CHAPTER 8. THE JEH

SECTION I
INTRODUCTION

Regarded as one of the most isolated and primitive of the Montagnard tribal groups of the Republic of Vietnam, the Jeh live in the rugged, mountainous Laos-Vietnam border region. The Jeh are of Mon-Khmer ethnic and linguistic stock, as are the nearby Katu and Sedang.

Jeh society is patriarchal and their autonomous villages constitute the group's highest level of social and political organization. The Jeh economy is based on the slash-and-burn cultivation of dry rice.

Name and Size of Group

The exact number of the Jeh (or Die, as they are often called) is not recorded. Recent estimates vary from 7,000 to 18,000.¹ In 1964 an American missionary estimated that the Jeh numbered approximately 15,000 persons.²

Location and Terrain Analysis

The Jeh live in the mountainous region along the Se Kemane, Poko, and Dak Mi Rivers in southern Quang Nam, western Quang Tin, and northwestern Kontum Provinces. Some Jeh also live across the border in Laos.³ Roughly, the Jeh may be placed within the region bounded on the north by Dak Nhe; on the east by Phuoc Son; on the south by Dak Sut; and on the west in Laos by the eastern edge of the Bolovens Plateau. The Sedang inhabit the area to the south of the Jeh, the Katu are located to the north, and the Cua are found to the east.⁴

The region is covered with monsoon and primary rain forests. The monsoon forest, along the lower elevations near watercourses, is relatively easy to penetrate. During the dry winter season, the monsoon forest turns brown and many of the trees lose their leaves. During the summer rainy season travel is difficult because of the quarries produced by flooding.⁵

Primary rain forest covers the more inaccessible regions (usually the highest elevations). Here the trees, with an average height

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of 75 to 90 feet, form a continuous canopy. Below this canopy are smaller trees 45 to 60 feet in height, and below this second layer is a fair abundance of seedlings and saplings. Orchids, other herbaceous plants, epiphytes, and woody climbing plants known as lianas are profuse. Little light penetrates this forest; hence, there is little ground growth. During the dry season, this forest can usually be penetrated on foot with little difficulty.

Areas of secondary rain forest develop after land in the primary rain forest has been cleared and then left uncultivated. Here the trees are small and close together, and there is an abundance of ground growth, lianas, and herbaceous climbers. Penetration is difficult without the constant use of the machete. There are few roads, trails, or navigable waterways in the Jeh area, and travel is difficult. Travel is especially inhibited during the rainy season from April to mid-September.

The climate of the Jeh area is influenced by two monsoon winds, one from the southwest in the summer (April to mid-September) and the other from the northeast in the winter (mid-September to March). Agriculture is greatly dependent upon the summer monsoons, which bring up to 150 inches of rain yearly and create local floods. Temperatures in the Jeh region are as much as 15 degrees lower than in the coastal lowland regions.

The Jeh area is crossed by Vietnam's National Route 14, a hard-surfaced, militarily important communication route running north from Kontum through Dak To, Dak Sut, Dak Gle, turning east at Thuong Duc to reach the coast at Hoi An.
SECTION II
TRIBAL BACKGROUND

Ethnic and Racial Origin

All the highland groups of the Republic of Vietnam are part of two large ethnic groups: the Malayo-Polynesian and the Mon-Khmer. In terms of language, customs, and physical appearance, the Jeh belong to the Mon-Khmer grouping. Indochina has been a migratory corridor from time immemorial, and the movement of the Mon-Khmer peoples into what is now the Republic of Vietnam probably started centuries ago. The Mon-Khmer peoples are generally believed to have originated in the upper Mekong valleys, from whence they migrated through Indochina. The Jeh are descendents of these ancient migrants and are related to the Sedang, Katu, Bahnar, and M'nong, in terms of customs, language, and agricultural techniques.

Language

Reportedly there are three or four Jeh dialects, all of which fall within the Bahnaric grouping of the Mon-Khmer language family. The Jeh dialects are understood by some Sedang and by some ethnic Vietnamese; some Jeh, in turn, can speak Sedang and Vietnamese. There are indications that a few Jeh can speak other tribal languages. Jeh knowledge of other languages has been acquired through trading contacts, limited education in Government and missionary schools, and military service with either the French or the Vietnamese.

The Jeh currently have no written language, although it is reported that a linguist in the area near Dak Sut has been developing one. At present the only way to learn the Jeh dialects is to live among the people or to establish contact with one of the limited number of Jeh tribesmen who have left their villages.

Legendary History

Legends about the origins of the tribes, the spirits, and the world are part of the large oral tradition of the Jeh. Passed down by word of mouth—usually in verse form to prevent distortion—these tales of legendary heroes, anecdotes about tribal members, proverbs, and traditional tribal laws are frequently chanted in the
Figure 18. Jeoh longhouse.
evening around the family hearth or are recited as invocations during religious ceremonies.

Factual History

What little is known of Jeh history reflects the story of a weak people who have been continually forced deeper into the mountains by stronger highland groups and by the ethnic Vietnamese. The Jeh were so severely oppressed by the neighboring Sedang that at one time they were close to becoming extinct as a distinct group. In the 19th century, in order to escape Sedang oppression, the Jeh retreated so far into the hills that the increasingly inhospitable land could not support their crops. Village organization fell apart in some cases, and from about 1850 on some Jeh abandoned their traditional longhouses in favor of isolated huts.

When the French reached the Jeh area around 1927, the Jeh, believing the French were allies of the belligerent Sedang, desperately resisted them. Some better organized Jeh villages were not pacified until approximately 1935. Under French administration, the Jeh began to reestablish themselves: they again cultivated fields; they began to produce articles for trade; and once more they began to build their traditional longhouses. Many Jeh worked for the French in the construction of National Route 14 across their home region. At first the Jeh would accept only salt and blankets for their labor, but by 1940 some were asking for payment in paper money. Thus, despite their comparative backwardness, the Jeh were among the first of the highland groups to use paper money. Although they still prefer to barter, they do accept paper money in trade with the ethnic Vietnamese.

Settlement Patterns

Jeh villages, built on steep hillsides, are surrounded by cultivated ricefields. As it is difficult to keep the land cleared of jungle growth, most fields are quite small. Usually built along watercourses, the villages may consist of from 1 to 10 longhouses, each about 150 to 600 feet long. The longhouses are built on low pilings, their orientation depending upon the contour of the land. Communal houses have been reported in some Jeh villages.

The interior of a Jeh longhouse is divided into as many compartments as there are nuclear families in the extended family household. The compartments are arranged on each side of a central corridor extending the length of the house. In addition to access to the corridor, each compartment has an outside entrance with a covering which can be lifted to serve either as a door or as a window. Part of the roof can also be raised to give ventilation and light. The houses are not clean, largely because of the tribal prohibition against dirtying water and because of the many hearths with no chimneys to carry smoke and soot out of the house.
A communal room is located in the center of the longhouse. This room serves as a meeting place and reception room, and as sleeping quarters for adolescent boys. The skulls of buffaloes, deer, and gibbon are hung from the walls in this room. On the floor are buffalo tails and coils of solidly woven rattan cable used to attach buffaloes to sacrificial poles. In the evenings, the villagers gather in the communal rooms—or communal house if there is one—and sit around the fire to talk, chant legends and tales, and exchange news with visitors from other villages.

Since 1927, the beginning of the French administration, the Jeh have migrated little. Occasionally they will build a new village some 500 yards or so from the old village, but custom and traditional taboos tend to keep Jeh villages in the same general area. When provoked, however, the Jeh have moved entire villages farther into the mountains. Recently the Jeh have begun to move again—this time to avoid harassment from the Viet Cong.

The water sources near a village are usually pure springs or rushing mountain streams. Most villagers take special care to keep their water source clean; strangers are always warned not to pollute the water.
SECTION III
INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical Characteristics

The Jeh are short (averaging about 5 feet 2 inches), muscular and broad-shouldered. Their skin is smooth and bronze colored, and they have wide noses, high cheekbones, and dark brown eyes. The Jeh seldom cut their long, thick, black hair, which they wear in a chignon. Rarely do the Jeh wash their person or their clothes. In the past, the Jeh knocked out their incisor teeth at puberty, but this custom appears to be dying out.

Health

The health of the Jeh who reach adulthood may be described as good, since they have survived in spite of a high infant mortality rate and exposure to many endemic diseases. Village sanitation and the tribesmen's personal hygiene practices are rudimentary, due partially to their belief that cleanliness angers the spirits. The Jeh reportedly bathe only once a year and are therefore highly susceptible to various skin diseases.

The principal disease among the Jeh is malaria—most tribespeople contract it at least once during their lifetime. Two common types of malaria are found in the tribal area. One, benign tertian malaria, causes high fever with relapses over a period of time, but is usually not fatal. The second type, malignant tertian malaria, is fatal to both infants and adults.

Infantile paralysis (polio) is also reportedly prevalent among the Jeh. A recent visitor to the area reported that every Jeh tribesman has polio some time during his life, either dying from it or surviving to develop an immunity.

The three types of typhus found in the Jeh area are carried by lice, rat fleas, and mites. Mite-borne typhus is reportedly rampant among all the Montagnard tribes.

Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, yaws, leprosy, venereal disease, tuberculosis, and various parasitic infestations are also found in the area.

Disease in the tribal area is spread by insects, including the anopheles mosquito, rat flea, and louse; some diseases are caused
by worms, including hookworms; and some diseases are associated with poor sanitation and inadequate sexual hygiene. All the Jeh reportedly suffer from a lack of vitamin A, and general malnutrition is widespread. Medical assistance can be given only after the confidence of the Jeh has been won: 'the Jeh are evidently afraid of inoculations and are distrustful of medical help. Those tribesmen whose confidence has been won will accept medical treatment such as sulfa powder for skin sores.

Endurance

The Jeh are reported to have exceptional endurance. They have a surprising resistance to fatigue and suffering and can travel great distances to find food or to trade with other villages and with the ethnic Vietnamese.

Psychological Characteristics

Like all the highland tribes of the Republic of Vietnam, the Jeh live in what they see as a hostile world. They believe their lives are constantly influenced by innumerable good and evil spirits. Strangers, of whom the Jeh are quite suspicious, are expected to conform to tribal customs: the Jeh have been known to kill strangers who they believe are guilty of violating their taboos. The Jeh are reported to be industrious, honest, and sincere in all they do. They are intelligent and have a tremendous capacity for imitation. They are naturally curious, and once their confidence is won, are hard working.

The Jeh are completely family oriented. An action has importance only to the degree that it is beneficial or harmful to their families. The Jeh have been characterized as serious, thoughtful, and somewhat fatalistic. Jeh men are discreet, dignified, upright, capable of devotion, and responsive to kindness.

The Jeh enjoy evening fireside gossip and conversation. They also like to hear news brought by the Jeh men of neighboring villages.
SECTION IV
SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Jeh society is patriarchal and the extended family, headed by the eldest male member, is its basic unit. Usually a village comprises one or more extended families, with social leadership provided by the eldest members of all the families. The marriage system is exogamous; men select their wives from neighboring villages. After marriage, the newlyweds take up residence in the groom's village.

Place of Men, Women, and Children in the Society

Men and women seem to occupy positions of near equality in Jeh society, although the society is patriarchal and only men can become elders. Furthermore, men and women apparently own property individually rather than jointly as husband and wife or with other members of their respective families.

Jeh women are very modest, often hiding when a stranger enters the village; a Jeh women would never leave the village area unless chaperoned by at least one Jeh man.

Highest on the social scale are the village elders. Strictly speaking, there is no village chief in Jeh society. Unless one family constitutes the entire village, the head of each extended family (the eldest male) must be consulted for any decision which affects the village. The weight of any elder's opinion in a decision depends upon his personal wealth—which, in a society this poor, may be only slightly greater than that of his neighbor. Nevertheless all elders are greatly respected by the other members of the village community. Since tradition and custom largely determine individual behavior, the elders' role of interpreting tradition contributes to their influence.

Marriage

In the past, Jeh families kept track of distant blood relatives, for marriages between 10th- or 15th-degree cousins were traditionally forbidden. More recently, since detailed records have not been kept, marriages between 15th-degree cousins would probably be permitted. Sexual relations within the extended family group constitute incest.

