

Woodson

LIFE UNDER THE P. L. IN THE XIENG KHOUANG VILLE AREA

Edwin T. McKeithen
Xieng Khouang

LIFE UNDER THE P. L. IN THE XIENG KHOUANG VILLE AREA

INTRODUCTION

The following notes on life under the P. L. were taken from discussions with different groups of refugees that came out of the XKV area in April and May. Many of the comments made by different individuals or groups of refugees were contradictory and it was not uncommon to hear groups of people arguing among themselves over the answers to specific questions. The following description is a summary of the responses that the refugees most frequently gave as well as an attempt on the part of the reporting officer to determine the middle ground of what they said and the underlying concepts that the P. L. base their programs on.

There were several important factors that contributed to the fuzzy pictures that sometimes emerged. Aside from a lack of interest or understanding on the part of the villagers as to what went on, there was the problem of P. L. policies that vary from area to area. Similarly the restrictions on travel and gatherings made exchanges of information more difficult than usual. The P. L. also discouraged villagers' curiosity about matters that "did not concern them".

Finally there were the problems created by the different cultural values that the P. L. have introduced. These concepts and their associated institutions are often rather foreign to traditional Lao values and are accompanied by a Pavlovian-response vocabulary that tends to mask rather than clarify the nature of their make-up. Hence it was easy for the villagers to understand the phrase "to open the truth" when they were being asked to admit cheating on rice taxes, for example, but it was something else to understand that the P. L. were trying to introduce the concepts of guilt and self-criticism.

Much of what follows is sketchy and incomplete; as we learn more about the NLHS, we will try to correct the errors that exist in this report.

SUMMARY: LIFE UNDER THE P. L.

Life under the Neo Lao Hak Sat is a lot rougher than many people realize. From the villagers' point of view, the most onerous aspect of P. L. rule is the coolie labor system of human convoys and work crews. The refugees often remarked that "the Pathet Lao talk about the soldiers helping the people, but actually the people do all the work for the soldiers". Another of the more unpopular facets of life is the separation of children from their parents, either through the draft or through the school system, which sees to it that children are as isolated as possible from the corrosive influences of the older generation. The introduction of rice taxation has further added to the villagers' discomforts by removing the reserves that traditionally saw them through lean years and enabled them to support relatives and friends in the traditional Lao social security system. The combination of the draft, taxation and the portage system - which often means that villagers are on convoys for two months of the year - adds up to a need for drastically increased labor productivity. As the taxes have increased and the available labor force has shrunk, the villagers have had to grow more just to hold their own.

The draft, the portage system, and the rice tax may be viewed as temporary war measures which might not exist in peacetime to the extent that they do now. But more fundamental changes that the P. L. are making in Lao society are more important in the long run.

The NLHS seeks nothing less than a radical transformation of Lao society from a loosely structured hierarchical system to a tightly organized conformist society where the rather foreign concepts of persuasion and guilt are introduced as mechanisms of social control. They have pressed for economic equality by introducing progressive taxation and discouraging the conspicuous consumption that establishes a wealthy villager's status. They have almost eliminated

the "wasted resources" that are spent on bouns, marriages, funerals and traditional celebrations. They have taken initial steps toward the communalization of property by establishing "public" padi, by closely controlling livestock sales and slaughter and by introducing public ownership of livestock in the school system.

The P. L. have thrown most of the old leadership in jail and installed new Naibans and Tassengs drawn from the lowest economic strata to emphasize that the leadership should be "the same as the people". They have established an intricate administrative apparatus necessary to effect the sociological transformation they are fostering as well as to manage their war economy. The restrictions on travel and personal freedom not only reflect security precautions but also help maintain the controlled environment that the P. L. need for long term change.

One of the most fundamental alterations they seek in the Lao personality is the addition of persuasion and guilt to traditional authority as means of social control. P. L. cadres are urged to reason, to question and to discuss with villagers until the villagers agree with the P. L. viewpoint. Direct orders are not enough; people must be "taught" until they genuinely believe in what they are doing. At the same time, a villager who cheats or commits crimes against the state must be enlightened until he feels guilty for his actions. This guilt must arise from an internalized higher morality and not from a simple feeling of shame or loss of face among fellows. "Study sessions" and "merit books" are among the mechanisms for introducing this concept.

Changes of this nature are rather difficult to effect in the adult population; hence the emphasis on youth and the importance given to education. It should be noted that this is particularly bothersome to older Lao who find

themselves being "enlightened" by more children. The status of women has also been altered, as they have been given greater responsibility in administrative affairs and have assumed jobs traditionally restricted to men. Other roles have become more tightly structured and the characteristic Lao ability to slip easily between roles has declined as the society has become more "democratic".

