Inter-Ethnic 'Dynamics in Asia

Considering the Other through ethnonyms, territories and rituals

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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 Dessaint 2008: 98).
12 Reference communicated by Yanina Boute.

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,[1] 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,2 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. Evrard (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, Poumon, etc.) speaking languages similar to Phunoy.

However, the results of my first enquiries showed a slightly different and more confused situation. Certain populations living at the far east of the district, the other side of the U River, claimed to be Phunoy despite the allegations of their neighbours, who sometimes called them 'Laoseng' and sometimes called them 'Poumon', etc. Nor did I find any traces of the Ong Hyao or the Phay, but I discovered numerous other ethnonyms: Tang, Phongsek, Phonghu, Laopan, Tchaho, etc. Even though some of these groups consider themselves to be different from the Phunoy - pointing to their linguistic and cultural specificity - my studies revealed that there are, in fact, no more differences between these groups and the Phunoy than amongst those Phunoy living in different villages, which in turn cause major variations. They all speak a language that can be understood by the others, have similar agricultural practices, and a similar social, parental and cultural organisation. I also noted that certain clan names of these groups are identical to those of the Phunoy.

All of them, including the Phunoy, when referring to themselves, use the expression *Gubaya* ('our group', 'our population') or *guba Khong* ('our village'). In comparison to the others, they can define themselves by the name of their village - Phongsek, Pumon, Tchaho, Laopan, Phongku or Tang - knowing that, generally, the size of a group does not exceed one, two or three villages.[3] However, a real confusion can be observed when each group names or defines the others. The Phongku claim to be close to the Laopan. The latter, rejecting this affirmation, say they are close to the Tchaho, and that they were originally one sole group. The Tchaho refute this claim, insisting on their presence on this territory well before the arrival of other populations. The Pumon say that the Phongsek are pure Phunoy, whereas the Phongsek say the Pumon are Laoseng. The inhabitants of the Phunoy villages also do not agree on how the populations should be identified. It is possible to obtain almost as many combinations as the number of people questioned - 'The Pumon and the Ban Tang are Laopan', 'the Tchaho are Laoseng', 'the Phongsek and the Pumon belong to the same group even though they do not know it', etc. Finally, on the left bank of the River Ou, a major waterway situated in the east of the district, there are several villages where the inhabitants are identified by the other groups and by the Phunoy as being Laoseng or Pumon. The inhabitants of these villages all claim to be Phunoy and not to have any other names. Finally, the only group that is identified the same way both by its neighbours and by itself is the Phunoy, living on the right bank of the U River.

This diversity and confusion of names results in equally varied classifications. The divergence between my readings and the reality with which I was confronted led me to question the pertinence of ethnic classifications and to try to understand the reasons for this confusion. As I attempted to retrace the history of this region, and notably the impact of the politically dominant populations, the Lao and the Lü, the logic of the current identity configuration became clear. This work also enabled me to understand that the Phunoy identity was not evident, but that it resulted from a special relationship with the regional ruling powers.

The diversity of ethnic classifications

The profusion of names and the confusion reigning around their usage, illustrated by the example of the Phunoy, is not an isolated case, and even seems to characterise all the populations in Laos. This diversity is a problem both for the local authorities, who try to establish, through census, a precise list of the ethnic groups in the country, and for foreign researchers, who want to do the same for scientific reasons. As with the native characterisations, the same dissimilarities can be found in the production of classifying terminologies and the criteria on which they are based.

When the new Communist regime arrived in power in 1975, one of its main preoccupations was to consolidate the country, destabilised by internal clashes between rival factions. To achieve this, it seemed vital to create a feeling of national unity capable of reuniting the whole population. While trying to create a national image to which all the different populations could relate, the government was confronted with the diversity of the many populations in the country, half of which were made up of ethnic minorities isolated in enclosed and little-known areas. In the name of a stable national image, the Laotian government endeavoured to draw up a fixed classification of the number of ethnic groups registered in the country (Goudineau 2000; Pholsena 2001). This task was not an easy one: in the 1985 census, an open question was proposed in addition to the sixty-eight official ethnonyms, and several hundred new names appeared. The government was obliged to call in foreign experts (from Vietnam, Russia and the West) to establish, according to their theoretically rigorous criteria, a classification of the populations including a reasonable number of groups (Goudineau 2000: 22). The number of ethnic groups registered was reduced from sixty-eight to thirty-eight, and finally stabilised at forty-seven. To preserve this number, the authorities decided finally simply to eliminate the names of certain populations mentioned in the provincial enquiries (Pholsena 2001). The number of populations registered is therefore not simply based on scientific criteria, but also meets the requirements of cultural policies. This is illustrated again in the 2000 census, where the term 'Phunoy' was simply removed and replaced by the term 'Singsili', which the authorities presented as being the real 'ethnonym' of the population. Following the example of the census carried out by their Vietnamese 'big brother', the Laotian authorities decided to rename groups deemed to have a pejorative name or which did not seem to be their real ethnonym (Pholsena 2001) - but in fact no Phunoy ever uses this term when referring to themselves, 'Singsili' being the Phunoy term to designate the town and the district of Phongsaly.

This desire to reach a fixed number of ethnic groups partially explains the evolution of the various censuses. A detailed study of the proposed successive categories of populations highlights the fact that there is no logic in the way in which these have evolved. For example, let us look at the different ethnic categories used to describe certain groups in the Phongsaly region. In the 1995 census, the Phunoy group is subdivided into branches described as follows: 'the

Xeng, the Fay (Phau Saly), the Lao Pane, the Phon Xet, the Phong Ku, the Phu Nhot and the Ban Tang'. However, two of these groups were not present in the previous census: the Pou Nhot (the name of a vii !age above the U River) and the Fay (a term completely unknown in the district, both by the populations and the by local authorities), whereas the Tchaho and the Purnon, which were indicated as 'Phunoy sub-groups' in the provincial census, did not appear. One could therefore question the criteria used to establish the denominations retained, as the names attributed to the groups are different from those used by the inhabitants themselves. The example of villages situated on the left bank of the U River is very revealing in this respect. The provincial statistics of 1992 classified the villages as 'Phunoy', with the exception of one which was registered as 'Laoseng'. However, according to the inhabitants, this village, founded some fifty years ago, originated from a neighbouring village which is classified as 'Phunoy'. In 1996 all of these villages were registered as 'Laoseng', but they were ultimately, in 2001, defined as 'Phunoy' ! The enormous variety of the number of ethnic groups registered therefore appears to result not only from the diversity of names recognised by the groups in question, but also by the collection methods employed, where the criteria have no scientific basis.

