

A5

FROM HIGHLAND TO LOWLAND

Impacts of resettlement on vanishing aspects of Tariang culture in the Lao PDR

*Watcharee Sriksam**

Introduction

This chapter arises from an investigation of the impacts of resettlement, from the highlands to the lowlands, on an important symbolic aspect of the culture of the Tariang ethnic group in the Lao PDR. The aspect in question is the Tariang tube skirt, called *sin nokkhaow*, a unique and striking garment woven and worn by Tariang women as an outstanding aspect of their culture and identity while they lived in the highlands. Now resettled in the lowlands of Attapeu province, the conspicuous *sin nokkhaow*, like many other aspects of a vibrant culture, may soon pass into history.

The unique weaving pattern of the *sin nokkhaow* meant that only the most skilled and dedicated weavers among the Tariang women were able to finish two pieces of fabric and sew them together to complete one skirt. In the past, an ability to complete a *sin nokkhaow* signified not only superb weaving skills, but also gave the weaver a high status in Tariang society. Every woman was expected to own at least one *sin nokkhaow*, for use on special occasions, regardless of whether she was capable of weaving it herself or had to buy one. In the highlands, *sin nokkhaow* were made from locally grown cotton which was spun into thick thread. The resulting fabric was thick and warm, suitable for withstanding the rigours of the mountainous environment.

According to preferred Tariang attributes, any Tariang woman who could weave the *nokkhaow* patterns was recognized as having high value, since the woven

An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the First International Conference on Language, Society, and Culture in the Asian Context, 20–21 August 2011, Mahasarakham University, Mahasarakham, Thailand.

* ASSISTANT PROFESSOR WATCHAREE SRIKHAM, Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand.

pieces could be used to bargain for other highly valued assets. For example, one *sin nokkhaow* could be exchanged for five chickens, and a blanket made from 16 pieces of *nokkhaow* weaving could be exchanged for a buffalo, which could then be used as a highly valued asset in major sacrificial rituals. In addition, a *sin nokkhaow* was used as a bride-price and became the bride's property in Tariang society. The traditional skirts were believed to ward off evil spirits and maintain the safety of rice in granaries if they were worn during rice harvesting in swidden fields. Tariang women always wore a *sin nokkhaow* during traditional ceremonies and rituals, and the skirt was placed in a Tariang woman's coffin as an asset of high value for her next life. Most importantly, it was an assurance of her Tariang ethnic identity in a spiritual world.

When they were resettled in the lowlands, either according to their own will or following government resettlement policies, the Tariang found themselves in a totally different social environment. Over time, the lowland influences have fundamentally restructured the social spaces occupied by *sin nokkhaow* and the meanings held by the traditional skirts in Tariang culture. The *sin nokkhaow* has been largely replaced by the garments of the *Lao loun* (lowland Lao).¹ The factory-manufactured garments of the *Lao loun* were thinner and more suitable for the lowland hot weather; they were easy to buy, cost little and required no time to produce. The shift to the lowlands has meant the loss of many important Tariang traditional ceremonies and rituals from the highlands. For example, swidden rice cultivation has been replaced by wet-rice cultivation. In the realm of ethnic beliefs, they have been influenced by new social spaces; the social meanings and values once attached to *sin nokkhaow* have faded. There are now only a few old women who are still able to weave the *nokkhaow* pattern; younger generations of Tariang women no longer perceive it as a high skill with substantial value. The social identification of Tariang women is now blurred and blended into the majority *Lao loun* group, whose attitudinal and structural interventions of 'being *Lao loun*' are changing Tariang behaviour, and the culture of the Tariang is gradually fading. Preservation of the high skills of the *sin nokkhaow* weavers may now depend upon those who value a retention of the unique Tariang ethnic identity.

Resettlement from the highlands to the lowlands

Development of the Lao PDR from 1968 to 1970 saw attempts to bring remote highland areas into mainstream Lao society. To do so, many highland villages were moved down to settle near to development hubs, where they were accessible to development policies. Evrard and Goudineau (2004, pp944-948) asserted that the relocations were the consequences of failed policies, such as the commune farming policy, and education and reproductive-health promotions for highland people. Furthermore, it was considered less costly and more effective to relocate ethnic people from remote villages to accessible areas rather than to send services out to them. For instance, when choosing between distributing water or irrigation systems in the highlands and moving people down to lowland river basins, the government

supported the latter – a decision made simpler by the fact that Laos was the most sparsely populated country in Asia. Moreover, international aid fell into step with the policies of the Lao government. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme all agreed with the relocation of highland people to the lower basins. In 1989, various highland development projects were supported by these organizations. They agreed to resettle 60% of the total population, which meant moving 900,000 people out of 1.5 million. Shifting cultivators were required to relocate in 2000. By now, all of these people should be resettled in the lowlands so they can access public services and claim their rights to farming plots.

