

VILLAGE SCHOOL RESEARCH

Translations of student research papers
from the Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs,
(ENI), Pakse, Laos; June, 1965

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INTRODUCTION

The following reports have been translated from the original Lao manuscripts of students at the Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs, Pakse (ENI). They were written as a class assignment for the rural arts class taught by the IVS Advisor at the ENI. The purpose of the assignment was to encourage these future teachers to examine their role as a village teacher, particularly in relation to village problems. It is hoped that they have obtained a more realistic and less "textbook" view of their job.

The information in these reports was obtained on field trips to villages in the Pakse area. The trips were planned and by the Director of the ENI in cooperation with the Primary School Inspector of Sedone. The general purpose of the trips was to acquaint the ENI students with practical social affairs in the village. Along with this they also gave an IVS questionnaire to survey the general resources and problems of the community. An agriculture survey was also conducted.

It must be pointed out that all too little time was available for the collection of data. The students visited no more than two villages for a duration of two or three hours each. Another problem is that these students have had little or no experience in writing down ideas and preparing reports. They have very few models on which to pattern their research.

The papers have been translated rather freely from the Lao and this has presented some problems. In their original language they are of a higher literary quality than is apparent in English. Certain words appear often because they are used generically in Lao where in English we might use many different ^{words} (particularly true in sociology). Further, certain Lao idioms deny translation into English.

What is significant about these papers is that the ENI students have undertaken the task of constructive criticism of their way of life. The fact that they speak freely of social change is evidence that their education is helping to generate ideas. How well these ideas will be put into effect is another question. The students speak of village problems but few practical solutions are proposed. They will "talk" to parents; "plant a garden"; use "psychology"; etc. While they are not certain as to just how they will play a role in the future they do appear to be committed to the idea.

Roderick MacPae,
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SURVEY
THE SCHOOL IN SMALLTOWN, LAOS
by Mr. Vixay Phrathoumaseng, 1963-64

INTRODUCTION:

It was the first time that I have been to this school. Where is the school; do they contact the officials on business; How do the villagers live; do they have things to sell at the market; does the government send materials to the school? So I went to the village and the village school to see for myself. The readers will learn about it in the following pages. If I have recorded wrongly and with too few words will the reader please add his own and excuse me.

THE VILLAGE:

As I have seen the village of Smalltown I can say that it is a medium sized village. If we compare it to other villages we can say that this one has experienced social change and other advantages. The village is on the banks of the Mekong River and near the fields. It is a suburb of Central Laos. There are 400 people living there and there are about 100 houses. The people are: farmers, fishermen, etc. There is a good transportation to the market because they are near to the city.

CHILDREN IN THE VILLAGE:

There are 97 children in the village between the ages of 3-12. 79 of them go to school and 18 of them stay home (approximately 78% in school). The villagers told me that the mothers of them stay home to take care of the young children when the parents are not at home. If I were a teacher in this village I would contact the parents and urge them to send the children to school. I must explain the meaning of education to them and how it benefits the children. When the children go to school we must have toys, cartoons, pictures, etc. to make them interested in school and to love studying. They should decorate the classrooms and plant flowers so that they will not want to miss school.

THE SCHOOL AND THE PLAYGROUND:

The school and its grounds should be made as well as the plans. The playground must be wide and safe for all kinds of sports. The playground at Smalltown would be very good if they would repair it, but now it is narrow with no playing space. They do not take care of it and it is dirty.

The school at Smalltown was built like many other village schools and there are some things lacking. For example, the walls are made of tin roofing sheets tied down with bamboo strips. They do not decorate the rooms. It is good that the villagers helped each other to build the school. They borrowed the tin and hired a carpenter themselves. I think that if the government gives them help that the school will be finished.

The classrooms are bright and have plenty of fresh air. They do not have enough teaching aids such as blackboards. Some of the tables are broken and are not clean. They do not have any water for the children to drink. There are no toilets and the children must go to the forest. This is bad for sanitation. There is no fence at all. Their books are not enough because the government did not send them to them. I asked what kind of books they need and they said every kind. They asked me for help but I replied that I only came to survey and that they should ask their school Director for help.

THE SCHOOL GARDEN:

I am surprised that they do not have a school garden this year. Last year they worked on a garden but this year the land is fallow. It is fertile soil so I asked the teacher why he did not plant again. He said that they have no seeds and are too far from the river. If I were the teacher in that village I will improve the situation and make examples for the villagers to see and talk to the people to do as I have studied in school.

ANIMALS:

In Smalltown, as I have seen, they keep animals such as: buffalo, pigs, chickens, ducks, etc. They keep the animals in the fields and in the village. They have a problem with disease and every year the animals get cholera. When the disease strikes the villagers have not gone to seek help from the Veterinary Service at all. The animal shelters are not built properly because there is not enough fresh air. If I am sent to this village I must show and advise them in order to have good shelters.

