



MY MEKONG





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MEKONG



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◀ (Halftitle page) It's a working day (Viet Nam).
◀ (Title page, right) Mum Sokhun throws his fishing net in Prasot village (Cambodia).
▶ Boats are a way of life on the Mekong River (Thailand).



► Arayachart Chanpeng, 14

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The mighty Mekong River is the 12th largest in the world, and an evocative icon of the region and the peoples it nourishes. Nearly 5,000 km long, it winds its way through six countries: the People's Republic of China (PRC), Myanmar, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Thailand, Cambodia, and Viet Nam, where it spills into the South China Sea. Together these countries are the Mekong region. Covering about 2.6 million square kilometers, the region is the size of Western Europe. More than 200 distinct ethnic groups make up its population of 320 million.

For more than 15 years, the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program, known simply as the GMS Program, has been a driving force in bringing the countries closer together. Under the GMS Program the countries are forging closer links and moving toward greater regional cooperation and integration, guided by the 3 Cs: improving the physical connectivity between countries, enhancing the region's competitiveness, and building a Mekong community. To achieve an integrated, harmonious, and prosperous Mekong, the neighbors are collaborating on common and cross-border issues in sectors such as transport, tourism, health, the environment, and energy. They have already come a very long way.

The Mekong is a region of stunning natural beauty and vibrant cultures that is undergoing rapid changes. In *My Mekong*, 106 young people from Jinghong (PRC), Lao Bao (Viet Nam), Luangnamtha (Lao PDR), Mukdahan (Thailand), and Svay Rieng (Cambodia) show us their world. Join us on a journey that showcases the diversity and dynamism of the Mekong, captured through the lens of youth. *My Mekong* is a product of the GMS Youth Forum, a series of activities and events involving the region's young people, leading up to the Third GMS Leaders' Summit in Vientiane in March 2008.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, *My Mekong* speaks volumes. Enjoy!

Ariun Thapan
 Director General
 Southeast Asia Department
 Asian Development Bank



One hundred kids + 200 cameras = more than 5,000 photographs from 5 countries. The formula behind *My Mekong* is simple. The result is a complex tapestry of colors, textures, faces, and images depicting the lived realities of people across the Mekong.

At the core of the Mekong region are the 320 million people who share a common culture and history, are nourished by the same great river and are more connected than ever before. While some of the traditional lifestyles and customs are centuries old and scarcely altered by time, many people's lives are changing as the region opens up and the meaning of community expands beyond borders.

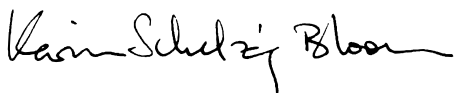
In *My Mekong* we journey into the heart of that community, as seen through the eyes of its young people.

My Mekong was produced for the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Youth Forum, a series of events leading up to the 2008 GMS Leaders' Summit in Vientiane. Youth workshops were held in each country to hear the views, concerns, and aspirations of young people. The participants worked together to craft national youth messages. At a regional workshop in Bangkok, youth delegates met their counterparts from neighboring countries, exchanged views, and shared experiences—often finding they had much in common. Collectively they worked on a regional youth message to deliver to the leaders at the Vientiane Summit. As a next step, mixed groups from different countries set off on three separate caravan road trips along the region's main economic corridors. The caravans originated from Kunming (PRC), Da Nang (Viet Nam), and Ho Chi Minh City (Viet Nam), crisscrossed the region, and ended at the Vientiane Summit.

My Mekong was conceived as a parallel activity and a way to get a younger group—the under-18s—involved. We went to five communities in the region—areas with a new border crossing, an improved road, or an area rich in biodiversity, flagged for protection. A local professional photographer developed a basic photography workshop for an average of 20 teenagers in each location, teaching them the basics of composition, lighting, perspective, and more. The kids were then given cameras and sent out to document their world, their life, and anything particular they wanted to show us about their community. The result: more than 5,000 images with detailed captions and explanatory notes, offering a rare glimpse into the lives and thoughts of the Mekong region's next generation. All captions included here are the participants' own words.

Whether in Jinghong (PRC), Luangnamtha (Lao PDR), Lao Bao (Viet Nam), Mukdahan (Thailand), or Svay Rieng (Cambodia), the young photographers demonstrated a keen eye for finding the extraordinary in the ordinary. It was no easy task to select the relatively few photographs that are reproduced here.

In these vibrant images, traditional meets modern and old meets new. Welcome to the dynamic Mekong region.



Karin Schelzig Bloom
Editor, *My Mekong*, and Team Leader, GMS Youth Forum
Social Sectors Division
Southeast Asia Department
Asian Development Bank



► Jennifer Le



► Somkiao Kingsada



► Anunchai Secharunputong



Young photographers in action in (clockwise from top left): Viet Nam, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Viet Nam, People's Republic of China, Cambodia, and Thailand.



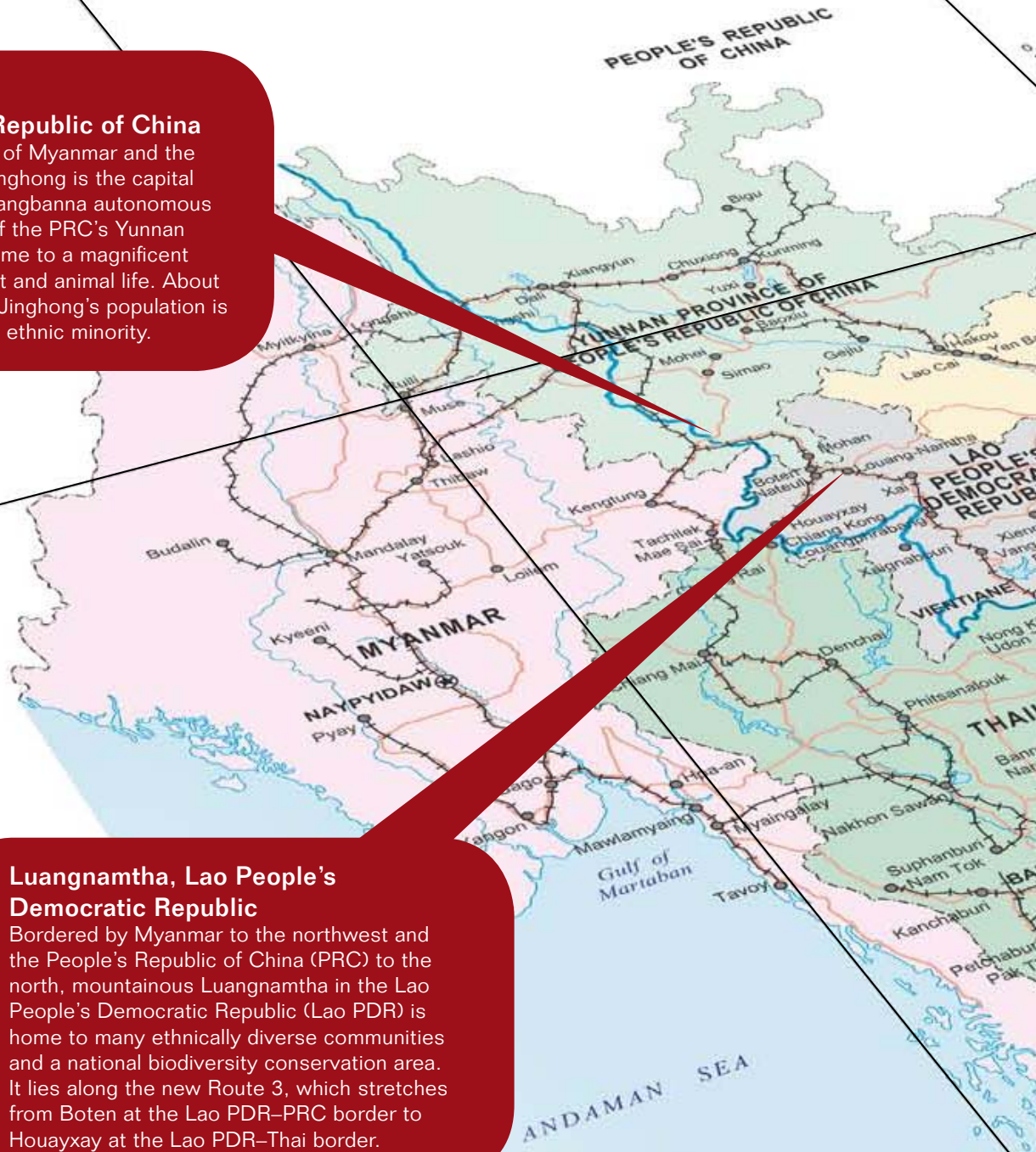
GREATER MEKONG SU

Jinghong, People's Republic of China

To the north of Myanmar and the Lao PDR, Jinghong is the capital of the Xishuangbanna autonomous prefecture of the PRC's Yunnan Province, home to a magnificent array of plant and animal life. About one third of Jinghong's population is from the Dai ethnic minority.

Luangnamtha, Lao People's Democratic Republic

Bordered by Myanmar to the northwest and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the north, mountainous Luangnamtha in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is home to many ethnically diverse communities and a national biodiversity conservation area. It lies along the new Route 3, which stretches from Boten at the Lao PDR-PRC border to Houayxay at the Lao PDR-Thai border.



BREGION



Lao Bao, Viet Nam

Viet Nam's Lao Bao has become an important border crossing for trade and tourism between central Viet Nam and the Lao PDR. Lao Bao's Special Economic Zone lies along Route 9, the central artery of the Mekong region's East-West Economic Corridor.

Mukdahan, Thailand

The Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge was officially opened in December 2006, linking Mukdahan, Thailand, to Savannakhet in the Lao PDR. The bridge has dramatically eased travel between the two countries. Mukdahan is known for the riverfront Indochina Market.

