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

Skaidrite Maliks Fallah

The American University
Washington, D.C.

February 1967

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by

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February 1967

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CINFAC

CULTURAL INFORMATION ANALYSIS CENTER

ABSTRACT

This study presents information on the customs and taboos of the tribes residing along selected trails leading into the Republic of Vietnam. The nine tribes studied were selected primarily for their size, prominence, and location along the common border of the Republic of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Physical characteristics and religious beliefs are also discussed.

This report originated as CRESS/CINFAC R-0426. Research and writing were completed in April 1966.

PREFACE

This study consists of 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 and prominence, and for 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. In addition to an overall map showing area coverage, maps of each tribal area have been included.

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 also are folk beliefs related to eating and drinking, animals, warfare, nontribal members, and villages and houses. Separate sections have been included on the psychological characteristics and religious beliefs of the individual tribes, since they are so closely integrated with the main theme.

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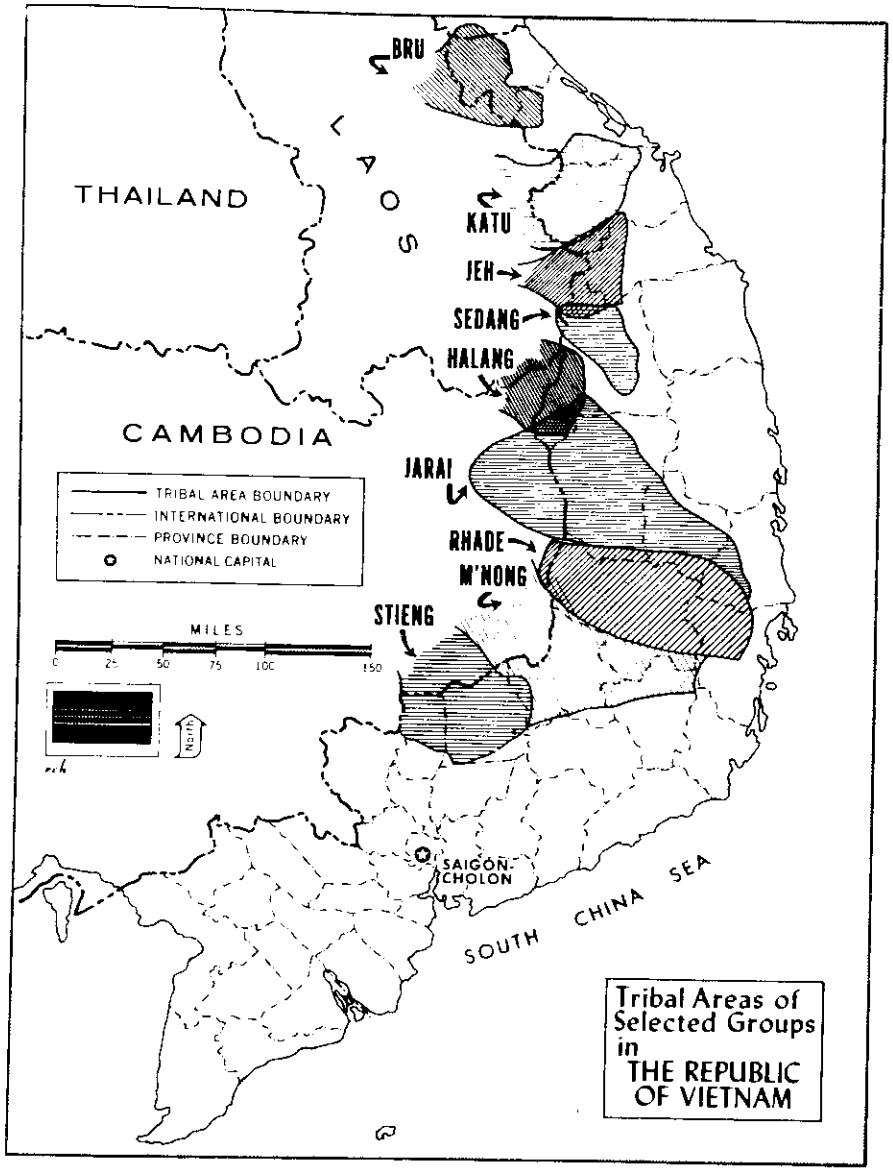
MAPS



THE 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. 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.

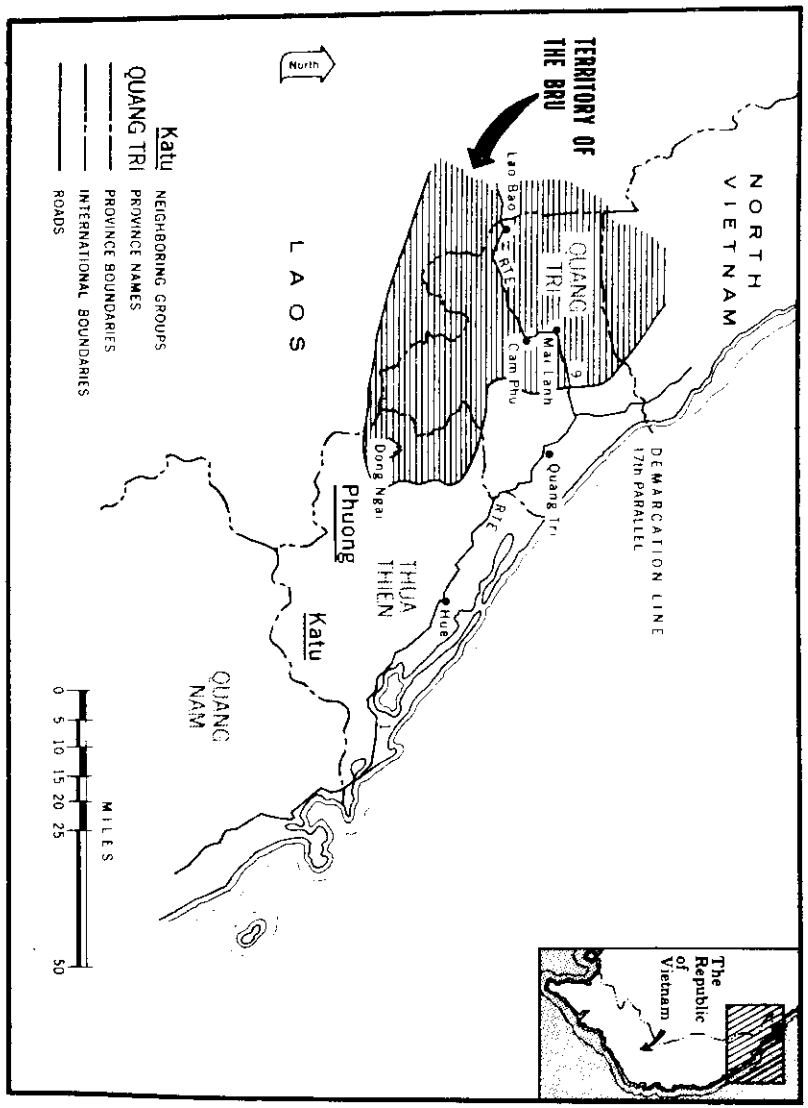
The sacrifices themselves involve a number of rites: an invocational prayer intended as an invitation to the relevant spirits to attend the sacrificial ceremony and as an expression of the wishes of the person making the sacrifice; the ceremonial slaying of an animal (chicken, pig, or buffalo); the offering 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.

