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Government Politics and Social Structure of Laos

Joel Halpern



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LAOS PROJECT

Paper No. 21

GOVERNMENT, POLITICS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF LAOS -
A STUDY OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION

by

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1961

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PREFACE

In 1957 the author served as a field representative of the American aid mission in northern Laos. A subsequent visit in the summer of 1959 was spent in Vientiane interviewing Lao government officials and making extensive trips in the countryside.¹ Helpful meetings were held with American, French, and United Nations officials concerned with Lao affairs, and several French scholars working in Laos provided useful insights. For a selection of specific interview materials on which this paper is partially based, the reader is referred to Laos Project Paper No. 18.²

No attempt is made here to give an up-to-the-minute analysis of the turbulent situation in Laos but rather to examine the fundamental patterns of governmental structure on national and local levels and correlate these with traditional family structure and observations on Lao character. Non-Lao groups are considered in detail. The key roles of religion, foreign influence and secular education are presented as they relate to changing value systems and to individual mobility. Finally, the clash and interaction of the three types of governmental systems -- Royal traditional, Western parliamentary, and Communist-oriented -- are considered.

Introduction

Located in the mountainous interior of the Indochina Peninsula, the Kingdom of Laos, with a population optimistically estimated at 2,000,000, would appear to have little to attract world attention other than its strategic geographic location. The long frontiers of Laos are from the western point of view vulnerable to infiltration tactics by her enemies, and events in Laos will continue to have serious repercussions in neighboring Thailand, South Vietnam, and Cambodia.

So far as is known, Laos has no extensive mineral resources, and she produces no significant agricultural surpluses for export. Yet in addition to current political interest there are certain features that commend Laos to the attention of the area specialist as well as to the scholar interested in studying problems encountered by newly emerging national states. Laos reveals on a small scale, but often in exaggerated form, many of the difficulties facing former colonial areas in Asia and Africa. This point deserves emphasis at a time when many small states in Africa are gaining independence. Like these new African states, Laos owes her existence to the happenstances of colonial history.

In Laos may be found diverse elements: a small elite, a constitution and formal political framework borrowed from

France, a lack of trained administrators, an indifferent (and in certain respects hostile) peasantry, dissident minority groups, an active Communist organization with its own administrative apparatus, and an American aid program.

Before incorporation into French Indochina, Laos had been in existence for many centuries in the form of a number of small kingdoms. If one turns back the clock six or seven hundred years -- a relatively brief period in man's historical development -- it becomes evident that at that time the Lao were by no means inferior to their European contemporaries in the complexity of their religious belief, the effectiveness of their political institutions, or the beauty of their architecture. The westerner can learn much from the Lao philosophy of life and code of personal behavior. These qualities are of inestimable value to the individual, but they do not suffice for the formation of a modern national state. In fact, ironically, traditional Lao values must be destroyed or at least modified in the process of forming an effective governmental structure, and both western and communist-oriented factions have recognized this either explicitly or implicitly. Our focus here is on the traditional value system and on its relationships to contemporary social structure as these determine the character of the nation. It is likely that many of the problems now faced by Laos are shared by other newly emerging nations.

Laos as a National State

Laos is primarily a formal political entity, so defined by the vicissitudes of French colonial expansion. The country is neither a geographic nor an ethnic unit, and it does not constitute a viable economic entity. If it be postulated that among the essential characteristics of a modern national state are ethnic homogeneity, shared traditions, geographic unity, effective internal administration, economic viability, borders accepted by other nations, diplomatic recognition by neighboring states, representation in the United Nations, and the positive support of its inhabitants, it must be said that Laos lacks most of these characteristics. Still, if one were to define a modern national state as a roughly outlined geographical area possessing a city or town which is the seat of a formal governing body, an entity which enjoys diplomatic recognition by at least some of the major world powers, Laos would meet this weak test. Unfortunately, these characteristics do not appear sufficient bases on which to erect an enduring political entity.³

As a political unit Laos has been incontestably recognized by all of the major world powers, even though the specific government may be questioned. Originally composed principally of four petty kingdoms, Champassak, Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, and Luang Prabang, these states began to disintegrate in the latter part of the 19th century under the pressure of an expanding Thailand and marauding groups from China such as the Hô.

When the French arrived they were greeted not as conquerors but, particularly in Luang Prabang, as protectors from the Siamese. At least some Lao leaders, notably the King of Luang Prabang, openly welcomed French explorers and traders. These peaceful contacts helped shape attitudes of the elite toward France which are reflected even today. It is difficult, however, to be certain on the origins of pro-French viewpoints, since most of the reports available are those of Europeans, and many of these are French.⁴ (Perhaps one day it will be possible to write a history of this area solidly based on Lao, Thai, Chinese, and Vietnamese sources. Meanwhile, there appears to be ample precedent for today's strongly pro-French attitude among the Lao aristocracy.) Mixed with this orientation, it must be admitted, is some degree of hostility and resentment connected with the emergence of Lao nationalism.

The borders of Laos in the 1950's were substantially those defined by the earlier French administrators of Indochina, in which Laos formed one of the associated states. One of the provinces of present-day Laos, Sayaboury, was annexed by Thailand during the Second World War but was reincorporated into French Indochina after the war.⁵

Laos emerged officially as a nation when it became an independent state within the French Union following the ratification of the Franco-Lao Treaty of September 20, 1949. By common agreement, the King of the Royal House of Luang Prabang

then became the head of the Lao state, an event accompanied by other manifestations of modern statehood, such as formation of national ministries, election of representatives to the National Assembly, establishment of diplomatic relations with foreign states. Full independence in the formal political sense can be said to have occurred as the result of the Geneva Agreement which concluded the Indochina War in 1954. The admission of Laos to United Nations took place at the end of the following year.

The Lao independence movement, the Lao Issara, was formed in 1945, but its members fled to Thailand after some brief fighting with the French Army. By 1947 most of them returned to Laos and were present when a constituent assembly met to draw up a constitution. With the exception of the Lao who served as soldiers in the French colonial forces, most of the population remained passive during the Indochina War. Although Laos was invaded by the Vietminh, the country was defended by the French Army.

Unfortunately, formal political evolution and economic development in Laos did not proceed simultaneously. The admission of Laos to the United Nations did not signify that the country had achieved effective internal administration. A case can be made for the fact that as the government assumed the trappings of nationhood, her economy became more dependent on outside assistance. With nationhood came new government

services which could be financed neither by taxation nor exports. It became necessary to maintain national ministries, an army, a police force, a health and educational system, and overseas embassies, to say nothing of instituting programs of rural development to deal with the 90 percent of the population living in some 10,000 small villages.

Although the French relinquished political control, a large number of French officials remained as technical advisors to various ministries. A French economic and cultural mission was established, and a military training group undertook the training of the new Lao Army. Even today all education beyond the elementary school remains almost exclusively in the hands of French teachers.

After the Geneva conference, the United States began to play an increasing role in Indochina. This was reflected in the establishment of a legation in Vientiane, later raised to the rank of embassy. An American aid mission was established, as was a "Program Evaluation Organization" designed to supervise the distribution of military aid as distinct from the French training program. These American organizations continued to expand up to the coup of August, 1960. The United Nations also began to send in technical assistance personnel from UNESCO, FAO, and WHO. In addition, the Colombo Plan and private relief agencies such as CARE began to provide assistance. Beyond a doubt there are today more foreign technical

advisers in Laos than there were French officials during the colonial days. Although no figures on technical advisers as such are available, in 1960 there were 753 Americans and several thousand French in Laos, while in 1921 and 1950 the total European population was 361 and 802 respectively.

The proliferation of these technical assistance and economic aid programs and even military missions is not an accidental accompaniment of the achievement of political independence. Rather, it is a logical corollary. When deficits occurred under colonial rule they would be met by the controlling power. In those days the developmental plans of the ruling authority were never as ambitious as the plans and hopes held by the new nationalist leaders. Once political independence is achieved the new leaders must justify their positions by embarking on ambitious economic and social programs modeled on those of more industrialized countries. For Laos to do this, even on a modest scale, requires assistance of skilled personnel and financial support. Since Laos has few technicians and less developed sources of wealth than most new nations, her dependence on the outside world is all the greater. The American government has been subsidizing a significant portion of the salaries of Lao civil servants in addition to those of the army and police, paying as well the salaries of many rural school teachers. In turn the Pathet Lao have received direct military aid from Russia and North Vietnam in addition to economic aid and political support.

Laos is a constitutional monarchy. The King resides in the royal capital at Luang Prabang, and government business is transacted in the administrative capital of Vientiane. Theoretically, the King has considerable power, but neither the former monarch nor the present incumbent has chosen to use his position in a dynamic way (as has been the case, for example, in Cambodia). Although King Savang Vatthana officially assumed the throne only in 1959 upon the death of his father, he had long been acting Chief of State. Only recently has he converted his largely ceremonial role into a more active although covert force in national politics.⁶

There is a popularly elected National Assembly which selects a cabinet and Prime Minister, subject to the approval of the King. The only elected officials in the provinces are the deputies and in some cases the local mayors and the village and district chiefs. Deputies to the National Assembly are elected at large (in the 1960 elections they represented districts). Provincial governors are appointed by the Ministry of Interior. There are also local representatives of the army and the police, as well as the health, education, and agricultural ministries, although all the technical ministries are not represented in all provinces. Recently, the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Census Bureau have also begun to establish provincial posts. Through the office of the Governor there is considerable informal coordination of these local officials.⁷

Social Background of the Elite

The social structure of Laos is a complex mosaic of many elements, the most clearly defined of which are the various ethnic groups. The major ones are the valley-dwelling Buddhist Lao; their linguistic cousins, the tribal Tai (e.g., Tai Dam, Tai Lu); the aboriginal Kha; and the sinicized hill tribes such as the Meo and Yao. To emphasize the ethnic unity of these groups, the Lao proper have been officially referred to as Lao Lum, or Lao of the Valley; the Kha, actually a broad generic term meaning slave in Lao, are called Lao Theng, or Upland Lao; and the Meo and Yao are referred to as Lao Soum, or Lao of the Mountaintops. In addition, there are the urban groups: Chinese, Vietnamese, and some Indians, Pakistanis and Europeans.

The Lao proper form the largest single ethnic group. They dominate the government and administration, although it is not definite that they form a majority of the population. Before examining relationships among these various groups, the social structure of the lowland Lao, from whom the elite are drawn, will be considered.

Since the urban component of Lao society is rapidly changing, it is difficult to delineate the elite with precision. Its members definitely share specific occupational, kinship and educational characteristics. On the other hand, there is considerable variation in their political associations,

standards of living, and value systems. While no figures are available, a generous estimate of the number of elite families is two hundred.⁸ The Lao occupy the major political offices and senior civil service positions, and many are prominent in business affairs. Most of the present Lao elite are either direct descendants of royal families of the former small kingdoms or of the courtiers who served those kingdoms. This situation is not particularly surprising, for when the French occupied Laos they attempted to make use of the existing administrative structure and officials. As a consequence, it was to be expected that their children would have preferential access to the limited educational facilities.⁹ At the time there existed only the small group of urban elite, the Lao peasantry, and the tribal peoples. No important Lao merchant group apart from the traditional elite had yet developed.¹⁰

Although the French did not provide widespread educational facilities in Laos, they did send certain selected members of the royal family and high nobility to study in France, many of whom later occupied key governmental positions. Among those who studied in France were the late King, as well as the present monarch; the late Viceroy Prince Phetsarath; his brother, the former prime minister, Souvanna Phouma, and their half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the Pathet-Lao. The small size of this group is emphasized by the fact that until the Second World War less than a dozen Lao had received the equivalent of

a full college education, although a somewhat larger number had studied in France for briefer periods. Without question, any Lao who spent time studying in France before the Second World War would definitely be classified as a member of the elite, although there are a number of important members of the elite who did not have this opportunity. Despite this, they have all been strongly influenced by French culture. (The ability to speak and write French fluently is a mark of membership in the elite.)

Almost without exception all members of the elite were educated at the Lycée Pavie in Vientiane and subsequently served in the civil service. As a marginal provincial outpost of the French colonial empire, Vientiane's educational standards appear to have lagged considerably behind those in metropolitan France. One of the reasons for this was that it was difficult to recruit highly qualified personnel to live under somewhat trying conditions in an isolated place, a situation which has continued up to the present.

Secondary education in Laos is conducted almost entirely in French by French teachers, the only exceptions being courses in Lao language and literature, which under this system have only the status of a foreign language such as English. Attempts have been made to change this situation, but no significant alterations have been made because of the shortage of qualified Lao to replace the French teachers at the lycée level.

When most of the present-day Lao elite were being educated there were still a number of Vietnamese teachers in Vientiane. They were eliminated when Laos became independent, but appear to have acted as carriers primarily of diffused French culture rather than of Vietnamese influence.

Under the prewar educational system the pupils began studying French in the first grade. After completing six years of elementary school, education was continued at the college and finally in the Lycée Pavie. It remains necessary to pass an examination in French before one can continue beyond the sixth grade. Not a few of today's elite received little more than nine years of formal schooling, after which they entered the bureaucracy, frequently as local district administrators.

A number of Lao received some advanced training in technical specialties such as medicine, forestry or education, in French schools in Cambodia and Vietnam, and several government ministers began their careers as school teachers or as sub-professional technicians or specialists. A Lao trained in medicine in Hanoi could do valuable work in a hospital, but he was in actuality an assistant to the resident French doctor. Today the French physicians in most of the Lao provincial hospitals handle the more technical tasks such as surgery. By the same token, a Lao teacher can become principal of an elementary school, but with few exceptions he lacks the background to give courses at a secondary school.

An additional characteristic shared by most members of the Lao elite has been their participation in the Lao Issara. This somewhat unusual independence movement was apparently catalyzed originally by the Japanese occupation of Laos at the end of the Second World War and was inspired by the dynamic leadership of the late Viceroy. According to available information, during the pre-war period there was no serious opposition to French rule on the part of the valley Lao. Unlike the Meo and Kha peoples, the Lao in the valleys never actively rebelled. A partial explanation for this may be that certain areas, such as the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, enjoyed a semi-autonomous position, the French only acting indirectly through local officials. When the French reoccupied Laos in 1945 there were some brief skirmishes between the returning French troops and the Lao Issara, but there does not appear to have been any determined resistance of long duration nor any subsequent guerilla activities, as was the case in Vietnam. Of the large proportion of Lao elite who sought asylum in Thailand, most returned within the next year or two as the French gradually increased their concessions, while Prince Phetsarath did not come back until 1957.

As the national economy of Laos has developed in the years since achievement of formal political independence, members of the elite moved into profitable business alliances with the Chinese and European business communities. This is usually a

mutually advantageous affair, since there are severe governmental restrictions on most alien-owned and operated businesses, particularly those controlled by Chinese. (The French, however, are allowed certain privileges.) At the same time most Lao lack the technical experience and international contacts necessary to successfully operate export-import firms or manufacturing enterprises. Many prominent Lao officials now own a part interest, or even controlling interests, in banks, airlines, movie theaters, hotels, sawmills, construction firms, and bus and trucking companies. Thus a number of the elite have recently acquired a substantial economic base outside the government. Much of this economic expansion has resulted directly or indirectly from the American aid program. Such opportunities did not exist when Laos was a colony.

The Lao elite has a monopoly on the highest civil service positions and most important political offices. These two categories overlap; that is, a man may occupy the highest civil service rank and at the same time serve as governor of a province or in the central administration. For various reasons he may decide to go into politics and run for the National Assembly. If elected, he can be appointed a minister or secretary of state for a particular department. If he loses, he can re-enter the civil service. It is not necessary, however, for a minister to have been elected as a deputy, although this is true in most cases. The province from which the

individual is elected may be one in which he has served as a government official. It is not necessarily his place of birth or even permanent residence.

During the period in which Laos emerged as a nation the elite has evolved as a group with a national orientation. This has been true even though family ties and power were originally based in the provinces. In the past there has been some conflict and rivalry between the north and south, mainly between the descendants of the kingdoms of Luang Prabang and Champassak. Although this appears to have been very much muted in recent years, one can still hear frequent complaints to the effect that sufficient economic progress has not taken place in the provinces compared to the city of Vientiane, or that one section of the country has been favored over another. Most of the elite appear to have originated in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Champassak, with relatively few coming from Xieng Khouang and only a limited number from such provinces as Khammouane and Savannakhet. No members of the Lao elite trace their origins to Nam Tha, Phong Saly, Sam Neua, Attopeu or Sayaboury. Except for the last, formerly a part of Thailand, all the other areas have overwhelmingly non-Lao populations.

If one examines the background of the deputies from these latter provinces, it is possible to find many cases of elite officials who have served there and then run for office. There may be a few individuals who were originally from Vientiane

Province, for example, served for a long time in Luang Prabang, and then proceeded to run for office from the latter area, but such cases are relatively unusual. Like the other members of the Lao elite, most of the Pathet Lao deputies run for office in their birthplace.

A Young Elite Reform Movement

In 1958 an association of "young Turks" came into existence as a self-proclaimed strongly reformist reaction to corrupt practices in certain aspects of the government. Calling itself the Committee for the Defense of National Interests and adopting a strongly anti-communist and pro-western orientation, it became a formal political party in 1960.

Most of its leaders appear to have enjoyed more extensive education abroad than their parents, in many cases completing their studies in the years since 1945. There was considerable friction between members of the CDNI and some older elite, and accusations were leveled by the latter that while the younger men may have had more experience abroad they lacked practical experience at home. It was further charged that the CDNI was supported by the Americans and that the Committee's projects were favored by the American aid mission. Many of the older elite also felt that the CDNI was disruptive of Lao unity at a time when unity was critically needed.

On the other hand, strong support for the group was found among many high-ranking army officers such as General Phoumi Nosavan, the so-called "right-wing strongman" during the 1960-61 civil war. Further, Committee officials claimed that they have drawn attention to crucial problems in rural development, have made the population aware of communist dangers, and have introduced new life into the government.

The CDNI's program was as interesting for what it did not include as for its positive statements.¹¹ Theoretically it appealed to a diverse group:

We, the merchants, manufacturers, farmers, workers, intellectuals, police, civil and military servants, have decided to unite our efforts to form a Committee for the Defense of National Interests. [The Committee] is composed of a single category of active members of both sexes, without distinction or discrimination for either political or social affiliation; nor is there any age limit.... Its promoters are of the young elite belonging to all social levels of the nation. It is not a political party but a mass civic group.

The manifesto emphasized a call for unity among the democratic parties and the need to struggle against bad administration, over-centralization of governmental power and communist interference. With regard to economic matters currency reform, price control, and a campaign against corruption and speculation were advocated. Also advocated was greater discipline among the Buddhist clergy. Gambling and alcoholism were denounced.

The following year the first CDNI national congress proclaimed a ten-point platform specifically endorsing "reform of

our judicial system, in the revision of the various legal codes to thus assure each person access to the courts and to means of legal defense without discrimination;...reform of our public service, with promotions based on merit and not on ancestry or nepotism." Also mentioned were measures for increasing literacy and improving the educational system of the pagoda schools as well as a program of external relations featuring close ties with western countries.

In 1960 the CDNI newspaper proclaimed that members were "ready to sacrifice for the survival of our race, for the good of our religion, for the crown which we cherish and for the constitution which we respect....following the right road, with justice, legality, honesty, and integrity."

One might have expected a reform group to make at least symbolic gestures toward austerity, particularly when it presented itself as an anti-corruption force. However, this was not apparent in the style of living of some members who placed an even greater emphasis on luxury cars, new houses, and night-clubbing than did their older colleagues.

At the same time, through an associated organization, the Lao Junior Chamber of Commerce (a political and governmental rather than business group ¹²), the CDNI sponsored the Philippine medical organization, Operation Brotherhood. The sources of wealth of members of the CDNI have not been clear; certainly they were not as prominent in business affairs as were many of the older elite.

Leading members of the CDNI had considerable verbal facility, and many of them spent time traveling about the country, but the extent to which they were able to inspire support from broad segments of the population has been open to doubt. While the older elite were influenced strongly by French culture, the time they spent abroad was relatively limited, and those who are over fifty grew up in an age when the material differences between the urban elite and the village dweller were much less significant than they are today. For example, an older politician might bring his wife along when campaigning in the countryside; she would quite naturally squat down with the local people and chew betel with them. By contrast, a member of the CDNI concerned with rural affairs requested a tribal leader to move down to the nearby valley so that the official could be in touch with him, remarking that he traveled only by car.

There is also the very important consideration of kinship and of other social ties between the older elite and the CDNI, for these groups have cooperated in a number of different governments. Often their differences have been more in their respective press statements than in their activities. The former majority party, The Rally of the Lao People, has, like the CDNI, also been strongly anti-communist and advocated national development.

Political conflict between the CDNI and the older elite raises the question of the extent to which there are clearly defined sub-groups within the elite. With the possible exception of the Pathet Lao, the political alignments do not appear to have been either permanent or rigid. Most of the strength of the CDNI was originally concentrated in the foreign and defense ministries.

Much of the political turmoil, and the turnover in governments which attracted so much attention from the outside world, prior to the civil war were the result of shifting alliances within the elite at large. The more junior government officials were sometimes involved in such maneuvers. Opinions of the CDNI leaders, moreover, do not always seem to have been strongly held. Since the number of administrators was so severely limited, there was no "in" or "out" groups in the absolute sense but only redistributions of power within a limited group. The younger elite have, however, shown a preference for working through formal organizations inside and outside of the bureaucracy (e.g., the army and the Junior Chamber of Commerce) while the older politicians preferred their personally dominated political factions, patronage groups, and commercial influences. The younger men placed less reliance on kinship ties, and their connections to traditional Lao cultures were not close.

The CDNI failed. Why? Many prominent members of the CDNI were army officers, and although factors relating to the 1960-61 civil war are not clear it appears that with the exception of Meo units the Royal Lao Army did not fight well. Because of the nature of the Laos situation, in which all internal politics have their external manifestations, it is not possible to separate the activities of the CDNI completely from the policies of their American backers.¹³ Certainly in almost all instances this group's policies coincided closely with American aims in Laos during 1958-1959.

But the CDNI can be viewed not only as a creature of international politics but as an attempted innovating force within Lao society. In this respect the CDNI had three basic shortcomings in common with the Lao elite as a whole: failure to conceptualize the minority problem, failure to enlist the support of the priesthood, and failure to work with Lao villagers on the local level. At no point does the CDNI manifesto or for that matter any of its subsequent declarations even indicate that there are peoples other than ethnic Lao in the country of Laos. Although Buddhism and problems of the clergy are specifically dealt with in CDNI statements, the bonzes themselves were not directly approached, nor was any sub-committee or other organization set up to work specifically with the Sangha, although a number of individuals associated with the CDNI did attempt various types of action. While

statistics are not available it is my impression that membership in the CDNI was principally limited to members in the upper and to a certain extent the middle echelons of the bureaucracy, mainly in the army and ministries such as that of Foreign Affairs, with practically no members in Education and particularly no village school teachers -- people who were likely to have most direct contact with villagers. Contacts in rural areas appear to have been of a ceremonial or inspection nature.

The CDNI stirred up a considerable resentment among the older elite. Still, its ties were perhaps too close to the traditional power structures in Lao society for it to make any real reforms. For example, the protocol officer of the then Crown Prince was an officer of the Committee. The Crown Prince saw fit to address at least one of its meetings, and available information indicates that he singled out no other unofficial groups in this manner.

The Pathet Lao

The legal political arm of the Pathet Lao, the Neo Lao Hak Sat, was formed in 1957. Information on the communist movement in Laos is incomplete, and most sources that do exist are biased. Its primary subversive character has made objective study difficult, but the general outlines are clear.

When France confirmed the autonomy of Laos within the French Union, most Lao elite in the independence movement returned from their exile in Thailand to assume positions in the government. Prince Souphanouvong and a number of his associates, however, chose to continue "anti-colonial action." This was done with the encouragement of the North Vietnamese with whom the Prince had long been in contact. To quote a communist source:

When the Japanese invaded Indo-China, Souphanouvong was in Viet Nam. He contacted the revolutionary movement there and was impressed by their ardour and self-sacrificing spirit and by their organisation, the practical way in which they were planning an eventual seizure of power. Once he met Ho Chi Minh and asked him for advice, ¹⁴ "Seize power from the colonialists," was the reply.

In August, 1950, Souphanouvong met with the tribal leaders Faydang and Si Thon and a number of others, and a "National United Front" was organized. Guerilla bases were established and village, women's, and youth groups were organized. From the beginning there appears to have been a strong emphasis on the participation of all ethnic groups. This was particularly significant since in those provinces which were the center of their operations there were few valley Lao.

The events of 1960-1961 have, in a sense, been a repeat and expansion of the developments of 1953-1954 which culminated in the Geneva Cease-fire Agreement of 1954.

In less than one year of regular military warfare, the Pathet Lao forces and Vietnamese volunteers had liberated a good half of Laotian territory and were in an excellent position to take the rest. The areas they had liberated were mainly mountainous regions, equally excellent for defence or for spring-boards for further advances. Sparsely populated as they were, about one-third of the total population was by then under the people's administration.¹⁵

Recognition of the role of the Vietnamese is important.¹⁶

In the second round of fighting (1960-1961) it was de-emphasized by the Pathet Lao. In 1953-1954, however, the Pathet Lao were not yet consolidated as a group, and the allotment to them by the Geneva Conference of the Provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua provided them with an excellent base of operations. Essentially this made possible the establishment of an incipient government. After a series of preliminary attempts, in November, 1957, agreement was reached between the Royal government and the Pathet Lao for the re-integration of the two provinces. Prince Souphanouvong became Minister of the Plan in the government of Prince Souvanna Phouma, and his associate Phoumi Vongvichit was made Minister of Religion. When this government fell in July, 1958, the Pathet Lao were excluded from the Phoui Sananikone government in which members of the Committee for Defense of the National Interests played a prominent role. The Pathet Lao leaders protested the change, and their protests were echoed in North Vietnam and China.

The alignment of the traditional elite and their associated parties with the CDNI did not prove to be stable. After a series of intermediate governments and questionable CDNI landslide victories in April, 1960, a coup d'etat led by neutralist-inclined Captain Kong Le occurred in August, 1960. This was followed by several months of civil war, Pathet Lao victories, and a tentative cease-fire in May, 1961.

Several scholars point out that communist tactics in Laos have represented phases in planned revolution. Among the most important have been an initial guerilla war waged along lines laid down by Mao Tse-Tung, followed by a cease-fire and temporary acceptance of a partial victory. The next stage is the strengthening of the revolutionary base in order to initiate a new revolutionary war which is pushed to its decisive stage as events permit and finally securing the conquest of the area.¹⁷

The Pathet Lao have had an easier time than their Chinese or Vietnamese predecessors in that they have had a ready source of help and refuge in adjoining North Vietnam. Their movement has been against a badly split group of elite in the Royal government. During the 1960-1961 civil war they have had the explicit moral support of China and direct material as well as moral support from the Soviet Union. They have also been joined by dissident factions of the Lao government in the "Committee for Peace, Neutrality, National Harmony and Unity"

led by Souvanna Phouma and Pheng Phongsavan, former President of the National Assembly, as well as by military forces under Captain Kong Le.¹⁸

Despite all this, their success has not been brought about without considerable effort. While the Royal Lao government has been both inefficient and corrupt it would be an exaggeration to say that the population, particularly the valley Lao, possessed anything resembling revolutionary fervor. Most villagers seem to feel that the sins of the Royal government were mainly those of omission rather than commission. The tribal peoples, possessing no over-all unity, were in no sense united in a positive attitude of support for the Pathet Lao.

