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June 1, 1961

## Laos Profiles

Joel Halpern, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*



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LAOS PROJECT

Paper No. ~~18~~ 19

LAOS PROFILES

**JOEL M. HALPERN**

Dept. of Anthropology

Brandeis University

Waltham, Mass.

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## NOTES ON LAOS PROFILES

The materials assembled in this paper consist of biographical sketches as well as interviews with and commentaries by individuals representing diverse aspects of Laotian society. The purpose here is not primarily to provide a background on current political problems but rather to give the reader some feeling for the peoples who inhabit Laos, by presenting representative viewpoints and something of the psychological framework out of which opinions emerge.

This paper illustrates reactions to innovations by various segments of the population, especially in fields of government activity such as economic and social development. Another subject treated is interaction among different factions--the older and younger generations, the elite, urban youths, monks, villagers and tribal peoples. One can follow the transmission of ideas as they pass from senior government officials to lower level bureaucrats and ultimately to the rural population.

The table of contents is so arranged that the reader with special interests such as political affairs or rural development can select those profiles which will be of greater interest to him.

The material collected here is mainly the result of two periods of residence in Laos--the year 1957, when the author was the provincial representative of the American aid mission in Luang Prabang, and the summer of 1959, spent chiefly in and around Vientiane, under grants from the University of California and the RAND Corporation. Thus field experience has been concentrated in northern and central Laos, although interviews with officials from southern provinces are also included. Interviews with government officials were conducted in French, and those with villagers were in Lao, with the assistance of an interpreter. Unless otherwise noted in the text, all comments refer to the summer of 1959. Also included are some selections from published but not readily available sources.

It should be emphasized that these profiles are by no means complete in the sense of representing all segments of the population--for example, there are no representatives of the highly important Chinese and Vietnamese communities or of the Pathet Lao, and coverage is inadequate on the diverse ethnic groups.

The profiles are here presented in raw form and with the exception of a few footnotes it is left to the reader to draw his own conclusions. For an analysis and interpretation see the author's "Lao Elites: Tradition and Innovation," where, in addition to presenting certain generalizations about Lao behavior, an attempt is made to interpret through available documentary evidence the political developments which have occurred since 1959. The rapid march of events has obviously dated many of the political statements. Still, I feel that many of the behavior

patterns indicated implicitly or explicitly have strong stability. It is not, therefore, specific comments of individuals which are felt to be significant but rather their general value system and personal orientation, which can be expected to remain fairly constant through successive political crises.

Through no fault or desire of her own Laos has come to occupy a critical position in world affairs. Despite platitudes of the public press in Europe and America the Lao are often surprisingly realistic in expressing their limitations and inadequacies. Many of the attitudes expressed in these pages are "official" in that they are intended for foreign consumption. Others indicate bitterness at a deteriorating political situation and reflect the felt impotency of the Lao to control their own affairs in the face of outside influences. But many also show an ability to be objective in assessing their relationships.

Included here are many controversial and indeed contradictory statements. The author does not pretend to agree with any particular point of view at this time, the idea being to let the peoples of Laos speak for themselves. No attempt has been made to censor remarks, although libelous materials have been deleted and, where appropriate, individuals have been identified in general instead of by name or title. In only a few cases was I requested specifically to conceal identities, and these desires have been followed. In some instances details of the backgrounds of unnamed officials have been slightly altered to protect anonymity while broad characterizations remain valid.

Appreciation is gratefully expressed to the various Lao officials and peoples of Laos who shared their thoughts with an outsider. It is hoped that their frank comments will be received in an atmosphere of sympathy and understanding by those who are interested in the future of Laos.

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## TRADITIONAL HEREDITARY LEADERS

The following four individuals, including two recently deceased, are presented because they exemplify some of the characteristics of Lao nobility, a group whose role and function is today rapidly changing.

## KING SISAVANG VONG

The (late) King of Laos was born in 1835 and is a direct descendant of the Khoun Lo dynasty, which goes back over 1,000 years and which came originally from Yunnan Province in China. King Sisavang Vong attended the French Colonial College from 1900 to 1901 and ascended the throne of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang in 1904. He was crowned in 1905, which makes his reign the longest of any monarch. Deposed at the end of 1945 by the Lao Issara, he lived a quiet life until his return to the throne in 1946, when he became King of all Laos. He made many trips to France for medical reasons, the last in 1956.<sup>1</sup>

Upon his death in October, 1959, a Bangkok newspaper reported from Luang Prabang:

A twenty-one gun salute boomed out over this pagoda-spired royal capital Friday, to proclaim the death of King Sisavang Vong, Monarch of Laos since 1904. The King, seventy-four... had been an invalid for years. He ruled the Kingdom until last August, when he appointed the Crown Prince Savang as Regent...

The King had twenty wives, it was once estimated. He was a fervent Buddhist and refused to budge from his royal capital when Communist Vietnamese forces threatened in 1953. His determined and serene faith that Buddha himself would protect the city led a French official to describe him as "stubborn as only a good, proud King knows how to be."<sup>2</sup>

When Sisavang Vong became King of the small territory around Luang Prabang at the age of nineteen, life remained tranquil and normal, following the traditional calendar, with court etiquette and festivities, until the war with Japan. Its end brought turmoil and aggrandisement. First the King was obliged to abdicate at the bidding of the Free Lao Movement, and then he was made King of all the territory of Laos in addition to Luang Prabang.

<sup>1</sup> Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos, Vientiane, United States Information Service, April, 1959, p L-1 (mimeographed).

<sup>2</sup> Bangkok Post October 31, 1959.

A visitor to the royal court of Luang Prabang in the early 1920's presents interesting details, picturing the King as a modest, unassuming individual very much under the domination of the French, with whom both he and the Crown Prince sided during the three Lao independence movements.<sup>1</sup>

Although not a dynamic leader he did lend a sense of symbolic unity to our country, at least as far as the Lao elite were concerned, and an important aspect of his long rule was that no one, not even the Lao Communists, openly attacked the Monarchy and advocated a Republic. Lithographs of his portrait were hung in a prominent place in Lao homes and were felt to protect the house from evil spirits.

SAVANG VATTHANA  
PRESENT KING OF LAOS

Savang Vatthana, the eldest son of the late King, was born in 1907 in Luang Prabang and graduated from the Ecole de Science Politique in Paris, until recently the French diplomatic school. In 1930 he became Secretary General of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang and in 1941 presided at the privy council of the Kingdom. In 1947 he went to Washington as an advisor on the Franco-Siamese Conciliation Commission. In view of his father's illness during the last several years, Savang Vatthana took the primary role in most state functions. In the fall of 1955 he again visited the United States, where he was received by the President and other high ranking officials.<sup>2</sup>

In no sense can King Savang Vatthana's role be compared to that of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in neighboring Cambodia, who appears to have completely dominated political life in that country. However, during 1959 when he was still Crown Prince, he did seem to take a more active role in government affairs. The extent of his influence is hard to determine, since he is at least formally consulted on all governmental changes. He appears to be a pleasant, fairly mild-mannered sort of person. As indicated earlier, he has been strongly influenced by French culture. Unlike his father who spoke rather halting French, the new King's French is fluent and he has a considerable knowledge of English. Most of his children have received extensive education in France.

Some observers contend that his French sympathies have had a rather negative effect on many Lao. Certain Lao officials have claimed he is

<sup>1</sup> Harry A. Frank East of Asia: Ramblings in the Five Divisions of French Indo-China, New York 1926.

<sup>2</sup> Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos, p. L-1.

unable to read and write his own language well, and that his speeches in Lao are not as good as those in French. There appears to be some truth in these statements, although his knowledge of his native language is said to have improved in recent years. A number of the inhabitants of Luang Prabang feel that both he and his father abused them during the period of French rule. In fact, some candidates for the National Assembly running for election in Luang Prabang Province have attempted to garner votes by criticizing the late King and the present King.

King Savang has traveled throughout the country, but only along the main routes and to those areas which can be easily reached by plane. He has not, like the late Prince Phetsarath, done much hiking through the back country. Nor does he appear to be a very dynamic figure having a great deal of popular appeal. It is, however, quite possible that he may assume more initiative in leadership in the future. So far no one has questioned his traditional prerogative of ascension to the throne as manifested in the Constitution. Although he appears frequently in public on ceremonial occasions, his contact with the general population is somewhat limited. This seems to be a matter of personal preference. For example, during the Lao New Year celebration, the King makes a traditional visit to a Buddhist shrine at the grotto at Pak Ou on the Mekong some fifteen miles upstream from Luang Prabang. The nature of the ceremonies are such that he has preferred to spend the night there rather than return to Luang Prabang. He does not stay in the village but in an encampment especially set up on an island in the Mekong. There is no doubt that traditionally there has been great social distance between Lao royalty and their subjects. However, considerable modification appears to be possible, depending on the personality of the individual. The continuation of the monarchy in Laos would not seem to be determined by the wishes of the population at large, but rather by the attitudes of the governing political elite.

In this connection his performance during the 1960-61 Civil War is highly significant. In theory remaining above the conflict he failed to resolve differences during the initial stages. Although the Pathet-Lao have not yet begun to attack the person of the King or the Monarchy as such they have ignored or opposed the King's pronouncements when they have run counter to Communist policy, as in the case of recognition of the government of Prince Boun Oun.

In February 1961, King Savang's proposal for a plan for a neutral Laos indicated the possibility of his assumption of a more dynamic role in the future.

PRINCE PHETSARATH

Prince Phetsarath was born in Luang Prabang in 1890, a son of the Viceroy who was an uncle of Sisavang Vong. After studying in Hanoi and Saigon, he went to Paris in



1905 where he attended the Colonial College for French Administrators. He also spent one year at Oxford and returned to Laos in 1918. After a brilliant career in the civil administration for Laos, where he attained a reputation as a hard-working and effective administrator, he was elevated to the rank of Viceroy of Luang Prabang in 1941. In 1945, following the Japanese coup-d'etat, Luang Prabang under the leadership of Phetsarath declared its independence, and he became the Prime Minister of the newly independent country. However, when the Japanese surrendered in August of that year, the French returned to Laos and re-exerted their sovereignty over the country. Phetsarath opposed the French re-occupation and in October, 1945, organized the Lao Issara provisional government. He went into exile in Bangkok in 1946, where he remained the leading power in the Free Lao Movement until 1948, when most of the Lao Issara returned to Laos, including his half-brother Souvanna Phouma. Phetsarath remained in Bangkok until March, 1957, when he returned to Laos. Soon thereafter he was made Viceroy for the entire Kingdom. Since his return he has not taken an active part in Lao political life.<sup>1</sup>

King Sisavang Vong and Prince Phetsarath grew up in similar circumstances but had opposite personalities. Prince Phetsarath was a rather dynamic individual who traveled widely and took a lead in his country's fight for independence from France.

In addition to his political role, he was a renowned hunter and interested also in writing a history of his country. During his lifetime he produced two books, one on hunting techniques and the second on the Lao methods of reckoning time. After his return from Thailand in 1957, instead of participating actively in government he played the role of elder statesman, spending considerable time consulting with many of the senior government officials, including his brother Souvanna Phouma who was at that time Prime Minister.

He also took an interest in the local villagers and tribal groups, for he had a strong feeling of responsibility to his people in the traditional sense of noblesse oblige. His family had acted as intermediary for certain tribal peoples in their contacts with the government, and his ancestors had resettled some Lu (tribal Tai) people in the area of Luang Prabang. In addition he assumed responsibility for the villagers near his own estate, some of whom served as household servants and others as laborers on his land. With his own funds he bought seed potatoes,

<sup>1</sup> Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos, p. L-1

Leghorn chickens and Hampshire hogs and bred these on his estate, later distributing them to villagers. For mountain people who wished to re-settle on the plains, he provided funds to buy buffalo and plows. Some of these people he met on his frequent tours; others came in delegations to his home. The effectiveness of some of these measures is questionable, but they are significant in that they indicate a type of traditional benevolence. Certain of these attitudes are also evident in the behavior of Lao elected officials, who tend to treat the people as subjects rather than as constituents but without a feeling of noblesse oblige.

In the autumn of 1957 the author made a four-day trip with Prince Phetsarath. This tour combined ceremonial, economic and religious functions in a unique way characteristic not only of Lao culture and relationships between villagers and the royal elite, but also reflecting quite clearly the personality of the Prince himself. The trip began at sunrise, departing from the Prince's estate on the outskirts of Luang Prabang. We were accompanied by various local officials, some of whom were relatives, plus several servants and his personal police bodyguard. The party also included fifteen Khmu tribesmen recruited (probably corve'ed) as coolies.

We set off up the Mekong in a traditional Lao pirogue (dugout canoe) powered by a modern outboard motor. Our first stop was at the village where a landing platform and a bamboo and palm frond arch had been especially prepared for his welcome. The villagers, all in their best clothes, were lined up along the embankment. The young girls held up silver bowls with floral offerings which they presented in the traditional squatting posture of respect to the Prince. He accepted the offerings, handing them over to an aide who carried them on a large tray and afterward presented them to the local pagoda.

The brief village visit concluded, the trek through the jungle began at the edge of the rice fields. Paddy fields lay fallow, the Prince explained, because the villagers had no dam to provide water for irrigation. He said he intended to help them build one. Later he asked if I could recommend a book on modern irrigation principles since it had been some time since he had designed dams.

After an hour's walk the Prince called a halt and rested on a foam rubber cushion carried by one of the porters. The trail became fairly steep in places, although it had obviously been prepared for this trip, as evidenced by small bamboo bridges over several streams. The entourage stopped frequently to allow the Prince to make notes for a route map he was preparing. He carried a compass and pedometer, noted the readings and sketched the terrain.

After several hours we arrived at the village that was our destination, where the Prince received the same traditional welcome. A special house had been constructed for him to sleep in. It had a tin roof, bamboo sides and a raised sleeping platform, the Prince's quarters being screened off by curtains. Another section was supplied for the officials,

including the Chao Muong or district chief. Protocol was not an involved procedure: the Prince made all decisions and his retinue followed accordingly, whether it was a question of time of departure or food for dinner. Anyone wishing to speak to the Prince did so on bended knee. This included his relatives and the provincial officials as well as the villagers. The district chief and the Deputy Inspector of Schools (also his cousin) ate at the same table as the Prince and the writer, all of us sharing a common bowl in customary Lao style. In almost all cases it was left to the Prince to initiate the conversation.

The villagers tendered the Prince a baci, the traditional Lao ceremony designed to bring prosperity to the person in whose honor it is given. The Prince was seated on his portable deck chair with all the villagers squatting down around him. Cords were tied to his wrists and blessings given in the customary manner. After the ceremony a few of the elders remained to discuss some of the problems of their village.

That evening we spent considerable time discussing the political future of Laos. Prince Phetsarath appeared to be quite cognizant of the Communists but also emphasized the fact that the future flexibility of the Lao government and its foreign policy was limited by the presence of China to the north and Vietnam to the northwest; he stressed the long common border Laos shares with both these Communist states. He severely criticized the corruption in the Lao government, which at that time was at its height. He indicated that he would clean up corruption in short order if he were heading the government but did not think the National Assembly would permit such thorough house-cleaning, implying many officials would be afraid of his direct methods. The Prince lamented the low state to which he said the moral climate in Laos had fallen. "Most of the young people in Laos now value money more than honor," he claimed, indirectly relating this to the American aid program, but limiting his criticism of the program to the way in which it was administered, since he was definitely in favor of Laos receiving aid.

When I asked if there were any solutions to this moral decline, he frankly acknowledged that he had no answer. His hope was that Laos might become self-sufficient in several years and might not require any more foreign aid. He thought this might be done by developing both the agricultural potential as well as mineral resources which he claimed were present in the northern part of Luang Prabang Province and other areas. Roads and communications, he felt, were important since some areas produce surplus rice and other products but have no way of taking their goods to market.

One of the desires of the particular village in which we were staying was a school. The village leaders put their proposal to the Prince, and although he made no direct reply, later that evening after he had retired, there was a conference among the Chao Muong, Tasseng (chief of a group of villages), Nai Ban (village chief), and the Deputy Inspector

of Primary Schools, at which it was decided to build a school for about sixty pupils for three neighboring villages, evidently with government funds.

The following morning we were up at 5 o'clock. The Prince excused himself, saying he was usually up by 4. By 6 a.m. we had breakfasted and were ready to continue our hike up the mountain. Our objective was a cave 1,300 feet above the village, where a skull and other archeological remains had reportedly been found. Boards had been placed across small streams so the Prince would not wet his feet, and the villagers sometimes leaned over for him to put his hand on their backs. Although he had some difficulty in ascending the steep trail (he was sixty-seven at the time) it was evidently not permissible to touch his person directly. I alone was able to offer him a helping hand.

Unlike the previous day's march, this trail had not been prepared in advance, and it was with some difficulty that our guides picked their way through the dense brush. The trail soon became quite steep approximating a sixty degree grade. In the course of our climb, the Prince stopped every hundred yards or so to take a compass reading as he continued with his mapping. As the ascent progressed we rested every half hour, and while the Prince calmly smoked a cigarette, I tried to catch my breath. The final 150 feet below the cave involved climbing a sheer rock face. This was no easy job for the Prince because of his short legs. Nevertheless, he set the pace for everyone. Two and a half hours after the trip had begun, we reached the cave located in a limestone outcrop. A surface collection of skeletal materials and pottery was made.

We descended to visit a second cave where the Prince had meditated as a monk, upon his return from ten years of study in France some forty-two years ago. He said he had spent twenty days alone there. The cave itself was not particularly interesting except for a pool of water the Lao consider to be holy, some of which was brought back to Luang Prabang to consecrate coronations. There were, however, a number of inscriptions in the cave, which he had his cousin copy.

Unlike many of his countrymen, he had a great desire to express himself precisely. This was shown not only by his map-making, but by the fact that he would quote to me the exact numbers of tigers or wild oxen he had shot, with the shoulder heights of the largest ones. His interest in Lao astronomy is also a reflection of this attitude. I asked him how his Buddhist belief correlated with his hobby of hunting. He acknowledged that in this respect he was not a very good Buddhist.

He claimed that it was only in recent years that he has acquired an interest in archeology. He was currently preparing a book on the history of Laos and intended to publish it in both Lao and French. He expressed regrets that his English was not adequate to the task of pre-

senting his writings in that language as well.<sup>1</sup>

We returned to the village in time for lunch. I found it almost as difficult descending as ascending, but I noticed that the Prince, long used to mountain climbing, walked slowly and did not once stumble or falter.

That evening a villager approached the Prince on bended knees and asked him to chase the phi<sup>2</sup> from his house. His family had had bad luck and his daughter was now ill. The Prince mounted the steps of the house and entered, not bothering to remove his shoes as is Lao custom. Perhaps he deemed it beneath his dignity. He took one look at the girl, diagnosed her illness as malaria and gave the father some quinine tablets. Then through an intermediary, a former civil servant now retired, he addressed the phi and requested them to depart.

Previously I had heard many tales of the Prince's "magical power," some of these told me by western-educated government officials. One asserted that Prince Phetsarath had the power to change himself into a fish and could swim under water for long distances. It was said that bullets could not harm him. He was also reputed to have the ability to change his form, so that at a conference with the French at the time of the Free Lao Movement, he became angry with them, changed himself into a fly, and flew out the window. The Prince laughed when I related these stories. He said that for the past thirty years or so villagers have been asking him to chase away the phi. People from many parts of the Kingdom often write to him requesting his picture, and some of them place it in their rice fields to keep away malevolent spirits. As far as I know similar powers have not been attributed to either the former or present King. Although no other officials are reputed to have magical powers, some Deputies of the National Assembly have told me that during the election campaigns, the villagers have asked them to exorcise the phi<sup>3</sup>.

The following morning a delegation of villagers came to the Prince to ask him to drive all the phi from the village. Their request was prompted by the fact that he had asked the villagers to cut down the brush surrounding the settlement in a radius of several hundred yards, thereby destroying the breeding places of mosquitoes and at the same time

<sup>1</sup> As far as I am aware this was not completed before his death.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to a series of beliefs in animism and nature spirits, antedating Buddhism. The two religions co-exist, not only in Laos but in Thailand and Burma as well.

<sup>3</sup> Some claim that Prince Boun Oum has similar powers.

providing cleared land for gardens. The people said they wanted to comply but feared that the phi of the forest would object.

Through an intermediary the Prince then addressed the phi and told them to depart, emphasizing his belief that Lord Buddha was stronger, and invoking the power of the Prince, the Chao Muong and the American. A police aide went into the forest and fired a few volleys, after which the spirit shrines, in the form of miniature houses, were set on fire and villagers began to hack at the trees in a gesture of defiance of the spirits (en route to the next village at which we stopped, our party paused briefly at a large rock where the phi inhabiting this boulder were literally told to move over and make room for the phi which had been ordered out of the previous village).

The third day was spent visiting more villages and ridding them of spirits. At one stop the Prince was asked to bless the children. Each household gave him a roll of white cord, and when a large amount was collected he placed his hands over it and blessed it. Then the cord was cut into suitable lengths and parents brought their children forward to receive a necklace of the sacred string. This was to prevent evil spirits from entering the body and so keep the child in good health.

When I last saw Prince Phetsarath in the summer of 1959, he seemed to have withdrawn almost completely from any direct interest in political affairs and did not care to comment either on Lao foreign policy or the American aid program. Most of his efforts appear to have gone toward the upkeep of his estate. He was still in the process of writing his book on Lao history, and most of our discussion centered around this topic.

A few months later, in October, 1959, Prince Phetsarath died in Luang Prabang of a cerebral hemorrhage.

#### PRINCE BOUN OUM OF CHAMPASSAK

Prince Boun Oum is the last surviving member of the Kingdom of Champassak one of the original four kingdoms that make up the present state of Laos.<sup>1</sup> He has been given the honorary title of Inspector

<sup>1</sup> The Kingdom of Xieng Khouang and the Kingdom of Vientiane were in effect defunct before the arrival of the French. Champassak became an independent Kingdom in 1713 but endured only to 1778 when it became a tributary to Siam. Champassak, Vientiane and Luang Prabang were all originally part of the traditional Lao Kingdom of Lan Xang which split in 1698.

General of the Kingdom of Laos. When not serving as a government minister he has devoted much effort to various business interests and is reputed to be one of the wealthier men in the country. He is closely related to a number of officials who have played important roles in government affairs. There has been some friction in recent times between the northern and southern parts of Laos, and the awarding to him of this title and his ceremonial position at all state occasions appears to be an attempt to offset the designation of the King of Luang Prabang as the ruler of all Laos.

Like both the late Prince Phetsarath and the present King, Prince Boun Oum maintains a residence in Vientiane as well as a local one (near Pakse). In common with other traditional Lao figures, he has his own retinue and a full staff of household servants.

In the past years he has been quite critical of the policies of the government, particularly the misappropriation of aid funds. When interviewed in the summer of 1959 he said he wanted to be constructive in his criticism and was quite forthright and direct in his statements. He felt that since Laos was bordered by the vastly superior states of China and Vietnam, and since the country had such a small population, her independence was something of a joke. If she had to have rulers, the French would be much better than either the Chinese or the Vietnamese. (Like the present King, he appears to have strong French sympathies).

He felt that the rural program of the government was not yet effective, and that officials did not have direct contact with the population. Although he thought that American aid was a good thing, it was not well used. Things had improved since the exchange rate was revised, but economic assistance was not being sufficiently utilized. He mentioned effective administration as the most critical problem of Laos. (This is a crucial point and a foreigner observing would be inclined to agree with this statement in a most emphatic way. Perhaps most significant, of the many top-ranking Lao officials who were interviewed by the writer, Prince Boun Oum was the only one to refer to the critical deficiencies in this area, although many appeared to be conscious in a general way of their government's lack of trained personnel.)

Prince Boun Oum also mentioned that favoritism is shown in promotion in the Army, and because of this the mass of soldiers were not content. He felt that both the army and the police force were too large for the needs of Laos and could be reduced.

In common with other politicians who assume public office, Prince Boun Oum is capable of drastically changing his publicly expressed ideas. As the Premier of the "pro-western" splinter government during the Civil War in 1960-61 he has had strained relations with the French and does not appear to have succeeded in forming a very dynamic administration.

## II

### HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS AND DEPUTIES

This unit is divided into three sections:

- A. High-ranking officials who are also Deputies
- B. Brief biographies of other Deputies
- C. High-ranking officials who are not Deputies

Biographic data on the following officials is taken from Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos, pp. L-2 - L-8.

Katay Don Sasorith, Prince Souvanna Phouma, Phoui Sananikone, Prince Souphanouvong, Bong Souvannavong, Thao Leuam, Khamphan Panya, Impeng Suryadhay, Sisouk Na Champassak.

#### A.

##### KATAY DON SASORITH

Unlike most of the Lao elite, Katay had rather humble origins. His father was proprietor of a bistro in Pakse which was a gathering place for the local French community. Despite his role as a leader in the Lao independence movement he retained a profound sympathy for individual French and for French culture in general. This attitude is reflected in his memoirs.<sup>1</sup>

Katay played a leading part in the organization of the Nationalist, or Progressive Party. Though at the beginning the party was organized on a national rather than a regional level, his political stronghold has been in the south around Pakse. In addition to political activity he was active in social and sports affairs. He personally promoted the Association Sportive de Pakse, was President of the Cercle Lao of Vientiane and General Secretary of the Lao Scout Society. He also headed the Lao Theater Committee as well as the Association of Lao Civil Service Officials. He wrote extensively, many of his articles appearing in his newspaper Voix du Peuple issued in both Lao and French editions. In addition to reminiscences of his life in Pakse, published in French, he wrote articles on the Lao alphabet and writing, the history of the Lao national independence movement and a book on the political evolution of Laos. These have appeared as separate publications as well as in the journal "France-Asie".

He is reputed to have derived large profits during the period of fixed currency transactions and to have vehemently opposed the devaluation

<sup>1</sup> Souvenirs d'un Ancien Ecolier de Pakse, Editions Lao Sédone, 1958.

of the kip. Touted as a friend of Americans, the extent to which his friendship was based on financial self-interest, has often been debated. In addition to his Pakse home, he also maintained a residence in Vientiane with a staff of servants and a retinue of associates. He reportedly had substantial business interests in both Vientiane and Pakse and was on the board of directors of at least one Lao bank.

Katay died in December, 1959, at the age of fifty-five. When interviewed in the summer of 1959, he held the position of Minister of the Interior and of Cults. Despite reports of his wealth, his home in Vientiane was a relatively modest wooden structure with a separate two-story building used as an office. Our conversation was a bit formal at first, but once the initial barriers had been overcome, he was quite direct in his comments. He seemed disturbed by the activities of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest.<sup>1</sup> Katay considered the young people in the Committee lacking in experience in government and claimed that the Committee was actually being backed by the Americans, and that many of the members who were supposedly leading an anti-corruption campaign were actually making a fair amount of money for themselves.<sup>2</sup> He cited a large private home being built by the then Foreign Minister, Khampan Panya, and the very nice home of another member of the Committee. He felt American aid should be given on a government-to-government basis rather than a person-to-person basis, and that the members of the CDIN were being favored in this respect. After my departure from Laos in September, 1959, Katay's newspaper issued some denunciations of the Americans to the effect that they had never paid the police on time and that under French control a much better situation had existed.

Katay felt that there was a lack of contact between government officials and villagers, and that effective government really ended at the Muong level. This was one reason why he thought more police were necessary to protect the rural population from the depredations of the Pathet Lao Communists. He cited one case of several villages located near Pakse which voted for the government and then were burned down by the Pathet Lao. In the course of his many trips to rural areas he observed that villages lacked adequate roads, this being true even for villages only fifteen kilometers from Vientiane. Some of the inhabitants of these villages had never even been to the capital. While visiting remote areas Katay said he liked to take villagers up in a plane just to show them

<sup>1</sup> CDIN, a committee composed of young members of the Lao elite who launched a reform program. Although they claimed not to be a political party they stressed the fight against Communism, and a desire to eliminate former corrupt practices. In 1959 they succeeded in having a number of their people appointed to Ministerial offices and in 1960 formed a political party.

<sup>2</sup> An American official made the interesting point that it is often difficult to determine the exact extent of corruption or sometimes even the intent of the individuals involved, due to the inadequate system of accounting for funds. He felt the Lao were not fanatics in their desire to get rich.

what modern civilization can be like (he was President of Air Laos). He also liked to show them how electric lights work.

In speaking of the monks, he said there are many poor boys who study in the pagoda schools in Vientiane because it is less expensive than studying in regular government schools where they have to buy books and supplies. In the wat they are totally supported by the community. Monks often come to him looking for jobs when they have completed the pagoda school. The Pathet Lao have been able to make effective propaganda among the monks by promising them jobs (after they have obtained their education many wish to leave the priesthood). Many villages in the south lack monks, but those in Vientiane do not want to leave the city.<sup>1</sup>

Now the new government policy is to decentralize control of the monks. With regard to Communist influence in the priesthood Katay mentioned the neutral Santiphab party and said that two of their six deputies are Mahas, that is, former monks who had attained a high rank in the priesthood. They are now influential among former students who remained as priests.

When asked about the problems of the non-Lao ethnic groups, Katay said that the chiefs among the Kha have a great deal of power, much more than the officials among the Lao. As evidence of this, he said there are very few cases involving the Kha which come before the Lao court. For the most part, he said, they do not wish to have schools, but that the situation had begun to change in certain areas such as those around Pakse. In contrast to what he imputed to be centralized leadership among the Kha,<sup>2</sup> he said the Meo do not get along with each other, citing the case of Toubi (Vice-President of the National Assembly) and his brother, who in 1959 was Procurator General. Toubi belongs to the Assembly of the Lao People, the party Katay organized by joining with the Prime Minister at that time, Phoui Sananikone; Toubi's brother then deliberately joined another party.

He felt that in Vientiane there was considerable sympathy for the Pathet Lao. In the last election some of the military and younger officials voted for the Pathet Lao because they did not believe the government leadership was strong enough. To strengthen the government, Katay thought it was necessary to diminish the role of monks in politics and, like Prince Boun Oum, emphasized the necessity of furthering government

<sup>1</sup> This is a characteristic they share with many government officials.

<sup>2</sup> Actually it appears that the Meo have a more strongly centralized government; it is difficult to generalize about the Kha, who are so diverse.

organization below the Muong level. He also claimed that some officials do not get out and travel.<sup>1</sup>

Katay emphasized the role of police and said that those who were not fitted for the task of administration should be eliminated. He expressed dissatisfaction with the American aid program, particularly the allotment that had been made for the Police: over one thousand salaries for new police had been requested, but only two hundred were granted. Although his enlarged request was made several months before our interview, he had not heard anything new on the subject. Commenting further on the American aid program he could not understand why the Americans did not build a Lycee like the French did. He mentioned there were eight hundred pupils who wanted to enter the sixth class of the Lycee, but there was room for only one-hundred-fifty. He had also asked some groups to establish a Christian religious school in Vientiane. He concluded by reiterating his claim that the Americans had favored some officials at the expense of others.

<sup>1</sup> This assertion is questionable since many Lao officials do travel. The amount of effective contact they have, is another matter, since much of their contact with the villagers is of a formal and ceremonial nature rather than one encouraging an effective two-way channel of communication.

## PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA

Prince Souvanna Phouma was born in 1901 in Luang Prabang, the son of the Viceroy of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. [He is a brother of the late Prince Phetsarath; Souphannouvong is their half-brother.] After studies at the University of Hanoi and in France, where he received a degree in engineering, he returned to Laos and married a Franco-Lao in 1933. He is one of the few Lao to have a college degree, a college education in the pre-war period appearing to have been reserved for the royal family, with a few exceptions.

During the 1930's he held several important positions in the Department of Public Works. In 1945 he was appointed Minister of Public Works but joined the Lao Issara and went into exile in Thailand in April, 1946. While there he earned his living as an engineer with the Thai Electric Company. With Katay, he was one of the founders of the Nationalist Party. In 1949 he signed the Franco-Lao Agreement granting a certain amount of independence to Laos. [Most Lao officials date their country's independence from the time of this agreement.] When he returned to Laos he joined the Phoumi Sannikone government as Minister of Public Works. In 1951 he went to San Francisco for the Japanese Peace Treaty Conference. He became Prime Minister in 1953, simultaneously holding the portfolios of Public Works, the Plan and Post Office. He remained Prime Minister until 1955 when he was replaced by Katay Don Sasorith, but continued to play an important role as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defense. In March, 1956, after a new Assembly had been elected Souvanna Phouma again became Prime Minister, also assuming the functions of Minister of Foreign Affairs, National Defense and Information. He continued as Prime Minister until September, 1958. In August, 1956, Souvanna started negotiations with Souphanouvong in an effort to solve the Pathet Lao problem. In November, 1957, the Pathet Lao signed a military and political agreement with the royal government which restored royal Lao government authority over the Provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua which had been held by the Pathet Lao since 1954.<sup>1</sup> In 1959 Souvanna Phouma was the Lao Ambassador to France and Italy.

In 1960 he again became Prime Minister and attempted to reconcile the divergent forces of right and left. His attempt failed, and he fled to Cambodia -- but as one of the few recognized leaders in Laos, it appears likely that he will continue to play an important role in government affairs.

<sup>1</sup> From "Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos"  
pp L 2 - L 3

## PHOUI SANANIKONE

Phoui Sananikone is a member of one of the most prominent families in Laos, in a political, economic and social sense. His brothers have been active in both government and business affairs,<sup>1</sup> and his family traces its descent from a manderin of the Court of the King of Vientiane. This Kingdom was destroyed by a Siamese invasion early in the nineteenth century, and the King was taken to Thailand where he was subjected to various indignities and later died. Phoui's immediate ancestors served as administrators under the French, one of them being the administrator for Vientiane. Nevertheless, Phoui likes to claim origin as a commoner and despite his descent from the royal family of Vientiane does not bear any title.<sup>2</sup> In building up his political following he has used his wealth to bolster his position, and has performed acts of good works for his constituents vaguely reminiscent of the noblesse oblige activities practised by the late Prince Phetsarath (although Phoui appears to lack the discernment and dedication of the latter). His activities in this sphere have included collection of old clothes for the villagers and donations to village wats.

Some of his political rivals have accused him of collaborating only with the elite in the villages, that is, the headmen and their associates, not reaching the people, and of being satisfied with only the formal responses of the villagers rather than going to the heart of their problems. Certain observations in the villages surrounding Vientiane tend to confirm these criticisms.

The following are details of Phoui's biography:

He was born in Vientiane in 1903. After completing his studies at Pavie College (nine grades) he entered the administration in 1923. A brilliant career followed. After his outstanding performance in the competitive examinations for Chao Muong, he soon was appointed Governor (Chao Khoueng) of the Province of Nam Tha and later reached the top of the administrative hierarchy with the rank of Chao Khoueng Special Class.

He was one of the leaders of the resistance against the Japanese

<sup>1</sup>His brother Ngon, a former Minister, served as a Deputy from Thakhek. Another brother, a merchant in Vientiane, was also in the construction business. A younger brother now lives in Bangkok and is in the silk business. He was formerly associated with the Lao Issara movement. A sister is in the weaving business in Vientiane, and is married to Khamsouk Keloungkhot, owner of one of the largest construction firms in Vientiane. Khamsouk's family, in turn, is related to that of Bong Souvannavong.

<sup>2</sup>Titles appear to be held today mainly by descendents of the courts of Champassak and Luang Prabang.

in northern Laos. At the end of May, 1945, he was forced to leave the Kingdom with the French troops, fleeing to Burma. Then he went to China and finally reached Calcutta.

His political career began in January, 1947, when Prince Souvannarath formed the first government of an independent and united Laos. He held the rank of Minister of Education, Health, and Social Welfare in this cabinet. He was elected representative of Pakse at the first legislative election in August, 1947. He became President of the first Lao National Assembly in December of the same year.

He was re-elected President of the Assembly in 1948 and 1949, and gave up his office only after the King commissioned him to form a government. In this capacity, as Prime Minister, he headed the Lao delegation at the Conference of the Associated States of Indochina at Pau, France, in July 1950.

In August, 1951, he was elected a Deputy from the Province of Vientiane. After the resignation of his government in October of the same year, he took part, from November, 1951 to February, 1956, as vice Premier and as head of various Ministries in cabinets formed respectively by Prince Souvanna Phouma and Katay Don Sasorith. Meanwhile he had been re-elected as representative of Vientiane in the election of December, 1955.

He was President and founder of the Independent Party until its merger with the Nationalist Party of Katay to form the Rally of the Lao People. (RPL: Rassemblement du Peuple Lao.) He acted as Vice-President of this organization, which in 1959 was the majority party controlling thirty-six of the fifty-nine seats in the National Assembly. He holds numerous foreign decorations.

He left the political scene for eighteen months and returned in August, 1957, after a cabinet crisis of seventy days, as a Minister in the Souvanna Phouma cabinet. He became Prime Minister of Laos in September, 1958, and continued in that position until the end of 1959.

## PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG

Prince Souphanouvong was born in 1912 and is a half-brother of Prince Souvanna Phouma and Prince Phetsarath. After completing his secondary education in Lanoi, he went to France where he prepared for one of the most difficult engineering schools. In 1937 he received his degree as an engineer and returned the next year to Indochina where he held various posts in the Public Works Department. In 1954 he joined the Lao Issara Movement, and held the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government in exile, formed in Bangkok. In March, 1946, Souphanouvong was wounded in battle against the French troops. While in exile he also served as Commander-in-Chief of the Lao Issara troops which were engaged in fighting the French in Laos. After Souphanouvong's efforts to strengthen the ties between the Lao Issara and Vietminh were repudiated by the Lao Issara government in Bangkok, he split with the other Lao Nationalists and organized an independent movement with close ties to the Vietminh. In 1950 he founded the Pathet Lao resistance movement which he has headed since then. In 1956 he started negotiations with his brother Souvanna Phouma, then Prime Minister, with a view to integrating the Pathet Lao into the Lao national community. After fifteen months of negotiation, the Pathet Lao agreed to turn over the two northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua to the royal government. One of the conditions for the settlement was the participation of two Pathet Lao Ministers in the royal government. In November, 1957, Souphanouvong entered the royal government as Minister for Plan and Urbanization,<sup>1</sup> a position he held until Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone formed his first cabinet in 1958.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This Ministry was also responsible for negotiating the American aid program. Another Pathet Lao was Minister of Religion and Cults.

<sup>2</sup>Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos p L-3

He is married to a Vietnamese, a fact often used against him by his Lao opponents. His children are reportedly being educated in North Vietnam and China. A Communist source provides some additional information on Souphanouvong:<sup>1</sup>

In 1937, the time of the popular front in France, Souphanouvong worked on the docks of Bordeaux and LeHavre. Here he met a very different type of Frenchman compared to the colonialists he had known in Laos. He contacted progressive intellectuals and members of the French working class. He was strongly influenced by French revolutionary and humanist culture in such stark contrast to all he had observed of colonialist comportment. He studied the classics of the French revolution and was caught up in the spirit of the great days of the popular front. After France, he went to Vietnam and worked at his trade building many bridges and roads in many parts of the country. He saw life on the rubber plantations, at the railways, construction camps and mines, and was appalled by the misery and exploitation of the workers. He saw more clearly the savagery of the colonialists. When the Japanese invaded Indochina, Souphanouvong was in Vietnam. He contacted the revolutionary movement there and was impressed not only by their ardor and self-sacrificing spirit, but also by their organization, the practical way in which they were planning the eventual seizure of power. Once he met Ho Chi Minh and asked him for advice: "Seize power from the colonialists" was the reply.

