

ASEAN 20TH CENTURY LITERATURES
SELECTED POEMS AND SHORT STORIES FROM
LAO PDR

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LAO PDR

POEMS*

The Keen Poem And A Man Of Poetry by Khamphor Phouangsaba

There Is Not Only You by Dara Kanlagna

The Bewail Of Mother by Dr. Thongkham Onemanisone

The Most Concern by Houmphann Rattanaavong

The Charming Of A Native Village by Maha Keo Rajvongxay

To Turn Over The Land And The Sky

To See Forward, The Past Path Should Be Looked

by Somsry Dejakamphou

*All poems translated by **Thanongsack Vongsackda***

SHORT STORIES*

American Bones by Bounthanong Xonxaiphonh

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda, Martin Currish, Peter Koret

Staying Overnight in the Forest by Chanthay Deuansavanh

Translated by Savankhone Rajmontry

The Wailing River by Viseth Svengsuksa

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**with short biographies of authors*

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THE KEEN POEM AND A MAN OF POETRY

by Khamphor Phouangsaba

Oh! What the fine consents of a poem is
They are as precious as the jewelry
As they are made with creative idea as useful message
For heart policy with stanza terminology

These consents are sharp as swords
Their words expressions can alert the idea
Line by line are on paper with verse style
To notify the grin from a poem

Some points are opened but some are hidden
For safe and sound by idiom screening
Only intellectuals can find their meanings
Principally, the stain for cutting

The keen poem is sharper than swords
When bearing in mind of the core facts
The exciting and modish arts could be in sight
With dedicated vision in realistic style

Old saying, name is elephant but a cat profile
Being a poet is a popular person
But be also an empty belly man
Whose stomach ached since yesterday night?

Listening to fine sonnet composed by a poet
Who know that rhyme was written by a slim?
Due to its fine stanza dialect
All are substantial terms for pleasure

I dislike telling the weak people to be shy
Since I have been a poet for quite long time
What on earth I have to devote the life of mine
The fine poets writing to reach all ears to be delight

I am afraid that the poet work will be hatred
And will be eventually broken down
Whenever it will be failure
Please don't throw the proverbs out

May I request all to be sympathy with the poet union
To maintain these writings at the World Theater
If the writers do give up poem writing
Who will keep this kind of literary works on the paper?

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda

Khamphor Phouangsaba was born in 1936 and entered to a novice and monkhood from 1951 to 1964. He started to work as a reporter, then nominated as editor and board director for printing house. He was expert in the fields of radio drama, news items, articles, reportages, criticism, short stories and poetry. Traditional literature and folk legends which were collected by him were printed. Some of his written works were selected into the teacher's book of the Ministry of Education. Many of his short stories and poems were translated into Russian, French, Chinese, and Thai.

THERE IS NOT ONLY YOU
by Dara Kanlagna

There lived a widower with her descendants
She is not anxious with any assistance
Day by day she does merits making
She thought there are no other mothers who can do as her

Oh dear! You feed your kids with no weeping
But you still said that you were poor
The poorest woman in this world
You asked to whom are poor level as you, please clarify.

When feeding your kids you were helped by ten
You are not called for house works or cooking
But your poor can not be compared with remote women
Who make incomes for their daily surviving?

Imagining when their kids were killed by bombs
They were crying as if they would die
Those were the most awful time of their lives
Could you please clarify what level of their poor lives?

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda

Dara Kanlagna was born in 1940. She is a SEA Write Award poet, national author and popular lady writer. Her literary works in Lao language depict her love for Lao culture. Her subtle, profound and graceful short stories, poems, novels, dramas, criticism and movies received numerous national and international awards. Her 50 years of continuous outputs are indispensable literary gems to keep in the national playground for language and literature.

THE BEWAIL OF MOTHER
by Dr. Thongkham Onemanisone

My dear daughter!
Why I cannot prevent my depressing tears
They are running over my cheeks
In particular when considered about the past
It seems sharp knife is placed in my heart

Mother effort is always assigned to daughter
To overcome all hard work without any distress
For rearing the daughter up with carefulness
When growing up she forgot the mother deed
What made her mind changing?

Even if she doesn't care but mother still beg?
To hear sweet words saying here is my mother
When I die I won't be boring
Since that word shown you accept the deed of your mother

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda

Dr. Thongkham Onemanisone is a SEA Write Award poet and national author. He was born in 1949. He graduated with a Philosophy degree on language and literature from Hungary. His refined works are fashionable and recognized by the society and readers in the present period of literature. He is a researcher for Lao idiom, literature and traditions. His works are considered national literary treasures.