Basic to the success of the Pathet Lao has been what appears to be their two main organizational structures -- the party and the army. Information on both groups is indirect and inconsistent, and it is hard to tell the extent of overlap.¹⁹ The number of Pathet Lao troops is said to have been 3,500 in 1960, expanded from 1,800 earlier,²⁰ while another source gives 8,000.²¹ There were 1,500 in the group to be integrated into the Royal Army in 1959. This compares to a combined Royal Army and police force of approximately 30,000. The flexibility of the size of the Pathet Lao forces may be related to their possible augmentation in times of need by ethnically similar Meo or tribal Tai groups from across the border.²²

The organizational activities of the Neo Lao Hak Sat in Phong Saly and Sam Neua Provinces have been described as similar to those practiced by the communists in China and North Vietnam. They consisted of the army and party cells to train cadres to propagandize the "masses." Both these activities were supervised by the party's central committee. One distinctive feature in Laos appears to have been emphasis on the "family group." That is, troops were permitted to take their families with them, and the mass organization was based on a group of five to ten families led by a Communist Party functionary. The groups are said to have met every five days when the leader gave ideological instruction and the members engaged in "self-criticism."²³

According to one source, to enforce discipline there have been expulsions, re-education sessions and secret trials. When under sentence of expulsion an individual was isolated from his family and others while re-education was carried out in special centers. Supplementing these are women's, youth, and peasants' organizations. Through these organizations people have been trained to disobey orders issued by village chiefs. [Petitions were circulated for the removal of undesirable village headmen, the objective being to have sympathetic officials at the local level.] Some observers have attributed the success of the Pathet Lao in the May, 1959 elections (capturing nine out of 21 seats) to intimidation on the local level.²⁴

This organizational success of the Pathet Lao was recognized in a Royal Lao government report as early as July, 1957:

The Pathet Lao propagandist knows how to present himself as a friend who helps and advises and works with his own hands. He acts disinterestedly, shows honesty and enthusiasm and knows how to get along with a minimum of comfort.

The success of his work lies in those qualities and in the fact that he is always there...and does not fear the ephemeral effect of the mobile information teams of the Royal Lao Government.

The proof of the success of the propaganda methods of the Pathet Lao cadres can best be seen in the fact that they have succeeded in having the Lao population accept the Vietnamese as "brothers."²⁵

In the summer of 1959 infiltration had proceeded to the point where Lao government officials were made unwelcome even in villages in the district of Vientiane.

Unlike data on their covert operations, there is an abundance of information on the public ideology of the Pathet Lao. Much of this has been disseminated by Hanoi and Peking Radios in keeping with their client relationship to the Pathet Lao. Stress has been on unity of all groups, allegiance to traditional symbols, and hostility to the United States primarily and secondarily to Thailand, "neutrality with the acceptance of aid from socialist countries," and internal reform. The flavor of these aims is given in the following quotes:

Unite the people of all nationalities, all social strata, all political parties and patriotic and peace-loving personalities throughout the country to oppose United States aggression and intervention and all the rebellious activities of the United States lackey,

the Phoumi Nosavan clique, to unify the country, bring harmony to the Laotian people, defend the motherland, religion, the King, and the constitution, and build Laos into a peaceful, neutral, independent, democratic, unified, and prosperous country.²⁶

Set up a coalition government participated in by representatives of all nationalities, all political parties...including the Neo Lao Hak Sat Party, the Coup d'Etat Committee, and the Committee for Peace and Neutrality. Consolidate the administration at all levels, in order to insure full implementation of the policies of the coalition government.

Carry out a foreign policy based on the principle of genuine peace and neutrality... Accept aid without any political or military conditions from countries in both camps which are willing to help Laos. Primarily accept aid from socialist countries and countries pursuing a policy of peace and neutrality.²⁷

Pay attention to the development of the economy and culture, repair and build communication and transport lines, develop education and health services, encourage and help the people to increase production and improve the material and cultural life of the people of all nationalities.²⁸

Faced with opposition, as in the case of failure to gain Vientiane, the Pathet Lao have become more explicit, as expressed in these orders of the Pathet Lao high command to their forces:

Throughout the country, the movement of struggle should be stepped up in all fields, and guerrilla warfare should be powerfully developed.... We must strive to expand guerrilla warfare, destroy supply lines and bridges to prevent the enemy's movement.

Or, Souphanouvong's appeal:

I would like to propose to compatriots throughout the country that December 13, 1960, be made a "Hate and Bitterness" Day against the nation's enemies--

the United States imperialists, the reactionary aggressors,...who have brought such great damage to the lives and property of the people in the capital.

Even in these cases the propagandistic element is not neglected. These appeals also contained instructions to attempt to win over some of the royalist troops. While fighting the Royal Army the Pathet Lao maintained theoretical loyalty to the King in that an objective was "to liberate the King and Luang Prabang from the rebel's grip."²⁹

The Significance of Kinship Ties

It is usually possible to identify a prominent member of the elite and to differentiate between those members of the National Assembly who can be classified as elite and those who are not. Precise limits cannot be made, however, because although the hereditary factors are readily apparent, there are evidences that the elite group may be flexible.

Even in traditional Lao society an individual who was outstanding could rise in the class hierarchy if he came to the attention of the King and received a title. Even the kingship itself did not always follow in a rigidly hereditary line. There are examples of this in traditional and present-day Lao society. Thus a general in the Lao Army is the son of a farmer, and a provincial governor came from a family of fishermen; significantly in each case they married members

of the hereditary elite. Today their children are fully accepted. A good example of the way in which such upward mobility is possible is provided by a Lao Army colonel who described his family background by saying, "We weren't royalty, but we were good people. My father was a chauffeur for the French Commissioner, a very responsible position. He was a good mechanic and was one of the first Lao to learn to drive a car." This colonel received the equivalent of a high school education, entered the army, and rose in the ranks. He married a relative of one of the princely families and today appears to be fully accepted by his colleagues. Possibly there may be more social mobility in the army than say the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or even Finance because of the wider recruitment of the former. There is also a greater possibility of rising to power than in ministries such as Education which also recruit from a broad base.

A few members of the elite are said to be of tribal origin, but once they adopt Lao culture, participate in the French influenced educational system, and ascend in the Lao status hierarchy, they appear to be accepted. In these cases acquired culture traits rather than ethnic and racial origins are the determining factor.

Franco-Lao metis and the children of Sino-Lao marriages are both accepted, but neither appear to obtain particular prestige as a result of their origins, while tribal origins

appear to fade into the background. The wife of a former prime minister is metisse, and some former ministers have European wives.

Those who traditionally entered the ranks of the elite were either born or brought up in urban or semi-urban areas. It was virtually impossible for an individual from a marginal rural district to do so, for, as indicated earlier, a main reason why the elite tended to be self-perpetuating was restricted access to the limited educational opportunities; these in turn were the key to government employment and hence the means to social mobility. Neither trade nor the priesthood offered this opportunity. Once an individual managed to achieve at least nine years of education, no insurmountable barriers blocked his way upward in the bureaucracy. Achieving even this modest education was next to impossible for a villager, since he either had no access to primary schools, or the ones he attended offered inferior training in French, the absolute prerequisite for further education.

Ethnic prejudices, as such, do not appear to play a determining role, although generally the non-Lao peoples have been completely excluded from this system. The sons of the prominent Lyfong family, who are Meo of Xieng Khouang, achieved an education and can be said to represent an outstanding exception in that their tribal connections are maintained and are indeed the source of their influence. The

dynamic and prosperous opium-growing Meo, however, do seem to be an exception. Toubi Lyfong became Vice-President of the National Assembly (1959) and later served for a time as Minister of Information. He also holds the rank of chao Khoueng in the civil service; his brother has served as procurator general in the Lao government. A number of Meo now are studying in the Lycee Pavie and in missionary schools, and some of them serve as provincial officials in Xieng Khouang. The Meo constitute the largest ethnic group in Xieng Khouang, but the royal family of that province was exclusively Lao and is still influential in its administration.

The Chinese are another case in point. A number came to Laos after the turn of the century as little more than common coolies. With the aid of borrowed Lao capital, some of them built up businesses and in many cases married Lao women. Children of these marriages appear in some instances to have had a choice of nationality. If a child of mixed parentage attends a Lao rather than a Chinese school, he may be accepted into Lao society if he desires. Some of these young men have become Lao officials, and several girls have married into the Lao elite. Again, the prime factors are the acceptance of Lao culture and mastery of French.

Ties of kinship can have significant political implications. There are many family ties existing between the Pathet Lao and important members of the Royal Lao government, the

most famous of which is, of course, the half-brothers Prince Souphanouvong, Prince Souvanna Phouma, and the late Prince Phetsarath (the latter two had the same mother). The father of one Pathet Lao deputy serves on the King's Council, and an important Pathet Lao party organizer is the brother-in-law of a prominent Lao diplomat. Similar kinship bonds extend into the police and army as well. These ties definitely proved influential in enabling the communist and royal Lao government groups to reach agreement, and it is significant that Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong were the principal negotiators in the 1957 coalition.

While it is open to question whether kinship is a vital factor in the formation of Pathet Lao policies, it would be hard to ever emphasize its importance within the royal government. For instance, a high-ranking Lao official remarked (following a coup d'etat in Thailand in 1959), "That could not happen here--too many of the ministers and army officers are members of the same family." This statement, of course, excluded junior officers who come from non-elite families (one of whom later turned out to be the leader of the 1960 coup in Laos) as well as several Pathet Lao leaders. While the statement itself proved to be in error, the attitude it embodied has been important. The only Lao senior official to be publicly accused of fraud complained to the author that he would never have had trouble if only he had had the right

family connections. Another official mentioned that a member of a very high-ranking princely family had been delinquent in the payment of taxes. When asked if that individual would be prosecuted, the official only smiled. In another case, a young officer reprimanded for laziness defied a superior by saying that, after all, his family would look out for him if there were any difficulties.

In part derivative from these kinship ties is a shared standard of living among the elite. This is also based on their common participation in business affairs. A man who is a government minister may have one brother who owns a construction firm, another brother a senior civil servant, and a close relative the proprietor of a manufacturing enterprise. These family connections naturally influence government attitudes and regulations toward business.

Reviewing lists of cabinet officers, provincial governors, ambassadors and prominent businessmen in Laos during the last decade, such names as Souvannavong, Sananikone, Champassak, and Voravong are seen again and again. The first two are the most prominent families in Vientiane, descendants of officials of the long-defunct court of Vientiane. The latter names are from princely families in the south, particularly from Champassak Province.

When the French assumed control of Laos in the late 19th century, these officials entered the French administration.

Many of the Lao elite also bear the title Tiao (loosely translated as prince), indicating that the individual is a descendant of a mandarin at the court of Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang or Champassak. Family names and even titles are, however, a poor measure of the extent of relationship, because surnames have come into use in Laos only since 1944,³⁰ and titles are not inherited by all the children. Despite these limitations, closer inquiry reveals a complex pattern of inter-marriage linking the Lao elite.³¹

It is one thing to say that the elite joined by social origin and kinship hold a monopoly of wealth and power, and quite another to assume that they will act as a cohesive unit. In this connection, traditional patterns of social organization are important and can be shown by contrasting Lao family relationships with those of the neighboring Chinese and Vietnamese.

In the old days, Chinese respect for patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal patterns was strongly developed in the upper classes and sanctified by the Confucian ethic. These extended family groups played important roles in political and economic affairs.

Lao culture is quite different, for there exists no cult of the ancestor. Bodies are cremated at death. People are often unaware of their ancestry beyond three generations.

Clan names, so important in China, are non-existent among the Lao. Descent and inheritance are, as we have seen, bilateral. Although there are no rigid rules, it is often the daughter who remains at home. The role of women is important. While women show formal respect to their husbands on public occasions, they play an equal and sometimes dominating role in the affairs of the household and management of the family budget. Divorce is not difficult, and in certain instances it may be initiated by the woman. Parents occupy a role of respect, but they are not venerated. In fact, when a man reaches 50 or 55 he often retires from active participation in affairs and not infrequently becomes a monk.

Kinship ties beyond the immediate family exist, but they are not necessarily accompanied by strong social or economic obligations. While positions may be inherited, the behavior of children is not expected to adhere to rigid patterns. Lao Buddhist concepts place a great deal of emphasis on the responsibility of the individual for his own actions. Today in Laos there is no question but that certain patterns of loyalty exist within families and that these ties influence decisions in government and business; still, the extent of their importance is not without limits. In this connection, the reaction of the elite to Prince Souphanouvong is interesting. His actions were not condemned in terms of disloyalty to his elder brother or to his branch of the royal

family, but rather because he failed to behave with the decorum expected of a Prince and had married a Vietnamese. Following the pattern of the three princely brothers, in no case do families seem to have split because individuals became members of the Pathet Lao. This is not to say that family ties were stronger than politics but that the Lao do not view these as conflicting loyalties. Being a Lao and member of the elite is more important than specific kinship or even political associations. Even these groups feelings, however, are not extremely strong or rigid.

The Communist Chinese pattern of destroying family loyalties by inducing children to denounce their parents would not have too much meaning in Laos. Certain extreme deviations in behavior are frowned upon. A minor scandal was created in Vientiane when a son beat up his father in an argument over gambling debts. His actions were strongly disapproved, but he continued living at home. On the other hand, Lao parents usually have some say in their daughter's choice for a husband, particularly among members of the royal family. (It was reported that the King had some trouble finding a husband for one of his daughters, since at least one of the eligible young men refused on the ground that he did not want to be bothered with the protocol his role would impose.)

As part of this pattern, Lao officials may not be too concerned about their subordinates but are rarely over-demanding

or strict in their discipline. The school and the priesthood both provide examples of the dual reality of discipline and flexibility. In school, the teacher has considerable authority and the children learn their lessons by rote, but this does not mean that they will work hard or feel forced to continue their education. A monk must listen to his superiors and observe many rules, yet the rules are not rigidly defined in practice, and he is able to withdraw from the priesthood whenever he wishes.

Doing things in a pleasant manner is a very important part of Lao life. Urban families and rural people very much enjoy just sitting on their verandas and passing the time in conversation or playing with their children. Holidays and religious festivals bring real pleasure. The self-indulgent living patterns of certain of the elite are undoubtedly derived from the traditional emphasis of Lao culture on pleasure. Only in the cases of luxurious cars and night clubs, however, does the religious aspect fade into the background.

Much of the favoritism that exists within the government appears to result not so much from strong family loyalties as such but from the implicit feeling that since the government is dominated by the elite it should primarily benefit them as a group. Persons who are not members of the leading families have not been harshly dealt with, although they may have been denied certain privileges. Despite the tremendous corruption

of recent years (freely and frankly acknowledged by the Lao) no members of the elite (except for certain Pathet Lao leaders who were held in jail for a time) have been imprisoned. This failure to act can be seen as a consequence of the refusal of the Lao elite to accept ultimate responsibility for their own actions as a ruling group. A country supported almost entirely by a foreign power is unlikely to develop a sense of responsibility very quickly.

Aspects of Western Influence

Founded as it is on the union of government and business enterprises, the standard of living of the elite is a composite Lao culture and French-style villas, Mercedes Benz automobiles, trips abroad, and consumption of imported food and beverages. It is true that in recent years large numbers of luxury automobiles have appeared in Vientiane, but even the most prosperous of the Lao are not very wealthy compared to successful businessmen or prominent officials in Singapore, Hong Kong, or Bangkok. While there may be one or two Mercedes parked outside a residence, the home furnishings are usually relatively modest. Houses of the elite are not particularly imposing, usually constructed of concrete or wood frame. As part of the pattern of extended family relationships and the presence of servants and retainers, households of ten to fifteen persons are by no means uncommon. There is probably some correlation between

the size of a household and the social status of the household head, since the average Lao family in town or village tends to be primarily nuclear (parents and children). Once a Lao has achieved a certain degree of wealth or material prosperity there is strong pressure on him to share it with close relatives.

In the course of their education and general adoption of French culture many Lao elite appear to have absorbed certain French anti-clerical attitudes. There is a theoretical union in Laos between the Church and State, and the constitution specifies that the King must be a fervent Buddhist, but most of the elite and particularly younger ones do not participate extensively in religious affairs. This is perhaps related to the degree of estrangement from their own culture and has been a point of conflict between the elite and the Buddhist clergy. Virtually none of the Lao elite are Christians.

Although they have not adopted western religious practices, many of the elite enthusiastically participate in other items of western-derived culture. French food and wine are very popular. There are no true restaurants in Vientiane featuring Lao cuisine, but there are many serving French-style food. These are usually run by Vietnamese or Europeans. The elite read French newspapers and magazines and use many French expressions in everyday conversation. One bookstore catering to the elite has hundreds of publications about France and

Europe but none dealing with the neighboring countries of Cambodia or Vietnam.

As part of the heritage of European rule, government offices are closed on Sundays but not on the Buddhist holy days. The most important Buddhist holidays are observed, however. Hunting for sport, although not in keeping with Buddhist values, has become popular, as has attendance at night clubs. Being a Buddhist layman, then, does not necessarily imply a spartan life. Observance of the rituals takes time and necessitates certain attitudes of abstinence which are not generally characteristic of the younger elite at present. Interestingly, the Pathet Lao have gained status with the priesthood in part because of their professed asceticism.

At the same time it should be borne in mind that the elite exist within a framework of a Buddhist state at the head of which the King symbolically participates in most religious affairs and the monks occupy a prominent role in public celebrations. There is also some religious instruction in the elementary schools.

While particular items in the elite standard of living are relatively recent, the concept of an elite as the hereditary ruling class is strongly embedded in traditional Lao culture. Before the arrival of the French, the individual kingdoms were ruled by an elaborate bureaucracy whose duties were hereditary and carefully specified. For example, the late Viceroy Prince

Phetsarath was descended from the second ranking princely family of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, whose duty it was to lead the army in time of war. Others were in charge of the royal household, of judicial affairs, or of regional administration. Even the keepers of the royal elephants and barges were specifically named.

Although the American aid program has intensified consumer orientation on the part of the elite, the American presence in Laos does not appear to have resulted in any basic alterations in behavior patterns which were not already in the process of developing under French rule.

The use of Mercedes Benz automobiles by almost all high-ranking officials has frequently been cited as an example of the corruption of the elite. This is true but not in the way that is often thought. This becomes clear if we contrast the Mercedes with the elephant, the former being the modern prerogative of the elite and the latter the traditional. A royal prince of high official riding on an elephant does not arouse envy or scorn. The elephant is the beloved symbol of the nation, integrated ritually into the life of the country (e.g., the ceremonies of the royal elephants at Wat Xieng Tong in Luang Prabang during the New Years celebration). A parade of the decorated elephants is a source of pleasure to all, while a Mercedes Benz can be a pleasure only to an

individual and his family. Elephants move with dignity and, say the Lao, with grace. To tell a Lao young woman that she walks like an elephant is a compliment, but "classy chassis" or its equivalent has no meaning in Lao culture. Walking slowly, an elephant provides its rider a chance to see and be seen by the populace; a car goes fast and kicks up dust in people's faces. Elephants are secured through the hunt, and protection of the spirits is sought. Mercedes Benz have been obtained through currency manipulations, or at best account juggling, and are the indirect largess of a foreign power.

But what member of the present-day elite would prefer an elephant to a car? Cars were first introduced into Laos by the French and were the privilege of the highest colonial officials and of the King. Therefore, although not sacred luxury cars have become a new status symbol, a symbol that connotes not power but wealth, and, even more importantly, unearned wealth.

In housing, food, and recreation the elite have accquired many items of European origin which have tended to set them more apart from the rural population and simultaneously increase the demand for economic change while undercutting the authority of the elite to bring it about. It is difficult to graft foreign institutions onto a traditional power-base vitiated by long foreign rule. A deputy to parliament is

different from a royal prince or a mandarin. Effective political parties in the democratic sense require interest groups clearly defined but willing to seek accommodation within a legal framework. Operation of a constitution, a national assembly and a modern bureaucracy all require a formal education. The ability to consume must be matched at least in part by the ability to regulate. None of the essential conditions are fulfilled in Laos.

For a time during the 1960-1961 civil war even the pro-western Boun Oum government took quite a hostile attitude toward the French, but this has appeared to be a temporary political tactic rather than an expression of long-suppressed and deep-rooted feelings. In fact, in 1959 Boun Oum himself declared something of nostalgia for the period of French rule.

Bonds with Thailand

The Lao have strong ties with Thailand. There are shops in Vientiane devoted to newspapers and magazines from Thailand, and Thai words figure prominently in the Lao vocabulary.³² Many Lao, including the elite, have relatives on the other bank of the Mekong.³³ The river is a formal political border but is in no sense a cultural barrier. A large number of Lao have received some education or technical training in Thailand. Historically, Lao culture is a provincial variant of Thai civilization, but the Lao are very sensitive to domination by the Thai.

One of the reasons for the Lao-Thai War (1827-1828), which was disastrous from the Lao point of view, was the King of Siam's refusal of requests made to him by the King of Vientiane when the latter visited Bangkok on the occasion of the funeral of King Rama II in 1825. These requests included permission to take back to Vientiane female artisans and palace dancers as well as Lao families living in Thai districts. It is also reported by a Lao source that members of the Lao retinue were ordered by the Siamese to cut down and transport palm trees.³⁴

While not confirmed historically, these statements represent marked characteristics of Thai - Lao relations. Lao music, art forms, religious practices and intellectual culture derive almost entirely from Thailand. Thai dancers and musicians trained those who performed at Lao courts. Today it is still Thai performers who are most in demand at Lao celebrations. Moreover, Lao monks go to Buddhist institutes in Bangkok for advanced study, and Thai monks come to preach in Laos. The reverse does not occur.

The Mekong has always been more a means of communication than a boundary, and even before the defeat of Vientiane many Lao had migrated south into what is today part of Thailand. As for the action of the Thai King in corvéeing Lao labor, the felt superiority of the Thai is still manifested. To be identified in Bangkok as being of Lao origin can be embarrassing

or even humiliating. Bangkok Thai often tend to regard the Lao (ethnic Lao from Northeast Thailand as well as those from Laos) as poor country cousins. Until banned, Lao from Northeast Thailand were the main samlaw drivers in Bangkok.³⁵

Differences which exist between the Thai and Lao elite are the result of French colonial control, nationalistic feelings which have developed since the Second World War, and the fact that westernization in Laos has come through a French colonial filter and in many cases through Vietnamese intermediaries. In the 19th and 20th centuries the Thai elite have been influenced principally by Britain and America; rare is the member of the Thai elite who has been educated in France or who speaks good French.

In Laos, although the number of elite as well as technicians and students who speak passable English is increasing it remains small. Thai scholars have recently attempted to point out the close links between the two countries. There have been constant interchanges of population, some forced as a result of war but much voluntary. With the exception of Luang Prabang all the major Lao towns are located directly opposite the Thai border (Vientiane, Thakhek, Savannakhet) or within approximately 25 miles (Pakse). It has been indicated that many Lao urban families have relatives in Thailand, many students and technicians have received some training there, and many Northeast Thai come to work and trade in Laos. One

observer estimates that about 25,000 of the approximately 70,000 people in Vientiane come from the Thai side of the river. Just as many people from Vientiane were taken to Thailand after the collapse of the Kingdom of Vientiane, so in an inverse way did Savannakhet derive much of its population from Thailand when it was established by the French as a garrison town.

Not only did the Lao Issara seek refuge in Thailand but, according to a number of sources, many Thai-Lao crossed over to fight the French. The Thai, of course, have resented the role of the French in emphasizing the cultural differences between the two areas and particularly the idea that the French liberated the Lao from the Thai. The Luang Prabang monarchy has always been strongly pro-French, but there is doubt as to the extent to which these ideas are shared by Lao villagers. Certainly the frequent display of lithographed pictures of the Thai King and Queen, in Lao village homes, is evidence of a broadly conceived relationship.

An important source of Franco-American conflict in the post-independence period has been the latter's overt and covert emphasis on closer Lao-Thai contacts in the economic, cultural, and technical fields. The French have deeply resented American emphasis on trade routes through Thailand at the expense of the former concept of the associated Indochina states as an economic unit. The American aid program's subsidization of

warehouses in Bangkok and the building of a ferry slip and storage facilities at Thadeua opposite the railhead in Nong-Kai a few miles down the river from Vientiane is significant in this regard.

It is true that there have been a number of French scholars interested in the Lao language who wrote dictionaries and other materials, but no substantial printing facilities were available for publications in Lao. The American Information Service in recent years brought in a relatively large number of Thai, many from the Northeast, to produce magazines and other materials in Lao. Although the language did not appeal to all Lao and was somewhat resented as being too Thai, still the American information effort has contrasted strongly with that of the French. The main American objective has been to tell the Lao more about their own country, through publications and films in their own language, while French efforts have been directed mostly toward the perpetuation of French culture, particularly in the secondary schools. In this sense the use of the Lao language and publication of Lao histories can be viewed as generally strengthening cultural ties with Thailand.

In the field of advanced and technical education the French have favored sending Lao students to France, while the Americans have sent many more students to study in Thailand, particularly various specialized fields such as nursing, education, and agriculture, than to the United States.

Relationship to Vietnam

One of the remarkable things about Pathet Lao successes in Laos is that they have occurred despite the communist group's strong tie to North Vietnam. The Lao frequently fought the Vietnamese and certain Lao kingdoms such as that of Xieng Khouang paid tribute to Annam, but it does not seem that the pronounced Lao distrust of the Vietnamese derives from military conflicts. (The various Lao kingdoms fought each other as often as they fought the Vietnamese--in fact alliances were made against one another, sometimes with the Vietnamese as allies.) More significant are the cultural differences between the two peoples and the fact that the French used Vietnamese as lower-echelon administrative intermediaries in Laos. This, combined with the more aggressive Vietnamese temperament and strongly felt linguistic and other cultural differences helped create a situation of hostility.

Prince Souphanouvong has been able to overcome the fact that he has a Vietnamese wife (who sometimes dresses as a Lao) and has chosen to educate his children in North Vietnam. Officials of the Royal government, attentive to these facts, have attempted to discredit him and his associates as being allied with foreigners.

During the 1960-1961 civil war these propaganda efforts were reciprocated by Pathet Lao accusations (frequently via

Radio Hanoi) that the Prince Boun Oum government was using Thai troops. There is a highly interesting contrast between all the Lao Issara leaders originally seeking shelter in Thailand and the defection of segments of the Royal army under Captain Kong Le to the Pathet Lao, and by inference to their Vietnamese sponsors. Can we conclude from this that ethnic ties or associations are no longer so strongly valued? Or does this represent merely a reversion to the type of shifting political alliances practiced by the various leaders in this part of Southeast Asia before the coming of the colonial powers with their imperial peace? Or, is drastic political reform more alluring than an appeal to traditional culture as represented by Thailand?

Despite Lao hostility to things Vietnamese, perhaps their association together in French Indochina did establish some ties. Is a drawing together of Laos and North Vietnam a re-establishment of these French-inspired economic patterns? Significantly, when Souvanna Phouma was in power in November, 1960, he concluded an agreement for barter and commercial exchanges across the frontiers. Moreover, the "foreignness" of the Vietnamese is from the point of view of the valley Lao and not necessarily of the tribal peoples who compose the overwhelming majority of the population in those areas in which the Pathet Lao have had their primary strength. On the contrary, in these areas there are mainly ethnic similarities.

Delimiting the Elite

An interesting problem is the point at which one draws the line between members of the Lao elite and other government officials, both elected and appointed. The National Assembly as it existed in 1959 is an excellent place to begin, since its deputies were not all members of the elite.

At the outset one can exclude from the elite those deputies whose influence and contacts are limited to the provincial level, that is, those who do not maintain a residence in Vientiane. To have two places of residence implies a certain amount of financial independence apart from salary and signifies important contacts outside the home province, for not a few contacts of deputies with constituents occur at election time or during a period of crisis. A number of deputies spend only relatively brief periods in Vientiane, chiefly when the assembly is in session.

There are also deputies who once worked in the lower echelons of government and then won election on the basis of local reputation. Significantly, the government provides housing for many of these individuals on the grounds of the National Assembly itself and in former army barracks. Needless to say, those who occupy such quarters are not members of the elite and probably would not be considered for appointment to ministerial posts.

Most of the members of the neutralist-inclined Santiphab Party (with the exception of its leader, a former governor) are examples of the non-elite deputy. Some bear the religious title Maha and have served as monks and religious teachers for long periods of time, ranging up to several decades, in which manner they established local reputations. Others have gained influence as local merchants. In none of these cases have the individuals concerned served apprenticeships in the bureaucracy.

Table 3 (Laos Project Paper No. 8) gives the composition of the National Assembly in 1958 and the number of votes received by individual deputies in 1955 and 1958. An important point about this list, as compared with the rosters of various government agencies, is the relatively few Tiaos and name families. (Only four with princely titles appear; interestingly enough, two of them, Tiao Vongsak and Tiao Souphanouvong, are members of the Neo Lao Hak Sat.) It is tempting to say that this evidence tends to indicate that the National Assembly is more democratic than the higher echelons of the bureaucracy. Certainly the presence of a woman on the list and a Kha tribal leader (Sisana Sisane), both Neo Lao Hak Sat deputies, mark notable divergences. The two Mahas are members of the Santiphab Party.

