

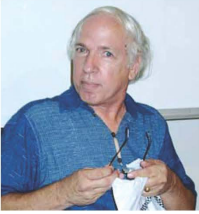


Mon-Khmer

Peoples of the Mekong Region

Edited by
Ronald D. Renard and
Anchalee Singhanetra-Renard

Editor Biographies



Ron Renard, an American from California, lived in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai for more than forty years. In Thailand, he was, at various times, a faculty member at Assumption College in Bangkok and at Payap and Chiang Mai universities in the North. His large body of research included studies of the history of the North and the Tai areas outside the country, other indigenous population groups in the area, as well as narcotic crop cultivation and control. Aside from teaching, he used his considerable expertise as an advisor to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), as well as several other international development agencies.

Ron's pioneering research on the history of the Karen people in Thailand, *Karieng: History of Karen-T'ai Relations from the Beginnings to 1923*, has inspired many Karen and other young scholars' interest in studying the ethnic minorities in the country. In addition, his published work includes six books and more than fifty academic papers, articles and reviews.

Among other distinctions, Ron was honorary editor of the *Journal of the Siam Society*, the representative of the US Library of Congress for Northern Thailand and a member of the Board of Directors of the Walter F. Vella Fund.

Ron, the only son of Joseph and Lillian Renard, was born in San Mateo, California, in 1947 and his untimely death from cancer occurred in December 2014. He was married for thirty-eight years to Dr. Anchalee Singhanetra. They have one daughter, and two grandchildren, living in California.



Anchalee Singhanetra is from Chiang Mai, in Northern Thailand. She was educated at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, California State University in Los Angeles, and the University of Hawaii, where she earned her Ph.D. She received a grant as an Alumna-in-Residence at the East-West Center in Honolulu. She was a faculty member of the Department of Geography, Chiang Mai University, for more than thirty-five years. She was a research fellow and visiting lecturer on overseas migration at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Anchalee's research interests have included population migration, labor migration, health (malaria and HIV-AIDS) and women's studies. She has been a consultant on indigenous peoples to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization, Plan International and the Thai Ministry of Public Health. She has published more than 20 reviews and papers in English. She was a visiting scholar with the Fulbright Foundation. Following her retirement, Anchalee has been deeply involved in the research reflected in this book, and in organizing its publication. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Dulabhatorn Foundation, a charity dealing with children with special needs in the North.

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UNIVERSITY PRESS



Mon-Khmer Peoples of the Mekong Region

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Abbreviations

BEFEO	Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
IRASEC	Institut de recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine, Bangkok
JBRS	Journal of the Burma Research Society
JSS	Journal of the Siam Society
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs, Vietnam
RCSD	Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University
SELAF	Société d'Etudes Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de France
SODECO/InDevelop	Social Development Consultants, consulting Firm, Sweden
TRI	Tribal Research Institute, Public Welfare Dept., Thailand
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WB	World Bank

Foreword

The Mon-Khmer project took a long journey before it was turned into a final product--the first comprehensive collection of articles on Mon-Khmer peoples of the Mekong Region. The project was started in 2001 by the first editor of the book, Dr. Ronald D. Renard, who unfortunately did not see the final product of his valuable work. During 1995-1996, Dr. Ron Renard, as the manager of the UNDP Highland People project, and I travelled to Northeast Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos to explain to representatives of ethnic communities the aim of the project and how the ethnic minorities, many of whom are Mon-Khmer, could be involved and benefit from it. It may well be that this encounter with these ethnic groups made him expand his intellectual interest to study them in addition to the Karen in Thailand whose history of integration into the Siamese state he had studied for his dissertation completed in 1980. According to my last conversation with Ron, it was during the time when he worked for the *Journal of Siam Society* in the late 1990s that he decided to embark upon the Mon-Khmer project which preoccupied the last part of his academic life.

The Mon-Khmer project, supported by a grant from Rockefeller Foundation (Bangkok) through the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University was an ambitious project involving several scholars and young researchers, indigenous Mon-Khmer as well as government officials to work with Mon-Khmer peoples in six countries of the Mekong Region. Both Ron and Dr. Anchalee Singhanetra-Renard undertook the arduous task of combing through scarce literature from different libraries, collecting empirical data to fill the gaps, and even writing

some chapters of this volume. All the articles in this volume were meticulously edited by Ron; he also contributed to the introductory narrative to Mon-Khmer studies with an extensive and up-to-date Mon-Khmer bibliography. Ron spent a lot of time personally supervising the preparation of the manuscripts, selecting photographs for illustration, and even helping with the cover design during the last few weeks before he passed away. This book is an academic legacy that he left with us.