Svay Rieng, Cambodia

Located along the highway that leads from Phnom Penh to Ho Chi Minh City, Cambodia's Svay Rieng province borders Viet Nam, and its crossroads location means that local businesses are beginning to prosper. Our young photographers come from the district of Svay Teab.

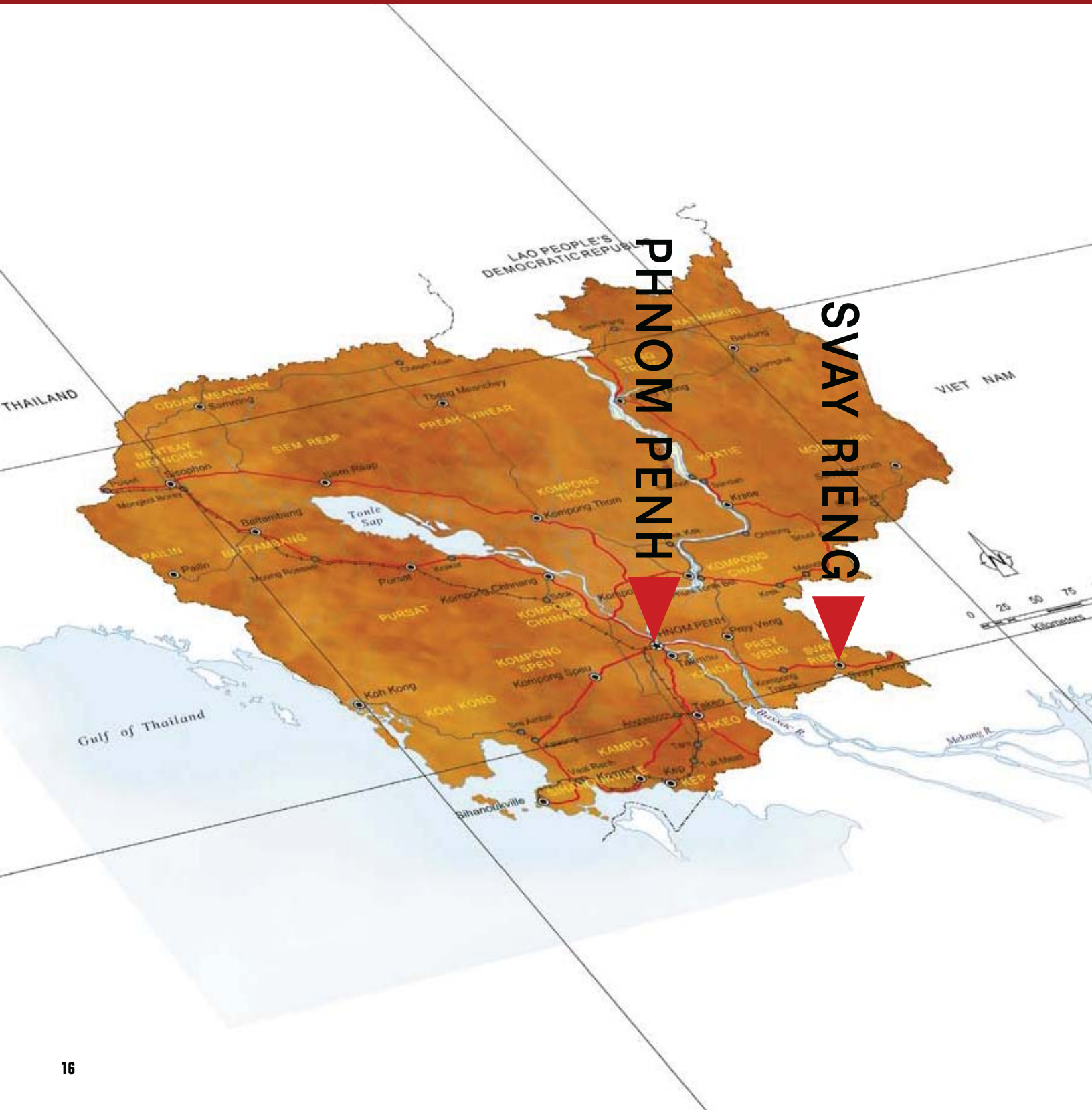




**The Mekong is a river
of friendship.** – Natsuda Sarapang, 14



Population: 14 million (2006)
Land Area: 181,035 km²
Land Borders: Lao PDR, Thailand, Viet Nam
Capital City: Phnom Penh
My Mekong Location: Svay Rieng





► Vien Piseth, 18

The Mekong River flows through the heart of Cambodia, passing through Stung Treng, Kratie, Kampong Cham, and Phnom Penh before it crosses its final border into Viet Nam. With its central location in the lower Mekong basin, Cambodia is the strategic link between Thailand and Viet Nam.

Our young photographers come from Svay Rieng, a southeastern province bordering Viet Nam located along Route 1, the recently completed highway from Phnom Penh to Ho Chi Minh City. The new highway has reduced travel time and cost and has improved access to markets, schools, and businesses. Svay Rieng is connected to a power source from Viet Nam through new transmission and distribution lines. The area has also seen improvements in water supply, with access to clean and safe drinking water. Although it is mainly an agricultural area, Svay Rieng now boasts a new public university which opened in 2006: the University of Svay Rieng.

In the past, students had difficulty in traveling to and from school. Sometimes the road had big holes and was dusty. When it rained, the road was muddy. Now that we have good roads, everything has improved. We can get to class on time.

– Mey Sopheak, 17

▲ A vendor transports his goods.
 ► Monks from Pich Montrey are constructing a new pagoda in Po Tavong village.



► Vien Piseth, 18



◀ Chen Saman is stamping rice in Prasot village.
▼ Yuy helps transport rice in Prasot commune, Svay Tiep district.



- ▶ Meas San is driving an ox-cart to transport rice to the village.
- ▼ Meas Sareith, a farmer, is harvesting rice in Trapaing village.



▶ Bin Sokhen, 19



▶ Meas Malin, 18



► Chea Somala, 15

Most villagers used to take water from streams, canals, ponds, and lakes for domestic use. Some villagers took their cattle to graze in the paddy fields and drank the water there when they became thirsty. They were often sick. Now there is reliable access to water supply. Sickneses have been reduced and living conditions are improving.

– Kim Saravuth, 19

▲ Pisey is washing her hands in the pond.

▼ Mr. Sien looks after his buffalos in Svay Tiep district.



► San Vy, 18



► Brother Chea is planting rice.
▼ Mum Sokhun is throwing his fishing net to catch fish in Samaki village, Svay Toer commune, Kampong Roar district .



- ▼ Chea Savun is pouring rice into a storage container.
- ▼ Phan is collecting palm juice to sell in Thmey village, Sambo commune.



► Ben Sovann, 19



► Prak Raksmeay, 19



- ▲ Khun Sami and his wife are clearing grass from the rows of cabbage and other vegetables like cucumber and string peas.
- Chen Samin is cleaning grass at the sugar cane farm.
- Kong Vanna is planting rice.



► Bin Sokhen, 19

Villagers here are happy to see things being improved. Availability of water, new roads, and electricity are benefiting their families and making their lives easier.

– Vien Piseth, 17



► Nguon Samnat, 17

- ▲ Suon Chamnab sells vegetables at Prasot market.
- ◀ Phouk Palla will take the chickens to sell at Prasot market.
- ▼ Man Savy is a cake seller in Prasot market.



► Meas Malin, 18

- ▶ Grandpa Yan makes baskets in O'kdam village, Sambo commune.
- ▼ Pich Saran is sewing tree leaves to cover the roof of her house.



▶ Khuon Socheat, 18



▶ Vien Piseth, 18



▲ Mien is taking vegetables and meat to sell in Prasot village.

▼ Grandma Mok Sareth transports goods to sell at the national road in Prasot village.



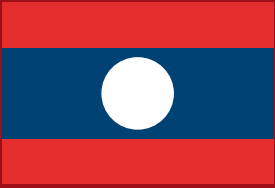


With bad roads, vendors and buyers did not want to go to the market. The whole market had only few vendors and it was so quiet. With the good roads, there are now many vendors.

