos. These rules for Bru behavior have been passed down from generation to generation until they have attained the force of customary law. It should be pointed out, however, that tribesmen who are in regular contact with Vietnamese and Americans may not observe their customs and taboos as closely as do the tribesmen living in greater isolation from outside influences.

The rules governing Bru behavior fall into three groups: prohibitions against mentioning certain words or subjects; taboos or prohibitions whose violation requires sacrifices to placate offended spirits and to restore harmony; and pronouncements of the proper use of certain objects.⁶ The following list includes some of the known customs and taboos of the Bru tribe.

<u>Folk Beliefs</u>	<u>Commentary</u>
A harvest taboo prohibits reaping for the remainder of the day if a stranger comes into the field during the harvesting. The next day harvesting begins again.	However, if the harvesters hear the cries of vultures, monkeys, or deer, they must again stop reaping and resume work on the following day. ⁷

When sleeping inside a house a tribesman must not point his feet toward any religious objects, such as statues woven of bamboo.⁸

Blue is a favorite color.

Evil spirits cause sickness. The Bru think that only sacrifices to the spirits can cure illness.

Tampering with any Bru grave is forbidden under the penalty of a heavy fine.

In cases of a sudden or accidental death (caused, for instance, by a tiger or a falling tree), all participants in the burial ceremony must remain in the forest for three days.¹²

In order to insure the fertility of the soil and a good crop, the paddy is not allowed to burn or fall into a fire. Furthermore, no one may speak while detaching the grains of rice from the stalk.¹⁴

The color blue is frequently worked into clothing designs.⁹ Consequently, blue is characteristic of attraction rather than repulsion.

Sorcerers -- men or women -- determine through divination the spirit responsible for the illness and the kind of sacrifice necessary to cure the afflicted person.¹⁰ Often the blood of the sacrificed animal is rubbed on the affected parts of the sick person's body.¹¹

It is believed that returning to the village any sooner might prompt the spirit responsible for the accident to cause another misfortune.¹³

Folk Beliefs

During an animal sacrifice, all tribesmen present must participate in the drinking of rice wine.

The Bru believe that the spirits consider the buffalo to be representative of man.

The tiger is believed to have supernatural powers. The Bru believe that they are threatened by a tiger even after it has been trapped or killed.

When the harvest festival is held, villages are declared taboo or khalam to outsiders.

During funerals villages are taboo.

When a fire destroys at least one house, the village is taboo for six days.

Commentary

Unless all participants drink, the sacrifice is believed to be ineffectual, the spirits being offended.¹⁵

Buffaloes have names and are considered members of the village. During a sacrifice, the buffalo represents the grievances or desires of the family, household, or village. The eating of the flesh of the sacrificed buffalo (which is divided among the spirits, family, and village) represents a kind of communion uniting them all.¹⁶

If a tiger is snared in a trap owned by the village, the entire village is immediately declared taboo to prevent the spirits and supernatural beings, including the tiger, from entering the village confines. Participants in the funeral of a person killed by a tiger may not enter their village for three days following the funeral ceremony.¹⁷

A star-shaped symbol of woven bamboo is placed on all paths leading to the villages to indicate the taboo.¹⁸

✓ Any stranger who enters the village during this period must pay for the sacrifice of one buffalo.¹⁹

Villages are taboo for one day when a villager is repairing his house or cutting a new trail in the forest.

When a party of villagers goes out to fight or raid, the village is declared taboo until their return.

To bring elephants or cattle into a village, an individual must offer the sacrifice of a buffalo to the spirit of the village.

✓ When a village is built on a new site, the residents must sacrifice one white buffalo and one black to the spirit of the new village.²⁰

If a stranger enters and steals something from a village, he must pay for a buffalo sacrifice to the spirit of the village.

A stick used to remove leeches from the body cannot be brought into the village.

An outsider visiting a Bru house must refrain from touching any of the interior furnishings.

✓ A stranger must not take care of his personal needs within the confines of the village; the stranger is expected to go beyond the village limits to relieve himself.

Whoever does bring in such a stick must pay for the sacrifice of a pig, a chicken, and an iron bracelet.²¹

If the hearth fire goes out while a stranger is in the house, he is forbidden to fetch wood from the woodpile under the house, since this task is strictly confined to members of the family.

Folk Beliefs

Commentary

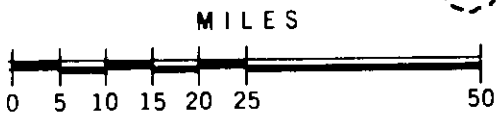
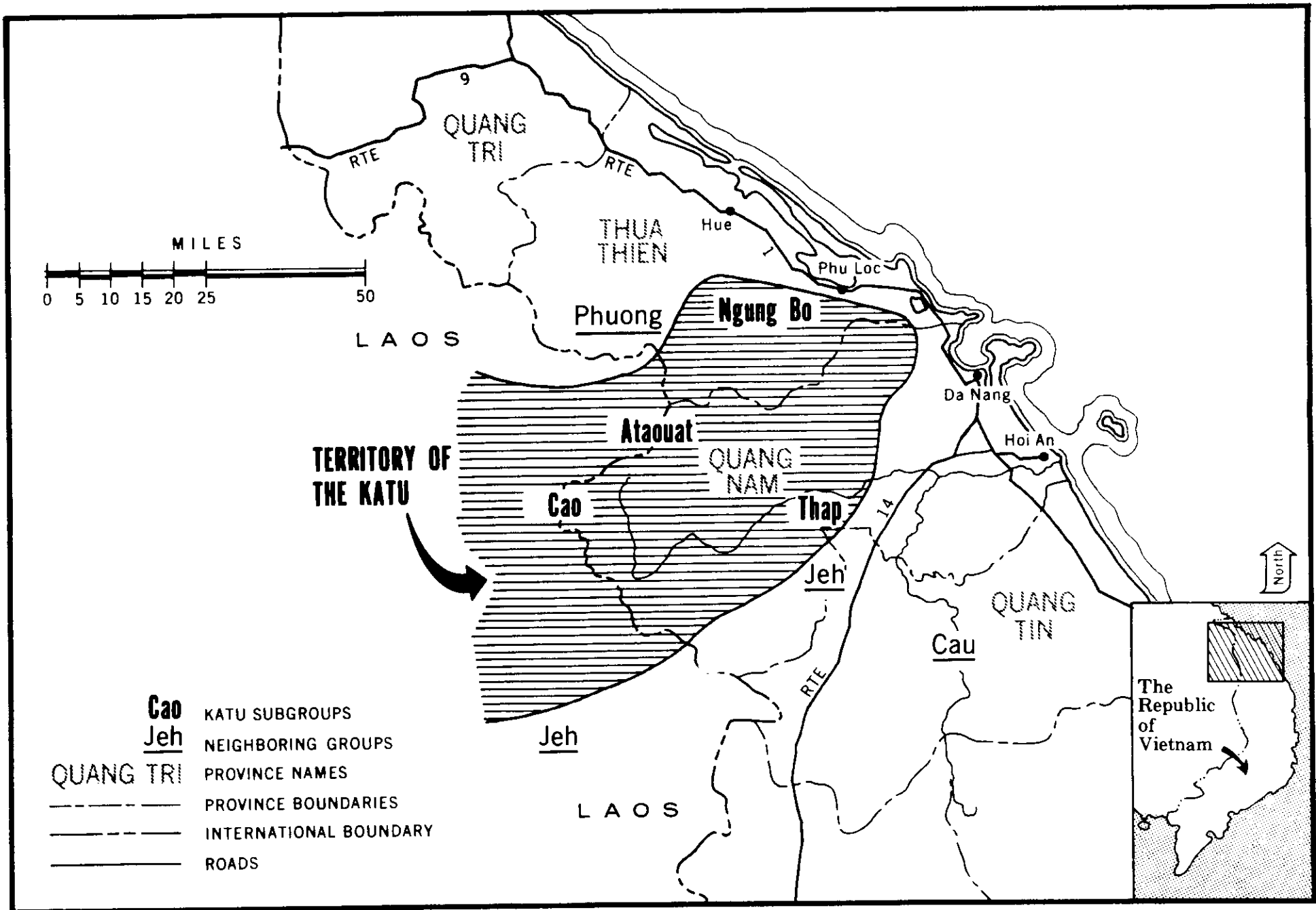
To bring gongs, jars, or silver bars into a house, a stranger must advise the head of the household of this intention, so that the objects may first be properly washed in a stream.

