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A NOTE

on

The Revised Nam Ngum Project

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Introduction

The present note is prepared at the request of the Mekong Committee for the examination on a smaller scale development of the Nam Ngum Project in Laos with a view to facilitating the financing of its initial stage development.

The Committee requested us to include in our study a few alternative plans instead of only one for this project, especially on the dam and power, so that the Committee may be able to select the most desirable one. As the power market survey is now undertaken by French Mission assigned by the Committee and the result will be made available by the middle of August in 1963, we have not gone much further into this study. At around that time, the review on hydrology is also to be completed by the UN-WMO expert.

According to these suggestions, this note includes three possible alternative plans with more modest investment in the initial stage. In this note, some supplementary explanations are also given to clarify the major points which have been raised so far by the authorities concerned for the Comprehensive Project Report on the Nam Ngum.

It should be understood that the one scheme selected by the Committee will have to be adjusted on the results of power market survey by French Mission and hydrologic review by UN WMO-expert and finalized in a form of revised Feasibility Report at a later date.

Part-I. Revised Scheme

1. Summary of revised scheme

In the Comprehensive Project Report, we have recommended that the dam should be built as high as 66 meters and the power installation should be 40,000 kilowatts, 2 units of 20,000 kilowatts each, for the first stage development, at a construction cost of 22 million US dollars.

In this scheme, the power capacity could be increased up to 120,000 kilowatts ultimately.

This scheme, as explained in the Comprehensive Project Report, has been determined at the lowest possible point that falls within the economic range which was assessed in due consideration of various benefits to be derived from optimum use of water resources of the Nam Ngum River. Consequently, there might have possibly been some fears that this scheme involves too many factors for the future aspects and the cost of the first stage development is a little overburden to this country in view of its initial investment.

As an alternative plan for the above, a reduced scheme is shown for reference in the Appendix of that Report. It comprises a stage construction of the dam in which a smaller dam will first be built in order to generate the power of 24,000 kilowatts, 2 units of 12,000 kilowatts at the first stage. The construction cost of this scheme is 17,700,000 US dollars. In this scheme, the additional power installation will be needed within a relatively short period.

It is not possible to expect flood control and navigation to the extent that is planned in the recommended scheme. Moreover, this scheme involves a complicated work of future heightening of the dam. In spite

of these, the initial construction cost can not be reduced considerably as compared with the case of the recommended scheme mentioned above.

With these in view, we have recommended as an ideal plan that 2 units of 20,000 kilowatts with full height dam should be considered. The two units of generating set have been aimed at a stable supply of power in the initial stage, as either one can serve as a stand-by.

Now, however, the initial investment in this project should be as small as possible and this fact came to an overwhelming factor for bringing this project into realization.

From this angle, we re-examined on the reduction of the project scale and worked out three possible alternative plans, viz. Revised Scheme I, II and III.

Our studies indicate that it is practically impossible to construct any large reservoir in the upper reaches of the Nam Ngum because the river slope in the upper part is very steep as shown in Fig.-2. and no favourable reservoir site is found for these reaches. It offers only a possibility of developing high-head power plant.

In this light, our comparative study was made only on the same dam-site. These results are summarized in Table - 1.

According to the request of the Laotian Government, all of these three Schemes were made so as to preserve the same flood control capacity as contemplated in the original plan of the Comprehensive Project Report.

As Revised Scheme I, we revived the reduced scheme shown in the Appendix of the Comprehensive Project Report. This is the plan for

stage construction of the dam. In this case, the only power installation is modified from 2 units of 12,000 kilowatts to one unit of 20,000 kilowatts for the first stage and from 16,000 to 20,000 kilowatts for the second stage. This scheme preserves every benefit as envisaged in the original plan of the Comprehensive Project Report. Namely, the power capacity could be increased up to 120,000 kilowatts ultimately.

Therefore, it could meet the power demand for some 20 to 30 years to come. This scheme is also preferable from the viewpoint of optimum use of water resources of the Nam Ngum River.

We studied, as Revised Scheme II, a smaller dam project instead of stage construction of the dam which is 10 meters lower than that in the original plan. It could generate 70,000 kilowatts in installed capacity, 4 units of 17,500 kilowatts each, at its goal instead of 120,000 kilowatts in the above Revised Scheme I. The installation of one unit of 17,500 kilowatts is considered for the first stage. With this initial installation, the power demand will be met for about 5 to 6 years according to our revised estimate of power demand as shown in this paper. The final capacity of 70,000 kilowatts will be able to meet the demand for 10 to 15 years.

Revised Scheme III is much smaller scale of development. It has a dam of 51 meters in height which is 15 meters smaller than that in the original plan. Under this scheme, it will be possible to generate 51,000 kilowatts in installed capacity at the ultimate stage. Of this total capacity, one unit of 17,000 kilowatts is planned for the initial stage. This power will meet the demand for only 4 to 5 years. And this project, even at the final development, could only meet the need

for the period of 7 to 12 years. In view of these facts, this scheme may not be so advisable though its initial cost is smaller than those in other schemes.

At the initial stage in the above three Schemes, only one generating unit is considered without installing any stand-by unit. This is the reason that in general the hydro-power may not need stand-by so often and the contemplated thermal power in Vientiane may serve as a stand-by to a certain degree when necessary. At present, the diesel power plant of 3,000 kilowatts capacity is under construction in Vientiane with Japanese aid and also another 1,000 kilowatts will go in soon with the aid of USA which is to be followed by additional 4,000 kilowatts in the very near future. By adding 3,000 kilowatts of present diesel power to these, it may be expected that around 10,000 kilowatts of diesel power will be made available in Vientiane within a few years. This may be considered as a stand-by power source for the Nam Ngum power.

The power rate may be determined properly on the basis of the generating cost and in comparison with a cost of possible alternative thermal power. Also it may be referred to a standard rate commonly adopted in this scale of consuming area. Choice of an adequate power rate will make it possible to reserve the fund necessary for future extension of the power plant as well as to ensure the amortization of capital.

Assuming that a loan with very low interest become available for this project under the spirit of economic aid towards Laos, for instance something like 3 per cent interest loan, the power cost for the above three schemes will be calculated as 1 to 1.2 US cents at

the first stage which may be decreased down to 0.4 to 0.7 US cent at the final.

In Laos, generating cost by alternative thermal power is estimated to be as high as 5 US cent per kilowatt-hour due to the high costs of imported fuel and its transportation. On the other hand, the power rate for the municipal uses in other countries averages 3 to 4 US cents in general. Based upon these figures, we have adopted rather low rate especially in the interest the people of this area and fixed at 3 US cents per kilowatt-hour at the beginning.

Thus, if measures are taken to accumulate the fund by starting at the power rate of 3 US cents and decreasing it to 2 and 1.5 US cents and further down to 1 US cent ultimately as demands increase in future, the successive investment for additional installations could be met by such accumulated fund from the sale of power.

Such accumulated fund will also make it possible to repay for the construction cost of irrigation system which can hardly be financed by itself, if the multi-purpose project of the Nam Ngum is operated under a same special authority to be organized by the Government. By doing so, this project will attain its self-financing.

The irrigation project was also revised so as to start with much smaller investment. For this purpose, we divided the priority area of 32,000 hectares into several smaller parts with an area of about 5,000 hectares. Thus these areas could be developed one by one as occasion demands.

For the first stage development, it is advisable to start in the area of 5,000 hectares in the south of Vientiane at the construction cost of 1.9 million US dollars.

The fund necessary for each of the three schemes are as follows:

	Revised Scheme-I	Revised Scheme-II	Revised Scheme-III
<u>Dam and power plant</u>			
Construction cost	17,400,000	16,800,000	15,200,000
Construction cost including interest during construction	18,220,000	17,610,000	15,910,000
Required fund	<u>18,220,000</u>	<u>17,610,000</u>	<u>17,010,000</u> ^{1/}
<u>Irrigation</u>			
Construction cost	1,900,000	1,900,000	1,900,000
Construction cost including interest during construction	1,970,000	1,970,000	1,970,000
Required fund	<u>1,970,000</u>	<u>1,970,000</u>	<u>1,970,000</u>
Total required fund (at peak time)	<u>20,190,000</u>	<u>19,580,000</u>	<u>18,980,000</u> ^{1/}
Foreign exchange	(13,650,000)	(13,040,000)	(12,760,000)
Local currency	(6,540,000)	(6,540,000)	(6,220,000)

Besides the above amount, 300,000 US dollars will be required for the initial investment in irrigation farming. This amount should be borne by the Government.

With the above fund, this project could be extended to its ultimate stage by self-financing as seen in Table 3, 4 and 5.

Revised Scheme-I could preserve the ultimate power potential of 120,000 kilowatts, while Revised Scheme-II and III will kill the power potential by 50,000 and 69,000 kilowatts respectively. Therefore, the supply period of power in the latter two schemes is shorter than that in the former scheme.

^{1/} Including additional fund of US\$1,100,000 as shown in Table 5.

However, since the Pa Mong Project on the main Mekong and the Nam Lik Project on the tributary of the Nam Ngum which is necessitated for the perfect flood control of the Nam Ngum would be realized in the near future, it may be expected that the power could be supplied from these sources. With this in view, the latter two schemes should also deserve consideration as alternative plans.

The results of comparative studies on the three Schemes are summarized in Table-1.

Laos Project
Paper No. 4

GEOGRAPHIC, DEMOGRAPHIC

AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND

ON

LAOS

[These papers are issued in a preliminary version for the scholarly community in the hope that they may elicit comments which may be incorporated in a subsequent revised version.]

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GEOGRAPHIC, DEMOGRAPHIC AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND ON LAOS

Geographic Setting

Land-locked in the center of Indochina is the Kingdom of Laos, hemmed in on the north by China, on the east by Vietnam, on the south by Cambodia, and on the west by Thailand and Burma.

In an area of approximately 91,000 square miles, or somewhat smaller than the state of Oregon or the British Isles, there dwell, according to the most optimistic estimates, only about thirty-three persons per square mile. In the most heavily populated area of Laos, the Mekong River plains along the Thai border, the population density may reach up to 180 per square mile. This figure is almost half that of the average for the whole of India or for a Thai village near Bangkok, as Tables 4 and 5 indicate. Compared to these areas, most of the Laos countryside is relatively empty. The topography of Laos provides a partial explanation, since most of the country is mountainous, particularly in the northern part.

The Annamite mountain chain forming the eastern frontier with Vietnam plays an important role in conditioning the climate of the country. There are two distinct seasons, a wet period from May through October, and a dry one from November through April.¹ About two-thirds of the 100-150 rainy days in a year occur in the rainy season. The amount of precipitation outside the wet season is only about twenty percent of the total annual rainfall. (Table 2). The rice crops in both the paddy fields and the upland clearings are, of course, dependent on this rainfall pattern.

Luang Prabang Province, along with most of northern Laos, is one of the drier areas of the country, receiving annually approximately 1000-2000 mm. (40-80 inches) of rainfall, while the Bolovens Plateau area in southern Laos has well over 150 inches of rainfall in its central portions. Recent years have been relatively dry, resulting in considerable difficulties for rice cultivation. During the height of the rainy season damage may be done to crops and overland transportation is rendered hazardous if not impossible. River transportation is improved due to the rise in the rivers (Table 3), and air travel is affected adversely to varying degrees.

Relative humidity is high, often reaching ninety percent even when it is not raining. During the wet season winds are predominantly from the southwest and during the dry season from the northeast. In late April, prior to the onset of the rains, temperatures reach the maximum for the year. Of course, they vary significantly with altitude and to a lesser degree with latitude.

Once the rains begin temperatures drop slightly, although the driest months of the year, January and February, are also the coolest. (Table 1). These winter months are frequently chilly in northern Laos, presenting a problem to all but the more prosperous inhabitants, many of whom lack adequate clothing and shiver around fires in the early morning and evening. There is a considerable incidence of pneumonia during this season.

From November to March the plains and valleys are foggy until late morning. In the area around the royal capital, a small basin surrounded by mountains, planes frequently cannot land until the haze burns off around noon. Some observers have linked an all-day haze from March through May to the burning of forest clearings which occur at this time. Although the fires are clearly visible and give off a fair amount of smoke, most geographers doubt that it is sufficient to have any real meteorological effects.

According to one recent writer Laos has a population density of 19 per square mile (7.3 per square kilometer), with eight percent of the land cultivated.² Comparing these facts with historical sources we find

that Reinach estimated the population density at 4.7 per square mile (1.8 per square kilometer) and stated that twelve percent of the land surface was cultivated with the possibility that one-third could be cultivated in the future. He felt that potentially the country could support a population density of 26-30 inhabitants per square mile (10-12 per square kilometer).³ Table 1 indicates that currently the population density of Laos ranges from 15 to 33 per square mile (6-13 per square kilometer) depending on the source used. Taking even the most modest present estimate of the population of Laos a minimum tripling of the population relative to the total land area in a little less than the past half century is indicated.

Another way of viewing population concentration is to compare the population density relative to the amount of arable land. Table 2 shows that Laos has the lowest density for any of the countries in Asia considered. The densely populated Mekong area is still less than the average for the Asian tropics. Thus despite the three-fold increase Laos still remains one of the most sparsely settled countries in Asia. Although Reinach's prediction appears to have been overfulfilled it is still hard to visualize Laos as being crowded from any point of view.

Demography

Commenting on the demography of Laos is a complicated undertaking in view of the fact that few of the available statistics are completely reliable. No complete official census has ever been undertaken.⁴ Those figures that do exist have been collected largely by untrained local officials. These form the basis of the statistics collected by the French colonial administration, and many French sources specifically emphasize their limited reliability.⁵

At the time when Laos was a French colony one of the chief uses for these figures was for tax rolls. Obviously such figures should be interpreted with extreme caution, but this does not mean that they are completely useless provided a certain internal consistency exists and the figures follow a logical trend. As a further check, in certain cases, it is also possible to compare data from Laos with analogous areas in neighboring Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia.

A principal motivation for undertaking the present study is that since Laos is one of the least known countries in the world it is hoped that bringing together in one place various bits of information from scattered sources may at least provide a point of departure for future studies of the population.

The basic place to begin is with an examination of the total population of Laos in historical perspective. Fortunately there exists a study by Pietrantoni which does an excellent job of summarizing all of the information available until 1943. According to Pietrantoni, the only figures for the population of Laos prior to the establishment of the French Protectorate is the census of King Oun Huan, son of the famous Fa Ngoum, traditional founder of the Kingdom of Lan Xang. It was undertaken in 1376, and recorded 300,000 Lao-Thai males between 18 and 60 years of age and 400,000 non-Thai. From this a population total of 3 million inhabitants can be derived, but it is of limited utility for comparison with figures of our era because we do not know the precise boundaries of the kingdom at that time. These figures are also obviously very approximate, and there is doubtless a wide margin of error. But from what is known of the relatively complex political organization existing at that time, it seems reasonable to assume that a population of approximately this order of magnitude existed in the general area now occupied by the Kingdom of Laos.⁶

In 1900 the publication Notice Sur le Laos Francais, published in Hanoi, gives a population of 470,000 for an area of 267,000 square kilometers, which is probably equivalent to 400,000 for the 225,000 square kilometer area of Laos in 1912, the date of the first official figures. A guide of 1910 gives the population at 548,000. These figures are summarized in Table 9.

Comparing the growth of the Laos population from 1917-1957 and with the rest of the world for 1920-1956 (Tables 10 and 11) we see that although the figures for Laos are high they are by no means unmatched by those of other areas; the close correspondence between Laos and Cambodia in Table 11A is particularly striking, although this cannot be cited as proof of the accuracy of the Laos figures. In any case, from what we know of population dynamics in predominantly agricultural and tropical countries analogous to Laos, it seems logical to suppose that the population grew at an increasing rate under French control. There are several reasons for making this assumption. First, even if the birth rate remained constant during the more than half century of French rule, it was a period of relative peace and Laos was free of the debilitating wars with Thailand and her other neighbors, which had taken such a toll of the population, particularly during the early 19th century when the Thai decimated Vientiane and removed a large portion of the population of that area to the other bank of the Mekong.

In addition the French established a health service. Even assuming that it was not too effective on the local village level, particularly among the scattered mountain peoples, still hospitals and clinics were established in the major towns, and large numbers of rural patients were treated and inoculation campaigns begun, doubtless affecting the death rate, especially in those relatively densely populated plains surrounding the major towns. The large scale malarial spraying campaign currently being conducted by the government of Laos should also have a significant effect on population increase, since malaria appears to be a major cause of death. Similar developments have been documented for other areas since World War II where DDT spraying dramatically decreased the death rate from malaria.

Table 7 gives the provincial breakdown for the periods available. It can be seen that the various provinces have increased rather unequally. For example, Nam Tha has grown by a factor of less than 4, while Saravane has increased over 10-fold. This may reflect a change in provincial boundaries, as is obviously the case with Luang Prabang, or the fact that the more easily accessible (to the government official) and larger Lao villages constitute a greater proportion of the population in one province than in another. It would be risky, however, to attempt to read too much into these figures.

The problems of using Lao statistical materials are well illustrated in Table 8 which provides a breakdown of the population by provinces and districts in the post-war period. Even excluding the three northern provinces for which insufficient information is available only half the provinces listed seem to show a pattern of inconsistent increase. For example, in Saravane some Muong figures are higher in 1956 than in 1960; such a development is possible but does not appear likely. In the case of Attopeu certain districts are identical for varying years while others show a third increase. The situation is summed up in Table 8A where figures for seven selected villages for 1955 and 1958 are compared. In certain cases predictable increase has occurred while in others there are random increases or decreases most likely reflecting the individual temperaments and abilities of village chiefs and the extent to which they wished or were able to comply with government requests for population estimates.

In Table 6 some significant relationships can be established. There is a noticeable variation between the hilly northern provinces and the central and southern ones, the latter having considerable (for Laos)

rice-bearing plains bordering on the Mekong. The former have for the most part less than 6 persons per square kilometer, while in the latter we get figures as high as 10 and 12 in 1958. Pietrantoni documents this distinction in great detail. In Muong Thakhek, Khammouane Province, he finds a density of 21 per square kilometer, 14 in Muong Pakse, Champassac Province, as contrasted with 2.6 for the whole of Nam Tha or 2.4 for Phong Saly.⁷ It should be noted that even these highest figures fall short of the 69 (180 per square mile) cited for certain areas of the Mekong plain in Table 4. Although the population density appears to have increased about 50 percent in the past 15 years, the relative distribution by provinces appears to have remained approximately the same.

Tables 14 and 15 clearly show that this population distribution by provinces which has been maintained historically is also closely correlated with village size. Thus the most densely populated provinces also have the largest villages. These differences are particularly striking in comparing Vientiane, Attopeu and Xieng Khouang: in the case of Xieng Khouang 88 percent of the population is concentrated in villages of less than 200 inhabitants, while in Vientiane only 42 percent of the population is found there. In Xieng Khouang only 10 villages are listed as having a population of over 300 or less than 1 percent of the total compared to over 13 percent for Vientiane. Vientiane, Savannakhet and Champassac all have average village populations of over 200, and they are also the three most densely populated provinces with densities of over 8.5 persons per square kilometer. Similarly, Khammouane, Nam Tha, Phong Saly, Sam Neua and Luang Prabang all have a population density of less than 6 and an average village size of less than 130 persons. (Table 22).

If we look at the ethnic composition of the first group of provinces, we see that all are at least 80 percent Lao-Tai, while in the second group only Khammouane has a majority of Lao-Tai in its population (Phong Saly and Sam Neua have practically no Lao villages, although they do have some Tai. See Table 31 for an ethnic breakdown of Phong Saly Province, and Table 27 for data on Sam Neua).

Ethnic Background

Two salient geographic facts -- the sparse, scattered population and the mountainous terrain -- are most forcibly impressed on the traveler making a plane trip north from the administrative capital of Vientiane to the royal capital at Luang Prabang. Circling over Vientiane one sees the town stretched out along the Mekong, surrounded by rice fields with occasional small patches of forest. Leaving the Mekong plain the land abruptly changes to rugged mountains cut by narrow valleys. Looking closely at the settlement pattern below, the observer will see what almost amounts to a textbook illustration of ethnic stratification and economic-geographic adaptation to the land based on varying degrees of altitude. The major ethnic groups inhabiting the mountains and valleys of Laos and their customary altitudes of habitation are summarized in Tables 16 and 20.⁸

Lao officials divide the inhabitants of the country into four groups: Lao-Lum, or valley Lao; Lao-Tai or tribal Tai⁹; Lao-Theng or Lao of the mountain sides (instead of the derogatory term Kha); and Lao-Soung, or Lao of the mountain tops (Meo and Yao). Implicit here is an attempt to emphasize the unity of the country. These terms, however, are largely political and the important cultural differences remain.¹⁰

Although the Lao and tribal Tai belong to the same general language group and share a common origin in China there are important differences. Some scholars have claimed that the tribal Tai are representatives of an earlier form of social organization out of which the Thai (of Thailand) and Lao evolved. The tribal Tai of whom perhaps the most important group in Lao are the Black Tai are patrilineal, with a belief revolving around ancestral dieties, and there are also hereditary elite families in the villages.

At one time they were organized into petty kingdoms. The last of these collapsed after the Second World War. By contrast the Lao and their associated sub-groups are bilateral in their social structure, Buddhist, and without hereditary class groups within the village. Unfortunately there is insufficient information available for us to draw a rigid distinction between Thai-Lao and tribal-Tai. For example, the Tai Lu in the area of Muong Sing bear many resemblances to the neighboring Tai Dam but unlike the latter are Buddhists (although they have not been so for very long).

The Lao-Theng or Kha is the general name applied to the very diverse group of indigenous inhabitants who lack both a writing system and formalized political organizations beyond the village. Those few who are Buddhists have adopted the faith of the Lao relatively recently, a few have become Christians, but the majority are animists. In contrast to both the Lao and tribal Tai whose economy is based largely on irrigated rice, the Kha cultivate slash-and-burn fields.

The Meo and Yao, although culturally distinct groups, share in common a number of important cultural traits. Like the Kha they are slash-and-burn agriculturists in most cases, but their distinction lies in the fact that they dwell high in the mountains and raise opium as a cash crop. Both Meo and Yao have strong patriarchal influences in family and village organization and share a common origin in China, from which they migrated relatively recently. Literacy in Chinese is also fairly widespread among these groups. Their religion has certain strong Confucianist and animistic influences. Their dress is a further distinguishing feature (Table 21A).

Migrations and Distribution

In general the Lao live along the rivers and in the valleys, and the Tai live in higher valleys. The Meo and Yao inhabit the mountains from about 600 to 1,800 meters while Lao-Theng groups are irregularly distributed in between on mountain slopes.¹¹ Reconstructing the patterns of migrations the Khmu and other proto-Indochinese groups appear to have originally been widely distributed in both the mountains and plains. About eight centuries ago the valley dwelling, wet rice cultivating Lao-Thai appeared in Laos, migrating south in response to the expanding pressures of the Han Chinese.¹² Later (largely during the past few centuries), the Meo and the Yao tribes moved in from Yunnan and Tonkin engaging in shifting cultivation. The current ethnic stratification, then, does not have very great historical depth.

In the northern part of Laos the Tai and Lao¹³ are distributed along the Mekong and its tributaries. In the eastern part of Indochina the Tai are found in the vicinity of the Tonkin plain and thence inland, while the Tai Dam and Tai Kao live in the highlands and to the south are found the Tai Deng.¹⁴

The Tai Dam and Tai Kao are located to the north and east of Sam Neua in the former 4th Military Territory of Indochina. Generally speaking the Tai Kao inhabit the north of this territory and are not an important ethnic group in Laos while the Tai Dam are found in the southern part particularly in the area of Dien Bien Phu located only a few miles from Phong Saly.¹⁵

The Tai Neua or northern Tai inhabit the Mekong valley from Vang Vieng to Sam Neua and part of that of the Salween. In 1918 they were estimated to number 600,000.¹⁶ Up to recent times there are said to have existed 28 Tai Neua districts some of which are felt to overlap with the Tai Lu of Sip Song Pan Na.

The Tai Lu, called by the Chinese Pa-vi or Shui Pa-vi¹⁷, inhabit the twelve Pan Nas ("countries" according to Seidenfaden and not 12,000 paddy fields), eleven of which are situated on the West bank of the Mekong. The twelfth is Muong Sing in Laos. Outside the Sip Song Pan Na there are many Tai La groups in places such as Chieng Tung in Burma, in North Thailand at Chieng Rai and Lamphun and in Laos in the Nam Ou valley near Luang Prabang. The Lu of Lamphun are the descendants of prisoners of war taken 150 years ago when a Thai army invaded Chieng Tung in Yunnan. There are also a few hundred Lu in northern Tonkin. In 1918 they were estimated to have numbered over 350,000 in the Chinese owned Pan Nas, with 50,000 in Chieng Tung and including those in Thailand and Laos they may at present easily number over 750,000, or almost equal to the number of Lao in Laos.

The Khmu are located mainly in the western part of northern Laos, up to the Nam Leng, a tributary of the Nam Ou which joins the Mekong a few miles north of Luang Prabang. The Khmu of the Nam Leng mark the northern limit of the Khmu on Lao territory with the exception of those in the area of Muong Sing.¹⁸ They are particularly numerous in the mountainous areas between Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang.