Needless to say the P. L. have had real difficulty in introducing many of these changes simply because they are so alien to the Lao culture. For example, much of the P. L. political machinery is based on group loyalty and dedication to organizations, but the Lao have had almost no experience with such groups or societies in the Western sense of the terms. There is simply no precedent for a "youth organization" devoted to lofty principles and dedicated to the advancement of long-range goals. Similarly the traditional Lao tolerance of practically everything (work habits, personality deviations, individual beliefs, etc.) has made the introduction of a new morality particularly difficult.

Finally, we should note the favorable aspects of P. L. rule as reported by the refugees. They favored the ideas of adult literacy and agricultural development but not the ways that the P. L. had been carrying them out. They also spoke favorably of the virtual elimination of official corruption.

GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION

The provincial government is set up in interweaving line and staff organizations in a sort of double-helix pattern. In the line organization there are three parallel hierarchies of administrative officials not including the North Vietnamese advisors, who might be considered a fourth. They consist of the Patriotic Neutralist officials (or "governing" administration), the NLHS officials, and a political cadre organization known as the Khana Puk Luk, which translates literally as the "Awakening Group".

The Patriotic Neutralists use the same titles as RLG officials -- Chao Khoueng, Chao Muong, Tasseng, etc., -- while the NLHS officials are called Neo (Front) Khoueng, Nso Muong, Neo Tasseng and Neo Ban. The Neo officials have traditionally been more powerful than their "governing" counterparts, but as more politically reliable men have been appointed to the Neutralist hierarchy the differences in authority seem to have lessened. North Vietnamese counterparts are assigned to the Khoueng, Muong and Tasseng levels of government. In addition to the formal lines of authority, the Khoueng and Muong offices have representatives whose job is to travel throughout the villages explaining government policy. The Khoueng offices were located in a small cave northwest of Xieng Khouang City near Tham Kap, and the Neo Khoueng offices in another cave called Tham Mat.

THE AWAKENING GROUP

The Awakening Group, which has become firmly established during the past three years, has responsibility for political surveillance and "economic leadership" and functions as a major watchdog organ of the state. The staffing pattern (which is not yet complete) calls for two agents in each village who are supposed to practice the "Four Togethers" with the people: Eat together, work together, discuss together and assist each other together. They have a nominal role as community development advisors but their prime responsibility is to check on villagers' industriousness and political reliability. Their surveillance extends throughout the formal government structure as well, where some agents are assigned as counterparts to administrative officials. The "Awakening Group" appears to have considerable power independent of regular channels and is staffed almost entirely by "outsiders", usually single men from other provinces. (The translated "P. L. Propaganda" distributed by USAID/AG in 1967 was a directive to the "Awakening Group").

STAFF ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the line organizations, the government is set up in staff patterns which include the heads of the various services at the provincial, district and village levels. The "Khoueng Group", for example, includes the Chao Khoueng, the Neo Khoueng, the Vietnamese advisor, and the provincial chiefs of the Awakening Group, the youth organization, the old age organization, the militia, the agriculture department, the irrigation department, the health department, the police, the school system, the court, the co-op, and all their assistants. A similar pattern exists in the "Muong Group". The "Tasseng Group" includes the Tasseng, the Neo Tasseng and the heads of the militia, the youth and old age organizations, and the chiefs of agriculture, irrigation, education and health. The Village Group is usually limited to the Nai Ban, Neo Ban and the chiefs of the militia, youth, and old age organizations. (Note that neither the Vietnamese advisors nor the Awakening Group are included in the publicized government hierarchy below the Khoueng level, although they exert considerable influence on political decisions.)

YOUTH AND OLD AGE ORGANIZATIONS

Women from the ages of 15 to 25 and men from the ages of 15 to 35 are encouraged to join the youth organization. Since most of the men of this age group are away in the army, the women's branch has assumed the most importance. Established in 1966, but poorly organized until 1968, the youth organization began collecting dues last year in some areas and had planned a province-wide dues of five kip per person for this year; the dues were to be collected only from women. As indicated above, the leadership sits at all levels of government as part of the various administrative "groups". Other than encouraging greater production and larger contributions to the state, the goals of the organization seem unclear even to those who have been members. It

appears, however, that it is designed almost as an end in itself; that is, it is intended to introduce the rather foreign concept of egalitarian, multi-purpose organizations as part of a general transformation of traditional Lao society. This may explain why so little effort has been put into the old age organization; although it has equal status on paper, its development has been hampered by the intransigence of the people in that age group.

SELECTION OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Government officials are chosen almost entirely on the basis of merit, although there seems to be a general preference for the economically deprived villager as opposed to his wealthier counterpart. Tasseng level officials hold office up to two years; village level officials hold office for six months to a year. Higher officials have no clear-cut tenure of office; most have been in power since 1964. Village and Tasseng leaders are usually chosen by acclamation in a large meeting where the whole "group" is presented before the villagers. Elections by "secret ballot" are sometimes held if two men are equally qualified for a position -- usually Naibans -- but the Neo officials are never chosen by ballot. Balloting sometimes takes place to assign specific positions to the members of a village or tasseng "group", i. e., to select which man shall be Naiban, assistant, militia commander, etc. In these elections the Awakening Group "advises" the villagers whom to vote for. The earliest balloting that anyone could remember was in 1967 for the Tasseng of Sen Noi. Some areas in the province have not had any elections by ballot at all.