He began organizing in a similar way. First of all he contacted young Laotians in Vietnam, then he returned to Laos and formed revolutionary groups, mostly from young intellectuals and other patriotic elements. It was he who prepared the ground and organized the seizure of power which started in August, 1945. He tried to interest all his brothers in the movement, but it was only Souvanna Phouma who responded, although Phetsarath gave his blessing from above.

I met Souphanouvong first at headquarters deep in the jungle, just as the battle of Dien Bien Phu was getting underway. His Pathet Lao forces were busy

<sup>1</sup>W. G. Burchett, Mekong Upstream, Hanoi, Red River Publishing House, 1957 pp 257-258.



blocking French attempts to push up through Laos to the rescue... He expresses himself with great vigor, and the impression of great strength of character is strengthened when he speaks. His speech is direct and clear as befits a technician and no time is lost with the superficial courtesies which one often encounters with even progressive figures from the feudal classes in Asia.<sup>1</sup> Souphanouvong by his contacts with the people had identified himself completely with them, and it did not take much time among his troops and cadres, or among the villagers near his headquarters, to feel that he was respected and loved by the people. They saw in him a patriot who had shared their suffering for many years on end; not a Prince of the feudal hierarchy.

Although the doctrinaire nature of the above statements leads one to question their validity, there is no doubt of the broad popular appeal of Prince Souphanouvong. For example, in the election of 1958 he received 37,389 votes as the candidate from Vientiane Province, the largest number of votes received by any candidate in all of Laos, in either the election of 1955 or 1958. He has assiduously cultivated the friendship of the Buddhist clergy, spending a great deal of time visiting the pagodas and talking with the priests at length. He has told both the monks and village people of the great sufferings that he has experienced in waging war for the Pathet Lao, and has been able in this way to evoke a good deal of sympathy for his cause.

During much of 1959 he was under house arrest or confined to Vientiane. There was talk of bringing him and other Pathet Lao leaders to trial for treason. However, this step was never undertaken by the Lao government, and subsequently the Prince and several associates "escaped" custody.

He has resumed his position with the Pathet Lao, although the extent to which he exercises leadership is not known.

<sup>1</sup>In the summer of 1959 the Prince was quite capable of engaging in polite chit-chat at an American Embassy reception.

## TIAO SOMSANITH

Tiao Somsanith, Minister of the Interior in the government formed in 1960 and subsequently Prime Minister until overthrown by the revolt of Captain Kong, he was at the time of this interview a Deputy from Nam Tha and also High Commissioner for the Provinces of Nam Tha and Phong Saly.<sup>1</sup> As his title indicates he is a "highness", or Prince, although not a member of the royal family.

He was born in Luang Prabang in 1913. His wife is a sister of Prince Souphanouvong, and they have seven children. A first wife, a daughter of Prince Phetsarath, died. One of his sisters is the wife of the Lao Ambassador to London. One brother, an officer in the Army, is now stationed in Paris; another is a lieutenant in a tank squadron. He is a nephew of Prince Souvanna Phouma and of the late Prince Phetsarath, as well as having been the latter's son-in-law. He is also a cousin of Tiao Souk, former Minister of Public Works and Deputy from Luang Prabang.

Tiao Somsanith attended the Lycee in Vientiane and in 1935 graduated from the School of Law and Administration there, providing the equivalent of a high school education. During World War II he served as Mayor of Vientiane and also as Deputy Governor. He took part in the Lao Issara movement and in 1946 went to Thailand, returning to Laos in 1949. He was Minister of Justice and Public Health in the Phoui Sananikone government from 1949 to 1952, and Governor of Nam Tha from 1952 to 1954. In 1954 he was appointed Director of the National Police. He also served as Secretary of State for the Interior in the Souvanna Phouma government in 1957. He has done some traveling abroad, usually on brief government missions.

His home is quite modest, built of wood with a large veranda, and located on the main road leading to the airfield. When I visited him, he entertained me on the porch and served beer. He introduced his wife, who came and sat with us for awhile, but since she spoke no French she soon left. (Most Lao elite are not hesitant about presenting their wives who, in most cases speak little, if any, French.)

We began our conversation by talking about the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest. Tiao Somsanith said they had a good program in theory, but that they were inclined to talk much and act little. Also, he felt some of their members were not quite honest. Then

<sup>1</sup>The latter position appears to have since been abolished.

we spoke of the non-Lao ethnic groups, who in the Province of Nam Tha are in the overwhelming majority. "It is absolutely essential for the Lao to get along with the minority groups. If they cannot, everything is lost. In Nam Tha, for every Lao village, there are fifteen non-Lao villages."

He had recently brought a Yao village chief to Vientiane to see the city. He lodged him at his home and provided him with western clothes. Several Lao officials have advocated doing this sort of thing on a large scale as a means of familiarizing the non-Lao groups with the country. Tiao Somsanith remarked that the Yao are now completely on the side of the government. He recently returned from a trip of several months through Nam Tha, in which he spoke to the people about their problems and brought along a mobile film unit, providing some of them with their first entertainment of this type. Schools have been set up in certain Yao and Kha Ko villages. At one Groupe Scolaire there were lodgings for Meo and Yao students, where they were able to get their own kind of food.

With regard to the Army and the police he felt that the situation in Laos is unlike that in Thailand. There are many cases in which they cooperate and use each other's equipment such as at the Tat Luang Fair. Concerning village needs, he felt health is the most important and other services are less significant. He said some of these services sleep and should be eliminated, but he refused to say which ones.

I asked him how Lao officials were able to afford expensive new cars on their salaries. He replied that he was paying for his car at the rate of 4,000 kip a month, over four years, under an arrangement that had been offered the Deputies by the government. Under the 1957 Souvanna Phouma government many officials stole and "got their hands dirty." He laughingly included himself since he was in the former government. Then, mentioning the name of a middle-rank government officer, he said that the official had a new Chevrolet and a Mercedes. I asked how he was able to pay for them on his salary, and Tiao Somsanith's reply strongly suggested that the colonel took graft although, with a broad smile, he said that he really did not know. (There appears to be a lot of hostility among Lao officials and Deputies, so that they do not hesitate to denounce one another to foreigners. When driving home from Tiao Somsanith's residence with a friend of his, a Deputy from Phong Saly and a member of the majority government party, we passed the new house being constructed for a cabinet minister, the Deputy remarked that one minister had stolen the money from his ministry to build the house.)

(Some Americans have claimed that Tiao Somsanith embezzled large sums while he was Chief of Police. However, no formal charges were ever made. In any case, his style of living does not appear overly ostentatious for Vientiane. It is possible that the American aid program

may have indirectly subsidized past and present political activities, since the salaries of many of these Deputies are not sufficient for them to carry on their political work, and even members of the elite often lack the substantial property holdings or industrial base from which independent wealth might be derived.)

With regard to the next election (at that time scheduled for December, 1959) he said that there should be only one government candidate opposing the Pathet Lao candidate for this was the only way to win the elections. (A similar policy has been expressed by members of the CDLN.) He remarked that it was a good thing that Katay, Phoui and Bong were united, instead of working at cross purposes, and added that the Santiphab Party had actually originated because its current leader had a dispute with a member of Katay's family.

When questioned about the American aid program Tiao Somsanith expressed the belief that it would continue and that there was therefore no need to reconsider the foreign policy of Laos.

#### BONG SOUVANNAVONG

Since independence Bong Souvannavong has been an outstanding figure on the Lao scene. Something of a maverick in Lao politics, he headed his own party, the Lao National Union. Formerly he was sympathetically aligned with the Communists. Within the past few years he has radically changed his position and has become an outspoken anti-Communist. This does not seem to have moderated either his former criticism of the government or of the American aid program. He is reported to be one of the wealthiest business men in Laos, deriving his income from real estate investments and construction activities. Unlike many other government officials, no accusations were heard leveled against him for having profited under the old currency exchange rate. He is a member of the same Souvannavong family which is very prominent in Lao business and government affairs. This family traces its descent from a court official of the old Kingdom of Vientiane. One of his brothers is a Chao Muong, and another is a former Deputy and vice-president of the National Assembly.

He was born in Vientiane in 1906 and is married to Boualay Keo Louangkhot. (It is possible that his wife is of the same family as one of the major Lao contractors who in turn is married to the sister of the former Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone. He is related to many other members of the Lao elite.) They have twelve living children, some of whom are studying abroad. Two sons have government scholarships in France and Japan. He himself has traveled in Europe and Asia and has spent some time in Japan. He is strongly sympathetic toward the latter country.

He graduated from the Ecole Supérieure de Pédagogie at Hanoi in 1928 and the Centre d'Éducation Physique at Hue. Much of his civil service career has been spent as a teacher. He has also served in a supervisory capacity in the field of primary education. Specifically he has been a teacher at the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane and at various times director of schools in the Provinces of Pakse, Savannakhet, Luang Prabang and Sam Neua. In 1946 he served as Governor of Luang Prabang.

Bong has been active in the Lao Independence movement since its inception. In 1946 he was elected as a Deputy from Vientiane Province and subsequently served as President of the National Assembly from 1946 to 1947. From 1947 to 1949 he was Minister of Economic Affairs in the first royal constitutional government. In 1947 he formed the Lao National Union Party and has remained as its leader. He also has edited the party's weekly paper, which currently has a circulation of approximately 5,000. He formerly served as President of the Committee for the Maintenance of a Policy of Peace and Neutrality (Khana Santiphab) and also director of the Santiphab paper. This group has since become a political party formally espousing a neutralist line. However, by 1959 as a strong anti-Communist, Bong had broken his former alliances and was very much opposed to their policy. He was Minister of Posts and Fine Arts in the Phoui Sananikone government.

Among other activities, he has been a Scout Commissioner and President of the Lao Scouts Organization. He acted as a promoter and president of the Lao Art and Sport Society in Savannakhet in 1932 and later headed this group in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. In addition he has been an officer of the Lao Literary Committee since its inception in 1951. He has received medals and awards from the Lao, French and Cambodian governments.

Bong is a thin, white-haired little man, appearing somewhat older than his fifty-four years. Unlike the homes of a number of other members of the Lao elite, his is a traditional rambling wooden house, the furnishings including, however, a number of upholstered chairs grouped around a coffee table, with family photographs on the walls. A striking note about his home was the fact that the wooden interior was painted a brilliant blue and green, which, although garish to some westerners, seem to be the preferred colors for Lao urban homes. (Some Thai tend to look on these decorations with disdain, since blue and green are supposedly the colors of houses of ill-repute in Thailand.) On most of the occasions I visited him, I usually found him out on his broad veranda, sitting on a bamboo stool, talking with his children or political followers.

As with most Lao officials, our conversation was carried on in French. He asked me if I knew Lao, and I tried a little bit, but my linguistic ability was not sufficient to sustain conversations on complex matters. With some pride he brought out and showed me a book he had written on the Lao language a few years ago. He mentioned with

pleasure an American working with the Asia Foundation who had recently spoken to him in fluent Lao.

I initiated discussion by asking him what he thought of the general situation in Laos. He replied by asking me what the objectives of the United States in Laos were, to which I answered that the United States desired a democratic and independent Laos; he agreed and thought that the aims were good but that the aid funds had been poorly used. Bong felt that the most important thing was to win the hearts of the people (this is one of his favorite phrases and although it would be hard to be in disagreement with it, I found it difficult to pin him down to specific details).

For every aspect of the American aid I mentioned, he has some negative comment. For example, with regard to education, he said that not enough aid had been given. At one time, when he mentioned that he had been offered the post of Education Minister, indicated he would like to implement a program for literacy throughout Laos in two years or possibly in one. This could be done, he said, by using the methods of the Pathet Lao, that is, no fancy buildings to be erected, but ordinary village dwellings were to be used, and he implied that the villagers would be used to teach each other. Concerning the rural aid program, he spoke of the Americans helping with the construction of wats, indicating that the Lao had managed to build pagodas before the Americans arrived. "Tin roofs do not change peoples' hearts (one of the big items in the rural assistance budget has been the provision of galvanized tin roofing, regarded as a mark of status among Lao villagers. The improvement that it represents over thatch is certainly questionable since it heats up in the summertime. In any case, it is certainly not better than tile)."

He felt strongly that the American projects were superficial. He cited the case of Civic Action (a program of rural aid, subsequently abandoned, in which the Army had participated, the agents being supplied with goods to distribute, which were contributed by the Americans). To carry out their activities, paid agents of the government went to the villages, gave things away and then left. People did not really know what the program was all about. He claimed the same was true with films produced by the United States Information Service, which were not clearly explained to the people. Certain individuals, such as the Deputy Governor of Vientiane Province, tell the people that the films are their personal property (this is done by many other Lao politicians who show these newsreels of Lao life in villages around election time).

Bong maintained that Americans work only with selected elite, perhaps one hundred top officials who cater to their ideas. This is what puts their aid on a personal basis.

When I mentioned the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest he said they seemed to have a reform program but lacked experience and contact with village people (similar remarks were made by many of the older politicians). Bong continued, "They should clean their own house before looking into the mess of others. A local Mercedes-Benz dealer conducts a large volume of business but pays no taxes. He is a member of their Committee. Many people in that organization do not clearly understand its purposes. For example, I sent one of my men to see the editor of the Committee's paper, and was told that he, the editor, did not know the policies of the Committee since he was only a paid employee."

Agents of the CDIN worked against his own party in the countryside. He had brought up these matters at Cabinet meetings, but the Ministers denied that they had ever given such orders (at the time of the interview five Cabinet Ministers were members of the CDIN).

He felt the propaganda of the Committee was largely for the ears of Americans and designed to impress them.

Turning again to the village aid program, he said that when you aid one village you make several others wonder why they have not been helped. In contrast to the government's Civic Action agents, those of the Pathet Lao stayed in villages, and often in one place, where they worked continuously.

Like so many other politicians, Bong was fond of talking in generalities and when I attempted to ask him what was being done to eliminate corruption, for example, he replied that some people have been put in prison, but these were only the little ones. The big operators had not been touched. He added that many of the younger government officials act pro-Communist in that they feel the Pathet Lao definitely should not be kept under house surveillance.

We discussed a recent conference of youth leaders from all Laos, hosted by the CDIN and held under government auspices. Bong said the participants did not clearly understand what it was all about and that most of them were from the capital city; some were forced into participating and although they carried provincial banners in the parade, they were not necessarily from those areas. This too, was to impress the Americans and other foreigners, Bong maintained.

Bong commented on the American project of the construction of a diesel power plant in Vientiane. Its consumption of over a thousand barrels of fuel oil per month was an extravagant luxury for Vientiane and for Laos in general. "Who is going to be able to pay for this?" he asked.

In subsequent discussions we went over many of the same topics.

He repeated some of his general themes, but with new twists. For example, he contrasted his own way of working with the villagers with that of the Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone. When he went to the villages with the Prime Minister, the latter handed out money to the village chiefs for the local wat. "You cannot win the peoples' hearts with money. Every villager must be a soldier. You cannot have an effective government with only a police force and an Army. The villagers should want to fight for their homes and protect them from the enemy."

Inspiring some of these comments was a recent shipment of several hundred heavy-duty American Army trucks. If the enemy lurked five meters from the road these trucks would be of very little use. They are actually capable of moving only short distances outside the capital during the monsoon season.<sup>1</sup>

"The country's big needs are good roads, schools and medicine. I myself go to the villages every weekend and often sleep there. I try to work with as many people as possible, while the government works with only two or three people in each village. Villagers have been made less self-reliant because of government policy. In building wats, for example, they used to help themselves and not ask the government. Now they are always asking the government for something. The Lao people have become lazy. The Americans have made them beggars. The officials of the Lao government must imitate the methods of the Pathet Lao, and stay with the people, not just pass through the villages and go away. Counting the Army and the police, there are perhaps 50,000 out of three million people who are with the government, and there are even Pathet Lao agents in the police."

Regarding the matter of allocation of funds, Bong felt that the American government should take the initiative with the Lao. "The Americans like spectacles like the meetings of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests. The Americans think this is a good organization, while the people say it is only an American organization and that the Americans bestow their favors on certain politicians such as those in the Rally of the Lao People" (this is the party of the late Katay, who made a similar remark about American favoritism, only directed at other officials and the Committee).

Following is an account of a trip made with Bong to visit some villages near Vientiane. It was made in August, 1959, in the middle of the monsoon season so our visits were limited to those villages adjoining the main road. We left his home early in the day in his Volkswagen stationwagon, accompanied by his wife, his sister, a son who had

<sup>1</sup>During the 1961 civil war fighting, Army truck convoys of the Boun (Oun) government were ambushed on the Vientiane-Luang Prabang road, about twenty-five miles north of Vientiane. This Pathet Lao action was reported by the United Press to have occurred on Feb. 7, 1961.

returned for the summer from engineering studies in Japan, and a policeman, two assistants connected with his party work and the chauffeur. (High-ranking Lao officials seem to travel with a retinue, at least one servant and an assistant. I cannot recall any of them going out alone.) His wife and sister were dressed in simple village skirts and brought their betel-chewing kits with them. The road we took was the main route north toward Luang Prabang.

The first stop was some twenty-kilometers from Vientiane. Here a procedure was enacted that was repeated countless times during the trip. The entire retinue got out of the car, and his wife and sister went over and squatted down with some of the village women and began chatting with them, while Bong himself spoke to the men or contacted his agent and left behind a stack of his newspapers. The effectiveness of this technique is open to question, but it seems he has traveled this route quite often before. Certainly the villagers showed no surprise in seeing him.

After we left this village Bong said the government had distributed arms to a neighboring village (presumably for the auto-defense forces). After the villagers had received their arms they had taken to the woods with their weapons. The government does not know what the true feelings of the villagers are, he felt.

At most of our frequent stops we halted at the house of his agent. There sometimes was a sign outside his house. In contrast to many other touring Lao officials, only once did Bong speak to the villagers from the car; instead, he got out to speak to them, as did his wife and sister. (Belonging to the older Lao generation they had many more of the cultural traits of the rural people than do those of the younger generation--betel chewing is perhaps a trivial example, but it is hard to imagine the wives of some of the younger officials squatting down with the villagers and chewing betel with them.) As we traveled along the road, Bong indicated his opinion as to which villages were pro-government and which were with the Pathet Lao. He said that it is possible for a pro-government village to have a few Pathet Lao sympathizers but not vice-versa.

In one village the people remarked that he had not been there for three months. On a brief trip like this it was hard to judge how effective his five-minute to half-hour visits were. Both he and his associates usually got right down to discussing politics and Communism with the villagers without the customary preliminaries which one has come to associate with traditional politeness in Lao society. Perhaps this is his own individual variation on the cultural pattern, or he may feel that he knows the villagers sufficiently well so that he can speak directly with them. Or, it may be the directness of a superior addressing an inferior.

At one village we stopped to pick up one of his agents who had

fled some years ago from a pro-Pathet Lao village. The agent said he did his work but was afraid. Bong did not give him much sympathy on this score, saying he could not work well if he were afraid. (It is hard to know whether his agents are paid, but they do come often to visit him at his home in Vientiane, and there is obviously some sort of reciprocal relationship. Village members of his party pay dues, but they are fairly nominal. It seems logical to suppose that his newspaper as well as his political activity are subsidized by his business interests.)

About noon, we reached the plain of Pha Khon, on which is situated a large village, or as Bong called it, town. Here we passed a police checkpoint. Men were busy in the fields plowing and harrowing, while women were transplanting rice. Many girls and young women were fishing with nets in the streams running by the sides of the paddies. Bong explained that after the plowing, the small fish are partly asphyxiated and rise to the surface. At one village we passed a church formerly used by the Vietnamese who before Lao independence used to have truck farms here, raising vegetables for sale in Vientiane. We frequently passed trucks and busses, and in one field we saw a police jeep and a Mercedes-Benz. The passengers appeared to be having a picnic meal.

In many of the villages there were small detachments of soldiers. In a larger village we stopped briefly at the combined store and home of a merchant friend of Bong's. He was in the process of having a new two-story building constructed by Vietnamese workers from Vientiane and was also having a hand-operated gasoline pump installed. He complained about American aid, saying it would have been better to have completed thirty kilometers of all-weather road instead of re-doing the dirt surface every year.

At the village home of one of Bong's party agents who had come with us from Vientiane, we stopped for lunch. As we arrived we heard the blaring of a loud-speaker. The Deputy Governor was holding forth at a partially-completed pagoda to an audience of fifty to sixty people, mostly men and boys. He was talking about the Eisenhower-Khrushchev meeting. As Bong approached the official immediately deferred to him. Bong took over and spoke to the villagers at length. Later he told me that the people had asked him why planes were flying overhead at night. They also wanted to know what was being done with Prince Souphanouvong. They requested help and protection from the government. He replied that they were acting like Communists in that they were lending tacit support to the Pathet Lao sympathizers among them. He said the people should learn to help themselves, that the government could not help every village, the people are the government and it is up to them to support it.

While lunching on roast chicken Bong had brought from Vientiane, his assistant was busy enrolling several new members in the party. As they signed up, each received a copy of the by-laws printed in Lao and paid a

two-kip month's advance on their dues. This business was conducted by assistants, the materials being shoved across the floor to the villagers who squatted separately on the other side of the room.

The party worker who was our host asked why we did not buy Laos' main export, opium, since, he said, "We buy your goods." Later he suggested to Bong that in order to win the villagers' favor they should give them presents, but Bong strongly disagreed.

On our return to Vientiane we stopped in one village where Bong said the soldiers had been menacing his agents. He summoned the local commander, a corporal, and dressed him down in front of his troops and a group of villagers. Bong then threw a copy of his newspaper on the ground, which the corporal picked up. "Here", said Bong, "are the principles and ideals of my party; we must all work together to fight the Communists." In contrast to his earlier friendly conversations, this meeting was conducted in a very authoritarian manner. It would be intriguing to know what happened after our departure. As we left the village Bong remarked that officials always give prior notice of their arrival, but that he never does this. We arrived back in the capital at nightfall.

Although substantive information is lacking indirect information appears to indicate that he has reassumed some of his former "neutralist" sentiments.

#### PAN SISOUPHANTHONG

Director General of Public Works and Deputy from Phong Saly, Pan Sisouphanthong gave this account of his background:

"My father was a merchant and gardener from Luang Prabang, but he also received the title of mandarin, or Tiao Panya, from the King in recognition of work he had performed. I am not a Tiao, however, and have inherited only the title of Panya. I attended the college in Vientiane and after my graduation worked in the administration. From 1946 to 1948 I was governor of Nam Tha, and from 1948 to 1952 I served in Phong Saly. From 1952 to 1956 I was Procurator General in Vientiane. In 1955 I was elected Deputy from Phong Saly to the National Assembly, from that part of the Province which was under the control of the Royal Lao Government. I have been a member of the Lao delegation to the United Nations and have also visited Japan."

In discussing the rule of the Pathet Lao in Phong Saly, he said, "During their rule they reorganized the provincial administration. They chose the poorest person as village chief and tried to gain the favor of those who lived in poverty. They promised that when Laos would be completely under their control, those who had helped them would receive

government posts as compensation.

"I do not think the population will stick with them. The older people are accustomed to the Royal Lao government. When the Pathet Lao need labor, they force everyone to work, including the older people. In Phong Saly, even the mountain people are mostly Buddhist. [The inference being that presumably they would resist infiltration because it is opposed to their religion -- Pan's idea that Buddhism is prevalent there is not borne out by the ethnographic composition of the region, however.] Phong Saly is very badly located for us; we have many transportation difficulties plus the fact that Dien Bien Phu with its concentration of Vietminh troops is located just over the border."

"Since we have assumed control we have made democratic changes, and there have been elections. The Tasseng is elected by several Nai Bans, and the Nai Ban is elected by the villagers. Only the Chao Muong is nominated by the government. Under the Communists the Nai Ban was designated by the administration. The Pathet Lao also changed the village headman's title to Pa Than, which means "president". However, the Communist administration was not as difficult for the people in Phong Saly as it was in Sam Neua. In Sam Neua they began to force the monks to go to work. They also urged the population not to feed them, in addition to trying to use some monks as propagandists.<sup>1</sup>

"The reason the situation was more difficult in Sam Neua was that it was occupied first, while even during the period Phong Saly was occupied, several areas continued to be held by the royal government. Sam Neua was closed and was also closer to North Vietnam."

#### LIEP SOUMPHONPHAKDY

Liep Soumphonphakdy, former Secretary of State for Agriculture, was also a Deputy from Saravane to the National Assembly. About forty-five years old, he studied in the Groupe Scolaire in Savannakhet, served as an official under the French and was Governor of Saravane before his election to the National Assembly.

"The major emphasis of our program at present is to build dams in the north where there is a lack of rice. The question of rice supply is,

<sup>1</sup>These two views appear contradictory, but the Pathet Lao have given much attention to the role of the monks and have courted their support.

of course, a political one in our country. The greatest shortage occurs from September to November, before the harvest, and the object of the dams is to allow the villagers to have two harvests a year. On the plains of the south we have enough rice for local needs. This year [1959] we have received 24,000,000 kip in American aid for agriculture, and so far have constructed dams in the Provinces of Sayaboury, Saravane, and Xieng Khouang. We are also building a dam on the plains of Vientiane. After all the projected dams are constructed there will be no need to import rice from Thailand. French aid is being used toward construction of dams in Luang Prabang and Savannakhet Provinces.

"Mountain people can then come down and settle in the lowland areas. I know that true mountaineers will come to live on the plains only with difficulty, because the climate is warmer there. Our government is not able to work all over Laos, however, and we are concentrating on the Meo in Xieng Khouang and the Kha in Attapeu. It is much easier to work with the Meo because they are more advanced and more civilized. Many Meo want to come settle in the valleys, but with the Kha it is a question of their phi. The Meo are more civilized because they have been in contact with Lao merchants, and we have received many requests for aid from the Meo in Xieng Khouang.

"A special service has been proposed to handle this problem of resettlement, and I hope American aid will be able to assist us.<sup>1</sup> This is necessary because we want to resettle refugees who are arriving from China. It is also necessary because we must protect our forests. Sixty per cent of the area of Laos is covered with forests, but most of them are of no value economically because they are of brush and in a degraded condition."

#### TIAO NITH NOKHAM

Tiao Nith, Deputy to the National Assembly from Xieng Khouang, and High Commissioner for Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua Provinces, is a grandson of the last King of Xieng Khouang. His father was a mandarin and an official in the French administration. He is related to Tiao Sopsisana, Chief of Royal Protocol, and Secretary of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests. The head of the Veterinary Service, Tiao Sinh, is his uncle. His wife is from the same family [she is a cousin], and they have seven children.

He began his government service with the Department of Forests, serving in the north and spending three years in Pakse as well. Tiao

<sup>1</sup>A few scattered programs were attempted but no comprehensive arrangement were made prior to the civil war.

Nith is a Director of the Lao Vieng Bank and former Secretary of State of the Finance Ministry. He is head of the Budget Committee of the National Assembly.

His home, although located on a rutted dirt road, is a modern concrete structure built in the style of a French colonial villa, and appeared to have been recently furnished. There were a number of new chairs of both rattan and metal, and a rug on the living room floor. He has two cars, one of which is a Mercedes-Benz. He invited his wife to join us although she speaks no French. While serving cold beer, he referred to himself as a banker and seemed proud of his contacts with high American officials connected with financial affairs.

We began by discussing the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests. He said, "Their program is very good; it is not possible to quarrel with it, but I have not yet seen any action. If they do work, it should be outside of Vientiane."

Then we switched to the question of whether the American aid program was reaching the villages. "The living standard of the villagers has improved; they now have shirts whereas previously they had only torn clothing. Some villagers now even own bicycles. There are even some farmers in the vicinity of Vientiane who raise betel nut and make enough money to afford a Mercedes. I am not completely satisfied with the aid program, and I feel that there has been a tendency to give more aid to the southern part of the country. Perhaps this is because they have better roads there."

"Roads are actually the key to the country's development. In Xieng Khouang, many of the village people have built their own roads." This led to a discussion of the financing of road construction: "Business conditions are now very slow. Kips are accumulating in the National Bank, but they are not being invested. This problem must be worked out with the Americans. As a result of the decline in business, government revenues are off, but with the help of American aid it will be possible to accomplish our objectives." When the possibility that American aid might be decreased was mentioned, he said, "In that case, the people have said it might be necessary to change the foreign policy of Laos." He personally did not think aid would be diminished and inferred that the foreign policy of the government was not subject to change.

The conversation turned to his responsibilities as a Deputy and his policies with regard to minority peoples. He said that some time ago twenty-seven Kha tribesmen had come to his house to ask his help because their village in Xieng Khouang Province, had burned down. They had come all the way to Vientiane to see him. He fed them for several days, his wife went out and bought them clothes and he asked the Ministry of Social Welfare to give them blankets.

Tiao Nith stated that since the end of French rule intermarriage between the Lao and Mo had increased. As an example, he cited the case of Toubi's brother, who is married to a Lao woman. Tiao Nith personally has cordial relations with Toubi himself, and when during the course of our interview, the latter came to visit, the two men chatted amicably, half in French and half in Lao.

"A few days ago," Tiao Nith commented, "Mo and Kha irregulars from North Vietnam massacred about fifteen Lao officers and their families at three military posts on the border of Sam Neua and Luang Prabang Provinces [late July, 1959]. Then they went back to the forest, so you can see it is necessary for the Lao Army also to be maquis." He said he would ask the Americans to help him outfit these guerilla troops. "Local Mo could be used," he said; "all they need is a few thousand kip a month each; and Eisenhower jackets would be ideal for them." He felt strongly that the attitude of the people in his province was more favorable to the government than it was in Vientiane.

Tiao Nith spoke of Haynes Miller [a former USOM employee who in 1958 wrote an article about the misappropriation of USOM funds for the Reporter magazine]. "Miller spoke French well and had been my friend. Although what he wrote was mainly true, it was exaggerated."

Tiao Nith wanted to know what my own political beliefs were, and to which political party I belonged. He said, "I have noticed that in recent debates your Congress has cut the aid budget by about three hundred million dollars. I feel that Laos deserves to be aided but if the Americans do not help us enough, we will ask our friends the French, although we know they cannot give us too much assistance."

#### CHAN VANHANOUVONG

Chan Vanthanouvong, a Deputy from Vientiane and a leader of the Santiphab party is a former governor of Sam Neua. Unlike many other members of his party, some of whom are former Buddhist priests, he speaks good French and has visited the United States. He derives an income from his store located on one of the main streets of Vientiane which stocks French books, a few English newspapers and hunting rifles. His apartment is located above the store, the sitting room containing a few chairs, tables and some large ivory tusks arranged as souvenirs.

His party is officially neutralist but is commonly regarded as sympathetic to the Communists. Most of the party's candidates did quite well in the 1958 election. Pinning him down on specifics of his party's program was very difficult, and he sometimes avoided answering questions.

"The Lao people should live within their means," he said. "Their

life has been too luxurious lately because the American aid has been poorly used. The standard of living of the villagers should be raised, and Laos should grow its own rice even if the quality is poorer than that imported from Thailand."

"The government has been harassing our party. We are not now trying to recruit any new members. We could have all the members we wish, but villagers who joined our party now would suffer at the hands of the government. Many Lao officials are poorly qualified and dishonest. This is true not only of the Lao but of some of the Americans as well. I expressed this point of view when I visited the Department of State in Washington in 1958."

Perhaps the most interesting statement he made was the following: "The dishonest Lao officials and technicians should be dismissed and replaced where necessary with Americans and French, for after all, we had the French running everything before independence. Anyone who objected to this procedure would be guilty of misplaced nationalism."

"With regard to technical aid, Japanese-type plows and simple equipment of this sort, which have been introduced by the Americans, are good things, but the Lao government's village development program has received a lot of publicity while it only duplicates existing technical ministries. It is time American aid helped in building more schools, for example. Much needs to be done."

Concerning the fighting going on in Sam Neua during the summer of 1959, he admitted that some units were aided by the North Vietnamese, "just as the royal Lao government was aided by the Americans," he said.

In response to questions about the situation in Tibet, he said the situation there was not clear. Then he asked if I thought he might become a Communist.

In 1960 he joined the Pathet-Lao government in Xieng Khouang.

#### THAO LEUAM

Thao Leuam, Minister of Finance in the 1959 government of Phoui Sananikone, was born in Savannakhet in 1923 according to his official biography although he states he was born in 1914. At that time his father worked for the French Consul in Ubon, Thailand, across the river from Pakse. He is a brother-in-law of Prince Boun Oum of Champassak who married one of Leuam's sisters.<sup>1</sup> His primary education was in Vientiane and he received further schooling in Phnom Penh, completing thirteen

<sup>1</sup>Thao Leuam was one of the first Lao officials to join the "Savannakhet government" of Prince Boun Oum.



years of education, more than most high-ranking Lao officials. His government career began in the Bureau of Forests in Attopeu and he later served as Deputy Governor at Pakse. He was Chef de Cabinet to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang from 1942 to 1944. In 1945 he participated in the resistance movement. In 1947 he served as Minister of Finance in the second government of Souvannorath, and in 1949 as Minister of Interior and Justice in the government of Prince Boun Oum. In 1950 he was Minister of the National Economy in the Phoui Sananikone government, elected Deputy from Savannakhet in 1951 and re-elected in 1955. In 1953 he served as Minister of Public Health in the first government of Souvanna Phouma and in 1954 as Minister of Finance and Public Welfare in the second Souvanna Phouma government. He has also served as administrative secretary of the National Assembly and as Ambassador to Thailand from 1951 to 1955, having held some of his posts concurrently. From 1956 to 1957 he was Charge d' Affaires in Paris, after which he was appointed Ambassador to Cambodia and finally, Minister of Finance in 1959.

As a member of the CDIN he is by implication one of the young Lao elite. Thao Leuam is a Catholic, the only Christian member of the Cabinet.

In his office he has a large scale map of Laos to which he constantly referred while making these remarks: "The 'economy of Laos' is non-existent. The chief economic problems are rice production and transportation. There must be roads before industry. First the people must have enough to eat. There must be aid to help them improve their cultivation of rice. We need French aid and American aid for livestock programs to help us raise pigs and cattle. If these little programs succeed, and each village then has enough rice and livestock, this will be a great victory. The question of rice is very vital."

"Right now it is difficult to make a political impression on Phong Saly or Sam Neua and to come in contact with the population through health services and other means. We must have roads, from the south to the north, before we can reach the masses. Roads are very necessary. The only thing that is more important is adequate rice."

"There are no funds to apply to the building of new roads, so I have asked USOM for help but have had no response as yet. However, they have said that the question interests the United States government. [The third largest allocation in the American aid program following the Army and the police, is the funds provided for transportation]."

"If in three to five years we can make some progress with small local industries and developing resources this too, would be a victory [in the sense that then Laos might then be less dependent on foreign aid]. "But for the next few years or so, foreign aid is essential."

"I have begun to prepare a tax program for the rich people in the towns but there is a question whether the Assembly will approve it. [At this point a member of Thao Leuam's staff remarked, "After we have made some good progress in collecting taxes from the Chinese and Vietnamese, then we will begin to work on the Lao]."

"The Lao are a contented people once they have their rice. There are no great needs. Nobody has ever died of hunger in our country. Life is easy here; we have enough land. Only people in cities have the material things of the West."

In reference to this last comment, I asked him how many people in the towns were interested in living well and how many were interested in the welfare of their country. Thao Leuam smiled and said that many were interested in living well, but very few put love of their country first, expressing his hope that this attitude will change in the future.

In response to a question regarding the role of the non-Lao peoples, Thao Leuam said they prefer to remain by themselves, but that progress in integrating them is being made. He felt that in five to ten years there would be non-Lao groups as officials in the government. Currently a Kha is serving as Deputy from Attopeu in the National Assembly. There are also officials at the Tasseng level as well as minor officials in the administration of Laos, from the non-Lao population.

Thao Leuam appeared highly rated both by his colleagues and by many foreigners and seemed to be trying to do a conscientious job under great difficulties.

#### KHORANHOK SOUVANNAVONG

At the time of the interview Khoranhok Souvannavong was Secretary of State for the Interior. He was born in Vientiane in 1915 and received a diploma from the School of Law and Administration in Vientiane, a secondary training school for Lao officials. He gradually advanced through various grades in the administration. Among the posts in which he has served are: Chief of the Postal Administration in Thadeua near Vientiane; District Chief in Xieng Khouang Province; Mayor of Vientiane and Governor of Sayaboury and Nam Tha Provinces. He was associated with the Lao Issara movement and later a member of the Progressive Party, and today belongs to the coalition group, Rally of the Lao People. In 1958 he was elected Deputy from Nam Tha Province. During his term as Governor of Nam Tha, he was active in the Sports Association in that Province.

He is a member of the same extended family as Bong Souvannavong, who is his cousin, the son of his father's sister. This family and the Sananikone family are perhaps the two most prominent in Laos outside of the Royal family. His great-grandfather was a mandarin at the court.

of the King of Vientiane. When that Kingdom was overthrown by the Thai his grandfather served as Chao Muong of Vientiane at the time of the Siamese rule. His father was Chao Muong of Vientiane at the time of Pavie, serving under the French in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

His father had several wives; he is the son of the first wife. Four of his half-brothers, prominent in Lao Administration, are sons of the second wife. These include Ourot Souvannavong, former Ambassador to Washington, and during the summer of 1959 scheduled to be appointed Ambassador to Vietnam. Ourot studied in Cambodia, and before his assignment abroad held an important position in the Ministry of Interior. Outhong Souvannavong, a former Minister is councilor to the King; he has a Bachelor's degree obtained in Saigon. Oudom, an ex-Ambassador to France, is at present serving as a Deputy Governor of the National Bank; he studied in France and has a degree in astronomy. Oukeo, who has a degree in agricultural engineering from France, is Director of the Ministry of the Plan, responsible for the administration of the American aid program.

Oudai, another relative, is a former Governor of Thakhek Province and is now Director of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Like Khoranhok he studied in Vientiane.

Oudong Souvannavong, the only Lao to hold the degree of Doctor of Medicine [obtained in France], is the son of Khoranhok's sister. He has occupied various high posts and in 1960 was for a time Minister of Public Works, Planning, Transport and Telecommunications in the Kou Abhay government.

Khoranhok himself, Secretary of State for the Ministry of the Interior, (1959) was formerly Chef de Cabinet to the Secretary of Defense.

