

# *The Comprehensive High School Movement in Laos*

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## *Historical Setting<sup>1</sup>*

The Kingdom of Laos received its current historical identity in 1353 with the consolidation of King Fa Ngum's domain Lane Xang (Kingdom of the Million Elephants). Fa Ngum, a convert to Buddhism, spent his youth as an exile at Angkor (Cambodia). In Buddhist Laos the ecclesiastical hierarchy assumed the function of maintaining the traditions of culture, its skills, knowledge, principals of inter-personal conduct, and its religious tenets and values. It manifested itself on the local level in the village wat where bonzes taught only boys. Evidence indicates that the curriculum of the Lane Xang period was quite extensive and included: study of religious texts, reading, writing, religious ethics, elementary law, medicine, politics, history, elementary geography, calligraphy and manual work such as smelting, carving and sculpture, painting, architecture, carpentry, metal forging, brickmaking, construction of canoes, domestic and religious objects. The traditional education was content with maintaining the status quo.

The status quo was upset dramatically by the arrival of western culture and technology which brought monetization, cheap imported articles to replace items once produced by skilled craftsmen, and disease traveling the newly-constructed roads to villages where principles of health and sanitation were unknown.

France began its colonial developments in Laos during the 1880s. The colonial administrators relied on wat schools to maintain a moral authority in the village and they established secular schools in the urban areas to meet the administrative and political requirements of the protec-

torate. French-speaking Lao secretary-interpreters and, later, minor functionaries were needed while Vietnamese held the higher civil service positions.

By 1917 the colonial school system was well-ensconced in the political and social fabric of Laos; members of the Lao elite, after exhausting the curriculum in French schools in Indo-China, were being sent to study in France while French teachers, in Laos, taught school children exclusively in the French language. Vietnamese instructors in the same schools used a combination of Lao, Vietnamese, and French. The intermediate and higher classes devoted 12 hours out of 27.5 hours per week to the study of the French language. French was taught in the elementary grades, too. By 1917 a young man who lacked facility in the French language could not compete in the new administrative hierarchy. Consequently, the wat schools declined.

By 1920, the colonial schools in Laos were incorporated into a common Indo-China education system in which every "commune" was to have a primary school. By 1939 another order authorized "village schools", the school building and a house for the teacher to be provided by the village and the teacher and school materials to be provided by the government. During and after World War II, elementary school enrollments increased and additional emphasis was placed on the construction of secondary schools — all in the French tradition.

The colonial educational system modified the traditional Lao system to the extent that it met the needs of a French protectorate and not of an independent country. The present emphasis in Lao education continues to be oriented toward French language studies and other academia which does



not prepare Laotians for life in a predominantly rural, Asian agricultural environment and does not prepare them to participate fully in the planned economic growth of their nation.

#### *The Education Reform Act of 1962<sup>2</sup>*

Many prominent citizens and government officials were deeply concerned with the preparation of the citizens for life in a modern world. Manifestation of the concern resulted in a Royal Decree referred to as the "Educational Reform Act of 1962". Some salient elements of the Act are quoted below:

"Article 3. Education is at the service of the whole Lao community. It is not made to perpetuate privileges, . . .

"Article 4. Education is not only the education of the intellect but of the whole person: intelligence, character, social mind, body. . . . the new programs of the elementary school leave out purely academic knowledge and stress what the child should know to live better and work for a better output in his community.

"Article 5. Programs, strongly oriented toward the practical, ought to emphasize the practical rather than the theoretical. . . . Audio-visual techniques will be used extensively, . . .

"Article 6. The pupil will take a more active part in the school and school life.

"Article 8. The public schools will bring a Buddhist education to the Lao population which is impregnated with Buddhism.

"Article 22. The last year of the second elementary cycle (Pathom 6) will include a class in vocational guidance.

"Article 28. Youth must not only know a trade but must also be able to use this knowledge and improve it.

"Article 37. The essentially academic character of present secondary education must be balanced by a systematic apprenticeship, leading to an appreciation of the realities of life."

#### *Changes Which Have Occurred in Lao Education<sup>3</sup>*

In 1955, only 17 percent of the Lao National Budget (exclusive of military and police expenditures) was allocated to the Ministry of Education in support of all titles under the Act; 22 percent is now being allocated.

