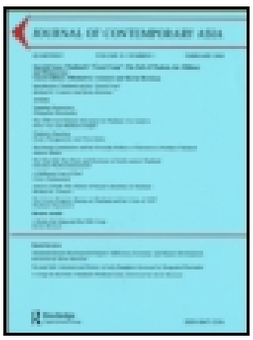

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Abolishing Illiteracy and Upgrading Culture: Adult Education and Revolutionary Hegemony in Socialist Laos

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the monopolisation of political space by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, before and after 1975. Together with coercive measures, the Marxist-Leninist regime consolidated rule by establishing and disseminating new concepts of state power, social responsibility and socialist subjectivity, which formed the basis of a radical form of revolutionary hegemony. The Party propagated a new rhetoric of rule through mandated activities including village meetings, co-operatives and a much expanded but poor-quality mass education system. This article examines the system of adult education, where the Party sought to eradicate illiteracy and "upgrade culture" among economically productive 15 to 45-year-olds. Motivated by both politics and pedagogy, the Party imported this system from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the 1960s before institutionalising it after 1975. The resulting organisational structure fanned the rhetoric of rule across the national territory in an extensive manner that reached the illiterate "masses" in large numbers. Even where the programme encountered material shortages and apathy, mandated participation in adult education propagated the vocabulary and grammatical structure of socialist Laos, providing a codebook for how to participate in socialist society.

KEY WORDS

Laos; Lao People's Revolutionary Party; adult education; state rule; socialist rhetoric

One of the most striking aspects of contemporary Laos is the continued domination of political space by the regime of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). While lifestyle magazines have proliferated and the state press regularly reports on development disputes, virtually all media, including the online sphere, studiously avoids direct or implied criticism of the Party and its leaders. Notwithstanding the increased outspokenness of the National Assembly, elected representatives, almost all of whom are party members, focus on development issues and structure their concerns according to normative values – solidarity, stability, consensus, active engagement and so on – that reinforce the status quo (Creak 2014; High 2013).[1] A series of modest challenges to these norms in 2011–2012 sparked well-publicised controversies including the dismissal of Khampheuy Panmalaythong, director of the National Academy of Social Sciences,

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the expulsion of Anne-Sophie Gindroz, director of the Swiss non-governmental organisation Helvetas, and the enforced disappearance of respected development leader Sombath Somphone, founder of the Participatory Development Training Centre (Creak 2014; Creak and Barney 2012; Baird 2018). Just as local civil society organisations, sanctioned for the first time by a 2010 decree, were testing the waters of political openness, these events reinforced existing norms of self-censorship, highlighting just how infrequently the party's control of political space has been transgressed since the 1975 revolution.

This article addresses the question of how the party came to monopolise political space. Upon coming to power, the LPRP regime implemented Marxist-Leninist reforms that monopolised political power and eviscerated the nascent civil society. It closed down newspapers, outlawed civil society groups and sent intellectuals and senior Royal Lao Government (RLG) figures for rectification (*datsang*) at the prison camps known colloquially as seminar (*sammana*) (Brown and Zasloff 1986, 162–193). The fear created by these repressive acts convinced a large proportion of the educated population, including most of the country's tiny intelligentsia, to flee (Evans 2002, 177). But censorship, coercion and fear cannot fully explain the new regime's monopolisation of public space in those years. The socialist regime also consolidated rule by disseminating new concepts of state power, social responsibility and socialist subjectivity, embedding these ideas in a new rhetoric of rule. While the coercive environment of the revolution aided these processes, cultural and bureaucratic mechanisms of state power were crucial in the establishment of revolutionary hegemony.

As in all modern societies, the education system was among the most important of these mechanisms. Socialist education policies aimed to form the "new socialist person" to build a "new socialist society." As Yamada (2018) shows, the regime's failure to achieve its economic goals was recognised surprisingly quickly after the 1975 revolution (see also Stuart-Fox 1997, 182). However, the rhetoric, symbols and practices associated with creating the socialist person continued to shape a public that was cognisant of and ultimately fluent in the language, duties and possibilities prescribed by the new regime (Creak 2010, 2015). With a focus on expanding access to education, the regime implemented the Lao language as the medium of instruction and prioritised basic literacy (see also Badenoch 2018).[2] The reformed education system was formally made up of several parts – general education; childcare and pre-school; vocational education; sport, physical education and fine arts education; and adult education – each of which targeted particular segments of society. Compounded by the flight of many RLG teachers and intellectuals, this expansion and diversification saw a dramatic deterioration of educational standards. But the new system was far more territorially extensive, not to mention politicised, than colonial or royalist education had ever been (Chagnon and Rumpf 1982, 167–170).

The territorial configuration of socialist Laos was not simply inherited through the seizure of power in 1975 but created over a period of decades before and after that watershed. The socialist state began to emerge in the early 1950s when the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) supported and expanded communist activism in Laos and Cambodia. Through a newly formed national resistance government, widely known as the Pathet Lao (literally "Lao country"), the Vietnamese communists "helped create police services, tax codes, economic structures, in short revolutionary states based on

the Sino-Vietnamese communist model" (Goscha 2004, 151–152). After the Geneva Accords of 1954, which granted the Pathet Lao the northeastern provinces of Phongsaly and Sam Neua as regrouping areas, the Vietnamese communists expanded their support through Group 100, which provided the human and ideological resources to create a functioning political, military and bureaucratic system. The Vietnamese withdrew in 1958, returned in 1959 and withdrew again in 1962, but by then the fundamental structures of the resistance government were in place. In the wake of further military conquests over the next decade, this nascent state expanded unevenly across the national territory, a process that reached its apogee with the proclamation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) on December 2, 1975.

Throughout this period, the socialist regime used education as a key means of integrating new populations into the socialist state. Before 1975, when the Pathet Lao zone was predominantly populated by non-Lao-speaking ethnic minorities, the education programme aimed at the propagation of both Lao as the common language, including literacy where possible, and revolutionary ideology as a means of political and social mobilisation. These two objectives were linked since Lao was the language of political communication and propaganda. After "liberation" in 1975, the principal target of ideological indoctrination – or what we might call socialist subject formation – was the Lao-speaking lowland populations of formerly royalist territories, who despite being native Lao speakers were politically suspect due to their experience of living under the US-backed RLG. With the wartime Pathet Lao replaced by the state apparatus of the LPDR, provincial authorities were responsible for administering this programme, although problems encountered in its implementation reflected enduring tensions between the dictates of the party centre and the more complicated reality on the ground in the provinces (see also Yamada 2018).