COURTS

Minor offenses like petty theft are handled at the village level, where the accused is put through a self-criticism session by members of the village or tasseng "group". More serious offenses call for the convening of a "peoples'

court" where the accused stands before a gathering of villagers and reads a confession of his crime and suggests the punishment that he should receive. The villagers then applaud his statement (which is usually prepared by the Awakening Group) and he is led off to jail. Serious offenses include attempts to escape, profiteering, adultery and passing information to RLG agents. Refugees who had spent time in jail reported that they had to write additional confessions during the course of their sentences. Reduced jail terms were granted on the basis of increased labor contributions by their families and convincing changes of heart on the part of the prisoners.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

The following is a list of government officials. Where a man uses two names or forms of address is indicated by a slash. All officials are Lao unless otherwise indicated. A question mark indicates that the name was not confirmed by a large number of refugees.

Khoueng Group

Chao Khoueng	Som Vang
Neo Khoueng for Lao	Thao Da/Ba Da
Neo Khouang for Meo	Nyia Veu (Meo)
N. Vietnamese Khoueng	
Advisor	Boun Chan (Lao alias)
Asst. Chao Khoueng	Sa Lat
Asst. Neo Khoueng	Bout Di
Awakening Group	"Major" Vichit
Youth Organization	Maja Boun Mi
Police	Su Van
Court	In Ta
Khoueng Group	
Representative	Chan Phim Pha
Khoueng Group	
Representative	Nguyen Van Thu (N. Vietnamese)
Agriculture	Siang Nan Tha/Pho Nu La

Irrigation	Guoc (N. Vietnamese)
Education	Phiang
Health	Lo Sao (Meo, son of Fai Dang)
Militia	Si That

Muong Group (Muong Khoun)

Chao Muong	Sai Vang (Meo)
Neo Muong	(?) Lia Heu (Meo)
N. Vietnamese Advisor	Boun Ta (Lao alias)
Asst. Chao Muong	Som Neuk
Asst. Neo Muong	(?) Sao Shua/Ga Ying (Meo woman)
Awakening Group	Van Pheng
Youth Organization	Thit Kham Ba
Muong Group Representative	Pho Fong
Police	Chum
Agriculture	Chan Kham Si
Health	Kham Mi
Education	Sim Ma
Irrigation	Kham Deum
Militia	Thao Nyom

ECONOMY

One of the most consistent themes in the P. L. rhetoric is the need for greater production. Directives to junior officials dwell at length on the need to put unused padi into production, to exceed last year's output, to increase the planting of secondary crops and to press for greater efforts on the part of the villagers. There can be no doubt that the P. L. have reduced disguised unemployment in the areas they control to an all time low. As the refugees put it, "No one can be lazy." Official directive Number 16, which states that one person shall do the work of five, refers not only to the labor shortages created by the draft

and the portage system, but also to production in general. The official, but secondary, function of the Awakening Group is to encourage greater effort and to assist in the introduction of new techniques. In this sense they function as community development advisors.

AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK

Minimum planting requirements have been established, but they are usually exceeded as a matter of course. Civilians are required to plant at least four Kg per person in seed-beds; homeguard soldiers are required to plant two Kg per person. Most refugees, however, reported planting from fifty to ninety Kg per year. Padi land is divided into three grades which must produce the following quantities of rice per kilo of seed: grade one, 50 Kg, grade two, 30 Kg, and grade three, 15 Kg. Additional crops which have gained importance as the rice tax has increased include sweet potatoes, cassava, corn, beans, eggplant, tomatoes, and a variety of other vegetables.

The use of natural fertilizers on padi has been strongly encouraged, and the Vietnamese irrigation advisors have tried to push the use of night soil on vegetable gardens. Locally conscripted agricultural and veterinary agents have recently been assigned to groups of villages; a vet agent who came out with the refugees said that he had received only one day's training, while the refugees reported that the agricultural agents knew little more than the average farmer. The vet agent was given medicines last year to inoculate cattle and buffalo, but he said that he didn't know what the medicines were for.

Beginning in 1967 increased emphasis was put on irrigation as groups of North Vietnamese technicians began to direct canal and dam construction. New padi land has been made available and a few experiments have been made with double-cropping, but not on a regular basis. The head of irrigation

for the province is a Vietnamese named Guoc and the refugees knew the Lao aliases of four of his technicians: Kham Ouan, Vi, Sing Kham and Boun Thao. Much of the impressed labor is used on irrigation works, and the presence of a relatively large group of Vietnamese advisors points to the priority given the irrigation program.