In 2005, Lang commented that the Lao PDR was broadly restructuring its society. In the previous decade, the government had relocated 100,000 highland ethnic people from remote mountains down to lowland areas or roads. Although this was intended to reduce their poverty, the impacts on their community life, food security, environment and social-cultural values had been tremendous.

According to the Lao Government, its resettlement policy was not a matter of enforcing regulations. Rather, moving highland people to the lowlands was a development strategy to improve the well-being of the Lao people. Some strategic processes, such as ‘providing permanent residences for slash-and-burn people’ or ‘providing stable occupations’, were applied in order to assure the people were firmly settled in permanent living conditions (Government of the Lao PDR, 2001, p33).

The development policy was promoted locally and the highland people were moved to lowland areas starting in the mid-1990s. Each province strictly conformed to the rural development and resettlement policies by conducting economic surveys, for example, of farming land, livestock, backyard and kitchen gardens and other livelihood aspects in some towns, to estimate their capacity to take more people to live and farm in surveyed areas. In some areas, overcrowding resulted in people being moved again, to live somewhere else (Goudineau, 1997, p20). Assigned areas were systematically developed into wet-rice farming plots, areas for raising livestock and other purposes. In order to restore fertility to the soil after cultivation of crops, farmers were restricted to only three years of fallow, when the average they normally observed was seven to eight years. Villagers who slashed and burnt the land to plant crops without legal permission were fined. Resettled villagers were issued temporary title to the land. If they followed land-use regulations, they could later obtain permanent ownership (Evrard, 2004).

In 1998, the Lao government announced the establishment of 87 villages as ‘relocating hubs’ for resettled newcomers. Over the following four years the number of ‘relocating hubs’ around the country swelled to 1200. In that period, 450,000 people, or 12% of the rural population, were resettled. Each relocating hub normally consisted of about 16 villages housing about 5200 people (Government of the Lao PDR, 1998, p26). Most of the development projects undertaken in those villages were funded by either the government or international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme, which supported projects in Oudomxay

and Luang Namtha. Between 2003 and 2005, 1400 families were resettled in Luang Namtha province.

According to Evrard and Goudineau (2004, pp944-948), the resettlements included people who volunteered to move to the lowlands in the hope of better lives, people who were requested to move due to national political security, and people who were partly forced, but were willing to relocate. Those resettlements were mainly conducted by provincial managements. Some people, particularly the older generations, were left in the highlands. When the younger generations moved first, the older generations could follow later. Sometimes, when this form of relocation took a year to complete, generation gaps appeared in families.

In some cases, international development organizations, such as the German Technical Cooperation Agency GTZ and Action Contre la Faim (ACF – Action Against Hunger), assisted in negotiating the relocations. As a result, the Khmu of Nalae town, in Luang Prabang province, did not have to move from their highland villages to the river basin of Luang Namtha. Similarly, the Katu of Kaluem town in Sekong province were allowed to stay in their highland location. However, their escape from relocation was conditional upon them achieving a reliable economy in their upland villages, such that they could maintain their well-being.

According to Goudineau (1997, p19) a survey conducted in 1996 found that 12% of relocated villagers had been forcibly resettled. Furthermore, the negative impacts of the relocations were unable to be controlled by government agencies, development organizations, or any stakeholders. There were significant gaps between expert assessments of the effectiveness of the policies and the realities of villagers' lives. Sisouphanthong and Taillard (2000, p56) affirmed that highland people from both northern and southern Laos encountered more significant changes in the resettlements than if they had moved into cities.