There were 1,040 elementary schools in Laos in 1955. There are now over 2,700 elementary schools with an enrollment of over 177,000 pupils (public schools only). This represents over a 400% increase in enrollment between 1950 and 1968. To meet the increased enrollment, USAID, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the village people constructed and repaired over 1,500 elementary classrooms.

Only 22% of the 177,000 enrollees in public schools are in grades 4 through 6, and only one in five of these finishes the sixth grade; one in 300 finishes the secondary course. In 1968, only 116 received the baccalaureate certificate (high school diploma). Of these, only 75 were of Lao extraction. This situation can be attributed in part to the fact that only 10% of the students who complete the primary course can be accommodated in the existing 16 secondary and three technical schools. To increase opportunities for terminal education of sixth-grade graduates, the Ministry, with some USAID assistance, has begun to establish a two-year crafts training program in connection with the elementary schools. USAID has provided limited assistance to the technical schools and major assistance to the teacher training program. In addition, USAID and the Ministry established in 1967 the Fa Ngum Comprehensive High School (grades 7 - 10) which conforms more closely to the Educational Reform Act of 1962 than do the other secondary schools. A contract team from the University of Hawaii provides technical assistance.

#### *The Laos-USAID-University of Hawaii Contract*

In the spring of 1965, while the University of Hawaii-AID team was preparing to terminate its operations in Thailand, the Chief of Party of the Hawaii team was asked informally whether or not the University of Hawaii would be interested in a Contract in Laos. This inquiry was transmitted to the Campus Coordinator who, in turn, relayed the information to the Director of the University's Office of International Programs. After a series of exploratory communications, the University of Hawaii, through its Office of International Programs, was invited by USAID/Laos to send a team to study secondary education in Laos and to come up with recommendations on how USAID/Laos could assist the Royal Lao



Government in developing its secondary education program.

In August-September 1965, a team of four University of Hawaii professors headed by the Director of the Office of International Programs went to Laos to make the study. The group's report, titled *Recommendations on Assistance that May Be Provided by the University of Hawaii for the Further Development of Lao Education — A Survey Report*, was completed in the field and submitted to the representatives of USAID/Laos and Washington in September 1965.

Subsequently in the early part of 1967 the Royal Lao Ministry of Education, USAID/Laos and Washington and the University of Hawaii negotiated a contract to develop the first comprehensive, Lao-language, secondary school in the nation. Negotiations included months of thoughtful planning and cooperative efforts.

The contract provided for University of Hawaii campus coordination and a consultation team of six members: chief of party and specialists in language arts — social studies, mathematics — science, agriculture, commercial and industrial arts.

Under the contract agreement, the University "shall assist the Cooperating Country's Ministry of Education in the following areas:

1. Development of a curriculum for a 7th to 10th grade comprehensive secondary school, offering courses in practical and vocational subjects, including agriculture, as well as academic secondary subjects.
2. Performing of such teaching duties as may be necessary, putting emphasis upon training of Lao teachers assigned to the school, enabling them to carry out all teaching and administrative duties, at the earliest feasible time, without foreign assistance.
3. Training of Lao teachers temporarily attached to the school for in-service education.
4. Development of textbooks and other instruction material in the Lao language, for publication by the Ministry's Material Production Center.
5. Such other professional duties and responsibilities as may be agreed upon by the Ministry's Director of Secondary In-

struction, the Mission, and the Contractor."

Due to the outstanding leadership of the Lao Directress of the new school, and the remarkable cooperation of the officials of the Royal Lao Ministry of Education, USAID, and the building and school furniture contractors, the Hawaii Team has been able to make substantial progress on the stated objectives.

#### *Plant Construction*

USAID officials had designed, secured approval of the Ministry of Education, and awarded the contracts for four buildings of the complex prior to the arrival of the Hawaii Team in Vientiane. On June 29, 1967, when the Chief of Party arrived, the contractor was digging the trenches for the foundations of the first building. Members of the Team and officials of USAID visited the site at least three times each week. Construction supervisors and workers caught the spirit of the project, put on around-the-clock shifts and had sufficient classrooms, director's suite, staff workroom and toilets ready for occupancy on October 2.