THE MOST CONCERN
by Houmphān Rattānavong

Medical herbs are obtainable in jungles
These donations are being created by god
In order to afford the people's needs and wishes
If trees are obtainable, lives will not be anger and famine

Perfume trees are wealthy in jungles
People see and cut them down
Small grasses are being replaced
In the places perfume trees were cut down

Power is the wide lands of tigers and lions
All were fought for meats
Weak lives without supports should be killed
If trees were available, young animals will be alive

Million inhabitants considered jungles as farming lands
Ten kings cut them for rice houses building
Without trees and water, how the god help us
Lives are depressed and people become poorer

Grandpa respected the forest god
Grandson criticized this worship is out of date
When no gods, there will be no trees
Miserable lives will be under the dry

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda

*Born in 1940, **Houmphān Rattānavong** is a SEA Write Award poet and national literary author. He participated in the revolutionary movement after his graduation from the French military academia in 1963. He is competent in the areas of history research, ecology advocacy, literature, arts and culture. A well-known Lao writer, his collection and compilation of ancient manuscripts were continuously printed by the National Institute for Literature Research from 1981 to 1997.*

THE CHARMING OF A NATIVE VILLAGE

by Maha Keo Rajvongxay

There was a person who left his village
To live in other province for quite a long time
He has been there for three years
Then he said good bye there to return home

As nearly to the village, his relatives
Came out to welcome greetings
Some paid salutations with raised hands
Some smiled to say how you are

Some asked what kind of pleasure that he has seen
Please let us know
He replied their country was so nice-looking
All kind of wares can be obtainable

But I do not satisfy them as in our native village
Because my heart feels happy when arriving near our village
Due to I see the cultivations
Along the fences and around the houses

Specifically, the jack fruit, mango, coconut and bamboo
Small oranges, bananas and longan
These made me more pleasure than living in other places
This happiness cannot be fully described

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda

Maha Keo Rajvongxay was born in 1865 and attended novice hood when he was juvenile. He graduated from Buddhism Institute in Khmer and Thailand. A senior researcher of Lao language and literature, he did not only write and compile some of his works into the Lao language teaching book, but some of his refined poems were also printed in text books for teaching in primary schools since 1930.

TO TURN OVER THE LAND AND THE SKY
TO SEE FORWARD, THE PAST PATH SHOULD BE LOOKED

by Somsry Dejakamphou

Since the past well-known history
Lao people have attempted to unite for many centuries
Since Kun Cheuang and Kun Boulom periods
Until to be called "AI LAO" equally with other nations

The word "AI" means the elder
Who the others ought to respect
The word Lao Lao it means the enormous
It has been clearly described in history

Many times and many long periods
Laos is remained Laos and not be disappeared
As the salt that could not to be salt less
If a little remained but being salty

Such as in Lanexang period of Fagnum Samsenthai
The history was so bright
Describe the heroic tradition and harmony
Unity to resistance and further development

The word Lao Lanxang is still outstanding
Coming from the mass people unity
Similar the holy elephant that has grand potency
For national defense and for civilization

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda

Somsry Dejakamphou was born in 1926 and has taken part in the revolutionary movement for liberation in 1946. He is a SEA Write poet and national literary writer. He was a popular senior poet for revolution. His pen was not only as sharp as the weapon, but also provided some knowledge on

life, philosophy and fighting. His works are about the legends of Lao revolution. Literature value and revolutionary history are resolutely described in the contents of his writings.

SHORT STORIES

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AMERICAN BONES by Bounthanong Xonxaiphonh

Respectful sirs,

I am an American. I cannot speak your Lao language. Misfortune forced me to request for your assistance in the way of food, shelter, or protection. Please take me to someone who can provide for my security and return me to American people. My government will reward you. I am thankful to you who offer me grateful assistance.

Every time that Butta Kaew¹ saw American soldiers with their t-shirts, jeans, and scarf, he thought of this message. It was translated into many languages: Lao, Vietnamese, Khmer, Chinese, Thai, French, English, Malay, Burmese, Indonesia, German.... Every American soldier carried an identified document for the body during the Indochinese war.

Butta Kaew first read these words at the museum of the Lao People Army in Vientiane. He caught the attention of his friend, a fellow soldier, and asked him for help in reading it.

This is the motto of the invaders; he said World-Class merchants of weaponry many achieve great wealth through military sales, but what about the soldiers? The soldiers would have the greatest of gratitude were they simply allowed to return home, crippled to their parents, family, and lovers.