In most Jeh villages there is a preponderance of adult males.
resulting in the customs of late marriage and the practice of the man's bringing valuable gifts to the woman's family.

When a young man selects a prospective bride, he asks an intermediary to request her parents' consent. The intermediary carries a jar of alcohol and a dead chicken to the girl's family. Once they decide the significance of the omens revealed by the chicken and alcohol, they discuss the value and type of gifts (perhaps rice and rice wine) which the prospective bridegroom must bring to the girl's parents every month of the customary 4-year engagement. Occasionally, the engagement is slightly shorter than 4 years.

Throughout the long engagement, the couple remain almost strangers. Although the young man frequently spends an evening at his fiancée's home, he is never alone with her.

One month before the proposed wedding, the fiancée's parents carefully consider, in the presence of the elders of the family, whether the prospective bridegroom has fulfilled his obligations to them during the engagement. If the deliberations are favorable, the girl's parents and the older members of the family discuss the details of the wedding festivities. They decide the number of jars of rice wine to be offered for the wedding guests. Once again omens are sought for the selection of an auspicious date. Then the young man's friends build the nuptial house, decorating it with garlands of flowers.

The villages of both the bride and the bridegroom participate in the wedding celebration, ringing gongs, visiting, drinking rice wine, and eating the meat of sacrificial buffaloes.

During the night of the celebration, the bridegroom's friends escort him by torchlight to his fiancée's village, where the villagers greet them with welcoming shouts and rice wine.

Meanwhile the bride pretends to hide in her village. Her brothers and their friends find her quickly and return her to her father's house, where her bridegroom soon comes to take her away. When the couple return to the bridegroom's village, they remain in the nuptial house for a lunar month. During this time, only the bridegroom's mother may enter this house. She provides them with whatever they need.

Child-Rearing Practices and Education

The Jeh child is nursed by his mother until the age of 2 to 3. When he is about 6 months old, however, his mother begins to feed him cooked rice which she has chewed.

Until the child is 4 or 5 years old, he is carried on his parent's back. All children are allowed free run of the village and go without clothing.

Once male children learn to walk, they are provided with small bows and arrows and other small-scale tools and weapons. Al-
though at first they may only use them to annoy the domestic animals, they are ultimately taught to hunt, fish, and survive on the trail. Young girls remain at home, watching the household fire for their mothers and learning to imitate the actions of the adult women. When they are a little older, the girls help with easy household tasks and the cultivation of garden plants.

A family with no daughters will ask one of its sons to take over the tasks normally performed by daughters.

Death and Burial

There is little information available concerning the rites and customs surrounding the death and burial of the Jeh tribesmen. It has been reported, however, that when a Jeh dies, he is buried in an open coffin carved from a tree trunk. One end of the coffin is decorated with a carving of a buffalo head, symbolizing the wish of the Jeh to "rest in the buffalo" after death and representing the vitality which the sacrifice of the buffalo gives to the village and its agricultural endeavors.

Inheritance Customs

The property of a tribesman is divided among his children after his death; his wife or eldest son then serves as the guardian of the property. If the eldest son serves as guardian, he is given the title pa nje.

When a son marries, his share of the family inheritance constitutes the first portion of a new patrimony. This patrimony consists of the fields, gongs, and dishes which are the son's possessions. On his death, these items will be inherited by his children.

When a daughter marries, she gives her part of the inheritance to the pa nje. But if a daughter marries a very poor man, she might retain her portion of the inheritance by returning to her village with her husband. On the other hand, if a young man marries and leaves his own village for that of his wife, he must relinquish his portion of the inheritance.
SECTION V

CUSTOMS AND TABOOS

Due to their isolation, little information is available concerning the specific folk beliefs and superstitions of the Jeh. However, it is known that almost all their activities are governed by numerous customs and taboos. Like other Montagnard groups, the Jeh probably have prescribed methods and procedures governing everything from dress to the construction of houses, from the settlement of disputes to patterns of individual behavior. The Jeh have handed down an oral tradition of customs and taboos from generation to generation until they have attained the force of customary law.

Dress

The Jeh dress very simply. The basic garment for men is the loincloth. Women wear a blue cotton skirt reaching from the waist to below the knees and often wrap their calves with bands of white cloth. The main additional item of clothing is an all-purpose blanket worn as an upper garment by both men and women. It is doubtful whether the Jeh own much in the way of ornamental or decorative clothing, although some men cover their hair knots with a net adorned by multicolored beads.

Reportedly the Jeh have a clothing shortage. They do not weave their own cloth but must obtain it through trade with other tribes or the Vietnamese. When they can afford it, they buy army shirts from the Vietnamese.

Folk Beliefs

Although the Jeh are believed to be among the most superstitious of all the Montagnard groups of the Republic of Vietnam, little information concerning their specific beliefs is available. An American missionary who worked among them stated that he had never observed a tribe that offered so many animal sacrifices to the trails, mountains, and other prominent features of the surrounding terrain. The Jeh, believing that their harsh surroundings are controlled by a multitude of spirits, offer sacrifices in the hope of easing their existence.

The Jeh are reported to bathe only once a year—and than only after offering an appropriate sacrifice, lest they anger the spirits by presuming to be clean.
Customs Relating to Animals

Certain animals are considered taboo by the Jeh. When tribesmen sight a taboo animal, they refuse to use the trail on which it was seen. The Jeh are known to be afraid of tigers and leopards, probably for a combination of spiritual reasons and actual knowledge of the beasts' predatory nature.

The Jeh value the buffalo highly. They save buffalo skulls, painting them with blood and chalk; these are hung in the communal room, solidly attached so they will not "run away." The Jeh living in the house feed the buffaloes symbolically by putting grass in the mouths, nostrils, and even the eye sockets of the skulls. The Jeh believe the spirits which the skulls represent affect the fertility of the fields and the general prosperity of the village. As many as 92 skulls have been counted in a single Jeh longhouse.

Figure 19. Jeh tribespeople in ceremonial dress.

Eating Customs

The basis of the Jeh diet is rice, supplemented by corn and manioc. Pieces of gourd or green bananas are sometimes mixed with rice; sometimes mixtures of rice and corn or corn and manioc are also cooked. When there is no salt, a pinch of wood cinder is used for seasoning. Freshwater shellfish are cooked in a pan with the leaves of a shrub resembling a mulberry bush. Tadpoles, broiled and then grilled, are well liked by the Jeh, as are June bug
larvae with red pepper. Occasionally the meat of a rat, squirrel, hedgehog, or monkey adds variety to the menu.

Venison is rare; but when available, it is generally cut up on the spot, each person carrying what he can back to his house. Stag tripe is considered a great delicacy. The grilled venison is eaten at a great feast. When such a windfall occurs, everyone eats until he is satiated; then the rest of the meat is smoked and hung from the rafters. The

Customs Relating to Outsiders

The Jeh rigidly subject themselves to the proscriptions of their traditional heritage; outsiders are also held accountable to these laws. The Jeh have reportedly killed people who dis obeyed their taboos: four soldiers, apparently guilty of "misbehavior" in a Jeh village, were once put to death. Similar treatment could probably be expected by an outsider who broke a taboo, made himself unwanted, or refused to leave the village.

However, the Jeh are friendly and hospitable to neighboring tribesmen, as long as the visitors do not violate Jeh customs. Although no information was available concerning their reception of Vietnamese or United States personnel, it is likely that the Jeh would treat them hospitably for fear of reprisal.
SECTION VI
RELIGION

The religion of the Jeh tribe is animistic. The Jeh worship all natural forces, attributing spiritual life to the sky, the earth, the water, the trees, and other inanimate objects of their natural environment. Jeh beliefs are motivated by a strong fear of the unknown and of many circumstances believed to cause suffering or death. They feel helpless and at the mercy of the numerous spirits responsible for their adversities and from whom they constantly attempt to extract benefits in return for animal sacrifices.

There is little information available on Jeh religious practices and it is doubtful that any two Jeh villages observe identical religious customs. Nevertheless, many Jeh do seem to have a common belief in at least two principal deities, the Heavenly Being and the Spirit of the Hearth or House, as well as in the spirits of their ancestors.

The Heavenly Being, whom the Jeh call Ra, seems to be the most abstract, mysterious, and omnipotent spirit. They believe he presides over all of nature from his dwelling place in ciok or heaven. The tribesmen say that thunder is the voice of Ra. The words Ra and Ciok are used interchangeably when the Jeh refer to the Heavenly Being.

The Spirit of the Hearth also commands great respect from the Jeh, who believe that he watches over all the members of a household. The dwelling place or kingdom of this spirit is thought to be the house itself, independent of whoever lives there. Should a family abandon their home, they leave it intact, for to destroy the house would be to destroy the shelter and kingdom of the Spirit of the Hearth. Moreover, the tribesmen believe that destruction of the house would change the spirit into a terrifying and angry god, bent on revenge.

The Jeh believe the spirits of the deceased protect the family against malevolent spirits: sometimes by friendly intercession, sometimes by warring with the evil spirits. Often the Jeh invite both the ancestral and evil spirits to fraternal banquets inside the house to encourage friendly settlements between them.

Apparently there are also water spirits in the Jeh religious beliefs. One observer cautioned against contaminating water sup-
plies or doing anything that could possibly be offensive near the water source, as this appears to violate Jeh religious custom.

Description of Religious Rituals

The principal religious ritual among the Jeh is the sacrifice, offered to appease or to avoid offending spirits, or to invoke pardon for persons who have committed offenses. The importance of a sacrifice is proportional to the gravity of an offense or to the extremity of need.

The Jeh appear to be more fear ridden and superstitious than any of the other tribes of the Vietnamese highlands: according to one observer, they rely on sacrifices more often than other groups to allay their fears.

The buffalo is the principal sacrificial animal. The Jeh will travel great distances across rugged mountainous territory to obtain buffaloes for sacrifices.

When sacrificing a buffalo, the villagers sound gongs throughout the night, drink much rice wine, dance, and pray to the spirits. The sacrificial buffalo is tied to an ornamented, hand-carved sacrificial pole. The following day, when the time comes for the offering, the Jeh chase the buffalo around the pole to spear and kill it.

The Jeh are known to perform special rituals whenever they enter a new territory. Approaching a mound of debris and accumulated vegetation, each traveler adds to the pile a green twig, a bunch of leaves or a handful of grass, and utters the following prayer:

Let all that is evil remain behind this boundary; I am coming in with good intentions. Let sickness and death remain behind; let the spirits of the deceased and spirits of the forest protect me.

Missionary Contacts

From 1956 to 1959, the Christian and Missionary Alliance attempted to convert the Jeh to Christianity with little success. Failure of most missionary efforts has been due to the difficulty of penetrating the mountainous terrain and to Jeh resistance to change. Since 1961, missionaries have not been able to reach the Jeh, for increased military operations have made their territory unsafe.

One missionary reported that in at least one village the Jeh were receptive to his presence, enjoyed visiting his house, and liked learning about the world outside their own. However, most Jeh have had little contact with missionaries.
SECTION VII
ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

Type of Economy

The slash-and-burn cultivation of rice is the basis of Jeh economy. Briefly, this technique of cultivation involves cutting down during the winter months all vegetation in the new area and burning it to clear the fields. The ashes produced serve as fertilizer which makes the soil rich enough for 3 to 4 years of crops. When the fields no longer support a crop, the village tribesmen repeat the slash-and-burn clearing process in a new area.

In addition to rice, the Jeh grow papayas, bananas, guavas, pineapples, and corn. These secondary crops are usually grown in small garden plots near the longhouses.

Farming is supplemented by cinnamon trading, hunting, fishing, and gathering edible berries and vegetables from the forest. Although there is little industry in the Western sense of the word, the Jeh are reported to practice ironwork, pottery making, and basket weaving. In recent years the Jeh economy has become more dependent on cinnamon trade with other Montagnard tribes and the Vietnamese, but the Jeh rarely have the surplus needed to establish thriving trade contacts; consequently, their life is reported to be harder than that of the southern tribes such as the Jarai, Rhade, and Bahnar.

The most important domestic animal raised by the Jeh is the buffalo, used for food and prized as the most significant sacrificial animal.