Several Westerners have also proposed a classification of the ethnic groups in Laos. Their methods and their results differ considerably. In certain cases, and in the absence of in-depth linguistic studies, 'cultural traits' (or those considered as such - e.g., habitat, local costumes, etc.) were used to separate the populations into different linguistic families. At the beginning of the century the French military classified the Phunoy as belonging to the Austro-asiatic group of languages, even though, strangely, they classified the Laoseng (identified as being Phunoy) in the category of 'Chinoasian' groups (Aymé 1930: 66). This classification of the Phunoy as an Austro-asiatic group (based on the habitat and customs deemed to represent this type of population) was notably taken up by Lebar *et al.* (1964:126).

For certain linguists - such as J. Chamberlain (1995) and S. Wright (2003) - ethnic identities are originally revealed by linguistic specificities. As J. Chamberlain wrote: 'Our experience in Laos has been that wherever a group identifies itself as having a distinct ethnonym, there are always explicit linguistic features that accompany and mark that distinction' (1995: 10). This supposition - that a name corresponds to a language and that a language corresponds to an ethnic group - leads him to register over a hundred ethnic groups (such profusion being for this author synonymous with scientific rigour) based on the supposed names of the populations in Laos. This type of research, based essentially on bibliographic references, cannot avoid falling into the trap of certain confusions. The spelling of the names of populations varying sometimes from one source to another, it can happen that one group is presented as forming two distinct ethnic types. J. Chamberlain registered in this way the existence of a group called Tchaho and another named Chalo, both localised in the province of Phongsaly. According to the sources indicated in the records drawn up by J. Chamberlain, under the first spelling the group was registered as Austro-asiatic by L. Chazee,

and under the second it was identified as being Tibeto-Burman by Kamdeng.[4] Another example of this confusion in the records is that of Laoseng, which can be found some pages later under the name of Xeng.[5] After a short stay in the Phongsaly province, an American linguist, S. Wright, basing her findings on a supposed correspondence between language and ethnic identity, isolated eight varieties of language within the Phunoy, concluding that each corresponded to a different subgroup.[6] She gave each of them a name which corresponded to the village in which each particular language had been identified, thus creating new sub-categories of the Phunoy population. Taking the opposite approach, D. Bradley (1983: 48) suggested considering that all the populations belonging to the linguistic branch of the southern Lolo group (these being the Pyen in Burma, the Bisu in Thailand, the Phunoy in Laos and the Cong in Vietnam) form one and the same ethnic group, due to the fact that their languages are very similar.

These studies result in very different ethnic divisions being described. In the case of the Phunoy and small groups speaking the same language, it is obvious that the criteria proposed - language and the ethnonym - are not sufficient to establish the frontiers between these populations. If identity is defined in relation to the methods of identification, be it mutual identification (Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart 1995) or of the greatest number, we are obliged to observe that the identity of these groups in the Phongsaly region poses a problem, as the names that the groups give themselves and those that are attributed by outside members are not the same.

The Tay denominations

Despite the confusion regarding the attributions of names, these populations - Phunoy and other small groups - share a characteristic trait: their names are all of Tay origin. This is clearly the case in the name 'Phunoy', which can, according to the tone and the pronunciation, take on several different meanings. The colonial administrators favoured the translation 'small people' *(phu noy,* Lao), arguing that the people composing this population were a size smaller than the others. A few Phunoy suggested the translation 'small crabs' *(pu noy,* Lao), saying that the Lao named them so on seeing them gathering small crabs. For certain Phunoy, the term should be translated as 'small mountains' *(phu noy,* Lao) in reference to the mountains (even though the highest in the region) which are at the heart of their habitat. For others, the term could signify 'small (in numbers) population' *(phu noy,* Lao) as the original inhabitants of the region were very few. There is one last meaning that could be possible for this tenn, the only one that the Phunoy omit to mention but one that their Ho and Tay Lu neighbours like to remind them of. According to the latter, the term means 'little person', not in the sense of size, but referring to social status. We will demonstrate later why this translation is certainly the most justified.

The names of certain small groups are also of Tay origin. The Poumon say that their name is derived from the Lao *'phu mong'* (wood men, Lao). It would seem that the Lao gave them this name as, in the past, the village people

frequently went to Luang Prabang to sell a type of wood called *'mong'*. The names Phongsek and Phongku are themselves composed in part of the Tay word 'Phong', designating large villages inhabitated by non-Tay populations. The Phongsek say that the *'sek'* added to 'Phong' is onomatopoeia for the cry of a royal elephant lost in the region. It should, however, be noted that *'sek'* is also a Tay term designating prisoners of war (Doré 1998: 487). 'Ban Tang' means in Tay 'different village', a translation readily agreed by the inhabitants of the village, who tell that the Lao had named them thus as they were different from the other groups. The term 'Phay' has a complex history, to which it will be necessary to return later, but we can say here that the term signifies 'a non-Tay subject'. The oldest inhabitants of the villages situated on the left bank of the U River (which, as we have seen, call themselves Phunoy) remember that the Lao from *Miiang* Hun (a village below the river), for whom they had to carry out fatigues and other duties, referred to them by this term.

The fact that certain observers have taken these Tay terms for endonyms of the groups (whereas some of them are generic terms applied to several populations) explains notably the confusion that reigns amongst the different classifications of the populations of the region. M. Ferlus notes that both the T'in from the province of Sayabury and the populations of the left bank of the U River were designated by the term Phay. This is perhaps why L. Chazée, in *L 'Atlas des ethnies et des sous-ethnies du Laos* (1995: 104), presents a map of where the 'Phay' are located and situates them, as if they were one and the same group, in the provinces of Phongsaly and Sayabury. However, the former speak a Tibeto-Burmese language, whereas the latter's language is Austro-asiatic. In the same way, A. Spangemacher (1997: 118) notes that the Bulang, or Plang, a population speaking an Austro-asiatic language and living in the Sipsong Panna (currently south Yunnan) would have been called 'Puman' by the Tay Lu. Having learnt of the existence of a group called 'Pumon' in the region of Phonsaly, she therefore supposed that it belonged to a Plang group. The author maintains, however, that this term comes from the Tay,[7] as she writes that it comes from !ti 'phu *man',* wild mountain people, but seems to reject the idea that, because of this, it could have designated any mountain group in the region.

As the names of these populations are of Tay origin, what criteria were used to attribute the name 'Phunoy' to a group of villages to the exclusion of others? One could suppose that the Tay would have used the existing frontiers of ethnic groups in order to name each population; however, this is not the picture por-trayed in the Phunoy writings relating to their settling in the region. On the con-trary, they underline the fragmentation of the group into clannish units or villages.