Twelve specialists from the Hawaii Center for the identification of human remains have arrived in Laos in search of bones. Many were veterans of the Indochina war. Sergeant major Kenly joked arrogantly with his friends. I came to Laos in 1971, he said. When we fled, I had no wish to ever return. At that time, people like me were of great popularity among the Lao the sound of his colleague's laughter echoed loudly through the forest where the C-130 aircraft has met its destruction.

The American searchers spoke freely, assuming that the fifteen Lao soldiers who helped them in investigating for bones did not understand American. The truth is, however, that the men whom in their eyes are ready to help them in any occasions does not only understood the English language but has also been able to make the Americans who did not understand Lao, know about the friendship, cooperation and understanding, about the loving kindness and humanity

Butta Kaew had already spent several days working shoulder to shoulder with these civilized people, gripping the edge of a small net, sifting through ashes to collect bone fragments. He had gathered some of skull, teeth, and other miscellaneous body parts and carefully collected them in bags. In addition to craft, both large and small, that had not been consumed by the fire, all were of great evidences. The area where the plane had gone down has been transformed into a well in which a person standing upright, would have completely been buried. The earth has been disturbed not only as a result of the impact of the collision of the plane, which has fallen 7,500 feet, but also by the 22mm bullet that had explored continuously for two days after the event. In the slightly longer than ten years that had passed since the plane had gone down, earth that had covered the pit and grass had grown deeply. Before it was possible to sift through the ashes. It was first necessary to dig up the grass and then earth with knives.

The Lao soldiers had been instructed to say 'man' wherever they discovered a bone, before handing it to Americans. Otherwise, they used the universal language for communication, hands in place to mouth.

The C-130 aircraft has gone down in the forest nine kilometers distant from the nearest village, not far from Se Kapheu². In 1972, the plane had taken off from American airbase in the Udon³ to drop bombs to suppress the Lao Revolutionary force that were active in the Boliven plateau⁴, liberating the province of Salavan and Attapeu from the end of 1971. The revolutionary force has struck in the areas of Kham Talat, Na Pheang, Ban Sung, Thaen Vong, Thaen Tha, Tha Taeng, and Thia Kam Nauy⁵. They had taken Naung Lae ⁶village, forcing the young Lao and Thai soldiers from Ban Naung Kin Hauy Nan Pak Saung to flee to Pak Se⁷ to escape death. Their master, American was in great turmoil. It was the month of December,

and only three more nights until Christmas, a holiday celebrated by Americans, and people belonging to the Christian faith. Soldiers would have the chance to rest and return home to visit their loved ones – that is, if they did not first abandon their teeth. One of the plane wings had been cut by artillery fire on its return to the air base in Udon, with the Mekong river only twelve miles distance.

Whenever Butta Kaew reflected on the war, he felt unhappy and a great point in his heart, in the past, his grandfather had been a soldier with Ong Kaew⁸ in his fight against the French. His father had fought both the French and relatives had fallen victim to American bombs.

When the American specialists stopped for a rest, one of them approached Butta Kaew. Butta Kaew did not refuse the Virginia filtered cigarette that American offered him, together with match and a matchbox. At the same time, Butta Kaew took a bag of Lao tobacco and banana leaf from the pocket of his camouflage colored pants and offered them in return. Butta Kaew was certain that the American could not roll his own tobacco. Nor could he enter the forest if an American has to take off his shoes and walk bare-footed. These people slept in tents, in addition to protect them from mosquitoes and the cold, and canned goods to consume. Even the very water that they used to wash their hands and feet had to be carried with them.

The Lao soldier had no canned goods. They had one cow to slaughter for every three days of their stay in the forest. The American soldiers grew bored with canned meat and dried bread. When they saw the Lao eating fresh meat, they acted friendly, hoping to exchange food, and sample the Lao beer that had no label. The head of the American team would confiscate Lao food or drink in the possession of any of his subordinates who were not clever enough to avoid detection.

No wonder you did not win the war against barbarians Butta Kaew laughed. Under-developed people eat roots and leaves, drink water from the earth, and bathe in the streams. The skin on their feet is thick, they are not near-sighted, and to them colds, fever, and malaria are but common matter. How can they fail to cause civilized American to flee in terror? After rolling a cigarette, Butta Kaew placed one in the American hand.

The American inhaled the Salavan tobacco for a moment. He coughed loudly, and tears covered his face. Ah, so strong. Thank you.

