
*Post-war Laos* contributes significantly to the revelation of ethnic-diversified Laos. It presents the conceptual ideology of Lao politics, identity, society and history by describing from an ethnographical approach and endows the idea of nation-building into present-day Laos.

Laos is a land-locked country in Southeast Asia and is regarded as an intricate and multi-ethnic nation. In an estimation of Lao population in 1995, there were 236 ethnic groups scattered along the Mekong River. Traditionally, they were divided into two groups: valley peoples who live on the plains and hill peoples who inhabit the mountains. While highlanders cultivate dry rice and are animist, lowlanders grow wet rice and are Buddhist. The Lao Lum, or lowland inhabitants, are the majority; other groups are Austro-Asiatic, such as Tai and Kadai, Tibeto-Burman and Hmong-Mien (or Miao-Yao).

Laos became a French colony in 1893 and subsequently declared its independence in 1945 after the surrender of the Japanese at the end of World War II. However, it was reunified under a constitutional monarchy with France a year later. During the Indochinese Wars from the 1940s to 1975, Laos was separated into two clusters: the North and the South. The North was dominated by the Lao Communists (later referring to the country as Pathet Lao) supported by Vietnam and China; on the contrary, the South was controlled by the Royal Lao Government (RLG) which was backed by the United States. The war ended with the victory of the Communists.

The socialist movement in Laos has been influenced by Vietnamese communism which is rooted on Marxism-Leninism. Its nationalism emphasises the necessity of including all the ethnic groups in Lao society with equal rights and opportunities (p. 5). Despite this ideal loom, the communist regime of the post-socialism has endeavoured to legitimise nationalist discourse within a context of multi-ethnicity by repeatedly coercing its ethnic taxonomy with historical and cultural accounts. *Post-war Laos* generates its analysis on the ideology of nationalism as a discourse of power by portraying the relationships between the One/Majority and the Other/Minorities. The author has evidently argued that minorities are neglected to be included in the process of nation-building. Theories of ethnicity and nationalism can be found from Foucault’s model of the state and the binary project of individualisation and totalisation.

*Post-war Laos* has eight chapters including the Introduction and Conclusion. Appendices, statistics of ethnic composition in Laos before and after the colonisation, are presented together with tables of ethnic groups’ names. The first chapter simply introduces readers to the national perception on establishing in ethnic-diversified society. Chapter 2 expounds the relationship and pattern of interaction between lowlanders and highlanders (ethnic-national representations) in a historical perspective — notably from the Lan Xang to French Indochina from 1887 to 1945. With the arrival of French colonial administration, some Lao highlanders emerged to become modern and educated. French policy played a significant part in the rise of rebellions that occurred from the late 19th century in Indochina and led to the transformation of modern political claims (p. 19). The Lan Xang Kingdom during the 14th to 18th centuries was influenced by the political and
religious model of the Khmer empire of Angkor that existed between the 9th to 15th centuries (p. 22). Theravada Buddhist polities in mainland Southeast Asia, at that time, were greatly influenced by the Hindu system and conception of power — the *Mandala*. The law code, known as *Law of Khun Bôrom*, was applied to the early Lao society. It consisted of four categories: aristocracy, *phai* (or commoners), *kha* (or slaves) and non-ethnic Lao. Drawing on ethnic Lao cosmology and saga, it illustrates the prominent and inequitable relationship between the ethnic Lao and the indigenous people (*aborigènes*). The author depicts further the root and definition of ethnic minority, the beginning of French intervention in Indochina, especially in Laos, and indigenous perspectives on French colonial taxonomy.

In Chapter 3, the author addresses the issue of national identity and culture through an analysis of the politics reflected among minority and majority. Different interpretations on the origins of Lao and their outcomes in the new socialist era have been elucidated. Lao culture in this period has been linked with its nation-state and influenced by Thai media; hence, cultural politics in post-socialist Laos appears to be ambivalent or caught between the rhetoric of preservation and the desire for modernity. Buddhism and monarchy were the key symbol of Lao identity (p. 67). Buddhism is employed as the revival of building a modern state, as a mean to proclaim the government's rule legitimately, and as a sign of the nation's autonomy from westerns. Laos PDR, as a modern state that adopted the Western model, had unsuccessfully created feelings of homogeneity within its population. This is regarded as 'crisis of authority'. Religion is supposed to reunite people with the sense of a 'primordial' identity, serving as the 'spiritual essence' of the nation. The impact of Buddhist resurgence on the relationship among ethnic groups, however, remains dubious.

Historical analysis and the ethnic classification of Lao population are summarised in Chapter 4. For instance, the myth of the Ai-Lao describes the origins of the Lao people and implicitly responds to the Thai nationalist historiography (p. 78). Thai notions of nation, race, ethnicity and identity were shaped by both the appeal of European civilisation and the threats of colonialism (p. 85). Because French claims over Laos and Cambodia and the Pak Nam crisis in 1893, Thailand altered its viewpoint about the European concept of national identity. Whereas Thailand conflated the nation with the idea of homogeneity, Laos defined its modern state by implementing racial categories. The formation of a nation within a complex society indeed depends on two trends: *homogenisation* and *stigmatisation*. Non-ethnic Lao, as well as ethnic Lao, are classified as 'Lao' under both the race and citizenship categories. However, ethnicity remains a vector of distinction and classification due to its regime's Marxist-Leninist ethnography through Nan Chao theory and collective autochthony, and the indigenised historiography. The key distinction between the former regime and communist rule lies in their concept of national identity, its practice and discursive content (p. 105).

Chapter 5 transcribes the narratives of ethnic minority origin that the author has encountered during her research trip to Ban Paktai in Meuang Thateng in Sekong Province. Some of these ethnic minorities were revolutionary activists and had been tortured by the 'enemy' during the capture. The next chapter analyses the attempt to control people's ethnicity of the Lao state in order to transform a fragmented and fluid cultural reality into an orderly and fixed ethnic landscape by applying ethnic classification and censuses. The terms of 'Lao Lum', 'Lao Theung' and 'Lao Sung' were replaced by officially ethno-linguistic terminology to give all groups official recognition equally.