A WORLD SAFE FOR REVOLUTION:
CHINA, LAOS, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM

by

Nicholas R. Zeller

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:
Viren Murthy, Professor, History
Judd Kinzley, Professor, History
Monica Kim, Professor, History
Ian G. Baird, Professor, Geography

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Pathoumvady Oukham, and to the cats I have known throughout this process – Doleful, Muad'dib, Horchata, Paprika, Gustavo Smolman, and Li'l Beignet. The former sacrificed so much to keep food on the table while the latter woke me up every day before dawn to put food in their bowls.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines relations between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Pathet Lao, and Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) from 1954 to 1972 based on materials from the People's Republic of China's Foreign Ministry Archives, the Shanghai Municipal Archives, and memoirs from CCP advisors in Laos. I argue that capitalism, as it expanded into Asia, incorporated pre-existing forms of exploitation (ethnic hierarchy, patriarchy, etc.) into a global system of uneven development. These forms of exploitation made revolution along strictly class lines impossible because this was not the experience of exploitation for most people in colonial countries. A larger coalition had to be formed. In China and Laos, this coalition was the nation. Thus, relations between the CCP, Pathet Lao, and VWP (a strong influence over the Pathet Lao) were guided by two projects: 1) creating the conditions for national self-liberation and 2) defining the nation that was to liberate itself. Beginning with the 1954 Geneva Conference, I demonstrate how these parties' experiment with a political transition to socialism in Laos was abandoned after US interference helped convince them that armed struggle was the only viable path. Although they became committed to armed struggle before the 1961-1962 Geneva Conference on Lao neutrality, the CCP, Pathet Lao, and VWP understood the neutrality in both agreements to serve one end – block foreign intervention while the Pathet Lao prepared for revolution. Conflicts between these parties emerged when the CCP dispatched its Sam Neua Working Group to Laos in 1964 to export a Maoist model of revolution. Disputes erupted between the CCP and VWP over whether Laos was a class society and whether concepts of class should be used to mediate the Pathet Lao's definition of the nation used to build its coalition. These disputes led the VWP and Pathet Lao to turn to the Soviet Union for aid, prompting the CCP to abandon efforts to guide revolution in Laos. In the end, I demonstrate

the logic of socialist internationalism as practiced by the CCP and its capacity to use foreign relations and military institutions to export revolution.

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INTRODUCTION

Let us judge the lived project of socialist internationalism on its own terms, and let us ask why this project, rooted in the hope of class revolution, was haunted doggedly at every moment by the nation. If, in looking for normative principles of revolution and international relations, we can remove the inaccurate (and worse – boring) assessment that communist leaders were all really pragmatists, a logic emerges in relations between Asian communist parties in which national liberation must be national *self*-liberation. The task of international diplomacy and relations between national revolutionary parties is to aid in this self-liberation by creating the conditions for its possibility. Why, then, *national* self-liberation? Because the legacy of imperialist capitalism created a pattern of uneven development in Asia that made the concept of the working class an unconvincing point around which to build a coalition capable of revolution. This was not despite the global spread of capitalism but because of it. The proletariat accounted for a portion of the participants of socialist revolution in Asia, but many more participants were motivated by calls for ethnic and gender equality.[1] The most obvious contradiction, however, was that between imperialist nations and their formal and informal colonies. Revolutionaries occupied different points in contradictions between capitalists and workers, landlords and peasants, ethnic majorities and minorities, patriarchy and its other, but all shared a common location in the contradiction between oppressor and oppressed nations. Again, this was not because of capitalism's backward development in rural China or upland Laos but because of its normal operation.

[1] C. J. Christie, "Marxism and the History of the Nationalist Movements in Laos," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (1979): 146–58; Vatthana Pholsena, "'Minority' Women and the Revolution in the Highlands of Laos: Two Narratives," in *Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements*, ed. Susan Blackburn and Helen Ting (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2013), 198–225; Ian G. Baird, "The Hmong and the Communist Party of Thailand: A Transnational, Transcultural and Gener-Relations-Transforming Experience," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 2020, 1–18.

This dissertation, then, sets out to answer the same question with two inflections: why national *self*-liberation and why *national* self-liberation? The former pertains to the political theory behind socialist internationalism, analyzing the goals of relations between Asian communist parties and the normative principles establishing the limits of these relations. I argue that a return to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's writing on revolutions in Europe through Lenin's work on the 'national question' to Mao Zedong's commitment to anti-imperialism and self-reliance reveals a coherent approach to international relations that is highly interventionist and committed to regime change.[2] From a certain perspective, this should be obvious. Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao called for world revolution, a process where regime change is unavoidably on the agenda. I do not point this out as a necessary condemnation of socialist internationalism. In its earliest configurations with Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and for Mao until the 1970s, socialist internationalism rested on the idea that sovereignty was held by the people, not the state.[3] Regime change through socialist revolution was the realization of sovereignty, not an infraction against it. Further, if the drive for capital to find new markets and sources of cheap labor and resources pushed it throughout the globe, then the overcoming of capital, whatever form it takes, would need to be equally global. This is not possible without support for revolutions internationally. The expansionism of the capitalist world had to be met by expansionism in the socialist world. Yet, at no point was this revolution expected to occur through military interventions by socialist states outside what they

[2] In this dissertation, the term 'international relations' is not used to refer to the academic discipline of the same name, and I make no claim to engage with International Relations literature beyond that which narrowly involves the PRC. Instead, the term 'international relations' is used here as shorthand for a whole host of complex and contradictory relationships between states, parties, militaries, and intellectuals. In other words, I simply mean relationships between groups who claim to be from distinct territories under distinct sovereign (or semi-sovereign) states.

[3] Aijaz Ahmad argues correctly that the transition of historical agency from the people to the state in Mao's thinking on world revolution is complete with the elaboration of Mao's three worlds theory in the early 1970s. The same transference in Soviet Marxism occurred much earlier at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Part of the Soviet Union in 1956. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1992), 304. See also Mao Zedong, *On Diplomacy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1998), 454.

believed to be their sovereign national borders. Interventions within what parties conceived to be there national borders occurred regularly and were often quite violent.[4] However, *in principle*, socialist internationalism was committed to the normative idea that national liberation was only meaningful if conducted by the people of that nation. The eventual bending and breaking of this principle played a major role in the conflict between, on the one hand, the Chinese and, on the other, the Lao and Vietnamese communities parties in the late-1970s.[5] This does not mean, however, that it has no value as a standard by which to interpret and judge relations between these states and revolutionary parties.

As a normative principle and strategic theory of international relations, socialist internationalism's commitment to national *self*-liberation is relatively uncomplex.[6] In the history considered here, one finds it throughout Chinese Communist Party (CCP) discussions on the role of neutrality in Laos. At both the 1954 and 1961-1962 Geneva conferences, Asian communist parties agreed that the purpose of neutrality was not to freeze Lao society in a state of coalition between socialist and capitalist forces. Instead, it was to create the conditions under which socialist forces in Laos could develop without Western interference. Once strong enough, these forces would then enact revolution – political revolution in the thinking around Geneva 1954 and armed revolution in the thinking around Geneva 1961-1962. Why this approach to international relations

[4] See , for example, the People's Liberation Army's role in land reform and the campaign against counterrevolutionaries in Yunnan in the early 1950s in Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 162–66. The PLA's fight against the Tibetan military during the Great Leap Forward is another example. Benno Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 161–80.
[5] Christopher E. Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War and the Meltdown of Asian Internationalism," in *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79,* ed. Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (New York: Routledge, 2006), 152–86.
[6] Löwy's classic essay on the 'national question' is an important summary. For my own summary of the lineage of socialist internationalism before the Chinese revolution, see chapter one. Michael Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question," *New Left Review*, no. 96 (April 1976): 81–100.

was committed to *national* self-liberation was not explicit among any of the actors considered here and requires a bit more theorization.

Uneven Development and Nationalism's Historical Necessity

In a series of lectures published under the title *History and Freedom*, Theodor Adorno makes two seemingly contradictory claims about the nation and nationalism. On the one hand, he argues that from "the very outset" the nation and nationalism "possessed what today we would call a romantic element that culminates in the delusions of racism."[7] The delusion occurs when "a form of association that is essentially dynamic, economic and historical" is misunderstood as a natural form of association.[8] Thus, the nation and nationalism contain all the philosophically and theoretically indefensible atavism and exclusion highlighted by later writers.[9] For Adorno, the ideological notion that the nation and the society the nation is purported to describe are identical ultimately leads to fascism. Because the nation is not identical to the given society, it must ceaselessly insist that it is identical, which drives those who cling to the concept of the nation to violence against those whose existence brings that concept into question. On the other hand, the nation and nationalism are demonstrably progressive forces. In Europe, they were key elements in the overcoming of absolutism and the barriers to communications and production created by smaller feudal monarchies. The emergence of the nation and nation-state resulted in the formation of universal legal systems and advances in cultural life, best known perhaps in the relationship between the development of national consciousness and literature. Although both elements are

[7] Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 106.
[8] Adorno, 106.
[9] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), 5; Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 28.

always co-present in nationalism, for Adorno, the turning point when nationalism becomes a "truly pernicious, destructive phenomenon" is the moment the bourgeois revolution is achieved.[10] So long as there was a ruling elite in society against which nationalist sentiment could be mobilized, nationalism's progressive elements remained. Once that elite was overcome, nationalism became a repressive force. In both instances it is an ideological concept, and therefore always both emancipatory and dominating. However, the ends to which it is wielded and the context of its emergence (i.e., revolution of one kind or another) matter in assessing its progressive potential.

Benedict Anderson makes a similar argument. However, instead of seeing two sides of the same phenomenon, Anderson distinguishes between "official nationalism" and "popular nationalism," especially in the formerly colonized world.[11] Anderson generally uses the former to describe the "willed merger" of nation and dynastic empire.[12] In Europe, this type of nationalism was developed in reaction to popular national movements' generally republican demands and was a strategy for survival. It was implemented by dynastic elites to obscure contradictions of class, ethnicity, gender, and so on with a non-contradictory national identity. The policies and transformations of state enacted by official nationalism were conservative, but they were adapted from what Anderson describes as the mostly spontaneous demands of popular nationalism. The latter is, for Anderson, a progressive force that created new forms of solidarity and drove scores of anti-imperialist struggles for national liberations throughout Asia and Africa during the twentieth century. Yet, the distinction between official and popular nationalism cannot be mapped neatly on to colonizing and colonized societies. Both forms exist in all modern societies – even in the socialist world. In revolutions in East and Southeast Asia, for example, once central committees

[10] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 108.
[11] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 150, 161.
[12] Anderson, 86.

and high councils were able to "inherit [the] old switchboards and palaces" of the previous regime, they propagandize the state as the true and finally realized representative of the people, mobilizing popular nationalisms in the interest of those who now held the reins of power. Although, for Anderson, popular nationalism remains potentially emancipatory, the difference between the political communities it and official nationalism imagine is the difference "between lies and myths."[13] In other words, both are ideological.

Despite Anderson's attempt to separate the two forms of nationalism, in his own argument they are both reliant on popular nationalist sentiment for the political goals they hope to accomplish. This places Anderson closer not only to Adorno but to the work Tom Nairn who argued quite forcefully that the nationalism of anti-colonial movements and the nationalism of fascist movements must be treated as the same core phenomenon. Nairn criticizes Marxist and liberal scholars alike for using the same "global folklore" to explain the emergence of nationalism:

> The gist of this piece of global folklore (which unfortunately embraces much of what passes for 'theory' on nationalism) is that nationalism is an inwardly-determined social necessity, a 'growth-stage', located somewhere in between traditional or 'feudal' societies and a future where the factors of nationality will become less prominent (or anyway less troublesome in human history). Regrettably, it is a growth-stage which can sometimes go wrong and run amok.[14]

Both Marxist and liberal scholars of nationalism, according to Nairn, understand nationalism as internally necessary to a society's development because they a) provide the conditions for the political-economic development of capitalism and b) provide new types of cultural and psychological cohesion necessary for social relations on a much larger scale. It is a biting criticism

[13] Anderson, 161n10.
[14] Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus," *New Left Review* 1, no. 94 (December 1975): 7.

if one considers the mechanical modernization theory that undergirds writing as different as, for example, Ernst Gellner's and Joseph Stalin's.[15]

Nairn's answer is that the origins of nationalism lie neither within any teleological dialectic nor within the individual's ahistorical need to feel like part of a community. They lie instead in the history of uneven development since the nineteenth century. Nairn turns to the colonial world for evidence. In Asia and Africa, communities who had the progress of Britain or France forced upon them did not experience the process of national formation as benign acculturation. "Progress in the abstract," Nairn argues, "meant domination in the concrete."[16] Whatever the myriad locations of classes within colonial societies in the relations of capital globally, the experience of colonization was first and foremost the experience of Anglicization, Americanization, Westernization, and so on. Moreover, because it was clear that abstract progress was in fact domination, it was also clear that the promises of linear, even development were delusions. Colonized intelligentsia saw that to free themselves from domination, they would need all the miracles of modernity that imperialists sought to force upon them in oppressive forms: factories, schools, a state with some form of representative government. This, Nairn argues, made nationalism a profoundly ambivalent phenomenon. It sought to resist imperialism by adopting many of the economic and political institutions of imperialist countries. Without any coherent class to enact revolution, colonized intellectuals were forced to mobilize around the ideology of the nation. This ideology was not democratic, but it was populist.

Nairn's argument begins in the colonized world, but he extends this logic globally. The most potent examples of nationalism are not sympathetic national liberation movements but the

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[15] Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, 1913, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm; Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).
[16] Nairn, "The Modern Janus," 10.

fascistic and militaristic nationalism that occurred among "late developers" in the twentieth century like Germany, Italy, and Japan. These forms of nationalism had a shared origin with anti-imperialist nationalisms in the experience of uneven development but were able to combine this with "modern socio-economic institutions enabling them to mobilize and indoctrinate their masses effectively."[17] Thus, it may be possible to parse certain nationalisms in moral and political terms, but theoretically they all share the same origin.

Nairn has been criticized for his simplification of Nazism, and, here, I will have to take his critics at their word.[18] This dissertation is about communist parties in Asia, not fascist parties in Europe. There is, however, something to Nairn's observation that "capitalism, even as it spread remorselessly over the world to unify human society into one more or less connected story for the first time, also engendered a perilous and convulsive new fragmentation of that society."[19] It is undeniable that this fragmentation was into an ever-growing number of achieved and hopeful nation-states. The result is that we must do away with the hopeful economism shared by early Marxism and various iterations of recent globalization theory and probe further into the relationship between capitalism, uneven development, and nationalism that Nairn asserts but does little to explain. To do this, however, I must go against Nairn's acerbic scolding of Marxist scholars and search "the scattered remarks and letters of Marx and Engels themselves."[20]

The central claim of this dissertation is that among these 'scattered remarks and letters' can be found a theory of capitalism's spread into Asia that, by its normal operation, prevents the organization of society such that class is an unconvincing category around which to mobilize a

[17] Nairn, 16.
[18] Christian Fuchs, *Nationalism on the Internet: Critical Theory and Ideology in the Age of Social Media and Fake News* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 93.
[19] Nairn, "The Modern Janus," 12.
[20] Nairn, 4.

revolution. Because this is the case, socialist internationalism was left in the awkward position of always supporting nationalist liberation movements while hoping endlessly for class revolution. To be sure, the working classes in places like China, Laos, and Vietnam played a role in the revolution. But these parties made promises beyond worker ownership of the means of production. They promised gender and ethnic equality. They promised industrial development. They promised literacy and full political enfranchisement. By doing this, these parties were able to create united fronts for national liberation whose members were motivated to fight by an enormous range of very real grievances that they would have been unlikely to characterize as class – certainly not in the since of an industrial proletariat. In Laos, it must be remembered that the main public face of the united front was of royal lineage – the 'Red Prince' Souphanouvong. Yet, it was capitalism that lay behind French and US imperialism in Indochina, and it was ultimately capitalism against which the revolutionary parties considered here fought. However, it was capitalism that made that fight about national, not class, liberation. It is not that these are mutually exclusive, only that one is dominant in the concrete mobilization for revolution.

In this dissertation, I deal first, in chapter one, with the normative political theory of socialist internationalism for no more a reason than relations between the Chinese and Lao parties remained largely within the world of diplomatic summitry from 1954 to the early 1960s. The theory of the historical necessity of nationalism for revolution is not presented until I reach the mid-1960s in chapter three because it is not until then that CCP advisers directly enter Laos and present their Indochinese comrades with an analysis of the revolution and how best to build support. Because it is the latter that produces the former (unevenness creating nationalist sentiment) I will briefly present them in that order here.

In his recent reinterpretation of Marx's concepts of real and formal subsumption, Harry Harootunian makes the argument that the general method of capital's expansion into new geographic areas or realms of society is to make use of whatever pre-existing forms of exploitation can be found.[21] In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx uses the term formal subsumption to denote this process, writing that as the relations of capital enter a new area, they take on ongoing labor processes "as it finds it."[22] Thus, for example, in Marx's writing on class struggles in France in the late 1840s, one finds regular references to usury and peasant modes of agricultural production existing within capitalism as "secondary modes of exploitation."[23] The key is that Marx does not place pre-industrial labor processes outside of the realm of capitalist relations. All that is required for formal subsumption is that these labor practices be performed in answer to the rhythms of global commodity production. As Kathy Le Mons Walker has demonstrated in her analysis of cotton production around Shanghai in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is possible for peasant agricultural production to become bitterly intensified to meet production demands for global markets without a fundamental change in how that labor is performed or the nature of the exploitation, i.e., that between landlord and peasant.[24]

For Marx, real subsumption occurs when the labor process has been revolutionized – when handicraft moves into the factory or agriculture becomes industrialized. While Marx calls real subsumption the "specifically capitalist mode of production," he is clear it occurs alongside formal subsumption and that it is the latter that is "the general form of every capitalist process of

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[21] Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
[22] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 1021.
[23] Karl Marx, *Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1964), 43. Marx often mentioned usury as an example of a form of exploitation present throughout multiple epochs and modes of production. See, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. III (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 732.
[24] Kathy Le Mons Walker, *Chinese Modernity and the Peasant Path: Semicolonialism in the Northern Yangzi Delta* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

production."[25] Harootunian's move is to argue that the process of formal subsumption produces multiple temporalities in capitalism resulting from 'backward' and 'advanced' modes of production answering to the same logic of value production. There is a tendency within this process for the relations of capital to eventually homogenize all societies on the road to real subsumption. But this is not the whole story. Were that the case, Marxism would simply be modernization theory by other means. Rather, the older forms of exploitation are continually reproduced for the new ends set to them by capital. Differences of ethnicity, gender, and so on, which formed central elements of exploitation in pre-capitalist societies, are subsumed and reproduced through formal subsumption, through the general form of capitalist production in a permanent state of uneven development. In the words of Massimiliano Tomba:

> Those differences are neither historical invariants nor pure products of capitalism. Instead, already existing differences and practices are located on a different temporality and, even when they are reshaped and reorganized by capital, they can appear with the physiognomy of traditional hierarchical relationships. While subsuming these differences and converting them into dimensions of its own life-process, capital cannot prevent them from also appearing as nonsynchronisms that, when confronted with the dominant capitalist temporality, can disclose both emancipatory and reactionary possibilities. Sometimes these two sides are interwoven.[26]

The last two lines are important. Through formal subsumption and the multiple temporalities it creates, exploitation that is ultimately economic (e.g., classed) is experienced as, for example, ethnic discrimination, patriarchy, religious oppression, and racism. Their specificity in different contexts is derived from what came before capitalism despite owing their continued existence to formal subsumption within capitalism. Tomba's reference to emancipatory *and* reactionary possibilities brings us back to the emancipatory and reactionary elements of nationalism.

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[25] Marx, *Capital*, 1990, I:1019.
[26] Massimiliano Tomba, "On the Capitalist and Emancipatory Use of Asynchronies in Formal Subsumption," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 38, no. 4 (2015): 298.

It is my contention in this dissertation that the process of uneven development through formal subsumption reproduces many forms of exploitation. Movements to remedy each of them are imaginable. However, within the concrete context of revolution only one form of exploitation impacts enough people to become a compelling category around which to mobilize an actual fighting force. That form is the exploitation of one nation by another. Perhaps to Nairn's consternation, we can return to his point about uneven development on far firmer ground by passing through appendices to *Capital* and some of Marx's journalistic writing.[27] The only chance to build a new society (or replicate an already existing society on one's own terms) is through the weapon on nationalist ideology. For this reason, one finds in the writing of many Marxist revolutionaries a constant search for ways to transform nationalist sentiment into class consciousness.[28] The normative political theory of socialist internationalism, the duty to support movements for national liberation, is entirely wrapped up in the consequences of formal subsumption and unevenness. In its purest form in Lenin's writing in the 1910s, it is about supporting national liberation in the hopes of discovering or creating proletarian revolution. There was little other chance.

The Chinese Communist Party in the Lao Revolution

Analysis of CCP and Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) policies toward the Lao revolution in the mid-1950s demonstrates that for a brief period both parties were acting in accordance with the idea that the Pathet Lao, a catch all term for the communist Lao People's Party

[27] As stated above, a fuller account of this argument can be found in chapter three.
[28] A particularly salient example in the context of this dissertation is land reform in China, where cadres tied the oppression of the landlord to the oppression of the capitalist imperialist. See Rebecca E. Karl, "Compradors: The Mediating Middle of Capitalism in Twentieth-Century China and the World," in *East-Asian Marxisms and Their Trajectories*, ed. Joyce C. H. Liu and Viren Murthy (New York: Routledge, 2017), 119–36.

(Lao People's Revolutionary Party after 1972) and its united front organization the Neo Lao Hakxat (NLHX, Lao Patriotic Front), could be aided from the outside but would have to conduct the work of political revolution on its own. This was a consensus developed at the 1954 Geneva Conference, where the Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese parties all agreed to experiment with the possibility of a strictly political path to socialism under the heading of peaceful coexistence.[29] The plan for Laos, in broad strokes, was to use Lao neutrality to create the conditions under which the Pathet Lao could grow as a political party, eventually resulting in an electoral transition to socialism. NLHX political victories would be complimented by unconditional aid to the Royal Lao Government (RLG) from its socialist neighbors to the north and east. CCP and VWP commitment to political revolution in Laos extended, for example, to diplomacy at the 1955 Bandung Conference, where People's Republic of China (PRC) premier Zhou Enlai helped broker agreements on friendly relations between the RLG and DRV.[30] Indeed, contra the metric tons of ink poured out first by the CCP itself and, after the Cold War, by well-intentioned academics looking for meaning in the Bandung Spirit, from the communist side, Bandung was about ensuring non-aggression to one end – creating the possibility of a longer term political transition to socialism.[31]

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[29] The general narrative is that CCP leaders compelled VWP leaders against their wishes to accept neutrality in Laos and a policy of peaceful unification with South Vietnam. Working from Chinese and Vietnamese language sources, Shu Quanzhi draws the same conclusion I have here. It was a mutual decision. All parties thought a peaceful political movement might be the best path to revolution. Shu Quanzhi, "From Armed Revolution to Neutralism: China and the Indochinese Revolution, 1950-1954," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 36, no. 1 (2021): 124–56.

[30] Chae-Jin Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos: A Case Study, 1954-67* (Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1970), 26.

[31] For examples of sympathetic assessments of Bandung, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 31–50; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture," in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 45–68; Naoko Shimazu, "Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 225–52. For a more clear-eyed analysis of the impossibility of Bandung resulting in any identifiable political project, see Ahmad, *In Theory*, 292–97.

The experiment with strictly political struggle was abandoned in 1958 in the wake of US interventions to prevent the successful formation of a coalition government between the Pathet Lao and the conservative RLG.[32] The centrist prime minister of the new government, Souvanna Phouma, was removed from his position and replaced with someone more in line with US plans for Southeast Asia. In violation of the principle of national *self*-liberation central to socialist internationalism, the VWP began rebuilding its vast military and party network in Laos, originally created during the war against France, to prepare for the possibility of armed struggle.[33] The CCP undoubtedly knew VWP forces were intimately involved in Laos, but archival sources reveal that many within the CCP were unaware of the extent of VWP domination of the Pathet Lao until the mid-1960s. In the early 1950s, the CCP sent a military advisory group to aid the VWP's fight against French forces in the Sino-Lao-Vietnamese border region led by Wei Guoqing.[34] It is unlikely that this group would have gained no intelligence on Lao-Vietnamese relations during this time.[35] However, if the relationship was known by CCP elites prior to the mid-1960s, archival sources provide little evidence that it was fully shared with CCP advisors in Laos.

Despite the failure of political struggle, the CCP, now embroiled in the disastrous Great Leap Forward, did not militarily enter Laos. Instead, Chinese communist leaders attempted to use international diplomacy to condemn US actions. They began by appealing to the chairs of the 1954 Geneva conference – Britain and the Soviet Union. According to the Geneva agreements an

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[32] A peaceful (i.e., political) road to socialism was also genuinely attempted in Vietnam. See, Pierre Asselin, "Choosing Peace: Hanoi and the Geneva Agreement on Vietnam, 1954-1955," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 95–126.
[33] Christopher E. Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside: The Case of Vietnamese Communist Advisers in Laos (1948–62)," *South East Asia Research* 12, no. 2 (2004): 141–85.
[34] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 124.
[35] Wei Guoqing personally met Souphanouvong in late March when the two accompanied VWP troops on their way into Houaphanh. Yu Huachen, "Yuan Yue Kang Fa Douzheng Zhong de Wei Guoqing Tongzhi," in *Zhongguo Junshi Guwentuan Yuan Yue Kang Fa Shilu: Dangshi Ren de Huiyi*, ed. Benshu Bianxiezu (Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 2002), 68.

International Control Commission (ICC) had been created to monitor and supervise Lao neutrality and political unification. CCP leaders called on this organization to denounce US intervention and demand that Washington's conditional aid and military advisors be removed. It did not work. The ICC was itself built to be a neutral organization. It was chaired by the non-aligned government of India, and its member governments, Canada and Poland, represented the capitalist and socialist blocs.[36] The ICC's very make up ensured that it could not achieve anything for either side in Laos, and the rightward movement of the US-backed government after 1958 proved beyond the reach of either the CCP or VWP. Change came instead by surprise in August 1960 when a captain in the Second Paratrooper Battalion of the Royal Lao Army, Kong Le, launched a coup d'état to bring Laos back toward neutralism. After being rejected by the more conservative Boun Oum, a member of the Champasak royal family, Kong Le convinced Souvanna resume his role as prime minister.[37] The following December, US-backed forces led by General Phoumi Nosavan attacked the Lao capital of Vientiane with artillery support from Marshall Sarit Thanarat's government in Thailand. Kong Le's forces and most of the government under Souvanna fled the capital. Some politicians went to Phnom Penh and Yangon. Others retreated with Kong Le's troops first to Vang Vieng and then to a Pathet Lao stronghold in the Lao province of Xieng Khouang in a village called Khang Khay on the Plain of Jars.

From the perspective of a normative theory of inter-state and inter-party diplomacy focused on creating the conditions for the possibility of revolution in Laos, the main results of these events were twofold. First, Phoumi's countercoup created a situation in which there were two

[36] Nicholas Tarling, *Britain and the Neutralisation of Laos* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2011), 19–21.
[37] Little information is available about Kong Le's decision to first approach Boun Oum. I present what is available in chapter two. For more, see Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 389.

governments in Laos. One was in Vientiane led by Boun Oum, under Phoumi's considerable influence, and aligned with the US. Another was in Khang Khay led by Souvanna and recognized by the PRC, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and the Soviet Union, among others. In Khang Khay, the Pathet Lao served with Kong Le as the main defense force for Souvanna's displaced government. By recognizing Souvanna's government as the only legal government, the PRC was able to send military aid to the Pathet Lao through Hanoi in the name of assisting the legal government of Laos. The goal was to strengthen Pathet Lao forces while convincing Souvanna into friendlier relations with his socialist neighbors, thereby improving the possibility of a transition to socialism in Laos.

Second, events from the 1958 ouster of Souvanna to the 1960 Phoumi countercoup coincided with the radicalization of domestic politics in the PRC and DRV.[38] The Great Leap Forward was launched in 1958, at least in part, to demonstrate a specifically Chinese path to communism.[39] Its ad hoc reorganization of grain and steel production coincided with the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis, a series of skirmishes between the People's Liberation Army and Guomindang troops on Jinmen Island in Xiamen Bay.[40] The two events reflected a mutual radicalization of PRC foreign and domestic policies in response to what Mao viewed as the Soviet Union's revisionism and capitulation to US hegemony. Nikita Khrushchev's decision in the summer of 1960 to support, with the US, a partial nuclear test ban and remove Soviet experts from

[38] According to official party history, the Communist Party of Thailand also decided to switch strategies toward armed conflict during this time in response to Sarit Thanarat's coup d'état in October 1958. Communist Party of Thailand, "A Breif Introduction to the History of the Communist Party of Thailand (1942-1977)," in *Thailand: Roots of Conflict*, ed. Andrew Turton, Jonathan Fast, and Malcolm Caldwell (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1978), 164.

[39] Felix Wemheuer, *A Social History of Maoist China: Conflict and Change, 1949-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 157–58.

[40] Michael M. Sheng, "Mao and China's Relations with the Superpowers in the 1950s: A New Look at the Taiwan Straits Crises and the Sino-Soviet Split," *Modern China* 34, no. 4 (October 2008): 490; Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 80.

the PRC working on nuclear weapons technology deepened convictions in the CCP that the Soviets had turned their back on fighting capitalist imperialism.[41] In the DRV, in January 1959, the VWP Central Committee issued Resolution 15 authorizing the resumption of armed struggle in South Vietnam. It was a response to both uncertainty in the socialist bloc created by the Sino-Soviet split and the realization that the US-backed regime of Ngo Dinh Diem would not succumb to the strategy of nearly exclusive political struggle implemented since 1954.[42] Every action taken in Laos by the US and the Lao right wing during this period, including election rigging prior to Souvanna's ouster, further confirmed the belief among Asian communist parties that armed struggle was now the only path to national liberation. Thus, when these parties entered the 1961-1962 Geneva conference on Lao neutrality, none of them sought a genuine political solution to a crisis that had now become the focal point of the Cold War.[43] Events in all three countries convinced communist party leaders that the only solution to US imperialism was armed struggle. If the purpose of neutrality in 1954 was to create the conditions for the possibility of political revolution, the purpose of neutrality in 1962 was to buy time for the Pathet Lao to develop the military capacity and mass support for armed revolution. For its part, the CCP maintained throughout this period that the fate of the Lao revolution was in the hands of the Lao people. Aid and advice could be given, and it was. From 1962 to 1965, the PRC was the dominant source of aid to the Pathet Lao outside Indochina. However, the war could not be fought for them.

The 1962 Geneva agreements and connected negotiations in Zurich and Khang Khay resulted in a second coalition government between what were then the three factions of Lao politics

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[41] Xiaobing Li, *The Cold War in East Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 128.
[42] Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 52–53.
[43] Nor was the US particularly interested in long term neutrality in Laos. Bruce Lockhart, "The Fate of Neutralism in Cambodia and Laos," in *Cold War Southeast Asia*, ed. Malcolm R. Murfett (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2012), 210.

– leftists around the Pathet Lao (known publicly as the NLHX), centrists and pro-Western neutralists around Souvanna, and Boun Oum and Phoumi's right wing forces. The PRC and DRV continued to funnel military and economic aid to the Pathet Lao while refusing to extend the same to Kong Le's armed forces. The Soviet Union, for its part, ended its brief support to the Pathet Lao in accordance with the new Geneva agreements. Without external support, Kong Le turned with Souvanna to the US, resulting in conflicts with the Pathet Lao and a splinter group of Kong Le's forces called the Patriotic Neutralists led by Deuane Sounnarath. The fighting that emerged ended the second coalition government in the spring of 1963. As the US and Soviet Union both turned away from the conflict, Laos became a laboratory for competing theories of revolutionary nationalism between the CCP and VWP.[44]

In autumn of 1963, at the suggestion of PRC premier Zhou Enlai, the secretary general of the Lao People's Party, Kaysone Phomvihane, invited a group of CCP political and military advisors to Pathet Lao headquarters in Sam Neua, Houaphanh Province, near the border with the DRV. Dubbed the Sam Neua Working Group (SNWG), this team of advisors was charged with creating a class analysis of Lao society that could be applied by the LPP Central Committee in the process of developing base areas, conducting what amounted to Maoist land reform, and recruiting and disciplining soldiers and cadres. It was led by Major General Duan Suquan whose career in the PLA began with peasant mobilization in ethnic Miao (Hmong) areas of Guizhou Province in the 1930s and placed him at the center of debates on the excesses of land reform in the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Border Region in the late 1940s.[45] The SNWG answered to the Central Laos

[44] The US decision to back away from Laos was rooted in the Kennedy administration's belief that the Lao people were unwilling to fight to protect themselves from the spread of communism. Vietnam seemed a more appealing battlefield to defend US imperialism, and the war there began in earnest with the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964. For the US thinking on Laos after Geneva 1961-1962, see Seth Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 235–70.

[45] Quan Yanchi and Du Weidong, *Gongheguo Mishi* (Huhehaote: Nei Menggu Renmin Chubanshe, 1998), 23; Marc Opper, *People's Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 141.

Working Group in Beijing, headed by General Yang Chengwu who simultaneously served on the CCP's Leading Group on Vietnamese Affairs.[46] Together, these groups oversaw all aid distribution to Vietnam and Laos in the 1960s.

On arrival in Laos, the SNWG were told the crucial obstacle for the Pathet Lao was the 'national question,' that is, how to resolve conflicts between the Pathet Lao and US-funded ethnic minority counterrevolutionaries. While Duan oversaw investigations into the Pathet Lao's armed forces, Liang Wenying, PLA officer and party secretary for Yunnan's Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, conducted a class analysis of villages in the provinces of Houaphanh and Khammouane.[47] The empirical results of these studies bore striking resemblance to the findings of contemporary Western anthropologists working in Laos with the US aid mission and the RAND Corporation.[48] What were considered by Western anthropologists to be benign district heads and intermediaries between majority Lao communities and upland ethnic minorities were, in the eyes of Liang's team, the connective tissue between rural Laos and capitalist imperialism. In this assessment, the weight of historical evidence was on the side of the SNWG. In the twelve major rebellions in Laos between 1876 and 1949, two of which occurred in Sam Neua, these district heads and intermediaries were most often the first targets of violence.[49] The SNWG reasoned that their ability to demand corvée labor, extract taxes on the part of subsequent French colonial and RLG administrations, and rent land and tools to poorer farmers made them an exploitative class

[46] Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 220.
[47] In the CCP archival documents and memoirs used in this research, the name Sam Neua is used to refer to the entire province of Houaphanh. Sam Neua is the capital of Houaphanh. In this dissertation, I use Houphanh when CCP sources are using the name Sam Neua to refer to the entire province. In direct quotations from source materials, I do not make this change and leave in the original reference to Sam Neua as a provincial name.
[48] Here, of course, I mean the seminal work of Joel Halpern and those who assisted him. Joel M Halpern, *Government, Politics and Social Structure in Laos* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1964); Joel M Halpern, *Economy and Society of Laos: A Brief Survey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1964).
[49] Geoffrey C. Gunn, "Sambran (The White Python): The Kha (Lao Theung) Revolt of 1936-39," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 3, no. 2 (August 1988): 208, 213.

and, therefore, an appropriate target for rural class struggle. That these district heads and intermediaries practiced higher rates of exploitation toward ethnic minority groups meant that toppling their power would have a significant ameliorating effect between the Pathet Lao and ethnic minority counterrevolutionaries. It would put into practice the Pathet Lao's stated commitments to ethnic equality and clarify the relationship between national liberation and socialist revolution. In essence, it would provide for the Pathet Lao a concept of the nation that was ethnically inclusive while excluding certain class categories.

The VWP disagreed. According to SNWG accounts, there were some signs of interest in the Maoist approach to revolution from within the LPP, and CCP archives reveal potential for further studies on the importance of attitudes toward the Chinese revolutionary model in later splits within Pathet Lao leadership, specifically the post-1975 rift between Kaysone and Souphanouvong.[50] However, VWP dominance in Laos ultimately meant that the direction taken in Laos would be decided in Hanoi. The VWP and member of the LPP challenged the SNWG's recommendations on two fronts. First, they argued that Laos was a classless society. The abundance of land meant that anyone with the will to turn forest into field could produce for themselves. Incredibly for a nominally communist party, several members of the LPP argued in no uncertain terms that in Laos hunger was the result of laziness alone. Second, acknowledgement of continued ethnic conflict in rural Laos could potentially wreak havoc among the Pathet Lao military. VWP advisors feared that struggle sessions of ethnic minorities targeted at Lao district heads and intermediaries could result in ethnic conflict within the Pathet Lao armed forces where ethnic minorities did much of the guerilla fighting but had little representation among the officer ranks. Further, the Pathet Lao, as a united front, relied on nationalist sentiment from all corners of

[50] Ian G. Baird, "Party, State and the Control of Information in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: Secrecy, Falsification and Denial," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48, no. 5 (2018): 739–60.

Lao society for survival. Introducing class struggle would alienate precious allies. Thus, the moments of national liberation and socialist revolution had to occur separately. To achieve a large enough coalition for national liberation, socialist revolution would have to be postponed.

The obdurate position of both the CCP and VWP advisory groups in Laos contributed to a larger split between the two parties beginning in 1965 when Hanoi turned to Moscow for aid, dragging the Pathet Lao in Sam Neua and Khang Khay with it. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, now under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev, realized it needed to take a more supportive position toward revolutions in Indochina if it wished to remain at the helm of the world socialist revolution.[51] Although Soviet influence was regarded with more suspicion by VWP leaders than the CCP seems to have appreciated, the move was enough to signal to leaders in Beijing that it was time to back away from the Lao revolution. Pride in the CCP's aspirational role in the world revolution, which reached its height during the Cultural Revolution, was more important than making that role a reality. This did not mean ending aid to Laos, but it did mean limiting PRC assistance to strictly material, as opposed to policy, support. From the departure of the last member of the SNWG in 1968 through the end of the revolution in December 1975 to the spring of 1979, the PRC continued to provide material aid to Laos. Much of this was in the form of road construction in the northernmost province of Phongsaly and in Oudomxay Province from the Sino-Lao border toward the Thai-Lao border in projects built and guarded by PLA troops. The Vietnamese decision to enter Cambodia in late 1978 and overthrow the PRC-supported Khmer

[51] As much as possible in this dissertation, I attempt to zero in on Sino-Lao relations. The closeness of the LPP and VWP necessitate discussing the Vietnamese role. Soviet-Vietnamese relations, however, are largely outside the scope of this project. For more, see Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The Sino-Vietnamese Split and the Indochina War, 1968-1975," in *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13–14; Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 128–31, 164–70; Tuong Vu, *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 187–89.

Rouge, however, was more than Beijing could allow. Aid to both Vietnam and Laos was rescinded as the CCP, now under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, decided to go to war with its erstwhile comrades.[52] The beginning of the end of the socialist project in Asia came on gradually throughout the 1960s, and an exact starting point is difficult to discern. The end of the end was February 1979, when the PRC finally went to war with Vietnam.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one focuses on the experiment with peaceful coexistence and political struggle among the Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese parties. I use this chapter to lay out in full the intellectual and political trajectory of socialist internationalism as a coherent political theory of transnational relations designed to create the preconditions for revolution. Based on Lenin's mobilization of Marx and Engels, I demonstrate that socialist internationalism was not a project of abstract solidarity. It was intended as a highly interventionist approach to international relations, but it was limited by an equal commitment to national *self*-liberation going back to Marx's thought on the nationalist movement in Ireland. Empirically, this chapter begins with a brief overview of the First Indochina War, CCP aid to the Viet Minh, and the formation of the Pathet Lao. It then explores the different strategies to end that war proposed by the Chinese and Vietnamese parties at Geneva in 1954. As I stress in this chapter, the decision to experiment with political struggle was a mutual decision and not the product of the CCP forcing its will on the VWP as it has classically been understood.[53] In this context, peaceful coexistence and political struggle should be seen as a brief

[52] For more, see Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War and the Meltdown of Asian Internationalism"; Xiaoming Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
[53] Shu makes a similar point based on Vietnamese-language sources. Shu Quanzhi, "From Armed Revolution to Neutralism," 146–48.

experiment with different methods for realizing the same goal of socialist internationalism – creating the conditions for the possibility for revolution abroad. I track how the CCP and VWP attempted to create these conditions by analyzing Sino-Lao rapprochement before the first coalition government at Bandung and in Souvanna's first diplomatic trip to the PRC in August 1956. The chapter ends with the diplomatic stalemate that arose with the fall of the first coalition and the US-backed ouster of Souvanna as prime minister of the RLG in 1958.

Chapter two follows the Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese parties' response to the Kong Le coup and their decision, unanimous by CCP accounts, to focus on armed struggle going in to the 1961-1962 Geneva conference. The argument is a largely empirical and historiographical point about the importance of the Kong Le coup to the history of the Lao revolution. In this history, the traditional markers of transition points in the war are the Geneva conferences. I demonstrate the central importance of the Kong Le coup and Phoumi Nosavan's countercoup in confirming CCP and VWP opinion that the only appropriate method for countering capitalist imperialism was armed struggle. Yet, from the perspective of the Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese parties, the Kong Le coup was a complete accident. Its results forced Souvanna to temporarily align with the Pathet Lao and allowed for increased CCP-LPP interaction through the establishments of an Economic and Cultural Mission in Khang Khay, a consulate general in Phongsaly, and ultimately an embassy in Vientiane. The Phoumi countercoup was especially helpful in generating increased nationalist sentiment against US interference, thus strengthening the Pathet Lao's united front. However, left wing action in Laos in late 1960 was almost entirely reactive to actions taken outside of its control.

Chapter three demonstrates the institutional apparatus the CCP had in place to export Maoist revolution through the history of the formation of the SNWG and Liang Wenying's social investigations team. The entry of the SNWG into Laos and its debates with the VWP advisory

group in Sam Neua allow me to theorize why both groups, despite their differences around the class structure of rural Laos, were compelled to use some concept of the nation as the revolutionary subject. In its shortest version, I argue that capitalist uneven development under conditions of imperialism utilizes pre-existing forms of exploitation (ethnic discrimination, patriarchy, etc.) which it subsumes into the general process of value accumulation. This makes class a thoroughly ineffective concept around which to build a coalition sufficient for revolution. The broadest identity around which to mobilize is the nation, but the nation is not a pregiven concept. Thus, the Chinese and Vietnamese advisors clashed over the type of nationalism they hoped to mobilize. The SNWG argued for an ethnically inclusive concept of the nation that excluded certain rural class categories. The VWP advisory group argued this would jeopardize the revolution and proposed an entirely cross-class concept of the nation instead. Conflicts over this issue resulted in Hanoi turning to the Soviet Union for aid, which signaled to CCP leaders in Beijing that they had lost in their bid to determine LPP revolutionary strategy.

Chapter four covers the same period as chapter three (roughly 1963 to 1968) but does so from the perspective of the SNWG's military investigation team and the broader diplomatic movements between the PRC and Laos, including Souvanna's 1964 trip to Beijing to gain support for resuscitating the failed second coalition government; Kaysone's meeting with CCP leadership in late 1965 after securing Soviet support; and the CCP's surprisingly impactful move to get the Pathet Lao to coordinate with Patriotic Neutralist military leader and governor of Phongsaly Province, Khamouane Boupha. Khamouane was a neutralist who all parties agreed had been forced to denounce US intervention largely because he was trapped between Pathet Lao forces to his south and the border with the PRC to his north. CCP advice to work with Khamouane flew in the face of all the SNWG's other recommendations about class struggle and its complaint that the Lao

revolution was *merely* anti-imperialist. Yet, as I argue, it also demonstrates in miniature an ideal case for how the path of political struggle tested in the mid-1950s could have unfolded. The overall point of the chapter, however, is this: anti-imperialism is not a politics. Everyone on every side of the Lao revolution considered themselves an anti-imperialist much like the CCP and Guomindang both considered themselves anti-imperialist during their long struggle in China. Anti-imperialism is an entirely negative concept. It says nothing about what society will be after the imperialists have left, and, in the absence of a positive vision of the future, creates a weak and unreliable movement. This was the SNWG's case against the Pathet Lao, and, given the latter's total dependency on the VWP throughout the revolution, the accusation has more than a little merit.

The fifth and final chapter follows delegations of lower ranking Pathet Lao members as they toured Shanghai and other PRC locales from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. The previous four chapters tend to find sympathy with the CCP's positions on Laos. Readers well versed in PRC history will find that CCP advice in Laos was based in some measure on a mythical version of the Chinese revolution. I agree that the version of, for example, 'minority work' (*minzu gongzuo*) that the SNWG presented to the Pathet Lao conspicuously omitted much of the violence that accompanied land reform. Yet, CCP dishonesty about its own affairs does not entirely undermine its usually accurate assessment of US global ambitions. In this chapter, I attempt to deal with that dishonesty head on through reports on Lao guests to the PRC created by organizations like the Chinese People's Foreign Culture Association (*Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Xiehui*) and the Communist Youth League. Most literature sympathetic to elements of the socialist project in Asia attempts to avoid, this is not to say denies, the obvious falsity of the PRC's self-image presented to foreigners by arguing that the sites they toured were presented as aspirational models of a future society or that the PRC cannot be known in the first place. Yet, much of this literature is focused

on intellectuals with no concrete ties to the PRC or on model communes and military units as a domestic issue. I argue that this deception takes on a different meaning when performed for Pathet Lao cadres and troops who genuinely, if briefly, depended on PRC aid for much of their survival. To put a fine point on it, it matters that the CCP lied to these revolutionaries, and highlighting this deception should not be the sole purview of McCarthy era anti-communism and its descendants as is now intimated by several PRC historians. Once in the foreign guest reception machinery of Shanghai, visiting Lao delegations, many of whose members were not entirely literate and unable to publish accounts of their time that might embarrass the CCP, were treated by local officials as easy wins. Any words could be put in their mouths inside the world of the top-secret reports on these delegations. This makes the use of Foreign Culture Association and Youth League documents difficult, but it also demonstrates the growth of the systemic chauvinism of the CCP over the course of the Cold War – perhaps most especially and most obviously after the launch of the Cultural Revolution. Paradoxically, as the need to fabricate the essential importance of Maoism to anti-imperialist movements all over the world grew in the 1970s within the PRC, the CCP's actual efforts to export the Maoist project were abandoned. If one takes the retreat from Houaphanh to Phongsaly as an example, by the later Cultural Revolution, the CCP mostly exported roads. Seen from another angle, however, continuous Lao delegations also helped maintain CCP-LPP relations after the dissolution of the SNWG. Thus, while these delegations may have been easy wins for low-level foreign relations workers in Shanghai and other PRC cities, Lao groups were also able to extract what they needed from the CCP.

Note on Sources

The most important source of documentary materials for this dissertation is the PRC Foreign Ministry Archives (PRCFMA). Astute followers of increasing censorship within the PRC in the past decade will no doubt notice that many of my references are to sources that are no longer available through the PRCFMA. As archival closures become increasingly common, one survival tactic of historians at universities inside the PRC is to employ large numbers of graduate students to transcribe the contents of state archives. The transcribed documents are then stored on personal hard drives. Generally speaking, the use of these materials after archival censorship is not, in itself, a politically risky act depending on what one uses them to say. It is acknowledged that the archives were briefly open and that academic work will continue to be produced based on what historians and others were able to retrieve during that time. The result, although not favorable, is that the PRCFMA has been decentralized to the private offices of interested academics. I am wholly indebted to these academics, who I will not name, for their generosity in sharing their digital archive. Were it not for them, my materials from the PRCFMA would have been limited to congratulatory letters between Zhou Enlai and various other heads of state on their respective national days.

The decentralization of the PRCFMA means that the sources cited here cannot be directly referenced without the appropriate personal contacts. Nonetheless, I believe that the story they tell is important and that PRC historians, who are all facing the same dilemma, will forgive me for using them under conditions where my claims to their contents are not easily verifiable. This is the case even with some of the documents I have referenced from the Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA), which were in some cases removed from the archive while I was transcribing them. Given this situation, my only recourse is to cite PRCFMA and SMA documents according to their

reference numbers at the time they were collected and hope that one day, if the archives are reopened, that these reference numbers will still have meaning.

There are scattered references throughout the dissertation to documents from the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Archives (GZARA). I was given access to scans of the original documents by the deputy director of the History and Public Policy Program at the Wilson Center, Charles Kraus. In some cases, English translations of these documents were available in the Wilson Center Digital Archive (WCDA), but I required the originals to check translations of certain terms or Lao names. In other cases, Kraus was kind enough to offer documents on Sino-Lao relations not yet available in the WCDA. In both cases, I have attributed these sources to the GZARA. If reference is made to a document in the WCDA, then the translated version is the only version of the document I consulted.

Although I have also made use of bound volumes published by the PRC Foreign Ministry and the CCP Central Committee Documents Research Office (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi* or ZZWY), these types of sources are usually sanitized. Volumes like the Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai's 'life chronicles' (*nianpu*) should not be relied on as major sources of historical inquiry but can be used in a limited capacity to account for the gist of certain meetings and glean a rough accounting of CCP leaders' whereabouts. Where possible, I have used these types of sources in conjunction with traditional archival sources. A compilation of translated documents from LPP Central Committee meetings has also proven useful in this research. It was compiled by the CCP Central Committee's International Liaison Department (ILD), Asia Branch, Second Team (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Duiwai Lianluobu Yazhou Erbu* or ZZDLYE). This type of volume was published as 'internal materials' (*neibu ziliao*) for reference by high-level CCP officials only. In its presentation, it is a straightforward translation of LPP Central Committee resolutions between

1957 and 1971. It was a regular practice during the Mao era for the ILD to act as archivist for foreign communist parties. Its archives are perhaps the most sought after by historians of PRC foreign relations, but they are also perhaps the least likely to ever become available. Bound volumes like the one used here, however, sometimes slip through the cracks. As is the case in this dissertation, it is likely that as more materials from the ILD come to light, historians will be able to narrate the untold histories of Asian communist parties whose native language archives remain under tight control. Finally, chapter three relies especially on memoirs from two members of the SNWG. The most important is Liang Wenying's *Days in Laos* (*Zai Laowo de Rizi*) followed by Hu Zhengqing's *A Diplomat's Diary* (*Yi ge Waijiao Guanyuan de Riji*). Where possible these have been confirmed by archival documents from the SNWG. Although both memoirs are highly paternalistic toward the Pathet Lao, nothing in them contradicts the account of the SNWG found in archival documents.

CHAPTER ONE

DIPLOMACY, POLITICAL STRUGGLE, AND THE FAILURE OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

For two decades, historians of the Cold War in Asia have claimed that one of the most significant developments in twenty-first century research is the newly appreciated importance of ideology. Yet, what it means to say "ideology matters" remains unclear.[1] For many scholars, Marxist-Leninist ideology remains a *particular* type of discourse communist party leaders used to frame *universal* drives to increase national power and prestige. Thus, nationalism remains both something outside of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the 'real' driver of socialist diplomacy and foreign relations. However, the failure to appreciate the specificity of revolutionary nationalism, theorization of which dates to Marx and Engels, has resulted in an equal failure to understand the specific logic of the socialist internationalism Asian communist parties inherited and advanced through their own revolutions.

Chen Jian is perhaps the most influential scholar advancing the notion that, at least in China, Marxist-Leninist ideology was merely a vehicle for a universal concept of national self-interest. This conclusion, however, is not straightforward. On the one hand, Chen argues that a commitment to Marxism-Leninism shaped Mao Zedong-era foreign policy from the very beginning. Mao's "lean to one side" policy, announcing alignment with the Soviet Union in July 1949, placed the new state firmly within an ideologically bounded bloc.[2] Years later, the Sino-Soviet split, which occurred when the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union had "more shared 'national interests' than ever," also required ideological commitments among party leadership

[1] Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 6.
[2] Mao Zedong, "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship: In Commemoration of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary of the Communist Party of China," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 4 (New York: Pergamon Press Inc., 1961), 415.

beyond national security concerns.[3] On the other hand, while Marxist-Leninist ideology played a major role in setting the parameters of PRC foreign policy, Chen is clear that the driving force behind these decisions was the Chinese people's sense of national victimhood. Chen argues this "victim mentality" arose from a belief that "the political incursions, economic exploitation and military aggression" inflicted on China by Japan and the West "had undermined the Central Kingdom's historical glory and had reduced it to the status of a victimized state"[4] For Chen and many others, this aggrieved nationalism finds its clearest expression in Mao's personal drive to ensure the PRC's "status" as leader of the world socialist revolution.[5] In short, Mao-era foreign policy was driven by an aggrieved nationalism on the part of CCP leadership and the Chinese people. Marxism-Leninism was a discursive framework grafted onto this universal nationalist imperative. Thus, the new claim to take ideology seriously is little more than the old national self-interest approach, re-establishing an old dichotomy between nationalism and socialist internationalism. Realism remains the watchword for Cold War Asia's international relations historians.

An investigation into the Marxist-Leninist theoretical tradition inherited by Asian communist parties, combined with an acknowledgment of United States interventions in Southeast Asia, provides more compelling reasons why the CCP and others remained committed to foreign intervention themselves and why that intervention became support for armed liberation movements. This chapter provides a brief intellectual history of socialist internationalism as a framework for

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[3] Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 9.
[4] Chen Jian, "A Response: How to Pursue a Critical History of Mao's Foreign Policy," *The China Journal*, no. 49 (January 2003): 139.
[5] Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 22–23; Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 25; Gregg A. Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 47–49.

understanding relations between Chinese, Lao, and, by extension, Vietnamese communist parties during the mid-1950s. It reveals that socialist internationalism was, by design, a highly interventionist approach to international diplomacy. Yet, despite this interventionism, internationalism also had prescribed normative limits. Namely, national communist parties must conduct their own revolutions; colonized societies could not be liberated from the outside. Thus, the goal was to create the conditions for the possibility of national revolution aboard, or, in the words of Fred Haliday, create a "world safe for revolution."[6]

In Indochina, during the period of CCP support for peaceful coexistence, internationalism entailed three general objectives. First, it required support for neutrality among non-communist leaders to prevent military alignment with the West, mainly the US. Second, it required the establishment of formal relations with communist countries and negotiation of aid agreements with these countries, because third, it was believed that this would lead most expediently to a political transition to socialism. As I demonstrate below, the period from the Geneva Conference of 1954 to the fall of the first coalition government in Laos between the Royal Lao Government and the communist Pathet Lao was a brief but genuine experiment with political struggle through peaceful coexistence. However, as the CCP and Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) were realizing the necessity of armed struggle against US imperialism, Washington's interventions in Lao politics confirmed their suspicions. Intervention from communist parties in this context can be understood in similar terms to a logic of just war. Mao believed, for example, that PRC involvement in the war in Korea was an anti-imperialist war to end imperialist war.[7] Intervention in a national

[6] Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd, 1999), 16.
[7] Wang Hui, *China's Twentieth Century: Revolution, Retreat, and the Road to Equality* (New York: Verso, 2016), 120.

revolution, therefore, is intervention to aid the establishment of an independent, self-reliant socialist society, or anti-interventionist intervention.

The Roots of Internationalism: Intervention and Socialist Diplomacy

In 1916, Lenin offered what I argue is a first principle for understanding CCP thought on the Lao crisis during the early 1960s:

> Socialists must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation – and this demand in its political expression signifies nothing else than the recognition of the right to self-determination; they must also render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their uprising – or revolutionary war, in the event of one – *against* the imperialist powers that oppress them.[8]

According to Lenin, the task of socialist internationalists was two-fold. First, they must demand an end to the *political* oppression of colonized people by demanding the right to self-determination. This demand was separate from the demand to end the *economic* oppression of the working classes by the capitalist class, an oppression which could occur with or without a system of liberal equality between states.[9] Second, although bourgeois-democratic movements should be supported in general, the more radical elements within these movements should be specifically sought out, lending socialist internationalism an interventionist quality.[10] However, there were normative limits to intervention. Lenin quoted Friedrich Engels in an 1882 letter to Karl Kaustky: "the victorious proletariat can force no blessings of any kind upon any foreign nation without

[8] Emphasis in original. V.I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 22 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 151–52.
[9] V.I. Lenin, "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 22 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 326.
[10] Julia Lovell's study of Maoism particularly emphasizes the highly interventionist character of CCP worldview and foreign policy but fails to connect it to this longer tradition of normative international relations theory within socialist organizations. The result is that CCP interventions appear to emerge from Mao's own personal ambition rather than as part of a larger inherited tradition. Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2019).

undermining its own victory by doing so."[11] The point was this: a socialist party or state must work to support movements for national liberation as a part of a global revolution against capitalism but cannot itself liberate a colonized nation. Instead, the goal was to create the conditions for the possibility of national liberation that would lead to class revolution.

The history of socialist anticolonial leaders in Asia may make the connection between Marxism and the right to national self-determination seem straightforward. It is not. Marx's most famous line on revolution, nation, and nationality comes from the *Manifesto*: "Workers have no nation of their own."[12] This passage is traditionally understood as an expression of Marx's economism, in which the relations of capital were expected to destroy traditional forms of social organization, pitting a global bourgeoisie against a global proletariat.[13] However, in the same passage, Marx added that once the proletariat has seized political control, it will "constitute the nation itself" in a form that is "still nationalistic, even if not in the bourgeois sense of the term."[14] For the bourgeoisie, for whom "nationality is already destroyed," the nation largely served as an ideological tool – a concept used to obscure exploitative class relations.[15] National liberation in the bourgeois sense would mean the freedom to continue these relations free of overt foreign political domination. Beyond this limited goal, Marx, and later Lenin, were clear that bourgeois nationalism was both exclusive and coercive.[16] On the other hand, because it would be an organic community

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[11] Lenin, "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," 352; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955), 351.
[12] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17.
[13] Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question."
[14] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," 17. Erica Benner's interpretation of the possible non-exclusive forms of national groupings allowed for by this passage is particularly insightful. Erica Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms: A Post-Communist View from Marx and Engels* (New York: Verso, 2018), 54–55.
[15] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "'The German Ideology' Chapter One, 'Feuerbach,'" in *Marx: Early Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 165.
[16] Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought: Theory and Practice in the Democratic and Socialist Revolutions*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 297–98; Paul Le Blanc, *Unfinished Leninism: The Rise and Return of a Revolutionary Doctrine* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 132.

free of class exploitation, the nation created through proletarian revolution would be inclusive and non-coercive. That this nation would differ from the bourgeois concept points to the ambiguity at the heart of nationalist politics.

