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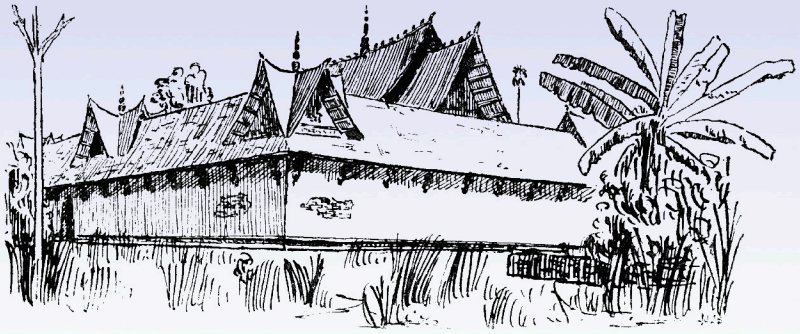

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The study of Laos and the Lao has grown significantly over the past decade. With the opening up of some historical and manuscript archives, the improvement of communication and transportation, and the launching of joint Lao-foreign research projects, Laos has attracted a number of new scholars in diverse fields of expertise. The *Journal of Lao Studies* (JLS) is an exciting new scholarly project which is expected to become the first and most prestigious venue for researchers who work on Laos.

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Language: Lao and English are the main languages, other languages are welcomed. Please check with the editors first before submitting articles in other languages not listed here.

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Research Essays

Muscular Buddhism for Modernizing Laos[1]

by Simon Creak[2]

Abstract

In royalist Laos, physical culture constituted a kind of "muscular Buddhism" that drew on the character- and state-building logic of European muscular Christianity, but was also enmeshed in the ideas and practices of Buddhism. Far from being supplanted by modern notions of physical culture, Buddhist ideas of merit and physicality offered a means for translating these practices into the Lao vernacular and experience, making them comprehensible as auspicious acts in the local cultural milieu. This process of translation inevitably changed meaning. Unlike the English or French "discipline," the Lao *labiap-vinai* was inextricably tied to notions of monastic discipline. Likewise, developing bodies was rendered into the Lao language as a meritorious act, which was necessarily absent from European notions of physical culture. This article draws these conclusions through a close study of the magazine *Seuksathikan* (Education, 1958-70), which was designed as a handbook for teachers in the Royal Lao Government's public education system. As a key tool and record of the process of translation, the magazine offers insights into parallels between monastic and military cultures and the militarization of political culture in Laos, both before and after 1975.

Introduction

Laos was a place of dynamic exchange and interaction in the 1960s and early 1970s. It may have been true, as journalistic stereotypes had it, that small and thinly-populated Vientiane provided respite from the war in Vietnam and the bustling centers of Saigon and Bangkok, but the country's unique role in the Cold War meant it was also a meeting place of people, ideas, and money. Vast amounts of foreign aid epitomized Laos' place at the intersection of international cultural currents. Just as the Lao communists depended on Vietnam, the Soviet Union and China, the Royal Lao Government (RLG) received abundant military and civilian aid from the United States and other anti-communist nations. Despite their policy of non-alignment, neutralists also received substantial aid from various sources. In the RLG zone, the influx of money saw the establishment and development of national institutions, the transformation of cities, especially Vientiane, and the proliferation of "Western" consumer culture, particularly in the form of automobiles, fashion, and

[1] This article is part of the Australia Research Council Discovery Project "Handbook knowledge and the environment in Thailand." I would like to thank Craig Reynolds and Andrew Walker for the opportunity to work with them on this project and for discussions that have helped to improve this article. The article has also benefited from discussions with Matthew Allen, Nathan Badenoch, John Holt, Junko Koizumi, Amrita Malhi, and Saowapha Viravong, though I alone am responsible for any mistaken interpretations that remain. An earlier version titled "Gender, Language and the Body: Manual Knowledge of Physical Culture in Postcolonial Laos," was presented at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Adelaide, 5-8 July 2010.

[2] Simon Creak is Hakubi Project Associate Professor in Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies. He is currently finalizing a book manuscript, based on his PhD dissertation (ANU, 2010), on the history of sport and physical culture in modern Laos, as well as beginning a new project on the history of the South East Asia Peninsular and Southeast Asian Games. Simon has also published recently on the 2009 SEA Games in Laos (*Anthropology Today* 27, 1, Feb 2011).

music. A small intelligentsia emerged from returned graduates of foreign universities, the members of which debated nationalism, modernization, and development in emerging newspapers and magazines. These changes had a profound impact, heralding a "new sensibility" in elite society in Laos.[3]

In contrast to the political intrigues and military battles of the period, little sustained attention has been paid to these social and cultural transformations. Where they have given attention to these aspects of the period, historians, like Vietnam War-era journalists before them, have tended to focus on the spread of popular culture, the loosening of cultural mores, and conservative and nationalist responses to these transformations on both sides of the political divide. Royalist elites in Vientiane were alarmed by the breakdown of traditional morals and culture, especially among the young, as materialism, alcohol consumption, and prostitution increased visibly. Wives of the elite in the Lao Women's Association campaigned for a clampdown on prostitution while monks "implicitly condemned American influence in sermons calling for a return to traditional Lao values."[4] On the other side of politics, Neo Lao Hak Xat (Lao Patriotic Front) propaganda exploited themes of foreign aid dependence, Western culture, and moral decline. After 1975 these issues formed the basis of the Lao People Democratic Republic's "revolution in culture and ideology," its ultra-conservative backlash against royalist "decadence" and "the wicked poison of the ideology and culture of neo-colonialism that the American imperialists and reactionaries introduced and propagated throughout our country."[5]

Given the vitriolic zeal with which this "revolution" was pursued, including the establishment of *samana* (reeducation camps), it is not surprising that discussion of foreign influences in royalist Laos has been dominated by the conservative reactions they elicited. This focus on the denunciation of foreign influence fails, however, to take into account the sociology of knowledge formation in royalist Laos, particularly the ways in which foreign interventions and ideas shaped Lao intellectual history. This article seeks to address this lacuna by examining handbook knowledge about physical culture in *Seuksathikan*, a magazine for teachers containing theory and practical tips on a wide range of education issues, including physical culture and education. The knowledge contained in the magazine is historically contingent, providing a window into the social and cultural milieu that shaped it. Since this knowledge pertains to physical culture and practices, moreover, it demonstrates how ideas were materialized and experienced. Handbook knowledge about physical culture thus provides the historian with an unusual but especially meaningful perspective on how Laos' immersion in regional and global flows influenced ideas and practice in the country, or, to reverse the perspective, how the Lao cultural milieu appropriated and reshaped foreign ideas and culture.

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[3] Grant Evans, *The Politics of Ritual and Remembrance: Laos since 1975* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 152-53.

[4] Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 156. See also: Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos: The Land in Between* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2002), 155.

[5] Kaysone Phomvihane, "Lainya mai, thitthang mai, nathi mai lae bang banha pheunthan pheua happakan saisana khong sangkhomninyom" [New Era, New Direction, New Tasks and some Basics for Guaranteeing the Victory of Socialism] in *Niphon leuak fen 2: kiaokap kansang setthakit nai samai khamphan kaokheun sangkhomninyom* [*Selected Writings: Volume 2: Concerning Economic Construction in the Period of Transition to Socialism*], ed. Kaysone Phomvihane (Vientiane: Lao PDR Publishing Office, 1977), 62-63.

Manual knowledge and physical culture

Handbook knowledge is the kind of knowledge recorded in manuals and handbooks to facilitate its practical use. We all know of and have used such handbooks: teaching manuals, child-rearing handbooks, recipe books, and travel guides informing us how to behave in a foreign country. As these examples suggest, manual knowledge, as it is also known, has been reinvented in recent years as it has proliferated in various forms on the Internet. In mainland Southeast Asia, handbook knowledge has long provided a means of preserving, retrieving, transmitting, and consuming knowledge about a wide range of social, cultural, and economic fields. Writing on handbooks in Thailand, Craig Reynolds surveys subjects as diverse as cosmology, astrology, grammar and versification, medical knowledge, the arts of war, and how to be modern. Of the genre's significance he concludes: "Manuals facilitate teaching and learning. They facilitate the exercise of power and authority, and yet they are also empowering. They are aids for living, and for helping people take care of the body, the soul, and the mind."[6]

As a product of its time and place, manual knowledge also offers insights into processes of knowledge formation. In particular, it sheds light on the integration of what is often called "indigenous" and "scientific" knowledge, as well as the integration of other binary couplets used to describe knowledge (i.e., local/foreign, rural/urban, elite/non-elite, secular/religious, etc.), which tend to reify these categories more than they reveal the complexities of how knowledge works.[7] While it has become commonplace in recent decades to observe that the "hybrid formation of knowledge" is a quintessentially "postcolonial condition," less attention has been given to the means of achieving this hybridity.[8] Manual knowledge represents a "bibliographic laboratory" for exploring processes of knowledge formation with a level of empirical rigor lacking in studies of a predominantly conceptual and theoretical nature.[9]

Though little has been written on the topic, manual knowledge in Laos would appear to share many similarities with that in Thailand. In both countries the most common term for a handbook is *khumeu*, which, as in the English "handbook" or "manual," incorporates the word "hand" (Lao: *meu*, French: *main*, hence *manuel* and manual). Also, as in Thai, Lao handbooks can be called *tamra* and *khamphi*, often interchangeably, despite the fact that *khamphi*, for instance, also has the narrower meaning of "scripture" or "treatise."[10] We know much less about the extent to which pre-colonial Lao courts consulted treatises on warfare and other manuals, as did their contemporaries in the Siamese and Burmese courts.[11] However, Justin McDaniel's recent study of monastic education demonstrates the equivalent importance in Lao and Siamese kingdoms of various genres of texts – *nissaya*, *namasadda*, and *vohara* – used to teach Buddhism. In overlapping ways, these texts functioned as manuals, providing teachers with the tools to relate Buddhist and

[6] Craig J. Reynolds, *Seditious Histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2006), 241.

[7] Reynolds, *Seditious Histories*, chap. 10.

[8] Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 157.

[9] Nicholas Farrelly, Craig J. Reynolds, and Andrew Walker, "Practical and Auspicious: Thai Handbook Knowledge for Agriculture and the Environment," *Asian Studies Review* 35, no. 2 (2010): 238.

[10] Allen Kerr, *Lao-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1992), 195.

[11] Reynolds, *Seditious Histories*, 229.

other teachings to their pupils. The fluid, informal, and annotated character of the texts offered insights into the idiosyncratic nature of pedagogy, which depended far more on the teacher than the cannon.[12]

Physical culture, the other key concept in this essay, can be thought of as "body work." The Lao term for physical culture, *kainyakam,* combines *kainya* (Sanskrit: *kaya/kayaka*), body or corporeal, with *kam*, a Sanskrit-derived word for work or labor. A similar term, *kainyaborihan,* combines *kainya* with *borihan,* a Pali-derived word for work. In specific usage, both *kainyakam* and *kainyaborihan* can mean gymnastics or calisthenics but, more broadly, this kind of body work also encompasses sport, physical education, and other types of physical training.[13]

While it is difficult to reconstruct pre-colonial physical culture, colonial physical culture was introduced to Laos from the 1920s as part of French military preparation and physical instruction programs. After being consolidated in the 1930s, sport and physical culture emerged as a central plank of the Lao Nhay (Great Laos) movement (1941-45), the local version of the Vichy "National Revolution," which aimed to defend the "Lao race" from the pan-Tai irredentism of Thailand and to keep the Lao faithful to France.[14] Adapted from the so-called National Revolution in Vichy France – in reality, an ultraconservative backlash against "decadence" – colonial officials used physical culture extensively in their paradoxical attempts to foster a "proto-national" Lao identity within Indochina and the French Empire.[15] The juxtaposition of physical culture and nationalism intensified after independence in the early 1950s. In a fledgling country propped up by French and then American aid, physical culture linked healthy bodies to a strong nation, one of the few expressions of nationalism the state could draw on at a time when an alternative communist vision of the Lao future was being forged by the Lao left and the Vietminh.[16] By the early 1960s, sporting events and physical culture were established as major aspects of national and regional statecraft, and, as in colonial times, they were notable for their institutional and philosophical connections to the military. This was demonstrated most emphatically in the National Games of 1961 and 1964, a pet project of right-wing strongman, General Phoumi Nosavan, and the South East Asia Peninsular (SEAP) Games, founded in 1959 by the Olympic Committee of Thailand (OCT).[17] Though further work is required to understand the military networks involved in the regional sports scene, the OCT president at this time was General Praphat Charusathian, a protégé of military dictator Sarit Thanarat, who, in turn, was related to Phoumi.

Besides major national and regional events, physical culture was promoted at the popular level through the nascent military, which expanded dramatically

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[12] Justin Thomas McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008), chap. 4.

[13] Simon Creak, "'Body Work': A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Colonial and Postcolonial Laos." (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2010), 14.

[14] Soren Ivarsson, *Creating Laos: The Making of a Lao Space between Indochina and Siam, 1860 -1945* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), chap. 4.

[15] Creak, "Body Work," chap. 2. Note: The term "proto-national" is borrowed from Soren Ivarsson, who describes Vichy-era historiography in this way. See Ivarsson, *Creating Laos*, 116.

[16] Creak, "Body Work," chap. 3.

[17] Simon Creak, "Sport and the Theatrics of Power in a Postcolonial State: The National Games of 1960s Laos" *Asian Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (2010): 191-210. See also, Simon Creak, "Representing True Laos in Postcolonial Southeast Asia: Regional Dynamics in the Globalization of Sport," in *Sports Across Asia: Politics, Cultures and Identities*, eds. K. Bromber, B. Krawietz, and J. Maguire (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

between the late 1940s and the 1960s. The Lao military was formally created in 1946 by a military convention appended to the Modus Vivendi founding the unified Kingdom of Laos, and France enlisted Lao military forces in the First Indochinese War. From 1946 to 1954 perhaps 50,000 men served in Lao units of the French Far Eastern Ground Forces. A further 30,000-40,000 served with the Lao National Army between its formation in 1950 and 1954, when the French officially withdrew from Indochina.[18] The army continued to expand thereafter as US military aid replaced French assistance. As in similar institutions elsewhere, physical culture was integral to military training: "Rather than being born with the body of a soldier, a man became a soldier – and a soldier a man – through the transformations that occurred in his body."[19]

Militarized physical training also took place in other institutions. In 1950 the defense ministry established the École Nationale des Cadres de Jeunesse et d'Éducation Physique (ENCJEP, or, in Lao, *Honghian oplomkhru nyuvason lae kainyaborihan*) in Vientiane. Teachers, civil servants, and other trainees completed 45-day leadership courses at the school. Explicitly based on the scout movement, which also expanded in post-war Laos, the ENCJEP program included physical training, general education, and manual work, all of which had been important elements of Vichy programs in France and Indochina. Replicating Vichy-era youth movements, trainees wore blue and white uniforms and carried out physical training in nothing but shorts and sandshoes. Together with the school's official "Olympic salute," which was in fact identical to the salute made notorious in fascist Germany and Italy, the uniforms and training reinforced the military culture of the school. The use of the salute so soon after the Second World War, though jarring, did not represent Nazi sympathies. Rather, it seems to have demonstrated the application of colonial physical culture – with all of its militarist underpinnings – to the new task of building a postcolonial nation.[20]

The government education system underwent similar expansion in the post-war period. Growth had begun during the Lao Nhay years but accelerated significantly after that. Between 1945 and 1959 the number of primary schools grew almost eight-fold from 187 to 1481 while the number of pupils increased from under 15,000 to nearly 100,000 (Figure 1). The vast majority of these were "rural schools," proving that the expansion of secular education was much more than an elite or urban phenomenon. The United States Operations Mission (USOM) estimated in 1955-56 that 15-20 percent of eligible school-age children were attending government schools, a small proportion but much higher than in the past.[21] While statistics are not available, the number of locally-trained teachers would also have increased substantially after Laos' first teacher training school was established in 1946, though demand continued to outstrip supply.[22]

[18] Michel Bodin, "Les laotiens dans la guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 230 (2008): 5-19.
[19] Creak, "Body Work," 140.
[20] Creak, "Body Work," 116-22.
[21] Joel M. Halpern, *Aspects of Village Life and Culture Change in Laos* (New York: Council on Economics and Cultural Affairs, 1958), 132-33.
[22] Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 77.

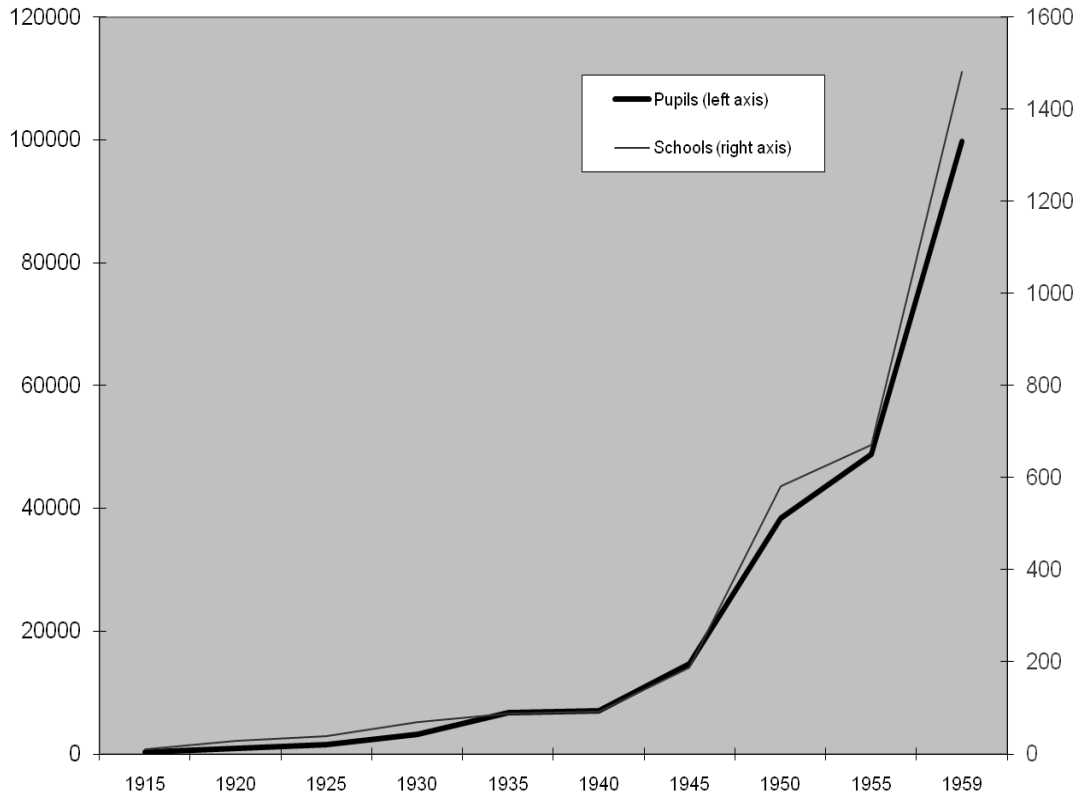

Figure 1: Primary pupils and schools in Laos, 1915-1959 (Halpern 1964, appendix 2, table 6).

The growing government education system represented a shift away from that based in the Buddhist monasteries (*vat*). According to anthropologist Joel Halpern, who conducted extensive fieldwork in Laos during this period, this shift occurred without major incident, "since the school teachers [were] invariably devout Buddhists themselves and some religious education [was] incorporated into the curriculum."[23] Rather than dislodging existing hierarchies, moreover, village teachers joined the local abbot and village head as "leaders of the village," providing a largely positive link between the village and the central government that contrasted with the reputation central government officials had for being arrogant.[24]

Seuksathikan

The philosophy and content of education in the expanding system was relayed to teachers through manuals and handbooks, which came in various forms. One such medium in Laos was *Seuksathikan* (Education), a magazine for teachers published by the Ministry of Education between 1958 and 1970 (Figure 2).[25] Reflecting the new sensibility of the royalist period, this was one of several magazines published to promote culture and religion in the young nation of Laos.

[23] Halpern, *Aspects of Village Life*, 132.
[24] Halpern, *Aspects of Village Life*, 131.
[25] An almost complete run of *Seuksathikan* is held in the library of the École française d'Extrême-Orient in Vientiane.

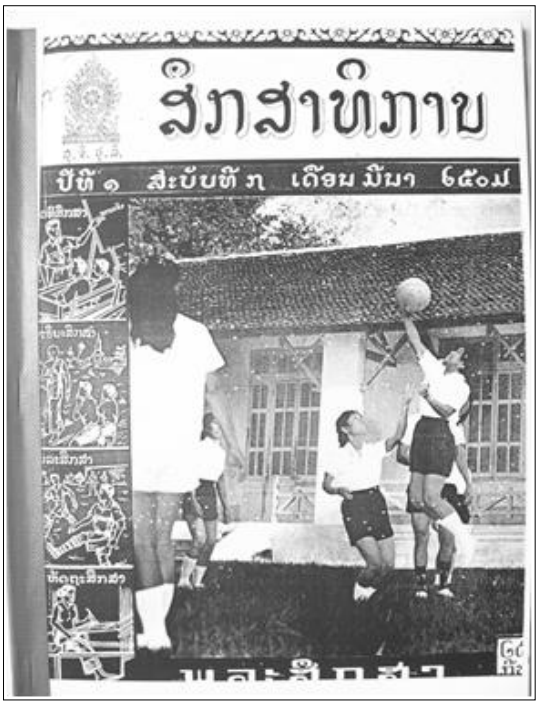

Figure 2: An early cover of *Seuksathikan* (vol. 1 no. 7, March 2503 [1960]) with girls playing basketball. The caption beneath the picture reads "physical education." Also note the cartoons down the left side, which, from top to bottom, read "intellectual education," "moral education," "physical education," and "vocational education."

Others included *Buddhavongsa*, published by the Lao Buddhist Association; *Khao nyuvason kila*, published by the Department of Sport and Youth; *Phai nam*, a literary and cultural journal; and a woman's magazine, *Nang*. The first regular edition of *Seuksathikan* explained that the magazine had two main objectives: to be "a handbook for teachers (*khumeu khong khru*) of all kinds" and to inform readers about education.[26] An introduction printed inside the front cover of later issues added: "The important objective of the magazine is the propagation of knowledge and theories about education."[27] These explanations confirmed the didactic intent of the magazine, as did the prescriptive style of articles, which included question-and-answer columns, lists of dos and don'ts, and articles titled in the form of a question (e.g., "What is education?" and "Why is student hygiene important?"). While I have found no record of the magazine's circulation or readership, it was clearly intended that as many teachers in the expanding education system as possible should read it.

In its structure and content, *Seuksathikan* aimed to provide teachers with knowledge and information for building an educational system that would serve as the foundations of national development. The magazine had three sections (*phak*): (1) commissioned articles on education, history, and other fields to "increase the knowledge of teachers"; (2) a "technical section" (*phak visakan*), including theory

[26] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 1. no. 2 (October 2502 [1959]), p. 2. Though labelled no. 2, this issue may actually have been the first regular edition after an initial "special edition" in November 2501 (1958). Reconstructing the full series of dates and numbers has been difficult (also see following note).

[27] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 2, no. 15 (March 2504 [1961?]), n.p. (inside front cover). Following convention, I have calculated the Christian Era (CE) year by subtracting 543 from the Buddhist Era (BE) year. However, there is cause for some doubt here, for, if this were true, a full year would have lapsed between vol. 2 no. 16 (April 2504) and vol. 2 no. 17 (May 2505 [1962]). Due to a confusing counting system and an earlier lapse between vol. 1, no. 12 (August 2503 [1960]) and vol. 2, no. 13 (January 2504), and given the fact that the only four 2504 issues were published before Lao New Year in mid-April, the year 2504 could feasibly have been 1962 rather than 1961.

and lesson plans to help teachers; and (3) news on a range of education matters.[28] Frequent articles on the importance and nature of education confirmed the intent of the magazine to modernize the country. The article titled "What is education?" argued above all that "education teaches people how to earn a living; it makes the country advance and prosper."[29]

The explicit goal of modernization is not surprising. Despite formally achieving independence in 1949, the Royal Lao Government remained heavily dependent on French and American military and economic aid, which largely financed the government. American aid was especially high. Between 1955 and 1975 the United States provided almost US$900 million in economic assistance, amounting to almost $50 million a year.[30] In per capita terms, this was higher than US assistance to any other country in Southeast Asia, including South Vietnam.[31] Though the vast majority of spending was for military aid, assistance also funded the day-to-day operations of the Lao state, including the salaries of officials. The US Operations Mission (USOM) was structured to mirror Lao ministries, effectively creating a "parallel administration."[32] The French also retained a role in Laos after 1954, especially in education.[33] Wherever the Americans and French worked in Southeast Asia, they brought modernization theory, the dominant non-communist development paradigm of the early Cold War period, which demanded wholesale transition away from tradition in order to foster development.[34] A major means of achieving modernization, however problematic this would turn out to be, was the establishment of a national education system, including universal primary school education. Capturing the importance of foreign capital to achieving this objective, *Seuksathikan* often printed images of American and French officials handing new schools and equipment over to the Lao government.

Despite the importance of foreign capital, however, it did not result in a dichotomy of local/traditional versus foreign/modernizing education systems. Just as monastic education contained elements of secular studies, the state school system explicitly taught "moral education" (*charinya seuksa*) with a syllabus based on Buddhist teaching.[35] Further, Lao elites were among those most committed to modernization. *Seuksathikan* was a good example of this trend. Although the magazine was funded directly or indirectly by foreign aid (like the education system as a whole), it was evidently a local initiative, or at least had the complete support of the Ministry of Education. The first issue contained letters of congratulation from a raft of Lao dignitaries, notably the king and other national leaders as well as the

[28] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 2, no. 15 (March 2504 [1961?]), inside front cover.
[29] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 1, no. 11 (July 2503 [1960]), p. 68.
[30] Viliam Phraxayavong, *History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts* (Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2009), 85, 104.
[31] Stuart-Fox, *History of Laos*, 191.
[32] Viliam, *History of Aid to Laos*, 119-20. Note: In accordance with the 1962 Geneva Agreement on neutrality in Laos, the USOM was renamed the US Agency for International Development (USAID), though its role did not change.
[33] Viliam, *History of Aid to Laos*, 95-99.
[34] Mark T. Berger, "Decolonization, Modernisation and Nation-Building: Political Development Theory and the Appeal of Communism in Southeast Asia, 1945-1975," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (2003): 421-448.
[35] McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves*, 11. See also, Halpern, *Aspects of Village Life*. Note: see below for the four kinds of education

current and former education ministers.[36] Furthermore, *Seuksathikan*'s original articles and translations from foreign sources were almost exclusively by Lao teachers and intellectuals. Most importantly here, the manual knowledge about physical culture manifest in *Seuksathikan* demonstrates how apparently "foreign" concepts were enmeshed in local vernaculars of understanding, creating ideas that defied simple categorization as local or foreign, traditional or modern.

Physical education as part of an all-round education

Seuksathikan promoted the philosophy of "four-part education" (*kanseuksa pakop-duai ong si*), consisting of intellectual, moral, physical, and vocational education. The four areas were illustrated in small cartoons on the front cover of each issue (Figure 2), summarized inside the front cover, and discussed frequently in articles. The idea of a well-rounded education accords with the broad focus of monastic schooling, but writers in *Seuksathikan* had specifically European ideas in mind. Modern Western theories of education encompassing the mind, body, and soul can be traced to the seventeenth-century, particularly English philosopher John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1685).[37] *Seuksathikan*'s authors frequently paid homage to Locke, citing his "three educations" (*sam seuksa*) philosophy – intellectual, moral, and physical – and the theories of other European philosophers.[38] In some cases they argued specifically for a European approach to education rather than a local one. One author, Samlith Bouasisavath, discussed the meaning of education in an article titled "Teachers and Education" (*khru kap kanseuksa*), which appeared in the regular "Principles of Education" (*lak kanseuksa*) column. The Lao word *kanseuksa* (education), he wrote, was derived from the Pali-Sanskrit *sikkha*, and could be taken to mean learning (*kanhian*), training (*kanfeukfon*), or instruction (*kan-oprom*).[39] This definition, however, was less broad than the English or French *education*, which also connoted "to draw out" (he included the English in parenthesis). *Kanseuksa* had adopted this European inflection of the term, argued Samlith, extending it to include the means of incorporating mental (*chitchai*), physical (*kai*), and character (*upanisai*) power into discipline (*labiapvinai*).[40] This was a roundabout way of saying education encompassed the mind, body, and character – an idea which, despite Samlith's emphasis on European roots, also exhibited Buddhist elements.

European ideas of education had come together in Laos during the Second World War under the philosophy of "general education." Implemented in France in the wake of its defeat by Germany, this model of education incorporated moral, physical, and practical training in specific response to criticisms that pre-war education had been overly bookish and failed to produce effective soldiers.[41] Although general education was promoted throughout the empire, officials aimed for it to ameliorate different problems in different places, often based on perceived

[36] See *Seuksathikan*, "special issue" (November 2501 [1958]). The Lao Buddhavong Association and its magazine was also a local initiative. See McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves*, 55.

[37] Cathy Burke, "The Body of the Schoolchild in the History of Education," *History of Education* 36, no. 2 (2007): 165-71.

[38] For example, *Seuksathikan*, vol 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), pp. 20-23.

[39] In fact *seuksa* derives from the Sanskrit *siksa*, which differs from the Pali *sikkha*. I thank Nathan Badenoch for pointing this out.

[40] *Seuksathikan*, vol 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), pp. 20-21.

[41] W. D. Halls, *The Youth of Vichy France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 186.

racial characteristics. In Laos the French viewed the population as *seu-seu*, lazy and indifferent, a characteristic blamed for historical calamities such as the fragmentation of Lane Xang and the near disappearance of the "Lao race."[42] Physical culture, manual work, and character training were promoted in the Vichy-era education system in Laos to counter these perceptions of decadence, indifference, and laziness. Whatever their other influences, similar ideas were evident in *Seuksathikan*'s promotion of a four-part education.

In *Seuksathikan* and throughout the postcolonial education system, physical culture was incorporated into the curriculum by way of physical education (*phalaseuksa*).[43] In fact, even though physical education was limited to schools, in practice it was more or less synonymous with physical culture (*kainyakam/kainyaborihan*). In any case, physical education was defined in *Seuksathikan* as "learning how to care for the body, to make it healthy and strong."[44] More specifically, it included "exercising the body in various ways starting with a little movement and going from there, for example walking, running, jumping, throwing, household chores, various games, and all types of sport: football, basketball, volleyball, tennis, etc."[45] Physical education received less attention in *Seuksathikan* than intellectual and moral education but, along with sanitation and hygiene, was discussed often enough to confirm that the body was a core concern of the Lao education system. Again, this emphasis mirrored the colonial education system.

In articles and lesson plans, physical education was said to have two main benefits. First was the instrumental one of staying healthy to perform work. In an article discussing the four educations, an author named Nai Phai Sisakada wrote:

> If we are to live with health and happiness (*khwamsuk*), and make a good living for ourselves and our families, we must have a strong and complete body (*hangkai khaenghaeng sombun*) to protect us against disease and to enable us to carry out our daily tasks. Our education or

[42] Ivarsson, *Creating Laos*, 187-89.

[43] *Phalaseuksa* is a compound of *phala* (derived from Pali/Sanskrit *bala*: 1. strength, power or force; 2. army or troops), and *seuksa* (education; see Samlith's discussion, above, and footnote 37). While in many Lao and Thai words *phala* (ພະລະ) has transformed phonologically into *phonla* (ພລະ, as in *phonlameaung*, population) and *phon* (ພລ/ພົລ/ພົນ, as used, for instance, in military ranks), etymologically *phalaseuksa* (or *phonlaseuksa*, as it could also be called) appears to possess military undertones. Thai dictionaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries do not list the term, however, suggesting it was a neologism coined for physical education. If this is true, it seems significant that this word (with its military connotations) was coined over other possibilities such as *kainyaseuksa* (lit. body education). Indeed, the latter term was used in preference to *phalaseuksa* in Laos in the period immediately after 1975, possibly to distance the Lao from the Thai (as other language reforms aimed to do). See: Simon Creak, "Cold War Rhetoric and the Body: Physical Culture in Colonial and Postcolonial Laos," in *The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia*, ed., T. Day and M. Liem (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2010), 125, n. 98. See also, N. J. Enfield, "Laos as a National Language," in *Laos: Culture and Society*, ed., G. Evans (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), 269-276. Reflecting the slackening of revolutionary language reforms since then, however, *phalaseuksa* is preferred in the Lao PDR's school texts published in the late 1990s. (I am indebted to Nathan Badenoch and Junko Koizumi for helping to clarify these speculations.)

[44] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 1, no. 2 (October 2502 [1959]), inside cover (repeated in all issues).

[45] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30.