The Pltunoy migratory narratives

The Phunoy date their arrival in the Phongsaly region sometime between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries.[8] This period corresponds roughly to the arrival of other populations speaking a T.ibeto-

Burmese language in the north of the Indochinese peninsula, who were seeking refuge in the mountainous regions situated on the outskirts of the Tay principalities and fleeing from the interminable wars between these principalities.[9] Ce1tain documents suggest that the ancestors of the Phunoy lived previously under Burmese domination.[10] Some who had enrolled as foot soldiers in the Burmese army had fled after a severe defeat inflicted by the King of Luang Prabang; others were captured and brought to Luang Prabang from where they escaped, and managed to reach Phongsaly by the U River.

Let us now look at what the writings of the Phunoy language group recount about how they settled in the territory. The most striking element in these stories is the insistence on discord and the ensuing battles.

The migratory stories describe a progressive but violent settlement in the region by several small groups bearing names that are today known, as we have mentioned, to be names of clans of Phunoy language groups. M. Ferlus described, about thirty years ago, a major corpus of writings relating the installation of certain clans in the Phongsaly region. Four clans were supposed to have arrived first: the Tongseu, the Phonglang (divided into two subgroups, the Salang and the Tesun), the Levap and the Tongcham. It seems to have been their time of arrival in the territory that distinguished them from each other. The name of the Tongseu clan signifies 'the first arrivals', and that of the Tongcham clan 'the last arrivals' (Ferlus 1971 : 3):

> After having escaped from the Burmese, we went towards Phongsaly. Then, we arrived near to Bun Tay and founded the village of Tjamlang (today Samlang) in the hills. From Tjamlang, the Taa Phu Ya group left to found a new village. The P'sung group stayed, but then some of them left to found the village of Phatan (today Montjao). When the village grew larger, the Pong Lang group arrived. And when they in turn had settled, the Tong Seu Ba arrived. They were called thus as the name means 'men who make new fields'. The last few people who arrived no longer had any place to live. They were called the Tongcham. As the population increased, the inhabitants of Phatan no longer had any room to cultivate freshly cleared land. They left to found a new village and they were named the 'Mating'. Others went towards Bun Neua to found other villages.[11]

These settlement stories also mention a period of war between the different Phunoy language groups, the causes of which were clearly land possession. A Phunoy from the Siman clan recounts:

> The Tapat was made up of at least a thousand families; they left to found a village on the road to Hatsa, but there were always fights between the Tapat and the Ong Hyao. The Ong Hyao then went near to the Chinese border towards a village called Sentan, and the Tapat went to settle near to Ban Montjao. The land in fact belonged to the Ong Hyao as they had settled there first. As for the Tongseu, they fought against the Tongcham as there

was no-one at that time to enforce order. It was the Tongcham who came to live in what is now the town of Phonsaly.

It should also be noted that these different groups (Taa Phu Ya, Tongseu, Tongcham, Mating, etc.) are designated in Phunoy by the suffix 'ba', a classificator designating a group of people. Therefore, the Hô and the Lü are called 'Hô *ba*', 'Lü *ba*'. The names given to most of these groups (Thum Khong, Mating, P'sum) are names of villages that still existed in the territory some thirty years ago. This division of the population brings to mind the current configuration of small Phunoy language groups (Phongsek, Laopan or Phongku, etc.); these names currently designate, for the most part, villages.[12] In short, these writings illustrate the fact that, when these populations arrived in the Phongsaly territory, they were a long way from forming a homogeneous group sharing a common name and identity. It would seem, to the contrary, that there were myriad small groups. None of them were named 'Phunoy'; they referred to themselves by their clan name and/or the name of the village they occupied. This still does not explain why, today, there is on the one hand a homogeneous group of villages in a circumscribed territory where the inhabitants call themselves or are called Phunoy, and on the other, at the outskirts of this group, a multitude of small groups speaking an identical language which call themselves or are called each by specific names. It is by continuing to retrace the history of the region, notably the relations between the Phunoy language groups and the Tay populations, that we will try to answer these questions and see how a 'Phunoy' group has been able to emerge from myriad small groups.

Looking to the past: the integration of certain marginal populations

The history of the Phunoy is partly linked to that of the dominant realms in the region. On arriving in the Phongsaly region, the Phunoy language populations settled in what was then a sort of mountainous enclave in the midst of several Tay principalities. To the west was the Tay Lü principality called Sipsong Panna; to the east, a federation of mainly Tay Dam principalities, the Sipsong Chaû Tay; and finally, to the south, the Lao realm of Luang Prabang. Because of its geographical situation at the intersection of several principalities, the region where the Phunoy language groups found refuge had for a long time been at the heart of unrest affecting the realm of Luang Prabang. This region served as a strategic zone where the warring factions could find refuge or beat a retreat, but was also a reservoir of mountain populations, whose allegiance was apt to vary according to the changes in the regional balance of power.

The history of the Phongsaly region, as recounted in the *Royal Chronicles of Luang Prabang*,[13] shows how the mountain populations were thus used as mercenaries during the wars between the region's various principalities. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Prince Inthasom, who had taken refuge in the Sipsong Panna, was fighting his brother, King Kitsarat, for the realm of

Luang Prabang. To do this he recruited the mountain populations in the current province of Phongsaly, with whose help he aimed to capture Luang Prabang. The royal troops, however, proved to be stronger, and obliged the Prince and his soldiers to retreat back along the U River. It is possible that some Phunoy language groups might have been amongst the mercenaries who had joined ranks with the Prince. It can indeed be seen that certain elements of Inthasom's troops are, on various occasions, referred to under the term *Phay* (or *Phae*);[14] a term which appears again at the end of the nineteenth century, in the works of French writers, to designate a faction of small Phunoy language groups. Certain versions of the *Chronicles* recount that Inthasom married the daughter of a *Kha Phay* leader who gave him men.[15] The Phunoy accounts refer to this alliance through the figure of Senpongsimun, a perfect hero described as a Lao prince who had married a Phunoy woman at the end of the eighteenth century.[16]

In the nineteenth century, due to repeated disturbances, the realm of Luang Prabang began to take interest in the territories and populations situated within their borders. Luang Prabang was indeed affected by various conflicts: insurrection in the upper regions of the U River, internal wars in the principality of Sipsong Panna, invasions by armed gangs from the Yunnan, known as 'Flags' (black, yellow, etc.), coming along the U River. The Siamese authorities[17] encouraged the King of Luang Prabang to launch a major control policy in his territory through the political reorganisation of the *müang* satellites and the confirmation of the powers of governors and other competent authorities in these areas (Smuckarn and Breazeale 1988: 59).

The inhabitants of the bordering mountain areas were also the object of integration measures, not only because their control depended on the prosperity of the local Lao élite, but also because these border populations constituted a potential barrier against aggressions from neighbouring principalities. The border zones were reorganised notably through the bestowal of a special status on the mountain groups. The Phunoy language groups were the first to benefit from such measures.

