

SIAM'S TRIBAL DRESSES ¹.

by

Major Erik Seidenfaden.

The Siam Society has to-day invited you to inspect a collection of national and tribal dresses gathered from all over the Kingdom during the last few years, and it is hoped that you will take this rather unique opportunity to acquaint yourselves with these interesting costumes, many of which are quite pretty, besides showing no mean ability and artistic sense in the execution of the different patterns and the composition of the colours used.

A few years ago I got the idea of collecting, as far as possible, all the national costumes of the various branches of the Thai people, as well as all the dresses of the non-Thai communities who are mostly domiciled in the hills on the western boundary of the kingdom and in the mountainous North. My thought was really to have all these dresses executed in a size to suit models of a height of not more than fifty centimetres.

These models, clothed correctly to represent all the various elements of the population of the kingdom of Siam were to be placed in air-tight glass show cases and placed on the top of the book cases of our Library. It is my hope that it will still be possible to do so, though the better solution would of course be that the National Museum establish a Folk Museum or an ethnographical branch, where all the national and tribal costumes of Siam would be exhibited on full size models, wearing the traits of the respective branches of the great Thai nation and of the many lesser tribes, whether of Mongolian,

¹ Paper read before the members of the Siam Society on the 20th December 1937 (The lecture being illustrated by the national and tribal dresses exhibited in the lecture hall).

Môn-Khmer or Negrito stock.¹ As you will see, the dresses exhibited here are of varying sizes, some in full size and some in reduced size, due to the instructions not being followed by all the contributors.

During my frequent travels in the provinces in these latter years I have noticed to my sorrow how the picturesque and time-honoured national and regional costumes, nearly all over the land, are fast disappearing, to be replaced by dresses of a more or less international fashion. To cite examples: in the town of Chiengmai to-day one rarely sees a girl or woman, with the exception of the quite old women, wearing the pretty yellow *phā-sin* with the black horizontal stripes; the same is the case with the girls of the North-Eastern Thai. It has been rightly said that the honk of the motor lorry with its load of cheap foreign textiles sounds the death knell of the national costumes, while the radio and the cinematograph are rapidly exterminating provincial dialects and ancient manners and customs.

Therefore if future generations are not to be kept in ignorance as to how their ancestors clothed themselves, it is high time now to collect all the various dresses still worn by the inhabitants of this picturesque and beautiful land, and to keep them carefully preserved in our museums for future information and study.

The exhibition you see to-day gives a fairly good impression of that richness of national and tribal costumes which is Siam's. It is, however, not complete, as some tribes in the North as well as some in the North-east are still unrepresented. In all some seventy-two distinct national and tribal dresses are exhibited, though some of them only represent septs or clans of the same tribe.

The bringing together of this rich collection is first of all due to His Serene Highness Prince Varnvaidyakorn's unstinted and generous assistance. As a matter of fact, without the help of His Serene Highness this exhibition would not have been possible. I take this opportunity to tender the sincerest thanks of the Council and the Members of the Siam Society to His Serene Highness for his very kind and interested succour.

Though this is not a lecture on ethnology it may be useful just in a few words to outline the history of the racial migrations in this part of the world.

¹ The dresses were handed over to the National Museum in 1938 and are now in part on exhibition there.

The earliest inhabitants of Indochina, including Siam, were probably Negritos, the scattered remnants of whom are still to be found in the Malay Peninsula. In Siamese territory they are met with in the provinces of Pattani and Patalung, but their skulls have been found as far away in the north as in the caves in Upper Tongking.

The Negritos were followed by the Proto-Australians, *i. e.*, the forefathers of the natives of Australia who hail from the shores of the Mediterranean, their skeletons having been found at the foot of Mt. Carmel in Palestine. The Proto-Australians probably did not spread over the Central and Eastern parts of Indochina but, coming via India and the littoral of Burma, wandered down through the Malay Peninsula and over the East Indian Archipelago till they reached Australia.¹ Some students of ethnology are inclined to believe that the Proto-Australians arrived before the Negritos, who may also have come from India.

