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In many parts of the world, like Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, there are many people's in remote areas who are far removed from modern society. They have no access to proper education and economic well being. They have few contacts with other people outside their domains. Yet they are unique in their way and desperately eager to maintain the culture and way of life of their ancestors. Certain modernization activities such as the building of new infrastructure, the development of new industries in ethnic regions, and cross border trade and tourism also threaten ethnic communities. If national governments and international agencies do not base their actions on knowledge and understanding of the ethnic people and their situation the results would be harmful and not to jeopardise their way of living. Ethnologically, Myanmar is one of the richest countries in the world, More than a hundred ethnic groups are presently scattered all over the country. It was described by Sir George Scott. GUBSS, Vol.I, 1990, as follows:

"... *There is in this* particular region a collection of races diverse in feature, language and customs such as cannot, perhaps, be paralled in any other parts of the world."

Ethnic minorities make up of 30 percent of Myanmar population. They occupy a large portion of Myanmar and represent a large number of social groups. Since ancient times there have been great differences in their history, level of socio-economic development, custom, belief and religion. Therefore, the customs, culture, beliefs and language of the different races differ according to their geographical location, climate and communication.

North eastern Kyaington and areas along the Myanmar-China, Myanmar – Laos and Myanmar – Thailand borders are known for their life degree at ethnic complexity. On the border of Myanmar and Kyaington, is the principal town in the State and the center of administration and trade. Kyaington is an interesting where there are many culturally distinct people such as Lu, Hkun, Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Yuan, Haw, Hmong, Yao and Wa, struggling in a hostile environment to maintain their beliefs, customs and way of life against the presure of rapidly changing society. Kyaington State is largest in the Trans-Thanlwin (Saween) area and the capital of the eastern Shan State, situated between 20^o 30' and 22^o 10' north and 98^o 30' and 101^o 9' east. It has an area of about 12,000 square miles and a population of about 600,000. It lies between the Mekong River on the east and Thanlwin

¹ This paper is an excerpt from the paper entitled "A Brief Account of Akha, Lahu and Lisu in Kyaington Area, Myanmar" that I submitted to the University of Michigan in the form of mid-term paper in 2002-2003 academic year.

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River on the west. Two thirds of the total area of Kyaington lies in the basin of the Mekong. The remaining one-third is in the Thanlwin(Salween) River basin and the average elevation is around 5,000 feet. Numerous ethnic groups settled along these rivers and along the Kyaington area many years ago.

Multi-ethnic groups are scattered over the Kyaington area, which is composed of Mong Yang, Mong Tong, Mong Pu, Mong Hsat, Mong Hkah, Mong Hpyak, Tachilek, Mong Ping, Mong La, Mong Pyin and Mong Pauk. Many ethnic groups such as Akha, Lahu, Lisu and others may be found in this region. These ethnic groups also live in the areas of Chiang Sean, Chiang Lar, Chiang Lab and Jinghung (Kyainghung)right up into Hsip Hsaung Panna, western Laos and north of Chiang Mai.

All these ethnic minorities migrated from China to this region long ago and their date of migration is uncertain. The classical Pali name of Kyaington State is **Khemaratta** and its capital, Kyaington city is **Tungapuri**. In the old days, Kyaington was also called the 32 cities of Gon's (Tai Hkun)because the people here speak the Hkun dialect. Since the time of Myanmar (Burmese) Kingdom, Kyaington existed as a state on her own in the furthest region of the eastern Thanlwin. The Shan Sawbwas(Sao Phas) paid tribute to the Myanmar King but they were never directly ruled or administered. Thus the Myanmar Kings were careful in dealing with the hereditary chiefs and constantly tried to incorporate Kyaington into the Myanmar empire.

After the British annexation of Upper Myanmar, the Shan States became a part of Myanmar proper, forming the Federated Shan State. During the Japanese occupation period, Kyaington was for years controlled by the Thai government. After independence in 1948, all major ethnic States joined the Union of Myanmar. In January 1950, **Kuomintang** Kuomintang(KMT) forces crossed over into Myanmar territory in Kyaington State.

