

LAO POPULAR BUDDHISM AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

by

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Introduction

During the last ten years, the referents of the term Community Development have become broader. All psycho-sociological schemes by which governments of young nations attempt to assist, promote and guide the socio-cultural and technical changes of their rural communities¹ are now subsumed under the term Community Development, although in its original meaning it covered little more than projects for adult literacy and self-help.

Although the programmes are extremely diversified according to the particular needs of each country, we find everywhere the same concern for awaking the rural population to greater community consciousness and participation in the process of modernization.

However, this conscious participation of the people in their own change depends on local leaders and the institutions which they manage, as well as on their ability to explain the messages from the centre of modernization by giving them a positive connotation. They must also express, in turn, the villagers' reactions and needs and act as a catalyst for the energies and the dynamics essential to the work of development.

It matters little whether leaders are traditional and informal or whether they come from Rural Action Groups, but in the former case it is essential that the traditional values linked to their role do not constitute an obstacle to the modern ideology of the programme. This is the problem which besets all attempts to use indigenous leaders in official programmes; how can one mobilise them without destroying the

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1) De Decker, H., 1966, p. 210

"In its sociological dimension, community development appears as a process oriented by socialization (or by integration) of traditional communities to [a new culture] which will enable people to assimilate the new values and techniques of progress."

bases of their support in the community. Traditional values must if possible be accommodated. This may appear to be manipulation, but often there is more to it than that; for the quest for ways to associate people with the task of modernization is a genuine concern shared by many leaders and does not proceed from African or Asian Machiavellianism.

As far as Lao society is concerned one of the main obstacles to Community Development activities is the relative absence of clans, age groups, work associations, village councils, or any structures which could permit the active expression of solidarity beyond the village limits. There is, however, one exception: the Buddhist monastic body. This group appears as a vertical functional organization with a centre and with ramifications extending to the most remote villages in Laos. Besides this widespread monastic phenomenon, the monk, according to all observers, is one of the most respected members of village society.

The monk's particular position—as a respected member of the only hierarchy within a weakly structured society—has called him to the attention of the Commission of Rural Affairs which is the ministry in charge of Lao Community Development. As part of its rural action strategy, the monks, school teachers and village chiefs have been selected as the three important categories of people to be trained in the spirit of Community Development as soon as possible. In 1969 regular contacts were established between the Commission and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and in 1970 training seminars for monks living in the national development zones began to be organized. This still continues.

The goal of this study is to point out the potentialities of the *Sangha* (the Buddhist monastic body) as a vehicle for change or as a conservative force, and to evaluate the results of the cooperation between the Commission and the monastic body.

It must be noted that it is the first attempt made in Laos to actively associate monks in government action. In the other Theravada Buddhist countries the religious community has already participated for several years in national modernization. This delay results from two main factors. On the one hand, the very intellectualized concept of Buddhism prevailing in western thought emphasizes the ascetic aspect of its doctrine and, as such, sees it as being opposed to development. On the other hand, during the colonial period, the ties between the ruling power and the Catholic Church and the republican tradition of the colonialist state left the *Sangha* out of count in the work of modernization being undertaken and even took away the monopoly of teaching which it had held in the old Buddhist Kingdom of Lane-Xang.

SECTION I

THE MONASTIC SYSTEM; FACTORS RELEVANT TO ITS USE AS A CHANNEL FOR CHANGE

In recent years, several excellent anthropological studies have been devoted to Theravada Buddhism and one of them particularly to Lao Buddhism². It would be useful to refer to these papers as background material, for within this report we shall deal only with aspects of Lao popular Buddhism which are influencing or may influence the process of change in rural society.

After a statistical presentation of the Lao monastic system, we shall present our analysis of the monk's role and status within the rural society, of the *wat* as a center of modernization and of the *Sangha* as an institution (Sections B, C, and D). A fifth section tempers the optimism of the four preceding about the role that the monks could play in rural modernization.

A. The Lao Monastic System; some statistical details

Information given in this section is derived from the 1969 census made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The results must be taken as indicators and not as precise measurements. One must particularly keep in mind that larger or smaller regions of the provinces are under Neo Lao Hak Xat control and consequently are not included in the census. One extreme case is provided by the province of Luang-Prabang, which includes 27 districts (*muongs*) and has only seven shown here due to the military situation. Thus the results displayed here cover only the areas under government control, i.e., two thirds of the population³.

- 2) Chronologically, Kaufman, 1960, Nash, Ed., 1966 and Tambiah, 1970. In particular, for the study of Lao Buddhism, Condominas, 1968.
- 3) Charts 1 and 2 were published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. As the documents related to monastic periods and the age of monks were not used, we have taken a 1/10 representative sampling of the total and constructed charts 3, 4, 5 and 6. The size of our sampling should have been of 635 monks. However, as we were able to study only 5,700 records, our sampling is only of 570 monks. Probably some 600 records were not sent to us but they might have been accounted as duplicates by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The census was made as follows: questionnaires were sent to the Abbots of the *wat* at the time of the Buddhist Lent, a period during which the monks have to stay in the *wat* without leaving to pay visits to other monasteries. The following information was asked of each monk staying in the *wat* during the Lent: name, age, time spent as a monk, birth place, address and rank. The Abbots of the *wat* was responsible for seeing that the questionnaires were filled out and returned to the representative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs at the provincial office.

a) **Size and Stability of the Lao Monastic Body :**Chart 1 — *Monastic population of Lao Kingdom—1969*

Province	Monks ¹	Novices ²	Total 1 + 2 = 3
Vientiane	1,601	1,897	3,498
Luang Prabang	548	1,135	1,683
Sayaboury	327	1,241	1,563
Houa Khong	78	429	507
Xieng Khouang	50	114	164
Borikhane	165	261	426
Khammouane	186	480	666
Savannakhet	1,025	1,658	2,683
Sedone	657	776	1,433
Champassack	604	1,271	1,875
Saravane	144	191	335
Wapikhamthong	234	444	678
Attapeu	39	74	113
Sithandone	690	1,279	1,969
Totals :	6,348	11,250	17,598

Source : Columns 1, 2, 3 : Ministry of Religious Affairs, Vientiane. 1970.

Chart 2 — *Stability of the Monastic Population*

Year	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
Monks	5843	5989	5463	5902	5349	5847	6371	6384

Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1970.

It must be noted that the spread of Buddhism coincides with the spread of the larger social ethnic group, the Lao. This link shows the geographic limits of a community development policy using Buddhism as a vehicle of change. The northern provinces of Houa Khong and Xieng Khouang and the southern ones of Savavane and Attapeu, where minority ethnic groups total over 50% of the population, are excluded, by definition, unless one envisages activities limited to small islands of Lao population.

b) **The age of Monks and Periods of Monastic Retreat :**

The distribution of the age of the clergy as well as the monastic periods of retreat present another limit, though relative, this time, to the monastic clergy itself. From charts 3 and 4, it clearly appears that a very low percentage of the Buddhist clergy is able to receive a useful training in community development and to capitalize on it during later years.

Chart 3 – *Age Distribution of Lao Buddhist Clergy*

Sampling 1/10 N = 570 1969

Age	20 ≤ 25	25 ≤ 30	30 ≤ 35	35 ≤ 40	40 ≤ 45	45 ≤ 50	50 ≤ 55	55 ≤ 60	60 ≤ 65	65 ≤ 70	70 ≤ 75	75 ≤ 80	80 ≤ 85	85 ≤ 90
Relative Frequency 100n/N	42,8	9,5	5,8	3,5	3,3	4,4	3,5	5,2	5,9	7,9	4,4	2,1	0,9	0,9

Source : Commission of Rural Affairs

By the closest approximation the average age of the monks is 40 years, 43% of the total number of monks falls within the 20-25 year age group. This is a result of the belief that all 20 year old men should enter the monastery before marriage for some period of time which is left to his own discretion. Most often, entrance into the *wat* occurs in the twenty-first year. This could be interpreted as a rite of passage into the adult world⁴.

