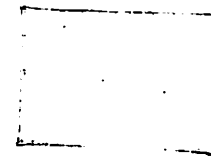


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Moi Culture

The so-called Moi peoples, who inhabit the plateaux and high valleys of south-central Indo-China, are the most primitive groups in the whole country. (The name Moi is the Annamite term for 'savages'.) They are divided into many tribes and sub-tribes, among the most important of which are the Kha Katang, Kha Pakho and Boloven in the north and north-west of the area, inland from Hue; the Reungao, Jarai, Sedang and Bahnar towards the centre and east; the Brao in the west; and the Rade, Mnong, and Stieng in the south. They show many differences of culture, in dress, ornaments, type of house, pottery, weaving and social institutions, but essentially their life is dominated by their upland forest environment.

The Moi cultivate a variety of crops including rice, maize, yams and sweet potatoes. Unlike the agriculturalists of the plains, who grow crops continuously on the same soil by means of irrigation, the Moi practise a form of shifting cultivation (known as *ray*). In the dry season a large area of forest or savanna is cleared by cutting and burning, and rice is sown soon after the first heavy summer rains. This agricultural work is done by communal labour, in which often not only the village people but friends in other villages also participate. The result is a rice field, covering sometimes, as among the Mnong, 80 ha. (200 acres) or more. Among the Mnong and some other tribes the field is abandoned after one crop, and a new clearing made; this process is repeated through a cycle of about twenty years, by which time the forest has reconstituted itself. Among the Rade and the Stieng, who cultivate the richer red soils, the same field can be used for as many as five successive crops of rice. Some of the tribes, however, such as the Katang and the Boloven, have come strongly under Laotian (Thai) influence, and have abandoned shifting cultivation for permanent agriculture.

The Churu, a Moi tribe who have been deeply influenced by the Cham, irrigate their rice lands in the broad valleys of the south of the Plateau de Djiring, and plough them with the aid of buffaloes. On the other hand, most Moi groups, who combine rice cultivation with the raising of buffaloes, use them mainly for feasts and sacrifices, and not as traction animals. Again, the Preh Mnong, living on a poor soil, have turned from agriculture to the more lucrative capture of elephants and to trade with Laos and Cambodia. The Moi keep only small reserve stocks of grain. Their granaries are usually empty by July, and they then live by hunting and collecting till the next harvest in September or October.

Moi crafts include the working of iron in a simple forge equipped with vertical bellows using two bamboo cylinders. Weaving, basketry and pottery-making are also practised. Although matches have been introduced they are still not common, and fire is kindled either by use of flint and iron, or by sawing a dry bamboo with a length of cane until the dust formed begins to glow.

The Moi economy is not entirely a closed one, though communications are poor, and most of the rivers are spanned only by slender bridges of rattan cane (Fig. 56). Elephants' tusks, stag and

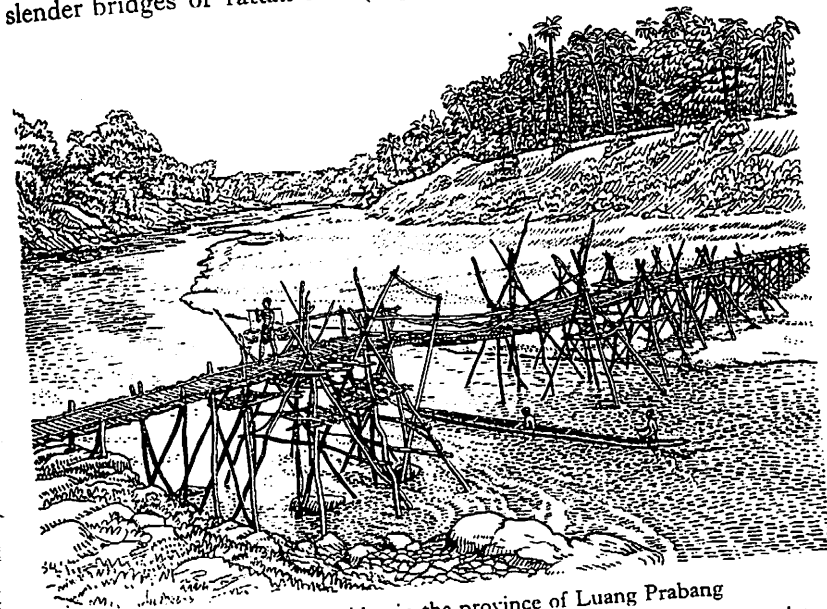


Fig. 56. Wooden bridge in the province of Luang Prabang
Source: Georges Maspero, *Un Empire Colonial français: l'Indochine*, vol. 1, plate 5 (Paris, 1929).

rhinoceros horn, eagle wood and cinnamon are exported; the principal imports include gongs and pottery jars (superior to the Moi sun-dried ware), both of which have a ritual value.

