

BAN POUNG

Ban Poug is a village located by the roadside that is about 32 km from Houei Sai to Muong Tha Fa and Muong Luang Namtha. Now it is the borderland (village) between the Vientiane Government and the Pathet Lao. Ban Poug is an old village full of edible crops and plenty of beautiful forests.

Background : Originally the villagers of Ban Poug were Leu, who came from Sibsong Phanna Leu, in Ban Bosa, Muong Ou. The word Sibsong Phanna is the name of a region.

According to elders, Phanna means Muong; and Sibsong Phanna Leu means 12 Leu Muongs which consisted of:

- 1) Muong Xieng Houng;
- 2) Muong Ou Tai;
- 3) Muong Ou Neua;
- 4) Muong La;
- 5) Muong Phong;
- 6) Muong Long;
- 7) Muong Mang;
- 8) Muong Che;
- 9) Muong Xieng Cheuang;
- 10) Muong Hai;
- 11) Muong Xieng Tong;
- 12) Muong Houne.

All these Muongs were under the administration of Muong Xieng Houng. Every year each Muong must donate salt and some other kind of food to Muong Xieng Houng. At one time the Red Chinese Ho attacked Muong Ou while it was ruled by Mom Eua Mom Mahachayen, who fought back courageously.^{2.} When they discovered that they could not

resist any longer, the Leu left the town and went towards
the south in B. E. 2429 which corresponded to 1886^{3.}; they
settled down in Muong La. Phagna Khouha and Sene Luang
Khamleu who were the Commander-in-Chiefs of the army
called out to people asking them to go back and fight with
the Ho in Muong Ou. So they tried to fight against the Ho
once again, but as the Ho outnumbered them, they were
defeated and went back to Muong La again. Even in Muong
La they were afraid that the Red Chinese Ho would follow
them, so they evacuated further down in B. E. 2130 which
corresponded to 1887. They followed the road that was
located between Muong Luang Namtha and Muong Houei Sai.
Doi Lakkham.
When they arrived at Lakkham Hill, which was formerly the
borderland between China and Thailand, they inscribed some
letters on a large stone and buried in in the center of the
hill to mark a borderline. This hill was located between
Muong Phookha and Muong Luang Namtha. At that time we
were a Protectorate of Thailand, and when Phagna Chi Tong^{4.}
of Muong Xieng Khong (Thailand) learned of this evacuation,
he sent out his courtiers to receive the refugees and brought
them to Muong Xieng Khong in B. E. 2431 which corresponded

to 1888. At their arrival in Xieng Khong, the refugees divided into two groups: one group settled in Thong Douk (Thailand) and another group settled in Thong Mot (Thailand).^{5.}

They lived in these two villages for about three years. As living condition was rather difficult, because of the shortage of land for farming, they moved to a new place called Houei Meng (Thailand) in B.E. 2434 which corresponded to 1891.^{6.}

They stayed in this place for about two years, that is until B.E. 2436 which corresponded to 1893. (Then Muong Ou[?] fell under the power of the Red Chinese Ho.) When there was no more fighting Chao Muong Ou decided to take his people back to Muong Ou again, but only some of them returned. On their way back to Muong Ou they discovered a fertile land full of natural resources that looked quite promising. So they decided to settle there instead of going back to Muong Ou. They named the new village as Ban Tha Fa that we still have today.^{7.}

Those who remained in Houei Meng lived there comfortably. Some Youan stole cattle from some other villages and sold them at a low price to these people. With these they could expand their cattle rearing greatly. The owners of the stolen animals came after them, so there were disputes

among these villages that were being carried on for 20 years. Some people who could not stand the situation any longer left the village. They crossed the road that connected Houei Sai to Tha Fa. They found an appropriate location where they settled down and called it Ban Nong Luang; now it is located about 10 km from Ban Phimounsinh to Nam Ngao. At this site the village was flooded every year. So they lived there for about five years, then left to look for another place to settle in. They found a place that looked fertile and quite promising; it was full of farm land and water. They settled here and named it as Ban Pong in B.E. 2459 which corresponded to 1916, and remained in this village until today. It was named as Ban Pong because it was surrounded by many Poungs (swamps).