The next wave was, anyhow, the Melanesian. The Melanesians seem to be a mixture of Proto-Australians and Negritos and originated in India, from where they spread all over Indochina, and *via* the Indonesian Archipelago, migrated to New Guinea and the neighbouring island groups. The negroid blood is clearly visible to-day in the Malays of Pattani, the Chong in Trat and also in the Cambodians and many of the so-called Khā or Moi tribes. Melanesian skulls have been found in the limestone caves in Upper Tongking and in Annam.

A new wave of peoples called the Austro-Asiatic, represented in Indochina by the Môn-Khmer, next displaced and absorbed the Melanesians in Indochina. As far as we can gather from linguistic evidence, the Austro-Asiatics came from the west, though some students argue that they came from the north and some even deny the existence of such a race at all. However, this does not concern us just now. What we know is that there certainly exists a group of Môn-Khmer peoples that stretch from Burma in the west right east over to the southern confines of China. To this group, which was civilized by Indian immigrants at about the time of the birth of Christ, belongs the credit of having evolved a really high civilization

¹ The lecturer is, however, now convinced that they *did* spread right over to the east coast of Indochina where Mlle. Colani has found their skeletons in many limestone caves.

inspired and moulded by the great religions of India, Brahmanism and Buddhism. Their greatest monuments are visible among us today in the shape of the wonderful temples of Angkor.

Perhaps somewhat later than the Austro-Asiatic immigration, took place an invasion from the north-west of Indonesians or the so-called Proto-Malays who, starting from the confines of Tibet, wandered down south through Burma and the Malay Peninsula, from where they crossed over to Sumatra and the other East Indian isles. A reflux from Malaya spread along the shores of the Gulf of Siam to Cambodia and Annam. In the latter country they settled and became mighty, founding the highly civilized Hinduized Kingdom of Champā.

We now come to the last great migrations, those of the Thai and the Burmese. You will of course all know that the Thai people came down from China, and well over a thousand years ago they must have penetrated into the present British Shan States and Upper Burma as well as into North Siam and Tongking. About the middle of the 13th century we see them as the masters of the whole of the territory of present-day Siam and far down in the Malay Peninsula.

The Annamites, who really are of Thai stock but profoundly impressed with ancient Chinese culture, customs and manners, came down from the coastlands of South-East China and conquered Annam and Cochinchina from the Chām and the Khmer respectively. The Burmese coming down from Tibet conquered Burma and have succeeded in almost annihilating the Môn, who, however, civilized these rude and savage mountaineers. Siam proper was also formerly peopled by Môn, who about the 5th-6th century A. D. had organized themselves in the so-called Dvaravati kingdom.

You will be aware that there is quite a considerable Môn element living among us in present-day Siam. These Môn are, however *not* the Môn of the Dvaravati era, who were absorbed long ago by the conquering Thai, but emigrants from Burma of only a few hundred years standing.

The Siamese or Thai of Siam must number at least ten millions and may be divided into several branches, such as the Thai Khôm or Thai proper of the Menam plain and the South and the Lāo or Thai of the North-East, called Thai Klāng in Khorat, Thai Gāo in Ubon and Roi Ett, and Thai Vieng in Udorn. A considerable number of Lāo or Thai from the North-East live in the Sak valley and the provinces of

Nakhon Sawan and Phitsanulok as well as in the former Prachin Circle. Northern Siam is peopled by the Thai Yuan. The Thai Yuan are of a fairer skin than the Thai of the North-East, who, on the other hand, are of a stouter build.

In former days it was quite easy to differentiate between the women of the Northern Thai and those of the North-East by help of their *phā-sins*, which in the case of the Northern people were striped horizontally, while those of the North-East were striped vertically. Then again their men folk were differently tattooed. The men of the North are tattooed on their bellies and are therefore called *Lāo phung dam*, while those of the North-East are tattooed on their thighs and called *Lāo phung khāo*. Spread round about in the North, at Savan-ka-loke and Nakhon Sawan, in the West, at Rajaburi and Petchaburi, and right down to Bandôn in the South, are settlements of the so-called *Lāo song dam*. They hail from the region east of Luang Phrabang, and they are recognized by their black dresses with silver buttons, their women wearing black *phāsins* with thin vertical white stripes.

The Khmer people of Siam, living mostly in the changvats of Buriram, Surin and Khukhan and some in Chantaburi, dress like the Siamese. Their women wear mostly the *pha-nung*. The Môn women of Paklat, Pakret and Sam Kok wear both *pha-nung* and a skirt or sarong called *pha-thung*.