Among the various areas of state education that played a role in these processes, there are a number of reasons for focusing on adult education. First, in targeting "economically productive" citizens, adult education was at the forefront of efforts to foster the ideological transformation of society. By contrast with the long-term challenges of educating the new generation of school-aged children, the results of adult education could be realised relatively quickly. Second, as mass literacy and post-literacy education for adults was unprecedented, many participants lacked previous experiences of formal education (particularly in the pre-1975 programme). In this sense, leaders and facilitators were often working with a blank slate. Finally, adult education aimed not just to form and educate new socialist people, but – in the case of lowland populations who had been exposed to RLG education and political ideas – also to *re*-form and *re*-educate. In this respect, adult education represented a mass system of re-education with similar ideological intent as the re-education camps aimed at RLG leaders, civil servants and soldiers. Like the education system as a whole, then, the political vision for adult education highlighted intersections between socialist mobilisation, subject formation and state formation. In this vision, the bureaucratic and territorially extensive character of the planned adult education system was central to making it a key means of propagating revolutionary hegemony.

Revolutionary Hegemony and Legitimacy

Control of the symbolic, rhetorical and ideological world is a key source of power in any state system. When a hegemonic system of symbols and culture explaining "what the world is and how it works" is taken for granted, it provides a ruling regime with a powerful source of popular consent or legitimacy. As Hall (1988, 44) observes, it is not necessary that "ruling or dominant conceptions of the world…directly prescribe the mental content of…the heads of the dominated classes. But the circle of dominant ideas *does* accumulate the power to map or classify the symbolic world for others." A major task for any revolutionary programme is therefore to replace the existing dominant culture with revolutionary culture. For Gramsci, the length of this "revolutionary moment" depended upon the strength of civil society's "embryonic hegemony." In cases when civil society was underdeveloped, a period of "statolatry" – or state-led cultural transformation – might be required. According to Williams (1960, 591), Gramsci believed this was not to be "construed as permanent condition or elevated into a theoretical principle." In practice, however, revolutionary leaders from Lenin to Mao and, ultimately, Kaysone Phomvihane embraced revolutionary hegemony as a fundamental and enduring mode of rule.

However it is conceived theoretically, imposing revolutionary hegemony involves symbolic rupture and reconstitution on a massive scale. Unlike liberal political systems, in which consent and legitimacy are secured through open elections, revolutionary one-party regimes seek to obtain legitimacy through the mass mobilisation of popular consent (see Holbig 2006). At the most basic level, argues China specialist Su Xiaobo (2011, 312), consent is obtained through the education and organisation of the masses, and more particularly, by "defining the performance criteria of the Party and illustrating the common interests of…society and the means of pursuing interests." Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991, 44) suggestion that ideology must be rooted in social space, Su stresses that mass education and mobilisation of the masses roots abstract ideologies in the "lived space of everyday life" (Su 2011, 313). In this way, mundane practices of governance help to realise the ideological objectives of the state. Following scholars such as Raymond Williams, Su (2011, 310) defines ideology not as "a set of discrete political doctrines," but more broadly as a "symbolic system of meanings and practices." One way to look beyond revolutionary doctrine and examine this wider symbolic system is through the language, ideas and social categories that permeate revolutionary society.

The practical barriers faced by revolutionary regimes in realising their own performance criteria pose tremendous challenges to the construction of revolutionary hegemony. Revolutionary regimes must be adept at modifying these criteria according to changing socio-economic conditions, "in order to positively frame the Party state's performance in relation to the common interests of the masses" (Su 2011, 312). Such adaptability has been a feature of socialist rule in Laos. As already noted, the LPRP regime moved surprisingly quickly to adopt economic reforms from the late 1970s, even as it retained socialism as an ideal (Yamada 2018). Failing to match ideal with reality, the Party sought to change the criteria against which achievement was measured. If establishing the moral legitimacy to rule was a long-term objective of mobilisation, more important in the short term was mobilising consent by reframing the basis of

legitimacy according to these changing criteria. Even as state policies and slogans came and went, adaptive mobilisation campaigns continued to produce a new political space saturated in the language and values of the new regime.

Revolutionary Rhetoric and Binary Mentality

As historian Hunt (1984, 24) writes in her seminal *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, revolutionary rhetoric not only possesses the capacity to rouse the population but provides "a way of reconstituting the social and political world." Language does not simply describe change but is an instrument of it. Encouraged by the linguistic turn, scholars have considered the revolutionary importance of language in the more proximate context of Communist China, which provided a model for the Vietnamese and Lao revolutions (Apter and Saich 1994; Hung 2011). While Mao Zedong was hardly the first communist leader to recognise the power of words, "the Chinese Communists proved to be even more seasoned and adept in this use of political language" than their counterparts elsewhere (Hung 2011, 2). From the Yan'an period (1937–1947), in particular, keywords of the Chinese Communist Party not only instilled a sense of camaraderie in its members but demonised enemies, "pitting the good against the reviled" (Hung 2011, 2; also see Wang 2010).

In Laos, revolutionary rhetoric was structured in a similar fashion by a binary socialist mentality defined by the party's distinction between the old regime (*labop kao*) and the new socialist society (*sangkhom sangkhomninyom mai*). The spirit of total transformation was expressed in the "three revolutions" – in relations of production, science and technology, and thought and culture – borrowed wholly from Vietnam (Doré 1982).[3] Given the material barriers to achieving the first two revolutions, culture and specifically language took on disproportionate significance in establishing this ethos of old and new. As in China and Vietnam, the chief rhetorician in Laos was the principal leader of the revolution, Kaysone Phomvihane. In a 1977 speech to the Supreme People's Assembly, Kaysone (1987, 46) declared: "In the…political movement, the rectification or abolition of the old and the construction of the new…[must] come together correctly. [We] must rectify in order to construct, and construct in order to rectify." In this worldview, the simplest keyword – "new" (*mai*) – was also the most ubiquitous and profound, for it served as the most basic marker distinguishing good from bad. The explicit object of official culture and education was to construct a new socialist people steeped in the new socialist culture, who in turn would build the new socialist society.