The Meo are distributed sporadically in northern Laos from Yunnan south to Phou Khao Quai¹⁹ but are concentrated mainly in Xieng Khouang. The Yao are found in relatively large numbers in the northern part of the Tonkin plain and in the mountains to the west, and in Laos they are located chiefly in southwestern Sam Neua, around Nam Tha town, northwestern Phong Saly and to a lesser extent in the Luang Prabang and Vang Vieng areas, as well as in northern Thailand. Their distribution is irregular and their villages are scattered.²⁰

The Lao are thought to constitute about fifty percent of the total population of Laos (see Tables 22 and 23). In any case, they are the dominant group politically, economically and socially. Their religious, linguistic and other cultural affiliations are with the Lao of Northeast Thailand. A handbook on Thailand published by the Thai government on the occasion of the Ninth Pacific Congress in 1957 makes the following statement about the Lao:

"The Lao differ but little from the Thai, and are in reality as much Thai as are the Thai. The Lao do not call themselves Lao but Thai.²¹ The Lao of Thailand are divided into two divisions: the Lao of northern Thailand or Lao Phung Dam, and the Lao of eastern Thailand, or Lao Phung Khao. (Black-bellied and White-bellied Lao)."

The terms refer to the fact that the men of the former are closely tattooed from waistline to mid-thighs; this tattooing is absent in the latter.²²

"The Northern Lao inhabit the whole of Northern Thailand...In addition to the name Lao Phung Dam they are frequently called by their neighbors Lao Yuen or Thai Yuen. The Eastern Lao occupy a great part of the Khorat Plateau and the valley of the Mae Khong [Mekong]. There are also scattered communities of both these Lao divisions in Lower Thailand..."

"The Eastern Lao can be divided into two language groups: the Lao Wienchau [Vientiane] and the Lao Kao... most of the population of the three provinces of Prachin, Krabin and Nakhon Nayok are Lao Wiengchan, all originally prisoners of war deported to these districts just one hundred years ago...²³

"The dialectic difference between Lao Wiengchan and Lao Kao is not great, but quite distinct to an observant ear."²⁴

Thus it becomes quite clear that the distinctions between the neighboring peoples of Laos and Thailand are largely political. This is true of the tribal groups as well as the Lao. (Table 64). Movements due to warfare are significant (there have been similar types of movements within Laos), although economic conditions can also be persuasive. But in both cases the movement is almost always southward. This applies to all major ethnic groups.²⁵

Klausner (1959) observes with regard to the Northeast Thai-Lao that villages migrated as units after first sending some responsible citizens to scout out the possibilities. The Lao village in terms of its agricultural economy is also not too stable a unit, at least when the matter is viewed in terms of fifty years or more (Table 18A); the tribal villages are even less so, since they move every few decades. It can be truly said that almost none of the rural villages in Laos are really permanent. The few villages in the Vientiane area that have existed for several centuries are rare exceptions. Some change every few dozen years, although generally speaking the Lao and Black Tai²⁶ tend to be more permanent than the Meo or Khmu because of the former's dependence on irrigated rice culture.²⁷ This mobility of the population has been a major obstacle confronting potential map-makers and census takers as well as government planners.

Ethnic Composition

It is certainly clear that a most important fact concerning Laos is the ethnic composition of her population. In recent years it has become quite common when discussing the problems of Laos to assert that the lowland Lao who control the government are not even a clear majority in their own country, and that at least half of the people belong to tribal groups. Unfortunately, it is not possible on the basis of currently available information to furnish any detailed documentation on this point, but the figures given in Tables 22-32 illustrate something of the complexities involved. Table 22 is incomplete since it omits the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly, which at the time of compilation were under Communist control.

One of the major complications is that the Lao and Tai are listed together and not broken down into separate categories as they were in the statistics issued during the period of French rule (see Tables 23-32). The political motivation for this is obvious since it places the Lao in a more favorable position. Yet on a personal basis the Lao sharply distinguish themselves from the Tai groups, although without question they consider themselves to be more closely related to the Tai peoples than to the Lao-Theng or Meo-Yao groups. As we have indicated, there are important differences between the Lao and various Tai groups in customs, religion and family structure, although some of the latter are Buddhists. The various Tai groups also had their own political hierarchies which were not integrated with those of the Lao. In fact, for the most part their origin lies in North Vietnam, and without question some of the Tai peoples now residing in Laos feel themselves strongly drawn in that direction.²⁸ This feeling is intensified by the fact that although some Tai do occupy government positions, they feel themselves to be discriminated against. It is also interesting that the inhabitants of the Tai Dam refugee villages in the area of the towns of Vientiane and Luang Prabang appear to have integrated themselves into Laotian society after the pattern of the Vietnamese rather than the Lao. For example, they have become craftsmen, vegetable gardeners, petty traders and domestic servants, occupations approximating those of the resident Vietnamese. These particular groups are for the most part not Buddhist and share certain ritual observances with the Vietnamese.

Even assuming the Lao-Tai to be a homogeneous group, we can see in Table 22 that they are in a clear majority in only 6 of the 10 provinces of Laos listed. Examining Table 23 we are able to check these figures comparatively and at the same time achieve some historical perspective. As has been repeatedly emphasized, all Lao statistics should be treated with some caution, yet they do show a significant degree of internal consistency. Thus the proportions of the total population in each of the major ethnic groupings has remained relatively unchanged in the period 1911-1942. In 1911 the Lao were 45 percent of the total population and in 1942 they were 44 percent; the Kha were 32 and 30 percent and the Tai were 19 and 17 percent for the respective years. Only the Meo-Yao seem to have more than doubled from 2 to 5 percent over the forty year interval (Table 23). In this latter case there is a very plausible explanation -- many groups may have migrated south into Laos from neighboring China and North Vietnam over this period, following earlier trends. In fact, based on the questioning of contemporary groups there appears to have been a migratory trend from the bordering provinces of the north into Luang Prabang, and subsequently into Sayaboury and Vientiane.

It is possible to see some deliberate attempt at manipulation here, but this would seem to be inconsistent with the idea of haphazardly collected statistics. Certainly on the local level, the village or district officials would have had to preserve some records in order to know what they were manipulating, and judging from the situation existing today there does not appear to be much support for this view. On the national level, the French administrators would have had to engage in keeping two sets of books. Although there are many things of which the French as a colonial power may have been guilty, this does not appear to be one of them. Their failing appears to be more on the side of laxness in keeping statistics and emphasis on the European and métis population for which, in contrast to the other inhabitants of Laos, detailed records exist. Yet, since tax assessments were based on these records, there was considerable motivation for some sort of accuracy.

Trying to assess the validity of the proportions expressed for 1942-1955 presents a number of difficulties. There can be noted interestingly enough, a spectacular jump in the Lao-Tai category from 61 to 74 percent and a decrease in the Kha figure, with the Meo-Yao statistics remaining more or less constant. This reflects the absence of Phong Saly and Sam Neua from the 1955 calculations. Fortunately there are detailed statistics available for Sam Neua for 1936 (Table 27), which indicates a Tai population of approximately 68 percent, rather close to the Lao-Tai average for all of Laos of 74 percent for 1955 (based on the maximum population estimate), so that we may roughly assume that the omission of this one province would not have made a great difference in the overall average, if the percentage composition of the population had not greatly altered in the intervening nineteen years. But in this case it must be remembered that the "Lao-Tai" are actually tribal Tai; there are virtually no Lao in the province. This leaves Phong Saly, whose population was estimated at about 50,000 in 1955, or approximately 4 percent of the total population of Laos. (Table 31).²⁹ We must therefore look elsewhere for an explanation of the increase in the Lao-Tai component of the population of Laos.

Table 24 gives us some help, but we must be cautious in assessing the figures since the Tai column includes proto-Indochinese groups such as the Souei, which in provinces such as Saravane constitute over 12 percent of the population. The Lao category, even though it is augmented by the Tai-lu, provides valuable help. Let us try to see specifically those areas in which the ethnic valley-Lao total significantly more than half the total population and constitute a definite majority. In Table 23 we see that in 1942 in the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, which included much of northern Laos (principally Luang Prabang and Nam Tha Provinces) they constituted only 35 percent of the population. In a survey conducted by the French authorities in 1950 in Sayaboury Province, the Lao composed only 25 percent of the population in Hong Sa district and 40 percent in Pak Lay (Table 30).

Together these two districts constitute the majority of the province accounting for 229 and 166 villages respectively out of a 1954 total of 523, or about 75 percent, while the 1960 census figures give 76 percent for Lao-Tai groups in the province. These sets of figures would incline us to treat with some reserve the Lao-Tai percentages given for these provinces in Table 22. Table 25 provides an extensive sample of the population of Xieng Khouang. The Meo figures are almost identical to those in Table 22 and one is inclined to doubt that they are complete for the larger population given in this table, since the population of the major towns appears to be excluded from Table 25. Turning to Table 32 we see that in Nam Tha province the Lao are not significant. In Muong Sing district they constitute only the officials and their families, while the Tai (principally Lu) are 37 percent of the population. In Nam Tha and Houei Sai districts the Lao are 2 and 6 percent respectively, while the Tai are 44 and 40 percent. In Sam Neua we have already seen that no Lao are listed, while the Tai form approximately 68 percent of the population (Table 27). In Saravane (Table 28) the Lao are 43 percent of the population, while Table 24 lists only 30 percent of the population as Lao-Tai in Attopeu (see also Table 29). This leaves the Provinces of Khammouane, Vientiane³⁰, Champassac, and to a lesser extent Savannakhet as predominantly Lao. It is only in Vientiane Province that the non-Lao-Tai peoples constitute a negligible minority.

It is not without significance that with the exception of the Province of Khammouane, all of the provinces bordering on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and People's Republic of China contain only a minority of Lao. This fact has made guerrilla and probing tactics such as occurred during the summer of 1959 much easier for the DRV since the same tribal groups are found on both sides of the border. In the civil war in 1960-1961 the question of Vietnamese infiltration has not been successfully answered (tribal or non-tribal), nor of Siamese Thai for the Royal Government.

Another important factor is underestimation of the population. The villages of the tribal peoples are much smaller and more scattered over mountainous terrain than the larger settlements of the Lao located in the valleys. Table 22 indicates that Vientiane is 99 percent Lao-Tai, while Xieng Khouang is 40 percent Meo-Yao, and Attopeu is 70 percent Kha. That is, the difference in village size on an ethnic basis (Table 14) reflects the different geographic adaptations and land use. The Lao practicing irrigated rice agriculture are able to have the largest, most permanent villages, while the Meo who live on the mountain tops appear to have the smallest and least permanent, with the Kha occupying an intermediate position in terms of geography, population and permanence. Tables 33-38 tend to confirm this generalization. In Luang Prabang Province Meo villages of 200 or 300 do occur but are rare, while those with over 100 inhabitants are not unusual, in marked contrast to the pattern of Lao and even Lao-Theng villages. An important factor not brought out in these figures is the occasional proximity of Meo villages to each other. For the most part they do appear to be widely scattered in Luang Prabang, but certain ecological factors may cause concentrations. Thus on a plateau several hours' walk from Luang Prabang town there are estimated to be some 3,000 Meo living in villages with as many as 80-90 houses each. This clustering is due at least in part to the fact that the soil has a high lime content, making it good for growing opium. By contrast, Lao villages of 500-1,000 population are by no means unusual in Vientiane Province (12 percent of the rural population) although they are less likely to occur in the north. It is also pertinent to note (Table 13) that the average size of villages in Laos has increased almost 50 percent in the past half-century, although exactly how this has affected the different minority groups it is impossible to say in any precise way. One might infer, however, that since the Lao villages are nearest the growing towns and are being reached to an increasing extent by roads, that these trade contacts may have tended to promote population concentrations. Therefore it is likely that the average size of the Lao villages has grown to a greater extent than those of the mountain peoples. It is likely, however,

that at least some Meo villages such as those on the Xieng Khouang plateau have shown increases.

The smaller size, scattering and hence greater inaccessibility of non-Lao villages are implicitly acknowledged in the official five-year development plan of the Lao government. There is considered to have been an underestimation of some 15 percent for certain poorly administered areas: the Provinces of Phong Saly, Vientiane, Savannakhet and Khammouane, and 20 percent for Saravane and Champassac, with 40 percent for Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Nam Tha and Sam Neua. Taking the census of 1936, one then obtains a corrected figure of 1,247,000 instead of 1,018,000 for 1936; 1,562,000 instead of 1,309,400 for 1951, and 1,708,000 instead of 1,575,450 for 1957. If one takes the electoral lists, composed of approximately 840,000 persons, an even higher figure for the total population appears reasonable -- perhaps 1,700,000 inhabitants. The report concludes that a population of 2,000,000 is a reasonable estimate on which to base the 1958-63 plan. This assumes an annual increase rate of 1.5 percent, which is considerably less than that of 2.03 estimated for the most recent period (Table 6).³¹

This official source also states (apparently quoting a French source for the census of 1936) that the Lao-Tai were underestimated by a factor of approximately 15 percent, while for the proto-Indochinese (Kha or Indonesians as they are referred to in the report) it is 40 percent, and for the Meo 50 percent. Applying these figures to the proportions given in the 1942 census and extrapolating to a census figure of 2,000,000, we arrive at a figure of 820,000 (40 percent) for the Lao, 320,000 (16 percent) for the various Tai peoples, 680,000 (34 percent) for the proto-Indochinese and 100,000 (9 percent) for the Meo-Yao. These figures are exclusive of other groups such as the Vietnamese, Chinese and Europeans, who dwell in the towns. In fact, in most cases the Lao appear to be definitely a minority in the towns demographically speaking, e.g. Pakse with its large Chinese and Vietnamese groups, while in Vientiane, in addition to sizeable communities of these two groups, there also appears to be more immigrants from across the river in Thailand than from Laos proper. According to Pietrantonio (1957: 230) in 1943 the Lao made up 61 percent of the population of Luang Prabang town and only 41.5 percent in Vientiane, with 16, 14, 10 and 11 percent in Savannakhet, Pakse, Xieng Khouang and Thakhek respectively (Table 58).

Ethnically and linguistically speaking the point can be made as far as the rural and urban areas are concerned that Laos has no characteristic population groups that cannot be found in greater numbers in neighboring states. A glance at Tables 65-74 shows that far greater numbers of Meo and Yao reside in North Vietnam and China than in Laos. A similar point can be made with regard to the Tai peoples. The Lao population of Northeast Thailand amounts to approximately 7 million, and of the Northern region some 5 million. There exists a mild Lao irredentism. More important perhaps is the fact that the Thai have annexed parts of Laos when France was weak, e.g. Sayaboury during World War II. As we have seen in the various tables, the Kha constitute a great many individual tribal units. These groups also overlap into North and South Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand (Table 64).

Although it is of great significance that there are ethnic overlappings with North Vietnam and China, without doubt the most significant cultural relationships are with the Lao of Thailand. The borders with China and North Vietnam are in mountainous country that can be crossed but with difficulty, while the Mekong which marks the Thai-Lao border for much of its length is in no sense an obstacle since the Lao are a riverine people. In fact it encourages contact since the Lao like to fish and traverse the river to trade. Cultural differences between the Lao on the one hand and the Chinese and Vietnamese on the other are strongly felt. There are differences in language, religion, ethos and food habits.

During the current civil war the Royal Lao government has talked darkly of "foreign" soldiers who use chopsticks and eat non-glutinous rice -- an oblique way of referring to the Vietnamese.

The increasing population pressures generated by the Han Chinese (Table 68) provide part of the explanation for the Thai-Lao migrations which culminated in the founding of the Thai capital of Ayuthaya in 1350. During the preceding century there was a legendary migration of Thai-Lao people along the Nam Ou river to the present site of Luang Prabang.³² This was an end result of a long series of southward migrations (Wiens: 1954, 113). During the pre-Chou period (approximately prior to 1000 B.C.) there appears to have been a belt of Thai people on the north bank of the Yangtze. Tattooing being a trait which has characterized the Lao people up to the present time, some scholars feel that it may serve as an indication of the presence of Thai peoples in China. During the Han period (200 B.C.-200 A.D.) tattooed people were found scattered over much of southern China except Yunnan and Kueichou. Their absence from these areas probably indicates that they had not yet migrated to these regions. The general picture presented by the historical records is that of a migration of related Thai peoples, first eastward from Szechwan, then south, and again west and southwest. These migrations are still continuing, the latest arrivals being groups of tribal Tai peoples who have crossed into northern Laos from Yunnan, fleeing the Chinese commune system.³³

A similar situation occurred with regard to the Meo. During the last 500 or 600 years the Meo have been subjected to pressures by the Han Chinese, who have steadily forced them into marginal and mountainous areas and also pushed them southward. The Chinese undertook campaigns against the Meo in 1698, 1732, 1794 and 1855. This warfare resulted in a series of movements by the Meo, one of which was to the eastern part of Yunnan and northern parts of Vietnam and Laos. As indicated earlier, large numbers of Meo and Yao have entered Laos since the beginning of this century. This fact is further confirmed by the present population estimates for the various ethnic groups. The other ethnic groups have approximately tripled since 1911, while the Meo have increased over six-fold. Even discounting the degree of underestimation and confining ourselves to the official figures for 1911 and 1942, we see that in that period the Meo-Yao group more than tripled, while none of the other groups even doubled.

Urban Population

So far we have confined our discussion to the rural population of Laos. An important indication of a country's social, economic or cultural development is its extent of urbanization. A glance at Table 52 clearly shows that Laos is one of the least urbanized areas in Asia even by the most generous estimates (within the definition laid down in the table). Yet it would be quite wrong to assume that the rest of Laos outside of Vientiane is composed only of villages, with a few "overgrown villages" forming the provincial capitals. This is definitely not true in certain specific cases. The royal capital of Luang Prabang -- the official residence of the King -- is certainly not a large village as its population of some 7,600 might lead one to infer. It has a long history as an administrative center, and the fact that it is also the residence of the chief Buddhist monk of Laos emphasizes its importance as a religious center. Luang Prabang has paved streets, a power plant, hospital and airfield. In addition to its administrative personnel there is a significant population of Chinese and Vietnamese who are engaged in commerce and crafts. Clearly, although the town is a major trading center, only a minority of the population is engaged in agriculture.

Although there is no other town in Laos that has the religious or ceremonial importance of Luang Prabang, there are several other towns that are administrative and commercial centers.

If 5,000 is set as a minimum population figure, we can include Savannakhet, Pakse and Thakhek in this category.³⁴ This raises the question as to how to classify the remaining provincial capitals and towns of lesser importance. Table 49 presents a list of 44 communities which are classified as towns. In reality most of them are minor administrative centers (muongs) containing, in many cases, the residence of the Chao Muong or district administrator, a lower court, a police post, a six-year school, perhaps an army company and a practical nurse and usually a few Chinese merchants. With the exception of Nam Tha, Sam Neua, Phong Saly, and possibly Attoupeu, where the only Lao are the officials, most of the others are Lao villages where the majority of the inhabitants are farmers with trading sometimes a secondary occupation. Many of these towns, particularly in the south, have road connections, and some are located along rivers; those which are not accessible in these ways in many cases have a landing strip which can be used during the dry season. As provincial capitals Attoupeu, Nam Tha, Phong Saly, Sam Neua and Sayaboury would fit in this category. They are distinguished from other secondary towns in that they have regular air service (at least during the dry season), usually a post and telegraph office and often a larger military garrison. There may be other towns in the province which have an equal or greater commercial importance, e.g. Houei Sai in Nam Tha province. By even the most generous estimates 90 percent of the population of Laos are peasants or tribesmen living in rural area, engaged in agriculture or related occupations. Considering that a number of areas usually included in counting the population of the towns are predominantly rural in character, it would seem safe to assume that about 95 percent of the people of Laos are either primarily or exclusively farmers, making it one of the most rural countries in the world.

The overwhelming importance of the Mekong is clearly demonstrated by the fact that all of the important cities of Laos are located along its banks from the trading post of Houei Sai in the north through Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Thakhek, Savannakhet to Pakse in the south. Those towns located in non-Lao areas such as Sam Neua, Phong Saly, Nam Tha, Xieng Khouang and Attoupeu are all distinctly of secondary importance. The only town that does not fit into this clearly marked dichotomy is Sayaboury, but the river town of Pak Lay is almost as large even though it lacks the administrative apparatus of a provincial capital. French administrators have, of course, strongly influenced the development of these towns and they are largely responsible for the creation of Thakhek and Savannakhet.

Within the last thirty years most of these towns have about doubled, approximating the increase in the population of Laos as a whole (Tables 50 and 51). Vientiane, which has approximately quadrupled, is the outstanding exception. In this case it is apparent that most of the growth has occurred since the end of the Second World War and the emergence of Laos as a nation. The large scale American aid program, by encouraging urban businesses and subsidizing the growth of government bureaus, the army and police, has greatly contributed to the growth of Vientiane and other towns as well. Not too surprisingly Luang Prabang was the most significant town in Laos at the beginning of the century when it was more than twice the size of Vientiane. If instead of the Census Bureau's estimate of 11,000, we accept the figure of 7,596 (subsequently obtained by the provincial office of this bureau in the royal capital), it appears that its population has remained remarkably stable during the last half century. This cannot be said for towns such as Xieng Khouang, Savannakhet and Saravane, which have grown from villages, in some cases increasing more than twenty-fold. In Table 51 we note that with the exception of Vientiane the towns in the other two provinces for which comparable figures are available appeared to have increased at a somewhat slower rate than the population as a whole.

The ethnic composition of the towns is clearly shown in Table 58.³⁵ The most outstanding fact emerging from these tables is that the towns of Laos are predominantly non-Lao in ethnic composition, an exception being

Luang Prabang where 61 percent were Lao in 1943. But if the predominantly rural areas usually included within the town limits were excluded, it is likely that the percentage of Lao would fall even lower. In any case, in 1943 approximately 30 percent of the "urban" population (in terms of the towns listed in Table 58) was Lao, the remainder being predominantly Vietnamese and Chinese. When comparing the growth of the Chinese and Vietnamese communities between 1921 and 1943 with the increase in the population of Laos as a whole, we find some impressive differences. In these 22 years the population of the country as a whole did not quite double according to the official figures, yet the population of the Chinese increased from approximately 500 to 4,000, or by a factor of 8, while the Vietnamese increased from some 4,100 to 30,700, or more than 7 times. The total gain was approximately 30,000 for both groups during this period. This population alone is almost sufficient to account for the total growth of the major towns during part of this period as given in Table 50. Although not all of these people settled in the major towns it is safe to assume that most of them did, since the Chinese came principally as merchants, petty traders and in some cases as coolies, while the Vietnamese came as craftsmen, gardeners, and many were recruited by the French to serve as technicians and administrators of various kinds.

Between 1943 and 1959 a number of important changes have occurred, but unfortunately statistics for comparison are not available. We must attempt to ascertain the situation indirectly. Among the more significant has been the departure of a large number of Vietnamese, particularly those who were in government service, since Laos gained her independence. As colonial administrators the Vietnamese were very much resented by the Lao. This feeling has a strong traditional basis, since the Lao both fear and distrust the more aggressive Vietnamese. Others who worked as truck-gardeners in the area of Vientiane also left. A number of them were Catholics and the deserted churches in some of the villages around Vientiane testify to this fact. It should be noted, however, that this loss was not a total one, since a number stayed on. Also, with the recent growth of Vientiane a number of Vietnamese have emigrated from overcrowded Saigon and set up small businesses or found jobs in the various service trades. In 1957 approximately 120 more Vietnamese were entering Laos each month than were leaving, so that one could estimate the annual increase by immigration at about 1,500.³⁶

The situation for the Chinese is somewhat different since, unlike the Vietnamese, they were not involved in the government. They prospered greatly in commerce, as the increase in their population attests. According to Table 58 there was an increase of over seven-fold in the Chinese population in the sixteen years between 1943 and 1959, or proportionately equivalent to the increase which had taken place in the preceding 31 years. Beyond doubt the Chinese population did increase but it would be unwise to give to these figures an absoluteness they do not merit. Many Chinese migrated to Laos after World War II. They came from a number of places for a variety of reasons. First, a significant number of soldiers and officers of the Chinese Nationalist Army crossed over into Laos from Yunnan after the occupation of that area by the Communists. Many of these men settled in various towns particularly in the north, established businesses and often married Lao women, since there were few eligible Chinese. Another source of Chinese immigrants has been the cities of Hong Kong, Saigon and Bangkok. Many of them were attracted to Laos by the lure of profits to be made as a result of the commercial boom indirectly fostered by the American aid program. Although easy money was no longer to be made in 1959 and 1960 as it was in 1956 and 1957, many of them have stayed on.

