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History of:

I Kow

Ban :

Pha Tae

Information given by:

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Interpreted by:

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The Kow are a group of ethnic people who don't know their history very well. This is because they are uneducated people who can remember things happened no more than 60 or 70 years ago. I asked them their first position. They said that they were from china. They moved from china to Muong Sing and then from Muong Sing to their present position. No-body knows how far it is from Muong Sing to china. They don't even know which province or which part of china they came from.

There were two Tassengs at Muong Bo. There were 27 Ko villages under these two I Ko Tassengs. It was about 1968-69 that the P. L. and north Vietnamese soldiers invaded that area and 36 families moved to this area, Pha Tae, as refugees. Their job in Muong Sing and at Pha Tae here are similar, that is, they are all high rice field farmers or shifting farmers.

Culture:

The I Ko's culture is very good. I don't mean that their culture is well-sighted, but I mean that these people still keep their old culture that they did centuries ago. These people believe in Phii or spirit. Therefore, I can say that, their religion is animism.

The I Ko have 3 bouns or celebrations. Every single celebration takes place on the 15th of the lunar month, but they don't take place at the same time. The first celebration which is the New year celebration takes place on the 15th of the third month. The second one is the villaged spirit-celebration

and this takes place on the 15th of the 6th month. The third celebration is also a villaged spirit celebration, but it is very different from the second and it takes place on a difference of date, that is, it takes place on the 15th of the ninth month.

The third month celebration:

This celebration is supposed to be the I Ko's yearly celebration. It takes place on the 15th of the third lunar month in every year. Every year at this time, every I Ko house kills a pig, a buffalo or several chickens to eat. Every one puts new clothes on. Boys play tops in the day and play with girls at night. At night they make a special stage where boys and girls are all present. They make a pig circle by holding each other's hands. They sing songs and dance their dancings. Their music at this time is to strike the bottom of empty bamboo tubes for water hardly on the ground. This celebration lasts for about 2 or 3 days.

The 6th month celebration:

This celebration is to make them happy and not being sick. This celebration is divided into 3 parts which must be in the same day. The first part is to raise the spirits in the rivers especially the river that they get water from. It's said that spirits give them water. So they have to raise the spirits by killing a couple of chickens and a bottle of wine. This is to make the water spirits give them more water. The second part is the entrance spirit of that village. Two doors are made this time. One is at the front of the entry path to the village and a second one is at the back of the entry path to the village. Two big logs about $2\frac{1}{2}$ meters high are set at the two sides of the road. Around

these two logs a picture of a woman who has both a womb and a penis. This is to make the evil spirits that will take woman's or man's life love this picture so that they will forget to enter into the village to destroy or make the villagers sick or dead. This spirit is raised by killing a pig, a couple of chickens and a bottle of wine. These logs along the each side of the road where they make this kind of spirit clearly shows how old that village is by counting the logs of one side of the road. Each year of this time they set up a new log at each side of the road. If one of the logs falls down they have to have it replaced. Replacing this fallen log they have to kill a pig and a couple of chickens and a bottle of wine, too. This is to make the spirit happy and not going into the village to make the people sick.

The picture with both the womb and the penis is by far to make evil spirits think that the picture is a guard. This picture is the I Ko's god as they all refer to it. Anyone who doesn't know anything when he passes this door and he touches one of the logs, cut or chop it a little bit or takes a rest by leaning to it, he will have made the guard-spirit there sorry or cruel to the villagers. He has to lose a pig, a couple of chickens and a bottle of wine to the villagers to make the spirits happy and retake care of them. When this celebration is held the I Ko say they are worshipping their God. This means that this celebration is the most important one among the three.

The third part is to call all the spirits, for instance, tree-spirits, mountain-spirits, forested-spirits and so on to come and eat their meal and take care of them. This meal is made by killing a pig a couple of chickens, and egg and a bottle of wine.