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



THE BRU

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.[5] The following list includes some of the known customs and taboos of the Bru tribe.

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
When sleeping inside a house a tribesman must not point his feet toward any religious objects, such as statues woven of bamboo.[6]	
Blue is a favorite color.	The color blue is frequently worked into clothing designs.[7] Consequently, blue is characteristic of attraction rather than repulsion.
Evil spirits cause sickness. The Bru think that only sacrifices to the spirits can cure illness.	Sorcerers—men or women—determine through divination the spirit responsible for the illness and the kind of sacrifice necessary to cure the afflicted person.[8]
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.[9]	
During an animal sacrifice, all tribesmen present must participate in the drinking of rice wine.	Unless all participants drink, the sacrifice is believed to be ineffectual, the spirits being offended.[10]
The Bru believe that the spirits consider the buffalo to be representative of man.	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.[11]

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 [pre-publication 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.

[4]SORO, The Bru, op. cit., p. 15.

[5]SORO, The Bru, op. cit., p. 11.

[6]Maspero, op. cit., p. 9.

[7]Laura Irene Smith, Victory in Viet Nam (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 88; Daupley, op. cit., p. 44.

[8]Ronald Morris, "Returnee Response to Questionnaire on the Montagnard Tribal Study" (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, January 1965).

[9]Maspero, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

[10]SORO, The Bru, op. cit., p. 12.

[11]Ibid.

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 who 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]

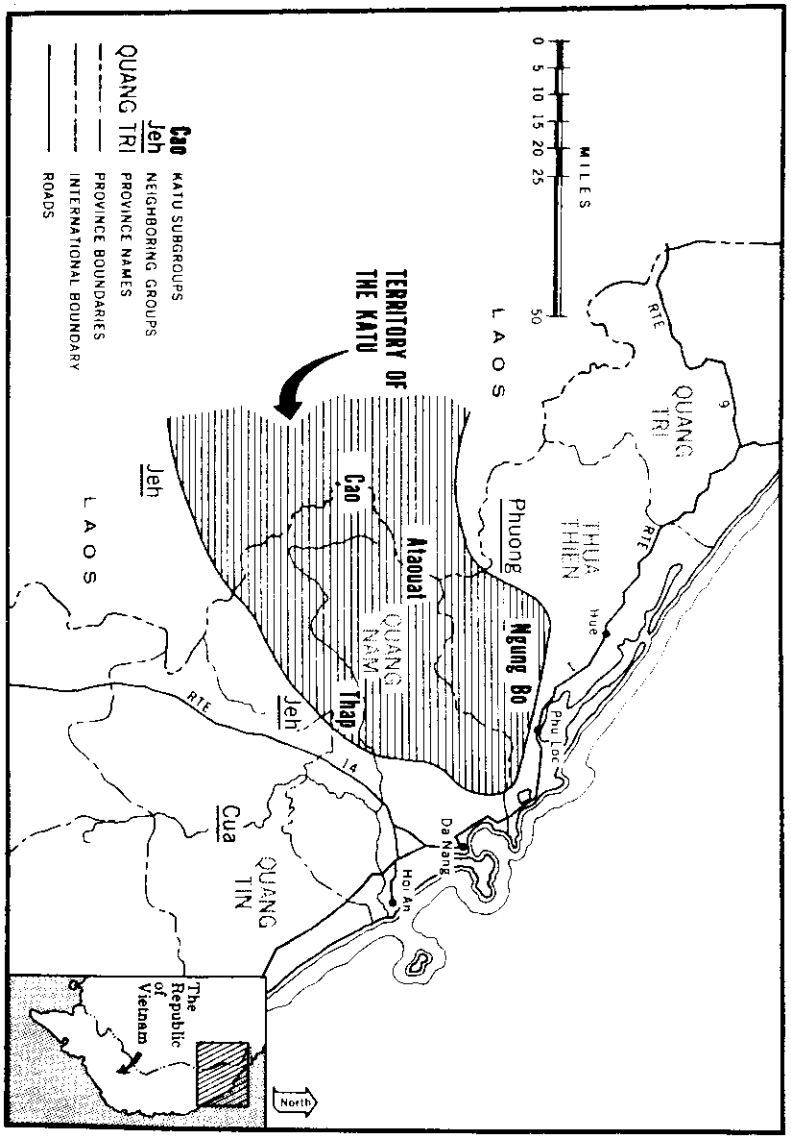
It appears that anyone may become a great sorcerer by causing an unusual event. LePichon, an early observer, recounts how he gained a reputation as a great sorcerer by using a charge of dynamite to put to flight some formidable spirits who were haunting a small river inlet.[8]

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.

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
Omens to be cognizant of:	**These signs or omens are supposedly**



Folk Beliefs

Omens to be cognizant of:
- Cocks crowing at midnight.
- Toucan flying toward the sun.
- Sighting a python.
- Finding certain types of plants in the forest.
- Sneezing when one is about to undertake some important business.[8]

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—2 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's dien for a village.
- An evil death—village dien for 1 to 6 months.[11]

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]

Commentary

These signs or omens are supposedly warnings from good spirits that danger is near.

It is not known what types of plants are taboo.

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 the 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]

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.

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
The buffalo is a sacred animal. The skulls of sacrificed buffalo are kept in the communal house.	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 Hué, XXV (1938), pp. 391-93.

[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 [pre-publication copy], November 1965), p. 17.

[5]LePichon, op. cit., p. 385.

[6]SORO, The Katu, op. cit., p. 18.

[7]LePichon, op. cit., pp. 395-97.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid., p. 395.

[10]Richard L. Phillips, "Here Are the Tribes," Jungle Frontiers, XIV (Winter 1962), p. 13.

[11]LePichon, op. cit., p. 396.

[12]Ibid., pp. 395-97.

[13]Ibid., pp. 369-72.

[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.

THE 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 its home, it is left 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]

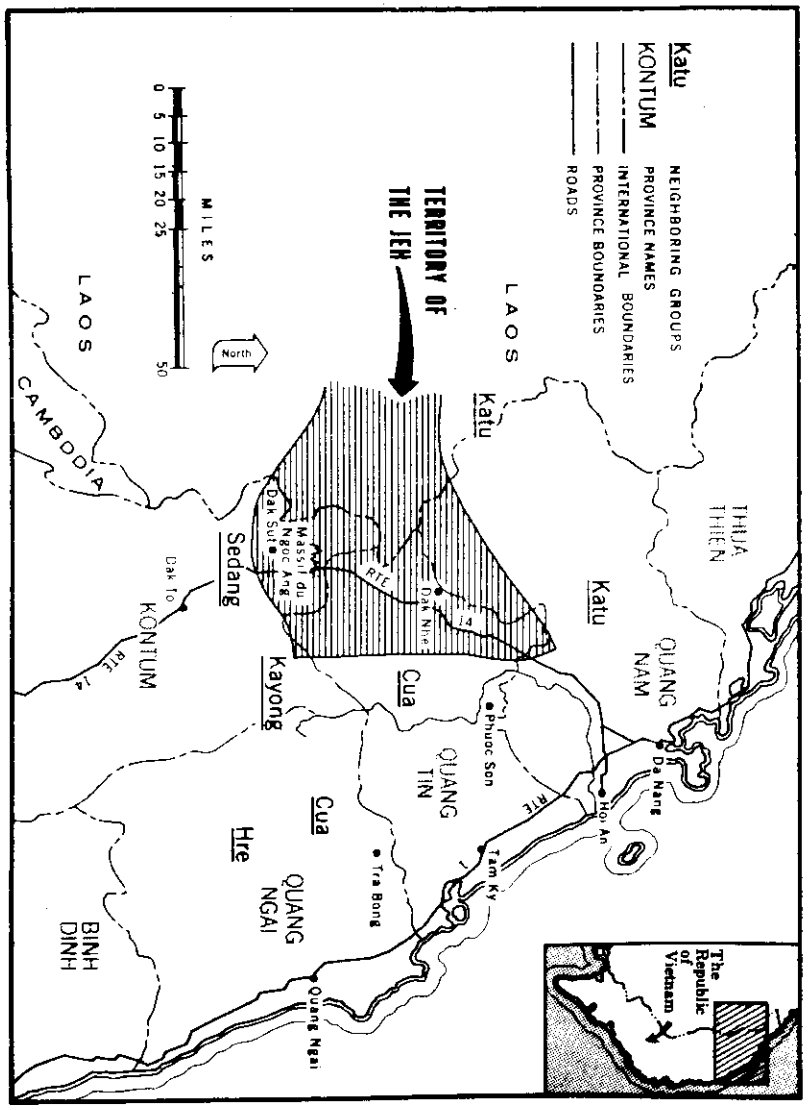
Apparently there are also water spirits in the Jeh religious beliefs. One observer cautioned against contaminating water supplies or doing anything that could possibly be offensive near the water source.[7]