Tables 59-60 provide further information on the Chinese and Vietnamese. It should be noted that in 1953 Laos had not yet assumed de facto control of her own administration, so that many Vietnamese probably left after that date. Today Vientiane remains an important center for both groups, and the Vietnamese as well as Chinese communities in towns such as Pakse and Savannakhet are still strong. One of the difficulties in

evaluating Table 61 is that the Chinese and Vietnamese communities³⁷ are composed not only of foreign born individuals, but also of many people who were born in Laos. This fact is not made evident in the official statistics.³⁸

The Indian population, composed mostly of cloth merchants, has grown from 6 individuals in 1912 to some 957 in 1958. French and Americans also figure appreciably in the Lao urban population. It was estimated that in 1959 there were approximately 8,000 Frenchmen in Laos. Presumably this included the military garrison stationed at the Seno base. Large numbers of Frenchmen serve as military and civilian advisors to the government in various parts of Laos, and there are also many businessmen. Like the Chinese, Frenchmen in this category seem to have increased in recent years. Without a doubt there are more French now in Laos than at the time it was a colony. In 1912, for example, there were only 226 French citizens in the whole country, and in 1937, 574 (the only exception to this statement being the time of the Indochina War, when large numbers of French troops were fighting in Laos).

As to the Americans, except for a few dozen missionaries, almost all of them work for the American government in one of its aid or information programs. A reasonable estimate would be 500 including families. In addition there are a few hundred Filipinos who work in the American aid program, as well as a number engaged in an independent rural medical program called Operation Brotherhood. Both the Americans and Filipinos are new elements in the ethnic mosaic of Laos which did not exist as recently as ten years ago.

If one were to approach the question of Lao urban population composition on a formal statistical basis, this might well be the end of the discussion, but it would have overlooked one of the most crucial groups, which does not appear at all in the official French statistics in any meaningful way.³⁹ These are the Thai and Thai-Lao from the north-east provinces of Thailand. The French were interested in emphasizing the integration of Laos with the other provinces of Indochina bordering on Laos. Although some migration statistics do exist they are obviously not very reliable in a country with only a small number of poorly supervised custom posts and an easily navigable river separating the two countries for much of their common border, particularly in the most populous regions.⁴⁰

It is necessary to define our terms, for the distinctions between the Lao and the Thai-Lao are not readily apparent. First it should be noted that a number of Thai businessmen from Bangkok have come to Vientiane in recent years, as have a number of students seeking jobs, but they are certainly a small minority compared to the Chinese or Vietnamese. Excluded from our consideration are the crossings of villagers who live on opposite sides of the Mekong and exchange produce. Also excluded are the many Lao (elites as well as peasants) who have left their country for an education, job or business venture in Thailand and later returned. What we are particularly interested in is the large scale migrations, often of a temporary nature, of farmers and coolies from the poor and overpopulated Northeast Thailand to the towns of Laos bordering on the Mekong, particularly to Vientiane. Here most of the samlaw drivers and coolies engaged in construction work (both men and women) are from the other side of the river. It is estimated that in 1959 there were 5,000 samlaws in all of Laos, of which a majority were probably operated by Northeast Thai-Lao, who also monopolized this trade in Bangkok before it was banned there. In addition, many come to work in the villages around Vientiane particularly at planting and harvest time.

Of equal importance is the cultural impact the Thai have had on the towns of Laos; although there is a strong French influence in the public buildings and administrative organization, as well as on the viewpoint of the educated classes, Thai culture is felt more strongly by the lower classes in terms of items such as movies, mass circulation newspapers

and magazines (most of the migrants from the Northeast are literate). It is possible that the situation in Laos may be unique, at least in degree: that is, the indigenous population is poorly represented in the towns, the only people of Laos living in them being the Lao officials and some merchants and craftsmen.

With the exception of Xieng Khouang where a few Meo have settled in the towns, the non-Lao tribal peoples do not live in the towns. A partial exception are the Khmu who come to work as coolies in towns such as Luang Prabang but usually return to their own villages in a few months. Conversely there are, however, some Chinese merchants scattered in certain of the larger Lao villages in the countryside.

Age Structure

Although we have previously indicated the severe limitations of Lao and French colonial statistics regarding the total population and its ethnic composition, an even worse situation exists with regard to statistics relating to birth and mortality. Although the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East has published a set of figures (see Tables 46-48), the sources on which they are based are unknown, and in any case not available to the Lao Bureau of Statistics, nor published in any French periodicals. Pietrantoni (1953:28) concludes that those figures which were collected by the French administration on natality and mortality are not of any scholarly use.

A somewhat better situation exists with regard to materials on the age structure of the Laos population, but here too there are severe discrepancies in many government reports. There appears to be a tendency in many cases to virtually ignore the group over 60 and to underestimate the number of people under 15. Table 43 brings together material bearing on the Lao from diverse sources in both rural Thailand and Laos which shows a great deal of consistency in a comparative sense. Table 41 shows the close comparability of the data obtained by Pietrantoni for all of Laos in 1943 and the figures obtained from Lao government sources for 1957. The data from the Kha and the Meo-Yao groups are less satisfying. It does not appear logical to attribute the widely varying differences for the tribal groups to different demographic features, although these may exist, but rather to census difficulties. On the whole it is reasonable to assume that they would be less cooperative. It is quite possible that these groups have a higher infant mortality rate and a shorter life span than the Lao, but on the basis of the available data we would not be justified in coming to any firm conclusions. There appears to be less reason to doubt the data in Table 43A since this was obtained from the records of the local Chinese community. The relatively small number of women and of people over 60 seems to be a natural consequence of an immigrant community composed chiefly of males, which established itself in the area during the past few decades. In general, the structure of the Lao population conforms to the age pattern common to the whole area of Southeast Asia (Table 45). The marked larger population under 15 and the smaller proportion of people over 60 are rather striking when contrasted with industrialized countries like France, the United States and even Japan.

As a final note, it can be added that on the basis of the available information there does not appear to be any consistent differences in family size between rural and urban areas (Table 57). There are, however, important differences between ethnic groups, with the Yao and Black Tai having larger household groups than the Lao (Tables 53-55).

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Some observers prefer to divide the year into three seasons: summer from March through June, the rainy season from July through October and winter from November through February.
- 2 Lafont (1959: 9,11).
- 3 Reinach (1901: 92-93).
- 4 One was planned within the next few years, "if sufficient funds are available," but the Lao government is largely dependent on outside aid and a census as such does not appear to have a very high priority. With the present civil war it appears unlikely that any program of this sort will be undertaken in the near future.
- 5 The Lao do not place any great emphasis on exact records. The chaotic condition of official Lao records is in part a result of a lack of technical facilities and in part a lack of interest in precise detail. An aspect of this attitude is that most Lao officials are extremely generous in making available those records they do possess.

Referring to the Kha, one investigator states, "There is no system of counting. If you want to know how many men there are in the village, the head man goes around with a bamboo stick, breaking one knot for each person met, and gives you the knots to count. There is no record of births. Their children were born 'when there was prosperity that year, when the tree was planted' and so on. A schoolteacher, when asked for the birthdates of his children, simply named dates in a series, made up in order to have something for the school record." Jumsai (1959: 20).
- 6 "La Population du Laos de 1912", 1945, Bulletin de la Societe des Etudes Indochinoises, N. S. Tome XXVIII, No. 1, 1953.
- 7 Pietrantoni (1957: 226-28).
- 8 It should be emphasized that these groupings are approximate, and that these tables represent only a summary. One of the greatest difficulties in attempting to identify the various ethnic groups in Laos lies in the fact that they are known by a great variety of names, different ones often used in French, English and Chinese sources while often there are additional Siamese and Lao names for these people as well as names by which these groups refer to themselves. "Meo" is used by the Lao and the French, "Miao" is usually found in Chinese and English language sources, and some Meo groups refer to themselves as "Mung" or "Mong." In the case of a major tribal Tai group we have Black Tai, Tai Noir, or Tai Dam, English, French and Lao versions of the same name. Several attempts are made to summarize the available information (Tables 21, 65, 77, 79), but in most cases the available sources are based on inadequate information. The best attempt to date has been made by John F. Embree and William L. Thomas in Ethnic Groups of Northern Southeast Asia (Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, New Haven, 1950). It cannot be too strongly emphasized that Laos, despite the work of French ethnographers, remains one of the most poorly known areas of the world from the point of view of ethnography.
- 9 The distinction in spelling is arbitrarily established here for purposes of clarification.
- 10 This system of classification also appears to reflect the desire of Lao government to spread Lao culture and civilization (principally as reflected in language and religion), tendencies which seem to have been encouraged by certain French colonial administrators who used Lao officials to oversee Kha groups. An excellent example is provided by the Kingdom of Luang Prabang which was a semi-autonomous area during the French

FOOTNOTES

(Continued)

period. One French writer remarked, "When the Commissioner assumes his office [in Luang Prabang], he quickly learns that he has to administer not only the Lao but also the Lu, Tai Neua, Tai Dam, Tai Houn, Mu, Lamet, Kho, Iantene, Hoc, Meo, Yao, Ho, Phontai, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Indians."

- 11 Although this is true of Laos, these divisions are not irreversible -- in parts of China the Meo live in valleys and cultivate irrigated rice, e.g. Margaret P. Mickey, The Cowrie Shell Miao of Kweichow, Peabody Museum, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1947. Seidenfaden in his epilogue to Wilhelm Credner's Cultural and Geographical Observations Made in the Tali (Tannan) Region (Siam Society, 1935), p. 19, cites the case of the Lao Song (a Thai group) of Petchaburi who a little over a hundred years ago were living on the plateau of Xieng Khouang from where they were deported as prisoners-of-war by the Siamese to Southern Siam. In certain cases Meo, Yao and Khmu are also settling in the valleys of Laos in response to modern economic drives.
- 12 The Kingdom of Luang Prabang is said to have been founded in 1353 by Fa Ngum (D. G. E. Hall, A History of South-East Asia, N. Y., 1958, p. 207).
- 13 Iwata speaks of 12 subdivisions including the Thai Souei, T(h?)ai Neua, Thai Poua, Thai Pouan, Tai Deng, Thai Dai, Thai Nouan, Thai Porong, Thai Et, Thai Soun, Thai O, Thai Sot Bau, T(h?)ai Neua and Tai Deng. These subdivisions are indicative of minor dialect variations and also tend to indicate the place of origin such as Xieng Khouang or Sam Neua (Table 18). There also appear to be some minor differences in customs. Generally speaking there does not seem to be restrictions on inter-marriage and in many cases the Lao are not even sure from which group they have originated. As they come more into contact with the towns these minor variations among the Thai-Lao become less significant.
- 14 In Lao Dam is black, Kao white and Deng red.
- 15 Roux (1954: 364).
- 16 Seidenfaden (1958: 24-25).
- 17 Hang-Seng (1949: 1) identifies them in three different groups.
- 18 Roux (1954: 301-2).
- 19 This settlement, about 40 miles north of Vientiane and also known by its French name of Ritaville, appears to be the southernmost extension of the Meo. It is only a few decades old.
- 20 According to the French scholar Andre Frasse there have been Yao in northern Laos for three or four centuries while the Meo have come less than a century ago.
- 21 This is true in Thailand where the Lao represent a minority of inferior social status and the above statement clearly shows the government's policy of emphasizing theoretical unity and equality. In Laos the term Lao has prestige associations.
- 22 Many of the older men in the Luang Prabang area today are tattooed in this fashion, and in the villages even some of the younger men, but in general the custom appears to be dying out. Khmu are also tattooed.
- 23 They are descendants of Lao from Vientiane who were taken to Thailand after the destruction of the Lao capital by an invading Thai army early in the 19th century.

LAOS PROJECT

Paper #13

THE MEO OF XIENG KHOUANG PROVINCE*
b y

George L. Barney

(One of a series of papers reproduced for limited circulation
to interested scholars)

*Chapters II and III of the author's Master's Thesis,
Christianity: Innovation in Meo Culture, A Case Study
in Missionization, University of Minnesota, 1957

The period of field work was 1949-1953

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The Meo of Northern Laos

The People and the Area:¹

The Meo people spread over the mountain areas of much of Southeast Asia. " The Miao, a mountain dwelling people in South and West China, constitute one of the largest aboriginal groups of South China, numbering in the millions."² In North Vietnam the Meo number about 60,000,³ in Thailand a few thousand,⁴ and " in Laos they live scattered in high mountain areas and are said to number about 50,000."⁵

The Meo are in the process of drifting southward. Since they are such vast numbers and yet have no territory of their own, they have been in a state of unrest for centuries.⁶ Roux, who has followed the development of Meo history in Indochina, states: " It seems, if one can judge by the transformations which they (the Meo) have carried to the terrain during the forty years that I have followed them, that their first migrations do not go beyond 120 to 140 years. Those who

1. See John Embree and Lillian Dotson, Bibliography of the Peoples and Cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia. In this book these people are listed as the Miao in the "Tribes" sections under Thailand and China and as the Meo in the "Tribes" sections under Laos and Vietnam.

2. Ibid., p.803

3. Ibid., p.752

4. Ibid., p.549

5. Ibid., p.460

6. Hugo Bernatzik, Akha und Meau: Probleme der angewandten Voelkerkunde in Hinterindien, vol. I, Chapters 2 - 3.

were already 'village elders,' some of whom were over forty years of age, informed me that that their fathers came from the extreme west of the Chinese province of 'Sze-Tchouan' from the eastern slopes of the Himalayas."⁷ This would give credence to statements of the writer's informants that their ancestors first entered Xieng Khouang Province about a century ago.

Xieng Khouang Province is located in northern Laos.⁸ The provincial capital which carries the same name is located about 193.5 degrees east of Greenwich and about 19 degrees north of the equator. The province is largely a plateau of about 4000 feet altitude surrounded by mountains which rise 1000 to 5000 feet above the plateau.

Roux states that an estimated 30,000 Meo lived in the eastern part of the Province of Xieng Khouang in 1920.⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that a recent estimate (1953) placed the number of Meo in the entire province as 45,000. This estimate was given in conversation by the Laotian governor.

In the Province of Xieng Khouang there is a general classification of the three major ethnic groups according to the topography:

Lao. The Lao live principally in river valleys, where they

7. Henri Roux, "Quelques Minorites Ethniques du Nord Indo-Chine," France-Asie, vol. x, p. 388.

8. See maps in Appendix.

9. Roux, op. cit., p. 387

carry on irrigated wet rice culture. In addition to this staple crop they grow tobacco, straw for making thatched roofs, and divers minor crops. They know some crafts, such as pottery making and weaving, but very few of their number approach the status of specialists. The Lao live in elevated bamboo or wooden houses with thatched roofs. A very few live in better houses with plastered walls and tile roofs. These are usually government officials and merchants.

The Lao are politically dominant in Laos, but maintain only a narrow margin of authority in Xieng Khouang. They are Buddhist, and their strong adherence to their religion is a cohesive integrative force in their society. Most males spend some years in the "pagodas" in study. The Lao society and culture appears well integrated with no major areas of stress or unsatisfied needs being evidenced.

Khmu: The Khmu, who are located in the foothills, carry on both wet rice farming and mountain rice horticulture. They live in houses which resemble the Lao in style but which are generally of bamboo, and less durable.

The Khmu are decidedly a political minority. They give little indication of attempting or desiring to attain political autonomy or political recognition.

...the Khmu show signs of deterioration and disintegration. The gongs and jars of tremendous value which are characteristic of tribal peoples in southeast Asia, and which are remembered as a part of Khmu culture of the past, are virtually gone. In all of southeast Asia these gongs and

jars are a focal point of interest in the culture. They are symbols of prestige and wealth. The fact that they have disappeared among the Khmu, and that apparently nothing has replaced them, is certainly of significance.¹⁰

The Khmu, who have borrowed much from the Lao, have not adopted Buddhism. They have a form of animism.

Meo: The Meo are usually located high on the flanks of the mountains but just below the summit. Their culture is described in greater detail below, but a few items are given at this point for comparison with the Lao and Khmu.¹¹

The Meo engage primarily in "slash and burn" agriculture. Dry mountain rice is their staple food. Their homes of rough wooden boards are built on the ground. Corn and some vegetables are grown, but they are particularly known for their production of opium.

The Meo appear to have maintained a higher degree of social and political solidarity than the Khmu. In the material culture, the Meo have retained their distinctive dress, are

10. William A. Smalley, "The Gospel and the Cultures of Laos," Practical Anthropology, vol. III, no. 3, 1956, p. 50

11. The Meo of Xieng Khouang are of two major dialects. The "white Meo," "mon tleu," are known by the clear white pleated skirts worn by the women. The "striped Meo," "mon len," are associated with the colorfully embroidered skirts worn by their women. The two dialects are mutually intelligible. The Meo language is largely monosyllabic, contains 53 consonant phonemes, 13 vowel phonemes, (9 simple vowels and 4 vowel clusters) and 7 tone phonemes.

reluctant to use the official local currency, and persist in their traditional habitat. In the abstract and subjective realm, the Meo continue in an acute consciousness of Meo society and culture, and reflect this consciousness in their rigid refusal to adopt freely elements of Lao culture.

Minor Ethnic Groups: With rare exception, the minor ethnic groups of the province are located in or near Xieng Khouang town. The town, with a population of about 1500 people, serves as the administrative and commercial center for the province. Vietnamese artisans, Chinese traders, Indian cloth merchants, and representatives of Western cultures may be found in town. The western cultural influence is carried on by those who represent Western governments, serve as missionaries, operate the office of a commercial airline, and a few legionnaires who have settled in the area as ranchers or artisans.

Since this paper will deal with the Meo who live in the general proximity of Xieng Khouang town, the writer feels it worth while to give just a brief description of the area. The most prominent building in the town was a huge palatial structure which served as the residence for the French Counsellor. The Laotian governor, entitled "Chao Khoueng," lived in a large but less imposing home. These and a few other buildings were constructed of brick and tile. Such buildings belonged to officials, the French army, and a few local business men. Public buildings consisted of a school, a health clinic, office buildings for the government, and the daily market pavilion.

Only one street ran through the town, with the above mentioned buildings and eight small shops being located along its sides. Back of these more prominent buildings, the general population lived in scattered clusters of homesteads. Some such clusters might be limited to a single ethnic group, while others might be inhabited by several groups. The dwellings were of any architecture and built of any combination of materials. One sensed that most of the inhabitants considered their residences to be only temporary.

Only the eighth month festival and the daily market served as integrating elements for the community in Xieng Khouang town. The school was limited in its enrolment, and the numerous religious groups precluded any cohesion along religious lines.

Before the arrival of the writer in this area, a road had been maintained from the Coast at Vinh, Vietnam, to the border of Thailand. This road passed through Xieng Khouang. Because of difficulties of maintenance during the Communist activities, this road was closed. Travel in and out of the province had to be by plane. A small airline operated the sturdy DC3 planes during the dry season, and a smaller bush plane during the rainy season. Communications were made either by letter or by the public wireless. These services followed a semblance of regularity, but were never certain.

The rainy season served to isolate the area for the most part. Trails were slippery and dangerous, landslides were common, and

air travel infrequent and dangerous. Often weeks would pass with no plane being able to land, but supplies and mail continued to come to the area by parachute. In sharp contrast, the dry season brought much activity in town and even to the remote parts of the province. Fields were being cleared to be burned off later. Trails, roads, bridges and buildings were repaired, and merchants competed with one another to charter planes to bring in new stocks and to replenish their supplies. prices would begin to drop as scarce items became plentiful and the rice was being harvested. Nevertheless, air freight charges made imported products two and three times higher than prices at the coast. People moved about, and the market became an exciting place with many new items appearing on the racks. Such was Xieng Khouang town around which lived the Meo, Lao, and Khmu in ever widening arcs. Except for some groups who had moved into temporary quarters close to town, the nearest Meo village was an hour away by trail. Other villages which were five days away from Xieng Khouang still considered the town as their administrative and trading center.

Xieng Khouang was also the home of a very important Meo personage named Touby. He is singled out at this point because of his unique position. Touby was recognized by the French colonial government, and now is recognized by the independent Laotian government as the representative of the Meo people. He is highly respected by both the government and his own Meo society.

Touby and the provincial governor are comparatively young men and maintain a close relationship on both personal and official levels.

Touby has championed the Meo people. While holding a position of influence with the administration, he also commands the respect, confidence, and support of the Meo. He is known throughout the whole area, and the Meo are quick to respond to requests made by him.

Just how and when Touby attained this status is not known to the writer. He lives next to the Lao governor, maintains a Meo militia, and has been influential in having Meo young people admitted to the public schools. During World War II and again during the Communist invasion of 1953-1954, he was given a field station beside the French and Lao commanders, and through his Meo militia furnished the government forces with almost uncanny intelligence and "guerilla" support. Perhaps the latter is a factor in his present "role." Both the French-Lao administration and the Meo people hated the Japanese and Communist forces. Touby helped to integrate the two groups in driving out these invaders.

Today the government sees Touby as the representative of the Meo and the communicator between the Meo people and the administration. The Meo see Touby from the other side, as one who can influence the government and communicate the "mind" of the Meo to the government in an effective manner. Thus Touby

appears to be the "connecting link" between the Lao governmental organization and the Meo's indigenous political system which extends only to the district level. In effect, the various districts are now brought together in an office which they have not instituted but in which Touby has been installed, with power, by the government. He is in a position to bring pressure to bear on the government in behalf of the Meo, and likewise he is able to influence the Meo toward adherence to the government's programs. For the purpose of this paper, the writer considers Touby as the "paramount chief" of the Meo in Xieng Khouang Province.

Meo Social Organization.

It appears that a patrilineal clan system not only dominates Meo social organization but also serves as a primary integrating factor in Meo culture as a whole. It functions in a cohesive manner to interrelate the social, political, economic, and religious aspects of Meo culture.

The household is the basic unit in the Meo social structure. The term "household" must be treated somewhat loosely, since it need not refer only to those who live in one house. Rather, it includes those persons who are under the authority of the householder. This means that a man's (householder's) household will consist of his wife or wives, his children, their wives and children, and possibly children in the next generation. In addition, the household may have a few relatives who are too

feeble, either physically or mentally, to maintain normal responsibilities, and are dependent upon their relatives in this particular household.

Members of a household always carry their clan name in addition to their given names. The clan names generally find their origin in mythology. Complete strangers who are unable to discover any common ancestry but who have the same clan name consider each other to be "clan brothers" and consequently observe any formalities or behavior which are therefore incumbent upon them.

Members of the same lineage refer to one another in a common term, ku to kew ti, "my youngers and elders." In the household the members call each other by specific terms which designate the actual relationship of "ego" to any other members of the household. Thus even in every day speech language serves to reinforce the traditional social structure in the minds of the Meo and implicitly indoctrinates the children in the same.

The numerical factor determines the actual domicile of the members of a household. One may observe as many as 35 people living under one roof. Frequently a married son may erect a house close to his father's home into which he moves after a child is born. This would not be considered as a new household in the sense that the term is used in this paper.

The household as a unit serves to train the children.

Although children are basically the responsibility of their

immediate parents, it appears that everyone in the household takes a part in the informal education and training of a younger person. Corrections may be made by elders without incurring the bad will of the parents. One never observes corporal punishment of children, but deep respect and obedience to parents and elders are characteristic of the Meo.

The Meo place high value on old age. In their conception, anyone of old age should have respect. The term of respect in Meo is Txi Lau, "grandfather," or Na Lau, "grandmother." These terms may be applied to younger people who have attained special status and deserve this sort of respect. The Meo train their young people to be self-reliant, and they admire a strong individualistic spirit. A stranger is impressed by the manners and poise that a young Meo boy will demonstrate when he is alone. Among his elders, he is just one of a group in the presence of the respected elders.

Within a household a young man may disagree with his father only in the mildest terms, although he may oppose him strongly. As a man assumes family responsibilities, he may become increasingly self-assertive, but should always pay deference to his aging father. The women are recognized as possessing authority over the children, but in all family considerations the father's word is final authority. Yet should a father be the son of a householder, he is expected to acquiesce to the will of the householder.

In a Meo village one may find from one to forty houses.

The average village has about eight houses. A village may have but one household, in which case the householder has the status of authority. Often there may be several households in a village, in which case the eldest householder usually functions as village head. Furthermore, some large villages have more than one clan represented. In this latter case, some complications appear in the pattern. This will be more fully discussed under "Political Organization."

While a distinct unit in the social organization, the household operates in a sphere which is largely defined by the patrilineal clan system. This is illustrated in the concepts of marriage and the events leading to it.

The practice of exogamous marriage is part of the customary law. In keeping with the principal that no one should marry a person of his own clan, a modified brother-sister taboo is observed between members of the opposite sex when they are of the same clan. Therefore, it is improper for a young man to manifest frivolity with a girl bearing his clan name.

After puberty a young man may attempt to gain the attention of a young girl of his liking. Of course she must be from a different clan. Acquaintance is often made and developed at such events as the New Year Festival Season. A village usually invites villages of another clan to come for festivities, which include games, contests, visiting and feasting. The village is likely to

receive a reciprocal invitation before the five day period is ended.

At such times everyone comes in his or her best clothing along with all the silver ornaments that can be accumulated. Girls proudly wear their colorful skirts as a display of their ability to sew and embroider. The young men demonstrate their prowess with horses and in contests. The playing of various musical instruments and the constant serenades add to the atmosphere of the occasion.

A hand ball game is always in order. Lines of young men form opposite lines of young women. Partners, each from a different clan, stand facing each other. The girl produces a ball which she has made from wads of cloth. This is tossed back and forth with her partner. Serenading accompanies the tossing of the ball, and may continue for hours at a time. Traditionally, scores are kept of all dropped balls with each error being penalized, whereby the guilty party must discard one garment, as in "strip" poker. The writer never observed this practice in either Christian or non-Christian villages, but he noted other penalties being paid, such as gifts or "dates" for the evening. However, flirting would be a mild term to use for the boy-girl relationship during such festival seasons. The writer has been told by his informants that sex-play is quite free during the evening hours.