The tribesmen believe that if gongs, jars, or silver bars are not washed, they will cause death to come to the village.

Strangers are forbidden to bring either elephant tusks or rhinoceros horns into a village; nor may a stranger bring a tiger skin or any other part of a tiger into a village.²²

FOOTNOTES

1. Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam, the Bru. Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office (Prepublication copy), February 1966, p. 7.
2. Ibid., p. 14.
3. Georges M. Maspero, Montagnard Tribes of South Vietnam, Washington, D.C.: Joint Publications Research Service, (No. 13443) 1962, pp. 6-7; M. Daupley, "Les Kha Tahoi," L'Ethnographie, III (April 1914), p. 45.
4. SORO, The Bru, op. cit., p. 15.
5. Daupley, op. cit., pp. 45-51; Maspero, op. cit., p. 8.
6. SORO, The Bru, op. cit., p. 11.
7. Daupley, op. cit., pp. 50-51.
8. Maspero, op. cit., p. 9.
9. Laura Irene Smith, Victory in Viet Nam, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965, p. 88; Daupley, op. cit., p. 44.
10. Ronald Morris. "Returnee Response to Questionnaire on the Montagnard Tribal Study," Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, January 1965.
11. Noel Bernard, "Les Khas, peuple inculte du Laos francais: Notes anthropométriques et ethnographiques," Bulletin de Géographie Historique et Descriptive, (1904), p. 386.
12. Daupley, op. cit., p. 46.
13. Ibid.
14. Maspero, op. cit., pp. 8-9.
15. SORO, The Bru, op. cit., p. 12.
16. Ibid.
17. Daupley, op. cit., pp. 46-47.
18. SORO, The Bru, op. cit., p. 13.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Daupley, op. cit., pp. 45-50.
22. Ibid., pp. 47-48.



TERRITORY OF THE KATU

- Cao** KATU SUBGROUPS
- Jeh** NEIGHBORING GROUPS
- QUANG TRI PROVINCE NAMES
- PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
- ROADS

THE KATU SUBGROUPS

KATU

Psychological Characteristics

The Katu are one of those warlike Montagnard tribes who were never completely pacified by either the French or the Vietnamese. It is believed that even now they engage in blood hunts, attacking weaker or unsuspecting victims with much relish and bloodletting.¹ However, when their villages are attacked by superior forces, they often do not fight; instead they abandon their villages, bury their valuables, and flee into the forest. Under normal circumstances, they are quite attached to their villages and are reluctant to leave them even for a short period of time.²

In spite of their warlike nature, the Katu are hospitable and generous, though they tend to be vain and boastful.³

Religious Beliefs

The Katu have a large pantheon of good and evil spirits whom they believe intervene in their daily lives. While the good spirits provide protection from the evil spirits, they may withhold this protection if the actions of the Katu annoy them. When a village is ravaged by disease or when a harvest is lost, the Katu believe the good spirits are angry and must be appeased by a blood sacrifice.⁴

The Katu believe that every person possesses two souls, a good one and a bad one. The manner of death determines the spirit form in which a person's soul will survive. A "good death," from natural causes, results in a good spirit; a "bad death," from violence, disease, or childbirth, or in a place far from home, results in a bad spirit.⁵

Except for marriage and death feasts, almost all recurring Katu religious ceremonies and festivals occur according to the agricultural cycle.

Sorcerers are reportedly common in Katu villages. Among his various other functions, a sorcerer inspects the claws of the cock to determine the advisability of an intended wedding or an anticipated blood hunt and to point out sacred places which are taboo.⁶

Wandering sorcerers, some from Laos, and certain tribesmen considered by the Katu to be very powerful travel the Katu territory, selling lustral water and amulets supposedly effective in warding off all ills.⁷

It appears that anyone may become a great sorcerer by causing an unusual event. LePichon, an early observer, recounts how he gained a reputation as a great sorcerer by using a charge of dynamite to put to flight some formidable spirits who were haunting a small river inlet.⁸

Customs and Taboos

Since the world of the Katu is inhabited by innumerable spirits, many of them evil, the Katu have recourse to numerous superstitious practices, which may be divided into two major categories: omens and taboos.

Omens exist in countless numbers as dreams or signs, supposedly warnings from good spirits that danger is near. The following list includes some of the known omens and taboos of the Katu.

<u>Folk Beliefs</u>	<u>Commentary</u>
Omens to be cognizant of:	These signs or omens are supposedly
- Cocks crowing at midnight.	warnings from good spirits that danger
- Toucan flying toward the sun.	is near.
- Sighting a python.	
- Finding certain types of plants in the forest.	It is not known what types of plants are taboo.
- Sneezing when one is about to undertake some important business. ⁹	

Folk Beliefs

Villages, houses, or fields may be deemed taboo or dien. When a village is taboo, no one may leave it, nor are any strangers allowed to enter. The following are some representative diens:

- House in which a woman is having a baby - 3 days dien.
- Before undertaking a serious matter, such as selling the harvest, the village is dien for 1 day.
- Festivals of spring sowing and harvesting -- the village is dien for 1 or 2 days.
- Before starting a blood hunt -- 1 day dien for a village.
- An evil death ii village dien for 1 to 6 months.

Commentary

A dien is shown by placing a tree or branch at all places where paths lead into the village.¹⁰ To satisfy the ancestors, a dien always requires a sacrifice of a pig, buffalo, or cock.

An extremely "bad" death, such as being devoured by a tiger, necessitates the permanent abandonment of a village. During the taboo period the villagers live in the forest and are forbidden to eat buffalo meat or to build a house. Afterwards, a new village is built at a different location.¹²

✓ Wooden statues are placed at the doors of the new houses, around the village communal house, and on familiar trails to frighten away the evil spirits resulting from a bad death. The statues have various shapes: grotesque human figures with huge faces, squatting figures with chin resting on knees and head between hands, pipe smokers, and dancing women.¹³

Folk Beliefs

Commentary

Warning signs that evil spirits are nearby include:

- Peacock eggs in a path.
- A large tree uprooted across a trail.
- A call from the left side of a path, of a bird nesting in reeds.¹⁴

Evil spirits may assume visible forms such as:

- A tiger.
- A cobra hissing in the afternoon.
- Flood waters causing a person to drown.¹⁵

The buffalo is a sacred animal. The skulls of sacrificed buffalo are kept in the communal house.

