

REVIEW ARTICLES

Review of: Butler-Diaz, Jacqueline, 1981. *Yao Design of Northern Thailand*. Bangkok: The Siam Society.

Diep Trung Binh, 1997. *Patterns on Textiles of the Ethnic Group of Vietnam*. Hanoi: Cultures of Nationalities Publishing House.

Goldman, Ann Yarwood, 1995. *Lao Mien Embroidery: Migration and Change*. Bangkok: White Lotus.

Höllmann, Thomas O. and Freidrich, Michael, 1999. *Botschaften an die Götter: Religiöse Handschriften der Yao; Südchina, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Lemoine, Jacques, 1982. *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*. Bangkok: White Lotus.

Lewis, Paul and Lewis, Elaine, 1984. *Peoples of the Golden Triangle: Six Tribes of Thailand*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Hjorfeifur Jonsson

What makes Yao culture collectible, and what sense do these collectibles make? By looking at some of the writings about the Yao over the last two decades, I want to suggest that to a considerable degree (that is, with one exception), the exhibits and picture books about the Yao reveal a culture of collecting and governmentality while ostensibly portraying the unique, shared, and timeless culture of the Yao people. The notion that “traditional” cultures are fast disappearing adds a sense of urgency to these displays, and contributes to the reality-effect of these portrayals as being about the Yao.

Botschaften . . . (“Instructions to the Gods: Yao Religious Manuscripts”) is a catalog for an exhibit of Yao manuscripts and related objects at the Bavarian State Library in Munich, Germany. The exhibit was for less than two months in late 1999, but the book remains and stands as a major effort to present Yao through a display of their texts. There is no comparable work on Yao manuscripts, and thus the book has significant value as an inventory of Yao texts. *Botschaften* contains catalog descriptions and photographs of 55 items. The majority are

ritual manuals for spirit mediums, but also included are genealogical records, horoscopic texts, cloth embroidered with blessings, painted masks and headdresses for ritual experts, and two copies of the “King Ping Charter.”¹

The introduction to the catalog contains background information on the Yao and their religion and books, as well as the extensive collection of Yao manuscripts at the Bavarian State Library, writing materials, woodblock stamps, the restoration of masks, and the King Ping Charter. Finally, the book contains a useful 41-item bibliography of works on Yao in Western languages.

The calligraphy and the illustrations in the manuscripts are in many cases striking, even if the items are in less than pristine condition. I liked photos of dog-eared, singed, water-damaged, and worn manuscripts for the sense they gave that the books had really been used. Given the long history and wide dispersal of the Yao, this sense of movement and wear and tear is a welcome reminder about their multiple histories. Some of the most compelling pieces in the catalog show that the Yao have not just carried books about. One example is the text of a chant most likely used for ordination rituals, written on the unprinted side of a recycled American care-package, a relic from the war in Laos. The catalog also contains a photo of the other side of the cardboard that identifies the country of origin and states that the contents were “not to be sold or exchanged” (pp. 34–5). Another reminder of the war in Laos is on a single sheet found within one of the manuscripts. It is written in Lao and shows an encounter between an old (Lao) couple and two soldiers. The grandfather asks for mercy from the soldiers, who reassure him that they are genuine Lao soldiers and here to protect them from harassment by the Vietnamese army. After this revelation, the grandmother declares her great relief that the two are “our Lao soldiers” (pp. 60–1). A third reminder of the world within which the Yao have found themselves is a 1951

addition to the King Ping Charter (not shown), that declares how the Yao were going to cooperate with the Han Chinese now that they had been liberated and were under the Chairman Mao's leadership. (pp. 31–2).²

Botschaften is not an ethnography. The range and variation of social and cultural formations within the Yao category is not seriously discussed in the introduction's brief overviews of the Yao and their religion (about two pages each). But given the subtitle's promise about the Yao of southern China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar, the absence of ethnographic content is frustrating. The reality of the book's Yao is that of Chinese texts and textual traditions. The bulk of the exhibit-materials is identified as variously belonging to Youmian or Jingmen subgroups of Yao which *Botschaften* says are both influenced by Chinese Daoism, Jingmen being "orthodox" while Youmian are defined as "undogmatic" (p. 12). The former have two kinds of ritual specialists, Daogong and Shigong, whereas the Youmian have only the lower-ranking Shigong. These ritual specialists are the primary book-keepers, so to speak. Therefore, some indication of the importance of the ritual experts and their texts in social life, as well as the distinction between Youmian and Jingmen and that between orthodox and undogmatic Daoism would have been informative. Yao households in Thailand, Vietnam and elsewhere sometimes maintain considerable collections of manuscripts. How they are used in daily life is a topic of much relevance.

Recent generations of Yao in both Thailand and Vietnam are schooled in national languages and in general they do not study the Chinese script in which the texts are written. This is part of the untold story of why there are so many Yao manuscripts on the market for antiquities and "primitive art." The Bavarian State Library collection contains over 1,000 manuscripts (p. 17). By asking traders about these goods, I learned that the German library most likely acquired its collection over a few years from a calligraphy dealer in England, who bought them from a "tribal and primitive art" dealer in Thailand. This specialist in Yao materials in turn makes collecting trips. His scouts in Laos and Vietnam have a sense of what materials

attract interest and the kinds of prices paid. From these conversations, I gained some sense of the prices at different levels of this international trade-network, and the difference in the tourist price of one or a few books and the dealer-price for ten, a hundred, or more books, and then how long one would have to wait for a bulk shipment. These mechanics of acquisition and trade matter for two reasons not discussed in the catalog but which are relevant to its content. One is the genealogy of European collections of Oriental objects, and the other is the apparent lack of knowledge about the Yao by those in the antique trade.