If the relationship between a boy and a girl develops into a serious interest for each other, the boy finds excuses to visit

her village. Trial marriage, a normal practice among the Meo, is carried on with a semblance of disapproval by the girl's parents. It is customary for a girl who has attained puberty to sleep on a platform apart from the rest of her family. The young suitor may be expected to visit her during the night, but must come and go surreptitiously while the rest of the family is asleep. If the young girl responds favorably to the young man's advances, the romance should end in marriage.

However, Marriage can only be realized after considerable maneuvering. The young man must secure a "go-between," usually an elder brother or paternal uncle, who will carry on all negotiations with the girl's parents concerning the young man's intentions. Several developments may occur. The parents may insist that the marriage be postponed until an elder sister's marriage. A satisfactory amount of bride-wealth may not be agreed upon. The parents may insist that their daughter is needed at home for another year until the smaller children are older. If a settlement cannot be reached and the young people are extremely interested in becoming married, they may result to an elopement. In such a case settlements and adjustments must be made later and often involves a decision being made by a panel of neutrals.

If the mediary for the young man is successful in arranging a satisfactory amount of bride-wealth with the parents of the girl, marriage is guaranteed. If the bride-wealth is immediately available, marriage formalities may be carried out without delay.

Silver neck bands are usually exchanged between the bride and groom.

The family or household of the groom gives a feast for the household of the bride. This is followed two days later by a reciprocal feast being offered by the household of the bride. At these feasts smaller gifts, such as silver rings may be exchanged between the parents and/or the householder, as the case may be. These formalities are the official announcement and legal evidence for the marriage of the young couple. At the same time it serves to encourage close relationships between the two households involved, and to some measure, between the two clans.

Marriage has very important effects on the girl's relationship with her parents. In theory, she leaves her father's family, household and clan. She becomes fully identified with the family of her husband. Should he die, she is responsible to the family of her husband. She has no demands whatsoever on her own father's family. In actual practice she may visit her home frequently, and even continue close relations with her family. After all, there may be other marriages being planned between the two clans or even between the two households. However, the wife never benefits from any inheritance in her original family.

Polygyny is common among the Meo, but is usually the result of the levirate. One case of sororal polygyny was observed by the writer. Wealthy men may be able to have several wives. One of them is considered the more important "big wife," and directs

the activities of the other wives in the matter of household duties. All wives live together under the same roof, and usually share the same sleeping area. They give no appearance of emotional complexes.

Divorce is possible, but not frequent. The Meo frown upon a young man who "runs around" promiscuously in the guise of trying to find a wife. Likewise, the Meo dislike divorce, and attempt in every way to avoid it. The writer was invited to sit on a panel which was to hear the complaints between a young wife and her husband. The panel consisted of the householder from the young man's household, the householder from the wife's former household, and the district chief in whose district the two households were located. Both the young wife and the young husband were permitted to voice their complaints and counter-complaints. Then the panel discussed the situation. The district chief finally summarized the discussion of the panel in strong terms of advice to the young couple. The advice was heeded, and the divorce avoided. This is the general procedure in such controversies, and it helps to maintain the stability of a marriage.

It would seem that the patrilinear clan system of the Meo serves to solidify the marriage and at the same time uses marriage to integrate the clans. Good marital relations are conducive to good clan relationships, which in turn are conducive to further marriages within the clans. The reciprocal element in the festivals, in the marriage feasts, and in finding marriage partners

is a strong cohesive factor in inter-clan relationships. The patrilinear clan system must be considered most important to the solidarity of the Meo social organization.

Meo Political Organization.

It is difficult to determine the full scope of the traditional Meo political system by observing the people in the Xieng Khouang Province. From the history of the Meo it appears that they possessed a strong and organized kingdom at some time before they entered Laos.¹²

Today the Meo are under the authority of an independent Lao government. Until recently, they were under the French in an "indirect rule" form of administration; this rule was preceded by Japanese occupation troops during World War II, and formerly by the rigid "old colonial" French authority. In spite of this confusion at the summit of administration, the Meo appear only mildly disturbed, and continue with a local political system which seems close to indigenous forms.

The patrilinear clan system with its household unit is an integral factor in the Meo system of authority. On the level of the household, the Meo's social and political systems find root in common soil. Thus in describing the household it seems that one is actually describing the foundations for both Meo social organization and Meo political structure.

Political authority appears to involve the Meo concept of respect for elders. A child is responsible to his father. If he

12. Bernatzik, op. cit., Chs. 2, 6.

is not a householder, a father is responsible for his family to the householder, who is usually his father, grandfather, or an elder brother. The householder apparently holds an ascribed status of authority which extends over the members of his household. In the smaller conjugal family units which make up the household, the parents must answer to the householder for the behavior of their children. This does not prevent any older person from assisting in the training of any child, as has already been indicated.

The householder has the final authority in matters of the household. Such authority is not of a dictatorial nature, but reflects the householder's considered opinion after discussion with the adult men under his authority. It appears that the degree of authority which the householder holds over his children and his children's children may vary with the proximity of these offspring. The writer illustrates with three examples.

(1) Zon Tsho with his wife and child left the village of his father, and settled several days away in the Xieng Khouang town area. He did not appear to incur any disapproval from the Meo in either area. They considered that he had established a new household.

(2) Ba Si and his wife lived with his parents in their house. His father, the householder, was addicted to opium, and contributed a minimum of effort in providing for the household. This may have been a factor in Ba Si's defection from traditional Meo

behavior. Much to his father's disapproval, he frequently procured odd jobs for cash income instead of assisting his father in the householder's rice fields. Although the writer feels that the father was quite incapable of adequately administering his household, the general attitude of the Meo was one of criticism toward Ba Si for his lack of respect and deference to his father. A few criticisms were leveled toward his father for not having properly trained Ba Si to conform to the Meo pattern of authority.

(3) Ntrua, an adolescent, worked for the writer. He lived in Xieng Khouang town. His father came periodically to receive Ntrua's wages. In turn he gave his son some money for necessary purchases, such as rice and other items for his livelihood. Thus, although he was some distance from his father, Ntrua was clearly under the authority of the father. This was probably due to several factors: the proximity of town, his youth, and the temporary situation of his employment.

However, it would seem that the authority of the householder is not absolute, but may be modified under certain conditions. Ntrua submitted to his father's will without any question or sign of reluctance. Ba Si incurred public disfavor because of his lack of parental respect. Zon Tsho was considered to be following proper procedure in establishing a new household. He was not without a superior authority, since he was still subject to the district chief and also was under the sanctions of his clan.

A village chief is a householder. In a village of one house-

holder, the selection of the chief is automatic. In a village of more than one household, the eldest householder is customarily the village chief. The writer has observed exceptions to this, but can not explain such unless it would be in recognition of military honors which the individual has received from the government.

On the village level this chief functions between households in much the same manner as the householder does between members of a household. The village has a good measure of autonomy. Therefore the village chief is more than just a representative of the village; he is an honored leader on the local scene. He holds a place of prestige at the local festivals, is the judge in inter-household disputes, and is expected to administer to the good of the community. He is responsible for the maintenance of the trails, for opening new ones, and for moving operations should the entire village move to a new location. He has authority in emergencies. During the Communist occupation, he was responsible for the evacuation of his village and its defence. Even as the householder in the household, so the chief in his village is not a dictator but with the counsel of other householders he serves to make the community a cooperative unit. Occasionally some family may feel abused, and move to take up residence in another area, thus forming a new household. This means some hardship until such time as they are able to gain an adequate subsistence in the new location.

When a village consists of more than one clan, problems of harmony are more common. The writer is unaware as to just how these villages developed in this manner. Apparently the government recognizes one chief for such a village, while the local population generally considers two men to be chiefs. The eldest householder of each clan is recognized by his clansmen as their village chief. This is an ascribed status from the Meo viewpoint. In most local affairs there appears to be harmony, but difficulty arises and tensions develop when outside or upper level authority attempts to enforce certain measures through only one of the chiefs. Strong feelings may result in the loss of cooperation between the clans. The writer observed one case which resulted in the minority clan group moving to a new site only five minutes away. Subsequently, the two groups regained friendly relationships, but remained apart. Inter-marriage appeared to be a real factor in this amelioration.

Above the rank of village chief is a district chief. He may have as many as forty villages under his supervision. It may be at this point that the resemblance with the traditional political organization of the Meo begins to break down. The district chief is appointed by the "paramount chief," Touby, in conjunction with the Lao governor of the province. It seems that Touby attempts to conform with a semblance of what may have been the former Meo pattern in that the district chief is usually a village chief and is selected from the clan which is predominant in the district.

The district chief is primarily the communicator between the village and the high office. The district chief is often called to settle disputes between villages or members of different villages. For example, he sat on the panel to listen to the case of the young married couple mentioned above. The husband and wife had been from different villages, and the parents of each desired the district chief to attend.

The Meo are desirous of settling disputes at the lowest level of authority. Thus, inter-family disputes would be settled within the household, inter-household within the village, inter-village disputes within the district, and inter-district within the sphere of Touby's authority. This does not mean that such disputes had to be between mass groups, but might be between individuals from within these unit categories. Seldom do disputes between Meo go beyond Touby. In cases involving the Meo with members of another ethnic group, Touby served as counsel for the Meo. He has proved himself most influential in this respect before both the Lao and French officials.

The economic returns of the political offices are significant but not sufficient to support fully the man and his family. The village chief receives gifts from the villagers, but these do not appear as payment to any overt obligation but rather to assist him in the hospitality he is expected to show to all travelers. Both the village chief and the district chief are supposed to receive a small commission on all taxes and fees collected. Fees and taxes

have been exacted of the Meo only in recent years. Fees may be gathered for marriage and birth certificates. The cooperation of the Meo in this program is increasing.

The writer considers the village to be the extent in which the indigenous Meo political system operates today. The district level seems to be a transition zone which might be likened to a bridge which is anchored on one side in the traditional Meo system on the village level, with the other side being firmly entrenched in the national government complex. It seems that Touby is a major factor in the maintenance of this relationship. It is important to observe that the household is not seriously affected in this situation, and even as it continues to function as the basic unit in the Meo social structure, so it also serves as a strong integrative force in the Meo political organization.

A brief word may be given to indicate the Lao plan of adopting a policy to incorporate all ethnic groups into their political system. Some years back, any individual residing in Laos who could not give sufficient evidence that he was a citizen of another nation was made a citizen of Laos. He was made responsible for taxes, military service, and conformance to Lao law. Enforcement of these rulings, with all the implications involved, has been gradually developed. The various ethnic groups are gradually being introduced to the political system both as it concerns their responsibilities and as it concerns their privileges. Taxes are collected by cash payment or con-

tributed labor. The Meo send representatives to the national assembly, as do the other ethnic groups.

As yet one is not sure whether this is an honest attempt to have these peoples fully represented in the federal government or whether it is a stop-gap measure to stem the apparent nationalistic tendencies of the Meo. The honor and prestige given to Touby and other Meo leaders, the educational facilities being offered to the Meo on an increasing scale, and the other benefits now available would indicate the former motive. A firm ruling against the Meo having their language in written form might indicate the latter motive. At any rate, the political system appears to be in a process of change, and the influence of French domination is decreasing. None of this seems to have seriously affected the indigenous Meo form of authority on the local village level.

Meo Economy

The role of the household in the Meo social and political structure is reflected and illustrated in the Meo economy. The division of labor is clearly related to the social and political patterns. Subsistence, land tenure, property rights, inheritance, and the economic factors relating to marriage and religious rites are all tied in to the socio-politico aspects of the household.

Rice is the basic food staple for the Meo population in Xieng Khouang. Its production requires the full cooperation of the entire household, and is supervised by the householder. A

regular annual cycle is followed in this rice economy.

Planting is carried out at the beginning of the rainy season in late April and May. The work may be done by any members of the family. During the rainy season some cultivation is done, but generally the rice stalks must fight their own battle with the weeds.

In late October, at the close of the rainy season, the grain ripens quickly and everyone joins in the harvest. Temporary shelters are erected on the field, since it must be watched until the harvest is completed and the rice is safely stored in the village. Hand sickles are used in cutting the rice stalks which are gathered into large stacks right on the field. This is done in urgent haste for fear of losing the over-ripened grain.

The stalks are then flailed and the grain is stored in huge carrying baskets. This work is the main concern of the women. Transportation of the rice to the village may be by human carrier or pack horse. A rice field may be as far as a full day's travel from the village. While the flailing is done by the women, the men prepare granaries to receive the rice. Some are built on strong platforms outside the house, while smaller ones may be erected inside the dwelling. These granaries are usually made of tightly woven bamboo.

During this entire harvesting process every member of the household is involved in the cooperative effort. Feeble elders watch the infants and prepare meals for everyone. Young boys may be seen leading the pack horses laden with grain. Young girls

assist their sex in flailing the rice stalks, gathering rice into baskets and performing other chores.

Assured that the harvesting process can be successfully completed, a selected few of the stronger men may actually commence the task of clearing new ground for next year's planting. In the "slash and burn" technique for clearing the field, the heavy vegetation and trees are cut down early in the dry season to give the sun as much time as possible to carry out the drying process before burning time in March. When the rice harvest is complete the men are joined by others of the household who methodically go through the site of the new field and cut down all vegetation.

By March the area should be dry enough to burn and is set afire. After the field has cooled, the entire family sets about clearing the debris, allowing only boulders and tree stumps to remain. The soil is loosened as much as possible after the first rainy days, followed by the planting of the rice, and thus the cycle is continued. Ideally, new ground is cleared each year, and some poorer soil is allowed to lie fallow. A field may be used for three or four successive years.

Potatoes, corn, squash and other minor food crops are grown by the Meo, but play a small part in the economy. Potatoes are sometimes sold to Westerners, but are most commonly used as fertilizer in the opium field. Corn and squash are used to feed the livestock unless the rice harvest is very slight.

Another important but non-edible crop is the opium poppy.

Every household has its opium field. The men erect a woven bamboo fence around a plot of ground near their village. As just mentioned, potatoes are used as fertilizer, and the soil must be carefully prepared. The opium harvest requires much skill and care. Most of the entire process is carried on by the women.

Opium is the main source of cash revenue for the Meo. In fact, it often serves as a medium for exchange. The first missionaries in the area were quite shocked to find carefully wrapped "globs" of opium in the offering at church. Embree writes:

Supposedly the production of opium is controlled by the French authorities, but both they and others are of the opinion that much illicit trade in opium does take place. Some of this doubtless goes to Siam in payment for manufactured goods from England and the United States.¹³

At the time of the writer's field work, Xieng Khouang was the only province in all of Indochina where the government officially permitted the cultivation of the opium poppy. The French administrator told the writer that an estimated 60% of the men of Xieng Khouang Province were addicted to opium. Its great worth and economy of transport makes opium of unique value to the Meo. One kilo of opium is worth one-half ton of rice. It is used as barter in the Xieng Khouang daily market as well as in the district markets and in the villages. Obviously opium plays a major role in the Meo economy.

13. John Embree, "A Visit to Laos, French Indochina," Journal of the Washington Academy of Science, vol. 39, 1949, p. 155

Flax is probably less important today than in earlier Meo history. Chinese merchants trade yard goods for opium. Yet one still sees the women spinning the flax on their thighs and storing it in large balls. It is later woven into long lengths of cloth, and through a mixture of techniques, including cire perdu and dyes, becomes designed materials for the typical Meo skirt. The hem of the skirt is beautifully embroidered in cross stitch with silk threads. Pleats are sewn in by hand and a beautiful skirt is formed, being approximately twenty feet wide at the hem.

Livestock plays a very important part in the Meo economy. Poultry, goats, pigs, buffalo and cattle are found in most villages. They are used for meat in the household and as cash income at the market. The Meo are considered adept in their care of animals. This is confirmed by comparing their livestock with those of other ethnic groups including the European ranchers.

Little milk is produced by the cattle. Goat's milk is more commonly used by the Meo. Poultry is used for meat, and serves as the most common sacrifice in cases of sickness. Eggs are eaten only occasionally. Other meat-supplying animals may be used for sacrifice if severe illness requires it. A cow would be the last and most expensive sacrifice.

For the Meo, a horse serves very practical purposes both for traveling and for transport of material. They are well groomed, fed, and splendidly trained. Meo horses demonstrate amazing sure-footedness and endurance on the steep and rugged trails of

Laos. They will generally bring a better price than the average oriental horse.

Every household has at least one horse, and more often will possess several. The horse appears to have prestige value in addition to economic worth. The horse, owned by the household, is under the supervision of the householder. It seems that a member may consider the horse to be his, but in actuality he means that it is his to use and that he is responsible for its care.

The writer has previously mentioned two young married men, Zon Tsho and Ba Si. Both of these young men purchased horses. Meo public opinion again was evident and was consistent with its previous expression. It was perfectly legitimate for Zon Tsho to own a horse, since he had established a new household a long distance from his parents. Ba Si was again out of order in considering his purchased horse as his own, since it belonged to his father, the householder, in accordance with recognized Meo political, economic and social sanctions.

Meo Material Culture

The Meo house is made entirely of wood. Beams, boards and shingles are hewn out by axe. Inside the structure, a sleeping platform is erected, and may or not be enclosed. There are no windows, but there are plenty of cracks and also two doors. Two fireplaces are found in every house. One is for cooking, and the other forms a center for all social gatherings. One area of the wall is reserved for a shrine or altar for the spirits, or Tlan.

Every household has at least one rice pounder, a rather clumsy but effective device for knocking the hulls off the rice. One corn mill of rotating stone grinders is also the common property of a household. This particular item is not found among other ethnic groups in Laos.

Tools, saddles, cross-bows, Meo-made flint lock guns, musical instruments, and the various items needed for food preparation make up most of the material goods which one finds in all Meo households. Wealth is tied up in livestock, opium and silver. The Meo use solid silver in bars for trade and in other pieces for ornaments. If one travels a day from Xieng Khouang he will find it difficult to do any buying with the Lao paper currency. He should carry old silver coins issued before World War II.

In addition to the implication of division of labor which has been given above, it should be noted that the women are responsible for the preparation and serving of food. This includes the pounding or grinding of the grain, the winnowing, and the cooking. The women carry all the water.

Young men have one special function in food preparation. They pour steamed rice into wooden troughs during festivals, and beat this into a pulp. Then they make patties of it, wrap the patties in banana leaves, and roast them to make what the Meo call their greatest delicacy.

Firewood is brought in by the boys, although the older men assist them from time to time in felling trees and cutting the

wood into lengths for carrying.

The men build and repair buildings and fences. They care for the livestock. Clearing the fields is mainly their responsibility as well. Specialists serve as silversmiths and gunsmiths. However, this does not provide them with enough income to refrain from the regular work cycle in production of the rice staple.

Land is owned and used by the ones who have cleared it. Usufruct of land is quite common. Usually a Meo household will have three or four rice fields and one opium field in production. This varies with the size of the household, number of families, wives and children. A married son may start work on a field of his own, if he can carry on without upsetting the distribution of labor in the household interests.

Married daughters receive no inheritance from their father's estate. Household property is under the supervision of the householder. Upon his death, the property is really not inherited, since it still belongs to the household. The property now comes under the supervision of the new householder, who may be a younger brother or the eldest son of the deceased.

In the event of the death of a husband in the household, the wife has the use of the materials which he had "possessed." Unless she is quite elderly, she is very apt to become the second wife of her husband's brother. Upon her death, the material she had from her first husband is re-distributed within the household.

In marriage, the bride-wealth is supposedly the responsibility of the groom. The entire household may assist him in procuring

the needed amount, but this help is apparently left to the discretion of the householder. It may be conditioned by the latter's evaluation of the bride and also the manner in which the young man has participated in the task of providing for the household. In any event, the young man is expected to lay aside any wealth which he can accumulate in anticipation of marriage. This reserve may come from extra labor, wage labor, gifts from the householder, and other good fortune.

In the actual marriage rites the practice of reciprocal feasts and gifts by the two households are always involved. Such procedures are carried out by the household as a whole, and the entire unit therefore carries the economic obligations which are involved. This all serves to integrate the young man more firmly into his household, to make firmer ties between the households and the clans, and to legalize the marriage.

In religious rites, taxes, and funeral expenses, the entire household again carries the financial responsibilities as a unit. Thus again, in the economic sphere, one observes the integral part played by the household in relating this aspect of Meo life to the social and political spheres. In actuality it is impossible to segregate clearly one aspect from either of the others, because they are so tightly interwoven on the household level.

Meo Folklore and Beliefs.

Meo folklore which carried the "History of the Meo" is of a vocabulary little used in the current vernacular. Either the

forms have passed out of use or reflect contact with the Chinese.¹⁴ It is given orally in couplet form, and can be recited for days by the few old men who still remember it. Their history contains certain ancestral heroes who are supposed to have taken on pseudo-spirit qualities and continue to aid the Meo today. Certain other ancestral spirits became jealous, and continue today their attempts to thwart the benevolent "spirits" or Tlan as the Meo call these spirit phenomena.

The folklore gives accounts of a first creation, a universal flood with two survivors in a barrel, and a great series of conflicts and exploits leading to the clan "fathers." Apparently these are vaguely identified with the present clans.¹⁵

Many stories are attributed to the mythology. They usually revolve about two brothers, one of whom is rather stupid but strong, and the other who is a cunning trickster. These two are usually involved in conflict with malevolent Tlan who are intent on harming the Meo.

14. "There are the very old songs which are almost exclusively Chinese in form, and there is much the same for the words of ritual in the sacrifices." F.H.Savina, "Dictionnaire Miao-Tseu-Francais, Bulletin de L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient, p. III

15. The writer's actual knowledge of Meo folklore is limited. Few actually know the entire folklore. Pages of text were finally secured, but the evacuation of Xieng Khouang took place before hardly any translation of the text had been made. The very extremely rare vocabulary defies translation now.

In just what manner one might relate the folklore to present day beliefs and Meo culture is difficult to determine. It appears that the Meo clan system is tied in with the folklore both as far as origin is concerned and as far as internal organization is concerned. It seems that the relationships between personages in the folklore pattern are consistent with the household and clan complex described in this paper.

Present day beliefs among the Meo are vague and inconsistent concerning life after death and the spirit realm. There is a concept that after death the soul remains in the house and inhabits the next child of the family. Some deny this concept and believe that the soul goes to dwell in the land of the Meo Tlan. At the time of death, the dead person was traditionally given a seat of honor in his house, where he remained several days before burial. Feasts were conducted in his honor, the Tu ua neng had special rites with the Tlan world in behalf of the deceased, and many dirges were chanted. These were normally sung by young men who had learned them from the Tu ua neng. After the proper period of time, the body was buried outside the village, after which the spirit either returned to dwell in the house or went to the land of the Tlan, depending on whose concepts one accepts.

The Meo observe an annual visit with their household Tlan, which some believe to be the representative of their ancestors. The doors are shut, and no one is allowed to enter or leave until the visit is over. This may last one or several days. A friend who has traveled

days to visit the household must find lodging elsewhere until the taboo period is over. Informants reported that they never saw or heard anything during this period, but knew that they should all be gathered in one house so that the Tlan would find them.

The Meo are animistic. They have numerous Tlan which are classified according to their functions. There are the Tlan of of the water, of fertility, of the trail, of the hearth, of the sleeping quarters, of the rice field, for hunting, and numerous other categories.

The Tu ua neng¹⁶ in a Meo village has a very important role. He has certain powers which help to define his responsibilities. These powers are recognized by the Meo to have been given to the Tu ua neng by the Tlan. This power, possibly a Tlan which dwells in him,¹⁷ enables the Tu ua neng to cure the sick, determine the meaning of signs and dreams, give security to a new infant, predict the future through ordeals, and in general communicate between the living Meo and the Tlan world.

The Tu ua neng may be male or female. He or she is given an ascribed status by the Meo on the basis of his relationship to the Tlan. However, there is an achieved status as well, which is determined by the degree of effectiveness the Tu ua neng's influence carries in the Tlan world. This is reflected in his ability to cure the sick, to drive away malevolent Tlan, and to

16. The writer is using a Meo term, Tu ua neng for a person who functions as a religious practitioner in Meo society. The

influence the Tlan world for the welfare of Meo society. The Tu ua neng is responsible for making all fetishes, erecting altars in the homes and placing shrines along the trail and at the rice fields. His role does not compete with that of the householder or chief, since he operates in a different sphere of life, although it might appear that their areas of influence overlap.

In cases of illness, the Tu ua neng is called. The Meo consider that the soul (pli) is attempting to leave the body of the sick person. If the person becomes unconscious, it has departed and will depart for good unless it can be brought back. The Tu-ua neng arrives, and orders the area around the altar cleared. The body of the sick person is brought and laid before the altar.

With various "sacred" gongs and rattles the Tu ua neng attempts to call kindly Tlan for help. Having achieved this, he launches into a chant which develops into garbled sounds when "real communication" is being made. Meanwhile, members of the household kill a sacrifice at the doorway.¹⁸ - The blood of the shaman and sorcerer" do not seem to fit the role as the writer observed it. For similar purposes, the Meo word Tlan is used in place of "spirits."