In 2005, Baird and Shoemaker published *Aiding or Abetting? Internal Resettlement and International Aid Agencies in the Lao PDR*. This record elaborates the land and forest management policies that aimed to reduce slash-and-burn agriculture and restore land fertility to the highlands. These policies resulted in inadequate harvests in the highlands, and the consequent hunger had the indirect effect of forcing people to decide to move down to the lowlands. In some cases, public services were terminated in order to persuade villagers to move out of the highlands. For example, teachers were withdrawn from Muang Phuvong, in Attapeu province. Therefore, some decisions to relocate were not initiated by the villagers. Resettlement was launched in the southern province of Sekong in 1990. In the following years people were moved from 19 villages in Muang Phuvong and Sanxay, in Attapeu province, including ethnic Tariang, A-lak and Yea people, to a relocating hub at Baan Nam Pa.

By 2003, the resettlements were creating health problems, along with difficulties in maintaining food and economic security. Later resettled groups did not receive proper farming plots. Even the villagers who were resettled earlier were allotted small farming plots that were incapable of producing harvests sufficient for the whole

year. The rice harvested by the new settlers could feed them for three months, but left them in hunger for nine months. Generally, they did not own buffaloes for ploughing and the assigned plots were not fertile. Because they were no longer in the highlands, they could not fall back on hunting and gathering. Although the government provided a market building for them, it had no goods for sale. The people began to suffer from diarrhoea, malaria, measles and skin diseases. In 2004, 20 families of resettled villagers from Baan Mai Tawan moved their belongings back to the highland village from which they came. Government staff tried to prevent them from returning because of fears that news of negative conditions in the lowlands would make remaining highlanders additionally cautious about relocation. One Tariang leader mentioned that if his people had been able to choose for themselves, only 10% of them would have opted to stay in the areas assigned to them by the government. This suggested that government management of the programme was not sufficiently effective to respond to the needs of the relocated people.

Studies on the impacts of resettlement from the highlands to the lowlands in Laos have focused on the aspects of health, food security, economy and well-being. The cultural impacts on ethnic families and societies have not been widely studied. The Lao PDR is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the Mekong region. To date, resettlement studies have focused on geographical changes, environment, and economy. These issues were deemed to be more important for investigation. Other aspects of these relocations, such as social and cultural transformations and the loss of cultural distinction, appear to have been of secondary importance in the attention of scholars. However, these must be regarded as central issues for study in order to help acquire a more complete picture of the impacts of resettlement on the lives of those involved. Only in this way can we push back the limits of knowledge in studying the effects of resettlement policies in the Lao PDR.

The Tariang

The Institute for Cultural Research, Lao PDR (2003, pp5-6), describes in detail how the Tariang people migrated into Laos about 133 years ago from two regions in central Vietnam, Dak Le Khong in Quang Nam province and Thua Thien Hue in Nam Giang, which is now a district in Quang Nam (Figure A5-1). Nowadays, many Tariang, or Gie Trieng people, still live in these two areas of Vietnam. When in Vietnam, they lived in an area called Palieu Nongjaluang Nongjalae, and were not then known as 'Tariang,' but were referred to by the collective names 'Jong' or 'Jing'. This was a designation of ethnic people that were divided into three main groups: 'Jongjaruem', 'Jongriang', and 'Jongta-ngo'. During the French colonial period, they crossed the border to the highlands of Tangbong, Tangtalang, Dak Puel and Sekaman in Laos and eventually to Dakcheung, Dakpong and Sansay in Sekong province

The Tariang language belongs to the Bahnaric subgroup of the Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer language group. The name 'Tariang' was derived from what the French heard when Tariang people urged their fellows to listen to what French visitors were