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]



Folk Beliefs

Certain animals, such as tigers and leopards, are considered taboo.

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

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

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]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Louis Condominas, "Notes sur les Mois du Haut Song Trang," Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises, XXVI (1951), p. 34.

[2] Interview with Rev. Long. Mennonite missionary, July 1964.

[3] Frank M. LeBar et al., Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia (New Haven, Conn.: 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 of the Republic of South Viet-Nam (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, 1965), 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

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 by acts designed to annoy them when their presence is no longer desired.[4]

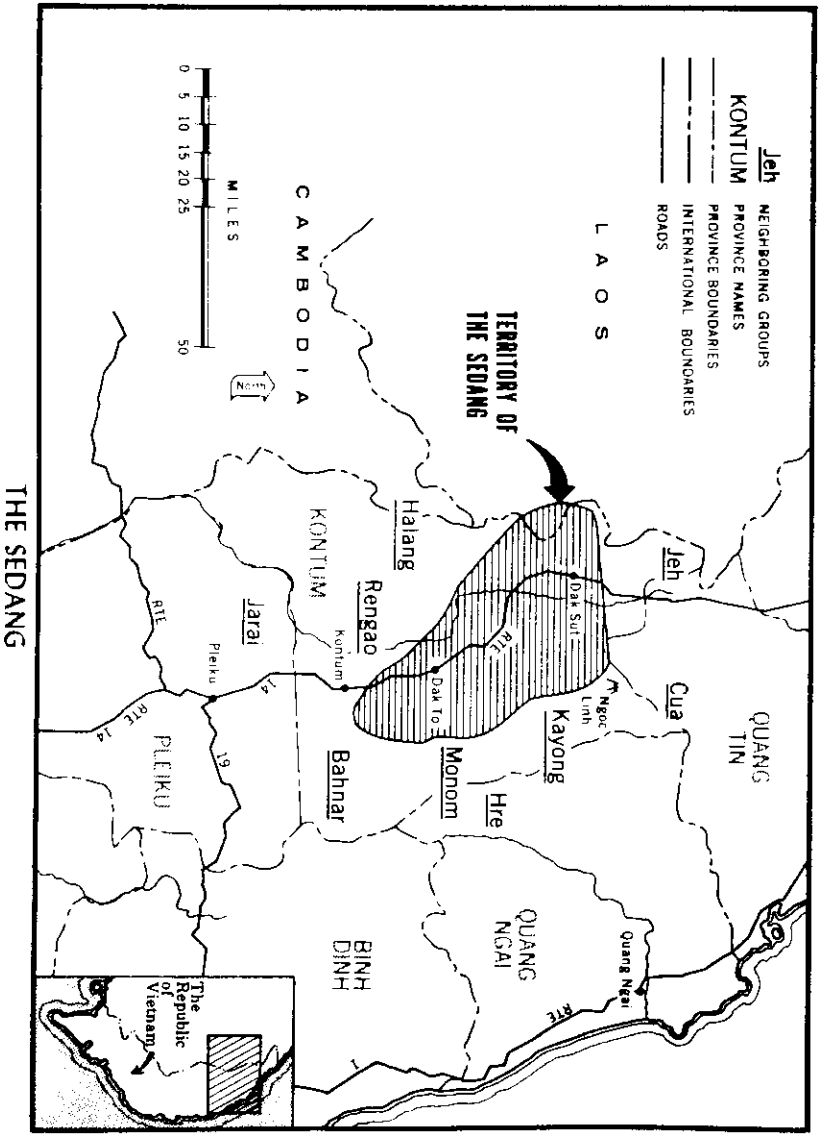
Among the Sedang, good spirits are called yang and bad spirits kia. Generally, spirits go in pairs—for instance, the fundamental pair is yang and kia. Each yang spirit represents some aspect of good, and each kia spirit represents some aspect of evil. The tribesmen attribute to the bad spirits all misfortunes, 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, every dream, and every accident is a sign from the spirits. Since everything means something, much of the 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.

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
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]
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]	The observance of this practice has often lead to entire villages being wiped out by fire, while the tribesmen sit by and watch. [14]
A Sedang will bathe only once a year and then only after the sacrifice of a buffalo.	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 see a snake suddenly on the path when returning from a trip signifies future misfortune. [16]	To encounter a snake when setting out on a trip, however, is not a bad omen. [17]
It is an unfavorable sign when a roebuck crosses a tribesman's path.	
A bird singing on the right or left of the trail is a bad omen.	A bird singing in front or behind the tribesman on the trail is a good omen. [18]
Snails are used to foretell the outcome of military operations.	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]

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
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 root on the blade of his sword, and lets the pieces fall one by one on his shield while offering a religious invocation. [20]	If the root lands in a prescribed position the attackers will be invincible.
If, while on the warpath, 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 that much booty will be seized. [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 Indo-China," Far Eastern Quarterly, VI (1946-47), pp. 393-95.

[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]Frank M. LeBar et al., Ethnic Groups of Southeast Asia (New Haven, Conn.: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), p. 140.

[5]Dam Bo [Jacques Dournes], "Les Populations montagnardes du Sud-Indochinois," France-Asie, Special Number (Spring 1950), pp. 1130-37.

[6]Gerald C. Hickey, The Major Ethnic Groups of the South Vietnamese Highlands (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, April 1964), pp. 63-64.

[7]Dam Bo, op. cit., pp. 1130-37.

[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 of the Republic of South Viet-Nam (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, 1965), 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. 125-27.

[20]SORO, The Sedang, op. cit., p. 15.

[21]Dam Bo, op. cit., p. 978.

[22]Ibid.

THE HALANG

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

No specific information is available at this writing.