The nomination of mountain people as border guards

One episode of the *Chronicles* tells of the nomination of populations as border guards in the mid-nineteenth century, as a result of the King of Luang Prabang's intervention in the north of the realm. When confronted with rebellions, the Prince of Sipsong Panna had indeed asked the King of Luang Prabang, his ally, to come to his aid. M. Lorrillard (1992: 60) transcribes the event as follows:

> In 1841 [...] Chao Ouparat gave orders [...] to Phya Si Thamma Nakhon Lok to go and camp at Muang Boun Tay with 800 men, and to Chao Souvana Phomma, Chao Souk as well as Phy Cha Ban to lead 800 men to settle in Muang Ahine [...]. He then ordered some Thao-Phya(s) to ensure the surveillance of the boundaries with the necessary armies.

In other words, the Viceroy, representing the Royal Counsel, after having sent an armed mission led by several local dignitaries, delegated the surveillance of the borders to local leaders. If nothing is mentioned about the identity of these 'Tao-Phyas' – two terms which designate noble Tay titles – it is likely that they were specific Phunoy language groups, as they were the only inhabitants to have been given the title of border guards. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the French military (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1916: 75; Roux 1924: 452) maintained that the King of Luang Prabang had made the Phunoy responsible for defending the frontiers of the kingdom since olden days. It is therefore possible that this nomination was consecutive to the disturbances within the principality of the Sipsong Panna, in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Distinguishing a mountain population to obtain services (intermediaries with other mountain peoples, border guards, etc.) was a phenomenon that can be found in other Tay principalities. The leaders of the principality of Nan (which corresponds to the current province of Nan, in the North East of Thailand) had attributed an identical role to the Khwen, a population living in the Vieng Phu Kha region on the borders of Müang Sing and Burma, so that they would drive back any invasions from the Shan and the Lü (Lefèvre-Pontalis 1898: 151). A Tay Lü narrative relating to the settlement of this population in southern China recounts how the land was distributed and how the servants of the leaders, the mountain peoples, were not given rice fields but the high ridges, with the mission of being the 'protective door' to the territory (Lemoine 1997: 174). Finally, according to A. Walker (1975: 333) a Shan prince from Kentung in Burma gave the Lahu and Akha warriors, two Tibeto-Burmese language groups, the responsibility of defending the borders of his principality. It should be noted that in those days, the function and title of border guard was seen as being sufficiently prestigious for the Tay Lü, neighbours of the small Phunoy language groups who had this privilege, to also want it for themselves.[18]

The gift of books and the settlements of clans

Even if it was not unusual for the Tay leaders to bestow the status of border guards onto mountain populations, it was, however, very rare that this was accompanied by the handing over of written documents, as was the case in Phongsaly. What exactly do we know about these documents?

Called 'the Books of the Land' (*püüm kondin*, Lao), and written in Lao tham,[19] these documents established the limits of the territories that the King of Luang Prabang had given to the Phunoy language groups responsible for protecting the frontiers. As these books retraced the limits of a territory, they were often in the possession of the Tay kingdoms. They explained how the borders of the territory had been established in the olden days (Phinith 1989: 195). During the nineteenth century, the King of Luang Prabang sent several books (*kondin*, Lao) showing the limits of the realm in the northern frontier region of North Laos.[20]

Twenty or so of these books were apparently given to certain clans among the small Phunoy language groups and it is not without reason that certain Phunoys refer to these books as the 'maps of the clans' (*penti khong angtchum*). The people who received the 'books' were to a certain extent beneficiaries of a delegation of royal authority on the lands they occupied, and were thus given the title of 'Masters of the Earth' (*tjao thi din*, Lao). I do not know who, at that time, were the delegates and by whom and how they were honoured. Perhaps they were chosen on the basis of criteria such as their proficiency in writing, as would seem to have been the case for the ennobled Khwen leaders of Müang Phou Kha (Lefèvre Pontalis, 1898: 147)?[21] It is also possible that the King handed over these manuscripts to local leaders, as the Phunoy maintain today. According to them, the people to whom the King gave the manuscripts came from the clan that founded the village, or a group of villages. I also do not know how territorial division was decided. The documents draw up the limits (indicated by trees, rocks or streams), and are now presented as being the domain of the clan who received these books. However, until 1950 the dimensions of these territories drawn up in the 'books', hereafter referred to as domains, varied depending on whether the village was on the left or right bank of the U River. On the left bank, each village received a manuscript and therefore became a domain in its own right, whereas on the right bank a domain was composed of an 'elder' village (*pi*, Lao) and the villages that were said to have evolved from this one.

This royal acknowledgement of the territorial rights of certain populations seems to have been the means of pacifying and consolidating the links between the central power and the outlying populations. It also fixed the limits of the realm, which had, until then, remained somewhat vague, as they were dependent on the allegiance of the leaders in these outlying areas. Finally, establishing borders was also a way of settling potentially turbulent populations on a given territory. The gift of the 'books' was also a first step in differentiating between small Phunoy language groups.

Ambivalent relations – from the Lao to the Kha Phay: the fatigue-duty system

The granting of border-guard status and the handing over of books, ratifying the rights of some of the Phunoy language groups on their territory, represented the first steps towards the integration of this region into the realm of Luang Prabang. But as these privileges were not granted to all the Phunoy language groups, this resulted in differentiation between certain groups and those who had a special relationship with the realm of Luang Prabang enjoyed a certain prestige. These groups came closer to the status of the Tay populations, and because of this, were distinguished from the whole group, pejoratively called *Kha* – a term which, as we saw above, designates non-Tay groups, but is also a generic term designating the social status of servile people or slaves. However, while these frontier guard populations emerged as a group distinct from other mountain peoples but also from other small Phunoy language groups who had not been distinguished by the King, two subgroups progressively became apparent. Despite a relative autonomy due to their special status, these small Phunoy language groups nominated as border guards were not all under

the same spheres of influence. Some of them, located in the west, were more under the domination of some small Lü *müang*, whilst those in the east were under the domination of the most Eastern *müang* Lao.