> career enables us to attain our aspirations and desires. Every kind of work more or less relies on physical energy (*kamlang kai*).[46]

Nai Phai reiterated the theme in the negative: "People who have good knowledge, have good conduct and good handicraft technique, but whose body is not strong and complete will be enfeebled (*on-ae*) or get sick all the time (*chep khai dai puai*)."[47] *On-ae* combines a common word for weak or soft (*on*) and baby (*ae*). While *on* alone can mean gentle in a positive sense, the phrase *on-ae* is the opposite of *khaeng haeng* (strong) and negative, even insulting. C*hep khai dai puai* is an idiom combining words for injured (*chep*), fever (*khai*), and to get sick (*dai puai*). Nai Phai added that people with such appalling afflictions would not be able to carry out their work with regularity "since disease makes work of any kind impossible for an extended period of time."[48] Being absent from work would incur the wrath of one's boss, leading ultimately to dismissal and the loss of income that would otherwise bring happiness (*khwamsuk*) or wealth (*khwamlamluai*) in life. This, he concluded, would be the devastating result of not undertaking physical education.[49] In cases like this one, the emphasis was explicitly on salaried work; in others, the kind of work was not specified. Certainly the importance of having a "strong and complete body" would just as readily have applied to a peasant. The practical and utilitarian importance of doing physical education was repeated often in the pages of *Seuksathikan*.

The second benefit of physical education was that a strong and healthy body was good for one's mind or spirit (*chitchai*), an idea that sounds very Buddhist. Indeed, Nai Phai cited an "ancient saying" along the lines of "if you have a strong, complete body, you also have a clear mind."[50] He was not explicit on the point, but having a clear mind appeared to be an end in itself. Pierre Somchin Nginn, the famous Francophile intellectual, addressed similar issues in an article on "the importance of confidence and perseverance for success." In a section titled "taking care of your body is the first step towards confidence," Nginn bemoaned that people took their health for granted, taking it seriously only when they became ill. To discuss health, he used the common idiom *yu di mi haeng*, literally meaning "live well, be strong". He further explained that, since "physical power and mental power [went] together," poor health would cause excessive thinking, that is, worry or anxiousness. By contrast, people who *yu di mi haeng* would "easily be able to fight for victory in their lives." This could be achieved by breathing fresh air, exercising daily (for fifteen minutes if possible), watching one's diet, drinking moderately, not smoking tobacco or opium or eating cannabis, and having eight hours of sleep a night. Nginn added that each Sunday one should plan the week to come "to maintain a balance of work and relaxation and of mental and manual work".[51]

Samlith Bouasisavath expounded on similar ideas in an article that described physical culture as "an important tool in teaching conduct and manners according to principles of mental hygiene." The unusual term "mental hygiene" (*sukkhavithanya thang chit*) was included in parenthesis in English, suggesting Samlith probably translated the Lao from it directly. Samlith explained that, since "physical health

[46] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), pp. 29-30.
[47] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30.
[48] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30.
[49] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30. Similar ideas were reiterated often in articles discussing the nature of and need for education.
[50] *Chit chai an chaemsai yu nai heuan hang an khaeng haeng sombun. Seuksathikan*, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30.
[51] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 2, no. 16 (April 2504 [1961?]), p. 14.

depends on mental health, just as a well mind depends on a strong body," working the body (*hangkai*) would also improve the mind and spirit (*chitchai*). As a result, one should be "conscious of taking good care of the body; not leaving it to nature." In a similar manner, Samlith urged that sport taught "gracious conduct and manners" (*kirinya maranyat an chopngam*), such as sacrifice, knowing how to win and lose, solidarity in the group, and love of the team. It provided, therefore, a standard by which to measure children's conduct and character, which was revealed by whether they "cheat their friends and get angry with them" or "play with justice and sportsmanship" (*namchai-nakkila*).[52]

Seuksathikan also published lesson plans for physical culture. A detailed primary school lesson plan of April 1962 described the clothes to be worn and, most importantly, explained the practical delivery of a lesson: warm-up, the actual training, games, and warm-down. This included a detailed explanation of exercises for the arms, legs, and trunk, as well as skipping, press-ups, and breathing exercises. It also listed and illustrated suitable games and activities, including jumping, tennis, table tennis, football (soccer), basketball, walking, and running (Figure 3).[53] While *Seuksathikan* did not mention gender in relation to physical education, the fact that these illustrations showed both boys and girls exercising suggested that physical education, like the education system as a whole, was coeducational.

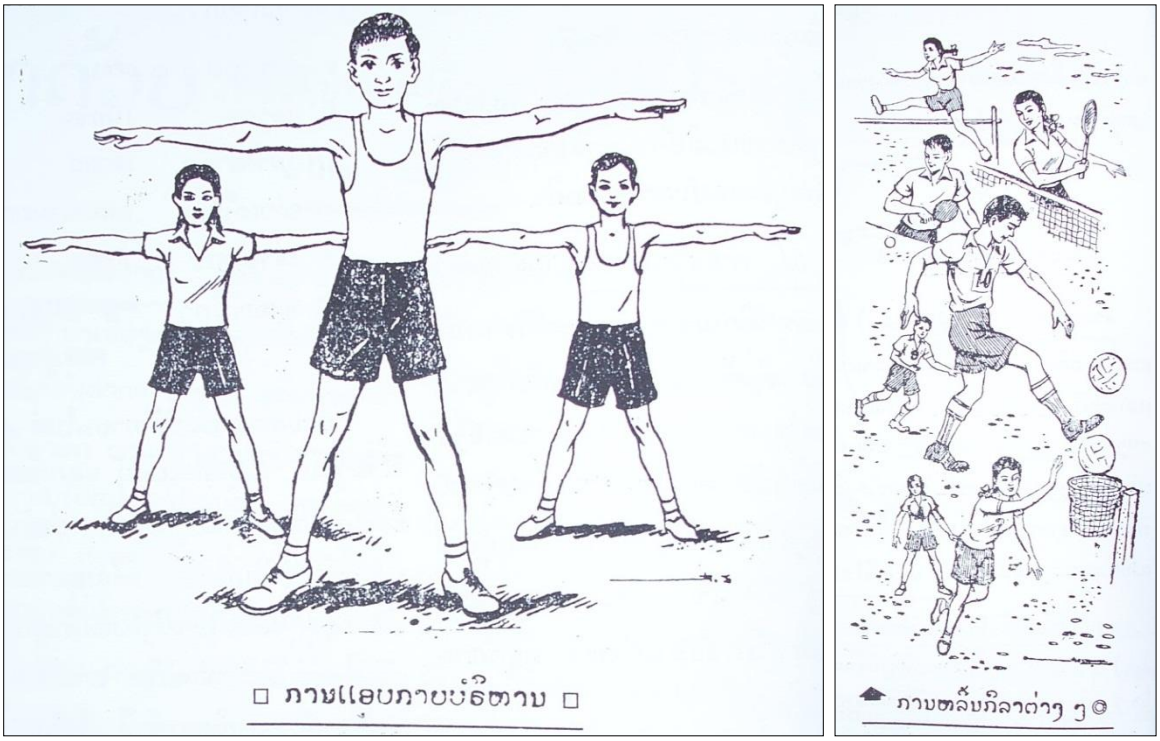

Figure 3: Illustrations from a physical culture lesson plan. The captions read "practicing physical culture" (left) and "playing sports". *Seuksathikan*, April 2504 (1962).

[52] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 2, no. 17 (May 2505 [1962]), pp. 28-30.
[53] *Seuksathikan*, vol. 2, no. 16 (April 2504 [1961?]), pp. 46-50.

European analogies

Much of these discussions sound characteristically Buddhist. But given the magazine's explicit reference to European ideas, it is productive to reflect first on analogies between postcolonial physical culture and the linking of mind, body, and soul in muscular Christianity. The term muscular Christianity was originally coined in the mid-nineteenth century to describe an "ideal of religious character" associated with British public schools, where games and sport were valued for moral purposes.[54] Like the related ideas of athleticism and the games ethic, which emerged later that century, muscular Christianity came to refer more broadly to the belief that a man's (it was always a man's) character – including qualities of leadership, moral virtue, manliness, loyalty, confidence, and sportsmanship – could be forged on the sports field.[55] This was partly due to the inherent qualities of sport and partly because it channeled male energy away from unhealthy or immoral temptations, especially sexual ones. As the term muscular Christianity implied, sport would not only teach moral and character-formation, it would also bring boys and young men to God. The ultimate objective was also instrumental, for this balance of physical and moral training aimed to produce effective soldiers and bureaucrats to man the imperial administration. Neither element of the compound muscular Christianity should be perceived too literally – it often failed to achieve its evangelical goals and was more often concerned with using muscles through physical endeavor than becoming muscular. This philosophy and athleticism also generated widespread criticism for being anti-intellectual. But the idea of linking physicality to leadership and morality had a profound impact on twentieth-century sporting culture, shaping Pierre de Coubertin's establishment of the modern Olympics and the promotion of sport throughout the colonial world.[56]

There were clear parallels between nineteenth-century muscular Christianity and the promotion of physical culture in postcolonial Laos. Samlith might have been ventriloquizing Thomas Arnold of Rugby School fame when he urged that sport would teach "gracious conduct and manners," including sacrifice, teamwork, and sportsmanship. Furthermore, the puritanical idea of mental hygiene – spiritual cleanliness, so to speak – resonated with more austere forms of muscular Christianity. It seems likely that here Samlith was at least partly referring to the exercise of control over sexual thoughts, a source of anxiety among muscular Christians and conservative Lao Buddhists alike. Most significantly, perhaps, athleticism and the postcolonial physical culture in Laos shared underlying concerns with self-making and state building. Whereas athleticism had sought to develop subjects to man the colonial service, Lao physical culture aimed to produce productive workers and to help the nation progress. In the process both created a modern sense of the citizen-self with particular physical and mental characteristics.

While post-War Laos was far removed from nineteenth-century Britain, these ideas were transplanted there by way of France. Fascinated by British sporting

[54] This ideal was initially exhibited in literature before spreading through the schools themselves. Ikuo Abe, "Muscular Christianity in Japan: The Growth of a Hybrid," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 5 (2006): 714-15.

[55] J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology*, revised ed., (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

[56] John MacAloon, "Introduction to Special Issue: Muscular Christianity after 150 years," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 5 (2006): 687-700.

values, Pierre de Coubertin introduced similar ideas of organized sport to France before going on to found the Olympics.[57] The austere regime of Vichy France (1940-44) further embraced the principles of athleticism as a key aspect of general education and the National Revolution.[58] Jean Borotra, a former tennis champion and the General Commissioner of Sport and Youth in Vichy, was particularly fond of England, and, in his time, there had developed a strong belief in the formative aspects of sport.[59] With other elements of the Vichy National Revolution, sport and physical culture were promoted throughout the French Empire, including colonial Indochina.[60] Although Laos perhaps lagged behind other parts of federation, these fields came to be heavily promoted by the colonial administration as a means of building a more robust national body, in both the literal and metaphorical sense. Urban Lao enthusiastically supported the Lao incarnation of the National Revolution, the Lao Nhay movement, including its physical culture aspects.[61] These included PS Nginn, who in 1942 published an unmistakably Pétainist treatise on the movement, including a ringing endorsement of physical culture for improving sanitation (*sukhaphiban*) and, through it, building the Lao nation.[62] As we have seen, such ideas survived the Vichy regime in Indochina in institutions such as the École Nationale des Cadres de Jeunesse et d'Éducation Physique (ENCJEP) in Vientiane.

The obvious difference between European athleticism and physical culture in Laos was the role of Christianity. The theory and practice of the Vichy National Revolution was consciously adapted to the local cultures of Indochina to counter anxieties particular to the region: the pan-Asian appeal of Japan and the pan-Tai irredentism of Thailand. Critical to the Lao Nhay movement was the bolstering of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions in Laos, which built upon efforts initiated in the 1930s.[63] By virtue of this unlikely mix of influences, physical training practices and ideology originally promoted in Britain and France as a means of drawing boys and young men to God were promoted in Laos as part of a cultural renovation that also sought to strengthen local Buddhism.

Muscular Buddhism

Given its mixed heritage, it is useful for analytical purposes to think of postcolonial physical culture in terms of muscular Buddhism. By contrast to muscular Hinduism in India, this term has been used only rarely in relation to physical culture in Buddhist societies.[64] Referring to *kungfu* and the monks of

[57] Eugen Weber, "Pierre de Coubertin and the Introduction of Organised Sport in France," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 2 (1970): 3-26.

[58] R. O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 146.

[59] Creak, "Body Work," 60.

[60] Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 188-98.

[61] Creak, "Body Work," 85-89.

[62] Pierre Somchin Nginn, "Kham tak teuan bang kho khong pheuan lao puu neung" ["Some reminders from a Lao friend"], in *Phraphutthahup saksit: nangseu anlin taeng pen phasa lao / La Statuette merveilleuse: nouvelle laotienne*, ed., P. S. Nginn (Vientiane: Éditions du Comité Literaire, 1966 [1944]), 33-41.

[63] Ivarsson, *Creating Laos*, 120-27. See also, A. Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 140-41.

[64] For muscular Hinduism see, Joseph Alter, "Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity," *Comparative Studies and History* 46, no. 3 (2004): 497-534. Also, Joseph Alter,

Shaolin, anthropologist Susan Brownell has wryly observed that Chinese muscular Buddhism preceded British muscular Christianity by at least 1200 years.[65] Historians Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper also use the term in suggesting that "foreign affairs schools" in 1930s Japan, which trained recruits in Southeast Asian languages and Japan's "manifest destiny as the dominant state in Asia," propagated an ideal of "muscular Buddhism mixed with Emperor worship," including *sumo* and martial arts.[66] While neither of these studies theorizes muscular Buddhism in general terms, they do imply that, contrary to commonly held ideas of renouncing the body, Buddhism is in practice ambivalent towards the body. This ambivalence is explored in detail by John Powers, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism. Powers argues that, as well as admonishing attachment to the body and describing the foulness of its contents, Buddhist literature demonstrates a pervasive concern with physical cleanliness. Likewise, although the body is described as vile and repulsive, it is considered the best vehicle to reach enlightenment.[67]

There is no evidence of any equivalent in Laos to the Shaolin temple, where monks mixed martial arts with meditation.[68] Nor in Laos were indigenous physical practices recast and tied to religion in overtly nationalist ways, as was yoga in fin-de-siècle India.[69] No less profoundly, however, the handbook knowledge discussed above was replete with Buddhist concepts and terminology, suggesting that postcolonial physical culture was "enmeshed in Buddhist practices" and especially language. Reynolds uses this phrase to explain how in southern Thailand the dark arts of *saiyasat* – Tantrism or black magic – have long been incorporated into Buddhist practice, so that it is unhelpful to draw a sharp line between Buddhist and Brahmanic rituals.[70] In a similar manner the Lao-Buddhist vernacular in discussions of physical culture demonstrates that physical culture was enmeshed in Buddhist practice and terminology to such a degree that it is neither possible nor necessary to distinguish clearly between Buddhist and colonial knowledge. Such enmeshing of disparate traditions had occurred previously at Vichy-era cadre schools in Laos and the post-war ENCJEP, where meditation was part of the trainee's daily routine. As if to symbolize the link between muscles and meditation, the latter school had been established inside the cloister of the That Luang stupa. Muscular Buddhism in Laos hardly advocated the building of large muscles through bodybuilding, and, indeed, as with muscular Hinduism and Christianity, "muscular" should not be perceived in this way. What mattered was the linking of physical culture – activities involving the muscles – to mind, body, and spirit.

"Yoga at the *Fin de Siécle*: Muscular Christianity with a 'Hindu' Twist," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 5 (2006):759-776.

[65] Susan Brownell, "Sports in Britain and China, 1850-1920: An Explanatory Overview," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 8, no. 2 (1991): 284.

[66] Christopher Alan Bayly and Timothy Norman Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 4.

[67] John Powers, *A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 112-13.

[68] It is interesting to note, however, that Wat Khao Or, a temple in Phatthalung (southern Thailand) known for *saiyasat* (Tantric or 'magic') treatments that could protect the body, was known locally as the "Shaolin of Phattalung." See, Craig J. Reynolds, "Rural Male Leadership, Religion and the Environment in Thailand's Mid-South, 1920s-1960s," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2011), 46. Although this does not mean that such Theravada Buddhist temples provided training in martial arts, it does show that a wide range of physical practices have been adopted as part of, or parallel to, the monastic code.

[69] Alter, "Yoga at the *Fin de Siécle*," 759-760.

[70] Reynolds, "Rural Male Leadership," 45-46.

A key benefit of physical culture, repeated in all discussions of the topic, was that it would result in a "strong and complete body" (*hangkai khaenghaeng sombun*). While this term sounds strange in English, the idea of physical completeness draws on the Lao term *sombun*, which means abundant, perfect, or whole in the Buddhist sense of being full of merit (*bun*).[71] For this reason *sombun* is used in a wide variety of situations to praise things, people, or actions; in both Laos and Thailand the word's auspiciousness makes it a common name for shops, schools, and even boys. In discussions in *Seuksathikan*, the ubiquitous use of *sombun* suggested that physical culture was a means of developing a body that was not just physically strong but robust – another inflection of the term – physically whole, and quite literally meritorious. It was not stated whether having a *sombun* body was an end in itself or if such a body was desired as an auspicious vehicle for achieving enlightenment. However, given that the body is required to reach enlightenment, the body's merit would presumably aid this process. And yet, as scholars of Buddhism have long emphasized, merit-making rather than enlightenment lies at the heart of religious practice in mainland Southeast Asia.[72] In this way, the body acts as a "field of merit." Like giving to the *sangha* – the most important field of merit – care for the body could result in the accrual or storage of merit for ones current or subsequent lives.[73]

Recognizing the body to be a field of merit may help to understand what writers in *Seuksathikan* meant by the link between the physical (*kai*) and spiritual (*chitchai)*. By developing a body that was not only strong but meritorious, physical training would benefit one's spiritual life. Buddhist philosophy was also evident in Samlith's statement that physical strength demonstrated and stemmed from being "conscious of taking good care of the body; not leaving it to nature." This notion of physical awareness accords with the principle of "mindfulness of the body." One of Buddhism's four "foundations of mindfulness," mindfulness of the body can be defined as: "observing and calmly categorizing physical states, developing awareness of bodily changes, and abandoning the inattentive attitude of most people, who move through life largely unaware of what is happening with their bodies."[74]

The idea that postcolonial physical culture constituted a form of muscular Buddhism, stemming from mindfulness of the body, requires some rethinking of the body and its place in Buddhist practice. Scholars usually discuss this sort of physical awareness in the context of ascetic practice. The monastic code (*vinaya*) is full of rules that govern diet, exercise, and deportment, which may be "understood as techniques for disengaging from the world and controlling the mind and its physical

[71] C. Gray, "Hegemonic Images: Languages and Silence in the Royal Thai Polity," *Man, New Series* 26, no. 1 (1991): 47.

[72] Jane Bunnag, *Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman: A Study of Urban Organization in Central Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 20. See also, Stanley Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 53.

[73] The notion of the Sangha as a "field of merit" comes from Buddhist scriptures and has been explained by scholars including Spiro and Ishii. See: Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 410. See also: Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 13. More recently Holly High has provided a useful example of how its literal meaning can be reinterpreted in creative and non-literal ways. See: Holly High, "Ethnographic Exposures: Motivations for Donations in the South of Laos (and beyond)," *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 2 (2010): 313.

[74] Powers, *Bull of a Man*, 121.

outlets in the body." This constitutes the "ascetic body" of Buddhism.[75] As opposed to ascetic practice, the idea of changing and improving the body through physical culture does not come naturally to Buddhism. As Powers writes, "there is little point in devoting oneself to physical culture, lifting heavy weights, running, jumping, and so forth because those with superior physical endowments will always surpass their less favored fellow citizens as a result of their karmic legacy."[76] By endorsing a muscular body in Buddhist terms of merit, the ideas in *Seuksathikan* extended the meaning of what is usually understood by mindfulness of the body. The basis of this extension might be located in the relative importance of merit in Theravada Laos as opposed to karma in the Mahayana societies Powers tends to focus on.

In any case, the extended meaning of mindfulness of the body identified in muscular Buddhism produces different ideas of power and potentiality from those to which we are accustomed. Whereas the ascetic body enhances potential internally by means of denial and self-control, the muscular body is developed through physical exertion. Indeed, the Lao verbal phrase meaning "to exercise," *ok kamlang kai*, literally means "to exert physical energy." Paraphrasing from *Seuksathikan*, such exertion would protect one from disease and facilitate work for one's own prosperity as well as that of the nation. Perhaps this was the greatest impact of muscular Christianity on Lao physical culture – to link mindfulness of the body, usually a concern of the individual, to the state.

Despite their differences, ascetic and muscular Buddhism also coalesced around shared notions of discipline. Vinaya, the name of the monastic code and one of the three baskets of the Buddhist cannon, literally means discipline. The Lao cognate of *vinaya*, *vinai*, is compounded with *labiap* (order, regulation, or rule) in *labiap-vinai*, the term used by writers in *Seuksathikan* to discuss discipline in the context of education. Developing *labiap-vinai* was a fundamental objective of physical culture just as it was considered essential for sporting success. As in diverse contexts ranging back to the British public school, exercise and sport were considered effective means of teaching individual and group discipline. But while the French *discipline* was heavily promoted in French sporting movements and in Vichy Indochina in the 1940s, the Lao translation *labiap-vinai* must have retained its Buddhist referent. By drawing this linguistic association, discussions of modern physical culture would, consciously or subconsciously, have reminded readers of monastic discipline. Despite physical education officially being coeducational, moreover, the two kinds of discipline were produced in cultural contexts that were overwhelmingly masculine, suggesting another reason why the two disparate influences came together easily.

These findings resonate with recent scholarship on embodied understandings of Buddhism. While the Buddha was above all else the paragon of good morality, a consequence of his spiritual perfection was physical perfection. In the Pali canon he (and only he) possesses all of the "physical characteristics of a great man." According to one explanation, "when beings catch a glimpse of the body of a great man, endowed with the major and minor physical characteristics, they are inspired to devotion, and this is the function of his perfect body."[77] Like all physical matter, these qualities are "contingent and transitory" and "people who focus on his

[75] Craig J. Reynolds, "Power," *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed., D. S. Lopez (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 224.
[76] Powers, *Bull of a Man*, 133.
[77] Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 178.

body are directed to shift attention to his spiritual attainments .... His perfect body and unique physiognomy are merely secondary phenomena."[78] Nevertheless, the perfect body of the Buddha is reflected in Southeast Asian Buddha images, which show the Buddha with an upright bearing, exaggerated chest size, and a V-shaped torso. These and other features "reflect societal notions of the ideal physique of a warrior, who is slender and lithe, strong but not muscle-bound."[79] In short, though Buddhist statuary certainly lacks the bulging muscles of Greek and Roman images or Michelangelo's *David*, Buddha images in temples throughout Laos present the image of a man who is physically as well as morally disciplined. It is this Buddhist notion of linking physical or muscular discipline to moral and spiritual attainment that I am highlighting in the worldly physical culture of the postcolonial education system.

Muscular Buddhism, the military, and modernization

The parallels between ascetic and muscular disciplining regimes offer insights into the militarization of political culture in postcolonial Laos and elsewhere in the region. Far from being anathema to one another, both monastic and military regimens demand discipline and training. This is not to suggest that military culture grew out of monastic practice; rather, the two share common features that have reinforced each other. In Thailand, the former soldier and governor of Bangkok, Chamlong Srimuang, built his political career by drawing on power simultaneously from military, civil, and religious sources. The strict ascetic practice for which Chamlong was famous drew on both his military training and monastic discipline.[80] In Laos, the public life of Captain Kong Le, engineer of the neutralist coup of August 1960, combined a similar mixture of spiritual and military culture, despite the soldier's short stature. Kong Le inspired fierce loyalty from his men on the basis that he was a *phu mi bun* (lit: man of merit) with special powers and a soldier of peerless bravery. Military authority and the political authority that accompanied it emerged not only from guns and money but, sometimes at least, from a disciplinary mode of conduct that claimed to be modernizing at the same time as it drew on traditional monastic values. It is no coincidence that men like Chamlong and Kong Le are to be found in many places throughout the Buddhist world.[81]

The conceptual crossover between military and monastic regimens continued after 1975. Of course, the revolutionary regime of Kaysone Phomvihane emphasized the differences between itself and its royalist and colonial predecessors, including those in the field of sport and physical culture. In familiar terms, the annual reports of Phoumi Vongvichit, the Minister of Education, Sport, and Religious Affairs, chastised the RLG for failing to recognize sport's "mass characteristics," or that "sport was the right of all people and a means of building the new person physically and mentally/spiritually."[82] Beneath the socialist rhetoric, however, familiar themes of building the nation, as well as the mind, body, and spirit of the individual, continued to resonate in ideas put forth by the new regime. *Kila kainyakam* (Sport and Physical Culture, 1976), a handbook for primary school teachers, detailed a catalogue of other familiar benefits, including solidarity (*samakkhi*), grace (*malanyat*

[78] Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 180.
[79] Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 60.
[80] Reynolds, "Power," 223-24.
[81] Reynolds, "Power," 226.
[82] Creak, "Cold War Rhetoric and the Body," 113.

an di-ngam), and discipline (*labiap-vinai*), thereby reinforcing the continuity that stemmed from the royalist physical culture and the colonial physical culture that informed it.[83]

The new regime's efforts to justify socialism in Buddhist terms were typically regarded with suspicion, due in large part to the fact that the initial changes under the party-state had had such a destructive impact on religious life. But Kaysone exercised visible material restraint in his life and is still celebrated for it.[84] Whatever the party's policies on Buddhism, there was a common thread connecting this type of discipline with that of monastic practice, which gave it a familiarity in the Lao cultural milieu that was sorely absent from exhortations to carry out socialist construction. Contrary to propaganda chastising the "wicked poison" of Western culture, these dictates of proper conduct were also shaped by the colonial programs of the 1940s and the postcolonial physical culture of the 1960s, which wedded ideas regarding the importance of discipline to the state. Though this lineage could never have been made explicit, the modern and modernizing aspects of physical culture introduced by the French served the socialist regime as much as they had their royalist predecessors.

The physical culture of postcolonial Laos constituted a kind of muscular Buddhism that drew on the character- and state-building logic of European athleticism, but was also enmeshed in the ideas and practices of Buddhism. Far from being supplanted by modern notions of physical culture, Buddhist ideas offered a means for translating these practices into the Lao vernacular and experience, making them comprehensible as auspicious acts in the local cultural milieu. This process of translation inevitably changed meaning, for, unlike the English or French "discipline," *labiap vinai* is inextricably tied to notions of monastic discipline. Likewise, the idea of building and changing bodies was rendered into the Lao language as a meritorious act, which was necessarily absent from European notions of physical culture. The handbook knowledge in *Seuksathikan* was a key tool in this process of translation and hybrid knowledge formation as well as a record of this process. The magazine also offers unique insights into parallels between monastic and military cultures and the militarization of political culture in Laos, both before and after 1975.

[83] Ministry of Education Sport and Religious Affairs (MESRA), *Kila kainyakam: san pathom labop saman seuksa (khumeu khu) [Sport and Physical Culture: Primary Level, General Education System (teachers' handbook)]* (Vientiane: Ministry of Education, Sport and Religious Affairs Publishing House, 1976).

[84] Evans, *Politics of Ritual and Remembrance*, 32-33.

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Language Vitality and the Ethnic Tourism Development of the Lao Ethnic Groups in the Western Region of Thailand

by Somsonge Burusphat, Sujaritlak Deepadung, Sumittra Suraratdecha, Narong Ardsamiti, Pattama Patpong, Pichet Setapong[1]

Abstract

This paper is part of the research project entitled "Ethnicity Language Culture and Ethnic Tourism Development" which aims to explore the language use and language attitudes of ethnic groups in the western region of Thailand in order to reach the ultimate goal, that is, ethnic tourism development. The research sites include seven provinces, namely, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Suphan Buri, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon, and Samut Songkhram. The paper sets its goals to explore the language vitality of Lao ethnic groups in order to evaluate the development of sustainable ethnic tourism in the region. A qualitative method combined with a quantitative method is used for this research. Two kinds of guided questionnaires were constructed for data collection, i.e., community and personal questionnaires.

It was found that there are six major Lao ethnic groups in the seven provinces, that is, Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng and Lao Tay. The analysis of the language use and attitude of these Lao ethnic groups shows that, among all the Lao ethnic groups in these provinces, Lao Song Dam have the strongest language vitality across all provinces except for Samut Songkhram province where few Lao Song Dam speakers reside. Next to Lao Song Dam are Lao Khrang speakers who mostly reside in Nakhon Pathom province. Other Lao ethnic groups, namely, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay have moderate language vitality.

The findings of the language vitality of the six Lao ethnic groups are used to determine a prospective sustainable ethnic tourism plan. Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang people are strongly united because of their strong language vitality and preservation of some cultural traits such as ritual practices and costumes. Therefore, the prospective community-based ethnic tourism project could be developed in those areas where the majority of these two Lao ethnic groups reside, and the ethnic language vitality and cultural practices are still productive.

Key words: Language vitality, language use, language attitude, Lao Song Dam, (Thai Song Dam), Lao Yuan (Thai Yuan), Lao Phuan (Thai Phuan), Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay, ethnic tourism development

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1. Introduction

1.1 The research project "Ethnicity, Language, Culture, and Ethnic Tourism Development"

The research project, 'Ethnicity, Language, Culture, and Ethnic Tourism Development' is developed with three main objectives. The first objective is to identify the ethnic languages spoken in seven provinces; Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, and Suphan Buri in the western region of Thailand. The villages where the ethnic languages are spoken are presented in ethno-linguistic maps, linked with cultural information of ethnic groups. The second objective is to explore the ethnic groups' language use and attitudes towards languages which determine the language vitality of ethnic groups. Finally, it aims to evaluate the development of sustainable ethnic tourism in the region. The findings of the research could be used as a fundamental reference for national language planning as well as sustainable ethnic tourism plans. During the first year of the research project, the research team collects and analyzes sociolinguistic data in the seven provinces. During the second year, the research team will select one ethnic community as a model community to develop sustainable ethnic tourism. The ultimate goals of the project are to promote diversity in unity and the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures, as well as to strengthen the ethnic communities.

The present paper[2], "Language vitality and the ethnic tourism development of the Lao ethnic groups in the western region of Thailand" is the outcome of the first year of the project's research . The paper is limited to the Lao ethnic groups and sets its goals to (1) present updated ethno-linguistic maps of areas inhabited by the six major Lao ethnic groups; Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng and Lao Tay (2) estimate the Lao ethnic groups' language vitality by their language use and attitudes towards their languages (3) evaluate the development of sustainable ethnic tourism in the areas where the Lao ethnic groups reside.[3]

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[2] This paper was presented at the Third International Conference on Lao Studies, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand, July 14-16, 2010. It is the first year outcome of the research project entitled "Ethnicity, Language, Culture, and Ethnic Tourism Development" funded by Mahidol University in 2009-2010. This research is conducted by a research team of the Research Institute of Languages and Cultures of Asia as follows:

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[3] Some people, especially Thai specialists on ethnicity, are worried that increased tourism may not be of benefit to the ethnic communities in Thailand, even though some respondents say they are in favor of it. It would be unfortunate if the effort to increase tourism were to lead to a huge influx of outsiders who are insensitive to ethnic cultural values, as seen in "Hill Tribes Shows", where members of various minority groups are made to sing and dance for tourists. In many villages, people charge tourists for taking photographs, which cannot be good for the local people.

Ethnic tourism in this study entails the recognition and strengthening of the role of ethnic people and their communities who should retain control of tourism development. Sustainable tourism is supposed to

1.2 Lao ethnic groups and language affiliation

In the Ratanakosin Period, the Siamese called people who lived in the central region of Thailand and spoke Thai with an accent, "Lao" (Thawat 2010). They also used to call all Tai- speaking, glutinous rice-eating groups residing in the north (Yuan or Lanna) and northeast (Isan) of Thailand "Lao" (Sysamouth 1998). Following the Siamese use of the term "Lao", Lao ethnicity in this study refers to ethnic groups who migrated from Laos and from the north of Thailand 200 years ago during the Ratanakosin Period to the central region of Thailand, and later on moved to nearby provinces in the western region of Thailand. These ethnic groups include Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay. The Lao people of western Thailand are addressed as "Lao" in the same way as the Lao people of the northeastern (Isan) region of Thailand. They can tell that their languages are related to Lao Isan because of extensive lexical similarity. A Lao Khrang speaker notes that her language is similar to the northeastern Thai dialect which sounds faster than the Lao Khrang language which is closer to Luang Prabang language. Despite the linguistic similarity, the Lao people of western Thailand identify themselves as a distinct ethnic group because of their typical customs and rituals which distinguish them from Lao Isan.

Apart from the Lao Yuan, all of these Lao ethnic groups migrated from Laos as prisoners of war more than 200 years ago. The initial migration was in the early Ratanakosin Period. The original homeland of these Lao groups was mostly designated according to their ethnic names. Lao Phuan came from Muang Phuan, Xieng Khouang Province (Werapong 1996); Lao Khrang from Muang Phukhrang or Phukhrang mountain in the northeast of Luang Phrabang; Lao Vieng from Muang Vientiane; and Lao Tay from the southern region of Laos, Champasak Province (Mayuree and Em-On 2005).[4] Lao Song Dam people have been addressed by various names. The name "Lao Song Dam" refers to people dressed in black costumes. They migrated from Muang Thaeng[5] in the northern part of Laos. This place used to be under the Luang Prabang government (M. Sribusara 1987). Lao Yuan were Lanna people who lived in the northern region of Thailand. They moved to other regions for various reasons. In the early Ratanakosin Period (1804), they migrated to the central region because of the war between Thai and Burma (Renu 2005).