Before attempting to draw any lines concerning the social backgrounds of high government officials versus assemblymen or members of the pro-government parties (later incorporated into

the Rally of the Lao People) versus the Santiphab and the Neo Lao Hak Sat, it might be worthwhile to view the type of people who tend to run for elective office in Laos and see if there are any significant occupational differences between the candidates and those of the group who are ultimately elected. In 1958 there were 107 candidates for 21 vacancies. Three of the candidates were Tiaos (including the two Neo Lao Hak Sat men who were elected); two were women (the defeated candidate was of the government party, a Voravong from Khammouane, and her successful opponent the school teacher wife of a Neo Lao Hak Sat Deputy from Phong Saly). There were eleven in the Thao category, six of whom listed themselves as merchants, four as middle-grade officials, and one as a minor official; of these, eight had pro-government affiliations. Two of them, and one Santiphab candidate, were elected. Of the five Chaos listed none were successful. It does appear that titles or rank as such is not of political significance.³⁶ Family affiliation may only conceivably be a hindrance. In 1958 among prominent families only Khoranhok Souvannavong was elected (from Nam Tha, the province of which he was former governor). Those defeated belonging to the same family were Outhong, one of the King Councilors, and Ouday, the Director of Protocol. Oun Sananikone, the brother of Phoui, and Nhouy Abhay, at that time Minister of Education and subsequently Deputy Premier,

were also defeated. Three members of the Na Champassak family were defeated, all by overwhelming margins, as was Inpeng Souyadhay, at that time Secretary General of the Council of Ministers and subsequently Minister of Education

With regard to the occupational breakdown of the candidates, thirteen were listed as former Pathet Lao (including two, both of whom were elected, who served in cabinet offices in the coalition government); fifty were low and middle ranking government officials, and seven were of cabinet rank. Twenty-eight were listed as businessmen (mostly in the southern provinces, especially Champassak where seven out of fifteen were in this category). In addition there were two "farmers," a housewife, a "mechanical engineer," and a number who were not identified. Those in the government were listed as having various ranks: thirteen unspecified, except for civil service rank; seven policemen, ranging from corporal to major; seven district administrators; six governors or deputy governors; four ministers; three each in the Ministries of Education and Information; two in the Judiciary; one in the Forestry Service; the Director of Protocol; the heads of the pension fund and foreign financial matters; the Secretary General of the Cabinet; the Acting Attorney General; and a member of the King's Council.

As a group the Pathet Lao were most successful, with nine of their thirteen candidates being elected. They were, in general, impressive in their vote-getting ability (although

their candidate in Attapeu failed miserably, winning less than 1,000 votes compared to more than 15,000 cast there for the pro-government candidate). Of the businessmen, five were elected, four of whom were members of the Santiphab, including a former monk. Most of the successful government deputies were from the rank of administrators, including one governor and three district administrators, the head of the pension fund and two other officials. Taken as groups, the businessmen, police, health officials, and high-ranking bureaucrats were quite unsuccessful. Not a single army officer was a candidate. Viewing subsequent events in Laos in perspective this appears to be meaningful and seems to indicate clearly that the police have not had significant influence. These elections were as much a defeat for the pro-government elite as a victory for the Pathet Lao. While many of the latter could be classed as elite, the same is not true for the Santiphab representatives who appear to have had neither secular titles, name families nor official positions.

In 1960 there were 149 candidates for 59 seats. Of these there were half a dozen army officers. In Vientiane province of the 28 candidates for six seats, 15 were former government officials, six were merchants, four police officers, one a doctor, one a lawyer, and one a former army officer. From the royal government side it appears that the army had decided to formally enter politics.

In terms of voter participation, the 1958 election was the biggest in Lao history (Table 2, Laos Project Paper No. 8). That a number of the defeated candidates went on to become ministers in subsequent pro-western governments would appear to be a clear indication that the elite structure remained intact in spite of lack of popular support. In fact, one can make the point that electoral failure is no bar to public office, although being elected might help one's career. It does not appear to have been necessary for a prime minister to have had a record of success in elections (e.g., Souvanna Phouma and Nhouay Abhay).

Changes in the composition and characteristics of the elite have been occurring. Most important was the advent of national independence, precipitating a demand for large numbers of administrators and technicians.

Many additional soldiers and police have been recruited. In a way, the army has become an important democratizing force. Although the upper echelons of the officer group are still dominated by the hereditary elite, the ranks of the army are filled mainly from the villages, with various tribal peoples also included. While the Lao army is by no means elaborately equipped, many kinds of technicians are required. Increasing numbers of Lao were sent overseas for specialized military training, especially to France. Foreign education, therefore, is no longer an exclusive prerogative of the elite. In the

late 1950's Laos acquired her first trained pilots, of whom a significant number were the sons of farmers. Some Kha tribesmen became paratroopers, and a Yao became an organizer in a program of rural development. During the 1960-1961 civil war the Russians were reported to be training Lao pilots. Undoubtedly similar activity was carried on earlier in the D.R.V.

Increasing numbers of school teachers have been drawn from rural and tribal backgrounds as the educational system is expanded. Most of these people are still in their twenties and are not organized, but they will obviously make an increasing impact in future years, and a number will doubtless become part of the ruling group.

A look at the composition of the Lao bureaucracy and the opportunities for entry into and mobility within it provide clues to this change. Table 4 gives a good idea of the composition of the civilian administration. Of the 7,404 employees listed, the largest group (over 2,500) is composed of elementary school teachers, most of whom have six years or less of education. Nevertheless their growing numbers are not without significance, for, as has been indicated, many prominent Lao politicians began their careers within the school system.

A number of the important ministries are surprisingly small, even for Laos, and are undoubtedly concentration points for the elite in terms of their representation on the total staff. This is particularly true for Foreign Affairs, which

has 45 employees in Vientiane and 35 abroad, or the Office of the Inspector General, with a staff of six. Those with larger staffs, such as Finance and Customs with 395, and Economic Affairs with 130, have only a few dozen people in positions of executive responsibility that are manned by the elite. Both the Pathet Lao and CDNI have appealed to government employees as a grown and manifested concern in their working conditions.

Unfortunately, detailed information on the army and police are lacking. In 1958 the former was composed of approximately 25,000 men and the police had approximately 2,900 and were attempting to increase their force to 4,000.³⁷

Education is both an indispensable prerequisite and a means for mobility. It was not until after the Second World War, however, that secondary education became generally available in Laos and with it opportunities for students other than the sons of high officials.³⁸ Statistics from the files of the college at Luang Prabang from 1947-1958 indicate that education is available to a wide range of the population (although limited in geographic area). Of a total of 253 male students for whom sufficient records were available, 70 were the sons of farmers, gardeners or fishermen (the highest number of students in any category and more than one-fourth of the total number), while 113 were sons of artisans, petty officials, and merchants. There were only 21 sons of high-

ranking officials and 25 from families of teachers, doctors or nurses. Even more significant is that 27 of the children of peasant families went on for further study, of whom six went to officers' training school (see Table 13). Percentage-wise, almost 40 percent of the children of peasants went on to higher education, while almost 60 percent of the children of high officials and merchants continued. Geographically the overwhelming majority of the students were from the area of Luang Prabang town. There were 461 in this category and by contrast only 11 from the whole of Nam Tha province and 28 from other areas in Luang Prabang province itself. The 2,396 students enrolled in all secondary schools in 1957 represent about .1 percent of the population.³⁹ Despite this small figure a growing number of Lao graduates of one of the collèges but most often not of the Lycée, have been receiving training abroad. In 1958 there were said to be 171 Lao students, of whom 16 were women, studying abroad under government scholarships.⁴⁰ From the point of view of continuity and numbers of students France has been the most important, as would be expected.⁴¹

Of shorter duration although more extensive has been the program of the American aid mission which in 1959 sent 198 "participants" abroad for periods ranging from two weeks to one year. In addition a large number of military trainees were sent to various countries (chiefly the Philippines and

the United States). The value of two-week or even two-month courses are open to question. The United States Information Service has had its own program of "Leader Grantees" which has been sending about half a dozen Lao students to the United States each year. Some of these earned American high school diplomas in this way and also attended college courses. At least one Lao has received an American Bachelor of Arts degree and was in 1960 Charge D'affaires of the Embassy of Laos in Washington. For the school year 1960-1961 three Lao have been studying in American high schools under the auspices of the American Field Service.

These attainments might not seem impressive by American, European, or even some Asian standards, but in a country where six years of education is enough to teach elementary school and nine years adequate for an officer's commission, even a year's education abroad can open up great opportunities: a person thus trained can become a section chief in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a "Professor" in the Education Ministry, or head of a specialized service like the Statistical Bureau or Geodetic Survey. Nor are monks immune to this trend --they may disrobe and set up an English teaching school.

It would be an exaggeration to say that such individuals thereby become part of the elite. They do, however, take a very large step in that direction. It is, of course, quite

possible that as more people are educated standards will be raised and elite status may entail higher qualifications.

A vital challenge facing any newly developing state is the formation of an effective system of internal administration. This problem is acute in Laos. There are several aspects to this situation, reflecting the different pieces in the mosaic of Lao society. First, there is the relationship between the governing elite and the lower echelon members of the bureaucracy and the army, including those stationed in the provinces. Then there is the degree of articulation between the government and the urban population in general. Finally, there is the relationship of the elite and these other groups to the Lao peasants and mountain peoples.

The Lao elite is not an absolutely closed group. Much of the apparent exclusiveness is based on traditional patterns of rank in Lao society which are still formally recognized to a certain extent by both the rulers and the ruled as in the very existence of the monarchy and its acceptance by all groups, including the Pathet Lao. It is interesting that in most of the communist propaganda emanating from North Vietnam and China relatively little attention has been paid to the traditional patterns of Lao government as such but has been concentrated instead on actions of individual officials and their alliances with the West. These countries obviously have not regarded traditional systems as important obstacles

to change, or perhaps they have felt that coming out directly against these patterns might have a negative impact on the general Lao population.

An evidence of strong continuing acceptance of rank distinctions are the Lao legal statutes of the 1950's which retain provisions in the penal code for the assessment of fines and penalties according to the traditional hereditary rank of the victims of the crime. Interestingly enough, these provisions were acceptable to and sought by some of the elite who, as members of the CDNI, demanded new government programs of social development.

It is also significant that none of their demands called for basic changes in the social structure (although many of their actions did point in that direction). Contradictory tendencies often exist within the same group or individual. Some members closely allied to the royal family were at the same time instrumental in forming a trade union organization for government employees. A reason for the latter activity, they stated, was to enable the problems of civil servants to be aired openly rather than through anonymous letters.

Perspective on the relationships existing between the elite and lower echelon officials is obtainable when visiting Lao offices. Most Lao officials, even those who deal frequently with Europeans, tend to be extremely casual about appointments and do not operate on a set time schedule.

Often a minister's secretary or office coolie is reluctant to disturb his superior. In one particular ministry the clerk always peeked through the key-hole before announcing to his employer the arrival of a caller. Most high ranking officials have beels on their desks which they ring to summon subordinates as well as coolies. While it is true that buzzers exist in American offices, their use is accompanied by appropriately polite words. The Lao office bells, on the other hand, are used not only to call clerks but for all manner of small services as well.

It would be incorrect to infer from these small signs of petty authoritarianism that Lao subordinates live in fear of their superiors, although some in the lower echelons of the bureaucracy have been hesitant to openly voice criticisms of the government. Among the elite, on the other hand, criticism of one's peers has often been very direct, sometimes almost embarrassingly so for a foreigner. A deputy to the National Assembly and member of the elite charged that a certain minister, a political opponent, had embezzled money in his official position and used these funds to build a villa. Lao diplomats abroad often do not hesitate to speak critically of their government's policies. Elite Lao officials are often more frank in criticizing the shortcomings of their government than are many resident foreign diplomats.

A number of officials, particularly those of middle rank may either be young elite or have close kin ties to those in higher positions. Yet even officials with only a modest amount of technical training have enjoyed a secure position regardless of their social background. One reform-oriented minister stated that a reason many dishonest officials had not been dismissed was that there was no one to replace them.

Lao Character Traits Affecting Social Attitudes

Despite the existence of obvious social stratification in Lao society there is a real problem in discipline within the bureaucracy. This is true despite the fact that it seems to contradict certain traits in Lao character, among them traditional recognition of many gradations in rank. A special honorific language is used in addressing the King, and there are specific terms employed in addressing superiors. There is still another set of terms used in speaking to equals and a third for inferiors.

The image of a Lao that the foreign visitor usually gets is a mild-mannered, soft-spoken, unaggressive person. These characterizations are true but it would be easy to over-emphasize them. Returning to the United States after a stay in Laos one cannot help but be impressed by how noisy and aggressive American people seem.

The picture of passive tranquility should not be overdrawn. Warfare has been common. Cities have been sacked and slaves taken. After his defeat by the Thai, the last King of Vientiane was brought to Bangkok and reportedly exhibited in a cage like a captured animal. The war was certainly a manifestation of strong Lao feelings, regardless of whether it is interpreted as having been a fight for freedom (Lao version), ingratitude and ambition (Thai version), or dynastic conflict (Vietnamese version). The complete collapse of the Kingdom of Vientiane may have been among the factors giving rise to the contemporary Lao reputation for placidity.

Historically, severe competition has not been required on the ecological level, status being gained for the most part through inheritance rather than achieved through hard work. Even individuals who have risen in the hierarchy are said to have done so not through personal qualities of application and persistence but as a result of inherent merit. This is connected with the belief in incarnation and to the ideal objective of acquiring enough merit to lead to a better rebirth. Such merit is not obtained by competitive action but through generosity and good deeds. Admittedly this is an idealized description, but acclaim does not go to the person who has achieved a position or fortune by hard work, but to a pious individual who has maintained good social relationships.

Prince Souphanouvong has gained support among the people by citing the privations his communist soldiers have undergone rather than by emphasizing their military successes.

Lao parents, particularly those living in or near urban areas, would like their children to become officials. They do not regard this as a goal for which their children must strive, with the help of parental sacrifice. Rather, they view the realization of their wishes as resting upon the merit inherent in the individual child. There is no thought of forcing events.

It is against this background that the interrelationships between the elite and their subordinates must be viewed. There is a lack of compulsion, striving, and urgency. During the summer of 1959, when North Vietnamese troops were reported to be invading the Provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, an American Embassy official remarked that he would be working in his office day and night throughout the crisis period. That evening one could hear the hum of generators supplying current to the American Embassy. There were lights on in the building and many cars parked outside. In contrast, the Lao Foreign Ministry was quiet and completely dark.

There is also a strong element of fatalism in Lao character. A Lao diplomat reacted in this way to the escape of Pathet Lao leaders from jail: "We are merciful. We let them go...; but you wait, they will come back and kill us." The Secretary to

the Cabinet, later to become a CDNI leader and hold several ministerial posts, was quoted in 1957 as saying, "I am pessimistic about the future. The Communists are too strong and hold their strength too ruthlessly."⁴² Combined with this has been an implicit inferiority complex summed up in the phrase "children of the French peace," which has been used by the Lao to refer to the period of French rule.⁴³

Attitudes and relationships are further illustrated by the following incident. In 1959 a group of Lao teachers returned from a Fundamental Education center in Thailand where they had studied techniques for working with rural people. They were to go to Lao villages and put their training into effect, and the European advisor connected with the program suggested that headquarters for the project be established in a roadless village some sixty miles from Vientiane. The senior responsible official in the Ministry of Education agreed, but the teachers wanted to remain near the capital and protested the decision. The official reversed himself, and the project was set up on the outskirts of town.

There is nothing remarkable in being reluctant to leave the capital city of an underdeveloped country; what is interesting is the way in which the change was brought about. Initially, after learning of the advisor's choice of locale, the teachers wrote, over his head, to the Minister of Education and to the Prime Minister. The senior official then

called to assure them that they would be provided with good housing and furniture and permitted to return to Vientiane at frequent intervals if they accepted the original proposal. The young teachers were not satisfied. Pressure was brought to bear, and the official himself reversed the decision over the objections of the European advisor.

It is significant that the teachers did not feel constrained to obey the order of their superiors. This behavior was closely tied to the strong recreational values in Lao culture, since some of the teachers had acquired small cars as a result of their stay in Thailand. (The living stipends of their American aid scholarships were generous, and by not using all the funds for the study and travel purposes for which they were intended they saved enough to buy cars. Similar practices were followed by army officers sent abroad for training programs.)

A lack of urgency and a pattern of flexibility are also characteristic:

After an invasion of Sam Neua, Lao paratroopers announced that they expected to be dropped near the target and would not march through the jungle like common infantry.

Any visitor to the Vientiane market can note women coming to shop in dozens of police and military jeeps. Many Lao villagers can be seen wearing parts of military uniforms. An American official associated with the military aid program

suggested that this was to compensate the soldiers for lack of other social benefits such as housing. Even by Lao rural standards, housing of the lower ranking military and their dependents leaves much to be desired. By contrast, the local provincial commanders, as well as many high-ranking officers in the capital, live rent free in government-provided residences. Rigid organizational methods appear to be foreign to the Lao administration and army, and flexibility in the social pattern can be clearly seen in the care and maintenance of equipment.

Although such practices doubtless outraged American officials who have tried unsuccessfully to alter them, they are still functional in that they may help allay discontent felt by lower-ranking officers who see their field-grade commanders ensconced in government-supplied villas.

Of course it is possible to carry such interpretations too far, and this reasoning cannot be applied to the private sale of military supplies. But such behavior cannot be viewed simply as corruption. Certainly the uses of PX's in our own culture has certain parallels, as has the use of enlisted men as servants for officers in the American Armed Forces. Rewards for military service can be found in the Lao Army even at the lowest level. One Khmu tribesman explained that he was very glad his son was in the army because an officer liked his son

more precisely, doing something in a pleasant way. A few years ago the provincial representative of the American aid program in one of the southern towns of Laos was summoned by the governor to a special meeting. It was held at the local Cercle, or Social Club, a direct inheritance from the days of French rule. Although somewhat surprised at the meeting place the American quickly reviewed the projects he had hopes of implementing and arrived at the meeting to face an impressive gathering of all the local and provincial officials. They were seated around a conference table with note pads in front of them, and the meeting solemnly proceeded with the election of club officers. Finally the governor rose to make an announcement, prefaced by a friendly welcome to the American. At this point he handed over a catalog from a Chicago mail order firm, on which the illustration of a deluxe pool table had been encircled. Attached was a formal government request, typed in the usual number of copies. "And would it be possible," the governor inquired, "for it to be sent by air freight?" It was with considerable difficulty that the American was able to explain why he did not think their proposal would meet with an enthusiastic reception at the aid mission's headquarters in Vientiana.

Implicitly at least, the Lao elite recognize their inability to survive without foreign assistance. This assistance, as well as the presence of foreign experts, does not appear

to be resented on the personal or the political level. When there have been objections they have usually been of policies rather than individual foreigners. Shortly before his death late in 1959, Katay Don Sasorith, the Deputy Premier, publicly criticized the American aid program for what he claimed was failure to pay the police on time. He added that when the French were in power they had always met their payroll promptly. Even the head of the Santiphab Party suggested that dishonest Lao officials be fired, and if necessary replaced by foreign technicians, Americans or French. Anyone who objected, he said, would be guilty of misplaced nationalism.

While the Lao are neither passionately nationalistic nor militantly anti-foreign in their outlook, they still reflect certain aspects of nationalist feeling in the relationships the elite maintain with the lower-echelon bureaucracy. The flexibility noted above is a characteristic common to many newly sovereign states. The elite are often rather tolerant of their bureaucrats--that is, strictness and discipline are frequently associated with the way in which the previous colonial government was run. In Laos this feeling is deeply engrained. After independence, the lack of rigid restrictions tended to reduce friction within the bureaucracy.

Despite the loosely structured nature of the Lao elite the amount of flexibility is finite. There is no easy or complete explanation for the coup d'état led by Captain Kong Le,

although a number of the motivating factors are obvious. Reportedly he is a Kha from the Province of Savannakhet, born in 1925, and married to a niece of a prominent Royal Lao Army general.⁴⁵ He has studied English and French, and in 1957 attended a Scout Ranger training course in the Philippines. Although all these characteristics place him in the category of an emerging young elite, some idea of his purpose is provided in speeches he gave when first assuming power:

What leads us to carry out this revolution is our desire to stop the bloody civil war, eliminate grasping public servants, carry out inquiries on military commanders and officials whose property amounts to much more than their monthly salaries can afford, and chase away foreign armed forces as soon as possible...

It is the Americans who have bought government officials and army commanders, and caused civil war and dissention in our country. The government officials have massacred, arrested, and imprisoned patriotic Laotians and have appropriated U.S. dollars. Patriotic and peace-loving Laotians must understand that as long as the above government officials assume leadership of the country, there cannot be peace but endless war, our race will perhaps degenerate, and the people will perhaps die instead of these officials. For this reason, all Laotians must remain wide awake and not allow themselves to be led like ignoramuses. We must help each other drive these sellers of the fatherland out of the country as soon as possible. Only then can our country live in peace.⁴⁶

It would seem that this coup is, above all, evidence of the failure of the CDNI to institute real reform, and of the incapability of the traditional elite to serve primarily as

a leadership group rather than as an association for the promotion of their single group interest.

Like many Lao leaders, Kong Le wishes for a policy of neutralism and reform:

All previous governments declared they had adopted neutralism, but I never saw them applying it. The time has come to put an end to this policy and to declare that Laos will remain neutral, that is, it will become neither pro-communist nor pro-capitalist... I support the Throne but I oppose corruption and persons who live on the sweat of others.⁴⁷

Because of the externalization of all Lao politics neutralism has proven impossible, and so Kong Le and Souvanna Phouma, whom he restored to power, together with their associates moved toward the side of the Pathet Lao.

Various unconfirmed reports have attributed this coup to French inspired efforts which got out of hand. Souvanna Phouma, in the early days of the coup before fleeing to Cambodia in December, 1960, regarded Kong Le as something of an upstart who, although admirably motivated, did not have a clear conception of authority. Certainly Kong Le's action in returning Souvanna Phouma to power showed that he did not feel himself capable of assuming control. Here was a case of reaction to a situation rather than clearly envisioning an alternative. In a sense the American decision to support the Savannakhet government of Prince Boun Oum and General Phoumi Nosavan removed whatever alternative may have been possible

to Kong Le and Souvanna Phouma and in this sense forced their closer alliance with the Pathet Lao.

These political developments have served to underline the inherent inability of the Royal Government and its associated reform groups to develop a dynamic ideology that might command the younger elite who look to the future. Kong Le's anti-Americanism provides a convenient focus for his frustrations which were accentuated and abetted but certainly not caused by the American aid program. The traditional value system has been vitiated by French rule and by sudden emergence into a secular world society of which the American aid program was only one manifestation. The late Prince Phetsarath remarked, "Our young men now value money more than honor." Kong Le was in a sense a young man searching for honor, but support of the Throne or for that matter of Buddhism did not fulfill his implicit lack of a code of honor. The Pathet Lao, despite their ties with the North Vietnamese, then provided the only ideological alternative.

Officials and the Rural Population

At the time of the arrival of the French, the highest ranking royal officials of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang dwelt in wooden-planked traditional style houses; there was nothing approaching palaces in the European sense. The present palace

in Luang Prabang was built by the French for King Sisavang Vong. It is true that early in the 19th century the King of Vientiane is said to have had an elaborate court, within a walled town, but this must be viewed in context: Laos at no time in her history consisted of more than a few petty kingdoms which were marginal to the states of the Khmers in Cambodia, to the Thai in Ayut'ia and to Annam in Vietnam; these in turn were to a great extent derivative from the great centers of civilization in China and India. Laos was then, and to some extent still is, doubly marginal with respect to Indian and Chinese civilization and to Thai culture.

The urban population of Laos has never been very large. Generous estimates for Vientiane today would be 70,000, and for Luang Prabang, which has been fairly stable, 10,000. These figures include a number of predominantly rural suburbs and a good proportion of the urban population consists, as has been pointed out, of Chinese, Vietnamese, Indians, and Europeans. In defining the elite we emphasized that although their standard of living has increased disproportionately to that of the peasantry in recent years, it still remains modest when compared to that of the neighboring countries. In other words, on a material basis alone, the separation between elite and peasantry never has been and is not now very great, viewed in world perspective. A brief walk from the heart of Vientiane or Luang Pragang soon brings one into villages and rice fields.

The elite owned rural land which they rented out, but the extent of their individual holdings rarely exceeded a few hundred acres. These holdings were very few in number, limited mostly to the royal family or descendants of local princes. Tremendous inequalities of wealth did not exist, perhaps in part because the economy was not sufficiently productive to permit vast accumulations of capital. Small land holdings are still owned by a few elite today and there are no formal limitations on size.

Almost all the elite of the older generation have considerable acquaintance with rural areas. Aside from Vientiane and four main provincial capitals, all the other towns of Laos are essentially large villages with a few stores and administrative buildings, often of wood and bamboo construction, where most of the inhabitants are farmers. The majority of the older elite who served as provincial and frequently as district officials found it impossible to avoid direct contacts with villagers. (Admittedly, in the enlarged government structure of present-day Vientiane it is possible for an official to have relatively little contact with rural people, especially if he does not have to do much traveling.) Particularly in the case of titled individuals social contact was within the context of formalized relationships. These have not completely disappeared.

In 1957 the writer made a trip with the late Viceroy. Most of the accompanying officials and especially the villagers always spoke to Prince Phetsarath from a squatting position. At each village a ceremonial welcome was prepared. The entire village population squatted with heads bowed, forming long parallel reception lines. This does not necessarily imply fear or awe of royalty, for although the villagers approached the Prince on bended knees, once he settled down in his especially prepared quarters in the village, everyone went about his normal activities, including bathing and eating, often in full view of him.

Ceremonial isolation can be extensive in Lao society, however. Neither King Savang Vatthana nor his father ever traveled very much in rural areas, but whenever they did they were always accompanied by a retinue, and their trips occasioned formal ceremonies.

An official such as a provincial governor may make a formal trip involving elaborate ceremonials, or he can go visiting in villages privately with relatively little formal ceremony. On one occasion when the sons of the Crown Prince (now the King) were home on summer vacation from universities in France, they attended a festival in a village about ten miles from Luang Prabang. Although restrained in their behavior, not completely at ease in the village, and treated with some deference, they danced with local girls and one of them

even performed with the village musicians. The following day, returning to the royal capital by pirogue, they stopped at another village to visit the home of a former servant and buy some melons from her. This incident does not, of course, indicate the absence of social distance but rather, in keeping with the general character of Lao society, that it is not rigidly interpreted.

Social distance is moderated in other ways as well. Humorous abuse of superiors is permitted on certain ceremonial occasions. For several days during the Lao New Years festival, water may be thrown at any and all, regardless of rank or position. In this way several foreign ambassadors were drenched, and a foreign photographer's camera was ruined. In Luang Prabang, on one afternoon during the week-long celebration, the governor dresses in old clothes and goes to a nearby island in the Mekong, joining villagers in throwing mud and water at one another. One year on this occasion he was playfully dumped into the river after being plastered with mud.

Horseplay is not limited to annual festivals, however. At a village ceremony for the dedication of a dam, two government ministers present got into a playful water fight with some of the village women, and a good time was had by all.

Due to the scattered distribution of the Lao population, lack of roads, and the mountainous terrain of much of the country, contacts between the elite or even lower echelon

officials and the Lao villagers are often extremely limited. Much of the informal interaction cited above is restricted to areas easily accessible to the major towns. In 1957, Lao villagers 30 miles from Luang Prabang and five miles off the road were unable to identify a picture of the Crown Prince or name any official of the government other than the King. In 1959, villagers on the outskirts of Vientiane did not know the name of the Premier nor had they ever seen the Crown Prince despite his frequent visits to Vientiane.

A recent survey disclosed that the late King, who had reigned for 56 years, was known by name to only 34 percent of the population interviewed in Vientiane, 32 percent in provincial capitals, and 19 percent in the villages sampled. The present King, who fulfilled the numerous public ceremonial functions of the monarchy for years before his father's death, was known to three, six, and four percent, respectively. The Prime Minister at the time of the survey was familiar to 29, 22, and six percent, respectively.⁴⁸

Much of the contact between the members of the elite and the villagers is conditioned by traditional factors. In the cases of pro-government deputies, politicians have built up followings based on the granting of personal favors, vaguely reminiscent of old-time American political machines and so-called pork barrel public works projects, and more closely approximating patterns of the nobility but without their

executive powers. The deputy placed himself in the position of protector, a direct intermediary between the villagers and the relatively impersonal and faceless government. In many cases peasants are aware of the government only through the deputies and local officials who have visited their villages.

