

A stylized graphic of a mountain range with several peaks, rendered in shades of brown and tan against a yellow and orange gradient background. The mountains are layered, with the foreground being the darkest brown and the background being the lightest yellow.

CREATING LAOS

**The Making of a Lao Space between
Indochina and Siam, 1860–1945**

SØREN IVARSSON

CREATING LAOS

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*The Making of a Lao Space
between Indochina and Siam,
1860–1945*

Søren Ivarsson

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Preface

My thoughts on French colonialism and Lao nationalism found in this book were initially expressed in my PhD dissertation. Since finishing the dissertation, I have been caught up in research on other topics, teaching and other distractive activities. Consequently, this book has had a long period of gestation. However, I have used this time to rewrite large parts of the dissertation and to expand the text quite substantially. Over the years I have profited from the friendship and support of Inga Floto, Christopher E. Goscha, Grant Evans, Chalong Soontravanich, and Saichol and Attachak Sattayanurak. When I was a PhD student Viggo Brun went far beyond the ordinary call of a PhD supervisor. Without him the current book would not have been possible!

My greatest thanks, however, go to Dorthe, Malthe and Jakob. Your love and support has been an important source of strength for me as I entered the often bumpy road of academia. At the same time you have constantly reminded me that there is more to life than research. Thanks for that.

A revised version of Chapter 2 has appeared in Christopher E. Goscha and Søren Ivarsson (eds), *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past*.

Abbreviations

AEFEO	Archives of l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris
AMAE	Archives of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris
c	carton (archival box)
CAOM	Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence
CD	Archives of the Conseiller Diplomatique
CG	Archives of the Commission Guernut
CM	Archives of the Cabinet Militaire
CP	Archives of the Conseiller Politique
d	dossier (file)
EA	Archives of the États Associés
GGI	Archives of the Government-General of French Indochina
HCI	Archives of the Haut Commissariat d'Indochine
NF	Indochine, Nouveau Fonds
RSL	Archives of the Résident-Supérieur of Laos
SHAT	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Paris
TNA	Thai National Archives, Bangkok

Thai and Lao Language Conventions

At the time of writing there exists no single and commonly used system of how to transcribe Lao words. Instead of devising yet another system for Lao I have chosen to make use of the system already in existence for the romanisation of Thai and adopt it for Lao. Therefore, for both Thai and Lao this book adheres to the 1999 guide for the romanisation of Thai words devised by the Royal Institute in Thailand. It has to be stressed that adopting this practice is purely a practical matter and should not be seen as an expression of a nationalist vision of a greater Thai space engulfing contemporary Thailand and Laos. Nor does it reflect an idea about Lao being a dialect or a derivative language of Thai. For both Thai and Lao, however, I have retained generally accepted spellings (e.g. Maha Sila Viravong instead of Maha Sila Wirawong, Chao Anou instead of Chao Anu, and Prince Phetsarath instead of Prince Phetsarat). For place names in Thailand I have used the romanised forms suggested by the Royal Institute in Thailand. As for place names in Laos I have used the forms given in a recent atlas of Laos in which the spelling is in conformity with the 1995 census in Laos. The atlas is Bounthavy Sisouphanthong and Christian Taillard, *Atlas of Laos. Spatial Dimensions of the Economic and Social Development of the Lao People's Democratic Republic* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2000). The guide for the romanisation of Thai words can be found at the homepage of the Royal Institute of Thailand (www.royin.go.th).

Introduction

Today we have grown accustomed to the existence of Laos as a nation-state in the heartland of the mainland of modern Southeast Asia sharing borders with Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Myanmar. Laos is, however, a new state in modern nationalist and geographical terms. Its creation can be traced back to the colonial encounter at the end of the nineteenth century, when France carved out Laos as an unprecedented territorial entity in conformity with Franco-Siamese treaties. As the new colonial possession of Laos came into being it formed part of two larger and competing spatial layouts which could have potentially superseded Laos as nation-states. One was that of an Indochinese-wide colonial space that many French colonial architects dreamed of making. Another was that of a Greater Siam – baptised Thailand in 1939 – including part of or all the territories making up present-day Laos and Cambodia that seduced many Thai nationalists, especially in the 1930s. Caught in a regional crossfire Laos was a contested space whose modern form was anything but sure during the colonial period.

This book examines the process through which Laos came into existence under French colonial rule, until the end of World War II. Rather than assuming that the Laos we see today was an historical given, this reflection looks at how its position at the intersection of these two conflicting spatial layouts of ‘Thailand’ and ‘Indochina’ made its national form a particularly contested process. It is, however, not an analysis of nation-building from the perspective of administrative and political structures. Instead, the aim of the book is to discuss how a specific idea about Laos and its culture was formed

with reference to divergent discourses on Laos and the Lao. It is an analysis of the emergence of a notion of a specifically Lao cultural identity that served to buttress Laos as a separate 'Lao space', both in relation to Siam/Thailand and within French Indochina. In so doing, this book provides a new approach to the study of Laos's history in general and to the study of nationalism in Laos in particular. On this note, it is worth considering some recent studies dealing with the wider colonial space of Indochina and its competing national forms.

LAOS BETWEEN INDOCHINA AND SIAM

Nation-states are landmarks of a quite recent date in the geopolitical landscape. In Southeast Asia, the formation of nation-states can be traced back to the establishment of borders throughout the region that followed in the wake of the colonial confrontation in the nineteenth century. In this process the unbounded states that had dominated the geopolitical layout of the premodern period were replaced by geographically bounded states. The geo-bodies, to use the term coined by Thongchai Winichakul, of the future nation-states were born.¹ Acknowledging the contingency of the modern nation-state scholars have discussed the background for the divergent experiences of two hybrid constructs, both of which were brought into being in the colonial period with only a slight – if any – resemblance to premodern domains: Indochina and Indonesia. While the French colonial domain of Indochina eventually gave way to the territorial nation-states of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the Dutch colonial domain of Indonesia was moulded into one unified space, even if that national unity is coming under increasing fire today.

This question was first addressed by Benedict Anderson in his seminal study *Imagined Communities* in which he discusses the origins, development and spread of nationalism and the process of national imagining from Latin and North America to Europe and further into the colonial domains in Asia and Africa. From a nationalist perspective, if one acknowledges the ideological position that nations are rooted in antiquity, the question of why Indonesia became one nation and why Indochina was fragmented is odd, if

not heretical. For Anderson, who perceives the nation as a modern cultural construct or artefact, this is, however, a quite illuminating question to ask as it illustrates two different outcomes of colonial policies with regard to the transformation of colonial states into nation-states. In general, Anderson associates the emergence of the nationalist imagining with the decline of classical communities linked by sacred languages and dynastic realms, with changing apprehensions of time and with the role of print-capitalism. More specifically, in relation to the emergence of nationalism in the colonial domains, Anderson accentuates the importance of the colonial state.

Anderson, however, is not concerned with the often-studied link between colonialism and anticolonial nationalism. Rather, Anderson is interested in how the colonial state in a much more subtle manner fundamentally engendered the grammar of the nationalisms that eventually rose to combat the colonial state. A central element of this grammar is the very idea that humans are divided into nations, which, according to Anderson, was spread through the classrooms in the colonies as the students studied the national histories of their colonial masters. Anderson also draws attention to what he calls the 'educational and administrative pilgrimages' which brought people from all over the colonial state together in educational centres and also circulated people for administrative posts within the colonial state. These pilgrimages contributed to turning the colonial space into an imagined reality. Finally, Anderson accentuates the importance of the census, the map and the museum. They contributed to forming a total classifying grid reflecting how the colonial state imagined its dominion. Later, these imaginations and classifications formed important elements in anticolonial and later postcolonial national imaginings. With this approach Anderson highlights the complexity of the colonial project: it was not only a political and economic project, but it was also a cultural and intellectual one that can be linked with far-reaching changes in local societies and cultures throughout the colonised world.

In relation to Indochina and Indonesia, Anderson locates the reasons for the divergent outcomes of these two colonial constructions in

the domain of educational and language policies and the trajectories of local civil servants in the bureaucratic system. In the case of Indonesia, Anderson draws attention to the centralised educational system where Batavia formed the nucleus for all tertiary education. The classrooms, where students coming from all over Indonesia met, represented the wider colonial space of Indonesia and turned it into an imagined reality. This process of imagination was further stimulated as the administrative careers of the educated locals were not restricted to their place of origin because they could seek state employment throughout the archipelago. In Indonesia this created a situation where 'virtually all the major ethnolinguistic groups, by the end of the colonial period, were accustomed to the idea that there was an archipelagic stage on which they had parts to play'.² Finally, a common Indonesian language had been created and spread through the press and schools, which gave Indonesia a real and experienced meaning.

As for Indochina, Anderson argues that in the first decades of the twentieth century Indochina also had an imagined meaning for the educated elite. Again, Anderson brings in the educational policies as important elements to explain the growth of an Indochinese consciousness. First, the educational system was designed so that it served to break the politico-cultural connections to the surrounding territories of the colonial construct of Indochina and thereby nourish the notion of Indochina as a separate entity. With regard to 'Western Indochina' – that is, Laos and Cambodia – attempts were made to break the religious and cultural connections to Siam through the formation of renovated pagoda schools and the *École Supérieur de Pali* in Phnom Penh in 1930. With regard to 'Eastern Indochina' – Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina – the connections with China were severed as the Confucian educational system was replaced by a colonial educational system and as a romanised phonetic script – *quoc ngu* – was adopted. Second, up until the 1930s a centralised structure of the higher system of learning comparable to that of Indonesia was in place where the classrooms in Hanoi and Saigon attracted students from the wider colonial space giving the notion of Indochina a real experienced meaning. In contrast to

Indonesia, however, this process of imagination was countered by other developments. With the formation of a *lycée* in Phnom Penh in 1935 the system of higher education was decentralised and the classrooms in 'Eastern Indochina' no longer served as a micro-cosmos of Indochina to the same degree as before. Further, contrary to the situation in Indonesia, there existed no isomorphism between education and administrative pilgrimage within Indochina as the local layer of the administrative apparatus primarily was peopled by Vietnamese,³ while the Lao and Khmer civil servants were seldom employed outside their home-country. While Indochina was the stage for the Vietnamese this was not the case for the Lao and Khmers – Indochina was not as easily imagined by them as by the Vietnamese. Furthermore, no common local language was designed for Indochina, as several vernacular languages remained in use whereby print-capitalism served to delineate the space of three separate domains rather than to unite them into a single one.

Exploring the study of nations and nationalism within a modernist framework Anderson is looking for the fundamental factors contributing to the divergent fates of Indochina and Indonesia in colonial policies and practices. He is not concerned about the impact of pre-national conditions on the formation of nations. Stressing how the rise of nationalism is associated with a change in human consciousness – e.g. new concepts of time and space – Anderson is more concerned with discontinuity between the pre-national and the national period than with continuity. In this respect Anderson's approach differs widely from other significant approaches to nations and nationalism which, on the one hand, just like Anderson acknowledge the modernity of nations and nationalism while, on the other hand, also identify important markers of continuity between the pre-national and national period in terms of ethnic bonds, symbols, sentiments or between what Anthony Smith has labelled 'ethnies' – ethnic communities of the pre-national period – and modern nations.⁴

Working from this framework, David Henley has taken the discussion of the reasons for the disintegration of the colonial domain of Indochina versus the integration of the colonial domain of Indonesia

in a new direction. Henley recognises the importance of colonial practices advanced by Anderson as working against the formation of an Indochina nation-state – the continued existence of several vernacular languages, several educational centres, and the non-sharing of mutual experiences within the Indochina-wide bureaucratic system. In addition Henley suggests various other factors located in the colonial period conducive to the fragmentation of Indochina: the continued existence of monarchical traditions in different parts of colonial Indochina, the lack of integrative political institutions due to the federal structure of Indochina, local resistance against the Vietnamese living in Laos and Cambodia, and the existence of a Vietnamese nationalism based on the eventual integration of the colonial division of the three colonial subunits Annam-Tonkin-Cochinchina. The point on which Henley differs most widely from Anderson, however, is in the articulation of factors located in the legacy of precolonial history that worked against the formation of an Indochina nation-state. That is, Henley does not hold that colonial practices alone were enough to explain why Indochina was not unified. While Anderson adopted a modernist approach locating the factors solely in the modern phenomenon of colonialism, Henley advocates a combined approach emphasising both modernist and perennial explanations. With regard to the last point, Henley sees the existence of a strong sense of a separate Vietnamese identity – and also to a lesser extent a Cambodian – located in the precolonial heritage as an immanent feature running against a unification of Indochina.⁵

In their studies both Anderson and Henley see the failure of the Indochina nation-state primarily in the light of the success of transforming two of the constituent parts of this colonial space into nation-states – Vietnam and Cambodia. The position of Laos within this wider Indochinese space and the reasons why the colonial state of Laos subsequently emerged into the nation-state of Laos receive only cursory treatment.⁶ In comparison, the aspect of Laos within Indochina receives more treatment in Christopher Goscha's illuminating study *Vietnam or Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in*

Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887–1954.⁷ In this study Goscha adds more depth and new dimensions to the perspectives outlined by Anderson and Henley by arguing convincingly for how French colonial policies aimed at making an Indochinese space a reality and how this notion of a wider Indochinese space was embedded in, for example, the layout of the infrastructure, maps, schoolbooks, and the dominant Vietnamese element in the local administration throughout Indochina. In addition to the factors brought forward by Anderson to explain why Indochina did not emerge as a nation-state, Goscha emphasises also how this colonial space was contested. Based on a reading of the Vietnamese press in the 1920s–1930s Goscha shows how Vietnamese nationalists were divided with regard to whether the geographical delimitation for a Vietnamese nationalism should be Indochina or Annam. But Goscha also argues that the notion of Indochina was contested by emerging national identities in Laos and Cambodia from the early 1930s. National identities that were nourished by opposition to the dominant role assigned to the Vietnamese by the French and by a premodern cultural divide between the Lao and Khmer Indianised Buddhist cultures in the west and the Vietnamese Sinicised Confucian culture in the east. According to Goscha, the hyphen in the word ‘Indo-China’ that up till the early 1930s was the official way of writing the name of this French colonial domain ‘was thus important, symbolic of a deeper, precolonial cultural divide that the French did not succeed in bridging – even though they dropped the hyphen.’⁸ While Indochina for the Vietnamese moving through it ‘was a functional concept and space’ and thus easily imagined, it was not a space imagined by the Lao and Khmer.⁹

The present book joins the above-mentioned studies showing how the French colonial project in Laos can be linked with the formation of an idea of Laos associated with a Lao cultural identity that emerged within the context of a wider Indochina-wide colonial project and subsequently ran counter to this. It will be argued that the formation of this idea of Laos or Lao-ness was linked with an attempt to dissociate the French colonial space of Laos from that of

a Greater Siam, a process that involved the formation of a 'cultural frontier' between Laos and Siam by attributing a distinctiveness to Laos in relation to Siam with reference to some of the basic factors normally used to define national identities – history, language and religion. What is analysed here is how the unprecedented colonial space of Laos was given a past and a culture and thereby also a future as a distinct state: the identity of a nation-to-be was formed. In this analysis a distinct and separate Lao nation did not emerge 'naturally', but was the product of competing discourses about Laos and the Lao. What this book is dealing with is not political but cultural nationalism as a distinctive form of nationalism preceding the formation of a nation-state. When we refer to political nationalism, the focus is on the state and the formation of an independent state. State-formation and the achievement of an independent state are not uppermost when we talk about cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism is concerned with identity and the regeneration of the national community through the development and strengthening of a national essence – a distinct civilisation which is the product of a distinct history and culture. The primary leaders of cultural nationalism are found among historians, lexicographers, artists and the like. In praxis, these two forms of nationalism are closely inter-related. However, as John Hutchinson has pointed out in his study of cultural nationalism in an Irish context: '[i]ndeed, the struggle for nationhood in the modern world has everywhere been preceded by emerging cultural nationalist movements'.¹⁰ In his classic study of the nationalist movements among eight small European nationalities Miroslav Hroch has also emphasised the cultural orientation of the nationalist movements when they first emerge. According to the three-stage periodisation of the nationalist movements proposed by Hroch, the activities in the first and initial phase are devoted to:

scholarly enquiry into and dissemination of an awareness of the linguistic, cultural, social and sometimes historical attributes of the non-dominant group [here Hroch is referring to cases with an 'exogenous' ruling class] – but without, on the whole, pressing specifically national demands.¹¹

Likewise, in his highly influential book *The Nation and its Fragments* Partha Chatterjee emphasises the importance of distinguishing – from both a thematic and a temporal perspective – between political and cultural nationalism in a colonial context. In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson argues that the colonial and anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa were based on a process of copying the modular forms of nationalism already in existence in the Americas and Europe. Chatterjee criticises this idea about nationalism’s modular nature as he finds that it deprives anticolonialism of agency:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized.¹²

In order to rectify this aspect of Anderson’s approach Chatterjee argues that anticolonial nationalism operates in two different domains. One is an outer and material domain encompassing economy, state-craft, technology and science. This is a domain dominated by the colonial power and it is a domain in which ‘Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated.’ The other is an inner and spiritual domain ‘bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity’. It is a domain outside the reach of Western hegemony. With recourse to this bifurcation Chatterjee demarcates the dual nature of anticolonial nationalism. On the one hand, we have the outer domain which is characterised by the modular nature proposed by Anderson. It is a domain in which anticolonialism strives to create similarities between European and local institutions and practices and thereby to negate the rule of difference that is fundamental for the workings of the colonial state. On the other hand, we have the inner domain in which anticolonial nation-

alism strives to establish a distinct national culture that is not only modern but also different from that of the colonialists. Therefore, if the history of anticolonial movements takes into account only the workings of anticolonialism in the outer domain then 'nationalism's autobiography is fundamentally flawed'. In order to present a more accurate portrait of anticolonial nationalism we need to take into account the process of localising the national idea in a specific context which takes place in the inner domain. According to Chatterjee it is here that:

[...] nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. In this, its true and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power. The dynamics of this historical project is completely missed in conventional histories in which the story of nationalism begins with the contest for political power.¹³

It has to be noted, however, that in Chatterjee's analysis the inner domain is by no means unrelated to the colonial system or colonial forms of knowledge. Take, for example, Chatterjee's discussion of how a national perception of history was formed in India. From his analysis there is no doubt about how colonial educational institutions and colonial knowledge had an impact on the new perception of history that came into being. Chatterjee writes:

For Indian nationalists in the nineteenth century, the pattern of classical glory, medieval decline and modern renaissance appeared as one that was not only proclaimed by the modern historiography of Europe but was also approved for India by at least some section of European scholarship. What was needed was to claim for the Indian nation the historical agency for completing the project of modernity. To make that claim, ancient India had to become the classical source of Indian modernity, while the 'Muslim period' would become the night of medieval darkness.¹⁴

In this manner, the local intellectual elite borrows from colonial forms of knowledge and this knowledge is adapted to fit with the

national project. Chatterjee characterises this process as a 'selective appropriation of Western modernity'.¹⁵

Picking up on these ideas about cultural nationalism in general and the link between cultural nationalism and colonialism more specifically, this book seeks to investigate how a similar kind of cultural nationalism or notions of a Lao cultural identity developed in Laos preceding the formation of an overt anticolonial and political nationalist movement. It will be evident from my analysis that this idea about Laos and its culture did not come into being in a sphere independent of the workings of the colonial state. Indeed, French colonialism was instrumental in bringing about a Lao cultural nationalism. To use Anderson's terminology, we can say that the colonial state engendered the fundamental grammar that made the imagination of a national culture possible. As colonial subjects the Lao manifested their agency in participating in this project by unearthing the cultural elements that a Lao nationalism subsequently identified as its national culture.

The cultural aspects of French colonialism is a topic that has been neglected in studies of Laos's history in general and of nationalism in Laos in particular. In order to place this book in relation to the field of studies in the history of Laos, I will in the following briefly discuss the main tenets of the existing studies dealing with the link between French colonialism and Lao nationalism.

COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM IN LAOS

In all societies, discourses about the past shape the understanding of the present and ruling groups have always used perceptions of the past as an ideological tool to legitimate and reinforce existing power relations. Nowhere can this be better seen than in the way the history of Laos is written in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR). Since the LPDR was established in 1975, the history of twentieth-century Laos has been framed to show how the revolutionary movement in Laos has deep historical roots and how the Lao People's Revolutionary Party is the carrier of the fight against colonial and neo-colonial foreign aggressors. It can come as no great surprise that a very critical representation of French colonialism and

its impact on Lao culture and society is embedded in this perception of the Lao past. The main tenets of this version of Laos's past can be located in Phoumi Vongvichit's assessment of Laos's history published in the late 1960s. Phoumi's treatment of the colonial period includes the following themes. First, French colonialism is made synonymous with a system of exploitation and oppression of the Lao people that brought no benefits to the population at large. A situation existed where the Lao people were 'plunged in misery and ignorance' during the 'sixty years of most ruthless French oppression and exploitation'.¹⁶ Second, French colonialism is associated with a system that brought decadence and stagnation to Lao culture. Not only because the French language and culture were promoted to the detriment of Lao language and culture, but also because the French colonialists pursued a policy of obscurantism, which 'kept Laos in stagnation, plunged its culture into decadence, and held its language and script in contempt'.¹⁷ Third, the heavy exploitation and repression of the Lao people by the French colonialists led to 'continuous popular uprisings' which are expressions of a so-called 'fighting tradition' of the Lao people against French colonialism.¹⁸ The Lao people's struggle against the colonialists was not, however, successful before 1945, when the Lao people seized power and established a provisional government. According to Phoumi, the reasons for the lack of success in the pre-1945 period are that the risings were 'short of a correct revolutionary line, a nation-wide co-ordination and especially the guidance of an authentic political party'. Still, these movements are important as they formed the basis for the later, successful fight against the foreign colonialists:

[...] the blood shed by thousands of patriots at the hands of the colonialists had exasperated the hatred of the Laos, tempered their combativeness and made the entire people aware of their historic mission to liberate the country and build a genuinely independent and free Laos. It was those traditions that brought about success to the Lao people's revolutionary struggle.¹⁹

Basically, it is the same representation of French colonialism that we find in state-sanctioned surveys of Laos's history published in

Laos after 1975. The recently published *History of Laos* by Souneth Phothisane and Nousai Phoummachan offers a good example of how French colonialism in Laos is represented in such an ideologically motivated and party-sanctioned perception of the Lao past.²⁰ The book is of a monstrous size (more than 1,000 pages) and it spans a period from prehistory to the turn of the twenty-first century. Therefore, in the part dealing with the colonial period we find more details and narrative than in Phoumi's account of the same subject. Still, Souneth and Nousai reproduce basically the same structure as found in Phoumi's text. Thus, they depict the colonial state as a state that not only demanded high taxes from the population at large, but was also equipped with an administrative and coercive apparatus to extract them. With reference to the economic sphere, Souneth and Nousai underscore that the colonial state only aimed to make an easy profit and was not interested in developing the economy for the betterment of the population at large. From this perspective the colonial period represents a situation without benefits for the Lao people:

The French colonialists forced the Lao population to pay different heavy and constantly increasing taxes. They used the money from the Lao to govern and to suppress the Lao people. Besides that, they [the French] were dependent on this money for their personal incomes and for income to be sent back to France. Nonetheless, the French propagated [the idea] that they brought capital from France in order to develop Laos to achieve progress and civilisation.²¹

Following Phoumi's narrative structure a central theme in Souneth and Nousai's representation of French colonialism is the Lao people's repeated uprisings against the French colonialists. Illustratively, the section of the book dealing with the colonial period is entitled 'the Lao people's struggle resisting French colonialism'. The struggle against the French is told with reference to a series of uprisings against the French which have attained an iconographic quality in the LPDR historical narrative: Pho Kaduak (1901–03), Ong Kaeo and Khommadam (1901–37), Chao Fa Pacaj (1914–22), Chao Fa Mueang Sing and Nai Khu Kham. On the one hand, these

revolts are described in order to illustrate how the Lao people courageously rose to fight the militarily stronger colonialists. On the other hand, the fate of these revolts is described in order to articulate the importance of the party in guiding the Lao people. Thus, despite the heroic struggle of the people none of the revolts succeeded in bringing down the colonial regime. For Souneth and Nousai, the lack of success is an expression of how the people who participated in the revolts lacked leadership and class consciousness (*sati son san*), and it illustrates how the revolts were merely localised forms of uprisings without a clearly specified goal.²² A new situation emerged in 1930 when the Indochinese Communist Party was created. Hereby the scene was set for a successful struggle against the French as Marxism-Leninism began to be spread to the Lao people and the banner of national democracy became the banner of the 'nationalist struggle resisting French colonialism.'²³

Another theme in the text is how the Lao people 'sank into a condition of ignorance, venerated the French, forgot their own lineage and consented to being the slaves of the foreigners.'²⁴ In the same vein, Souneth and Nousai refer to an association for Lao civil servants founded by the French as an organisation established to manipulate the Lao and make them 'forget the nation and venerate the French.'²⁵ Whereas French is being implemented as an official language, religious institutions – temples in general and the Buddhist Institute in Vientiane in particular – become the guardians of Lao language and culture.²⁶

Built into this representation of Laos's history is the idea of the Lao nation as a primordial entity which is tinted temporarily by French colonialism only to emerge in full blossom again after a long period of anticolonial struggle under the guidance of the party. Such a primordialism is, for example, expressed when French colonial expansion into the Mekong region is linked to the splitting up of 'Laos' (*pathet lao*) or a Lao nation (*sat ban mueang*) spanning both banks of the Mekong River, when this river became the boundary between French Laos and Siam.²⁷ The authors also invoke the primordial character of 'Laos' when they place the leaders of the various revolts

in the colonial period in a pantheon of 'Lao heroes' and note how the struggle against the colonial state strengthened the 'patriotism' (*lathi hak sat*) which had existed since Fa Ngum, Setthathirat and Chao Anou.²⁸ In this manner the precolonial and colonial period is linked together with reference to the existence of a timeless Lao patriotism. In relation to the uprisings, the authors describe the timeless quality of the Lao nation in the following manner:

The Lao people have [in the lineage] an ancestral love for their homeland, [a love for their] territory and village, and a love for their birth place. That is, they love their nation (*pathet sat*), [and] they cherish and venerate their nation in an unsurpassed manner. Therefore, when the French colonialists came in and placed the yoke of control on the neck of the Lao people, the Lao people felt the need for extreme revenge towards the enemies of the nation and together they rose up to fight the French. [...] The armed uprisings of the Lao people to resist the yoke of the French colonialism were done in order to seize independence and national freedom.²⁹

In this party-sanctioned version of the Lao past, an independent Lao nation and Lao culture emerged not because of but rather despite of French colonialism. There is no room for the cultural aspects of the French colonial project and the cultural aspects of an early Lao nationalism.

We encounter basically the same thematic orientation as outlined above in Western studies of French colonialism and nationalism in Laos published since the 1970s. One dominant theme is the background for and nature of the revolts during the colonial period.³⁰ Another dominant theme in the literature is the political and anti-colonial dimension of Lao nationalism. In this connection the main focus is on identifying the impact of Marxism on the nationalist movement or the Vietnamese communists' role in the anticolonial struggle in Laos.³¹ Despite the overall focus on the political and anticolonial aspects of Lao nationalism, an important feature of these studies is that they unanimously link the birth of a modern Lao nationalism with a movement that developed with French support during World War II. The movement in question is the so-called

Lao Renovation Movement which emerged as part of a French propaganda campaign designed to stimulate awareness in Laos of a Lao cultural and national identity. The aim of this campaign was to counter potent pan-Thai propaganda radiating from Thailand and show the Lao elite that their future was to be found in an alliance with the French colonial project. Alfred McCoy, for example, in his very comprehensive outline of the history of French colonialism in Laos, deals with this movement under the heading 'the great awakening', emphasising its importance in relation to an understanding of the emergence of Lao nationalism.³² In order to distinguish the later 'revolutionary' nationalism from the nationalism that developed under the French aegis, the latter has variously been termed 'immature defensive culturalism' or 'bourgeois'.³³ Likewise, in his account of Laos's history, Phoumi Vongvichit refers to this movement in the following manner:

During the Second World War and the Franco–Thai conflict, France stepped up her policy of buying over the higher strata of the feudal class and the bourgeoisie, launched a 'nationalist' movement dubbed 'Lao Nhay' (Greater Laos) to counter the 'Greater Thailand' policy of which the Japanese fascists pulled the strings, and issued the first Lao paper Lao Nhay as its propaganda medium.³⁴

By placing the term 'nationalist' in quotation marks Phoumi conveys the idea that here we are not faced with a 'true' or 'real' form of nationalism – it is not a 'mass', 'revolutionary' or 'authentic' nationalist movement. In the same vein, Souneth and Nousai mention this movement but do not give it a pivotal place in the development of Lao nationalism, due to the political connotations and the primordial conception of the Lao nation.³⁵ What we are dealing with here, however, is in fact a classic example of a cultural nationalist movement that developed with support from the colonial state – a movement which was not linked with the formation of an independent state, but is associated rather with the sowing of 'the seeds of cultural pride and national identification'.³⁶ Although the cultural aspect of this early form of Lao nationalism is highlighted in this manner in

these studies it is not an aspect that is discussed at length. What count in these studies are the political and anticolonial forms of Lao nationalism that dominated the perspective in Western studies in the 1970s–80s.

In more recent studies, we can discern a gradual move towards not only a more systematic incorporation of the cultural aspects of this early Lao nationalism, but also a move towards locating the roots of a Lao cultural nationalism earlier than the World War II period. This is the case, for example, in Martin Stuart-Fox's *History of Laos*. The backbone in Stuart-Fox's approach is the political and the economic spheres. In the chapter on the French colonial period Stuart-Fox provides a general overview of some of the central aspects of the French colonial project in Laos: the administrative and economic organisation and the anticolonial revolts. Overall Stuart-Fox's discussion of the Lao nationalist movement includes the classic elements consisting of the Lao Renovation Movement, the anticolonial Lao Issara and the anticolonial revolutionary Pathet Lao. However, he adds a new element to our understanding of the formation of the nationalist movement and a nationalist sentiment in Laos. He refers to the impact of the restoration and preservation of ancient monuments and scholarly research into Lao history and literature which took place during the 1920s–30s.³⁷ According to Stuart-Fox, these are central for an understanding of the formation of Lao nationalism as 'these historical, literary and cultural studies and the discussions to which they gave rise provided an early stimulus to elite Lao nationalism, thus laying the groundwork for the more overtly nationalist movements of the 1940s'.³⁸ He connects this development with the first stirrings of 'Lao cultural nationalism'. Here the use of the term 'cultural nationalism' is employed to convey clearly the difference from the political nationalism that later emerged. Thus, it was not a popular movement with mass appeal. Rather, it was confined to a tiny, culturally active group who made little attempt to pursue political goals.³⁹ However, he does not provide us with a thorough discussion of this issue and – as mentioned earlier – the backbone in his approach is the political and economic spheres.

Grant Evans is another scholar who has been dealing with the cultural dimensions of French colonialism and the implications of French colonialism on the formation of Lao nationalism and Lao cultural identity. Evans' point of departure is in the modernity of nation-states and to him the 'culture of Laos' is not simply the embodiment of a primordial Lao culture or a timeless socio-cultural substratum. Rather, as Evans points out in his thought-provoking introduction to the edited volume *Laos: Culture and Society*, the study of culture in Laos involves a 'study of the state's attempt to standardise features of Lao culture and society under several regimes.'⁴⁰ It is through this process that a distinct sense of Lao-ness or Lao cultural identity takes its form. Evans traces this process back to the formation of the colonial state of Laos at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴¹ This, of course, raises the fundamental question of what constitutes this element of Lao culture that the modern state finds in the premodern period and sets out to standardise in its endeavour to make culture congruent with the borders of the modern state. Evans does not provide a clear answer to that question, but his text constitutes an attempt to outline a programme for further research into the cultural complexities of the premodern period on which the later national cultures have been formed. It is a call for new research on Laos and Lao culture, which go beyond national units and beyond the notions of bounded cultures and societies when dealing with the premodern period. For the modern period it is a call for research into the contribution of French colonialism to the formation of a notion of a Lao cultural identity. Subsequently, in his *Short History of Laos*, Evans has followed up on this approach to the nexus between colonialism and nationalism. In this book Evans stresses the importance of French colonialism for the formation of Lao nationalism, not only in relation specifically to the role of the Lao Renovation Movement but also in relation to French colonialism more generally. As he puts it:

When the French took over Laos there was no sense of a Lao nation among the population that fell within the boundaries that

they mapped. Even for the French, Laos was, at that time, more a cartographic reality than a social or historical one. But it was the French who brought the idea of the modern nation to Laos, and this idea would grow slowly among the population over the following 50 years.⁴²

Based on this understanding of the relationship between French colonialism and Lao nationalism, Evans briefly outlines how the French colonial state contributed to forming a basis for a Lao cultural identity with reference to the endeavours undertaken to create a national Buddhist religion, a new national history for Laos and to standardise the Lao written language.

While newer studies of Laos's history in this manner clearly display a tendency to incorporate cultural elements in their analysis of Lao nationalism, this topic is still lacking a thorough analysis. This book is intended to take the first step to fill this gap in the scholarly literature on Laos's history. It is based partly on an analysis of the campaign for a national renovation in Laos during World War II referred to above. From an Indochina-wide perspective Eric Jennings and Anne Raffin have discussed the centrality of the French-orchestrated campaign for a national renovation in relation to understanding subsequent anticolonial nationalism defined along the lines of the three nation-states that later came into being – Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.⁴³ There can be no doubt about the importance of the machinations of the French colonial state in Indochina during World War II for understanding why Indochina broke up into three individual nation-states. However, adopting a cultural approach this book will also show how the nationalist discourse on Laos and the Lao related to this campaign in the first half of the 1940s did not come out of nothing but can be linked with the notion of a Lao-ness already in the making in the 1920s–1930s. Finally, the book will show that the basic grammar for this notion of a Lao-ness that formed during the colonial period is located in the French discourse on the Lao in the period preceding the formation of Laos as a French colonial state. In doing so the book is intended as a sequel to the existing literature dealing with cultural nationalism and cultural

identities under French colonial rule in other parts of Indochina, and studies dealing with French metropolitan representations of Indochina.⁴⁴

NOTES

1. Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994).
2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [revised version]), p. 132.
3. During the colonial period that this book deals with, the term 'Annamite' was the conventional term used by the French for the ethnic majority in present-day Vietnam. Today it is conventional to use 'Viet/Vietnamese' in preference to 'Annamite' or 'Annamese' as the latter may invoke notions of racial inferiority *vis-à-vis* the white coloniser.
4. The classic statement is Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
5. David E. F. Henley, 'Ethnographic Integration and Exclusion in Anticolonial Nationalism: Indonesia and Indochina', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37:2, 1995, pp. 286–324.
6. The same Vietnam–Cambodia dominating perspective is reproduced by Stein Tønnesson and Hans Antlöv in their introduction to the anthology *Asian Forms of the Nation* (NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, No. 23, Richmond: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1996), pp. 36–37.
7. Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam and Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887–1954* (NIAS Report, No. 28, Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995). See also Christopher E. Goscha, 'Annam and Vietnam in the New Indochinese Space, 1887–1945', in Tønnesson and Antlöv (eds), *Asian Forms of the Nation*, pp. 93–130; and Christopher E. Goscha, 'L'Indochine repensée par les "Indochinois": Pham Quynh et les deux débats de 1931 sur l'immigration, le fédéralisme et la réalité de l'Indochine', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 82:309, 1995, pp. 421–453.
8. Goscha, *Vietnam and Indochina?*, p. 78.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 58.
10. John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism. The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 2. For a recent general discussion of cultural nationalism, see John Hutchinson, 'Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 45:3, 1999, pp. 392–407.

11. Miroslav Hroch, 'From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation. The Nation-building Process in Europe', *New Left Review*, 198 (March–April 1993), pp. 6–7.
12. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 5. See also Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1993).
13. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, p. 6.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
16. Phoumi Vongvichit, *Laos and the Victorious Struggle of the Lao People against U.S. Neo-Colonialism* (No place: Neo Lao Haksat Publications, 1969), p. 35.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.
20. See also Bruce Lockhart, 'Pavatsat Lao: Constructing a National History', *Southeast Asia Research*, 14:3, 2006, pp. 361–386. For a discussion of the LPDR's historiographical relationship with communist Vietnam, see Christopher E. Goscha, 'Revolutionizing the Indochinese Past: Communist Vietnam's "Special" Historiography on Laos', in Christopher E. Goscha and Søren Ivarsson (eds), *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the Crossroads* (NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, No. 32, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), pp. 265–299.
21. Souneth Phothisane and Nousai Phoummachan, *Pawatsat lao (duekdamban – pachuban)* [History of Laos (from ancient times to the contemporary period)] (Vientiane: Ministry of Information and Culture, 2000), p. 551.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 632.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 655.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 562.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 571.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 569–570.
27. E.g. *ibid.*, pp. h, 512.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 634.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 630–631.
30. See, for example, Bernard Gay, 'Millenarian Movements in Laos, 1895–1936: Depictions by Modern Lao Historians', in Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Kennon Breazeale (eds), *Breaking New Ground in Lao History. Essays on*

- the Seventh to Twentieth Centuries* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), pp. 281–295; Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Rebellion in Laos. Peasant and Politics in a Colonial Backwater* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); François Moppert, ‘La Révolte des Bolovens (1901–1936)’, in Pierre Brocheux (ed.), *Histoire de l’Asie du Sud-Est: Révoltes, Réformes, Révolutions* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1981), pp. 47–62; John B. Murdoch, ‘The 1901–1902 “Holy Man’s” Rebellion’, *Journal of the Siam Society*, 62:1, 1974, pp. 47–66.
31. E.g. Clive J. Christie, ‘Marxism and the History of the Nationalist Movements in Laos’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 10:1, 1979, pp. 146–158; MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930–1985* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986); Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Political Struggles in Laos (1930–1954). Vietnamese Communist Power and the Lao Struggle for National Independence* (Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1988); Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Jean Deuve, *Le Laos, 1945–1949. Contribution à l’histoire du mouvement Lao Issara* (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 2000 [1992]).
 32. Alfred W. McCoy, ‘French Colonialism in Laos, 1893–1945’, in Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy (eds), *Laos: War and Revolution* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper Colophon Book, 1970), p. 92.
 33. Nina S. Adams, ‘Patrons, Clients, and Revolutionaries: The Lao Search for Independence, 1945–1954’, in Adams and McCoy (eds), *Laos*, p. 101 (‘immature defensive culturalism’); Gunn, *Political Struggles*, p. 3 (‘bourgeois’).
 34. Phoumi, *Laos and the Victorious Struggle*, p. 36.
 35. Souneth and Nousai, *Pawatsat lao*, pp. 673–675.
 36. Brown and Zasloff, *Apprentice Revolutionaries*, p. 22.
 37. Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 45. Clive Christie has pointed out that in the late 1930s the Société des Amis du Laos formed by ‘old colonial hands’ in Paris in 1937 also stressed the importance of restoring the crumbling monuments of Lao civilisation in order to help form the foundation for a secure sense of Lao identity. Clive J. Christie, *Ideology and Revolution in Southeast Asia, 1900–1980. Political Ideas of the Anti-Colonial Era* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), p. 113. Likewise, in an article from 1989 Geoffrey Gunn briefly addresses the cultural aspects of French colonialism in Laos when he refers to the archaeological work and restoration of monuments associated with the Buddhist religion and royal power undertaken by the French in the colonial period. In this connection Gunn associates these undertakings with attempts to strengthen Buddhist social institutions and royal power to coopt traditional hierarchies in the interest of

- indirect rule and the administrative expediency that flowed from that measure. Thus, he is not emphasising the relevance of these undertakings in relation to the formation of a Lao cultural identity. Geoffrey C. Gunn, 'Approaches to Tai-Lao Studies: From Orientalism to Marxism', *Review*, 12:4, 1989, p. 508.
38. Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, p. 45.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
 40. Grant Evans, 'Introduction: What is Lao Culture and Society?', in Grant Evans (ed.), *Laos: Culture and Society* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), p. 23.
 41. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.
 42. Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos: The Land In-Between* (Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), pp. 70–71.
 43. Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940–1944* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001); Eric Jennings, 'Conservative Confluences, "Nativist" Synergy: Reinscribing Vichy's National Revolution in Indochina, 1940–1945', *French Historical Studies*, 27:3, 2004, pp. 601–635; Anne Raffin, 'Easternization Meets Westernization. Patriotic Youth Organizations in French Indochina during World War II', *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 20:2, 2002, pp. 121–1140; Anne Raffin, 'Domestic Militarization in a Transnational Perspective. Patriotic and Militaristic Youth Mobilization in France and Indochina, 1940–1945', in Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira (eds), *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 303–321; Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).
 44. The first group of studies includes, for example, David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam. New Histories of the National Past* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002); Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007). The second group includes studies like Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina. French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film and Literature* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2001); Kathryn Robson and Jenifer Yee (eds), *France and 'Indochina': Cultural Representations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

CHAPTER ONE

The Colonial Encounter

If the formation of Laos as a modern nation-state is closely associated with developments in the twentieth century, the terms 'Laos' and 'Lao' have a much longer pedigree. Writing in the middle of the sixteenth century Portuguese historiographer João de Barros, for example, employed Lao as a collective term for the people living in a region north of Siam (then the Ayutthaya Kingdom) encompassing the kingdoms of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Lan Xang.¹ In general, the use of Lao/Laos with reference to a region encompassing what is today northern Thailand, northeastern Thailand and Laos can be found in both Western and Siamese texts produced in a period spanning approximately from the middle of the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century.² In line with this tradition Carl Bock's account of his expedition from Bangkok to Chiang Mai in 1881 was published with the subtitle 'Narrative of a journey of exploration through upper Siam and Lao', even though Bock never entered areas considered Lao today.³

The origins of these terms remain obscure. However, it seems likely, as Grant Evans has suggested, that Lao/Laos came to be used as a general category for referring to a region located beyond the Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya as a result of encounters with Western merchants and missionaries who 'trafficked in general categories, such as Siamese or Chinese' and demanded 'general descriptions of the people who lived beyond Ayutthaya'.⁴ In other words, the terms Lao/Laos were initially employed as a vaguely defined meta-

category or general names to describe a group of people constituting 'the other' as part of an Ayutthaya-centred 'us-them' dichotomy. Later, the same basic dichotomy was employed in the Bangkok period.

Predating the period of modern nation-states, the statecraft of nineteenth-century Siamese kings was not linked to the ideal that the political unit corresponded to an ethnic and culturally homogeneous population. Rather, the Siamese political unit was envisaged as a culturally diverse empire including the Lao as one of its subject populations. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the category Lao became increasingly problematic as the geo-bodies of Laos and Siam were coming into being and burgeoning nationalist thinking stipulated that political and national units must be congruent. Thus, from the turn of the twentieth century the Siamese elite set about to incorporate the Lao into the 'us' category in order to link the emerging geo-body with the idea of a cultural and ethnic homogeneous population. At the same time, a French colonial discourse aimed at consolidating and more clearly defining Lao/Laos as a classificatory category. The Lao were made manifest. They could be identified, classified, counted, measured and compared with other groups of people.

This chapter details how the French colonial discourse on Laos and the Lao in the pre-1893 period contributed vitally to defining and placing the Lao on a par with the Siamese in a racial order and how the French gave the terms Lao/Laos a more clearly defined and fixed meaning. It has to be noted that I am not concerned with the validity of race as a category for dividing humanity. Rather, I approach race as a social and cultural construct and my concern is how categories of race were applied on both sides in the colonial encounter. The chapter also considers how the territories east of the Mekong to become Laos constituted a contested space forming part of two conflicting spatial layouts – that of a larger French colonial space defined with reference to Vietnamese tributary rights, and that of a larger Siamese space defined with reference to Siamese tributary rights. Before dealing with these issues I will offer a brief historical backdrop providing a short account of first Siam's and later France's

interference in the Mekong region. For if the French were newcomers to the Mekong region in the second half of the nineteenth century, Siam had gradually expanded its suzerainty over the small kingdoms and principalities located in the territory that later became Laos since the end of the eighteenth century.

SIAM AND THE MEKONG REGION: INTERSTATE
RELATIONS IN THE PREMODERN PERIOD

The kingdoms of premodern Southeast Asia differed in some fundamental ways from the modern states that developed in the wake of the colonial confrontation. While the new states developed into centralised structures linked with a specific geographical region demarcated by fixed boundaries, the premodern kingdoms were unbound and overlapping structures based on hierarchical networks of personal loyalties among rulers. With reference to Indian political philosophy O.W. Wolters has shown how the system of power and interstate relations of the premodern period conforms to the so-called mandala conception of the state.⁵ A mandala does not refer to a geographical area with fixed boundaries or to state structures. It signifies rather a map of power relations between political centres. It was a tributary network comprising a political core surrounded by numerous political centres connected to the core by personal loyalties and kinship alliances. Within such a tributary network the political centres outside the core area were regarded as separate entities which enjoyed a high degree of independence as long as they remained loyal to the centre. This loyalty implied, for example, mobilising manpower on demand and not supporting forces from competing mandalas. Political centres outside the core area were often part of more than one mandala structure at the same time. Consequently, mandalas were overlapping structures due to overlapping tributary networks and they represented a highly fluid structure that expanded or contracted in accordance with the ability of the centre to keep the tributary states from breaking away to form an individual tributary network or to attract new tributary states. Wolters has applied this perception of power and interstate relations

to describe early Southeast Asian polities in general and specifically to the diplomatic dealings of King Naresuan of the Ayutthaya Kingdom.⁶ The mandala perception of interstate relations has also been applied to describe the Lao kingdoms in the Mekong region and Siam's interaction with these in the initial period of Siam's endeavours to expand its suzerainty over this region – a period spanning from the late 1770s until the early 1880s.⁷

Direct Siamese involvement in the territories east of the Mekong, which later became Laos, can be traced to the late eighteenth century. At that time, the Lan Xang Kingdom, which long had formed the centre of gravity for political power in the Mekong region, had been split into three rival kingdoms centred on Luang Phrabang, Vientiane and Champassack. Besides these three kingdoms located in the Mekong Valley, the geopolitical map of what was to become Laos was made up by smaller kingdoms like the Phuan Kingdom in Xiengkhuang and a group of smaller chiefdoms like Huaphan and Sipsong Chuthai situated between the Mekong Valley and the Annamese Cordillera. In the late 1770s, the three major kingdoms situated along the Mekong River became vassals of King Taksin's newly resurrected Siam. The paradigm of power and interstate relations of the premodern period guided Siamese suzerainty over these territories. This meant that the Lao vassals retained a significant measure of autonomy and Siamese intervention was expressed primarily through the naming of new rulers. The Lao vassals could consolidate and expand their own tributary networks, as well as be part of other tributary networks. During the rule (1804–28) of Chao Anou over Vientiane, for example, Vientiane paid tribute to Hue and in this period relations between Vientiane and Hue may have been just as close as relations between Vientiane and Bangkok.⁸

At that time Siam was also consolidating its position on the Khorat Plateau stretching out between the valleys of the Mekong River and the Chao Phraya River. Volker Grabowsky has studied the demographic development of this region and has pointed out that the amount of settlements on the Khorat Plateau increased markedly following the political conflicts that led to the disintegration of

Lan Xang.⁹ While these new settlements were initially dependencies of Vientiane and Champassack, many ceased to accept the overlordship of Vientiane and Champassack and established tributary relations with Siam via Khorat instead of one of the Lao political centres situated along the Mekong River. To further strengthen its control with manpower in this region, Siam initiated a Khorat-wide tattooing campaign in 1824. This reorganisation of tributary relationships on the Khorat Plateau, however, did not go unchallenged. Under the leadership of Chao Anou, troops from the kingdoms of Vientiane and Champassack attacked Khorat in 1827 in order to resettle people in the vicinity of Vientiane. The Siamese response was firm. The Lao troops were not only defeated but subsequently Vientiane was sacked. In the words of the official chronicler of the third Bangkok reign, the Siamese troops allowed only 'grass, water and the savage beasts to remain' in the area where Vientiane had been located previously.¹⁰

Subsequent Siamese policies towards the territories east of the Mekong can be associated with an attempt to maintain these territories as a buffer zone – or 'overlapping margin' as Thongchai Winichakul has termed it – between Siam and Vietnam (or Dai Nam under the Nguyen).¹¹ This was done mainly through depopulation and allowing overlapping tributary networks. As a result, in the north Luang Phrabang continued to exist as part of an overlapping tributary network as a vassal of both Bangkok and Hue.¹² Furthermore, the position of Luang Phrabang as the centre for local tributary relations was strengthened. The tiny towns of the Huaphan states had formerly been vassals of both Vientiane and Hue. In the early 1830s a Siamese military expedition was sent to this region in order to secure the loyalty of local rulers there, who subsequently were made vassals of Luang Phrabang. The region of Sipsong Chuthai formed part of both Luang Phrabang and Hue tributary networks. The role played by Luang Phrabang – and therefore also Siam – in Sipsong Chuthai was, however, very limited, and by the 1850s Luang Phrabang no longer regarded it as a vassal. Contrary to this, Siam interfered directly in the Phuan state centred in the

strategically located Xiengkhuang-area. A radical depopulation of that area was undertaken by Siam in the 1820s–30s with the aim of evacuating the entire population. This policy was, however, not successful and from the 1850s Bangkok settled for a policy of dual Phuan suzerainty via Luang Phrabang to Bangkok on the one hand and to Hue on the other.¹³

Further to the south, the Kingdom of Vientiane ceased to exist after the destruction of the city of Vientiane in 1827–28, when the people who had formerly belonged to this kingdom were removed to territories west of the Mekong. In areas along the Mekong between Vientiane and Champassack a policy of depopulation was also pursued. In this region a Vietnamese influence emerged in the early 1830s, both in the Mekong valley itself, where, for example, a Vietnamese military camp was established opposite Nakhon Phanom in 1833, but especially in the three river basins of Banghian, Bangfai and Kadin. Siamese military campaigns were undertaken, burning towns and removing the population so that the Vietnamese troops in an attack on territories west of the Mekong should not be able to gain assistance and supplies from the local population. The aim of these campaigns was, as it was stated in an edict of King Nangklao (Rama III): 'to cut completely the routes of the Vietnamese armies.'¹⁴ By the 1840s–50s this policy was abandoned and instead a situation emerged by which the towns east of the Mekong were officially regarded as non-existing and no attempts were made to build up any administration or buttress Siamese suzerainty. On the other hand, in practice the region was considered as an extension of the towns west of the Mekong and the elite from these towns collected taxes from the people inhabiting areas across the Mekong. This situation continued until the 1880s, when the territories to become the colonial state of Laos were defined as a Siamese space proper.