Besides the Môn-Khmer and Thai peoples there are a great number of tribes both of Môn-Khmer and Mongolian origin. To the former belong the Lawā in North Siam, the Chaobon, the Sô, Sek, Kaling and Kui in North-East Siam and the Chông in South-Siam. Some of these tribes are represented here to-day by their dresses. The Lawā are cousins of the Môn and populated formerly the whole of North Siam. There are many tribes of Tibetan and Chinese blood living on the hills in North Siam such as the Karén, on the great Tenasserim chain that divides Siam from Burma. The Karén are the best known of all these mountain people. They are divided into white and red Karén and in the southernmost part they are called Karang. The white Karén are again divided into the septs of Pwo and Bghai.

• We have several beautiful Karén dresses on exhibition which I shall show you presently. Nobody knows from where the Karén came, but they have been here for a very long time and arrived no doubt prior to the Thai. The Maco, Yao, Mussô, Lahu, Kô and Lisaw are

all new-comers who have arrived in Siamese territory during the last sixty or seventy years from Southern China. With the exception of the two first named they are of Tibetan stock.

Finally there is to mention the utterly uncivilized and shy savages called the *Khā dōng lüang*, who were visited by Dr. and Mrs. Bernatzik last winter. They live on the jungle-covered crests of the hills in the north-north-east. We possess no dresses of this tribe for the simple reason that they generally go round quite naked. The hill tribes of Southern China are well known for their often very artistic and tasteful dresses of which I shall show a few examples.

And now I shall conclude this rather rambling but perhaps not quite uninteresting talk and explain to you the origin of the various dresses exhibited here. In doing so I am going to take you on a long journey, from the extreme south to the extreme north, thereafter going east and south-east till we have covered the whole of the territory of the kingdom.

Before departing on this journey I shall just point out on the map the route we are to follow and the areas of the various groups of people we are to visit by the medium of their national or tribal costumes.

LIST OF THE NATIONAL AND TRIBAL DRESSES COLLECTED.

Thai.

Southern Thai	from	Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Trang and Surat.
Thai Yuan	„	Chiengmai, Phrae, Nān and Lablæ.
Thai Vieng	„	Paknam Pho, Kamphengphet, Prachinburi.
Thai Phoan	„	Nakhon Sawan, Udorn.
Thai Glāng	„	Nakhon Rajasima.
Thai Gao	„	Ubon, Khonkaen.
Lao Song Dam	„	Pichitr, Sawankaloke, Nakhon Sawan, Nakhon Pathom, Rajaburi, Petchaburi, Chumphorn.
Lao Ti	„	Rajaburi.
Shan or Thai Yai	„	Mae Hongson, Chiengmai, Mae Sot, Chantaburi.
Thai Ngio	„	Mae Hongson.
Thai Lü	„	Chieng Khong.

Negratoes.

Semang	„	Pattalung.
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Indonesiano.

Malay	from Pattani, Yala.
Chão Nãm or Selöng	„ Ranong.

Môn-Khmer.

