THE ROLE OF THE CHINESE IN LAO SOCIETY

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PREFATORY NOTE

This paper will be incorporated into the author's book on Laos which will be published by the University of California Press.

It is intended here to only briefly outline some of the outstanding characteristics of the Chinese as an urban ethnic group, and to assess their economic role in the Lao economy. Throughout the countries of Southeast Asia the Overseas Chinese[1] play a crucial role and in many cases a dominant one in commerce, industry and banking.[2] Since in most cases they constitute a minority of the total population and simultaneously stress their Chinese cultural identity, they pose a critical political problem to the self-conscious national states in this area that have gained their independence from Britain, France and Holland since the end of the Second World War. This problem has been approached in various ways by the countries concerned. They have attempted

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[1]The use of this term is certainly indicative of the strong ties that bind the Chinese to their homeland, since many of the Overseas Chinese in this country, particularly in Laos, live in areas bordering on China. Perhaps the term also derives from the fact that many Chinese even in Laos arrived by ship rather than travel overland.

[2]The Chinese also stand out because of their great concentration in the capital cities such as Bangkok, Saigon, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane.

to lessen Chinese control of commerce by restricting their activities in certain businesses or by forcing them to change their cultural orientation, at least outwardly. The Chinese have been barred from certain trades and professions, forced to eliminate the Chinese signs on their shops and become formal citizens of the countries in which they reside. In certain cases deportation has been resorted to.

These measures have at best had a partial success and have not been made any easier by the emergence of China as a major political and military power.

Before going into any detail about the relationship between the Lao and Chinese communities let us first examine the history and economic role of the Chinese in Laos. Chinese as used here does not refer to all emigrants from China who have come to settle in Laos but rather only to those of the so-called Han group who have settled in the towns. Excluded by definition are peoples such as the Meo and Yao who may speak and to a lesser extent write Chinese, and who were either born or originated in the recent past in Yunnan, although both of these tribal groups have extensive dealings with Chinese merchants. Before the war these people traded with (Ho) Yunnanese caravans. Now they do

most of their business with urban Chinese merchants.

The urban, or perhaps more accurately town-dwelling Chinese in Laos are a rather diverse group; Cantonese, Yunnanese, Hainanese, Teochiu, Swatow, and Hakka. The latter are people originally from North China who migrated south from Honan in the 400-600 A.D. as a result of military pressures. They moved to hilly areas in southern Fukien and Kwangtung provinces. Today their language is distinct from that spoken in their original homeland. In the past century many of them have migrated to Southeast Asia, especially Malaya, Indonesia and Indo-China (J. Spencer, personal communication). The composition of these communities varies (see Table 1) although as might be expected the Yunnanese are more numerous in the towns in the north.

According to Skinner (1957:35) the terms used for the distinct groups of Chinese in the literature dealing with Southeast Asia are "tribe," "congregations," and "dialect groups." The first term which is used by British writers with reference to Malaya has no meaning in the technical anthropological sense and its popular use is too vague. "Congregation" used by the French in Indo-China implies a formal organization which is not always present particularly

in the smaller towns of Laos. "Dialect group" is also unfortunate since the speech differences which determine the groups are more than dialectal in most cases. The linguist's distinction between dialect and language is in essence that if a speaker from one speech community can, without too much difficulty, understand a speaker from another speech community, then the forms of speech of the two communities constitute dialects of the same language. If, on the other hand, the two forms of speech are mutually unintelligible, then the communities speak two different languages. On this basis, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese, and Hokkien-Teochiu are languages and only the Hokkiens and Teochius speak dialects of the same language. Cultural factors are also important so that in Laos the Yunnanese also constitute a separate group.

The divisions of the Chinese groups in Laos seem to be similar to those in Thailand with the exception of the Yunnanese who are much more important in Laos. Over 95 per cent of the Chinese in Thailand come from the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien, (Skinner: 1957, 35). There appears to be considerable competition between these groups in Thailand and elsewhere although data on this point is

incomplete for Laos.[3]

Evidence of the felt distinctness of the communities is shown by the fact that in Vientiane there are two Chinese Chambers of Commerce representing groups from Swatow and Canton - the former having more members.

Since Laos shares a common border with China some Han Chinese have doubtless been present there for a long time. But until recent times with the beginning of some commercial development under the French colonial rule this area was probably not a highly attractive place for settlement. During this century there has, however, been considerable growth and currently (1959) the Chinese population of Laos is estimated at some 40,000. The present-day communities have grown up within the memory of living inhabitants, the first migrants having come to many communities forty or fifty years ago. For example, two of the oldest inhabitants of the Chinese community in the town of Xieng Khouang, men now in their eighties, estimated that they had come from their native Yunnan about forty years ago. Not all of the Chinese in northern Laos come from Yunnan as there are

[3]William H. Newell - review of Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History by G. William Skinner [Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1957] in Man, December 1959, pp. 219-220.

significant numbers from Swatow, Canton, and even Hainan. Since the defeat of the Nationalists in China not a few soldiers and officers have crossed over into Laos and settled down in some cases assuming rather important positions in these communities. According to one observer, the Chinese communities in Laos developed mainly from those individuals who had failed to make a living in Thailand or Vietnam or for one reason or another were dissatisfied with conditions in those countries. More recently there has been an influx of merchants from Hong Kong, but unlike the refugees from Yunnan most of them came to make a quick profit during 1956-57 when there was trading in import licenses and currency manipulations resulting from mismanagement of the American aid program.

Almost every one of these communities are politically organized into a Groupement Administratif Chinois Regionaux. It is likely that this system derives from or at least is related to that which originally developed in Vietnam. To quote Hinton (1958:10), "Under the Vietnamese empire the Chinese were organized into bang (congregations), each of which was composed of people from the same province and speaking the same dialect, largely exempt from Vietnamese jurisdiction, and under a chief of its own choosing who

was in charge of its affairs....The French colonial administration retained the congregation system in its essentials...." These are organizations with official standing in the government. (In certain areas such as Vientiane and Luang Prabang where their numbers are sufficiently large the Vietnamese community also has an organization.) Each group is presided over by a chairman equivalent to a tasseng (district administrator) in Lao government terms, and often a vice-chairman as well. Where the community is large enough there is also a permanent salaried secretary and in certain cases some paid assistants. When the community is large and diverse there may be two chairmen, one for each area of origin in China. Thus in Vientiane there are Swatow, Cantonese and Hakka groups and in Luang Prabang there are Hainanese and Swatow congregations. (See Table 2 at end for description of the situation in all of Laos.)

A chairman is elected to his position every four years, with the elections usually supervised by the Lao government. He is often a leading merchant. There does not appear to be any time limit on his continuance in this honorary position (no pay is received) but the job does carry a great deal of social prestige. He is expected to be generous in

providing help to the poorer members of the community.

The duty of the permanent secretary in the larger congregations is to deal with Lao government authorities. Unlike many of the other Chinese he usually has a knowledge of French. In Vientiane the leaders of the Chinese community were fluent in French and had attended the Lycee Pavie achieving about the equivalent of a ninth grade education. The money for meeting various expenses of the congregation comes from service fees collected whenever it submits applications to the Lao authorities on behalf of the Chinese residents, and also from the interest received on money which the congregation has loaned out, at a monthly interest rate of five per cent (the usual rate in Laos is ten to fifteen per cent per month). In certain cases the congregations in the larger towns also have jurisdiction over Chinese in outlying communities in the same province.

A very important function of the community, if it is large enough, is the operation of a private school. The maintenance of these schools which are the largest privately operated ones in Laos is, of course, a key factor in maintaining Chinese cultural identity. In the larger towns the Chinese schools are extensive; there are some 1,400 pupils in Vientiane and even in the smaller communities over a

hundred Chinese pupils are enrolled. Nine years of education are offered in the larger towns and six years in the smaller ones (see Table 2). Although certain general aspects of the curriculum are supervised by the Lao Ministry of Education which maintains a formal control over the schools their graduates cannot continue on in the Lao system since these schools do not teach French. These pupils therefore must go to Taiwan or mainland China for further training, depending on their political sympathies. In 1956 it was estimated that there were less than 100 Chinese students in government operated educational institutions including the Lycee. Generally speaking they come from the more prosperous families.

As early as 1900 the prominent role of the Chinese in Lao commerce was cited by Reinach (1901: 312):

"Just about everyone engages in trade in Laos, in highly variable proportions, to be sure, and each according to his resources. There are, however, real merchants, businessmen and traders who are the middlemen between the native producers and the exporters in neighboring countries or on the coast. The greater number of these and also the most active ones, are the Chinese, then come the Hos and the Burmese. They may act either on their own account, or

in behalf of a small local syndicate, or again as representatives of Chinese or European houses established in the ports."

He also makes the further interesting points:

"The Laotians are more likely to operate individually or in family groups financed by nobles, officials of high rank or wealthy men who use this means of putting to work the capital which business has already brought them."

Although not mentioned by Reinach, an important symbiotic relationship seems to have grown up between the Chinese immigrants and the Lao nobility with the Lao supplying a good deal of the capital and the Chinese running the businesses. This integration was aided by the fact that many of these merchants took Lao wives. This pattern has continued to the present day. Although there are formal government regulations limiting certain types of trade and commerce exclusively to Lao citizens, the Chinese have taken in Lao partners who supply their name and sometimes some capital as well. These business relationships reach up to the highest levels of Lao society.

In Thailand the royal family itself has participated in intermarriage with the Chinese. It was rather common for ennobled Chinese to present daughters to the king as

maids-in-waiting and prospective concubines. One of these was taken as wife by King Mongkut and later elevated to a queen. She gave birth to Princess Saowapa, later one of Rama V's queens and the mother of Rama VI and Rama VII. Thus, taking into account only known cases of Chinese admixture, there was from the first an extensive Chinese strain in the Jakkri royal family which still rules Thailand. The social importance of this fact lies in the consciousness and acknowledgment of it by the kings themselves. But it was not only the women who played a role. Phraya Tak or Taksin was born in 1734, the son of a Chinese (Teochiu) father and a Thai mother. He was adopted as a Thai nobleman. He became a provincial governor, fought the Burmese and subsequently became King and ruled from 1767-1782 (Skinner: 1957, 20, 26-7).

On special ceremonial occasions the Chinese (and Vietnamese) participate jointly with the Lao but as a distinct group. On the 2500th Anniversary of Buddhism in Luang Prabang, Chinese school children in Luang Prabang formed a part of a procession parading with a lighted paper dragon to the royal palace. Both Lao and Chinese use the Buddhist pagodas. As far as is known, there are no Chinese monks as such and Chinese Buddhists are mainly of the Mahayana

rather than the Hinayana sect prevalent in Southeast Asia.

Although intermarriage is significant in Laos to some extent it appears to be discouraged in the major towns as opposed to the smaller communities where Chinese wives are less easily available. One explanation for this situation may be in the fact that as a group the Lao have less prestige in Chinese eyes than either the Thai or Vietnamese with whom the Overseas Chinese appear to intermarry more readily.

Table 3 briefly summarizes some approximate statistics concerning Chinese ownership of urban businesses and points up their overwhelming predominance. The Chinese are also active in rural areas. Not only do Chinese operate shops in many villages but they also loan money. The villagers often feel they can obtain lower rates from the Chinese than they can get from their own clansmen. Actually, the rate is the same, but the Chinese are willing to take their interest payment in rice at the next harvest. Psychologically speaking, a farmer would rather part with 100 pounds of rice at harvest time when he has thousands, than 100 kip in cash when he has practically none. (Kaufman: 1956, 6).

The most important Chinese business concerns are, of course, concentrated in Vientiane. A brief survey conducted in 1959 showed that the Chinese operated 749 or almost

exactly 50 per cent of a total of 1550 businesses (see Table 4). The other 50 per cent is divided among Lao, Vietnamese, Thai, French and others.

It should be pointed out that most large enterprises such as banks, insurance companies, saw mills, motor truck transport firms and particularly export-import houses have Chinese capital and/or management, so that actually the Chinese community participates in more than half of the total commerce in Vientiane. This is particularly true in the case of Lao-Chinese partnerships where the former supplies his name and government contacts with perhaps some capital as well and the latter manages the enterprise and provides capital. In the case of import-export concerns it is the Chinese partner who provides contacts in Hong Kong, Saigon and other trade centers. Lao-Chinese intermarriage is also an important factor here since a business may sometimes be registered in the name of the Lao wife. In certain cases the Lao and Chinese partners may be linked through marriage bonds between their children.

When one Chinese (a recent immigrant who had received an English education in his native Hong Kong) was asked if he feared restrictive legislation of the Lao government, he replied that this would not threaten his business but merely

create annoyances since he would then have to pay a Lao for the use of his name, and if things really got difficult he would hire a few Lao to sit around in his shop. This may have been an oversimplification, but the overt contempt and disdain for the Lao was clearly evident. There is no doubt that the Chinese regard themselves as superior. In western cultures Chinese are stereotyped as being very polite, quiet and self-effacing while in countries such as Laos they are often aggressive and overbearing.

Vietnamese in Vientiane operate restaurants and night clubs, serve as skilled craftsmen, waiters, butchers, bakers and domestic servants while the French who are present in smaller numbers tend to operate, often in partnership with the Lao, only those concerns which require heavy capitalization and European contacts or technical skills such as airlines, hotels, large construction enterprises, garages, export of benzoin (used in perfume manufacture) and a tobacco factory. Individual Frenchmen work as airline supervisors, mechanics, pilots, automobile mechanics and hotel managers, while the Indians and Pakistanis operate fabric stores.

Thai from Bangkok participate in the ownership and management of some of the banks and hotels and also serve

as representatives of certain international firms such as oil companies. Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese are employed in skilled positions by foreign governments notably the American aid mission. They are categorized by the Americans as "Third Country Nationals," that is, neither Americans nor Lao of the host country. Lao from Northeastern Thailand serve as construction laborers, samlaw drivers, and street merchants. Although there is some overlap in the specializations of these different ethnic groups, by and large there does not appear to be much direct competition. Rather these occupational structures can be viewed as a mosaic whose component parts fit together. In certain cases some can be removed, as was the case of the Vietnamese truck gardeners and government officials after the war, without causing the whole structure to crumble. It is quite possible that as the Lao acquire further skills they will gradually replace groups such as French technicians, and Vietnamese craftsmen without necessarily eliminating the Chinese businessmen and merchants.

To return to the Chinese, let us see to what extent they are specialized and how the situation in Vientiane compares to that in some of the smaller towns. Although

they own half the shops and participate in most businesses they do not appear to go in too much for small scale peddling in urban areas (although small Chinese merchants are scattered throughout the countryside). Thus, of 1,980 small peddlers in the streets and four market places of Vientiane only fifty-three of these are Chinese, the rest being Lao, Lao from Northeast Thailand, and a few Vietnamese. But even here the Chinese are distinctive in that even as street peddlers they display a little more capital than the Lao. This group includes the Chinese "hot noodle and soup" vendor who roams the streets of Vientiane until late at night clacking his sticks to offer tasty hot food to the movie and festival crowds. While the 120 taxi drivers and 700 pedicab or samlaw drivers are almost exclusively Lao from Northeast Thailand, with a few local Lao, a certain number of the samlaws are owned by Chinese who rent them out. Many European strangers who see the Chinese noodle peddlers walking the streets at night contrast their ambition unfavorably with that of the Lao but pay little attention to the samlaw driver who pedals around looking for a fare at almost all hours.

Within Vientiane there is a great range in the Chinese community consisting as it does of British educated

Chinese merchants from Hong Kong who may have arrived only a year or so ago or the largely illiterate noodle seller or small shopkeeper born in Laos who may never have been far from Vientiane.[4]

In Luang Prabang, the royal capital, business has expanded much less than in Vientiane but there is nevertheless a significant business community since this town is the main commercial center for northern Laos. Here the Chinese owned more than eighty per cent of the 233 stores in town (as of 1959). Not only are they merchants and importers, but they also engage in specialized crafts such as barbering and goldsmithing. The two movie theaters in town and a third one under construction are all owned by Chinese, although in at least one there is some Lao capital invested. A saw mill, dyeing establishment, rice mill, brickyard and other small local industries are also owned by Chinese. Of five local restaurants two are Chinese-owned, one was French (until it closed in 1958), and the other two are Vietnamese.

Here as in other towns in the north there is a division of labor among the Chinese community; those from Swatow,

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[4]The large financial support Laos has received under the American aid program has stimulated the growth of many concerns and also attracted considerable numbers of Chinese from Saigon and Bangkok as well as Hong Kong.

Hainan, Canton and of Hakka origin run the shops or engage in the import business,[5] most Yunnanese travel in the highlands and trade with the Meo and Yao.[6] This is facilitated by the fact that many of the people in both tribal groups, but particularly the Yao, speak Yunnanese. In many cases these Yunnanese have moved south to Luang Prabang in recent years and are merely carrying on the same type of general trading they did in their former home.

According to some reports a number of the Yao in this area are partially literate in Chinese. Reportedly in one Yao village about twenty-five miles from Luang Prabang a former major in the Chinese Nationalist Army has been giving Chinese lessons to the villagers and their children. He receives his tuition fees in old silver coins which are still widely used currency in this area.[7] The Yao observe

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[5]Many of them have direct business connections through relatives in Vientiane, while in several cases the same individual conducts businesses in both towns.

[6]It is presumed that a considerable portion of this trade involves opium, but, of course, such facts are hard to check precisely.

[7]This Chinese teacher is considered a learned man by the Yao and is asked to write out spells to keep away the evil spirits. He receives payment for these services and also sells various goods. His total monthly income is estimated to be over 300 silver dollars.

the Chinese lunar calendar and celebrate festivals which are strongly influenced by Chinese culture. A popular item for merchants selling to the Yao are colorful Chinese shrouds which are made in Luang Prabang. The Yao believe that when they die and are wrapped in Chinese shrouds their spirits will be allowed to return to the land of the Han from whence they came. It is not possible to completely authenticate all of these facts but they do serve to indicate the strong cultural ties between the Chinese and Yao.

In Xieng Khouang a similar pattern is found. In this area the Chinese operate twenty-five shops of various kinds, including lunch stands and meat stalls. Here, too, the Yunnanese carry on trade in the neighboring highlands with the Meo and other tribal groups. In this predominantly Meo area there are only two Lao shops, while other Lao residents are peddlers, farmers, or government officials. The Meo are farmers, and a few act as small scale tradesmen of vegetables, meat and poultry. In contrast, the Tai Dam (Black Tai) run half a dozen shops. The local Vietnamese operate a dozen stores, including two restaurants, a tailor and barber shop, a few general stores and several dozen stalls selling noodles and manufactured goods in the market. A good deal of this trade is based on the sale of

opium by the Meo and is legally approved by the Lao government within the province.

Twenty-three miles away by road is Phong Savanh, a town which has grown up in the last few years because of the opening of an airport nearby. This town is actually more easily accessible by air from Vientiane and other centers than is the old provincial capital of Xieng Khouang. In this new community the Chinese predominate in commercial life since they own forty-six of the sixty-seven shops in town. Even though they only total about 250 persons there the Lao own ten small shops, six Indian and three Cambodian families run textile shops and a few general stores. A Frenchman runs a bar-restaurant, and the only Vietnamese family repairs radios.[8]

Muong Sai is an important but rather isolated district center in northern Luang Prabang province. It has an airfield and army post and is the administrative and trading center for the region. As in the larger towns so in this isolated area the Chinese exert a similar control over commercial life. The eight families of Swatow extraction and the two of Hainanese origin came here through Thailand

[8]This town is reportedly an important trans-shipment point in the export of opium by small private planes.

some twenty years ago and operate all of the ten shops in town. There is also a Lao-run food stall. There are some 400 Chinese in the region, almost all of them from Yunnan. About half of them have lived in this area for more than two decades, while the remainder have come since the fall of Nationalist China in 1949. A few are agriculturalists but most engage in trade with the mountain peoples.

As in other isolated areas the number of Chinese males far outnumbers the females. About three-quarters of the Chinese have taken local wives. The head of the Chinese community in Muong Sai illustrates some of the characteristic types of relationships of the Chinese in this area. He originally migrated from Yunnan thirty years ago, and married a Lao woman. He grows vegetables, occasionally trades in the highlands and also owns a store in Vientiane where he has a son and daughter studying in the Chinese school.[9]

The situation in remote Phong Saly located near the Chinese border, is quite different. Here, out of a

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[9]Formerly the Chinese community was about twice its present size. In 1943 a Chinese school was opened which enrolled 60 pupils but it was closed down when Japanese troops came in during 1945.

population of some 5,000 estimated for the town and its surroundings, there are a few dozen Vietnamese, and approximately two hundred odd Chinese of whom ninety per cent are Yunnanese.[10] The bulk of the population are Phou Noi (a Sino-Tibetan group). There are also some 400 people known as Hon Lu the descendants of Yunnanese who immigrated here five or six generations ago and who although regarded as of Lao nationality still speak Yunnanese. They have intermarried with the more recent Chinese immigrants. The Chao Muong of this district is a Hon Lu.[11] There are about 30 stores in town, 15 of which are run by the Chinese, 8 by the Hon Lu and the rest by the Lao and the Vietnamese. These are general stores which secure their goods from Luang Prabang. About half of the Yunnanese are farmers and the rest are traders in the highlands.

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[10]There are also seven Hainanese families, three of Cantonese and one of Swatow origin.

[11]From 1949-1956 there was also a school which for a time had over 90 pupils. Many of these were Hon Lu children. The school closed down due to the lack of a teacher.

[12]Actually Phong Saly is very difficult of access. It is reached by plane to the Boun Neua airstrip and then thirty miles over a narrow mountain road. Or one can go by road to Hat Sa a dozen miles to the northeast and then down the Nam Ou river by boat for three days to Luang Prabang.

The Chinese position of economic predominance is also found in Pakse in the southern part of Laos. In Pakse the Lao themselves are in the minority. Of a total population for the area of some 15,000 about half are Chinese, 4,000 Vietnamese and only 3,000 Lao. As in many other areas in Laos - Swatow and Hakka people make up a large part of the Chinese community. Recently there has been an influx of Swatow people from the other side of the Mekong River in Thailand.

Over eighty per cent of the 390 stores in Pakse are owned by Chinese. Unlike in Vientiane all four of the hotels in town are run by Chinese,[13] as are both movies. In addition there are some 300 Hakka truck gardeners living on the outskirts of town along the Mekong. They provide Pakse with vegetables and some fresh meat. Members of these families also work as tailors at home. Many of the Vietnamese work as masons, carpenters, tailors, barbers and mechanics. The Lao have a monopoly on government jobs, and a few are small shopkeepers while the majority are farmers in the hinterland.

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[13] The hotels in Vientiane are owned by Lao, Thai and French interests.

The striking differences between the Chinese and the Lao with regard to achievement in business and commerce naturally raises questions. Skinner (1957: 92-94) provides some answers which although not conclusive are highly suggestive. Although he is referring to the Thai his comments take on added emphasis in Laos where the Thai are regarded as aggressive and dynamic compared to the Lao. His observations are given here in abbreviated form:

> The complimentary preferences of the Chinese and Thai in Siam are especially striking because the great majority of the population in South China, as well as Siam, is rural, agricultural, and village centered. This was truer still in the early nineteenth century, by which time the occupational patterns in Siam were fairly well set. Moreover, those patterns were not significantly altered after the last decades of the nineteenth century, when Chinese immigration took on the character of a mass movement of peasants.
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> Of primary importance is the fact that the South Chinese peasant lived in a grimly Malthusian setting where thrift and industry were essential for survival. Characteristics that may have arisen from necessity through the centuries came, in time, to be cultural imperatives. The Thai peasant lived in an underpopulated and fertile land where the requirements for subsistence were modest and easily obtained. In the Thai universe, consumption and enjoyment were the immediate stuff of living. The Chinese peasant, however, had every practical reason for

thrift and frugality: consumption had to be limited in the present in hopes of assuring future survival; enjoyment had to be sacrificed for work. Under these circumstances protracted labor in the interests of the future became a value in itself.

The Chinese peasant had a definite place in a continuum of kin-dead, living, and yet to be born - he looked to the past as well as to the future. His primary goal was not individual salvation, but lineage survival and advancement. Protracted labor and extreme thrift were the means of these strongly sanctioned ends. The ambition of the Chinese peasant for family advancement was especially marked because values in Chinese society were elite-centered. Thus scholarship, government position, the extended family under one roof, proper homage and honors to ancestors were possible only as a family rose to elite status. The road to success was simple: hard work, thrift, and mutual help among kin.

The Thai peasant had no place in an historical continuum of kin; the Thai did not even use surnames. Immediate ancestors were honored by cremation and then usually forgotten; there was no ancestral cult, no kin responsibility outside the immediate or extended family. The religion of the Thai peasant emphasized individual merit-making and salvation and condemned as worldly any excessive concern for the material advancement of self and family. The Thai peasant could obtain prestige and come closest to achieving his spiritual ends by entering the Buddhist priesthood, a step taken by [many] men which involved no upward mobility.

Lao sentiment about the Chinese appears to be somewhat ambivalent. To the extent that they are associated with their homeland to the north they are feared.[14] Their economic power and industriousness also incite[redacted] mistrust and envy.

There is a certain amount of mutual friction in business relationships. For example, some Lao complained that Chinese merchants from Hong Kong to whom they had loaned money to set up businesses made a quick profit and left the country without repaying their debts, while a Lao revenue agent outlined his procedures: "We first collect taxes from the Chinese and Vietnamese and then we start on the Lao."

Lao officials often do not hesitate to use their position to extract bribes from the Chinese while other Lao point to the latter as the root of dishonesty in government saying that if it were not for the attempts of

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[14] Some Chinese are openly pro-Nationalist. In 1959 there was a Nationalist Consulate in Vientiane. A number are openly Communist and some send their children for further education to the Chinese People's Republic while others go on to schools on Taiwan. But a great many attempt to appear neutral in the political sense. For the most part the schools in the two major Chinese centers of Vientiane and Pakse appear to be firmly in the hands of sympathizers of the C.P.R. While in Luang Prabang the Nationalists have run the local schools.

the Chinese to corrupt their officials good morals would prevail. To a lesser extent these attitudes also apply to the Vietnamese. But while the Pathet Lao receive direct support and advice from the People's Republic of Vietnam, and there has been a good deal of trouble and some fighting on the Lao-North Vietnam frontier, the Chinese border has remained relatively quiet. For the present the Lao do not feel themselves directly threatened by the Chinese in an active sense as they do by the North Vietnamese. Another factor causing conflict between the Lao and Vietnamese is that the French employed the latter as teachers and minor administrators during their rule in Laos. This focusing of resentment on the Vietnamese, even though today they are much less important economically than the Chinese, does to a certain extent ease relations between the Lao and the Chinese.

Another factor is the blurring of lines between the Chinese and Lao urban communities. A good example of the acculturative process of the Chinese in Laos and Northeast Thailand is provided in the autobiography of a young Thai-Lao woman (Tirabutana: 1958, 16-17).

> Grandmother's father was a Chinese and very clever, he was a merchant, he could neither read nor write, but he could keep the books perfectly. He invented his own mark for each debtor and creditor. Grandfather was half Chinese, half Thai too, and his younger brother was the biggest and most brilliant merchant in town in father's period. [According to my father.] On his own side, he said his maternal grandmother came from Vientiane....But on his father's side he could not trace far because his father died when he was a year old, but somebody told him that his grandfather had some Chinese blood. And because his father died when he was so young he had to be raised up by his uncle-in-law who was Chinese.
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> This was the funny thing in my family. On my mother's side there was a lot of Chinese blood but they were bred in the Thai manner. They did not even talk Chinese. Their manners were properly and completely Thai....On father's side, he had just a few drops of Chinese blood, but he was bred by Chinese so his manners were rather Chinese but the other funny thing was he could not talk Chinese.

Viewed in this light the barriers between Chinese and Lao societies certainly do not appear rigid.

Although the Chinese maintain their own temples, and as we have seen have their own administrative and educational organizations they do not constitute caste groups in the sense that distinctions are hereditary in the absolute sense. Indeed it appears to be much easier for a Chinese

and more rarely a Meo to become a Lao in the cultural sense than for the same transition to be made by a Khmu. At least in some cases there is a choice for the children of Chinese fathers and Lao mothers.[15] Education is a crucial factor for if a child completes education in a Chinese school no further progress in the Lao system is possible. In almost all cases the graduates of these schools remain in the Chinese community but a number of Chinese[16] children do, however, attend Lao schools. In some cases they may even transfer from a Chinese school before completing the course although this is rather difficult to do. The Chinese children are often superior pupils with better than average economic resources. They may later hold important jobs in the Lao civil service, or, in the case of girls may marry a Lao. These mixed marriages occur at the highest levels of Lao society. These people appear to minimize most of their ties with the Chinese community and to consider themselves Lao and not Chinese, although to a

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[15]Ethnic differences appear, however, to come strongly into play with regard to the marriage of Lao men to Chinese women who in any case are few in number compared to the men.

[16]Chinese is used here in the sense of the father's ethnic identification. The children with Lao mothers are more apt to go to the government schools.

certain extent family ties may still be maintained.

It would be a mistake to consider the Chinese in Laos as a closely integrated unit. It is split geographically, linguistically, politically and with regard to education, occupation and financial status. There does not appear to be any over-all effective organization. Still it is most unlikely that the urban Chinese in Laos will be assimilated and ultimately disappear as a distinct cultural entity in the near future. Emigration from Thailand, Hong Kong and Yunnan has in recent years strengthened their numbers. Their future is undoubtedly closely linked to the extent to which the Lao government feels itself internally secure and this in turn is related to the future foreign policies of the Chinese People's Republic.

TABLE I

Data on Chinese Communities in Laos - 1959

Town	Estimated Chinese Population	Foreign Asians in the Province[a]	Estimated Total Population	% of Chinese	Origin of the Chinese
1. Vientiane	15,000	8,672	68,000	22	Over 50% Swatow, the remainder Hakka, Yunnanese, Hainanese
2. Pakse (Champassae)	7,500	13,135	8,000	94	50% Swatow, 40% Hakka, the rest Hainanese, Cantonese and Yunnanese
3. Savannakhet	3,500	5,011	8,500	41	60% Swatow, the rest Hakka, Cantonese, Hainanese, Fukienese
4. Luang Prabang	1,800	2,683	11,000	16	40% Hainanese, 40% Swatow, the rest Yunnanese, Cantonese Hakka
5. Thakhek (Khammouane)	1,500	5,625	5,500	27	Mostly Swatow and Hakka
6. Xieng Khouang	1,300	1,521	3,500	37	Mostly Cantonese and Yunnanese, a few from Swatow
7. Muong Sai (Luang Prabang)	400	--	2,000	20	90% Yunnanese, the remainder Swatow, Hainanese
8. Sam Neua	500	--	3,000	17	Mostly Yunnanese and Hainanese

[a]Lao government statistics for 1958. The difference between the estimated Chinese population and the foreign Asians can be assumed to represent mostly Vietnamese with a few Thais. The overwhelming majority of all of these foreign ethnic groups live in the major towns. The Chinese group also includes Chinese born in Laos who are Lao citizens.

TABLE I (cont'd)

Data on Chinese Communities in Laos - 1959

Town	Estimated Chinese Population	Foreign Asians in the Province	Estimsted Total Population	% of Chinese	Origin of the Chinese.
9. Phong Saly	400[b]	--	2,500	8-12	90% Yunnanese, a few Hainanese, Cantonese, and Swatow
10. Muong Sing (Nam Tha)	200	--	1,500	13	90% Yunnanese, the remainder Hainanese, Swatow, Kweichou
11. Paksane (Vientiane)	200	--	2,500	8	Swatow
12. Ban Houei Sei (Nam Tha)	?	--	1,500	?	80% Hainanese, the remainder Yunnanese and from Kwangsi
13. Nam Tha	50	--	2,200	2.3	Yunnanese, Hainanese and Swatow
Total	40,000	32,350	119,700	27	

[b]These are Lao Nationals who five or six generations ago emigrated from Yunnan (Hon Lu).

TABLE II

Administrative Structure of Chinese Communities in Laos, 1959

Town	Formal Sub-groups Within Chinese Community	Ethnic Extraction of Chairman	Estimated Population	No. of Pupils	No. of Years of School Available
Vientiane	Swatow, Hakka	Swatow, Hakka	15,000	1,423	9
Pakse	Swatow, Hakka	Swatow, Hakka	7,500	950	9
Savannakhet	--[a]	Swatow	3,500	451	6
Luang Prabang	Hainanese, Swatow	Hainanese, Swatow	1,800	239	6
Thakhak	--	Swatow	1,500	190	6
Xieng Khouang	Cantonese, Yunnanese	Cantonese, Yunnanese	1,300	176	[b]
Muong Sai	--	Yunnanese	400	--	--
Sam Neua	--	Hupeh(nese)	500	60	[b]
Phong Saly	--	Yunnanese	200		[c]
Muong Sing	--	Yunnanese	220	--	--
Paksane	--	Swatow	200	32	6
Ban Houei Sei	--	Hainanese	60	--	--
Nam Tha	[d]		50	--	--

[a]As far as is known, there are no formal sub-groups in the community.

[b]Private tuition only; no regular school organization.

[c]Formerly had about 90 pupils; suspended in 1956.

[d]Has no organized Chinese community.

TABLE III

Chinese Ownership of Business Concerns in Towns of Laos, 1959

Town	Total No. of Businesses	No. Chinese Owned	% Chinese Owned
Vientiane	1500	749	50.0
Paksane	40	37	92.5
Xieng Khouang	50	25	50.0
Luang Prabang	233	190	81.0
Muong Sai	8	4	50.0
Phong Saly	30	15	50.0
Pakse	390	372	93.0

TABLE IV

Chinese Businesses in the Vientiane Area, 1959

Category	No. of Concerns	% of Total	Remarks
Small assorted shops	272	34.0	Includes stalls at market, all carrying assorted merchandise
Import-export	110	13.7	
Food stores	73	9.0	
Artisans	69	8.6	
Cafes and restaurants	54	6.7	
Peddlers	53	6.6	
Factories and mills*	30	4.0	
Hardware and tire stores	22	2.75	3 machine and tool shops 7 hardware and tool shops 5 auto parts tool shops 5 bicycle shops 2 tire shops
General stores	11	1.3	
Goldsmiths	11	1.3	
Pharmacies	11	1.3	5 pharmacies 6 Chinese medical herbs shops
Clinics	10	1.2	1 doctor 3 Chinese traditional practitioners 6 dentists
Photo studios	8	1.0	
Electrical supplies shops	8	1.0	5 radio shops 3 general electrical supplies shops
Eyeglass and watch shops	7	0.9	
Furniture stores	7	0.9	
Stationers	6	0.8	
Banks	6	0.8	

TABLE IV (cont'd)

Category	No. of Concerns	% of Total	Remarks
Tailor shops	6	0.8	
Transportation companies	6	0.8	4 truck 1 airline 1 river shipping
Drycleaning and dyeing	6	0.8	
Barber shops	5	0.6	
Construction	5	0.6	
Movie Theaters	2	0.25	
Insurance	2	0.25	
Truck gardens	2	0.25	
	802	100.0	

*3 carbonated water concerns
2 ice
1 match
1 candles
2 bakeries
3 breweries
3 saw mills
6 auto repairs
1 battery and tire
1 rubber
5 brick and tile
2 cosmetics

TABLE V

Chinese Population of Xieng Khouang Province by Age and Sex, 1959

Age Groups	Xieng Khouang			Phong Savanh			Lac Hong			Lac Bouat			Muong Kam		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Over 60 years	13	15	28	1	3	4	5	9	14	--	1	1	8	1	9
20 - 60 years	188	160	358	57	57	114	68	73	141	31	16	47	48	36	84
Under 20	195	168	363	63	36	99	70	56	126	35	23	58	46	35	81
Totals	406	343	749	121	96	217	143	138	281	66	40	106	102	72	174

Grand Total	No.	%
Over 60	56	3.7
20 - 60	744	48.7
Under 20	727	47.6
	1527	100.0

	No.	%
Grand Total, Male	838	54.9
Grand Total, Female	689	45.1
Total	1527	100.0

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