In order to understand the special relations between the groups nominated as border guards and the Tay populations, it is useful to first note that, within the Tay principalities, they were generally the relations between the Tay populations and the non-Tay inhabitants living on their outskirts. We should recall that the configuration of the *müang* living on the borders of the Luang Prabang realm reproduced the interlocking principality system which, as mentioned by J. F. Papet (1997: 221), resembles more a hierarchy of human groups rather than a strictly spatial hierarchy. The population of these principalities (*müang*) was not uniform, and the villages had neither the same status nor the same rights and obligations, as the structure of the *müang* was based on a division of the population into two groups: the free men (*thai*)[22] and the subservient subjects (*kha*). In the first group, there were on the one hand the descendants of the founders of the first settlements, living in the chief town of the *müang* or close to it (*khon müang*) and belonging to the nobility; in the second, on the other hand, were the *Tay* peasants called *phay*. This term *phay* (or *phray*) related to a fraction of the population who had the status of free men, although they were not exempt from carrying out certain tasks for the leaders of the *müang*. We shall also see that the term *phay* has been used to designate the Phunoy language populations who were nominated as border guards. Finally, the term *kha* was most often used to designate the non-Tay populations who lived autonomously in the communities but were still a part of the *müang* system, in the sense that they could be linked to the dominant population through ritual relations, services and fatigues.

In parallel to the official administrative organisation (a head *müang* ruling over the villages, which were themselves governed by leaders) another type of relationship linked the valley and the mountain populations: the *lam*. G. Aymé (1930: 72–73) defined this relationship as follows:

> Firstly, what exactly is the lam? It is a mountain fief whose leader 'father of lam' is a distinguished person belonging to the Thaï race living in the valley. In actual fact, he does not govern his fief but serves as an intermediary between the 'children of lam' (*Luk-Lam*) and the indigenous government. He centralises taxes, presents his clients petitions and in exchange, receives certain fees. The lam also corresponds to a moral need amongst the Kha who often have to be defended against their official Lu or Lao leader by a man belonging to the same race as this leader.

According to J. Halpern (1964: 121), the *lam* father used to meet the mountain peoples every time the latter had forest products to sell and salt and clothes to buy.

The configuration was as follows: the villages with a Tay population formed the centre of small principalities – the Lü or Lao *müang* – themselves integrated into the realm of Luang Prabang. These Tay villages were surrounded by populations who had different levels of servitude towards them, depending on the

status they attributed to these mountain populations. The term *Kha Phay*, by which the Tay designated the Phunoy language populations' nominated border guards, reveals a status at the crossroads of several categories: that of non-Tay groups (indicated by the epithet *kha*) who were slightly more respected than other mountain peoples as benefiting from a certain autonomy through their nomination as border guards by the King of Luang Prabang – which was why the epithet *phay* was added to *kha*.[23]

The Phongsaly populations' nominated border guards did not all have the same type of relations with the dominant Tay populations in the region and consequently, not the same rights and obligations. As we have seen, the Kha Phay occupied a portion of land crossed from the north to the south by the U River, bordered in the west by the *müang* governed by the Tay Lü (the *müang* of Bun Neua, Yo and Bun Tay) and bordered in the east by those of the Lao (Müang Khoa and Müang Hun). So depending on which side of the river the border guard populations lived, they were subject to either the Lü or Lao authorities. We will now see how these different relations between the Tay Lü, the Lao and these small groups could differentiate two groups of population within the border guards.

The populations nominated as border guards situated on the right bank of the U River were, through their geographical proximity, more directly in touch with the Lü. Theravadin Buddhism was passed on to them by the Lü, and they also had to go to one of the Lü villages to procure their salt. However, their relations proved to be potentially conflictual, or so it would appear through their oral accounts, in which the Phunoy language groups are always victorious in their conflicts with the Lü thanks to the powers of their leader Senpongsimun. P. Neis (1885: 61) also notes conflicts between the two groups in 1880: 'The Paï Pou Noï tell me that they did not manage to arrive in time for the water festival (in Luang Prabang) because they were at war with the Leues (Lü), their neighbours.'[24] The fact that the right-bank populations were organised in groups made up of several villages (which then became, after receiving the Books of the land, domains), thus forming a more elaborate political organisation than that of the other mountain peoples, enabled them to stand up to the Lü inclination to control them. The first French people exploring the region also noted that, in this area, the village heads and the leading citizens had Tay nobilary titles. P. Lefèvre-Pontalis thus mentioned 'noble and hereditary' heads (1898: 233), 'who bore as proudly as the Thaïs the noble titles of Thao and Kam' (1898: 219). This is also indicated by the names of the villages noted on the map (Sensi, Senpok, etc.) made up of the word *sen* (village head, in ancient Lao) followed by the name of the head.[25] Despite the conflicts, and perhaps because of this specific political organisation, matrimonial alliances were sometimes arranged between these border-guard populations and the Tay Lü (Aymé 1930: 38).

The relations between the Lü and the border-guard populations situated to the west of the territory – that is on the right bank of the U River – were therefore sometimes conflictual and sometimes privileged, which indicates that these populations had dealings with the Tay Lü on an almost equal status. This cannot be said of the relations between the border-guard populations on the left bank of the U River and the Lao.

The border-guard populations living on the left bank of the U River – and other Phunoy language groups, such as the Pumon and the Phongsek – were directly under the authority of the neighbouring Lao populations. The inhabitants of these villages were governed by the Lao head of the Müang Hun, for whom they regularly had to provide men apt to carry out various types of work. Under French administration, when the territorial divisions were modified, these villages were attached to the Lao town of Hatsa, and their inhabitants also had to work for their new *po'lam*. From what has been retained by the collective memory of these groups, the yoke of the *po'lam* seems to have been a heavy one. Above and beyond the tasks that had to be carried out and the tributes of forest products the left-bank border guards had to provide regularly (honey, wild cardamom), the control of the Po'lam extended to their Buddhist practices. Up until the Communist takeover of the region, the inhabitants of the left bank were not authorised to have their own bonzes in the pagodas even though they themselves had built them. Moreover, the villagers were obliged to go in turn to Müang Hun to bring part of their food to the Lao bonzes. As a result of or a reason for their submission, these border-guard populations were divided into several small villages, politically and ritually independent from each other. We have seen, in previous paragraphs, that the domain defined by the Books did not extend beyond the administrative area of a village. Another difference between the right-bank border guards and these populations was that if the latter claimed to have practised Shan Buddhism on their arrival in the region, they adopted Theravada Buddhism as it was practised by their Lao neighbours.

If at first a distinction was made between the different Phunoy language groups, between those that were nominated border guards (and called *Phay*) and those that were not, these *Kha Phay* did not, however, form a homogeneous body, and could be divided into two subgroups on the basis of their relations with the Tay populations. Those on the right bank had conflictual or privileged relations with the Lü, which reflected their relative autonomy vis-à-vis their neighbours. Those on the left bank, even though distinguished from the other *Kha* whose social status was, in the eyes of the Lao, lower than theirs, were, however, tightly controlled by the Lao and obliged, because of this, to provide services and to carry out tasks.

Further differentiation came into play, this time within the border-guard groups, when the territory occupied by certain of these populations was subject to new territorial and administrative restructuring, on the instigation first of royalty and then of the colonial administration. It was then that one of the groups was to emerge as a 'Phunoy' group.