Padi is still privately owned for the most part and traditional inheritance procedures are followed unless the owner escapes to the RLG, when the land becomes public property. Most of the public padi was acquired from land abandoned by refugees in 1961, although some of it is new land that has been recently irrigated. Government officials and school children at the Mayanyom and Udom levels work the public padi; villagers are not required to put in time on the public lands.

Water buffalo and cattle are almost entirely privately owned, but strict regulations regarding their sale or slaughter have been in force for several years. For example, villagers must have written permission from the Muong administration in order to slaughter an animal for a marriage ceremony. The sale of these livestock is permitted only at fixed prices and is usually limited to the coop. Cattle are priced at 15,000, 12,000 or 8,000 kip and buffalo at 28,000, 24,000 or 20,000 kip. Beef or buffalo meat may be sold at the market, but the price is fixed at 200 kip per Kg for beef and 180 kip for buffalo. Illegal slaughtering increased markedly when the co-op prices were reduced in 1968. The refugees reported various kinds of "accidental deaths", such as strangling on a tether, drowning in a wallow, or suffering wounds to the achilles tendon which necessitated the animal's slaughter.

Swine are not as closely controlled and may be sold or traded freely among villagers. However if pork is sold to the co-op, the price is fixed at 250 kip per Kg, including bones and viscera. Chickens and ducks fall under none of the restrictions placed on other livestock and may be

slaughtered or sold at the owner's discretion; careful records of each family's flock are kept at the Tasseng office.

CO-OP AND MARKET

The co-ops are the commercial centers of the province and have recently been expanded to the point that several Tassengs have outlets of their own. They are not co-ops in the sense that shares are owned by members, rather they function as purchasing agencies and retail outlets. Most of the goods sold are North Vietnamese or Chinese and include common household items. Most of the merchandise is rationed and it is not uncommon to find many items out of stock. Priority is given to the military co-op, a separate organization, which appears to be better supplied than its civilian counterpart. Following are some representative prices: cloth, from 260 to 500 kip per meter; trousers, up to 1500 kip; shirts and blouses, 500 kip; salt, 100 kip per Kg. Great quantities of pots and pans were found in the cave housing the military co-op, but these items were apparently in short supply at the civilian outlets.

The market at Xieng Khouang city is open daily for several hours in the early morning; however, it frequently closes at dawn to avoid the possibility of air strikes. Travel documents are not required to go to the market. Most of the produce sold is locally produced and most of the Chinese and Vietnamese merchants have been put out of business long ago or severely restricted in their trading activities. Chickens, ducks, swine, vegetables, and the like may be bargained for freely and the prices are comparable to those in RLG areas.

The new NLHS currency, in notes of 100, 200 and 500 kip, was introduced at last year's harvest and was used to purchase the "trading rice".

TAXATION

Since the introduction of formal rice taxation in 1965, the effective rate has steadily risen although it has assumed different names. The rates vary throughout the province. In more secure areas like Ban Ban, Xieng Khouang City and the eastern PDJ area, the people are subject to higher taxes than in, for example, Muong Ngan or Muong The. The differences reflect the extent of P. L. administrative and military control and illustrate a P. L. policy of setting examples in one area to be followed later in another.

The primary tax, called "rice to help the state", is set at 15% after exemptions. Each member of a family, including those in the army or away at school, is allowed 100 Kg of paddy tax free. The remainder is taxed at the rate of 15% and this "state rice" is put in a public bin in each village.

The secondary tax, called "trading rice", was put in effect for the 1968 harvest. Approximately ten percent of the rice remaining after the primary tax is bought by the co-op for 27 kip per Kg or the equivalent in co-op merchandise. The sale of this rice is obligatory in secure areas, but the practice does not appear to have spread throughout the province.

The third tax, in effect since 1967, is called "rice from the heart". It is a voluntary contribution solicited from villagers at the same time that the other taxes are collected. Each villager is cajoled and "enlightened" until his contribution exceeds his neighbor's or his own of the previous year. The average for the Xieng Khouang area appears to run on the order of ten to twenty kilos per family, although further contributions are solicited throughout the year as the need arises.

In 1968 the P. L. began collecting a monetary tax to "support the teachers and medics". The tax is progressive and is

set at the following amounts: 500 kip a year for wealthy families, 300 for average families and 200 for the poor.

What might be considered an additional tax was levied in 1968 when the co-op prices for cattle and water buffalo were reduced by thirty to forty percent.

TAX EVASION

The P. L. have had some difficulty in collecting the rice and monetary taxes, particularly as the total levies have increased. Villagers have lied so consistently about total harvests that officials and representatives from the Khoueng and Muong governments and NVA cadres have been forced to watch harvesting and thrashing to prevent cheating. Each year an additional surtax is levied, with varying degrees of success, to "make up for the rice which was hidden" the previous year.

