Muscular Buddhism for Modernizing Laos[1]

by Simon Creak[2]

Abstract

In royalist Laos, physical culture constituted a kind of "muscular Buddhism" that drew on the character- and state-building logic of European muscular Christianity, but was also enmeshed in the ideas and practices of Buddhism. Far from being supplanted by modern notions of physical culture, Buddhist ideas of merit and physicality offered a means for translating these practices into the Lao vernacular and experience, making them comprehensible as auspicious acts in the local cultural milieu. This process of translation inevitably changed meaning. Unlike the English or French "discipline," the Lao *labiap-vinai* was inextricably tied to notions of monastic discipline. Likewise, developing bodies was rendered into the Lao language as a meritorious act, which was necessarily absent from European notions of physical culture. This article draws these conclusions through a close study of the magazine *Seuksathikan* (Education, 1958-70), which was designed as a handbook for teachers in the Royal Lao Government's public education system. As a key tool and record of the process of translation, the magazine offers insights into parallels between monastic and military cultures and the militarization of political culture in Laos, both before and after 1975.

Introduction

Laos was a place of dynamic exchange and interaction in the 1960s and early 1970s. It may have been true, as journalistic stereotypes had it, that small and thinly-populated Vientiane provided respite from the war in Vietnam and the bustling centers of Saigon and Bangkok, but the country's unique role in the Cold War meant it was also a meeting place of people, ideas, and money. Vast amounts of foreign aid epitomized Laos' place at the intersection of international cultural currents. Just as the Lao communists depended on Vietnam, the Soviet Union and China, the Royal Lao Government (RLG) received abundant military and civilian aid from the United States and other anti-communist nations. Despite their policy of non-alignment, neutralists also received substantial aid from various sources. In the RLG zone, the influx of money saw the establishment and development of national institutions, the transformation of cities, especially Vientiane, and the proliferation of "Western" consumer culture, particularly in the form of automobiles, fashion, and

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music. A small intelligentsia emerged from returned graduates of foreign universities, the members of which debated nationalism, modernization, and development in emerging newspapers and magazines. These changes had a profound impact, heralding a "new sensibility" in elite society in Laos.[3]

In contrast to the political intrigues and military battles of the period, little sustained attention has been paid to these social and cultural transformations. Where they have given attention to these aspects of the period, historians, like Vietnam War-era journalists before them, have tended to focus on the spread of popular culture, the loosening of cultural mores, and conservative and nationalist responses to these transformations on both sides of the political divide. Royalist elites in Vientiane were alarmed by the breakdown of traditional morals and culture, especially among the young, as materialism, alcohol consumption, and prostitution increased visibly. Wives of the elite in the Lao Women's Association campaigned for a clampdown on prostitution while monks "implicitly condemned American influence in sermons calling for a return to traditional Lao values."[4] On the other side of politics, Neo Lao Hak Xat (Lao Patriotic Front) propaganda exploited themes of foreign aid dependence, Western culture, and moral decline. After 1975 these issues formed the basis of the Lao People Democratic Republic's "revolution in culture and ideology," its ultra-conservative backlash against royalist "decadence" and "the wicked poison of the ideology and culture of neo-colonialism that the American imperialists and reactionaries introduced and propagated throughout our country."[5]

Given the vitriolic zeal with which this "revolution" was pursued, including the establishment of *samana* (reeducation camps), it is not surprising that discussion of foreign influences in royalist Laos has been dominated by the conservative reactions they elicited. This focus on the denunciation of foreign influence fails, however, to take into account the sociology of knowledge formation in royalist Laos, particularly the ways in which foreign interventions and ideas shaped Lao intellectual history. This article seeks to address this lacuna by examining handbook knowledge about physical culture in *Seuksathikan*, a magazine for teachers containing theory and practical tips on a wide range of education issues, including physical culture and education. The knowledge contained in the magazine is historically contingent, providing a window into the social and cultural milieu that shaped it. Since this knowledge pertains to physical culture and practices, moreover, it demonstrates how ideas were materialized and experienced. Handbook knowledge about physical culture thus provides the historian with an unusual but especially meaningful perspective on how Laos' immersion in regional and global flows influenced ideas and practice in the country, or, to reverse the perspective, how the Lao cultural milieu appropriated and reshaped foreign ideas and culture.

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[3] Grant Evans, The Politics of Ritual and Remembrance: Laos since 1975 (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 152-53.

[4] Martin Stuart-Fox, A History of Laos (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 156. See also: Grant Evans, A Short History of Laos: The Land in Between (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2002), 155.

[5] Kaysone Phomvihane, "Lainya mai, thitthang mai, nathi mai lae bang banha pheunthan pheua happakan saisana khong sangkhomninyom" [New Era, New Direction, New Tasks and some Basics for Guaranteeing the Victory of Socialism] in Niphon leuak fen 2: kiaokap kansang setthakit nai samai khamphan kaokheun sangkhomninyom [Selected Writings: Volume 2: Concerning Economic Construction in the Period of Transition to Socialism], ed. Kaysone Phomvihane (Vientiane: Lao PDR Publishing Office, 1977), 62-63.

Manual knowledge and physical culture

Handbook knowledge is the kind of knowledge recorded in manuals and handbooks to facilitate its practical use. We all know of and have used such handbooks: teaching manuals, child-rearing handbooks, recipe books, and travel guides informing us how to behave in a foreign country. As these examples suggest, manual knowledge, as it is also known, has been reinvented in recent years as it has proliferated in various forms on the Internet. In mainland Southeast Asia, handbook knowledge has long provided a means of preserving, retrieving, transmitting, and consuming knowledge about a wide range of social, cultural, and economic fields. Writing on handbooks in Thailand, Craig Reynolds surveys subjects as diverse as cosmology, astrology, grammar and versification, medical knowledge, the arts of war, and how to be modern. Of the genre's significance he concludes: "Manuals facilitate teaching and learning. They facilitate the exercise of power and authority, and yet they are also empowering. They are aids for living, and for helping people take care of the body, the soul, and the mind."[6]

As a product of its time and place, manual knowledge also offers insights into processes of knowledge formation. In particular, it sheds light on the integration of what is often called "indigenous" and "scientific" knowledge, as well as the integration of other binary couplets used to describe knowledge (i.e., local/foreign, rural/urban, elite/non-elite, secular/religious, etc.), which tend to reify these categories more than they reveal the complexities of how knowledge works.[7] While it has become commonplace in recent decades to observe that the "hybrid formation of knowledge" is a quintessentially "postcolonial condition," less attention has been given to the means of achieving this hybridity.[8] Manual knowledge represents a "bibliographic laboratory" for exploring processes of knowledge formation with a level of empirical rigor lacking in studies of a predominantly conceptual and theoretical nature.[9]

Though little has been written on the topic, manual knowledge in Laos would appear to share many similarities with that in Thailand. In both countries the most common term for a handbook is *khumeu*, which, as in the English "handbook" or "manual," incorporates the word "hand" (Lao: *meu*, French: *main*, hence *manuel* and manual). Also, as in Thai, Lao handbooks can be called *tamra* and *khamphi*, often interchangeably, despite the fact that *khamphi*, for instance, also has the narrower meaning of "scripture" or "treatise."[10] We know much less about the extent to which pre-colonial Lao courts consulted treatises on warfare and other manuals, as did their contemporaries in the Siamese and Burmese courts.[11] However, Justin McDaniel's recent study of monastic education demonstrates the equivalent importance in Lao and Siamese kingdoms of various genres of texts – *nissaya*, *namasadda*, and *vohara* – used to teach Buddhism. In overlapping ways, these texts functioned as manuals, providing teachers with the tools to relate Buddhist and

[6] Craig J. Reynolds, Seditious Histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2006), 241.