Geographical Characteristics: Ban Pong is located about 32 km north-east of Muong Houei Sai, along the bank of Nam Ngao. It has a surface of about 600 square meters, and is quite a large village. It is a flat land with a few hills scattered here and there. The soil is sort of sandy clay that is suitable to crop farming, and there is plenty of land that can be used as paddy fields.

Climate: Ban Pong has two seasons: dry season and rainy season. The dry season starts from October to May. In the beginning of the dry season the climate is a little cooler than in Muong Houei Sai. In the beginning of the rainy season the climate is rather warm. In the middle of this season there is plenty of rain water that enables the people to do farming and growing rice.

Transportation: From Ban Houei Sai to Ban Pong there is only surface travel by following the road Houei Sai-Luang Namtha. There are also several paths leading from Ban Pong to other villages.

Population: Ban Pong is an old village made up of 43 houses. According to official census taken in 1973-74 there are 450 people, and all of them are Leu.

Administration: Ban Pong has a democratic system of administration under the King, Chao Sisavang Vatthana. Nai Ban and Tasseng are also assigned to this village; they are assisted by some other civil servants.

Economics: With its warm and humid climate Ban Pong

is full of forests and different kinds of crops grown in the village are of good quality. It has many kinds of good lumber for the construction of houses such as Mai Dou, Mai Khene, Mai Peuai, and Mai Gngang.

Industry: There is no industry. Some of the local products consist of weaved baskets and weaved clothes.

Profession: Most of the people are farmers who sell their rice products to some other villages. Each year a family produces about 100 barrels of rice.^{8.} Some people are doing blacksmithing, but it is not their profession. Women are usually doing the work of cotton or silk weaving to make Sin (Lao skirts) and local shirts. These are also sent to other villages for sale.

Education: There is an opportunity for each child to attend the school since the government had set up a primary school in the village. Each year there are about 120 boy and girl students. Some of these students continue their education in some other places as suitable.

Religion: The villagers of Ban Pong believe in Buddhism.^{9.}

They give out alms on religious days that are important. But we do not understand why the Lao months and the Leu months are not corresponded. For example, the 5th month for the Lao is the 6th month for the Leu. But ceremonies on religious days do fall on the same day, for example, the Beginning of Buddhist Lent (Khao Vatsa) takes place on the 8th month with the full moon; on this same day the Leu also celebrate their Khao Vatsa, but to them it is the 9th month. Leu has no Rice Growing Day, so they substitute it with "Boun Phaveth", a festival commemorating Buddha in his Incarnation before Enlightenment. On the day that the Leu celebrate their Buddha's Incarnation, the Lao celebrates their Rice Growing Day. The reason that "Boun Phaveth" is celebrated in the middle of the Buddhist Lent is that - at the time when they were living in Muong Ou they were always fighting with each other during the dry season that they had no time for the festival, so they postponed it to the middle of the Buddhist Lent, as it was usually raining, and no fighting was possible. This is still so today. There is no festival at all on the 3rd month. Differences concerning the counting of the months are told

by elders that there was a period when the Leu King wanted to have a second wife and appointed the wedding day on the 4th month. But the king who had a strong passion could not wait any longer. On the 3rd month he told his people that it was the 4th month, so that he could get married right away. As the people could not object to the king they agreed that the 3rd month was the 4th month, so today the Leu is one month ahead of the Lao.

Customs and Traditions: The villagers of Ban Pong are good-hearted and friendly. They receive visitors warmly, and preserve their customs and traditions strictly. In the village the people live in groups of houses. While they were in Muong Ou, the people were divided into 7 groups as follows:

1. Thai Heuane Pane Ly. They were called as such because they had helped Pane Khang Pane Ly (some kind of fish trap).
2. Thai Heuane Kang. Since they constructed their houses in the middle of the village they were called people of Heuane Kang.
3. Thai Heuane Ko Kham. These people had large tamarin ^{10.}

trees in front of their houses, so they were called people of Heuane Ko Kham.