Revolutionary rhetoric produced and propagated the major political and social categories of the new society: the Party and party-state, the new socialist society and subjective categories that resided within each of these. The objectives of the revolution granted a role, task and subjectivity to everyone, prescribing relations between them in promoting the socialist transformation. In official reports and the state press, these subjectivities were always arranged in the same hierarchy: party leaders, civil servants, soldiers and the masses (*mahason*) or ordinary people (*pasason*), constituted of sub-categories such as workers, farmers and ethnic minorities. Beneath the masses were those in need of punishment and reform: "reactionaries" (*patikan*), meaning political opponents associated with the old RLG regime, drug addicts, prostitutes and so on

(Doré 1982, 109–111). The Party would determine the path to the new society, officials would implement it, the masses would learn and follow it, and the politically and morally degenerate would undergo re-education to eventually re-join mainstream society (Creak 2010, 119–120). Social mobility was obtained through results or achievements (*phonngan*), another key term. At the lower levels, achievements were obtained through physical labour; at higher levels through "political education" (Doré 1982, 111). Throughout society, acquiring the new language of the new society was a fundamental prerequisite for social mobility.

The ideal subject, the new socialist person, would possess the full range of revolutionary qualities (*khunsombat pativat*) – political, moral and physical. The most basic of these can be summarised from chapter headings of *Khunsombat mathanyom neung* (Qualities: Middle School Grade One), a 1971 morals text published by the Lao Patriotic Front. These included diligence (*du man*), urgency (*hip hon*), a cheerful revolutionary spirit (*namchai boekban pativat*), ambition and perseverance (*mana otthon*) and a spirit of self-reliance (*namchai poeng ton eng*) (Lao Patriotic Front 1971). Other revolutionary keywords, such as those used in Kaysone's speech, included solidarity (*samakkhi*), equality (*samoephap*), respect (*khaolop naptheu*), kindness (*nam chai hak phaeng*), strong health (*sukkhaphap khaeng haeng*), participation (*khao huam*), active engagement (*ao chai sai*), consensus (*hen di*), stability (*mankhong*), friendship (*mittaphap*), rights (*sit*), democracy (*pasathipatai*) and socialism itself (*sangkhomninyom*) (Kaysone 1987, 59–60). Given Kaysone's fluency in Vietnamese and his close co-operation with Vietnamese advisers, it is no surprise that these terms were often identical or very similar to those in neighbouring Vietnam (see Malarney 2002, 54). Many key terms had Lao/Tai roots (as opposed to being more complex Pali-Sanskrit neologisms), which made them easier to learn for the mostly uneducated "masses," many of whom were non-native speakers of Lao (Badenoch 2018). It is also worth noting, however, that several of the qualities were generic "good character" traits, familiar from pre-revolutionary society and neighbouring Thailand, but newly inscribed as socialist characteristics.

Although revolutionary rhetoric certainly served propaganda purposes, more important for the purposes of this article were its constitutive features. As Malarney (2002, 53) wrote decades after the rise of Vietnam's communist regime, "the ideas, terms, and categories introduced by the revolution, far from being abstract ideas divorced from everyday life, profoundly structure and influence the way in which people conceive and talk about society, culture, ritual, morality, politics, and numerous other aspects of social life." As Verdery (1991, 430) expresses it, writing on socialist Romania, "[f]or a party bent on transforming consciousness, control over language is vital." This importance was magnified by economic and political failures. Such an enhanced role was doubly applicable in Laos, where the early years of the revolution were marred by policy failures and natural disasters. Although the party's model of social change was soon revealed to be unachievable, the mentality and rhetoric it embraced was appropriated and reproduced throughout society. It is through this use and ubiquity that official rhetoric gained and retained its power. The question of whether people believed in this rhetoric – if belief could satisfactorily be gauged – mattered less than how it shaped the socio-cultural world (see Malarney 2002, 53).

As socialist rhetoric has been rewired to "temporary slogans" associated with reform and development, notably *chintankan mai* (new imagination or thinking) and graduating from least-developed nation status, the ideological function of language has transformed from radicalism to conservatism (see Creak and Barney 2018; Yamada 2018). But it has not disappeared. The didactic "new" has become drab and old and socialist-era rhetoric could be ridiculed even two decades ago (Enfield 1999, 275). Yet the language that first emerged in socialist Laos remains prevalent in political action and activism today. For example, just as values such as solidarity, equality, unity, and consensus remain staples of administrative argot throughout the country, aggrieved farmers express anger over land losses in terms of rights, democracy and socialism itself (High 2013, 138; LIWG Laos 2013).

Propagating Revolutionary Rhetoric: A Vietnamese Model

The Lao socialist state used a number of familiar technologies to propagate revolutionary rhetoric throughout society, including news and propaganda services and revolutionary newspapers and magazines. But compared even to other agrarian revolutionary societies, such as Vietnam and China, the Lao population was overwhelmingly illiterate. Much of the population did not even speak Lao as a first language. This made typical communist technologies such as public-address systems and state radio, including broadcasts in minority languages, all the more important in Laos (see Badenoch 2018). Another crucial mechanism was mass education, not just for children but among the adult population. While schooling offered a long-term literacy solution, adult education promised to teach basic literacy and "upgrade culture" among the existing adult population.

Although adult education programmes were formally voluntary and often held inherent appeal for illiterate people, the militarisation and politicisation of society created pressure to participate. Prior to 1975, the wartime mobilisation of the population spared few people in the Pathet Lao zone from pressure to participate in political and educational activities (Pholsena 2012b, 171). Even after the revolution, the Party's continuous political campaigns meant that participation in mass mobilisation activities was effectively mandated, and society remained tense due to the presence in Laos of some 50,000 Vietnamese troops (McBeth 1979, 10–11). The result was a geographically extensive system of adult education targeting specific types of people in certain territories, relying upon cultural, bureaucratic and coercive mechanisms for its effectiveness.

Like other aspects of Lao socialism, cultural and educational policies were imported from the DRV, which itself drew extensively on Chinese models of mass mobilisation. The Viet Minh's cultural policy took shape in two documents drafted in the 1940s by Truong Chinh, the chief cultural theorist of the Indochinese Communist Party. According to Ninh (2002, 28), the first of these, "Theses on Vietnamese Culture" (1943), was "remarkably brief and free of Marxist formulations." Nevertheless, the document gave clear priority to cultural transformation in the vision that "a vanguard party must lead the vanguard culture…to clear the way for the subsequent thorough revolution." In "Marxism and Vietnamese Culture" (1948), Truong Chinh developed a far more detailed and ideological exposition of such views, which guided "all the major elements of the development of Vietnamese intellectual activities and cultural and

educational work for the next three decades" (Ninh 2002, 39). As the title suggests, the tract was explicitly Marxist in tone, but wove socialist and nationalist themes together in the assertion that, in a choice between resistance and colonial forces, there could be no "neutral culture" (Ninh 2002, 40). Although the Viet Minh's united front policy initially permitted a degree of intellectual debate and contestation, this was short-lived. The communist monopolisation of cultural expression in the name of the revolution foreshadowed the same for revolutionary Laos.