17. See above footnote.

18. A sacrifice may be anything from a chicken to a buffalo or cow. It may be determined by the wealth of the household, the prestige of the sick person, etc. Usually a chicken is first offered, and larger sacrifices will follow if necessary.

sacrifice is poured on a paper doll that represents the sick person. This is then buried ~~at~~ the doorway. At the end of the ceremony, which may take many hours, the Tu ua neng casts the split horn of a cow on the ground. The manner in which the two pieces fall determines whether the person will recover. This sort of oracle is also used for other situations.

In time of epidemics, the Tu ua neng erects a type of doorway on each trail leading into the village. The Tlan is thereby urged to protect the village. Such frames are commonly encountered on the trail.

The Meo do not consider a Tu ua neng categorically to pass on his role to his or her child, since the position is not inherited but requires appointment and enablement by the Tlan. This appointment is attested to by effective power in pragmatic tests. A village of any size may have more than one Tu ua neng. Some are recognized as having special powers for certain situations. Small fees are paid for services of the Tu ua neng, but he must subsidize this small income with a considerable amount of rice horticulture.

The Meo appear keenly aware of the unusual. The Tlan may cause good and bad fortune. Therefore it is little wonder with the increasing political, social, and economic pressures that the Meo endeavors to employ the spirit realm to afford some control on their environment. A fallen tree, a washout, a strange rock formation, lightning striking a tree, and many other phen-

omena require interpretation by the Tu ua neng with any subsequent taboos which he may consider essential. One seldom travels any distance on a trail without observing areas where great numbers of sticks are standing on the ground. This part of the trail is thought to possess some strange Tlan, as a murder, accident or illness overtook someone there. Placing the sticks in the ground by the traveler indicates his recognition of a Tlan presence, and guarantees the individual safe passage. Likewise, a drop or increase in the price of opium, rice, and taxes are accredited to good or bad relationships with the Tlan as the case may be.

Thus, with the Meo there is a constant awareness of his associations with the Tlan and of the requirements and duties which are incumbent on him if he is to cultivate their good will and secure their aid. In keeping with this concept, the Meo are continually showing deference to the Tlan by innumerable taboos and ceremonies. Examples of such are the fetishes placed on the body following birth, blessings sought at marriage, before trail journeys or hunting trips, and solicitation of Tlan help during the crop seasons.

Individuals vary in their attitude toward the Tlan. Some appear to be deeply confident of the effectiveness of the varied observances. Others appear to hold to it because of tradition and hope it may do some good. It would appear to this writer that the Meo whom he observed may have been involved in much more detailed attempts to control the Tlan world than would be indic-

ated by reports given by Bernatzik and other investigators whom he quotes. At the same time, it appears that the Xieng Khouang Meo are quite disunited in any pattern of beliefs.

Therefore one questions if this may not indicate an attitude of insecurity among the Meo. Although the clan and household unit remain as integrative units, there appear to be separations from the traditional pattern of Meo life--especially in the matter of belief. It seems that this is the first real piece of evidence of any major break-down in Meo culture.

Before leaving the religious aspect of Meo beliefs, there should be mention of the Meo concept of a supreme being whom they call Fua Tai. The writer does not believe that the nature of his work in Laos has influenced his understanding of this concept. In Meo thinking, Fua Tai created all things and originally had close communication with man. He became distraught with man, and left him to the "spirit" world. Fua Tai still exists, but is no longer concerned with the affairs of man.

The Meo Life Cycle.

With the Meo, life is conceived as one long series of events with no great traumatic experiences leading from one stage to another. Birth and death are considered the major crises, while marriage is an important event that assures the continuance of the Meo society and culture. The household functions throughout the life of the Meo, and serves as the mold in which life is lived.

The Meo father is recognized for the part he plays in causing the conception of a child. At birth, he assists the wife during the delivery, and receives the child. He cuts the cord, and immediately bathes the baby with warm water. The writer has observed a father dashing water over a new-born infant as he squatted in the doorway of his house on a frosty morning. The writer does not know of any significance which the Meo place on the father's assisting with the delivery. If it is associated with the couvade it is such in only a minor form, inasmuch as the father does not observe any period of confinement. The writer did not observe any taboos on the part of the father. It was evident, however, that the Meo expect the father to be present for the delivery. On one occasion a catechist asked to be excused from school until his child was born. He was asked when he expected the child, and replied that it would depend on the sex of the baby. If the baby is a girl, the Meo claim that it takes nine months for maturity; ten months are required for a baby boy.

Shortly after birth of a child, a Tu ua neng is summoned to place fetishes on the child's neck and limbs to encourage the soul to stay in the body. Also, these fetishes may guard against a malevolent tlan which might attempt to claim the life of the infant. This fear is emphasized by the fact that Meo children, who are often given numbers instead of names, are never named number one. The Meo state that the tlan might not look for number two until he has found number one.

During infancy the child is cared for by mother, father,^{41.} and any of the other children. The mother will generally remain in confinement for only a few days unless she is from a wealthy household. Children are allowed to nurse as long as the mother has milk. There is no traumatic weaning experience for the Meo child. It is common to observe a mother nursing a child in her arms, and simultaneously nursing another who stands beside her. There appears to be little toilet training, and only after adolescence has begun does the Meo go beyond the village limits to perform his toilet. Children are frequently pacified by manipulation of their sex organs. This causes no apparent sexual irregularities in later life.

During childhood the children commence to share in work responsibility. Both boys and girls may follow their mother about and assist her. Boys may follow their father about as he performs his tasks. Primarily, the children serve as "baby sitters" and also gather firewood. They observe the duties which will later fall to them because of their sex, and make attempts to perform these tasks. They get their first introduction to riding horses, shooting the cross-bow and hunting.

Childhood is a time for recreation, also. Games of tag and hide-and-seek are common. Every boy has his spin top, which is used for a game in which the older boys and even the men may engage to amuse themselves. These tops, wound about with strong cord are set spinning at high speed. Experts can place them on a precise spot from some distance. In the contests, one person

attempts to dislodge and replace his opponent's spinning top with his own.

No specific rites are performed at puberty. The Meo girls may start wearing white scarves over their heads to indicate that they have reached puberty. These scarves are often used to cover half the face as an indication of real or affected shyness.

Adolescence is conceptually a time for preparing for marriage. Both sexes become proficient in discharging the work responsibilities that Meo society demands of them. Recreation takes on new dimensions. Horse racing is common, and sexual adventures become a frequent activity.

Young couples interested in marriage usually practice trial marriage, as has already been described. Although this is spoken of in a joking manner by the Meo, they consider it an essential phase in the life cycle and necessary for securing a suitable partner. Except at the time of the festivals, little affection is shown between the sexes in public, although there is little doubt that such relationships persist between them.

As the young people gain maturity and become increasingly aware of their desire for marriage, each will seek more earnestly to prove his or her readiness for marriage by demonstrating the perfection of his or her labors. The young man begins to lay aside a reserve for the bride-wealth, while the young lady makes additional skirts and secures a silver neck piece to present to her husband at marriage. The process of contracting a marriage has been discussed above and does not require repetition.

Adulthood is considered to begin with marriage. The prime objective in adulthood is to carry on the process of the cycle of life, i.e., raising children and training them in the traditions of Meo society and culture. To be considered as good parents the adults must not only provide for their family but must successfully rear their children in the Meo way of life. Life is meaningful to the adult Meo, not so much in his preparation for old age and death, but as he sees the development of his descendants in the Meo tradition. He finds that life has special satisfaction if he can observe this continuum in the life of his own grandchildren.

Old people are highly respected by all the people in the village. Those who have attained success in the matters of the previous paragraph enjoy the highest prestige and deference. The writer has often observed the great care and attention which an entire village shows to elderly people, and the measure of pride displayed when he was introduced to these aged Meo.

Death closes the life cycle for the Meo. Adjustments are difficult for the bereaved. Traditionally, the Tu ua neng is called to perform all that is essential to ensure the deceased a safe journey into the next realm. The deceased continues to live in the memories of the bereaved. Dreams are considered desirable, since they are means by which the departed spirit communicates with the living.

From birth to death the individual is not only made aware

of his responsibilities to the household, but he also learns^{44.} to reckon on his household for security and status in the social, political, economic and religious spheres of Meo culture.

Recent Changes in Meo Culture

Among the Meo of Laos, the decade from 1940 to 1950 brought about many observable changes in culture. These people had been in a southward drift from China for about three generations. They had entered an area where they were more accessible to other ethnic groups and Western influence, and where they were engulfed in a sequence of wars and political upheavals. Since 1940 control of Laos has passed from the French to the Japanese, to the Lao, and back to the French from whom it has only recently been disengaged. During these times of stress, the various local ethnic groups were placed under common dangers and hardships. Such conditions resulted in closer communication and cooperation between them. Thus, in addition to the constant change which takes place within any culture, the Meo were under severe pressures from without.

Comparison of the Meo situation before 1940 with that which existed after 1950 is amazing. The writer does not attempt to psychoanalyze these changes which have occurred in the major phases of Meo life.

A market scene in 1950 shows a large number of Meo participating in both the buying and the selling. A decade earlier, they were rarely seen in town.

Many Meo now engage in wage labor. The airline company has Meo employees handling the freight. The Meo assist local artisans in brick making, wood work and building. Others are employed for domestic tasks in homes and gardens. Still others have jobs with the Travaux Publiques in road maintenance and in repair shops. The writer does not wish to imply that there is a mass movement to wage labor, such as are found in the mining areas of Africa. The Meo uses wage labor as a source of cash income to supplement the livelihood derived from horticulture.

There are a few instances of Meo actually changing their economy. The writer knows a few who have been able to lease terraced fields for irrigated rice farming. Some of these were encouraged and underwritten by Touby. Still other Meo have become mechanics, trained medical practitioners, and specialists in other types of work.

Most of the Meo still maintain a basic mountain rice economy. Nevertheless, it is evident that there is a trend toward a modified cash economy. The Meo are anxious to possess western saddles, western knives, saws and other tools. Those who live near town purchase bicycles, motor bikes, and some even own jeeps. Most of the Meo wish to own Western guns. They want to buy medicine, sun glasses, colorful hats, footwear, flashlights, and any number of miscellaneous items which may be purchased in the Xieng Khouang shops. These "needs" require cash income. This cash is obtained largely through opium, wage labor, and the sale of surplus items.

The Meo have a faculty for inquiry into and adoption of new items. This is illustrated again and again as new elements have been introduced into their area. The inquisitive Meo will flock to an airstrip to see a plane. When the first one appeared on the outskirts of Xieng Khouang, the Meo not only joined the crowd as observers, but were found in the pilot's cabin attempting to determine the functions of all the gadgets. The writer has experienced the same with a jeep. The women are quick to employ a sewing machine. The men are quick to use new tools. Whether it be an imported doll whose sex they must determine, a soccer ball, a bicycle, or any other new items, the Meo are anxious to investigate and adapt it, if it will fit into their way of life.

Recent changes are also affecting the political sphere of Meo culture. The political bridge, on the district level, which ties the Meo into the national government of Laos, has already been indicated. However, intelligent interest in this larger political configuration is only beginning to emerge, as the Meo have come to be considered citizens of Laos and also to be represented in the National Assembly.

Increased enforcement of taxes, marriage licenses, and various permits for such things as selling and wood cutting directly affect the Meo and have stimulated their interest in the larger political sphere. This political interest is augmented further by increased literacy, more frequent contact with

Xieng Khouang town, and Meo candidates for provincial and^{47.}
national political offices.

As yet these changes have not seriously affected the Meo political organism on the local village level, because the traditional channels of authority are used. Nevertheless, the increasing measure of participation in government programs of taxation, legislation, and the military indicates a strong change in the basic Meo attitude toward authority.

With this cooperation, the Meo are receiving greater opportunities for education, medical attention, and recognition in all civic functions. Perhaps the most significant progress has been made in the area of education. In many Meo villages schools have been set up by the village households. Often the village has been able to pay a higher salary to a Lao teacher than the government pays in the official public schools. Literacy has been extremely low among the Meo, but is increasing now at a rapid pace.

In Xieng Khouang the public school has admitted Meo children who have the ability to read and write in Lao. Those who maintain consistently high scholarship are permitted to complete their elementary education. Some have gone to lycée at Vientiane, and the writer knows of at least one who is attending college in Saigon. Others are receiving special training in various trades and professions.

Economic, political, and educational changes are certain to have some effects in the social sphere. The intrusion of cash

economy, participation in a broader political sphere, and educational developments (especially school programs which necessitate young people being away from home for extended periods) have all put strain on the primary integrative force in Meo society--the household.

Briefly, one can see the points of stress. A child attends school in Xieng Khouang town for many months. He has not been subject to the direct social sanctions of his household. He returns home to be intellectually superior to his elders, and may eventually wish to dominate the household, or he may move away to become a specialist in some new line of work. There are those who remain integral members of their household, use their new abilities to augment its economy, and participate as much as possible in its traditional affairs. Others appear to forget their household's claim on them, and become independent. Such are subject to general criticism from the Meo population.

Wage labor is part of the problem. The household has attempted to meet the need for cash through endeavors in which the entire household participates, e.g. the opium complex, raising and selling surplus products, and other communal projects. The communal endeavors reinforce the regular social pattern of the Meo, but the wage labor and individual specialization of labor tend to put strain on the framework of Meo social structure.

Political change has not caused severe hardship on the

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VILLAGE LIFE IN
VIENTIANE PROVINCE

Report by:

Howard K. Kaufman
Field Service Officer

Vientiane, Laos
October 1, 1956

Errata Sheet for Report on Village Life in Vientiane Province

Page 3 para 3 line 19 delete by broadcast method.

Page 12 para 3 line 4 delete Countries add Counties

Page 12 para 3 line 8 delete Naibahn add Paubahn

Page 12 para 3 line 15 delete Naibahn add Paubahn

Page 14 para 1 line 6 delete Exercising add exorcising

Page 15 para 2 line 7 delete Wat add Local Wat.

Page 15 para 5 ~~line~~ 5 delete your-round add year-round.

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VILLAGE FIELD OFFICER'S REPORT ON VIENTIANE PROVINCE

Introduction

This report is the result of a brief survey of sixteen Lao villages in Vientiane province. In no way does it pretend to be a definitive work, nor is it necessarily applicable to conditions in Laos other than those in Vientiane province. The villages visited were in an area, the extremities of which are Ban Nam Ka Din in the Southwest, Ban Pon Soung in the North, and Ban Hap Souk in the West. Though the northern area of Vang Vien was not visited due to impassable roads at this season, a villager from that area was interviewed.

This report does not pretend to treat any one particular village, but endeavors rather to present a brief, conglomerate picture of Lao village life and its problems in Vientiane province. If details are desired on any aspect of this report, please contact Howard Kaufman, USOM.

Demography

The villages, for the most part, are located on main roads and along river banks. About 15 percent are located in the interior and are accessible only by narrow cart trails or foot paths. The villages range in size from 10 houses to 400, with the mean about 50. Population ranges from 50 to 1800 persons, with the mean about 250, thus giving an average of approximately five persons per household. (This average is used throughout this report.)

Houses are built on wooden piles, have wooden floors, and use either bamboo matting or thatch for walls and roofs. The older houses, and those of wealthier families, may have wooden walls and roofs of either tile or corrugated iron. Each house has one large social room which serves as living and dining room, one small room for cooking, and one or two partitioned areas for sleeping. In most cases, furniture as such is non-existent.

Social Organization

Social organization of the Lao may be called loosely structured. Unlike many rural peoples and relatively speaking primitive societies who have strict patterns for marriage, the Lao are free to marry whom they please. One can find parent-arranged marriages here and there, but there is a rapidly developing trend for the young people to seek the spouse of their choice.

Second cousin marriage is preferred, although by no means the rule. First cousin marriage, however, is taboo. In general a girl marries between the ages of 16 and 20, a boy between 18 and 24. Personal considerations for a marriage include wealth, industriousness, personality, proximity, and pulchritude, in this order. A mutual friend of the two families serves as a go-between and makes arrangements for the marriage. A bride-price is discussed in terms of kip--silver. One kip--silver is valued today at 40 kip--paper. The average bride--price is 50 kip--silver (2000 kip) which the boy's parents pay to the girl's parents during the marriage ceremony. If the boy's family cannot afford the asked-for sum of the bride-price, it is quite frequent for the young lovers to elope.

Residence is matri-local, i.e., the husband goes to live with his wife's family. This is a natural result of the very old system of matrilineal rule of inheritance. It is only natural that in a society where the girl inherits the property, the husband should come to live with her in order to work on this property.

The basic social relationship in the village is that of older-younger (pee-naung). Age is respected and everyone gauges himself as either older or younger than the next person, and behaves accordingly. An exception to this is the layman-priest relationship. The latter, regardless of age, is one of the most respected member of the community. Next to the priest, and a close second, comes the school teacher; then the village headman, the male village elders, and the harder-working, non-drinking farmers, in that order. Because of the Buddhist philosophy which places women on a metaphysical level below that of men, the village women are lowest in the social hierarchy. Nevertheless, women are well treated.

Children are wanted and loved. Nearly all families are indifferent as to whether they have boys or girls. The old adage that "children should be seen and not heard" is highly exemplified in the overt behavior patterns of village children when they are with adults. Children, on the other hand, are not excluded from passive participation in all functions and conversations regardless of how intimate.

Sustenance

The staple diet in these villages is glutinous rice. The average individual consumes roughly 1.3 pounds of rice per day. The average household consumes roughly 200 pounds of rice per month, or closer to 2500 pounds per year. Three meals a day are consumed by 60 percent of the villagers, with 40 percent eating only two meals. There seems to be no correlation between wealth

and the number of meals taken per day; it is more likely a matter of habit. In addition to rice, a meal consists of locally caught fish or fish bought in the market. A family of five consumes approximately 1.8 pounds of fish a day, or roughly six ounces per capita. In addition to fish, the meal will include fish paste, pak bung (a universally found wild, green vegetable), cucumber and peppers. Between meals, locally grown or purchased fruits are eaten--the season and area determining the type and quantity of fruits consumed. Eggs are rarely eaten, but for those who can afford them, eggs are consumed about once a week, raw or mixed in with other foods. Water, obtained from wells and rivers, is taken, like fruit, only between meals. The water is never boiled, the villagers maintaining they do not enjoy the taste. Salt is procured from neighboring groups through the bartering of rice, or is purchased in the local market. Serious shortages of food occur between June and September.

Comparing these consumption patterns with those which I have observed in Thailand, I feel it safe to assume that the average daily per capita caloric intake ranges from 1500 to 2000, slightly under the 1700 to 2300 daily intake found in Thailand.

Agriculture

The plowing begins as soon as the rains have arrived and ground has softened (usually in late May or early June). The buffalo, rented or owned, is attached to the wooden plowshare and the farmer merely guides the animal in a criss-cross fashion over the banded area, exerting only a small amount of energy. Meanwhile, the paddy seedlings from last year's crop are soaked for four days in a small water-filled, troughed-out area. Following the plowing, the fields are harrowed. One small section of paddy field is selected and the seeds are then sown in broadcast fashion over the area. A family of five plants on an average of 300 pounds of rice seed a season, and receives at harvest time between 6000 and 8000 pounds of rice (depending upon the soil), or roughly 1200 to 1600 pounds of rice per capita per year. In wooded areas where the slash and burn method is used, the yield is 70 to 80 percent less. Approximately 20 percent of the farmers must rely on this unprofitable means of rice cultivation (Slash and burn is a system whereby the farmer cuts away the brush and small trees in an area; burns the area, believing that the ashes enrich the soil; and then sows his crop by broadcast method. This area is then left fallow for the following five years, at the end of which time, it is slashed and burned again while the other areas are left fallow. Soil exhaustion is very rapid under this system.)

In approximately six weeks comes the arduous task of transplanting. This is nearly always a group-cooperative enterprise. Small groups will pick the rice seedlings, remove the mud from the roots, and tie it into small bunches with paddy stems. Another group will carry the bunches and deposit them in the corners of the banded fields. All groups then begin the laborious task of the actual re-planting.

Three types of rice are used: heavy, medium, and light, with the greatest percentage being of the heavy type. These three types of rice mature in 150, 120, and 90 days respectively, and are used in the larger farms in order to stagger the labor recruiting problems which arise during the short harvest season.

Following the harvest, the chaffing of the rice begins. This is accomplished by either beating the plants against boards or by beating the plants with sticks. The next step, that of milling, is done with a wooden foot-pedaled, mortar-pestle device. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to rice-cycle methods used in Thailand, in Laos the buffalo are never used for the chaffing procedure, and the simple wood-toothed stone milling mechanism is completely absent.

Paddy is stored in mat bins at the ground level, or in small storerooms raised on piles. The stocks are drawn upon according to the need of the farmer. The rice stalk is often piled up and used as fodder for the buffalo.

For the most part, no second crop is planted in the idle rice fields. This deplorable condition exists primarily from lack of sufficient water, secondarily because of lack of implements for irrigation, and only thirdly from lack of "know-how". Where an adequate water supply is available, cucumbers are grown in the paddy fields, as well as manioc, and in some areas corn. Only an acre or less is devoted to the former two crops, whereas one to two acres may be devoted to the latter crop. In each compound, the farmer grows some peppers, cucumbers, sugar cane, betel, and three or four fruit trees. Families located near rivers plant patches of tobacco and vegetables along the river banks, but these are barely sufficient for local consumption. No compost or other fertilizer whatsoever is used in either field or garden.

Livestock and Poultry

Eighty percent of the households own at least four chickens with a few owning as many as sixty. In the Paksan area, however, only 15 percent of the households own chickens. In all cases, they are raised as a small cash product, and are consumed only on special occasions. The eggs represent the bulk of the income here. Ducks are raised by only 10 percent of the households. Again in this case, eggs are the primary cash product. Cholera attacks the ducks nearly every rainy season and, as a result of this, most farmers have given up their productions.

Two or three pigs are raised by about 40 percent of the households. The villagers claimed that there was never enough food for these animals and that during the rainy season the soil was too muddy, rendering it difficult for the animals to forage for themselves. Half of the households possess one buffalo.

Twenty percent of the households had two, and wealthier farmers three or more. The buffalo are used primarily for rice cultivation, and occasionally are sold for slaughter. Those households with wagons will also possess two oxen for pulling the cart. Prior to 1938, these wagons were the sole means of transportation. Cows and oxen are found belonging to the wealthier families and serve as a meat-cash commodity. Cows' milk is not used by the peoples east of India. This is interesting when one considers the large quantities of canned milk, both powdered and evaporated, bought by the farmer for his children.

Economy

The rural economy in Vientiane province is predominantly cash, although a rice-barter economy becomes prevalent during the two months that follow the harvest. At this time rice is used as the medium of exchange for salt, fish, tools, clothing, etc. Rice is also sometimes used as payment for small services rendered, e.g., a midwife's fee is five kilos of rice. Rice is also the means of payment for lands rented during the rice cultivation season. Anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of the yield reverts back to the land owner. However, the renting of land for rice cultivation is peculiar to Vientiane province.

Family income is obtained by various means: 1) the sale of paddy; 2) the sale of forest foragings--bamboo, mushrooms, herbs, birds, and small animals; 3) the sale of domesticated animals, fowl, and eggs; 4) sale of home prepared foods; 5) hiring out of services; and to some extent 6) sale of truck garden produce.

A farmer receives 200 kip for a grown pig, 2 kip for a duck egg, 3 kip for a chicken egg; a pound of paddy brings 1.3 kip. If we subtract the seed needed for planting and the minimum rice needed for consumption, there remains roughly 2000 pounds or a value of 2300 kip. If we stop to consider that a "store-bought" shirt costs 200 kip, this gives us a rough index of the value of the kip, as well as a forceful picture of what the farmer is up against.

Prices in rural stores range from 10 to 20 percent higher than in the town of Vientiane. The smaller local stores sell such commodities as candles, cigarettes, matches, local crude tobacco, cotton thread, Chinese cakes, Chinese soda pop, hard candies, beer, canned milk, salt, Chinese and Thai medicines (all-purpose pills), and canned fish, which is growing in popularity. The larger stores carry a bigger selection and greater range in quality of merchandise than the smaller stores. For example, blankets, Hong Kong made shirts and pants, soap powders (Tide), Royal Standard cigarettes, eau de cologne, Pepsi Cola and more expensive brands of rice whiskey and wines.

Trips are made by the villagers to Vientiane for the purpose of purchasing tools, clothing, medicine, and for the purpose of investing their money in gold belts and jewelry for the women. These latter items are not only objects of beauty to the villagers, but also serve as an investment which is always carried on one's person. (This has its advantages in case of emergency flight, flood evacuation, or more commonly, household robberies.) The sale of gold is monopolized by the Chinese. It ranges from 20 to 24 karat, and nearly all of it comes from Bangkok via Nongkai. A very minute portion is panned from the rivers of Mamtha province. The Chinese do not divulge their source of gold, or the price they pay. Gold jewelry is sold by waight and only a small percentage of the cost goes for the workmanship. Money is often borrowed using these gold belts and chains as collateral. Interest rates range from 10 to 15 percent per month. These loans are always transacted in secret with one or two witnesses, usually relatives. Secrecy is merely a precaution against theft, inasmuch as loans may involve as much as 10,000 kip. Loans are made for the purchase of rice seed, tools, buffalo, and land.