When this celebrated date is reached and the celebration is held, nobody in the village can go out. Conversely, nobody in other villages can come in. If anyone comes in or goes out that day, he'll pay everything that the villagers have done or killed so that they can form a second celebration which is supposed to make the spirits happy.

The ninth month celebration:

This celebration is also one of the village celebrations. It is a very important celebration for the I Ko. It is not to worship their God, but it is as important as the second part of the 6th month celebration. This celebration is also formed to call the village spirits or the good spirits to come to eat what they have made or prepared. At this time they will ask the good spirits to take care of the villagers and chase away the evil spirits.

This celebration takes at least 3 days to complete it, that is, the celebration lasts for at least three days. Before the celebration is held a seesaw shaped like the figure below is formed first:

String

Bench.

Seesaw.

Girls, boys, young or old of that village will come and play this seesaw. Girls and boys will dance around this seesaw. They can enjoy themselves as much as they want to.

People from other villages can come and join the dancing. However, they have no right to go straight to a girl and kiss or dance with her at the time they arrive. The people who are guests must sit on the benches that have been prepared for them. They will stay there until one of the villagers takes a girl to them. Now they can dance or kiss this girl as much as they like but not other ones. If more girls come they can dance around the benches but not around the seesaw. They can not even play with the seesaw.

At this celebration, a pig, a chicken and a bottle of wine are used to raise the spirits. The pig and the chicken are killed. After the spirits are called to eat what they've prepared, the meal is served to everyone of the people who come to see the celebration.

After the celebration is ended, the string is cut away. Now nobody can go and touch or chop it. If anyone chops or touches it, he has to pay a pig, a chicken and a bottle of wine to the villagers.

The seesaw must be under very good care. It is said that if anyone wants the I Ko to move away from their own village in one or two days, he just chops down the trees or logs that make the seesaw. I asked one of the Pho Ban why they don't set up a new one to replace the fallen one. They said that it is impossible because if the trees are all chopped down the spirits will be very angry and they have nothing else to make the spirits happy. It is for this

reason that they must move immediately to another place and ask or call the spirits of the new position to help them.

Marriage:

It is quite easy for young girls and young boys to get intouch with each other. This is because their parents cannot control them very much. It is not because of the children are bad and the parents cannot control, but it's because of their culture. Usually the boys and the girls can contact each other easily to be fiance during the three I Ko's celebrations, the 3th, 6th and 9th months celebrations.

Sexual association between a girl and a boy can not be taken place in either the girl's or the boy's house. In a house, a special quarter is prepared for boys and girls talk to each other. However, they can do nothing but talking at this location. If both or either the boy or the girl want their sexual intercourse, they have to go out of the house first.

Now, if the boy wants to marry the girl, he just steals her with out letting her parents know about it. At first, the couple can not go straight into the boy's parent's house. He has to take his wife to one of his relatives' house and then let his parents know that he has taken a wife to his relative's house. The next day, the boy's mother will boil an egg and take the egg and some rice to the daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law will eat the egg and the rice. After having eaten the egg and the rice, she will be given a white skirt, a white towel to wrap around her head and a spotted shirt. Now she changes her clothes and both (the new couple) are taken to the boy's parents' house. On the way to the house, the villagers will splash the couple with the mixture of water and buffalo

manure. The reason for this is to wash away the couple's evil spirits and their sins. When the couple enter the house, they will sit in the middle of the house. The boy's mother will give her daughter-in-law a boiled egg. This egg is used to call her spirits to come and stay with her so that she will not get sick. She will give it to her husband. The husband will take out the shell of the egg and eat a little bit. The rest is given to the wife to eat. While the couple are sharing the egg, the people in the house, especially the father and mother, will kill a 5 to 10 days chicken. This chicken is to call the house spirits to come and eat it and take care of the couple. After that, the chicken is given to the couple to eat.