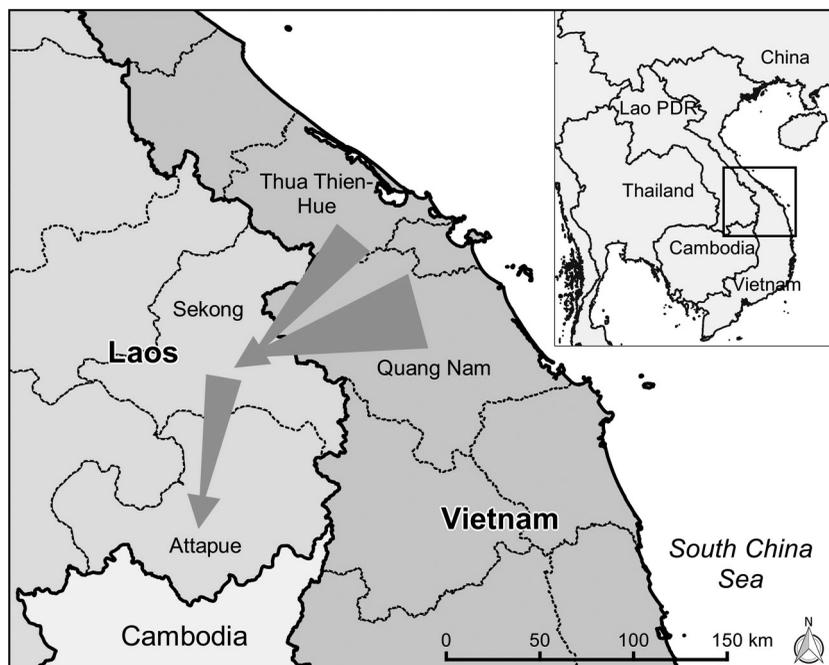


FIGURE A5-1: The migratory path of the Tariang, from central Vietnam to the highlands of Laos and later to the lowlands.

saying. They said ‘tring, tring!’, which literally means ‘listen, listen’ in their native tongue. The French then named them ‘Tariang’ and the name has stayed with them.

The Tariang practise swidden cultivation of upland rice, rotating their swidden fields around seven or eight plots in different areas. Rice is very important as their staple food and is embedded in their year-round cultivation rituals.

The general crop calendars of upland farmers, including the Tariang, normally start one or two months in advance of crop calendars in the lowlands.

Beliefs and practices of the highland Tariang, and the *sin nokkhaow*

A 27-year old ethnic Tariang called Takmanee, from Attapeu province, told the author in a 2011 interview that the swidden agricultural practices in her upland village involved clearing and burning trees and undergrowth to prepare fields for planting crops. After this was done, a fence was erected around the burnt clearing to keep away animals that might harm the crops. The upland rice cycle, she said, involved eight to nine long months of strenuous work. The Tariang typically grew maize and other vegetables along the edge of their rice fields and harvests began in the seventh month. Maize was consumed as a basic food, and was usually mixed with rice and used to make maize wine. Upland rice was normally hard-grain rice, so cooking it with maize created a softer texture for the cooked rice, making the rice more

delicious than eating it on its own. If a farmer had surplus maize, he might sell or barter it for chickens, clothes, or baskets.

Before beginning to harvest the rice, the person who had earlier conducted the sowing ritual (see Table A5-1) had to conduct a harvest ritual. First, three perfect rice panicles without any pests were chosen and placed above the stove or fireplace, and care was taken to ensure that the flames of the fire were not allowed to die out overnight. In the morning, the fire was extinguished with water, and if the

TABLE A5-1: Lunar calendar cropping and farming practices of the Tariang, Lao PDR.

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Tool preparation and pre-cultivation ritual	First month	Ritual is performed to inform and seek permission from the spirits of the forest, houses, village and town. If this ritual is overlooked the people will get sick or even die.
Slashing	First month	New plots should be in thick forest cover with rich soil suitable for rice planting and with few weeds.
Sun-dry plots	Second month	Drying of debris takes 10 to 15 days, depending on the condition of the wood.
Main burning	Third month	In Tariang belief, the best day for the main burning is from the fifth to the seventh day of a new moon. When winds blow from west to east, they start burning from west to east, to make a strong fire.
Clearing and second burning	Fourth month	Clear remaining debris and burn large pieces; build fences and a field hut in which to stay during the cultivation period.
Rice sowing	Fifth month	Rice is sown at the same time as maize, cucumbers, pumpkins and other vegetables. <i>Kanian</i> rice for rice wine is planted along the edge of the rice field.
First weeding	Sixth month	The first weeding is usually done when the rice is about 15cm high.
Second and third weeding	Seventh and eighth months	The second weeding is done when rice is about 30 to 40cm high; The third weeding is done when rice panicles first appear.
Site selection and dream interpretation	Ninth and tenth months	Site chosen for a new plot of land; dreams are believed to foretell a family's rice yield.
Harvesting	Eleventh and twelfth months	A swidden field is usually located in a midland or upland area, so firewood collecting is essential for use in a field hut during winter. Besides rice harvesting, other vegetables are harvested as well.