Special Arts and Skills

The Jeh engage in ironwork, pottery making, and basket weaving. Materials used in the latter skill are bamboo, rattan, palm leaves, and wood. These materials are also used to construct matting, light walls, traps, pipes, weapons, and containers for water, salt, and tobacco.

Exchange System and Trade

The Jeh favor a barter system for intertribal trade, although they are familiar with a monetary system though trade with the Vietnamese. Among themselves, the Jeh prefer to barter, often fixing prices in terms of buffaloes, copper pots, jars, and gongs.
At one time the Jeh were reported to be extremely fond of paper currency because it could be folded and concealed in bamboo tubes. They accept paper money when they trade in Vietnamese towns; they also use this currency to buy agricultural implements, cloth, iron, and domestic animals to take back to their villages. The chief items of trade are salt, gongs, iron, brass, cloth, and buffaloes, which have prestigious as well as practical value.

Cinnamon is the most important trade item available to the Jeh. They strip the bark from cinnamon trees and haul it to the Vietnamese towns of Tra My and Tra Bong. Reputedly the Vietnamese profit tremendously from the cinnamon trade; they pay the Jeh about 500 piasters for a load of cinnamon and resell it for as much as 5000 piasters. One source states that the Jeh are so dependent on the cinnamon trade that loss of it for any prolonged time would create an economic depression from which they could not recover.

**Distribution of Wealth**

The Jeh are not a prosperous people. Their farming, hunting, and trading barely suffice to feed them; surpluses for trade are rare. Poverty is a condition common to all Jeh families, with little differentiation in their standard of living. Some families may be wealthier than others, but the difference is generally so slight as to be insignificant.
SECTION VIII
POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

General Political Organization

The highest political unit of the Jeh is the village. These isolated people have apparently never developed an overall tribal organization or united under a single leader. Each village or hamlet is independent of its neighbors. There is no indication of even a loose alliance between individual villages, as is found among other Montagnard tribes. Relations among Jeh villages are friendly, and a traveler from a neighboring village will be given food and a place to spend the night.

Authority within a Jeh village having more than one extended family does not reside in one man. Individual extended families form the primary social organization of the village; each family has its headman (usually the oldest male) and its inner council of elders. Generally, decisions affecting the welfare of the entire village will be rendered only after combined deliberations by the headmen of the various families and their chosen advisers.

Whenever the village must deal with another village or outsiders, one or several individuals may be selected to act as a representative or intermediary for the entire group. Although the qualifications of this representative are unknown, it is doubtful that he ever acts independently during negotiations. Persons unfamiliar with Jeh customs might mistake this man for a chief; however, in reality, he probably only represents the consensus of the headmen of the village families.

Although a chief or headman as such can rarely be found in a Jeh village, certain individuals will often play a powerful role when decisions are formulated. Wealth is usually the most important factor of influence. The status of each headman is determined by his family's possessions, such as rice paddies, buffaloes, gongs, and jars. Since a family's holdings, at least in ricefields, are normally proportionate to its size, the most influential headman often comes from the largest family; thus, his power within the village as a whole will be more pervasive than that of the other headmen. Such influence, however, may be short lived, for great differences in wealth and family size are uncommon among the Jeh. A seemingly minor increase in the affluence of a family can result in its head-
man becoming the most powerful man in the village. It is reported
that such changes in status occur frequently.¹

Age is also an important determinant for status within the Jeh
family and village. The elders are always accorded profound re-
spect. Before decisions are made, they are consulted in deference
to their wisdom, experience, and knowledge of tribal customs and
laws. Effective action by the family headman or by the headmen
of several families is always dependent on the advice of the elders.
The elders have authority to make a final decision, however, only in
cases specifically concerning their immediate family, that is, their
own wives and children.⁴

To integrate the Jeh into the political life of the country, the
Vietnamese Government has attempted to appoint one individual
within most tribal villages as liaison. This person is expected to
transmit Government decrees and communications to the villages
by word of mouth. Since the Jeh protect their own headmen and
elders by refusing to identify them to strangers, it is doubtful that
this Government appointee is ever one of the actual leaders in the
village. Likewise, the appointee probably has little real status
within the village. Being selected as the Government appointee is
a dubious honor, because this person is usually held responsible by
the villagers for any misdeeds allegedly committed by the Govern-
ment in the village.⁵

Both the mountainous isolation of the Jeh and their strong de-
termination to retain their traditional system of customs and ta-
boos aggravated the relations between the Jeh and the Central
Government in the past. Relative pacification of the Jeh did not
occur until the late 1930's. Moreover, no Central Government has
ever made a concentrated attempt to maintain contact with the
entire Jeh population.

The French apparently had very little influence on the Jeh, al-
though they did establish forts in the Jeh territory during the Indo-
china War and did train a few Jeh for military service. An Amer-
ican missionary who lived in the area in the late 1950's reported
that he may have been the first white man to go to some of the
remote hillside villages.⁷

With the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and the creation of the
Republic of Vietnam, the problems of establishing a rapprochement
between the Montagnards in the highlands and the more culturally
advanced Vietnamese in the coastal areas became acute. The
French Government had supported a policy of permitting the Jeh
and other tribes to be separate administrative entities. Now, how-
ever, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam has taken mea-
sures to incorporate the highlanders into the political organization
of the nation.
Although Jeh taboos permit the tribespeople to establish new villages in a restricted geographic area (for example, the populace of a village may establish a new village just 500 yards from the first village), Government resettlement proposals for new Jeh villages apparently have violated these taboos. For example, the Government attempted to persuade the Jeh to relocate their villages in the Tra My area. But the Jeh responded by moving their villages farther into the mountains, telling Government officials that they would not comply with such decisions to move their villages to sites selected by the Government. In at least one instance, such a move would have left Jeh buffalo trails across a river from the Jeh houses. This, the Jeh thought, would cause their people to sicken and die.

Legal System

The Jeh have no written language and thus no written code of laws. However, nearly all Jeh behavior is strictly governed by unwritten tribal laws expressed in terms of taboos and sanctions. The failure of a Jeh or even of a stranger to adhere to these traditional codes may result in severe punishment.

Authority to punish depends on the degree of violation. An offense that has no consequence outside the immediate family of the wrongdoer (for instance, a child striking his father) is settled within the family itself. If the culprit's actions have harmed the entire extended family, then the elders and headman of that family will determine what sanctions are to be applied, according to their interpretations of the traditional oral code. When an offense affects all the extended families of a village, the matter requires general consultation by all the family headmen and elders of the separate families; in serious cases, the offender's entire family may be held responsible for his actions.

If a village-wide decision is disagreeable to one or several extended families within the village, they may establish a new village. Every attempt is made to avoid such secessions, which gravely weaken the morale of both parties.

On the village, district, and provincial levels, a special system of courts was established under the French to adjudicate matters concerning the various tribal groups. In the village, a village court decided the sentences, which could be reviewed on the district level. Three district court members were assigned to each ethnic group in a district jurisdiction, and these members handled only tribal matters. The district court officials selected a president to preside over the district court, which met in the house of the district chief.

Under the French, those cases that could not be resolved on the village level were sent to the Tribunal Coutumier, which convened for the first 7 days of every month. In judging the cases brought
before the tribunal, the chief judge relied on traditional tribal law and customs. The tribunal dealt only with cases in which both parties were tribespeople. Cases involving Vietnamese and tribespeople were the responsibility of the province chief, but provincial authorities tried not to interfere with the operation of the tribunal.

The legal system instituted by the French still governs the Montagnard tribes, but steps have been taken by the Vietnamese Government to revise the legislative code in the tribal areas. Under the Diem regime, an attempt was made to substitute Vietnamese laws for the tribal practices. This attempt was connected with Vietnamese efforts to integrate the tribespeople politically into the Republic of Vietnam.

In March 1965, the Vietnamese Government promulgated a decree restoring the legal status of the tribal laws and tribunals. Under this new decree, there will be courts at the village, district, and province levels which will be responsible for civil affairs, Montagnard affairs, and penal offenses, when all parties involved are Montagnards.

Village customs law courts, consisting of the village administrative committee chief aided by two Montagnard assistants, will conduct weekly court sessions. When a case is reviewed and a decision reached by this court, it will be recorded and signed by the parties involved. This procedure will eliminate the right to appeal to another court. If settlement cannot be determined, the case can be referred to a higher court.

District courts, governed by the president of the court (the district chief) aided by two Montagnard assistants, will hold bimonthly court sessions. Cases to be tried by the district court include those appealed by the village court, all minor offenses, and cases which are adjudged serious according to tribal customs.

At the national level, a Montagnard Affairs Section will be established as part of the National Court. This section, under the jurisdiction of a Montagnard Presiding Judge and two assistants, will handle cases appealed from the Montagnard district courts and cases beyond the jurisdiction of the village or district courts. It will convene once or twice a month, depending upon the requirements.

Subversive Influences

Their isolation and marginal subsistence make the Jeh susceptible to the subversive activities of the Viet Cong. The primary objective of the subversive elements is to win allegiance of the Jeh and to turn the Jeh into an active, hostile force against the Government of the Republic of Vietnam.

Generally, the Viet Cong infiltrate a village and work to win the confidence of either the whole village or its key individuals. Once
the villagers' suspicions are allayed and their confidence won, the next phase is an intensive propaganda program directed against the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. Then individuals are recruited, trained, and assigned to various Viet Cong support or combat units. An American returning from the Jeh area in 1965 reported that he saw little evidence of Viet Cong influence in the Dak Sut area at that time. He attributed this to the fact that Jeh villages in the Dak Sut district are located along National Route 14, thus easily accessible to the Central Government. The same source believed that many of the Jeh actively disliked the Viet Cong.
SECTION IX
COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

Oral communication is the principal means of disseminating information among the Jeh. The vast majority of Jeh neither read nor write any language. They do, however, have an interest in news and reportedly spend their evenings sitting around the fire in the communal room of their homes telling stories of recent events. One observer returned from the Jeh area in 1965 noted that participation in these evening sessions might provide an opportunity to introduce desired information.¹

No specific information is available about Jeh familiarity with and access to radios and movies. It is probable that due to their isolation and lack of advancement the Jeh have few, if any, radios and are generally unfamiliar with movies. However, judging from experience with other tribes, short movies covering simple subjects presented in the Jeh language might be an effective means to inform or instruct them.

Additionally, various missionaries in the area have found that simple diagrams and drawings are useful devices for communicating concepts to the Jeh.²

Although the Jeh as yet have no written language of their own, material written in French or Vietnamese will have some effect, as a limited number of the tribesmen do read these languages. These tribesmen could be expected to communicate information contained in written materials to the remainder of the tribesmen. Data about the successful use of printed materials are not available at this time.

Information themes to be used among the Jeh should be oriented around the principle of improving conditions in the tribal villages. The control of disease, the improvement of agriculture, and protection against Viet Cong harassment are some possible themes for information programs.
SECTION X
CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

Any proposed civic action should take into account the religious, social, and cultural traditions of the tribespeople. Initial contacts in villages should be made only with the tribal elders in order to show respect for the tribal political structure. The Jeh tribespeople should also be psychologically prepared to accept the proposed changes. This requires detailed consultation with village leaders, careful assurance of results, and a relatively slow pace in implementing programs.

Jeh tribespeople would probably respond favorably to ideas for change presented in terms of local community betterment. Civic action proposals should stress improvement of village life rather than emphasize ethnic or cultural pride, nationalism, or political ideology. Reasons for innovations should be thoroughly explained: the Jeh resent interference in their normal routine if they do not understand the reason for it.

Civic action programs of the Vietnamese Government have included the resettlement of some Jeh groups into new and larger villages, the control of malaria and other medical aid programs, agricultural assistance, and the provision of educational facilities.

The following civic action guidelines may be useful in the planning and implementation of projects or programs.

1. Projects originating in the local village are more desirable than suggestions imposed by a remote Central Government or by outsiders.
2. Projects should be designed to be challenging but should not be on such a scale as to intimidate the villagers by size or strangeness.
3. Projects should have fairly short completion dates or should have phases that provide frequent opportunities to evaluate effectiveness.
4. Results should, as far as possible, be observable, measurable, or tangible.
5. Projects should, ideally, lend themselves to emulation by other villages or groups.
Civic Action Projects

The civic action possibilities for personnel working with the Ieh encompass all aspects of tribal life. Examples of possible projects are listed below. They should be considered representative but not all inclusive and not in the order of priority.