The souls of those who die a good death watch over their descendants, protecting them from danger in the forest by warning them when evil spirits are nearby.

It is not known if this taboo refers to a specific type of bird or to any bird nesting.

A buffalo is never sold because it belongs to the ancestors, not to an individual or a village. Buffalo meat is never eaten merely to satisfy the appetite, but only at ritual ceremonies involving sacrifice.¹⁶ It is believed that the presence of buffalo skulls promotes the fertility of the land and prosperity of the village.

It should be noted that, although the Katu live in a world full of spirits and superstitions, their fears and superstitions apparently do not impair their ability to make war.¹⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. J. LePichon, "Les Chasseurs de sang," Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue, XXV, (1938), pp. 391-393.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 366.
4. Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam, The Katu. Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office (Prepublication copy), November 1965, p. 17.
5. LePichon, op. cit., p. 385.
6. SORO, The Katu, op. cit., p. 18.
7. LePichon, op. cit., pp. 395-397.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 395.
10. L. Phillips, "Here are the Tribes," Jungle Frontiers, XIV (Winter 1962), p. 13.
11. LePichon, op. cit., p. 396.
12. Ibid., pp. 395-397.
13. Ibid., pp. 369-372.
14. Ibid., p. 385.
15. Ibid.
16. LePichon, op. cit., p. 377.
17. U.S. Army Special Warfare School, Montagnard Tribal Groups of the Republic of South Viet-Nam, Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, 1965, p. 133.

JEH

Psychological Characteristics

The Jeh live in what they see as a hostile world. They believe their lives are constantly influenced by innumerable good and evil spirits. The Jeh have been characterized as serious, thoughtful, and somewhat fatalistic.¹

Religious Beliefs

The religion of the Jeh is animistic. They worship all natural forces, attributing spiritual life to the sky, the earth, the water, the trees, and other inanimate and animate objects of their natural environment.² Jeh beliefs are motivated by a strong fear of the unknown and of many circumstances believed to cause suffering or death. They feel helpless and at the mercy of the numerous spirits responsible for their adversities, from whom they constantly attempt to extract benefits in return for animal sacrifices.³

The Jeh have a common belief in at least two principal deities, the Heavenly Being and the Spirit of the Hearth or House; they also believe in the spirits of their ancestors.

The Heavenly Being, whom the Jeh call Ra, seems to be the most abstract, mysterious, and omnipotent spirit. They believe he resides over all of nature from his dwelling place in ciok or heaven. The Jeh say that thunder is the voice of Ra.⁴

The Spirit of the Hearth is believed to watch over all the members of a household. The dwelling place of this spirit is thought to be the house itself, independent of whoever lives there. Should a family abandon their home, they leave it intact, for to destroy the house would be to destroy the shelter and kingdom of the Spirit of the Hearth. Moreover, the tribesmen believe that destruction of the house would change the spirit into a terrifying and angry god, bent on revenge.⁵

The spirits of the deceased protect the family against malevolent spirits, sometimes by friendly intercession, sometimes by warring with the evil spirits. Frequently the Jeh invite both the ancestral and evil spirits to fraternal banquets inside the house to encourage friendly settlements between them.⁶

Apparently there are also water spirits in the Jeh religious beliefs. One observer cautioned against contaminating water supplies or doing anything that could possibly be offensive near the water source.⁷

The most prevalent principal religious ritual among the Jeh is the sacrifice offered to appease or to avoid offending spirits, or to invoke pardon for persons who have committed offenses.

The buffalo is the principal sacrificial animal. The Jeh will travel great distances across rugged mountainous territory to obtain buffaloes for sacrifices.⁸

Customs and Taboos

Although the Jeh are believed to be among the most superstitious of all the Montagnard tribes of the Republic of Vietnam, little information concerning their specific beliefs is available. An American missionary who worked among them stated that he had never observed a tribe that offered so many animal sacrifices to the trails, mountains, and other prominent features of the surrounding terrain.⁹

<u>Folk Beliefs</u>	<u>Commentary</u>
Certain animals, such as tigers and leopards, are considered taboo.	When tribesmen sight a taboo animal, they refuse to use the trail on which it was seen. ¹⁰ Some Jeh carry a tiger tooth as protection.

Folk Beliefs

After sacrifice, the tail and skull of the water buffalo are saved. For instance, the Jeh believe that if the tail is transported across a river, sickness and death will come to the village.¹²

The Jeh reportedly bathe only once a year after offering an appropriate sacrifice, lest they anger the spirits by presuming to be clean.¹⁴

Commentary

It is reported that attempts by the Central Government to relocate a village across a river failed because of this taboo. The villagers packed up and moved further into the mountains and out of government control, making sure at the same time that no rivers were crossed in the process.¹³

GN

453

.V584

1966

Skaidrite : [Maliks] Fallah

Customs and taboos of selected tribes residing along the western border of the Republic of Vietnam, compiled by Skaidrite Fallah. Washington, D.C., Special Operations Research Office, The American University, 1966.