THE FRENCH AND THE MEKONG

French focus on the Mekong region initially followed in the wake of the French move into Cochinchina in the early 1860s.¹⁵ When the French Navy took possession of Saigon in 1862 they gained a long-

desired foothold on Vietnamese territory, a stepping stone to penetrating the Chinese markets from the south. Taking control over this small harbour city, however, was still a long way from establishing of a protectorate over the whole of Vietnam which had been the initial objective of the naval expedition. In order to legitimate a continued French presence in this new colonial possession, it was of utmost importance for the navy and members of the pro-expansionist segment in the political circles in Paris to prove the economic profitability of Saigon. In these endeavours it was inevitable that Saigon would invite comparison with the major entrepôts in the region, such as Singapore and Shanghai. At first glance, however, Saigon had really nothing to offer. Chasseloup-Laubat, a long-time Navy Minister and major supporter of French expansion in Indochina, put it this way:

It is clear that this town [Saigon] does not stand out as one of those essential ports of call on one of the world's great sea routes [. . .] However splendid the position of Saigon and Mytho, it must be acknowledged that these towns do not have the advantages that are offered by Singapore as a trading settlement, situated as it is at the far end of the Malacca Strait, the very entrance of the highway to China and Japan, or by Shanghai at the mouth of the Yangtse Kiang.¹⁶

It is in this context that French focus shifted towards Cambodia and the territories found north of Cambodia along the Mekong River. Together these territories formed part of a new geographical layout in which Saigon was designated a central position, promising unlimited economic opportunities for the French. This vision was based on the assumption that Saigon should become the nucleus of trade carried by the Mekong to and from Cambodia, the Lao territories flanking the river, and southwestern China. Paraphrasing Chasseloup-Laubat, the Mekong was to become the Yangtse Kiang and Saigon the Shanghai of Southeast Asia.

At that time, only limited knowledge existed about these areas and their economic potential, as the Mekong region up until the middle of the nineteenth century had been more or less terra incognita for European travellers. Notable exceptions are the Dutch

trader Van Wuysthoff, who had visited Vientiane in 1641–42 and the Jesuit missionary Giovanni Maria Leria, who stayed in Vientiane in 1642–48.¹⁷ Over two centuries passed before this region was again visited by Europeans – this time by the French explorer Henri Mouhot who travelled to Luang Phrabang in 1861, where he died the same year.¹⁸ Many of the Western accounts of Siam produced in the first half of the nineteenth century included information about the territories in the Mekong region. However, in the middle of the nineteenth century this information was of a ‘very imperfect and of fragmentary character’, as the British envoy John Bowring noted with reference to the state of Western knowledge about the ‘countries’ dependent on Siam – including territories in the Mekong region.¹⁹ This lack of knowledge is, as Thongchai Winichakul has pointed out, also reflected in Western maps of Siam dating from the same period. In these maps the great eastward bend of the Mekong River south of Luang Phrabang was not indicated, whereby the northeastern region of modern Thailand only appeared as a narrow strip of land.²⁰ The vision of a prosperous Saigon at the mouth of a lively trading river was therefore sustained by vivid expectations rather than by real knowledge of the navigability of the Mekong and of existing trade on this river.

A first move to secure the economic viability of Saigon and the French colonial enterprise in Indochina was taken in 1863 when a treaty was signed placing Cambodia under a French protectorate. Subsequently, in order to verify the expectations of the economic gains to be gained from the territories in the Mekong region, the so-called Mekong expedition was initiated in 1866 under the leadership of Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier. It was expected that this expedition would add credibility to the Saigon-Mekong-China vision by sailing up the Mekong investigating the navigability of the river and collect information about the unknown hinterland that spread out north of Cambodia. Although the expedition actually made it all the way to China, it meant the burial of the dream of the Mekong as an artery of trade. It was realised that the rapids at Khemmarat and the cataracts at Khon presented obstacles too great

to make the Mekong the desired commercial highway. As one of the members of the expedition explained soon after leaving Cambodia:

The truth began, at last, to force itself on the most sanguine among us. Steamers can never plough the Mekong, as they do the Amazon or the Mississippi; and Saigon can never be united to the western provinces of China by this immense river-way.²¹

The hope of attaining a river-way to China, however, was not completely abandoned. The expedition's report observed that the Red River 'promises to realise all the hopes and expectations which the Mekong destroyed'.²² In this way one vision was rejected while another was born. As mentioned above French interest in the Lao territories in the Mekong region in this early period of French colonial expansion in Indochina was primarily a function of the relevance of these areas to the economic viability of Saigon. Therefore, as the dream of the Mekong as the link between southern China and Saigon crumbled, the focus of the French Navy moved towards the northern parts of Vietnam where the Red River became the new hope for French access to the supposed riches of southern China. With this re-orientation of French focus, the Mekong region north of Cambodia slipped away from the agenda of French colonial expansion for the next decade.

THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER:
TWO CONFLICTING SPATIAL LAYOUTS

In the early 1880s French interest in the Mekong region was rekindled under the Third Republic. There are several reasons for this renewal of interest. First of all, it can be linked with a changing political environment in France. Following the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (1870–71) the new government in the Third Republic was faced with a strained economy caused by the loss of Alsace–Lorraine with its industries and mines, and by the huge war indemnity it had to pay. In this situation the government initially turned to internal restructuring and did not favour further French colonial expansion and increased colonial expenditures. By the end

of the 1870s, however, the government started supporting a renewed French colonial expansion for political and economic reasons. France was to regain its national prestige and strengthen its economy through overseas expansion. Colonial expansion in general was placed firmly on the political agenda, and thus French politicians now favoured the further expansion and consolidation of French colonial interest in the Mekong region. A second reason for the re-emergence of French interest in the region was that many French colonial administrators feared either that Siam would soon fall under British colonial rule or that the British would move first into the Chiang Mai region and subsequently into the upper Mekong region. Therefore, plans were made to put Luang Phrabang under French control in order to bar possible British expansion eastwards. In conformity with this view the French consul in Bangkok, Jules Harmand, characterised Luang Phrabang as 'the most significant strategic point in Eastern Indochina' in the early 1880s.²³ Third, since a French protectorate over Annam and Tonkin was established in 1884 the need to settle the frontier with Siam became an issue of utmost importance. But this renewal of French interest in the Mekong region raised the problem of Siam's relationship with the territories east of the Mekong.

I have earlier mentioned how Western accounts of Siam from the first half of the nineteenth century stressed the lack of information concerning the territories in the Mekong region. In general, however, Siam's suzerainty over the Lao-territories in the Mekong region had been acknowledged, as this region was perceived as one of the outer tributary layers or dependencies in a Siam-centred empire.²⁴ Not surprisingly, the issue of Siam's suzerainty in the Mekong region became a thorny issue when the French became interested in the region in the 1860s. It was addressed in connection with the signing of a Franco-Siamese treaty in 1867 whereby Siam acknowledged a French protectorate over Cambodia. While the Siamese were given a verbal assurance that they did not intend to extend their control over Laos, the French had all phrases implying formal French acknowledgement of Siamese suzerainty over the Lao territories along the Mekong removed from the text.²⁵ The same kind of ambivalence

to the issue of Siamese suzerainty over the Mekong region was also raised by Louis de Carné, who participated in the Mekong expedition as representative of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs. On the one hand, Carné noted that:

We had always refused to recognise the rights of the king of Siam over Laos, and, he himself, had besides, found it convenient, about that time, to say that he exercised a purely nominal sovereignty over that country, so that he could not with a good grace, formally shut us out of it.²⁶

On the other hand, Carné refers to the letter that the expedition had received from the Siamese king as the ‘magic talisman which opened every door to us’, and territories east of the Mekong – like Saravane and Atopeu – are called ‘Siamese provinces.’²⁷ It is also significant that according to the map produced by the expedition the limit for Siamese possessions in the east follows the Annamese Cordillera.²⁸

When the Mekong was put on the French colonial agenda again in the 1880s, the French challenged this perception of Siamese suzerainty. This change is illustrated in French-produced maps of the region from the 1880s. When a shortened version of the official report of the Mekong expedition was published in 1885, it included a map where Siamese suzerainty no longer extended east of the Mekong.²⁹ Likewise, a French-produced *Atlas Colonial* published the same year included a map in which the border of Siam runs along the Annamese Cordillera, while in another map the frontier is placed between the Mekong and the Annamese Cordillera with a legend explaining that this is a ‘unsettled frontier’ that should be moved to the Mekong.³⁰ A parliamentary report of 1855 had also underscored the need for a regulation of the frontiers between Siam and the French colonial possessions.³¹ A year later one of its authors – the future governor-general of Indochina, Jean Marie de Lanessan – observed in his book *L'expansion coloniale de la France* that the border between Siam and the French colonial empire should be pushed not only to the Mekong but beyond. In fact, he claimed that what is northeastern Thailand

today should be included in the French colonial empire as he identified the mountain range between the Mekong Basin and the Menam Basin as the 'natural limit of her [France] Indo-Chinese Empire on the side of Siam.'³² Although neither these maps, the parliamentary report or Lanessan's book were official documents, they reveal how a new notion of a French colonial space was in the making. By 1885 the Quai d'Orsay regarded the Mekong River as the future line of demarcation between Siam and the French colonial possessions.³³

From a Siamese point of view, however, European colonialism had unleashed the powerful weapon of modern geographical knowledge and introduced new ideas to the region about fixed borders and undivided suzerainties. As Thongchai Winichakul has shown amply, the Siamese elite was not a passive victim of an intruding Western colonialism and new forms of knowledge. Rather, they set out to transform the premodern system of dual suzerainty into modern territorial rights under the influence of the new forms of knowledge associated with the colonial powers. Therefore, from the early 1880s Siamese claims to the territories east of the Mekong were framed with reference to a new perception of geography and geopolitical space in which overlapping margins were no longer permissible. In this bid to define exclusive rights to territory and create a bounded Siamese space, mapping became an indispensable technology. As Thongchai Winichakul has put it:

Apparently they [the Siamese elite] realized that in order to counter the French claim, modern geography was the only geographical language the West would hear and only a modern map could make an argument.³⁴

In his birthday speech in 1884 the King of Siam announced that a geographical expedition would be sent to the territories east of the Mekong with the aim of drawing a map of the territories in the Mekong Basin up to the water-shed, which was regarded as 'the limit for our possessions where our authority is respected' and as a 'convenient and natural frontier.'³⁵ James McCarthy headed the Siamese mapping enterprise. Between 1884 and 1887 McCarthy led

several mapping expeditions to the territories east of the Mekong and in 1888 the first modern map was published. It projected a territorially bounded Siam incorporating all the territories that would subsequently become Laos.³⁶

However, the newly bounded Siam in the making did not only exist as a cartographic representation. In the Mekong region French travellers found border posts on the ground marking it out. In contemporary French publications reference is repeatedly made to how these border posts were kicked over by the French to erase this trace of a Siamese space running counter to French colonial designs.³⁷ At the same time a Siamese military and civil presence was built up in the contested region. In 1886, resident commissioners were sent to Luang Phrabang and to Xiengkhuang. Likewise, a postal map from 1886 proclaimed that the Royal Thai Post Offices would soon appear in the Luang Phrabang region signalling how this region was to be considered an integral part of a new modern Siam.³⁸

We can gain another insight into how a new Siamese space was emerging from a report written by a J. Taupin, who lived for several months in Ubon in 1887–88 to study the Lao language and collect information about the Khorat Plateau. Taupin notes that all local governors on the Khorat Plateau worked directly under resident Siamese commissioners and twice a year they made an oath of allegiance to the King of Siam in a local temple. Similar ceremonies had been conducted in the past. But what was new about this ceremony was that it was related to the King of Siam and not to a local ruler. At such occasions a photograph of the King was present in the temples and the governors heard lectures on what Taupin calls the political geography of Siam, and the greatness of the Siamese King was elucidated.³⁹ This praxis had also been institutionalised in localities east of the Mekong as local chiefs twice a year travelled to Ubon to take the oath of allegiance likewise before a portrait of the King of Siam.⁴⁰ On these occasions the east-bank chiefs received a betel-box decorated with portraits of the King and Queen of Siam. In general, royal photographs were distributed to frontier towns claimed by Siam and were displayed prominently in administrative centres in

the contested territories.⁴¹ In 1889 an oil painting of the Siamese King dressed in military uniform appeared in the hall of audience of the King of Luang, Phrabang signalling that the kingdom formed part of the Siamese space.⁴² In his recent book on the fashioning of the Siamese monarchy's modern image, Maurizio Peleggi has shown how the royal elite adopted photography as a medium reflecting modernity in its form and at the same time displaying a modern image of the royal elite in its modern sartorial ways.⁴³ Photographs and paintings of the King of Siam served also to demarcate the emerging geo-body of Siam on the ground. Yet another marker working to define the Siamese space on the ground was the red flag with a white elephant which was placed in front of the offices of the Siamese commissioners' offices in the contested territories. This flag later became the first national flag of Siam. To link a flag with Siamese territory, however, was in fact a new practice instigated during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.⁴⁴

In this manner, French expectations about including the east-bank territories in their colonial domain were countered in a most tangible way by the Siamese using an assorted compilation of military force, administrative arrangements, the map as an avatar of modern geographical knowledge, and the modern symbolism of the flag. The premodern system of multiple suzerainty and overlapping margins was giving way to notions of exclusive territorial sovereignty and modern territorial rights. For the French, a military confrontation as had taken place in Tonkin was one way of fulfilling their territorial ambitions. But for domestic political reasons the Quai d'Orsay did not support an occupation of the east-bank territories through the use of overt force throughout the second half of the 1880s.⁴⁵ Instead, as noted by Martin Stuart-Fox, the French response was twofold. One was gradually to increase the French presence in the east-bank territories through a number of expeditions, commercial agents, and military garrisons. Second, they sought evidence to support French claims to the east-bank territories which could then be used in negotiations with the Siamese government.⁴⁶ What the French were looking for was proof that could establish Vietnamese

historical tributary rights to the territory to the east of the Mekong – rights that the French claimed that they had taken over when a protectorate had been established over Annam.

To this end a Captain Luce was first commissioned in 1887 by the Quai d'Orsay to search for material to substantiate these claims in the royal archives in Hue. Later the task of the first Pavie expedition, 1886–89, was to 'gather information on the true conditions of these little known regions to provide us with the means to formulate arguments claiming ownership of them' – that is, with reference to Vietnamese claims.⁴⁷ The Siamese presence on the east-bank territories was to be countered with reference to Vietnamese historical rights to the same territory. McCarthy's map of 1888 of what was perceived as Siam's contemporary geopolitical layout was to be countered with historical maps showing the extent of a Vietnamese space encompassing not only the east bank of the Mekong, but also most of the Khorat Plateau, as a certain Professor Folliot argued in an article published in the journal *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indo-Chinoise* in 1889. The title of Folliot's article was the 'investigation of the ancient frontiers between Siam and Annam [...] and Siam's encroachment on Annamite territory'. This title illustrates nicely an important aspect of French colonial thinking on the territories east of the Mekong. First, the frontier in question was presented as a frontier between Siam and Annam, not between Siam and Laos. In other words, the French did not perceive the territories that would become Laos to constitute a separate political entity. Second, whereas the Siamese presence in these territories in the 1880s was a reality, it was linked to an illegitimate occupation of or to the encroachment (*empiètement*) on a Vietnamese space defined with reference to a notion of historical rights. In defining the extent of a historical Vietnamese Empire, Folliot refers to a map published by Bishop Taberd in 1838. This map depicts supposedly the extent of a Vietnamese Empire in the early nineteenth century encompassing Cambodia, the territories that became Laos, and great parts of the Khorat Plateau.⁴⁸ In 1892 a report from the Résident-Supérieur in Hue reached the desk of the Governor-General of Indochina de-

fining the east-bank territories as part of a Vietnamese space with reference to the same logic as expressed by Folliot – ‘historical rights’ as opposed to ‘illegitimate occupation’ in the present.⁴⁹ This report was accompanied by a map in which the east-bank territories were depicted clearly as a Vietnamese space. The map includes the terri-

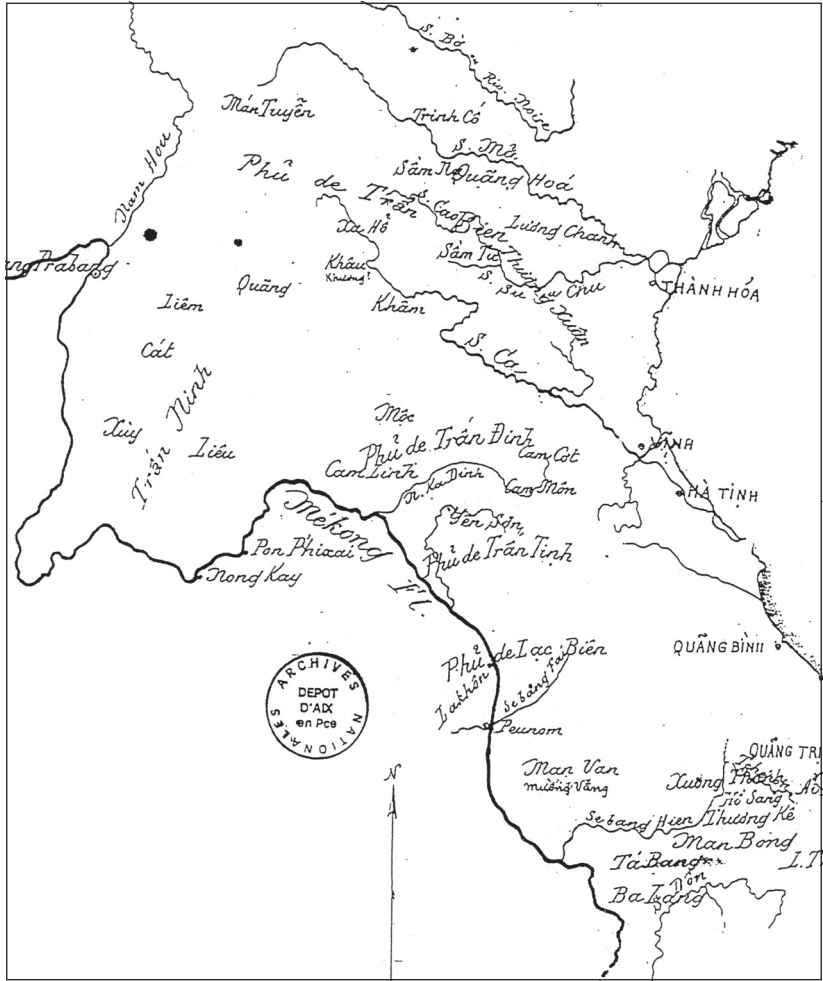


Figure 1: French map depicting ‘Laos Annamite’ (1892).

Source: ‘Rapport à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général sur les territoires du Laos Annamite occupés par les Siamois, le 7 septembre 1892, No. 741’, d. 14476, GGI, CAOM.

tory between the coastal areas of Annam and the Mekong River, and localities are primarily identified with Vietnamese names – exceptions being Luang Phrabang, Nong Khai, Phon Phisai, and Lakhon – while the Khorat Plateau is not included. (See Figure 1.) In fact, what we can observe here is how two contesting spatial layouts were in the making as both parts – Siam and France – adopted the same strategy: transforming premodern systems of dual suzerainty into modern territorial rights and states.

However, a diplomatic confrontation based on cartographic claims and historical documents on tributary relationships never developed, because the French decided to resort to force. In 1893 France sent gunboats up the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok and forced the King of Siam to sign a treaty whereby Siam relinquished all claims to the territories east of the Mekong. In this manner, the ‘Lao fate’ of the territories on the Mekong was decided outside the region itself. Siamese colonial expansion into the territories across the Mekong halted and the river became the border between Siam and the new colonial construct of Laos. In 1904 the French incorporated two territories west of the Mekong into Laos – one opposite Luang Phrabang and the other being Champassack.⁵⁰ In the treaty of 1893 between France and Siam we find no reference to tributary rights and no reference to ‘Laos’ as an entity. According to the treaty, the ceded territory was considered a geographical not a political entity. This was a logic that ran clearly against the idea of Laos as a separate Lao space. Yet in French colonial thinking on the Lao in the pre-1893 period we can also locate a discourse on race and history that laid the foundation for notions about a Lao cultural identity, something which occurred later when Laos came into existence as a French colonial state.

THE FRENCH COLONIAL DISCOURSE ON THE LAO:
NOTIONS OF RACE AND HISTORY

During the high tide of European colonial expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century, the logic of racial classifications provided what was seen as a scientific means to classify the people

encountered by the Europeans. Whereas race implies classification in accordance with biological characteristics, language and culture were in fact determining. In relation to the Siamese-Lao nexus, an overall classificatory grid emerged in which the Siamese/Thai and Lao were incorporated as different branches of an inclusive Thai race. This classification of the Siamese/Thai and Lao as members of the Thai race was linked primarily with linguistic communality as the Thai and Lao languages are closely related and are part of the overall Tai language family.

Focusing primarily on the period after Laos was established as a French colonial space in 1893, David Streckfuss has discussed how notions of race became an important ideological tool for French colonialists in the attempts to seize the 'Laotian' and 'Cambodian' portions of Siam and how the Siamese ruling elite creatively adapted racial thinking in delegitimising French claims. As I have discussed earlier, before 1893 notions of tributary rights – and not notions of race – loomed large in official French colonial thinking on the east-bank territories. Streckfuss mentions, however, that the French colonial discourse on the Lao in the pre-1893 period contributed to placing the Lao on the same footing as the Siamese within a racial hierarchy and thereby set the stage for the racial policies of the later period.⁵¹ Since Streckfuss focuses primarily on the period after 1893 he does not deal at length with this issue. In the following section, I will develop this aspect of Streckfuss' ideas looking at how the Lao and the Lao-Siamese nexus manifested themselves in the French colonial discourse in the period before 1893. In order to set the stage for this discussion it is worthwhile to start with examining John Crawfurd's early nineteenth century account of the Siamese Empire. This account offers a window into this process of demarcating racial differences and to how the Siamese-Lao distinction is articulated and consolidated.

In 1821 the government of India dispatched John Crawfurd to the courts in Siam and Cochinchina. His mission was a diplomatic and trade one, but in many ways it was a fact-finding mission about the people inhabiting mainland Southeast Asia. From an overall

perspective Crawford's analysis of the population inhabiting the region between China and India is a tale of unity in diversity. On the one hand, leaving out the Vietnamese, Crawford classifies the people of this region as 'a distinct and peculiar family of the human race' as they are believed to display a high degree of affinity with regard to physical form, language, manners, institutions and religion.⁵² On the other hand, within this unity Crawford distinguishes between several groups of people which are distinct from each other: Siamese, Lao, Cambodians and Peguans. Crawford is not explicit about on what basis this demarcation is made within the overall racial unity he has proposed. Only with regard to language does he note:

The dialects of these nations bear each other a common resemblance in structure and in idiom. They have borrowed much from each other, yet appear radically distinct.⁵³

Along these lines, Crawford breaks up the Siamese Empire into various components. At the core is 'the proper country of the Siamese race' surrounded by the vassals of 'a large portion of Lao, a portion of Kamboja, and certain tributary Malay States.'⁵⁴ In the case of the Siamese and Khmers the racial constituted entities coinciding with political entities ('Kingdom of Siam' and 'Kamboja'). This is not the case with the Lao. Lao is purely an overall cultural-racial or geographical category split into various political centres, which are vassals of either Siam or Burma. The terminology employed by Crawford is not unequivocal. In some instances Crawford applies the term 'nations' to these subgroups while in other instances they are called 'race' or even tribes. In spite of this vagueness, Crawford's account of the Siamese Empire is one of a racial or cultural heterogeneous political structure in which the Lao and Siamese are distinguished from each other. The heterogeneity of the Siamese Empire becomes more apparent in a table quantifying each group of people making up the empire.⁵⁵

Another important feature of Crawford's account is the civilisational hierarchy he proposes. His hierarchy has two dimensions. First, there is an 'indigenous' versus Western distinction. The 'indigenous'

cultures and societies are ranked far lower than the Western equivalents. With reference to the Siamese language, Crawford notes that it 'possesses that species of redundancy which belongs to the dialects of many semi-barbarous nations, and which shows a long but not an useful cultivation.'⁵⁶ Likewise, Crawford classifies repeatedly the Siamese as a 'rude people' – that is, a 'rudimentary' people. With reference to the existence of historical texts, for example, he notes:

The Siamese are said to have some historical compositions; and it is probable that the dry chronology of their kings, and the leading events of their history for a few centuries, may be told by them with sufficient fidelity; but it cannot for a moment be imagined that they are capable, any more than other rude people, of writing a rational and connected narrative of their national history.⁵⁷

Second, Crawford proposes a hierarchy among the 'indigenous' people or races and here we are confronted with a civilisational hierarchy in which the Lao are ranked on a scale lower than that of the Siamese. This is evident in several ways. Although Crawford ranked the Siamese low in comparison with Western societies and culture, he regards the Siamese, together with the Burmans and Peguans, as the most civilised and the leading group in the area. In comparison, the Lao are identified as a 'secondary nation'. In addition, the Lao language is classified as a 'dialect of the Siamese language.'⁵⁸ Embedded in this notion is the idea of the Lao as being derivative of a Siamese standard and of a hierarchical ordering with the Siamese towering over them. Such an ordering of the Lao vis-à-vis the Siamese was apparently widely accepted at the time. In a book on Siam serialised in 1881 in the *Illustrated Library of Travel*, it is noted that it was common for some writers to characterise the Lao as 'a primitive stock of the Siamese.'⁵⁹ Likewise, James McCarthy noted how Lao was used as a term of contempt indicating the same kind of hierarchical ordering.⁶⁰

With regard to the multi-racial aspects, Crawford's description of the Siamese Empire was in conformity with contemporary Siamese perceptions of the geopolitical space. This perception, however, was bound to become problematic when confronted with Western notions of 'natural' political entities defined along racial or cultural

lines. If such notions were applied to the Siamese Empire, this could imply the deconstruction of the Empire into 'natural nations' that had potentially the right to self-rule outside the Siamese orbit. This comes through in a geographical memoir contemporary with Crawford's account of the Siamese Empire. The text was written by James Low and presented together with a map of Siam, Cambodia and Laos to the Government of Prince of Wales Island (Penang) in 1824.⁶¹ Larry Sternstein has analysed Low's map and the memoir and he has classified the memoir as a 'sloppy document comprising bits of information both factual and fanciful presented in an indifferent, if not negligent, fashion.'⁶² From a geographical point of view the memoir may therefore be rated as a mere historical curiosity. Nevertheless, the document provides a window into contemporary understandings of how to demarcate groups of people:

In venturing to mark out the limits we ought to assign to Siam as a Country essentially distinct from its neighbours, I have been greatly influenced, and indeed regulated, by two considerations of material importance. The first is the extent of Country throughout which the Thai or Siamese language is indigenous, the second, that in which tattooing the body is not practiced. By these [cultural characteristics] it may with some degree of confidence be shewn, how wide the original confines of Siam were, and how far it may be conjectured to have advanced beyond its *natural boundaries* [my emphasis]⁶³

Although Low does not develop this point further, the ideological framework for race politics in a crude form is obvious – that is, the argument that rule can only be legitimate when the rulers and the ruled share the same race or ethnicity.⁶⁴ However, if the Lao or Laos were to be 'liberated' from Siamese rule, the Lao had not only to be defined as a culturally distinct group but also had to be placed on a par with the Siamese in a civilisational hierarchy. Crawford's civilisational ordering had to be reshuffled. Nowhere can we see better this repositioning of the Lao in relation to the Siamese than in the knowledge on things Lao produced by the Mekong expedition of 1866–68.

In the words of one of the participants, this undertaking was aimed to get to 'know our neighbours of Laos better.'⁶⁵ This implied

collecting knowledge not only on trade and political relations, but also on physical and cultural characteristics of the Lao. The report contains a chapter dealing specifically with anthropological notes on the Lao, Siamese, Vietnamese and other groups of people encountered by the expedition. The chapter is written by Clovis Thorel – the expedition’s medical doctor – and in it we witness how the Lao are consolidated as a separate group with reference to the classificatory principles employed in physical anthropology at that time.⁶⁶ Thorel’s point of departure is the general classificatory scheme developed by Cuvier and later modified by Omalius d’Halloy in the end of the 1860s. According to this scheme humanity was divided into five races: white (corresponding to the Caucasian type), yellow (Mongolian type), brown (Ethiopian or Negro type), black and red. Following the scientific nomenclature of the day the overall racial categories are divided into branches (*rameaux*) and finally *tribus* and *sauvage* are employed with reference to hill-dwelling people with only a low degree of civilisation. In line with this conceptual layout, the people encountered by the expedition were classified as belonging to the yellow race – ‘not only because of their natural characteristics but also because of their civilisation and language.’⁶⁷ This overall category is further divided into six branches where the Lao and the Siamese appeared as two separate branches along with the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Burman and Chinese branches. Whereas the Lao and Siamese in this way were distinguished from each other in theory, the report repeatedly stresses how it was in practice very difficult to distinguish between them. However, within the logic of physical anthropology, the distinction between the Lao and Siamese is first and foremost carried out with reference to physical characteristics:

[. . .] what distinguishes this Mongol branch [the Lao] above all is the vertical elongation of the cranium, that appears oblong and not ovoid like the neighbours. It offers a perfect example of brachycephalic cranium, that makes their front less narrow and less receding at the top than is found with other members of the Mongolian [race]. We have to note that this brachycephalis is a characteristic of race and is not justified by any particular practice with regard to the heads of the children, as is the case with certain savages.⁶⁸

However, the distinction between race and branch breaks down throughout the report. For example, the term race is also employed with reference to branches of race in the rigid classificatory scheme. The Lao and Siamese, for example, are also termed the 'Lao race' and 'Siamese race'. In the same manner, the classificatory scheme is made further complicated as 'Thai race' – encompassing the Lao and Siamese – is employed as a subdivision of the yellow race.⁶⁹

Whatever the nomenclature employed, the important point is that the Lao were singled out from the Siamese with reference to the scientific discourse of the day. It therefore became possible to talk about Lao/Laos with much more confidence than ever before and part of the report can be read as an inventory of 'things Lao'. From the report also follows a civilisational hierarchy in which the Lao and the Siamese are placed at the same level. Here the main distinction delineated in the report is that between the equally rated civilisations in the river valleys and the lower standing of the 'wild' people inhabiting the mountains. However, in the areas visited, it was only in Luang Phrabang that the Mekong expedition encountered what was seen as a viable Lao civilisation. Therefore, Louis de Carné characterised the Lao as a 'decayed race', being of a 'lazy and slothful nature' and as 'indolent and hating work'.⁷⁰ Whereas such a characterisation of the Lao could have potentially ranked the Lao lower than the Siamese in a racial hierarchy this was not the view propagated in the official account of the expedition. Here the lack of dynamism in the Lao territories is not regarded as flaw in the Lao race. Rather, it is linked to an illegitimate Siamese oppression of the Lao. Thus, when comparing the relative dynamism of Luang Phrabang with the situation encountered in the Lao territories further south along the Mekong River, the background for the differences lies in the different political systems. While Luang Phrabang maintained a relatively independent standing vis-à-vis Siam, the other parts had been subjected to Siamese rule which has had a stifling influence due to suppression, economic monopolies and forced transactions.⁷¹ Although the contemporary relationship between the Lao and Siamese races was not a relationship between equals, an equal ranking in a racial

hierarchy is produced with reference to the past. In this rendering of the Lao past, the fate of the Lao is intimately linked to that of Vientiane – ‘*la celebre métropole du Laos*’.⁷² Thus, the Kingdom of Vientiane is presented as a kingdom that flourished already in the late fourteenth century and a fragmentary history of this kingdom is presented.⁷³ Vientiane is elevated to a symbol of the greatness and glory of the Lao in a distant past which later was destroyed by the Siamese who left ‘nothing existing of the Laotian nationality but a name, and to make of Vien-Chan [Vientiane], its principal centre, a mass of ruins.’⁷⁴ Chao Anou’s uprising is thus interpreted as a valiant attempt to liberate the Lao from Siamese expansion designed to include all the members of the Thai race in Siam. The destruction of Vientiane epitomises the essence of an unacceptable historical process of Siamese expansion into the Lao territories in the Mekong region:

[T]hus a flourishing capital has been annihilated in our own days, and an entire people has, in some sort, disappeared, without Europe ever having suspected such scenes of desolation – without even a solitary echo of this long cry having reached her.⁷⁵

Or, as it later was summarised succinctly by Taupin in his report to the Governor-General in Cochinchina:

One can conclude [...] that Laos, powerful in the first centuries of our era, thriving and flourishing in the sixteenth century, has seen its greatness decline rapidly and has ended up in a rank of slaves of its first cousin: Siam. The Lao people have no [notions about their] history, they do not possess any of the great historic traditions which can form the basis for patriotic feeling and the idea of nationality. Nevertheless, the instinct of race is not completely absent. It owns in this field a feeling intense enough, and its regrets expressed in the elegies about the ancient Vien-Chan resemble the lament of Jeremiah.⁷⁶

It is with reference to this historical projection that the French colonial expansion was viewed as a legitimate interference to undo the injustice done to an Asian ‘nation’ – the Lao. The early beginnings of a French colonial discourse on Laos and the Lao were com-

ing into being, where the survival of this 'intelligent and gentle race' is intimately linked with the French colonial project under the guise of the *mission civilisatrice*.⁷⁷ In that connection it is interesting to see how external influences are linked with a positive impact on Laos and the Lao. In the past, such an external influence is linked with a Chinese domination which later was eclipsed by the despotism of the Siamese or Burmese. In this way, an ideological framework for French intervention is established:

This domination [the Chinese], benevolent and wise, which stimulated production instead of weakening it, and increased the well-being and the vital strength of the subject population by raising it on the ladder of civilisation, bequeaths today to European powers a role which she [China] no longer is capable of fulfilling. [...] France cannot renounce the moral and civilising role which it is her responsibility [to play] in this gradual emancipation of these so interesting populations in the interior of Indo-China; she [France] must not forget that this emancipation is the express condition for the commercial freedom and franchises necessary for establishing profitable relations for our industry. The suzerainty of an Asiatic government always means monopoly, compulsory transactions, [and, as a consequence] motionlessness; [in comparison] European intervention in the nineteenth century means commercial freedom, progress and wealth.⁷⁸

The Pavie expeditions are also of central importance to the framing of French colonial expansion into the Mekong region and perceptions of the Lao past. In connection with the first expedition (1886–89) to Upper Laos, Pavie spent considerable time in Luang Phrabang in an attempt to establish a close relationship with the court and counter the Siamese presence. In that connection he was in Luang Phrabang in June 1887 when the town was sacked by marauding Ho – Chinese troops from southern China. During the attacks he helped save the King of Luang Phrabang from the troops. This event became crucial for the framing of French representations of the colonial enterprise in Laos. According to Pavie, it made the king declare that he would offer the kingdom as a gift to France and thereby became iconographic for representing French colonial expansion into Laos as a 'conquest of hearts'.⁷⁹

Further, it is through Pavie that the Lao were given a written history based on indigenous chronicles handed over to him by the King of Luang Phrabang in 1887 after Pavie supposedly saved his life. These Lao chronicles were copied, translated and later published. With these in hand it was now possible to document a continuous Lao history stretching back to the middle of the fourteenth century. In the manuscript *Abrégé de l'histoire pays de Lan-Cchang, Hom-Khao* a myth of origins of the Lao is first presented. It is followed by a brief outline of the Kings of Lan Xang from when the kingdom was founded by King Fa Ngum in 1353 until the kingdom was divided into two parts in 1707. Only a few lines are subsequently devoted to the following fate of Vientiane, while the history of Luang Phrabang is followed up to 1836.⁸⁰ The same sense of a continuous history spanning almost five centuries is depicted in the manuscript *Chronologie de l'histoire de pays de Lan-Cchang, Hom-Khao*, where the chronological table itself spans the period from 1559 till 1845, while the introductory text links this period with that of the mythical past of King Borom.⁸¹ These chronicles brought the Lan Xang Kingdom out of the mists of time and made the history of Lan Xang synonymous with the history of the Lao in the Mekong valley. The brief outline of the history of the Lan Xang Kingdom that had been delineated around thirty years earlier in the official report of the Mekong expedition was substantiated. With reference to the Lan Xang Kingdom the Lao were placed as actors on the historical scene alongside with the Siamese kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. We have earlier seen how reference to historical Vietnamese tributary rights formed one strategy for the French to counter Siamese endeavours to incorporate territories east of the Mekong into Siam. Here we encounter the outline of another path whereby the Siamese presence is refuted by referring to past Lao splendour. In the words of Pavie:

What is revealed in them [the chronicles] about the relations with the neighbours: China, Annam, Burma and Siam is very suggestive as to what concerns this latter empire. [...]. Incontestably written fully in freedom, they [the chronicles] give a clearly negative note of

her [Siam's] pretensions. They say that of the four countries Siam is the only one to which Luang Phrabang never had to bow. They say that in ancient times Siam brought tribute to the kings of Lan-Chang [Xang]. [...] These findings have shown why the Siamese agents had desired to see me unaware of everything except the present about these territories.⁸²

The Lao were not only given a past; but they also possessed a written tradition symbolising a flourishing civilisation of the past. The written history was an important mark of civilisation vis-à-vis the Siamese. Lefèvre-Pontalis, a member of the Pavie expedition, summarised nicely the importance of these chronicles for the perception of the Lao in the following way:

Of course the Siamese have destroyed, smashed and carried away many things. But, by the fact that they acted as conquerors and sowed fear along their way [southwards], many things would escape them and would never belong to them. Not least of which was a desire for independence, for the [Siamese] never succeeded in smothering the memory of their past of the Laotian populations, nor did they [the Siamese] destroy the chronicles that celebrate it [the Lao past]. Not only did the members of the Pavie mission obtain very important [chronicles], but even in places where their disappearance seemed clear, they [the members of the Pavie mission] were able to certify their existence – 'All was burned,' said the Siamese. Or even better: 'Those people are savages. How can you think that they actually have books?'⁸³

Massie, another member of the Pavie expedition and later (vice) consul in Luang Phrabang, put it this way:

What an error to treat the Laotians as savages! On the contrary, they are a civilised – very civilised – people, possessing their own language and writing, more than 3,000 years old, and an original literature. Education is found in all villages. Hundreds of years ago we were savages ourselves; and today, I do not know who deserves the most this epithet – our peasants or the Laotians. To have an idea about Luang Phrabang, move Athens of the antique time to Haiti and let it evolve in this environment.⁸⁴

In this way, the Lao were liberated from a subordinate position in relation to the Siamese. The key was the reference to the glory of a distant past. At the same time, however, they were placed in a new hierarchy subordinate to the Vietnamese. The east-bank territories were not only – as we saw in the last section – associated with Vietnamese tributary rights, but in the French colonial discourse the Vietnamese were closely associated with the French colonial project in the Lao territories. Thus, the Vietnamese are pictured as a sedulous race that can be turned into a catalyst bringing development and progress to the Lao territories. This is evoked by Carné when confronted with the village of Lakhon – Nakhon Phanom – on the banks of the Mekong, peopled by Vietnamese:

At the sight of this simple village, which was busy as an ant-hill, one could not but hope that Annamite emigration would be still more developed in Laos; for the Annamites would be like leaven in heavy dough, among the Laotians. Essentially similar in both their good and bad points, they would be most useful, and the leading instrument of our policy in these countries.⁸⁵

Or, as it is phrased in the concluding chapter of the account of the expedition compiled by Francis Garnier:

The Annamese [Vietnamese] have, following the example of the Chinese, been endowed with expansionist and colonising qualities of an excessively remarkable type. They took possession of the Delta of Cambodia only just at the beginning of this century and today this region is one of the best cultivated and most rich on the Chinese seas. Thus the pioneers are capable of taking the place of the settlers that we lack and extend our influence and commerce to the interior of the Indochinese peninsula.⁸⁶

While both the Siamese and Vietnamese were associated with expansionist capacities, in this colonial logic they were not linked with the same qualities. A set of polarities was set up whereby the Siamese were linked with an oppressive influence whereas the Vietnamese – by means of Chinese influences – were imbued with a ‘democratic spirit’ and individual initiative. The stifling influence of

the Siamese was to be countered with the industrious Vietnamese who would serve both 'the interests of France and of civilisation.'⁸⁷ The Vietnamese were thus presented as an integrated part of the French civilising mission that – in this specific case – aimed at liberating the Lao from their subordinate position in relation to the Siamese and help the Lao attain a more refined and developed position in the human hierarchy.

The same vision of the superiority of the Vietnamese was embedded in the writings of Jules Harmand, who travelled in the Mekong region in 1870s and later became French Minister in Bangkok.⁸⁸ In a short article published in an anthropological journal in 1875, Harmand delineated a hierarchy of races in Indochina. At the top of this hierarchy Harmand placed the Vietnamese. Although he knows that he may be labelled an uncritical 'annamitophile', for Harmand there is no doubt: despite the 'vices' and 'immorality' of the Vietnamese he recognises them as 'notably superior, as a nation, to their neighbours of Siam, Cambodia and Laos.'⁸⁹ Therefore, according to Harmand, the Vietnamese were to become the tool for French colonial expansion and it was this race that should be allowed to colonise the major part of Indochina.⁹⁰ He repeated the same view in an address to the Quai d'Orsay in 1892 when he pushed for French expansion into the Mekong region and he linked French colonial expansion into this region with the fulfilment of the historical destiny of this superior race with expansionist qualities.⁹¹ This position had already been set out by Le Myre de Vilers in 1881 in connection with the dream of reaching the 'rich provinces of the Upper Mekong' to form a vast Indochinese Empire as a substitute for the 'loss' of India. This project is associated with Vietnamese advisers whose:

[...] fathers conquered Ciampa [Champa]. Their race has spread to Cambodia and has already passed the rapids at Sambor. They are not surprised by our dreams. We only follow the traditions of this *nationalité conquérante*.⁹²

This chapter has focused on the racial and spatial aspects of the process that brought Laos into being as a territorial entity in the

late nineteenth century. Whereas the outcome of this process was to de-link Laos from the Siamese geo-body, the fate of Laos within the colonial space of Indochina was by no means given. The French colonial discourse on the Lao had outlined two possible trajectories. First, Laos could be turned into a de facto Vietnamese space perceived as a territory defined with reference to tributary rights and peopled by Vietnamese, who would pull the Lao out of their torpor or even replace them. Second, Laos could be turned into a Lao space perceived as a resurrection of the Lao kingdom – or kingdoms – of the past that the Siamese had destroyed so utterly. Within Indochina Laos was a contested space. In the following chapter we shall see how Laos also remained a contested space from a Thai perspective in the period after 1893.

NOTES

1. See Joaquim De Campos, 'Early Portuguese Accounts of Thailand', *Journal of the Siam Society*, 32:1, 1940, p. 9.
2. A general overview of early Western accounts dealing with Lao/Laos can be found in Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosrivathana, 'Early European Impressions of the Lao', in Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Kennon Breazeale (eds), *Breaking New Ground in Lao History. Essays on the Seventh to Twentieth Centuries* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), pp. 95–149. For Thai usage of Lao/Laos in the early Bangkok period, see Thaveesilp Subwattana, "'Lao' nai thatsana khong thai samai ratanakosin" ['Lao' in the view of Thai rulers in the early Ratanakosin period], *Codmai Khao Sangkhomsat*, 11:1, 1988, pp. 104–121.
3. Carl Bock, *Temples and Elephants. The Narrative of a Journey of Exploration through Upper Siam and Lao* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1985 [1884]).
4. Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos: The Land In-Between* (Crow's Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), p. 22. For a possible genealogy, see Jit Pumisak, *Khwan pen ma khong kham sayam, thai, lao lae khom lae laksana thang sangkhom khong chue chon chat* [Origins of the words Siam, Thai, Lao and Khom and social characteristics of nationality names] (Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1981), pp. 579–611, or Michel Lorrillard, 'Les Chroniques Royales du Laos. Contribution à la connaissance historique des royaumes lao (1316–1887)' (PhD thesis, Paris: École des Hautes Études, 1995), pp. 329–338.
5. O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

6. O.W. Wolters, 'Ayudhaya and the Rearward Part of the World', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 & 4, 1968, pp. 166–178. The applicability of these notions to the kingdom of Ayutthaya has further been discussed by Sunait Chutintaranond, "'Mandala', 'Segmentary State' and Politics of Centralization in Medieval Ayudhaya", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 78:1, 1990, pp. 89–100. It is the same notion of power relations that is embodied in the perception of the 'galactic polity' proposed by Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Backdrop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
7. See Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geobody of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994); Evans, *A Short History of Laos*.
8. Kennon Breazeale, 'The Integration of the Lao States into the Thai Kingdom' (PhD thesis, Oxford: University of Oxford, 1975), p. 6. For a general overview of the history of the Lan Xang Kingdom and the dynamics that led to its disintegration, see Martin Stuart-Fox, *The Lao Kingdom of Lan Xang: Rise and Decline* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998).
9. Volker Grabowsky, 'The Isan up to its Integration into the Siamese State', in Volker Grabowsky (ed.), *Regions and National Integration in Thailand 1892–1992* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), pp. 107–129.
10. Quoted in Mayoury Ngaosyvathn and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Paths to Conflagration. Fifty Years of Diplomacy and Warfare in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, 1778–1828* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1998), p. 60. This book offers a modern Lao nationalist account of these events. For another interpretation see Evans, *A Short History*, p. 25. Evans offers an insightful and critical discussion of different interpretations of Chao Anou in Grant Evans, 'Different Paths: Lao Historiography in Historical Perspective', in Christopher E. Goscha and Søren Ivarsson (eds), *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the Crossroads* (NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, No. 32, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), pp. 97–110
11. Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, pp. 97–101.
12. Breazeale, 'The Integration of the Lao States', pp. 11–12.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 18. The campaigns undertaken to depopulate Phuan are dealt with in Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos* (Monograph Series, No. 31, New Haven: Yale University of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), pp. 9–22.
14. Breazeale, 'The Integration of the Lao States', p. 20.

15. A general account of French colonial policies in Indochina can be found in Martin Stuart-Fox, 'The French in Laos, 1887–1945', in Martin Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist Kingdom. The Making of Modern Laos* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1996), pp. 17–36. For a detailed study taking the political climate in France and its implications for the colonial policies in Indochina into account, see Patrick Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb. The French Threat to Siamese Independence, 1858–1907* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1995).
16. Quoted in Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, pp. 16–17.
17. Jean-Claude Lejosne (translation and comments), *Le journal de voyage de G. van Wuysthoff et de ses assistants au Laos, 1641–1642* (Metz: Centre de Documentation et d'Information sur le Laos, 1993). Giovanni Filippo de Marini, *A New and Interesting Description of the Lao Kingdom, 1642–1648* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998 [1666]).
18. Henri Mouhot, *Voyages dans les Royaumes de Siam de Cambodge et de Laos* (Genève: Éditions Olizane, 1989 [1868]).
19. John Bowring, *The Kingdom and the People of Siam* (Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969 [1857]), Vol. II, p. 1.
20. Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, p. 115. See for example 'Map of the Kingdom of Siam and Cochinchina' in John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967 [1828]), without page; or 'Map of Siam and the Adjacent Countries', in Frederick Arthur Neale, *Narrative of a Residence at the Capital of the Kingdom of Siam with a Description of the Manners, Customs, and Laws of the Modern Siamese* (Bangkok: White Lotus Co, without year [1852]), without page. For a series of historical maps of Siam, see Lucien Fournereau, 'Le Siam Ancien', *Annales du Musée Guimet*, 27, 1895, pp. 1–43.
21. Louis de Carné, *Travels on the Mekong, Cambodia, Laos and Yunnan. The Political and Trade Report of the Mekong Exploration Commission* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1995 [1872]), pp. 99–100.
22. Carné, *Travels on the Mekong*, p. 362.
23. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, p. 63.
24. See, for example, Neale, *Narrative of a Residence*, p. 67; or Bowring, *The Kingdom and the People of Siam*, Vol. I, p. 3.
25. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, pp. 28–29.
26. Carné, *Travels on the Mekong*, p. 35.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 88.