Like its antecedent counterpart in Yan'an, China, the Viet Minh's mass literacy campaign provided, in the words of Ninh (2002, 206), the "backbone of its educational effort" in the early years of the revolution (see also Boshier and Huang 2010, 284). Also, as in China, the literacy campaign had political and ideological objectives from the beginning. Not only did adult education provide the Viet Minh with "a structure with which to…establish its political agenda at the most basic level of the population," it transmitted "a newly constructed vocabulary of the revolution" (Ninh 2002, 206). After 1945, the new Ministry of Education sought to build on these successes with "complementary education" for adults at primary and middle school levels, before later developing a more ambitious Worker-Peasant Complementary Education Program (based on a similar system in China) aimed at promising and "politically pure" cadres and workers who lacked access to education (Ninh 2002, 225–228).

Goscha's work with Vietnamese sources has greatly enhanced our understanding of just how profoundly the Vietnamese communists guided the revolutionary movement in Laos. The Vietnamese communists possessed a missionary zeal and civilising spirit, seeking to propagate "a superior revolutionary civilization running from Moscow to eastern South East Asia by way of China" (Goscha 2004, 152). By necessity, language, culture and education assumed significance in the communist campaign in Laos. Vietnamese cadres learned the languages of their target population, including minority languages, and recruited ethnic Vietnamese from Laos and northeast Thailand (where Lao is also spoken). Realising language alone was not sufficient, Vietnamese cadres recruited local leaders and monks to act as go-betweens to reach the people. These cadres established revolutionary schools and taught Lao to villagers and upland minorities, facilitating the spread of Lao as a national language in efforts that effectively constituted the first communist literacy campaigns. The Vietnamese also translated party materials and textbooks used in teaching. Such measures allowed the Pathet Lao and Group 100 to "channel nationalism into their heads and transform them into the modernizers of a new culture and Lao vision of the future, this one allied with the Vietnamese and linked to a larger [socialist] world view" (Goscha 2004, 172). Many of the targeted Pathet Lao recruits were from ethnic minorities.

By late 1957, the Vietnamese leadership believed its Lao counterpart could pursue revolution through participation in the First Coalition Government. Group 100 withdrew from Laos in January 1958 but Lao recruits continued to travel to North Vietnam for education (Goscha 2004, 175). The following year, after the coalition collapsed, Lao and Vietnamese leaders determined to remilitarise their struggle. A new advisory group called Doan 959 was created to rebuild political and military organisations, including in education. By 1962 it had grown to over 3,000 cadres. After the Geneva Agreements formally returned Laos to neutrality, Doan 959 mostly withdrew to Vietnam, but organisational foundations had been laid (Goscha 2004, 175-82). Over the following

decade the Lao Patriotic Front (LPF), the public wing of the Lao People's Party modelled on the Viet Minh, established a basic education system throughout the Pathet Lao zone, which came to cover around a third of Laos's population. In addition, thousands continued to travel to Vietnam for education and training (Pholsena 2012a, 50).

People's Education and Upgrading Culture

As in Vietnam, the vital importance of education was a regular theme in speeches by Party leaders. In 1969, Phoumi Vongvichit, the leader with oversight of education and culture, declared knowledge to be a "tool of" and education the "key which opens all doors of our revolution" (cited in Langer 1971, 8). In 1974, again following the Vietnamese example, Kaysone ridiculed the RLG notion of "neutral" education, declaring that "education is always intended to serve the Party's political duties" (cited in Lockhart 2001, 21). As part of this endeavour, adult or "people's education" (*pasaseuksa*) aimed first to eradicate illiteracy and then "upgrade culture," both of which had political as well as educational objectives. Perhaps not surprisingly, the political intent of adult education was clearly recognised by the RAND Corporation, which provided advice to the US military during the Vietnam War. In a report on education under the LPF, RAND analyst Paul Langer (1971, 23) wrote that adult education "may well be one of the most significant measures adopted by the Lao communists. Its political importance is enhanced by the fact that. . .nothing comparable is under way in the portion of the country ruled by the government."

The key term *bamlung vatthanatham* ("upgrading culture") highlights the close correlation between culture, education and ideology in the socialist system of people's education. Kerr (1992, 731) defines *bamrung* (according to pre-1975 spelling) as "improve, repair," but the common gloss of "upgrade" captures more fully the moral dimensions and socialist inflections of the word. Meanwhile, although the Pali-derived neologism *vatthanatham* is typically glossed as "culture," the term "cultural level" – widespread in both Lao (*ladap vatthanatham*) and Vietnamese (*trinh do van hoa*) – referred "specifically to one's level of education" (Lockhart 2001, 22; see also Ninh 2002, 205). In the most basic sense, then, upgrading culture (*bamlung vatthanatham*) or increasing one's cultural level (*nyok ladap vatthanatham*) meant improving educational standards.

Like notions of culture more broadly, *bamlung vatthanatham* also contained political and civilisational connotations. Kaysone made this clear in his exhortations after 1975 to "wipe out the remaining vestiges of feudal and especially colonial thought and culture" and, in a reference to spirit worship, to "wipe out backward customs that obstruct production" (Kaysone 1987, 62–63). With "a substance of socialism displaying revolutionary, national and mass characteristics," the new culture would draw selectively on the "fruits of civilisation of all mankind" and "reinforce the priceless cultural heritage of the nation" (Kaysone 1987, 62). Didactic and instrumentalist, culture was thus a moral category defining political correctness and suitability to govern. Likewise, one's cultural level referred not just to one's level of educational attainment but to moral and political correctness. It was in this sense of the term that the LPDR's new Ministry of Education, Sport, and Religious Affairs (MESRA) defined the objective of

bamlung vatthanatham work as "to incessantly raise the people's cultural level and to internalise this upgrading work" (MESRA 1980, 5).