Although Marx never developed systematic thoughts on proletarian nationalism and internationalism, his writing on Irish national liberation and class revolution leaves some clues. Marx and Engels advised Irish revolutionaries that national liberation was necessary for workers' emancipation, but it was not enough on its own. After all, not all exploitative landlords were British.[17] In addition to independence from Britain, Ireland needed an agrarian class revolution. However, Marx believed class revolution in Ireland was the task of the Irish alone, writing to Engels that with the "best intentions in the world the English cannot accomplish this for them."[18] Instead, the role of the English worker in Irish national liberation was to demand Ireland's right to secede.

Lenin cited these ideas in his own writing on national self-determination to develop a prescriptive theory of socialist internationalism. He argued that it was "the Marxist's *bounden* duty" to demand radical democratization of relations between all nations, even the right of oppressed nations to secede, as part of the development of conditions for socialist revolution.[19] The demand for the right to secede from the proletariat of oppressor nations was to be met by the demand of working people of oppressed nations to reunite after liberation on equal terms, dialectically related political demands which Lukács summarized as "secede" and "belonging together."[20]

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[17] Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 123.
[18] Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 196–97.
[19] Emphasis in original. V.I. Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question," in *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 20 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 34.
[20] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 276.

Facing the actuality of the Russian revolution, Lenin recognized that nationalist ideologies existed in every stratum of society in oppressor and oppressed nations. However, in the latter, national liberation was a demand of the broad masses, lending the small working class a larger base of non-proletariat allies – bourgeois and peasant alike. Thus, a united front built on nationalist demands was essential for revolution in largely agrarian societies. In places where capitalist penetration remained low, Lenin argued, cross-class nationalist sentiment could be harnessed through a united front led by a revolutionary proletarian movement, creating a "weakest link" in the capitalist imperialist chain.[21] As this united front struggled for national self-determination, its non-socialist elements could be convinced of socialist internationalism, Lukács's "belonging together," through concrete demonstrations of solidarity by the proletariat of oppressor nations.[22]

Nationalist sentiment, ambiguous in its politics, could therefore be harnessed and radicalized but only under certain conditions. At the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, Lenin and Indian Marxist M. N. Roy argued that there was a growing trend of colonized, reformist bourgeoisie both committed to national self-determination and willing to collaborate with imperialist powers – at least in quelling radical movements. Therefore, communists needed to be selective in their support for bourgeois-democratic liberation movements, endorsing them only "when they are genuinely revolutionary, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organizing in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited."[23] In other words, nationalist movements would only be supported when they had the potential to become weakest links by virtue of proletarian leadership.

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[21] Wang Hui, "Twentieth-Century China as an Object of Thought: An Introduction, Part 1, The Birth of the Century: The Chinese Revolution and the Logic of Politics," *Modern China* 46, no. 1 (2020): 29–30.
[22] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 276.
[23] John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920*, vol. 1 (New York: Pathfinder, 1991), 213.

Peaceful coexistence as it was practiced by the CCP basically entailed the search for a political road to proletarian leadership of newly independent states. As I show below in Laos, the goal was to aid socialist parties in building their membership and organization domestically while winning over non-socialist elements of the state through non-aggression pacts and economic aid agreements. In both cases, nationalist sentiment was key because, in both cases, deciding one's own diplomatic relations and acceptance of development assistance was part of building national independence. If non-socialist politicians agreed to aid from socialist countries, the CCP believed, then so much the better for building conditions for political revolution. If they did not, then the opportunity arose for the proletarian-led party to claim that state leaders were subject to the pressures of capitalist imperialists. It was, therefore, no less interventionist than the CCP's later engagements with Asian communist parties. It simply took a different form. At the heart of the experiment with peaceful coexistence and political struggle remained a drive to create the conditions for the possibility of national revolution abroad.

In one of his final essays, Lenin wrote that the rapid spread of anti-colonial struggles in Asia was the determining factor keeping the international socialist revolution alive.[24] Soon after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, CCP leadership contributed to this vision by supporting armed conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. Vietnamese communists, in turn, became the driving organizational force behind the revolution in Laos. CCP participation in these revolutions makes clear that experimentation with solely political struggle toward socialism during the mid-1950s was more an aberration than the norm. It was, however, a serious experiment. To understand the significance of the turn to political struggle during Geneva 1954, it is necessary to outline the revolutionary world that emerged in Asia in the late-1940s and early-1950s.

[24] V.I. Lenin, "Better Fewer, but Better," in *V.I. Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 33 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 500.

The Revolution in Asia

As early as summer 1947, Mao hoped to discuss the systematic establishment of relations between Asian communist parties with Stalin during a proposed trip to Moscow to negotiate Soviet aid.[25] Stalin, however, rejected Mao's proposed trip, and the latter had to wait several years before the CCP's general role in revolutions in Asia could be discussed. With the CCP consolidating military victories against the Guomindang in February 1949, Mao told a visiting Mikoyan that the CCP was in regular contact with communist parties in Indochina, Siam, Burma, Indonesia, and the Philippines and proposed the formation of an Asian Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) modeled on the Cominform in Europe. Mikoyan agreed, and, in May, Mao made the same suggestion to a representative from the Workers' Party of North Korea, saying he had received support from parties in Indochina, Burma, and Malaya. Stalin initially feared an Asian Cominform would spark too strong a response from imperialist powers, but, by July, his mind was gradually changing. Speaking to a delegation led by Liu Shaoqi, Stalin said he hoped the CCP would be able to guide revolutionary movements against imperialism in Asia while the Soviet Union took responsibility for movements in the West. The center of the revolution had shifted to Asia, Stalin believed, and the CCP should seek to build relations with parties in East and Southeast Asia. He stopped short of supporting an Asian Cominform, but this provided Mao with enough of a consensus to begin approaching Asian parties.[26]

The work of coordinating contacts between these parties was originally handled by the CCP's United Front Work Department, but quickly grew beyond that department's capacity. By January 1951, Wang Jiaxiang, the PRC's first ambassador to the Soviet Union, was placed in

[25] Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 167.
[26] Shen Zhihua and Xia Yafeng, "Leadership Transfer in the Asian Revolution: Mao Zedong and the Asian Cominform," *Cold War History* 14, no. 2 (2014): 199–201.

charge of the International Liaison Department (ILD), an organization answerable directly to the Central Committee whose chief responsibility was managing relations between the CCP and other Asian communist parties.[27] Among its operations, the ILD ran the Marxism-Leninism Institute, which brought high-level members from parties across Asia together in a secret compound in Zhongnanhai to study the works of its titular theoreticians alongside collections of Mao's own writing.[28] The ILD also participated in planning for any visiting delegations from communist parties abroad and collected intelligence on these organizations throughout the Mao period.

As mentioned above, however, PRC support for Asian revolutions, was not limited to education and intelligence. In October 1950, at Stalin's request and after Zhou Enlai's warning of an armed response if the United States crossed the 38th parallel, PRC forces entered the 'War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea'.[29] Commitment to a foreign war against the US came at great expense to the newly formed state. By the end of the war, in November 1953, the PRC cancelled North Korea's entire war debt, a sum of about $364.5 million, and promised an additional $150 million in aid from 1954 to 1957.[30] Support for the DRV came even earlier. At the end of Japanese occupation in 1945, the Viet Minh had a guerilla force of about 5,000 along the Sino-Vietnamese border commanded by Vo Nguyen Giap. With no imperialist power to challenge them, Viet Minh forces entered Hanoi in August and Ho Chi Minh declared DRV independence the following week. The French returned, however, and as negotiations broke down a new war for

[27] Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 96–97; Xia Yafeng, "Wang Jiaxiang: New China's First Ambassador and the First Director of the International Liaison Department of the CCP," *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 16, no. 2 (2009): 143.
[28] Somsak Jeamteerasakul, "The Communist Movement in Thailand" (Dissertation, Melbourne, Monash University, 1991), 36; Chin Peng, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Matters Pte Ltd, 2003), 426–30; John W. Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 200–201.
[29] Wang Hui, *China's Twentieth Century*, 115; Shen Zhihua and Xia Yafeng, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 42.
[30] Shen Zhihua and Xia Yafeng, "Leadership Transfer in the Asian Revolution," 81–82.

independence began. Ho sent requests for financial aid to Beijing five days after the founding of the PRC. At a Politburo meeting led by Liu Shaoqi in December 1949, most members were skeptical about the possibility of meeting Ho's nearly $10 million request. Liu suggested fulfilling only a small part of Hos' weaponry request, but Mao, who was in Moscow conducting his own aid negotiations, rejected this idea. Instead, assured of a mutual assistance treaty with the Soviet Union, Mao telegrammed Liu and instructed him to tell Ho that the PRC could provide half of his original request.[31] In February 1950, eight months before the PLA's more famous entry into Korea, a PLA work group led by Luo Guibo crossed the border into Vietnam to investigate the military situation. This group was followed by a Military Advisory Group in August led by PLA Political Commissar Wei Guoqing.[32] By July 1953, the PRC was supplying the Viet Minh with approximately 10,000 tons for military material per month. By the time French and Indochinese representatives met in Geneva in 1954, Viet Minh forces used this aid to expand to 350,000 troops.[33] How much direct contact CCP advisors in Vietnam had with Lao revolutionary leaders during this period is unclear. In state media, the PRC spent much of the early 1950s supporting the notion that Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian struggles were unified for geopolitical reasons. Yet, Wei did not meet the 'Red Prince' Souphanouvong until the two joined the People's Army of Vietnam's entrance into Houphanh Province in March 1953. At the time, Wei was uncomfortable with Lao cadres' high level of dependence on the VWP but made no direct criticism.[34]

The Lao fight for independence was a comparatively royal affair. Incorporation of Laos into the French Indochinese Union began around the royal city of Luang Prabang in 1887, and its

[31] Xiaobing Li, *Building Ho's Army: Chinese Military Assistance to North Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2019), 33–34, 41–43.
[32] Shu, "From Armed Revolution to Neutralism," 130.
[33] Li, *Building Ho's Army*, 61.
[34] Shu, "From Armed Revolution to Neutralism," 139.

western borders with Siam were determined through the Franco-Siamese War in 1893.[35] Territories were initially administered in two sections – Upper Laos with its capital in Luang Prabang and Lower Laos with its capital on Khong Island in the Mekong River. These two administrative regions were consolidated in 1899, and, in 1900, the capital was moved to Vientiane. By 1905, French-controlled territories included the royal houses of Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, and Champassak west of the Mekong in southern Laos.[36] Luang Prabang was governed as a protectorate while the territory of the other two houses, constituting central and southern Laos, were ruled directly as colonies or French military territories.[37] Under French rule, the creation of Lao nationalist sentiment was deterred in two ways. First, to help create an 'Indochinese' identity, the French administration encouraged Vietnamese settlement in Laos. Second, the borders drawn with Siam in 1893 left an enormous proportion of ethnic Lao people inside Siam. Most of the territory in the new Lao political entity was populated by ethnic minorities toward whom the majority Lao had been traditionally discriminatory. The French colonial administration made no concerted effort to resolve these traditional patterns of ethnic hierarchy.[38]

Under pressure from Japanese occupying forces, King Sisavang Vong declared Lao independence in March 1945. By August, however, Japanese forces surrendered, and the king declared that the French protectorate over Laos remained in place. In response, an independence

[35] These borders were not static and were subject to Thai irredentist movements, especially during World War II. Søren Ivarsson, *Creating Laos: The Making of a Lao Space between Indochina and Siam, 1860-1945* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), 150.
[36] Ian G. Baird, "Millenarian Movements in Southern Laos and North Eastern Siam (Thailand) at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Reconsidering the Involvement of the Champassak Royal House," *South East Asia Research* 21, no. 2 (June 2013): 260–61. For a detailed analysis of the creation of Lao borders, see also Kennon Breazeale, "Laos Mapped by Treaty and Decree, 1895-1907," in *Breaking New Ground in Lao History: Essays on the Seventh to Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Mayroury Ngaosrivathana and Kennon Breazeale (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 297–336.
[37] Søren Ivarsson and Christopher E. Goscha, "Prince Phetsarath (1890-1959): Nationalism and Royalty in the Making of Modern Laos," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 58.
[38] Christie, "Marxism and the History of the Nationalist Movements in Laos," 148.

movement called Lao Issara ("Free Laos") led by Prince Phetsarath, a member of the Luang Prabang royal family, seized power in Vientiane and attempted to move Laos toward constitutional monarchy.[39] The effort, opposed by Sisavang Vong, lasted for six months. French troops began reoccupying Laos from the south through the cooperation of Prince Boun Oum, head of the Champassak family.[40] As French forces moved north, Phetsarath and his allies were met with opposition by the king, eventually forming a provisional government to depose Sisavang Vong and entering into a military agreement with the Viet Minh.[41] Much of the Lao Issara's strength came from an uneasy alliance with Guomindang troops who were sent to help supervise Japanese withdrawal in northern Laos. In February 1946, the Guomindang reached an agreement with French colonial authorities and withdrew, further isolating the moderate Lao nationalists. By April, most of the Lao Issara were in exile in Thailand where the movement continued.

The Lao Issara movement was significant for bringing together many of the figures who would dominate conflicts in Laos for the next thirty years. Phetsarath's younger brother was Souvanna Phouma, and Souphanouvong was their half-brother. After Geneva 1954, Souvanna became the Royal Lao Government's (RLG) longest running prime minister and a voice for a largely pro-Western concept of neutrality while Souphanouvong became the public face of the Lao communist movement.[42] In 1946, Souvanna fled with Phetsarath to Bangkok, and Souphanouvong joined them after being shot in Thakhek. Over the next few years, the French worked with the monarchy to declare a unified Laos, produce a new constitution, and hold elections for National

[39] Ivarsson and Goscha, "Prince Phetsarath," 65.
[40] Although not a focus in this dissertation, Ian Baird has written on how family rivalries during this period continued influencing political factions throughout the Lao crisis. Ian G. Baird, "Elite Family Politics in Laos before 1975," *Critical Asian Studies*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2020.1869573.
[41] Martin Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary of Laos* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), xxxviii.
[42] There are many figures to the right of Souvanna Phouma who also claimed to support neutrality. However, it should not be forgotten that by the early 1970s Souvanna was endorsing US bombing campaigns and CIA intervention. Harish Chandola, "New Light on Souvanna Phouma's Role," *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 29 (1971): 1425–26.

Assembly. These moves caused conflicts between moderate and radical members of the Lao Issara who could not agree on how to advance their own call for independence. For his insistence on armed struggle in northeastern Laos, Souphanouvong was dismissed from the Lao Issara in May 1949. In July, a Franco-Lao agreement recognizing partial Lao independence prompted Souvanna and another future prime minister, Katay Don Sasorith, to dissolve the Lao Issara and return to Vientiane.[43]

While the PRC sent aid and advisors to Vietnam, the DRV did the same for Laos. During the late-1940s, the Vietnamese-run Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) created the Central Lao Party Affairs Committee. By 1950, this advisory organization had roughly 150 personnel operating from provincial to local levels in Laos. Added to this were about 8,000 Viet Minh soldiers.[44] Many of the Vietnamese ICP members working in Laos went to great lengths to learn Lao and other local languages and blend in with their cultural surroundings. In August, the First Congress of Representatives of the Free Laos Front was held in the south of Tuyen Quang Province, approximately 150 kilometers from Hanoi. The purpose of the conference was to create a resistance government in opposition to the government formed by Souvanna in Vientiane. No votes were held. Rather, a prepared list of names and positions was read to those in attendance. Souphanouvong was both president and minister of foreign affairs. Phoumi Vongvichit, a former governor of Houaphanh Province, was the minister of the interior.[45] Souk Vongsak, another member of the Luang Prabang royal family, was the minister of education and propaganda. Sithon Kommadam, a member of the Jrou (Laven) ethnic minority, and Faydang Lobliaoyao, a Hmong

[43] Martin Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State: The Making of Modern Laos* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2002), 53.
[44] Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside," 150.
[45] The actual name of the province is Houaphan; Sam Neua is its capital city. However, all CCP documents from this period refer to the entire province as Sam Neua, and it is common to see histories of Laos in English follow suit. I adhere to this convention.

district chief, were ministers without portfolio charged with mobilizing within their respective ethnic communities. Kaysone Phomvihane, the minister of defense, was the son of a Vietnamese father and Lao mother who joined the ICP while studying law in Hanoi. Nouhak Phoumsavan, minister of economy and finance, was a northeastern Thailand-born merchant recruited to the ICP while driving trucks between Laos and Vietnam. This organization is the beginning of what came to be known as the Pathet Lao ('Country of the Lao').[46]

Reportedly at the CCP's suggestion, the ICP was dissolved in 1951 in order to establish Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian national parties.[47] The Vietnamese Workers' Party was formed immediately. Kaysone was placed in charge of a committee to form the Lao party, but that work would not be completed until 1955. The creation of separate parties did not mean VWP retreat from Laos. In early 1953, the Pathet Lao and Viet Minh worked together to begin preparing for an invasion that would lead from Dien Bien Phu west through the Lao province of Phongsaly toward Luang Prabang. In April, Vo Nguyen Giap's forces invaded Laos along this route and directly through Houaphanh, also on the Lao-Vietnamese border. The operation almost reached Luang Prabang, but the Viet Minh were ultimately forced to withdraw due to lack of supplies. The result was that large swaths of Phongsaly and Houaphanh were now liberated zones under Pathet Lao control. As Vietnamese cadres assisted the Pathet Lao with recruitment for and organization of its political and military wings, Souphanouvong formally announced the creation of a resistance government headquartered in Houaphanh.

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[46] Phoumi Vongvichit, *Laowo Ji Qi Shengli Di Fandui Meiguo Xinzhiminzhuyi de Douzheng* (Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Chubanshe, 1970), 40–41; Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 78–79; Nakhonkham Bouphanouvong, *Sixteen Years in the Land of Death: Revolution and Reeducation in Laos* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2003), 37–39.
[47] Li, *Building Ho's Army*, 37.

Meanwhile, as its hold over Indochina weakened, France looked for a negotiated solution in Laos. On October 22, King Sisavang Vong signed the Treaty of Friendship and Association with French authorities, guaranteeing full Lao independence within the French Union. The agreements, however, included a costly promise that French forces would remain to defend Lao territory. Unable to defend all of Laos but hoping to avoid a repeat Viet Minh invasion, French forces were parachuted into Dien Bien Phu.[48] The Viet Minh moved to meet them in November 1953 accompanied by the CCP's military advisory group led by Wei Guoqing. The CCP Central Military Commission, the PRC's top military organization, advised the Viet Minh against a full assault, proposing instead a slower strategy of encircling the enemy and wiping them out slowly. The CCP supplied the People's Army of Vietnam with antiaircraft weaponry to disrupt French supplies, taught them how to use snipers to disrupt troop activity, and supplied the Viet Minh with vast amounts of ammunition.

As preparation began for a conference at Geneva on Korea and Indochina chaired by Britain and the Soviet Union, Mao pressed the Viet Minh to finish the battle at Dien Bien Phu. Despite concerns about fatigue among Viet Minh troops, the VWP politburo agreed with Mao's position and launched a general offense on May 1.[49] In his memoir, former non-communist Pathet Lao member, Nakhonkham Bouphanouvong, recalls that the general offense coincided with the opening of a new Marxism-Leninism school in Houaphanh. At the opening ceremony, Prince Souk Vongsak announced the new assault and explained that recent battles in Laos had been of "great benefit to the great battle at Dien Bien Phu." A party was held that night near the school with VWP cadres performing songs of revolution.[50] Six days later, the victory at Dien Bien Phu was complete.

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[48] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 82–84.
[49] Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 46–49.
[50] Bouphanouvong, *Sixteen Years in the Land of Death*, 77–78.

During the siege, Pathet Lao forces fought to expand their territory as much as possible with VWP support, securing Phongsaly and a portion of Luang Prabang. Even with the siege, VWP presence in Laos still amounted to roughly 17,600 soldiers and cadres.[51] Such were the conditions just prior to negotiations at Geneva. PRC aid and military advice helped force imperialist powers into discussions over wars on China's northern and southern borders, but this model of socialist internationalism was unsustainable for the new Chinese state.

Peaceful Coexistence and Geneva 1954

Support to revolutions in Indochina was, of course, covert. Beijing spent the years leading up to the 1954 Geneva Conference building the PRC's public image as a peaceful nation. Peace in this sense, however, had limits. The peace the CCP promoted was a "bellicose peace" defined largely in terms of just war against imperialist powers and non-aggression with the socialist and decolonizing worlds.[52] In September and October 1952, Zhou Enlai travelled to Moscow for discussions with Stalin on issues related to the war in Korea. Zhou had also been tasked with raising the possibility of a non-aggression pact between China, India, and Burma. The latter was particularly important given the sizeable number of Guomindang troops then occupying portions of Burma's Shan State.[53] Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had indicated his interest in the pact as well as a visit to Beijing in the hopes of a reciprocal visit by Zhou to India. Mao believed Nehru and Burmese prime minister U Nu were likely to express the desire for a non-aggression

[51] Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside," 150.
[52] Elisabeth Forster, "Bellicose Peace: China's Signature Campaign and Discourses about 'Peace' in the Early 1950s," *Modern China* 46, no. 3 (2019): 250–80.
[53] Enze Han, *Asymmetrical Neighbors: Borderland State Building Between China and Southeast Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 56–59.

pact publicly making it "inconvenient to refuse."[54] Stalin agreed and further approved of Beijing's efforts to include India, Japan, and Pakistan in a peace conference scheduled for October, saying that the PRC should take the principal role in the conference.[55]

At the end of 1953, Zhou articulated Beijing's new posture toward the world by proposing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to an Indian delegation visiting China to discuss cross-border trade in Tibet. He hoped these principles would serve as guidelines for relations between all Asian countries based on "mutual respect for territorial sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in domestic affairs, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence."[56] Zhou, Nehru, and U Nu promoted these principles heavily throughout 1954 as a framework for a conference of African and Asian states to be held in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. They would also become a slogan for Lao neutralists in the formation of the first coalition government between the RLG and Pathet Lao in 1956.[57] Thus, despite contestations by the United States, China arrived in Geneva having shown that it was both capable of holding its own in a war against the world's largest military power and interested in peaceful relations in Asia.

The US saw the Geneva Conference as a waste of time and a face-saving measure for French surrender in the Indochinese war of independence. Eisenhower wrote to Winston Churchill on April 4, 1954, saying "there is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem."[58] As the conference began, US Secretary of State John Dulles fumed that the US would only sit down with

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[54] "Hand delivered note, Zhou Enlai to Stalin, conveying telegram from Mao Zedong to Zhou Enlai," September 16, 1952, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113030 Wilson Center Digital Archive (WCDA); Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World*, 77.
[55] "Minutes of conversation between I.V. Stalin and Zhou Enlai," September 19, 1952, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111247 WCDA.
[56] ZZWYB, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1997), 342; Zhou Enlai, *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Wenxuan* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2000), 63.
[57] "Guanyu Sufanufeng yu Fuma Huitan Qingkuang," August 3-5, 1956, PRCFMA 106-00176-10 (1).
[58] Quoted in Marek Thee, "Background Notes on the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Laos and the Vientiane Agreements of 1956-1957," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, ed. Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 124.

the PRC delegation when "their actual position must be dealt with" and that discussions "did not constitute recognition of the Chinese Communist regime."[59] Beijing, on the other hand, saw the conference as an opportunity to determine its own global image. It would demonstrate to the West and, more importantly, other Asian nations, that it was the US who was committed to war, not the PRC. In preparation for the conference, Zhou drafted a set of preliminary opinions in which he stressed that the US, Britain, and France held contradictory views on what the conference should achieve for Indochina. Although the US would "try everything possible to sabotage reaching all kinds of agreements favorable to the cause of peace," the differences between the US and its Western allies could be exploited. Namely, if communist forces in Indochina pursued a strategy of "negotiating while fighting," then the resulting political strife in France could make the French delegation more willing to negotiate and less supportive of US hardline anti-communism.[60] He wrote to Ho Chi Minh in mid-March to make clear the potential benefits of successful negotiations and to provide instructions on how to prepare.[61]

Beijing began preparing for negotiations at Geneva with the commitment that the question of Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian independence must be addressed as a whole. The CCP was highly dubious of the independence granted to Laos by the French government and argued that the presence of any imperialist powers in either country threatened the independence of all of Indochina. On April 4, the Chinese delegation's Vietnam group issued its "Comprehensive Solution for Restoring Peace in Indochina." The document called for guarantees from the US, Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the PRC that no new foreign military equipment would enter

[59] Quoted in Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World*, 84.
[60] "'Preliminary opinions on the assessment of the preparation for the Geneva conference,' prepared by the PRC Minister of Foreign Affairs (drafted by PRC Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai)[excerpt]," March 02, 1954, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111963 WCDA.
[61] ZZWY, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 1:358.

Indochina from the day of the armistice and for a complete withdrawal of equipment and personnel six months later. It also called for the creation of a provisional joint committee of the governments of the DRV and the State of Vietnam, "the resistance government of Laos and the government of the Kingdom of Laos, the Committee for National Liberation of Cambodia and the government of the Kingdom of Cambodia" to oversee peaceful unification, national independence, and the establishment of democracy.[62] PRC delegates maintained the position that the situations in Cambodia and Laos could not be handled separately from Vietnam throughout most of May. Historian Qiang Zhai has previously argued that Zhou Enlai's insistence on treating Indochina as a whole resulted from his ignorance that Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were distinct polities prior to colonization. Once CCP delegates understood the relationship between these countries better, they decided to negotiate separate policies for each new country.[63] However, as Shu Quanzhi demonstrates, this cannot have been the case given the high level of CCP involvement in northern Vietnam against the French.[64] More likely, CCP leaders abandoned the strategy of a single resolution to all of Indochina when they were forced to face the reality that the resistance governments in Laos and Cambodia were largely the products of VWP efforts with little popular support. As Zhou telegrammed to Mao, Liu Shaoqi, and the CCP Central Committee on May 30:

> [N]o [communist] Party has been formed in either Cambodia or Laos. Few cadres have been trained in either country. Our…armed forces in Cambodia number 3,000 troops, and in Laos there are less than 2,000 troops. If an armistice is implemented, it will be difficult for Vietnamese troops to remain in Cambodia and Laos…Neither Lao nor Cambodian resistance governments have much influence among the people.[65]

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[62] "Draft memorandum, 'A Comprehensive Solution for Restoring Peace in Indochina,' prepared by the Vietnam group of the Chinese delegation attending the Geneva Conference," April 04, 1954, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110592 WCDA.
[63] Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 56.
[64] Shu, "From Armed Revolution to Neutralism," 143.
[65] Zhou Enlai quoted in Shu, 145.

While Souphanouvong's resistance government was not a fiction, its dependence on VWP presence and the international recognition already gained by the RLG made defending the resistance government a difficult position. Thus, a significant tactic taken by the French and RLG delegations at Geneva was to demand the withdrawal of the Viet Minh from Laos before beginning negotiations on Vietnam itself, thereby weakening CCP and VWP negotiating positions in the other two Indochinese countries.[66]

Several of the Pathet Lao leaders announced in 1950 were previously unknown even to long-time Lao Issara members, and the organization's territorial control was concentrated only along the Vietnam border in Houaphanh and Vietnam and China border in Phongsaly. After strong protest from the RLG chief delegate, Phoui Sananikone, the Pathet Lao were refused direct representation at the conference. Instead, both it and the Cambodian resistance were represented by the DRV Minister of Foreign Affairs Pham Van Dong. Prior to the conference, Beijing had some direct contact with the members of the Lao resistance government, but this did not compare with the closeness shared with the VWP.[67] Thus, the lack of popular support for the resistance government among Lao people seems to have been something the CCP was not initially prepared to face, and it gave those negotiating on behalf of the RLG the upper hand. Zhou Enlai and other Chinese delegates were surprised that representatives of the RLG and Cambodian government claimed China was acting as an imperialist power in Indochina by supporting DRV aggressions against its neighbors – in part through the issue of Pathet Lao representation at Geneva. Zhou quickly sent delegates to further investigate the situations in Laos and Cambodia from each

[66] "Shuang Fang Silingbu Daibiaotuan Huiyi Jianbao Di Jiu Hao," June 14, 1954, PRCFMA 206-00047-09.
[67] On Pathet Lao contact with the CCP prior to Geneva, Chae-Jin Lee says that Souphanouvong travelled to Beijing in 1951 and 1952 for "policy consultations" but does not elaborate. According to Xiaoming Zhang, "the new leaders of China did not have any contact with the Lao" until Geneva. In either case, Beijing had not had any substantial relations with the Pathet Lao prior to the conference. Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, 14; Xiaoming Zhang, "China's Involvement in Laos during the Vietnam War, 1963-1975," *The Journal of Military History* 66, no. 4 (2002): 1142.

governments' delegations.[68] In Zhou's May 30 telegram, he admitted that the main problem in CCP negotiation strategy was "the lack of proper understanding of the complexity of the Indochina question."[69] The royal governments of Laos and Cambodia were legitimate in the eyes of most of the people. The PRC and Vietnamese delegations would have to recognized them as well, and Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia would have to be treated as separate issues.

Ultimately, the answer in Laos was to abandon any attempts to draw territorial boundaries between Pathet Lao and RLG areas. Through the course of conversations with French prime minister Pierre Mendès France and Phoui Sananikone, Zhou was able to negotiate a solution in which Pathet Lao forces would gather in Phongsaly and Houaphanh to await negotiations for integration into the Royal Lao Army. By June, Zhou had determined that Mendès France, while not a leftist, was committed to ending the war in Indochina and amenable to negotiations. He telegrammed Beijing on June 19 saying that the survival of the prime minister's cabinet depended on ending French involvement in the war and that "our strategy at this stage should be placed upon encouraging the [peace] initiatives by the French, and make the French not listen to the Americans completely, make the British support stopping the war, and quickly reach an armistice agreement [with them] as long as the conditions seem reasonable" (sic).[70] In a meeting with Phoui on June 21, he told the foreign minister that Beijing's position was to "do as much as possible to facilitate closeness between the three countries of Indochina, to respect the independence of the three countries, and to oppose the US establishing bases in the three countries."[71] Two days later, he repeated a similar message to Mendès France, saying that the PRC delegation's conditions on the

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[68] Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 56.
[69] "Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and the CCP Central Committee, (excerpt)," May 30, 1954, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121150 WCDA.
[70] Brackets in original. "Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and the CCP Central Committee," June 19, 1954, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121156 WCDA.
[71] ZZWY, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 1:389.

Indochina question were peace, opposition to US interference, stopping the US from internationalizing the war, and opposing the construction of US military bases in Indochina, "beyond these, we have no other conditions."[72] He also facilitated several meetings as his residence between the Lao, Cambodian, and DRV delegations hoping to build trust.[73]

Pham Van Dong, however, continued to push for partition in Laos. On June 26, Li Kenong reported from a meeting between the PRC, Soviet, and DRV delegations that Pham hoped to partition all of Houaphanh and Phongsaly as well as a portion of Luang Prabang. If the partition could be negotiated further south, into Xieng Khouang Province, the Pathet Lao would control nearly all of northern Laos. Pham mentioned a few other territories on the border with Vietnam in southern Laos, but said he agreed with Zhou's assessment that negotiation efforts should be focused on the north. Pham admitted he was unclear on how to handle the political aspects of a partitioned Laos but said, in the event of a coalition government, there would be no need to change the current VWP-dominated Pathet Lao administration.[74]

Zhou offered his clearest assessment of the stakes involved at Geneva in meetings with Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap in Liuzhou, Guangxi Province from July 3 to 5. There Zhou asked about the DRV's military prospects if France continued to fight and the United States did not enter the conflict. Giap replied that it would take between two and three years for DRV forces to control all of Indochina, including Laos. Ho was slightly more cautious, estimating "at least three to five years."[75] Zhou then expressed Beijing's view. "The Indochina question has already been internationalized; this is its key characteristic," he explained, "It has gone beyond the

[72] ZZWY, 1:390.
[73] "Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong, regarding the banquet with the Laotian and Cambodian delegations and Pham Van Dong," June 24, 1954, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121158 WCDA.
[74] "Su, Zhong, Yue San Fang Huiyi Neirong Jianbao," June 26, 1954, PRCFMA 206-00046-34.
[75] Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 58–59.

internationalizing scope of the Korea question." Because the US feared the expansion of Chinese power into Vietnam, it would not allow the DRV to achieve too great a victory: "If we demand too much, then Indochina will never reach peace, and the US will inevitably interfere…The Indochina question itself is not only a question for these three countries. Rather, it affects all Southeast Asia; it affects Europe and the global situation."[76] From Beijing's perspective, the way to avoid an unwinnable global war against the US was to isolate it through successful peaceful negotiations. Zhou assured his Vietnamese counterparts that there was no contradiction between peacefully settling the Indochina question and the fulfillment of the internationalist mission of the communist movement, "otherwise it is not true internationalism."[77] He counseled flexibility on the issue of territorial negotiations in Laos, explaining that both Laos and Cambodia could be united with the socialist world through peaceful means. To attempt a military solution would only push their respective governments toward the US. Although he anticipated disapproval among some of the VWP leadership, Ho Chi Minh agreed with Zhou's assessment, and the VWP politburo informed Pham Van Dong in Geneva that negotiations related to Laos should seek to designate Phongsaly and Houaphanh as locations for the Pathet Lao armed forces to regroup before incorporation into the Royal Lao Army.

On July 18, two days before the end of the conference, Phoui and RLG Secretary of Defense Kou Voravong visited Zhou at his residence to discuss lingering misgivings. For several weeks, Phoui had dismissed formal RLG-Pathet Lao negotiations, telling Pham that Souvanna and Souphanouvong were brothers and could work out an agreement on their own.[78] Phoui and Kou were concerned that recognizing the Pathet Lao in a coalition government and allowing it to

[76] ZZWY, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu,* 1:394.
[77] "Main points, Zhou Enlai's presentations at the Liuzhou conference (excerpt)," July 03, 1954, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121159 WCDA.
[78] "Fan Bao Fan Wen Dong yu Laowo Waizhang Tanhua Yaodian," June 29, 1964, PRCFMA 206-00046-38.

concentrate its forces would amount to a division of the country akin to Vietnam. Zhou attempted to assuage them by saying Laos's problems could be divided into two types – external and internal. Solutions to the external problems had already presented themselves. The DRV and French forces had already agreed to withdraw, and Phoui had promised the RLG would not allow new foreign military bases to be built inside Laos. Internally, there should be mutual recognition between the Pathet Lao and the RLG. Concentrating Pathet Lao forces in Houaphanh and Phongsaly, instead of leaving them scattered across Laos, would reduce the risk of local conflicts and allow the RLG to consolidate the majority of Lao territory. He ended by reassuring the Lao delegates that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence applied to Sino-Lao relations as much as they did anywhere else in Asia.[79]

The Geneva Accords were signed on July 20 and 21. The settlement included recognition of Laos and Cambodia as independent states, the withdrawal of foreign troops from all three states in Indochina, and the partition of Vietnam until elections scheduled for 1956. It also established the International Control Commission (ICC), which was intended to be an impartial organization for monitoring the ceasefire, military neutralization, and the formation of a coalition government between the RLG and Pathet Lao. It was chaired by delegates from the non-aligned Indian government, and its members, Canada and Poland, were meant to represent the capitalist and socialist blocs, providing the ICC, in principle, with built-in neutrality.

The 1954 Geneva agreements have generally been recognized as a setback for Vietnamese communists who entered negotiations on the heels of a significant victory at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. Although they only reluctantly abandoned the immediate hope for a federation of

[79] "Minutes of conversation between Zhou Enlai and Laotian Foreign Minister Phoui Sananikone (summary)," July 18, 1954, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111067 WCDA. Note: The document in the WCDA names "Ku Keolavong" as the RLG Defense Minister. This is a mistranslation.

Indochinese communist states, Qiang Zhai is right to note that the PRC and Soviet delegations at Geneva had no reason to doubt that Vietnam would be united under the VWP within two years.[80] This, in turn, would have precipitated revolutionary victories in Laos and Cambodia. At the same time, VWP leaders, among whom Pham Van Dong was the most vocal, knew that the Pathet Lao were dependent on Vietnamese support to further build their organization. From the perspective of the Asian communist parties involved, the Geneva Agreements created a problem. On the one hand, VWP control of Vietnam felt reasonably assured, which would benefit the revolutions in Laos and Cambodia. On the other hand, the removal of VWP troops from these places was a setback for those revolutions, which still depended on VWP aid. Nonetheless, scholars of DRV history have demonstrated that the VWP attempted to take a strategy of political transition to socialism seriously after Geneva.[81] In Laos, VWP presence decreased to less than 1,000 personnel from 1954 to 1957.[82] During the same period, the CCP focused its efforts in Laos primarily on formalizing diplomatic relations and convincing Souvanna and the RLG to accept aid from neighboring socialist countries in the hope that this would make the Pathet Lao's political struggle easier. Although this new strategy put the brakes on armed conflict, it was not a move away from the core goal of socialist internationalism – creating the conditions for the possibility of national revolution abroad.

Sino-Lao Rapprochement Before the First Coalition Government

After Geneva, political instability inside Laos stalled CCP plans for international political struggle. Lao political elite were dissatisfied with concessions on Pathet Lao negotiation and

[80] Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 62.
[81] Asselin, "Choosing Peace."
[82] Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside," 162.

French military presence Phoui made at the conference. In September, an attack on Phoui's home injured Phoui and resulted in the death of Kou Voravong, his companion at Geneva. There are multiple accounts of this attack. In one, members of a small Lao independence movement, Lao Pen Lao (Laos for the Lao), contracted an assassination attempt on Phoui. On September 18, a group snuck across the Mekong River into Vientiane to attack Phoui while he was hosting a dinner. Phoui escaped the assault with minor injuries from an exploding hand grenade, but Kou was shot to death.[83] In another version, believed by Phoumi Nosavan, future US-backed strongman and close relative of Kou, Phoui ordered the attack himself to block Kou from becoming prime minister.[84] Whatever the reality, Kou had been an ardent supporter of then Prime Minster Souvanna Phouma, and his murder sent shockwaves through the RLG that resulted in Souvanna leaving office. In November 1954, Katay Don Sasorith formed a new government with Phoui as his deputy prime minister, while Souvanna was assigned minister of defense.[85]

Against the wishes of Charles Yost, US ambassador to Laos, Katay began negotiations with the Pathet Lao to establish a coalition government. Six months after the signing of the Geneva agreements, Souphanouvong and the Pathet Lao were still in control of the Phongsaly and Houaphanh, and the ICC had begun to pass resolutions urging the two sides to begin negotiations as soon as possible. Yost advised Katay to take an aggressive approach by demanding the "immediate restoration [of] royal administration in [the] two provinces" with nothing in return beyond a guarantee that there would be no reprisals over past conflicts.[86] Rejection, Yost urged, must be met with the forced occupation of both provinces by the Royal Lao Army. Katay disagreed but had his own plan for blocking the Pathet Lao from government. He continued negotiations

[83] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 87.
[84] Baird, "Elite Family Politics in Laos before 1975," 9.
[85] Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State*, 57.
[86] Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 56.

with Souphanouvong and convinced him to agree to postponing nationwide elections from August to December 1955, allowing the RLG to begin countering Pathet Lao propaganda. However, disagreements arose over which power should serve as interim administration in the two provinces, and Houaphanh and Phongsaly were excluded from elections on December 25.[87] The Pathet Lao were banned from campaigning outside their own provinces and denounced the elections as illegal. As a result, Katay's National Progressive Party and Phoui's Independent Party won twenty-seven out of thirty-seven seats in the new National Assembly.[88] Writing in 1970, Phoumi Vongvichit claimed that the whole process of negotiations with Katay was a US plot: "While launching military attacks in vain attempts to wipe out the Lao revolution, the US imperialists continue to give counsel. They permitted their running dog Katay to 'continue to sit in discussions with the Pathet Lao' to shift the attention of public opinion domestically and abroad."[89] Katay was undoubtedly an anti-communist, but Phoumi's depiction of him as a total US puppet is exaggerated. At the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia the following year, Katay continued his own path of negotiation with the socialist world.

Despite Beijing's repeated conjuring of the 'Bandung Spirit' in the late 1950s and 1960s, the event itself and the spirit it left behind were politically nebulous. For CCP leaders, Geneva was fundamentally about negotiating a ceasefire against the will of the United State so that China and the DRV could find alternative routes for socialism in Southeast Asia. Although there were disagreements among delegations on either side, the sides themselves, the capitalist and socialist worlds, were clear. Bandung was something else. Delegations from twenty-nine countries in Africa and Asia met from April 18 to 24 under the banner of peaceful coexistence to workout political

[87] Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, 27.
[88] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 88.
[89] Vongvichit, *Laowo*, 89.

agreements and build the foundations of economic and cultural exchanges. Both Koreas, South Africa, and Israel were excluded while all four nations of Indochina and three African colonies on the verge of achieving sovereignty were invited. Traditional histories of Third Worldism and the Non-Aligned Movement typically begin with the Bandung Conference, yet, as Aijaz Ahmad observes, "[n]one of the senses in which the term 'Third World' is…used…would apply to this event."[90] That is, nothing at Bandung offered a third path between the capitalist and socialist worlds. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, the divisions between participants at Bandung were so deep that the conference, nominally opposed to imperialism, could not agree on what exactly imperialism was.[91] Instead, the joint statement published at the end of the conference amounted to a muted expression of non-aggression between governments whose alignment tended to be quite clear.

During the conference Zhou and Nehru arranged a meeting between Pham Van Dong and Katay, which resulted in the Hanoi-Vientiane agreement. In it, Pham repeated assurances made at Geneva that disputes between the RLG and the Pathet Lao were questions internal to Lao affairs. He and Katay also agreed to establish good neighborly relations between Laos and the DRV.[92] On May 13, Zhou congratulated the agreement in a report to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. Because of the meeting he and Nehru brokered, Zhou recounted, Pham and Katay were able to issue a joint statement "indicating the development of relations between the two countries according to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. This statement will be effective in implementing the Geneva agreements and strengthening peace in Indochina."[93] This

[90] Ahmad, *In Theory*, 294.
[91] Chakrabarty, "Legacies of Bandung," 50.
[92] Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, 26.
[93] Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiaobu Danganguan, ed., *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiao Dangan Xuanbian (Di Er Ji): Zhongguo Daibiaotuan Chuxi 1955 Nian Ya Fei Huiyi* (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 2007), 117.

did not, however, prevent Katay from continuing to seek aid from the United States. Despite Yost's complaints to Washington that Katay was vacillating in negotiations with the Pathet Lao, US military and economic aid to Laos during 1955 totaled around $50 million – multiple times the total RLG budget. None of this could save Katay's government. His willingness to establish relations with the DRV and his stubbornness in dealings with the Pathet Lao cost him support among conservatives and left neutralists alike. With no clear lines of support, he was forced to step down from office. In March 1956, Souvanna Phouma returned to the position of prime minister.

Souvanna announced that his first priority was solving "the settlement of the Lao problem," and Souphanouvong quickly proposed resuming negotiations in Vientiane.[94] On May 28, he issued a public letter to Souvanna saying that domestic and world circumstances were right for the peaceful unification of Laos. The letter called for an official foreign policy of peaceful neutrality, which, Souphanouvong argued, would curb foreign interventions and safeguard Lao independence. A unified Laos would be able to increase its international position and receive economic development aid from many more nations.[95] This was endorsed by the Committee for the Maintenance of Peaceful and Neutral Policy organized in July by left neutralist Quinim Pholsena, vice president of the National Assembly from 1953 to 1955. Both Souvanna's appeal to help from world powers and Souphanouvong's suggestion of diversifying foreign aid included, to varying degrees, an acknowledgement that Laos would soon be open to formal relations with the PRC.

The half-brothers finally met in Vientiane for negotiations in August 1956. At the time, the PRC still had no presence in Laos. What CCP leadership understood about Laos came from the VWP or was relayed to the PRC embassy in Hanoi by the Polish and Indian delegates to the ICC.

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[94] Quoted in Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 89.
[95] "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Haozhao Laowo Renmin Zhengqu Guojia de Zhongli Minzhu he Tongyi," RMRB, July 14, 1956.

In Vientiane, Souphanouvong, Phoumi Vongvichit, and Nouhak Phongsavan represented the Pathet Lao's newly formed political party – the Neo Lao Haksat (NLHX, Lao Patriotic Front). Souvanna's RLG representatives originally included Katay, but Souphanouvong succeeded in having him replaced. After opening speeches, in which both sides made repeated reference to Zhou's Five Principles, negotiations moved quickly. RLG representatives accepted most of the NLHX's proposals but hesitated on the issue of universal suffrage, leaving it to a vote by the National Assembly. According to the Polish ICC delegation, Souvanna favored joint administration of Phongsaly and Houaphanh and hoped RLG neutralists and the NLHX could resolve their issues by the end of the conference to unite against a conservative faction forming around Katay.[96] On August 6, the RLG and NLHX issued a joint statement committing themselves to a ceasefire in the Pathet Lao-controlled provinces, the reorganization of Pathet Lao armed forces under the Royal Lao Army, and the transfer of governing authority to the RLG. Souvanna also promised the RLG would develop relations with neighboring socialist countries and began preparations for diplomatic trips to the DRV and PRC.[97]

Beijing expressed public approval for the agreements and began planning for direct consultations with the RLG under advice from the Indian ICC delegation that Souvanna's dedication to military non-alignment was firm.[98] Whatever his opposition to Katay may have been, Souvanna found himself on a plane from Hanoi to Guangzhou with Katay and twenty-eight other Lao delegates on August 19. Boun Oum, whose star would soon rise in Laos's conservative faction, also joined them; Souphanouvong does not appear in any reports from this trip. The PRC Foreign Ministry reported that officials from the DRV, India, Poland, England, and France all saw them

[96] "Guanyu Sufanufeng yu Fuma Huitan Qingkuang," August 3-6, 1956, PRCFMA 106-00176-10 (1).
[97] For more on the content of the agreements, see Thee, "Background Notes," 131–34.
[98] "Guanyu Sufanufeng yu Fuma Huitan Qingkuang," August 3-6, 1956, PRCFMA 106-00176-10 (1).

off at the airport in Vientiane. Only the US embassy refused to make an appearance. In Guangzhou, the provincial governor held a banquet at which Souvanna appeared to provincial foreign relations cadres as "calm, seasoned, self-effacing, amiable."[99] At dinner, he revealed that Laos had no industry, and he was hoping to gain assistance from the PRC in acquiring equipment for a planned sugar refinery and matchstick factory.

Discussions around Lao economic underdevelopment continued in Beijing. The delegation told Zhou and several other high-level CCP officials that Lao rice production had barely reached subsistence levels since the end of war with France. In the past, their main export commodities were timber, coffee, and benzoin resin, which they shipped to Vietnam and Cambodia as part of the French Indochinese Union. Under the new and complicated international situation in Indochina after Geneva, Thailand had become Laos's most important export market – not least because the rail line from Bangkok to Nongkhai was the only significant land route between Vientiane and any major city. Zhou offered to send an economic work group to Vientiane to advise the RLG on industrial development, but Souvanna ultimately declined, saying he preferred to send a Lao group to the PRC to study once the RLG-Pathet Lao coalition government was complete.

The CCP's efforts to set the delegations minds at ease about their socialist neighbor to the north went beyond economic aid. Lao officials were shown iron works factories in Shenyang in the hopes they would ask for more industrial aid, but the CCP also needed to overcome Lao fears about religious and ethnic minority oppression. On their first night in Beijing, they were shown the film "The Butterfly Lovers" based on a folktale originating in the Tang Dynasty, a decidedly non-revolutionary choice. The following day, they toured the Forbidden City where, Foreign Ministry reports claim, they encountered a group of minority students who softened their

[99] "Laowo Shouxiang Fuma Fang Hua Jianbao," August 16-31, 1956, PRCFMA 204-00029-02 (1).

impression of PRC policy toward its non-Han population. Similarly, the Lao group was taken on tours of Yonghe and Guangji temples to convince them of CCP support for religious freedom. The group complained that the temple tours were too long, but their guides felt the job had been done.[100]

Before leaving, they had an hour and a half long audience with Mao at Zhongnanhai.[101] Mao and Zhou both took pains to express that the PRC was not a threat to Laos. Mao told Souvanna that smaller states deserved the same respect as larger, more powerful states. The level of preparation that went into receiving previous diplomatic envoys from Cambodia and now the Lao delegation served as proof of the PRC's commitment to this idea. He drew analogy between Lao and Chinese history, citing that both had been colonized by Japan, and while Laos struggled with the continued presence of foreign military bases, Taiwan was occupied by a government supported by the United States. Mao congratulated Souvanna on the policies he and Souphanouvong had adopted and assured him that the PRC was willing to support the RLG in accordance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. He depicted a China working to build relations with its neighbors and calmly waiting for the US imperialists to come to their senses: "We are concerned with the East, not the West, because the East has Syngman Rhee, Jiang Jieshi, and Ngo Dinh Diem…We have been in discussion with the US at Panmunjeom for two years and at Geneva for one year. We trust that one day these discussions will end well; we are not worried."[102] He added that in the future, after formal relations had been established, they could enter China through

[100] For Southeast Asia scholars, it is worth mentioning that Souvanna made a few requests while in Beijing to meet with former Thai prime minister Pridi Banomyong, who was exiled in the PRC. Foreign Ministry reports confirm that the two met in Guangzhou on August 27, but they do not disclose what was discussed. "Laowo Shouxiang Fuma Fang Hua Jianbao," August 16-31, 1956, PRCFMA 204-00029-02 (1).

[101] CCP Vice Chairman Liu Shaoqi, PRC Vice Chairman Zhu De, Mayor of Beijing Peng Zhen, Minister of National Defense Peng Dehuai, Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Wentian, and writer and historian Guo Moruo were all in attendance at this meeting. ZZWYB, *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2013), 604; Tao Wenzhao, ed., *Zhong Mei Guanxi Shi (Xiuding Ben): 1949-1972*, vol. 2 (Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe, 2016), 239.

[102] Translation amended, Mao Zedong, *On Diplomacy*, 188.

Kunming, where the RLG would be allowed to build a consulate.[103] Zhou conveyed a similar message but spoke more directly on the issue of receiving aid from China and the US. "Laos is seeking international aid, so you should visit each country," he told Souvanna, "The Chinese government does not oppose you visiting the US, nor do we oppose you being friendly with them." He added a few days later that China was willing to provide economic aid to Laos in the same way it had to Cambodia, "with no political conditions attached."[104]

At the end of the visit, Chinese and Lao officials issued a joint statement written mostly by Katay.[105] The Lao politicians reaffirmed their policy of peaceful neutrality and military non-alignment and promised no foreign military bases would be built within Lao territory beyond the French bases allowed for in the Geneva agreements. The CCP pledged to respect these positions. They also promised to promote cross-border relations between Phongsaly and Yunnan provinces and to promote economic and cultural exchanges between both countries.[106] It was not, however, an unqualified success. Despite promises to build further connections, Souvanna could not be convinced to establish formal diplomatic relations. He traveled to Hanoi to sign a similar agreement with Ho Chi Minh before returning to Vientiane. Once home, he attempted to allay US fears, stating that a "Communist government will not work in Laos, and I would not be able to hold office under such a government." On the PRC and the DRV, he added, "We are not ready to establish diplomatic or economic relations with either country."[107]

In 1961, as Souvanna was on an international tour rallying support for the second Geneva conference on Laos, the PRC Foreign Ministry recalled that this visit had left them with "many

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[103] ZZWY, *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, 2:604.
[104] ZZWY, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 1:612.
[105] "Laowo Shouxiang Fuma Fang Hua Jianbao," August 16-31, 1956, PRCFMA 204-00029-02 (1).
[106] "Zhou Enlai Zongli he Laowo Shouxiang Fuma de Lianhe Shengming," August 16-31, 1956, PRCFMA 204-00029-03 (1).
[107] "The Premier of Laos Cheered at Peiping," The New York Times, September 5, 1956, 3.

doubts." Souvanna had only spoken of Sino-Lao friendship in general terms and would "not even dare to accept assistance."[108] It is true that Souvanna was reluctant to enter aid agreements, but Foreign Ministry reports from 1956 indicated that CCP officials were mostly pleased with their ability to initiate relations with the RLG. Of the 1956 delegates, Katay and Boun Oum never became advocates for PRC aid in Laos, and Souvanna only reluctantly turned to the PRC for help briefly after the fall of the first coalition government. The 1956 and 1961 Foreign Ministry accounts of this visit both reflect the CCP's geopolitical outlook at the time – warm to Souvanna when it seemed like he could be persuaded to accept PRC aid and pulled away from US and European powers, cold when it seemed like he could not. Given Souvanna's actions in the coming years, the Foreign Ministry's later, less positive assessment of the 1956 trip is probably more accurate. That is not to say, however, that the trip was a diplomatic failure. In 1956, Beijing trusted Souvanna enough to issue public statements of glowing support and open border trade between Yunnan and Pathet Lao-controlled Phongsaly, which reached 60,000 RMB before Souvanna's second removal from premiership in 1958.[109]

The Fall of the First Coalition and the End of Peaceful Coexistence

The NLHX was the Pathet Lao's official political party, but it was not the movement's leading organization. On March 22, 1955, Kaysone Phomvihane completed the assignment he was given during the voluntary dissolution of the ICP by forming the Lao People's Party. While Souphanouvong was the public face of the Pathet Lao, Kaysone and his deputy Nouhak

[108] "Cable from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, 'Regarding the Planned Discussion by Our Side during Souvanna Phouma's Upcoming Visit to China'," April 12, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120880 WCDA.
[109] "Guanyu Wo dui Laowo Tigong Jingji Yuanzhu deng de Yijian," November 20, 1960 – December 8, 1960, 106-00555-03 (01) PRCFMA.

Phoumsavan held the actual decision-making power outside of public view.[110] Although organizational development continued through RLG-Pathet Lao negotiations, the VWP raised no objection to the integration of opposing Lao military forces.[111] Coupled with the CCP's warm treatment of Souvanna, there is little reason to believe that any of these parties were not still committed to the potential of a slow, political transition to socialism in Laos. For them, the formation of the first coalition government was a major step in this direction. That government lasted for only eight months.

In January 1958, the Royal Lao Army occupied Houaphanh and Phongsaly, and the integration of Pathet Lao troops began without bloodshed. Elections were held in May for a small number of available seats in the National Assembly, and the NLHX and left neutralist party, Santiphap (Peace), won thirteen out of twenty-one open positions. Souphanouvong alone received more votes than any other single candidate. The results meant that neither the right nor left wings of government had enough members to control policy decisions. For Souvanna, these elections meant that Laos had finally met all the terms to which it had agreed at Geneva. He requested that the ICC disband and leave Laos, which it voted to do over the Polish member's objections on July 20.[112] It appeared as though a neutral Laos had finally been achieved.

However, NLHX victory was more than Washington could allow. In June, the US began promoting the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest (CDNI), a group of younger, educated public servants and military officers who were strongly anti-communist and opposed Souphanouvong.[113] Among its members was Colonel Phoumi Nosavan, a political opportunist who

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[110] Joseph J. Zasloff, *The Pathet Lao: Leadership and Organization* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 1973), 101–18; Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State*, 76.
[111] Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside," 176.
[112] Arthur J. Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 109–10.
[113] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 103.

had served the French colonial administration in the early 1940s, became a non-communist member of the Lao Issara after WWII, and rejoined the pro-French Lao National Army after 1948. His cousin, Sarit Thanarat, came to power through a military coup in Thailand in 1957 and enjoyed full US support. When the US began increasing its aid and personnel in Laos, Phoumi saw his chance.[114] Although the "hyper-nationalist, anti-communist, and strongly Buddhist" convictions of CDNI members had roots outside of US designs in Laos, the organization's limitless financial resources exposed its CIA backing.[115]

In response to the NLHX electoral victories, and despite Souvanna's multiple trips to the US to assuage fears about his political leanings, the Eisenhower administration decided to remove Souvanna from office. At the time, Laos was receiving the highest per capita influx of US aid of any country in Southeast Asia, most of which went to the Royal Lao Army.[116] Throughout 1957, the US government had been threatening to devalue the *kip*, which Souvanna opposed on the grounds that it would deepen problems with inflation and reduce US aid in dollars. He was able to postpone negotiations on the issue through elections, but in June the US withheld its monthly aid disbursement and caused a financial crisis that convinced many of Souvanna's subordinates he had lost Washington's favor. Souvanna was forced out of office on July 22, 1958, and Phoui Sananikone was selected to form a new government. From Hanoi, the PRC embassy reported that the US was done with both Katay and Phoui and was hoping for a new group to take control of Lao civilian politics and the military.[117] By December, Phoui had declared a state of emergency

[114] Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*.
[115] CDNI founder, Oudone Sananikone openly acknowledged CIA support. Ryan Wolfson-Ford, "Ideology in the Royal Lao Government-Era (1945-1975): A Thematic Approach" (Dissertation, Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018), 200.
[116] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 104.
[117] "Wo zhu Yuenan Shiguan Guanyu Laowo Zhengju Qingkuang de Zhuanti Baogao," August 15, 1958 – November 4, 1958, PRCFMA 106-00416-04 (1).

and given three new ministerial positions to the CDNI; most notable was Phoumi Nosavan's appointment as minister of defense.

The RLG shift to the right was sudden. In January 1959, the Lao ambassador to Thailand made public statements that Laos would be willing to accept aid from Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and that it was firmly under that organization's military protection.[118] On February 11, Phoui set the terms of the major diplomatic debate surrounding the Lao question by announcing that, despite having removed all NLHX representatives from the National Assembly, the RLG had successfully fulfilled the commitments it had made to reconciliation in the Geneva agreements. Laos was no longer bound to its previous promise of neutrality. Vientiane was now able to receive economic and military aid from whomever it wished.