28. Ibid., without page. See also Malte-Brun's 'Carte du Royaume de Siam de la Cochinchine Française et du Royaume de Cambodge d'après les documents les plus récents, 1878' in Amédée Gréhan, *Le Royaume de Siam* (Paris: Challamelainé, 1878), without page.
29. Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 78.
30. The first map is 'Carte spéciale du Tong-King' and the second is 'Voies de pénétration en Chine', in H. Mager, *Atlas colonial* (Paris: Charles Bayle, 1885).
31. Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 78.
32. Quoted in Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East* (London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1895), pp. 469–470.
33. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, p. 81. This colonial space had actually been anticipated by the Catholic missions in Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina whose domains were limited by the Mekong in the west, see Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 88.
34. Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, p. 121.
35. Quoted in 'Consulat de France à Bangkok à Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Bangkok, le 4 octobre 1884', d. 13536, GGI, CAOM.
36. See James McCarthy, 'Siam', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 10:3, 1888, pp. 117–134.
37. See, for example, Charles Lemire, *Le Laos Annamite. Affaires Franco-Siamoises* (Paris: Augustin Challamel, 1894), pp. 19, 36, 70.
38. Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 98.
39. J. Taupin, 'Rapport à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général', *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, 2:3, 1889, pp. 83–84.
40. Lemire, *Le Laos Annamite*, pp. 41–43.
41. Breazeale, 'The Integration of the Lao States', p. 275.
42. 'Copie du journal du poste de Luang Prabang et de la mission d'étude pour la période le 27 mars à le 20 avril 1889, rédigé par Monsieur Massié', d. 14403, GGI, CAOM.
43. Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).
44. Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 98. For a discussion of the birth and politics of the Thai national flag, see Chanida Phromphayak Phueaksom, *Kan mueang nai prawatisat thong chat thai* [Politics in the history of the Thai national colours] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2003).
45. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, pp. 83–84.
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CHAPTER TWO

Thai Discourses on History and Race

This chapter will approach Laos from the outside to highlight how Laos remained a contested space from a Thai¹ perspective even after the French conquest in 1893. It is a study of how the idea of a 'Greater Siam' or 'Thailand', running counter to the national boundaries established at the turn of the twentieth century, was articulated in Siam between 1900 and 1941. This is a period during which a coup in 1932 overthrew the absolute monarchy and paved the way for the emergence of authoritarian military rule in Siam associated with a militant pan-Thai nationalism, intended to implant a growing sense of national unity and secure political legitimacy. Especially under the premiership of Phibun Songkhram (1938–44), the pan-Thai ideology was linked with an irredentist drive designed to incorporate Laos and Cambodia, among other regions, into a 'Greater Siam', or 'Thailand' as his government termed it officially in 1939. This nationalist campaign culminated in 1941, when Thai troops attacked the French colonial possessions in Indochina and subsequently annexed parts of Laos and Cambodia with the backing of the Japanese. This military campaign was known as 'the campaign for a return of the lost territories'. This chapter is a study of this Thai nationalist discourse on Laos and the Lao and how it stressed the sameness of the Lao and Thai in geo-historical and racial terms. The first part of this reflection looks at how Thai nationalists incorporated the 'lost territories' east of the Mekong – that is, most of modern Laos – into a wider Thai historical and nationalist geography. The second part examines how these same Thai

defined the Lao, the inhabitants of modern Laos, into a greater Thai space with reference to notions of race.

MAKING LAOS 'OUR' SPACE: BELONGING IN HISTORY

The last chapter dealt with different discourses on Laos and the Lao that crystallised in the Franco-Siamese colonial encounter in the pre-1893 period and we saw how the Thai elite using both administrative undertakings and symbolic markers claimed the territories which were to become Laos as part of Siam. Therefore, as Siam was forced to accept the Mekong River as the boundary in the northeast it can come as no surprise that the Thai elite regarded Laos as a 'lost territory'.² Still, according to Thamrongsak Phertlert-anan, the loss of territories was an issue treated with caution among the Thai elite in the early twentieth century. This was because references to this part of Siam's recent past, when the absolute king was forced at gunpoint to submit to the demands of a foreign power, discredited royal dignity and could potentially be associated with an attempt to compromise the absolute monarchy. Another reason was fear that public treatment of this issue would damage the relationship between Siam and France. This was at least the reason given by the former minister of the interior and long-time chief librarian of what became known as the National Library in Bangkok, Damrong Rajanuphab, when, in 1925, he halted the publication of a book entitled *Memoirs From the Time When France Occupied Chanthaburi, 1893–1904*, written by a Thai official.³ Later, Wichit Wathakan, the chief ideologue of Thai nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s, probably had these ideas in mind, when, in a 1940 speech dealing explicitly with the loss of territories, he noted that people who had previously written about this subject had to conceal many 'truths' because of 'fear for upsetting [people] causing danger for oneself and nation'.⁴ However, the 1932 military coup in Bangkok – which toppled the absolute monarchy – paved the way for a more open treatment of this touchy issue in the rapidly emerging nationalist discourse. Indeed, the lost territories became a nationalist question. The coup implied, as Thongchai Winichakul has noted, that the wound of 1893 was no longer in-

terpreted as wounded royal dignity, but as wounded nationhood, as a stain on the Siamese past.⁵ Illustrative of this change, the book stopped by Damrong in 1925 was published in 1936, and three years later an account by the same author of the French occupation of Trat was published.⁶ The changing events in Europe and Asia, especially as World War II began in China in 1937, held out the possibility that a new conjuncture would allow Siam to reverse this 'shame' in concrete, territorial ways.

In conformity with Thamrongsak's observation, a study of history and geography schoolbooks used in Siam in the first two decades of the twentieth century shows that many of them are silent about the loss of territories, even though these matters formed an important part of Siam's very recent past.⁷ However, a reading of Thai school textbooks from the pre-1932 period reveals also that the issue of the territorial losses inflicted on Siam in the wake of the colonial encounter was not entirely banned from officially sanctioned knowledge about the formation of Siam. In a geography textbook from 1908, for example, students are presented with the following knowledge under the heading 'something to be remembered':

The left-bank territories of the Mekong used to be a major *monthon* in our country and people in that locality are 'Northern Siamese', whom we once called 'Thai-Lao'. In year 112 of the Ratanakosin Era [1893] [these territories] fell to France and were integrated into Vietnam (*prathetsarat yuan*).⁸

To characterise the east-bank territories of the Mekong as a *monthon* in Siam is an anachronism, since this term refers to an administrative structure first introduced in 1892–93. However, by invoking this anachronism, the text conveys a clear message: the east-bank territories used to be as much a part of Siam as all the *monthons* found within contemporary Siam, now delimited by internationally recognised boundaries. While the textbook's author was a teacher at the army's officer training academy, the book was intended for general use in Siam. Indeed, it had received official approval from the Department of Education.⁹ Thus, the fact that the issue of ter-

territorial losses had been excluded from other textbooks published by this institution did not imply that this was an issue to be banned from schoolbooks altogether.¹⁰

Moreover, the subject of the lost territories can be found in another geography textbook on Siam published in 1925 by the Department of Textbooks. Despite its title, *Geography Textbook*, this book did not focus exclusively on Siam's geography; it served, too, as a general introduction to various aspects of Siam, including religion, culture, language and history. In several parts of the book, the issue of the lost territories figures as an intrinsic feature of the knowledge about Siam passed on to the students. In the section dealing with the different administrative parts of Siam, for example, several references are made to how neighbouring territories now under foreign rule 'used to be Thai' (*tae doem pen khong thai*) or 'used to be under Thai rule' (*tae doem yu nai khwam pokhrong thai*).¹¹ Further, in the part dealing with the history of Siam the issue of the lost territories figures prominently. On the whole, this part of the textbook provides an outline of Siam's history running as a straight spatial and chronological line from the historical centres of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Bangkok to the present. The making of this perception of Siam's history can be traced back to the turn of the twentieth century and pointed up the emerging of a national history that went beyond dynastic history.¹² When dealing with the territorial fortunes of Siam in the Thonburi and Bangkok periods, the *Geography Textbook* presents a picture of a fluctuating Siam, in which the knowledge about the loss of the territories emerges. It associates the reigns of King Taksin of Thonburi and King Phra Phuttayotfa of Bangkok (Rama I) with a steady process of territorial expansion, with the latter's territorial control being 'more extensive than in any period', including the territories east of the Mekong.¹³ However, that of one of his successors, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), appears as follows:

Siam had to withdraw the authority (*thon amnat*) it held over Cambodia and give it to France. In addition, France also requested

Siam's territory on the left-bank of the Mekong, claiming that this territory used to be a colony of Vietnam which now was a colony of France. The truth, however, is that the territory in question used to belong to Lao Vientiane, which was a colony over which Siam held absolute rights (*mueang khuen khong thai doi sithi khat*).¹⁴

In this manner the issue of the lost territories was incrementally incorporated into an officially sanctioned knowledge about Siam's history and geography. There is a shift from 'forgetting' to 'remembering'. One of the first to give a more detailed account of the loss was Wichit Wathakan. As mentioned above, Wichit emerged as the chief ideologue for the nationalist regime in the 1930s, especially in his role as Director General of the Fine Arts Department and as a prolific writer of articles, books and plays carrying a highly nationalistic message. Through this, he pushed the issue of the lost territories to the forefront of the nationalist discourse. His first detailed account of the loss of territories in a general description of Siam's history appears in his *A Universal History*, published in the last years of the absolute monarchy. The first edition of this monumental work included twelve books, the first of which appeared in 1929 and the rest being published over the next two years. In this large collection, the lost territories received unprecedented treatment. Wichit presents a detailed account of the territorial losses to France, dividing this process into five phases, each encompassing various geographical entities. The first covers the loss of a large part of Cambodia in 1867, followed by Sipsong Chuthai in 1888, the rest of the east bank in 1893, territories on the Mekong opposite Luang Phrabang and Champassack in 1904 and finally the loss of the Khmer provinces of Siamreap, Sisophon and Battambang in 1907.¹⁵ In each case, he enumerates how many square kilometres had been ceded, explaining that the total added up to the size of contemporary Siam. The disappearance of the territories was made more tangible by quantifying the loss and placing it in time and space. Further, he presents the text of the treaties between Siam and France, thus rendering very real this part of Siam's 'painful' recent past to his readers. Second, Wichit emphasises how this issue has to be regarded as an integrated part of Siam's national history. Thus, when dealing

with the reign of King Chulalongkorn – the reign during which most of the territorial losses were inflicted – Wichit explains how he finds it important to study this reign both for what was gained and what was lost. Here the first point refers to such things as the abolition of slavery, the introduction of a new educational system and the developments in Siam's infrastructure, all of which signalled how King Chulalongkorn was moving Siam towards a 'new age'. For this, he called the king a 'true revolutionary'.¹⁶ The second point refers to the loss of territories inflicted on Siam. Here, however, Wichit shifts his focus:

With regard to the losses, that is the loss of territory, this is not due to faults of the king or the government of that time. It was a matter beyond control (*rueng hetsutwisai*); no one was able to take preventive measures against it. We were forced to give up territory adding up to half of the country due to one reason – namely that we are a small country with inferior strength and we could not withstand a greater power that forced us [to cede these territories].¹⁷

In this way, Wichit made sure that the inclusion of this subject would not be regarded as an attempt to discredit the king. Wichit's *A Universal History* became very popular. Not only was it one of the best selling publications of the era, but it was also used as a textbook at Thammasat University until the end of World War II.¹⁸ Wichit's text can be said to have paved the way for a full integration of the territorial losses into the unilinear historical narrative of Siam as a timeless national body and a similar treatment can be found in textbooks used in the period after 1932 on the geography and history of Siam.¹⁹

MAKING LAOS 'OUR' SPACE: RETHINKING NATIONAL MAPS

The idea of lost territories was even easier to grasp in various so-called historical maps of Siam popularised after 1932. Generally, the occurrence of such maps is associated with bringing the irredentist cause to the forefront of public discourse in Siam in the post-1932 period. At this time, the issue of the restoration of the lost territories became an important political objective for the military government, since it gave 'an embryonic nation-state its pride and wash[ed] out [the] humiliation it had witnessed in the recent past', as Somkiat

Wanthana has put it.²⁰ One such map is the *Map of the History of Thailand's Boundaries*, published by the Ministry of Defence in 1935. The map depicts what was perceived as the extent of Siam in the early Bangkok period and indicates the sequence of territories later lost to France and Britain. This map was widely used in schools and military training centres.²¹

Another graphic representation of the lost territories is found in a series of maps published by the Royal Survey Department in 1935–36. They depict the territorial extent of historical Thai kingdoms through the ages and include the east-bank territories as a part of Siam. The most recent map referred to the early Bangkok period during the reign of King Phra Phuttayotfa (King Rama I), which predated the territorial encroachment on Siam by European colonial powers. Therefore, the territorial losses are not explicitly indicated in this set of historical maps, unlike the map published by the Ministry of Defense referred to above. If a map of Siam in the 1930s was compared with any of the historical maps published by the Royal Survey Department, however, it was clear that Siam had shrunk in size since the early Bangkok period and thus the tale of the lost territories was implicitly told. Such a comparison can be found in *Guideline for the Teaching of the History of Siam* – a history textbook used at the military academy – where the boundaries of contemporary Siam had been plotted upon a map of Siam in the early Bangkok period, thereby displaying the changing territorial fortunes of Siam in a recent past.²²

These maps all convey the impression that the east-bank territories formed an integral part of Siam in a recent past, delimited by boundaries just like the territories making up modern Siam. The same perception can be found in the booklet *Siam in the Ratanakosin Era Year 112* published by a nationalist group, *Khana Yuwasan*. A map in the book makes this clear by showing the northeastern boundary of Siam before 1893 following the Annamese Cordillera.²³ In the text, the east bank territories of the Mekong and the Khorat Plateau are collectively referred to as 'Siam-Isan' (*sayam phak isan*) – that is, the northeastern part of Siam.²⁴ Initially introduced by the Siamese gov-

ernment in 1900 as the name of one of the administrative entities on the Khorat Plateau, the term 'Siam-Isan' or just 'Isan' became widely accepted as the designation for the whole of the Khorat Plateau by the early 1920s.²⁵ By employing this term with reference to a much earlier period, these authors wanted to play up the similarity between the historic region and the one region with the same name in a contemporary Siam, again delimited by modern boundaries. Furthermore, the publication throughout the 1920s and 1930s of various historical documents and accounts related to the suppression of Chao Anou's 'revolt' in Vientiane reiterated the idea of the east-bank territories forming part of Siam's historical realm of influence.²⁶

Another characteristic embedded in the perception of the east-bank territories as lost territories is that the colonial state of Laos is not perceived as a historically constituted state. Such a perception is implicit in descriptions of the lost territories. These nationalist publications define the major part of the east-bank territories constituting Laos as simply a geographical entity – the 'left-bank territories' – and not as a political entity 'Laos'. Indeed, the perception of 'Laos' as a 'non-country' is conveyed in various textbooks discussing the reasons why Siam's neighbours had to succumb to foreign powers. Take, for example, *Guideline for the Teaching of the History of Siam* referred to earlier. Here the reader is informed that King Chulalongkorn acted wisely by acknowledging the military superiority of the Western powers. He rightly avoided any acts that could possibly have provoked a military confrontation and could have consequently led to the colonisation of Siam. Contrary to this prudent policy, Burma and Vietnam, we are told, pursued a disastrous path of confrontation, while the Cambodian king actually invited French colonialism into his country because he wished to be under French rule.²⁷ My point here is that no political state called 'Laos', with an individual political will, is to be found on the historical scene of colonial confrontation. Nor is the king of Luang Phrabang mentioned. In this way, 'Laos' was not a historically constituted state comparable with Siam or Cambodia on the eve of Western colonial expansion into the region in the mid-nineteenth century. As the 'Thai' Ministry

of the Interior put it in a book published in 1940 on the administrative formation of French Indochina:

France got the *district* [my emphasis] of Laos (*khwaen lao*) as a protectorate after signing a treaty with Siam and not with a local ruler, since Laos at that time really was a part of Thailand. Therefore, although Laos in reality has the status of a protectorate, it has a lower status than Cambodia, which became a protectorate in accordance with a treaty between France and a local ruler that still legally rules the country. Accordingly, Laos is only a protectorate 'in name' (*nai nam*); but in reality it has been treated as a colony (*dai rap kan patibat chen diaokan ananikhom thae*).²⁸

In general, the perception of a continuous history of Laos in terms of state structures stretching from the Lan Xang Kingdom to the modern state of Laos is impaired by a major problem of discontinuity. First, the division of Lan Xang into three kingdoms in the early eighteenth century marks the end of a unified political structure. Second, of these three kingdoms only Luang Phrabang survived as a political entity to be incorporated into French Laos.²⁹ What is remembered about the east-bank territories in the narrative structure discussed above is the period that creates the discontinuity: the period when the territories east of the Mekong, which became the colonial state of Laos, did not constitute an independent politically defined entity, but, from a Thai nationalist perspective, an integrated part of Siam, indeed 'Thailand' by the 1930s.

That the colonial state of Laos from a contemporary Siamese point of view was perceived as an 'anomaly', indeed as a 'non-country', is reflected in many maps of Siam and surrounding countries that can be found in Thai schoolbooks and other official publications during the 1920s and 1930s. This is the case in yet another *Reader in Geography* from 1934. In a section dealing with the neighbouring countries of Siam, students learn that Laos is one of the five dependencies (*prathetsarat*) making up the neighbouring French colonial domain. However, in its Map of Siam, which includes the adjacent territories, no territorial entity called 'Laos' can be found. (See Figure 2.) The only territorial entities found on this map are

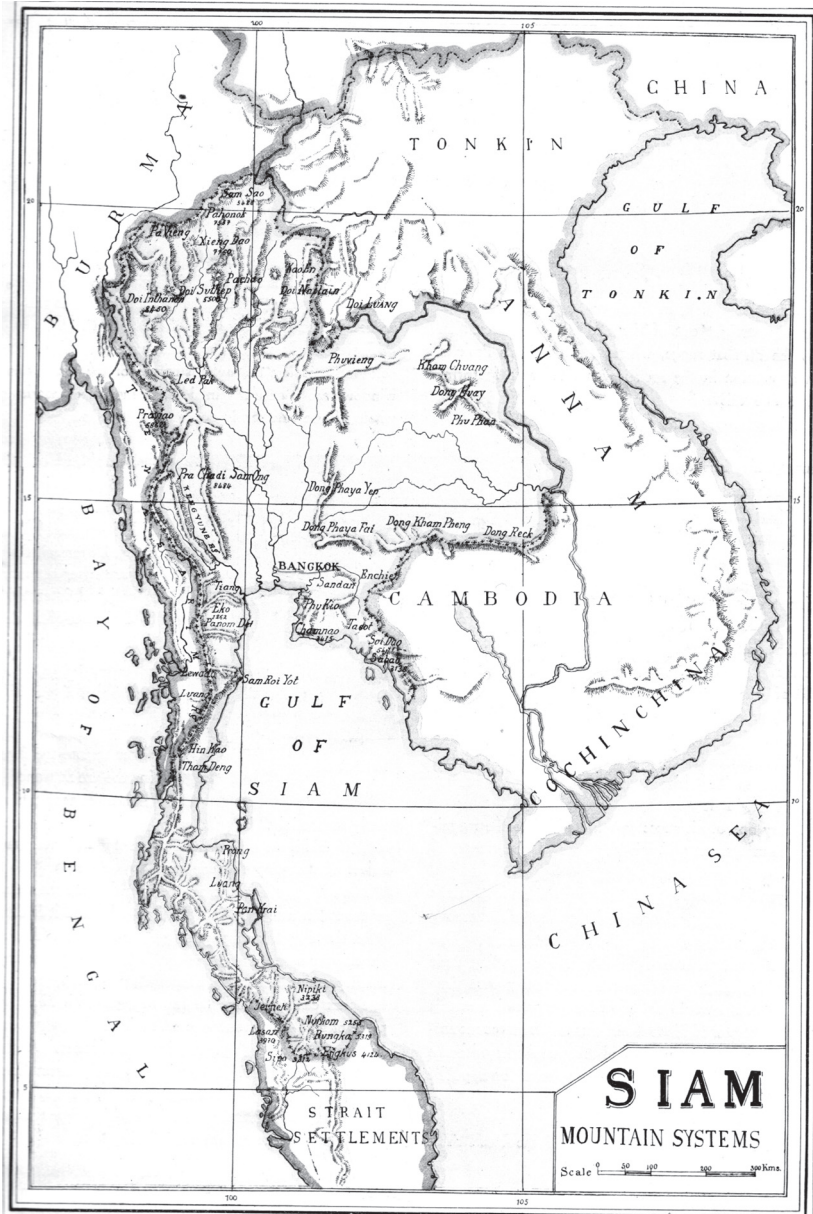


Figure 2: Erasing Laos from cartographic representations.

Source: *Atlas-Geography of Siam (28 Lessons and Readings)* (Orne: Imprimerie de Montligeon, 1925),

those of Siam, Vietnam and Cambodia.³⁰ Similarly, the first lesson in a 1925 *Atlas-Geography* used at the Assumption College (*Collège de l'Assomption*) in Bangkok outlines how 'Siam is limited on the North by the Shan States of Burma, and Tonkin; on the East by Annam and Cambodia'; and how the Mekong River separates Siam 'from the French territories of Annam and Cambodia'.³¹ It is hard to believe that these are simply repeated accidents in cartography. In the same manner, for the Thai authorities, Laos is erased from the surface of the earth in an introductory geography book of 1932. In the book it is noted that in the east Siam shares the border with Vietnam (*Yuan*), which is a French colony, and in the north with 'Lao-Vientiane and Luang Phrabang which are part of Vietnam'.³² From this perspective the east-bank territories that became the colonial space of Laos were perceived as having been ceded from being a part of Siam to becoming part of another overall space, that of Vietnam (itself part of the colonial state of French Indochina). Within the logic of this historical framework, the colonial space of Laos was not perceived as a geopolitical entity that could aspire to an independent nationhood legitimated with reference to a historical projection or distinctiveness delineated with reference to history.

SUWANNAPHUM OR LAEM THONG: THE RACIAL LINK

Rethinking maps and history in nationalist ways was not enough. Race was also an issue. As Siam came into being as a bounded territorial state at the turn of the twentieth century, the people recognised as 'Lao' were split into two groups when the Mekong River was established as an internationally recognized boundary between the nascent nation-state of Siam and the colonial state of French Laos. Later, turning Siam into a modern nation-state would be associated with a process of racial homogenisation set in motion by the Siamese state. In the words of David Streckfuss, this process implied that the Lao had to be erased 'ethnically, historically and demographically from Siam'. Basically, this was achieved, first, by 'forgetting' the distinctions between the different branches of the Thai race living in Siam. Instead, they were grouped together simply as 'Thai'. At the

same time the concepts of 'Thai nationality' and the 'Thai race' were merged in the term 'Chat Thai' whereby the entire population of the country became 'Thai'. The Lao in Siam were turned into Thai and Siam was turned into 'Thai-land' (*prathet thai*), a term which was being used in Thai language legal documents from the early twentieth century.³³ Officially, in foreign languages 'Siam' was the name of the country until it was changed to 'Thailand' by the Thai government in 1939, a change that was implemented to merge – also in foreign languages – the name of the country with that of the projected racial composition of the population: Thai ruled over Thai in Thailand. However, the change of name from Siam to Thailand was fuelled also by the pan-Thai nationalist ideology and the irredentist campaign, which was popularised in Siam during the 1930s, and expressed the desire to expand the country to encompass the various branches of the Thai race now living under the colonial yoke in other countries. The change from 'Siam' to 'Thailand' can be seen as a prelude to the military campaign for a return of the lost territories, which materialized in 1940–41.

This move to define the Lao out of Siam and to transform Siam into a 'Thai-land' is clearly reflected in the census conducted in Siam in 1904. The census and an explanatory note make up a fascinating text. It gives us a splendid opportunity to gain insight into not only how the racial layout of Siam was perceived by the ruling elite in Siam at the turn of the twentieth century, but also into the fuzziness of racial categorisation. In the note accompanying the census it is mentioned how the aim was to do a census in which the race (*chat*) of each individual was noted. However, it is cultural and not biological factors that are used to place the various groups of people within the classificatory grid. These cultural factors are, however, employed in an inconsistent manner. Thus, with reference to the Chinese segment of Siam's population the explanatory note offers the following guidelines:

It means that all men wearing pigtailed were counted as real Chinese. Even men of partly Chinese origin would have been regarded as Chinese, provided they wore pigtailed. All women wearing Thai style clothes were counted as Thai. Therefore, only the women wearing

Chinese clothes, i.e. those quite numerous women who immigrated from China, were regarded as Chinese.³⁴

When dealing with Mons and Khmers who had been living in Siam for a long time, 'language' is applied as a distinctive factor. Whereas these people dressed in the 'same fashion' as the Thai they are singled out from the Thai as a separate 'language race' if they use another language than Thai when communicating with each other. On the other hand, the Lao are not singled out as a separate group or race:

But there does exist the case where a separation [into different races] is not feasible. That is how to separate Lao from Thai, for even among the general population itself there are no discernible traits which can be used to differentiate Thai from Lao. If we speak about languages, Lao and Thai languages are of the same stock. Only the accent and some vocabulary are different. [...] If we base our supposition on well-known facts, then the people we call presently Lao, were actually Thai, and not Lao. Furthermore, the Lao regard themselves as Thai.³⁵

The census referred to here did not cover the whole of Siam, but only the twelve inner *monthons* thereby leaving out most of the administrative entities with a large Lao population – that is, Phayap, Udon and Isan. What I am looking for, however, is not exact figures, but classificatory patterns, and from this perspective the considerations presented in the explanatory note are still relevant. This removal of the Lao from the racial layout of Siam is also reflected in Thai schoolbooks from the early twentieth century. Take, for example, a schoolbook in geography from 1900 written by the head of the Department of Education. This text takes as its point of departure the notion that the myriad of countries making up the world are racially constituted entities, in which Siam is 'the dwelling place of the Thai' (*samnak asai haeng khon thai*).³⁶ Whenever reference is made to other races (*tang chat tang phasa*) living in Siam this term refers only to foreign people living, for example, in Bangkok. Here the Lao figure aside other foreigners like Vietnamese, Burmese

and Europeans, whereby the Lao are associated with a group coming from the outside.³⁷ In *Geography and History of Siam* published by the Department of Textbooks, a text I dealt with earlier in this chapter, the question of the Lao in Siam is approached in much the same manner. When discussing the northeastern part of Siam in the chapter on the population of Siam, the Lao – together with Vietnamese and Khmers – appear only as people under French jurisdiction (*pen khon yu nai bangkhap farangset*) who have escaped into Siam to evade paying tax to the French.³⁸ In a section specifically on race, however, we encounter the term Lao used with reference to the people in the northern and northeastern parts of Siam. But in this instance the distinction is blurred as it is indicated in the text that these Lao are in fact synonymous with ‘Northern Thai’ (*thai nuea*) who in reality are ‘Thai’ (*thae ching pen thai*).³⁹ So although the term Lao is employed it is defined so that it does not convey difference.

The conceptual changes brought about by this process of racial standardisation through manipulation of often confused and confusing classificatory labels, where groups of people first disappear only to reappear under a new name, is neatly described by the American missionary William Clifton Dodd in his book *The Tai Race*. Dodd opens his chapter on the people of northern Siam in the following manner:

To our friends and co-workers in the home land, with the exception of the Siamese, the people of North Siam are the most familiar and most dear. I wonder if you who have worked so long and faithfully for them will recognise your dear Laos people in the title of this chapter [Yün]. If not let me introduce them to you under a new name. The old name and the old life of the Laos people have passed away. The name ‘Laos’ as applied to the people of North Siam was a mistake, both in pronunciation and application. Even though it has been used for generations past alike by Siamese, Europeans, and Americans, it was never used by the people themselves. A few years ago, the Siamese government expressed a desire, which was equal to a mandate, that all the people of the realm should be called Siamese. So in deference to government plans and innovations the name of our Laos Mission was changed to North Siam Mission, and the

North Laos people passed out of existence. Their country is now known only as Payap.⁴⁰

The term Yûn that Dodd applies instead of Lao to the people of northern Siam figures as the name of a sub-group that appears aside, among others, Siamese and Lao in Dodd's layout of the overall Tai or Thai race. In this way Dodd did not 'forget' the differences between the 'Yûn' and the 'Siamese' as two distinct branches of the Thai race living within the boundaries of Siam. On the other hand, he did erase the Lao from the racial layout of Siam. First, he rejects the applicability of the term to the people of northern Siam. Hereby he departed from the practice followed in many Western publications contemporary with Dodd that still employed the term 'Lao' or 'Laos' with reference to the people of northern Siam.⁴¹ Second, he only deals with the Lao in relation to the French colony of Laos.

This process of turning the Lao into Thai and Siam into Thailand had implications not only for Thai perceptions of the Lao in Siam, but also for the Thai discourse on the Lao in Laos. If we look at school-books used in Siam in the early twentieth century, we can see how the Lao in Laos initially had been singled out from the Thai in Siam.⁴² Through the 1930s, however, a new discourse on the Lao in Laos was in the making. According to this view, racial kindred between the Lao in Laos and the Thai in Siam was stressed. Just as the Lao in Siam had become Thai, the Lao in Laos also became defined as Thai. The notion of an extensive and common Siam-centred Thai space, including, among others, the French colonial space of Laos, was evolving: a Thai space defined with reference to racial kindred within the overall Thai race in spite of the fact that an international boundary divided the two spaces. This pan-Thai ideology that flourished in Siam in the 1930s was heavily influenced by the universe outlined by Dodd in his book *The Tai Race*. In nationalist imaginings, presumed origins are important and in Dodd's narrative the Thai race is in fact older than civilisations normally associated with antiquity – both in an Asian and a Western context. As the subtitle of the book reveals, the Thai race is not only the 'elder brother' of the Chinese, but according to Dodd the Thai race was also civilised 'while our ancestors were still

wearing skins and using flint knives.⁴³ Equally important is the ‘spatial dimension’ of the Thai race depicted by Dodd. Here I have in mind how Dodd lines up the different branches of the Thai race and locates them in space, and how the Thai race is quantified with reference to the grand total of people making up this race.⁴⁴ In this manner a ‘racially’ defined Thai-space running across state boundaries emerges. The immense extent of the Thai race, in Dodd’s view, called for a new definition of missionary work:

Mission policy in the past has been influenced by the prevailing tendency to deal with peoples according to civil boundaries. The partition of mission fields according to comity agreements among the various Boards has usually followed national or provincial lines. But in the case of our Tai task, we anticipate the broadening effects of the War by following up a people, regardless of civil boundaries.

With regard to the ‘broadening effects of the War’, Dodd refers to what he sees as the new perception of the world that had come into being after World War I, which ‘has taught us to pay less attention to arbitrary civil boundaries, and more attention to racial lines.’⁴⁵ Although Dodd most probably thought only in terms of missionary work, such statements must have given Thai nationalists food for thought. The book could be read as an important nationalist manifesto and in the 1930s it was translated into Thai and was serialised in journals.⁴⁶

An examination of two texts by Wichit Wathakan provides a glimpse into conceptual changes with regard to the perception of the Lao in Laos, which took place in Siam in the 1930s. In his *A Universal History*, Wichit followed what could be called a principle of unity in diversity. That is Lao and Siamese Thai figure as two branches of the overall Thai race associated with two different territories – that of French Laos and Siam.⁴⁷ In his 1933 book, *Siam and Suwannaphum*, a shift in the labelling of racial sub-categories emerges. On the one hand, Wichit starts by presenting a racial layout expressing the same principle of unity in diversity as in the earlier text. Thus, he divides the overall Thai race into two larger sub-categories: the greater Thai (*thai yai*) and minor Thai (*thai noi*). The last category then is further divided

into, among others, Siamese or Siamese Thai (*thai sayam*) and Lao.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Wichit singles out Laos (*prathet lao*) as an individual country, which could be used to reinforce a notion of distinctiveness between the Siamese and the Lao.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the Siamese-Lao distinction is blurred throughout the text. Wichit points out that the term Lao actually should be avoided, as it is a misnomer:

As for the Lao [. . .] I refer to the group occupying the upper part of the left bank of the Mekong today. In reality, however, we should not call them 'Lao' at all. The reason why we call them Lao is that they are under French rule today and the French call them Lao. [Therefore] we also have to call them Lao officially. Actually, our brothers and sisters on the bank of the Mekong are genuine Thais with no less Thai blood than we Siamese (*chao sayam*). They [i.e. Lao and Siamese] are like a married couple and they [i.e. the Lao] have a history that is intertwined with us Siamese Thai [...].⁵⁰

In conformity with this perception Wichit seldom uses the term Lao in the text. Even when dealing with the history of the Lan Xang Kingdom – the founding myth of a distinctive Lao history – the term Lao is avoided.⁵¹ And yet, Wichit does not apply the term Thai to the Lan Xang Kingdom either. Instead, he associates the history of this kingdom with the names of kings and cities, not with any label signalling racial belonging. Finally, as Wichit summarises the racial composition of mainland Southeast Asia at the end of the book, he only mentions the Thai, Burmese, Khmer, Vietnamese and Malay. Wichit explains that Lao and Shan are not singled out, since these groups are 'genuine Thai'. They are included in the Thai-group.⁵² In this way the differences within the overall Thai race are forgotten and the Lao in Laos have become Thai. The notion of Laos as a distinct space from Siam defined with reference to race is thus contested. In this text Wichit can be said to have set the agenda for the discourse on Laos as a part of a Thai space and the Lao as Thai, popularised under the guise of the campaign for a return of the lost territories in 1940–41. As French Indochina began to crumble, he would go even further by promoting the idea of a Thai *Suwannaphum* (Golden Land) or a Thai *Laem Thong* (Golden Peninsular).

Suwannaphum is a term that occurs in various Buddhist texts as the name of a region believed to be part of Southeast Asia, to where King Asoka sent missionaries to spread Buddhism in the third century BC. Wichit latched on to this idea for other reasons. In his *A Universal History*, he used it as a collective term to refer (vaguely) to the region made up of Burma, Siam, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. He preferred this term to the one coined by Westerners: Indochina.⁵³ No explicit reasons are put forward by Wichit, but we can glean some clues by looking at the connotations associated with the two terms. First, *Suwannaphum* represents an indigenous term as compared with a term coined by a foreign colonial power. Second, Indochina implies foreign cultural influences from China and India, which is not implied in Wichit's term. Third, *Suwannaphum* refers to a precolonial space, while the term Indochina is, in his view, linked to Western colonial borders, especially since the French had borrowed the pre-existing idea of Indochina to describe their colonial construct made up of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The term *Laem Thong* is used synonymously with *Suwannaphum* – but is a modern term without the same historical connotations as the latter.

However, in Wichit's book *Siam and Suwannaphum*, the term emerges as more than a mere regional label. It is employed rather as shorthand for what would have been a 'greater' or 'powerful country' (*maha prathet*) encompassing the whole of mainland Southeast Asia if the various races inhabiting this region had been united. In this context, *Suwannaphum* was not linked with a distinct Thai space. However, Wichit presented some preliminary positions that set the stage for a later Thai-ification of this spatial layout. Take, for example, his proposition that the Vietnamese have Thai origins or are of Thai stock.⁵⁴ According to Wichit, the Vietnamese were a Thai group who had originated in southern China and who moved into *Suwannaphum* before the other Thai. Settling on the eastern side of the Annamese Cordillera, they were separated from the rest of the Thai who settled in *Suwannaphum* on the western side of this mountain range: the Annamese Cordillera divided the lives of the Thai and Vietnamese, who used to be one and the same group, and caused

them to split into different lineages. This difference was enhanced by the strong Chinese influence that the Vietnamese subsequently underwent – according to Wichit, an influence so profound that it ‘completely turned the Vietnamese into Chinese’. But when dealing with ‘racial classification’, the perceived origin counts. Thus, ‘in reality, if we talk about the lineage in ancient times, the Vietnamese belong to the same group as the Thai.’⁵⁵ Or:

For this reason [the Chinese influence] the Vietnamese and the Thai, who are friends through thick and thin, belong to the same lineage (*chuea sai*), had a common life four thousand years ago, but later became very regrettably estranged because of being separated.⁵⁶

Whereas this definition actually moved *Suwannaphum* in the direction of being defined as a Thai space, this was not a point Wichit stressed in this context. He simply stressed that the similarities were greater than the differences among the groups of people inhabiting *Suwannaphum*.⁵⁷ However, in many of the plays written by him in the second half of the 1930s the theme of *Suwannaphum* as a Thai space was widely popularised. In the song *Golden Peninsula*, included in his play *The Battle of Thalang*, the space of *Laem Thong* was linked with a territory including Siam and the Lao and Shan territories in neighbouring countries.⁵⁸ *Suwannaphum* or *Laem Thong* were, however, also linked with an even wider Thai space, including not only Siam and the Shan territories in Burma, but all the territories of French Indochina: Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. To define this space as a Thai space involved an inclusion of the Khmers as Thai, which was a major theme in two of Wichit’s plays, *Rachamanu* (1936) and *Phokhun Phamueang* (1940).

The play *Rachamanu* was named after a legendary military commander from the sixteenth century who supposedly played a decisive role in the resurrection of the Ayutthaya Kingdom under King Naresuan and in countering Khmer attempts to break away from Thai suzerainty. The play contains many of the themes which recur in Wichit’s plays – personal love has to be sacrificed for love of the nation and martial qualities are praised.⁵⁹ But more importantly, the

play was intended to present the audience with two important 'historical truths' with regard to the Thai-Khmer relationship, as Wichit put it in his introduction to the play. The first 'truth' was that the wars of the past between Siam and Cambodia should not be seen as brutal warfare between two antagonistic 'nations' or 'races', but between two antagonistic kings.⁶⁰ The second 'truth', reinforcing the first one, was that the Khmers and Thais were of the same 'race, religion, and culture' and are 'blood relatives' (*yat ruam sailohit*). To drive this point home, Wichit made a basic distinction between the terms 'Khmer' and 'Khom', where Khom refers to the 'real Khmers' (*khamen thae*), who inhabited what became Cambodia before the advent of the Thai people in this region. The term 'Khmer' is called an 'artificial term' (*chue somut*), which a group of Thai that settled in the former Khom territory adopted. To make his point, Wichit further develops his argument along the 'scientific' lines of racial classification:

If we follow the fundamental methods used by historians to discuss race (*chuea chat*), namely, face, form of the cranium, food, common diseases, local literature, songs, and music, and compare these for current Thai and Khmer, it is clear that the Khmer of today are Thais. I am prepared to prove this truth to any historian.⁶¹

In the play itself this contention is neatly presented at the zenith of the action in an exchange between a Thai soldier and the military commander Rachamanu:

Soldier: Khmer and Thai look the same.

Rachamanu: Yes, they are Thai like us! They happened to settle down in old *Khom* territory and came to be called 'Khmer'. The term 'Khmer' is an artificial term and in fact we are all Thai brothers.

Soldier: Then we should be friends and not fight each other.

Rachamanu: Yes, there will be no reason to fight for a long time. All of us on *Laem Thong* are of the same stock. [...]. We Thai [*thai rao*, referring to the Siamese Thais] are the elder brothers. [...].⁶²

The same perception is echoed in the play *Phokhun Phamueang*, which is set in the early fourteenth century and deals with a legendary Thai prince, Phamueang, who fought to liberate the Thais from Khmer

suzerainty to establish the first independent kingdom of Sukhothai. In the final part of the play the same lesson on the Thai-identity of the Khmer is taught once again as Nang Sikhon – the Khmer wife of Phamueang – asks Nai Man why her husband refrained from enthroning himself:

Nai Man: Because [your husband] is uneasy as his wife is of another race (*tang chat*). To place him as ruler is not right (*mo meng*). [...]

Nang Sikhon: You are wrong. What an offensive idea. Why does he hold that I am of another race? This is a major mistake. You should be able to see that the Khmer are Thai. *Khom* blood vanished long ago and of the old *Khom* only the name remains today. The Khmer are of real Thai stock because the Thai are divided into many lineages. The Vietnamese (*yuan kao*) and the Khmer are Thai through and through. Take a look! On what points do our face and colour of skin differ? For several hundreds of years Thai blood has been running in Khmer veins, making them one race. [...].⁶³

The perception of *Suwannaphum* as a Thai space is also popularized by Wichit in the 1938 song *Thai Blood*. He compares the movement of the Thai in historical times to a stream of blood flowing across the Golden Land.⁶⁴ The same notion of the Thai covering *Suwannaphum* as floodwaters is invoked in the opening scene of the 1939 play *Nan Chao*, presented as a historical lesson describing the movement of the Thai into *Suwannaphum*. The scene culminates with the presentation of a map showing the extent of the Thai race while one of the persons in the play voices the desire for all Thai to be united.⁶⁵ By means of this notion of a steady stream of Thai flowing southwards from China, *Suwannaphum* thus emerges as a Thailand or Thai space with a crucial mythical past providing a sense of historical legitimacy for the present 'flows'. Although the various groups of this Thai people, including the Khmer and Vietnamese, were later subjected to different developments, they were linked together in a distant past. That is what counted most. Within this framework *Suwannaphum* or *Laem Thong* became synonymous with an enlarged Thai space or Thai-land of the past, one which superseded the warfare and antagonisms of the more recent past.

Researchers writing about Wichit and the pan-Thai ideology of the 1930s stress that he was influenced by a French-produced map he saw during a visit to Hanoi showing the extent of the Thai people, including major areas outside of Siam.⁶⁶ With regard to the perception of a Thai-land of a distant past linked with a water-like movement of the Thais, however, Wichit was influenced by an allegory attributed to the French scholar Louis Finot. Finot described the movement of the Thais from southern China in the following manner:

The march of this remarkable race – supple and fluid like water, seeping along with the same force to take on the colour of all the heavens and the form of all the shores, yet maintaining through its diverse aspects the essential identity of its character and language – spread out like an immense tablecloth over southern China, Tonkin, Laos, Siam and into Burma and Assam.⁶⁷

In Wichit's interpretation, Finot's allegory not only delineates the spatial contours of the larger Thai space – including the Khmer – but it also expresses the notion of a basic quality uniting the Thai, despite their differences. The common origins still count and, according to Wichit, it was Finot's parable that he popularised in the song *Thai Blood* referred to above. Wichit also evoked Finot's metaphor in a speech broadcast on the Thai national radio in November 1940 in defence of the racial kindred between the Thai and Khmer. Through this programme, Wichit not only hoped to reach his 'fellow Thai' (*phuean thai*) in his own country, but also the 'fellow Thai all over *Laem Thong*', including his 'race-fellows' in Cambodia.⁶⁸

This perception of racial kindred between the Thai and Khmer, and of the larger space of *Suwannaphum*, was not just a dream for Wichit, it was in fact widely accepted in military circles. In an article published in the journal of the Thai Army, *Yuthakot*, for example, the author praises the play *Rachamanu* for reminding the audience about the racial bonds that exist among all the people inhabiting *Laem Thong*.⁶⁹ In his study of Wichit Wathakan, Scot Barmé also refers to a young army captain, Phayom Chulanan, who, in a lecture to military cadets, advanced the notion that the Burmese, Vietnamese, Khmer and Malays were 'all descendants from [...] original Thai stock'. When *Rachamanu* ap-

peared in 1936, Wichit was hailed in a local newspaper for bringing this 'new information' about the racial identity of the Khmer to public attention and was, according to Barmé, 'urged to continue his research in this area and investigate possible Thai links to other inhabitants of the Southeast Asian mainland.'⁷⁰ While the notion of the wider space of *Suwannaphum* as a Thai space implied the definition of the Lao as Thai and Laos as a Thai space, the Lao were brought to the forefront of the public discourse in 1940 when the irredentist cause gained new momentum in Thailand.

DEMANDING THE RETURN OF THE LOST TERRITORIES

In August 1939, France proposed the signing of a non-aggression pact with Thailand, which was designed to guarantee the territorial integrity of French Indochina at a time when France was confronted with a growing irredentist movement in Thailand and a war with Germany in Europe. The Thai government used the occasion to negotiate an adjustment of the border with French Indochina, proposing that the Mekong River should be adopted as the border, whereby the territories west of the Mekong ceded in 1904 would be returned to Thailand. After several months of negotiations the mutual non-aggression pact was signed on 12 June 1940. The Thai proposed that the border should be adjusted prior to ratification of the pact. But then France was defeated by Germany. The new Vichy government in France was, however, no more supportive of an adjustment of the border than the Third Republic, and asked for a ratification without territorial adjustments. In an *aide-mémoire* from the *Legation Royale de Thaïlande* in France to the Vichy government, the Thai government made its position clear. The non-aggression pact would not be ratified unless the Mekong was adopted as a border and furthermore it was stated that:

His Majesty's Government would also be grateful if the French government would be so good as to give them a letter of assurance to the effect that in the event of a change from French sovereignty, France will return to Thailand the territories of Laos and Cambodia.⁷¹

The breakdown in the negotiations between Thailand and France fuelled the nationalist cause in Thailand. Throughout October 1940, large demonstrations were staged in most major cities in Thailand in support of the return of the lost territories. It is not always clear whether 'lost territories' referred to Laos and Cambodia in totality or just to the territories of Laos west of the Mekong. This ambiguity was no doubt promoted by the Thai authorities. A claim to the totality of Laos and Cambodia was, however, reflected in semi-official publications. On the front page of a pamphlet produced by the Department of Information, handed out during the celebration of Constitution Day in December 1940, a map of mainland Southeast Asia shows the border of an enlarged Thailand at the Annamese Cordillera, with the Democracy Monument looming large over this entire space.⁷² Furthermore, a book containing correspondence from 1893 relating to the loss of the east-bank territories published by the Ministry of Interior and distributed at a religious festival in Wat Pathumkhongkha in 1940 contained an 'historical map' on the front page. It depicts the 'boundaries' of an historical Siam running along the Annamese Cordillera.⁷³ Likewise, when speaking to military cadets in October 1940, Wichit called for a return of the east-bank territories ceded to France in their totality. As he urged the soldiers:

[W]e shall not limit ourselves to talk just about the frontier or the area opposite Luang Phrabang and Pakse – we shall talk about the left-bank of the Mekong River – we shall talk about every piece of territory we have lost to France.⁷⁴

Whatever the territory in question, it was in this context that a new focus was placed on Laos and the Lao. Indeed, by then the Lao were explicitly defined as Thai. In the speech to military cadets, Wichit alluded to both the Lao and the Khmer in the following manner:

[...] we have lost half of our country. This territory really belongs to us. It is not a colony, it is not a foreign territory; rather it is a living place for Thai people of Thai blood, our relatives, who have a way of living, mind and culture being identical to ours; they are truly of our own flesh and blood.⁷⁵

A reading of the newspaper *Prachachat*, an official publication, for the second half of 1940 reveals how the term Lao (*khon lao* or *chao lao*) never seems to have been used when referring to the people inhabiting the territories making up Laos. Instead, they were simply referred to as ‘persons of the Thai race’ (*bukhon chuea chat thai*), ‘Thai’ (*chao thai* or *khon thai*) or ‘Thai brethren’ (*phi nong chao thai*).⁷⁶ After the territories on the west-bank of the Mekong had been annexed by Thailand in March 1941, the inhabitants in what was called the ‘liberated’ areas were referred to as ‘Champassack-Thai’ (*thai champasak*)⁷⁷ or ‘free Thai’ (*thai itsara*).⁷⁸ Furthermore, the Lao, Khmer or Vietnamese soldiers fighting on the French side were typically referred to as ‘local soldiers’ (*thahan phuen mueang*).⁷⁹

When in 1939 Siam became Thailand, this change in the name of the country indicated a conjoining of the name of the country and the projected racial composition of the population. That the same merger, according to the logic of the Thai discourse on Laos and the Lao, did not exist between the geopolitical entity of Laos and the ethnic–racial composition of its population, was emphasised by the term *khwaen* Laos, which always seems to have been used instead of simply Laos whenever reference to Laos was made in public in 1940–41.⁸⁰ The term *khwaen*, being an administrative-cum-geographical label meaning ‘district’ or ‘region’, was employed to remove Laos from the orbit of ethnically distinct countries or nations. Laos was not a country, but an administrative entity peopled by Thai – not Lao. Phibun clarified this in a speech broadcast over the radio at the end of October 1940:

As for our brethren in *khwaen* Khmer or *khwaen* Laos there may be some people who think that they are of the Khmer race or Lao race that are different from the Thai race. The truth is that ‘*khwaen* Khmer’ or ‘*khwaen* Laos’ have the same ‘characteristics’ (*laksana*) as *khwaen* Krungthep, *khwaen* Lopburi or *khwaen* Chiang Mai, which are only names of geographical areas. The people living in these localities – like Chiang Mai – cannot be regarded as belonging to a different race. They are all Thai people (*khon thai*). Likewise, the people living in *khwaen* Khmer or *khwaen* Laos are not of the

Khmer race or Lao race, but are in reality Thai. They are of Thai blood – they are our Thai brethren.⁸¹

It is also significant that when the term *khwaen* Laos was employed for Laos in Thai newspapers and public announcements by the Department of Information, it was often preceded by the three words *thi riak wa* – meaning ‘that is called’ or ‘so-called’ – indicating that Laos actually was a misnomer in the same manner as we earlier in this chapter saw how Wichit connected the term Lao with a French invention.⁸² It was a misleading name, as this territory did not constitute a Lao space, but a Thai space.

This message of Laos and the Lao belonging to a wider Thai space was also popularised across the Mekong. Phibun, for example, sent Mo Lam singers to Laos in 1940 for propaganda purposes and pamphlets were either thrown out over Laos from Thai aeroplanes or distributed by hand.⁸³ In one such pamphlet, written in Lao, the racial affinities were phrased in the following manner:

Indochinese brothers. We are brothers since we share the same origin, have the same [colour of the] skin, have the same religion, our languages have the same roots, in every respect our way of living is the same. Let us be united as brothers of the same blood and not fight each other.⁸⁴

Another pamphlet distributed in the Thakhek region in Laos gave a radical and Wichit-like interpretation of the Thai discourse on Laos and the Lao. It was construed as a kind of lesson about the true nature of the racial identity of the Lao. It explained how the term Lao was a misnomer that had been applied by foreigners and subsequently had obscured the true Thai racial identity of the people known as Lao. The truth was that they were Thai and previously were united with the Thai in Thailand in one *pays*, and according to the historical lesson propagated in this pamphlet, the Thai in Thailand and in Laos:

became separated only forty-eight years ago [referring to 1893] by the French pirates and barbarians who afterwards taught us to name the people on the left-bank of the Mekong Lao. But the truth

is that the people on the right-bank uphold the same language and say: 'We are first cousins and have the same blood in the veins.'⁸⁵

At the end of 1940 the demand for a return of the lost territories was made more concrete as Thai troops were sent to the Thailand-Indochina border and sporadic fighting developed along the border. These hostilities ended at the end of January 1941 when a ceasefire was effected through Japanese intervention. Following negotiations in Tokyo, France was forced to cede the territories west of the Mekong opposite Luang Phrabang and Pakse, the Cambodian province of Battambang and parts of Siemreap and Kampong Thom to Thailand.