The monetary tax has caused villagers to hide many of their possessions and has reinforced a tendency to appear as poor as possible. Jewelry is almost never worn and people consistently dress in the oldest serviceable clothes they can find to emphasize their poverty.

TAX REVENUES

The public rice is distributed to P. L. soldiers and civil servants above the Tasseng level; the NVA brings in its own rice. Even the officials entitled to public rice rarely receive their full quota as the army has first priority. A nurse from the Muong dispensary reported that in 1968 she received her ration for only eight months. The "refugees" from Ban Pha (LS 239) who were evacuated to Xieng Khouang city in 1967 received almost no rice during their stay and were forced to forage in the woods and beg rice from other villagers. The Xieng Khouang people who did not come out with the refugees are reported to be "starving" in the Ban Ban area where they have been relocated by the P. L.

The rice taxation has encouraged the production of substitute crops and many of the refugees reported that had they not planted sweet potatoes, cassava, mung beans, etc., they would have had little to eat during the four or five months before harvest.

PORTAGE AND IMPRESSED LABOR

The single most unpopular aspect of life under the P. L. is the portage system. Almost no one is exempt from numerous "short trips" of up to a week's duration, and everyone with enough strength is required to make one "long trip" a year. The long trip usually means thirty cumulative days of actual hauling, not counting rest days or the return trip. In 1968 people from the Xiang Khouang city area were drafted for two long trips, although the official requirement called for only one. Most of the portage was to the areas of Tha Vieng, Tha Thom and Pha Lavek. Men are required to carry fifteen kilos of cargo plus their own rice, but the loads seem to average out to about fifteen kilos including the rice. Women average about ten kilos including rice although they are supposed to carry ten kilos of cargo alone. On long trips, rice is provided by the state at the rate of 600 grams per day, and each porter also receives 300 grams of canned meat per week. Short trips are organized whenever the need arises and have become more frequent over the years as the P. L. administration has become more effective. They now average one to two times a month. Women are less frequently assigned to the long trips, but everyone else, including the local Chinese and Vietnamese, are subject to the draft. Women who are not assigned to specific portage groups are responsible for the children of the women who go on the trips. The refugees reported that they often puncture holes in rice sacks to lighten the load, and that they are sometimes able to discard part of their cargo in the woods without being caught.

Civilians are also assigned to road construction and maintenance groups. The roads to Tha Thom (LS 11) and Muong

Ngan (LS 236) were built almost entirely by conscripted village labor and POW's over the past two years. Route 7 west of Xieng Khouang city, however, is maintained by an NVA engineering unit. The villagers are also conscripted to build major bunkers and air raid shelters, and many of the anti-aircraft gun emplacements around the city were dug by civilian labor crews. Impressed labor is also used on earth dams and irrigation works, which have become priority projects during the past two years.

Requirements for "labor strength" (heng ngan) are passed down through the administrative and Neo government channels to the villages where their fulfillment is supervised by the youth organization as well as the Tasseng and village officials.

A great deal of official verbiage is devoted to supporting the communal labor projects. Two recent policy statements were directed precisely toward the impressed labor system: Statement Number Fifteen, announced last year, says that one man shall do the work of three; Number Sixteen, which came out this year, declares that one man shall do the work of five. These are interpreted by the "Awakening Group" as meaning that the one member of a family of three who is not on a communal labor project shall do the others' work in the fields and gardens as well as his own; statement Number Sixteen places him under even greater pressure.

MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

The official draft age is 15, but many of the refugees reported that conscription often begins at age 13. The draft quotas are normally passed down through the government hierarchy and the school system, although the school system has no authority of its own to draft soldiers. Almost every eligible male in the province is in the army.

The refugees said that soldiers are classified into the following groups: homeguard, ambush, muong, khueng

and regulars. Most of the young men become regulars, while older villagers are conscripted into the other categories of service. Homeguard and ambush soldiers receive no salaries. There appears to be a consistent pattern of assigning new conscripts to P. L. units rather than to Deuanist units with the predictable result that the Deuanist army is withering away.

There is also a conscious policy of keeping news of casualties from the villagers. It is not uncommon for parents to not know of their son's death until months after it has occurred. No death benefits are provided although the 100 kilos rice exemption is still allowed even after death.

EDUCATION

In Xieng Khouang province, the primary schools teach grades 1 through 4; the first three grades are taught in local schools found in virtually every village, while grade 4 is taught in the provincial school near XK city. Students enter grade one at age six or seven; they study four hours a day and spend several additional hours working in the school gardens and tending to the school livestock. Each student, or his parent, is required to provide a chicken and sometimes a pig for this program. Primers are distributed free, but notebooks and pencils must be bought (at the co-op or at the market). To graduate from grade 4 usually takes more than four years, but qualifies a student for enrollment in the secondary school or Matanyom.