As shown in Chart 4, the period spent in the monastery is relatively short for most monks. On an average, it is of 10 years but the modal category is from one year to less than two years i.e. 22% of the total spend between one and two years in the Order.

The number of monks who leave the secular life for a long enough time to become part of a professional stratum having its own reflexes, customs and ways of relating to society comprises 44% of the Buddhist clergy if we consider monks who have over 5 years or more of monastic life to be professional in this sense or 25%, if we take as a criterion, a period of monastic life of at least 10 years or more.

4) Condominas, 1968.

Chart 4 — *Figures on years of monastic service (Expressed in Years)*

N = 570

Monastic Periods in Years	Relative Frequency 100n/N
0 — < 1	8,9
1 — < 2	22,6
2 — < 3	11,7
3 — < 4	8,9
4 — < 5	5,1
5 — < 6	5,4
6 — < 7	3,8
7 — < 8	3,9
8 — < 9	3,1
9 — < 10	1,4
10 — < 15	11,75
15 — < 20	
20 — < 30	4,38
30 — < 40	5,26
40 — < 50	1,75
50 — < 60	0,70
60 — < 70	0,87
Totals :	100,0

It must be stressed from the outset that this estimation includes two categories of monks whose aspirations and antecedents are diametrically opposed. On the one hand is the monk who enters the monastery for life (regular monk) at the age of 20 or before and stays in the clergy. On this group the monastic hierarchy is established. On the other hand is the man who, at the autumn of his life, when his children are married and have already their children, decides to devote the rest of his life to try to improve his social position for a life beyond, hoping, perhaps, to reach *Nirvana*. Compared to the "regular monk" his educational level is low, his reactions are oriented towards traditionalism and conservatism and his interest in matters of this world, with certain exceptions, is less in evidence.

Chart 5 correlates the age of each monk with his period of monastic life. 157 of them, i.e. 27% of the sampling may present characteristics of modern professionalism. In view of the form of this article, it seems advisable to eliminate the regular monks of over 50 years of age, i.e. 27 units. Thus, we have isolated the group relevant to our studies.

Chart 5 — *Lao Buddhist Monks : Age and Period of Monastic Service*
(Sampling 1/10 N = 570)

AGE	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	TOTALS
MONASTIC TIME (years)	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	
0 — < 1	35	3	1	—	—	1	3	1	2	4	1	—	—	—	51
1 — < 2	102	2	1	—	1	3	1	1	9	6	2	1	—	—	129
2 — < 1	49	3	2	—	1	—	—	3	2	4	2	1	—	—	67
3 — < 4	31	3	3	1	2	—	—	1	1	5	3	—	1	—	51
4 — < 5	17	—	2	2	—	1	—	1	—	4	1	1	—	—	29
5 — < 6	10	8	1	—	1	1	—	4	5	1	—	—	—	—	31
6 — < 6	—	7	—	—	1	1	—	2	3	3	3	1	1	—	22
7 — < 7	—	12	2	—	—	2	1	2	1	3	—	—	—	—	23
8 — < 8	—	10	—	1	—	—	1	4	1	—	1	—	—	—	18
9 — < 10	—	2	1	1	—	—	—	1	2	1	1	—	—	—	8
10 — < 15	—	2	2	—	—	1	1	2	—	2	—	1	—	—	11
15 — < 10	—	2	18	8	4	1	4	4	2	4	4	—	1	4	56
20 — < 30	—	—	—	7	2	3	—	1	—	6	2	3	1	—	25
30 — < 90	—	—	—	—	7	11	3	1	4	—	2	2	—	—	30
40 — < 50	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	2	1	—	1	—	1	—	10
50 — < 60	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	—	—	—	—	4
60 — < 70	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	1	5
TOTALS:	244	54	33	20	19	25	19	30	34	45	25	12	5	5	570

Source: Commission for Rural Affairs 1970.

c) Absence of a Gerontocracy

Our interest is focused on religious cadres having several years of monastic life who can thus be considered as the backbone of the *Sangha*. Our survey was centered on the religious cadres of Luang-Prabang province having more than five years of monastic life. Actually, it is not uncommon to find village abbots with only two or three years of religious service behind them. In that case, they are not considered as cadres according to the definition used here.

Chart 6 – *Length of Monastic Service of the Religious Cadres in Luang-Prabang Province.*

Monastic Service	5 10	10 15	15 20	20 25	25 30	30 35	35 40	40 45	45 50	50 55	55 60	
Number of Monks %	33,3	26,8	8,3	12,0	11,1	1,8	1,8	2,7	0,9	—	0,9	100

Source: Commission of Rural Affairs.

This chart indicates that 60% of the religious cadres of this province have less than 15 years of monastic life, which means they are less than 35-40 years old. Particularly the *Chao Khana Khoueng* and the *Chao Khana Muongs* who, with the exception of only one, are less than 40 years old. Therefore they are relatively young adults which is an important factor to be borne in mind in later analysis.

B. The Monk's Role and Status

a) *The Monk's Prestige :*

The high status of the monk is reflected in behavioural and linguistic forms used by laymen during interaction with members of the *Sangha*. Chart 7 shows some examples of vocabulary changes that reflect asymmetry in social status, especially when the interlocutor is a monk.

Similarly, we must note that Lao is a classificatory language. And therefore the appropriate classifier must be used both in reference and in address. "*Khang*" is the designation for a person and is applied no matter what the social rank of the person is, with the exception of the king and the monks who belong to the sacred group, the "*ong*".

On the other hand, the status achieved by entering the monastery gives a prestige which is not only limited to the period of service there but which lasts in a more limited way even if the monk returns to secular life. According to the religious rank attained, the individual will be no longer called "*Tao*" (Mister N), but "*Xieng*" N, "*Thit*" N or "*Chane*" N.

<i>Religious ranks</i>	<i>Equivalent Term of Laity</i>
<i>Choua</i> (Novice)	<i>Xieng</i>
<i>Phra</i> (monk)	<i>Thit</i>
<i>Somdet</i> (monk 1st class)	<i>Chan</i>
<i>Xa</i> (monk 2nd class)	<i>Chan Xa</i>
<i>Gna khou</i> (monk 3rd class)	<i>Chan Xou</i>

At his eldest son's ordination, a man can again change his title and be designated as the "monk Y's father" as a mark of esteem due to a man who introduces a new disciple to the Buddha's Way.

b) Monk—Layman Relationship

The monk, by renouncing the goods and desires of this world, realizes a highly praised social ideal. His life is without sin (*baab*) and rich with merits (*boun*), which will certainly ensure him an enviable status in his next rebirth.

But also, by his very existence, he gives to all people engaged in this life the opportunity to gain merit and to improve their *kharmic* balance. The monk is totally dependent upon layman for his subsistence and for his clothing and his housing needs. By assisting the monk to live in this world and to spend a life unconcerned with physical contingencies, the layman gains merit, as there is nothing more meritorious than to take care of Buddha's representatives: reciprocal giving and receiving.

Chart 7 — Relationship from Ego to Others.

EGO

Terms of reference and address.