1. Agriculture and animal husbandry
   a. Improvement of livestock quality through introduction of better breeds.
   b. Instruction in elementary veterinary techniques to improve health of animals.
   c. Introduction of improved seeds and new vegetables.
   d. Introduction of techniques to improve quality and yields of farmland.
   e. Introduction of insect and rodent control.
   f. Construction of simple irrigation and drainage systems.

2. Transportation and communication
   a. Roadbuilding and clearing of trails.
   b. Installation, operation, and maintenance of electric power generators and village electric light systems.
   c. Construction of motion-picture facilities.
   d. Construction of radio broadcast and receiving stations and public-speaker systems.

3. Health and sanitation
   a. Improve village sanitation.
   b. Provide safe water-supply systems.
   c. Eradicate disease-carrying insects.
   d. Organize dispensary facilities for outpatient treatment.
   e. Teach sanitation, personal hygiene, and first aid.

4. Education
   a. Provide basic literacy training.
   b. Provide basic citizenship education.
   c. Provide information about the outside world of interest to the tribesmen.
SECTION XI
PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

Given the incentive and motivation and provided with the necessary training, leadership, and support, the Jeh can become an effective force against the Viet Cong. The tribesmen can serve as informers, trackers and guides, intelligence agents, interpreters, and translators. With intensive training and support, the Jeh can be organized to defend their villages against the Viet Cong; with good leadership, they can be organized into an effective counter-guerrilla combat unit. The Jeh have a reputation for engaging in aggressive warfare if they are provoked or if they have a justifiable reason.

In the past the Jeh were considered capable fighters, whether fighting offensively in raids against other groups or defensively within their villages. Some Jeh had military training with the French and are capable of sophisticated combat operations. Recently some Jeh have been trained by U.S. personnel and are familiar with U.S. operational techniques as well as modern equipment.

Hostile Activity Toward the Jeh and Tribal Reaction

When psychological pressures to win Jeh support fail, the Viet Cong have resorted to outright brutality and terror. Frequently, the Jeh yield and cooperate with the Viet Cong; without Government training and support, they do not have the wherewithal to oppose the Viet Cong. Jeh villages have no able organization for defense except those equipped, trained, and organized by the Government. Jeh villages with adequate training and support will defend themselves and will initiate aggressive action against the Viet Cong.

Weapons Utilized by the Tribe

In the past the Jeh relied upon crossbows, spears, swords, and knives. The Jeh also are familiar with the use of traps, pits, and concealed sharpened sticks used as foot traps. Some Jeh received military training from the French and are familiar with modern weapons. Their relatively small stature limits the weapons the Jeh can use, but they are proficient in handling light weapons such as the AR.15 rifle, the Thompson submachinegun, and the carbine.
The tribesmen are less proficient in the use of the M-1 or the Browning Automatic Rifle, although they can handle larger weapons which can be disassembled, carried by two or more men, and then quickly reassembled.

The Jeh pride themselves upon their hunting skill and their mastery of traditional weapons; they are equally as proud of their skill and marksmanship with modern weapons. If a Jeh can carry and handle a weapon conveniently, he will use it well.

The Jeh cannot handle sophisticated devices—such as mortars, explosives, and mines—as proficiently as hand weapons. They find more abstract and technical aspects of such weapons—such as timing trajectories—difficult to absorb.

Ability to Absorb Military Instruction

The Jeh can absorb basic military training and concepts. Their natural habitat gives them an excellent background for tracking and ambush activities; they are resourceful and adaptable in the jungle.

The Jeh learn techniques and procedures readily from actual demonstration, using the weapon itself as a teaching aid. They do not learn as well from blackboard demonstrations, an approach which is too abstract for them.

Some Jeh are veterans of service with the French and are invaluable in training the younger tribesmen.
SECTION XII
SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONNEL WORKING
WITH THE JEH

Every action of the Jeh tribesman has specific significance in terms of his culture. One must be careful to realize that the Jeh may not react as outsiders do. The outsider should remember that a relatively simple course of action may, for the tribesman, require not only divination but also a sacrifice.

A few suggestions for personnel working with the Jeh are listed below:

Official Activities
1. The initial visit to a Jeh village should be formal. A visitor should speak first to the village elders who will then introduce him to other principal village figures.
2. Sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness are essential in dealing with the Jeh. Promises and predictions should not be made unless the result is assured. The tribespeople usually expect a new group of personnel to fulfill the promises of the previous group.
3. Outsiders cannot gain the confidence of Jeh tribesmen quickly. Developing a sense of trust is a slow process, requiring great understanding, tact, patience, and personal integrity.
4. An attitude of good-natured willingness and limitless patience must be maintained, even when confronted with resentment or apathy.
5. Whenever possible, avoid projects or operations which give the tribesmen the impression they are being forced to change their ways.
6. Tribal elders and the village chief should receive some credit for civic action projects and for improved administration. Efforts should never undermine or discredit the position or influence of the local leaders.

Social Relationships
1. The Jeh should be treated with respect and courtesy at all times.
2. The term *moi* should not be used because it means savage and is offensive to the tribesmen.
3. Outside personnel should not refuse an offer of food or drink, especially at a religious ceremony. Once involved in a ceremony, one must eat or drink whatever is offered.

4. A gift, an invitation to a ceremony, or an invitation to enter a house may be refused by an outsider, as long as consistency and impartiality are shown. However, receiving gifts, participating in ceremonies, and visiting houses will serve to establish good relations with the tribespeople.

5. Outsiders should request permission to attend a Jeh ceremony, festival, or meeting from the village elders or other responsible persons.

6. An outsider should never enter a Jeh house unless accompanied by a member of that house; this is a matter of good taste and cautious behavior. If anything is later missing from the house unpleasant and unnecessary complications may arise.

7. Outsiders should not get involved with Jeh women. This could create distrust and dissension.

8. Teachers should be careful to avoid seriously disrupting cultural patterns.

Religious Beliefs and Practices
1. Do not mock Jeh religious beliefs in any way; these beliefs are the cornerstone of Jeh life.

2. Do not enter a village where a religious ceremony is taking place or a religious taboo is in effect. Watch for the warning signs placed at the village entrances; when in doubt, do not enter.

Living Standards and Routines
1. Outsiders should treat all Jeh property and village animals with respect. Any damage to property or fields should be promptly repaired and/or paid for. An outsider should avoid borrowing from the tribesmen. Animals should not be treated brutally or taken without the owner’s permission.

2. Learn simple phrases in the Jeh language. A desire to learn and speak their language creates a favorable impression on the tribespeople.

Health and Welfare
1. The Jeh are becoming aware of the benefits of medical care and will request medical assistance. Outside groups in Jeh areas should try to provide medical assistance whenever possible.

2. Medical teams should be prepared to handle, and should have adequate supplies for, extensive treatment of malaria, dysentery, yaws, trachoma, venereal diseases, intestinal parasites, and various skin diseases.
FOOTNOTES

I. INTRODUCTION
4. Long, op. cit.
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II. TRIBAL BACKGROUND
3. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

III. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS
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5. Ibid., pp. 118-24; Long, op. cit.
10. Ibid.
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IV. SOCIAL STRUCTURE
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3. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
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V. CUSTOMS AND TABOOS
1. Long, op. cit.
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5. Hoffet, op. cit., p. 36.
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VII. ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION
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2. Ibid.; Hoffet, op. cit., p. 6, 22.
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15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 2.
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IX. COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES
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X. CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

XI. PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES
2. Long, op. cit.

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The Katu Subgroups
CHAPTER 9. THE KATU

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

The Katu, a Mon-Khmer Montagnard group, inhabit the territory inland from the coastal cities of Da Nang and Hoi An and across the border into Laos. The tribe is divided into the "highland" and the "lowland" Katu: the "highland" Katu inhabit the higher mountains near the Laotian border, while the "lowland" Katu live in lower mountains nearer the coastal regions.

The Katu have a patriarchal social organization and live in widely dispersed villages. The household consists of the extended family. The head of the extended family is the household head and owns all the family property.

Leadership in Katu villages is provided by a chief and a council of elders. In some villages the chief is elected; in other villages the position is hereditary.

All aspects of the social, political, and economic life of the Katu are influenced by their religious beliefs. In addition to offering animal sacrifices, the Katu engage in blood hunts or ritual murders to appease the spirits.

Name and Size of Group

The name Katu, meaning savage, is applied to this group by neighboring tribes. The Katu are also known as the Kato, Ka-Tu, or Kantu. The Katu refer to themselves as "Monui" or "people" followed by the name of their specific village.

Recent estimates of the Katu population range from 20,000 to 30,000. A source dated 1938 estimated the number of Katu at 25,000.

Location

The Katu inhabit the northern plateau and mountain regions of the Republic of Vietnam, west of the cities of Da Nang (Tourane) and Hoi An (Faifo). Katu villages are concentrated along the slopes and valleys of the Song Giang, Song Cai, and Song Boung Rivers in the Provinces of Quang Nam and Thua Thien. Scattered
Katu villages are also found in Quang Tin Province, and an undetermined number of Katu live in Laos.3

As noted, the Katu are commonly divided into "lowland" and "highland" groups.4 There are at least four Katu subgroups. The Ngung Bo and the Thap are both eastern lowland groups, the former living along the tributaries of the upper Se Khong River, the latter living east of the Cao in the An Diem hinterland. The Ataouat, or Ka-Taouat, and the Cao, western highland groups, live in the Ataouat Massif, where the Se Khong and the Song Boung Rivers originate.7

The neighbors of the Katu include the ethnic Vietnamese to the east and northeast, the Jeh tribe to the south, the Phuong tribe to the northwest, and various Laotian tribal peoples to the west.

Terrain Analysis

The Katu territory in the Annam Cordillera is bordered on the south and west by the Massif du Ngoc Anh and on the west and north by the Massif du Pouak. This area, a plateau rising sharply from the narrow coastal plains, is cut by gorges and is dominated by isolated peaks, including one rising to a height of 8,200 feet.

In general the rivers are short, flowing swiftly through steep rocky valleys. Rain-bearing monsoons and typhoons frequently and rapidly alter the currents and depth of these rivers.

The summer monsoon (May–October) and the winter monsoon (November–January) provide a regular seasonal alternation of wind. In the summer, these winds come mainly from the southwest; in the winter, from the northeast. The eastern portion of the region has the most rain from September to January, while in the western portion the rainy season occurs during the summer months. Agriculture is greatly dependent upon the monsoon-borne rain. Precipitation is high—averaging more than 80 inches in the lower elevation and more than 150 inches in the higher areas. Normally the weather is warm and humid, with frequent cloudiness, especially from January to April.

Temperatures vary by roughly 20 degrees between summer and winter. Actual surface temperatures average 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit in winter (January) and above 85 degrees Fahrenheit in summer (July).

Typhoons influence the climate of this area and are especially dangerous from July to September, when heavy rainfall often causes extensive material damage by flooding and the uprooting of forests. During the rainy season the area is virtually inaccessible.

The high and relatively evenly distributed precipitation gives this area rain forest vegetation of two distinct belts. At the higher elevations is the primary rain forest, where the trees, with an
average height of 75 to 90 feet, form a continuous canopy. Below this canopy are smaller trees of 45 to 60 feet in height, and below this second layer is a fair abundance of seedlings and saplings. Orchids, other herbaceous plants, epiphytes, and woody climbing plants known as lianas are profuse. Little light penetrates this type of forest and there is not much ground growth. During the dry season, this forest can usually be penetrated on foot with little difficulty.

The second belt or secondary rain forest, which develops after land in the primary rain forest has been cleared and then left uncultivated, is more extensive in this area. In this forest the trees are small and close together, and there is an abundance of ground growth, lianas, and herbaceous climbers. Penetration is difficult without the constant use of the machete.

There are no roads in the Katu area. The jungle has reclaimed the French-buit, dry-weather, unsurfaced road running from Da Nang to Kontum and extending through the southeastern section of the area along the Son Thu Bon River. In any case, it would be difficult to keep any road in year-round usable condition. There are very few trails in the area, and they are difficult, if not impossible, to see from the air.