Beijing's response was to use its role as participant in the Geneva conference to demand the restoration of the ICC on two grounds. First, the removal of NLHX representatives from parliament meant that a coalition government had yet to be realized, and second, that US military presence in Laos violated the commitments to neutrality in the Geneva agreements. Prior to the ICC's dismissal, Chinese domestic and foreign language press were already printing reports of US military personnel and equipment entering Vientiane while denying Phoui's counter claim of DRV troops entering Sam Neua.[119] PRC Foreign Minister Chen Yi, who replaced Zhou Enlai in that position in 1958, issued a statement condemning Phoui's dismissal of the ICC as a "grave act of unscrupulous violation of the Geneva Agreements" and joined the Soviet Union's call for its restoration.[120] In mid-March, the People's Daily ran commentaries on the situation in Laos which reported that US aid was being funneled to remnants of the Guomindang army who had fled to the

[118] "Safeguard the Geneva Agreements! Defend Peace in Indo-China!" Peking Review, March 17, 1959, 6.
[119] "U.S. Military Intervention in Laos," Peking Review, February 10, 1959, 16
[120] "Foreign Minister Chen Yi's Statement," Peking Review, February 24, 1959, 22.

border area between Thailand, Laos, and Burma in the wake of the Chinese civil war. The claim was that these groups were being armed for the purposes of creating conflict along the border with Yunnan, allowing US forces to fly low-altitude reconnaissance missions into southern China. The Chinese press also supported Souphanouvong's assertion that the CDNI was created specifically for the suppression of the Pathet Lao and that the RLG was currently conducting the "wanton slaughter and arrests of such patriots."[121] While the Phoui government argued that calls to restore the ICC constituted foreign interference in Lao affairs, China denied interference of any kind. "It is only natural that as a signatory to the Geneva agreements and a neighbor of Laos, the Chinese people are particularly interested in peace in Indochina," ran an article in Peking Review, accusations of interference "cannot but arouse the indignation of the Chinese people…[who] can never allow the U.S. to sabotage implementation of the Geneva agreements and carry out its schemes of spreading aggression."[122]

Although hopeful of eventual revolution in Laos, Chinese officials continued to work largely through diplomatic channels to restore the ICC and, thereby, formal neutrality. The PRC ambassador to Britain, Huan Xiang, sent frequent reports to the Foreign Ministry attempting to read British interpretations of the Lao situation off the British press. He reported in May that Britain seemed satisfied to allow the right-wing government to consolidate power. The CDNI takeover had not compromised the Geneva agreements, and Britain would likely only support restoring the ICC if Pathet Lao forces could not be integrated into the Royal Lao Army.[123] The PRC embassy in Moscow kept similarly close watch on the Soviet press. In general, the embassy

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[121] "Tense Situation in Laos," Peking Review, March 17, 1959, 8; Phoumi Vongvichit would later claim that US-backed forces in Laos killed over 1,000 "patriots" from the end of 1954 to the beginning of 1957, Vongvichit, *Laowo*, 90.
[122] "The International Commission in Laos," Peking Review, March 31, 1959.
[123] "Yingguo dui Laowo Jushi de Taidu he Fanying deng," May 20, 1959 – September 13, 1959, 106-00485-22 (1) PRCFMA.

found, the tone of Soviet reporting on the Lao situation was "essentially identical" to that of the PRC and the DRV even if news related to Laos was not given a prominent position within the papers themselves.[124]

In June, officials from the PRC, DRV, and Polish embassies in Moscow met with Georgy Pushkin to receive information on talks between Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd. Both were attending a two-month long conference of foreign ministers in Geneva convened to settle issues regarding tensions in Berlin. Gromyko met with Lloyd outside formal proceedings to try to convince him that the cochairs should send a joint statement to the RLG asking it to uphold the 1954 agreements and that US operations in Laos constituted interference. Lloyd, however, refused, stating that the current problem in Laos had been caused by Pathet Lao and DRV propaganda. He agreed with Phoui that restoring the ICC would be interfering in Lao domestic affairs. The following month, PRC ambassador to the Soviet Union, Liu Xiao, met with Gromyko directly only to discover that while the Soviet official felt that there had been a definite relaxation in the international situation, the Lao question had been pushed aside for the sake of settling conflicts in Europe.[125]

The British and Soviet ministers met again before the end of the conference to talk about Laos, but this time from the opposite yet equally unfruitful position. The British government took seriously Phoui's accusation that DRV troops had crossed the border to aid the Pathet Lao, and, true to Huan Xiang's prediction, they were willing to involve themselves in Laos over the matter. Lloyd came to request that the Soviet Union formally ask the DRV to stop supporting the Pathet Lao's armed struggle. Gromyko responded that he had been refused earlier when he asked for

[124] Sulian Guanyuan ji Baokan Tan Laowo Wenti," June 12, 1959 – November 23, 1959, 109-01932-01 (1) PRCFMA.
[125] "Rineiwa Waizhang Huiyi Qingkuang," June 22, 1959 – August 6, 1959, 110-00849-03 (1) PRCFMA.

British support to end US interference in Laos because US aid to the RLG was a Lao domestic issue. That Lloyd would now ask him to agree that DRV aid to the Pathet Lao was foreign interference was surprising. He rejected Lloyd's request. According to PRC Foreign Ministry reports, the ministers discussed the Lao question only once more when Lloyd found Gromyko to tell him that growing tensions in Indochina were making Britain and the US "nervous."[126]

The diplomatic stalemate lasted through the end of 1959. By August, the British had joined the RLG in suggesting the UN organize an observation team to send to Phongsaly and Houaphanh, but the PRC, DRV, and the Pathet Lao rejected this plan on the grounds that the PRC and DRV had no UN representation. The issue, they argued, should be decided between the original signatories of the 1954 agreement. According to PRC intelligence, London believed the RLG was fighting a losing battle against the Pathet Lao, and the best solution for both Britain and France would be to allow the stalemate to drag out as long as possible hoping for a break between the socialist countries involved. When RLG foreign minister and leading member of the CDNI, Khamphan Panya, travelled to London in September, he and Lloyd agreed that while both sides were certain the Pathet Lao were supported by the VWP, they had no evidence to prove it. Worse, both agreed that the Soviet Union's veto power on the Security Council made requests for UN investigative operations futile. Lloyd promised that Britain would militarily support the US and SEATO if no other option were left available, but Khamphan was even less eager to escalate the conflict. Should the Pathet Lao grow to control all of Phongsaly and Houaphanh provinces, he requested that the Geneva cochairs mediate whatever solution they saw fit.[127]

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[126] "Sulian Guanyuan ji Baokan Tan Laowo Wenti," June 12, 1959 – November 23, 1959, 109-01932-01 (1) PRCFMA.
[127] "Yingguo dui Laowo Jushi de Taidu he Fanying deng," May 20, 1959 – September 13, 1959, 106-00485-22 (1) PRCFMA.

In late September 1959, Kaysone Phomvihane travelled with Khamtay Siphandone, director of propaganda and Pathet Lao military training for the Lao People's Party, to meet with Mao in Beijing during the tenth anniversary of the PRC's National Day. Given that the Lao People's Party remained a clandestine organization behind the NLHX, their visit received less fanfare than Souvanna's 1956 trip but also more straightforward discussion of the actual task at hand in Laos – national revolution. "Political struggle is winding and complicated," Mao told them. He assured them that the right-wing takeover that brought down the first coalition government was evidence of the strength of revolutionary forces at the time. Phoui and the US had acted out of fear of that strength. Although the Pathet Lao was currently on the defensive, Mao believed the guiding principles of their struggle would endure. "The final victory is yours," he said, "but you still have many difficulties in this stage."[128] Indeed, their difficulties increased when it was announced that the RLG would be trying Souphanouvong and other arrested NLHX leaders for "conspiring against the nation."[129] Chen Yi sent a letter of protest to Gromyko and Lloyd asserting that these actions would inevitably lead to civil war, but nothing changed. Britain maintained that it could not restore the ICC unless the RLG wished it, and, in any case, a UN investigative operation would do nothing to violate the Geneva agreements.[130]

Although the situation continued to worsen, the Soviets believed the Pathet Lao did not want a civil war. According to the Soviet assessment, the Pathet Lao hoped to force Phoui into a neutralist position and to reinstate the NLHX's political rights.[131] As war seemed ever more inevitable, China kept its distance, preferring to advise and watch from the sidelines. In January,

[128] ZZWY, *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2013), 201.
[129] "Foreign Minister Chen Yi's Letter on Laotian Situation," Peking Review, November 3, 1959, 25.
[130] "Sulian Guanyuan ji Baokan Tan Laowo Wenti," June 12, 1959 – November 23, 1959, 109-01932-01 (1) PRCFMA.
[131] "Sulian Guanyuan ji Baokan Tan Laowo Wenti," June 12, 1959 – November 23, 1959, 109-01932-01 (1) PRCFMA.

Chen Yi informed the Soviet ambassador to the PRC, Stepan Chervonenko, that China and the DRV were not "meddling in the Lao question." The CCP had already told Pathet Lao representatives that "the Lao struggle depends entirely on themselves…China and Vietnam can only aid them politically and sympathize spiritually; everything depends on their own struggle against the reactionaries." Earlier, when fighting had forced Pathet Lao guerillas to cross the border into China, PRC authorities removed their weapons and provided them accommodations. No other types of aid were given. Nonetheless, in anticipation of the Lao conflict expanding into a regional war, the PRC and DRV had both begun military preparations at their borders.[132]

Conclusion

The 1958 removal of Souvanna as prime minister marked the end of CCP and VWP efforts toward a political transition to socialism in Laos and destroyed any willingness to entertain peaceful coexistence. It rocketed Laos to the forefront of the world's attention at a time when PRC foreign policy was already going through significant transition. If nothing else, Souvanna's neutrality was useful for keeping Lao politics in a holding position while the Pathet Lao grew its popular support. His removal from office in July 1958 helped prove the impossibility of peaceful coexistence to CCP leaders only one month before the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis and the launch of the Great Leap Forward, both key events in the longer history of the Sino-Soviet split.[133] The rise and fall of the first coalition government also coincided with VWP rethinking of its policies toward South Vietnam. In January 1959, the VWP adopted "Resolution 15," a decision Pierre Asselin called "the most meaningful revision of strategic policy since September 1954."[134] In light

[132] "Chen Yi Fuzongli Jiejian Sulian zhu Hua Dashi Qierwonianke de Tanhua Jilu," January 22, 1960, 109-00934-01 (1) PRCFMA.
[133] Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 80.
[134] Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965*, 53.

of South Vietnam's refusal to abide by the Geneva agreements and backed by the CCP's renewed militancy, the resolution called for a consolidation of socialism in the north and resumption of armed insurrection in the south. It would be an obvious overreach to claim that the overthrow of Souvanna's government caused these events in the PRC and DRV, but the timing cannot be ignored. During a moment when the Pathet Lao's main external supporters were doubting the utility of a strategy based solely on political struggle, the US took actions that confirmed their doubts. The only way forward was armed conflict.

For the CCP, the limits to which it could support this conflict were both geopolitical and normative. Sending PLA troops into Phongsaly and Houaphanh to fight the Pathet Lao's war for them would spread the Lao civil war into China. On the other hand, as CCP officials would stress many times in the coming years, it would prevent the Pathet Lao from mobilizing the masses and giving the social revolution meaning. Although the CCP did not express it at the time, VWP violation of this principle in Laos before 1954 had already resulted in a movement that many Lao people understood as foreign and not their own, weakening their negotiating position at Geneva. This would become an explicit point of disagreement between the Chinese and Vietnamese parties leading into negotiations at Geneva in 1961-1962. As with Engels in 1882, the CCP opposed any outside party forcing the blessing of revolution onto Laos. Such were the limits of intervention under socialist internationalism.

CHAPTER TWO

ACCIDENTS OF REVOLUTION: KONG LE AND THE RESUMPTION OF ARMED STRUGGLE

World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favorable chances. It would on the other hand be of a very mystical nature, if 'accidents' played no part. These accidents naturally form part of the general course of development and are compensated by other accidents. But acceleration and delay are very much dependent upon such 'accidents,' including the 'accident' of the people who first head the movement.

Marx to Kugelmann, April 17, 1871[1]

The Chinese Communist Party was in severe crisis in October 1928. Surrounded by the Guomindang's superior military force and still reeling from the shock and bloodshed of the White Terror in April 1927, the CCP had taken refuge in the Hunan Jiangxi Border Area. There Mao posed the question, "Why is it that Red political power can exist in China?"[2] His answer, according to Wang Hui, was an extrapolation of the Marxist-Leninist concept of the weakest link from international to domestic terrain.[3] Mao argued that the CCP was able to exist in China, first, because it was an "economically backward" semi-colony under "indirect imperialist rule."[4] The indirectness of imperialist rule left room for powers outside the CCP to battle one another for control. Seeking vainly to build durable coalitions for civil or military government, cliques within the Guomindang faced one another as regularly or perhaps more often than they faced the CCP.[5] Mao's point is basically a counterfactual. If China was a formal colony, he reasoned, then opposition to the CCP would be better organized under a colonial administration. In other words,

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[1] Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 264.
[2] Mao Zedong, "Why Is It That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?," vol. 1 (New York: Pergamon Press, 1965), 63–72.
[3] Wang Hui, "Twentieth Century China as an Object of Thought, Part 1," 35.
[4] Mao Zedong, "Red Political Power," 65.
[5] Brian G. Martin, "The Green Gang and the Guomindang State: Du Yuesheng and the Politics of Shanghai," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 1 (February 1995): 64–92.

he believed the absence of formal colonization was a pre-condition for the factionalism that haunted the Guomindang – the challenge to Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai-shek) authority presented by Wang Jingwei's left-wing faction, cliques among provincial warlords, and so on.[6] Whether Mao's counterfactual was correct or whether such in-fighting was a legacy of Sun Yat-sen's leadership, it remains the case that there was no force outside China making a serious attempt to settle Guomindang rivalries. This incessant conflict internal to China's rightwing powers allowed the CCP to carve a place for itself while its enemies struggled to maintain coalitions within their own organization. Such a situation, Mao argued, was unthinkable within capitalist imperialist countries or colonies under their direct rule.

Two interrelated phenomena made this possible. On the one hand, China was predominately a "localized agricultural economy," not a unified, industrialized capitalist economy.[7] On the other hand, imperialist powers in China had a policy of "marking off spheres of influence in order to divide and exploit."[8] Mao's claim here is one-sided in terms of Guomindang and warlord agency, but it is important. One example of imperialist political intervention can be found in the December 1926 attempt by British anti-Guomindang authorities to support a 'Southern Expedition' by the northern warlord Fengtian regime. Out of self-preservation, the Guomindang was forced to walk a tight rope of supporting popular anti-imperialist demonstrations to temper British plans while seeking international recognition from the very powers against whom Chinese people were protesting, including the British themselves.[9] Thus, British intervention exacerbated factionalism and revealed the Guomindang leaders' cynical, instrumentalist view of

[6] For more on the problems these factions presented for the Guomindang, see Brian Tsui, *China's Conservative Revolution: The Quest for a New Order, 1927-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 68–69.
[7] Mao Zedong, "Red Political Power," 65.
[8] Mao Zedong, 65.
[9] Michael G. Murdock, "Exploiting Anti-Imperialism: Popular Forces and Nation-State-Building during China's Northern Expedition, 1926-1927," *Modern China* 35, no. 1 (January 2009): 81–88.

popular anti-imperialism. In other cases, popular movements called for further foreign intervention as a tactic for opposing certain warlord regimes[10] During the May Fourth Movement, some warlords even incorporated themselves into broad based anti-Japanese nationalist, if not entirely progressive, platforms.[11] The point is that the potential for foreign support from imperialist powers endlessly complicated political relationships among China's right-wing powers, GMD and provincial warlords alike. As Zarrow notes in his history of the Chinese revolution, CCP rural base areas emerged after the White Terror in the literal geographic interstices between these groups.[12] While Mao's point about imperialists creating spheres of influence removes important examples of warlord and Guomindang agency, it is correct insofar as it highlights the role imperialist powers played in preventing the emergence of a single hegemonic power among these groups.

Second, within this chaotic environment, the centers of CCP power were those places where workers, peasants, and soldiers already had experience with mobilization and political organizing. The survival of these centers depended, third, on the continuing dynamism of the revolutionary situation, the prevention of a CCP-Guomindang stalemate. This dynamism came in part from small victories against the Guomindang, but, crucially, it also came from the constantly shifting power struggles with the Guomindang itself. CCP power depended in a significant way upon the contingencies of Guomindang internal conflicts for survival. Fourth, despite the setbacks of the White Terror, the Red Army still existed in some areas and could protect the peasant mobilization campaigns being carried out by CCP cadres. The continuation of this situation,

[10] Edward A. McCord, "Synarchy and the Chinese People: A Plea for Internationalization in Warlord China," *Modern China* 39, no. 5 (September 2013): 475–510.
[11] Zhongping Chen, "The May Fourth Movement and Provincial Warlords: A Reexamination," *Modern China* 37, no. 2 (March 2011): 135–69.
[12] Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 275.

however, depended as much on Guomindang disorder as it did CCP discipline. If CCP organization weakened, Mao reckoned, Red power would disappear.

Prior to the Geneva conference on Lao neutrality from May 1961 to July 1962, events transpired in Laos that brought it largely in line with Mao's analysis of the relationship between indirect imperialism and the conditions for the possibility of revolution. Internal conflicts among pro-Western Lao factions, local strongmen vying for US sponsorship, lingering elements of Pathet Lao control in Houaphanh, and a steadily growing Pathet Lao military force characterized the years between the first and second coalition governments. However, it was by no act of any socialist group in Laos that the revolution was able to continue past Souvanna's ouster in 1958. In this chapter, I argue that the renewed dynamism of the Lao revolution after the failed experiment with a solely political transition came, from the perspective of the communist parties involved, by accident.[13] That accident was a neutralist coup d'état from a military leader few had heard of before August 1960, Captain Kong Le.

Planned outside the knowledge of the Pathet Lao or rightwing groups, Kong Le's coup briefly restabilized the a government with Souvanna as prime minsiter, creating a situation that was, if nothing else, more favorable than conditions under Phoui Sananikone's government. However, as Marx notes above, the time and pace of revolution are variable. Such accidents are often compensated for by further accidents, accelerating, in the Lao case, the delay of a stagnant revolutionary movement. The compensating accident was Phoumi Nosavan's countercoup in December 1960, which created a temporary but crucial alliance between the Pathet Lao and

[13] It was, of course, not an accident from the perspective of the actors involved in the coup and those who helped plan it. Exactly who helped plan it, however, remains a matter of some controversy. Sidwell provides some evidence that French intelligence officer Jean Deuve may have helped plan the coup, Sophie Sidwell, "A New Interpretation of Kong Le's Coup in Laos, August 1960," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 35, no. 1 (March 2020): 5–6. Dommen strongly suggests it was planned by Phoumi Nosavan. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience*, 389. Jacobs argues that while Kong Le convinced US advisors to help him plan a hypothetical siege of Vientiane, it was Kong Le himself who was behind the events. Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 156.

neutralist forces and allowed the CCP and VWP to begin advocating the necessity of armed revolution to a broader audience. Judged by socialist internationalism's commitment to limited intervention and the normative significance of national revolution, the changes that occurred across the broad spectrum of Sino-Lao relations were one of tactics. For the CCP, the turn to armed struggle did not, in itself, represent an abandonment of overall commitments to creating the possibility for national revolution in Laos. Considering the history of PRC aid to Korea and Vietnam in the early 1950s, it was a return to form.

The Kong Le Coup and the Fight to Control Souvanna

For all their efforts, PRC, DRV, and Soviet international diplomacy did nothing to change the situation in Laos after Souvanna Phouma's removal as prime minister in July 1958.[14] Between Souvanna's ouster and August 1960, a succession of right-wing, anti-communist governments in Vientiane were led by Phoui Sananikone, Kou Abhay, and Prince Somsanith Vongkotrattana. In May 1959, despite orders from Souphanouvong to proceed with the military integration called for in the first coalition government agreements, the Pathet Lao battalion stationed on the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khouang Province failed to appear. Instead, they took flight toward Houaphanh. The other battalion, stationed near Luang Prabang, also fled. In July, the RLG retaliated by arresting Souphanouvong and fifteen other members of the NLHX, including Nouhak Phoumsavan, Phoumi

[14] All three foreign ministries made efforts to coordinate official statements as well as newspaper editorials on fraudulent elections in Laos and calling for the ICC to return to restore the Souvanna government. "Guanyu Peihe Sulian, Yuenan jiu Laowo Daxuan Wenti Kaizhan Douzheng de Baogao," March 9, 1960, 106-00155-02 (1) PRCFMA. In China, Xinhua News Agency frequently reprinted NLHX statements written by Kaysone Phomvihane. "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Zhongyang Fuzhuxi Kaishan zhi Zhou Enlai Zongli Liang feng Xin," March 24, 1960 – July 7, 1960, 106-00275-01 (1) PRCFMA. Reflecting the emerging Sino-Soviet split, however, there were also competitive attempts to highlight the problem of US imperialism in Indochina at five-year anniversary celebrations of the Bandung Conference in Moscow and Beijing. "Sulian Jinian Wanglong Huiyi 5 Zhounian Qingkuang ji Wo Fang Taidu (dui Dongnanya Tiaoyue Zuzhi Waizhang Huiyi de Kanfa deng)," March 16, 1960 – June 9, 1960, 109-02099-02 (1) PRCFMA.

Vongvichit, Phoun Sipraseuth, Sithon Kommadam, and Singkapo Sikhotchounnamali.[15] They were held in the village of Phonkheng in recently repurposed horse stables surrounded by barbed wire and spotlights.[16] Open fighting between the Pathet Lao and the RLG quickly resumed.

On April 24, 1960, the RLG held blatantly fraudulent elections in which right-wing CDNI candidates received more votes than the total number of registered voters.[17] Somsanith assumed the role of prime minister, but real power remained in the hands of CDNI members Phoumi Nosavan, minister of defense, and Khamphan Panya, minister of foreign affairs.[18] Both men were committed to maintaining close alliances with the US and Thailand, their sources of financial and military support. Their plan was to cement this commitment through public trials of the arrested NLHX leaders. Trials, however, were continually postponed due to disagreements within the RLG and a wave of anti-corruption and anti-US protests in Vientiane. In May, after ten months of imprisonment, Souphanouvong, Nouhak, and their comrades escaped from Phonkheng dressed in Royal Lao Army uniforms and aided by prison guards loyal to the NLHX. After a brief stop at a Pathet Lao base area in Vientiane Province, the group began a 500-kilometer trek to Sam Neua along a path planned by Kaysone.[19] Their journey has gained mythic status in official histories emphasizing patriotism and the oppression of US and right-wing Lao forces, a king of Lao Long March.

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[15] Hugh Toye says there were fifteen total arrested. Hugh Toye, *Laos: Buffer State or Battleground* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 125; Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience*, 378. Oliver Tappe says lists sixteen. Oliver Tappe, "The Escape from Phonkheng Prison: Revolutionary Historiography in the Lao PDR," in *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Lao Studies*, ed. Karen L. Adams and Thomas J. Hudak (Tempe, AZ: Southeast Asia Council, Arizona State University, 2010), 241.
[16] Tappe, "The Escape from Phonkheng Prison," 241.
[17] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 111.
[18] Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos: The Land in Between* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 115.
[19] There are conflicting accounts of the details of this escape. What I recount here is a less sensationalized version of the official account. For more, see Tappe, "The Escape from Phonkheng Prison."

Although the VWP reinvested organizational resources toward building a Pathet Lao fighting force, no Asian communist party inside or outside Laos seemed able to halt the rightward movement in Vientiane. Change in Laos came instead in the form of yet another coup d'état, this time conducted by the 26-year-old captain of the Royal Lao Army's Second Paratrooper Battalion, Kong Le. On the morning of August 9, 1960, while most RLG cabinet members were in Luang Prabang to discuss funeral arrangements for the late King Sisavang Vong, Kong Le's forces captured the city of Vientiane and the nearby Chinaimo military base in a near bloodless operation.[20] At a rally later that day, Kong Le announced that there must be an end to "Lao fighting Lao" and a return to genuine neutrality. He told the crowd that he had carried out this "revolution" in order to end the civil war, fight corruption among civil servants and military officers, and "chase away foreign armed forces as soon as possible."[21] Stuart-Fox observes that this event has played a relatively minor part in the periodization of Lao historiography compared to the 1954 and 1962 Geneva conferences.[22] This observation remains correct and highlights historians' continued lack of information on the causes of the coup as well as the chance at new life it offered international communist efforts in Laos.

Accounts of Kong Le's actions generally focus on widespread anger in Vientiane toward the RLG's deep dependence on and squandering of foreign aid. His politics, however, are more difficult to parse. His paratrooper battalion served under Phoumi, with whom Kong Le was rumored to be very close. Dommen suggests that the coup could have been planned by Phoumi himself in an effort to remove French, not US, troops following aid disputes. The argument is that

[20] Sisouk Na Champassak, *Storm over Laos: A Contemporary History* (New York: Praeger, 1961), 154–56; Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 156–57.
[21] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 112.
[22] Martin Stuart-Fox, "On the Writing of Lao History: Continuities and Discontinuities," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 24, no. 1 (March 1993): 118.

Kong Le may have been Phoumi's puppet in a political maneuver gone wrong. This is partially supported by Kong Le's initial attempt to recruit Phoumi collaborator Prince Boun Oum to serve as prime minister in the new government.[23] Boun Oum refused, reportedly telling Kong Le, "You have rolled in shit and still smell of it."[24] Two days later, on August 11, left neutralist Quinim Pholsena suggested that Kong Le approach Souvanna Phouma about the position.[25] Kong Le's willingness to listen to Quinim partially supports Sidwell's argument that the coup was rooted in a genuine belief in Buddhist-inspired neutralist ideologies popularized in part by Quinim's Peace Party.[26] Evidence from PRC archives, although not definitive, also supports this argument.

In 1964, Deuane Sounnarath, previously a lieutenant under Kong Le, gave officials in the Guangxi Provincial Foreign Affairs Department a brief account of events leading up to the coup. According to Deuane, Kong Le commanded a force of less than one thousand, many of whom received US-financed training in Thailand or the Philippines.[27] Upon return to Laos, they were placed "directly under US command" and used to conduct "operations to suppress the people." Many of the officers voiced criticism about their orders but no clear answers about who to blame or what to do emerged until a meeting was held in Attapeu, Laos's southernmost province. Deuane recalled that all in attendance wanted to break away from US control but mentions no specific plans. His account of the coup itself is vague:

> After we returned from Attapeu to Vientiane in 1960, we stopped for rest and reorganization. The US imperialists and Phoumi issued orders to perform a mission on August 9. I was in command of two units. On August 8, Kong Le also issued orders to prepare for a military coup d'état according to the plan. At the time, we had seven or eight hundred people. We took advantage of their [NZ: the RLG, presumably] guard being down to conduct our mission. We began on August 9 at 3:00AM, and the coup was victorious.

[23] Na Champassak, *Storm over Laos*, 157.
[24] Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience*, 389.
[25] In an older work, Dommen speculates that Quinim was the only civilian Kong Le's Coup Committee trusted with their plans. Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 145.
[26] Sidwell, "A New Interpretation of Kong Le's Coup." Jacobs agrees that a real commitment to neutrality is the simplest explanation for Kong Le's actions. Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 156.
[27] Stuart-Fox confirms this much. Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary*, 167.

> We controlled the major offices, captured the Ministry of Defense, and arrested top-ranking military officers. After the mission was complete, we announced our demands for neutralist policies and the cooperation of the people.[28]

It seems from Deuane's account that the coup was planned well in advance by military officers sympathetic to the neutralist politics swirling around Laos's literate social strata at the time. It also bears mentioning that, by 1964, Deuane and Kong Le were on opposite sides of the Lao civil war, the former aligning himself with the Pathet Lao. If Deuane had information on any pro-US, rightwing origins of the coup, he would likely have included it in his report to the CCP, then a major source of aid to Deuane's Patriotic Neutralist forces and the Pathet Lao. Whatever Kong Le's personal motivations, his neutralist demands and reinstatement of Souvanna received the support of thousands in Vientiane and opened a new path for the Pathet Lao who finally made contact on August 13 to suggest cooperation.[29]

The coup was a welcome surprise to the Pathet Lao, VWP, and CCP alike. The PRC Foreign Ministry drafted a hasty letter of congratulations to Souvanna in Zhou Enlai's name, and the People's Daily reprinted an NLHX statement claiming that Kong Le's coup was proof that the organization's leadership in the struggle against the US had awoken the national spirit among all classes of Lao society, "even officers and rank-and-file soldiers in the Royal Lao Army."[30] In internal documents, the LPP Central Committee praised the coup as a "great victory for creating the conditions to expand the anti-US national united front and developing Lao revolutionary forces."[31] Returned once again to the head of government, Souvanna announced that he would continue to pursue his earlier policies of neutrality and negotiating the formation of another

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[28] "Dun Shangjiao Jieshao Laowo Qingkuang Jianbao," February 2, 1964, X1-35-116, 127-139 GZARA.
[29] "Dun Shangjiao Jieshao Laowo Qingkuang Jianbao," February 2, 1964, X1-35-116, 127-139 GZARA.
[30] "Zhou Enlai Zongli Dianhe Laowo Xinren Shouxiang ji Duifang Fudian (Zhongwen, Fawen)," August 17, 1960, 117-00594-06 PRCFMA; "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Shengming Zhichi Geming Weiyuanhui Zhuyao Zhengce," RMRB, August 13, 1960.
[31] ZZDLYE, *Laowo Renmin Geming Dang Lijie Zhongyang Quanhui Wenjian Huibian* (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Duiwai Lianluobu Yazhou Erzu, 1975), 72.

coalition government with the NLHX. Souphanouvong responded with a public letter of support, saying that the NLHX was ready for negotiations "at any time."[32] Meanwhile, the PRC foreign affairs apparatus scrambled to understand what had happened. From Hanoi, the embassy telegraphed Beijing a top-secret report saying that "the character of the coup is progressive…Although the coup was launched by middle and low-ranking officers in the Royal Lao Army and pro-French forces also had a hand in it, it has gained the support of the Pathet Lao, the Committee for Peaceful Neutrality, and numerous Lao people." The nature of Kong Le's policies and the support he received from the people of Vientiane led the PRC Foreign Ministry to determine the coup "belongs to the category of national, democratic movements."[33]

This interest in Kong Le, however, did not extend to Souvanna, who, in late August, traveled to Savannakhet to meet with Phoumi and ask him to rejoin the government in Vientiane. The two agreed that Souvanna's current position was unconstitutional and that Kong Le should be returned to his original post to await judgement by parliament. Further, according to Chinese reports from Hanoi, both agreed that fault for the current civil war lay with the Pathet Lao alone. Kong Le, on the other hand, had quickly become close with the Pathet Lao, giving them weapons and allowing them to station a battalion of five hundred troops outside Vientiane. His passionate call for neutrality could serve the longer-term goal of socialist revolution, because, DRV officials told Chinese diplomats, in Laos, "the reactionary forces admittedly should not be underestimated, but the dominant actions are still those of foreign forces."[34] Thus, a stronger united front around nationalist sentiment could help keep Laos neutral while the Pathet Lao prepared for revolution.

[32] "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Zhuxi Sufanufeng Qinwang Fasheng Shengming," RMRB, August 25, 1960.
[33] "1960 Nian Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," August 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.
[34] "1960 Nian Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," August 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.

The LPP Central Committee's evaluation of the post-coup revolutionary situation identified three distinct powers. First, the "people's forces" consisted of the NLHX, Kong Le's Coup Committee, and *Santiphap Pen Kang* (Peace Through Neutrality) led by Quinim.[35] The Central Committee believed that this alliance could be used to reach every stratum of Lao society, including the Buddhist Sangha and military personnel. Although this new united front had increased the Pathet Lao's military strength, the Central Committee noted several weaknesses with their own operations. The mass movement remained shallow, with loose organizational discipline. The number of cadres was lacking, and those that were available were neither firm in their political positions nor experienced. The development of Pathet Lao armed forces had far outpaced the development of their "political qualities," and party organizations within the military struggled for control. The Central Committee feared that "the party's organizational and leadership capacity cannot meet the demands of developments in the people's movement."[36] In other words, the emergence of a broad nationalist movement was certain, but, as in earlier Marxist-Leninist thought, its political direction was ambiguous and malleable. From the LPP's perspective, the danger was that it lacked the capacity to transform this movement into a class-oriented revolution. Nationalist sentiment could, at any point, be harnessed by the second power in Laos.

This second power was the "capitalist and feudalist classes," including high-level civil servants and pro-French intellectuals with some sense of nationalist consciousness.[37] The most significant figure in this group was Souvanna himself, but also several smaller neutralist factions whose politics were "wavering and indeterminate."[38] This was the reformist bourgeoisie Lenin and M. N. Roy delineated in opposition to revolutionary nationalist movements in 1920. The CCP

[35] ZZDLYE, *Laowo Renmin Geming Dang*, 74.
[36] ZZDLYE, 74.
[37] ZZDLYE, 75.
[38] ZZDLYE, 75.

itself had long warned that these elites were only reliable in a national liberation movement when foreign domination jeopardized their own political power.[39] What was not acknowledged in LPP reflections on Souvanna's vacillations, however, was that the US and communist parties involved were actively preventing the possibility non-alignment.[40]

Kaysone and other Central Committee members saw Souvanna as ultimately inclined toward Western powers but vacillating between France and the US. His goal in negotiations with the Pathet Lao was to obstruct their movement and, abetted by the US, use peaceful methods to eliminate them. Souvanna, despite his conflicts with Phoumi, was always more likely to align with pro-US forces than with the Pathet Lao. On the matter of Souvanna's "essential duplicity," the LPP, VWP, and CCP were in total agreement.[41] Given the LPP's assessment of its own weaknesses, Kaysone and his international allies agreed that the best hope was to combine nationalist pleas with military strength to compete with the West for Souvanna's ultimately ephemeral loyalty, forcing him into alignment with the socialist bloc. The final power was, of course, the pro-US 'feudal forces' and comprador bourgeoisie led by Phoumi and Boun Oum, whom the LPP wrongly believed were now isolated and weak in Savannakhet.

Conditions in Vientiane deteriorated quickly. In Thailand, Sarit Thanarat, Phoumi's cousin, instituted a blockade on goods crossing the Mekong River into the Lao capital. Within weeks, Souvanna's new government found itself forced to take a circuitous path in search of aid from the socialist world.[42] In early September, the Soviet charge d'affaires in Beijing, Nikolai Sudarikov,

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[39] Liu Shaoqi, "Internationalism and Nationalism," 1952, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/liu-shaoqi/1952/internationalism_nationalism/index.htm.
[40] Bruce Lockhart argues that the high level of US intervention in Lao politics, coupled with Souvanna's inability to build enough personal political support, was a key element in preventing the possibility of non-alignment. The CCP, VWP, and LPP were equally involved in actively blocking such a possibility. Lockhart, "The Fate of Neutralism," 206, 210.
[41] 1960 Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi), November 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.
[42] Tarling, *Neutralisation of Laos*, 36.

approached Deputy Foreign Minister Luo Guibo, head of the CCP's first mission to northern Vietnam in 1950, about the possibility of providing economic aid to Laos.[43] When Luo asked if the question of aid had been brought up in direct conversations with the Lao government, Sudarikov responded that Souvanna had not yet spoken with any socialist states. Rather, Soviet aid had been "brought up with Burma and one other country, possibly Cambodia."[44]

This was confirmed in a meeting on September 28 between Chen Shuliang, a Foreign Ministry bureau chief, and Soviet embassy attaché I. I. Safronov. An official at the Burmese embassy in Vientiane traveled to Phnom Penh to tell the PRC ambassador, Wang Youping, that he had been pressuring Souvanna to establish formal relations with the Soviet Union, the PRC, and the DRV. Souvanna felt that the diplomatic presence of Taiwan and South Vietnam in Vientiane, established under Phoui's rightwing government, made formalizing relations with Beijing and Hanoi difficult. The Soviet Union, however, was another matter, and the pressure on Souvanna to find a new source of aid was dire. While he met with the king in Luang Prabang on September 13, thousands rallied in Vientiane demanding the establishment of formal relations with socialist countries.[45] Chen told Safronov that Vientiane only had enough rice and petroleum to last ten days. While Beijing was willing to join the aid effort, Souvanna's government would first have to contact them directly. The rift in loyalty among Lao officials between the Souvanna and Phoumi factions, Chen speculated, may mean that no one in the Lao embassy in Phnom Penh could be trusted to approach China on this issue. Despite the aid question, Chen expressed optimism. The Lao king's official dismissal of Phoumi from his position as minister of defense meant that he supported the new Souvanna government, and the Pathet Lao, now reequipped by Kong Le, were ready to

[43]Luo Guibo was also the first PRC ambassador to the DRV. Li, *Building Ho's Army*, 44.
[44] "Luo Guibo Fubuzhang Huijian Sulian zhu Hua Shiguan Linshidaiban Sudalikefu Dijiao dui Yinduzhina Wenti Reneiwa Huiyi Liang Zhuxi 7 Yue 27 Ri Laihan de Fuxin," September 27, 1960, 109-00933-16[F] PRCFMA.
[45] "1960 Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," September 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.

reclaim all of Sam Neua. "There have been great advances in the strength of the Lao people," Chen told Safronov, "their consciousness is higher than a year ago." He added that the CCP supported Souvanna's current position, but the situation depended on the Lao people carrying out their own struggle. "Through struggle," Chen said, "the Lao people will actualize their strength."[46]

In fact, from the Pathet Lao's perspective, things were looking better than Chen estimated. On the day of Chen and Safronov's meeting, the Pathet Lao succeeded in pushing Phoumi's forces out of Houaphanh entirely according to Vo Nguyen Giap's report to the PRC embassy in Hanoi.[47] Within hours, Kong Le provided airdrops of new weaponry to help the secure their new position.[48] The PRC Foreign Ministry reported that the Pathet Lao "now lead the patriotic progressive forces and are striving for [Souvanna] Phouma and the centrists to form an anti-US patriotic front." This would be possible due to a division within Souvanna's government between factions led by Quinim and secretary of defense and CDNI member Ouan Rattikun.[49] While the latter represented the interests of Phoumi and the US, the former's neutralism could be appealed to in order to slowly draw Souvanna closer to the Pathet Lao. Recent Pathet Lao victories were helpful toward this end. Souvanna, whom the CCP and VWP believed would run toward the US at the first available opportunity, must be forced out of right-wing alignments.

As Soviet-Lao aid discussions progressed, the Soviet Union turned toward the PRC for intelligence on Lao domestic affairs and logistics in moving petroleum and foodstuffs through China to Hanoi and on to Vientiane. Chervonenko asked Luo Guibo for intelligence from the Soviet Union's "Chinese friends" on the "political situation and other things," including the

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[46] "Wo Waijiaobu Chen Shuliang Sizhang yu Sulian zhu Hua Shiguan Canzan Safulong Guanyu Laowo Wenti de Tanhua Jilu," September 28, 1960, 106-00557-01 PRCFMA.
[47] "Guanyu Peihe Yuenan, Liaofang Fandui Lianheguo Ganshe Laowo Shi," September 29, 1960 – October 2, 1960, 106-00155-04 PRCFMA.
[48] "Guanyu Gongle Zhengbian Hou de Laowo Jushi," August 23, 1960 – November 15, 1960, 106-00551-03 PRCFMA.
[49] "1960 Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," September 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.

possibilities for neutrality under Souvanna, the Pathet Lao's level of influence, and the most effective ways to organize a national front. He promised Luo that the "Soviet government is prepared to do everything to support the Lao patriotic and progressive forces."[50] According to reports from the DRV embassy in Beijing, Pathet Lao influence had become significant. Many Lao provincial governors supported the Souvanna government, and the Pathet Lao was able to threaten most of the remainder into pledging their support as well.[51] Officials from the VWP Central Committee told the PRC embassy in Hanoi that developments since the coup were "to the benefit of the revolution." England and France were showing signs of support for the Souvanna government and criticizing the US's obstinate insistence on supplying right-wing forces in Savannakhet. However, should the Pathet Lao and Kong Le fail to create a sustainable united front, then, the VWP warned, "the capitalists and feudalists [Souvanna and his closest allies] will move toward imperialism, cooperate with Phoumi, and oppose the people."[52] Again, the views from Beijing and Hanoi were consistent. The Pathet Lao should move quickly to gain enough power to control Souvanna before the US and Thailand do. Souvanna's "essential duplicity" meant he would not oppose the US on his own.[53]

To some degree, the efforts of the Pathet Lao, CCP, and VWP were working. J. Graham Parsons, the US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, arrived in Laos on October 12 with a series of demands, including that Souvanna abort plans to establish relations with the Soviets, cancel negotiations with the Pathet Lao, and enter an immediate ceasefire with Savannakhet. Souvanna refused, and the PRC Foreign Ministry credited the work of the Pathet

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[50] "Wo Waijiaobu Fubuzhang Luo Guibo yu Sulian zhu Hua Dashi Qierwonianke Guanyu Laowo Wenti de Tanhua Jilu," October 7, 1960, 106-00557-02 (1) PRCFMA.
[51] "Guanyu Gongle Zhengbian Hou de Laowo Jushi," August 23, 1960 – November 15, 1960, 106-00551-03 PRCFMA.
[52] "Gongle Zhengbian Hou de Laowo Jushi ji Youguan Ge Fang dui Lao Jushi de Kanfa," September 7, 1960 – November 18, 1960, 106-00550-02 (1) PRCFMA.
[53] "1960 Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," November 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.

Lao and Kong Le. For the moment, the multilateral effort to force Souvanna to the left appeared to have borne fruit. Soon, however, the US decided it had no choice but to restore aid to the government in Vientiane. Souvanna placed Kong Le under house arrest for an excessively lavish reception of the new Soviet ambassador and sent Ouan to Luang Prabang to establish new Royal Lao Army units with US funds. He also demanded that the Pathet Lao return all Royal Lao Army weapons captured while retaking Houaphanh. The PRC embassy in Hanoi telegrammed Beijing that Souvanna's attitude after the restoration of US aid had become "unyielding."[54]

The winds changed once more in November. US aid was distributed to forces loyal to both Souvanna and Phoumi with most funds funneled toward the latter. On November 11, Phoumi loyalists staged a failed coup attempt in Luang Prabang, pressing Souvanna back toward the Pathet Lao.[55] Six days later, a radio broadcast in Vientiane announced that the RLG and NLHX agreed that Laos would send a friendship delegation to the PRC and the DRV and establish friendly, if not formal, relations with the PRC government. Although the PRC Foreign Ministry cautioned that it was a protest of US pressure in Laos, Souvanna went as far as to telegram Zhou Enlai asking for specific dates when he could lead a delegation to Beijing.[56] Souvanna also wrote to Pham Van Dong promising to uphold the agreement he had signed with Katay Don Sasorith at Bandung.[57] In Hanoi, Soviet petroleum sat awaiting shipment to Vientiane pending Souvanna's formal request. In Phnom Penh, Soviet Ambassador Nikitich Abramov returned from his second trip to Laos and reported to the PRC embassy that "Laos has already begun to depend on the socialist countries."[58]

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[54] "1960 Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," October 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.
[55] "1960 Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," November 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.
[56] "Guanyu Laowo Wangguo Zhengfu Ni Pai Youhao Daibiaotuan Fang Hua Shi," 106-00280-02 (1) PRCFMA.
[57] "1960 Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," November 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA.
[58] "Guanyu Laowo Jushi de Qingkuang Baogao," November 21, 1960 – December 1, 1960, 106-00551-05 (1) PRCFMA.

The planned trip to Beijing never occurred. Although Soviet petroleum was finally flowing to Vientiane after Souvanna's formal request, it meant little in the face of the vast sums of military aid the US and Thailand had been providing Phoumi in Savannakhet. Under the leadership of US Special Forces officers, Phoumi's military defeated Kong Le's troops in the city of Paksan on the Mekong River in Bolikhamsai Province. As Phoumi's troops marched toward the capital from Paksan to the east and artillery support was prepared in the Thai border town of Nongkhai, Souvanna's cabinet began abandoning the government and the city. On December 9, Souvanna and several remaining ministers fled to Phnom Penh; others flew to Yangon in Burma. Quinim went to Hanoi to ask for Soviet military aid.[59] The Lao king, not as persuaded by the neutralist-socialist alliance as CCP officials believed in September, issued a royal decree stating that Souvanna had "allowed communist organization[s] to usurp power" and dissolved his government, entrusting Laos to Phoumi's Revolutionary Committee headed by Boun Oum.[60] The US recognized the Boun Oum government immediately. In the afternoon of December 13, Phoumi's forces initiated the Battle of Vientiane. No match for Phoumi's superior US-supplied weaponry, Kong Le's troops left the city after two days of bloody fighting followed by thousands of families, students, and monks.[61] Five hundred people, mostly civilians, were killed and the lack of water caused by the destruction led to a cholera outbreak.[62] After a brief stop on the outskirts of Vientiane, they continued to the Plain of Jars where they were welcomed by the Pathet Lao.[63]

[59] The general account is that Thailand only provided artillery support. In Stuart-Fox's account, Phoumi troops crossed the Mekong into Vientiane from Nongkhai. Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 115–16. In Jacobs' account, Phoumi's forces did not cross the Mekong River from Nongkhai but travelled upriver from within Lao borders on the orders of Kouprasith Abhay after December 13. Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 131.
[60] Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 168–69.
[61] Sidwell, "A New Interpretation of Kong Le's Coup," 6.
[62] Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 134.
[63] "Dun Shangjiao Jieshao Laowo Qingkuang Jianbao," February 2, 1964, X1-35-116, 127-139 GZARA.

The PRC government denounced the "traitorous [Phoumi] Nosavan clique" and joined the Soviet Union and the DRV in demanding again that the Geneva agreements be upheld.[64] The People's Daily printed a statement written by Souphanouvong denouncing "interference and invasion" by "US imperialism and the Thai reactionary clique" and appealing in the name of the NLHX to the two chairs of the Geneva Conference to "closely watch the interference operations" of both groups.[65] In a meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Norodom Sihanouk, Mao admitted Thailand had played a part but insisted that it was "still America pulling the strings." He told Sihanouk, "[Phoumi] Nosavan has already taken advantage of the four months he had to prepare and has the aid of America and Thailand. [Souvanna] Phouma, on the other hand, has done no preparation."[66] In the aftermath, Kong Le began accepting Soviet aid directly, which Souvanna defended from Phnom Penh, saying, "It is hard to accuse the Soviet Union of airdropping supplies to Kong Le and the Pathet Lao, because the US is also publicly aiding right wing rebels."[67]

Stuart-Fox has argued that the Battle of Vientiane ultimately had very little impact on the military balance of power in Laos and that, moreover, it accomplished even less in settling the political crisis.[68] This is undoubtedly true. However, it was a major turning point for Beijing. In a Rand Corporation report from 1972, Langer argued that the Pathet Lao had benefitted from Chinese military and economic aid "[s]ince its inception."[69] Yet, in Langer's own report, the

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[64] "Chinese Government's Statements," Peking Review, December 20, 1960, 20.
[65] "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Zhuxi Sufanufeng Fabiao Shengming," RMRB, December 15, 1960.
[66] "Memorandum of Chairman Mao's Conversation with Sihanouk on 17 December 1960," December 17, 1960, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120870 WCDA; ZZWY, *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2013), 497.
[67] "1960 Xiabannian Laowo Qingkuang Tongbao (Juemi)," December 1960, 106-00558-02[F] PRCFMA. Langer and Zasloff state that Soviet aid was distributed first among DRV armed forces in Laos, then Pathet Lao forces, and finally the remainder was given to Kong Le. This seems more than plausible, but the fact remains essential for events after Geneva 1962 that Soviet aid was the only aid Kong Le received. Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, *North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao: Partners in the Struggle for Laos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 72.
[68] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 116; Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State*, 61.
[69] Paul F. Langer, *The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao: Analysis and Chronology* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1972), 19.

benefit to the Pathet Lao was indirect. As discussed in chapter one, CCP officials began funneling aid to the Viet Minh soon after consolidating power in China. Chinese weapons and matériel were then used by the Viet Minh, and later the VWP, to supply the Pathet Lao. To say, as Langer does, that Chinese aid increased after December 1960 obscures the significance of the event for the Asian communist parties involved.

The counter coup temporarily forced many 'wavering and indeterminate' neutralists into an alliance with the Pathet Lao by creating two competing governments – one headed by Phoumi and Boun Oum in Vientiane, another by Souvanna near the Plain of Jars in Khang Khay, Xieng Khouang Province. US support for Phoumi continued unabated while, in December, Souvanna finally formalized relations with the Soviet Union, securing aid to Khang Khay. By the reckoning of the LPP Central Committee, it was a major service to their cause in a revolution still conducted "under the slogan of peaceful neutrality, independent democracy, and respect for the constitution and king" because it allowed them to claim an even larger united front with no middle ground.[70] For the moment, neutralists among the Lao governing elite could side with the Pathet Lao or capitulate with obvious US intervention by aligning with Phoumi. Phoumi's counter coup forced Quinim, for example, to permanently align with the Pathet Lao and champion PRC aid in Laos until his assassination in 1963.[71] Further, Central Committees in China, Laos, and Vietnam all understood the Battle of Vientiane as the final failure of political struggle. For LPP leadership, the immediate tasks for the party were to combine direct attacks with long-implemented guerrilla tactics, strengthen party discipline within the military, and expand base areas all while "tightly seizing" the national united front.[72] There is no doubt that this decision was arrived at under the

[70] ZZDLYE, *Laowo Renmin Geming Dang*, 90.
[71] Marek Thee, *Notes of a Witness: Laos and the Second Indochinese War* (New York: Random House, 1973), 80, 93.
[72] ZZDLYE, 95.

influence of the VWP, who had been preparing for armed conflict in Laos since mid-1959.[73] It was also, however, part of a larger transition among communist parties in Asia – the turn to armed struggle.

'The Only Genuine Resolution to the Lao Situation'

Officials in Beijing spoke very little of the Geneva agreements or the International Control Commission during the last four months of 1960. After the Phoumi-Boun Oum counter coup, both found renewed significance in the political, diplomatic struggle. Chen Yi issued a statement demanding that Britain and the Soviet Union take action to stop the US and its "vassal," the Thai government. He joined Moscow and Hanoi in demanding the ICC resume its activities, saying that the PRC government had always believed that the ICC was critical for peace in Indochina and the independence of Laos.[74] Marshal Zhu De beat a similar drum in a speech given at a celebration of the second anniversary of the Cuban revolution: "U.S. imperialist interference in the internal affairs of Laos is becoming more and more serious and dangerous. This action of the United States violates the Geneva agreements, breaches peace in Indo-China and threatens China's security."[75] Meanwhile, Zhou spent the first days of January 1961 in Burma discussing the Lao question with Prime Minister U Nu.[76]

On January 14, Zhou met with Sudarikov in Beijing. Sudarikov thanked him for the "very discrete" logistical aid and intelligence the PRC had provided. There had already been forty-two flights from Hanoi to Xieng Khouang Province, where Kong Le, some Pathet Lao forces, and the remnants of the government under Souvanna were headquartered on the Plain of Jars. Ten more

[73] Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside," 117.
[74] "Foreign Minister Chen Yi on the Laotian Situation," Peking Review, January 6, 1961, 19-20.
[75] "Halt U.S. Aggression Against Laos," Peking Review, January 13, 1960, 14-15.
[76] ZZWY, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1997), 383.

flights were scheduled for the following day. China supplied rations for the flight crews and fuel for the plains, which Sudarikov promised would be repaid. Beyond demonstrating lingering Sino-Soviet cooperation, the meeting is significant because it establishes the logic by which the CCP would simultaneously defend aiding the Pathet Lao and Lao neutrality. When Sudarikov remarked that Western newspapers and bourgeoisie were making a "ruckus" over the flights from Hanoi, Zhou responded that the aid had been requested by Souvanna's government, which meant it was "perfectly legal." "They're the illegal ones!" Zhou said, referring to US support for Phoumi.[77]

According to the CCP interpretation of the 1954 Geneva agreements, the RLG could not enter a military alliance with any other state. It could, however, receive foreign military and economic aid so long as the aid was provided without political conditions. Under CCP and VWP guidance, the Pathet Lao's position had always been to negotiate integration into the RLG, after which a political revolution would be conducted. Prior to December 1960, the push to secure Soviet aid to Souvanna's government was to keep him in power to facilitate this plan. This was also the logic behind plans made during his 1956 trip to Beijing. Souvanna tried to ameliorate his dependence on the socialist world by accepting US aid. Although he could not dissuade Washington of its preference for Phoumi, he was able to briefly play capitalist and socialist powers off one another. However, US recognition of the Phoumi-Boun Oum government created a new situation. Now, with competing governments in Laos and with full US backing behind one of them, the PRC, Soviet Union, and DRV were Souvanna's only real hope. When he turned to them for aid from self-imposed exile in Phnom Penh, Souvanna freed them to directly support the Pathet Lao and Kong Le's left neutralist forces while simultaneously offering a pretext of unconditional

[77] "Record of the Conversation Between Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and the Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy of the Soviet Union in China," January 14, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120872 WCDA.

aid to the RLG without the need to enter a military alliance, thereby avoiding violating Lao neutrality.

This is the only way to understand Chen Yi and PLA Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing's conversation with neutralist members of Souvanna's cabinet in Kunming as the latter travelled from Yangon to Sam Neua via Hanoi. Neutralist politicians Pheng Phongsavan and Khamsouk Keola spoke with Chen on January 16 and told him they were eager to restore the relationship between Laos and the PRC that had been built before 1958. Pheng said he was confident that Souvanna's government would be victorious over the US-supported rebels if they had the support of "all peace-loving nations." Chen Yi agreed and employed the logic of Lao neutrality made possible by the events of the previous month to contrast US and Chinese aid: "Our policy is antithetical to US policy. The US wants to intervene in other countries' internal affairs and force other countries to provide them with bases so they can achieve their goal of political and military control." PRC aid flowed to the new government in Khang Khay without formal political or military conditions. Chen confirmed that Mao, Zhou, and Liu Shaoqi had approved plans to directly aid the Souvanna government. "We have already given you a large amount of aid through Vietnam, including weapons, ammunition, provisions, and medicine," he told Pheng, "we will continue giving you this aid in the future."[78]A significant amount of these supplies had already arrived in Xieng Khouang.

Chen Yi made explicit the relation between peace and war, as a unity of opposites, that lay behind PRC foreign policy in the early 1950s and had reemerged through the Sino-Soviet split:

> All Afro-Asian nations want to liberate themselves out from under imperialism, and all must go through the process of arduous struggle. This is unavoidable. The schism between democratic and anti-democratic forces, between pro-US and anti-US forces, between

[78] "Chen Yi, Luo Ruiqing Fuzongli Jiejian Laowo Daibiaotuan Tanhua Jilu," January 1, 1961, 106-00620-03 PRCFMA.

> patriotic and treasonous forces is unavoidable. Only through struggle can the imperialists be driven out and national peace achieved. [79]

Comparing the Lao situation to China, he told Pheng that the US State Department would never willingly give up on Jiang Jieshi's government in Taiwan. To settle the issue, combat was unavoidable. The US's ambition was "not only to control China but to control Asia and the entire world." Nonetheless, CCP officials believed the situation in Laos remained favorable. Phongsaly, Xieng Khouang, and Sam Neua were quickly liberated, reflecting what the CCP believed to be the general attitude of the Lao people toward the Phoumi-Boun Oum government.[80] Quinim and Kong Le's retreat from Vientiane provided an opportunity to consolidate power in northern Laos, which was far more important that attempting to negotiate peace. Chen continued:

> The view of your Chinese friends is that the Lao patriotic forces are internally united. Previously liberated areas are strengthening, and more areas are being liberated. This is most important. It is possible to hold international negotiations, but they will not have any decisive impact. A meaningful resolution would be the unification of the Lao Patriotic Front [NLHX], solidarity between the government forces under Captain Kong Le and the Pathet Lao armed forces, consolidation of previously liberated areas, and continued development toward victory. *Victory on the front lines is the only genuine resolution to the Lao situation.*[81]

Pheng told Chen and Luo that their next plan was to capture Luang Prabang. Luo responded that he and Chen agreed this was essential but that the details should be discussed with Kong Le and Pathet Lao commanders once Pheng and his group had returned to Laos. He also told the Lao guests that because the PRC and Laos still had not established formal relations, providing aid

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[79] "Chen Yi, Luo Ruiqing Fuzongli Jiejian Laowo Daibiaotuan Tanhua Jilu," January 1, 1961, 106-00620-03 PRCFMA.

[80] The CCP eventually discovered that this was an overstatement when the Sam Neua Working Group entered Laos in 1964. Nonetheless, most scholars agree that Phoumi and those around him lacked popular support. An important attempt to question this can be found in Wolfson-Ford's recent dissertation. Wolfson-Ford, "Ideology in the Royal Lao Government-Era."