Average family expenditures for a one year period are as follows:

Special gifts for the Wat (including rice)	800	kip
Gifts of money to the priests on holy days	300	"
Clothing	2500	"
Tools	1000	"
Meat and vegetables	6000	"
Gambling at the bouns	1000	"

In addition, there may be other expenses such as:

750 pounds of rice - poor families	900	Kip
Ordination ceremony	1500	"
Cremation ceremony	800	"
Marriage	2000	"

Small Industry and Commerce

In most households, the older women and many of the younger women know how to weave, though many have been forced to give up this skill because of growing preference amongst the villagers for imported, ready-made clothing. Nevertheless, about 65 percent of the households have looms which are operated sporadically for making shirts and men's pahkama. "Store-bought" clothing carries more prestige for the wearer. This is particularly true of men's clothing.

Quite a few villages have their own blacksmith. These men work in pairs; one man operates the crude, piston-~~7~~bellows, the other hammers out the much needed machete and axe blades used by the villagers.

In the larger villages one finds one or two tailors (male or female) who earn their livelihood making pants, shirts, mosquito nets, sheets, etc. They have purchased their foot-pedaled sewing machines in Vientiane. One or two members of the community supplement their meagre income by being herb doctors or midwives. There is also usually a barber or two in the village. Members of poor families will hire themselves out during the rice season. For these services the man will receive 2600 pounds of rice, the woman 1600 pounds.

Children and women of the village will set home-made wares such as cakes, noodles, sugar cane, etc., on trays or in baskets and squat along the roads or near the Wat on holy days selling and chatting. Average individual income is 15 kip net per day.

Property

The amount of land on an average compound including the house site is approximately one-eighth of an acre. Most families (70 percent) own their own rice fields. A "poor" family is considered to be one which owns less than eight raj (3.2 acres), a wealthy family, one which owns 20 or more raj (eight acres). Average holdings besides the compound are about four acres. Those who do not own land, rent land from wealthier farmers in the community. In these cases the former turns over anywhere from 20 to 50 percent of the rice yield to the owner. The amount of rent paid is determined by a) the affinal proximity of the parties involved, and b) the degree of fertility of the soil. Absentee landlordism in rural areas is virtually non-existent.

All property is divided equally among the progeny, with the eldest daughter inheriting the house. This emphasis on the principle of primogenitor is quite common amongst rural peoples in many parts of the world. I might add, however, that inheritance through the matrilineal side of the family is not necessarily typical of all southeast Asian countries. In Thailand, for example, sons as well as daughters inherit the property and the youngest son inherits the house. (Ultimo-genitor).

The Role of the Chinese in Lao Rural Life

In the larger villages the Chinese control over 80 percent of the local commercial market, e.g., the stores, etc. In addition, they serve as middlemen for the rice mills. They know how to ingratiate themselves with the Lao villagers. They are liked by the villagers who regard them, so to speak, as their source of bread and butter. The middlemen are the persons who buy the villagers' rice. They also loan money to the villagers at what appears to the farmers to be a lower rate of interest than they can get from their own clansmen. In actuality, it comes to the same, the only difference being that interest is paid in rice with the next harvest crop. Psychologically speaking, a farmer would rather part with 100 pounds of rice at harvest time when he has thousands, than part with 100 kip cash.

I mention these circumstances for the benefit of those who may plan to set up any form of cooperatives among the farmers. If the latter plan is ever put into effect, the instigators must concomittantly plan to substitute the complete role (both physical and psychological) that these Chinese play in the rural community.

Education

There are over 12,000 students going to school in Vientiane, This represents 23 percent of all students in Laos. All schools lack sufficient equipment and all schools are over-crowded. In some schools, there is one teacher for 70 pupils; in some schools 70 to 80 students, representing three classes, are crowded into one small classroom, with four pupils occupying a desk adequate for two. In some areas where a school exists with two classrooms, there are over 200 eligible students, of which about 40 percent show up. In all villages there are students who wish to continue their education, having completed their three years, but because of the absence of facilities are forced to give up their aspirations.

There are five categories of schools:

1) The Pagoda School: The education here consists of three grades in which the students, taught by priests, learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and some simple stories concerning the Gautama's life in which the moral aspects are emphasized. These schools are closed every holy day (4 each month), but classes are held Saturday and Sunday.

2) The rural public elementary schools: There are 93 in Vientiane province. Here a similar academic program exists with greater emphasis on the three "r's" and only two hours a week being devoted to religious and moral training.

3) The rural school centers: There are 19 in Vientiane province. Here the training is similar to the rural schools except that the teachers teach only half a day and devote the rest of their time to distributing medicines and to helping the farmers to improve their agricultural techniques.

4) The "Groupe Scolaire" schools: There are 21 in Vientiane province. These are found only in the larger (city) areas. They are built by the government, contain seven grades, and as many teachers. This is in contrast with the rural schools with three grades, one or two teachers, and construction done by the villagers. In theory, a village of 50 eligible pupils is entitled to a school. The government pays for the materials and the villagers contribute the labor. The government in the past few years has had no money.

5) "College" (found only in the city of Vientiane) consisting of the four upper grades (seven to eleven). There is also of course the Lycee in the city of Vientiane.

The prestige of the teacher is second only to that of the priest. The teacher has himself, in most cases, undergone only six years of schooling. His income averages 5000 kip per month if he is married and has one child.

Classroom discipline is a "cola va sans dire" mode of behavior. To talk back to the teacher or to disobey him would be unheard of. This exemplifies to some extent the aura under which the rural teacher is held.

There is never enough chalk, pencils, or notebooks to last through the academic year of nine months. Blackboards are often absent, roofs have many large holes, and floors are quite often precariously nailed down.

General Knowledge

Of the 16 villages visited, only two had ever heard of American Aid. These two villages were those with a dispensary and the medicines, they all knew had been given by the Americans.

As to general knowledge of the world, the villagers were ignorant. Ninety percent of the people did not know where their King lived, nor who was the Prime Minister. The world was flat and consisted of Lao peoples, with a handful of Chinese and white people coming from some where far away. Surprising as it may be, literacy was relatively high, ranging from 30 to 50 percent with 80 percent of these being men. These latter had learned to read while serving in the priesthood.

Religion

The Hinayana Buddhism of Laos is the same as that of Burma, Ceylon and Thailand. In Vientiane province over 90 percent of the villages have their own wat (church) compound. In a village of 300 persons one will find three or four priests and four or five novices. (A priest must be a man at least 20 years of age, and he must try to follow the 223 commands of Buddha. The novice is a male between 8 and 19 years of age, and must follow only the first ten of the 223 commands. In Laos only five percent of the eligible male community joins the priesthood. This number, compared with the same situation in Thailand, is extremely low.

The village wat consists of a public hall (sala) where sermons are given every eight days, a small dormitory for the priests, and a special altar building (bod) where the priests convene on special occasions, and where the ordination ceremony takes place.

Early every morning, except on holy days and rainy days, the priests go about the village in single file silently begging for their food for that day. On rainy days and holy days, and at the eleven o'clock offering, women of the village bring food to the wat for the priests. The early morning food offerings consist only of rice; the late morning offerings (11:00 a.m.), besides rice, consist of meat and vegetables. Buddhist law forbids consumption by priests of solid foods after midday. Liquids, with the exception of alcohol, may be taken at any time. Smoking is not prohibited, nor is betel chewing.

In theory, all young men upon reaching the age of 20 are expected to join the priesthood for one Lenten period--July 15 to October 15. The fact that the cost of an ordination ceremony is 1500 kip is only a minor factor explaining the paucity of young men joining the priesthood. The more important reasons are the accelerated pace of living, the increasing interest in material things, the lure of high pay in the army, and the slow decline in the prestige of the church.

The priests are still, however, the most highly respected members of the community. The educational level of the priests varies from three to six years. During their stay at the wat, they study for the yearly priest examinations. The three levels to which they aspire are Chan Tri (third level), Chan Tho (second level), and Chan Egg (first or top level). In the province of Vientiane, only one percent of the priests aspire to the even higher Barien examinations, of which there are an additional six levels.

The functions of the wat in the community are many. Aside from its function as the spiritual center of the community, it may serve as a school for the villages in which government schools are absent. The priests are the instructors and a great deal of emphasis is placed on religious education. In addition, it often serves as the recreational, social, medical, and advisory center for the community. It can well be said that the wat is the community center of the village.

Each village elects one of its most respected members to serve, without salary, as keeper of the wat. It is his duty to supervise and handle all contributions for wat construction, maintenance, and socio-religious activities, be it in the form of currency or commodity. It is also his duty to recruit and supervise the villagers in all programs of wat construction and maintenance.

Throughout the year, there are special Buddhist festivals observed by the villagers. (The following dates are approximate, being based on the lunar calendar for 1955.) On the fifteenth day of July, the eighth month of the Lao year, the Lenten period begins. During the three months that follow, the priests lead

a more austere, disciplined life than at other times, i.e., they devote more time to study, they must return to their respective wats by sunset, etc.

At the beginning of September comes the festival of the Kowpadapdeen. This festival is primarily one in which the spirits of the deceased are invited back to partake of the offered food. In addition, this festival celebrates the half way mark of the lenten period. On the fifteenth of September comes the festival of Haukowsah, in which the farmers bring rice offerings (which have been blessed at the wat) to the fields, requesting the goddess of rice to partake of this food and in return to bring them a rich harvest. In Vientiane and other more sophisticated areas, it is also a festival for the spirits of the dead.

On the fifteenth day of October, occurs the festival celebrating the end of the Lenten period known as AugPhasa. Within the next few weeks comes the festival of Thaud Katin. Each wat reserves a certain day for this festival at which time the people of the village present the priests with yellow robes for their use during the ensuing year, as well as presenting them with small utilitarian gifts such as cigarettes, soap, etc. At the end of the Katin season, there follows a series of bouns known as Boun Fawayd. These are the popular bouns with which many of us are already acquainted. Each wat sponsors its own boun, the objective being to raise money for wat maintenance and construction. Ramwong dancing, boxing, leekay (popular drama based on the Ramayana), and gambling are the main attractions.

On the fifteenth day of February is the ceremony of Fabat. On this occasion the foot-print of the Buddha is covered with gold leaf by the villagers as a token of respect. The gold leaf is sold by the priests and the proceeds are used for wat maintenance.

On the eleventh of May begins the three-day New Years festival known as Songkran. Although this is a layman's celebration, the wat always plays an important role. On the last day of this festival comes the celebration of Bahng Fai with its fifteen foot long rockets, its phallic symbols, figures, etc.

In the more sophisticated areas two festivals celebrating the birthday and death of Buddha are held, but in the rural areas they are merely treated as another holy day.

Holy days (Wan Phra) fall on the seventh or eighth, fourteenth or fifteenth days of both the waxing and waning moon. On these days, the older members of the community bring gifts of food to the priests, and spend the bulk of the morning the sala listening to sermons, chatting amongst themselves, and seeking personal advice from the priests.

Throughout the course of the year the priests serve in such household functions as a new-house warming ceremony; a household blessing ceremony in which all members of the household are blessed; a pre-cremation ceremony. Though marriage is a layman's ceremony, completely executed by the villagers, the priests will be asked to choose a propitious time for the ceremony, by astrology.

In addition to Buddhism, there is a strong current of Animism which permeates the entire religious behavior of the villagers. Earth, trees, fire, sky, water, etc., all have their guardian spirits. The most important of these is the guardian spirit of the rice. Offerings of rice are made at various times to propitiate these spirits. The most common animistic ceremony involves the calling back of someone's khwan (soul) which has left the body and lost its way or tarried too long. The concept of the khwan explains the unconscious state of sleep as well as explaining ill health.

Government

The governor is the executive head of the provincial government. His officers serve as the provincial arm of all the various ministries represented. Each province is sub-divided into countries (meang) in which a Jow Meang performs the executive duties. Each county is further divided into districts under a district head called the Tahsang. These districts are composed of from six to ten villages. Each village has its headman (Naibahn). The headman is elected for life by the members of the village. The Tahsang is elected by the headmen in the district. Retirement is voluntary and usually takes place at about 55 years of age. The Jow Meang is appointed for an indefinite period by the provincial governor and is the lowest level, but a definite part of the Civil Service. All orders or matters of policy pertaining to the villages are transmitted from the ministries to the governor, to the county head, to the Tahsang, to the Naigahn, to the villagers.

Practically speaking, village government consists merely in the settling of local domestic disputes. The headman will be asked to arbitrate family quarrels, to witness financial transactions, etc. Discipline in the village is enforced principally by social sanction. As was mentioned above, the headman is elected by public vote for life and remains in office until he dies or feels that he is old enough to retire. Qualities considered necessary by the villagers for a village headman are temperance, industriousness, and adherence to the Buddhist way of life. Wealth plays a minor role.

In Vientiane province there is a relatively large number of young headmen. Of the sixteen villages visited, thirteen of the headmen are under 40, and of these thirteen nine are under 30 years of age. All of them can read and write Lao, and each has had approximately three years of education. The headmen receive no salary.

The Tahsang is elected by the various headmen in his district. He receives (in principle) a small stipend of 500 kip a month paid by the offices of the county. He meets once or twice a year with the village headmen, members convening only as the urgency demands. At these meetings the topics of discussion usually concern those which the Tahsang has discussed with the county head during their monthly meetings: such topics as preparation for festivals, preparation for visiting officials, needs and complaints of the villagers, conscription, fixing of local prices for the army, coolie corvee for the army, taxes, etc. As with the village headmen, retirement is voluntary and usually takes place at about 55 years of age.

Health and Sanitation

A great percentage of the villagers suffer from malnutrition. This is evident to some extent when one observes the length of time that sores seem to fester. Polished rice is preferred to the more nutritional unpolished rice. The farmers claim that not only is the taste better but also that unpolished rice is the food served to prisoners. Malaria is rather common, as is trachoma. Nearly all villagers complain of frequent attacks of dysentery, especially during the rainy season. Water is boiled only for women during later pregnancy and post-labor periods, in the belief that boiled water increases the supply of mother's milk. Body lice is frequent; chest pains are a common complaint. Defecation takes place in the rivers and open fields for no privies exist. Micturation is done at every and any locale. The Lao are, relatively speaking, a clean people. A villager will descend to the river or collect water from the well in order to bathe at least once a day. Soap is used when afforded.

A small dispensary can be found in some of the larger villages (population of 400 or over). However, stocks are always mildewed and depleted. The male nurse attendant has had a training course of from one to six months; his salary is from 750 to 4000 kip per month. For all intents and purposes, his training is highly inadequate. "Thesomide" is given for nearly all illnesses. Injections are given with un-sterilized hypodermic needles which are simply wiped off with a dirty cloth after use. Mouldy medicines sit on dirty shelves, in some cases, medicines which require refrigeration. Medicines are received from the Vientiane hospital every six months (in principle) in insufficient quantities, which results in their being exhausted within a two month period.

In villages where there are no dispensaries, the sick villager goes first to the priest (if there is one who claims curing powers), and secondly to the local village doctor. These local doctors have learned their trade from their fathers or through contact with the local doctor in another village. They use certain herbs and formulas for exercising many common illnesses. For example, one common technique is to spend ten to fifteen minutes blowing on the pained area. Charcoal and soot-covered spider webs are used on wounds and cuts.

Though a woman may give birth to a child every 18 months, the infant mortality rate ranges from 55 to 65 percent, which immediately strikes one as not only being consistent in its small 10 percent range, but also as being disturbingly high. On the other hand, fatality of the mother at child birth is only about five percent.

Transportation

Nearly all transportation within the daily living pattern is by foot; food and water supplies are carried in baskets (often waterproof) attached to a shoulder pole. Villages located along the river will paddle supplies in long dug-outs from village to market. Ox carts are owned by most of the inland households, by many of the river bank households and are used for transporting rice, pigs, sugar cane, bamboo, etc, from village to market, and store supplies from market to village. Households along the road may also own bicycles which are used for gaining access to neighboring villages and to Vientiane. Along the main arteries to Paksan, Bangkoen, and Hinheub, there is daily bus service in the dry season. Many farmers bring their produce, (if not too bulky) by cart as far as the main road and then travel by bus to Vientiane.

Trends in Rural Vientiane

There is a definite trend away from traditional values and towards new ideas and an accent on educated youth. (of the 22 village headmen and district heads, over half were under 35 years of age). All this is a result of the influence of urbanization. There is also a strong trend towards "rising expectation" as bus service and bicycles are enabling more and more people to visit Vientiane and see factory made products-- such as tools, clothing, gadgets--and to desire these articles. The prices are too prohibitive however to show much technical changes in the rural areas. Nevertheless, the availability of factory made articles has caused a gradual but observable decline in village industry.

There is a growing tendency for the youth of the village to join the army because of the relatively high salaries, thus causing not only a shortage of eligible males, but also changing the traditional values (both moral and monetary) within the village socio-economic structure. A restlessness and dissatisfaction with village patterns of behavior is observed within villages where large percentages of young men have left to join the army. This restlessness is even more evident in the returning soldier.

A concurrent lessening of interest in the village wat is unfortunate. That which once served as the socio-religious center of the community/ is gradually losing its hold on the younger members of the village. The government has gradually taken the responsibility of education away from the wat. Easier access to Vientiane, movies, large bouns, etc, have supplanted the older functions of the wat.

The villagers are slowly losing respect for their government, and are becoming more and more imbued with the philosophy of "We're only farmers, so what's the use?." This fatalistic outlook is deplorable in the light of the present political situation. Today, when the future of the country potentially offers them more than it ever could before, we see them losing faith in their government and developing a frame of mind that could easily cause them to fall prey to Communist promises.

Expressed Needs, Desires, and Anxieties of the Villages

1. In nearly every village, one of the basic "felt needs" is land. The farmer is willing to clear and level the jungle and develop it into paddy fields. However, his lack of knowledge concerning whom he should contact, whose property it is, deters him from taking action. Recently squatters in certain areas have been requested by government officials to vacate their homes and fields. Concurrently, there is in many areas a growing anxiety among the Lao farmers concerning the large infiltration of Thai farmers into potential Lao farming areas. The Thai come across the river in search of available land, squat in an area and begin clearing and occupying it. The fact that these Thai are desperate for land makes them more industrious than the Lao which adds to the resentment felt by the latter.

2. The second most common "felt need" is irrigation. The farmers are anxious to raise a second crop during the post-rice season (December through May), but are unable to do so because of the paucity of water. Connected here is the frequently occurring request for your-round wells. There are two or three wells per village. They range from 4 to 6 meters in depth and contain a water supply for only 8 months out of the year. The few villagers who own wells do not permit the other farmers to use them during the dry months when water is at a minimum.

3. There is a constant demand for tools for digging, cutting and chopping. The villagers complain that they cannot afford these tools at the present market price. Farmers, though capable of performing various tasks for themselves, lack the necessary tools.

4. Several farmers in various areas requested loans at a reasonable rate of interest. At present they have little collateral and as a result must pay exorbitant rates of interest, often as high as 180 percent per year, and always as high as 120 percent. One farmer said that he wished to clear some land in order to raise kapok, for which operation he needed 10,000 kip. He was sure that he could pay back this debt within 12 months, but knew he couldn't afford the high interest rate.

5. Nearly all farmers desired to raise truck gardens which would include such vegetables as onions, garlic, lettuce, kalampee, and such fruits as mangoes, pineapples, and papayas.

6. A dispensary is desired (and needed) by all villagers in areas where there is none. Where a dispensary is in existence, there is always a need for frequent renewal of such stocks as cotton, syringes, penicillin and especially aureomycin.

7. In areas where no schools exist they are earnestly requested; and, in areas where schools do exist, over-crowding is so extreme that annexes are requested. Many of the young people who have finished their three years of local schooling expressed a keen desire to continue their education but could not afford lodging in another village where advanced schooling was available. Only 1 percent of potential advanced students come to Vientiane for further education. Many adults expressed a desire to learn to read and write. In nearly every village there were several young men who expressed a willingness to come to Vientiane to study animal husbandry, agriculture and nursing, if room and board were provided.

8. The rural school teachers were originally intended to teach only in the mornings, and to give out medicines and advice to the farmers on methods of agricultural improvement in the afternoons. However, due to their inadequate training in agriculture--two months in Xieng Khouang--they feel incapable of offering any advice to the veteran farmers who "know much more about farming than we do." Concerning the distribution of medicines, once their meagre supply is exhausted, they are left idle. Several of them have mentioned that they would like to continue their studies in medicine or agriculture. Inasmuch as they are well above the average in intelligence, their talents should not be wasted.

9. The Tahsangs complained that they rarely received their salary. They also lamented the fact that though their job held some prestige value in the community, it nevertheless resulted in their losing a great deal of income, i.e., so much time was required for the execution of the governmental duties that they had no time to work their fields.

10. All households expressed an interest in raising telapia fish. Here again, lack of water was their cul de sac.

11. The teachers in the rural school centers complained that the seeds given to them by USOM arrived too late to be planted that season. They felt that if they kept them until after the rainy season, the seeds would mildew and become useless--which is exactly what happened.

On the other hand, the Black Thai received their seeds on time and proceeded to plant them immediately. But here, unfortunately, no instructions were given as to how to plant and water these American type seeds. The Black Thai watered them in the morning and in the afternoon, with the result that the soil dried out during the midday sun, and the plants withered. It was later suggested, after a post mortem inspection by the Deputy Governor that these seeds should have been watered once a day at sun down using twice as much water.

12. 2500 Black Thai refugees from the Dien Bien Phu area (via Saigon and Xieng Khouang) have been settled at kilometer 30 on the Luang Prabang road, and have been left pretty much to their own initiative. Rice, garden seeds and tools have been furnished by USOM. A large tract of land has been cleared, originally to serve as rice fields, but now to be used as the village site. This too was financed by USOM.

The chief of the Black Thai has recently returned from a sojourn in France and has requested the Lao Government to permit the entry of an additional 15,000 Black Thai refugees who are now miserably located in the Dalat area of Vietnam. The implications and innuendos are that USOM will be asked to contribute additional funds for their resettlement.

LAOS PROJECT

Paper No.16

MINORITY GROUPS IN NORTHERN LAOS

- Especially the Yao -

by
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There are many groups in northern Laos, such as the Lao, the Meo, the Yao and the Kha Mou (Phou Theng), interspersed among one another. It is an area where the ethnic structures are complicated and the cultures are mixed. I am limiting my consideration to the district of Pha Tang and its vicinity, and will try to make clear the relationship of the Yao to the other groups. First, I will present some data on the Yao tribe in the village of Kaisou, their settlement patterns, social organization and religion; then I will show their contact and interrelationships with the surrounding groups. In the vicinity of the village of Pha Tang, the Yao and Meo are found in the mountainous districts, the Phou Theng settle on the slopes and at the foot of the mountains, and the Lao live in the valleys and on the plains.

From September, 1957, to April, 1958, the author traveled in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos as a member of the party for Research on Rice Culture in Southeast Asia. From January to April, 1958, the writer lived in the village of Pha Tang in northern Laos and did research on the Thai villages in the area.¹ Pha Tang is a Lao village located between Vientiane and Luang Prabang. In the vicinity of Pha Tang there are many mountains which rise 1,000 to 1,700 meters above sea level, and between them the two rivers -- the Nam Pha Mone and the Nam San flow toward the south. They meet at the southern border of the village, becoming the Nam San and the Nam Ngun before joining the Mekong River east of Vientiane. Ban Pha Tang is located in a valley. On the same river there are sev-

eral other Lao villages at intervals of a few kilometers. Among these are some Thai Deng villages, originally from other areas. The language of the villagers differs slightly.² Most of them are immigrants from Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang. The Meo and the Kha Mou, (the latter also known as the Phou Theng or Thai Theng)³ are located in the mountains and at the foot of the mountains in this district. There are also a couple of Yao villages. While they preserve their own cultural traditions, they also maintain close inter-relationships with the other groups. Although they are not all content, in general, they live together peacefully. The complexity of the ethnic structure is one of the remarkable characteristics of this district.⁴

The purpose of research in this village (Ban Pha Tang) was an intensive study of the society and the culture of a Lao village; and to collect data for comparative purposes, we visited as many as possible of the surrounding Lao villages. Accordingly, at first there was no intention of researching the minority groups, but the sight of their extraordinary costumes, and the smoke rising from the top of the mountains whetted a desire to seek their culture and society. I visited the Yao village of Kaisou first on January 24th and again on February 14th to the 16th. At the time of the first visit, I took Po Boua and Tondi of Ban Pha Tang, and a porter. On the second visit I took Po Boua and a porter. Of course, they were not primarily interested in our research. Po Boua was the landlord of the house where I stayed, and Tondi the landlord of the house next door. Our research was done in a short period of time

and we had many difficulties, one of them being the language (even though the Yao spoke Lao quite well), so we could not get sufficient data. I should restrain myself from publishing data in this form, but we do not have much data on the Yao so I hope this report will offer new knowledge on the Yao.⁵

Yao tribes are found in great numbers in the northern part of the Tonkin Plain and in the western mountains, but in Laos they are found mainly in the southwestern part of Sam Neua and around Nam Tha, and in the northwestern part of Phong Saly. There are also a few Yao villages around Luang Prabang and some in the northern part of Thailand.¹⁰ In contrast to the Lao, the geographic expansion of the Yao has been erratic. Yao youths around Luang Prabang frequently take the three-day walk to visit the Yao villages near Pha Tang, and when I showed them pictures of Yao in the highlands of Tonkin, they looked eagerly and made a note of their location.