WELLS AND SAFE WATER:

The people in Smalltown drink the water from the Island River. This water is not clean and only a few families boil it before drinking. I guess that they do not have a way to store the water and must go fill up their water cans every day. I would be hard pressed for ideas too because the river is in a very low bed and they could not make a water wheel. We would have to buy a pump.

HOUSES:

Their houses were built up along the banks of the river. There are 88 houses and 400 people. Most of the homes are built of hardwoods and have tin roofing. The walls are wood or bamboo. Their houses are not laid out properly for they built wherever they wished with no plan for the future. Soon there will be no place to build roads. They have one road through the village but it is not wide enough nor is it clean. They should build properly as I have shown on this map. (Handdrawn map of the village.)

SURVEY
THE SCHOOL IN PICH VALLEY, LAOS¹
by Mr. Bouadith, 1963-64

INTRODUCTION:

On this trip we have seen many things: the way of life of the villagers; sanitation; animal husbandry; and the relationships of the people to Central City. We have seen the school, the wat, and the limitations of the village. Then I have recorded what they are missing, what they produce, and the customs of the people of Pich Valley. What is the economic condition of the village? What is the condition of their agriculture? I wrote the report for you to read because I have known and seen Pich Valley. It is the first time that I have seen this village. I talked with the people and they explained the situation very well. When I go to work in the village I will bring the good methods and cast away the old methods. I would like to apologize if I use critical language.

GENERAL ITEMS:

The purpose of this survey is to solve some of the problems of the village. I will also note the things which they do right and the things which they are lacking. This field trip has helped me to create ideals because we will serve as the officials of the future who need a good education to help the nation achieve modernization. How does the teacher in Pich Valley educate the people? Do the villagers work well together to achieve results? The job of the teacher is to work with the children and with the village people. Is the school building in good condition? Now that I have seen Pich Valley I am glad that the people work together on education in other projects. This is a good village and it has high production.

But they lack good sanitation. In specific, the villagers build chicken houses under their own houses. They do this because the teacher and the officials did not explain to them nor provide proper examples for them to see. I think that later they will know better because there is much communication with Central City.

PHYSICAL SETTING OF THE VILLAGE:

Pich Valley is situated on a narrow plain on the banks of a river and at the foot of a mountain. The village has good fresh air. It was built up in no particular way or plan. There is no main path in the village only winding ways. I can say that this village lacks only a few things. They are surrounded by rice paddy land and forest. In the village there are many kinds of fruits which they have planted. These fruits, planted in their courtyards are: coconut, papaya, mango, oranges, pomelo, etc. Some of these fruits they sell in the Central City market each year. It shows that the economy of the village is good even though they have only a small amount of fruit.

1. Pich Valley is indeed as idyllic as its name and this writer proclaims (ed. note).

The river is very useful to these people. They use the water from the river every day. During the dry season it is a little difficult because there is not enough water in some places but, generally, the water runs all year around. The water is not clean and they must boil it before they drink it. They boil it because the the technical teacher advised them to do this.

OCCUPATIONS:

Most of the people in Rich Valley said that they were farmers. Some families have rice paddies and some have gardens. They are able to provide enough rice for ten festivals per year and, so, do not starve. Some years they have an abundance of rice which they sell on the Central City market. Everyone is busy and the fields are not left empty. Besides planting rice paddy they also plant some dry rice on the hillside to increase production. Everybody is interested in working. They also plant: pineapples, bananas, sweet potatoes, beans, corn, cucumber, etc. When they have an excess they sell at the Central City market. Family gardens show that they work together because of the advice of the technical teacher. They have built a water wheel to raise the water from the river to their garden.

SANITATION & TRANSPORTATION:

The houses are clean like the school playground. In front of each house is a basin to support cool water. There is a lack of one thing and that is that they build chicken houses under their own homes. This happened because the technical teacher didn't advise against it. Rich Valley is not isolated and they can travel to other villages. The present road is in very poor repair and it is difficult to travel in the rainy season. There is only one road to Central City and it was developed when the village was first built. The technical teacher is helping the villagers build a new road.

THE PEOPLE AND THE SCHOOL:

The people send their children to school because of the advice of the technical teacher. They repair the school as well as they can because their children need it. The school was built as well as the plans. The school was built as an PLG Department of Rural Affairs project and the cement and the tin roofing were given to them. The playground is not very large; not enough room for games. They do not have a school garden nor a flower garden. The school teacher said that the ground is haunted and the "phi"² had made them sick last year when they made a garden. They are afraid to make one this year. There is no toilet and the children must use the forest. There is no well. Inside the building there is no wall between the teacher's office and the main classroom. The classroom is well-decorated.

