



Cornell University Southeast Asia Program

Spring 2012 E-Bulletin



"I find it strange that in America puppets are often reserved for children. Puppets are powerful. I can't think of more accessible indirect allegory than puppetry. Everyday people pull the strings. Voice travels through the fingers of the voiceless and enters the minds of the audience. The separation between the performer and the form disguises controversial messages as entertainment. At the same time, it accentuates the beauty of the mundane." — Alicia Freedman



A shadow puppet performance at a Chinese Buddhist temple in Surat Thani, Southern Thailand. Just before the full moon in January 2011.

Inset: Backstage at the shadow puppet performance.

Photos copyright Alicia Freedman, used by permission.

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It has been a busy fall for the Southeast Asia Program. In September SEAP helped to host the international cross-disciplinary symposium on “Rice and Language Across Asia.” See John Phan’s article on page 7 and accounts on pages 8-12 of the impact of the new course on this topic offered under the guidance of Magnus Fiskesjö.

Timed to coincide with the rice symposium, SEAP launched the social media elements of the Visibility Project. You can now follow SEAP on Facebook (and by extension Twitter) and get up-to-date insights into SEAP events such as brown bags, new book releases from SEAP publications, conferences, faculty blogs, exhibits and so much more.

We are delighted at how many SEAP alumni are participating in this new extension of the SEAP community and we look forward to including more graduate and undergraduate students in the coming months. We are striving to make SEAP’s Facebook page an interactive space to share reading/viewing suggestions related to Southeast Asia.

Don’t just “like” SEAP—please share your thoughts, comments and recommendations!

<http://www.facebook.com/seapcornell#!/seapcornell>

In addition to using social media to raise SEAP’s profile on campus and beyond, we are laying the groundwork for creating an online pressroom/media center to facilitate quick access to SEAP expertise on the region. SEAP faculty took part in a short media training in October and are participating in individual interviews to help us build online profiles for this project. Our aim is to use these tools as part of an effort to build connections between journalists and our faculty.

The spring promises to be very full as well. On January 9, Professors Marty Hatch, Eric Tagliacozzo, and Tom Pepinsky were in Jakarta with Alice Pell, Cornell Vice Provost for International Relations, to participate in the formal opening of the American Institute for Indonesian Studies (AIFIS) (see photo). The AIFIS website is up and running <http://aifis.org/> and we will be putting coverage of AIFIS on Facebook as information comes in. We hope to bring you more in-depth coverage on AIFIS in the fall SEAP bulletin.

You should also mark your calendar for the annual SEAP graduate student conference March 2-4. SEAP Director Tamara Loos is this year’s keynote speaker. The outstanding paper from last year’s conference by Chip Zuckerman (University of Michigan) is featured on pages 13-18.

In mid-March shadow drama master Ki Purbo Asmoro will have a residency at Cornell, including sessions with Chris Miller’s gamelan class and Kaja McGowan’s shadow puppet seminar (see their exhibit at the Johnson Museum), an outreach performance, and workshops with undergraduates. He will perform at Bailey Auditorium at 8pm on Wednesday March 14. For ticket information see <http://www.cornellconcertseries.com/>. Tell your friends and help us spread the word.

Warm wishes,

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Title: Kammu (Khmu') village 150 kilometers south of Luang Prabang
Original Caption: "Peoples in Laos previously termed "kha" have been redesignated as "Lao Theung", meaning something like "Lao who live at slightly higher elevations." Although this designation erases the fact that such peoples are not ethnically Lao, it does capture something of their economy and social structure."
(1957)

Lao Lum, Lao Theung, Lao Suung:

A Few Reflections on Some Common Lao Ethnonyms

In Laos, there is a popular tripartite system of classifying ethnic groups. The system categorizes people by the altitude at which they live. There are three categories: "Lao Lum" (lowlanders), "Lao Theung" (midlanders), and "Lao Suung" (highlanders).¹



Charles Zuckerman, Ph.D.
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Anthropology at the
University of Michigan

Although once propagated by the revolutionary government, during the last three decades the Lao Lum-Theung-Suung system has been formally replaced and critiqued by Lao political leaders. Instead of using it, they advise organizing and referring to the groups of Laos with ethnolinguistic categories. Academics also normally prefer these ethnolinguistic categories, regarding them as more exact and scientific (See Grant Evans's discussion of this: Evans 1999a; Evans 1999b). And yet, many academics and government workers still use the tripartite Lao-Lum-Theung-Suung system in writing and in speech. I have found that when I have asked some of these academics and government workers

about the system, they typically respond by perfunctorily dismissing it as oversimplifying, generalizing, and negligent of modern movements of people. And yet, they still use it. In fact, most people in Laos still use it and some insist on doing so. What is it about this system that makes it so lasting, not only among the Lao populace, but among academics? Is it compelling? Is it ingrained?