The rivers, often embedded in valleys with steep longitudinal profiles, are for the most part un navigable. During high water, very small boats and canoes can pass through the rivers; however, typhoons increase the danger of water transportation.
SECTION II

TRIBAL BACKGROUND

Ethnic and Racial Origin

The Katu are grouped with the Mon-Khmer peoples by language and culture. The Mon-Khmer ethnic stock is believed to have originated in the upper valleys of the Mekong River in Yunnan Province of southern China.1

Language

A Mon-Khmer language, the Katu language consist of a basically monosyllabic vocabulary supplemented by a number of borrowed polysyllabic words. Each Katu subgroup has its own distinct dialect, but these dialects are reportedly similar enough to be mutually intelligible.2

Very few Katu understand any other languages; a small number of tribesmen have a limited knowledge of the languages of neighboring tribes or of Vietnamese, French, or English. Some Katu, educated in North Vietnam, reportedly speak fluent Vietnamese.2

There is no written form of the Katu language, although Protestant missionaries are currently devising one for translation of the Bible.

Legendary History

Generally speaking, the legends of the origin of the Katu, of the spirits, and of the world are part of the oral tradition of the Katu. Because the Katu have no written language, they have passed down by word of mouth legends, tales of legendary heroes, anecdotes about tribal members, proverbs, and traditional tribal laws. To preserve the tribal traditions unchanged, the legends are usually remembered and chanted in verse form, most frequently in the evening around the family hearth or as an invocation in a religious ceremony.5

There was no specific information available on the legends of the Katu.

Factual History

There is little information about the factual history of the Katu. Presumably they originally lived in the coastal area adjacent to
their present territory and were forced into the upland region by
the expansion of the Annamese (ethnic Vietnamese).

Annamese records of the mid-19th century mention the Katu as
an aggressive tribe engaging in blood hunts—ritual murders to
appease evil spirits—against the Annamese in the lowlands. During
the reigns of Emperors Minh-Mang and Thieu-Tri of Annam,
Katu raids were so numerous that the Annamese government was
forced to organize a Chui-Yen or Acceptance of Peace Ceremony
in the hope of bribing the Katu to refrain from these raids.

Blood hunts were also perpetrated against neighboring tribes
and even against Katu villages. When their enemies finally fought
to stop the bloodshed, they showed the Katu no mercy, so savage
were the Katu during their blood hunts.

The first French penetration into the Katu lands was Captain
Debay's reconnaissance expedition early in this century; later,
prior to World War I, a colonial government official, Mr. Sogny,
entered the land of the Katu. However, thereafter there was little
contact between the Katu and the French until 1935, when a
planned settlement of Katu lands was started and six French out-
posts were established.

Settlement Patterns

Katu villages are usually located close to a water source or a
brook. The village is surrounded by a fence and may contain from
5 to 50 houses arranged in a circle around a sacrificial post. In
the larger villages a communal house is also found in the center
area.

Katu houses are quite neat, comfortable, oval-shaped bamboo
and wood structures set on pilings about 1 to 2 feet above the
ground. A thatched roof, sloping down from a center ridge pole,
is so close to the ground as to require stooping to get into the
house. Entrance is through a double sliding door in the front of
the house. Floors are usually a lattice of bamboo.

A house belonging to a chief or wealthy tribesman measures an
average of 30 feet by 15 feet, with a central post or a tanol support-
ning the framework; the larger the house, the larger the central
post. The roof beam, supported by the central post, in turn
supports the crossbeams set on boards and connects with smaller
vertical poles supporting the roof. These poles are frequently
covered with painted designs of hunting or fishing scenes, sacred
animals, geometric figures, or other unusual signs. The walls are
plaited bamboo, from 3 to 4.5 feet in height. The roof of finely
woven pandanus leaves or palm fronds is protected from the wind
by long logs laid over it as weights. At each corner of the roof,
The wooden framework is sculptured, representing stylized animals, human silhouettes, or phallic symbols.

The interior of a Katu house consists of only one room, used both for living quarters and storage. At the arc-shaped end of the room is a stove—a block of hard earth with a wood fire built around three stones. The embers of the fire are never allowed to go out. Alongside the stove is a screen to hold firewood and to keep the sparks in the hearth. The interior of the house has a blackish veneer caused by the smoke, since there is no flue to permit the smoke to escape.

There is no furniture in a Katu house; household utensils include jars for the storage of grain and for fermenting rice, bamboo tubes filled with water, copper pots, wooden bowls, clay pots, baskets,
and trays. Drums, bronze gongs, fish nets, and animal traps are also found in the house. Suspended from the ceiling are ears of corn, fresh game, and fish. Knives and long spears are stuck in the roof. 

In all the large villages the communal house or gual, similar to the individual dwellings, is the largest structure in the community, often having a roof as high as 35 feet. Construction of the communal house is a cooperative venture: the village bears the expense, and all the men of the village contribute their labor. No women are admitted to the communal house. It is the social center for males, serving as a sleeping place for young bachelors and old men; a meeting place for the men of the village; a seat of the village council; and a haven for ancestral spirits of tribepeople who died a natural death. In addition, the communal house plays an important role as a sanctuary: no quarrels or fights are tolerated within its walls. Under its roof a stranger may find asylum.

The walls of the communal house are hung in disarray with the heads of birds and animals—buffalo, deer, wild goats, and toucans. In some villages one may find carved masks of human appearance hanging on the walls of the communal house. The masks are blackened by smoke from the fireplaces and are always hung in even numbers from 2 to 10.

The sacrificial poles, which are found in the center of nearly every Katu village, are ornately sculptured with designs of sacred animals such as the cock, toucan, fish, snake, iguana, and tortoise; with geometric figures; or with designs such as a cross, the sun, and the stars. Only three colors are used in finishing the sculpture: black, made by wood smoke; red, from betel leaves; and white, from lime. On feast days, the sacrificial poles are embellished with two wing-like arms pointing upwards. Le Pichon suggests that in ancient times these posts may have been used for human sacrifice.

Katu villages relocated by the Vietnamese Government were at first composed of small houses built on piles, with straw roofs and rattan sides. Each family had its own house and kept livestock in the house. Later, longhouses were built, so that each family then had one to three rooms (depending on their number) for themselves. The entire village was arranged in the form of a horseshoe and overlooked a river. Each relocated village had an open area for rituals, with a ceremonial pole or tree for buffalo sacrifices. It may be noted that various other types of settlement patterns and houses may be found among the Katu, especially in more isolated or inaccessible areas. For instance, in a few villages of the Cao subgroup the communal house is located in the outer
circle of regular houses rather than in the center. In still other areas, longhouses may be arranged in groups of two or four.

Some Katu houses built on small mounds of earth have been reported. These seldom have pilings, for the mound serves as the floor and as a place for fire.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Figure 22. Layout of Cao village.}
SECTION III
INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical Characteristics

Though described as varying in body and facial type from the Negrito to the Indonesian to the American Apache, a typical Katu tribesman is 5 feet 4 inches to 5 feet 6 inches tall, of stocky build, muscular, with very dark skin, black hair, and brown eyes. They have little body hair and pluck their eyebrows into very thin lines.

Men and women are tattooed on the face, chest, arms, wrists, and above the knees. The most common tattoo designs are a dancing lady, found on the forehead; a sun motif, on the chest, forehead, or leg; and a cross, on the forehead. Other popular designs are geometric shapes or figures, a circle with a swastika inscribed, and triangles of three dots. The thin lines of the eyebrows are extended by a series of tattooed black spots to below the ears.

Health

The health of the Katu is generally poor, for they suffer from many endemic diseases. In the Katu area many diseases are insect-borne—by the anopheles mosquito, the rat flea, and the louse. Other diseases are associated with poor sanitary conditions, including poor sexual hygiene practices.

Malaria is a common disease in the Katu area; most tribespeople have contracted it at least once in their lifetime. Two common types of malaria found in the Katu area are benign tertian malaria, which causes high fever with relapses over a period of time but is usually not fatal; and malignant tertian malaria, which is fatal to both infants and adults.

The three types of typhus in this region are carried by lice, rat fleas, and mites. Mite-borne typhus is reportedly especially common among the tribes.

Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, yaws, leprosy, tuberculosis, venereal diseases, and smallpox are also common in the tribal areas. Dysentery and yaws are significant causes of infant mortality. Parasitic infections and various fungus diseases are also prevalent.

Associated with evil spirits, illness is treated by prayers and numerous spiritual cures. Some magic words spoken over animal
entrails are thought to endow them with great healing powers. Sorcerers travel around the countryside selling lustral water supposedly efficacious against all ailments.

Psychological Characteristics

One of the most warlike Montagnard tribes, the Katu were never completely pacified by the French—even now it is believed that they engage in blood hunts, attacking weaker or unsuspecting victims with much relish and bloodletting. However, when their villages are attacked by large expeditions, they often do not fight; instead, they abandon their villages, bury their valuables, and flee into the forest, despite the fact they are attached to their villages and reluctant to leave even for a short period of time under normal circumstances.

The Katu are, in spite of their warlike nature, hospitable and generous, though they tend to be vain and boastful.

* See "Customs and Taboos," p. 361.
SECTION IV
SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The social life of the Katu centers around the family and the village, rather than around tribe or clan. The family or household unit is the extended patriarchal type, headed by the eldest male, who is the family authority and owns all the family property. Residence is patrilocal: kin groups—married sons and their families—live in the house of the father. The household serves as the economic unit, and its members cultivate a field in common. The village social unit is a collection of extended families.

In the patriarchal Katu society the female members have lower status than the males. A male is the undisputed head of the household and administers all punishments. Women walk behind men, often carrying heavy burdens such as a load of wood while the men carry only a crossbow. Family goods are passed from male to male according to seniority. The eldest son inherits the bulk of the family property, and the other sons divide the remainder. The family goods usually consist of buffaloes, stored paddy, jars, and gongs.

The Katu language suggests a certain class distinction within the society, as do many Mon-Khmer languages. Well-to-do persons or those in places of authority use the article “a” when speaking of an inferior person or object. The article “a” denotes a person or object inferior to the speaker; thus, a dog is called “a ca” by the well-to-do. The ordinary tribesmen do not use such an article; this difference makes it possible to distinguish between classes by their speech.

Marriage

In the Katu society, the male selects his future wife from his own or neighboring villages. When he informs his father of his choice, a family conference is held around the fireplace the following evening, and everyone gives his views. The girl’s family and estimates of the probable bride price are discussed, and the intermediary is selected.

At a suitable time—frequently at full moon—the intermediary will visit the girl’s parents, already alerted by village gossip. After sharing a meal, the intermediary will discuss the bride price (usually gongs, pots, jars, a buffalo, and cloth) with the girl’s family.
A young man who has participated in a successful blood hunt is considered a particularly desirable husband.

When the bride price is agreed upon, the spirits are consulted to see whether they agree to the marriage. First some prayers are said. Then the intermediary takes a cock and with one slice cuts off its right foot. The omen is determined by the way the claw contracts; if the main spur of the claw lies between the two others, the ancestors approve; if the spurs touch, the ancestors disapprove.

Premarital sexual relations between engaged couples are common. A boy who has already engaged in a blood hunt and is strong and handsome is considered irresistible by the bride-to-be. Should they be discovered making love, the boy’s family must pay the girl’s village a sacrificial fine—customarily a pig or buffalo—which is eaten by the men in a communal house feast, to the accompaniment of much teasing of the clumsy lovers. If the boy’s family is too poor to pay the fine, the girl will go to live with the boy, who is now under obligation to assist her parents whenever required.

If a Katu girl becomes pregnant before her wedding, she and her lover are sent into the forest for 6 days while the parents agree on a fine to be paid to the village by the boy’s family. When the fine is paid, the girl and her lover are considered married, though no wedding celebration is held.

Polygamy is permitted but is rare because of the expense of keeping more than one wife.

Adultery and Divorce

Adultery, under specific conditions, is ground for divorce among the Katu. If the cause for divorce is adultery by the wife, all of the bride price is forfeited, and her extramarital partner is punished by being struck on the forehead by the offended husband and is fined two buffaloes, one for the village and one for the husband. When the guilty man wishes to keep the wife, he is required to obtain the consent of her husband and to reimburse the husband’s family for the original bride price. In case of divorce, the children always remain with the father.