1. The "technical teacher" referred to here is an PLG Fundamental Educator. Many of the villagers do boil their water. (ed. note).
2. "phi" = spirits that inhabit the forest.

SUREVY
THE VILLAGE OF SMALLTOWN, LAOS
by Thao Soupho, 1964-65

As I saw on my field trip Smalltown is economically sound and convenient to Central City. It is primarily a farm village located along the banks of the Island River. I think it is a good spot to raise all kinds of farm animals. But in the dry season they have a problem because the water in the creeks and rivers dries up. Right now it is necessary for the animals to get their water from the Island River. The village occupations are: farmers, laborers, civil servants, and soldiers. There is much commerce and communication with Central City. Smalltown is located about 1 kilometer from Central City.

One serious problem that they have is that they are located in a low area and during the rainy season the village is isolated by flood waters. During the 1964 flood the road and fields were under 2 meters of water. Much of the village was under 1 meter of water. During the dry season the road is also bad because of the bumps and the dust. There is another small road leading from Smalltown to Stoneville and Bo Tree Village. During the rainy season they must use a boat to cross the flooded areas and this is expensive and difficult if they work in Central City.

Smalltown has been located here for about forty years. It received its name because it is a large commercial village. There are about 95 families in the village and many of them come from Saravane Province. Most of them are close friends and the village has a tightly woven social structure. If the people are sick it is not difficult for them because they are near Central City and a good hospital.

There are about 150 children of school age (6-12 yrs) in the village. Only about 3/4 of this group attend school, however. This includes 35 children from nearby villages and hamlets to study in Smalltown. It is a public school and the students do not need to pay money. The school was built by the people themselves. There are two school sessions, morning and afternoon. If I were the teacher here I would want to increase the number of students attending school. I would meet the parents and talk to the children. I will use psychology and the good teaching method as I have learned at my college. Psychology is more important than any other subject.

The manners of the students need some improvement. Their uniforms are not neat and the teacher has not spoken to the parents about this. Many students were noisy and did not listen to the teacher when I watched. I will teach them good manners as best I can if I am the teacher.

I think that the school grounds are good; there is room to play and for flowers. But the yard is not well kept.

There are many holes in the ground and no one has filled them in yet. Behind the school it is not neat because there are many tree stumps. They need a saw to cut them out.

Smalltown School was begun five years ago but construction is not yet complete. The school was built by the villagers themselves. The school is about 15 meters long and 5 meters wide with 2 doors and 2 windows in each room. There is no ceiling and it is very hot inside because of the tin roof. The floor is made by small stones because they are preparing to lay a cement floor soon. One construction mistake was made because the building is turned with its front into the sunshine. Because of this they must close the doors and windows to keep out the hot sunshine. It would be better if they had placed the building longways to the sun. There are no flowers planted at the school. The fence is loose and broken in many places.

There are three old blackboards but they are difficult for the teacher to use because they are broken. Many of the desks are old and broken and there are not enough to meet the needs of the students. Many chairs were broken in the First Grade and they had to sit on the desks. This makes it difficult for the students to study. There is no place to prepare clean water for the students to drink and they must bring their own from home. Perhaps that water is not clean. There is a problem that the school has no bathroom. It is not good that the students use the forest because the flies may spread disease from the excrement.

The school is divided into three classes (grades 1-3). There are 107 students and 3 teachers. The teacher tried to make a vegetable garden this year but when I saw it the vegetables were all dead. I asked why he didn't continue the garden and he said that they had no water. He said that they could get water from the Island River but that is difficult for the students to carry it that far. No handicrafts are taught at the school because they have no materials. The teachers teach physical education everyday. There are few art materials and they barely have enough paper to go around for regular class work. They have only a few charts because the government did not give them enough. They asked me to help but I have no way to help them. They must solve this problem themselves. They teach science but do not have enough materials. They teach by word of mouth and the students do not see the real thing. The school is well managed but their methods are a little different than what I have studied.

There were no vegetables in the school garden. The soil, of clay and small stones, is dry and not too good for agriculture. They have no immediate source of water for the garden. They need a well at the school. The headmaster has contacted the government officials about this but has received no help as yet. It could be a good garden if they had water.

(ii)

Seeds for the garden were bought in the market. If I am the teacher in this village I shall work hard on the problem of the garden. First, I think that we need the well and then can make the demonstration garden. This will introduce gardening to the people. I would try and get seeds and fertilizer from the government agriculture service. I would work hard so that the people will work along with me. I hope that they pay attention more than they do now. They will see that it is advantageous to have the garden because they can get more money. It is also good for the children to learn to become diligent in their work and to love to plant the garden. This will be good development for the future. There is one group of farmers who grow gardens beside the Yang Creek. They have many kinds of vegetables now. The seeds were bought from the market. They have experienced severe insect damage but have bought some insecticide from the market and this seems to help. But I think it would be good for these people to have some help from an experienced man.

