In Memoriam: Jacques Lemoine (1936–2026)



Figure 1: Jacques Lemoine, in the late1980s © Louis Gabaude

Former Siam Society member Jacques Lemoine passed away on 17 May 2026 in Bangkok, where he had resided for many years. A French senior researcher in social anthropology at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), he established himself as one of the world's foremost specialists on the Hmong and Yao peoples, to whom he devoted most of his career and several important publications. He also conducted pioneering research on the political systems of the non-Buddhist Tai populations of southern China and northern Vietnam.

A gifted linguist and true polyglot, Lemoine studied Japanese and Chinese at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO) in Paris after completing his secondary education. These linguistic skills led to his appointment as a librarian at the Institut des hautes études chinoises of the Sorbonne in the late 1950s. In 1960, while participating in the French cultural mission to Laos, he first encountered the country that would shape the course of his scholarly life. Between 1962 and 1963, he briefly served in the French Navy, notably acting as a French–Japanese interpreter during the expedition off the coast of Japan that enabled the bathyscaphe *Archimède* to set a world record for deep-sea diving.

His fascination with Asian cultures, together with the lasting impression made by his first stay in Laos, led him to undertake doctoral studies at the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE, VIe Section) in Paris. His dissertation focused on a Green Hmong village in Xayaburi (Sainyabuli; ໄຊຍະບູລີ) province, Laos, and was based on nearly three years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1964 and 1967 under the difficult conditions of the Laotian Civil War. Defended in 1968 and published by the CNRS in 1972, the dissertation immediately established him as a leading authority on Hmong society. Having recently joined the CNRS, Lemoine remained in Laos and continued his research among Hmong and Yao communities, concentrating increasingly on cosmology, ritual practices, and shamanic traditions. He pursued this work until 1975, when the Communist takeover of Laos forced him to seek refuge in Thailand.

From the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, Lemoine became deeply involved in assisting Hmong refugees as they adapted to life in France. This commitment allowed him to develop enduring friendships within Hmong clan networks and reflected a rare combination of scholarly engagement and personal dedication.

In the early 1980s, he founded the Centre d'anthropologie de la Chine du

https://doi.org/10.69486/114.2.2026.1 © The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage

Sud et de la péninsule indochinoise (CACSPI), a CNRS research unit that he directed until 2001. Under his leadership, the center played an important role in establishing scientific partnerships with the People's Republic of China during the country's gradual reopening to Western scholarship. This opportunity enabled him to extend to China the research he had previously conducted in Laos with Hmong, Yao, and Tai-speaking populations. In 1986, together with Professor Chao Chien of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, he organized the first international conference devoted to Yao studies.

Alongside his personal research, administrative responsibilities, and efforts to promote international scholarly exchange, Lemoine maintained an extraordinarily prolific publication record. During the 1970s, he founded Vithagna Publishing House in Vientiane, which issued a number of influential works on China and Southeast Asia that have since become classics, including Charles Archaimbault's *Structures religieuses lao* (1973) and Stephan Feuchtwang's *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy* (1974). In the 1980s, he established Pandora Press in Bangkok, which published such notable studies as Richard B. Davis's *Muang Metaphysics* (1984) and Gehan Wijeyewardene's *Place and Emotion in Northern Thai Ritual Behaviour* (1986). Later, in the 2010s, he created OI Publishing, which issued, among other works, *Bouddhas, nāgas et lieux de mémoire en R.D.P. Lao* together with *Chefferie lao*, a collection of previously unpublished texts by Charles Archaimbault (2014).

Lemoine remained passionately committed to the study of languages throughout his life. In addition to Japanese and Chinese, he spoke Thai and Lao fluently and developed an exceptional command of several Hmong dialects. His linguistic expertise is reflected in one of his final books, *Parlons* (*H*)*mong* (2013).

A tireless scholar of remarkable intellectual curiosity, Jacques Lemoine continued to analyze and publish his extensive field materials until the very end of his life. His passing leaves a profound void in the study of the Miao–Yao peoples and among the many colleagues, students, and friends who benefited from his scholarship, generosity, and enduring commitment to the peoples whose lives and cultures he dedicated himself to understanding.

Bernard Formoso
Université de Montpellier—Paul Valéry
bernard.formoso@univ-montp3.fr

Key Publications

• 1972. *Un village hmong vert du Haut Laos. Milieu technique et organisation sociale*. Paris: CNRS.
• 1975. *Khoi Tan Seou: A Yao Manuscript*. Vientiane: Vithagna Press.
• 1982. *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*. Bangkok: White Lotus.
• 1983. *Kru'a ke (Showing the Way): A Hmong Initiation of the Dead*. Bangkok: Pandora Press.
• 1987. *Entre la maladie et la mort. Le chamane Hmong sur les chemins de l'Au-delà*. Bangkok: Pandora Press.
• 1991. *The Yao of South China. Recent International Studies* (co-edited with Chiao Chen). Paris/Pangu: Association française des études Yao.
• 2013. *Parlons* (*H*)*mong : langue et culture.* Paris: L'Harmattan.
• 2014. *Bouddhas, nāgas et lieux de mémoire en R.D.P. Lao. Essais à la mémoire de Charles Archaimbault suivis d'un inédit : Chefferie lao, cosmogonies, structures religieuses et rituel par Charles Archaimbault* (co-edited with Bernard Formoso). Bangkok: OI Publishing.
• 2016. *Le triptyque taoïste des San Diu du Viêt-Nam : naissance, ordination, mort.* Bangkok: OI Publishing.