#### TANE CHOUNLAMOUNTRI

Born in 1908 at Kengkok, a village near Savannakhet, Tane Chounlamountri was the son of a local merchant. His mother was the daughter of a prominent Savannakhet family. He is very proud of his village origin, and when I visited him, he said that his was one of the most famous villages in Laos because it had provided so many officials for the Lao government. In his office he has a list of all the officials originating from Kengkok, and as the Deputy for this area in the National Assembly, he is now in the process of collecting money to build a bridge to link his village with the road, and also to dig several wells. The village, he said, has a population of between one and two thousand, and he told the American Ambassador about this "so that they will know about my village." After this orientation he took

me across the hall to the office of the Secretary of State for the Interior and located Kengkok on the large scale map for me.

In response to my questions during our initial interview, he indicated that he would like to write his biography for me and also submit a statement of his ideas. Following the biographical data below is a translation of his prepared statement.

He was educated at the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane and received the Diplome Universitaire in 1926, having received eleven years of schooling. From 1937 to 1942 he served as Chao Muong of the region of Borikane, in Vientiane Province. In 1942 he was transferred to Xieng Khouang and served there until 1945. From 1945 to 1946 he served as Governor of Phong Saly. In 1950 he was Executive Secretary to the Lao Cabinet, and in 1951 he served as President of the Court of Appeal. From 1952 to 1957 he was Director of Pension Funds. In May, 1958 he was elected a Deputy to the National Assembly and served as Executive Secretary in the Ministry of Public Health. In 1959 he was appointed to a similar position in the Ministry of Justice. These are in effect sub-ministerial posts.

#### THE SITUATION OF LAOS August, 1959

According to the thoughts of Thao Tane Chounlamountri, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Justice, of the Royal Government, presided over by his Excellency Phoui Sananikone.

#### Internal Administration

The present regime, a democratic monarchy, goes well with the desires and hopes of the Lao people. The King represents the unity and the soul of the nation. It is earnestly hoped that the monarchy will continue to exist in the future.

The Constitution has recognized the right of the Lao people to vote and to elect their representatives in the National Assembly. There are advantages as well as disadvantages in this system.

By way of advantages, the people, via their representatives, participate in the affairs of the country and their control. With regard to disadvantages the people are poorly educated. Many are still illiterate, and do not understand the intrinsic value, and above all, the ideologies of the candidates who represent them. The last supplementary elections are proof of

this. Almost all the contests were won by the Communists. What is necessary here is a transitional system, that is, one which will allow the designation of representatives by the crown, or by the government, on the one hand, and representatives elected by the people on the other, while awaiting development of education in the villages. This wise measure would avoid the dismissal of educated candidates presented to the voters, and would eliminate the disorders which can be created by the voters.

#### Government Leaders

It would not do to pass without commenting on this point. On the political scene those figures who have dominated the government are Katay Don Sasorith, Prince Souvanna Phouma and Phoui Sananikone. The former is from the south, the second originally from the north, and the third is from central Laos. The first and third are from the Lao bourgeoisie, and the second is from royal stock, belonging to the family of the Viceroy, the royal family "that goes ahead." We know well the tradition that was handed down to us of three-fold royalty: the central royal family, that is, the present royal family which occupies the throne, of which the Crown Prince is Savang Vatthana; the royal family "that goes ahead" which currently includes Prince Phetsarath, Prince Souvanna Phouma and Prince Souphanouvong, and which formerly occupied itself with the Army, police, and foreign relations; and the royal family "which goes behind" which is currently in the background, not having any representatives on the political scene, but which is engaged in the internal affairs of the Kingdom, finance, public works and economy.

Even though Prince Souphanouvong is obedient to Communism, he maintains his royal blood and his respect for the throne. Proof of this was in 1953 when his Lao-Vietminh troops coming from Dien Bien Phu approached within four kilometers of Luang Prabang. Knowing that the King refused to leave the palace, he told his officers and soldiers, "I will cut off the head of anyone who attacks the royal city." [This differs from the usual version of the battle, to the effect that the decision of the King to remain in the royal capital and the prophecy of the blind monk of Luang Prabang that the Communists would not succeed, inspired the defense of the city.]

Then the Lao-Vietminh troops turned away in order to attack Thakhek later on.

From the above we can see that it is necessary to speak of the past a bit, in order to examine the present and prepare an opinion for the future.

The Lao elite recalls the intentions of certain French leaders, I do not say the French government, dating from the time of the protectorate. These people wanted to see Prince Phetsarath ascend the throne in place of his Majesty Sisavang Vong, the present King. Then, for the second time, in 1946 word went around that Prince Phetsarath desired to ascend the throne. The French denied this then, and still deny it today. All this offended His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, who feared the effrontery to the throne in case the branch of the royal family "that goes ahead" obtained too much power in the government. People bear a complete devotion to a reigning sovereign sharing the cares and worries of the royal Prince.

In admitting that the Princes of the royal family "that goes ahead" are sincere in their aspirations, the recollection of the rights and prerogatives of their ancestors in the roles they formerly played under the Crown cannot be excluded. According to the people, after the King, it is they to whom all royal trust and principal charges of the state fall due.

Prince Souvanna Phouma has been able to obtain the consent of Souphanouvong in the integration of the united Lao combatants into the national community. Internal peace reigned during the government of Souvanna Phouma, and troubles appeared when he quit as Prime Minister. Some say that the ex-Pathet Lao are Communists. Others affirm that Souphanouvong does not accept his exclusion from the government and that he looks with disfavor on the reins being held by a member of the bourgeoisie. For my part, I see these two things at the same time in the political disorders currently developing in Laos:

I. The retreat of the Lao-Vietminh troops before Luang Prabang when they had all the facilities for attacking and conquest

2. The respect for the Crown on the part of the chief rebel

It is desirable that the Crown Prince himself should undertake for some time the high function of head of government. In doing so he would bring together, I am certain, all the political parties, and concord would be established around the throne among the high personalities of the Kingdom. No one would command, and all would serve the country and their King.

I had the occasion one day to banter with one of leaders of the Neo Lao Hak Sat [the political party successor to the Pathet Lao].

"You say that we are bitter against each other in this country. Your paper Neo Lac Hak Sat and that of the Lao Haksa Sat [Committee for the Defense of the National Interests organ] insult and torment each other. Added to this is the Voice of the Lao People, the National Unity and Independence Party, directed to modifying your pro-Communist conduct.

"So, worn out with incessant and interminable quarrels, if the Good Lord one day put me in charge of forming the government, here is what I would do: I would call the influential men of your group to collaborate with me in the setting of right of the country. I need your intelligence and your capacity for work, but not your beliefs and your ideology. I will forbid your journal 'Neo Lao Hak Sat' to appear, because I don't want to hear your songs of praise for Lenin and Stalin, Mao Tse Tung and Ho Chi Minh, and I will slash the neck of anyone who communicates with, or gives intelligence to the Communists. On our part, I would like all the journals to follow the same line of conduct, which consists in bringing constructive ideas to the government, and not in provoking senseless sterile criticism with regard to our internal unity, or for purposes of alienating our immediate neighbors, or friendly nations.

"Well then, what do you think of it? Are you willing to bring me your sincere collaboration without duplicity?"

He replied, "Yes, one hundred per cent."

There you are, a sounding out of the spirit of one of the leaders of the Neo Lao Hak Sat.

Laos is geographically indefensible from the military point of view, with her three million inhabitants scattered over an area of two hundred fifty thousand square kilometers.

Roads are non-existent in the mountainous areas. Inter-village and inter-provincial communication is very difficult at every season of the year. This makes it hard to move troops and equipment. Also air transport cannot operate during the rainy season. That is why it is necessary to change our means of defense. We currently have 25,000 men in the Army equipped in western style. This is sufficient for police and village security, but to combat an enemy from the outside, it is necessary to create a guerilla army. This would consist of about 25,000 men, equipped with light arms communication and transmission equipment. It would need many helicopters and some fast, small airplanes.

This infantry would, moreover, be equipped with radar of the type currently in use by the French Army in Algeria, sensitive enough to detect the enemy at a distance of five to seven kilometers. If we possess means of defense, we will be able to resist the Vietminh Communists. If we don't, we expose our young Army to sheer loss. It will be necessary to be diplomatic as has been done formerly by our King, to tie the knot of friendship with the whole world. This cannot be done immediately but by degrees.

Many people will disagree with me on this point, but why then do Thailand and the United States allow Soviet Embassies in their countries? The way I see it, it would be a better solution to accept a Soviet Embassy in Vientiane to regulate the affairs of the ex-Pathet Lao. That would constitute an honorable solution without the return of the International Control Commission.

Having said this, I am opposed to any interpretation which excludes my friendship for the representatives of the American Mission to Laos, for the sacrifices and the most precious aid they bring my country.

#### American Aid

The precious American aid is very much appreciated

in Laos -- only the way in which it is applied is often the cause of criticism. It is complicated and slow, given by many people of the aid mission to many people in the Lao government, in a way that makes it difficult for the heads of the Lao government to follow and still more difficult for the other Ministers. Most of this aid goes to the police and the Army, and very little to the economists, such as Public Works and Industry.

The results are visible only to the government and the chiefs of the various national services. They are seen with difficulty by the mass of the people. One wishes that the aid in question would be distributed once a year, at the beginning of each year. This would allow the government services benefiting from the aid to plan their programs with continuity and without interruption. The aid will have to be augmented in some sections in order to ease our economic conditions. Thus, we would certainly be better off if we had many black-top roads linking Vientiane to Thakhek, and Vientiane to Luang Prabang, and to Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua via Paksane and Tha Thome, as well as to Savannkhet and the Vietnamese coast. With these well-made roads surplus agricultural products could be absorbed by other provinces that need them and internal economic equilibrium could thus be created.

At the present moment the American aid in road-building consists in making platforms or earthen embankments, which the rains carry away each year. With each new dry season they begin the same thing again, never accomplishing more. In my opinion, I feel it would be good to limit road work performed with the money from foreign aid to black-topping the surface of roads that have already been created. Then at the end of each dry season, one would at once see the concrete evidences of American aid. This would let the masses see with their own eyes this type of American aid and appreciate it.

Rural aid is very well received. It is wished that this kind of aid would also extend to small artisans and industries in the village.

In the private sector, long term loans with small interest, given by the American aid mission, would be well received by Lao businessmen, who, for lack of capital, are condemned to inactivity.

In the social domain, the local financial means are insufficient. There are enough schools, but they are not as yet adequate. Dispensaries are almost non-existent in the important provincial villages. In my opinion, it would be a good idea for American aid to go as well into this activity, in order to help the Lao government lower the infant mortality rate.

In the administrative department, it would be a good idea to make the number of Provinces twenty-four instead of twelve. This would reinforce Royal authority and also tighten up surveillance and control of the territory of the Kingdom. It would entail great expenses but is necessary if we want to survive. Currently, the large territory of our country with the weak security the government exercises on the villages makes possible the birth of subversive ideas.

#### Laos Seen From Above

Seen from above with a magnifying glass, Laos is a little strip of mountainous terrain situated in the heart of the Indochinese peninsula. It exists among other strips of land called Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Vietnam and the Philippines. They constitute Southeast Asia.

How are these split-up countries able to exist, each with its own administration, beside their colossal neighbors, India and China? Up until now, they owe it to France, England and the United States, but despite the interest of these big powers, the countries of Southeast Asia are going to be eaten up sooner or later, one after the other by Communist China with the support of Soviet Russia. Then, in the last round, India will be devoured in its turn, in spite of its size.

Already the tentacles of Communist China have reached out to Burma and Cambodia. Only Laos, Thailand, the Philippines, South Vietnam and Malaya fight courageously against being taken. Today Laos is invaded. Tomorrow it will be Thailand, and the next day Cambodia and Burma.

Just as small fish in the ocean and little birds in the air are eaten up by larger ones, the same will happen to little countries. It is time to grow together in one cluster which will be strong

enough to defend itself. The Arabs and Europeans avoided smallness on their part and the dangers that this leads to, by working to assemble themselves as the United Arab Republic and the United States of Europe.

The Federated States of East Asia can form themselves into a unit. First would begin the easiest union, based on similarities of manners and religion: Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Laos.

Do France, England and the United States like the idea of promoting this? If it is the best way to guard their interest in these countries and peace in Asia, it is possible to wait for their happy initiative. Thais, Burmans, Cambodians and Lao are all too timid to envision this creation. To you, French, English and Americans falls this social and humanitarian role.<sup>1</sup>

#### PHENG PHONGSAVAN

President of the National Assembly and Deputy from Luang Prabang, Pheng Phongsavan was born in Luang Prabang in the neighborhood adjoining the Royal Palace. His father was an official although he has no direct connection with the royal family. He served in administrative posts until 1942, when he achieved the rank of Chao Muong. He acted in this capacity until 1947, when he was elected a Deputy from Luang Prabang, a post in which he continues to serve at the present time. In 1951 he was a Deputy Secretary of State for the Interior and in 1954 became Minister of Economic Affairs and Public Works.

As President of the National Assembly, he has a much better equipped office than most Lao officials. There was an air-conditioner, and about half the space in the relatively small room was taken up by a huge desk.

<sup>1</sup>An article with a similar theme appeared in the Bangkok Post, although the roles of the French, English, and Americans were not mentioned in promoting such a union. Border conflicts between Cambodia and her neighbors appear to make such an undertaking quite difficult. But a beginning has been made - according to a New York Times news dispatch (Feb. 13, 1961) the Philippines, Thailand and Malaya have agreed to form a regional organization for economic and cultural cooperation but non-political in nature.

In general he talked rather freely, although officially:

"Among the most important problems of Laos are the economic ones. We must raise the living standards of the population and above all produce in Laos what is needed. Currently we must import a lot of things. As an independent country we must first of all satisfy the needs of the population and then be able to export goods to have a favorable commercial balance. If the economy can be developed the question of finances can be solved, and the population will be satisfied. If the population is satisfied, subversive propaganda cannot have much effect."

"Roads must be made to reach the different regions. After this we can develop agricultural production and then industry. I have a project that I would like to propose to our friends - the building of a railway line from Luang Prabang to Pakse. This would greatly promote economic exchange between the two regions. It is a big undertaking, but it can be realized. This railroad may cost about a billion kip but can be amortized over ten to fifteen years by French or American interests (a loan from these sources is implied, but it is also significant that in matters of technical and economic aid, France and America are usually mentioned in that order, although it has been the United States which has provided the overwhelming amount of assistance in recent years). There are companies that would undertake this. The government will give them a guarantee.

"Transportation is more important than rural aid, because villages produce things they cannot sell. Now they cultivate products only for themselves. The most important thing is for the government to obtain credit to build roads. The aid we are receiving is not sufficient in view of our current government policies (the clear implication here is that the government of Laos is pro-West and therefore the United States should support it more generously). We also need the Army and police to defend the country (the major amount of aid funds are currently spent to support the Army and police.)

"The government wants to raise taxes but the Assembly does not agree with this because the population is too poor to pay. You can't impose a tax on the population. The assembly has already voted a tax on the exterior signs of wealth (this does not check with the statement of the Finance Minister, but it is possible that two different types of taxes are involved.) Actually, the receipts derived from taxes on customs and import licenses have diminished because business is not very good. People do not have the money. There is not much money in circulation; it stays in the bank."

Commenting on the role of women in Lao politics, he said, "They are not very interested in these matters, spending their time caring for their homes and children" (there is one woman Deputy in the National

Assembly, elected in 1958. She is from Luang Prabang and a member of the Pathet Lao party. Her husband is also a Deputy from the same party. She has been interested mainly in campaigning against prostitution).

"Out of the twenty seats in the last election, the Pathet Lao obtained nine. It will probably be necessary to postpone elections because the government is not prepared. Much time is needed. The affair with the Pathet Lao battalion has had a bad effect, and the government should go and capture them; otherwise they will turn into guerillas. This is a very easy thing to do in our mountainous country. (During the summer of 1959, one battalion of Pathet Lao forces refused to be integrated into the National Army and after some maneuvering retreated towards the North Vietnam border.) However, we in the Assembly know only the broad outline of these problems. The government can give you the details. ("This is a reference to a feeling prevalent among a number of the Deputies that they have not been taken into government confidence.)

At the time of the 1960 coup of Captain Kouge he strongly associated himself with the "neutralist" faction.

#### OUNHEUAN NORASING

Ounheuan Norasing, Deputy from Luang Prabang and member of the Rally of the Lao People, is the son of a former Chao Muong. He has held several Ministerial posts in the government including those of Religion, National Economy and Justice, and is at present High Commissioner for the Provinces of Luang Prabang and Sayaboury. Theoretically, his job is to oversee the work of the local officials in these two Provinces.

"It is necessary to work with the mountain people for many reasons. They compose over half the population of Luang Prabang Province, and the Pathet Lao have been very successful with them. The valley Lao are sophisticated, but the Kha need to be shown that the government will help them. After I have distributed prizes at the Luang Prabang college graduation, I hope to make a trip to Muong Sai, Houei Sai and other places and towns in the provinces. I will then call conferences of Tassengs and Nai Bans and will talk with them. But it is not enough simply to talk. The government must also do something concrete, such as make presents of iron bars which then can be made into points for digging sticks. They should also be given other tools which they badly need."

#### NOWING RATAVONG

Nowing Ratavong, Lao Ambassador to Cambodia, was born in 1915, and is related through marriage to the prominent Viravong family. Colonel

Phoumi Nosavan, Minister of Defense and Veterans Affairs, is his cousin. He graduated from the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane and also received a diploma from the School of Law and Administration in Vientiane. In 1935 he began his career in the civil service, assigned first to the provincial court in Saravane and later occupying a similar position in Savannakhet. In 1943 he passed his examination to become a Chao Muong, serving as deputy governor of the Province of Savannakhet and from 1944 to 1945, as Chao Muong in Champassak. He participated in the Lao Issara movement and spent the years 1946 to 1949 in Thailand. Upon his return he became Director of the National Information Service and served in that capacity from 1949 to 1950. In 1950 he became Chao Muong in Savannakhet and from 1950 to 1951 served as President of the Lower Court in Savannakhet. In 1951 he was elected a Deputy to the National Assembly from Savannakhet and was re-elected in 1955.

During 1951 to 1957 he edited the now defunct "Xieng Lao" (Lao News). From 1952 to 1956 he served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Interior and also participated in international conferences, such as the FAO International Rice Conference in Tokyo. He has also served as Secretary of State for Justice, and in various financial and commercial assignments in the Lao government. In 1959 his daughter returned from a year of study in the United States.

#### A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTY

A former Deputy Mayor of Luang Prabang town, he is a member of the majority government party, the Rally of the Lao people. He lives quite modestly in Vientiane in small government-supplied quarters on the grounds of the National Assembly while his wife and seven children remain in Luang Prabang. He complained, "It is very difficult to support my family on my salary of 15,000 kip a month. We are given very little, while the Police Colonel in Vientiane, who has no children, earns 20,000 kip a month."

Our conversation turned to the question of American aid and he said, "The most important project is to build a permanent all-weather road from Vientiane to my province. This route has been worked on for a number of years, but it still closes down at the beginning of every rainy season. What the Americans should do is build the road themselves and then turn it over to the Lao, rather than try to build it with the Lao government; when it is done jointly what happens is that corrupt officials put money in their own pockets. The same happens with the dams. The Americans should build the dam or bridge and then present it as a gift to the Lao government. This is what the French did with the new Lycee they constructed. It is a good method. If a permanent road were completed, it would serve as a monument to American aid, and would be something to show the people."

"Look at the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests. It is composed of the same people who have previously profited from the American aid program. Although they have a good program, they do not execute it very well. I feel that the best way to promote honesty in government would be to give the power back to the National Assembly so that it would be possible to check on government programs. For example, the Army budget is now very high, but the National Assembly has no say on these matters. With strong government policies now, people are afraid to speak out for fear of being called Communist."

When asked what the situation was previously when the Assembly had power and there was much corruption, he replied, "All the power was in the hands of the executive branch of the government, and only a few Deputies (who were also Ministers) got rich. Actually, a few minor officials have been punished for corruption, and are currently in jail; one of the people from Customs, another from the Treasurer's office, and proceedings are being instituted against the Director General of Agriculture."

"The situation is somewhat better now: in my province one hundred per cent of the population was with the Pathet Lao; now only fifty per cent are with them."

B.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON SELECTED LAO DEPUTIES (1959)

1. SISOUPHAN PHOUNPADITH: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Luang Prabang, now lives in Luang Prabang where he was born; formerly Chao Muong of Muong Xieng; his father was a merchant and farmer. (In northern Laos these two occupations are often practiced together); his younger brother is a teacher in Luang Prabang.
2. KHAMPHENG BOUPHA: Unaffiliated  
Deputy from Phong Saly, born in Luang Prabang, and a brother of the present Chao Khouang of that province; his father was a former Chao Muong in Luang Prabang, of apparently modest means; he speaks fluent French.
3. KHAMPHAY BOUPHA: Pathet Lao  
Deputy from Phong Saly, cousin of Khampheng, born in Luang Prabang; former merchant, has been with the Pathet Lao since its inception; his father is a councilor to the King.
4. TIAO SOUK BOUVAVONG: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Luang Prabang, formerly Mayor of Luang Prabang town, then Post Office Director in Vientiane, and a Deputy since 1955; was a former Minister of Public Works in the 1957 Souvanna Phouma government; his father was a Prince at the Royal Court; a prosperous member of the Lao elite, he speaks fluent French.
5. OUAN BOUNDARN: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Luang Prabang; his father was formerly secretary to the police; born in Luang Prabang, was a provincial official before his election.
6. OUAN VINAIGNA: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Luang Prabang, born in Vientiane; formerly a Chao Muong, and worked for a long time as an official in Luang Prabang, now lives in Vientiane.
7. NANG KHAMPHENG BOUPHA: Pathet Lao  
Wife of Khamphay Boupha; both are Pathet Lao Deputies; she is from Luang Prabang, has five children and was a midwife and teacher before her election; she is the only woman Deputy in the National Assembly; her brother is employed by the Ministry of the Interior.
8. TIAO SOUK VONGSAK: Pathet Lao  
Deputy from Luang Prabang, born in Luang Prabang, son of an official; was a Chao Muong in government service before he joined the Pathet Lao.



9. CHANDA OUNTHUANG: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Luang Prabang, born in Xieng Khouang; was formerly a Chao Muong in Luang Prabang Province.
10. PHAYA PHOUMY VONGVICHIT: Pathet Lao  
Born in Xieng Khouang, now Deputy from Luang Prabang where he has never lived; was elected on the strength of of his Pathet Lao association; married to the daughter of a prominent Luang Prabang family; father-in-law was a former Chao Khoueng in Xieng Khouang; brother-in-law is in the diplomatic service; another brother-in-law works for the American Aid Mission.
11. SISANA SISANE: Pathet Lao  
Deputy from Savannakhet, about fifty years old, has had no formal education and is illiterate; is the only Kha in the National Assembly; his father led the rebellion in Saravane against the French from 1936 to 1938; he was captured and jailed until 1945 when he was freed by the Japanese; then joined Prince Souphanouvong and became a member of the Pathet Lao; speaks no French but does speak Lao.
12. THONGDY SOUNTHONE VICHITH: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Saravane, about forty years old; is a medecin Indo-chinoise studied at Hanoi; has been an official in the Health Service, is a good musician and the composer of the Lao National Anthem.
13. PRINCE BOUN OUM NA CHAMPASSAK: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Champassak; a brother of Prince Boun Oum; studied in Saigon but did not obtain a degree; his father, the hereditary Prince of Champassak, was Governor of that province. He is fluent in French.
14. BOUNLAP NHOUYVANISONG: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Champassak, is about thirty-five, a business man in export-import field; graduated from elementary school in Pakse.
15. MAHA KOU SOUVANNAMEDHI: Santiphab  
Deputy from Champassak; speaks no French, was a monk for over twenty years, and resigned from the priesthood in 1945; he studied Japanese while a monk and became an interpreter for the Japanese Army during their stay in Laos; after they left he became a small trader in the Bolovens; is also a former teacher in the Pali school; about forty-five years old.
16. KOUILY BANCHONGPHANIT: Santiphab  
Deputy from Champassak, does not speak French; a former business man who has not worked for the government previously; this is the second time he has been elected to the Assembly.

17. SISAAT PHOLSENA: Santiphab  
Deputy from Champassak, about thirty-five, educated at the elementary school in Pakse; was formerly a business man.
18. KHAMRING SANANIKONE: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Saravane, was Chao Muong in Saravane before his election; about forty-two years old, is a cousin of Phoui Sananikone; he is on the executive committee of the National Assembly; attended the Groupe Scolaire in Vientiane, and is a graduate of the School of Law and Administration.
19. LOU BOUALAVONG: Santiphab  
Deputy from Saravane; about forty-five with little formal education; does not speak French; a business man and former truck and bus driver; became known because of his bus service in Saravane Province; has been arrested many times for his propaganda against the government, and is said to be very popular with the people.
20. XUN MUONGMANY: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Saravane; about forty years old, was a teacher before his election; studied in the Groupe Scolaire in Pakse, speaks a little French.
21. CHAMPA PHOMMACHANH: National Union  
Deputy from Attopeu; about fifty years old, former Chao Muong in Sam Neua; born in Attopeu; graduated from the elementary school and speaks some French; his son-in-law, a member of the Rally of the Lao People, is Director of Police in Attopeu, and they occupy the same house.
22. KHAMLEUANH BOUNGNASENG: Rally of the Lao People  
Deputy from Attopeu; about forty-two, attended the college in Vientiane and studied forestry in Phnom Penh; a former technician with the Department of Water and Forests.

C.

KHAMPAN PANYA

Foreign Minister in the government of Phoui Sananikone in 1959 and continued in the same position in the 1960 government of Thao Kou Abhay, Khampan Panya is a member of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest. He was born in Luang Prabang in 1917 (an official source lists 1912) where his father was a mandarin at the court. An only son, he was a widower with one son until his recent second marriage. He received his secondary education in Hanoi, Saigon and Phnom Penh and graduated from the School of Forestry in Hanoi. He also has a law degree from the Faculty of Law in Paris, representing a rather exceptional education by Lao standards.

Khampan Panya began his civil service career in 1942 in the Forestry Bureau in Vientiane, later becoming Chief of the Forestry Division. He served successively as assistant to the Governor of Vientiane, assistant to the Secretary General of the Royal Palace, Director of Protocol for the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Assistant to the Secretary General, Council of the French Union, Director of an economic mission in Saigon and Lao Ambassador to New Delhi. From 1950 to 1957 he represented Laos at various international conferences in France, Switzerland and the United States, and has been a leader of the Lao delegation to the United Nations.

As befits his country's chief diplomatic representative, he occupies the most spacious office of any Lao official I visited. His manner is relaxed and pleasant. In discussing relations between Laos and Vietnam as contrasted with those with Thailand, Khampan Panya said his government wanted to be friendly with South Vietnam, there having been almost one hundred years of association with her as a consequence of French rule. There are strong cultural and kinship bonds with Thailand. For example, Marshall Sarit, the Prime Minister of Thailand has relatives in Pakse, and the Chief of Police of Thailand is descended from the royal family of Luang Prabang.

In discussing the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest I remarked that some government officials had said that although the program of the Committee was good, there were some members who were not. Khampan Panya agreed, saying that ideally, it would have been good to replace the entire Cabinet. "But if certain people are removed, there is no one to replace them. It is possible for people to change. Certain people who profited before have now changed their minds." (There is a rather tolerant attitude on the part of Lao officials, so that even the bitterest enemies of the Pathet Lao, for example, never talked about shooting them.)

"There is already a tax on homes, and the people are paying it. For example, 'one of the most prominent men in the Kingdom' who before did not pay any taxes, has now begun to pay some." When asked what would happen if people did not pay their taxes, Khampan Panya said they would be put in jail. He laughed when I asked whether this would apply to this man as well. "Currently," he said, "the Finance Minister has under consideration a tax on the villages; he thinks that a head tax of about one hundred kip per household might be possible, and thus enable them to participate in the affairs of the Kingdom."

"Roads are a major problem in the development of Laos. Economic self-sufficiency is also an important objective. With regard to the minority peoples we could all live well together if the Communists did not make propaganda. Toubi, Vice-president of the National Assembly, and his half-brother who is Procurator General, are cases of Meo participation in the government."

<sup>1</sup> Khampan Panya referred to the individual by name.

As to the charge that Committee people did not get out to the villages and are not acquainted with the farmers, Khampan Panya felt this probably referred to the Ministers, explaining that they are unable to get out because of the heavy pressure of work in Vientiane. He stressed that Committee members in rural affairs agencies do travel. (As a matter of fact, much of the Committee's strength is in the Army, which has extensive contacts with the rural population.) One of Khampan Panya's assistants added that all members of the Foreign Ministry are members of the CDIN because the Minister is a member. This aide also took pride in the fact that unlike in other government offices, there were no former Pathet Lao here. He said, "No one is permitted to work in the Foreign Affairs Ministry who does not share our ideals and principles. We would rather take a young person as a clerk and train him, than a former member of the Pathet Lao."

When asked what would happen if the United States Congress decided to cut the aid budget for Laos, Khampan Panya replied, "Then we would have to reconsider our (foreign) policy, but I do not believe this will happen because the Americans well understand the situation of Laos."

The following news release was printed in a bulletin of the Royal Embassy of Laos in Washington:

In a recent interview granted to Agence France Presse, His Excellency Khampan Panya declared that several questions need to be restated regarding the "dispute" between the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest and the Rally of the Lao People parties during the Political crisis of last December.

...Asked whether the CDIN and the RPL had settled their dispute, the Minister stated: "They have never been at variance on ideology, as reported. In fact, the CDIN and the RPL are both anti-communist and have the same national ideals. However, I want to point out that their anti-communism does not extend beyond the borders of Laos."

Referring to last fall's political crisis, Khampan Panya declared that he wanted to clear up any misunderstanding about that critical period. "The Foreign press made several incorrect statements in connection with this crisis", said the Minister. "The first inaccuracy was to report that the trouble arose from dissension within the Sananikone government, between the CDIN and RPL parties over foreign policy. For instance, how could anyone conceive of Mr. Hammarskjold and Mr. Sananikone reaching any kind of separate agreement on the new trend to be given our country's politics when Mr. Sananikone himself had always insisted that I attend all meetings during the Secretary General's visit to Laos".

The Foreign Minister added: "Later it was reported that the Army had tried to seize power during the crisis. This is another inaccuracy. I know the Army very well and I can assure you it never had such ambition. It so happens that during the period of uncertainty we lived through, the Army was the only organized and disciplined force in Laos, thus the only element capable of restoring constitutional legality in order and security. If the Army took over to dis-patch current business, it was only to prevent further abuse".

Finally, he denied that the Army's withdrawal from the political scene had followed the intervention of Western Embassies with the King. He said that at that time, the Army took over only to resolve the political crisis. Its objective was the appointment of a neutral government capable of preparing fair elections. The Army was not trying to serve its own interests.

The present Government, whose establishment was decided long before the intervention of the Western Embassies, is endeavoring to fulfill its tasks. It is merely a coincidence that this Government was effectively formed shortly after such an intervention; there is no relation between cause and effect.<sup>1</sup>

#### IMPENG SURYADHAY

Impeng Suryadhay, The Secretary of the State for Education in the Phoui Sananikone government, was born in 1923 in Muong Khong, in the Province of Champassak. He graduated from the National School of Political Science of the University of Paris in 1953 and began his career as a high school teacher in Vientiane, after which he became Director of teacher training.

Later he joined the Foreign Service of Laos and was appointed First Secretary of the Royal Lao Embassy in Washington, where he remained until 1955. In 1956 he was Director of Information and Propaganda Services and in 1957 Secretary General of the Council of Ministers. In 1958 he ran as a candidate for the National Assembly from Champassak; although he polled almost fifteen thousand votes, he was not elected.

He is a member of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests.

<sup>1</sup> "Laos Information Bulletin" Royal Embassy of Laos, Washington, D. C., February-March 1960.

#### SISOUK NA CHAMPASSAK

Sisouk Na Champassak was, in 1959, the youngest of the higher-ranking officials in the Lao government, serving as Secretary of State in the Ministry of Information, Sports and Youth, and as acting Foreign Minister when Khampan Panya was abroad. A nephew of Prince Boun Oum, his father's elder brother, Sisouk was born in 1928. He attended the University of Paris, the School of Political Sciences, and also studied at Schools of Journalism and Diplomacy. It is not certain whether he received a degree, but in any case his education is superior to that of most other high Lao officials. His wife is French.

In 1954 Katay Don Sasorith, then Prime Minister, asked him to be his Chef de Cabinet, a position he held until the elections of 1955. He was the representative of the Royal Lao Government to the International Control Commission which supervised the Geneva Agreements in Indochina. He also took part in all the political negotiations with the Pathet Lao which took place at Xieng Khouang, Rangoon and Vientiane. In 1956, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma named him Executive Secretary of the Council of Ministers. He was a member of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests.

Since the end of 1956, he has been the leader of the Lao permanent delegation to the United Nations and in 1960 was appointed Lao Ambassador to the United Nations.

#### OUKEO SOUVANNAVONG

Director of the Ministry of the Plan and Chairman of the American Aid Committee, Oukeo Souvannavong is a member of one of the most influential families in Laos<sup>1</sup> and has received higher education in France. His comments follow:

"Laos is an agricultural country. More than 90 percent of the people earn their living by farming. Rice is the basic crop and without rice the Lao cannot live. Vegetables, corn and livestock are of lesser importance. Each Lao is a landowner. If the weather is good the people can live from the products of their land, and do not lack anything. The life of the lowland villager is very simple, but in the mountains people make hai (slash-and-burn fields) where they grow rice, vegetables, pepper and sometimes tobacco. Their cultivation is intensive and after two years the land is exhausted and it is necessary for them to select another site.<sup>2</sup> Forests are being cut down for the hai, and the government is searching for a way to encourage mountain dwellers to come down into the

<sup>1</sup> See Khoranhok biography for details of family affiliations.

<sup>2</sup> Ethnographic reports usually give 4-6 years and sometimes as high as 15 for crops such as opium.

valleys. We hope to provide them with tools for plowing the land so that they will be able to make irrigated rice fields." He added that the USOM Agricultural Division was giving money for the resettlement of the mountain tribes. (The American officials in the Agricultural and Community Development Divisions had no program of this sort in mind, but a request has been initiated by the Department of Forests of the Lao Ministry of Agriculture.)

"The rice culture of the Lao depends on rain. If there is enough, rice grows; if not, a poor harvest results. The government is constructing small dams to irrigate rice fields. In this way it will be possible to conserve rainwater. On the plain of Vientiane, the Lao government has asked a private organization to make a study of irrigation problems. This study has been completed, and we have asked the French Aid Mission to analyze the problem of irrigation and study the soil and the sociological aspects of the situation." (It is interesting to note that although the Americans have been asked to support these programs, they were not asked to undertake the study.)

"We also need money to set up an experimental agricultural station and have asked United Nations support for that. The UN has replied that they must first see the report of the Committee for the Mekong. The Lao government is very much interested in this Mekong project, which is concerned with hydraulic and navigation problems.

"Since I work only with foreign aid programs, I cannot talk with much authority about the national budget, but in principle, it depends on customs receipts, personal tax and a revenue tax. Salaries are taxed and merchants are taxed on their sales.

"We cannot realize our Five Year Plan without American aid. Among our industrial developments, we have authorized a cement plant in Thakhek, which will be owned by Prince Boun Oum. A cigarette factory seven kilometers from Vientiane is already functioning. (This is owned by Oukeo's brother and staffed mainly with Vietnamese.) There are also saw mills and factories for matches, ice, soda water and 'Green Spot' (a soft drink). After the Lao learn more of the technical tasks they will replace the Vietnamese in these enterprises. A sugar factory will be established, combining Thai, Lao and Chinese interests, and there will also be some printing companies.

"The most important thing for economic development is for Laos to be able to produce enough for her own needs. Thus we have no need to import cloth; we can do our own weaving. We can also produce our own vegetable oil and items like peas and pineapples, and set up tanneries to cure skins. In this way, we can utilize our local products."

When the possibility that American aid might be decreased was mentioned, Oukeo replied that at times the program has not functioned well, and that the employees have not been content because they were not paid

on time. "If American aid were to be decreased, aid would be requested of other countries, perhaps France, but this is a political question, outside my scope."

"In our towns there are mostly officials and foreigners. The Lao, for their part, live mostly in the villages. For this reason it is necessary to give a lot of aid to the rural areas. We have asked the Japanese Aid Mission to make a study of dam construction to help irrigate the Plain of Vientiane and possibly to supply electricity as well. Included in this program is the tentative electrification of some villages. At present electricity is available only in the cities, and usually only in stores and the homes of officials, at that. Japanese aid is currently limited to one billion yen. If there is any money left over, we will also ask them to build a bridge."

In reply to a question about the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests, Oukeo again replied that this was something outside his sphere of concern, but later indicated that the CDIN members were inexperienced and thus made the work of the other officials more difficult.

### III

#### UNATTRIBUTED COMMENTS OF OFFICIALS

##### LAO OFFICIAL OF SUB-CABINET RANK (Official A)

He stated that government policy was pro-American and anti-Communist and that although Laos is not formally a member of SEATO she counts on its protection.

He said, "Sixty-five percent of the rural population is now with the government. It is very important for the government to come into contact with the masses. Now many of the Pathet Lao have quit the party since they were not paid. The police, the administration and the military must work with the people. Rural aid, that is, aid for village schools and medical work, these are the important things. At present there are plans to place a group of police in each Tasseng, but not enough are available. They will make patrols and contact the villagers." When asked how this would correlate with the program of "Teams of Six" of the Army, he said that the police would go to the areas where there are no military. "The police will make propaganda, show films and form a liaison with the population to put across the government's point of view at village festivals and ceremonies. These projects must be pushed as much as possible.

"Previously, only fifty-five percent of the population was with us, but after the elections of 1958 we have gained about ten percent. By working with the people I won the election in Nam Tha and defeated my

Pathet Lao opponent by a margin of 3,000 votes. Future elections should be delayed six months or a year, so that the population can be completely won over. But, we must change the Constitution to make sure. There is no idea of having a dictatorship, but the people must be won over to the side of the authority through the activity of the government.

"Because of family ties encompassing the Army, the young elite and the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests, any kind of coup d'etat, such as has occurred recently in Thailand, would not be possible in Laos."<sup>1</sup>

On the subject of American aid, he felt that if it were constant, perhaps in five years it would be possible for Laos to dispense with this assistance.

In reply to my question he said, "The monks have no right to participate in politics. Actually, they are supposed to be neutral but the Santiphab has exerted some influence on them."

"Last summer," he continued, "there was a one-week seminar for the chief monks from each province. I worked in cooperation with the U. S. Information Service, which has also helped start a newspaper specifically for the monks. If we can make the monks instruments of propaganda then we can be sure of reaching the population. Through religious publications we can tell the population about the Communists and the affair in Tibet. Two old people, who are now in Muong Xieng, who had fled the Communists, came to the seminar here and explained how the Chinese had destroyed Buddha images and defrocked the monks.