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support the integrity of the place, benefit residents, conserve resources, respect local culture and traditions, strive for quality, not quantity, and not abuse local products. The ethnic groups select their cultural activities by themselves to show to tourists, so shows and photographs are not a problem as far as they are controlled by the ethnic communities themselves.

The researchers of this research project are aware of the negative effect on ethnic tourism development that has taken place in Thailand and will make sure that the Lao community plays a major role in ethnic tourism.

[4] The naming of Lao Khrang and Lao Tay is sometimes controversial. Some people believe that Lao Khrang and Lao Tay have these names because they paid *khrang* 'stick lacquer' and *tay* 'torch ashes' respectively as tributes to the Thai government (Mayuree and Em-On 2005).

[5] Muang Thaeng is presently Muang Dien Bien Fu in Vietnam.

The Lao ethnic groups of western Thailand whose communities are linguistically and culturally united, such as Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang, pay much attention to their settlement history. They have learned from chronicles and oral history that they came from Laos. Qualitative data reveal that Lao Song Dam still practice a funeral chant giving directions to the dead back to their original homeland in Laos. So, some Lao Song Dam people are determined to delve deeply into their history by going to Laos (Phanus 2010). Other Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang speakers are simply interested in seeing their original homeland so they arrange trips to visit those places known as their homeland. It has been more than 200 years since these people migrated from Laos so they have lost contact with their relatives in Laos and have been visiting Laos as tourists, not for family reunion reasons.

The Lao language is defined as the languages spoken by ethnic groups who migrated from Laos and northern Thailand as prisoners of war, to the central and western Thailand. These languages belong to the Southwestern Branch of the Tai-Kadai language family (Li 1960). Based on tonal splits and mergers, the languages of these Lao ethnic groups are classified into two groups: Lao group which includes Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng and Lao Tay and the Tai group which consists of Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, and Lao Phuan (Brown 1965). Consequently, Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, and Lao Phuan are also addressed as Thai Song Dam, Thai Yuan, and Thai Phuan. [6]

As Lao Yuan are descended from Lanna people who speak the northern Thai dialect, their language is similar to the northern Thai dialect. According to Kantima and Suwattana (1988), Lao Khrang language is similar to the languages of Luang Prabang group. Lao Vieng and Lao Tay languages are close to the languages of Vientiane group. Both the Luang Prabang and Vientiane language groups are closely related to the Lao Isan language or the northeastern dialect of Thailand. Though the tonal system distinguishes Lao Song Dam and Lao Phuan from Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay, based on the lexical criterion, both Lao groups are closely related to the northeastern Thai dialect. They share such vocabularies as *nam* 'with', *song* 'pants', and *bakkhiap* 'custard apple'. [7]

2. Methodology

2.1 Ethno-linguistic map of the west

The first step of this research is to locate the Lao ethnic residency. An ethno-linguistic map of the west is constructed to portray the distribution of all Lao ethnic languages found in the western part of Thailand. The data collected include Lao ethnic languages spoken in each location, still pictures and videotape of the Lao ethnic and cultural activities. To obtain the linguistic data, the researchers first conducted a library research on previous works, gathering information as to which districts or sub-districts are homes to the relevant Lao ethnic peoples. After the secondary data was collected and summarized, a survey form was constructed for a postal survey. The form includes a

[6] This paper uses the term "Tai" to refer to Tai-Kadai speaking people who reside outside Thailand and "Thai" to those who live in Thailand. Some linguists still use "Tai" to address Tai-Kadai speaking people who migrated from other countries to Thailand, e.g., Tai Song Dam and Tai Phuan.

[7] See a detailed discussion of Lao dialects in Phinnarat (2003).

list of village numbers, village names, and Lao ethnic names as exemplified in table 1.

Table 1 Example of a survey form

Village #	Village names	Lao Ethnic Names						
		Lao Song Dam	Lao Yuan	Lao Phuan	Lao Vieng	Lao Khrang	Lao Tay	Others
1								
2								

The survey form was sent out to all relevant district and sub-district offices. The purpose of the survey was to obtain updated information on the languages spoken in each location in detail—what ethnic languages are spoken and in which village. To assure the validity of the data received, the research team also went to their field locations to collect more data on the general living environment, seeking information on the vitality of ethnic languages and cultures, as well as cultural activities.

The collected data are analyzed in order to identify the Lao communities in the western region of Thailand by using two criteria. First, the Lao communities are settled communities where Lao people have lived for over a hundred years. Second, other ethnic communities into which some Lao people have moved, and where the Lao languages are not used in everyday life, are excluded. Based on these criteria, a number of villages are screened for display on the ethno-linguistic maps. By using a geographical information system, maps of the Lao villages where the Lao languages are spoken, overlapped with multiple layers of cultural information of Lao ethnic groups, are displayed.

2.2 Lao language vitality and attitude towards ethnic tourism development (ETD)

At the initial stage, an in-depth interview, a qualitative research technique, is used as a method of data collection to obtain self-reported data about the speakers' language usage and attitudes towards their language and ethnic tourism development. Two kinds of guided questionnaires were constructed for the in-depth interview, i.e., community and personal questionnaires. After the in-depth interview has been completed, it is confirmed by a quantitative method. A guided questionnaire is constructed for a collection of quantitative data. It consists of fifty questions which can be grouped into six themes: personal questions, verbal repertoire questions, language use questions, language attitude questions, cultural heritage questions, and ETD attitude questions (see the appendix). The personal questions include age, gender, family members, birthplace, and spatial movements. The verbal repertoire, the language use, and the language attitude questions will provide answers that are used to determine the language vitality of each Lao ethnic group. The last two themes of questions are used to elicit data on the cultural preservation and attitude towards ethnic tourism which are crucial to Lao ETD. A semi-structured interview is conducted by using this guided questionnaire. Using a sociolinguistic approach, the informants are classified into three age groups: old generation (over 60), middle generation (36-59), and young generation (18-35). Three informants of each age group represent the sampling of each district where Lao ethnic groups reside. Based on the two criteria mentioned in 2.1, a village of each district was selected for a data collection site. The

total number of villages is 162 as shown in table 2. Three informants from each village were interviewed giving a total number of informants of 486.

Table 2 Numbers of villages where the data have been collected

Provinces	Numbers of villages						
	Lao Song Dam	Lao Yuan	Lao Phuan	Lao Khrang	Lao Vieng	Lao Tay	Total
Kanchanaburi	8	2	1	3	4	-	18
Ratchaburi	8	14	-	1	12	1	36
Phetchaburi	20	-	2	-	5	-	27
Nakhon Pathom	13	3	-	12	-	8	36
Samutsakhon	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Samut Songkhram	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Suphan Buri	9	-	8	12	12	-	41
Total	62	19	11	28	33	9	162

The data collected from the in-depth interview with Lao community leaders are analyzed by the qualitative approach. The analysis shows physical features of Lao communities such as village settlements, public utility, means of communication, education, language and culture, etc. The data collected from the guided questionnaire are quantitatively analyzed in order to evaluate the language vitality of Lao people in each age group which results in the language maintenance and language loss, as well as to evaluate the feasibility of ETD. The SPSS for Window Program has been used to calculate the frequency, percentage, and arithmetic mean of the data. To display the analyzed data, tables consisting of questions and answers of informants of different age groups are created. The appendix illustrates these tables with exemplified Lao Song Dam data of Nakhon Pathom province.

3. Findings

3.1 Ethno-linguistic maps of Lao ethnic groups

The survey of areas inhabited by Lao ethnic groups reveals that in the western region of Thailand, the six Lao ethnic groups reside in the provinces described below. Table 3 shows the numbers of villages where the six Lao ethnic groups live.

Table 3 Numbers of villages where Lao ethnic groups reside

Provinces	Numbers of villages						
	Lao Song Dam	Lao Yuan	Lao Phuan	Lao Khrang	Lao Vieng	Lao Tay	Total
Kanchanaburi	49	7	23	25	46	-	150
Ratchaburi	49	87	-	32	70	4	242
Phetchaburi	98	-	21	-	22	-	141
Nakhon Pathom	74	27	-	81	16	18	216
Samutsakhon	30	-	-	-	-	-	30
Samut Songkhram	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Suphan Buri	92	-	88	121	112	-	413
Total	394	121	132	259	266	22	1194

3.1.1 Lao Song Dam

Lao Song Dam people were found in all seven provinces under this study: Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, and Suphan Buri. Lao Song Dam community leaders reported that the first migration of Lao Song Dam settled in Phetchaburi province. At later stages, Lao Song Dam moved to nearby provinces.

Map 1 Lao Song Dam speaking areas

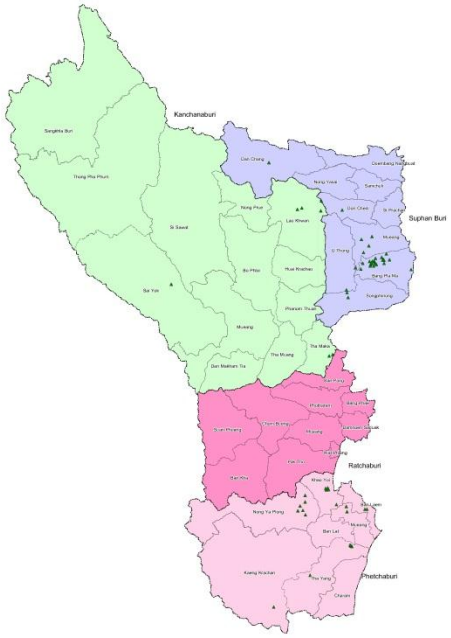
3.1.2 Lao Yuan

Lao Yuan people reside in three provinces: Kanchanaburi Ratchaburi and Nakhon Pathom. Ratchaburi has the highest concentration of Lao Yuan people.

Map 2 Lao Yuan speaking areas

3.1.3 Lao Phuan

Lao Phuan live in three provinces: Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri where the majority of Lao Phuan reside.



Map 3 Lao Phuan speaking areas

3.1.4 Lao Khrang

Lao Khrang speakers live in four provinces: Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Suphan Buri. The original settlements of Lao Khrang were in Nakhon Pathom and Suphan Buri.

Map 4 Lao Khrang speaking areas

3.1.5 Lao Vieng

Lao Vieng people live in five provinces: Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Suphan Buri. The majority of Lao Vieng people reside in Ratchaburi and Suphan Buri.

Map 5 Lao Vieng speaking areas

3.1.6 Lao Tay

Lao Tay people are found in Nakhon Pathom and Ratchaburi provinces.

Map 6 Lao Tay speaking areas

3.2 Language vitality and attitude towards ETD

The results of data analyses using both qualitative and quantitative methods are summarized in tables 4-9. The language vitality of Lao ethnic groups is determined by degrees of language use and language attitude. The language vitality is high if the language use is strong (S) and there are positive language attitudes (POS); medium if the language use is moderate (M) and language attitudes are neutral (NEU); and low if the language use is weak (W) or endangered and there are negative attitudes (NEG).

A prospective sustainable ethnic tourism plan can be evaluated by considering degrees of cultural preservation and the attitudes of Lao ethnic groups towards ETD. The cultural preservation is strong (S) if the community can preserve over 50 percents of their traditional customs; medium (M) if less than 50 percents; and weak (W) if no customs are practiced. The feasibility of ETD is high if the community has positive attitudes (POS) towards ethnic tourism; medium if the community has neutral attitudes (NEU); and low if the community has negative attitudes (NEG) or unable to develop as an ethnic tourism site because there is no cultural heritage left. The language vitality and attitudes towards ETD cannot be evaluated and thus non-applicable (NA) if there are few or none of the ethnic group living in the province.

3.2.1 Lao Song Dam

Table 4 Lao Song Dam language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi	X			X			X			X		
Ratchaburi		X		X			X			X		
Phetchaburi	X			X			X			X		
Nakhon Pathom	X			X				X		X		
Samutsakhon	X			X				X		X		
Samut Songkhram			X		X				X			X
Suphan Buri	X			X			X			X		

Overall, Lao Song Dam is considered strong in all aspects: strong language use, positive attitudes towards the ethnic language, and active preservation of cultural heritage. The group also has positive attitudes towards ETD. The Lao Song Dam in Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri are the strongest in all aspects among other provinces. Those in Ratchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Samut Sakhon are quite strong with moderate language use in the former, and moderate preservation of cultural heritage in the latter two. Samut Songkhram is rather weak in all aspects.

3.2.2 Lao Yuan

Table 5 Lao Yuan language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi	X			X				X				X
Ratchaburi	X			X			X				X	
Phetchaburi	NA											
Nakhon Pathom		X		X					X			X
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Suphan Buri			X			X			X			X

The language use and language attitudes of the Lao Yuan people are still strong in Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi provinces. Those living in Nakhon Pathom have positive language attitudes, but moderate use of language in daily life. In terms of the preservation of cultural heritage, Ratchaburi is the strongest followed by Kanchanaburi. In Nakhon Pathom and Suphan Buri, Lao Yuan cultural activities are not practiced any more. As far as attitudes towards ETD are concerned, the Lao Yuan people across all

provinces do not show much interest in the development of ETD in the community. The Lao Yuan people in Suphan Buri are weak in all aspects.

3.2.3 Lao Phuan

Table 6 Lao Phuan language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi		X		X					X		X	
Ratchaburi	NA											
Phetchaburi		X			X			X			X	
Nakhon Pathom	NA											
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Suphan Buri		X			X			X			X	

The Lao Phuan people in Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri display moderate daily use of their ethnic language as well as neutral attitudes towards the development of ethnic tourism in the communities. Language attitudes are still positive among those in Kanchanaburi, but moderate in Phetchaburi and Suphan Buri. The preservation of cultural heritage is also moderate in these two provinces. Those residing in Kanchanaburi have, to a large extent, assimilated and embraced the customs of the Thai people, with weak cultural heritage, as shown in the table. Due to the moderate and weak degrees of cultural preservation, Lao Phuan in these three provinces have neutral attitudes towards ETD.

3.2.4 Lao Khrang

Table 7 Lao Khrang language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi		X		X					X			X
Ratchaburi		X			X				X			X
Phetchaburi	NA											
Nakhon Pathom	X			X				X		X		
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Suphan Buri		X			X			X			X	

From table 7, it seems all aspects of language use, language attitude, and preservation of cultural heritage among the Lao Khrang people across all provinces are

generally at a moderate level. Those who reside in Nakhon Pathom province exhibit the strongest language use and language attitudes, but are moderate in the preservation of cultural heritage. The only group which seems to be interested in ETD is the Lao Khrang in Nakhon Pathom.

3.2.5 Lao Vieng

Table 8 Lao Vieng language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi	X			X			X				X	
Ratchaburi		X		X				X				X
Phetchaburi		X			X			X			X	
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Nakhon Pathom	NA											
Suphan Buri		X			X			X			X	

The Lao Vieng people reside in four provinces in the western part of Thailand. These provinces are Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri. Among others, the Lao Vieng group in Kanchanaburi is the strongest in all aspects of language use and attitude, cultural heritage, with a moderate interest in ETD. Those in Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and Suphan Buri demonstrate a moderate language use. The preservation of cultural heritage is also moderate in all these three provinces. None of the Lao Vieng communities in four provinces have positive attitudes towards ETD. Those in Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri have a moderate attitude while those in Ratchaburi have a negative attitude.

3.2.6 Lao Tay

Table 9 Lao Tay language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi	NA											
Ratchaburi		X			X				X		X	
Phetchaburi	NA											
Nakhon Pathom		X			X				X			X
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Suphan Buri	NA											

The Lao Tay people reside in Ratchaburi and Nakhon Pathom provinces. Both communities have moderate language use and language attitude. The preservation of their cultural heritage is weak, with a neutral attitude towards ETD in Ratchaburi province and negative one in Nakhon Pathom province.

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents the first year's findings of the research project entitled "Ethnicity Language Culture and Ethnic Tourism Development." The initial attempt is to locate Lao ethnic groups residing in the western region of Thailand. A survey form is devised for a data collection on Lao inhabited areas. Based on the collected data, an ethno-linguistic map of areas inhabited by Lao ethnic groups, overlapped with multiple layers of cultural information of Lao ethnic groups, is presented. A preliminary survey of language use and attitudes of Lao people towards the Lao language and ethnic tourism development was carried out using a qualitative approach. Two kinds of guided questionnaires were constructed for data collection, community and personal questionnaires. Key persons living in each Lao community were interviewed using the guided questionnaires. The in-depth interviews yield preliminary findings on physical features of Lao communities, the language vitality, cultural preservation, and language attitudes of Lao people as well as attitudes towards ethnic tourism development in six provinces. These findings are supplemented by a quantitative method using the SPSS for Window Program to calculate the frequency, percentage, and arithmetic mean of the data.

It has been found that there are six Lao ethnic groups residing in the seven provinces in the western region of Thailand: Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay. Based on the population size, the strong language vitality, and the preservation of cultural heritage, the dynamic linguistic and cultural resources of these six Lao ethnic groups were found in the following provinces: Phetchaburi which is a rich source for Lao Song Dam; Ratchaburi for Lao Yuan and Lao Vieng; Nakhon Pathom for Lao Khrang and Lao Tay; and Suphan Buri for Lao Phuan. In

addition, a large number of Lao Khrang and Lao Vieng migrated to Suphan Buri from Laos and have settled there since early Rattanakosin period. At present the linguistic and cultural aspects of the groups are still prominent. Accordingly, Suphan Buri can be considered as a productive source for Lao Khrang and Lao Vieng as well.

The study of language vitality which is determined by the language use and language attitudes of the six Lao ethnic groups in seven provinces reveals that Lao Song Dam in all provinces except Samut Songkhram, where a minority of Lao Song Dam lives, has the strongest language vitality. Lao song Dam speakers of all generations still use their ethnic language in their daily lives though speakers of the younger generations speak more Thai than Lao Song Dam these days. Having seen lesser use of their language among young generation speakers, community leaders, especially in Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Suphan Buri have tried to establish language maintenance programs by integrating Lao Song Dam language lessons into the regular curriculum. The strong language vitality and these language maintenance programs confirm that Lao Song Dam language will be maintained for the next few generations, at least.

In addition to the language vitality, Lao Song Dam people still preserve over fifty percent of their cultural traits such as ritual practices. Though folk plays and traditional costumes are dying out, Lao Song Dam people have tried to revive them by wearing Lao Song Dam traditional costumes at ceremonies or adapting traditional costumes for modern use. Museums and community cultural centers have been constructed. A number of traditional houses have been reproduced in many locations. The strong language vitality and cultural preservation have united Lao Song Dam communities. It is believed that the development of community based ethnic tourism will help to preserve the Lao Song Dam language and culture and refocus children's attention on their own language and culture as well as improve the Lao Song Dam economy.

Next to Lao Song Dam are Lao Khrang people in Nakhon Pathom who have strong language vitality while those in other locations have moderate language vitality. Though the Lao Khrang population in Nakhon Pathom is less than that of the Lao Song Dam, they are strongly united and have tried to revive their language and culture as well. Both Lao Khrang and Lao Song Dam agree that in the old days they were embarrassed to reveal their identity because they had ancestors who were prisoners of war from Laos and thus had low status in Thailand. However, over the past ten years, the situation has changed. There are many organizations campaigning towards the preservation of linguistic as well as cultural diversity in many countries. To name a few, UNESCO declared its Policy on Linguistic Rights in 1997, the United Nations announced a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in 2007 and declared the year of 2008 as International Year of Languages and 2009 as International Year of Indigenous People. Having seen the importance and value of linguistic and cultural diversity in Thailand, the Thai government is encouraging ethnic groups to preserve their language and culture and has implemented a number of development projects including ethnic tourism. Like the Lao Song Dam, the Lao Khrang people favor ethnic tourism so that they can preserve their cultural identity and practices.

Lao Tay and Lao Phuan have moderate language vitality in all locations. The degree of cultural preservation is either moderate or weak. Also, attitudes towards ETD are either neutral or negative. On the other hand, Lao Yuan have strong language vitality

and cultural preservation in Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi but attitudes towards ETD are either neutral or negative as well. Similarly, Lao Vieng in Kanchanaburi display strong language vitality and cultural heritage but neutral attitudes towards ETD. Lao Yuan and Lao Vieng in other locations show language vitality and cultural heritage at a neutral or weak degree and thus their attitudes towards ETD are either neutral or negative.

The Lao Song Dam and the Lao Khrang have stronger language vitality than the other groups because the nature of their 'Lao-ness' is still maintained. Ancestor worship which is related to the patriarchal family system plays an important role in the linguistic and cultural maintenance of Lao Song Dam. An in-depth interview with Mrs. Ruang (2009), a 72 year old Lao Song Dam speaker, reveals that Lao Song Dam people have a strong belief that they need to have a place called *kalorhong* in the house for ancestor spirits to live in and ancestor worship needs to be done regularly or else they will meet with unfortunate events, such as illness. This strict belief has survived through important rituals and customs.

Similar to the Lao Song Dam, Lao Khrang people also believe in ancestor worship. They practice a yearly ritual for the benefit of ancestor spirits to apologize for the bad deeds they have performed and to let the spirits know when a new member of the family is born. Any important activities need to be informed to the ancestor spirits. Ancestor worship helps to unite Lao Khrang communities and preserve their language and culture.

In addition to the traditional beliefs, population size is also another factor in linguistic and cultural maintenance. Lao Song Dam people have the highest population among ethnic groups so they have more strongly united communities. The Lao Khrang population is less than the Lao Song Dam but they are more concentrated. They live mostly in two provinces, Nakhon Pathom and Suphan Buri while Lao Song Dam live in many provinces in central, western and lower northern Thailand. Thanom (2010) explained to the researchers that during the initial period of migration from Laos to Thailand, Lao Song Dam people wanted to go back to Laos so they went in the direction they thought was their homeland. However, they never reached their destination and finally settled at the location they stopped their journey. Nowadays, Lao Song Dam can be found in many provinces. Wherever they live, they tend to preserve their traditional beliefs, especially ancestor worship.

Though these traditional beliefs help to maintain Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang identity, the heavy influence of Thai language and culture have almost destroyed it. Muang (2010), an 89 year old Lao Song Dam speaker, opined that "In the past ten years, cultural activities and rituals of Lao Song Dam have been gradually dying out. It was just recently that a campaign of cultural revitalization has been initiated by the Thai government and thus some traditions and customs are able to maintain."

The cultural campaign is employed on special occasions such as *Songkran* festival 'water splashing festival'. A number of cultural centers and museums have been established in Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang communities. Lao Song Dam traditional houses have been reproduced in most Lao Song Dam communities. Lao Song Dam (Tai Dam) and Lao Khrang Associations have been set up in Nakhon Pathom province to promote their ethnic languages and cultures. Documents have been produced for disseminating the linguistic and cultural information of ethnic groups to the public.

Lao Song Dam community leaders have established language revitalization programs by including Lao Song Dam language lessons in the school curriculum. These programs will help to refocus Lao Song Dam children's attention on their own language and culture. The linguistic and cultural revitalization programs are supported by various organizations such as the Provincial/District Cultural Council, Sub-District Administrative Organization, schools, and temples.

It should be noted that although some Lao groups possess language vitality and cultural preservation at moderate or weak level, their language attitudes are still positive. All Lao ethnic groups, especially middle-aged and old-aged people, wish their children could speak Lao because they are proud of their language which is unique to the Lao community and it helps to unite Lao people as a powerful ethnic group. They believe that being competent in Lao is an advantage. It is the language of their ancestors. It is the language used in rituals. Speaking Lao is the best way to preserve the language which is gradually diminishing in terms of its usage and vitality. Lao is a 'secret' language among Lao speakers. Along with the Lao language, parents also would like their children to be competent in Thai as both Lao and Thai languages function differently in Thailand. Thai is widely used in the public domain whereas the Lao language is a useful language and is widely used in all Lao communities.

Despite their attempts to maintain and revive their languages and cultures, all Lao ethnic groups have been assimilated into the Thai community. Thai is the most important language in the current situation as Thai is widely used in the public domain, especially in contacting governmental organizations and outsiders. In addition to the heavy influence of the Thai language as a standard language, there has been intermarriage with Thai and other ethnic groups, resulting in more Thai being used in heterogamous families as a means of communication. Mainstream education of young generation speakers is also an important factor leading to language loss. Consequently, it is anticipated that the Lao languages will be used less and less. Over the next 20-30 years the linguistic vitality of the language may decline.

Semi-structured interviews with local knowledge experts confirm the positive language attitudes of Lao groups and the Thai assimilation. The status of Lao ethnic groups in the past was different from the present. When the Lao ethnic groups migrated from Laos, they were placed in reserved areas in central Thailand. As prisoners of war, they were threatened by Thai people and afraid of them. This fear was so extreme that they could stop children from crying by saying *bakkuay maa yut ronghay* 'Thai people are coming. Stop crying.' To Thai people, Lao ethnic groups were animists whose ways of life were tied to spirit worship. They offered sacrifices to all kinds of spirits so that their life would be successful. They were seen as being poor and unhygienic. So, most Lao did not intermarry with Thai people or other ethnic groups. In those days, all Lao ethnic groups had a low status in Thai society. Nobody wanted to reveal themselves as Lao so that Thai people wouldn't know that they were foolish Lao people. They were ashamed of being Lao (Thanom 2010).

The situation has now changed. Lao people no longer live within their own communities remote from the outside world. They have been exposed to outsiders. There is inter-marriage between Lao and other ethnic groups, as well as Thais. Lao people have become Thai citizens. They feel that they have the same Thai national

identity as Thai people. The negative attitude towards Thai people has gradually diminished. As Thai citizens, they have access to education and enjoy the same rights as Thai people. Some Lao people have even achieved better social advancement than Thai people. Most Lao ethnic groups have assimilated into Thai society to the extent that the young generation no longer identify themselves as ethnic people. They are totally Thai. However, elderly and middle aged Lao are determined to retain their ethnic identity by using their ethnic languages in daily life and practicing rituals on special occasions. They teach their children not to be ashamed of their Lao identity. In fact, Lao people should be proud of their unique language and culture and need to help each other to create unity within Lao communities (Pattiya 2010).

Based on the language vitality, cultural preservation, and attitudes towards ETD, ethnic tourism can be developed in those areas where the majority of Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang reside. Lao Song Dam areas are in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom Samut Sakhon, and Suphan Buri. Lao Khrang area is in Nakhon Pathom. On the other hand, the communities of other ethnic groups are either too small or not strongly united enough to develop ethnic tourism and are highly integrated into the Thai community.

In the past few years, various ethnic groups in Thailand have been brought to the attention of the public via mass communications such as television, radio, and the press. In addition, the Thai government has changed its policy from one which promoted a single Thai national identity to a policy that follows a mainstream global trend towards the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity. Therefore, the Thai government now encourages ethnic groups to preserve their language and culture and has implemented a number of development projects including ethnic tourism. Such tourist attractions already exist in western Thailand such as floating markets, waterfalls, beaches, orchid gardens, and temples. Most ethnic communities are located near tourist routes so ethnic tourism development will attract more tourists to the region. Tourists may stop off at ethnic villages to observe cloth weaving and buy some local products which helps to boost the community's economy. They may even have an option to home-stay for a day or two in order to learn the ethnic way of life. Consequently, there is a market of prospective tourists who have learned about these ethnic groups from the media and wish to visit the Lao of western Thailand.

Following the findings of the first year's research, participatory action research (PAR) will be carried out. One model community will be selected based on a number of supporting factors such as overall community strength, availability of manpower, the authenticity of the linguistic and cultural data available in the community, and most importantly the willingness of the whole community to participate in sustainable ethnic tourism development. After a model community has been selected, the research team will proceed with preparing the community and providing all the relevant information. The research team will re-visit the field site and discuss the objectives of the whole project in detail with the community, looking for leaders, community developers, and coordinators for the project. Essentially, the research team will be working together in partnership with the community, as consultants rather than directors. There will be a series of activities and discussions between the research team and the community to promote mutual understanding and cooperation, as well as to ensure an active role for the community towards sustainable community based ethnic tourism.

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APPENDIX

Guided questionnaire

Number of questionnaire……Date……..
Name of informant……..Telephone number……..
Address……..
Name of researcher……

Personal Questions

1. Age ☐ 18-35 years ☐ 36-59 years ☐ over 60 years
2. Gender ☐ female ☐ male
3. How many family members do you have? How are they related? What is their ethnicity?

Number of family members	Relationship	Ethnicity	Age
1.	Self (informant)		
2.			
3.			

4. Birthplace……..
5. How long have you lived in this village? .....years.
6. Have you ever moved to other places? If yes, how long?
☐ No ☐ Yes, for……..years.
7. If you have moved to other places, what are your purposes of moving?
☐ to study ☐ to work ☐ others, please specify……..

Quantitative Analysis of Lao Song Dam language vitality and attitude towards ethnic tourism development in Nakhon Pathom Province

1 = first generation (over 60 years old)
2 = second generation (36-59 years old)
3 = third generation (18-35 years old)
TC = Total count of three generations (Average)
NA = Non-applicable

Verbal repertoire questions

Table 1: Lao Song Dam language repertories, percentages and averages based on age groups

Answers / Questions	Lao Song Dam				Thai				Both			
	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC
8. What is your mother tongue? /	100.0	100.0	61.5	87.2	.0	.0	23.1	7.7	.0	.0	15.4	5.1
9. What languages can you speak?	.0%	.0%	7.7%	2.6	-	-	-	-	100.0	100.0	92.3	97.4
10. What languages can you write?	-	-	-	-	92.3	100.0	100.0	97.4	7.7	.0	.0	2.6
11. What language do you speak best?	46.2	30.8	7.7	28.2	7.7	.0	53.8	20.5	46.2	59.2	38.5	51.3

Language use questions

Table 2: Lao Song Dam language use, percentages and averages based on age groups

Language	Lao Song Dam				Thai				Both				Others				NA			
Age group	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**
Family domain																				
12. What language do you speak with your grandparents?	92.3	100.0	76.9	89.7	.0	.0	15.4	5.1	7.7	.0	7.7	5.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13. What language do you speak with your parents?	92.3	100.0	61.5	84.6	.0	.0	23.1	7.7	7.7	.0	15.4	7.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
14. What language do you speak with your siblings?	84.6	100.0	53.8	79.5	.0	.0	46.2	15.4	15.4	.0	.0	5.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
15. What language do you speak with your children?	53.8	53.8	7.7	38.5	7.7	7.7	.0	5.1	38.5	30.8	7.7	25.6	-	-	-	-	-	7.7	84.6	30.8
16. When you are at home, what language do you use most?	92.3	92.3	46.2	76.9	.0	.0	30.8	10.3	7.7	.0	23.1	10.3	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-
Community domain																				
17. What language do you speak with your friends when you are in your village?	84.6	92.3	30.8	69.2	.0	.0	46.2	15.4	15.4	.0	23.1	12.8	.0	7.7	-	2.6	-	-	-	-
18. What language do you speak at a temple or at a festival?	61.5	69.2	46.2	59.0	7.7	.0	38.5	15.4	30.8	23.1	15.4	23.1	-	7.7	-	2.6	-	-	-	-
19. What language do you speak when you are working in the paddy fields?	38.5	46.2	.0	28.2	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	7.7	.0	.0	2.6	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	53.8	46.2	92.3	64.1
20. What language do you speak at shops in the village?	61.5	69.2	46.2	59.0	.0	.0	38.5	12.8	38.5	23.1	15.4	25.6	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-
Public and Official domain																				
21. What language do you speak with your friends when you are outside your village?	-	-	-	-	15.4	15.4	69.2	33.3	84.6	84.6	30.8	66.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
22. What language do you speak at work (e.g. a factory)?	.0	15.4	23.1	12.8	.0	7.7	7.7	5.1	15.4	7.7	7.7	10.3	-	-	-	-	84.6	69.2	61.5	71.8
23. What language do you speak at school?	15.4	7.7	.0	7.7	76.9	30.8	92.3	66.7	7.7	61.5	7.7	25.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
24. What language do you speak at government offices?	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	84.6	69.2	100.0	84.6	15.4	23.1	.0	12.8	.0	-	-	-	53.8	-	-	-
25. What language do you speak at shops outside the village?	-	-		-	30.8	23.1	69.2	41.0	69.2	69.2	30.8	56.4	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-

Language attitude questions

Table 3: Lao Song Dam language attitude, percentages and averages based on age groups

Answers	Yes				No				Not sure				NA			
Questions	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**
Positive attitude																
26. You would like your children speak an ethnic language.	100.0	100.0	84.6	94.9	-	-	-	-	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	.0	.0	7.7	2.6
27. Ethnic people should speak their own language as well as in the past.	100.0	100.0	92.3	97.4	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
28. You think that ethnic language is still useful.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
29. You think that one should use the ethnic language when practicing traditional activities or religious rituals.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
30. You would like to be known that you can speak the ethnic language,	100.0	100.0	84.6	94.9	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-	.0	.0	7.7	2.6
31. You think that the ethnic language is worth preserving because it is the way to maintain and preserve the ethnic language.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
32. If people still speak ethnic languages, it would help the ethnic communities to survive.	100.0	92.3	92.3	94.9	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-
33. You think that parents should speak their ethnic language with their children.	92.3	100.0	92.3	94.9	7.7	.0	.0	2.6	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-
34. You think that children should speak their ethnic language with their parents.	92.3	100.0	100.0	97.4	7.7	.0	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
35. You think that a person who can speak an ethnic language well is respected and a role model for others.	100.0	92.3	100.0	97.4	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
36. You think that knowing your ethnic language offers you support from people who are from the same ethnic group (e.g., getting a good discount).	92.3	76.9	61.5	76.9	7.7	.0	15.4	7.7	.0	23.1	23.1	15.4	-	-	-	-
37. You think that in your community should have an ethnic language learning and teaching class at school.	92.3	84.6	92.3	89.7	-	-	-	-	7.7	15.4	7.7	10.3	-	-	-	-
Negative attitude																
38. You are ashamed when you speak your ethnic language in front of others because other people will view you as inferior.	7.7	15.4	15.4	12.8	92.3	84.6	76.9	84.6	-	-	-	-	.0	.0	7.7	2.6
39. In 30-40 years, there will be no one speaking the ethnic language because ethnic people will speak Thai instead.	53.8	84.6	53.8	64.1	23.1	15.4	23.1	20.5	23.1	.0	23.1	15.4	-	-	-	-
40. You think that the ethnic language is difficult to learn.	23.1	30.8	38.5	30.8	76.9	69.2	53.8	66.7	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-
41. You think that learning an ethnic language is a waste of time.	7.7	.0	23.1	10.3	92.3	100.0	76.9	89.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
42. You think that a person who still speaks an ethnic language is an “old thinking” person.	15.4	7.7	.0	7.7	84.6	92.3	100.0	92.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Cultural heritage and ETD attitude questions

Table 4: Lao Song Dam cultural preservation and attitudes towards ETD, percentages and averages based on age groups

Answers	Yes				No				Not sure				NA			
Questions	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**TC**
43. Do villagers have ethnic cultures, customs, beliefs, and rituals that are unique?	100.0	92.3	100.0	97.4	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
44. Do villagers have ethnic costumes, accessories that are unique?	100.0	84.6	100.0	94.9	.0	15.4	.0	5.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
45. Should villagers preserve their unique ethnic language, cultures and customs?	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
46. Does ethnic tourism development maintain the language and culture of the ethnic group?	92.3	92.3	92.3	92.3	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	7.7	.0	.0	2.6	.0	7.7	.0	2.6
47. Does tourism change the language and culture of the ethnic group?	23.1	.0	7.7	10.3	69.2	92.3	92.3	84.6	-	-	-	-	7.7	7.7	.0	5.1
48. Villagers would welcome tourists to the village because tourism does not harm the way of life of the villagers.	92.3	76.9	76.9	82.1	.0	7.7	23.1	10.3	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	7.7	7.7	.0	5.1
49. If there is promotion of ethnic tourism in the community, will villagers support this promotion? Will this promotion be successful?	92.3	92.3	92.3	92.3	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-	7.7	7.7	.0	5.1
50. Do the villagers have regular involvement in public activities with local government organizations, such as the village committee, school, temple?	100.0	92.3	92.3	94.9	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-

A Protective Spirit in Lao-Tai Textiles: The *Pii Nyak* and Its Indian Antecedents

by Ellison Banks Findly[1]

Abstract

The Pii Nyak design, from Lao-Tai textiles, is rarely discussed by scholars and is mysterious to the weavers themselves. Described by them as representing an evil spirit from the forest who kidnaps passersby, its image becomes a protective one when embedded in the textile. By tracing the iconography back to the evil Nyaks of the *Sinxay* epic, and then to Hindu and Buddhist material, this article argues that the Pii Nyak belongs to an old association of Indian *yakshas* and *nagas*, figures both beneficial and malevolent, with "door-protectors" of sacred spaces. Translating this into the Pii Nyak, we find that the image's two serpent arms and terrifying face match the antecedent image as, when on a head cloth, it protects the interior space of human consciousness.

