

Emerging Sexual Inequality among the Lisu of Northern Thailand. By Otome Klein Hutheesing. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989. Pp. 232.

Perhaps everyone who studies groups so variegated and whose identity is so elusive as the Lisu (a “*problematique*” says Yves Conrad [1989]) should have as rich a cultural background as Otome Klein Hutheesing. Perhaps too, all students of little-known ethnic groups whose culture markedly diverges from that of the investigator should spend (however impractical) the most of four years living in their midst. And perhaps all anthropologists should, when reporting their findings, eloquently state their objectives, biases, and idiosyncrasies regarding the groups they study.

Having satisfied these conditions in writing *Emerging Sexual Inequality among the Lisu of Northern Thailand*, it is no wonder Leiden’s house of Brill published her findings. The result is profound, yet lucid, prose convincingly describing consequential changes in the northern Thai hills. It is seminal, artful, and meticulous. The reader sees the Lisu villagers on Bald Mountain from their own vantage, on their own terms, and in the context of their village. It is a pity, though, that acquiring this book in northern Thailand costs 1,500 baht (US\$60). Her book contributes greatly to understanding highlanders in the region; it is a must for all interested in the Lisu and related groups.

Perhaps too, there are lessons in the changes that have taken place. There may be a lesson, for example, in traditional, opium-cultivating Lisu society, in which male and female roles are comparable in status and repute, becoming a society in which males dominate as the Lisu take up new cash crops like tomatoes to replace opium. And there may be another: the developers, referred to obliquely by the author as parties in “international poppy politics” (p. 177), who advocated the cultivation of tomatoes (but not in the huge amounts or with heavy use of chemical pesticides popular on Bald Mountain) did indeed aim mainly at eliminating opium and its allied problems while enabling the Lisu to make a living. While development in some northern Thai areas, such as Robert Cooper (1984, pp. 246–47) has recorded in four Hmong villages in Chiang Mai province, has resulted in untoward consequences among the hill tribes, this has not occurred among other Chiang Mai Hmong, for

example in Chiang Khian village, as studied by Kathleen Culhane-Pera [personal communication, 1991]). Thus, it is unlikely that developers could be expected to have the foresight and ability to have kept female Lisu from losing status to Lisu males. Such changes might well be viewed as the unintended consequences of development and, perhaps, it needs to be recognized that development programmes can also result in conditions such as those found among the Hmong studied by Culhane-Pera.

Still, the germinal work gives rise to questions which demand answers. How, for example, did international poppy politics arrive? As a monolith forcing (as the cryptic reference on p. 177 hints) Lisu to raise tomatoes? Were the Lisu given real choices in these discussions? Did the programme's women's project play a role in this village? What, pray tell, was the relationship the author saw (p. 172) between conversion to Christianity and tomato growing? Surely, the programme and the mission were not collaborating? Were Christian women the most disadvantaged? And as for the enigmatic coffee magnate, what did he offer (500 baht per rai for land that could not legally be sold?) to achieve the solidarity needed in their village which, incidentally, lies in a national forest reserve? And for that matter, since intensive opium cash-crop cultivation by Lisu is not much more than a century old, following the Opium War in China (Grandstaff 1979, pp. 70–79) can anything be said about the pre-opium Lisu?

Hopefully, the author will confront such issues in the future. The anthropology of coffee tycoons, development programmes, and missionaries may hold less romance than the "pure" Lisu society she enticingly describes, but it is no less relevant to its understanding. Although the author makes no mention of the role of missionaries in development programmes, a reference to a pleasant surprise about Lisu linguistic complexities shared with David Morse (of *the* missionary family) shows she did know one. Trained anthropologists, besides Cornelia Kammerer among others, and now a few graduate students, ought to be bold enough to examine the profound changes wrought by Christian evangelists whereby entire villages of Lahu, Karen, Lua, and others are converting to Christianity so quickly that the Secretary-General of the Karen Baptist Convention of Thailand remarked that he cannot

provide the support he believes the new Karen Christians need. To feel the pulse of this important trend, students of change in the northern Thai highlands might do well to make their way to Chiang Mai's Community Church, where many missionaries to the hill tribes worship.

It may be noted, finally, that the study village is hardly typical, being in the project area of an international development programme, where seventeen families are Christian (up from four in the book), where coffee is cultivated in possibly the only plantation-scale venture in all northern Thailand. Accordingly, overt recognition of these factors might further clarify village dynamics. Although it may be impossible to write in a way that is compellingly reminiscent of Georges Condominas while describing crop extension agents, world-wide evangelism, and grass strips, Condominas himself returned to assess conditions among the Mnung Gar after the Vietnam conflict. Even so, perhaps no one is better equipped than Otome Klein Hutheesing to return to Bald Mountain and present an emic view of the messier elements of the development process which has continued since she left the field.

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