Mahakap Thao Hung Thao Cheuang [Thao Hung Thao Cheuang Epic], vol. 1, edited and adapted into modern Lao prose by Douangdeuane Bounyavong, Othong Kham Inxou, & Somphay Vilaysack

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vidu et de son développement intellectuel, et non pas des événements extérieurs. Au contraire, les autobiographies indonésiennes sont tournées vers le triomphe du nationalisme qui « orchestre le rythme du narratif », au point qu’à tout moment « le lecteur peut délaisser l’intrigue et resituer un épisode particulier en fonction de son apport à la réalisation du nationalisme ».

*Of self and nation*, un travail finement ciselé. Perspicace et subtile, la lecture effectuée par Watson synthétise de façon convaincante une représentation de l’Indonésie moderne par des auteurs dont l’existence intime se confond avec la destinée de leur pays.

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*By Frédéric MAUREL*

This is the first volume of the *Thao Hung Thao Cheuang* epic, edited and adapted into modern Lao prose. It is based on a manuscript discovered in the National Library in Bangkok by Maha Sila Viravong (a prominent figure of Lao historiography and philology), who published a transcription into Thai script on the occasion of a funerary ceremony in 1943. The manuscript was later transcribed into Lao script and published in 1988 by the National Research Institute for Art and Culture (Ministry of Information and Culture, Vientiane).

The *Thao Hung Thao Cheuang* is generally considered one of the greatest texts of Lao literature. It recounts the life and battles of a part-historical, part-mythical character, Thao Hung or Thao Cheuang (*thao* means “king” or “lord”), son of Khun Chomtham, a ruler of the Suantan or Nakhong kingdom. From a philological viewpoint, this text is important because it contains data on early historical and religious structures and on origin myths of the Tai people. For this reason, this new edition in modern Lao is very welcome.

This first volume includes a short introduction in Lao (pp. 1-11) and English (pp. 12-16), the foreword by Maha Sila Viravong to the 1988 edition, in Lao (pp. 17-30) and English (pp. 31-41), various maps and tables (pp. 42-59), an update on the question of pronouns and personal names (pp. 60-67), the text of the epic, with the Lao transcription and its modern adaptation on opposite pages (pp. 69-378), and a useful selective glossary including words now obsolete in modern Lao and Thai (pp. 380-401).

The Lao transcription is virtually the same as that published in 1988 – apart from a few changes and minor adjustments – and is correctly transliterated. I must express one major reservation, however, about the overall procedure used in this first volume: There is no systematic critical apparatus. I assume that the critical notes usually found accompanying such a text have been transferred to the forthcoming second volume. As for the adaptation into modern Lao prose, it is really a *tour de force*, as the interpretation of such texts is made difficult by numerous terms and phrases that very often are opaque, polysemous, and ambiguous. This is why the authors, like other scholars having had to deal with such problems, present their work as “paraphrase” (pp. 15 et seq.). Indeed, despite numerous dictionaries and glossaries dealing with Tai languages (Lao, Siamese, Thai dam, etc.) and published during the last few decades, there will never be a consensus on the meaning of some archaic terms and phrases.

Although for a definitive assessment it will be necessary to wait for the release of the second volume, this edition, on the basis of what is offered here, promises to be a valuable contribution to the ever-expanding universe of *Thao Hung Thao Cheuang* studies.


*Par Louise PICARD-BERTAUX*

Cet ouvrage fait suite au *Manuel de Birman* publié en 1990 à L’Asiatheque par les mêmes auteurs. Ce premier volume, véritable méthode de langue, se présentait sous forme de chapitres composés chacun de plusieurs textes illustrés, de listes de vocabulaire, d’exercices et d’une fiche grammaticale et s’accompagnait de deux cassettes audio. Le