	Salutation	I	he	please	to eat	to sleep	to give
Monk	Khalavat	Attama	Pheun	Si Mon	San Khao	Ban Thom	Khen
Superior	Sabaidi Khanoi	Khapha-chao	Than	Seun	Rappa-than	Non	Ao hay
Equal	Sabaidi	Khoy	Lao	Seun	Kin	Non	„
Inferior	Sabaidi	Khoy	Man	Seun	Kin	Non	Hay

The body postures vary for each salutation. The height of the hand elevation, in relation to the head, palms clasped, turned inwards, shows the respect given to the person spoken to. Any visitor, whatever his social rank, kneels for a monk and joins his hands at his forehead, and bows and touches the ground three times. When sitting down, a visitor will take care that his head is not higher than the monk's head.

Alone, the monk could not survive: the layman's presence is indispensable. And for the layman, the monk is a necessity too, for it is he who teaches the *Dhamma* and gives everybody the opportunity to lead a meritorious life. This interdependence between monk and layman is essential and Moerman sees in the ritual which accompanies these gifts the dramatization of the principle of reciprocity which is the basis of the whole of Lao village life⁵. This principle was very often spontaneously explained to us by informants who experienced it as peculiar to Lao society.

c) The Parish Life:

It would be wrong to believe that monks spend a monastic life, apart from the world, similar to the life led by some Christian monks. The parish aspect of the monk's life is very important. Aside from the

5) Moerman, 1966, p. 158—Ingersoll, 1966 p. 64-65.

three months of the Buddhist Lent, which coincides with the rainy season and during which the discipline is more exacting and the religious tasks more time-consuming, the monks participate in village life in many ways. They are invited to celebrate important events of family life such as the construction of a house, a birth, a death, the undertaking of a new activity or the celebration of a village festival. For example, for the *boun bang fai* (rocket festival), it is the monk who prepares the rocket and determines the explosive charge. And he is the one from whom the villagers will seek advice, apply to for a horoscope, or simply visit for the pleasure of discussing something with an eminent and respected man.

C. The Wat as a Centre of Modernization

For many people, the *wat* appears as an element of stability and even conservatism. However, without striving for paradox, the idea of the *wat* as a center of modernization can be maintained. The existing anthropological literature and our own observations provide numerous examples to support this thesis. By classifying the innovations taking place at the *wat*, according to their kind, we can arrive at the monk's attitude *vis-a-vis* modern materials and technology, the acceptance of new habits of hygiene, and their taste for education, given or received.

a) Attitudes towards Modern Materials and Technology

1) It is known that the *Sim* (the sanctuary) is the place where the Buddha image is sheltered. It is often the only permanent construction in the village, in that bricks and sometimes even reinforced concrete are used, rather than wood.

Bricks and cement are materials foreign to the village and require a technology originally unknown to the villagers. Condominas points out that in 5 villages of *tasseng* Na Khouay, where he worked in 1961, the *Sim* was the only non-wooden construction⁶. This is explained by the fact that the *wat* is, for the villagers, the symbol of their community, and it is through these buildings that they are distinguished from other villages. Also, as soon as a community has gathered the necessary funds, it will feel

6) Condominas, 1968, 1-p. 88.

the need to beautify and enlarge its temple. Whatever the motivation, even if, considering the use of resources, the investment in temples is highly questionable, it nevertheless remains that their existence has preserved and perpetuated handicraft as well as created opportunities of contact and circulation for men and goods.

It should be noted that more and more, the *wats* are replacing their roof tiles by less expensive and more lasting corrugated iron sheets. What is lost in aesthetics is gained in economy. Corrugated iron sheets were first brought into the Lao countryside in 1955 and were considered a huge success by the villagers who looked on them as a symbol of social advancement. These sheets, which can be procured only in town for money, are still an unquestionable sign of wealth and prestige in an economy still largely non-monetary. The monks from rural origin share the current opinion about this roofing material.

2) Festivals, either religious or secular, take place in the *wat* compound. It is common practice that the monks from the monastery where the *boun* will take place request from USAID the loan of a generator, a loudspeaker and a movie projector. In the village of Ban Na Tane in the Muong Phieng cluster in Sayaboury Province, the returns from the 1967, 1968 and 1969 *Mahaxat bouns* were used for the purchase of one generator and one public address system, the whole costing \$300 U.S. The equipment remains permanently in the *wat* and is operated by the chief monk himself⁷.

3) During festivals or seminars organized in cities, the monks display great interest in and ability to handle audio-visual equipment. For instance, during a seminar organized at Nongkhai (Thailand) opposite the small border town of Thadeua (30 kms from Vientiane), when a monk was speaking over the microphone, another was recording his talk. In a nearby building, one monk was transcribing the previously recorded seminar while another was operating a mimeograph machine. This is a common occurrence⁸.

7) Field trip in the Development Zone of Muong Phieng, Province of Sayaboury, May 1969.

8) Participation in the seminar in Nongkhai—August 1970.

b) Attitudes and Behavior towards innovations related to hygiene

1. It is one of the mundane chores of the monk to look after the cleanliness of the *wat*. Therefore, during the monsoon season, the *wat* is kept rigorously clean, which is in evident contrast to the rest of the village.

During this time, the village is transformed into a mire by the rains, where even animal feces float around because of the lack of dung pits.

2. There are latrines, relatively well built, but the use of them is not widespread among the villagers. In 1965, a sanitary engineer from the World Health Organization, Mr. Sritawach Chateketu, organized several demonstrations of building concrete toilets in the *wats* of the Muong Phiang area. The audience regularly amounted to 50 or 100 people and the monks of the *wats* concerned gave him their support⁹.

3. The practice of drinking boiled water is not widespread in rural areas. Water filters are unknown. However, such filters are found in a number of *wats*.

4. If there is one concrete lined well in the village, it is very likely that it is located inside the *wat*. On the other hand, Niehoff, an American anthropologist, notes that out of 10 water pumps installed by USAID in villages of Sedone Province, half of them were out of order less than a year later. However, two pumps installed in one *wat* compound were still working because their maintenance (greasing) had been taken over by the monks. In addition, the area surrounding these pumps was clean because a water drainage system had been built on the monk's initiative¹⁰.

c) The Monk's Attitude Towards Modernity

1. Southeast of Luang Prabang, about 20 kms away, the Agriculture Service established a vegetable demonstration patch in the compound of a *wat*. It is taken care of by the monks with guidance provided by an agriculture extension officer.

9) Maynard-1969-p. 102-4.

10) Niehoff-1964-p. 111.

2. At Ban Hat Kansa, 25 kms from Vientiane, in the loop of the Mekong, the Superior of the *wat* started an English class. Courses were free and open to everyone (II).

These examples serve to show the monk's interest in development and innovation. Often in rural areas, they act as pioneers of new undertakings while the villagers are still hesitating. Although, as we shall later see, we must beware of over-emphasising the part the monk plays as a change agent.

D. The Sangha as an Institution

a) *The Relationship between the Sangha and the Administration*

The territorial organization of the Lao Buddhist clergy as specified by the Royal Ordinance No. 160 dated May 25, 1959, corresponds roughly to the organization of the civil territorial administration in areas where the population is ethnic Lao.