[81] Instead of "Pathet Lao armed forces," the original document refers to "*Liaoguo zhandou budui* 寮国战斗部队." Literally translated, this also means "Lao Combat Forces." However, nearly all CCP documents from this period use *Laowo* 老挝 to indicate the Royal Lao Government and *Liaoguo* 寮国 or *liaofang* 寮方 to indicate the Pathet Lao. Emphasis added. "Chen Yi, Luo Ruiqing Fuzongli Jiejian Laowo Daibiaotuan Tanhua Jilu," January 1, 1961, 106-00620-03 PRCFMA.

openly was inadvisable. However, the PRC government was willing to offer their assistance "by any means necessary," including through Soviet channels in the DRV. In his final comments, Luo stressed the limits of international political struggle against the US. Pheng reported that since the Battle of Vientiane the US had added four jet fighters to Phoumi's arsenal. Luo warned that these planes should not be drawn into the conflict. Ill-suited for use in ground conflicts, Luo estimated they were placed there to threaten Soviet airlifts. Souvanna and neutralist politicians could "call on the international community" to demand their removal, but Luo was uncertain that such a strategy would be successful. "If you do not win," he told Pheng, "sole reliance on worldwide condemnation will not make the US withdraw."[82]

There are several points to be emphasized from this meeting. One, although the bellicose tone of these discussions is in sharp contrast to prior Sino-Lao interactions, the underlying principle is no different than Zhou Enlai's suggestion that Indochinese groups practice "negotiating while fighting" at the 1954 Geneve Conference.[83] At base, the logic in both cases is that imperialist powers only negotiate when forced to do so and that only military strength insures adherence to peace agreements with such powers. This means that, two, CCP officials continued to understand international peace negotiations as one possible step on the road to national socialist revolution, not as an end in themselves. Ultimately, only armed revolution could bring peace. Where there was the possibility of political revolution in the mid-1950s, each step toward that end provoked severe reaction from the US resulting in a situation that required violence. Three, despite Chen and Luo's repeated assurances regarding Chinese aid capabilities, both continually

[82] "Chen Yi, Luo Ruiqing Fuzongli Jiejian Laowo Daibiaotuan Tanhua Jilu," January 1, 1961, 106-00620-03 PRCFMA.
[83] "'Preliminary opinions on the assessment of the preparation for the Geneva conference,' prepared by the PRC Minister of Foreign Affairs (drafted by PRC Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai)[excerpt]," March 02, 1954, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111963 WCDA.

emphasized the importance of the Pathet Lao and left neutralists achieving the revolution themselves. This occurs mostly in the form of reiterating the importance of consolidating power and creating a united front to achieve victory. Zhu De and other CCP officials were quite public that they saw the Phoumi-Boun Oum government as a national security threat.[84] Zhou Enlai made this clear to DRV Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Duy Thrinh, telling him the PRC must give the Lao situation maximum attention.[85] Part of the calculation behind not sending PLA troops into Laos involved the basic national security concern of avoiding direct war with the US (though some were eventually sent to defend PLA engineer corps involved in road construction). However, national security concerns do not cancel the equal normative commitment to national revolution. Indeed, once PRC advisers finally entered Laos, they criticized Pathet Lao dependence on foreign military powers for occupying new areas and their unwillingness to mobilize the masses toward anti-imperialist struggle. The lack of self-reliance, they claimed, threatened to undo the Lao revolution entirely.[86]

On January 1, Prince Norodom Sihanouk began proposing an enlarged meeting of the 1954 Geneva participants to negotiate a settlement of the Lao crisis. Two weeks later, Zhou responded with an endorsement for the idea despite the conversations CCP officials were now having with Pathet Lao and left neutralist leaders.[87] A February 13 meeting between Chen Yi and Chervonenko reveals the problems in the dual positions the CCP held. Chen told Chervonenko of a recent conversation he had with VWP Central Committee member Hoang Van Hoan in which both sides agreed that it was no longer possible to trust in the ICC to achieve a favorable situation for the

[84] "Halt U.S. Aggression Against Laos," Peking Review, January 13, 1960, 14-15.
[85] ZZWY, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 2:388.
[86] "Wo zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.
[87] ZZWY, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 2:384.

Pathet Lao. The best course of action was "victory on the front lines."[88] Only after the Pathet Lao had won a few battles against Phoumi's forces should they consider entering negotiations. Yet, Chen also believed that another Geneva Conference was inevitable; neither the PRC, DRV, nor Soviets could refuse it. Moreover, convening an international conference would mean a ceasefire, which could occur before the Pathet Lao had gained a favorable military position. Beijing, therefore, requested that the VWP impress on their Lao comrades not to relent in their work building military strength and mass organization. If they entrusted their hope to an international conference, then all could be lost. The Chinese recommendation of escalation was news to the Soviet ambassador, and he pressed Chen for clarification. Should the socialist countries involved be pushing for an international conference and advocating the Pathet Lao prepare for armed struggle at the same time? "Political struggle and armed struggle should be coordinated," Chen replied, "As armed struggle better develops, the more the benefit to political struggle."[89] It was too risky for the Pathet Lao to enter negotiations from a weak position.

Although Beijing and Hanoi agreed on the need for armed struggle, disagreements had also emerged around the issue of sending military troops into Laos. By the time Chen and Chervonenko met, the DRV had already sent troops across the border to replace Pathet Lao forces fighting to defend the Plain of Jars and was preparing to send two companies to Houaphanh with another battalion waiting for orders in Hanoi.[90] The CCP strongly disagreed. In prior discussions, the VWP indicated that it did not support sending its own troops, leaving Chen somewhat confused on what had changed. He told Chervonenko unequivocally that Beijing did not support this approach. First,

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[88] "Chen Yi Fuzongli jiu Laowo Wenti Jiejian Sulian zhu Hua Dashi Qierwonianke de Tanhua Jilu yiji Su Dashi Mianjiao Zhong Fang de Beiwanglu," February 13, 1961, 109-03754-03 PRCFMA.
[89] "Chen Yi Fuzongli jiu Laowo Wenti Jiejian Sulian zhu Hua Dashi Qierwonianke de Tanhua Jilu yiji Su Dashi Mianjiao Zhong Fang de Beiwanglu," February 13, 1961, 109-03754-03 PRCFMA.
[90] Dommen reports that DRV troops entered Laos in early January at Kong Le's request. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience,* 431.

it was "politically unfavorable," because the PRC would receive blame along with the DRV, potentially costing them the support of allies in Burma and Cambodia. It would also give the US and SEATO a pretext to enter the conflict directly. Second, it did not benefit Laos in the longer run of the revolution because it was "detrimental for the development of the Lao people's power." As outsiders, the PRC, DRV, and Soviet Union, should limit themselves to helping the Lao people "temper" themselves for revolution.[91] Part of this process was the ammunition, clothing, and medical supplies Beijing had already sent to Laos, enough for ten thousand people. Another part was planning for possible betrayal among the neutralists. Chen singled out Souvanna, Quinim, Kong Le, and Khamsouk Keola as possibly untrustworthy. If so, then revolutionary forces in Laos must be ready to carry on without them, which would only be possible, again, through the consolidation of power and organization of the masses Beijing had been advocating.

With this in mind, and with the West's full knowledge that the PRC, DRV, and Soviet Union supported the Pathet Lao, Chen estimated that neither the capitalist nor socialist powers wanted the crisis in Laos to expand beyond a civil war. He told Chervonenko that the PLA had enough troops in Guangxi and Yunnan provinces to occupy Laos within less than a month, but such a strategy was "risky."[92] The revolution in Laos should be allowed to develop in its own time. Soon after his meeting with Chervonenko, Chen reiterated these points to Sisana Sisane, the director of Radio Pathet Lao who had been imprisoned with Souphanouvong and other NLHX leaders in 1959. The 1954 Geneva Conference, the ICC, and the international conference proposed

[91] "Chen Yi Fuzongli jiu Laowo Wenti Jiejian Sulian zhu Hua Dashi Qierwonianke de Tanhua Jilu yiji Su Dashi Mianjiao Zhong Fang de Beiwanglu," February 13, 1961, 109-03754-03 PRCFMA.
[92] "Chen Yi Fuzongli jiu Laowo Wenti Jiejian Sulian zhu Hua Dashi Qierwonianke de Tanhua Jilu yiji Su Dashi Mianjiao Zhong Fang de Beiwanglu," February 13, 1961, 109-03754-03 PRCFMA.

by Sihanouk were "all just political struggles…just quarrels." As such, they could "only be placed in a subordinate position" to armed struggle.[93]

By April, Luang Prabang and Vientiane remained out of reach, but Beijing and Hanoi also believed that the Pathet Lao military campaign was going in their favor.[94] Zhou told Nikitch Abramov that the Lao people were engaged in a long-term struggle in which armed struggle was the "main form." "However," he cautioned, "this does not exclude…political struggle." Due to recent losses, Western powers had become more responsive to the idea of an international conference and renewal of the ICC's activities. Zhou believed that their plan was to convince Souvanna to join another pro-Western neutral government. When this plan failed, then war would begin again. The PRC supported Britain and the Soviet Union's call for a ceasefire because it appealed to both sides of the conflict, thereby preserving the sovereignty of Souvanna's government alongside the Phoumi-Boun Oum government. The negotiation of a ceasefire should be "organically linked" to the issue of convening an international conference. The idea was that if an international conference on a ceasefire failed and, as a result of not establishing a ceasefire, the US refused to participate in negotiations related to Lao neutrality, then "all the responsibility and blame will fall on the Americans." Contra the CCP's position in 1958, however, the ICC should be allowed back into Laos only under strict supervision by Britain and, more importantly, the Soviet Union. Conflicts over the Sino-Indian border in Tibet and India's support for US operations in the Congo convinced Zhou and other CCP officials that India was firmly within the capitalist bloc.[95] Indian representatives in the ICC would, therefore, work with Canadian representatives to

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[93] "Transcript of the Reception Between Vice Premier Chen Yi and the Delegation from Laos," February 10, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120875 WCDA.
[94] "Cable from He Wei, 'Comrade Nguyen Chi Thanh Talked about the Situation in Laos with Me and the Soviet Ambassador," March 25, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120594 WCDA.
[95] For Sino-Indian bilateral relations regarding the border, see Dai Chaowu, "From 'Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai' to 'International Class Struggle' against Nehru: China's India Policy and Teh Frontier Dispute, 1950-1962," in *The Sino-Indian War of 1962: New Perspectives*, ed. Amit R. Das Gupta and Lorenz M. Lüthi (New York: Routledge,

help the US use the organization to "limit and reduce the activities and positions" of the Pathet Lao.[96]

The Brothers Come to Beijing

In mid-April, Souvanna and Souphanouvong embarked on an international tour promoting the idea of a new conference. In preparation for their visit to China, the PRC Foreign Ministry reported that they expected Souvanna to ask for aid repairing the road between Xieng Khouang and the DRV border, building a new capital in Khang Khay, and providing residents in Phongsaly with daily necessities. CCP officials were prepared to agree to all these projects plus any military aid Souvanna might directly request. The report cautioned, however, that military aid should be left out of public documents on the agreement.[97]

On April 17, Souphanouvong stopped in Beijing on his way to meet Souvanna in Moscow. When Zhou asked what he thought of Souvanna, Souphanouvong responded that his half-brother had changed "to some degree, compared to before." Souvanna had become dependent on the Pathet Lao for political survival and "witnessed the generous support provided by our socialist camps." At the same time, Souvanna was anxious about the Pathet Lao gaining too much strength. Earlier in the year he attempted to merge the Pathet Lao armed forces under Kong Le's command, but Souphanouvong persuaded him against it, claiming that they "were all the same patriotic force" in

2017), 68–84. For domestic motivation behind the CCP's different approaches to the border dispute, see Eric Hyer, "The Strategic and Regional Contexts of the Sino-Indian Border Conflict: China's Policy of Conciliation with Its Neighours," in *The Sino-Indian War of 1962: New Perspectives*, ed. Amit R. Das Gupta and Lorenz M. Lüthi (New York: Routledge, 2017), 85–101.

[96] "Cable from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, 'Our Opinion Regarding the Soviet Union's Memorandum on the Laos Issue," April 01, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120879 WCDA.

[97] The report initially suggested that aid given to Kong Le could be entered into public agreements, but a note from Zhou Enlai said that China had only given aid via the DRV, not directly to Kong Le. Mentioning Kong Le in the public agreement would be "inconvenient." "Cable from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, 'Regarding the Planned Discussion by Our Side during Souvanna Phouma's Upcoming Visit to China," April 12, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120880 WCDA.

support of the "legitimate government's existence." Just as he had disastrously sought his own military in the autumn of 1960 under the leadership of Ouan Rattikoun, Souvanna now harbored hopes of gaining the loyalty of forces in Phongsaly under the left neutralist Colonel Khamouane Boupha, but he had been unable to travel to meet him due to the onset of the rainy season. According to Souphanouvong, Souvanna had also originally planned to meet with Phoumi in Phnom Penh, but Quinim, Kong Le, and Souphanouvong disagreed. Instead, Souvanna elected to go on his current international tour. Although Souphanouvong told Zhou that Souvanna "seems to be again changing his stance and swaying a great deal," he also found Souvanna to be genuinely committed to the idea of neutrality defined as military non-alignment and a capitalist economy. He wanted Pathet Lao assistance against the US, but "[h]e is also anti-communist, so he can't see that the United States is our supreme enemy." Zhou asked if Khamouane, who was scheduled to meet with Yunnan provincial governor Yu Yichan, was willing to do the work of fighting remnant Guomindang forces in northern Laos. Souphanouvong was certain he was; it had been Khamouane's own suggestion.[98]

Souphanouvong returned to Beijing on April 22, this time accompanying Souvanna, who exuded confidence in the possibility of a negotiated solution in Laos. In the car from the Beijing airport, Zhou met Souvanna's confidence, saying that in 1954 US Secretary of State Dulles was unwilling to shake hands the PRC foreign minister. This time, US Secretary of State Rusk expressed a willingness to negotiate with the PRC, but now, "our foreign minister must consider if he wants to shake *his* hand."[99] True to Souphanouvong's assessment, Souvanna spent his time in the PRC reiterating the threat Thailand posed to Lao neutrality and playing down the US's

[98] "Transcript of Talks During Zhou Enlai's Reception of Prince Souphanouvong," April 17, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120881 WCDA.
[99] "Mao Zedong Zhuxi, Zhou Enlai Zongli deng tong Lai Fang de Laowo Lingdaoren Tanhua Jilu," April 22 – May 6, 1956, 204-01438-01 PRCFMA.

involvement. Souvanna believed that stability in Laos would spur the seven million Lao speakers in Thailand's northeast to cross the Mekong River into Laos. Sarit's government was willing to do anything to prevent this from happening. Although Zhou agreed Thailand represented a threat, he tried to emphasize US interference. He stressed that the US would not stop supporting Phoumi. Rusk had apparently told Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko that Phoumi was the only leader in Laos that the US trusted. Washington's willingness to negotiate was temporary, and they would betray Souvanna when the opportunity arose. "The US's policy is to make peace when they want peace and make war when they want war," Zhou told the brothers, "When they lose, they use peace talks as a shield and launch assaults again when their forces are strong."[100]

Before travelling to Hangzhou to meet Mao, the group agreed that the PRC would begin construction on two roads connecting Phongsaly and Houayxay to Xishuangbanna in Yunnan. Both sides hoped that these roads would facilitate trade and enable neutralist military forces in Phongsaly to cross through Yunnan into Houayxay more quickly, supplying themselves along the way with PRC weapons and ammunition before fighting the 4,000 Guomindang troops who had recently crossed the border from Burma.[101]

During the meetings with Zhou, Souphanouvong spoke only to Souvanna, making suggestions in Lao. While riding to tour the Summer Palace in Beijing, Souphanouvong directly briefed Wu Xiuquan, deputy director of the International Liaison Department, on Souvanna's reaction to his conversation with Zhou. Left-leaning members of their delegation had attempted to convince him of the threat the US posed, but Souvanna's "wavering character is still strong."[102]

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[100] "Mao Zedong Zhuxi, Zhou Enlai Zongli deng tong Lai Fang de Laowo Lingdaoren Tanhua Jilu," April 22 – May 6, 1956, 204-01438-01 PRCFMA.

[101] For a concise history of Guomindang forces in Burma and their eventual exit, see Victor F. Kaufman, "Trouble in the Golden Triangle: The United States, Taiwan and the 93rd Nationalist Division," *The China Quarterly*, no. 166 (June 2001): 440–56.

[102] "Mao Zedong Zhuxi, Zhou Enlai Zongli deng tong Lai Fang de Laowo Lingdaoren Tanhua Jilu," April 22 – May 6, 1956, 204-01438-01 PRCFMA.

Thus, Souphanouvong requested that their Chinese counterparts spend the remainder of their trip emphasizing that the Pathet Lao were the only reliable force fighting for Lao independence, peace, and neutrality. He also requested that Souvanna be shown examples for how the PRC's national capitalist class was reformed after the revolution to help convince Souvanna there as a path forward.[103] "Of course," Souphanouvong added, "this is in addition to requesting China give all the material aid it can to establish a temporary government in Xieng Khouang."[104]

In Hangzhou, Souphanouvong remained silent again while Souvanna thanked Mao for the PRC's support. He told Mao that he hoped "reason and the patriotism of the Lao people" would convince Phoumi and Boun Oum that it was time to end the civil war. Mao pressed Souvanna a little on the real possibilities of negotiating with Phoumi, noting that he had broken past agreements and asking, "Didn't you arrange a coalition with them before?" Not surprisingly, for Mao, long-term armed struggle in Laos was as inevitable in 1961 as it had been when he met with Kaysone in 1959. "Though it is likely negotiations in Laos will result in an agreement being reached," he told Souvanna, "the enemy will say anything and sign an agreement while in defeat. Once they are prepared, all prior arrangements will be off, and all agreements signed will be breached." They spoke of the dangers in allowing Phoumi to take part in a new coalition government. Both Mao and Souvanna agreed that Phoumi lacked the support of the Lao people, but he may still be able to manipulate elections to his favor and cause problems for Souvanna in parliament. Zhou advised again that preparations be made to block US attempts to insert Phoumi in any new government.

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[103] Despite the recent disastrous experiment with collectivization during the Great Leap Forward, the CCP still had many methods for convincing visiting foreigners of its moderation when necessary. It is unclear from PRC archives how well Souphanouvong himself understood life under the CCP. After the Lao revolution, Souphanouvong was sidelined in decision making due to his pro-PRC positions, yet it is unlikely he ever witnessed much of Chinese society beyond what the PRC foreign relations apparatus wanted him to see. For more on the CCP's system for hosting foreign guests, see chapter five in this dissertation.

[104] "Mao Zedong Zhuxi, Zhou Enlai Zongli deng tong Lai Fang de Laowo Lingdaoren Tanhua Jilu," April 22 – May 6, 1956, 204-01438-01 PRCFMA.

Mao then assured Souvanna that "dodgy" men like Phoumi, Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam, and Sarit Thanarat in Thailand had no future because they had "distanced themselves from the people." Eventually, the masses would rise against them on their own. "There need not be any foreign presence to overthrow them," he said, "The citizens will overthrow them themselves."[105] Such was China's experience when it defeated the Guomindang without direct foreign intervention. This was a romanticized version of the Chinese revolution that ignored the significant importance of direct Soviet military aid during the civil war, which allowed the CCP to wage its own largely conventional military campaign against the Guomindang.[106] Given CCP officials' combined promise of military aid and insistence on Lao people fighting their own war of national liberation, Mao's comparison of the Chinese revolution and CCP hopes for the Lao revolution is apt to a level he probably did not intend.

Souphanouvong broke his silence in a meeting with Chen Yi before leaving Hangzhou. He told the PRC foreign minister that there were many things he would have liked to say to Mao but could not due to Souvanna's presence. "You should know," Chen replied, that Mao's "emphasis on the struggles the Chinese party experienced during negotiations was primarily directed towards you." Souphanouvong assured Chen that he had taken note of Mao's words. Although he too was prepared for a long struggle, the current task was winning over Souvanna. While travelling together, the princes were able to agree that the new coalition government would have six or seven ministers loyal to Souvanna, four to five ministers from the NLHX, and only one or two ministers from Phoumi's faction. Of the NLHX members, Souphanouvong hoped that half would be

[105]"Mao Zedong Zhuxi, Zhou Enlai Zongli deng tong Lai Fang de Laowo Lingdaoren Tanhua Jilu," April 22 – May 6, 1956, 204-01438-01 PRCFMA.; ZZWY, *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, 4:579.

[106] Andrew Walder's recent survey of the Mao period places a great deal of importance on the Chinese civil war (1945-1949) for the level of Soviet military aid the People's Liberation Army received. Andrew G. Walder, *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 31–35.

members of the Lao People's Party Central Committee while the remainder would be drawn from the Pathet Lao military. If Mao and the CCP Central Committee had any further advice for establishing an interim government, Souphanouvong requested that the information be passed through He Wei, the PRC ambassador in Hanoi.[107]

Geneva, 1961 – 1962

According to historian Seth Jacobs, the key meeting marking a change in US policy toward Laos occurred on April 27, 1961, in the early months of the Kennedy administration. In a room of thirty administration officials and members of congress, Kennedy read aloud a request from the US ambassador to Vientiane, Winthrop Brown, that SEATO forces intervene in Laos to halt communist advances toward the capital. The Pathet Lao and Kong Le's neutralists now controlled most of the territory in Laos, including recent victories over Phoumi's Royal Lao Army at Sala Phou Khoun and Vang Vieng.[108] Kennedy emphasized the PRC and DRV's ability to send reinforcements to Laos and Britain and France's unwillingness to become directly involved unless the Pathet Lao succeeded in capturing Vientiane, at which point it would be too late. Armed Services Committee chairman Richard Russell responded that Washington should "write Laos off," that it was "an incredible fantasy."[109] His comments reflected a general view in Washington that the Lao people were unwilling to join the US crusade against communism and that Thailand and South Vietnam would be better investments. No matter the consequences, the Kennedy

[107] "Mao Zedong Zhuxi, Zhou Enlai Zongli deng tong Lai Fang de Laowo Lingdaoren Tanhua Jilu," April 22 – May 6, 1956, 204-01438-01 PRCFMA.
[108] Both these victories were celebrated in the Chinese foreign language press, "Military Situation in Laos," Peking Review, March 31, 1961, 14-15; Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 236.
[109] Quoted in Jacobs, 237.

administration decided it would not directly intervene in Laos. Outwardly, however, Washington went to Geneva maintaining its anti-communist position.

As preparations for the conference began in May, Chen Yi voiced an interest in trying to keep the socialist states on the same side. He believed that socialist leaders "must make a distinction between enemies and friends" and that the PRC should cooperate with the Soviet Union and Poland in dealing with the US.[110] Nonetheless, cracks in the socialist world from the Sino-Soviet split had begun to show.[111] The PRC ambassador to the Soviet Union, Liu Xiao, met with Gregory Pushkin several days before the conference to help settle points of discussion. Pushkin was adamant that the Soviets did not want Lao domestic issues to be negotiated in Geneva. These included the organization of a new coalition government, reorganization of the military, and the power of representation of any of the three Lao factions. Instead, the conference should be limited to international issues, namely, Lao neutrality, the removal of foreign military personnel, and preventing further intervention in Lao internal affairs. The Soviets considered the ceasefire both a domestic and international issue – it could also be discussed.[112] In his report to the PRC Foreign Ministry, Liu wrote that the Soviets seemed willing to take the interests of the Lao people into account along with the views of China and the DRV. The Soviets were "simultaneously grasping the banner of peace" and "insisting that the United States stop interfering" in Laos. Liu reported positively that Moscow was ready to defend Souvanna's government as the only legitimate Lao government and place restrictions on the ICC.[113] They were also in agreement regarding India.

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[110] Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 99.
[111] Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*; Mingjiang Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962-63," *Cold War History* 11, no. 3 (August 2011): 387–419; Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*.
[112] "Record of Conversation Between Soviet Union Deputy of Foreign Affairs Pushkin and Ambassador Liu," May 05, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120885 WCDA.
[113] "Cable form the Chinese Embassy in the Soviet Union, 'Preliminary Views on the Soviet Union's Attitude at the Geneva Conference," May 08, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120886 WCDA.

Pushkin himself remarked that while India "flaunts" its neutrality, it was in fact closely aligned with the capitalist world.[114]

However, not all was well. Liu believed that the Soviet Union was "unduly apprehensive" that the situation in Laos could continue to be tense. This might cause the US to "act rashly," thereby undermining the potential for further Soviet-US peace agreements elsewhere in the world. Liu felt the Soviets had a desire to please potential Western critics, which meant they were creating space for compromise. Chief among these compromises was the possibility that the Soviets would agree to the "'Austrian' style," or permanent, neutrality suggested by the US.[115] No outcome could be more at odds with the neutrality CCP officials had in mind. The PRC Foreign Ministry's response to Soviet plans stated the purpose of neutrality in Laos plainly:

> We feel the goal of guaranteeing Laos's neutrality is to put a stop to the American led imperialist bloc's encroaching on and meddling in Laos's affairs. For the Lao People's strength to develop [they] cannot have restrictions from outside parties. Starting from this point of view, we feel it is not suitable [for us to] put forth [the concept of] 'permanent neutrality'.[116]

In his preparations, Chen Yi was also able to demand that the Pathet Lao, in the form of the NLHX, be allowed a representative delegation at the conference. Britain and the Soviet Union agreed that any Lao group could join so long as they were sponsored by a conference participant, enabling China to sponsor the Pathet Lao.[117]

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[114] "Record of Conversation Between Soviet Union Deputy of Foreign Affairs Pushkin and Ambassador Liu," May 05, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120885 WCDA.
[115] "Cable form the Chinese Embassy in the Soviet Union, 'Preliminary Views on the Soviet Union's Attitude at the Geneva Conference," May 08, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120886 WCDA. For more on the Soviet concept of permanent neutrality, see Wolfgang Mueller, "The USSR and Permanent Neutrality in the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 148–79.
[116] Brackets in original, "The Chinese Government's May 5th Response to the Soviet Government on the Memorandum on the Expansion of the Geneva Conference and the Peaceful Conclusion of the Laos Issue," May 09, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120887 WCDA.
[117] Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars,* 101.

The conference began on May 16, 1961. Chen Yi headed the PRC delegation, the largest at Geneva. Among those with him were Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu, Qiao Guanhua, who had participated in Korean War armistice negotiations and the 1954 Geneva Conference, PRC Ambassador to Poland Wang Bingnan, and PRC Charge d'Affaires in London Huan Xiang.[118] The Souvanna government was represented by Quinim Pholsena while Phoumi Vongvichit represented the NLHX.[119] The US delegation was led by W. Averell Harriman to whom Kennedy gave clear instructions to extricate the US from Laos. "I want a negotiated settlement," he told Harriman, "I don't want to put troops in. It's your problem. Work it out."[120]

Chen spoke at the opening session of the conference, setting the tone by blaming the US for the crisis in Laos. He reminded participants that the US had refused to sign the 1954 agreements and, instead, issued a unilateral declaration of noninterference which they "soon repudiated." Chen criticized the US equally for its military aid to South Vietnam and the use of Thailand as its "main military base and source of war in Southeast Asia."[121] On May 24, he presented five principles for use in any solution to the Lao question. All participants must agree to adhere to the 1954 Geneva agreements, respect Lao sovereignty and independence, ensure Lao neutrality, draw a clear line between domestic and international issues in Laos, and accept the common agreements from the current conference.[122] He also responded to a demand by US Secretary of State Rusk that neutrality in Laos "must go beyond the classical concept of non-alignment and include positive assurance of the integrity of the elements of national life." These assurances, Rusk argued, should include the

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[118] Zhai, 99–100.
[119] Jonathan Mirsky and Stephen E. Stonefield, "The Nam Tha Crisis: Kennedy and the New Frontier on the Brink," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, ed. Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 165.
[120] Quoted in Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 255.
[121] "Foreign Minister Chen Yi's Speech at Geneva Conference," Peking Review, May 19, 1961, 5-7.
[122] Chae-Jin Lee, "Communist China and the Geneva Conference on Laos: A Reappraisal," *Asian Survey* 9, no. 7 (1969): 529; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 101.

protection against threats from within and without Laos. Chen responded that "US ruling circles" had always understood "the people's national and democratic movements…as aggressive activities organized from without." Rusk's real aim, according to Chen, was to suppress the possibility of revolution in a neutral Laos by "eliminating the patriotic forces in Laos." To the PRC delegation, this constituted "bare-faced interference" in Lao domestic affairs.[123]

Outside formal conference sessions, Chen worked with Sihanouk and the French and Indian delegations to orchestrate a meeting between Souvanna, Souphanouvong, and Boun Oum in Zurich. On June 22, the three princes met and agreed to establish a framework for creating a tripartite coalition government that would adhere to the peaceful neutrality of the 1954 Geneva agreements and the electoral regulations and rights in the 1957 Vientiane agreement.[124] Zhou Enlai spoke with the Cambodian ambassador to China, Leng Ngeth, on July 10 congratulating the Lao princes on coming to an agreement but warning that realizing a coalition government would not be easy and implying China was ready to deal with the consequences of Lao domestic failures: "We oppose a rupture, but we are not afraid of a rupture."[125] Meanwhile, in conversation with the Albanian ambassador to the PRC, Reiz Malile, Chen Yi commented that Sino-Soviet cooperation in the conference so far had been good "to a certain degree," complaining that the Soviets "come up with their own approaches and insist on them."[126] Indeed, Kennedy and Khrushchev met

[123] "Five Principles for Solution of the Laotian Question," Peking Review, June 2, 1961, 6-9; Lee, "Communist China and the Geneva Conference on Laos," 529.
[124] MacAlister Brown, "Communists in Coalition Government: Lessons from Laos," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, ed. Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger (London: Macmillan, 1991), 46; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 103.
[125] ZZWY, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 2:423.
[126] "Information on the Meeting with Comrade Chen Yi," July 27, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110798 WCDA

without representatives from the PRC or DRV in early June in Vienna and agreed that both wanted Lao neutrality.[127]

Through the end of 1961, negotiations seemed consistently in favor of the PRC, Pathet Lao, and Souvanna's neutralist. The two governments began the process of formalizing relations, and preparations were made to dispatch He Wei, the PRC ambassador in Hanoi, and Liu Chun, political department director for the PLA Artillery Corps, to Xieng Khouang to establish an economic and cultural mission.[128] On October 21, Zhou told Quinim and Phoumi Vongvichit that, consistent with the plan Souphanouvong shared with Chen Yi in April, the overwhelming power of the neutralists and Pathet Lao would need to be reflected in the coalition government currently being negotiated.[129] In December, conference participants finally produced the Draft Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos, stipulating that all foreign troops and personnel must be removed from Laos within thirty days of signing and prohibiting "armaments, munitions and war material" except that which the RLG found necessary for national defense.[130] Problems arose, however, when Boun Oum suddenly renounced his support for the Zurich agreements and demanded that the minister of defense and minister of interior positions be allocated to members of Phoumi's faction. To the consternation of all involved, not least the US delegation's Averell Harriman, Phoumi had not given up on militarily defeating the Pathet Lao and Kong Le.

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[127] Mirsky and Stonefield, "The Nam Tha Crisis," 164; Edmund F. Wehrle, "'A Good, Bad Deal': John F. Kennedy, W. Averell Harriman, and the Neutralization of Laos, 1961-1962," *Pacific Historical Review* 67, no. 3 (August 1998): 349–77; Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 292.
[128] "Zhongguo Renming He Wei he Liu Chun Wei Zhu Laowo Jingji Wenhua Daibiaotuan Zhengfu Tuan Zhang," October, 17, 1961, 117-00898-03 PRCFMA.
[129] Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars,* 103.
[130] "Protocol to the Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos," Peking Review, December 22, 1961, 8-10; Quinim and Phoumi Vongvichit delegations travelled to Beijing with Huan Van Hoan's DRV delegation shortly after the protocols were released, but the substance of their discussions is not included in the archival materials on the trip. "Canjia Renaiwa Huiyi Daibiatuan Guojing Jiedai: Yuenan Waizhang Yong Wen Qian deng he Laowo, Liaofang Daibiaotuan, Yuenan Ruan Wei Zhen Fu Zongli Guojing Jiedai: Yinsong, Huijian, Yanqing, Zhibing," December 19, 1961, 117-01031-01 PRCFMA.

In early months of 1962, while PRC aid was helping Souvanna establish a new capital in Khang Khay, Phoumi gathered over five thousand troops in Nam Tha fifteen miles from the Sino-Lao border. Phoumi's US advisors warned that this would provoke socialist powers but failed to understand that such provocation was the goal. By that point, Phoumi realized the US was not willing to fully commit to a war in Laos. Thailand and South Vietnam, however, were worth protecting in Washington's eyes. Phoumi believed that a full-scale attack from any socialist force large enough to threaten Thai security would compel the US to send its own troops into Laos.[131] He was wrong. By May, Phoumi's Royal Lao Army was venturing into Pathet Lao-controlled areas in the surrounding hills. The Pathet Lao responded by taking over the Royal Lao Army's supply airstrip at Muang Sing. As conflicting reports emerged from the US government and military about PRC troops in northern Laos, on May 6, the Pathet Lao launched their offensive. Six hours later, Nam Tha was captured.[132]

The New York Times reported that the Kennedy administration now saw Phoumi's "inability as a military commander" and that his army was "even weaker than had been believed." Phoumi himself was in Taiwan at the time of the attack. He and Boun Oum were touring Asia gathering support for negotiations with Souvanna and Souphanouvong. When they arrived in Manila, the message from Washington was clear. The US ambassador to the Philippines, William E. Stevenson, snubbed the former American darling for launching the Nam Tha operation by refusing to receive him at the airport.[133] Although Kennedy moved several thousand US troops in Thailand closer to the Lao border, he refused to enter. Phoumi and Boun Oum were now forced to negotiate.

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[131] Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience*, 448; Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 260.
[132] Mirsky and Stonefield, "The Nam Tha Crisis," 168–69.
[133] "U.S. Loses Faith in Laos General." The New York Times, May 28, 1962, 1 & 3.

The three princes and Phoumi met in Khang Khay to finally settle what would become the second coalition government in Laos. To facilitate negotiations, Boun Oum agreed to resign as prime minister. Souvanna would once again take that role as well as minister of defense. Souphanouvong and Phoumi would both be deputy premiers with veto power over cabinet decisions. Souvanna's neutralists got seven cabinet posts while the Phoumi faction and the NLHX each got four. An additional four were allocated to conservatives with no allegiances to Phoumi.[134] The agreement was signed on June 12, and the following day the PRC government issued a statement of congratulations, not failing to point out that it was the US-backed Phoumi who caused negotiations to drag out for a full year after the initial Zurich agreement.[135] The Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos was signed in Geneva on July 23, 1962. It required foreign military forces to leave Laos within seventy-five days and assured that Laos would establish formal diplomatic relations with all its neighboring countries. As Beijing had hoped, the ICC was limited largely to monitoring the ceasefire.

In a conversation with members of the Albanian Labor Party before the signing, Deng Xiaoping offered China's assessment of the agreements and Laos's future. The CCP believed it would now be much more difficult for the US to interfere in Laos and maintained that the "most important thing is to gain time for the Pathet Lao to strengthen its work with the masses." The coalition government itself would likely fail. Deng said the veto power of each side meant the emerging government was "'a cart with three horses'…an empty thing." Yet, the formation of a new government meant the start of a new political struggle "more complicated than the armed war." Deng stressed that CCP and Soviet leadership had differing opinions on the conference results. While Khrushchev saw the conference as a model for peaceful negotiations with the West, China

[134] Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 262–63.
[135] "China Hails Laotian People's Victory," Peking Review, June 15, 1967, 6-7.

was ready for the struggle to continue. Nonetheless, the expected distancing of the Soviets from Laos benefited the PRC.[136] In the final days of the conference, Chen Yi gave a speech claiming that the achievement of the conference meant that no power could suppress the Lao people's desire for national liberation. Although the neutralization of Laos would likely push the US to increase interventions elsewhere in Southeast Asia, he believed that the conference had "broken through a link in the chain of tensions…and we should enlarge this breakthrough."[137]

Conclusion

From the perspective of the communist parties invested in Laos, the Kong Le coup was an accident of the revolution. Its significance was to open the door for direct PRC and DRV aid to the Pathet Lao in the name of defending Souvanna's government in Khang Khay. The government Kong Le tried to establish in Vientiane lasted only four months, but its importance to the larger Lao conflict did not lie in any policies it could have achieved. Instead, it created a target for US-backed forces that, when struck, accelerated the revolution and forced clearer alignments between left and right than were possible under any previous government. The accident of Kong Le was thus compensated for by the accident of Phoumi and Boun Oum's countercoup. In Maoist terminology, no event in the first six years of Lao independence did more to sharpen the contradictions between socialist and capitalist alignments than Kong Le's arrival in and expulsion from Vientiane in the last half of 1960. Official Lao histories date the beginning of the civil war from the flight of the Pathet Lao's two battalions to Sam Neua and the arrest of NLHX leaders in the capital. Kong Le's defeat foreclosed the possibility of a negotiated end to this war and ensured the long-term failure of Lao neutrality before discussions in Geneva even began. For these reasons,

[136] "Fifth Official Meeting Between the Delegation of the Albanian Labor Party and the Delegation of the Chinese Communist Party," June 19, 1962, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110806 WCDA.
[137] "Chen Yi's Speech at Geneva," Peking Review, July 27, 1962, 6.

it far outweighs the 1961-1962 conference in terms of importance for understanding the Lao revolution.

As negotiations unfolded at Geneva, the Lao People's Party Central Committee counted among its united front allies "government members, the military, the youth, the *Sangha*, the gentry, and well-known figures like Souvanna Phouma and Pheng Phongsavan." Support from such a broad cross section of Lao society, they claimed, was a feature of the particularity of the Lao revolutionary situation. Another feature was the concerning degree to which development of political education lagged behind military build-up. To address this, the LPP and VWP would soon turn toward CCP expertise. Lao revolutionary leaders continued to fear they could not ride the wave of nationalist sentiment Kong Le's coup sent rocketing through Lao society, but they knew what stood before them. In the Central Committee's words, they believed they "must cleverly make the Party Central Committee's line become the line of the united front."[138] Speaking to the LPP Central Committee in 1965, Kaysone recalled their objectives immediately following Geneva 1962. First, they were to fulfill the Geneva Agreements by struggling to maintain a coalition government. Second, they were to "promote a situation of short-term stability to create favorable conditions for comprehensively building revolutionary strength."[139] The mere formulation of these objectives, based as they were on the outcomes of Geneva 1962, would have been impossible without Kong Le's unforeseeable actions in August 1960.

This is not to make Kong Le a pro-communist figure. His anti-communism would become clear in the coming years. Rather, it is to emphasize that no communist revolutions occurred in "infallibly favorable" situations.[140] As accidents changed the course of the Lao revolution

[138] ZZDLYE, *Laowo Renmin Geming Dang*, 113–15.
[139] "Liao Fang Zhongyang Wenjian: Kaishan zai Zhongyang Changwei Kuoda Huiyi Shang de Baogao deng," April 1 – July 30, 1965, 106-00896-02 PRCFMA.
[140] Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 264.

domestically, so did they change CCP and VWP assessments of the (im)possibility of a political transition to socialism and methods for supporting the Pathet Lao. From the perspective of a reconstructed socialist internationalism, the difference between Geneva 1954 and Geneva 1962 in the eyes of the Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese parties rested on how revolution was to be achieved. The former was characterized by a willingness, and in the wake of the wars of the late 1940s and early 1950s a necessity, to experiment with the possibility of political transition. The latter was a return to better tested tactics – armed struggle.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NECESSITY AND AMBIVALENCE OF NATIONALISM: CCP ADVISERS IN NORTHERN LAOS

The People's Republic of China's invasion of Vietnam in 1979 shocked the socialist world. Following quick on the heels of the Vietnamese overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, it marked the "meltdown of revolutionary Asian internationalism."[1] Yet, as scholars of Sino-Vietnamese relations have shown, it is best understood as the death rattle of a long-enfeebled alliance with clear fissures in the 1960s.[2] Historians of the PRC's role in the Cold War predominately locate the roots of this and other conflicts with socialist allies in Chinese leaders' transhistorical pursuit of "status."[3] The idea is that, couched in Marxist-Leninist discourse, Mao Zedong and other CCP leaders wanted to restore "the Central Kingdom's historical glory" by becoming "first among equals" in the former colonial world.[4] The innumerable and sometimes incoherent accusations of 'revisionism' by CCP leaders and diplomats toward anything that questioned the preeminence of Maoist thought after the Sino-Soviet split lends this perspective common sense credibility. Further, the CCP's reform-oriented position on international economic inequality under Mao's Three Worlds Theory and PRC-US cooperation against the Soviet Union in the 1970s demonstrate the transformation from revolution to reform as much as they do the continuity of nationalist self-interest across the entire Mao era.[5]

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[1] Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War and the Meltdown of Asian Internationalism," 154.
[2] Nguyen, "The Sino-Vietnamese Split"; Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*.
[3] Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 22; Lo, *Axis of Convenience*, 25; Garver, *China's Quest*, 113; Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World*, 4.
[4] Chen Jian, "A Response," 139; Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World*, 5.
[5] Ahmad, *In Theory*; Chen Jian, "China's Changing Policies Toward the Third World and the End of the Global Cold War," in *The End of the Cold War and the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict*, ed. Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergey Radchenko (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 101–21.

Whether conflicts between Asian communist parties originated in nationalist motivations or disagreements of Marxist revolutionary theory points to a larger problem for PRC and Cold War historians – the relationship between national liberation, internationalism, and class revolution. This problem was acutely felt by communist parties themselves, and, in the mid-1960s, as advisers from the CCP and VWP studied the Pathet Lao, Laos became a laboratory for working out an answer. These parties agreed on two key points: 1) nationalist sentiment provided the only path for building a coalition large enough to defeat US-backed rightwing and neutralist forces in Laos and was therefore necessary for the revolution, and 2) this sentiment was politically ambivalent. That is, it could be mobilized in different ways to different ends. The specific ways and ends for Laos, however, became a point of conflict between the CCP and VWP.

Nationalism is a weapon. Like any weapon, it is not always wielded for the same reasons. Classical Marxism-Leninism's instrumentalist approach to nationalism has been well documented, both critically and with qualified approval.[6] The previous two chapters focused on how the CCP worked with the Pathet Lao and VWP to create the conditions under which this weapon could be used. In this chapter, I am concerned with why it was the only category around which sufficient revolutionary mobilization was possible and the problems that presented. Why this weapon and not another? With this in mind, it is useful to summarize the basic foundations of socialist internationalism, this time acknowledging that its politics are a response to an issue it did not sufficiently theorize.

[6] For critical assessments, see Nairn, "The Modern Janus"; Régis Debray, "Marxism and the National Question," *New Left Review* 1, no. 105 (October 1977): 25–41; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Shlomo Avineri, "Marxism and Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 3/4 (September 1991): 637–57. For more qualified approval, see Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question"; Horace B. Davis, *Toward a Marxist Theory of Nationalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978); Enzo Traverso and Michael Löwy, "The Marxist Approach to the National Question: A Critique of Nimni's Interpretation," *Science & Society* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 132–46; Mike Davis, "Marx's Lost Theory," *New Left Review* 2, no. 93 (June 2015): 45–66; Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms*.

As developed by Lenin and made orthodoxy at the Communist International in 1920, traditional thought on the 'national question' argues that nationalist sentiment is politically ambivalent. In the abstract, the demand for national self-determination explains nothing about what the nation will determine to do. What was clear, however, was that freedom from political oppression along national and ethnic lines was a prerequisite for emancipation in general. Thus, while Marxists should be agnostic about the particular content of nationalist claims, Lenin argued it was "the Marxist's *bounden* duty" to support oppressed nations' right to secede from larger empires and demand radical democratization between all nationalities.[7] As the proletariat of oppressor nations championed the right of oppressed nations to secede, working classes in oppressed nations would mobilize under the slogan "belonging together," reuniting these groups on new, equal terms.[8] After the founding of the Communist International, Lenin and M. N. Roy developed a programmatic approach to nationalist movements that distinguished between bourgeois and revolutionary variants. While the former sought to harness nationalist sentiment to paper over class contradictions within colonial societies, the latter would mobilize a coalition of oppressed classes (i.e., a united front) against foreign oppressors and their local allies.[9] Under the guidance of a proletarian party, a united front based on revolutionary nationalism was the key for socialist revolution outside Western Europe.

Mao pressed the connection between national liberation and class revolution further by arguing that the Chinese national struggle against Japanese imperialism was "applied internationalism."[10] Because Japan was an imperialist power oppressing many nations in Asia,

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[7] Lenin, "Critical Remarks," 34.
[8] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 276.
[9] Riddell, *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!*
[10] Mao Zedong, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 2 (New York: Pergamon Press, 1965), 196.

weakening it through China's liberation was an advance against imperialism in general. The CCP's role in this struggle was to foster nationalist sentiment against Japanese oppression while maintaining the party's independence as a class-revolution-focused organization. During the early 1930s, the CCP adhered to Lenin's formulations to the point of including the right of minority ethnic groups to secede in the constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic and, until 1941, supporting Taiwanese independence.[11] Although the right to secede was abandoned after it became apparent that not all minority groups would elect to reunite in a federation of socialist nations, the claim to ethnic equality remained. What emerged was a revolutionary nationalism that was ethnically inclusive while excluding the most exploitative strata of Chinese society. This model for a united front using nationalist sentiment to mobilize a broad coalition against foreign and domestic oppression was repeated in both Vietnam and Laos.[12]

Successful revolutions in China, Laos, and Vietnam attest to the efficacy of this *strictly strategic* theory of the relationship between national liberation and class revolution. However, the appeal to nationalist sentiment in each revolution also suggests a problem – class, on its own, was never a sufficient category for political mobilization. A strategic theory cannot address why this was the case. It can only suggest methods for political organizing. In this chapter, I use recent work on Marx's concept of formal subsumption to outline a theory for why nationalism presented itself as the only viable path to revolution in the colonial world. I argue that the reproduction of pre-capitalist forms of exploitation and uneven development under capitalist imperialism continually reproduced many types of identities. Of these, the nation was the only one with broad enough appeal for revolution. I then turn to CCP attempts to export its revolutionary model to Laos and the resultant conflicts with the VWP. These conflicts demonstrate the variation in Asian

[11] Westad, *Decisive Encounters*, 118.
[12] Bouphanouvong, *Sixteen Years in the Land of Death*; Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965*.

communist thought on how to use nationalism for revolution but also the necessity of nationalism as the only effective mobilizing category.

Nationalism, Formal Subsumption, and Unevenness

Subsumption is the incorporation of particularity into a universal system. The term has recently gained renewed relevance in Asian Studies through Harry Harootunian's reinterpretation of Marx's concepts of formal and real subsumption as a theory of capitalism's expansion through imperialism.[13] In *Capital* vol. 1, Marx uses formal subsumption to describe the incorporation of pre-capitalist labor processes into capital's larger accumulation process. He writes that, as the relations of capital enter a new arena, "capital subsumes the labour process as it finds it…it takes over an *existing labour process*, developed by different and more archaic modes of production."[14] Once answerable to the rhythms of global commodity production the specific forms of labor involved in, for example, handicraft or peasant agriculture are performed at higher intensity for longer periods of time. However, because the concrete labor performed does not change, Marx stresses that it is only "formally distinct" from the same labor performed in pre-capitalist social relations.[15] This is contrasted to the real subsumption of labor, which Marx describes as the "specifically capitalist form of production."[16] Under real subsumption the labor process is revolutionized through technological innovation and the relations of production are transformed into that between the capitalist and wage laborer in, for example, factory production or industrial agriculture. Marx is clear that these two forms coexist and are not sequential moments of development. The formal subsumption of labor under capital

[13] Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*.
[14] Emphasis in original. Marx, *Capital*, 1990, I:1021.
[15] Emphasis in original. Marx, I:1025.
[16] Marx, I:1024.

> …is the general form of every capitalist process of production; at the same time, however, it can be found as a *particular* form alongside the *specifically capitalist mode of production* in its developed form, because although the latter entails the former, the converse does not necessarily obtain [i.e. the formal subsumption can be found in the absence of the specifically capitalist mode of production].[17]

The lesson to be drawn from these concepts here is that capital obstructs its own homogenizing tendencies. Harootunian uses formal subsumption to argue for the presence of multiple temporalities in capitalism owing to the continued existence of older labor processes and forms of exploitation repurposed to produce surplus-value. As capitalism spread to Asia through imperialism, it formally subsumed preexisting labor practices to its logic of accumulation, "taking on the baggage of older forms of exploitation and resituating them alongside and within newer capitalist demands to create value."[18] Thus, in China, for example, the system of gentry-landlordism as it developed under the Qing was taken hold of by Western powers. Rural elites in the late Qing and early Republican years used traditional modes of exploitation to increase peasant production of agricultural goods for a world market.[19] Many Chinese observers lamented the continuance of older labor processes and forms of exploitation as evidence of China's 'backwardness', but some, in keeping with a nonlinear view of capitalist development, diagnosed this hybridity of old and new labor processes as fundamental to capitalism itself.[20] The latter is closer to the late Marx's own view.

There are more modes of exploitation in capital than industrial wage labor, and these modes may continue for myriad reasons. In *Capital* vol. 3, Marx writes that, for example, usury "has capital's mode of exploitation without its mode of production."[21] It predates capital but can be

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[17] Emphasis and brackets in original. Marx, I:1019.
[18] Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, 13.
[19] Walker, *Chinese Modernity and the Peasant Path*.
[20] Rebecca E. Karl, *The Magic of Concepts: History and the Economic in Twentieth-Century China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
[21] Marx, *Capital*, 1991, III:732.

found within branches of the bourgeois economy that are "struggling against the transition to the modern mode of production" (i.e., that are formally subsumed).[22] There is a tendency within capital to reproduce the heterogeneous forms of exploitation it initially adopted through formal subsumption. These forms may involve landlord-peasant relations, but they may equally involve prior exploitation rooted in patriarchy, ethnic hierarchy, or preexisting tributary relations, such as between upland and lowland polities in Southeast Asia. This tendency coexists with a drive to overcome these older forms and create the homogeneous social relations between capitalist and proletariat predicted in works like the *Communist Manifesto* (i.e., the tendency toward real subsumption). For the study of socialist revolutions in Asia, the implication of formal subsumption as the general form of capitalist accumulation is the impossibility of revolution rooted solely in class identity. The coexistence of multiple and more apparent forms of exploitation meant that a larger coalition needed to be developed to enact revolution.

Writing on the conflicts in France in 1848, Marx notes that the "struggle against capital in its developed, modern form, in its culminating phase the struggle of the industrial wage worker against the industrial bourgeois" was only "partially a fact."[23] The struggle between capital and wage labor was unable to provide the "national content" of the French uprising because other struggles against "capital's secondary modes of exploitation" were unresolved.[24] These secondary modes included peasant struggles against usury and petty bourgeois struggles against banking and manufacturing. The result, in Marx's analysis, was a cross-class uprising against the French aristocracy in a confused combination of classes who, for the moment, developed a common enemy. The key is that Marx did not place these non-industrial labor processes in France outside

[22] Marx, III:732.
[23] Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, 43.
[24] Marx, 43.

the relations of capital. Instead, they were secondary modes of capitalist exploitation.[25] Through a process Marx would later call formal subsumption, capital accumulation was reproducing older forms of exploitation and older class formations (i.e., the peasantry). The relations of capital themselves prevented the conditions for 'developed', 'modern' class revolution. The content of the uprising came instead from a coalition of interests. In 1926, Mao Zedong may have been more in line with Marx's political writing than he realized when he opened his analysis of classes in Chinese society with the questions, "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?"[26] Coalition was inevitable. No revolution to that point had been a strictly proletarian revolution and none would be.

Formal subsumption and the uneven development it produces leads to Althusser's observation that, in the last instance, the capital-labor contradiction is the core contradiction, but "the 'lonely hour' of the last instance never comes."[27] In this framework, domination along gender, ethnic, and international lines is part of capital's need for a "vast differentiation of forms of exploitation," which predate it but which it continually reproduces.[28] For Harootunian, formal subsumption represents the possibility that older forms of community could survive in capitalism and serve as the basis of a vision of post-capitalist society.[29] Similarly, Massimiliano Tomba argues that the repurposing of older forms of domination along the lines mentioned above can "disclose both emancipatory and reactionary possibilities."[30] My point here, however, is to illustrate that whatever ideological form nationalism takes, it is in response to the material foundations created through formal subsumption. It is a response to uneven development, which creates many forms

[25] Davis, *Toward a Marxist Theory of Nationalism*.
[26] Mao Zedong, "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 13.
[27] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: Verso, 2005), 113.
[28] Tomba, "On the Capitalist and Emancipatory Use of Asynchronies," 292.
[29] Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, 55.
[30] Tomba, "On the Capitalist and Emancipatory Use of Asynchronies," 298.

of identity in response to many forms of exploitation. The nation oppressed by foreign powers is only one among these, but it is the broadest.[31] If the nation can be defined in a way that is inclusive of enough segments of society, it is also the most useful for revolution.

This can be seen in the CCP's experimentation with land reform in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In the wake of the White Terror in 1927, the CCP was split into many rural base areas. Under Mao's leadership the base area around Ruijin, Jiangxi Province grew to become the largest and most important of these.[32] While rural inequalities in the early twentieth century were not as profound as CCP-authored accounts might imply, peasant life was generally characterized by a constant struggle for subsistence.[33] As Zarrow observes, by the 1930s neither the trajectory of the commercialization of agriculture under the Qing nor the integration of the Chinese countryside into global markets through imperialism had done much to change the "basic shape of the ancient small-peasant economy."[34] Despite this, however, Chinese peasants were subject to both domestic crises and crises of the international economy, and their immiseration was due to a combination of the two.[35] Within this context, groups the CCP defined as poor peasants (those who owned a small portion of land but had to rent more or work as part-time labor for survival) and farm laborers (those who depended entirely on selling their labor) were the most receptive to the CCP's message of class revolution through land reform. Prior to Mao's arrival in Jiangxi, the CCP in the area had already experimented with land reform with an emphasis on public ownership. All land was confiscated and redistributed equally among the local population, including those landlords and

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[31] Nairn, "The Modern Janus."
[32] Brantly Womack, *The Foundations of Mao Zedong's Political Thought, 1917-1935* (Honolulu, HI: The University of Hawaii Press, 1982), 143.
[33] Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution*, 272.
[34] Zarrow, 273.
[35] Zarrow argues that the Great Depression contributed significantly to pushing many already teetering peasant households "over the edge" when industrialized nations closed their markets. Zarrow, 272. Prior to this, however, peasants were already in a profoundly precarious position not despite but because of commercialization of agriculture. Walker, *Chinese Modernity and the Peasant Path*, 178–82.

rich peasant who did not resist. The result was recurring demands for egalitarianism and redistribution among the poor peasants and farm labors who constituted the CCP's main source of support. Constant redistribution gravely impacted production, which already struggled to reach subsistence levels. This, in turn, impacted the CCP's ability to collect taxes to supply the Red Army.

Mao intervened to moderate these policies while maintaining a focus on equal distribution.[36] Under his leadership, rich peasants' land was still subject to confiscation, but they were allowed to keep portions of their traditional fields instead of being assigned new ones. Although usury and pawn-broking were outlawed, rich peasants could keep other types of pre-existing businesses. Middle peasants (those who owned enough land to produce at subsistence levels but neither rented out land nor hired labor) were untouched, and poor peasants and farm laborers were assigned land confiscated from rich peasants and landlords by the CCP. In the short-term, the goal of these policies was equitable private, not public, land ownership.[37] These moderate policies briefly strengthened the CCP's revolutionary coalition, providing compliance, if not support, among traditional rural elites. This coalition was expanded to include many women by the 1931 Marriage Law, which codified the right to divorce and choose one's own spouse as well as prohibiting polygamy, the sale of women for marriage, and child marriage.[38]

That same year, top CCP leadership (of which Mao was not yet a part) arrived at Ruijin and established the Chinese Soviet Republic (CSR). As Opper has shown, these events marked a renewed radicalization of party policy.[39] By 1932, the CCP had succeeded in equalizing all land

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[36] Womack, *The Foundations of Mao Zedong's Political Thought*, 148.
[37] Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution*, 282–83.
[38] Wang Lingzhen, "Women's Liberation," in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, ed. Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2019), 318–19.
[39] Opper, *People's Wars*, 38–46.

under the CSR, creating a system of small, private land holdings. The CCP followed this with further land reform campaigns aimed at achieving public ownership – this time denying landlords any land whatsoever and reassigning rich peasants only the poorest quality land available.[40] Under the leadership of Zhang Wentian, these groups were also assigned to hard labor camps.[41] By the time moderate policies were put back into place in 1933, the damage to the fragile coalition had been done. The CCP made bitter enemies of rich peasants and presented itself as a potentially serious threat to middle peasants. The CSR endured constant military attacks by the Guomindang, but it was not until Jiang Jieshi's 1934 German-inspired blockhouse strategy that the CCP were forced to abandon the area and begin the Long March. During this campaign, landlords, rich peasants, and middle peasants impacted by the radicalism of post-1931 land reform defected from CCP areas in larger numbers. Without CCP control, the rural economy in Jiangxi quickly returned to its previous state.

These lessons were remembered in the CCP's "Resolution on Changing the Policy Toward the Rich Peasantry" in December 1935, which openly addressed how previous attempts to eliminate rich peasants threatened middle peasant households and weakened the overall coalition.[42] It called for unification among all peasants to create a broad mass line and directly stated it was wrong to prevent rich peasants from participating in the revolution. The following year, the threat of Japanese imperialism made the need for a larger coalition more apparent and provided a form of exploitation around which that coalition could mobilize – oppression by a foreign state. Under the second United Front with the Guomindang, the CCP went further than it previously had to incorporate classes outside its traditional base, recruiting some rich and middle

[40] Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution*, 283.
[41] Opper, *People's Wars*, 55.
[42] Opper, 97.

peasants into the party in the hope of transforming them into allies. As Kathleen Hartford observes, in the war against Japan, the CCP had to "perform an elaborate balancing act between classes."[43] As it continued to place poor peasants in dominant political positions at the village level in base areas, it also had to appease traditional rural elites to keep them within the anti-Japanese coalition. If these elites were alienated too much from base area governments, they could easily endanger these organizations as well as those peasants willing to participate with the CCP's resistance and reform policies. What bound these groups together was the project of national liberation.

After the war against Japan, CCP land reform policies radicalized once more, reaching a peak in 1947.[44] If opponents of moderation during the war against Japan are to be believed, the CCP's message of limited class struggle and anti-imperialism succeeded in incorporating segments of the peasantry that opposed the party in Jiangxi. The point is that, in the case of the Chinese revolution, the CCP's class base among poor peasants and farm laborers (not to mention the actual proletariat in the cities) was never enough to build a coalition large enough for the revolution to succeed while the CCP was still militarily weaker than its opponents – a problem whose resolution began with Soviet resupplies of the PLA in 1945.[45] In Marx's words, the classes who formed the CCP's base of support were unable to provide the revolution's 'national content'. Such content came instead when the CCP was willing to incorporate opposition to other forms of exploitation (traditional patriarchy and imperialism) into its revolutionary strategy.

For revolutionary groups with socialist aims, the benefits of mobilizing a cross-class coalition around nationalist sentiment came with compromise. In China, class-based initiatives

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[43] Hartford quoted in Opper, 99.
[44] See, for example, Duan Suquan's speech at the opening of the Hebei-Jehol-Chahar Party Committee Land Conference. Hebei Sheng Dang'an Guan, ed., "Duan Suquan Tongzhi Zai Ji-Re-Cha Qu Dangwei Tudi Huiyi Shang de Kaimuci," in *Hebei Tudi Gaige Dang'an Shiliao Xuanbian* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Renmin Chubanshe, 1990), 281–84.
[45] Walder, *China Under Mao*, 31–32.

like land reform were only possible where the CCP had consolidated power precisely because it weakened the coalition for revolution by placing narrower class interests over the national struggle.[46] Similarly, in Laos, many revolutionaries joined not because of a proletarian class position but because the Pathet Lao promised to end older forms of gender and ethnic domination reproduced through the history of capitalist imperialism.[47] Several communist parties in Southeast Asia expanded their ranks precisely on the vision of a nation with gender and ethnic equality.[48] The history of the CCP's direct involvement in advising the Pathet Lao centers on identifying the possible class base for Lao revolution and the degree of compromise necessary to make the revolution viable.