Butta Kaew, who had never heard the word strong, used to describe a cigarette, felt a little pride that the American had complimented his tobacco for its strength. History had shown that the Lao People were strong.

Those who still had the strength braved the heat, and bathed in sweat, continued the task of sifting through bones and ashes.

Sunlight at the beginning of the dry season, although not painful for Lao people, was of the greatest cruelty for people of white skin. Only once in a long interval would a breeze blow against the limbs and leaves of the tall trees which stood together thickly in rows. The color of the skin was brilliant and beautiful. The Americans who were unwilling to eat fresh beef and vegetables needed injections, growing dizzy as they stood. The only American who remained in good health was those who ate fresh meat, vegetables, and beer without a label, which they skillfully hid from their superior.

The American soldier turned away. Butta Kaew returned to his own thoughts, and reflected on the life of his family. He had lost his parents and much of the rest of his family as a result of the war. It was a war that Americans created. Until the present day Butta knew had wished to pluck white flowers to pay respect to his parent's remains. However, there was not a single bone that remained. His parents remained only in his memory.

Butta Kaew was from Lao Ngarm. From when he first became aware of the world as a child to present day, the word "American" had a single meaning: One who hungers after war. Americans were invaders from the all-powerful world empire. He had never once imagined that there would come a day when he would stand face to face with American people and work towards a common goal. There was no medicine that could ever cure his anger, an anger, which had remained as a lingering disease in his mind. During the past few days, however, he had been forced to suffer the unimaginable. Here he stood digging up and sifting through dirt, not in search of gold, but rather the bones of American soldiers, the same people

who only ten years earlier had arrived in Laos to murder his own parents and relatives

Once, as a mischievous and innocent child Butta Kaew had separated a baby tiger from its mother. Together with his village friend, Damn, he had entered to the forest in search of food, following the custom of the people who live in the mountains. They encountered a baby tiger that was learning clumsily to walk. It was adorable, and would probably fetch a good price in the market. At the very least, it would help them afford the books and ink that were necessary for their education. The two children decided to steal the tiger. After they stole it, they wished to return home in a hurry, but they had already traveled a far distance into the forest that they came upon the tiger mother, an animal that was large enough to devour a buffalo. It reared and bit its teeth in fury, chasing them through the forests, mountains, and stream. There was a dead tree with two branches that stood at the edge of a stream. One branch pointed upwards to the sky, and the other downwards into the water. Butta Kaew and his friend climbed the tree, and sat, huddled and shaking. But they remained unwilling to free the baby tiger. The tiger mother crossed the stream, and came towards them. Furious, it climbed the tree without hesitation. Butta Kaew used one hand to hug the tree, and the other to grasp to stab at the tiger's foot. With great commotion, the animal fell from the tree into the stream. However, it was not willing to abandon its struggle. The tiger stood perched at the banks of the stream, and immediately lunged at the children. It bruised and bloodied an ear of Butta Kaew's friend with its nails. It jumped at the children for a second, third, and fourth time. Ten times the tiger scaled the tree. The children's hearts deeply breathed with fear.

Occasionally they held their breaths. In the end the tiger's strength grew exhausted. It collapsed, lying on the ground, panting with its mouth open wide. The blood from the wound in the tiger's foot grew into puddle. When the children saw their opportunity, they climbed down the tree and escaped with great haste into the village. The villagers took their weapons and formed a party to hurt the tiger. What they found, however, were merely traces of the tiger's blood that stained the earth.

Every time that Butta Kaew thought of his mother, what came to mind was the image of the mother of that baby tiger with the fire of fury in its heart. When his

parents and younger siblings had died as a result of American bombs, his own sanity become another victim. In front of this pitiable sight of devastation, he vowed that as long as there were Americans that remained on this earth, he would hunt them down and kill them all. Butta Kaew dressed in a military uniform and entered the war with a desire to fight to the death. As he first grew up from a child to a young man he offered assistance on many occasions in many battle. With great joy in his heart he joined the Youth Organization of the Revolutionary Movement, without as of yet truly appreciating the meaning of the struggle. Once, during a battle, as he traveled to provide support to the front line of troops, he and his friends were ambushed and fired on the enemy. His group fled and scattered in all directions. It had been the first time in Butta Kaew's life that he had encountered true danger, and faced the risk of death. He dropped his sack of rice and fled through the forests and mountains. He became lost and separated from his companions. He traveled several days and nights through deep forest with no other food than the leaves that he cut and chewed in the forest, when Butta Kaew finally arrived at home, he could neither speak, chew rice, nor swallow water, and collapsed, unconscious. From that time onwards, he became a person who was terrified of war. He feared the sound of the guns and bombs and planes as if he were a weak-hearted person. His father spoke of him contemptuously: in this lifetime, my son will never have the ability to become a soldier nor to go near battle. However when Butta Kaew's village was bombed and burnt to the ground and the corpses of village scattered in all directions, in Butta Kaew's mind he had nothing left to fear. Bombs and corpses, fire, ashes, blood... it had all become normal.