There is one reason why objects from peoples such as the Yao take on new connotations when they are traded elsewhere. They become meaningful in a range of ways connected to their new contexts. My point is not a purist argument about an authentic "Yao" meaning of these objects. This is because Yao peoples appropriated Daoism and various other aspects of Chinese culture and society, often for purposes other than their sources would indicate. Because of these reasons, a textual approach will miss whatever relevance these texts have had for the Yao. Given social, economic, religious, and other variety among the more than two million Yao people, it is unlikely that there ever was a uniform Yao set of meanings for these texts. Yet this is precisely the museum-effect of the display of Yao manuscripts. It takes on a collective Yao reference whose sources are the Bavarian State Library and the international market in antiquities and "primitive" art and culture, not any Yao background of the objects.³

This is not unique to Yao exhibits.

Why, given the lack of knowledge about the Yao, is this material collected and exhibited? What makes Yao objects collectible? For some, an interest in Yao things comes from the appeal of Eastern religions in the West. Just outside the city of Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, there is a Center for Daoist Studies. Quite a few people, after taking the Center's courses, visit nearby shops selling objects such as spirit-paintings. The reasons for the exhibit in Munich are doubtless more complex. For one thing, it has funding and an institutional framework, a Yao Project by the Departments of Chinese

Studies at the Universities of Hamburg and Munich and the Bavarian State Library, in operation for four years before the exhibit. This institutional context contributes to an explanation of the Chinese textual emphasis and possibly of the lack of ethnographic content concerning the Yao.

Some reasons for collecting Yao things are related to the collectors' sense of their identity, and have precious little to do with the Yao themselves. Yao materials, in spite of their local significance, come to represent a key to outsiders' personal or historical space that may have little to do with Yao realities. One example is a major Japanese study of Yao manuscripts and histories conducted in Thailand around 1970, and led by Yoshiro Shiratori. It "yielded a collection of almost 2000 items of ethnological material, tens of thousands of photographs as well as many copies of ancient Yao documents." One motive behind the research effort was the possibility that "the actual origins of the non-Chinese tribes in Central and South China and Southeast Asia [would help to solve] directly or indirectly the origins of the Wajin, and the formative process of Japanese culture."⁴

Many collectors' stories are more personal, but also relate to national pasts in international contexts. One concerns a dealer in Yao antiquities in search of his own Chinese roots: a Singaporean Chinese who does not speak Chinese but who became fascinated with the culture and objects of the Yao after living in Thailand for some time. To him, various aspects of Yao culture suggested that they were "more Chinese than the Chinese" who had lost much of their supposed essence. Another collector is a Frenchman who grew up fascinated with the exotics of Indochina, and once in Thailand started amassing a collection of things from the Yao in Vietnam. Initially, he supplied the ex-Singaporean dealer with an inventory of the things he would like, and from this the latter gained a sense of how to supply his store that he has run for over ten years since. Both are still collecting Yao objects. One is thinking about making a museum from his collection while the other already has a private museum. In these life-stories, Yao objects from Vietnam and Laos have to some extent satisfied, in Thailand, longings for the otherwise unat-

tainable essences of French Indochina and Chinese Singapore.⁵

Museums and collections do not just satisfy already-existing longings, they also contribute to definitions of the world and its components that can refine and/or create particular tastes and desires. An exhibit on Yao manuscripts makes the public conversant with the objects, which in this case is beneficial for the Yao Project vis-à-vis its sponsors. It is also likely to create not only an interest in these items but also a desire for these now-valued and significant but previously obscure or unknown objects.⁶

Collections and exhibits can create new markets, and thus articulate relations (and potential conflicts) among scholars, museums, dealers, and local experts, producers, and/or suppliers.⁷

Jacques Lemoine's book, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*, is a case in point. Beautifully illustrated with photographs of the paintings and their details and also of some Yao rituals, it has helped to consolidate the market for Daoist paintings.⁸

A market for these paintings existed in the 1970s, but the book made dealers and buyers better able to attach a set of meanings to the objects that made them much more valuable. In his Introduction, Lemoine states that he wrote the book "in order to help connoisseurs and collectors understand and appreciate the treasures they have acquired" (p. 8). There are still paintings on the market, and all the better shops have a copy of Lemoine's book for their customers to peruse. Like museums, publishers hold an important place in the connections among dealers, experts, and the public. The publisher of *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* had been an antiques dealer, but turned publisher once he saw Lemoine's manuscript.

The presentation of material in *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* is largely informed by Chinese texts, and the problems of linking the materials to Yao rather than to collectors and connoisseurs are similar to those with *Botschaften*. Because the German collection most likely came in the mail and the Project's team may never have met any Yao, this may be understandable.⁹

This is less acceptable in the case of Lemoine who did research with the Yao in Laos and

Thailand. Lemoine's treatment of Daoism misses interesting aspects of ritual dynamics, such as the high-level ritual ordinations that are featured in some of the photographs. Chao La, who helped Lemoine find ritual experts to interview, was the son of a high level Mien headman who ruled over more than 100 villages within the French colony and was renowned for his military prowess. Later, Chao La and his older brother were generals in Vang Pao's CIA-supported army during the American "secret war" in Laos. Given that the ritual ordinations are expensive and mostly done by the wealthy, it is significant that the photos in Lemoine's book show mass ordinations sponsored by Chao La.¹⁰

In all likelihood, he was both elevating his own military and spiritual status and reinforcing his command over his followers. Drawing on his encounters with Western academics, Chao La wore the cap and gown of a Ph.D. for some of his rituals. He did not pretend to hold a Western academic degree, but wore the outfit because of the analogy between his ritual rank (*to-sai*, "master-teacher") and that of academics. This lesson in cultural translation was apparently missed by the team behind *Botschaften*, as it is in *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*.¹¹

In both books, the (Chinese) origins of a text or another object explain its true meaning. I have not learned whether Chao La was a collector of any kind, but his father who had the title Phaya Luang collected all kinds of clocks and had a special room for his collection.¹²

In Thailand in the early 20th century, the connotations of ritual rank among Mien shifted from military prowess to success in farming.¹³

Lemoine's omission of what goes on in social life, in spite of his research, only reinforces the sense that the significance of the Yao resides in texts whose privileged interpreters are foreign scholars literate in Chinese.¹⁴

From this perspective, what I view as the lack of knowledge about the Yao in *Botschaften* is not a mistake that should have been corrected. It is the essence of the presentation of Yao to collectors and the interested public in the West.