Should the adulterer be a member of the family—uncle, cousin, brother-in-law—he is fined a pig to be eaten by the entire family. The Katu do not severely punish incest and sexual deviation.

Birth

A pregnant woman works until the day of her child’s delivery. It is not uncommon to see a woman in the ninth month of her pregnancy carrying a log on her back.

As soon as labor pains start, the house of a pregnant woman becomes taboo or dien to everyone except the old village midwife.
Combining physical care with incantations, the midwife will remain with her charge for 3 days following delivery, leaving only once, to bury the afterbirth in the mountains. Reportedly the midwife may assist only in the woman’s first birth; the mother then delivers all subsequent children unsaid.

In the meantime, the men of the family assemble in the communal house, awaiting the news; when it arrives, the new father provides an animal, usually a pig, to be sacrificed and eaten. When a woman dies in childbirth, it is thought that she becomes an evil spirit, thus necessitating propitiatory sacrifices and temporary abandonment of the village. Appeasement of the evil spirit may include a blood hunt.

Although the mother resumes work the day after birth, she nurses her infant until her milk supply is completely exhausted. In addition, as soon as the baby can eat solid food, he is given rice, mashed manioc, or corn and cooked herbs. Infant mortality is high, but only after an infant has survived his seventh day can his death be called an “evil death,” requiring offerings to the evil spirit.

Childhood

Until he or she can walk, a Katu infant is carried on the mother’s back—even during her most laborious chores. When a boy can walk, he will spend his days around the house under his brothers’ supervision. He sleeps in a small bamboo cradle near the fireplace. Later he is allowed to wander on the village square. When he is older, he will be assigned to tend the buffaloes and will be allowed to visit the communal house, where the old men will teach him legends, songs, how to trap wild animals, and the art of sculpturing. Children are disciplined only by voice, never by hand or beating. At 17 years of age the Katu boy is allowed to sleep in the communal house and is considered an adult.

The life of a Katu girl is similar; however, instead of tending buffaloes, she attends to the needs of the household and learns the housekeeping skills that will be required of her as an adult.

Death and Burial

The Katu have two types of burial ceremonies: one for a natural death, and one for an evil or violent death. In the event of a natural death, the corpse is placed in a coffin made from a tree trunk cut down the middle with the halves closely fitted. These coffins are prepared in advance and are never brought into the village houses but are stored in natural caves until they are needed. For the burial, a grave about 9 feet deep is dug in the forest. The coffin is lowered into the grave with food and various objects of the de-
ceased placed on the lid. The coffin is not covered with dirt but remains exposed so the soul may escape to return to its home, where it will protect the survivors.

On the day a death occurs, a buffalo is killed at the sacrificial pole; in the case of a wealthy man, the Katu traditionally sacrificed as many as five or six buffaloes during a period of as many days. During the nights of these sacrifices, gongs and drums are beaten.

After a period of 1 or 2 years, the entire family and all friends of the deceased gather again, and, to the reciting of prayers and playing of drums and gongs, they remove the remains from the tree-trunk coffin, transferring them to another coffin—this one beautifully sculptured and decorated.

Then the sculptured coffin is placed in the family vault, built in the shape of a small house and supported by at least four poles on which rests a slanting or flat roof. The vault is open on the sides, well constructed of heavy wood (sometimes bamboo is used for the roof), and is ornately carved and covered with decorations.

The coffin is placed with other family coffins in the vault. Libations and prayers are offered for the soul of the dead to rejoice in the company of his ancestors. If his family remembers the deceased with sacrifices, his spirit will regard them with benevolence. The Katu believe that if the departed soul has not been propitiated with sacrifices, he will cause his family to suffer nightmares.

If a death is "bad," the family of the deceased must bury the corpse in the deepest corner of the forest, far away from the village. They must abandon their house, field, and village, live in the forest temporarily, and kill the animals that belonged to the deceased.

An extremely "bad" death, such as being devoured by a tiger, involves stringent taboos and necessitates the permanent abandonment of a village. Traditionally all village animals, including the dogs, were put to death, but this is apparently not the custom at present. The villagers live in the forest; while the taboo lasts—often a matter of 6 months—they may eat no buffalo meat nor build a house. Afterwards a new village is built at a different location.

Wooden statues are placed at the doors of the new houses, around the village communal house, and on familiar trails to frighten away the evil spirit resulting from the bad death. The statues have various shapes: grotesque human figures with huge faces, squatting figures with chin resting on knees and head between hands, pipe smokers, and dancing women.
SECTION V
CUSTOMS AND TABOOS

Dress

Ordinarily, Katu men wear a long blanket of blue cotton around their chests and shoulders and a loincloth sometimes trimmed with small lead rings. In the past, these garments were often made by the Ataouat, a subgroup of the Katu. New most cloth is obtained in trade with the ethnic Vietnamese. Some Katu wear a garment resembling a coat of mail, made of cloth with iron rings interlaced through the cloth. Katu women also wear the loincloth, but more frequently they wear a blue cloth which comes up to the breasts; some women, however, have also adopted a vestlike upper garment. Both men and women go barefooted.1

Beads are a very important part of Katu dress. The men wear chokers of yellow, white, and reddish-orange beads. The women wear both chokers and necklaces of loose strings of beads—sometimes as many as 30 to 40 strings. Katu men and women wear long necklaces of large black and white beads with tigers teeth and claws and the beaks of the hornbill bird strung among the beads.2 The tribeswomen sometimes wear brass rings around or just below the waist.3

Hair styles among the Katu vary. Some Katu wear their hair in bangs; others, in a chignon held in place with a copper comb or a hog's tusk 5 or 6 inches long. Hogs teeth are highly prized as combs, and hogs are sometimes carefully fed for 6 or 7 years until their teeth are long enough for use as hair ornaments.4 Still other Katu wear bamboo rings decorated with buttons on their heads. The women often wear sprays of bamboo in their hair. Katu women consider everything that glitters potential jewelry.5

Folk Beliefs

Since the world of the Katu is inhabited by innumerable spirits, many of them evil, the Katu have recourse to thousands of superstitious practices, which may be divided into two main classes: omens and taboos.

Omens exist in countless numbers as dreams or signs, supposedly warnings from good spirits that danger is near. Some of these signs are listed below.

Cock crowing at midnight.
Toucan flying toward the sun.
Sighting a python.
Finding certain types of plants in the forest.
Sneezing when one is about to undertake some important business.

Incantations and invocations are addressed to ancestors to prevent the foreboded misfortune. Amulets are worn as protection against evil spirits.

Villages, houses, or fields may be deemed taboo or dien. When a village is taboo, no one may leave it, nor are any strangers allowed to enter. A dien is shown by placing a tree or branch at all places where paths lead into the village. To satisfy the ancestors, a dien always requires a sacrifice of a pig, buffalo, or cock. Some representative diens are listed here.

- House in which a woman is having a baby — 3-day dien.
- Before undertaking a serious matter, such as selling the harvest, the village is dien for 1 day.
- Festivals of spring sowing and harvesting — the village is dien for 1 or 2 days.
- Before starting a blood hunt — 1 day dien for a village.
- An evil death — village dien for 1 to 6 months.

The Katu Blood Hunt

The Katu occasionally engage in a blood hunt, a ceremony during which human blood must be shed as a last resort to appease angry spirits. The decision to undertake a blood hunt generally rests with the council of elders. After drinking fermented rice wine and invoking the ancestors, the oldest village male cuts off a cock's claw. While drums beat, children shout to the souls of the dead. If the omen is favorable, the Katu look for a victim; if no victim can be found, the cock is examined for more guidance. The signs may reveal a directive such as, "For 2 days you shall march towards the rising sun and on the morning of the 3rd, shed the redeeming blood."

At dawn, after talking, boasting, drinking, and singing all night, Katu warriors leave the village armed with spears, bows, and poisoned arrows. After an all-day march the hunters ambush their victims, members of another village or another tribe, finishing them off by spear point. To satisfy the spirits blood must be spilled, so each hunter stabs his victim many times. The victim's corpse is abandoned on the spot, unstripped, for theft would nullify the ritual of the spilling of blood. For a perfect ceremony, the hunters must dip their hands in the blood and smear it on their faces.

The triumphant, boasting hunters return to the communal house for a ritual animal sacrifice and several nights of feasting, with
chanting and beating of gongs and drums to communicate the great success to the ancestors.10

Music and Art

Music, particularly simple songs, plays an important role in the lives of the Katu tribespeople. As an infant, the Katu is lulled to sleep by songs; as a child, he sings while he guards the buffalo or while he roams the forest in search of beehives. Later when he goes wooing he improvises courting songs, and the girl mockes him if his song is feeble. Still later he sings while hunting, working in the forest, or dancing around a buffalo tied to the sacrificial stake. By song he praises his own courage before leading for a blood hunt, and by song he mourns his dead. Katu songs are often accompanied by a bamboo flute of three or four notes, or more frequently by tambourines.

Particular singers are famous throughout a large area: the village of Pa-San, for instance, has some renowned bards.11 Such famous singers are invited to important festivities, often at distant villages. Singers are given the privilege of drinking from the best jar of wine to stimulate their inspiration.

The Katu are noted woodcarvers, possibly the most accomplished craftsmen in Indochina. Their caskets (teram), tombs (pin), statues, sacrificial posts, and houses are works of art adorned with an infinite variety of designs, often in the shape of animals and geometric figures, each expressing the personality of its designer.12

Eating and Drinking Customs

The Katu normally eat two meals a day, one very early in the morning and one at bedtime. Their staple food is rice, though they also eat corn and manioc. In some regions the Katu drink a palm wine called barac. In other areas they make a wine for special occasions only by fermenting rice, manioc, or even maize in jars.13

Customs Relating to Animals

Animals are very important in the Katu religion. The buffalo is an especially sacred animal; a buffalo is never sold because it belongs to the ancestors, not to an individual or a village. Buffalo meat is never eaten merely to satisfy the appetite, but only at ritual ceremonies involving sacrifice.14 The skulls of sacrificed buffaloes are kept in the communal house. It is thought that the presence of buffalo skulls promotes the fertility of the land and prosperity of the village. According to Katu belief, animals have a soul; thus the buffalo's soul stays near the communal house where its skull is hung. In addition to buffalo skulls, the skulls and tails of wild animals are hung in the communal house.15
SECTION VI
RELIGION

The Katu have a large pantheon of good and evil spirits they believe intervene in their daily lives. Without the aid of the good spirits the tribesmen feel they have no protection from misfortunes brought by the evil spirits. However, even the good spirits withhold their protection if the actions of the tribesmen annoy them: when a village is ravaged by disease or when a harvest is lost, the Katu believe the good spirits are angry and must be appeased by a blood sacrifice.

The Katu believe that every person has two souls, a good one and a bad one. The manner of death determines the spirit form in which a person's soul will survive. A "good death," resulting from natural causes, brings a good spirit; a "bad death," resulting from violence, disease, or occurring during childbirth or in a place far from home, brings a bad spirit. The souls of those who die a good death watch over their descendants, protecting them from danger in the forest by warning them when evil spirits are nearby. Warning signs include: peacock eggs in a path; a large tree uprooted across a trail; and the call, from the left side of the path, of a bird nesting in reeds. The evil spirits also have visible forms such as a tiger, a cobra hissing in the afternoon, and the flood waters causing a person to drown.

Tattoos probably have religious significance for the tribespeople. The dancing girl tattoo reportedly represents the materialization of the spirit of man. When a tribesman is awake and in good health, the tattooed girl in the middle of the man's forehead acts as a guardian angel, lighting his intelligence and acting upon his will so that he will embark only on successful enterprises.