Although I am not going to answer these questions matter-of-factly here, the answers are surely related to the fact that those researching mainland Southeast Asia have long been intrigued by the patterning of altitude and ethnicity throughout the region (Moerman 1967; e.g., Leach 1954

and Scott 2009). Both in the cultures of these places themselves and in academic writing about them, divisions between lowland peoples and hill peoples are ubiquitous. As this tripartite system evinces, Laos is no exception. There is something about the affinity between kinds of space and kinds of people that makes intuitive sense (much like, for many people, there is something about the affinity between kinds of language and kinds of people that makes sense (Hymes 1967)). As Vatthana Pholsena writes, “Indeed, those who criticized the Lao Lum, Lao Theung, and Lao Sung stratification also recognized the logic of it” (Vatthana 2006: 155).

In other words, part of the “logic” of this system is that it charts a compelling and intelligible image of Laos. In his 1964 book, *Economy and Society of Laos*, Joel Halpern describes flying from Vientiane to Luang Prabang and looking down at the “sparse, scattered population and the mountainous terrain” from the plane window (Halpern 1964: 4). “Circling over Vientiane one sees the town stretched out along the Mekong, surrounded by rice fields with occasional small patches of forest. Leaving the Mekong plain the land abruptly changes to rugged mountains cut by narrow valleys. The observer looking closely at the settlement pattern below can discern almost a textbook illustration of ethnic stratification and economic-geographic adaptation to the land based on varying degrees of altitude” (Halpern 1964: 4-5). Halpern continues to explain that the people living at each of these geographic levels have official names. “The terms, however,” he writes, “are largely political and cannot erase the important cultural differences” (Halpern 1964: 5).

When I first read this passage, I found it compelling—even more so when I discovered a trove of Joel Halpern’s photographs.² After reading more about the history of the tripartite system, I now believe that its ubiquity



Title: “Air views of village and surrounding area”
Original caption: “This is another village visited by Halpern and his traveling companions when they went to the Vang Vieng area. It is called Ban Done, meaning “Island Village.”” (1969)

and its appeal for academics and for me is partly a result of the conceptual power of its central metaphor of space (c.f., Jonsson 2010). I also argue that, beyond this metaphor, the system is powerful and productive because of its fuzzy logic. That is, it invites speakers to generalize. It is a good tool for speaking broadly and simply about a complex nation and complex people.

Below, I will briefly sketch the history of the system, with regard to its governmental implementation and its scholarly reception. I explore how it differed from preceding ways of classifying ethnic groups in Laos in three important respects, which made it an appealing system for the revolutionary government, the Pathet Lao: it foregrounded geography, euphemized ethnic slurs, and labeled all groups as “Lao.” What the system shared with earlier colonial systems of classifying ethnicity, and many ethnic classifications based on space or language, was a stark simplicity that allows for still starker generalizations about Laos. Because of this simplicity, the terms of the tripartite system are inexact. They do not refer to people with necessary

and sufficient characteristics, but generalized tendencies, united by “family resemblance.” I argue that the semantic blurriness, but not quite hollowness, of national ethnonyms, like the terms Lao Lum, Lao Theung, and Lao Suung, is, in part, responsible for their usefulness and, despite governmental and scholarly attempts, their continued presence in discussions about Laos.

HISTORY OF THE LAO LUM, LAO THEUNG, LAO SUUNG SYSTEM

The tripartite system was vigorously promoted by the Lao revolutionary government as it came to power. As a result, many academics assume that the Pathet Lao created the system. But, the system’s roots are deeper insofar as it resembles earlier French colonial classifications of ethnic groups (Evans 1999b: 24) and insofar as its terms were in circulation before the Pathet Lao rose to power.³

The history of these terms comprising the system is murky. They emerged at different times from one another and were probably combined

in the mid-1940s by Toulia Lyfoung, brother of Touby Lyfoung (Proschan: Personal Communication; Batson 1991; Schneider 2000: 162). As the linguist William Smalley reported, “in Laos in 1952 and 1953, the terms were commonly used by expatriates and Lao government officials” (Proschan 404), nearly twenty-five years before the Pathet Lao officially gained power. The use of the word *theung*, in the specific sense of “people in the mountains” seems to have preceded its counterparts.⁴ Frank Proschan provides a list of instances of it in European sources dating as far back as 1884 (Proschan 405-406).