The focus on Yao religious objects in books and exhibits is recent. One example of the previous lack of interest in this subject is John Blofeld, who wrote in the 1950s that "properly speaking, the Miaos and Yaos have

no religion. They worship nothing and offer no prayers or sacrifices except in times of trouble. They are doubtful about the existence of ghosts or demons, excepting the spirits of their own ancestors who seem a rather unkind lot." He relates how disappointed he was on entering a Miao house because he initially saw nothing interesting, but that his "spirits revived [once his travel-partner pointed out to him] all sorts of instruments and utensils fashioned of wood, bamboo, gourds and fibre, which showed great ingenuity and some of which possessed that beauty of utter simplicity which is brought to perfection by the interiors of Japanese houses. Well, at least these people were ingenious"¹⁵

To Blofeld, the hilltribes were ancient peoples whose "extinction . . . would be a shame [because their cultures had] hardly changed in thousands of years—a rich source of material for anthropologists and all students of the human race."¹⁶

The interest in dress as something notable and collectable has a longer history than the interest in the accoutrements of Yao religion. Before World War II, there was an exhibit of "Siam's tribal dresses" in the lecture hall of the Siam Society in Bangkok. The idea originated with Major Erik Seidenfaden, who gave a speech when the exhibit was launched in December, 1937.¹⁷

His idea had been to collect "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. [His] thought was really to have all these dresses executed in a size to suit models of a height of not more than fifty centimeters."¹⁸

Seidenfaden was concerned that "time-honored national and regional costumes [were] fast disappearing, to be replaced by dresses of more or less international fashion . . . 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."¹⁹ This assembly of dresses, largely in miniature, was an attempt

to visualize Siam through these markers of ethnic identities. In this exhibit, Yao clothes were a part of the disappearing diversity of Siam. A footnote to this article states that the dresses were handed over to the National Museum in 1938, but it is not clear what subsequently happened to them.

Yao collectibles do not stand out in the account of this exhibit, but this is in many ways a notable museumizing project. For one thing, it visually represented Siam/Thailand through its ethnic diversity that included upland populations. Seidenfaden's view of Siam through this exhibit was neither widely shared nor long-lasting. Yao and other upland minorities only came into official and public view again, and then as a national problem, with integration policies and anti-insurgency campaigns during the 1960s. A part of these later efforts was the establishment of the Tribal Research Centre (now Institute), whose mandate included studies of the "six main tribes," Akha, Hmong, Karen, Lahu, Lisu, and Mien.²⁰ The mandate of the research center effectively defined the "ethnic landscape" of northern Thailand's hills as that of six groups of people,²¹ and the Centre had a museum where the six tribes were on view through a display of their material culture.

The rather arbitrary definition of the six tribes has since become routinized, and is both naturalized and commemorated in the coffee-table book *Peoples of the Golden Triangle: Six Tribes of Thailand*. In its illustrations and photo captions, this book is much like a museum exhibit. At least two museums in Thailand draw directly on the book for its displays of Yao.²²

Peoples of the Golden Triangle presents each of the six tribes as an entity, to the point that each ethnic group has a personality or a "basic theme." Thus one learns that "a desire for harmony is a basic theme in the Sgaw and Pwo Karen cultures . . . A desire for independence dominates the lives of the Hmong . . . A desire for propriety is a driving theme in Mien culture . . . A desire for blessing is a dominant theme throughout Lahu culture . . . A desire for continuity is a dominant theme among the Akha . . . [and] a desire for primacy is predominant in Lisu culture" (p. 10). These are people of dress, according to the authors. "Just the mention of the names Karen, Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Akha,

or Lisu will conjure up mental images of the distinctive dress of each group" (p. 11).²³

Pictures and accompanying text bring to life these separate and unique cultures in ways that make them eminently collectible. The final chapter, *Signs of Change* (pp. 287–91), contains photos of "modern" things in the everyday lives of uplanders. The signs of change (cars, motorcycles, cassette players, sewing machines, foreign tourists, Thai schools) serve to place the cultures of the "six tribes" out of time, at the same time that they produce the collector's effect that the ethnic things in view are soon to disappear. As Seidenfaden wrote in 1937; "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."²⁴

Predictably, *Peoples of the Golden Triangle* is at hand in many of the stores that sell tribal handicrafts in Thailand. If one were to take the book as a guide to the Mien (Yao) in Thailand, it would most likely produce disappointment similar to that of John Blofeld, that there is not much of interest in the villages. The book presents an ethnic world that never was. As such, it reminds me of an episode from my research with Thailand's Mien when a Yao expert from the Tribal Research Institute arrived with two photographers to document the Yao way of making New Year sweets. To document the reality they were after, they first had the local people change their clothes and the instruments they were using, and then they proceeded to photograph what they themselves had conjured up based on their expectations about "real" Yao. *Peoples of the Golden Triangle* has a resonance similar to *Botschaften* and *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*, that is more related to the reality of collectors and museums than to that of the upland ethnic minorities in northern Thailand and neighboring countries. In addressing the longings and tastes of interested outsiders, these books are successful. The culture these books describe is not that of Yao. Rather, their authors' ideas about Yao serve as a vehicle for the perpetuation of particular kinds of longing and pleasure within the culture of connoisseurship and collecting.