Contradictions in Sino-Lao Relations

On October 1, 1962, Nouhak Phoumsavan raised a glass in celebration. The occasion was the thirteenth anniversary of the founding of the PRC. Speaking to a crowd of over one hundred at the PRC Economic and Cultural Mission in Khang Khay, Nouhak's praise for his Chinese comrades was effusive. "Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's socialist construction, under the brilliant leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao Zedong, in thirteen years has achieved glorious success," he said. "The Lao people's struggle for peace, neutrality, and independence has received all along the vigorous and selfless support of the Chinese people…Today, our two countries' diplomatic relations are ever closer. This is our victory."[49] Nouhak was not alone. Pheng Phongsavan thanked Chen Yi for his support during the

[46] Walder, *China Under Mao*; Brian DeMare, *Land Wars: The Story of China's Agrarian Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019); Opper, *People's Wars*.
[47] Bouphanouvong, *Sixteen Years in the Land of Death*; Pholsena, "'Minority' Women and the Revolution."
[48] Han, *Asymmetrical Neighbors*; Baird, "The Hmong and the Communist Party of Thailand."
[49] "Zhuwai Shiguan Guoqing 13 Zhounian Zhaodaihui: Jianpuzhai, Laowo, Xuliya, A'erjiliya, Jiana, Yilake, Jineiya, Mali, Tangannika," October 1, 1962 – November 23, 1962, 117-01052-03 PRCFMA.

recent Geneva Conference and declared that the "Lao people's victory and the aid of the Chinese people cannot be separated."[50] In Vientiane, the RLG sent the newly established PRC embassy a discordant message. Police surrounded the building while Chinese music played over the RLG radio. Inside, PRC diplomats hosted over two hundred people from across Vientiane's political landscape. In the northern-most province of Phongsaly, a smaller crowd of sixty gathered to celebrate at the PRC Consulate General.[51]

Of these three initial offices in Laos, the Khang Khay mission was undoubtedly the most important. It was established in November 1961 by He Wei, then PRC ambassador to the DRV, and his deputy Liu Chun.[52] By October 1962, Liu was living in Vientiane, waiting to present his ambassadorial credentials to the Lao king, Sisavang Vathana, and the reins of the Khang Khay mission were in the hands of Deng Kunshan.[53] The mission allowed the PRC government to enter close collaboration with the Pathet Lao and the VWP mission in Laos.[54] This closeness resulted partly from the signing of agreements on Lao neutrality at Geneva.

For left and neutralist forces in Laos, the immediate impact of the agreements was that the Soviet Union, in compliance with the agreements, halted aid. By August, Pham Van Dong reported to Zhou Enlai that the Pathet Lao and neutralist forces who had so recently defeated Phoumi's

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[50] "Zhuwai Shiguan Guoqing 13 Zhounian Zhaodaihui: Jianpuzhai, Laowo, Xuliya, A'erjiliya, Jiana, Yilake, Jineiya, Mali, Tangannika," October 1, 1962 – November 23, 1962, 117-01052-03 PRCFMA.

[51] Embassy personnel highlighted that Phoumi's head of military police, Ouane Rattikone, and the right-wing Hmong politician Touby Lyfoung were both in attendance. "Zhuwai Shiguan Guoqing 13 Zhounian Zhaodaihui: Jianpuzhai, Laowo, Xuliya, A'erjiliya, Jiana, Yilake, Jineiya, Mali, Tangannika," October 1, 1962 – November 23, 1962, 117-01052-03 PRCFMA.

[52] "Zhongguo Renming He Wei he Liu Chun Wei Zhu Laowo Jingji Wenhua Daibiaotuan Zheng Fu Tuanzhang," June 28, 1961 – October 18, 1961, 117-00898-03 PRCFMA; Langer, *The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao*, 58.

[53] "Zhongguo Zhu Laowo, Wuganda, Tansang, Sudan he Jianpuzhai Xinren Dashi Daoren Qingkuang," January 16, 1962 – November 30, 1962, 117-00986-01 PRCFMA; "Liaofang dui Kanwen Kanfa," October 9 – December 2, 1963, 106-01094-02 PRCFMA; Shi Weitong, "Zhongguo Xiang Laowo Paichu Sangnu Gongzuozu Shimo," *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu*, no. 3 (2019): 107.

[54] Meetings were held, for example, between all sides in determining detailed plans on how to treat US representatives who occasionally visited Khang Khay. "Zhongguo Zhu Laowo, Wuganda, Tansang, Sudan he Jianpuzhai Xinren Dashi Daoren Qingkuang," January 16, 1962 – November 30, 1962, 117-00986-01 PRCFMA.

soldiers at Nam Tha were "on the verge of disbanding" due to dwindling supplies. Zhou asked that a list of needed aid be delivered to the new PRC ambassador to Hanoi, Zhu Qiwen, and assured Pham that the PRC would continue supplying the Lao revolution.[55] The Soviet Union would not commit serious aid to Indochina again until after Leonid Brezhnev's rise to general secretary of the CPSU in 1965.[56] China was now the Lao left's only benefactor outside Indochina.

Once firmly established in Laos, PRC diplomats reported to three institutions: the Foreign Ministry, the International Liaison Department (ILD), and the Second Department of the People's Liberation Army's General Staff Department (Second Department). The public face of the Foreign Ministry, the diplomatic importance of its leaders during the Mao era, and the opening of its archives have made it the subject of many PRC foreign relations histories. However, the Foreign Ministry's importance in exporting revolution should be qualified by the other organizations in the foreign relations apparatus. During the Mao era, the Foreign Ministry, the Commission for Foreign Cultural Relations, and the Commission for Overseas Chinese Affairs comprised the Office of Foreign Affairs, itself a part of the State Council. The State Council was directly answerable to the CCP Central Committee. The Foreign Ministry was, therefore, a governmental, not party, organization two levels away from the apex of power within the CCP administrative hierarchy.[57] The ambit of its public activities included managing embassies and consulates abroad, receiving foreign dignitaries, issuing statements on behalf of the Chinese government on international matters, and organizing development aid. In practice, the Foreign Ministry also served as a link between the CCP's clandestine foreign relations organizations and revolutionaries abroad.

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[55] "Record of Premier Zhou's Talk with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong," August 28, 1962, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/176894 WCDA.
[56] Xiaobing Li, *The Dragon in the Jungle: The Chinese Army in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 66–68.
[57] For a diagram of the State Council's foreign affairs apparatus, see Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Chinese Foreign Policy During the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 138.

The ILD and the Second Department were far more secretive. As discussed above, the ILD was established in the early months of 1950.[58] Its first director, Wang Jiaxiang, was also assigned director of the Guiding Commission on International Activities of the CCP Central Committee, which oversaw the international activities of mass organizations like the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the Communist Youth League, and the All-China Women's Federation.[59] While the Foreign Ministry was tasked with state-to-state relations, the ILD was responsible for party-to-party relations. Although the ILD was a party organization answerable directly to the Central Committee, there is some evidence that its status was roughly equal to the Foreign Ministry before the Sino-Soviet split.[60] Its main tasks included hosting communist delegations, attending foreign communist party congresses, and collecting intelligence for the Central Committee.

Perhaps most important for the international communist movement, ILD Deputy Director Liu Ningyi and CCP counterintelligence expert Kang Sheng ran the Marxism-Leninism Institute, a secret, top-level cadre school in Beijing for parties whose revolution was still in process. This included radicals from Laos, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Cambodia, and Indonesia.[61] In the early 1960s, the ILD was also involved in creating area studies institutes in Beijing, adding West Asia, Africa, and Latin America to its well established East and Southeast Asian programs.[62] In the fall of 1962, as Sino-Lao relations were strengthening, Wang Jiaxiang was criticized by Chen Yi, Kang Sheng, and Mao for penning a defense of peaceful coexistence and recommending détente with the Soviet Union. Although he was not removed from his ILD post until 1966, he spent the

[58] See Chapter One.
[59] Xia Yafeng, "Wang Jiaxiang," 143–44.
[60] Robert Suettinger, "Intelligence Report: The International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party" (Central Intelligence Agency, December 1971), 2.
[61] Garver, *China's Quest*, 200–201. Chin Peng, secretary general of the Communist Party of Malaya, includes an account of the cadre school in his memoir. Chin Peng, *My Side of History*, 426–30. Udom Sisuwan, Communist Party of Thailand politburo member, also included references to the ILD's impact on the Thai movement in his memoirs. Jeamteerasakul, "The Communist Movement in Thailand," 36.
[62] Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 51.

intervening years in "semi-retirement."[63] In his absence, the ILD continued to play an important role in relations between socialist organizations under the management of deputy directors Liu Ningyi and Wu Xiuquan (one of Souphanouvong's CCP confidants in preparations for Geneva 1961-1962).[64]

Significantly less is known about the Second Department (情报部 or 总二部). As part of the General Staff Department, it answers to the Central Military Commission, which controls the PLA.[65] Its general purview during the Mao era was military and political intelligence.[66] Chinese histories of CCP intelligence operations, even when produced for internal party use, tend to focus on pre-1949 activities guided by Zhou Enlai.[67] These activities, however, little resembled the system in place in the 1960s. Beginning in 1938, CCP security and intelligence activities were domestically focused and housed under the Social Affairs Department (社会部), led by Kang Sheng, Li Kenong (part of the PRC delegation to Geneva in 1954), and Pan Hannian.[68] In August 1949, the CCP Central Committee and the Central Military Commission decided these organizations would be dissolved after liberation and security and intelligence would be managed separately. The following October, Li Kenong was given dual positions as head of the Central Military Commission's new intelligence department and deputy foreign minister.[69] In April 1950,

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[63] Xia, "Wang Jiaxiang," 153.
[64] MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 97.
[65] The PLA is not ultimately answerable to the PRC Department of Defense. David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 125.
[66] Mark A. Stokes and Ian Easton, "The Chinese People's Liberation Army General Staff Department: Evolving Organization and Missions," in *The PLA as Organization v2.0* (Montgomery, AL: China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2012), 145.
[67] See, for example,Luo Yala, Chen Daiping, and Yang Guocai, eds., *Laizi Lishi Shenchu de Baogao: Zhongguo Gongnong Hongjun Ji Zhen Qingbao Gongzuo Chuchuang Shiqi Huigu* (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Zongcanbu Di San Bu, 2008); Dai Hongchun, ed., *Fenghuo Qianshao: Yan'an Shiqi Ji Zhan Qingbao Gongzuo Lishi Huigu* (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Zongcanbu Di San Bu, 2009).
[68] Xiaohong Xiao-Planes, "The Pan Hannian Affair and Power Struggles at the Top of the CCP (1953-1955)," *China Perspectives* 2010, no. 4 (2010): 120.
[69] Michael Schoenhals, "Guanyu Zhongguo Gongchandang Zhongyang Diaochabu de Lishi Kaocha," *Dangdai Zhongguo Shi Yanjiu* 17, no. 2 (March 2010): 98; Hao Zaijin, *Zhongguo Mimizhan: Zhonggong Qingbao, Baowei Gongzuo Jishi* (Beijing: Jin Cheng Chubanshe, 2015), 385.

Zhou announced that the PLA's new intelligence organization would include political and economic affairs along with military intelligence and that this work would now be focused abroad. Both Zhou and Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing stressed that the purpose of the organization was not to export revolution but to assist in active defense by understanding "enemy plots directed against our side."[70] Late in the Korean War, this system was rehoused under the PLA's General Staff Department. Li Kenong advanced within the PLA, and Liu Shaowen became director of the newly formed Second Department.

These organizations operated in concert and contradiction. Despite Zhou and Luo's words to the contrary, the system functioned such that the Foreign Ministry could maintain peaceful relations with a country's government while the ILD trained revolutionaries from the same country in methods to overthrow that government. It was a division of labor between diplomatic and armed struggle. If the latter developed far enough then the PLA's Second Department could be brought in to offer military advice. Together, they formed a means of exporting revolution far more detailed and direct than the CCP's attempts to popularize Maoism globally through *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (aka, the Little Red Book).[71] The full use of this system was also quite rare, first, because it depended on what Lukács called the "actuality of revolution" (ongoing revolution as a practical reality), and, second, because the recall of political and military advisers in the early Cultural Revolution left only a narrow historical window of operation.[72] During this window, the

[70] Luo Ruiqing quoted in Schoenhals, "Diaochabu," 99.
[71] For serious consideration of the history and intended impact of the Little Red Book, see Alexander C. Cook, "Introduction: The Spiritual Atom Bomb and Its Global Fallout," in *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander C. Cook (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1–22.
[72] Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought* (New York: Verso, 2009), 11. According to contemporary CIA reports, the ILD was completely remade in the late Cultural Revolution as a more moderate institution focused on rebuilding connections with socialist allies. Suettinger, "The Internatinal Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party."

most focused attempt to spread the Chinese revolutionary model began in 1963 with the formation of the Sam Neua Working Group.

Exporting Revolution: the Sam Neua Working Group

Established weeks prior to the signing of the 1962 Geneva agreements, the second coalition government in Vientiane consisted of representatives from all three Lao political forces under Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma. Phoumi and Souphanouvong served as deputy ministers. Although a November agreement called for the creation of a new military out of each sides' troops, no serious measures were taken. Instead, right and left forces retained control of their respective territory, creating a de facto partition. At the same time, tensions were growing on the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khouang between neutralist leader Kong Le and the Pathet Lao. While the loss of Soviet aid cost Kong Le his only source of support, Pathet Lao forces continued to receive underground supplies from Beijing and Hanoi. Soon, Kong Le joined Souvanna in a request for aid from the US, which the Pathet Lao immediately denounced.[73]

In November, left-wing neutralists under Colonel Deuane Sounnarath shot down an Air America transport delivering supplies to Kong Le's forces. Deuane later explained himself to CCP officials, claiming that US aid had corrupted many of Kong Le's officers.[74] The Pathet Lao stepped in to prevent Deuane's arrest, creating a rift between the left and a growing centrist alliance.[75] Friction continued to build as Souvanna joined Quinim and King Sisavang Vathana on a nine-country tour promoting Lao neutrality in February 1963. The following month, the Pathet Lao assisted Deuane in creating a new military force, the Patriotic Neutralists, out of former Kong Le

[73] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 127.
[74] "Dun Shangjiao Jieshao Laowo Qingkuang Jianbao," February 2, 1964, X1-35-116, 127-139 GZARA.
[75] Stuart Simmonds, "Laos: A Renewal of Crisis," *Asian Survey* 4, no. 1 (1964): 681; Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 264.

troops opposed to US intervention. On April 1, shortly after his tour with Souvanna, Quinim and his wife were fired upon by a member of their personal guard outside their home, killing Quinim and injuring his wife. Quinim was instrumental in establishing the PRC mission in Khang Khay and openly supported the prospect of PRC aid to Laos.[76] His death, assumed to be retaliation for the actions of Deuane and the Patriotic Neutralists, marked the end of the second coalition government. Souphanouvong and several other NLHX members fled Vientiane to Khang Khay. On April 21, Quinim's wife fled to Beijing for medical treatment, where she became active in hosting delegations of Lao leftist groups.[77]

As conditions in Vientiane worsened, the PRC Foreign Ministry moved many of its embassy staff to the mission in Khang Khay. By the end of May, the Pathet Lao and the Patriotic Neutralists had forced Kong Le out of the Plain of Jars, and the PRC Foreign Ministry began asking to increase Chinese presence there to "advance research in understanding the Xieng Khouang situation."[78] Two months later, the CCP dispatched its first ten-member team of military experts to Khang Khay led by PLA Senior Colonel Zhu Ying. Negotiations for further assistance began in late September when Zhou Enlai met with leaders from the LPP, the VWP, and the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (the Indonesian Communist Party) at the resort town of Conghua near Guangzhou.[79] At the meeting, Zhou advised each party to expand their united front work to generate mass support, increase the development of base areas in liberated zones, and strengthen

[76] Mao Zedong Zhuxi, Zhou Enlai Zongli deng tong Lai Fang de Laowo Lingdaoren Tanhua Jilu," April 22 – May 6, 1956, 204-01438-01 PRCFMA. Quinim was also one of several Lao politician who had travelled to the PRC to receive medical treatment unavailable in Vientiane. "Jiedai Laowo Daobiaotuan Guining, Fengweixi Deng Ren Guojing Beijing, Zhibing: Ying Song, Huijian, Yanqing, Jianbao," May 05, 1961 – August 15, 1962, 117-01033-01 PRCFMA.
[77] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Guining Benshana Furen de Jihua yu Huibao," May 07, 1964 – May 13, 1964, C37-2-1043 SMA.
[78] Shi, "Sangnu Gongzuozu Shimo," 107.
[79] Zhang, "China's Involvement in Laos," 1146.

party leadership. To this end, he proposed to Kaysone Phomvihane, general secretary of the LPP, that the CCP establish a team of expert advisers at his headquarters in Houaphanh.[80]

Kaysone left Conghua convinced. On October 8, Ambassador Zhu Qiwen telegrammed the Foreign Ministry, ILD, and Second Department from Hanoi notifying them that Kaysone had requested a significantly increased PRC presence in Laos. In addition to increased military advisory personnel at Khang Khay, Kaysone approved the dispatch of a team to Sam Neua specializing in developing base areas, including experts in "politics, military affairs, economics, production, nationality [ethnic minority] work (民族工作), social investigations (社会调查), and other aspects."[81] The group would be allowed to accompany top-level LPP officials throughout Laos to conduct research. Kaysone told Zhu the group could live in Sam Neua (the provincial capital) but suggested it would be easier to communicate if they stayed with the LPP Central Committee in the countryside, where accommodations could be ready by late November. In Khang Khay, Deng Kunshan was asked to notify Nouhak.[82]

Within days, Zhou summoned a meeting between Foreign Ministry officials, Deputy Chief of Staff Yang Chengwu, Second Department Director Liu Shaowen, and ILD Deputy Director Wu Xiuquan to begin planning. Given the VWP's close connections to the Lao revolution, the group decided that the team would be labeled a 'working group' in deference to the Vietnamese 'advisory group'(顾问团). Although this demonstrates clear acknowledgement of the relationship between the Lao and Vietnamese parties, the new team's initial reports from Laos indicate that top CCP leadership either did not know the extent of LPP dependence on the VWP or did not communicate

[80] "Guanyu Jiu Zhu Sangnu Jigou Wenti Zhengqiu Yuefang Yijian Shi," October 8 – December 27, 1963, 106-01420-03 PRCFMA.
[81] "Guanyu Jiu Zhu Sangnu Jigou Wenti Zhengqiu Yuefang Yijian Shi," October 8 – December 27, 1963, 106-01420-03 PRCFMA.
[82] "Guanyu Jiu Zhu Sangnu Jigou Wenti Zhengqiu Yuefang Yijian Shi," October 8 – December 27, 1963, 106-01420-03 PRCFMA.

it to the new team. Due to the wide ethnic diversity in Pathet Lao-controlled areas, officials at Zhou's initial meeting decided that any non-military experts should be selected from provincial party committees in Guangxi or Yunnan. It was not necessary, however, that experts come from minority backgrounds. They also felt the complexity of the Lao situation required institutional separation between open and clandestine operations.[83] The Foreign Ministry was assigned management of "public diplomacy and political struggle" and direct leadership over diplomatic missions in Vientiane, Khang Khay, and Phongsaly.[84] To manage the "secret work" of directly aiding the LPP, Liu Shaowen, Wu Xiuquan and Deputy Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei formed the Central Laos Working Group under the leadership of Yang Chengwu.[85] This group was not under any foreign relations organization but answered instead to the PLA's General Staff Department. The decision shows that the distribution of labor between these three organizations was explicitly acknowledged within the CCP and waiting to be deployed when the correct circumstance arose.

To lead the Sam Neua Working Group (SNWG), Yang and his associates selected Major General Duan Suquan. Duan joined the Communist Youth League in Chaling County, Hunan Province in 1930 at the age of fourteen. Three years later, he was a member of the Red Army and secretary of the CCP Qiandongnan Special Committee in Guizhou, establishing base areas in Miao minority regions.[86] In 1947, Duan was deeply involved in CCP debates on land reform in the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Border Region, arguing for closer alignment with radical elements of the

[83] "Guanyu Choujian Wo zhu Laowo Sangnu Jigou de Qingshi Baogao Deng," July 6 – December 25, 1963, 106-00751-03 PRCFMA.
[84] "Guanyu Choujian Wo zhu Laowo Sangnu Jigou de Qingshi Baogao Deng," July 6 – December 25, 1963, 106-00751-03 PRCFMA.
[85] Early planning documents also mention Zhou Enlai's military secretary Lei Yingfu and Foreign Ministry official Zhou Qiuye as proposed members, but these names do not appear in subsequent available documents. "Guanyu Choujian Wo zhu Laowo Sangnu Jigou de Qingshi Baogao Deng," July 6, 1963 – December 25, 1963, 106-00751-03 PRCFMA.
[86] Quan Yanchi and Du Weidong, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 23.

peasantry.[87] In a position the SNWG would later reformulate for Laos, Duan believed the CCP's united front with rich peasants during the civil war was introducing a "petty bourgeois class standpoint," causing the CCP to waver in its commitment to land redistribution, and blurring the line between ally and enemy. For Duan in the late 1940s, land reform was the "historical mission" of the CCP and the main thing connecting the party to its most reliable base – poor peasants.[88] After 1949, Duan's career took an academic turn. By late 1963, he was assistant director of the PLA's Advanced Military Academy and head of its Strategic Research and Teaching Office.[89] Duan's superiors believed that his experience with land reform, peasant mobilization, and cadre training fit Kaysone's request. His work in Miao areas, made up mainly of ethnic Hmong groups with historical connections to the Hmong in Southeast Asia, was an equally compelling factor as the Hmong are a key ethnic group in Houaphanh. By December, Zhu Ying, already in Khang Khay, joined the SNWG as assistant group leader overseeing investigations of the Pathet Lao armed forces. Liang Wenying, the provincial party secretary for the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan, was selected to oversee social investigation. (see Table 1 for a more complete roster).[90]

Duan's team was assigned three overall tasks: conduct investigations to create policy proposals on building the LPP party organization, the Pathet Lao military, and peasant support in base areas; report findings to the CCP Central Committee; and, upon instruction, communicate Central Committee proposals to LPP leadership. The last of these made the SNWG a direct conduit

[87] Opper, *People's Wars*, 141.
[88] Hebei Sheng Dang'an Guan, "Kaimuci," 282.
[89] Li Jie and Bing Zhe, eds., *Duan Suquan Huazhuan* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2004), 106.
[90] Liang Wenying, *Zai Laowo de Rizi* (Kunming: Yunnan Guoji Youhao Lianluohui, Yunnan Shekeyuan Dongnanya Suo, 1991), 2–3.

between Beijing and Houaphanh. Knowing this was potentially damaging to relations with the DRV, Luo Ruiqing had it removed before Zhu Qiwen shared planning documents in Hanoi.[91]

Duan and his team were told by PLA General Xiao Hua and Chairman of the State Planning Commission Li Fuchun that the problems facing the Lao revolution rested on a lack of class analysis and an unwillingness to politically engage with the peasantry.[92] Their social investigations should show the efficacy of class-based organizing for the Lao revolution and ultimately contribute to new LPP policies, thereby exporting the CCP's model for revolution. In essence, Duan was asked to apply the same views he had taken on class struggle and land reform in the late 1940s to Laos. In his memoir, Liang Wenying recalls that Kaysone and the LPP leadership did not believe Laos was a totally classless society. Rather, they felt that the mode of production in the Lao countryside had not produced a stark enough division of labor, scarce enough resources, or direct enough modes of exploitation to use class as a fulcrum for peasant mobilization. Many feared that "fighting a war at the front and mobilizing the masses in the rear" would "muddle social order."[93] In comparison, very few people were untouched by French and US imperialism regardless of class position. Thus, anti-imperialism and national self-determination were the rallying cries. As a form of oppression, imperialism was immediately obvious and compelling to the largest cross-section of Lao society.

[91] Shi, "Sangnu Gongzuozu Shimo," 109.
[92] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 29, 32–33.
[93] Liang Wenying, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 15.

Table 1: Known Members of the Sam Neua Working Group[94]

Name	Background	Role
Duan Suquan 段苏权	PLA Major General; Pre-1949: Chaling County Communist Youth League, Qiandongnan Special Committee Secretary, PLA Commander in Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Border Region; Post-1949: PLA Advanced Military Academy Assistant Director, Head of Strategic Research and Teaching Office	Working Group leader, head of SNWG Party Committee, largely oversaw military and combat investigations, arrived February 1964
Zhu Ying 朱英	PLA Colonel, assigned to an earlier CCP military advisory group in the Plain of Jars	Deputy Working Group Leader, assisted Duan in overseeing military and combat investigations, arrived July 1963
Liang Wenying 梁文英	Assigned to Yunnan in 1960, Provincial Party Secretary for Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, PLA officer	Deputy Working Group Leader, oversaw economic and social investigations, arrived February 1964
Li Wenzheng 李文正		Deputy Working Group Leader, arrived February 1964
Yang Yousheng 杨有生	County Party Committee Secretary for Yunnan's Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture	Oversaw grassroots level investigations of Lao Loum villages in Sam Neua, arrived in November 1964
Liu Shuxiang 刘淑湘	County Party Committee Secretary for Yunnan's Lancang Lahu Autonomous Prefecture.	Oversaw grassroots level investigations of Lao Loum villages in Sam Neua, arrived November 1964

[94] Hu Zhengqing, *Yi Ge Waijiao Guanyuan de Riji* (Jinan: Huanghe Chubanshe, 1991); Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*; Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*.

Table 1 cont.

Li Li 李力	Director of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture Finance Office	Responsible for organizing military aid, arrived November 1964
Sun Pirong 孙丕荣		Military investigation team, arrived February 1964
Jiang Qingyun 姜庆云	Miao Dong Cadre from Guizhou, only confirmed non-Han member	Arrived February 1964
Li Wenlin 李文林	Head of Rural Work Department for Gejiu in Yunnan's Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture	Work Group Secretary, arrived February 1964
Wu Zhen 吴镇		Military and combat investigation team, arrived February 1964
Hu Zhengqing 胡正清	PLA Commanding Officer, transferred to Foreign Ministry March 1965	Arrived April 1965
Zheng Guocai 郑国材		Translator

To summarize the general LPP position, the Central Committee believed class was secondary to imperialism in two senses. First, it was logically secondary in understanding the objectives of revolution because foreign imperialism, not class, was the primary source of oppression. There was a Lao elite, but their power to exploit flowed primarily from the US and its Southeast Asian allies, not from a domestic system of accumulation. Second, because a broad, cross-class united front was necessary to defeat imperialism, class was chronologically secondary in the sense that social transformations were a project delayed until after Laos was independent. In Marxist-Leninist terminology, the SNWG was tasked with advocating the logical and

chronological simultaneity of national (read: anti-imperialist) and democratic (read: anti-feudalist) revolutions.

Ho Chi Minh communicated his approval of the new team on January 1, 1964, and the SNWG left for Hanoi. Upon arrival, Duan Suquan was briefed by the head of the VWP Central Committee's Laos Working Committee, Nguyen Khuong. Nguyen stressed that Vietnamese cadres had been in Laos since 1945. VWP cadres were stationed in "the rear, the frontlines, and behind enemy lines."[95] Nguyen told Duan that the "development of the Lao revolution is out of balance (不平衡)."[96] The LPP Central Committee was in Houaphanh in name only. In fact, they were scattered across Laos. The center of the revolutionary struggle was in Xieng Khouang on the Plain of Jars where "the critical question is the nationality question." Rather than conducting social investigations for a class analysis of rural Laos or developing methods for mobilizing peasants around land reform, Nguyen said the VWP's primary hope was that Duan and his team could develop ways to overcome ethnic (national) minority resistance to the Pathet Lao. This was far less than Kaysone had requested, but it would soon become a central issue "China," Nguyen said, "is a big country with a lot of experience with the nationality question. We hope you can aid the Pathet Lao on this question."[97] In early February, the first of the SNWG finally crossed the border into Laos.

[95] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA.
[96] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA.
[97] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA.

New Class Categories for the Lao Revolution

Once settled into bamboo dormitories in Xiang Su, just south of Viengxay in Houaphanh, Duan and his team were treated to a banquet. The SNWG presented LPP leadership with stacks of commemorative notebooks, copies of Mao's essays, and a carefully selected library of Chinese films.[98] At least one, *The Area of Menglongsha* in which a fictional PLA officer succeeds in winning over a Dai minority village in Yunnan, was intended as instructional material for Pathet Lao cadres.[99]

Work planning began immediately. They would conduct studies around Houaphanh until the onset of the rainy season in late April, after which they would transfer to central Laos until August. They separated the military and social research teams, sending both to provincial heads for macro-level briefings. The military team, headed by Duan and Zhu Ying, would then move through Pathet Lao units as the social team, headed by Liang, constructed an "anatomy of social economic structures" in "representative villages in newly liberated and guerilla areas."[100] On March 5, Kaysone granted them full access to Pathet Lao operations, encouraging them to study as many locations in Laos as possible and join the Lao and Vietnamese social investigation teams due to start after the upcoming NLHX conference.[101] However, there was some friction. The SNWG sent a message to the Central Laos Working Group that some Vietnamese advisers had grown suspicious. In several meetings, the Vietnamese requested increased intelligence sharing, citing their previous amicable relationship with Ambassador Liu Chun and Deng Kunshan in

[98] Li and Bing, *Duan Suquan*, 109–10. Frederic Benson confirms Xiang Su as the location of the LPP headquarters in early 1964. Frederic C. Benson, "Turbulence in Sam Neua Province, Laos: 1953-1970 (Part 1)," in *Indochina in the Year of the Dog- 1970*, ed. Vietnam Veterans for Factual History (Houston, TX: RADIX Press, 2018), 299.
[99] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 84.
[100] First quote, Liang Wenying, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 11. Second quote, "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA.
[101] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA.

Khang Khay. SNGW members explained they had only been in Laos a few weeks and had nothing substantial to share, but the Vietnamese suspected they were withholding. In truth, the SNWG was not at liberty to share information even with other PRC missions.[102] To smooth relations, Beijing promised to indicate what intelligence could be shared but restricted the SNWG to verbal delivery: "Do not use writing; do not allow the other side to see the original reports."[103]

In Sam Neua Town, the governor explained to Liang's team the RLG's three general, residence-based categories for ethnic classification: Lao Loum (lowland), Lao Theung (midland), and Lao Soung (highland). He then listed the array of ethnicities within each, noting that throughout the country the Lao Loum (largely Tai ethnicities) controlled political power.[104] In Lao Loum areas, there were three types of land ownership. The first was publicly owned and, before the war, annually redistributed. The second was privately owned and planted, passed down through household generations. The third was controlled by the *chaokok chaolao* (ເຈົ້າກົກເຈົ້າເຫຼົ່າ / 昭公昭老).[105] In the 1960s, this term referred to locally powerful people who controlled large amounts of land. For some, their power was connected to low-level political positions, often head of a district (Lao: ຕາແສງ *tasseng*). Many others were ethnic minority leaders with no state-recognized title. For the SNWG, they were the first evidence of class division. According to Liang's account, the chaokok chaolao exploited peasants by using corvée labor in agriculture and taxes on hunting, which the Chinese advisors considered a form of tribute. Peasants with little land could rent more from the

[102] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 40.
[103] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA.
[104] For a brief history of these groups, see Carol J. Ireson and W. Randall Ireson, "Ethnicity and Development in Laos," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 10 (1991): 921–25. Pholsena offers a more critical assessment of these categories. While I agree with Pholsena's criticism, the archival documents used for this research rarely provide more precise terminology. I have mentioned specific ethnic groups by their preferred name when possible. Vatthana Pholsena, *Post-War Laos: The Politics of Culture, History, and Identity* (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 154–56.
[105] Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 16. See footnote 95 for an explanation of the variations in transliterating this and other Lao terms.

chaokok chaolao, using a portion of crop yields as payment. The Pathet Lao attempted to redistribute chaokok chaolao land in the early 1950s, but their control over liberated areas was never sufficiently stable. The fallout from these failures left many chaokok chaolao diminished but still comparatively wealthy. By 1955, the LPP Central Committee decided the situation was so confused that rural classes could not be defined and abandoned class-based organizing.

Village surveys revealed a more ambiguous class structure than the SNWG had hoped. In their first village, the team found that the term chaokok chaolao only applied to half of the wealthiest households and included some middle peasant households. Undeterred, they set about selecting a sample of rich, middle, and poor households, determining their role in village production, whether they hired labor, and tallying their possessions.[106] Before abortive land reforms, one chaokok chaolao household rented out enough land to produce about 125,000 liters of grain annually. The head of the household, Mr. Bounmy, hired villagers to raise his cattle and paid them by giving them every third calf born. Laborers on his remaining land were paid in cash or opium depending on their preference. Although the team believed Bounmy's politics were reactionary, they noted he was still a member of the NLHX – an early indicator of the political ambiguities in the Pathet Lao's united front.

Other chaokok chaolao households followed a similar pattern, employing villagers to raise livestock, farm rice, and perform household duties like cooking and childcare. One former district head had deep familial ties to right-wing political parties in Vientiane and, during French rule, rented two-thirds of his family's land for planting. Liang's team noted that "four out of every five days, people fetch water, feed horses, wash clothing, and perform other tasks for his household." He was also in charge of state tax collection to which he added his own fee. Additional taxes were

[106] The SNWG's approach part of a methodology developed by Mao in his investigations in places like Xunwu. Mao Zedong, *Report from Xunwu*, trans. Roger R. Thompson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

levied on hunted animals and those sacrificed for spiritual ceremonies: "When a deer is killed in the field, he must be sent one leg and the spine. When the masses hold ceremonies for gods and ancestors, he must be given the good meat from slaughtered animals."[107]

Liang and his team adopted another Lao term for this system of exploitation: *koklam*. *Koklam* is not a Lao word but an abbreviation of another position very similar to chaokok chaolao: the *chaokok chaolam* (ເຈົ້າກົກເຈົ້າລ່ານ / 昭公昭兰).[108] In Western studies of Laos, this is referred to simply as the lam (see below). Hu Zhengqing, who joined the SNWG in 1965, described this system as a "feudal remnant" used to control the peasantry.[109] A report to the Central Laos Working Group explained that in the Lao countryside "rich people have exploitation and the koklam system, the group leader and headman system; it is a form of feudal class exploitation against working people."[110] Liang's Pathet Lao informants told him that the chaokok chaolao and lam both used the 'koklam' system, but there was a difference between them. The chaokok chaolao were "nationality [ethnic minority] headmen and chiefs" while the lam were "appointed by high-level authorities."[111] The connection to state power allowed the lam to demand labor and tribute from

[107] Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 30–32.
[108] In Lao script, ເຈົ້າກົກເຈົ້າລ່ານ is reduced through Chinese abbreviation to ກົກລ່ານ. In Liang's memoir, he refers first to the *gong lamu* (贡·拉木) system, then the *gonglan* (公兰) system run by *zhaogongzhaolan* (昭公昭兰) or *gonglan* lords (公兰主). Liang Wenying, 30, 64, 92. In its own reports, the SNWG spoke only of the *gonglan* system. "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA. In his memoir, Hu Zhengqing also only refers to the *gonglan* (公兰) system. Hu Zhengqing, *Yi Ge Waijiao Guanyuan de Riji*, 106–23. Quan Yanchi and Du Weidong use different characters for gonglan (贡滥) but do not explain why. Their characters respectively mean 'tribute' and 'excessive,' which is likely intentional. However, none of the SNWG archival documents nor accounts from its members use these characters. Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*. In contemporary Lao, *laam* means 'translator,' but it has an older meaning denoting someone who collects non-timber forest products and other possible forms of taxes from upland villages. In personal correspondence in 2020, Nathan Badenoch told me their role is usually "defined fairly benignly as…an economic and cultural middle-man connecting the upland villages to the lowland political and economic systems."
[109] Hu Zhengqing, *Yi Ge Waijiao Guanyuan de Riji*, 106.
[110] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA.
[111] Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 92.

ordinary peasants and chaokok chaolao alike.[112] Further, because they were less dependent upon prestige, the lam could exploit the peasantry at higher rate than the chaokok chaolao.

The briefings also revealed that the Pathet Lao was a largely Lao Loum organization in an ethnic minority region. In 1963, the LPP inducted 1,040 new members. Of these, 87.4 percent were Lao Loum, 7.5 percent were Lao Theung, and only five percent were Lao Soung, a category that importantly included Hmong people.[113] The few Lao Soung members in Houaphanh were guerilla fighters, not members of the party bureaucracy. Liang was told that the historically bad relationship between the Lao and the Hmong had grown worse since the anti-US struggle began. Despite a history of Hmong armed resistance to the French, the Pathet Lao had failed to bring them over to the cause in large numbers. The SNWG attributed this to lingering discrimination against minority groups by Pathet Lao cadres, and the LPP Central Committee was ready to listen. The resolutions from their twelfth plenary session, held a month after the SNWG's arrival, included the self-criticism that "nationality policy has not been carried out thoroughly," especially with Lao Soung groups.[114] When the SNWG regrouped at LPP headquarters in mid-April 1964 to celebrate Lao New Year, Liang was convinced the team was beginning to produce a class analysis useful for revolutionary organizing but deeply aware of differences between Chinese and Lao rural society.

On May 10, Liang's team left Xiang Su again, traveling through Vietnam to the central Lao province of Khammouane. As in Houaphanh, they began with briefings from provincial level cadres. In villages, the team adopted Mao Zedong's method of "investigation meetings" developed in early 1930s, holding what Liang called "poor peasant forums" to gather detailed household and

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[112] Grant Evans's account of French colonial administration through Lao Loum appointees confirms these types of exploitation were used "unevenly", but he does not mention the term chaokok chaolaam. Grant Evans, *Lao Peasants under Socialism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 31–33.
[113] Liang, 18.
[114] ZZDLYE, *Laowo Renmin Geming Dang Lijie Zhongyang Quanhui Wenjian Huibian* (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Duiwai Lianluobu Yazhou Erzu, 1975), 175.

community information from those in attendance.[115] The SNWG believed that the key mechanism for class exploitation in central Laos was the *navan* (ນາວານ / 纳万) system.[116] In Lao, the term refers to a system of rotating communal labor in which a household invites others to help (*van*) work in their field (*na*) sowing and transplanting rice. Those who assist are provided a meal in exchange for their labor. This exchange is then repeated by each participating household. The SNWG did not read all instances of navan as exploitative. However, the system, they argued, was manipulated by local elites to produce a form of slavery.

Liang's team noted that in Khammouane "the feudal nobility's 'chaokok chaolao' system no longer exists in Lao Loum areas, but feudal privilege remains."[117] Chaokok chaolao privilege had been "inherited" by local politicians who continued to use corvée labor, gift giving, and tribute as a means to live off the labor of others.[118] Based on accounts from poor peasants, the SNWG believed that, through the navan system, local political elites were able to employ the lowest stratum of village society as temporary labor, paying them in food and clothing. Yet, the team found few peasants with no access to their own land. Near universal access to some amount of agricultural land made the difference between middle and poor peasants difficult to distinguish. Either may perform labor in exchange for a non-money wage or irregularly rent land and tools. Thus, they concluded that "although the public field system no longer exists, land disparities are not great. Renting land, money lending, and employment relations are all in the process of formation. Therefore, although there is a difference among the peasantry between rich and poor, class relations are still not distinct."[119]

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[115] Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 49; Mao Zedong, *Report from Xunwu*, trans. Roger R. Thompson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 46–47.
[116] Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 64.
[117] Liang, 57.
[118] Liang, 57.
[119] Liang, 58.

Assessing the SNWG's Studies

There are few Chinese or English-language studies on CCP-Pathet Lao relations during this period. Through lack of sources or lack of knowledge about Laos, none have attempted to assess what the SNWG found.[120] This is often done with the implicit assumption that Maoist blinders prevented any serious assessment of rural Lao economic structures. The earliest and most foundational ethnographic studies of northern Laos were conducted by the US anthropologist Joel M. Halpern in the late 1950s. Although his research was largely in Luang Prabang, Halpern confirms the existence of the lam, who he found to be intermediaries between "traders (occasionally the government) and the tribal peoples (primarily the Khmu but also the [Hmong])."[121] In Halpern's studies, the lam was a Lao Loum man, often the district head, who negotiated trade between upland groups and lowland ethnic majority Lao. On occasion, the lam would pay taxes to the French colonial administration on behalf of upland groups, who would then perform agricultural labor as repayment. Halpern argued firmly against journalists and others (Wilfred Burchett, for example) who travelled to Houaphanh and argued that the lam were oppressive toward ethnic minorities.[122] He also admitted, however, that "the hereditary and governmental aspects of the lam…has certain feudal overtones."[123]

More recently, Vatthana Pholsena has argued that the French colonial strategy of *mise en valeur* (enhancement) combined with an opposing strategy of reducing the cost of colonization led to a taxation policy mixing cash payments and corvée labor. Because ethnic minorities were understood to be poorer, their cash payments were reduced while corvée demands were increased

[120] See, for example, Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*; Zhang, "China's Involvement in Laos"; Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World*, 248; Shi, "Sangnu Gongzuozu Shimo."
[121] Halpern refers to the Hmong as Meo is his studies. Halpern, *Economy and Society of Laos*, 94.
[122] Wilfred Burchett, "Front-Line Village [1959]," ed. George Burchett and Nick Shimmin (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105–14.
[123] Joel M Halpern, "Capital, Savings and Credit among Lao Peasants," in *Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies*, ed. Raymond Firth and B. S. Yamey (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1964), 91.

(between 15 and 20 days annually). Under this system, the corvée period could be extended further if cash payments could not be made. The most unpopular part of the system, Pholsena observes, were the lam and district heads. Lam were employed to communicate French orders to upland groups and often abused their authority. District heads were more despised due to their ability to demand corvée labor and role as tax collector. Men in both positions often behaved as despots.[124] In the late 1930s, the French Inspector of Colonies reported that Lao Theung minority groups were taxed at nearly twice the rate of upland groups in northern Vietnam. Thus, the lam and district heads were frequently the first targets of rebellions, and there were many rebellions. In fact, between 1876 and 1949, there were at least twelve serious rebellions in Laos – two of these in Sam Neua.[125]

Two points can be made from this. First, the SNWG's description of Sam Neua's political economy only a few years after Halpern's study is highly plausible. Halpern admits, at least in Luang Prabang, that the lam could also serve as district head, occupying both of the most hated positions in rural Lao society. All western accounts also confirm that the lam and district heads were from Lao Loum groups. Under increased exploitation during French colonialism, this sharpened traditional ethnic divisions. Further, Western and CCP studies both acknowledge there was no land shortage. SNWG simply emphasized that economic scarcity was not necessary for there to be an identifiable political economic hierarchy. The point was that the lam could extract surplus, through taxes and corvée, from the local ethnic minority populations.

Second, this is how the remotest portions of rural Laos were formally subsumed into the capitalist imperialist system. The SNWG did not draw this conclusion, preferring to understand the lam as part of a feudal system that needed to be overthrown (see below). However, increased

[124] Pholsena, *Post-War Laos*, 20, 30–33.
[125] Gunn, "Sambran (The White Python)," 208, 213.

taxation rates and demands for corvée labor were put in place by the French administration as part of an attempt to make its Indochinese colonial endeavor profitable. The SNWG studies show that the lam and district heads revived this system whenever their territory flipped to RLG control. To be sure, Laos was the least developed of all France's Indochinese colonies. Yet, as the concept of formal subsumption helps elaborate, capital does not need proletarianized labor to extract surplus-value. Further, the form of exploitation, pitting Lao Loum lam and district heads against ethnic minority upland groups via the authority of French empire, obscured any kind of class location. What was seen instead was heightened ethnic oppression and the mostly *political* subordination of Laos by the French (all communist parties on the ground attempted to extend the latter to the US). Under these conditions, talk of proletarian revolution would have been bizarre indeed. The question became along what lines to define the coalition for national liberation – the only cause common to all.

The SNWG's Recommendations

The first major report of the SNWG's findings was given in early July 1964 at a conference between the CCP, LPP, and VWP in Hanoi. Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi traveled from Beijing with Yang Chengwu, Wu Xiuquan, and Zhang Zhongru (political commissar for the Second Department).[126] Duan Suquan, Zhu Ying, and Liang Wenying led the group from the SNWG. Zhou and Chen expressed satisfaction with the team's work and encouraged them to continue pressing the issues of class analysis, mass mobilization, and democratic reforms – meaning, in practice, ending the lam system. In his formal address, Zhou proposed that the CCP and VWP continue

[126] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 92.

aiding the LPP in carrying out social investigations and select a few "test sites" in Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang for increased political mobilization of minority nationalities.[127]

The SNWG remained in Hanoi throughout July preparing its report. They were congratulatory about the long tradition of Lao people fighting French, Japanese, and US imperialism, but frustrated that the LPP had done so little to fight the "feudal forces" who routinely collaborated with these powers.[128] Liang advocated the importance of class analysis and class-based organizing by linking it directly to ethnic minority resistance to the Pathet Lao. He argued that although the Lao and Vietnamese were correct that class divisions among the lower strata of peasantry were unclear, there was a clear exploitative class, indicating the lam and navan systems. "If there are exploitative relations and an exploitative system," he said, "then there are classes."[129] This form of exploitation was not limited to the Lao Loum areas where the SNWG conducted its research but extended to Lao Theung and Lao Soung areas as well. He reported, "Descending from the king, a top-down system of feudal rule has taken shape chiefly in Lao Loum areas; 'chaokok chaolao' in Lao Loum areas also have jurisdictional control over nearby minority nationality areas."[130] Widespread Lao Loum prejudices against ethnic minorities allowed exploitation in these areas to become severe.[131] A combination of "deep estrangement" between ethnic groups and bad LPP policies allowed right-wing forces to persuade minority groups to their side.[132] The answer to the nationality question rested on Lao Loum groups building solidarity with minority groups through combined struggle against imperialism and Lao Loum feudalism.

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[127] Shi Weitong, "Sangnu Gongzuozu Shimo," 118.
[128] Liang Wenying, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 63.
[129] Liang, 65.
[130] Liang, 65.
[131] To the SNWG's credit, their account resembles James C. Scott's later history of upland Southeast Asia in general, with the exception that Scott emphasizes upland groups' strategies to evade lowland exploitation. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 142–46.
[132] Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 65.

The SNWG's anachronistic use of the term feudal belies a more sophisticated understanding of uneven capitalist development. They found multiple modes of production from multiple epochs in Laos. The lam system predominant in Houaphanh, and which the SNWG took to be the characteristic Lao feudal form of exploitation, had been largely replaced in Khammouane by comprador abuse of communal labor practices (the navan system). Owing to greater penetration of capitalist relations through imperialism, production in Khammouane no longer operated through the lam system, but feudal privilege remained. Elites in Khammouane could lead triple lives as politicians, capitalists, and holders of debt-slaves. If the point of the SNWG's class analysis was to objectively determine which stage of history Laos occupied according to orthodox dialectical materialism, then the evidence they reported would have made the task impossible. However, their social investigations were not aimed at academic description. They were aimed at finding the lines of struggle most advantageous for revolutionary policy. Feudal, in this sense, is not the name of an epoch; it is the name of the enemy. The identification of this feudal enemy satisfied the Pathet Lao's request for advice on 'nationality work' while fulfilling the CCP's instruction to communicate the importance of class analysis. Hewing close to Lenin's writing on national self-determination, the SNWG believed that the only way minority nationalities would join a largely Lao Loum socialist movement was to encourage struggle against Lao Loum chauvinism. The autonomy gained through minority political mobilization had limits. Specifically, the LPP would still be the vanguard. Yet, the core dialectical logic remained – cross-ethnic unity in class struggle could only emerge if each had the right to be disunited.

The Xiang Louang Test Site

Whatever the Lao and Vietnamese views of the SNWG's report may have been, the threat of US imperialism spiked in the days after the conference, resulting in close collaboration between

all three. On August 2, three DRV torpedo boats fired on a US warship, the USS Maddox, assisting with South Vietnamese raids on CIA selected targets in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days later, the Maddox falsely reported a second attack. President Lyndon Johnson claimed that both attacks were unprovoked aggression against the US and South Vietnam, and, on August 7, US Congress gave Johnson the authorization to wage unofficial war directly on the DRV.[133] US bombs had already been falling on Xieng Khouang since May and had struck the PRC mission in Khang Khay killing one Chinese diplomat and wounding five others.[134] The air war expanded to Sam Neua in late 1964.[135] In December, the SNWG reported on changes in party relations since the Gulf of Tonkin incident, describing a new openness from the Vietnamese. Nguyen Trong Vinh, head of the VWP mission, told his subordinates to report to CCP experts in Laos "as if they are reporting to Vietnamese comrades." Nguyen Hoa, head of operations in Houaphanh, told the SNWG that the last decade of work had come under criticism at a conference in Hanoi for being too dogmatic and not applying international experience.[136]

In Xiang Su, the SNWG relocated with the LPP into limestone caves to avoid US air attacks. At Kaysone's request, Duan and Liang began individual study sessions, meeting at night multiple times a week to discuss Mao's writing on class and military strategy.[137] Kaysone revealed that the LPP Central Committee had selected eight locations as test sites for peasant mobilization and land reform as Zhou had suggested. He initially proposed that the SNWG and the LPP form research teams among themselves, but as Duan waited for approval from Beijing, Kaysone shared his plan

[133] Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018), 206.
[134] Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, 116.
[135] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 138–39.
[136] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA.
[137] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 89; Li and Bing, *Duan Suquan*, 115.

with Nguyen Hoa.[138] Nguyen requested that the Vietnamese advisory group also take part, and Kaysone agreed.[139] In November 1964, Yang Chengwu sent two county-level party secretaries from Yunnan to join grassroots efforts at the test sites: Yang Yousheng and Liu Shuxiang.[140]

By the time the research team was formalized in January 1965, Yang and Liu were already working with a campaign in the Tai Khao (Lao Loum minority) district of Xiang Louang. There, LPP officials explained that building a movement against the local chaokok chaolao would be disastrous. Their prestige made them better allies in a united front than enemies. However, the local district head, a lam named Mr. Houay, was a suitable target. Houay inherited his lam status from his father, and, during French colonialism, had abused his power to allot the best land to family and those able to afford bribes. Among local elites, he was also the cruelest in his use of corvée labor. Houay was arrested in 1954 when the Pathet Lao took control of Sam Neua but later released. His replacement was a Pathet Lao cadre who used the position for propaganda work. After release, Houay reported him to Phoumi Nosavan's right-wing forces, and he was publicly executed.[141] There were four other lam among Xiang Louang's three hundred inhabitants, but Houay was the most exploitative.[142]

The experiment with peasant mobilization at the Xiang Louang test site was the most direct effort the SNWG made to enact the strategy Liang suggested in Hanoi. Although Liang continued to travel around Laos collecting data, there is no indication that further research changed how the SNWG viewed Laos or that they were involved in test sites outside Xiang Louang. As far as the relation between class and ethnicity was concerned, success in exporting the Chinese revolutionary

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[138] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 213.
[139] Shi, "Sangnu Gongzuozu Shimo," 119. Hu Zhengqing says the request to join came from Nguyen Trong Vinh. Hu Zhengqing, *Yi Ge Waijiao Guanyuan de Riji*, 108.
[140] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 214.
[141] Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 92.
[142] Hu Zhengqing, *Yi Ge Waijiao Guanyuan de Riji*, 110.

experience depended entirely on the SNWG's ability to guide the fate of Mr. Houay. Its failure took another two years to unfold.

As official work began, the ILD wrote Yang and Liu on how to guide Pathet Lao class analysis. The CCP approach of tallying productive assets and time spent laboring for others would have to be adjusted to local conditions. This was perhaps a nod to the comparative availability of land, meaning even the poorest may have a chance to farm for themselves. More importantly, the SNWG should emphasize the difference between class position and subjective politics. The ambiguity of nationalist sentiment meant that statements of subjective support were unreliable even if heartfelt. A comparatively wealthy anti-imperialist may only oppose foreign domination to the extent that it disrupts their ability to exploit others. Villagers' professed support for the Lao revolution would have to be weighed against their class position to determine potential allies from enemies. Finally, they should attempt to create a united front with elites in Lao Theung and Lao Soung groups. Ethnic diversity even within the Lao Loum meant that the decision to denounce or ally with the lam could not be made beforehand.[143] At least in Liang's account, Beijing's recommendations to the SNWG were comparatively moderate. The sharp disagreement over how to guide the revolution in Laos seems to have emerged first in Laos itself between Chinese and Vietnamese advisory groups.

SNWG and Pathet Lao cadres working together in Xiang Louang decided that a struggle session should be held in which Houay would be denounced and punished as an anti-imperialist and member of the feudal ruling class. The VWP advisory group strongly disagreed. The difference was subtle but important. All sides agreed that further propaganda work was necessary to educate the peasantry about connections between French and US imperialism and that this

[143] Liang Wenying, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 110–11.

should be done through public rallies. However, VWP advisers argued that Houay should only be criticized for his past "counter-revolutionary behavior."[144] The LPP's priority in mass mobilization, they believed, should be providing material aid. US success in creating counter-revolutionary guerrilla groups was based largely on their ability to solve immediate problems of survival. With appropriate aid, the Pathet Lao could try to beat the US with their own tactics.[145] Denouncing Houay for his lam status imposed a false class structure in a situation where class was strategically unimportant if it existed at all – an incredible position for a communist revolutionary to take.

In Khang Khay, Nguyen Trong Vinh explained the Vietnamese position in more depth. "All struggles are class struggles," he told Duan, "In essence, national struggles are also class struggles. If there is class division in the countryside, then there will be class struggle. Whatever name a revolution uses, it is for the liberation of laboring people, for people's economic and political liberation." This was in contradiction to the long history of Marxist-Leninist writing on the national question, which stressed the political ambivalence of national liberation movements. Nonetheless, Nguyen argued that whether the Lao revolution was anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, or both, it would ultimately benefit the exploited classes. By universalizing class struggle, Nguyen was negating its importance in the Lao revolution. The revolution as *revolution* had a progressive class character. For Nguyen, all revolutions had this character. The SNWG's emphasis on class struggle was, therefore, superfluous. However, Nguyen admitted, the Pathet Lao had not succeeded in winning the masses over to their cause, jeopardizing the revolution. Solving this issue required a two-fold process of increasing mass political consciousness and working toward their immediate benefit. "The enemy has materials to bribe and entice," Nguyen said, "we do not have the enemy's money or wealth." In Laos, the communists' "fundamental strong point" was the ability to increase

[144] Liang Wenying, 103.
[145] "Wo zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 9, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.

the masses' political awareness, but this was not enough. If they could not provide aid, then the masses would not join the movement. Nguyen argued pointedly, "If we do not have salt, cotton, land, and other direct needs, then the problem is unsolvable." He assured Duan that peasant liberation was the goal, but "each country, each nation, according to the conditions of class division, should consider how peasants should achieve liberation."[146]

In SNWG reports, some LPP members are portrayed as willing to listen to their Chinese comrades' advice, leading the latter to believe they were having some success in persuading Lao revolutionaries on the issue of class struggle.[147] Nguyen's argument, however, showed the VWP's outlook remained unchanged. Class remained secondary, logically and chronologically, to the issue of imperialism. Nguyen made the case that the most effective political mobilization technique was for the Pathet Lao to replace the US in patron-client relations with ethnic minority groups. The Pathet Lao would then lead the revolution as benefactor to existing social structures. Whatever the exploitative nature of these structures, their abolition should be postponed until after the anti-imperialist revolution. In this formulation, peasant liberation was an *effect* of successful revolution. The SNWG insisted it was a *cause*. Success depended on simultaneous, not sequential, struggles for independence and social revolution. A report to the Central Lao Working Group on work in Vientiane Province typifies the SNWG's frustration:

> The relationship between national [anti-imperialist] and democratic [anti-feudal] revolution has not been resolved. The national and democratic revolutions have been separated, and the flag of democratic revolution is not distinct. Anti-feudalism has no practical content…There is no importance attached to investigating Lao society and…implementing concrete analysis of each class within Lao society. Transform whose life, rely on whom for revolution? This fundamental question has not been solved. They have not organized and mobilized the numerous worker and peasant masses as the backing force of the revolution. Rather, they imagine a coalition of all people simultaneously

[146] "Yuenan Guwentuan Tuanzhang Ruan Zhong Yong deng dui Laowo Wenti de Yixie Kanfa," January 8, 1965 – August 19, 1965, 106-00896-01 PRCFMA.
[147] The nature of the sources (reports and memoirs authored by SNWG members) makes it difficult to gauge in this period how persuaded Lao revolutionaries actually were.

