



ISBN 978-616-438-374-6

Book Review:

Dararat Mattariganond.

**Khwamsamphan thang kanmueang
lao-vietnam kho.so. 1353-1975.
(In Thai) [Laos-Vietnam Political
Relationships, AD 1353-1975]**

Khon Kaen: Center for Research on Plurality in
the Mekong Region, 2019, 232 pages.

Sutida Tonlerd

*Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University
Ubon Ratchathani 34190, Thailand
Email: stonlerd@yahoo.com*

This book is about how the Lao struggle for independence was assisted by the partnership between the Lao and the Vietnamese communist movements. Written in Thai by Dararat Mattariganond, the book views events through the perspectives of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). The author illustrates the special relationship between the two countries in international affairs not as communist propaganda but as cultural politics, which is practiced in the everyday lives of the Lao and Vietnamese people. This book defines the friendship of the Mekong communities and is the third in a series by the author, after *Kanmueang song fang khong* (Mattariganond, 2003) and *Khwamsamphan lao-vietnam: Mong phan thahan asasamak vietnam nai lao (chuang kon kho.so. 1975)* (Mattariganond, 2014).

Mattariganond uses the historical method in her research rather than modernism, post-modernism, or pop culture. Her work is a study of Mekong history using documentary research without theory. She classifies the documents into the following six groups: (1) chronicles/tales/ legends written in Thailand and Lao PDR, (2) old Vietnamese

documents, (3) documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (Lao PRP) on special occasions of the two countries, (4) publications by the Lao PRP, the Lao People's army and the Lao PDR government, (5) personal publications in Lao PDR, (6) other sources regarding the previous five topics.

International affairs between Laos and Vietnam were limited to the political leaders, who controlled the destiny of the Lao. They were the traditional royal family (1353-1954) and the modern political leaders, who split into the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP, 1930-1955), the Lao Party (1933-1955), the Lao People's Party (1955-1972), and the Lao PRP (1972 to the present day).

Mattariganond recognizes the Lao historical method, which highlights the political geography within the Marxist anthropology arena. She describes the various ethnic groups that live in the Lanxang community and how they have adjusted or made history from time to time relying on geography. She also includes the result of fieldwork conducted at the Lao PDR and SRV borders.

While Mattariganond states that the creation of Lao PDR was the building of a socialist state (2019: 4, 42, 45), Lao socialist theorists never refer to themselves as being from a socialist country, but from a country of socialist orientation (Office of Higher Education, 2016: 150-164).

Chapter 2 describes Laos as a landlocked country, surrounded by the more powerful countries of mainland Southeast Asia. The Lao political leaders emphasized diplomacy more than political or military policies. The author understands very well the development strategy of Lao PDR. It can be called one of dependency, in that Laos relied on nearby powerful groups. In the traditional period, Lanxang depended on Pagan, Siam, and Dai Viet. When the Burmese and the Siamese invaded, they relocated some of the Lao people into their territories. During the liberation war, some of the Lao people were afraid of the communists and migrated to other countries. Mattariganond also relates the trauma and suffering during the suppression of the Chao Anuvong rebellion.

Reading relations between Laos and Vietnam during the years 1353-1893, according to Lao and Vietnamese sources, the two states maintained their relationship through intermarriages. The political leaders helped each other in case of threats from the power centers. The author employed four historical sources regarding Lao internal viewpoints. The first consists of documents in Siam written under the Chakri dynasty. The second was the Ming Shru Lu (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty). This illustrates the war relationship of Laos and Dai Viet in the fifteenth century (Sakonratnamathee and Pongsripian, 1994 cited in Mattariganond, 2019: 77). The third group of historical documents was produced in the Kingdom of Laos and Lao PDR. The fourth source is a reference to the Siam administrative plan and the effects of malaria in Vientiane after the Anouvong war by the American historian Walter Vella (1987:156).

Finally, there were viewpoints between Lao and Thai sources regarding the location of the border between them. According to Lao and Vietnamese sources, Lao political leaders controlled both sides of the Mekong river, up to the Korat plateau, while Thai historical interpreters rely on the Ramkhamhaeng Inscription (known as Sukhothai Inscription No. 1), declaring the Mekong river as the border (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhon Anthropology Centre, 2012).

Evidence from Vietnamese historical evidences consists of two documents. The first is the *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* (Complete Annals of the Great Viet) to explain the invasion by Vietnam of Lanxang in the late fifteenth century (Methanon, 2011:115-133 cited in Mattariganond, 2019: 78). The second is the *Quy-Hop Chronicle*, according to which Lanxang and Nakhon Phanom were tributary states of Vietnam. The Vietnamese organized a team to translate documents from the Lao language into Vietnamese. The Vietnamese paradigm described the long-lasting relationship between Laos and Vietnam, which did not depend on the Chao Phraya River. Ho Chi Minh wrote of this in a poem about the Lao-Vietnamese relationship (Mattariganond, 2019: 170). This poem celebrated and welcomed the last king of Laos to Hanoi. It has been reproduced until today.