Ann Y. Goldmann's *Lao Mien Embroidery* is closer to its subject. The material draws on the women embroiderers who went to the United States after the war in Laos had uprooted their lives. There are many individual voices and stories of particular lives in the book. In this, *Lao Mien Embroidery* breaks markedly from the generalized Yao in the timeless hills of most other work. To appreciate the visual and textual materials on variation and changes in embroidery, the reader must be willing to meet the subject half-way. The book provides a considerable inventory of Mien embroidery designs, and contains a glossary of well over 200 relevant Mien terms. The stories that the book tells, about war-time in Thailand and Laos in the 1960s and 1970s, and about migration and new life in the United States (pp. 27–36) reveal various aspects of the social and historical life of cloth, designs, and dress. Through these interesting stories and the accompanying photographs Goldmann conveys a reality of Lao Mien embroidery that is firmly grounded in particular encounters, histories, and women's life-stories. As such, Goldmann's book (including Sandra Cate's informative introductory chapter) shows that a presentation of Mien (material) culture to a Western audience does not have to be alienated from Mien or other Yao realities.²⁵

The chapter on Yao (called "Dao," but pronounced "Zao" in Vietnam) in Diep Trung Binh's *Patterns on Textiles of the Ethnic Groups in Northeast of Vietnam* (pp. 81–135) is much more conventional. There are no individuals or particular histories, not to speak of a situated researcher, behind the accounts of pieces of clothing. The Yao materials are presented by subgroup (Dao Tien, Dao Quan Chet, Dao Thanh Y, and Dao Thanh Phan). These sub-group identifications are Vietnamese, and do not necessarily match the local reality of the various Zao groups in the country. As with research on Thailand's Yao at the Tribal Research Institute, Vietnamese research on Zao is entangled with official definitions of minority identity, and concerns to some extent the manifestation of expertise by the state's agents, and an official definition of the nation. This is evident for instance in the first words of the book's Introduction: "The woven products of its 54 ethnic groups are valued cultural treasures of

the entire Vietnamese nation. Vietnam produces a wide range of lovely woven products including mats and carpets. Wearable textiles and utilitarian fabrics play an indispensable role in the historical and cultural evolution of Vietnamese peoples . . . the ethnic groups of Vietnam create decorative designs and patterns on textiles as their unique historical, aesthetic and religious expressions"(p. 1). This positive presentation leaves out entirely the extent to which "ethnic" dress and culture are a political issue and a matter of official directions. At an international conference on the cultural heritage of Vietnam's ethnic minority groups, one Vietnamese ethnologist stated that: "In the course of development, each ethnic group should know how to preserve fine customs, reform bad habits and accept and build new fine customs both traditional and modern."²⁶

In contemporary Vietnam, as in Thailand, "ethnic dress" is a rare sight outside the context of ethnic tourism and shops with minority handicrafts. Aside from remote settlements, minority peoples such as Zao tend to wear "market clothes," in part at least because of the stigma attached to ethnic minority cultures as backwards. The expectation about backwardness in minority areas is apparent for instance in Binh's remark about batik designs on Dao Tien clothes: "One can hardly believe that such beautiful 'works of art' are created with these primitive tools" (p. 133). The official appreciation of ethnic minority clothes and other markers of difference within the modern nations of Thailand and Vietnam, evident for instance in recent museum projects, sits rather uneasily with the official suppression of the practices of difference that are associated with the upland minority peoples.²⁷

Much the same is true of Yao in China, in picture books as much as in the focus of Yao cultural practices within the Chinese nation.²⁸

With one exception, the portrayals of the Yao in these books do not reveal much about the Yao themselves. Rather, these works draw on the Yao and sometimes other upland ethnic minority groups to perpetuate other cultures, notably those of collectors and governments. These efforts are projections, whose effect is the notion that "culture" is something that concerns the Yao and similar peoples. The

attribution of “culture” to the Yao and other ethnic minorities is part of a classificatory scheme that divides up the world’s peoples in particular ways. The location of culture in particular places implies the separate location of expertise regarding the collection, definition, display, and improvement of the objects and practices pertaining to (in this case) the Yao. With the exception of Goldmann’s book, these works perpetuate an attractive stereotype of Yao as a timeless people with a unique culture and dress that we Moderns are lucky to have on view before their dress and other uniqueness disappear. What these portrayals fail to acknowledge is that the uniqueness they are after is a product of a museumizing culture and that the Yao they display are of their own making. The aestheticization of Yao objects is a political process, while the presentation of these objects in exhibits and books tends to gloss over politics and history. Except for *Lao Mien Embroidery*, these works on Yao collectibles are primarily valuable as (unintended) sources about the classification and collection of the ethnic Other.

Notes:

¹ This document is also known as “The Yao Passport,” “License for Crossing the Hills,” and by several other terms. It is attributed to a Chinese Emperor, and explains how the Yao ancestor Pien Hung (P’an Hu) earned a princess for a bride after doing the emperor a great favor. Various in the form of a book or a scroll, this manuscript defines Yao as free to live in the forests beyond the state, explains their royally-decreed twelve lineages, and states that it is issued for the protection of the Yao against duties of state subjects. See *Kia Shen Pong: Passport for Travelling in the Hills. Perpetual Redaction of the Imperial Decree of Emperor Ping Huang for Protection when Travelling in the Hills* (Theraphan L. Thongkum, ed. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, Linguistics Research Unit, 1991), Huang Yu, “A Preliminary Study of the Yao ‘King Ping’s Charter,’” in *The Yao of South China* (Jacques Lemoine and Chiao Chien, eds. Paris: Pangu, 1991), 89–123, Barend J. ter Haar, “A New Interpretation of the Yao Charters,” in *New Developments in Asian Studies* (Peter van de Velde and Alex McCay, eds. London: Kegan Paul

International, 1998), 3–19, and Hjorleifur Jonsson, “Yao Minority Identity and the Location of Difference in the South China Borderlands,” *Ethnos* 65 (2000):56–82.