[7] Reynolds, Seditious Histories, chap. 10.

[8] Akhil Gupta, Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India (Delhi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 157.

[9] Nicholas Farrelly, Craig J. Reynolds, and Andrew Walker, "Practical and Auspicious: Thai Handbook Knowledge for Agriculture and the Environment," Asian Studies Review 35, no. 2 (2010): 238.

[10] Allen Kerr, Lao-English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1992), 195.

[11] Reynolds, Seditious Histories, 229.

other teachings to their pupils. The fluid, informal, and annotated character of the texts offered insights into the idiosyncratic nature of pedagogy, which depended far more on the teacher than the cannon.[12]

Physical culture, the other key concept in this essay, can be thought of as "body work." The Lao term for physical culture, *kainyakam,* combines *kainya* (Sanskrit: *kaya/kayaka*), body or corporeal, with *kam*, a Sanskrit-derived word for work or labor. A similar term, *kainyaborihan,* combines *kainya* with *borihan,* a Pali-derived word for work. In specific usage, both *kainyakam* and *kainyaborihan* can mean gymnastics or calisthenics but, more broadly, this kind of body work also encompasses sport, physical education, and other types of physical training.[13]

While it is difficult to reconstruct pre-colonial physical culture, colonial physical culture was introduced to Laos from the 1920s as part of French military preparation and physical instruction programs. After being consolidated in the 1930s, sport and physical culture emerged as a central plank of the Lao Nhay (Great Laos) movement (1941-45), the local version of the Vichy "National Revolution," which aimed to defend the "Lao race" from the pan-Tai irredentism of Thailand and to keep the Lao faithful to France.[14] Adapted from the so-called National Revolution in Vichy France – in reality, an ultraconservative backlash against "decadence" – colonial officials used physical culture extensively in their paradoxical attempts to foster a "proto-national" Lao identity within Indochina and the French Empire.[15] The juxtaposition of physical culture and nationalism intensified after independence in the early 1950s. In a fledgling country propped up by French and then American aid, physical culture linked healthy bodies to a strong nation, one of the few expressions of nationalism the state could draw on at a time when an alternative communist vision of the Lao future was being forged by the Lao left and the Vietminh.[16] By the early 1960s, sporting events and physical culture were established as major aspects of national and regional statecraft, and, as in colonial times, they were notable for their institutional and philosophical connections to the military. This was demonstrated most emphatically in the National Games of 1961 and 1964, a pet project of right-wing strongman, General Phoumi Nosavan, and the South East Asia Peninsular (SEAP) Games, founded in 1959 by the Olympic Committee of Thailand (OCT).[17] Though further work is required to understand the military networks involved in the regional sports scene, the OCT president at this time was General Praphat Charusathian, a protégé of military dictator Sarit Thanarat, who, in turn, was related to Phoumi.

Besides major national and regional events, physical culture was promoted at the popular level through the nascent military, which expanded dramatically

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[12] Justin Thomas McDaniel, Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008), chap. 4.

[13] Simon Creak, "'Body Work': A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Colonial and Postcolonial Laos." (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2010), 14.

[14] Soren Ivarsson, Creating Laos: The Making of a Lao Space between Indochina and Siam, 1860 -1945 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), chap. 4.

[15] Creak, "Body Work," chap. 2. Note: The term "proto-national" is borrowed from Soren Ivarsson, who describes Vichy-era historiography in this way. See Ivarsson, Creating Laos, 116.

[16] Creak, "Body Work," chap. 3.

[17] Simon Creak, "Sport and the Theatrics of Power in a Postcolonial State: The National Games of 1960s Laos" Asian Studies Review 34, no. 2 (2010): 191-210. See also, Simon Creak, "Representing True Laos in Postcolonial Southeast Asia: Regional Dynamics in the Globalization of Sport," in Sports Across Asia: Politics, Cultures and Identities, eds. K. Bromber, B. Krawietz, and J. Maguire (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

between the late 1940s and the 1960s. The Lao military was formally created in 1946 by a military convention appended to the Modus Vivendi founding the unified Kingdom of Laos, and France enlisted Lao military forces in the First Indochinese War. From 1946 to 1954 perhaps 50,000 men served in Lao units of the French Far Eastern Ground Forces. A further 30,000-40,000 served with the Lao National Army between its formation in 1950 and 1954, when the French officially withdrew from Indochina.[18] The army continued to expand thereafter as US military aid replaced French assistance. As in similar institutions elsewhere, physical culture was integral to military training: "Rather than being born with the body of a soldier, a man became a soldier – and a soldier a man – through the transformations that occurred in his body."[19]

Militarized physical training also took place in other institutions. In 1950 the defense ministry established the École Nationale des Cadres de Jeunesse et d'Éducation Physique (ENCJEP, or, in Lao, *Honghian oplomkhru nyuvason lae kainyaborihan*) in Vientiane. Teachers, civil servants, and other trainees completed 45-day leadership courses at the school. Explicitly based on the scout movement, which also expanded in post-war Laos, the ENCJEP program included physical training, general education, and manual work, all of which had been important elements of Vichy programs in France and Indochina. Replicating Vichy-era youth movements, trainees wore blue and white uniforms and carried out physical training in nothing but shorts and sandshoes. Together with the school's official "Olympic salute," which was in fact identical to the salute made notorious in fascist Germany and Italy, the uniforms and training reinforced the military culture of the school. The use of the salute so soon after the Second World War, though jarring, did not represent Nazi sympathies. Rather, it seems to have demonstrated the application of colonial physical culture – with all of its militarist underpinnings – to the new task of building a postcolonial nation.[20]

The government education system underwent similar expansion in the post-war period. Growth had begun during the Lao Nhay years but accelerated significantly after that. Between 1945 and 1959 the number of primary schools grew almost eight-fold from 187 to 1481 while the number of pupils increased from under 15,000 to nearly 100,000 (Figure 1). The vast majority of these were "rural schools," proving that the expansion of secular education was much more than an elite or urban phenomenon. The United States Operations Mission (USOM) estimated in 1955-56 that 15-20 percent of eligible school-age children were attending government schools, a small proportion but much higher than in the past.[21] While statistics are not available, the number of locally-trained teachers would also have increased substantially after Laos' first teacher training school was established in 1946, though demand continued to outstrip supply.[22]

[18] Michel Bodin, "Les laotiens dans la guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954," Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains 230 (2008): 5-19.
[19] Creak, "Body Work," 140.
[20] Creak, "Body Work," 116-22.
[21] Joel M. Halpern, Aspects of Village Life and Culture Change in Laos (New York: Council on Economics and Cultural Affairs, 1958), 132-33.
[22] Martin Stuart-Fox, A History of Laos (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 77.