Butta Kaew then entered the war, seeking out the sound of explosion and the sight of blood and death and fire. He led his friends to fish in a sacred swamp where villagers had been forbidden to visit in search of food. The swamp had been left undisturbed for an entire generation, and as a result had grown crowded with fish, oily and bloated. The spirits of the swamp could not do combat with Butta Kaew's anger. From small skirmishes to larger battles, in missions to seek out the American and their lackeys, Butta Kaew volunteered to die in every fight. In places and circumstances that other people would have normally feared, Butta Kaew was always willing. There was nowhere he would not go, and there was nothing that he

would not do, if only it would help do battle with the anger in his heart. Even if that anger would not be extinguished, if only to quench it for a single moment. Butta Kaew became an expert at war, a fighter whose hand had decided the outcome of countless battles. He was a man trusted both among friends and the higher authorities. It pained his heart that the Americans had been able to flee from Indochina. They should have all to die for having come to sow death and devastation in his land. By the present day, however, Butta Kaew's anger had subsided. The political theory that he had studied had expanded his view, what had previously been a fire of anger that knew no bounds. Butta Kaew had reached the stage where he could now exchange cigarette and meat with American soldiers. Had this been the time of war... He did not wish to carry his thoughts any further. He had grown tired of sifting through ashes in search of the skulls and bones and teeth that had escaped incineration of this particular group of people.

Occasionally, a cool breeze would blow, and Butta Kaew would feel calm. He thought about the mothers and families and relatives of the bones that piled in sacks.

They were probably wiping back their tears, anxiously the remains of their children and husbands and lovers. But these people lacked one right. They could not be angry. It was different with that of Butta Kaew or the tiger mother. Butta Kaew's parents and relatives had not flown planes to drop bombs on Washington or New York. But their sons had brought death across continents to burn and destroy an under-developed land, killing its innocent of death or the piles of money being made from the war.

The fact that Americans had lost the war did not mean that its debt of blood had been paid in full. The Americans had simply escaped death. They were preparing at this very moment for another major war. In spite of this, however, our revolution was humane enough to send home the bones of the invaded so that they would find a more comforting place of rest than the forests, mountains, and stream of Laos. Butta Kaew did not desire that even the wild grass be fed with minerals from the bone of the invaders. On the ninth day, the search for bones had met a successful conclusion. They had discovered all of the bones that remained of the fourteen soldiers and officers of the American air forces from the ill-fated C130

plane. The American bone specialist were all pleased, and held a great feast in celebration. Not one tasted the Lao beer without a label, nor did they criticize the fresh meat and vegetable that they had apparent tastes better, and provided more strength and energy than did the canned goods of the Americans. Not a single Lao revolutionary soldier had fainted as a result of digging up and sifting through ashes during the past nine days. When Butta Kaew shook the hand of the head of the American specialists in bones, he surprised the American by digging farewell in the language of the bones.

Respectful sirs,

I am a Lao. I can speak your language. Humanity forces me to assist you with food and board, and to provide for your protection. Please take my heart of humanity and present it to appreciate it, and return these bone fragments to their American relatives. My government with sincerity has made this act of merit without even requesting that you consider it as such. Thank you very much for taking back the bones of these unwelcome invaders. Goodbye and good luck. Certainly we will meet again, because the American bones are not all gone. What is important is that you do not allow another war, I am afraid that in modern warfare age, there will not even be bones left over to be sent back to greet the widows who are waiting at home.

(1) *Butta Kaew: name of a person*

(2) *Se Kapheu: a river*

(3) *Udon: name of the town in the North East of Thailand*

(4) *Boliven: name of the plateau located in Southern Laos*

(5) *Thaen Vong, Thaen Tha, Tha taeng, Thia Kam Nauy: names of villages*

(6) *Naung Lae: village*

(7) *Naung, Kin Hauy Nan, Pak Saung: names of villages*

(8) *Ong Kaew: Revolution hero*

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda, Martin Currish, Peter Koret

Bounthanong Xonxaiphonh was born in 1953. In a writing career spanning more than 30 years, he has published more than 20 books, including short stories, poems and novels, many of which have been translated into Thai, Japanese, French and English. His passion in writing has also spirited him to help the establishment of the young writer's club, Lao Writers Association and many magazines. The story "American Bones" won the SEA Write Award in 2011.