> opposing imperialism…From top to bottom, the demarcation of the contradiction between the enemy and us is very confused. They are unwilling to harm feudal power and avoid mobilizing the masses to gradually implement the struggle for democratic reform.[148]

Despite the VWP advisory group's misgivings, Kaysone ordered organizing in Xiang Louang to continue. A public trial against the "Mr. Houay Counter-Revolutionary Clique" was held on March 5. Houay was sentenced to death before a crowd of over three hundred. Other lam and members of Houay's family were sentenced to between five and twenty years in prison and heavy fines. Yet, Yang and Liu observed that the trial failed to provoke the cooperation of local peasants. Instead, the crowd stayed mostly silent as the accused vociferously denied Pathet Lao allegations. Without the correct fervor, Houay's life was spared. In May, the SNWG sent a detailed report to Beijing and were told they had done what they could. Any decision to advance the campaign should come from the LPP Central Committee.[149]

Kaysone was slow to decide, but it is unclear if this was an attempt to stall for a final decision in Hanoi or if he was already looking for a way to politely refuse. As he wavered, the SNWG reported to the ILD that the revolution was faltering. Since their arrival, Houaphanh was the only base area able to maintain expansion. Xieng Khouang had grown and contracted over the last year and a half while those behind enemy lines were lost. This was loathsome because disarray among the Lao right wing had created an otherwise favorable situation. "The Lao revolution cannot develop forward quickly," they reported, "chiefly because they have not mobilized the masses." Even the Pathet Lao's most developed strongholds were constantly under threat from counter-revolutionary ethnic minority militias, who had a "ready-made social foundation and can use the masses as a shield." The SNWG believed this foundation could be broken through class-based

[148] "Guanyu Wanxiang Genjudi he Fandong Qunzhong de Diaoyan Baogao," July 18, 1965 – December 29, 1965, 106-00901-01 PRCFMA.
[149] Liang Wenying, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 114–15.

organizing but wrote in exasperation that the Pathet Lao continued the flawed method of using "whatever classes" to "carry out anti-imperialist struggle."[150]

In June, members of the LPP Central Committee were called to Hanoi for a conference to unify thought on the revolution. In a clear response to the SNWG, the VWP announced plans to strengthen its relationship with Pathet Lao and take a more active role in helping it implement the VWP advisory group's policies. While these included the elimination of corvée labor and oppression of ethnic minorities, the VWP also sent additional cadres to oversee the mobilization of the peasantry through aid campaigns advocated by Nguyen Trong Vinh. Perhaps most damning for the SNWG's mission in Laos, the VWP and LPP used the conference to send a detailed aid request to the Soviet Union.[151] Kaysone returned from the conference aloof toward the SNWG. His study sessions with Duan and Liang became infrequent, and, although he mentioned wanting to continue the experiment in Xiang Louang and expand to other test sites, he made clear that this could not be included in Central Committee documents.[152] Whatever Kaysone's motivations before the June conference, the point of refusal had finally arrived. Several members of the SNWG were slow to recognize it.

VWP advisers continually warned Kaysone against speak bitterness (诉苦) rallies aimed at the lam and their connection to minority oppression. They added to their argument a concern that denunciation campaigns among the Pathet Lao armed forces, "if handled poorly, will become Lao Theung and Lao Soung speaking bitterness against Lao Loum oppression, thereby deepening contradictions between nationalities." Further, many mid and upper-level cadres were intellectuals who would be alienated by class-based organizing, to say nothing of minority leaders in the NLHX

[150] "Wo zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 9, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.
[151] Shi Weitong, "Sangnu Gongzuozu Shimo," 122.
[152] "Wo zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 9, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.

who "still maintain the exploitation of the laboring masses by headmen and chiefs."[153] For the SNWG, whose head it must be remembered was a staunch proponent of radical land reform in China's civil war, this only proved the Pathet Lao's fragility. The insistence on saying 'not yet' to all but the struggle against US imperialism resulted in an organization hobbled by contradictions. Narrowing the revolution to the task of national liberation became the main obstacle to the liberation of the nation.

Work in Xiang Louang stagnated. At the end of 1965, Liang Wenying fell ill with digestive issues and returned to Beijing. He did not return to Laos until September 1966.[154] In his absence, Yang Yousheng and Liu Shuxiang continued advising a campaign against Houay. In May, Kaysone travelled with Nguyen Hoa to Xiang Louang to hear their report. Yang told Kaysone that the answer to mobilization in Xiang Louang lay, as it had with minority communities in Yunnan, in clearly demarcating class division. Nguyen Hoa, however, denied any comparison between Yunnan and Sam Neua. Kaysone simply asked the SNWG to continue their research. When he returned in July, Kaysone refused yet again to decide between the SNWG's proposal of denouncing and possibly executing Houay and the more moderate Vietnamese proposal of negotiating redistribution of his land.

Finally, in December 1966, Kaysone found a compromise, agreeing to a second rally against Houay but no execution. Instead, a large portion of his land would be split among the peasantry.[155] The message in Kaysone's compromise was clear. Influence over the Lao revolution was firmly in the hands of the VWP. It was a slow, sputtering end, but the failure to hold a Maoist-style struggle session against Houay marked the direction of the Lao revolution for the next nine

[153] "Yuenan Guwentuan Tuanzhang Ruan Zhong Yong deng dui Laowo Wenti de Yixie Kanfa," January 8 – August 19, 1965, 106-00896-01 PRCFMA.
[154] Liang Wenying, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 183–84.
[155] Liang Wenying, 113–22.

years. Although CCP military and economic aid for the Pathet Lao would continue into the 1970s, there was no attempt to guide policy decisions after the failure in Xiang Louang.

Conclusion

To make the Pathet Lao a viable force for revolution, the CCP, VWP, and LPP were forced by the realities of uneven development to build a coalition based on nationalist sentiment. For the SNWG, this meant a combination of class struggle within Lao society against the rural lam and an international struggle against the US. For the VWP, the former threatened the possibility of the latter. French use of the lam and district heads as mechanisms for value extraction in remote regions of northeastern Laos exacerbated older forms of oppression along ethnic lines. Although it never made Laos a profitable endeavor for the French, this form of exploitation formally subsumed rural Laos into the global system of capitalist imperialism while doing almost nothing to transform the rural economy beyond increasing rates of agricultural labor and forest collection to meet tax requirements and introducing annual demands for corvée labor.[156] In the language of Marx's writing on the French revolution, the lam and district heads were engaged in secondary forms of capitalist exploitation. These forms were particular to Laos, to be sure, but they were equally part of the universal project of value extraction through uneven development. Although contemporary US anthropologists like Halpern played down the exploitative nature of the lam, the history of rebellions against these individuals suggests otherwise. As Baird shows, many rebellions in the early twentieth century were millenarian movements aimed at reviving imagined pasts or manipulated by Lao elites. Further, there is evidence that not all lam were seen by ethnic minority groups as exploitative as both benefited from the trade the lam facilitated.[157] As Pholsena argues,

[156] Gunn, "Sambran (The White Python)."
[157] Baird, "Millenarian Movements in Southern Laos and North Eastern Siam."

however, lam and district heads were "an essential link" in the French administration of ethnic minority regions, many of whom "abused their position and were greatly resented by the population."[158] Together, these studies suggest that the lam would probably not have worked as a target of class struggle throughout Laos. Yet, when the investigations of the SNWG and their Pathet Lao guides are compared with contemporary Western ethnographies of northern Laos, the former seem correct in identifying the lam of Houaphanh as an exploitative class even if they fit neither the image of the Chinese landlord nor English capitalist. However, therein lay the problem.

Efforts to make Laos an economically profitable colony within the French empire subsumed places like Houaphanh into global capitalism with value extraction schemes that obscured even the opaquest notions of a working class. Empowered by the French colonial administration, lam and district heads in Houaphanh extracted value in the form of state taxes and corvée labor without transforming traditional methods of production and land tenure. Yet, this extraction was in the service of trying to make a capitalist imperialist project (French colonialism) profitable.[159] It is obvious that this was a tenuous form of subsumption into the rhythms of the global market, but my point rests on exactly that tenuousness. If colonialism had drastically transformed production in Houaphanh, then class might have been a more effective category around which to mobilize for revolution. Under the system identified by the SNWG, all parties agreed that it was not. The 'general form' of capitalism, by its own operation, presented communist groups on the ground with limited options for revolution. The SNWG believed that class identity and cross-ethnic solidarity could be fostered through land reform. VWP advisors in Laos preferred to mobilize around the issue of US imperialism devoid of any class content. Yet, it is important to note that when the SNWG criticized VWP advisers for suppressing the issue of class, they were

[158] Pholsena, *Post-War Laos*, 33.
[159] Pholsena, 31.

attempting to clarify the distinction between ‘anti-feudal’ and anti-imperialist struggle *to strengthen the latter*. The sum of their argument was that the project of national self-liberation would be more successful it if were able to take on a class character, not that class revolution could liberate the nation. It was a resumption of arguments that plagued the CCP during their own revolution. The VWP, by contrast, advocated reliance on a remarkably traditional concept of the nation, what Lenin and M. N. Roy would have called bourgeois nationalism. The VWP were openly concerned that the deep connections between ethnic and economic exploitation, if raised, would rupture the brittle united front the Pathet Lao had managed to create through successive imperialist incursions in Laos. Neither party questioned the necessity of some concept of the nation for revolution. The VWP model, as the SNWG were quick to point out, succeeded in increasing the coalition behind the Pathet Lao but also created myriad organizational problems regarding the purpose and direction of the revolution stemming from the political ambiguities of nationalist sentiment. For the SNWG, these criticisms of the mass mobilization campaign extended to all aspects of the revolution.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WORKING PEOPLE ALL HAVE LOCAL GODS: THE CCP'S ASSESSMENT OF THE LAO REVOLUTION

Anti-imperialism is not a politics. An anti-imperialist movement for national liberation may have its sights set on establishing a rigidly hierarchical recreation of an imagined past in the present, or it may seek, also with reference to traditions inherited from the past, to guide the nation toward a new, non-hierarchical, classless future. In China's revolution, Jiang Jieshi's Guomindang, despite successes in modernization, operated on a fascistic vision of the nation as "a hierarchical, spiritual and productive community" that would serve as the "primary subject of history."[1] Theirs was a conservative revolution in favor of "narrowly self-interested preservation of class privilege" and opposed to political mobilization of the peasantry.[2] By the 1940s, Jiang's plans for China's enormously diverse ethnic minority population was to admit some "territorial as well as religious" differences while claiming China was a mono-ethic population descended from the mythical Yellow Emperor.[3] The Guomindang's post-independence goals were no more and no less than to further develop capitalist relations in China with prohibitions against Western materialism.[4] The CCP's anti-imperialism, on the other hand, was deeply engaged in the mobilization of the peasantry as a method of preparation for a protracted conflict with the Guomindang and Japan. As early as 1926, Mao Zedong wrote that "China's national revolution is, to put it plainly, a peasant revolution."[5] The mobilization of China's poor peasantry and the linking of their struggle with the

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[1] Tsui, *China's Conservative Revolution*, 4.
[2] Rebecca E. Karl, *China's Revolutions in the Modern World: A Brief Interpretive History* (New York: Verso, 2020), 76.
[3] Chiang quoted in Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 28.
[4] Tsui, *China's Conservative Revolution*, 197.
[5] Mao quoted in Walder, *China Under Mao*, 41.

far smaller urban and rural proletariat was necessary, according to Mao, to make clear the friend-enemy distinction in the revolution and to establish for whose benefit the revolution would be fought.[6] For the CCP, the issue of class struggle was always paramount, but it was also always mediated by other types of oppression that, if addressed, would widen the revolutionary coalition. Contra Guomindang policy, the CCP made explicit effort to link autonomy for national minorities with the larger struggle for socialism. Although the limits of this autonomy and CCP commitment to intervention were clear by the late 1950s, these war-time ideas played a large role in diagnosing the Lao revolution years later.[7]

The indeterminacy of anti-imperialism also created problems within the socialist bloc. In late 1957, CCP leaders told the CPSU that Beijing would no longer be supporting the policy of peaceful coexistence mutually advocated during the years of the Geneva and Bandung conferences, signaling a rift in the socialist world around forms of anti-imperialism. By December 1959, Mao began interpreting Khrushchev's willingness to negotiate with Washington on European conflicts as a turn toward revisionism.[8] At the same time, the radicalism of national liberation movements and newly independent states in Africa and Asia toward Europe and the United States seemed to align with Mao's longstanding militancy toward the capitalist world. In the spring of 1960, following a conflict over foreign policy at a meeting of the Political Consultative Conference of the Warsaw Pact, Mao commissioned a series of polemical essays on Leninism in celebration of the Russian revolutionary's ninetieth birthday.[9]

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[6] Mao Zedong, "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society."
[7] For CCP interventions in Yunnan autonomous regions during the Great Leap Forward, see Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts*. For relations with Tibetan populations during the same period, see Wemheuer, *A Social History of Maoist China*, 152–57.
[8] Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 150–56.
[9] Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 57.

The root of the problem was the theory of anti-imperialism within Soviet peaceful coexistence, which stressed weakening connections between newly independent states and their former colonizers through aid to expanding state-sector development. These new states in Africa and Asia could, through Soviet assistance, become "states of national democracy" on a "non-capitalist path of development" by ruling via a broad united front that slowly subsumed the national bourgeoisie under a peasant-worker alliance.[10] The government would then move gradually toward the left as geopolitical and economic ties to socialist countries strengthened. Over time, capitalism would be competed out of existence. Soviet theorists believed this should be a non-violent process and sought to discourage armed struggle. Although elements of this framework bore striking resemblance to Mao's arguments about New Democracy in the late 1940s, the CCP saw it as a cover for capitulation with the US. Mao's commissioned response emphasized that the struggle against capitalism and imperialism encompassed "a whole historical epoch" and would be characterized by struggles "both sanguinary and bloodless, violent and peaceful."[11] They repeatedly made the case for the importance of class struggle in anti-imperialist movements as the US escalated its military expenditure globally. In the summer of 1960, the emerging division in the socialist world was apparent to the US-aligned powers of SEATO.[12] However, Beijing and Moscow were able to continue diplomatic cooperation through the signing of the Geneva agreements on Laos neutrality in July 1962. By then, however, the damage to international socialist solidarity had been done. Over the course of several European conferences in the winter of 1962-63, Sino-Soviet clashes over Cuba and India resulted in a further series of CCP polemics that

[10] Friedman, 71–74.
[11] "Long Live Leninism!," April 16, 1960, https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/cpc/leninism.htm.
[12] "Sulian Jinian Wanlong Huiyi 5 Zhounian Qingkuang ji Wo Fang Taidu (dui Dongnanya Tiaoyue Waizhang Huiyi de Kanfa Deng)," March 16, 1960 – June 9, 1960, 109-02099-02 (1) PRCFMA.

cemented the end of cooperation.[13] Again, the CCP argued that Soviet peaceful coexistence was capitulation to US imperialism.

The SNWG's conflict with the VWP over the relationship between class revolution and national liberation occurred during and was fueled by this broader international schism. It was fundamentally an argument over the proper form of anti-imperialism to be taken in Laos. For SNWG advisors in Laos, the form of anti-imperialism adopted by the VWP and forced on the Pathet Lao was not just wrong on ideological grounds. Unwillingness to introduce class struggle, the SNWG believed, was causing deeper organizational problems. Pathet Lao troops were an amalgamation of all classes fighting for Laos's freedom, but to do what they did not know. Or, at least there were many unpoliced imagined versions of an independent Laos swirling through the ranks. While Liang Wenying's team argued for what was essentially CCP-style land reform in the Pathet Lao's policy for dealing with ethnic minority groups, the rest of the SNWG argued for the necessity of class politics in troop discipline – pointing to a range of issues from widespread desertion to corruption and waste.

The relationship between the CCP and VWP advisory groups seems to have soured before the relationship between their respective Central Committees. As I show below, the latter occurred in 1965 when Hanoi approached Brezhnev's new leadership in Moscow for aid. The result for Laos was that CCP leadership finally decided the Lao revolution was hopelessly *merely* a nationalist revolution. That is, it was a largely military movement preaching the liberation of all Lao people. Fundamentally unconcerned with the working classes in the eyes of the CCP, the Pathet Lao refused to conduct land reform or implement sustained political education in its cadre training programs. By the late 1960s, Beijing, unable to abandon Indochina completely, gave up

[13] Shen Zhihua, *Zhong Su Guanxi Shigang: Zhong Su Guanxi Ruogan Wenti Zai Tantao, 1917-1991*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Beijing: Beijing Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2016), 492–98.

on exporting its model for rural revolution and contented itself to aid a comparative revolutionary outsider just across its borders in Phongsaly.

"The Chinese government has always respected Lao independence and neutrality"

In April 1964, as the SNWG was concluding the first phase of its investigation, Souvanna travelled to Beijing to try to gain support for negotiations to resuscitate the second coalition government. In the year since Souphanouvong and colleagues fled Vientiane, negotiations between the RLG and NLHX led to a proposal to move the administrative capital to Luang Prabang. The royal city would be demilitarized, and a tripartite police force would be established.[14] The notion that three distinct factions still existed in Laos – left, right, and neutral – was a near fiction. In the collapse of the second coalition government in 1963, Phoumi was able to establish himself as the undisputed strong man of the right in charge of the National Directorate for Coordination, a catch all security organization under Phoumi's leadership that combined national civil and military police forces with information services responsible for propaganda.[15] US aid dollars flooded back into the pockets of many corrupt RLG politicians. Among other things, Phoumi and Boun Oum both used these funds to open casinos in Vientiane and Pakse, respectively.[16] According to the Stuart-Fox, USAID's presence in Laos expanded to the point that "its parallel administration included counterparts for virtually every government ministry and department."[17] In Stuart-Fox's account, the US office of the military attaché, USAID, and Air America all offered fronts for many CIA agents.[18] What the VWP had created for the Pathet Lao, the US created for the RLG.

[14] Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, 111.
[15] Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary*, 226.
[16] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 130.
[17] Stuart-Fox, 130.
[18] Stuart-Fox, 130.

Under these conditions, very little light shown between neutralist and right-wing factions. Kong Le's forces were reabsorbed into the Royal Lao Army from whence they had originally emerged. At Souvanna's orders, neutralist military command was reorganized and reequipped with US weaponry. The NLHX publicly protested these changes.[19] They demanded the demilitarization of Luang Prabang as a location for the Provisional Government of National Union, where NLHX members could be guaranteed safety from Phoumi's Coordination. Provisional agreements were reached between the RLG and NLHX in December 1963, and in January Souvanna, accompanied by the Soviet and British ambassadors to Laos, travelled to Sam Neua to confirm plans with Souphanouvong.[20] Souvanna's trips to Beijing and Hanoi in April were to try to gain support for the Provisional Government and dissociate Laos from the war in Vietnam.[21]

If the prospects for Souvanna gaining any goodwill toward another coalition government were not grim enough given the presence of the SNWG in Laos, they were made all the worse by a conference in Beijing in March between key figures in the Pathet Lao-aligned Patriotic Neutralists (see below). Zhou Enlai exchanged opinions on how to handle Souvanna with this group, which included Souphanouvong, between meetings on distributing increased PRC military aid to the Patriotic Neutralists through the "secret aid" they provided the Pathet Lao.[22] The conclusion was that Souvanna had become isolated. His willingness to neutralize Luang Prabang was, at base, an effort to gain some room to maneuver back from Phoumi's faction. The CCP felt that, caught between Phoumi's demands to also neutralize Khang Khay and the Lao king's

[19] "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Zhongyang Haozhao Renmin Jiaqiang Tuanjie Tigao Jingti Fensui Mei Diguozhuyi jiqi Zougou de Yangmou," RMRB, October 15, 1963.
[20] "Fuma Qinwang tong Sufanufeng Qinwang zai Sangnu Jiaohuan le Yijian," RMRB, January 22, 1964.
[21] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 132.
[22] "Guanyu Laowo Wangguo Zhengfu Shouxiang Sufana · Fuma Qinwang lü Zhengfu Daibiaotuan Fang Hua Jiedai Jihua de Qingshi," April 2, 1964, X50-3-140 GZARA; ZZWYB, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1997), 629.

reticence toward allowing NLHX into the city, plans for Luang Prabang were unlikely to materialize.

Their reasons for disapproval, however, were not limited to covert support for the Pathet Lao. First, the RLG and PRC now disagreed on the status of the consulate in Phongsaly and the economic and cultural mission in Khang Khay. After the second coalition government was formed and Souvanna returned to Vientiane, he formally requested that these offices be closed and PRC staff be relocated to the embassy in Vientiane. The RLG already made a similar decision of its own accord, closing its consulate in Kunming and leaving only the embassy in Beijing. The PRC refused Souvanna's request. In August 1963, Chen Yi formally wrote to him stating that the establishment of both diplomatic offices was based on legal agreements from three years prior; they would not be willingly closed. Second, since the end of 1962, the RLG had proposed several plans for PRC aid, including support for light industry, extension of the PRC-built road between Phongsaly and Muang Xay to Nam Tha, and air transportation agreements linking Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, Hanoi, and Nanning. The events of 1963 left these unaddressed. However, Zhou and his colleagues in the Foreign Ministry cannot have expected much given their refusal to cooperate in Phongsaly and Khang Khay, much less the open secret of their support for the Pathet Lao. Third, the Lao right wing had become very vocal about their support for 'two Chinas', which the PRC foreign relations apparatus could not abide.[23] This was a sore spot in Sino-Lao relations since their formalization in 1962. Moving from Khang Khay to Vientiane to serve as ambassador, Liu Chun was directed to protest any event where diplomats from both the PRC and Republic of

[23] All of these issues are recounted in the PRC Foreign Ministry's preparatory reports. "Guanyu Laowo Wangguo Zhengfu Shouxiang Sufana · Fuma Qinwang lü Zhengfu Daibiaotuan Fang Hua Jiedai Jihua de Qingshi," April 2, 1964, X50-3-140 GZARA.

China were invited.[24] Throughout 1963, Liu spent considerable effort policing Phoumi's repeated public mentions of "two Chinas," protesting, for example, the RLG's decision to allow some Overseas Chinese to visit Taiwan.[25]

Souvanna arrived in Beijing on April 4 flanked by Phoumi loyalists and a few remaining neutralists. The only exception was Souk Vongsak, who remained in Vientiane to represent the NLHX after Quinim Pholsena's assassination. PRC Foreign Ministry plans called for them to be welcomed at the airport by Zhou, Chen, and about 80 other CCP officials. All embassies and foreign reporters in Beijing were to be notified as well as all Lao persons "openly" in the city.[26] At a banquet for RLG delegation, Zhou gave a speech saying, "The Chinese government has always respected Lao independence and neutrality and has faithfully carried out its duties opposing imperialist invasion and intervention in Laos."[27] Promises were made to base Sino-Lao relations on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and, in a joint communique, both sides pledged to uphold the Geneva Agreements and support yet another international conference proposed by Cambodia's Prince Norodom Sihanouk.[28] In reality, of course, the communique meant nothing.

Souvanna returned home to turmoil. In further talks with Souphanouvong, the Red Prince demanded Luang Prabang's immediate neutralization. Phoumi balked, and negotiations broke down. On April 18, 1964, Souvanna, perhaps the only Lao leader searching for a negotiated solution to the civil war, gave up and announced he would resign as prime minister. Overnight, Siho Lanphounthakoul and Kouprasith Abhay used troops in Phoumi's Coordination to launch a

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[24] "Zhongguo Zhu Laowo, Wuganda,Tansang, Sudan he Jianpuzhai Xinren Dashi Daoren Qingkuang," July 11, 1962, 117-00986-01 PRCFMA.
[25] Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, 110.
[26] "Guanyu Laowo Wangguo Zhengfu Shouxiang Sufana · Fuma Qinwang lü Zhengfu Daibiaotuan Fang Hua Jiedai Jihua de Qingshi," April 2, 1964, X50-3-140 GZARA.
[27] ZZWYB, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 2:632.
[28] "Laotion Premier Visits Peking," Peking Review, April 10, 1964, 3; "China-Laos Joint Communique," Peking Review, April 10, 1964, 10.

coup. They arrested several neutralist politicians, including Souvanna and Pheng Phongsavan, and dismissed all ministers, including Phoumi.[29] Phoumi's son, Phoumano, a pilot in the Royal Lao Air Force, took off from a base in southern Laos with the intent to bomb Vientiane over his father's arrest. He turned around, however, when he was assured of Phoumi's safety.[30] The coup lasted less than twenty-four hours. Britain, the Soviet Union, France, Australia, and the United States announce that they would all sever aid to the RLG if Souvanna was not restored to power. This came as a surprise to Siho and Kouprasith, who expected to be rewarded as right-wing strongmen.[31] On the afternoon of April 19, Souvanna, who had now chosen not to resign, was released.

In the autumn of 1965, CCP intelligence diagnosed Siho and Kouprasith's coup as a split between factions loyal to Phoumi and Phoui Sananikone, RLG negotiator at Geneva 1954 and prime minister after Souvanna was removed in 1958.[32] International demand for Souvanna's return forced this conflict back under the surface, but it did not resolve it. The political influence of both Souvanna and Phoumi was diminished by the coup. In an effort to regain some control, Souvanna fully and formally merged his remaining neutralist forces with Phoumi's rightists.[33] The Pathet Lao openly denounced this, saying that Souvanna had lost all political independence. They, along with the PRC, refused to recognize the legality of Souvanna's post-coup government.[34] However, it is unclear what impact these events had on the LPP Central Committee's evaluation of Souvanna. Victory through armed struggle was decided upon long ago, and no events since the late 1950s had changed that goal. The lessons from Souvanna's April trip to meet with CCP leaders lies in how

[29] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 132; Evans, *A Short History of Laos*, 127.
[30] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 265.
[31] Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience*, 586.
[32] "Muqian Laowo Zhengzhi, Waijiao Douzheng Zhong de yi xie Qingkuang," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-05 PRCFMA.
[33] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 133.
[34] "Muqian Laowo Zhengzhi, Waijiao Douzheng Zhong de yi xie Qingkuang," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-05 PRCFMA.

disinterested the latter were in pursuing any substantive agreements. Beijing had now fully walked away from the prospect of convincing or cornering Souvanna into an alliance leading toward socialism. The only goal now was to strengthen the Pathet Lao for revolution.

The Scope of the VWP Advisory Group

While Liang Wenying's team travelled through northern and central Laos trying to create a class analysis for the revolution, Duan Suquan and Zhu Ying oversaw investigations into the other elements of Kaysone's request from October 1963. They followed a similar schedule, concentrating in northern Laos until April 1964 and moving south to Xieng Khouang and the Plain of Jars. Their goals, however, were broader than Liang's team. They planned to study the Pathet Lao's experience with establishing base areas, the proletarianization (无产阶级化) of the armed forces, and capacity for "self-reliance and self-sufficiency" (自力更生，生产自给).[35] Duan in particular became responsible for emphasizing Maoist strategic concepts like war of annihilation directly with Kaysone through individual study sessions.[36] The SNWG's initial studies revealed the depth of VWP integration into the Pathet Lao.

The VWP advisory group was headed by Nguyen Trong Vinh. Like the SNWG, it was headquartered with the LPP Central Committee in Xiangsu, Houaphanh Province. Below the main organization, the advisory group split into a party and government work group and a military work group. Both were currently expanding their roster of Vietnamese cadres. The SNWG military investigation team's Sun Pirong reported that VWP political and government groups were

[35] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA. The concept of self-reliance had always played a large role in the CCP's narrative of its own survival at Yan'an. In the summer of 1964 (after the SNWG's initial plan but while they were still in Laos), the concept reached new heights of importance. For more, see Covell F. Meyskens, *Mao's Third Front: The Militarization of Cold War China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[36] Li Jie and Bing Zhe, *Duan Suquan*, 89; Li Jie and Bing Zhe, 115.

stationed in every province in Laos while only those provinces with open conflict also had military groups. The latter came equipped with their own direct wireless communication to Xiangsu, something Kaysone told the CCP he could not provide.[37]

The scope of the VWP's advisory group encompassed every element of the Pathet Lao's revolution. The political and government group oversaw mass movements, united front work, and the recruitment of ethnic minorities; the recruitment and training of new cadres; all economic aspects of the Pathet Lao's organization, including management of food self-sufficiency for the Pathet Lao armed forces and for those living in liberated areas, commerce and trade, and requests for and distribution of foreign aid; propaganda work, including radio broadcasting, party school curriculum, and Pathet Lao-supported public education; management of intelligence information; and postal and telecommunications infrastructure. The military group, led by Le Hoa, oversaw all military related logistics, development of combat guidelines, military recruitment, military intelligence analysis, and proposed combat plans. Sun noted it was the Pathet Lao's responsibility to carry these plans out. The military group also oversaw combat and intelligence training for the Pathet Lao; maintained separate VWP and LPP communications networks; developed militias and guerilla groups, including in RLG-controlled areas; advised the engineering corps; and even had a hand in banal administrative office duties. A still further subset of the military group run by Le Xuan and Nguyen Hoa advised on everything from military supplies and ordinance distribution to health and sanitation and the Pathet Lao's motor pool. It is little surprise, then, that VWP cadres told Sun, "The relationship between the advisory group and the [Pathet Lao] is very close; it is a familial relationship. Even in [Pathet Lao] internal affairs, for example, investigating cadre

[37] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA

promotion, rewards and punishments, determining party committee members, dealing with counterrevolutionaries, etc., they solicit the advisory group's opinion without exception."[38]

Reports to the Central Laos Working Group make the VWP advisory group's reticence to cooperate with the SNWG clear. As mentioned in the previous chapter, leading VWP cadres in Laos, like Nguyen Hoa (the military group's chief of staff), hoped that the SNWG would function as an intelligence gathering organization for the VWP's preexisting infrastructure. Within the CCP's foreign relations apparatus, the origin of the conflict with the VWP over the Lao revolution is less clear. Prior to the VWP's turn to the Soviet Union for aid, available sources indicate it was the SNWG itself that pushed for a firmer line on class revolution while Beijing recommended moderation. This interpretation would be consistence with Duan's advocacy for more radical land reform policies in China during the late 1940s.[39] Before travelling to Laos, Zhou Enlai told Duan Suquan that the mission was to convince the LPP to incorporate class analysis and the CCP's approach to rural class struggle (in essence, the CCP's approach to land reform) into the revolution. He also repeatedly warned that the SNWG should respect the Lao-Vietnamese relationship. Once in Laos, Yang Chengwu and the Central Laos Working Group, although guarded about their own intelligence, frequently directed the SNWG to "take the initiative" on communicating with the VWP advisory group and to "respect that they are on the frontlines." After the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, when VWP cadres in Laos briefly seemed more open to the SNWG's recommendations, the PLA's Second Department recommended that Duan and his team ensure relations with their Vietnamese comrades stayed "natural and harmonious."[40]

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[38] In the original documents, the term I have replaced with brackets in the quote is "Lao side" (Liao fang). "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA

[39] Hebei Sheng Dang'an Guan, "Kaimuci."

[40] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA

By December 1964, the SNWG believed the VWP advisory group was giving them more intelligence on the situation in Laos than was given to the Pathet Lao. In Xieng Khouang, they now had the ear of Nouhak and Pathet Lao military commander Singkapo Sikhotchounnamali, whom they counselled on mass mobilization, strategic policy, and political education within the military. Yet, despite their newfound position, SNWG recommendations to incorporate class struggle into the revolution were ignored. Thus, they concluded in frustration that "without instructions from the advisory group of the VWP Central Committee, it is impossible to smash common practices and achieve this stage [of class revolution]."[41]

As Duan and his team were advising Pathet Lao leaders in Xieng Khouang, a bandit suppression campaign was getting underway in Houaphanh. 'Bandits' in this context meant CIA-funded Hmong counterrevolutionary groups. Not all counterrevolutionaries in Laos were ethnic minorities. CIA operations in southern Laos, for example, were conducted in cooperation with a combination of ethnic Lao military strongmen and ethnic minority groups.[42] In Houaphanh and Xieng Khouang where the SNWG was operating, however, many guerilla fighters opposing the Pathet Lao were Hmong, Khmu, and Iu-Mien (Yao) groups fighting under the leadership of General Vang Pao.[43] Recently equipped by increased US air support, the Royal Lao Army surprised Pathet Lao headquarters in Houaphanh with a round of raids from Phou Pha Thi, west of Sam Neua town. The LPP responded by attacking pro-RLG Hmong areas while the dry season still allowed travel by road.[44] The plan was for a team of political cadres to follow the Pathet Lao armed forces along their campaign. This team would enter liberated villages to provide medical aid and

[41] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA
[42] Baird, "Elite Family Politics in Laos before 1975."
[43] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and Teh Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 137.
[44] Benson, "Turbulence in Sam Neua (Part 1)," 294–95.

restart agricultural production. Each person needing aid would receive between ten and twenty kilograms of rice, two kilograms of salt, two meters of cotton cloth, a blanket, and a pot for cooking. Cadres would then stay behind to assist with farming. As they took control of local markets, the LPP planned to allow limited trade and for merchants to move in and out of liberated areas so long as they provided their own transportation. To try to win over local leaders, upper-level cadres planned to host banquets and distribute gifts "according to different situations."[45]

The SNWG believed that the level of preparation going into this campaign was "positive and necessary," especially given the conflict it was likely to create with Hmong groups. "However," the SNWG wrote to Beijing, "the critical problem is the cadres and soldiers conducting ideological work well." The concern was that, once in power in the new villages, Pathet Lao cadres would begin indiscriminately conscripting labor, slaughtering livestock, confiscating peasant property, drinking excessively, and "taking liberties with women." The SNWG wrote that they hoped to hold a special meeting with the LPP Central Committee to present the CCP's own experience moving into new villages, but the Central Lao Working Group found this unnecessary, recommending instead that the CCP's history be brought up casually when discussion arose on specific issues.[46] Again, the SNWG's eagerness to export the CCP model for revolution seemed to outpace Beijing.

The single point of unanimous agreement between the three parties in Laos was that the Pathet Lao's military capacity had developed far beyond its political capacity. Even Nguyen Trong Vinh, despite his disagreement with the SNWG over class struggle, shared criticisms that Pathet Lao cadres were ideologically undisciplined and that this weakened the revolution. Much of this

[45] "Zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu dui Jiaofei Gongzuo de Kanfa," December 29, 1964 – January 8, 1965, 106-00900-02 PRCFMA.
[46] "Zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu dui Jiaofei Gongzuo de Kanfa," December 29, 1964 – January 8, 1965, 106-00900-02 PRCFMA.

could be brought down to cadre origins. Too few Pathet Lao cadres were from peasant origins and therefore were politically irresolute – working for revolution when it suited them and absconding from duty when it did not. In January 1965, he told the SNWG that in Vietnam this issue had been resolved through geographic expansion. As the Viet Minh liberated more villages, more poor peasants and farm laborers joined their cadre ranks. He described a snowball effect in which increased numbers of reliable cadres mobilized increased numbers of masses, many of whom would further expand the party. "In principle," he said, "the [Pathet Lao] also thinks like this, but why are they unable to do it?"[47] Nguyen admitted that there were VWP cadres who had been working in Laos for years without concerning themselves with how the Pathet Lao should fill its own ranks. "From the past to now," he said, "it has never been implemented; this is our weak point."[48]

Although Nguyen's candor about the VWP's dominating role in the Lao revolution is striking, it is unlikely that he or any other ranking VWP official planned to change course. According to Goscha, several years earlier, in July 1961, during talks in Hanoi between the Lao and Vietnamese Central Committees, VWP General Secretary Le Duan openly discussed VWP dominance with Kaysone. Le believed that one shortcoming in their relationship was that VWP cadres "have not helped our friends to strengthen their own machine, therefore, they often undertake their work for them; sometimes [our cadres] undertake and finish the work without reporting it." This was especially true of military matters. Kaysone responded that he was grateful for VWP support but agreed that they had neglected the task of building "hardcore cadres" and

[47] "Yuenan Guwentuan Tuanzhang Ruan Zhong Yong deng dui Laowo Wenti de yi xie Kanfa," January 8 – August 19, 1965, 106-00896-01 PRCFMA.
[48] "Yuenan Guwentuan Tuanzhang Ruan Zhong Yong deng dui Laowo Wenti de yi xie Kanfa," January 8 – August 19, 1965, 106-00896-01 PRCFMA.

developing the Lao party.[49] The problem of the LPP's political weakness compared to its military development resounded through Central Committee reports throughout the early 1960s, and, in April 1965, Kaysone raised the issue once more. He told an expanded meeting of the Central Committee's standing committee that the situation in Laos had grown complicated, and "cadre, soldier, and peasant ideological understanding is equally complicated." Although LPP leadership had made certain victories at Geneva and in the coalition governments, they were unable to communicate their views on US imperialism effectively to the masses. He blamed the LPP leadership itself. "Although we can see these problems," he said, "we do not see them thoroughly enough. Therefore, we have no way of clearly explaining the reactionary essence of US imperialism and its running dogs or Souvanna Phouma's fickleness to the cadres, soldiers, and masses." Despite what Kaysone regarded to be great victories in December's bandit suppression campaign and support from the DRV and PRC, the Pathet Lao had stagnated compared to the periods around the Geneva conferences. "Why", he asked, "can't the revolutionary movement arouse the same vigor it had in the past?"[50]

The SNWG's answer to this question was steadfast. The Lao revolution would stagnate until the VWP allowed them to implement class struggle on the village level, clarifying the difference between politically ambiguous anti-imperialism and socialist revolution. Through class struggle and land reform the Pathet Lao would be able to recruit more committed to troops while winning over the rural masses, which would translate into firm but gradual military victories. This could not happen, however, under VWP control. Beijing continued to council moderation but

[49] Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside," 183–84.
[50] "Liao Fang Zhongyang Wenjian: Kaishan zai Zhongyang Changwei Guangda Huiyi Shang de Baogao Deng," April 1, 1965 – July 30, 1965, 106-00896-02 PRCFMA.

remained committed to the project until events in the summer of 1965 changed alignments within the broader socialist world.

The Revolution Turns Toward Moscow

Kaysone's address to LPP Central Committee in April was given at the zenith of the conflict over whether to hold a struggle session culminating in the execution of the lam Mr. Houay in Xiang Louang. Although it always paled in comparison to the control the VWP exercised over the Pathet Lao, the SNWG's ability to make class struggle an issue for the Lao revolution was at its height during the first half of 1965. When the LPP Central Committee were called to Hanoi to unify thought on the revolution in June, the VWP made two decisions that would block CCP influence over the Pathet Lao. The first, explored in chapter three, was to tighten control over its "apprentice revolutionaries."[51] The second was to ask the Soviet Union for aid. If the SNWG was causing its own rifts inside Laos, this sent a message to Beijing that the Indochinese parties who had joined them, albeit with great diplomacy, in the call for armed struggle in the years before Geneva 1961-1962 were now turning to Moscow for support.

After agreements were signed with the Souvanna government in Khang Khay in 1960, the Soviets began running regular airlifts of aid from Hanoi, 184 missions between December 15, 1960 and January 2, 1961 alone. As Gregory Pushkin described it to Averell Harriman, "apart from the second World War, this was the highest priority Soviet supply operation since the Revolution."[52] That was when Laos was the center of the world. After the second coalition government was formed, the Soviet Union ended its aid to the Pathet Lao in adherence with the Geneva agreements. When that government collapsed in 1963, the Soviets, as co-chair to the agreements, focused most

[51] MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986).
[52] Langer, *The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao*, 13–14.

of their international clout in supporting Souvanna's efforts to negotiate a ceasefire and in supporting successive proposals for international conferences to settle the civil war.[53] Actual aid to the RLG after the collapse was nonexistent.[54] Dean Rusk went as far as to tell the Yugoslavian foreign minister, Koca Popovic, that the US no longer believed Moscow had any influence in Laos: "[W]hat they are doing is contributing to not making it worse."[55] By the middle of 1964, Khrushchev was looking for a way out of co-hair responsibilities that would not raise the hackles of the PRC foreign relations apparatus. There was no such way.

In June, Zhou Enlai told a visiting delegation from Kenya, that Khrushchev was afraid of revolution despite his public statements of support for national liberation movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. "Thanks to our resolute support," Zhou said, "it is impossible for the Soviet Union to completely withdraw its support from Vietnam and Laos."[56] The following October Zhou told Sithon Kommadam, a member of the NLHX Central Committee, that even a "sell out" like Souvanna could now see that "the Soviet Union is cooperating with the US."[57] The SNWG also made a special point to explain Soviet revisionism and their untrustworthiness as an ally to the Lao revolution when talking with Pathet Lao military commanders.[58] The transition from Khrushchev to Leonid Brezhnev in 1964 did nothing to change CCP opinion despite the latter's renewal of Soviet commitment to international revolution, especially in Vietnam.[59] In

[53] Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, 117.
[54] Langer, *The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao*, 15.
[55] "Report on the Conversation between Koca Popovic and Dean Rusk at the State Department," October 17, 1963, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111943 WCDA.
[56] "Cable from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, 'Premier Zhou Talked about the Relationship between China-Soviet Difference and the National Liberation Movement'," June 29, 1964, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121188 WCDA.
[57] "Zhou Zongli Jiejian Laowo Youhao Daibiaotuan de Tanhua Jilu ji Shizhengxie Jiedai de Qingkuang Huanbao," October – November 1964, A33-2-22 SMA.
[58] "Zhu Laowo Sangnu Gongzuozu tong Yuenan Guwentuan Guanxi Wenti," January 24, 1964 – June 25, 1965, 106-00902-02 PRCFMA
[59] Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 124; Li, *The Dragon in the Jungle*, 51.

December, the PRC embassy in Moscow reported that the "new leadership…had put greater effort into faking sincerity about its phony opposition to imperialism and its phony support and taken some phony positions."[60] While Khrushchev had "openly courted and fawned over" Souvanna, under Brezhnev, Moscow had begun criticizing him for not working diligently enough to mend relations with Souphanouvong and started denouncing US destruction of the Geneva agreements.[61] Based on Soviet refusal to allow the NLHX to establish diplomatic offices in Moscow, however, CCP diplomats reckoned this support was false. Hanoi's interpretation of the change in leadership in Moscow differed. According to Asselin, the VWP believed that the CPSU had "recognized the untenability of peaceful coexistence as a strategy for world revolution" and was creating a new one.[62] Change, however, was not immediate, and high placed officials in the VWP began to see some truth in the CCP's prognosis of Khrushchevism without Khrushchev. Encouraged by the CCP, Hanoi advocated for armed struggle in Indochina against the new Soviet leadership's continued pressure for negotiations. In March, the PRC embassy's NLHX contacts in Vientiane still believed that Soviet objectives in Laos were to establish a ceasefire with Souvanna and block aid from other socialist countries to the Pathet Lao.[63] To regain its place within the world revolution, the Soviet Union had to commit to militarily supporting the DRV. In distinction from both Khrushchev and Mao, the new leadership did this without demanding that Hanoi pick a side in the split with Beijing.[64]

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[60] "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in the Soviet Union, 'Attitude of the New Soviet Revisionist Leadership to the Situation in Vietnam'," December 29, 1964, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118724 WCDA.
[61] "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in the Soviet Union, 'Attitude of the New Soviet Revisionist Leadership to the Situation in Vietnam'," December 29, 1964, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118724 WCDA; "Sulian zai Laowo Wenti shang de Zuofa," January 5 – March 3, 1965, 106-01332-01 PRCFMA.
[62] Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965*, 203.
[63] This contact is most likely Souk Vongsack, who remained in Vientiane after Souphanouvong left in 1963. However, Foreign Ministry documents only used the name "Souk." "Sulian dui Laio Fang de Zuofa," August 8 – December 28, 1965, 106-01332-02 PRCFMA.
[64] Nicholas Khoo, "Breaking the Ring of Encirclement: The Sino-Soviet Rift and Chinese Policy toward Vietnam, 1964-1968," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 18.

Alexei Kosygin travelled to Hanoi in early 1965 to meet with the VWP and communicate the Soviets' desire to work through the ideological divisions that had arisen in the world communist movement since the beginning of the Sino-Soviet split. A conference to this end, originally proposed by Khrushchev, was scheduled for March 1. The CCP tried and failed to block the conference from being held on the grounds that not enough parties had been invited that were sympathetic to Beijing's position.[65] Kosygin met with Zhou and Chen Yi in Beijing on February 5 on his way to Hanoi. He told them that if they wanted to prevail over the US in Vietnam, then they would need to act together. Zhou turned the conversation to Laos, insisting that opposition to US interference in Vietnam would have to include opposition to the same in Laos. Contrary to Soviet thinking, it was the US, not Souvanna, who first broke the Geneva agreements. Souvanna's current alignment with the US and Phoumi was the result of successive struggles and failures to implement neutrality. Zhou proposed that Kosygin use his time in Beijing to begin discussing Sino-Soviet cooperation on aiding the revolutions in Laos and Vietnam. This was one of Kosygin's own goals, and thus he agreed.[66] Zhou immediately used this as evidence that a conference in Moscow was not necessary. Instead of trying to grab the reigns of the world communist movement, the Soviets should start over with bilateral and multilateral relations.[67] The move did not work. Although Soviet officials would still be complaining about PRC influence over DRV policy a year later, Kosygin's trip to Hanoi helped solidify an emerging alliance.[68]

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[65] Lorenz M. Lüthi, "The Origins of Proletarian Diplomacy: The Chinese Attack on the American Embassy in Th Soviet Union, 4 March 1965," *Cold War History* 9, no. 3 (August 2009): 413.
[66] Khoo, "Breaking the Ring of Encirclement," 17–19.
[67] "Record of the First Contact between Premier Zhou and Vice Premier Chen Yi and Kosygin," February 6, 1965, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/165488 WCDA.
[68] Ang Cheng Guan, "The Vietnam War, 1962-1964: The Vietnamese Communist Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 4 (October 2000): 617; Nguyen, "The Sino-Vietnamese Split," 21; Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 165.

The conference, which the VWP did not attend, opened with a joint statement condemning US escalation of its war in Vietnam. The following day the US launched a bombing campaign against the DRV. As a result, around 3,000 mostly Vietnamese and Chinese students rallied around the US embassy in Moscow to protest. The Soviet army was called into the city to keep order.[69] On March 4, when the protestors attacked the embassy, an apparently violent clash broke out between the students and Soviet troops. A few Lao students also joined the demonstrations, Souphanouvong's son among them. He wrote to his mother, and ethnic Vietnamese woman named Viengkham, in Khang Khay soon afterward, and she angrily told PRC diplomats that they should be working to expose the event among Pathet Lao cadres. The following day, however, her anti-Soviet feelings had cooled. She reportedly told PRC officials: "We are a small country. We cannot be compared with your country and its 650 million people, but trust that we agree with your standpoint and resolutely oppose revisionism."[70] This became an ever more common position.

Viengkham's initial agreement with PRC diplomats is interesting for later events in Lao political history pertaining to a little understood but important rift between Souphanouvong and Kaysone in the 1980s.[71] Although Souphanouvong largely disappears from available PRC Foreign Ministry archives soon after the 1961-1962 Geneva conference, he and the NLHX remained the face of the revolution in PRC media outlets.[72] As noted in chapter two, in the early 1960s Souphanouvong seems to have placed a certain degree of trust in CCP officials, secretly confiding, for example, with Chen Yi and Wu Xiuquan about developments with the Pathet Lao and his assessments of Souvanna. After 1962, there are no other examples of this kind of interpersonal

[69] Lüthi, "The Origins of Proletarian Diplomacy," 416.
[70] "Liao Fang dui Sulian de Taidu he Fanying," January 13 – December 15, 1965, 106-01332-03 PRCFMA.
[71] My characterization of this rift comes from Baird, "Party, State and the Control of Information," 743–46.
[72] See, for example, "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang he Aiguo Zhongli Liliang Lianmeng Juxing Tebie Huiyi Haozhao Aiguo Wuzhuang Liliang Fenyong Qianjin Duoqi Geng Da Shengli," RMRB, February 25, 1971.

trust between Pathet Lao and CCP operatives in the SNWG's reports and other diplomatic messages between Beijing and PRC missions in Laos. This is not to say these operatives were always at odds – only that there seems to be few times where individuals were pulled aside to be delivered secret information in the manner Souphanouvong adopted with CCP leaders. In 1984, Souphanouvong, whose prominent place within the NLHX did not translate to power within the LPP, was significantly sidelined when two of his sons were arrested for apparently invented charges of selling gold and heroin. Viengkham complained publicly that these arrests were conducted by Kaysone and Nouhak out of fear or resentment of Souphanouvong's popular public persona. For this, she was temporarily relocated to Sam Neua. According to Baird, it is believed that Souphanouvong was also part of a faction within the Pathet Lao that remained sympathetic to the CCP even after the revolution ended in 1975.[73] With this is mind, it is possible that Viengkham's initial hope that CCP operatives in Laos could work against Soviet influence came from a pro-PRC position within the Souphanouvong family that was quickly quelled by others within the Pathet Lao. To say more than this, however, would require more information than available archives provide.

The PRC mission reported on "three fears" among the Pathet Lao regarding Soviet revisionism: the fear of ruining relations with the Soviets by being drawn into Sino-Soviet debates, the fear that the war in Vietnam would spread into Laos, and the fear that the DRV could not look after Laos on its own – that it needed international support. Knowledge of the police crackdown in Moscow did not phase Deuane Sounnarath, who responded to inquiries about the March conference saying, "US imperialism is the enemy. The Soviet Union is a socialist country; we

[73] Baird, "Party, State and the Control of Information," 744.

should unite to oppose the enemy."[74] NLHX representatives in Vientiane began blaming Chinese students for instigating the violence.

As late as May, Ho Chi Minh was able to discuss PRC aid for road building in Laos without the mention of Soviet support. At a meeting with Mao in Changsha, Ho explained that there were 30,000 Vietnamese currently working on road construction in Laos. He asked Mao for assistance in first building a road between Houaphanh and Xieng Khouang and then extending this road south. Mao agreed, suggesting that the large scale of the future fight might warrant building roads toward Thailand as well.[75] That summer, however, when DRV Deputy Prime Minister Le Thanh Nghi visited Beijing, talks took a different tone. On the one hand, Liu Shaoqi told him that the PRC was happy to provide further aid, but there were some things that even they had to import. If the DRV required, for example, trucks or construction equipment, then they should turn to the Soviets. If the Soviets could not provide this aid freely, then the DRV could buy them on credit and never repay them. This was apparently what the North Korean government had done. Zhou, on the other hand, told Le not to trust the Soviets. They could approach them for aid, but they would not get what they requested. Zhou believed the VWP delegation to Moscow, of which Le was a part, had done well in gaining short-term Soviet and East European sympathies, but this was temporary. "The leaders of those parties and states agree with you and support you," he said, "but later on they may still vacillate in the face of imperialism."[76]

On June 25, Sergey Lapin, the Soviet ambassador to the PRC, told the Foreign Ministry that Moscow had agreed to provide the LPP with unconditional military aid. Transport would begin

[74] "Liao Fang dui Sulian de Taidu he Fanying," January 13 – December 15, 1965, 106-01332-03 PRCFMA.
[75] "Discussion between Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh," May 16, 1965, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113059 WCDA.
[76] "Le Thanh Nghi, 'Report on Meetings with Party Leaders of Eight Socialist Countries'," 1965, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134601 WCDA.

before the end of 1965. Lapin's requested that the PRC take charge of delivering this aid via railroad to the DRV. In a memo to Deng Xiaoping and members of the Central Lao Working Group, the Foreign Ministry noted that this would cause problems in a rail system already overburdened by current levels of aid transport. However, "the [Pathet Lao] is currently struggling against the US, and, when Kosygin came through Beijing in February, Premier Zhou expressed the desire for the Soviets to not only aid Vietnam but also Laos. Now that the Soviets are requesting permission for aid to cross the border, it would be inconvenient to refuse."[77] In August, Li Qiang, deputy director of the Foreign Trade Ministry, formally exchanged letters with the Soviet embassy agreeing to move all Soviet aid at Moscow's expense. Upon return from the conference in Hanoi, Kaysone announced plans to travel to Moscow and Beijing (pending CCP approval) to discuss the direction of the Lao revolution. The PRC Foreign Ministry agreed to host a high-level LPP delegation. The visit, combined with further aid negotiations in Yunnan, required the CCP to make a full assessment of the Pathet Lao's political and military prospects. The intelligence Duan's team generated was grim, and, combined with CCP frustration over the Soviet Union's renewed involvement in the Lao and Vietnamese revolutions, it prompted Beijing to adopt a new position in Laos. The Pathet Lao and Patriotic Neutralists would continue to benefit from financial support, especially road construction in Phongsaly, but CCP leaders were now totally disinterested in building their model of social revolution in Laos.[78]

[77] "Zhong Su Shuang Fang Guanyu Yuan Lao Wuzi Guojing Wenti de Huanwen," August 12, 1965, 109-03966-01 PRCFMA.
[78] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 285; Sheldon Simon, "Peking and Indochina: The Perplexity of Victory," *Asian Survey* 16, no. 5 (1976): 405; Geoffrey C. Gunn, "Foreign Relations of the Lao People's Democratic Republic: The Ideological Imperative," *Asian Survey* 20, no. 10 (October 1980): 997; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 180–81.

The Working People All Have Local Gods

Kaysone and the LPP delegation were due to arrive in October. Although CCP leaders were welcoming, an ILD report from the previous month offers a kind of executive summary of their actual thoughts on the Lao revolution:

> Within the party, there is a lack of Marxist ideological education. The combination of the universal truth of Marxism and the Lao revolution in leading ideology has not been resolved. The [Lao] People's Party still lacks concrete analysis and correct understanding of the character of Lao society and class relations. They have not formulated a program for the party in the current phase and in the long-term revolutionary struggle, nor do they have correct policies and methods for establishing a party. Regarding objectives for the current phase of revolution, they only emphasize defeating US imperialism and its running dogs; they attach no importance to the question of opposing feudalism. Many party members and cadre do not know what the current revolutionary goal is…[T]he Central Committee sometimes says it is a Marxist, working class political party. However, they also feel that Laos is a backward agricultural country where the working class has just been born. The overwhelming majority of party members and cadres come from the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie of all ethnicities (民族). This is in contradiction to the party's character, and this contradiction is not easily resolved. *Therefore, in building their party, they do not observe the standards of a proletarian political party politically, ideologically, or organizationally.*[79]

The report went on to say that corruption and profiteering were a critical problem. Many branches reportedly recruited new members for the purpose of collecting dues. Very rarely were any members of local branches engaged in mass mobilization. In the eyes of the SNWG, the absence of class politics from Pathet Lao recruitment and organization crippled all other elements of the revolution.

During the rainy season in July and August 1964, combined neutralist and right-wing forces attacked Pathet Lao base areas in Vientiane Province. According to Kaysone, Pathet Lao troops and ethnic minority guerilla units fought many battles, but a sizeable portion of officers began to defect. One of the VWP's military advisors, Tran Nguyen Phi, reported that only the

[79] Emphasis added. "Laowo Renmin Dang de Qingkuang," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-03 PRCFMA.

Hmong guerilla units had no defections, nor was the Royal Lao Army able to enter their territory. The Pathet Lao, on the other hand, in addition to defections, lost several thousand rifles. During the attacks, RLG forces also created "political disintegration" by holding a banquet for all those willing to defect. Pathet Lao cadres and soldiers willing to leave the base areas and return home were asked to register their names and write a signed confession. They were then given business licenses and allowed to leave. The SNWG believed that this was an attack on the Pathet Lao's "fatal weak point."[80] Because no concept of class politics was involved in recruitment, many disaffected middle-class people from the capital were able to move to base areas as part of the Pathet Lao's organization behind enemy lines. Once the RLG offered them an opportunity for economic advancement, they abandoned the cause. In his own reflections, Kaysone said of the urban middle class in Vientiane Province base areas: "They hate the enemy but do not have a steady revolutionary spirit. When conditions are to their benefit, they join the revolution; when they meet hardship, they easily become discouraged and waver." If the problem was not resolved, Kaysone warned, the Pathet Lao threatened to become "an unstable petty bourgeois revolutionary movement." [81] The SNWG reported that the collapse of base areas in Borikham, Viengthong, and Khongsedone followed a similar pattern.

By August 1965, the base areas in Vientiane Province were completely lost while base areas in central and southern Laos were shrinking. CCP advisors became increasingly vexed. By their estimation, the Pathet Lao was receiving more aid from the PRC and DRV than at any point in the past. Meanwhile, the RLG was riddled with factional struggles. Yet, the Pathet Lao was unable to take advantage of the situation. Houaphanh was the only base area that was able to sustain

[80] "Guanyu Wanxiang Genjudi he Fandong Qunzhong de Diaoyan Baogao," July 18 – December 29, 1965, 106-00901-01 PRCFMA.
[81] "Guanyu Wanxiang Genjudi he Fandong Qunzhong de Diaoyan Baogao," July 18 – December 29, 1965, 106-00901-01 PRCFMA.

territorial expansion since the SNWG arrived in early 1964. Even still, base areas in Houaphanh and Xieng Khouang were constantly beset by "bandits" – the SNWG's term for CIA-funded irregular Special Guerilla Units (SGUs), considered to be counterrevolutionary groups.[82] As became clear in debates over the class structure of rural Laos during this period, the SNWG believed that the source of these counterrevolutionaries was the chaokok chaolao and the lam – rural social classes the VWP and LPP refused to attack. The Pathet Lao's fighting force in Xieng Khouang shrank by about one third from January to August 1965 while the VWP estimated that Royal Lao Army troops had grown by approximately 2,000.[83] As for the "bandits," the parties estimated there were between 3,600 and 8,400 throughout Laos. About 3,000 of these were in Houaphanh and Xieng Khouang with another 2,000 in the northern provinces of Luang Nam Tha and Oudomxay.[84]

Preparatory reports for Kaysone's visit, repeatedly criticized the LPP for refusing to pay attention to village economics, which, among other issues, resulted in confusion over who the counterrevolutionaries were and how they fit into the overall revolution. The LPP could not be convinced that "the feudal ruling class is the social foundation for imperialist rule in Laos," nor that the poor peasants should be "the main military force," despite Kaysone's speeches making nearly the same point.[85] As always, what the SNWG meant by attacks on the rural ruling classes was CCP-style land reform. Those who could be shown to benefit primarily from the labor of others should be subject to struggle sessions following the model recommended in Xiang Louang. The corvée labor system used by the lam would have to be abolished throughout the country while

[82] On the formation of these units, beginning with Hmong companies trained in Hua Hin, Thailand, see Kenneth Conboy, *War in Laos: 1954-1975* (Carrollton, TX: Squadron/Signal Publications, 1994), 17.
[83] "Wo Zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.
[84] "Laowo Jiefangqu Feihuan Qingkuang," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-06 PRCFMA.
[85] "Wo Zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.

land rents and interest rates in the countryside would have to be reduced.[86] The LPP Central Committee oscillated between asking the SNWG to help them study the CCP's experience with land reform and assertions that land reform in Laos was pointless.[87] A common refrain was that land was freely available to anyone willing to start their own fields. Land poverty in rural Laos was, therefore, the result of moral failings: "Most poor peasants without a field to plant are gluttonous and lazy people."[88] The SNWG reported that because there was "a contradiction between [the LPP] standpoint and the facts" about class exploitation in rural Laos, they were forced to make convoluted statements about counterrevolutionary bandits.[89] Bandits (or SGUs) had, alternately, "complex character, national character, class character, local character, mass character;" at no point would the LPP or their VWP advisors straightforwardly state, as the SNWG believed, that "bandits are a reactionary weapon controlled by the feudal ruling class."[90]

Alignment with the Pathet Lao and RLG did not follow strict ethnic lines, but the SNWG were quick to note that the longer the LPP refused to begin class struggle, the more likely conflict between Pathet Lao armed forces and counterrevolutionaries in Houaphanh were to become an ethnic conflict. This was especially true of the Hmong who performed so well at the Vientiane base area but saw little representation in the higher ranks of the LPP or NLHX. "In essence," CCP advisors believed, "the Lao liberated areas' banditry problem is also an ethnicity (民族) problem."[91] One report cited an incident in Muang Sing where, after a village was liberated, Pathet Lao troops beat and scolded the locals, harassed women, and indiscriminately seized peasant

[86] "Wo Zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.
[87] In addition to Kaysone, Nouhak Phoumsavan also expressed interest in reading Mao's works. "Zhu Laowo Daibiaotuan 1965 Nian Gongzuo Guihua," January 18 – September 28, 1965, 106-00911-02 PRCFMA.
[88] "Wo Zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.
[89] "Wo Zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.
[90] "Wo Zhu Sangnu Gongzuozu de Liang ge Zhongyao Dianbao," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-02 PRCFMA.
[91] "Laowo Jiefangqu Feihuan Qingkuang," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-06 PRCFMA

property. When the opportunity arose, many villagers fled to the mountains to join the counterrevolution. The same was happening in Hmong areas in Houaphanh, where Pathet Lao troops could not distinguish between counterrevolutionaries and the masses: "If they saw a Hmong person, they fired, deepening Hmong people's prejudice against the Pathet Lao armed forces."[92] Following VWP advice, the only other approach the Pathet Lao took toward minority villages was to follow military campaigns with aid delivery (as in the campaigns of December 1964) and withdraw. No cadres remained in these villages to conduct political work.