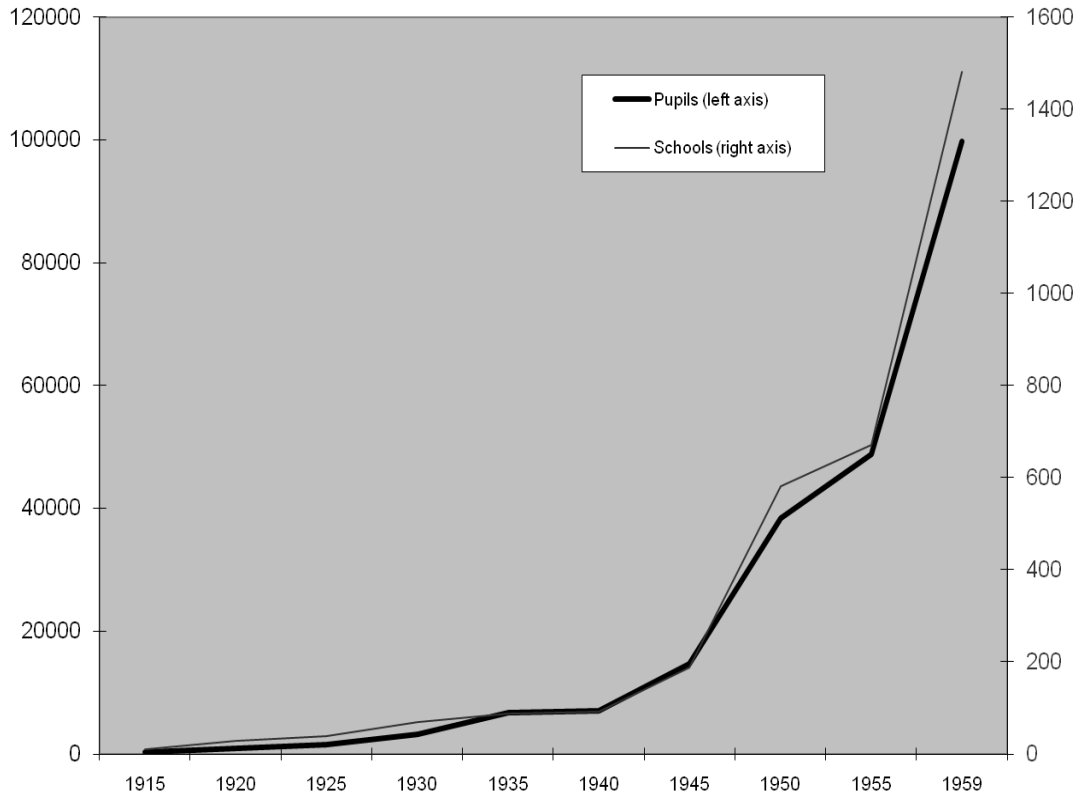


Figure 1: Primary pupils and schools in Laos, 1915-1959 (Halpern 1964, appendix 2, table 6).

The growing government education system represented a shift away from that based in the Buddhist monasteries (*vat*). According to anthropologist Joel Halpern, who conducted extensive fieldwork in Laos during this period, this shift occurred without major incident, "since the school teachers [were] invariably devout Buddhists themselves and some religious education [was] incorporated into the curriculum."[23] Rather than dislodging existing hierarchies, moreover, village teachers joined the local abbot and village head as "leaders of the village," providing a largely positive link between the village and the central government that contrasted with the reputation central government officials had for being arrogant.[24]

Seuksathikan

The philosophy and content of education in the expanding system was relayed to teachers through manuals and handbooks, which came in various forms. One such medium in Laos was *Seuksathikan* (Education), a magazine for teachers published by the Ministry of Education between 1958 and 1970 (Figure 2).[25] Reflecting the new sensibility of the royalist period, this was one of several magazines published to promote culture and religion in the young nation of Laos.

[23] Halpern, Aspects of Village Life, 132.
[24] Halpern, Aspects of Village Life, 131.
[25] An almost complete run of Seuksathikan is held in the library of the École française d'Extrême-Orient in Vientiane.

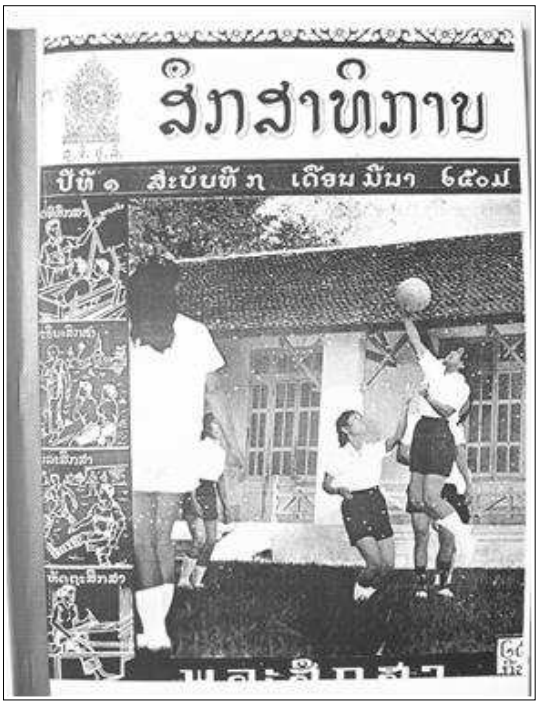


Figure 2: An early cover of Seuksathikan (vol. 1 no. 7, March 2503 [1960]) with girls playing basketball. The caption beneath the picture reads "physical education." Also note the cartoons down the left side, which, from top to bottom, read "intellectual education," "moral education," "physical education," and "vocational education."

Others included *Buddhavongsa*, published by the Lao Buddhist Association; *Khao nyuvason kila*, published by the Department of Sport and Youth; *Phai nam*, a literary and cultural journal; and a woman's magazine, *Nang*. The first regular edition of *Seuksathikan* explained that the magazine had two main objectives: to be "a handbook for teachers (*khumeu khong khru*) of all kinds" and to inform readers about education.[26] An introduction printed inside the front cover of later issues added: "The important objective of the magazine is the propagation of knowledge and theories about education."[27] These explanations confirmed the didactic intent of the magazine, as did the prescriptive style of articles, which included question-and-answer columns, lists of dos and don'ts, and articles titled in the form of a question (e.g., "What is education?" and "Why is student hygiene important?"). While I have found no record of the magazine's circulation or readership, it was clearly intended that as many teachers in the expanding education system as possible should read it.

In its structure and content, *Seuksathikan* aimed to provide teachers with knowledge and information for building an educational system that would serve as the foundations of national development. The magazine had three sections (*phak*): (1) commissioned articles on education, history, and other fields to "increase the knowledge of teachers"; (2) a "technical section" (*phak visakan*), including theory

[26] Seuksathikan, vol. 1. no. 2 (October 2502 [1959]), p. 2. Though labelled no. 2, this issue may actually have been the first regular edition after an initial "special edition" in November 2501 (1958). Reconstructing the full series of dates and numbers has been difficult (also see following note).

[27] Seuksathikan, vol. 2, no. 15 (March 2504 [1961?]), n.p. (inside front cover). Following convention, I have calculated the Christian Era (CE) year by subtracting 543 from the Buddhist Era (BE) year. However, there is cause for some doubt here, for, if this were true, a full year would have lapsed between vol. 2 no. 16 (April 2504) and vol. 2 no. 17 (May 2505 [1962]). Due to a confusing counting system and an earlier lapse between vol. 1, no. 12 (August 2503 [1960]) and vol. 2, no. 13 (January 2504), and given the fact that the only four 2504 issues were published before Lao New Year in mid-April, the year 2504 could feasibly have been 1962 rather than 1961.

and lesson plans to help teachers; and (3) news on a range of education matters.[28] Frequent articles on the importance and nature of education confirmed the intent of the magazine to modernize the country. The article titled "What is education?" argued above all that "education teaches people how to earn a living; it makes the country advance and prosper."[29]

The explicit goal of modernization is not surprising. Despite formally achieving independence in 1949, the Royal Lao Government remained heavily dependent on French and American military and economic aid, which largely financed the government. American aid was especially high. Between 1955 and 1975 the United States provided almost US$900 million in economic assistance, amounting to almost $50 million a year.[30] In per capita terms, this was higher than US assistance to any other country in Southeast Asia, including South Vietnam.[31] Though the vast majority of spending was for military aid, assistance also funded the day-to-day operations of the Lao state, including the salaries of officials. The US Operations Mission (USOM) was structured to mirror Lao ministries, effectively creating a "parallel administration."[32] The French also retained a role in Laos after 1954, especially in education.[33] Wherever the Americans and French worked in Southeast Asia, they brought modernization theory, the dominant non-communist development paradigm of the early Cold War period, which demanded wholesale transition away from tradition in order to foster development.[34] A major means of achieving modernization, however problematic this would turn out to be, was the establishment of a national education system, including universal primary school education. Capturing the importance of foreign capital to achieving this objective, *Seuksathikan* often printed images of American and French officials handing new schools and equipment over to the Lao government.