STAYING OVERNIGHT IN THE FOREST

by Chanthy Deuansavanh

One day at the beginning of the rainy season in 1960, the provincial office of Vientiane charged Miss Maychai, the head of Lao Women's Union Organization, with the daunting task of establishing a branch of the Association of Patriotic Lao Women in the area of Houy Vai village a place located deep in the lush Lao Forest.

As it was known to take one day to reach this village travelling on foot, Maychai did not carry much on her journey, apart from a change of clothes, a pocket knife and some documents.

The officer who was assigned by the provincial authority as her security guard was Mr. Yia Cheu, an ethnic-Hmong¹ from Pha Kao Phou Sae² who was orphaned in his childhood.

He came to work at the military unit to protect the provincial office in late 1959. On the trip, Maychai asked Yia Cheu to walk four to five meters ahead of her. To protect herself, Maychai firmly held the small knife in the hand at all times, while Yia Cheu carried a bag on his shoulder and a gun with three pieces of grenade tied around his waist. In one hand was a cylinder containing a lime powder to ward off the wild leeches so prevalent in the area. During the first two hours of their hike, they did not speak one word to each other. Maychai was a revolutionary girl who never had much interest in men even though many male officer and soldiers had tried in vain to win her heart. She had a shy streak, and would often grow red in the face whenever her girlfriends complimented her for good looks or nice personality. Most girls liked to be thought of as beautiful, but in this time of war there were obviously more important things on the mind of Maychai. So along the 30-km long trip, Maychai never walked close to her guard and Yia Cheu also said little attention to the training woman. Yia Cheu walked so fast that sometimes Maychai had to run to keep up and maintain Yia Cheu on her sights.

In that afternoon, Maychai became hungry and tired, and her spirits sank as she started to feel somehow lonely. The weather that May was so humid, and she

tromped through the woods her handkerchief became soaked with the sweat of her brow. When they've reached a river, Maychai called Yia Cheu to stop and rest and have some small meal together. Mr. Yia Cheu did not say anything, he just waited for her to reach him and then he used a knife to cut banana leaves and bamboo shoots to hold some water. After laying tree leaves on the ground, and setting their meal of rice and chili sauce, he told Maychai to eat, while he himself went and sat on a nearby rock and nonchalantly clipped his fingernails. Maychai asked him to join her but he just turned his head away and intoned: "I am still not hungry." Soon after, Maychai finished a drink. Yia Cheu spoke in a sharp tone of a commander to pack up and began. "Let's go", he ordered, "if we are late the rain will come, and we will not be able to reach our destination". Although Maychai once worked as a propaganda cadre for many years, and experienced hardship in the forest, she could not restrain herself from getting angry because Yia Cheu walked too fast. His tough attitude also annoyed her. Along the road, he always looks too stern and unapproachable. She thought that if she was asked to take a similar trip she would decline the offer.

The forest of Long San Long Tone area was very dense and the humidity made breathing difficult. Wild leeches were everywhere and people hiking the area had to remove five or six of them at a time. Different kinds of wild fowl ran up and down both sides of the road, and dangerous wild boars were even known to follow the same path. Monkeys also loomed in the trees overhead: jumping with excitement at the sight of seldom-seen humans.

But late afternoon, the sky started to darken and thunder clapping across the distant forest signaled an approaching storm. Yia Cheu looked back to Maychai and said they should stop because the rain was coming quickly. Then Yia Cheu used some tree leaves to make a small shelter on the side of the road and asked Miss Maychai to sit under it, while he himself sat under a tree, keeping dry by holding a banana branch over his head. Shortly after that, the skies opened up and the temporary shelter could not withstand the pounding rain. Yia Cheu ran to Maychai and draped her rain coat and head covering and then returned back to his spot. Maychai called him to join her under the shelter but he pretended not hear her. From the shelter, she saw him holding a branch of banana leaves in one hand over his

head as he wiped water from his cheek with the other. He was drenched to the bone and looked an awful sight, but she no longer kept silent and implored him to seek shelter with her. But he just turned his head around as a sign of his refusal. "Ah, so this is what people mean when they say that Hmong people never change their mind when they say "No" Maychai thought secretly to herself.