According to historical records, regions of southwestern China and mainland Southeast Asia were settled by many ethnic people since ancient times. Many ethnic groups of Yunnan(China) moved southward and settled in Myanmar long ago. Yunnan shares a long common border with Myanmar, and many ethnic groups that live in Yunnan can also be found in Myanmar, such as Akha, Lahu, Lisu and many others. Trans-Thanlwin ethnic groups have experienced the same natural environment, live in small in clusters of hamlets, develop their own cultures, follow the same tradition that their ancestors practiced and hence, have developed a unique culture distinct from the urbanized people of Myanmar.

These patterns may be seen clearly in the culture of Akha, Lahu and Lisu who have a common linguistic root with Yi(Lo-Lo) which is part of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The people who live in the border areas of Yunnan and Szechun provinces of China were the great ancestors of present day of Akha, Lahu and Lisu. The Akha and Lahu migrated in stages from the province of Yunnan, China into Myanmar. The Lisu migrated from the head of the Thanlwin River into northern Myanmar and then Thailand Kyaington

state, Myanmar. Only minor segments of those three tribes live in Thailand but a much larger population of each groups has experience in Myanmar. Akha, Lahu and Lisu preferred to settle in the mountainous region of the Kyaington area in basically the same natural environment as their ancestors made choice. These tribal groups still remain concentrated in the larger part of Kyaington. The question here is when did they enter Myanmar? In fact, they migrated into this country so long ago no one could determine exactly the actual time of their coming. According to C.C.Lewis, 1919, **The Tribes of Burma(Myanmar)**.

"We shall never be able to trace all the people who now inhabit Burma(Myanmar) back fully to their originally seats, or say precisely where they had their beginning."

Untill recent times, the level of social economic and cultural development of these ethnic group of Kyaington area was very low. In this paper I would like to have a close study of Akha in the Kyaington area. I traced their route of migration from their original home to their present sites. Their language and linguistic peculiarities have been documented. The linguistic origins, roots, similarities have been recorded. Their culture, belief, mode of dress have been described by ethonologists.

The important aspect of this study is their economic activities, that is, the procurement of their daily necessities from hunting and farming. It is important to understand their traditional modes of agriculture, including the slash-and-burn system which sustain their economic life. It is quite necessary to know the present system before important schemes can be made for their future good.

Akha

The Akha are one of the Tibeto-Burman groups which have been certain linguistic relationships to the Lahu and Lisu. The Akha refer to themselves by this name, though the Shan and Myanmar call them Kaw, or E-Kaw, a term which they find derogatory. It is generally believed that Akha originated in Yunnan. During the last 2000 years, the Akha migrated southward from their original home. The reasons for moving southward are not clearly known but some believe that it was due to a search for a warmer climate in which the cultivation of corps would provide a better yield. By the middle of the 19th century a great number of Akha were already settled the Kyaington area.

In 1984, the number of Akha population reached 180,000 and it is still increasing with an annual birth rate of about 2%. In 1995 about 200,000 lived in the kengtung area. Myanmar's current Akha population is limited mainly to the Kyaington district. They also live in northern Thailand especially in the Phya Thai, Hin Teck region, Mae Sai and Mae Chan in Chiang Rai and Chaing Mai provinces. Some Akha spread in Laos and Vietnam. In

the early 20th century only a few Akha lived in Thailand, but in recently years there has been heavy migration into Thailand to escape the terrible economic and political problems their society.

The Akha are proud of their connection to Chinese, when they call "Muchus" which means brother. However their facial features are quite distinctive from the Chinese. The Akha have no recorded history concerning their origin but they have numerous legends, proverbs, myths and rituals that give some information about who they are and what Akha means. In short they are versed in their genealogy. There are eight major groups of Akha of Myanmar with distinctive styles of dress: U Lo, Lomi, Musa, Meu-I, Adzho, Paruee, Makha and Patch.

The basic economic needs of the Akha depend on agriculture which, as in other tribal societies, is usually based on slash – and – burn or swidden cultivation. Thus, the agricultural methods of the Akha in remote areas are considered to be primitive. Thus, the agricultural methods of the Akha in remote areas considered to be primitive. There is not much recent improvement in their methods. Their basic crops are rice, maize, millet, sugar cane, buckwheat, tobacco, tea some cotton and opium. They keep pigs, chickens, horses, cattle and a few buffaloes. They also raise dogs(which are eaten)and are used for ceremonies and sell for cash. The Akha also have their own distinctive handicrafts and weavings, selling them in the Kyaington market-day.