Despite the importance of foreign capital, however, it did not result in a dichotomy of local/traditional versus foreign/modernizing education systems. Just as monastic education contained elements of secular studies, the state school system explicitly taught "moral education" (*charinya seuksa*) with a syllabus based on Buddhist teaching.[35] Further, Lao elites were among those most committed to modernization. *Seuksathikan* was a good example of this trend. Although the magazine was funded directly or indirectly by foreign aid (like the education system as a whole), it was evidently a local initiative, or at least had the complete support of the Ministry of Education. The first issue contained letters of congratulation from a raft of Lao dignitaries, notably the king and other national leaders as well as the

[28] Seuksathikan, vol. 2, no. 15 (March 2504 [1961?]), inside front cover.
[29] Seuksathikan, vol. 1, no. 11 (July 2503 [1960]), p. 68.
[30] Viliam Phraxayavong, History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts (Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2009), 85, 104.
[31] Stuart-Fox, History of Laos, 191.
[32] Viliam, History of Aid to Laos, 119-20. Note: In accordance with the 1962 Geneva Agreement on neutrality in Laos, the USOM was renamed the US Agency for International Development (USAID), though its role did not change.
[33] Viliam, History of Aid to Laos, 95-99.
[34] Mark T. Berger, "Decolonization, Modernisation and Nation-Building: Political Development Theory and the Appeal of Communism in Southeast Asia, 1945-1975," Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 34, no. 3 (2003): 421-448.
[35] McDaniel, Gathering Leaves, 11. See also, Halpern, Aspects of Village Life. Note: see below for the four kinds of education

current and former education ministers.[36] Furthermore, *Seuksathikan*'s original articles and translations from foreign sources were almost exclusively by Lao teachers and intellectuals. Most importantly here, the manual knowledge about physical culture manifest in *Seuksathikan* demonstrates how apparently "foreign" concepts were enmeshed in local vernaculars of understanding, creating ideas that defied simple categorization as local or foreign, traditional or modern.

Physical education as part of an all-round education

Seuksathikan promoted the philosophy of "four-part education" (*kanseuksa pakop-duai ong si*), consisting of intellectual, moral, physical, and vocational education. The four areas were illustrated in small cartoons on the front cover of each issue (Figure 2), summarized inside the front cover, and discussed frequently in articles. The idea of a well-rounded education accords with the broad focus of monastic schooling, but writers in *Seuksathikan* had specifically European ideas in mind. Modern Western theories of education encompassing the mind, body, and soul can be traced to the seventeenth-century, particularly English philosopher John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1685).[37] *Seuksathikan*'s authors frequently paid homage to Locke, citing his "three educations" (*sam seuksa*) philosophy – intellectual, moral, and physical – and the theories of other European philosophers.[38] In some cases they argued specifically for a European approach to education rather than a local one. One author, Samlith Bouasisavath, discussed the meaning of education in an article titled "Teachers and Education" (*khru kap kanseuksa*), which appeared in the regular "Principles of Education" (*lak kanseuksa*) column. The Lao word *kanseuksa* (education), he wrote, was derived from the Pali-Sanskrit *sikkha*, and could be taken to mean learning (*kanhian*), training (*kanfeukfon*), or instruction (*kan-oprom*).[39] This definition, however, was less broad than the English or French *education*, which also connoted "to draw out" (he included the English in parenthesis). *Kanseuksa* had adopted this European inflection of the term, argued Samlith, extending it to include the means of incorporating mental (*chitchai*), physical (*kai*), and character (*upanisai*) power into discipline (*labiapvinai*).[40] This was a roundabout way of saying education encompassed the mind, body, and character – an idea which, despite Samlith's emphasis on European roots, also exhibited Buddhist elements.

European ideas of education had come together in Laos during the Second World War under the philosophy of "general education." Implemented in France in the wake of its defeat by Germany, this model of education incorporated moral, physical, and practical training in specific response to criticisms that pre-war education had been overly bookish and failed to produce effective soldiers.[41] Although general education was promoted throughout the empire, officials aimed for it to ameliorate different problems in different places, often based on perceived

[36] See Seuksathikan, "special issue" (November 2501 [1958]). The Lao Buddhavong Association and its magazine was also a local initiative. See McDaniel, Gathering Leaves, 55.

[37] Cathy Burke, "The Body of the Schoolchild in the History of Education," History of Education 36, no. 2 (2007): 165-71.

[38] For example, Seuksathikan, vol 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), pp. 20-23.

[39] In fact seuksa derives from the Sanskrit siksa, which differs from the Pali sikkha. I thank Nathan Badenoch for pointing this out.

[40] Seuksathikan, vol 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), pp. 20-21.

[41] W. D. Halls, The Youth of Vichy France (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 186.

racial characteristics. In Laos the French viewed the population as *seu-seu*, lazy and indifferent, a characteristic blamed for historical calamities such as the fragmentation of Lane Xang and the near disappearance of the "Lao race."[42] Physical culture, manual work, and character training were promoted in the Vichy-era education system in Laos to counter these perceptions of decadence, indifference, and laziness. Whatever their other influences, similar ideas were evident in *Seuksathikan*'s promotion of a four-part education.

In *Seuksathikan* and throughout the postcolonial education system, physical culture was incorporated into the curriculum by way of physical education (*phalaseuksa*).[43] In fact, even though physical education was limited to schools, in practice it was more or less synonymous with physical culture (*kainyakam/kainyaborihan*). In any case, physical education was defined in *Seuksathikan* as "learning how to care for the body, to make it healthy and strong."[44] More specifically, it included "exercising the body in various ways starting with a little movement and going from there, for example walking, running, jumping, throwing, household chores, various games, and all types of sport: football, basketball, volleyball, tennis, etc."[45] Physical education received less attention in *Seuksathikan* than intellectual and moral education but, along with sanitation and hygiene, was discussed often enough to confirm that the body was a core concern of the Lao education system. Again, this emphasis mirrored the colonial education system.

In articles and lesson plans, physical education was said to have two main benefits. First was the instrumental one of staying healthy to perform work. In an article discussing the four educations, an author named Nai Phai Sisakada wrote:

> If we are to live with health and happiness (*khwamsuk*), and make a good living for ourselves and our families, we must have a strong and complete body (*hangkai khaenghaeng sombun*) to protect us against disease and to enable us to carry out our daily tasks. Our education or

[42] Ivarsson, Creating Laos, 187-89.