² Chinese authorities incorporated many Yao leaders into local administrative structures. While the first decades of communist rule saw many attempts to curb “feudal superstitions,” the post-Mao era has been characterized by a different gaze on Yao customs, now as the bedrock of social morality. See Ralph Litzinger, “Reimagining the State in Post-Mao China,” in *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Jutta Welds, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, and Raymond Duvall, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 293–318.

³ On the ethnic reference of the objects, see note 6. While the trajectory of the objects in this display makes them commodities, the museum-effect and the catalog (both through its text and its silences) presents them as culture/religion. As presented, the objects are rare and exotic, and require several years for a team of experts to reveal the knowledge they contain concerning the Yao. James Clifford’s “On Collecting Art and Culture,” in his *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 215–51, provides a useful discussion of collections and the classifications of objects as “art,” “culture,” “commodities,” etc. The textual emphasis of the exhibit that *Botschaften* accompanied has many parallels in European studies of Buddhism. See *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism* (Donald Lopez, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁴ Namio Egami, “Preface,” in *Ethnography of the Hill Tribes of Southeast Asia* (Yoshiro Shiratori, ed. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1978), 280–81, quote from p. 281.

⁵ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) provides a wide-ranging account of the relations between longing and various kinds of collections and museums. Christian F. Feest has discussed German and other European interest in and identification with Indians of North America. Like Stewart, he shows how various aspects of such fascinations concern identity formation. In his words, European concerns with American Indians have been “a homegrown fantasy embellished with the trappings of exotic stereotype.” Feest, “Europe’s Indians,” in *The*

Invented Indian (James A. Clifton, ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 313–32, quote from p. 330.

⁶ A recent comparable example is a well-illustrated article on intricately embroidered spirit medium's robes from Lantien Yao in northern Laos, published in a magazine aimed at textile aficionados. I had seen the robes around in "tribal" stores for some time, and I am told that they sold much better once this article came out. Wimolrat Jenjarassakul, Vichai Chinalai and Lee J. Chinalai, "Yao Lan Tan Shamans' Robes." *Hali* 109 (Spring 2000), 94–9, p. 120. As a "Yao expert," I have had some of these encounters. Once I was given a photocopy of a manuscript and asked to find out whatever I could, such as identity, meaning, and purpose. This was for American traders in tribal exotica on their acquisition trip in northern Thailand. My sojourns with the photocopy among the Mien of Thailand revealed only that the book contained the text of a ritual chant and was in a different Yao dialect. All the books are written in Chinese, but they are read in (the local dialect's) Yao ritual language that is separate from everyday language. The spirit mediums' robes, like the manuscripts in the exhibit in Munich, are "Yao" because they are labeled so by experts. The Tay in northern Vietnam have the same kinds of robes for spirit mediums, as well as other Daoist imagery and Chinese texts. These are multi-ethnic objects and motifs across the south China borderlands, whose ethnic identification is a product of museumizing and marketing.

⁷ See for instance Edwin Wade, "The Ethnic Art Market in the American Southwest, 1880–1980," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (George W. Stocking, ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 167–91.

⁸ Lemoine had written articles on the subject for aficionado magazines, one for *Connaissance des Arts* (Paris, August 1979) and another for *Arts of Asia* (Hong Kong, January 1981).

⁹ The three photos of Yao people and villages in *Botschaften* are all from other people's publications.

¹⁰ This history may help identify the ordination chant that is written on the back of a U.S. care-package. Chao La's access to American supplies for his "secret army" and his followers, as well as his emphasis on Mien ritual practices, make him a likely candidate as the sponsor of the ordination ritual. The exhibit's emphasis on "Yao" misses such important particulars. On Chao La and his political context, see

Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1991), pp. 283–386.

¹¹ *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* contains two pictures from a second-level (*to-sai*) ordination, p. 26. These show a ritual specialist and Chao La climbing a sword ladder, the latter wearing the cap and gown of a "Western" academic. The pictures show a crowd of ordinands wearing "Daoist" robes with the "Western" caps. Lemoine makes no comment on the outfits.

¹² See K.G. Izikowitz, *Över Dimmornas Berg* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1944), pp. 72–73. On the mutual appropriations of material culture by Europeans and Pacific Islanders and the range of significance that the objects acquired in their new contexts, see Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹³ For a discussion of changes in Mien ritual practices, see Hjørleifur Jonsson, "Moving House: Migration and the Place of the Household on the Thai Periphery." *Journal of the Siam Society* 87 (1999): pp. 99–118, and Jonsson, "Does the House Hold?: History and the Shape of Mien (Yao) Society." *Ethnohistory* (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Lemoine has castigated "anthropologists lacking knowledge of written Chinese" for not recognizing that Yao have a unilateral, patrilineal kinship system. His criticism is aimed at Douglas Miles, whose work showed clearly that at least among Mien in Thailand, descent was bilateral. There is a patrilineal rhetoric to Mien kinship, and people's lineage position can be altered with a single ritual to fit this ideal. Though a ritual of re-filiation, an outsider becomes directly linked to the set of ancestors that the household has relations with. This is not confined to the incorporation of men into households, women as spouses and children whether born to the household or adopted from elsewhere also must be ritually introduced to the ancestors. Any Mien adult that goes through this has first to be ritually separated from the household of his previous affiliation. Yao genealogical books present the ideal world of patrilineages. Confronted with a mis-match between rhetoric and practice, Lemoine relies on what the texts say. For Lemoine's critique, see his "Yao Religion and Society" in *Highlanders of Thailand* (John McKinnon and Wanat Bhruksasri, eds. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 194–211, quote from p. 209. The issue of re-filiations places ritual rank in a new light. Once a man has ordained to *kwa-tang* rank, he cannot