There are four Matanyom schools in the province at XKV, Khang Khai, Muong Ngan and Ban Khai. Students usually board at the Matanyom during the two year course and return home to pick up rice whenever they run out. As in the primary schools, they spend several hours a day on the school plots which include rice padi as well as vegetable gardens. Each student provides four chickens and two ducks and each classroom raises at least one pig. This

year there were 436 students enrolled at the Matanyom level, about evenly divided among the four locations. The teacher-pupil ratio varies from ten to thirty students per teacher.

Beyond Matanyom the students enter the Udom level, established in 1968. As of 1969, there were only nineteen students at the province-wide Udom at XKV. Graduates of Udom attend the "Sithon Kommandam School" at Son Lay, DRV, where returnees report that ten to twenty thousand Lao students from all over the country are enrolled. There are separate schools in XKV for the small Chinese and Vietnamese populations, but the reporting officer was able to find out little about them except that the Chinese school had teachers attached to the Chinese mission at Nhang Khai.

TEACHER TRAINING

Until late 1968, the only prerequisite to teach grades 1 through 3 was a knowledge of written Lao, but since then a four month training course has been set up. Teachers at the grade 4 level are required to attend a one year course near XKV. Teachers in the Matanyom must be graduates of a training course of "several years" given at Sam Nuan, DRV. Little is known about the backgrounds of the Udom teachers -- presently five Lao and five North Vietnamese. The teacher training courses include instruction in carpentry, blacksmithing and agriculture as well as lengthy lessons in politics and the policies of the P. L. administration.

Most of the instruction given teachers, however, is in the form of inservice training. Primary school teachers spend each Saturday at Tasseng-wide meetings where they say they are encouraged to teach more, grow more and guide their students away from the "old way" toward the "new way".

In addition to these weekly sessions, all of the Matanyom and some of the primary school teachers attend annual one-month training sessions during the two month vacation period. The other month is devoted to work in the fields.

The head of teacher training for Xieng Khouang province is a Lao from Sam Neua named Kham Pian.

SALARIES

Primary school teachers receive twenty kip a day subsistence and 600 grams of rice. Teachers at the Matanyom receive the same rice ration and 1150 kip per month.

SUBJECT MATERIAL

The textbooks, even at the primary level, emphasize hygiene and better agricultural practices, as well as self-denial, communal endeavor and solidarity against U.S. imperialism. A great many allegorical stories (akin to Aesop's fables) teach right and wrong, while patriotic songs talk of capturing enemy arms and heroic stories tell of the successes of the people's infantry and anti-aircraft units. The arithmetic texts, for instance, include exercises involving taxation, rice donations to the army, equivalent Vietnamese units of weight, numbers of people at political rallies, production records set by various districts, kilometers of road construction, loads carried by porters, and other examples appropriate to the new way of life. Only Arabic numerals are used. Textbooks in Meo orthography have been in use since 1967, but Meo students are required to learn Lao first; the Meo script is an altered Lao script, easily learned once the Meo students know Lao.

ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

The only formally organized adult education program is for illiterate P.L. government officials. Since minor officials are chosen on the basis of their contributions to the state and their reliability (strong back/weak mind), it is not uncommon to find low-level administrators with little

knowledge of written Lao. The greater part of the literacy campaign, however, consists of a 1966 requirement that all teachers instruct five adults per year to read and write and all literate people teach two adults per year. Monks are also required to act as instructors in the program. This informal campaign depends on the availability of time and the dedication of the teachers and has been found wanting on both counts.

Another "literacy program" consists of posters and placards placed on houses, trees and along trails. These are usually brief political slogans such as "rise up against the American imperialists", "shoot down U.S. airplanes", or "plant more rice than last year". Such placards are frequently worn by porters walking in single file so that the sign on one man's back is read by the one behind him.

GOALS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The education system has two primary functions: to change the society from the bottom up by introducing new values and patterns of thought, and to provide a manpower base to meet the requirements of the state. Students are expected to grow up in a society radically different from that of their parents and the school system has become a major instrument of transformation. The schools treat material that would be anathema to the older generation in a very matter-of-fact way -- such as the waste of resources on funeral rites and describe rather radical programs, such as the portage system, as normalcy. From the Matanyom on, the pupils are largely isolated from their parents and become official wards of the state, and unless they return to their village as teachers or medics, they are largely cut off from the influence of the older generation.

The second function of the school system is that of meeting certain manpower requirements of the state. Quotas for soldiers, medics, nurses, agricultural agents and other

state employees are sent down from the provincial government to the school system, which helps to weed out the least promising students for these occupations. Increased requirements for soldiers in particular and an emphasis on more diligent study in general have led to the abolition of two grades in the system: a fifth primary grade was eliminated in 1967 and a third year of Matanyom was cut out in 1968. (The introduction of the two-year Udom does not replace these, rather it represents a transfer of facilities from the DRV to Laos.) The students are now expected to learn more and learn it faster to be able to serve their country sooner. There seems to be no clear cut pattern as to the number of times a student is allowed to repeat a grade, but his chances of being drafted increase rapidly as his exam grades worsen.