Now a big pig is ready to kill for the villagers to eat, that is, to celebrate the couple to be husband and wife. When everything is prepared, the husband will take a plate of rice and meat to everyone who comes to the meal one by one. Each of the guests will give him one or two piastre of the French Indo-chinese money.

If the couple want the girl's parents to come and join this party, they can call them to. However, if they don't want to, the girl's parents will have no chance to come to join it. There will be no bride price for the girl's parents. If the girl's parents want to give their daughter, dowry, they just send it to her at the boy's parents' house or ask the daughter to go to get it. The girl must always stay with the boy and never stay with her parents.

The new couple can stay in the boy's parents' house only before their celebrated party. After that they must go out to build a small house that they can spend their nights there. If it's not so, they will have no chance to spend even

one night in the boy's parents' house. This is reasoned that the house spirits don't like a couple forming sexual association in a I Ko's house if they are not the top person in that house. I asked them where this association must take place. The answer is simply to be in the forest or out of a house. My second question is what they will do if the sexual intercourse is taken place in a house which is not his. The first word that I hear is to kill the couple. However, when I ask them again quietly, the Pho Ban tells me that the couple have to give the house owner a one or two year pig, 3 chickens and a bottle of wine to make the house spirits give the couple excuse and not to harm the people in the house.

The wife has Twins:

It is really very bad luck if a couple have twins. Having twins is the worst thing for this ethnic group. Anytime they worship their god is firstly to ask god not to give the couple twins. The tensest rule in an E Kow village for their culture is having twins. If a couple happens to have twins. The two twins will be killed by the villagers. The villagers put the children out side of the house. Everyone of that village will throw very hot-red-charcoal and hot ashes over the children. This will be done until the children are dead. Further, it will be said that this couple have taken very bad and dangerous spirits into the village. Therefore, they must be chased away to stay in the forest in a duration of one year round. This couple can take nothing with them but their clothes over the body at present. The couple's food will be like a wild animal, that is, they will have no change to eat rice or meat. If, unluckily, they are dead in the forest because of starvation or being attacked, that is their end.

The materials in the couple's house will be all shaved by the villagers and will never be returned to the couple, though they come back after having spent the year round in the forest.

To me, this is like a case of murder. However, to the E Kow, it is their customs. I was very interested in it. The worst thing for the writer is that he cannot get the history of the first twins to the last ones. Anyway, this might give the readers something about this ethnic group.

Rice Field's Rule:

This that I'm going write is not about the dispute for an area. However, it is the for bidden of a rice field after the rice has been planted in the field.

In every E Kow celebration, you will never see them kill a bull or a cow for the celebration. It is said that their spirits never like to have a cow or a bull for them. A cow or a bull is killed only when there is no celebration, that is, the villagers just kill it for food and there must be no talking about Phii or spirits at the time of killing the animal.

It is said that thousands of years ago an unknown guy had taken his cattle through an E Kow's rice field, that is, the road passed through the rice field. This made the rice all die out. The field owner had to kill two chickens and a bottle of wine to ask the field spirits to help him. This helped him. So, now, if anyone who has cattle with him cannot go past an E Kow's rice field. If he does, he has to pay a couple of chickens and a bottle of wine to the rice owner.

This ethnic group seem to have their own rules. However, their rules are quite new because they always refer to court. This means that they have been under the Lao supervisors quite long ago and that is why they don't know their very old rules. What I've asked from the are written below step by step.

1. Divorcement:

Divorcement can occur in many ways. Some are tough while others are soft. They mostly occurs by because of the husband who dislikes the wife when she gets old or it might be because the wife commits adultery with somone. Marriage is very easy for the E Kow because the man doesn't pay for his wife, therefore, divorce is also very easy. It is said that a man who is not afraid of God or sin can have a wife in two or three days with no problem. If there is divorcement, the husband will always have the children, though he doesn't want them. Everything in the house including the wife's dowry will all belong to the husband. If the children are all boys and the husband wants to divorce his wife, he has to pay five piastre of the French - Indochinese currency. However, if the wife wants to divorce the husband because he is a bad husband or doesn't love her, she has to pay 5 piastres to him (she never has the children.)