"The Asia Foundation has aided us with specialists to help decorate the pagodas. I am very happy with this program. We will have a conference of the chief provincial monks in Vientiane every year, and then also have conferences with the monks in the provinces. I am very happy to work with U.S.I.S. and the Asia Foundation. The best propaganda can be made through the monks because the population respects them. It would be a good idea to distribute medicine through the pagodas, because unlike the local chiefs and teachers, monks cannot sell goods. There are about sixty-thousand monks in all of Laos. (According to official statistics there are less than one-third that number.) It would be a good idea to send them to America and other countries."<sup>2</sup>

"We must work in rural action programs, using the military and the police in the villages as well as the monks. We must be in contact with

<sup>1</sup> He did not attempt to relate this attitude to families divided between the Royal Government and the Pathet Lao.

<sup>2</sup> Two Lao monks studied in the United States in 1959 on American government scholarships provided by the United States Information Service.

the population. This is the only democratic solution. These programs have just begun. We must make this effort. We cannot hesitate or neglect these programs.

"If we don't have enough time to work with the villagers, we will postpone the elections for a year or so, to give the program a chance to work. We are in the process of reconstruction; we must wait for the population to develop. We can't force them with dictatorship. If we use the method of force, we can win the population only for two or three years, and then what?"

"We must also watch the Chinese (in Laos).

"We must indoctrinate our officer corps and our younger element in the Army. As for the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest, it is not the time for this, for now we must all work together and face the common enemy. The young people do not have the experience; they did not fight the Vietminh; they were in France."

OFFICIAL ASSOCIATED WITH THE COMMITTEE FOR THE  
DEFENSE OF THE NATIONAL INTERESTS  
(Official B)

One of the chief spokesmen for the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests, Official B, appeared to be impressed with his own importance and was much more difficult to see than many other Lao officials of equal rank (in all fairness to him, however, during the period of these interviews, he had a great many official responsibilities).

Referring to the time he called "the period of parliamentary democracy" in Laos, he said it did not succeed very well. "You cannot go directly from the shadow of colonialism into democracy. For example, Indonesia has more resources than Laos, but nevertheless she was compelled to revert to directed democracy.

"The Lao people did not understand democracy. The old Deputies became demagogues. They did not pay their taxes. They wanted freedom and independence, but this did not mean to them civic responsibility. The idea of liberty and the right of free speech was abused.

"The people were not aware of their rights. The Deputies did not represent the people. They put the people against the government. The people did not pay taxes. Each time the government proposed that the people participate by paying taxes, the Deputies refused to vote the measure.

"Formerly, the government did not have much power. For example, an official would arrest a thief, but then a Deputy would interpose himself

year. We need six to ten thousand kilometers of roads, so we would have to devote our total budget for eight years exclusively to this program. We have no means.

"If our friends cannot help us, we will not be able to do anything. All we can do is hope and look at each other. We have no electricity. We cannot be independent if we are not aided. The present aid level to Laos is about thirty-six to forty million dollars a year. People cannot pay taxes if we do not do anything for them. We have no engineers to build roads. Give us the engineers to show us how. We could put 5000 boys to work on road projects."<sup>1</sup>

When discussing how this project could be accomplished in view of the limited financial resources and the fact that the American aid to Laos might not be increased, as a partial answer I ventured the suggestion that it might be possible to take some funds from the military, since many people have said that the Army was too large. Official B replied that this would be in accord with his view but that the level of the Army was fixed by the Americans in the Program Evaluation Office (this is the equivalent of an American Military Aid Mission in Laos). He strongly implied that it was American money and the Lao had no say about it. This directly contradicts the remarks of certain foreign observers who said that at a Cabinet meeting, at that period, the Lao government had decided to ask the Program Evaluation Office for an increase in Army strength in view of the trouble in the north.

"In any case," Official B said, "if a road were built, people would be able to sell things and would then be able to pay taxes. For example, at Pakse pineapples are now three to five kip each, while in Vientiane they cost thirty to thirty-five kip apiece. Also, fifty thousand pounds of potatoes go bad in Pak Song in the south because there is no transportation. In other regions there is a spoilage of excess rice. "Roads are the most important thing in any program trying to reach the village people."

We turned next to a discussion of religious matters. He said, "There are now about twelve thousand monks in Laos. We are a Buddhist state. The monks have considerable influence in the villages. There they are the teachers and doctors like the village priest in France, but unlike France, here there is no conflict between the right and the left factions. In Laos the Pathet Lao also seek influence among the monks. Now, slowly the monks are beginning to understand the government and its policy, but we are not able to go too fast. If we proceed too rapidly we risk a contrary effect. The recent meetings of the provincial

<sup>1</sup> Attempts have been made by the American aid mission to have American contractors train Lao at the same time they undertake road building. This has also been the objective in the past but it has not always been successfully implemented.

leaders of the priesthood was designed to develop the monks' discipline.

"Some foreign influences on the priesthood are not good. Many of the monks want to learn English, but this cannot be done in the pagoda itself. For young monks to go to foreign families to study English is not good. Formerly, after nine p.m. no monks would be seen on the streets. This is not true today. Now there is no discipline. There are Mahas in the Santiphab Party who have much influence and work closely with the Pathet Lao. To counter this trend, twice a month government officials are requested to go to Wat Sissaket to listen to sermons. About one hundred officials attend."

When Official B was asked about the development of Vientiane with its movies, pastry shops, beauty salons and other luxury establishments as compared to the countryside where there is a lack of educational and medical facilities and roads, he replied that all these things were normal in the development of a city. He said that investigators coming from the United States have written articles about Laos and have made certain incorrect references.

"For one thing," he said, "the cost of the aid program to Laos includes the salaries of American technicians and the cost of their servants and transportation. Many of these officials are connected with USOM affairs only, and the Lao government has never requested them."

When asked if he thought Laos could get along with fewer technicians Official B would not give a direct reply. He did bring up one evident point of pique and dwelt on it at length--the fact that Americans paid their servants four to six thousand kip per month, while he could only afford to pay his servants about three thousand kip a month, implying a very high living standard for American technicians, even the lower ranking ones, as contrasted with that of the high Lao government officials.

In discussing the possibility of taxes for Laos Official B pointed out that government officials earn about fourteen thousand kip a month, or just about the salary of a common laborer (he used the term--coolie) in the United States. (Actually high ranking Lao government officials can receive up to twenty or twenty-five thousand kip per month.) There are only about one hundred families in Vientiane who could be considered prosperous. By taxing them one would not be able to raise much money. When the symbolic factor was mentioned he seemed to agree, but only in a lukewarm way. He also felt the villagers could not pay taxes since they lacked the means, but that once roads were built to the villages it would help solve this problem.

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HIGH-RANKING OFFICIAL CONCERNED  
WITH EDUCATION PROBLEMS  
(Official C)

With regard to village development Official C felt that, "This should be directed through the schools since they have the personnel and the means to reach the villagers. They also have the experience. The efforts of the Rural Development Program are in competition with the Ministry of Education. There are also other programs, but officially I know nothing about them. (This was a specific reference to the Army Teams of Six. He also commented bitterly about the superficial training of their personnel.)

"There are now five organizations working in rural development: Education, Agriculture, Public Health, the Army and the Village Development Program. They are all in competition, and there is not enough money."

Like most civil service officials who are not in politics, he was rather hostile to the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest. He said they claim they are not a political party, but this is a joke, for their people are Ministers of Education, Foreign Affairs, Army, Finance and Social Affairs.

Then we turned to a discussion of the minority groups. "They are all Lao. Our problem is to Laotianize them. The missionaries in Xieng Khouang who are using Meo texts to teach the people there, are working against the interests of the Lao government."

When it was mentioned that the Meo and the Kha did not know Lao when they entered school he replied, "The teachers should know these languages. As for the students, this is the same as Lao not knowing French when they reach the junior high school level. We do not discriminate against them. Priority should be given to developing schools for mountain peoples, but the Kha, for example, represent a problem because their villages are so scattered. We do not discriminate, but priority should be given to the establishment of schools in the larger villages."

HIGH OFFICIAL DEALING WITH RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS  
(Official D)

An interesting point in connection with this interview is that on many matters he takes a view opposite that of many of his associates. A transcription of his remarks follows.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compare with viewpoints of Officials A & B and see footnotes on page 60 on activities of clergy in 1960-61.

"Lao people by tradition respect monks deeply. Now we have a problem. There is a Communist bloc and a Free World bloc. The Lao government has chosen the Free World. We are near the frontier of Communist China and North Vietnam. There are elements of the other side within Laos, and they attempt to subvert the monks to achieve their goals. Therefore, the government has to watch the situation concerning the monks very closely.

We must be extremely careful. The monks are very young (in terms of political sophistication). On the average, they have had five years of schooling and at most, up to eight or ten years (in general Lao monks are not as well educated as those in Thailand).

"There are some very old monks who have been forty years in the pagoda but have never participated in politics. In principle, the monks are forbidden to enter into political affairs. A present problem of the government is that attention must be paid to the anti-government elements within the priesthood. The monks in general are still not contaminated by politics. If some go over to the other side, it is because they do not understand the danger.

"The Pathet Lao say that if the monks do not think there are enough pagodas, this is because the government is not pro-Buddhist, thus maneuvering the monks into the position of being anti-government. The government does not pay sufficient attention to the monks. The problem is very difficult: we have to deal with their ignorance in political matters as well as counteract the work of the well-organized Pathet Lao.

"The priesthood is one of the best elements for working against the Communists, but it cannot participate directly like political groups. Do you know what Neo Lao Hak Sat means? It means 'the Lao who love their country'. These Neo Lao Hak Sat, or Pathet Lao as they were formerly known, work as nationalists not as Communists. They have never declared themselves Communists. Only one or two monks who are already Communists want a Communist regime because they feel it would advance their own careers. These are the monks who are consciously serving the Communists. If we have formal proof that monks serve the Pathet Lao against the government, we must punish them. We cannot wait until many are contaminated, for we cannot proclaim a collective punishment. We have begun to be vigilant.

"Buddhist doctrine forbids politics, but things can be done discreetly. Because of the strong belief of the people in the monks, we must proceed with caution. We should have meetings where government officials and ministers speak directly to the monks (actually the strong French influences among many Lao elite seem to have affected them as far as anti-clerical attitudes are concerned. Some, particularly the younger elite who have been educated in France, are not at all religious. This situation has reached the point where the government has recently begun



requiring officials to attend services once a month. This contrasts with the outward attitude of some Pathet Lao leaders, notably Prince Souphanouvong, who makes a great show of visiting the wats frequently and talking with the monks). Our enemies exploit the credulity of the monks. If some monks serve the Communists we can defrock them and punish them. One monk had a warrant issued for his arrest and fled to Thailand.

"There is a lack of discipline among the monks here in Laos. Rules should be enforced for the respect of the Buddhist faith. These regulations must be observed. There must be pure discipline to show the people that the monks are truly respectful of Buddhism. If there are some bad elements within the religious community, this must be corrected.

"The young monks are novices who are in the priesthood only to profit from the generosity of the Lao public: to live, to study in the pagoda and later to find a job outside. The novices do not think of becoming monks and living that way until death: They are able to study because they are fed and lodged in the pagoda at the expense of the population. They learn to read and write Lao and also study English and French. When they have completed their course they hope to seek a job, a small job in the government. They cannot, however, get an important position because the Pali school emphasizes Buddhist doctrine above all (and this presumably is not too useful in the government service although Laos is formally a Buddhist state).

"The Communists tried to sabotage the recent conference the government held for chief provincial monks. They tried to convince the Director of the Ministry of the Interior to allow 'professors' or lecturers for the conference, chosen by the pro-Pathet Lao group. About twenty-four monks who are pro-Communist were proposed for this work, including the former chief monk. The Minister of Religious Affairs understood and refused to permit them to attend the conference. The Communists also tried to delay the meeting. If this conference had been held here in Vientiane, we could not have obtained the good results which were achieved. Having it eighty kilometers away posed many difficulties in terms of transportation, and so many Ministers and other high-ranking officials were not able to attend.

"From time to time we should have conferences of monks directed by competent officials. The government can control the affairs of the monks, but it is a delicate situation. We must show respect for the monks, for if we are not tactful they can say 'We should not be treated like laymen'. I do not want to act as if I know more than the monks.

"Fortunately the Prime Minister (Phoui Sananikone) was able to attend our conference before its closing. In his discussion he was very respectful to the monks, but he advised them not to occupy themselves with politics because when monks participate in politics they risk the

decadence of their religion. This approach is very good; this lesson must be repeated very often. My point of view is that to redress the situation, it is necessary to make explanations to the monks.

"It is possible for them to be anti-Communist and at the same time preserve our tradition of non-participation of the priesthood in politics. Thus, it is forbidden for the monks to work against the government, so they must support its program. If you are against the government you can be punished.

"The Director of the Rural Development program (Civic Action) asked the Minister of Religious Affairs to enlist the monks' support in this project. There was a meeting with the former head of the monks, and he in turn had a conference with some thirty of his associates, to which the Minister was invited. The chief monk then posed the question, 'Is it not true that politics are involved in the Civic Action program?' (This was one of the programs backed by the American government, which provided the major funds for its support.) The Minister replied, 'No, you are not making politics, but you are supporting an activity of the government.' Then the head monk said that the monks wished to avoid such a situation. The Minister counseled them to meditate on this problem, and to bear in mind that it was the wish of the government. Finally the monks refused to participate, claiming it would mean they were engaging in politics. From my point of view if this example is repeated, the government must then say to the monks, 'If you are not for the government, you are against it. If you are against us, we are obligated to take action.'

"Whatever we do we must do carefully, because the population watches us. We must honor the good monks, and do this (smashing his fist hard against his hand) with the bad ones. This is very difficult, because some, including the chief monk, have relatives who are members of the Pathet Lao."

EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR  
(Official E)

As an official of the Lao Ministry of Education, Official E spent over a year in the United States. Unlike most of his colleagues he now has quite a good command of English. He has had extensive dealings with Europeans and Americans. His wife has been a government employee and is a member of a prominent Lao family.

(An account of Official E's travels in the United States is included under the section on impressions of America.)

At the beginning of our meeting Official E brought up the subject of American reaction and especially the reactions in the American press, to the aid program in Laos. He specifically mentioned an article that

had appeared in the "Readers Digest" magazine. (This was a reprint of an article originally printed in the Wall Street Journal dealing with the deficiencies of the American aid program under the old 1 to 35 exchange rate.)<sup>1</sup> "The situation is in part the fault of the Lao, but the Americans have made errors too," he said, "They give the Lao the money or materials and then keep hands off. But later they feel free to criticize what happens." What he appeared to imply here was the lack of American participation in carrying out the programs themselves, which is also related to the way in which the Americans conceive of Lao independence. It is also true, of course, that although the Lao say they welcome greater American participation in the carrying out of the various programs, they are sometimes very obstructive toward American efforts directed at detailed cooperation. It does also seem that there is a matter of cultural communication involved, between the American officials particularly those in the aid mission on one hand and their Lao government counterparts on the other. A number of Americans are conscious of this situation and have a realization of some of the problems.

Official E's attitude toward the United States is by no means completely negative. He spoke with deep affection of his stay and of the various people he met who were very helpful to him. "I want to return to the United States to do graduate study. I have the equivalent of a Bachelor's Degree." On further questioning, it appeared that what he actually obtained was the first part of a baccalaureate from the Lycee, or the equivalent of a high school education in the United States.

When the writer tactfully suggested that perhaps he might want to take courses as a non-matriculated student, he replied that he wanted a degree, implying that it was an important prestige item in the Ministry. This is a real problem for middle-rank Lao officials attempting to go abroad to the United States and other countries for further education. Most of them occupy responsible positions in the bureaucracy but seldom have more than a high school education; it is with difficulty that they would fit into an educational situation on the graduate level, for which their administrative experience would appear to qualify them.

He also spoke at length of the Ministry's plan to recruit foreign teachers, Thai, Philipinos and Americans to fill out the staff of the college and the teachers' training school being built by the Americans, which he referred to as the University and which occupies a campus on the outskirts of Vientiane.<sup>2</sup> The French are not able to supply a suffi-

<sup>1</sup> Igor Oganessoff, "Living It Up In Laos", Wall Street Journal, April 9, 1958, p. 1-14.

<sup>2</sup> Several Americans were subsequently recruited through a non-governmental organization.

cient number of teachers and very few Lao have the qualifications to teach at this level. Any Lao who has the equivalent of a high school diploma can obtain quite a good appointment in one of the Ministries and is not tempted to go into teaching. There are actually very few Lao now teaching in the Lycee. During the colonial period many of these positions were held by Vietnamese and when Official E was asked if there was any thought of recruiting people from South Vietnam now, he said he personally was against it. "The Vietnamese flatter the Lao, but then they try to stand on our heads. There were Vietnamese teachers in the Lao educational system five or six years ago, but they have all been eliminated now. I knew that compared to the Vietnamese the Lao are lazy, but this is because of our climate and because we do not have to struggle to earn a living."

"As to the Thai, they have some of the ways of the Vietnamese and they take advantage of the Lao, but then, they are more easy-going and there is more of a common culture. The Lao people understand them better."

The discussion shifted to the role of the Ministry of Education in national life. "Education is very important for the future of Laos. I myself could have obtained a much better job since a close relative is a government Minister, but I preferred to stay with this Ministry because I feel that the work we are doing is important. Our Ministry however, is strongly discriminated against when it comes to the distribution of funds. USOM turns over funds to the Lao National Bank. Sometimes other Ministries get their hands on the money first. It usually works out on a first come, first served basis, and in this way education is denied support. At times the pay of teachers is held up for weeks or months. An attempt is now being made to put funds for education into a blocked account to avoid these problems. (This blocked account procedure has also been mentioned by some American officials as a way of cutting down on embezzling.)

"In theory there is much sympathy for the requests of the Ministry of Education in the National Assembly, but when it comes to voting the money, the military and police take priority. Look at the Philippines and Thailand. These are nations which are much more developed than we are, and they spend a larger part of their budget on education than does Laos. We should attempt to follow their example.

"One of the big problems in education is recruiting personnel. Now it is very difficult to recruit people to serve in the secondary schools, since all qualified individuals look for better-paying jobs in the other Ministries." Official E continued, "Under the French, teachers were much better paid, so that in a qualitative sense their position has deteriorated since independence.

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"Many villages have built schools and are awaiting teachers. In order to stretch our funds, I would like to suggest that villagers be asked to build a house and provide the teacher with food as well." (This would seem to be one of the ways in which the Lao can at least make a beginning in having a self-supported educational system. American aid funds pay a substantial portion of the teachers' salaries and even provide school supplies such as books and pencils.)

After many apologies he invited me to his home. He said that the house (located next to his prosperous in-law's business) had been given to him by his wife's father. Nearby is the imposing French style villa another in-law, who works in the Ministry of Finance. He introduced me to his wife, who spoke some French. He apologized again for not having any beer and for the fact that he lacked a refrigerator. I was served lemon-flavored water, after being assured that the water was filtered and boiled and that he knew the customs of Americans in these matters.

When asked whether American officials with whom he had contact ever came to visit him socially, he said he saw them only on business and that some of them work much too hard, implying that this was to the detriment of their social contact with the Lao.

PROVINCIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR  
(Official F)

Official F is an excellent example of the older generation of provincial civil servants who matured during the days of French colonial rule. He is a man in his mid-fifties, who, in common with most of the senior officials in his province (for example, the Chao Khoueng, the President of the Court of Appeals) was born locally. As a descendant of an official at the former royal court he bears the honorary title Tiao. He received approximately nine years of education, including a diploma from the Lycee Pavie, and then entered the school system.

Although a conscientious worker for the present government administration he is fond of recalling what he considers to have been the better position of teachers during the French administration. At that time, he claims, teachers were the best paid civil servants. Today the situation is reversed, and a young man will try to get a job with the Army, police, or Ministry of the Interior before considering a career as a school teacher, which now pays least. He also feels that it has been a negative development that the French language has been displaced in the curriculum of the elementary schools. It was originally taught beginning with the first grade but is now started in the fourth year. He said this creates difficulty for students who go on to study at the local collège (junior high school) where all classes are in French. He noted that one of the reasons many children fail to pass the examination for the primary school certificate is lack of knowledge of French. This

is especially true of the elementary schools located in the villages outside the provincial capital. There are about four hundred candidates each year for the sixth grade certificate, but of these only about one hundred pass. Some of those who do not pass go to the technical school in Vientiane, where they train to be carpenters, masons, electricians and mechanics.

Despite this veneration of certain aspects of the French system and French culture, Official F is also proud of his country. He cited what he believes to be the great unexploited mineral wealth of his province. He also felt that certain agricultural products could be produced in greater quantities if sufficient credit were available. One of the difficulties, he said, was that no adequate geological survey had ever been made of the area.

He also has a strong feeling about the status of his part of Laos, particularly his own province, vis-a-vis the other areas of Laos, and expressed the opinion that certain developments in his area have been neglected. He also said that most of the American aid has stayed in Vientiane, and cited the small budget he had in education versus the large demand for schools.

When I remarked that some of the points he mentioned seemed cogent, and should perhaps be discussed with some of the Ministers in Vientiane, he appeared momentarily horrified and reacted strongly, saying, "I am only a government official not a politician, and do not want to get involved in political affairs."

On the subject of teachers he felt that it would be desirable, on the secondary (collège) level, to replace the French teachers with Lao, but said it would not be possible until the salaries of collège teachers were raised. At present, any Lao who has the educational qualifications to teach at the collège is much more interested in serving in the Army or becoming an official.

Official F commented on the improvement in educational facilities despite limited funds, saying that there are now about thirty percent of the eligible children in school in his province, with an increase of over ten percent enrollment over the previous year.

The requirements for teaching primary school are rather minimal: one must have six years of schooling and three and a half months in a teachers' training school, but the very low starting salary of 3,400 kip does not attract many candidates. This is little better than the wages for a coolie, he explained.

In addition to his duties as Director of Education, Official F takes an active interest in the youth groups in his province. These groups aid in the construction of additional school buildings, the boys

doing the work and the girls preparing food.

Despite the many French influences in the school system, traditional values are still strong. School is closed each day with a Buddhist prayer. The Director himself, although strongly influenced by French culture is a devout Buddhist and goes very frequently to the wat. He is also present at the ceremonies connected with most of the major religious holidays.

In common with many of the older officials, he often goes away to meditate for a few days each year. Another characteristic they share is that of withdrawal from active participation in life after one reaches the mid-fifties. This is often an ideal rather than an actuality, since due to the great lack of trained officials Official F and many others have been requested to stay on past the usual retirement age. However, they do so somewhat begrudgingly, feeling that they have made their contribution, and now is their period for rest and contemplation. It would not be fair to say that they have become lazy, but rather that they do not view activity at this stage of life as a positive virtue.

LAO OFFICIAL OF THE OLDER GENERATION  
OF LAO OFFICIALS  
(Official G)

Official G, a man in his mid-fifties, was born near Thakhek. His family lived on the western side of the Mekong in what is now Thailand, where his father was assistant to the Chao Muong. His mother was the daughter of the district chief of the Lao region on both sides of the Mekong in this area, before the arrival of the French. Today many of his relatives are Thai nationals, one brother being mayor of a Thai town near Thakhek, and two brothers-in-law holding Thai government posts on the provincial level. A half-brother is a retired official in Thailand.

He himself has resided in Vientiane since 1925 and attended the college there. He was formerly a teacher and later editor of a political journal. From 1944 to 1945 he was a school principal and in 1945 was given an administrative post in the Education Ministry of his department (the Director was French; a Franco-Lao of French citizenship currently occupies the post). He also translated and adapted school books from French.

In 1946 he left with the Lao Issara, residing as a refugee in Bangkok and returning to Laos in November, 1949, resuming his position in the Ministry of Education. In 1951 he was appointed Director of Youth Affairs, and from 1956 to the present he has served as bureau chief in another ministry.

LAO OFFICIAL OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION  
(Official H)

Official H, in his early thirties, was born in Luang Prabang, where his father was a Chao Muong. He studied for six years in the local groupe scolaire and spent six years at the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane. His studies were interrupted from 1945 to 1949, when he joined the Lao Issara in Thailand. He has had nine years of government experience, including six months in 1950 as private secretary to the Minister of the Interior. From 1951 to 1955 he was on the staff of the Lao Embassy in Phnom Penh as an accountant and later as secretary to the Ambassador. From 1955 to 1956 he was assistant in the United Nations Affairs section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and from 1956 to 1959 he was Second Secretary in the London Embassy. From 1959 to the present he has been the Chef de Cabinet in the Information Ministry.

At present, he said, his twelve-thousand kip a month salary makes it very difficult for him to support his family. He lives in an old style house but owns a Mercedes-Benz which he said he bought from savings while living abroad. Only those officials who made money on the old exchange rate are able to have modern homes, he claimed.

During the course of our conversation he showed me a circular he had received from Boston University's Graduate School for International Affairs. He said he would very much like to attend, and asked for my opinion. It was hard to explain to such a person who obviously has had experience in international affairs and occupies a responsible position with his government that his limited high school education would create difficulties in undertaking such graduate training. Although the situation was explained in most tactful terms he immediately became discouraged. Providing advanced technical training to Lao officials with minimal formal education by western standards would seem to be a major problem to be faced in attempting to build up a corps of trained government servants in Laos.

OFFICIAL IN THE MINISTRY OF  
SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
(Official I)

Official I was born in Pakse and studied at the Lycee Pavie. After graduating he entered the School of Law and Administration in Vientiane. Recently he made a trip to France as a member of a parliamentary delegation. To date this has been his only trip outside of Laos. He explained that his bureau has provincial offices in Luang Prabang and Pakse and works closely with the Red Cross and the Lao Womens' Association.

"Our budget this year is sixteen million kip while last year it was twenty million. It varies with the government income, and there is not

enough money to hire sufficient personnel. Our money is principally for fires and other disasters, and to aid refugees. The difference between our program and those of village aid is that we provide assistance, while they create new projects.

"From China alone in the past year (1958) approximately six thousand refugees have come into Laos, principally in Nam Tha and Phong Saly Provinces. This is the result of the Commune system. Most of these refugees are Lu people. In Sam Neua there have been some Vietnamese refugees, and they have been sent on to Saigon. Black Thai refugees are sent on to Xieng Khouang. There are also about 1,000 Black Thai in villages near Vientiane. We have provided some of these refugees with implements, money and in some cases, buffalo. Our budget is so small that we are not able to do too much.

"We have other activities in both the north and south. For example, in Sam Neua there is a shortage of salt. The Vietminh, as part of their propaganda campaign have set up salt depots along the frontier. The inhabitants come to the frontier and are able to receive up to five kilos of salt. These depots then give the Vietminh a chance to influence the population. To counter this, we now send salt to Sam Neua and sell it at the same price as do the Vietminh. But the air transport is very expensive. This is of course not the traditional route, for before the war Sam Neua was directly linked to Hanoi by road. We have also dropped salt in certain sections of Attopeu, where the district chief sells it to the people at a fixed price. Earlier we had given it free but we were not able to continue that practice. In addition, we have also sent rice to Sam Neua and distributed it among the mountain people. We did this particularly after a crop failure. As I said, it is much harder for us than the Vietnamese to bring supplies to Sam Neua, because they are closer to Hanoi.

"We have sent five Lao girls to study for six months in Thailand. They have returned and work for the Ministry of Social Welfare. As I told you, we are not able to recruit too many people for our Ministry because of lack of funds. The same holds true for the Rural Development Program and the Agriculture Ministry. Since we in Social Welfare subsist on the Lao national budget, we do not get appropriations unless there is government income from tax receipts.

"The situation with regard to the mountain people very much merits our attention, but it is difficult to do much since they do not have products to exchange with the valley people."

(This last statement directly contradicts some of the basic trade patterns of Laos. For example, opium is one product that a number of mountain people, such as the Meo, have traditionally exchanged for other commodities with the merchants in the valleys.)

## OFFICIAL CONCERNED WITH RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS (Official J)

Official J, now in his late sixties, has been a provincial official for many years. A former monk, he remains very devout and maintains close contacts with the priesthood. He has been influenced by French culture to a much lesser extent than have other Lao officials.

In discussing recent changes in Laos, he said, "Most of these changes have been material rather than spiritual. There are many new cars. The people do not know how to take care of them. These attitudes have affected even the monks who are more interested in repairs to the pagoda than in their Buddhist beliefs.

"Many of these changes have been brought about by American aid. The dollar aid of the Americans fell into the hands of three kinds of people: first, the politicians, then the officials and finally the merchants. Most of the latter are not Lao but are from Thailand or Hong Kong. Only about twenty percent of the aid reached the people. No government buildings were erected during this period, most of the government buildings dating from the time of the French. However, many private houses and stores were built by people who got rich from the dollar exchange. For example, an Army lieutenant with a very small salary was able to buy several cars and own a couple of houses. The villagers did not have an opportunity to enrich themselves because they were outside the circle and did not know the tricks about the exchange rates. (Many of the villagers did not appear to resent the corrupt practices as such, but rather were hostile because they did not have a chance to participate in them.) No roads or streets have been built in the last few years except the roads to the politicians' homes.

"American aid has caused a difference in social classes, because the people in town, the politicians, officials and traders became rich while the villagers remained poor. Sometimes the people lack things they need, but the government does not give them these things. That is why the Communists have attained influence and why they may gain power. The people are favorably inclined toward the Pathet Lao because the Pathet Lao did not get rich like those in the government. They were not engaged in corruption and they did not receive aid. Most of the Pathet Lao people are humble and polite, not like those in the government, who are very arrogant.

"The Lao people, however, do not like to talk about these things in public. They prefer to remain silent. They do not feel they can talk freely because the government is like a dictator.

"Most of the people in Vientiane are favorable to the Pathet Lao, who at present have few representatives in the parliament. They do not have enough votes to control the government. Most of the people, in-

cluding villagers, do not like American aid because they see that it benefits only the clever people in the government. Most people feel that they have not benefited from hospitals, schools, roads and public works. They do not realize that the Lao officials are the cause of these difficulties. For example, most of the police have become rich by allowing in Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, many more having been permitted than were legally allowed under the quota.

"The people conclude that all the corruption, all the bad things, all the social conflict and luxurious life are due to two causes: American aid and the influence of the Thai people from the Northeast."<sup>1</sup>

"Formerly there was no stealing, cheating, drinking or quarreling. People could leave the gate of their home open at night. For the past few years, bad things have been happening. Thai from the Northeast on the other bank of the Mekong have been immigrating to Vientiane. I recommended some of them for jobs, but then they stole, and I lost face. Most of the samlaw drivers have come here from Thailand; very few are Lao. Although they earn a lot of money, they spend it on drinking and gambling. Most of the prostitutes have also come from Thailand. Some of the Thai young men from the lower class curl their hair and have duck-tail haircuts like the actors in Thai films. Material civilization has come into this country too quickly. The people who have a lot of money spend it on luxurious living; dancing, restaurants and new automobiles. In former times the Lao people could obtain land and build their own homes, but now they have to rent their houses and their land because there is a big demand for it on the part of politicians, officials and merchants. So the poor people have fewer opportunities."

The interviewee himself rents his home to an American official, presumably at a substantial profit. However, he complained of the difficulty of supporting his large family on his relatively meagre government salary. Many officials expressed fear at being quoted on hostile remarks they made about the government. This is not true for members of the elite, who seemed to have little, if any, reticence about making critical remarks concerning each other, but it is definitely so of officials of the second rank, such as the interviewee.

AGRICULTURE OFFICIAL  
(Official K)

Official K, was born in 1918. He completed the Lycee Pavie in 1938, after which he studied in Hanoi from 1939 to 1942 and entered the agricultural service in 1943. From 1948 to 1950 he had additional training at an agricultural college in France.

<sup>1</sup> Official J's parents and wife are from northeast Thailand.

"The following are the principal agricultural problems of Laos: First, there is the matter of producing enough rice and being able to transport it to market. For example, certain regions of Nam Tha produce a surplus of rice, but there is no transportation available to bring it to market. It is also important to encourage the cultivation of fruit trees. There are certain areas in Luang Prabang that have a good potentiality for raising oranges. It is necessary to encourage the cultivation of commercial crops such as coffee, which can be produced in the Bolovens in the south.

"I have suggested that the government forbid the import of rice during the harvest season and so encourage local production, even though now the rice which comes from Thailand is cheaper. But there are difficulties now, since we have a free market. I believe there should be controls as there are in Indonesia, Thailand and Formosa.

"My program is very modest, and I would like to proceed slowly and surely. Now there are too many services trying to do work in agriculture; for example, there is Civic Action and Rural Development. Our organization lacks funds and personnel. Our people lack experience and initiative. It is very difficult to do much work in my service. There is much good will, but we always have the problem of funds.

"They have accused me of stealing, and now I am in the process of preparing my defense. If they give my Service the means for continuing work I can do my job; if not, I am finished, and will become a merchant. The government itself will judge my actions. This is not something for the courts. There are people who think highly of me.

"My subordinates in the provinces have accused me of stealing money from a dam project in Sayaboury, but USOM, which is supporting the project, agrees on the cost. These officials are in reality jealous of my position. My father was a merchant and not in the government. I am not a member of one of the big families. They say official connections do not count, but they really do. You see, this is the way the Lao are."

OFFICIAL IN THE EDUCATION MINISTRY  
(Official L)

Official L is a genial man in his mid-fifties and claims descent from the last King of Vientiane. He studied at the Lycee Pavie and after graduation went to work as a school teacher. Prior to employment with the Ministry he was a provincial official. He has spent a year abroad studying education techniques. His wife is a daughter of a Chao Muong; he met her while serving in the provinces. One of her brothers is a Deputy from Sayaboury and another has succeeded his father as Chao Muong.

One of Official L's children is studying medicine in Cambodia. Another is an official of middle-rank who was educated in France. There are ten people in Official L's household, including a fourteen year old girl who serves as a domestic. She is from a poor family in his wife's village. They provide her with room and board and a salary of 4-5,000 kip a year. His wife occasionally buys her trinkets, and sometimes Official L sends her parents money.

Commenting on the role of Lao women Official L said, "There are many women in business in Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Pakse. Some are shopkeepers, some are in the silk-weaving business, others own gardens and farmland or make contracts with the Lao government to supply food and clothing to the Army. They have become rich and have automobiles and multi-storied houses. Some Lao women have married Thai or Chinese merchants. Foreigners sometimes say that Lao women are timid. They are not timid at all, but stronger in spirit than men. Those who say Lao women are shy do so because they are not in close contact with the people. For example, at the end of the Buddhist Lent, women have pirogue races with men, on the Mekong River. There are also basketball teams of Lao girls. Now there are many girls studying in Bangkok and Paris, but about twenty years ago no Lao women studied either in France or in Thailand. The women have become stronger now, and there is an Association of Lao Women.

"In inheritance men and women have equal shares; no differentiation is made. Actually the parents can make a will and specify what each child shall receive. If a man dies his wife inherits his money, but if she remarries, it goes to his children.

"If a man has two wives, both cannot stay in the same house, because in that case they will fight. The first wife has the right to chase away the other ones. It is only the first wife who has legal rights. Now women in our country are teachers, and some work in offices. This was unknown thirty years ago. Formerly it was forbidden for a woman to sit on a chair; she was only permitted to sit on a mat. When a woman went to the home of a respected official in the village, like the Nai Ban, Tasseng or Chao Muong, she walked on her knees. Women also wore necklaces, bracelets and anklets to adorn and beautify themselves. They wore a large

chignon coiled around with a gold chain and sometimes a pin with rubies. Now this has almost disappeared.

"Now Lao women have begun to learn home economics, in the same way as Europeans or Americans. They are beginning to acquire technical skills for without a vocation it is difficult to get married (this refers to the elite in the towns). It is hard for the husband to earn enough money, so it is sometimes necessary for the wife to work as well. Eighty to ninety percent of the Lao men give their salaries to their wife to manage and ask her for money for their own needs. A wife may refuse to live with her husband if he does not let her do this, and she may leave home. An exception is made in the case where the wife likes to gamble, but this happens only in about five percent of Lao marriages. A neighbor of ours recently lost a million kip, and now she is in serious trouble. In Laos the woman is responsible for the family's funds, while in Vietnam, the wife regards her husband as a god.

"Formerly, the wife had to have her husband's permission on many matters. Only after he consented was she able to carry out her tasks. If the wife did not heed her husband she would be scolded or beaten and driven from the house. But the husband was also obliged to support his wife and children, and if he did not do so, they were free to leave him. Now husband and wife both have equal rights. They conform to European or American life. There is no difference between the Europeans and the civilized Lao in the towns. The women can sing or dance at a banquet; they can go out together or alone. Formerly, if a Lao woman went out alone she was considered to be a prostitute.

"Fifty years ago, if someone borrowed money and was not able to repay the debt, he became a slave of the lender and had to pay off the debt with his labor. Sometimes this is still done secretly in Vientiane, but it is against the law. Now it is very difficult to borrow money. If you want to buy a car, for example, you must offer your house or land as security. Many people who own cars have sold their land. Some people have gotten very rich this way. One man made 6,000,000 kip by selling his land to the American aid mission. He was formerly a farmer.

"To go into business these days people sometimes get together and pool their funds--as, for instance, in the case of buying a bus or taxi. In doing the actual borrowing, a contract is drawn up, and a house, garden, animals, buffalo, elephant or gold is given as security. This is done in the presence of three witnesses. If a person has some gold but no money he gives the gold to a rich man who charges him four to ten percent interest for a month. When the debt is paid up, the gold is returned.

"Lao borrow money mostly from other Lao. But many Chinese merchants borrow from wealthy Lao. Many of these merchants are in debt, and there are frequent cases before the courts. A number of Chinese have left Vientiane without paying their debts. I think many more townspeople than



villagers are in debt, for they borrow money to build a house or buy land, or start a business.

"Some government officials who have made money loan it at five to ten percent interest a month. The larger the loan the smaller the interest, so that it may be as low as two to three percent a month. In most cases, however, it is ten percent a month. Our family used to lend money in this manner. Sometimes when people gamble they pay as much as twenty percent interest, as in the case of the woman in our neighborhood, who lost over a million kip gambling.

Although a sympathetic and kindly man Official L is conscious of his role as an official. I accompanied him on a ride in his Mercedes to an area in which he formerly served as an official. Unlike Bong he never once left the car but waved to his former acquaintances from the back seat of his auto. On the way back to Vientiane we passed village girls carrying vegetables to their homes from the fields. He stopped them and easily persuaded the frightened girls to part with their produce, complimenting himself on the good bargain he had obtained. For a man who ten years ago had no more than a bicycle, ownership of a luxury car has definitely effected his relationship with his former village friends and acquaintances.

#### MEMOIRS OF A YOUNG LAO OFFICIAL (Official M)

The following autobiographical sketches, written in Lao and mimeographed under the title "Smiles and Tears", were prepared in 1960 for distribution to the friends and associates of the writer, a young Lao diplomat.<sup>1/</sup>

His own preface will serve to introduce these memoirs:

The story of Smiles and Tears is a real tale of what has happened to me in the last ten or twenty years. My friends and classmates might forget the troubles that we have had together -- eating burned rice, sleeping with bed bugs, bathing in the Kon Keo river or hitting the teacher. Some of you may now be Chao Muongs, Ambassadors, members of Parliament or government Ministers, but I hope that you officials will not forget the Lao people. I wrote this book three years ago but, having had to go from one place to another, I did not have time to publish it. ....