The village does not raise many animals. There are a few cattle, buffalo, pigs, and chickens. But most of the animals have diseases and parasites. In 1964 all but five pigs died in smalltown. Large numbers of chickens and ducks also die every year. For this reason the people do not want to raise animals. They have never been visited by the Veterinary Service. The animals do not have enough food, water, or medicine. They usually die in the hot season. Also the people do not build animal shelters. The animals wander freely in the village. But the people do not understand about diseases and parasites so the animals are kept under the trees exposed to the rain.

The people get all of their water from the Island River but this water is not clean. There are no wells in the village. I don't think that the people boil their water before drinking it. Only the civil servants boil their water. If I am the teacher I will introduce the method of boiling water. As I have learned from my teachers boiled water is good for the health.

I think that the field trip was good for me. I have seen the village school methods and I will remember. If I use the poor words please correct me because I have never done this kind of report before. Now I will try out my ideas. Finally, I wish the spirits to keep the reader in good health and long life.

1. It is not clear whether the author means himself or the government agriculture agent. (ed. note).

SURVEY
THE VILLAGE OF RIVERSIDE, LAOS
by Mr. Khamphao Singshong, 1964-65

This village is neither large nor small. Its name is Riverside and it is located along the banks of the Mekong River. It is surrounded on the north and south by other villages whose houses are close. In the east is the forest and a military camp. There are many professions in the village including farmers, animal husbandrymen, civil servants, and merchants. In this field trip I heard about many problems in agriculture and animal raising. Why are the animals and the potatoes dying? When I know why and if I were the teacher here I would find some ways to prevent parasites and disease by good sanitation and good feeding.

There are 500 adults in the village. It is conventionally near Central City which has markets, hospitals, etc. About 2% of the school children are Chinese and Vietnamese and the rest are Lao. About 75% of the children go to school here. I asked the people why they didn't send all of the children to school and they gave me many answers. Some people said that they needed the children at home to help with the household and others said that they had no money for clothing or books. A few people said that the government already had enough school personnel and that their children would have no chance to be employed in government service. It is easy for me to answer these objections. I think it is necessary for children in this village to become good government servants in the future. Secondly, the Lao government wants to provide all its citizens with a better education because Laos lacks so many things. We are not the same as most foreign countries. All progress will come because of a good education so everyone should send their children to school. The government is training teachers for this village.¹

There are two or three students absent everyday. If I were the teacher in this village I would talk with the parents and convince them to send their children to school. When the students have finished at Riverside School they can continue their studies in the big school in Piceville which is only three kilometers away. I could see that the children in the Riverside School were in better health and had better manners than the children who did not go to school. I told them that to improve your education you should pay attention to the teacher.

The school grounds are a sand/gravel with green grass on top. It is a good place to play because there is not much chance for accidents. The school was built by the

1. The author's argument does not appear as convincing as it could have been. (ed.note).

village people. The school project was introduced by the Fundamental Education teacher. It was built for 3 rooms but they have divided it into 2 rooms. There are 96 students and 2 women teachers. The school has good blackboards but some desks and chairs are broken. The children take care of the school. There is no fence around the school and the teacher has not asked the villagers to help build it. The teachers teach according to the government program but there is no one to teach physical education. They do not have enough books for all subjects but they do have many donated by USAID and by the French. They take very good care of these books.

The children have not made a garden at Riverside because the teachers have not been diligent. They did not dig the soil deeply enough nor add enough manure. There is no well at the school and they are a long way from the river because the school was built in old fields. If I am the teacher in this school I will try and improve the garden. I will dig the soil more deeply than they do and add more manure. As for water I will try to make an all-year well. It will need a fence to keep the animals out. I think I could do a good job if I were the teacher here.

There are many kinds of animals such as: cattle, buffalo, pigs, chickens, and ducks. They have more pigs than any other kind of animals. It is sad because many animals have parasites and disease. The people do not use a good system or good medicine. The animal shelters are crowded and have no light or fresh air. They usually have the animal house under their own. I will make them understand about the correct way to raise animals.

They use the water from the Mekong River but do not boil it before drinking it. They have a well in the village but it does not produce water in the dry season. If I am the teacher I will help them dig the well. Then I will teach them to boil the water to prevent the parasites and disease. Clean water is good for the village.

The houses in Riverside are typical Lao houses made by bamboo, barbed, and tin roofing. I think it is better to use barbed to make the roof because tin is very hot in the sun-shine. The village is not very clean because I don't think that the teacher has introduced the idea of cleanliness to the villagers.

I hope that the reader will understand this paper and will excuse my mistakes. I have no qualifications as a philosopher.