[43] Phalaseuksa is a compound of phala (derived from Pali/Sanskrit bala: 1. strength, power or force; 2. army or troops), and seuksa (education; see Samlith's discussion, above, and footnote 37). While in many Lao and Thai words phala (ພະລະ) has transformed phonologically into phonla (ພລະ, as in phonlameaung, population) and phon (ພລ/ພົລ/ພົນ, as used, for instance, in military ranks), etymologically phalaseuksa (or phonlaseuksa, as it could also be called) appears to possess military undertones. Thai dictionaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries do not list the term, however, suggesting it was a neologism coined for physical education. If this is true, it seems significant that this word (with its military connotations) was coined over other possibilities such as kainyaseuksa (lit. body education). Indeed, the latter term was used in preference to phalaseuksa in Laos in the period immediately after 1975, possibly to distance the Lao from the Thai (as other language reforms aimed to do). See: Simon Creak, "Cold War Rhetoric and the Body: Physical Culture in Colonial and Postcolonial Laos," in The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia, ed., T. Day and M. Liem (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2010), 125, n. 98. See also, N. J. Enfield, "Laos as a National Language," in Laos: Culture and Society, ed., G. Evans (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), 269-276. Reflecting the slackening of revolutionary language reforms since then, however, phalaseuksa is preferred in the Lao PDR's school texts published in the late 1990s. (I am indebted to Nathan Badenoch and Junko Koizumi for helping to clarify these speculations.)

[44] Seuksathikan, vol. 1, no. 2 (October 2502 [1959]), inside cover (repeated in all issues).

[45] Seuksathikan, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30.

> career enables us to attain our aspirations and desires. Every kind of work more or less relies on physical energy (*kamlang kai*).[46]

Nai Phai reiterated the theme in the negative: "People who have good knowledge, have good conduct and good handicraft technique, but whose body is not strong and complete will be enfeebled (*on-ae*) or get sick all the time (*chep khai dai puai*)."[47] *On-ae* combines a common word for weak or soft (*on*) and baby (*ae*). While *on* alone can mean gentle in a positive sense, the phrase *on-ae* is the opposite of *khaeng haeng* (strong) and negative, even insulting. C*hep khai dai puai* is an idiom combining words for injured (*chep*), fever (*khai*), and to get sick (*dai puai*). Nai Phai added that people with such appalling afflictions would not be able to carry out their work with regularity "since disease makes work of any kind impossible for an extended period of time."[48] Being absent from work would incur the wrath of one's boss, leading ultimately to dismissal and the loss of income that would otherwise bring happiness (*khwamsuk*) or wealth (*khwamlamluai*) in life. This, he concluded, would be the devastating result of not undertaking physical education.[49] In cases like this one, the emphasis was explicitly on salaried work; in others, the kind of work was not specified. Certainly the importance of having a "strong and complete body" would just as readily have applied to a peasant. The practical and utilitarian importance of doing physical education was repeated often in the pages of *Seuksathikan*.

The second benefit of physical education was that a strong and healthy body was good for one's mind or spirit (*chitchai*), an idea that sounds very Buddhist. Indeed, Nai Phai cited an "ancient saying" along the lines of "if you have a strong, complete body, you also have a clear mind."[50] He was not explicit on the point, but having a clear mind appeared to be an end in itself. Pierre Somchin Nginn, the famous Francophile intellectual, addressed similar issues in an article on "the importance of confidence and perseverance for success." In a section titled "taking care of your body is the first step towards confidence," Nginn bemoaned that people took their health for granted, taking it seriously only when they became ill. To discuss health, he used the common idiom *yu di mi haeng*, literally meaning "live well, be strong". He further explained that, since "physical power and mental power [went] together," poor health would cause excessive thinking, that is, worry or anxiousness. By contrast, people who *yu di mi haeng* would "easily be able to fight for victory in their lives." This could be achieved by breathing fresh air, exercising daily (for fifteen minutes if possible), watching one's diet, drinking moderately, not smoking tobacco or opium or eating cannabis, and having eight hours of sleep a night. Nginn added that each Sunday one should plan the week to come "to maintain a balance of work and relaxation and of mental and manual work".[51]

Samlith Bouasisavath expounded on similar ideas in an article that described physical culture as "an important tool in teaching conduct and manners according to principles of mental hygiene." The unusual term "mental hygiene" (*sukkhavithanya thang chit*) was included in parenthesis in English, suggesting Samlith probably translated the Lao from it directly. Samlith explained that, since "physical health

[46] Seuksathikan, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), pp. 29-30.
[47] Seuksathikan, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30.
[48] Seuksathikan, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30.
[49] Seuksathikan, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30. Similar ideas were reiterated often in articles discussing the nature of and need for education.
[50] Chit chai an chaemsai yu nai heuan hang an khaeng haeng sombun. Seuksathikan, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 2503 [1960]), p. 30.
[51] Seuksathikan, vol. 2, no. 16 (April 2504 [1961?]), p. 14.

depends on mental health, just as a well mind depends on a strong body," working the body (*hangkai*) would also improve the mind and spirit (*chitchai*). As a result, one should be "conscious of taking good care of the body; not leaving it to nature." In a similar manner, Samlith urged that sport taught "gracious conduct and manners" (*kirinya maranyat an chopngam*), such as sacrifice, knowing how to win and lose, solidarity in the group, and love of the team. It provided, therefore, a standard by which to measure children's conduct and character, which was revealed by whether they "cheat their friends and get angry with them" or "play with justice and sportsmanship" (*namchai-nakkila*).[52]

Seuksathikan also published lesson plans for physical culture. A detailed primary school lesson plan of April 1962 described the clothes to be worn and, most importantly, explained the practical delivery of a lesson: warm-up, the actual training, games, and warm-down. This included a detailed explanation of exercises for the arms, legs, and trunk, as well as skipping, press-ups, and breathing exercises. It also listed and illustrated suitable games and activities, including jumping, tennis, table tennis, football (soccer), basketball, walking, and running (Figure 3).[53] While *Seuksathikan* did not mention gender in relation to physical education, the fact that these illustrations showed both boys and girls exercising suggested that physical education, like the education system as a whole, was coeducational.