The Mon-Khmer people represent one of the most ancient and influential groups in the entire Mekong Region; however, there has been little research looking at the remnants of this group as a whole. Historic violence in the region and the relative isolation of certain groups has made comprehensive research difficult if not impossible until recently when new roads, tourist infrastructure and increased access in Myanmar have all improved. These recent developments have allowed for increased scholarship on both the contribution of the Mon-Khmer to modern society and culture, and for connections to be made between groups now living in separate countries. Linkages between these now separate groups have primarily been reconstructed by linguistic scholars. It is acknowledged that many local languages borrow heavily from the Mon-Khmer language. It is presently estimated that more than 74 million Mon-Khmer speakers live in the Mekong Region, with the greatest concentration in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Two millennia ago, the Mon-Khmer speaking population dominated almost the entire Mekong Region. On-going studies have begun to link the Mon-Khmer people with early rice cultivation. The arrival of rice agriculture in the lower Mekong is also thought to be associated with the emergence of iron production. The significance of the Mon-Khmer contribution to present society and culture is often disguised through cultural assimilation, or buried under the written histories of people who came after them. The Mon-Khmer have also been influenced by

other cultures, for example borrowing forms of architecture, religion and concepts of kingship from the Indic culture. However, historically these influences were often assimilated into fundamentally Mon-Khmer ways of being.

By the thirteenth century, almost all the Mon-Khmer kingdoms were in decline. Recent work, drawing on a range of sources, proposes that a combination of factors including climate change and the introduction of new military and irrigation techniques contributed to the Downfall of most of the old Mon-Khmer kingdoms. The entrance of Tais, Burmese, Indo-Europeans, Han Chinese, and Malays split the group into smaller units. Many present Mon-Khmer speakers have adopted new practices and beliefs as they interacted with the new ways of being they came into contact with. At the same time, this exchange works in both directions and many Mon-Khmer traditions, most notably rice cultivation, metal work and religious practices, have profoundly impacted many other groups in the region.

Many aspects of Mon-Khmer life and beliefs remain undiscovered and undocumented and a comprehensive understanding has yet to be attained. However, this book is a significant contribution to the understanding of the Mon-Khmer presently scattered throughout the region. The collection includes interviews and detailed descriptions at the village level of areas where little or no previous academic research has taken place. The bibliographies compiled at the end represent a significant contribution to scholarship in their own right as a resource for those wishing to carry out research on the Mon-Khmer people.

The edited volume on *Mon-Khmer: Peoples of the Mekong Region* is undoubtedly a first, but significant contribution to the scholarship of Mon-Khmer peoples which should be further nurtured, encouraged and developed. Center for Ethnic Studies and Development (CESD) as well as Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable (RCSD), Faculty of

Social Sciences are privileged to be part of the effort to build a body of knowledge on ethnic groups in the Mekong Region and honored to assist Dr. Ron Renard and Dr. Anchalee Singhanetra-Renard in making their work available to scholars and researchers interested in Mon-Khmer peoples in particular, and ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia in general. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to both of them and particularly to Dr. Ron Renard whose intellectual legacy remains with us.

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Ph.D.

Center for Ethnic Studies and Development, and
Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development
Chiang Mai University
January 2015

Preface

Recent Mon-Khmer Studies

Ronald D. Renard

The articles in this book are the results of a research project from 2001-2005 on Mon-Khmer peoples in the six countries of the Mekong Region. Three groups were studied in three countries: Kmhmu' in the Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam; Suay/Kui in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Thailand, and Blang/Palaung in China, Myanmar, and Thailand. The project was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and was carried out from a base at the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, in the Social Sciences Faculty, Chiang Mai University. The authors include well-established academics, indigenous Mon-Khmer, government officials, and younger authors who were included in the project in an effort to promote



Mekong at Phnom Penh 1995

Mon-Khmer research in the future. All the authors of articles in this volume very much appreciate this support and hope that their work will contribute to a better understanding of Mon-Khmer peoples and their position in the Mekong Region countries.

Since the finalization of the papers and bibliographies in this collection in 2006, several years have passed. Much research on the Mon-Khmer, including the three main groups studied in this volume, has been carried out from 2007 onwards.