An arrete issued by the Ministry of Education in September 1967 legally established the school and officially named it Fa Ngum in honor of the first king of the kingdom now known as Laos and who was ordained in 1353 A.D. The location of the school is in a very desirable setting in the outskirts of Vientiane.

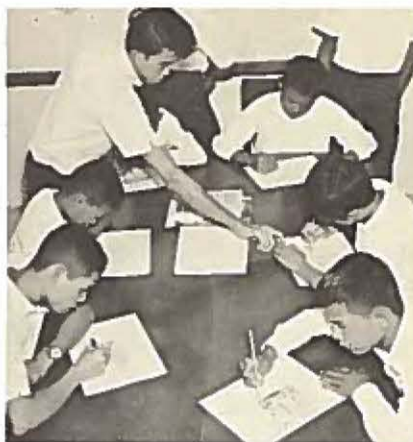
The formal dedication of Fa Ngum High School was held on November 21. The outstanding events were the speeches by the Secretary of State for Youth and Sports of the Ministry of Education, of the United States Ambassador, and the singing of an inspiring school song by the student body. The song was composed by one of the school's science teachers. The ceremony was followed by an "open house."

The contracts for hand-constructed classroom furniture were awarded September 5, 1967. Sufficient furniture had been delivered to the school by October 1 to equip three classrooms. Eight classrooms, completely equipped with furniture, were put into use on October 27, 1967.

The completed school plant has 12 buildings. The two-story buildings contain 16 spacious, airy (with ceiling fans) and well-lighted classrooms,



*Students on drawing unit with their Industrial Arts teacher, Mr. Oun Heuane.*



*Complete view of Phase I classroom building.*

director's suite, assistant director's suite, and five larger conference rooms. The latter provide excellent space for the library, typing room, a materials production room, and two faculty workshops. The two science buildings house laboratories for general science, biology, chemistry, physics, home economics, and agriculture. The agriculture complex includes, in addition to the laboratory, a classroom, farm mechanics shop, saran greenhouse, compost shed, farm machinery shed and a nursery storage and work shed. The two industrial arts buildings include facilities for five areas of concentration. A large open-sided, all-purpose building, two modern eastern style toilets and a janitor-guard residence are appropriately spaced.

#### *Educational Equipment and Supplies*

The USAID — University of Hawaii contract provided \$5,000 for educational equipment and supplies for 1967-68 and an additional \$30,000 in 1968-69. USAID provides the funds and most of the implementation services for procurement of educational equipment and supplies. A substantial amount of the procurement is processed by the



*Home Economics class with teacher, Mr. Outhai.*

Campus Coordinator's office. The Hawaii Team selects and initiates all orders as educational needs are anticipated. Audio-visual equipment includes a 16 mm sound movie projector (USAID and USIS have developed and adapted several fine films in the Lao language), film strip projector, opaque projector, loop film instant movie projector, slide projector and overhead viewer. Both commercial and staff-constructed maps, charts, models, mock-ups and transparencies are available. Science laboratory equipment, typewriters, adding machines, abacus, home economics refrigerator and stoves, sewing machines, power and hand shop tools, mechanical drawing equipment, tractor with attachments, well, pump and irrigation system are all very much in evidence. USAID furnished the initial expendable supplies, e.g., paper, stencils, chalk, toilet and janitor supplies. The Ministry of Education will increasingly absorb expendable materials' costs.

#### *Staff Procurement and Development*

The Hawaii Team advisory staff members were recruited by the Dean of the College of





Agriculture class with specimen seeds — Mr. Vandii, teacher.



Dedication Day Dignitaries—Ambassador Sullivan surrounded by Director Mendenhall, and Mr. Lian, Director of Youth and Sports.