To those who have supported me who are still living and to those who have died, may I receive their forgiveness if I have done anything to them. If it were not for these people I would not have the strength to fight throughout the rain and wind of life.

From temple school to the city, by merits I accumulated or by sins which I committed during my last life, I parted from my childhood teachers and came to the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane. I had a feeling of prestige in coming to Vientiane, the beautiful city of Laos, at that time still a colony of France. Being in the city was a great pleasure to me because I did not have to get up early with the cocks and sleepily find a lantern to light before starting the fire to cook rice. Sometimes I had to study by firelight. I was glad not to have to go into the jungle for firewood, or to find mushrooms, bamboo shoots and other vegetables. No more stepping on thorns and kicking stumps. I didn't have to fight off mosquitoes and escape from leeches. No fishing for food. No setting fish traps or bird traps.

The first time I parted from my father and mother, to attend elementary school in Luang Prabang, was a great strain for me, a child only eight years old. But I did not come to the city to find happiness nor part from my parents to be sad: I knew I was here to study. Yet the memories of home were still vivid to me -- filling kerosene lamps, pounding the rice before cooking, sweeping the courtyard, feeding the

<sup>1/</sup> Translated by Sawat Chaichana with the assistance of Kiat Bounthong. I have deleted certain personal anecdotes and altered specific facts in some cases, to preserve the anonymity of the author.

chickens and searching for eggs in the chicken-coop, which was full of itchy insects biting my nose and ears all the time--then going down to the cold, chilly river to bathe, sometimes having to find firewood along the river, bringing it home and chopping it. I believe I have to suffer in this life for the sins I committed in my last life. From the age of eight years to manhood I have returned home more than 20 times. How great is the love of parents towards their children or the child towards his parents?

The little bird knows where to return home at dusk. Ships at sea always return to their port, but where shall I go? No relatives to rely on or to lead me from darkness. My life is that of a wanderer, like a bird with no nest or like a drifting boat that goes with the current. I have never had anything which I did not have to work for. I have never had silk clothes, only an old ragged cotton shirt, just enough to keep me warm. I do not quite remember how many temples I have slept in and how many families I have lived with. There were Viet-Nameese, Chinese, Americans and also Lao families. I am deeply grateful to everyone from friends to Ministers, all the way from Phong Saly to Moung Khong and all the places in which I have been. I can't remember how many times I had my rice with tear drops. I have slept in old ruined temples and also in rice fields and huts full of biting insects. I have also slept in the jungle and even in the rain. All these happenings have always been a part of my life and I shall remember them all my life. This world is not just. God has created people unequally.

Life in boarding school when I entered the Lycee in 1943 opened the eyes of a village boy far past the temple walls and rice fields, to parts of the world I never dreamed of fourteen years before.

Life at school was very rugged. Just thinking of those old days I cannot imagine how we survived. The main struggle in life at school was to try not to get behind--not to get behind the teacher's children who were well brought up and who always had their parents to guide them, not to fall behind the European boys and the Vietnamese who were well trained in French. Since Laos was under the French until 1947 there were no universities and the Lycee Pavie was the only school in Vientiane. Despite this, the students were mostly Vietnamese. Lao students had to study hard. In classes which had about forty students about ten were Lao. From the first through the fourth, or highest class,<sup>1/</sup> the Lao students became less in number, so there were only four or five Lao students who could transfer to higher schools outside Laos. The teachers were European and their wives were Vietnamese, so how could they love

<sup>1/</sup> At that time the Lycee Pavie did not offer the Baccalaureat, and was equivalent to a college, or approximately through Junior Highschool in the American system.

the Lao and overlook the Vietnamese? I do not wish to speak of the schools and colleges and the universities which are mostly in Vietnam and Cambodia because it is a very sad story, but I always thought of trying to go study in Vietnam and Cambodia. After nearly seven years I had a chance to enter the Lycee at Saigon and later in Cambodia as I had hoped for, and I received my primary and secondary diploma and the baccalaureate, first and second parts. Before the Japanese War the lucky students were sent to Hanoi, Saigon, Phnom Penh, Dalet, Hue and also to France. These lucky students were the sons of the high officials who were sly and well-acquainted with Europeans. Though I was sent to Phong Saly for twelve years, this did not mean that I had submitted to the colonial system. If, during the days of the fighting for independence, during the Free Lao Movement, I were more than fifteen years old and old enough to be a soldier, I would have gotten a gun and crossed the Mekong River to fight my old conquerors. In the Lycee the teachers were most European and Vietnamese, as I have related. We had to fight to be on the same level as the Vietnamese children, and it was very difficult. Among the students there were two groups--the Lao students were separated from the Vietnamese not only in studying but also in playing. Sometimes there were disputes between the two groups caused by unfair circumstances.

We Lao are easy-going people. It was the system of the Europeans to let the Lao forget the Lao nation, let them become lazy and let the Vietnamese, who are hard-working people, rule over the Lao nation. This is the policy of the conquerors.

Roads in Laos in those days were in good condition for only five kilometers. Buildings were only one story high. Lao teachers and technicians numbered less than one's own fingers, just enough to help the Europeans rule over the Lao.

We Lao like to think that we are rich people. We like to dress up, like to let other people think we are clever even though we are not. We do not respect ourselves or others. There are many Lao who spend their parents' money in other ways, not knowing the value of the money which their parents had to earn with their sweat by rowing boats for about fifteen days to get that amount. Many married Vietnamese with their parents' money. There are those who think only of lust than of love of country. Famous Lao politicians are losing their country because of this. The Vietnamese are very industrious in every way. They know how to work because their parents are always on their necks. The teachers in the school believed in the Vietnamese more than in the Lao. We Lao do not show our love in public like kissing each other in public. Our love, sorrows and sadness are within us. There are histories which relate the disputes between us and the Vietnamese, as in the dynasty of Tiao Phaya Tia Kaphat and Theng Kham, in the dynasty of Ong Hue and Ong Boun and under the French colonialism, during the

Japanese occupation in Vientiane and Thakhet before and after the Chenelle Treaty, and there is a saying which goes: "The Lao and Vietnamese are like dogs and cats." We Lao must not change our love from our country to love for a Vietnamese wife.

There is one European who has sympathy toward the Lao. No Lao teachers, students, or farmers who will ever forget the name Charles Rochet. We cannot ever forget this man who was very different from other French. We will never forget that in 1945, during our studies at the teacher's training school, beneath the shady trees along the Mekong River and near the air field, every student had to get up early in the morning, salute the flag and do drilling exercises. And every Sunday we went to the Lao Association lawn to drill. We also sang songs. We sang youth songs, Boy Scout songs and other songs, songs that would not let us Lao forget that Laos still exists in this world. Our European teacher was very kind. He had a very soft voice and ever-smiling face though he was a very big man. He loved Laos as his own country and never felt that Laos was a colony of France but a country to be helped in guidance and education. While he was trying to help the Lao express loyalty to their own country, other French thought he was disloyal to his own country. The real truth is that every person who knows about Lao culture and philosophies would feel sympathy and love towards Laos. M. Rochet gave a start to the young Lao who are now helping their country. He also gave birth to Lao dramatic plays, the Lao Club and the Lao Yai bulletin which has made the Lao feel gratitude and appreciation toward him more than any other European except M. Pavie.<sup>1/</sup> We will never forget that we used to wear our blue shirts and white shorts with a Lao emblem on our pockets, which is a symbol of young Lao. We were well disciplined, which gave us the feeling that Lao can rule themselves rather than the French or the Vietnamese and also we speak the same language. The Lao at that time had just been awakened from a dream. The Lao knew that the Vietnamese and the Cambodians tried to absorb the Lao nation into their own nations as the whites used to do. This policy is quite opposite to human nature, and Great Britain did not succeed in India, Burma, Pakistan or Malaya. The good deeds M. Rochet showed to the Lao, though only for a short period, we Lao appreciate and feel gratitude for. His name has been written in the history of Laos, and there are many schools and streets which were named after him. It is for the young Lao to remember him always. I pray that his soul, which has shown love and kindness to the Lao, may rest in peace in the great Buddhist heaven.

We used to go on trips to a little pond with sloping banks about 5 kilometers from Vientiane, where there were shade trees such as tamarind and jujube. The ground near the pond was salty. People used

<sup>1/</sup> French explorer who was largely responsible for establishing a French protectorate over Laos in 1893.

to take this earth and mix it with water to extract the salt from it. All around this pond are rice fields and fish ponds. During the cold season the teachers used to take us boys out to play in this place. We used to take our food along--bamboo shoots, ground meat, dry fish and other foods and also fruits such as bananas. Some of us took our fishing poles along, some took books along to read, some went to meet their girls. We started out early in the morning with excitement, arriving at about 8 o'clock. The boys would go out and pick tamarinds and jujubes and eat them with salt. At the same time we could see the older boys and girls trying to separate from the group. As for us, only 13 and 14 years old, we would go and gather brush to put behind the bushes and then we would try to peep from behind the bushes to see the romantic show. We would then call friends who would try to break in on the scene. In the afternoon we would go out fishing with our nets. Thao Khamsing and Thao Bounthong were the most experienced in net fishing. They caught most of the fish and they were not afraid of leeches. When we had enough fish we would build a fire and cook them. While we were cooking our fish we used to talk of the baldness of our teacher and also about his height because he was about 5 centimeters shorter than his wife. We left the place quite late in the evening, having had a good time. We were allowed to go to bed early but in bed we would talk about the fun we had had until we all went to sleep.

The Japanese arrived. The siren sounded for people to get into their bomb-shelter holes. American and Japanese planes were fighting for quite a while. The teacher and his wife ran to their holes. There were a lot of noises caused by the chickens and ducks. Some of the students brought their blankets and some carried their belongings to the hole but some of them just put their blankets over their heads and went to sleep as if nothing were happening. There was the sound of bombs, and it was later reported that the bombs were dropped about 4 kilometers from Vientiane and Tong On and two people were killed. We did not have much sleep for many days. Some took their bedrolls and slept in the hole all night while others just slept in their beds as usual. On the morning of March 9, 1945, the Japanese arrived in Vientiane. They went through Chienaimo and Togkhampan killing two Indian watchmen there. The news reached us and after breakfast we all prepared our belongings. The head teacher called us and told us not to be afraid and run away. The school was still going to carry on. Some of the students who had packed their things were to stay with relatives, since it was Saturday. But the students who had no relatives in school had to stay on. The sound of guns and explosions, machine guns and the sound of people was getting louder and louder. The next thing we knew our head teacher had run away into the woods leaving his wife alone. The students then left the school to stay with their friends' relatives. The students who lived south of Vientiane were lucky to get a ride on a steamer down the river. Those who lived in the north had to go by ox-cart and by the boats which carried salt up river. All students left.

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The school changed quickly. The teachers were now Japanese. One day PhaSouk, one of our students, dressed in a Japanese uniform, got a salute from one of the Lao policemen who thought he was a Japanese officer, which made us laugh. I had to go and live in an outlying village again. The school was closed all during the war until the French came back, so during that time we had to put away our books. The Vietnamese who were under the Japanese could do anything they wanted to do in Laos, which caused fighting and killing between the Vietnamese and the Lao. I was then only 15. I did not have any relatives in Vientiane, only a friend named Thao Khamsing. We had been friends from the first grade. My friend's father was a Vietnamese but his mother was a Lao. But both were very kind and industrious and also very honest, which I always admired.

Communication between Vientiane and Vang Vieng was very difficult in the rainy season. I used to go by horse to visit my family when they were stationed at Vang Vieng during my studies at school in Vientiane.

Three years earlier my father had been a Chao Muong there. Later he was appointed governor, but during the Japanese occupation I did not know whether he was at Vang Vieng or if they had left for Luang Prabang. During my school years Thao Khamsing and I used to take food to his father at the jail where he was a warden. Thao Khamsing was good in poetry and I always wanted to be a poet and describe my childhood experiences living in temples and working. During my stay with him I did everything I could to help the family, such as shopping, cooking and doing house work. But I realized that it was a burden to the family since the father's income was only 100 kip which had to be used for a family of 10. I thought of this for many nights. Finally the family decided to go to relatives at a village called Napeng. The family decided that the Lao in the family would go but the Vietnamese would remain. Thao Khamsing's father said that if anything happened to me, what would he do. He and Thao Khamsing would be blamed, so my friend said that he would go with his mother to Napeng. Everything was settled that night. I took my few belongings and my two books and went with Thao Khamsing and his mother and some of the family by a direct trail. About noon we arrived at Ban Napeng. People came to meet us. Some people brought us vegetables and some asked for news of Vientiane. I slipped away and went to the pond and then went to Ban Ho Pa which was not far from the village, just for a visit. A month at Ban Napeng passed. We were quite well off because we could go out and find food as we wished. We could go hunting and fishing as usual. The children in the village thought that I was Vietnamese because I was a little bit white and my speaking was a bit different from the others. But soon I made a lot of friends. I now

slept in many houses, moving from one to another each night. Some asked me to go visiting the girls which I dared not do because I had never before in my life talked of love to a girl.<sup>1/</sup> There was a boy only 15 years of age, the same age as I. He came to like me and was interested in old legends and history of Laos. When I was small, about 5 or 8 years old, my mother used to tell stories to me. My grandfather was a phya during the reign of King Sakarine and my mother was a lady-in-waiting in the royal court of Tiao Sisavang Vong for many years until she was dismissed to marry my father. My grandfather used to tell stories to mother. My mother then told the stories to me. So now I was telling the stories to others. I told many tales about the country and also about my life. I had many friends. The children liked to gather and hear my stories. I was afraid of the Japanese during the night so I did not go out at night very often, and from the experience of telling stories I became an author. Three years later, when I was 18, I wrote a poem about my life which was well accepted by the people.

Another month passed during my stay at Ban Napeng. I wanted to be near my family. The two books which I brought to read while fishing and looking after the ducks were read over and over again. I was more homesick than ever. I wanted to know about my father and mother and my two younger brothers and also my nurse. Was she still living? I then decided to go back to Vientiane and from there try to get to Luang Prabang.

When I went back everything had changed a lot. All the barracks were now guarded by Japanese. I was very lucky to find out that there were two Lao officials who were going to Luang Prabang and Phong Saly. One of them later became an assistant to my father at Luang Prabang. I asked help of these two officials. They asked me who I was and what I was doing and about my parents. They decided to let me go along. We started out about 10 o'clock by ox-cart. The journey took us 33 days. We had to stop at Kha and Meo villages which were crowded with itchy insects. We had to go around the river for two days because a bridge was destroyed. Our group consisted of 24 persons. Sometimes we had to sleep in the jungle in the rain; sometimes we were lucky to sleep in a sala.<sup>2/</sup> Sometimes we had to build huge bonfires and lead the buffalo near the fire to protect them from tigers. Sometimes we would meet hunters who told about a fierce tiger that killed two people and had not yet been killed. I was then very frightened and hoped that day might soon break.

<sup>1/</sup> A reference to traditional Lao love courts in which groups of boys and girls get together to exchange improvised romantic verses.  
<sup>2/</sup> In a temple.

As for food, it was not at all difficult to find because we could get food in the forest, but the most difficult thing was when the wood was wet, for it then took a long time to cook. We passed through many villages until we finally reached Xieng Ngeun. I went to the headman there who told me that my father had been there and had returned to Luang Prabang three days earlier. So I stayed at Xieng Ngeun overnight, and the next day I met my family for the first time in many years.

I was very glad to see my father and mother. They said I had changed a lot and had grown much taller. I asked for my brothers but was told that they were at school. Then I remembered my nurse but my mother could not tell me. Her eyes were very sad. I went out of the house and looked around for my nurse, but I could not find her. At last my mother told me that my nurse had died many months ago. I was very sad. I cried. I had just met joy and sorrow at the same time. I then went into priesthood for 33 days for my parents and my nurse. During this period in the priesthood I published a book with the help of two Mahas, under the supervision of the head priest who was my father's uncle.

During the Free Lao period many weeks and months passed. I had no school to attend. I could not work because I was too young. Then came the news of the atomic bomb explosion in Japan. This caused many Japanese soldiers in Laos to commit hari-kari.

When the Japanese left Vientiane there was news that Chinese troops were occupying north Indo-China and British were occupying the south, up to the 16th parallel. The Chinese troops ate all of our chickens and ducks. Their money was of no value. They caused a lot of trouble in Laos. They told the people to rebel against the Japanese and then the French. The older people would say, "We seem to have too many bosses." The Free Lao Movement started in Vientiane then spread to Thakhet, Savannakhet and other provinces. I was still only 15 and my father would not allow me to be a soldier, but some of my friends who were older, about 17 to 18 years old, were being trained as officers in Vientiane. A new government was established with the purpose of fighting against the French. Tiao Phetsarath was the leader and Phya Khama, the governor of Vientiane, was the Prime Minister. There were many who were forced to be soldiers. The government placed the Crown Prince in the palace under guard. I witnessed the surrounding of the palace. It started about 4 p.m. when the soldiers began shooting. My mother pulled me and my brothers into the house, but I was so interested that I slipped out to see the action with my father. The palace was surrounded and guarded by soldiers. I then was able to join the military with no pay and worked in the hospital. For seven or eight months I had to work and study in the hospital. In the afternoons I

would go out for drilling and singing and sometimes go out into the villages to speak to the people about our freedom. The Vietnamese also had their own force called the Vietminh.

News from Vientiane said that the French had captured Vientiane and many places in the southern area. Many Lao crossed the river to Thailand and many who were afraid of their crimes also went over into Thailand. The Katay currency was used in place of Chinese money which no longer had value

Many weeks passed. The soldiers who came to Vientiane were from many nations. There were Thai, Kha, Mao, Vietnamese and Lao. The ranks were shifted rapidly during two months, and although everything was in chaos I always thought of school. I could not read French books because others might think that I was with the French. I had to read and study secretly. When the French took over and a college was opened at Luang Prabang they also taught English. I had learned a little English during the Japanese occupation so I knew some of the words, but the pronunciation was too difficult for me. The King let his son Prince Vong Savang come and study with us. We played soccer together. Sometimes his sisters, Princess Savivan and Princess Dara would come watch their brother play soccer. Later there was news that the Lycee Parie school was reopening. There were 5 or 6 foreign teachers, who were all soldiers, and 3 or 4 Lao teachers. The head teacher of the Luang Prabang school called us and told us that peace was restored and that "the government has ordered you to continue your studies at the Lycee. The government needs you! We will all rejoice!"

We had to travel back to Vientiane by boat. Every boat was armed with machine guns. The flags bore the three-headed elephant symbol which was different from the Free Lao flag which had a moon in the center. Everyone had his belongings loaded into the boat. I had an ivory image of Buddha around my neck, which was given to me by the high priest since the war with the Thai as an amulet. The boat shoved off. Finally I saw my house and town with the bright golden spire of the phousi pagoda. We did not hear any shooting from the Free Lao. At that time the Free Lao had crowned Tiao Maha Siuit as the head of the Free Lao which ruled above the 16th parallel.

It took three days to reach Vientiane. The school had changed a lot. The buildings were remodeled and the students were many times less than before. There were only four classrooms and each room had only 9 or 10 students. The beds were all broken. Some had to sleep on their bedrolls on the floor. Our belongings such as our clothes, books and stationery were piled on the floor at the head of each bedroll. The pipes in the bathrooms were broken and torn out because they had been used as ammunition by the Free Lao in fighting the French.

1/ Named for Katay Don Sasorita, who was then Minister of Finance.

We had to go out in groups to bathe in other places around town. The veranda of the building was used as a dining room. The electric lights were often shut off and we had to use candles. Though it was the biggest school in Laos, everything was in sad shape due to the war. Books were difficult to get and we had to study hard all through the twelve months. Many nights we had to go to bed early because the lights were out. When the teacher had gone we would get up and set up our sleeping mats as a wigwam, putting a cloth over it and light a candle to study by. It was a very difficult way to study. The system of education was quite different from the American system which I later had a chance to observe during a stay in the United States. We had to pass all our courses in one year. If we failed only one course we had to study all over again. This is the European system. This system has made many Lao fall far behind in education. Many countries under the British and Americans which were given freedom at the same time as Laos, have progressed farther than the Lao.

The students also had a bad reputation for going out at night to gamble and dance the Lam Vong. Their excuse for absenting themselves was illness. There were many nicknames given. I got a nickname as The Poet because I used to write for many magazines. My teacher guided me in literature.

Every morning the students would rush disorderly to the dining room; before the war we used to march in single file. The rice for breakfast was glutinous rice. Our food was little better than the food in a jail. Sometimes the rice was not cooked properly because the cook got up late. At noon we had plain rice and curry. The curry was cooked with old buffalo meat. It was very tough. The noodles also were tough. We had to use a special scissor to cut them before eating. Still those who were late had to go with a light stomach. Sometimes if we were lucky we would have chicken and bananas for desert.

During the crises before Lao became independent we were interested in politics, but we were spied on all the time. They did not let us leave school to pick fruit. My name and those of some teachers were written in the police black-book, but we did not do any harm, and as Laos was our own country why should we not do anything we wished? I was not afraid that the French might send me to Phong Saly or Sam Neua because I had no trouble. The French used to send people to an island in the south, but I still sent articles to the newspaper all the time, telling the Lao to prepare for our independence. Later, in Saigon, I set up a Lao Student Association and also broadcast on the radio.

I did not see my parents and brothers for a long time. The Lycee Pavie was the new name for our old college and we did not have to go to Saigon to do our written examinations for the baccalaureate. New

teachers were coming from France. They did not get along with the students very well. They seemed to be lacking in understanding. We Lao were tired of colonialism, but they seemed to put pressure on us. A new teacher named Levy, who was transferred from the secondary school in Pakse, taught us physical education. He always used bad words and also kicked and hit the students on their cars. He treated us like animals. We did not mind because we thought that he was only a country man and had no brains. One day on the school field this teacher hit a student in the third class and said, "You Lao are barbarians and the Lao are stupid". So we all gathered around and said, "Why do you talk that way to the Lao? Why don't you scold only one person?" The student got very angry. He took a brick and was going to hit him on the head, but it missed but it struck the teacher's left hand and made it bleed. The teacher was very mad, but he didn't dare do anything. If he had done anything we would have killed him without thinking. He got on his bicycle and went to report to the head teacher. We gathered around and said that if the head teacher dismissed Thao Bounthong from school we would all resign. We then all went back to school and it was talked about all through the day and night. The head teacher told the student to leave school, so he packed his belongings and left. We all went to the Minister of Education but did not succeed. We just wanted to tell him our story. We then got together about 42 students from the first through fourth grades. We decided to write a letter to the head teacher, Lucas. The letter is as follows: "We 42 students whose signatures are below wish you to give more consideration to your dismissal of Thao Bounthong from school. We would like to have him back and the teacher replaced. If you do not answer our letter we are all going to leave school with Thao Bounthong at 3 p.m." We gave the letter to the watchman to give to the head teacher.

From 2 p.m. on our hearts began to beat. We waited until 3 p.m. and started to go see the head teacher. He came out and said, "I have read your letter. It is a letter for me to surrender. I have not seen things like this happen before. I have already dismissed Thao Bounthong from school. If you do not like it the school gates are open to you all." These words were like a pang in our hearts. We all left with 42 samlaws in a line and had our picture taken as a remembrance. We all prepared to meet the Minister of Education the next day at 7 a.m. When we met the Minister we told him about our problems. He told us to go back to school again. We tried to see him twice after this and did not succeed, so we left school for a whole week. After one week the head teacher asked us to return to school with Thao Bounthong and the foreign teacher Levy was moved to Khoueng Noi. I hope he didn't cause any trouble there.

This was the first year that we had our written baccalaureate exams

in Vientiane, but we had to go to Saigon to take the oral second exam. Of a total of 10 only four passed the written exams at Vientiane and were able to go on to Saigon for the oral exam. I was one of the four. Two of them were in the lowest grade, while I was in the second grade.<sup>1</sup> They had moved to Thailand during the Free Lao years and when they came back they had to remain in the lowest Lycee class. But they were very bright. That year I got first prize in Lao history, French history, French literature and French composition. I got second in French geography and English, but in arithmetic and physics I was next to last and just barely made it. I was very glad and very excited to see Saigon. On the oral examinations it turned out that I failed in French history but passed everything else, so I was very sad and did not enjoy the trip to Saigon at all. I was beginning to think that I had done too much writing of articles. I had to take that exam again during the next three months. I went back to see my family at Luang Prabang. My father had had to flee from the shooting and nearly all his belongings were lost. When I got home my brothers came around me and asked for presents from Saigon. They did not know how sad I was. My mother said, "Don't be dismayed. We have disappointments sometimes, but we must try again." My father took me out to a coffee shop and told me not to be upset. I did not leave the house because I was very ashamed of my failure, but after three months I left the family again to go to Saigon. I did not want to ask for any money from my father and mother. We only had 5,000 kips. My mother gave me 3,000 kips. The remaining 2,000 kips was for the family of four. My father was going to retire soon because he had worked for the government for 35 years. During the journey I was afraid I would fail again, but this time I passed. I wanted to study more so I put out a publication called World Statesmen of the 20th Century. I got the necessary capital of 4,000 kip from two government Ministers. The profits of this publication I used for continuing my education in Saigon. There I stayed in the home of a Lao official and got a job in the publishing business. I met a friend who was also working on a newspaper. We both wanted to study abroad together in countries other than France, and eventually he went to America and as for me, I went to England. My eleven years of experience in Laos and foreign countries and my smiles and tears will continue on. I am trying to use my knowledge and my experience to help the Lao people and the country which I have always loved. I have made a vow to the Luang temple that I will not love any country more than Laos and any people more than the Lao.

<sup>1</sup>Approximately equivalent of the 12th grade of an American high school, the first grade being the highest Lycee grade.

#### CIVIL SERVANTS

Government officials of middle rank are presented in this unit.

PIERRE NGINN

The Chairman of the Lao Literary Committee, Pierre Nginn, presented the following autobiographical sketch:

"I was born in Luang Prabang. My father came from Cambodia and was a member of the Mission Pavie. (The famous French explorer, Pavie, was largely responsible for consolidating French power in Laos.) His name is on Pavie's monument.<sup>4</sup> My mother is a Lao from Luang Prabang and her title is Nang Phya. Both my parents are dead, and my father rests in the French cemetery here.

"I studied in Vientiane and undertook my secondary school studies at the Lycee in Saigon. After this I studied in France at l'Ecole Coloniale (now called l'Ecole National de France d'Outre Mer). After I returned to Laos, I worked in the elementary school system, there being no lycee at the time. Following this I worked at the French Consulate in Ubon in Northeast Thailand as an interpreter. Then I became Chef de Bureau at the Residence Superieur at the time of the French protectorate. From 1939 to 1942 I was a Thai announcer on Radio Saigon. Upon my return to Vientiane I worked in the Information Service and when Laos became independent, I was made Director. I have also been President of the Buddhist Institute and am now the President of the Lao Literary Committee.

"I retired in 1948, but I was immediately requested to continue working and have not stopped yet. I was sixty-seven this year. As you can see, I have had an active retirement.<sup>2</sup> I have no children, but lots of nieces and nephews. I currently teach twenty-one hours at

<sup>1</sup> Being less fervent nationalists than many other people, the Lao have shown no urgency about removing the superficial trappings of colonialism. A case in point is a statue of Pavie pointing toward the Mekong, in the only public park in Vientiane. The names of a few streets have been changed from French officials' names to those of traditional Lao heroes, but interestingly enough, the new signs have been put up in Latin letters and not in the Lao alphabet. There are still many streets bearing the names given them by French administrators.

<sup>2</sup> Most Lao officials seem to feel that they work too hard. When they reach their mid-fifties, they feel they are entitled to retire. This is not only a result of the governmental pension system, but also a strongly embedded tradition in Lao society, in which a man in his 50's or 60's considers it his prerogative to retire and go to meditate in the pagoda. A number of men become monks at this time. Compare with comments of official F.



the lycee each week and give courses in Lao Literature and Pali. We use the publications of the Lao Literary Committee as texts.

"Recently there have been many changes in Lao customs. I have published a number of articles on this subject and have mentioned things that I would like to see preserved. Formerly the young people were very respectful to important people, but this is no longer true. Before, children obeyed their parents; now they think they are more intelligent. There have also been changes in our religious customs. In former times both the young and the old went to the pagoda on the eighth and fifteenth days of each month to listen to the Buddhist sermon. Now very few young people go.

An important problem facing Laos is that of unifying the national language, and Pierre Nginn has been a leader in this movement. He explained, "In the Lao language there are three different sorts of terms: one for ordinary use, another to be used between mandarins or when speaking to one of this class, and the third for the members of the royal family. To be polite to a superior, one adds khanoj at the end of each phrase. We have, for example, three different words, all meaning 'to eat.'

"The Lao orthography is not yet fixed, and each person writes in his own fashion. It is the Literary Committee that is charged with unifying the orthography and language. We recently had a conference at the School of Fine Arts on this subject, with more than four hundred intellectuals attending."

When he was asked to identify the "intellectuals," he said they were the officials.

(The whole question of national language is a very vital one to organizations such as the United States Information Service in Laos, which publishes a magazine plus posters and many other materials in the Lao language. A number of Lao have complained that the Americans are ruining their language, since the materials are prepared mostly by people from Thailand. It is interesting to note, however, that in ordinary conversations Lao officials employ many Thai and French words.)

Pierre Nginn continued, "Among the members of our Literary Committee are: Kou Abhay (1960 Prime Minister of Laos), President of the King's Council. He lives in Vientiane, but comes from Khong, an island in the Mekong near the Cambodian border, in the Province of Champassak; his brother, Nouhy Abhay, a former Minister of Education (1960 Deputy Prime Minister): Phoui Panya, Governor of the National Bank; Bong Souvannavong, Minister of Telecommunications and Fine Arts; Phouvong, Procurator General; Kruong, Director of Cults; and Thao Kene, our Administrative Director, a former teacher who has spent a year studying

in the United States and is assisted by Maha Sila, a traditional scholar from Northeast Thailand."

(The traditional elite of Laos share a common interest in their country's history and customs, at the same time retaining an active interest in politics. For example, during the 1930's Prince Phetsarath evolved a standard Lao orthography. A glance at a recent issue of "France-Asie" devoted to the Kingdom of Laos further documents this close relationship between traditional scholarship and current politics.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the French scholars and administrators listed as contributors, the following prominent Lao politicians are also included as authors:

"Historical Aspects of Laos" by Katay Don Sasorith  
"Lao Music" by Prince Souvanna Phouma  
"The Laotian Calendar" by Tiao Maha Upahat Phetsarath  
"The Custom of the 'Baci'" and "Marriage Rituals" by Thao Nouhy Abhay  
"Some Practices of Traditional Medicine" by Dr. Oudom Souvannavong  
"Literature" by Phouvong Phimmasone

(Certainly these historical folklore interests can be linked to the characteristically mild tone of Lao nationalism.)

#### BOUAVAN NORASING

Bouavan Norasing is Director of Justice, a member of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests, and has studied law in France. His father was a Chao Muong in Phong Savanh in Xieng Khouang.

"Judges are part of the administration and are centrally appointed. Before our independence, an administrator also served as judge. Since independence we have tried to separate these two functions, and have also tried to separate the jobs of judge and prosecutor. But the police continue to make the investigations. Our law is mostly based on the French system, but we have also tried to combine it with Lao custom. There is a Justice of the Peace in each Muong. There are also Courts of Appeal located in Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Vientiane, Thakhek and Pakse. There is a Supreme Court for all Laos and a system of Military Courts. In reforming our judicial system we have tried to adopt the principle of having a single judge in the lower courts. Also we have proposed to the Cabinet to have a Council of State to pass on administrative regulations. If all goes well, this Council will be

<sup>1</sup> French edition, 1956; English edition, 1959

installed next year.

"We are also now trying to form a union of government employees. This is necessary to counter the Pathet Lao and to instill in officials a sense of patriotism. At the present time government employees have no outlet for their grievances, and they are currently using the system of anonymous letters, which is not very effective. This union will permit us to advance our professional interest, and we can also contribute to improvements. There is also dissatisfaction in the rates of pay of different services. We want to have equal pay for the same ranks in all of the different government services. We want to be democratic and have allotments for dependents at the same rate for all categories of officials. In the professional sense we want to ameliorate the moral situation, stimulate the officials' conscience, discipline, sense of duty. This will be our first attempt, but these things will come about."

#### NAKHALA SOUVANNAVONG

Nakkhala Souvannavong, Director of Sports and Youth was born in Vientiane in 1922, where his father was a Secretary in the French Administration. Closely related to the Souvannavong family previously mentioned, both his brothers have studied in France, one in law and the other in communications.

He began his career in the administration in 1941, spending four years in the office of the French High Commissioner and three years in Luang Prabang working for the Ministry of the Interior. During the mobilization in 1945 he became a Lieutenant and later served as Chao Muong in a district of Vientiane Province. Then he worked in Vientiane in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For the past five years he has been with the Office of Sports and Youth, having taken a special course in the Vietnam School of Physical Education in 1943, spending the year 1955-1956 studying sports techniques, and three months in 1958 in the United States observing youth activities. His civil service rank is that of Chao Khoueng with a speciality in sports.

"We have several kinds of sports activities in Laos, including Scouts and soccer teams. There are about 1,200 Boy Scouts in all Laos and about 100 Girl Scouts. Of the Boy Scouts about 500 are in Vientiane, some 100 in Luang Prabang, 70 in Sam Neua, some 100 in Thakhek and about 200 in Savannakhet. There are an equal number in Pakse, some 60 in Attopeu and less than 100 in Xieng Khouang. There are Girl Scout organizations in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Thakhek, Savannakhet and Pakse. Scouting, however, is something of a luxury in certain parts of the country because the participants must buy their own uniforms. [It is inferred that this activity is largely limited to the urban

population.] Scouts are prominent in Vientiane and Luang Prabang on all official occasions and participate in parades in full uniform. They have also been given an opportunity for practical activities: during the summer of 1959, for a few weeks, they aided the regular police in directing traffic. They go on hikes and engage in other activities and have sent representatives to International Jamborees.

"Recently there was a conference attended by about 120 youth monitors. These included officials in the general administration and teachers, with a majority of the latter. [They were housed in tents and barracks near the national stadium and participated in a number of group activities as well as lectures and film showings. An attempt at political indoctrination was made. This conference was said to have been inspired by the CDIN.]

"Our federation of soccer teams, a private association authorized by the government, includes eleven teams in Vientiane. The most important one and champions for two years in the Dara Vieng (Youth of Vientiane). These are young Lao men born in Vientiane. The second team is from the Lycee Pavie, the third from general staff headquarters of the Army. There are also two police teams, plus Chinese and Vietnamese teams. The Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, the Air Force and the Pakistanis have teams as well.

"Although soccer is the most popular sport, there are also twelve basketball teams. This year the police team won the championship of Vientiane."

(There is also a girls' basketball team. The United States Information Service has done much to popularize sports throughout the country by photographing many of the matches in their Lao newsreels and then distributing them throughout the country. Tennis is popular among the elite, and there are courts in Vientiane and some of the provincial towns).

"Our department is thinking of creating a National Youth Organization to contact the mass of the population living in the countryside. We want to get in contact with the true Laotians who live in the villages as well as the towns. The youth of Laos in towns is already organized, but we have yet to do much work in the countryside," Nakkhala concluded.

(During 1959, an American physical education expert spent several months in Laos. His activities were under the auspices of the State Exchange Program Department. He is a specialist in track and field sports and gave many demonstrations in provincial capitals as well as in Vientiane. He said, however, that both the interest and the training facilities of the Lao leave much to be desired, and they are not yet ready to participate in international contests.)

#### HOUAN PHANN SAIGNASITH

The Director of the Lao Bureau of Statistics, Houan Phann Saignasith, was born in 1928 in Luang Prabang and received his primary education in Luang Prabang and Vientiane. His secondary education was obtained at a lycee in Saigon, and advanced education in Paris in the School of Sciences of the Sorbonne and at the Institute of Statistics of the University of Paris. From 1955 to 1956 he was Director of the Department of Social Welfare, and since then has been Director of the Bureau of Statistics. In early 1958 he visited the United States for several months and has been a member of Lao delegations to international conferences, including those in Australia and New Zealand. Like an increasing number of younger Lao officials, he has a fair knowledge of English. His wife is French.

His Bureau is concerned with gathering information on Lao population and economy. To date, this has included a preliminary census of the town of Vientiane and some collection of statistics from officials in the provinces. A branch of the Bureau has been opened in Luang Prabang and is also headed by him.

Perhaps the most detailed survey made so far by his Bureau has been a study of the cost of living and its relation to governmental salaries. Although this study is interesting for its own sake, it also has significance in that it indicates an attitude prevalent among Lao officialdom: according to the report, despite great increases in the cost of living over the past few years, the salaries of officials have remained fixed. There appears to be considerable resentment of this fact.

Like most officials in the technical ministries, he complained that he had insufficient funds with which to do really effective work. He has received assistance from the United Nations in the form of a French statistical expert who works in his office. Although apparently willing to accept French technical assistance he was resentful that the French had not provided him with any of their statistical files relating to their period of rule.

#### THIP THAMMAVONG

Thip Thammavong, Director of Information, was born in Vientiane in 1912, the son of a local merchant. He completed the college and studied at the Lycee Pavie, but has not studied abroad. He was first a school teacher, and then successively Director of the Groupe Scolaire

at Pak Sane from 1933 to 1940, Director of the Groupe Scolaire in Khong from 1940 to 1948, Deputy Provincial Primary School Inspector for Vientiane from 1948 to 1949 and Provincial Inspector in Sam Neua from 1949 to 1953. He was named Deputy Director of the Lao Information Service in 1953 and Director in 1957.

In 1958 he spent two months in the United States. He has also traveled in Malaya, Thailand, and Vietnam, and has visited London, Paris, and Tokyo. Thip is married and has eleven children, four of whom are married.

"Our office is under the Ministry of Information, and our principal activity is the publication of a daily news bulletin in French and Lao. It comes out every day except Sundays and holidays. We propagandize government programs from the political, economic and social points of view. Our mobile units go to villages and explain government programs to the people. They also explain to them their rights as citizens. We do public relations work, as you do in the United States. In addition to this news bulletin we also use films, radio and photographs. We distribute the speeches of the Prime Minister in separate publications, and also make posters.

"In each province we have a Bureau of Information which issues a weekly bulletin in Lao to be distributed in the province. These bulletins contain many of the same kinds of information as those issued in Vientiane, but they also deal with local matters. These Bureaus also send us news by radio.