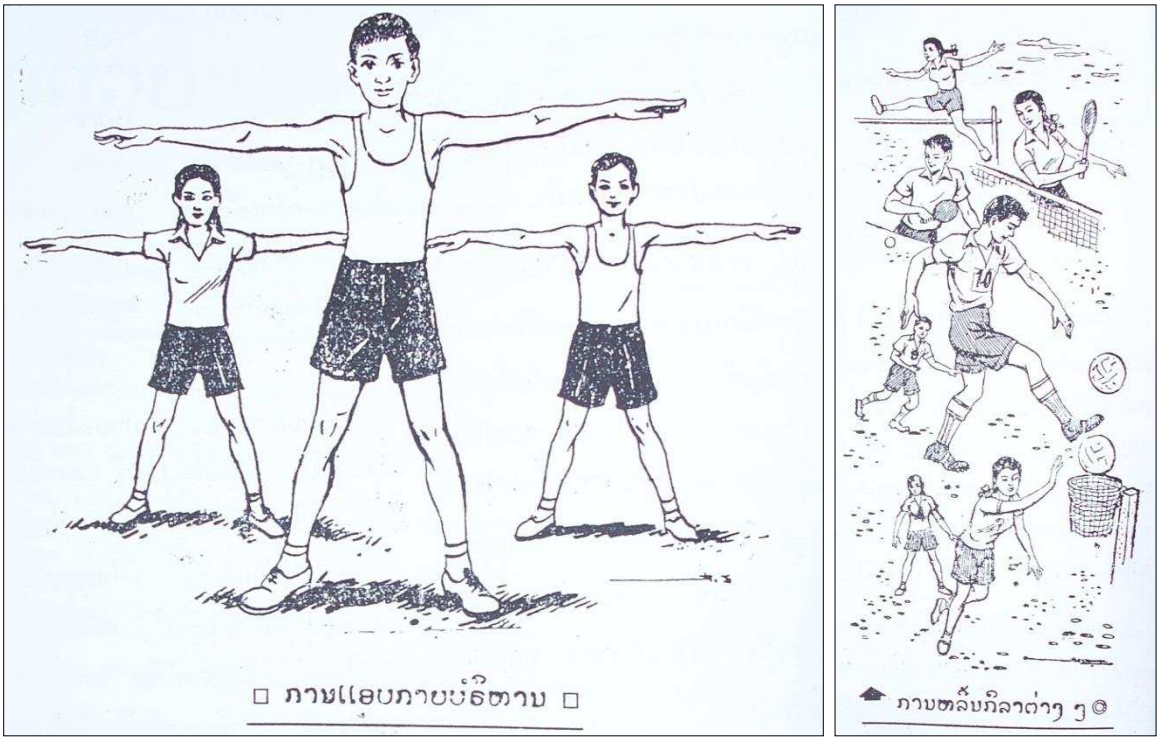


Figure 3: Illustrations from a physical culture lesson plan. The captions read "practicing physical culture" (left) and "playing sports". Seuksathikan, April 2504 (1962).

[52] Seuksathikan, vol. 2, no. 17 (May 2505 [1962]), pp. 28-30.
[53] Seuksathikan, vol. 2, no. 16 (April 2504 [1961?]), pp. 46-50.

European analogies

Much of these discussions sound characteristically Buddhist. But given the magazine's explicit reference to European ideas, it is productive to reflect first on analogies between postcolonial physical culture and the linking of mind, body, and soul in muscular Christianity. The term muscular Christianity was originally coined in the mid-nineteenth century to describe an "ideal of religious character" associated with British public schools, where games and sport were valued for moral purposes.[54] Like the related ideas of athleticism and the games ethic, which emerged later that century, muscular Christianity came to refer more broadly to the belief that a man's (it was always a man's) character – including qualities of leadership, moral virtue, manliness, loyalty, confidence, and sportsmanship – could be forged on the sports field.[55] This was partly due to the inherent qualities of sport and partly because it channeled male energy away from unhealthy or immoral temptations, especially sexual ones. As the term muscular Christianity implied, sport would not only teach moral and character-formation, it would also bring boys and young men to God. The ultimate objective was also instrumental, for this balance of physical and moral training aimed to produce effective soldiers and bureaucrats to man the imperial administration. Neither element of the compound muscular Christianity should be perceived too literally – it often failed to achieve its evangelical goals and was more often concerned with using muscles through physical endeavor than becoming muscular. This philosophy and athleticism also generated widespread criticism for being anti-intellectual. But the idea of linking physicality to leadership and morality had a profound impact on twentieth-century sporting culture, shaping Pierre de Coubertin's establishment of the modern Olympics and the promotion of sport throughout the colonial world.[56]

There were clear parallels between nineteenth-century muscular Christianity and the promotion of physical culture in postcolonial Laos. Samlith might have been ventriloquizing Thomas Arnold of Rugby School fame when he urged that sport would teach "gracious conduct and manners," including sacrifice, teamwork, and sportsmanship. Furthermore, the puritanical idea of mental hygiene – spiritual cleanliness, so to speak – resonated with more austere forms of muscular Christianity. It seems likely that here Samlith was at least partly referring to the exercise of control over sexual thoughts, a source of anxiety among muscular Christians and conservative Lao Buddhists alike. Most significantly, perhaps, athleticism and the postcolonial physical culture in Laos shared underlying concerns with self-making and state building. Whereas athleticism had sought to develop subjects to man the colonial service, Lao physical culture aimed to produce productive workers and to help the nation progress. In the process both created a modern sense of the citizen-self with particular physical and mental characteristics.

While post-War Laos was far removed from nineteenth-century Britain, these ideas were transplanted there by way of France. Fascinated by British sporting

[54] This ideal was initially exhibited in literature before spreading through the schools themselves. Ikuo Abe, "Muscular Christianity in Japan: The Growth of a Hybrid," International Journal of the History of Sport 23, no. 5 (2006): 714-15.

[55] J. A. Mangan, Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology, revised ed., (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

[56] John MacAloon, "Introduction to Special Issue: Muscular Christianity after 150 years," International Journal of the History of Sport 23, no. 5 (2006): 687-700.

values, Pierre de Coubertin introduced similar ideas of organized sport to France before going on to found the Olympics.[57] The austere regime of Vichy France (1940-44) further embraced the principles of athleticism as a key aspect of general education and the National Revolution.[58] Jean Borotra, a former tennis champion and the General Commissioner of Sport and Youth in Vichy, was particularly fond of England, and, in his time, there had developed a strong belief in the formative aspects of sport.[59] With other elements of the Vichy National Revolution, sport and physical culture were promoted throughout the French Empire, including colonial Indochina.[60] Although Laos perhaps lagged behind other parts of federation, these fields came to be heavily promoted by the colonial administration as a means of building a more robust national body, in both the literal and metaphorical sense. Urban Lao enthusiastically supported the Lao incarnation of the National Revolution, the Lao Nhay movement, including its physical culture aspects.[61] These included PS Nginn, who in 1942 published an unmistakably Pétainist treatise on the movement, including a ringing endorsement of physical culture for improving sanitation (*sukhaphiban*) and, through it, building the Lao nation.[62] As we have seen, such ideas survived the Vichy regime in Indochina in institutions such as the École Nationale des Cadres de Jeunesse et d'Éducation Physique (ENCJEP) in Vientiane.

The obvious difference between European athleticism and physical culture in Laos was the role of Christianity. The theory and practice of the Vichy National Revolution was consciously adapted to the local cultures of Indochina to counter anxieties particular to the region: the pan-Asian appeal of Japan and the pan-Tai irredentism of Thailand. Critical to the Lao Nhay movement was the bolstering of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions in Laos, which built upon efforts initiated in the 1930s.[63] By virtue of this unlikely mix of influences, physical training practices and ideology originally promoted in Britain and France as a means of drawing boys and young men to God were promoted in Laos as part of a cultural renovation that also sought to strengthen local Buddhism.

Muscular Buddhism

Given its mixed heritage, it is useful for analytical purposes to think of postcolonial physical culture in terms of muscular Buddhism. By contrast to muscular Hinduism in India, this term has been used only rarely in relation to physical culture in Buddhist societies.[64] Referring to *kungfu* and the monks of

[57] Eugen Weber, "Pierre de Coubertin and the Introduction of Organised Sport in France," Journal of Contemporary History 5, no. 2 (1970): 3-26.

[58] R. O. Paxton, Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 146.

[59] Creak, "Body Work," 60.

[60] Eric Jennings, Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 188-98.

[61] Creak, "Body Work," 85-89.

[62] Pierre Somchin Nginn, "Kham tak teuan bang kho khong pheuan lao puu neung" ["Some reminders from a Lao friend"], in Phraphutthahup saksit: nangseu anlin taeng pen phasa lao / La Statuette merveilleuse: nouvelle laotienne, ed., P. S. Nginn (Vientiane: Éditions du Comité Literaire, 1966 [1944]), 33-41.

[63] Ivarsson, Creating Laos, 120-27. See also, A. Raffin, Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and its Legacies, 1940 to 1970 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 140-41.

