

# LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG



## Le Sourire de Chiang Khong celebrates its 20th anniversary



It was the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2018 and after several months of preparation, the committee in charge of the festivities was ready to welcome its guests.

At 6pm the jazz band, "The Fat Boys" directed by Thomas Winteler, announced the commencement of the aperitifs on the lawn of the Best Western Hotel in Chavannes-de-Bogis, with musical tunes each more playful than the other. In a relaxed atmosphere facing the Mont-Blanc, with sun shining and a pleasant temperature,

the guests arrived with large smiles on their faces.

Guests numbering 115 were then welcomed by Barbara to the evening and we moved over to the reception room. Each table was delicately decorated with a floral arrangement reminiscent of Thailand and its orchids, as well as one photo of a child of the home.

Throughout the meal, the comedians Christian Baumann and Fausto Borghini made us relaxed with their solo repartees, or seeking out guests in the room to interact with. Their theatrical improvisations were of a very high quality and very much appreciated, as could be heard from the sound of the laughter and exclamations from the public filling the room. Their intermittent comedic interventions were welcomed and it allowed us to partake of the delicious menu, specially created for the occasion by the hotel. They also assisted with the tombola for the evening which comprised of 34 different prizes ranging from paintings, perfumes, show tickets, ski passes and luxurious stays in places in Valais or Provence. We again thank our generous sponsors for these prizes that made some people very happy!

Barbara and Prapapone, who came specially for the occasion to Switzerland, gave an official speech thanking all the sponsors of the Sourire without whom their efforts in Thailand would be in vain, as well as thanking the three former presidents of the association, who were present for the occasion.

They did not forget to also thank all those who could not be present at this beautiful evening but who are supporting or have supported the Sourire during these last 20 years. Their speech was very moving.

From their side, the committee wished to thank these two women for their engagement, but also for their motivation so that the home gets better and better, especially in the respect of the rigorous norms imposed by the Thai government. They were given an enormous poster with a look back at the Sourire in pictures, from its creation until today.

And for the guests to have a glimpse of and travel to the home of the Sourire for an evening, a slide show went on a loop on one of the walls of the reception room, showing the daily activities of the children and of the staff, but also the events undertaken to highlight the cultural differences present within the home.

Finally, listening to the feedback received from our guests, it appears that the evening was very successful. We are already looking forward to celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Sourire, with Barbara and Prapapone !

Will you be amongst us ?



Organizing committee

## Introduction

From our 20 years experience and presence close to youths with diverse backgrounds and different ethnicities who have been immersed in the cultural practices of neighbouring countries for decades, we have realised that the growing child is naturally influenced by his circumstances and surroundings.

At the beginning of the 20th century King Rama VI was educated in England, where he went to Oxford University. He came back to Thailand with many new ideas amongst which was scouting for boys, founded in Britain by Robert Baden Powell. His conviction in the values of this movement, led him to introduce scouting to Thailand. In 2011 this teaching was integrated in the school curriculum. Supported by the government and the people, scouting became part of the customs and King Bhumibol, recently deceased, was the Scout Leader of his country. One day a week is reserved for scouting in all schools and the scout's uniform is part of the different uniforms imposed by the government.

The more we progress with our work in education, the more we realise that the scouting values correspond with our pedagogy, born from our experience in the field. Very close to nature, our children have the opportunity to observe its rules and adopt them into their lives. Their creativity has no limits. Naturally, the big ones take care of the smaller ones and instinctive protection settles in. Their sense of spontaneity and free sharing is impressive. We are keen to promote physical hygiene which leads to self-respect without forgetting the mutual respect that awakens the respect of others. Their joy is the signature of our philosophy. For those who leave the home, their first instinct is often to help their parents and family. This proves us that it is not material interest but love that prevails.



## Dominique

Dominique is a child of the Sourire. He was two years old when his parents, who were seriously ill, were hospitalised in Chiang Rai. As it is very often the case in hospitals, all the family members are present, and the medical staff got to know the small child running around the corridors very quickly. Unfortunately, both parents died very rapidly and the paternal grandparents requested custody of the child. Despite their notorious opium consumption, they were awarded custody of Dominique. Although warned repeatedly regarding their habit, social services finally removed the child and handed him over to the Sourire.



Dominique arrived in our home in an unkempt, wild state and was undernourished. He did not want to touch the rice but swallowed earth and leaves! From then on, he became "our baby" and slowly got used to a civilized life. At first, his grandmother came to see him regularly, but the visits became more spaced out and then ceased completely.

Enrolled in kindergarten he progressed well, and then attended primary school with great ease. His bright mind struck us and we witnessed his agility, extreme curiosity, and intellectual faculties. He could have easily continued his secondary scholarship in the governmental school but his thirst for knowledge challenged us and we opted for more challenging schooling.

A buddhist monk of a certain age that we had known for a long time came to our rescue. He now houses our Dominique with two other teenagers, and the three youngsters follow their High School education in a temple. We are in permanent contact with his master and every two weeks, he comes "home". He thoroughly enjoys studying, he has matured and says he is perfectly happy.