Despite this new work, the research reports in this book remain topical and relevant. The work herein is original, generally using data collected at the village level, often in areas where little academic research has been carried out before or since. The articles are mainly down-to-earth descriptive accounts derived from village work and interviews rather than testing theories as might be expected of academic work at present. This focus results from the work being carried out among many previously unstudied peoples in remote areas, the involvement of indigenous researchers whose focus has been on preserving local traditions, and the participation of several younger scholars.

A number of the authors, namely Suksavang Srimana and Bounnyun Senthavysook both from the Lao PDR, were government officials and also members of the Mon-Khmer groups they studied. The privileged insights and personal connections they possess inform their articles on the Kmhmu' and Suay, respectively, with new information stated from an indigenous point of view. Bounnyun's article, it should be noted, although concise, is essentially the first article on the Suay in Laos (in a Western language) that we are aware of. Dr. Nguyen Van Chinh and his student, Le Manh Hung (now a professionally employed academic in his own right), have carried out years of research on the Kmhmu' in Vietnam, the results of which have rarely been available in any Western language. Their reports objectively assess the impact of economic development activities they were privileged to observe first-hand among the Kmhmu'. Similarly, another academic, Achan Poomjit Ruangdej has through dedicated work and her proficiency in Khmer, won the confidence of the Cambodian Government to study the Kui (Suay) in Cambodia (the trust of whom she also has won), making her the leading outside expert on these people. The results for this book are two articles on Kui culture, one on Cambodia and one on Thailand. Anchalee Singhanetra-Renard,

from the Chiang Mai University Social Sciences Faculty, made use of a combination of access to Nam San, the heartland of the Palaung (and now closed to outside visitors) and library research, to examine the Palaung in Myanmar. Professor Qiao Henrui of the Social Science Academy of Yunnan has used the same ability to access heretofore almost unstudied Blang peoples to present new information on changes in their society.

The Mon-Khmer project recruited younger scholars (such as Hung from Vietnam) to conduct research and write reports. Among those supported were Sakunee Nattapoolwat who explored themes identified in her M.A. thesis work on Palaung (Dara'ung) in Thailand. Two other MA graduates Tivani Wongtongson from Chiang Mai University and Tim Wong from the University of Sydney, carried out research on Kmhmu' in a remote area of Nan Province (itself remote) on people never studied before.

In addition to these articles, a review of previous scholarship on the Mon-Khmer was carried out and presented in the introduction. Bibliographies, through the cooperative effort of all the researchers, were compiled on the Mon-Khmer as a whole and on the three individual groups as well as on the Wa in Myanmar. While it was not possible to update the bibliographies, they collectively represent a significant contribution to scholarship and a resource that can help scholars carrying out research on the Mon-Khmer.

My own experience, as manager of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Wa Project, gave me access to an area in Myanmar whose people are the last remaining major ethnic group in the Mekong Region to not have been described in a detailed ethnography. Travel to the area is banned to anyone not a citizen of Myanmar (except Chinese from border regions of Yunnan). While no ethnography could be drawn up for this volume, several articles, including two interviews of experts (one a Wa elder) were compiled on the Wa.

The articles and bibliographies in this volume will contribute to the new research being carried out. As increased access to areas where small Mon-Khmer groups are found becomes more possible, the articles and bibliographies in this volume will provide useful information that will help further this work on the Mon-Khmer.

Conducting the research for these articles already provided the opportunity for new cooperation between scholars from neighboring countries. As will be seen in the articles on the Kmhmu', even though Suksavang Simana was a Lao government official who had been educated in Vietnam and spoke the language fluently, he was never able to visit Kmhmu' villages in Vietnam until this project provided the opportunity. Similarly, the Vietnamese scholars learned through this project of the many works Suksavang had written enabling them a much greater field of literature on the Kmhmu' to explore.

This increased research has been facilitated by the gradual end of insurgencies in Myanmar, as well as the opening up of areas throughout the Mekong Region to tourism. This has made it possible to visit heretofore inaccessible groups, such as the Palaung (Ta-ang) in the Hsipaw (Thibaw) area. In both Myanmar and the Lao PDR, where social science research is essentially prohibited, access to remote groups is provided through innovative combinations of work with international agencies and NGOs as well (in Myanmar especially) of multiple entry business visas (which the government apparently has been quietly allowing for nearly a decade). Several master's theses and doctoral dissertations are being prepared (or have recently been completed) on Mon-Khmer groups such as the Mon and the Wa. Furthermore, graduate level research is being carried out in Myanmar increasingly as new doctoral programs are being launched and students write theses to complete degree requirements.