It has usually been these deputies, rather than the local officials, who have been able to undertake any meaningful action as far as villagers are concerned. For the most part only a one-way channel of communication has existed: the deputies would try to persuade the villagers to be sympathetic to their point of view by the dispensation of gifts and favors as a way of buying support, and occasionally they would aid in crisis situations. These activities have been particularly pronounced at election time. Government ministers, deputies, and candidates have toured the countryside making donations to local pagodas and distributing old clothes to villagers, after first having received formal ceremonial welcomes. Others have presented motion pictures produced by the United States Information Agency, largely to attract attention and to amuse the villagers, many of whom had not seen movies before. Many of the newsreels of political and social life, particularly in Vientiane, have attempted to convey specific information on government officials, the participation of Laos in international politics, the army, and rural aid. Still, the films functioned chiefly as entertainment, especially

when shown at a pagoda festival. They have often been touted as the personal property of the individual politician as his contribution to the festivities. While they may have effectively conveyed their themes in a subtle way, one of the dominant impressions remaining in the minds of the villagers is that "X came to our village and showed us his films."

When a group of villagers' homes were destroyed by fire, they trekked several hundred miles to Vientiane to call on their deputy. In his role of social protector, he provided them with some cash to rebuild their village, and his wife went out and bought clothes for the women and children. Such activities appear to have had their parallels in the days of the traditional monarchies, when absolute rulers provided assistance to their people in time of need in return for personal allegiance and service in wartime.

The government's efforts in the field of rural aid have often been converted to individual political purposes. One official attempted to have several wells drilled in his area at election time. Another wanted a bridge to connect his native village with the main highway. In a third case villagers obtained a school by a personal petition to their deputy who was also an influential minister. The activities of Prince Phetsarath are also in this tradition, although in his case he used personal funds rather than those of the government. For

example, he purchased agricultural implements, improved seed potatoes, Hampshire hogs, and Leghorn chickens and distributed them to the villagers.

These types of activities have not been limited to the elite, for similar attitudes are also taken by lower-echelon members of the bureaucracy. That is, programs of government assistance are presented as grants of individual largesse. Villagers appear to have been conditioned (at least in recent years) to accepting aid from the government without feelings of reciprocal responsibility. Groups of villagers are often asked how the government can help them. The most frequent response is requests for improvement or maintenance of the village pagoda, and the largest amount of aid under a recent government program was allocated for this purpose, as opposed to schools, dams, wells, or roads. In other cases, aid has been allocated to villages as part of programs planned without consulting the local people. This has been the case with numerous schools, dams, and meeting halls, which the villagers regard as government property having little relation to their own lives. While they may make some use of these facilities, the local people have often shown a pronounced unwillingness to maintain them.

The younger elite have shown an increasing tendency to act through an organization rather than as individuals. Support by the CDNI of the rural medical activities of

Operation Brotherhood, channeled through the Junior Chamber of Commerce, has been noted. The young elite also endorse the work of the Lao Red Cross, the Civic Action program, and the Lao Women's Association.

The now defunct Civic Action program had many weaknesses but was interesting as an emerging type of social structure guided by young elite. It was a crash-type program modeled on a similar organization in South Vietnam which was active in resettling refugees from the north. Led by a Lao army colonel and financially supported by United States military and economic aid agencies, groups of young men, mostly soldiers, were selected for six-week courses designed to make them "experts" in education, agriculture, health, and propaganda. Then they were sent out to work in the villages giving advice and instruction, distributing medicine and agricultural equipment, and showing films. Not too surprisingly, the program, which operated during 1957-1958, was strongly resented by the Ministries of Education, Health, and Agriculture who were not asked to cooperate.

By mid-1959 it was being replaced by another called "Teams of Six," the ultimate objective of which was to have teams of experts operating in each of the 600 tassengs of the Kingdom. These teams were similar in composition to those of the Civic Action program and were under the command of a colonel in the Psychological Warfare branch of the army.

A visit in the summer of 1959 to a Civic Action model village about twenty miles from Vientiane was revealing. On the main road was a brightly lettered sign pointing toward the village, and after turning off to the village trail the traveler was inspired by further signs every few kilometers. In the village it was apparent that attempts had been made to pave the lanes, but these efforts had been largely obliterated during the rainy season. The model sector consisted of a fenced-in compound at the edge of the village, within which was a new concrete well, a school, a hall, and a first-aid station, in addition to living quarters for the Civic Action personnel and a flower and vegetable garden which they tended. On the day of the visit, the Civic Action people were all away, but several of the village elders were happy to chat about the project. They said they were not consulted about the location of the new facilities, nor did they request them. The man who owned the land on which the buildings were erected said he was informed by the officials that if the project proved to be a success he would be paid in a few years; otherwise the land would be returned to him.

The villagers did use the new well, but there appeared to exist the sentiment that the original well on the property had been taken away from its owner and that the new well did not belong to anyone. The village children used the new school, but the villagers spoke of erecting their "own" school nearer

the village pagoda. None of the villagers appeared to have participated in the construction of the new buildings which, they said, were erected by hired labor brought in from town.

Other Civic Action activities have included courses of approximately one month's duration for all district chiefs, followed by a period which they spent in other parts of the country in order to gain perspective on national as opposed to local problems. There have also been rural development conferences for provincial governors. Less intensive courses have been given to district and village chiefs, the latter being villagers while the former are permanent civil servants. Some of these courses have been presented in a purely formal manner with compulsory attendance and ritual-like recital of government regulations. Language has been a problem, particularly in tribal areas.

In 1960 the American aid mission's rural affairs program supported the Lao Ministry of Rural Affairs in establishing Provincial Development Councils which passed on schemes proposed by villages. According to one source, 5,000 village proposals were considered, of which 1,466 were assisted. These schemes were supposedly carefully documented, giving the total cost of the projects and the amount of aid required. In one case cited, of the total cost of 70,000 kip for a school, the villagers were to provide 49,000 kip in labor and basic materials and the American aid program was to donate 21,000

for galvanized roofing and other items. An American official estimated that the program reached 8,500 of the 10,000 villages of Laos.

One-week training sessions were held for tassengs, including lectures on what could be done in the way of village development and how villagers could go about getting assistance. In 1961 it was hoped to start the formation of Development Councils in 64 Muongs and by 1965 to have them operating at the tasseng level and eventually in the villages.⁴⁹ Undoubtedly this program, if implemented as described, had the potential of greatly strengthening governmental ties with the rural population.⁵⁰

But it came too late. While detailed information is not available, the program has undoubtedly been completely disrupted by the 1960-1961 civil war, and with de facto occupation by the Pathet Lao of a major portion of Laos its operation has been destroyed or at best severely limited. Had a program of this sort been in effect five years previously it might have had sufficient impact on the rural population to motivate the Royal Lao army to more strongly contest Pathet Lao advances.

The foregoing discussion presupposes that face-to-face contacts are the primary means of relaying information and conditioning attitudes. Implied is an absence of various types of modern communications and mass media. To a great extent this is borne out by the facts. In 1959 Laos had only

four radio sets per 1,000 population (compared to ratios of 45 for Thailand, 23 for South Vietnam, 20 for North Vietnam, three for Cambodia, and five for Burma).⁵¹ Since electricity is non-existent in almost all villages and battery sets require replacements and an initial large cash expenditure, it can be safely assumed that the overwhelming majority of these radios are in urban areas and in many cases owned by Chinese and Vietnamese merchants and craftsmen. Transistor radios have recently appeared on the Lao market (they are a popular item with the military) and the Vientiane radio station has increased its power. Even if the radio station has survived the recent fighting and transistor radios are available cheaply it will be a long time before radio exerts significant impact on rural Laos. One observer reports, however, that in 1959 Royal Lao army officers listened regularly to Lao language broadcasts of Radio Hanoi, which transmitted in Lao at the rate of 17½ hours a week. The reception was also much better in mountainous areas.⁵²

Motion pictures have tremendous potential, and the major towns have theaters. In Vientiane and Luang Prabang there are theaters equipped for cinemascope projection. Like radio listening, motion picture attendance is limited largely to townspeople, particularly younger ones. During the past several years the films produced by the United States Information Service in cooperation with the Lao Information Service

have been shown in the theaters as well as by mobile teams traveling in the countryside. It is not clear how effective a medium of communication they have been for the elite, and, as has been brought out, the films are often received as entertainment in rural areas, competing for attention with lam vong dancing and other diversions. To the extent that the viewers relate themselves to the films, it is quite possible for reactions to be negative. A film short on the work of the Lao Veterinary Service emphasizing experiments in poultry breeding was interpreted by some villagers as meaning that the rich townspeople enjoyed the plump chickens for themselves.

A traditional technique has been used in the form of teams of mo lam singers (a type of folk repartee which originated in Northeast Thailand) which were sent into villages to publicize various aid projects. They often performed in conjunction with showing USIS films and were also used by Operation Brotherhood.

As to printed materials, in 1959 Laos was estimated to have 18 library books per 1,000 population (compared to 401 for Thailand and 75 for Cambodia). There were three daily newspapers with a total circulation of approximately 3,000, and the newsprint consumption per inhabitant per year amounted to .07 kilograms (compared to .7 for Thailand, .5 for South Vietnam, and .3 for Cambodia).⁵³ Correlated with these statistics is the highest illiteracy rate in Southeast Asia

(85 percent, contrasting with 50 percent for Thailand, 45 percent for South Vietnam, and 65 percent for Cambodia).⁵⁴ Laos also has the smallest primary school attendance per 1,000 population, with a figure of 57 (Cambodia has 95 and Thailand 149).

Although printed material as such is limited largely to the better educated segment of the urban population, the United States Information Service, again in cooperation with the Lao government, has printed tens of thousands of posters of the late King and distributed them widely throughout the country. These are appreciated by the valley Lao and have been hung in places of honor in their homes, since the picture is felt to have a certain degree of magical potency. A Lao language color map of Laos has also been widely distributed. However, the efficacy of a weekly Photo Sheet published in 22,000 copies, and the magazine Free World, published in the same number six times a year, is questionable. The Photo Sheets are seen in village homes, even in remote areas, but appear to function as decoration or to cover cracks. The language used in the Free World magazine is much too complex for the average villager.⁵⁵

It seems evident, then, that the only effective channel of communication between the Lao elite and the mass of the population, even in urban areas, is by word of mouth either through public speeches or personal contacts. This explains

much of the frantic traveling practiced by candidates at election time and by government officials concerned with subversion. But these efforts have had to cope with limited transportation facilities.

The Role of Religion in Government and Politics

Obviously Buddhism is one of the more important components of Lao culture, but its significance is easy to misunderstand, particularly on the contemporary scene. During the 1960-61 civil war in Laos, American newspapers tirelessly repeated the platitude that the Royal Lao army refused to fight because the Buddhist beliefs of the soldiers went against killing. Another theme was that the Lao were not likely to become communists because of their strong Buddhist beliefs. The latter point has also been stressed by a number of high Lao officials, usually for its favorable propaganda influence in the West. At best these attitudes are exaggerations. The actual position of Buddhism and the role of religious beliefs themselves is much more subtle and diffuse.

Basic to an understanding of the role of Buddhism and the sangha (Buddhist clergy) in politics and government is a knowledge of its structure and functions. The close relationship between government and clergy is formally defined. According to Article 7 of the Lao Constitution, Buddhism is

declared the state religion and the King its Grand Protector. A Royal Ordinance of May 25, 1959, set forth this relationship in great detail. Although it appears to have been promulgated in response to mounting unrest among the sangha, still it gives a picture of church-state relationships of more than momentary value.

The clergy is headed by a phra sang kharath who resides in the royal capital. The other grades parallel the administrative hierarchy, with a chao khana khoueng for the province, a chao khana muong for the district, a chao khana tasseng for each subdistrict, and a chao athikane wat for each pagoda. 56

Legally a new abbot of a pagoda is chosen by the local monks, the nai ban, and the village elders. The choice must be approved by the chao khana khoueng in consultation with the chao khoueng, who have authority to reject it and order a new election. This procedure continues up the scale with the government participating at all stages and implicitly having the right of veto. The phra sang kharath is to be chosen by a meeting of the chao khana khouengs from a list of candidates approved by the cabinet and presented by the Minister of Cults. Another important provision of these regulations is that all correspondence between the various administrative levels of the sangha must pass through official secular government channels.

At each level tribunals to enforce discipline were set up, consisting of the ranking religious and secular officials plus additional members of the laity and priesthood. For infractions of religious and civil codes a bonze can be defrocked and punished with from six months to two years in jail. Specifically mentioned in the law is prohibition of the use of opium or alcohol. An additional provision is that government permission be required for the construction of a new pagoda. Not all of these provisions are new but they indicate a continued government desire to exercise administrative control over the priesthood.

Unlike in the Christian clergy, it is not necessary to become a bonze for life. One's entry and exit from the sangha is completely at the discretion of the individual. There are a minimum of restrictions.⁵⁷ This attitude accords well with the emphasis on individual ethical responsibility, an important concept in Hinayana Buddhism.

The history of Europe is replete with examples of the political role of the clergy who at times concentrated political power in their own hands and at others shared it with the secular state. An analagous role has been impossible for the Buddhist clergy in Southeast Asia for at least two basic reasons. First, the Buddhist church possesses no properties of its own outside of the wat compound, and second, the composition of the sangha constantly changes.

The clergy is supported entirely by the voluntary donations of the laity. This includes food, which is contributed ritually every day at sunrise, as well as garments and other needs. In addition, it is the laity who are responsible for keeping the wat buildings in repair, although the monks occasionally participate in this work. Contrary to the usual western phrase the bonzes do not beg for contributions or charity; rather, it is considered a privilege to have the opportunity to give, since in this way boun or merit for a better rebirth is acquired.

Before considering the question of the political role of the priesthood in the light of current events in Laos, it is important to see how religion shapes Lao ethos. Hinayana Buddhism is the formal religion of less than half the population of Laos, limited to the ethnic Lao, some of the tribal Tai groups (some, like the Lu, still said to be in the process of missionization), and a few indigenous tribal groups who have adopted Buddhism to a certain extent as a result of efforts by the valley Lao. Important groups such as the Meo, Yao, and Tai Sam are not Buddhist.

Primarily in the rural areas but also persisting in the towns is a complex of beliefs involving the phi, spirits associated with various natural phenomenon, one's home, one's village, and manifestations of the deceased. There are also strong Brahministic influences interwoven with the monarchy

and the practice of Buddhism as it has developed in Laos. The Naga beliefs, for example, associated with the spirits of the river, is obviously part of an imported complex fused with traditional beliefs which themselves have been modified through time.

Although there are certain important differences between rural and urban manifestations of Buddhism, which will subsequently be explored, basic to both is a common set of shared principles.

Buddha's teachings have been summed up as: "To refrain from all evil, to do what is good, to purify the mind." This is elaborated in the Eight-fold Path:

1. Right understanding--of the cause for men's ills
2. Right thoughts--free from lust, ill-will, and cruelty
3. Right speech--that abstains from lying, tale-bearing, harsh or indecent language, and vain talk
4. Right action--that abstains from killing, stealing, unlawful sexual intercourse
5. Right livelihood--earning a living in a way that causes no harm to any living thing
6. Right effort--to avoid, overcome, develop, and discipline the impulses derived from the senses
7. Right mindfulness--contemplation, to know oneself and the world one lives in, so as to rightly understand both
8. Right concentration--to learn contemplation.

The Buddhist faith is implemented by accepting the Buddha, his dharma or Law, and the interpretations of the priestly

community. The theoretical and actual tolerance of Buddhism itself derives from the way in which Buddha presented his teachings. That is, he encouraged his disciples to question and find out for themselves rather than to follow blindly. Buddhism, then, does not regard itself as an exclusive faith with a prophet or prophets. Buddha regarded himself as a teacher whose discoveries would enable men to achieve better lives and ultimately peace. From its inception the individual sense of responsibility associated with Buddhism was profound. By understanding the laws one can find release from suffering. In Buddhist temples there are no objects of worship other than for the purpose of contemplation. A Buddhist comes before a shrine and attempts to find there a means to reflect on Buddha's teachings. These, then, are the ideal patterns.

Buddhism having developed in India, it was natural then that many Hindu concepts should have been retained, including the idea of transmigration of souls and of karma (the sum of good and bad deeds performed in previous lives). The doctrine of Buddha offers hope for escape from this otherwise inevitable cycle of rebirths, with its attachment to material things, in the form of attainment of Nirvana.

Historically Buddhism diverged into the Mahayana and Hinayana branches. In the former, activity formerly condemned is sanctified on condition that it is free of personal interests and is used for the salvation of others. Individual salvation

has value only if it contributes to universal salvation. Bodhi, the supreme knowledge which makes Buddhas, is then accessible to all, and the universe is filled with a multitude of Buddhas who are on the point of reaching Nirvana yet remain to save souls. By contrast the Hinayana ("Lesser Vehicle") doctrine of Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos considers the Buddha as a man, and stresses the role of the individual.

Buddhism was introduced into Laos in the 14th century by Khmer monks, who brought with them the Prabang statue of Buddha which subsequently became a most important symbol of Lao Buddhism. Under Chao Setthatirath, who ruled the Lao Kingdom of Lan Xang (1548-1571), with his capital at Vieng Chan (Vientiane), Buddhism prospered, and under Souligna Vongsa the first Buddhist schools were established. In 1778 the Thai captured Vientiane and took with them to Bangkok the sacred Emerald Buddha (reportedly obtained by the Lao earlier, from Chieng Mai).

The basis of the religious literature of Laos is the Tripitaka or "Three Baskets," one of which, the Vinaya, sets forth the rules of monastic life. Others give the list of daily obligations, illustrated by examples from the life of Buddha. The Jatakas, or collection of tales about the former lives of Buddha, is an important part of this literature. These combine moral and satirical tales and parables in which

Buddha appears in turns as ascetic, king, scholar, courtier, brahman, merchant, landlord, slave, potter, woodcutter, thief, actor, student, or sometimes as an animal such as serpent, lizard, bull, pig, or dog, proving an example of how, in all aspects of creation, one can realize perfection in oneself and serve the collective interests of the universe.

Thao Nhouy Abhay depicts in somewhat romantic although sincere terms the impact of Buddhist doctrine on the Lao of his youth, presented below in slightly condensed form: ⁵⁹

We heard our fathers repeating all day long that life is suffering, that nothing belongs to us, that this present existence is only one among a thousand others, that we were reaping the fruit of our past actions in former lives, that death could overtake us unexpectedly at any moment and that our salvation depended on ourselves alone. And then our fathers enjoined us to be humble and gentle, kind, just and charitable.

"To do charity" is hed boun,...and the best of good deeds is a religious act....

...Since childhood we were taught to walk around the temples, with flowers and candles in hand; as soon as we were able to talk, we, as well as our sisters and friends, pledged ourselves to offer our hair, our bones, our body and our hearts; following the tradition of our elders and mothers, we never dared to soil the floor of the temples, nor even dig the smallest hole in it.

By constantly hearing and repeating the Precepts in Pali, we would come to know them by ear, keenly impatient to hear our mothers repeating them to us as soon as we became monks, since we were told that such action was a source of great merits....

...as with the Roman Catholic Church's festivals which are accompanied by profane rejoicings...so are our ceremonies celebrated in temples preceded

or followed by demonstrations of our attachment to life: songs and Courts of Love, musical performances and sometimes banquets.

Whoever sees only one aspect of such festivals is making a mistake: the deep devotion of the Lao people dominates both the most profane rejoicings and the loftiest of religious ceremonies.

The Lao has given himself heart and soul to the Good Law.

To be convinced of this fact, it is only necessary to observe the imperviousness of the population to any new religious doctrine.

[But] the Lao is tolerant, a tolerance sometimes verging on indifference....

...As an image of the Buddha, the monk is respected and revered; everyone prostrates before him and no one doubts his good faith. No one dares accuse or even criticize him, since none of us has any idea of the extent of his knowledge....

...In this country a gentleman is one who 'listens to the monk's advice.' Every Lao grows up under the supervision of a monk, his khru, who even after leaving the pagoda will remain his guide and friend, his counsellor and sometimes his confidant. Blessed is the Lao who has a male child; he can then organize a ceremony of ordination and offer him as a disciple to Buddha.

In the autumn of life, every Lao seeks refuge in the [pagoda]. Every Lao tries to find solace in the atonement for his past mistakes. Through meditation everyone prepares himself for his death to come.

These have been the idealized traditional patterns sanctified in the yearly cycle of Buddhist festivals. On the rural level the annual cycle of festivals serves to reinforce the reciprocal relationships between the villagers and the monks and maintains Buddhism as one of the central focii of Lao

culture. It lends both variety and meaning to villagers' lives.

In urban areas Buddhism continues to have some of the same functions but also takes on a number of qualitatively different roles related to the nature of the towns themselves. Vientiane and Luang Prabang have historically functioned mainly as the administrative and religious centers, respectively, or, to state the situation from another point of view, the focii of administrative ritual and religious administration.

The relationship between Buddhism and the state is stressed on almost all public occasions, one of the most important of these being the That Luang Festival in Vientiane during the 12th month of the Lao calendar (approximately November). Originally this was a ceremony oriented toward the Kingdom of Vientiane as reflected in the oath taken by the officials following prayers recited by the monks:

We, Chao Muongs, Mandarins, Tassengs and Nai Bans of Vientiane, Borkihane, Tura-khom, and Vang-Vieng Districts, take the solemn oath of loyalty to His Majesty our August Sovereign. We swear to perform our duties and services loyally and to the best of our abilities...

Should one of us not keep this oath, let him be punished and may the following curses be cast upon him...

But should we, on the contrary, remain loyal, faithful and devoted, our happiness will increase and all misfortunes shall be spared us. May we then become rich so that we can give alms without restraint.⁶⁰

Today the That Luang festival lasts six days and includes a boun for the Simuong pagoda, and a large trade fair. In addition to monks, the King and officials of the army, youth groups, and diplomatic corps also take part. This festival combines ceremonially all the various levels of government--the monarchy, the hereditary prince of the south, the elected representatives, the army--and the civilian bureaucracy. In addition to visiting the pagodas the King also gives his official sanction to commerce by inspecting the exposition booths. At the conclusion of the festival the Minister of Economy awards medals to certain exhibitors. This is followed by a final procession of the monks and then fireworks.

The Lao New Year celebration in Luang Prabang in April serves a similar function. Here the emphasis is again local, with ceremonies focusing around the statue of the Prabang. Royalty, members of the Assembly, civil servants, the army, and the diplomatic corps again participate. There is a small exposition of local crafts. The Buddhist nature of the government is again strongly affirmed. Not only the King, but members of the National Assembly and high officials all take turns anointing the Prabang with holy water.

Tribute is paid to the ancestral dieties of Luang Prabang with the ritual dance of the Phou Gneu Gna Gneu, representing the first Lao man and woman and their son, the Lion. This ceremony, held at Wat Visoun, is concluded when all three

dancers bow to the King, to present him with the best wishes of all Lao past, present, and future. The close ties between the monarchy and the clergy are further emphasized during this festival when the bonzes go in procession to the Royal Palace to partake of a meal provided by the King and Queen.

The interplay of sacred Buddhist influences, traditional governmental organization, and western-derived ideas are thus clearly seen in Lao ceremonial life. Also indicative of this relationship was the elaborate celebration of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in Luang Prabang in 1957. The population of the town generously contributed time and money to build a monument to surround a Bodhi tree sent for the occasion from India. The celebration itself, however, was organized by the government, with the elite and representatives of Asian Buddhist countries participating extensively. In all these celebrations the key role is played by the King (or, as had been the case for several years prior to the infirm late King's death, the Crown Prince). The monks were distinct but secondary. In essence these have been sacred ceremonials emphasizing the piety of the royal family.

National Independence Day (July 19th) and Constitution Day (May 11th) as celebrated in Luang Prabang provide examples of secular holidays in which a representative of the royal family participates symbolically, but the active role is taken by the governor. The clergy lend support by offering prayers,

and sometimes the ceremonies take place on the grounds of a pagoda. By contrast, completely secular ceremonies in which the clergy does not participate include occasions such as school graduations, youth conferences, United Nations Day, or World Health Day. It often appears that the King or his official representative participated formally only on those occasions sanctified by the presence of the priesthood. Important exceptions would be reviewing the army or other national secularly-organized groups, such as the scouts. On some occasions, however, the monks bless the troops by offering prayers and aprinkling water on them; there is, however, no equivalent of a military chaplain. Organizations such as the local Cercle social clubs, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, the Lao Red Cross, the League of Lao Women, and the major political parties appear to be largely if not entirely secular in outlook.⁶¹

Unlike Burma there has not been a formal Buddhist layman's association in Laos; perhaps this is because the former is officially a secular state.

In the past few years and particularly during crucial periods of the 1960-1961 civil war, many western correspondents have reported bemusedly the strong emphasis by the Royal Lao government on holidays and ceremonies such as Lao Army Day, New Years, and the cremation of the late King. The latter, particularly, was emphasized, supposedly as a means of bringing

hostile factions together.

In European cultures in times of war there is a tendency to minimize elaborate ceremonial display and to concentrate on the pursuit of victory. It does seem possible that implicitly if not explicitly ceremonial occasions in Laos have been given increased symbolic value by the Lao. Faced with uncertain western allies, an enemy supported by the feared Vietnamese and explicitly but not actively by the vast country of China, the futility of a relentlessly pursued struggle may seem obvious. Therefore, there is much psychological comfort to be derived from emphasis on traditions, and while the covert functions of these traditions have largely disappeared a potent symbolic value remains. Both Buddhism and the monarchy have become progressively less important forces in Lao culture, and instead of supporting each other they have become, to a certain extent, mutually antagonistic. All the more reason, implicitly, to maintain the symbolic facade of unity. The monarchy and the associated elite as well seek the formal ceremonial sanctions of the clergy. The power base of the traditional elite is in the process of being destroyed; a rational solution to the dilemma is not possible and therefore, in desperation (in terms of Lao culture), attempts are made to emphasize the traditions of the past as well as to incorporate new influences into the old ceremonial pattern. Should the Communists assume control, it would appear unlikely that they would have

the priesthood participating in, e.g., a May Day parade.

Returning at this point to a discussion of the possibility of the Sangha assuming an active political role, it is important to recognize that a close symbiotic relationship between church and state can exist and at the same time that too direct participation in politics would tend to secularize the priesthood.⁶² If an individual wishes to assume secular power he leaves the priesthood. If an official wishes to increase his stature or retire temporarily from the political arena, he becomes a bonze for a time. Both types of behavior are common. Examples of the first are provided by the Santiphab candidates in the 1958 elections, some of whom had served as monks for as long as twenty years and in some cases had attained the rank of Maha. After leaving the priesthood a number became merchants. On the other hand, it is not at all unusual for Lao officials to become monks for brief periods. During the 2500th Anniversary of Buddhism the normal operations of the town practically came to a halt because so many officials decided at that time to become monks. These included, among others, the local chief of police and the army commander. Another example is provided by the late Viceroy, who became a monk and retired to a forest cave to meditate, after he returned from his education in France. One point seems clear, however: although some Lao officials may temporarily enter the priesthood, no long-term monks have come to play an important role in Lao politics either among the

Pathet Lao or the royal government. Characteristically, ex-monks in the Santiphab have occupied a marginal position in Lao politics.

This does not mean that the sangha does not have an important political potential, as has become increasingly evident within the past few years.

Underlying tensions came into the open in February, 1960, when a group of monks demonstrated in Vientiane against the government, evidently in protest against the transfer of a teacher "for administrative reasons"--i.e., anti-government activity. The pro-government newspaper L'Independent representing the traditional elite expressed chagrin and shock at this development. Hundreds of bonzes carrying placards and streamers "for the first time in the history of the kingdom, vigorously called for the complete autonomy of the clergy in all fields." Stressing its upper-class prejudices the paper referred to the gathering as a workers' type of demonstration and emphasized that such behavior went against the admonition of Buddha on the use of gestures and language. The article declared that the meeting was a result of communist infiltration among the young bonzes and concluded with the observation that the superior Buddhist clergy had been derelict in its duties and should in the future look after the bonzes more carefully. The necessity of firm government intervention was also stressed.

The Pathet Lao newspaper Lao Pak Xat came to the defense of the monks and accused the royal government of being "ring-leaders of the pro-American clique of reactionaries," and of misusing Buddhists to make propaganda for their reactionary policy. Lao Pak Xat said the bonzes

...have always been fervent believers. They are also patriots and peace-loving people anxious to see the country in peace so that Buddhism, the national religion, may flourish, and Buddhists may worship freely. The customs and constitution of Laos have always considered Buddhism as the national religion and the Buddhist monks as virtuous, patriotic, and peace-loving people who care for the moral life of the people. In the history of Laos, the Buddhist community has always kept its own internal organization managed by monks. Never have we seen such arbitrary measures as arresting and dismissing monks and setting up special "courts" run by the administration to try monks.

