**Book Review: by Lang Reid**

**Chiang Mai Mail, Volume VIII No. 43, October 27 – November 2 2009**

**Songs of Memory**

 This very hefty book arrived on the reviewer’s table from author/compiler Victoria Vorreiter in Chiang Mai. Published this year by Resonance Press and printed by Nopburee Press in Chiang Mai (ISBN 978-0-692-00262-9) there were many people in the credits at the front of the book - Editor Susan Stem, field photographs Victoria Vorreiter, archival instrument photographs Galen Garwood and the design by Susan Stem and Victoria Vorreiter.
 The book is its own documentary on the music and lives of the hill tribes in the Golden Triangle region. In the acknowledgement Victoria Vorreiter states, “To the musicians, Shamans, men, women and children of the mountains who have graced my path and opened their hearts and homes to share with me their sacred ceremonies, songs of life, and ancestral instrumental music, I dedicate this book. May it in some way contribute to the chain of collective knowledge that has been passed on for generations, to illuminate for others the integrity, beauty and creativity of their world.”
 Author and researcher Victoria Vorreiter begins this book by showing that in this Golden Triangle region there are over 130 tribal groups and from those, there are six very distinct peoples, being the Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Hmong, Mien and Karen. She devotes the book to looking at the forebears and migrations to Thailand and the tribes themselves in minute detail.
 Although she is an authority on musical instruments, *Songs of Memory* goes much further than being a compendium of different instruments, though she does look at the tribal instruments with a very technical eye. Each chapter divulges details of the six main tribes’ lifestyles and their music and religious practices, which are surprisingly quite different from each other. In the section of the Akha, for example, she goes through the 2,000 year migration of the tribe from eastern Tibet to the Szechuan and Yunnan provinces of China where they expanded into 30 different subgroups with three major dialects. She shows the spirit gates denoting the Akha villages with its totems and taboo signs to ward off unfriendly spirits. The Akha ‘code of conduct’, the Akhazang is explored and is fascinating in today’s world.
Despite having many excellent photographs on every page, this is not a photo-book with captions, the photographs are illustrative, and are of an extremely high quality.
As with any reference book of any substance, *Songs of Memory* gives its own reference sources, a glossary of musical terms, and photographic instrument archives complete with examples of the different tribal embroidery. It is a very complete work.
 This book has more than “contributed to the chain of collective knowledge”, this is a seminal work relating to the hill tribe people, as well as being a work of art in its own right. Congratulations Victoria.
The RRP for the book is 1650 baht, and a CD of the music is 400 baht. They can be obtained at Suriwong Book Center (Chiang Mai), Asia Books, Kinokuniya, Orchid Books, River Books (all national museums), Silkworm Books (at Siam Society, Bangkok), Chula University Book Store, Jim Thompson Online Sales, Bookazine (in Chiang Mai), and Book Zone (Chiang Mai).