While the modern tripartite system is in some ways quite similar to French colonial systems of classifying ethnic groups (Evans 1999b), it is distinct from them in three main respects, each of which appealed to the Pathet Lao: first, the Lao Lum-Theung-Suung system foregrounds geographical criteria; second, it functions as a series of euphemisms for previous terms perceived as offensive; and third, it pointedly accompanies each ethnonym with the term “Lao.”

Taking these points one by one, first, the terms that comprise the modern tripartite system—i.e., Lum, Theung, and Suung—are adjectives describing vertical relationships.⁵ Thus, although, geography is not the only organizing principle, it is the most prominent principle. For instance, Laurent Chazée, in *The Peoples of Laos: Rural and Ethnic Diversities*, describes the three ethnic groups by giving us the measurements of the altitudes at which they live: the “Lao Loum” are “generally situated at 200-400 meters altitude,” the “Lao Theung” at “between 300 and 900 meters altitude,” and the “Lao Soung” between 800 and 1,600 meters altitude” (Chazée 2002). The figures in these measurements vary among the scholars that cite them; in the Lao government’s own 2008 publication, they write that the Lao Theung live higher than 700 meters and the Lao Suung

live higher than 1,000 meters (LFNC (Lao Front for National Construction) ສູນກາງແນວລາວສ້າງຊາດ 2008: ຊ-ຢ, c-d).

Second, the geographic terms of the Lao Lum-Theung-Suung system replaced ethnonyms considered derogatory by many. The system was an appealing euphemism for two terms particularly, Khaa and Meo. These terms were common in Laos when this system emerged (Stuart-Fox 1986: 135). As Proschan tells us in his paper “Who are the ‘Khaa?’”—Khaa is a term “usually employed to refer

That is, it pointedly included the word “Lao” in each term. Ing-Britt Trankell writes that the system was attractive for the Pathet Lao because “it implied a certain national unity—the inhabitants of Laos were all in some sense ‘Lao’—and that it thereby entailed a recognition of the efforts that all the different ethnic groups of the country had made in the common struggle for national liberation” (Trankell 1998: 47).⁸

In sum, the system was well suited for the Pathet Lao’s goals and it spread



Title: “Air view: Hmong (Meo) settlement”
Original Caption: “A Hmong village nestled in the mountain tops of Luang Prabang district.” (1957)

to groups of people speaking Mon-Khmer languages...but in certain areas...[the term] may also encompass peoples speaking Tibeto Burman or Kadai languages (Proschan 1). Presently, the term also means slave (ຊາ) and is derogatory in most situations.⁶ In Laos, “Meo” likewise is considered a derogatory term for Hmong people.⁷ As the Hmong were perhaps the most salient Lao Suung group, the new system brought with it two forms of euphemism—Khaa was euphemized as Lao Theung and Meo as Lao Suung.

Third, the new classificatory system emphasized the unity of its three ethnic groups through a lexical parallelism.

widely during and after the government’s 1975 rise to power. Grant Evans, in discussing the system’s persistence, writes that “followers of the communists for many years had this essentially politically inspired schema drummed into them, and then it was drummed into the whole population for many years after 1975” (Evans 1999a: 190). Likewise, and shockingly, one Hmong refugee whom I interviewed in the United States told me that if someone used derogatory names for ethnic groups after the revolution, the government would make him or her go to “a seminar,” i.e., the infamous “re-education camps.” This story, whether true or exaggerated,

Photo credit: <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/SEAITLaos>

points to the fact that names were serious business for the Lao revolutionary government. This has had lasting effects.

In modern Laos, some people self-identify with these names casually to outsiders. Others insist on using them. For example, in 2009, I spoke with a “Lao Theung” man from Bokeo who when I asked if he was Kmhmu said he did not like that name, rather, he preferred Lao Theung or Lao Kmhmu. As a veteran of the revolution, he explained, he wanted to ensure that his Lao-ness was not forgotten.

