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GEOGRAPHIC SUPPORT STUDY

THE HAW PEOPLE OF NORTH VIETNAM



CIA/RR GS 63-5

June 1963

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Research and Reports

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THE HAW PEOPLE OF NORTH VIETNAM*

I. General

The Haw of North Vietnam are the descendants of Yunnanese Lolo who moved into northern Vietnam before the late 19th century. One large-scale Lolo invasion was repulsed in the 16th century. Another major attack between 1870 and 1874 penetrated as far south as northern Thailand and Luang Prabang. French reprisals drove most of the invaders back into Yunnan, but a number remained in what is now North Vietnam. Others have come more recently from Yunnan and have stayed to trade and to cultivate the land.

II. Population and Distribution

The Government of North Vietnam reported that there were 6,898 members of the Haw tribe within its borders in 1960, comprising 0.04 percent of the total population. Of this total, 3,331 were male and 3,567, female.

The Haw are concentrated near the North Vietnam -- Yunnan border in two major nodes. The larger of these concentrations is in the extreme northwest near Lai Chau, whereas the other is east of Ha Giang (see Map 29462).

* In literature relating to the Haw people of North Vietnam several tribal names have been used. One name, Lolo, that is widely used is of Chinese origin and normally refers to all of the people of the Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group. The Tibeto-Burmese tribes of Laos are called Ho, whereas those residing in North Vietnam near Lai Chau are often referred to as Ho-nhi, Houni, Ouo-ni, or Wo-ni. The term "Lolo" literally refers to the little baskets that are hung on the roof pole of a Lolo house as part of a religious ritual. The Haw themselves dislike the term and refer to their original tribe as Dji or Gni. In order to avoid confusion, the term "Haw" will be used in this report to denote all of the Lolo people of North Vietnam.

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Although the Haw form a minor percentage of the total population of North Vietnam, closely related Lolo groups form a significant ethnic minority group in China. Chinese Communist sources recently estimated that there are 3,400,000 Lolo living in Yunnan and Szechuan. It also has been estimated that 5,000 Ho live in Laos, and 650 tribesmen of the Lolo group in northern Thailand.

III. Culture

The language of the Haw belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family, being monosyllabic with intonations. There are reported to be dialectal differences in the forms that are spoken by the Haw tribes of North Vietnam. The Lolo of Yunnan have developed a simple script, but it has never been widely used and, reportedly, few of the Haw are familiar with it.

Most of the Haw are animists who worship evil spirits primarily. Many of them also worship their ancestors, and figurines of ancestors are often displayed, one for each generation, within their houses. Most villages have a shaman who orally transmits the traditions of the tribe. The traditional religious practices of the Haw, however, have been influenced and modified by the neighboring Meo and Yao. The Haw normally cremate their dead.

The Haw of North Vietnam are generally of Mongoloid stock. The men normally go barefooted and wear a bun of hair on the top of the head. Haw dress is similar to that of the Yunnanese Chinese. The women generally wear long, pleated skirts and wear kerchiefs on their heads.

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The Haw are divided into two major social classes: The Black Bones (man zi), who form the upper class, or nobility; and the White Bones (mung za), who form the peasant class. There has been almost no inter-marriage between the classes. Because the Haw of North Vietnam are mostly White Bones, class distinction is of minor significance. Furthermore, their social system is breaking down not only as a result of being far removed from their homeland in Yunnan but also because of contact with their neighbors of other tribes. Marriage seems to be a more respected institution among the Haw than among the neighboring tribes, and adultery is considered to be criminal. Haw society is based upon the clan system, which is credited with having preserved much of the solidarity of the Black Bones. The Haw are warlike and are given to blood feuds, perhaps an outgrowth of clan loyalties. In general, the Haw have been strongly influenced by the Meo and Yao, and many of the social customs that developed in China have been altered in North Vietnam. Reportedly, the Haw use large quantities of alcohol and opium.

Haw villages are normally constructed on hillsides at elevations above 4,000 feet. Haw houses usually have three rooms; two types of construction have been observed. The poorer Haw tend to construct their houses on the ground and to use cornstalks or mud to build the low walls and straw to build the roofs. In the wealthier villages the Haw use lumber and build

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their houses on piles, after the fashion of their Tai neighbors. Livestock normally is kept under such houses, and Haw villages have been noted for their unsanitary condition. Generally, Haw villages are not far from the fields. Destruction of nearby forests is common.

The Haw have a complex economy, although they are primarily agriculturalists. Apparently, many Haw have adopted a sedentary pattern of agriculture that is superior in many ways to that of their neighbors. Wherever possible they use oxen for plowing. In some rugged areas of North Vietnam, however, they are forced to use a digging stick. They are one of the few tribal groups that raise a fodder crop (buckwheat). The basic diet consists of rice, maize, and vegetables. The Haw cultivate both mountain (dryland) rice and wet rice. They also grow peas, beans, cucumbers, and eggplant, and fruits such as pears, peaches, grapefruit, and guava, as well as nuts.

The Haw raise livestock -- horses, cattle, oxen, pigs, and poultry -- extensively, and some keep bees. Like most mountain people, they also hunt and fish.

The Haw generally are regarded as shrewd businessmen. They are active traders who make extensive use of the barter system. Most of their transactions involve agricultural products. The Haw probably are best known, however, for their involvement in the opium traffic between China and Southeast

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Asia. In the past, Haw caravans from Yunnan went deep into Laos and North Vietnam in search of opium. Even today, many Haw live in the villages of other tribes, where they deal in both alcohol and opium. It is probably safe to assume that the Haw are still deeply involved in the opium traffic, although the Government of North Vietnam has taken steps to control it, probably through the North Vietnamese state trading organization (Mau Dich). It is reported that the opium of North Vietnam is of high quality and is well-received on the international market.