In response to a question, Thip said that they have recently begun a ten minute news broadcast in Meo and are also planning to start one in Kha in the south. He said a problem here is that there is no one Kha language, and they will have to decide which one to use. The Meo broadcaster has a certificate from the groupe scolaire in Xeing Khouang, while the Kha is a soldier. They are also thinking of broadcasting in Lu and Yao but as yet have no candidates for these jobs. The United States Information Service provides his office with considerable technical assistance.

V  
MILITARY

Included here are some of the more prominent military leaders of Laos.

COLONEL OUDONE SANANIKONE

Colonel Oudone is an Army officer who has been in charge of the Civic Action Program. He is Director of the Ministry of Social Welfare and supervises its Rural Aid Program. He has never been in the United States, but has spent several years in France at various times undergoing military training. He is a member of the same family as the Prime Minister, Phoui Sananikone. His wife is principal of an elementary school and President of the Lao Womens' Association. Like many other Lao they have a large family, six children. He claimed he supported thirty people in his household, including his wife's mother and brother and their families. Although Oudone and his wife both work, one wonders how it is possible to maintain such a large household and run two expensive automobiles on his salary, which he said was only 17,000 kips a month. He rather bitterly referred to the fact that some of the "third country nationals" (Thais employed by the United States Government) are paid more.<sup>1</sup>

Although his house is a modest wooden bungalow located next door to the former Vietnamese slaughter house (which was removed to the outskirts of town as a result of protests), both he and his wife each drive a Mercedes-Benz. Yet combined with this luxury, he pointed out that every evening the furniture is cleared out of his living room so his relatives and servants have room to sleep on the floor.

A prominent member of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest, he is a personable man and makes a very pleasant impression. He appears to be a devoted father. As a matter of fact, in meeting him at his home I had to wait for some time, since each evening when he returns from work he takes all his children for a ride around town, providing an enjoyable excursion for all concerned. Many of his colleagues mentioned him as a person who had been favored by the Americans. He is in his early 40's.

"There was a Pathet Lao victory in the last (1958) election," he said. Almost all their candidates won office. The government functionaries have not sufficiently explained the situation and the activities of the government to the people. Now some of the officials are going through training in Vientiane for this purpose, so they will know what

<sup>1</sup> In a recent cost of living survey conducted by the Lao Bureau of Statistics, 100 households were selected, with a total of over 700 members. The smallest household had five persons, the largest sixteen, with most having six to eight persons in the household.

the policy is. All the Chao Muongs have to come to Vientiane for a course of several months, while the Nai Bans go to the district center for their training. The lectures are conducted by Civic Action personnel.

"The course for the Chao Muongs, who often spend from ten to fifteen years in one location, is supposed to give them some perspective on the rest of the country. After the course they receive diplomas in a formal ceremony and are then sent for brief periods to different parts of the country in order to gain some idea of the situation and problems in other areas.

"In the beginning, Civic Action was in the field of community development, with teams of ten persons each; now that function has been taken over by the Rural Development Program. Civic Action personnel are instead used in training programs. There are about 240 people in Civic Action, including about twenty-five girls and about fifteen people from tribal groups. Some of them will be sent to a course in Saigon, which will be limited to those who are best qualified. [the time of the interview, this program appeared to be in the process of being phased out, and consideration was being given to the reassignment of the best Civic Action personnel to other programs.

"I have proposed to the government, and sent letters to the provincial governors with the suggestions that four representatives from each tribal group be sent to Vientiane to undergo orientation. I do not think they will be able to come at this time because they are in the process of preparing their rice fields, but I feel it will be a good idea to have them come here and receive indoctrination.

"The courses for the Tassengs and Nai Bans in the muongs were given the first time. This is thanks to American aid."

(On this point one American aid official commented that one of the most crucial problems in Laos was to be able to strengthen the government on the district level in order to make it really effective.)

Oudone continued, "When the French left Laos, Communism was very strong. Now we have the job of eliminating it from our system."

When asked about the monks who have refused to cooperate in his Civic Action scheme, he said, "I am not very well informed about the affairs of the monks. However, some of the people in my Ministry are interested in these matters. I am a believing Buddhist rather than a practicing one. Many old people go to the pagoda and say prayers every day, but they really do not understand what it is all about. I have never been a monk. I have had no time for this. The most I have done was to have my head shaved and spend an afternoon in the pagoda on the occasion of my father's death, and also for the death of a cousin. This is our custom."

Commenting on the accusations which have been made to the effect that officials have enriched themselves, Oudone said he did not know exactly what the situation was. "But I do know that many people had to recall their children from France because it now costs them approximately one hundred and fifty dollars a month to support them as students, and since the currency exchange rate has been altered, they are no longer able to do this."

During the civil war Oudone resumed military service and was reported to have been in charge of troops leading attacks north of Vientiane on the Luang Prabang road.

BRIGADIER GENERAL OUAN RATHIKOUN

Ouan Rathikoun was born in 1922 in Luang Prabang and attended the Groupe Scolaire and college there from 1930 to 1938. He began his Army career with enlisted service in the French Colonial Army and attained the rank of Second Lieutenant before transferring to the Lao Army which was formed after independence, having been in the military service since 1941.

In contrast to many Lao officials born in Luang Prabang, he is said to be of humble origin. He and his wife have six children. He is one of the principal members of the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests.

"There have been many changes in Laos," he said, "Now we are pushing the three R's: Revolution, Rice and Roads. Almost all revolutions are good, except those of the Communists, which are bad. Here in Laos there has been a moral revolution. Now the government and the officials are the servants of the people. The time has passed when officials pocketed money instead of helping the people.

"This former democracy in which everyone stole for himself has now been rejected and replaced by directed democracy. Now things are much better. There are now Civic Action teams going out into the countryside and working directly with the local civilian administrations. One of the team members is an expert in agriculture, another in health, a third in education, still another in propaganda techniques. They see what the needs of the people are, then these Army men make requests to headquarters and supplies are sent. This is not like in the old times when papers were made out and it took months if not years, to get anything done."

In response to the question whether Laos would be able to survive without military aid, he said he thought it might be possible in five years, after roads had been built and rice and other supplies could be transported.

When asked about working with the monks he said this was a good thing, and an important one too. "But first, people must have enough to eat before they can give to the pagoda and support the monks. The Pathet Lao have worked closely with the monks, but the government is now making proper counter-propaganda and showing that the Communists were merely exercising tactics, that they have no real belief in religion."

General Ouan was among the early supporters of Colonel Shoumi Nosavan and Prince Boun Oua during the Civil War.

MAJOR GENERAL SOUNTHONE PATHAMAVONG

The Minister of Defense and Veterans Affairs, Sounthone Pathamavong, was born in Vientiane in 1913. He was educated at local schools and studied at the Lycee Pavie from 1928 to 1932. From 1933 to 1941 he was a school teacher and from 1942 to 1945 he served as Chao Muong of Muong Xieng, later serving as Provincial Governor from 1947 to 1953, when he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Lao National Army.

Although he had had no previous military experience, his official biography comments that he was noted for his work as an administrator. In many circles, however, he is not very highly regarded and tends to be considered more of a politician than an effective administrator.

COLONEL PHOUMI NOSAVAN

Secretary of State for Defense and Veterans Affairs at the time of this interview, Phoumi Nosavan replaced Sounthone Pathamavong as Minister of Defense and Veterans Affairs in the Kou Abhay Government (1960). He was born in 1920 in Savannakhet, and in 1940 received his diploma from the Lycee Pavie. Since 1950 he has been an officer in the Lao National Army. He was formerly Commander of the Second Military Region.

It was difficult to arrange time to talk with him, since at the time of the interview the Lao Army was reported to be engaged in military action with the North Vietnamese. He appears to have a pleasing personality and speaks in a rather dynamic and convincing fashion. He said he originally began his career with the police but later switched to the Army at the time of the Vietminh War. He has had some training in France.

In response to a question, he said most of the officers are from the towns because of the inferior schools of the villages. "The sons of farmers do not get an equal chance. Currently there is not enough room at the Lycee, with two or three times as many candidates as there are vacancies." (Despite these statements, there does appear to be some mobility in the Army, which is recruited from all sections of the country. The writer spoke briefly with a few pilots, trained in France, who are among the first pilots in the incipient Lao Air Force; in two cases they were sons of farmers in the vicinity of Vientiane).

Phoumi continued, "I do not believe the North Vietnamese will start a war with Laos, since they have many internal problems of their own. There are also many deserters who are coming into Laos. We then send them on to South Vietnam.

"The Lao Army is now going into social work on a large scale, and soon we will have Teams of Six Army men in each Tasseng. There is a Colonel in charge of this project, and we also have one who deals with psychological warfare problems.

"The principle problem of Laos is one of internal security. I feel that the Army is about the right size now.

"As to participation of tribal peoples in the government--in the Army we have a number of lower-ranking Kha officers and there are also a few Meo. There are a large number of local tribal people in the defense forces." (This is a very significant point, since many of the Pathet Lao battalions operating in the north contain considerable Khmu and Meo).

Phoumi did not seem to have many illusions about the tribal problem faced by the Lao government. He said the Chinese as well as the North Vietnamese were having similar problems with minority peoples near the border. He again stressed the importance of social service and village aid for the population at large.

With regard to talk of competition between the Army and the police, he said he was in favor of having one unit for internal security under the Army, with the police concerned only with municipal affairs. (The police officials, however, were not in agreement with this program.)

Subsequently, Phoumi assumed leadership of the so-called right wing government under the titular leadership of Prince Boun Oum. Originally based in Savannakhet this group defeated Captain Kongle in Vientiane and assumed power there. The government of Prince Souvanna Phouma, which had resulted from Kongle's coup against the Tiao Somsenith government, then fled to Cambodia.

#### COLONEL KOT VENEVONGSOS

Colonel Kot assistant Chief of Staff for Psychological Warfare, appears to be in his mid-thirties and was born in Pakse. He said, "My father was a very respected man, better than [some] officials. He was among the first to learn to drive a car and was a chauffeur for the French Administrator. He had no title, but the Chao Muongs and the Chao Khoueng respected him. I came from a class which was not rich but honorable." He is married to a cousin of Prince Boun Oum; he and his wife, daughter of a councilor to the King, have seven children.

In 1945 he was a sergeant in the French Army fighting the Japanese. In 1950 he spent a year in France, studying at St. Cyr, the French Military Academy, and later spent two years as military attache in the Philippines and Vietnam. He has also served as Director of Veterans Affairs having spent a total of sixteen years in military service. His younger brother, a Major in the Army, studied in the United States.

"By the end of this year (1959) there are to be six hundred teams of six persons each, operating one team to a Tasseng," Kot said. "There are already one hundred teams in the First Military Region. There is a problem, however, of cooperation between the civilian and military

officials. Formerly the Chao Khouengs received materials for rural development, but it did not reach the people. It is much better to distribute material directly through the military. Civilian authorities rarely go to the villages; it is only the military who actually get there.

"One problem we have to face is the different conditions and diverse needs in various parts of our country. In one place the people want newspapers and books, and in another they need teachers. The teams of six for rural development work consists of: a chief, who is also in charge of propaganda; an assistant who is a specialist in auto-defense; a health expert who distributes some medicines such as quinine; a teacher for the children; one man who knows about the construction of roads and houses; and finally, an agriculturist to teach the people how to grow rice, corn and vegetables. These are all regular Army soldiers.

"The training of the team varies from fifteen days to three months and in some cases as much as six months. In response to the requests they pass on from the villagers, they are provided with roofing, nails, tools and salt. In some cases the villagers also ask for rice. Our work is easier in some areas, for instance in Xieng Khouang where the population knows the Vietminh, under whose control it has lived for a while. In areas such as Vientiane Province, the people have not become personally acquainted with the Communist rule.

"Communist propaganda in Laos declares that aid is given only to the towns and that nothing reaches the villages. We need the Teams of Six to fight this idea. We have promised the people aid. The Communists live among the people and make propaganda. We must counter this. I think it would help us if we got more films in Thai from the United States Information Service, so that we can show them to the people.

"Mr. Keo Vipakhon of the rural development division of the Social Welfare Ministry has no personnel and no funds. He cannot do anything. Our Civic Action teams have been much more effective, remaining in the Muongs. The tools sent out by the government's rural development program remain in the store-rooms of the provincial capital, and from time to time the villagers come in and ask for them. But it is different with the military where the materials go directly to the local commander and sub-commanders and then to the Tassengs through the Teams of Six.

"In each military region we have about twenty men who have specialized in anti-Communist propaganda. Further, here in Vientiane in our Military Information Service we have a special section for press and radio.

"The first problem when we go to work in the Tassengs is civic instruction, teaching the population to read and write. We must also explain to the people about the government and its organization.

"Among the tribal peoples in the mountains, when a man is sick the others gather around him and do no work in the Hai (Slash-and-burn fields). We come in and give medicine. We also give them salt when it is needed. This is the way we fight the Communists."

## VI

### LAO STUDYING ABROAD

Excerpts from applications for foreign scholarships

Reports by Lao teachers who studied in the United States

#### APPLICANTS FOR FOREIGN SCHOLARSHIPS<sup>1</sup>

The following brief essays were written in English, a language which the applicants have studied for two or three years. They have been edited to a certain extent for the sake of anonymity, but an attempt has been made to preserve their feelings. Although the applicants obviously cannot express themselves as freely in English as they would in their own language, and these short essays are written in the hope of soliciting a grant, still they do indicate something of the values, outlook and background of the individuals concerned. Important also is the way they reflect the objectives the applicants seek from advanced training abroad. In a sense, these applicants represent an emerging young Lao elite. Almost all of those who receive training abroad come back to occupy responsible positions in the central government in Vientiane. Very few are willing to serve in the provinces.

Applicant A: Male, age twenty-five; unmarried; school teacher in Vientiane since 1955; born in small town near Vientiane.

From 1948 to 1954 I studied in the elementary school. I made good progress in my studies. In 1954 I would like to have continued my studies in the college but was only able to study there for one year. We worked in French.

In 1955 I became a teacher. I did not work at teaching school but have been employed in the teachers' training school. I was able to study in this school for six months and I found the work very interesting. In May, 1956, the director of this school sent me to work in the Ministry of Education in Vientiane.

Three months ago I began to study English with teachers under the Colombo Plan and with a lady at the Lao-American Association. I am now able to speak a little better than last year. In 1959 fifteen scholarships were offered to Lao students to attend a nine-months course in general administration at a University in Great Britain. I am interested

<sup>1</sup> The military has its own foreign training program and is not included here.

in this course and would like to go there. My friends who have been there have told me that it is a very beautiful country.

I want to see and to know the civilization of other countries, how they organize their country. I know it will be very helpful for me, and I hope to serve my country by using this experience when I return.

Applicant B: Male, age twenty-seven; married; primary school graduate; since 1959 Secretary in the Office of the Procurator General.

I was born in 1933 in a village in the Province of Savannakhet. I studied in the elementary school at Savannakhet from 1947 to 1950, and then had two years of study at the college. In 1952 I studied law at the School of General Administration in Vientiane, and I have a certificate from this course. Formerly I worked in the office of the Council of Ministers and then was sent by the government to work in the Ministry of Religious Affairs as the chief accountant. I was in that Ministry for two years. Beginning in 1959 I was sent to the Ministry of Justice and have continued working there.

I have studied English since 1956. My first teacher was Mr. X, sent by the international aid plan. When he left for his country, I went to study English with two new Colombo Plan teachers. Besides English, I have studied French for about six years. At present I am rather good in French.

I am willing to go to your country because I would like to learn about medical and sanitary matters and similar problems that exist in the Kingdom of Laos. As I have had some practice in English I am sure that I shall be able to understand many things I will meet in your country. I hope that when I return, what I have seen and understood will be very useful to my country.

Applicant C: Male; age twenty-seven; employed by the National Police.

(Better educated than most Lao officials, he went to live with his parents in Bangkok and married a Thai girl. He has recently had difficulty in keeping his position because a close relative is a Pathet Lao Deputy. He also felt embittered because he said that many of his associates in the National Police have gained large sums through graft while he has tried to be honest, and has had difficulty supporting his family on his salary. Recently he has had to borrow from some of his Thai friends. He studied at the primary school in Pakse from 1940 to 47, and then at Assumption College in Bangkok from 1948 to 1953, attaining the equivalent of a high school diploma. From 1954 to 1958 studied at the Police Academy in Bangkok and received a diploma upon completion of this course; since 1956 has been a Lieutenant in the Lao National Police at Vientiane.)



I was born in 1933 in Pakse in the Kingdom of Laos. At the age of six I entered the primary school where I studied Lao and French for eight years. After the Second World War, my family and I migrated to Thailand. At that time I was sixteen years old. Then I went to study at Assumption College in Bangkok and learned French and a little English. After finishing my high school education in 1953, I was a teacher at Assumption College for one year, and then went on to study at the Thai Police Adademy with the help of the Lao Police Department. After four years of training, I was successful in the last examination, and returned to Laos, my own country, in 1958.

During the first six months I worked in the foreign registration section of the metropolitan Police. After that I was sent to the traffic Police, and until now, I have worked as chief of the section in charge of investigation, collecting information. My other special work consisted of teaching methods of investigation to the metropolitan Police.

I want to study and train in your country so as to make better progress in my English and to learn some useful Police subjects.

Applicant D: Female; unmarried.

My parents sent me to study in Bangkok when I was eight years old. I did well and skipped the third grade, so it only took me five years in elementary school. When I finished there I went on to high school, which was located in the same building. I then received my diploma. After finishing high school, I went to work for my uncle in his private school for about ten months. Then I dropped out when my mother sent a telegram from Vientiane asking me to come back. I stayed in Vientiane with my parents for five months and returned to Bangkok to learn English at a special language school, where I studied for six months and then received a certificate. When I returned to Laos I went to work as a teacher in a private school. Then I left and went to work for the government.

Applicant E: Male; age twenty-seven; works as a secretary in the Foreign Trade Department of the Ministry of National Economy; studied in the primary school from 1943 to 1949 and received a certificate; attended the Lycee from 1950 to 1954.

I am presently working at the Department of Foreign Trade, where I have been employed for four years. My work is to check on import licenses, and matters dealing with the National Bank, the commercial banks, USOM/Laos and ICA/Washington. With regard to my work, I think it is very important and interesting to me, as I often converse and write in English. I wish to point out, however, that I am specially interested in local and foreign trade in my country and all over the world. I therefore wish to go to study in your country and pursue courses in General Administration and International Commerce. My studies should profit my country and nation.

Applicant F: Male; unmarried; employed by the Department of Foreign trade in the Ministry of the National Economy; studied in the primary school in Xieng Khouang from 1937 to 1948; from 1948 to 1952 studied at the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane and from 1952 to 1956 in the School of Administration in Phnom Penh, from which he received a diploma.

I have been employed by the Ministry of the National Economy since December, 1956. My job at the Ministry is concerned with external and internal commerce. I have been appointed chief of the office of commerce and have held this office for more than two years. My particular work is to check the prices of invoices dealing with what businessmen import and sell in Laos. The prices are checked to see if they conform to those given by foreign traders. I also check all licenses submitted to my office before they are sent to the National Bank. In 1959, I began a new job. This concerns industries; I try to encourage the people of Laos to build more factories and set up different local industries. I feel that I am able to work in the field of external and internal commerce, so I am most interested in learning more about economics and general administration and studying in the United Kingdom. I hope that I will be able to inspire my fellow countrymen to work better in order to solve our problems.

Applicant G: Male; unmarried; age twenty-one; attended primary school in Vientiane and the Lycee Pavie where he received a diploma; employed as a secretary in the Statistical Services of Laos.

My name is Khamphay X. I live in Vientiane. I have a brother, Pheng X, a doctor. My sister is in business in town with two other sisters. I have studied in the primary school, secondary school, and high school in this capital city. I studied at the Faculty of Medicine in Cambodia for two years. After that I went to study in Hong Kong at the Institute of Business Administration. In 1955 I came back and got a job in the statistical office in Vientiane. I can speak five foreign languages. I can read and write French, English and Siamese, and also speak Japanese and Vietnamese.

Applicant H: Male; age twenty-six; unmarried; employed in the Ministry of the National Economy in the Foreign Trade Department in Vientiane; from 1940 to 1948 attended primary school in Luang Prabang; from 1948 to 1954 attended the Lycee in Vientiane; from 1954 to 1957 attended the School of Administration in Phnom Penh. (He bears the title Tiao and is related to the royal family of Luang Prabang).

Upon completion of my degree in Phnom Penh, I returned to Laos to work in the Ministry of National Economy, in the Department of Foreign Trade, and have been employed there since 1957, when I was appointed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While in the Department of Foreign

Trade I worked in the purchasing and accounting office. Subsequently I moved to the billing office. It was my responsibility to check all bills and receipts coming into our office. Then I was moved to the economic section, where I had the responsibility of helping to communicate with merchants about foreign markets. With my experience I wish to study General Administration in your country, and upon completion of my study abroad, I intend to return to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to apply the advanced training in public administration.

Applicant I: Male; age twenty-three; unmarried; employed by the Ministry of the Interior in Vientiane; from 1946 to 1951 attended primary school in Pakse; from 1951 to 1959 studied at the Lycee Pavie, but did not receive diploma.

While I was studying in the Lycee Pavie, I always wanted to be a doctor, because as a little boy I had seen the doctors in their white coats nursing the sick and thought that doctors as a group were very useful in the world. While in school, I was very active in the Boy Scouts, the Association of Lao Students and other groups. In 1959 I became an official of a youth organization.

When I went to work in the Ministry of the Interior, I changed my ideas about higher education and decided I wanted to study administration, because my father likes his work as administrator and Ambassador.

I saw a notice in the "Lao Presse" about the program of examination for studying administration in a city in your country. I want to have my name listed. When I finish my training in administration, I want to return to my home country and continue my work. I want to continue to work in the government service to the end of my life. I want to be an administrator or Ambassador.

Applicant J: Male; age twenty-five; married; Police Lieutenant in Vientiane.

I have been in the National Police since September, 1954, after my graduation from high school. I worked as an inspector. In 1956 I was sent to France for police training for six months. For three months we studied theory, and for the other three months we had practical training, including courses in traffic regulation and rules. After returning from France, I was assigned to the Traffic Police as Chief of the division, as part of the metropolitan police force in Vientiane. This job was my favorite. I had sixty-five men under my command. Every morning I rode out on a motorcycle and checked the men on the beat. If I had spare time, I taught my men how to direct traffic and investigate traffic accidents. Sometimes I almost went crazy when I received telephone calls that two or three serious accidents had occurred. These cases were my responsibility.

In 1959 I was sent to the Philippines for four months' training with the Philippine constabulary. I took courses in administration and detective training. After that I returned home and was assigned to a different job.

I would like to go to your country for the Public Administration training course, because I would like to improve my English. I would also like to know the administrative system in your country, then perhaps I can apply their ways to my country. If I am in your country, I would like to be at police headquarters so that I can study their organization and their way of administration and learn about criminology.

#### EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH BY LAO TEACHERS WHO STUDIED IN AMERICA

The program pursued by these teachers is similar to that described by Phensy Manoroth and Pinkham Uparavarn. Unlike the preceding scholarship applications these reports have been relatively little edited, although they are excerpted from much more detailed documents. Despite the writers' obvious desires to please their American hosts, certainly the items they select for emphasis, and the way in which they describe their experiences, provide some significant insights into Lao values.

The first report is by a school administrator who, at the time of his visit to the United States in 1954, was a Provincial Inspector of Primary Education.

The second report is by another official in the Ministry of Education. He was awarded a study grant to the United States in 1955 and spent almost two years in America.

#### I

The American people were very lucky to leave Europe, their ancestral home, and come to live in a broad fertile land with incalculable resources both under and above ground. In our travels we have seen many dense and extensive forests with many kinds of good trees. The American people plant and harvest many kinds of food: corn, wheat, oats, barley, and other cereals, fruits and vegetables. They produce a surplus and cannot consume all of it. With the remainder they feed the needy people of the world. We visited many mines: coal mines, copper mines, iron mines, uranium mines, gold mines etc. In these places many thousands of miners work day and night to exploit the resources of the earth with machinery, rarely by hand.

The people of the United States developed big industrial enterprises such as the automobile, oil, machinery, ship building, meat packing and fish canning factories. They also have large plants for the manufacture

of products from cotton, silk and wool. The finished products from all these enterprises are exported to countries all over the world.

The people of the United States live in good houses, where there are all kinds of commodities for their convenience, such as electricity and running water. They eat good food, which is easily found and bought cheaply in the grocery store located near their homes. In America the farmer works with machinery, rarely with animals or with his own strength. With machinery they can produce more and more, fifty or one hundred times better than they did one hundred years ago. Their standard of living is much higher than that of other peoples of the world. When we walk along the street of a big city, or go into the far-flung countryside, we do not encounter beggars as we would in India or China.

#### In Close Contact With the American People

Each time we approached Americans of both sexes, old and young, they greeted us with open arms, broad smiles and a helpful manner. They talk to us amiably and graciously. We know that Americans come from many lands to live together in their vast country, but they have learned to cooperate in all their activities, to speak a common language, submit to the same laws, to sacrifice their lives in battle under the same banner.

#### American Congress

In so short a time since the discovery of this country in 1492 by the adventurous navigator, Christopher Columbus, it has become the home of a powerful nation, well known over the whole world for its powerful strength in armies and military equipment and plentiful resources which surpass those of all the countries in the world. The First and Second World Wars found it a nation of good fighters, and these wars ended in peace only after the intervention of the United States. Also a Third World War was prevented by the wise and good-hearted leader, President Eisenhower, and the other distinguished political leaders.

#### Conclusion

In six months of observation in America, traveling from south to west, from west to east, and south again, I have seen and learned a great deal about your schools. I gained much experience in how to teach, how to organize the school system in my country, how to develop a good school program. This experience will be valuable to my country when I return.

We use the old French system of education in Laos. When I return to my country, I will try to suggest to my government the methods of teaching which you use in your schools, especially in the elementary school, from the first to the sixth grade, and also the kindergarten,

which is a good idea to adopt in our schools.

#### Evaluation of the American Way of Life

Houses: Very comfortable; big and beautiful for living; use good materials.

Furniture: Lots of furniture in every house for use and ornamentation.

Household Equipment: Washing machines, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators do an excellent job with a small amount of work for the housewife.

Hospitality: Everywhere I went I met friendly people. I have made many friends in school and outside of school. They invited me to their homes, their churches and their clubs. They invited me to have luncheon and dinner and to have tea. Sometimes I spent weekends with families, and I have been invited to talk about my country and my religion, Buddhism.

## II

In 1955 the Lao government gave me permission to accept a teacher's grant to the United States as part of that government's international educational exchange program. This had long been a cherished dream of mine for, being a teacher, I was anxious to see the progress made in the field of education in that great country.

My journey began on August 19, 1955, when I began my four-day air voyage which would bring me to Washington, the capital of the United States. Our trip was by way of the southeastern coast of Asia, across the Pacific Ocean from Bangkok to Hong Kong, Tokyo, Wake Island, Hawaii, San Francisco, and finally to Washington. While crossing the Pacific we became concerned over the possibility of engine failure. Our worries proved to be unnecessary, as we reached Washington in good health.

As our plane circled the city of Washington I was amazed by the huge sea of many beautiful colored lights. Before arriving I had often dreamed of how beautiful this magnificent city would be, but reality proved to be more fascinating than my wildest dreams had led me to imagine. According to my observations, Washington is a clean, calm and restful city. The homes are soundly constructed and equipped with many conveniences. One item that I had heard about was "TV". I noticed that this wonderful invention was viewed by almost everyone and that it was a source of recreation and education for the entire family. All homes were lighted with electricity and every home had a telephone.

While visiting the large department stores, the courtesy of the personnel was very noticeable. The "May I help you?" and "Thank you" were a help to me and reassured me that America is a friendly country. Everyone was patient with my poor English and reflected to me that the product of education in the American schools is quite satisfactory in its dealings with other people. The democratic way of life of the American

people was seen in their daily activities.

During my stay in Middletown, many organizations requested the services of the members of my class for various programs. The class was quick to respond to these invitations and as a result our knowledge of American life grew rapidly. The speeches made included four formal, six informal, and several short talks in various school classrooms. Several times I was called on to perform my native dances, sing my native songs and tell of my religion. The audience participation was very encouraging. I was asked many questions especially by businessmen who were interested in the economy and standard of living of the small, new country of Laos. Lao politics, education system, form of government, communist activities, imports and exports were common questions from all clubs or organizations to which I spoke.

In addition to these activities I had the opportunity to visit ten elementary and high schools in Ohio. Everywhere I found that modern techniques of teaching and excellent instructional materials were used. Efficient heat and light, large storage space, beautiful gardens and grounds, auditorium and gymnasium facilities, large classrooms and delightful cafeterias reflected the emphasis the United States places on the education of its children.

Integrated into my school visitation program were opportunities to study the large industrial plants that represent "working America". The four included the Ford Motor Company in Chicago and the United States Steel Company. The huge machinery and the maze of workers were dazzling to my imagination. From this tour I learned that the U.S. is an industrial giant and I can understand how they can serve the world in trying to establish peace and freedom.

During vacation I undertook to travel as much as I could to get a better view of this great land and its wonderful people at my leisure. From Middletown I traveled by rail to Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Missouri and Mississippi. I especially enjoyed visiting Dallas and Houston, Texas, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Jackson Mississippi. In all the states I visited the large universities, high schools and elementary schools, were an outstanding landmark reflecting the emphasis placed on education.

Another interesting phase of my stay in America was my visit, as an observer, to Moss Point, Mississippi. Moss Point in the American south reminded me very much of any of the cities of Laos. The friendly attitude of the people, the consideration and patience they had for me and the desire to make my visit a happy one will never be forgotten. The industrial life of Moss Point centers around a chemical corporation, a fish meal company and a paper making company. Extensive tours through these industrial plants were enjoyed extremely and great care was taken by everyone to make my visit a success.

The town of Moss Point covers an area of only 11 square kilometers. In this area, and for a population of approximately 6,000 people, there are three elementary schools, one junior high school, and two senior high schools. In spite of this, the schools are overcrowded and the buildings, although modern and beautiful, are inadequate to provide for the type of program desired by the city administration and school staff. Plans are underway for a \$250,000 expansion program for the city schools.

The lessons taught in the elementary schools are, for the most part, the same as in the schools of Laos: arithmetic, spelling, writing, music, health, science geography, art and English. In Laos, of course, English is substituted by French. The methods of presentation of these subjects express the eagerness of the teachers to improve their techniques through their own study, their personal experiences, and the experiences shared with other members of the staff.

In all of the schools I visited I found that a large portion of the pupils share enjoyable experiences in extra-curricular activities. The existence of hobby clubs, 4-H clubs, Brownie Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts has a tendency to further influence and enrich the learning experience of the children. In these clubs they participate in activities, program planning and citizenship which they are taught during school hours. Being able to adapt their school subject matter to live situations in their organizations successfully stimulates their desire to study and improve their way of life.

In addition to these activities, active participation in all branches of sports is encouraged. Practically every high school and university in America has athletic teams in the popular American sports like baseball, basketball and football. The large schools are also represented by teams in other sports like tennis, track, swimming etc. Schools of the same size compete with each other in these sports, and the spirit of friendly competition exists throughout. Americans believe that a sound body makes a sound mind and every school in the country does everything in its power to develop both sound body and sound mind.

In June, 1957, after 21 months in America, I returned to Laos to resume my work in the school system of Laos. During these 21 months I learned many things about the United States, and, more important, about a modern educational system. But putting into use in Laos this experience I acquired in America, I feel that I will partially repay the kindness and confidence that both my government and the American government showed toward me in granting me this wonderful privilege. I am grateful to my superiors in the Ministry of Education and to the American people who, where ever I went, showed me courtesy and friendship I never dreamed could exist away from one's own country.

## ABBOT AT ONE OF THE LARGER WATS IN VIENTIANE

This chief monk is thirty-eight and has been in the priesthood for twenty-eight years. He originally came from Attopeu but has lived in Vientiane since 1941. At the time of the 2500th Anniversary of Buddha's birth he visited India. He became the Abbot of this pagoda in 1959. He had previously had some contact with Americans. The wife of the Ambassador once came to his pagoda, and last year an American with USIS taught English in their Pali school. This year, however, the English classes are being taught by a Thai.

When asked about the situation in Tibet, he said he felt it was too bad, that he had seen the Dalai Lama when he was in India and had also seen large numbers of Tibetan monks. But he said it is difficult to explain these things to the local people because Tibet is very far away. When the fighting in San Neua was mentioned, he said he realized what the Communists did to the monks when they were in control and thought that if the government lost control of the northern provinces, it might be bad for their religion. He said government officials come to his wat, but only on holidays. Prince Souphanouvong sometimes comes to visit.

The discussion turned to the American aid program. The Abbot said he understood many of the difficulties with regard to the administration of funds and the ensuing corruption, because he said that the people have much respect for the monks and come to talk over these things with them. He suggested that a good way to use American aid would be to help the monks.

"For example, in the Pali schools there are no textbooks. Since USIS is able to print a magazine like 'Free World' why are they not able to print some books for our school? Now we must copy our books by hand, and this wastes a lot of time. We have asked for government aid in this matter, but so far nothing has happened."

He seemed pleased that the Chief Monk of Laos had recently visited America, and he was aware of the fact that Buddhists have begun to establish themselves there, chiefly through the Japanese Mahayana sect.

TH is twenty-three years old. His father is a Lao from Vientiane, and his mother is from Udon Province in Northeast Thailand. His father, a customs official at Thadeua, divorced his mother and remarried. His mother returned to Udon to live.

"I completed secular primary school in Thailand but have now been a monk for eight years. From eight to ten-thirty in the morning and from two to five in the afternoon I study Buddhism and Pali. After six I go to study English with a USOM official. I do not have to pay for this course. I am the first monk from this wat who has asked to study English with a USOM official. During the past year most of my friends in the priesthood have wanted to study English. I have also tried to become acquainted with Americans from USIS and the Embassy.<sup>1</sup> Some Americans who work in the Embassy have asked me to be an interpreter for them. I have gone to Savannakhet as an interpreter for the Americans. Some of my friends in the priesthood have asked me to teach them English. I have also taken a course in typing in both English and French, from Mr. Meyer's school.<sup>2</sup> I paid for the course with money I have saved. [It is only the stricter Thammayout sect, to which this monk does not belong, which is forbidden to handle money.] At the end of this year I will take the examination to become a Maha. If I pass it I will be able to work as an official in the Foreign Ministry. Meanwhile it is convenient for me to study as a monk, because I am very poor and have no place else to live."

TH said the government was thinking of forbidding the Maha examinations because those who attain this degree tend to oppose the government. If this prohibition comes about, he said, the monks are ready to demonstrate in opposition. Some government officials attend sermons but only because they are ordered to do so. When these officials meet the monks on the street, they do not show respect, TH felt.

TH contrasted this behaviour with that of Prince Souphanouvong. "He visits the monks at the wat and tells them of his troubles and the hardships suffered by his Army when they were fighting in the forest. The soldiers were not paid any salary, and they had to beg rice in the villages. I like Souphanouvong and the Pathet Lao because they are honest people. Most of the monks sympathize with the Pathet Lao in their difficulties."

<sup>1</sup> TH is quite aggressive in becoming acquainted with more people from USOM. He takes a taxi to the USOM compound and knocks on doors until he finds someone with whom to practice his English.

<sup>2</sup> A German who runs a private commercial school.

"At the 'time of the dollars' the big people in the government were able to get dollars very easily," he continued, "but it was very difficult for the common people to obtain them. Premier Phoui Sananikone is not known as the Premier for the Lao people but only as the Premier for the Americans. The government always says that the people who become Maha are Communists because they are opposed to government orders. The government always sends a man to watch the people who come to the wats to talk. The officials in the government have become rich as a result of the USOM aid. Most of the young monks like to talk about politics but the government forbids them to do so. If the next election is fair, I feel certain the Prince Souphanouvong's party will win."

(TH was at first afraid to express himself clearly because he thought the interviewer was an official representative of the Lao government. The author's Thai assistant was able to obtain a friendly response from the monk because TH was interested in visiting Thailand.)

#### ENGLISH-SPEAKING MONK IN LUANG PRABANG

In terms of education and travel, M P represents the elite in the Lao priesthood. In addition to studies in Laos and Thailand, he has spent time in India and has also visited China. His English has a heavy Indian accent. For a monk, he leads a rather luxurious life. His residence is near the top of the Phousi hill in the center of Luang Prabang town, from which one gets a magnificent view of the town and surrounding countryside. His house, a lean-to shack constructed of beaverboard and galvanized sheeting, contains a western-style bed with a mattress and mosquito netting. Near his bed is a small bookcase filled with various pamphlets, documents and notebooks, and on top there is a battery powered radio. Nearby is a shed used as a shower, rigged with a piped water system with fifty-gallon gasoline drums for storage. Personal needs are taken care of by a tribal Khmu boy who works at the local wat, and during the course of our visit young novices acting as servants brought in hot tea and bananas. When I remarked that the set-up seemed very pleasant he said that some of the more old-fashioned monks had objected to his having a radio, but "I felt it was necessary to listen to the news and be informed about what was going on in the world."

M P was born in a village south of Vientiane. During World War II he went with his parents to Thailand and later became a monk, going to Bangkok to study. He is now thirty-five and has been a monk for twenty years. When he completed his studies in Bangkok he was selected by the chief monk of Laos to continue his studies in India, where he spent five years at the Buddhist University in Bihar. Upon his return he was sent to Luang Prabang to take charge of one of the local pagoda schools. Every day he teaches classes from eight to eleven and from two until eight. In the evening he gives English lessons at his home. In addition

to his teaching chores he is in the process of compiling a Lao dictionary. He has been living in Luang Prabang for about six months. During this time he has made several trips up the Mekong to preach in various villages. One of his great challenges has been the struggle with the cult of the phi.

The conversation turned to some of the problems connected with the priesthood in present-day Laos. He said that he had heard about the suppression of the Tibetans, but that to the local monks, Tibet was far away and did not have much significance for them. He said he realized during his brief trip to China that he was only able to see what the Communists wanted to show him. Although he heard a great deal about what the Communists are doing to the monks in China, these facts did not seem to concern the local people very much, because even China seems far away and not concerned with Lao daily life.

"Many monks do have fairly strong feelings against the Americans and the Lao government. Some of them say the quarrel between the royal government and the Pathet Lao was due to the interference of other nations; this had incited quarrels among the Lao people. Many monks feel that the Pathet Lao are good people and that the Pathet Lao and the royal government are brothers. I think I understand the methods of the Communists, but most of the monks do not. The monks feel that they have many grievances against the government, but they keep quiet."

The last phrase was repeated many times during the course of our talk. As a partial solution to this problem, he suggested that since the money the Americans gave to the Lao government was not used to help the people, it would be given directly to the monks for the support of the priesthood. He particularly stressed this point.

Many monks feel that the high government officials have kept the money and have not helped the people. At the same time they have attempted to restrict the activities of the monks and their travels. It is true that the monks have given only a minimum of cooperation to these orders.