The dress of most Moi is scanty; the men wear a loin-cloth with a flap in front, and the women a brief skirt. A cape is also sometimes worn, the men often rolling it bandolier-fashion across the chest. The hair is often dressed in a kind of 'bun'; the lobes of the ears are pierced and often greatly distended by wooden rings or other ornaments till they may even touch the shoulders. Some tribes practise tattooing and sawing out of upper incisor and canine teeth.

Two species of porcupine are found in the north. Hares are found in parkland, particularly in the central and southern parts of the country. There are no rabbits in Indo-China.

Ungulates

The Indian Elephant occurs on the plateaux of south Annam, near Vinh in north Annam, and in the forests near Siem Reap in Cambodia; the herds are gradually diminishing in size. Before the French occupation of the country, elephant hunting was an annual sport of the kings of Cambodia, the animals being driven into large stockades erected for the purpose. A few Rhinoceros have been shot in the valley of the Mekong, but they are now becoming very rare.

The Sambur and the Brow-antlered Deer are the best known species of deer, and their flesh is sold locally in the markets for food. The smaller Barking Deer and the Hog Deer are almost as numerous. The tiny Mouse Deer, a timid helpless creature no bigger than a hare, is common in the forests of the south. Its flesh is excellent eating. The Serow, a heavily built animal with short, curved horns, is found wherever there are bare, rocky hills.

The Gaur, the Bantang, and the Buffalo are the only species of wild oxen in the country. The Gaur, which grows to a height of almost 2 m., has a huge head, a dark brown coat and white or yellow limbs below the knees and hocks. The Bantang, almost equal in height to the Gaur, has a chestnut coat with white or grey spots on the limbs. It is found locally in thick jungle, and is dangerous. Buffaloes occur in the wild state, and large numbers are domesticated for use in the rice fields and as transport animals.

The Wild Boar is plentiful locally in more or less open country. It often does great damage to the crops and is shot whenever opportunity occurs.

Edentates

The Pangolin or Scaly Anteater, a curious and primitive creature, covered with large scales and able to roll itself into a ball like a hedgehog, is not uncommon. Its skin is often to be seen on sale in the shops.

BIG-GAME HUNTING

Indo-China offers hunting equal in standard to that of India or parts of Africa. Among the best hunting grounds are the plateaux of Lang Bian and Darlac. The chief game animals are elephants, tigers,

leopards, Gaur and Bantang, several species of deer, and wild boars. In suitable country all are fairly plentiful. The French residents indulge in much shooting, especially of deer, from motor cars. The most popular method is to travel quietly by night along the roads that pass through jungle country, spotting the animals with the headlights. The tiger and leopard are shot from ambush, with the help of a decoy; wild oxen are usually stalked.

Lang Bian is the most accessible of the recognized hunting grounds, being easily reached from the coast by road or rail, or from Saigon by road. Big-game hunting on this plateau is regulated by a law of 1917; the region is divided into three districts known as preserved, protected and free. In the preserved district shooting is prohibited except to holders of special licences; these are available for three months and only one is issued to the same person in a year. A licence entitles the holder to shoot a very limited number of animals. Shooting of most big game is prohibited at all times in the protected district, although certain small animals may be shot between 15 September and 15 March. In the free district, male game may be shot at any season, though a licence, valid for one month, is necessary for Gaur. The cost of a licence in the preserved district was about 200 piastres.

BIRDS

The main characteristics of the bird fauna of Indo-China are now known, but, as in the case of the mammals, most of the investigations made have had to depend on museum collections rather than on field observations. While, therefore, it is now possible to name almost any bird seen without much difficulty and to give a broad indication of its distribution, extremely little is known about the habits and biology of any species. Only a few representative birds can be mentioned here under the heading of each order represented.

Cormorants, Gannets and Pelicans (Steganopodes)

The Common and Lesser Cormorants frequent the inland waters, where the Darter or Snake Bird is also found. This last named is so called because of its habit of swimming submerged with only its long snake-like neck above water. Rosy and Spotted Pelicans abound on the inland waters of the south. Out at sea Red-fronted Gannets or Boobies dive for fish.