13187-c.1

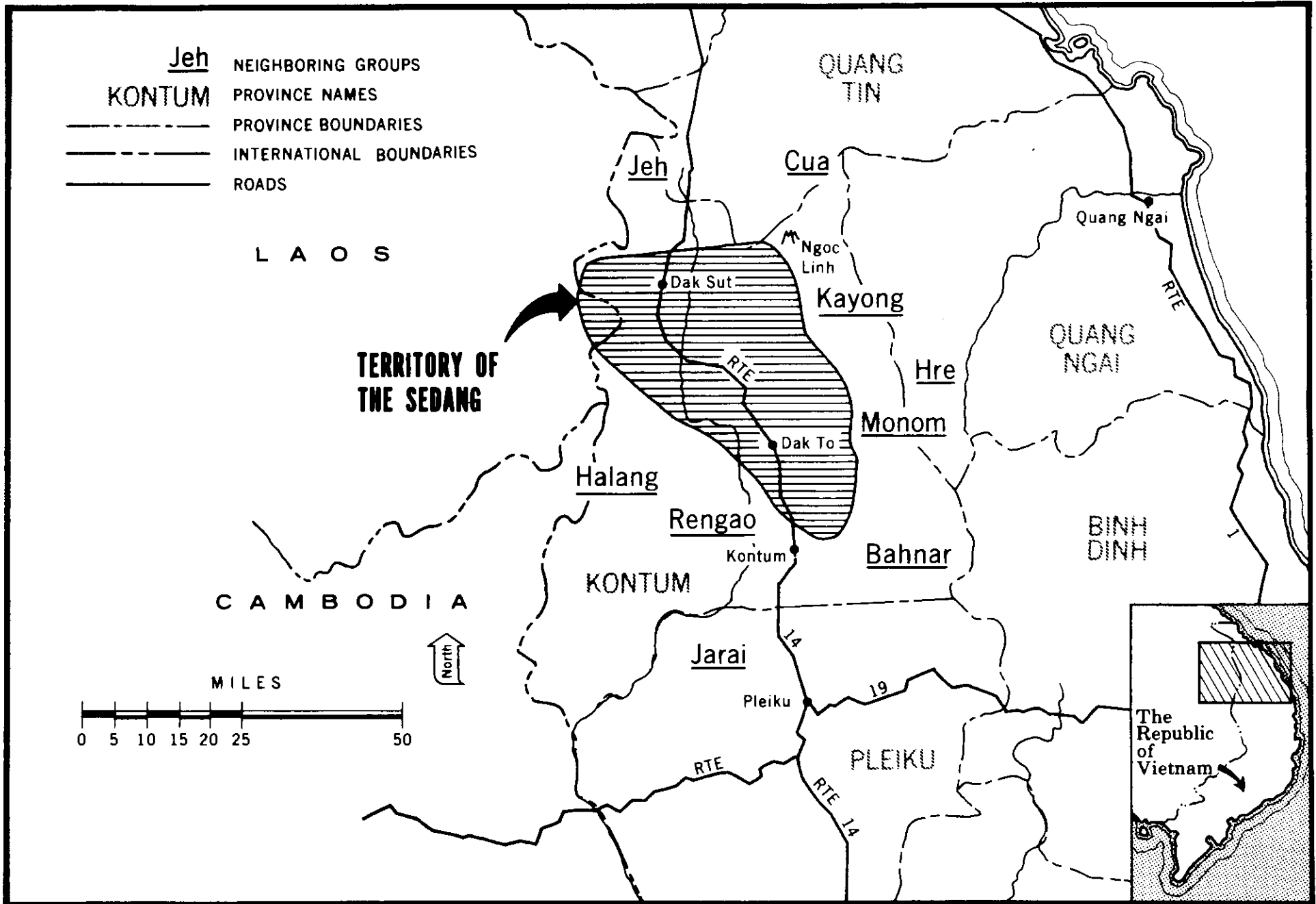
13188-c.2

v. 67p. maps. 28em. (SORO/CINFAC/0426)

Bibliography: p. 65-67.

FOOTNOTES

1. Louis Condominas, "Notes sur les Mois du Haut Song Trang, "Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises, XXVI (1951), p. 34.
2. Rev. Long, Interview, July 1964. (Mennonite Missionary).
3. Frank M. LeBar, et al., Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia. New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964, p. 140.
4. Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam, The Jeh. Washington, D.C.. Special Operations Research Office (Prepublication copy), February 1966, p. 13.
5. Ibid.
6. Condominas, op. cit., pp. 32-33.
7. Long, op. cit.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. U.S. Army Special Warfare School, Montagnard Tribal Groups, op. cit., p. 19.
12. Ibid., p. 118.
13. Ibid.
14. Gordon, H. Smith, The Blood Hunters. Chicago: World Wide Prayer and Missionary Union, 1942, p. 124.



THE SEDANG

SEDANG

Psychological Characteristics

The Sedang believe that they live in a hostile universe, where their gods and the spirits of their ancestors decree severe punishment for any offense. As a result, the Sedang are defiant and quarrelsome, taking advantage of anyone weaker than themselves.¹

The Sedang tribesman does not think of himself as an individual, but identifies himself in terms of his village. Only when he violates taboos and customs is a Sedang an individual.²

Religious Beliefs

The Sedang are animistic and believe that gods or spirits inhabit the lands, animals, trees, and other objects. There are good and evil spirits, spirits of the deceased, and ghosts. Sacrifices are offered to placate spirits who have been offended by taboo violations and to insure the fertility of soil and an abundant harvest.³

The Sedang believe that a long time ago, gods and men were equal, but that in time the gods became more powerful and have since then exacted tribute from men by intimidation. Gods die as men do and eventually, both men and gods become the same type of ghost, through a series of metamorphic reincarnations. Gods are invited to Sedang rituals but are dispersed when their presence is no longer desired by acts designed to annoy them.⁴

Among the Sedang, good spirits are called yang and bad spirits kia. Generally, spirits go in pairs -- for instance, the fundamental pair is yang and kia. Each yang spirit represents some aspects of good, and each kia spirit represents some aspects of evil. The tribesmen attribute to the bad spirits all misfortunes, such as crop failure, sickness, and death.⁵

There are spirits of the sun, moon, the sky, and the earth. The spirit of the sun represents fertility, and the spirit of the moon represents the rhythms of life -- the calendar, vegetation, and the crops. The spirit of the sky is connected with agrarian rites; the spirit of the earth is associated with the growth and generation of living things. The most powerful Sedang spirits are Grandfather and Grandmother Kanda, the creators of the world. Also important are the thunder gods, the Tara, who are associated with warfare.⁶

There are also the spirits who inhabit all surrounding things, such as rocks, trees, buildings, tools, and rice. Each spirit plays a part in the considerations of the tribesmen.⁷

The Sedang religious practitioners are the tyin and sorcerers (bojau). Since the basic Sedang agricultural unit is the household, which collectively cultivates and owns its sacred dry rice fields, and since the rice soul (mahua phae) is believed to live in the hearth of the household chief, the chief's wife, the tyin, is considered a religious leader. The tyin is responsible for sacrifices held in connection with clearing the fields, planting, and harvesting. These sacrifices are designed to insure that the power of the rice soul will be strengthened and the crops abundant. Crop failure is considered a tragedy, as the Sedang believe it results from a weakening of the rice soul. If sacrifices by the tyin do not strengthen the rice soul, the house chooses another tyin.⁸

Divination by sorcerers involves the use of dice and snails. When a question is asked of the spirits, the dice are thrown, revealing the answer by the way in which they fall.⁹

Customs and Taboos

The Sedang have many customs and taboos associated with their fear of offending the spirits. These are established by tradition, and each tribesman knows and attempts to observe them. Therefore, the Sedang live in constant awareness, and often dread, of the supernatural world; nothing happens by chance, and every bit of good luck, every success, every failure, and every dream, and every accident is a sign from the spirits. Since everything means something, much of Sedang's life is taken up with discovering and/or interpreting the meaning of everything that goes on about him. Still more time is spent in attempts to ward off misfortune, to placate angry spirits, and to keep the favor of the more friendly spirits.

<u>Folk Beliefs</u>	<u>Commentary</u>
The Sedang will not engage in trading when about to build a house.	Trading under such circumstances would tempt an adverse reaction from the spirits.
A tribesman is forbidden to take a meal in his own house after eating at the common house. ¹⁰	
Before building a house, a Sedang male goes alone to a previously selected spot and places seven grains of rice on a banana leaf held on the ground by a piece of wood.	If the grains of rice are undisturbed on his return the following morning, the signs are favorable for his building the house and for the rice fields to flourish. If, however, the rice has been disturbed, he must select a new site and go through the same ritual until the signs are favorable. ¹¹
The burning of a village is often attributed to the spirits, as punishment for incest or secret premarital intercourse.	The guilty parties must offer up sacrifices to placate the angered spirit and to strengthen the power of the rice souls of the hearths of the village, which these violations have weakened. ¹²

Folk Beliefs

A Sedang will sit and watch his house burn to the ground and make no attempt to put out the fire. He will extend a red cord around the fire. If the fire stops, all is well; if not, the spirit being manifested by the fire is still angry. The fire will subside only when the spirit is no longer angry.¹³

A Sedang will bathe only once a year and then only after the sacrifice of a buffalo.