Almost all Buddhist monks have seen that the United States interventionists and their followers are actually those who have provoked the civil war, massacred the people, arrested and detained thousands of innocent people, and sown mourning and poverty everywhere, at complete variance with Buddha's preachings for fraternity, peace, and patriotism. That is why Buddhist monks in Laos have resolutely opposed the United States imperialists and their followers in order to defend the splendid morality of Buddhism, the independence of the motherland, and the peaceful life of the people. They are joining in the struggle for peace, neutrality, independence, unity, and prosperity of the country which they consider as fully corresponding to the teachings of Buddha and the supreme interests of the country and people.⁶³

Subsequently, this theme of "United States imperialists and their henchmen" as the true enemy of the Laotian people, Buddhism, peace, and morality, has been further developed. Bonzes and religious people have been called upon to safeguard "Buddhism and peace."

The attitude of the Pathet Lao toward Buddhism, as broadcast from North Vietnam and reflected in their newspaper in Laos, is obviously expedient. Yet it has undoubtedly been successful, despite the fact that directly across the border in Yunnan and North Vietnam, and even in the long-time centers of Pathet Lao power within Laos, monks have been persecuted, driven from their pagodas, and in some cases forced to work in the fields.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the royal government has taken suppressive measures against individuals in the clergy. This situation seems the more surprising in view of the great degree of participation by the King and many high Lao officials in Buddhist ceremonies. But in this case a distinction must be made between bonzes and the Buddhist doctrine.

There are several other explanations for this seeming paradox. When Nhouy Abhay wrote his article on Buddhism in Laos in 1956,⁶⁴ he saw Lao Buddhism in urgent need of reform. He depicted the monks as largely ignorant of Pali, and in some cases illiterate in Lao as well. Prayers were poorly known and the bonzes were lax in observance of the monastic rules. He claimed that reform was made difficult because of the Buddhist emphasis on individual salvation. His article contained a plea for leadership in religious affairs, to be exercised by a small group of enlightened monks who would, supported

by the laity, help to establish "a more learned, dignified, and austere clergy." Although it might be something of an overstatement to say that his warning, "we have made Buddhism a doctrine of apathy, which is leading us to our doom," has been fulfilled, yet it seems that the major forces in Laos--the traditional elite, the Pathet Lao, and the clergy themselves--have all contributed to a weakening of the moral influence of the sangha.

It does not appear, however, that any simple explanation can suffice. In part the explanation may be historical. Buddhism has usually tended, as has been pointed out previously, to prosper when aligned with a dynamic state, and Lao Buddhism is said to have reached its height in the 17th century, during which period many famous temples were built and "the monks were respected and well looked after, their morals were of a high standard, and they strictly adhered to the rules of the Community." The devastation of the Kingdom of Vientiane, attacks from Yunnan, and finally French colonization, all contributed to the decline of Lao Buddhism as a national institution. The French appear not to have interfered with the Buddhist church, and they even restored many national shrines, such as the That Luang, but their strong secular views inevitably had an impact on the emerging generations of Lao elite. Thus the wat, which formerly enjoyed a complete educational monopoly, was transformed into a minor

adjunct of the secular education system.

As with all aspects of Lao culture, Buddhism, too, is marginal to Thai culture. Those monks who have received any advanced training have had to secure it outside the country, largely in Thailand. Visitors from Thailand have remarked on the lack of sophistication of Lao monks.

Connected with this historically marginal position has been the extreme provincialism of the Buddhist monks. In conversations some naively inquired about the status of Buddhism in America, but generally there is no strong curiosity about other countries. There appears to be no felt link with Buddhists in other countries. They do not concern themselves with what is happening in China or Vietnam, and outside of a few abbots who showed interest in developments in Tibet and appeared to realize its implications, there was no widespread concern about the situation in that country. Neither did there seem to be evidence, despite the claims of the Pathet Lao, of consciousness of national unity or patriotism in any comprehensive sense. Unlike certain institutionalized religious systems, Buddhism--at least as it has developed in Laos--does not appear to involve itself directly with any kind of nationalistic movement. Again, the strong Buddhist ethic of individual responsibility doubtless plays a role in this respect.

Although little specific documentary data is available there is considerable inferential evidence to suggest that to some extent the priesthood and particularly the novices are inversely class-structured. The free schooling and boarding facilities are attractive to young people from impoverished homes. Further, a pagoda in the town often provides a convenient living place for the poor country boy. Children of the elite and officials appear to be universally enrolled in the secular school system. It appears that not a few youths have consciously used the priesthood as a means of securing an inexpensive education. Much of their concern seems to focus on the ways in which they might be able to supplement their limited religious-oriented learning. For example, many of the young bonzes show a great desire to learn English since they feel it will open up government jobs to them. At the same time they maintain strongly anti-American attitudes and also oppose the policies of the royal government in a general way. One prominent government minister complained of how he had been beseiged by young monks looking for jobs. They are not stimulated by their religious studies, lack strong discipline, and are keen on town life. It is not surprising that the Pathet Lao have seized upon these latent dissatisfactions.

The American aid program has also contributed to this situation. At one time being a bonze was a uniformly respected

career for a young man. Under the American aid program the army and police were very much built up. These forces received good pay and smart uniforms plus, in certain cases, access to supplies and/or to graft, thus increasing the potential income from the job. It has become possible even for young officers to acquire cars and other luxuries. The standard of living of the elite themselves, who have controlled the aid program, has also risen, creating a significant gap in standards of living within the Lao population which previously did not exist. Strongly influenced by a French-type education and a general secular background, many of the elite, particularly the younger ones, have become less devout Buddhists, so much so, in fact, that in 1959 the government issued an edict requiring officials to attend religious services at specified intervals. The Pathet Lao have entered this situation by professing their great piety and by regularly visiting wats and stressing the privations they have endured (while fighting the Royal Army). This approach has been well received by many of the monks, including some of the older ones. Sensing this development, the government has increased its formal restrictions on the priesthood, thereby intensifying the conflict situation.⁶⁵

An additional factor may have been the lack of Buddhist lay movements in Laos such as have existed in other countries of Southeast Asia. This type of organization might have

provided a moderating bridge between the government and the clergy. Perhaps the elite felt too insecure to sanction such a movement? Such groups, if they function well, can strengthen the historic relations between the sangha and the political authority, can facilitate social welfare programs for the government in the public interest, and can help meet the modern educational needs of Buddhist institutions (but they may also infringe upon the role of the priesthood or become factional interests in political affairs).

In different ways the royal government, unintentionally, and the Pathet Lao, subtly, have both been undermining the traditional religious system in attempting to use it for their respective political ends.

The Role of Women and Youth Groups

Both the Pathet Lao and young Lao government elite have accorded women a greater role of participation in public affairs than was formerly the case in traditional Lao society.

While the status of women in Lao culture has not been one of formal equality, still they enjoyed many rights and privileges which were denied women in other countries. They were never isolated in the home and often engaged in trade. They could inherit property and they shared many tasks with the men, since in many cases the division

of labor was not clearly defined. Women are the owners of a number of important businesses, and some of them even enter into supply contracts with the government. But women traditionally appear not to have held government offices or to have played prominent roles in ceremonial affairs.⁶⁶ In 1959 only one woman deputy (Pathet Lao) served in the National Assembly.

When foreigners observe the shy behavior of Lao women at formal western gatherings they often assume that they occupy an inferior position. Seeing them at home or in a village gives one quite a different impression.

Polygamy has existed in Laos. The practice was never widespread, however, and was limited largely to the national elite. The former King had a number of wives, while the present King has but one wife, as have all the high-ranking officials. Among the elite and urban population generally, the position of the second wife is unenviable, and those men who have two wives must maintain a separate household for each.

Among urban elite as well as villagers the Lao wife has considerable say in the management of the household budget. In many cases urban Lao turn over their salaries to their wives, who control the household accounts. This financial independence for women is indicated further by the fact that women as well as men can engage in gambling.

A few years ago the wife of a member of the elite created a scandal by going more than 1,000,000 kip into debt in this manner.

The national Lao Women's Association and its provincial affiliates (which are composed mainly of the wives of the elite) is perhaps symbolic of the new trend toward broader participation of women in public life and of the increasing importance of acting through groups. Several more prominent members are elementary school principals, representing about the highest administrative positions yet achieved by women in Laos. A number have studied abroad and attended international conferences. In addition to the increasing number of school teachers, women also work as clerks in offices and as nurses, and some of them participated in the Civic Action teams. A few are represented in profiles in Laos, a new Lao magazine on the pattern of Life. Some of these young women come from semi-rural backgrounds and are the daughters of farmers or of petty officials.

The Lao Women's Association is not a traditional feminist organization in terms of agitation for equality, since most Lao women do not consider themselves underprivileged. There has, however, been some attempt on the part of this organization to outlaw polygamy and legally ban prostitution, which has developed in Vientiane as part of the general urbanization of the administrative capital.

The Women's Association has provided emergency relief in case of fire disasters, offered public courses in hygiene and sanitation, and made some attempts at rural extension.

Youth groups include Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and there are girls' as well as boys' basketball and soccer teams. CDNI members have had a key role in organizing these groups, and there have been conventions and assemblies with provincial groups represented. There have been initial (though often clumsy) attempts to use them for political purposes by the CDNI, although no serious efforts have been made to use youth groups in rural development work. In some of the urban areas they have participated in such diverse projects as building schools and helping the local police direct traffic. During the conflict in Vientiane there was some evidence of communist use of youth groups in demonstrations. Groupings based on women and youth are of emerging importance in Laos.

Traditional Government

We have seen that of the former petty kingdoms, only that of Luang Prabang has continued to function, albeit in modified form, into the 20th century and up to the present. The structure of the kingdom as found by the French at the end of the 19th century derives originally from the Kingdom of Lan Xang (Kingdom of the Million

Elephants--1353-1707), with strong Indian influences as modified via transmittal through Cambodia. Over five hundred years before the arrival of the French the clear-cut hierarchical structure of the kingdom had crystallized.

Fa Ngoum, acknowledged as the founder of Lan Xang, was a son of an exiled Lao chief who had taken refuge at the court of Angkor. He was brought up there by a Buddhist monk. When he reached the age of sixteen the Khmer King gave him a daughter in marriage. Between 1340 and 1350 he organized and led an army which conquered part of his father's former territories. An important consequence of these events was that Sinhalese Buddhism and Khmer civilization, which previously had never penetrated beyond Vientiane, were introduced into northern Laos. In 1368 his Khmer wife died, and then began a series of debaucheries that led to his being deposed by his ministers and exiled in 1373.

At the time of his coronation he selected officials to carry out his directives. He specified those who would oversee his policies and named five in charge of the army, two of them to take command of the vanguard and two of the rearguard. Then he named those who would serve the palace. The provincial hierarchy was established, and the highest-ranking provincial official was specified, with five officials of decreasing rank under him. Finally, four high-

ranking officials were named for Lan Xang itself. To these officials he decreed:

You will attend to all the usual practices and administer justice in Lan Xang; see to it that there are no pirates, thieves, murderers, or rebels.

See to it that the masters are kind to their slaves, that they do not strike them but forgive them their evil ways.

If any chiefs or their children behave badly or are unjust, the chief who arrests them must submit them to the decision of other judges so that he himself may not be suspected of being unjust.

The guilty ones must be punished according to their offences and released from prison on the day fixed by the judge so that they may return to their families and try to live with them once again.

In the country there are rich and poor alike. Everyone must accept his station in life so that we may never have to condemn anyone to death.

If enemies from abroad form evil designs against the country, as soon as these things come to your knowledge give warning and do not keep such grave news to yourselves.

During the year send me reports on the state of affairs in your provinces and come to Xieng-Dong Xieng-Tong every three years to bring the taxes you have collected.

We offer thanks to...[Indra, the four Celestial Protectors of the country and the four Ancestors of the people].

We shall offer greetings to the guardian spirits ...and to them we shall sacrifice, upon arrival, the flesh of 36 buffalo.⁶⁷

Of the reign of Phya "Sam Sen Thai," son of Fa Ngoum, a French historian relates:

In 1376 King Sam-Sen-Thai (King of the 300,000 Thai) gave orders for a general census of the inhabitants

of Lan Xang. The results gave 300,000 "registered" Thais, not counting women, children, bonzes, foreigners, slaves, and Khas.

These folk then constituted a society grouped by families and divided into Nobles and Commoners. The Nobles were given certain privileges and helped to administer the kingdom, from the dignitaries who were princes of royal blood down to the simple officials who were responsible for collecting taxes, for assembling labor drafts, for transporting goods, etc.

In the provinces the heads of the Muongs were elected either from the Nobles or from the Commoners, but the choice of the electors generally fell on the son or some relative of the person who was to be replaced, unless there was some unworthiness or notorious incapability.

The common people, kind and carefree in character, ...left the household tasks to the women and the work of the fields to dependents of an inferior race or to slaves. They were excellent boatmen and traders rather than farmers, so that they liked to perform the function of peddlers and served as a link between the multiple varieties of mankind which inhabited Lan Xang.⁶⁸

Slavery existed--slaves could be obtained through capture, as the result of debt, or through trade, and brought high profits to those who engaged in this traffic. In the region of Muong Swa [Luang Prabang] there was also a kind of serfdom which was applied to certain Kha tribes placed under the patronage of the king, the princes or the chief representatives of the nobility.

But if we consider the gentle and happy temperament of this people whose good humore made up for everything, we are justified in believing that the relations between the various social levels must have been free of any harshness....⁶⁹

As a wise sovereign who was the friend of peace but knew how to prepare for war, Sam Sen Thai profited by the census in order to reorganize his kingdom's army. He raised its strength to 150,000 men, whom he divided into three distinct groups: the first to form an interior police force, the second to be specially drilled in defending the country

from foreign attack, and the third as a reserve force. The total army was divided into five corps with 30,000 fighting men each, plus 20,000 coolies responsible for provisioning the army. The warriors fought on horseback or on elephants and had lances and swords for weapons. They also had a few flintlock rifles which were originally imported from China and which the Laotians were already learning how to make themselves.

This large military force made no small contribution to the tranquility of Lan Xang. Sam Sen Thai also seems to have been a clever politician--already allied to Siam by his marriage he strengthened his relations with Lan Na by taking a daughter of the King of Xieng-Mai for his second wife. In 1404 he also received Chinese titles when the Mings replaced the Mongols.⁷⁰

Of the surviving original political structure the French encountered in 1894 he says:

On the whole...the political and social organization which we found was a good one, and we acted wisely in preserving all the mechanisms of the native administration and in respecting the traditions, customs, and mores of the populations throughout all of Laos, insofar as they were compatible with our own institutions. This was all the easier for us in that all the Laotian muongs (whether or not they were dependencies of Luang Prabang) had a similar organization which was a smaller model of that of the kingdom (except for the Senam, of King's Council) and was an obvious vestige of the epic times of Fa Ngoum and the great state of Lan-Xang....By establishing the different government commissions in Laos, Pavie therefore strengthened the native authorities in their age-old prerogatives and the princes of Luang Prabang in their dynastic rights and privileges.⁷¹

Most notable among the many historical traits was the concentration of power in the hands of the King. The royal title, Tiao Tsi Vit Luang, implies absolute power of the monarch over the lives of his subjects.⁷² While the hierarchical structure was stressed ("everyone must accept his station in

life"), the explicit provisions that power be exercised in a humane manner were also noteworthy. These included a stricture against excessive fines, as well as the policy of the penalty of life imprisonment for murder, and provision for permitting other prisoners to resume their occupations after having served their sentences.

The close connection of the state with religion remains significant although in recent times the cult of the phi, and its associated animal sacrifice, has been largely replaced by Buddhism as far as official functions are concerned.⁷

Until very recently the second-ranking official in the kingdom has been Tiao Maha Oupahat, or Tiao Tsi Vit Vang Na, the "second King" (i.e., the "King who goes ahead").⁷⁴ The last holder of this title, which is another enduring vestige of Fa Ngoum's original designations, was the late Prince Phetsarath. He himself emphasized that the bearer of the title was actually the military leader, and that the organization of the army provided the basic framework of the Lao state. The Oupahat was the leader of the advance guard, while other "kings" had titles assigning them to the center and the rear. All were given territories, and they were responsible for the defense of those areas. The government structure had many analogies to that of Europe in the Middle Ages. Phetsarath, who was fourth in a line of Oupahats, said his ancestor achieved this rank as a result of his

battles with the Hô and Lu in Sip Song Panna (on the present Yunnanese and North Vietnamese borders). Some of the Lu were taken prisoner and moved to the area of Luang Prabang where, in a sense, Phetsarath became the patron of their descendants. He emphasized that continuance of the title did not depend on heredity alone but was also related to the individual's capabilities. Upon his return to Laos from exile in Thailand, Phetsarath was awarded the title of Viceroy, which is perhaps as close as one can reasonably come to an approximation of his hereditary position in the modern sense.⁷⁵

In recent times an important position has been that of Crown Prince, Ong Mongkout Rasa Kuman (Great Royal Crown of the Sun--the terms are largely of Pali derivation). There was considerable rivalry between Phetsarath and Savang Vatthana. The former acknowledge the latter's primacy to the throne, although friction between the two continued to exist. Certainly the important political role played by Phetsarath in the Lao Issara movement, the constitutional role of the King in approving new governments, the position of Phetsarath's half-brother as head of the Pathet Lao, the 1960 crisis which saw Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister approved by the King temporarily pitted against an insurgent southern group led by Boun Oum, with Souphannouvong's Pathet Lao continuing guerilla warfare, and each of the three

contesting factions led by a royal prince, provide ample proof of the continued influence of the traditional royal hierarchy on present-day politics in Laos.⁷⁶

Two other individuals traditionally called "kings" were Tiao Tsi Vit Vang Lang ("king who goes behind") and Tiao Tsi Vit Vang Kang ("king in the middle," who also served as governor of Luang Prabang Province). The relationship of these individuals to the Latsavong (first prince, minister of the right), Latsaboute (second prince, minister of the left), Komakhouné (third prince, minister of the middle), and Komamouné (fourth prince, minister of the civil services) is not clear; it is possible that some of these titles overlapped. As far as is known, these positions are now extinct, although there does exist today a Secretariat at the Royal Palace, and the position of Secretary-General is occupied by a brother of the King.

Traditionally there were also a court chamberlain, officials in charge of servants, a palace guard, and a long list of pages, bearers, and guardians of royal property, each with his own specific title. These included, for example, the keeper of the royal elephants, the keeper of the royal barge, and the bearer of the white parasol, the royal insignia. There were also special artists and craftsmen attached to the royal household.

On a smaller scale the Tiao Tsi Vit Vang Na and Tiao Tsi Vit Vang Lang also maintained courts, each with his own mahadlik, or retinue.

In 1960 an official government list named eight officials of the Royal Palace. This, of course, did not include the present Palace Guard or servant staff. There are also royal musicians, now mostly old men, who used to perform on ceremonial occasions. An interesting item of acculturation is that the traditional musicians are no longer regularly employed, having been replaced by the western-style military band, and instead of the aging royal dancers the traditional dances are now executed for state ceremonies by children from the local primary school.

The present mahadlik are said to trace their origins to the personal retainers of royalty in earlier times. Prince Phetsarath and many other high Lao officials have maintained retainers. As recently as 1957, when the author accompanied Phetsarath on a week's river trip up-country, the Prince took with him a military guard, several provincial officials, a former government secretary, and his personal cook, in addition to a dozen bearers, Khmu coolies, and local village and district headmen.

The chief of the Mandarins, of noble although not royal rank, was the Phaya Muong Sen, head of the King's Council (Conseil du Roi) and Justice Department. Members

of the Council were high officials with the rank of Phaya. The King's Council still survives as part of the Lao government framework, and in the event that the King fails to designate a successor, this body is empowered to do so. Officially they advise the King on legislation, draft bills for his consideration, and may lay bills before the National Assembly for action. It also examines bills originated in the Assembly and may recommend a veto or amendment. Six of the twelve members are appointed by the King, and six are nominated by the Assembly. They cannot hold Cabinet office concurrently, nor be members of the Assembly at the same time. The Council also acts as a High Court of Justice in impeachment proceedings against Cabinet members.

It is, of course, a simplification to view the King's Council as merely a traditional carryover, since it can also be looked upon as part of the bicameral legislative system forming the upper house to the National Assembly, broadly on the line of the French Conseil de la Republique.

In 1959 one member of the King's Council was of the Luang Prabang royal family, and another belonged to the royal family of the south. Three others bore the title of Tiao, and others were members of the prominent Souvannavong and Voravong families. The children or close relatives of these individuals occupied ministerial posts, or were members of the National Assembly, representing both the government

and Pathet Lao parties. A member of the Council, Kou Abhay, briefly served as Prime Minister in early 1960.

In addition, up until the coming of the French there was the Phaya Muong Tiana, or first mandarin of the left, who was head of the courts. There was also the Phaya Muong Khan, in charge of public works and transport, and the Phaya Pantana Luk Tao, who in recent times acted as architect for the Royal Palace and the Royal Pagoda, and is also reported to have played a part in administering religious affairs. Then there was the Phaya Na Neua, in charge of the rice fields in the northern part of the Kingdom, and the Phaya Na Ti, who performed the same duties for the southern part.

It has been difficult to distinguish those individuals who were awarded rank on the basis of achievements and those who had institutional and hereditary positions. The two categories are, of course, not mutually exclusive. An example of the former was the Phaya Muong Qua, who began life as the son of a fisherman and later became a provincial governor. Today the members of his family serve in the Lao diplomatic corps as well as in the leadership of the Pathet Lao.

The following description of the administration of subdivisions of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, roughly equivalent to the present Province of Luang Prabang, was written by a French colonial official around the turn of the century: ⁷⁷

The head of a muong bears his personal title, plus that of Phaya or Phya [the two highest grades in the administrative hierarchy], the name of the muong, and the designation Chao Muong.

Under his command he has three principal mandarins who bear the titles of Oupahat, Latsavong, and Latsaboute. Each of them is generally responsible for the administration of one part of the muong, under the supervision of the Chao Muong.

These high officials are seconded, depending on the importance of the muong, by a larger or smaller number of counselors or judges who bear the titles Sen, Tiane, Khan, etc.

Muong are generally divided into cantons, and the head of the latter bear the title of Tasseng. Each canton includes several villages or Bans, and each of these has at its head a chief who is usually called Pho Ban (Father of the Village). The village chiefs are aided by a kind of council or assembly of notables, the titles of whom are Pia, Luong, Koun, Sen, Mune, or Nai.

The four principal leaders of a muong (the Chao Muong, the Oupahat, the Latsavong, and the Latsaboute) are elected either by the nobles or by commoners who possess sufficient intellectual aptitude.⁷⁸ The entire population, nobles, officials, and common people, are consulted. Then the canton head and village chiefs, who might be described as the canton and village delegates, gather in the capital of the muong to vote on the names of the candidates presented. The one who obtains the most votes is then presented by the provincial administrator to the Resident,⁷⁹ who accepts or rejects him after studying his personal qualities, aptitudes, and background. In the case of a rejection the electors are consulted a second time. The Resident names the four muong chiefs by delegation from the Governor General. The latter may not begin office until they receive their commission, insignia and seal from the French government.

In general, the electors' choice falls on a son, brother, or nephew of the high official who is to be replaced, unless he is unworthy or notoriously incapacitated.

Mandarins of lesser importance are named by the provincial head with the approval of the persons under his administration and of the Resident.

Officials receive a salary only in the Kingdom of Luang Prabang and in the Provinces of Vientiane and Muong-Hou. Everywhere else they must be content with a fee equivalent to one-tenth of the sums they collect as taxes.

In their capacity as judges the muong authorities also collect legal costs and shares in the sums of certain fines, as is the custom of the land.⁸⁰

The Lao administration generally functions well, is sufficient to the needs of the natives, and makes it possible for us, despite the vast extent of our possession, to keep only a few European officials there.

Le Boulanger claims that the military occupied an insignificant position in the hierarchy. Following Reinach, he ranks the military leaders with the mahadliks and officials responsible for petty tasks within the palace, and finds no remains of Sam Sen Thai's powerful army. A very different position has been taken by the late Prince Phetsarath who, as has been indicated, stated that the military organization formed the framework for the state government. Analogous materials from Thailand, as given by Wales and others, appear to confirm this view. Judging by the number of wars fought by the Lao kingdoms over the past few centuries, the latter position would seem more logical.

The structuring of Lao society is reflected in the law codes. For example, the kha khum phi, or payments

that the bridegroom makes symbolically to the household spirit and which actually revert to the bride's parents, are specified (in the 1928 civil law codes, and formally still in force today) according to the rank of the individual young woman concerned, as follows:⁸¹

Rank	Amount in piasters
1. For a daughter of the King of Luang Prabang	1500
2. For a daughter of Tiao Maha Oupahat of Luang Prabang or a daughter of the Governor of Bassac	1210
3. For a daughter of Tiao Latsavong of Luang Prabang	1140
4. For a daughter of the Tiao Latsabout of Luang Prabang	900
5. For a daughter of the Latsamphan or Latsaphakhinay of Luang Prabang	750
6. For a daughter of a Tiao Krom <u>Judge</u>	500
7. For a daughter of a Tiao of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, recognized as such by the King	400
8. For a daughter of a Chao Muong with the rank of Phya, or other officials of an equivalent grade	350
9. For a daughter of an Oupahat who is not an official with the rank of Phaya or a Phya, or all other officials of an equivalent grade	250
10. For a daughter of a Phouxouei, or a Samien, or a Phya who is not an official, or all other officials of an equivalent rank	200

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 11. For a daughter of a Sen or Mun
who is not an official | 150 |
| 12. For a daughter of any other person | 100 |

These distinctions are also found in the criminal codes, where the penalty is specified according to the rank of the individual against whom the crime is committed, while fines vary with the rank of the perpetrator. Although to a large extent the ranks in the hierarchy correspond to government offices, it is significant that in the case of individuals of equal hereditary rank, those in government service rank above those who are not.

Patterns of Tribal Authority

Having examined the traditional governmental patterns and distribution of authority among the valley Lao, the following discussion will be concerned with the tribal peoples, with illustrations selected from the Meo, Tai Dam, and certain Kha groups. With the possible exception of the latter, all of the others can be characterized as mountain dwellers.

Basing his categories mainly on Burmese data, Leach has hypothesized two polar types, the Hill People and the Valley People.⁸² The Hill People are said to have taken their social organization, trade, and kinship systems from China, while the Valley People derive their social

structure, politics and religion from India. In addition, the Valley People are wet-rice cultivators speaking Tai and Burmese languages, while the Hill People are shifting cultivators. There is, of course, a certain overlap. The categories do not fit perfectly the Laos data--the Tai Dam, for example, are often irrigated-rice cultivators, and the Lamet, unlike the Meo, did not derive their social structure and politics from China.

In the Meo village, which is based on a patrilineal clan system, the headman is the dominant political figure. The household reflects in miniature the larger social organization. A basic principle in the organization of the household and of the village is respect for elders. The head of the household, usually the eldest male, enjoys the deference and respect of the family members, while the village headman is unquestionably regarded as the leader of the village (unlike the Lao headman, who is more of a first among equals) and is customarily the eldest household head.⁸³

Just as the head of a Meo family has many responsibilities, so a Meo village headman has many duties. This is particularly the case in Laos, where relations with the government are indirect and villages have considerable autonomy. He acts as judge in intra-village disputes, sees that the trails are maintained, and in time of war

oversees the evacuation of the village. He usually plays a major role in decisions to migrate in search of new fields.

The power of the village chief is not absolute, however, and he must consult with other elders in arriving at his decisions. The cohesiveness of the village as a social and political unit is also related to shared clan membership. Where there is more than one clan occupying the same village the government may recognize only one chief, but there may be two as far as the local population is concerned. Although the shaman is also a person of importance in the Meo village, his sphere of influence is quite separate and there appears to be little conflict.

Among the Meo in Laos there does not seem to be any permanent institutionalized authority beyond the village level. The most prominent Meo leader, Touby, appears to have inherited his rank, but its ultimate source remains obscure. Although he has considerable popular backing the basis of his authority is a position in the Lao administration (formerly with the rank of Chao Muong; he now holds the rank of Chao Khoueng), perhaps ultimately derived from the fact that his clan is dominant in the area he has represented. However, as will be indicated subsequently, both Touby and the Pathet Lao Meo leader, Faydang, seem to have characteristics of charismatic leadership, each of them having opposing Meo factions temporarily united for political purposes.