be incorporated into the household of another lineage. See Yoshino Akira, "Father and Son, Master and Disciple: The Patrilineal Ideology on the Mien Yao of Northern Thailand," in *Perspectives on Chinese Society: Anthropological Views from Japan* (Suenari Michio, J.S. Eades, and C. Daniels, eds. Kent, Canterbury: Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing, University of Kent at Canterbury, 1995), pp. 265–73. Viewing ritual ordinations as something Yao collectively "have" or "do" fundamentally misconstrues the local and historically varied significance of these practices.

¹⁵ John Blofeld, "Some Hilltribes of North Thailand (Miaos and Yaos)." *Journal of the Siam Society* 43 (1955): pp. 1–20. Quotes from pp. 9 and 4.

¹⁶ Blofeld, "Some Hilltribes," p. 17.

¹⁷ Seidenfaden, "Siam's Tribal Dresses," *Journal of the Siam Society* 31 (2). Reprinted in *Selected Articles from the Siam Society Journal, Vol II, 1929–1953* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1954), pp. 84–94. He is best known for his book *The Thai Peoples* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1958). The coverage in his book is largely the same as that of the exhibit. To Seidenfaden, it was Siam in the 1930s rather than a single ethnic group that was collectible.

¹⁸ Seidenfaden, "Siam's Tribal Dresses," p. 84. The stated reason for the intended mini-ization of these representations of the peoples of Siam was in order to fit them above the bookcases in the Siam Society Library. Following Stewart's logic in her book *On Longing*, one can also posit this museum project as an attempted dollhouse of Siam's disappearing cultural diversity. Seidenfaden complained in his address that not all the ethnics followed his instructions toward miniatures.

¹⁹ Seidenfaden, "Siam's Tribal Dresses," p. 85. Karl Döhring's *Siam, Land und Volk* (Darmstadt: Folkwang Verlag, 1923) has photos of women in Yao dress but with the caption "Karen Frau." This book has recently been re-issued in English in Thailand, but the mis-identification of Yao as Karen still stands. See Karl Döhring, *The Country and People of Siam* (translated by Walter J. Tips, with a Foreword by Krisana Daroonthanom. Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999), 11, 109. Presumably, upland peoples were so unknown in Siam in the 1920s that the gloss "Karen" ("Yang," "Kariang") was sufficient in reference to any and all of them, as "Lawa" had served earlier and "Meo" did in more recent times. Among other mis-identifications from this period are a photo with the caption "Yao Women" in

W.A.R. Wood's *Land of Smiles* (Bangkok: Krungdebanagar Press, 1935) that shows men and women dressed in what I take to be Tai Lue outfits (facing p. 128). A photo captioned "Yao people, North Thailand" in Seidenfaden's *The Thai Peoples*, shows men and women that most likely are Lahu (fig. 32). The men wear "Shan" jackets, and the women wear what most likely are Lahu dresses. Seidenfaden refers to this picture in his text on Yao, where he states that "the Yaos in Thailand belong to the Lanten clan" (132). Lantien Yao are not known to have ever lived within Thailand, nor do the people in the photo wear what are considered to be "Lantien" clothes. The various mis-identifications are indicative of the emphasis on identifying and photographing the exotic peoples of Siam at the time, and need to be understood within the context of Siamese exploration and ethnography (done in part by expatriates) that Seidenfaden's exhibit was a part of. For a discussion of early Siamese ethnography, see Thongchai Winichakul, "The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects, 1885–1910," in *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States* (Andrew Turton, ed. London: Curzon, 2000), pp. 38–62.

²⁰ William R. Geddes, "The Tribal Research Centre, Thailand: An Account of Plans and Activities" in *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations* (Peter Kunstadter, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 553–581.

²¹ For an ethnographic critique of the supposed reality of the "six tribes," see Peter Hinton, "Do the Karen Really Exist?" in *Highlanders of Thailand* (John McKinnon and Wanat Bhruksasri, eds. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 155–168.

²² The National Museum in Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai Province, uses photos, maps, and text from the book. The Hilltribe Museum and Education Center, run by the Population and Community Development Association in Chiang Rai City (upstairs from their restaurant, Cabbages and Condoms), draws on its text and photos.

²³ There is an interesting parallel between this portrayal and the recent British pop-sensation the Spice Girls, each of whom had their own dress, hairstyle, and personality. A collector of "tribal art and culture" is unlikely to feel much commonality to those assembling Spice Girls paraphernalia. This is one of the ways in which collections serve to mark identity and social distinctions.

²⁴ Seidenfaden, "Siam's Tribal Dresses," p. 85. The museumizing impulse is partly informed by the urge to save "disappearing ways." This impulse is not confined to museum projects, it is equally true of much anthropological reporting on "vanishing traditional worlds." See James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory, in *Writing Culture* (James Clifford and George Marcus, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 98–121. Richard K. Diran in his book *The Vanishing Tribes of Burma* (New York: Amphoto Art, 1997) writes: "It is my hope that this book will help to preserve the unique traditions of Burma's ethnic groups for future generations. If not, then at least the photographic record will be there" (11).

²⁵ For a separate study of Mien identity and culture in an American context, see Jeffrey MacDonald, *Transnational Aspects of Iu-Mien Refugee Identity* (New York: Garland, 1997).