At M P's request the writer gave a lecture in the local pagoda school. He said they wanted to take advantage of the opportunity because they were interested in having Americans and other qualified people come and lecture. The talk was delivered in English and translated into Lao and dealt with topics such as brotherhood, the common denominators in all religions and how the Americans could learn from the Lao as well as teach them. A number of questions were asked by the students, such as:

- "How many people are there in America?"
- "How many schools?"
- "How many Buddhist monks?"
- "How is it possible to go and study in America?"
- "What are the religious beliefs of the Americans?"

"What is the best way to study English?"  
"What are good ways for propagating Buddhism?"

I was later told by others that M P occupied a somewhat tenuous position in the local priesthood since he was not fully accepted by the older monks, some of whom were suspicious of his western contacts and disliked his way of living.

#### MONK SENT TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

"When I was a boy I studied in the primary schools and received a certificate. After entering the priesthood, I went to study at the Pali School in Pakse. It took nearly six years to finish the course. At the end I took the examinations and received a secondary certificate. Higher education is rare in Laos. Even so I have tried my best to improve my knowledge.

"In 1953 I was sent to Burma by the government of Laos, to attend the Sixth Buddhist Council which was held in Rangoon. This was my first time abroad. When the meeting was over, I remained there to study the Burmese and particularly the English language. In 1955 I left Laos for the second time, for Ceylon where I spent nearly three years. During my stay I attended Prince College, a secondary school. On my return from Ceylon, I visited parts of India.

"In Laos I have been in contact with Americans in order to learn about their way of life. I would like to study about the United States and from time to time contribute an article to the Buddhist newspaper published in Laos.

"When I was in Laos I thought I was among the most clever. When I arrived in the United States, I became a foolish man. I saw fruits and milk in boxes. I wanted them, and in spite of my having money, I did not know how to take them out of the box. I entered a cafeteria. I thought that it was the same as a restaurant because I saw so many people eating there. Then I sat down waiting to be served, for nearly a half hour. No one came to ask me anything. I looked at the writing on the board at the entrance to the cafeteria line, but I did not know the meaning. Then an old lady came and asked me to follow her.

"Everywhere I go, all the people look at me, asking me why I am clad only in a yellow robe, why I shave my hair, and do the people of Laos shave their hair and dress as I do. They ask how I live and eat, and from what part of the world I have come, and what religion I belong to. In Laos I was a common man; here I become a wonderful man. I am very grateful to be in the United States, the heaven on earth. Everything does not appear as if it is man-made. It seems to me that everything is made by supernatural power."

This monk wrote the following after having been in the United States for several months:

"I do not wish to return to Laos. I wish I could stay in the United States, but unfortunately, I cannot do so.

"In America the life of a Buddhist monk is very hard because of the cold, particularly in the winter. The climate in Laos is good."

The following is an evaluation by an American educator at the University at which the monk studied:

By dint of very hard work, and when he has time enough, he understands what he reads. Although he has improved in the special course offered to foreign students, he is still not up to the standard required of regular students of freshman English. Much of the time he understands spoken English. His sometimes dogmatic as well as linguistic deficiencies frequently stand in the way of comprehension. When he chooses his own subject, he can speak lucidly and intelligibly if his listener is patient. He is working very hard, but in his work with English he is hindered by his unfamiliarity with western culture.

#### VIII

##### TOWNSPEOPLE

of  
During the last decade the town/Vientiane has grown tremendously, almost tripling its population to its present (1959) total of some 70,000. Although not large by Asian standards, many of the problems of rapid urbanization can be seen. Many immigrants to Vientiane have come from poor and relatively crowded parts of Northeast Thailand, and brief sketches of some of these newcomers are presented in this unit.

##### A LAO BARBER IN VIENTIANE

Thirty-seven years old, Pheng is married to a woman from the same section of Vientiane. They have four sons, the eldest twelve years old and a pupil at the primary school, and the others eight, four and two. Phang's wife stays home and manages the household. He has been working as a barber for the past six years. His earnings average over 100 kip a day, but when he has a larger number of customers he can earn 200 kip. He attempts to earn as much money as possible so that he can support his children at school. Ideally, he would like his children to continue their education at a higher level, but he does not know what they will be able to do when they grow up.

"At present it is very difficult to earn money in Vientiane, because there are many foreign people who have come to live here. Some people have a lot of money but they keep it. A very good thing is that when someone is sick, he is able to go to the hospital and see the Philipinos there, and not have to pay for their services. (This is a unit of the Philipino Operation Brotherhood.)

"In my neighborhood is the home of an Army major who often brings home films to show. These are mostly newsreels, but there are also some that tell stories. The movies that tell stories are the most interesting. I would like to ask the government to help the villagers by lowering the price of rice and clothing, for the villagers are poor and earn only a little money each day, but they have to spend a lot to live.

"I have never had an opportunity to see the King or the Crown Prince, because I am always busy cutting hair but my wife and children have seen them."

When he saw some Americans passing by in a jeep he said, "They have much money and America used to give dollars to Laos, so that now Vientiane has many buildings and automobiles. There has been much progress. I like to see changes like this, but I do not take much interest in political affairs because that is a matter for the high ranking officials. I am only a poor person. As long as I have a chance, I pursue my life day by day."

#### A SAMLAW DRIVER IN VIENTIANE

"I am twenty-eight years old and was born in Northeast Thailand. I have an elder brother and sister and a younger brother. All of my family are farmers. I came to Vientiane after my father died about eight years ago, and I became a soldier. I was sent to Xieng Khouang to fight against the Pathet Lao. After two and a half years I left the Army and went back to my home village to get married. Then I returned to Vientiane because I thought there was money to be made 'at the time of the dollar'. I worked as a coolie on construction projects and then bought a samlaw with the money I saved. I paid a friend 7,000 kip for my samlaw and have been at this work for the past year.

"My wife stays home and takes care of our children, a boy and a girl. I do not gamble because I earn my money with difficulty and do not want to spend it in that way. But most of my friends do gamble. I have built a small hut on some land owned by a Thai from Bangkok, and I am not charged for its use. Usually I drive my samlaw from four a.m. until about nine in the evening and am able to earn about two hundred kip a day. Those of my friends who also work at night are able to earn up to three hundred kip. There are about seven hundred samlaw drivers in Vientiane who have licenses, and about three hundred more do not. They have always tried to escape from the police.

"I hope to return to my home village next year because there will soon be more samlaws here and I will have less opportunity to earn money. I am getting older every day and will not be able to work so hard. Also, I want my children to study in a Thai school. They are better than those in Laos. I want to go back to farming because my wife can help me, while in Vientiane she only stays at home and minds the children."

#### ANOTHER SAMLAW DRIVER

"I am thirty-two years old and come from Northeast Thailand. I originally came here five years ago with a girl from Northeast Thailand, leaving my wife and son in my home village. I might not be able to recognize my son now. My father wrote me some time ago saying that the boy is now going to school and that my wife is going to marry another man in the village. I think about all this and long for my wife and son, but it cannot be helped; I cannot go back because I lack money for anything to present to my wife and son. I am ashamed to go back without money or property."

"When I first came to Vientiane there were plenty of dollars, and a lot of money changed hands. At that time I worked in a Chinese shop as a coolie. Every afternoon I had to fill tins of water and sell them from house to house, because there is no piped water in Vientiane. I received a salary at that time of about 10,000 kip a month. I did this work for about two years and then quit.

"Although my salary was good, I was not able to save any money because I spent most of it gambling at the bouns. With some savings I bought a second-hand samlaw for only 4,000 kip. At that time I also bought a small bamboo shack, a new wrist watch and a big gold ring. Now these properties no longer belong to me. I have sold them to a friend from Northeast Thailand. Now I live at this friend's house, and he loans me money. In the evening I eat my fruit and rice and other food with the family, but I have breakfast and lunch in town.

"Though I own my samlaw I have no license for it, because in Vientiane there are now too many samlaws and the police are not giving any more licenses. I have asked for a license but have not been issued one. If I had money to give to the traffic police, I would be able to get a license very quickly, I think. Once I was arrested for not having a license and had to pay a fine of 120 kip.

"I am better off than most of my friends since I do not drink. The income of the samlaw drivers has dropped very much, and I am able to earn only two hundred to three hundred kip a day, much less than in the past few years when there were many dollars and a samlaw driver could earn 1,000 or 1,500 kip in one day. A year or two ago many automobiles were converted to taxis, charging only ten kip for a long or short distance. This is quicker than a samlaw so the people preferred to use it.



Now business is best during the rainy season."

He had spent the previous night gambling at a boun. The games of chance are run by a Chinese and taxed by the government. He said he had lost three hundred and fifty kip, and felt that for every samlaw driver there was only one in a hundred who did not gamble. "But you can never become rich by gambling -- if you win money, your friends will ask for some, or borrow it. I cannot help gambling, because I am unable to control my mind and forbid myself to gamble."

#### TWO SHOESHINE BOYS

Oung is thirteen years old. He is a Kha, but does not know which group he is from. He knows that his people live in the mountains. About two years ago he came to Vientiane from the Province of Attopeu, after his father left his mother, and another man adopted him. While in Attopeu he began school and continued when he came to Vientiane. He said he did not like school and so became a shoeshine boy. One time his father came looking for him, but he ran away. Oung is glad he is now living in Vientiane because it was not very enjoyable in Attopeu, where it is difficult to earn money and there are no movie theaters.

His closest friend is Tat, twelve years old, who although a year younger is much taller and seems more intelligent. Tat's hair is red from the dust in the street, and his short pants are torn. He said he has only one shirt, which he got from an old Vietnamese woman who hired him to massage her. As payment she gave him fifty kip and the old shirt. For about the past five years he has lived in Vientiane. His family moved away and left him with relatives so that he could study. He does not remember what province he was born in, but only that it was near Nong Kai. Tat has an older brother who used to be a shoeshine boy too, but Tat does not know where he is now. He has two younger sisters and two younger brothers. His father is a carpenter.

Tat attended school for two years in his village in Northern Thailand. Then he ran away from school and went to Bangkok, staying there a few days until he was arrested by the police. They sent him to a training school where he spent two months and then ran away. He tried to return home, hitch-hiking by bus and a freight-train. Learning that his parents had moved to Vientiane, he came here and tried to find them by asking people from the Northeast who have their own district along the streams at the edge of the city and finally located them.

Oung claimed he has now forgotten the alphabet which he had learned in Attopeu, and Tat said he has almost forgotten the Thai alphabet. The two boys met while shining shoes, and always stick together. The seldom go back to their parents and return only if they have some money in their pockets. When they earn money they spend it on food, which they

have to buy every day. When they do not earn enough they borrow from their friends. Now they charge five kip for a shoeshine, but three or four years ago shoeshine boys were able to charge ten to twenty kip and could earn one to two hundred kip a day. Fewer people want to have their shoes shined now, so that on some days the boys are not able to earn anything. They spend their time looking for customers in front of the theaters and restaurants, where they are sometimes offered left-over food.

Both Oung and Tat are friends of the Indian watchman at a local movie theater, who also doubles as ticket collector, so they are able to see movies every night if they wish. When they have money they also go to gamble at the bouns.

Some nights they sleep at the movie theater, and on other nights they sleep in vacant buildings. Both said they did not want to study any more but were not sure what they wanted to do when they grew up. Oung felt he would like to return home to his mother, because he had a very great longing for her.

## ANOTHER SHOESHINE BOY

Deng is twelve years old and comes from the town of Udorn, in northeast Thailand. He first came to Vientiane about six months ago before I met him, and he speaks Bangkok Thai and the dialect of the northeast, in addition to his native Lao. His father died when he was a baby and since he was an only child, he remained with his mother, who became a washwoman for a Chinese family. When he completed primary school, his mother became ill, so he was not able to continue in school. After his mother's death he became a vagabond.

He first worked in a welding shop, and then with four friends, hid in a freight car and went to Bangkok. When they reached Bangkok the following morning they walked along the road, visiting many places, and at the end of the day returned to the freight car and went home. After spending several months in Udorn, Deng came to Vientiane, where he met a boy selling ices. He asked to meet the owner of the stand, and got a similar job working for this Chinese man and staying with his family. He could not earn more than twenty kip a day selling ices and after two months decided to become a shoeshine boy.

His shoeshine box is made from an old movie poster. He said he had no relatives in Vientiane, and so he sleeps with friends, usually at different places: sometimes in the pagoda and sometimes in buildings under construction. It is not a problem, because the monks allow them to stay in the wat, and there are also many vacant buildings. He is able to earn up to fifty or sixty kip a day if he is diligent, and sometimes he can earn up to a hundred kip in one day.

Since most of his friends are fond of seeing movies in the afternoon, they earn less than he does. Most of them go to the movies without paying, for they shine the shoes of the ticket-taker who then allows them inside. He is not able to do this if the Chinese supervisor is nearby. He spends money on cigarettes, usually smoking two a day, and sometimes as many as seven or eight. He also likes to gamble with his friends. Sometimes they use money and sometimes cigarettes or playing cards.

He has only one shirt and one pair of shoes but bathes several times a day in the Mekong. He does not worry about clothing because he can buy new clothes if he saves his money for only a few days. He also has to buy matches and candles to have light for playing cards before going to sleep. Sometimes he plays with the pickpockets, who come from Northeast Thailand and Savannakhet. They are older and dress well. Once he was arrested with them, but was released "because he was only a shoeshine boy" although the police shaved his head as a sign that he had been arrested. Most of the shoeshine boys who have had their heads shaved sleep with the pickpockets.

He said, "I would like to go further in school if I had the opportunity, because I think I will not be able to find a good job if I do not have a good education. I do not want to be a shoeshine boy forever, but it cannot be helped for now, because I have no other opportunity. Perhaps when I am older I could repair bicycles, or if I am in Bangkok, I could be a ticket-collector on the bus.

"The falahngs [white foreigners] always seem to have a lot of money, much more than the Lao. Most of them are rich and own automobiles." In reply to a question, he said that he would rather marry a Lao girl than a Thai when he grows up, because "Thai girls are very deceitful."

## BOY STUDYING AVIATION MECHANICS AT THE VIENTIANE AIRFIELD

This seventeen year old boy said he likes to study but is not interested in doing anything into which he is forced. He would like to have a higher education but does not feel it is necessary now, because most of the young Lao people do not have this opportunity. He is interested in medicine and agricultural sciences and thinks they will be good for the country, but his own ambition is to serve in the Lao Air Force.

He would like to see roads built and government buildings constructed and thinks there should be enough schools for the children. He claims he does not take much interest in national affairs other than feeling that his country should be progressive as other nations. He has seen the Crown Prince and the Premier many times. He likes French movies because, he said, he is able to learn the language that way. He has a few foreign friends from France, and some from the United States. He said he appreciates American aid but does not clearly understand its purpose.

IX  
RURAL LAO

THREE LAO TEACHERS

The following extracts from essays written by three village school-teachers illustrate something of the accomplishments and problems from a rural teacher's point of view.<sup>1</sup>

The typical three-year village school has one teacher and is housed in a building of bamboo and thatch with a dirt floor. Crude benches and desks are fashioned from bamboo. Keeping the school-house in repair is a major problem, and it is not always easy to get the villagers to contribute their services toward its upkeep. Supplies of even the most basic materials such as pencils and paper are often grossly inadequate. There are rarely enough primers to go around. The major school support generally comes from the central government.

I am twenty years old. I was born in Ban Pak Ngun, Tasseng of Pak Beng, Luang Prabang Province. I started to study when I was young. When I finished the sixth grade I received a certificate, and I took the examination to be a teacher. I passed it. The government sent me to the Teacher's Training School in Vientiane. After I finished the course I was sent back to my native province, Luang Prabang, and was assigned to Ban Nah Pah, Tasseng Muong Beng, in Luong Sai District. When I reached there I organized the building of the schoolhouse. When the school building was finished I began my class on October 10, 1955. Aside from my teaching, I told the villagers that if anybody was interested in learning [to read and write] and they were over-age (for school attendance) I would teach them any time they were free. Whenever there was a holiday I visited with the villagers to encourage their interest in education.

In this village there are eighty-five houses. It is divided into two sections, one big and one small. The school is in the big section where there are fifty-five houses. I have forty-five pupils, all boys, from both sections ... When they need tools, they come to the school. When someone is sick, I give the medicine that is good for them.<sup>2</sup> I teach the pupils to show respect for country, religion, King and laws.

This teacher, in keeping with Lao concepts of politeness, replied that everything was fine when asked to describe general conditions in

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<sup>1</sup>These essays translated from Lao.

<sup>2</sup>Tools and medicines were supplied as part of a rural aid program

the village where he worked. In response to specific questions about his problems, however, he conceded that he had some difficulties, particularly with regard to keeping the school in repair:

The villagers don't give much support to education and improving the school. When I asked for aid to repair the schoolhouse I had to speak to them many times and then only three or four people came to help, so I couldn't accomplish anything. The two sections of this village oppose working together, and the people are interested in their personal work, too busy to support the school ... Some villagers don't have any children who go to school, so they don't care about the school. They grumble that they cannot earn any money by repairing the schoolhouse. They are not willing to work. Some parents want their sons to work in the fields so they take them out of school and never tell me. So many students are always absent.

Although this teacher mentions some parents' resistance to schooling for their children, particularly when it deprives them of needed labor, there are other teachers who claim that more pupils ask to be admitted than there is room for, necessitating their limiting the size of the class. The foregoing essay points up problems caused by lack of support from villagers who have no children attending school and by inter- and intra-village rivalries which make it difficult for villagers to work together. There is also a certain amount of coercion on the part of some Nai Bans who force children to go to school so that attendance figures desired by the Provincial Education Inspector can be achieved.

The following account is by a teacher at a groupe scolaire in a village which is the seat of a muong.

Ban Fa is a big village with many merchants. There are more than seventy houses here and four other villages nearby. These other villages have merchants too. People came here from the neighboring villages to help build the schoolhouse. It is a clean and nice school. Boys and girls from the other four villages come to learn here. There are eighty-seven pupils. After I had taught here for two years another teacher was sent to be the head of the school. This school became a groupe scolaire. Now there are 156 pupils. The number of boys is equal to the number of girls. They are all very polite and know the rules of the school very well. They also show respect for the customs of the country. When they meet elders or government officials they also show respect.

Every Sunday when I have time I go to see the parents. I talk with them about education and about Laos and other countries.

My living conditions are good because there are many places to find food and a place to fish and hunt. It is easy to buy clothes from a Chinese merchant. Talking about recreation, the village has bouns and the villagers give charity according to custom. There are several government officials here -- teachers, administrators, a nurse, soldiers and police. I have taught at this village for over three years. I have seen that the villagers are interested in their work and obey the government officials. This makes me trust them very much, and I want to continue to stay with them.

In contrast, the following essay is by a Lao teacher in a relatively isolated tribal Khmu village where the level of living is much lower.

There are eighteen houses in this village and there are three villages nearby. There are forty-six pupils, four girls and forty-two boys.

One of the problems in this village is that the drinking water is very dirty. Another is that life is very difficult because when people want something there is no place to buy it. Another is that it is very difficult to travel over the mountain trails. Also it is a big problem when someone is ill because there is no one to care for him. It is very far from a hospital and there is no nurse in the village. This means that sometimes children cannot come to school because of illness. I have taught the children about health matters, to keep their bodies, clothing and homes clean. I try to show them how to exercise. The village elders love me as a second parent.

This is a Khmu village. They clear rice and vegetable fields high up in the mountains. There are no fields near the village because there are no level places. The villagers can grow good crops, and would like to make permanent fields. This is the reason why the mountain peoples have never become civilized. They still show respect to the evil phi.

On holidays I go with the children to take trips to the

forest so that they can see the kinds of trees there are in the lessons. I want to make friends with the children, and I want them to be friendly with me. These trips are also for finding something to eat, and for finding some firewood so that it is possible to read books at night. Every holiday I take children to see their neighbors, to encourage other children to come to school and to make new friends.

The village elders and the children's parents give good support to the school, because they never had a school before. The parents send enough children to school and sometimes more than is necessary. Some of the children want to learn, but others are forced by their parents and they are very lazy. If we divide the pupils into five groups one is lazy, but the other four like school and look after it, clean it and work on the school grounds. When the schoolhouse needs repairs the children do not want the villagers to repair it. They repair it by themselves and they repair the teacher's house, too.

#### A LAO VILLAGE HEADMAN

His village is located approximately twenty kilometers from the town of Luang Prabang, about fourteen kilometers of which are over the main dirt road connecting Luang Prabang and Vientiane, and the remaining six kilometers on a jeepable trail. There are seventy-three houses and under four hundred inhabitants. There is a relatively new village school and a resident teacher. At present only about one third of the men are literate and almost all of the women are illiterate, although there are now some girls attending school. Most of the villagers cultivate slash-and-burn fields, and only a few have irrigated rice fields. They sell pigs, ducks, chickens and bamboo mats in Luang Prabang in order to earn a little cash income. Occasionally some of them work as coolies.

When shown a picture of the Crown Prince (the present King) only one villager was sure who it was, because he had formerly worked as a servant for the royal household. There is a single radio in the village, belonging to the school teacher. The Nai Ban and some other villagers said that they like everything on the radio----music, news and advertisements. Since the station in Vientiane can not be received clearly, they listen to Thai stations which they understand, although not without difficulty.

There are no local health facilities, but there are three traditional herb doctors. The Nai Ban said that if the cures of the tradi-

tional healers do not work well, only then do they think about going to the hospital in Luang Prabang. At the time of our visit the school teacher was ill and was being treated by a village healer. The Nai Ban said that he believed that this local curer was valuable for certain types of treatments only and that those illnesses ascribed to the phi must be treated in another way, by a shaman. Sometimes the monks are helpful in these matters.

According to the Nai Ban there are four people concerned with the village government: himself, two assistants, and one person responsible for relaying news to the villagers, a sort of local town crier. Recently the Nai Ban sent a petition through the Tasseng to the Chao Muong asking permission to resign. The Chao Muong in turn forwarded it to the Chao Khoueng, who gave it his approval. When his resignation was accepted, the Chao Muong sent a district assistant to aid in the selection of a new Nai Ban. The villagers nominated six candidates and then held an election; a ballot box was used and votes were counted by the Chao Muong's assistant.

His resignation was necessary, he said, "because it is too difficult and takes too much time to deal with government officials. I was constantly being called to meetings without being reimbursed for my time or bus fare. I was also annoyed at the requisitioning of cows, buffalo and rice that had been done by the soldiers. Sometimes these requisitions are at the request of the officials such as the Chao Muong, and when I had not complied with them, soldiers were sent to the village. But when I asked for help from the government officials I never received any. For example, our crops are often infested by insects, and despite repeated requests, the government has done nothing about it."

However, in seeming contradiction, he said that the road to the village, a rather rough trail, was built after his request to a member of parliament. The government gave 50,000 kip to each village along the trail. The Nai Ban said this sum was not enough, however, and he had to force the villagers to work on the road.

Quite a different situation is reflected in the development of the pagoda. There are two bonzes and three novices permanently resident in the village. The pagoda itself was built six years ago. Last year a big boun was held in the village to raise money for it. The celebration was advertised in Luang Prabang and elsewhere, and many people came to the village. Some 25,000 kip was raised by lam vong dancing alone, and another 20,000 kip was raised by contributions of those who came to hear visiting monks recite passages of Buddhist scripture. This money was then used to buy materials for the pagoda. Both the monks and villagers worked together in the improvements to the wat. In addition the Nai Ban went to Nong Kai in Thailand to buy gold leaf for further adornment, traveling by air from Luang Prabang and returning by boat.

(It would be hard to over-emphasize the importance of religion in rural Lao life. When funds are made available for rural welfare, they are almost always requested for development of the local pagoda. Certainly it would seem that although religious and commercial contacts with the town are fairly well developed, administrative integration lags far behind. While the Nai Ban gladly made the trip to Vientiane and Nong Kai to buy gold leaf, his relatively expensive travel being financed by village contributions, it was evidently with a great deal of hesitation and resentment that he made the much shorter trips to Tasseng or Muong centers on official administrative business.)

#### LAO MERCHANT ENGAGED IN TRADE WITH TRIBAL GROUPS

Although contact between many of the tribal peoples and government officials is often tenuous, there do exist numbers of Lao and Chinese merchants who go out into the hill-country every dry season to trade with these people, and are often more effectively in contact with them than is the government. The following are some of the comments of a Lao merchant engaged in this trade:

"Most business is with the Meo and Yao. The Yao are more civilized because they have their own system of writing; they are also cleaner, using soap to wash with, and having such items as tables, beds and mattresses. Actually Lao merchants buy only two things from the Meo and Yao: opium and potatoes. In return we sell them salt, red and black cloth for clothing, matches, needles, thread, and plastic beads. We also sell small amounts of condensed milk, iron bars, flashlights and batteries, and shotgun shells."

(This is the merchant's evaluation, and it is possible that the Meo would not agree, particularly with regard to iron bars.)

If the Meo or Yao are not interested in any of these trade goods, they are given silver bars in payment for their opium. The merchant felt that the customs of the Meo were very similar to those of the Chinese. "They are much better craftsmen than the Lao, since they can make guns, knives and all kinds of tools in their villages. They also make cloth from tree bark, and they work very hard to improve their crops and their livestock. Meo crops and animals are better than those of the Lao." The Meo pride themselves on the fact that they are better than the Lao, but they respect the Ho (merchants from Yunnan) whom they feel are richer and fiercer. The Meo deeply respect the Nai Bans of their villages, and when they give orders, all obey.

"When we merchants go to the villages, we work through the Nai Bans. If they agree, we are able to conduct our business; if not, then we leave."

"The Khmu are very lazy, and if they have food to eat, they do not work. In contrast to the Meo, who always keep their promises, very few Khmu bother to do so. Most of them work only during the rainy season when they plant their rice, while the Meo work hard throughout the year. They wear their clothes until they rot and then try to find some money. The Khmu are exploited by the government, and are unlike the Meo who retain their independence. The Meo use the Khmu as coolies and pay them in opium."

#### LAO VILLAGER ABOUT SIXTY MILES FROM VIENTIANE

When asked about the American aid program, one villager first wanted to know what it was and what it had done to help the people. After an explanation had been made, he asked that the Americans be told that the villagers were poor in contrast to the people in the city, and that they needed help. When asked if the Lao people could not help themselves, he said this was difficult to do since the officials steal money from the government.

This man said that in his village, which was the site of a Civic Action model village, the land on which the Civic Action people erected buildings was owned by another villager. The officials from Vientiane told him that if things worked out he would be paid in five years, if not, the land would be returned to him. There is a medical building in this village and a doctor has been promised but has never come. The Civic Action people have erected a fence around their compound and cultivate gardens. The villagers did not ask for this project, but the site was selected by the "Director General". Exactly who he was, or from which government department he came, the villager did not know. He said that the Director General spoke too loudly, and if one was not acquainted with him, one might be afraid.

The villagers are sometimes called to meetings about this project and they were also told to erect posts for a school, but labor for the building was supplied from town. They do not consider the school building thus constructed as their school, but hope to build another near their pagoda. The villager continued, "When officials come to our village they do not visit with us but go to the Civic Action compound. When the Director General comes through he tells us to clean up our houses. Once he ate a meal with us. The Civic Action people built a well with our help, and we villagers use it, but it formerly belonged to one man in the village. Now the well belongs to no one."

When asked what he would really like for his village, the man replied that they would like some stone to pave the road connecting the village with the main road.

X

TRIBAL PEOPLE

TOUBI LYFONG

Vice-president of the National Assembly and Deputy from Xieng Khouang, Toubi Lyfong is the only Meo in the National Assembly. His grandfather was a Tasseng and his father was also an official. He has a brother studying in France and a son at the Lycee in Vientiane. An uncle and a cousin are in the Pathet Lao and he himself is a member of the Rally of the Lao People. He has traveled abroad extensively and is reputed to be quite wealthy as a result of opium trade. His wife and children are Protestant but he has not become a Christian. This is said to be for political reasons. Toubi said there are many Meo officials in the Pathet Lao, but none of them received posts under the integration plan. In addition to those Meo who side with the Lao government and those who favor the Pathet Lao, he indicated that many are neutral. There are some 50,000 Meo in Xieng Khouang Province, of whom approximately 3,000 to 4,000 are Protestants; there are also a few hundred Catholics.

(Foreign Christian missionaries have been active in Xieng Khouang for some time. The Christian Meo seem more anxious to settle on the plains than do other Meo groups, but the na, or paddy land, is hard to find, especially combined with an adequate water supply. In Luang Prabang Province, for example, there is not too much valley land which can be settled in this way. In Luang Prabang the mountain people sell their rice to the valley Lao, who are the traders, while in other areas the process is reversed.)

With regard to participation of the Meo in the government, Toubi said there are now about six nurses in Xieng Khouang, three of whom are women. The situation is fairly good among the Meo in Xieng Khouang, where there are a number of Meo functionaries. There are also increasing numbers of Meo schools and clinics. Roads are being constructed to the villages as part of the rural self-help program. "But this is not the situation in Luang Prabang," Toubi maintained, "where there is discrimination in the administration. There should be a Meo representative on the court, for example, because often the Meo do not know Lao, or speak it very poorly."

Concerning the opium trade he said that currently the price of this commodity is stable. He is against its cultivation, but there remains the problem that there still are smokers. A good deal of the opium is shipped across the border to Vietnam.

Toubi injected a little historical note in our conversation, stating that at the end of the war he sided with the King and the French against Souvanna Phouma and Katay, but that this is past history now and he is good friends with them. (Under the French administration there was a tendency to favor some of the tribal groups.)

With regard to the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests Toubi said, "They say that the old people are not good enough but I believe you must judge an individual on his merits." He strongly implied that the members were using their organization to advance their own career interests. As to young Meo belonging to the CDII, he said they were never asked to join. (This is contrary to what some organizers of the Committee have said, maintaining that their membership included many tribal people including village people in all the provinces.)

During the Civil War Toubi became a member of the government of Prince Boun Oum. Xieng Khonang came under control of the Pathet Lao, but considerable resistance has been reported, particularly from Toubi's home territory.

The following comments about Toubi [Touby] appeared in an issue of a missionary bulletin:<sup>1</sup>

Although Phanya Touby has the official title of Chao Muong Miao (Chief of the Miao) in the Xieng Khouang Province and acts as the governor during the absence of the Lao governor, his influence reaches to all the Miao in Laos. I was told of one who travelled in the north bordering China, found that the Miao tribesmen in that area, although never having seen Phanya Touby, respect him as their great Emancipator.

Touby Ly Fuong (his full name) was the first Miao tribesman to receive a formal education. In addition he has an Abraham Lincoln personality. He is extremely friendly and kind, making no distinction between the illiterate tribesmen who have little or no contact with civilization and the elite Lao Officials ...

#### MEO VILLAGER

He lives in Phou Kao Quai, a large Meo village about 60 kilometers from Vientiane and was originally from North Vietnam. After serving with the French Army during the Indochina War he came here and married a local girl. He presently lives with the family of the Nai Ban, who has the same surname and has accepted him as a member of their clan. He is thirty-two and his wife is eighteen.

<sup>1</sup>The Challenge of Laos, published by the Laos Mission of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, October, 1957.

"Several months ago a Meo who had been in Thailand appeared in our village. He had worked for missionaries in Vientiane for some time. Upon his arrival he announced that God was coming to this village in a jeep. This God was a white Meo with the face of an American and with fingers as big as water glasses. He would wear no clothes. When this God arrived, he would make all the Meo officials in the government. The Meo from Thailand said that anyone who opposed him as the representative of the God would be struck dead by lightning. He stayed in the village for two months, during which time local Meo gave him food. However, when nothing happened, someone reported him to the government, and some soldiers came to arrest him and took him to Vientiane."

(According to the son of the man who was arrested, his father had never been in Thailand, but had spent some time in Vientiane where he became a Christian under the instruction of "the Frenchmen with beards" presumably the local Catholic priests. When his father returned to the village he told them about Christianity.)

#### YAO WORKING FOR CIVIC ACTION

This twenty-four year old Yao tribesman was born in a mountain village near Nam Tha. He went to the Lao elementary school in his village for three years and then continued his education in Nam Tha for one year. For several years he worked as a carpenter in the office of the Chao Khoueng.

He impressed the Civic Action people when they were recruiting, and they sent him to school in Saigon for a few months, where he was instructed by Lao-speaking Vietnamese. He was then sent back to Nam Tha and later assigned to Muong Sing. In addition to Lao and Yao, he also speaks Yunnanese, as do most of the Yao.

One of his aims, he said, is to bring his family down from the mountains so that they can settle in the valley and cultivate irrigated rice fields. He said he likes to live like a Lao, and would prefer also to marry a Lao girl.

In the Muong Sing area, some Yao have begun to cultivate irrigated rice fields with seed, hoes and plows given them by the government. He said buffalo are also supplied. The mountain people come down to the valley only temporarily and retain their upland homes.

His work consisted of giving lectures to Kha Kho tribesmen who had been summoned to Muong Sing for a Civic Action indoctrination course. He also showed government films in the villages.



KHMU CHRISTIAN PASTOR

The interviewee, a Christian tribesman, is forty-eight years old and has a wife and five children. His eldest son is a soldier, and two of his daughters are students in the local groupe scolaire. He was born in the area of Muong Sai in northern Luang Prabang Province. At the age of sixteen he went to Northeast Thailand where he studied for a year in a Thai school. At twenty-six, he was sent to Vientiane where he studied with the missionaries for two years and then returned to Luang Prabang. Since that time he has visited Vientiane twice. He said that if he can pass an examination to be a "professor" he will be able to earn about 5,000 kip a month.

He earns over 2,000 kip a month and is supplied with a house and some furniture by the mission for which he works. They also give his family some clothing. When he stays in his village he gets only 1,500 kip and his food is supplied by the villagers. He prefers to live in town, he said, so that his children can go to school.

Of his group he said, "The Khmu in the area of Luang Prabang town are poor because they are lazy. They don't grow enough rice to feed themselves. Last year all the chickens and pigs in the area died. The Khmu here believe that their 'King' has been born and will come to help them by giving them gold and silver. If anyone works in the fields and grows rice, it means they do not have respect for the 'King'."

This 'King' is said to have been born in a sacred cave in a jungle and not to have had human parents. In time he is supposed to grow stronger, and finally emerge from the cave and come out into the world to help the Khmu. He will help only them. Reputedly, there is one Khmu who went to this cave and saw the 'King'. He said that the interior of the cave was as big as a city and that there were many people there, who speak another language but that it was easy for a Khmu to understand after a little practice. The cave itself was guarded, and it was necessary to ask permission of the guard to enter. According to the Khmu observer, inside everything was very civilized, with "all sorts of things:" cars, boats, airplanes, a lot of silver, gold, clothing, pigs, cows, buffalo, chickens, all of which are to be distributed to the Khmu when the King emerges. The observer continued that when he saw him, the King was still too young and not strong enough to leave. He was not able to take anything with him because the King would not give his permission.

(All the facts on this Messianic cult are not available, but the factor of cultural compensation for the inferior status of the Khmu in social hierarchy is readily apparent. It is also significant that this King is not said to be reestablishing the old way of life but rather will magically bring to his people those modern material goods of which

the Khmu have become aware, but to which they are denied access.)

When the government heard about this movement they arrested some of the people involved. The Khmu went back to work in their fields, but because of the loss in rice yield many were forced to work as coolies in the Lao towns.

The Khmu in the area of Luang Prabang know no handicrafts, but they come to the Luang Prabang market to sell bamboo shoots, betel leaves, mushrooms and banana leaves. Usually they arrive the night before, sleep in the market and sell their goods in the early morning. Then they buy some clothing or food, and return to their villages. A very few Khmu act as merchants, selling buffalo and pigs.

According to the pastor the Khmu in the north, where he comes from, are very much better off, since they work harder and also grow opium. Lao merchants visit their villages to buy opium and offer goods in exchange. The people dislike paper money, preferring silver coins. The pastor said, "The Khmu in my home area live like the Lao and eat better than the Meo. They grow rice and vegetables, but only for their own consumption. This is largely because of the difficulty in transportation. However, when they visit a town they sometimes take vegetables with them. They also practice various crafts such as weaving, blacksmithing and silversmithing. They can make guns, bracelets, necklaces and silver bowls. Usually they do not have to visit the towns, since the merchants come to their villages for opium. A hard-working man is never poor in the north because he is not lazy like the people here, who never work when they have something to eat."

## TAI LU PRISONER

This tribal prisoner claims he was jailed because he was engaged in the opium trade, and that one of the merchants who competed with him wanted him out of the way. He has already spent nine months in jail in Luang Prabang and has to stay another three. There is not enough sleeping space in the jail, so some of the new prisoners have to sleep on the ground, while those who had been there longer sleep on boards. He is permitted out during the day and has worked as a coolie at the government-owned bungalow. At present he is working at the home of the Director of the prison. When he finishes his chores, he is free to wander around the town at will, on the condition that he return to the jail at night. The informant said that many government officials use prisoners as personal coolies.

His own work consists of gathering firewood and hauling water and doing the laundry. He likes working outside the jail because in this way he is able to get better food. Sometimes he is paid for his work. He said, "Last week I built a drain for a government official and received 300 kip. With this money I bought a shirt and some cigarettes."

He said his village, located in Sayaboury Province, is composed exclusively of Tai Lu. There are some hundred and fifty houses and approximately five hundred people. It is reached by a six-day walk over mountain trails from Luang Prabang, or by a two-day river trip by pirogue plus another day's walk. The village is the seat of a Tasseng, and so there are a few soldiers and police stationed there. Since the Thai border is only a two-day walk away, most of its commerce is with Thailand, rather than within Laos. Goods are transported by elephant, of which there are about one hundred in the village. When villagers are in need of jobs, they usually walk to Thailand instead of coming to Luang Prabang or some other Lao town. When they are finished with their work in the rice fields, they may seek jobs in logging camps or a tobacco factory.

"I worked in Thailand twice," the interviewee said, "once for two years and another time for six months. I think living conditions in my village are better than those in the Luang Prabang area, because in the village there is never a lack of rice. For currency we use baht (Thai currency) and old Indo-Chinese and Burmese silver coins. If a person attempts to buy goods in the village with Lao paper currency, the merchants will usually say they don't have anything to sell. Very few people from my village have ever visited Luang Prabang."

(The Province of Sayaboury was formerly part of Thailand. Economic orientation towards Thailand occurs in many parts of Laos bordering on that country since trade and commerce are much better developed there than in Laos. This also tends to lessen the cohesion of Laos as a political unit.)

## A KHMU VILLAGE CHIEF FROM LUANG PRABANG PROVINCE

The interviewee is headman of a village located several kilometers off the road, about a half-day's walk south of Luang Prabang town. It has twenty-two houses and some seventy people. There are several smaller Khmu villages in the vicinity.