Emergence of a Phunoy Müang and a population of the same name

When the members of the Pavie Mission, responsible for the demarcation of frontiers in the Luang Prabang realm, went to the region in 1894, the territory corresponding to the province of Phongsaly was made up of Tay and Lao *müang* of Bun Neua, Bun Tay, Hun, Khoa and Ahine, with, in the centre, a territory occupied by a fraction of the border-guard populations installed on the right bank.

This right-bank zone, without having the characteristics of a *müang* Tay (the specificities of which we have previously seen), was commonly called *Müang Phunoy*, no doubt because of the relative autonomy of its inhabitants, their rudimentary organisation in domains, the presence of ennobled leaders, and their localisation at the junction of several Tay Lü or Lao *müang*. It is this name that is entered on the map drawn up by P. Lefèvre-Pontalis in 1894. The French military that settled in the region at the beginning of the twentieth century noted that the inhabitants of the Phunoy *Müang* had a certain amount of autonomy compared to the other mountain peoples.

The term 'Phunoy *Müang*' ('the territory of small people'), with its pejorative connotation, was probably given by the Tay populations in the region; this was the term they no doubt used to name its inhabitants 'the small people' (*phu noy*). Throughout the peninsula other examples can be found of the attribution of a Tay name to a population and, by extension, to the territory it occupies. In the Shan States, J. G. Scott referred to the Lahu groups (probably the same as those that were identified as border guards) living in a *müang* called *Müang Kwi* (Kwi being the name by which the Shan designated the Lahu) (Scott and Hardiman 1900: 577). Similarly, the name of the territory occupied by the Khwen was made up of the pejorative term *kha* used by the Tai: *Müang Phu kha* (the territory of servile people).

As it appears on the map drawn up by J. Lefèvre-Pontalis, the Müang Phunoy does not include the villages situated on the left bank of the U River. P. Lefèvre-Pontalis then named this group of populations 'Kha Phay', distinguishing, however, the inhabitants of the Müang Phunoy that he called at first the 'Kha Phay of Phunoy Müang'[26] then, a few pages further on, the 'Kha Phay Phunoy'. This term was progressively employed by other military, then simplified, and at the beginning of the twentieth century the 'Kha Phay Phou Noy' (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1916) were simply called 'Kha Phunoy' (by Roux in 1924) then 'the Phunoy' (Aymé 1930).

The name attributed by the Tay populations to a territory inhabited by small groups with a particular status then became, for the colonial administrators, the ethnonym of the inhabitants of this locality. The impact of the colonial administrators in the zone was not limited to the attribution of a common name to the inhabitants of a group of villages. We shall now see how the administrative and territorial restructuring carried out by the French at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries will complete the similarity with the territory occupied by the right-bank border guards, which will from now on only be called 'Phunoy' with a Tay *müang*.

The reorganisation of the territory by the French

When, at the end of the nineteenth century, the French integrated the realms of Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champassak into French Indochina, they had to settle the problem of numerous frontier disputes existing between these ancient realms and Siam. In order to resolve these conflicts – either latent or established in numerous places – the French colonial administration decided to control the

territory and the population by the introduction or reinforcement of a pyramidal administrative system. The organisation of the Phunoy *Müang* and the political and religious powers of its inhabitants were clearly redefined through the introduction of new figures of authority. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Phunoy *Müang* had all the characteristics of a Tay political and administrative organisation. This transformation completed the process of distinguishing its inhabitants from the other groups of border guards, and cemented unions amongst the former, enabling them to be united under the term 'Phunoy'. We will now take a look at how this integration was achieved.

The treaty of 1893 obliged the Siamese to retrocede the territories on the east bank of the Mekong to the French; then, with the treaties signed with China (1895) and England (1896), French colonial power took over the Lao principalities and integrated them into French IndoChina. In 1916 the Fifth Military Territory was created, the contours of which resemble the province of Phongsaly as it is today. It was placed under both the administrative authority of the Superior Resident in Laos (Gay 1989: 215–216) and the control of the realm of Luang Prabang (Pholsena and Banomyong 2004: 9). The *müang* that made up this Fifth Military Territory, traditionally governed by the Lü and Lao leading citizens, were successively recomposed by the French administration into cantons (*tasseng*), 'delegations', and finally redivided into *müang*.

The Phunoy *müang* was also totally restructured. The ten or so domains of the right-bank Phunoy groups were regrouped into four, then five new units, the *tasseng*, which formed the *Phunoy Müang*. Then the *tasseng* were renamed 'groups' by the French, and it was the *müang* that were then called *Phunoy Tasseng* (Roux 1924: 465). Soon after this, this *tasseng* were grouped together with the Akha villages governed by the head of the Hô group mentioned previously, to form the *Phongsaly Müang* (Aymé 1930: 127).

In order to facilitate the control of populations, each *tasseng*, at least in the north of Laos, was divided into smaller circumscriptions, at the head of which 'group leaders' were nominated.[27] These 'group leaders' were chosen by the French in order to control the villages inhabited by people with the same ethnic origins. They remained, however, under the authority of the Head of the *tasseng*, generally of Tay origin. In M. Stuart-Fox's opinion (1997: 31), this reorganisation by the French government was aimed not only at controlling the mountain populations but also at directing the resentment of the populations, resulting from the tasks imposed upon them, away from the French administration and towards the leaders of the *müang*, the *tasseng* and the group, who could, if tensions became too strong, be dismissed and replaced by others.

Certain of these group leaders, shortly before (or at the time[28] of) the reorganisation of the region by the French, received titles of nobility from the King of Luang Prabang that were more prestigious than those of Sen or Tao, which certain village leaders had borne until then. According to G. Aymé (1930: 40, 58, 66), a Hô leader, an Akha leader and four – then five – Phunoy leaders received the titles *Phya* and *Panya*. These titles were hereditary, and passed on to the eldest son. The Panya received, above and beyond their title, the insignia

of their new distinction: a sword, a small drum, cymbals and a flag. These Panya often gave their name to the village in which they lived (Ban Panya Si, Ban Panya Sulinya, Ban Panya Suline). They were mainly responsible for the relations between the people under their jurisdiction and central government. They organised the collection of taxes (in kind or money), building works, and the construction and maintenance of roads and buildings reserved for the military. The Panya also acted as judges in the event of inter-village conflicts.

It is difficult to know how the Panya and the Phunoy Phya were nominated. The first four were chosen from amongst those whose ancestors had received the Books of the King, the so-called 'Masters of the Earth', but we do not know the criteria used to distinguish them from other owners of the books. The fifth Panya was not a Master of the Earth, and was nominated at a later date. The creation of the *tasseng* that he was to govern no doubt corresponds to the importance of the small village of Senpok, which the French renamed Phongsaly and that became the chief town in the Fifth Military Territory in 1921 (Aymé 1930: 123).