In this chapter we have seen how the French colonial space of Laos from a Thai nationalist perspective was perceived as essentially nothing but an integrated part of the nation-state of Thailand. Laos was defined as a Thai space in terms of history and race – some of the factors brought forward normally to define a national identity. From a Thai nationalist perspective Laos was a 'non-country'.⁸⁶ In the next chapters we shall see how another discourse on Laos and the Lao was set in motion under French colonial rule. This discourse served to buttress Laos as a separate 'Lao space' – both in relation to Thailand and within French Indochina.

NOTES

1. In relation to the process whereby the Kingdom of Siam was transformed into the nation of 'Thai-land' in the early part of the twentieth century, David Streckfuss has noted that the year 1902 could be recorded on its birth certificate. This is the year when the term 'Thai' started to replace 'Siam' or 'Siamese' in Thai language versions of treaties with foreign powers. Reflecting this change I will be using 'Thai' and not 'Siamese' in the chapters dealing with the post-1902 period. See David Streckfuss, 'The Mixed Colonial Legacy in Siam: Origins of Thai Racialist Thought, 1890–1910', in Laurie J. Sears (ed.), *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honour of John R. W. Smail* (Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph No. 11, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1993), pp. 139–140.
2. Still, we need to employ the term 'lost territories' with prudence. What became Laos can be regarded as a lost territory in the sense of being a territory

- 'lost' by a nascent nation-state trying to establish modern territorial rights in an area where such rights had not existed before. It is not a territory ceded by a timeless nation-state, as Thai nationalist historiography claims. In order to clarify this distinction I should have kept the term 'lost territories' in quotation marks throughout the text. However, for reasons of typographical simplicity I have dropped the quotation marks.
3. Thamrongsak Phertlert-anan, 'Kan riak rong din daen pho so 2483' [The demand for territories in 1940], *Samut Sangkhomsat*, 12:3–4, 1990, pp. 57–58. The seaboard provinces of Chanthaburi and Trat bordering Cambodia were occupied by French troops until Siam had complied with the stipulations in the 1893 treaty.
 4. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 57.
 5. Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), p. 150.
 6. Thamrongsak, 'Kan riak rong din daen', p. 58.
 7. See Kitiyakorn Woralag, *Phumisat khong prathet sayam – samrap rongrian thai* [Geography of Siam for Thai schools] (Bangkok: no publisher, 1900); or a textbook in the history of the five first Bangkok kings: Krom Rachabandit [Department of the Royal Academy], *Thetsana phra rachaprawat phong-sawadan krungthep* [A sermon on the history of the kings and of Bangkok] (Bangkok: Nangsuephim Thai, 1913).
 8. Inthara Prasat, *Baep rian phumisat lem nueng wa duai thawip asia* [Textbook in geography, book one: about the Asian Continent] (Bangkok: Rongphim Akson Nit, 1908), p. 162. 'Yuan' is the Thai word to refer to what has become the present-day state of Vietnam.
 9. *Ibid.*, front page.
 10. For another example where references to the loss of territories can be found in publications from the pre-1932 period, see Thamrongsak, 'Kan riak rong din daen', pp. 48–49.
 11. Krom Tamra [Department of Textbooks], *Baep rian phumisat – phumisat prathet sayam* [Geography textbook: the geography of Siam] (Bangkok: Krom Tamra Krasuang Sueksathikan, 1925), p. 153 (territory east of Chiang Rai), p. 165 (the Mekong), p. 167 (territory east and south of Khukhan), p. 168 (Khmer territory), and p. 175 (territory north of Loei).
 12. For a discussion of the emergence of this perception of Siam's history, see Somkiat Wanthana, 'The Politics of Modern Thai Historiography' (PhD thesis, Melbourne: Monash University, 1986).
 13. Krom Tamra, *Baep rian phumisat*, pp. 499–500.

14. Ibid., p. 508. For an example of another contemporary publication where the same knowledge is incorporated in the historical narrative, see *Souvenir of the Siamese Kingdom Exhibition at Lumbini Park* (Bangkok: no publisher, 1925).
15. Wichit Wathakan, *Prawatisat sakon* [A universal history] (Bangkok: Rong Phim Rung Watthana, 1971), Vol. V, p. 519.
16. Ibid., pp. 536, 548.
17. Ibid., p. 536.
18. Scot Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), p. 45; Somkiat, 'The Politics of Modern Thai Historiography', p. 289.
19. See, for example, Luean Asanan, *Nangsue an phumisat lem song (wa duai prathet sayam – tam pramuang mai) samrap chan mathayom thi song kap prathom thi hok* [A reader in geography, book two (about Siam – according to the new syllabus) for secondary school year two and primary school year six] (Bangkok: Bamrung Nukunit, 1934); Krasuang Kalahom [Ministry of Defence], *Naeo son prawatisat sayam* [Guideline for the teaching of the history of Siam] (Bangkok: Rong Phim Krom Yuthasueksa Thahanbok, 1935).
20. Somkiat, 'The Politics of Modern Thai Historiography', p. 274. For a detailed discussion of these maps and the perception of history embedded in them, see Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, pp. 150–156.
21. Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan*, p. 125.
22. Krasuang Kalahom, *Naeo son prawatisat sayam*, without page.
23. Khana Yuwasan, *Sayam ro so 112* [Siam in Ratanakosin Era year 112] (Bangkok: Samnak-ngan Khana Yuwasan, 1935), p. 130. Formed during the early 1930s, Khana Yuwasan included young Thai journalists, who primarily published books on wars and biographies of foreign political leaders like Hitler.
24. Ibid., p. 68.
25. Volker Grabowsky, 'The Isan up to its Integration into the Siamese State', in Volker Grabowsky (ed.), *Regions and National Integration in Thailand 1892–1992* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), p. 107.
26. *Chotmai het rueang prap kabot wiangchan* [Accounts of the suppression of the Vientiane rebellion] (Cremation volume for Major Thaem Chuto, Bangkok: 1958 [1923]); Thipakorawong, *Phraracha phongsawadan krung ratanakosin rachakan thi sam* [The royal chronicles of the third reign] (Bangkok: Department of Fine Arts, 1995 [1934]).
27. Krasuang Kalahom, *Naeo son prawatisat sayam*, pp. 244–247.
28. Krasuang Mahatthai [Ministry of Interior], *Kan pokhrong khaen lao lae khamen* [The administration of the district Laos and Cambodia] (Bangkok: Railway Department, 1940), p. 15.

29. For a discussion of this issue of continuity and discontinuity in the perception of Lao history, see Martin Stuart-Fox, 'On the Writing of Lao History: Continuities and Discontinuities', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 24:1, 1993, pp. 106–121.
30. Luean, *Nangsue an phumisat lem song*, p. 45, without page (map).
31. *Atlas-Geography of Siam (28 Lessons and Readings)* (Orne: Imprimerie de Montligeon, 1925), pp. 2, 4.
32. *Phumisat bueang ton: wa duai prathet sayam yang sangkhep* [An introductory geography: On Siam in brief] (Bangkok: Rong Phim Akson Nit, 1932). For another official publication including the same map, see Ministry of Commerce and Communications, *Siam. Nature and Industry* (Bangkok: Ministry of Commerce and Communications, 1930).
33. David Streckfuss, 'The Mixed Colonial Legacy in Siam', pp. 139–142.
34. Volker Grabowsky, *An Early Thai Census: Translation and Analysis* (Institute of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Publication no. 211/93, 1993), pp. 52–53.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.
36. Kitiyakorn, *Phumisat khong prathet sayam*, p. 8.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
38. Krom Tamra, *Baep rian phumisat*, p. 77.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 383
40. William Clifton Dodd, *The Tai Race. Elder Brother of the Chinese* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1923), p. 252.
41. For publications where Lao is employed with reference to northern Siam, see for example George Cœdès, 'Documents sur l'histoire du Laos occidental', *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 25, 1925, pp.1–202; Reginald le May, *An Asian Arcady. The Land and Peoples of Northern Siam* (Cambridge: Heffer & Sons, 1926).
42. See, for example, Krom Tamra, *Baep rian phumisat*, p. 77; Kitiyakorn, *Phumisat khong prathet sayam*, p. 51.
43. Dodd, *The Tai Race*, p. 339.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 344.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 340.
46. Parts appeared, for example, in *Withayacharn* published by the Department of Education in 1929–30. See *Withayacharn*, 30:21, 1929–30, pp. 1665–1680; 31:9, 1930–31, pp. 720–727; 31:14, 1930–31, pp. 1175–1194.

47. Wichit Wathakan, *Prawatisat sakon* [A universal history] (Bangkok: Rong Phim Rung Watthana, 1971), Vol. III, pp. 15–16.
48. Wichit Wathakan, *Sayam kap suwanaphum phak nueng: adit* [Siam and Suwannaphum, part one: the past] (Bangkok: without publisher, 1933), p. 87.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 189–199.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
53. Actually the French term also includes Indonesia – but this is not mentioned by Wichit. See Wichit, *Prawatisat sakon*, Vol. III, p. 30.
54. Wichit, *Sayam kap suwanaphum*, pp. 37–38.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
57. The same perception is expressed in Khana Yuwasan, *Sayam ro so* 112.
58. ‘Bot lakhon rueang suek thalang’ [The battle of Thalang: A play], in *Wichit wannakhadi* [Wichit literature] (Cremation volume for Lady Praphaphan Wichitwathakan, Bangkok: 1993), p. 156.
59. For a general discussion of Wichit’s plays, see Pra-onrat Buranamat, *Luang wichit wathakan kap bot lakhon prawatisat* [Luang Wichit Wathakan and the historical plays] (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1985); and Jiraporn Witayasakpan, ‘Nationalism and the Transformation of Aesthetic Concepts: Theatre in Thailand during the Phibun Period’ (PhD thesis, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992).
60. ‘Bot lakhon rueang rachamanu’ [Rachamanu: A play], in *Wichit wannakhadi*, p. 25.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
63. ‘Bot lakhon rueang pho khun pha mueang’ [Phokhun Phamueang: A play], in *Wichit wannakhadi*, pp. 524–525.
64. Text in Wichit Wathakan, ‘Khwam samphan thang chuea chat rawang thai kap khamen’ [The racial relationship between Thai and Khmer], in *Prachum pathakatha khong luang wichit wathakan kiao kap rueang riak rong din daen khuen* [Collected lectures of Luang Wichit Wathakan related to the call for a return of the Thai territories] (Bangkok: Rong Phim Phra Chan 1941), pp. 48–49.
65. ‘Bot lakhon rueang nan chao’ [Nan Chao: A play], in *Wichit wannakhadi*, pp. 342–343.

66. Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan*, pp. 147–148; Somkiat, ‘The Politics of Modern Thai Historiography’, p. 271.
67. Quoted in Wichit, ‘Khwam samphan thang chuea chat rawang thai kap khamen’, p. 47.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 45–49.
69. ‘Khwam rusuek khong khaphachao muea du rueang lueat suphan lae rachamanu’ [My feelings when I watched *Suphan’s Blood* and *Rachamanu*], *Yuthakot*, 5:6, 1936, pp. 87–91. See also ‘Kho sangket khong rao’ [Our viewpoint], *Yuthakot*, 46:11, 1938, pp. 172a–172b.
70. Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan*, p. 126–127.
71. ‘Aide-memoire, Legation Royale de Thaïlande, Hotel de Lilas, 17 September 1940’, d. 1148, c. 128, NF, CAOM.
72. Reproduced in Kambuputra, ‘Comment les Siamois comprennent l’indépendance’, *Indochine* (20 January 1941), p. 2.
73. Krasuang Mahatthai [Ministry of Interior], *Chodmai to top bang chabap rueang prathet thai sia din daen* [Some correspondance related to Thailand’s loss of territories] (Bangkok: Rong Phim Rotfai, 1940), front page.
74. Wichit Wathakan, *Pathakatha rueang sia din daen thai hai kae farangset* [Lecture about the loss of Thai territories to France] (Bangkok: no publisher, 1940), pp. 37–38.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
76. ‘Ton rap thai tang dao’ [Welcoming Thai from abroad], *Prachachat* (19 July 1940), pp. 1–2; ‘Khon thai nai indochin’ [The Thai in Indochina], *Prachachat* (20 August 1940), pp. 1, 16.
77. ‘Nam thiao champasak’ [Guide to Champassack], *Prachachat* (15 March 1941), p. 7.
78. ‘Thai mi chai samkhan nai prawatisat esia’ [Important victory for Thailand in the history of Asia], *Prachachat* (20 March 1941), p. 3.
79. ‘Kamlang chai thahan’ [The spirit of the soldier], *Prachachat* (18 December 1940), p. 2.
80. This is the practice that can be found in articles in *Prachachat* throughout 1940. See, for example, ‘Thai yuen kham to farangset’ [Thailand gives an answer to France], *Prachachat* (14 September 1940), p. 12; ‘Khon thai nai indochin’ [The Thai in Indochina], *Prachachat* (20 September 1940), p. 9; ‘Rathaban thai chuai ratsadon lum mae nam khong’ [The Thai Government helps the people in the Mekong Basin], *Prachachat* (21 September 1940), p. 7; ‘Withi haeng santiphap’ [The road to peace], *Prachachat* (4 October 1940), p.

- 11; 'Prawatisat yom ubat sam' [History always repeats itself], *Prachachat* (11 October 1940), p. 9.
81. 'Kham prasai khong nayok ratamontri klao kae muan chon chao thai thang withayu krachai siang wan thi 20 tulakhom 2483' [Speech by the Premier to the Thai public broadcast over the radio, 20 October 1940], in Krom Kosanakan [Department of Information], *Thai riak rong khwam yutitham* [The Thai demand justice] (Cremation volume for Mr That Vibuncan, Ayutthaya: no publisher, 1941), p. 119.
82. For the inclusion of the words *thi riak wa*, see articles referred to in note 80. For public statements by the Department of Information, see for example, 'Rueang rathaban damnoen kan chuai luea ratsadon tam mae nam khong thi ophayop khao ma yu nai racha anachak thai' [The government carries on support to the people from the Mekong River basin escaping into the Thai Kingdom (19 September 1940)], in Krom Kosanakan, *Thai riak rong khwam yutitham*, p. 292.
83. Jiraporn, 'Nationalism and the Transformation of Aesthetic Concepts', p. 294; 'Télégramme officiel, Résuper à Gougal, no. 4710, Vientiane, 28 December 1940', d. 563, CM, CAOM, reporting Thai planes over Vientiane throwing out pamphlets.
84. 'Pamphlet in Lao, no year', d. 563, CM, CAOM.
85. 'Des tracts lancés à Hinboun: Événements importants pour le *Siang Thai*, dated September 1940', d. 563, CM, CAOM.
86. This 'colonising view' has also influenced Thai thinking on Laos and the Lao in the second half of the twentieth century. For a discussion of how Thai Princess Maha Cakri Sirindhon's official visit to the Lao People's Democratic Republic in March 1990 forms a counter-narrative that legitimates the existence of Laos as an independent state of Thailand and the existence of a Lao national identity, see Charles F. Keyes, 'A Princess in a People's Republic: A New Phase in the Construction of the Lao Nation', in Andrew Turton (ed.), *Civility and Savagery. Social Identity in Tai States* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), pp. 206–226.

CHAPTER THREE

Roads, History, Religion and Language, 1893–1940

When Laos came into existence as an unprecedented territorial entity at the turn of the twentieth century it was incorporated in the overall colonial space of French Indochina. Besides Laos, Indochina consisted of Cambodia, Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina. Only limited French investments and resources found their way to Laos and social and economic development there lagged behind that of other parts of Indochina. Reflecting this situation, in the literature dealing with the history of Laos in the French colonial period the epithet ‘colonial backwater’ or ‘neglected colonial backwater’ is often invoked to characterise French colonial priorities towards Laos vis-à-vis the other parts of French Indochina.¹ Despite this perception of Laos as a neglected colonial backwater, the French project in Laos in the pre-World War II period in a most fundamental way buttressed the notion of a specifically Lao cultural identity distinct from that of Siam. In the last chapter we saw how a potent nationalist discourse flourished in Siam in the 1920–30s. On historical and racial grounds, it contested the existence of Laos as a country independent of Siam. This chapter details how the French colonial project in Laos in the pre-World War II period was part of a wider attempt to de-link ‘French Laos’ from this ‘Greater Siam’ in the making. This process involved two things. First, the integration of Laos in an Indochina-wide infrastructural network intended to sever the

closeness of Laos to Siam in terms of infrastructure. Second, the formation of a 'cultural frontier' between Laos and Siam by attributing a unique historical, religious and linguistic distinctiveness to Laos. The nationalist character of these policies is obvious. While these endeavours contributed to carving out a separate space for Laos within French Indochina, we shall also see how the notion of a 'Laos Annamite' was expressed in the pre-World War II period and contested the existence of a 'Lao Laos' within Indochina.

LAOS BETWEEN SIAM AND INDOCHINA: LINKING SPACE

When Laos came into existence at the turn of the twentieth century the new colonial space did not constitute a unified political entity. The organisation of Laos as a separate administrative unit within Indochina was a piecemeal process. In the years 1893–94 individual commissionerships were established throughout Laos in order to secure co-operation with local leaders. A further step towards organisational consolidation was taken in 1895 when Laos was divided into two administrative parts – Upper and Lower Laos – each administered locally by a Commandant Supérieur. Finally, in 1899 the French merged Laos into a single administrative entity under a Résident-Supérieur. The latter was based first in Savannakhet but in 1900 the administrative headquarters were moved to Vientiane when this defunct city was resurrected from the ashes of the Siamese destruction decades earlier. The consolidation of Laos as a separate administrative entity within Indochina formed part of the major reorganisation of Indochina undertaken by Poul Doumer when he served as governor-general from 1897 to 1902. While an Indochinese Union had been established in 1887 no administrative or political organs had been created to consolidate such a structure. It was only with Doumer's reforms that an administrative structure was defined and put in place. Although Laos in this manner was consolidated as an independent administrative unit within Indochina, no attempt was made to develop an indigenous political structure to unify Laos in the pre-World War II period. Of the royal families which the French colonised – Luang Phrabang, Xiengkhuang and

Champassack – only the first was recognised officially and given an administrative identity. While the Luang Phrabang Kingdom was administrated as a protectorate, the rest of Laos was ruled directly by the French as a colony or as military territories. Until the unification of Laos under the King of Luang Phrabang in 1946, the question of the legal status of Laos remained a puzzle, despite repeated debates in French colonial circles during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The discussions centred on whether the legal status of Laos as a whole should be considered as a colony – which would imply that the Kingdom of Luang Phrabang should be regarded as and administered as a colony – or as a protectorate.² In 1923 an indigenous consultative assembly was formed but no representational government followed.

The new colonial space of Laos was part of the overall colonial space of Indochina and from the outset the French colonial project in Indochina was guided by a vision to make this wider space a reality. In his book *Turning Peasants into Frenchmen*, Eugen Weber has discussed the importance of infrastructure – roads, railways and bridges – as an agent of change in the modernisation and nationalisation of rural France at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Weber, infrastructural developments not only make space manageable but can be linked with movements in time and mind as well. He sees roads and railroads as ‘great motors of civilization’ and as important tools in the formation of the modern French nation-state. In his words: ‘there could be no national unity before there was national circulation.’³ Infrastructure bound the national space together and contributed to making it a living reality. In the same manner, the formation of French Indochina was also associated with endeavours to make the Indochina-wide space a reality through the development of transport, infrastructure and communications networks. Historically, access to the territories that became Laos had been primarily via the Khorat Plateau to Bangkok. Therefore, to make Indochina a reality and make Laos a viable part of an Indochina-wide space implied a de-linking of Laos from Siam in terms of infrastructure. Attempts to nationalise Laos itself in terms of infrastructure came later. Initially,

in French colonial thinking railways were envisaged to form the basic infrastructural skeleton of Indochina. Thus, a 1898-scheme projected a line running north–south between Saigon and Hanoi which would be connected with other lines running east–west linking the coastal areas with parts in the interior of French Indochina. It was hoped that this railway-network would link not only the French colonial space together but would also divert trade to and from adjacent territories – northern and northeastern parts of Siam – away from Bangkok.⁴ This scheme was never achieved and only the line running along the coast was constructed. Instead, an overall network of roads across the Annamese Cordillera was envisaged to form the arteries linking Laos with the coastal areas in Indochina breathing life into the colonial space of Indochina.

However, the construction of durable roads binding Indochina together progressed only slowly. At the same time, in Siam roads and railways stretching out towards Laos were built. In 1921, Chiang Mai was linked with Bangkok by railway and Chiang Mai was linked to Chiang Rai further north by road. According to the French Resident Commissaire in Huoixai in northern Laos this created a situation where goods from Bangkok could reach Huoixai in 20 days while the same goods would take at least three to four months travelling up the Mekong.⁵ In 1900, Khorat was linked to Bangkok by railway and a network of roads and tracks running towards the Mekong River meant that Vientiane was only an estimated four days transport from Bangkok. In terms of infrastructure Laos was evolving within a larger Siamese space. That Laos was placed in such position vis-à-vis Siam was repeatedly pointed out in reports in the first half of the 1920s to the Résident-Supérieur in Laos by Roland Meyer – Chef de la Sûreté in Laos. According to Meyer the closeness between Siam and Laos in terms of infrastructure caused French returning to France from Laos to travel through Siam and not Saigon.⁶ But he notes also how Laos in an economic sense formed a hinterland of Siam as the major part of Laos's exports and imports 'converged on Bangkok as the fingers on a hand.'⁷ From a French point of view this linkage between Siam and Laos was further aggregated when

a Siamese air service and truck service between Nong Khai and Khorat was introduced in early 1924. Hereby Vientiane was only 25 days from France via Bangkok as compared with 50 days via Saigon. If these services were consolidated, Laos would, according to Meyer, become in reality 'the country within Indochina the closest to Europe'. In order to keep Laos within the French sphere of influence Meyer called for a speed-up of the infrastructural developments within Indochina, including an upgrading (*empierrement*) of the road between Thakhek and Vinh and the construction of a railway between Tanap and Thakhek.⁸

The inauguration of Route Coloniale No 8 from Thakhek over the Nape Pass to Vinh (280 km) in late 1924 and Route Coloniale No 9 between Savannakhet and Dong-ha just north of Hue (330 km) in 1926 can be seen as measures to de-link Laos from Siam in the field of infrastructure. These roads certainly served to shorten past itineraries for transport across the Annamese Cordillera. (See Figure 3.) In 1910, the previous route between Vinh and Thakhek implied the use of four different means of transport – rail, samphan, horse or elephant, and finally pirogue – and it was estimated to take 14 days.⁹ In reality, however, these new roads left much to be desired. Only Route Coloniale No 9 was passable all year around. Route Coloniale No 8 could be driven by trucks only in the dry season and was impassable in the rainy season due to flooding. Therefore, according to a French traveller on Route Colonial No 8 in 1925, the new roads running across the Annamese Cordillera did not imply a reversal of trade from Bangkok. In his words, it was only the French who bought their provisions in Saigon, while local traders acquired foreign goods in Bangkok. In short, transport through Siam remained cheaper and quicker.¹⁰ Looking to the northern parts of Laos, the region of Luang Phrabang was also evolving clearly within a Siamese-centred space. While a road between Vinh and Xiengkhuang existed by 1925 this road could only be travelled on for five months a year due to rain and flooding in the remaining part of the year. Further, travel beyond Xiengkhuang to Luang Phrabang was very difficult and supported no transportation of goods. Therefore, the shortest itinerary for the

transport of goods to Luang Phrabang was through Siam along the following route: from Bangkok to Lampang by railway, then by car to Chiang Rai, and finally by river to Luang Phrabang. This route was considerably quicker than the eight months calculated for goods travelling to Luang Phrabang from Saigon.¹¹ Reflecting the same spatial orientation, in a book on Laos published on the occasion of the Exposition Coloniale in 1931, tourists travelling to Laos were advised that the quickest way from Europe to Laos was to go through Siam.¹² In the 1930s the closeness between Siam and Laos in terms of infrastructure was further accentuated when the Bangkok–Ubon railway was constructed with its terminus merely about 30 kilometres from Pakse.

From the middle of the 1930s attempts to counter the Siam–Laos nexus were also made with recourse to air transport. From February 1935, Vientiane was placed on the schedule of Air France implying that Vientiane was only nine days from Paris and three hours from Hanoi, as compared with twenty and six before.¹³ Still, it was within the field of road construction that Laos should be de-linked from Siam. Thus, the opening of the road between Xiengkhuang and Luang Phrabang in the middle of the 1930s was widely regarded as the means to achieve the de-linking. Following this development in Laos's infrastructure the layout of Indochina's network of roads was dominated by two major arteries. One was the so-called Route Mandarine running between Saigon and Hanoi along the coast. The other was Route Coloniale No 13 – or Route René-Robin as it was also called – linking the same two cities but following the Mekong Valley. This road was hailed as bringing Laos firmly into the Indochinese family and implying a definite break away from Siam. In the words of a contributor to the journal *Le Monde Colonial Illustré*:

The antique kingdom of Lan Sang [Xang] that became Laos under the French protectorate was until 1926 more or less isolated from the rest of Indochina. Separated from the ports in Tonkin and Annam by the Annamese Cordillera and only linked to the rest of the world by the Mekong the destiny of this country seemed to be the economic satellite of Siam as the politics seemed to link by



Figure 3: Infrastructure of Laos in the colonial period.

railroad the various locations of the Mekong with Bangkok instead of with the French ports, especially Saigon.

But now, according to the same author, due to the new roads Laos has 'entered the economic unity of the colony.' The roads have led to:

[...] a veritable miracle of spatial and moral rapprochement. Laos has taken its place with the other countries in the Union and now the Indochinese *communauté* is complete.¹⁴

Under the headline *Le réveil du Laos* the same achievement within the field of road construction was extolled in another article in *Le Monde Colonial Illustré* as:

[...] the beginning of a new era where Laos liberated from its isolation, freed from hindrances will occupy its legitimate position in the Indochinese family. [...] by this work Laos has been awakened from its nightmare that has oppressed it for a long time.¹⁵

Still, we have to distinguish between imagination and reality. Whereas the cartographic representation of these roads reflects an imagined integrity of Indochina in terms of infrastructure, they still had many shortcomings. First, the road between Xiengkhuang and Luang Phrabang was passable for motorcars in the dry season only. Second, central parts of Route Coloniale No 13 were only passable in the dry season and other parts simply were not constructed yet – this included 70 kilometres on the leg between Vientiane and Luang Phrabang and the entire stretch between Thakhek and Paksane. So despite the endeavours to de-link Laos from Siam, Laos remained a contested space caught at the intersection of two conflicting spatial layouts – Siam and Indochina. However, from an intra-Indochina perspective the new roads led to an unprecedented movement of Vietnamese civil servants and workers within Indochina.

LAOS IN INDOCHINA: THE VIETNAMESE LINK

In French colonial thinking and practice the Vietnamese were closely associated with the Indochina-wide colonial space as they were sup-

posed to form the indigenous backbone of this construction. This pro-Vietnamese aspect of French colonial policies found expression in a westward movement of Vietnamese in order to staff the administrative apparatus in Laos and Cambodia with Vietnamese civil servants, and to exploit local resources by means of Vietnamese peasants and workers. In absolute numbers the Vietnamese in Laos remained small. The size of the Vietnamese population in Laos increased from an estimated 4,000 people in 1912 to 44,500 in 1943 when they made up around merely four per cent of the total population of Laos.¹⁶ Nonetheless the Vietnamese had a disproportionate impact on Laos's society, as they were concentrated in urban areas. Thus, in 1937 the Vietnamese in Vientiane numbered 12,400 people in comparison to only 9,570 Lao. The same pattern was reproduced in other urban centres in Laos with an even more radical discrepancy between the Lao and the Vietnamese. In Thakhek and Savannakhet respectively the Vietnamese accounted for 85 and 72 per cent of the total urban population in 1943. The only exception was Luang Phrabang, where the Lao population accounted for 61 per cent of the total in the same year.¹⁷ In the urban centres the Vietnamese worked as traders and workers or were employed as civil servants in the colonial administration and by the middle of the 1930s a little more than half of the posts in the French administrative level of the administration in Laos was staffed with Vietnamese civil servants.¹⁸ The presence of the Vietnamese in Laos was a most tangible indicator of how the newly constructed roads running in an east–west direction across the Annamese Cordillera had broken down earlier barriers to the movement of people. For the Vietnamese civil servants travelling on these roads, Indochina constituted an overall space in which they roamed around in pursuit of employment within the colonial administration. By 1930 a situation existed, when, in the words of Christopher Goscha:

[...] thinking in Indochinese terms for an Annamese [Vietnamese] was not as hard as it once seemed or as it might seem to us today. Traditional barriers to his mobility were being eroded by French

colonialism, eschewed or expanded by the necessity of creating and running a modern Indochinese political, economic and administrative space. The automobile, the map, the bureaucracy, and an unprecedented Indochinese network represented a major reorientation in traditional conceptions of time and space by 1930.¹⁹

This policy of bringing Vietnamese into Laos could be seen as a rational solution to a practical problem within the confines of an Indochina-wide colonial space. Since Laos had come into being French colonial administrators had repeatedly complained about the lack of human resources in this part of the French colonial empire. For example, Lucien de Reinach – who served as Commissaire du Gouvernement in Laos in the early twentieth century – estimated that only around 30,000 of the 80,000 square kilometres of farmable land found in Laos was under cultivation in the first decade of the twentieth century due to manpower shortage. Based on this calculation Reinach believed that an increase in the population of Laos amounting to about 500,000–600,000 people was needed to put the land in Laos under full cultivation.²⁰ In order to alleviate this under-population of Laos the French made early attempts to populate the east-bank territories with people who had been moved from these territories by the Siamese prior to the establishment of Laos. To this end Chao Lek – a prince from Luang Phrabang who had been sent to Bangkok for education in the late 1880s – was attached to the French delegation in Bangkok as a kind of ‘chef for the numerous Lao in Siam’. In this capacity he travelled around Siam to recruit Lao to return to the east-bank territories at the turn of the twentieth century.²¹ This was allowed in accordance with the convention attached to the 1893 treaty. According to Reinach only a total of around 2,000 families – amounting to approximately 8,000 people – returned to the east-bank territories following such initiatives.²² Against this background, Reinach argued for the move of Vietnamese into Laos in order to profit from what he saw as the under-populated plains in southern Laos and to put an end to the ‘ostracism’ which Laos had experienced for too long. To move Vietnamese into Laos made sense from an Indochina-wide per-

spective. For, as Reinach put it: 'isn't [Laos] today part of the large Indochinese family; [and aren't] all the people forming [this family] in the same way French subjects?'.²³ In the same manner, Gosselin, who served also as Commissaire du Gouvernement in southern Laos at the end of the nineteenth century, saw the Vietnamese peasants as the key to the exploitation of Laos's agricultural resources and linked the movement of Vietnamese into Laos with a 'natural expansion' of a people in constant growth.²⁴ At the same time such a movement of people was expected to lessen the problem of overpopulation, especially in Tonkin. A French colonial administrator in Laos hoped that roads constructed across the Annamese Cordillera linking the overpopulated parts of Annam and Tonkin with the areas with a lower population density on the Mekong would create a situation where the different regions were connected as 'communicating vessels' (*vases communicantes*).²⁵

The population of French Indochina, 1921

	Population	(%)	Area (km ²)	(%)
Cochinchina	3,795,613	20	66,000	9
Annam	4,933,426	26	150,000	21
Tonkin	6,850,453	36	105,000	15
Laos	818,755	4	214,000	30
Cambodia	2,402,585	13	175,000	25
Kouang-Tcheou-Wan	182,371	1	842	–

Source: Albert Sarrault, *La mise en valeur des colonies francaises* (Paris: Payot, 1923), p. 131.

However, this need to bring Vietnamese into Laos in order to gain economic benefits from this part of Indochina was linked also with concerns other than the demographic setup of Indochina. First, when the French strove to establish colonial rule in eastern Indochina – Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin – they were faced with armed resistance and Chinese incursions. To associate Vietnamese bureaucrats with the new colonial construction of Indochina formed

one way to convince them that their interests were compatible with the French colonial project and thereby gain their support. As Jules Harmand argued in 1885:

The day that this race [the Vietnamese] see that its historical ambitions can, thanks to us, come to fruition in ways that it never imagined; when [the Vietnamese] sees that our aid allows him to take vengeance for the humiliations and defeats that he has never forgiven his neighbours; when he feels definitely superior to them and sees his domination expand with ours, only then will we be able to consider that the future of French Indochina is truly assured.²⁶

Second, the centrality of the Vietnamese to the French colonial project was reinforced also by the stereotypical dichotomy between the Lao and the Vietnamese that crystallised within the French colonial discourse on Laos and the Lao in the late nineteenth century: between the dynamic and industrious Vietnamese as opposed to the decadent and lazy Lao. The designs of Governor-General Paul Beau (1902–08) to settle Vietnamese farmers on the fertile plains of the Mekong was, for example, not only intended to solve a demographic problem but was also envisioned as an important means to counter what was perceived as Siamese designs to absorb western Indochina in a greater Thai entity. Beau's perception of the Vietnamese versus the Lao was framed with reference to a perception of the history of mainland Southeast Asia characterised by the battle for superiority between two major races. The Vietnamese and the Thai constituted these two combatant races while the Lao and Cambodians figured as races on the verge of extinction. Within Indochina it was, according to Beau's vision, only the Vietnamese who were numerous enough, cohesive enough and had the right personality to 'take up the battle successfully and smash this effort towards a unity of the Thai race before it can be realised' – and potentially undermine the integrity of French Indochina.²⁷ Taken to its logical extreme, such an association of the development of Laos with that of the dynamic Vietnamese manifested itself in a vision of a future Laos turned into a Vietnamese space – 'Laos Annamite' – rather than a Lao space. Reflecting this negation of a 'Lao Laos', plans to split up the administrative structure

of Laos and attach the separate parts to the administration found in neighbouring territories within Indochina was aired in 1902–03 under the governorship of Paul Beau.²⁸

As is evident from the figures for the Vietnamese population in Laos found at the beginning of this section, great numbers of Vietnamese farmers never moved into Laos and a ‘Vietnam-ification’ of Laos, as Paul Beau desired, did not take place. The idea of turning Laos into a Vietnamese space was, however, brought forward not only at the turn of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, at a time when the numbers of Vietnamese in Laos increased rapidly, this idea was strongly supported by influential French colonial administrators in Indochina and Vietnamese nationalists. One ardent advocate of the formation of a ‘Laos Annamite’ was Jean Marquet – a longtime civil servant in eastern Indochina and author of several texts extolling Vietnamese tradition. In 1925 Marquet travelled to Laos on the newly constructed Route Coloniale No 8 running between Vinh and Thakhek and he was thrilled with what he saw:

The Annamese [Vietnamese], who are marvellous colonisers, have begun to invade Laos. There are already 3,000 of them in Vientiane. Placed before them, the Laotians, gentler and less organised, have drawn away. The Annamese [Vietnamese] peddler wrests or buys up everything he can in the most remote of places. Despite the wild animals, some of them make 15-day road trips to bring back to the Delta a sow and her piglets, whipping them along the way. Soon, thanks to trucks the Annamese [Vietnamese] will push the Laotians into the unhealthy forests.²⁹

With the roads Marquet believed that more Vietnamese would follow and with them the development of Laos:

Very mild temperatures, the great silence of mountainous banks and the ‘susu’ peace of gentle and happy Laos. For the Laotians are perfect beings, on one condition: that you do not ask them to work! This country is horrified by [physical] exertion like a mad dog is by water. And this leads us into a terrible blind-alley: either doing nothing in order to conserve the Laotian or developing the country and the Laotians will disappear. They have already fled Vientiane;

3,000 Annamese [Vietnamese] have replaced them. They [the Laotians] increasingly abandon Luang Phrabang, whose population has decreased by half over the last ten years. On the other hand, 400 Annamese [Vietnamese] have now settled in and work there. The development of this country, whose potential is nonetheless enormous, cannot be done without the Annamese [Vietnamese] race. Without considering this saving fact and until it happens, Laos will continue to be what it is, to use the words of the late Van Vollenhoven: a blister on the foot of the peasants from Annam.³⁰

The same year, Marquet aired similar views in a lecture to the Education Society of Tonkin as he called for a full-scale colonisation of Laos by the Vietnamese who were 'superior both in number and worth to the other Indochinese peoples', who, he argued, 'would be fatally absorbed' one day or another by the Vietnamese. Reflecting the same view on Vietnamese expansion within Indochina he wrote later in a personal dedication to Bao Dai: 'Soon the Mekong River will be the final western wall of your three clawed Empire! Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin.'³¹ In arguing so Marquet set the stage for Indochina as the geographical framework for a Vietnamese nationalism which was advocated also by many Vietnamese nationalists in the 1920–30s, implying the transformation of Laos from a 'Lao Laos' to that of a 'Laos Annamite'.

Such a perception of Laos was contested from various positions. For many a Vietnamese nationalist the geographical delineation of their nationalism was 'limited' to Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin and did not imply a 'Vietnam-ification' of Laos.³² It was, however, also rejected by a prominent Lao voice. In March 1931 the Hanoi-based newspaper *France-Indochine* published an interview with the Prince Phetsarath which addressed the issue of Vietnamese immigration into Laos. Prince Phetsarath was born into the royal family of the Luang Phrabang Kingdom as son of Viceroy Boun Kong in 1890. After having been educated abroad – in Vietnam, France and England – he returned to Laos as a young man. Here he pursued a career in the colonial administration and rose to the post of Inspector of Lao Political and Administrative Affairs – the

highest post for a Lao in the colonial administration in Laos. His education, position, travels and curiosity put him in touch with the country, its peoples, their needs and Laos's future. Up until the end of World War II, Prince Phetsarath emerged as one of Laos's most important modernisers under French colonial rule and an ardent nationalist. In the interview, Prince Phetsarath stated that he was not totally opposed to Vietnamese immigration into Laos. But he stressed that the immigration had to be controlled and the immigrants had to be subjected to the current law and institutions in Laos so that they should not end up forming a state-within-the-state. In that connection Prince Phetsarath also stated clearly his opposition to the existing split-up of Laos into two separate entities. For him Laos did exist and should be united as one political entity under the King of Luang Phrabang.³³ What we have here is a clash between a French administrative and a local nationalist perception of the state. From a French Indochina administrative point of view Laos formed a viable administrative entity – no matter if it was split into two separate administrative entities or whether Vietnamese dominated its administrative apparatus and major towns. From a nationalist point of view, however, such a situation was highly untenable.

A similar critical stance towards the prospects of Laos as a potential receptor of Vietnamese immigrants was shared and advocated by French serving in the colonial administration in Laos. Some years before the interview with Prince Phetsarath appeared in the press, a report dealing with the prospects of Vietnamese immigration into Laos was submitted to the Résident-Supérieur of Laos. The report was written by J. Dauplay, who served as Inspector of Political and Administrative Affairs in Laos. At that time Prince Phetsarath also held the position as the Lao Inspector of Political and Administrative Affairs in Laos and there is a basic agreement between Dauplay and Prince Phetsarath concerning the role they assign for the Vietnamese in Laos. The main conclusion of the report was that the influx of Vietnamese into Laos should not be stopped but controlled so that the Lao were not squeezed out of Laos – as Marquet hoped. Dauplay had decided to submit the report as a reac-

tion to what he had witnessed during a trip to Tonkin in 1924. There he had been appalled by the perception of Laos he had encountered among his colleagues working in this part of Indochina – a perception he believed could be linked with what he called the ‘myth of Laos’. He summarised this myth in the following three points. First, Laos is a poor country without interest for the French except as a spillway for the surplus Vietnamese population. Second, there is no need to worry about the population increase in Tonkin as Laos with its immense fertile – but yet uncultivated areas – can absorb this population. Third, the French need only be inspired by the work of Gia Long and do with Laos what he had done in Cochinchina.

According to Dauplay most of the land in Laos that could be farmed was already occupied by Lao farmers and only a limited quantity of uncultivated land of poor quality was available. Therefore he called for the making of an inventory of land actually available in Laos for Vietnamese peasants. The stream of Vietnamese peasants had to be moderated in accordance with the reality of available resources rather than mythical perceptions of Laos. For, as Dauplay puts it, ‘nobody in Laos wants the Lao to disappear and supports the invasion of the Annamese [Vietnamese] race.’³⁴ Dauplay’s point of view was seconded by the French Commissioners in Thakhek, Savannakhet, Pakse, Vientiane, and Saravane.³⁵ Later, he became Résident-Supérieur in Laos *per interim*. In this position he passed on his report to the Governor-General of Indochina and recommended that no more than 10,000 Vietnamese families should be allowed to settle in Laos, which, he pointed out, was an amount far from what was ‘presumed by many Indochinese personalities.’³⁶ In the report Dauplay does not state who these ‘Indochinese personalities’ include but from a note he later wrote to the Governor-General of Indochina it is clear that he had Marquet in mind. In the note he asked for permission to send the relevant dossiers to Marquet ‘in order to open his eyes.’ This was authorised by the Governor General.³⁷ The position of Dauplay was therefore not to call for a total stop to Vietnamese immigration into Laos but to ensure that this immigration was controlled in accordance with local needs and resources,

instead of being framed by social-Darwinist perceptions of the Lao versus the Vietnamese, a call that also implied the preservation of a Laos for the Lao.

In public, Marquet's position was also countered implicitly in an article in the journal *Le Monde Colonial Illustré* by a Doctor Legendre, who had also travelled on the newly opened Route Colonial No 8 in 1925. On the one hand, Legendre hailed the new road and the possibilities it offered in relation to the exploitation of resources in Laos by bringing in people from Tonkin who he characterised as 'a group of people more active than the Lao', a position that fits well with Marquet's vision of a 'Laos Annamite' and the metaphor of connected vessels. On the other hand, Legendre also offered a notable reservation as he pointed out that this Vietnamese immigration should only involve a limited amount of Vietnamese so that they did not exert any influence on the 'social environment' of the Lao. In fact, Legendre held that the construction of new roads would in fact make Vietnamese immigration into Laos unnecessary, as the roads would make it possible for the Lao to export their products, which in turn would induce diligence among the Lao.³⁸

In a book on Laos published as part of the official publications on the occasion of the Exposition Coloniale in Paris in 1931 we are presented with the same opinion that a balance has to be reached between, on the one hand, the need for harvesting economic gains from Laos by employing Vietnamese manpower, and, on the other hand, for Laos to be a function of the Lao. In the words of the author, Roland Meyer:

Laos for the Laotians? Without a doubt. The Laotians are the ethnic majority and the first occupiers of the land. They will remain the real masters. But, as a scattered race or a not very prolific one, they will not be able to elude the demographic phenomenon of [increasing the population] through [bringing in] non-natives, which will develop and regenerate their country [*pays*].³⁹

For Meyer there was no doubt that the Vietnamese constituted the non-native element necessary for the economic development of

Laos. By constructing roads across the Annamese Cordillera the French had created the necessary conditions for opening up Laos for the Vietnamese. In this process, however, Laos was opened up for a population more 'bold, enterprising, [and] ready to fight' than the Lao and a population that may make a 'mouthful' of the Lao. According to Meyer, it was the responsibility of the French to avoid this. It was the duty of the French to safeguard the Lao in Laos against this non-native element:

As long as our protected [the Lao] have not learned to defend themselves, we will have to exercise a guardianship [over them], unless we want to see them eliminated by coming into contact with more audacious races and disappear from their own *patrie*.⁴⁰

To present Laos as a distinct Lao *patrie* within Indochina was in conformity with the political orientation taken especially under the governorship of Pierre Pasquier, who served as Governor-General of Indochina in the period 1928–34. For Pasquier French Indochina was to be developed along federal lines, implying that the French colonial project should be linked with the preservation of local identities, languages and traditions, to be bound together by French colonialism.⁴¹ While Pasquier had already taken this position in the late 1920s it was strengthened by the communist and nationalist revolts in Tonkin and Annam in the early 1930s. In the light of these revolts, a Vietnamese dominance of Indochina figured no longer as a dynamic factor to buttress French colonial rule. An Indochina dominated by the Vietnamese could now be seen as a threat to continued French colonial rule. From this point of view, French preservation of cultural traditions within Indochina other than the Vietnamese made sense. Such an orientation in French policies was well understood by Prince Phetsarath, who, in the interview mentioned earlier in this section, did not miss the chance to air it in public. Thus, Prince Phetsarath argued that his proposition to buttress Laos as a Lao space within the overall Indochina-wide colonial project from a French colonial point of view was politically more opportune than turning it into a Vietnamese space. Here he played

up the vision of the Lao as a loyal and pro-French population while the Vietnamese were associated with anti-French communism.⁴² In this manner a new dimension was added to the Lao–Vietnamese dichotomy, which placed the Lao in a more favourable light than the Vietnamese, and supported the idea of a Laos for the Lao. Later, Tzenas du Montcel, Inspecteur des Colonies, alluded to the same aspect of the Lao–Vietnamese nexus in a 1937 report on the advantages of gradually replacing the Vietnamese in the French administration in Laos with Lao:

The Laotian element represents an unquestionable loyalty and at this moment when the *pays annamite* is deeply wrought by revolutionary elements it seems not very [wise] politically to avoid playing an excellent card.⁴³

Therefore, Montcel also welcomed various initiatives undertaken in the 1930s to safeguard the place of the Lao in the administration in Laos. Here Montcel for example referred to various *arrêts* passed in the 1920s–30s in order to ensure that specific positions in the administration in Laos were occupied solely by Lao, measures that all pointed in the direction of strengthening the idea of Laos as a Lao space within Indochina as opposed to a ‘Laos Annamite’. In the following section we shall see how life was breathed into the notion of a ‘Lao Laos’ in a cultural sense by buttressing the notion of a distinct Lao cultural identity with reference to perceptions of history, religion and language. This process carved out a place for a ‘Lao Laos’ within Indochina and implied a de-linking of Laos from Siam from a cultural point of view.

TOWARDS A NATIONAL HISTORY OF LAOS

In the words of Benedict Anderson, one of the intriguing paradoxes of the modern nation-state is ‘the objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eyes vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.’⁴⁴ This paradox derives from the overt contradiction between, on the one hand, the modern and contingent nature of the nation, and, on the other hand, the nation as the subject of a linear and evolu-

tionary history rooted in a distant past. The linear and evolutionary perception of history has its roots in the Enlightenment's teleological model of history. Subsequently, it was spread to the colonial domains where it formed part of new knowledge forms that conquered other ways of conceptualising the past. The colonial state's diffusion of historical narratives includes not only the concept of historical time as linear and evolutionary but also, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has discussed, the validation of colonisation as a necessary dynamism that modernises regions lagging behind.⁴⁵ In the same vein, Penny Edwards has argued that in Cambodia the new historicist narratives introduced in the French colonial period comprised 'visions of descent from a glorious Angkorean past, and prospects of ascent to a thoroughly modern future which deviated from an indigenous reading of time as at once cyclical and, in its accommodation of spirits and living beings in the same temporal space, multilayered.'⁴⁶ With the advent of French colonialism a new way of writing history followed also in Laos and challenged and replaced the local chronicle tradition, which presented the history of a kingdom or dynasty, with a history of the modern state written along the lines of a modern national history.⁴⁷ The development of this kind of historical writing can be traced back to French colonial historiography in the early 1930s when the first comprehensive French history of Laos was written. This is the history of Laos produced by Paul Le Boulanger on the occasion of the Exposition Coloniale in Paris in 1931, in which a narrative locating the early roots of the modern state of Laos in a distant past is expressed. The major part of this book is dedicated to the treatment of the history of the Lao kingdoms in the Mekong region prior to the formation of Laos in 1893. Only in the last chapter is the history of French Laos treated, in merely fifty of the book's almost 400 pages.⁴⁸ Due to the cursory treatment of the modern state of French Laos found in this book, it could be argued that its title, *Histoire du Laos Français*, is in fact misleading. However, the apparent discrepancy between the title and content of the book expresses in fact the essence of the historical narrative – adding historical depth to the modern state. Thus, the history of

the modern state of French Laos is not limited to the history of the territorial state after it was founded by the French in the end of the nineteenth century. Rather, in the historical narrative proposed by Le Boulanger the history of French Laos is linked with the history of the Lao kingdoms in the Mekong region. In this manner the formation of French Laos becomes the culmination of a linear history in which the Lao kingdoms in the Mekong region form the constituent parts of the past and French colonialism forms the necessary dynamism safeguarding Laos.

It is also in the 1930s that the first history books in Lao adopting a national framework were written and used in schools in Laos. A good example of this shift in writing history is the course-book entitled *A Lao History/Chronicle* from 1934 written by two teachers in Vientiane. Another is a *A Lao Reader* published the same year in which a condensed presentation of Laos's history can be found in one of the chapters.⁴⁹ In these two text-books the history of Laos is depicted as following a chronological axis, in which the ancient Lan Xang Kingdom constitutes the early beginnings of Laos's history in terms of state structures. With reference to a pantheon of legendary Lao hero-kings personalising different epochs, we can divide the history into the following parts. Legendary King Fa Ngum (1353–73) represents the *formative period* and is hailed as the king who brought unity to the country by bringing the many hitherto independent principalities in the Mekong region under the sway of the King of Lan Xang to form the first independent Lao kingdom. In this process of state-formation Fa Ngum is also praised for bringing Buddhism to the kingdom to enhance the unity of the population. Proceeding along the chronological axis and the list of legendary Lao kings we encounter King Samsenthai (1373–1417), son and successor to Fa Ngum, who personalises a period of *consolidation*. Unlike his father, Samsenthai was not a warrior king or conqueror but a religious king who brought peace and tranquillity to Lan Xang. Society was put in order, military service improved, and the king cultivated friendly relations with neighbouring countries. Under his reign Lan Xang is characterised by peace and harmonious co-existence.