[64] For muscular Hinduism see, Joseph Alter, "Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity," Comparative Studies and History 46, no. 3 (2004): 497-534. Also, Joseph Alter,

Shaolin, anthropologist Susan Brownell has wryly observed that Chinese muscular Buddhism preceded British muscular Christianity by at least 1200 years.[65] Historians Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper also use the term in suggesting that "foreign affairs schools" in 1930s Japan, which trained recruits in Southeast Asian languages and Japan's "manifest destiny as the dominant state in Asia," propagated an ideal of "muscular Buddhism mixed with Emperor worship," including *sumo* and martial arts.[66] While neither of these studies theorizes muscular Buddhism in general terms, they do imply that, contrary to commonly held ideas of renouncing the body, Buddhism is in practice ambivalent towards the body. This ambivalence is explored in detail by John Powers, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism. Powers argues that, as well as admonishing attachment to the body and describing the foulness of its contents, Buddhist literature demonstrates a pervasive concern with physical cleanliness. Likewise, although the body is described as vile and repulsive, it is considered the best vehicle to reach enlightenment.[67]

There is no evidence of any equivalent in Laos to the Shaolin temple, where monks mixed martial arts with meditation.[68] Nor in Laos were indigenous physical practices recast and tied to religion in overtly nationalist ways, as was yoga in fin-de-siècle India.[69] No less profoundly, however, the handbook knowledge discussed above was replete with Buddhist concepts and terminology, suggesting that postcolonial physical culture was "enmeshed in Buddhist practices" and especially language. Reynolds uses this phrase to explain how in southern Thailand the dark arts of *saiyasat* – Tantrism or black magic – have long been incorporated into Buddhist practice, so that it is unhelpful to draw a sharp line between Buddhist and Brahmanic rituals.[70] In a similar manner the Lao-Buddhist vernacular in discussions of physical culture demonstrates that physical culture was enmeshed in Buddhist practice and terminology to such a degree that it is neither possible nor necessary to distinguish clearly between Buddhist and colonial knowledge. Such enmeshing of disparate traditions had occurred previously at Vichy-era cadre schools in Laos and the post-war ENCJEP, where meditation was part of the trainee's daily routine. As if to symbolize the link between muscles and meditation, the latter school had been established inside the cloister of the That Luang stupa. Muscular Buddhism in Laos hardly advocated the building of large muscles through bodybuilding, and, indeed, as with muscular Hinduism and Christianity, "muscular" should not be perceived in this way. What mattered was the linking of physical culture – activities involving the muscles – to mind, body, and spirit.

"Yoga at the Fin de Siécle: Muscular Christianity with a 'Hindu' Twist," International Journal of the History of Sport 23, no. 5 (2006):759-776.

[65] Susan Brownell, "Sports in Britain and China, 1850-1920: An Explanatory Overview," The International Journal of the History of Sport 8, no. 2 (1991): 284.

[66] Christopher Alan Bayly and Timothy Norman Harper, Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945 (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 4.

[67] John Powers, A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 112-13.

[68] It is interesting to note, however, that Wat Khao Or, a temple in Phatthalung (southern Thailand) known for saiyasat (Tantric or 'magic') treatments that could protect the body, was known locally as the "Shaolin of Phattalung." See, Craig J. Reynolds, "Rural Male Leadership, Religion and the Environment in Thailand's Mid-South, 1920s-1960s," Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 41, no. 1 (2011), 46. Although this does not mean that such Theravada Buddhist temples provided training in martial arts, it does show that a wide range of physical practices have been adopted as part of, or parallel to, the monastic code.

[69] Alter, "Yoga at the Fin de Siécle," 759-760.

[70] Reynolds, "Rural Male Leadership," 45-46.

A key benefit of physical culture, repeated in all discussions of the topic, was that it would result in a "strong and complete body" (*hangkai khaenghaeng sombun*). While this term sounds strange in English, the idea of physical completeness draws on the Lao term *sombun*, which means abundant, perfect, or whole in the Buddhist sense of being full of merit (*bun*).[71] For this reason *sombun* is used in a wide variety of situations to praise things, people, or actions; in both Laos and Thailand the word's auspiciousness makes it a common name for shops, schools, and even boys. In discussions in *Seuksathikan*, the ubiquitous use of *sombun* suggested that physical culture was a means of developing a body that was not just physically strong but robust – another inflection of the term – physically whole, and quite literally meritorious. It was not stated whether having a *sombun* body was an end in itself or if such a body was desired as an auspicious vehicle for achieving enlightenment. However, given that the body is required to reach enlightenment, the body's merit would presumably aid this process. And yet, as scholars of Buddhism have long emphasized, merit-making rather than enlightenment lies at the heart of religious practice in mainland Southeast Asia.[72] In this way, the body acts as a "field of merit." Like giving to the *sangha* – the most important field of merit – care for the body could result in the accrual or storage of merit for ones current or subsequent lives.[73]

Recognizing the body to be a field of merit may help to understand what writers in *Seuksathikan* meant by the link between the physical (*kai*) and spiritual (*chitchai)*. By developing a body that was not only strong but meritorious, physical training would benefit one's spiritual life. Buddhist philosophy was also evident in Samlith's statement that physical strength demonstrated and stemmed from being "conscious of taking good care of the body; not leaving it to nature." This notion of physical awareness accords with the principle of "mindfulness of the body." One of Buddhism's four "foundations of mindfulness," mindfulness of the body can be defined as: "observing and calmly categorizing physical states, developing awareness of bodily changes, and abandoning the inattentive attitude of most people, who move through life largely unaware of what is happening with their bodies."[74]

The idea that postcolonial physical culture constituted a form of muscular Buddhism, stemming from mindfulness of the body, requires some rethinking of the body and its place in Buddhist practice. Scholars usually discuss this sort of physical awareness in the context of ascetic practice. The monastic code (*vinaya*) is full of rules that govern diet, exercise, and deportment, which may be "understood as techniques for disengaging from the world and controlling the mind and its physical

[71] C. Gray, "Hegemonic Images: Languages and Silence in the Royal Thai Polity," Man, New Series 26, no. 1 (1991): 47.

[72] Jane Bunnag, Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman: A Study of Urban Organization in Central Thailand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 20. See also, Stanley Tambiah, Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 53.

[73] The notion of the Sangha as a "field of merit" comes from Buddhist scriptures and has been explained by scholars including Spiro and Ishii. See: Melford E. Spiro, Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 410. See also: Yoneo Ishii, Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 13. More recently Holly High has provided a useful example of how its literal meaning can be reinterpreted in creative and non-literal ways. See: Holly High, "Ethnographic Exposures: Motivations for Donations in the South of Laos (and beyond)," American Ethnologist 37, no. 2 (2010): 313.

[74] Powers, Bull of a Man, 121.

outlets in the body." This constitutes the "ascetic body" of Buddhism.[75] As opposed to ascetic practice, the idea of changing and improving the body through physical culture does not come naturally to Buddhism. As Powers writes, "there is little point in devoting oneself to physical culture, lifting heavy weights, running, jumping, and so forth because those with superior physical endowments will always surpass their less favored fellow citizens as a result of their karmic legacy."[76] By endorsing a muscular body in Buddhist terms of merit, the ideas in *Seuksathikan* extended the meaning of what is usually understood by mindfulness of the body. The basis of this extension might be located in the relative importance of merit in Theravada Laos as opposed to karma in the Mahayana societies Powers tends to focus on.