4. Thai Heuane Houa Ban. They were called as such because they constructed their houses at the head of the village.
5. Thai Heuane Nam Houei. They were called as such because they constructed their houses along Nam Houei (brooks).
6. Thai Heuane Khang Pa. They were called as such because they constructed their houses near the forests.
7. Thai Heuane Nai Khonh. They were called as such because they were assigned with the responsibility of arranging for ceremonies making offerings to the spirits. They were also assigned to divide people into groups or house groups. This system of house grouping is still practiced today.

In Ban Pong only three groups of houses are left; these are: Thai Heuane Pane Ly, Thai Heuane Kang, and Thai Heuane Ko Kham. Houses were grouped together because at that time the people had to pay taxes to the government in Muong Xieng Houg. And the villagers paid

in house groups to make it easy for the Nai Ban and Tasseng. The people of Ban Pong are referred to as Leu Thai Bo because at the time when they were living in Muong Ou, they dug salt mine and sold it to other villages. This salt mine was called Bo Sa, so they are called Thai Bo Sa until today.

Customs in regard to birth: When a woman is pregnant she would stop doing hard work and rests as much as possible until the baby is born. As soon as the baby is born it would be washed with warm water, put in a cradle, and placed at the center of the entrance door. This is being passed over, back and forth, three times while calling out to the spirits from all corners of the world that if they want the baby they should come and take it right then. If they do not take it on that day, they must not come on any other day since then it would be a human being's offspring whom they have raised with love; they also request that their offspring grows up beautifully and happily. After that there will be what can be called as "a month's confinement". In this month's confinement, the mother has to sit exposed

to fire by using a rattan stool. A bowl of burning charcoal is put under the rattan stool and the mother sits on the stool twice a day for a month. She has to drink warm water and eats only food that is not too peppery or too salty. Before salt can be eaten it has to be burned first. She eats ginger instead of chilli. Her food consists of ginger and lettuce soup, a kind of vegetable called "Phak Vane"; only some kinds of fish are allowed such as Pa Chat, Pa Pak, Pa Kem Deng, Pa Kho, and Pa Khing. None of the meat kind is allowed. If food is not available on a certain day, she eats rice with boiled water. She is supposed to live in this way for a month; and the child is to be breastfed. On the last day of this "month's confinement", the mother would wash her hair and the baby's hair has to be shaved off. Then there would be a baci for both mother and child, followed by a little entertainment. After this day she can, gradually, eat some other kinds of food until finally she can eat everything. This custom of confinement and refrainment is followed strictly with the birth of each child.

Funeral: If someone is dead in the village, everybody comes

to the dead person's house for a wake. The period of time regarding the keeping of corpses at home depends on the individual; there is no definite rule on this. Usually corpses are buried since there is no furnace. When it is sure that a person is dead, they wash him, change his clothes, and sit him up in a rattan chair; then one of them would say: "Please sit right here!". After that the corpse is laid down at the center of the house. Some people would sit watching the corpse while others see to the making of the casket. Before putting the corpse into the casket, pieces of silvers are put into the mouth for three days. Both hands of the dead person are joined together holding a conical container made of banana leaves used to hold flowers and candles. Both toes are tied together with cotton string. Then the corpse is put into the casket. Two relatives of the dead person are assigned to take food tray to one end of the casket and call to the corpse to come and eat. In the evening, monks are invited to come and chant prayers. They do this everyday until the corpse is buried. Before the casket is taken to the cemetery, a boiled egg and a glass of water are given to the corpse. Two persons are

assigned to feed the corpse. Rice and egg are cut into pieces by a sword and thrown under the house. After this the casket is carried to the cemetery. It is carried by four people with the help of a pair of Mai Xang.¹² It is led by a monk and followed by others in a procession. Women and children go as far as the edge of the village and return. Only men can go into the cemetery with the monk. Before burying prayers are chanted; then the corpse is placed in the hole. Many things are put in and some people would call out to the corpse that everything has been provide here for his comfort, that he should not go back and worry his children or relatives at home. He is told to go and to be born again in a good, happy place. Then the casket is buried. The lumber used in carrying the casket are again used in making the fence around the hole.^{13.}