Religious Ceremonies

Except for marriage and death feasts, almost all recurring Katu religious ceremonies and festivals occur according to the agricultural cycle: when bamboo sprouts begin to appear; when fields are cleared; and when rice is sown and harvested. When a new communal house is built, a great village feast is also held. Many other feasts, particularly those to placate the spirits, occur at frequent but unpredictable intervals. Every Katu ceremony involves
dancing, invocations, heavy drinking, and much eating. On particular occasions a buffalo is sacrificed; only at these special festive ceremonies are the fermented wines drunk from their jars.¹

Religious ceremonies connected with certain occurrences in the life cycle or with particular customs are discussed elsewhere in this study.⁶

Religious Practitioners

Although information about them is vague and evasive, sorcerers are reportedly common in Katu villages. A sorcerer inspects the claws of the cock to determine the advisability of an intended wedding or of an anticipated blood hunt. The sorcerers point out sacred places which are taboo and which the Katu may not disturb. Wandering sorcerers, some from Laos, and certain tribesmen considered by the Katu to be very powerful travel the Katu territory, selling lustral water and amulets supposedly effective in warding off all ills.³

Apparently anyone may become a great sorcerer by causing an unusual event. Le Pichon, an early observer, recounts how he gained a reputation as a great sorcerer by using a charge of dynamite to put to flight some formidable spirits who were haunting a small river inlet.⁴

Missionary Contacts

The Christian and Missionary Alliance established a mission in the Katu area in 1941. Prior to this time, missionaries attempting to work among the Katu had been either driven away or killed. The Christian and Missionary Alliance claims its missionaries have converted over 250 tribesmen to Christianity. This organization also asserts that there are several all-Christian villages among the lowland Katu.⁷

SECTION VII
ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

Type of Economy

The Katu have a subsistence economy and are dependent upon agriculture for the bulk of their food. Upland rice, manioc, and corn are grown by slash-and-burn cultivation. Under this agricultural technique, a plot is farmed for a given period of time. When fertility declines, the land is allowed to lie fallow to regain its natural vegetation and nutrients. Meanwhile the Katu move to other fields, returning to the original, overgrown plots at a later time. A field may be used for 3 or 4 successive years depending on its fertility. These fields are not always close to the village—sometimes they are as far away as a full day’s travel, due to the exhaustion of nearby soils. After exhausting all possible sites in the vicinity of the village, the Katu then move their village to fresh available land. Presumably such moves occur every few decades.

Early in the dry season or late in the wet season, the trees—except for the largest—are felled. The dense floor vegetation is cut to the ground and allowed to become sun-dried before the next burning time—usually a month before the heavy rains begin. Then the field is burned carefully to prevent the fire from spreading. After the burned field has cooled, the family clears the debris, leaving only boulders and stumps. The layer of fine ash from the burned vegetation is subsequently washed into the soil by the rains. Then, until the harvesting, the only attention given the land is the planting and some weeding during the growing season. When the first rains loosen the soil, the planting begins. The men make holes for the seed rice with dibbles, and the women follow, planting and covering the seeds. Usually harvesting occurs at the end of the rainy season.

New sites and locations for the fields are chosen by the chief, generally in consultation with village elders and the sorcerer, according to rules and interpretation of traditional signs. The vegetation is inspected to determine the prevailing soil conditions. Certain divinations also are regarded as signs showing the potential of the land.

The Katu supplement their basic diet of rice by hunting and collecting edible jungle plants. Hunting provides the bulk of the
meat diet, as the Katu are skilled hunters using the trap, the crossbow (sometimes with poisoned arrows), imitative calls to attract birds, and hunting dogs.

Katu women roam over large areas collecting herbs, roots, shoots, and edible leaves, fruits, and tubers. They use a sharp stick or small hoe to dig the earth for the roots and tubers. With the help of dogs, the women catch lizards, rats, snakes, squirrels, and birds.

The Katu also have small kitchen gardens near the village where they grow various secondary crops, such as vegetables and tobacco.

Special Arts and Skills

In addition to agriculture, food collecting in the forest, and hunting, another basic Katu occupation is craftwork for which the tools are very simple, even crude.

In every village, basketmaking is the chief craft. Katu baskets, made of very thin strips of rattan, are very well designed and executed.

Bamboo, rattan, palm leaves, and wood are the materials used for making receptacles, matting, light walls, traps, containers (for water, salt, and tobacco), pipes, nets, and weapons.

The women weave coarse, colorful cloth of cotton, using a light weaving loom made of several pieces of wood, usually with four sets of thread. The fiber providing the thread for the weaving is no longer grown locally and is presently obtained in trade from the ethnic Vietnamese.

The Katu are especially adept at woodcarving. Reportedly they are the most accomplished woodcarvers in Indochina—a contention substantiated by the carved ornamentation of their houses, tombs, and sacrificial poles. The Ataouat are particularly renowned as artisans. In contrast to other Katu subgroups, the Ataouat make pottery, iron lance tips, jewelry, and blankets.

Another subgroup, the Ngung Bo, is reportedly skilled in tanning buffalo skins.

Exchange System and Trade

Although the Katu have recently begun to use a monetary system, they still largely depend upon barter. Even now, prices are often fixed in terms of buffaloes, jars, gongs, weapons, cotton cloth, and other objects considered valuable.

Vietnamese traders enter Katu country to buy and sell, and the Katu descend to Vietnamese towns for barter. The Katu purchase blankets, pots, salt, cotton goods, jars, glass beads, jewelry, necklaces, and iron for their spears. In return, they trade wood, betel leaves, medicinal roots, and tree bark from the forest, as well as fruit, corn, and glutinous rice. Other Katu groups also frequently barter with the Ataouat for pottery, spear tips, jewelry, and blankets.
Tribesmen of the Ngung Bo subgroup sell live buffaloes and buffalo hides to the Vietnamese, and the Thap subgroup has a highly lucrative trade in betel leaves with the Vietnamese.

Each Katu family usually does its own trading. Large transactions, however, are often undertaken in public for the purpose of having witnesses; but some dealings with Vietnamese merchants are handled privately by the village chief.

Trading for the Katu is a form of entertainment, involving long discussions. When the arrangements are made for a large transaction, the village chief bends small pieces of bamboo into as many sections as days remain for the actual exchange to take place. When the day arrives, the Vietnamese trader will meet the Katu at the appointed place designated for trading. The Katu will not disappoint him; on time, they arrive in long lines, men and women carrying their produce in baskets. In the evening when the trading is finished, they return to their village with their newly acquired goods.

Property System

Among the Katu, land ownership is an unknown concept. Although the fields do not belong to the cultivators, the crop is the property of the one who has worked the land. The first cultivator of a particular field has unwritten title to the use of that plot; only if the first cultivator does not wish to use the field, may another tribesman do so. Communal lands, or lands held and administered by the village, do not exist.

Distribution of Wealth

Distinction by wealth prevails among the Katu. Usually, this is indicated by the tribesman's house, which may be larger, better built, or more ornately carved. Other signs of wealth are personal ornamentation and ownership of gongs, jars, and buffaloes.

The well-to-do have servants, usually orphans who work and live with the family, receiving no pay. However, when the servants come of age, the master must sponsor their marriage. Then the servants are free to depart to set up their own household or to remain in the service of their former master, who then pays for their labor by feeding them and giving them a portion of the harvest.

A poor man and his family may become servants by entering into a verbal service contract. They live in the master's house and exchange labor for a fixed return, usually their sustenance, a buffalo per annum, and one-third of the yearly crop. When differences occur between the parties of the contract, the master gives the servants only half their pay, and they are free to leave.
SECTION VIII

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

General Political Organization

The only political unit the Katu are known to have is the village, which is governed by a chief and a council of elders—with the elders having the dominant influence.

The village chief or ta-ka is selected by the elders, who choose the cleverest man of the village, preferably one who has led a successful blood hunt or who has made a favorable trading transaction for the tribe. If misfortune, such as a poor harvest, death, or epidemic, befalls the village, the chief is likely to be held responsible and to be replaced by the elders. Ordinarily the former chief bows out gracefully, for the Katu believe this is what the ancestors would want him to do.1

The chief and elders have jurisdiction over disputes between families or with other villages, while disputes within a family are judged by the male head of the household.2

Officially, the Vietnamese Government administers relationships between tribal villages and assigns officials to be responsible for small groups of tribal villages. Above this level are district and provincial chiefs. Through this hierarchy the Vietnamese Government administers tribal affairs and transmits its orders to the village level.3

However, the extent of Government control over the Katu is limited because most of the Katu area is under Viet Cong control.4 Even before the Viet Cong established control over their area, the Katu had minimal relations with the Central Government. It may be noted that not until 1935 did the French open up the Katu area and establish six guard posts there. The difficulty of travel in the Katu area enabled the tribespeople to live in isolation and maintain only minimal contact with the Government.5

Legal System

Justice is usually administered by the village chief with the advice of the elders. Generally the plaintiff will accept the decision of the council; if he does not, he will abandon his house, move to another village, and start over again.

The most common cases handled by the village council include
family quarrels, marriage conflicts, and adultery. The verdicts for such cases always result in an indemnity for the victim and a penalty fine of a cock, pig, or buffalo. Although within the village thefts are very rare, they occur frequently between villages and lead to interminable intervillage conflict.

If a tribesman accused of murder cannot absolve himself, he is judged to be guilty; he is usually sentenced to pay a large fine to the parents of the victim—generally a sacrifice of 10 to 20 buffaloes. Murderers usually cannot pay this high price, and if the fine is not paid, the family of the murdered person has the right to kill the murderer with spear thrusts. If the murderer is from another village, the determination of punishment is no longer a family matter: it then becomes the responsibility of the murdered man's village. Invariably a war expedition results, for failure to avenge blood by blood brings dishonor upon the village. Until the dishonor has been wiped out, none of the villagers may eat buffalo or appear in public.

On the village, district, and provincial levels, a special system of courts was established under the French to adjudicate matters concerning the various tribal groups. In the village, a village court decided the sentences, which could be reviewed on the district level. Three district court members were assigned to each ethnic group in a district jurisdiction to handle only tribal matters. The district court officials selected a president to preside over the district court, which met in the house of the district chief.

Under the French, cases that could not be resolved on the village level were sent to the Tribunal Coutumier, which convened for the first 7 days of every month. To judge the cases brought before the tribunal, the chief judge relied on traditional tribal law and customs. The tribunal dealt only with cases in which both parties were tribespeople. Cases involving Vietnamese and tribespeople were the responsibility of the province chief; however, provincial authorities tried not to interfere with the operation of the tribunal.

The legal system instituted by the French still governs the Montagnard tribes, but steps have been taken by the Vietnamese Government to revise the legislative code in the tribal areas. Under the Diem regime, an attempt was made to substitute Vietnamese laws for the tribal practices in an effort to integrate the tribespeople politically into the Republic of Vietnam.

In March 1965, the Vietnamese Government promulgated a decree restoring the legal status of the tribal laws and tribunals. Under this new decree, there will be courts at the village, district, and province levels which will be responsible for civil affairs, Montagnard affairs, and penal offenses when all parties involved are Montagnards.
Village customs law courts, consisting of the village administrative committee chief aided by two Montagnard assistants, will conduct weekly court sessions. When a case is reviewed and a decision reached by this court, it will be recorded and signed by the parties involved, thus eliminating the right to appeal to another court. If settlement cannot be determined, the case can be referred to a higher court.

District courts, governed by the president of the court (the district chief) aided by two Montagnard assistants, will hold bi-monthly court sessions. Cases to be tried by the district court include those appealed by the village court and cases which are adjudged serious according to tribal customs.

At the province level, a Montagnard Affairs Section will be established as part of the National Court. This section, under jurisdiction of a Montagnard presiding judge and two assistants, will handle cases appealed from the Montagnard district courts and cases beyond the jurisdiction of the village or district courts. It will convene once or twice a month depending upon the requirements.

Subversive Influences

The principal objective of subversive activity among the Katu is to alienate the tribesmen from the Vietnamese Government. Another important objective in the Katu area is to control and to maintain supply lines through the tribal area. In 1965, the Viet Cong reportedly controlled almost all of the Katu area.

As a rule, subversive elements infiltrate a tribal village and attempt to win the confidence of the village as a whole or of its key individuals. A thorough knowledge of tribal customs aids the Viet Cong—for example, their agents adopt Katu dress to identify themselves with the tribespeople.

Once the villagers' suspicions have been allayed and their confidence won, the Viet Cong begin an intense propaganda program directed against the Central Government. Individuals are then recruited, trained, and used for various support or combat missions with the Viet Cong.

When propaganda and cajolery are not effective, the Viet Cong will resort to extortion and terror. The Katu may be coerced into passive support, such as refusing cooperation with the Central Government, or the villagers may be pressed into active support for the Viet Cong as laborers.