In Xieng Khouang, in cases involving disputes between the Meo and members of another ethnic group, Touby has served as counsel for the Meo (prior to 1961). He has proved himself influential in this respect with French and, subsequently, with Lao officials.

As in the case of the Lao, village leadership imposes economic burdens. Since a headman is expected to extend hospitality to strangers, he receives gifts from villages to help fulfill this function. He is also supposed to receive a small commission from the taxes he collects for the government.

According to Bernatzik⁸⁴ the Meo he investigated in the late 1930's had retained a memory of a major political organization, in the form of a powerful kingdom of their own ruled by a hereditary king who was at the same time the commander-in-chief. After the death of the king, all the adult men who bore arms selected the successor from among the sons of the deceased. Their last king fought the Chinese, but the Meo were finally beaten and the king and his associates killed in battle. Then the younger brother of the king assumed leadership and retreated southward with his people. The Meo in Thailand are said to still believe that sometime, somewhere, a Meo king will rise to unite his people and lead them against their oppressors. Of this waiting for a king as a liberator, or phoa thay, has been written: "As soon as the arrival of a phoa thay is reported somewhere, the Meo arm

themselves right away and start on their way to put themselves at his disposal. What we call a "rebellion" the Meo call oa phoa thay, "to make a king."⁸⁵

Bernatzik mentions the Meo tradition of "great chieftans" (tsun koan) who ruled over about twenty villages. Such a chief was elected for a lifetime by all the arms-bearing males over sixteen. After his death, however, the administrative unit might undergo a change since the association was in essence voluntary. He acted as judge and assessed fines. It is possible that this type of position was involved in the leadership of the Meo tribes who fought against the French.

On such matters as war and peace, popular assemblies were held of all men within the district. Decisions had to be unanimous, and while not formally binding on the great chief were usually accepted by him. These gatherings could also remove him from office.

Unfortunately, no information is available on the extent to which these extra-village institutions function today. In Laos it is likely that the French and subsequently the Lao administrative framework has taken over whatever activities existed beyond the village, although in the case of Meo revolts the details of organization are not known.

The following Pathet Lao version is supposedly based on an interview with Faydang:⁸⁶

The revolt started by Chao Pha Pachay in 1918 was against the opium tax and the corvée system, and started in Sam Neua, in the village of Muong Son where Chao Pha Pachay was the chief. The French had named another chief, but Pachay was chief as far as our people were concerned. The French wanted to collect two kilograms of opium from everyone whether they grew it or not...Pachay refused and the people supported him....Next time the agents came with French troops he ambushed ...and sent messengers to other tribes telling them to resist also. Everywhere our tribespeople led by Pachay rose up against the French...

We didn't know how to organise in those days. We had no programme. We hated the enemy and wanted to wipe him out. That was all. We had no idea of national unity. We fought alone and thought we Lao Xung [Meo] could defeat the enemy. We never thought of combining with others, because we always believed in the past in directly settling our own quarrels, without help from others....

Faydang was chief of a village atop a thousand meter peak near Nong Et, in Xieng Khouang province, not far from the Vietnamese border. And he was a chief in the truest sense of the word. He was elected to lead his people in war and peace....

"It was in our area where the repression was the most severe.... Soldiers were sent all the time to pillage our people...."

Faydang sent word back to his village as to where he was and what was happening. The whole village moved over to him and after that two neighboring villages.

Later, after contact with Prince Souphanouvong, he is quoted as saying:

"I visited village after village throughout our mountains and talked with the chiefs and the people. Everyone hated the French and were glad to know our plans to fight. Every village appointed organisers and formed scouts and defence corps."

All this meant long, patient work. It was the period between 1946-1950....Faydang created the Lao Xung resistance League which included virtually every

Lao Xung village in the whole of Xieng Khouang province. They created such strong inter-village organisations and set up such formidable defences, that the French and their agents--including the tax-collectors--scarcely dared set foot in Lao Xung areas.

Obviously the last statement is greatly exaggerated, but the account itself is not completely inaccurate since many Meo have served in the Pathet Lao contingents. It is likely that no extra-village organization which was politically useable existed. Perhaps future research on the history of Meo society in China and contiguous areas may be able to provide more positive data on this point.

North Vietnamese publications picture the traditional Meo village chiefs as exploiters of the poorer villagers, often abusing them as debt slaves.⁸⁸ Burchett gives a similar picture for Lao, specifically citing the tasseng as an abusive figure used by the French to exploit the population (although evidently men such as Faydang can be heroes if they follow the right cause). In view of Burchett's distortion, it is important to stress that, if anything, the French colonial authorities tended to favor the tribal peoples at the expense of the lowland Lao and other Asian inhabitants of the towns. This is illustrated by the tax structure at the turn of the century,⁸⁹ a policy to which it is possible to apply many interpretations, but it was undoubtedly influenced by the greater difficulty of access to the mountain

The official French account of the Meo uprising brings
out the traditional oa phoa thay aspect of the revolt: 90

In July, 1919, one of the leaders of the Tonkin rebellion who was being pursued by our troops and was called Batchay came to seek refuge in north Laos... From his lair he sent out emissaries whose mission it was to devote themselves to secret propaganda efforts among the Meo groupings of Upper Laos in favor of a king who, "accomplishing the will of Heaven, was to bring them happiness, peace and prosperity." The rumour circulated rapidly among these credulous tribes that a prophet who had fallen from the sky was summoning all Meos to revolt and form a great independent kingdom with its capital at Dien Bien Phu or Muong Heup. To the accompaniment of incantations and magic formulas, the able-bodied population was called to march against the Laotians, Khas and Annamites and to build the palace of the awaited sovereign.

In vain did the King of Luang Prabang send messages to the Meo leaders in protest against these absurd rumours. Within a few weeks armed bands were formed which began to pillage the villages of Tran-Ninh /Xieng Khouang/, Luang Prabang and Sam Neua. Our militia attacked and Barchay was killed by Khas in the vicinity of Muong Heup in October, 1922.

They returned in peace to their agricultural labors... A special administrative statute gave them the canton and village autonomy they desired, with no Laotian or Annamite intermediary.

There is ample evidence that the supernatural role in the organization of the Meo is by no means dead. In 1959 in the Meo village of Phou Kao Quai in Vientiane Province, one Meo was arrested for inciting fellow villagers against the government. According to the villagers, the basis of his appeal was his prediction that Jesus Christ would soon appear, riding in a jeep and dressed in the

clothes of an American. Then all the Meo would be united and would go to the towns, where they would all become officials ruling over the surrounding area. All they would have to do to prepare for the Messiah's coming would be to dispose of the local officials. When this development became apparent village officials called the police, and the man was taken into custody. He is reported to have worked for missionaries prior to coming to the village. It is significant that the villagers apparently supported him for several months prior to his arrest.⁹¹

The Tai Dam provide an interesting pattern, for here is a patrilineal society with a feudal structure below the kingdom level of the Lao and above the village level of the Meo.⁹²

The socio-political system of the Tai Dam is organized along the lines of three social classes: the nobility, the religious functionaries, and the commoners. This system functions almost exclusively within the framework of the muong.

A popular Tai Dam legend relates how the different patrilineal families emerged from a gourd which had been carried to earth by two incarnate spirits, Tao Swong and Tao H'wong, both sent by Ten Luong, the supreme God of the Soil. Tao H'wong settled in China, while Tao Swong went to Nghia Lo and Muong Lo and there created a man named Tao Lo,

the ancestor of all the Thai, including those in Laos, Thailand, and Burma. His many children were divided into eight groups from which the Lo, Vi, Lu, Leo, Luong, Ka, Tong, and Kwang families originated. Those children of the son called Lang Truong formed a special family that became known as the Lo Cam Lo. Lang Truong formed an army of 108 of his brother's offspring and their descendants, and it spread from northern Vietnam to northern Burma. They established Tai muongs along the Red, Black, Mekong, and other great rivers of northern Southeast Asia. The supreme god Ten Luong dictated that the descendants of Lang Truong would lead the Thai. Thus, the legend concludes, the Lo Cam Lo family were divinely authorized to be the traditional leaders.⁹³

The Luong and Ka families traditionally have held the role of mo, or official priests, and they perform the public rituals in addition to individual curing and contacting spirits for clients. There are three grades of priesthood, and they enjoy high prestige in the community and tend to remain apart as a group.

Families other than the Lo Cam, Luong, and Ka are considered to be commoners. They are the farmers, artisans, and military of the society. Reportedly, within this class there are individuals called ong pan, "leaders of the people."

They are assisted by ong pong and ong ho luong, but their duties are not reported. In each village, the quan ban, or village chief, is invariably a member of this class.⁹⁴

The highest office in the muong is that of the chao muong, a position traditionally held by a member of the Lo Cam family. The muong is divided into communes, the chiefs of which are called ly truong. Traditionally this position was held by a noble. The chao muong was considered owner of the land in his muong. It was common for the tao or nobles to have "client" villages that performed agricultural labor for them, and in return the nobles assumed responsibility for their protection. In both these traits the Tai system somewhat parallels that of the Lao.

Vietnamese penetration into the Tai Dam area, followed by the arrival of the French, officially broke the political monopoly of the Lo Cam family. The office of chao muong became elective. His most important administrative responsibilities included collecting taxes, organizing corvées, maintaining military recruitment in the area, and carrying out the directives and decrees of the central government. He received as salary five fields for his own use. His assistant, the tho lai, received four fields. The office of ly truong, chief of the commune, also became elective. The lowest political office is that of the village chief.

Traditionally he was a leader selected by the villagers themselves. He is the most respected man in the village, often the wealthiest. Lao village level organization appears to be much more flexible in this respect.

In spite of these institutional changes, the Lo Cam until recently have been the only ones elected to the position of chao muong. The name Cam means gold, and the Tai Dam are said to feel that, "If gold should disappear, it must be replaced by other gold." The role of ly truong also is reported to have remained in the hands of the nobles.⁹⁵

The strength and importance of these local organizations are evident today in Tai Dam areas in Laos. Below the tasseng level they appear to have remained largely intact, and even at the chao muong level Tai native to the area have been appointed to this office in those regions in which they predominate. In the Tai Dam refugee communities in Luang Prabang and near Vientiane there are leaders who represent their groups in negotiations with the government.

When the author, representing the American aid mission in Luang Prabang, supervised the distribution of gardening implements to the local Tai Dam group, the tools were formally accepted by the headman. After acknowledging their receipt with thanks he presented a list, typed in French, of other equipment "necessary to improve our life."

Although part of this action was explicable in view of the fact that many of the men had served in the French army and felt that they merited the extra assistance, still the organized manner in which it was carried out resembled much more the activities of the Chinese or Vietnamese communities, than any other local group, including Lao. Certainly their traditional forms of local organization were involved.

In contrast to the Lao, Tai, and even Meo, are Kha groups such as the Khmu and Lamet and certain Tibeto-Burman peoples such as the Akha who apparently lack any form of organization beyond the village. At the time of Izikowitz's stay among the Lamet (1936-1938) in Nam Tha Province they were under the jurisdiction of a Lao chao muong, while the district headmen were both Lu and Lao. Each village had its chief, who was responsible for handing over tax money to the tasseng. Before the French assumed control of the area it belonged to Thailand, and the tassengs were appointed among the Lamet themselves. This system continued for some time after the French arrived, but later these offices were turned over to the Lu who had migrated to the area and who, in contrast to the Lamet, were literate. With administration in turn under Thai, French, and Lao rule there has apparently never been any organization that could keep the villages united. The Lamet have no real village headman. The position

that most closely approximates this is that of the individual responsible for religious activities.⁹⁶

This office is hereditary in the male line, and if there are no sons the office goes to one of the nephews or to a brother. His duty is to perform all the sacrifices made to the different spirits of the village, and also to see that order is kept in the village, so that the spirits are not disturbed. In addition he supervises the community men's houses and all activities that take place there. His authority can be considerable but varies from village to village, depending in part on his personality. His wealth also plays a part. As long as the priest deals with religious affairs he is obeyed, but when he tries to function as chief without having the prestige of a rich man, he has no power to command. In cases where villagers have gone outside the Lamet area to work in the teak forests in Thailand, the priest's authority often appears to have lessened.

There is also a medicine man in the Lamet village. His function is only to heal the sick, that is, to determine which spirits are the cause of the illness and to locate lost souls which have left the body. He has no power in the village and no special privileges.⁹⁷

The wealthy men of the village, in a position of great power, are the lem. Status is based on ownership of a number

of bronze drums (at least two) and several buffalo, and, while not necessarily hereditary, distinguishes them from the common people known as to. When a man has acquired sufficient capital he is declared to be a lem, at a feast held in his honor by his equals in the village. Sacrifices are made to the spirits on this occasion.

As the most prominent men in the village the lem function as a jury in disputes and evidently play a leading part in decisions involving the community as a whole. Since they do not constitute a stable or rigid group, however, their power would not seem comparable to that of a Meo patriarch or even a Lao village headman.

Among the Akha the position of village chief is hereditary, and if there is no son a procedure similar to that followed among other groups is used, i.e., the eldest brother of the deceased inherits the title or a council of elders is convened to select a new one. In general a man must have passed his fiftieth year in order to qualify as an elder, but not every old man is so considered. In certain cases the council can exercise veto power against the legal heir of the chieftainship.

In addition to advising the headman on all village matters the council acts in disputes in which the chief is more an examining magistrate than a judge.

It is felt that formerly the position of the Akha headman was more influential and that there was some form of inter-village organization, a situation said to derive partly from the fact that under Tahi or Lao control the chief must give orders contrary to the established traditions and customs. It is natural that he does not work too hard to see that these are carried out although this attitude, in turn, must undermine his position.⁹⁸

According to Bernatzik, if there are disputes between two Akha villages, the headmen turn to the Shan or Lao for a decision. The status of the Akha (Kha Ko in Laos) in the total government structure is illustrated by a meeting which the author attended in Muong Sing. It was called to inform the village leaders of government policies. A Lao official read the decrees in Lao, and these in turn were translated into Kha Ko by a Lu tasseng for the benefit of the Kha Ko nai bans who participated.

While none of the Kha groups appear to have any formal organization beyond the village level, they do seem to have organized to a certain extent for revolts against the French. As among the Meo, there has been a supernatural basis for this activity. The rebellion that started in 1901 described below is of Kha groups of southern Laos with, interestingly enough, the temporary participation of the Lao.⁹⁹

The fief of Bassac [Champassak], which was administered by the descendants of Chao-Houy in behalf of the King of Siam, had lost much of its importance for the latter ever since the treaty of 1893 had amputated the muongs of Saravane and Attoupeu. All this region, which was populated mainly by Khas [Boloven, Alak, Nha Huen], had been only sparsely colonized by a few Phou Thai and Laotian families, and Siamese domination over these tribes, which were refractory to all authority, had never been more effective than the purely nominal domination of the old kings of Vientiane. In fact the region had long been a vast supply ground for slaves--Annamites generally, whom the turbulent and hardy Khas went and kidnapped on the other side of the watershed chain and bartered on the banks of the Mekong for buffalo, gongs, metals, and cloth, of which they stood in permanent need.

The cause of the rebellion of 1901, which arose in the region of Oubone [Oubon] and spread like wildfire, remains highly obscure. Doubtless the abolition of slavery by King Chulalongkorn and the prohibition against engaging in this traffic which was pronounced by our first administrators were not unconnected with the mystical fervor which agitated the Khas, who were tacitly supported by those Laotian functionaries who had suddenly been deprived of profitable dealings. Whatever the case may be, these basically superstitious people were inflamed by their sorcerers, or Phou Mi Boun, who resembled messiahs and in whose supernatural gifts they had an unshakeable faith, and they declared war against the established order for the purpose of imposing the authority of their ringleaders, who alone were worthy, in their eyes, of governing men and causing justice to reign among them. In March, 1901, the Commissioner in Saravane was attacked at Thateng by 1,500 Khas with flintlock rifles. A few days later the whole plateau was up in arms. All the villagers had followed the Phou Mi Boun without distinction of race. They had, moreover, scarcely any other alternative, for the lukewarm and hesitant individuals were simply massacred.

The rebels' success had no aftermath, however. The Phou Mi Boun were powerless to perform the slightest miracle.

But other agitators, also from Siam, had already abandoned the plateau and directed their efforts against Savannakhet and Vientiane. At about eight in the morning on April 19, 1902, the Savannakhet commissariat was surrounded by hordes of Laotians, bands of inspired folk who marched, sang and plated the khene, convinced that the bullets from our rifles would change into frangipani flowers. It was necessary to open fire in order to free the capital. They left 150 dead on the square, and probably carried off many wounded. On our side losses were limited to one militiaman killed and two wounded. Then everything became calm again.

From then on the revolt seemed to be throttled. It nevertheless lasted longer than was reasonable as a result of the lack of agreement between the heads of the provinces involved, who could not settle on an overall plan of action against the rebel chieftains who had taken refuge in the wooded mountains on the left bank of the Mekong. The latter were able to hold out in their dens for more than four years, and not until 1906-7, when discord spread among them, did they make their submission, discouraged and dying of hunger.

In the case of one of the rebel chieftains, the famous BacMy, his so-called submission was only a pretense designed to lull our vigilance, to enable him to recruit partisans, and above all to procure an army from Siam. This was so true that he had to be suppressed towards the end of 1910. As for the Voloven Khomadan, he never made his submission. He still lives with his partisans on the mountains of Phou-Louang in the northeast of the plateau.

Excerpts from the Pathet Lao version, with regard to the leadership and organization involved, follow:¹⁰⁰

It was typical that the best organised and most tenaciously fought revolt was that of the despised "Kha" (slaves) of the Lao Thenh minority. It started with an uprising of the Lavel and Alak tribes in the Plateau of the Bolovens in the South and continued for 27 years. As usual, the reason was refusal to pay the iniquitous taxes, resistance to the tax-collectors and their guards and then an ambush of the troops sent to "pacify" the region....

The revolt which started in 1910 was led by tribal chief Ong Keo, of the Lavel, the largest single tribe of the Lao Thenh. Against the French with their breech-loading rifles, machine guns and mountain artillery, the Lao Thenh used their flintlocks and crossbows and traps with poisoned spikes similar to those they set for tigers. Expedition after expedition was sent against Ong Keo and his people, but they failed. He was an expert natural fighter who varied his tactics with such shrewdness that the French were constantly taken by surprise. They were outflanked and ambushed and every fresh attack only left more bodies pierced with poisoned arrows and more French arms and ammunition in the hands of Ong Keo and his men....

Another tribal chief, Komadome, took up the fight. He was a remarkable figure, and developed into one of the great leaders of the Laotian people. He began gathering the threads linking all the Lao Thenh tribes together, sending his agents from mountain top to mountain top, in provinces not only in the Bolovens area but into the neighbouring provinces of Saravane and Attopeu. It was a long and painful process. Contact could only be established by personal couriers on foot. Komadome with his wider contacts and network of allies, however, could keep changing his bases. He developed also something of a political programme, urging the people to oppose the colonialists by all means: to refuse to pay taxes, refuse to be conscripted into the army or labour service. In order better to propagate his ideas and coordinate activities of widely spread tribes, Komadome developed a written language for the Lao Thenh people and established study classes among his own and allied tribes. He made alliances with other racial groups and even succeeded in winning parts of the Lao Lum over to the struggle. At one period, the French mobilised the major portion of their forces in Indo-China against Komadome, massing everything from elephants to fighter and bomber planes against him....

...The Ong Keo-Komadome revolt which started in 1910...continued without a break until 1937. Komadome was sixty years old when he was killed....Si Thon [one of his sons] became one of the leaders of the Pathet Lao forces, and Khampan [another son] was also a leading cadre.

From this background of traditional Lao government on the level of the state and the tribal political organization confined mainly to the village level, a number of factors emerge that have in a way set the stage for current political events.

In spite of important trade and ritual relationships and even successful corvée practices with the mountain peoples, there is no real evidence to suggest that the valley Lao were ever able to administer effectively the hill tribes.¹⁰¹ The highly complex administrative structure of the Lao was defined essentially by the areas of irrigated rice cultivation. Perhaps a limiting factor here was the prolonged periods of warfare between the Lao states themselves, including areas now located in Thailand, as well as with the Burmese and the Vietnamese. It appears logical to suppose that the relatively small valleys and the intervening mountainous terrain placed obstacles in the way of the formation of larger states. This in turn is related to the lack of an effective traditional civil service since the Lao officials were expected to live off the areas they administered. The King, as the embodiment of the state with all officials dependent on his whim, provided an element of instability.

The concept of clearly defined national boundaries, today so important in Laos and other areas, has probably

been an outgrowth of European colonial expansion.¹⁰² While it is true that the mountain peoples seem to have lacked any permanent organizational forms beyond the village, still they were able to unite under charismatic leadership to oppose the French. The Lao, with their loosely structured village organization and highly centralized extra-village political structure, seem to have been easily controlled by the French once the latter took over the kingdom structure. Their physical accessibility was obviously also a factor. In a sense, then, to expect the Lao to have administered the whole of their country effectively after independence was to expect them to do something for which they had no institutional precedent. Nor had the French established an effective one, outside of temporary military pacification. Clearly, in the case of the Lamet and the Meo the degree of village political autonomy was great, while the Tai Dam formed their own petty state organization until incorporated by the French.

Even the north Vietnamese have had trouble exercising complete control over their mountain peoples. Under the heading, "It is Necessary to Intensify the Setting Up and Consolidation of Party Bases in the Mountainous Regions," the Hanoi magazine Hoc Tap (Issue No. 4, 1960) comments:

...the development of party bases has been unequal in various areas. In low areas, party bases have been set up and the number of party members is relatively large. In high areas, especially frontier and remote

areas, party bases have not been set up in many villages and the number of party members is small. Though a number of party members were trained during the revolutionary struggle and the resistance and have, since the re-establishment of peace, scored brilliant achievements in production, their degree of socialist enlightenment is generally low... In areas where the democratic transformation has not been completed, party members have a wavering class standpoint, cannot distinguish between exploiters and laborers, and do not guard against subversive activities. Besides, they are still influenced by outmoded habits and customs and colonialist vestiges. While party members of populous nationalities slight party members of less populous nationalities, the latter nurture an inferiority complex and display a low sense of responsibility... Though having scored a number of initial results, the task of setting up and consolidating party bases in the mountainous region has failed to fulfill the requirements of the situation... attention must be paid to creating and consolidating government organs and especially mass organizations such as the Lao Dong Youth Group, the militia, and the Women's Association. Also, the tendency to resort to administrative measures alone and to neglect propaganda and education must be eliminated.

Social Structure and Ideology - a Series of Elite Views

The political and military factors in Laos have been rapidly changing within the past few years, but all change has been proceeding under the aegis of elite groups, regardless of whether they are communist or western oriented. It should be stressed that although these terms are used here for the sake of convenience, they are at best difficult to define precisely. Much of the world's attention has been focused on the external aspects of the Laos situation, which has been seen as one of foreign intervention from both the communist and non-communist points of view.

The communists, particularly the North Vietnamese, had been campaigning for the reinstatement of the International Control Commission ever since it was disbanded in 1958, although after the military success of the Pathet Lao an International Conference to formalize their military victory was their chief objective. The Pathet Lao, their neutralist allies, the North Vietnamese and also the Chinese and to a lesser extent the Russians have all proclaimed loud and long about imperialist intervention. Their main focus has been on the "provocative acts" of the United States, with France and Britain playing a lesser role. With regard to Asian countries the Thai have been pictured as the chief villains, with minor roles played by the Nationalist Chinese remnants in northern Burma, the South Vietnamese, and the Philippines. Conversely, to the western world the villains have been the North Vietnamese and more recently the Russians, with the Chinese involved indirectly.

Most overt has been the intervention by the Americans and Russians. The Americans have, of course, for several years maintained a military assistance mission scarcely disguised by its noncommittal name of Program Evaluation Office and the fact that the military advisors wore civilian clothes. (Toward the end of the civil war in 1961 they were permitted to put on their uniforms and accompany the Lao troops into

battle.) On the other hand, open Russian intervention in Laos began only in late 1960, after the capture of Vientiane by the troops of the right-wing government of Prince Boun Oum. Their major activity has focused on airlifting supplies to the Pathet Lao troops in Xieng Khouang and also the reported training of Lao pilots.

In contrast to this open intervention by western powers, the activities of the North Vietnamese and Thai have been much more subtle. Details are hard to come by, but it appears that the North Vietnamese have played a much more active role in support of the Pathet Lao and even of the neutralist government than the Thai have in support of the Royal Government. The Hanoi Radio has extensively broadcast Pathet Lao and neutralist group activities. This has been done by Peking Radio as well. Significantly, neither the North Vietnamese nor Thai have been anxious to publicize their efforts in Laos. Obviously the presence of Americans and Russians in Laos is conditioned by geographic distances, and the end of European colonialism has made their open assumption of direct power remote, while both the Thai and Vietnamese have traditionally held parts of territory which is today considered Laos, and their roles in Laos appear to significantly resemble at least a return to the type of politics practiced in this area prior to the appearance of European colonizers.

Perhaps because of this pronounced internationalization of Lao politics, relatively little attention has been paid to internal problems and the ways in which the Lao elite, of whatever political orientation, view their own society.

An excellent insight into this problem is presented by the approaches used by the different groups in appealing to the various segments in Laotian society. The period 1959-1961 has been one of political upheavals and military conflicts, accompanied by edicts, proclamations, appeals, and proposals addressed to the peoples of Laos. These have been directed to segments of the population on the basis of caste, class, occupation, age, religion, nationality, and sex, as reflected in terms such as royal family, elite, soldiers, officers, civil servants, police, merchants, farmers, workers, priests, tribal peoples (sometimes specifically named), youth, and women. There is considerable overlap between Royal government and Pathet Lao appeals, but some significant variations as well. These differences are indicative not only of ways of looking at society but of conceptualization of the governmental process.

During the 1960-1961 civil war the appeals of the Royal government as opposed to those of the Pathet Lao (and to a certain extent to those of their neutralist allies) diverged clearly in two respects--with regard to tribal peoples and monks.

In no case did the Royal government appeal directly to any non-Lao ethnic group or to the priesthood as a group. In fact, the ethnic Lao composition of the government was emphasized by frequent references to "foreign groups" who "do not speak Lao nor eat glutinous rice." The monks were virtually ignored.

On the other hand, the Pathet Lao very frequently made reference to Buddhist monks as well as emphasized the different religious and ethnic groups within Laos, requesting their support. They broadcast a number of specific appeals by members of various tribal groups, particularly the Meo. Although no monks broadcast for the Pathet Lao they constantly alluded to their persecution by the Royal government and in some cases referred to the latter's harsh treatment of minorities, particularly during the 1960 election campaign.

Ironically, the Pathet Lao appear to have encountered their greatest difficulties during the civil war from Royalist Meo troops commanded by Meo officers, holding out in Xieng Khouang. Moreover, the prominent Meo politician, Toubi Lyfong, became a member of the cabinet of the Royal government and was welcomed on his arrival in Savannakhet (before the capture of Vientiane), with no mention made of his ethnic origin. Further, although the support of the monks was not sought, the Boun Oum government went out of its way to proclaim

loyalty to traditional Buddhist ideals. It is significant that Souvanna Phouma echoed the appeals of the Pathet Lao at many points but apparently did not refer in any of his speeches to the tribal peoples as such.

The Pathet Lao have appealed to all groups, from the royal family and high officials to farmers and tribal peoples, also mentioning groups as yet barely evident, or conceptually distinct in a political sense, such as youth, women, intellectuals, and workers. The Royal government, however, has limited its appeal more or less to the officials of all ranks and to the population at large, broadly conceived as devout Buddhists.

Related to this is the Royal government's conceptualization of society in the classic reactionary sense. That is, its appeals are based on preserving the old traditions and, by inference, opposing change. The speech of King Savang Vatthana in February, 1961, requesting a neutral nations advisory commission (Cambodia, Burma, and Malaya), depicts this situation quite clearly. In his closing remarks the King both proclaims and implores:

Lao People, by this message, We wish to assure you of Our affection and Our protections. We also want you to understand that our country is a member of the United Nations Organization whose goal is to preserve and defend peace in the world, that this great international body is interested in seeing us emerge from this state of discord and war; but, above all, the

Lao People must put their forces and strength together to the service of their country. They must have no other ideal than the respect of the Constitution without which we cannot but go through adventurous paths full of dangers.