Now let us extend our scope to the whole of south China and look at the distribution of the Yao tribe. For this purpose, we have only the maps of Bernatzik,¹¹ Eickstedt¹² and Wiens. From these we know that the Yao tribe is now widely distributed in Kwantung, Kwangsi, Hunan and Yunnan provinces. If we compare these maps with those of the distribution of the same tribe in ancient times by Wiens, we can surmise that formerly the Yao were widely scattered all over the districts south of the Yangtze River, and later were gradually forced into the mountain districts. But is this true?

Wiens¹³ summarizes tribal relationships in south China as follows: 1) The Chuang or T'ai, are the wet-rice cultivators located

in the valleys and plains. The central location of the Chuang culture is in Kwangsi Province, but they also extend into a large part of Kwangtung and Fukien, Chekiang, Kwangsi, Hunan, Kweichow, Szechwan, Yunnan and Kiangsi Provinces. In Yunnan the Chuang culture is comparatively isolated as a minority group, but in the eastern part it made a great contribution to the ancient Yueh culture, and in Kweichow and Szechwan it has undergone some changes and has become integrated with the local culture.

The Yao established their influence all over south China. Eickstedt mentions that Hsia-min in Fukien is one of the Yao tribes in a broad sense. It is said to be the Yao and not the Thai who are the oldest inhabitants (Urbewohner) of the coast of south China, and it is the Thai, not the Yao, who were the next group appearing there. According to Eickstedt, the Yao language belonged to "monkmerische Sprache" from the beginning.

Liang Shun Sheng's¹⁵ view is as follows: The ancient Man is the same as the present Yao and Hsia-min groups. The Man tribe, in a broad sense, is identical with the Meo tribe. But in a narrow sense, the Man tribe refers only to descendents of "P'an-hu." Hsia-min are scattered in Fukien, Chekiang and the northern part of Tonkin. Man is the Yao's name for themselves. The areas inhabited by the Man before the three ancient dynasties (Hsia, Shang and Chou) were the southwestern parts of Hunan in the Chou period, and were located in the Yangtze valley. In the Sung period they were called Man-Yao, and migrated south to Kwangtung and Kwangsi. Later, they divided and the eastern group entered Fukien and Chekiang and be-

came Hsia-min; the western group moved into Yunnan via Kwangsi and have been called Man. The people who stayed in Hunan and Kwangsi are called Yao.

Hsu Sung Yu's¹⁶ History of the People in the Yueh Chiang Valley was also useful for my research, even though there were some questionable points in it. Above all, his free linguistic interpretation was instructive. According to him, the places of origin of the Yao are Kwangsi, Chekiang and Fukien. In sum, Yu considers the Yao tribe moved first to the southwest, then west, and finally to Indochina.

We can summarize these statements as follows: They all agree that the place of origin of the Yao is the eastern part of south China, but there are many disagreements as to the course of migration, the relation between the adjacent tribes and the classification of their language. Recently Benedict classified the Meo and Yao languages together with the languages of Thai, Kadai, Indonesia, Monkhmer and Vietnamese as proto-Austrian languages.¹⁷ But to clarify the origin and course of Yao migration, we have to depend on the further development of anthropological and archaeological research. Here, I only want to make the following points:

1) due to the pressure from the Han (Chinese) to the north, the Yao have spread to the mountainous area of south China, and their culture has gained many elements through long contact with the Han and adjacent groups, especially the Thai and Meo, and 2) the western extremity of their distribution is in northern Laos, and the southern boundary is approximated by Pha Tang village. This village is the south-western frontier of the Yao and as such reflects accretions of

patterns from northern Indo-China, south China as well as the influences of surrounding local cultures.

Culture and Society of the Yao Tribe

What is the culture and society of the Yao tribe like today.

Eberhard summarized it as follows:¹⁸

Economy: Mountainous habitat with shifting cultivation; frequent change in settlements, and hunting and gathering of edible plants. The cultivation of potatoes is significant.

Social Structure: Neither a ruling class nor a tribal organization are well developed. They have a strong patriarchal clan, and practice exogamy, with frequent cross-cousin marriages. Other traits include the custom of spontaneous exchange of poetry, and trial marriage. The formal marriage rite is performed only after the child is born. Initiation ceremonies into the adult life exist.

Religion: Worship of the dog god and P'an-hu. They have both dog and tiger taboos, and tiger worship. At the end of the year they perform the No play masquerade rite. They have memorial tablets and worship their ancestors. The deceased is placed in a coffin and buried. Shamanism forms an important element in their religious practices.

Domestic Life: One-story houses with earth floors, no veranda. A fire is in the center of the floor; along the walls there

are pallets; the cooking is done in a corner of the rectangular house, over a crude stove. Most of their houses are for small families. They wear short coats and do not wear shoes. Their hair is carefully braided. Burdens, supported by a headband, are carried on their backs.

These are some of the generalized features of the Yao. Now let us describe the Yao in northern Laos.¹⁹ The following data on the Yao pertains to Ban Kaisou unless otherwise specified:

(1) Houses and Settlements.

In the mountainous areas near Ban Pha Tang, there are three Yao villages, Kaisou, Pha Louang and Pha Nam Pin. All of them located in Muong Vang Vieng, are between 1,000 to 1,700 meters above sea level. In Muong Kassy (north of Muong Vang Vieng) there is a Yao village called Pha Tiou, but only the three villages in Muong Vang Vieng are in direct contact with the Lao in Ban Pha Tang. There are 27 houses in Ban Kaisou, making it a comparatively large Yao village. The other two villages are much smaller; Pha Louang has only 5-6 houses and Pha Nam Pin has 7-8 houses. There are also several Yao villages near Luang Prabang sub-divided into hamlets, e.g. Pha Koum is composed of the hamlets of Nja Kha (25 houses), Om Se (4-5 houses), and Tam Yat (10 houses). But in the villages near Pha Tang there is only one community and one Nai Ban (village headman) who supervises the three villages.

To reach Kaisou from Pha Tang it is necessary to walk for four hours to Den Din (occasionally trucks are used) then turn

right into the forest; cross a single bamboo-pole bridge (which was subsequently rebuilt) over a small stream 3 meters wide, and then climb a steep slope. At places there are log huts where people rest when carrying heavy burdens, and there are also caves providing shelter from the rain. In about an hour a ridge of the mountain is reached and then the path crosses the ridge. After a while we come to a rotted-bamboo gate which seems to be the entrance to Kaisou village. After another hour, a wide field suddenly opens up and the Yao village appears in the basin surrounded by many limestone peaks.

The village is located on the south side of the basin, 980 meters above sea level, surrounded by the sharp peaks of Pha Tong Ching. In the surrounding areas there are forested limestone slopes interspersed with a few patches of grass. In the center of the basin is a small stream, but during the dry season there is no water. The houses stand in one or two lines in the shape of a right angle. They are situated very close to each other. Scattered nearby are rice granaries, pig pens, horse stables and chicken coops. There are no boundary fences. In the center of the village is a fenced-in area where plants from which dyes are made, are cultivated. Tea plants, peach trees and other plants are nearby.²¹ In the northern part of the village there is another field of tea plants, and beyond it there are poppy and vegetable fields. When the author visited the village at the end of January, there were white and purple poppies in full bloom. Corn, red peppers and cabbage are interspersed in the poppy field. The western part of the village is covered by shrubbery but some areas have been cleared to cultivate coffee.

According to the Yao the coffee plants had been brought from the Boloven plateau to the Lao but did not grow well in this area. The south of the village is dense forest which spreads over the ridges and the mountain tops. The Yao village is like an oasis in the desert, a "hidden village" in the tropical forest.

The size of the houses in this village varies. In Figure 2, the houses numbered 11, 22, 23, 26 and 27 are very small. Some of them are so small that they look like storage houses or tool sheds, while some are well-built. This seems to indicate social strata in the community. Generally speaking, the houses are made of wood with earthen floors and gabled roofs. Some of the houses have thatched roofs while others have wood shingles. Two or three of the houses use the wave-shaped galvanized iron sheets (Japanese made) on one side of the roof. The slope of the roofs is very steep, and the rain water is conducted through bamboo pipes into a well, which is not used during the dry season. Pallets are built in a row on one side of the room; on the opposite side are pallets for guests. The fireplace and cooking stove are built on the floor²² and an altar is placed on one side of the wall. There are, occasionally, several papers pasted near the altar with the saying, "Directly overhead, pure wind blows; He grows wings and flies away," written in Chinese. At times, on a board over the entrance there are very expertly written Chinese characters indicating the year and date of the construction of the house. Since the houses are built on the slope, one side of the house is on stilts, and on this side are generally placed the beds for the guests, and the pig-pen. The horse stables, chicken

coops and the rice granary are attached to the houses. The floor of the rice granary is built high on pillars with board planks to prevent mice from getting into the rice. Occasionally, the pig-pens are built separate from the house.

Kaisou was founded 14 years ago, Pha Nam Pin 20 years ago and Pha Louang village is more than 50 years old.

Agriculture and Livestock.

Horses, cattle, pigs, chickens and dogs are kept. Water buffalo cats and geese do not occur in Kaisou but they are found in Pha Koum village. At a distance from the village, fields have been cleared (by burning the grasses and trees) for cultivating poppies, dry rice, sugar cane, corn, sweet potatoes and bananas. On the ridges and slopes, a distance of 2-3 hours walk from the village, there are rice fields, and also three groups of houses; one group of two, another of three and a third one of five can be seen. Wood and bamboo are used for construction and for making paper. They also mine silver and lead.²³ Recently, the population has increased and the fields have expanded from Kaisou village to the Den Din ridge (675 meters above sea level).

Their main agricultural products are opium, rice and corn. Poppies are harvested three times a year -- first the poppy seeds are sown in July and harvested in September. Second, the sowing is done in August and the harvesting in December, and the same procedure again in September, with the harvest in January or February. They gather the milky liquid from the poppy seeds and make raw opium. This is their main source of cash income.

They have several kinds of dry rice, of which the author obtained samples of three types. Rice is sown in March or April and reaped in September. Their staple food is non-glutinous rice. Corn is used for livestock.

They have several horses, used for transportation. They also have cows. According to the Yao, the Lao buy cows from them and the Meo. Beside wild birds and animals, pork and chicken are very important food items.

Food Habits

They take their breakfast at 11:00 a.m. and have two or three other meals, but usually have two formal meals per day, and when they are hungry between meals, they eat baked sweet potatoes, baked bananas or chew on sugar cane. They sit down around a round table or take their seats around the fire. Men and women never eat together. If the family is large, the head of the family and the elder males eat first; next the rest of the males, and last are the females, who eat by the stove. During meals the head of the family is seated first and prays before all begin to eat. At the time of a formal party for a festival this procedure is more complicated. First, the village headman or the eldest man gives a long prayer in a low voice; next, the host stands and passes the wine glasses to the guests, one by one. The glasses are received by the guests then returned to the host. Next, the guests individually pass the glasses to the host. Then a toast is made, the wine is drunk and the eating begins. Long tables covered with banana leaves are prepared for parties. If there are many guests, they are divided into two or three groups, the first

group being the eldest males, the second the remaining male guests, and last, the male members of the host's family. In the case of a wedding party the fathers of the bride and bridegroom eat last, and finally the women, by the stove. The women do the cooking, and the young unmarried girls serve the food under strict supervision.

The staple food is non-glutinous rice, which is served in a cooking bowl, and chopsticks are used. At a formal meal glutinous rice is also eaten, steamed and occasionally served on banana leaves. Some of the rice seems to be steamed, then fermented, while another rice dish seems to have sweet rice alcohol poured over it. They are especially fond of this type of food. A soup is made of pork fat and bamboo shoots; as the meal is eaten, boiled vegetables are placed in the soup. Braised ground pork, boiled chicken legs and wings are also favorites. Raw cabbage and roasted pork are also served. The foods are usually saturated with pork fat. There are two kinds of rice alcohol, red and white. Some of the older people keep saccharin which they put in the alcohol when they drink. They refer to the saccharin as "sugar." As the dinner progresses, pig blood which has coagulated into the consistency of pudding is placed in a wash basin, and passed around. Sometimes chopped green onions are placed in this dish, which is considered an energy-producing food. Tea and opium are also taken -- the tea leaves being toasted and then placed in the hot water. Opium is eaten only by the adult males, never by the younger boys. The same is true of tobacco. There seems to be a strict rule concerning age limits with respect

to eating opium and smoking tobacco. The older men eat opium in the afternoon, especially after their meals, and because of this habit many of them appear pale. The headman of the village spent most of the time lying down, wrapped in blankets, and appeared to be addicted to opium. The Yao import Nescafe and condensed milk from the Lao villages, and the rich people favor coffee.

The Yao people like their costumes and do not change them for their daily labor or to take part in rituals. Their clothing is made of roughly woven black cotton, most of which is made in Japan. Their caps are decorated in the center with red yarn pompoms, while the sides of the caps have red woven cotton material. The same red cotton is woven into the collars and sleeves. Silver braiding is also used along the collars and sleeves. Usually, no underwear or shoes are worn. The women place a piece of red material on top of their heads and wrap a turban on top of that. The material used for the turban is also used for their sash, but the flower embroidery on the turban is a little smaller. Silver earrings and several bracelets are also worn. The skirt worn by the women is divided into three panels. Red yarn is used on the collar of the blouse, which is held together with two rectangular silver-plated hooks. Their trousers are embroidered with flower patterns and a sash is worn over the skirt and trousers, with one end of the sash tucked in at the waist. Undergarments are not worn. The women do not bathe at all and their body odor is overpowering.²⁴

Literacy in Chinese

In addition to the board above the entrance to a house with the

year and the date of construction, there were also Chinese characters beside the altars. On the wall of the house where I stayed, I found a paragraph of Chinese writings...

"My country is large and has a large population, and there were formerly 28 provinces. After victory in the war, we took the northeastern part (Manchuria), and made it into 9 provinces. Since the recapture of Formosa from Japan, there are now 35 provinces."

The family had a dictionary published in Shanghai and they also had a textbook of social studies, which was used in their daily life. A record of the opium sales was kept in a kind of account book by brush-writing on the bamboo paper they made. They write not only records, but also something approaching poetry, and I was very much surprised by a 15-16 year old boy who wrote a Chinese poem. The following are examples of their poems (in rough translation):

"Those who share a common destiny will meet though far apart,
But if they do not have a common destiny, they will never meet.

"Those who share a common destiny will be related to each other
as brothers by a miracle sent from heaven.

"In the beginning our ancestors all lived together, but now we
are scattered all over mountainous places.

Chinese is also used in letter writing; the following is a letter a villager wrote to me asking for incense burners from Japan:

"I am very sorry to trouble you, but if you will, please get ten incense burners and ten bowls regardless of the price."

According to their geographical concept, Japan is located next to Vientiane.

A teacher from the Hô tribe teaches Chinese. (The Lao refer to the Hô as the Khon Hô, whom they believe to be descendents of refugees from the Taiping rebellion in China.) Some of the Hô understand Yao while others do not. The Hô teachers are under contract to the Yao for a certain period of time to teach Chinese to the young people. In the village of Pha Koum near Luang Prabang, many

Ho teach Chinese and receive 1,100 kip.²⁵ In Kaisou, a Hô teacher from Yunnan taught Chinese, but he died five years ago. Hô teachers are not found in all Yao villages. For instance, there are none in Pha Luong or Pha Nam Pin. Therefore, the young people in these two villages do not understand much Chinese. Generally speaking, the women are not literate in Chinese.

Contacts with other Groups and Trade

Both the Yao and Meo are very curious by nature in comparison with other groups. When the Yao come to a Lao village, they walk to every corner of the village, looking inside temples, watching carpenters at work and picking up every article in the stores for inspection. They also observe the fish in the small rivers, the method of breeding pigs and chickens; cultivation, and the possessions of strangers including the author (neither the Lao nor the Phou Theng would think of doing this). There are two or three houses with battery radios, and one house with a bicycle which is not used and is covered with dust. There are a few homes with kerosene lamps. Galvanized iron roofing is used, following the pattern of the Lao. Saccharin is taken with coffee. Formerly they tried to plant coconut palms and betel nut trees but failed. The Yao would like to open up the valley to shifting cultivation, and purchase an automobile to connect their village with Vientiane. They would like to do this in order to bypass the Lao intermediaries with whom they trade opium for their necessities. According to the Yao, they had saved sufficient money to purchase an automobile but had decided not to do so.

Household Units and the Village

Among the Yao in northern Laos there appear to be twelve sub-groups, and those of Kaisou as well as Pha Luong and Pha Nam Pin are classified as Yao Khaw. There are 27 households in this village and the names of the heads of the families and the number of people in each household is as follows:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. Chao Wen Lung -- 18 | 15. Cheng Fu Sheng -- 9 |
| 2. Chao Lung Sheng -- 8 | 16. Cheng Wen Szu -- 5 |
| 3. Chao Chin Sheng *
Chao Lung Ching *-- 10 | 17. Chao Wen Kyn -- 14 |
| 4. Chao Lung Huan *
Chao Lung Tang *-- 13 | 18. Chao Wen Hsiang -- 6 |
| 5. Chao Chin Mao -- 8 | 19. Chao Wen Sheng -- 10 |
| 6. Cheng Kuei An --11 | 20. Cheng Kuei Chu -- 7 |
| 7. Cheng Kuei Fu -- 5 | 21. Chao Wen Shou -- 6 |
| 8. Cheng Chin Chang --6 | 22. Chao Wen Tsung -- 5 |
| 9. Cheng Kuei Tang -- 6 | 23. Cheng Kuei Tsung -- 6 |
| 10. Cheng Chin Sheng -- 10 | 24. Chao Wen Tang -- 13 |
| 11. Cheng Chin Fu -- 3 | 25. Chao Chin Shou -- 4 |
| 12. Chao Lung Hsiang -- 5 | 26. Cheng Tsai Ching -- 3 |
| 13. Li Lung Tsung -- 7 | 27. Chao Lung Fu -- 4 |
| 14. Chao Lung &zu -- 7 | |
- * In regard to no. 3 and no. 4,
two couples share one home.

There are 27 homes with a population of 209 in the village of Kaisou. The average number of members in one household is 7.74. There are some families with only 3-4 members, others with about 10, and the maximum is 18 members in a household. The full names of No. 2,3 and 5 are: Chao Lung Sheng Kun, Chao Chin Chin Sheng and Chao Chin Mao

Ming. Kun and Ming are their fathers' names.

The 'actual' age of a person is known only to himself and to his family members. In general, it is not necessary for them to count their ages numerically. The four families considered no.1, 3, 8 and 17 are unilineal and consist of at least three generations, and there are 2-3 couples in each generation. The marriages in all 27 households are monogamous, but in Pha Koum there are several polygamous marriages, and the village headman has three wives. Next, let us look at the birthplace of the husbands and their wives. There are only a few couples among whom both the husbands and wives were born in different villages (two couples out of five, in the households surveyed). These facts are reminders of their traditional migratory life, i.e., the village is like a temporary, mixed household, with the people coming together from different villages; but consanguinity still has a strong influence in village structure. Marriage ties extend widely to other villages beyond the limitations of their own mountain area. Cases of village endogamy are relatively few. Marriages are all initially matri-local: after the wedding ceremony the husband and wife²⁶ go to the bride's home where they work for two years (one year if the wife's home is far away), then they return to the husband's home. For example, in Chao Chin Sheng's house a man called Pan Kuo Sheng is living with them. He is the husband of a granddaughter of Chao Chin Sheng, and after working two years there he will return to Pha Koum with his wife. It is noteworthy that the premarital sexual relations of Yao girls are free, and it does not

matter to which group their partners belong. There are many cases of marriage in which the wives are of the same age or older than their husbands. In one case I observed a marriage between a 17-year old bridegroom and a 25-year-old bride.

As we can see from the list of names of family heads, among the Yao many names are similar: in the village of Kaisou there are only three name groups: Chao, Cheng and Li. Families with the same names are referred to as ton sinh or ton fi:nh. This, however, does not indicate a common ancestor. They distinguish this latter fact by the name chuan tsaou. In Kaisou there are four chuan tsaou:(households nos.1, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 34) and nos. 2,3,4,5,12, 14, 25 and 27 as well as nos. 6,7,8,9,10,11,15,16,20, 23 and 26, and last, one family, no. 13. Chuan tsaou. is a lineage, and marriage within the same lineage is not permitted, that is, they may marry people of the ton sinh but not of the chuan tsaou. Some people think families 1, 17, 19 and 21 are of the same chuan tsaou but families 18, 22 and 24 belong to other chuan tsaou's. According to the Yao the Lao word for chuan tsaou is sua diaw kan.²⁷

The Yao kinship structure belongs to the bifurcate-collateral type which distinguishes the paternal line from the maternal line, and the direct line from the collateral, and it also belongs to the Eskimo type in referring to names of cousins, which does not distinguish cross-cousins from parallel-cousins.

Religion

I am not able to describe the general religious patterns of the Yao, but during the second visit I was able to observe a festival.

(It was on February 14th, December 28th by the Yao calendar) when Pu-tou:n (festival of their ancestors) occurred. At this time the divination of the coming year was held. The Lao people refer to this festival as Boun Phi Mai, meaning the New Year Festival, but according to the Yao people the Sian Hyan Sio Penh (Yao for New Year Festival), is held on January 1st. This festival (called Tsa) was not celebrated by the whole village but by only the second chuan tsaou group in the village. The following is a description of this festival:

On February 14th, around 3:00 p.m., I arrived at Kaisou and went to the home of Chao Lung Sheng. Suddenly, I heard the sound of drums coming from the center of the village. Accompanied by youngsters, I went to one home where the drums were sounding. There were many Yao gathered there on the earth floor. As I entered into a small room of the house, a person by the name of Chao Lung Szu beckoned to me. He was the head of this household and about 60 years old. He was lying down, wrapped in blankets and smoking opium. I sat beside him. The sound of zon (drum) and the two kinds of bells, (man and chao tsoui) became gradually louder and louder. The drum and the bells were being sounded in one corner of the house, and a large number of people had gathered around. A space 2 yards square was cleared and on the mien tia lon (altar) incense and candles were burning.

The altar is the shrine of the ancestor. It is made of wood and decorated with paper cut-outs in the form of the sun, moon and a star. On a table, placed to the left of the altar, was a skinned

pig. There was a wine glass placed in front of the pig, and behind the pig were 15-16 triangle-shaped white paper flags placed upright. To the right of the altar was a stool. For a while, nothing happened -- then one Yao man pushed open the side entrance door and rushed in, pushing the people aside. He was hatless, with closely cropped hair except for the back of his head where the hair extended down to his shoulders. He was in a trance and moving around wildly. He was then seized by the others and taken before the altar, where he began mumbling in a low voice while scattering salt around him.

Next, he pulled out a chao (bamboo sticks); holding it in his right hand and bending his body forward a little, he dropped the sticks on the floor. He watched the position of the sticks as he dropped them two or three times, then turning toward the people he dropped his head forward. His face was pale and he was breathing heavily. Lung Szu, who had been lying down, suddenly got up, and pushing the people aside, sat on the stool by the altar. He then began shaking his right foot, then his left foot, repeatedly, and continued this for twenty or thirty seconds. With his long hair disheveled, he stood up before the altar and started to pray. He tossed around several handfuls of rice, then began to dance in circles around the floor. While holding out his right arm and his left leg before him, he held his left hand to his head, hopped a round in a circle about three times, then stood before the altar. He picked up the chao sticks and dropped them to the floor several times in an experienced manner. At times the sticks would pile up, one on top of the other, while at other times the sticks would

separate. Following this, he stood beside the first man, then he dropped his head forward and started to touch his hair with his left hand. There was a moment of silence.

Another man in the crowd suddenly threw off his hat, then sat on the stool and began to shake his foot. Going into a trance, he rushed forward, fell to the ground and started to writhe. Several men picked him up, and brought him struggling before the altar. In this manner, seven men were brought before the altar, facing the assembled people. (One of these seven men had cut short the hair on the top of his head, leaving the sides and back long; another had his hair cut off short on one side of his head; another had very long hair, each of the others in like manner had their hair in an unusual arrangement.)

The seven men began to hop in a circle in one direction, shouted "ha-ha" and reversed their direction. This was repeated two or three times. The men went to the altar where each man picked up two flags and started to dance holding them -- one waving the flags over his head, another holding the flags on his shoulder, another put a flag between the toes of his left foot. They proceeded to dance around in a circle several times, then planted the flags in the center of the circle and got together to drop the chao.

In the meantime the drum and the bells were sounding loudly. A man brought out a plate of white rice, placed it in the center of the floor and replaced the flags around the plate. The wine glasses were placed around the flags, and wine was poured into the glasses. Each man was given a chicken, with Lung Szu receiving

three chickens. The men held the chickens high above their heads and proceeded to dance around several more times, without saying a word. During this procedure the chickens squawked and fluttered their wings wildly. The circle was made smaller and the men crouched down and strangled the chickens. Four or five young men appeared with swords and cut the neck arteries of the chickens. The seven men raised the chickens, with the blood still dripping, over their heads, and danced again for a short while. Again they gathered in the center, and crouching on the ground, threw the chickens behind them. Additional chickens were brought in and the same routine was repeated.