Akha village are usually situated on mountains below the villages of the Hmong, Lisu and Lahu, in houses built on stilts along the mountainside. The people build their houses of bamboo and thatch raised above the level of the ground. Akha houses have no windows, and the roof is constructed in such a way that the eaves come down very low on both sides. They build their houses on watersheds with no ravines or other natural resources of water, so they have to go down to lower valleys and carry water back up the hill for their daily needs. They say their houses are built in this manner to protect them from water spirits.

In Kyaington area, the average village has about 30 or 50 houses. Every Akha village builds a spirit – gate at the entrance of village. The gate way called (La Kaung) demarcates the two domains of spirits and humans. This gate way is important for the Akha. Whenever an Akha returns from the forest or anywhere else it is customary to enter the village through the spirit gate so that they can be cleaned.

For the Akha, the most important social unit is the family. The clan is the next unit of importance. It provides a base for contact with the outside society. The members of an Akha community are under the two village leaders. The first is the village headman. The headman serves as the village administrators, the shaman and the guardian of the traditions. The second village leader conducts all the external affairs of the village. Since long ago, Akha were under the control of Shan Sawbwas' administration.

The Akha are famous for their women's head – dresses, which differ from clan to clan and resemble very heavy silver helmets. The man's dress is almost the same as that of the Shan or the Chinese: dark blue or black coats and trousers, black or occasionally red turbans, the only relief to the general sombreness. The dress of women is much more distinctive, as always with the hill tribes, and varies according to the different clans. In general it consists of a short coat and a kilt of suit that reaches from the waist half way down to knee. Most Akha clothing is made of home spin cotton. Akha women spend much time spinning and weaving cotton cloth.

The Akha are basically animistic in their belief, but nowadays Christianity has made a headway deep into Akha society. Since the 19th century Christian missionaries, mainly American Baptists, were active among the hill tribes of Kyaington area and Myanmar. The American Baptist missions to Myanmar began work in 1813. There are many native Akha Catholic priests, nuns, and Baptist pastors and they extend their faith far and wide. The offerings fed the ancestors, who in turn will feed or care for the family by providing abundant rice, wealth, good health, and everything else necessary for the continuation of the line. Each ancestral offering must begin on an auspicious day. The village swinging day is a day when boys and girls alike swing happily on a specially built swing. A variety of sacrificed pigs and fowls are offered to the spirits on Akha auspicious days.

Since the 18th century, Kyaington has been an important commercial centre home to many ethnic groups. Available literature indicates that it was a major commercial, cultural and political centre in the region. Many ethnic groups in the area are believed to have migrated from China. However, since 1960 ethnic groups have been gradually migrating from Kyaington to northern Thailand because commercial activities in Thailand are more attractive. It seems that they have maintained primitive agricultural practices such as the slash – and – burn method or *taungya* cultivation which has not yielded enough produce that is economically viable.

In fact, the produce especially rice yielded is just enough to satisfy the needs of the family. Other produce such as vegetables, sweet potato, green peas, cucumbers, French beans, pumpkins and chili are usually sold at the weekend market that give them a very small amount of market days. This money is usually spent on a *Khawpoat* and *Khaungye*. Hence more often than not, they go back to the hills without money from the weekend market trade. It is obvious that what little money they make is used to make ends meet.

It seems that they have not developed any alternative sustainable economic industry except weaving and handicrafts. Many believe that this has led to people from this region to grow opium poppy, and now the region produces approximately 20% of world heroin. This has created huge social problems, especially those associated with heroin syndicates and money laundering in the area. This is compounded by the fact that two major ethnic groups,

in particular Shan and Karen have been fighting with the central Myanmar government for more than 40 years to establish independent states.

If we look at all ethnic hill tribes in this area generally, it is obvious that they are very poor and many of them are illiterate. Literacy and numeric rate in the area is much lower than of Myanmar as a whole(90%). The children have no access to proper educational system. There is no proper infrastructure, social welfare system or public housing. Although one can say that this is not an isolated or exceptional situation in developing countries, it is important to recognize the extreme social and economic deprivation they experience.

Since colonial days governments have made attempts to develop these remote areas of the Shan States, but no significant improvements has been seen. This is partially due to inadequate funds allocated and in part due to bureaucratic misuse of these funds. There have been allegations that funds were misappropriated by government officials.