Figure 1: *Pii nyak, paa dtuum* (body wrap). Author's Collection: Catalog Number SS-56. (Images from the author's collection listed hereafter will follow the short format AC: SS-56.)

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Introduction

In Lao-Tai textiles, there is an image of great beauty, power, and mystery. It is an image known to weavers as the *pii nyak*, "the great or evil spirit" (**Fig. 1**). The design of the image in textiles has two parts: (1) a diamond-shaped head, known as a *gaap* pattern, that has upright crests, eyes, and earrings, and (2) two arm-like "appendages" that derive from the serpent, the Lao *ngueak* or *naak (naga).* These limbs come in two varieties: either the coiled tail of the serpent asleep, or the upright head of the serpent in motion. The "great spirit" figure appears in a number of different textiles. We find it woven into head cloths, worn here by a weaver from Xam Tai (**Fig. 2, 3**) and used for everyday, ceremonial, or shamanic wear; into body wraps, worn here by a woman in Muang Vaen (**Figs. 4-6**) and used by parents to carry children, or by men and women when they go traveling; into shamanic healing cloths, shown here by a healing shaman (*maw mon)* from a village outside of Xam Tai (**Fig. 7**); and into Buddhist door curtains or temple hangings (**Fig. 8).** In each of these cases, the *pii nyak,* itself once an evil spirit but now embedded in a textile, provides protection from other evil spirits and, thereby, ensures the prosperity of the user.

Figure 2: Xam Tai weaver wearing a modern head cloth containing *pii nyak* patterns

Figure 3: *Pii nyak, paa kaan hua* (head cloth). Xam Nuea. AC: EF-172

Figure 4: Woman carrying baby in a *paa dtuum*. Muang Vaen.

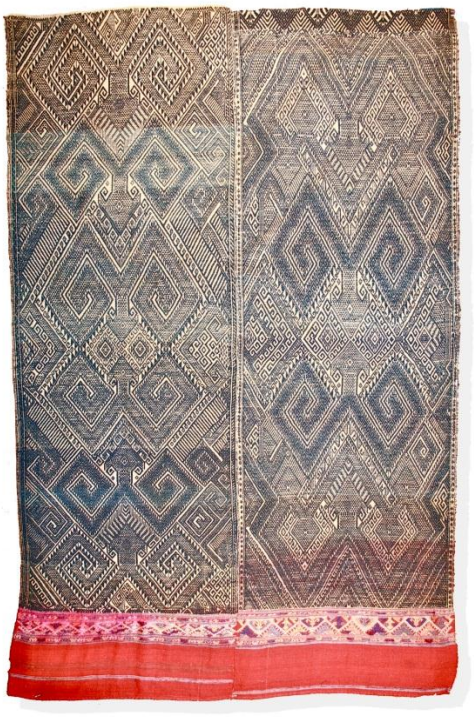

Figure 5: *Pii nyak, paa dtuum*. Xam Nuea. AC: SS-56

Figure 6: *Pii nyak, paa dtuum*. Xam Nuea. AC: SS-59

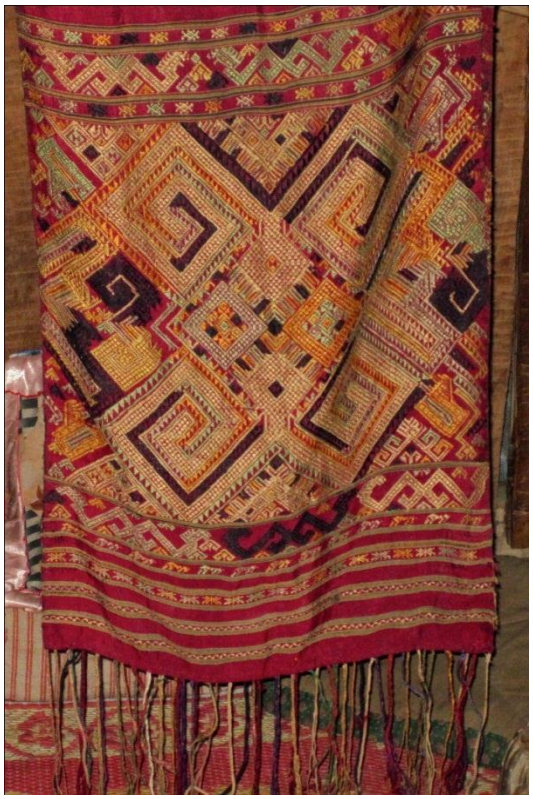

Figure 7: One end panel of a healing shaman's *paa sabaai* (healing shawl). Xam Tai.

Figure 8: Buddhist door curtain or temple hanging, showing a Buddha, *thupa naga* pillars, and *naga* candles. In the lower register is an abbreviated *pii nyak* image. AC: SS-37

The design of the *pii nyak* has great resonance in the world of the textile. Its head, as a *gaap* design,[2] belongs with a large range of other *gaap* designs, not necessarily connected to one another. First, the diamond head style is similar to that of the head of the *ngueak laeng* or "dry serpent" (**Fig. 9**). The "dryness" of this serpent refers either to the "dry season" when the serpent is likely to come into town and do mischief, and to use his supernatural powers to bring rain, or to a "dry place," namely mountain caves, where he lives with little water around him. Most weavers opt for the second interpretation, that of a mountain serpent, a small serpent living in the dry caves or holes in the mountains and never approaching water except during the rains. Second, the *gaap* design can refer to such small design elements as the triangular scales on the elephant (**Fig. 10**) or other triangular decorative features, appearing along lines or covering plain surfaces. Finally, the *gaap* design reflects another diamond pattern, the *koom,* that is often used in a larger format to hold things like flowers and small birds, and found as a design element in its own right or as a filler in other designs. It is also interpreted as a "third eye" on shamanic healing shawls (*paa sabaai*) (**Fig. 11**), and as a pattern for the notion of a "ritual threshold" or "transit doorway" when a person is moving from one religious state of being into another.

[2] It may be that these triangles derive from *gaap*, "to bow in respect with palms together," an action that would create a triangular form both in the folded palms and in the bend of the body.

Figure 9: *Ngueak laeng*, *paa faa* (baby blanket). Xam Nuea. AC: SS-14

Figure 10: *Saang* with *gaap* scales, *paa kang (*door curtain). Xam Tai AC: SS-53

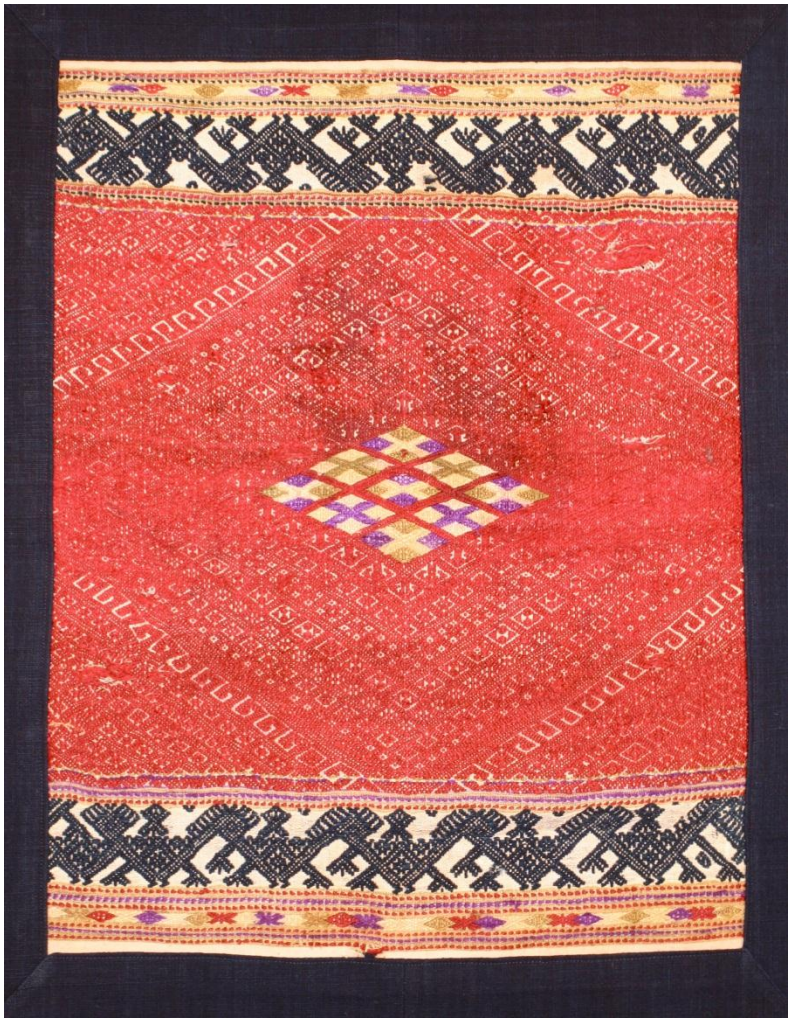

Figure 11: End panel of a healing shaman's *paa sabaai,* showing the central eye, or *dtaa*, in the middle of the traditional red ground, bordered by the traditional indigo panels of figures. AC: SS-108

The *pii nyak's* other structural elements, its "appendages," are derived from both the head and the tail of the *ngueak/naak* body. It is important to note here three things. First, there are two appendages, positioned in an open and inviting mode as if offering entrance to a space inside. Second, the appendages belong to a serpent who – unlike beneficent creatures in Lao-Tai design like the bird or the elephant – has a dual nature, being well disposed when treated properly by humans, and destructive when not. And, third, the coiled tail and the striking head are the power points of the serpent, the former representing stored energy, hoarded and ready to be unleashed, and the latter being the source of poisonous attack.

A variation on the traditional *pii nyak* image is the image of "mating serpents" (*ngueak saung gaang*, "*ngueaks* with a cavity (*saung*) in the middle (*gaang*"). In **Figs. 12** and **13**, we see the womb-like *koom* or diamond design made by the serpents' tails as the two have their backs to each other in intimate relationship. Weavers often say of this image that, because their bodies are touching and entwined in a certain way, the *ngueaks* are copulating, and have made a womb with their tails in which there are eggs.

What is unusual about these versions is that the crested *gaap* head of the *pii nyak* caps the *koom* design housing the bird[3] or candles, each signifying offspring in this design. Here the *gaap* head usually has small colored diamonds for eyes but no ears or earrings, and the lower *koom*/diamond design of the entwined tails is normally filled with emblems of the next generation. It would make sense, then, to describe this design either as of a pregnant *pii nyak*, or as of mating serpents protected by the *pii nyak*.

Figure 12: Mating *ngueaks, paa kaan hua*. Xam Nuea. AC: EF-135

Figure 13: Mating *ngueaks, paa kang*. Xam Tai. AC: EF-164.

Who is the Pii Nyak?

Weavers in our four main research sites – Xam Nuea, Xam Tai, Ban Muang Vaen, and Ban Sop Hao in Hua Phan, as well as Tai Daeng[4] weavers in Vientiane – recognize the *pii nyak* as an important weaving design.[5] When we ask the weavers about the meaning of the *pii nyak*, their answers are consistent. The *pii nyak* (**Fig. 14**), they say, is a real animal who lived long ago. Though once a water animal with a long fish body and

[3] In support of the "mating" attribution to these inner-*koom* elements is that one of the religious functions of the bird in Tai-Lao textiles is to bring babies down from heaven to expectant parents.

[4] Of those informants who identified themselves as Tai, most further identified themselves as Tai Daeng. We interviewed Lao-Tai weavers in four sites in Hua Phan, Laos (Sam Nuea, Sam Tai, Muang Vaen, and Ban Sop Hao) over the course of the years 2006-2010. Our approach was to gather groups of "eldress" weavers together over 4-5 days, and show them images of textiles and textile details and
asked them various questions. In total, we met with 40-50 weavers over the five years, the same groups each year in order to pull from their knowledge as much as we could. Each year the answers could differ, and this added to the complexity of our final understanding of each textile
motif, and to my conclusion that design motifs are multi-valent, and that textiles are poly-functional. During the sessions there was vociferous discussion of each design element. The weavers would each offer their own views and then would develop a consensus view, all noted next to the textile design in my large image file. When I give "consensus" views, they are "consensus" views noted three or more times on separate occasions, while "divergent" views are those noted only once or twice on separate occasions, either by individuals or by groups. That is, a "divergent" view might be a group view given on only one or two occasions over the years.

[5] The research for this article, and for the author's manuscript entitled *Spirits in the Loom: Religion and Design in Lao-Tai Textiles*, has been carried out during the years 2006-2010, by a small three-person team, consisting of the author, Peter Whittlesey, and Baythong Sayouvin Whittlesey, in these four sites in Hua Phan as well as in a number of Tai Daeng communities in Vientiane.

a curved tail, he is not one now – living instead in the mountains and the forests, and sometimes near temples. Because he was once an aquatic being, he has a body like a serpent, a *ngueak,* and like a *ngueak* he is both feared and worshipped.

Figure 14: *Pii nyak* images, *paa dtuum*. Xam Nuea. AC: MM-67.

According to the weavers, the *pii nyak* is a terrifying creature, a real and evil spirit who inhabits the forest high up in the mountains. Tall and dark skinned with big eyes, big ears, long arms, and large fingers,[6] he (or she) stands up straight like a tree with his arms hanging down and laughing wildly until the sun goes down. Because he doesn't want people in the forest he will, at night, attack and eat anyone who walks by, in particular, children who have mistakenly gotten lost in the forest. It is this attribute – that the *pii nyak* eats people – that weavers universally focus on when describing their fear of him. After sunset, they say, the *pii nyak* will grab a unsuspecting person, open his own mouth and, with his teeth, bite the person at the base of the neck, one lip covering the face and the other covering the body down through the chest. He then breaks the person's head open and drinks his or her blood. The *pii nyak* not only eats people physically, but can also consume their spirits (*kwan*) making them sick – and this is why people are exceedingly afraid of him. Ordinarily, however, weavers say, he only eats bad people – "people who aren't good people" – as well as bad spirits, though all people try to keep a far distance from him. One way of keeping the *pii nyak* away when walking in the forest is to wrap bamboo sticks around one's hands and arms, so that the *pii nyak* can't grab hold.

A good person, "a regular person," can ask the *pii nyak* who eats bad people to come and protect his/her family from the other bad spirits. The *pii nyak*, then, comes to be a protective being who keeps evil at bay. Xam Tai weavers say: "We ask the bad spirit (e.g., the *pii nyak*) to protect us because we are good and it is powerful. We don't let bad spirits into the house; we use a 'picture' to scare them away." The transformation of the *pii nyak* from a spirit who can cause great evil to one who can provide great protection seems to happen when the image is woven into a textile – for as one informant told us, "we don't depict evil spirits in our textiles." Thus "enshrined" in a textile, a large *pii nyak* on a door curtain then prevents bad spirits from entering a

[6] Another version given by weavers is that the *pii nyak* has no arms and no legs, only a head.

private room and, in a body wrap, from penetrating the wrap to harm the child held inside.

Figure 15: *Pii nyak* images inside *saang* bellies, *paa kang*. Xam Nuea. AC: MM-30

The presence of a *pii nyak* can also be used to explain diseases, as in **Fig. 15** that shows *pii nyaks* inside the bellies of *saang* elephants. Weavers in several villages say of this piece that the elephant will soon die, as the presence of the *pii nyak* means that the elephant is diseased and sick. Here the *pii nyak* woven into the textile has not been transformed into a protector of the health of the elephant but is one of the elephant's descriptors, that is, it could be "pregnant," it could be a "parent," but here it is "sick."

Where do Pii Nyaks Come From?

While it's always possible that the *pii nyak* is entirely the product of the indigenous Lao-Tai imagination, several authors note that the Nyaks of the Lao epic *Sinxay* are none other than the *yakshas* of Hinduism and early Indian Buddhism. In *Sinxay*, the hero and his brothers, Siho (half lion – half elephant) and Sangthong (half human – half snail), successfully battle against the Nyaks who have kidnapped Sinxay's aunt, Nang Soumountha (**Fig. 16**). The Nyaks are described as ogres, half demon – half human creatures, who are cannibals and who can travel in mid-air. They are terrifying, angry, and hateful beings, who are full of tricks and strong powers, and have the magic to call upon nature to help their cause as when, in the epic, they successfully call upon rocks from heaven to fall upon their enemies. They guard their home territory fiercely, as when one Nyak says to Sinxay:

> I am Valoonna Nyak who is very brave, daring, and well-known all over this forest. Every human who arrives here always dies and never leaves our land…Once I've got you in my hand I won't let you get away.

And, when Sinxay, reaches the border of the Nyak homeland, the Nyak border guard says:

> Who has come and trespassed across the border? You have chosen the wrong road and coming here like this means you are offering your life to me.

Figure 16: Nyak carrying away Nang Soumountha, *Sinxay* epic. Wall mural. Wat Sunuan Wari, Khon Kaen, Thailand

Nyaks attack humans with large wooden clubs, spears, and rocks, but are fatally susceptible to the swords, arrows, and fire unleashed by righteous humans, and can even be crushed by the likes of Sinxay's brother, Sangthong.[7] The epic tells us that Nyak faces are distorted, and have protruding eyes, frizzy hair, and skin that is usually dark or green in color.[8] In these ways, then, the characterization of the Nyaks in *Sinxay* as evil-minded, tempestuous, and powerful, eaters of creatures (**Fig. 17**) fits well with a description of a negative version of the Indian *yaksha* – but it fits this version better if we add elements of a companion figure from the Indian tradition, the *rakshasa*.

Figure 17: Nyak, *Sinxay* epic. Wall mural. Wat Chaisi, Khon Kaen, Thailand.

In early Indian culture, the *yaksha* is among the first Indian deities to be depicted in anthropomorphic form as an icon, beginning around the 3rd c. BCE in the Mauryan period. This early appearance, and the nature of the *yaksha* character, has led some scholars to argue that he is the

[7] Material taken from a rough draft of a new English translation of the *Sinxay* epic, especially pp. 34, 35 of the rough text. Courtesy of Peter and Baythong Sayouvin Whittlesey.

[8] Leslie Desmangles, Trinity College, private translation of Outhine Bounyavong, adapt., *L'Epope´e de Sinxay de Pangkham*, Vol. II. Vientiane: Dokked, 2004.

prototype of the Buddha image. In general, the *yaksha* is a vegetative divinity, associated with the earth, whose jurisdiction is life and death, health and disease, fertility and mortality, and whose natural home is the lonely and remote recesses of the forest, where there is no noise or sound of any kind, where breezes blow across from the pastures through the trees, and where the place is hidden from humans. Sometimes, *yakshas* are said to inhabit holy sites, such as pilgrimage spots or temples. The shape shifting quality of the *yaksha,* gives him two personalities, associated with his ambiguous capacity to heal and harm, to protect and make mischief, and to promote life and bring death.

The positive, beneficent personality renders the *yaksha* a kindly and inoffensive figure who is associated with mountains and forests, as well as a caretaker or steward of the treasures that are hidden in the earth and among the tree roots. In this way, the *yaksha* is the keeper of secrets and hidden things, and the knower of places where magical amulets are kept. Because of his being custodian of water holes and of his association with the cyclical patterns of nature, the *yaksha* is thought to control the rains that are essential to prosperity and abundance and, related to this, is worshipped as a bringer of children. The name "*yaksha*" comes from the Sanskrit root "*yah*" which, in its desiderative form, suggests "to honor or worship," and this lends itself to the characterization of his supporting a master in all situations, and providing friendly service and guardianship whenever needed. The *yaksha* is portrayed either as a squat, portly, big-bellied figure, often shown in a weight-bearing pose and associated with wealth, or as an agile figure whose slimness likens him to a vine. His earthy appearance – either squat and tree-like, or tall and vine-like – means that he is often green or brown in color, the green being a color often attributed to *nagas* as well.

The negative, threatening personality renders the *yaksha* a cannibalistic ogre or demon who, like his positive personality, inhabits the natural world. Here, however, he haunts the darker, wilderness areas, attacking and devouring travelers. "We Yakshas," says the *Matsya Purana*, "are by nature cruel of heart; we eat anything, including flesh; we are habitually violent!"[9] Here the *yaksha* can be a "warrior" but a warrior who, because of his warring tendencies, has a positive side. This strong and aggressive figure, the fiercely fighting champion, is the archetypal guardian, for in Indian art and literature, the *yaksha* is seen chiefly as a strong-armed attendant and gatekeeper (*dvarapala*), a bearer, supporter, and friendly server in all types of situations.[10]

The "door keeper" role of *yaksha* in his warrior mode can be seen in **Fig. 18**, from the early Indian cave site of Pitalkhora. Here the two *yakshas* guarding the staircase that goes up to the terrace stand in full protective regalia that, as J. C. Harle notes, is an example of an "archaic style" of dress, confirmed by the date of the particular site as late second to early first century BCE.[11] Two points are important here. The first is that such imagery, central to our argument, is of great antiquity in Indian iconographical history, and the second is that the *yaksha dvarapalas* are guarding a staircase to an inner religious space – a notion recapitulated in later Lao architectural and textile design patterns.

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[9] Dimmitt and van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, p. 248.
[10] Coomaraswamy, *Yakshas*, pp. 5-11.
[11] Harle, *Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, pp. 48-52.

Figure 18: Two *yaksha* warrior *dvarapalas*, Pitalkhora Caves, late 2nd – early 1st c. BCE. Archaeological Survey of India photo

The *yaksha* is often combined (and confused) with his fellow, the *rakshasa,* who augments his demonic traits by himself being a flesh-eating cannibal, a powerful warrior, and a demonic and mischievous shape shifter. As the *Mahabharata* notes, *rakshasas* "are capable of assuming any form at will and will [often] change their forms" whenever needed. The *rakshasa* is yellow, green, or blue, with eyes like vertical slits, matted hair, large belly, and poisonous fingernails that can kill humans. In the *Mahabharata*, the *rakshasa* is described as having large red eyes, strong arms, "standing hair and large mouth…sharp teeth and fearful appearance," and who is easily angered and prone to attack. Because the *rakshasa* kills and eats people, he is often addressed in the text with "O, cannibal," as he grows and thrives on "unsanctified meat." [12] Among the class of non-human semi-divines who inhabit the areas of the earth just above and below the surface – e.g. the Gandharvas, the Nagas, the Pishacas, the Ganas and

[12] Dutt, *Mahabharata*, Vol. I, p. 2001.

Ganeshas, the Yakshas and the Rakshasas[13] – it is only the last two (the *yakshas* and the *rakshasas*) who enjoy all the same offerings: flowers, and meat and spirituous liquor.

The *yaksha* is tied to another figure in this family of semi-divines, the *naga,* both of whom have an association with water, in particular an association with the control of the rains for prosperity and abundance. *Nagas,* who inhabit the aquatic nether world are figures of fertility, in the same way that *yakshas* are in their association with trees and vegetation on the surface of the earth. In India, as in Laos, the *naga* has a dual nature. On the one hand, he can be a beneficent being, bringing rain and fertility to drought stricken regions (and, thereby, prosperity to humans), but on the other he can be destructive and harmful to humans when not properly propitiated. **Fig. 19,** a fresco from an Ajanta cave, shows the Naga King Shankhapala caught by villagers when he was mistakenly attacked out of fear of his powers. He was later to have a generous and supportive role in the wellbeing of the village. The protective powers of the *naga* are highlighted as well in early Indian art, as in **Fig. 20**, a relief from Bharhut, showing a five-headed *naga* paying homage to the Buddha (in the form of the Bodhi tree) and reminding worshippers of his protective role in keeping the monsoon rains away from the Buddha during his enlightenment experience. These protective powers, of course, come into full expression when the *naga* assumes the "door-keeper" properties of his fellow semi-divine, the *yaksa.* This process achieves its full realization in Southeast Asia, where *naga* protectors of entranceways at Buddhist temples are ubiquitous in a number of countries, and where the *pii nyak* image is a common sight in Lao-Tai textiles.

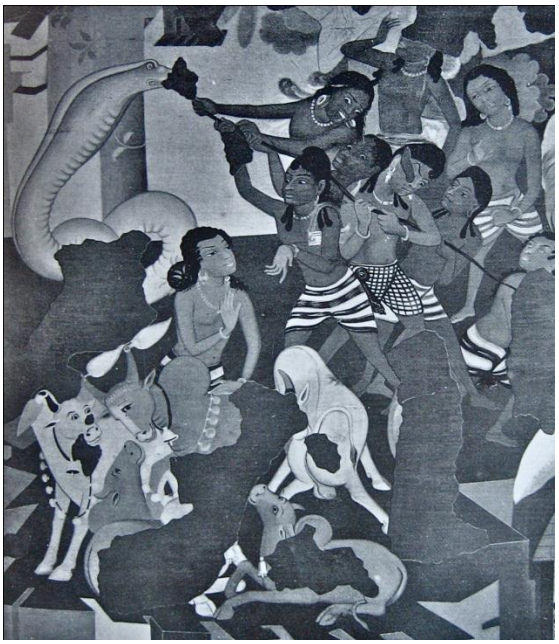

Figure 19: The Naga King Shankhapala being caught by villagers. Ajanta fresco, Pl. XIII. Courtesy of Vogel, *Indian Serpent Lore,* p. 150.

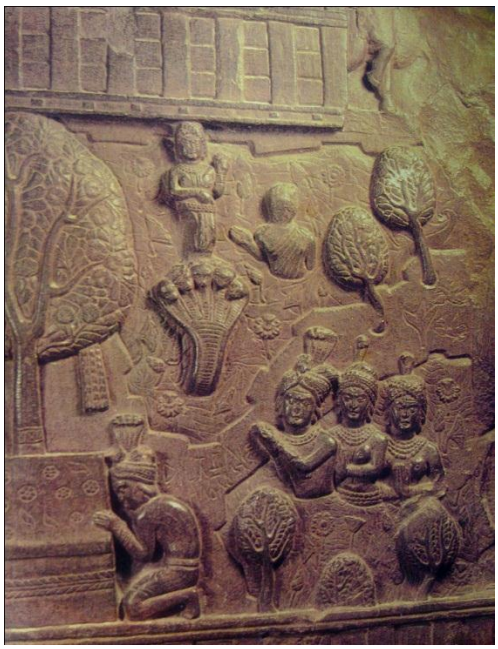

Figure 20: Relief of five-headed *naga* Elapattra paying homage to, and protecting a tree symbol of the Buddha. Courtesy of Vogel, Indian Serpent Lore, p. 40.

[13] See Eck, *Banaras: City of Light*, pp. 36, 61, 146, 183, 201, etc. for the ubiquity of these groupings in, for example, the culture of the holy Indian city of Kashi.

Where and how does this Indian material show up in northern Laos? Historically, as Indian culture spread south and eastward, many argue rightly that it met the Lao-Tai peoples as Khmer culture moved northward in the Southeast Asian peninsula. Indian materials first appear in Kampuchea around the first century of the Common Era, with Hindu materials (including beliefs in the *yakshas, rakshasas,* and *nagas*) arriving earliest, followed by Mahayana Buddhist and then Theravada Buddhist materials some time later. From the large Angkor site come images reflective of their Indian origin and supportive of our argument that there is a continuity between the old Indian material through its early transmission into Southeast Asia. **Fig. 21** shows a contemporary view from Angkor Thom of a sandstone terrace with multiple full-length *nagas* lining the entranceway, thus supporting the "door-keeper" theme of the *yaksha/naga* group. **Fig. 22,** from the Bayon temple at Angkor, shows another contemporary view of an upright multiple-headed *naga* lining a walkway at the Angkor site, again highlighting the entranceway position of *nagas* and their protective functions. The "golden age" of Khmer culture is that of the Angkor period, 9-14thc. CE, and this culture moved north into what is now Laos, influencing the founding of the Lan Xang kingdom in 1353.

Figure 21: Full-length extended *nagas* serving as guardians of an entrance. Angkor Thom. Courtesy of Andrea Wise

Figure 22: Close-up of one of the *dvarapala nagas*. Bayon. Courtesy of Andrea Wise.

Contact with Indian materials also took place along the Southwest Silk Road that extended at least from Assam, India through Upper Burma, Yunnan and other areas in southern China, northern Laos, and northern Vietnam. We know that King Ashoka (304-232 BCE), the great Mauryan Buddhist king, had emissaries in southwestern Yunnan in the 2nd c. BCE, and that trade with India occurs along these routes from at least this time. Moving westward along the route, the first port of call in India is Assam, known to have a flourishing *naga* cult; and not too far away is the ancient city of Kashi (modern day Benares) on the River Ganga, whose sacred geography Is built on old mythological beliefs in the *yakshas, rakshasas, nagas, gandharvas, ganas*, and *ganeshas*. We argue, then, that there is every reason to believe that the Tai peoples along the "wide arc" of this area have contact

with this Indian material and that it, plus Khmer influence, is present in contemporary images that we find among peoples like the Lao-Tai.

Figure 23: Pair of Nyaks guarding gate at Vat Mixai, Vientiane.