Two examples of new research on Mon-Khmer peoples using innovative techniques, one in a previous conflict zone, show that much can still be learned about these peoples.

The first example is the archaeological work being conducted on the Phnom Kulen plateau, about 40 kilometers northeast of Angkor. The Sdok Kok Thom inscription in Sa Kaeo Province of Thailand tells that this plateau was where the kingdom of Angkor was founded in 802 by Jayavarman II. Since 1900, French archaeologists have suspected that the ancient capital city of Mahendraparvata really was located on the plateau due to its proximity to Angkor and due also to the many temples in the area.

However, research of the area proceeded slowly due to initial French interest in Angkor itself and it was not possible to confirm their suspicions. From World War II through the coming of independence to Cambodia, and decades of war thereafter, which left much unexploded ordnance, all serious study in the area was precluded and the Kulen Plateau remained covered by dense forest and populated by shifting cultivators.

This has changed recently as peace has come to Cambodia. With the formation of a consortium based in Sydney University including French, Japanese, and other scholars along with the Australians an intensive study of Phnom Kulen is being undertaken. One main objective of the study was to conduct an aerial survey of the plateau using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology. This remote sensing technology, involving airborne imaging linked with GPS, creates 3D topographic models of the ground even where there is dense vegetation.

In 2012, evidence was found indicating that Phnom Kulen was almost surely the site of Mahendraparvata and that it was far grander than previously imagined. The research team identified what they believe are broad highways several kilometers long that are oriented along cardinal points and that appear to be linked to sacred sites. The operation also identified a complex water supply and distribution system. Further research is forthcoming since the actual urban area extended beyond the 30 square kilometer area surveyed with LiDAR in 2012.

How the Khmer center moved down to the Angkor region remains a matter for future study. However, the second example of new research being done is yielding ideas on how the kingdom came to an end. In this, a team of scientists has reconstructed 759 years of climate change in the Angkor region through the examination of growth rings on a cypress tree, *Fokienia hodginsii*, in Vietnam's Bidoup Nui Ba National Park, about 700 kilometers away from Angkor.

Normally this sort of research is not possible in tropical areas because growth rings do not exhibit annual variations because the climate does not change significantly from season to season. However, this species of cypress does, enabling the researchers to date moisture levels from 1250 to 2008. The researchers discovered that there were two long droughts, from the 1330s to the 1360s and from the 1400s to the 1420s.

These droughts, especially the latter period which was more severe than the first, may have compromised agricultural production of the area weakening the resilience of the Khmer population to resist invaders. In the 1350s, Siamese from Ayutthaya laid siege to Angkor. Then in 1431 they conquered the Khmer capital. The evidence from the tree rings raises the possibility that environmental change may have been an important factor.

The authors of these research reports and bibliographies as well as the staff of the Center for Ethnic Studies and Development at Chiang Mai University hope that the work in this volume will contribute to future research. Understanding the Mon-Khmer people is essential to make sense of all the countries of the Mekong Region. Increased work on these peoples, both past and present, is sure to provide a more comprehensive conception of local cultures and ways of life.

The authors wish to thank the director of the Center, Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaputi, for his support and encouragement throughout this lengthy endeavor. Thanks are also due to Kanchana Kulpisithicharoen, Chanida Puranapun, and Fongjan Chaithima of RCSD who provided extensive administrative support throughout the project. Joe Rickson edited an earlier version of the manuscript for which we are most grateful. Acarima Nanthanasit provided indispensable assistance in the final editing and proofing and pre-publication preparation of this lengthy volume. We are also indebted to John O'Toole, Rosalia Sciortino, and Alan Feinstein, all of the Rockefeller Foundation when this project was being formulated and funded.

These papers were edited so as to conform to a common standard and formatting protocol. However, the individual authors set the basic format for whether they used footnotes or endnotes or some combination of the two. A certain amount of editing was carried out on the footnotes so that the same amount of information appeared in the footnotes or endnotes in the body of the text. All the bibliographies in the individual papers as well as the ethnic group bibliographies follow a common format.