To see a snake suddenly on the path when returning from a trip signifies future misfortune.¹⁶

When a roebuck crosses a tribesman's path, this is an unfavorable sign.

A bird singing on the right or left of the trail is a bad omen.

Snails are used to foretell the outcome of military questions.

A fixed ritual in the common house always precedes an attack against another village. A chief cuts a special root into three pieces, places the roots on the blade of his sword, and lets them fall one by one on his shield with a religious invocation.²⁰

Commentary

The observance of this belief has often lead to entire villages being wiped out by fire, while the tribesmen sit by and watch.¹⁴

The sacrifice is to appease the "river spirit" for the terrible thing that will happen to it when the entire village goes in for its annual bath.¹⁵

To encounter a snake when setting out on a trip, however, is not a bad omen.¹⁷

A bird singing in front or behind the tribesman on the trail is a good omen.¹⁸

Two rows of snails -- six in one row and five in the other -- face each other; the row moving into the other signifies the victorious group.¹⁹

If the roots lands in a prescribed position, the attackers will be invincible.

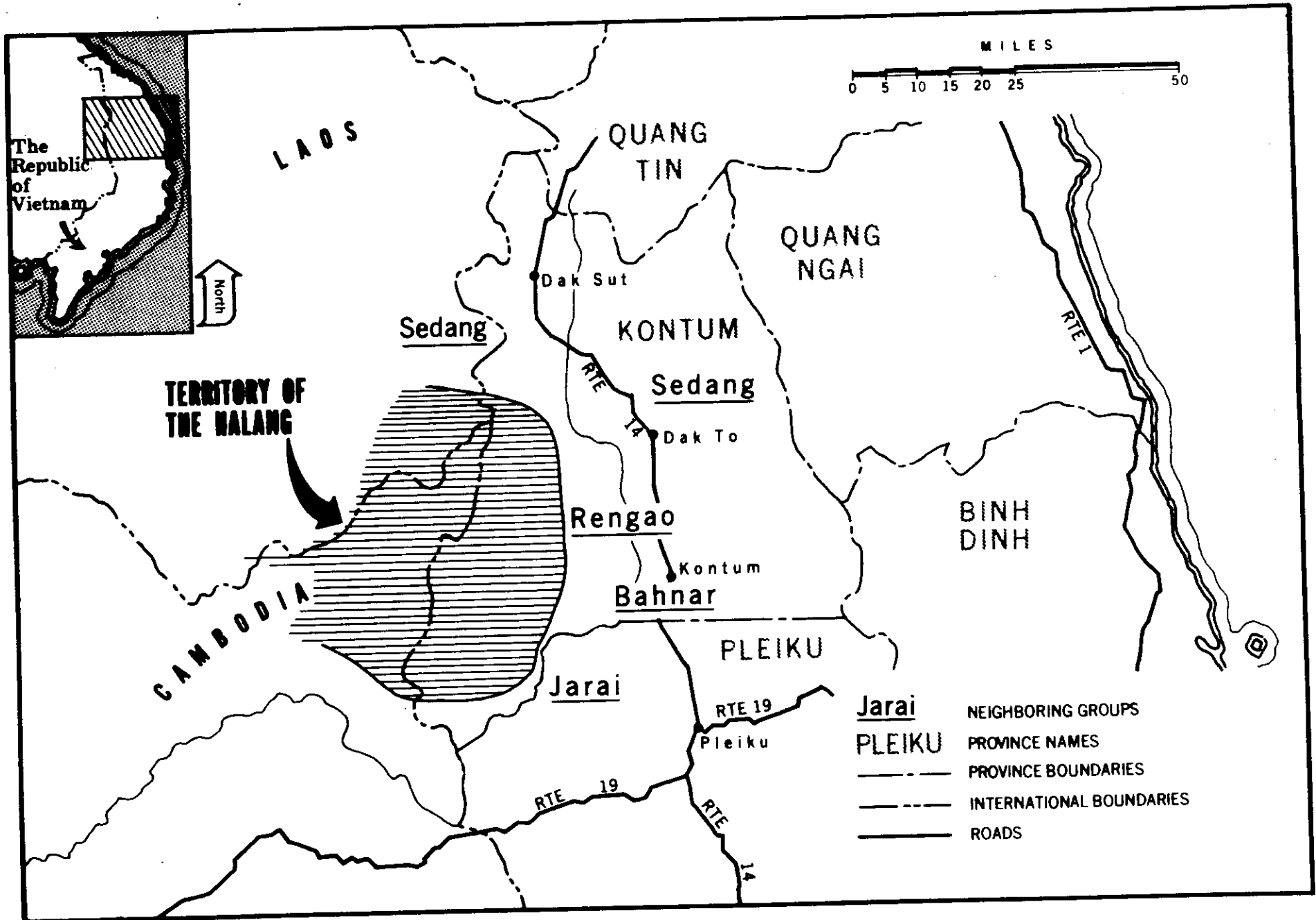
While on warpath, if the birds are singing and no mice are on the trails, the warriors consider the operation progressing to the satisfaction of the spirits.²¹

A bird of prey circling overhead is an omen of much booty.²²

While most Sedang tribesmen will attempt to observe their taboos, it should be noted that those tribesmen who are in regular contact with Vietnamese and Americans may not observe their customs and taboos as closely as tribesmen living in greater isolation from outside influences.

FOOTNOTES

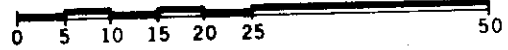
1. George Devereux, "The Potential Contributions of the Moi to the Cultural Landscape of Indochina," Far Eastern Quarterly, VI (1946-1947), pp. 393-395.
2. Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam, The Sedang. Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office (Prepublication copy), November 1965, p. 7.
3. Ibid., p. 17.
4. LeBar, et al., op. cit., pp. 148-149.
5. Dam Bo (Jacques Dournes), "Les Populations montagnards du Sud-Indochinois," France-Asie, Special Number (Spring 1950), pp. 1130-1137.
6. Gerald C. Hickey, The Major Ethnic Groups of the South Vietnamese Highlands. Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, April 1964, pp. 63-64.
7. Dam Bo, op. cit., pp. 1130-1137.
8. George Devereux, "Functioning Units in Ha(rh)ndea(ng) Society," Primitive Man, X (1937), pp. 4-5.
9. SORO, The Sedang, op. cit., p. 18.
10. Dam Bo, op. cit., p. 1149.
11. Ibid., p. 1021.
12. Devereux, "Functioning Units," op. cit., p. 31.
13. U.S. Army Special Warfare School, Montagnard Tribal Groups, op. cit., p. 192.
14. Ibid., p. 193.
15. Ibid.
16. SORO, The Sedang, op. cit., p. 14.
17. Ibid.
18. Dam Bo, op. cit., p. 1152.
19. George Devereux, "Principles of Ha(rh)ndea(ng) Divination," Man, XXXVIII (1938), pp. 125-127.
20. SORO, The Sedang, op. cit., p. 15.
21. Dam Bo, op. cit., p. 978.
22. Ibid.