Figure 24: Pair of Nyaks guarding temple doors at Vat Phonxai, Vientiane

To support this point, we note that Buddhist temple compounds in northern Laos are often guarded by Nyak or Yaksha figures. **Figs. 23** and **24** show Nyak guardian figures at Vat Mixai and Vat Phonxai, respectively, in Vientiane. Here they perform the same function as traditional Hindu *dvarapalas* or "doorkeepers:" they are dressed as warriors, and they have fierce faces, strident poses, and are colored green. **Fig. 25** shows a close up of a Nyak at Vat Mixai showing his ferocious eyes, teeth, and bearing. Most of all, however, the Nyaks are protectors, in the same way that the early Hindu and Buddhist *yakshas* are. Another image found even more ubiquitously in northern Lao temple architecture is the double *naga* protectors that line stairway entrances throughout the temple compound. As noted, we see such "*naga* entrance protectors" in places like Angor Wat, but not in such pervasiveness as in Laos, where the *dvarapala* aspect of the *yaksha* has been conflated with the characterization of the *naga*, its close associate in the class of supernatural beings. As examples, we submit **Fig. 26** where two green *nagas* protect the entrance stairs at Vat Sisaket in the capital city of Vientiane; **Fig. 27** where two green *nagas* line stairs to an outdoor Buddha pavilion at the main Buddhist temple (Vat Ban Muang Yong) near the rural village of Muang Vaen near Xam Nuea in Hua Phan; and **Fig. 28** where two green *nagas* line the steps to the main temple in the northerly, rural Lao area of Ban Sop Hao. This latter is interesting, as weavers and teachers in Ban

Figure 25: Single Nyak at Vat Mixai, Vientiane.

Sop Hao proudly proclaim that their village has a hundred Tai (e.g., spirit religion, *saatsanaa pii)* families and only seven Lao (i.e., Buddhist, *saatsannaa put)* families. The presence of a Buddhist temple in a strongly Tai Daeng area is not surprising, however, as, in times of sickness, the patient's family likes to keep its options open and often will go to a local healing shaman, a Buddhist monk, and a western clinic in that order, just to cover its bases.

Figure 26: *Nagas* guarding stairs at Vat Sisaket, Vientiane

Figure 27: *Nagas* guarding stairs at Vat Ban Muang Yong, Muang Vaen

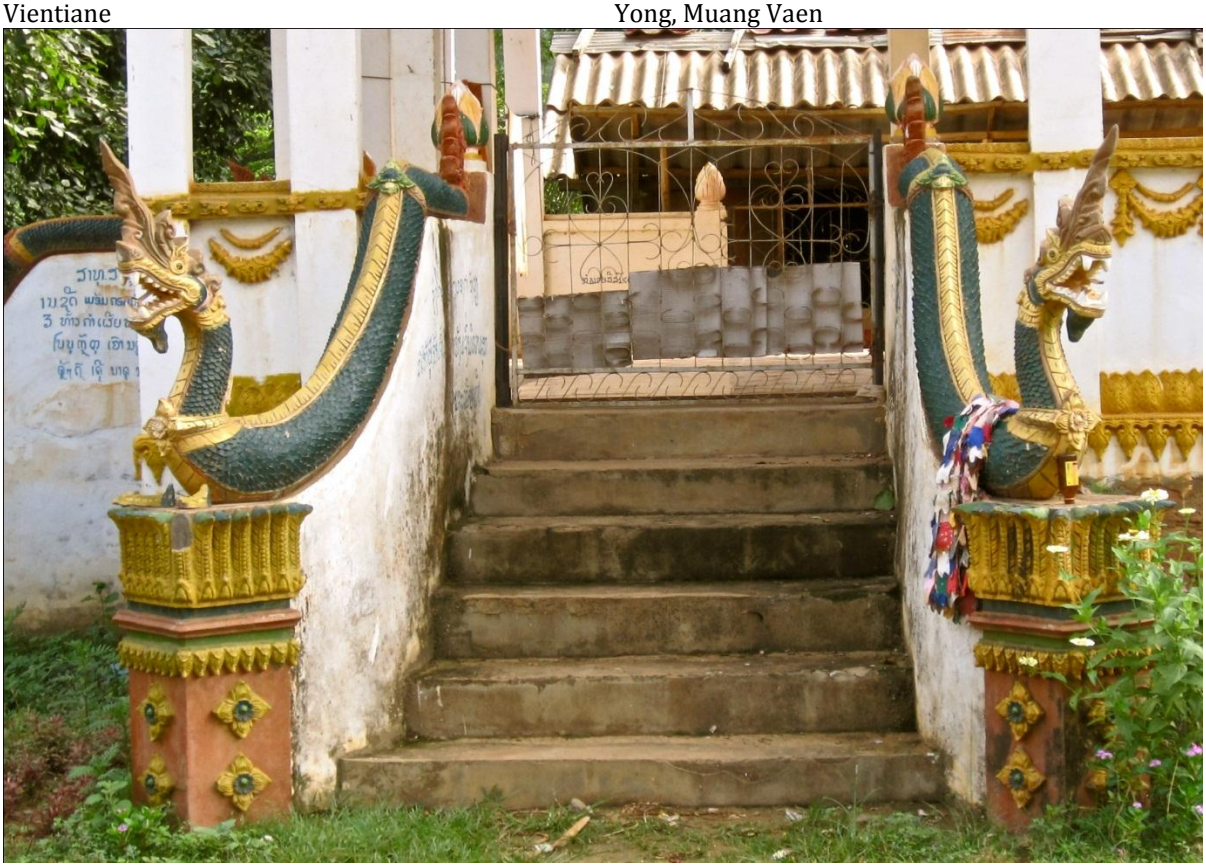

Figure 28: *Nagas* guarding stairs at *vat* near Ban Sop Hao.

We now return to what the weavers in the four sites in Hua Phan call "the great spirit" or *pii nyak*. If the *yaksha*, with some *rakshasa* elements, and in conjunction with another "family" member, the *naga,* contributes to the meaning of the *pii nyak*, then we can argue that whatever negative (evil, hurtful, or scary) properties it has as a figure "out there," they are tamed and transformed when rendered in a textile. (The same would be true when they are rendered in plastic form, in the case of the Nyak statues outside Buddhist temples.). Of **Fig. 29**, a body wrap for parents and children, weavers note the highly protective function of the *pii nyak,* whose visage indicates that he/she is on "high alert," with erect crests of hair, attentive and vigilant eyes, long ears the better to hear approaching enemies, and coiled *naak* arms full of energy and ready to strike out in protection of the user of the textile. "*Naaks* are important for protecting people," weavers commonly say, even though sometimes "in order for protecting yourself against the *naaks* you need amulets."

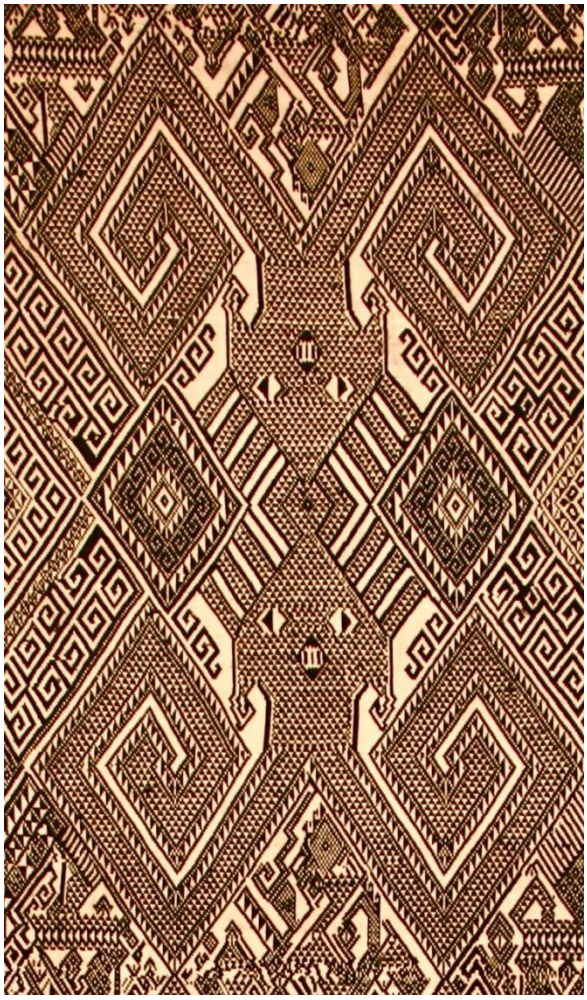

Figure 29: *Pii nyak, paa dtuum.* AC: SS-81

If we apply this material to the *pii nyak* image in Lao-Tai weavings, then we can draw four conclusions. First, if the *yaksha*, with some *rakshasa* elements, and in conjunction with the *naga,* contributes to the meaning of the *pii nyak*, then we can argue that whatever negative (evil, hurtful, or scary) properties it has as a figure "out there" in the unseen wild, these dread-filled properties are tamed and transformed when rendered in a textile. Weavers commonly note that textiles cannot include designs of anything evil, so that whatever is in a textile, in this case, an image of a *pii nyak*, must be a good, beneficial image. If the Indian imagery of the *pii nyak* in the head cloth of **Fig. 30**, for example, has ambivalent antecedents that are changed for the good once it is "textile-embedded," then we must note further points about the positive contributions of the *ngueak* serpent to the image.

Second, the *pii nyak* head makes use of the *ngueak*'s rainbow crest instead of hair. The rainbow crest of the serpent as rendered in Lao-Tai textiles makes reference to an old Hindu myth that describes *nagas* as living below the surface of the earth in palaces where they guard the earth's treasures of jewels and precious stones. *Nagas* have entrance to, and exit from, these underground palaces via anthills on the earth's surface. When there is rainbow following a thunderstorm, it is thought that the rainbow reaches down through the anthill into the earthly treasure of jewels. The

Figure 30: *Pii nyak, paa kaan hua.* AC: EF-168.

rainbow that shines in the sky is an emanation from (or reflection of) this subterranean world of the *nagas,* being made from the light of the jewels as that light hits the air above. Although *nagas* in India do not themselves have crests, those in the Lao arts do, and it is presumed that the serpent crest comes into Laos via influence from the Chinese dragon or *long*. In Lao-Tai Buddhist architecture, the *nagas* almost always have crests, although their crests are not rainbow ones but colored mainly in gold and red. It is primarily in textiles where the *ngueak* crest is rendered with rainbow colors, and we argue here, in the case of the *pii nyak*, that it is the textile rainbow crest of the serpent that harkens back to the Indian antecedents of the *naga* – rainbow – anthill myth.

Third, the *pii nyak* makes use of *ngueak* heads or tails as its body. We note, however, that the *pii nyak* has <u>two</u> *ngueak* heads or tails, and that they are rendered as if they are opening up a pathway for the viewer. Knowing the past history of the Nyak, we argue that what we see in the textile is the double *nagas* that line the entrance steps to Buddhist temples, and that this is a reiteration of their earlier *yaksha*-derived "door-keeper" function. This would confirm that this image – the *pii nyak* – is in fact a guardian protector. And what remains of the *yaksha* iconography in the *pii nyak* are signs of its two-fold nature, the malevolent and the benevolent: the scary face and bristly hair, on the one hand, and the protective open arms on the other. While all of these elements bear an Indian imprint, the facts that the *pii nyak* often appears on both

the head cloth and the body wrap – protecting the human seat of consciousness, and the ongoing generation of the family – suggest that the Lao-Tai transformation of the image has become highly personal, and that it's protective function, like each textile, is here, not institutional (as for the temple), but individual.

How, then, fourth, do we understand the *gaap* head attached to <u>two</u> *naga* appendages, whether heads or tails? And, in particular, how do we understand the shift from "door protector" imagery of the temple – with Nyaks/Yakshas or *nagas* guarding the gates and stairways into the compound and temple building itself – to the *pii nyak* image in textiles? Here we make use of Carl Jung's idea *that images of the house or building are actually images of the self.* If, as we argue, the embeddedness of the *pii nyak* in the textile (1) renders it protective rather than destructive, and (2) shifts the function of the image away from the institutional to the individual, then the *pii nyak's* appendages protectively guard the entranceways into, not a house or a building, but the self: the seat of human consciousness, if it is used on a head cloth, for example, or the baby representing the next generation, if it is used on a parent's body wrap. Thus, as a textile image, *the* pii nyak *maintains its old function of protecting the thresholds into the inside, but the insides here they are not those of a physical structure, but of the human self.*

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The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts[1]

by Harald Hundius and David Wharton[2]

Abstract

Scholarship in Lao monasteries extends back over five centuries and has produced a huge number of texts containing resources for the study of Buddhism and Lao culture. Much has been achieved in the survey and inventory of the country's traditional literature over the past 100 years, and more recently in the physical preservation of texts. The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts builds on this previous work by providing detailed searches of inventory data for almost 12,000 manuscripts and making digital images of the texts available for study. It is unique in Southeast Asia in providing online access to such a large number and variety of primary literary sources. It is broadly representative of the national literary heritage.

Introduction

Scholarship in Lao monasteries extends back over five centuries and has produced a huge number of texts containing resources for the study of Buddhism and Lao culture. Much has been achieved in the survey and inventory of the country's traditional literature over the past 100 years, and more recently in the physical preservation of texts. The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts builds on this previous work by providing detailed searches of inventory data for almost 12,000

[1] Several sections of this article have been adapted from information available on the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts website, at www.laomanuscripts.net. The text of the website was written by David Wharton and Harald Hundius.

[2] Harald Hundius is a Professor Emeritus of the University of Passau (Germany) in the Languages and Literatures of Thailand and Laos, and received an honorary doctorate in Northern Thai Language and Literature by Chiang Mai University. He conducted the first comprehensive survey of Northern Thai manuscripts in the 1970s and later initiated and participated in the Preservation of Northern Thai Manuscripts Project, while working as a guest lecturer and research advisor at Chiang Mai University (1983-1992). He was Senior Advisor to the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme (1992-2004) and Project Supervisor for the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts project from 2007-2011. David Wharton has been working in the Manuscript Section of the National Library of Laos since 2004, most recently as the Researcher for the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts project. He spent 12 years as a Buddhist monk in the Thai Forest Tradition and worked for six years in peacebuilding and development in Cambodia. He holds a BA from Durham University (UK) and is a PhD candidate at the University Passau, studying the literature of the Tai Nuea ethnic group in Northern Laos.

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manuscripts and making digital images of the texts available for study. It is unique in Southeast Asia in providing online access to such a large number and variety of primary literary sources, and, although it does not yet include samples of all the ethnic groups that possess written literature, it is broadly representative of the national literary heritage. The project was implemented by the National Library of Laos in collaboration with the University of Passau and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, and funded by the German Research Foundation and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. The project has the full support of the Government of the Lao PDR, which granted permission for the manuscript collection to be made accessible via the Internet. This article will provide an overview of traditional Lao literature and of survey and preservation work to date, followed by an introduction to the online library.

Traditional Lao Literature

Laos possesses a rich literary tradition dating back to the 15th/16th century AD.[3] Most works have been handed down through continuous copying and have survived in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts, which were traditionally stored in wooden caskets and kept in the libraries of Buddhist monasteries. A small proportion of texts were written on other materials, such as mulberry (*sa*) paper, which is much less durable than palm-leaf. Although monasteries have been seats of learning in the country since ancient times, in recent decades, tens of thousands of invaluable manuscripts have faced the threat of destruction.

The majority of Lao manuscripts are from the Theravada Buddhist tradition, most commonly in bilingual versions, i.e. Pali texts with more or less elaborated Lao translations or commentaries, which shed light on the local interpretation of the Pali texts. In addition, extra-canonical works, such as the Jataka narratives – a considerable number of which are thought to originate from local Southeast Asian traditions – form an important part of the literary heritage of Laos. Indeed, many of these legends are among the most popular texts used by the monks in their recitations and sermons given to the lay people; they deserve special interest because they contain valuable information about the social life and values in the Buddhist societies of the region. Other texts contain a wide range of works about history, traditional law and customs, astrology, magic, mythology and rituals, traditional medicine and healing, grammar and lexicography, as well as poetry, epic stories, folk tales, and romances.

There also exists a vast array of other literary traditions belonging to the various ethnic groups that form almost half of the total population of Laos. Although the majority of these traditions are oral, notable examples of written literary traditions include the Hmong, Mien, and Thai Dam. These texts are generally more difficult to access, and inventories of Lao literature have focused largely on the Lao and Tai texts stored in Buddhist monasteries. Given the remarkable ethnic and cultural diversity within Laos, much work remains to be done in recording and preserving its many written and oral literatures.

Today, there are on-going efforts to keep stories derived from traditional literature alive amongst the younger generation in Laos, especially through the

[3] The oldest known dated manuscript in the DLLM collection is a monolingual Pali copy of part of the Parivāra (PLMP Code 06018504078_00), in Tham Lao script, dated CS 882 or CE 1520, kept at the Provincial Museum in Luang Prabang (formerly the Royal Palace).

publication of youth-oriented adaptations of well-known folktales. This is in response to a perceived loss of Lao cultural values due to the modernisation process and the influence of modern entertainment media, such as television and computer games. Many traditional tales are timelessly appealing to children, and these materials are being integrated into reading promotion programmes in primary schools throughout the country. And yet, even though there may be a measure of success in preserving knowledge of these stories, the physical manuscript tradition itself faces even greater challenges. In Thailand and Myanmar, the arrival of the printing press hastened the demise of the production and reading of handwritten texts, and the fact that they are still inscribed and read in Laos at all may well be a reflection of the country's comparatively underdeveloped publishing industry. However, in Laos today, even in monasteries, television or videos are likely to have more appeal than manuscript repositories. Similarly, while Pali language and the Tham script are still taught in monastic schools, English language and other secular subjects are generally seen as being of more practical use in improving job prospects for students, the vast majority of whom will disrobe upon graduation.

Previous Surveys and Inventories

Almost all of the early surveys and registrations of manuscripts were undertaken by French scholars and their Lao assistants. Though now outdated in many respects, these surveys have remained helpful tools for researchers. Louis Finot's *Recherches sur la littérature laotienne*, published in 1917 in the Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême Orient, still provides a useful overview of traditional Lao literature in a Western language.[4] His *Liste générale des manuscrits laotiens*, which is provided in the final part of his study, is a list of two principal collections existing at the time – the Bibliothèque Royale de Luang Prabang (catalogued by M. Meiller, 1181 entries) and the Bibliothèque de l'École française d'Extrême Orient (338 entries). Several other inventories of monastery or library holdings undertaken during the period from 1900 to 1973, by both Lao and French scholars, list a total of 3,678 manuscripts from 94 monasteries in nine provinces. A notable initiative is the work of the Chanthabouly Buddhist Council (under the leadership of Chao Phetsarat), which asked abbots throughout the country to submit lists of their manuscript holdings between 1934 and 1936. In the 1950s and 1960s, Henri Deydier, Pierre-Bernard Lafont and Charles Archaimbault worked on the EFEO inventory, researching and analyzing manuscripts. An *Inventaire des Manuscrits des Pagodes du Laos*, building on the previous work of French scholars, was conducted under the leadership of Pierre-Bernard Lafont in 1959 and covered 83 monasteries altogether: 13 in Luang Prabang, 25 in Vientiane, and 45 in Campasak.[5] Other related catalogues during this period, though valuable tools in themselves, were of limited collections and were not intended to be representative of Lao literature as a whole.

During the Second Indochina War and the years immediately following the proclamation of the Lao PDR in 1975, the country met with extremely difficult conditions; it was only in the mid-1980s – with the end of the Cold War and among changes in the global political climate – that national awareness of the importance of

[4] Louis Finot, "Recherches sur la littérature laotienne," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 17, no. 5 (1917): 1-128.

[5] Pierre-Bernard Lafont, "Inventaire des manuscrits des pagodes du Laos" *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême Orient* 52, no. 2 (1965): 429-545.

literary works re-appeared. In March 1988, with the support of the Toyota Foundation, a conference was convened in Vientiane. Monks and knowledgeable lay people from all over Laos were invited to discuss the state of manuscript conservation in their home communities, and to exchange views on what should be done in order to safeguard the remaining manuscripts that were in danger of being forgotten in the monastic libraries. As a result of this meeting, the project to set up a Lao-language *Inventory of Palm-leaf Manuscripts in Six Provinces of Laos* was initiated by the Ministry of Information and Culture with the support of the Toyota Foundation.[6] In the course of this project (1988-1994) approximately 128,000 fascicles were inventoried from some 250 selected monasteries in Vientiane Capital and the provinces of Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Bolikhamsai, Khammuan, Savannakhet, and Campasak. In the years that followed, a more comprehensive survey was undertaken by the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme.

The Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme

The Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme (PLMP) of the Lao Ministry of Information and Culture was supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its cultural assistance programme from 1992 until 2004. The main objectives were to help the Lao PDR physically preserve its national literary heritage; to revitalise public awareness of its value; to help build the local capacity for the field preservation, research, and dissemination of these resources through the systematic survey and *in situ* preservation of manuscript holdings of selected Buddhist monasteries as well as State and private collections in all 17 provinces; to microfilm documents of historical or cultural importance; to support the revitalisation of traditional literature in religious life as well as its integration into the modern public education system; to guide and assist in the creation of scientific and technical tools such as databases, study material, textbooks, and specialized computer software; and to develop academic and human resources capable of assisting teachers and researchers in using the manuscripts at institutions of higher learning.

The programme responded directly to local needs and the work was carried out with strong community participation. Under the guidance of a mobile preservation team of three, which was joined by locally recruited volunteers, manuscripts were systematically scrutinized, reassembled, cleaned, titled, classified according to their content, and entered into a computerized database. Throughout the programme, none of the material – including the most damaged or decayed palm-leaves, wooden covers, manuscript wrappings and storage chests, or any other local artefacts – was removed from its original site. Where necessary and feasible, damaged documents were restored and repaired and then stored in an appropriate way (i.e. safe from termites, mice and mould).

One of the outstanding results of these efforts is a library of microfilm recordings collecting approximately 12,000 selected texts – including a large number of parallel versions or additional copies, which are necessary for serious scholarly work. The master copy is stored at the Lao National Film Archive and Video Centre, while a working copy is kept at the National Library of Laos, and a

[6] National Library of Laos, *Inventory of Palm-leaf Manuscripts in Six Provinces of Laos* (Vientiane: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1994).

second copy at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Germany. This collection is by far the most extensive to date and can be regarded as representative of the national literary heritage. It comprises almost 500,000 frames, which on average contain about 6-8 palm-leaf pages, giving a total of some 3-4 million recorded manuscript pages.

The criteria for selection in the microfilming process included historico-cultural importance, cultural diversity or regional representation, age (all manuscripts over 150 years old) and quality of the manuscript. Within these general guidelines, and whenever the condition of the manuscript allowed, priority for microfilming was given to extra-canonical literature, manuscripts which were thought to represent indigenous literary traditions, and texts of a non-religious nature.

This unprecedented project not only covered every province in Lao, but it managed to include remote monasteries – many of which had never been surveyed before – in addition to the more well-known collections. Over the course of ten years, until the cooperation project officially ended in December 2002, the manuscript holdings of over 800 monasteries were surveyed, and approximately 86,000 texts (368,000 fascicles) preserved. The inventory data sheets for these texts are kept in hard copy at the National Library of Laos. Although this is far more extensive than any previous survey, it must be seen in context; there are over 4,000 monasteries (*vat*) in the country.[7] What is more, the selection of texts for microfilming further reduced the sample – texts within the DLLM collection are in fact from only 380 locations.

The German Foreign Office supported a follow-up phase of the project from January 2003 to December 2004, during which time provincial Manuscript Preservation Centres were set up in selected monasteries in Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Savannakhet, and Campasak provinces. Their role is to serve as examples of well-kept monastic libraries, to act as centres for the study of traditional literature, and to advise and assist the monasteries that were not included in the project in preserving their manuscript holdings. In addition, these centres hold annual manuscript festivals (*bun bai lan*), during which the entire manuscript holdings are taken out of their repositories, unwrapped, inspected for signs of damage, cleaned if necessary, re-wrapped, and carried three times around the ordination hall (*sim*) in a dignified procession.

The best way to preserve the manuscripts would be to preserve the traditional use and copying of the texts, and to use the local palm-leaf technology which has proven to last for 500 years. Unfortunately, while every effort should be made to prevent the loss of this tradition, it appears unlikely to succeed on the required scale. In all likelihood, the best modern technology for the long-term storage and retrieval of surrogate copies is high-quality microfilm, which can be passively stored and easily read. Digital surrogates – which must be actively stored and are always in danger of having their particular format lapse into obsolescence – do of course have the great advantage of being easy to transfer and to search.

It is important to see manuscript preservation as an ongoing task, rather than a project conducted over a limited time period. This is very clear on the ground in Laos, but it is not the perspective of project-driven funding. Preservation work and

[7] According to statistics released by the Lao Buddhist Fellowship (*Salup luam sathiti kan pok khong song thua pathet khong ongkan phutthasasanasamphan lao*), in 2005-2006 there were altogether 3,656 monasteries with residing monks and 826 deserted monasteries.

related research continues to this day, supported by the Lao Government and other project funds based at the National Library of Laos. However, the results of efforts to encourage *in situ* local participation and ownership of the preservation process are mixed, and the National Library's resources are insufficient to centrally manage the large number of collections found throughout the country, many of which are in danger of deterioration.

The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts

The aim of the digital library is to complement ongoing manuscript preservation work in Laos by making the extensive PLMP microfilm collection of primary sources easily accessible and, thereby, to facilitate the study of Lao literature and culture within Laos and overseas. It is unique in Southeast Asia in providing online access to such a large number and variety of primary literary sources. As mentioned above, the DLLM collection can be seen as broadly representative of the Lao national literary heritage. It comprises religious and non-religious works, and indigenous traditions as well as texts from the "greater tradition" found in Southeast Asian states with Indian cultural influences, and it also includes examples of all the major languages and scripts used by the ethnic Lao and Tai groups found in the country.

The collection contains over 900 monolingual Pali texts, including the oldest dated manuscripts, which are from the early 16th century. Almost 75 percent of the manuscripts are bilingual texts containing Pali-vernacular translations, glosses, and elaborations. Such bilingual texts, where the vernacular can provide important information about local understanding or interpretation of the Pali, are increasingly appreciated by scholars for the insights they provide into the functions of the text in the real life of people, and as pedagogical tools. The collection also offers an opportunity to study a mass of extra-canonical Buddhist literature, which provides insight into how societies used, practiced, and taught Buddhist values.

The website and all inventory data are mirrored in both Lao and English, and interested readers are invited to view the web application online at www.laomanuscripts.net. Search fields include title (both auto-complete and by browsing alphabetical lists), ancillary term, language, script, category, material, location, date, and PLMP code number. Search results can also be filtered to show only texts with illustrations or only texts with colophons, and a map interface (using GIS data for Lao villages) shows the distribution of texts for any search criteria. The project also plans to add a feature enabling online searches of handwritten terms within the digital images themselves; such a feature would, which will significantly enhance research possibilities.

In compiling the inventory data, the handling of titles was particularly challenging. The actual titles appearing on the texts are complex in terms of orthographic variants, the common use of ancillary or supplementary terms indicating the genre of the text, and the fact that a manuscript may contain several distinct works, each with its own title. Another common problem is that a single work may have more than one title, and, in addition, alternative titles may sometimes be found within the same manuscript. For example, the extra-canonical Jataka story with the Pali title *Tepadumā*, is found with the following titles: *Tepathumma*, *Lam tepathumma*, *Tepathumma kumman*, *Tepathumma bua hom*, *Bua hom*, *Lam thao bua hom*, *Lam thao bua hong*, *Bua hom bua hong*, *Bua hom bua hiao*,

or *Thao bua hom bua hong bua hiao*.

The purpose of the inventory database is to enable users to access images of the primary sources, and the design of the user interface for searching the collection aims to make this process as straightforward as possible. The title search list was therefore simplified as much as possible; it contains a standardised main element of each title as well as alternative titles, but it does not include orthographic variants or ancillary terms. An additional "Ancillary Terms" search option is provided for approximately 35 of the supplementary terms found in titles, including genres of text such as *salong*, *tamnan*, *jātaka/sadok*, translated renderings such as *śabda/sap*, *nissaya/nisai*, *vohāra/vohan*, metric forms such as *khong*, *kham kon*, *samāsa/samat*, as well as titles and terms of address such as *kampha*, *cao*, *thao, nang*, *phanya*.

Manuscripts for which the titles are not found are entered as "Untitled (*survey title*)" in the digital collection, where *survey title* is the title that was assigned when the text was identified during the PLMP survey. All other discrepancies between the title used in the digital library and the previous survey title are noted under "Remarks." In the case of orthographic variants, the inventory data preserve the diversity of the originals (within the limitations of modern Lao orthography), while simplifying the title search terms to the most commonly used forms.

The rendering of titles in modern Lao script and in Romanised form also aims to make the title search list as simple as possible for users. The Lao title search list is therefore written according to the orthographic principles introduced by the post-1975 government, whereby the writing of Lao words follows their pronunciation, while the orthographic variants and historical linguistic evidence found in the texts are preserved in the main inventory data. Likewise, a simple Romanisation is used in preference to a linguistically more accurate system using diacritics or special symbols. The system very closely follows the revised Royal Thai General System of Transcription for Central Thai,[8] which is a broad, phonetically-oriented transcription with no distinction of vowel length or of tonal phonemes.

For the benefit of Pali scholars, titles of monolingual Pali manuscripts are also Romanised according to the standard system used in the Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD).[9] PDF guides to the Romanisation system used for Lao and to the rendering of Pali consonants in Lao script and their Romanisation are available via the website at http://www.laomanuscripts.net/en/pages/about_collection.html#4. For non Lao-language vernacular texts such as Lan Na, Tai Lue, and Tai Nuea, Romanisation is also based on the title found on the original, using the same system as for Lao language texts, but based on the present pronunciation in the original language rather than the modern Lao phonology and orthography.

To minimise possible confusion arising over the Lao rendering and the Romanisation system used, the title search list and other search options are provided as alphabetical lists through which users can browse, rather than relying upon typing in data. The Lao script rendering of all data is also provided in

[8] Nitaya Kanchanawan, "Romanization, Transliteration, and Transcription for the Globalisation of the Thai Language," *The Journal of the Royal Institute of Thailand* 31. no. 3 (2006): 832-841.

[9] V. Trenckner et al., *A Critical Pali Dictionary*, vol. 1, 1924-1948; vol. 2, 1960-1990; vol. 3, 1992-1994. (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 1924). When searching for titles of monolingual Pali texts, the Romanised Lao title is given before the Romanised Pali. This means that when selecting titles, Pali titles beginning with 'D' or 'Dh,' for example, are found under the tab for 'T.' It may therefore be preferable for Pali scholars who are unfamiliar with the Lao rendering of Pali to type the CPD Pali title (with or without diacritics) into the auto-complete box under Title Search.

parentheses after the Romanisation. The DLLM Romanisation system is designed as a practical tool to access the digital images of primary sources, which is the main purpose of the web application.

The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts is unique in Southeast Asia in providing online access to such a large number and variety of primary literary sources. In doing so, it is also bridging the gap between the 'ancient' manuscript tradition and modern Internet technology, which is still in its early development in Laos. The project also seeks ways to enhance networking and coordination with related manuscript preservation and inventory projects in neighbouring countries and overseas, particularly in the development of digital libraries.

Remembering Within a Sacred Space in Vientiane

by Rafael Martinez[1]

Abstract

Taking as a subject the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Vientiane, I aim to explore dimensions of the past in modern-day Lao PDR. The goal is twofold. First, by analyzing the mix of common communist features with Buddhist shapes, I propose to examine the monument as a public, iconographic assertion of the current regime's legitimacy. The second goal is to link the regime's assertion of legitimacy to the particular space in which the monument was built. In addition to selecting clear Buddhist patterns, the Lao government chose to construct the monument within what is arguably the most sacred space in the country. In the 1990s, despite the debacle of communism, the Lao regime decided not only to continue to abide by this ideology, but also to renovate the external expression of its communist position by combining it with elements of the local culture (e.g., Theravada Buddhism) within sacred spaces.

Keywords*: Ban* That Luang; collective memory; monument; sacred space; Theravada Buddhism; Vientiane

Introduction

On January 20, 1994, National Army Day, high-profile authorities formally inaugurated the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Vientiane, the capital of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). Located in the village (*ban*) of That Luang,[2] the monument was meant to memorialize the Pathet Lao who died during the Thirty-Year Struggle (1945–1975).[3] The monument was initially located at the intersection of Nongbone Street and Kaysone Phomvihane Avenue. However, redevelopment works held in the ban That Luang area in August 2008, necessitated the dismantling of the

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[2] In the 1990s, it was estimated that Vientiane city encompassed almost 1,500 square kilometers of wetlands, of which That Luang was the largest. At the time, such wetlands provided the city and its inhabitants with fisheries and flood control. See: P. Gerrard, *Integrating Wetland Ecosystem Values into Urban Planning: The Case of That Luang Marsh, Vientiane, Lao PDR* (Vientiane: IUCN – The World Conservation Union Asia Regional Environmental Economics Programme and WWF Lao Country Office, 2004), 6.

[3] The communist movement Pathet Lao (Country or Land of the Lao) uses this term "to describe the period of revolutionary warfare from 1945, when the revolutionary Left in Laos took up arms against the French, until 1974, when the Kingdom of Laos was replaced by the Lao People's Democratic Republic" See: M. Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary of Laos* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 346.

monument and its relocation South west of the National Assembly, where it was re-unveiled on January 20, 2009 (see appendix B: figure 5).

Much like those of the National Assembly, the architectural and decorative elements of the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Vientiane are characterized by what might be considered the "traditional style" in Lao PDR. That is to say, both the National Assembly and the Unknown Soldier's Monument use superimposed platforms and nature-inspired decoration (see appendix B: figure 4; appendix D: figures 4 and 5). Nevertheless, unlike the geometrical rigidity of the National Assembly, and very much in opposition to the style commonly used to build monuments of this genre,[4] the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Vientiane was built on the basis of what is clearly a Lao Theravada Buddhist design.