IV. Contacts

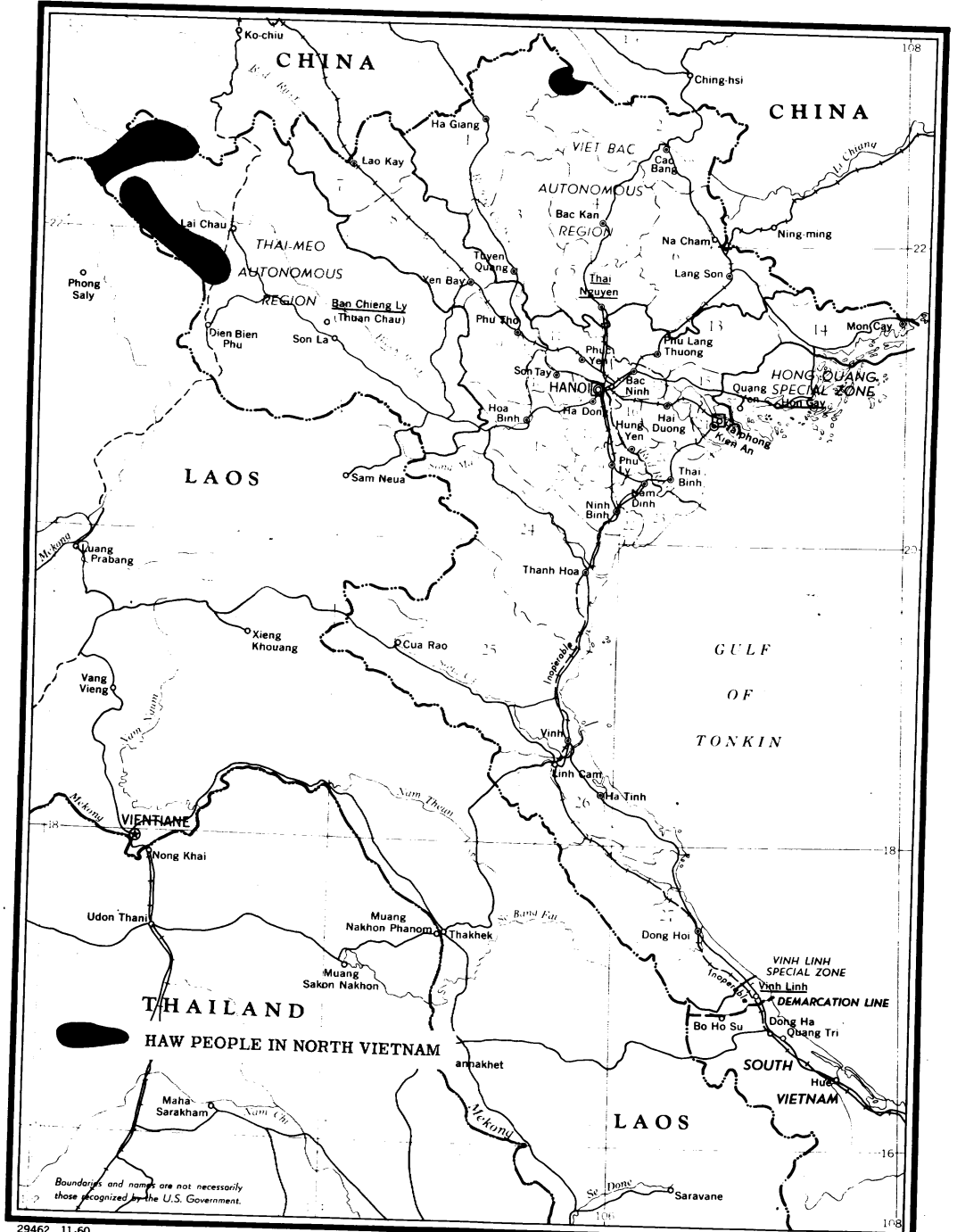
It is difficult to estimate the extent of contacts between the Haw and the Vietnamese today. In the past, contact has been limited, partly because the Haw live in a remote, mountainous section of the country, whereas the Vietnamese live in the lowlands. The caption for the accompanying photograph (see p. 6) suggests that the present regime in North Vietnam is attempting to establish greater contact with its minority groups.

The Haw have been greatly influenced by the neighboring tribes, such as the Tai, Meo, and Yao. It has been reported that the Haw are so subservient to these tribes that they are subjected to both forced labor and tithing.

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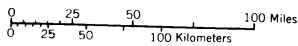


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NORTH VIETNAM

- International boundary
- Autonomous region or special zone boundary
- Province boundary
- ⊕ National capital
- ⊙ Thai Nguyen Region or zone capital
- ⊙ Province capital
- Special city
- +— Railroad
- Road
- - - Track or trail



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As translated from the caption in the March 1963 edition of the North Vietnamese publication Vietnam, the description of this photograph reads:

This is the view of the Hanoi daily Thoi Moi (New Times) of Miss Nguyen thi Van, Ha Giang Province, accordionist of the local Song and Dance Ensemble of Lolo minority origin. Young and gifted art workers like Nguyen thi Van have emerged in increasing numbers among the minority peoples of North Vietnam.

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