<i>Administrative Divisions</i>	<i>Civil Authorities</i>	<i>Religious authorities</i>
Kingdom	King	<i>Phra Sangharaja</i>
Province (<i>Khoueng</i>)	<i>Chao Khoueng</i>	<i>Chao Khana Khoueng</i>
District (<i>Muong</i>)	<i>Chao Muong</i>	<i>Chao Khana Muong</i>
Sub-District (<i>Tasseng</i>)	<i>Tasseng</i>	<i>Chao Khana Tasseng</i>
Village (<i>Ban</i>)	<i>Nai Ban</i>	<i>Chao Athikane wat</i>

The *Phra Sangharaja* is assisted by a religious council composed of five high ranking religious dignitaries (*Chao rajakhana*). The *Chao Khana Khouengs* depend directly on the *Phra Sangharaja*; the *Chao Khana Muongs* depend on the *Chao Khana Khouengs*, and so on. The Royal Ordinance specifies that the religious chiefs should reside in the villages and towns of their civil counterpart so as to be in constant contact with them. The interrelationship of secular and religious powers is shown particularly clearly in the wording of the rules of nomination of a religious leader. According to Mr. K. Pathoumxad, former Director of Religious Affairs, when a *wat* is deprived of its abbot through his death or

for any other reason, the senior monk takes charge of management and immediately reports to the *Chao Khana Tasseng* who, in turn, informs the *Tasseng* of the situation without any delay. Within three days the *Chao Khana Tasseng* must go to the *wat* concerned in order to select, together with the monks, the village chief, and village leaders, a new *Chao Athikane wat*. Once the choice is made, the *Chao Khana Tasseng* submits it in writing, through the *Tasseng*, to the *Chao Khana Muong*, who transmits it with his recommendation through the *Chao Khoueng* to the *Chao Khana Khoueng*. This last then decides, with the *Chao Khoueng*'s agreement, to approve or reject the nomination presented to him.

In the first case, the *Chao Khana Khoueng* hands over to the new abbot the certificate of appointment with his signature and his stamp appended as well as the *Chao Khoueng*'s enclosure. In the second case, it is the duty of the *Chao Khana Tasseng* to select, in the same above mentioned way, a new candidate.

The installation of a new abbot and the delivery of his appointment certificate are done by the *Chao Khana Tasseng*, assisted by the *Tasseng* and the village chief concerned.

A similar zigzag procedure, from religious power to civil power, is maintained for the nomination of monks to higher ranks.

b) The Sangha as the Only Vertical Functional Organization

Condominas, very properly, points out that this organization must not be understood as a rigorous hierarchy¹¹. Nevertheless, the *Sangha*, because of the lack of clan or other forms of association, is the only permanent *vertical functional organization* which reaches into the Lao rural population. It must be noted that the Lao village, where the family constitutes the nucleus, is not structured by any kind of extended family, council, or association. The village head, elected by his peers, is more an equal among equals than a superior. When events make it necessary, he convenes a village meeting where decisions are made in common. For community work, a provisional committee is established,

11) Field Trip in the Mekong loop - February 1971.

but it disbands upon completion of the project. In fact, there is no formally established *wat* committee.

Many anthropologists are confused in this area due to the ambivalence of the term *Kammakan* which means both "committee" and "committee member". In this last meaning the word also means the organizer, the man who takes care of the job. The *Salawat* is an organizer in this last sense. He is the layman in charge of the relationships with the *wat*, i.e. comparable to a church warden. When the occasion presents itself, he occasionally convenes a committee to organize important work such as repairing the *wat*, but, again, the committee will disband upon completion of the project.

E. Limitations on the Use of Monks in Rural Action Programmes

Briefly, let us recall the reasons which motivated Lao Community Development to seek the collaboration of the Buddhist clergy :

1. The breadth and stability of the religious order as well as the parallel between secular and religious powers.
2. The leadership assumed by the monk in a loosely-knit rural society, and
3. The monk's openness of mind to modernisation.

If the first of these points is beyond question, the second and third present implications for development which are not so positive as may appear at first glance. Two questions must be asked :

a) Is the monk's leadership functional, i.e. derived from and limited to its religious function ? Or is it polyvalent ? That is, does the motivational force linked to the monk's role and status touch upon the sphere of secular activity ?

b) What is the motivational force of the notion of merit, which is a pivotal value of Lao traditional culture ?

a) Functional or Polyvalent Leadership

The first of these questions poses the problem of the process of acculturation and its subsequent consequences. After the introduction of one innovation, in which the *wat* can play the principal role, follows the phase of diffusion, and adoption by the social milieu. The innovator

is therefore more than an introducer. The approval and the adoption by the group of the new condition and way of doing things is needed before one can speak of an innovator.

If the innovation introduced is within the range of activities for which the innovator is known as a person with particular knowledge or ability, we can speak of functional leadership. For instance, a favorable judgement concerning the introduction of insecticides and their use by a farmer well known for the success of his undertakings would be a determining factor for the adoption of the product by his peers. On the contrary, his advice would not be sought in medical or political matters because his social group would not accord him any particular competence in this field. If this is the case, this person appears as a polyvalent leader whose influence springs either from a charismatic personality or from the prestige accorded him within his group. Prestige, we agree with Mr. Declerck, is "a moral authority which has for its basis the respect that the members of a group have for their social traditions. The effect of this prestige joins together the person who exercises it and the one subjected to it; if one or the other fails, the whole is compromised."¹² Prestige is based upon the respect which surrounds traditional values.

The difference between functional and polyvalent leaders is not only of academic nature but also of a functional one. It would be a waste of resources to utilize functional leaders to diffuse innovations not related to their particular area of influence.

In relation to this classification, what is the monk's position? It seems that he is at one and the same time a functional and a polyvalent leader. Functional in terms of his knowledge and his monastic practice, polyvalent in terms of the prestige attached to his status, keeping in mind the definition we have given to the term prestige.

However, the weight of his influence is not uniform and varies according to different fields of activity. To determine the areas of the monks' influence, we used two indicators:

- i. The nature of advice requested from monks by laymen.
- ii. The perception of the *wat* as functional space by the lay community.

12) Declerck, M., p. 2.

i. The Nature of Advice Requested by laymen :

During the seminar held in Savannakhet we questioned the monk trainees about this matter. Our sampling included 21 monks. All were professional monks living in village *wats*.

Chart 8 — *The Nature of Advice Requested by Laymen :*

N = 21

	No. of answers
I. <i>The Religious field</i>	52
a) Religion	16
b) Feast organization	18
c) Pagoda construction	18
II. <i>The Lay Field</i>	51
A. Construction	40
a) Wells	11
b) Schools	9
c) Roads	6
d) Dispensaries	8
e) Housing	6
B. Agriculture	3
C. Health	8*

The most frequent answers were related to the construction, the repair, and the beautification of the *wat* and the organization of festivals. Religious matters followed immediately.

Then, for between 11 and 8 answers given, we find a group of lay preoccupations—wells, schools, dispensaries—and the concern for health, right after this, roads and private housing (horoscopes), finally, agriculture with only 3 answers.

These choices do not depend on chance and point out with relative accuracy the setting of the monk's area of influence. The high score of the threefold area of concern—wells, schools, dispensaries—is easily explained by the monk's traditional functions in matters related to education, health and the primary importance of a drinking-water supply

* Among the eight monks who gave these answers, 5 were over 50.

during the dry season. It must be noted that the ascetic ideal of the begging monk, living outside villages, is in contradiction with this image of a monk-advisor which gradually manifests itself to us. The monk is consulted by the villagers and, in return, his concerns may be extremely pragmatic, dictated by the care to assure, at one and the same time, a moral and secular leadership.

ii. Perception of the Wat :

This perception manifests itself in the use of the *wat* by the villagers. Most authors note that the festivals, gatherings and meetings on the occasion of the arrival of an official visitor are held on the *wat* grounds. However, a *naiban* of a village located near Vientiane told Orr, an American anthropologist : "The meeting is usually held in the Naiban's house if the subject of the meeting is related to the construction of a road, a school or the improved rice program. . . The meeting is held in the *wat* if related to the construction of a *sala* or the preparation for the *Boun Pravet* or the *Boun Bang Fai*"¹³

At Ban Hat Kansa, we noted that if it is true that inoculation sessions take place in the *wat*, the contrary is true when an agriculture extension officer comes to the village. His meeting is held at the *Naiban's* house. It is the same at the nearby village of Ban Done. Both *Naibans*, questioned about this matter, replied that during their predecessors' times, the meetings related to agriculture were held in the *wat* but they personally considered this showed "a lack of respect for religion". Both of these examples come from areas under city influence. The same is not true for *wats* located in areas which have less contact with the urban phenomenon. Yet, here too, it is obvious that the *wat* did not play the role of innovator which could be expected of it. Ten years after Condominas' survey, few changes spear-headed by the *wat* and oriented towards development have affected the villagers, although rural life has changed considerably. Here, women no longer weave the *sinh* (skirt), handmade pottery has been abandoned for modern, cheap chinaware; but, almost everywhere, the villagers still drink unboiled water and leave animal excretions under their houses because the dung pit is still unknown.