Proceeding further along this list of legendary Lao kings of Lan Xang we encounter the reign of King Setthathirat (1548–71), which marks a transitory step on the road to the apogee of the Lan Xang Kingdom, to be experienced later under the reign of King Souligna Vongsa. Although the capital city of Vientiane flourished under Setthathirat, his reign was marred by continued warfare against Burmese invaders. After a brief period when the Lan Xang Kingdom was under Burmese rule there followed a period of chaos and disorder, which gave way to the reign of King Souligna Vongsa (1637–94). This king personifies the *golden age*. His rule marks a period when the kingdom is more flourishing than ever. The account of Van Wuysthoff – the Dutch trader who visited Vientiane in the 1640s – is presented to give a colourful portrait of Vientiane as a joyful and pleasant city adorned with many temples. This reign is also a period in which much literature was produced by the many learned people residing in Vientiane.

From this point the accounts presented in the two books differ slightly. In *A Lao History/Chronicle* we encounter an elaborate account of how this golden age is followed by a period of gradual *decline* and an almost total annihilation of an independent Lao state. First, this process of decline is marked by the breaking up of the unity of the Lan Xang Kingdom as it is divided into ‘two countries’ (*kan baengpan pathet pen song fai*) or two ‘autonomous states’ (*dai baeng pen song ekarat*).⁵⁰ Champassack is mentioned as another state breaking away from the Lan Xang Kingdom, but as it quickly became integrated into Siam it is not dealt with as an independent Lao state on a par with Vientiane and Luang Phrabang.⁵¹ Following the disintegration of the Lan Xang Kingdom the history of Laos is tainted by increased Siamese intervention from the late eighteenth century, and finally by the destruction and disappearance of the Vientiane Kingdom in the early nineteenth century. The only bright spot in this process of decline was the reign of King Anou of Vientiane (1804–28). Not only did he reign over a prosperous Vientiane, but he also embodied the desire to free his country from the yoke of Siamese domination. But his efforts to liberate Vientiane

from the Siamese were unsuccessful. The result was devastating, symbolised by the sacking of Vientiane by Siamese forces. All that was left of the great and prosperous Kingdom of Lan Xang was the small Kingdom of Luang Phrabang. But the process of decline continued as the Luang Phrabang Kingdom is compared with a 'district in Siam' (*khēt khwaeng khong sayam*) and the status of the King of Luang Phrabang with that of a 'district official in Siam' (*kha rachakan khwaeng nai pathet sayam*).⁵² Despite the disastrous outcome of King Anou's fight against the Siamese he emerges as a genuine hero-king in the history of Laos due to his desire to free his country from the Siamese. In comparison, the contemporary King Manthathurat of Luang Phrabang is proclaimed the great villain of Lao history as he, due to selfishness (*chaj khaep*), refrained from supporting King Anou's crusade against the Siamese.⁵³ In the short account found in *A Lao Reader* the text deals with King Anou immediately after King Souligna Vongsa, with no explicit reference to the break-up of the Lan Xang Kingdom that happened in early eighteenth century. Neither is it mentioned that King Anou's kingdom was a vassal of Siam.⁵⁴ After praising the greatness of King Anou we are just told that he fought a war against Siam that marked the end of the 'civilisation of the Vientiane kingdom.'⁵⁵ Thus, while the split-up of Lan Xang is mentioned implicitly, the text nonetheless conveys a notion of continuity. Later in the text, however, reference is explicitly made to the fragmentation of Lan Xang into 'two countries'.⁵⁶

Finally, this pitiful phase in the history of Laos is followed by *re-constitution* under French rule. The French are linked with the liberation and resurrection of Laos and the first chapter covering this period of Laos's history in *A Lao History/Chronicle* is illustratively called 'The French Come to Help' (*falang khao ma suai*).⁵⁷ Just as the history of Laos preceding this period of re-constitution has been personified with reference to Lao kings, the French intervention is in the same way personified by Pavie to whom the King of Luang Phrabang and the people voluntarily entrusted themselves. Subsequently the accomplishments in the fields of health, education, and economy under French rule are cherished and the text leaves

no doubt about how France brought happiness to Laos.⁵⁸ The same interpretation of French rule is found in *A Lao Reader* where, for example, it is stated that under French rule the Lao have 'gained confidence in their own strength and wisdom'.⁵⁹

This narrative of Lao history is plagued by a great sense of discontinuity. From being a major kingdom, Lan Xang was first split up and later the smaller parts were either destroyed or integrated into Siam. Nonetheless, a pretence of continuity is presented in the narrative. First of all, throughout the text-books the term 'country' (*pathet*) is used as a prefix with both the historical kingdom of Lan Xang (*pathet lan sang*) and the modern state of Laos (*pathet lao*).⁶⁰ Secondly, the term for the modern state 'Laos' (*pathet lao*) is also employed with reference to the historical state. In *A Lao Reader* Fa Ngum is, for example, identified as the person who successfully 'unified Laos' (*huap huam pathet lao hai pen an nueng an diao*).⁶¹ In the same book, the link is stressed further by calling Lan Xang 'our country Lan Xang' (*prathet lan sang hao*).⁶² So despite the split-up preceding the reign of King Anou and the destruction of Vientiane, 'Lan Xang' is made synonymous with a timeless entity that continues to exist despite all the apparent changes. In the same vein it is mentioned in *A Lao Reader* how Vientiane – the capital of Setthathirat that the Siamese destroyed so utterly – has become the 'capital of Laos again' and even though it has changed, the temples and religious monuments are 'souvenirs of the glory of Lan Xang'.⁶³ The narrative brings Laos into being as a historically constituted state and what we have here is the outline of a proto-national history where the historical roots of the modern state are 'discovered' in the ancient past. What we have also, of course, is a nice example of a colonial legitimising discourse where the survival of a timeless 'Laos' is intimately linked with French colonialism.

In the last chapter we saw the importance of historical maps in representing Laos as a 'non-country' in Thai nationalist discourse in the 1930s. In *A Lao History/Chronicle* we encounter a sequence of maps similar to the ones discussed in the previous chapter for Siam. A map of Lan Xang (*pathet lan sang*) during the reign of King Fa

Ngum encompassing most of what is today northern and north-eastern Thailand and Laos is included, as well as one showing the boundaries of a much smaller contemporary Laos.⁶⁴ Whereas such maps express the historical greatness of 'Laos' they also accentuate how the history of Laos is a tale of decline. In the book this decline is, however, not linked with a wise strategy adopted by the king for the survival of the nation, and neither is a call for a return of the 'lost' territories voiced, which would have put the tale of decline in a positive light – as it was in Siam in the 1930s. To call for a 'return of the lost provinces' was impossible in this colonial representation of Laos's history because such a call potentially could have led to blaming the French for not 'resurrecting' all of Lan Xang. By invoking only the aspect of decline and the French as liberators the narrative becomes an important element in the colonial legitimising discourse. Through this historical narrative the lesson is taught that without the French Laos would not have existed in the modern period, a fact that haunts modern Lao historians who remember the 'lost' provinces.⁶⁵

The historical narrative and its associations with a colonial legitimising discourse are expressed forcefully in the fate of the city of Vientiane. Associated with the reigns of Setthathirat and Souligna Vongsa, Vientiane symbolises the apex of the golden age of the Lan Xang Kingdom. The destruction of this city by the Siamese thus expresses the quintessence of the Siamese oppression and tyranny that brought Laos to the brink of extinction. Resurrected by the French, Vientiane becomes a carrier of continuity in the history of Laos and a symbol of the resurrection of Laos under French tutelage. As this defunct city was resurrected from the past the streets were given the names of French colonialists and Lao kings of the past, expressing the close inter-linkage between Laos and the French in the present.⁶⁶ In the general survey of Laos published together with Le Boulanger's account of Laos's history on the occasion of the Exposition Coloniale in Paris in 1931, Roland Meyer neatly summarises the role of Vientiane in the colonial logic. Due to the historical position of this city devoid of links to the other parts of Indochina other than the Mekong River, the resurrection of Vientiane was not

an easy task to accomplish. But this 'task of a magician' – as Meyer calls it – was accomplished because of the important symbolism associated with this city:

[...] this leaderless country [Laos] should have a capital, a political centre [capable of] rallying the weak forces of the ancient generations and the hopes of the new. The site of Vientiane, the dead city, was chosen as a symbol for the renaissance of Laos and this bold initiative was what we needed to win all the hearts.⁶⁷

Furthermore, the link between the past and present was accentuated as the new premises of the French Résident-Supérieur were built on top of the remains of King Setthathirat's palace to form a new 'political heart of Laos called for to compensate for the vanished monarchy of Lan Cang [Xang]'.⁶⁸ All this was lost upon Jean Marquet. Reporting on his trip to Laos in 1925 he notes that he had seen instead the capital of Laos situated further south in Thakhek, which was the locality supposed to become the terminus of the projected – but never constructed – railway running from Tan Ap on the coast south of Vinh.⁶⁹ Whereas Marquet's idea might make sense from the perspective of infrastructure his suggestion does not take into account the potent symbolism associated with Vientiane – a symbolism that is meaningless in Marquet's perspective of a 'Laos Annamite'.

Later, after Vientiane had been resurrected, the link to the past was further accentuated through the restoration of religious monuments and temples. Of special interest were That Luang and Wat Phra Kaeo, dating back to the reign of Setthathirat, and Wat Sisaket, erected during the reign of Anou.⁷⁰ These were monuments that formed the last remains of a 'flourishing civilisation' and could give back to 'the ancient capital of the kings of Vientiane a part of the monuments that survive as testimonies of its splendour', as the Résident-Supérieur of Laos in 1911 noted to the Governor-General, requesting financial support for the restoration of these monuments.⁷¹ The restoration of monuments, however, not only supplied Laos with symbols representing a glorious past. As an inte-

grated part of the resurrection of Vientiane, they expressed also the essence of the historical narrative outlined above where the survival of the Lao was closely linked with French colonial rule. Thus, the monuments were relics of a glorious past that it has been possible to resurrect only because of the French. In relation to Wat Sisaket the Résident-Supérieur in Laos expressed the symbolic importance of the resurrection of this temple in the following manner:

Wat Sisaket, the doyen of the Laotian temples and the only survivor from the glorious kingdom of Vientiane, remains in the middle of the vestiges of the temples and ruined buildings as a symbol, to instil into modern Laos a remembrance of its history and the hope of a renaissance under the aegis of the French protectorate.⁷²

The problem of the resurrection of Vientiane from a national perspective was, however, that it endorsed the division of Laos into two separate spaces – that of the Kingdom of Luang Phrabang and the rest of Laos – with reference to the past. But what needs to be stressed is how the immediate past of the Siamese presence and expansion is bypassed with reference to a more distant past symbolised by an autonomous Lao past – whether this is done with reference to a united Lao political structure (Lan Xang), or separate Lao political structures (the kingdoms of Luang Phrabang and Vientiane). This perception of Laos's history clearly formed a counter-narrative to the Thai perception of Laos as a 'history-less' colonial construct. Through this narrative 'Laos' is placed on the historical scene and the discontinuities of a recent past are played down with reference to a distant past. This perception also formed a counter-narrative to what could be called a Vietnamese or Indochina-oriented approach to the history of Laos, which, for example, is expressed in a schoolbook on the history of Annam used for primary education in schools in Indochina. According to this text Laos 'had never formed a unified state placed under the authority of a single government' and when the French established protectorates over Annam and Cambodia it was only natural that the French also intervened in the Lao territories considered as vassals of these two kingdoms.⁷³ Here

we are confronted with a historical deconstruction of the modern state of Laos in accordance with a 'Laos Annamite' approach. The historical narrative found in schoolbooks and the monumental past represented by Vientiane as a whole and the temples of this town served not only to define Laos as a Lao space distinct from Siam but also singled it out as a separate, historically constituted country within Indochina. And this is also where religion could be used to serve nationalist ends.

TOWARDS A NATIONALISATION OF RELIGION:
THE BUDDHIST INSTITUTE

Vientiane formed an important regional centre for religious studies during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, attracting monks from Siam and Cambodia. But this position naturally was eclipsed after the town was destroyed by the army from Bangkok in 1828. Subsequently, Lao monks from the Khorat Plateau started travelling to temples in Bangkok for religious studies.⁷⁴ The revival of Vientiane by the French did not lead to Vientiane regaining its position as a centre for religious studies of regional importance. Yet, when a teachers' training college for monks (*école normale de bonzes*) was established in Vientiane in 1909 Vientiane became the centre where monks from all over Laos met for secular studies.⁷⁵ The foundation of this school was linked with the scheme of using the pagoda schools to diffuse secular education in the vast territories of Laos, and in the early 1930s more students were enrolled in pagoda schools than government schools.⁷⁶ At the school in Vientiane monk-teachers received instruction preparing them for their task as teachers of reading, writing, and calculation. A similar school was established in Luang Phrabang, while additional ones planned for other localities in Laos – in Pakse and Savannakhet – never materialised. Therefore, while Vientiane in this sense was revived as a secular educational centre for Lao monks this was not linked with religious education as in the past. Rather, in the religious sphere it was Bangkok that constituted the religious metropolis attracting monks not only from Laos but also from Cambodia for higher religious studies. According

to a French anonymous note from 1918, a situation existed where Laos and Cambodia,

due to their religious brotherhood [with Siam] are exposed to becoming spiritually dominated by Siam. Bangkok is a religious metropolis that exerts a major attraction on all Lao and Cambodian monks, educated as well as uneducated. Up to the present [Siam] has – in this part of the Far East – been the centre of Buddhist studies, the guardian of religious traditions, and the centre for a recognised ecclesiastic hegemony. It is there [in Siam] that the sacred texts are compiled and printed; it is from there they [the texts] are dispersed.

Such a close relationship between Laos and Siam in the religious sphere was *de facto* running against the integrity of French Indochina. This was a situation that potentially could be worsened if Thai monks were granted freedom to conduct missionary activity in Indochina, as the Franco-Siamese treaty of 1925 allowed. The note referred to above neatly summarised the political implications that could arise from such a religious association:

The consequences of such a liberty, appearing simply as being religious, may prove disastrous, as for Siam, Buddhism is before anything else a Siamese religion closely associated with Siamese patriotic ambitions. To prevent that a real nationalism unifies the two parts of French Indochina with Siam, we have to make Phnom Penh the base for all Buddhist propaganda.

The newly established Royal Library in Phnom Penh was conceived to form the centre for the efforts to counter the Siamese religious and political influence. With regard to the efforts to counter the Siamese influence in Laos it was stressed that a Buddhist revival in Laos could not be based on the initiatives in Cambodia exclusively. Therefore,

[i]t is advisable that the Royal Library in Phnom Penh is replicated in Vientiane or Luang Phrabang. This institution will be charged with distributing among the population in Laos Buddhist texts in Lao to replace the publications of the same order that derive from Bangkok. The danger of Siamification is much greater in Laos than

in Cambodia due to the geographical situation of our Mekong provinces and the closeness between the Lao and Siamese people who have related languages. So measures are necessary especially in this respect to protect our populations against Siam's spiritual and intellectual ascendancy [...].⁷⁷

It is interesting to note how the desire to de-link Laos from the religious sphere of Siam had also been stressed in connection with the plans for the restoration of Wat Sisaket a few years earlier. This temple was full of a potent symbolism related to a golden age in the history of Laos. For the Résident-Supérieur in Laos the restoration of this temple had suggested turning it into a museum. This plan was, however, met with disapproval by Lao monks and civil servants, who, in a petition signed by 57 of them in Vientiane – among these Prince Phetsarath – asked that the temple should instead become the domicile of the leading monk of the Vientiane region. By doing this the petitioners intended to resurrect Wat Sisaket as a centre for ceremonial practices that would attract Lao monks and laymen who used to go to Siam for religious festivals and ceremonies.⁷⁸ Taking the desire to de-link Laos from Siam in the religious sphere into consideration it will come as no surprise that these words were not wasted on the Résident-Supérieur. Rejecting the initial plan of turning the temple into a museum the Résident-Supérieur gave his full support to the project desired by the Lao as it implied a rehabilitation of the local religion that ultimately would serve as the best means to 'defend the Laotian personality against various influences that threaten to destroy it'.⁷⁹ Wat Sisaket was to be turned into 'the Buddhist cathedral of Laos', the centre for an 'artistic, cultural and intellectual renaissance, the base for the revival of the Laotian people'.⁸⁰ Subsequently, the Résident-Supérieur praised the way that this endeavour to turn the temple into an important ritual centre not only had contributed to stopping Lao monks from going to Siam for ceremonial purposes but also had even brought the chief-monk in Bangkok to visit the temple to perform his devotions, symbolising how Laos was about to 'regain' a position of regional importance in the religious sphere.⁸¹ It is interesting to note that according to a French *sûreté* report of May

1924 the abbot of Wat Sisaket had been approached by two Siamese civil servants who had delivered a letter to him. The letter was from relatives of the abbot who were government officials in Bangkok and who asked him to leave Vientiane and settle in Bangkok. It is not clear whether this request was motivated by personal motives or was linked with official designs of trying to counter the popularity of Wat Sisaket by removing a charismatic and influential monk. According to the *sûreté* report the abbot preferred to remain in Vientiane.⁸²

In Cambodia the formation of the School of Pali in Angkor in 1909 marked the beginning of attempts to reconstruct and popularise a local religious textual tradition and improve the education of Khmer monks. At the same time a Royal Ordinance of 1909 placed a near-total ban on Khmer monks travelling to Siam for study, in order to 'erect a clear, cultural boundary around Cambodia'. However, the School of Pali in Angkor had a short life as it was closed in 1910, but later the establishment of the School of Pali (1914) and the Royal Library (1925) in Phnom Penh formed part of the same trend of de-linking Cambodia from Siam in the religious sphere.⁸³ In Laos no specific initiatives seem to have been undertaken until the late 1920s. The re-organisation of the Buddhist clergy in Laos in 1928 may have been part of this scheme for a religious revival in Laos, but it is as Buddhist institutes were formed first in Phnom Penh in 1930 and later in Laos – Vientiane in 1931 and Luang Phrabang in 1933 – that the endeavours to de-link Laos from Siam in the religious sphere gained momentum.

With an *arrête* of 25 January 1930 the outline of the Buddhist Institute was established. The name Buddhist Institute was a shorthand for a hierarchy of various institutions encompassing Buddhist libraries and museums in Phnom Penh, Vientiane and Luang Phrabang, a School for Preparatory Studies in Pali (*Écoles préparatoires de Pali*) in Laos, Cambodia and Cochinchina, and a Higher School of Pali (*École supérieur de pali*) in Phnom Penh.⁸⁴ The section in Vientiane was opened with great ceremony in February 1931 and the speeches presented at that occasion neatly set the stage for the establishment of this institute.⁸⁵ First, the formation of the institute

embodies the positive impact of France on Laos's culture and society by acting as a guardian of local religious traditions. Second, it should serve to suspend the close relationship that previously had existed between Laos and Siam in the religious sphere. This was to be achieved, on the one hand, through a strengthening of the religious connections between Laos and Cambodia under the auspices of the Buddhist Institute, and, on the other hand, by establishing the section of the Buddhist Institute in Vientiane as a centre for the collection of old Lao religious manuscripts, for the writing of new texts and of learning for Lao monks. A Lao religious tradition was to be resurrected within the confines of Indochina devoid of Siamese influence and the inauguration of the institute in Vientiane was hailed as the beginning of a 'new era in Laotian intellectual development.'⁸⁶

As chairman of the institute in Vientiane we encounter Prince Phetsarath and as secretary Maha Sila Viravong, who was to have an immense impact on Lao culture over the next nearly six decades.⁸⁷ Born in Roi Et in Northeast Thailand in 1905, Maha Sila received his education in Siam, first in a local temple and later in Bangkok. In 1930 he decided to settle in Vientiane, crossed the Mekong River and became closely connected with the 'resurrection' of a Lao national heritage, first under the French and later under both the Royal Lao Government and post-1975 in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. In this endeavour it is very clear how he brought an intellectual framework from Siam into Laos and applied this in his effort to establish a Lao national heritage. Maha Sila is the author of the first Lao national account of Laos's history, which was supposedly written while he was in exile in Thailand during World War II, and his text is clearly influenced by the conceptual framework applied by contemporary Thai nationalist writers like Wichit Wathakan.⁸⁸

As the author of or translator-compiler of many of the textbooks intended for religious studies in Laos, the work of Maha Sila was intimately linked with the endeavours to resurrect Buddhism in Laos orchestrated by the French under the auspices of the institute in Vientiane. Among the texts produced by Maha Sila we find grammars of both Pali and Lao, Jataka tales, and a book of Buddhist

chants intended to serve as a standardisation-key for chants used in Laos. In the section of the Buddhist Institute in Luang Phrabang an ambitious project of translating the Tripitaka from Pali into Lao was undertaken. By 1939 the three first volumes had been published, but then the translator and compiler Maha Phal retired. No one suitable to continue the project apparently could be found and it was terminated. In terms of students attending the various Pali schools in Laos in 1939 it was reported that 115 students studied in Luang Phrabang while a total of 411 students attended the various Pali schools in Laos outside of Luang Phrabang, developments that were praised not only for the amount of students in absolute numbers but also for the fact that of the students attending the Pali school in Vientiane one came from Cambodia and twenty-two from Siam.⁸⁹

In the attempt to de-link Laos from Siam it was deemed necessary to establish an additional elementary Pali school in Bassak to stop monks from this locality going to Bangkok – easily accessible because of the Ubon–Bangkok railway – for religious studies. To establish a Pali school in this locality was therefore necessary, according to the minutes of the first meeting of representatives of the Buddhist Institute from Phnom Penh and Vientiane, from both a ‘moral and political point of view.’⁹⁰ Although the political aspect of the construction of the Pali school in this locality had been stressed at this meeting, this theme was, however, not popularised. In the report of the meeting published in the *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, for example, the political aspect of founding a new Pali school in this locality was not touched upon.⁹¹ Likewise, in the copy of the minutes of the meeting found in the Archives of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient the word ‘politique’ has been crossed out and substituted with ‘practique’ – probably by the then director of this institution.⁹² The importance of the political agenda associated with the Buddhist Institute, however, is clearly reflected in the discussions concerned with the removal of the long-time general secretary of the institute in Phnom Penh, Suzanne Karpelès, in 1941. In a note to the Governor-General written by the Résident-Supérieur of Cambodia shortly after the Thai attacks on areas in

Cambodia and Laos in 1941 the need is emphasised to dismiss Karpelès because of her lack of understanding of the 'political character' of the Buddhist Institute, as she had been associated with an attempt to renew the relations to Siam in the religious sphere that 'we intended to break'.⁹³ Given the political situation in the wake of the Thai attacks George Cœdès, the director of *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, recognised the need to replace Suzanne Karpelès and at the same time he also recognised the political implications of the work undertaken by this institution aiming at 'counterbalance the Siamese influence'. For Cœdès this kind of 'indirect counter-propaganda' being a product of scientific work was not incompatible with the objectives of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, but he objected to the proposal of replacing her with Manipoud, Inspector for Traditional Education (*Inspecteur de l'Enseignement Traditionnel*) in Cambodia, as he found that this would transform the Buddhist Institute into an outright political organ.⁹⁴ It has to be noted, however, that other factors also were behind the removal of Karpelès from her position in Cambodia. Not only had she encountered opposition from French-educated members of the Khmer elite, but she was also among fifteen Europeans forced from office in Indochina for being Jewish during the Vichy period.⁹⁵

While the foundation of the institute in Vientiane was associated with an attempt to stop Lao monks from going to Siam for religious studies, it is, however, significant that Lao monks still had to go outside Laos for higher studies in Phnom Penh. In this way Laos was still placed in a subordinate position in the religious hierarchy. In terms of learning the inferior position of the institutions in Laos had also been expressed at the initial meeting in Vientiane between monks from the institutes in Phnom Penh and Vientiane. When it was discussed what material should be used in Laos leading monks from Cambodia recommended that books in Khmer written by Cambodian monks for use at the institute in Phnom Penh should be translated and used by the institutions undertaking Buddhist teaching in Laos.⁹⁶ At the opening of the institute in Vientiane two of the books in Lao distributed were texts based on Khmer transla-

tions of Pali texts.⁹⁷ A third text distributed at that occasion was a booklet on Buddhist discipline attributed to the King of Luang Phrabang.⁹⁸ This booklet may have been distributed to invoke not only the notion of royal patronage of the Sangha but also the notion of the intellectual monarch as represented, for example, by King Mongkut of Siam (1851–68). While the use of Lao translations of Khmer texts presented a practical solution to the problem of building up an indigenous religious Lao textual tradition, this solution would embody the subordinate position of Laos *vis-à-vis* Cambodia and not stimulate the development of a Lao intellectual tradition. In fact, Maha Silá's endeavours to write textbooks can be seen as an attempt to build up a Lao textual tradition based on a Lao intellectual tradition independent of the Khmer. That the perceiving of Laos in a subordinate position with regard to Cambodia within the confines of the Buddhist Institute had been a source of conflict is evident from a comment made by Coédès when he proposed Paul Lévy as successor to Karpelès as General Secretary of the institute in Phnom Penh. He believed that Lévy's close relationship with Laos could ease the view held by people attached to the institute in Vientiane that the Buddhist Institute in general was too exclusively Khmer in nature.⁹⁹ Closely linked with this endeavour to build up a Lao religious textual tradition was the problem of the standardisation of the written Lao language.

TOWARDS A STANDARDISATION
OF THE WRITTEN LAO LANGUAGE

The Lao and the Thai languages are closely related. In their spoken forms they only display minor deviations with regard to tones and the pronunciation of specific vocals and combinations of vocals. In the written form, though, these languages have been submitted to different trends and at the turn of the twentieth century they displayed different characteristics. In this manner, spelling would come to reflect national differences, a vector for emerging Lao nationalism during the colonial period, and an important cultural battle for Lao nationalists both at that time and today.

Over a long period the Thai alphabet and orthography had gradually been modified and at the turn of the twentieth century the Thai writing system appeared as a quite fixed system. Tone-signs had been employed in order to indicate the five tones of the language and through an enlargement of the alphabet and use of the *karan* an etymological orthography was in the making.¹⁰⁰ The process towards a standardisation of Thai orthography can be traced back especially to the reign of King Mongkut, when the king personally took an interest in regulating or fixing the language through royal edicts as the printing of Thai texts increased – a development which, in turn, raised the need for a fixing of the orthography. Later, at the turn of the twentieth century, a series of dictionaries were published by the Department of Education. Although these were not intended as an authoritative and complete key to a standardisation of Thai spelling, they served definitely as a checklist for the meaning and irregular spelling of words of foreign origin.¹⁰¹ Likewise, a contemporary series of school textbooks contributed to delineate the framework for a spelling of Thai following an etymological principle.¹⁰² Although these texts were officially sanctioned none of them represented complete standardisation keys to a fixing of the Thai orthography. Still, they indicate how a process of standardisation of Thai spelling in accordance with an etymological principle was in the making in Siam at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰³ At the same time various dictionaries and grammars of the Thai language produced by Westerners appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century. In these the structures of the Thai language were presented to foreigners and thereby they contributed to presenting Thai as an ‘ordered’ or ‘fixed’ language in the eyes of foreigners.¹⁰⁴ Further steps towards a standardisation of the Thai language were taken in the 1920s as the Department of Texts was authorised to standardise spellings and create Pali-Sanskrit neologisms to replace some of the more commonly used English loan words. These changes were codified with the publication of the second and expanded version of the Department’s dictionary in 1928.¹⁰⁵

In comparison, the contemporary Lao writing system was far less complex, as the orthography was related to the phonetic rendering

of the word. While this orthographic principle made writing easy it also made it impossible to distinguish between homonyms in writing, a tendency further aggravated by written Lao being devoid of tone-signs. Consequently, reading was made difficult and for many words it was not possible to determine the exact meaning when read outside a context. The difference between the two writing systems is stressed by the compilers of the first Lao word lists or dictionaries that appeared in the early period of the French colonial adventure in the Mekong region.¹⁰⁶ While it was emphasised how the spelling of Siamese was so complex that it was difficult to spell correctly – even for learned Siamese – what followed implicitly from this comparison of the two languages was a hierarchical ordering in which Siamese represented a more developed language in comparison to a more primitive and basic Lao. Of course, this is a theme that linked up nicely with the notion of the process of degradation experienced by the Lao *vis-à-vis* the Siamese. Estrade, for example, in the introduction to his *Dictionnaire et Guide Franco-Laotiens*, neatly summarises the relationship between the two closely related languages in the following manner:

According to Laotian scribes, their language has varied little from its original [form]. The same cannot be said of the Siamese language, which has considerably changed in terms of its writing [system]. Pushed into the poorest and most uncultivated parts [of the country] by the inevitable flow of things, the Laotian has in no way been associated with the progress of the mother race [*la race mère, Siam*]. Reduced to the brutish state of a savage by that part which the environment made more intelligent [Siam], he [the Lao] could only obey obsequiously his master and in no way expressed the need to develop his intellect.¹⁰⁷

The expression of Lao as being subordinate to Siamese was carried to the extreme in a dictionary published by the French missionary Cuaz in 1904. In this dictionary Lao was presented as a dialect of Siamese and thereby denied the status of an independent language.¹⁰⁸ Cuaz introduced this Lao–French dictionary as a ‘mere supplement’ to his French–Siamese dictionary published earlier.¹⁰⁹ Further, in

cases where there existed a difference between the Lao and Siamese forms of a word, the Siamese form was given in order not to 'confuse people' who already had studied this language.¹¹⁰ Further, he informs the readers, as Siamese is the 'mandarin language' used by the nobles in Laos he urges foreigners to study this language in preference to Lao if they wish to pass as 'learned' in Laos.¹¹¹

In nationalist discourses language is generally perceived as the crucial criterion for nationality. Any discourse on the perception of Laos as a country independent of Siam with its own cultural identity had to reverse this relationship between Lao and Siamese and place the Lao language in a position *on a par* with Siamese. With regard to this process the Lao–French dictionary compiled by the French missionary Guignard represented an important break with the above-mentioned hierarchical ordering of Siamese and Lao.¹¹² Guignard placed the two languages side-by-side as different dialects within the overall 'Thay' language family. In his introductory chapters we find a systematic presentation of the Lao language that was intended to parallel the French-produced dictionaries of the Siamese language already in existence.¹¹³ In this manner Lao was established on an independent basis and Guignard further drew a dividing line between the two languages as he identified a sixth tone in Lao whereas Siamese only has five tones.¹¹⁴ To establish Lao as an independent language implies a process whereby the language is standardised and its structure codified with regard to its orthography and grammar. The existence of an officially sanctioned dictionary or grammar serving as an inventory of the language is the most tangible representation of language standardisation. Guignard's dictionary, however, did not fulfil this role as it was intended for foreign students of the Lao language and it never received official status. Consequently, it did not serve as an official guide to the Lao language. Furthermore, it did not solve the problem concerning the use of tone-signs. In its own right, however, it can be seen as an important symbol of the liberation of Lao from its subordinate position in relation to Siamese. In the same manner the French linguist Henri Maspéro distances himself from the, according to him, erroneous perception of Lao

as a dialect of Siamese in a study contemporary with Guignard.¹¹⁵ He thereby reconstitutes Lao as a separate language on the same hierarchical standing as Siamese – a relationship between the two languages that subsequently became generally accepted.¹¹⁶

At the same time, in Laos we encounter early attempts to give written Lao a more fixed form. The responsibility of carrying out the work necessary to standardise written Lao was left in the hands of various committees appointed by the Résident-Supérieur in Laos in the first half of the twentieth century. Although none of these committees were able to produce the needed key – that is an official grammar or dictionary – to standardise the language, written Lao was slowly acquiring a more fixed form. We have seen how Guignard's dictionary of the Lao language had been devoid of tone-markers. However, the use of these signs to indicate the tones of words had been recommended by a language commission in 1908.¹¹⁷ The use of tonemarkers was probably first institutionalised when a commission for schoolbooks in the Lao language, formed in 1917, stressed the need for tone markers and also set up a framework for the spelling of Lao. The guidelines put forward by this commission received the blessing of the educational authorities in Laos and Indochina and consequently were employed in schoolbooks in Laos.¹¹⁸ Thus, written Lao was achieving a more fixed form although a formal standardisation key was still missing.

A leading person behind this attempt to standardise written Lao was Pierre Lê-Ky-Huong – one of the numerous Vietnamese employed in the colonial administration in Laos who played a significant role in the formation of a national discourse in Laos. Lê-Ky-Huong's role in the standardisation of Lao was linked with his occupation as translator for the Résident-Supérieur in Laos and as director of the Government Printing Office in Laos. Here he used the fonts for printing Lao that the King of Luang Phrabang had purchased from Schneider and Co.¹¹⁹ It was, furthermore, also Lê-Ky-Huong who took the initiative to publish the *Bulletin Officiel du Laos* in Lao under the title *Codmaïhet*, which, of course, also pointed to the need for a standardised written language. The aim of *Codmaïhet* was to publish

documents of a official nature in Lao in order to show how taxes claimed by the French not were transferred to France, but – contrary to what the Lao according to Lê-Ky-Huong believed – were used for the betterment of economic and social conditions in Laos.¹²⁰ In 1917 he published a course in the Lao language and also co-authored many of the first Lao schoolbooks used in franco-indigenous schools in Laos.¹²¹ Unfortunately, I have not had access to either the documents outlining the orthographic principles employed or to the schoolbooks in Lao written by Pierre Lê-Ky-Huong from the early 1920s. A reading of schoolbooks from the 1930s indicates, however, how tonemarkers have been adopted and how the *karan* and irregular finals only occur to a limited extent.¹²²

Although this endeavour to standardise Lao spelling can be approached as a practical problem, it is important to stress how the question of language standardisation was of a highly politico-ideological nature with regard to the relationship between Laos and Siam, between Lao and Siamese culture. This is reflected in the reactions to a language reform of a rather radical nature suggested by Meillier, Government Commissioner (*Commissaire du Gouvernement*) in Luang Phrabang, in 1918. In short, Meillier proposed the use of Siamese letters to write Lao in order to facilitate the printing of books, particularly schoolbooks, in Lao.¹²³ Not surprisingly, this proposal caused strong reactions from, among others, Prince Phetsarath, who resisted such a scheme as it would ‘hasten the disappearance of the Lao writing system and thus undermine our Lao literature and our Lao language’. With the Siamese alphabet Siamese literature would follow and consequently the ‘spiritual influence of the Siamese would win over the Lao “spirit”’.¹²⁴ In other words, what was at stake was the survival of two important cultural denominators that could serve to detach Laos from Siam – language and literature. Only one year earlier, Finot’s study of Lao literature had appeared and served to dissociate Laos from Siam within the sphere of classical literature.¹²⁵ Were the Lao language and literature to vanish this would seriously weaken any Lao claim to be a country independent of Siam. As Prince Phetsarath put it:

Whereas the improvement of public instruction, that is, the recovering of Lao literature and language, is the *raison d'être* for this reform [proposed by Meillier], it will produce the opposite results of the envisaged. The implementation will be more regrettable as for only a minor sacrifice on behalf of the administration the printing house can be given the medium to spread books exclusively all over Laos and thereby restore the language of the country.¹²⁶

Instead, Prince Phetsarath called for a standardisation and codification of the structures of the Lao language. In the same vein Pierre Lê-Ky-Huong, adducing practical reasons, also objected strongly to Meillier's proposal without 'going into the political considerations.'¹²⁷ It was obvious that any attempt to consolidate the Lao language as different from Siamese had important political implications for the Lao–Siamese nexus. This close connection between language engineering and national politics was also well known to leading members of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*. In 1918 George Cœdès was asked to participate in the work to standardise Lao. At that time he was acting as the director of the Vajiranana Library in Bangkok, and he asked for certain precautions as he did not want letters to fall into the hands of the Siamese censors indicating his participation 'in a project which had as its goal to defend Laos against Siamese political influence.'¹²⁸

What none of the above-mentioned committees had been able to accomplish was carried out by the Buddhist Institute in Vientiane, which published the first grammar of the Lao language in 1935.¹²⁹ This grammar was compiled by Maha Sila Viravong, who – as we have seen – was one of the key figures in the Buddhist Institute in Vientiane since its foundation in 1931. As mentioned earlier this institute was explicitly concerned with building up a Lao religious textual tradition. Given this emphasis on local tradition it can therefore come as no surprise that the first manual to codify the rules of the local language also should emanate from this institute. The first volume of the grammar presents a basic outline of some of the fundamentals of the Lao language: the alphabet, tone-signs and the basic rules for their use, and some basic rules concerning spelling

– e.g. the use of the *karan*, consonant-clusters and irregular Pali-finals. It has to be noted that this grammar was not only intended as a guide to the contemporary language but it also introduced important new elements. Formerly two alphabets had been in use in Laos. One was the ordinary alphabet used in secular texts. The other was the so-called Tham alphabet used to transcribe religious Pali-texts. Through an enlargement of the ‘secular’ alphabet with 14 new letters, Maha Sila’s intention was to introduce the use of only one alphabet suited to render all the sounds of vernacular Lao as well as the religious texts in Pali. The motivation for this reform has to be sought in the above-mentioned endeavour to establish a Lao religious textual tradition. Just as the religious texts were to be ‘localised’, it was also the intention to make them more easily accessible by writing them with the same alphabet that was used in daily life. This was in conformity with the practice in Siam where only one alphabet was employed. Therefore, it was to be regarded as an attempt to ‘do as the Siamese but by means of what the Lao possess and have possessed’, as it was put by Prince Phetsarath.¹³⁰ Or, as it was put by Maha Sila in the foreword to this *Grammar*, the reform of the Lao alphabet was linked with an attempt to reverse a situation where religious texts in Laos only were written with the ‘alphabet of another nation/race’.¹³¹

Maha Sila’s grammar was never granted official status, however, and consequently it never became the master key to a standardisation of the Lao language. The reason for this has to be sought in the fact that the undertaking to standardise Lao was caught in the cross-fire between two contradictory approaches. On the one hand, we find the approach of the Buddhist Institute, seeking to be able to produce Lao in a written form rendering the non-Lao words in conformity with the orthography of their Pali-Sanskrit origins, implying the introduction of new letters in the alphabet. On the other hand, we find an approach seeking to adopt a more simple and uncomplicated system of writing in conformity with the one already in use in schoolbooks in Laos. These were the two positions that crystallised during the sessions undertaken by the Commission

for the Fixing of Official Lao Writing and Orthography that went to work in 1938–39.¹³² Following intense discussions the demand for simplicity became the victorious principle and consequently the Lao alphabet already in existence, with some minor modifications, was confirmed as the national alphabet.¹³³ From the proceedings it is clear that a spelling in conformity with some kind of phonetic principle was opted for, although no exact rules were laid out.

That the alphabet and grammar devised by Maha Sila were rejected in this way was, however, not only linked with practical considerations. Politico-ideological considerations were also at stake. For whereas the ultimate aim of Maha Sila's scheme was to de-link Laos from Siam in the cultural-religious sphere, the new strategy was to use Siam as a model and 'Lao-ify' the Siamese experience. It is significant that Maha Sila had relied heavily on Thai scholarship when writing his grammar: it was modelled closely on the influential *Fundamentals of the Thai Language*, produced by Phaya Uphakit in Siam over several decades.¹³⁴ Thus, an inherent problem in the model for the Lao language envisioned by Maha Sila was that it brought the spelling of Lao very close indeed to the spelling in use in Siam. This is reflected in a *Syllabaire Laotien* from 1936, where the author acknowledges the need for a regulation of the spelling of Lao but stresses that this should not imply a 'blind subjugation' to Siamese orthography – implicitly referring to Maha Sila's standardisation key.¹³⁵ Later the reform proposed by Maha Sila was interpreted as an outright attempt to adopt the Siamese etymological spelling system.¹³⁶ Although the politico-ideological aspect of the rejection of Maha Sila's model was never referred to in the proceedings of the Commission's work, this view no doubt contributed to the downfall of the Maha Sila model. However, the alphabet devised by Maha Sila was allowed to be used in religious texts published by the Buddhist Institute and in Pali schools in Laos.¹³⁷ But this did not include Luang Phrabang, where the Tham alphabet still was used in religious texts. So, all in all, three alphabets were in use in Laos in late 1930s and two orthographic principles. Still, these endeavours undertaken to standardise written Lao can be linked with the proc-

ess of de-linking Laos from Siam by protecting and promoting the written Lao language as a carrier of distinction in relation to Siam.

In his book on Laos published on the occasion of the Exposition Coloniale in 1931, Roland Meyer characterised the Lao as a people whom 'centuries of historical calamities had deprived of their strength and national unity, government, institutions, and erased the exact memory of their glorious past, their religion and even language.'¹³⁸ A unification of Laos under an indigenous political institution was not effected in the period dealt with in this chapter. Still, as the chapter has shown, in the 1893–1940 period we can discern the early contours of a Lao national tradition that emerged under French tutelage; a tradition that served to carve out a space for a 'Lao Laos' in relation both to a 'Greater Siam' and within the overall colonial space of Indochina; a tendency that was further accentuated during World War II.

NOTES

1. The term 'colonial backwater' is, for example, invoked by Geoffrey Gunn in the title of one of his books on Laos, *Rebellion in Laos. Peasant and Politics in a Colonial Backwater* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).
2. In his doctoral thesis the French lawyer François Iché gives a good overview of this discussion. He argues for the legitimacy of upholding the dual structure, see François Iché, *Le statut politique et international du Laos Français. Sa condition juridique dans la Communauté du Droit des Gens* (Toulouse: Imprimerie moderne, 1935).
3. Eugen Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), p. 218.
4. See, for example, 'Le développement des grandes voies de communications en Indochine', *Le Monde Colonial Illustré*, 50, 1927, pp. 228–229.
5. 'Résident Commissaire Houeisai à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur, Houeisai, le 11 Janvier, 1924, telegramme no 38', d. 40590, GGI, CAOM.
6. 'Note confidentielle, no 144/2, Vientiane, le 8 Avril 1924', d. 40590, GGI, CAOM.
7. 'Note Confidentielle de la Chef de la Sûreté du Laos résumant la situation des relations politique administratives et économiques entre le Laos et le Siam, Vientiane, le 31 Janvier 1924', d. 39634, GGI, CAOM.

8. 'Note confidentielle no 16/s de la sûreté du Laos, Vientiane, le 9 Janvier 1924', d. 40590, GGI, CAOM.
9. 'Itinéraire de Vinh à Hin-boun, corrigé et mis à jour au 1er août 1910', c. H1, RSL, CAOM.
10. Jean Marquet, 'Une excursion au Laos', *Le Monde Colonial Illustré*, 23, 1925, p. 182. Later, the president of the Chambre Mixte de Commerce et d'Agriculture du Laos reached the same conclusion, see 'Extrait d'une lettre du président de la Chambre mixte de commerce et d'agriculture du Laos, juin 1937', c. 27, CG, CAOM.
11. Jean Marquet, 'Voyage au Laos', *Le Monde Colonial Illustré*, 27, 1925, pp. 280–281.
12. Roland Meyer, *Le Laos* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1930), p. 80.
13. M.B., 'Le développement des voies de communication au Laos', *Le Monde Colonial Illustré*, 143, 1935, p. 77.
14. François Marty, 'De Saigon à Luang-Prabang – La route au secours du Laos', *Le Monde Colonial Illustré*, 179, 1938, p. 72.
15. 'Le réveil du Laos', *Le Monde Colonial Illustré*, 155, 1936.
16. Eric Pietrantoni, 'La population du Laos de 1912 à 1945', *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, 28:1, 1953, pp. 26, 34.
17. Eric Pietrantoni, 'La population du Laos en 1943 dans son milieu géographique', *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, 32:3, 1957, p. 230.
18. 'Rapport fait par Monsieur Tzenas du Montcel, Inspecteur de 3^{ème} classe des colonies, utilité du remplacement par étapes des auxiliaires annamites de l'administration française au Laos par des Laotiens, Vientiane le 13 Mars 1936', d. 2494(2), c. 287, NF, CAOM.
19. Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam and Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954* (NIAS Report, No. 28, Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), p. 42.
20. Lucien de Reinach, *Le Laos* (Édition posthume, revue et mise à jour par P. Chemin Dupontès) (Paris: Librairie Orientale & Américaine, without year), pp. 116–118.
21. 'Chao Lek à Monsieur le ministre de France à Bangkok, Bangkok, le 25 Novembre 1901', d. 25598, GGI, CAOM.
22. Reinach, *Le Laos*, p. 118.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
24. Gosselin, *Le Laos et le protectorat français* (Paris: Librairie académique Didier, 1900), p. 211.

25. Pietrantoni, 'La population du Laos de 1912 à 1945', p. 34.
26. Quoted in Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?*, p. 17.
27. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 17–18.
28. The 1902–03 plan is mentioned in Kennon Breazeale, 'Laos Mapped by Treaty and Decree', in Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Kennon Breazeale (eds), *Breaking New Ground in Lao History. Essays on the Seventh to Twentieth Centuries* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), pp. 328–329. In 1911–12 similar designs occurred again, see 'Résident Supérieur au Laos à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général, Vientiane, le 30 Novembre 1912, No 273', d. 21383, GGI, CAOM.
29. Marquet, 'Une excursion au Laos', p. 182.
30. Marquet, 'Voyage au Laos', pp. 280–281.
31. Quoted in Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?*, pp. 59–60.
32. This is documented by Goscha in his reading of the Vietnamese press, see Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?*, pp. 46–62.
33. F.I., 'La question laotienne. Opinions du Prince Phetsarath', *France-Indochine*, 3,416, 1931, p. 1. For a discussion of this article and its context, see Christopher E. Goscha, 'L'Indochine repensée par les "Indochinois": Pham Qũnh et les deux débats de 1931 sur l'immigration, le fédéralisme et la réalité de l'Indochine', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, 82:309, 1995, pp. 421–453. See also Søren Ivarsson and Christopher E. Goscha, 'Prince Phetsarath (1890–1959): Nationalism and Royalty in the Making of Modern Laos', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 38:1, 2007, pp. 55–81.
34. J.J. Dauplay, Inspecteur des Affaires Politiques et Administratives au Laos, à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Laos, Thateng, le 2 Mai 1924', d. 42054, GGI, CAOM.
35. See letters in d. 42054, GGI, ANSOM.
36. J.J. Dauplay, Résident Supérieur au Laos p.i., à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine, Vientiane, le 10 Septembre 1925', d. 42054, GGI, CAOM.
37. 'Telegramme Officiel, Résident Supérieur à Gouverneur Général, Vientiane le 30 Octobre 1925', d. 42054, GGI, CAOM.
38. A. Legendre, 'Coup d'œil sur l'Indo-Chine', *Le Monde Colonial Illustré*, 20, 1925, pp. 106–107.
39. Meyer, *Le Laos*, p. 62.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
41. Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina*, pp. 53–54.
42. F.I., 'La question laotienne. Opinions du Prince Phetsarath', p. 1.

43. 'Rapport fait par M Tzenas du Montcel', d. 2494(2), c. 287, NE, CAOM.
44. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [revised version]), p. 5.
45. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also the discussion in Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation. Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).
46. Penny Edwards, 'Making a Religion of the Nation, and its Language: The French Protectorate (1863–1954) and the Dhammakay', in John Marston and Elisabeth Guthrie (eds), *History, Buddhism and New Religious Movements in Cambodia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p. 66.
47. For examples of chronicle texts, see Charles Archaimbault, 'L'histoire de Champassak', *Journal Asiatique*, 4, 1961, pp. 519–595; Charles Archaimbault, 'Les annales de l'ancien Royaume de S'ienk Khwang', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 53:2, 1967, pp. 557–673; Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'histoire du Royaume de Luang Prabang* (Paris: Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1987); Michel Lorrillard, 'Les chroniques royales du Laos. Contribution à la connaissance historique des royaumes lao (1316–1887)' (PhD thesis, Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1995). For a discussion of some of the problems related to the writing of Laos's history, see: Michel Lorrillard, 'Lao History Revisited: Paradoxes and Problems in Current Research', *Southeast Asia Research*, 14:3, 2007, pp. 387–401.
48. Paul Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français* (Paris: Plon, 1931), pp. 319–362.
49. Blanchard de la Brosse and Lê-Duy-Luong, *Phongsawadan lao* [A Lao history/chronicle] (Vientiane: Imprimerie Gouvernementale, 1934); *Baep son an* [A Lao reader – cours préparatoire] (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1934), pp. 148–174.
50. Brosse and Lê, *Phongsawadan lao*, p. 43.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 64.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
54. *Baep son an*, pp. 159–161.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 167.
57. Brosse and Lê, *Phongsawadan lao*, p. 66.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–93.
59. *Baep son an*, p. 165.