The SNWG saw this type of aid delivery as waste, which linked to a still further issue with the Pathet Lao armed forces – squandering of supplies from the PRC and DRV with no real plans to develop the level of production toward self-reliance. With both parties' backing, the Pathet Lao was, they claimed, better supplied than their Vietnamese comrades. The comparison to the VWP seems unlikely, but the point stands that if Chinese and Vietnamese aid were combined then the Pathet Lao had been receiving substantial outside support for decades. The SNWG believed the LPP's aversion to developing base area production was because a general lack of political ideological discipline had led to embezzlement and misuse of resources. They recounted many instances where Pathet Lao troops would go home with their weapons, sell them, and return empty handed. Ammunition was often stored improperly and became unusable. In one case, a Pathet Lao soldier trying to shoot down a bee nest spent over 100 rounds in the attempt. Regarding automobiles, the SNWG wrote, "If there is fuel, they will use it. If there is a car, they will drive it. Once it is broken, they cast it off."[93]

As Beijing prepared to receive the LPP delegation, the Yunnan Provincial People's Committee and Foreign Trade Bureau were in aid discussions with NLHX and LPP officials from

[92] "Laowo Jiefangqu Feihuan Qingkuang," September 24, 1965, 106-01323-06 PRCFMA
[93] "Liao Jun Zhengzhi Houqin Gongzuo Baogao," July 15 – September 20, 1965, 106-00897-04 PRCFMA.

the provinces of Luang Nam Tha and Oudomxay. During the Mao era, provincial governments had surprising leeway in party-to-party aid negotiations. General guidelines, such as budgetary caps, were decided in discussions between Central Committees, but the actual content of aid packages and mode of delivery was decided at the provincial level. PLA engineering corps would then be tasked with construction and sometimes transport related to aid agreements.[94] The Luang Nam Tha delegation, headed by an LPP member and provincial governor listed only as Somboun, arrived on September 11, and the Oudomxay delegation, headed by a provincial party member listed as Bounsong, arrived four days later. Both were welcomed by Yunnan Provincial Governor Zhou Ying and officials from the PLA's Kunming Military Area Command. Their agenda included discussions on transporting current aid, opening local cross-border trade, and proposals for new aid packages to assist in Pathet Lao self-reliance.

Both delegations stayed in Kunming for several weeks. The local foreign affairs offices reported that none of the delegates arrived with a change of clothes, and they were given new clothes and underwear to attend National Day celebrations on October 1. Requests for aid immediately exceeded amounts for which the Yunnan offices were authorized. The Foreign Ministry instructed provincial officials to accept documentation of the full requests and promise renegotiations with the LPP Central Committee. Perhaps the most difficult component of negotiations for Yunnan officials was the combined 3.5 tons of opium the delegations hoped to exchange, in combination with other locally produced goods, for cotton, agricultural tools, and miscellaneous household items under the auspices of cross-border trade. The value of the opium Luang Nam Tha could provide almost doubled that of all other items. Opium offered from

[94] "Guanyu Shang Liao dui Mengsai, Nantha Liang Sheng Daibiaotuan Wen Yunnan Shi," September 3 - October 26, 1965, 106-01331-02; For an example in Cambodia, see Andrew Mertha, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rogue, 1975-1979* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 90–91.

Oudomxay was twelve times the value of anything else it could offer for trade. Available records do not show the Foreign Ministry approving of trade in opium specifically, but the final approved totals for cross-border trade between parties were far in excess of non-opium goods the LPP provincial officials could have provided – almost 1,000 percent more in the case of Oudomxay (see Table 2). Thus, Yunnan officials must have been instructed to accept the deal. Opium was a major cash crop for myriad groups in Laos throughout most of the civil war. Its sale was not outlawed by the RLG until 1972 and only reluctantly.[95] Given the CCP's crackdown on opium use in the early 1950s, it is highly unlikely opium have been used for anything other than medical purposes. It does, however, implicate both parties in the thriving opium trade in northern Laos during this period.[96]

Table 2: Opium in CCP-LPP Border Trade[97]

	Luang Nam Tha	Oudomxay
Value of Opium Offered	126,000 RMB	168,000 RMB
Value of Other Locally Produced Goods	70,000 RMB	14,000 RMB
Combined Offer Total	196,000 RMB	182,000 RMB
Value of Trade Approved by Yunnan Foreign Trade Bureau	118,000 RMB	148,000 RMB
Discrepancy between Non-Opium Goods and Total Trade Agreement	68.57%	957.14%

[95] "Laos's Opium Country Resisting Drug Law," The New York Times, October 16, 1972, 12.
[96] Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003).
[97] "Guanyu Shang Liao dui Mengsai, Nantha Liang Sheng Daibiaotuan Wen Yunnan Shi," September 3 - October 26, 1965, 106-01331-0 PRCFMA.

Negotiations ended with an agreement for 200 tons of material aid (including weapons and ammunition). The Lao delegations requested exchanges take place in a Hmong village sixteen kilometers south of the border with the PRC, but Yunnan officials refused to invest PLA resources in building and guarding the necessary warehouses. All goods were handed over on the PRC side of the border in Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture – to Luang Nam Tha on an agreed upon location along the Cha River and to Oudomxay at a site near the village of Shangyong. From there, they would be transported into Laos by the Pathet Lao on horses provided by Yunnan.[98]

The negotiations were also an intelligence gathering mission for Yunnan officials. They reported that, according to Bounsom, 2,000 people fled liberated areas in Luang Nam Tha in 1964, a figure he expected to increase by the end of 1965. At the village level, nothing was being done to reform older structures of political power. Yunnan officials reported that the Pathet Lao "cannot control power at the grassroots," which remained in the hands of "landlords and ethnic (民族) chiefs." Thus, most ethnic minority groups were under the influence of "higher level enemies." Economically, they found the Pathet Lao to be entirely reliant on foreign aid for survival. "Both provinces' 1966 to 1968 economic plans," officials wrote, "are basically to ask for foreign aid." In Luang Nam Tha and Oudomxay, the party apparatus had three sources of funding: first, they collected fifteen percent all of grain production in areas they controlled; second, profits from cross-border trade; and third, profits from selling PRC material aid. Reports from the negotiations indicated that provincial level LPP members sold the materials they received for ten times the value assigned to them in aid agreements.[99]

[98] "Guanyu Shang Liao dui Mengsai, Nantha Liang Sheng Daibiaotuan Wen Yunnan Shi," September 3 - October 26, 1965, 106-01331-0 PRCFMA.
[99] "Guanyu Shang Liao dui Mengsai, Nantha Liang Sheng Daibiaotuan Wen Yunnan Shi," September 3 - October 26, 1965, 106-01331-0 PRCFMA.

Like their comrades in Houaphanh and Xieng Khouang, both delegations insisted that, in the current stage of the Lao revolution, military victories were more important than mass work. The cadres and soldiers spoke only of the anti-imperialist movement, "they never speak of socialism or communism." Both delegations also reflected the position expressed by the VWP advisory group that, except for some areas in Vientiane, Laos was a classless society. The availability of land made the CCP's experience of revolution irrelevant to the Lao situation because landlord exploitation was nothing like late Qing or Republican China. The Yunnan Foreign Trade Bureau attempted to convince their Lao guests of the value of class struggle and self-reliance by touring them around Kunming's enamel, thermos, and lightbulb factories, but they did not feel they had done any real convincing. The result was an extremely pessimistic report on the prospects for people's war in northern Laos. Superstition and belief in the primordial, spontaneous nature of productive relations would most likely continue unchallenged. "The working people all have local gods," Yunnan officials reported to Beijing, "they really do not take class struggle seriously."[100]

On October 4, Duan Suquan escorted Kaysone, Phoun Sipraseuth, and four other LPP Central Committee members to a meeting with Deng Xiaoping, Kang Sheng, ILD Deputy Director Wu Xiuquan, and Deputy Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei. Over the course of two days, Kaysone presented them with a history of the Pathet Lao movement and requests for aid. Deng agreed to the requests but deflected logistical discussions, instead explaining the importance of class analysis for correct policy. The delegation was scheduled to travel to Moscow in the coming days, and more meaningful discussion was saved until their return to Beijing in December.[101] Upon return, Kaysone met with PLA General Li Tianyou, the Second Department's Liu Shaowen, Duan Suquan,

[100] "Guanyu Shang Liao dui Mengsai, Nantha Liang Sheng Daibiaotuan Wen Yunnan Shi," September 3 - October 26, 1965, 106-01331-0 PRCFMA.
[101] Quan Yanchi and Du Weidong, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 180–91.

and five others. At the time, Li was deputy chief of staff and a member of the Leading Group on Vietnamese Affairs, one of two committees in charge of PRC policy toward the DRV created in May to manage increases in aid requests since the US escalated its involvement in the war. Central Laos Working Group Director Yang Chengwu was also a member of this committee and Li served as Yang's deputy in the second major authority in charge of implementing PRC policy on the DRV – the Group in Charge of Supporting Vietnam.[102] Kaysone gave the LPP's analysis of the current military situation. Although the US was likely to continue attacks in central and southern Laos, it was unlikely to directly attack Houaphanh. Kaysone, therefore, believed there was an opportunity in the north for the LPP to "better use aid from brother countries" to develop production in liberated areas and become self-reliant.[103] Li noted that the only CCP member in attendance with any experience in Laos was Duan. Nonetheless, he congratulated Kaysone on his plans. "In my view," Li said, "the Lao struggle and the struggle in South Vietnam are organically linked. However, while the military and political struggles are good, both must act independently. This is the meaning of self-reliance about which Comrade Kayson just spoke."[104] Li made assurances that the PRC was there to act as a supporting rear to the frontlines in Indochina and promised aid would continue. Other meetings seem to have garnered a similar a response.

The delegation travelled to Shanghai as Mao was preparing for a Politburo Standing Committee meeting to purge Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing (also a member of the Leading Group on Vietnamese Affairs). PRC Defense Minister Lin Biao had been working to emphasize Maoist political education within the PLA since the early 1960s. By 1965, his work had culminated in the

[102] Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 220.
[103] "Laowo Renmindang Daibiaotuan Jieshao Laowo Junshi Douzheng Qingkuang Jilu," December 1, 1965, W651201 PRCFMA.
[104] "Laowo Renmindang Daibiaotuan Jieshao Laowo Junshi Douzheng Qingkuang Jilu," December 1, 1965, W651201 PRCFMA.

publication of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung* (better known as the Little Red Book).[105] Over the last year, Lin clashed with Luo, who supported Lin's goals in public but privately edited his written directives on the primacy of politics. Luo's purge marked a transition within the PLA in which radical politicization of the military and the use of PLA troops in propaganda as model citizens took precedence over aid to active revolutions on the PRC's southern borders. By the time Kaysone and his associates returned to Laos, Yang Chengwu had replaced Luo as acting Chief of Staff. Yang himself would be purged in 1967, one year before the last member of the SNWG left Houaphanh.[106] Duan later claimed to have been totally unaware of the Luo purge while he stayed with Kaysone in Shanghai's Jinjiang Hotel.[107]

The LPP delegation met with Zhou Enlai on December 4.[108] According to a conversation he had with Le Thanh Nghi the following day, Zhou told Kaysone that the CCP believed the US was paying increasing attention to Laos compared to the previous few years. "In this way, the burden on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has become heavier," Zhou said, "We can only cooperate from the side, for example, by aiding Phongsaly."[109] Zhou warned against trusting vague Soviet promises of support, but he made no suggestion that China could provide the aid instead. After a few days of waiting inside the hotel, the group finally met with Mao on December 11, where they received what must have been a familiar chorus of advice to focus on class struggle during military recruitment and assurances that the fight in Southeast Asia was worthy of study.[110] These meetings by no means marked the end of PRC economic support for the Lao revolution.

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[105] Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 109.
[106] MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 20–27, 49, 246.
[107] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 201.
[108] ZZWYB, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, 2:768.
[109] "Zhou Enlai Zongli Huijian Yuenan Fuzongli Li Qing Yi Tanhua Jilu," December 5, 1965, 106-01484-01 PRCFMA.
[110] ZZWYB, *Mao Zedong Nianpu*, vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2013), 546.

However, as Zhou made clear, based on LPP refusal to implement any of its recommendations, the CCP was stepping back from its advisory role.

The Exception to Class Struggle: Khamouane Boupha in Phongsaly

While the SNWG preached the importance of class analysis over anti-imperialist politics in Houaphanh and Xieng Khouang, PRC operations in Phongsaly pressed LPP leadership to become more flexible with their alliances. In particular, the CCP worked to encourage cooperation between Pathet Lao forces in southern Phongsaly Province and the "local warlord" of Phongsaly town – Khamouane Boupha.[111] Khamouane was appointed head of regional military command and governor in Phongsaly in November 1957 when the province came under RLG administration.[112] During the tumult of the early 1960s, he commanded about 2,000 troops centered on Phongsaly town (Phongsaly is the name of the province and the provincial capital).[113] As early as 1961, Khamouane began receiving PRC military aid and training in Yunnan to fight Guomindang forces recently pushed into Laos and Thailand from northern Burma.[114] The Yunnan provincial government increased its aid to Phongsaly in July 1963, adding 180,000 RMB worth of rice, cotton, tools, and medicine.[115] For the LPP leadership, however, Khamouane's willingness to protect his territory from Guomindang incursions was not sufficient to prove loyalty to the communist parties surrounding him.

[111] This description came from Godley, US ambassador to Laos from 1969 to 1973. Archival sources indicate that in the early 1960s, the Pathet Lao would have spoken about Khamouane in similar terms. G. McMurtrie Godley and Jinny St Goar, "The Chinese Road in Northwest Laos 1961-73: An American Perspective," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, ed. Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger (London: Macmillan, 1991), 292.
[112] Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary*, 153.
[113] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos,* 245.
[114] "Transcript of Talks During Zhou Enlai's Reception of Prince Souphanouvong," April 17, 1961, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120881 WCDA.
[115] "Guanyu Laowo Wangguo Zhengfu Shouxiang Sufana · Fuma Qinwang lü Zhengfu Daibiaotuan Fang Hua Jiedai Jihua de Qingkuang," April 2, 1964, X50-3-140 GZARA.

In October 1963, on his return from the Conghua meeting where Zhou Enlai originally proposed what would become the SNWG, Kaysone briefed PRC Ambassador to the DRV Zhu Qiwen on relations between Khamouane and the Pathet Lao. He recounted a history of conflict between the two, warning that Khamouane was very "cunning."[116] Although placed into power by Souvanna under the first coalition government, Khamouane refused to voice support for Souvanna after Kong Le's coup in August 1960. Only after Phoumi's countercoup, when Pathet Lao victories in Houaphanh and the Plain of Jars threatened to turn north toward Phongsaly, did Khamouane issue a statement of support for the government at Khang Khay. In April 1963, after the collapse of the second coalition government following Quinim Pholsena's assassination, Khamouane refused to issue statements condemning the government led by Souvanna and Phoumi in Vientiane until after Pathet Lao forces moved into Phongsaly Province. Caught between the PRC to the north and west, the DRV to the east, and the Pathet Lao to the south, Khamouane began negotiations with the Pathet Lao for governance of Phongsaly and founded a "Social Democracy and Peace" organization, which claimed to oppose imperialism and feudalism while seeking to develop industry and foreign trade based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Kaysone told Zhu Qiwen this organization was created "to scam the people" and that Khamouane was "worse than [Souvanna] Phouma." He even intimated that Khamouane had allowed Guomindang troops to remain in the extreme north of the province to conduct espionage for the US.[117] Although Kaysone did not mention it directly, the embassy believed this was his way of criticizing PRC aid to Khamouane. On October 15, amid planning for the SNWG, Zhou Enlai personally directed the consulate in Phongsaly town to investigate Kaysone's account.

[116] "Liao Fang dui Kanwen Kanfa," October 9 – December 12, 1963, 106-01094-02 PRCFMA.
[117] "Liao Fang dui Kanwen Kanfa," October 9 – December 12, 1963, 106-01094-02 PRCFMA.

The consulate agreed with Kaysone about Khamouane's "reactionary nature and cunning mutability." His statements in 1961 and 1963 in support of Lao neutrality had only come when he was under direct military threat. However, they also believed he could be useful and was close to making irreversible moves against Phoumi and his US backers. Like any neutralist in CCP reckoning, Khamouane had done much wavering in the past. During the battles around Nam Tha, when the US refused to come to Phoumi's assistance, Khamouane's allegiance was completely with the right, actively attacking the Pathet Lao around Nam Tha and Muang Sing. He had also opposed PRC road construction projects negotiated by Souvanna himself in 1961. Currently, Khamouane was isolated from Vientiane and therefore also from US aid. Successive Pathet Lao military victories and continued PRC aid, according to the consulate, had pulled him to the left. The report noted that Khamouane had now gone beyond formal statements about US interference to holding mass anti-US rallies and threatening to shoot down US flights over Phongsaly. Likewise, he recently refused Souvanna's handwritten request to return to Vientiane for negotiations and commanded his troops to defy orders to work with Kong Le against the Pathet Lao – aligning himself instead with Deuane Sounnarath's Patriotic Neutralists. While there were still several pro-US "bastards" among his military officers, PRC diplomats in Phongsaly believed he could no longer swing back toward Souvanna. They wrote that "winning Khamouane over is possible and necessary."[118]

In Khang Khay, Deng Kunshan was ordered to show the consulate's report to Nouhak Phoumsavan. Nouhak expressed general agreement. Khamouane was "essentially reactionary" and had "expansionist ambitions," but recent Pathet Lao victories had forced him to break ranks with Vientiane, denouncing the US in Laos. Convinced that Khamouane had nowhere else to turn, the

[118] "Liao Fang dui Kanwen Kanfa," October 9 – December 12, 1963, 106-01094-02 PRCFMA.

LPP took his recent request to meet with Souphanouvong as a good sign. However, trust needed to be built. Given Souphanouvong's high profile in Laos, Nouhak feared Khamouane would leak news of the meeting to the press. He therefore convinced Deng to help organized a preliminary meeting in Kunming between Khamouane and Phoun Sipraseuth, an LPP Central Committee member and vice president of the Pathet Lao-Patriotic Neutralist mixed High Military Command.[119]

Although CCP support for Khamouane contradicted much of the advice from the SNWG, it also shows in miniature an alternative to attempts to win over Souvanna before Geneva 1961-1962. Souvanna and his allies were privately condemned by the CCP and LPP for their 'wavering and indeterminate' politics from Kong Le's coup until the fall of the second coalition government. Yet, even with the unanimous turn toward armed struggle among the Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese parties in the late 1950s, none argued against a strategy of offering Souvanna's government unconditional foreign aid while building Pathet Lao forces to compel an anti-US position. Surrounded on all sides yet aided by the PRC, Khamouane was in the position the LPP and its communist neighbors had hoped to create around Souvanna. In Khamouane's case, the strategy worked.

Sufficiently vetted by the LPP, Khamouane joined Souphanouvong, Deuane, and Khamsouk Keola in March 1964 for meetings in China where the latter was made president of the Patriotic Neutralist movement. By April, the PRC was committed to increased rice and fuel shipments to Phongsaly as well as enough military supplies to outfit 1,500 troops.[120] The following

[119] "Liao Fang dui Kanwen Kanfa," October 9 – December 12, 1963, 106-01094-02 PRCFMA. For Phoun's position within the Pathet Lao, see Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary*, 261.
[120] CCP intelligence reports indicate that Souphanouvong and Phoun Sipraseuth began a series of secret meetings with Khamouane and Khamsouk in December 1963 but do not reveal the content of these meetings. "Guanyu Laowo Wangguo Zhengfu Shouxiang Sufana · Fuma Qinwang lü Zhengfu Daibiaotuan Fang Hua Jiedai Jihua de Qingkuang," April 2, 1964, X50-3-140 GZARA.

year, the SNWG reported to the ILD that relations between the Pathet Lao and Khamouane were going well despite occasional disputes. Several cadres in the LPP provincial committee and the VWP advisory group continued to emphasize Khamouane's reactionary past while others expressed anxieties that Khamouane's progressive measures in mass education would convert Pathet Lao troops to the Patriotic Neutralists. Thus, on multiple occasions the Pathet Lao refused to provide Khamouane with cadres for mass mobilization. Dissatisfaction also arose around the issue of PRC aid to Khamouane in Phongsaly compared to that given to the Pathet Lao in Houaphanh. A Pathet Lao military official formerly stationed near Phongsaly town told the SNWG that the economic situation in Khamouane's territory was better due to PRC aid. "The implication," the SNWG reported, "is that the Vietnamese aid the Pathet Lao while the Chinese aid Khamouane."[121]

By the summer of 1965, Kaysone had accepted the CCP position that Khamouane was a valuable ally in Phongsaly. Although Khamouane's forces received aid from Yunnan, the CCP required approval from the Pathet Lao, often directing Khamouane's representative to gain Souphanouvong's consent before negotiating new agreements, especially relating to military equipment. Actual approval had to be granted from the LPP Central Committee. In August, Kaysone told the SNWG that the LPP Central Committee was willing to allow Yunnan to begin supplying Khamouane with surface to air weaponry and an additional 100 tons of rice. No official limit on military aid was established, but Kaysone cautioned that he should not be given too much weaponry. In Kaysone's view, Khamouane was, after all, aligned with the Pathet Lao as much out of self-preservation as principle. As he told the SNWG, "Recently, Khamouane's attitude is more positive than before. Other than being compelled by general circumstances, this is inseparable

[121] "Guanyu Wanxiang Genjudi he Fandong Qunzhong de Diaoyan Baogao," July 18 – December 29, 1965, 106-00901-01 PRCFMA.

from the work China is doing with Khamouane."[122] The following month, the LPP's deputy secretary for the Phongsaly provincial party committee claimed to CCP foreign affairs officials in Yunnan that he had even taken steps to protect Khamouane from a coup by "progressive figures" within Khamouane's own ranks.[123]

Khamouane himself passed through Yunnan in the autumn of 1965 along a well-travelled, if circuitous, route from Phongsaly to Houaphanh. Still blocked from free movement through Pathet Lao controlled areas in Laos, Patriotic Neutralists followed this route across the border into Yunnan through Simao, then northeast to Kunming, southeast to Nanning, and on to the Lao-Vietnamese border through Hanoi. In November, on a return trip from an NLHX conference in Houaphanh, Khamouane's gratitude for CCP aid effusive. The record of his visit implies that it was not until this conference that Pathet Lao officials told him he would be receiving increased military support from the CCP. In Kunming, Khamouane, who expected US air strikes to become more aggressive during the upcoming dry season, was granted a meeting with Yunnan Military Zone Political Commissar Zhang Lixiong. The two discussed "anti-aircraft defense and anti-imperialism," and Khamouane tried to secure further training for Patriotic Neutralist forces, which was granted pending Souphanouvong's approval. Claiming inspiration from studying the Chinese revolutionary experience, Khamouane assured PLA officials in Yunnan that previous problems with "avaricious" thought toward aid among the Patriotic Neutralists had changed. Increased military aid and steps toward ideological cohesion filled him with confidence. "US imperialism coming to Laos, Vietnam, and China," he told Yunnan officials, "is equivalent to placing themselves in a deathtrap."[124]

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[122] "Kanwen Yaoqiu Wo Yuanzhu Yi Bai Dun Dami deng Shi," June 28 – September 16, 1965, 106-00910-01 PRCFMA.
[123] "Liao, Yue Fang dui Kanwen Kanfa he Zhengce," February 8 – September 24, 1965, 106-01334-02 PRCFMA.
[124] "Fengshali de yi xie Lingxing Qingkuang," June 5 – November 20, 1965, 106-01334-04 PRCFMA.

Very little has been written about Khamouane's role in the Lao revolution, much less CCP involvement in placing him within the Pathet Lao-Patriotic Neutralist united front. Stuart-Fox makes brief mention of Khamouane's refusal to take a side between Kong Le and Phoumi in 1960.[125] In Marek Thee's memoir on the period between the two Geneva conferences, the former Polish ICC member mentions only that Khamouane was compelled to remain friendly with the PRC for reasons of geographic proximity. He was less close to the Pathet Lao than Kong Le in the early 1960s but "remained loyal" to the NLHX after the collapse of the second coalition government.[126] Around 1970, Khamouane was given the title Supreme Commander of the Patriotic Neutralist forces, and it is generally assumed that his relations with the Pathet Lao before that point were smooth.[127] An LPP Central Committee document from 1964 labelling Khamouane a reactionary and alleging that many of his officers maintained close ties with the US, Phoumi, and Guomindang forces in northern Phongsaly reveals the LPP's initial deep suspicions.[128] Although Khamouane never joined the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, he played a decisive role as the minister of defense in support of the Pathet Lao when they took over the Lao government in 1975. After the revolution, Khamouane eventually served separate terms as vice minister of defense, agriculture, and industry and minister of justice in the government of Lao People's Democratic Republic.[129]

CCP advice regarding Khamouane seems to have played an important to role in convincing Kaysone and others it would be worth their while to bring him into the united front. At the same time, flexibility with Khamouane in the name of anti-imperialism ran counter to the advice the

[125] Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 114.
[126] Thee, *Notes of a Witness*, 132.
[127] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 302–3; Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary*, 154.
[128] ZZDLYE, *Laowo Renmin Geming Dang Lijie Zhongyang Quanhui Wenjian Huibian* (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Duiwai Lianluobu Yazhou Erzu, 1975), 173.
[129] Ian G. Baird, pers. comm., April 18, 2021; Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 154.

SNWG was giving regarding class struggle and its importance for the overall revolution. Although CCP diplomats and advisers did not use this language, it is best to understand their recommended approach toward Khamouane in terms of the political struggle they practiced toward Souvanna years earlier. In light of the SNWG's failures to guide the politics of the Lao revolution, Khamouane's ultimate status within the military movement marks one of the few places where CCP attempts to influence organizational elements of the revolution (as opposed to supplying aid) were successful.

Conclusion

When the SNWG originally arrived at LPP headquarters in Xiang Su, they were welcomed with a banquet. Liang Wenying sat beside Souphanouvong and recalled that the Red Prince took great care in explaining what foods we placed before them and how they should be eaten. When dinner was complete, a Lao dance troupe appeared before the guests and performed *lamvong* dances, a traditional form of dance among the Lao ethnic majority. They invited the SNWG to join them, and, after some convincing, Liang reluctantly entered the crowd of swaying revolutionaries. It was the only time in his life he ever danced.[130] Almost three years later, in November 1966, the Kunming Military Area Command sent a dance troupe to perform for Pathet Lao troops and the CCP and VWP advisors. The troupe arrived laden with crates of all the Maoist *object d'art* associated with the Cultural Revolution – Mao badges, pamphlets, posters, and printed slogans. Lao revolutionaries travelled days to see the performance. It was so popular that VWP advisors requested their stay be extended for five more performances. If memoir accounts of the dance

[130] Liang Wenying, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 9–10.

troupe incident are true, then it seems the VWP advisors made this request without having actually seen the performance.[131]

At a certain point in each performance, members of the Yunnan dance troupe descended from the stage and passed out the Mao-festooned souvenirs they hauled with them over the mountains of northern Laos. This was a high point during the multiple performances for Pathet Lao cadres and troops, but it caused serious disagreement when a performance was finally scheduled exclusively for Nguyen Trong Vinh's team. In anticipation of the performance, Duan escorted Nguyen to meet the troupe. Together, they sang a few songs in praise of Ho Chi Minh, and Nguyen seemed pleased. Problems arouse at a meeting to review the show's program. Rather than the Yunnan troupe passing out Mao badges and essays during the high point of the performance, the VWP advisors asked if they could be given the souvenirs now to hand to the troops on their own. Controversy did not erupt until the VWP asked the troupe not to perform the song "The East is Red," the lyrics to which include "The East is red, the sun is rising. From China, appears Mao Zedong" and "Chairman Mao loves the people, he is our guide to building a new China." Instead, they proposed "Solidarity is Strength," a song that describes solidarity among the people as harder than iron and stronger than steel but makes so specific reference to any communist leaders. For the dance troupe, this was revisionism, and they refused.

At some point during that night, a poster of Ho Chi Minh was removed from the performance all and replaced with a character poster upon which was written, "We must persist in the truth, and the truth must have a clear-cut stance. We communists have always believed hiding our standpoint is shameful." The poster was quickly removed. Nguyen brought it to Duan claiming it was evidence of counterrevolutionary activity and an attempt to harm Sino-Vietnamese

[131] Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 228.

solidarity. After conferring with other members of the SNWG, Duan attempted to explain that this was a famous Mao saying and that a member of the troupe was simply studying in their spare time. He rejected the idea that it was counterrevolutionary activity. The SNWG decided that the accusation warranted an urgent telegram to Beijing. The reply simply instructed them to express regret over Nguyen's protest.[132]

Duan Suquan was recalled to Beijing shortly after this incident, as was Liang Wenying. The SNWG was downgraded to the Sam Neua Liaison Group with a significantly diminished staff. The VWP had always seen the relationship between the parties in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as part of the same struggle. Although the idea became a major point of contention between both communist and non-communist nationalists in Laos and Cambodia years later, the VWP's original program from 1951 was to bring about "an independent, free, strong and prosperous federation" of all three states.[133] More than fifteen years later, the VWP had not abandoned this goal. Beijing's criticism of this plan, vocal in the 1980s, was still muted during the early years of the Cultural Revolution when the CCP's support for the DRV was central to its bid to lead the world revolution.[134] In fact, by 1968, the CCP had become totally resigned to its inability to change any of the VWP's plans in Laos. SNWG members were ultimately stationed at the test site in Xiang Louang for over three years, but it is unclear what they were able to accomplish after losing the debate over how or whether to operate struggle sessions. In September 1968, Kaysone suggested that the head of the liaison group, Li Wenzheng, take a vacation back to the PRC. Beijing's interpretation of this suggestion was most probably correct – CCP advisors were no longer wanted

[132] Liang, *Zai Laowo de Rizi*, 188–89; Quan and Du, *Gongheguo Mishi*, 230–39.
[133] Brown and Zasloff, *Apprentice Revolutionaries*, 47.
[134] Zachary A. Scarlett, "China after the Sino-Soviet Split: Maoist Politics, Global Narratives, and the Imagination of the World" (Dissertation, Boston, MA, Northeastern University, 2013).

in Houaphanh. Beijing decided to recall the remaining liaison group.[135] Li's farewell banquet was held in Hanoi in November 1968 with Kaysone, Nouhak, and Souphanouvong all in attendance.[136] All that was left of CCP guidance in the Lao revolution was the alliance between Khamouane Boupha in Phongsaly and the LPP Central Committee in Xiang Su. First in the minds of the SNWG and later for CCP leadership, the Lao revolution, at all points dominated by the VWP, was not a class revolution. It was a *merely* anti-imperialist revolution, a fight for national liberation with no goal beyond the negative of 'not US domination' that welcomed anyone willing join. Its lack of class politics hobbled it every step of the way, while PRC and DRV aid kept the LPP Central Committee and its military forces afloat. The VWP's turn toward the Soviet Union, while causing serious problems for Sino-Vietnamese cooperation in what was seen as the more viable revolution in Indochina, allowed the CCP to step away from a movement in Laos that its advisors repeatedly claimed was thoroughly dysfunctional.

[135] Zhang, "China's Involvement in Laos," 1156.
[136] Hu Zhengqing, *Yi Ge Waijiao Guanyuan de Riji*, 161.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE REVOLUTION AFTER THE REVOLUTION: LAO TOURS THROUGH SHANGHAI'S SOCIALIST CONSTRUCTION

The success of the ten-thousand-ton hydraulic press is due to the Chinese Communist Party's mastery of Marxism-Leninism. The Soviet Union cannot manufacture a ten-thousand-ton hydraulic press because CPSU leaders do not have a Marxist-Leninist standpoint. They do not have the spirit of daring to want and daring to do, of daring to struggle and daring to win.

Bousou Sisan
Patriotic Neutralists' 15th Battalion Commander
Shanghai, 1965[1]

Robert Loh was a factory manager in Shanghai for most of the 1950s. In June 1957, at the height of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, he fled the PRC through Hong Kong.[2] The city he left behind occupied a contradictory place in the national image the CCP hoped to project domestically and abroad. On the one hand, Shanghai accounted for over half of the PRC's entire industrial capacity during the Mao era.[3] To the degree that the CCP wanted to emphasize its successes in socialist construction, it was necessary to propagandize the wide array of factories operating in Shanghai and the goods they were able to produce. On the other hand, this industrial capacity was the legacy of imperialist incursions, the establishment of foreign concessions and extra-territoriality agreements, and Shanghai's comparatively close ties to the West – factors that combined to create a pattern of industrial development unique among China's major cities.[4] The city was also the site

[1] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Qingnian Daibiaotuan de Jihua yu Huibao," May 1965, C21-2-2637 SMA
[2] Robert Loh and Humphrey Evans, *Escape from Red China* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1962), 355. I am indebted to Julia Lovell's work on the reception for foreign delegations in China for introducing me to Loh's memoir. Julia Lovell, "The Uses of Foreigners in Mao-Era China: 'Techniques of Hospitality' and International Image-Building in the People's Republic, 1949-1976," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (2015): 135–58.
[3] Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 73.
[4] Niv Horesh, "The Bund and Beyond: Rethinking the Sino-Foreign Financial Grid in Pre-War Shanghai," *China Review* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 1–26.

where, on April 12, 1927, Jiang Jieshi launched his purge of the CCP from the first united front with the support of green gang leaders like Du Yuesheng who then created for themselves a boom in the sale of opium.[5] By the time PLA troops rolled into Shanghai in the summer of 1949, the CCP had no real connection to the city. Guomindang crackdowns and Japanese occupation had divorced the party from the remaining labor organizations.[6] Thus, the city also had a reputation for decadence and addiction.

The title of Loh's memoir on his time in Shanghai under CCP rule, *Escape from Red China*, offers immediate clues to the kind of experiences it contains. It is a story of navigating political oppression and the hollowness of CCP claims to building a united front with reformed Chinese capitalists. Although Loh eventually rose to membership of the Shanghai Political Consultative Council, he was also marginalized from the operation of the three flour mills he nominally managed, replaced by CCP appointees. In his own words, by 1957, Shanghai manufacturing was "being managed openly by State Representatives. Nevertheless, to show outsiders that a Communist society generously rewarded remolded capitalists, we were given impressive-sounding but largely meaningless titles in the government administration."[7] It is in this latter role, as a living exhibition of the achievements of socialism, that Loh becomes significant for understanding the processes behind diplomatic tours of the PRC during the Mao era.

Loh compared the reception of foreign delegations to well-staged and carefully rehearsed plays. Cadres charged with accompanying foreign delegations in the first years of the PRC struggled with the delicacies of diplomacy, often not allowing foreign guests and Shanghai's

[5] Martin, "The Green Gang and the Guomindang State."
[6] See the chapter on this period (Radical Resurgence, 1937-49) in Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).
[7] Loh and Evans, *Escape from Red China*, 286.

former capitalists to communicate directly in English.[8] The ham-fisted, direct approach to controlling these interactions, however, soon gave way to something more sophisticated. In 1954, the CCP established the Chinese People's Foreign Culture Association (中国人民对外文化协会) and soon branch offices were opened in all major cities.[9] This new organization developed a highly efficient system for displaying what the CCP wanted outsiders to believe about the cities they toured. The "performers" in these new plays, as Loh called them, were allowed to speak English with their guests and given some leeway in where conversations could go. Interpreters, which Loh remembered were "usually pig-tailed girl cadres," were in fact there to act as reporters, carefully documenting conversations and foreigner reactions to various exhibits for daily reports back to the relevant municipal foreign affairs offices.[10] Following Zhou Enlai's view that "there's no such thing as a small detail" in diplomacy, the stops along foreigner tours in Shanghai were meticulously planned.[11] Loh recounted that if a foreign delegation was due to tour one of his flour mills, he would receive word one week in advance.[12] Preparations entailed a series of meetings to go over talking points. Loh could suggest directions to steer conversation, but they would need to be approved or rejected by committee before they were put into practice. Alongside the interpreters' reports, Loh would submit his own accounts of what happened during the visit, and discrepancies would be investigated immediately.

Members of foreign delegations were closely studied so that their behavior could be anticipated. They stayed in the nicest hotels the PRC had to offer and were given access to shops

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[8] Loh and Evans, 154.
[9] Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 90.
[10] Loh and Evans, *Escape from Red China*, 155.
[11] Lovell, "The Uses of Foreigners in Mao-Era China," 146.
[12] This is confirmed by reports on a Lao delegation in May 1965. The reports' authors note that a scheduled trip to the Huafu Pen Factory had to be cancelled when guides forgot to give the factory a full week's notice. They called on the day they were due to arrive, but changed plans once they realized their error. "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Qingnian Daibiaotuan De Jihua Yu Huibao," May 1965, C21-2-2637 SMA.

filled with imported goods specifically for such delegations. According to Loh, enormous emphasis was placed on making each visit to his mill or home seem spontaneous. Tours of the mill would be carefully choreographed so that Loh would be the individual selected by the visiting delegation to answer questions about his experience of reforming Chinese capitalists. Often, he would then invite the guests for tea at this house, which had been temporarily adorned with books, records, and other *object d'art* local CCP offices kept on hand for the occasion. An extra car would be parked in Loh's driveway to project affluence. He would be supplied with foreign cigarettes and liquor and people specially trained for waiting on foreign guests would arrive to act as his servants. Occasionally, as in the case of a group of South Asian journalists in 1955, a foreigner would notice that, for example, the servant in Loh's house was the same person who acted as a waiter where they had eaten lunch, but such slippages were rare. The façade was convincing not least because "all visitors wanted to see the same things," and most of them, particularly those from the decolonizing world, "were idealists who *wanted* to believe [the CCP's] comforting fabrications."[13]

Loh's account is not one that would commonly be found in a dissertation sympathetic to elements the socialist project in Asia. Yet, the records now available on Lao delegations to Shanghai compel Cold War historians of any stripe to take Loh's version of these events seriously. No less than Souphanouvong himself asked CCP leaders to take Souvanna on the type of tours Loh describes to convince him of how moderate the reform of the capitalist class could be.[14] Regarded by several Chinese historians I met in the archives as *feihua* (rubbish or superfluous words), the records on Lao travelers in Shanghai offer a window into the CCP's machine for

[13] Emphasis in original. Loh and Evans, *Escape from Red China*, 159.
[14] "Mao Zedong Zhuxi, Zhou Enlai Zongli deng tong Lai Fang de Laowo Lingdaoren Tanhua Jilu," April 22 – May 6, 1956, 204-01438-01 PRCFMA.

receiving foreign guests. One can see the level of preparation that went into each visit, the political goals targeted at individual guests, and the moments when the system broke down, exposing something closer to the realities of life in Shanghai or revealing the failure of certain political messaging. Lao visits were all the more significant because many of them overlapped with the most concentrated period of CCP aid to the Pathet Lao – the dispatch of the SNWG. Taken together, the CCP was not only trying to convince Lao revolutionaries of the Maoist approach to combining class struggle and national liberation. They were promising Pathet Lao soldiers, cadres, and high-ranking officials what could come in peacetime if they followed CCP advice during war.

What Lao delegations were shown is now known to have been, in its most favorable accounting, aspirational models of factories and communes communicating the PRC's vision of its own future. In some cases, this is undoubtedly true. In many others, the rank chauvinism of Foreign Culture Association and Youth League guides toward the Lao indicates something else. While some campaigns, like those to emulate elements of the PLA, were lessons on what the PRC *will be*, far more of the sites along Lao tours were about what the PRC *has become*. How else should one interpret the common instruction "Help them understand our country's achievements (成就 *chengjiu*) in socialist construction and the correctness of the party's guiding policies"?[15] The word *chengjiu* indicates an attainment. It is the result of some action. It is not an aspiration.

The point is obvious but important. Several recent historians of cultural diplomacy in Mao era China have argued that the children's palaces, communes, and textile mills shown to foreigners were not significant as representations of the PRC's actual achievements but, instead, marked its developmental aspirations. Denise Ho argues, for example, that the model housing development along Shanghai's Fangua Lane (see below) was intended as a model for what workers' lives in the

[15] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Yafei Xuesheng Liaoyangyuan, Laowo Xiuyangyuan," December 1965, C21-2-2573 SMA.

PRC would become. It was filled with politically reliable residents to demonstrate to others how PRC citizens *should* behave, not how they *did* behave. Thus, historians should not understand these tours as attempts to deceive foreigners but instead as demonstrations of what the PRC hoped for its own future.[16] Sigrid Schmalzer finds that US delegations in the 1970s understood that they were being shown models but nonetheless found these to be proof enough that the US and other capitalist nations were wrong in their descriptions of life under the CCP.[17] In his study of black radical intellectuals' journeys through the PRC, Robeson Taj Frazier focuses less the discrepancy between these models and everyday life and more on how belief in these models helped black radicals contest the claims of US foreign policy.[18] Fabio Lanza, in his study of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars' trips to the PRC in 1971 and 1972, argues that Maoism in the 1960s was a signifier for global equality. While it is true that many US China scholars negatively changed their views on the PRC after finally gaining first-hand experience, Lanza believes that the turn away from Maoism was rooted in larger geopolitical developments – namely, Sino-US rapprochement.[19] Ho and Lanza both link criticism of model communes and factories as Potemkin villages to McCarthy era anti-communist conservatism.[20] Lanza in particular warns against the "smug certainty" some scholars have found in knowing that Mao era PRC was not able to live up to its presentation of self to visiting foreigners.[21]

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[16] Denise Ho, *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao's China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 92–93. David-Fox makes a similar argument about model schools in inter-war Soviet Union diplomacy. Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiement: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 113–14.
[17] Sigrid Schmalzer, "Speaking about China, Learning from China: Amateur China Experts in 1970s America," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 342–43.
[18] Robeson Taj P. Frazier, *The East Is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 4.
[19] Fabio Lanza, *The End of Concern: Maoist China, Activism, and Asian Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 101–41.
[20] Ho, *Curating Revolution*, 93; Fabio Lanza, "Global Maoism," in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism*, ed. Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2019), 85.
[21] Lanza, "Global Maoism," 85.

Yet, these histories are written from the perspective of how these sites might have been perceived by PRC citizens or Western activists and intellectuals. In the case of the former, model communes and campaigns to emulate the PLA may very well have been understood as purely aspirational. In the latter, the PRC is a kind of discursive tool for critiquing the US. Thus, the representativeness of a factory tour or trip to a workers' cultural palace is less directly important. Lao delegations, deeply dependent on PRC aid even after the VWP's turn toward the Soviet Union in 1965, had more to lose. They were traveling to the PRC from imperialism's periphery, not its metropoles. Lao delegations were shown the achievements of socialist construction as accomplished facts, not what socialist construction hoped to achieve. Those campaigns intentionally used as models were seen as such. However, Shanghai's hotels and hospitals, printshops and theaters were not presented as what the PRC *will be*; they were presented as what it was. Lao guests were, of course, intended to return to Laos with PRC successes in their heads as a new model for building a revolutionary society. However, PRC achievements in socialist construction were intended to function as a model for Lao guest precisely because they had been *achieved* – in the past tense. To eschew the elements of deception in these tours is to miss some the most compelling evidence of the development of PRC chauvinism toward what should have been comrades in the international struggle. The CCP's goal with all delegations was to project the image of developmental success after the revolution. However, for Lao delegations during this period, the experience of touring ersatz communes and Potemkin factories had increased significance. To these delegations, the CCP was not simply defending itself against foreign accusations about life under communism, it was showing the Pathet Lao a vision of society after national liberation – the revolution after the revolution.

Preparing for Guests

Hosting foreign delegations was a major enterprise in the PRC during the Mao era. Beijing alone is thought to have had fourteen large hotels dedicated solely for the purpose of housing foreigners. Groups from across the globe could, at the invitation of the Foreign Ministry, spend weeks traveling the country, staying in the finest hotels, and eating at the highest quality restaurants without ever seeing a bill. Between 1962 and 1975, Shanghai hosted at least twenty-six separate Lao 'delegations' ranging in size from one to fifty-two members. Eighteen of these occurred between 1963 and 1966, an average of one every two months. Seven delegations involved medical procedures unavailable in Sam Neua, Khang Khay, or Hanoi performed for leftists and neutralists alike.[22] Lao politicians and military commanders travelled to Beijing for treatment of gunshot wounds, tuberculosis, eye surgery, and neurasthenia – a diagnosis once popular in the US characterized by fatigue, anxiety, headache, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, and depression brought on by environmental stress.[23] Once released from care, they would be sent on a tour of the PRC's major cities to view factories, workers' cultural palaces, communes, revolutionary films, and exhibitions of recently developed industrial and agricultural machinery. The largest single Lao group to travel through the PRC was an NLHX art troupe in September 1964 led by poet and editor

[22] This was not a courteously extended to Kong Le after the split with Deuane Sounnarath and the formation of the Patriotic Neutralists. A PRC Foreign Ministry report from August 1965 indicates Kong Le made three separate written requests and one in-person request with Ambassador Liu Chun to send his wife to Beijing for medical treatment. By this point, however, he was a known anti-communist. Beijing declined his request at the urging of the LPP. "Laowo Gong Le Yaoqiu Yuanzhu jiqi Qi Lao Hua Zhibing Shi (Zhong, Fawen)," April 4 – September 1, 1965, 106-01325-01 PRCFMA.

[23] David G. Schuster, "Personalizing Illness and Modernity: S. Weir Mitchell, Literary Women, and Neurasthenia, 1870-1914," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 79, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 695–722.

of the Pathet Lao's official newspaper Somsy Desakhamphou.[24] Others travelling for study or medical treatment often arrived alone or in small groups.[25]

Regardless of the reason, all groups were given roughly similar treatment. Most Lao travelers stayed two to a room in Shanghai's Jinjiang Hotel, the same location where Kaysone met Mao in December 1965. Instructions from the Foreign Culture Association in Beijing provided brief biographies of each guest, focusing on their political alignments within Laos, past behavior in relation to the PRC, and specific propaganda goals for their visit. Newspaper articles and speeches from CCP leaders were planned well in advance. In the case of the NLHX art troupe, Shanghai's *Liberation Daily* issued a directive that articles would be run on their performances and experiences in Shanghai everyday throughout their stay. The articles were expected to be written with a sense of "realism," and authors were told to "avoid diplomatic language and ornate rhetoric."[26] In other cases, the receiving organization was reminded that although their guests were members of the LPP, the party's existence was still a secret and any public reporting should refer to delegates as members of the NLHX.[27]

Preparation for the reception of a Lao youth delegation by the Communist Youth League Central Committee offers a typical example. The delegation would arrive in Beijing on February 6, 1964 after joining an international rally in Jakarta against British attempts to merge northern

[24] Very little has been written about Somsi in English. For a short biography, see Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary*, 315.
[25] "Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Waibin Yang Guangyu de Jihua," July 10, 1962, B177-1-326-43 SMA; "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Yafei Xuesheng Liaoyangyuan Laowo Xiuyangyuan Jihua yu Huibao," April – May 1966, C21-2-2807 SMA.
[26] "Jiefang Ribaoshe Guanyu Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Lai Shanghai Fangwen Yanchu de Xuanchuan Jihua," September 1964, A73-1-543-65 SMA.
[27] "Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Renmin Dang Diantai, Yinshua Daibiaotuan Jianbao," July 20, 1971, B246-1-428-97 SMA. As late as 1973, the existence of the LPP behind the NLHX was still "semisecret." Zasloff, *The Pathet Lao*, 15–17.

Borneo into the Federation of Malaysia.[28] The delegation consisted of only two members. One, Sithon Sorangkhoune, was an NLHX member, deputy bureau chief in the Ministry of Finance in Khang Khay, and a former member of the Peace through Neutrality Party's executive committee.[29] He previously led a youth delegation through Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing, and Wuhan in June 1962. The last time he was in the PRC, the report notes, Sithon had been "friendly": "[He] praised our achievements and is close to our standpoint on international questions and the anti-revisionism question."[30] In Jakarta, he publicly denounced Soviet support for Souvanna's government, claiming that it had enabled attacks against the Pathet Lao. Sithon was accompanied by Nahoum Thammavongsay, another NLHX member in charge of its youth organization and political commissar for the Pathet Lao armed forces' Second Battalion. In addition to touring evidence of the PRC's industrial development, the two Lao guests requested discussions on anti-revisionism among the international youth movement.

To avoid repeating sites Sithon had seen in his previous trip, the group was sent north to Shenyang and Anshan before turning south to their final stop in Shanghai. During "reception work," Youth League guides were instructed to emphasize how the national economy had improved in the years since the Great Leap Forward and the Chinese people's "spirit of working hard for the prosperity of the country and self-reliance." When appropriate, guides could explain the historical background of the Sino-Soviet split and share intelligence on international youth and student movements' opposition to revisionism. The key points were Soviet cooperation with US imperialism and opposition to national liberation movements. However, guides were to be delicate

[28] This was part of an insurgent war with Malaysia known as the *Konfrontasi*. For more on CCP policy toward Indonesia and Sukarno's government during this period, see Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 135–41.
[29] Stuart-Fox reports that Peace through Neutrality Party disbanded after Quinim Pholsena's assassination in 1963. Youth League reports do not speak of it is in past tense. Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary*, 289.
[30] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Guba, Laowo, Sangjiba'er, Fashu Guiyana, Si Guo Qingnian Wu Ren De Jihua, Jianbao, Xiaoxi Baodao," 1964, C21-2-2350 SMA.

in their discussion of these issues: "Do not connect everything to anti-revisionism, and do not repeat the same content everywhere. Do not force them to state their own positions, and do not impose upon them." The Youth League in Shenyang was instructed to organize a public lecture for one to two hundred people where Sithon could give a history of the Lao struggle. Each city was to provide 20RMB in petty cash to both Sithon and Nahoum and give them gifts worth roughly 15RMB. Whether or not these gifts were "politically significant souvenirs" was up to the local Youth League branches to decide.[31]

Not all Lao delegation were as aligned with CCP political views as Sithon and Nahoum, nor were all Lao visitors viewed favorably. In June 1966, one of the main leaders of the Patriotic Neutralists, Gen. Heuane Mongkholvilay, traveled through Shanghai with several other nominally left-wing Lao individuals after being secreted to Beijing for medical treatment. Preparatory briefs from the Shanghai branch of the Foreign Culture Association were clear about the political views, positions, and relative importance of everyone. Such information was essential to planning an effective itinerary. In the recent past, Heuane had been the target of a great deal of Pathet Lao political work, which did not seem to pay off in terms of a firm anti-US position until after Siho and Kouprasith's abortive coup against Souvanna in April 1964. The report warned Heuane's guides that he was a timid, cowardly person who placed a great deal of importance on personal status. Nonetheless, he had been friendly with officials and medical staff in Beijing and reportedly interested in learning about the CCP's experience in united front work.[32] He was accompanied by his wife who was deputy chair of the Lao Women's Union.[33] However, she had never performed

[31] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Guba, Laowo, Sangjiba'er, Fashu Guiyana, Si Guo Qingnian Wu Ren De Jihua, Jianbao, Xiaoxi Baodao," 1964, C21-2-2350 SMA.
[32] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Mengkunweilai Jiangjun Daibiaotuan de Wenjian," June 6 – 11, 1966, C37-2-1272 SMA.
[33] Very little has been written on this organization, and from available literature it is impossible to confirm the names of any of the women mentioned in this report. All are referred to exclusively as Madame [husband's first name]. However, it seems that these documents are referring to the Association of Patriotic Lao Women, which was

any "practical work" in this capacity and reports somewhat insultingly described her as a "housewife" with a "low educational level." Yet another member of the Lao Women's Union, the unnamed wife of a colonel in the Patriotic Neutralists' forces, was also a housewife with little education. The Foreign Culture Association reported that her political views were "puerile", and her ideological thinking was "simple." Another male guest, the editor of the NLHX's French-language radio broadcast, had been won over by the Pathet Lao in 1963 after studying taxation on an RLG scholarship in France. Like other members of the delegation, he was reportedly politically childish, this time due to Western influences gained during his studies in Europe. These four were joined by Quinim Pholsena's widow, a diplomatic success story for the CCP (see below) whose handlers exclusively referred to as Madam Quinim.[34]

While receiving medical care, CCP cadres took the opportunity to conduct study sessions with Heuane and his compatriots on "political theory and the Chairman's works." Heuane himself completed studies on the construction of the CCP, the peasant question, armed struggle, and the united front. The three goals set out for their tour of Shanghai begin with the bombastic rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, now in full swing, and move toward more achievable aims given the assessment above:

1) "Show them how our country, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chairman, and raising high the great flag of Mao Zedong Thought, persists in the general line and self-reliance to build up the country through thrift and hard work, how our country advancing along the great road of socialist revolution and socialist

created in 1955. This organization was renamed the Lao Women's Union in 1975 under the leadership of Khampheng Boupha. In separate publications, Stuart-Fox had reported that the first public congress was held in March or June 1984. For more on the Lao Women's Union, see Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos in 1983: A Time of Consolidation," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1984, 181–82; Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary*, 192; Ng Shui Meng, "Social Development in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: Problems and Prospects," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, ed. Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger (London: Macmillan, 1991), 159–83.

[34] I have contacted several scholars, some of whom were in Laos during the civil war, attempting to ascertain Madam Quinim's actual name. Sadly, none were able to provide an answer. "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Mengkunweilai Jiangjun Daibiaotuan de Wenjian," June 6 – 11, 1966, C37-2-1272 SMA.

construction, has achieved great successes and brought about excellent circumstances, thereby inspiring their confidence and steadying their conviction."
2) "Coordinate studies to increase their perceptual knowledge."
3) "Sightseeing"[35]

Even during the Cultural Revolution, however, critical briefs like these seem to have signaled to guides working on the ground for the Foreign Culture Association that a relaxed approach was the best. Unlike most other Lao delegations to Mao era Shanghai, and partly due to their weak health, Heuane's group was allowed to split up. While they spent their mornings touring flannel factories and exhibitions of newly developed industrial machinery, in the evenings they were allowed to rest, walk with their guides along Shanghai's streets, and spend more time than most other groups shopping – even if in stores designed and stocked exclusively for foreign guests.

Tours through Socialist Construction

The tailoring of plans for foreign guests was mediated by the PRC's domestic political campaigns. After all, the exhibitions, dramas, and model communes they viewed in Shanghai were developed first and foremost for Chinese citizens. One such site was a housing development in Zhabei District called Fangua Lane. Zhabei was a commercial district that developed on the northern bank of Suzhou Creek beginning in the eighteenth century. During the 1920s and 1930s, it was a major site for investment by Chinese capitalists, containing 256 large factories and accounting for 42.6 percent of the city's textile production. Development coincided with a rapid population increase from 23,000 in 1910 to 700,000 just prior to Japanese occupation.[36] However, wartime urban conflicts reduced the neighborhood to rubble. After 1945, what was once a booming industrial district was flooded with over 16,000 civil war refugees living in 3,000 to 4,000

[35] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Mengkunweilai Jiangjun Daibiaotuan de Wenjian," June 6 – 11, 1966, C37-2-1272 SMA.
[36] Christian Henriot, "A Neighbourhood under Storm: Zhabei and Shanghai," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2010): 295.

shantytown houses.[37] By 1949, it had become "one of the largest urban slum areas in Shanghai."[38] Fangua Lane was one of many areas schedule for renewal in the 1950s. However, the devastation of the Great Leap Forward forced the city to postpone construction until a new proposal was agreed upon by the Shanghai Party Committee in January 1963. Construction began in the autumn, and the first families, handpicked for political trustworthiness, moved into the new housing in July 1964.[39]

Propaganda surrounding Fangua Lane began well before housing was complete. Newspapers ran stories on the planned development accompanied by personal narratives of residents 'recalling bitterness and reflecting on sweetness' (忆苦思甜) – a method of personal narration with roots in Lin Biao's new political education programs within the PLA.[40] This form of narration required residents to recall the horrible living conditions of the past and compare them to the advancements they had experienced after the revolution. It was connected to a city-wide campaign to 'compare the past and present' (回忆对比) that, by the winter of 1963, had swept through "500 bureau offices, over 3,000 work unites, and almost one million people."[41] As construction began on Fangua Lane, it became a model for comparing the past and present as well as the utopia the PRC would eventually build. Primarily a resource for print propaganda, it was also a frequent stop along tours for foreigners.