Although the question as to why people identify in the way that they do when they do is fascinating—and a necessary one to ask so as to avoid reifying systems—unfortunately, I cannot deal with it here because I have not yet conducted sufficient ethnographic research and I do not have the proper space this topic deserves. It suffices to say that the situation is complicated, but when people refer to themselves, the tripartite ethnonyms are a popular means for doing so; that is, many Lao people still have these ethnonyms in their terminological tool-boxes, so to speak.

Although the system was once promoted heavily, by the early 1980s, the Lao government was less enthusiastic about it. This shift was partly a result of the presence of Vietnamese ethnographers in Laos (Evans 1999a), and according to Vatthana Pholsena, the Pathet Lao’s negative reaction to the system was severe. She writes, “The threefold categorization with the ‘Lao’ prefix was deemed to be anti-revolutionary and *its use was abandoned in official documents*, although this terminology is still widely used in Laos”⁹ (Vatthana 2006: 159). However, I have found that the tripartite system still lingers within some official Lao documents and, in my experience, the system is not so much characterized as anti-revolutionary but rather inadequate to the present needs of the Lao nation.

Both Vatthana Pholsena and Grant Evans highlight Kaysone Phomvihane’s 1981 speech as the pivotal moment in the government’s ideological shift away from the tripartite ethnogeographic classificatory system and towards an ethnolinguistic one (Evans 1999a; Vatthana 2002; Vatthana 2006). In this speech, lengthily entitled “Reinforce and Expand the Basic Trust and Solidarity Between Various Ethnic Groups in the Lao National Family, and Strengthen Unity. Resolutely Uphold and Strengthen the Country and Build Socialism to its Completion” (ເຊີມຂະຫຍາຍມູນເຊື້ອແຫ່ງຄວາມສັມຄົງລະຫວ່າງເຜົ່າຕ່າງໆ ໃນວົງຄະນາຍາດແຫ່ງຊາດລາວ ທີ່ເປັນເອກະພາບ, ເດັດດຽວປົກປັກຮັກສາປະເທດຊາດໄວ້ໃຫຫມັ້ນຄົງ ແລະກໍ່ສ້າງສັງຄົມນິຍົມສຳເລັດຜົນ),¹⁰ Kaysone, then Prime Minister of Laos, advised his countrymen and women to set aside these older political terms for more scientific ones.

In a 2008 government-produced volume, we can see that the terminological shift that Kaysone advocated has largely taken place—however, the tripartite system remains for the authors as a common sense touchstone. In the book, the Lao Front for National Construction, the authors list and discuss the forty-nine ethnic groups of Laos, categorized into four “Language Families:” The “Lao-Tai” (which has 8 ethnic groups), the “Mon-Khmer” (32 ethnic groups), The “Chine-Tibet” (7 ethnic groups), and the “Hmong-Iu Mien” (2 ethnic groups) (LFNC (Lao Front for National Construction) ສູນກາງແນວລາວສ້າງຊາດ 2008). These terms are introduced after a discussion of the “three main groups” of the past, the Lao Lum, Lao Theung and Lao Suung. Thus, in modern-day Laos, the government has officially adopted a classificatory system that prioritizes ethnolinguistic criteria. Still, however, the tripartite system remains present in government documents and profuse in many other contexts.

THE LOGIC OF THE LAO LUM, LAO THEUNG, LAO SUUNG SYSTEM

While the tripartite system foregrounds geography, the geographic is not its only organizing principle. At times, linguistic features trump geographic ones (Chazée 2002; Trankell 1998: 46-47). According to Laurent Chazée, “In 1994, it was estimated that more than 80% of the Tai linguistic family’s populations had been grouped in the category of Lao Loum, more than 85% of the Austroasiatic populations in the Lao Theung group and at least 90% of the Miao-Yao and Tibeto-Burman populations in the Lao Soung” (Chazée 2002: 6). Therefore, while the government has been transitioning from an ostensibly ethnogeographic classificatory system to an ethnolinguistic one, this transition is made less drastic because language is already an implicit but important criterion within the tripartite system.

Beyond these geographic and linguistic criteria, academics and lay people commonly associate agricultural, religious and behavioral practices with the different terms of the tripartite system. The Lao Lum are assumed to be Buddhists and wet-rice cultivators who speak a Tai language. The Lao Theung and the Lao Suung are assumed to be animist swidden farmers. Each of these groups has a number of other features and stereotypes that cluster with it (e.g., Seng-Amphone Chintalath and Earth 2001).