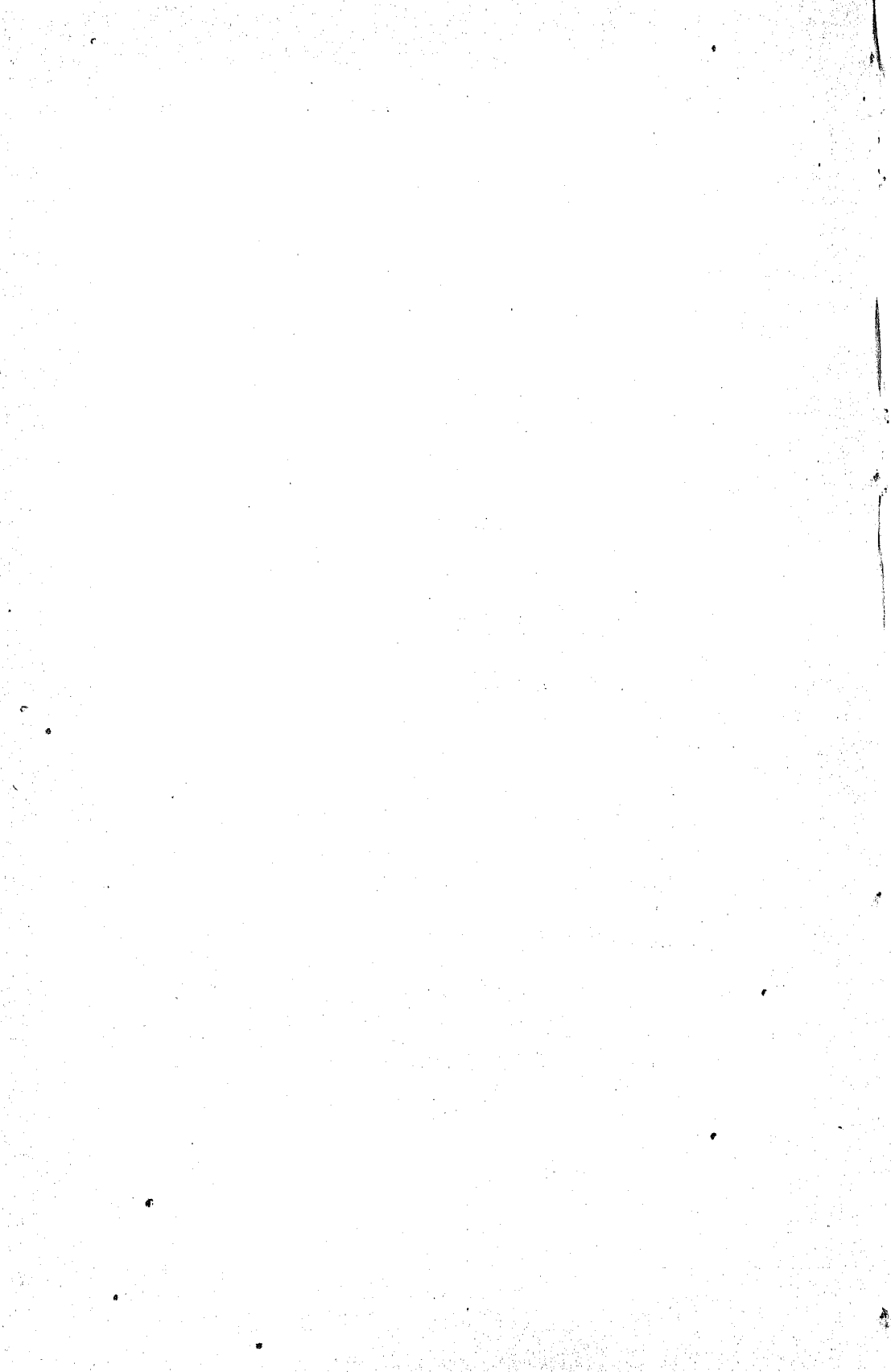
Môn	„ Paklat, Pathumthani, Rajaburi.
Khmer	„ Trat.
Chong	„ Trat.
Chao Bon	„ Chaiyaphum.
Sæk	„ Nakhon Panom.
Tin	„ Nãn.
Lawã	„ Bô Luang, Mae Sarieng.
Khamu	„ Chiengmai.

Tibeto-Burmese.

White Karén	from Tãk, Mae Sarieng, Khun Yuan.
Red Karén	„ Tãk, Muak Tô (Mae Hongson).
Red Mussö	„ Müang Fang.
Black Mussö	„ Müang Fang.
White Maco	„ Nãn, Loi.
White Maco	„ San Mahaphon (Chiengmai), Nãn.
Black Maco	„ San Mahaphon (Chiengmai), Nãn.
Yao	„ Nãn.
Hô	„ Nãn.
Chinese	„ Puket.
Annamite	„ Chantaburi.

Many of the above are represented by both male and female, and a few by children's dresses, besides turbans, scarves, bags and various jewelry.

A complete collection of Siam's national and tribal dresses should include those of the Thai Yo, Thai Yiei and Puthai of N. E. Siam, those of the Sô, Kalüing, Khã Brao, Khã Hinhao and Kui also in N. E. Siam, and the dresses of the Lissaw (Müang Fang) and more dresses of the septs and clans of the white and red Karéns and of the Karangs.





Thai Gao girl (Ubol).