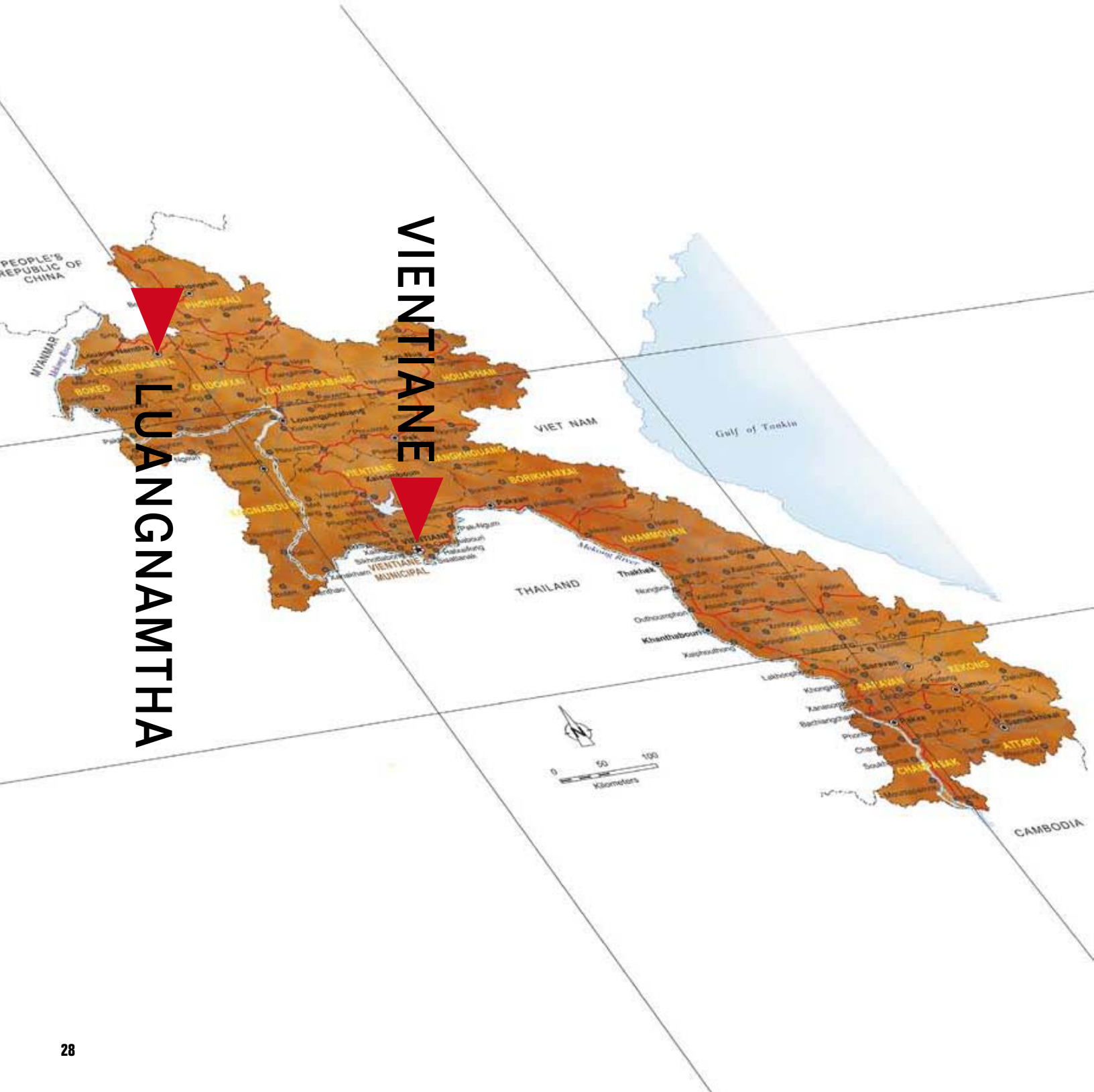
– Vien Piseth, 17

- ▲ Kong Yong is pushing a bicycle to transport rice in Prasot village.
- ▼ Kha drives a motorized cart to grind rice in Svay Tiep district.





Population: 6.5 million (2007)
Land Area: 236,800 km²
Land Borders: Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, PRC, Viet Nam
Capital City: Vientiane
My Mekong Location: Luangnamtha





► Phankeo Louang Khunseng, 14

The landlocked Lao PDR is truly situated at the heart of the Mekong region. It is the only country that shares a border with each of the other Mekong countries. Our young photographers are from Luangnamtha, a northern province bordering Myanmar and the PRC. The rich combination of environmental, cultural, and historical treasures has made Luangnamtha a center for sustainable cultural and eco-tourism development. The Nam Ha National Biodiversity Conservation Area was established to protect the area's vast array of wildlife and lush vegetation. More than 20 different ethnic groups live here.

A newly completed highway—Route 3—links the province of Yunnan in the PRC with northern Thailand via Luangnamtha and Bokeo provinces. The promise of socioeconomic development comes with the new road, which means expanding trade and easier access for tourists.

When I was young, the road was very bad. Now the road is good and it is much easier to travel to school.

– Anan Yotkeo Amphorn, 15

In the last few years we have gotten electricity, tap water, and a paved road. My family even has a motorbike.

– Kitta Bounvilay, 14



► Manivan Homthavy, 15

► Buddhist drum at the temple.

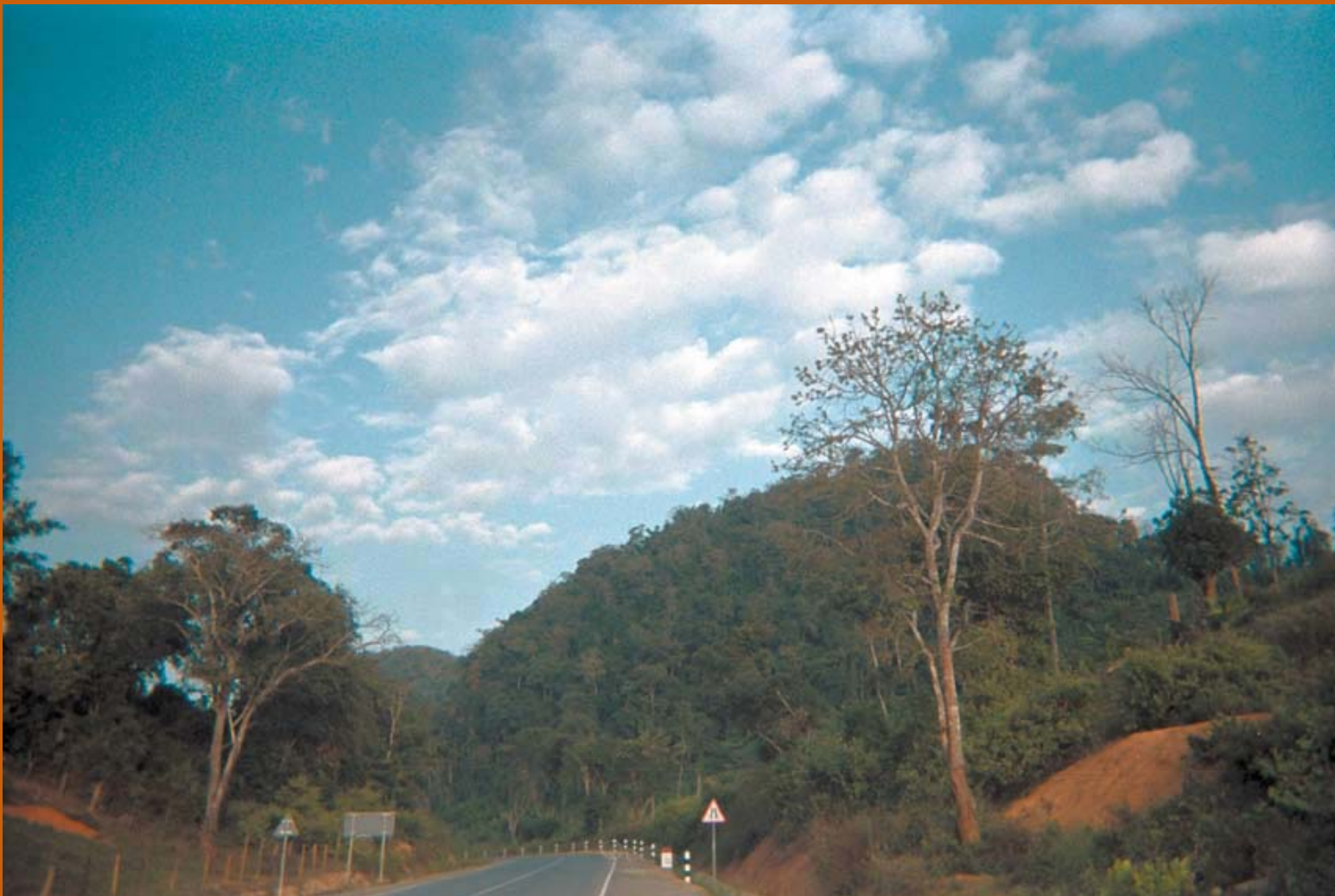


◀ Nam Eng villagers.
▼ Two rivers join to become the Namlan river.



- ▶ A Khmu ethnic house at Namha village.
- ▼ Lekham Mountain.

▶ Sonexay Lyearlu, 16



▶ Manivan Homthavy, 15



◀ Traditional houses and lifestyle.
▼ Mountains on the way to Vieng Phu Kha district 1.



- ▶ Big tree in the forest near the cave.
- ▼ Mountains on the way to Vieng Phu Kha district 2.





◀ Slow down when the road passes through a village.
▼ Namlan bridge.





When I was 10 years old there were mostly wooden houses. Now there are many houses made of brick, concrete, and tile.

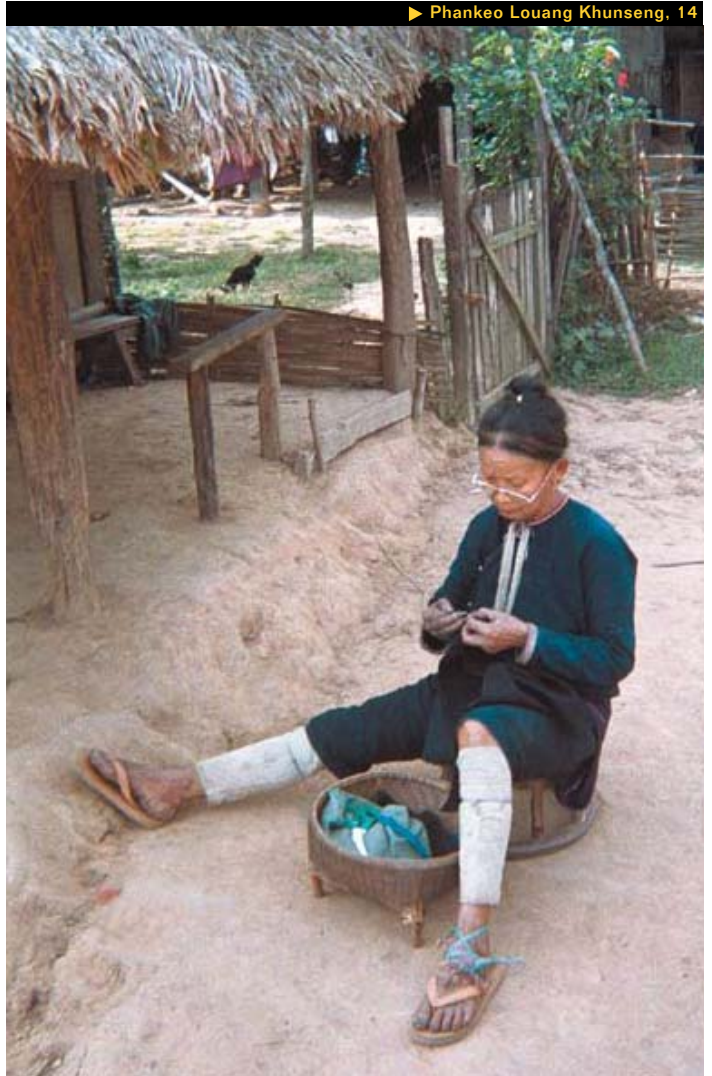
– Loueng Dosypaseurt, 16



- ▲ Phulan villagers around the fire.
- A big house in town.