As the rain cleared up, and the sky turned blue as the brooding clouds disappeared to the west, the sound of birds chirping filled the damp woods

Maychai got out from under the shelter with her clothes soaked wet by the cool rains. Her body shivered "Thank you very much." She said to Yia Cheu, who answered her quick nod of the head.

"Please walk a little bit slower because I don't keep pace with you." Maychai asked him. "But we still have to reach our destination before sunset."

It was impossible to reach the destination before that set time because they still had to cross a wide river filled with dangerous jutting rocks. There was no way to swim across this river because the treacherous current was also too strong it was getting dark and ten kilometers remained. In this very difficult situation, the one who felt most upset was Maychai. She saw Yia Cheu as being aloof. On the other hand he complained to her saying "I already told you to walk faster, but you did not listen. Now you see what has happened."

Maychai knew that he was right and asked him what they ought to do. "The only thing left for us to do now is wait until the water level subsides." He replied.

As it was getting dark, Yia Cheu cut some small trees to make a shelter and then brought some firewood to make a fire. Luckily his matches did not get wet in the rain. Half an hour later they had a fire to warm them. The rice they brought along from home was completely wet, but the fire made their clothes dry and warmed the atmosphere somewhat.

While sitting close to fire Maychai secretly stole a glance at Yia Cheu's rectangular and well-built body. Although they knew one another, their relationship was by no means close due to their different stations in society. Yia Cheu possessed a solitary nature and he took to his work very seriously. He was not the type to talk

very much. At monthly work reviews, Yia Cheu was often named as an outstanding officer.

In terms of people relationship with one another, one at the time of national salvation, everybody enjoys equality: man and woman treated each other as comrades and friends. They trusted and regarded each as brother, both as brothers and sisters of the parents. When falling in love with each other, both a bride and groom would officially inform their organization of their wish to enter marriage by submitting their biography with an application form for approval. If anyone failed to observe this rule, by secretly having affairs, they would certainly be subjected to some form of discipline.

As midnight approached, the calmness multiplied, but Maychai could not sleep, in the past she had travelled alone with a man, but he had never experienced a situation where she had to stay overnight on the way such as this.

When fire and the petrol are put close to each other, an explosion can occur. But throughout that night nothing happened between these two revolutionary fighters. Yia Cheu remains alert by the side of the fire as cradled his gun in his arms. Maychai said, "Please try to get some sleep, because today you become tired by carrying the load for me."

"Nevermind. I will." He said pushing a piece of wood into the fire.

Maychai pretended to sleep and kept her eyes on the Hmong companion. Yia Cheu remains resistant. Eventually fatigue overtook Maychai and she fell asleep.

She was awakened at midnight by the cry of a nearby deer. As she felt uneasy, she moved to sit closer to Yia Cheu, who was sleeping on his back against a big tree.

"Get up. Yia Cheu, don't you hear that animal crying?"

Yia Cheu opened his eyes. When he realized that it was just a deer, he laughed. It was the first time that Maychai had seen him smile and it warmed her.

"Don't be afraid, it's only a deer." He said.

“But I feel frightened” Maychai said, while taking a jacket out of her bag to cover herself.

“Please sleep, and don’t be afraid. As long as I am alive, you are safe.” Yia Cheu said as he cocked his gun.

Maychai returned to her sleeping place but she still could not sleep. She kept looking thoughtfully at Yia Cheu.

“Oh, the revolution trains people so well!” Maychai thought to herself. She felt that this man was so kind and so respectful to her.

Usual Lao People tend to regard the Hmong as lacking in education and think they are only able to do manual labor “they have disproportionately large feet and hands” many say, in mocking fashion. She felt pity for him and regretted her initial suspicion of him at the beginning of the journey. Then she slept. After she waked up at dawn the next day, she found Yia Cheu standing ready for departure. “Let’s go.” He said.

Maychai nodded her head in agreement and showed her sweet smile. But he did not reciprocate the gesture and simply walked away to show they needed to start moving again.

After that trip, Maychai and Yia Cheu become good friends. She made him a red handkerchief as a souvenir of their journey together. When she gave him the handkerchief, he was filled with emotion and blushed. He simply said. “Thank you” after that, he always avoided Maychai.

After the coup d’état by the royalist military forces on September 9, 1960 in Vientiane, Yia Cheu was admitted into a revolutionary military regiment commanded by Mr. Sithong³. One day before his departure on a military mission in Vientiane, Yia Cheu made a date with Maychai, but on that day he said “I am leaving you now and I don’t know if I will ever see you again.”

Maychai held Yia Cheu’s hands firmly in hers and said. “Don’t talk like that. I will wait for you.”