The monument consists of seven superimposed quadrangular platforms that decrease in size as they ascend. The uppermost platform is crowned by a cube-shaped base on which rests an empty structure called a *stupa* (reliquary), inside of which might be placed the mortal remains of a soldier. The stupa is topped by a five-pointed golden star. The external façades of the platforms forming the monument are also decorated. The upper-level platforms are adorned with lotus-like petals, and the mid-level platforms feature flower-like panels crowned by plaster *Bodhi* tree leaves that frame an anthropomorphic Buddhist-style representation (see appendix C: figure 1). Finally, the ground level platform is covered with bas-reliefs representing historic Lao PDR episodes (see appendix B: figure 3). Exactly in the middle of this lower level is embedded another five-pointed golden star, the center of which is a cauldron where the flame that symbolizes the memory of the Unknown Soldier continues to burn (see appendix C: figure 3). With the exception of the upper-most level, where the stupa is located, visitors can walk along the different levels of the monument and view its surrounding environment, which is dominated by the National Assembly, as well as the seat of the Lao PDR Buddhist Patriarch, and, in particular, the golden stupa of That Luang – arguably the most sacred monument in the whole of Lao PDR (see appendix D: figures 7 and 8).

This article aims to respond to the following questions: *Why did the Lao PDR regime, given its communist affiliation, order the construction of a civic monument based on a design almost entirely Buddhist in style and appearance? Why has the Lao PDR government of the past two decades steadily undertaken the construction of official (secular) facilities within what is possibly the most sacred space in the country?*

I argue that the hybridization of Buddhist-influenced architectural design and decoration with communist iconography, as evidenced by the Unknown Soldier's Monument – a building conceived to host and represent secular rites – derives from a quest for legitimacy by the Lao state. This quest has intensified since the fall of communism in Europe. Further, I suggest that in order to achieve legitimacy, the Lao PDR government has undertaken its own strategic "insertion into the past" via the adoption of sacred spaces such as ban That Luang (see appendix G).

[4] In different parts of the world, the unknown soldiers' monuments tend to be designed based on an abstract architectural line. Cf. M. Evans and K. Lunn, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berg Publishers, 1997).

In order to substantiate this position, in this article I discuss material manifestations of collective memory (monuments) within the sacred space of ban That Luang. On the basis of theoretical and historical analysis, I examine two cases: the Unknown Soldier's Monument and the That Luang or Great Stupa. I observe these monuments from three perspectives: *shape* (the form of the monument); *space* (how this monument affects the space where it is located); and what I call *metaspace* (how the space surrounding the monument affects a larger, namely national, context).

The article is divided into four sections. In the first, I discuss the theoretical and symbolic relevance of secular and religious monuments. In this section, on the basis of an *ad hoc* theoretical framework, I present the synergetic relationship between *shape* (form), *space*, and *metaspace*. I argue that the relationship between these elements has been possible thanks to how the collective memory has been historically manifested within ban That Luang. In the second section, I discuss the relevance of Buddhist stupas to collective memory. Then, by observing the historical use of the space surrounding That Luang, I discuss the idea of space within ban That Luang and suggest that, by undertaking the construction of official facilities within this space in the past two decades, the Lao government has reoriented its position, transforming itself from guest to host of That Luang's sacred space. In order to demonstrate this point in the final section, I examine first the issue of the legitimacy of *metaspace* in Lao PDR. The last half of this section is a return to the point of departure: the Unknown Soldier's Monument. Designed in a Lao Theravada Buddhist style, the monument, besides functioning as a stage for civic ceremonies, serves educational/ideological purposes. Nevertheless, unlike Buddhist monuments where education is achieved by means of the *decodification* of abstract elements embedded in the building's bas-reliefs, the Unknown Soldier's Monument offers a simplified (and causal) version of national history, allowing the visitor to understand and connect the Lao PDR regime to the nation's past, thereby granting legitimacy to the regime's rule.

I. Monuments and the Spectrum of Spatial Power

"Monuments are … only possible in periods in which a unifying consciousness and unifying culture exist"[5]

In his quintessential work on space, Henri Lefebvre explains that human beings do not merely inherit space from their ancestors; rather, space is something produced and reproduced. Thus, space is not just an "empty area."[6] It is:

> a setting in that it is the obvious base upon which all activity must occur, but it is more than that. Architecture, human densities, locational relations are a force in structuring what can be done in space itself. Space contains more than we ordinarily appreciate. A space is thus neither merely a medium nor a list of ingredients, but an interlinkage of geographic form, built

[5] Sert, Léger, and Giedon as cited By Siegfried Giedon. Siegfried Giedon, *Architecture, you and me: The diary of a development*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 48.

[6] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 1.

> environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life. Ways of being and physical landscapes are of a piece, albeit one filled with tensions and competing versions of what a space should be.[7]

An example of the spatial tensions referred to by Lefebvre takes place when establishing a boundary between what Mircea Eliade called *the sacred* and *the profane*.[8] Generally speaking, secular (profane) spaces are those "whose primary characteristics are not essentially religious in nature."[9] Unlike the secular, the sacred space is one "whose primary characteristics are defined in explicitly religious terms by the people who recognize and use the space, either materially or symbolically."[10] In order to effectively *use* sacred spaces, that is to say, to *reproduce* the sacredness, people require a material seat or places within space. These places can be natural (caves, forests, grottos, etc.), but places can also be built expressly for religious purposes, such as temples, monasteries, or monuments.

In its most basic sense, according to Alois Riegl, "a monument is a work of man erected for the specific purpose of keeping particular human deeds or destinies (or a complex accumulation thereof) alive and present in the consciousness of future generations."[11] Although there could exist a wide range of motivations to build monuments, the common feature among all of them is that they consist of spatial representations of collective memory. Young noted that, "by creating common spaces for memory, monuments propagate the illusion of common memory."[12] According to Halbwachs, memory is collective because "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories."[13] Moreover, memory permits people to interpret the past and, in so doing, grants it meaning and values, which then become a part of a people's collective identity. One way to link collective memory to monuments is by means of their forms or shapes. As spatial representations of memory, monuments possess particular features that make them stand out in space.

From a semiotic perspective, monuments "have signs of their ideological functions written all over them: they signify their function as use."[14] These signs could be expressed in the size of various structural features, such as windows, doors, columns,

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[7] Harvey Molotch, "The Space of Lefebvre," review of *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre, *Theory and Society* 22, no. 6 (1993), 888.

[8] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959), 14.

[9] R. Stump, *The Geography of Religion: Faith, Place, and Space* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 24.

[10] Stump, *Geography of Religion*, 24.

[11] Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development," in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, eds. Nicholas Stanley Price, Mansfield Kirby Talley, and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), 69.

[12] James E. Young, "Memory/Monument" in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2nd edition, Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 237.

[13] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.

[14] Michael O'Toole, *The Language of Displayed Art* (Cranbury: Fairleigh University Press, 1994), 85.

or even the span of roofs. On the iconographic plane, religious monuments and politically motivated monuments use symbols that facilitate not only the identification of the subject of remembrance but also the identification of the one convening such remembrance. From the point of view of semiotics, the distinction between religious and political monuments is associated with their respective degree of abstraction. For instance, political monuments tend to privilege the use of statues in order to remember heroic deeds, whereas religious monuments tend to use abstract symbols (e.g., crosses and crescents). This distinction between religious and political monuments might be linked to their respective "target population." Whereas religious monuments seek to strengthen the idea of a *metaethnic* (beyond ethnicity) religious community, political monuments seek to strengthen the idea of a community beyond religious and ethnic identification. Thus, with the rise of nationalism, political monuments started to incorporate expressions of collective memory, enabling people to connect with one another and thereby link themselves to people they do not know. That is to say, monuments became instruments for the construction of imagined communities.[15]

As has already been mentioned, the boundaries between the sacred and the profane are difficult to establish. To different extents, nationalist monuments become sacred, whereas religious monuments are, in certain ways, "secularized" in order to deal with the complex cohabitation resulting from strong national ideologies (which could even be religious). Despite this, it would hardly be possible to consider the space occupied by nationalist monuments as "sacred." As Young writes:

> [T]he sacredness of the monument's space derives from a public's willing complicity in the monument's essential illusion. That is, monuments depend on the public for their very lives: as long as the public shares a regime's desire for permanence or its formal self-idealizations, it suspends disbelief in the monument's own impermanence and this makes the regime's monument its own sacred space.[16]

How valid is this statement for Vientiane, the capital of Lao PDR? I propose to observe the case of a particular sacred space: ban That Luang. In the past two decades, the Lao PDR regime has undertaken the construction of a number of secular buildings within this sacred space. In this context, I wonder: *how deep is the insertion of the profane into the sacred in ban That Luang? What makes That Luang sacred? How might this sacred appeal have lured the secular Lao PDR regime?* In the following sections I shall respond to these questions by examining the interaction of *shape* (spatial representations of collective memory) and *space* in ban That Luang. Finally, I will discuss how this space containing representations of memory (*metaspace*) influences a broader context in Lao PDR.

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[15] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

[16] Young, "Memory/Monument," 244.

II. Buddhist Monuments and the Power of their Shape

Buddhism originated more than 2,500 years ago in the northeastern part of what is now India. Some years after its founding, Buddhism spread, covering great expanses of south, southeast, and eastern Asia. Historically, a crucial factor enabling the global diffusion of Buddhism was the role of King Ashoka (304–232 BC). In addition to being a brilliant military leader and ruler, after embracing Buddhism, Ashoka committed himself to spreading the message of Gautama Buddha to different parts of the world. He sought to spread Buddhism by sponsoring the Buddhist *sangha* and by constructing stupas. However, stupas were more than just an expression of Ashoka's piety; they were also material referents that served to indicate the presence of Buddhism within some spaces.

The word stupa comes from Pali (*thúpa*), derived from the root *stúp* ("to heap").[17] Stupa is generally translated as "reliquary," owing to its funerary connection. In pre-Buddhist times, the ashes of the dead were retrieved from the funeral pyre and placed inside these containers. According to Mitra, stupas may be grouped into four categories: *saririka* (containing corporeal relics not only of the Buddha but also his disciples); *paribhogika* (containing objects used by the Buddha); *uddesika* (memorial), and votive.[18] The first stupas that Ashoka had constructed throughout South and Southeast Asia would be categorized as *saririka*, for they are said to have contained relics of Gautama Buddha.

Consistent with the increasing number of Buddhist converts, stupas were not only spatial manifestations of Buddhism, they were also places that attracted visitors who congregated at these places in order to conduct symbolic rituals in remembrance of the Buddha. Memorial or votive stupas, therefore, became what Pierre Nora calls *mémoire réelle* (true memory). According to Nora, *true memory* can be passed on by oral history, ritual acts, or ceremonies. Unlike what Nora designates *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory) – museums, archives, cemeteries, shrines, and memorials[19] – true memory derives from cultural manifestations, not from something man-made.

A particular feature characterizing Buddhist stupas is associated with the symbolism of their shape. Reynolds notes that "the monument (stupa) concretizes metaphysical principles and generates multivalent meanings in ways that can be articulated with literary texts and other architectural forms."[20] Though Reynolds ascribes meanings attributed to stupas as multivalent, with respect to their form, we could summarize the importance of stupas by focusing on two main uses. First, as "spatial references,"[21] stupas serve as geographical points which believers identify

[17] Debala Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1971), 21.

[18] Mitra, "Buddhist monuments," 21.

[19] Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire I: La république* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), xxiv.

[20] Craig Reynolds. Preface to *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, by Adrian Snodgrass (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1985), i.

[21] Sadalla et al. argue that landmarks, as spatial references, are "points that serve as the basis for the spatial location of other (nonreference) points" Edward K. Sadalla, W. Jeffrey Burroughs and Lorin J. Staplin, "Reference points in spatial cognition" Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory 6, no. 5 (1980), 516.

within space as places where they can practice their religion and meet with their peers. Second, as educational sites, stupas' use could be observed from a twofold perspective: From the abstract, that is, through the *decodification* of symbols embedded in stupas; and from a material perspective, for instance, through the *reading* of bas-reliefs embedded in the pedestal of the stupa.[22] By these two means, believers are able to learn more about their faith while simultaneously strengthening their bond with other believers.

An additional aspect associated with Buddhist monuments, unlike those reviewed above, is related to the *profane*. For instance, the importance of these monuments transformed the places hosting them into important commercial hubs. In this way, in just a few years, these places became important from a political perspective to rulers who sought to control these monuments and to dominate the spaces surrounding them. The goal was not only to gain profane (economic) advantage, but also to establish legitimacy derived from their custody of sacredness.

III. Ban That Luang and the Negotiation of its Space within Vientiane

Ban That Luang (or That Luang village) is an urban area located in the Sisattanak district in northeastern Vientiane. It constitutes an urban space containing permanent and temporary structures designed for the performance of both secular and spiritual activities.

On the spiritual side, That Luang village houses *wat*s or monasteries, which have two basic functions: education and ritual performance. The Luang Neua and the That Luang Tai are the most important of these monasteries. Apart from That Luang Neua – the residence of the Buddhist Supreme Patriarch of Lao PDR (*Pha Sangkhalat*), where major works have recently been undertaken – these *wat*s, together with the That Luang or Great Stupa, are the oldest constructions in the area (see appendix D: figures 1 and 6).

The historical origin of the Great Stupa, also known as *Phra Chedi Lokacûlâmani*,[23] has not yet been clearly identified. However, a popular story dates the *That*'s construction to the third century BCE, and, as the story has it, That Luang is now located at the site where Ashoka ordered the construction of a stupa containing one of the Buddha's relics. After moving the capital of the kingdom of Lan Xang (1560) from Luang Prabang to Vientiane, King Setthathirath[24] undertook the construction of several Buddhist buildings.[25] Although Ashoka is acknowledged as the builder of the original

[22] An example of this kind of temple is Candi Borobudur in Central Java, Indonesia. Besides a profuse representation of Buddha images covered by stupas, the walls of this temple are covered with bas-reliefs portraying historical passages of Gautama Buddha's life and teachings. Bas-reliefs in Borobudur, however, are not limited to religious purposes. Some levels of the monument also depict aspects of political and everyday life during the time of Sailendra's dynasty (c. 8th CE).

[23] In Pali this means "the majestic reliquary, precious summit of the world."

[24] King Setthathirath was ruler of Lan Xang's kingdom between 1548 and 1571. In 1560 he moved the capital of the kingdom to Vientiane where, in 1566, That Luang was built.

[25] In 1565, Setthathirath ordered the construction of another important temple for housing the Jewel Buddha (Emerald Buddha or *Phra Keo*).

stupa, its foundational stele indicates that That Luang acquired its shape under the rule of King Setthathirath (see appendix A).[26]

The monument of That Luang comprises three levels. The wall surrounding the lower two is topped by battlements. Thirty small stupas symbolizing the Buddhist virtues (*palami*) surround the first one (see appendix A: figure 5). At the top level, ringed by lotus petals, rises the *That* (see appendix A: figures 1–3).

The Lao term *that* is translated as "a monument containing a corporal relic." As in other parts of the Buddhist world, in Lao PDR, the importance of *that*s is based on both doctrinal and semiotic issues. At the doctrinal level, "the *that*s are not just symbols or the [physical] support of a cult. They are also places where are exerted particular and complex forces coming from relics, consecration rites, the essence acting as doctrine canon (*dhamma*) and the local protective forces (god or genie) as well."[27] Meanwhile, at the semiotic level, the importance of *that*s derives not only from their architectural representations of the Buddha, it also derives from summarizing and expressing the idea of unity. This unity is symbolically achieved by means of "decodifying" That Luang's architecture. That Luang pilgrims *materially* decodify the idea of unity by circumvallating the temple and, from an *abstract* perspective, by contemplating and understanding the meaning of the symbols embedded in the temple's architecture.

The importance of architecture and the decodification of some of the symbols embedded in it has already been discussed by some scholars.[28] Referring, for instance, to the case of Borobudur in Central Java, Miksic proposed the existence of a linkage between enlightenment and the temple's design. Used as a *device* to "accelerate spiritual progress,"

> Borobudur's structure required pilgrims to walk ten times around the monument in order to view the reliefs in sequence, all the while gradually moving upward, thus symbolically retracing the steps of bodhisattvas who had attained enlightenment by successfully passing through the ten stages of existence.[29]

The religious importance of That Luang is not concentrated solely in the monument; it also extends to its surrounding space. At the beginning of every year, between the 13th and 15th day of the Buddhist calendar, *boun That Luang,* the most important religious festival in the whole of Lao PDR, takes place. For three days, ritual activities – such as processions (*prasat pheung*), offerings (*takbat*), and traditional games (*tikhee*) – bring Lao together around religious buildings such as That Luang. Venerating the Buddha or giving alms to the monks, as well as worshiping the guardian

[26] Its current appearance dates back to the 1930s when French archaeologists undertook a second major restoration.

[27] F. Engelmann, *Le That Luang de Vientiane : symbole de la nation Lao*. (Vientiane: Éditions du Vientiane Times, 1995), 12-13.

[28] For a fuller discussion of the linkage between architecture and enlightenment in Buddhism, with particular reference to South Asia, see D.P. Leidy. and R.A.F. Thurman, *Mandala: The architecture of Enlightenment* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997).

[29] J. Miksic, *Borobudur: Golden Tales of the Buddhas* (Jakarta: Periplus Editions, 1996), 48.

spirit of Vientiane (*lak muang*)[30] or surrounding the stupa (*pradaksina*),[31] Vientianers and Lao people from all over the country get together in That Luang.[32]

Lao government officials stand out at these ceremonies. By paying homage to the *tripitaka* (Buddhist canons), by addressing a prayer to the That Luang, or by accepting the Five Precepts of Buddhism,[33] the highest ranking Lao authorities carry out an essential role in boun That Luang. According to some scholars, essential Lao-Buddhist constructions related to power "were [traditionally] reiterated in a series of annual ceremonies."[34] However, the presence of the Lao government in ban That Luang has not been restricted to the performance of yearly religious activities by high-ranking officials. The space surrounding That Luang's monument has become a temporary venue hosting activities such as exhibitions, trade fairs, markets, and music concerts sponsored by the state. In fact, the organization of secular events in That Luang has coincided with an increasingly permanent presence of the Lao government within this space.

In the past two decades, the central Lao government has ordered construction of a number of official buildings in That Luang village, just a few meters from the monument. However, two buildings of particular interest to this study were built within That Luang's space during the 1990s. The first, the National Assembly (Hongkad Souvannavong, architect), was inaugurated in 1990. The building departed from the predominantly Soviet-inspired style previously used for official buildings, privileging an innovative design based on a geometrical interpretation of traditional and local decorative motifs. The second building is the Unknown Soldier's Monument, originally unveiled in 1994. The relevance of this particular construction resides in the fact that it synthesizes two apparently conflicting natures. Designed as a Buddhist stupa, the Unknown Soldier's Monument was conceived to stage secular rituals pertaining to nationhood.

Containing both secular and religious buildings and periodically staging both secular and religious activities, ban That Luang, since the 1990s, has become *the* symbol used by the Lao government to represent the nation (see appendix D: figure 3). In the final section of this article, observing ban That Luang's space, I propose to identify some historical facts that may have facilitated the transformation of That Luang into a national symbol in recent times. In this section, too, observing the Unknown Soldier's Monument as an official building located within ban That Luang, I examine and discuss

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[30] The city's foundational stele is located at the monastery of Si Muang, in Vientiane's city center. Among Tai cultures, in order to commemorate the creation of a city, temples housing phallic sculptures containing the guardian of the city were built (Lak Muang).

[31] In Pali: "advancing towards the south": a Buddhist rite consisting of walking around an image, a place, or even around a whole region considered sacred. While performing this rite, the individual draws a circle of virtues.

[32] M. Zago, *Rites et cérémonies en milieu Bouddhiste Lao*. (Roma: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1972) 326-336.

[33] Basic principles accepted by main Buddhist sects including Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism: *To abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication.*

[34] Martin Stuart-Fox, "Marxism and Theravada Buddhism: The Legitimation of Political Authority in Laos," *Pacific Affairs* 56, no.3 (1983), 429.

the official motivations behind the regime's attempt to insert its image into this urban space (see appendix G).

IV. The Unknown Soldier's Monument: Memorializing Lao PDR's Past from the *Metaspace*

Legitimacy and power in Lao PDR

Before the 1990s, the national image in Lao PDR was characterized by its use of communist symbols, such as the hammer and sickle. However, in 1991, the Lao government suppressed not only these symbols but also expunged the word "socialism" from the original emblem, inserting the new inscription, "*Peace, Independence, Democracy, Unity, Prosperity*" and a new iconographic element – the That Luang[35] (see appendix D: figure 3).

Transformed into a national symbol, ban That Luang no longer derives its importance exclusively from hosting the most sacred Buddhist monument in the whole of Lao PDR. As a national symbol, ban That Luang has in fact become a *metaspace* that symbolically contains both the country and people of Lao PDR. I argue that the monument's importance as a *metaspace* resides in the fact that it provides legitimacy to the Lao regime following the fall of communism in Europe in the 1990s. Further, I argue that the legitimacy of this *metaspace* derives from the particular spatial practices that the place has historically hosted, which the state "sponsors" by inserting itself physically within this space. Next, in explanation of this argument, I present an overview of the issue of legitimacy in Lao PDR and its connection with the ban That Luang space.

Discussing the issue of legitimacy as it relates to the Lan Xang kingdom (historical background of the Lao modern state), Stuart-Fox writes:

> [L]egitimation of power rested on the legitimation of kingship. Such legitimation comprised two elements: one was descent of the royal line from Khun Borom, mythical ancestor of the Lao people, and the other was provided by Buddhism. The king had the right to officiate at the rituals essential to maintain the prosperity and security of the kingdom. In carrying out those duties, the king established his right to rule in the eyes of the people. But in addition Lao Buddhists accepted the king's legitimate right to rule because they believed he had the necessary merit. The king added to his merit by giving generously to the *Sangha* and endowing temples.[36]

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[35] According to Article 90, Chapter 10 of the Lao National Constitution: "The National Emblem of the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a circle depicting in the bottom part one-half of a cog wheel and red ribbon with inscriptions [of the words] 'Lao People's Democratic Republic,' and [flanked by] crescent-shaped stalks of fully ripened rice at both sides and red ribbons bearing the inscription 'Peace, Independence, Democracy, Unity, Prosperity'. A picture of That Luang Pagoda is located between the tips of the stalks of rice. A road, a paddy field, a forest, and a hydroelectric dam are depicted in the middle of the circle." (Art. 10: Lao National Constitution).
Source: http://www.na.gov.la/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=61&lang=en .

[36] Martin Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary of Laos* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 196-7.

Many centuries later, after seizing power, the communists in Lao PDR sought to legitimate their own rule, claiming "to exercise a dictatorship of the proletariat on behalf of all working Lao." However, "as the ideological appeal of Marxism–Leninism waned, the regime turned increasingly to nationalism and religion as a means of legitimizing its monopoly hold on power."[37]

As Stuart-Fox confirms, since the 1990s the state of Lao PDR has undertaken a number of measures which have resulted in an increasing mix of secular and religious features within the framework of its ideological redesign. Owing to this religious association, the Lao government achieves legitimacy, for religion represents a bond linking citizens beyond their ethnic backgrounds. In the past two decades, one way the state has achieved this proximity to religion has been by participating in religious festivals. However, a crucial aspect in this linkage has been the spatial insertion of itself within the sacred space of That Luang.

In this context, perhaps wishing to emulate practices of rulers of the Lan Xang kingdom, the government in Lao PDR has in recent times not only inserted itself into That Luang's space but has also built a Buddhist-like monument within this space: the Unknown Soldier's Monument. The importance of this monument is linked not only to the space where it has been built but also to the particular features associated with its Buddhist design. Thanks to these particular features, the state is able to *create* a referent for collective memory among its citizens.

These features are intended to enact secular rituals, by means of which the state achieves legitimacy by framing its image within a *past tense* iconographic narrative.

The Unknown Soldier's Monument

The emergence of nation-states brought with it a series of secular rituals performed by their governments on a regular basis. The connection of these rituals with a *remote past* or *tradition* has become a strategy used by nation-state governments to deal with different issues linked to the legitimacy of their rule. One example of these secular rituals is the remembrance of the Unknown Soldier.[38]

Pierre Nora defined the *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory) as "places where memory crystallizes and seeks refuge."[39] According to Nora, realms of memory are born and live from the feeling that spontaneous memory does not exist. That is to say, "it is necessary *to create* archives, to celebrate anniversaries, to organize celebrations, to deliver funeral orations, to notarize certificates, since such processes are not natural."[40] Further elaborating on his concept, Nora argues that realms of memory are places in three senses: material, symbolic, and functional.[41] Referring to Nora's characteristics of realms of memory, semiologist David Scott explains:

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[37] Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary of Laos*, 197.

[38] E. Hobsbawn and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

[39] Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, xvii.

[40] Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, xxiv. [Italics added]

[41] Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, xxxiv.

> They are material in the sense that they are objects, places or events in the real world that can be seen, heard, felt, or touched; they are symbolic in that they represent or stand for meanings of cultural, social, political, or historical import. Finally, they are functional in that they impact on the mental conceptions – memory, association, experience – of their perceiver or receiver.[42]

Much like Buddhist monuments, the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Vientiane is characterized by two particular features: its shape and the space where it is located. Placed just a few meters from the Great Stupa or That Luang, and built in clear Lao Theravada Buddhist style, it is no wonder that casual or foreign visitors mistake the Unknown Soldier's Monument for another sacred building. However, these characteristics have specific purposes that are understood by framing Nora's conceptions of memory within a semiotic perspective.

From a semiotic perspective, the choice of a stupa for the Unknown Soldier's Monument is connected to an ancient tradition. In pre-Buddhist times, when ascetics died, their bodies were seated on the ground and covered with earth. Inspired by this pre-Buddhist tradition, rulers like Ashoka ordered the construction of stupas containing relics of Gautama Buddha throughout different parts of South and Southeast Asia in an effort to spread Buddhism. Historically, therefore, a stupa – as well as the entire place (monument) where it was located – was likely to be regarded as sacred and thus become a pilgrimage destination and a site of devotional practice.[43] It should be noted, however, that consistent with the spread of Buddhism, the practice of storing the ashes from the funeral pyre inside a stupa was, over time, extended to ordinary people as well. In any case, by means of a stupa, the believer was able to connect his or her faith to a particular place within space by, figuratively speaking, conferring a more "tangible" form on an abstract representation of the Buddha.

From Nora's point of view, the choice of a *stupa* is connected with the physical nature of the monument. The Unknown Soldier's Monument can be touched (*material*); it symbolizes an anonymous national hero (*symbolic*). Moreover, it is *functional*, for it "impact[s] on the mental conceptions – memory, association, experience."[44] In other words, the Unknown Soldier's Monument is a *realm of memory* because it does not evoke a spontaneous enactment of memory. The lack of a spontaneous evocation of memory resides in the fact that an individual is expected to identify an anonymous target (Unknown Soldier) during his or her evocation.

Memory in stupa-shaped monuments is characterized by the evocation of a recognizable target, meaning that, despite the abstraction, when seeing a stupa an individual is indeed "seeing" the shape of Buddha by means of what Sturken calls a *cultural memory*. According to Sturken, cultural memory is a "memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural

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[42] David Scott, "The Semiotics of the *lieux de mémoire*: The Postage Stamp as a Site of Cultural Memory" *Semiotica* 142, no. 1 (2002), 108.

[43] J. Miksic, *Borobudur: Golden Tales of the Buddhas*, 5, 97.

[44] Scott, "Semiotics," 108.

products and imbued with cultural meaning."[45] Despite the failure to connect the monument to a particular target, the final choice of using a stupa to represent a secular (Unknown Soldier) monument could also be explained by the fact that "[C]ultural memory is not concerned with factual representation of the past, but rather must be seen as one among many strategies for the production and maintenance of identity of a people."[46]

On the basis of what we have observed, the importance of cultural memory could explain why the Lao government used a Buddhist architectural design to shape a secular structure in the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Lao PDR. Although, through cultural memory, the Lao state has not been able to connect Lao citizens with a secular symbol, another facet of this same form of memory might have provided the state with a successful outcome. I contend that the success of the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Vientiane lies, in fact, in its *being a Buddhist monument without being a Buddhist monument*. That is to say, the accomplishment of the Unknown Soldier's Monument lies in the fact that, without being a Buddhist monument, it is using the semiotic advantages of one.

Observed in detail, what stands out is that the monument's shape is not exactly a Buddhist one. The Unknown Soldier's Monument, unlike Buddhist monuments, is characterized by an oversimplification of its architectural lines (compare appendices B and A). Distinguished by their highly elaborate architectural semiotics, Buddhist monuments, besides being conceived as sites of remembrance of the Buddha, are also intended to serve educational purposes. By means of the *decodification* of abstract elements embedded in the building (e.g., columns and designs), the individual learns about the symbolic meaning of a particular building and, by doing so, strengthens his or her faith, as well as the bond with other believers (see appendix A: figures 2 and 4). Despite architectural differences, the Unknown Soldier's Monument still relies on an iconographic resource used in some Buddhist monuments: bas-reliefs (see appendix B: figure 3).

Covering the ground-level platform, a number of these bas-reliefs describe national historical passages. Interestingly, however, because they lack a clear beginning and end, the bas-reliefs may create some confusion about the precise chronological order of Lao PDR's history. Referring to problems associated with Lao historiography, Michel Lorillard notes,

> The absence of [chronological] markers in the memories of a number of the peoples who share the Lao territories places them in history's shadow, or even excludes them altogether. This is the case for practically all the ethnic minorities in Laos before the nineteenth century, but it is also the case for the Lao themselves before the 1300s.[47]

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[45] M. Sturken, *Tangled memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), 3.

[46] Hawley, *Remains of War*, 160.

[47] Michel Lorillard, "Lao History Revisited: Paradoxes and Problems in Current Research," *South East Asia Research* 14, no. 3 (2006), 394.

The selection of historic passages may also pose a problem for the visitor, particularly from a chronological perspective. As in the architectural lines, the bas-reliefs on the monument arguably portray a rather oversimplified version of national history (see appendix E: figure 4). This oversimplification is characterized, for instance, by the iconographic stress on an almost imperceptible difference between the ethnic groups officially recognized (see appendix E: figure 5), but particularly by its causal expression of national history, which allows the visitor to understand and connect the Lao PDR regime to the nation's past (see appendix F: figure 3).

Conclusions

In recent times, legitimacy has become a subject of anxiety for modern states. One way for a state to ensure its legitimacy is by preserving unity among the people it governs. Bringing people together around specific symbols is a means widely used by states to generate this sense of unity.

Before the 1975 Revolution, Buddhism and the monarchy were the basic symbols of the Lao state. Once in control of the government, the communists appealed to secular (international) symbols in order to bring the population together. Within the almost 240,000 square kilometers of Lao PDR, the communist regime officially identifies 49 different ethnic groups. Despite their number – and cultural complexities- all these ethnic groups are considered Lao (the nation's ethnic majority) and classified within a geographic-based category: *Lao Lum*, *Lao Theung*, and *Lao Soung* (Lowland Lao, Midland Lao, and Highland Lao, respectively).

Before the fall of communism in Europe, legitimacy had not been a dilemma for the Lao state. During this time, as in other communist countries, people were seen as the proletariat, and national governments represented the leadership guiding them towards their class emancipation. However, after the fall of European communism, Lao PDR was faced with the lack of both economic and ideological support; consequently, it undertook a complex program aimed at solidifying its legitimacy in the eyes of its people. In order to achieve this goal, the state focused on the creation of an idea of national community through which the people – looking beyond their specific and local ethnic identities – could consider themselves collectively as Lao.

With this goal in mind, the Lao state conceived the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Vientiane as a secular shrine capable of gathering the people of Laos – regardless of their different ethnic backgrounds – in order to share in the memory of the loss of loved ones during the Pathet Lao Revolution (1945-1975). By choosing a stupa to represent the Unknown Soldier, as is the case in other Buddhist funerary monuments, the Laotian government provided mourners of soldiers with a spatial "target" for their remembrance. By means of this target, mourners would not only remember their loved ones but would also participate in a (secular) ritual created by the state.

Unlike at conventional Buddhist monuments, however, by focusing their remembrance on the target of the Unknown Soldier, stupa mourners would not be conferring a more "tangible" form on an abstract representation of the Buddha; rather, they would confer a more "tangible" form on an abstract representation of a soldier who had not returned from the front. The anonymity of the mourned soldiers, I posit,

allows the state to insert its own image in the memory of Lao citizens while, perhaps more importantly, creating an idea of community. Referring to monuments aimed at memorializing war, Geoffrey White notes,

> Warfare and the identity building that accompanies both its prosecution and its memorialization are intimately intertwined with the individual body and the body politic alike. War memorials encompass more than mere commemoration of an event. Especially in national contexts, memorials consecrate the sacrifice of individual bodies to the nation, while 'their histories instantiate the collective, national "we".[48]

Today, despite the government's efforts to bring Lao citizens together around the Unknown Soldier's Monument stupa – unlike the That Luang stupa – the monument is largely ignored by visitors of ban That Luang. This phenomenon could be explained in Nora's terms. Passed on through oral history, ritual acts, and ceremonies, That Luang represents what Nora calls *true memory*. In contrast, the Unknown Soldier's Monument represents a *realm of memory* since it derives from a cultural manifestation, in this case, a stage to perform a secular ritual which aims at providing the state with the role of the nation's unity guarantor. Although the Unknown Soldier's Monument stupa has flawed appeal among ban That Luang visitors, it has a successful face, too.