13) Orr, K.G., 1967-p. 152.

Innovations are only slowly introduced into such communities and once known there is often a time lag before they are adopted although it would have been reasonable to expect that the *wat* and its inhabitants would have played an innovative role.

This is even more curious as 70% of the village male population is ordained and dedicates one year or more to the monastic life. Becoming a monk may be considered as an in-service training during which time the new monk daily becomes familiar with new patterns of behavior. The existential aspect must be underlined, as the maintenance of the water pump, the cleanliness of the *wat*, the latrines, and the generator are not only symbolic functions, but part of the daily routine.

Lack of continuity can be explained by the dichotomy between the lay and the religious worlds as perceived by the laymen. The villager frequently refers to the monk's way as opposed to the layman's way (*Thang Loek, Thang Dham*). The monk belongs to another world, governed by an intricate set of rules, (two hundred and twenty seven), many of them purely formal, while only five rules are applicable to the layman.

For the layman whose concern is for his daily rice, it seems normal that the monk, whose life tends towards an aesthetic ideal and is free from material contingencies, drinks only filtered water, sleeps under a mosquito net, does not wear shoes, and so on.

Monastic practices which may have nothing to do with the religious rules proper are lumped together in the minds of most people with those observations which are the *raison d'être* of the monkly role. Confusion is not limited to villagers but extends also to monks who, in rural areas, have only rudimentary instruction even if they stay many years in the monastery. For them, drinking filtered water is significant only if the action is seen in a religious context. The aspect of disease prevention is not understood. Moreover, the fact that many minor, seemingly trivial matters of etiquette are organised written rules, such as the requirement to chew carefully each mouthful and only to take the next one when the first one has been swallowed, makes confusion easy.

Because the adoption of practices observed while at the monastery does not spontaneously continue afterwards, it should not be concluded that monks are able to play no useful role as agents of change in develop-

ment. But in fact, the Lao monk scarcely uses the influence linked to his status to persuade the rural population to change their behavior.

Mulder who is very reserved regarding the monk's usefulness in a rural development programme, takes as an example the religious head of Ban Ping district (North-East Thailand) who, at the request of the district officer, tried to convince the villagers to build a new school at Ban Ping after they had already started the construction of the sanctuary at a *wat*. The villagers scarcely paused in their work and continued their work at the *wat* notwithstanding the Abbot's advice¹⁴. In fact, there was interference between an activity decided previously upon by the villagers and a new activity proposed from outside without considering what the villagers felt urgent and necessary. But the determining factor in the villagers' refusal was that the religious chief had been appointed from Bangkok in accordance with his educational degree and, not according to custom, for his saintliness and the time spent in monastic life. The village reaction therefore consisted in not acknowledging the prestige usually accorded to this status. This case therefore does not contradict our previous thesis.

Philips, in his study of the Thai villager's basic personality, conducted in the village of Bang Chan, mentions several times the dynamism of the monastery's abbot and gives him the credit for having mobilized the villagers for community works¹⁵. J. Olsen, an American volunteer who worked in Khong Sedone province during 1967, reports that after having started the construction of a small irrigation dam, he did not find any cooperation among the villagers until the day the local abbot literally mobilized them to build the dam. Olsen's impression was that the abbot was not so much interested in irrigation or in the dam construction but he was distressed to see him working alone and doomed to failure¹⁶.

At this stage of the analysis, we must investigate the underlying motivation. What we must keep in mind is that in the above cases, the monk's influence was sufficient to make the villagers decide to work on the projects.

14) Mulder, N., (no date) p. 16, is referring to Moerman-1966-p. 166.

15) Philips-1965, p. 19. "It is clear, however, that the organizational vigor of the Bang Chan monkhood is mainly a function of the aggressive personality and leadership of Bang Chan's particular abbot, and that with a more retiring, contemplative headmonk—a not uncommon or undesirable role for an abbot—the situation would be strikingly different."

16) Personal communication.

b) Motivating Strength of the Boun

Is there, in the Buddhist doctrine of *Kharma*, or rather in the way in which the villager implements this doctrine a motivating strength which can be channeled for the benefit of development? To what extent can elements of this doctrine be utilized to create a favourable climate for the growth of attitudes oriented towards development?

According to the Buddhist doctrine, death is normally followed by a rebirth for which *Kharma*—the balance between good and bad deeds accomplished during previous lives—determines the type of reincarnation, as an animal, a human being, or a divinity. It is only after numerous rebirths that man can hope to reach *nirvana*, a state characterized by the disappearance of desire, a state of detachment.

Questioned about the doctrine of rebirth, the Luang Prabang monks, participating in our training, did not give very orthodox answers, but ones that accurately reflected popular ideas, as we were able to verify later while interviewing villagers.

Most of them knew little, but all mentioned concepts of *kam* (*Kharmā*), *boun* (merit), *baab* (sin) and *nirvana*. The connection between *kam* and ideas of *boun* and *baab* was clear to them as was the fact that the state of *kam* determines rebirth and, more specifically, social status. The more the *kharmic* balance of a person is favorable, the better are his chances of being born again into a high social position such as that of a prince, a high dignitary or a city man. To the question whether or not there was a link between *boun* earned during this life and subsequent improvement of the present social condition, our interlocutors were dubious. Only four declared firmly that one might reap the benefits in this life of merits gained here.

It is also interesting to note that to the question: "How do you hope to be born again in your next life?", only three young monks replied "to be in *nirvana*". The others defined very concretely the conditions of this subsequent life: "to have white elephants", "to have money and to buy a car", "to live in town", and "to have a big brick house where my relatives and my friends could pay me a visit". Two even added that they hoped to have numerous rebirths before reaching *nirvana*.

The value of the doctrine is essentially explanatory. Of a young man who fails in his study, it is said that he has a "*kam sua*", a bad *kam*. For another who was rich and is now bankrupt, *kam* (destiny) is

also put forward. However, all motivating value is not to be excluded. It is obvious that the concern of "making *bouns*" diverts towards the *wat* and its inhabitants considerable resources in men and money. Sometimes merit-making provides the rationale for a display of conspicuous consumption. It nevertheless remains that there is a tacit classification of acts, source of merits or demerits, which serves as a standard. Some actions, more so than others, are a particular source of merit, for instance, to offer an image of the Blessed One to the *wat*.

But, behavior which at first sight has little to do with religion is also a source of positive or negative evaluation terms of merit. Thus a man who is temperate, who moves with ease in his social relations, will be highly praised and considered as advancing in the way of the Buddha.

We requested the monks of the seminary in Luang Prabang to point out to us the actions to which they attributed the most merit.

Here are the five categories most often cited¹⁷:

1. To build, widen or beautify a *wat*, particularly the *sim* and the *koudhi*.
2. To become a monk,
3. To feed the monks,
4. To make either a joint *boun* or individual one, and
5. To dig a well, or to build a bridge, a *sala* or toilets.