Since independence economic growth in the region has been very slow due to a couple of reasons. Firstly, the Kuomintang (KMT) group had invaded the Kyaington area in the 1950s and occupied it for a couple of years. The Myanmar military successfully defeated them later. However, there were some ethnic groups who sympathized or shared ideology with the KMT, which has created outbreaks of ethnic insurgencies after the KMT left. During that time the Communist Party of Burma(CPB)gained a stronghold in the region and made alliance with ethnic insurgent groups to wage guerilla warfare against the central socialist government. Other small insurgent groups such as the Lahu National Organization(LNO) and Lahu National United Party(LNUP) had also emerged. In addition, the major ethnic insurgent groups of Shan States, the Shan State Army(SSA), Shan United Revolution Army(SURA) together with minor ethnic insurgent groups based on the Thai side of the border actively engaged in a very profitable opium trade. A large chunk of this income has been used to buy sophisticated weapons to fight against the central government of Myanmar.

In early and mid 1990s, the military government of Myanmar made peace with many ethnic insurgent groups through political dialogue and negotiation. Some have been defeated by the Myanmar military and made peace with the government since then. However, the conflict between the major ethnic groups of the northeastern part of Myanmar, the Shan and the Karen, and the Myanmar military government continues. This ongoing conflict between the central government and the ethnic insurgent groups in the area combined with the presence of the notorious opium trade has created huge economic and political instability. As a result, one can certainly conclude that even among all the races and ethnic groups of Myanmar, people from this particular area have been severely disadvantaged in almost every aspect of socio-economic development.

In addition to the political instability and extreme poverty, cultivation of opium poppies in the last 30 years has become entrenched in the community. In fact, they have not got any skills or knowledge to grow any crops except opium poppies. The use of opium among them is so widespread that it has led to social degradation which in its own right poses as a single major problem that needs to be tackled. It is apparent that from this area need to rehabilitated and retrained to be able to develop sustainable economic opportunities other than opium trade. This is an enormous task, and to achieve this goal, will require assistance from the central government of Myanmar as well as other international non-profit organizations.

To advance the socio-economic development of this remote are of Myanmar Kyaing-ton, I would like to make the following proposals:

_First to view socio – economic problem of the Golden Triangle as a global problem no local. The chief reason is that approximately 20% of world opium is being produced in this area. In light of social and health problems associated with the use of heroin in developed countries it is prudent to suggest that efforts should be made mainly at alleviating extreme poverty, rehabilitation and educating people of this region.

_To build a basic infrastructure such as road and transportation to facilitate the trade and communication between different ethnic groups and bring them in contact with Myanmar as a whole.

_To lobby non-profit organization such as the UNDP, UNDCP, International center or Integrated Mountain Development(ICIMOD), the Japan International cooperation Agent (JICA), regional and non-government Organizations to participate and aid in regional programs and assist in their implementation.

_To make hill people change over from slash and burn to stable farming practice like rased agriculture that prevents fertile soil erosion. This obviously requires such programs as rural agricultural education assisted by either the government to other non-government/non-profit organization as the UNDP.

_Because active participation of local people is instrumental in rehabilitation of this region a strong leadership within the community is paramount. The Myanmar government must work to gain cooperation from the local leaders in order to bring fundamental changes such as abandoning opium growing and adopting cultivation of different crops utilizing more modern agricultural practices.

_Development may be more rapid if well – designed programs offer incentives to peasants who abandon opium growing and seek to cultivate other crops.

_To fund research in the area of farming practice in a smaller scale that is suitable for this particular area.

_To shortage of educated manpower perhaps poses the most serious problem that would hinder the development of this region. As such intensive – training programs must firstly be established. The efforts should also be directed at developing primary and secondary schools and public clinics and hospitals.

_Since the Kyaington region is rich in minerals and crude oil deposits, attempts could be made to attract foregin investment from multinational companies. Such investment would provide employment of local people.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the Kyaington region must be developed although there are some limitation concerning their cultural, geographical and economic condition of the regions. Hence the main purpose of this paper is to explore every avenues to get the material that may be available at the region or Universities Historical Research Centre in relation to cultural heritage of Akha.