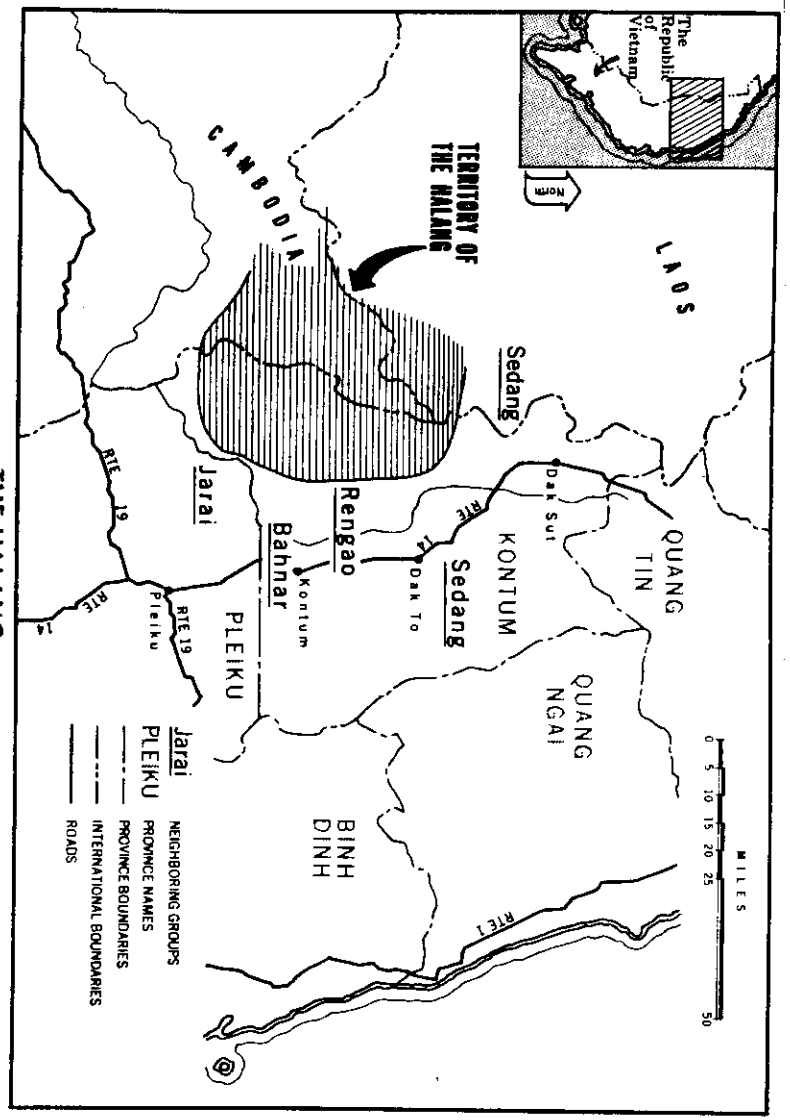
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

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]	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]
Birds are considered intermediaries between man and the spirit.	Before undertaking any activity a Halang will listen to the birds and postpone action if the songs are unfavorable omens.[5]
Evil spirits cause sickness and require sacrifices.	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]



THE HALANG

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 tribus du sud-est de l'Indochine," Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, I (1901), p. 301.

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 group.[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 full-fledged 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

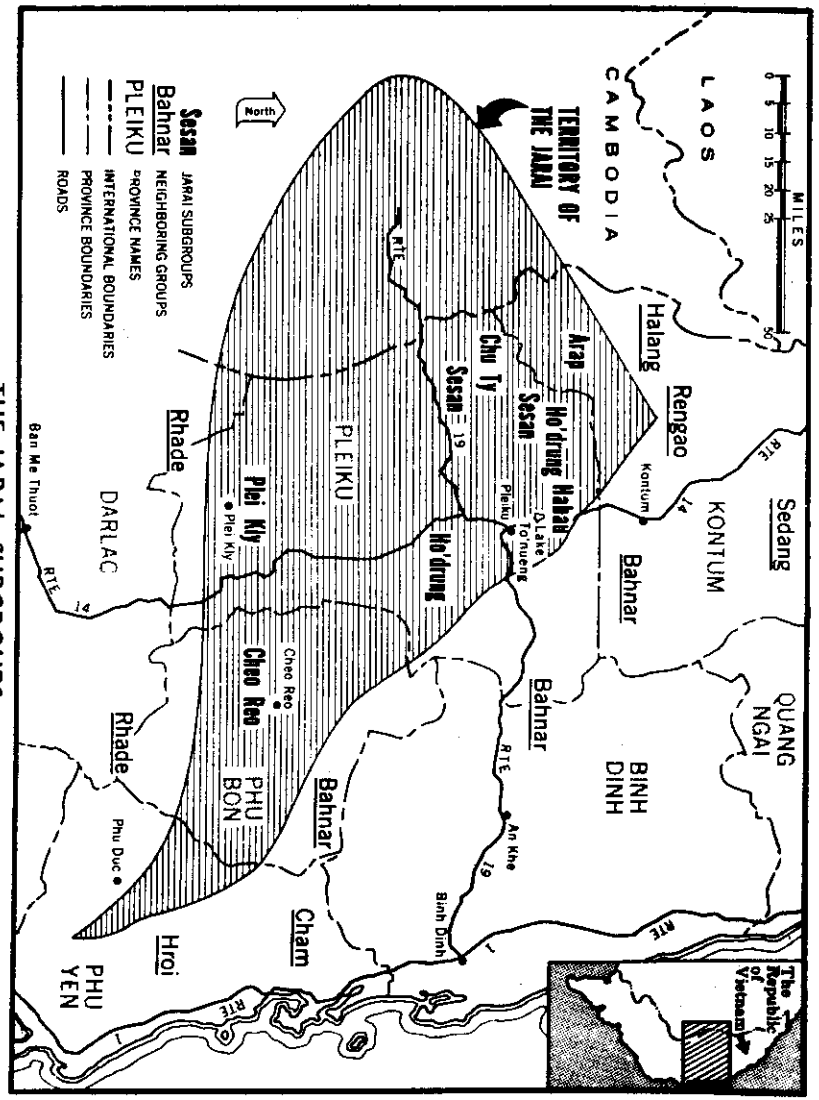
The Jarai religion is based on a multitude of spirits—yang—who created the earth and rule it. The spirits are masters of the world, as well as guardians of society and religion. Any action contrary to social or religious tradition is considered an attack upon the spirits and requires the tribesmen to 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 worshiped in only one village. The good spirits, fewer in number than the bad spirits, receive special attention from the Jaral. 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 that 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 longhouse 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

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

Ro'mah—Eels and elephants.

Ro'chom—Domestic and wild cattle.

Siu—Iguanas, toucans, and kites.

Ro'hlan—Toads, lizards, grackles.

Commentary

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

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.

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'chom have not eaten the flesh of cows, because a cow caused the death of one of their people.

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.

Two sisters from the Ro'hlan clan once lived together. One day the older 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.

Folk Beliefs

Ko'pa—Monitor lizards.

Ro'-o—Toads.

Kso'r—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]

The Jarai fear dying away from their home village.[11]

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]

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

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

Commentary

Once, when a Ko'pa clan ancestor was near a river, she saw a gourd full of pepper 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.

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.

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.

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 principle, the body will then be obliged to die.[10]

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

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

Tha Jarai believe this plant is the home of a spirit which steals the soul of those who touch it.[13]

[illegible] skeletons 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]

[illegible] 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 sicken 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 of the Republic of Viet-Nam (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, 1965), 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 [pre-publication copy], October 1965), pp. 12-13.

[4]Lafont, op. cit., pp. 156-75.

[5]SORO, The Jarai, op. cit., p. 25.

[6]Lafont, op. cit., pp. 158-59.

[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. 215-17.

[8]Lafont, op. cit., p. 155.