Performers from Rattanakiri in Phnom Penh

Mon-Khmer Peoples and Thai Culture

Ronald D. Renard

You see them at the heights of civilization, their broad faces carved from stone at the Bayon, staring across the centuries from when Mon-Khmer peoples dominated Mainland Southeast Asia. From old Mon sites such as the Shwedagon in Rangoon to Hariphunchai in the Ping River Valley to temples the entire length of Vietnam, their images endure.



Khmer at the Bayon



Bayon 1996



Mon-style Chedi
at Wat Phrathat Hariphunchai 1991

You see them in the rice paddies practicing an agriculture that started flourishing when these people dominated the landscape and when their culture was supreme. All the elements of paddy rice cultivation were in place in Mon-Khmer areas two thousand years ago. Although no one knows who in the world pioneered lowland rice agriculture, Mon-Khmer peoples must have been the first in Southeast Asia. From them the practice spread to other groups entering the region afterwards.

Their millennia-old stone jars in Xieng Khouang and the menhirs at Hin Tang to the northwest on the road to Xam Neua hold their dead and mark their role in the past. The Old Lua graves along the Thai-Burma border yielding outstanding northern Thai celadon and Ming Blue and White symbolize their prosperity. The finds at Ban Chiang, even with much lost to the illegal artifacts trade, were so rich that many Thais began wanting to change their history. Instead of saying that they were descended from migrants fleeing Dali after a Mongol invasion, they suggested that the Thais were always in Thailand and, by implication, places like Ban Chiang had been Thai.



Plain of Jars 2003

The iron and bronzeware of the region bespeak their advancement at a time when most others in the region were hunters and gatherers. The Mon-Khmer built cities. They conveyed Indic culture to the peoples of the region. Wat Phu on the Mekong south of Champasak was an early Saivaite temple that later became Buddhist, similar to what happened at Angkor and the other Khmer sites.

All the Tai and Lao groups that became Buddhist did so after being influenced by different Mon-Khmer groups. After Hariphunchai, where Mon Buddhism flourished, came Chiang Mai and other northern Thai states, many of which adopted the belief in Buddhism. Similarly, Sukhothai was a part of the Angkor Empire before it was an independent state.

You hear their voices in all the region's languages. Besides national languages like Khmer and Vietnamese, the vocabularies of many local languages are rich with Mon-Khmer borrowings from common words such as for nose and bridge to loftier "civilized" terms. For years, students at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University took a course on Khmer



Lopburi Phra Prang Sam Yot 2010

influences on the Thai language. So many are the borrowings and re-borrowings through continued interactions between Khmer and Thai that is quite unlike any other Tai dialect, making it all but unintelligible when traveling among small Tai groups in China, Shan State, and northern Vietnam, where even Southern Thai would be more functional.

And when they voice their rolling “r’s”, a characteristic of Mon-Khmer speakers from Phnom Penh to Pang Kham in the Wa Region of Shan State, you are hearing sounds that have resonated here for centuries. Lost when the Mon-Khmer lexicon is borrowed, they still echo across Mainland Southeast Asia.

The expressiveness of Mon-Khmer languages, the many ways to denote motion, sound, feeling, emotion and gesture, resonate in all the languages indigenous to the region. In some Mon-Khmer languages, these “expressives” are so common that they form a separate lexical category,¹ and this also reverberates throughout the entire region.

¹ DiCanio. 2005. “Expressive Alliteration in Mon and Khmer.”



Sekong Katu 1995



Wa village 2003



Rattanakiri people in Phnom Penh 1995



Tampuan and their house Rattanakiri 1995

Stories—there are stories told by Mon-Khmer throughout the area that repeat old traditions and relive ancient accounts. Take, for example, a story the Kmhmu' in Laos and Vietnam tell. After a three-year pregnancy, the woman delivered two large gourds. After some days, she fell asleep against one of gourds. When she awoke, she discovered people: Tai, Lu,

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Mon-Khmer Peoples of the Mekong Region

Mon-Khmer Peoples are found in all six Mekong countries: Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. This volume includes over a dozen studies of the Blang/Palaung, Kmhmu', and Kui/Suai, as well as several reports on the Wa. Also included are bibliographies on each of these groups as well as the Mon-Khmer as a whole. Authors include ethnic Mon-Khmer, academics young and old, and government officials. Taking advantage of increased opportunities for research and for visiting remote areas in the Region, this book is intended to increase awareness of these peoples and to encourage more research.



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