60. Brosse and Lê, *Phongsawadan lao*, passim; *Baep son an*, passim.
61. *Baep son an*, p. 151.
62. *Ibid*, p. 155.
63. *Baep son an*, p. 164.
64. Brosse and Lê, *Phongsawadan lao*, p. 19.
65. See for example, Krasung Sueksa lae Kila [Ministry of Education and Sport], *Pawatsat lao lem 3 (1893 thoeng pachuban)* [History of Laos – volume 3 (1893 to today)] (Vientiane: Social Research Institute, 1989), p. 3.
66. E.g. Quai Pavie, Quai Francis Garnier, rue Doudart de Lagree, rue George Mahé, Avenue de France, rue Setthathirat, rue de roi Anou, see 'Extension de la Ville de Vientiane, 1930', c. R, RSL, CAOM.
67. Meyer, *Le Laos*, pp. 47–48.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
69. Marquet, 'Voyage au Laos', p. 281.
70. For a discussion of the symbolism of That Luang in contemporary Laos, see Grant Evans, *The Politics of Ritual and Remembrance. Laos Since 1975* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1998), pp. 41–48.
71. 'Monsieur Ernest Outrey, Résident Supérieur au Laos, à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général de l'Indo-Chine, Vientiane, le 3 Fevrier 1911, No 43', d. R61, c. 30, AEFEO.
72. 'Résident Supérieur au Laos à Monsieur le Directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Vientiane, le 5 Mars 1924, No 68', d. R61, c. 30, AEFEO.
73. 'Histoire du Annam', *Bulletin général de l'instruction publique*, 3:8, 1924, p. 437.
74. Kitirat Sihaban, 'Phrasong isan khao krung thep samai raek' [When north-eastern monks first came to Bangkok], *Sinlapa-Wathanatham*, 12:9, 1991, pp. 112–119.
75. Roger Monteil, 'La pénétration scolaire au Laos', *Bulletin général de l'instruction publique*, 10:1, 1930, pp. 1–6.
76. Gunn, *Rebellion in Laos*, p. 38. See also Etienne Boulé, *La rénovation des écoles de pagodes au Laos* (Saigon: Direction de l'instruction publique, 1933); and 'Circulaire relative aux écoles de pagodes au Laos', *Bulletin général de l'instruction publique*, 12:3, 1932, pp. 60–64.
77. 'Note au sujet de l'application eventuelle en Indochine des dispositions de l'article 4 du traite 14 fevrier 1925 relatives à la propagande religieuse, Hanoi, 20 octobre 1928', d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.
78. 'Le résident supérieur au Laos à Monsieur le directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Vientiane le 1er Août 1922', d. R61, c. 30, AEFEO.

79. 'Le résident supérieur au Laos à Monsieur le directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, le 3 Août 1923', d. R61, c. 30, AEFEO.
80. 'Le résident supérieur au Laos à Monsieur le directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, le 5 Mars 1924', d. R61, c. 30, AEFEO.
81. 'Le résident-supérieur au Laos à Monsieur le directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, le 6 Avril 1925', d. R61, c. 30, AEFEO.
82. 'Note confidentielle no 235/s. L'administrateur chef de la sûreté à Monsieur le chef du SCR et SG, Vientiane le 14 mai 1924', d. 39762, GGI, ANSOM.
83. See Edwards, 'Making a Religion of the Nation', p. 70 for quote.
84. 'Arrête, 25 Janvier 1930, le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine', d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.
85. The speeches are printed in *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 31, 1931, pp. 334–342.
86. Speech by Susanne Karpelles, *secrétaire de l'Institut Bouddhique* in Phnom Penh, printed in *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 31, 1931, p. 338.
87. For a brief outline and a very Lao nationalistic interpretation of Maha Sila's life and deeds, see Pheuipanh Ngaosyvathn, 'Maha Sila Viravong et la littérature classique lao', in Khana Kamakan Withayasat Sangkhom [Social Science Committee], *Maha sila wirawong – siwit lae phon ngan* [Maha Sila Viravong – life and work] (Vientiane: Rongphim Haeng Lat, 1990), pp. 245–253.
88. For a concise analysis of the impact of Thai modernist notions of history on Maha Sila's work, see Chalong Soontravanich, 'Sila Viravong's *Phongsawadan Lao*: A Reappraisal', in Christopher E. Goscha and Søren Ivarsson (eds), *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the Crossroads* (NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, No. 32, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), pp. 111–128.
89. 'Rapport moral sur l'exercice 1939', d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.
90. 'Institut Bouddhique, Procès Verbal de la Séance du 19 Février 1931, Vat Chan, Vientiane', AEFEO, d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.
91. 'Inauguration de l'Institut Bouddhique', *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 31, 1931, p. 335.
92. 'Institut Bouddhique, Procès Verbal de la Séance du 19 Février 1931, Vat Chan, Vientiane', d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.
93. 'Le Résident-Supérieur au Cambodge à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine, Phnom Penh, le 4 février 1941, No 360 Px', d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.
94. 'Le Directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient à Monsieur le Directeur du Personnel, Gouvernement Général, Hanoi, le 9 avril 1941, No DC II/22', d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.

95. Edwards, 'Making a Religion of the Nation', pp. 79–80.
96. See, for example, 'Institut Bouddhique, Procès Verbal de la Séance du 19 Février 1931, Vat Chan, Vientiane', d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.
97. *Kalamasutta* (Vientiane: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1931); and *Traypranam* (Vientiane: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1931).
98. *Athi phommacharyakassikkha: petit manuel de discipline bouddhique* (Vientiane: 1931).
99. 'Le Directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient à Monsieur le Directeur du Personnel, Gouvernement Général, Hanoi, 14 Février 1941, No 421', d. K3, c. 23, AEFEO.
100. Placed above a consonant the *karan* indicates that the letter underneath – or several in connection with it – is not pronounced.
101. See for example *Phochananukrom pen kham plae sap phasa thai samrap khian kham chai hai thuk tong tua sakot* [A dictionary giving a translation of Thai words to be used to write final consonants correctly] (Bangkok: 1901). A general outline of the history of dictionaries in Thailand is given in Thiraphan Thongkham, *Kan tham phochananukrom thai-thai: adit-pachuban (pho so 2389–2533)* [The production of Thai-Thai dictionaries: past and present, 1846–1993] (Bangkok: Khrongkan Phoeiphrae Nganwichai, 1995).
102. See for example Krom Sueksathikan [Department of Education], *Baep khon tua sakot chuai nai baep rian reo* [A textbook of final consonants to be used with the *rian-reo* system] (Bangkok: Rongphim Bamrung Nukunkit, 1899).
103. See Anthony Diller, 'Thai Syntax and "National Grammar"', *Language Sciences*, 10:2, 1988, pp. 273–312 and 'What Makes Central Thai a National Language?', in Craig J. Reynolds (ed.), *National Identity and its Defenders* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1991), pp. 87–132 for an analysis of various aspects of this process.
104. E.g. J. Taylor-Jones, *Brief Grammatical Notices of the Siamese Language* (Bangkok: The Mission Press, 1842); Jean Baptiste Pallegoix, *Grammatica Linguae Thai* (Bangkok: Assumption College, 1850); Jean Baptiste Pallegoix, *Dictionarium Linguae Thai* (Paris: Jussu Imperatoris Impressum, 1854); B. Bradley, *Dictionary of the Siamese Language* (Bangkok: 1873).
105. Matthew Copeland, 'Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam' (PhD thesis, Canberra: Australian National University, 1993), p. 210.
106. See for example J. Taupin, *Vocabulaire Franco-Laotien* (Hanoi: Schneider, 1893 [deuxième édition]); and Estrade, *Dictionnaire et Guide Franco-Laotiens* (Toulouse: Imprimerie G. Berthoumien, 1895).
107. Estrade, *Dictionnaire et Guide*, p. 10.

108. J. Cuaz, *Lexique Français-Laotien* (Hong Kong: Imprimerie de la Société des Missions étrangères, 1904), pp. xi–xii, xiv.
109. *Ibid.*, p. vi.
110. *Ibid.*, pp. xii–xiii.
111. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
112. Théodore Guignard, *Dictionnaire Laotien-Français* (Hong Kong: Imprimerie de Nazareth, 1912).
113. For example Pallegoix, *Dictionarium Lingua Thai* and J. Cuaz, *Essai de Dictionnaire Français-Siamois* (Bangkok: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1903).
114. Guignard, *Dictionnaire Laotien-Français*, p. xx.
115. Henri Maspero, 'Contribution à l'Étude du Système Phonétique des Langues Thai', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 11:1–2, 1911, pp. 6–7.
116. See for example 'Les langues tai', in A. Meillet and Marcel Cohen (eds), *Les langues du monde* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Édouard Champion, 1924), pp. 379–384; George Cœdès, *Tamnan akson thai* [A history of the Thai script] (Bangkok: Khronkhan Phathana Kan Sueksa, 1961 [1925]).
117. 'Note par Lê-Ky-Huong sur la reforme de l'écriture laotienne, Vientiane, le 6 Février 1918', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
118. 'Vers la réforme de l'orthographe laotienne par Pierre Nginn, sd', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
119. A. Raquez, 'Les rois de Luang Prabang', *Revue Indochinoise*, ns. 1:7, 1904, pp. 426–438.
120. 'L'interprete au titre Europeen Lê-Ky-Huong en service au commissariat de Viengchan à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Laos, le 11 Février 1907', c. F.10, RSL, CAOM.
121. 'Vers la réforme', d. F.4, c. 33, AEFEO. The language course book was entitled *L'Essai de Cours de Langue Laotienne*.
122. See for example *Baep son an san triamsueksa phasa lao* [A Lao reader – cours enfantin] (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1934).
123. 'M. Meillier à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Laos, Luang Prabang, le 10 Janvier 1918, No 93/5', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
124. 'Note sur la reforme de l'écriture laotienne par Phetsarath, Vientiane, le 8 Février 1918', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
125. Louis Finot, 'Recherches sur la littérature laotienne', *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 17:5, 1917, pp. 1–218.
126. 'Note sur la reforme de l'écriture laotienne par Phetsarath'.

127. 'Note par Lê Ky Huong sur la reforme de l'écriture laotienne, Vientiane, le 6 Février 1918', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
128. In 'Le Directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Laos, le 12 Septembre 1918, No 872', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
129. Maha Sila Viravong, *Wainyakon lao* [Lao grammar] (Bangkok: Kramol Tiranaw, 1957 [1935]). The grammar was divided into four parts of which only the first was published in 1935.
130. 'Proces-Verbal, 3 Mars 1938', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
131. Sila, *Wainyakon lao*, pp. ix-x.
132. Similar discussions took place in Siam in the 1920s when various articles in Thai newspapers reflected a demand for a simplification of Siamese spelling. For an account of this perspective, see Matthew Copeland, 'Contested Nationalism', pp. 209-215.
133. 'Proces-Verbal, le 6 Juin 1938', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
134. Uphakit Sinlapan, *Lak phasa thai: akharawithi, wachiiwiphak, wakaya-samphan, chantalaksana* [Fundamentals of the Thai language: Akarawithi, Vaciviphak, Vakayasamphan, Chantalaksana] (Bangkok: Thai Wathana Phanit, 1995 [reprint]). For a discussion of Maha Sila's use of Uphakit's work in relation to an analysis of Lao literature, see Peter Koret, 'Books of Search: The Invention of Traditional Lao Literature as a Subject of Study', in Grant Evans (ed.), *Laos. Culture and Society* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), pp. 226-257.
135. Quoted in Katay Sasorith, *Alphabet et écriture lao* (Vientiane: Éditions du 'Pathet Lao'), 1943, p. 14.
136. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
137. 'Arrête No 1021, Résident Supérieur au Laos, le 9 Août 1939', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
138. Meyer, *Le Laos*, p. 27.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Campaign for a National 'Re-awakening', 1941–1945

Following the Franco–German armistice in June 1940 the newly appointed Pétain regime in Vichy launched a campaign for what was known as a national revolution in France. Clad in ultra-conservative ideology this campaign set out to reform the French nation and its collective identity, erase the stain of the national humiliation of the German invasion, and secure the political legitimacy of the new regime. Central to the politico-cultural aspects of the campaign was an emphasis on folklore and rural culture, an idealised national birth, the cult of the leader, and condemnation of the former French regime for bringing decadence to French culture and society. Youth movements served as important means to spread the ideals of the national revolution and bring about the regeneration of French culture and society through a resuscitation of virile virtues. The Pétain regime exported this campaign throughout the French colonial empire.¹

In Indochina the campaign for a national renovation was launched under the enthusiastic leadership of Admiral Decoux, Governor-General of Indochina 1940–45.² In metropolitan France the national revolution addressed the humiliation of the German invasion and occupation. In the same manner, the campaign for a national renovation in Indochina can be linked with attempts to wipe out the stain of defeat and to alleviate French insecurity in

this part of their colonial empire. Since 1940 Japanese troops had been positioned throughout Indochina. In other parts of Southeast Asia Japanese troops deposed the European colonial powers and supported local nationalist movements. The situation was different in Indochina. Until March 1945 Indochina remained under French colonial rule. In return the Japanese army was granted access to resources in Indochina necessary to fuel their war-machine. Still, the presence of Japanese troops challenged French colonial rule in Indochina throughout the World War II period. In early 1941 French prestige in Indochina received a further blow when Japan intervened in the Thai–French border war and forced the French to accept Thai annexation of areas in Laos and Cambodia. In addition, in the end of 1940 the French were faced with upheavals several places in Indochina.³

Faced with Japanese and Thai pretensions and local unrest, the aim of the campaign for a national renovation in Indochina was to enrol the support of the local population – especially the local elites – to keep French Indochina under French suzerainty. In a most tangible way, the loyalty of the local elites was to be secured by opening up to them more and higher positions in the colonial administration in Indochina and increasing the wages of the civil servants. In cooperation with the traditional elites, the campaign also involved the cultivation of pro-French nationalisms in each part of Indochina. Hereby the French sought to take control of emerging Indochinese nationalisms and use them to legitimise the colonial status quo at a time when revolutionary nationalisms were plotting another future for Indochina. These pro-French nationalisms were to become integrated in a federal Indochina nourished by French colonialism. From this perspective, Laos was to be brought into and be made part of the Indochina-wide project as a full-fledged *patrie* with its own ‘personality’ or cultural identity. This chapter details how the discourse on Laos and the Lao encompassed in this campaign for a national renovation in Laos rested on and contributed to the idea of Laos already in existence.

OUTLINE OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR A NATIONAL
RENOVATION IN LAOS

The campaign for a national renovation was directed towards the revival of the individual *patries* making up French Indochina without moulding these into a uniform entity. 'Federalism', as Eric Jennings has put it, 'became the catchword for Vichy's new "idyllic" Indochina.'⁴ Still, as Christopher Goscha has shown, the visions of a wider Indochinese space linked up with an 'Indochinese personality' or a 'superior Indochinese nationalism' were also reflected in the Vietnamese and French press in Indochina in the first half of the 1940s.⁵ According to this view Indochina was no longer just to constitute a territorial and administrative entity. It should be turned into a 'living reality' where the Cambodians, Lao and Vietnamese would be fused into 'one unique personality', as it was argued in an editorial in the newspaper *Annam Nouveau* in late 1941.⁶ Likewise, an article in the journal *Indochine* – the mouthpiece of the Vichy regime in Indochina – supported the idea that civil servants in Indochina should be granted an Indochinese citizenship, as it was believed that such a measure would pave the way for the formation of a wider 'Indochinese nationality'.⁷ The issue of the journal *Indochine* where this article appeared carried a small map of Indochina without an indication of the local territories of Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia and Laos in the upper left-hand corner of the front-page. It was repeated in the next ten issues.

There can be no doubt that the notion of an 'Indochinese nationality' must have caused concern among many Lao and Cambodians. The formation of such an identity could imply a *de facto* 'Vietnamification' of the cultures of the western part of Indochina. In comparison, the emphasis on the federal aspect of Indochina left room for cultural diversity. Decoux must have had such Lao and Cambodian concerns in mind when he, in an address to the *Conseil Fédéral Indochinoise*, clarified the meaning of the term 'federalism'. According to Decoux 'federalism' was not to be linked with terms such as 'centralisation', 'invasion' or 'absorption'. Rather, 'federalism' was synonymous with the 'blossom' of the 'local personalities'. Accordingly,

[t]he thought of levelling the nationalities by weakening the proper character of each of them is far away from us. On the contrary, we intend to rest on the Government of the *protégés* and work closely with their indigenous chiefs – the sovereigns – safeguarding the civilisations that your ancestors have moulded.⁸

Or, as Decoux phrased it in retrospect, each *pays* in Indochina had not only the right but even the duty to develop a local identity in conformity with its religion, history and sovereign to form individual ‘small homelands’ (*petite patrie*).⁹ Just as the Bretons, Basques, and Corsicans were allowed to live within France guarding their ‘traditions’ and ‘souvenirs’, so were the individual *patries* to be integrated in a ‘federal Indochinese nation’, as it was argued in an editorial in *Indochine* in December 1942.¹⁰ The individual *patries* were to be united in and remain loyal to the higher entity of the Indochinese Federation and ultimately to the French Empire that was presented as the guarantee for the survival of each *patrie*. Laos was to be brought into the Indochinese family as a full-fledged member, thereby making it a more viable part of the multi-layered structure, with the individual *patries* at the bottom, the Indochinese Federation at the intermediary step, all united under the protective shade of the greater French Empire.

This way of addressing Laos’s future was not met with approval by all French colonial administrators in Indochina. George Gauthier – Vichy’s secretary-general in Indochina – voiced a strong critique of the programme launched in Laos. In a very Marquet-like manner he argued that the Lao population of the Mekong Valley should be allowed to leave Laos to settle in Thailand and be replaced by immigrant Vietnamese. Gauthier believed that it was only through such an undertaking that it would be possible to de-link effectively Laos ‘psychologically’ and economically from Thailand.¹¹ While Gauthier’s critique actually encompassed a destruction of the very idea of Laos, the programme for a national renovation launched in Laos aimed at the precise opposite. Laos was to become a more viable member of the Indochinese Federation by improving its economy and social conditions and by stimulating the resurrection of a Lao cultural her-

itage. This was to convince the Lao that Laos had a place within an Indochina under French colonial rule. The campaign for a national renovation should show how any uncertainties that may have been associated with the future of Laos in the past were pushed aside.

A 'New Laos' was in the making in which the Lao elite had a future within the framework of French–Lao co-operation, at a time when the rise of Thai power had caused members of the Lao elite to look favourably on Thai expansion into Laos if this would grant Laos a form of independent status in relation to Thailand. In 1940, according to Maha Sila Viravong, Prince Phetsarath informed a Thai government official that if Laos were to be 'given back' to Thailand he would welcome this move if the Lao kingdom could co-exist in a kind of Thai–Lao confederation without being integrated in Thailand the same way as the Lao territories of Isan had been.¹² Although an anti-French coup plotted by young Lao students at College Pavie in 1940 was never carried out, it indicated how the changing political situation around the time of the World War II nourished anti-French feelings among members of the Lao elite.¹³ In fact, a group of around forty Lao crossed from Laos into Thailand in 1940–01, many of whom later returned to Laos to become leading figures in the first attempts to build up an independent Lao government in 1945–46.¹⁴

Under the auspices of the campaign for a national renovation in Laos more resources from the general budget were channelled into diverse sectors of society.¹⁵ In order to better the standard of living various measures were taken in the economic sphere to boost Laos's economy and integrate it more firmly into the wider Indochinese economy. The completion of roads to link different parts of Laos with each other and Laos with other parts of Indochina was speeded up. At the same time local agricultural production was to be stimulated. To this end the former Agricultural Service was resurrected and put in charge of the agricultural extension on the Boloven Plateau and of the establishment of agricultural co-operatives. Likewise, the Forestry Service was reopened in order to improve the use of the forest resources. In the social sphere the program aimed at an improve-

ment of the educational system through the opening of more village and temple schools. According to a French scholar more schools were opened in Laos between 1940 and 1945 than in the previous half century of French presence in Laos.¹⁶ Similarly, the health situation was to be improved through the establishment of mobile medical units. In the administrative-political sphere several important issues were addressed. The Lao elite were to be granted a greater role in the administration of their country. To achieve this the stream of Vietnamese immigrants into Laos was temporarily suspended and the Administrative College in Vientiane was reformed to secure a steady flow of well-educated Laotian civil servants. Lao were also assigned to the newly instituted posts of provincial governor. Finally, the Luang Phrabang Kingdom, which had been forced to cede its territories on the west-bank of the Mekong River to Thailand after the Thai attacks in 1940–41, was compensated for this territorial loss by being given suzerainty over all of northern Laos, including the provinces of Vientiane and Xiengkhuang. At the same time the administration of the kingdom was modernised and the status of the kingdom was settled by designating it a protectorate on a par with Annam and Cambodia. In this process of reorganisation the king's council was abolished and replaced with a ministerial system in which Prince Phetsarath was appointed prime minister.

Concurrently a politico-cultural campaign was carried out under the auspices of the newly founded Lao Propaganda Service. In the words of the Résident-Supérieur in Laos the aim of this service was to 'awaken among the Lao a national spirit (*amê nationale*) and progressively realise the moral unity of the country'.¹⁷ Or, as Decoux put it in 1940, the Lao shall know that from now on 'they belong to the great Lao people' that France had decided to resurrect.¹⁸ Laos was to be buttressed as a *patrie* with a unified territory and a population possessing a unique and common identity. To this end a cultural renovation was carried out through which a specific Lao cultural heritage was to be unearthed, reformed and resurrected in order to communicate the common identity of the Lao people as defined through a specific Lao cultural identity. That is, an identity defined

in pure ethnic-Lao terms to which the other ethnic groups were to be assimilated.¹⁹ It is important to remember how the French were up against a potent pan-Thai nationalist and anti-French campaign, stressing the sameness of the Lao and the Thai in historical, racial



Figure 4: Lao Nhay – Laos's first newspaper.
Source: Lao Nhay, 2 (March 1941).

and cultural terms. To build up a specifically Lao identity – distinct from the Thai – was an important strategy to counter Thai propaganda and de-link the Lao *patrie* from Thai nationalist pretensions.

As an important medium for propagating this new Lao identity and the vision of a unified space in the making, the Lao Propaganda Service launched Laos's first newspaper in the Lao language, *Lao Nhay*, in January 1941. (See Figure 4.) At first it appeared as a hand-written journal, but soon the hand-written characters were replaced by printed characters and *Lao Nhay* achieved a more professional appearance. In its pages readers could, among other things, read news from the various regions of their country (marriages, deaths, births, appointments, meetings, celebrations etc.), news from the world, poems of both modern and classical origin, information about agriculture, and practical information about the administration of the country. The latter information was often presented in the form of dialogue between Mr. Phed (diamond) and Mr. Kaew (jewel). Although without the same political and nationalist connotations, the application of the dialogue-form in *Lao Nhay* may have been inspired by dialogues between Mr. Man Chuchat and Mr. Khong Rakthai which in the 1939–44 period were broadcast over the Thai radio popularising the policies of the Phibun regime.²⁰ Originally, some of the articles also appeared in French, but this practice was brought to an end in 1943 when the French readers were directed towards a new newspaper, *Le Nouveau Laos*. *Lao Nhay* was published until the Japanese occupation in March 1945, making up a total of a little fewer than 100 issues. In 1941, *Lao Nhay* was supplemented with a journal entitled *Pathet Lao* ('Lao-land'). *Pathet Lao* was published in French and was destined for the Lao elite, while *Lao Nhay* was intended as a newspaper for the masses or 'our uninformed brethren', as it was stated in *Pathet Lao*.²¹

In Vientiane committees for literature, music and theatre were formed to stimulate a resurrection of the Lao cultural heritage and to write new poems, songs and plays that could propagate the vision of a 'New Laos' in the making. *Lao Nhay* was, however, not only the name of the newspaper, but also synonymous with a group of people

attached to it who frequently travelled throughout Laos on propaganda tours. They participated in festivals where poems, songs, plays and speeches addressed the theme of national renovation in Laos. Associations – the so-called *Cercles Lao* – were formed in all major cities in Laos and served as a meeting place for local civil servants. These associations were often visited by people from *Lao Nhay* to ensure that the newspaper, songs, pamphlets and other material produced in Vientiane in support of the campaign for a national renovation reached beyond the capital. The Pétain regime was closely associated with a physical fitness cult and placed great emphasis on character building through the physical education of the youth in various youth and sports associations. In Laos, the organisation of youth was relatively underdeveloped in comparison with the other parts of Indochina.²² Still, youth groups were formed all over Laos and the plays written by the Theatre Committee in Vientiane were typically put on stage by local youth or sport associations.

A central figure in the *Lao Nhay* movement was Charles Rochet, then director of public education in Laos. Rochet arrived in Laos in the early 1930s and is known to have developed a deep affection for the country and its population.²³ His book *Pays Lao, Le Laos dans la tourmente 1939–1945* gives a very personal account of the campaign for a national renovation in Laos.²⁴ It stands not only as a monument to his devotion to the Lao and Laos, but it expresses also a deep-felt antipathy towards official French colonial policies pursued in Indochina prior to 1940. For Rochet the campaign for a national renovation undertaken in Laos during World War II was an attempt to save Laos from extinction in a situation where it potentially could be engulfed either by the Vietnamese or the Thai. The *Lao Nhay* movement had a very broad appeal among civil servants in Laos. Among its principal members we find people who later played central roles in the anticolonial struggle, and ended up on different sides in the long civil conflict that ravaged Laos in the post-World War II period to 1975 – people like Katay Don Sasorith, Nhouy Abhay, and Phoumi Vongvichit.²⁵

The campaign for a national renovation stressed how Laos was to emerge as a full-fledged *patrie* and member of the Indochinese

Federation with a specific cultural identity, but it implied also a movement towards the formation of a unprecedented sense of unified Lao national space. In the next section we shall see how this sense of unified space was expressed and represented, and look at the problem that a *de facto* political and administrative unification represented.

TOWARDS A NEW NATIONAL SPACE:
THE PROBLEM OF UNIFICATION

It could have been expected that political unification under the suzerainty of the Luang Phrabang King would be accomplished by this undertaking to build up an unprecedented sense of unified Lao space and a notion of a common Lao identity among the population. Actually, such a move had been proposed by the king himself as compensation for the territory the kingdom had been forced to cede to Thailand in 1941.²⁶ Even though this move would have given the politico-cultural campaign an important unifying symbol, this suggestion was turned down by the French. It was believed that a unification of Laos under the King of Luang Phrabang would cause problems due to loyalty to the former royal house of Champassack in southern Laos.²⁷ In the words of Hugh Toye:

[. . .] the haughty northerners of Luang Prabang were not liked in the south, where, furthermore the arbitrary retirement in 1935 of Prince Nhouy, head of the old royal house of Champassak, who had served as governor of the former kingdom under the French, was still widely resented. [. . .] The union of the whole country was something the French could not yet concede.²⁸

The existence of the same kind of regionalism is also reflected in a French report on the political situation in Laos during the first half of the 1940s. In the report the author comments that in southern Laos he had met people, who, maybe not without exaggerating, held the opinion that they preferred to 'become Siamese rather than be under the rule of the *Satou* [the King of Luang Phrabang]'.²⁹ Likewise, Rochet also ruled out the court of Luang Phrabang as a factor on which the campaign in Laos could be based as it did not 'represent

anything for the Lao of the centre and the south'.³⁰ So, creating a unified Lao space had some serious pre-existing regional divergences to overcome.

It could have been expected that the politico-cultural campaign launched in Laos would address and alleviate this problem of regionalism that apparently barred the way for a political unification of Laos by making the King of Luang Phrabang well known and favoured throughout Laos. A reading of the early issues of *Lao Nhay* indicates that such a campaign promoting the king and making him more visible seems to have been set in motion. The readers could, for example, read about Decoux's visit to Luang Phrabang in April 1941 and could follow the king on trips first to Hanoi and later to Phnom Penh.³¹ The last trip was the first time the king ever visited the urban centres in the south – Thakhek, Savannakhet and Pakse – where he addressed the population at public meetings. In *Lao Nhay* it is remarked that the king's trip to Phnom Penh was intended to strengthen the relationship between Cambodia and Laos, which gives the impression that the king actually travelled as an official representative of Laos.³² Likewise, in 1941–42 we also encounter articles in the journal *Indochine* focusing on the Kingdom of Luang Phrabang and emphasising the antiquity and the historical roots of the kingdom.³³ These were all measures that all could be linked with an attempt to make the king visible – both locally within Laos and regionally within Indochina – in order to pave the way for a unification of Laos. Further, in connection with the installation of Prince Phetsarath as prime minister in the reorganised Luang Phrabang Kingdom Lao officials from all over Laos participated and through these rituals the kingdom symbolically claimed the whole of Laos.³⁴

On the other hand, when the king appeared on a stamp in the end of 1942 it was still as King of Luang Phrabang, and by 1943 this focus on King Sisavang Vong and the Lao monarchy disappeared from the columns of *Lao Nhay* and *Indochine*.³⁵ Moreover, it is quite significant that the king and royalty were absent from the song regarded as the national anthem of Laos – *Hymne Lao* or *Lao Hak Sat* – written in 1941 and from other songs written as part of

the campaign for a national renovation in Laos. When *Hymne Lao* appeared in the official publication *Hymnes et pavilions d'Indochine* in 1941, the Lao king figured as 'King of Luang Phrabang' – not 'King of Laos'.³⁶ Likewise, the king did not appear as promoter or sponsor of the various contests launched by *Lao Nhay*, a role which would have linked him closely with the national renovation. This role was rather associated with Prince Phetsarath, who was a frequent speaker at the meetings of *Lao Nhay* in Vientiane and sponsor of the prizes offered for the best Lao translation of a French literary work.³⁷ Apart from the early period the King of Luang Phrabang was not presented as an important symbol in the campaign for a national renovation. Therefore, whereas a unification of Laos under the king still presented a possible option in a distant future, the French did not perceive the king as instrumental for the achievement of this unification.

What form the unification of Laos should take remained obscure, and the problem of the practical means to achieve it remained foreign to the French propaganda.³⁸ It was the 'idea of Laos' that gained momentum under the auspices of the campaign, but this idea was never allowed to manifest itself in the unification of Laos. Rochet touched upon this problem in a letter to Decoux written in early 1943. For Rochet there was no doubt that the campaign in Laos had been a major success so far. According to him, the campaign had succeeded in turning the attention of the Lao away from Thailand towards the *Patrie Lao*. It had brought the population in Laos closer together and aroused among them a 'new mysticism and a feeling of union'. In doing so, he believed the campaign had collected the Lao elite around the French cause by convincing them that a Lao nationalism could only be viable under French protection. Rochet, however, also pointed out that the time was not yet ripe for outright unification. As a step towards the desired unification of Laos he proposed the formation of a Lao Congress that should 'embody the idea of Laos' and be an important step towards an administrative unification of Laos. In Rochet's view the formation of such an institution, where representatives from all the provinces of

Laos should meet, would 'support' and 'symbolise' the idea of Laos so that this idea 'did not remain a sentimental dream that never would become a reality'. In conformity with the ideals of Vichy, Rochet stressed that this institution was not supposed to be a political organ, but should be devoted to the examination of issues of a social character. As a first step towards the realisation of a Lao Congress, Rochet wanted to form a Committee for the Study of Social Issues in Laos that later could be transformed into the Lao Congress. The meetings of the members of this institution should be accompanied by ceremonies and celebrations of a national character that would 'strike the imagination'.³⁹ The resurrection of the defunct Association of Friends of Laos (*Association des Amis du Laos*) – which formerly had published the journal *Bulletin des Amis du Laos* – as the Society for Laotian Studies in October 1943 may have been the association that Rochet envisaged to form a first step towards the formation of the Congress.⁴⁰ The theatrical celebrations that Rochet called for were, however, never realised under the auspices of this society and a Lao Congress never came into existence during World War II.

Although the notion of a unprecedented unified Lao national space was not expressed in terms of an unified administrative structure, it was expressed in the real world of road development. As noted in the last chapter, in the 1920–30s priority had been given to the construction of roads running east-west so as to integrate Laos with the overall colonial space of Indochina and de-link it from Siam. In that period Laos had not been nationalised in terms of infrastructure. This happened during the early 1940s. In 1942 the section of Route Coloniale No 13 between Thakhek and Paksane was finished and linked Vientiane with the urban centres further south in the Mekong Valley. Later, Vientiane was linked with Luang Phrabang and Xiengkhuang when the section of Route Coloniale No 13 between Dendin and Phoukhun was finished in 1943. Hereby, the isolation of Vientiane was over in Laos. Route Coloniale No 13 formed the 'longitudinal artery' linking the most important urban centres in Laos for the first time ever by road.⁴¹ The formation of a unified Lao space was now a reality in terms of roads. The administrative

divide had been bridged and a national circulation was made possible. But these new roads served not only to link the diverse parts of Laos together, they also served to de-link Laos from Thailand. Before the section of Route Coloniale No 13 south of Vientiane was completed in 1942 it had been normal practice for cars travelling between Thakhek and Vientiane to cross the Mekong and use the newly constructed road between Lakhon to Nongkhai via Oudorn in Thailand in preference to the much slower river transport. This detour into Thailand was now no longer necessary. Another political aspect of the need to finish the road between Paksane and Thakhek was also raised by André Touzet – Résident-Supérieur in Laos – in a note to the Governor-General. In this note Touzet pointed out that road building in Laos would serve the French cause at a moment when,

[...] some indigenous authorities in Laos do not hide their admiration for the development efforts pursued in Thailand and let us hear that our realisations in Laos are far from being comparable with what has been achieved on the right-bank of the Mekong.⁴²

In this manner, road development also served as an important symbol of the dynamism and development linked with French colonialism. Embedded in this infrastructural development was not only a new sense of Lao space, but also a closer integration of this territorial entity into a wider Indochinese space. The completion of the section of Route Coloniale No 13 between Pakse and Savannakhet – where it merged with Route Coloniale No 9 – was hailed from the wider spatial perspective of Indochina. Now transport over land between Hanoi and Saigon was 200 kilometres shorter than the normal route following the coastline.⁴³ Laos was taking its place in the Indochinese Federation by means of the development in infrastructure and the administrative centre of Laos – Vientiane – was placed at the Route Coloniale network that bound Indochina together.

As Laos's first newspaper, *Lao Nhay* can also be assigned an important role in creating a sense of a unprecedented unified space, and not only because it carried articles that propagated the vision of

unity. As the first country-wide newspaper published in Laos, it was also a symbol of the new space in the making. In the column *News from Laos* the diverse regions of the country were linked together to make up the territory of Laos and the local news filled up this space with people similar to the reader. A united Laos was no longer an abstract and empty space but was taking shape before the eyes of the readers. In an open letter to *Lao Nhay* published in *Pathet Lao*, the newspaper was applauded for opening up a new horizon for the people of Laos:

What people like to find in *Lao Nhay* is news, and, first and foremost, news from the country [*pays*]. This is where they start to read. In Laos, especially among the civil servants and notables, we know each other fairly well. Someone who, for example, is in Mahassay has a brother in Xiengkhuang, a cousin in Pakse, and some friends just about everywhere. He was at first surprised when he read news about them in the newspaper. But he quickly got used to it and now he waits for the newspaper to know if it is true that this one has changed his post, that that one has been hospitalised and that another one has received an award. It is the same for information about villages or provinces – harvests, epidemics, new roads, the opening of a school or a temple etc. ... Naturally our curiosity is drawn to these facts because they form our small horizon and, in a way, our living environment. This is why this news is received with the greatest of pleasure.

The newspaper played an important educating role in the making of a 'New Laos' and a national consciousness:

Among all the things that we lack first, it must be noted that the most important of them is cohesion and solidarity. The Laotian is an individualist, even a bit anarchist. His gregarious nature does not extend beyond the village and often it does not reach even that far. Why is this so? Because ignorance rules out for him any intellectual and moral contact with the ensemble of his compatriots. His ignorance isolates him, makes him inward-looking. It is such that he has almost completely lost the ideas of people and nation. The newspaper has still a lot to do to awaken these ideas lying dormant in the souls. I am sure that it will manage to do so, because, I notice, the

effect is already there. *Lao Nhay* opens up a new horizon by linking the Laotians to their history and to their compatriots in the north and south, and it comes as a real discovery for some. This awakening of the national conscience and the religious idea should serve as the foundation for all the altruistic and social feelings that the modern Laotian needs to acquire. Mutual aid, charity, professional consciousness or devotion to the general interest should rest on this basis. Our old morality only insufficiently meets the requirements of a modern people. A new morality must be born, one which, without conflicting with the old one, completes it and adapts it. We are going to need qualities and activities that our fathers did not need or, alas, lacked. We needed above all an ideal. This ideal we have today: it is the resurrection of the Lao *patrie*.⁴⁴

In the same manner the idea of Laos and the sense of a unified Lao space was nourished in the novel *Khamson and Sisamud* serialised in *Lao Nhay*.⁴⁵ The novel was written by Blanchard de la Brosse, who was one of the authors behind the Lao schoolbook *A Lao History/Chronicle* discussed in the previous chapter. Throughout the novel we follow two orphans on a journey through large parts of Laos. Setting out from a village in Champassack, they travel through Pakse, Savannakhet, Thakhek, Vientiane, Borikhan, Xiengkhuang, and Luang Phrabang. On this tour of Laos the boys are constantly eager to learn about the areas they pass through. Obtaining information from other people or from books they carry with them, the boys acquire knowledge about towns, natural phenomena, and agricultural products produced in the regions of Laos they visit. Through the boys' eyes the readers see and experience the country in which they live – Laos is brought into being.

At the same time a variety of national symbols linked with the new space of Laos were designed and propagated. A national anthem was composed and recorded on a gramophone record. The text was written by Maha Phoumi and the music by the medical doctor Thong Dy, and it was hailed as the winner of the first music context launched by *Lao Nhay* in the middle of 1941. It was distributed throughout Laos to all local associations, schools, and writers

who regularly contributed to *Lao Nhay*. In this manner, the record became an important symbolic expression of the new space in the making. Not only Laos was taking shape before the eyes of the readers of *Lao Nhay*, Laos could also be heard – the record was the voice of Laos:

For the first time a revived Laos sings on a gramophone, and when we think that tomorrow – from the banks of Khong to the lost mountains of Phongsaly – the same notes will ring out and will talk to the hearts, we believe we hear the very voice of our *patrie*.⁴⁶

A national flag was also designed. In *Lao Nhay*, however, it was never presented as an important national symbol. In comparison, it is striking that *Lao Chaleun* – the newspaper published as a successor to *Lao Nhay* following the Japanese occupation in March 1945 – carried Laos's flag together with the Japanese flag as a heading on the front page.⁴⁷ Likewise, the second issue of the newspaper *La Patrie Lao* published by the Lao Issara Government after the Japanese surrender in August 1945 carried the new flag of Laos on the front page and an article explaining the symbolism of the new tricolour flag superseding the three-headed elephant flag of the past.⁴⁸ Instead, That Luang and from issue number 72 also Wat Phra Kaeo figured as national symbols on the front page of *Lao Nhay*. The symbol of the letter L produced on a pentagonal shield was also promoted as an important national symbol. According to a notice in *Lao Nhay* it represented the unity of the population.⁴⁹ It also figured as the emblem of the Lao Youth Movement in Laos and judging from drawings appearing in articles about the new theatre in Vientiane or in printed versions of the plays performed there this emblem towered over the scene.⁵⁰ The reason for this preference for other national symbols to the flag may be that two flags were actually in existence in Laos – that of the king, used in the Kingdom of Luang Phrabang, and that of Laos.⁵¹ In India the British colonial authorities also resisted the propagation of the Indian flag as a national symbol for fear that it could nourish anticolonial resistance and this may also have been the reason for French preference for other national symbols over the flag.⁵²

Lao Nhay means 'Great(er) Laos' and the title of the newspaper could imply that the new national space in the making was linked with an enlarged national territory, a territory associated with pan-Lao irredentist claims infringing on the territorial integrity of contemporary Thailand. But this was not the case. A reading of *Lao Nhay* reveals how the national territory in the making was linked with the current extension of Laos – not with an enlarged territory defined with reference to history or race including the Khorat Plateau in Thailand. Still, in *Lao Nhay* we do encounter references to the existence of a pan-Lao space including both banks of the Mekong. Not only is reference made repeatedly to 'our Lao siblings' on the other side of the Mekong River, but in the novel *Khamson and Sisamud* a Lao-space running counter to the national boundaries is vividly depicted. Reference to this Lao-space can, for example, be found in the part of the novel dealing with the boys' trip through the eastern part of the Khorat Plateau in Thailand. In search of information about this territory and the people inhabiting it, the boys are told that it is a Lao territory in terms of both history and culture. Before crossing the Mekong and entering Thailand, the boys are briefed by an actor belonging to theatre company they are travelling with:

Earlier both banks of the Mekong used to be one Lao territory (*pen mueang lao hao an diao kan*) and was under the King of Lan Xang Hom Khao who had established his palace in Vientiane. Today our brothers and sisters [west of the Mekong] are not under the Lan Xang flag as they used to be. But soon you will have the opportunity to go and visit the right-bank. Then you will discover that people in the villages follow the same traditions as we do.⁵³

Nonetheless, upon arrival in Thailand Sisamud is at first worried about having to perform before an audience of foreigners (*khon tang pathet*). Fortunately, he is comforted by Khamson:

[...] the people you will see when you perform are all Lao to the very bone. They speak Lao and uphold the traditions we Lao have respected since our forefathers. Even though you will see that some people have changed their dress and speech, these people are few in number. [...] Therefore, younger brother, you have to know they are

like our race-fellows/fellow-nationals (*phuean huam sat*) in Thahae, Pakse, Savannakhet and Thakhek.⁵⁴

Subsequently, Sisamud takes great pleasure in observing how the people living on the Khorat Plateau belong to the same race (*sat*) as himself.⁵⁵

Although the vision of an extensive pan-Lao space including both banks of the Mekong runs counter to the pan-Thai nationalist discourse, we find no overt call for a territorial enlargement of Laos in *Lao Nhay*. We only encounter a few articles in *Lao Nhay* addressing directly the pan-Thai nationalist discourse in Thailand, and the few cartoons ridiculing pan-Thaism, which appeared in the first issue, were not followed up in later issues. (See Figures 5, 6, 7.)



Figure 5: Bangkok monkey drills imitating soldier. Anti-Thai cartoon in Laos's first newspaper.

Source: *Lao Nhay, sabab ton* (January 1941).

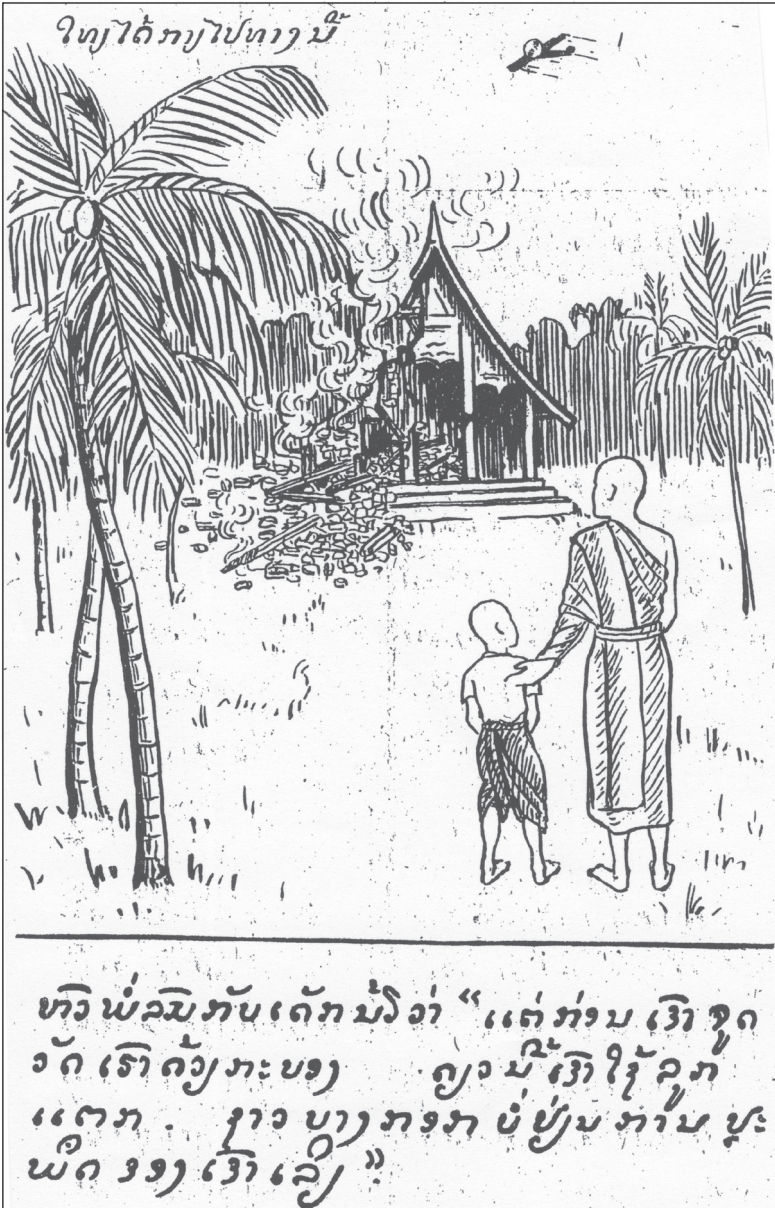


Figure 6: 'In ancient times they burned our temples with wooden torches. Today they use bombs. The Bangkok people have not changed their ways at all'. Anti-Thai cartoon in Laos's first newspaper.

Source: *Lao Nhay, sabab ton* (January 1941).

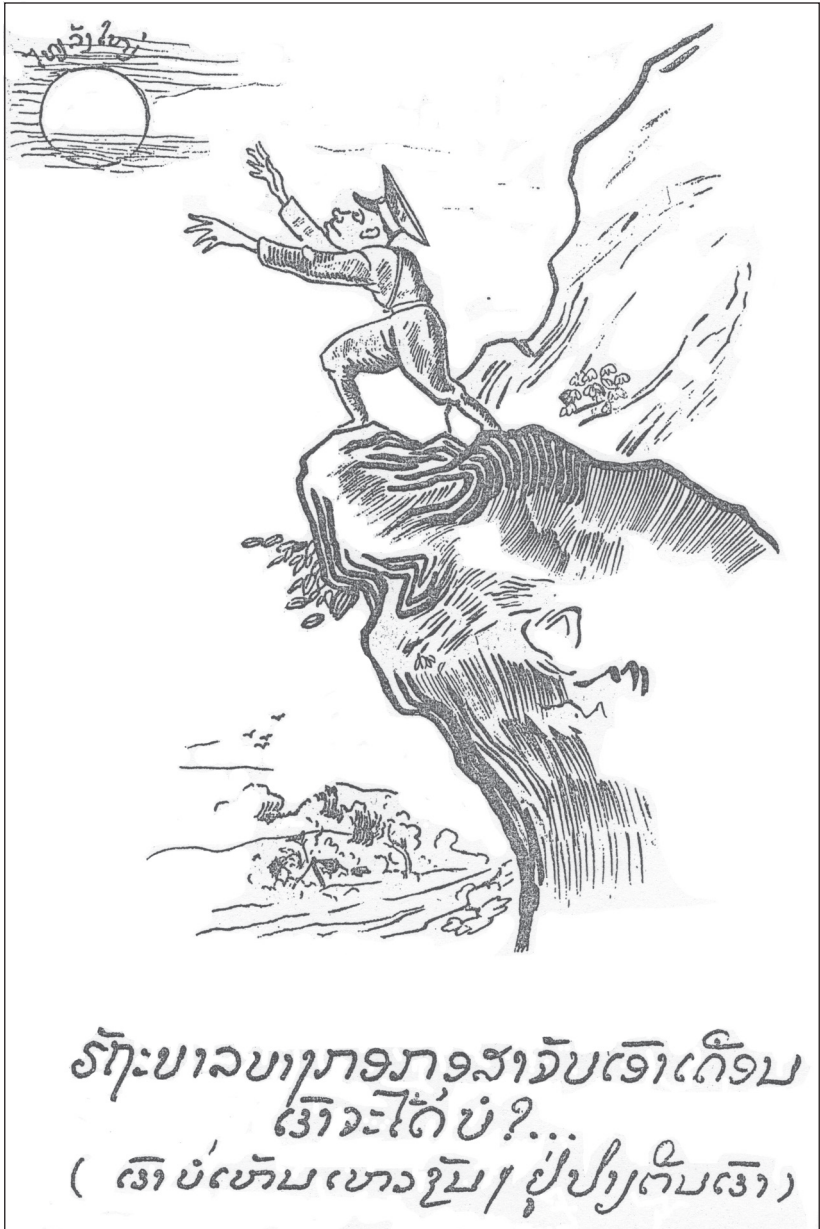


Figure 7: 'The Bangkok Government tries to catch the moon [Greater Thailand]. Will they succeed?' Anti-Thai cartoon in Laos's first newspaper.

Source: *Lao Nhay, sabab ton* (January 1941).