In any case, the extended meaning of mindfulness of the body identified in muscular Buddhism produces different ideas of power and potentiality from those to which we are accustomed. Whereas the ascetic body enhances potential internally by means of denial and self-control, the muscular body is developed through physical exertion. Indeed, the Lao verbal phrase meaning "to exercise," *ok kamlang kai*, literally means "to exert physical energy." Paraphrasing from *Seuksathikan*, such exertion would protect one from disease and facilitate work for one's own prosperity as well as that of the nation. Perhaps this was the greatest impact of muscular Christianity on Lao physical culture – to link mindfulness of the body, usually a concern of the individual, to the state.

Despite their differences, ascetic and muscular Buddhism also coalesced around shared notions of discipline. Vinaya, the name of the monastic code and one of the three baskets of the Buddhist cannon, literally means discipline. The Lao cognate of *vinaya*, *vinai*, is compounded with *labiap* (order, regulation, or rule) in *labiap-vinai*, the term used by writers in *Seuksathikan* to discuss discipline in the context of education. Developing *labiap-vinai* was a fundamental objective of physical culture just as it was considered essential for sporting success. As in diverse contexts ranging back to the British public school, exercise and sport were considered effective means of teaching individual and group discipline. But while the French *discipline* was heavily promoted in French sporting movements and in Vichy Indochina in the 1940s, the Lao translation *labiap-vinai* must have retained its Buddhist referent. By drawing this linguistic association, discussions of modern physical culture would, consciously or subconsciously, have reminded readers of monastic discipline. Despite physical education officially being coeducational, moreover, the two kinds of discipline were produced in cultural contexts that were overwhelmingly masculine, suggesting another reason why the two disparate influences came together easily.

These findings resonate with recent scholarship on embodied understandings of Buddhism. While the Buddha was above all else the paragon of good morality, a consequence of his spiritual perfection was physical perfection. In the Pali canon he (and only he) possesses all of the "physical characteristics of a great man." According to one explanation, "when beings catch a glimpse of the body of a great man, endowed with the major and minor physical characteristics, they are inspired to devotion, and this is the function of his perfect body."[77] Like all physical matter, these qualities are "contingent and transitory" and "people who focus on his

[75] Craig J. Reynolds, "Power," Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism, ed., D. S. Lopez (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 224.
[76] Powers, Bull of a Man, 133.
[77] Powers, A Bull of a Man, 178.

body are directed to shift attention to his spiritual attainments .... His perfect body and unique physiognomy are merely secondary phenomena."[78] Nevertheless, the perfect body of the Buddha is reflected in Southeast Asian Buddha images, which show the Buddha with an upright bearing, exaggerated chest size, and a V-shaped torso. These and other features "reflect societal notions of the ideal physique of a warrior, who is slender and lithe, strong but not muscle-bound."[79] In short, though Buddhist statuary certainly lacks the bulging muscles of Greek and Roman images or Michelangelo's *David*, Buddha images in temples throughout Laos present the image of a man who is physically as well as morally disciplined. It is this Buddhist notion of linking physical or muscular discipline to moral and spiritual attainment that I am highlighting in the worldly physical culture of the postcolonial education system.

Muscular Buddhism, the military, and modernization

The parallels between ascetic and muscular disciplining regimes offer insights into the militarization of political culture in postcolonial Laos and elsewhere in the region. Far from being anathema to one another, both monastic and military regimens demand discipline and training. This is not to suggest that military culture grew out of monastic practice; rather, the two share common features that have reinforced each other. In Thailand, the former soldier and governor of Bangkok, Chamlong Srimuang, built his political career by drawing on power simultaneously from military, civil, and religious sources. The strict ascetic practice for which Chamlong was famous drew on both his military training and monastic discipline.[80] In Laos, the public life of Captain Kong Le, engineer of the neutralist coup of August 1960, combined a similar mixture of spiritual and military culture, despite the soldier's short stature. Kong Le inspired fierce loyalty from his men on the basis that he was a *phu mi bun* (lit: man of merit) with special powers and a soldier of peerless bravery. Military authority and the political authority that accompanied it emerged not only from guns and money but, sometimes at least, from a disciplinary mode of conduct that claimed to be modernizing at the same time as it drew on traditional monastic values. It is no coincidence that men like Chamlong and Kong Le are to be found in many places throughout the Buddhist world.[81]

The conceptual crossover between military and monastic regimens continued after 1975. Of course, the revolutionary regime of Kaysone Phomvihane emphasized the differences between itself and its royalist and colonial predecessors, including those in the field of sport and physical culture. In familiar terms, the annual reports of Phoumi Vongvichit, the Minister of Education, Sport, and Religious Affairs, chastised the RLG for failing to recognize sport's "mass characteristics," or that "sport was the right of all people and a means of building the new person physically and mentally/spiritually."[82] Beneath the socialist rhetoric, however, familiar themes of building the nation, as well as the mind, body, and spirit of the individual, continued to resonate in ideas put forth by the new regime. *Kila kainyakam* (Sport and Physical Culture, 1976), a handbook for primary school teachers, detailed a catalogue of other familiar benefits, including solidarity (*samakkhi*), grace (*malanyat*

[78] Powers, A Bull of a Man, 180.
[79] Powers, A Bull of a Man, 60.
[80] Reynolds, "Power," 223-24.
[81] Reynolds, "Power," 226.
[82] Creak, "Cold War Rhetoric and the Body," 113.

an di-ngam), and discipline (*labiap-vinai*), thereby reinforcing the continuity that stemmed from the royalist physical culture and the colonial physical culture that informed it.[83]

The new regime's efforts to justify socialism in Buddhist terms were typically regarded with suspicion, due in large part to the fact that the initial changes under the party-state had had such a destructive impact on religious life. But Kaysone exercised visible material restraint in his life and is still celebrated for it.[84] Whatever the party's policies on Buddhism, there was a common thread connecting this type of discipline with that of monastic practice, which gave it a familiarity in the Lao cultural milieu that was sorely absent from exhortations to carry out socialist construction. Contrary to propaganda chastising the "wicked poison" of Western culture, these dictates of proper conduct were also shaped by the colonial programs of the 1940s and the postcolonial physical culture of the 1960s, which wedded ideas regarding the importance of discipline to the state. Though this lineage could never have been made explicit, the modern and modernizing aspects of physical culture introduced by the French served the socialist regime as much as they had their royalist predecessors.

The physical culture of postcolonial Laos constituted a kind of muscular Buddhism that drew on the character- and state-building logic of European athleticism, but was also enmeshed in the ideas and practices of Buddhism. Far from being supplanted by modern notions of physical culture, Buddhist ideas offered a means for translating these practices into the Lao vernacular and experience, making them comprehensible as auspicious acts in the local cultural milieu. This process of translation inevitably changed meaning, for, unlike the English or French "discipline," *labiap vinai* is inextricably tied to notions of monastic discipline. Likewise, the idea of building and changing bodies was rendered into the Lao language as a meritorious act, which was necessarily absent from European notions of physical culture. The handbook knowledge in *Seuksathikan* was a key tool in this process of translation and hybrid knowledge formation as well as a record of this process. The magazine also offers unique insights into parallels between monastic and military cultures and the militarization of political culture in Laos, both before and after 1975.

[83] Ministry of Education Sport and Religious Affairs (MESRA), Kila kainyakam: san pathom labop saman seuksa (khumeu khu) [Sport and Physical Culture: Primary Level, General Education System (teachers' handbook)] (Vientiane: Ministry of Education, Sport and Religious Affairs Publishing House, 1976).

[84] Evans, Politics of Ritual and Remembrance, 32-33.

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