TERRITORY OF THE HALANG

LAOS

MILES



QUANG TIN

QUANG NGAI

Dak Sut

KONTUM

Sedang

Sedang

Dak To

Rengao

Kontum

Bahnar

BINH DINH

CAMBODIA

PLEIKU

Jarai

RTE 19

Pleiku

RTE 19

RTE 14

Jarai

PLEIKU

NEIGHBORING GROUPS

PROVINCE NAMES

PROVINCE BOUNDARIES

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES

ROADS

THE HALANG

HALANG

Psychological Characteristics

No specific information is available at this writing.

Religious Beliefs

The animistic religion of the Halang is based on a vast pantheon of spirits, both good and evil, who inhabit every object and creature of the environment. The good spirits are not honored, for the Halang consider it unnecessary.¹

Customs and Taboos

Believing that the world around them abounds in both good and evil spirits, the Halang are constantly trying to avoid actions, activities, and contact with objects or animals that they believe might displease the spirits.

Folk Beliefs

Commentary

Powerful spirits are believed to dwell in old or large trees and in stones or roots of unusual shape and color.²

If a tribesman brings home an unusual rock and then has nightmares, he will immediately sacrifice at least a chicken to the spirit of the rock.³

Birds are considered intermediaries between man and the spirit.

If the tribesman, on the other hand, has a good night's sleep, he will consider the rock a useless object and throw it away.⁴

Before undertaking any activity a Halang will listen to the birds and postpone action if the songs are unfavorable omens.⁵

Folk Beliefs

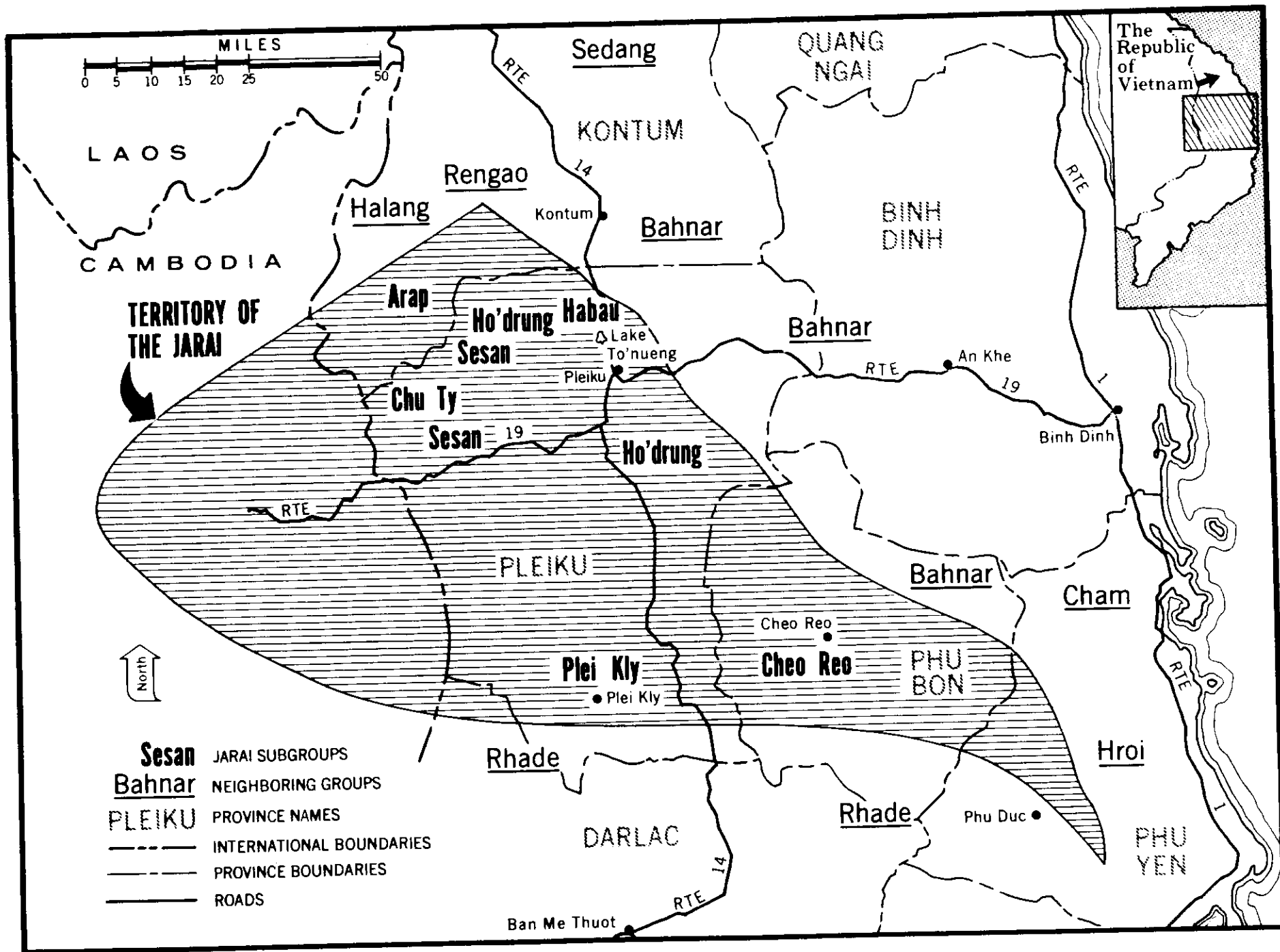
Evil spirits cause sickness
and require sacrifices.

Commentary

If a villager has a fever, he makes an offering, phak-chak, to the evil spirits by placing bamboo stakes at the village entrance. The basket-shaped stakes, with openings at the top, contain the offering of bamboo tubes, the bottom of a gourd, and eggs pierced with a stick.⁶ Serious illness requires the sacrifice of a buffalo.⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam, The Halang. Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office (Prepublication Copy), February 1966, p. 12.
2. Ibid.
3. A. Baudenne, "Les Khas de la région d'Attopeu," Revue Indochinoise. (January-June 1913), p. 426.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Henri Maitre, Les Jungles Moi, Paris: Émile Larose, 1912, p. 238.
7. A. Lavallée, "Notes ethnographiques sur diverses du sudest de l'Indochine," Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, I (1901), p. 301.



- Sesan** JARAI SUBGROUPS
- Bahnar** NEIGHBORING GROUPS
- PLEIKU** PROVINCE NAMES
- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES
- PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
- ROADS

THE JARAI SUBGROUPS

JARAI

Psychological Characteristics

In Jarai society, the family is preeminent, socially and economically. Little interest is shown in the individual; he is only part of the family groups.¹

The Jarai are reportedly quite industrious and are generally reliable; they are slow but methodical workers. The Jarai ridicule lazy people and appear to try to do their best on any job.²

When a Jarai group raids another village, the leader of the raid is one of the village bachelors. The tribesmen submit to the leadership of this person who, by reason of his bachelorhood, is not yet considered to be a fullfledged member of the tribe.³ Traditionally, the tribesmen have not submitted to any external authority.