Organisation of Upgrading Culture Work

Prior to 1975, these objectives took shape in LPF-administered areas as "people's education," which aimed principally at eradicating illiteracy. According to Langer's (1971, 24) RAND report, which drew on interviews with Pathet Lao refugees and third-party reports, people's education had two distinct purposes: "It increases the number of those who can be mobilized for the economic and social development of the country; at the same time, it offers the Communist administration a convenient vehicle for carrying on propaganda and political education." When Langer carried out his research, he found people's education to be informally organised with no targets or classroom instruction. Those who could read and write would teach small groups of those who could not. Even in areas where bombing had not forced people to take shelter in caves or the forest, classrooms were scarce. Classes would take place at night or during breaks in the agricultural cycle.

Despite this informality, a rudimentary system of organisation, targeting particular subjects in particular territories, was critical to the effectiveness of people's education. First, according to Langer, the "higher administrative level" would identify a region or village of high illiteracy and order the district education officer or another official to launch the programme. That person would in turn contact the relevant official at the canton (*tasaeng*, sub-district) level, who would contact the local teacher in the target area, and he/she would in turn call a meeting of villagers to explain the importance of literacy and value of education. Even at this early stage, the message was overtly political, as cadres would tell villagers "education meant knowledge and that knowledge would free the Lao people from foreign, that is American, oppression." Langer (1971, 25) added, "Instruction is always linked to simple political lessons promoting the new value system of patriotism, mutual aid, and service to country which the Pathet Lao seek to propagate."

The teacher would then determine who amongst his or her audience could read and write and these people would also be appointed as non-salaried instructors. The teacher would provide help by shadowing the new instructors – including literate children in some cases – and helping them with their own literacy skills where necessary. Regular teachers, who were critical representatives of LPF authority, provided broad oversight. At the end of a ten-month course, the same teachers would administer an examination comprising basic questions in history, geography and arithmetic, and award those participants who passed a certificate. Although the main targets of people's education were those aged 15–45, some older people also took part. Classes were not compulsory but social and official pressure, including severe criticism, pushed participants to complete their courses (Langer 1971, 27).

Langer was realistic about the limitations of *pasaseuksa* in these years. Bombing interrupted lessons, shortages of teaching materials forced improvisation, and many isolated areas, especially ethnic minority villages, were inaccessible or had no literate villagers to facilitate the process. Nevertheless, he found the *pasaseuksa* programme to be "the most outstanding feature" of the LPF education system, unmatched by anything in RLG areas, where adult literacy training was small-scale and confined to the military.

Dismissing more fanciful reports of the number of participants involved, he estimated that perhaps 60,000 – or 10% of the adult population – were enrolled in the *pasaseuksa* programme in 1969 and concurred with East German reports that up to half of the 15–45 age group were able to read in Sam Neua, the administrative base of the resistance government (Langer 1971, 32–33). Adding to Langer's positive impressions, Pholsena (2012a, 63) argues that minority villagers who undertook revolutionary education in southeastern border areas in the pre-1975 period "internalized the values of the regime – attachment to the collective, respect for authority, the sense of discipline."

After the LPDR was proclaimed in 1975, MESRA expanded and formalised the system of adult education through its Department of People's Education and Upgrading Culture (MESRA 1980). As before 1975, people's education had educational and political goals but, as already noted, these were formalised into two levels: "eradicating illiteracy" and "upgrading culture." Participants were expected first to complete literacy training before taking up to six "upgrading culture" classes, consisting of three at preparatory level (called *bamlung vatthanatham* or *pathom*, meaning primary school) and three at intermediate level (called *matthanyom*, or middle school). The people's education system thus included seven levels in all, approximating primary and middle school levels in the general education system (Table 1). While literacy classes aimed to make the entire population literate, upgrading culture classes were aimed principally at party members, state officials and "promising youth." As before 1975, the targeted age group was 15- to 45-year-olds.

MESRA's Two-Year Education Plan for 1979–1980 and 1980–1981 aimed to eradicate illiteracy entirely, claiming it would target 227,165 people in addition to the 471,027 people that had learned to read in 1979 (MESRA 1979, 2). Such numbers were plainly unrealistic. Still, the plan reveals the organisational principles used to target adult education towards particular territorial areas and subject populations. The basic objective was to mobilise people's education teachers according to a participant–teacher ratio of 3:1. Of the 75,721 teachers required, around 20,000 were said to already exist. In order to recruit the remaining 55,540, the ministry adopted different principles for different parts of the country. In populated areas, it aimed to mobilise civil servants, junior officials, workers, soldiers, police and monks, as well as teachers and students. Those who taught in their own village would receive a subsidy of 800 *kip* (about US$2); those volunteering outside their village would receive 2,500 *kip*. After completing literacy training, participants were required to continue, "level by level," onto upgrading classes (MESRA 1979, 3).

Table 1. System of people's education.

Level in system	Class	General education equivalent
1	Eradicating illiteracy	Primary school
2	Upgrading culture 1	
3	Upgrading culture 2	
4	Upgrading culture 3	
5	Intermediate 1	Middle school
6	Intermediate 2	
7	Intermediate 3	

Source: Compiled by author based on MESRA (1979).

In rural, mountainous and ethnic minority areas, a scheme like the pre-1975 system was envisaged, which would begin with "youth of every ethnicity" gathering in their canton to study literacy in "bursts." The teacher trainers in the first stage, where possible from ethnic minorities, would be drawn from the general education system. After completing literacy classes, the first group of trainees would have a "duty" to teach literacy classes, after which they could continue to study upgrading culture. When graduating this level, they would teach upgrading culture to those who had just learned literacy, and so on (MESRA 1979, 3). In addition, two-month campaigns during the dry season would mobilise civil servants and other literate people, including students of grade five level and higher, to eradicate literacy in remote, mountainous and ethnic minority areas. Local party and administrative headquarters were responsible for ensuring implementation and providing resources.

The broader upgrading culture system was aimed primarily at state employees and others in positions of authority. Closely resembling the Vietnamese system of complementary education (Ninh 2002, 224–225), it aimed for village and canton-level civil servants, heads and members of agricultural co-operatives, heads and members of base-level security forces, and heads and members of local mass organisations to achieve primary school level in the general education system. The greatest priority was given to permanent government staff and party members. At the district level and higher, 90–95% of officials were expected to complete primary level in the following two years, of whom 60% or 2,238 people were expected to complete middle school level. As 1,596 had already done so, a further 642 were expected to achieve this level in the two-year period of the plan.