That morning of his departure they dared to talk about the future they dreamed of having together. Before leaving, Yia Cheu gave his knife to Maychai and asked her to keep it for herself defense and as a reminder of him.

For the first time, tears ran down Maychai's cheeks. Yia Cheu wiped her tear away with his handkerchief. She tried her best not to cry in front of him as he left for battle. Just three months later. She heard the sad news from Vientiane. "Comrade Yia Cheu" it said, "the heroic son of the Hmong people, laid down his life on the battlefield to protect Vientiane from the opposition force at Sala Kuktane⁴ on December 13, 1960.

Translated by Savanhone Rajmontry

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- (1) Hmong: Lao ethnic group
 - (2) Pha Kao Phou Sae: mountain name
 - (3) Mr. Sithong: revolution hero
 - (4) Sala Kuktane:village name

Chanthy Deuansavanh is a national writer born in 1940. He participated in the revolutionary movement since 1952 when he was only 13 years old. He graduated with a diploma of Journalism from Vietnam in 1961. "The Lights of Revolution" was his first writing printed in 1965. "The Road of Life" is his fashionable book outfitted with 3 volumes first printed in 1970 then reprinted five times more. Some of his short stories were chosen into the instructor's book for secondary school by the Ministry of Education. "Staying Overnight in the Forest" was his short story that won the SEA Write Award in 1999.

THE WAILING RIVER

by Viseth Svengsuksa

No one would have uttered a word, if it hadn't been the plain season of rain. But no rain was in sight, not even a tiny drop of it. Every morning, mountains of clouds were spotted hanging from the sky ceiling, sometimes, they glided over very low as if they would touch the water surface. But as soon as the sun leveled itself with the palm leaves, these clouds escaped from sight, leaving behind blistering heat to the point that the whole river would evaporate and empty to its bones.

Such situation dragged on nights and days posing deadly threat to this long snaking river. No one had any idea about the origin of this river, except its long blue line snaking past mountain range and valleys. It generously fed plants, animals and human beings dwelling along its bank.

Now, the large blue line thinned itself to its spine, piles of pebbles and stones stood high right in the middle of the river. Many shallow stretches were cut, but Phra Nha Thaen, the God of rain, never lent his ears to those shrimps, crabs and tiny fish on the river. Being cornered and helpless, the river burst out crying waiting for its last breath. The lofty mountains and high cliffs and thick forests all gave her a cold shoulder. Days passed by, finally the wailing of the river reached the adjacent streams. The streams then, gathered at once and were quick to rescue the wailing river.

"We originate from a thick highland of eternal watershed. We have to show mercy and brotherhood" one of the streams said and was supported by another one. "Though we fear no drought, care no rain, we are still committed to help the affected" "How shall we help, then?" the thinnest stream asked.

Not wanting to waste a minute, the streams reached quick unanimity. They all led their way to the wailing river. Within three days, the river flooded its banks with crystal clear water.

"Thanks... a thousand thanks. I will never forget you dear Liberators" the river expressed its deep gratitude to the streams.

From then on, brotherhood between the river and the streams were cemented. They fear no drought and care no rain. They lived harmoniously.

But one day, as time went by, the giant river convocated the streams to a meeting to acknowledge its coronation as the king of all river and streams.

“My body is gigantic; I can flood every living thing to death, thus enabling me to defend all of you. We need a mighty king and I am right for that position. From now on, you must call me King of the Great.”

The streams found the river’s remarks ridiculous but they kept quiet. They understood that, poisoned with ignorance and power, the river was at loss. One of the streams uttered a warring remark.

“You were once boiled down to the bottom by the sun and we came to save you. We are committed to hold high eternal brotherhood through mutual assistance, now you declare yourself the king of all without any appropriate consultations.”

Irritated by the remarks, the river shouted aloud.

“Call me king of the Great, the weak must follow the strong. I need no consultations.”

Late that night, the streams made up a big decision that they were to return to their origin leaving the river at the mercy of the sun.

The following day, the merciless sun pours down its shiny rays. The whole river boiled and evaporated. The river bed was cut into pieces full of pebbles and sand. It’s wailing voice no more responded.

Translated by Thanongsack Vongsackda

Viseth Svengsuksa was born in 1953. A newspaper editor-in-chief and a well-known personality, his writings are mainly short stories, poems and jokes. A large number of short stories composed by him were translated into English, French, Russian, Vietnamese and Thai. He was designated into positions, and was voted as representative of the National Assembly for four terms.