The success of the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Vientiane resides in its linkage to cultural memory, exemplified by a particular form of architecture, with space. This linkage took place in two different ways : First, by linking it to a Buddhist-like form and locating it within a sacred space; and second, by fetishizing the space containing this Buddhist-like form and placing it within a *metaspatial* or national context (see appendix F: figure 1).

Appealing to a cultural memory, therefore, the state in Lao PDR sought to produce and to maintain the identity of Lao citizens. However, a decisive movement from the Lao regime in its quest for legitimacy has been, in fact, perpetuating gaps in Lao historiography and, by doing so, inserting its image directly (e.g., space) or indirectly (e.g., bas-reliefs) into the nation's past (see appendix F: figures 2 and 3).

[48] Geoffrey M. White, "Museum/memorial/shrine: National narrative in national spaces." *Museum Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (1997), 11.

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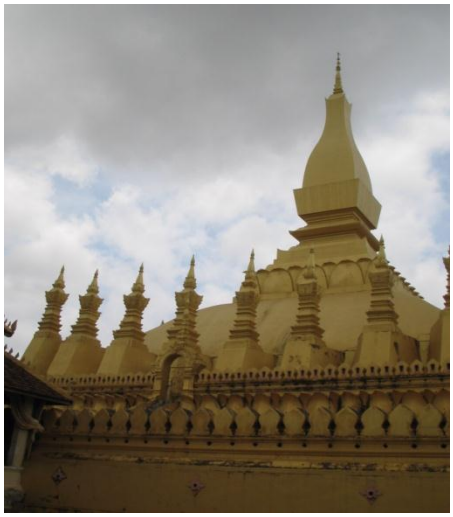
Appendix A. That Luang (Great Stupa)

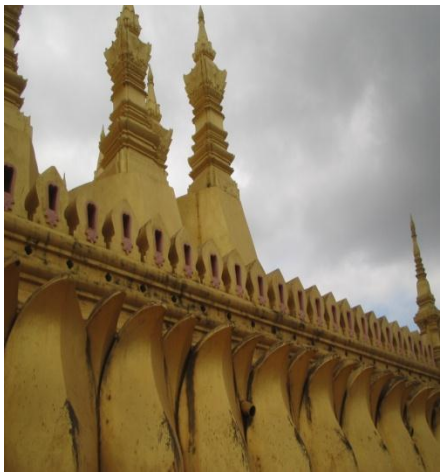


A-1. That (stupa)

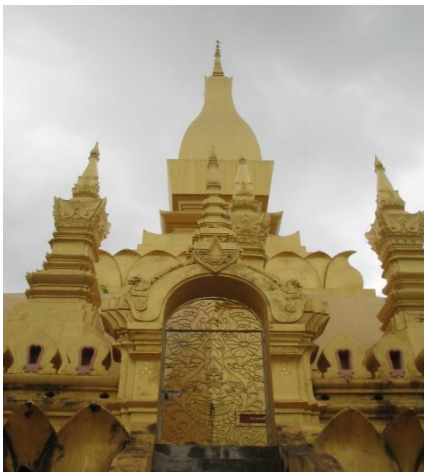
A-2. Decodification of symbols

A-3. That (stupa)

A-4. Architectural symbols

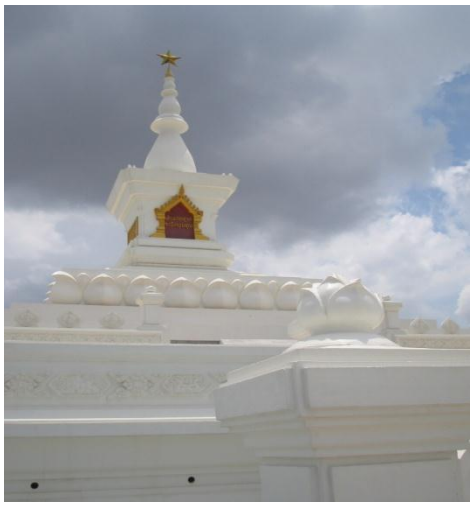


A-5. *Palami* (virtue towers)



A-6. That Luang (Great Stupa)

Appendix B. The Unknown Soldier's Monument



B-1. That(stupa)

B-2. That (stupa)

B-3. Bas-reliefs

B-4. The Unknown Soldier's Monument

B-5. The Unknown Soldier's Monument (the National Assembly, in front)

Appendix C. Unknown Soldier's Monument, details

C-1. Plaster *bodhi* tree leaf (decoration)

C-2. That (stupa)

C-3. Cauldron

Appendix D. Ban That Luang (That Luang village), spatial elements

D-1. That Luang (1566)

D-2. National Assembly (1990)

D-3. National emblem (1991)

D-4. The Unknown Soldier's Monument (1994)

D-5. National Assembly

D-6. Lao PDR Buddhist Patriarch's seat

D-7. (Left) Unknown Soldier's Monument; (Center) Lao PDR Buddhist Patriarch's seat; (Right) That Luang

D-8. (Left) National Assembly; (Right) Lao PDR Buddhist Patriarch's seat

Appendix E. Bas-reliefs, details

E-1. Arrival of Buddhism in Laos

E-2. Buddhism in Laos

E-3. Setthathirath I: ruler of Lan Xang and builder of That Luang

E-4 (Left) Colonialism; (Center) Communism (Kaysone); (Right) Spread of Communism (Pathet Lao)

E-5. (*Metaethnic*) Laotian unity

E-6. Present Laos

E-7. Future Laos

Appendix F. Conclusions

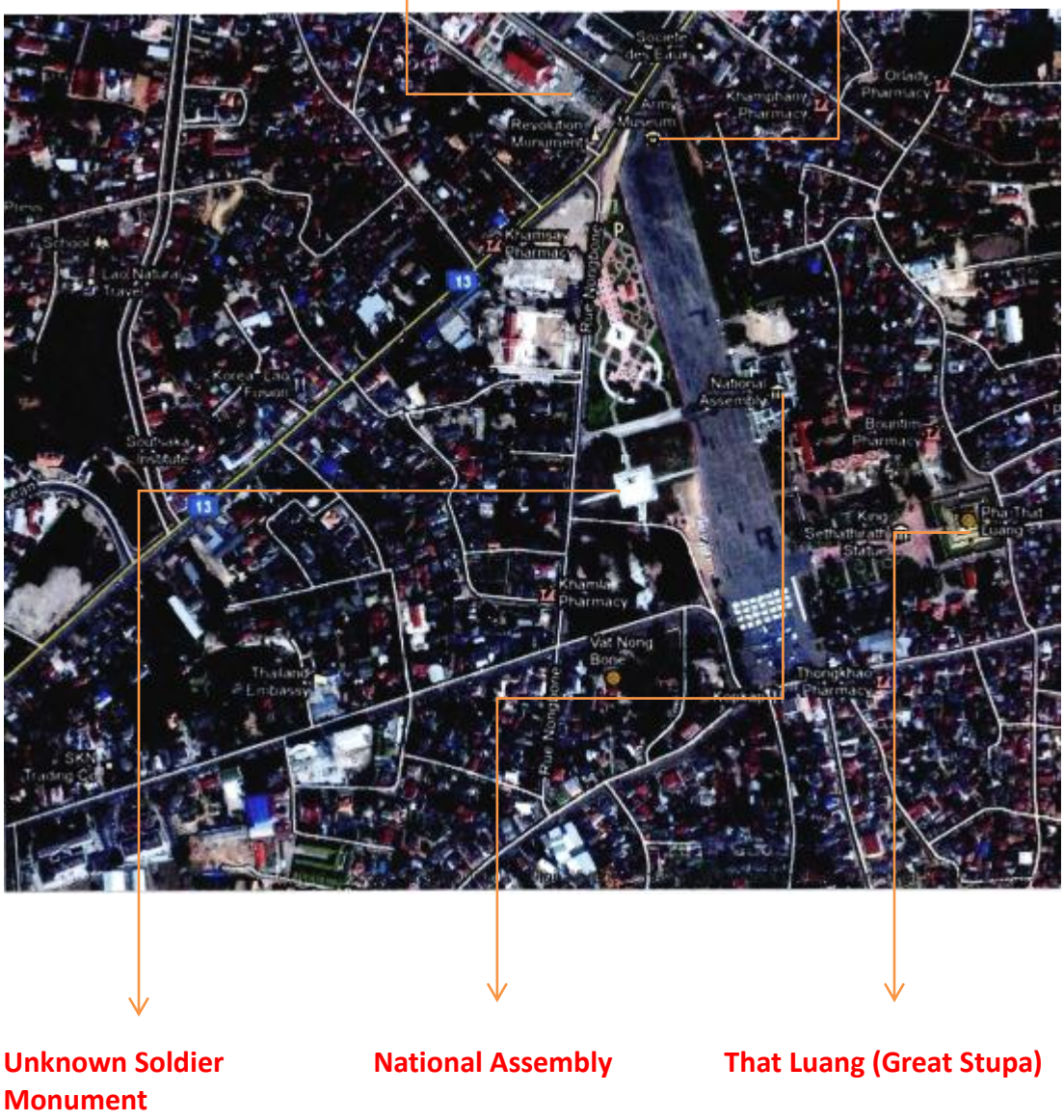
F-1. Architectural oversimplification

F-2. Historical oversimplification

F-3. Incorporation into the past: bas-reliefs (That Luang) Unknown Soldier's Monument

Appendix G. Ban That Luang area (2011)

Source: Google Maps



Memories of Chao Anou: New History and Post-Socialist Ideology

by Ryan Ford[1]

Abstract

This article follows the development and rise to prominence of the history of the last king of Vientiane, Chao Anouvong. The importance of this King to the Lao state was demonstrated last year when President Choummaly Sayasone presided over the official ceremony to consecrate the new statue in the city. The Lao PDR now officially endorses the history of four heroic kings; however, it was not always as comfortable with the subject of kings. In the historiography, Chao Anou has been seen as a king who upheld as many different kinds of values and politics as there were scholars to write about him. I pay particular attention to the work of Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana, two Lao scholars who are most responsible for remolding Chao Anou for the present. Finally, I consider the space afforded for royal history in the nominally socialist state.

Introduction

Looking into the past is always a self-reflective moment. As the mind traces back over the struggles of the previous age, a double identification takes place as one sees oneself a part of that time even as the old conflict is renewed in the trials of the present. So it is with the history of the last king of pre-colonial Vientiane, Chao Anouvong, who fought a war against Bangkok in 1827-1828, which today holds particular resonance. In the words of the event's principal scholars, Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana, the war "left lasting, vivid scars on the soul and spirit of the people in the region."[2] Both previous members of the Foreign Ministry of the Lao P.D.R., the Ngaosrivathanas still see the influence of a war, nearly two centuries old, in the relations of Laos and Thailand, whose politics are "still spoiled by miscues, misrepresentations, and conflicting assertions regarding the 1827 conflict."[3] Thus their history of Chao Anou is a splice in time they call, "moving backward and forward."[4] For them, the war represents an Ur-text for Lao-Thai relations as "virtually every book on Lao or Thai history covers the 1827 conflict to some extent."[5] Moreover, the Ngaosrivathanas' work on this period

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[2] Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana, *Paths to Conflagration: Fifty years of Diplomacy and Warfare in Laos*, *Thailand*, *and Vietnam*, *1778-1828* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1998) p. 13, (hereafter cited as *Paths*).

[3] ibid.

[4] ibid, p. 14.

[5] Mayoury Ngaosrivathan and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana, Vietnamese Source Materials concerning the 1827 Conflict between the Court of Siam and the Lao Principalities, vol. 1 (Tokyo: The Center for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco, 2001) p. 30, (hereafter cited as *VSM*).

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in Lao history has itself become the basis for a new kind of historiography in the nominally socialist state of Laos. Their work has gained wide acceptance in Laos and abroad. While in many cases other scholars have attenuated their most extreme points, the broad outlines have remained, being uncritically accepted by a surprising array of historians. The Ngaosrivathanas' level of scholarship certainly inspires confidence, as they have mastered a massive amount of sources in no less than six languages after decades of research. Yet this new Lao scholarship, which focuses on the war of Chao Anou, in its unique way of remembering, is, at its core, as much about forgetting the dismemberment of the old Lao kingdom of Lan Xang more than a century before. Along the way, in its vitriolic scorn of the Thai, it shapes a new ideology that I argue has since been accepted by the Lao P.D.R., as the state undergoes the turbulent transition to global integration into the world's capital markets. With a longer view of Lao historiography it becomes clear that the story of Chao Anou, which (in its modern form) has been prominent since Lao independence in 1953, is more often only a means to tell the story of the present.

This study will explore the issues of developing Lao scholarship and its relation to the state by focusing on the historical memory of Chao Anouvong. It will begin with a review of Lao historiography, surveying the field of modern nationalist history prior to 1975 and following with what came after the transition to a socialist state. From here we will move to consider the thought of Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana in order to explain the rise to prominence of their historiography; many of the issues in modern Lao historiography and nationalism are present in their work. The discussion will begin with their claim to authoritative texts and disputes with other historians. Then we will explore the memories which anchor and define the history in the heroic character of Chao Anou and the cruelty of his enemies. Behind this striking violence is an alternate history of over a century of warfare among the dismembered Lan Xang *muang* which is antithetical to the nation. The study will close with a consideration of the interpretation's warm, if not halting reception by the Lao P.D.R. This investigation will suggest an additional dimension to a number of scholars' ongoing research into the Lao government's rehabilitation of tradition, as well as suggesting a quiet limit to that revival.

As a brief introduction to the subject, Chao Anouvong was born in 1769, the same year in which Ayutthaya was destroyed. In less than a decade Vientiane would be attacked and come under the suzerainty of a revitalized Siam. The youngest of three brothers, Prince Anou served in the Siamese army as a commander fighting against the Burmese. At the battle of Chiang Saen Prince Anou proved his military skill as he helped turn back the last major Burmese threat to Siam. In that same year of 1804, Anou succeed to the throne of Vientiane with the approval of the throne in Bangkok. He ruled in accordance with the kingly ideal of *chakravartin*, most notably by renewing the *sangha* and rebuilding religious structures around the city. He was said to have excellent relations with Rama II and that it was only when the latter died that conflict with Siam began. King Anou launched a full-scale war against Siam in early 1827 that led to his eventual defeat and capture. The surviving Lao kingdoms remained under the power of Siam until the arrival of the French in 1893.

Modern Lao Historiography

Before 1975, in the chaos of civil war less than five history books were published.[6] Dependent as the Royal Lao Government was on uninformed French teachers, no school curriculum was ever developed for teaching Lao history.[7] Given these grim circumstances, Bernard Gay has characterized the elite of the period, not to say the masses, as showing "only slight interest in the study of history."[8] This may be a result of the legacy of French colonial historians, who, as opposed to their special interest in Khmer history, saw Lao history as one of division and disorder. This claim on the Lao was incidentally the basis of French protectorate status.[9] Yet an early effort to alter this prejudice came shortly after independence with the publication of the scholarly volume *La Royaume du Laos*. The former Prime Minister Katay Don Sasorith's contribution offered a study of Lao history as a remedy to the anonymity imposed by the French. Rather he found evidence of a Lao kingdom with a long and glorious history which in sum was greater than its times of uncertainty:

> [A]lthough Lan Xang was divided up at certain periods of its history into several distinct Kingdoms, it never ceased to be unanimously considered, in the eyes at least of its populations, as forming in its entirety one single and same geographical moral entity, if not a political one.[10]

In his inclusion of the nation as an analytical category, Katay wrote of the monarchy, patriarchy and a single ethnic identity as essential aspects. Few scholars to come after him would escape this act of selective memory. Yet, in many ways the individual who has cast his shadow longest over the historical writing of Laos has been the Isan-born scholar Maha Sila Viravong. His masterwork the *History of Laos*, first published in 1955, has been translated and updated many times; it was republished as recently as 2001. By default the study was not made obsolete until well into the socialist period.[11] The story of Chao Anouvong formed the conclusion of the work, which did not include the colonial era.[12] Sila's *History of Laos* presents Chao Anou as the tragic hero of Lao nationalism as

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[6] Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana, "Lao Historiography and Historians: Case Study of the War between Bangkok and the Lao in 1827," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20, no. 1 (1989) p. 12-14, (hereafter cited as *LHH*).

[7] Bernard Gay, "Millenarian Movements in Laos, 1895-1936: Depictions by Modern Lao Historians," in *Breaking New Ground in Lao History: Essays on the Seventh to the Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Kennon Breazeale (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002) p. 281.

[8] Ibid. By this Gay is referring to western-style histories. There is no study of local history production, yet manuscripts continued to be copied well into the mid-20th century.

[9] Martin Stuart-Fox, "The Challenge for Lao Historiography," *Southeast Asia Research* 14, no. 3, (2006) p. 347.

[10] Katay Don Sasorith, "Historical Aspects of Laos," in *Kingdom of Laos* ed. Rene de Berval (Saigon: France-Asie, 1959) p. 28. This originally appeared as a special issue in French in 1956, but was translated into English three years later.

[11] The reviewers have noted their own archival research in Luang Phrabang has yielded some manuscripts specifically written about Chao Anou by local historians which may indicate a wider interest hitherto unknown.

[12] This discussion refers to his original edition, but he continued to update and amend the work every few years. In later editions, Sila advanced the history up to 1946.

he struggles for "national liberation."[13] However, because Chao Anou is ostensibly the hero in this story, he is also blamed for a number of critical mistakes, such as allowing the betrayal of the Lao *Oupharat*, Chao Titsa, and the resistance of the famed Grandma Mo.[14] Other Lao military commanders actually seem more heroic in comparison, such as Phraya Narind who fought valiantly, killed the enemy commander and refused to surrender, preferring death to subservience.[15] The Lao failed to achieve victory as unity was sorely missing; Luang Phrabang, Nan, Phrae, Chiang Mai and Lampang sent nearly 20,000 troops – although they did not assist the Siamese effectively.[16] Chao Ratsavong was betrayed by the elite families of Champassak as they closed the city gates and then hunted him down.[17]

Perhaps the most significant point is that the pathos of the work is readily apparent in its vivid depiction of torture of Anou at the hands of Siam and the razing of Vientiane. In the first post-colonial Lao state, the story of Chao Anou was ubiquitous in the few publications available such as a 1971 seminar on Lao history hosted by the Ministry of Education, which included in its proceedings a section on Chao Anou guided by nationalist interpretation.[18] Another volume from 1970 titled *The Most Important Kings of Laos* includes Chao Anou contemplating neutrality.[19]

In the revolutionary zones of Laos prior to 1975, the Pathet Lao had a historical consciousness almost entirely devoted to the struggle for independence. Thus, they primarily issued pamphlets which chronicled the efforts of the Party to liberate the country.[20] After the revolutionary government was installed in 1975, the history of insurrection remained a favorite subject. However, at the same time, new obligations of the state redefined the idea of the past; the history of a state cannot be solely concerned with the story of revolt.[21] Consequently, since 1975 the Lao P.D.R. has attempted to formulate a synthesis of all Lao history. In his 1980 book *La Revolution Lao,* Kaysone Phoumvihane provides a crucial link between the history of Lan Xang and the intrinsic values of uprisings and resistance to foreign domination:

> [S]ince the XVIII century, the feudal system declined, our divided country was invaded and dominated by the feudal Siamese. But our people strengthened their unity and never stopped fighting with courage. The most splendid struggle was the uprising of the whole country under the leadership of our national hero Tiao Anouvong (1827-1828). While not victorious, the insurrection has however written glorious pages in our

[13] Maha Sila Viravong, *The History of Laos* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1964) p. 115.
[14] Ibid, 117-118. Her husband is said to play a large role as well.
[15] Ibid, p. 120-121.
[16] Ibid, p. 123-125.
[17] Ibid, p. 127.
[18] LHH, p. 14.
[19] Grant Evans, "Different Paths: Lao Historiography in Historical Perspective," in *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao History at the Crossroads* ed. Christopher Goscha and Soren Ivarsson (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2003)
[20] Gay, p. 281; LHH, p. 14.
[21] Thus Mayoury and Pheuiphan significantly order the phases of the Lao revolution as firstly the "millennial leap," followed by the "nationalist phase," and then *finally* the "communist phase." LHH, p. 15.

> national defense and its heroic and indomitable spirit transmitted to this day among the people.[22]

However, in the production of an official history, the Lao P.D.R. has dealt with this feudal period in history with far more difficulty. A nine volume history was circulated in 1980 by a member of the former regime, Maha Kham Champakeomany. It was left "unfinished" and has never been released.[23] In the many drafts, reviews and revisions, the National Institute for Social Sciences in Laos demonstrated a distinct sense of uncertainty.[24] This is a crucial period that will be returned to in detail in the last section. Eventually, in 1989 the Ministry of Education and Sport did release a history which began only with the arrival of the French.[25] The release of the volume treating pre-colonial history would only appear over a decade later in the year 2000.[26] Bruce Lockhart's careful analysis of this edition begins by noting a new appreciation for the pre-colonial period's significance as it now accorded forty percent of the text.[27] What is immediately apparent in this edition of the text is the eschewing of Marxist analysis in order to validate the Lan Xang kingdom: there is no Marxist periodization (instead the history is pushed as far back as possible) or detailing of the kingdom's exploitation of its subjects.[28] Instead of Marxism, the history has been overtaken by a brand of cultural nationalism and a society driven by economics, which is entirely comprehensible to a reading public in the age of globalization. Thus, the key factors of Lao history in this new edition are comprised of Lao culture, the struggle against foreign domination and a political unity which engendered economic prosperity.[29] The clear purpose here is to create a genealogy which stresses the Party's role as the successor to the heroic kings of the ages.[30] The Lao P.D.R.'s new appreciation for antiquity is not without its uses, as such an appeal to the past effectively serves to stabilize the present social order. In order to account for this dramatic shift in approach to the history of Lan Xang, which occurred between the failure to produce such a history in 1989 and its release eleven years later, we must consider the scholarship of two researchers, Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana.

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[22] Quoted in LHH, p.12.

[23] Ibid, p.14. The reviewers have suggested that Maha Kham Champakeomany continued to work and translate many ancient manuscripts; however, this does not alter the Nation Institute for Social Science's reticence approach to ever publishing his history. An interesting continuity is that Souneth Phothisane was a student of Maha Kham Champakeomany.

[24] The 1980 draft was 798 pages; the 1989 draft was cut down to 377 pages; the final version came to roughly 500 pages in 2000, see LHH, p. 14.

[25] Souneth Phothisane et. al, *Lao History: 1893 to the Present* (Vientiane: Ministry of Education and Sport, 1989).

[26] Souneth Phothisane and Nousai Phoummachan, *Lao History (Ancient Times to the Present)* (Vientiane: Ministry of Information and Culture, 2000).

[27] Bruce Lockhart, "Pavatsat Lao: Constructing a National Identity," *South East Asian Research* 14, no. 3, (2006) p. 362.

[28] Ibid, p. 364, 385.

[29] Ibid, p. 367, 374.

[30] Ibid, p. 386. This would explain the Lao P.D.R.'s recent valorizing of four heroic kings of Lan Xang: Fa Ngum, Setthathirat, Surinyavongsa, and Anouvong, see Souneth Phothisane, *King Anouvong's Heroic Battle*, (Vientiane: National University of Laos, 2002) p. 9.

The Thought of Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana

In certain ways the field of Lao historiography was over-turned with the publication in 1988 of Mayoury and Pheuiphan's work *Chao Anou 1767-1829: Old Story, New Problems*.[31] In his review, Michael Vickery positively rated the work as "a new current of interpretation."[32] This was echoed ten years later in David Wyatt's assessment, which described how the work "completely opened up a field of historical study that previously had been closed."[33] According to the authors, a year before their work was published, they were invited to give a seven hour talk to an audience of Lao historians, who thereafter believed that they "would have to revise all their opinions in the field."[34] Moreover, at 160 pages, the 1988 book was one of the first major historical publications of the new government.[35] But it was also consciously seeking a break with previous historical interpretation, or in their words: "We Lao researchers are only beginning our recovery of the historical truth."[36]

In a discussion of the reception of their research, the Ngaosrivathanas noted that Maha Sila Viravong's work was still seen as stubbornly influential in the late 1980s since "other Lao have difficultly questioning the traditional analysis."[37] They criticized the work of Sila Viravong as having "indigenized" the Thai scholars' account of Anou and accepting the "orthodoxy [sic] Thai version," which they equated to importing a flawed model.[38] Later, they wrote in a more neutral tone, about mid-twentieth century Lao scholarship (an ambiguous reference to Sila), which "reshaped and diminished the figure of Chao Anou in an attempt to bring Lao history in line with the Thai version."[39] While they clearly wanted to bring about new views on Lao history they were also curiously linked to their predecessors as well:

> It is interesting to notice that before his death one year ago, Maha Sila Viravong told us that things did not happen in the fashion of the scenario he put forward in his "Lao history", and in a worthy endeavour, he succeeded in producing a new draft of his "Lao history", among the other masterpieces which this respected veteran historian has penned.[40]

With the above comment, the Ngaosrivathanas simultaneously cleared away the old analysis of Anou, which proved so intractable, while at the same time preserving the

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[31] This was published on the 160th anniversary of Chao Anou's death.

[32] Michael Vickery, "Review," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 21, no. 2 (1990), p. 443.

[33] Paths, p. 9. Wyatt oversaw the publication of this work for Cornell. In his preface to the book he noted some weaknesses, which he ultimately believed were outweighed by the positives.

[34] VSM, p. 42. In a long footnote here the authors' describe their works' reception in Laos during a presentation they gave to a number of Lao intellectuals.

[35] Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana personal communication to the author, 4/25/10.

[36] Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana, "160 Years Ago: Lao Chronicles and Annals on Siam and the Lao," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Thai Studies*, vol. 3, part 2, complied by Ann Buller (Canberra: Australian National University, 1987) p. 476, (hereafter cited as *160 Years*).

[37] LHH, p. 12.

[38] Ibid, p. 13-14.

[39] Paths, p. 29.

[40] LHH, p. 13, fn. 75.

revered figure of Maha Sila Viravong. By doing so, paradoxically, they perhaps even made a claim to take up his mantle.

In order to appreciate the Ngaosrivathanas' historical work it bears knowing a brief biographical background. Prior to 1975 they studied law in France. As has been mentioned they worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Royal Lao Government period and after leaving the country for a time they returned to again take up their post in the spirit of patriotism. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the authors were part a small intellectual elite living in Laos who had been educated abroad. They had been exposed to the radicalism at Universities in France at the time.

The *oeuvre* of the Ngaosrivathanas has grown voluminously in the last two decades, with seventeen articles, conference papers and books in English alone.[41] The writing is marked by an overt nationalism and a normal historical mode of analysis, consisting of a twin concern for antiquarianism and "how it really happened," that subsequently reveals their preponderance for the reading and use of sources.[42] In the major works the use of sources is always the *a priori* issue. The voice of the document is seen as natural by the Ngaosrivathanas as they "allow the documents, the archives, and the testimonies to speak for themselves."[43] Deeply embedded in this methodology is a special concern for authoritative texts. Their publication in 2001 of a two volume translation of Vietnamese source material is exemplary as its significance lies in a presentation free of interpretations or rewriting, preferring instead to provide the reader with "plain, hard facts, and raw data."[44] Letting the document speak purportedly offered a window into the individual's "frame of thinking, their emotions and their innermost thoughts."[45] Their fidelity to the truth of the text may be shown by Thai documents which they charged as forgeries, having been "doctored."[46] Moreover, their impulses are mirrored in current ongoing efforts by the National University of Laos to produce a series of authoritative texts concerning "Traditional Lao Literature during the late Lan Sang period."[47] This has included the "San Lupphasun" (an enigmatic poem said to be written by Chao Anou), the "Kap Muang Phuan" and the "Pheun Viang" a document that "reflects real historical events and displays real characters."[48] The latter is a text which is carefully informed by the division between figural and literal genres as it stresses that it should not be confused with a legendary version and claims the author had "witnessed most of the events that he described."[49] The Ngaosrivathanas' efforts therefore stand as path-breaking work that exemplifies cutting-edge methods for Lao historians.

Along with a claim to new found authority, the Ngaosrivathanas have been involved in a number of disputes with other historians. Not only did they take issue

[41] Much but not all of the Ngaosrivathanas' work is listed in their bibliography of their *Paths to Conflagration*.

[42] Paths, p. 14.

[43] Ibid, p. 15.

[44] VSM, p. 17.

[45] Ibid, p. 19.

[46] Ibid, p. 18.

[47] Department of Lao Language and Literature, The Legend of Vientiane in the Time of Chao Anou (Vientiane: National University of Laos, 2004) p. iii.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

with Maha Sila Viravong but other Lao views of the past as well. Thus they saw their later work as a contribution "to the quiet efforts of *Lao* and Thai to get their facts straight."[50] In particular, the Ngaosrivathanas' account of the role of foreign powers, such as the British and the Vietnamese, has not been accepted by other Lao scholars such as Souneth Photihsane and Phoummachan, authors of the most recent edition of the *Pavasat Lao*. The politicization of the history of Laos' foreign relations is clear as a result. Writing in 1989, the Ngaosrivathanas note another opponent in the government of the Lao P.D.R.:

> For the current vice-Minister of Culture, the Siamese invasion of Laos in 1827 was master-minded by the British, and Chao Anou was going to Bangkok to help Rama III against the expansion of capitalism.[51]

The evidence for the vice-minister's analysis relied on the tactic Chao Anou utilized to move his army within three days of Bangkok without alarming the Thai, by falsely warning of impending British attack. Yet the vice-minister took this event further, and his interpretation of an anti-capital vein in the conflict undoubtedly resulted from the Party's orthodox historiography on foreign intervention. The Ngaosrivathanas' own interpretation of Britain's role during the war is far different. They suggest the British were a possible friend of Chao Anou which has not been accepted over this other reading in the official history, the *Pavasat Lao*.[52] More significant may be the role the Ngaosrivathanas assign to the Vietnamese during the 1827 war. Although the royal brothers Nanthasen (r. 1782-1795), Inthavong (r. 1795-1804) and Anouvong (r. 1804-1828) all tried to establish a close alliance with the Vietnamese, in the end the latter proved fickle allies for the Lao, in the Ngaosrivathanas' account, as the Vietnamese court "showed that it would refuse to act in accord with or assist any challenges to the established order, for such challenges had been prohibited by heaven."[53] Rather, the Vietnamese "Mother" addressed Anou as a disobedient child who should ask for forgiveness from the Siamese "Father." At the moment of war, however, the Vietnamese were suggested to have gone even further as direct sponsors of Lao destruction, for the Ngaosrivathanas record a French explorer's claim that Siam "undertook their invasion only after clinching a preliminary accord with the court of Hue."[54] In the *Pavasat Lao,* these views of Vietnam are not present, instead "the Lao and Vietnamese 'peoples' enjoyed ties of mutual affection."[55]

In a 2001 speech, Mayoury Ngaosrivathana described the problem with the history of Chao Anou as being, at root, a problem stemming from the distortions which Thai scholarship has effected on the recorded history.[56] Mayoury argued this point based on the case of the Thai-Isan heroine Grandma Mo, and her role in the war. Instead

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[50] Paths, p. 13.
[51] LHH, p. 12.
[52] Lockhart, p. 374.
[53] Paths, p. 104.
[54] Ibid, p. 106. This may also be an example of an uncritical reading of French accounts by the Ngaosrivathanas who frequently do not take into account the colonial project behind such statements.
[55] Lockhart, p. 373.
[56] These proceedings are presented in Phothisane, *King Anouvong's Heroic Battle,* p. 108-109.

of enshrining her as the Thai have done, Mayoury suggested that the history be brought in line with the "truth" and that Grandma Mo be considered only as a mythical figure. At the same time, Mayoury argued that the maltreatment of Anou had been suppressed, especially the details of his horrific torture. The core of the Ngaosrivathanas' work is animated by a desire to correct perceived distortions of Thai scholarship. The autonomy of Lao principalities was one such subject of dispute, as even after the 1827 war, the Ngaosrivathanas accused Thai scholars of thinking these places were "an integral part of Siam."[57] Yet the Thai misunderstanding of Chao Anou as an individual may be the most crucial point of contention. The Ngaosrivathanas note that Rama III "depicted Chao Anou as a symbol of hate. For these rulers, Chao Anou was a rebel, and even worse, a loser…Chao Anou probably appeared like the doddering fool of his entourage."[58] Anou in their eyes became dehumanized by terms that described him as "rubbish" and "sputum."[59] This tendency to question Thai historiography has since become a significant component of analysis for other Lao scholars as well. Thus an article in the authoritative edition of the *Pheun Viang* text disputes the existence of Grandma Mo:

> It is interesting to note that – unlike some "purely" Siamese sources – Pheun Viang does not mention Thao Suranari…at all, let alone the role she played…This is a most important observation for historians of the Lao/Siamese war of 1827/1828.[60]

Similarly, the authors disassemble Prince Damrong's analysis of Anou's motivations as nothing more than an effort to disguise Thai failure and exaggerate Lao wickedness.[61] The prominent Lao historian Souneth Phothisane also questions Thai history more generally, calling attention to its hegemonic pretenses in its attempts to subsume Lao history within a sub-category.[62] Yet the ironies of Lao historiography are such that this trend must also ultimately be approached with circumspection even today, for the researchers compiling their authoritative edition of the *Pheun Viang* found that the oldest extant copy was housed in the Thai National Library – they were denied access for reasons that remain unsaid.[63]

It is difficult to abridge all of the meaning implied in the person of Chao Anouvong. His descriptions are fused with virtues as diverse as strength, courage, hope, self-sacrifice and a royal pride tempered by unity and common cause with his people. In this way, the historiography of the Ngaosrivathanas is fundamentally a call to remember in a unique way and with special attention to the moral lesson of history. In this study it will be important to ask why certain details are remembered and in what way they mold memory to meet a preconceived ideal. In the work of the

[57] Paths, p. 34.
[58] VSM, p. 19.
[59] Ibid, p. 6.
[60] Department of Lao Language and Literature, p. 231.
[61] It is important to note that this analysis is based on the English version of the book which was written by Volker Grabowsky, while the Lao version reflects influences from Maha Sila Viravong.
[62] Phothisane, *King Anouvong's Heroic Battle*, p. 21; see also Lockhart's analysis, p. 384.
[63] Department of Lao Language and Literature, p. 232.