[9]R. P. Kemlin, "Au Pays Jarai," Missions 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. Army Special Warfare School, Montagnard Tribal Groups, op. cit., p. 93.

THE 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 ricefield, 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, and he is also the spirit of cold, heat, wind, storms, and night—hot 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.

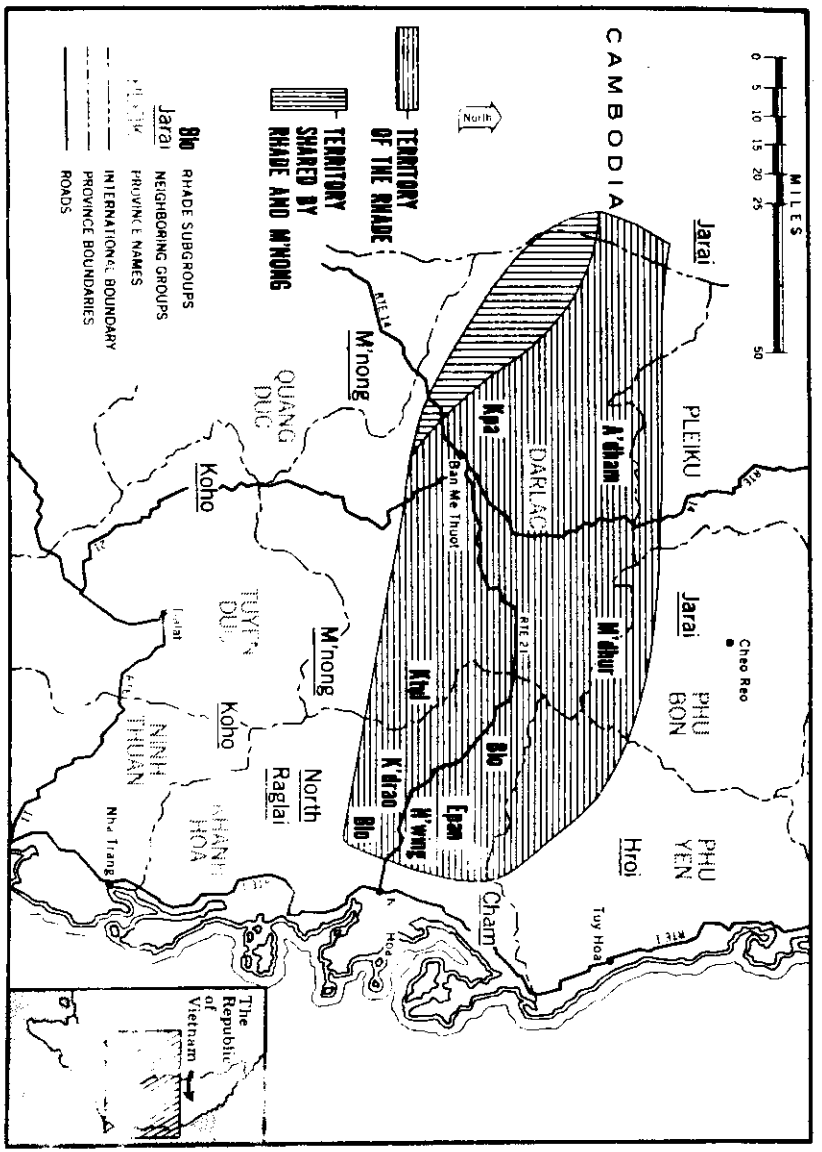
Accidents and sudden deaths are caused by two types of evil spirits. The first type includes Yang Brieng Pomg and Hong Klang, with all of the higher ranking evil spirits under their command; and they are termed collectively Yang Brieng. The second type, M'tao and K'sok, generally perform lesser evil 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 diverse and deceptive forms. These errant spirits are invisible and live in villages, as well as deep within the forests. Their high chief is Yang Lie.

THE RHADE SUBGROUPS



magic bellows, blow a cloud of [illegible]. They also shoot magic darts that will quickly

In addition to these numerous spirits, the Rhade believe that a person has three souls. The m'ngat is the first soul, representing the individual during life and continuing to represent him after death. After death, it is called yang atao.

The second soul, m'ngah, also called ewa, meaning life or breath, is the soul which after death quits the body and goes to another body to give it life. It is called yun for the short period after it has left one body and before it has entered another. The first cry of a baby is a sign that the yun has entered the body of the infant to give it life, m'ngah.

Tlang hia is the third soul, and it is represented by a bird which leaves the body at death and becomes dew. This dew is used in the infant-naming ceremony to obtain the consent of the deceased maternal aunts and uncles to use one of their names. [6]

Relationships between the Rhade and the spirits can be adjusted to a degree by rituals and ceremonial sacrifices to the spirits. These relationships are handled by special religious practitioners called mjao. They can be either male or female, although in practice few mjao are female. Among their duties, the mjao protect the tribesmen from attacks by the spirit of the tree trunk, the spirit of the molehill, the spirit of the forest, and the spirit of the spring, all of which are evil forces. [7]

CUSTOMS AND TABOOS

The folk beliefs of the Rhade are intimately related to their animistic religion. Evil spirits can cause anything from petty annoyances to major disasters, and they must be constantly appeased by sacrifices.

A technique of divination, called epa gie, or "measuring the stick with the arm," is designed to ascertain the desires of the good daily life. This consists of interrogating a spirit and of the intermediary, who then measures his arm on a bamboo stick previously cut to that length. Under the influence of the spirit of the stick, the intermediary goes into a trance and is unable to stretch out his arm. The differences of degree of arm movement are observed and interpreted as responses of the spirit of the bamboo stick. [8]

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
The Rhade want to die in their own villages because their local spirits cannot protect them outside the immediate area.	If the Rhade are in a hospital and believe they are dying, they will insist on being taken home. If a Rhade dies in a hospital, the tribesman responsible for his being there will be in trouble with the deceased person's family. [9]
If a turtle facing eastward is seen in the rice fields, a speedy death is presaged.	The Rhade bury their dead with the head toward the east, and the turtle shell resembles the mounded shape of Rhade graves. [10]
The movement of birds and small animals in the brush, the howl of the roe-deer, and the song of the m'lang birds are ill omens. [11]	
If a deer barks three times in a newly prepared ricefield, death will strike the family. [12]	

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
If a crow lands on a longhouse during its construction, the structure must be abandoned or the family will suffer bad luck. [13]	
When a Rhade walks through the forest, a call from a certain bird on his left heralds bad luck, whereas a call from the right forecasts good fortune. [14]	
The appearance of a tiger, a snake, or a monkey is a bad omen. [15]	Its appearance is sufficient reason to stop work and make special sacrifices.
It is forbidden to kill any kind of snake in the tribal fields. [16]	
The sight of a lizard is an unfavorable omen.	A lizard is a prediction of death. [17]
An early morning sneeze before going to work insures good luck for the rest of the day. However, a sneeze during a trip or upon starting a trip or departing from a person's home requires a short delay to prevent misfortune. [18]	The Rhade believe sneezing irritates the spirits and, after a sneeze by a person or animal, one must remain still until the spirits recover from their anger.
A person who leaves a village, taking his mats, jars, dishes, chickens, and pigs, without offering rice or corn to each house arouses the anger of the dead and of the spirits. [19]	If a person in the village should become sick, the departed person is brought back and required to pay for all the sacrificed animals. If the sick person dies, the departed person must pay the blood price because he is considered responsible for the death. [20]
Some significant omens in dreams: [21]	Dreams assume a great importance in the lives of the Rhade.
Dreaming of water —	— means fire will destroy the house or possibly even the village.
Dreaming of large fish or jars —	— evokes a sense of death.
Dreaming that one's teeth are broken —	— means there will be deaths in the family. The upper teeth represent the mother; the bottom, the father; and those on the sides, brothers, sisters, and cousins.
Dreaming about an accident —	— is a warning to remain at home and avoid an inevitable mishap.
Dreaming about a red blanket —	— forecasts trouble.
Dreaming about fishing —	— indicates that if the tribesman then goes fishing and catches a white fish, he will have good fortune.
Dreaming of harvesting eggplant —	— means that people will be severely critical of the dreamer.