Each territory governed by a Panya or a Phya grouped together two or three domains of clans, but we do not know how the decisions were made to divide the territory and to regroup certain domains into cantons. Generally, the canton (*tasseng*) is an administrative unit which is part of a larger human and geographical unit – the *müang* – governed by a leader (the *tjao müang*). However, the five Phunoy Panya benefited from a greater autonomy than the other group leaders (Hô, Akha, etc.): they were not placed under the authority of a *müang* leader but were directly responsible to the *Nay Khueng* authority, the governer of the province (Aymé 1930: 40); they were therefore 'independent in law' in accordance with the terms used by G. Aymé (ibid. 72). According to Guillemet and O'Kelly, this situation was due to their status of border guards: 'the court of Luangprabang considered them to be the border guards of the kingdom and as such, always treated them in a special way, as a small State. Their leaders are the natural intermediaries between them and the King's officials' (1917: 198).

The transposition of the Tay political and administrative system to the scale of this mountain population, outlined with the ennoblement of local leaders, was completed by the French when they reorganised the administrative workings of the villages themselves. The smallest – less than twenty houses – were no longer considered to be autonomous entities, but were grouped with other small villages or with larger units. New authorities were nominated. These village authorities were given Lao titles: the position of leader was renamed *Sen long*, perhaps to mark the difference of status from that of his deputy (*sen kouan*, designated by methods of which we know nothing). People were also put in charge of districts (*sen phrasi*). H. Roux (1924: 490) indicates that these authorised persons were called *nay ng'un* – or 'head of the money' – which could indicate that their function was that of tax collector for their district. According to the Phunoy, it was the heads of a lineage that received these titles.

The ennoblement of local leaders and the pyramidal organisation of the territory (the domains integrated into the *tasseng* which were themselves part of the Müang Phunoy) brought to light social differences between and within the

Phunoy villages. The Tay administrative system was from then on transposed within the villages, whose own organisation until then had not had such a hierarchical method of organisation. Their leaders could benefit from the same prerogatives as a leader of a *tasseng* or a *müang* within their own village or group. H. Roux thus notes that the heads of villages were entitled to

> a day of service per dwelling and per year for working in their fields. Each group leader receives every three years a thang (24 kgs) of paddy per dwelling in his group. The Tjao Ban, the Quan and the Nai Ng'un (leading citizens, of which there was one for every 20 dwellings) were elected by the village inhabitants.
>
> (Roux 1924: 490)

With these nominations, it was as if the Panya behaved in the same way as the Tay Lü lords and as if the Phunoy social environment reproduced the *müang* model. The Panya controlled several villages and theoretically had the power of life and death over its subjects. He had the benefit of free labour to work his fields, he received taxes in kind and a leg of each animal hunted on his territory. He nominated the village heads, who had, in turn, certain advantages in relation to their status of leader. The powers granted by the King to the Panya tended to create certain differences between villages. Often, in those with the most inhabitants, the villages in which the Panya lived had a certain prestige as they became important centres due to the meetings that were held between all the village heads of the district and, subsequently, where various commercial transactions were carried out. This situation could correspond to that of other groups in which the relations with the Tay political systems developed a similar, highly graded organisation.

Due to this organisation on the Tay model, the French military who settled in the region often distinguished the Phunoy from other mountain groups. They considered them to be more trusting (Doze 1955: 33) or again the most 'likeable' people in the region (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1917: 324; Doze 1955: 33) – a somewhat paternalistic adjective which underlines the privileged relations that the French established with the Phunoy, 'the tribe in the Territory which was the easiest to command', concluded G. Aymé (1930: 40). They also considered them to be extremely hardworking (Roux 1924: 451), and more civilised: 'Even less than with the other Khas, the word "primitive", applied at random and wrongly to all the tribes of the race, could not be attributed to the Poi-Noi' (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1917: 198). The Phunoy were therefore chosen, amongst all the other mountain peoples, to be given military training (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1917: 324). They, with the Annamites, made up the native French guards (Roux 1924: 451; Doze 1955: 34), and were the only mountain people that were chosen to attend the French lessons given in Luang Prabang (Gay 1995: 235). Through their actions, the French helped to maintain – and accentuate – the inequality between the Phunoy and the other small Phunoy-speaking groups until 1954, with the French defeat in Dien Bien Phu.

This chapter started with the observation that the frontiers of the Phunoy group were far from clear due to the many satellite groups of both linguistically and culturally similar populations. To understand this phenomenon it was necessary, with the help of oral histories and written sources on the region, to retrace the history of the formation of all of these populations.

In sum, upon their arrival in the territory, the modern-day province of Phongsaly, the Phunoy-speaking populations were not united into one group; what counted were their ties to a village or a clan. In the second half of the nineteenth century, some of these populations were named frontier guards of the Luang Prabang realm and were then communally designated by the term 'Phay' or 'Kha Phay' – Tay terms signifying 'free man', and which marked their special status in comparison with other mountain peoples. Due to their role in defending the realm, they benefited from political and land privileges in the territories they occupied. This, therefore, was the first differentiation between on the one hand those groups nominated as frontier guards, and on the other hand Phunoy-speaking groups who were not nominated as guards. The nominated groups, however, were subdivided into two categories: the territories of some – situated on the right bank of the U River – were divided into domains consisting of several villages, while the territories of the others – on the left bank – consisted of several small, independent villages. Moreover, those on the right bank had closer contacts with the Lü Tay, with whom they had a privileged relationship, whereas the others were under Lao authority.

Because of their relative independence compared to their powerful Tay neighbours, the organisation of their domains, their right-bank territories were commonly named '*Müang* Phunoy' (the territory of little people).

The differences at the heart of the frontier-guard group were heightened when the above *müang* were reorganised by the French at the beginning of the twentieth century. The introduction of many territorial and political restructurings resulted in their perfect resemblance to the Tay *müang*, and the statute of the inhabitants changed. They were notably exempt of taxes and labour duty for their Tay neighbours, and took care of their own tax-collecting through their chiefs, knighted by the king of Luang Prabang. The villages of the other small groups, as well as those of the frontier guards on the left bank, spread over several different *müang*, united into administrative units composed of other ethnic groups, and remained administered by Tay lü or Lao dignitaries for whom they had to continue to perform different types of forced labour.

The inhabitants of Müang Phunoy, with their clearly delimited territories and their particular institutions, thus unified, had the feeling they were different from those situated at the periphery. The name of the territory that had been used to designate the inhabitants in reference to their social status ('Phu noy') was progressively taken on by the latter.