The Jarai respect men whom they believe to be favored by the spirits. Age is also a basis for respect. The elderly are considered, because of their long experience, to have much knowledge. Age is honored by positions in Jarai village councils.⁴

Religious Beliefs

The Jarai religion is based on a multitude of spirits -- yang -- who created the earth and rule it. The spirits are masters of the world, as well as guardians of society and religion. Any action contrary to social or religious tradition is considered an attack upon the spirits and requires the tribesmen to make amends to the spirits in order to escape punishment.⁵

The Jarai believe that the spirits or yang govern the movement of the entire cosmos. They control the rhythm of the seasons, the movement of the stars, rainfall, the fertility of the soil, the growth of the plants, riches and poverty, and the multiplication of herds. Particular spirits have

importance for the entire Jarai tribe, while other spirits have only local or regional importance; some spirits -- such as the spirit of a special rock -- may be worshipped in only one village. The good spirits, fewer in number than the bad spirits, receive special attention from the Jarai. Household spirits, such as the spirits of the hearth and the broom, are accorded special treatment. There are two types of evil spirits: those which cause epidemics, accidents, and death among animals and plants and those which punish men for acts contrary to the established customs of the tribe. These latter spirits are responsible for temporary illnesses and nonfatal accidents. Again, regional variations determine the significance and manifestations of the various spirits: a spirit believed in one area to punish with drought might in another area punish with rain.⁶

A technique of divination designed to ascertain the desires of the spirits and the exact sacrifices required for ceremonies is called Topa Gai. In the Topa Gai ritual, a special religious practitioner questions the spirit of the stick (Yang Gie) by holding a stick parallel to his outstretched arm. Replies from Yang Gie are derived from the motion of the muscles of the extended arm: the Jarai believe the distances the muscles, in contracting, move away from the stick indicate the spirit's answers. Only married men may question the spirits with this technique, which is also used to select long house sites, interpret dreams, determine the cause of sickness, and choose land for cultivation.⁷

Customs and Taboos

Similar to the other Montagnard tribes, the Jarai have numerous folk beliefs and taboos of which the better known ones are listed below.

Folk Beliefs

Commentary

The Jarai clans and some of their food taboos are as follows:⁸
(clan - food taboo)

The Jarai have specific food taboos which are identified and explained in their tribal folklore.

Ro'mah - Eels and elephants.

One legend tells of members of the Ro'mah clan who fell into the water, and how they were sustained while in the water by nourishment from eels. Consequently, the Ro'mah do not eat eels. Another story tells of Ro'mah fishermen who used the technique of poisoning the water to catch fish. When they ate these fish, their skin turned to leather, and they became elephants; since then the Ro'mah have not eaten elephants.

Ro'chom - Domestic and wild cattle.

Once two Ro'chom sisters washed a fishing net and put it out to dry. During the night the net disappeared; the older sister accused the younger of having stolen it. A fight ensued in which the older sister killed the younger one. Later when a cow was killed, the stolen net was found inside its carcass. Since then the Ro'ham have not eaten the flesh of cows because a cow caused the death of one of their people.

Siu - Iguanas, toucans, and kites.

An ancestor of the Siu clan found an iguana skin in his house and a kite and a toucan (birds) perched on his house; this was a very rare occurrence. These events were considered to be the manifestations of the sympathy of the spirits for these animals and of the animals' desire to contract an alliance with that family.

Ro'hlan - Toads, lizards, grackles.

Two sisters from the Ro'hlan clan once lived together. One day the oldest sister trapped a toad and cooked it for her dinner; while she was away, the younger sister ate the cooked toad. When the older sister returned, the younger one confessed her deed and swore that neither she nor her descendants would ever again eat toads.

Another Ro'hlan tale concerns a clan ancestor who had a valuable jar in which a grackle and a lizard lived; to the tribespeople this meant that the spirits of the grackle and lizard wanted to have a special connection with the clan.

Ko'pa - Monitor lizards.

Once, when a Ko'pa clan ancestor was near a river, she saw a gourd full of peppers and rice and a gourd of rice wine which she consumed. A little later some kinsmen came by the river, saw a lizard, and killed it. Upon opening the lizard, the kinsmen found inside it all the things the woman had eaten; they realized that the woman had been transformed into a lizard. Since then, the Ko'pa do not trap or kill lizards for fear of injuring their ancestor.

Ro'-o- Toads.

Once, among the Ro'-o, the people saw a toad sitting next to a newborn baby girl. The baby's father threw the toad into the river, but it came back, to be thrown into the river a total of seven times. The girl's family then realized that the spirit of the toad wanted to form an affiliation with their clan.

Kso'r - Reptiles.

In the Kso'r clan, an ancestor once discovered the scales of a dragon in the rice storehouse. She asked a sorcerer what this meant, and he replied that the reptiles (according to an oral tradition, all reptiles are descended from dragons) wanted to make an agreement with her clan and to help them. Therefore, Kso'r do not trap or kill any reptiles.

The Jarai are afraid to cut their hair; they believe that the soul of a man dwells especially in his head and that to cut a man's hair is to take away his soul. Sight of the man's hair enables the soul to recognize its home when it returns from its nocturnal wanderings during dreams.⁹

If the hair is cut and buried, the soul will search for it and, finding it buried, will think "my subordinate (body) is dead." This will cause the soul to flee to the realm of the spirits. Deprived of its vital principal, the body will then be obliged to die.¹⁰

The Jarai fear dying away from their home village.¹¹

This fear has a tendency to restrict Jarai travel away from the village.

In order to ward off evil spirits that may have brought death to the villagers, a grotesque figure of straw and bamboo complete with bow and arrow is placed on the path near Jarai village entrances.¹²

The Jarai reportedly place great faith in the power of this figure to guard the village against evil spirits.

It is taboo to touch the big ✓ liana plant called ana khea which bears fruit like the Indian horse chestnut, because it causes a weakness in the knees.

The Jarai believe the plant is the home of a spirit which steals the soul of those who touch it.¹³

A closed door and branches tied to a wooden post before a Jarai house indicate the house is taboo.¹⁴

Folk Beliefs

An epidemic in a village results in a seven day taboo. The following sign is erected: The heads of monkeys, the shackles of elephants, and spears are suspended at the entrance gate of the contaminated village.¹⁵

It is reported that some Jarai object to being photographed because they fear their spirit will be stolen.¹⁶