Source: Adapted from the Institute for Cultural Research, 2003, pp14-16.

person had a good dream, such as of weaving, the harvest could begin. The rice was harvested in the 11th and 12th months according to the lunar calendar, and the Tariang would begin by putting old rice seeds in a basket to call forth abundant new rice. An old woman in each family would strip the lower rice ears first and then move to the top. She began to strip the rice to her left and throw it as an offering to the spirits, and then she changed to the right. After that, others could begin to collect rice, but only in a right to left direction. During the harvest, this woman was not allowed to take a bath, but if a bath was needed, she had to allow others to fetch water for her. After harvesting was completed, the harvesters gathered around a clump of new rice panicles that had earlier been tied together in preparation. The panicles were cut and placed in a basket decorated with flowers of the ‘golden shower tree’ (*Cassia fistula*). The flowers were then scattered over the fields. In this ritual, women had to wear *sin nokkhaow* or sarongs with a dove pattern, the traditional pattern of the Tariang. Those who did not follow this tradition risked becoming ill or having their new rice infested with pests while in storage. Before the new rice was placed in a granary, the woman who conducted the harvesting ritual would blow on a handful of rice and then wrap it in a piece of cloth. This bundle was then put in the granary first, followed by the rest of the crop.

A 59-year-old Tariang weaver called Heet told the author in a 2009 interview that, in the past, *sin nokkhaow* were symbolic of Tariang womanhood (Figure A5-2). Moreover, the *nokkhaow* weaving pattern was unique and only the Tariang were able to weave it. Even then, it was a task for only the most skilled weavers. There were two main patterns for *sin nokkhaow*: The simpler of the two was called *karairoy* and the other, more difficult pattern was *der sern der cho*, or ‘dog’s paw’. A highly skilled weaver was capable of producing matching *nokkhaow* patterns on both sides of the *sin*, or skirt.

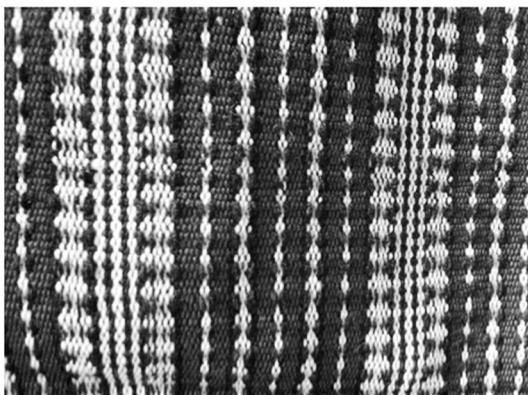


FIGURE A5-2: *Sin nokkhaow* fabric woven by the interview subject Heet.

Photo: Watcharee Srikham.

The traditional pattern was usually woven with red, black and yellow cotton yarn, dyed with natural colours. The weaver had to have unbroken concentration because different numbers of threads were required for each row and colour. According to Tariang tradition, the number of threads in each row was unequal, a factor called *khajeng*. For instance, red colours required different numbers of threads in different rows. In one row the number of threads could be 20; in the next 25, then 20, 30, 25 and so on.

When they lived in the mountains, before the heat of the lowlands and convenience of lowland garments intervened, Tariang women wore *sin nokkhaow* in their everyday life. To weave the cloth, they used a loom called *ki aew*, which was attached to a weaver's waist. The weavers were therefore unable to produce a wide piece of cloth. This necessitated the production of two pieces of cloth, which they then sewed together using white or red thread to show the sewing techniques and skills of the weaver. The two pieces did not overlap, but were sewn together to make a single, larger piece of cloth. The *sin* was the only garment worn by Tariang women; they did not wear a blouse. Some women also used another piece of cloth as a belt, and during traditional ceremonies they could use yet another piece of cloth as a scarf. At night, the thick cotton *sin nokkhaow* could be used as a warm blanket. Even larger blankets, up to five or 10 feet in length, were made by sewing together many pieces of woven cloth. These were called *duran* or *kadoe*.

A woman who could weave the *nokkhaow* pattern was respected and valued for her skills. According to the Institute for Cultural Research (2003, pp29–30), *sin nokkhaow* could be sold for cash or exchanged for five fully grown hens. One *duran* could be bartered for a large, fully grown goat. Four *durans* could buy a bead necklace with a boar's tooth, eight could buy a buffalo with six-inch long horns, and 16 *durans* could be paid for a big buffalo. Between two and eight *durans* could also be bartered for various 'Vietnamese jars' – highly valued assets for storing rice wine, a main offering in many Tariang rituals and a drink for guests and relatives.