On their way back the people would stop at a lake to wash their hands or faces or take a bath before returning home. That night they would have another wake (gathering at the house of the dead person) in order to prepare for alms giving the following morning. In the preparation two persons are told to go cut a kind of leaf (Ban Thong) to

← check dao word

wrap the food. This leaf should not be touched by hand, but cut off by a sword.^{14.} Chopsticks are used in picking the food into the leaf, wrap and then tie by hand into a bunch. They use a sword to place the food package into a tray and this is to be taken to the Wat. Afterwards household goods^{15.} are taken out and placed at the center of the house, and two people started singing all night until dawn. When they hear the cock's crow three times they would stop singing and put all the things back into place.

Three days later a baci is arranged for the dead person's brothers and sisters.^{16.} This baci consists of boiled chicken and some money from each of his brothers and sisters. The two people specifically assigned with the work as mentioned above have to kill a chicken, donate a set of clothes and some money for the baci. At each religious ceremony the relatives would make offerings to the dead persons which would be carried on for one year, for example, at the Beginning of the Buddhist Lent, a tray of food would be offered; at the celebration of Buddha's last Incarnation, a clothes' house is offered; on Rice Donation Day, a palace is offered; and at the End of Buddhist Lent, a tray of food

is offered. This alms giving is going on for a year, then no more alms would be given to the dead. This custom is still practiced until today.

17.

Ceremony to enter the priesthood: When someone wants to enter the priesthood, they find for him a father called "Pho Nhok". Then things used in the ceremony are acquired. Money needed for the buying of these things are equally shared by his "Pho Nhok" and his "Natural Father". Everyday before the ceremony he has to learn words of prayers from a novice in the Wat. Then a good day for the occasion is selected. One day before the ceremony, people gather at the house of the priest-to-be with some entertainment until dawn. On the day of the ceremony, the procession is marched to the Wat to be ordained there. In the procession, the priest-to-be sits on the back side of the neck of his "Pho Nhok"; if he is too big the "Pho Nhok" carries him on his back. He is ordained at the Wat by a novice. For three days he has to sleep at the cloister instead of the monks' dormitory; he carries water for the old novice to bathe, takes care of Buddhist Statues, and chants prayers. After that he can sleep in the monks' dormitory with the novice.

Marriage: When a boy and a girl fall in love, the boy's parents would come and ask for the girl's hand. Then a day is set to be what can be called as an "engagement day". There are two kinds of engagement. In the first one nothing is guaranteed; in the second when one of the parties wants a divorce, he has to pay either in money or in property. In the first type of engagement, some of the boy's properties are carried to the girl's house - about 30-40 pole-loads¹⁸. (a load consists of 2 baskets about 60 kg). With this type of engagement, the boy or the girl who wants to get a divorce can do so without losing any money. In the second type of engagement there are rice, tobacco, catch (a tanning substance chewed with betel), betel leaves, fruits and a package of salt. In this type of engagement if one of the parties wants to get a divorce he has to lose some property. Rice was used as an engagement property because formerly people did not always have money. As they were farmers the appropriate thing for them to use was rice; but if they have some money, that can also be used. On the morning of the wedding day the bride gets up early and goes to the groom's house with some of her

← look up dictionary:

friends to clean the house and make some preparations. Later on a pig is killed and food is prepared for the people who come to the baci. After the baci they would eat together and enjoy themselves with a little entertainment as accustomed to. If the bride and groom are from the same village, the bride goes and lives in the groom's house because they consider the girl as the seller and the groom as the buyer; so the boy brings the girl home and is responsible in caring for his family. If the boy comes from another village the people would march in a procession leading him to the bride's home, followed by a baci as mentioned above. He has to live in his wife's house until the appropriate time comes, when he is ready to say goodbye to the wife's parents and takes her away to his hometown. *

Another custom is that if a girl is pregnant out of wedlock there will be a fine of 7 Thep. But in case where the couple has a baby after they have been married for about 5-6 months, they will have to pay a fine of 5 Thep. If they have a baby after 7-11 months of marriage, they must pay a fine of 3 Thep. This custom is still practiced today.