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Appendix 1

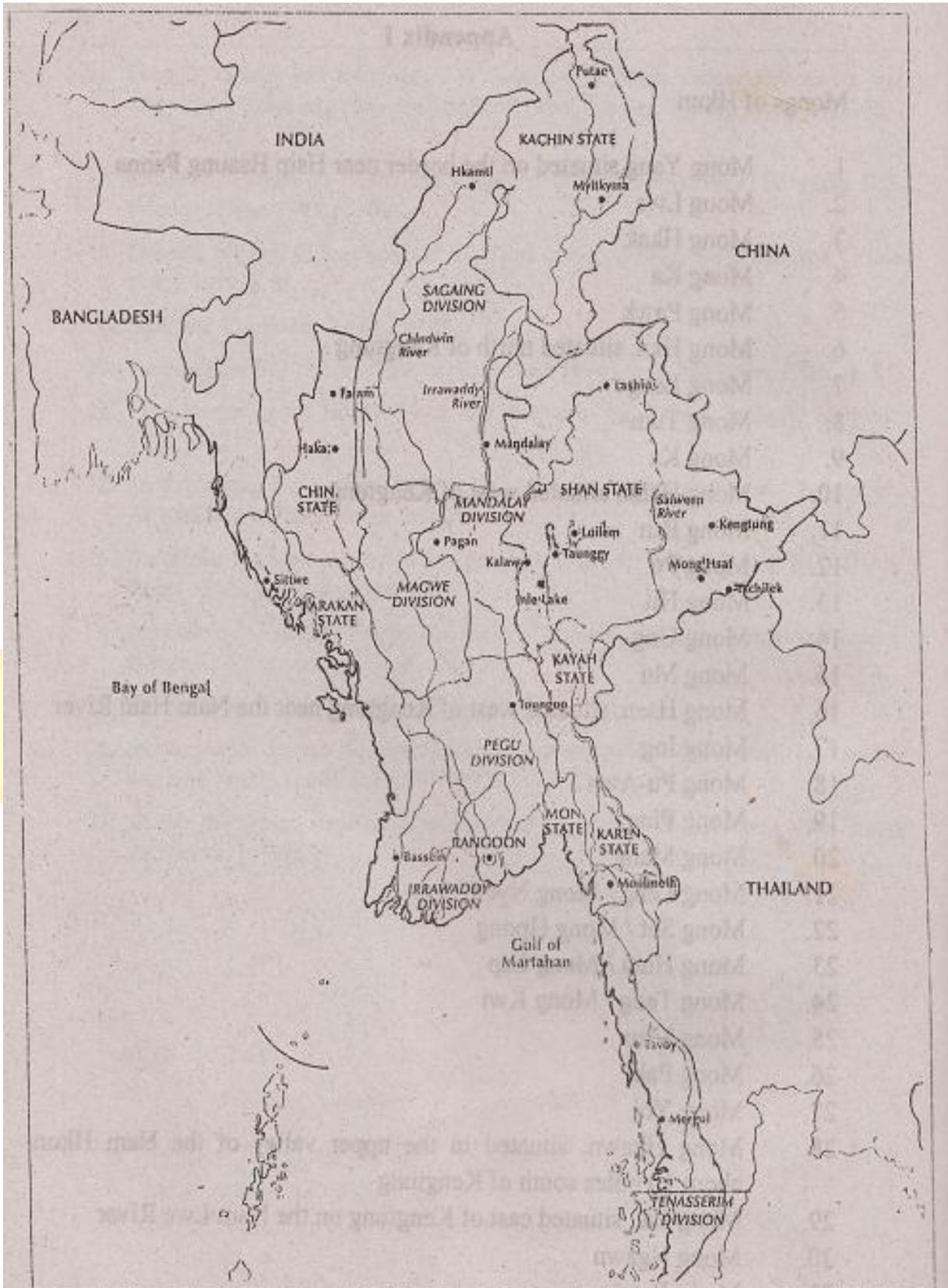
Mongs of Hkun

1. Mong Yang situated on the border near Hsip Hsaung Panna
2. Mong Lwe
3. Mong Hkak
4. Mong Ka
5. Mong Pawk
6. Mong Hka, situated north of Kengtung
7. Mong Leng
8. Mong Tum
9. Mong Ka
10. Mong Hsim, situated west of Kengtung
11. Mong Pan
12. Mong Pu
13. Mong Hit
14. Mong Ung
15. Mong Mu
16. Mong Hsen, situated west of Kengtung near the Nam Hsin River
17. Mong Ing
18. Mong Pu-Awn
19. Mong Ping
20. Mong Mang
21. Mong Leng/Mong Nyen
22. Mong Set/Mong Hpong
23. Mong Hum/Mong Lap
24. Mong Tang/Mong Kwi