Beyond the fact that there are individual people who have characteristics that violate each of these stereotypes—who, for example, might identify as Lao Theung, live in the lowlands, practice Buddhism, and speak Lao—there are also groups within each of these categories that violate each of these stereotypes: Buddhists in the highlands, swidden farmers in the lowlands.

In short, the system is riddled with internal inconsistency. Even in regards to geography, its most foregrounded aspect, it does not work in

any straightforward sense. Many of the so-called “tribal Tai” groups, for example, are classified as Lao Lum, while they live in the hills and do not practice Buddhism. Chazée provides a series of similar examples of groups that live in altitudes different than the system predicts (Chazée 2002). The three elements of the system are not clusters of necessary and sufficient features. Rather, they are clusters of common features, the “family resemblances” of the terms.

“Family resemblance” is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s term. It characterizes the logic of the tripartite system well. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein introduces it through a discussion of the concept of “language”:

Instead of pointing out something common to all that we call language, I’m saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in virtue of which we use the same word for all—but there are many different kinds of affinity between them. And on account of this affinity, or these affinities, we call them all ‘languages’ (Wittgenstein 2009: 35).¹¹

The affinities that unite these particular languages are “family resemblances.” Wittgenstein writes that he “can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family—build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth—overlap and criss-cross in the same way” (Wittgenstein 2009: 36).

Likewise, there is no one feature that is necessary or sufficient to pick out all Lao Lum people, or all Lao Theung people, or all Lao Suung people: not geography, language, religion, or agricultural practice. Rather the logic of the system is that these groups *tend* to have these features (and certainly not physical features like those that unite Wittgenstein’s family). This tending, but not entailment, this blurriness of the categories, provides a space for play. It allows people to



Lao 1,000 Kip banknote featuring the tripartite. From left to right: a Lao Suung woman, a Lao Lum woman, and a Lao Theung woman. (Photo Retrieved from http://aes.iupui.edu/rwise/banknotes/laos/LaosP35a-1000Kip-1998_f-550.jpg on December 29th, 2011.)

generalize more than they would otherwise and digest contradictions with less consternation.¹²

In my future research, I hope to further investigate the way Lao men and women negotiate these contradictions. This paper is preliminary and primarily historical. It is the product of my reading and my brief experiences in Laos. To understand the Lao Lum, Lao Theung, Lao Suung system of ethnonyms fully, much more ethnography needs to be done. One would need to study how the system has been and is being used in a variety of situations, by a variety of different people. Here, however, I merely hope to have sketched aspects of this compelling system’s history and internal logic.

The system is simple, with only three terms. It is also oversimplifying. It purports to be describing where people live, but is really about so much more: language, religion, behavior, a way of life. In a similar way, ethnolinguistic groups are likewise never just about languages, but they make predictions about concomitant and emblematic cultural forms. That is, ethnolinguistic categorizations are only interesting for most of us insofar as a shared history of language seems to anticipate and capture other affinities. Perhaps, since the theories of Johann Herder took root in the ‘Western’ imagination, academics are prone

to see language as a natural basis of community (c.f., Evans 1999a; Evans 1999b).¹³

In contrast, in the Lao Lum-Theung-Suung system, space, not language, is the centerpiece. Space ostensibly divides the nation into subgroups and unites the nation into a whole. But while geography and ecology are foregrounded in this tripartite system, and in part responsible for its conceptual power, the ethno-geographic system is in some ways quite similar to classifications based on language—they both erase differences and invite comparisons among groups that may otherwise seem far-fetched.

This older tripartite system is, in some ways, on its way out; as we speak, it is being replaced by more ostensibly “scientific” classifications based upon “ethno-linguistic” categorizations. Yet, by exploring it, I think that I have in part explored something about classificatory systems in general. The ones we use, returning here to Wittgenstein’s term, are often more familial than they seem. It is this blurriness that allows intellectual blunders, objectifications that erase difference, and the slipperiness and slippage of ethnonymic systems. But this blurriness, albeit dangerous, is not entirely bad or ‘unscientific.’ It allows us to talk about ourselves and the world: about language, space, and people. ♪

ENDNOTES

¹ There are many variations in the transliterations of these terms. For this paper, I will be using the following forms: “Lao Lum” (laaw2 lum1; ລາວລຸມ), “Lao Theung” (Laaw2 Thuṅ1; ລາວເທິງ) and “Lao Suung” (laaw2 suṅ3 ລາວສູງ). I have also represented them in parenthesis, using the International Phonetic Alphabet and Lao orthography. The numbers represent the lexical tone of the words, see Nick Enfield’s *Grammar of Lao* (Enfield 2007) for further information.