In the journal *Indochine* a series of articles written by a Kambuputra appeared at the height of the Thai–French border war at the end of 1940 and early 1941. These articles took a direct stance against the pan-Thai irredentist discourse and used the inner logic of this discourse to deconstruct Thailand from a historical perspective. Such an overt critique of the pan-Thai nationalist discourse cannot be found in later issues of the journal.⁵⁶ Nowhere do we encounter the kind of potent pan-Lao discourse later expressed by, for example, Prince Phetsarath in 1945 in support of a Lao state encompassing the east-bank territories and the Khorat Plateau.⁵⁷ In August 1945, a strong anti-Thai note was also struck by the official representative of the Royal Government in Luang Phrabang to the representative of the French colonial authorities in Calcutta. He demanded a recovery of the Emerald Buddha and of the territories on the Khorat Plateau.⁵⁸ Finally, in 1945 when the French guerrillas and the royal family of Luang Phrabang started recruiting volunteers, Crown Prince Savang reportedly insisted that the oath to be sworn by the new recruits should focus on the issue of invading Thailand.⁵⁹

That a strong pan-Lao and anti-Thai discourse was absent from the columns of *Lao Nhay* does not, however, imply that such notions were non-existent in Laos in the preceding period. At a great gathering in Vientiane in late 1940, for example, banners appeared with the text: ‘Today Xieng-mai, Oubone and Korat are under the Siamese yoke – in the past they were Lao.’⁶⁰ Rather, the absence of a strong irredentist rhetoric in the *Lao Nhay* newspaper and other contemporary publications indicates how these were framed in conformity with the official French guidelines set for the propaganda launched in Laos and in other parts of Indochina. From an official French perspective a rather defensive stance was taken: allusions to Thailand were to be avoided. The propaganda was not intended to run counter to the ‘re-establishment of a good neighbourhood’, as the Résident-Supérieur of Laos reprimanded Rochet after he had made polemic allusions to Thailand on Radio Vientiane.⁶¹ This orientation of the French propaganda is also reflected in the treatment of a selection of songs intended to be diffused in Cambodia by the French

for propaganda purposes. These songs received approbation from the Governor-General with the reservation that certain sections of the text – in which reference to Thailand was made – were deleted. All the propaganda intended for use in French Indochina should only inform the Indochinese about their history and the role France had played in their development.⁶² For Laos it was specified that the counter-propaganda should include the following themes. First, the decadence of the later Lan Xang Kingdom, the rivalry between the Lao principalities, and the anarchy that was caused by and furthered by the rise of the Siamese. Second, the nature of the relationship between the Lao and the Siamese including, on the one hand, the sack of Vientiane, and, on the other hand, how the Siamese were unable to provide any protection when the Hos ravaged the Lao territories. Third, the French encounter personified by Pavie and his so-called '*mission pacifique*' that gave security to the Lao.⁶³ These themes are in accordance with the overall narrative structure of the perception of Laos's history that came into being in the 1930s and was discussed in the last chapter. In the following section we shall see how central elements of this narrative were propagated by the campaign for a national renovation in Laos.

A NATIONAL REAWAKENING: THE IMPORTANCE OF
HISTORY AND FRANCO–LAO COOPERATION

Apparently, no new books dealing with the history of Laos in broad terms were published in the period 1941–45. Likewise, in the columns of *Lao Nhay* and other contemporary publications like *Indochine* and *Pathet Lao*, we are not presented with detailed accounts of Laos's history. Still, publications from this period supply us with valuable historical insights, which, when put together, serve to delineate the framework of a Lao historical narrative. It can come as no surprise that the Lan Xang Kingdom occupies a central position in this narrative structure. Throughout *Lao Nhay* we encounter references to Lan Xang. In the pages of the newspaper it never seemed important to fix the proportions of this kingdom, neither in terms of time nor space. Lan Xang becomes a kind of timeless entity of

the past, synonymous with a distant golden age associated with, for example, military bravery, a flourishing Buddhism, and the apogee of Lao craftsmanship.⁶⁴ With reference to a timeless Lan Xang, Laos is given a historical identity and is removed from the historical orbit of Thailand. As it is expressed in one of the few articles in *Lao Nhay* dealing explicitly with the history of Laos:

The Lao are different from the Siamese. Lan Sang [Xang] has never been part of Siam. It [Lan Xang] possessed its own personality. As we go back to the most distant periods of our history, we can see that our ancient state has never been a vassal of another. Such an assertion is a historical fact. The Lao people are entirely distinct from their neighbours. It is only in vain that a deceitful propaganda tries to distort the truth which the entire history proves: in heart, language, customs, as much as by their ancestors the Lao are Thai [Tai] but they are first and above all Lao. [...] Laotians, wake-up! ... Let us unite our efforts to defend our country! Let us gather around our guardian nation to save the land of our ancestors. The day will come when we restore the Lao country [*pays lao*] and we will recover again our national prestige.⁶⁵

In the historical narrative propagated as part of the campaign for a national renovation in Laos great emphasis is placed on explaining the reasons for the disintegration of the Lan Xang Kingdom and the loss of unity. The period of decline is linked with a changing state of mind. First, unity was lost as political conflicts emerged because rulers were guided more by 'egoism' and 'personal interests' than by national interests. Second, continued warfare and conflict led to the emergence of the so-called *su-su* nature of the Lao during the period of decline. That is, a Lao stereotype characterised by keywords such as 'lazy', 'indifferent', 'ignorant', 'uneducated', and 'light-hearted'. The perception of such a causality, which links the fate of Laos over time with changes in the mental dispositions of the Lao, is, for example, forcefully expressed in a series of articles appearing in the first issue of *Pathet Lao*. Take, for example, the article with the revealing heading 'The Errors of Our Ancestors'. It is written by Bouasy, a Lao civil servant. Bouasy states that decadence emerged because the Lao an-

cestors sacrificed the overall interests of the country to their personal interests. When dealing with the 'dark age' of Lao history – the period when Lan Xang had been split into rival kingdoms – Bouasy refers to the existence of a kind of solidarity among the Lao. This solidarity, however, did not equate to a sense of belonging to a country:

[it] did not include the whole of the country; it was only limited to the village or neighbouring villages. Clannishness took the place of what we term love of the nation or patriotism, as the Lao of one mueang seemed to be unaware that the Lao of another mueang were their brothers. The horizon of our ancestors was very narrow-minded. In general the outlook was confined by the mountains forming the limits of the rice fields. This was their universe.

This divided geopolitical landscape also implied the existence of many lords each guided by egoist concerns. In the words of Bouasy a 'feudalism' existed that formed the 'gangrene that destroyed our country'. At the same time Bouasy characterises the Lao of past generations as being much too caught up with amusing themselves while neglecting work and education. In doing so these Lao neglected the duty of 'preparing the future for their descendants'. Alluding to an old saying – 'a father who takes his food too salty also makes his children thirsty' – Bouasy laments further how this *su-su* nature for much too long has characterised the Lao and how the Lao have inherited the 'sickness of merrymaking' from their forefathers. But now the time had come to remedy this situation:

Thank you, *Lao Nhay*, for inviting us to correct the mistakes of the past. Thank you for waking us and turning us towards a new horizon, towards a future more viable, more secure and more glorious. The mistakes of our ancestors will not be futile if they serve us as a lesson today.⁶⁶

In the same vein Thao Phoui alluded to the changing states of mind when he sets out to discover 'Who are We?' in an article in the same issue of *Pathet Lao*. Phoui provides a twofold answer. On the one hand, referring to the recent past he characterises the Lao as 'lazy' and 'carefree' in accordance with the *su-su* stereotype. But

on the other hand, Phoui locates the remnants of a more glorious identity under the veneer of the decadent nature. The Lao not only have a genealogy stretching far back in time, but he characterises them also as a people 'who sleep in the shadow of a great past'. Now, according to Phoui, the Lao are ready to take advantage of what the French have to offer them:

A new spirit has been born that calls for solidarity, sacrifice, and the revival of a *Patrie* – mutilated and gasping for breath. Our answer is: here we are. Here we are with all our strength and energies not yet destroyed. And we say to France: do to us what you will. Our ancestors gave their hearts to Pavie; following their example and, in full confidence, we give you ours.⁶⁷

Following the guidelines mentioned earlier, French propaganda in Laos was to de-link Laos from Thai pretensions, stressing how the Thai in the past were unable to protect the Lao against the ravaging Ho. Referring to the same logic, the military confrontation and the loss of Laos's territories west of the Mekong could have been interpreted as evidence for the inability of the French to defend Laos. This is not the case. In the narrative, the attacks represent a necessary evil that violently shook the Lao out of their lethargy and made them conscious of their country and the unity that they had lost in a distant past. In this manner, the attacks become a decisive turning point that woke the Lao from a slumber and made them desirous to carve out a new path towards the future. That is, the attacks are linked with the formation of a new state of mind among the population in Laos. The problem or frustration associated with the loss of territory is played down in comparison with the gains achieved: a spiritual awakening. In an editorial in *Lao Nhay* entitled 'The Lao have Regained Consciousness' the positive implications of the Thai attacks are summarised in the following manner:

The deeds of the Thai have also made us understand that we do not suffer as individuals. All the Lao living along the Mekong have endured sufferings. This has been the occasion for all to awaken and think about their Lao race/nation (*sat lao*). From North to South,

Housai to Pakse, from the Lan Xang Mountains to the Saravan Mountains, [...] all the Lao now feel that a line unites them: the line of the old Lao race/lineage. When feeling this, [the Lao] desire to preserve the Lao name for ever.

Cessation of territory is not a pleasant experience, the editorial continues, but what is important is that a people can face the future when they have faith in themselves, and:

[a] faith like this has been lit in the mind of the Lao (*sao lao*). Together we will preserve this flame to be bright forever. Soon it will shine brightly over all of the Mekong Valley and be a sign that the Lao race/nation has awakened.⁶⁸

The same positive linkage between the attacks and a fundamental turning point in the history of Laos and the Lao is stressed in another editorial of *Lao Nhay*, extolling what has happened in Laos since 1941. Besides the construction of new roads, reforms of the administration and educational sector something more important has been achieved:

[...] the Lao have regained consciousness and have re-found their love for the race/nation passed on from a distant past. From North to South no matter what districts, [the people] call out for their compatriots (*phuean huam sat lao*) to unite.⁶⁹

That is, a unified Laos has become the ideal and it is deemed necessary to work for the unification of Laos. A unified Laos, however, is not perceived as a new and strange creation. In the previous chapter we saw how a proto-national history of Laos was in the making in the 1930s. In this history the modern state of Laos is conceived as being part of a linear history stretching back to the early beginnings of the Lan Xang Kingdom. The perception of history propagated by the campaign for a national renovation in Laos places great emphasis on associating the emergence of a unified Laos with the re-awakening of an identity and sentiments that have always been in existence. With reference to the glorious past of Lan Xang, the 'New Laos' or 'Young Laos' embodies the 're-construction' or 're-unification' of a space and its population which lost its unity under

specific historical circumstances. Laos is transformed from 'Old Laos' to 'New Laos' implying continuity with the past. 'New Laos' is to be formed in conformity with an ancient Lao cultural heritage. Or, as Nhouy Abhay puts it in his speech on the occasion of the opening of the Lao Theatre in Vientiane (*Théâtre Lao de Vientiane*) in late 1941: the new Laos is to be constructed with 'old Lao stones'.⁷⁰ Bringing a 'New Laos' into being indicates a process of change within an overall continuity. This idea of embedding Laos with continuity within an overall process of change is nicely captured by Rochet in a small article published in *Indochine*:

Of course, I knew that this old Laos – nice and resigned – was still intact, but at its side, a young Laos was in the process of being born and was looking towards life. On thinking about it, I found it logical, natural, inevitable. And yet, I remained surprised as if I had had a revelation. 'Moral unity, national spirit, revival of the Lao *patrie* ...'. These words that I heard proclaimed with so much faith vibrated in my ears. Oh! They were not exactly new for me. During chats, I had often heard the old Laotians pronounce them as well. But they talked about these things with their gaze on the past and with a voice loaded with regret. They talked about them as memories lost long ago in the mists of the centuries ... And I came to gaze upon a room of young men – confident and enthusiastic – who had decided to make this dream of their ancestors a living reality. My stroll had taken me to Wat Phra Kaeo. Before the temple, in the night, stood the statue of Pavie against the star-studded sky, as if he was on the guard. Pavie! ... The saint, the creator of French Laos! ... What does he think, I asked myself, if, high on his pedestal, the man with his big hat could contemplate this birth of a Laotian patriotism? ... Without a doubt he would be thrilled. Yes, it would be sweet for him to see his work accomplished, crowned. It would be sweet for him to see resurrected the country he had loved and, because of him, France had saved.⁷¹

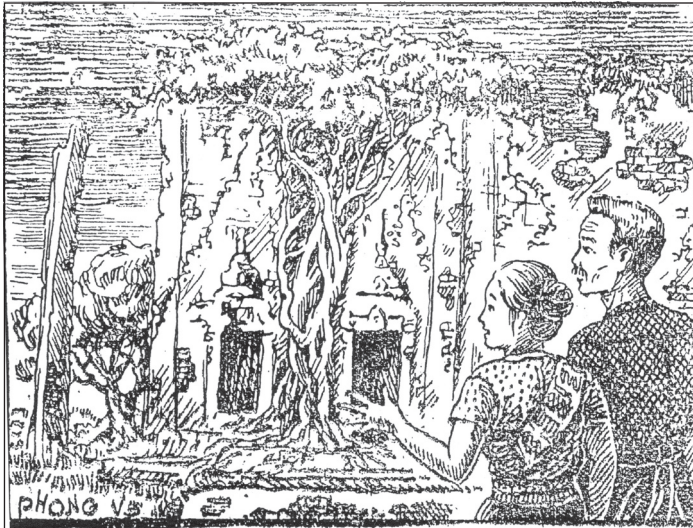
Just as in the historical narrative propagated in the previous period, we also see here how Auguste Pavie in the 1941–45 period is presented as the epitome of the positive aspect of French colonialism: had it not been for Pavie 'Laos and the Lao name would probably

have disappeared' as readers could read in *Lao Nhay*.⁷² In general this is reflected in numerous references throughout *Lao Nhay* and specifically in an article where the deeds of Pavie are praised under the heading 'Great Men and their Everlasting Work'.⁷³ In the novel *Khamson and Sisamud* Pavie is hailed as 'the one who restored the Lao race/nation (*sat lao*) so that it did not disappear'.⁷⁴ In that connection an interesting parallel between, on the one hand, Pavie and Oun Kham, and, on the other hand, Decoux and Sisavang Vong is often invoked to communicate this theme of French protection. Pavie was instrumental in the survival of Laos. But initially the *patrie* was not resurrected because the Lao were not ready for this due to their decadent nature. But now a new spirit has been born after the Thai attacks and the Lao once more turn to Decoux to be saved.⁷⁵ Furthermore, this theme of the necessity of French colonialism to safeguard and develop Laos is conveyed with reference to the symbolism of Laos as a 'spiritual child' and France as an 'adopted mother'. Or as it is phrased in an article in *Pathet Lao*: 'In reality Laos is still at the stage of an infant. If not supported, it will fall; if not defended it will be beaten.'⁷⁶ Laos is moving forward by resurrecting qualities of the past under French tutelage.

In the previous chapter I dealt with the significance of the restoration of Vientiane and of various religious monuments as national symbols expressing the essence of the historical narrative. In 1942 Wat Phra Kaeo in Vientiane was inaugurated after it had undergone a thorough restoration. This was hailed as a very auspicious sign for the future of Laos, and the fate of the temple was so closely related to the sorrows and happiness of the country that it was characterised as the 'national temple of Laos'.⁷⁷ In fact, the history of Wat Phra Kaeo can be read as the essence of the above-mentioned historical narrative. Its creation dates back to the Lan Xang Kingdom and it is a unique symbol of that period. When it was raided by the Siamese invaders in 1828, the most auspicious Buddha image of the kingdom kept in the temple was carried off to Bangkok and the temple was left in ruins. Following 150 years of devastation Wat Phra Kaeo was finally restored to its former glory with French help in 1942,

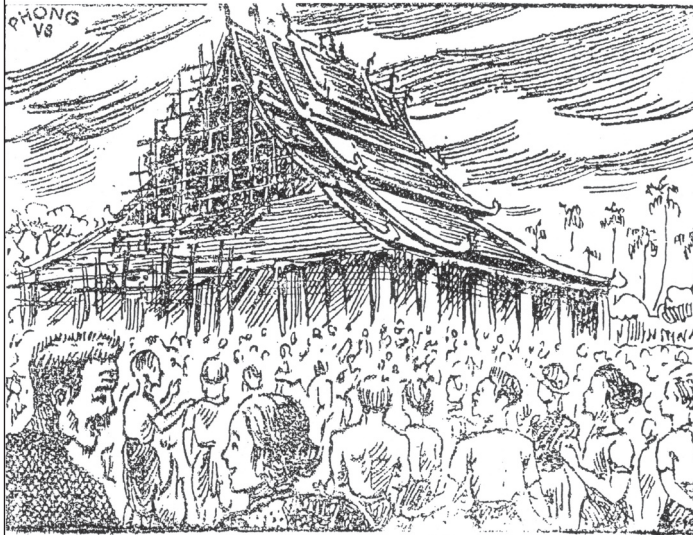
'giving back to Laos its glory and prosperity of the past'.⁷⁸ Emerging from the ruins it appeared more smart and 'svelte' than ever – resurrected under French tutelage, but under the supervision of Souvanna Phouma and employing Lao workers indicating that the Lao are just as capable as any other people.⁷⁹ In the same way the historical narrative portrayed a 'New Laos' in the making under French guidance, but with the Lao taking an active part. Although new and modern in its appearance Laos was formed according to a specific historical heritage. Like a phoenix, Laos – and Wat Phra Kaeo – rose from the ashes in a slightly different but still familiar shape.⁸⁰ (See Figure 8.)

The process of creating a sense of an unprecedented unified Lao space is also reflected in a change in the Lao term used to signify 'Laos'. Here I have in mind how the term *sat* took on a new meaning in the public discourse under the auspices of the campaign for a national renovation. This shift parallels the same conceptual development that took place in Thailand in the early part of the twentieth century with regard to the term *chat* – the Thai equivalent to Lao *sat*. Etymologically, the term *chat* means 'origins, birth, race'. By the early twentieth century it was also used to mean 'nation' – often occurring in *prathet chat*.⁸¹ Dictionaries of the Lao language published in the early twentieth century reflect the same polyvalence in the meaning of the term *sat*. In Cuaz's French–Lao dictionary of 1904 the meanings of *sat* are given as: 'race' (*sat*) and 'nation' (*satpathet*).⁸² Likewise, in Guignard's Lao–French dictionary published around a decade later the meanings of the word *sat* are listed as: 'race', 'gender', 'sex' (*sat*) and 'nation', 'people' (*sat pathet* – listed as synonymous with *pathet*).⁸³ Therefore, according to these dictionaries, in the early part of the twentieth century in Lao *sat* could be associated with the term for 'nation'. Still, judging from a reading of Lao schoolbooks from the 1930s the term *sat* was not used officially in connection with Laos. Rather the term *pathet lao* – 'Laos' or 'Lao-land' – is used. Invoking notions of independence from western dominance it is only natural that *chat* in the meaning 'nation' flourished in non-colonised Thailand, while its Lao equivalent was evaded in texts published with the approval of the colonial authorities in Laos.



๕. - บำพูนแกวเมื่อห้าหกปีก่อน

[Wat Phra Kaeo 5-6 years ago.]



๕. - บำพูนแกวในปัจจุบัน

[Wat Phra Kaeo today.]

Figure 8: Wat Phra Kaeo and the resurrection of Laos.

Source: *Lao Nhay*, 26 (March 1942).

Pétain's ideology was closely linked with the idea of the nation, so it must have been almost unavoidable not to begin thinking about Laos in national terms too. If we turn our attention to the World War II period a reading of *Lao Nhay* indicates how *pathet lao* was still the term used primarily when referring to Laos. At the same time we can also see how *sat* and *pathet-sat* appear now with the meaning 'nation'.⁸⁴ In this manner, *pathet sat lao* and *sat lao* were used to conceptualise Laos as a nation-state. However, if we look solely at the term *sat lao*, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to know whether it is employed in the meaning 'Lao race' or 'Lao nation'. Judging from the context it can mean both. Take, for example, *Hymne Lao*, which had an official version in both Lao and French. In the French version we come across the following lines:

Long ago our **Lao race** [*sat lao*] benefited from great renown in Asia.

Then the Lao [*sao lao*] were united and loved each other.

Today once again they love their **race** [*sat lao*] and their *pays* [*pathet*], and are uniting around their leaders.

[...]

They will not allow some **nation** [*sat*] to come and create trouble or take possession of their land.⁸⁵ [My emphasis]

In parenthesis I have given the word used in the Lao version of the text. We can see how *sat* is employed both with the meaning of 'race' and 'nation': 'race' when referring to Lao(s) and 'nation' when referring to a foreign nation. In the Lao version it is impossible to see with what meaning the term *sat* is employed. In line one and three we could just as well have translated *sat lao* as 'Lao nation'. It is the French version that fixes the meaning. This play with words may mirror a French reluctance to apply the term 'nation' to Laos as this potentially could be linked with the notion of an independent Laos released from French colonialism. Nevertheless, ideologically the campaign for a national renovation in Laos is linked with the 'resurrection' or 'reconstruction' of a Lao nation conceptualised as *sat lao* or *sat pathet lao*. This emerging Lao nation is harnessed to the French

colonial project. That is, the process of bringing Laos into existence as a Lao nation is not linked with a political revolution releasing Laos from French colonial rule. Instead, as discussed above, the creation of the Lao nation is linked with a human revolution under French guidance. This idea is summarised nicely in a note published together with the first novel in Lao in 1943. Here, in a very Pétain-like manner, it is specified that the Lao national renovation is linked with forming a new work ethic, exercise of the body, cleanliness, and discipline. These entail the qualities of the human revolution that will bring Laos forward. If we do not know 'respect for seniors, to tell the truth, [...] our Laos cannot become "Great Laos"', as it is stated in the note.⁸⁶ In the same vein, a young Lao 'patriot' or 'nationalist' (*phū hak sat*) is defined as a 'docile and well-mannered person' (*pen khon hu phū di*).⁸⁷

LES ANNAMITES ET NOUS:
AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP

In the last chapter we saw how the Vietnamese population in Laos increased in the 1920–30s and how debates on the future of Laos had centred on whether Laos should be a 'Lao Laos' or a 'Laos Annamite'. The administrative, economic and politico-cultural programme launched by the French colonial administration in Laos during World War II intended to bury designs for a 'Laos Annamite'. Still, for many Lao the Vietnamese population living in Laos and their dominance in the urban centres was still perceived as a threat. In a report written in 1945 summarising the accomplishments of the campaign for a national renovation in Laos, Rochet notes how the theme of an Indochinese federation was received 'coldly' in Laos due to fear that this would imply an increased Vietnamese influence in Laos.⁸⁸ In this connection it is interesting to note how the first issue of *Lao Nhay* contains a small textbox informing the readers that this new Lao newspaper is intended to be the journal of the Lao, French and Vietnamese, with the aim of establishing a 'line between' these people.⁸⁹ Letters from Vietnamese in Laos published in the early issues of *Lao Nhay* were, however, soon to disappear. Later, in 1943,

Lao Nhay was supplemented with *Le Nouveau Laos* in French and *Tin Lao* in Vietnamese. Although it is not stated explicitly such a split up of the readership along 'racial' or 'national' lines may have been connected with Lao discontent with the Vietnamese being present in their 'national' newspaper.

Still, in *Lao Nhay* we also encounter articles that stress how the 'New Laos' is to be constructed by Lao and Vietnamese in co-operation and hail the harmonious co-existence between these two groups of people.⁹⁰ There are also articles dealing with the Lao-Vietnamese relationship from a historical perspective. Take, for example, the article entitled 'The relationship between Lao and the Vietnamese according to the chronicles' which was published over two issues in May 1943.⁹¹ In this article the relationship between these two people over the *longue durée* is characterised as:

[...] a friendly relationship only scarred by minor instances of conflict in a distant past that we have all but forgotten today. For five centuries the Lao have been on good terms and have been getting along well with the Vietnamese but not with other people.⁹²

This 'harmonious' relationship, however, is not one between two equal partners. While the Thai appear as the 'oppressors' in the Lao historical narrative, the Vietnamese are assigned the role of 'protectors'. They fulfil this role especially after the destruction of Vientiane in 1828, an event that expresses the quintessence of the oppressive Thai. However, after this the Vietnamese Ming Mang stationed troops in Xiengkhuang in order to 'protect it against Thai troops', and many of the Lao principalities sought Vietnamese protection as a bulwark against harassment by the Thai.⁹³ From this historical projection emerges, first of all, an 'us-them' dichotomy, with the Lao juxtaposed to the Thai. But the 'us' category is enlarged to include the Vietnamese. In this way the modern creation of an Indochinese unity is projected back in time. From this historical perspective the Thai are perceived as a 'danger from the outside' (*antalai phai nok*).⁹⁴ According to this article the closeness between the Lao and the Vietnamese is further nourished by common descent or racial

closeness (*pen suea phi sai nong kan*). Originally, the two peoples were settled in a region north of Indochina. In search for land to farm they moved southward to live on each side of the Annamese Cordillera and were subjected to different cultural influences. But when it comes to 'mind and spirit' they are still closely related.⁹⁵ Through this projection Laos is sealed off from Thailand as part of this historically constituted 'Lao-Vietnamese federation'.

However, in *Pathet Lao, Lao Nhay* and *Indochine* we encounter articles presenting the Lao-Vietnamese in more ambivalent terms. This ambivalence is, for example, expressed clearly in the article 'Les Annamites et nous' by Ourot Souvannavong.⁹⁶ On the one hand, Ourot praises the Vietnamese for contributing positively to the development of Laos: not only have the coolies on roadwork and the civil servants in the offices assisted the development of Laos, but recently they have also defended Laos when it was threatened by the Thai. Furthermore, Ourot notes that many of the Vietnamese living in Vientiane as teachers, traders and civil servants have married Lao women, and have, in fact, become 'just as much Laotians as us'. On the other hand, Ourot likens the influx of Vietnamese farmers to an 'invading flood' and emphasises that they can be a danger for Laos. If these farmers – characterised as 'disagreeable' and 'arrogant' – arrive in great numbers in Laos, a situation will be created where the Vietnamese will not only be masters of the cities, but also owners of the rice fields. Echoing Prince Phetsarath and French colonial administrators in Laos in the 1930s, Ourot calls for a controlled immigration of Vietnamese into Laos:

Just as it is impossible to keep the waters of the Mekong from flooding the plains it is also impossible to keep the Annamese [Vietnamese] from entering Laos. But in the same way as it is possible to guide the water through channels to allow it into this locality and keep it out of another, in the same manner it is possible to control the stream of immigrants that threatens to drown us.⁹⁷

According to Ourot, however, it is not only the responsibility of the French administration to control Vietnamese immigration into

Laos. In line with the discourse on Lao decadence and regeneration, he notes that it is also up to the Lao to work. In other words, the Lao have to take responsibility themselves by leaving their *su-su* nature behind. The change of mind imbedded in the campaign for a national renovation is the best barrier to the danger to the Lao and Laos arising from the immigrant Vietnamese.

In another article praising the material progress achieved in southern Laos, the author laments the tendency of the Lao to leave the major cities in Laos to settle in the countryside because of the stiff competition they encounter from foreigners (*tang dao*). People who do this

[. . .] do not think of the future of our nation [*pathet sat*] at all. The time now is the time for fight. Anyone who does not fight and defend their rights must die and disappear. The Lao race/nation [*sat lao*] used to be well known and in history they were not weak and lazy like the ones referred to [i.e. those moving away from the cities]. We are clever and can live like all other races/nations [*sat*]. We must show that we have strength, intelligence and ideas equal with other races/nations [*sat*].⁹⁸

Eric Pietrantoni's study of the population in Laos in 1943 attests how the Vietnamese made up the major component of the population in the cities in southern Laos.⁹⁹ So although there is no explicit reference in the above-mentioned article to the Vietnamese there can be no doubt that they are the ones the Laotians have to fight. This theme of 'racial' exclusion is also a recurring theme in articles stressing the need for the Lao to attend schools and become educated. In one article focusing on the need to educate more Lao teachers, for example, the author takes issue with a problem he has heard people addressing very often: that they only encounter other races/nationalities in the government offices in Laos. Instead of just complaining, the author urges these to send their children to the schools to counter this menace.¹⁰⁰ Again, there is made no explicit reference to the Vietnamese. But taking into consideration the great abundance of Vietnamese in the administrative sector in Laos there can be no doubt that this argument is framed with them in mind.¹⁰¹

CULTURAL REVIVAL: LITERATURE AND SONGS

We saw earlier how an attempt was made to build up a Lao religious textual heritage at the Buddhist Institute in Vientiane in the 1930s. Contemporary Lao literature was, however, virtually non-existent when the Vichy-sponsored campaign for a national renovation was launched in Laos. Instead, the reading public in Laos had to turn to publications in foreign languages, such as French and Thai. If Laos were to be revived as a full-fledged *patrie* this lack of contemporary Lao literature constituted a problem, not only because the reading public in Laos was potentially confronted with Thai anti-French propaganda when reading Thai literature, but also because the lack of an indigenous Lao literature kept Laos within the cultural sphere of Thailand. This problem was acknowledged by the chief for the Service for Information, Propaganda and Press (IPP), who called for a speeding up of the publication of books and pamphlets in Lao to counter the diffusion of books and other material in Thai in Laos.¹⁰²

In connection with building up a separate specific modern and popular Lao literary tradition *Lao Nhay* – both as printed medium and as an institution – played an important role. As Laos's first newspaper written in the Lao language, *Lao Nhay* was not only a symbol of the new national space in the making and a symbol of the modernity of 'New Laos'. The newspaper was also instrumental in the attempt to bring a new Lao literary tradition into existence by printing and diffusing the new literature. In a regularly-featuring column entitled Liberal Arts (*aksonsat*) classical and modern Lao poems were printed and made known throughout Laos. The classical Lao literary heritage was especially connected with the poem *Sin Sai* and sections of it were a recurring feature in the newspaper. In co-operation with a Lao Literary Committee formed in 1941, *Lao Nhay* also arranged literary contests to stimulate the writing of modern Lao literature and selected texts were published either in *Lao Nhay* or under separate cover. The first poetry contest was arranged in early 1941 on the theme 'our homeland' (*thinthan bankoet khong sat lao*). This contest was followed by other literary contests

covering tales, cartoons, and translations of French literary pieces into Lao. Among the books published by *Lao Nhay* we find the winning poem from the first poetry contest written by Thao Nouthak. This was followed by the publication of *The Sacred Buddha Image* by Lao Cindamani (Pierre Nginn), the first short story in Lao. It was published in 1943.¹⁰³ Later a book *Lao Poetry (kap kon lao)* containing the poems found most popular by *Lao Nhay* was published. The idea was that this book should serve as a guidebook for other potential poets. A collection of Lao translations of French literary pieces was likewise published. Finally, all the songs and theatre plays written as part of the campaign for a national renovation in Laos were published by *Lao Nhay* throughout the period 1941–45.

Linked with this drive to publish Lao literature was an attempt to standardise the rules for Lao poetry. People who wanted to contribute poems to *Lao Nhay* were urged to follow the strict rules for Lao poetry. This served two purposes. First, to secure and improve the quality of modern Lao poetry. Secondly, to link the modern literature with that of the past by reproducing rules that supposedly were found in Lao classical poetry. In that connection it is interesting to note how a Lao literary history was in fact framed with reference to the golden age-decadence-resurrection narrative structure mentioned earlier. In an editorial in *Lao Nhay*, for example, Thao Nouthak is hailed as the winner of the first literary contest in the following manner:

For three centuries Lao poetry has been in a disastrous state. The scribes copied the poetry passed on from antiquity wrongly and changed it from the original form as the scribes or the singers were neither diligent nor interested. The conventions of poetry were not respected. Thao Nouthak has solved this problem entirely and has resurrected our classical verses of seven or nine syllables in conformity with the classical conventions and has made them just as renowned as in the past.¹⁰⁴

As Laos got its new generation of poets, the new poetry expressed continuity with the classical traditions with regard to *form*, but was characterised by change with regard to *content*. The new

literature was to fulfil a new function in a 'New Laos'. In *Lao Nhay* it was noted:

These days the poets do not only write about adultery and young girls. Rather, the poets have attempted to compose poetry dealing with other subjects in order to advise the elder and younger Lao siblings [...].¹⁰⁵



Child: 'How can I get the coconut?'
 Father: 'If you want it, you have to climb up the school.'
 Child: 'I do not want to follow that path.'
 Father: 'Then you will have nothing to eat.'

(The tree trunk reads 'school'; the top reads 'doctor', 'teacher' and 'district administrator')

Figure 9: Building a future through education.
 Source: *Lao Nhay*, 19 (November 1941).

In this way literature fulfilled a double function in the campaign for a national renovation. It was not only a symbol of the renovation but was also used as a medium for carrying the message of what the Lao in a 'New Laos' should and should not do. That is, the poems were used to express the characteristics of 'Lao-ness', and the ethics and human ideals embodied in the human revolution that should bring Laos forward from a degenerate past. An exaltation of the human qualities that should characterise the modern Lao was therefore a recurrent theme in many of the poems published in *Lao Nhay*.

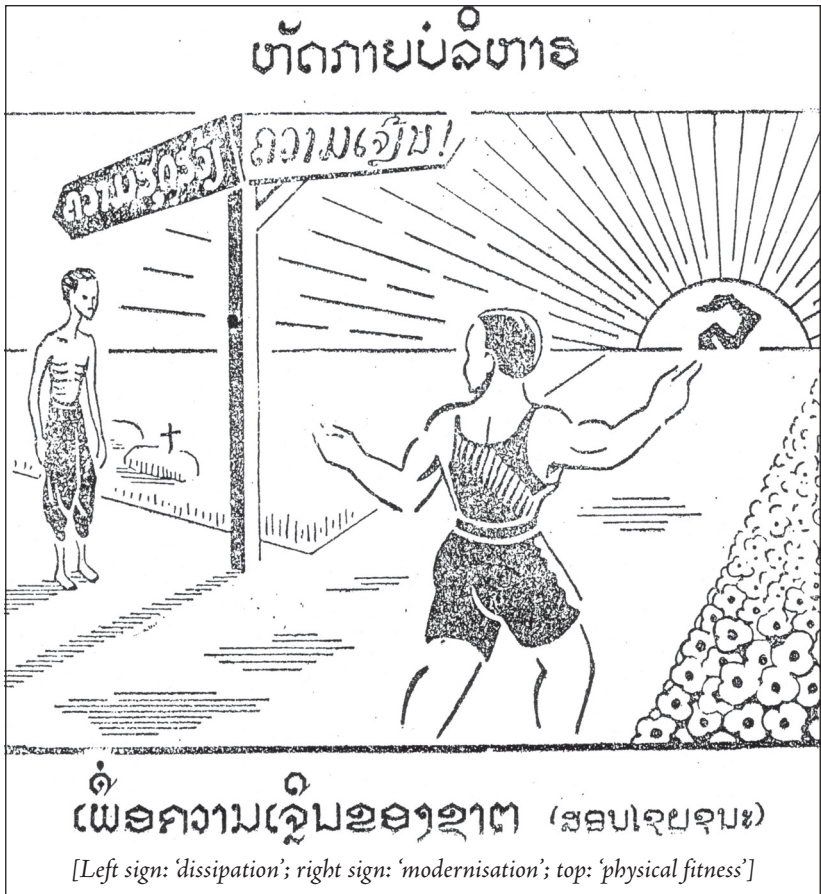


Figure 10: Disciplining the body and modernising the nation/race.
Source: *Lao Nhay*, 33 (June 1942).

Not surprisingly, a central theme in many poems was the need for education.¹⁰⁶ Another recurring theme was the need for the people to work and produce instead of idling the time away. The lazy ways of the past were to be left behind and instead the Lao were to work for a common future.¹⁰⁷ These two characteristics of the new-born Lao – education and diligence – were linked also with a 'pure' way of living and in poems gambling and the misuse of alcohol and opium were likewise discouraged.¹⁰⁸ The need to abandon ways and beliefs of former times was also a recurring theme. In an untitled poem, for example, the habit of chewing betel was discouraged. The causes of various common diseases were explained with reference to modern medicine while the 'traditional' way of explaining illness with reference to spirits was rejected.¹⁰⁹ (See Figures 9, 10, 11.)



'To put on your father's glasses will not help you read if you do not attend school.'

Figure 11: The need for education.
Source: Lao Nhay, 21 (November 1941).

Besides serving as a kind of checklist to the ideal characteristics of 'Lao-ness' in the 'New Laos', the quintessence of the historical narrative of degeneration and resurrection was a recurring theme in the poems published in *Lao Nhay*. This theme added both historical depth to 'New Laos' and emphasised the positive – and indeed necessary – influence of French colonialism on Laos and Lao society. This narrative was, for example, embodied in the poems that were awarded prizes in the first literary contest launched by *Lao Nhay*. Take, for example, the poem by Thao Set – a teacher from Mueang Nong who received the second prize. The poem traces the history of the Lao back to a mythical homeland in southern China. Due to hardship the Lao left this place and moved further south and settled on the east-bank territories of the Mekong. According to the poem, at first the Lao people were politically divided and King Fa Ngum is hailed as the king who brought unity to the Lao. This distant past is evoked as Laos's golden age. Only part of the poem was published in *Lao Nhay*. In this extract the golden age is followed abruptly by a period of disorder and chaos that only the French were able to stop. Thao Set finally encourages the readers to contemplate how Laos today is more prosperous and civilised than ever due to France. The term 'Laos' (*pathet lao*) is used throughout the poem, embedding modern Laos with a permanent and everlasting quality. In another poem by Thao Khammuy – a clerk from Paksong who also received a second prize – it is the protective and positive aspect of French colonialism that features as the recurrent theme. As a tiny country it has only been possible for Laos to survive in the protective shade of French grandeur. Finally, there is the poem by Thao Thong Sing – an assistant in Luang Phrabang – which received fourth prize in the contest. In the poem Thao Thong locates Laos's golden age in a distant past in southern China. Threatened by enemy forces the Lao were forced to leave this wonderland and started moving southwards to settle in the Mekong region. During this migration the Lao were split into various groups fighting each other. As they were divided, the Lao were weak and came under the rule of other people. Thao Thong wants the Lao to remember this historical lesson: in times of

danger it is only when the Lao are united that they are strong enough to fight the enemy. The poem ends with Thao Thong asking the Lao to unite and love their homeland that has been passed on to them from their ancestors.¹¹⁰

Parallel to this endeavour to resurrect and renovate Lao literature a similar project was launched with respect to another facet of the Lao cultural heritage: Lao songs. A first step was taken in May 1941 when a Committee for Music was formed with the aim to 'revive' and 'modernise the classical songs of Laos'.¹¹¹ A few months later, an editorial in *Lao Nhay* spelled out what the work of this committee entailed. According to the editorial Laos was in the middle of a modernisation process and things 'backward' and out of fashion had to be changed in order to fit the modern era. The readers, however, were assured that this modernisation process did not imply that 'old songs that are pleasant to our ears will be thrown away'. These songs represent a 'heritage that has been passed on to us from the time when the Lao race/nation was born'.¹¹² These traditional songs were to be preserved. At the same time new songs were to be written that were more suited to the demands of contemporary Laos. This implied the composition of songs elucidating the themes of a degenerate past, the positive aspect of French colonialism, and the need for a unification of the people. These are all themes that figures prominently in many of the songs written as part of the campaign for a national renovation in Laos. In 'The Lao peasant' (*pho na lao* or *Chant du paysan lao*), for example, the farmers are asked to work hard for their country:

Come, come, come, farmers, my friends,
Let us get up, as usual, at the first crow of the cock.
Come, come, come, the horizon is already glowing in the East.
The sun soaks us in its rays; hurry up, dear friends.
Prepare our ploughs, our buffaloes, our harrows and leave.
Working in the fields is not a humiliating task;
On the contrary, it makes us money:

We shall undertake this with ardour.
Farmers, my dear companions,

We must love working in the fields.
It is hard but we will persevere:
We harvest from it excellent fruits.
Working in the fields is just as useful and necessary
As trade and better than the bureaucracy [*mandarinate*];
It provides pleasure for both body and spirit.¹¹³

In 'A call to the Lao' (*tuean chai lao* or *Appel aux Lao*) the decadent Lao stereotype is identified as the cause that has brought the Lao race/nation to the edge of extinction. This deplorable situation can only be reversed if all the Lao who have been living in 'indifference' and 'idleness' break with the past and become united:

Listen, Lao, my brothers,
You who take pleasure in indifference and laziness:
This attitude is contrary to our interests
For the danger stalks us.
Our Lao race [*suea lao*] was on the brink of perishing, its name was
going to disappear.
Must we, my brothers, accept such a situation?

Listen, Lao, my brothers,
You who take pleasure in indifference and laziness:
When you think about it, what sadness;
The one who has understood this is awakened with a jolt and stops
his daydreaming.
Let us keep each other on guard all the time
And let us search for ways to defend our country [*pathet*] and make
it long-lasting.

Listen, Lao, my brothers,
You who take pleasure in indifference and laziness:
The best way to reach this result
Is to love each other, my brothers;
To help each other all our lives,
To share on all occasions and with a kind heart
Our sorrows and happiness.¹¹⁴

'Union of the Lao' (*lao huam samphan* or *L'union Lao*) reflects on the unity of the people in Laos from north to south with regard to race and common ancestry:

The [geographical] limits of Laos are very vast. Its name 'Lan Xang' was once famous.

Whether they be from the North or the South, its people do not belong to different races. They are all Lao.

Oh, compatriots, protect yourselves mutually.

Do not say that there are people from the north and people from the south.

Those who have good fortune and wealth must help those who find themselves in unhappiness, poverty and misfortune.

We are of the same blood and we are descendants from the same ancestors,

We must love each other to the end of our lives.

Friends, gather quickly and let us unite our physical and spiritual strengths.

Quick, quick, rush to defend the Lao race [*lueat nuea suea lao*] together.

Quick, quick, wake up and help us protect ourselves against misfortune, so that the Lao will continue to exist.

Sacrifice yourself body and soul. We are virile men and we must accept dying for our *pays* [*sat*].

And we will be ready to spill our blood for the greatness and the glory of our *patrie* [*sat*].¹¹⁵

Finally, the close relationship between Laos and France is a central theme in *Hymne Lao*:

In olden times our Lao race [*sat lao*] was well known in Asia.

Then the Lao [*sao lao*] were united and loved each other.

Today they still know how to love their race [*sat lao*] and their *pays* [*pathet*], and unite around their leaders.

They have preserved the religion of their fathers and have known how to watch over their ancestral soil.

They will not allow any nation [*sat*] to come and create trouble or take possession of their land.

Whoever will invade their land will find them firmly determined to fight until death.

Together they will restore the antique glory of the Lao blood and help each other in times of hardship.

France is here; she assists us in hard times, she awakens us and shows us the way.

Hurry, get in line and march towards our destiny.

Laotian brothers, wake up! It is only through the rebirth of our country that we will find happiness.

France is our teacher, she seeks to teach us and lift us up.

Hurry! Let us march resolutely towards progress like other nations [sat].

Let us come together! Unite our hearts and our forces and work with zeal.

We are united in life, we will be united in death, we will know to share as brothers the times of hardship and days of happiness.¹¹⁶

The first Lao gramophone record with *Hymne Lao* embodied the close relationship between Laos and France as the Lao national anthem appeared on this record together with the French national anthem. This close relationship between the Lao and the French is depicted nicely in a cartoon included in the published version of the play *La Folie des Grandeurs*.¹¹⁷ The cartoon depicts a group of Lao children belonging to the Lao Youth Movement – all wearing on their shirt the emblem with the L mentioned earlier – singing the Lao national anthem. Two of the children in the centre of the group carry a picture of Petain whereby Laos is linked symbolically to the overall French Empire.

‘SIAM-IFICATION’ OR ‘LAO-IFICATION’:
THE ISSUE OF LANGUAGE STANDARDISATION

The Lao Literary Committee was not only concerned with the renovation of Lao literature, but was also concerned with language matters. One of its explicit aims was to defend the Lao language.¹¹⁸ For the committee this endeavour was linked with a unification of Lao vocabulary and orthography, and in *Lao Nhay* they found the medium through which this was to be achieved. As it is evident from my discussion of the language issue in the last chapter, at the turn of World War II a standardisation key for the spelling of Lao had yet to be produced. An analysis of the spelling employed in the columns of

Lao Nhay displays how it was still difficult to establish a fundamental principle according to which Lao should be spelled.

In accordance with the results of the discussions concerning the standardisation of the Lao alphabet in 1938–39, the first line of approach was to use an orthography in accordance with the so-called phonetic principle. In the early issues of *Lao Nhay* published in 1941, the words were spelled as they are pronounced and the *karan* figures only in very few words. A systematic presentation of the rules for spelling was, however, not laid out and in the early issues we can find certain variations in the spelling, especially with regard to the final consonants.

This phonetic spelling was praised as a system that was easy to read and therefore suited to the educational level of the masses.¹¹⁹ But this spelling was never given time to mature. Instead, from the beginning of 1942, a new spelling principle was adopted in *Lao Nhay*. This change was motivated by an ambition to enrich the Lao language through neologisms. Following long discussions in the Lao Literary Committee it was decided to borrow words of Pali–Sanskrit origin from Thai and write them in a Lao manner. Or, as Charles Rochet put it, to 'Lao-ify' them.¹²⁰ This change was based on a principle devised by Pierre Nginn. In practice this meant the overall implementation of what was called 'simple etymological spelling' (*tam khaomun nyang ngaj*), which gradually superseded the original phonetic spelling. The new spelling implied widespread use of what Maha Sila Viravong had earlier termed irregular Pali final-consonants and of the *karan*. At the same time various measures were taken to codify this new way of spelling. First, extracts from a new 'mini dictionary' were published in the *Lao Nhay*. In this dictionary new words were explained and their spelling was fixed. Among the phrases introduced in this way we find what could be termed 'high language' (*sap sung*) forms of ordinary words and words used explicitly in connection with royalty (*lasa sap*).¹²¹ A problem with the simple etymological spelling was the uncertainties it often created with regard to the pronunciation of certain words, and in the word-list a specification of how these new words were to be pronounced

was included. Second, a table entitled 'A Revision of the Spelling of Lao' was printed where some basic spelling rules were laid out.¹²²

The simple etymological spelling principle presented and used in *Lao Nhay* had one serious problem: it moved the spelling of Lao dangerously close to that of Thai. Just as George Cœdès two decades earlier had stressed the close relationship that exists between language engineering and politics he also pointed his finger to this pertinent problem in this case. Although he approved of the spelling employed in the newspaper, Cœdès raised the following issue in a letter to Pierre Nginn, the mastermind behind the reform and later editor of *Lao Nhay*:

It is clear that Siamese orthography is much more conservative and accordingly more 'etymological' than the Lao [orthography], and that all attempts to write Lao in conformity with its etymology will be inspired by the Siamese orthography. The only inconvenience (but I do not know how to avoid this unless the etymological principle is dropped for the phonetic principle) is that you certainly will be accused of Siam-ifying the Lao language at a moment where, in the political sphere, attempts are being made to achieve the just opposite. I only indicate the danger to you without being able to indicate a cure.¹²³

Clearly, the initiators of the spelling reform were aware of this problem and on several occasions they were accused of using Thai words and Thai spelling, which entailed widespread use of what was called the 'Thai *karan*',¹²⁴ Faced with such a critique, the proponents of the semi-etymological principle argued vigorously that in no way did the new style entail the use of Thai words. In the minutes of a meeting of the Lao Literary Committee published in *Lao Nhay*, the readers are assured that the new words for terms related to political, economic and social issues are exclusively of Pali or Sanskrit origin; and words for scientific terms of French origin.¹²⁵ So although the language engineers looked for inspiration to Thailand, and many new words used in Thailand were introduced in Laos, they sought refuge in a distant origin of the words to argue that the reform of the language by no means implicated Thai- or Siam-ification. 'Take the word *kila*. It is a Pali word that both the Thais and we have bor-

rowed,' it was argued.¹²⁶ Even if the simple etymological spelling at first sight moved written Lao closer to Siamese than the phonetic spelling used previously, yet the new system was designed so that written Lao in some fundamental ways was different from Thai.