Sin nokkhaow could also be used as a bride-price in Tariang society. A bride's parents had to give her at least one *sin nokkhaow* before the wedding. If they did not own a *sin nokkhaow*, they had to find one or buy one, as it was regarded as essential for the bride's well-being in her husband's family. According to tradition, the bride would then give the *sin nokkhaow* to her husband's parents, who might or might not return it.

When the *Lao loun sin* (lowland skirt) and blouse replaced the *sin nokkhaow* for daily wear, the *sin nokkhaow* became a garment worn only on special occasions or in traditional ceremonies and rituals. These included *Boon Kin Kwai*, the annual buffalo-sacrifice ritual in the third and fifth months, according to the Lunar calendar; the dried-rice harvesting ritual in the 10th and 11th months; and *Boon Koon Khao*, the rice ceremony ritual in the 11th and 12th months.

In their highland existence, when a Tariang woman died, she was dressed in a *sin nokkhaow* and a *duran*, or traditional blanket, was placed in her coffin or covered her body, as a highly valued asset for her next life and to assure her Tariang identity in the spirit world. Above the burial coffin, the Tariang would build a small house to hold all of her belongings. If a man or woman asked before they died for his or her buffalo, cow, goat or chicken to be placed in the house, the family was obliged to do so. They also planted maize, bananas and sugar cane around the little house if a person requested before they died that this be done (Institute for Cultural Research, 2003, p49). The 2011 interviewee, Takmanee, said that in her village, relatives, friends and neighbours could give a blouse, *sin* (skirt) or cloth to a dead person, and these

would be hung on the small house. Some even wrote a biography of a recently departed and placed it on the house. Everything was left to the dead; in earlier times no one dared to collect or steal it. Nowadays, however, outside mobile traders had been known to collect bead necklaces, jars, and other valuables from Tariang cemeteries to sell for high prices in the lowlands. Brass pots, for instance, could sell for as much as 10 thousand Thai baht.

The *sin nokkhaow* and spatial change

Up to now, most swidden peoples like the Tariang in Laos have remained peripheral to state power and are typically portrayed by national decision-makers as 'backward peoples' requiring state control. In Laos, this perspective links shifting cultivation with ethnic minorities, an official position influenced by the Marxist/Stalinist belief about those considered to be in a primitive 'stage' along the social evolutionary spectrum (Jamieson, 1991; Rambo, 1995; Sturgeon, 2005; Cramb et al., 2009). The National Land and Forest Allocation Policy in Laos has limited the number of plots allocated per household and categorized most fallow land as various types of conservation forests, which are prohibited from use as agricultural plots (Fujita and Phanvilay, 2008).

From 1975 to the mid-1980s, traditional livelihoods changed rapidly under the influence of policy interventions to directly suppress political insurgency and to 'modernize' agricultural production by discouraging shifting cultivation and encouraging people in the uplands to resettle in the lowlands. A national campaign to eradicate opium cultivation in swidden fields, established after 2005, also involved moving minority peoples to the lowlands (Cohen, 2009, 2017). The Department of Forestry developed new policies and legislation to promote conservation, imposing restrictions on upland peoples' access to their swidden fields and fallows. Under the National Biodiversity Conservation Areas Law of 1993 and Forest Law of 1996, the government implemented its National Land and Forest Allocation Policy, which established village boundaries and demarcated newly protected areas.

Under the influence of those policies, the Tariang in the highlands had to move, willingly or otherwise, to the lowlands. In her case, Takmanee said that her family decided to move because they thought they could live a better life close to all the facilities provided by the state and gain access to more economic opportunities.

When the Tariang first moved to the lowlands, they did not know how to cultivate rice in paddy fields. Everything they had went on payments for industrialized production items, such as fertilizer, insecticide and wage labour during the intensive transplanting and harvesting periods. The result was substantial shortages of rice. In their earlier existence, shifting cultivation had been a significant form of food security, such that 'settled' farmers often returned, either totally or partially, to swidden cultivation in order to compensate for serious shortcomings in various government-sponsored 'sedentarization' projects (Pravongviengkham, 1998). Some Tariang went back to highland areas to illegally resume slash-and-burn agriculture, to

grow upland rice. Some reported that by doing so they harvested about 100 baskets of rice, which was significantly better than working on paddy fields and getting only seven to eight sacks of rice. As Phanvilay (2009) noted:

This not only indicates the loss of customary resource management practices, but a failure of formal resource management institutions to substitute for those practices and secure long-term access to essential assets ...for less well-off farmers.