Ngaosrivathanas, Chao Anou fights for freedom, justice and the nation. Thus, Chao Anou and his brothers Nanthasen and Inthavong are characterized as always subtly resisting Bangkok, even as they appear to be fulfilling the role of a tributary; as such their teleological struggle overshadows everything else about their lives.[64] Given this view, the Ngaosrivathanas happily recite the words of Rama III's great grandson, who accuses Chao Anou of "planning from the first to free his country from T'ai control."[65] It is this spirit of freedom and "will to assert independence" that is seen as the root cause of the war.[66] Yet this mentality was not just found among the royals – all the Lao were said to be fighting for the cause of independence:

> In the face of such threats, the Lao could not but rise up to save their identity, their nationality, and to recover their liberty lost in 1778. They faced losing everything by the total "siamicisation", the "provincialisation" of Muong Lao…the insurrection that followed was an "insurrection of the Lao", not the "revolt of Chao Anou"[67]

Underlying the Ngaosrivathanas' retelling of Anou's war as a popular war is a deeply-seeded contradiction between the royal past and the current regime. They present Chao Anou's cause in a unique fashion, describing this pan-Lao movement as having emerged from the search for justice and restitution from Siam for unfair treatment. Chao Anou's war was framed in terms of his demands, which included the return of the Emerald Buddha, the repatriation of Lao people and restitutions for the various affronts he and his son Chao Ratsavong suffered at the hands of the Bangkok elite:

> During his visit to the king (Bangkok), several great Thai lords, by their words and their behavior, had boundlessly insulted Chao Anou. And the princes…had plotted to humiliate and to exploit Chao Anou for the simple reason that he was Lao. Chao Anou who, for his part, considered himself a true offspring of the Lao king was therefore hurt by these personages whose nobility and age had no match with his own.[68]

It is noteworthy that this sense of inferiority in Lao-Thai relations is a feeling which continues to the present and so would be immediately identifiable to the audience. Chao Anou was said to consider stepping down from his position of superiority in society as he willingly offered to the Luang Phrabang king his abdication in order to unite the Lao.[69] In this act of homage to the nation the distant king also becomes someone to identify with for the audience. But the theme of unity runs deeper than just the hierarchical orders of the supreme leader. The Lao recruits who rallied to Chao Anou's banner made up diverse cross-sections of society that formed a cohesive identity in

[64] LHH, p. 5; for Nanthasen see Paths, p. 104.
[65] VSM, p. 5.
[66] 160 Years, p. 470; see also LHH, p. 7.
[67] LHH, p. 5.
[68] 160 Years, p. 472.
[69] LHH, p. 10.

battle as they were "struck down together with their generals."[70] Even military operations are seen by the Ngaosrivathanas as turning on this difference:

> The evacuation of the Khorat Plateau was accomplished ruthlessly. Lao soldiers bluntly asked, "Lao or Thai?" to determine whether inhabitants would live or die. They executed all Thai commoners summarily, while high-ranking Thai officials – totaling forty-two persons – were taken prisoner and beheaded on Don Chan Island opposite Vientiane. The remaining local elites…were asked one additional question: Would they relocate themselves to Vientiane or not? All recalcitrants were treated as Siamese; in short, they were killed.[71]

In this account, the war is brought to each individual person as they are categorized to create a macabre ethnic tally. Consequently, this nascent identity took on metaphysical conditions, as a "quasi-mystical attachment of the Lao to their native land" is said to have remained after the searing events of the war.[72] Thus the Ngaosrivathanas quote an old Lao maxim: "the fruit won't fall far from the tree."[73] Their examples come from what they consider a deep folk under-current of memory and resistance to the Thai, such as a prisoner's song which describes his being taken to Bangkok as a fall to hell and the injustices suffered there.[74] Yet if Maha Sila Viravong's account "diminished" Anou by pointing out his mistakes and recording other Lao heroes who performed more ably or acted more nobly, then the Ngaosrivathanas may equally be accused of their own de-centering of Chao Anou's place in history by their inclusion of a role for all social-classes in the war, which would be anachronistic to the period. At the time the Ngaosrivathanas wrote, they found the struggles of a monarchical ruler to be less compelling than a general insurrection led by the people, who struggled against foreign domination. The innovation of the Ngaosrivathanas' work was to overlay on top of the intrinsically royal qualities of Chao Anou another story in which all the Lao are marked by a sense of unity and duty among them to work together toward a common goal and the conceit that each is bounded together by a shared Lao-ness.

The other side of this unique case of remembrance is found in the Ngaosrivathanas' construction of the Siamese. If the Lao are virtuous and noble in their struggles, then the Thai are depicted as always intending evil, and nothing they do is interpreted as beneficent, much less neutral or accidental. As a result, the carefully formulated policies which the Ngaosrivathanas explore in depth to prove this – the "swallowing of Laos" by tattooing Lao with marks of service to the Thai in Isan, the Governor of Khorat's crooked initiatives or the importation of guns from the British – are juxtaposed with Bangkok's outright desire, which "has always found it in its national interest to annex the whole of Laos."[75] The war itself has been suggested to be an elaborate plot unfolded by the Thai to lure the Lao to their defeat, an "engineered

[70] LHH, p. 12.
[71] Paths, p. 157.
[72] LHH, p. 12.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid, p. 8, 11-12; this story is also repeated in Paths, p. 21 and 160 Years, p. 473.
[75] Paths, p. 78.

outrage."[76] Underneath this aggressive duplicity lies a psychopathology attributed to the Thai royalty. The kings were said to adore portraits of Napoleon. They were driven by a fundamental lack, a psychological need to expand, to succeed, and to amass large sums of merit in order to assure their position as *cakravatin/dhamma-raja*. Taksin and Rama I were both usurpers to the throne while Rama III's "royal right encountered constant challenges."[77] The "paranoia" of the court at Bangkok then seized on the Lao who were seen as being "as dangerous as Burma" or Britain and consequently, they were deemed "a foe to be wiped out at the first opportunity."[78] This aggression took on cultural significance as regarding their wayward younger Lao brothers, the "Bangkok elite never doubted its manifest destiny, its *mission civilisatrice*."[79] This translated into the horrible violence of the early Chakri era: "Everywhere and always, it was by the sword and the gun that this strongman succeeded."[80] The pathos of the work is encapsulated perfectly in the tragedy at its core: the torture of Chao Anou and the destruction of Vientiane. In their descriptions of the torture suffered by Anou, the Ngaosrivathanas quote in minute detail the circumstances of his death:

> Chao Anou had his "eyes put out by the application of searing-irons…without food, with no protection from the fierce sultry heat at the noontide sun, with his brains racking and burning, and suffering from the acutest agonies that thirst can impart."[81]

This excerpt is, by far, the shortest version of the torture accounts that they include. As a result, it is clear that the authors intend for the reader to relive the details of Chao Anou's agony, witness every act and empathize with his suffering. The same can be said of the pillaging of the city, which was ordered by Rama III to face a similar fate, as he commanded his army "to return Vientiane to the wild animals and to leave nothing behind but weeds and water."[82] This made up the "genocide" or "holocaust" of the Lao, their own fall of Jerusalem or Carthage.[83] But words are not all that the Ngaosrivathanas offer to their audience, for pictures are reproduced in many works – on covers or within the pages – of the image of the ruin of Vientiane.[84]

The image of the heroic strength and courage of Chao Anou and the unity among the Lao people determined to fight for freedom – these powerful images over-lay a deeper historical experience cast into silence. The Ngaosrivathanas' demonizing of the Thai engages our ire and antipathy, representing a subtle shifting and refocusing of attention away from over a century of divisive warfare since the tri-partition of the old Lao kingdom of Lan Xang in 1707. Considering this process, the date for which the

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[76] Paths, p. 133, 138, 154; also VSM, p. 6, 8.
[77] Paths, p. 35.
[78] VSM, p. 5, 32, fn. 23-25.
[79] Paths, p. 21.
[80] Ibid, p. 36.
[81] Ibid, p. 23.
[82] 160 Years, p. 467; Paths, p. 60.
[83] Paths, p. 45, 50, 129; 160 Years, p. 467
[84] See for example, the covers of *Paths to Conflagration*, *The Legend of Vientiane in the Time of Chao Anou*, and *King Anouvong's Heroic Battle*.

Ngaosrivathanas' study begins, in 1778, takes on new meaning. Their story begins with the Siamese invasion of Champassak and Vientiane, while also implicitly leaving out the previous three-quarters of a century of intense warfare between Lao *muang* and ignoring the broader contexts of the 1707 tri-partition of the Lan Xang kingdom. Thus in their narration of the attack in 1778, the role of Luang Phrabang appears bewildering:

> [I]t took two trips for the Thai armies to break the Lao resistance and take over the Lao capital. Then, as the Royal Khmer Chronicles reported:
>
> > The order was given to confiscate all precious objects, all weapons, guns and flints, and the population. Afterward, the Luang Prabang troops received orders to attack the territory of Than and the territory of Moi…
>
> Only the survivors of these attacks went to live in the designated areas. However, fully two-thirds died during their journey to Siam. The Lao chronicles call this ordeal the *suk Thai* (Thai war).[85]

In the midst of this spilling of "Lao" blood by "Thai" armies – nomenclature that the Ngaosrivathanas stress – their own sources reveal the contradiction at the heart of their synthesis: "Lao" fought in supposedly "Thai" armies. The Ngaosrivathanas' usage of the terms "Lao" and "Thai" raises an important question: who exactly are "the Lao" in this period? Rather than a coherent identity spanning from Champassak to Luang Phrabang, most often the term referred to any ethnic Tai north of what is today central Thailand simply as "Lao."[86] The term "Lao" was a crude generalization, representing the view from central Siam, which was a blanket reference to a vast array of diverse groups of people, rather than actually referring to any politically-bounded unit at the time. What is noticeably missing from this account is any kind of analysis of the Luang Phrabang/Vientiane war that had been raging since 1707. But in fact, Luang Phrabang played an important role in sparking the 1778 war, as they had been urging Siam to invade Vientiane, accusing the latter of an alliance with Burma. Without acknowledging this context, the Ngaosrivathanas are free to construct Siam as seeking nothing but to devour Vientiane, with only aggressive expansion as the rationale. Furthermore, whenever violence among Lao *muang* inevitably comes up in their narration, it is always immediately followed by Thai brutality to keep the reader's attention locked on the real enemy, Siam:

> In the meantime, Luang Prabang attacked Vientiane, which apparently turned to the Burmese for help. Taksin assailed Cambodia and compelled the southern Lao kingdom of Champassak to accept Thai suzerainty. Then Taksin launched two campaigns to secure Chiang Mai, which he subdued

[85] Paths, p. 42.

[86] A source from "160 Years" demonstrates this: "Her neighbors (at Siam) too on the north, the Laos of Che-ung Mai and Lan Chang…," p. 470.

> by the end of 1774. As his expansion gathered momentum in the heart of Lan Na territories…Taksin had a letter delivered to the Vientiane king in January 1774. He emphasized that henceforth no one, not even the Burmese king, would be capable of hindering him.[87]

This potent refocusing is supported by the Ngaosrivathanas' narration of Vientiane as the center of the Lao, "the Lao political center,"[88] "the hub of Lao political power"[89] and even the successor to the empire of Lan Xang.[90] Therefore the struggle of Chao Anou synecdochically becomes the struggle of all the Lao.[91] This is a crucial point to establish in order to confer a modern relevancy upon the story of Chao Anou, otherwise the destruction of Vientiane remains a regional story, not yet a national tragedy. This position imputed to Vientiane is complicated by its warlike exchanges with its neighbors: the attacks on Luang Phrabang in 1765 and 1771 and the invasion of Xieng Khuang in 1787.[92] Prior to the 1760s the historical record is incredibly obscured, although there are hints of intermittent violence continuing since the division of 1707.[93] The climax came with a series of wars in 1787-1792 which left Vientiane holding power over Luang Phrabang, Xieng Khuang and Sam Nua. The Ngaosrivathanas address this conflict with a deft move, suggesting that, rather than there being any real division among the Lao, these wars were the result of a Bangkok strategy of manipulation that aimed to divide and conquer:

> Bangkok's policy toward the Lao and particularly Nanthasen was eminently sophisticated…In his military expeditions against Luang Prabang and Sam Nua, Nanthasen was accompanied by Siamese contingents dispatched from Bangkok…Siam spurred on this fratricidal war among the Lao, which resulted in the Laocization of a war in a country already moribund from endemic violence.[94]

While all of the guilt must be shouldered by the Thai, some good does come of all this war, for at the same time Nanthasen is still seen as realizing a dream to reconstitute the old empire of Lan Xang.[95] Thus, the later stories of Chao Anou's heroic battles all signify an effort to exorcise the ghost of 1707 by reunifying the country. Ultimately, Anou's war is seen by the Ngaosrivathanas as a "national" awakening among the Lao.[96] Vientiane

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[87] Paths, p. 39.
[88] Ibid, p. 44
[89] Ibid, p. 122.
[90] VSM, p. 27. This last statement ignores the fact that there were two other claimants to the mantle of Lan Xang, Luang Phrabang and Champassak.
[91] LHH, p. 5; Paths, p. 105, 139-140.
[92] David Wyatt, "Siam and Laos, 1767-1827" in *Studies in Thai History: Collected Articles* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1998) p. 184-186, 197-198.
[93] Martin Stuart-Fox, *The Lao Kingdom of Lan Xang: Rise and Decline* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998) p. 102-106.
[94] Paths, p. 44, 66-67.
[95] Ibid, p.66; see also VSM, p. 3-4.
[96] Paths, p. 56.

consecrated this movement as it convened a pan-Lao war-council.[97] Luang Phrabang, Xieng Khuang and Champassak are each asserted to have assisted the war effort of Anou without more than symbolic mechanisms to suggest how their previous century of warfare had been overlooked or much less resolved.[98] Champassak was noted to have "swallowed its aversion until French Colonialism," but also important was the fact that Chao Anou's son had recently been appointed to the throne.[99] However, the degree of his popularity and influence in the region is seriously questionable considering that after the war the old elite were quickly reinstated.[100] For Luang Phrabang, the Ngaosrivathanas suggest that an alliance founded on symbolism was acceded to, but other scholars point to King Manthathourat's alerting Bangkok to its faithless vassal.[101] While the debate over Luang Phrabang's role seems intractable, it is more important to note that Luang Phrabang's actions suggest it remained neutral during the war. Xieng Khuang's role was also to "rally to Anou" whereas the actions of its monarch, Chao Noi, who sent hunting parties to capture Anou for Bangkok in 1828, has been vigorously denied.[102] What is important to this analysis is not what actually happened in the war, but how the Ngaosrivathanas reconstruct the event now; as such they claim that Anou's war represented a struggle against Bangkok aggression that spanned to Chiang Mai in the west and Kedah in the south.[103] Thereby Vientiane became a symbol for all victims of Siam as it "shin[ed] as a beacon for the oppressed."[104] Only as an aside do we learn that the event of 1707 had "torn apart" the "political and social fabric" but Anou would somehow unite this patchwork of disaffected Lao.[105] Yet the unresolved division of 1707 proved to be not so easily elided, for in 1795 Nanthasen was accused by Luang Phrabang of plotting against Bangkok and was taken to the capital and then executed. Chao Anou, captured by Chao Noi in Xieng Khuang, suffered a similar fate.

New Ideology of the Lao P.D.R.

On April 7, 2010 a news article appeared in *the Vientiane Times* on the progress of construction on the "new face" of the city.[106] The article discussed Chao Anouvong Park, which was designed to be a "recreational hub" and "the centre of Vientiane."[107] The spatial location at the heart of the capital is not a mistake, as the regime now officially endorses four kings from its feudal past.[108] The rise of this new ideology has

[97] VSM, p. 12; Paths, p. 155; LHH, p. 10.
[98] Paths, p. 128.
[99] Ibid, p. 65-66; VSM, p. 5.
[100] Ian Baird, "Contested History, Ethnicity, and Remembering the Past: The Case of the Ay Sa Rebellion in Southern Laos," *Crossroads* 18, no. 2 (2007) p. 131, fn. 12.
[101] See for example, Sila, p. 114, 137 – Sila also noted that Luang Phrabang committed 5000 troops to the war against Anou even as he urged them to "forgive and forget the past," ibid.
[102] LHH, p. 10; Paths, p. 57; VSM, p. 40, fn. 92.
[103] VSM, p. 33, fn. 28, 30.
[104] Ibid, p. 6, Paths, p. 148.
[105] Paths, p. 34, 69.
[106] Phonesavanh Sangsomboun, "'New Face' of Vientiane Progressing Well," *The Vientiane Times* April 7, 2010.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Souneth, *King Anouvong's Heroic Battle*, p. 9; see also Stuart-Fox, "The Challenge of Lao Historiography," p. 356.

pre-occupied much of recent Lao scholarship, which has attempted to explain the apparent contradictions of the nominally socialist state. Most scholars have considered this move to revive traditional culture as a reaction to the collapse of international communism in the early 1990s; the image of the grandiose, but empty Russian embassy completed in 1992 seems apt.[109] With the loss of support from the COMECON states, the Lao PDR seemed to retract deeper into isolation, and even experienced an episode of democratic protests.[110] The response to and eventual acceptance of the Ngaosrivathanas' work is inexorably caught up in these changes in two inter-related ways. The first of these issues appears in the Lao-Thai relations at the root of the Ngaosrivathanas' work. For even if we accept the government's turn to tradition as being inspired by recent global events, this does not account for the early work (mid-1980s) of the Ngaosrivathanas' that was undertaken well before such fissures appeared. The context for their writing then must be found elsewhere. In the sudden violent outbreak of the Lao-Thai border wars of 1984 and 1988 the Ngaosrivathanas found affirmation if not their cause, for the conflict was seen as a continuation of Chao Anou's war 160 years ago.[111] There may be no better example than Thailand's M.R. Kukrit Pramoj's comment on these conflicts – he said that troubles with Laos "will never be over unless Vientiane is burned to the ground," vividly recalling the destruction of the city in Anou's time.[112] In this context, the Ngaosrivathanas' work became infused with a strain of virulent anti-Thai vituperation, which quickly became a liability once a sizeable thaw in relations began later in the decade. As a result, their work was embargoed by Lao PDR censors for one day in 1988.[113] That it was published at all was due to their personal connections within the government, which enabled them circumvent the authority of the Ministry of Information and Culture and acquire permission to publish their work from higher party officials.[114] Nevertheless, their 1998 Cornell publication was banned in both Laos and Thailand.[115] At a 1996 conference, Grant Evans was told by Pheuiphan that "he pointedly remarked that he can only publish his views outside the country."[116] Yet the Lao rapprochement with the Thai was

[109] Stephan T. Johnson, "Laos in 1992: Succession and Consolidation," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 1 (1993) p. 79; see also Grant Evans, *The Politics and Ritual and Remembrance* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998) p. 172, (hereafter cited as *RR*).

[110] Geoffrey C. Gunn, "Laos in 1991: Winds of Change," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 1 (1991) p. 89-90.

[111] Paths, p. 32 gives the Ngaosrivathanas' view of these border wars. They were also probably influenced by the low-scale guerilla fighters the Thai government supported against the new Lao government during the 1970s and 1980s.

[112] Vickery, p. 444.

[113] VSM, p. 43, fn. 109; Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana personal communication to the author, 5/3/10.

[114] Martin Stuart-Fox, personal communication to the author, 5/6/10; see also Stuart-Fox, "The Challenge of Lao Historiography," p. 357, fn. 41.

[115] Constance Wilson, "Review," *Pacific Affairs* 73, no. 2, (Summer 2002) p. 307. Today this book is for sale in an upscale bookstore in Vientiane along with Grant Evan's *The Last Century of Lao Royalty* and Nakhonkham Bouphanouvong's *Sixteen Years in the Land of Death.* However there has not been any translation of this work, which originally appeared in Lao in 1988. It is dubious whether this availability represents real access for any Lao, a case similar to the availability of books on the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, which would also be seditious, but for being in English only and highly expensive by local standards.

[116] RR, p. 180, fn. 10.

inevitable given the desire by both governments to expand trans-Mekong trade.[117] Additionally, the Lao PDR's finances approached insolvency in the early 1990s after short-falls in foreign aid were not covered by the remaining socialist powers. Thus, the Lao government was forced to open itself to capitalist forces and specifically the Thai – this trade at a point in the early '90s equaled nearly half of all exports. Yet this closer relationship was at the same time an unequal one seen by the Lao as a vaguely existential threat.[118] In an interview one year before his death in 1993, the chief ideologue of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, Phoumi Vongvichit, expressed the fear in terms of morality:

> The other subject that Phoumi was eager to discuss with Dr. Mayoury and myself [Martin Stuart-Fox] was the future of Lao culture and the moral state of Lao youth today, which caused him much concern. I asked him how he felt about the new Mittaphap bridge across the Mekong. It was not the bridge per se he was worried about, however, but the influence of Thailand in a much broader sense. The Thai economic stake in Laos is large and growing, and so is Thai cultural influence in general.
> Phoumi expressed concern over the transmission over Thai television of values that were harmful to Lao youth. He was particularly worried about the effect the culture of consumption and sexual permissiveness was having on young Lao, whom he saw as lacking in discipline and commitment to the country. Time and again in our discussion Phoumi referred to the alternative values taught by Buddhism, stressing the need for young Lao to take to heart the Buddha's message of self-control and mental discipline.[119]

Some Lao continue to see Thailand as a society in decline and lacking moral virtue as an orgy of capitalist consumption, prostitution, AIDS/HIV and an anarchy of ideas ensues. Thereafter, the Ngaosrivathanas were vindicated in 1997, for the first seminar on Chao Anouvong was held where discussions were described as having "uncharacter-istic vigor."[120] The malaise of the early 1990s broke down as the regime began to accept the Ngaosrivathanas' work as the center-piece of its revival of history:

> In January 1997 a three-day seminar at the National University of Laos drew a hundred participants "to study the struggles of the Lao people under the leadership of King Anouvong"; several important historical monuments are being restored; and seminars were held on protection of

[117] Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos in 1988: In Pursuit of New Directions," *Asian Survey* 29, no. 1 (1989) p. 84. See also Vickery, p. 444.

[118] Grant Evans describes this difficulty as "cultural blurring," RR, p. 178-179.

[119] Martin Stuart-Fox, *Obituary: Phoumi Vongvichit (1909-1994).* http://home.vicent.net.au/~lao/laostudy/phoumi.htm, Accessed 2/3/2010.

[120] RR, p. 180, fn. 10.

> the national heritage and of minority cultures. In February, the Fifth National Games became a celebration of Lao culture.[121]

The location of this disruption in discourse may be pinpointed to the mid-1990s: in 1994 Evans noted that a statue of Sisavang Vong had been barricaded while another such statue mysteriously disappeared – yet, only three years later, the government reversed its position and planned a refurbishing of these statues with more to come.[122] The culmination of this culture-turn by the government could be seen three years later, in 2000, as a major public event was held in the new National Culture Hall. The Ngaosrivathanas presented their work before an audience of a thousand people, and the event was broadcast live on TV.[123] However, the spontaneous decision to set up a Chao Anou Foundation was stalled later by the government due to the projects' perceived threat to Lao-Thai relations. In recent scholarship from the National University of Laos, scholars note "Mayoury and Pheuiphan (1988, 1989, and 1998) present the modern Lao interpretation of events."[124] However, they are careful to attenuate the extreme form of nationalism and the anti-Thai bias. Even as the Lao P.D.R. seeks to legitimate its rule on the basis of cultural preservation, it must avoid a jingoist/xenophobic attitude as its economy is ever more tightly integrated into that of its neighbors.[125] Thus, the Chao Anouvong Park may be the perfect representation of the current government's posture as its reinforced embankment is designed to ward off flooding of the Mekong while at the same time subtly warding off the flood of Thai culture.

The second issue is more ephemeral and thus more speculative. The evidence is indirect at best and the conclusions remain dubious. But this may be related to the nature of the topic itself, for it is clear that certain issues about kings in the Lao P.D.R. remain dangerous subjects.[126] The important distinction is that the danger is entirely focused on King Savang Vatthana, the last monarch, and his death in a re-education camp around 1980. Evans has noted these issues are still "politically problematic" to

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[121] Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos in 1997: Into ASEAN," *Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (1998) p. 76. The reviewers note that at this conference the impact of the Ngaosrivathanas was actually marginal (based on no one having read their English work) even though the Ngaosrivathanas were present and had their work included in a later volume of the conference's proceedings (Dept. of Lao Language and Literature, 1997(for their contributions see pages 66, 73). The reviewers also suggest that while working at the National University of Laos they had to introduce the Ngaosrivathanas' work to their colleagues. The most concrete example of a connection between Lao historians in Laos and the Ngaosrivathanas is indeed Souneth Phothisane's work Virakam Chao Anouvong, which includes a round-table discussion with Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana. This was released shortly after the Ngaosrivathanas presented their work at the National Culture Hall in Vientiane in 2000, which was televised live on TV. Even if one wishes to deny a direct lineage or there is a lack of interest in their work at the NUOL there is clearly a broader interest in Chao Anou which the Ngaosrivathanas have played a role in shaping with their 1988/1997 work published in Laos. Their presentation in 2000 also demonstrates the government sanctioning of their views after near censorship in 1988.

[122] Grant Evans, "Immobile Memories: Statues in Thailand and Laos," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002) p. 165-167.

[123] VSM, p. 43, fn. 109; Stuart-Fox, "The Challenge of Lao Historiography," p. 357.

[124] Department of Lao Language and Literature, p. 287-288, fn. 62-63.

[125] RR, p. 179.

[126] RR, p. 180 explains the interest in Anou is due to the fact that he is a king which they cannot explicitly acknowledge.

publically discuss.[127] Even as Kaysone finally admitted this much in a 1989 interview in Paris, at the Luang Phrabang Museum (formerly the royal palace) the tour guides continued to say the King was "at seminar" as late as December 1996.[128] Yet the LPRP is not antagonistic to all royalty; in fact, their relationship to royal blood was crucial in gaining popular support. This is most exemplified by the fact that the LPRP were led by the "Red Prince" Souphanouvong during the war.[129] After 1975, the LPRP did not suppress the cult of Prince Phetsarath, given his central role in the 1945 independence movement of the Lao Issara, from which the party grew.[130] Also the LPRP worked comfortably with Prince Souvanna Phouma, who was given a large state funeral in 1984. It is often remarked that the revolution came late in Laos as the LPRP only assumed power on December 2, 1975 after forcing the abdication of the King. But it is important to note that the LPRP refused to acknowledge this as an act of abdication and continued to seek to work with King Savang Vatthana as evidenced in Phoumi Vongvichit's awkward announcement shortly following:

> Rumors spread by the enemy that we had dismissed the King…Realizing that the monarchy had blocked the progress of the country, the King abdicated and turned over power to the people. He abdicated intentionally…The King is still in his palace, and is now Supreme Adviser to the President of the country. He is still enjoying his daily life as before, and his monthly salary will be sent to him as usual. The only difference is that he is no longer called King.[131]

Rather than storm into a republican age, the Lao revolution came very near instituting what could only be called a socialist monarchy. It was King Savang Vatthana's refusal to be a figure head of the new regime that led to his being accused of supporting Hmong resistance fighters and being sent to "seminar."[132] After the King's death, the LPRP's initial unease with the history of kings first appeared. As we have seen already, Maha Kham Champakeomany produced a nine volume work of history that the regime deemed as "unfinished," significantly in the same year the last King is thought to have expired. This reaction against royal subjects continued. In 1982, Phueiphan attempted to obtain a translation of a Vietnamese text on the war of Chao Anouvong, but he was blocked:

> We had miserably failed in our previous attempts from 1982 to 1984 to desperately obtain through the Committee for Social Sciences (Hanoi) a copy of this document, while working on a political biography of Chao Anou. A Lao high-ranking official who had been given a typewritten copy of this document adamantly refused to lend it to us. The reason was (as

[127] Grant Evans, *The Last Century of Lao Royalty: A Documentary History* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009) p. 421, (hereafter cited as *LCLR*).
[128] RR, p. 100.
[129] LCLR, p. 25-26.
[130] RR, p. 101.
[131] RR, p. 99.
[132] Ibid; LCLR, p. 25.

> we found out later) that the contents of this "feudal" document are considered to be highly subversive.[133]

This translation was eventually published in 1984, but it is unclear if it was subversive due to the negative light it shone on Vietnamese-Lao relations during the 1827 war or because it addressed the royal past while the LPRP was still uneasily negotiating the place of monarchy in Lao society. The Ngaosrivathanas' first book on Anou was published in 1988 through a series of maneuverings at the top levels of the party, and yet, significantly, this should be compared with the failure to publish volumes one and two of the official history a year later. In 1989, the official history that was published began only with the narrative of colonialism/anti-colonialism (1893), while remaining silent about the country's feudal past. In 1990, there was a version of the first two volumes of this history under review for publication, but at 377 pages it was deemed "too long…for use in secondary schools."[134] This history would not be published for another decade. The person overseeing the Lao P.D.R.'s production of an official history had been a major figure of the party, Phoumi Vongvichit. Martin Stuart-Fox interviewed him and reported his response on the issue:

> The first two volumes have not been published because Phoumi was not satisfied with them, and refused to give them his stamp of approval. He apparently had his own ideas about the vexed question of the origin of the Lao people, where they had come from and when, and wanted more research done. Also there were problems about how to deal with the history of the Kingdom of Lan Xang from a Marxist perspective, and about the historic relations between Laos and neighbouring states.[135]

It is this subtle discomfort that made the larger issue of kingship problematic to the regime. In the late 1980s when the Ngaosrivathanas published their history of Chao Anou, which was dependent on their connections within the party, their experience can only be seen as the exception to a general prohibition on such a subversive, dangerous subject as the throne. The last king's death is at the center of this regime of censorship. The ban seems only to have been lifted completely in 2000 with the publication of the pre-colonial history. This seems only possible after the old guard of the LPRP had retired or died. Yet problems with historical interpretation of the subject remain. As Martin Stuart-Fox and Grant Evans have suggested, the revival of historical interest in the Kings of Lan Xang implicitly questions the legitimacy of the revolution.[136] While glorifying the four kings is an obvious strategy to return to this history in a carefully delineated, circumscribed way, it has nevertheless raised issues about the empty throne today.

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[133] VSM, p. 42, fn. 109; this 1984 book was an earlier edition of the VSM (2001).
[134] LHH, p. 14.
[135] Stuart-Fox, *Obituary*.
[136] RR, p. 182; Stuart-Fox, "The Challenge of Lao Historiography," p. 357.

Conclusion

The history of Chao Anouvong as an Ur-Text for Lao-Thai relations may also be seen as the meta-narrative for how the Lao have regarded themselves since independence. From Maha Sila Viravong to Kaysone Phoumvihane and the Ngaosrivathanas, the hero Chao Anou has been enlisted to bring about a national consciousness among otherwise disaffected Lao. The revolutionary historiography concerned with struggle for independence against foreign aggression has undoubtedly marked recent scholarship on the history of Chao Anou, but the concerns from the opening of the post-colonial era remain as well; notably the martial skill of Lao heroes, the pathos of tragedy established in the torture of Chao Anou and the ruin of Vientiane. An analysis of the contributions of Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana highlights the tendency of Lao historians to de-center Chao Anou from the story in order to bring to light other issues deemed more significant to the present. Yet rather than chastise the Ngaosrivathanas or other Lao historians for not looking at their past with an objective eye which sees all that is unsightly as well as noble, it is important to note that this blind-spot is at the root of all ideological consciousness, historical, communist, capitalist or otherwise.[137] It is this very blindness which animates the impulse of modern Lao nationalist analysis to carry on intractable disputes with Thai scholars, exorcise the ghost of Lao disunity from the past and numb the venomous memory of King Savang Vatthana.

[137] Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verson, 2008)

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