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
A pregnant woman dreaming about:	
A knife or a cross-bow —	— will give birth to a boy.
A basket —	— will give birth to a girl.
An elephant is a kind of talisman to the Rhade.	Elephants have supposedly mystical ties with the clan. These ties are so strong that they are considered part of the family and are given names.[22]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam: The Rhade (Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office [pre-publication copy], July 1965), p. 13.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Bernard Jouin, La Mort et la tombe: L'Abandon de la tombe (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1949), p. 9.

[4] Ibid., p. 10.

[5] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[6] Ibid., p. 34.

[7] SORO, The Rhade, op. cit., p. 37.

[8] Ibid., p. 28.

[9] Transcription of interview with Donald Voth, Mennonite missionary in Darlac Province, July 1964.

[10] SORO, The Rhade, op. cit., p. 29.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] A. Maurice and G. Proux, "L'Âme du riz," Bulletin de Société des Études Indochinoises, XXIX (1954), p. 27.

[17] A. Maurice, "L'Habitation Rhade," Bulletin de l'Institut Indochinois pour l'Étude de l'Homme, V (1942), p. 98.

[18] SORO, The Rhade, op. cit., p. 29.

[19] L. Sabatier, Recueil des coutumes Rhades du Darlac (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1940), p. 102.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Maurice, "L'Habitation Rhade," op. cit., pp. 92-93.

[22] Maurice and Proux, op. cit., p. 144.

THE M'NONG

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The M'nong are group oriented and seldom approach tasks and problems as individuals. Their behavior is strongly influenced by the conformity required by their traditions and customs.

The behavior of the M'nong is often unpredictable: at times they are overactive, excitable, and aggressive; at other times they are calm and almost indolent.[1] In situations of great stress, the M'nong will quickly disappear into the forest. For instance, an attempt by the Central Government to relocate a M'nong group failed because being away from their lands and spirits so distressed the M'nong that, at the first opportunity, they all moved out of the new village, disappearing into the forest to prearranged traditional hiding places.[2]

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The M'nong have an animistic religion; they believe that spirits inhabit all parts of their world. In addition, spirits are associated with mythical birds and mythical heroes. The M'nong live in constant interaction with those spirits; life is a continuing struggle to thwart the evil spirits.[3] The M'nong believe that their ancestors have an existence after death, and they, too, watch over human beings and help them in their relationships with the spirits.[4]

The most important spirit in the M'nong religion is Nduu, who represents the soul of the rice (fertility) and is also the mythical or legendary hero who started the human race.[5] This spirit is called Tum Nduu by the Gar and Prah ba by other M'nong groups.[6]

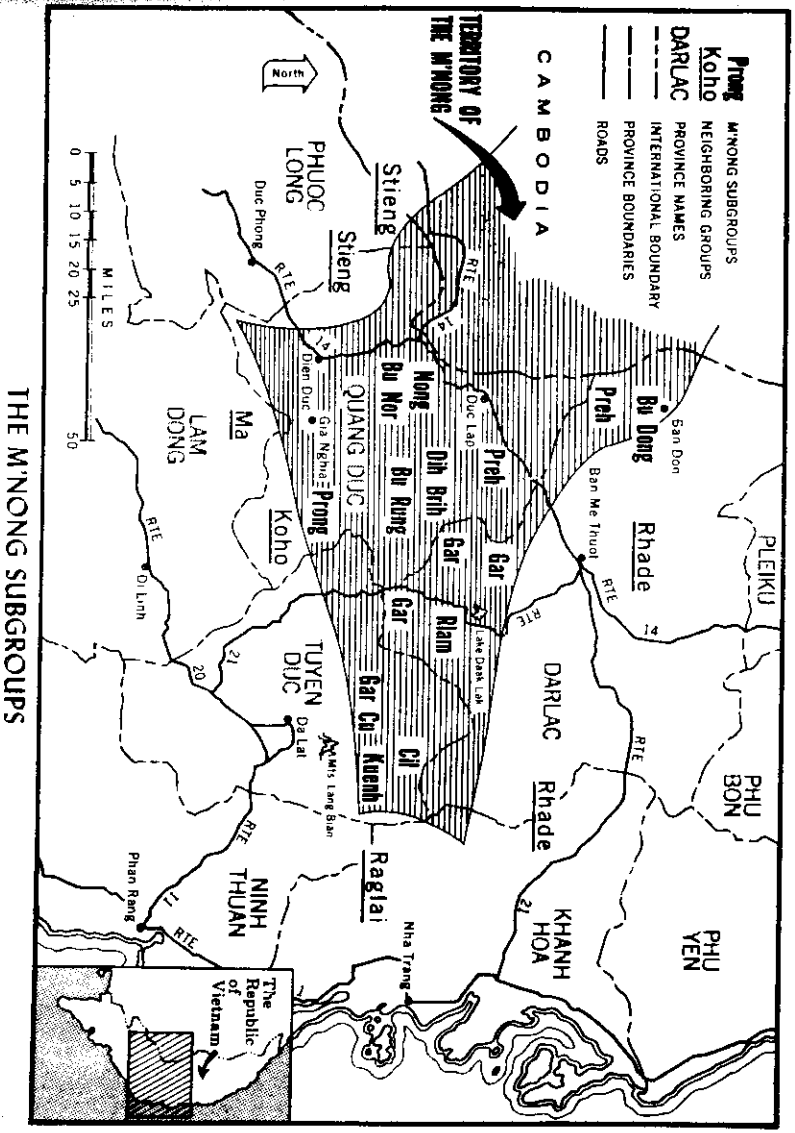
Next in importance are the spirits of the elements: earth, fire, water, and sky. The spirit of the earth or land, Nglar Nguec, plays an important role in the selection of sites for fields and houses. The name Nglar Nguec means, literally, "Bird of the Rock Crystal."[7] There are several sky spirits of the rain, the sun, the moon, and the stars, and there are also subsidiary land spirits—for example, spirits of topographical features and streams. Moreover, there are spirits connected with the village and its houses—for example, spirits of the village gate, of the columns of the house, and of the hearth.[8]

In addition to the various spirits, the M'nong also have demons believed to be responsible for illness. These demons, called <u>caak</u>, are believed to steal the souls of the tribesmen, thereby causing illness.[9]

Prominent among the religious ceremonies performed by the M'nong are the rituals for the purification of a field when incest is suspected, for healing the sick, for preserving or improving the crops, for the burial of the dead, and for cementing alliances between parents and children or between tribal groups.[10]

CUSTOMS AND TABOOS

Believing that trees, rocks, and animals—in fact, all their surroundings—are inhabited by spirits, the M'nong are always on guard against evil spirits; they avoid committing offenses which might anger them. The M'nong believe that spirits make their wishes known through dreams and omens.