The Tariang in Attapeu province now practise both swidden farming and paddy-rice cultivation, but their skill sets differ between generations. In her 2011 interview, Takmanee said she was not really keen on dry-rice farming. Younger-generation Tariang like Takmanee are keen to practise wet-rice cultivation: ploughing fields, pulling and transplanting young rice and harvesting, in particular. Their elders, in contrast, maintain their upland-rice practices of slash-and-burn, weeding, manually hand-stripping the harvested grain and performing rituals related to the cultivation cycle. Some of the elders transplant rice and use rocks to prop up the new plants. These different skills, knowledge, and practices have affected the building of relationships between younger and older generations, especially between sons-in-law and their wives' grandparents. Most sons-in-law no longer know the traditional techniques involved in growing upland rice, so they cannot help their wives' grandparents work in their swiddens. This creates tension and widens generation gaps within the Tariang and other ethnic groups.

In another interview in 2006, a Tariang woman called Thame told the author that although wet-rice cultivation might earn her more money, she had to invest more in fertilizer, pesticide and labour to do so. She said her family was better off, not because of rice, but because they could weave and sell their clothes. Otherwise, they would have to follow others, and go to a city to work for wages as labourers.

As for the traditional *sin nokkhaow*, those weavers who can still follow the complex patterns no longer use cotton thread in the heat of the lowlands. Instead, they often use a fine and chemically-dyed thread bought from markets. In any case, fewer and fewer Tariang women know how to weave a *sin nokkhaow*; the skills and ability to follow the difficult pattern are all but lost.

Sin nokkhaow are no longer needed in wet-rice cultivation to ward off evil spirits when transplanting or harvesting, as the farmers have fertilizer, pesticide, other chemical items and machines to help them to grow the rice. Although some of them might still grow upland rice in swiddens, the related rituals have faded out or some details are commonly ignored. *Sin nokkhaow* are no longer worn during harvesting season or at traditional ceremonies and rituals. In fact, *sin nokkhaow* are nowadays very hard to find, and it is even harder to find a women who can weave them. Recently, one of Takmanee's neighbours died, and her husband tried to find a *sin nokkhaow* for her burial robe. He finally found a very old one in poor condition, but he decided to buy it for his wife's funeral.

Resettlement of ethnic minorities from the uplands to lowlands has not only resulted in drastic changes in farming practices and yields, but has also affected related traditions and rituals that once supported robust ethnic bonds, comforted hard-working people and preserved ethnic traditions, such as the wearing of *sin nokkhaow* by Tariang women. These important traditions are doomed to dwindle in value and function in ethnic-minority societies displaced by the Lao government's policies.

Conclusion

Sin nokkhaow were once both economic and cultural capital for Tariang women and their highland livelihood, where money was not so necessary and they could barter what they had for what they wanted from within their ethnic group or others. The traditionally woven cotton skirts used to have high value in the highlands, but in the different social space of the lowlands, *sin nokkhaow* have less capital value and even less cultural value, except for a final grasp of tradition when used as a funeral robe for a deceased woman. Well-off families might even be able to buy a *duran* for the same purpose. However, the original cultural value of *sin nokkhaow* has fallen and the symbolic capital has disappeared. The 'third space' that links historic, social and spatial attributes in a strategically balanced 'triple dialectic' of *sin nokkhaow* has been broken. The historicity of *sin nokkhaow* is no longer connected to a Tariang society occupying lowland social space.