► Seng la Tongsavath, 15



► Phankeo Louang Khunseng, 14

▲ Man Pheung, is 54 years old and from the Yao ethnic group.

► Ping is 64 years old, knitting clothes at Namha village in town.

► Ju Khoua, 40, is from the Lao Theun ethnic group. She is carrying grass back to her home.
▼ Chane, a 19-year-old Youan woman, carries firewood on her back.



► Loueng Dosypaseurt, 16



► Phengsouk Sombovan, 15

► Kitta Bounvilay, 14

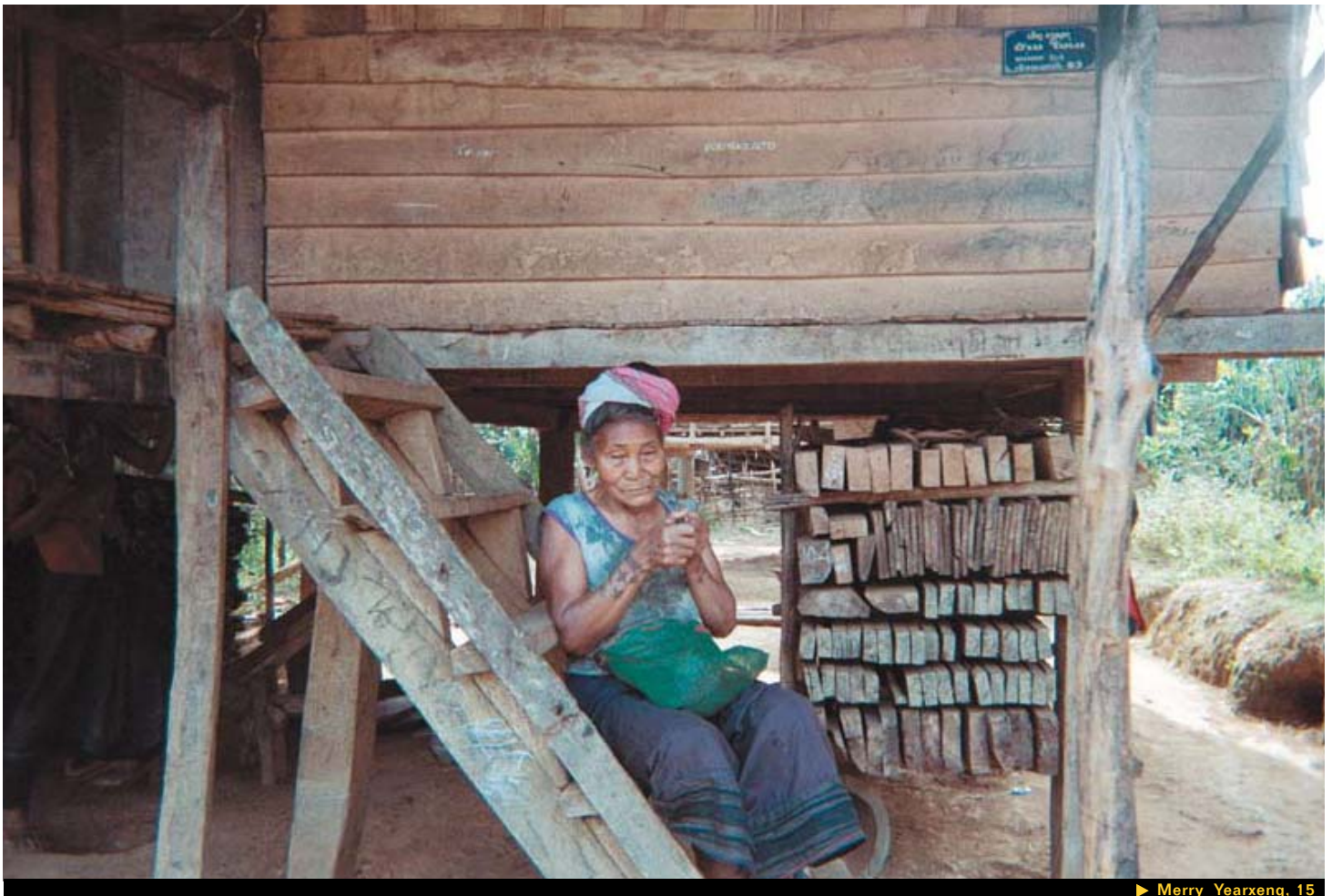


► Phankeo Louang Khunseng, 14

▲ Nang Seng, a 29-year-old Tai Dam woman, sells fish at the market.
◀ Boualoy is 24 years old, squeezing sugar cane for sugar juice.



- ▲ A Khao Sung villager.
- ▶ Mother and son at Khao Sung village.
- ▼ Nang, 65 years old, belongs to the Nouang ethnic group.



Mekong Markets

► Natsuda Sarapang, 14



◀ Northeastern musical instruments (Thailand).

▼ Hand-made bamboo items at the market (Lao PDR).



► Chong Be Chongteng, 16

To know the true local life, you have to visit the local bazaar. There is a special draw to the market with all its attractive goods.

– Chen Jinyu, 16



▶ Thongkeo Keobounphon, 16

▶ People shopping at the market in town (Lao PDR).
▼ Scene at the early bazaar (PRC).



▶ Chen Jinyu, 16

The Indonchina

The people are friendly

► A woman sells yams on the riverbank (Thailand).

▼ Along the river there are many stalls. They sell their goods to Thai and foreign tourists (Thailand).



Market is along the Mekong River, and the area is nice and spacious...

► Nakwan Kosanwit, 15



► Natsuda Sarapang, 14

▲ Selling things is a way of life along the river (Thailand).
◀ Sunglasses at the Indochina Market (Thailand).

If you come during a weekend or in the busy season it will be full of people, with



► Nguyen Thi Giang, 13

▲ Development of transportation promotes trading (Viet Nam).



► Bai Xue, 16

▲ Mother and father shopping (PRC).

he festival many tourists.

– Arayachart Chanpeng, 14



► Wang Guangyang, 16

▲ A pretty Dai woman selling lovely ornaments (PRC).



► Nguyen Thi Quynh Nga, 14

▲ There are a variety of goods sold at the market (Viet Nam).



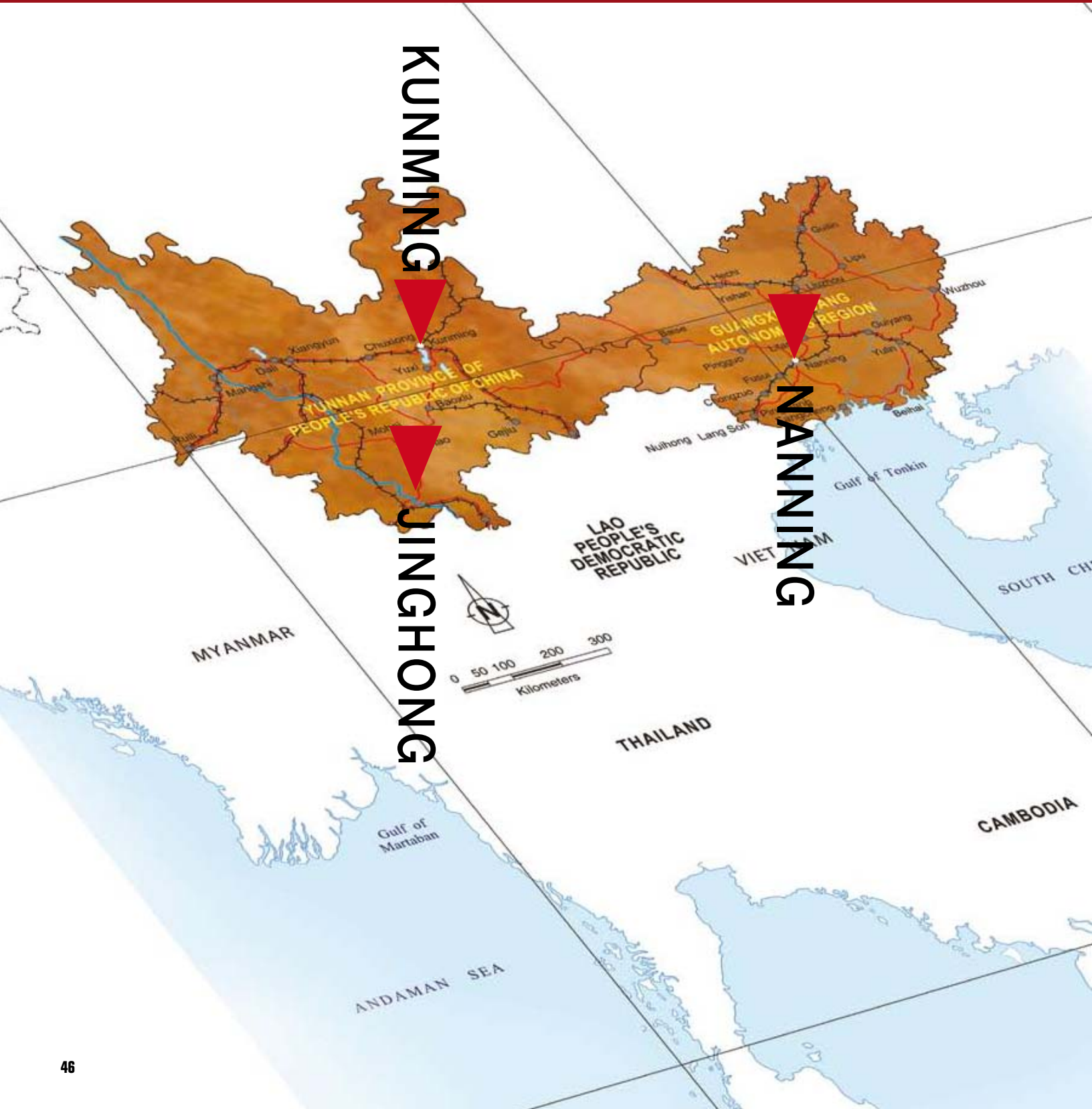
Population: (Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Yunnan Province): 94.4 million (2006)