THE M'NONG SUBGROUPS

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
During the selection of a house site, it is considered a good omen if the owner of the new house dreams about fruit, rice, a paddy, a tomb, hunting, or swimming.	If the dream is about buffaloes, killing deer, or the breaking of teeth, it is considered a bad omen.[11]
Seeing flames devour the loincloth of a person in a dream predicts that person's death.[12]	
A violation of the taboo of sexual relations between members of the same family through the maternal line can precipitate disaster.[13]	For instance, the crops may fail or torrential rains may fall.
If rice is scraped from a pot with a knife, tigers are sure to come and attack one.[14]	
After the filing down of one's teeth, the person is prohibited from eating chicken or the vegetable khoi for eight days.[15]	In the past, at puberty the upper front teeth of boys and girls were filed down and stained black, while the lower front teeth were filed to sharp points.
To the M'nong, the tiger has supernatural significance and is associated with the spirits.	They do not like to hunt tigers, which some believe can become invisible.[16]
If a dog steps over a newly born infant, the dog must be sacrificed at once, then cooked and eaten by the people who attended the delivery of the child.[17]	
A swallow caught outside the house may be eaten; if a swallow is caught inside a house, eating it is taboo.[18]	The tribesmen examine the bird for evil signs; and if any evil signs are found, the house is purified with a sacrifice of a dog and a jar of alcohol.
It is taboo to touch animal dung; the M'nong believe lightning will strike a person who does.[19]	The exception to this taboo is touching of animal dung used as fertilizer for the fields.
When a village is taboo, a cord is usually stretched across the village gate, or some sort of barrier will be erected to prohibit entrance.	Generally, outsiders are not permitted inside a M'nong village when a taboo is in effect. If the villagers expect a visitor, the tribesmen will go out to warn the outsider that the restriction is in effect.[20]
The M'nong women never eat with the men, because a woman can draw down the anger of the spirit which shows itself in certain dishes.[21]	
The M'nong refuse to carry away dead bodies of alien tribespeople for fear that evil spirits will haunt them.[22]	

The M'nong have also certain taboos which indicate that some days are not for work and that specific kinds of meats or fruits are not to be eaten. However, such taboos are primarily clan customs and have limited applicability, since they do not hold true for a village or a tribe as a whole.[23]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Georges Condominas, Nous avons mangé la forêt de la pierre-génie Gôo (Hil saa briî mau-yaang Gôo); chronique de Sar Luk, village mnong gar (tribu proto-indochinoise des Hauts-Plateaux du Viet-Nam central) (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957), pp. 9-12.

[2] Interview with Evelyn Mangham, missionary, 1964.

[3] Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam: The M'nong (Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office [pre-publication copy], October 1965), p. 24.

[4] Pierre Huard and A. Maurice, "Les Mnong du plateau central indochinois," Bulletin de l'Institut Indochinois pour l'Étude de l'Homme, II (1939), p. 112.

[5] Condominas, Nous avons mangé la forêt, op. cit., p. 258.

[6] Huard and Maurice, op. cit., p. 119.

[7] Ibid., p. 49.

[8] Pierre Huard, "Les Croyances des M'nong du plateau central indochinois," Revue des Troupes Coloniales, CCXLII, September 1936, p. 867.

[9] Condominas, Nous avons mangé la forêt, op. cit., p. 378.

[10] Georges Condominas, "Notes sur le Tam Bo Mae Baap Kuon (Échange de sacrifices entre un enfant et ses père et mère) Mnong Rlam," International Archives of Ethnography, XLVII (1955), pp. 133-54.

[11] Huard and Maurice, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

[12] Condominas, Nous avons mangé la forêt, op. cit., p. 128.

[13] Ibid., p. 101.

[14] Norman Lewis, A Dragon Apparent: Travels in Indo-China (London: Jonathan Cape, 1951), p. 116.

[15] A. Maurice, "A Propos des mutilations dentaires chez les Moi," Bulletin de l'Institut Indochinois pour l'Étude de l'Homme, IV (1941), p. 136.

[16] Lewis, op. cit., p. 116.

[17] Ibid., pp. 244-45.

[18] Ibid., p. 106.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Condominas, Nous avons mangé la forêt, op. cit., pp. 203-204.

[21] U.S. Army Special Warfare School, Montagnard Tribal Groups of the Republic of Viet-Nam (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, 1965), p. 152.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Stieng are considered one of the more warlike tribes of the Republic of Vietnam.[1] By Western standards, the Stieng may appear lazy, for they do not submit to the observance of regular hours.[2] Judged by their performance of routine tasks, the Stieng are apathetic and seem incapable of sustained effort.[3]

The Stieng love their independence and will obey a chief's directions only if they agree with them. In disputes with chiefs, villages have been known to split or members have left the villages.[4] Stieng tribesmen are oriented first toward the family and then toward the village.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The life of the Stieng is dominated by his animistic belief that gods and spirits inhabit every animate and inanimate object. Sacrifices to placate spirits offended by violation of taboos are the primary religious ritual.

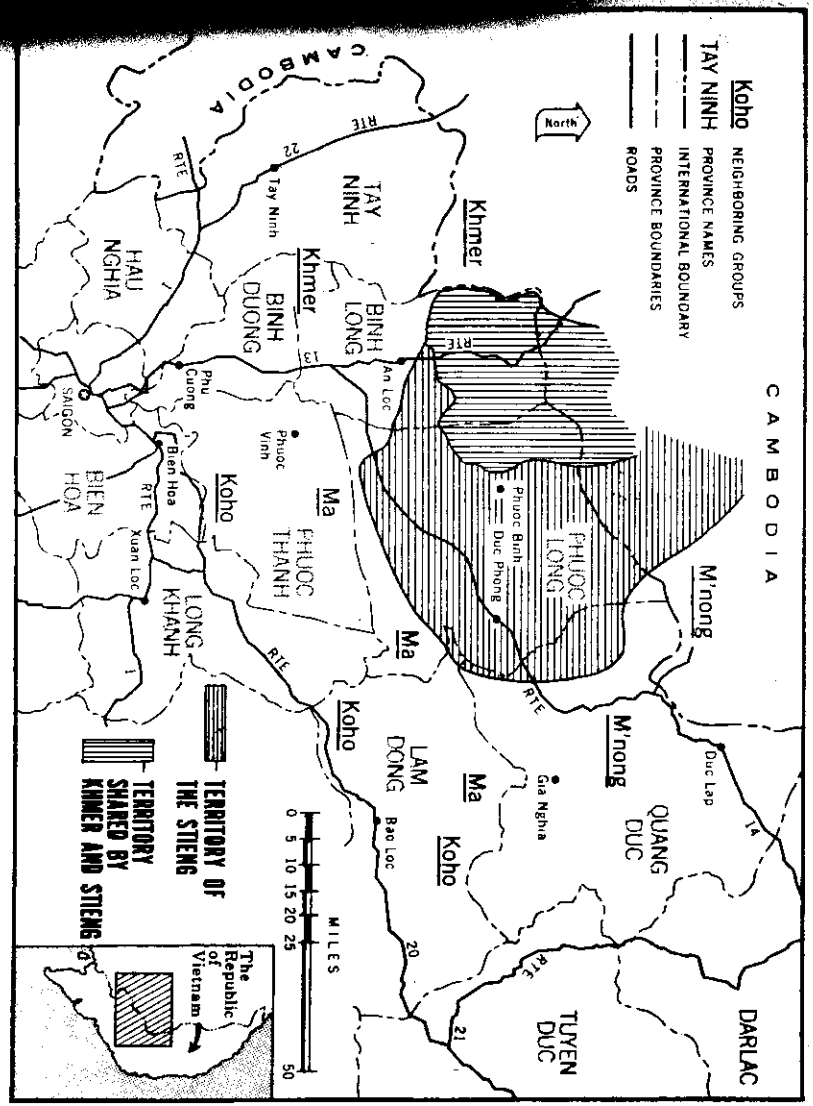
The most important Stieng spirits are those of the sun, moon, earth, sky, and lightning. The spirit of the sun is responsible for fertility; the spirit of the moon, for the rhythms of life, such as the calendar, vegetation, and crops; the spirit of the earth, for the growth of things; and the spirit of the sky, for agrarian rites. The spirit of lightning is especially feared by the tribesmen; if certain taboos are broken, they believe this spirit will strike down the guilty party.[5]