A handsome rooster was given to Lung Szu. He gazed at the beak and at the claws of the rooster for a few seconds, held the rooster over his head and started to dance. The rooster fluttered wildly, Lung Szu's hair was disheveled, and he presented an unearthly appearance. The rooster's blood colored the rice and the flags again, and the glasses of wine were dyed red. When this was finished, the seven men stood before the altar while the chao slipped through Lung Szu's hands several times with the men watching the results of the fall of the chao on the ground. I could not tell whether good fortune or bad was indicated. Lung Szu's expression had not changed.

The seven men before the altar faced the crowd and again dropped their heads forward. The sound of the drum and bells ceased, the crowd dispersed, the festival came to a close. The seven men came out of their trance, back to life.

A party was in progress in the homes of Chao Lung Szu, Chao Lung Huan and Chao Chin Mao. The headman of the village and thirty or forty guests attended, proceeding from one house to the other during the party. After the men finished, the womenfolk came to eat.

The Yao religion is generally considered ancestor worship, but judging from the previous description, it is also connected with shamanism. The village shaman was the man who rushed into the house where the festival was being held. The Yao people refer to the shaman as Hung Chia Jen (in this case his name was Cheng Tsai Ching). The Lao people refer to him as Mō Mō (meaning conjurer in the Lao language). What is worshipped at the altar is the spirit of the ancestors, but besides this, in the home of the village headman some local Taoist Deity is also worshipped. All the Yao people are trained to go easily into a trance from youth, and they dance with a live chicken held over their heads, mimicking the chicken in flight. Drums also play a prominent part. These facts point up the role of shamanism; but in this festival many other factors are also involved and it has a complex character. The people in the village of Kaisou do not want to show this festival to outsiders, and they particularly do not want to talk about the shaman to outsiders. My friend, Cheng Chin Chung wrote the name Hung Chia Jen in my notebook, but he immediately erased it.²⁸

In this Yao village, there is no village shrine. Lao villages have a village shrine which is called Ho:phi (meaning the house of the spirit).²⁹

Other Inter-Cultural Relationships

There are many minority groups located in northern Laos, but they are firmly tied together by bonds of common commercial interest, in which the Lao play the central role. Actually, the villages of the minority groups are geographically separated and the people of these villages live in isolation, but at the same time they have a close inter-relationship with each other. For example, in the Nam Tha market in northern Laos, the following people gather: Thai Dam, Meo, Yao, Lu, Kha Mou, Kha Kho, Lanten, as well as Pakistani, Vietnamese and Chinese merchants. On the other hand, the Kha Mou people, Yao and Meo meet in the neighborhood of the Thai village of Pha Tang. Pha Tang is the central trading place for many minority villages.³⁰

With regard to specific trading patterns, in the Thai-Lao villages there are straw hats made by the Phou Theng as well as baskets and kon to, a type of raincoat; carrying baskets and children's hats are made by the Yao people. On the other hand, the architecture of the houses in the Phou Theng villages shows Yao influence. Grinding stones are another instance of this influence. Necklaces made by the Meo tribe, bracelets made by the Yao, woven cloths, skirts and head turbans made by the Lao are also widely used. In Yao villages the ta:n (chair) made by the Lao, is frequently observed, and bac nam (bamboo pipe) for scooping water also seems to be from the Lao. A variety of merchandise from Europe, Japan and Hong Kong is imported through the Lao.

With regard to methods of communication among the groups, the Lao language plays the chief role among the Yao, Meo and Phou Theng

tribes. The three groups speak the Lao language (for trade purposes). On the other hand, the Lao do not have a knowledge of any other language. Very few Lao know Phou Theng words and even fewer understand Yao or Meo. The inter-relationship between the Lao groups and the other surrounding peoples is not new but has considerable time depth. In the vocabulary of the other groups are many words borrowed from Lao; e.g., in the Phou Theng language the numerals are completely replaced by Lao words, and such words as ke, tau, kad, om and og, are from the Lao language. Bo (negation) is also occasionally used. On this point, there is a difference between the northern and southern Phou Theng tribes.³¹ In the Yao language there are the words tae, hiw, mae, which may possibly have a common origin, although I cannot confirm this.

With the exception of one case (the husband is Phou Theng) marriages of the Yao people take place mostly within the tribe. Contrary to a widespread idea that the Lao do not intermarry with the Phou Theng and Meo, in reality there are a surprising number of such marriages. I cannot decide whether trade among the different groups has brought about intermarriages or whether the converse is true. However, the existence of intermarriage itself, is an undeniable fact.

The interchange of materials, people and linguistic patterns among the tribes is not always on an equal basis. Each group occupies a different position.

In Pha Tang and its vicinity, Lao culture is the dominant influence. The clearest distinction is found between the Lao and the Phou Theng. The latter work for the Lao at very low wages, and they /outwardly/ accept their position as servants of the Lao people. The Phou Theng, as seen by the Lao, are not clever but good workers. I sympathized with the Phou Theng people who exercised self-control and responded timidly to the Lao. The culture of the Yao and the Lao is on the same level, but some of the Yao look down on the Lao. For their part, the Lao consider the Yao as temporary inhabitants, and think it only natural that the Lao profit from them by acting as intermediaries in the opium trade and associated commerce. The Lao wish only to collect rent, metaphorically speaking, from the Yao, but they are not willing to maintain political and social relations with them. As seen by the Lao, the Yao are good workers and wealthy people, and are second in wisdom to the Lao. Some Yao are attempting to participate in Lao society. When they visit Lao villages in the valley, some of them change their clothes, put on wool sweaters, and mingle with the Lao. They acknowledge the King of Laos and their subordination to the Lao government. On the other hand, they have not forgotten the existence of the mythical Yao King.³² The relationship between the Lao and the Meo, at least in the vicinity of the village of Pha Tang, is not as close as it is to the Yao. The few Meo villages are located at a great distance. They are poorer than the Yao people: here the Meo are located at the edge of the Lao world. Briefly, the cultural position of each group is taken

with respect to the Lao, who are the central focus.

Naturally, today's order of the local culture is not perfect. One day, Cheng Chin Chang (a Yao youth) wrote the following sentences in my field notes, in Chinese:

"Today in this world, unfortunately, many people are not able to live together; there are a few people in many places who live isolated in the mountains. If we are able to have a brother return to preserve our way of life, that is very good."

This report has been written in the spirit of Cheng Chin Chang's comments.

FOOTNOTES

1. Keiji Iwata: "In the Valleys of Northern Laos," Geography, Vol. 3, No. 12 and Vol. 4, No. 1. Although this article is a part of the report of the village life in Pha Tang, it does present the routine of everyday life in the village. See Laos Project Paper No. 15 for further details on Pha Tang.
2. Keiji Iwata: "Tribal Distribution and Migration in the Valleys of Nam Song and Nam Lik," Journal of Japanese Society of Ethnology, Vol. 23, Nos. 1, 2 - 1959
3. Kha Mou (Khmu, Khamuh, Kambmu) is the name which they call themselves. "Kha" is supposed to mean "slave" in the Thai language, but I am not sure. Kha Mou also means "man." They do not like to use this name; therefore, in Laos, they generally refer to themselves as Phou Theng (Phou=man, Theng=highland).
4. Halpern, J. M.: Aspects of Village Life and Culture Change in Laos, 1958. In this article, the tribal structure in Luang Prabang Province is described particularly with reference to Luang Prabang district.
5. Takuji Takemura: "Contribution of Chinese Ethnology to the Study of non-Han Tribes in South and West China" Bibliography II, Social Anthropology, No. 2, 1958.
6. Credner, W.: "Völkerschichtung und Völkerbewegungen im Mittleren Hinterindien", Geografiska Annaler.
7. Thai Souei, Thai Neua, Thai Pouan, Thai Poua, Thai Deng, Thai Dai, Thai Nouan, Thai Porong, Thai Et, Thai Soun, Thai O, Thai Sot Ban. They are also classified into two, i.e., Phou Thai (Thai Deng) and Thai Lao (including other 11 groups).
8. Quelques Minorities Ethniques du Nord-Indochine, France-Asie, 92-93, 1954.
9. This distinction depends on differences in their costumes. such as the length of the men's coat and the women's skirt, e.g., the women of the Meo Lai tribe wear a pleated skirt.
10. Thailand, (H.R.A.F. Country Survey Series, 1957) or Thailand, Past and Present, 1957. We also find more details in E. G. Sebastian, "The Yao" The Journal of the Siam Society, Vol. XIX, Part 2, 1925.
11. Bernatzik, H. A.: Die Neue Grosse Völkerkunde, Bd. II, 1954.

12. Eickstedt, E. von: *ibid.* S. 148-161.
13. Wiens, H. J.: China's March Toward the Tropics, 1954.
Reviewed with detailed analytical comments by Junichi Tsunemi
Social Anthropology, No.2, 1958.
14. Eickstedt, E. von: *ibid.* S. 1948, 161.
15. Liang Shun Sheng, Jin I Fu: Report on the Investigation of the Meo Tribe to the West of Hsiang River.
16. Hsu Sung Yu: "History of People in the Yueh Chiang Valley," 1939. Japanese Translation by Iwata Ide.
17. Benedict, R.K.: "Thai, Kadai and Indonesian: A New Alignment in Southeast Asia," American Anthropologist, Vol.44, No.4, pt. 1, 1942. Osamu Matsuyama gives a different view from that of Benedict with regard to the origin of the Thai language. Area and Culture Studies, 3, 1953.
18. Eberhard, W.: Kultur und Siedlung der Randvolker Chinas, 1942 (Quoted from Wiens *ibid.* pp. 51-52)
19. I do not know much in general about the Yao within Laos.
20. The administrative system in Laos consists of Ban (village), Tasseng (5-10 villages), Muong (county), Khoueng (prefecture), and Muan (country).
21. Coconut palms and betel nut trees do not grow in Yao villages any more. Banana plants and sugar cane are cultivated in the fields outside of the villages.
22. The fireplace is very simple and made on the floor. Because the village is located in the mountains, it is very cold at night and the people get warm by burning wood in the fireplace. Of course, they sometimes boil water and cook food in the fireplace, but they usually prepare meals on the kitchen stove.
23. They melt lead and pour it into one half of a bamboo which has been split lengthwise between the joints. This is the unit of their monetary value.
24. They do not make their cloth but buy many kinds of fabric from Lao merchants (the wool yarn and black cloth are mostly from Japan). When I visited the village, they were in need of beads for tassels. Earrings and necklaces are all silver and these are made by the people themselves. The price of the ornaments depends on the weight and not the quality of the workmanship. Some of the men wore a ring on their finger.

Every house has a bellows and simple farming tools and other utensils are made. Their bellows are styled after those of the Chinese. The ingots they mainly use are made in Bangkok.

25. The official exchange rate was one dollar to thirty-five kip in 1957 (but the market rate was considerably higher).
26. The procedure for a wedding is as follows: 1) The bride arrives at the bridegroom's house and bows to the ancestors of the groom's family. The bride's father and the girls of the village accompany her to render assistance. 2) The marriage ceremony takes place and the groom's father presents silver to the bride's father. At this wedding a lump of silver (called Ngun Yao, meaning silver, or money of the Yao), of 2.5 cm. in width, 1.5 cm. in height and 11 cm. in length, and 1/8 cup of silver coins of the colonial period, is presented. Then the fathers of both sides and the village headman, together with several influential villagers join them for dinner. 3) Next, the wedding reception takes place. 4) They chant a wedding song, the beginning part of which is as follows:

"We use the green grass to make paper to write the wedding announcements. We spread the paper over the earth to let all the people know. In the beginning, Pan Wang came to the earth and established the Heavens, the earth and 10,000 people. He raised the people so that the women can marry and the men can grow in strength to be able to lift the heavy incense burner...."

27. Takuji Takemura: "On Several Characteristics of Social Organization of the Yao Tribe." Social Anthropology, Vol.2, No. 2, 1959. Fong or zong in his article seems to correspond to chuan tsao in this paper. The Lao word sua diaw kan seemingly corresponds to patriclan, but in some phases it corresponds better to patrisib.
28. I did not study their religion and their myths in general. The youths of the Yao tribe did not know about P'an-hu. However, it appears in the wedding previously mentioned.
29. Sebastian, E.G.: "The Yao," The Journal of the Siam Society, 1925. According to this article the Yao have three kinds of altars, i.e., 1) the altar for ancestors, 2) for heaven, and 3) for the spirits of the forest or town.
30. Keiji Iwata: The Social Order of Village Life in Northern Laos (in preparation).
31. Cf. Tsa-Khmu's vocabulary in France-Asie; Quelques Minorities Ethniques du Nord-Indochine, 92-93, 1954.
32. The Yao people believe there is a Yao nation and the emperor of that nation lives in the Kiukiang district.

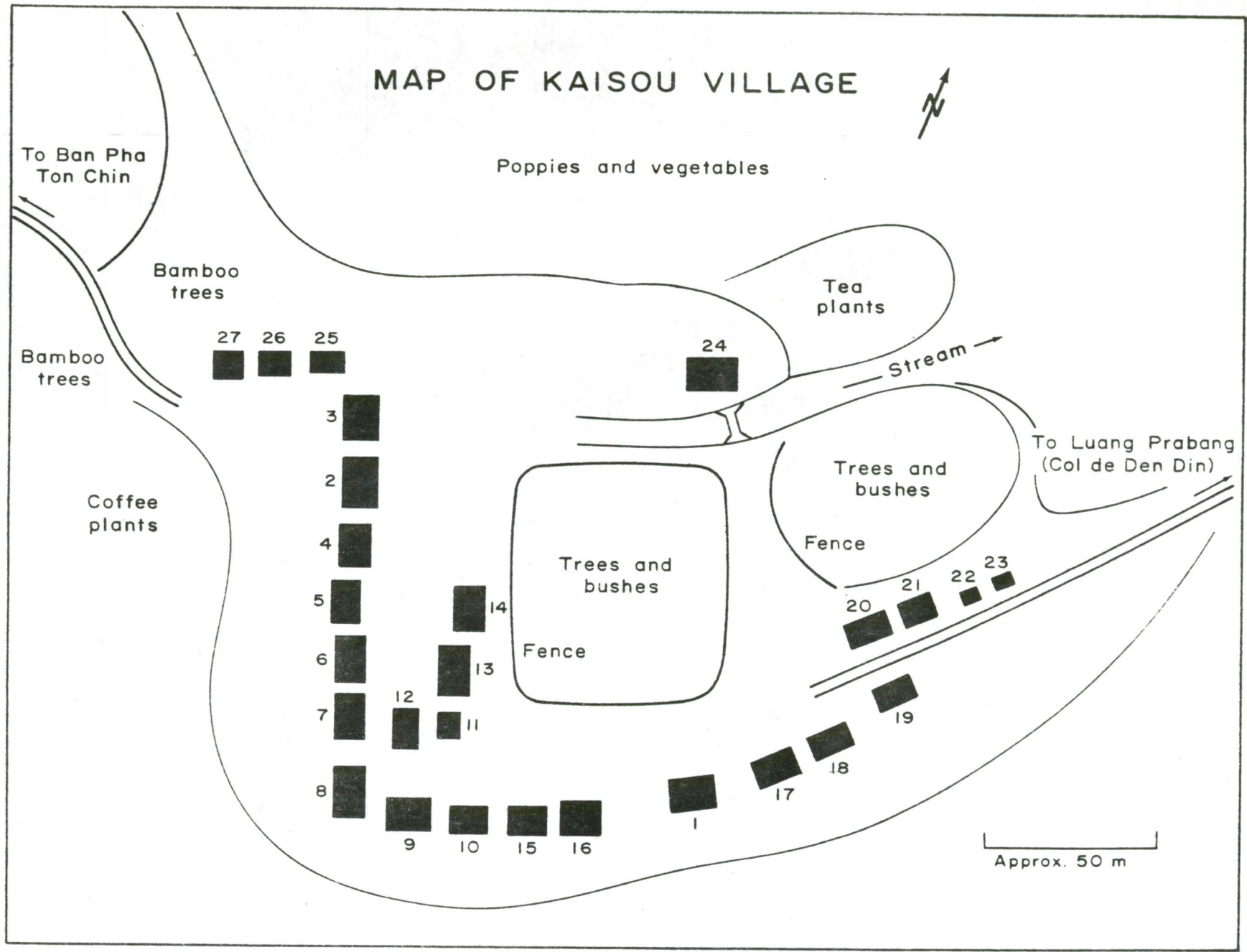
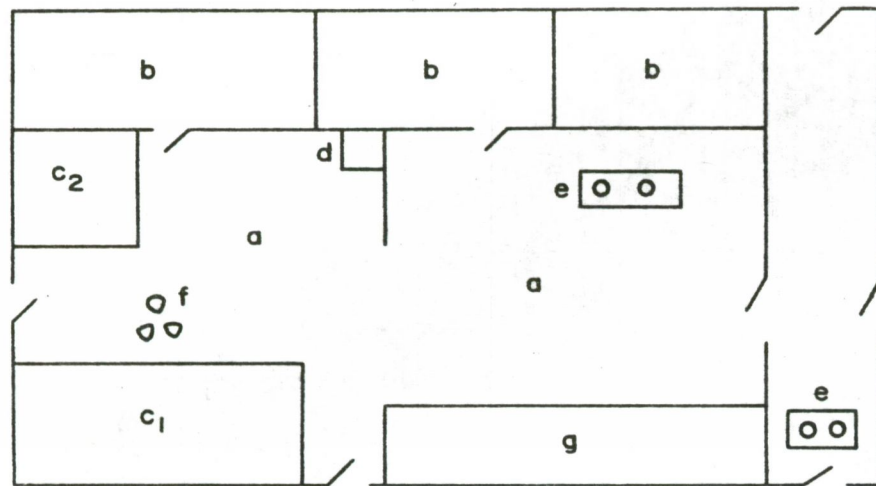


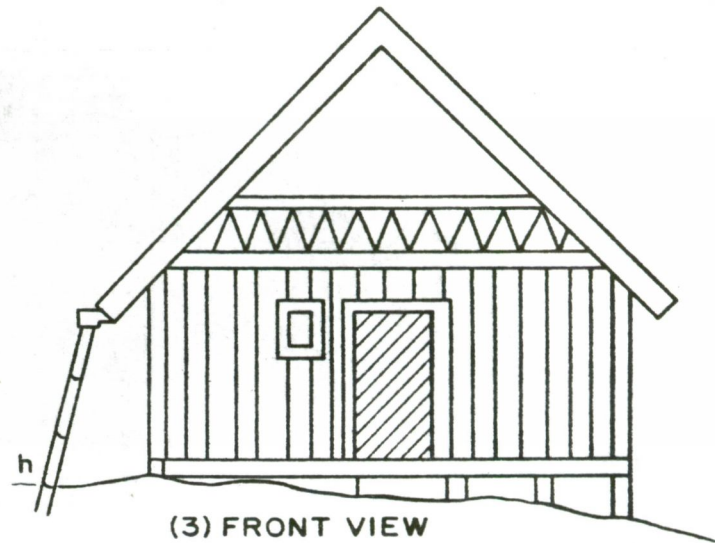
FIGURE I

YAO HOUSE (HOUSE OF CHAO LUNG CHING)

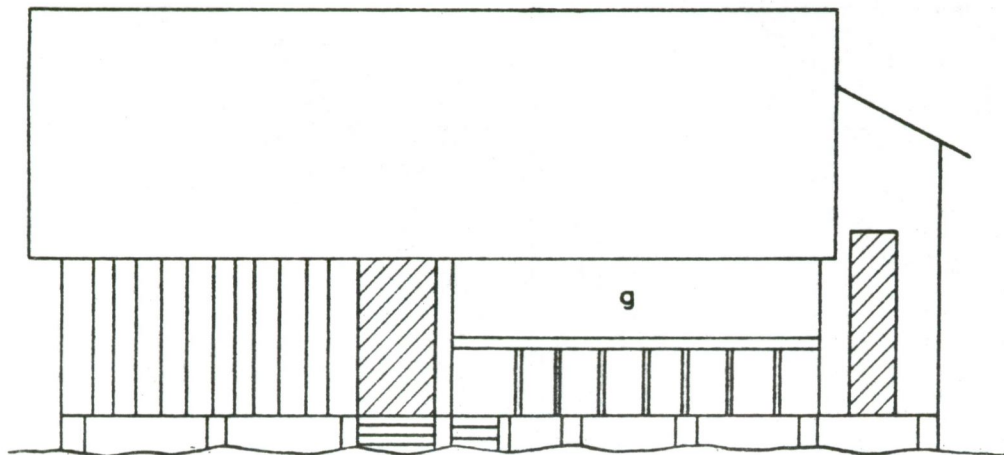


(1) FLOOR PLAN

Approx. 4 m



(3) FRONT VIEW

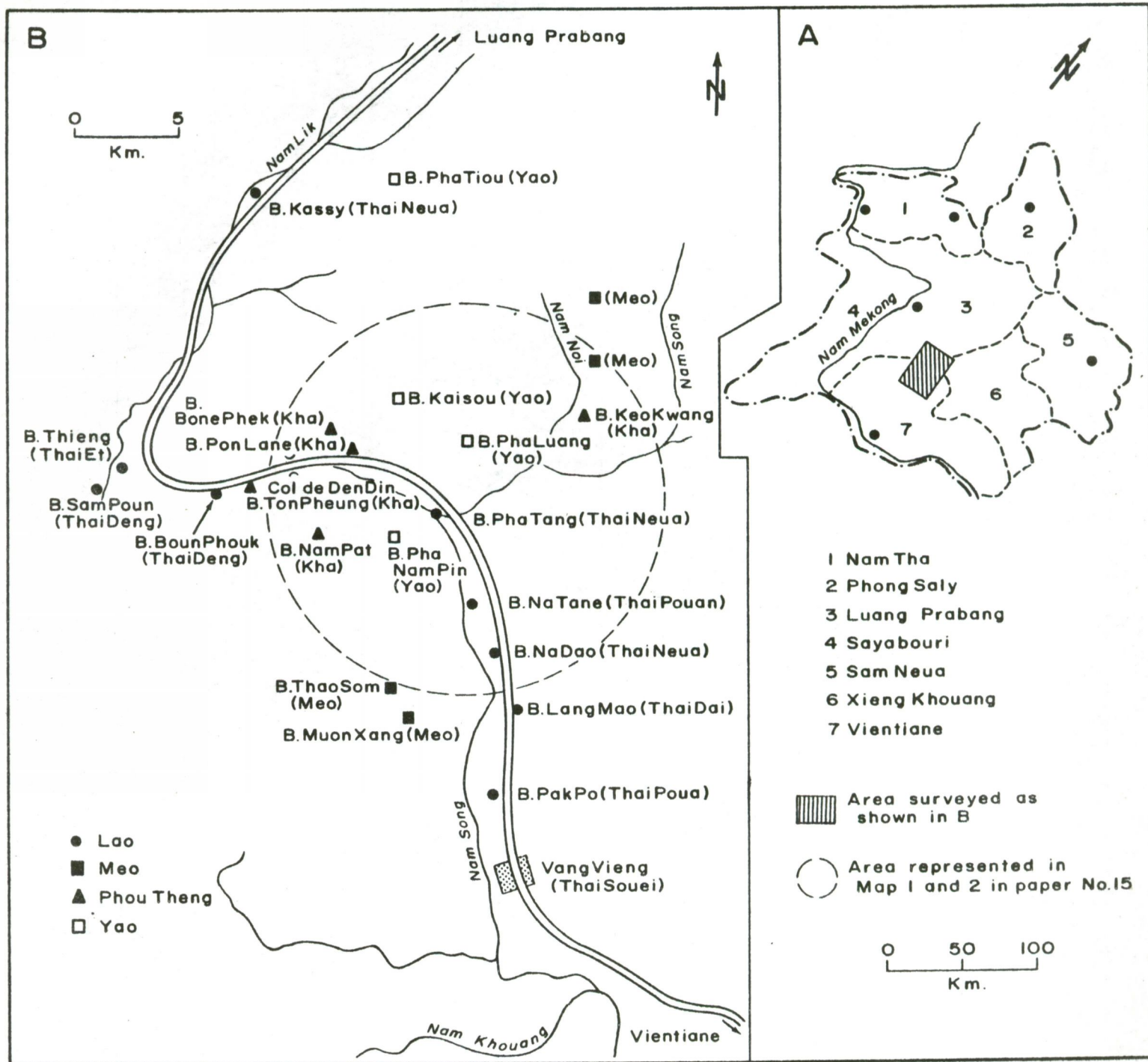


(2) SIDE VIEW

(1) Notes:

- a = earth floor
- b = sleeping quarters
- c₁ = guest sleeping quarters
- c₂ = guest sleeping quarters
(absent in many houses)
- d = altar
- e = cooking range
- f = fireplace
- g = pig pen
- h = bamboo pipes

FIGURE 2



NORTHERN LAOS AND AREA SURVEYED
MAP I