Land Area: (Guangxi and Yunnan): 630,700 km²

Land Borders: (Guangxi and Yunnan): Myanmar, Lao PDR, Viet Nam

Capital Cities: Nanning (Guangxi), Kunming (Yunnan)

My Mekong Location: Jinghong





► Chen Zeng, 16

The Mekong River's headwaters are high up on the PRC's Tibetan Plateau. About half the river's total length is in the PRC, where it is known as the Lancang, meaning "turbulent river." True to its name, much of the river in the PRC consists of deep gorges. With its source at an altitude of more than 5,000 meters, the Lancang River leaves the country at an altitude of 500 meters. The name Mekong comes from the Dai people further downstream, who named it Mae Nam Kong, the "mother of all rivers."

Yunnan Province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region are the two provinces that share a border with other Mekong countries. Our young photographers come from tropical Jinghong City, capital of the Xishuangbanna autonomous prefecture in southern Yunnan Province. Xishuangbanna ("twelve thousand rice fields") is an area of stunning biodiversity. Its jungles are home to wild tigers, elephants, leopards, and more. It is one of the pilot sites for the Mekong region's biodiversity conservation initiatives, which aim to restore and protect the ecological integrity of important landscapes in the Mekong region.

The city where I live is in the beautiful Dai area. Tourism is prosperous in the city. The Kunming-Bangkok expressway will bring economic, trade, and cultural communication between our city and other cities and countries. In a word, every day there are changes, and my hometown is becoming more prosperous and beautiful.

– Bai Xue, 16

▲ Kunming-Bangkok Highway.
▼ Old and new houses stand together at Manjingbao village.



► Tian Siyu, 16

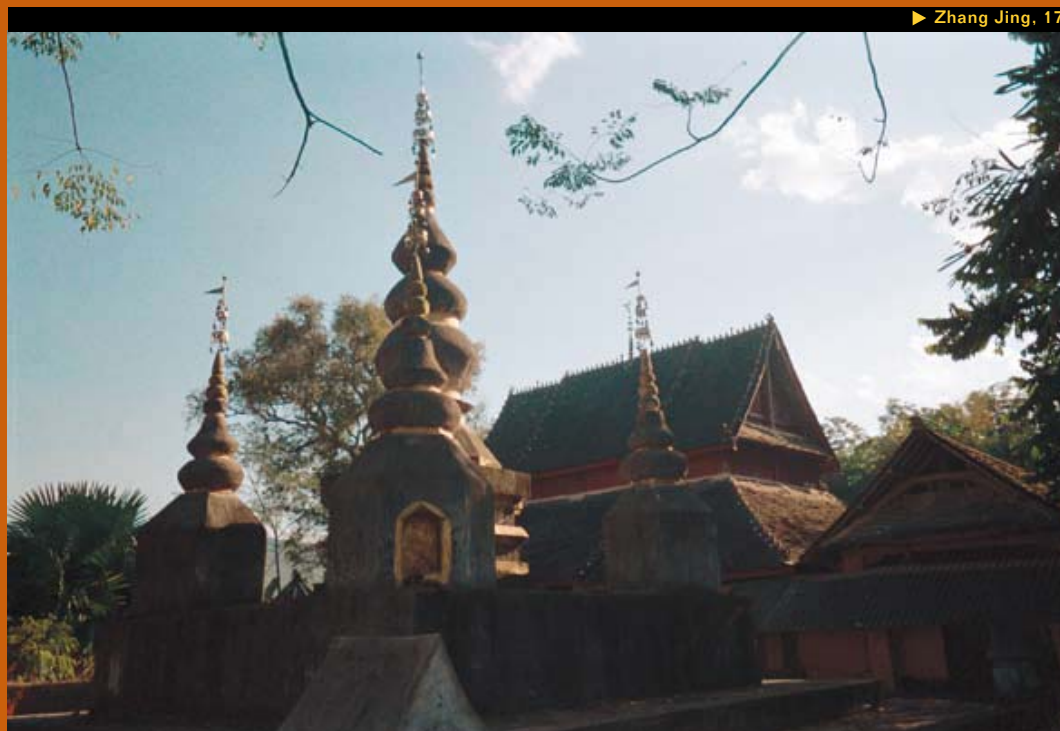


The Dai are an industrious and kind ethnic minority. To judge whether a Dai family is hardworking or not, just check whether the knives in the family are sharp.

– Bai Xue, 16

► Zhang Jing, 17

- ▶ An old Dai temple.
- ▼ A Dai home.





- ◀ Grandma making pickle.
- ▼ A Dai couple working in the bamboo forest.



- ▶ A street haircutter.
- ▼ On a street corner at the bazaar.





◀ Father teaching students to play basketball.

▼ The blackboard newspaper designed by students.





► Students have to wash their clothes.
▼ Ten-minute class break.





- ▲ She likes to paint. She works hard and she will succeed.
- Playing violin.

- ▶ Taking an English test.
- ▼ My family having dinner at home.

▶ Liu Siyu, 16



▶ Xiao Zhang, 15

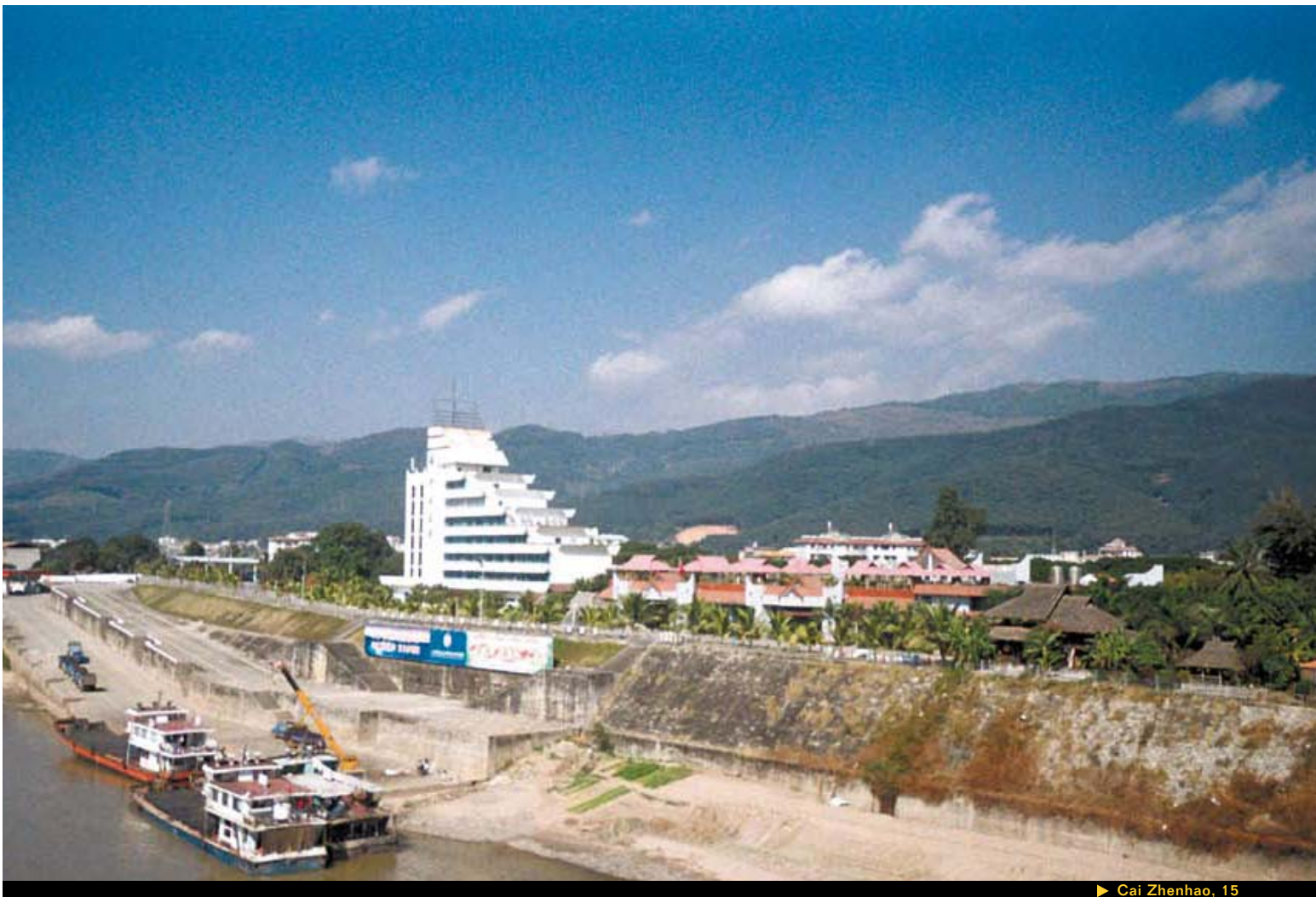
- ▶ Mekong River scene.
- ▼ A woman washes clothes in the Lancang (Mekong) River.



