

New Laos, New Challenges

edited by

Jacqueline Butler-Diaz

Throughout much of the more than twenty year period since 1975, American scholars have experienced a lack of access to Laos and to readily available current information. Over the last few years, the Laotian government has permitted more foreign scholars to visit. Several of the authors whose papers are included in this volume are among those recent visitors. This volume is divided into four sections: (1) State of the State, describing recent internal changes in Laotian society; (2) Tradition and Culture in the New Laos, discussing new developments in literature, music, classical dance, religious organization, and education; (3) Laos and Its Place in the World Arena, exploring shifts in Laos' foreign relations; and (4) Bibliographic Essays, including a complete indexed guide to American research on Laos over the past several decades. I strongly recommend this volume as a valuable aid in understanding the dramatic changes in contemporary Laos.

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On April 8, 1994, the Mittaphab (Friendship) Bridge was inaugurated as the first modern road link between Laos and Thailand and the first bridge outside of China to span the great Mekong River. The opening of this important transportation link between Laos and Thailand not only opened a new era of economic possibilities between the two countries, but also importantly symbolized the beginning of a new era of openness to the outside world after a decade and a half of Lao isolation and introspection. It is particularly gratifying to me that this often forgotten and overlooked country has been the topic of this book. I would hope that this is a beginning toward putting Laos back on the agenda for Southeast Asia.

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