In the P. L. areas, the phrase "to go to study" has become a suphemism for conscription because of the frequent student drafts. The same phrase is used by the P. L. to indicate self-criticism sessions and has acquired an ugly connotation among the older Lao. Most of those who "go to study" outside the province or to North Vietnam are rarely heard from again; they are usually attached to military units in other areas; or if they graduate from the advanced schools, they are sent to work in Sam Neua where the "model state" is being built.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Medical facilities are organized at the khoueng, muong and tasseng levels. No village level program exists although one had been planned for 1969. The tasseng dispensaries are usually stocked with little more than a few pills and are able to treat only simple maladies. The tasseng dispensary at XKV was staffed by a single nurse who rarely made sick calls and usually referred patients to the muong dispensary at Na Kwa (NW of XKV). At the muong level, a greater variety of medicine was available, but again the staff (of three) usually referred patients needing more intensive treatment to the khoueng infirmary at Tham Hok. The

Khoueng infirmary was run by a surgeon and was able to handle up to fifty in-patients who slept in shelters outside the cave entrance. The "surgeon" left evidence of a rather crude amputation technique on one of the refugees he had treated.

TRAINING

The nurses at the muong hospital attended a six month training course in 1964 at Khang Khai. The program was run by Dr. Saramani, a Deuanist officer who received his medical training in Cambodia. The tasseng nurse studied for three months at Khang Khai, and in March of this year a new training program was begun for village level medics and nurses. Twenty five students, mostly girls, attended a 25-day course at Tham Hok taught by four Lao and two North Vietnamese instructors. The course was almost completed when the fall of Phu Khe (LS 19) forced its postponement. The muong level nurses receive 1150 kip a month and a rice ration while the tasseng nurse receives 800 kip a month and eat with the villagers.

MILITARY MEDICS

P. L. soldiers appear to receive much better medical care than their civilian counterparts. Each of the four (?) battalions in XK province has the following personnel assigned to it: a surgical unit consisting of a surgeon and six assistants, two battalion level medics, a medic for each company, as well as company level hygiene advisors who supervise food preparation, latrine construction and camp cleanliness. Each of the surgeons studied in Hanoi for six years. The hospital at Tham Kap (NW of XKV) was the main military hospital for the province and admitted only soldiers or high-ranking government officials. Tham Kap could accommodate about a hundred in-patients and was equipped with a laboratory and a surgical unit. It was also the main medical warehouse for the province and supplied units in the field with pre-packaged first aid kits and

surgical supplies. About a hundred tons of medical supplies were found in Tham Kap and other caves at the time of their capture. A smaller medical warehouse in Khang Khai, under the nominal control of the Deuanists, prepares native remedies which are distributed to the troops and civilians along with manufactured pharmaceuticals. These local preparations include: alcohol, "afterbirth medicine", diarrhea medicines, "tonic pills", and "deer horn" medicine. The latter is a hormone preparation sometimes given to soldiers before battle. Following is a list of the more important people associated with the medical programs in Xieng Khouang province:

Kham Pheuang	Overall head of military and civilian services for the province; director of Tham Kap hospital
Tri, or Chi	his NVA advisor
Mai Thong	head of the military medics
Siramany	head of the Khang Khai hospital
Lo Sao	provincial director of public health
Sing Thong	Director of the Khoueng hospital at Tham Hok
Van Thong	his NVA advisor (Lao alias)
Nang Vilai	head of medic and nurse training (Phoumi Vongvichit's adopted daughter)

More detailed information relating to the P. L. medical programs can be found in PHD reports.

CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS

The Neo Lao Hak Sat have followed a consistent policy of eradicating the influence that Buddhism has on the lives of the villagers. All forms of "making merit" are sharply curtailed and visits to the Wats are strongly discouraged. Monks are not allowed to receive offerings of food from villagers and no "bouns" have been held since 1964. Monks

are required to work on impressed labor projects, but do not have to go on portage trips. They must cultivate their own paddy fields and gardens and contribute to the common good rather than "eat the peoples' rice".

Most of the novices who have joined the order in the past several years have been installed by the P. L. government. They openly denounce Buddhism and emphasize the waste of resources on religious and secular festivals. They sometimes wear civilian clothes and are said to spend a lot of time eavesdropping on conversations in villagers' houses. They frequently wear pistols under their robes and are referred to by the older monks who came out with the refugees as "agents" and never as bonzes. They also function as teachers in the adult literacy program. Buddhist holy days are not celebrated and cremations have almost ceased entirely; they have been replaced by simple burials which represent a lesser waste of resources.