² Paralleling Halpern’s passage are his photographs of Lao Lum, Lao Theung, and Lao Suung villages. He has graciously donated his photographs from his time in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They are accessible online through the University of Wisconsin, Madison, website: <http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/SEAIT/Laos>. Halpern took two of these three photographs from an airplane, just the viewpoint he had described in the above quote.

³ Vatthana Pholsena writes, “The ‘Lao Lum’, ‘Lao Theung’, and ‘Lao Sung’ categories referred exactly to the same major ethnic groups (‘Lao and Tai’, ‘Kha’ and Meo-Yao’, respectively) defined by the colonial administrators” (Vatthana 2002: 180). C.f., Vatthana 2006: 153-154.

⁴ Interestingly, Grant Evans points to a passage in the 1953 writings of Katay Don Sasorith in which Katay refers to some minorities that have “shown their ‘patriotism’ by wishing to be called ‘Lao Theung’”, i.e., the “Bolovens” and the “Mèos” (Evans 1999b: 20).

⁵ Although academics often translate the three terms that constitute the classificatory system—“Lao Lum,”

“Lao Theung,” and “Lao Suung”—as “lowland Lao,” “midland Lao,” and “upland Lao,” respectively, these translations hide a more complicated etymology. Once, during an interview with a Hmong man in the United States, the man and I both became confused as we tried to parse out if and why *suung* was higher than *theung*. In Lao, the words *lum* and *theung* are generally antonyms and are used for terms such as lower and upper lip (ສົບລຸມ: ສົບເທິງ). *Suung* (ສູງ; tall), on the other hand, is often thought of as the antonym of the word *tam* (ຕ້າ; short) and thus forms a strange third to the system (Trankell 1998: 48-49). Ing-Britt Trankell conjectures that the somewhat illogical nature of the three terms has encouraged Lao speakers to refer to Lao Theung as Lao “K’ang” (ກ້າງ), which means, “middle Lao.” However, Frank Proschan points to some potentially more complicated reasons for why Lao K’ang may have become used as an ethnonym. K’ang, Proschan tells us, may here be a term meaning politically mediate, i.e., those supporting Kong Le who were between both the NLHX and the RLG (Proschan 406).

⁶ These two meanings are probably etymologically related (Izikowitz 2001 [1951]: 28; Proschan 394).

⁷ While conducting an interview with an ethnic Lao person in the United States, I was told that in the mid-1950’s the Lao children in Vientiane would hiss “Meo, Meo,”—like a cat’s meow and like the Lao word for cat—to the Hmong people that came to sell brooms in town.

⁸ Many others have made similar observations. For example, Jan Ovesen writes that “The great attraction

of this scheme, apart from its simplicity, was for the non-Lao groups that, at least rhetorically, they could be recognized as equals of the Lao” (Ovesen 2002: 76). See also, (Postert 2004).

⁹ Emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Translation is Grant Evans’s (Evans 1999a). Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain the original document.

¹¹ Some emphasis added, some original.

¹² A great example of this over-generalization, which was central to my presentation of this paper at the Cornell conference, is Seng-Amphone Chintalath and Barbara Earth’s paper, “From the Forest to the Clinic: Changing Birth Practice among the Katang, Lao.” The article, written in 2001, uses a combination of the tripartite system and other ethnonyms for individual Lao Theung “tribes” to argue that the majority of “Lao Theung births continue to take place in the forest, with a corresponding absence of any record of maternal deaths or other outcomes” (Seng-Amphone Chintalath and Earth 2001: 101).

¹³ For example, Judith Irvine writes that, “To [Johann] Herder’s heirs, scholarly and lay, it has seemed natural to suppose that language itself creates—or automatically reflects—community: that there is always some aggregate of people who could be said to ‘share’ a language and who must, by virtue of that fact alone, share a cultural tradition, feel that they ‘belong’ together, and participate jointly in a social formation of specifiable type—a people (or ethnic group, or nationality)” (Irvine 2006: 689).

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