Lao Elite, cease fratricidal struggles, seek together a new and fruitful union founded on national reconciliation.

Lao People, may you live always in independence and peace under the protection of the triple jewel of Buddha, of his teachings, and of his community.

In essence this appeal was based on conceptualizations of groups which are no longer valid. More than a year before, serious doubts were expressed implicitly by the newspaper of the then Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone, specifically referring to possible inadequacies in the elite and constitutional organization.¹⁰³ The question arose because of differences with CDNI concerning government policies and the latter's representation in the government.

...Does this constitute a failure of parliamentary government? Is the executive inefficient? Is the army unfit? Do the elite truly not hold their place in our society? If these are true then we have a situation beyond cure...

Is the administration completely inefficient? This cannot be so, for this would include all of our elite. Or perhaps there are no longer any elite. As for the army, is it composed only of officers?...

Why should we allow a transitory crisis to alarm us? A few well applied laws and regulations will improve the situation.

It is easy to attribute the troubles of the Royal government to the conflicts among its factions, the CDNI and the older conservative politicians, and the failure of the King

to unify these groups. But the fundamental failure is one of a shared ideology which proved unsuitable to the changing social situation in Laos. This ideology and the basic social composition of the CDNI was expressed in their newspaper:¹⁰⁴

Contrary to the gratuitous and spiteful statements of certain elements of the foreign press, who have pretended that "not even one man exists in Laos who will defend its institutions," Laos counts among its children many honest citizens who are willing to offer themselves, even to the supreme sacrifice, for the defense of that which they hold most dear and sacred in the world, all for the benefit of the people and the well-being of the kingdom. These sacred possessions, the most precious of which are carried on our insignia, are the symbols of our ideals, the reasons for our sacrifices: the defense of national interests--race, religion, crown, constitution.

Despite this theoretically broad appeal to the masses and constitutional process, the basic commitment of the CDNI has been to the traditional organs of power and to reinforcing (or perhaps better stated, to patching up) the governmental structure to prevent communist subversion, and to carry through a modest program of economic development.

This behavior was manifested in the April, 1960, elections, after which the CDNI emerged as the Paxasangkhon Party in May. The election laws were changed, requiring higher registration fees of candidates and setting minimum educational qualifications.¹⁰⁵ As a result of manipulations at the polls all pro-government candidates were elected and some CDNI candidates received up to 99 percent of the vote. This victory was attributed to hard campaigning which "demoralized the left wing."¹⁰⁶

Other administrative measures reported to have been favored by the CDNI included strengthening the army as a substitute for civil power and increasing its role in development programs.¹⁰⁷ This may have reflected the prominence of the military in this organization, e.g., General Phoumi Nosavan became Paxsangkhon's chairman in its initial organization. It is significant that when the crisis came and Phoumi led many of the CDNI members to form the Savannakhet government under the titular head of Boun Oum, the basic appeals were made to administrators or associated groups, to civil servants, high officers, chiefs of administrative services, policemen, soldiers, district and village chiefs, merchants, and only lastly to farmers or "people." They were based not on innovation but on preservation and defense--of the monarchy, the national heritage and civilization, or, simply internal order. To quote a statement of Boun Oum, "I desire that Laos remains as it was, with its pagodas and bonzes, and I am determined to fight, hand in hand with you, against those who want to destroy our age-old customs and who cause harm to our country."¹⁰⁸ Despite this stress on religion no appeal was made to the bonzes, and, in fact, Buddhist monks were accused of supporting the opposition government in Vientiane. The monarchy, the traditional leadership, and the CDNI, in spite of certain gestures toward reform,

were united in a basic commitment to the preservation of the status quo or, at most, to readaptation to changing political situations by attempting to revise the traditional administrative system with its western accretions.

A significant aspect of the appeals of the Royal government for support during the civil war was the almost complete absence of references to what might be interpreted as western democratic ideology, as opposed to its abstract symbols such as the constitution to which both sides paid lip service. As has been indicated, the appeals have been to the traditional power structure and to historical aspects of Lao civilization. No attempt was made to rally support on the basis of "democratic freedom" or "preservation of civil liberties" since these concepts, as known in the west, can hardly be said to have existed in Laos.

By mid-1961 the communist movement in Laos had not consolidated control over the country to a point where it could begin thinking in detail about a program of internal development, but certain features of its domestic ideologies and methods of approach have clearly diverged from that of the Royal government. In appealing to "intellectuals and workers" the Pathet Lao have obviously chosen groups which are not as yet defined in Lao society. Politically

speaking, the monks, students, youth and non-Lao nationalities are groups still in the process of formation. The Pathet Lao have also innovated the stress on mass demonstrations. Groupings of youth and mass meetings (as opposed to gatherings for holidays or ceremonies) have been used by the central government, particularly by the CDNI, but not on the same scale as those of the Pathet Lao.¹⁰⁹

For the Pathet Lao the chief spokesmen on minority problems have been Faydang (Phay Dang) and Sithon Kommadam, both vice-chairmen of the Neo Lao Hak Xat Central Committee. These leaders can be said to represent traditional tribal elites since, as has been indicated, Sithon is the son of the leader of tribal revolts against the French in southern Laos, and Faydang is a Meo chieftain who led revolts in northern Laos. Major Pathet Lao emphasis has, not surprisingly, been on the Meo of Xieng Khouang Province, a significant number of whom have evidently chosen to resist the Pathet Lao and in this sense remain "loyal" to the Royal Lao government. Both leaders have appealed for unity among the various nationalities. Faydang broadcast from Hanoi:

We will never allow the reactionary clique and its lackeys to make use of their power and money to deceive and create discord and hatred among the Lao Som /Meo/ people and will never allow them to

sow dissension between the Lao Som nationality and the Lao Lum /lowland Lao/ and Lao Then /Kha/ nationalities. We resolutely demand that . . . the Lao Som people enjoy full, free, and equal rights.¹¹⁰

Si Thon has called on the minorities of southern Laos to bring into full play their tradition of unremitting struggle. Referring to Prince Boun Oum he said:

He is the number one exploiter in lower Laos. The Laotian people hate him. The people of the Bolovens rose up against him in 1949. Now the name of Boun Oum can fool no one . . . We must first consolidate and expand national solidarity. We must strive to win over patriotic and peace-loving persons among the people, soldiers, policemen, civil servants, and officials, and struggle for peace, neutrality, national amity, and the crushing of the Phoumi-Boun Oum rebellious clique.¹¹¹

Both these leaders have also made general policy statements for the Neo Lao Hak Xat party. On the occasion of "Laos Day" (March 15, 1960) Faydang said that people in Asia and Africa would observe the occasion "by expressing solidarity and giving support to the Laotian people in their struggle for national salvation and against aggression by U. S. imperialism and its stooges."

The Pathet Lao have accused the "ruling clique" heading the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests of discriminating against "two candidates of the Meo people-- the most important minority in Laos"¹¹² and at the same time claimed that in June, 1960, Meo troops rebelled against the Royal Army.

In contrast to this specific ideology with regard to and use of minority peoples has been the policy of the various Royal governments. A broadcast of the Savannakhet Revolutionary Committee (the group under Prince Boun Oum which subsequently became the official Royal government after their capture of Vientiane) issued a communique addressed to "The high officers, chiefs of administrative services, and people in Xieng Khouang Province." It commended them and specifically Colonel Vang Pao and Touby Lyfang for their anti-communism, patriotism, and love for royalty and also mentioned Touby's fight against the communists in 1953. Not once, however, was there a reference to their Meo ethnic origin.¹¹³

Of all of the Royal Army fighting units, it is the Meo who have performed best. Resistance forces in Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua Provinces (presumably mostly Meo) are said to have consisted of 2,500 regulars, 4,100 trained militiamen and 3,600 armed civilians.¹¹⁴ Although these figures have been open to some doubt, still the forces have been considered important enough for American pilots to risk their lives supplying them. The communists also paid tribute to their importance by continuing to attack posts near Xieng Khouang and Oun after the May, 1961 armistice, while negotiations in Geneva were in progress.

These Meo appear to have fought to preserve their traditional sense of national identity, out of loyalty to Touby or to their new faith (a number are Christian converts) and out of resentment for previous communist depredations. The least likely motivation is a sense of "love of royalty" or even clearly defined loyalty to the Royal government generally.

At no time have the officials of any of the Royal governments in the post-war period had any sharply defined positive attitude toward the non-Lao peoples other than a vague policy of assimilation. In some cases their attitude has been negative. To quote Sisouk Na Champassak, former Secretary of State for Information and more recently Lao Ambassador to the United Nations, in referring to the battalions of Pathet Lao troops that refused to integrate into the Royal army in 1959, "More than 200 were Meos and Khas. The real Laotians made up scarcely more than half of the battalions and did not have much influence on the others [this by way of explaining their refusal to integrate]."¹¹⁵ Another example of this attitude was the refusal of officials in the Ministry of Education to permit missionaries to teach Meo as a written language and also the preferences of these same officials for establishing schools in the more easily

accessible valley areas. A number of non-Lao teachers were trained and some upland schools were set up, but only a very small percentage compared to the Lao, the excuse being that with limited funds it was best to concentrate on the more densely populated and more readily accessible lowland villages. It is true, however, that a number of tribal people have been employed in the various government programs which attempted to reach rural areas.

Generally speaking the various Royal governments of the post-World War II period have conceived of the tribal problem in traditional, i.e. administrative and charitable, terms rather than attempting to work out a positive ideology or an equal or potentially equal relationship.¹¹⁶

In October, 1959, the government attempted to establish special sub-prefectures and generally to strengthen government administration in minority areas. Despite the praise with which this measure was greeted,¹¹⁷ the Lao leaders themselves implicitly recognized the possible inadequacy of these measures: "There is no other solution except to establish separate mountain provinces; this would require more time than we now have."¹¹⁸

Successive Lao governments also attempted to cope with the problem. Upon assuming the premiership, Tiao Somsanith cited as the third goal of his government, "To establish

the mountain people on the plains so that their standard of living, which up to now has been extremely low, can be raised."¹¹⁹ The first two goals were also implicitly concerned with this problem since they dealt with improving administrative control in all areas of the country, particularly in those isolated regions where it was felt that subversion could develop, and in addition to build a communications network, mainly roads, to enable security troops to move about more rapidly.

A similar concern, but expressed in a somewhat different manner, was voiced by his successor Prince Souvanna Phouma in his speech to the National Assembly on August 30, 1960. After first speaking of the restoration of peace, achievement of unification, improved tax collection and administration, he mentioned a need "to promote the occupations and livelihood of various minority groups and the general public as well; to draft a program to assist directly and look after the welfare of the people in rural areas."¹²⁰

Classic traditional methods have also been used. In April, 1960, the King and Queen visited Nam Tha and "appeared before an immense crowd of mountain peoples who knelt down to greet their sovereign, proving by this gesture that, in spite of differences in language and

customs, they were faithful to the nation and devoted to His Majesty." ¹²¹ This excerpt is all the more interesting in that it is taken from an account in the newspaper of the young elite "reformist group." It would appear that this ceremony was more meaningful to the Royal elite than to the mountain peoples, since it ritually confirmed the King's position which was simultaneously denied by contemporary political developments, i.e., concurrent subversion in minority areas and the elite reaction in terms of attempts to strengthen administrative organs. Here, clearly, is another example of elite faith in traditional rituals which are no longer functional.¹²²

Individual elite attitudes have taken such lines as: "They (specifically referring to the Kha of the south) are no problem; they keep to themselves and settle their own disputes. Anyhow, they have equal rights to vote in the elections." A high official connected with educational affairs replied when asked about facilities provided for the non-Lao peoples: "We have not kept records on the matter. Ours is a small country and we must strive for unity. It is no harder for tribal children to learn Lao than for the Lao to learn the French they must have for education beyond the primary school."

The attitude of noblesse oblige assumed by certain officials in dealing with rural Lao peasants is even more

pronounced in their contacts with the tribal peoples. One deputy, stating (in 1959) that he was much concerned with the problem, said that he was going to visit certain remote areas of his province and ask the Chao Muong to summon all the tassengs and village headmen. Then he was going to lecture them about the government and distribute agricultural tools as gifts. Another deputy brought a Yao nai ban to Vientiane to see the sights. One official remarked that it would be an excellent thing to bring large numbers of tribal leaders to the capital for an indoctrination course. These pathetic gestures were at least a beginning of awareness, but, of course, provided no real solution.

Formidable social barriers exist. As one Khmu said, "To us every Lao is a boss." The writer was present when a government school inspector interviewed a Kha about village school problems. The man knelt throughout the interview. Even the younger Lao petty officials expect this deference. At a clinic in a tribal area in the north, male and female Lao nurses dispensed medication to their tribal patients in a condescending manner which indicated a sentiment that they were dealing with a lower order of life. (At the same time some of these same young people complained of what they felt to be the rigid status conceptions of the governor of that province, who happened

to be a member of the Royal family.)

The position of the Royal government in dealing with minority problems has been depicted essentially as a failure in contrast with Pathet Lao successes. However, it is an oversimplification to picture these developments as an inevitable series of events. There were aspects of elite views which might have served as a basis for unifying Laos, had they only been made explicit several years earlier. A very important concept but, unfortunately, one that was never really implemented, was the right of the tribal people to vote and the responsibility of the deputies to their constituents. While many tribal peoples doubtless did exercise their right to vote and probably even freely expressed a choice in a number of Lao elections, the efficacy of this process was undermined by the traditional ideologies of the Lao elite deputies themselves. As with their attitude toward the Lao rural population, the strongest accusation one can make is that they failed to envisage the future or to conceive of society as an integrated, evolving unit, so that a series of half-expressed and uncoordinated efforts--elections, strengthening administrative offices, hierarchically dispensed aid, and lesser attempts in the fields of education and resettlement--proved ineffective. (This situation is doubly tragic

since the communists despite their well-conceived ideology, were by no means successful in winning over all the tribal peoples; in fact, in many cases they applied force, thereby alienating certain segments of the population.)¹²³

As we have seen, the Pathet Lao have also not neglected any of the traditional symbols--Buddhism, the monarchy, and even western importations such as the constitution and the concept of legality. They have, however, used these concepts to suit their own purposes. Loyalty to Buddhism is affirmed not by their announced support of old traditions or religious concepts but by their championship of the rights of the monks in the latter's conflict with the government. Loyalty to the King is repeatedly affirmed. At the same time, the Pathet Lao and neutralists as well have ignored all actions of the King that run counter to their interests by asserting that he has been "coerced by reactionaries." Their "regard" for the constitution and legal process is asserted by their repeated proclamation of the Souvanna Phouma government as the legal government during the civil war, despite the fact that the government of Prince Boun Oum was invested by a majority of the National Assembly and proclaimed by a royal ordinance.

While the Pathet Lao have competed symbolically with the Royal government in all traditional areas as well as in professed loyalty to democratic institutions, they have more or less had the field to themselves in all matters of political innovation. This is a deep-seated difference that was apparent a long time before the outbreak of the civil war and is evident if we examine attempts at innovation by the Royal government. Even within the original charter of the CDNI there is no concept of a mass organization. Rather, it is a group of the elite leading the people from above.¹²⁴ Certainly the Pathet Lao leadership is an elite group, too, to a certain extent in the traditional sense but also in terms of selection and concept of leadership. However, in the latter case they clearly conceptualize the groups whom they wish to lead, the ways in which this is to be done, and the future they envisage. Although as yet not clearly spelled out for Laos, a model pattern exists in the neighboring autonomous areas of North Vietnam and to a certain extent in Yunnan as well.

The Royal government has become increasingly concerned about problems of rural development and associated tribal problems, and they have been dealt with largely in an ad hoc way through schemes such as the most recent rural development program, which despite its modest success, has merely been the latest and perhaps the best of a long

series of improvised schemes adopted by the government and in certain instances fostered by the army, in all cases with the assistance of the American aid program. In no sense have these programs succeeded in building a stable base on which the government can operate, perhaps because the traditional elite system was already bankrupt--a fact the Lao themselves implicitly recognized.

To prevent the structure from completely going to pieces it has been necessary for the Royal government to manipulate somewhat, because of the evident popularity of the Pathet Lao among the voters.

It is not intended here to contrast a successful reformist group (the Pathet Lao) with a decadent Royal government since the Pathet Lao until recently have not had much of a base in which to develop an alternative pattern. All they have needed has been to present an ideology of change and a new interpretation of class and ethnic group structure to oppose to the static one of the Royal government. In a sense the Royal government has been operating in a world which no longer exists, and the Pathet Lao are operating in terms of a social structure still to come.

It does not, of course, follow from this that the Pathet Lao hold out an irresistible program to the peoples of Laos. Domestic policies have been a secondary issue

since, as has been indicated, both groups act as proxies for a complex of powers. The Pathet Lao are not capable of instituting alone any broad program of social change, so that their basic desire is to change one group of protectors for another. In this process they are, however, at ethnic disadvantage because despite certain tribal ethnic similarities the dominant Lao are culturally oriented toward Thailand and fear and distrust the Vietnamese and Chinese. The Royal government, through genuine fear as much as conceived tactics, has spent much of its effort calling attention to this fact. If the situation were reversed and it were a communist Thailand attempting to initiate political change in Laos opposed by a western-oriented North Vietnam (leaving the role of China aside), it is likely that the process would have already been accomplished.

In essence the massive American aid program has inevitably brought about the virtual collapse of the very thing it sought to preserve, namely the traditional system of values and authority. This has been the basic although unrecognized dilemma that the west has faced in Laos and the reason the Royal Lao army has not fought well. It has been obscured by obtuse rationalizations about peaceable Buddhists refusing to fight and the Lao being interested only in recreation. The CDNI were not able to

bring about any effective modernization in the system and their attempts at remodeling archaic institutions have proven disastrous. In no small measure has this been promoted by their even greater isolation from the Lao rural population, the tribal groups, and the priesthood, an isolation even greater than that of their elders whom they presumed to replace. There existed no stable base for their power. They might have attracted the support of a merchant class had such a Lao class existed, but the Chinese and Vietnamese merchant groups, despite extensive communist sympathies, have remained essentially neutral. The junior civil servants were courted as were the officer corps, but here there was dissatisfaction with the lack of self-discipline and ostentatious self-indulgence by the elite. Had a Mercedes-Benz possessed the accepted symbol status of the traditional elephant the elite might have survived. Moreover, despite attempts at control and manipulation a National Assembly never functioned like a royal court but instead as an alternate center of power. It is perhaps no accident that two of Souvanna Phouma's chief associates in his neutralist group have been a presumably idealistic young officer of tribal origin and the former President of the National Assembly. The latter, like Souvanna Phouma, was born into the traditional elite, while the former had

married in; but for different reasons they were both dissatisfied with the existing power structure, of which the corruption was an effect and not a cause.

It is not possible to innovate in the economic field and partially in the political area while keeping frozen a sense of social structure and values.

FOOTNOTES

1. The 1959 trip and subsequent research in the United States was made possible by support from the RAND Corporation. The Research Committee of the University of California and a Faculty Research Grant also provided assistance. Information received from various government agencies interested in scholarly research is gratefully acknowledged. A preliminary version of this paper was issued by RAND in 1960, under the title The Lao Elite, a Study of Tradition and Innovation. The views expressed are, of course, the author's own.
2. These contain biographical data and interviews with selected Lao officials, townspeople and villagers, presenting their points of view on a variety of topics such as economic development, foreign aid and aspirations for the future.
3. According to Goldschmidt (Man's Way, N. Y., 1959: 207-8) a state has the following characteristics: 1. A seat of authority in an urban center with clear provisions for succession of power; 2. an effective system of local administration; 3. a police force to support the system; 4. a system of courts; 5. a unified religious system which provides an ideological sanction for authority; 6. a military force to protect the state from outside aggression; 7. a system of commerce which permits the exchange of goods between the towns and various groups in the society. Laos lacks the second and possesses the others to varying extents but is incapable of maintaining three, six and seven without outside assistance.
4. For a traditional Lao viewpoint see History of Laos by Maha Sila Viravong (English translation in J.P.R.S. (N.Y.), 712, October 1, 1958.) Interestingly, Europeans are not mentioned in this account.
5. Thailand has maintained a mild irridentism, and there is no doubt that it was superior French military power which forced the Thai to relinquish territorial claims as well as influence in Laos.

6. Maintenance of a royal capital separate from the seat of administration has been a factor in preserving factional allegiances and made effective royal leadership more difficult.
7. A detailed description of the formal government organization is already in print. See Laos, in Survey of World Cultures series, Human Relations Area Files, New Haven, 1960.
8. This represents perhaps some two thousand people in the broadest sense and, in terms of the political decision-making groups, a few dozen.

There are some indirect means of determining the number of Lao elite. In June, 1959, the Lao government's official publication, Lao Presse, had a daily circulation of 2,000 in the Lao edition (and 1,600 in a French edition). Since this bulletin carried all official announcements it seems reasonable to assume that any Lao with an important position in government affairs would get a copy, or at least have easy access to one. This is obviously a high figure, and many copies went to the provinces and to offices rather than to individuals.

Another partial determinant is official guest lists as, for example, the invitation list for the American Embassy's annual Fourth of July reception. Such a list is obviously limited, however, excluding as it does provincial officials, members of the priesthood, and some individuals who do not hold official positions in the Royal government. Those prominent in the Pathet Lao movement who are also members of the National Assembly are included. Not counting wives, approximately 150 Lao names appeared on the 1956 list and 225 on the 1959 list. While they must be examined with care, it is possible to gain some perspective by comparing the two lists. The largest category in each list, excluding Deputies to the National Assembly (who are subsequently discussed in this paper in detail), is the army. Interestingly enough, although the total list has expanded, the military category has decreased from 42 to 26, and has become more exclusive. No lieutenants and only three captains are on the 1959 list, whereas in 1956 there were six lieutenants and twelve captains. In other government departments the list has simultaneously been expanded or become more selective, a development shown clearly by the Ministry of Education

guests. In 1956 five Lao officials from that ministry were included; in 1959 there were eight, but an elementary school principal and the Director of the Lao Literary Committee had been eliminated. Certainly these developments indicate a growing number and official maturity of the Lao elite (in some instances it is merely promotion, as is the case with every army officer who appears on both lists). The number of civil service officials of importance in certain technical ministries appears to have increased dramatically, while the number of Lao diplomats has remained stable. There are seven officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs included each year, while in 1956 there were two from Public Works as opposed to nine in 1959; only the Minister of Communications was invited in 1956, and six from his department were included in 1959; in Finance there were seven in 1956 and thirteen in 1959. Perhaps equally significant is the complete disappearance of French advisors from the Lao ministries. In a sense this is more apparent than real, as French technicians are listed separately in 1959; earlier they were included under the respective ministries.

During these three years the Lao elite had in a sense come of age and unquestionably had taken greater control of their own affairs. The extent of their independence should not be exaggerated, but the assumption of increasing responsibility is indisputable. Obviously the lists cannot be used to document this development, but the increasing numbers of Lao receiving technical training abroad, the expansion or addition of government agencies, such as Urbanism, Planning, Sports and Youth, and Statistical and Topographic Services, are all evidences of this trend.

9. This has been a widespread characteristic of Southeast Asian societies in general. For example in Malaya, "The new administrators were recruited largely from the old upper class because of its access to the necessary kind of education. Members of this class could acquire education partly because they were richer, and partly because of the selection policy of institutions such as the famous Malay College at Kuala Kangsar. With their greater names, influential connections, and their ties with the towns, officials were able to secure special opportunities for their children and fit them to enter government service." (M.G. Swift, "Rural Sociology in Malaya," in Current Sociology, vol. VIII, no. 1, 1959:3.)

10. The Pathet Lao use the term sakdina to refer to the elite as "exploiters of the people." The term sakdi means dignity but also connotes power, and na are the irrigated rice fields, a symbol of wealth and status. Fall, 1960: 31. In a sense this is an artificial term, since large land holdings have never been significant in Laos.
11. As published in their newspaper Lao Haksa Sat, September 1, 1958.
12. This is characteristic of Junior Chambers of Commerce in many Southeast Asian countries.
13. The United States Government never made this a public policy. It was rather a widely known implicit policy, sometimes with explicit manifestations; e.g., the use of American planes on at least one occasion to transport CDNI demonstrators to Vientiane. Many non-CDNI government officials claimed that members of this group were given preferential treatment by American officials. Although other factors were involved, American backing of General Phoumi was not unrelated to his CDNI membership.
14. Wilfred Burchett, Mekong Upstream, 1957:258.
15. Op. cit.:276.
16. This is documented by the following State Department statement: "In March, 1951, the 'Laotian National United Front' became associated with a similar organization for dissident Cambodians created by the Vietnamese Communists, and a tri-national 'Vietnamese-Cambodia-Laos Alliance Bloc' was then created. The dependent roles of the Lao and Cambodian groups, however, was revealed in a Vietnamese Communist document issued in November, 1951, which noted that 'the Vietnamese Party reserves the right to supervise the activities of its brother Parties in Cambodia and Laos' and that

...the Central Executive Committee of the Vietnamese Workers Party has designated a Cambodian and a Laotian bureau charged with assisting the revolutionary movements in these countries. It organizes periodic assemblies of the three parties in order to discuss questions of common interest; it works toward the creation of a Vietnamese-Khmer-Laotian United Front. Militarily Vietnam,

Cambodia and Laos constitute a combat zone; Vietnam has substantially assisted Cambodia and Laos militarily as well as from all other points of view ...

Although the DRV radio between 1950 and early 1953 periodically made resounding claims concerning the strength and achievements of the 'Laotian National United Front' and the Pathet Lao 'resistance government,' there was little concrete evidence that the Pathet Lao did anything more than maintain a few small guerilla bands along the Laos-Vietnam border. Nevertheless, in June, 1951, the Chinese Communist radio attributed to Prince Souphanouvong claims that his regime exercised formal authority over one-sixth of Laos, that Pathet Lao guerillas controlled one-third of Laos, and that 'democratic elections' in two-thirds of Laos had selected representatives to the regional executive committees of the 'National United Front.' Informal Communist bloc recognition of the Pathet Lao 'resistance government' was also indicated in DRV broadcasts in 1952, which noted for example that an 'official' letter had been sent to the Soviet Government by the Pathet Lao 'foreign minister.'" The Situation in Laos, Department of State, September, 1959:3-4.

17. A. Jonas and G. Tanham, "Laos: A Phase in Cyclic Regional Revolution," Orbis, Spring 1961.
18. Although there have been considerable communist sympathies among the urban Chinese and Vietnamese communities in Laos, generally speaking their loyalties appear to be directed primarily toward their respective homelands rather than toward the Pathet Lao.
19. Estimates of party membership range from 100 (World Strength of Communist Party Organizations, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, January 1961:93) to 3,500-4,000 (Imai Tadashi, Japanese Study on Communist Forces in Laos, J.P.R.S.:3296, May 24, 1960, p. 1.
20. World Strength of Communist Party Organizations, 1961:93.
21. New York Times, April 30, 1961, section 4:1.
22. Although the report of the United Nations committee which investigated attacks in northern Laos in October, 1959,

makes frequent reference to Vietnamese attackers . . . observed by witnesses, there is also mention of Red and Black Tai prisoners interrogated at Sam Neua military headquarters. They were listed as "Laotian Nationals." (Report of the Security Council Sub-Committee under Resolution of 7 September 1959, Nov. 5, 1959, United Nations Security Council s/4236:26).

23. The Neo Lao Hak Sat cadre training system included a command school for the military, another for administrative and political cadres and an additional one for those from ethnic minority groups.
24. Tadashi, 1960:3-4.
25. Quoted in B. Fall, Informal Communications in Southeast Asia, Washington, 1960, part two:32-33.
26. This program was made explicit in the period before the 1960 elections with the following provisions:

"Respect the present constitution, support the Royal Government, support religions, protect the pagodas, respect the parliamentary regime, guarantee democratic freedoms of the people, and conduct general elections on the principles of equal, free, universal, direct and secret suffrage." Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), EEE 7, March 22, 1960.
27. "There are many countries of the socialist camp possessing increasing industrial capabilities who would be willing to aid any country without strings attached, in order to help it rid itself of imperialist control." Pathet Lao Radio, Oct. 12, 1960.
28. FBIS, III 3-4 October 19, 1960. Expansion of this point was provided in an earlier declaration, "improve the life of the people of various nationalities and strata, gradually abolish the cuong lam /"feudal"/ system, reduce all heavy taxes and abolish unjust ones, oppose the forcible drafting of manpower and troops, supply salt, textiles, and production implements to the people." Apropos of this mention of forcible drafting it is interesting to note Burchett's account of the "cheerful" atmosphere in which "convoys of porters were moving in endless lines, baskets of rice and bags of salt, grenades and mines from the jungle arsenals, uniforms and blankets from soldiers' aid cooperatives swinging around their carrying poles," in order to supply Pathet Lao troops fighting in 1955.

