



I am a child of the countryside, born amongst of earth thrown up by the plough and growing up on the back of a water buffalo. I could hunt for frogs and collect forest produce since I was only knee high, because I am a child of farming people who lived a world away from modern development and city life. I was born in the village of Bane Nong Meun Thane (which in those days was part of the district of Selaphoum) in Roi Et Province, in the country of Siam on the first day of August 2448 the first day of the waxing moon in the ninth month [of the Buddhist lunar calendar], at 12.30 p.m. on a Tuesday. This was in the Year of the Snake, or the year 1905. My father's name was Senh and my mother, whose name was Da, gave birth to eight children in all, of which I was the fourth.

Bane Nong Meun Thane was a sizeable village of about 300 houses, situated on the edge of a forest. The woodland to the west of the village was an abundant source of wild produce such as various kinds of mushrooms and vegetables. To the east of the village was a large, deep pond called Nong Meun Thane, which held water throughout the year and provided a refuge for cows and buffaloes to drink and sleep during the dry season. Moving out from Nong Meun Thane pond there were na thom paddy fields (high rice fields scattered with various kinds of trees) as far as the eye could see.

In the past, the way of life in this village and in all other (Lao) villages in the Isahn which at present has a population of more than 15 million – was uniform: everyone grew rice, other crops, and garden products; pigs and chickens were raised in every household; and without exception everyone ate sticky rice.

We made all the cloth we used, and when the season came in the eighth month, we would plant cotton in the melon fields and then in the first and second lunar months we harvested the cotton and spun yarn for weaving cloth. The time for spinning yarn was mostly in the dry season after harvesting and storing the rice. Young women would gather to make a khuang platform (a low working surface) in the middle of the house clearings and then spin the yarn together, with four or five to each khuang. This would take place at night by lighting brightly burning fires of dry wood. The young bachelors would go to court these young women at the khuang, some of them carrying bamboo to split into strips, or bringing hemp to make into rope, so as to make good use of the time.

As well as spinning cotton thread and making cloth, people raised silkworms and the young women made very good silk cloth, and it was essential for every house to have a patch of mulberry bushes so that the leaves could be used to feed the silkworms. Weaving cotton and silk cloth was the duty of every woman. When the cotton was woven into cloth and made into

clothes, it was dyed with indigo (the Lao term for this colour comes from the Pali word nila, which means black or very dark blue). This dye was made from indigo plants that were kept in a person's plot of land or garden patch (Chiang Mai people call it mor hom). The blouse of a young woman made from cotton died with indigo had long sleeves and white buttons which were closely spaced as on the shirts of Thai Dam people today. Nobody wore clothes made elsewhere.