After the Geneva Agreement of 1954, a number of the Katu were taken to North Vietnam, where they received indoctrination and guerrilla training. It is believed these trained tribesmen have since assumed important positions in villages throughout the Katu area.
SECTION IX
COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

The principal means of disseminating information in the Katu area is by word of mouth. The Katu do not have radios. Any radios in the tribal area presumably have been brought in by outsiders for military use.

The Katu are not likely to be receptive to motion pictures, due to their belief that the soul of a man whose image is captured in the form of a photograph is lost, bringing misfortune to the area. Written communication will likewise have little effect on the Katu, as they presently have no written language. The few Katu who read Vietnamese or French could, however, be expected to share information contained in written communications with their illiterate neighbors.

All information directed to the Katu should be based upon projects and programs beneficial to the village, as the tribesmen have a strong communal attachment. Should the tribesmen believe that a particular program is not explicitly for Katu benefit, they will not cooperate. The control of disease, the improvement of agriculture, and protection against Viet Cong harassment are possible themes for information programs.

Any unusual act to persuade the tribesmen to believe a person has supernatural powers may be a useful information technique. As mentioned earlier, a Frenchman reportedly gained the respect of the Katu by setting off a dynamite charge; the tribesmen believed he was a great sorcerer and had put to flight some formidable spirits which had been haunting a small river inlet.
SECTION X
CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

Any proposed civic action should take into account Katu religious, social, and cultural traditions. All initial contacts should be made with the village chief and the elders because of the Katu political structure. It is also essential to psychologically prepare the Katu to accept the proposed changes. This requires detailed consultation with village leaders, careful assurance as to result, and a relatively slow pace in implementing programs.

Because they are village-oriented, the Katu respond favorably to ideas for change when they are presented in terms of community betterment. Civic action proposals should stress the resulting improvement of village life rather than emphasize ethnic or cultural pride, nationalism, or political ideology. The reasons for an innovation should be thoroughly explained; the Katu resent interference in their normal routine if they do not understand the reason for it.

Civic action programs being conducted by the Vietnamese Government have included the resettlement of the Katu into new and larger villages, the control of malaria and other medical programs, agricultural assistance, and an educational program. These programs have not been notably successful, because of the isolation of the tribesmen, their disinclination to change their traditional ways, and Viet Cong activity in the area.

The following civic action guidelines may be useful in the planning and implementation of projects or programs.

1. Projects originating in the local village are more desirable than suggestions imposed by a remote Central Government or by outsiders.

2. Projects should be designed to be challenging but should not be on such a scale as to intimidate the villagers by size or strangeness.

3. Projects should have fairly short completion dates or should have phases that provide frequent opportunities to evaluate effectiveness.

4. Results should, as far as possible, be observable, measurable, or tangible.
5. Projects should, ideally, lend themselves to emulation by other villages or groups.

Civic Action Projects

The civic action possibilities for personnel working with the Katu encompass all aspects of tribal life. Examples of possible projects are listed below. They should be considered representative but not all inclusive and not in the order of priority.

1. Agriculture and animal husbandry
   a. Improvement of livestock quality through introduction of better breeds.
   b. Instruction in elementary veterinary techniques to improve health of animals.
   c. Introduction of improved seeds and new vegetables.
   d. Introduction of techniques to improve quality and yields of farmland.
   e. Insect and rodent control.
   f. Construction of simple irrigation and drainage systems.

2. Transportation and communication
   a. Roadbuilding and clearing of trails.
   b. Installation, operation, and maintenance of electric power generators and village electric light systems.
   c. Construction of radio broadcast and receiving stations and public-speaker systems.

3. Health and sanitation
   a. Improve village sanitation.
   b. Provide safe water-supply systems.
   c. Eradicate disease-carrying insects.
   d. Organize dispensary facilities for outpatient treatment.
   e. Teach sanitation, personal hygiene, and first aid.

4. Education
   a. Provide basic literacy training.
   b. Provide basic citizenship education.
   c. Provide information about the outside world of interest to the tribesmen.
SECTION XI
PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

Given the incentive and motivation and provided with the necessary training, leadership, and support, the Katu can become an effective force against the Viet Cong. The tribesmen may be used as informers, trackers and guides, intelligence agents, interpreters, and translators. With intensive training and support, the Katu can be organized to defend their villages against the Viet Cong; with good leadership, they can be organized into effective counter-guerrilla combat units.

Under threat of terror and reprisals, the Katu have been forced to give the Viet Cong support in the form of food, taxes, and labor. When tactics of subversion, propaganda, and simple cajolery fail to subdue the Katu, the Viet Cong resort to murder and brutality.

Frequently, the Katu yield to and cooperate with the Viet Cong. The isolated Katu do not have the wherewithal to oppose the Viet Cong; they need Government training and support. Most Katu villages have no organization for defense that is effective against modern weapons, except for the few villages equipped, trained, and organized by the Government. Katu villages with adequate training and support will defend themselves and will occasionally initiate aggressive action against the Viet Cong.

Organization for Defense

Traditionally, the Katu village has been organized for defense against surprise attack: the village site was chosen for inaccessibility, and the villages were formerly surrounded by a stockade, with sharpened bamboo stakes and traps placed along access trails. Furthermore, bamboo tubes filled with poisoned water were left near their fields to be drunk by the intruder.

Weapons Utilized by the Tribe

Traditional weapons of the Katu are spears, swords, crossbows, and poisoned arrows. The poison used on the arrows is a form of curare poison made from plants of the genus *strychnos*. The Katu are familiar with the use of traps, pits, and concealed sharpened sticks used as spiked foot traps.

Their relatively small stature limits the weapons the Katu can use but they are proficient in handling light weapons such as the
AR.15 rifle, the Thompson submachinegun, and the carbine. The tribesmen are less proficient in the use of the M-1 or the Browning Automatic Rifle, although they can handle large weapons which can be disassembled and quickly reassembled.

The Katu pride themselves upon their hunting skill and their mastery of traditional weapons; they are equally as proud of their skill and marksmanship with modern weapons. If a Katu can carry and handle a weapon conveniently, he will use it well.

The Katu seem unable to handle sophisticated devices, such as mortars, explosives, and mines, as proficiently as they handle hand weapons. They have difficulty absorbing the more abstract and technical aspects—such as timing trajectories—of such weapons.

Willingness to Fight

In warfare on their own terms, the Katu are quite willing, often even anxious, to initiate offensive action. Their traditional blood hunts, during which warriors often traveled considerable distances to attack neighboring villages, may contribute to their willingness to fight offensively. However, the Katu are reluctant to fight unless they enjoy a clear superiority either in numbers or weaponry. They favor night attacks and fighting from ambush. The Katu defend their villages unless attacked by a vastly superior force; in that event they will take refuge in the forest.

Ability to Absorb Military Instruction

The Katu can absorb basic military training and concepts. Their natural habitat gives them an excellent background for tracking and ambush activities: they are resourceful and adaptable in the jungle.

The Katu learn techniques and procedures more readily from actual demonstrations using the weapon itself as a teaching aid. They do not learn as well from blackboard demonstrations; such an approach is too abstract for them.
SECTION XII
SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH THE KATU

Every action of the Katu tribesman has specific significance in terms of his culture. One must be careful to realize that the Katu may not react as outsiders do. The outsider should remember that a relatively simple course of action may, for the tribesman, require not only divination but also a sacrifice.

A few suggestions for personnel working with the Katu are listed below.

Official Activities

1. Initial contact with a Katu village should be formal. A visitor should speak first to the village chief and elders, who will then introduce him to other principal village figures.

2. Sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness are essential in dealing with the Katu. Promises and predictions should not be made unless the result is assured. The tribespeople usually expect a new group of personnel to fulfill the promises of the previous group.

3. Outsiders cannot gain the confidence of Katu tribesmen quickly. Developing a sense of trust is a slow process requiring great understanding, tact, patience, and personal integrity.

4. An attitude of good-natured willingness and limitless patience must be maintained, even when confronted with resentment or apathy.

5. Whenever possible, avoid projects or operations which give the tribesmen the impression they are being forced to change their ways.

6. No immediate, important decision should be asked of a Katu. An opportunity for family consultation should always be provided; if not, a flat refusal to cooperate may result.

7. Tribal elders and the village chief should also receive credit for projects and for improved administration. Efforts should never undermine or discredit the position or influence of the local leaders.
Social Relationships

1. The Katu should be treated with respect and courtesy at all times.
2. The term moi should not be used because it means savage and is offensive to the tribesmen.
3. Outside personnel should not refuse a Katu offer of food or drink, especially at a religious ceremony. Once involved in a ceremony, one must eat or drink whatever is offered.
4. The Katu are great boasters and may talk of the hundreds of men they have killed. An outsider should accept these boasts and echo them.
5. A gift, an invitation to a ceremony, or an invitation to enter a house may be refused by an outsider, as long as consistency and impartiality are shown. However, receiving gifts, participating in ceremonies, and visiting houses will serve to establish good relations with the Katu.
6. Outsiders must request permission to attend a Katu ceremony, festival, or meeting from the village elders or other responsible persons.
7. An outsider should never enter a Katu house, unless accompanied by a member of that house; this is a matter of good taste and cautious behavior. If anything is later missing from the house, unpleasant and unnecessary complications may arise.
8. Outside personnel should avoid taking pictures of the tribesmen, for the Katu believe that they will "lose their spirit" if photographed, as the soul will thus be captured on the piece of paper.
9. Outsiders should not get involved with Katu women.
10. Generally, Katu are eager to learn; however, teachers should be careful to avoid seriously disrupting traditional cultural patterns.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

1. Do not enter a village where a religious ceremony is taking place or a religious taboo is in effect. Watch for the warning signs placed at the village entrances; when in doubt, do not enter.
2. As soon as possible identify any sacred trees, stones, or other sacred objects in the village; do not touch or tamper with them. The Katu believe these sacred objects house powerful spirits. For example, if a sacred rock is touched without due ceremony, the village may have to be moved or expensive sacrifices may have to be made.
3. Do not mock Katu religious beliefs in any way; these beliefs are the cornerstone of Katu life.

4. The wooden Katu statues, placed on trails or near village structures, can be examined by an outsider, but a stranger should not touch the statues. If it is necessary to move a statue, arrangements should be made with the villagers.

Living Standards and Routines
1. Outsiders should treat all Katu property and village animals with respect. Any damage to property or fields should be promptly repaired and/or paid for. An outsider should avoid borrowing from the tribesmen. Animals should not be treated brutally or taken without the owner's permission.

2. Learn simple phrases in the Katu language. A desire to learn and speak their language creates a favorable impression on the tribesmen.

Health and Welfare
1. The Katu are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of medical care and will request medical assistance. Outside groups in Katu areas should try to provide medical assistance whenever possible.

2. Medical teams should be prepared to handle, and have adequate supplies for, extensive treatment of malaria, dysentery, yaws, trachoma, venereal diseases, intestinal parasites, and various skin diseases.
FOOTNOTES

I. INTRODUCTION

II. TRIBAL BACKGROUND
3. Yosieh, op. cit.
6. Ibid., pp. 365-73; LeBar, et al., op. cit., p. 141.
7. Yosieh, op. cit.
10. Yosieh, op. cit.
11. Ibid.

III. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS
1. Le Pichon, op. cit., p. 363; Yosieh, op. cit.
2. Louis Bezacier, "Notes sur quelques tatouages des Mol katu."
IV. SOCIAL STRUCTURE
2. Yosich, op. cit.
6. Ibid., pp. 375-77.
7. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Yosich, op. cit.
15. Ibid., p. 348.
18. Ibid., p. 386.
20. Ibid., pp. 369-72.

V. CUSTOMS AND TABOOS
3. Yosich, op. cit.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 395.
10. Ibid., pp. 391-92.
11. Ibid., pp. 381-84.
12. Ibid., p. 372.
13. Ibid., p. 367.
15. Ibid., p. 377.

VI. RELIGION
2. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

VII. ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION
3. Ibid., p. 361.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

VIII. POLITICAL ORGANIZATION
4. Yosich, op. cit.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 2.
13. Ibid.

IX. COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

X. CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS
No footnotes.
XI. PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

XII. SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH THE KATU
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