29. FBIS, III 4, December 13, 1960.
30. By government decree. See "People's Names" by Thao Nhoy Abhay in Kingdom of Laos, 1959:190-93
31. Referring again to the American July Fourth invitation lists, the influence of some of the major families is apparent. In 1956 and 1959 there are eight Sananikones listed; four Souvannavongs in 1956 and six in 1959; three Voravongs in 1956 and four in 1959; one Phattammavong in 1956 and four in 1959. Family relationships are actually much more significant than these sparse figures would indicate. Individuals having the same name may be only distant cousins, while a son-in-law or nephew would not necessarily show up by this test, since descent may be traced through both sides.

Detailed kinship charts will not be presented here, but a closer look at two of the major family groups, the Sananikones and the Souvannavongs, is in order. Among the Sananikones, in 1959 when Phoui was Prime Minister, a brother, Ngon, a former Minister of Education was serving as a deputy in the National Assembly, and two other brothers, Oun and Phay, were listed as prominent business men (the former was President of the Chamber of Commerce and was also an unsuccessful candidate for deputy from Vientiane in 1958.) A brother-in-law, Khamsouk Luangkhot, a prominent contractor and hotel owner, was another one of a total of seven Lao businessmen listed. The commercial ties here may be said to depend to a great degree on official government connection, e.g., government contracts. Other Sananikones are listed as Deputy from Saravane Province, Chefs de Cabinet in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Public Works, and three army majors.

As to the Souvannavongs, four half-brothers held important posts in the administration in 1959: Khoranhok was a Deputy from Nam Tha (where he also served as governor) and Secretary of State for Interior; his half-brothers (by the father's second wife) include Ourot, former Ambassador to the United States and in 1959 appointed Ambassador to Vietnam; Outhong, a former Minister and member of the King's Council; Oudai, a former governor of Khammouane Province and in 1959 Director of Protocol for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Oudong, a nephew, the first Lao to hold the degree of Doctor of Medicine, has served as Minister of Health and in 1960 became Minister of Public Works.

Several other family groups may be mentioned briefly. Most prominent among the Abhays are the brothers Kou and Nhouy, the former having served as President of the King's Council and briefly as Prime Minister beginning in January, 1960; the latter has served in various ministerial posts and was Deputy Prime Minister in his brother's government. Phao Abhay was Deputy Director of the Immigration Police in 1959, Khamphai Abhay is reportedly the sole Lao trained as a pharmacist and in addition to operating a private pharmacy has served as Director of Pharmacy in the Ministry of Public Health. Kouprasith Abhay is a lieutenant colonel in the army. Among the Voravongs, in 1959 Tane was on the King's Council, Ou and Bounthong were serving as deputies from Savannakhet, and another Voravong was Director of the Geodetic Survey, evidently the only Lao to have technical training of this sort. Sounthone Pathammavong was Minister of Defense in 1959, and three Pathammavongs are listed as lieutenant colonels. To these families must be added the names of the royal families of Champassak, which includes a number of active politicians, and Luang Prabang, which has contributed many administrative appointees and several provincial governors as well as, of course, Phetsarath, Souvanna Phouma and Souvanouvong from the second royal family of Luang Prabang.

A survey of the 1959 list, counting names of the major families and their close relatives of whom the author happened to be aware, yielded 31 names, not all of them in important positions; checking those who had titles and eliminating duplications yielded another 45 names (23 Tiaos / and Chaos/, princes of varying ranks; 14 Thaos or sons of mandarins; and six of lower ranks; there were also two Mahas /a title derived from the priesthood and retained after disrobing/), for a total of 76, not an insignificant proportion of the 220 or so names on the complete list. An important point here is that neither the Sananikones nor the Souvannavongs have titles (although as has been indicated they both trace descent from mandarins of the court of Vientiane). This is also true of several of the other prominent families.

Taking these two indicators of status--title and/or family name--we find that only two members of the King's Council (of a total of 12) do not have either or both types of affiliations. Cabinet and sub-cabinet posts are about equally divided, seven with an affiliation and six without. The latter group could doubtless be reduced if more exact biographical information were available on the individuals concerned. Included in that group,

however, is the late Katay Don Sasorith, Deputy Premier at that time and one of the most prominent Lao politicians of recent years. He appears to have been a self-made man of humble origin (according to his memoirs his father ran a cafe in Pakse which served as rendezvous for members of the local French community. / Souvenirs d'un Ancien Ecolier de Pakse, Editions Lao Sedone, 1958:20./), but his children have married with the traditional elite. A similar situation prevails with respect to the military: of a total of 26 officers on the list, 16 have overt kin ties with members of the King's Council or Cabinet or bear titles.

32. About 40,000 copies of Thai language newspapers and magazines are distributed monthly in Laos (Pickerell, "The Press of Thailand: Conditions and Trends," Journalism Quarterly, vol. 37, no. 1, 1960). There are also Thai bookstores in Vientiane. A popular magazine, complete with color photos, is printed in Thailand.
33. During the 1960-61 civil war much mention was made of the kin ties between General Phoumi Nosavan and the Thai leader Marshal Sarit.
34. Viravong, op.cit.:113-14.
35. The main differences between people from Northeast Thailand and those from Bangkok are said to be dialect differences, distinctive music, preference of the former for glutinous rice and a general cultural conservatism. See also Textor, "The Northeastern Samlaw Driver in Bangkok," in The Social Implications of Industrialization and Urbanization, UNESCO, 1956.
36. The situation appears to have been somewhat different in the elections of 1955, when family connections and aristocratic ancestry seem to have played a greater role, particularly in the southern provinces. In Savannakhet, for example, 31 out of 37 candidates had the title of Thao, and three of the non-titled belonged to the Voravong family. Four out of six deputies elected had either family or lineage affiliations (this included two Voravongs and Leuam Insisienmay who was a cabinet minister). In Champassak 35 of 51 candidates had titles (including 5 Chaos and 3 Mahas; there were also 5 Na Champassaks). Among the four deputies elected was non-titled Katay Sasorith (at that time also a minister), Khammouane listed seven of eleven candidates as Thaos; Ngon Sananikone, non-titled, was one of three elected. In Vientiane there were 16 titled individuals of 37 candidates as well as four Souvannavongs and two

Sananikones; among the four deputies elected was one from each family.

In northern Laos (except Luang Prabang) and in Attopeu in the extreme south the situation was quite different. In those areas titled individuals and those from name families are found in relatively small numbers. In Xieng Khouang a member of the traditional Meo Lyfoung family and Chao Nith Nokham of the former Xieng Khouang royal family were the sole candidates and were both elected. Surprisingly in Luang Prabang there were few titled candidates (two out of 25) and only four of political or family prominence. In Sayaboury one of seven and in Nam Tha two of 11 had these types of affiliations.

On the surface the contrasts between the types of candidates are strong. Of the 225 candidates in 1955, 105 had Thao (lesser mandarin) or princely rank compared to 14 out of 107 in 1958. This is highly suggestive of a radical change in the social origins of aspiring politicians over a rather brief period. Unfortunately detailed documentation on this point is not available. Without doubt, however, name families and experienced politicians and government officials continued their roles.

37. U. S. Comptroller General's Report on the Economic and Technical Assistance Program in Laos, Washington, 1958:62.
38. Limited education beyond elementary school was available even before then. In 1921 a three-year secondary school named for Pavie (beyond the sixth grade) was established in Vientiane, and in 1924 a fourth year was added. A technical school on the same level was established in Vientiane in 1923. In 1946 a college was opened in Pakse, followed by Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, and Xieng Khouang in 1955. In 1947 a teacher's training school was founded in Vientiane and subsequently developed a four-year course. In the same year the college in Vientiane became the Lycee Pavie.
39. Not all of these were Lao. In 1959 almost 25 percent (237 of a total enrollment of 961) of the Lycee Pavie were non-Lao (mostly French, with some Vietnamese and Chinese).

40. Of these, 98 were in France, 32 in Thailand, 27 in Cambodia, six in India, four in the United States, three in Vietnam and one in Burma. (International Yearbook of Education, vol. XX, 1958:221.)
41. Between 1950 and 1958, 104 students trained in France on Lao government scholarships and between 1955 and 1959, 171 were sent on French government stipends. (Tables 24, 25). The most significant item is unfortunately missing from both these records since neither indicates the extent of military training although 84 police are listed.
42. Impeng Suryadhay quoted by John Scott, "Asian Journey" (personal report to Time's publisher:94).
43. Nhouay Abhay, "Buddhism in Laos" in Kingdom of Laos:240.
44. See also Embree, "Thailand, A Loosely Structured Social System," American Anthropologist, vol. 52, no. 2, 1950:188-91.
45. New York Times, December 10, 1960.
46. FBIS, III-7, August 9, 1960.
47. FBIS, III-2, August 17, 1960.
48. Information and Attitudes in Laos, Bureau of Social Science Research, Washington, 1959:35. As the authors of the survey stress, these figures must be viewed with caution. Additional factors are that before World War II the King's influence was limited to Luang Prabang, and that in the hierarchical society of Laos peasants and often townspeople are more apt to be aware of a class of superior persons or of a position rather than of the name of an individual. Had the questions been posed in terms of knowledge of authority or status it is possible that quite a different index of awareness would have resulted. In any case, it is true that most of the population see themselves as widely separated from the government machinery.
49. Vientiane World, July 23, 1960.
50. According to official Lao statistics, during 1959, its first full year of operation, this civilian program of rural development was directly or indirectly responsible

for the construction of 356 schools, 232 wells, 46 roads and 48 irrigation canals as well as the repair of a large number of similar facilities (Address by Keo Viphakone, Lao Commissioner of Rural Affairs at the UNESCO Conference on Problems of Rural Life in Southeast Asia, Saigon, 1960).

51. Fall, Washington, 1960, part two:13.
52. Ibid.:14
53. Ibid.:12
54. Ibid.:10. Presumably this represents literacy in Lao, while knowledge of Pali as taught in the pagoda schools does not count.
55. During 1959 a commercial Lao language magazine was published in Bangkok and carried advertising, yet it was reported to be having difficulty attracting a sufficient audience. Outside of a few school textbooks and some volumes on Lao history, printed matter in Lao is severely limited.
56. It appears that the chief administrative officer of the priesthood, the Phra Sang Navaka, was eliminated by this ordinance as was the administrative power of the Council of Monks.

Despite their formally strict control of the priesthood the Lao government has provided generous material subsidies for the construction of new pagodas, the repair of old ones, housing for monks, and Pali schools. Initially a considerable amount of the funds connected with the rural aid program went into the construction of pagodas and associated structures. Voluntary work groups have also been organized under government supervision and not infrequently the army and other organizations may aid informally even in private religious festivals.
57. These refer basically to age, sex, and health. In Laos, to become a bonze one must be male, at least 18 years of age, without crippling or debilitating disease. (There are blind monks and those who are crippled as well, but these infirmities appeared to have developed while the individuals were serving as monks. There do not seem to be any upper age limits. In fact, many older villagers and some townspeople become monks toward the end of their lives when they retire from both their

formal occupation and family responsibilities as well. To some extent the priesthood also appears to be a refuge for unsuccessful officials.)

The bar against women is absolute. There are some older women who perform minor chores around the vat, but their numbers and ritual significance are limited. Their pronounced secondary role in Buddhist ritual and theology (women were not considered capable of attaining Nirvana) contrasts sharply with their important economic role in the larger society and the extensive material support they provide the bonzes.

A novice must be at least ten years old. He must be presented by his parents or the nai ban or tasseng, who certify his "identity and morality." Two years after admission he must be literate in Lao.

According to official figures in 1958 there were 17,023 monks (of whom 10,209 were novices). There were 100 Pali schools with 4,870 pupils, leading to the conclusion that at least half the novices were not receiving any formal education. This is probably the case in the small village pagodas with only a few monks and novices.

58. Summaries of the Buddhist faith in Laos, as presented from various points of view, are given in H. Deydier, Introduction a la Connaissance du Laos, 1952:18-32; Nhouay Abhay and Kruong Pathoumxad, 1959:237-67 in Kingdom of Laos (France-Asie); and the Human Relations Area Files study of Laos, 1960:44-60.
59. Nhouay Abhay, 1959:242-44.
60. Quoted in ibid.:290-91.
61. The Lao National Anthem, a recent western inspired innovation, makes no mention of Buddha or Buddhism, but monks are present for the opening of the National Assembly.
62. Comments on traditional Siam are to a great extent applicable to traditional Laos:

"Considerable though the numbers of the inhabitants of monasteries are in proportion to the total population of the country, and despite the fact that what education there was was in the hands of the monks, the tendency has been rather to secularize the administration of the Church, than to allow the latter to obtain any degree of temporal power. Indeed, the very limited sphere of

influence of the clergy in the heart of a people devoted to religious activities, and the almost complete separation of Church and State, are at first sight surprising. Anything in the nature of a religious hierarchy is of quite modern development for, in former days the existence of a highly organized religious body would have constituted a menace to the absolute power of the king, such as no Siamese ruler could have tolerated. In any case a desire for temporal power by the monks was contrary to the teachings of Hinayana Buddhism, and was further minimized by the fact that only a very small proportion of the brotherhood was made up of men who intended to devote themselves permanently to the religious life...ambitious persons desirous of material power and wealth could so readily obtain it in the legitimate sphere of government service...that there was little to tempt the monk to meddle in political affairs." Wales, op. cit.:237-38.

This stress on the separateness of Church and State in Thailand is relative. Other scholars have underlined the symbiotic relationship between state and sangha, where sangha sanction and support of Buddhist kings was exchanged for their protection and promotion of the faith. Occasionally, kings persecuted or utilized the priesthood for personal or non-Buddhist ends, and sangha leaders tried to oppose the secular power. Generally, however, Buddhist sovereigns have supported their religion, while the priesthood often served as political advisors and helped bolster the kingdom on the national as well as local levels. The nobility as well as the villagers supported Buddhism, and the fortunes of the sangha paralleled those of Buddhist kings since the well-being of one tended to induce or insure the welfare of the other. Today the traditional form of Hindu-Buddhist monarchy has taken a constitutional form in Laos, as in her neighbors Thailand and Cambodia. Consequently, Buddhist political thought may have little actual impact upon constitutional monarchies and parliaments even though Buddhism has been made the state religion with the king as its protector. (Gard, "An Introduction to the Study of Buddhism and Political Authority in South and Southeast Asia," unpublished paper.)

63. Quoted in abbreviated form from issue of February 16, 1960. Although no confirming information is available the account of Prince Souphanouvong's escape from the custody

of the Royal Lao Government in May 1960 as it was published a year later in the Hanoi newspaper Quan Doi. Nhan Dan provides some possible insights into Pathet Lao influence in the Buddhist priesthood. One of the points made is that "Many guards who had undergone a period in the Buddhist priesthood showed themselves to be very sensitive to the sufferings of the Prince and his friends." The point is also made that the requests of Prince Souphanouvong and his associates in asking the guards to take flowers to pagodas on religious festival days also deeply moved the guards. Also specifically mentioned are the monks who guided the Prince and his associates through the jungle after their escape.

64. Nhouy Abhay, 1959; originally published in French version in 1956.
65. The United States Information Service has disseminated on a large scale what might be called Buddhist type propaganda. This includes printed materials, exhibits and films, a number of which were particularly prepared for the 2,500th Anniversary of Buddhism. One exhibit dealt with Buddhist art in the United States, and a special issue of the USIS magazine Free World, issued in the Lao language, portrayed some of the holy shrines of Buddhism in Southeast Asia and concluded with a description of Buddhists in the United States. Lao newsreels, produced with USIS help, have dealt with various religious ceremonies. On the basis of a number of casual conversations with villagers, monks and townspeople, it is inferred that the materials and films are favorably received, although they have not necessarily promoted American objectives. The abbot at one wat handed some USIS Buddhist booklets to a Thai visitor at the same time telling him in very strong terms how the Americans were ruining his country by corrupting the people.

Also subsidized by USIS are English teaching programs among the bonzes. In addition several have been sent to America for study. The USIS has also assisted the sangha in producing newspapers while the Asia Foundation, a private organization, has been interested in subsidizing the publication of books and in employing technicians to assist in the reconstruction of pagodas.

Various conflicting elements within the priesthood were brought out during an interview I had with the director of the Pali school in Luang Prabang in the summer of 1959. This particular bonze had an exceptional background for a Lao monk. He had been selected by the chief monk of Laos to study in India and said that he had a Master's Degree from the University of Bihar, specializing in Buddhist studies. In addition to travels in Southeast Asia, he had visited China as a member of a Buddhist delegation. He was assigned to Luang Prabang with a view to improving the system of religious education. His quarters at the summit of the Phousi hill in the center of town were not without appeal. A bamboo shack with galvanized tin roofing was furnished with a cot and mattress; nearby was a bedside table with a radio and a jug of boiled water. During our visit a young novice who acted as his servant served fruit. In a bookcase were a number of volumes, magazines and pamphlets. We discussed several problems including the ignorance of most local monks of the Chinese suppression of Buddhism in Tibet, and their contrasting (though covert) hostility to the government. Then he launched into a discussion of animistic spirits and how it was necessary for the bonzes to constantly struggle against beliefs in the phi which remain strong in the villages. This combination of international contacts, provincialism, hostility to the government and age-old struggles with the phi are all indicative of the conflict between the forces of secularization and tradition both within and impinging on the clergy. This particular monk also felt some of the pressures directly, since a number of the more conservative bonzes objected to his use of a radio.

66. There was, however, one ruthless female despot in Lao history who was finally killed because of her excesses.
67. From the translations by Pavle, quoted in Kingdom of Laos, 1959:397-99.
68. This trading function of the Lao, which continues today (see Laos Project Paper no. 19) had its origin in the fact that the Lao were river people who dwelt along the Mekong, an important trade route, and its tributaries.
69. Because the Lao are a small group in Southeast Asia and have been relatively passive in their contacts with

Westerners, it becomes easy for the European to generalize their behavior. After having seen Kha kneel before a Lao official, or watched Kha children breaking rock for roadbeds one may be inclined to question this.

70. Paul Le Boulanger, Histoire du Laos Francais, 1931:196-97.
71. Ibid.
72. In his book Ancient Siamese Government and Administration, H. G. Quaritch Wales makes the important point that during their early history in Southeast Asia the Thai (and it can be assumed the Lao as well) were organized primarily for warfare, and that this military organization promoted the centralization of power and with it the monarchy. Since the government was always monarchical the term "king" was really synonymous with government and state. The king was the leader and protector of his people in war and their ruler in time of peace (p.15). He also states, "Among the effects of Indian influence on the Thai were the deification of the king, his exaltation by greatly elaborated royal ceremonial, and his isolation and protection by taboos. These naturally fostered the growth of the master and servant relationship between the king and his people, though this seems never to have entirely excluded the old Thai relationship which approximated that of a father and his children (p. 71)."
73. A notable exception was reported early in this century in connection with the French-built Royal Palace in Luang Prabang. After the dedication ceremonies, a local Khmu chieftain was the first to enter the building, since it was considered that he had better acquaintance with the guardian spirits than the king, and could more easily come to terms with them.
74. The use of the term "king" is misleading, since there was only one head of state. Yet "prince" does not indicate the primacy of the Tiao Tsi Vit Vang Na position and that of the other "Kings." There is a similar problem in conveying the true sense of Tiao, usually translated as prince.
75. This position was largely honorific and carried with it no official duties. Similarly, Prince Boun Oum of Champassak was given the title of Inspector General of the Kingdom.

76. Wales (Ibid:76), quoting the Siamese Law of the Civil Hierarchy of 1454, notes that the royal family is placed at the head of the civil division of government although until comparatively recent times members of the royal family did not take any definite part in the central administration. This did not, however, apply to the Vang Na which usually performed great service to the state and shared with the king the responsibilities of guiding the general course of the administration, so in this sense Phetsarath and his brothers have carried an old tradition into contemporary Lao politics.
77. Reinach, 1911:236-38.
78. Some French sources say that suffrage was conferred on those who paid a head tax.
79. The French Resident Supérieur.
80. This traditional lack of clear differentiation between personal and state resources may offer a possible explanation for the widespread "corruption" of Lao officials in the administration of American aid programs.

This has also been an important principle in traditional Siamese administration. "At all times the officials were dependent for their living on the people committed to their charge, not on any direct rewards or salary from the king. They obtained a portion of the personal services and of the fruits of the agricultural labours of the people who lived under their control, a share of the taxes they collected if that happened to be their duty, of the fines that they imposed if they were judges, or of the cost of issuing legal documents and affixing seals. . . the officials mainly depended for their living on what they could make in the course of the execution of their duties and also by presents from inferiors" (Wales, op. cit.:42).
81. Code Civil, 1928:10.
82. Edmund Leach, The Frontiers of "Burma" in Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. III, no. 1, October 1960:49-68.
83. According to Zarney (1957) a deviation from this pattern may occur when an individual has received recognized military honors from the government.

84. 1947:40-47.
85. Savina, 1930 II:258.
86. Burchett, 1957:250 ff.
87. A number of Meo served in the French forces and remained in the Royal Lao Army after independence.
88. "The A Phus" (To Hoai Stories of the North-West, Hanoi, 1957), by a Vietnamese writer, To Hoai, is a good example of created mythology. All the characters are neatly typed: the arrogant, exploiting headman, his weak self-indulgent son, the poor, virtuous, abused daughter-in-law whose father was forced to sell her. The girl elopes with the righteous young man who was forced to serve the headman's family as a herdsman. The herdsman becomes a communist cadre and regains his dignity.
89. "A headtax is owed by every able-bodied man between the ages of eighteen and sixty, except for bonzes, pagoda servants, the native authorities, men who have served for four years in the civil guard, militiamen on active duty, invalids, and liberated slaves.

There are four categories of registered persons:

1. Those of the great Thai race, who pay five francs and also owe twenty days of service in kind in Upper Laos, and ten in Lower Laos. This service may be redeemed upon payment of five francs.
2. Those of the other races such as Khas, Meos, Yaos, etc. who pay 2.50 francs and owe ten days of service in kind, redeemable for 2.50 francs.
3. The Annamites, who pay a headtax of five francs and do not owe service in kind.
4. Foreign Orientals, who pay a headtax of 12.50 francs per year and do not owe any statue labor. If they are merchants they pay a license fee of five francs per shop." (Reinach, 1901:241).

90. Le Boulanger, 1931
91. These concepts appear to be widespread, as in the case of the Khmu "King" in his cave stocked with western goods (see Laos Project Paper 18:82-83). One form of the story is that the Khmu King and Meo King are located in adjacent caves. The whole messianic concept, however, is identified by many with communist propaganda (Smalley, personal communication, 1961).

92. Tai Dam dated from Lafont (1955) and Hickey (1958).
93. Throughout northern Vietnam and parts of northern Laos, the Lo Cam have been recognized as the social and political elite. With their position sanctioned by the highest god in the Black Tai pantheon, the Lo Cam were reputed to have special powers to communicate with the gods. As a result, at the most important rituals, such as the opening of the planting season and the offerings to the spirit of the muong, it is essential that a member of the Lo Cam officiate.
94. Col. Diguët, Les Montagnards du Tonkin, 1908:90.
95. Lafont, 1955:800.
96. Izikowitz, 1951, calls him the priest of sacrifice.
97. Ibid: 112-16
98. H. Bernatzik, 1947:44-47.
99. Le Boulanger, 1931:209-11.
100. Burchett, 1959:239-47.
101. The institution of lam notwithstanding (although data here is unfortunately meager. See Laos Project Paper no. 19).
102. Leach, 1960:49-50.
103. L'Independent, December 10, 1959.
104. Lac Hakxa Sat, French edition, February 1, 1960.
105. Presumably these regulations as such did not have too great an effect on the Neo Lao Hak Xat candidates who included three former governors, two former civil servants and school teachers, and an ex-deputy as well as a former district chief.
106. Vientiane World, April 30, 1960:2.
107. Le Journal d'Extreme Orient, April 7, 1960.
108. FBIS, III-1, October 18, 1960.

109. Emphasis on tribal groups is peculiar to the communists. Even "neutralists" such as Souvanna Phouma and Pheng Phong Savan, former President of the National Assembly, did not appeal to them for support.
110. FBIS, III-1, November 9, 1960.
111. FBIS, III-3, September 26, 1960.
112. Although numerically the Meo are a relatively small group in the kingdom as a whole, they are concentrated largely in Xieng Khouang and are excellent fighters. The communists have made many special efforts to win over the whole group.
113. FBIS, III-7, October 11, 1960.
114. Jacques Nevard, New York Times, May 22, 1961, quoting Colonel Vang Pao.
115. The Facts Behind the Pathet Lao Affair, Ministry of Information, Vientiane, June 23, 1959.
116. Two editorials from L'Independent illustrate this attitude: "There is a lack of communication in the high plateaus and in the mountain regions where people of differing origins are to be found--people whose customs and way of living are very different from ours. A rich Chinese or Thai background is the spiritual strength of these 'ethnic minorities,' who are often considered as 'nature's children' even though their society is strongly as well as hierarchically organized (October 22, 1959)." And again, concerning the elections held in April, 1960: "Mountain people are only interested--rightly, we admit--in what they can obtain from the government...We are sure that the rural and mountain people will ask for explanation not concerning subtle political schemes but regarding taxes, aid to rural areas, road building, public health, dams and anti-communist bans...the rural and mountain people will exactly estimate each candidate according to his good or bad service. In our opinion, the time for empty promises is over and candidates must take their occupation as deputies seriously. So far neglected, the rural people will raise their voice [in the elections]. (March 10, 1960)."
117. See editorial by Ginsey, Le Journal d'Extreme Orient, November 7, 1959.

118. L'Independent, October 22, 1959.
119. Le Journal d'Extreme Orient, August 2, 1960.
120. FBIS, III-1, September 2, 1960.
121. Lao Hakxa Sat, April 11, 1960.
122. No information is available on the history of these ceremonies of obeisance, but judging by other types of ritual relationships which have prevailed between the Lao and tribal peoples, it is conceivable that they formerly had a real function to bind the various tribal peoples to the valley Lao and were underlain with a substructure of religious and economic symbiosis. Political and economic innovations have; however, virtually destroyed the symbiotic substructure and removed whatever basis of political loyalty may have originally existed. Probably this process of destruction began with the French colonization of Laos.
123. Formal recognition of minority groups is, however, by no means limited exclusively to communist states. Although the Laos Constitution makes no specific mention of non-Lao ethnic groups and ethnocentrically proclaims Buddhism as the state religion, the Burmese Constitution as adopted in 1957, provides for a Chamber of Nationalities and, while recognizing the special position of Buddhism as the faith of the great majority, also officially mentions Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Animism. Perhaps it is the persistence of the Lao monarchy which has prevented any effective way of dealing with tribal problems, for there is an interesting correlation between monarchies and established religion, e.g., Buddhism in Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos and Islam in Malaya while the republics such as Indonesia and Burma are officially secular. (For a comparative analysis see S. Rose, "Constitutions in South-East Asia," in St. Antony's Papers, No. 7, Far Eastern Affairs, No. 2, ed. G. F. Hudson, London, 1960.
124. While the younger elite have tended toward group action the older elite, as exemplified by Princes Phetsarath and Boun Oum, have attempted to act the traditional princely role. A remark of the late Prince Phetsarath is illustrative. After his return to Laos in 1957 he said

that it would be impossible for him to become Prime Minister because, "I would deal directly with problems and not stand for any nonsense. This is something to which the National Assembly would never agree."

A resident diplomat, when asked why the Prince was not backed by some of the western powers, replied that it might be a possibility if they could determine where the army stood with regard to the Prince. The Viceroy's attitude and the diplomat's question symbolized the beginning of the end of the old power structure. (Further, his hereditary title as second king in charge of the military vanguard for the Kingdom of Luang Prabang had no practical meaning for the Lao generals and colonels who were trained as sergeants and lieutenants in the French Colonial Forces). More recently, a speech by Prince Boun Oum (December 23, 1960) exemplifies the princely attitude: "Laotians are already democrats, communists and socialists in their own traditional way of life. What Laotians now want is to be commended and to know that their leaders have a sense of proportion in good measure so that they will be able to live in peace and practice Buddhism."