In the early 1940s, however, the distinction that had existed between written Lao and written Thai was getting blurred. This was the result of a reform of the Thai alphabet and spelling that was proposed in the middle of 1942 by the Committee for Promoting Thai Language Culture in Thailand. This committee was headed by Prime Minister Phibun himself and counted among its members many of the leading cultural personalities of that age, like Anuman Rajadhon and Wichit Wathakan.¹²⁷ The reform entailed a simplification of the orthographic principle used previously in Thailand. The number of letters in the Thai alphabet was to be reduced and a spelling closely related to the pronunciation of the word was to be adopted. With the exception of three letters, the Lao and Thai alphabets would now be identical and the spelling employed in Thailand would be closely related to the 'simple etymological spelling' used in Laos. The overall cultural reform programme initiated under the premiership of Phibun in the 1940s aimed at defining a distinct 'Thai-ness'. In the same manner, the language reform was also an effort to 'Thai-ify' the writing system. At a meeting of the committee for compiling a new dictionary of the Thai language it was argued that the former spelling had blurred the distinction between words of foreign origin and 'authentic Thai words' (*kham thai doem*) – the latter were said to constitute around seventy per cent of the language.¹²⁸ By spelling the 'authentic' Thai words in accordance with a phonetic principle and adopting a reformed system of etymological spelling for the words of foreign origin, the Thai roots of the language would be clarified. Officially the purpose was to simplify the Thai writing system to make it more easy to read and write. However, always keen on the nexus between cultural reform and political ideology and practice, George Cœdès connected this reform of Thai orthography with the irredentist policies of the Phibun government. As Cœdès noted in a letter to Pierre Nginn:

Moreover, it is probable that this simplification, which as a result will have a kind of unification of the alphabets used by the Siamese, the Laotians, and the Shans of Burma, is inspired by political motives and is part of the pan-Thai policies of the Government in Bangkok.¹²⁹

From a Lao perspective this reform of Thai orthography was hailed as a 'Lao-ification' of Thai.¹³⁰ What had been perceived as the traditional relationship between Lao and Thai was reversed. In a very polemical booklet on the Lao alphabet written by Katay Don Sasorith this point was taken even further. Katay wrote the text in support of the simple etymological principle which had been used and propagated in *Lao Nhay*. According to him this was a sound principle that placed Laos on a middle road, avoiding the extremist positions represented by either the purely phonetic principle or the 'Thai etymological' principle designed by Maha Sila Viravong. What makes Katay's exposition especially interesting is his rehabilitation of the Lao language from a historical perspective and his counter-attack on the standard perception of 'Thai-ness' associated with the Sukhothai Kingdom. In a very Wichit-like manner Katay juggles with former 'ethnic' categories in order to read new meanings into the past and thereby read new meanings into the present. According to Katay, King Ramkhamhaeng was a Lao king. Katay presents this as a historical fact and in passing he substantiates his claim with reference to the language used in the famous Ramkhamhaeng Inscription.¹³¹ In this manner, the Sukhothai Kingdom becomes synonymous with a golden age of Lao – not Thai – culture. The 'Thai-ness' that this kingdom represents in, for example, Wichit Wathakan's contemporary historical narrative of the Thai nation becomes 'Lao-ness'. The implication is that the cultural roots of modern Thailand normally associated with the Sukhothai Kingdom are in fact 'Lao roots'. In Katay's words:

Have we ever seen the vestiges of a specifically Thai past? No. It is well known that the Thais themselves, when speaking about old traditions and their secular literature, always refer uniquely to old Lao traditions – to the classical Lao literature.¹³²

According to the logic of Katay's historical projection the origins of modern Thai writing can be traced to a Lao system of writing – the 'Lao' alphabet of King Ramkhamhaeng. Katay discusses the different reforms the Thai writing system has undergone over time and he welcomes the latest reform as it implies an approximation of Thai written language to that of the writing system currently used in Laos. Having the critics of the latter system in mind, Katay interprets this development as an indication that the writing system employed by *Lao Nhay* in fact represents the most 'rational' and best 'organised' indigenous writing system of the Far East.¹³³ Likewise, in *Lao Nhay* advocates of a spelling in conformity with a purely etymological principle and the introduction of additional letters in agreement with the principle devised earlier by Maha Sila Viravong were criticised openly. *Lao Nhay* was intended be a newspaper of the masses. Therefore to adopt the etymological principle, it was argued in *Lao Nhay*, would be a mistake as it would turn the newspaper into a newspaper for an intellectual elite comprising scholars of Pali and Sanskrit while it was intended be a newspaper of the masses.¹³⁴

Despite all the arguments and despite the fact that the proponents of the simple etymological spelling seemed always to have the upper-hand in the articles published in *Lao Nhay*, this new spelling was stopped without further notice in the end of 1943. At the same time, the publication of Pierre Nginn's dictionary in *Lao Nhay* was terminated. The readers were just informed that a return to a spelling without the *karan* would take place.¹³⁵ A reading of *Lao Nhay* in the period following this announcement shows how the spelling returned to an almost pure phonetic spelling. Whereas the simple etymological spelling had been associated with an attempt to enrich the Lao language through resort to foreign traditions, the new trend was associated with a 'rediscovery' of local Lao traditions. Local manuscripts were to be consulted in order to locate words no longer in use and incorporate them in the modern Lao language. This new strategy to reform the current Lao language was outlined in an article that suggestively had the headline: 'The Original Lao Texts are the Most Precious Objects.'¹³⁶ In the same vein the new spelling

employed was characterised as a return to the 'old pronunciation' (*samniang buhan*).¹³⁷ So in order to move forward it was deemed necessary to go back and in this way Lao writing was established as distinct from Thai writing and the enrichment of the Lao language was removed from the Thai orbit of influence.

Parallel to these endeavours to standardise the spelling of Lao another issue related to the future of written Lao surfaced, namely, the question about using Roman letters to write Lao. In the middle of 1942, an editorial in *Lao Nhay* informed the readers that plans to Romanise Lao existed and that a Committee for Writing Lao with Roman Letters were taking care of this project. The editorial claimed that immense technical progress could be gained through Romanisation, which, it was argued, would make it easier to print Lao texts, would make it possible to use typewriters, and would be more economical by reducing the amount of paper used in printing. According to *Lao Nhay*, Romanisation did not imply a replacement of Lao letters proper. Roman letters would be used along with Lao letters. Therefore, *Lao Nhay* had decided to give the Romanisation-project its full support as it would not lead to a marginalisation of the Lao alphabet which is 'an intellectual heritage of the Lao race/nation'.¹³⁸ The same issue of *Lao Nhay* included a preliminary list showing how to write Lao with Roman letters, and in line with the practice adopted so often before *Lao Nhay* soon launched a contest for writing short texts with Roman letters.¹³⁹

The question of how the use of two distinct ways of writing Lao was to be realised in practice was not dealt with. Concurrently, a similar scheme was launched in Cambodia. A Romanisation of Lao and Khmer might be linked with a plan to de-link these parts of French Indochina from Thailand by adopting an alphabet of non-Indian origins. However, in the contemporary literature dealing with this issue, Romanisation is linked in general with a desirable, indeed necessary, modernisation of the Laotian and Cambodian societies.¹⁴⁰ This view is, for example, advocated by Katay Sasorith – an ardent supporter of the Romanisation project – in his booklet on the Lao alphabet. Basically, Katay proposed that two alphabets

and two spelling principles should be used in Laos. The first was a phonetic spelling written with Roman letters. The second was an etymological spelling written with the Lao alphabet. While the first was intended for the 'ignorant mass', the second was intended to be used by a small group of 'highly learned compatriots', and he calls this scheme the 'writing of culture'.¹⁴¹ Therefore, in principle the Romanisation scheme is not linked with the extinction of the 'national' Lao alphabet. Katay, however, notes that had Romanisation been linked with the displacement of Lao characters, this should not necessarily be seen as an 'un-nationalistic' move:

One should not exaggerate inordinately the importance of the 'national character' of our traditional alphabet. That which determines, which assigns the nationality [national character] of human achievements down here is usage and time. Since the day when King Ramkhamhaeng adapted the Indian alphabet in order to make the Lao alphabet – because, in reality, one should not think that he invented it out of nothing, this Lao alphabet – six or seven centuries have gone by. What will our descendants think of this 'Romanised Laotian' when they will have received it as [their] heritage? I wouldn't even say in six or seven centuries – man's memory is becoming ever shorter – but in two or three centuries later? Will they deny it all national character?¹⁴²

For Katay, the nation and its culture is a living organism. It is constantly changing to adapt itself to new conditions. If this does not happen, the future of the Lao nation and its population is at stake:

We find ourselves at a historical turning point, where the slightest mistake in calibration [literally: switching railway tracks] could be fatal for us, and when it is no longer allowed to hesitate or procrastinate on such vital matters, without running the risk of being overrun by more developed races. We must not use [the need to] respect traditions as an excuse for refusing all reforms out of hand, whatever they might be. Just as there are good traditions there are also bad ones. We must no longer take cover behind 'national prestige' in order to renounce in advance all innovation. Everything evolves: people, things, the language and the writing system like everything else. One must know how to adapt oneself to the times, to

one's milieu and walk courageously towards the future with others, like the others. The world is in constant movement; no nation that desires to live can remain at a standstill. All people must progress or perish.¹⁴³

Therefore, the use of Roman letters is not a move which threatens to de-nationalise the Lao written language and thereby imperil an important national characteristic. Rather, according to Katay, it is an adaptation to modernity that will enable Laos to live in a new and ever-changing world. Other countries have shown the way:

All the countries in Europe and America have adopted Roman letters. For a long time, Turkey, China and Japan have romanised their writing systems. Even the Thai have begun to adopt Arabic numerals. Sooner or later, they, too, will end up romanising their alphabet. In this century of the aeroplane and wireless telegraphy, the diffusion of education is a question of life and death for all peoples. Why would we not follow the example of the Turks, Chinese and Japanese? Are they less nationalist than us? No. They are as much as we can be. But their nationalism, instead of clinging blindly to the past, is adapted to the present and faces the future. We should, we must do like them. To love one's country is, first and foremost, the desire for your country to live.¹⁴⁴

In Cambodia a decree institutionalising the use of Roman letters in the administration had been passed in 1943. In Laos, the project met resistance from prominent people such as Prince Phetsarath, Crown Prince Savang and the King.¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, the effort to propagandise the Romanisation project was slowed down. But in September 1944 it was made public that Roman letters should be used to write Lao in the administration in Laos. Later, the system was supposed to be taught in schools throughout Laos.¹⁴⁶ The use of Roman letters to write Lao, however, was never carried out as Laos was occupied by Japanese troops in the beginning of March 1945. With the Japanese occupation the French colonial administration was overthrown and a new period in the formation of a Lao nationalism opened up. It is a period when a Lao cultural nationalism orchestrated by French colonialism was transformed into a Lao political and anticolonial nationalism.

NOTES

1. See Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics. Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940–1944* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001); Anne Raffin, 'Easternization Meets Westernization. Patriotic Youth Organizations in French Indochina during World War II', *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 20:2, 2002, pp. 121–140; Anne Raffin, 'Domestic Militarization in a Transnational Perspective. Patriotic and Militaristic Youth Mobilization in France and Indochina, 1940–1945', in Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira (eds), *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 303–321; Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).
2. In the contemporary literature dealing with the campaign in Laos, the campaign was known as a campaign for a 'national renovation' and I will use this term throughout this chapter.
3. This included guerrilla activity in northern Tonkin and in the Mekong Delta region. The latter was violently suppressed by the French with several thousands killed and 6,000 arrested. See Raffin, 'Domestic Militarization', pp. 308–309.
4. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, p. 174.
5. Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954* (NIAS Report, No. 28, Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), pp. 80–86.
6. Quoted in Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?*, pp. 82–83.
7. Nguyen Phan Long, 'Un des fruits du fédéralisme indochinois: La citoyenneté indochinoise', *Indochine*, 175 (January 1944), pp. 1–3.
8. Jean Decoux, 'S'il nous a été possible de mettre sur le chantier une œuvre durable, c'est à la Révolution Nationale que nous le devons', *Indochine*, 127 (February 1943), p. i.
9. Jean Decoux, *À la barre de l'Indochine. Histoire de mon Gouvernement Général (1940–1945)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1949), pp. 388–389.
10. 'Fédéralisme Indochinois', *Indochine*, 119 (December 1942), pp. 1–2.
11. A summary of this critique is given by Eric Pietrantoni, 'Le problème politique du Laos' (Unpublished report: Vientiane, 1943), pp. 108–111.
12. Maha Sila Viravong, *Chao maha upalat phetsalat* [His Highness Viceroy Phetsarath] (Vientiane: Social Science Committee, 1996), p. 61.
13. Nina Adams, 'Patrons, Clients, and Revolutionaries: The Lao Search for Independence, 1945–1954', in Nina S. Admas and Alfred McCoy (eds), *War and Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 102.

14. Among others this group included Maha Sila Viravong and Oun Sananikone.
15. A general outline of the program can be found in Eric Pietrantoni, 'Le problème politique du Laos', pp. 101–105. See also 'Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine à le Résident Supérieur au Laos, Hanoi, le 8 août 1941, no 3094/API, B221/203, Série B, GGI, CAOM.
16. Paul Lévy, *Histoire du Laos* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), p. 90.
17. Quoted in Pietrantoni, 'Le problème politique du Laos', p. 104.
18. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 101.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
20. The names Man and Khong put together means 'stability', Chuchat means 'upholding the nation' and Rakthai means 'love the Thai'.
21. 'Servir', *Pathet Lao*, 2 (February 1944), p. 1.
22. Raffin, 'Domestic Militarization', p. 317.
23. Alfred McCoy, 'French Colonialism in Laos, 1893–1945', in Nina S. Admas and Alfred McCoy (eds), *War and Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 94.
24. Charles Rochet, *Pays Lao. Le Laos dans la tourmente 1939–1945* (Paris: Jean Vigneau, 1946).
25. Lists of people contributing regularly to the Lao Nhay newspaper can be found in *Lao Nhay*, 6 (May 1941), p. 4 & 11 (July 1941), p. 5.
26. Pietrantoni, 'Le problème politique du Laos', p. 96.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.
28. Hugh Toye, *Laos. Bufferstate or Battleground?* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 58.
29. 'Notes sur le Laos par Parisot, Calcutta, 20.6 1945', d. 245, CP, CAOM.
30. 'Note sur le Laos par Rochet, Septembre 1945', c. 157, EA, AMAE.
31. E.g.: 'Than phu samlet lasakan indochin pai yiam pathet lao' [The Governor-General visits Laos], *Lao Nhay*, 4 (April 1941), pp. 11–12; 'Kao na ha lao mai' [Towards a new Laos], *Lao Nhay*, 6 (May 1941), p. 1; 'Sadet phan wiangchan' [Passing through Vientiane], *Lao Nhay*, 18 (October 1941), p. 1; 'Pha lasa damnoen' [Royal trip], *Lao Nhay*, 19 (November 1941), p. 1.
32. 'Pha lasa damnoen', *Lao Nhay*, 19 (November 1941), p. 1.
33. 'Antiquité de la Famille royale de Luang-Prabang', *Indochine*, 35 (May 1941), pp. 1–3 (in this issue also pictures from Sisavang Vong's visit to Hanoi); 'La rénovation laotienne', *Indochine*, 71 (January 1942); 'La nouvelle organisation du Royaume de Luang-Prabang', *Indochine*, 90 (May 1942), pp. 1–3; 'Une famille royale en Indochine – La dynastie de Khoun-Borom', *Indochine*, 91

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- (May 1942), pp. 3–5; 'Les fêtes du grand serment à Luang-Prabang', *Indochine*, 121 (December 1942), pp. 1–6.
34. Evans, *A Short History of Laos*, pp. 77–78.
35. This stamp is depicted in *Indochine*, 117 (November 1942), p. 8.
36. *Hymnes et Pavillons d'Indochine* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1941). For other songs, see the discussion on cultural revival later in this chapter. The king and kingship appear in Cambodia's first national anthem coined likewise in 1941, see *Hymnes et Pavillons*.
37. E.g. 'Prix littéraire Lao 1943', *Indochine*, 188 (March 1944), p. 31.
38. A point stressed by Rochet in a 1945-report, 'Note sur le Laos par Rochet, Septembre, 1945', c. 157, EA, AMAE.
39. 'Rochet à Amiral Decoux, Vientiane, 23 février 1943', d. 14PA 8, c. 1, Papiers Decoux, CAOM.
40. 'Société des études laotiennes, status du 31 octobre 1943', c. D7, RSL, CAOM.
41. 'La Route Coloniale No 13', *Indochine*, 140 (1943), p. 7.
42. 'Laos – rapport politique du mois mars 1940', d. 2336, c. 267, NF, CAOM.
43. 'La Route Coloniale No 13 entre Paksé et la Route Coloniale No 9', *Indochine*, 55 (September 1941), pp. 5–7.
44. X [Anonymous], 'Au Lao Nhay', *Pathet Lao*, 1 (June 1941), pp. 27–28.
45. First part was published in *Lao Nhay*, 3 (March 1941).
46. *Lao Nhay*, 26 (March 1942), p. 9.
47. *Lao Chaleun*, 1 (March 1945), p. 1. I am grateful to M. Jean Deuve for kindly providing me with a photocopy of this issue of the newspaper otherwise difficult to obtain.
48. *La Patrie Lao*, 2 (March 1946), p. 1. Again I thank M. Jean Deuve for providing me with a copy.
49. *Lao Nhay*, 17 (October 1941), p. 1.
50. E.g. *Lao Nhay*, 15 (September 1941), p. 1; J.R., 'Théâtre Lao', *Indochine*, 129 (February 1943), p. i; *Lao Nhay*, 25 (February 1942), p. 1; *La folie des grandeurs, Comédie en deux actes*, Vientiane: Imprimerie du Gouvernement Vientiane, 1942, p. 39.
51. Both flags are depicted in *Hymnes et Pavillons*.
52. Arundhati Virmani, 'National Symbols under Colonial Domination: The Nationalization of the Indian Flag, March-August 1923', *Past and Present*, 164 (August 1999), pp. 169–197.
53. 'Khamson kap sisamut' [Khamson and Sisamud], *Lao Nhay*, 16 (September 1941), p. 7.

54. 'Khamson kap sisamut', *Lao Nhay*, 19 (November 1941), p. 10.
55. E.g. 'Khamson kap sisamut', *Lao Nhay*, 24 (February 1942) p. 7, using the phrase 'pen khon sat diao phasa diao kan kap sisamud' when referring to the people living between Sakhon Nakhon and Nongkhai.
56. See a series of articles by Kambuputra, 'Le Cambodge héritier de l'empire khmer', *Indochine*, 9 (November 1940), pp. 7–8; 'La prétendue identité raciale des Khmers et des Thais', *Indochine*, 12 (November 1940), p. 5; 'Les vestiges de la domination khmère en territoire thaïlandais', *Indochine*, 14 (December 1940), pp. 8–9; 'Ingratitude', *Indochine*, 19 (January 1941), pp. 1–3; and Kambuputra, 'Comment les Siamois comprennent l'indépendance', *Indochine*, 20 (January 1941), pp. 1–2.
57. 'Prince Phetsarth au Prince Kindavong, Vientiane, 6 septembre 1945', c. 157, Indochine, EA, AMAE.
58. 'Kindavong à Raymond, inspecteur des colonies, chef de la mission colonial française en Extrême-Orient, Calcutta, le 15 Août 1945', d. 245, CP, CAOM.
59. 'Rapport du Sous-Lieutenant Thormann au Commandant Norois, le 1er Mai 1945', c. 10H84, SHAT.
60. Georges-Marie Kerneis, 'La vérité sur le différend franco-siamois', *Indochine*, 18 (January 1941), p. 7. See also the pictures published under the heading 'Le Laos manifeste son loyalisme', *Indochine*, 12 (November 1940), pp. i–iii.
61. 'Telegramme Officiel, no 3609/s, RESUPER à GOUGAL, Vientiane, 5 juin 1941', d. 563, CM, CAOM.
62. 'Monsieur le Gouverneur Général à le général de corps d'armée, commandant supérieur des troupes du groupe de l'Indochine, Dalat, le 2 juillet 1943', d. 604, CM, CAOM.
63. 'Note de section des affaires politiques pour Monsieur le chef du service de l'IPP, sd [around October 1942], no 2258/AIS, Objet: Propagande thaïlandaise', d. 604, CM, CAOM.
64. See, for example, *Lao Nhay*, 34 (July 1942), p. 1; *Lao Nhay*, 2 (March 1941), p. 1; *Lao Nhay*, 35 (July 1942), p. 1
65. *Lao Nhay*, 2 (March 1941), p. 4.
66. Bouasy, 'Les fautes de nos pères', *Pathet Lao*, 1 (June 1941), pp. 7–10.
67. Phoui, 'Qui sommes-nous?', *Pathet Lao*, 1 (June 1941), pp. 3–6.
68. 'Lao hu muea khing' [The Lao have regained consciousness], *Lao Nhay*, 2 (May 1941), pp. 1, 7.
69. 'Nai pi nueng' [In one year], *Lao Nhay*, 27 (March 1942), p. 1.
70. 'Allocution prononcée par M. Thao Nhoy à l'inauguration du théâtre Lao, le Vendredi 28 Novembre 1941', *Bulletin général de l'instruction publique*, 21:6, 1942, pp. 14–15.

71. J. Rochet, 'Vers un Laos nouveau. Une soirée imprévue', *Indochine*, 42 (June 1941), p. 10.
72. 'Kao na ha lao mai' [Towards a New Laos], *Lao Nhay*, 6 (May 1941), p. 1.
73. 'Maha bulut lae kan ngan thawon', *Lao Nhay*, 49 (February 1943), p. 5. This article seemed to mark the introduction of a new series, but it was not followed up by others published under the same heading.
74. 'Khamson kap sisamut', *Lao Nhay*, 29 (April 1942), p. 7.
75. 'Ou allons-nous?', *Pathet Lao*, 1 (June 1942), pp. 6. See also *Lao Nhay*, 6 (May 1941), p. 4.
76. 'Les annamites et nous', *Indochine*, 57 (October 1941), p. 4.
77. 'Wat pha kaeo' [Wat Phra Kaeo], *Lao Nhay*, 26 (March 1942), p. 10.
78. 'Le voyage du Gouverneur Général au Laos', *Indochine*, 82 (March 1942), p. 17.
79. 'La restauration du Vat Phra Keo de Vientiane', *Indochine*, 82 (March 1942), p. 12.
80. 'Le Phra-Kèo est restauré', *Lao Nhay* 15 (March 1942), supplément.
81. See, for example, Scot Barmé, *Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), chapter two; Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), pp. 134–135.
82. J. Cuaz, *Lexique Français-Laocien* (Hong Kong: Imprimerie de la Société des Missions étrangères, 1904).
83. Théodore Guignard, *Dictionnaire Laotien-Français* (Hong Kong: Imprimerie de Nazareth, 1912).
84. *Sat* appears, for example, in *kan patiwat haeng sat* ('national revolution'), see *Lao Nhay* 50 (March 1943), p. 1 and 53 (April 1943), p. 1. *Pathet sat lao* appears, for example, in *kan fuenfu pathet sat lao* ('Lao national renovation'), see *Lao Nhay*, 22 (December 1941), 1; 25 (February 1942), p. 1; and 26 (March 1942), p. 10. For the use of *pathet sat* with reference to Laos, see *Lao Nhay*, 15 (September 1941), 1; 58 (July 1943), p. 2; 86 (September 1944), p. 7.
85. *Hymnes et Pavillons*.
86. Somchin Nginn, 'Kham tak tuean bang kho khong phuean lao phu nueng' [Some warnings from a Lao friend], in Lao Cindamani, *Phaphuthahub saksit* [La statuette merveilleuse, nouvelle laotienne] (Vientiane: Éditions Lao Nhay, 1943), p. 37.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
88. 'Note sur le Laos par Rochet, Septembre 1945', c. 157, MAE, EA.
89. *Lao Nhay, sabab ton* (January 1941), p. 5.

90. See for example 'Sao falangset lao lae kaeo thi dong bolawen' [The French, Vietnamese and Lao at Bolowen], *Lao Nhay*, 56 (June 1943), p. 1; 'Nathi lao nai sahalat induchin' [The duty of the Lao in the Indochinese Union], *Lao Nhay*, 81 (June 1944), p. 1; J.M., 'Au Laos avec sa Majesté le roi du Cambodge', *Indochine*, 128 (February 1943).
91. 'Khwam samphan lawang lao kap kaeo tam pawatkan' [The relationship between the Lao and Vietnamese according to the chronicles], *Lao Nhay*, 54 (Mai 1943), p. 9 & 55 (Mai 1943), p. 8.
92. 'Khwam samphan lawang lao kap kaeo', *Lao Nhay*, 55 (May 1943), p. 8.
93. 'Khwam samphan lawang lao kap kaeo', *Lao Nhay*, 54 (May 1943), p. 9.
94. 'Khwam samphan lawang lao kap kaeo', *Lao Nhay*, 55 (May 1943), p. 8.
95. Ibid.
96. Ourot Souvannavong, 'Les Annamites et nous', *Pathet Lao*, 1 (June 1941), pp. 29–32. Later this article appeared also in *Indochine*, 57 (October 1941), pp. 3–5.
97. Ibid., p. 31.
98. 'Khwam chaloen khong lao tai' [Progress in southern Laos], *Lao Nhay*, 61 (August 1943), p. 10.
99. Eric Pietrantonio, 'La population du Laos en 1943 dans son milieu géographique', *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, 32:3, 1957, p. 230.
100. 'Khu son lao' [Lao teachers], *Lao Nhay*, 30 (May 1942), p. 10.
101. See also the article 'Phak hong hian' [Holiday], *Lao Nhay*, 14 (August 1941), pp. 1–2.
102. 'Note de le chef du service de l'IPP pour M. le directeur des affaires politiques, Hanoi, le 22 octobre 1942, no. 2347-IPP, d. 604, CM, CAOM.
103. Lao Cindamani, *Phaphuthabub*.
104. 'Thin than ban koet khong sat lao' [Our Homeland], *Lao Nhay*, 23 (January 1942), p. 1. See also Nhouy Abhay's exposition of elements of a Lao literary history in 'Une belle conference', *Lao Nhay*, 9 (June 1941), p. 4; or Thao Nhouy, 'Poésie lao', *Indochine*, 50 (August 1941), pp. 6–9.
105. *Lao Nhay*, 81 (June 1944), p. 7.
106. This theme is for example treated in 'Wisa' [Knowledge], *Lao Nhay*, 40 (October 1942), p. 3; 'Khu son' [The Teacher], *Lao Nhay*, 45 (December 1942), p. 3; 'Tak tuean' [Advice], *Lao Nhay*, 86 (September 1944), p. 3.
107. See for example 'Wiak kan' [Work], *Lao Nhay*, 49 (February 1943), p. 3; 'Tuean phuean sao na' [An advice to our friends the farmers], *Lao Nhay*, 57 (June 1943), p. 3; 'Wiak hai kan na' [Farming the land], *Lao Nhay*, 59 (July 1943), p. 3; 'Soen sao lao hed-wiak kan' [Lao, please work], *Lao Nhay*,

- 61 (August 1943), p. 3; 'Kan puk fang' [Cultivation], *Lao Nhay*, 74 (March 1944), p. 3.
108. 'Thot khong ya fin lae sula' [The danger of opium and alcohol], *Lao Nhay*, 69–70 (December 1943–January 1944), p. 3; 'Phu sai lin phai' [The gambling man], *Lao Nhay*, 73 (February 1944), p. 3; 'Nying lin phai' [The gambling woman], *Lao Nhay*, 75 (March 1944), p. 3.
109. Part of the first poem is found under the heading 'Nak taeng kap kon lao hao' [Our Lao poets], *Lao Nhay*, 81 (September 1944), p. 3; the other poem is 'Sena matchulat' [The ministers of death], *Lao Nhay*, 44 & 45 (December 1942), p. 3.
110. Extracts of the poems can be found in 'Phon khong kan seng kap-kon' [Result of the poetry competition], *Lao Nhay*, 16 (September 1941) & 17 (October 1941), supplement, without pagination. I have not been able to obtain a copy of the winning poem by Thao Nouthak which was published separately. A short résumé, however, can be found in *Lao Nhay*, 23 (January 1942), p. 1. It confirms that it also reproduced this overall narrative structure
111. *Lao Nhay*, 7 (Mai 1941), p. 11.
112. *Lao Nhay*, 12–13 (August 1941), p. 1.
113. *Pho na lao* [Chant du paysan lao] (Vientiane: Éditions du Lao Nhay, without year).
114. *Tuean chai lao* [Appel aux Lao] (Vientiane: Éditions du Lao Nhay, without year).
115. *Lao huam samphan* [L'union Lao] (Vientiane: Éditions du Lao Nhay, without year).
116. *Lao hak sat* [Hymne Lao], in *Hymnes et Pavillons d'Indochine*.
117. *La folie des grandeurs*, p. 8.
118. *Lao Nhay*, 11 (July 1941), p. 5.
119. 'Vers la réforme de l'orthographe laotienne par Pierre Nginn, sd', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
120. 'Le Chef de la Section Laotienne d'Information à M Pierre Nginn, Vientiane, le 9 Octobre 1941, No 311/Inf', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
121. Extracts of this 'mini-dictionary' (*athibai sap* – explanation of words) can be found in the following issues of *Lao Nhay*, 43 (November 1942), p. 10; 44 (December 1942), p. 10; 50 (March 1943), p. 10. This list of words was supplemented by a list of French words translated into Lao, see 'Sap', *Lao Nhay*, 49 (February 1943), p. 10.
122. 'Kae khai withi sakot kham-lao' [A solution to the spelling of Lao], *Lao Nhay*, 44 (November 1942), p. 9.

123. 'Le Directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient à M Pierre Nginn, le 23 Mai 1942, No 1074', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
124. See, for example, *Lao Nhay*, 44 (December 1942), p. 5; and *Lao Nhay*, 45 (December 1942), p. 9.
125. 'Pasum khana kamakan aksontat lao' [Meeting in the Lao Literary Committee], *Lao Nhay*, 44 (December 1942), p. 5.
126. 'Pasum lueang sakot kham lao' [Meeting concerning the spelling of Lao], *Lao Nhay*, 45 (December 1942), p. 9.
127. A list of members is given in the journal *Khao Khotsanakan*, 5 (May 1942), p. 765.
128. *Khao Khotsanakan*, 7 (July 1942), p. 1054.
129. 'Le Directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient à Monsieur Pierre Nginn, Hanoi, le 4 Juin 1942, No. 1113', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
130. 'Pierre Nginn à M le Directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Saigon, le 29 Mai 1942', d. F4, c. 33, AEFEO.
131. Katay Sasorith, *Alphabet et écriture lao* (Vientiane: Éditions du 'Pathet Lao', 1943), pp. 8–10. Katay, for example, refers to the use of the Lao negative particle *bo*, used instead of the Thai particle *mai*. The term *thai* – normally interpreted as an ethnic label associated with the Siamese – in the inscription is 'neutralised', as Katay reads it not as an ethnic denominator but in accordance with contemporary use of this term in Laos as a word meaning 'people' or 'inhabitant'.
132. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
134. *Lao Nhay*, 49 (December 1943, p. 9.
135. 'Thoeng nak an thang lai' [To all our readers], *Lao Nhay*, 69–70 (December 1943), p. 5.
136. 'Mun doem haeng nangsue lao pen khong pasoet thisut' [The original Lao texts are the most precious objects], *Lao Nhay*, 87 (September 1944), p. 1.
137. 'Aksontat lao' [Lao literature], *Lao Nhay*, 74 (March 1944), p. 6.
138. 'Nangsue lao' [The Lao alphabet/Lao letters], *Lao Nhay*, 36 (August 1942), p. 1.
139. 'Tableau d'équivalences adoptées pour la transcription de l'alphabet laotien en caractères romains', *Lao Nhay*, 36 (August 1942), p. 9 and 'Set' [Contest], *Lao Nhay*, 40 (September 1942), p. 1.
140. See, for example, W., 'Une importante réforme au Cambodge. La romanisation du cambodgien', *Indochine*, 160 (1943), p. 9–10; Thao Kham, 'La roma-

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- nisation au Laos, *Indochine*, 169 (November 1943), p. 14; George Cœdès, 'La romanisation des langues indochinoises', *Indochine*, 212 (1944), pp. 21–22.
141. Katay, *Alphabet*, p. 17.
142. *Ibid.*, p. 16, note 1.
143. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
144. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
145. 'Résident Supérieur au Laos à Decoux, Vientiane, le 21 octobre 1943', 14PA8, CAOM.
146. 'Kan khian phasa lao duai akson romaeng – dai pakat ok hai sai thang lasakan laeo' [Writing Lao with Roman letters. A decree has been passed], *Lao Nhay*, 88–89 (October 1944), supplement. See also 'Kan khian phasa lao duai akson romaeng' [To write Lao with Roman letters], *Lao Nhay*, 90 (November 1944), p. 2.

CHAPTER FIVE

Setting Laos Free from the French

In March 1945 the uneasy alliance between the Japanese troops and the French administration in Indochina ended when Japanese troops occupied Indochina and deposed the French colonial administration. For the Lao this meant the end of half a century of French rule. The Japanese occupation of Laos lasted only six months. By April 1946 French–Lao military forces had reoccupied Laos and the French colonial administration was reinstalled. Nonetheless, this brief interlude in French colonial rule had a radical impact on Lao nationalism. It was in this period that the idea of Laos nourished by French colonialism was let loose from its French connotations and Lao nationalists made the first feeble attempts to establish an indigenous political structure for a unified and independent Laos. It was in this period that the idea of Laos became associated with a political and anticolonial Lao nationalism.

TURNING THE IDEA OF LAOS AGAINST THE FRENCH

Following the Japanese occupation of Laos in March 1945, the Japanese Supreme Counsellor Ishibashi replaced the French Résident-Supérieur in Vientiane and Laos was basically transferred from the rule of one colonial master to that of another. While the French were ousted the Lao part of the administration remained in place. Likewise, the Japanese confirmed the position of the Royal Government in Luang Phrabang. In a direct continuation of French policies the Japanese sponsored the publication of a newspaper in Lao entitled

Lao Chaleun (Prosperous Laos). This newspaper replaced *Lao Nhay*. The first issue of *Lao Chaleun* heralded how Japanese troops had been victorious all over Indochina. Just as the Japanese had granted independence to Vietnam and Cambodia it was believed that Laos soon would be following.¹ The move towards a Japanese-sponsored independence for Laos was taken in early April 1945 after Japanese troops had moved into Luang Phrabang. On April 8 the King of Luang Phrabang declared:

[...] that from this day forward, our *Kingdom of Laos*, formerly colony of France, is now an independent nation. Henceforth, the *Kingdom of Luang Prabang* will attempt to preserve its own independence like other countries of East Asia, and will join with neighbouring countries to build prosperity and progress following the principles of the Greater East-Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Consequently, in order to work with the Japanese Empire as a trusted ally, I hereby declare that our Kingdom has agreed to co-operate in all things with Japan.² (My emphasis)

It is unclear whether the independence included the whole of Laos or just the Kingdom of Luang Phrabang. We have earlier seen how the unification of Laos had been a distant goal for the campaign for a national renovation in Laos. However, the unification was something yet to be achieved when the declaration of independence was proclaimed. As emphasised in the quotation above, both 'Kingdom of Laos' and 'Kingdom of Luang Prabang' appeared in the King's declaration. The same uncertainty is conveyed in *Iron Man of Laos*, the supposed autobiography of Prince Phetsarath. According to this account, Prince Phetsarath had advised the Japanese to sanction the unification of Laos. The Japanese turned this suggestion down as 'the French had administrated the provinces separately and had refused a Lao request to unite them; the Japanese would do the same.'³ Accordingly, in the book the declaration of independence is introduced under the headline 'Royal Proclamation of the Independence of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang under King Sisavangvong of Luang Prabang'. A few lines later, however, the declaration of independence is linked with Laos as a whole.⁴ Jean Deuve gives another

angle. Despite the lack of a formal declaration of unification, in the wake of the Japanese occupation Prince Phetsarath declared that the Royal Government in Luang Phrabang covered the whole of Laos. According to Deuve, the Japanese Supreme Counsellor approved of this move and intended the declaration of independence to encompass the whole of Laos.⁵

In August 1945 the Japanese troops in Indochina surrendered. Therefore, there had not been much time available to prepare for Lao independence under Japanese tutelage or implement changes in the political system. For Lao nationalists, however, the Japanese occupation and the King's public declaration of independence represented a radical turning point: they symbolised how French colonial dominance in Laos had become obsolete and how Laos had been set free from its colonial form. Repeatedly, Prince Phetsarath propagated this message after the Japanese troops' official surrender. In a proclamation to French prisoners in Laos about to be released from Japanese custody, Prince Phetsarath made it clear that although peace had been re-established in the Pacific it did not interfere with the kingdom's newly acquired national independence. Because the French had been overthrown by the Japanese, Prince Phetsarath regarded the treaties between Laos and France as void.⁶ The French were no longer to be involved in the internal affairs of the kingdom. When the former *Résident-Supérieur* of Laos was freed from custody and called on Prince Phetsarath to inform him that he would take up his old position, he was rejected by Prince Phetsarath.⁷ On 15 September 1945, Prince Phetsarath unified Laos when he proclaimed the attachment of the four southern provinces to the Kingdom of Luang Phrabang.

That the Japanese interlude in Laos represented an important break with French colonialism is also reflected in Prince Phetsarath's call for the reconstitution of a Laos rather different than the one brought into existence and cultivated by French colonialism. In a report written by him in early September and sent to a British mission in Thailand, he envisioned a post-war Laos that would encompass:

[...] besides the territories on the left-bank of the Mekong up to the Annamese Cordillera to the East, the territories on the right-bank of this river limited roughly by: in the North, Burma; in the West, Chiang Mai Province and the dividing line between the waters of the Mekong and the Menam [Chao Phraya]; in the South, by the Dangrek Mountains and the Khone Falls.

Prince Phetsarath was calling for a wider national Lao-space including the Khorat Plateau. He unleashed a powerful nationalist rhetoric to defend the historical legitimacy of this new and greater Laos situated in the heart of mainland Southeast Asia. He rejected the idea of the Mekong River as a 'natural' boundary. 'The Mekong', he argued, 'has never been a barrier but rather a bridge.' He insisted that the Lao people are all united by their 'common origins; they speak the same language; and they have shared the same joys and have been subjected to the same national sufferings'. Although the Lao on the Khorat Plateau in Thailand have been subjected to half a century of 'thai-ification', they still belong to this larger Lao-space, as they have not 'lost their memories of their origins and their national sentiment'. 'The so-called Thai of Ubon and Khorat', he continued, 'still continue to use the Lao language and sing Laotian poems, practicing on all occasions the mores and customs of Laos.' On this basis Prince Phetsarath calls for the constitution of a new Laos:

Laos as it exists with the Mekong as [western] boundary and its million inhabitants is a mistake with regard to both geography and politics. This country has been amputated from three-fifths of its territory – the richest and most populated; it is not viable and cannot exist as a state. It has only been able to survive due to the support received from the other countries of the Indochinese Federation more favoured than it [Laos]. But its [Laos's] progress has been slow due to limited human resources. It is in view of the reconstitution of a geographic and ethnic reality in conformity with its history and in view of forming a State that is viable from a political and economic point of view, capable to figure on the map of the world, that this report has been written. It expresses the profound and intimate sentiment of all Lao – both those of the right [west] bank and the left [east] bank.⁸

During World War II, the French colonial administration had called for a 'New Laos' linked with a human and moral re-making of the 'decadent Lao', and contained within the territorial straight-jacket of the colonial Laos. In comparison, Prince Phetsarath propagated a 'New Laos' set loose from French colonialism and nourished by a potent nationalist imagining with an expansionist dimension. In the wake of the World War II, Prince Phetsarath must have believed that a situation existed when geopolitical boundaries on mainland Southeast Asia could be broken up and replaced by new ones. But such a major redefinition of the geo-body of Laos never materialised. In pursuing this vision, however, Prince Phetsarath shows how the idea of Laos was set free effectively from French connotations.

At the same time an initiative to prepare for a Laotian government was taken by the Lao Issara or the 'promoters' (*khana ko kan*), which consisted of a mix of civil servants who had worked in the French colonial administration and people who had been in Thailand during World War II as exiles or in the service of the Thai government.⁹ On 12 October 1945, this new government held a ceremony in Vientiane and proclaimed the unity and independence of Laos under its authority. The new government also promulgated Laos's first constitution and on 15 October the government presented its programme to the provisional national assembly.¹⁰ We can follow the attempts to set the idea of Laos free from the ideology of French colonial protection and the French civilising mission in a memorandum delivered by the new Lao government in Vientiane to the Allied Powers in October 1945. The note was signed by Prince Phetsarath but it is supposedly written by Katay Sasorith and Nhouy Abhay, respectively ministers of finance and education in the new government. In the memorandum French colonial policies in Laos are castigated. In fact, the message conveyed is that Laos has survived as a separate state not due to but rather *despite* the impact of French colonialism. According to the memorandum, French colonial policies in Laos had the following shortcomings. First, they created a '*demi-pays*' by dividing the Lao population in Laos from the Lao living on the Khorat Plateau. Second, they failed to turn Laos into a viable state since

they did not establish a territorial, political, moral and national unity for Laos. Third, the influx of Vietnamese into Laos of the colonial period is criticised. It is a development that has turned the Lao into a poor and backward minority in their own land. Thus it is French colonial policies that are adduced to explain shortcomings in the social and economic development of Laos – and not the idea of the decadent Lao that loomed large in French colonial ideology. Set free from French colonial control the Lao government has set a new path for Laos.¹¹

In this way the idea of Laos was re-situated and liberated from French colonial ideology. But it proved impossible to establish Laos as an independent state in the real world of international politics in the wake of World War II. By April 1946 French–Lao military forces had reoccupied the whole of Laos and a new French colonial administration was reinstalled. However, this brief period in Laos's history shows how the very idea of Laos nourished by French colonialism was turned against the French and how a French-sponsored Lao cultural nationalism was transformed into a political and anti-colonial nationalism.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: BRINGING LAOS INTO EXISTENCE

At a meeting at the *L'Académie des Sciences Coloniales* in 1953 George Cœdès – the doyen of the epigraphic and historical studies of the Indochinese countries – mounted a strong attack on the views presented in an article that had recently appeared in the journal *L'Observateur Politique, Économique et Littéraire*. In this article Claude Bourdet criticised the French policy of presenting the views and complaints of the Royal Lao Government before the United Nations. What provoked Cœdès was not this denouncement of French policy, but rather Bourdet's representation of the history of Laos. Cœdès rejected Bourdet's claim that Laos had been created artificially by the French in 1945. In a man like Cœdès, who had studied and published widely about the historical kingdoms that dotted the Indochinese peninsula in the premodern period, this perception of a modern and history-less Laos was bound to provoke

a strong reaction. Bourdet was in for a lesson about the history of Laos, which, according to Cœdès was to 'prove the existence in antiquity and the historical importance of a state the creation of which M. Claude Bourdet attributes to Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu.'¹² With reference to the writings of Auguste Pavie on the historical Lao states in the Mekong region, to the military accomplishments of legendary Lao kings of the Lan Xang Kingdom, to the travelogue of the Dutch trader Gerrit van Wuysthoff, and finally to historical maps where the term 'Laos' occurs, Cœdès sets out on an intellectual mission to unearth 'Laos' from the past and link it to its new post-World War II future. In this perspective, Laos is not without a history; on the contrary, Cœdès gives it a past in which the Lao Kingdom of Lan Xang is identical to Laos of the past. As Cœdès later argued in a short article entitled *Introduction to the History of Laos*, it is indeed the existence of a glorious past that gives an independent Laos the right to be treated as an equal partner by other countries in the world. No modern Lao nationalist could have put it better. To have a history equals civilisation and in this connection Cœdès differentiates Laos – and the other Indochinese countries – from the tribal societies in Africa:

It might indeed seem presumptuous if some African tribe whose stage of human development had remained very backward were to claim equality with the most civilised nations of Europe, and this notion has been carried over and applied to Indochina, forgetful of the fact that with a very few exceptions the tribes of Africa have no past, whereas, in Indochina, the history of Viêt-Nam dates back to before the Christian era, of Cambodia from the 6th century, and of Laos from the 14th century.¹³

Yet Cœdès' comments highlight a fundamental problem in the writing of the 'modern' or 'nationalist' history of Laos: when the French extended their authority over that part of Indochina which would become Laos, this colonial state did not correspond to any political entity already in existence. The Lan Xang Kingdom that long had formed the centre of gravity for Lao political power in the Mekong region was in the early eighteenth century split into separate

kingdoms centred in Luang Phrabang, Vientiane, and Champassack. Subsequently, since the late eighteenth century, Siam gradually expanded its suzerainty over these kingdoms. In this process Vientiane was destroyed by Siamese forces in the early nineteenth century. When the French intervened at the turn of the twentieth century, Champassack had become a province of Siam, and Luang Phrabang, while formally retaining the status of a tributary kingdom of Siam, was close to becoming the same. While the Lao past undoubtedly contains glorious episodes, it is by no means certain that the Laos on the map since World War II was necessarily synonymous geopolitically with the one that had existed before the French arrived. Cœdès was far too good an historian of peninsular geography not to know this. But he was also keen to give Laos a past in the manner of the Lao nationalists whom he knew so well after the war.

This exchange between Cœdès and Bourdet illustrates a fundamental issue in the writing of the history of Laos specifically and of nation-states more generally. Nation-states are landmarks of a quite recent date in the geopolitical landscape and Bourdet is fundamentally right in stating that Laos is a modern colonial construct. However, that the date of its creation is 1945 is debatable. Cœdès is on firm ground when documenting the existence of a Lao or Lao state or states in the Mekong region prior to Laos's formative period. The problem arises when these histories are linked together and presented as part of a continuous history of 'Laos'. By doing this, nations become historically rooted entities embedded with a primordial and almost timeless quality that spans the historical divide. This approach brushes aside the novelty of nation-states and neglects the various complex historical processes that led first to the formation of the territorial entities and later turned these into viable nation-states.

In general, the writing of Laos's history has been linked with a historical narrative where the roots of the modern state are located in a distant past in conformity with the approach adopted by Cœdès.¹⁴ This book has taken another path in its search for an understanding of how French colonialism was instrumental in giving the unprecedented

colonial space of Laos a past and a culture and thereby also a future as a distinct nation-state. In doing so, this book is placed in the modernist camp and it has been inspired by Benedict Anderson's thinking on the close link between Western colonialism and colonial nationalism. In his approach to nations and nationalism, Anderson has primarily focused on how the fundamental grammar that enabled thinking in nationalist terms came into being in different contexts. He has not been dwelling on the concrete forms of the nationalist imagination – except in his very general considerations about the role of history. In this book, I have focused on the early roots of the nationalist imagination in Laos. I have approached the link between French colonialism and Lao nationalism from a cultural perspective and have discussed how a specific idea about Laos and its culture was formed under French colonial rule in the period up until the end of World War II. Adopting this chronological framework I have traced the beginnings of a Lao cultural nationalism that was closely linked to the French colonial project, and I have followed it to the juncture where it was transformed into a political and anticolonial nationalism.

Grant Evans has pointed out that one of the paradoxes of studying Laos is 'that even those people most engaged in its affairs have questioned whether Laos exists as a "real" national entity'.¹⁵ Such a questioning of whether Laos's current form is 'real' is often linked with the idea that the border running between Laos and Thailand is 'unnatural', since the people recognised as 'Lao' in the precolonial period were split into two groups which were later incorporated into two different national forms. The largest group of Lao, living in the Khorat Plateau, has been turned into 'Thais', while a smaller Lao population lives across the Mekong in 'Laos', the nation-state whose name is associated with the Lao. Laos in this common view is somehow not quite natural in its emergence from half a century of French colonial intervention. Accordingly, it should have included all of the ethnic Lao extending across the Khorat Plateau, but instead struggles to integrate its ethnic minorities. By illuminating the inter-relationship between French colonialism and Lao nationalism my point is neither to deny the existence of a Lao national identity in

Laos nor to treat Laos in its current national form as an 'anomaly'. Rather, my point is that by studying the cultural aspects of the nexus between French colonialism and Lao nationalism Laos is treated as 'normal'. This, however, does not imply 'normal' in the sense of being a primordial nation embodying a national identity with a lineage stretching back into a distant past. Instead, it implies 'normal' in the sense of being a historical nation which came into being in the modern period under influence of French colonialism, and was shaped in a dialogue between external and internal forces.

NOTES

1. *Lao Chaleun*, 1 (March 1945), p. 1.
2. Quoted in 3349, *Iron Man of Laos: Prince Phetsarath Ratanavongsa* (translated by J.B. Murdoch, Data Paper No. 110, Southeast Asia Program. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 36.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
5. Jean Deuve [Caply], *Guérilla au Laos* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997 [1966]), p. 176.
6. 'Proclamation de S.A. le Premier Ministre du Gouvernement Royal de Luang Prabang à la population française', (1.9 1945) in Deuve, *Le Laos 1945–1949. Contribution à l'histoire du mouvement Lao Issala* (Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry, 2000 [1992]), pp. 292–293
7. 3349, *Iron Man of Laos*, p. 26.
8. 'Renseignement – Objet: Indochine, Activités laotiennes, a/s Phetsarath, juillet 1947', c. 163, HC, CAOM. Sent first to Kindavong in Calcutta and later presented to the British mission in Thailand in September 1945.
9. An overview of events in Laos in 1945 can be found in Sila Viravong, *Pawatsat wan thi 12 tula 1945* [History of 12 October 1945] (Vientiane: Pakpasak Kanphim, 1975). For a discussion of events in Laos in 1945 and subsequent Lao interpretations of these, see Bruce M. Lockhart, 'Narrating 1945 in Lao Historiography', in Christopher E. Goscha and Søren Ivarsson (eds), *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the Crossroads* (NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, No. 32, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), pp. 129–163.
10. '*Nayobai khong rathaban thalaeng to sapha phu thaen ratsadon 20.10 1945*' [The policy of the Government announced to the House of Representatives, 20.10 1945], (3) SR.0201.9/4, TNA.

11. 'Mémorandum. Note présentée par le gouvernement laotien sur le protectorat français et sur les menées françaises après la défaite du Japon et contenant quelques vœux du dit gouvernement exprimés conformément aux aspirations du peuple lao, Vientiane, le 4 Octobre 1945', in Deuve, *Le Laos 1945–1949*, pp. 298–310.
12. George Cœdès, 'Présentation d'ouvrages', in *Comptes Rendus Mensuels des Séances de l'Académie des Sciences Coloniales*, 13 (séance du 22 Mai 1953) (Paris: Académie des sciences coloniales, 1957), p. 246.
13. George Cœdès, 'Introduction to the History of Laos', in René de Berval (ed.), *Kingdom of Laos* (Saigon: France-Asie, 1959), p. 20.
14. Texts such as the first and for long only general history of Laos produced by the French colonial administrator Paul Le Boulanger, *Historie du Laos Français* (Paris: Plon, 1931); the Thai nationalist approach to Laos's history by Manich Jumsai, *History of Laos* (Bangkok: Chalermnit, 1971); the first part of Hugh Toyé's study that forms an insightful historical backdrop to his analysis of Laos's role in the Second Indochina War: *Laos. Bufferstate or Battleground?* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); the short but perceptive account written by Paul Lévy, *Histoire du Laos* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974); the accounts published recently by Michael Schultze, *Die Geschichte von Laos. Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der neunziger Jahre* (Hamburg: Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde, 1996); Peter and Sanda Simms, *The Kingdoms of Laos. Six Hundred Years of History* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999); and Saveng Phinith, Phou Nheun Souk-Aloun and Vannida Thongchanh, *Histoire du Pays Lao, de la préhistoire à la république* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1998).
15. Grant Evans, 'Introduction: What is Lao Culture and Society?', in Grant Evans (ed.), *Laos: Culture and Society* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), p. 1.

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<i>Lao Nhay</i>	<i>Yuthakot</i>
<i>La Patrie Lao</i>	<i>Withayacharn</i>

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