Sithon Sorangkhoune and Nahoum Thammavongsay arrived in Shanghai from Beijing on February 9, 1964, accompanied by delegates from Cuba, Zanzibar, and French Guiana. Their first

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[37] I am primarily indebted to Denise Ho's research on Fangua Lane for the background provided here. Ho, *Curating Revolution*, 63.
[38] Wing Chung Ho, "From Resistance to Collective Action in a Shanghai Socialist 'Model Community': From the Late 1940s to Early 1970s," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 1 (Autumn 2006): 86.
[39] Ho, *Curating Revolution*, 69.
[40] Leese, *Mao Cult*, 99.
[41] Ho, *Curating Revolution*, 74–75.

days were spent touring the site of the CCP's First National Congress, the Yimin Foodstuffs 1 Factory, and the Xuhui Children's Palace. In the Yimin Factory, Sithon reportedly recognized several products and told the other delegates that everyone on the frontlines in Laos had eaten Chinese canned foods. On the February 11, they toured the Wujing Chemical Plant, Caoyang New Village, and Fangua Lane.[42] Their guides reported that, once in the communes, the international group was filled with questions about the rules for commune representatives and the role of women within commune administration, how life in the commune was organized, and the distribution of food and wages. Although the answers to these questions were not recorded, Sithon was apparently so moved by this experience that he told his hosts Shanghai's progress in the two years since his last visit exceeded anything he imagined.[43] In October, a more prestigious group, headed by the ethnic Jrou (Laven) political leader from southern Laos, Sithon Kommadam, and Phoun Sipraseuth, future minister of foreign affairs of the Lao PDR and politburo member, followed a similar itinerary. Reports indicate that Sithon paid particularly close attention to the version of workers' livelihoods put on display. He asked about the number of people per household and their wages, favorably comparing the quality of worker housing to that of the hotel where his delegation was staying. As they left, he remarked to his guides, "There are people who say that Chinese workers' lives are bitter; today I have seen the facts with my own eyes." Significantly, Sithon connected, or was reported to have connected, the condition of workers' lives under the CCP with what he was told it had been before the revolution: "If this were the imperialist period, it would be fundamentally out of the question that workers could have such a good life."[44] At least within the

[42] Caoyang New Village was the PRC first attempt at new housing developments after the revolution. Construction began in 1951 and continued until the 1970s. Xinyu Liu, "Stakeholder Analysis of Community Planning in Shanghai: A Case Study of Caoyang New Village" (Masters Thesis, New York, Columbia University, 2020).
[43] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Guba, Laowo, Sangjiba'er, Fashu Guiyana, Si Guo Qingnian Wu Ren de Jihua, Jianbao, Xiaoxi Baodao," 1964, C21-2-2350 SMA.
[44] "Zhou Zongli Jiejian Laowo Youhao Daibiaotuan de Tanhua Jilu ji Shizhengxie Jiedai de Qingkuang Huanbao," October -November 1965, A33-2-22 SMA.

world of these reports, Pathet Lao leaders themselves were participants in comparisons of the Chinese past and present. Even if true, the existence of these remarks within the reports reflects an overlap in the purpose of places like Fangua Lane for domestic and foreign viewers. Both were expected to draw similar conclusions about PRC successes.

As late as December 1972, Fangua Lane was still a stop on Lao tours of Chinese socialist construction.[45] As Denise Ho notes in her study of Fangua Lane, residents suffered extreme hardship before the revolution, and were genuinely grateful to the new state for supplying them with what would have been state of the art housing for 1960s PRC. Many residents were therefore also happy to share their stories, comparing the past and present for foreign and domestic guests alike. A small portion of the ramshackle housing that existed before 1949 was preserved as part of the living exhibition of Fangua Lane and artifacts such as begging gourds were saved to emphasize the miserable condition of life before the PRC. Even here, however, residents were warned well in advance before a foreign delegation would tour their new homes. Laundry needed to be taken down and residents were required to wear their nicest clothes as they went about their daily tasks. Better off families with good political records and acceptable class status were pre-selected to spontaneously invite foreign guests into their homes for tea and discuss how their lives had changed. Interactions were as scripted as they could be based on the briefs received and observations of the foreign delegations once inside the PRC.[46]

Another example of Lao exposure to domestic politics is the Good Eighth Company campaign. Roughly contemporaneous to the reconstruction of Fangua Lane, the Good Eighth Company campaign was designed to vilify capitalists and other corrupting elements that remained

[45] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Aiguo Qingnian Daibiaotuan de Jihua he Qingkuang Jianbao," December 1972, C21-3-8 SMA.
[46] Ho, *Curating Revolution*, 84–89.

in the city. The Eighth Company was formed in Shandong in 1947 and later incorporated into the Shanghai Garrison Regiment's Third Battalion. Initially stationed near Pudong, it began patrolling near Nanjing Road in 1956. The campaign had its origins in 1959 with a *Liberation Daily* article entitled "The Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road." Through vignettes of the soldiers' good deeds, the article detailed the laudable thought and actions of the PLA unit as a model for civilians. The company's troops were reported to be known for their "proletarian thought" as well as their "frugality, hard work, honesty, and diligent political study."[47] Shanghai municipal authorities believed the article to be a propaganda success and pushed for increasing numbers of stories on the Eighth Company and its good deeds in the city, resulting, in 1960, in a film named after the original *Liberation Daily* article. By mid-April 1963, the sensation around the Good Eighth Company prompted Shanghai's Youth League propaganda team to conduct focus group-style investigations with its members to study the effectiveness of the campaign in promoting proletarian values like hard work, thrift, and moral rectitude. Their reports expressed concerns that capitalists were not only still living in Shanghai but had begun to exert influence over the urban population. The campaign, they believed, was an effective way to instill moral rectitude among the people. The Good Eighth Company, as a moral and political model of proletarianism, slowly began to stand out rhetorically from the corruption and lasciviousness of Shanghai itself - good soldiers in a bad city. In August, even Mao penned a brief song extolling the virtues of the Good Eighth Company. The campaign reached its height in the form of the 1964 stage play and film *Sentinels*

[47] The Good Eighth Company Campaign was comparatively minor in the grand scheme of propaganda campaigns during the 1960s. I am indebted to Yomi Braester for this account. Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 74.

under the Neon Lights.[48] Lao delegations began viewing elements of the campaign the following year.[49]

In May 1965, Bousou Sisan (whose incredible statement about hydraulic presses at the top of the chapter will be addressed below) chaired a delegation of the Lao Youth Federation through Beijing, Hangzhou, Shanghai, and Xi'an. Bousou was a secret member of the NLHX, head of the Lao Youth Federation's central committee, and commander of the Patriotic Neutralists' Fifteenth Battalion. He was accompanied by Sombath Chounnamali, nephew to the Pathet Lao armed forces' General Singkapo Sikhotchonnamali and a Pathet Lao officer in his own right. They brought along with them unnamed individuals involved in the "Voice of Laos" radio and antiaircraft artillery units in Houaphanh. Together, they were the first official group from the Lao Youth Federation to visit the PRC, and, the Shanghai Youth League noted, their chief objectives were to propagandize their own struggle to the Chinese people, garner support, and study the PRC's "military work."[50] To satisfy the latter, the were introduced to members of the Good Eighth Company.

Wang Jingwen, now assigned to Shanghai Military Command headquarters and no longer patrolling Nanjing Road, explained the PLA's methods for political education and how current soldiers were trained to replicate the process. The Lao guests were told that soldiers must struggle with material and non-material enemies alike. The former were, of course, living class enemies. The latter were moral temptations like bribery, alcohol, and casual sex. It is unclear from the

[48] Braester, 75–81.
[49] During their October 1964 trip, Sithon Kommadam complicated the diligently choreographed visit by asking to stay in the city an extra day. The Shanghai Political Consultative Council's Reception Office hoped to fill the time by screening Sentinels, but were saved by Phoun Sipraseuth, who argued instead for an early return to Laos. "Zhou Zongli Jiejian Laowo Youhao Daibiaotuan de Tanhua Jilu ji Shizhengxie Jiedai de Qingkuang Huanbao," October - November 1965, A33-2-22 SMA.
[50] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Qingnian Daibiaotuan de Jihua yu Huibao," May 1965, C21-2-2637 SMA.

reports what precisely Bousou and Sombath may have thought about the experience, but the quotes attributed to them reflect what their guides wanted them to learn. Bousou reportedly told his guides:

> Traveling here to study this type of construction and military leadership, how they became a genuine people's army to serve the interests of the proletariat, has been a valuable experience. First, the party's brilliant leadership; second, establishing proletarian ideology; third, each unit and comrade mutually assist one another [with ideological work]; fourth, the spirit of determining to do better and self-reliance. After we return, we will use the Good Eighth Company as a model (榜样) to build our military.[51]

The Lao guests asked about concrete teaching methods, what to do if soldiers persisted in their backward ideology, and how to motivate soldiers who feared dying in battle. Guides reported that Bousou was so moved by the experience he continued the conversation at a banquet that night. He told them that the lesson from the Good Eighth Company was that soldiers must always carry two rifles. One rifle was in their hands, the second was in their thought. Only thus could they be alert to enemy invasions from any direction.

Fangua Lane and the Good Eighth Company demonstrate what could be rightly called the aspirational model elements of diplomatic tours in Shanghai. However, for the most part, Lao tours of Shanghai were an overwhelmingly industrial affair. The point was not only to show them what the PRC itself had achieved but to show them a possible future for Laos after the revolution. In the mid-1960s and into the early 1970s, Lao delegations continuously cycled through pen, chemical, and steel factories. They toured the Yangshupu Power Plant and interviewed waiting managers at the Shanghai Watch Factory. In the world of the reports, none of these events was a disappointment. All were attributed to Mao's leadership and served as lessons to be taken back to Houaphanh, Xieng Khouang, and Phongsaly. In December 1965, a group of four low ranking officers in the Pathet Lao and Patriotic Neutralist forces travelled through Shanghai, Nanchang, and Changsha

[51] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Qingnian Daibiaotuan de Jihua yu Huibao," May 1965, C21-2-2637 SMA.

on their way home from Beijing's Afro-Asian Student Convalescent Hospital, where they had been receiving treatment since February. One, Mr. Wan, was a sergeant in Deuane Sounnarath's rear-service department.[52] In the autumn of 1963, he had worked as a chauffeur for the PRC Economic and Cultural Mission in Khang Khay. His home village was bombed by the US in September 1964, killing his wife, child, and two younger brothers. While this had made him a firm anti-imperialist, briefs warned local guides that he was still very "undisciplined."[53] Wan's compatriots, Mr. Van, Mr. Ka, and Mr. Louang, appear to have had less storied pasts, but all were connected through CCP operations in Khang Khay. On their second day in the city, they toured the Shanghai Steel 1 Factory where their guides reported that the PRC's "tremendous advancement in industrial construction and spirit of self-reliance" left a "very deep impression." The experience was so moving that Mr. Ka, who had been quiet until this point, said, "In the past, in Laos, I heard Kong Le and other running dogs say that China could not manufacture anything. It could not even manufacture wireless radios. Only the Soviet Union and the US could manufacture them. In reality, this is not true." Ka caught word of the PLA's first successful atomic bomb detonation while travelling through Hanoi on his way to Beijing.[54] He reasoned that with this type of military capacity and after seeing the steel factory that "the facts speak for themselves; those running dogs who say China cannot manufacture anything are all liars."[55] In response to a visit to a freight truck repair facility the following day, guides reported their Lao guests looked at the facility with "extreme admiration." Mr. Van reportedly noted that this advanced level of automotive

[52] 'Wan' is almost certainly an abbreviation, but reports do not provide enough information to determine his actual name, nor the name of anyone who joined him.
[53] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Yafei Xuesheng Liaoyangyuan, Laowo Xiuyangyuan," December 1965, C21-2-2573 SMA.
[54] The detonation was in October 1964, making the PRC the fifth nation to successfully produce its own nuclear weapons. Cook, "Introduction," 12.
[55] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Yafei Xuesheng Liaoyangyuan, Laowo Xiuyangyuan," December 1965, C21-2-2573 SMA.

maintenance was a victory of working-class ideology. Wan was so moved he reportedly told his guides, "Although we do not understand politics or technology, and only understand war, looking at your achievements in construction has strengthened our confidence in the fight. When I return [to Laos], I will hold my rifle firmly and fight the enemy to the end. If I am sacrificed in combat, it will be a sacrifice for the people."[56]

Clearly, if nowhere else than in the minds of Foreign Culture Association and Youth League cadres, the PRC's industrial development was an accomplished fact used, in this case, to inspire foreign revolutionaries. These factories were a symbol of what the PRC was, not what it would become. If reporting on what Lao guests had to say about socialist construction sounds wildly paternalistic, it was. Wan's visit ended with a banquet at which he posed two plausible questions. First, why had the PRC and Soviet Union come to such bad relations if they had gotten along in the past? Second, why was US imperialism so committed to dominating even the poorest places in the world like Laos, which "does not even have one factory"? The report notes that their host gave a concise history of the Sino-Soviet split from the PRC's perspective and explained the "aggressive essence" of imperialism and monopoly capitalism. The Lao guests reportedly listened to the answers with rapt attention. "In the end," the report notes, "Wan expressed that he had not even understood his own question. He was like a little boy asking his older brother for guidance."[57]

PRC Tours and the Chance for International Cultural Exchange

Condescending toward their Lao guests as internal reports certainly were, travelling through the PRC also provided the opportunity for Lao revolutionaries to speak for themselves

[56] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Yafei Xuesheng Liaoyangyuan, Laowo Xiuyangyuan," December 1965, C21-2-2573 SMA.
[57] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Yafei Xuesheng Liaoyangyuan, Laowo Xiuyangyuan," December 1965, C21-2-2573 SMA.

about their own struggle. Lower ranking military personnel and LPP party members were regularly given the opportunity to speak to Chinese audiences, sometimes numbering into the thousands.[58] Although their speeches on the Lao revolution were neither as focused on class nor as bellicose as their guides would have preferred, they were firmly anti-US. Nowhere else could they have expected such a large audience or to see their photos printed in newspapers with glowing support and sympathy for the war they were fighting back home. To the extent that Lao delegations to the PRC provided an opportunity for real cultural and political exchange (and helped maintain CCP-Pathet Lao aid relations), the most significant tour was that taken by the NLHX art troupe in the autumn of 1964.

Travelling art troupes were an integral part of the Chinese revolution before and after Mao's rise to power. DeMare has demonstrated the central importance of drama troupes in communicating CCP politics and dramatizing the kinds of narratives of oppression and speaking bitterness that were essential to party recruitment and land reform campaigns.[59] In the early 1960s, the PRC began exploring the use of art troupes in international diplomacy. Earlier Japanese ballet performances of revolutionary classics like *White-Haired Girl* toured the PRC to enormous fanfare, and the lesson was quickly learned that shared cultural performance was a powerful diplomatic tool. In 1962, the PRC sent its first group of ballet dancers on an international tour to Burma.[60] That same year, the Oriental Song and Dance Ensemble was established in Beijing to study and perform music and dance from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. At its inaugural show, Chinese

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[58] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Guba, Laowo, Sangjiba'er, Fashu Guiyana, Si Guo Qingnian Wu Ren De Jihua, Jianbao, Xiaoxi Baodao," 1964, C21-2-2350 SMA; "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Qingnian Daibiaotuan De Jihua Yu Huibao," May 1965, C21-2-2637 SMA; "Shanghaishi Wengong Wuwei Zhihuibu Guanyu Yingsong Laowo, Luomaniya, Nipoer, Yilang Deng Guojia Daibiaotuan de Anpai, Baowei Gongzuo Jihua Yu Yitu," January – July 1971, B74-1-1261 SMA.

[59] Brian James DeMare, *Mao's Cultural Army: Drama Troupes in China's Rural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14–20.

[60] Emily Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 140.

artists performed music and dance from Cambodia, India, Cuba, Guinea, Nepal, Mexico, and Vietnam. These performances and performers were labelled counterrevolutionary at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and replaced with revolutionary ballets. However, for a few years, the CCP made real strides toward creating a shared sense of cultural exchange in the decolonizing world.[61] The NLHX Art Troupe was part of this effort.[62]

This art troupe was a relatively new creation. The Pathet Lao created its first art troupe in 1954 in Houaphanh. Its original line up included ten male and five female performers. By 1956, it had doubled in size to fifteen male and twenty-one female performers. The troupe was initially used to entertain troops living in base areas and rarely travelled beyond the borders of Pathet Lao control. This changed, however, in 1957 with the agreements to form the first coalition government between Souvanna and Souphanouvong. Believing a more relaxed atmosphere was emerging, the Pathet Lao allowed the group to begin touring across Laos. Their hopes were misplaced. Performances were regularly interrupted by right-wing attackers hurling poison gas and grenades. During one performance at That Luang in Vientiane, surprise right-wing assaults rendered three performers unconscious. Continued touring garnered them some notoriety, but they were forced to disband after Souvanna's ouster from government in 1958.

A new troupe was not created until 1961, the same group that cajoled Liang Wenying into dancing at the SNWG's welcome banquet in Xiang Su in 1964. Its initial thirty members were all Pathet Lao military personnel, but it quickly grew to twenty-six male and twenty-five female performers, ranging in age from nine to nineteen years old. The troupe was significantly more

[61] Emily Wilcox, "The Postcolonial Blind Spot: Chinese Dance in the Era of Third Worldism, 1949-1965," *Positions: Asia Critique* 26, no. 4 (2018): 804.
[62] My account of NLHX art troupes is drawn from "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan de Jihua yu Huibao," September 15-22, 1964, C37-2-1042 SMA.

ethnically diverse than the first iteration and combined its travelling performances with assisting locals in agricultural labor. Under conditions of open civil war, the troupe traveled Laos under constant military protection. Because many members were themselves trained fighters, they traversed between performance locations by splitting into six smaller groups. Each group would take separate routes and carried with them a small number of rifles and grenades. Their repertoire combined revolutionary songs with traditional music from Lao ethnic minorities. Most of their original material, songs like "Sing the Victory of Nam Tha's Liberation" and "Struggle to Defend Peace," were written by Radio Pathet Lao director Sisana Sisane. Briefs from the foreign affairs office of the PRC State Council also note that the troupe had not yet become self-reliant. Souk Vongsak, one of the few remaining NLHX members in Vientiane during this time, was personally responsible for securing all clothing and props.[63]

Their tour of China as originally scheduled to be three months long and included stops in Beijing, Anshan, Nanjing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Wuhan, and Nanning. PRC reports noted that the event should be accorded special significance because, while the LPP Central Committee took it upon themselves to approach the CCP to allow and support the tour, Kaysone and others rejected a previous invitation for a similar tour of the Soviet Union. Preparatory instructions emphasized to all municipal branches of the Foreign Culture Association that "[t]he Lao question is a focal point of the current international struggle. Therefore, there is extreme political significance to performing reception work well with this troupe." Guides were instructed to be "cordial, friendly, ceremonious, self-effacing, to receive them sincerely, and give them deferential treatment." Foreign Culture Association personnel were to strike a balance between praising the achievements of the Lao struggle and educating members of the troupe on the importance of self-reliance and

[63] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan de Jihua yu Huibao," September 15-22, 1964, C37-2-1042 SMA.

opposing revisionism. From the moment they crossed the border in the village of Pingxiang in Guangxi, they were to be greeted in each city by crowds of no fewer than 200 people.[64]

The group arrived by train to Beijing on July 29, met at the station by the director of the Sino-Lao Friendship Association, Lian Guan. Pictures published in *People's Daily* show hundreds of members of Beijing's art organizations crowding the station to greet them.[65] A highly publicized banquet was held in their honor the following night and work began on preparing their stage equipment (which the CCP agreed to provide) and touring them around Beijing. Two weeks later, they finally made their debut performance to an audience including no less than Chen Yi and Vice Premier of the State Council and Central Propaganda Department Director Lu Dingyi. Although no one in the RLG was consulted about the tour, the charge d'affaires at the Lao embassy also made an appearance. The PRC government threw an after party for all performers with the leading cadres from all branches of its foreign relations apparatus. The following day, Lian Guan published an editorial on the troupe and their performance emphasizing the meaning behind the event:

> Now, as the Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese people and people all over the world denounce US imperialist invasion with one voice, now, as the Vietnamese people's fight against US aggressors has a achieved a great victory, the Lao Patriotic Front's arrival to perform in our country has a special significance. No one can destroy the brotherly solidarity between China and Laos. It will withstand the test. No matter the past, present, or future, through the wind and the rain, the Chinese people will forever stand with our Lao brothers.[66]

According to LPP Central Committee instructions, part of the art troupe's mission was to earn invitations to other postcolonial counties. Thus, PRC organizers insured that second and third performances were reserved for foreign embassy staff, Afro-Asian and Latin American students,

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[64] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan de Jihua yu Huibao," September 15-22, 1964, C37-2-1042 SMA.
[65] "Yaoqing Lao Wo Guo Fangwen Yanchu Laowo Aiguo Zhangxian Dang Wnegongtuan dao Jing Youguan Fangmian Fuzeren he Ji Bai Ming Wenyi Gongzuozhe dao Chezhan Relie Huanying," RMRB, July 30, 1964.
[66] "Yingxiong de Renmin Geming de Yishu – Relie Zhuhe Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Yanchu Chenggong," RMRB, August 13, 1964.

foreign experts, and any foreign guests publicly in Beijing.[67] Despite the self-importance apparent in reports on smaller Lao delegations, this was a genuine attempt to connect the NLHX (and thereby the LPP) to sympathetic governments and organizations that might assist in their anti-imperialist struggle.

By September, the troupe had worked their way to Wuhan. With female performers dressed in traditional Lao *sinh* (wrap around clothes) in front of a painted backdrop of That Luang, the group combined their Lao-language repertoire with Chinese-language versions of "Socialism is Good" and "Commune Members are All Sunflowers." The musical performance was followed by a reading from poet and group leader Somsy Desakhamphou of his two most recent works – "China is Beautiful" and "Laos and China Have a Traditional Friendship." When it was over, Liu Shaoqi walked on to the stage, still applauding, to congratulate them.[68] The next day, Somsy, still accompanied by Lian Guan, met with Mao, who emphasized the need for political education in the military and confused his guests with concerns about ideological problems among PRC intellectuals. Asked about his health, Mao responded that he was still able to get around although with some difficulty. "My eyes are not good," he told Somsy, "soon I will go meet Marx."[69]

Mao congratulated the troupe on the Pathet Lao's military struggle so far but emphasized the necessity of training soldiers not to take advantage of the peasantry. He predicted that if the Lao and Vietnamese people were able to continue in their struggle, then they would be able to defeat the US in a little over a decade. Somsy credited this to learning from the Chinese experience, but Mao was more in a mood to talk about errors. He slowly walked Somsy and his associates

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[67] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan de Jihua yu Huibao," September 15-22, 1964, C37-2-1042 SMA.
[68] "Liu Chuxi Kan Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Yanchu Jiejian Wengongtuan Fuzeren he Zhuyao Yanyuan," RMRB, September 4, 1964.
[69] "Mao Zhuxi Jiejian Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Tuanzhang, Fu Tuanzhang he Zhuyao Yanyuan Tanhua Jilu," September 4, 1964, X1-35-116 GZARA.

through the history of the Chinese revolution – the White Terror, the loss of the Jiangxi Soviet, and the Long March. He bemoaned the mistakes the CCP had made, telling Somsy that the Pathet Lao was still a young party unable to see the problems in its future. "A society can have a dark side and bright side," Mao said. In the PRC, the bright side was the military, the party, and the state. The dark side, however, were the lingering landlord and capitalist classes whose number Mao estimated to be around 35 million. "You may ask," Mao continued, "why is this person so confused? After fifteen years, he still has not performed well? It is precisely because I am confused and unwise, not as wise as you all are. Do you believe me? You don't believe me?" Mao's comments, and indeed most of what any Lao visitors to the PRC saw and heard during this period, made sense within the context of the Socialist Education Movement – a rolling out of several campaigns, like that to emulate Lei Feng, the Good Eighth Company, or the five antis, targeted at revisionism and urban corruption. Seemingly unfamiliar with the PRC domestic political context, Somsy responded simply that he did not understand.[70]

Mao attempted to explain by example of dramas Somsy might have seen. Many of them, even after the revolution, were about nobles. There was no mention of the workers and soldiers, nor of anti-imperialism. This was a problem that came down to ideological resistance among the PRC intellectuals, themselves supported by remnant landlord and capitalist groups. Somsy, who had seen plays in Beijing on previous trips, told Mao that the new style was firmly anti-imperialist. Lian Guan assured Mao that the NLHX art troupe's performances were all related to revolutionary combat, and Mao approved. Before parting, Mao tried to provide more encouragement. Laos was a small country, but it had great importance for the world revolution. He asked if Somsy knew the leader of the *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, D. N. Aidit. Somsy did. Mao continued:

[70] "Mao Zhuxi Jiejian Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Tuanzhang, Fu Tuanzhang he Zhuyao Yanyuan Tanhua Jilu," September 4, 1964, X1-35-116 GZARA.

> This comrade, I asked him where he was from. He said he was from a small island southwest of Sumatra, that he was an ethnic minority [少数民族]. [Aidit] said he was from such a small place, how could he become chairman of the Indonesian party? He told me not to pay attention to whether a place was small. [Aidit's birthplace] became the standard for the Indonesian language and was the Communist Party of Indonesia's most animated area. Marx was an ethnic minority; he was Jewish. Jesus was also Jewish. In the past, Jewish people were also an ethnic minority. China's Confucius lived in Lu, which only had a few hundred thousand people. He became the most important teacher in Chinese history…[71]

Somsy thanked Mao for the words, and the chairman continued at length about the problems of unreformed intellectuals in the arts. In the end, Somsy said the new revolutionary dramas the NLHX troupe had seen represented a new mission for the Pathet Lao and thanked Mao again for PRC aid.

As the group continued its tour, the *People's Daily* and local newspapers published glowing articles on their every move.[72] CCP English-language publications touted the troupe's performances to a global audience.[73] In Beijing, articles were run on events hosting the art troupe and other Lao delegations, all congratulating the Lao people on their anti-imperialist struggle and affirming its global significance.[74] In a symbiosis of cultural diplomacy, each piece promoted the NLHX as the front line against US imperialism and the CCP has their ardent supporter. The tour ballooned into a six-month affair, ending in Nanning in December 1964. Before they crossed the border back into the DRV, the NLHX art troupe gave thirty-two performances in eleven cities for over 60,000 people, Chinese and foreign officials alike.[75] Nowhere else could the Pathet Lao have

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[71] "Mao Zhuxi Jiejian Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Tuanzhang, Fu Tuanzhang he Zhuyao Yanyuan Tanhua Jilu," September 4, 1964, X1-35-116 GZARA.
[72] "Jiefang Ribaoshe Guanyu Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Lai Shanghai Fangwen Yanchu de Xuanchuan Jihua," September 1964, A73-1-543-65; "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Li Nanjing Qu Shanghai," RMRB, September 16, 1964.
[73] "Chairman Liu Sees Laotian Concert," *Peking Review*, September 11, 1964, 3.
[74] "Zhengxie Jihui Huanying Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang he Zhongli Pai Lianhe Daibiaotuan Zhongguo Jianjue Zhichi Laowo Renmin Fanmei Douzheng," RMRB, October 8, 1964.
[75] "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan Likai Nanning," RMRB, December 11, 1964.

found a comparably large platform. Whatever the discrepancies between what they were shown of the PRC and lived reality, in diplomatic terms the trip was an unqualified success.

Reading Lao Reactions through the Rhetoric

Despite distrust of intellectuals and artists within the PRC in the years before the Cultural Revolution, in many cases the CCP actively sought cultural producers from foreign countries to tour its museums, communes, and factories.[76] The hope was that these individuals would return home to tell stories about the workers' and peasants' improved living conditions, about the cultural achievements of the working class under the CCP, and about the industrial development the PRC had achieved without the benefit of Western technical aid. In many cases, it was an extremely successful enterprise.[77] Other times it failed. In 1952, Nehru's sister, Mrs. Pandit, met Song Qingling on a tour through Shanghai.[78] Cadres escorting Pandit through the city reported that she described Song as "half-woman, half-goddess."[79] Once returned to India, Pandit gave a different report to US diplomats, telling them that Song seemed "bitter at the world" and was generally taciturn. Likewise, Shanghai foreign relations officials reported that Pandit's delegation was awed by the examples they were shown of socialist construction, saying that in India something as trivial as installing a water tap could be a major event. Yet, once home, Pandit told the US ambassador that health conditions in the PRC were worse than in India.[80] In the case of Lao delegations to the PRC, however, there is little that could be used to compare Foreign Culture Association and Youth League claims with what Lao visitors perceived for themselves. Most of the tours were undertaken

[76] Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 157; Ho, *Curating Revolution*, 87–88.
[77] See, for example, the experience of W. E. B. DuBois and Shirley Graham Dubois in Frazier, *The East Is Black*, 37–71.
[78] For more on Song's role in dealing with foreigners in the PRC, see Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 43.
[79] Lovell, "The Uses of Foreigners in Mao-Era China," 156.
[80] Lovell, 156.

by soldiers and low-ranking cadres who left no written record of their own. The question, then, is what value these reports might have for understanding CCP-Pathet Lao relations. The value is twofold. First, reports on these delegations allow one to see how the PRC wished itself to be perceived by other revolutionary organizations. In this, the overwhelming sense is that reporting the glories of PRC industrial achievements back up the hierarchy of the foreign relations apparatus mattered more than accuracy in reporting their guests' response. Second, despite the need Loh describes in his memoir to report favorably upward, the system did need to be convincing. For this reason, occasional problems do appear in the reports and highlight the limits of the system for receiving foreign guests.

Many quotes attributed to Lao visitors read like obvious fiction. In December 1972, an NLHX youth delegation, the last recorded Lao delegation to tour Fangua Lane, was taken to a limb replantation unit of the Shanghai People's 6 Hospital. The Youth League's account of deputy head delegate Vixay's reaction to the hospital requires a certain suspension of disbelief. Vixay reportedly told them:

> Yesterday, we heard that we would visit 6 Hospital's broken hand and limb replantation ward. All night I hoped that dawn would break a little earlier, thinking to myself how are [the bones] reset. After visiting, we have understood it theoretically and seen it practically. They apply Marxism-Leninism in practice and always hold firmly in mind Chairman Mao's guidance 'Medical personnel should serve the people in the countryside and in the factories'.[81]

Another delegate, Somsani, was reportedly loath to leave the hospital, saying that he wished he could take it and the doctors back with him to Laos and asking his group be given a film to explain the process of limb replantation to Pathet Lao medical personnel. In the 1960s, Laos was the least

[81] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Aiguo Qingnian Daibiaotuan de Jihua he Qingkuang Jianbao," December 1972, C21-3-8 SMA.

populated, least developed country in Southeast Asia.[82] It is entirely possible that Pathet Lao troops from the rural countryside would have been astonished by the medical possibilities available in Shanghai. Given the picture of the revolution provided by CCP advisors inside Laos, however, it seems unlikely in the extreme that they would have made such grandiose claims about Marxism-Leninism unless, perhaps, they had been prepared by Pathet Lao officials to impress the CCP, which remained a key source of material aid in the early 1970s.

Reading these accounts, one cannot help but think that Foreign Culture Association and Youth League guides looked on their Lao guests as an easy win. Unlikely or unable to publish reflections on their trips once home, who would contradict their guides' accounts? Consider Bousou Sisan's fantastical claim that a ten-thousand-ton hydraulic press in Shanghai was a blow to imperialism, that it was a direct result of the CCP's anti-revisionism. To whom did it matter that Soviet revisionism prevented Moscow's best and brightest from developing an equally impressive piece of equipment? In the same report, before Bousou makes the connection between the correct Marxist-Leninist standpoint and mechanical engineering, his guides note with some dismay that no one in the Lao group had ever studied Mao's writing. Their knowledge of Marxism-Leninism in general was quite low, leading some among them to attribute the invention of the press to the work on a single brilliant individual, not the amalgamated wisdom of the working class. Indeed, in a conversation several days later, reports reveal that Bousou subscribed to the same view of Lao society voiced by the VWP and LPP central committees. "The Lao peasantry is all about the same," he told his guides, "There is no division between those who are very poor or wealthy." Some households had more tools than others and thus loaned them out with the expectation that they would receive a portion of the resulting harvest, but Bousou reckoned that this was a fair system,

[82] Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, vii.

"so there is no exploitation." Bousou was certain there were no landlords nor rich peasants in rural Laos, only "primitive communism." "In the future," he said, "building socialism and communism will be comparatively easy."[83] It is clear from the contradictory version of Bousou from Youth League accounts, simultaneously ignorant of Marxism-Leninism and yet an expert on the failures of revisionism, that the drive to tout the achievements of socialist constructions internally (all reports of foreign delegations were top secret) outweighed other concerns. Yet, the reporting of both sides of this contradiction are important. On the one hand, the presence of Bousou's claim that Laos was a classless, primitive communist society shows that there was occasional room for reporting on foreign guests' unorthodox opinions. On the other, Bousou's claims support the SNWG's diagnosis of Pathet Lao political education (that it had no focus on rural class structures) and the LPP Central Committee's unwillingness to change educational practices after more than a year of the SNWG in Houaphanh.

Nonetheless, there were real successes in converting some on the Lao left to the CCP's view of itself and the world revolution. Among these, Madam Quinim Pholsena may be the clearest example. When her husband was assassinated in front of their home on April 1, 1963, Madam Quinim suffered serious wounds to her leg. By April 23, she had made her way to a hospital in Beijing for long term treatment. Recovery took a full year, during which time Madam Quinim studied the history of the Chinese revolution through one-on-one study sessions with professors from Renmin University and received regular briefs on developments in Laos from Foreign Ministry officials.[84] Her husband's killer was known to work for Kong Le, and the latter's receipt of Soviet aid was enough to make Madam Quinim an ardent anti-revisionist. Several of her eight

[83] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Qingnian Daibiaotuan De Jihua Yu Huibao," May 1965, C21-2-2637 SMA

[84] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Mengkunweilai Jiangjun Daibiaotuan De Wenjian," June 6 – 11, 1966, C37-2-1272 SMA.

children accompanied her to Beijing. The remainder were sent to universities in Moscow prior to the assassination. Madam Quinim told PRC foreign relations officials that she feared for their safety and would soon be moving them to Beijing. She seems to have succeeded with all but one, Khamphet Pholsena, a daughter who returned to fight in Laos after graduating from Moscow University.[85] Khamphet later became a senior official in the Lao PDR government.

In the spring of 1964, as Souvanna was travelling to Beijing, Madam Quinim embarked on a major tour of the PRC with particular interest in learning more about how the CCP worked with ethnic minority groups and women's organizations. Rare for Lao tours, she was taken to Xishuangbanna in Yunnan Province before eventually arriving in Shanghai. There, she spoke with cadres on the Yunnan Border Area Work Committee about the establishment of cooperative farming in ethnic Dai areas. She was introduced to a former headman (土司) who transitioned to life as a worker after the revolution, joined the CCP, and become a local governor. She also spoke with several women involved in local party organizations about her own political awakening in the wake of her husband's assassination. Madam Quinim toured textile mills, sugar refineries, and hydropower dams. She was even taken to see her father-in-law's hometown of Shantou in Guangdong Province.[86] By the time she arrived in Shanghai, much of the work convincing her of PRC developmental achievements had been done.

Her time in Shanghai was much like that of any other Lao delegation, but one conversation offers some further insights into the level of preparation taken for these kinds of trips. Speaking to one of her guides over dinner, Madam Quinim commented on how pleased she was that tipping culture did not exist in the PRC. "In the Soviet Union," she explained, "when they open a car door,

[85] Jacques Decornoy, "Laos: The Forgotten War," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 2, no. 3 (1970): 21.
[86] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu JIedai Laowo Guining · Benshana Furen De Jihua Yu HUibao," May 7 – 13, 1964, C37-2-1043 SMA.

open the elevator, or anything else, they all expect a tip; it is truly annoying." Travelling to Geneva in 1961, she and her husband stayed as guests of the PRC embassy in Moscow. The embassy spared no expense, which had left a deep, if not explicitly political, impression on Madam Quinim. On their return trip, they were guests of the Soviet government, whose lackluster accommodations led her to believe that the Soviets did not see Lao officials as equals. Now, by contrast, the PRC government had not only paid for her medical care, housing, and necessities for over a year, they also taught staff in all her hotels a few basic phrases in Lao.[87]

This kind of attention to detail paid dividends for the PRC. In the coming years, Madam Quinim was a regular at banquets for visiting NLHX delegations and helped receive multiple NLHX art troupes and Pathet Lao military leaders.[88] As mentioned above, in June 1966, she also accompanied Patriotic Neutralist leader Heuane Mongkholvilay, his wife, and their associates through the country. While the new guests were regarded by the Foreign Culture Association as politically childish and individualistic, Madam Quinim had absorbed much of PRC political culture from her three years in Beijing. By this point she was a regular at major rallies in the city and had worked with university faculty through the first four volumes of Mao's *Selected Works*. Reports from most of their trip through Shanghai contain the same adulatory language one might expect apart from one night. On June 9, the deputy mayor's wife held a banquet for the delegation. Their guides reported that the atmosphere was friendly and provided some quotes from Heuane connecting the Lao struggle French and US imperialism. On the way to the banquet, however, guides noted Madam Quinim's mood was not as pleasant as it had been on previous days. At their

[87] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu JIedai Laowo Guining · Benshana Furen De Jihua Yu HUibao," May 7 – 13, 1964, C37-2-1043 SMA.
[88] "Zhengxie Quanguo Weiyuanhui Juxing Yanhui Huanying Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang he Zhongli Pai Lianhe Daibiaotuan," RMRB, October 3, 1964; "Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Wengongtuan dao Jing," RMRB, March 3, 1966; "Huansong Laowo Aiguo Zhanxian Dang Zhongyang Wengongtuan Zhong Lao Youhao Xiehui Juxing Zhaodaihui," RMRB, October 8, 1966.

hotel, after dinner, Heuane called one of their guides, Cui Baolin, into his room. The other male member of the delegation had become deeply upset. Seated on the bed, he told Cui, "You have seen that I have been following at the back of the group these past few days. It is because I am angry at these bombastic, boastful people…There were these types of people at the banquet tonight."[89] Cui worked out that he was talking about the dramatic pro-PRC position Madam Quinim had adopted during her time in China. Useful when invited to events with more radical members of the Pathet Lao's united front, Madam Quinim had become too committed for recent converts to bear. If not a major asset in PRC international relations, Madam Quinim at least shows that the system could work.

Conclusion

Reflecting on a trip to PRC during the 1960s, French sinologist Lucien Bianco wrote, "In China, one does not glean anything but impressions, which are by nature subjective and debatable. One does not learn anything, one does not add anything to what was already known and catalogued: we all see more or less the same things and we repeat them *ad nauseam.*"[90] Although the actual impressions Lao delegations may have had would require going beyond the archives used in this dissertation, one quickly sees the repetition and falsity alluded to in Bianco's description. As I have shown here, one cannot enter the world of Foreign Culture Association and Youth League reports without suspecting that the façade put up for foreigners during their travels made its way even into internal, top-secret CCP documentation on delegates' responses, behavior, and feelings toward the *already achieved* successes of socialist construction. Nor can one help but suspect that

[89] "Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui Shanghaishi Fenhui Guanyu Jiedai Laowo Mengkunweilai Jiangjun Daibiaotuan De Wenjian," June 6 – 11, 1966, C37-2-1272 SMA.
[90] Emphasis in original. Quoted in Lanza, *The End of Concern*, 106–7.

it was all the easier for words to be put in the mouths of Lao guests who could not then return home and embarrass their hosts in front of the US and Europe with a tell-all memoir. Many of them were not entirely literate. What emerges, just outside of what can be proved, is the image of a Janus-faced foreign reception machine, projecting one type of untruth to foreigners and another type of untruth internally, into the system itself. This would, if nothing else, be consistent with the type of overzealous internal reporting common in other aspect of the PRC state apparatus.[91]

An argument that what foreign guests saw in the PRC was a charade should not need to be made, but it does. Recent literature proposing that the PRC presented its tour destinations as models is not supported by a sustained look at how Foreign Culture Association and Youth League cadres described the tours themselves. If a campaign was intended as aspirational, as in the Fangua Lane exhibit or the Good Eighth Company campaign, then it was presented as aspirational. Most elements of these tours were not presented this way. PRC guides hoped to convince their guests that ten-thousand-ton hydraulic presses, happily reformed capitalists, and surgical practices founded on Marxism-Leninism were representative of the PRC's lived, everyday reality. This simple statement does not need to be made with the 'smug certainty' of post-Cold War reflection. This chapter has not discussed the tours of sympathetic leftists from capitalist countries, nor those of intellectuals and activists in the postcolonial world who took little from the PRC besides admiration. Instead, I have demonstrated how the revolution after the revolution was shown to cadres and soldiers for whom the PRC was a major lifeline, their primary source of aid outside of the DRV. The deception practiced with Lao delegations reveals a chauvinism, a nationalism that

[91] To be clear, I am not comparing any harm in falsifying these reports on foreign guests with the horrors that came, in part, from a culture of overreporting in the Great Leap Forward. I am only alluding to the culture of overreporting itself. Felix Wemheuer, *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 50.

is profoundly unrevolutionary, one that eventually overpowered all remaining reason in the politics of socialist internationalism and drove a wedge between the PRC, Laos, and Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

> *[W]e suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development. Alongside the modern evils, we are oppressed by a whole series of inherited evils, arising from the passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production, with their accompanying train of anachronistic social and political relations. We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead.* Le mort saisit le vif! *[The dead man clutches onto the living!]*
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> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, preface to the first edition[1]

The 'we' Marx is addressing in the above passage is his nineteenth-century German audience. Germany, as a 'late' developer of capitalist relations and forms of production, faced a specific set of problems not entirely evident in Marx's analysis of England as the "classic form."[2] This dissertation is based on the premise that capitalist social relations, as they expand into even the most remote regions of European and US imperialist endeavors, always make use of relations and modes of production that are already available. These already available relations and modes of production find new life within the capitalist world market as they are used for new ends of value accumulation. Instances of capitalist relations with an "accompanying train of anachronistic social and political relations" are, in fact, the classic form – if by classic one can mean modal. Further, I have argued that this fundamental premise has wide ranging implications for revolutions (that they must find a coalition beyond the proletariat, often a coalition based on a concept of the nation) and the way different national communist parties interact (searching for ways to create the conditions for the possibility of national liberation movements abroad).

In better studied cases, such as agricultural production in the Chinese countryside of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where one has an identifiable comprador bourgeoisie, the

[1] Marx, *Capital*, 1990, I:91.
[2] Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, 97.

argument can and has been made on firmer ground that local forms of exploitation are directly connected to and perpetuated by the rhythms of global capitalism.[3] Less data is available for the mountains of northern Laos. The social investigations conducted by the Sam Neua Working Group provide an intriguing window into the rural political economy of Houaphanh and Khammouane provinces, but they must always be qualified by the purpose for which they were conducted. Members of the SNWG set about their work in Laos according to a core principle of Maoist social analysis – real understanding of a phenomenon requires "participating in its transformation."[4] The goal of Duan Suquan, Liang Wenying, and their comrades was to study rural Lao class structures for the purpose of creating revolutionary policy. Nonetheless, their identification of the chaokok chaolam (lam) as the connection between capitalist imperialism and local forms of exploitation accords well enough with non-CCP accounts to give it serious consideration.[5] The traditional, locally produced relations between the lam and ethnic minorities in Houaphanh, once subject to the demands of French colonial administration, can be counted among the "archaic and outmoded modes of production" Marx mentions. Because the lam had a long history and appeared to be evidence of a lack of modernization, however, their new life within capitalism was very far from obvious. In 1919, industrial workers in China totaled roughly 1.5 million, somewhere between

[3] There are, of course, complex and myriad forces within Chinese society itself that contributed to the original emergence of these forms of exploitation. My point here is not that agency belongs only to capitalist imperialism but that the continuation of these forms of exploitation requires *both* an appreciation of local and global dynamics. Karl, "Compradors."

[4] Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation*, 99.

[5] Pholsena is careful to note that accepting rebellions against the chaokok chaolaam (or just 'lam') is to tread very closely to ersatz nationalist histories created after 1975. She also acknowledges, however, notable exploitative elements to the lam and their connections to French attempts to keep colonial Laos from becoming a total economic loss. Pholsena shares with Baird the observation that many rebellions against ethnic Lao lam and district heads were millenarian movements. Yet, Baird's analysis, looking at southern Laos, also mentions French-imposed systems of tax and corvée labor as significant parts of larger changes that spawned millenarian movements. It is not necessary for my objective in this dissertation that participants in these movement had an explicit class consciousness. The turn to millenarianism is, in fact, evidence of my case that different forms of exploitation in capitalist imperialism are experienced and challenged differently, and class has often not been the best category for mobilizing people for revolution. Pholsena, *Post-War Laos*, 33–34, 129; Baird, "Millenarian Movements in Southern Laos and North Eastern Siam," 270–71.

fifty and seventy-five percent the size of the total population of Laos in 1970.[6] Although this was a small fraction of the Chinese population, it was still a far larger proletariat than could have been claimed in Laos, which, in 1965, Pathet Lao members claimed still did not have a single factory.[7] My point is that places like China and Laos were both subsumed into the relations of global capital in ways that took advantage of and preserved older forms of exploitation rather than abolishing them. The result was that, by capitalism's own normal functioning, conditions never emerged in either place where the revolution could be strictly conceived as a struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie as imagined in texts like the *Manifesto*.[8] In the words of Althusser,

> *the basic notion of the Capital-Labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised.* It is specified by the forms of the *superstructure* (the State, the dominant ideology, religion, politically organized movements, and so on); specified by *the internal and external historical situation* which determines it on the one hand as a function of the *national past* (completed or 'relapsed' bourgeois revolution, feudal exploitation eliminated wholly, partially or not at all, local 'customs' specific national *traditions*, even the 'etiquette' of political struggles and behaviour, etc.), and on the other as functions of the existing *world context* (what dominates it - competition of capitalist nations, or 'imperialist internationalism', or competition within imperialism, etc.), many of these phenomena deriving from the 'law of uneven development' in the Leninist sense.[9]

If the capital-labor contradiction is never simple, if it localized contexts are always the conditions for its existence, then the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is, likewise, never simple. Without the universalization of simple class struggle in China, Laos, and beyond, coalitions needed to be formed to build a movement capable of revolution. As LPP and VWP officials in Laos argued even before the arrival of the SNWG, and as the CCP found out for itself during the second united front with the Guomindang, the concept best able to mobilize the largest

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[6] Karl, *China's Revolutions in the Modern World*, 42; Lee, *Communist China's Policy Toward Laos*, vii.
[7] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Yafei Xuesheng Liaoyangyuan, Laowo Xiuyangyuan," December 1965, C21-2-2573 SMA.
[8] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto."
[9] Emphasis in original. Althusser, *For Marx*, 106.

coalition was the nation. Maintenance of this coalition, however, requires compromises for the class revolution.

In the history of CCP-LPP-VWP relations regarding Laos, the implications of the compromises necessary to build a national coalition were not addressed directly until the SNWG began its mission in 1964. In the decade prior, beginning with the 1954 Geneva conference, CCP positions on Laos were largely informed by a normative commitment to national self-liberation inherited from Lenin's writing on Marx and Engels in the 1910s. The turn to peaceful coexistence among all these parties in 1954 was an acknowledgement of several national and international realities. While the PRC was exhausted from supporting two revolutions against far wealthier Western powers in Korea and Indochina, VWP dominance over the Pathet Lao had not resulted in significant domestic support for revolution in Laos.[10] These obstacles led Zhou Enlai to suggest experimentation with a political path to socialism in Indochina, to which the VWP agreed and which it tried to implement in its efforts to unify Vietnam immediately after the conference.[11] At the broadest level, the plan for Laos had three components: 1) support neutralism internationally as a means for preventing European and US interference in the development of Lao politics; 2) convince Souvanna and other non-socialists within the RLG to accept aid from and formalize relations with Laos's socialist neighbors; 3) provide diplomatic and financial support to the NLHX in its campaign to gain representation within the RLG. The hope was that this plan, over time, would allow the Pathet Lao to build a strong domestic base of support and effect a political transition to socialism. It did not work.

When the US instigated the removal of Souvanna from the office of the prime minister in 1958 to undermine the first coalition government, the move confirmed the necessity of armed

[10] Shu Quanzhi, "From Armed Revolution to Neutralism," 74; Shu Quanzhi, 145.
[11] Asselin, "Choosing Peace."

struggle in Laos for the CCP and VWP as both parties were radicalizing their own position on anti-imperialism. CCP and VWP reactions to the burgeoning crises in Laos, however, diverged significantly. In 1959, while the CCP combined attempted to reinstate its vision of neutrality through ineffectual diplomatic maneuvering, the VWP began rebuilding its organizational infrastructure within Laos.[12] Despite CCP officials' disapproval of the VWP's actions, both parties began advising their Lao comrades that armed struggle was the only path to revolution. Within conditions in Laos, however, it was unclear to all parties how the revolution would concretely move forward.

The answer to this problem came from outside any party's organization. Kong Le's coup in August 1960 and Phoumi Nosavan's counter coup the following December briefly but radically changed political alignments within Laos. By the end of 1960, the CCP was able to send direct aid to the Pathet Lao under the guise of aiding Souvanna's government in Khang Khay, which it recognized as the only legal government in Laos. The US directly aided Boun Oum and Phoumi's government in Vientiane under the same pretense. As negotiations were being planned for the 1961-1962 Geneva conference on Lao neutrality, the CCP's message to left-wing and neutralist politicians was clear. The US and right-wing politicians around Phoumi and Boun Oum had proven that political struggle could, at best, afford more time to prepare for what would actually resolve the crisis – armed struggle. Signed in July 1962, the new set of agreements at Geneva were understood by the Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese parties along these terms.

To this point, CCP involvement in the Lao revolution operated at some remove. Beijing offered diplomatic support, advice, and material aid to the Pathet Lao, but did not have a stable presence inside Laos until the founding of the Economic and Cultural Mission in Khang Khay in

[12] Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside," 177.

November 1961, followed quickly by a consulate in Phongsaly in the same month.[13] Although an embassy in Vientiane would also be added to this list, the real point of contact between the CCP, LPP and VWP in Laos was the Mission. Its importance in terms of intelligence gathering and communications between central committees was superseded in early 1964, however, by the arrival of the SNWG in Houaphanh.

The argument in this dissertation is that the uneven way in which imperialism subsumed older, local modes of production in Asia to the global rhythms of capitalism created conditions in these places where class was an obscure and unhelpful category around which to mobilize for revolution, thus necessitating coalitions around a concept of the nation. Yet, as Ahmad observes, the nation is not a given thing. It is, instead, a "terrain of struggle" that organized forces within society attempt to "endow with specific meanings and attributes."[14] At least during the Cold War and the era of decolonization, to say that a movement was 'nationalist' said very little about its politics, its understanding of the nation it claimed to represent, and the future it hoped to build once self-determination had been achieved. All sides in the revolutions in China, Laos, and Vietnam during this period could be accurately (if not exhaustively) described as nationalist. The history of the SNWG's debates with VWP advisors in Laos demonstrates this point not only within the socialist bloc but within its more radical segments. The core question was how to separate the 'people' who constitute the nation from those who should be labelled enemies. For Duan Suquan, it seems that these debates over whether to incorporate class struggle into the struggle for national liberation was a continuation of debates that raged within the CCP in northern China in the late 1940s.[15]

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[13] Langer, *The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao*, 58.
[14] Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Politics in Contemporary South Asia* (New York: Verso, 2000), 145.
[15] Hebei Sheng Dang'an Guan, "Kaimuci."

A more direct comparison of the Chinese and Lao revolutions and both parties' shifting attitudes toward land reform would require archival materials beyond those available for this research. However, disputes between the CCP, LPP, and VWP on the issue of class struggle in Houaphanh are suggestive of a few things. First, the SNWG's insistence on pushing the Chinese experience of land reform (mythologized though some of it was) seems to have come more from the members of SNWG members than from the institutions they reported to in Beijing – the ILD, the Second Department, and the Foreign Ministry. A reticence to insist upon exportation of a modular form of Maoist revolution among these institutions probably reflects the moderate positions for which the leaders of these institutions were attacked during the Cultural Revolution. It is at all points a mistake to think of any of these institutions, or the PLA, as corporatized individuals. Factions existed and competed with one another. The purge of Luo Ruiqing in December 1965 for attempting to put the brakes on Lin Biao's politicization of the PLA is one example. At the time, Luo was the PLA chief of staff and deeply involved with advising and managing aid to the DRV.[16] He was also repeatedly involved in meetings advising left-wing Lao politicians. His replacement, Yang Chengwu, was head of the Central Laos Working Group and part of the committee managing aid to the DRV. Yang himself was purged in 1967 for being, according to MacFarquhar and Schonhals, "considered either antagonistic or insufficiently reliable by Mao, Lin Biao, and Jiang Qing."[17] Chen Yi, vice premier and foreign minister, came under attack by rebels within the Foreign Ministry in January 1967, and Wu Xiuquan, deputy director of the ILD and Souphanouvong's confidant in preparatory meetings for Geneva in 1961, was imprisoned in 1968.[18] All of this suggests that those who were selected to join the SNWG were to

[16] Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 219.
[17] MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 246.
[18] MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 185, 228–29, 474. For more on the Cultural Revolution within the Foreign Ministry, see Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Chinese Foreign Policy During the Cultural Revolution*.

the left of several of the leaders of Beijing's foreign relations apparatus. Given Laos's importance in CCP-VWP relations during this period and given that SNGW disputes with VWP advisors were a clear part of Hanoi's decision to turn to the Soviet Union for aid, at least some of the blame for the Sino-Vietnamese split can be laid at the feet of Duan, Liang, and their associates. Through analyzing this history, this dissertation has contributed to literature on the exportation of Maoism to other anti-imperialist movements during the Cold War as well as literature on relations between socialist parties and states. It has also contributed to a far smaller, but important, literature of the PLA itself, how it operated during the Mao era, and its role in the PRC's foreign relations.

Second, the SNWG's insistence on radical land reform, its removal from Laos, and the ultimately victory of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party in December 1975 under VWP guidance should not reduce the importance of the core question each of these parties were debating. Even if one were to hang all the SNWG's advice about using class struggle to create solidarity across ethnic groups in Laos under the sign "Do as I say, not as I do!", it would still be the case that each party faced serious issues in finding a way to balance coalition building, class revolution, and the overcoming of other categories of domination. Indeed, according to many in the LPP it was not clear if class revolution was even a part of the equation or if Laos was a primitive communist society. Howland has shown that CCP policies toward ethnic minorities in China were fundamentally chauvinistic even at their most benign. These policies began from the premise that ethnic minority groups were still at an earlier stage along the Stalinist trajectory of national development in comparison to the Han. Despite CCP efforts to provide these groups with resources, to codify written languages, and to incorporate ethnic minorities into CCP organizations, the ultimate goal was to overcome ethnic distinction through socialist construction. Howland also argues, however, that chauvinism within the PRC was the "condition of existence" for class

contradiction.[19] Because ethnic hierarchy was the condition of existence of class contradiction, it is impossible to reduce chauvinism simply to a class *or* ethnicity issue. SNWG members understood rural Lao class structures and ethnic hierarchies along similar lines. They may have stopped short of elaborating longer-term, chauvinistic CCP development policies only because it was not germane to their immediate mission, but their analysis still deserves serious consideration as one side of a debate that was never resolved – not in the long run of Chinese or Lao revolutions anyway.[20]

SNWG members' constant insistence was that the LPP could only develop an ethnically inclusive concept of the nation broad enough (but also dependable enough) to win a revolution by using class struggle to overcome ethnic discrimination. The latter was the condition of existence of the former as well as the connection to capitalist imperialism, as expressed in their assessment of the lam. While all parties agreed the LPP needed to helm some form of national coalition to maintain a viable revolution, judged solely on the goal of attaining state power, it is not at all clear that SNWG advice would have been effective. Ultimately, the VWP's concept of the nation, one that eschewed class struggle for the sake of the largest possible coalition, was the path taken, and it worked. Both side of this debates were concerned with immediate strategies for the survival of the Pathet Lao, but they understood this survival to be entwined with definitions of who was and was not a part of the Lao nation currently in the process of liberation. In either case, the lesson from these debates was that coalition building was necessary, but it also confused to goals of the revolution.

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[19] Douglas Howland, "The Dialectics of Chauvinism: Minority Nationalities and Territorial Sovereignty in Mao Zedong's New Democracy," *Modern China* 37, no. 2 (2011): 189.

[20] Ethnic hierarchies within the Lao PDR are well documented. Ireson and Ireson, "Ethnicity and Development in Laos."

The great irony of this history is that the CCP gave up on its goals to guide revolution on its southern border at precisely the same time that belief in Mao's importance in world revolution reached hyperbolic levels domestically. It is not true that the PRC removed itself from the world during the Cultural Revolution, but it did undergo a change that can be seen in its relations with Indochina. Despite conflicts over relations with the Soviet Union, Beijing continued to provide financial and material aid to Vietnam until June 1978. Likewise, aid to Laos, mostly in the form of road development, continued until the eve of the third Indochina war in 1979.[21] As some reports on Pathet Lao delegations to the PRC in the 1960s and 1970s reveal, however, Mao Zedong Thought clearly did not leave the impact CCP elites had hoped it might. How else could Pathet Lao members continue to claim that Laos was a classless society?[22] Dai Jinhua dates the end of the PRC's participation in the Cold War to 1973, after the Nixon visit and withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam.[23] As concerns material aid to national liberation movements, the PRC remained engaged in the world revolution throughout the Mao period. In the intellectual sphere, however, the history covered in this dissertation is illustrative of the reasons and timing for the PRC's retreat. It began with Laos in 1965 when the rejection of a modular form of Maoist revolution spurred the VWP and LPP to turn to the Soviet Union for support.

[21] "Shanghaishi Waijingbu, Waijingju Guanyu Tingjian Yuanzhu Yuenan, A'erbaniya, Jianpuzhai, Laowo deng Guo de Xiangmu Gonzuo Tongzhi," May 1978 – July 1979, B32-2-268 SMA.
[22] "Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shiwei Jiedai Laowo Qingnian Daibiaotuan De Jihua Yu Huibao," May 1965, C21-2-2637 SMA
[23] Wu Qi, "Living in the End Times? An Interview with Dai Jinhua," trans. Yun Zhu, *Chinese Literature Today* 7, no. 2 (2018): 83.

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Archives:

GZARA Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Archives

PRCFMA People Republic of China Foreign Ministry Archives

RMRB *Renmin Ribao* (The People's Daily)

SMA Shanghai Municipal Archives

WCDA Wilson Center Digital Archives

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