* other notes: The father's of bride and groom sign an agreement; a document of exchanges. A person playing the flute goes about singing songs and collecting money. What is money used for.

Rice Baci (The calling back of the soul or the guardian spirit of rice). Every year there will be rice harvesting; then rice is taken from the rice-field into the storehouse. After rice is harvested, an auspicious day is to be chosen for the baci. Before the day of the baci, some rice has to be taken out of the storehouse in the amount that would last for three days. This amount of rice is reserved for the next three days because after the baci they are forbidden to take any rice out of the storehouse for three days. Some kinds of fish, cocks and hens are boiled and put in the baci tray with some sweets or desserts, flowers and candles. Some hulled rice is put in a bowl to see if its soul is coming back. If the rice grains are in pairs such as a pair of four, a pair of eight, or a pair of 12, they are "Khao Khouane". Then the Khao Khouane and some cooked rice are put in the storehouse. Four posts are put at the four corners of the storehouse. A long cotton strand is wound around the storehouse and prayers are chanted, calling back the rice soul and they also prayed that this storehouse should always be full with rice. The cause that led to this baci was that -- long, long time ago the

rice grain was as big as three fistfuls, and the people did not have to grow it. At the harvesting time the villagers would construct storehouses and rice would just flew into the storehouses. The people had only to husk the rice and cooked it. One day at a harvesting time, rice flew into the incompleated storehouse of a widow that was under construction.^{19.}

The widow was so angry that she took a piece of wood and hit the rice so hard that the rice grains were broken down into small grains of the size that we have today. Rice from all other storehouses were also angry that all rice grains flew away into the jungles. So after that there was a shortage of rice that the people had to go find something else to eat such as root crops and fruits. About a 100 years later two daughters of the King went fishing and the elder one caught a fish (Pa Nai Kham).^{20.} This "Pa Nai Kham"^{21.} had a lover called "Pa Kang". "Pa Kang" found a grain of rice called "Nang Khosok" to exchange for "Pa Nai Kham". He told the two girls that it was rice and a magical cure for all human beings. It would cure any kind of disease, both for adults and children. He told them to keep it in the field for future use. The two sisters took the rice and

return the fish to "Thao Pa Kang". When they returned home they took some of the rice to eat and keep some in the field. But they thought that the soul of rice was still wandering in the jungles, so they prepared the calling back of the rice's soul referred to as rice baci or "Soukhouane Khao", that is still practiced today.

There is also the baci for the house if some members of the family often get sick, because they believe that the house is unlucky. In this case a priest would be called to come and chant prayers to drive away the evil spirits. Various baxis are believed to be a praise and encouragement. If someone is often sick and easily frightened, a baci would be arranged for that person. There are two kinds of baci. In the first kind it is a small baci in which a chicken is killed or eggs are boiled to baci a weak person. The second baci is a big one in which chickens or pigs are killed. ^{22.} This is a baci for the one who has serious illness. There is also a baci for cattle. ^{23.} It is arranged as a gratitude to these animals.

Faith: At the time of our ancestors at Muong Ou, the villagers boiled salt and sold it as a means of earning

a living. The salt mine was called Bo Sa, and was discovered by the four brothers of Lao Theung named Bak Sy, Bak Be, Bak Keo, and Bak Kham. These four brothers were trying to cross a river with a goat; they were on their way to sell that goat. When they reached the middle of the river, the goat stopped walking and cried aloud. They could not do anything to get it moved. So they went back, and thought that this must be a salt mine. They took some water and boiled it and discovered that it was really salt. So they began producing salt in this place. Not long afterwards the four brothers died. As they were still worried about this salt mine when they died, they were born again as the guardian spirits of the salt mine.