Dominique shared with us a small anecdote: The monks get up very early to beg their meal from the locals. Our protégé did not get up hoping to be able to "share" the meal with his friends. But the master intervened telling him – "without work, no food". He had to understand very quickly the rules of his new surroundings!

## Family story

**Ammara\*, Thai woman, deadlocked and badly accepted by her entourage, experienced a sad childhood as an orphan.**

Often our support goes beyond the children we welcome in the home. As is the case of Ammara a Thai woman who had a sad childhood as orphan. Having no education and in search of "happiness", she married very young. She gave birth to a daughter, Batsuba\* and a son Kirasak\*. The marriage failed and her husband sent her away, keeping the children and the house himself. Worryingly, she learned that the paternal grand-father of the children was getting too close to his grand-daughter and custody of the children was granted to her. It was then that we welcomed the two children into our home. Ammara who lived in the area came to visit expressing her appreciation and recognition of our services. Their lives seemed to get better. Batsuba did well in school and enrolled in commercial training. As for Kirasak, he currently attends secondary school.

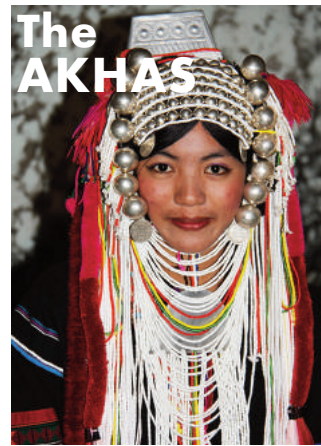
During this time, Ammara met another man. Without any training he was taking advantage of Ammara who was working hard to maintain the household. The couple's relationship was deteriorating and the children had to endure another separation. Both children would not speak up openly but their behaviour revealed their pain and suffering.

Ammara recently revealed to us that she was having an affair with a married man, himself the father of two children! This time it was too much for Batsuba. The fickleness of her mother perturbed her too much and she left for Bangkok to find a job which was a hard blow for Kirasak who remains with us.

Once again, Ammara was deadlocked, not being well accepted by those around her, she came to us to find a solution. During long discussions, we tried to open her eyes to her situation. Either she continues to allow herself to be exploited by clearly ruthless profiteers or she finally thinks about HER future and more so, the well-being of her children. Tears flowed and she decided to put an end to the past in order to consider a healthier existence. Of course we will continue to support her in the hope that with mutual trust the children will be reborn and that a new more balanced life can start again!

\* Fictitious name

## Look at the tribes



Originating from China more than a thousand years ago, the Akhas migrated in the 19th century to Laos, Vietnam, Burma and Thailand. Their history, traditions, rituals and proverbs have been passed down orally for centuries and only in the 20th century was an alphabet invented. Very proud of their past, some Akhas are able to recite the names of their

male ancestors back to their origins!

This tribe is recognisable by their colourful clothing that is woven and embroidered by the women and by its typical female headdress decorated with buttons or silver coins. The shape and the colours of the clothes determines child, adult, civil status, etc. Nevertheless, the young generation tends, more and more, to wear modern clothes. However, for important celebrations, the traditional costume is always worn.

The Akha follow or must follow the "Akha Way" (Path of Akha) which includes all the life rules, as well as the practical advice such as cultivation of land, treatment of animals, curing diseases and even their attitude towards others. Closely linked to the highly venerated ancestors, respect for seniors remains absolute. An awakened consciousness nurtures their respect and their love for the wealth of creation. Animists, they cultivate and believe in a world of spirits that influence good or bad in earthly life. The shaman comes into direct contact with the spirits contrary to the priest who is responsible for the rites. The two of them watch over the behaviour of the inhabitants, protect them and give them advice. Thus, we find an altar in each house to honour the respective spirits. The village chief deals with all political and administrative matters with the government.



Traditional headdress

20th anniversary of the Sourire







Akha mother with child

Boys and girls are free to choose their life partner, if possible, not from the same village and always with the consent of the fathers. They also decide the price to pay! The minimum age for the girl is set at 13 years old, the ideal age suggested is 16/17 years old – for the boy, the commitment is between 17 and 24 years old. Once married, the girl lives with her husband's family, she now belongs to his clan. She is encouraged to have several children preferably boys for the family lineage. Ideally: 5 boys and 5 girls, which is not really the case nowadays.

Death is not a departure, but only a transition for the land of life to the land of the ancestors. The deceased is watched over in his house each night by his family, neighbours and friends. Songs, games and ceremonies go on continuously until the day of the burial. Animists bury their deceased contrary to Buddhists who practice cremation.

The survival of the unity and integrity of the Akha culture were preserved despite the hardships and obstacles encountered in the different countries. One can only admire their determination and their strength. At this moment, the Akhas feel threatened. Throughout their history, they have always found solutions to remain faithful to their "AkhaWay". However, the complex problems of the modern world seem overwhelming to them. The young people, naturally marked by the traditions and deeply rooted in them, ask themselves seriously how to practice them in today's world.