Country roads have been replaced by wide paved roads, one-story houses are being replaced by tall towers, and all people have access to power. Some even have PCs and private cars. Drastic changes have taken place.

– Pu Ling, 16

▼ Jinghong port.



► Cai Zhenhao, 15

Mekong Mothers



► Nguyen Thi Nhi, 14

▲ The ethnic minority boy is shy but he is very happy to have the chance to go to the market with his mother (Viet Nam).



► Anan Yotkeo Amphorn, 15

▲ A mother works very hard (Lao PDR).



► Chong Be Chongteng, 16

▲ Mother and child sitting in the sun (Lao PDR).



► Loueng Dosypaseurt, 16

▲ Paly, 32, selects chili peppers (Lao PDR).

A mother's smile dissolves a thousand worries

– Cai Zhenhao, 15

Our family belongs to the traditional Huayao Dai ethnic minority group. As per local custom, a mother should begin preparing her daughter's marriage costume once a daughter is born. Huayao Dai people have very complex costumes and the decorations rely totally on needlework. Every thread of the needlework is filled with the love of a mother for her daughter.

– Bai Xue, 16

▼ Mother does needlework (PRC).



► Bai Xue, 16

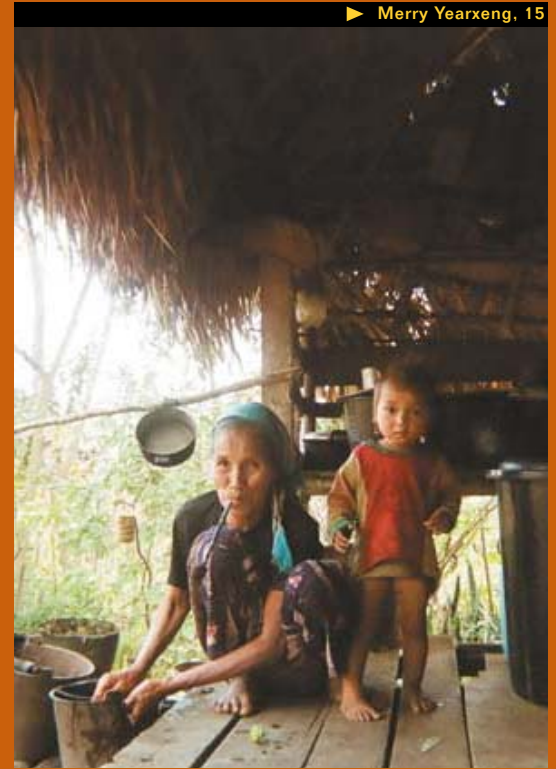


◀ Women in Xiaozai (PRC)

▼ She brought her sister to play with other kids (Lao PDR)



► Yimun, 50, and her grandson are Lao Theun people (Lao PDR).
▼ Old bike on a new road. The smiling child is going to the market with her mother (Viet Nam).



► Merry Yearxeng, 15



► Nguyen Thi Nhi, 14

A mother works very hard.

– Anan Yotkeo Amphorn, 15

▼ Granny takes my younger brother to the bath (PRC).





Population: 65.6 million (2007)
Land Area: 513,115 km²
Land Borders: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar
Capital City: Bangkok
My Mekong Location: Mukdahan





Thailand is a major hub in the Mekong region. All three GMS economic corridors pass through the country. Our young Thai photographers live in Mukdahan, directly across the Mekong River from Savannakhet in the Lao PDR. The Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge was opened here in early 2007.

More than a convenient river crossing, the bridge also strengthens trade and tourism between Mekong neighbors Thailand, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam. The movement of people and goods has already increased remarkably along the recently upgraded road network and will continue to grow in the coming years. The completion of the East–West economic corridor will improve quality of life for the people who live in the area, through improved opportunities for work and education as well as better access to public utilities and services.

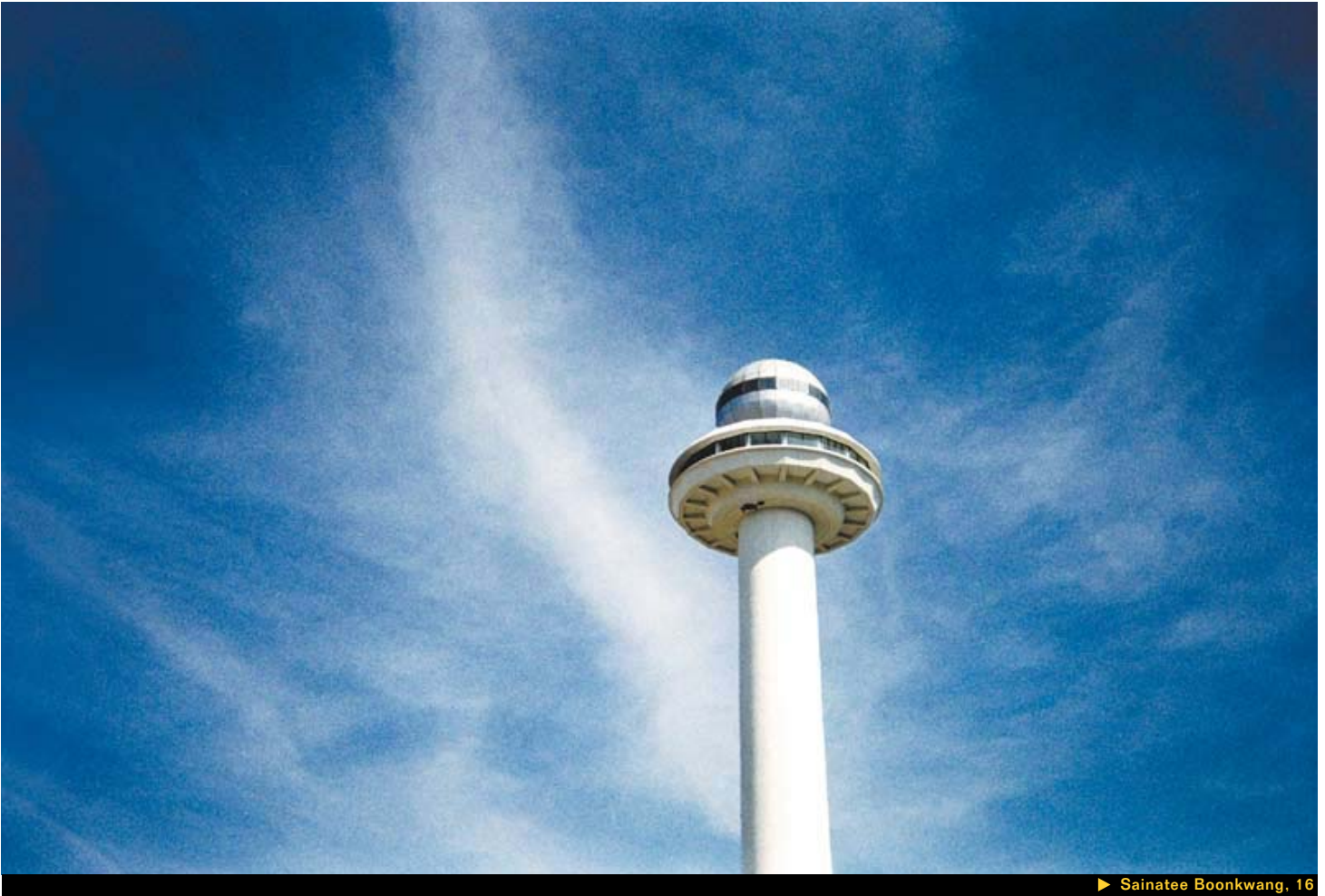
The Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge is new. It is beautiful and convenient for travelers who want to go from Mukdahan (Thailand) to Savannakhet (Lao PDR). It helps bridge the relationship between Thai and Lao people. Many things are traded, and when people come to visit here, it helps Thailand's economy grow.

– Kingdao Nonpila, 13

▲ To cross the border you can take your own car or ride a bus that goes between the two countries.
▼ A tuk-tuk driver works hard to make a living.



► Papatsara Choochert, 15



▶ Sainatee Boonkwang, 16

▲ The Mukdahan Tower

The height of the Mukdahan Tower represents the culture that has been here since the old times. The tower is the center of culture and contains old items that have been left for the next generation to study.

– Sainatee Boonkwang, 16

The murals in the Mukdahan Tower tell stories of the different cultures and traditions of the local people. It is good to convey these stories to the next generations.

– Khanapong Meerasingh, 14

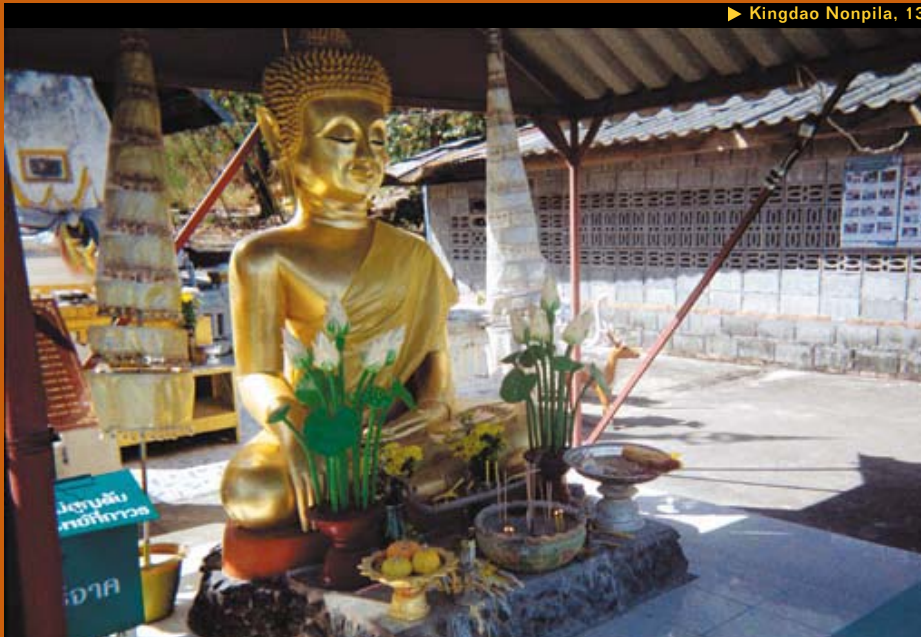
▶ Growing coconut trees.
▼ The river is calm, just like the souls of the people in this community.