This last point is very interesting since the interviews took place at the beginning of the seminar before the trainees had been oriented to these subjects. The redefining of meritorious actions in relation to development, the explanation of new administrative structures such as village councils in terms of solidarity which is a pivotal value among the Buddhist is in part what the monk's action could be within the programme of Lao Community Development.

17) Kaufman gives a somewhat different classification, p. 183, 1960.

1. To be ordained Monk,
2. To build a *Wat*,
3. To have a son ordained Monk,
4. To make a pilgrimage to a Buddhist sanctuary,
5. To fund the repair of the *Wat*,
6. To feed the Monks,
7. To be ordained novice,
8. To go to the *Wat* on Holy Days and to observe the 8 Articles of the Law,
9. To observe the 5 Laws,
10. To make a *Kathin*.

Conclusion

From the above considerations, if it does not appear that popular Buddhism constitutes a force of social conservatism opposed to progress, it does not appear either that it has yet played an important role in diffusion of innovations. Some cases can be pointed out in which Buddhism played a progressive role, but these are due more to individuals than to a social dynamism which would impose itself irresistibly. If diffusion of new behavior adopted by the monastic body does not spontaneously take root among the villagers, this does not prove that efforts would not be successful if monks were mobilized by their superiors to participate actively in community development work. We have put forward a hypothesis explaining why there is no spontaneous imitation of and adoption by the laymen of the monks behavior: there is a dichotomy of the secular and religious worlds. But no one can prejudge what the reaction of villagers will be *vis-à-vis* a conscious and didactic action of the Buddhist clergy, oriented towards the diffusion of social and technical innovations.

The monk's willingness to participate in community development seems quite clear. Not only is the teaching value primordial for the monk, defining him as a wise man, "as one who knows", and arousing in him positive responses, but even more, the threat of the Buddhist clergy losing its predominant position may be a factor which would encourage the monks to join in the programme of rural development. We see various attempts to recuperate lost status through appropriation and handling of things with a high prestige value almost always borrowed from western culture—tape recorders, loud speakers, corrugated roofing sheets and cement.

These manifestations may be understood as a search to reaffirm the superiority of a social group in relation to the society in which it finds itself surrounded. This is a difficult task and often takes unexpected forms; one monk for example wanted his body to be embalmed like the pharaohs and not cremated according to custom.

To propose that monks participate in Community Development is to give them, within a new context, the opportunity to become the wise men again, the ones who know and who can guide others. It is a motivation which may seem contrary to orthodox Buddhist philosophy but which is nevertheless a powerful one.

SECTION II

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK WITH BUDDHIST MONKS

A. Organization of Community Development Seminars for Monks

a) Background to the programme

At the beginning of the second half of 1969, the Lao Commission of Rural Affairs formally contacted the Ministry of Religious Affairs in order to seek the participation of the Buddhist clergy in its programme of rural development. During workshops which followed this first meeting the responsible officials of both organizations, sometimes helped by monks renowned for their doctrinal works, examined the compatibility between the monk's monastic role and his incorporation into activities oriented towards development, the modalities of his participation in such activities, and the training which should be given beforehand to the monks concerned.

During these consultations, the reaction of the religious dignitaries was from the beginning favourable to the project. No doctrinal obstacle was raised to the monks' participation in development activities. Oddly enough, this seemed to be self-evident to them. On the other hand, some dignitaries close to the *Chao Khana Khoueng* of Vientiane expressed reservations of a political nature. They raised as an objection the fact that the Pathet Lao would not fail to tell the villagers: "See your monks! They work for the Government and the Americans." We tried to quiet their apprehensions by pointing out that our programme was not "politically oriented" and that our rural agents were not behaving as propagandists for government policy, as could have been the case for the Civic Action Programme of 1958.

Nevertheless, it seemed useless to us to attempt to convince the monks of Vientiane, particularly since they were not supported by their provincial colleagues. It was finally decided that the seminars would be held only in the provinces which requested them. It was then that the *Chao Khana Khoueng* of Luang Prabang, the royal and religious capital of the Kingdom, proposed that the first seminar be held in his province.

First programmed for April, the time of the great Lao New Year festivals which in Luang Prabang last almost three weeks, this seminar was postponed until the month of May. Meanwhile, a request for the

organization of a seminar came to us from Sithandone, the province bordering Cambodia, where two Buddhist sects coexist, the *Thamayut* and the *Mahanikay*, both practicing Theravada Buddhism. The *Thamayut* sect is relatively new and owes its origin to the religious reforms initiated by the Prince-Monk Mongkut of Thailand in the 1820's and 1830's. With the exception of the provinces of Champassak and Sithandone, where both sects are equally represented, it is the *Mahanikay* who largely predominate in the rest of the country.

From July to October, the Buddhist Lent prevented the opening of other seminars and afterwards our training team had other work to do. However, the *Chao Khana Khoueng* of Houei Sai decided that a seminar would be held in his province without waiting for 1971. This initiative was certainly encouraging for the future of our programme but, in the absence of our training team, we had to ask the Director of Religious Affairs to intervene to have the seminar postponed until the following year. After our first 1971 seminar those in the provinces of Champassak, Savannakhet, Sayaboury and Khammouane followed at 15 day intervals.

b) Goals and Objectives

i. Goals

During our meetings with the religious dignitaries, the ultimate aims of our action were often discussed and our interlocutors always displayed realism and high ideals.

After several months, agreements were reached about the main ideas which should guide our action. Development is more than an increase of produced goods and services, it is also the appearance of new types of relationships between social groups as well as new ways of relating to the physical environment. The villager is not a machine whose function can be easily re-organised but both the way and the end of the modernization process.

For the Commission the search for the monks' participation had to be seen in a double perspective. On one hand, the monk could lend his moral authority to the cause of development; on the other hand, and particularly as a privileged transmitter of culture, he could contribute to shaping new ways of existing, new ways of looking at things, and new ways of doing things oriented towards the constitution of a progressive society, but without ever rejecting the traditional cultural heritage.

The first point raised few problems if considered as the principle of the monks' collaboration with the action of modernization agents. However, the reshaping of a culture, even with the participation of the people concerned, is only conceivable as a non-final process, generating its anti-thesis, resolving in synthesis which itself in turn generates new dialectical movements. It is not only the work of a few people but a collective move where the receptivity to and the assimilation of new values derives from everyone's contribution and participation.

If the Lao Community Development programme was to expect that the first goal could be reached rapidly and that the results would be apparent as early as the first year, it has never forgotten the difficulty of the global undertaking.

Lack of national ideology, conservatism of some religious chiefs, importance of factors beyond control such as war, to mention only the most important, are some of the many elements which do not allow one to plan for the future except in rough outline.

ii. Objectives

The goals defined above correspond to the final objectives desired, but, as such, are not easily handled since they are too general and presuppose too many conditions. It is necessary to translate them into operational objectives, which may be stated as follows:

1. Monks' sensitivity to the modernization process which is radically altering rural life,
2. Through appropriate teaching, the monk-trainee's free decision to participate in rural development,
3. To provide the monk with simple techniques to assist him in his role of adviser, such as methods for solving problems, etc.,
4. Consideration given to the objectives of development and its compatibility with Buddhist values.

c) Nature of Monks' Cooperation in Rural Development

In the imagery common to literature related to Community Development, the rural agent (front line worker) is a village leader, who stimulates his fellow-citizens to work for the community interest and does not hesitate himself to use shovel and pick. This is not the kind of behaviour that we were expecting from the monk. It is rather from the other side of the picture which is complementary to it that the role of the monk is envisioned within this development programme.

The change agent easily appears as an activist, always ready to exhort the villagers to follow government advice. If there is a campaign for an increase in rice production, he will advise the farmers to extend the area of their rice fields, to use fertilizers and irrigation. If the government promotes adult literacy, child inoculations or improvement of ways of communication, he will again give his assistance.