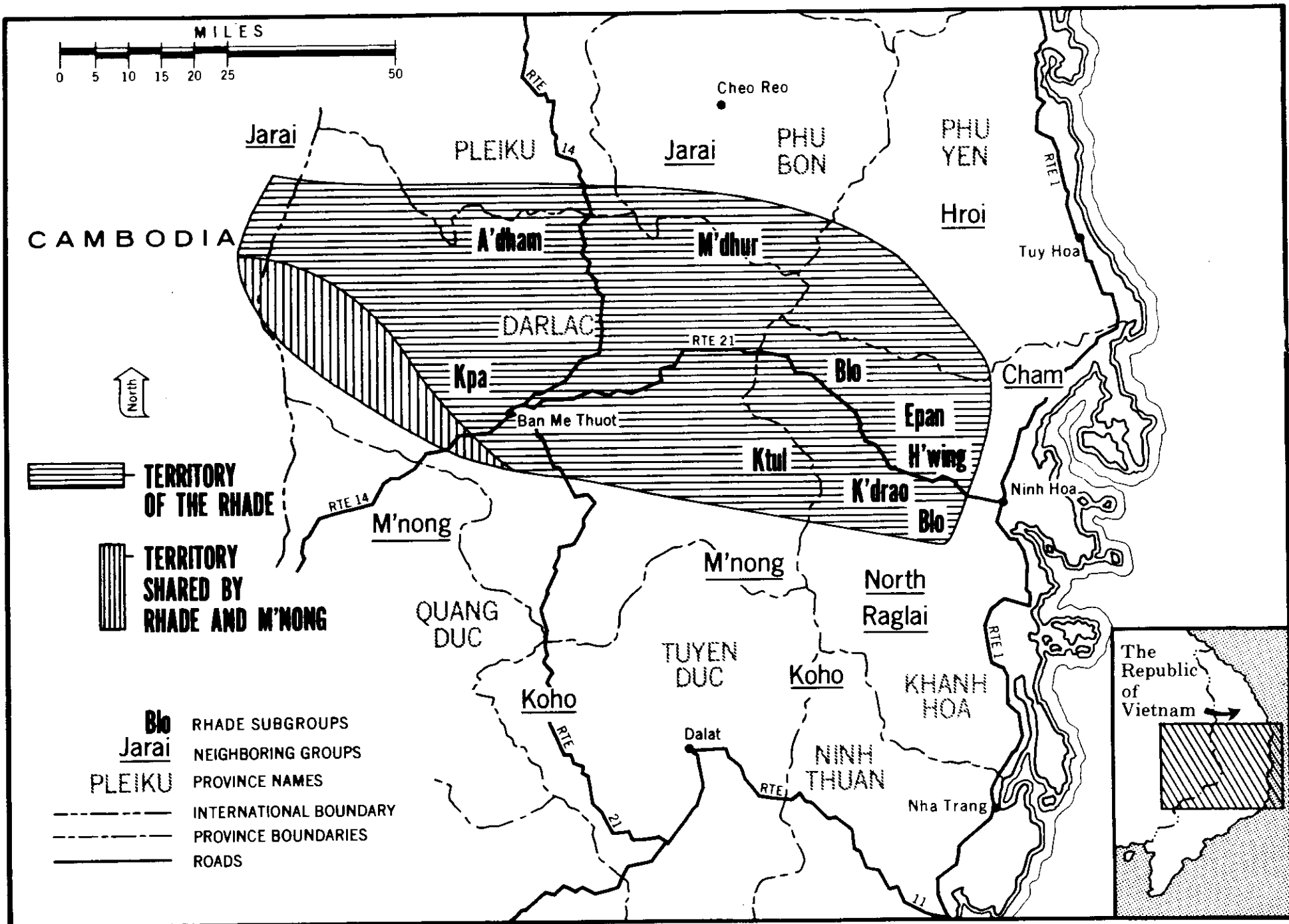
Commentary

During the period no strangers are allowed to enter the village. If the epidemic becomes widespread, the entrance gate, as well as paths leading to the village, is closed by numerous tangled branches.

If the spirit is stolen, the Jarai believe, the person will become weak or sick and die.

FOOTNOTES

1. Pierre-Bernard Lafont, Toloi Djuat: Coutumier de la tribu Jarai, Paris: L'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1963, p. 12.
2. U.S. Army Special Warfare School, Montagnard Tribal Groups, op. cit., p. 90.
3. Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam, The Jarai. Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office (Prepublication copy), October 1965, pp. 12-13.
4. Lafont, op. cit., pp. 156-175.
5. SORO, The Jarai, op. cit., p. 25.
6. Lafont, op. cit., pp. 158-159.
7. J. Kerrest, "La Consultation du Batôn (chez les Moi Rhade et Jarai)," Bulletin de l'Institut Indochinois pour l'Étude de l'Homme, IV (1941), pp. 215-217.
8. Lafont, op. cit., p. 155.
9. R. P. Kemlin, "Au Pays Jarai," Mission Catholiques, XXXIX (1909), p. 246.
10. Ibid.
11. SORO, The Jarai, op. cit., p. 26.
12. Evelyn Mangham, "Superstitions," Jungle Frontiers, XI (Summer 1960), p. 10.
13. Kemlin, op. cit., p. 246.
14. Ibid., p. 247.
15. Bernard Jouin, "Histoire légendaire du Sadet du Feu," Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises, XXVI (1951), pp. 79-80.
16. U.S. Special Warfare School, Montagnard Tribal Groups, op. cit., p. 93.



THE RHADE SUBGROUPS

RHADE

Psychological Characteristics

The Rhade believe that man cannot challenge supernatural power; they accept their fate and take no practical measures to safeguard themselves from natural calamities. They accept serious misfortunes, such as fire and disease, because they attribute such occurrences to the evil influences of local spirits.¹

Despite their fatalistic attitude, most observers consider the Rhade the most intelligent Montagnard tribe, showing a strong desire to learn new and better ways of life.²

Religious Beliefs

The Rhade are surrounded by good and evil spirits of all their deceased ancestors. The spirits inhabit inanimate and animate objects and can dwell in a human body, as well as in rocks, trees, and streams.

The most important god is Ae Die, "Master of the Sky." He is the ruler of the universe and of all other spirits.³

H'Bia Dung Dai, the sister of Ae Die, is the goddess who oversees the cultivation of rice and the rice field, the ray or paddy. She is concerned with fertility and with the birth of children and their early years. She is responsible for the souls of all those who died when they were young.

Ae Du is the husband of H'Bia Dung Dai. He is a good spirit who governs harvests and rain. He is also the spirit of cold, heat, wind, storms, and night -- but only to the extent that these are beneficent. He serves as an assistant to Ae Die.⁴

The chief of the evil spirits is Yang Lie. He commands all the greatly dreaded evil spirits and the M'tao and K'sok who do lesser evils. Ae Die can intervene against the systematic and habitual malice toward humans caused by

Yang Lie. If Ae Die forgets Yang Lie for a moment, Yang Lie will at once cause mischief and accidents. The Rhade represent Yang Lie in human form, his neck under a yoke, his feet fastened to a wooden block, and his head split by a saber blow.

Accidents and sudden deaths are caused by two types of evil spirits. The first type includes Yang Brieng Pong and Hong Klang, with all of the higher ranking evil spirits under their command; and they are termed collectively Yang Brieng. The second type, M'tao and K'sok, generally perform lesser evil acts than the Yang Brieng.

Yang Brieng Pong is responsible for accidental and sudden deaths. The most dreaded of the Rhade spirits, he is responsible for deaths caused by drowning, burning, falling trees, wild animals, and in fact, all accidental deaths. In addition, he is also responsible for deaths occurring during pregnancy, for miscarriages, and for stillbirths. After a normal delivery he can still suddenly appear and cast a spell on the baby: if he arrives ahead of the good spirits, the Yang Mnut Hra, the child is slated for death.

The evil partner of Yang Brieng Pong, Hong Klang, is found on earth and enters the corpses of all who die from accidents. He is found in the bones of a corpse, where he assumes the form of a wasp, from which he gets his name. Hong Klang literally means "wasp of the bone." People attending the funeral of anyone who has died suddenly are afraid to be in the vicinity of the grave after sunset, for fear they might be in danger of this spirit, which roams near the corpse.

The word K'sok designates the imps, jinn, and little devils, who are blamed for nasty tricks. In general, they appear suddenly before the Rhade, causing severe shock, and at times, miscarriages. They assume diversified and deceptive form. These errant spirits are invisible and live in villages, as well as deep within the forests. Their high chief is Yang Lie.