The Stieng also have numerous local spirits, including the spirits of the trees, ponds, rocks, and implements, that require certain behavior on the part of the tribesmen. For example, if a tree is to be cut down, the tribesmen will make a small sacrifice to the spirit of the tree in order to avoid arousing its anger. These local spirits take their names from the objects they inhabit; for example, the spirit of a particular mountain is called yang (spirit) and the name of the mountain.[6] Evil spirits, or good spirits that are angered by the tribesmen, are believed to cause misfortune, illness, and death. The Stieng believe the evil spirits can "eat the soul" of a living man, thus bringing illness and death.[7]

CUSTOMS AND TABOOS

Numerous fears, superstitions, and prejudices are associated with the Stieng's animistic religion. The Stieng believe that good and evil spirits inhabit all the objects of their world, including such things as streams, rocks, the soil, crossbars, jars, and gongs. The evil spirits actively cause trouble for the man who fails to observe the appropriate rite when dealing with any object or when performing any task.

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
A person entering a taboo village is thereby responsible for any illnesses or accidents subsequently occurring in the village.[8]	That person has offended the spirits, who in retaliation cause illnesses and accidents.
Stieng food taboos are tigers, turtles, and domestic elephants.[9]	



Folk Beliefs	Commentary
The first seven days following the formal inauguration of a new village are sacred. It is also forbidden to bring in paddy, jars of rice wine, mortars, pestles, and winnowing baskets.[10]	No strangers are allowed to enter the village at this time. During this same period, there is no cooking in the houses, and no vegetables, pork, or chicken may be eaten.[11]
While sacrificial poles—to which sacrificial buffaloes are tied—are being built in a new village, all the men must sleep in the forest.	The sign outside the village warning strangers is a rope, intertwined with a handful of leaves, across the village gate.[12]
When a stranger comes to live permanently in a Stieng village, he must sacrifice a chicken or a pig and rice wine. He must then live in the field he is cultivating—not within the confines of the village—until the village is moved to a new location.[13]	In this way the stranger will not offend the evil spirits and will avoid causing illness and accidents in the village.
A house is taboo for three days after the birth of a child or the birth of a buffalo or a pig belonging to the household.[14]	If the buffalo or pig is born in the forest rather than near the house, the house is not considered taboo.
No one may enter a hut on a cultivated field for three days after a child has been born in it.	
A house is taboo for three days after a sorcerer has conducted a healing ceremony in it.	Warnings that a house is taboo are a closed door and a bamboo pole, with leaves fastened at the top, stuck in the ground in front of the house.[15]
If a group of Stieng warriors en route to an attack saw something that might be an evil omen, the attack would be abandoned.[16]	It is not known what these omens are.
When an iguana or poisonous snake happens to enter a rice field, even at harvest time, the land is immediately abandoned.[17]	
If the oldest son of a family dies prematurely, the family must never again eat turtledoves or salted fish.[18]	
If someone sneezes in a house, no one may go outside of the house immediately.[19]	If someone goes outside, the Stieng believe he will meet some evil spirit.
Entering the house of a sick person may cause his death.	
Children are forbidden to eat black ricebirds because their parents will die.[20]	There is no taboo, however, against adults eating these birds.
Three or thirteen pigs or chickens born of one litter cannot be raised.	Those numbers are considered bad luck in this connection; however, the numbers by themselves have no evil connotation.
If chickens spend the night outside of their coops, they must be killed the next day.[21]	

Folk Beliefs	Commentary
Cats cannot be bought, but money may be given before or after they are accepted. This is done to "fool" the previous owner of the cat so that the cat will not return to him.[22]	Cats are considered to be as valuable as a small pig.
Parrots flying over a village indicate that an attack by an enemy is imminent.	
Stieng believe that the world is flat, the sky is solid, stars are hung in the sky by string, and the moon and the sun are guided across the sky by ropes.[23]	
It is believed that all rivers run to an end, which is a great hole in the ground. There are people who guard this hole in order to prevent it from clogging up.	If the hole becomes clogged, there will be a flood.
When a baby dies his forehead is marked with ink or ashes.	When children with birthmarks are born to other families, they are supposedly the marked dead children who have come back to life.[24]
A wasp's nest hung by the doorway of a home will frighten away evil spirits.	
Waterfalls are haunted and every effort should be made to avoid them.[25]	
Certain trees deep in the forest are haunted and the Stieng will make large detours to avoid these trees. However, trees of the same species located in a village are not taboo.[26]	It is not known what particular species of trees the Stieng believe are haunted.
Yellow termites cause skin disease.	If the nest of termites can be discovered and destroyed, a person will be cured of the disease.
Curses which are taboo for the Stieng include: "May a tiger bite you." "You are a son of a tiger." "You are a son of a witch."[27]	These curses can be and are used only against strong enemies.

While Stieng tribesmen violating the taboos are punished, outsiders from a powerful group, such as the Vietnamese or Americans, are not usually held responsible for violations of tribal taboos. However, the Stieng long remember the person flouting their customs and may associate a particular group, as well as an individual offender, with the taboo violation.[28]

[1] Special Operations Research Office, Ethnographic Study Series: Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam: The Stieng (Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office [pre-publication copy], November 1965), p. 8.

[2] R. P. Henri Azemar, "Les Stiengs de Brolam," Excursions et Reconnaissances, XII (Saigon, 1886), p. 26.

[3] Personal communication from Irving Kopf (Ph. D. candidate, Columbia University; extensive U. S. Government service in tribal areas in Vietnam), July 1965.

[4] Azemar, op. cit., pp. 13-14; T. Gerber, "Coutumier Stieng," Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, XLV (1951), pp. 227–28.

[5] Dam Bo [Jacques Dournes], "Les Populations Montagnardes du Sud-Indochinois," France-Asie, Special Number (Spring 1950), pp. 1130-37.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] SORO, The Stieng, op. cit., p. 15.

[9] Azemar, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

[10] SORO, The Stieng, op. cit., p. 16.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Gerber, op. cit., p. 248.

[13] SORO, The Stieng, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

[14] Ibid., p. 17.

[15] Gerber, op. cit., p. 258.

[16] Azemar, op. cit., p. 19.

[17] U.S. Army Special Warfare School, Montagnard Tribal Groups of the Republic of Viet-Nam (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, 1965), p. 208.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 209.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 210.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] SORO, The Stieng, op. cit., p. 15.

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13. ABSTRACT

This study presents information on the customs and taboos of the tribes residing along selected trails leading into the Republic of Vietnam. Nine tribes are studied, primarily selected for their size, prominence, and location along the common border of the Republic of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Physical characteristics and religious beliefs are also discussed.

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