

# **Inter-Ethnic Dynamics in Asia**

Considering the Other through  
ethnonyms, territories and rituals

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François Robinne**

# Contents

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*List of illustrations* ix  
*List of contributors* x  
*Acknowledgements* xiii

**Introduction** 1

CHRISTIAN CULAS AND FRANÇOIS ROBINNE

## PART I

**Ethnonyms: naming oneself, naming others and being named in a multi-ethnic complex** 11

**1 The ethnonyms of the Hmong in Vietnam: early history (1856–1924) and practical epistemology** 13

CHRISTIAN CULAS

**2 Rai, Khambu, Subbu, Kirant, etc.: ethnic labels or political and land tenure categories? Logics of identification of an ensemble of populations in Nepal** 42

GRÉGOIRE SCHLEMMER

**3 Making ethnonyms in a clan social organization: the case of the so-called Kachin subgroups (Burma)** 57

FRANÇOIS ROBINNE

**4 Names and territoriality among the Phunoy: how the state creates ethnic group (Lao PDR)** 79

VANINA BOUTÉ

- 8 The eldest of three brothers, he is presented as the ancestor of 'the yellow race', the second as the ancestor of 'the black race' and the third as the ancestor of 'the white race' and 'the red race' (Robinne 2007b).
- 9 Pejorative appellation, known more in South-East Asia as *Kala* or *Kula*. Jean Baffie presented a paper on this subject during the workshop on the theme of ethnonyms which took place at the IRSEA in March 2003.
- 10 See, on this subject, Chapter 4 in this work.
- 11 For a detailed analysis of clan correspondences, see Robinne (2007b). Actually, the clan correspondences are conditioned by the matrimonial alliances, and may vary from family to family. For example, according to Adee Che's own experience, his Lisu clan *Ngaw shi* is equivalent to the *Jinghpaw* clan *Marip*, and we could multiply the examples in Kachin State, in Shan State and everywhere the Lisu and Kachin live together (see Desaint 2008: 98).
- 12 Reference communicated by Vanina Bouté.

## 4 Names and territoriality among the Phunoy

### How the state creates ethnic group (Lao PDR)

*Vanina Bouté*

Upon arriving in the northern province of Phongsaly (RDP Lao), I thought I would easily be able to define the population I was about to study with maps, census and, most especially, a name. At first glance, it appeared easy. I obtained some documents in French dating from the beginning of the twentieth century as well as other articles,<sup>1</sup> all of which led me to believe that the frontiers of the Phunoy ethnic groups were clearly delimited. Phunoy appear to be a Tibeto-Burmese-speaking group of nearly 40,000 people, practising swidden agriculture in the mountainous Phongsaly district. Phunoy's villages were, moreover, located in a clearly defined territory – the south of the district – where they were the only inhabitants, with the exception of one or two *Akha* villages, recently resettled. Comparing the map drawn in 1924 by Commandant Roux and recent documents from the PDDP,<sup>2</sup> one could see the names and the settlement of the Phunoy villages had changed very little. The Phunoy's contained and single ethnic habitat was quite striking in Northern Laos, where ethnic groups live in villages scattered in different provinces.

However, the literature about the inhabitants of the district showed here and there unusual names. P. Neis (1885: 61) and P. Lefèvre-Pontalis (1898: 226, 230–233) mentioned a 'Phay-Phunoy' group, whereas H. Roux (1924: 445) and G. Aymé (1930: 34) distinguished the Phunoy from the Phay, considering the latter to be similar to the Phunoy, yet settled a little further away to the east near the plain of Boun Tay. The 'Phay' group was also mentioned by O. Evvard (1998: 24), but he located them in the western part of the Phunoy's territory. M. Ferlus (1971: 2) talked about 'Ong Hyao' people, quite similar to the Phunoy, and driven out by the latter to the plain of Boun Neua. G. Aymé (1930: 66) and L. Chazée (1995: 104) also mentioned the 'Laoseng', similar physically to the Phunoy, but a Phunoy-speaking group according to Aymé and an Austro-asiatic speaking group for Chazée. Last, other names appeared in the various national and provincial census. In a country well known for its ethnic diversity, this multiplicity of groups was at first not too surprising. Each name should refer to a particular ethnic group, thus rendering evident the ethnic set-up of the district. Phongsaly district was populated by a major group, the Phunoy, plus several small ethnic groups (Phay, Ong Hyao, Laoseng, Pounnon, etc.) speaking languages similar to Phunoy.