Miss Nith, team secretary, Mr. Somnuk, Social Studies teacher, and Miss Todoki going over lesson plans

Education and the Campus Coordinator in April and May 1967 and again in 1968. The project has greatly benefited by the quality of this well-experienced and highly-motivated group. Team members participated in well-planned orientation programs both in Hawaii and in Laos. The Team also profited greatly from studying the Hawaii University Lao Educational Survey Report of 1965, the Royal Lao Educational Reform Act of 1962, and project developmental literature. All team members and spouses studied the Lao language five hours each day, starting with their arrival and continuing for nine weeks. Recently the team members have renewed their study of the Lao language. Further orientation to the Asian educational scene was provided by temporary duty assignments enroute to Laos to observe the new comprehensive high schools in Bangkok.

The officials of the Royal Lao Ministry of Education have been most cordial in their relationships with project personnel and have an unusually clear understanding of the project and its potential for the development of the Lao nation. The inclusion of the comprehensive type

high school and secondary school instruction in the Lao language are unique with this project in the Lao educational system.

The Director of Secondary Education for the Ministry of Education has displayed unusual insight regarding the magnitude of the task by making available an outstanding directress and young, capable teachers (most of the staff received their basic training at the USAID-sponsored College of Education, Vientiane) at a very favorable teacher-pupil ratio. He implemented the appointment of seven full-time and four part-time teachers per grade level, the director and administrative assistant, secretary and custodians from the Ministry of Education's budget. During the current year, this staff serves 200 students. The Ministry fully appreciates the need for staff time to write instructional materials, including textbooks, and to learn and experiment with modern teaching techniques.

In spite of the inadequacy of the Hawaii staff's ability to communicate fluently in Lao, the Lao teachers have learned many modern techniques of teaching. The Directress, who speaks English well, has been highly effective in our



communications. She is not only bilingual, but is a modern educator in her own right. Teachers have learned to develop objectives, write content implementations and to evaluate learning. Such techniques as buzz sessions and project work have tended to make classroom instruction less formal than what is normal in Laos. This, it is believed, has helped to develop a classroom climate more conducive to learning. Field trips, instructional games, models, mock-ups, bulletin boards, panels, resource speakers, films, demonstrations and lectures are utilized to great advantage. The weekly staff meetings are chaired by the Directress.

Recruitment of next year's expanded faculty has begun and an accelerated participant training program has been projected. Candidates will be sent to the United States, the Philippines, India, and Thailand for teacher training.

#### *Program and Content Development*

Immediately upon arrival the Hawaii Team was given the responsibility of developing a firm program and definite schedule for the first year of instruction, beginning with the 7th grade. Proposals were approved by the Ministry of Education and USAID. Suggested modifications were cooperatively worked through to mutual satisfaction.

Since the initial period, a four-year curriculum has been developed for each of five tracks: academic, agriculture, commercial, home economics, and industrial arts. All tracks include four hours of Lao language and literature per week, four hours of English, four hours of French, four hours of social studies (Laos and Southeast Asia, Asia and Europe, Americas, Australia and New Zealand, Africa and the Middle East), four hours of science (general science, biology I, chemistry I, physics I or applied pre-vocational science).

All tracks also include four hours of mathematics (general math, algebra, geometry, Algebra II or applied pre-vocational math), six hours of practical arts (eight the fourth year), two hours of physical education, one hour of guidance and four hours of student government, interest clubs or pre-vocational electives.

Practical arts — agriculture pursues an orientation course, crop production, animal production,

farm mechanics and farm management. Practical arts — commercial includes orientation, Lao-English-French typing, adding machine-abacus calculation, filing and office procedure. In addition to the home economics orientation, instruction is given in nutrition, health, food preparation, clothing, sewing, child care, personal development, and interior decoration. The industrial arts program offers orientation (arts and crafts), drafting, woodwork, general metals, electricity and power mechanics.

Practical arts studies are closely integrated with the academic courses. The program is designed to serve general education purposes. Students who complete the four-year program will have salable skills but will not be skilled journeymen. They will have basic attitudes, orientations and skills that will provide needed flexibility in pursuing advanced formal education or on-the-job advanced training.

The total curriculum includes attention to the development of pride, patriotism, citizenship, and social skills. School opens and closes with flag raising and lowering ceremonies, singing of the national anthem and Buddhist prayers. Lao music, classical dancing, art work and Lao social graces are integrated into the program. Many traditional Lao customs are followed, such as ceremonies in the honoring of teachers, Buddhist priests, and distinguished guests. Intramural — interscholastic sports and participation in community activities are pursued throughout the year.