When asked what he thought about the people in Luang Prabang, he said that he knew the Tasseng, but that all the (Lao) people who work in the government are bosses. He goes to town once in a while on business. The Khmu also bring vegetables to market, chilis, banana leaves and scallions. They gather the banana leaves from the forest, but they grow the other items in their gardens. Money received is spent on rice or dried meat. The maximum one can earn is 200 kip per trip to the market. If one makes this much money he might buy a piece of cloth. "But," said the chief, "clothing is not very important since even I, the richest man in the village, have only three changes of clothing." He wore an Army shirt which his soldier son had given him last year. He said it was a very good shirt and would serve for at least three years. "Usually," he said, "the young men want to be soldiers because they can have good clothing and enough food, and if an officer likes them, they will be able to get extra clothing and give some to their family." Sometimes the villagers receive old clothes from the Lao. They have no money to buy blankets, so that when it is cold they keep warm around a fire.

When asked if he had any problems, the chief said he had none, but that he would like to have everything that he now lacks. He said the Tasseng has never visited his village, nor has he ever asked the Tasseng for any kind of village help because he would not know how to ask him and is also afraid to do so. He knows nothing of the American aid program and does not recognize any difference between Americans and the French. They are all falahng (foreigners).

EXCERPTS FROM COMMUNIST TRIBAL BIOGRAPHIES

The following two profiles are extracted from Mekong Upstream by Wilfred Burchett (Red River Publishers, Hanoi, 1957) and are included because they represent the Communist viewpoint with regard to non-Lao ethnic groups. In an attempt to emphasize the unity of the diverse peoples of Laos, the Kha are referred to as the Lao Thenh (Lao Teng) or Upland Lao, and the Meo as the Lao Xung (Lao Som) or Lao of the Mountaintops. This terminology has been used by both Communist and non-Communist Lao.

In the parts of northern Lao which I visited, the Lao Thenh lived exclusively on the mountain flanks, but in the south they also occupy the summits. And those who lived on the summits were never conquered by the French. They lived in a state of perpetual revolt and never accepted the colonial-feudal regime imposed elsewhere. Like the Lao Xung, they are naturally wonderful mountaineers and hunters. Darker of colour than the Lao Lum, they are stockily built with the muscular legs of the mountain dwellers. At the time the French arrived, the Lao Thenh were organized in tribes, each with their elected chiefs. Inter-tribal conflicts, mainly over land boundaries and abduction of each other's women were fairly frequent.

Among the Lao Thenh, the chiefs have certain privileges but also responsibilities. On the mountain summits in the South where they resisted the colonialist-feudal regime, the chief owns all the cultivated land and forests within the village boundaries--the latter are usually negotiated with his neighbors. If there is too much land, he may rent part of it to a neighboring village. The chief has a patch of land about the same size as the other villagers but the latter clean it up and cultivate it for him. He has the right to all booty in case of victory in a tribal conflict. He usually has several wives for which however he has to pay the negotiated fees. But if the chief is unsuccessful in negotiating a peaceful settlement of a quarrel, he must put himself at the head of his men in any conflict which results. The Lao Thenh, as hunters, usually have flintlock rifles, but their favorite weapon is the crossbow and poisoned arrows.

The revolt which started in 1910 was led by a 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.

(Ong Keo was later shot by the French in what was supposed to have been a peaceful negotiating session.)

Another tribal chief took up the fight. Komadome 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 neighboring provinces of Saravane and Attapeu. 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, using the people to oppose the colonialists by all means; to refuse to pay taxes, refused to be conscripted into the army or labor service. In order better to propagate his ideas and coordinate activities of widely separated 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 mobilized the major portion of their forces in Indochina against Komadome, massing everything from elephants to fighter and bomber planes against him.

I had the good fortune to meet Komadome's son, Khampan, a sturdy mountaineer with a fine open face, alert and intelligent and who is said to resemble his father closely. He had fought side by side with his father during the latter stages of the revolt.

"My father hated the colonialists from the start," he said. He was only 13 when they invaded our country. Because he never concealed his hatred, he was later arrested by the French and tortured. He learned to read and write while he was in prison. By the time he was released, his friend, Ong Keo, had already started to fight the French. He went straight from the Muong May prison to Ong Keo's headquarters. He had great prestige among our people, and soon everyone from our village went to join him. After Ong Keo was murdered, father was asked to take his place.

"The French thought that after they had wiped out Ong Keo, resistance would cease. They sent a strong force to 'mop up', but my father had prepared an ambush. The enemy were all wiped out. News of this victory spread throughout the mountains and across into neighboring provinces. As the struggle continued, whole villages left their bases to come into Komadome's territory. Others from Lao Thenh villages all over Central and South Laos sent representatives to find out what was going on and what they could do to help. They were so numerous the French could not stop them. Sometimes they arrested people and asked where they were going:

'To see the great chief Komadome,' they would reply. The French would shoot them on the spot.

"When they blockaded our central bases, my father launched a movement to increase production. He started education classes and invented the Khon script for our people. He told our people to resist the feudal regime the French were imposing on us. But the weakness of our struggle was that although we had some alliances with other groups, the French were able to concentrate everything on crushing the Lao Thenh."

Thus ended the Ong Keo-Komadome revolt which started in 1910 and continued without a break until 1937. Komadome was sixty years old when he was killed. Si Thon and the other two brothers were horribly tortured and later taken as far as possible away from the Lao Thenh bases to be imprisoned in the extreme northern province of Phong Saly. Si Thon was sentenced to life imprisonment and the others to 20 years each. When the Japanese took over and the French fled, they took the third brother from the prison to act as coolie and carry their baggage. He has never been seen since. Si Thon and Khampan were liberated during the popular uprising against the Japanese and French in August 1945. They both immediately joined the revolutionary forces and carried on the magnificent traditions of their father by setting up resistance bases in Phong Saly and neighboring provinces. Si Thon became one of the leaders of the Pathet Lao forces and in the administration. Khampan was also a leading cadre when I met him.

Still another member of the family who has carried on the tradition is Xang Kham, eldest son of Si Thon. His story really belongs to another generation's struggle against French imperialism, but it has its roots also in Komadome's revolt.

"After the Japanese took over, my father escaped. But he was rearrested. He was freed again during the August uprising. He set up resistance bases in Phong Saly and then in 1947 came further south and liberated the whole of Xieng Khouang province. The French knew about him and were frightened I might try to join him. I was arrested and beaten up. They kept asking me about my father, but I pretended I was too young when he was taken away to remember anything about him. They set me free but under constant guard. I was forbidden to move further than five kilometres from the village--just enough to work

my 'ray' (hai). It was not until 1950 that I was able to slip away and join my father. By that time he was setting up resistance bases at Muong May, in our native province."

There are an estimated 100,000 Lao Xung in Upper Laos and a few scattered tribes in the centre and south. They have no written language but are regarded as very intelligent and energetic. They have a strong sense of race and a wandering fellow-tribesman can find hospitality in a Lao Xung village far from his own for as long as he wishes to stay. Like most of the mountain people, they are very superstitious and have complicated customs and taboos which are easily violated by the uninitiated. Their women descend to the markets--often a two or three days' journey by foot--to exchange opium, mountain fruits and a fiercely strong alcohol, for textiles, salt and iron for their guns. But they feel uncomfortable in the heat of the valleys and plains and get back as quickly as possible to their mountain tops.

From all points of view, the Lao Xung are excellent allies in wartime, firstly, because of their steadfast, unswerving character. Once a thing is decided, it is for a long time. Secondly, because they occupy the strategic mountain tops. Thirdly, because they are excellent marksmen and natural hunters. Fourthly, because they make their own highly accurate flintlock guns, their own black powder and balls.

Cultivation on the mountain tops is difficult business. Fresh jungle patches must be cut and cleared every year. There is a constant battle between weeds and crops. As the men almost exclusively devote themselves to hunting--and unfortunately also to opium smoking--the main burden of the work falls on the women. The men help with felling the timber but after that the women are the producers. They cultivate the ricefields, the maize and opium patches. They look after cattle breeding and marketing of produce and of course the cooking. Because of the very hard work and long hours, a Lao Xung wife is said to encourage her husband to take a second, third, or even more wives so that the work may be shared out.

The most important Lao Xung chieftain today is undoubtedly Faydang. His role in starting a private war against the

French and how it developed will be presented in due course.

He told me of the revolt started by Chao Pha Pachay in 1918. "It was against the opium tax and the corvee system," he said, "and it started in Sam Neua, in the village of Luong 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, whether they smoked or not. Pachay refused and the people supported him. Then they sent agents from town to round up villagers for labour service. Pachay refused and again the people supported him. Next time the agents came with French troops but Pachay was ready. He ambushed the French and sent messengers to other tribes telling them to resist also. Everywhere our tribespeople led by Pachay rose up against the French. It was a real war. Pachay was a great chief. All of his plans were kept very secret and he was able to take the French by surprise many times. Once when the French were looking for him in the mountains of Xieng Khouang province, he swept down to attack and capture the provincial capital, seizing many arms.

"The French mobilized great forces against him, but Pachay also mobilized our people not only in his own province of Sam Neua but in Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang provinces. They could never defeat Pachay," Faydang said proudly, "but in 1922 they sent in an agent to assassinate him. After that the people were disheartened. We were no longer united. The French massacred our people by the thousands.

"We didn't know how to organize in those days," he said. "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 alone could defeat the enemy. We never even thought of combining with others, because we always believed in the past in directly settling our quarrels, without help from others."

Faydang was chief of a village atop a thousand metre high 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. On one occasion he had left his mountain peak to go to far distant Luang Prabang to demand of the king that he protect the interests of the Lao Xung people and punish the agents who ravaged the region.

"It was in our region where the repression was the most severe," Faydang told me when I asked how he had come to join the resistance movement. "When the Japanese came we had hopes of something better, but they were just the same. Villages were destroyed, crops burned on the ground, our people massacred. The French came back and they carried on in the same way. They set up a post only about seven kilometres from our village," he continued. "Soldiers were sent all the time to pillage our people. They took everything from rice and alcohol even to our buffaloes. Our people were very poor, but even the little they had was taken by the troops. Once they robbed us of our last grain of rice. I had to go down to the plains to buy rice for our own people to eat. On my way back, I was arrested and even the rice I had bought was taken away. It was To Bi and To Jeu (Two Lao Xung chiefs who had collaborated with the French) who caused my arrest. They knew I hated the French. I escaped and went back to the village. The French sent troops to encircle us. With four of my friends and two boys, I slipped through the encirclement at night, into the jungle.

"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 organizers and formed scouts and defense corps."

In August 1950 something quite unique in all Laotian history took place. It was possible only by the patient, difficult work of leaders and patriots like Souphanouvong, Faydang, Si Thon (who had been organizing the Lao Thenh as Faydang had been the Lao Xung), Nou Hac, Thao Seum, Chau Suk Vong Sak--who had been organizing the Lao Lum under the very noses of the French in Vientiane province and others. A congress was held attended by delegates from all the nationalities and all sections of the population. Nothing of the sort had ever been dreamed of before. Souphanouvong traced the history of previous insurrections and of the 1945 uprising. He presented his ideas for a united movement of all the peoples. Faydang had been chosen by the Lao Xung people as their delegate, Si Thon by the Lao Thenh. All the other leading minorities were represented. It was unanimously agreed to create the Neo Lao Itsala, or National United front, and to set up a new government of National resistance. Souphanouvong was unanimously chosen as president of the Front and prime minister of the new government. Si Thon and Faydang also became ministers. From that moment, the struggle of the Laotian people entered a new phase.

Town and countryside were as one, the Lao Thenh "slaves" and the Lao Lum were allies and comrades on a basis of complete equality, "minority" and "majority" peoples were forged into a single, real national entity. The provisional government elected was one which really represented the varied national interests and was of a very different quality to that set up in August 1945.

"When the program of the Front was distributed among our Lao Xung people," Faydang continued, "they saw it answered their deepest wishes. Equality for all races. Nobody had ever spoken of this before. A united fight against the French. We had never thought it possible. Abolition of unjust taxes. The French had burned and plundered our villages, massacred our people, taken our women in collecting taxes in the past. Of course there were difficulties. We could not immediately improve the lives of the people. But it was not long before the people could see the benefits of our alliance with the Lao Lum and others. They felt the efforts made by the Front and government to improve their lives. In place of our poisoned arrows and flintlocks we began to get some modern arms, some automatics and light machine-guns. Great efforts were made to get salt to our villages. The opium tax was abolished and other taxes lightened. We formed women's associations and a youth movement. At first membership was slow. Each village is on an isolated mountaintop and it was difficult to get people together. But after a few months people saw this was a very good thing and they joined up with great enthusiasm. From the self-defense corps we set up guerilla bases, first of all in our own province of Xieng Khouang and then in the neighboring ones. We have 40,000 Lao Xung in our province alone and later on we were able to form whole Lao Xung companies from our guerilla bases and attach them to the regular Pathet Lao forces formed by Souphanouvong.

"The political level of our people was raised as they got together and talked things over. They could clearly see who were our enemies and who were our friends." And as it was with the Lao Xung, so it was with all the minority peoples. Relations between themselves and with the Lao Lum were as between members of one family. Consolidation of forces within the country had its counterpart the following year when Neo Itsala Front delegates, headed by Souphanouvong took part with delegates of the Vietminh and Khmer Issarak to form the alliance between the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and coordinate their fight till final victory.

XI

LAO WOMEN

MADAME OUDONE SANANIKONE

Like her husband, Madame Sananikone knows some English but prefers to use French. She visited the United States under a State Department grant. As President of the Lao Womens' Association, she made the following comments:

"Among the Lao women there is no fight for political equality. They do not feel that they have been oppressed by their husbands. In fact, many people say that it is the other way around. We have no desire to limit the size of our families. Only those who have been abroad and had constant contact with the West have gotten this idea. Lao women do not plan ahead the way Western women do."

We discussed the present status of polygamy in Laos. "There are very few second wives today. If this is the case, the husband keeps each wife in a separate house. Also, the second wife does not have much status for when she goes to market other women look down on her. You can see that this custom is no longer popular when you look at the (late) King and the Crown Prince. The King has many wives, while the Crown Prince has only one. This is also true of the fathers of many government officials; they have had several wives, but their sons have only one. (An example of the current trend is the case of one of the government Ministers who has taken a second wife in a village near Vientiane and maintains a separate home there. This situation is very much resented by the villagers, but they feel they are powerless to act because of his prestige.)

"The Lao Womens' Association is now in the process of setting up an office. Our main work is social service. In the villages, for instance, almost fifty percent of the babies die. At present I am in charge of a home economics school, and I want to give women training in health and other matters. The Pathet Lao use women for propaganda, and we must counter their work. Some of the monks have become very interested in our work, and we have had to explain to them that this is not only a religious program, but one for economic development. The pagoda is the center of Lao life, and when the pagoda is aided, everyone is satisfied."

## GIRL GRADUATE OF COLLEGE

The following biography was written in 1957 by a seventeen year old girl in the graduating class at the college in Luang Prabang. The author is a daughter of a Lao mother and a Chinese merchant father, and is particularly interesting because it illustrates the way in which it is possible for an individual to move from the Chinese sub-culture into the dominant Lao culture. One of her sisters has married a high Lao official, while a brother has followed their father's occupation and has remained within the Chinese community. Written in Lao, this account uses many Thai idioms.

### MY LIFE

My parents have told me that when I was born I was a nice, fat healthy baby, but a naughty one. As a child I always wanted to be the leader and to take things from other children. When I reached the age of four I developed a love for music. When I heard my brother or sister sing I attempted to follow their tunes. When I was five my parents sent me to the Chinese school. They wanted to do this because my father said that I am half Chinese, and it was necessary for me to know the Chinese language. I studied in the beginning class and was friendly with Chinese children of the same age. In my class there were thirty-four pupils.

I worked hard and was interested in my lessons. My parents' interest strengthened my purpose. I was never lower than tenth in the examinations. It was difficult to do better than the boys, but let them be better. Sometimes, however, I did beat them. All the teachers liked me because I was a good pupil, and so my parents said nice things about me. This increased my determination.

At the age of eight I had already studied Chinese for three years. The war stopped my schooling.<sup>1</sup> The French entered Laos and came to Luang Prabang. Since there was trouble the Chinese school was closed and I had to stay home for many months. I waited for the Chinese school to open so that I would be able to study again, but the school was closed permanently because the French would not allow it to re-open.

<sup>1</sup>The Indochina War, during 1948

When I was nine years old my mother sent me to the Lao school, the groupe scolaire. I had a strong desire to learn. In addition to going to school, I helped my parents at home, but it was not hard work. After studying in the Lao school for some time I received a special award from the principal. I tried to work hard so that my parents would think well of me. My best subject was French. I liked mathematics too, but I did not do too well in it.

When I was twelve years old I had smallpox and so wasted a year. I was very seriously ill, and everybody thought I would die. Then, because of my great merit<sup>1</sup> I recovered, and my mind was not affected.

As I went on in school, I began to help my mother more at home and to take my younger brothers and sisters to school. After graduating from the groupe scolaire I entered the college. In the first year I received top honors in the examination. I have never repeated a class.<sup>2</sup>

During my third year in the college I never dreamed I would have the good fortune that came my way: the head of the Womens' Association of Thailand invited some Lao people to visit and study first aid and practical nursing. The government sent a letter to the Minister of Education in Vientiane, saying that ten girls from the college were to be selected from all Laos. From Luang Prabang another girl and I were chosen.

The ten of us received a fine welcome from the Thai, and I saw evidence of the bonds of friendship between Lao and Thai students. I stayed in Thailand for three weeks. I was very pleased when I saw the beautiful green sea. The Director of the Association took us to see many memorial statues, and the USOM photographer in Bangkok took pictures.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>In the Buddhist sense

<sup>2</sup>Repeating grades is a frequent occurrence for Lao pupils

<sup>3</sup>This visit was paid for by the Educational Division of the American aid program, and each girl was later presented with a photograph album of the trip



During the last week of the visit I had some practice in nursing. I was able to broaden my outlook and advance friendship between Thailand and Laos. So I pray with all my heart to be able to go back there again and promote this friendship.

After graduating from the college I went to Vientiane for several months. While there I tried to find someone to study with so that I would not forget my lessons. Then I went to Xieng Khouang with my sister and stayed there a week. There is fresh air there and normal living, and it is a good place. I liked it very much because it is quiet and the scenery is beautiful. I can say of my former life that it is like a dream that goes on continuously.

#### In the Future

I think I am a girl who has merit and is able to learn well. I was born into a good family, my father treats me well, I have always been happy and have been able to continue my studies.<sup>1</sup>

Now I am over seventeen and have finished the college. My parents want me to work. They say it is not necessary for a girl to study any more, but I do not like this idea and I try to persuade them. In my opinion it is important for a girl to have an education. I told my parents that I have made up my mind to study in the Lycee Pavie in Vientiane and they have finally agreed with me. I will try my best, because in Laos there are no girls who have finished the Lycee.<sup>2</sup> I promise that I will be patient until I am enlightened and will try to make my country more civilized. I know that my country has a lack of advantages. Civilization and its advantages do not only depend on men. I think I will be one of the women who will be able to do some good for our country, and I will also advance my status for my own personal and family happiness.

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<sup>1</sup>Unlike a number of other students, this girl does not appear to have had any financial difficulties

<sup>2</sup>This is not strictly true, but there are very few Lao girls who have more than the equivalent of a high school education

If I finish at the Lycee I would like to study in a foreign country because foreign countries are more civilized than Laos. My objective, about which I dream every day, is France and America. I would like to go to America because I have learned that it is the most civilized country and the whole world regards America as superior. It is a beautiful country, has a nice climate and the people are cultured. I am most interested in studying law and diplomacy. I am sorry that in my country there are no women in political life and I hope that after I have finished my studies in Vientiane I will be allowed to study law in a foreign country. I want my country to be civilized and develop like other countries such as America, Japan and Thailand where there are women members of parliament.<sup>1</sup>

I think that medicine is important too, because there is a lack of doctors in Laos. It is good to be a doctor. The people love them, and no one is jealous. A doctor is satisfied with himself, because he is able to help others.

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<sup>1</sup>There is one woman in the National Assembly of Laos

## MY BIOGRAPHY <sup>1</sup>

by

Pinkham Uparavarn

I was born in Luang Prabang, the royal city of Laos, daughter of Thit Leck and Sao Faieng Uparavarn. We had a small bamboo house in Luang Prabang. In that house I was born and lived for all my childhood. We lived a very simple life. My father earned a living making bamboo roof shingles. My parents worked hard in order to support our family of four: my parents, my older brother and myself.

I began school. The first day of September, 1942, was my first day of school. I started in the first grade because at that time we had no kindergarten. After three days I could write the alphabet. I felt that I learned very fast. The school at which I studied was the "Groupe Scolaire de Luang Prabang." This was the only elementary school in the city. I did well during my six years in this school.

My parents were proud of me because I was always a good student. I respected them because they wanted me to have a good education, even though they had not had any themselves. However, my father could read and write a little. During my mother's generation girls did not go to school. If you did, you were talked about. I remember that my father used to help me read the primer after dinner. When I finished school in the afternoon, I helped my mother cook and bring water from the pump in the neighborhood. Every morning I used to get up to cook rice for my mother. She offered it to the monks who passed by our house every day. While the rice was cooking I swept the house, washed the dishes and brought water. When my mother came back into the house I had

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<sup>1</sup>This biography and the one following were written in English at the author's request

my breakfast and went to school. My parents had a low income. I tried to help them but I was so young. When vacation came I used to go to the market and buy fruit to re-sell in the neighborhood. During the two and a half months vacation I earned enough money to pay for my school materials and clothing. Sometimes I could give some to my mother. All the time I went to school I had to work housework for we never had a servant.

At the end of the school year 1947-1948 I took my final examination in primary school. I passed it with good grades. In the fall of that year I enrolled in the first year of the "College de Luang Prabang" which is similar to junior high school. In this school I studied more French than Lao.<sup>1</sup> I was good in French. In the ninth grade I studied English with a French teacher. I made good grades in English too. Since then I have been interested in English. However, I had only three months of English because the teacher left.

Upon graduation from junior high school in 1952, I applied for work in the elementary school in Luang Prabang. I could not go to the Lycee in Vientiane because my parents could not afford it. I had to stop school. For two years I was a practice teacher in the sixth grade, as *institutrice stagiaire*. At the end of two years I took a professional oral examination, passed it, and became a teacher. I taught in the school for three years.

I have always liked music and sports. When I was in college I played badminton and basketball. I played many basketball games when I was in school and also when I taught in the elementary school. As a musician I played the mandolin and guitar. I could not read notes but played by ear.

In 1955 my father passed away. My mother and I went to live in Vientiane, my mother's home town. I taught the sixth grade in the Chao Anon School for one year, and a half year in the Tafforin School; both of these schools are in Vientiane. I began to study English again. I had several teachers who

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<sup>1</sup> Almost all the courses in the college are taught in French by French instructors.

were American, English and Australian. In Vientiane I had more opportunity to study English. I also audited classes at the Lycee Pavie when I had time.

I studied English for over a year before going to the United States. I had never dreamed of going there, for I do not have much education. How happy I was when I heard that teachers who knew English might have a chance to do. In February of 1957 I left Vientiane with some other teachers for the United States. We were selected by our Minister of Education and the United States Information Service to study in the United States for one year.

My trip to the United States was the first time I had been out of Laos. We went via Bangkok, Hong Kong, Manila, Wake, Guam, Honolulu, San Francisco and arrived in Washington, D. C. First I studied English at the American University Language Center for four months, and then at the English Language Institute in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for two months. This first year program was an extensive experience. I met and mingled with students and teachers from all over the world. For the rest of my program, I observed methods of teaching in the elementary schools in different parts of the United States: In Denver, Colorado; in Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Sparta, Tennessee. I traveled in a number of states.

At the end of one year, I felt that my English was very much improved, and I had much experience in observing family and social life. However, I felt that one year of study was not enough if I was going to carry out the work in Laos. Another year was granted me by ICA. In Washington, D.C. I participated in the workshop of the development of educational materials, a project at George Washington University sponsored by the United States Office of Education. At the workshop, I learned techniques of writing and education. I wrote one project "Festival in the Royal City" which was completed at the end of the workshop. During the workshop I took field trips to Blair County School and Penn State University.

In August, 1958, I took the English summer course at American University. In September, I attended the

District of Columbia Teachers' College. There I took two English courses and audited some education courses. Besides this, I prepared for a high school examination offered by the Board of Education of the District of Columbia in December, 1955. I passed the examination and was given a high school diploma. My studies at the District of Columbia Teachers' College were very profitable, as I learned much English that helped me in my high school exam.

I left Washington in the middle of February, 1959. I came home with two girl friends from Laos. We traveled through London, Paris, Geneva, Rome, Istanbul, Teheran, Karachi, New Delhi, Bangkok and came to Vientiane. We stopped for a few days in each place. My trip back home was very interesting and educational, as I saw different people, their ways of living and cultures. My people and foreigners too, asked me, "Which country do you like best?" It was a very hard question for me to answer. I would be mistaken if I said I liked the United States best. However, I feel that the more you stay in one place the more you like it. Because I studied two years in the United States it seems that I like it there more than the places in which I was only for a short time. In the United States I knew the people well. I participated in various aspects of American life. Everything was familiar to me. Of course, I should be mistaken too, if I said that the American people, their ways of living and culture are better than that of the English or French. My idea is that each country has its customs and traditions, and each country has its significance. One country is better than another because of the peoples' philosophy.

The most interesting thing I liked in the United States was democracy. I saw democracy in action there. Americans live in a democracy in their every-day life. It is practiced in different phases of life. I admired the informality of the American people. They work hard, yet they are friendly and helpful to foreign visitors. Everyone has the right to study, to work, to worship and the like. No one is superior to another. The servant is equal to his master. This idea of equality and democracy impressed me deeply. I brought back home with me many new ideas, and I will try to inspire my compatriots. Since I have returned to my country

as a teacher, I would like to improve our educational system and methods of teaching, to revise our school curriculum and to set up parent-teacher associations, which I think would be very helpful. I would like to promote good will and understanding among pupils, teachers, and parents. I also would like to go on with my writing. It would be very helpful if I could write educational materials for the elementary schools in Laos, for we lack so many of them. I would like to teach English to students, too.

As a child I never dreamed of having a chance to go to the United States or around the world. However, I had never let people talk me out of it by saying "Why do you study so much? It is no use for girls to study a lot." It is hard to believe that my life has changed so much, and so have the people of my generation. Only in 1956 were women given the right to vote and hold office. For a long time the women in Laos did not have the same opportunity as men. However, women employees are paid the same as men provided they have the same qualifications.

I think that education has a strong influence in changing the way of life of women. The most important duty of today's women is not only to be good wives and mothers, but also to play an important role in the society in which they live. They should be aware of current events in order to keep up with what is going on in their society, and assist in government projects in community development and social welfare. They should bring up their children to [maintain] a good standard of living, to make them good citizens, and give them a good education which will be a precious fortune for them. These children in turn should do the same for their children.

My recent trip to Manila with a group of ten Lao women for the General Federation of Women's Clubs was very profitable. There I met women from fourteen Asian countries. We discussed the situation of women in the world today. We exchanged ideas. It was most interesting for Lao women to see how civic-minded and cooperative their Asian sisters are. We also visited Social Welfare projects outside of Manila. These were a school for the physically handicapped and self-help projects.

From this trip I was stimulated to set up another association for Lao youth. However, we already have in existence a Girl Scout Club. I would like to work with young girls still in school in Vientiane. I hope this association will promote friendship and understanding among school girls.

#### MY BIOGRAPHY

by

Phengsy Manoroeth

I was born in Luang Prabang in the Ban Mounna neighborhood of the town. When I was a child I accompanied my parents to Muong Pakseng and other areas in the north of Laos, where by father worked as Chao Muong. We moved from Muong Sai to stay in Luang Prabang. There I attended school from the first grade through junior high school. I started my first year in school in 1944, at the elementary school. Then I went to the college and graduated in 1953. Then I went to work in the elementary school in Luang Prabang where I taught two years as a student teacher. I passed my teacher's examination in 1955. In 1956 I moved to Vientiane where I worked and studied English for six months.

Fortunately I was among the teachers selected to study in the United States under the International Exchange Students program. We left Vientiane on February 25, 1957, and arrived in Washington, D. C. early in March. When I first arrived in the United States I was fascinated by the big crowded city of San Francisco, which is very different from my country of Laos. Then we went to study at the English Language Center of the American University in Washington, D.C. for four months. After this, I attended the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan. Subsequently, I was sent to the Illinois State Normal School to study methods of teaching in elementary school. I spent a few months there and then went to Swampscott, Massachusetts, to visit some elementary schools and came back to Washington in February, 1958. After a year of study in the United States, I felt that I had improved my English and my knowledge of elementary education, and also of American life in the United States. Everywhere I went in the U.S. I found that American people

whom I met were so nice and kind to me. They were very friendly, and interested to know about the peoples, customs and traditions of Laos. I was so pleased to talk with them and tell them about my country and to make my country known in the United States. My program with the I E S was completed in February, 1958, and I was selected by my government and the United States International Cooperation Administration as a participant in a technical training school program. We had a textbook writing workshop session at George Washington University. ...In the workshop everyone of us wrote a book that we needed for young school children in our country. This was my first experience in writing. I had never done any writing before. I decided to write a supplementary reading book for children in second and third grades. My textbook is "My Mountain Home." It is a story of a little girl who lived in a high mountain village near Luang-Prabang. This work was completed on July 31, 1958. After this workshop on textbook writing, I attended the English course for foreign students at American Univeristy...and then took, and passed the high school examination.

In my own opinion, I found that every country is beautiful, but since I just visited for a short time I was not able to tell which country I liked best. The only country in which I had been for a long time was the United States, where I knew people very well and I had good friends, so I liked it very much, of course. The United States is more beautiful and more modern than our country. People don't have to work hard. Everything is done by an electric machine. I would like very much to have taken back to my country all kinds of electric machines used in the United States.

## DARA VIRAVONG<sup>1</sup>

Dara is the daughter of Maha Sila and Nang Mali. She is the second of eleven children and was born on July 2, 1940. She is nineteen. When she was an infant she moved with her parents to Bangkok and then to Nong Kai, Thailand. There she studied the Thai language. After eight years in Thailand her family returned to Vientiane. She entered primary school and then studied in the Lycee. In 1957 she received her diploma and became a teacher at the Tainoi School.

She won a debate in competition with twelve men. The debate was sponsored by the Lao Junior Chamber of Commerce and held at Vieng Sami Theater on August 23, 1958. She was acclaimed by the majority of the people who attended this debate. Princess Savivan awarded her a silver tray. People said that she not only won the debate but that she also was very beautiful.

For a time, Dara was very much appreciated by the public. She was a radio news announcer and is interested in literature and fond of listening to music. She also goes to the movies occasionally and sometimes to parties. She continues teaching in the sixth grade in Wat Tainoi School.

The following are captions to the photos accompanying the article:

- At seven o'clock in the morning she leaves for school
- She willingly teaches her pupils
- After school she always waters the flowers
- In the afternoon she helps in the kitchen
- At mealtime all members of the family come together as is Lao custom
- She washes and irons the clothing of her parents, sisters and brothers
- After finishing all the housework, she is always at her desk preparing for next day's teaching. Sometimes she writes down her thoughts

Dara Viravong was asked by the present writer to tell about her life and the problems of her country. She prepared the following essay in French:

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the magazine "Laos" appearing in summer, 1959. This is the first privately published Lao magazine. It is printed in Bangkok and features illustrated popular biographies. This one is interesting in that it represents the first attempt in Laos to publicly glamorize a career girl.

## WE ARE THE YOUNG WOMEN OF LAOS

by Dara Viravong

### Our Life

We are enraptured with the land of our birth, even if she does not permit us to open our windows on the rolling waves of the vast ocean or on cliffs of white snow.

We have our Mekong, our plains, our mountains with numerous streams and rivers. The physical setting of our country goes well with the human spirits that inhabit it. It is peaceful and tranquil.

Our family life fits our circumstances. By this I mean we do not have servants. All our work, be it easy or difficult, is performed by helping one another. Every day Father and Grandfather are busy in the garden and in cleaning up our house compound. Mother goes shopping, while the elder sister serves breakfast, and afterwards the little ones will go to school.

At noon the same scene takes place. But in the evening everyone helps. The older children pump water. The younger ones help in cleaning up around the yard. On days off, we do our laundry. Then we take walks in the orchard or in town.

Our educational system functions well. The government has tried to assist us in every way. In the primary schools they have loaned us books. In the Lycee we have new courses in foreign languages such as English.

We go forward on our own and if possible, attempt to pursue our studies at a foreign university with the aid of a national scholarship or from certain international associations which have come to admire and consider us seriously.

### Change and Education

Since independence many new things have appeared in our country. Now women are equal to men. We have obtained the right to vote. This shows that women as well as men are capable of accomplishments.

Normally, before we know what we can do, it is necessary to study. We are now studying harder than before. The instruction we receive makes us rejoice and some of us have our diplomas. Now that we have awakened to the value of study it is necessary for others to follow.

One of the important changes is this miracle of the birth of English language study here in Laos. We say "birth" because formerly we ignored it completely. It has been born and grows day by day. We could care for it with patience as if it were a sweet baby for us to adore forever. The English language has shown us a wonderful way in which we can make changes and look for ways to improve ourselves.

### Social Life

Aside from our studies, we have also changed in our social manners. Associations have been created which have permitted us women to take our first steps. Formerly we were accustomed to remain in a corner, leaving the men to participate in festive receptions. Thus the creation of associations and clubs is certainly something strange. Thanks to our education and the knowledge of our rights, we are beginning to be responsible in new roles. There are in Laos among these newly created clubs, two which are most suited to our tastes and inclinations: Femmes Lao and Guides Lao. The basis of these women's associations is the hope of aiding children and of brightening and improving the situation of Lao women, in order to seriously pursue our march to civilization as the women of other countries have done. The Lao Women's Association is a good example. They have done fine acts of charity, undertaken various kinds of aid and also participated in international affairs. The Lao Girl Guides are still weak and hardly known at all. Its intention is to instruct young girls to become true Lao women, new women who will be capable of everything, in spirit as well as deed.

SAVANDARI SANANIKONE<sup>1</sup>

### Biography of the Cover Girl

She is the daughter of Ngon Sananikone (Minister of Justice in the 1960 Lao government), former Minister of Education. She is a student at the Lycee. She was born in Savannakhet on November 11, 1940. At that time, her father was a teacher there. When she was small, she went many places with her family. When she was three years old she went with her parents to Thakhek where her father became Deputy Governor. At six she followed her family to Vientiane and two years later they went to Saigon. At nine she entered the Lycee Saigon. Later they returned to Vientiane and her father became Minister of Agriculture. In 1953 she accompanied her father to England when he became Ambassador. In 1954 her family returned to Vientiane and she has remained here since then.

Her fame has become so widespread that people say she is the "Amara of Laos" (Amara is a Thai movie star). Some people say she is the "Chan Chen Wan of Laos" (A Hong Kong movie star). But she says that

<sup>1</sup>Translated from the magazine "Laos" Summer, 1959.

it is better to be the "Savandari of Laos." She is a favorite daughter of her parents. She is intelligent and modest and shows respect to old people. She can speak Lao and French, and some English, Thai and Vietnamese. She is interested in movies and songs. Her social life is well known. At present she continues her studies at the Lycee Pavie.

#### Captions of the Photographs Accompanying the Article:

- She makes her bed every morning before going to school although her family has a servant
- After finishing her housework she always dresses up
- In her spare time in the afternoon and evening she takes a rest in the garden
- After her class she is fond of reading a magazine
- She likes to be with friends

#### WOMEN VEGETABLE SELLERS

"I live in a village about ten kilometers from Vientiane, but I used to live in a village in the Province of Sayaboury, several days by pirogue to the north of Vientiane. I moved because it is a forest village and most of the people there have no money unless they can plant some vegetables and sell them. I heard that in Vientiane it was easy to get money, so I came here."

A friend, who was sitting in on the conversation said, "I am from Northeast Thailand, and my family moved to Vientiane because we heard it was very developed and there was money to be made. We sold our land and farm and moved here. When we first arrived, we received some aid from the government, a little rice, but now we do not receive anything."

The women go to market to sell sugar cane, peppers, papaya, bamboo shoots and other vegetables, sometimes acting as intermediaries for the local farmers. If they sell all their produce they are able to earn up to two hundred kip a day, but their usual income is about one hundred kip a day. They spend the money to buy rice, salt and fermented fish. They seldom buy clothes, but when they have some extra money they buy cookies for their children.

Last year they saw some government films at a funeral ceremony at the wat. They like all types of films because they feel they are both entertaining and interesting, but they have never seen a film in a Vientiane theater because it is too expensive.

They feel their village is going to be improved now. Some people asked Prince Souvanna Phouma, who lives nearby, for a school for the children. As a result of their request a school was recently opened,

with about thirty pupils and one teacher, who was formerly a monk. There is no clinic or doctor in their village, but occasionally Souvanna Phouma sent a medical team there.<sup>1</sup> One of the women said she does not allow her eldest daughter who is twelve years old, to go to school, but the second eldest who is eight, is able to attend. Since the family is poor the eldest must remain to take care of the baby, since she must go to the market and her husband is a gardener.

She has no idea what her children can become when they grow up, but she said it depends on their boun, or fortune. She would like them to be Chao Nai, or high officials. (This is an almost universal wish among Lao parents generally.) If they do not have good boun, it is enough if they are literate.

These women feel they would like the government to help them with many things, because they are poor. They would like help with rice, food and some clothes, and it would be nice if the government could construct a better road to their village. Now the road reaches only to the gate of Souvanna Phouma's home, and the path after that is still muddy. For each trip to market they must walk along the muddy path until the paved road begins, where they can take a bus. They always used to see Souvanna Phouma around, but they have heard now that he has gone abroad. They do not know exactly what he does.

They have heard that the present Premier is Tiao Phoui, whose picture they have seen only at election time. They said that perhaps they would be able to recognize him, but they have never seen him in person. As far as the King and the Crown Prince are concerned, they have seen their pictures but cannot tell them apart. They only know that both of them are fond of wearing the sampot (traditional Lao male attire).

One of the women said, "There is a wat in our village and most of the village people support it. As villagers we have never had an opportunity to see many things, and when we come to town we see that everything is well developed and prosperous. We like Vientiane and its prosperity, but it is hard to earn a living."

They said they know nothing about American aid, except that a few years ago there were dollars, and now they do not hear about them any more.

<sup>1</sup> This is in the same pattern of paternalistic relationship practiced by other politicians in Laos.

OLD LAO WOMAN VENDOR

An elderly Lao widow in the Vientiane marketplace said she buys leftover rice the monks do not eat. With it she makes rice cakes and brings them each morning from her village on the outskirts of Vientiane. She tries to support herself in this way since she has no children and lives with relatives.

She said, "Now many vendors, wives of local police, soldiers and government officials, come to sell things in the market. A few years ago the same women came only to buy. Things were better before because one could earn more selling."

She said she sometimes goes to see films shown at bouns held in her village wat but said that if she were shown pictures of the King, the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister she would not be able to tell them apart. As far as any change in her way of life is concerned she said, "All I want is to have enough to eat and time to go to the wat."