Further reflecting the Vietnamese system, the two-year plan included extensive plans for establishing upgrading culture schools at various levels of administration across the country. Although results would be mixed, these plans offer further evidence of the organisation of upgrading culture work, and how it sought systematically to spread this work throughout the national territory. Initially, a new "upgrading culture school consisting of three levels (primary, middle, upper)" was to be built in the "centre" – which had moved from Viengxai in the far northeast of the country to the capital of Vientiane. This school was designed for at least 150 and 200 civil servants to attend in 1978–1979 and 1979–1980, respectively. These were to include senior party and government officials at the provincial and sometimes district levels, especially secretaries and deputy secretaries of party cells and senior civil servants (division and department heads) who were party members. Priority was placed on sending those who were "confused" to "upgrade political theory" (MESRA 1979, 4). With this in mind, the plan suggested building this school alongside the Party's political theory school located in Tha Ngon, near Vientiane.

The central upgrading culture school was to be replicated on a smaller scale at the provincial and district levels. Each province was to build an upgrading culture school consisting of primary and middle school level for groups of 80 to 100 to attend at any one time. These groups would include district-level party officials, district administration officials, provincial-level mass organisation officials and other district and provincial officials. In two four-month periods of "cultural study," participants could complete upgrading culture 1 and 2, while those completing three periods (a total of a year) could achieve upgrading culture 3 or intermediate 1. The plan's two-year target was for 90–95% of all district level officials to complete upgrading culture level 1 or 2, and for 60%

to achieve upgrading 3 or intermediate 1 level. Meanwhile, district-level upgrading culture schools teaching to the level of intermediate 1 were to receive groups of 60 to 80 district and canton officials, including local party secretaries and deputy secretaries, heads and deputies of mass organisations, canton security forces, those responsible for agricultural co-operatives, and so on. The target in this case was for 90–95% of "grass roots civil servants" to achieve upgrading culture 3 or intermediate 1.

Another element of the upgrading culture system borrowed from Vietnam was Worker-Peasant Upgrading Schools (*hong hian bamlung kammakon-sao na*), which were to be built at both the central and provincial levels. According to Ninh (2002, 228), the "truly radical" objective of the equivalent Vietnamese Worker-Peasant Complementary Education schools was no less than "generating a new, pure intellectual class from the worker and peasant class" from politically pure but educationally disadvantaged groups. In Laos, worker-peasant schools targeted civil servants and youth in the same way that other upgrading culture schools did, but as in Vietnam targeted the "purest" and most promising among these groups: those aged 15–35 possessing achievements, high moral character, good health and a good cultural level. These students would "build a basic foundation of culture" before being fast-tracked into middle- and upper-level vocational training, the highest educational level available (after the new regime closed the RLG's only university). The ultimate objective was to build technical workers, inspectors and civil servants specialising in scientific work (MESRA 1979, 5).

The other major type of special needs school was Ethnic Minority Study-Work Schools (*hong hian saomu sonsat thang hian thang het*), which were also to be established by both central and provincial authorities. These schools reflected two ideological emphases of the new regime: practicality and targeting "Lao people of all ethnicities" (*pasason lao banda phao*), a key trope of the new regime (see also Badenoch 2018). The schools would "receive friends of every ethnicity from general education age to the age of increasing labour productivity" – 15–25 years of age. Much like the other upgrading culture schools, "[t]he substance of basic cultural learning is based on the general education curriculum, commensurate with the technical level of each person, together with the study of culture, politics, technical training and science." The main difference from the other upgrading culture schools was the joint emphasis on study and work: "Supervision and production are closely related, which means: half-study and half-production leads to self-supervision." The goal once again was to build a cadre class of low- and mid-level civil servants, particularly those who could work in technical roles and as inspectors in rural and mountainous areas. Outstanding students could be sent for further education in "the centre" or overseas (MESRA 1979, 6). The emphasis on self-supervision and self-reliance reinforced the subject-forming and self-making intent of the programme, always under the guise of the Party.

The structure of the school system allocated financial and organisational responsibility to the provinces and lower levels of the administration. For each of the schools discussed in the plan, the implementing unit would be the central, provincial or district administration where the school was located. Although the plan did not include financial details – a major oversight – it stipulated that the education office or department in each jurisdiction was obliged to build and run the schools. The plan also stated that government, provincial and district offices and organisations had to support upgrading classes by devoting two periods each week to the task,

according to Phoumi Vongvichit's ministerial order, and submit examination results to MESRA each year (MESRA 1979, 6). The role of the centre was one of planning and oversight: producing the plan, setting the curriculum, publishing educational materials, including a number of *bamlung vatthannatham* textbooks, and reporting on and assessing results.

These textbooks captured the revolutionary culture, language and social categories that were propagated as part of adult education. This can be seen in *Hat taeng leuang* (Composition Practice), a 1977 handbook for teachers of level 2 and 3 upgrading culture classes. One of several texts funded with Soviet assistance, this volume – the only one located for this study – claimed a scarcely believable print run of 200,000 (MESRA 1977). While the stated purpose of *Hat taeng leuang* was to provide teachers with a syllabus for teaching basic writing skills, example stories and exercises were replete with revolutionary themes. *Sithong Vilason* (Sithong the Hero), a well-known revolutionary tale, defined revolutionary qualities such as comradeship, patriotism and "loving the people" through a didactic hero narrative (MESRA 1977, 12–14).[4] A model letter written by a student to loved ones propagated familiar revolutionary values in the context of describing everyday activities at the school and an example text "Who are you responsible to?" conveyed the message that, while people were responsible to the party, the party was also responsible to the people (MESRA 1977, 25–27, 54–55). In other articles, revolutionary themes were accompanied by general civilisational leitmotifs. An example text "On the exercise field" outlined the value of physical training, "The good civil servant" listed the virtues of a good state employee, and a lesson exercise on minute-taking at meetings, a staple of revolutionary society, conveyed organisational decorum and processes (MESRA 1977, 58–59, 67–68). The power – or at least promise – of adult education was to propagate such revolutionary and civilisational terms and categories across the national territory through a bureaucratic apparatus paralleling the state administration.