Then the Leu people came to make salt out of this mine and it seemed that people always take turn to get sick, and this happened quite often. So they prayed to the spirits that they would worshipped them and make offerings to them. The spirits told one of the villagers in his dream that they should offer a buffalo whose horns turned downwards. As there was no such buffalo in the village, they assigned some of the villagers to steal it

from other village. When they got the buffalo into the village, they made a "Khalam" (forbiddance) at the edge of the village. By this "Khalam" no strangers could enter the village. This day is considered as the offering day until today. When they left Muong Ou they brought the spirits with them and, today, still make offerings to them. ^{25.}

Now there are five offerings in a year: in the 2nd month there are three offerings - first pig offering, 2nd and 3rd are fish offerings. In the 8th month there are two offerings - first, pig offering, and 2nd, fish offering. On these offering days strangers are forbidden to enter their homes. If any stranger insists on going in he would have to pay a fine of 7 Thep.^{26.} On these offering days too the villagers are not supposed to go out.

- Usually they wear cotton dresses.
- Some people ride on horseback, while some others walk.
- Weapons consist of guns, swords, cross and bows.
- Villagers sometimes act as soldiers; the fighting lasts about 9-10 years.
- While they were refugees in Muong La, they could live among the local people comfortably; and they helped

each other in doing their work.

- At Muong La the local villagers had the intention of helping the refugees so they could have something to eat and they could travel comfortably.
- Thong Douk was located a little beyond Thong Ngieo, on the right.
- They moved from Thong Douk because there were not enough farm land or paddy field. The land consists of small brooks, so there was a shortage of water.
- When the Leu were dispersed only some left the village. Those who remained behind continued farming.
- In 1893 Muong Ou was under Xieng Houng.
- They were evacuated to Xieng Khong.
- At that time Houei Sai was
- When they first arrived the village was under Houei Sai.
- Men's jobs consisted of plowing the fields, raking the fields, and fencing the gardens.
- Women's jobs consisted of carrying water, husking rice, cooking, transplanting rice seedlings, harvesting rice, weaving and making clothes.
- Today nothing has been changed.

Materia Medica

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Dysentery: Boil a kind of grass called "Gna Hou Noi" and drink the water.

Constipation: Wrap in a piece of cloth : leaf of "Mak Tot", a kind of oyster, the skin of broiled "Mak Lin Mai", pepper, ground ginger. Boil water and dip this wrapping into the pot and drink the water.

Diabetes: Boil a kind of wood^{29.} and drink the water.

Sorethroat: Boil together: the shell of an oyster, Mak Tong Teui, Mak Pai Nane, Mak Hia, Nom Na, a kind of bird's comb, a cock's comb, wild fowl's comb, and a snake's neck. Drink the water.

Madness: Combine a leaf of a type of fruit crop called Mak Kheua Ba and a large onion. Grind these and grill half of this. Then combine the cooked and uncooked portions together and smear on the body of the mad person, from head to foot.

Diarrhea: Eat grilled liver.

- Now Thai Heuan Ban Ii has 9 houses, Thei Heuane Kang has 23 houses, and Thai Heuane Ko Kham has 10 houses.

From bark to root to leaf of shrubs, tribal healers drew on a rich array of botanicals about them. Tribal lore and tribal trial-and-error yielded the medicines. Tribes recognized both natural and supernatural sources of ailments. Treatment was by individual practitioners - herbalists who handled symptoms and medicine men who dealt w/ origins, and by the "social" approach of medicine societies.

If someone does something wrong the elders in the village will judge and charge the fine according to the seriousness of the wrongdoing.

Formerly there was no color, but was later made up as follows:

Red: Burn Mai Meut; mix the ash with stick lac and boil.

Yellow: Ground cumin combined with any sour substance and boil.

Black: Soak Tonh Hom in a large basin until it gets rotten.

This has to be filtered before it can be used.

White: Burn cattle dung, then soak in water, filter this and use.

Light color: Grind Mak Seth, then add any kind of sour substance and use in washing.

Green: Dye with black color, then dye with yellow.

- Coffee trees are brought from
- Before a house is constructed, magic prayers are chanted into the water of Sompay, then sprayed with branch leaves all over the site. In constructing the house there should be "special columns" called "Sao Thao, Sao Nang" (male and female columns). Then sugar cane, Ta Leo, and some leaves are tied to these posts; and the house can

be constructed.

- While they were in Muong Ou they believed in Buddhism which were brought from the Lao.