The program in toto implements the most recent statement of educational objectives developed by the Lao Ministry of Education. The current national budget (1968-69) presentation was accompanied with the following rationale:

#### *Objectives for Secondary Education:<sup>4</sup>*

1. To increase the output of agriculture and animal husbandry and to multiply and improve small crafts, in order to obtain a surplus of production which will allow the gradual financing of equipment and industrialization.
2. To improve the health of the population.
3. Not to create a premature influx of rural people to the cities where there is not yet work to be offered them.
4. Not to multiply indefinitely middle level workers (and especially "literary" mid-



dle level workers) for whom jobs are limited.

5. To train higher echelon workers to fill, in 15 years at the most, all key positions of the country, so as not to have to turn to foreign advisors.
6. Not to touch the magnificent popular culture of the countryside, to protect this national culture in the cities, and to see to it that the elite do not abandon this culture.

The Lao and Hawaii staff have developed materials continuously. Since there are no secondary school courses or books in the Lao language, it is necessary to write new materials. The staff reviews texts from France, the United States, Australia, Thailand, and a variety of small pamphlets that had been developed in Lao, primarily for community development purposes. Through interpreters, mutually agreed upon objectives are first written in English, then translated into Lao. These are then submitted to the Ministry of Education and USAID for approval.

The Lao staff, with advisory assistance from UH team members, develops educational units and daily lesson plans. Teachers and consultants implement the process of mimeographing materials for class distribution and accumulation. These materials, written to cover instruction to the end of current years and revised during the succeeding school year, will provide the content for textbooks which will be published cooperatively by the Ministry's Production Center and USAID following the second year of usage.

#### *Student Recruitment and Development*

Each year a nationally-administered comprehensive examination is given to approximately 1,000 candidates who must be 6th grade graduates. The top 100 are selected for admittance at the 7th grade level. (This number may be increased to 150-200 beginning in 1969.) Approximately one-half of the admittants are residents of Vientiane and the remaining outer province students live with friends, relatives or in the Buddhist wats.

The Directress carries on a continuing program of vocational, educational and personal guidance, including parent participation. All students pursue the same courses during the 7th

(orientation) year. At the end of the year they must select one of the five educational tracks. The program includes the validation of an aptitude test consisting of five subtests. The initial research on validation is most encouraging.

The student body is vigorous in its pursuit of learning. They work hard and enjoy it. Absence is rare; misbehavior and tardiness do not exist.

#### *Summary and Future Plans*

Fa Ngum Comprehensive High School is firmly established in the Lao educational scene. Its support grows daily as more and more citizens become acquainted with its program. A full evaluation of its effectiveness cannot be made until its students become members of the adult community, but current observers are predicting that they will be soundly educated, economically viable and responsible citizens. The Lao Ministries of Education, Finance, and Plans have requested that a second "Fa Ngum" type school be developed in central Laos to open in 1969.

The University of Hawaii Team and University of Hawaii officials most closely concerned with the project wish to acknowledge the fact that such a significant enterprise in intercountry cooperation could not develop without the enthusiastic and sustained support, the strategic planning, and the vigorous effort of the wonderfully patient and motivated people of Laos, the American Ambassador and his staff, USAID/Laos, USAID/Washington, and the divisions and sections of USAID/Laos.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from "USAID Mission to Laos, FY 1969 and FY 1970 Program, Education", mimeographed, page 1.

<sup>2</sup>Royal Decree "Education Reform Act of 1962", Laos Government Records.

<sup>3</sup>Op. cit., page 3.

<sup>4</sup>Translated from the "Educational Budget Request (1968-69)" by the Ministry of Education.

DWane R. Collins is currently serving as Chief of Party of the University of Hawaii/AID/Laos Contract with headquarters in Vientiane, Laos. Prior to this overseas assignment, Dr. Collins was Chairman of the College's Department of Educational Psychology.

Madam Chanthanom Manophars is the Lao Directress of the school and counterpart to co-author Dr. DWane R. Collins. Mrs. Manophars is a graduate of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. In addition, she has done advanced graduate work at the University of Texas.