The fourth chapter presents documentary research of historical evidence after the Cold War period. Twenty-five years after the Vietnam war, the US government released secret files of the war, while the governments of the Lao PDR and the SRV used their stories of the American War or the 30 years' war. Mattariganond illustrates the legitimacy of the Lao PRP and the Lao PDR government (Mattariganond, 2019: 115-185).

A resolution in the Lao PRP's fifth congress in 1991 ordered the Lao PRP network to produce literature and historical works, many of which were used by Mattariganond. She summarizes the Laos-Vietnam relationship in terms of three characteristics. First, they are the children of world revolution, who believe in the proletarian spirit. Second, the Indochinese colonies used socialism to organize the revolutionary movement and gain independence. Third, the special Laos-Vietnam relationship stems from the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) and the way of life of the people who live along the Lao and Vietnamese borders.

Mattariganond's ideas differ from those of mainstream scholars, who view socialism as impractical. To refute the idea of "Lao PDR as a satellite state of Vietnam," she gives the example of the Vietnamese volunteers who dedicated their lives in Laos during the liberation war. Other examples are the Missing in Action project and the Returning Home of the Vietnamese Volunteers (Mattariganond, 2019: 220-223). According to Lao publications, the Lao thanked the Vietnamese volunteers for operating their mission in Laos for independence (Mattariganond, 2019: 162-169).

Having studied the written sources of North Vietnamese, the SRV government, and the Marxist-Leninist Party of Vietnam, Mattariganond concludes that the Vietnamese revolutionary movement assisted the Lao revolutionary groups at all stages. They promoted Kaysone Phomvihane and Prince Souphanouvong. The documents explain the Friendship Treaty of Laos-Vietnam in 1977 and the visits of the political leaders of the two countries both in formal and informal activities.

In summary, *Khwamsamphan thang kanmueang lao-vietnam kho.so. 1353-1975* [Laos-Vietnam Political Relationships, AD 1353-1975] describes the nation building of Lao PDR and SRV, which originated in three factors. First, the leaders of ICP understood the historical and political geography of the Indochinese colonies and used it in creating the Indochinese revolutionary movement. Second, the communist international spirit influenced the socialist-oriented countries to help the Laos-Vietnam revolutionary movement during the war for independence. Finally, although some Lao still mistrust the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese are the best comrades of the Lao people. This book illustrates "the long lived strong relationship of the Lao and the Vietnamese." One minor weakness is that the maps in the book are unclear. As Lao studies explorers who focus on Laos and Vietnam, we need this work to be more precise.

References

- Mattariganond, D. (2003). *Khanmueang song fang khong*. (In Thai) [Politics of the two sides of the Mekong River]. Bangkok: Matichon.
- _____. (2014). *Khwamsamphan lao-vietnam: Mong phan thahan asasamak vietnam nai lao (chuang kon kho.so. 1975)*. (In Thai) [The relationship between Laos and Vietnam: Through the lens of the Vietnamese volunteer militants in Laos (before 1975)]. *Journal of Mekong Societies*, 10(2), 21-49.
- _____. (2019). *Khwamsamphan thang kanmueang lao-vietnam kho.so. 1353-1975*. (In Thai) [Laos-Vietnam political relationships, AD 1353-1975]. Khon Kaen: Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region.
- Methanon, A. (2001). *Tam roi songkram vietnam-lao nai plai krissattawat thi sipha*. (In Thai) [The trail of Vietnam-Laos war in the late fifteenth century A.D.]. *Journal of the Historical Society*, 21(2), 115-133.
- Office of Higher Education, Education and Sport Department of Lao PDR. (2016). *Puem tamla hian pi thi 1 khong mahavittayalay visa kanmuang*. (In Lao) [Textbook for the first year in a university course in politics. Hanoi: Hanoi Printing Joint Stock Company.

- Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhon Anthropology Centre. (2012). *Silajareuk phokhun ramkhamheang dan thi si*. (In Thai) [The First King Ramkhamheang inscription: the fourth side]. Retrieved July 5, 2019, from https://db.sac.or.th/inscriptions/inscribe/image_detail/51
- Sakonratanamethee, P. and Pongsripian, W. (1994). *Botbat khong lanna nai wikittakan kanmueang rawang rath nai ratcha anachak lao pho.so. 2002-2024*. (In Thai) [The role of Lanna in the political crisis among states in the Kingdom of Laos]. *The Journal of Historical Collection*, **16**, 98-110.
- Vella, F.W. (1987). *Phaendin phranangklo*. (In Thai) [The Reign of King Nangklo] (Nich Thongsophit, trans.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing.