THE LAO ELITE:
A STUDY OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION

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PREFACE

This paper is based on field work in Laos and on research in the United States. In the year 1957 the author served as a field representative of the American Aid Mission in northern Laos; a subsequent visit during summer, 1959 was spent in the capital of Vientiane interviewing Lao government officials and making extensive trips in the countryside. Helpful comments were received from American, French, and United Nations officials concerned with Lao affairs, while several French scholars working in Laos provided useful insights. For a selection of the specific interview materials on which this essay is based, the reader is referred to the author's collection entitled Lao Biographies.¹

Readers of the daily newspapers will find that specific political situations referred to in these pages have not always remained exactly as they were when described. Despite this, it is evident that barring a full-scale revolution and the abolition of the Monarchy and Constitution, the types of social relationships discussed in this paper will have enduring

¹These Biographies contain data on selected Lao officials, townspeople and villagers and present their points of view on a variety of topics such as economic development, foreign aid and future aspirations.
qualities. Unlike political alignments, they have remained relatively stable, through a series of governments. The emphasis in this paper is on analyzing behavior rather than suggesting solutions. This paper is presented from the viewpoint of the anthropologist rather than the political analyst.

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INTRODUCTION

Located in the mountainous interior of the Indochinese peninsula, the Kingdom of Laos, with a population optimistically estimated at 3,000,000, would appear to have little to attract world attention other than its strategic geographic location. The long frontiers of Laos are vulnerable to infiltration tactics by its enemies, and events in this country can have serious repercussions in neighboring Thailand and South Vietnam. So far as is known, Laos has no extensive mineral resources, and it produces no significant agricultural surpluses for export. Yet there are certain features that commend Laos to the attention of the area specialist as well as to the scholar interested in studying problems encountered by newly emerging national states. This is because Laos reveals on a small scale, but often in exaggerated form, many of the difficulties facing former colonial areas in Asia and Africa. This point deserves emphasis at a time when many small states in Africa are gaining independence. Like these new African states, Laos owes her existence to the happenstances of colonial history.

In Laos may be found diverse elements: a small elite, a constitution and formal political framework borrowed from France, a lack of trained administrators, an indifferent (and in certain respects hostile) peasantry, dissident minority
groups, an active communist party, and an American aid program. Before attempting to examine these factors we will look briefly at the historical background of Laos.

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

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

Laos has become incontestably a political unit recognized by all of the major world powers. It was originally composed mainly of four petty kingdoms -- Champassak, Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, and Luang Prabang. These states began to disintegrate in the latter part of the 19th century under the pressure of
an expanding Thailand and marauding Chinese bandits. When the French came they were greeted not as conquerors but -- particularly in Luang Prabang -- as protectors from the Siamese. At least some Lao leaders, notably the King of Luang Prabang, openly welcomed the French explorers and traders. These peaceful contacts helped shape attitudes of the elite toward France which are reflected even today. Yet it is difficult to be absolutely certain on the origins of pro-French viewpoints, since most of the reports available are those of Europeans, and many of these are French. (Perhaps some day it will be possible to write a history of this area solidly based on Lao, Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese sources. Meanwhile, there appears to be ample precedent for today's strongly pro-French attitude among the Lao aristocracy.) Mixed with this orientation, it must be admitted, is some degree of hostility and resentment connected with the emergence of Lao nationalism.

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

Laos emerged officially as a nation when it became an
independent state within the French Union following the ratification of the Franco-Lao Treaty of September 20, 1949.

By common agreement, the King of the Royal House of Luang Prabang then became the head of the Lao state. This event was accompanied by other manifestations of modern statehood. Formation of national ministries, election of representatives to the National Assembly, establishment of diplomatic relations with foreign states. Full independence in the formal political sense can be said to have occurred as the result of the Geneva Agreement which concluded the Indochina War in 1954. The admission of Laos to United Nations ensued at the end of the following year.

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

Unfortunately, formal political evolution and economic development in Laos did not proceed simultaneously. The
admission of Laos to the United Nations did not signify that the country had achieved effective internal administration. Ironically, a case can be made for the fact that as the Lao government assumed the trappings of nationhood, her economy became more dependent on outside assistance. With nationhood came new government services which could be financed neither by taxation nor exports. It became necessary to maintain national ministries, an army, a police force, a health and educational system, and overseas embassies -- to say nothing of instituting a program of rural development to deal with the 90 percent of the population living in some 10,000 small villages.

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

After the Geneva conference, the United States began to play an increasing role in Indochina. This was reflected in the establishment of a legation in Vientiane, which was later
raised to the rank of an embassy. An American Aid Mission was established, as was a Program Evaluation Organization designed to supervise the distribution of military aid as distinct from the French training program. These American organizations continued to expand up to the coup of August, 1960. The United Nations also began to send in technical assistance personnel from UNESCO, FAO and WHO. The Colombo Plan and private relief agencies such as CARE also began to provide assistance. Beyond a doubt there are today more foreign technical advisers in Laos than there were French officials during the colonial days. Although no figures on technical advisers, as such, are available, in 1960 there were 753 Americans and several thousand French in Laos, while in 1921 and 1950 the total European population there was 361 and 802 respectively!

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

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

There is a popularly elected National Assembly which
selects a cabinet and Prime Minister, subject to the approval of the King. The only elected officials in the provinces are the deputies and in some cases the local mayors and the village and district chiefs. Deputies to the National Assembly are elected at large (in the 1960 elections they represented districts). Provincial Governors are appointed by the Ministry of Interior. There are also local representatives of the army and the police, as well as the health, education, and agricultural ministries, although all the technical ministries are not represented in all provinces. Recently, the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Census Bureau have also begun to establish provincial posts. Through the office of the Governor there is considerable informal coordination of these local officials. A detailed description of the formal organization of the Lao government is already in print (see the handbook Laos, Human Relations Area Files, New Haven, 1960).

II.** SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE ELITE**

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

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

Since the urban component of Lao society is rapidly changing, it is difficult to delineate the elite group with precision, but its members definitely share specific occupational, kinship and educational characteristics. On the other hand, there is considerable variation in their political associations, standards of living, and value systems. While no figures are available, a generous estimate of the number of elite and their families would be several thousand in a population of approximately two million. The Lao occupy the major political offices and senior civil service positions, and they are prominent in business affairs in Laos. Most of
the present Lao elite are either direct descendants of the old royal families of Champassak, Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, or Luang Prabang, or of the courtiers who served these kingdoms. This situation is not particularly surprising, for when the French occupied Laos they attempted to make use of the existing administrative structure and officials. As a consequence, it was to be expected that their children would have preferential access to the limited educational facilities. At the time there existed only the small group of urban elite, the Lao peasantry, and the tribal peoples. No important Lao merchant group apart from the traditional elite had yet developed.

Although the French did not provide widespread educational facilities in Laos, they did send certain selected members of the royal family and high nobility to study in France. Today, many members of this small group occupy key governmental positions. Among those who studied in France were the late King, as well as the present monarch; the late Viceroy Prince Phetsarath; his brother, the former prime minister, Souvannah Phouma, and their half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, the leader of the communist Pathet-Lao Party. The small size of this group is emphasized by the fact that until the Second World War less than a dozen Lao had received the equivalent of a full college education, although a somewhat larger number
had studied in France for briefer periods. Without question, any Lao who spent time studying in France before the Second World War would definitely be classified as member of the elite, even though there are a number of important members of the elite who did not have this opportunity. Despite this, they have all been strongly influenced by French culture. (The ability to speak and write French fluently is one of the marks of membership in the elite group.)

Almost without exception all members of the elite were educated at the Lycee Pavie in Vietiane and subsequently served in the civil service. Even today the Lycee provides only slightly more than the equivalent of an American high school education. As a marginal provincial outpost of the French colonial empire, Vietiane's educational standards appear to have lagged considerably behind those in metropolitan France. One of the reasons for this was that it was difficult to recruit highly qualified personnel to live under somewhat trying conditions in what was essentially an isolated provincial town. This same situation has continued up to the present.

The most significant fact about the Lycee, as indeed about all secondary education in Laos, is that classes are conducted almost entirely in French by French teachers. The only exceptions are courses in Lao language and literature,
which in this system have only the status of a foreign language such as English. Attempts have been made by the present Lao government to change this situation, but they have not been able to alter it in any significant way because of the shortage of qualified Lao to replace the French teachers at the Lycee level.

When most of the present day Lao elite were receiving their education, there were still a number of Vietnamese teachers. These were eliminated when Laos became independent. The Vietnamese appear to have acted as carriers primarily of diffused French culture rather than of Vietnamese culture.

Under the prewar educational system the pupils began studying French in the first grade. After completing six years of elementary school, education was continued in the college (junior high school) and finally in the Lycee. It remains necessary to pass an examination in French before one can continue beyond the sixth grade. Not a few of today's elite received little more than nine years of formal schooling, after which they entered the bureaucracy. In addition to formal training in administrative practices, French cultural values were stressed among this Lao group. For example, French established social and sports clubs in the towns have been continued and even expanded by the Lao elite.
A number of Lao received some advanced training in technical specialities such as medicine, forestry or education, in French schools in Cambodia or Vietnam. Several government ministers began their careers as foresters, medical assistants, or school teachers.

The strength of French influence at all levels of the Lao government is indicated by the difficulties it imposes on the American technical assistance missions. These have had to cope constantly with the problem of adjusting their own practices to what is in essence a French system. In terms of modern governmental structure, the Lao government seems to be in the process of being constructed more on a French colonial administrative base than on one rooted in traditional Lao royal administrative practices, although the latter remains significant. This tendency is strengthened by the presence of French advisors in key posts within various ministries. The American advisors operate from their own offices.

Upon completion of their education, the students entered the government as local district administrators (Chao Muongs) or as sub-professional technicians or specialists. Thus a Lao trained in medicine in Hanoi could do valuable work in a hospital, but he was in actuality an assistant to the resident French doctor. Today the French physicians in most of the
Lao provincial hospitals handle the more technical tasks such as surgery. By the same token, a Lao teacher can become principal of an elementary school, but with few exceptions he lacks the background to give courses at a college or the Lycee.

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

As the national economy of Laos has developed in the years since achievement of formal political independence, members of the elite moved into profitable business alliances with the Chinese and European business communities. This is usually a mutually advantageous affair, since there are severe governmental restrictions on most alien-owned and operated businesses, particularly those controlled by Chinese and Vietnamese. (The French, however, are allowed certain privileges.) At the same time most Lao lack the technical experience and international contacts necessary to be able to operate either export-import firms or manufacturing enterprises successfully. Many prominent Lao officials now own a part interest, or even controlling interests, in banks, airlines, movie theaters, hotels, sawmills, construction firms, and bus and trucking companies. Thus many members of the elite have recently acquired a substantial economic base outside the government. Much of this economic expansion has resulted directly or indirectly from the American aid program. Such opportunities did not exist when Laos was a colony. This is an important point, since large individual land-holdings are unknown in Laos. Even the royal family owns extensive
agricultural land in only a few villages in the neighborhood of the royal capital. It is true that in principle the royal family also owns large tracts of forest land, but the income from these is not very great.

The Lao elite has a monopoly on the highest civil service positions and most important political offices. These two categories overlap; that is, a man may occupy the highest civil service rank, that of Chao Khoueng, and also be governor of a province or serve in the central administration. Then for various reasons he may decide to go into politics and run for the National Assembly. If elected, he can be appointed a minister or secretary of state for a particular department. If he loses, he can re-enter the civil service. It is not necessary, however, for a minister to have been elected as a deputy, although this is true in most cases. The province from which the member of the elite is elected may be one in which he has served as a government official. It is not necessarily his place of birth or even permanent residence.

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

If one examines the background of the deputies from these latter provinces, it is possible to find many cases of elite officials who have served there and then run for office. While there may be, for example, a few individuals who were originally from Vientiane Province, served for a long time in Luang Prabang, and then proceeded to run for office from the latter area, such cases are relatively unusual. Like the other members of the Lao elite, most of the Pathet-Lao deputies run for office in their birthplace.
III. COMMITTEE FOR DEFENSE OF THE NATIONAL INTEREST (1959)

Even if the Pathet-Lao officials are excluded from our consideration, it must be said that the elite do not form a completely homogenous political entity. This is true of a group called the Committee for the Defense of the National Interests (CDNI), who state that they are not a political party. (In 1960 they formed a formal political party.) This association of "young Turks" came into existence in 1958 as a self-proclaimed strongly reformist reaction to the previously corrupt practices of the Lao government. It adopted a strong anti-communist and pro-western orientation. Most of its leaders appear to have enjoyed more extensive education abroad than their parents; indeed, this young element in the elite have in most cases completed their studies in the years since 1945. Strong support for the group can be found among many high ranking army officers, many of whom have also studied for varying periods in France. Beyond doubt there is considerable friction between the members of the CDNI and the older elite. (Youth is a relative matter, since a number of the prominent members of the CDNI are in their late thirties or early forties.) There have been accusations leveled by the older elite that while the CDNI members may have studied abroad they lack practical experience at home. They have
further charged that the CDNI is supported by the Americans and that the projects of that group are favored by the American aid mission. Many of the older elite also feel that the CDNI are disruptive of Lao unity at a time when unity is critically needed. On the other hand, the CDNI officials claim that they have introduced needed new life into the government, have drawn attention to the crucial problems involved in rural development, and have made the population aware of communist danger.

One might expect a reform group to make at least symbolic gestures toward austerity, particularly as they have presented themselves as an anti-corruption force. However, this is not apparent in their style of living. In fact, certain members of this group place an even greater emphasis on luxury cars, new houses, and night-clubbing, than their older colleagues. At the same time, through an associated organization -- the Lao Junior Chamber of Commerce, (a political and governmental rather than a business group as it has developed in Laos), -- they have sponsored the Philippine medical organization known as Operation Brotherhood. The sources of wealth of the members of the CDNI are not clear; certainly they are not prominent in business affairs to the extent of the older elite.

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

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

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

Much of the political turmoil, and the turnover in governments which has attracted so much attention from the outside world, are the result of shifting alliances within the elite group. The more junior government officials are sometimes involved in such maneuvers. The opinions of the CDNI leaders, moreover, do not always seem strongly held. Nor is the fervor of the group such as to cause a crystallization into "old" and "new" segments within the elite. With the exception of the Pathet-Lao, the power-political groupings appear to result more from the policies of foreign powers -- coupled with the perhaps inevitable desire for individual advancement. Since the number of administrators is so severely limited, there are no "in" or "out" groups in the absolute sense. There are only redistributions of power within a limited group. Inevitably, this group will be expanded. With its expansion, subgroupings will emerge more clearly.

While the elite cannot be concisely sub-divided on a
political basis, a number of potentially divisive cultural characteristics seem to be emerging. For example, the younger elite show a preference for working through formal organizations inside and outside of the bureaucracy (e.g. the army and the Junior Chamber of Commerce) while the older politicians have preferred their personally dominated political factions, patronage groups and commercial influences. As a consequence, the younger men place less reliance on kinship ties, and their connections to traditional Lao cultures are not close. If they were able to assume power as a group, their reforms might prove pervasive.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KINSHIP TIES

What are the limits of the elite? Is it a closed and rigidly restricted group? It is usually possible to identify a prominent member of the elite and to differentiate between those members of the national assembly who are members and those who are not. Yet it is hard to set precise boundaries. Although the hereditary factors are readily apparent, there are evidences that the elite group may be flexible.

Even in traditional Lao society an individual who was outstanding could rise in the class hierarchy if he came to the attention of the King or other royal personage and received a title. There are examples of this situation in both
traditional and present day Lao society, but they appear to be relatively few in number. One of the generals in the Lao Army is the son of a farmer, and a provincial governor came from a family of fishermen; yet in both cases they married members of the hereditary elite. Today their children are fully accepted. A good example of the way in which such upward mobility is possible is provided by a colonel in the Lao Army. He described his family background in the following way: "We weren't royalty, but we were good people. My father was a chauffeur for the French Commissioner, a very responsible position. He was a good mechanic and was one of the first Lao to learn to drive a car." This colonel received the equivalent of a high school education, entered the army, and rose in the ranks. He married a relative of one of the princely families and today appears to be fully accepted by his colleagues. A few members of the elite are said to be of tribal origin, but once they adopt Lao culture, participate in the French influenced educational system, and rise in the Lao status hierarchy, they appear to be accepted. In these cases acquired culture traits rather than ethnic and racial origins are the determining factor. The children of Lao-Chinese marriages and Lao-French métis are both accepted, but neither appear to obtain particular prestige as a result of their origin. The wife of a former
prime minister is metisse and some former ministers have European wives.

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

Ethnic prejudices, as such, do not appear to play an overwhelming role, although generally the non-Lao people have been completely excluded from this system. The sons of the prominent Lyfong family, who are Meo of Xieng Khouang, achieved an education and can be said to represent an outstanding exception. Toubi Lyfong became Vice-President of the National
Assembly (1959) and in 1960, for a time served as Minister of Information, he also holds the rank of Chao Muong in the Lao civil service; his brother has served as procurator general in the Lao government. A number of Meo now are studying in the Lycee and the missionary schools, and some of them serve as provincial officials in Xieng Khouang. Although the Meo constitute a large minority in Xieng Khouang, the royal family of that province was exclusively Lao and is still influential in its administration.

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

Ties of kinship can have very important political implications. They are many family ties existing between the Pathet-Lao and important members of the Royal Lao government
the most famous of these is the case of the half-brothers Prince Souvanna Phouma and Prince Souphanouvong and the late Prince Phetsarath (the latter two had the same mother). Again, the father of one of the Pathet-Lao deputies serves on the King's council, and an important Pathet-Lao party organizer is the brother-in-law of a prominent Lao diplomat. It should be emphasized that similar kinship bonds extend into the police and army as well. These ties definitely proved influential in enabling the Communist and Royal Lao government groups to reach agreement. It is certainly significant that Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong were the principle negotiators in arriving at the initial accords in 1957.

While it is open to question whether kinship is a vital factor in the formation of Pathet-Lao policies, it would be hard to overemphasize its importance within the royal government. For instance, a high-ranking Lao official remarked (following a coup d'état in Thailand), "That could not happen here. Too many of the ministers and army officers are members of the same family." This statement, of course, excluded the junior officers who come from non-elite families (and as it later turned out the leader of the coup d'état of August, 1960). Although the statement itself proved to be in error, the attitude it embodied has been important. The only Lao senior
official to be publicly accused of fraud complained to the author that he would never have had trouble if he had only had the right family connections. Another official mentioned that a member of a princely family had been delinquent in the payment of taxes. When asked if that individual would be prosecuted, the official only smiled. In another case, a young officer reprimanded for his laziness defied a superior by saying that, after all, his family would look out for him if there were any difficulties.

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

If one goes over the lists of cabinet officers, provincial governors, ambassadors and prominent businessmen in Laos during the last decade, he does see again and again such names as Souphanouvong, Sananikone, Champassak, and Voravong. The first two are the most prominent families in the administrative capital. They are descendants of officials of the court of
Vientiane which was destroyed by the Siamese in the early 19th century. Some of them continued on under Siamese rule, while the latter came from princely families in the south, particularly from Champassak province. When the French assumed control of Lāos in the late 19th century, these officials entered the French administration. Many of the Lao elite also bear the title Tiao (loosely translated as prince) indicating that the individual is a descendant of a mandarin at the court of Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang or Champassak. Such names (and even titles) are a poor measure of the extent of relationship, since family names have only recently come into use in Lāos and titles are not inherited by all the children. Despite these limitations, closer inquiry reveals a complex pattern of intermarriage linking the Lao elite together.

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

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

Lao culture is quite different, for there exists no cult of the ancestor. Bodies are cremated at death. People are often unaware of their ancestry beyond three generations. Clan names, so important in China, are non-existent in Laos. Descent and inheritance are bilateral. Although there are no rigid rules, it is often the daughter who remains at home. The role of women is important. Though women show formal respect to their husbands on public occasions, they play an equal and sometimes dominating role in the affairs of the household and management of the family budget. Divorce is not difficult, and in certain instances it may be initiated by the woman. Parents occupy a role of respect, but they are not venerated. In fact, when a man reaches 50 or 55 he often retires from active participation in affairs and not infrequently becomes a monk.

Kinship ties beyond the immediate family exist, but they are not necessarily accompanied by strong social or economic obligations. While positions are inherited, the behavior of children is not expected to adhere to rigid patterns. Lao Buddhist concepts place a great deal of emphasis on the
responsibility of the individual for his own actions.

Today in Laos there is no question but that certain patterns of loyalty exist within families and that these ties influence decisions in government and business; still, the extent of their importance is not without limits. In this connection, the reaction of the elite to Prince Souphanouvong is interesting. His actions were not condemned in terms of disloyalty to his branch of the royal family or to his elder brother the Viceroy, but rather because he failed to behave with the decorum expected of a Prince and had married a Vietnamese. Following the pattern of the three brother Princes, in no case do families seem to have split because individuals became members of the Pathet-Lao. This is not to say that family ties were stronger than politics, but rather that the Lao do not view these as conflicting loyalties. Being a Lao and member of the elite is more important than specific kinship or even political associations. But even these group feelings are not extremely strong or rigid.

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

As part of this pattern, Lao officials may not be too concerned about their subordinates. Yet on the other hand they are rarely over-demanding or strict in their discipline. The school and the priesthood both provide examples of the dual reality of discipline and flexibility. In school, the teacher has considerable authority and the children learn their lessons by rote, but this does not mean that they will work hard or feel forced to continue with their education. A monk must listen to his superiors and observe many rules; yet the rules are not rigidly defined in practice, and he is able to resign whenever he wishes.

Doing things in a pleasant manner is a very important part of Lao life. Urban families and rural people (when they
have the time) very much enjoy just sitting on their veranda and passing the time in conversation or playing with their children. Holidays and religious festivals bring real pleasure. The self-indulgent living patterns of certain of the elite are undoubtedly derived from the traditional emphasis of Lao culture on pleasure. But only in the case of the luxurious cars and the night clubs does the religious influence fade into the background.

Much of the favoritism that exists within the government appears to be a result, not so much of strong family loyalties as such, but rather the implicit feeling that since the government is dominated by the elite it should primarily benefit them as a group. Persons who are not members of the leading families have not been harshly dealt with, although they may have been denied certain privileges. Despite the tremendous corruption of recent years (freely and frankly acknowledged by the Lao) no members of the elite have been imprisoned. This failure to act can be seen as a consequence of the refusal of the Lao elite to accept ultimate responsibility for their own actions. A country supported almost entirely by a foreign power is unlikely to develop a sense of responsibility very quickly.
V. ASPECTS OF FRENCH INFLUENCE

Founded as it is on the union of government and business enterprises, the standard of living of the elite is a composite of French-style villas, Mercedes-Benz automobiles, trips abroad, and consumption of imported food and liquor. Yet there is more variation here than might be expected. Although it is true that in recent years large numbers of luxury automobiles have appeared in Vientiane, even the most prosperous of the Lao are not very wealthy compared with successful businessmen or prominent officials in Singapore, Hong Kong, or Bangkok. While there may be one or two Mercedes cars parked outside a residence, the home furnishings are usually relatively modest. Houses of the elite are not particularly large or imposing; they are usually constructed of concrete or wood frame -- never of bamboo and thatch. As part of the pattern of extended family relationships and the presence of servants and retainers, households of 10 to 15 persons are by no means uncommon. There is probably some correlation between the size of a household and the social status of the household head, since the average Lao family in town or village tends to be primarily nuclear (parents and children). Once a Lao has achieved a certain degree of wealth or material prosperity there is strong pressure on him to share it with close relatives.
In the course of their education and general adoption of French culture many of the Lao elite appear to have absorbed certain French anti-clerical attitudes. That is, although there is a theoretical union in Laos between the Church and State, and the constitution specifies that the King must be a fervent Buddhist, most of the elite (particularly those under 50) do not participate extensively in religious affairs. This is perhaps related somewhat to the degree of estrangement from their own culture. This has been a point of conflict between the Lao elite and the Buddhist clergy.² Virtually none of the Lao elite are Christians.

Although they have not adopted Western religious practices, many of the elite enthusiastically participate in other items of Western-derived culture. French food and wine are very popular. There are no true restaurants in Vientiane featuring Lao cuisine, but there are many serving French style food. These are usually run by Vietnamese or Europeans. The elite read French newspapers and magazines and use many French expressions in everyday conversation. One bookstore catering to the elite had hundreds of publications about France and Europe but none

²This topic is discussed in detail in the author's paper: America and Laos: Two Views of Political Strategy and Technical Assistance (1959); available from the author on request.
dealing with the neighboring countries of Cambodia or Vietnam. As part of the heritage of European rule, government offices are closed on Sundays but not on the Buddhist holy days. The most important Buddhist holidays are observed, however. Hunting for sport, although not in keeping with Buddhist values, has become popular, as has attendance at night clubs. So it is seen that being a Buddhist layman does not necessarily imply a spartan life. Observance of the rituals takes time and necessitates a certain attitude of abstinence rather than self-indulgence which does not appear to be generally characteristic of the elite (particularly the younger ones) at the present time.

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

The antiquity of many of the characteristics of elite culture is difficult to estimate. Certainly particular items in their standard of living, such as the cars and European style houses, are of recent origin. The concept of an elite as the hereditary ruling class, on the other hand, is strongly embedded in traditional Lao culture. Before the arrival of
the French, the individual kingdoms were ruled by an elaborate bureaucracy whose duties were hereditary and carefully specified. For example, the late Viceroy Prince Phetsarath was descended from the second ranking princely family in the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, whose duty it was to lead the army in time of war. Others were in charge of the royal household, of judicial affairs, or of regional administration. Even the keepers of the royal elephants and barges were specifically named.

VI. BONDS WITH THAILAND

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

The differences which exist between the Lao and Thai elites are almost entirely the result of the last hundred years of
French colonial domination and nationalist feeling which have developed since the Second World War. On the walls of their homes Lao peasants place pictures of the King of Thailand beside that of the Lao King. Buddhist monks travel freely from one country to another. In fact, many of the higher clergy have been educated in Thailand. A number of officials have received their education in Bangkok. The American aid program has promoted the development of transportation and trade links as well as subsidized the studies of large numbers of Lao students and technicians in that country.

The possibility of greater rapprochement and perhaps even the formation of a political and economic union in the future should not be underestimated. Certainly Pathet-Lao ties with North Vietnam and China are weak points in their structure.

VII. DELIMITING THE ELITE

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

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

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

Most of the members of the neutralist-inclined Senthipab Party (with the exception of its leader, a former governor) provide clear examples of the non-elite type of deputy. A number have the religious title Maha and have served as monks and religious teachers for long periods of time, ranging up to several decades. In this way they established a local reputation. Others have gained influence as local merchants. In none of these cases did the particular individuals concerned
serve apprenticeships in the bureaucracy. It is not surprising, then, that many of them have a strong anti-government orientation.

Changes in the composition and characteristics of the elite are occurring. Most important has been the advent of national independence, precipitating a demand for large numbers of administrators and technicians. Many additional soldiers and police have also been recruited; in a way, the army has become an important democratizing force. Although the upper echelons of the officer group are still dominated by the hereditary elite, the ranks of the army are filled mainly from the villages with various tribal peoples also being included. While the Lao Army is by no means elaborately equipped, many kinds of technicians are required. Increasing numbers of Lao are sent overseas for specialized military training, especially to France. Thus foreign education is no longer an exclusive prerogative of the elite. In the late 1950's Laos acquired her first trained pilots, of whom a significant number were the sons of farmers. Some Kha tribesmen became paratroopers, and a Yao became an organizer in a program of rural development. Increasing numbers of school teachers are being drawn from rural and tribal backgrounds as the educational system is expanded. Most of these people are still in their twenties and are not organized, but they will obviously make an
increasing impact in future years, and a number will doubtless become part of the ruling group.

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

The Lao elite does not appear to be an absolutely closed group. There is a certain exclusiveness, to be sure, but much of this is based on traditional patterns of rank in Lao society which are still recognized to a certain extent by both the rulers and the ruled. The very existence of the monarchy and its acceptance by all groups -- including the Pathet-Lao -- is evidence of this attitude. It is interesting that in almost all of the Communist propaganda emanating from North Vietnam and from China relatively little attention has been paid to the traditional patterns of the Lao government as such. Rather, attention has been concentrated on the actions of individual
officials and on their alliances with the West. These officials obviously do not regard these traditional patterns as important obstacles to change. Perhaps they also feel that coming out directly against this system might have a negative impact on the general Lao population.

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

One aspect of the CDNI of importance here is its close link with the royal family and to the advisors to the King. The King himself has addressed several of their meetings. It is also significant that none of their demands call for basic changes in the social structure; rather, they merely hope to make the existing system more efficient and dynamic. A reflection of this attitude is that one of the charges they have made against Prince Souphanouvong, the Communist leader, has been that his behavior -- and particularly his aggressive manner -- is unbecoming to a prince.
Although members of the CDNI have not advocated changes in the social structure, many of their actions point in this direction. Further, as has been the case with many other social reformers, contradictory tendencies often exist within the same individual. While some are in certain ways closely allied to the royal family and participated in drafting an archaic legal code, they were at the same time instrumental in forming a trade union organization for government employees. A reason for the latter activity, they state, is to enable the problems of civil servants to be aired openly rather than through anonymous letters.

Perspective on the relationships existing between the elite and lower echelon officials is obtainable when visiting Lao offices. Most Lao officials, even those who deal frequently with Europeans, tend to be casual about appointments and do not operate on a set time schedule. A westerner arriving for his appointment may find that the minister's secretary or office coolie is reluctant to disturb his superior. In one particular ministry the clerk always peeked through the key-hole before announcing to his employer the arrival of a visitor. Members of the Lao elite nearly always have bells on their desks which they ring to summon subordinates as well as coolies. While it is true that buzzers exist in American offices, their use
is accompanied by appropriately polite words. The Lao office bells, on the other hand, are used not only to call clerks but for all manner of small services as well.

It would be quite incorrect to infer from these small signs of petty authoritarianism that Lao subordinates live in fear of their superiors. It is true that in recent crisis situations during a time when there is fear of communist military action and internal subversion, use has apparently been made of police informers, homes have been searched, and there has been enforced attendance at pro-government rallies. (It is possible that now, fall 1960, this process has been reversed and it is the opponents of the Pathet-Lao who live in fear.) Some Lao, especially in the lower echelons of the bureaucracy, have expressed a fear of openly voicing criticisms of the government. Among the elite, on the other hand, criticism of one's peers has often been very direct, sometimes almost embarrassingly so for a foreigner. In one case, a provincial official in a technical ministry criticized temperately the policies of his superior. When the foreigner said jokingly that he would be sure to repeat this to the minister, the local official was extremely upset until reassured that this would not be done. At the same time, in Vientiane a deputy to the National Assembly and member of the elite did not hesitate to
charge that a certain minister, a political opponent, had embezzled money in his official position and was using these funds to build a mansion. Also, Lao diplomats abroad often do not hesitate to speak critically of their government's policies. Elite Lao officials are often more frank in criticizing the shortcomings of their government than many resident foreign diplomats.

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

VIII. LAO CHARACTER TRAITS AFFECTING SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Despite the existence of obvious social stratification in Lao society there is a real problem in discipline within the bureaucracy. This is true even though it seems to contradict certain traits in Lao character, among them traditional recognition of many gradations in rank. A special honorific language is used in addressing the King and there are specific terms employed in addressing superiors. There is still another set
of terms used in speaking to equals and a third for inferiors. It is a complicating factor that some young men may have the hereditary honorific title of Tiao (Prince) and yet occupy subordinate positions.

The image of a Lao that the foreign visitor usually gets is a mild-mannered, soft speaking, unaggressive person. These characterizations are true in a sense, but it would be easy to overemphasize them. Returning to the United States after a stay in Laos one cannot help but be impressed by how noisy and aggressive American people seem. But the picture of Lao tranquility should not be overdrawn. Warfare has been rather common in this area. Cities have been sacked and slaves taken. After his defeat by the Thai in the early 19th century, the last King of Vientiane was brought to Bangkok where he was exhibited in a cage like a captured animal. Even now, Lao officials and villagers often show little compunction in conscripting tribal people, including women and children, for hard labor.

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

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

It is against this background that the interrelationship between the elite and their subordinates must be viewed. There is a lack of compulsion, of striving, and of urgency. During the summer of 1959, when North Vietnamese troops were reported to be invading the Provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua,
American Embassy official remarked that he would have to work in his office day and night during the crisis. Walking through Vientiane that evening one could hear the hum of the generators supplying current to the American Embassy. There were lights on in the building and many cars parked outside. In contrast, the Lao Foreign Ministry was quiet and completely dark. It is quite possible that while the Lao are very much concerned about threats to their country, they do not respond by working harder, as would be the case with many Americans or Westerners faced with a similar situation. There is also a strong element of fatalism in Lao character. A Lao diplomat reacted in this way to the escape of Pathet-Lao leaders from jail: "We are merciful. We let them go...; but you wait, they will come back and kill us."

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

There is nothing remarkable in being reluctant to leave the capital city of an underdeveloped country; what is interesting from the point of view of Lao administrative functioning is the way the change in the decision occurred. Initially, after they had learned of the advisor’s choice of locale, the teachers wrote, over his head, to the Minister of Education and to the Prime Minister. The official in charge of the project then called them in and said that they would be provided with good housing and furniture and permitted to return to Vientiane at frequent intervals if they accepted the original proposal. But the young teachers were not satisfied. Pressure was brought to bear, and the official himself reversed the decision over the objections of his European advisor.

It is possible that this change was brought about, in part, because one of the teachers might have been considered a member of the elite (since he bore the hereditary title of Tiao) but if this were the only problem he could have been transferred elsewhere. In any case, it is significant that the teachers did not feel constrained to obey the orders of
their superiors. This behavior was also closely tied to the strong recreational values in Lao culture, since some of these teachers had acquired small cars as a result of their stay in Thailand. (The living stipends of their American aid scholarships were generous and by not using part of these funds for the study and travel purposes for which they were intended they saved enough for their cars. Similar practices were followed by army officers sent abroad for training programs.)

Two traits, the lack of urgency and a pattern of flexibility, are reflected in the following instances. At the time of the invasion of Sam Neua (in the summer of 1959) it was rumored that Lao paratroopers had announced that they expected to be dropped near the target and would not march through the jungle-like common infantry. Again, any visitor to the Vientiane market can see women doing their shopping in dozens of police and military jeeps, while many Lao villagers can be seen wearing parts of military uniforms. One American official associated with the military aid program suggested that this was to compensate the Lao soldiers for their lack of other social benefits -- such as housing. Even by Lao rural standards, housing of the lower ranking military and their dependents leaves much to be desired. By contrast, the local provincial commanders, as well as many high ranking officers in the capital, live rent-free
in government-provided residences. Rigid organizational methods, at least those on the American pattern, appear to be foreign to the Lao administration and army, and flexibility in the social pattern can be clearly seen in the care and maintenance of equipment.

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

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

A Lao official does not tend to be overly demanding of his subordinates. Time is not viewed in the narrow sense. One
official explained in an apologetic way to a visitor that he would not be able to produce a promised report because his clerks typed so slowly. He did not seem to feel that he could alter the situation.

In Laos, the question of technical facilities is intensified because there is the dual problem of managing bureau inherited from the French administration and at the same time evolving new ones. Attitudes toward discipline and time can also be seen in the operation of hospitals. In one provincial town, a missionary expressed fear at sending his parishioners to the local hospital, saying that during holidays many of the assigned staff, including nurses, left to celebrate. The present writer was once summoned to provide help when a gasoline dump exploded, severely burning several people. The French surgeon assigned to the provincial hospital was quickly located and rushed to the hospital, but the operating room was locked, since there was no Lao nurse on duty at the time. A medical orderly was finally found at home, and the operating room was eventually opened in order to treat the injured man. In this case, there was certainly no acute sense of urgency (although in fairness to the Lao one should add that even in other countries emergency cases sometimes are not treated until certain bureaucratic formalities have been fulfilled).
In accordance with a lack of urgency there is also a lack of fervent nationalistic sentiment among the Lao elite. We have mentioned the independence movement and the fact that some fighting took place before the Lao Issara sought refuge in Thailand. These activities were rather mild, however, and they soon stopped. The same attitude is also reflected in the Francophile tendency of most of the Lao elite, which contrasts strongly with the feelings of a country like Guinea which has severed French contacts. There is, of course, some resentment toward the French among a number of officials, but it has rarely taken an overt form.

Implicitly, at least, the Lao elite recognize their inability to survive without foreign assistance. This assistance, as well as the presence of foreign experts, does not appear to be resented on either the personal or the political level. Even in the latter case it is the policies and activities of certain nations which are found objectionable rather than foreigners as such. Shortly before his death late in 1959, the Deputy Premier, Katay Don Sasorith, publicly criticized the American aid program for what he claimed was failure to pay the police on time. He added that when the French were in power they had always met their payroll promptly. Even the head of the Sanhipab Party suggested that dishonest Lao officials be fired, and if necessary
replaced by foreign technicians, Americans or French. Anyone who objected, he said, would be guilty of misplaced nationalism.

The Pathet-Lao have agitated strongly against the Americans, and in late 1959 and early 1960 campaigned with promises of securing Russian and North Vietnamese or Chinese assistance. The Pathet-Lao de-emphasize talk of the latter two countries, however, because of traditional Lao distrust for their northern neighbors.

At the time of the April, 1960 elections, a French UNESCO expert was killed by a group of Pathet-Lao who are said to have mistaken him for an American. They were, however, apparently disciplined communists controlled by the North Vietnamese.

Incidentally, one of the most potent arguments of the government against the Pathet-Lao has been to associate them with the detested Vietnamese. It is a passive dislike based on a resented feeling of inferiority rather than an active hatred. One Lao official summed it up picturesquely, "We detest the Vietnamese because they would like to sit on our heads."

While the Lao are neither passionately nationalistic nor militantly anti-foreign in their outlook, they still reflect certain aspects of nationalist feeling in the relationships the elite maintain with the lower echelon bureaucracy. The flexibility noted above is not only a characteristic peculiar
to the Lao; in a certain sense, it can be said to be common to many newly sovereign states. The elite are often rather tolerant of their bureaucrats -- that is, strictness and discipline are frequently associated with the way in which the previous colonial government was run. In Laos this feeling is deeply engrained. Not only were the French in complete control; they put many Vietnamese in subordinate positions, particularly in those which required technical competence. After independence, villagers were no longer required to pay a head tax, and while civil government officials were taxed, the military and policy were specifically exempted from this requirement -- the latter being a feature of the French system that the Lao government maintained.

The absence of rigid restrictions does tend to reduce friction within the bureaucracy. This does not mean that there are no conflicts; rather, strains tend to be muted.

The main threat to the Lao government does not come from the possibility of splits within the bureaucracy as such; rather, it comes from the Pathet-Lao who are backed formally by the North Vietnamese and, informally, by the Chinese. Although, as we have seen, some of their leaders are from the same elite class, the Pathet-Lao still differ greatly from the Lao Royal government in their mode of operation. They have capitalized
on the weaknesses of the government in three principle areas: elite conflicts, local administration, and minority groups.

Thus there is significant communist influence among both the Vietnamese and the Chinese urban groups. This is particularly true in the schools, especially in those operated by the Chinese. For the most part the sympathies of these town dwellers appears to be expressed directly in terms of the regimes in their homelands rather than overtly on behalf of the local Pathet-Lao.

In any case, the Vietnamese -- and particularly the Chinese -- exercise much economic influence in Laos; for this reason their continuing association with their homelands is very much feared by the Lao. These groups are discriminated against in such matters as taxes. As one official in the Ministry of Finance put it, "We are first trying to collect taxes from the Chinese and Vietnamese, and then we will start on the Lao."

Some Lao officials also like to trace corruption in the government to Chinese attempts to bribe officials. Despite these attitudes, both groups have officially recognized administrative organizations in the major towns. Indeed, in Pakse (in southern Laos), they appear to outnumber the Lao.

Even if united, Laos obviously cannot defend herself against any serious external threat on the part of North Vietnam or China. Yet it may not be necessary for the Communists to
resort to external military pressures if they are able to use internal subversion successfully. Directly involved here is the extent to which the Lao government is able to administer the rural areas effectively.

This is a complex matter. Although subversion is encouraged and directed in a general way from North Vietnam, it nevertheless feeds on local conflicts. Since the crucial problem is the extent of meaningful contact between the central authorities and the rural people, it is noteworthy that the institutions having contact with the villagers include the Ministries of Interior and Education, the Army, the police, and the Buddhist priesthood. (The Buddhist priesthood constitutes a special case which will be considered subsequently.) Rather than look into the individual programs of these government agencies, we will now concern ourselves with the social relationships that exist between officials of the Lao elite (and other government personnel) and the villagers.

IX. OFFICIALS AND THE RURAL POPULATION

A ranked hierarchy once existed historically, but distinctions between groups were then based more on occupational and social status than on the standard of living. At the time when the French arrived, the highest-ranking royal officials of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang dwelt in wooden-planked Lao style houses;
there was nothing approaching palaces in the European sense. The present palace in Luang Prabang was built by the French for King Sisavang Vong. It is true that early in the 19th century the King of Vientiane is said to have had an elaborate court within a walled town (all later destroyed by a Siamese invasion). But this must be viewed in context: Laos at no time in her history consisted of more than a few petty kingdoms which were marginal to the states of the Khmers in Cambodia, to the Thai in Ayut'ia and to Annam in Vietnam; these in turn were to a great extent derivative from the great centers of civilization in China and India. Laos was then, and to some extent still is, doubly marginal with respect to Indian and Chinese civilization and to Thai culture.

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

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

Almost all the elite of the Lao older generation have considerable acquaintance with rural areas. This is because, aside from Vientiane and the four other main provincial capitals, all the other towns of Laos are essentially large villages with a few stores and administrative buildings, where a good proportion of the inhabitants are farmers. The majority of the older elite who served as provincial and often as district officials found it impossible to avoid direct contacts with

3The economy of Laos is discussed in detail in the author's Aspects of Village Life and Culture Change in Laos, Council on Economic and Cultural Affairs, N. Y., 1958.
villagers. (Admittedly, in the enlarged government in the Vientiane of today it is possible for an official to have relatively little contact with rural people, especially if he does not have to do much traveling). Particularly in the case of titled individuals social contact was within the context of formalized relationships. These have not completely disappeared even today.

The writer made a trip with the late Viceroy in 1957. Most of the accompanying officials and especially the villagers always spoke to Prince Phetsarath from a squatting position. At each village a ceremonial welcome was prepared. The entire village population squatted with heads bowed, forming long parallel reception lines. This does not necessarily imply fear or awe of royalty, for although the villagers approached the Prince only on bended knees, once he settled down in his specially prepared quarters in the village, everyone went about his normal activities, including bathing and eating, often in full view of the Prince. Ceremonial isolation can be extensive in Lao society, however. Neither the present King Savang Vatthana, nor his father, ever traveled extensively in rural areas, but whenever they did so they were always accompanied by a retinue and occasioned formal ceremonies. An official such as a provincial governor may make a formal trip surrounded
by ceremonial receptions, or he can go visiting privately in villages with relatively little formal ceremony. On one occasion when the sons of the Crown Prince (now the King) were home on their summer vacations from Universities in France, they attended a festival in a village about 10 miles from Luang Prabang. Although restrained in their behavior, not completely at ease in the village, and treated with some deference, they danced with local maidens and one of them even played with the village musicians. The following day, returning home by pirogue, they stopped at a village where they visited the home of a former servant and bought some melons from her. This incident does not, of course, indicate the absence of social distance but rather that it is not rigidly interpreted (in keeping with the general character of Lao society).

Social distance is moderated in other ways as well. Humorous abuse of superiors is permitted on certain ceremonial occasions. For several days, during the Lao New Year's festival, water may be thrown at any and all, regardless of rank or position. In this way several foreign ambassadors were drenched and a photographer had his camera ruined. In Luang Prabang on one afternoon during the week long celebration, the governor dresses in old clothes and goes to a nearby island in the Mekong, joining the villagers in throwing mud and water at one another.
One year on this occasion he was playfully dumped into the river after being plastered with mud. Horseplay is not limited to annual festivals, however. At a village ceremony for the dedication of a dam, two of the government Ministers present got into a playful water fight with some of the village women, and a good time was had by all.

Due to the scattered distribution of the Lao population, the lack of roads, and the mountainous terrain of much of the country, contacts between the elite or even the lower echelon officials and the Lao villagers are often extremely limited. Much of the informal interaction cited above is restricted to areas within a few hours distance of the major towns. In 1957, Lao villagers 30 miles from Luang Prabang and five miles off the road were unable to identify a picture of the Crown Prince or name any official of the government other than the King. In 1959, villagers on the outskirts of Vientiane did not know the name of the Premier nor had they ever seen the Crown Prince despite his frequent visits to Vientiane.

Much of the contact between the members of the Lao elite and the villagers is conditioned by traditional factors. To cite the case of the pro-government deputies, each politician builds up a following based on the granting of personal favors that in some ways is vaguely reminiscent of oldtime American
political machines and so-called Pork Barrel public works projects and more closely approximately that of a royal Prince without the latter's executive powers. The deputy places himself in the position of protector, as a direct intermediary between the villagers and the relatively impersonal and faceless government. In many cases the peasants are aware of the government only through the deputies and local officials who have visited their villages.

It is usually only the deputies, rather than the local officials, who are able to undertake any meaningful action as far as the villagers are concerned. For the most part only a one-way channel of communication exists: the deputies try to persuade the villagers to be sympathetic to their point of view by the dispensation of gifts and favors as a way of buying support since they cannot command it; occasionally they aid in crisis situations. These activities are particularly pronounced at election time. Government ministers, deputies, and candidates tour the countryside making donations to local pagodas and distributing old clothes to villagers, after first having received formal ceremonial welcomes. Others present motion pictures produced by the U.S. Information Agency, doing this largely to attract attention and to amuse the villagers -- many of whom have not seen movies before. Many of the newsreels of
Lao political and social life, particularly in Vientiane, are attempted to convey specific information: on government officials, the participation of Laos in international politics, the army, and rural aid. Still, the films function chiefly as entertainment, especially when shown at a pagoda festival. They are touted as the personal property of the individual politicians and are said to be his contribution to the festival. It is quite true that they may effectively convey their themes in a subtle way, but it is also significant that one of the dominant impressions remaining in the minds of the villagers is that "X came to our village and showed us his [sic] films."

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

The government's efforts in the field of rural aid are
often converted to individual political purposes. One official attempted to have several wells drilled in his area at election time. Another wanted a bridge to connect his native village with the main highway. In a third case villagers obtained a school by a personal petition to their deputy who was also an influential Minister. The activities of Prince Phetsarith are also in this tradition, although in his case he used personal funds rather than those of the government. He purchased agricultural implements, improved seed potatoes, Hampshire hogs, and Leghorn chickens and distributed them to the villagers.

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

The individual pattern of dealing with social problems is beginning to show signs of change, particularly among some of the younger elite, who increasingly show a tendency to act through an organization. This is true of many members of the CDNI. We have noted one of their activities, the support of the rural medical activities of Operation Brotherhood, channeled through the Junior Chamber of Commerce. The young elite also support the work of the Lao Red Cross, the Civic Action program, and the Lao Women's Association. Although the Civic Action program has many weaknesses and is now largely defunct, it is very interesting from the point of view of an emerging type of social structure guided by the young elite. Like the Junior Chamber of Commerce, this was also an attempt to work through an organized group. In this case, teams of young men selected from the army were sent into the villages in an attempt to start programs of rural improvement and social action.
Certain Pathet-Lao attempts run parallel. Yet their group appears to be more firmly disciplined and to have goals more clearly in mind. But unprejudiced information on Pathet-Lao activities is difficult to obtain. It is probable that their rigidly disciplined approach may not appeal to many rural Lao, and the way they punish non-cooperation or indifference by resort to killing and burning of villages would not appear to promote popularity.

X. THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The role of women is becoming important. Here again both the Pathet-Lao and young Lao government elite have given them a greater role of participation in public affairs than was formerly the case in traditional Lao society. While the status of women in Lao culture has not been one of formal equality, they still enjoyed many rights and privileges which were denied to women in other countries. They were never isolated in the home, and often engaged in trade. They could inherit property and they shared many tasks with the men, since the division of labor was not clearly defined in many cases. Women are the owners of a number of important businesses, and some of them even enter into supply contracts with the government. But women traditionally appear not to have held any important government offices or to play prominent roles in ceremonial
affairs. (There was, however, one ruthless woman despot in Lao history. She was finally killed because of her excesses.) In 1959 only one woman deputy served in the National Assembly. With regard to Buddhism, nuns play a very definitely minor role compared with that of the monks. When foreigners see the shy behavior of Lao women at Western parties they often assume that they occupy an inferior position. Seeing them at home or in a village one gets quite a different impression.

Polygamy has existed in Laos; indeed, the former king had a number of wives. The practice was never widespread, however, and was limited largely to the national elite. Polygamy is no longer popular. The present king has only one wife, and almost all high ranking officials have a single spouse. Among the elite and urban people generally, the position of the second wife is unenviable, and those men who have two wives must maintain a separate household for each one.

Among both the urban elite and the villagers the Lao wife has a considerable say in the management of the household budget. In many cases urban Lao turn over their salaries to their wives and they control the household accounts. This financial independence for women is indicated in still another way: women as well as men can engage in gambling. A wife of one of the elite in 1959 created a scandal by going more than
1,000,000 kip into debt in this manner.

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

The Lao Women's Association is not a traditional feminist organization in terms of agitation for equality, since most Lao women do not consider themselves underprivileged. There has, however, been some attempt on the part of this organization to outlaw polygamy and legally ban prostitution. The Women's Association has provided emergency relief in case of fire disasters, offered public courses in hygiene and sanitation, and made some attempts at rural extension. The organization is a new one, however, and its work is in the process of expansion.
Youth groups include Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and there are teams in basketball and soccer, with both sexes participating. CDNI members have played an important role in organizing these groups, and there have been conventions and assemblies with provincial groups represented. There have been initial (though often clumsy) attempts to use them for political purposes, although so far no serious efforts have been made to use youth groups in the work of rural development. In some of the urban areas they have participated in such diverse projects as building schools and helping the local police in directing traffic.

XI. **INDIVIDUAL VERSUS GROUP ACTION**

One cannot draw a rigid line and say that the older elite have built individual organizations while the young elite have worked through groups. Certainly the older politicians belong to political parties and make some attempt to coordinate their actions, while almost all of them share membership in the original Lao Issara Movement. Many have held high governmental positions and have been responsible for the administration of ministries. At the same time, some of the young elite have been willing to increase their personal positions by using group activities as a medium for their own advancement. Nevertheless, particularly in their interaction with the rural population, the young elite have tended to participate in terms of their group programs. This
may be a function of the fact that most of the young elite are civil servants or belong to the military; relatively few have attempted to run for elective office. It is possible that this situation may change; even so, a return by young people to the old pattern of individualism within a traditional hierarchy does not appear probable.

Here again, the case of the late Prince Phetsarath is illustrative. He remarked after his return to Laos in 1957 that it would be impossible for him to become Prime Minister because "I would deal directly with problems and not stand for any nonsense. This the National Assembly would never agree to." A foreigner once inquired why the Prince was not backed by some of the western powers, to which a resident diplomat replied that this might be a possibility if they could find out where the army stood with regard to the Prince. The Prince's attitude and the diplomat's question symbolized the beginning of the end of the old power structure which, although still of some significance today, is in the process of demise. Prince Phetsarath's hereditary title of Viceroy in charge of the army for the Kingdom of Luang Prabang had no practical meaning for the Lao generals and colonels who were trained as sergeants and lieutenants in the French Colonial Forces, even though he had seemed to fulfill this role for a time as the leader of the Lao Issara.
There has been a partial breakdown in the status of the hereditary nobility, as indicated by Prince Phetsarath's remark that the members of the National Assembly would not permit him to dictate to them. This does not mean that an authoritarian political system will become impossible, but rather that it will be built on a basis different from the old hierarchy. The latter was partially replaced by the French at the end of the 19th century and then to some extent reactivated after independence e.g., the role of the King and the King's Council. Following the pattern in much of Southeast Asia, it is possible that the army may form the basis for a new power structure. Although the elite play a prominent role in army leadership, their positions rest on achieved as well as inherited status and have a completely secular basis. On the other hand, Prince Phetsarath, as a traditional leader, was vested with a certain amount of supernatural power. He was said to be able to exorcise spirits or change his shape -- powers which some of the officials as well as the villagers believed in. As far as can be determined, none of these qualities is attributed to the present King, although they have been imputed to Prince Boun Oum of Champassak the hereditary leader of the South.

Although the monarchy is presently accepted as a unifying concept by the elite, it does not appear to have aroused much
enthusiasm among the Lao villagers, or even among the urban population. It is only since the end of the Second World War that the King of Luang Prabang has become the King of all Laos. As we have seen, neither the former king nor the present one traveled widely through the country, and the monarchy has no real popularity in the countryside. For the most part Lao villagers appear to be indifferent; they regard the King as an august but distant personage with whom they feel little personal involvement. Many homes have their walls plastered with pictures of political candidates and officials. Rarely is there a picture of the Crown Prince. Several years ago photographs of the then Crown Prince were distributed in Luang Prabang town. A number of them ended up being used to wrap food in the market.

As the new King, the latter has aligned himself at least indirectly with the young elite of the CDNI and publicly participated in the annual round of state and religious ceremonies; however, most of his activities are limited to Vientiane and Luang Prabang. He has been more a symbol than a leader, and that in a limited sense. He will not be able to maintain his position merely on the basis of his traditional prerogatives -- his present political maneuverings at this writing appear to confirm this statement.
XII. ATTITUDES OF THE PEASANTRY TOWARD THE ELITE

We have indicated that there are pressures for a change within the government itself, particularly among the lower echelon bureaucracy of the elite; still, it is possible that the elite group may prove flexible enough to accommodate the more dynamic elements from the lower ranks. Let us now see how the peasantry relates itself to the elite, the inverse of the relationship already explored.

What has been said to this point indicates quite clearly that the Lao villager does not fit the stereo-typed picture of an impoverished, over-taxed tenant burning with resentment at a tyrannical exploiting aristocracy. It is true that rural services such as schools, health centers, and roads are inaccessible to the majority. This is somewhat balanced by the fact that the contribution to the national state the peasant is called upon to make is (in most cases) virtually negligible. Since abolition of the head tax, most government income today is derived from import duties and taxes on urban merchants. The deficit is made up by the American Aid Program (estimates have placed this as high as 80% of the Lao annual budget).

While Lao villagers are beginning to acquire "felt needs" for government services, their major focus is on the community pagoda. It is by no means unusual to find a situation in which villagers
who say they are too poor to finance a school building will a short time later raise money to buy gold leaf for the Buddha images in their pagoda.

One definite point of conflict appears to be the relationship between the Nai Bans (village headmen) and Tassengs (sub-district chiefs) on the one hand, and their district administrator on the other. The former are village people selected by the peasants themselves, while the latter is a government civil servant, often a member of the elite, who may be transferred from one area to another after a few years of residence. The Chao Muong often acts in a rather authoritarian manner, ordering the Tassengs and Nai Bans to come to district headquarters for meetings, where they receive instructions. Most administrators spend little time visiting villages under their jurisdiction. The very marked differences in status also make communication difficult. The government has recently made strong efforts to change this situation.

In a sense the villagers acknowledge their status, in that they traditionally look upon the government as a superior power which owes them protection and aid in the feudal sense. Yet they resent it when the Chao Muong, acting under theories of reciprocal relationship, requests some service of them. The viewpoint of many villagers toward the enrichment of certain
politicians and the disproportionate development of the towns as opposed to the countryside was expressed by one Lao villager this way: "We villagers are only poor people and deserve the help of the government." Or, "The Chao Nais (officials) get all the benefits of foreign aid programs, while we receive nothing." The implication here seems to be that, at least as far as the Lao villagers are concerned the old feudal system has largely broken down, while the colonial government has been abolished. The Royal Lao government supported by foreign aid commands neither their allegiance nor respect -- to the limited extent they feel its punitive power. They also feel that the originators of aid have an obligation to help them, that is, in the broad humanistic sense as interpreted through their Buddhist faith.

Although inequality may be felt strongly, the villager does not consider himself able to alter the situation either through the electoral process or by personal petition to the responsible government officials. "We have tried this and it is useless," they insist. Some peasants have joined the Pathet-Lao, of course, apparently choosing the path of violent revolution, but it would be a mistake to say that most Lao peasants are organizing to overthrow the government. Only a few have been recruited into the Pathet-Lao movement, which is directed by certain urban Lao elite and the North Vietnamese.
At the same time, it may become increasingly difficult for the royal government to control the countryside without the active support of the population.

In a way, the Lao Army seems to be following the pattern of the Chinese Nationalists, the French Colonial Forces, and the South Vietnamese Army in that its strength is concentrated in the towns and district centers, leaving the countryside unprotected. It is in any event very difficult to root out highly mobile rural guerillas. This was done in Malaya but only at the tremendous investment of regrouping villages and tying down large numbers of troops equipped with the latest in weapons and helicopters. Laos lacks the facilities even to attempt this approach, and her mountainous terrain provides a ready refuge for rebels. Under present conditions it seems likely that a good proportion of the rural Lao population would remain neutral if possible.

XIII. POSITION OF THE TRIBAL PEOPLES

While tribal Tai constitute a major minority group in Laos, a significant external threat derives from the fact that most of the Tai peoples live outside Laos in neighboring North Vietnam and Yunnan. Many have fled the oppression of the Communists and crossed over into Laos as refugees, but the situation is by no means clearly defined. Tai autonomous areas have been
created in both these bordering regions, featuring the form if not the substance of self-government for these groups. Theoretically purporting to offer them their own internal administration, instruction in their own language, and recognition of their cultural uniqueness, this arrangement has not always worked smoothly. Concessions to national autonomy have always specifically and significantly excluded religious practices, especially when they interfere with loyalty to the state or with plans for economic development (as for instance, in the sacrifice of livestock to animistic spirits).

The Communist press has often accused some of the lower-echelon Chinese and Vietnamese cadres of excessive nationalism in failing to show respect for local customs; the communists also point out the "misplaced localism" of the non-Han or non-Vietnamese ethnic groups.

Brutal, cynical, and oppressive though they may be, the Communists nevertheless have a definite policy for dealing with their minority nationalities. The Pathet-Lao, who emphasize the "brotherhood of all peoples," also have a policy. It is thus no accident that a good proportion of Pathet-Lao troops are composed of non-Lao peoples. In the summer of 1959, wishing to create difficulties in northern Laos, the North Vietnamese reportedly used Tai Dam and other tribal groups who
are indistinguishable from the ethnic groups living on the Lao side of the border.

Like the Lao, the tribal Tai are valley-dwelling, irrigated-rice cultivators in Laos, they were formerly from an area divided into petty states with a clearly defined political hierarchy. Their languages and Lao are mutually intelligible. With regard to religion, only a minority of the Tai are Buddhists. The others practice various combinations of animism. Included in the tribal Tai are such peoples as the Tai Lu and Tai Dam (Black Thai), a number of whom are recent refugees from North Vietnam. Most Tai are rural farmers, with a few refugee villages located near Vientiane and Luang Prabang.

The Lao clearly differentiate between themselves and the Tai, but at the same time they have permitted the latter considerable local representation in the areas in which they predominate. In Nam Tha Province some of the Chao Kuongs are Tais, and there are a significant number of Tai teachers. As is the case with the other non-Lao groups, however, virtually no concession is made to their cultural uniqueness. For example, under the rural development program instituted by the
government, considerable aid was given to Buddhist pagodas, but no provision was made for non-Buddhist religious shrines.

The Tai (Dam) refugees who live on the outskirts of the two major towns have integrated themselves into the Lao economy in some ways parallel to the activities of the local Vietnamese. They have become gardeners, butchers, chauffeurs, tailors, and small traders; some of the women have become domestics for Europeans. This ability to fit into Lao urban culture at a status higher than that of coolie distinctly demarcates the Tai from the aboriginal Kha, who have found employment only as common laborers, and from the Meo and Yao, who rarely spend time in the towns.

In contrast to the Chinese and the North Vietnamese, the Lao elite either profess to ignore the problem; or deal with it in terms of traditional social relationships; or they deny its importance and advocate assimilation. For example, one Lao Minister when questioned on the subject, replied, "They [specifically referring to the Kha of the south] are no problem; they keep to themselves and settle their own disputes. Anyhow, they have equal rights to vote in the elections." Another high official connected with educational affairs replied in the following manner when asked about the facilities provided for the non-Lao peoples: "We did not keep records on the matter."
Ours is a small country and we must strive for unity. Missionaries have done us a great disservice by trying to teach in languages other than Lao. It is no harder for tribal children to learn Lao than for the Lao to learn the French they must have for education beyond the primary school."

When asked if it might be possible to provide more schools for non-Lao villages, the official replied that it was hard to set up schools in small scattered villages, and that priority had to be given to the larger population centers, i.e., to the valleys inhabited by the Lao. Even if the Lao government were eager to extend its educational system to all the tribal peoples, this would not be an easy matter, since many of the latter are suspicious of the Lao and their motives in addition to cherishing their own traditions. The Communists have broken down some of these cultural barriers by force, but so far the Royal Lao government has not shown any interest, nor is it equipped to use the brutal methods of the Communists.

We have mentioned the attitude of noblesse oblige assumed by certain officials in dealing with Lao peasants. This attitude is even more pronounced in their contacts with the tribal peoples. One deputy, stating that he was very much concerned with the problem, said that he was going to visit certain remote areas of his province and ask the Chao Muong to summon the Nai
Bans and Tassengs. Then he was going to lecture them about the government, and distribute agricultural tools as gifts. Another deputy brought a Yao Nai Ban to Vientiane to see the sights. One official remarked that it would be an excellent thing to bring large numbers of these tribal leaders to the capital for an indoctrination course. These pathetic attempts show the beginning of some awareness of the problem, and it is possible that in time more sophisticated efforts will develop. Whether they can come soon enough to avert the disintegration of the Lao state remains to be seen.

Any efforts to deal effectively with the non-Lao people, especially Lao Theng (Kha) groups, must take into account formidable social barriers. As one Khmu living near Luang Prabang expressed himself, "To us every Lao is a boss." The writer was present when a government school inspector interviewed a Lao Theng about educational problems in his village. The man knelt throughout the interview. Even the younger Lao petty officials expect this deference. In a clinic in a tribal area in the north, both male and female Lao nurses dispensed medication to their tribal patients in a condescending manner which indicated a belief that they were dealing with a lower order of life. (At the same time some of these same young officials complained of what they felt to be the rigid status conceptions
of the elite. At that time their superior was a royal prince, and they resented very much having to go through the formal motions of respect every time they had to meet him on official business.

It is tempting to infer on the basis of this information that there has never been any meaningful contact between the lowland Lao and the various tribal people. This definitely is not true. There have been extensive contacts in commerce and religion -- but government and administrative relationships, where they have not coincided with the first two areas, have been little developed.

Certain Lao village officials have traditionally assumed the position of protector and intermediary between the Lao Theng and the Lao administration. These protectors, or Lam (interpreters in Lao), paid the taxes of the Lao Theng and supplied them with trade goods such as cloth and metal tools. In return, the Lao Theng brought them forest products, game, and sometimes rice. They also worked in the fields of their patron, but they were not bound to one individual and appear to have been able to change their Lam.

In recent years the system has begun to disintegrate, although until his death Prince Phetsarath carried on a small-scale exchanges with and offered aid to a number of tribal
groups in the traditional manner.

Joint sacrifices to the phi (spirits) were also undertaken by certain Lao and Lao Theng groups, with Lao officials occasionally participating. For example, when the Royal Palace was dedicated, a Khmu chieftain was the first to enter so that he could appease the spirits. The Lao felt that since the Khmu had lived in Laos for a longer time they were more familiar with the resident spiritual forces.

Trade contacts between the mountain and valley peoples are still vital to the economy of both,\(^4\) but there is no doubt that exploitation of the tribal peoples has continued since independence. For example, Nai Bans or Tassengs often conscript the Lao Theng to construct schools or build houses in Lao villages. Although the latter receive food and sometimes second-hand clothing for their work, the degree of just compensation is often open to question. These demands may also come at an inconvenient time, perhaps when the Lao Theng are busy in their fields. Recently, some of the requests of local Lao officials have been refused by the mountain people; the officials do not then usually try to press the issue, since their requests are theoretically illegal.

\(^4\)See *Aspects of Village Life and Culture Change*, op. cit.
The tribal groups have never accepted their own inferiority passively. During much of the French period there were revolts among both the Meo and the Lao Theng (although not among the Lao). Further, since the end of the Second World War many of the minority peoples have served in the ranks of the Pathet-Lao.

XIV. CONCLUSIONS

Superficially, there would appear to be strongly opposing factions within the elite (outside of the Pathet-Lao). The political policies advocated are radically different, although a number of prominent Lao politicians have been by turns "anti-Communist" and "neutralist," while Souvanna Phouma has been characterized as a "pro-western neutral" (a seeming contradiction). Many of the Lao elite feel that the Pathet-Lao pose a direct threat to their positions and to their way of life. They have reacted to this threat in a series of contradictory ways compounded of fear and confusion. The flexibility and lack of strong loyalty ties among the extended family groups of the Lao elite have co-existed with an emphasis on individual responsibility. These factors, combined with the simultaneous diminution of traditional patterns of respect on which much of their power rested, has produced a situation in which instability appears inevitable. A period of colonial rule, followed by heavy reliance on foreign aid, prevented the development of
strong feelings of political responsibility and national service. Many members of the Lao elite realize that they cannot determine the future of their country. Strong united leadership (attempting to play off the power blocs against each other) might tend to provide a certain degree of maneuverability -- as has been achieved by Cambodia. Yet that country possesses a great degree of ethnic homogeneity and boasts economic resources which Laos lacks.

Can the Lao elite build social and ethnic unity quickly? Can the Lao leaders develop a real sense of social responsibility? Will it be possible to broaden the base of power, increase social mobility, and promote reciprocal contacts between rural and urban areas? Is it possible for the United States, France, Great Britain, the United Nations agencies, and the neighboring countries of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand to work together in a positive way and to promote social stability by bringing about long range economic development of the whole area?

In thinking along these lines it is obvious on the one hand that the position of the non-Lao ethnic groups will remain a major problem for future governments. On the other hand, it is impossible to predict the exact composition of next month's government or even what form that government will take. The following statements seem to have a fair degree of validity:
1. It appears unlikely (September, 1960) that the series of governments of 1959-60 had either the dynamic leadership or the popular support in urban and rural areas necessary to initiate and carry out the social and economic innovations required if Laos is to remain a viable state.

2. The younger elite, particularly in the army, may prove capable of undertaking reforms if they are able to concentrate on internal matters rather than face the threat of direct or indirect North Vietnamese intervention or subversion. This appears unlikely. The neighboring Communist states may acquiesce in the existence of a weak Laos, but they might regard a strong government as a threat. A Neutralist inclined military dictatorship is a possibility. But this is a contradiction in terms for Laos, since the Lao army cannot exist without outside aid. Neutralism of the Indonesian or even the Cambodian variety requires a minimum economic base which is lacking in Laos.

3. Although the problems of the non-Lao tribal peoples are being approached in many different ways, e.g., through education, health, welfare, and resettlement programs, much of the incentive comes from foreigners. The Lao elite view the problem either in terms of hierarchically ordered concepts of assistance or in the framework of Laotianization. No national program for comprehensive integration of the non-Lao peoples
into the national state has evolved, and none appears to be in the offing. It does not seem likely that the future leadership of Laos will crystallize around the Lao elite as presently constituted. The split loyalties of some groups and the neutrality of the majority has been brought about by the brutality of the Communists and the ineffectiveness or indifference of the Lao.

4. From the point of view of stability and active popular support the broadening of the power base of the Lao appears to be the most hopeful prospect. It is a virtual certainty as more technicians and administrators from non-elite groups are educated.

5. The cooperation of the various non-Communist states in the area offers some hope. Furthermore, developments toward the United Nations-sponsored scheme for the development of the Mekong River, involving Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, assisted by the western powers as well as many Asian countries, could be good portent for the future.

6. An increased assumption of responsibility by the United Nations for programs of social and technical assistance is capable of providing a stabilizing influence. If sufficiently developed in the political field, this approach might make it more difficult for the Communists to intervene particularly
with the continued presence of high ranking United Nations officials in Laos.

From the Western point of view, the outlook in Laos has been bleak but not hopeless. It is obvious that the Lao elite will not be able to solve their problems independently. In this sense their formal political independence is illusory. The Lao elite implicitly and at times explicitly realize these limitations. They deeply feel a need to unify both in the political and psychological sense.

Laos, like China, has not been and is not now "ours" to lose, but by attempting to understand the cultural attitudes and social values of the elite it might be possible to aid in the development of a group that can exert effective local leadership toward goals compatible with Western interests and values.