Animism is no less exempt from denunciation as a corrosive waste of time and energy. Spirit houses, bacis, food for the phi and belief in the supernatural are decried as useless remnants of the "old way". The refugees reported that the "old way" (of Buddhism-animism) is still practiced as much as possible under the circumstances, but that constant harassment has reduced the level of active participation such that traditional practices are dying out. One of the most frustrating aspects of the P. L. study sessions is the need to justify under cross-examination beliefs and practices that have never been questioned, like the value of expensive funeral preparations. Why throw good money away on a corpse?

Marriage has similarly been altered by the P. L. administration, but to a lesser extent than Buddhism. Couples are encouraged to "drink tea" rather than have a large party, and the bride price has been criticised as another wasteful anachronism. The taking of minor wives is strictly forbidden as it violates women's equal rights. The refugees remembered a people's

court session where a man and his mistress were publicly condemned and sentenced to jail. Similarly in Meo areas the practice of abducting a bride has been outlawed, with limited success. The role of women in general has changed, since "they have ten fingers and ten toes and should do equal work as men". The P. L. encourage marriages between men and women who have both worked well for the state; some refugees said that the government has given large wedding presents to such model couples while others said that they had never heard of the practice.

Alcohol has been denounced as not only a corrosive influence on mind and body, but also as a serious waste of otherwise good grain. The refugees nonetheless told of hidden stills in the woods that were operated by hard core drinkers.

CELEBRATIONS AND RALLIES

A "victory celebration" is held each year on October 12, the anniversary of the founding of the Lao Issara in 1945. The year's military successes are reviewed along with the number of enemy soldiers killed, airplanes shot down, weapons captured, etc. Production figures by district and by crop or animal are announced and progress in the fields of education, irrigation, health, etc., is summarized. The celebration is an occasion for cataloguing the successes of the NLHS administration and sometimes features entertainment provided by the "morale group" under the direction of the Vietnamese Khoueng advisor "Boun Chan" who is an accomplished magician. Attendance is encouraged but is not obligatory.

An entirely different type of gathering is called the "boun meeting"; the English/French word "meeting" is used although none of the refugees knew that it was English. (It also appears in print - in Lao script - in P. L. publications.) The "boun meeting" is a protest rally where the atrocities of the American imperialists and their lackies are denounced

and where petitions condemning the policies of these bandits and their running dogs are signed and sent to the NLHS central committee. Banners are posted on walls, e.g., "shoot down 1000 airplanes", and villagers carry around posters and chant "long live Prince Souphannouvong". Boun meetings are held several times a year or whenever an especially horrible atrocity has been committed by the enemy.

MERIT BOOKS AND STUDY SESSIONS

One of the more important mechanisms of political control is the use of a sort of report card called psum phon ngan which may be translated as "work success book" or "results of labor book". However, we will call them merit books. All adults have been required to carry them since 1964 although many villagers have a tendency to lose them and they are often kept by Naibans or Tassengs. A person's merit book summarizes most of what the P. L. considers important in his life: The harvests he has had, the taxes he has paid, the voluntary contributions he has made, the celebrations and rallies he has attended, the portage trips he has gone on, and his participation in impressed labor projects. The merit book, in short, catalogues a person's assets as a citizen of father land. Refugees refer to their merit books when they speak of conditions in which their candidates of "equal merit" were nominated for low-level offices; they both had an equal number of brownie points in their books. Several of the refugees who had served as P. L. officials said that civil servants had to make daily entries in their merit books; most of the refugees reported that entries for civilians were made weekly or whenever the occasion called for it. Some people said that entries were made by government officials while others said that the Awakening Group was responsible for keeping the books up-to-date. The P. L. nonetheless encourage villagers to maintain their own books once they learn the proper format.

In addition to the merit books, personal dossiers are maintained on villagers whose political loyalty is in question. Their cheating, their crimes, their deviation from official policy and their opposition to "progress" is recorded in personal files. One of the agents who came out with the refugees had the responsibility of taking notes on the kinds of questions asked at meetings where government policy was explained. Villagers whose questions reflected unpatriotic tendencies were later called to attend study sessions to correct their misconceptions.

The study, or re-education sessions are designed to change the thinking of the individual such that he genuinely believes what his guides want him to believe and fully understands the mistakes of his former actions. The individual is not harangued, but is slowly shown the error of his ways through careful questioning; these sessions can last for days as long as there is hope that the subject is not an incorrigible traitor. A former P. L. Tasseng said that he was "guided" by the Chao Muong and several other officials for three days through his failures to carry out his duties. Villagers who protest the contributions of "rice from the heart" are often "taught" until they make an adequate donation. Mass study sessions are held at the Muong each year for village and Tasseng officials at the same time that the coming years' policies are discussed.