References

- Baird, I. G. and Shoemaker, B. (2005) *Aiding or Abetting? Internal Resettlement and International Aid Agencies in the Lao PDR*, Probe International, Toronto
- Cramb, R. A., Colfer, C. J. P., Dressler, W., Laungaramsri, P., Le, Q. T., Mulyoutami, E., Peluso, N. L. and Wadley, R. (2009) 'Swidden transformations and rural livelihoods in Southeast Asia', *Human Ecology* 37(3), pp323–346, doi: 10.1007/s10745-009-9241-6
- Cohen, P. T. (2009) 'The post-opium scenario and rubber in northern Laos: Alternative Western and Chinese models of development', *International Journal of Drug Policy* 20(5), pp424–430
- Cohen, P. T. (2017) 'Opium and shifting cultivation in Laos: State discourses and policies', chapter 31, M. F. Cairns (ed.) *Shifting Cultivation Policies: Balancing Environmental and Social Sustainability*, CABI, UK
- Evrard, O. (2004) *La mise en oeuvre de la réforme foncière au Laos: Impacts sociaux et effets sur les conditions de vie en milieu rural* (The implementation of land reforms in Laos: Impacts and social impact on rural living conditions), Livelihood Support Programme working paper, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Rome (with English summary)
- Evrard, O. and Goudineau, Y. (2004) 'Planned resettlement, unexpected migrations and cultural trauma in Laos', *Development and Change* 35(5), pp937–962
- Fujita, Y. and Phanvilay, K. (2008) 'Land and forest allocation in Lao People's Democratic Republic: Comparison of case studies from community-based natural resource management research', *Society and Natural Resources* 21, pp2120–2133
- Goudineau, Y. (1997) 'Main report', in Y. Goudineau (ed.) *Resettlement and Social Characteristics of New Villages: Basic Needs for Resettled Communities in the Lao PDR*, vol. 1, UNESCO-UNDP, Vientiane, pp5–42
- Government of the Lao PDR (1998) *The Rural Development Programme 1998–2002: The Focal Site Strategy, Sixth Round Table Follow-Up Meeting*, Government of Laos, Vientiane

- Government of the Lao PDR (2001) *Action Programme for the Development of the Lao PDR, 2001–2010*, document presented to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, 14–20 May 2001, Brussels
- Institute for Cultural Research (2003) *The Life and Houses of the Tariang People*, Institute for Cultural Research, Ministry of Information and Culture, Vientiane (Lao language)
- Jamieson, N. L. (1991) *Culture and Development in Vietnam*, East-West Center Working Papers, Indochina Series No. 1, East-West Center, Honolulu
- Lang, C. (2005) *Laos: Aiding or Abetting? Internal Resettlement and International Aid*, <https://chrislang.org/2005/10/27/laos-aiding-or-abetting-internal-resettlement-and-international-aid-agencies/>, accessed 24 April 2016
- Phanvilay, K. (2009) 'Impacts of land use and land cover transitions on people's livelihoods in the uplands of northern Laos: Case studies from Bokeo and Luang Namtha provinces', PhD dissertation to the Department of Geography, University of Hawaii, Honolulu
- Pravongviengkham, P. P. (1998) 'Local regulatory systems in support of the Lao swidden-based farm economy', in M. Victor, C. Lang and J. Bornemeier (eds) *Community Forestry at a Crossroads: Reflections and Future Directions in the Development of Community Forestry*, Proceedings of an international seminar, Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC), Bangkok
- Rambo, A. T. (1995) 'Defining highland development challenges in Vietnam: Some themes and issues emerging from the conference', in A. T. Rambo, R. Reed, Le Trong Cuc and M. Di Gregorio (eds) *The Challenges of Highland Development in Vietnam*, East-West Center, Honolulu, ppxi–xxvii
- Sisouphanthong, B. and Taillard C. (2000) *Atlas du Laos de la RDPL: les structures territoriales du developpement economique et social* (Atlas of the Lao PDR: Land Structures for Economic and Social Development), CNRS-Liber Geo-La Documentation Francaise, Reclus, Paris
- Sturgeon, J. C. (2005) *Border Landscapes: The Politics of Akha Land Use in China and Thailand*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA

Interviews

- Takmanee, T., 28 May 2011, Bachiengchalernsouk district, Champasak province, Lao PDR
- Heet, D., 11 July 2009, Bachiengchalernsouk district, Champasak province, Lao PDR
- Thame, D., 5 May 2006, Sivilay village, Samakkhisay district, Attapeu Province, Lao PDR

Note

1. Lao villagers are commonly categorized according to the elevation at which they prefer to live, as *Lao Loum* (lowland Lao), *Lao Theung* (midland Lao) and *Lao Soung* (upland Lao).