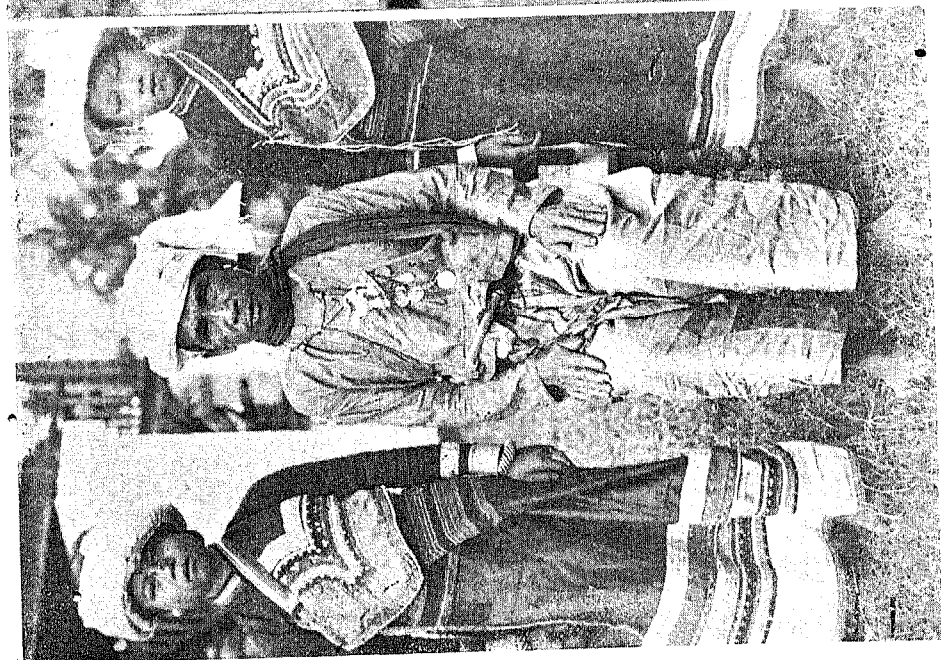


Maeo people (N. E. of Chiengmai).





Yao girls.



Thai Lü.



Gui woman (N. E. Siam).

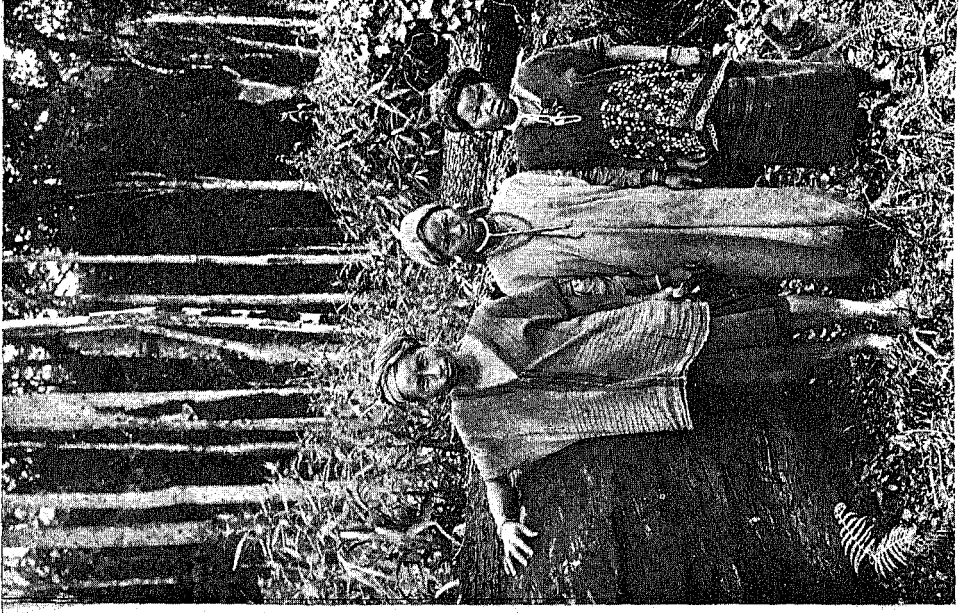


Gaw women (North Siam).





Mussü (North Siam).



Sgaw Karen villagers (Doi Angka, North Siam).