Sometimes the understanding of the project by the villagers is weak or they are reticent because they do not see any advantage. In these cases, the attitude of the abbot of the *wat* is crucial. The conclusion of the task undertaken by the rural agent can depend on the interest or the hostility of the religious community.

It is evident that the reinterpretation of the message from the center of modernization in terms of the popular religious culture is basic. Especially since this popular religious culture is far from being limited to what is properly speaking only religious. In terms of the sociology of communication, this is particularly true for the villages which are not yet open to a market economy,—which is the majority of rural communities,—and which are not very receptive to the modernist arguments advanced by the officials. For example, at Ban Nam Phou, Muong Phoumachedy, Province of Savannakhet, the *Chao Muong* planned the construction of a self-help road between two villages “to allow each of them”, he explained, “to sell their products in the market”. The argument of the abbot of the *wat* was very different: “Consider a village without a *wat*,” he said to the villagers, “that is a sad thing. And what is thought of people who after so many years are unable to build a *wat*? Here, we have a *wat* but no road, and when there is a *boun* festival, few people come since vehicles cannot get through. Our friends and relatives from the *Muong* do not make *boun* with us and we cannot go to make *boun* with them. A village has to have a *wat* but also a road. By working on the road, you will gain merit if you are bound one to the other.”

Soon after, we went through this village, where the road had just been completed. Several villagers, justifying the work they were proud of, explained to us the analogy of the village without a *wat* and a road. No one told us about going to the market to sell their products. However, it is likely that in the relatively near future, commercial links will

develop between this village and the *Muong*, generating in turn new activities¹⁸.

The monk's attitude is equally decisive as to the use of funds gathered from *boun*. Traditionally, the money is used to enlarge, repair, or beautify the *wat* buildings. However, nothing prevents part of the funds from being assigned to the construction of the school or to any other community project. Such initiatives, not very common before, are now more and more frequent.

On the other hand, once the rural agent has left, the village risks falling back into its original apathy if there are not one or more persons, usually within a new institutional structure, such as a village council, to continue the work. The aid that the monk, guarantor of tradition, gives to these new leaders is primarily to convince them of the lawfulness and the importance of their task, as well as to sanction their function in the sight of all.

The emphasis placed on the role of the monk as advisor does not exclude his participation in manual labour, but all our interlocutors emphasized his participation in this as a teacher. For example, if the monk teaches the villagers how to make latrines, he must have previously attended a practical training course in concrete making. Considered as acquisition of knowledge, which afterwards will be turned over to the community through teaching, the manual work is then legitimate for the monk: the significance of the action more than the action itself is the determining factor. Our interlocutors always insisted on emphasizing the difference between the monk who does manual labor to learn and then teach, and the monk who joins the villagers just to accomplish a task. The monk is a leader and a reference, not a coolie.

d) Teaching Programme Framework

A permanent team of four instructors was established. Three of them came from the Commission, the fourth one from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. To this permanent nucleus were added the Commis-

18) Indirectly, all Maynard's report, 1969, treats of the importance of the road in rural areas and of the social and economical changes which occurred in the Muong Phieng Development Zone after the connexion of this zone to the provincial capital by an all-weather road. *Mutatis mutandis*, these remarks are valid for Ban Nam Phou.

sion staff in the field and lecturers made available by the Ministries of Public Health, Agriculture, Water and Forests, Livestock, and Public Works. The contribution from the Buddhist clergy to the teaching was generally limited to not more than three or four hours of courses per seminar.

The course contents were as follows :

1. Community Development.	15%
2. Buddhism and Community Development.	15%
3. Group techniques.	30%
4. Manual work.	15%
5. Presentation of activities of other ministries.	25%
	<hr/> 100%

The manual work consisted in making the trainees familiar with concrete slab construction, well and latrine ring making. Molds also had to be made by the trainees.

The pedagogy used had to be non-directive and aimed to permit the expression of everyone's point of view, to multiply interactions between the trainees and their trainers. We were thus hoping to orient ourselves towards processes of collective changes and the formulation of group standards favourable to the participation of the monks in the action undertaken by our agents.

B. Seminars Organization

The initial instructions given to the team of instructors were as follows :

1. The seminars had to be organized in the National Zones of Development, i.e. where there is an integrated work of development taking place. This option should allow a follow-up and assure the monks of assistance from the Commission if, upon their initiative, the villagers decide to undertake a development project. The organization of the seminar within these zones of development also aimed to create a psychological impact upon the villagers and to avoid, for the rural monk, a break with his surroundings which would inevitably happen if the seminar had taken place in Vientiane.

2. The selection of the trainees had to be made among the monks usually living in the area, plus some other observers selected from the influential monks of the province.

3. The trainee-monks had to be selected from the professional body as we have defined it. This necessarily excludes young monks under twenty-five years old, whose future is too uncertain, as well as monks over fifty years of age.

4. The recommended number of participants had to be about fifteen in order to permit teaching methods based on group dynamics.

The operational budget was small as living accommodations were made available by the *wat*. Per diem amounting to 500 Kip (\$1.00 U.S.) per monk was provided. It is very interesting to note that the per diem for our training of farmers and rural agents amounts only to Kip 300. This higher amount of 500 Kip was fixed at the initiative of the Commission and may be understood as a manifestation of respect for the monks. During the training, similar signs were numerous. For example, in Luang Prabang, the official in charge of the training, one of our agents, took great care that the rice served to the monks be of first quality and came from Thailand, where rice is felt to have more flavour.

The practical organization of the seminars diverged somewhat from the theoretical plan given above in points 1, 2, 3 and 4.

1. The first point deals with the organization of the seminars in development areas. With the exception of the first one, all were held in the main *wat* of the provincial administrative capital. This change was made to accommodate the wishes of the roving team who came from Vientiane, who objected to visiting the development areas.

Difficulty of access and lack of comfort were partially the reasons for this decision, but the main reason, it seems to us, was the social status of members of the team of instructors; holding the seminar in the development area far from the provincial capital would have prevented them from enjoying the psychological reward attached to their promotion prospects. The inclination to grant more attention to the formal and external manifestation of roles, rather than to their contents, was therefore important in the selection of the training site.

The guarantee of the presence of the Governor of the Province and the Chiefs of Service, as well as the availability of vehicle—less as a means for transportation than as a sign of status—were, we think, determining factors.

2. The second and third points decided the quality of the trainees and the area of their current residence. Depending on the session, extensive variations were recorded. Except for the first seminars held in 1970 at Sangkalop and Sithandone, which the expert personally organized, the criterion of the place of residence was not applied. Our team, under pressure from the provincial authorities, accepted monks coming from all districts. This opposition to geographical selection is by no means exceptional and when the Commission organizes farmer training sessions in Vientiane, it is not possible to select the participants according to the criterion of their residence in development zones.

3. The double criteria of professionalism and age were not much respected either. The statistical analysis of the trainees in Houei Sai, Champassak and Savannakhet shows that only 40% of the monks questioned—32 out of 83—met the previously chosen criteria. If we add the criterion of religious education, the percentage drops to less than 30% (i.e. twenty-three monks!).

Chart 9 — *Classification of the Monk-Trainees in relation to Age, Duration of Monastic Life and Education* N = 83

		Not Educated	Educated	Total
Group. I	Professional monks			
	≥ 25 ≤ 50 years old	9	23	32
„ II	Professional monks			
	> 50 years old	6	3	9
„ III	Monks > 50 years			
	Joining the <i>wat</i> after age			
	of 40	5	2	7
„ IV	Monks < 25 years old	15	20	35
	Total	35	48	83

Only twenty-three monks satisfied the conditions laid down earlier. However, this report must be corrected by taking into consideration the fact that among the monks under the age of 25, group IV, some will enter the *wat* permanently. In fact, they were probably selected on this basis by their superiors. But, nevertheless, the ease with which one leaves the monastery makes any prediction difficult.