▶ Natsuda Sarapang, 14



▶ Janewit Polharn, 13



► Kingdao Nonpila, 13

- ◀ At the Poomanorom Temple.
- ▼ A small garden near the Mukdahan Tower.

Mukdahan and Savannakhet are like siblings. Many buses cross the Thai-Lao border every day. People from all walks of life can travel by bus. There are a lot of tourists now, both Thai and foreigners. – Patcha Tongkarn, 15



► Arayachart Chanpeng, 14



- ▲ Untitled
- Signs of principle.





◀ Looking down on Mukdahan from above, you can see that Mukdahan is developing and there are changes, but we still grow rice and have backyard gardens.
▼ Stairway to the Mekong River.



The Mekong is a river of friendship. When the sun rises it shines orange and golden rays that reflect off the water. The river is a way of life for the people of Mukdahan.

– Cholticha Chantim, 14



▲ We Love Mukdahan Pavillion. This pavillion is a good spot for tourists to stop and rest.

▼ Along the Mekong River bank there is agricultural activity. You can see corn fields and vegetable gardens.



► Khanapong Meerasingh, 14



► Chong Be Chongteng, 16

▲ People catch fish in the river and set up stalls to sell them.
◀ Along the river there are many stalls. They sell their goods to Thai and foreign tourists.

Most Thais have an easy style of eating. They can eat anywhere. They just spread a mat and sit down and eat. The main dishes are papaya salad, sticky rice, and fried chicken. They were happy to have their picture taken.

– Kusuma Wongkonkaen, 14



► Kingdao Nonpila, 13

▲ Tuk-tuks at the Indochina Market.
▼ Having a meal together.



► Kusuma Wongkonkaen, 14

◀ Boats of emptiness.



▶ Papatsara Choochert, 15

► The area surrounding Mukdahan Tower has many buildings and looks nice.
▼ In Mukdahan.



► Papatsara Choochert, 15

Tuk-tuks are common in the local area. The fee is not too high, so they can still survive in the modern world. But today people are buying personal cars and the price of oil is going up so there might be a fee increase. In the end people might ride tuk-tuks less.

– Kingdao Nonpila, 13



► Papatsara Choochert, 15

Mekong Kids

► Ethnic minority children are playing with each other. The way they play shows the innocence of childhood (Viet Nam).
▼ Rattan ball players at school in town (Lao PDR).



► Truong Minh Cuong, 14



► Phankeo Louang Khunseng, 14

Today's children will become the adults of the future. – Natsuda Sarapang, 14



► Shi Jiayi, 13



► Liu Siyu, 16

▲ Village children playing table tennis (PRC).
◀ Children are the hope of the country (PRC).

When I was a child my family had to transport water from the well. Now we use tap water at home!

- Thongkeo Keobounphon, 16

- ▶ Ethnic family in Katang mountain village. There is still poverty in this area and we need to help the people here (Viet Nam).
- ▼ Kids are playing on a sunny day (Viet Nam).



▶ Nguyen Van Chanh, 13



▶ Nguyen Thi Nhi, 14

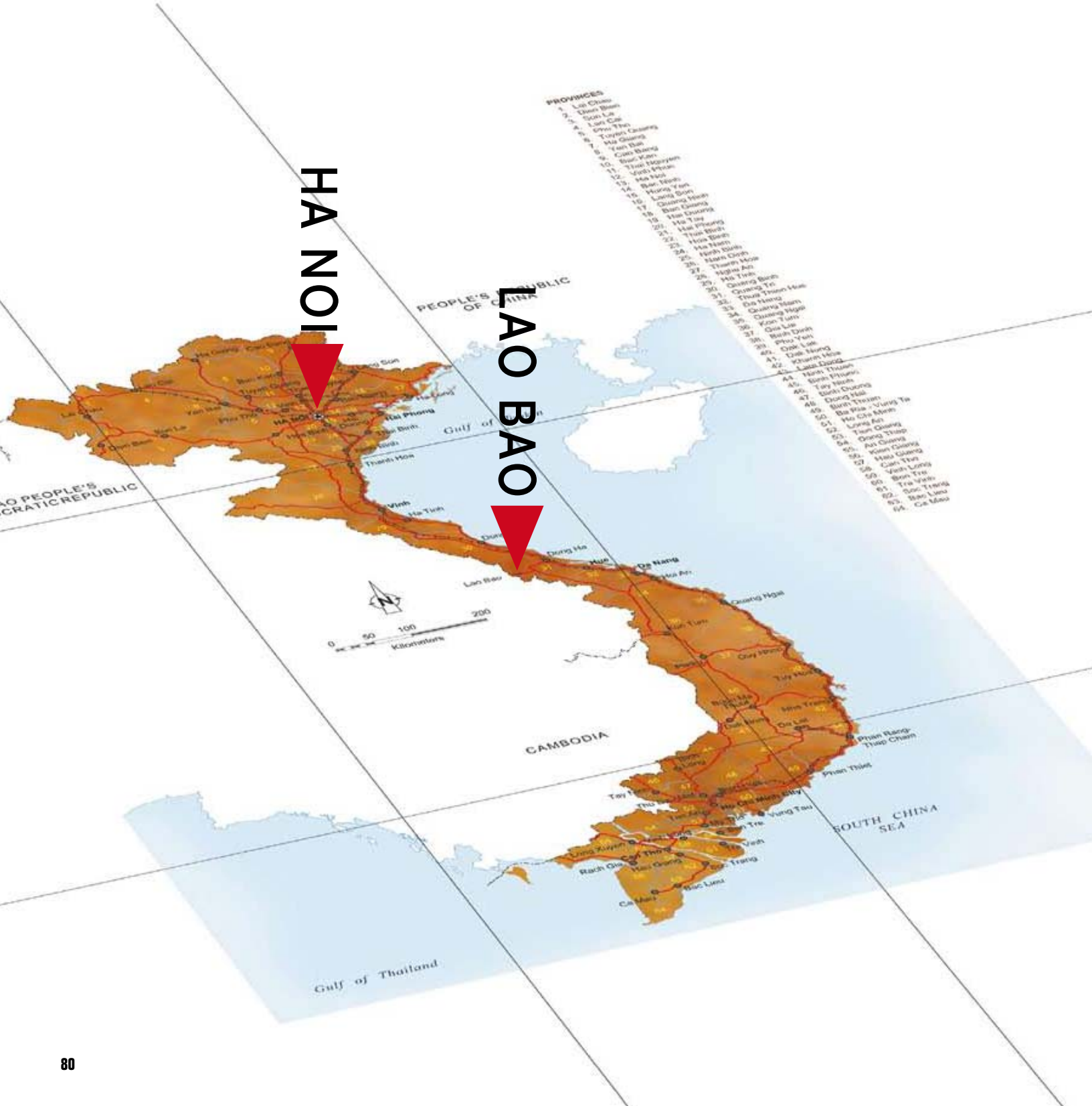


◀ Modern vehicles are a new development. People's lives have been improved, it shows in the modern facilities they have (Viet Nam).
▼ Horn Bunna and Pheng Na are riding a buffalo (Cambodia).





Population: 85.3 million (2007)
Land Area: 331,212 km²
Land Borders: Cambodia, Lao PDR, PRC
Capital City: Ha Noi
My Mekong Location: Lao Bao





▶ Nguyen The Song, 14

Viet Nam is one of only two countries (along with Thailand) that is a part of all three of the Mekong region's economic corridors—the North–South, East–West, and Southern economic corridors. Lao Bao, where our young photographers live, is a small but growing border town in the west central province of Quang Tri. Across the border from Lao Bao is the Lao town of Dansavanh.

Lao Bao lies along the 1,600-km East–West economic corridor. Many businesses have been set up in the Lao Bao special economic zone that the Government of Viet Nam established in 2005. Hundreds of jobs have been created since then, and the town has seen rapid development.

There have been many developments in my home town. Before, Lao Bao was very remote with few people living there. There were poor facilities. Now it is totally different. We have electricity and good transportation. Also, my school is much more beautiful than before. It has better teachers. I love my school.

– Truong Minh Cuong, 14

▲ A family goes shopping at the Lao Bao trading center. Looking at it from afar, the trade center is beautiful.

▼ The National Heroes Memorial was built to remind us to be grateful to our national heroes for everything they have done.



▶ Nguyen Quoc Dat, 14



► Nguyen Van Thuyet, 14

◀ There are many women bread sellers around Lao Bao.

▼ A simple scene of cows by the lake, near empty land.



► Nguyen Thi Nhi, 14

► Mother Ho Thi Loc is 43 years old. She is an old beautiful woman. She is happy to see us.
▼ Two young ladies by the lake in the afternoon. The lake has been improved. It is a beautiful site in Lao Bao.

► Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao, 13



► Nguyen Thi Huyen Trang, 14



◀ Two happy and innocent girls.
▼ Crossing a stream to get to the field. Ethnic minority people need help to improve the road to avoid dangers when they go to work.

**Take care
of plants and
protect the
environment!**

–Nguyen Thi Nga, 14



- ▶ A shy pretty girl stands beside the bamboo.
- ▼ A young woman coming home from work. She looks beautiful.