²⁶ Ha Van Thu, "Positive and Negative Factors in Traditional Customs and Practices of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam," UNESCO, International Expert Meeting for the Safeguarding and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups in Vietnam, Hanoi, 15–18 March, 1994. For a discussion of some of these issues, see Oscar Salemink, "Sedentarization and Selective Preservation among the Montagnards in the Vietnamese Central Highlands," in *Turbulent Times and Enduring Peoples: Mountain Minorities in the South-East Asian Massif* (Jean Michaud, ed. London: Curzon, 2000), pp. 125–148. For a Chinese emphasis on reform regarding Yao clothing, see Li Xiaowen, "Study of the Pai Yao Dresses and Ornaments," in *The Yao of South China* (Jacques Lemoine and Chiao Chien, eds. Paris: Pangu, 1991), pp. 421–456.

²⁷ See Jonsson, "Yao Minority Identity," 62.

²⁸ See Ralph Litzinger, "Reimagining the State," Litzinger, "Memory Work: Reconstituting the Ethnic in Post-Mao China." *Cultural Anthropology* 13 (1998): pp. 224–255, and Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

Forbes & David Henley, *Khon Muang: People and Principalities of North Thailand*, Bertil Lintner, *The Kachin: Lords of Burma's Northern Frontier*. [Chiang Mai]: Teak House 1997.

Ronald D. Renard

Those familiar with the local publishing scene have been following the fortunes of the 'People and Cultures' of Southeast Asia series for some years now. Changes in orientation, format, and authors of many books in the series as well as certain imponderables resulted in Teak House Publications of Chiang Mai serving as the virtual publishers. The "credits" opposite the Table of Contents in each volume hint at the complexity of this process that led to the series' current form of serious "coffee table" books on ethnic minorities in mainland Southeast Asia and the far south of China. Authors of the published works include an academic, journalists, and a non-Aristotelian peripatetic. All are excellently illustrated with historical and contemporary photography. Although manuscripts and in one case, camera-ready text, have been prepared for additional titles, no new works have appeared in the last year, making it appropriate to review what has been accomplished in the series to date.

The appearance of these books coincides with new ways of studying ethnic groups, such as mentioned in Hjørleifur Jonsson's review article in this issue of the *JSS*. Because of such analyses of ethnic groups in this part of the world, this review will discuss how ethnic groups, particularly smaller groups such as Kachin and Akha, have been studied, and what contribution the People and Cultures Series makes to this study.

The study of ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia, as peoples of intrinsic interest, began when European and North American explorers, missionaries, and ethnographers, appeared in the region's uplands during the nineteenth century. Previously Thai and neighboring kingdoms had considered the hill and forest people as inferior non-Buddhist denizens of the forest. The word, *Kariang* (Karen), for example does not appear in the Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya even though there were Karens in Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi and other

Review of: Andrew Forbes, *The Haw: Traders of the Golden Triangle*; Jim Goodman, *The Akha: Guardians of the Forest*, Jim Goodman, *Children of the Jade Dragon: The Naxi of Lijian and Their Mountain Neighbours the Yi*, Andrew

areas in the western forests and hills controlled by Ayutthaya and surely known to the chroniclers. Nor does the word appear in the Mon chronicles of the Hanthawaddy which ruled to the west of those hills (and despite the fact that the Thai language borrowed the word, *Kariang*, from Mon).

The early Western authors, particularly ethnographers, treated the hill groups as primitive 'noble' savages, living in a timeless non-historical equilibrium. Ethnographers assumed that ethnic groups were units sharing common characteristics such as ancestry, language, and culture that were essentially unchanged for centuries. Many articles in the early years of the *JSS* discussed the hill peoples in this way.

The assumption that ethnic groups are so uniformly unchanging has been questioned frequently since E.R. Leach discussed what it means to be Kachin in his epochal work, *Political Systems of Highland Burma* in 1954. Leach provided a generation of anthropologists in Southeast Asia with new questions by examining to what extent "a single type of social structure prevails throughout the Kachin area". [p. 3]

Although a discussion of the social structures Leach found among the Kachin is beyond the scope of this paper, he noted that the word, *Kachin*, was a Burmese, not a Kachin term. The Burmese used it to refer to different peoples speaking a variety of languages such as Jingpaw, Lisu, and Maru and whose social structure varied. Leach also pioneered the use of historical evidence to support his thesis regarding the ethnic group he was studying.

Leach concluded that ethnographic terms in Southeast Asia were not defined according to the practices of European anthropological scholarship. He recognized that such an artificially defined group as the Kachin did not possess any uniform identity. Instead, the Burmese had created something new and what they called Kachin was not so understood by the *Kachin* themselves. Westerners in Burma, however, adopted the use of the term, *Kachin* applying to it an assumed (but unreal) sharing of ancestry, language, and other characteristics.

For the last 20–30 years, anthropologists have increasingly looked at ethnic groups in

this light. They have found that certain groups, such as the Miao (Meo) and the Yao, are in fact collections of sometimes diverse peoples that sometimes do not even speak the same language. As such, Chinese terms like *Miao* and *Yao*, just like Burmese term, *Kachin*, are roughly equivalent to the term "barbarian" that meant non-Hellenics beyond the pale of ancient Greek civilization.

The examination of these groups is complicated by the various names they are called and prefer to be called. For example, Hmong (sometimes known as Green Miao) in Thailand do not like to be called *Miao*. However, Mien (a Yao sub-group) find the term Yao acceptable. Similarly, the names national governments apply to certain groups often differ. Vietnam, for example, refers to the Yao as Dao (pronounced "Zao"). The Lao government calls one group Lao Huay that elsewhere is known as Lanten (and is also a Yao group). The result is something that the British Burma colonial official, James George Scott, called an "ethnological thicket" but which also is terminological diversity if not disagreement.