If all the children are girls. The one who wants the divorcement has to pay 3 piastres to the one who denies the divorcement.

If the husband is good but the husband and the wife have to dovrce, the dowry or materials in the house can be shared or divided. However, this is dependent upon the husband.

The most important thing on earth is human's life. If one kill another the E Kow will make the murder pay 60 piastres. This is the highest price for a human. Now if the wife commits alultery with someone, the husband will never remarry her.

She will be given to the man and force him to pay sixty piastres to the husband. The man has to buy a pig, the biggest pig in that village and kill it to make phui or raise the village spirits that he has done what he shouldn't do. This pig is also served to the judges, for instance, Pho Ban or Tasseng. He must apologize these people for what he has done wrong. He has also kill two chickens for the woman's husband to raise the house spirits. The wife gets nothing from her husband.

2. Untruth:

If anyone borrows your money and appoint a certain date to return to money to you. However, the appointment is useless because the man who borrows your is very poor. "Now," Mr. ASA said, "just take him to work for you. Don't care about what he spent the money for." Force him to kill a pig and a bottle of wine for the judges, old villagers or Pho Ban.

If Mr. A borrows Mr. B's horse. Mr. B is told that the horse will be used to carry rice from Mr. A's rice field to his house. However, he uses the horse to carry materials for trade. If this is discovered, Mr. A will be taken to the Pho Ban. All the money Mr. A got from this trip will be divided into half. Each one will take half of it. Mr. A also has to kill a pig for the Pho Ban and the old villagers to ask apologize from them that he will never be an untruth guy.

3. Murder:

Talking about murderer, these people always refer to court. Before going to court they force the murderer to pay 60 piastres for the dead's relatives and kill a pig for the discovering of the truth. After this, the murder must be taken to court to tell the lawyers there that the murderer is that guy. This shows that the E Kow can never go through the Lao's court.

4. Criminals:

This world is never clear and clean and that is why the E Kow also have criminals. It is said that if one steals something he must pay back the same kind of thing that he has stolen. If the thief is so poor, he can be taken to work for you or let him give the owner pigs or chickens if he has them.

If Mr. A steals one ear of corn from Mr. B's born. What he has to pay Mr. B is two ears of corn for the first time, two ears of corn for the second time and so on until Mr. A is exiled. However, each single time Mr. A has to kill a pig (big pig) and a bottle of wine for the Pho Bans or Tasseng. If he has no pigs he has to ask someone to help him and he'll work for the helper until it is enough for the helper.

If Mr. A steals 5000k from Mr. B. Mr. A has to be taken to court, Pho Ban or Tasseng. He must pay Mr. B the same amount of money. If he has no money, he must give Mr. B something else which has a cost of 5,000k. He has also to kill a pig (big pig) and a bottle of wine for the judges to ask them to give him an excuse. If Mr. A does it again a second time, he has to pay double plus a big pig and a bottle of wine. If he does it again a third time, he must pay the same as the second time. This time he must be exiled to somewhere else. Every single rule of the E Kow seems to be similar to each other, that is, they make the thief pay the same amount for the first time and double for last, say, 10th time.

5. Disputes of Lands:

It is said that the E Kow don't have many disputes between land areas. It is because the land is large, that is, the forest is large and they have their own marks around the field they need to. The marks are on the back of the trees, similar to the Meo's. The picture look like this:

The person whose marks are the oldest is always the real land owner. But, if both marks seem to have the same age the land must be divided into two parts or just let noone to settle a field in it.

If the land is at an area of having no trees, the land owner must mark like this:

mark.

Land.

The purpose is the same as what I just written up here. Or it is simply said that the oldest mark always be the real land owner.