25. Mong Mau
26. Mong Pak
27. Mong Yoi
28. Mong Hkawn, situated in the upper valley of the Nam Hkon about 10 miles south of Kengtung.
29. Mong Lai, situated east of Kengtung on the Nam Lwe River
30. Mong Ngawn
31. Mong Ram
32. Mong Wak

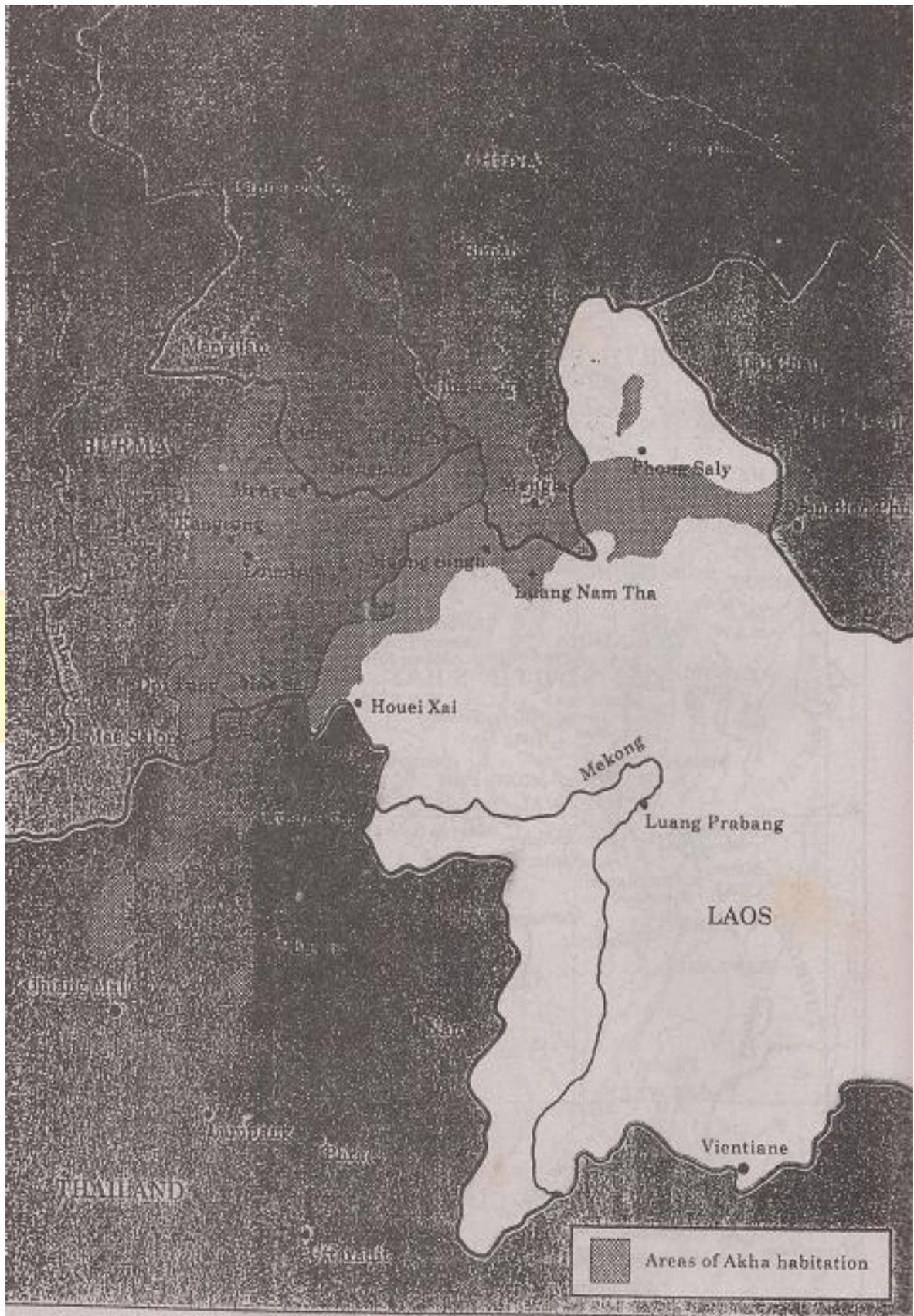




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