THE MOUNTAIN TOPS OF WANDERING FOLKSONGS – A WAY BACK TO HMONG PERSONALITY

Switzerland is a mountainous country. The rough topography of our landscape had a big part in shaping our history, as well as our mentality and personality, be it in fostering the independence will of valleys' inhabitants or in the necessity to be creative and make the most out of limited resources. Also, Switzerland is a multicultural nation in which minority rights are constantly lively discussed. In his famous speech "Our Swiss Standpoint", Swiss winner of the Nobel Prize for literature Carl Spitteler said: "In Switzerland we disregard nobody. Even if the minority were ten times smaller, we would take it serious, nevertheless."

How not to feel, then, deep curiosity and empathy for the numerous ethnic minorities living in the mountainous areas in Vietnam? On the 4th of March 2015 Ambassador Motyl invited Vietnamese scholars, media and intellectuals at his Residence for a special event dedicated to Hmong people. It was the occasion for Mr. Manh Tien, a young Vietnamese scholar, to present his latest book on the inspiring topic "Hmong – personality and mountainous politics". The key theme of the book is the "Weltanschauung" of the people of Hmong, as Mr Manh has observed it during three years of research work in different regions of Vietnam. The book presents a comprehensive study of the Hmong people. It discusses mountainous communities in their historical evolutions, power structures and sheds light on the complex relationships between the lowlands (reign of the majoritarian Viet people) and the inhabitants of the uplands.

Guest of Honor of the evening was Master Ma Khái Sò, a Hmong elder and renowned pan-pipe master of the Dong Van Karst Plateau, who inspired the audience with his presentation of panpipe-folksongs and his first-hand accounts of Hmong traditions and societal system.

The audience learned about the fundamental traits of the Hmong personality, condensed in the set of key words that the book author used to define it, including: exile mentality – migrant mentality – orphan mentality, suicide, rebellion, freedom, dream, love, ethnic autonomy, mountainous power.

With such powerful, both emotionally and historically sensitive themes, a lively debate be-tween audience and the guests was easy to spark. An enriching discussion, not only about the motives behind the actions and habits of Hmong people, but also about the general situation of ethnic groups in the mountainous Northern Vietnam that remain full of mysteries and faces multiple challenges today. What can keep young generations close to their traditions? How is the mainstream historical narrative of Vietnam missing out or misinterpreting the role of the minorities? How to make use of the ethnic and other differences of the peoples in this or any other country for the common good? How to celebrate the beauty of diversity?

The Embassy wishes that the evening could be just a beginning of more such debates which in any multiethnic country are needed, or rather are indispensable.