The System in Practice

Assessing the breadth of the adult education system is made difficult by the patent exaggeration of statistics. In 1980, MESRA reported that 612,305 people, or 80% of the target set in 1977–1978, had achieved literacy since the new regime came to power. Although seven provinces with success rates as low as 51% (Attapeu) were singled out for criticism, 8,838 villages, 795 cantons, 60 districts and two provinces, Huaphan (Sam Neua) and Luang Prabang, had been declared completely free of illiteracy. Another four provinces were said to have achieved this feat but had not yet announced it (MESRA 1980, 3). Five years later, MESRA did not report the number of those who had studied but claimed that 98.75% of people targeted, 90% of villages and 92% of cantons had abolished illiteracy. Huaphan, the original party centre and seat of the "revolutionary struggle," was consistently singled out for special praise, particularly in 1985 when Xiengkho district won the UNESCO Nadezhda K. Krupskaya literacy prize for abolishing illiteracy altogether (MESRA 1986, 2; see also UNESCO 1985, 1).

The education ministry reported similar successes in the upgrading culture movement. In 1979, it reported that 95,848 people had studied upgrading culture (MESRA 1979, 2). Similarly, in 1986 it stated that around 205,000 people had studied upgrading

culture between 1975 and 1985, the vast majority at primary level (MESRA 1986, 3). These figures included a sizable number of government officials and other targeted groups. In 1980, the Ministry reported that in the previous year 4,000 civil servants, 913 youth and 115 worker-peasants had received training in, respectively, 75 upgrading culture schools, nine ethnic youth schools and one worker-peasant school. Six years later, MESRAreported that a total of 4,620 people had attended 76 upgrading culture schools, 20 ethnic youth schools and four worker-peasant schools in the previous year, suggesting the number of schools had increased despite trainee numbers easing slightly (MESRA 1986, 3). Annual reports sometimes included more specific statistics. In 1978–79, for instance, 3,256 officials from ten ministries were reported to have studied in 127 classes at all seven levels of the system (see Table 2). Completion statistics for some of these classes indicated that slightly over half of the participants successfully completed their courses (see Table 3).

Many of these figures were obviously unrealistic, suggesting teachers, like other government officials, exaggerated results (Doré 1982, 107). Yet some claims were more believable than others. Whereas reports of the complete elimination of illiteracy in Huaphan, Luang Prabang and other districts and villages seem unlikely, the 1978–79 statistics of civil servant participation were detailed and reasonable. Hence, official statistics should not be dismissed entirely. With a discount for exaggeration, a conservative estimate of participation would still be in the low hundreds of thousands, though the numbers of people who actually learned to read and write would be lower. This estimate would accord with Langer's estimate, noted above, that one-tenth of the adult population of the "liberated zone" was enrolled in people's education in 1969, a percentage that should have increased with improved organisation after 1975. A contemporary observer concluded, despite questions over statistical reliability, that literacy campaigns experienced "considerable success" (Doré 1982, 106).

As in education more generally, the quality of the adult education system was a concern. MESRA reports identified a litany of constraints, especially with the upgrading culture schools. At the provincial level, upgrading schools did not always open, selection of students did not meet targets and, while military officers were over-represented, party and administrative officials at district and provincial levels were "not motivated to rectify themselves." This resulted in the qualification of fewer officials than stipulated at the preparatory or intermediate levels. Likewise, a number of districts had not organised upgrading schools and civil servants were "shunning" upgrading work, which they considered to be "dishonourable" (*sia kiat*) (MESRA 1980, 6). Among such people, upgrading culture produced the same apathy and resignation that plagued mandated political training in general, as a *New York Times* (April 10, 1979) report captured:

> The large meeting room of the Lane Xang Hotel was stifling, the temperature above 100 degrees [Fahrenheit]. As each of the six meetings wore down its four-hour course, only the lecturer showed no sign of fading. His public spent more energy fanning and yawning than concentrating on the subject.

Adding to these problems, there were more general issues of material shortages and ad hoc implementation. In "many provinces and districts," worker-peasant and ethnic minority upgrading schools had yet to be built and support was inadequate. As MESRA's (1980, 6) five-year report of 1980 summarised:

Table 2. Number of civil servants taking literacy and culture classes, 1978-79 academic year.

Level	Literacy		B1		B2		B3		M1		M2		M3	
Ministry	Classes	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	Students
Education	1	14	2	23	2	35	3	27	3	142	3	81	3	32
Public Works	2	36	2	47	2	30	3	82	1	40	0	0	1	10
Foreign Affairs	0	0	1	6	2	3	1	7	1	11	1	6	1	9
Agriculture	5	112	3	71	10	308	14	675	8	138	6	125	5	243
PM's Office	2	17	2	26	2	26	3	112	3	121	2	79	2	46
Interior	2	129	3	108	2	44	4	115	0	0	0	0	0	0
Finance	1	2	1	5	1	8	2	14	0	0	0	0	1	5
Justice	0	0	1	21	1	14	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	20
Ethnic Affairs	1	3	1	10	1	6	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	14	313	16	317	23	474	32	1044	16	452	12	291	14	365

Source: MESRA (1979, 3). B1-B3 refer to Bamlung vatthanatham (upgrading culture) levels 1-3; M1-M3 refer to Matthanyom (intermediate) levels 1-3.

Table 3. Number of civil servants completing studies, 1978–79 academic year.

Ministry	Grade	Number completed	Total
Public Works	Literacy	20	36
	Upgrading culture 3	43	82
Public Health	Middle 3	9	20
PM's Office	Middle 3	34	46
Interior	Literacy	56	129
	Upgrading culture 3	74	115
Finance	Upgrading culture 3	8	14
	Middle 3	5	5
Total		249	447

Source: MESRA (1979, 3).

> Documents, projects, curricula, materials and equipment, and capital for upgrading culture work have received incorrect attention and are greatly insufficient. This has created great difficulties for the movement, principally that we still lack the means to obtain organisational funds for universally eradicating illiteracy and upgrading culture.

MESRA's 10-year report covering 1975–1985 outlined a similar litany of problems. In some places, 40–60% of those who had learned to read and write had relapsed into illiteracy due to lack of reading materials. Despite the building of upgrading culture schools, the ratio of civil servants and other targeted groups undertaking classes was "very low" due to "poor organisation of study," and the time dedicated to study was often insufficient to "achieve results." Senior civil servants in supervisory roles were "increasing their cultural level" too slowly, with only around 60% having achieved primary level. In summary, the upgrading culture movement was "less vigorous than during the [revolutionary] struggle" before 1975 (MESRA 1986, 10).