◀ Mrs. Sim is a single mother. She sells corn sticky rice. Every morning I run out to buy sticky rice to help Mrs. Sim earn more income to raise her kids.
▼ Motorbikes are used to carry goods for trading.



▼ More construction in Lao Bao needs more human resources so people have more jobs and local unemployment is falling.
▼ Urbanization means there is a lot of construction.





► Cycling past the Sepon Hotel.
▼ Untitled (Sepon Hotel)



► The quiet school on Sunday.
▼ Lao Bao primary and secondary school. We learn a lot of interesting things here.

► Dang Hoang Thanh, 13



I love my school. Even though this is a mountain school it achieves national standards.

– Tran Thi Thao Nhi, 14



► Nguyen Thi Quynh Nga, 14



◀ You might think this is a big city but it is only a corner in Lao Bao, my small home town in the Mekong region. There are a lot of investment projects. Lao Bao has become a busy town and there are all sorts of tall buildings.

▼ Trade and development at the Lao Bao trading center. The special trading area has been opened and it is a center that serves people's needs.



The economy in Lao Bao is very developed these days and travel between Viet Nam and Lao PDR is easy, safe, and secure at the international border. Customs officers work hard to help bring security and safety to the country.

– Nguyen Thi Thu Huyen, 14

▼ The big Lao Bao border southern gate. A lot of vehicles pass through here.



► Nguyen Thi Nhi, 14

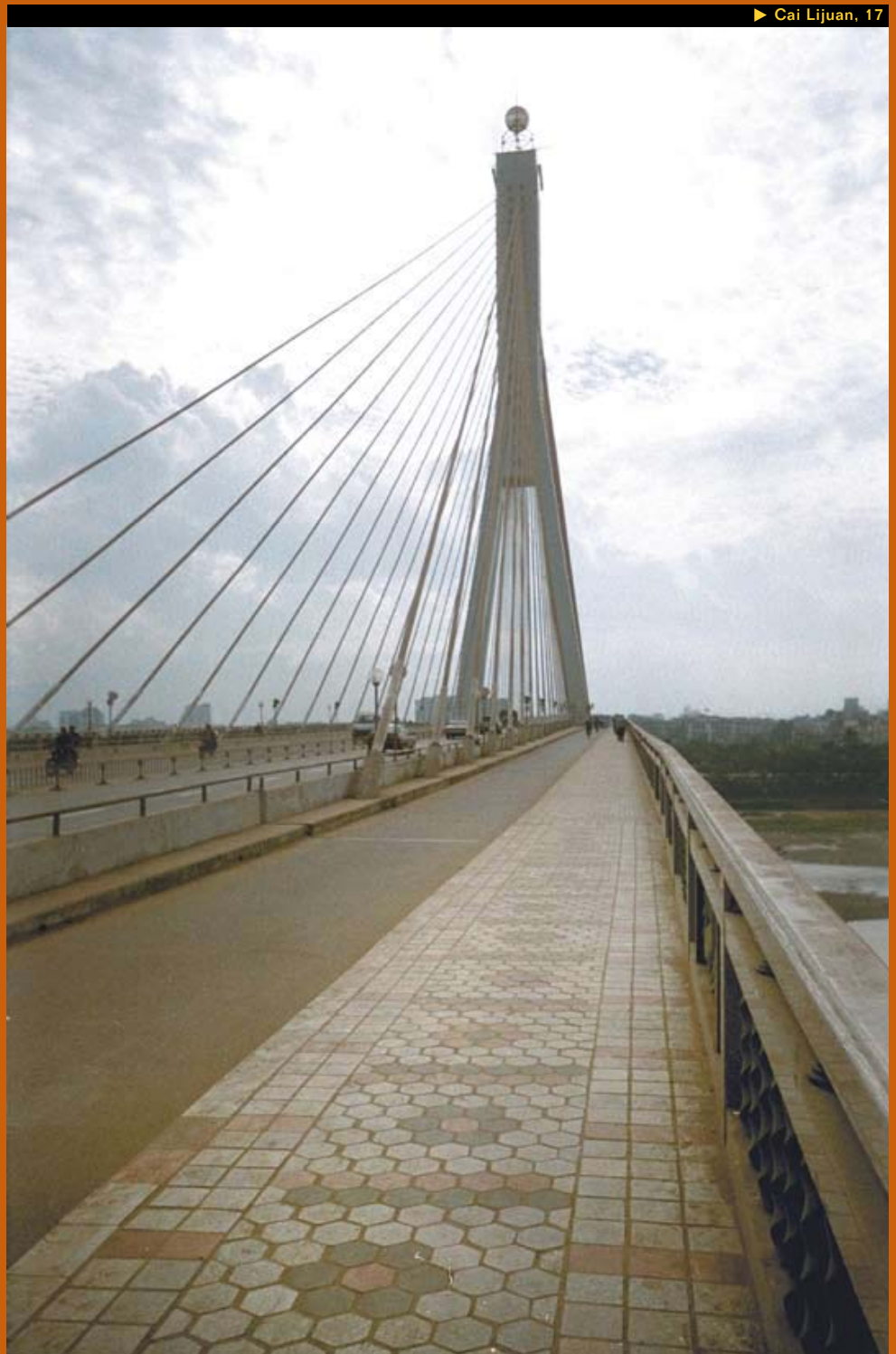
Connectivity

con·nec·tiv·i·ty (kŏn'ĕk-tĭv'ĭ-tē)

n., pl. -ties.

1. The quality or condition of being connected or joined together.
2. The ability to make and maintain a connection between two or more points.

The Mekong neighbors are more connected than ever before. In a region that is upgrading roads, building bridges, enhancing power interconnections, and expanding telecommunication networks, the flow of people, goods, and information is getting easier and easier. With improved road networks it will soon be possible to have breakfast in Ho Chi Minh City, drive to Phnom Penh for lunch, and arrive in Bangkok for a late dinner. A decade ago, this would have been impossible.





► Bai Xue, 16

▲ Jinghong port is located on the Lancang (Mekong) River. This waterway links us with other countries (PRC).

◀ The new bridge (PRC).

- ▶ Untitled (Viet Nam).
- ▼ People are happy with the new roads (Lao PDR).



New roads connecting villages and communes make transportation much easier.

– Tran Thi Thao Nhi, 14



- ▶ Puth Sarin is a duck seller in Prasot market (Cambodia).
- ▼ An intersection of Route 9. Travel and transport are much more convenient now (Lao PDR).



▶ Bin Sokhen, 19

The road near my house is wider and better than before, and we have electricity now. We had to use a generator before.

– Thongloun Oukhamla, 14



▶ Nguyen Thi Giang, 13



◀ Kunming-Bangkok Highway (PRC).
▼ Expressway through the tropical rainforest (PRC).



Mukdahan and Savannakhet are like siblings. Many buses cross the Thai-Lao border every day. People from all walks of life can travel by bus. There are a lot of tourists now, both Thai and foreigners.

– Patcha Tongkarn, 15

▼ Friendship of the neighbor. This bridge binds the Thai and Lao people together. It connects the two countries and makes the economies of both nations prosper (Thailand).



► Khanapong Meerasingh, 14

Competitiveness

com·pet·i·tive·ness (kəm-pět'ĭ-tĭv-nĕs)

n.

1. In a globalized world, the ability of a country or region to achieve rapid and inclusive economic growth and to improve quality of life.
2. Characteristics (such as lower transaction costs, unique tourist attractions, or superior technology) that permit countries or regions to compete effectively with others.

The Mekong neighbors are working together to achieve regional competitiveness through increased connectivity, improved trade logistics systems, better information and communications technology, more cross-border trade, and the promotion of the Mekong as a single tourist destination. The region's exquisite cultural, historical, and ecological riches are unsurpassed, and the river itself is one of the world's most evocative.



► Nguyen Thi Thu Huyen, 14

▲ Shops in Lao Bao attract many buyers, and trading at Lao Bao trading center is very profitable (Viet Nam).
► People like to withdraw their money from the ATM (Viet Nam).



► Nguyen Thi Quynh Nga, 14



The internet is being integrated into people's lives. It helps open people's eyes to the whole world.

– Nguyen Quoc Dat, 14



▲ School and buildings under construction (PRC).
◀ Students at PC class (PRC).

Xishuangbanna is undergoing tremendous change. Tourism is developing rapidly and infrastructure is improving quickly. The city has become increasingly prosperous.

-Yu Ying Bo Han, 15

▼ The border crossing (Thailand).



► Arayachart Chanpeng, 14



► Toll gate on the Kunming-Bangkok Highway (PRC).
▼ Scene at the Lao Bao border gate. It shows Lao Bao's development (Viet Nam).



Community

com·mu·ni·ty (kə-myū'nĭ-tē)

n., pl. -ties.

1. A group of people living in the same locality.
2. A group of people sharing similar cultures and traditions.
3. Sharing, participation, and fellowship.

The meaning of community is expanding beyond borders as countries become more connected, competitiveness grows, and peace prevails. Mekong neighbors are working together to protect the environment, develop human resources, promote education and training, control communicable diseases, and encourage safe labor migration. Community is the heart of the Mekong region.

▼ The livelihood of local people (Lao PDR).



► Tuti Sengsavanh, 14

A close neighbor is better than a remote relative.

– Yu Ying Bo Han, 15

► Chen Zeng, 16



◀ Dancing to the music (PRC).
▼ Old people enjoy playing cards under the tree (PRC).



► Chen Zeng, 16

**Everybody
needs friends.
We cannot
live alone.**

– Kulthida Sapanan, 13



- Rin's family is having a meal in Svay Tiep (Cambodia).
- ▼ Trimming vegetables (PRC).





◀ Namha villagers returning home from the fields before the sun sets (Lao PDR).
▼ Playing bridge (PRC).



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