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Conflict in Laos: the Politics of Neutralization

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choosing certain versions of the Khun Borom legend in preference to others. The translator also makes several attempts to qualify the assertions of the text, as when he translates "He was reported to have had two sons" (p. 75) where the text reads "He had two sons" (1st ed., p. 153). Transcription follows no consistent system: thus one has first "Visulraj" (p. 44) and then "Visulrad" and "Visul-Raja" (p. 48). The translator further compounds this confusion by ignoring the standard forms for many place names.

Maha Sila's weak spots, the shortcomings of the translation, the typography (which is no more than a photocopy of the JPRS mimeograph edition), and the relatively high price of this book should not dissuade the serious student of Southeast Asian history from obtaining and using this volume. Maha Sila offers much new material of substantial value which, when used intelligently, can assist in filling many of the enormous gaps in our knowledge of Lao history.

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Conflict in Laos: the Politics of Neutralization.

By ARTHUR J. DOMMEN. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964. xiv, 338. Appendices, Bibliography, Index. \$5.95.

For the serious scholar there are few books dealing with Laos, especially with respect to the post-war political situation. *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization* is, therefore, particularly welcome.

Arthur J. Dommen, a journalist, was formerly Bureau Manager for United Press International in Saigon and Hong Kong and most of the book reads like an extremely detailed news dispatch combined with background reporting. Except for an introductory chapter the book is devoted mainly to the period since the 1954 Geneva Conference, beginning with a chapter on the post-war independence movement, the Lao Issara, and continuing to the subsequent splitting off of Prince Souphanouvong and his associates to form the Pathet Lao under the auspices of the Viet Minh. The origins of the Communist movement in Laos are treated in considerable detail. Biographical data

is presented on Pathet Lao leaders and on personalities in the royal government. Especially complete is coverage of the series of coups, counter-coups and coalitions. Two final chapters analyze American policy and suggest alternatives, especially with regard to the possibility of a viable neutralization of Laos. A fairly extensive bibliography, mostly of English-language sources, and a number of useful appendices are included. Of particular interest is one presenting the 1964 action program of the Neo Lao Hak Sat.

In addition to defining various western concerns in the area the author consistently treats the situation from the perspective of North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist interests as well as in the light of recent conflicts within the Communist world. Concrete problems involved in the implementation of the two Geneva agreements and particularly those regarding their enforcement are spelled out at length.

The enormous amount of specific descriptive material of the kind on which the daily press concentrates is sometimes overwhelming. In a chapter dealing with the coup led by then Captain Kong Le, for example, in addition to useful information on the Captain's social background and education the author gives details of local PTT services, which is distracting.

Information on economic and social factors in Laos might have been more pertinent in evaluating political developments. For example, the ideological appeal of the Pathet Lao to villagers and minority groups is emphasized, and the reader is told about communist methods of organization. In a one-page summary of The People (p. 3) in the introductory unit, however, Mr. Dommen describes the "Kha." In fact there is no such group, for the term itself is a general pejorative one used by the dominant valley Lao to apply to widely diverse groups of indigenous upland peoples who share neither common language nor culture. Similarly misleading are statements about the stability of Lao villages and of strong family ties. Further, certain population figures cited for ethnic groups appear to be exaggerated, while those for urban communities of Vietnamese and Chinese are not reliable, judging by what limited information is already available from other published sources.

Granted that Mr. Dommen's emphasis is on political events, there is little attempt to evaluate in any comprehensive fashion the great body of facts given. It would seem important, for example, to know how the author regards the Lao elite as a group or series of groups and especially how he views their relations with the Thai. This is a crucial point, since the Pathet Lao have apparently been successful on the village level in many parts of Laos despite barely concealed sponsorship by the Vietnamese Communists, a point the author documents in depth. When one bears in mind the traditional antipathy of the Lao to the Vietnamese this development is even more notable.

Perhaps of greater concern is the assessment of a small national state in the modern world. In this sense Laos has much in common with new states in Africa which lack ethnic homogeneity, developed resources or effective internal administration. Laos differs, however, in that it shares borders with immensely more powerful states. Also the ruling Lao have a literate tradition, a history of independent kingdoms and, most important, a broad range of cultural complexes shared with the neighboring Thai. Despite a history of conflicting petty states only formal political factors divide the Northeast Thai from the Lao on the other side of the Mekong.

Considering the gradual withdrawal of the French and English in Southeast Asia and consequent return in part to a type of political conflict predating European control, the present American engagement in Indochina can be justifiably viewed as a temporary holding action. A somewhat surprising statement by the author, in view of the data he himself presents, is: "The survival of a Laos that is neither a colonial possession occupied by European or American garrisons nor a Vietnamese fief in a Communist-dominated Indochinese federation, nor a vassal of a powerful and expansionist China, depends on the effective neutralization of Laos by international consent (p. 292)." Even assuming that for compelling reasons of international politics an effective international concert could be obtained and that North Vietnamese cadre would no longer be actively aiding the Pathet Lao, this would not resolve the problem of workable Lao internal administration, including the vital matter of effective

integration of the non-Lao ethnic groups which comprise approximately half the population, to say nothing of the question of a self-sustaining economy.

It is true that the tribal Meo have been among the more effective fighters against the Pathet Lao, but it is not Americans who can achieve their integration into a Laotian state. Therefore, in this fundamental sense the work of dedicated Americans and programs of village aid, although important for short-term humanitarian reasons, are basically irrelevant in terms of long-term political and social institutional effects. Thus the author's references to these efforts (as on p. 294) do not come to grips with the real problems with which Laos is faced. A degree of union with a neutral Thailand or a block of neutral Southeast Asian states with a productive economy based on the development of the Mekong River might be long-term possibilities. At present these possibilities seem remote but then, so does effective neutralization.

These qualifications aside, Mr. Dommen presents a number of cogent comments on American policy as it pertains to the area, and his detailed description of post-war politics in Laos provides valuable background reading for a comprehension of contemporary patterns of conflict in Southeast Asia.

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The Archaeology of Central Philippines: A Study Chiefly of the Iron Age and Its Relationships. By WILHELM G. SOLHEIM, II. Monographs of the National Institute of Science and Technology, No. 10. Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1964. viii, 235. Appendices, Illustrations, Tables. n.p.

Archaeological research has been slow to develop in the Philippines. Our knowledge has been largely supplied by one man, Professor H. Otley Beyer of the University of the Philippines, who has amassed large collections in central Luzon since 1926 without, however, publishing them in any detail. He has used them to prepare conjectural syntheses of the Stone, Iron, and Porcelain Ages, as he terms the three parts of Philippine prehistory, but has published only his Stone Age synthesis (*Philip-*