4. The fourth point provided that the trainees would be limited to fifteen, to allow maximum discussion and facilitate the elaboration of group values and standards. Work in small groups seems to counter prevailing ideas within the administration and also within Lao society where the intermediate steps are multiplied in order to prevent direct conflicts. Our trainers, as well as the provincial religious and administrative authorities all argued for seminars of about 25 persons. In fact, there were 30 to 35 monks per seminar. This figure may seem high. However, at the same time, trainings for village leaders were organized by the Commission and the size of the groups was set up at between 40 and 50 participants.

C. Seminar Evaluation

The recorded deviation from the ideal organization plan envisaged by the Commission does not imply that the seminars, as communication centers oriented towards attitudinal changes, were inefficient. As no instrument for measuring attitudes before and after the seminar was used, it is difficult to come to a conclusion on this matter. However, from conversations we had with the trainees and the systematic interviews we held, it appears that :

1. Understanding of community development concepts differs according to age and education level. If one monk, 66 years old, without any education tells us that Community Development "is increasing agricultural production", another one, a 35 years old *Chao Khana Muong*, describes it as "the community feeling of the villagers who join together for better development . . . that is a forward step, the creation of things which do not yet exist, the improvement of things which exist."

2. There was strong interest among the monks who grasped the Community Development philosophy and who found in it points in concordance with Buddha's Word.

3. The prospects that the monks would undertake Community Development projects once they returned to their villages seemed quite good. This was shown by their responses when asked what they intended to do after completing the seminar. Chart 10 gives their answers. The totality of responses may be superior to the number of monks as some of them gave several responses.

Chart 10 — *Work Projects according Monk's Categories.*

N = 83

Projects of Work	Group. I *	Group. II *	Group. III *	Group. IV *
A. Construction	20	5	8	15
a) School	4	—	1	2
b) Wells	4	3	2	4
c) Dispensaries	2	—	—	2
d) Pagodas	1	1	5	3
e) Latrines	5	1	—	4
B. Agriculture	3	—	1	3
C. Council Advisor	8	—	—	7
D. Unspecified	4	—	2	9
E. Nothing to do	0	1	1	1

The choice of projects varies greatly according to our classification of monks into four categories and confirms our theoretical analysis showing that only the career monks (Group I) between 25 and 50 years old have the potential for participating in a programme of rural action. In this regard we must eliminate the monks over fifty years old (Group III) who joined the monastery after raising a family. Their motivation is essentially oriented towards improvement of their *Kharma* by virtue of the popular belief that the deeds accomplished at the end of life have

* Key to the classification: Group I : Professional monks $\leq 25 > 50$ years old
 „ II : Professional monks > 50 years old
 „ III : Monks > 50 , joining monastery over 40 years old
 „ IV : Monks < 25 years old

a higher karmic value and are primary in determining rebirth. Of the seven monk-trainees in this category, five declared "they wanted to build a *wat*", i.e. that they understood the teaching in religious terms.

The activities proposed by the monks under age 25 (Group IV), reflect the uncertainty of their situation. Out of 35 interviewees, nine stated they were willing to do something but did not specify what. Out of all possible construction projects mentioned by the monk trainees, this group of monks had proposed only 14 work projects compared to the 20 work projects proposed by the group of professional monks (Group I). As far as the activities of the village council are concerned, the groups are not far from each other: 8 as against 7 answers. The score of 7 among the young ones is due to the presence among them of *Pali* teachers, who appeared very dynamic and receptive to the ideas developed by our trainers. They formed a secondary group which it would be profitable to investigate more closely.

Some answers from Group I offer extremely interesting prospects. For example, the chief of a *Pali* school in Champassak province, 35 years old, said he had in mind to "construct water sealed latrines and to sell them to the villagers at cost"; another, 39 years old, abbot of a *wat* in Savannakhet province, planned to establish a cooperative movement: "I will suggest to the laymen that they cultivate a community field, and with the income from sales, we shall be able to purchase commodities to construct the school and the dispensary". There is no lack of ideological justification and the proposed activities are placed in a religious context. The chief of the Champassak *Pali* school mentioned above also said: "If the villagers are doing what is useful to the country by joining together to work, they will earn merit. The Buddha said: "Any constructions useful for the public interest is a source of happiness for those who made it"! In fact, such an understanding of collective deeds calls to mind the "welfare state" of the great Buddhist King, Asoka, who had hospitals built in order that his subjects would be delivered from sickness and be able to devote themselves to meditation.

D. Operational Value of the Programme

At the time of writing this paper, little could be stated about the operational value of the programme. The first seminars, in Luang Prabang and Sithandone Provinces, were held in 1970 and the span of time since then can hardly be considered long enough for effecting institutional changes. It is in the nature of the required changes that they be slow to develop and difficult to measure. However, in evaluating the effectiveness of the programme, it would be a mistake to attribute success in Community Development projects to the monks' participation since the monks' intervention is only a part of the overall strategy. Apart from the monk's role in development, the effectiveness of other public interventions must be taken into account as independent factors: war for example, all too often shapes social action.

Fundamentally, the monks' influence is not contested but we consider that the degree of his influence should be measured more precisely in terms of sustaining community development work. However, the programme is too recent to measure it significantly. Accordingly, we will only try, here, to assess the monks' interest in the programme.

No systematic survey has been done, partly due to the military circumstances and partly to lack of time. Instead, we had lengthy and comprehensive talks with the chief of our rural agents from Luang Prabang and Sithandone.

The most striking points of these talks are:

1. It is reported that a high percentage of monks speak about Community Development in public gatherings, such as village festivals. They also participate in Village Councils set up by the Commission. In this latter case, their advice can be decisive and their help is deeply appreciated by the rural agents.

2. The monks' work is restricted to the village where they live, except for the *Chao Khana Tasseng*, Chiefs of Sub-districts, who have the capacity to do Community Development work in more than one village. It clearly appears that monks feel themselves as part of the community, with responsibilities towards *that* community, and are reluctant to get involved in problems of other villages, unless they hold a senior position, with territorial duties, such as the *Chao Khana Tasseng*.

3. But a more interesting fact we discovered is the obvious need for guidance felt by the monks. All of them who undertook their new advisory role were working in close collaboration with rural agents. The monks' participation in rural development is directly linked to the support that they receive from the rural agents.

Thus, the direct relationship of the monks' training to their effective participation in Community Development work once back in their village is highly unlikely if there is not a conscious and systematic interaction between them and the rural agents. The presence and help of the latter is essential.

The problem arises because some of our agents are reluctant to request active support from the abbots of the *wat*. This is a respectful reaction *vis-à-vis* a superior. We had underestimated this reaction and for refresher courses for rural agents, it is necessary to give attention to this problem.

Conclusion

The experience gained through collaboration with the Buddhist clergy suggests to us that the monks, with some reservations that we have explained at length, can play an important role in helping the diffusion of technical and social innovations inside the village community.

The success of such a policy stems from a careful choice of the monks to be trained (professionalism, age and instruction) and the setting up of regular relationships between them and the rural agents. In this field, some difficulties may occasionally arise from our own staff, but the problem can be solved through appropriate training sessions.

Until now, the Lao monks have taken few responsibilities in the field of organizing and structuring the programme and it is one of its weakest points. Fortunately, eight monks were later sent to Bangkok in order to attend a course in Community Development more sophisticated than we could offer in Vientiane. We hope that, once returned to Laos, they will give a new thrust to the programme by placing greater control in the monks' own hands.

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