Coming from China (their supposed Tibetan, Mongol or Siberian origins are unverifiable), the Hmongs settled in Laos and Thailand. Since the Vietnam war, one can also find them in the United States. They are also called the Miao, which means "raw rice" and for many years signified poorly integrated nomadic popula-

tions. The Hmongs themselves often use the name "mountaineers". Their language and their history is transmitted orally, as is for all the "people of the hills" in Thailand.

For many years they have sought to live at high altitude for the cultivation of poppies and opium production, but gradually they got closer to better situated villages with more suitable fields for growing rice, for animal rearing and agriculture in general. They move frequently for various reasons: exhausted land, problems with the government or a bad shaman forecast.

Animists (partially Christianised), they consult the



Hmong girls at the Sourire home



House of a hmong village

ancestors/the spirits before settling and building their houses. The elders have unlimited authority over their entire family and it is he who solves the problems and that takes care of the well-being of all. The relationship of father-son is capital.

The son is obliged to marry the daughter of another clan but always with the permission of his parents; a union between two generations is forbidden. A few men take two or several wives which increases his status. According to the proverb: "A man with two women and ten horses is a very rich man"! At present, however, rich means to own a car, motorbike, phone, TV and if possible, a beautiful house.

Only a minority of children are in school and even though a few of them sometimes manage to reach uni-

versity level, they tend to return to their families even it is to return farming or join the father's business! Unlike other ethnic groups, the Hmongs are difficult to integrate with other people.

Having a great knowledge of medicinal plants - their benefits and virtues - illnesses are treated in a natural way. Initiated by the shaman, some heal with rites, sacrifices or even by specific nutrition. The shaman himself is consulted for severe diseases. Following a change of habits, they also adhere to modern medicine.

The Hmongs attach great importance to ancestral beliefs, even in the construction of their homes. To decide on the place where the construction will take place, they place a few rice grains in a bowl depending on the number of family members and animals they own and if the bowl remains intact after one night, the parcel of land is considered fit to accommodate the family home. .

For a long time, the Hmongs felt inferior to the Thai population and were closer to their Chinese origin. But the deceased king, Bhumibol (Rama IX) largely promoted the dignity of the tribes in the north of his country facilitating contact with the government and by royal projects simplifying their existence.



The LISUS

Of Tibetan origin, the Lisus lived for many centuries in China. Often cruelly oppressed, they always managed to keep their identity and in the 20th Century, they started emigrating out of China. A minority stopped in India, others in Myanmar and some in the North-

West of Thailand. Animists, partly Christianised, particularly in Myanmar, while others joined Buddhism in Thailand. The language and the traditions are transmitted orally or more precisely "musically". Singing and dancing have an important place in their history. Despite a prodigious memory, only a small number have memorised all the songs.

Very flexible, they adapt easily when encountering problems with other dominant groups and accept "mixed marriages" as long as the man remains Lisu! However, the woman who is subordinate to the man, manages the finances! The Chinese New Year is very family orientated and all are obliged to return to their respective villages to express their gratitude to the elders and to obtain their blessings.

Preferably, the Lisus establish themselves close to a watercourse that has a meaning to them or specific



Bamboo flute lisu

power. Independent and free, for a long time they cultivated opium, which is forbidden today. Now they live of the revenue from agriculture and crafts such as magnificent wood sculptures, silverwork, and musical instruments. The men primarily also work on guns, and bows and arrows. The women take care of the weaving, sewing, embroidery and the patchwork which is very much appreciated. Now,

the tendency is towards manufacturing by machine.

As all tribes, the Lisus have their own traditional costume, which is worn especially for New Year and for other celebrations during the year. All of their silver jewellery is displayed to show their wealth. The women are proud of their ample and very colourful tunic and both men and women wear a richly decorated turban that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups.

Less shy than other ethnic groups, they are very hard workers, hate laziness, and are very open towards education. They have a pushy side and like to excel in everything. The young generation, eager for openness thinks it is ready for modernity, but the change turns out to be painful.



Folk dance lisu

## Renovations

After 15 years, some of our buildings needed a renovation. Heavy rains, storms, and heatwaves were not kind to some of the materials and as our home is

located on a seismic fault, earthquake damage is frequent. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to restore the library!



Dormitory for boys



Renovated library



Guest rooms and storage rooms



The Girls say  
**THANK YOU**  
for the renovation of their dormitory!

Pi Aie after her university degree with her «sisters and brothers» of the Sourire



SIMPLE IS TRUE and TRUE IS SIMPLE!

Fruit  
Flower  
Développement et élévation  
Roots



Power/Strength/Victory  
Wisdom/Beauty/Harmony  
Love/Respect/Justice  
Measure/Rules/Truth

**LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG**

Warm thanks to the printing house Gessler SA, Sion and to the graphic artist Jeanclaude Warmbrodt