The Phunoy, as a group, constructed an identity through political and territorial configurations imposed by an outside power: that of the court of Luang Prabang. This relationship with the dominant power may have generated different identities within the Phunoy-speaking populations. On the one hand,

we can identify small Phunoy-speaking groups (Poumon, Phongsek, etc.) who were never unified by a single status (frontier guard) or by a name (the Phunoy), and whose identity referent is mainly associated with the village. On the other hand were the former frontier-guard populations, called 'Phay' by their Tay neighbours, who were divided into two groups – those from the former *müang* Phunoy, in other words the villages on the right bank, and those inhabitants of the left bank, who highlight their common history with those on the right bank (frontier guard status and the gift of 'books') and who refuse absolutely the endonym 'Phay', affirming they are 'Phunoy' just like their neighbours.

Notes

1 P. Néis (1885), P. Lefèvre-Pontalis (1898), H. Roux (1924), G. Aymé (1930), M. Doze (1955), M. Ferlus (1971), O. Evrard (1998*a*).
2 PDDP; 'projet français de développement' (French project for development), present in the district since 1996.
3 If a group is spread throughout several villages, the name used is that of the original village.
4 J. Chamberlain *et al.* (1995: 24, 201).
5 In Chamberlain's files (Chamberlain *et al.* 1995: 96, 218), the first group is identified according to L. Chazée (1995), the second according to the 1995 national census.
6 Starting with a study of a zone that encompassed a relatively small number of villages, S. Wright pointed out these dialectal variations. The inhabitants of each village in the Phongsaly region all affirm using a slightly different oral language than their neighbours. An exhaustive study would certainly have led to the identification of a number of 'languages' much higher than the official eight.
7 It would seem that the term comes from the Chinese *man*, 'barbarian', a name the Chinese gave to the inhabitants of Yunnan when they integrated the western part into the empire. According to D. K. Wyatt (1984: 13), 'Wu-man' (black barbarians) specifically designated populations of Tibetan-Burmese speakers dominating the region and who would have constituted during the seventh century, the Nan-chao realm.
8 The Phunoy retrace their arrival seven or eight generations back (one generation for them corresponds to thirty years, half the age of a man eligible to become an elder); this corroborates what H. Roux noted in 1924 when he indicated their arrival as dating back five generations.
9 Stuart-Fox (1997: 16), Alting von Geusau (2000: 126, 130).
10 A population speaking a language very similar to that of the Phunoy's is known as the Pyen at Ken Tung (Shan States) (Scott and Hardiman 1900: 717–719). According to E. Leach (1979 [1954]: 65), the word 'Hpyen' means 'mercenary' in Shan, and he suggests the Shan may have used the mountain populations to fight in their wars.
11 Sound-recording in Phunoy language made by Michel Ferlus in 1969, which was generously made available to us. Khampeng and myself have translated it into French.
12 This absence of an appellation has been observed in other peninsular populations. G. Vargyas (2000: 33), in a work on the Brou, shows the diversity of ethnonyms and other appellations regarding this population, and the confusion for the researcher who is trying to identify the 'original' or 'generic' term. He quotes a sentence by Dr Harmand that he finds particularly pertinent in answering the question. This author had written in 1877, during an exploration mission in the south of Laos: 'the Khâs [i.e. savages] … know only one thing, that is they are Khâs, but they are incapable of linking themselves to any one tribe. As I have already pointed out elswewhere, the term tribe is not exact and many of these hapless souls do not seem to understand the importance of a generic denomination. The true unit is the village' (op. cit. in Vargyas 2000: 33).

13 According to the different versions of the Chronicles given by P. Le Boulanger (1931), S. Phinith (1987) and M. Lorrillard (1992).
14 Lorrillard (1992: 18, 24).
15 Lorrillard (1992: 18).
16 Today, he is the most important figure in Phunoy history. For more information on him, see Bouté (2006).
17 Smuckarn and Breazeale (1988: 59). The Luang Prabang realm was, since the end of the eighteenth century, a vassal to Siam (former realm of Ayutthaya).
18 Guillemet and O'Kelly (1916: 75) wrote: '…the people of Boun Neua [who are Taï Lü] wrote, not so long ago, to the king of Luang Prabang: "We are in charge of guarding the borders." It is the Kha Pou-Noi and not the Lüs who are viewed by the king of Luang Prabang as being frontier guards.'
19 The Lao (and more generally the Bhouddist Taï) possess two kinds of writing: 'one, called 'tham', derived from the Pégou scripture (Burma), is used for religious texts; the other, of the 'Soukhothaï' type, comes from Khmer writing and is used for ordinary texts (Finot 1917: 25–26).
20 M. Lorrillard, personal communication.
21 These populations of Phunoy speakers were for the most part Boudhists; certain individuals had acquired the rudiments of writing, as novices of bonzes in the Lü or Lao pagodas.
22 '…L'aristocratie guerrière t'aie se distingue à ce point des populations conquises que le terme ethnique t'ai a pris en siamois le sens d' "homme libre", par opposition aux autochtones encadrés dans la société t'aie en qualité de serfs' (Cœdes 1964 [1949]: 359). (The warrior aristocracy t'aie is so different from the conquered populations that the ethnic term 't'ai' in Siamese has taken on the meaning of 'free man', in opposition to the indigenous population within the framework of the t'aie' society who were serfs.)
23 It should be noted that, contrary to other mountainous populations, the Kha Pay paid their taxes directly to the court of Luang Prabang (Neis 1885: 61).
24 P. Lefèvre-Pontalis equally notes that the Phunoy were 'animated by the same preventions as their M. Ngay neighbours against the Lus of Sipsong Panna' (1898: 230).
25 On the left bank: Ban Sensi, Ban Senboun, Ban Sensoukhoua; on the right bank: Ban Sensili, Ban Senpong, Ban Senpok, Ban Senna, Ban SenInn, etc.
26 In 1894, P. Lefèvre-Pontalis (1898: 230) wrote thus: 'The Straw Khas who constitute the largest group of M. Pou Noi are full of surprises for this tribe of mountainous Khas are utterly characteristic.'
27 This is how the French administrators named them (Aymé 1930; Roux 1924). I do not know the Lao term for this function; the elders I questioned on the subject (whether part of the Akha, Khmou, or Phunoy group) do not remember any generic term. Today, they designate these heads by by their name (SenTaPoum) or by their title (Phya Si, Panya Kham, cf. infra).
28 The *Panya* and the *Phya* Phunoy seemed to have appeared somewhere between 1894, the date at which P. Lefèvre-Pontalis arrived and who did not notice the existence of the *tasseng*, or of the heads of several villages, and 1916, the date of the first document mentioning the existence of the Phunoy dignitaries (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1921). It should be noted that these dates corroborate information gleaned on the subject from the Phunoy themselves.