Such a situation does not differ significantly from what is found in some European countries and the "races" there. In the Spanish "race", for example, the mutually barely intelligible tongues of Castilian, Catalan, and Galician are all officially spoken 'Spanish' languages. In Italy, Genovese is so different from the Italian spoken in Rome that it could be a foreign language. Some Genoese contend that there are (almost) more Genovese words in common with English than with Italian.

Issues such as these make it difficult to discuss the various groups and groupings in way that satisfies both social scientists and the general public. So it is that when there was a request for the Society to republish Erik Seidenfaden's classic, *The Thai Peoples* either in its present form or updated, a response was difficult. While republishing is desirable, the conditions in which different ethnic groups in Thailand are now found have changed so profoundly considerable discussion is required. To review the various factors now important in their lives in a changing Thailand requires raising questions such as Jonsson and others like him pose.

The Teak House books are meant for readers who want to gain an overview of the different groups from authors and photographers familiar with and well-disposed towards them. These books also appeal to the members of the groups described. Akha and Kachin who have been shown *their* book by this reviewer have all grown enthusiastic that such handsome publications have been done on them. Although quite a few books have been written on the Khon Muang and Kachin and a fair number on the Akha, none on any except the Khon Muang are so well-illustrated and show the reader so well what the people, their clothing, and their surroundings are like. Jim Goodman's book, *Children of the Jade Dragon*, on the Naxi and the Yi of northwestern Yunnan, is the first book-length treatment of these groups readily available to the world outside China in decades.

The different authors respond to questions such as those raised by Jonsson to various degrees. Perhaps the most astute answers of interest to scholars of Southeast Asia are the works on the Haw (Yunnanese Muslim Chinese) by Andrew Forbes and the Kachin by Bertil Lintner. These shall be discussed in some depth.

Andrew Forbes, an Islamicist historian from the United Kingdom, a Senior Associate Member of St. Antony's College, Oxford, and presently based in Chiang Mai, is well-known for his scholarship on the Haw. His command of the sources is evident in what may well be the most comprehensive bibliography of Western language sources on the Haw in existence. Forbes also used various Chinese sources but these were not included in the bibliography because of mistaken advice from someone in the publishing process.

Through his command of the historical sources, Forbes provides new insights on the dynamics of this complex region. He traces the origins of the Haw as a definable group in Yunnan, their entry into the trade with Chiang Mai, Mandalay and elsewhere south of Yunnan, and their large-scale southward migration in the twentieth century. The Haw came to play a key role in the marketing of opium and other commodities in the region.

Less space is devoted to contemporary societal issues in Thailand such as how the Haw are coping in modern Thai society. Despite

discussing "Who Are the Haw?", Forbes manages not to estimate the population of the Haw. More on their current conditions would have been useful. Readers might well gain from learning that the Haw-dominated Doi Mae Salong Rotary Club is the only such club in Thailand to hold its meetings in Chinese as well as other, weightier, information.

Some issues of contemporary Haw society are covered Ann Maxwell Hill's *Merchants and Migrants: Ethnicity and Trade Among Yunnanese Chinese in Southeast Asia* (1998, New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies), which also provides a historical backdrop to the Haw in the region. Between the two works, scholars have recently gained a solid base for studying the modern issues confronting the Haw, such as assimilation into Thai life and their situation in Myanmar where conditions are more in flux.

Bertil Lintner is a well-known Swedish journalist who has written extensively on the contemporary politics of Burma. His trek in 1985 and 1986 across insurgent areas in the north of the country, besides making him an enemy of the state, gave him a profound awareness of the peoples, such as Kachin, who were settled there. He lived among the Kachins for almost all of 1986. Subsequently he has written about the politics and the trade in drugs in the region for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and as an independent author.

In the present work, Lintner begins by asking, "Who Are the Kachin?" He discusses their social structure, explaining the basics of Kachin diversity. He points out there are people called Kachin, such as Lisu, who are not "entirely convinced that they are Kachins at all." Conscious of such concerns, the Kachin Independence Organisation invented a new term, *Wunpawng*, referring to all the clans and linguistic groups that are indicated by the term, Kachin. This has proven so popular among these people that its use has spread across the border to China where it is spelled *Wunpong*.

Major aspects of Kachin life are covered comprehensively. Lintner gives a history of Christian contacts and reviews the important role the Baptist and the Catholic churches have played in Kachinland. He also devotes considerable attention to the important role the

Kachins played in the British Burma military and how, during World War II, they managed to keep a part of Kachin State as the only area of the country out of the control of the Japanese military. The influence of Christianity and the military were important factors in the KIO afterwards and its long resistance to the central government. A separate chapter is devoted to the mining area of Hpakant where the world's most expensive jadeite is extracted.

Lintner discusses the present situation of the Kachin, particularly the implications of the KIO ceasefire with the government and how the future will be for the Kachins. Lintner echoes the words of another Swede, the missionary Ola Hanson, who wrote in 1913 that the "future of the hill tribes is bound up with the future of Burma." Lintner ends on a hopeful note, stating that "the Kachins seem finally to be on the verge of what

may turn out to be a relatively peaceful and prosperous era, a fitting and long-awaited reward for their many years of struggle and war."

Of additional value is the inclusion of several hundred photographs. Oliver Hargreave and E.J. Haas, two Chiang Mai-based photographers were able to travel to several places in Kachin State. The images in the book from their visits to the jade mines, Myitkyina, and other sites show Kachin diversity well. Additional photos from archival sources enhance their contemporary images.

Whether the other manuscripts appear in book form is uncertain. Their publication depends on whether the likes of Cleo and Saratsawati resolve the imponderables in the international production process that have so frustrated the publication of the texts on Karens, Lao, Naga, Hmong, Lisu, Yao and others.