There were several possible reasons for the contrasting results between the pre- and post-1975 adult education programmes. Prior to 1975, the anti-colonial struggle against France and the US bestowed the revolutionary movement with greater legitimacy, justifying military-enforced hierarchy, discipline and sanctions that were crucial in mobilising revolutionary solidarity (see, for example, Nakhonkham 2003). As in all post-revolutionary societies, mobilising consent among the newly "liberated" population was much harder for the Party (see Stuart-Fox 1983, 443; Evans 1988, 5–7). Unlike the pre-1975 recruits, who were promised and ultimately part of a triumphant revolution, post-1975 trainees were often from the losing side of the war. For many who had vigorously opposed the revolution, the content of revolutionary hegemony sought consciously to turn their world – the existing hegemonic system – upside-down. These divisions had geographical as well as political and economic dimensions. As cadres and soldiers descended from the original revolutionary centre in the Annamite range to the Mekong valley, the middle-classes of the lowland towns, who had generally supported the royalist regime, were subjected to revolutionary lecturing from people they considered poorly educated and inferior. For them, this revolution did not emerge from within but was imposed from outside. Many royalists who chose not to flee across the Mekong River to Thailand were sent to re-education camps in the former heartland of the revolution (Evans 1988, 4–5; 2002, 177–178).

Despite these barriers, adult education facilitated pedagogical processes that, over time, helped to establish revolutionary culture as a new hegemonic form. Of course, participants' attitudes varied along with the degree to which they "internalised" or believed in the ideas conveyed in adult education classes. As noted, post-1975 trainees

often learned the new rhetoric less enthusiastically than their predecessors in the Pathet Lao zone. As the new regime consolidated its rule, however, the gap between the two groups narrowed. Some people were drawn by the promises of Party rule, especially after its eviction of the Americans; others, particularly the more ambitious among the population, recognised that, as the only sanctioned political vocabulary, knowing the socialist rhetoric of rule was a prerequisite for social mobility and prosperity – a pattern that remains detectable today. For others still, exhausted from three decades of national division, war and now revolution, adult education and the language it taught would simply have been part of the new society's culture of mandated participation, which they tolerated in the hope that peace would prevail. Despite the evident frustration of MESRA cadres, the mandated participation of adult education and other mass mobilisation programmes suited the new regime, for it reinforced the Party's ethos of participation (*khao huam*) and strengthened the impression that the new government was in charge. Even when participation was half-hearted, time and repetition made socialist subjects familiar with and eventually fluent in the language of the revolution. Even today, the success of this process of establishing revolutionary hegemony is evident in the revolutionary generation that continues to speak this language.

Through mass mobilisation activities such as adult education, revolutionary hegemony was thus learned rather than internalised – or, at least, learned before being internalised. While internalisation suggests a process of absolute appropriation, learning implies one of acquisition by degrees. Over time, the vocabulary of the revolution was normalised in individuals and society more generally, reinforcing the capacity of the new regime to rule. As time passed, a new generation emerged that was fully socialised in the ideas propagated by adult education. Twenty-five years after the revolution, as Evans has noted (2002, 234–235), over 70% of the population had "grown up with no immediate knowledge of the recent past," a percentage that would now be far higher. What they did understand was the symbolic structure and vocabulary they had been taught throughout their lives and education: that of the revolution.

Conclusion

Adult education was one of many measures through which political space was monopolised and saturated with revolutionary language, functioning in parallel with village meetings, meetings of co-operatives and mass organisations and the coercive state surveillance that penetrated to the household level. Like other means of monopolising political space during the first decade of the revolution, adult education reached across the country along the bureaucratic and territorial lines that constructed the socialist state – from the party centre in Vientiane to the provinces, districts, villages and rural, mountainous and ethnic minority areas in the hinterland. Although the reality was never this straightforward, these territorial swatches, many of which started out as enemy RLG areas, gradually joined up to remake the national territory as one populated by socialist subjects.

This organisational structure gave adult education a great advantage over textual sources or propaganda such as newspapers and government reports, since it took state rhetoric across the national territory in an extensive manner that reached substantial numbers of the largely illiterate population. In addition to its territorial aspects, the

organisation of adult education targeted particular subjects – party members, civil servants of varying levels, leaders and members of co-operatives, ethnic minorities, farmers and so on – which it also helped to produce. In other words, these people undertook adult education classes according to their social group, in a social process that reinforced the existence and identity of these groups. Targeted at certain territories and subjects of the revolution, the adult education programme propagated the vocabulary and grammatical structure of socialist Laos, providing a codebook for how to participate in socialist society.

Today, more than four decades after the tumult of 1975, the grammar of the revolution represents conservatism rather than radical transformation. Moreover, its content has changed with cultural and economic reforms enshrining Buddhist patronage, royalist-revolutionary historiography and fast-paced, resource-intensive economic development as the basis of political legitimacy. In recognising the emergence of these sources of legitimacy, however, we must not overlook the ongoing effects of revolutionary hegemony in producing the boundaries of acceptable political discourse. As the political crackdown of 2011–2012 demonstrated, transgression of these limits continues to attract coercive force, including threats and intimidation, from elements of the LPRP regime. More than that, these relatively infrequent occurrences serve also to highlight – and reinforce – the more mundane adherence to long-learnt lessons of how to speak and behave in socialist and post-socialist society. From the early days of the struggle and revolution, adult education was a major means of teaching these lessons and helping the party-state to establish revolutionary hegemony.

Notes

1. Self-regulation pervades the traditional media in Laos and this has generally been true of the internet too (Mayes 2009). A notable forum for debate are a few websites run by the non-governmental organization Coalition for Lao Information, Communication and Knowledge (CLICK http://clicklaos.org/), which aims to uphold Article 44 of the constitution providing for free speech, but the two main sites, LaoLink (in Lao) and LaoFAB (English), are carefully moderated to avoid critical discussion of politics. Social media offers wider avenues for critical discussion, as suggested by the arrest of three people in 2016 for criticising the Party on Facebook (see Baird 2018). On the other hand, the government's public and hard-line response, duly shared across social media, was no doubt calculated to reinforce self-regulation among social media users.
2. Lao was introduced as the medium of instruction from around 1970 in the RLG's USAID-funded Fa Ngum comprehensive schools, but not across the entire education system (Chamberlain and Evans 2010, 89).
3. The third revolution is usually translated as the "revolution in ideology and culture," but the Lao term *neo khit*, literally "way of thinking," is more accurately rendered as "thought." Ideology is usually translated as *latthi*.
4. For the use of hero narratives in Laos, more generally, also see Pholsena (2006). For a more thorough treatment of these themes in Vietnam, see Tréglodé (2012).

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