The technique of the Americans was very much admired. Further, the high salaries offered by Americans made working for them desirable. On the other hand, the exclusiveness, to the extent that some informants termed it racism, was hotly resented. These viewpoints were not universal, it must be mentioned, but they were nevertheless widely held.

To maintain a self-contained American community in a country such as Laos is no easy task. It is only recently that housing conditions, office space and commissary supplies have been termed adequate. Having reached this point, most of the divisions of the official American community are now stressing the need for increased personnel.

Many of the technicians associated with the American aid program fail to see the broad political implications of their work. This is partly the result of their having received little if any orientation regarding the history, culture and economy of Laos. Apparently little effort is made to enable the technician to see where his personal effort fits into the overall picture. Classification of such information heightens this problem.

Individual attitudes among Americans range from those who count the days until the end of their assignment and wonder how they ever came to be stationed in such a place, to those
who show a real curiosity about the country and the people. The opinions of the former, often openly expressed in front of the Lao, do not help create a favorable impression. At the same time little is done by the American officials in charge to encourage the latter in their point of view.

Conclusions

It is not possible to tie up all these complex factors in one neat package. The information presented here has purposely been given in a brief and somewhat impressionistic style. Detailed factual documentation has been omitted, since this is a preliminary report designed to stimulate comments and discussion. Enough examples have been given, however, to indicate some of the specific problems involved. The following are tentative conclusions:

1. Problems faced in Laos reflect in exaggerated form difficulties confronting American policy in many other parts of the world. Perhaps the most crucial factor is our government's lack of long-range planning and our inability to see the effects of our aid program as a whole. During the past few years we have had a unique opportunity for leadership in Laos. Both the officials and villagers have received American representatives in a friendly manner. What we have had to offer
them has been largely a sterile form of anti-Communism, preservation of the status quo and an abundance of material gifts. A high ranking officer in the United States aid mission told the author that it was necessary to proceed slowly in technical assistance programs because otherwise we might disturb the traditional social system. He seemed quite unaware that our aid program has transformed the social system at least in the towns and has given villagers many new ideas. After five years and the expenditure of approximately two hundred million dollars on a population of some two million there has been little positive economic development in terms of exports or small industries. There does not even appear to be much enthusiasm for the Royal Lao government. This should not be interpreted to mean that the majority of the population is pro-Communist but rather that most people appear to be indifferent. Our huge outpour of aid has provoked little enthusiasm; even in certain non-Communist quarters it has caused hostility. In all fairness to both American and Lao administrators, it is necessary to bear in mind that the program's chief aim and major funds have been military.

At this point one might logically ask, "Isn't an army one of the first requirements for the continued existence of Laos and hasn't this need been proven by the recent Vietnamese
incursions in the northern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly?" Further, to paraphrase State Department officials, "Isn't the continued survival of Laos proof of the value of our program?" These statements certainly have much to support them. Yet it is possible to disagree, not with their factual implications but rather with a point of view they seem to represent. In fact, the basic point of view expressed in this paper is not that the American program has been an utter and complete failure -- this is patently false -- but that it has not been sufficiently imaginative. It is quite true that Laos is still an independent nation, but one questions how long it will remain this way and to what extent the people associate their fate with that of their government.

No one has ever seriously contended that the Lao Army could provide more than a deterrent or temporary obstacle to the armies of North Vietnam, to say nothing of the military forces of China. This writer maintains that by concentrating on external military forces insufficient consideration has been given to the threat of internal subversion or even to Communist control through legal elections. In fact certain Lao officials have talked of postponing elections for fear of Pathet Lao victory.

By concentrating primarily on a program of direct military
subsidies, even defense associated activities such as road construction have never been undertaken in a serious or comprehensive manner. With most of our funds going to pay the salaries of soldiers and police, we have yet to aid in the construction of any all-weather roads. Would it have been possible to get along with less personnel, or pay them smaller salaries? Could their labor have been enlisted in tasks such as road building? Should we have provided more aid in the form of materials or even overseen the construction of projects and then turned them over to the Lao as the French have done as, for example, in the case of a lycée in Vientiane? To what extent has our emphasis on military aid reflected the ideas and values of leading Lao government officials or the population at large? What types of programs are most likely to enlist the support of the rural population? Have we over-extended ourselves by attempting to simultaneously initiate programs in fields as diverse as public health, transportation, education and agriculture, each with many separate projects, or would it have been better to concentrate our efforts in only a few fields? These are some of the questions which deserve discussion and have so far received little attention. Many of these matters are obviously internal affairs of the Lao government, but they do become an American policy concern when the expenditure of foreign aid funds is involved.
As has often been stated, Communism is above all a system of ideas that can best be met on the ideological level regardless of whether it is an ideology oriented toward intellectuals or peasants. Our ideas of individual liberty, political democracy and the creative value of labor badly need redefining in the light of Southeast Asian cultures. The United States cannot, nor do we wish to, force our ideas on others but we can make them attractive as possible. Certainly, the overemphasis on the amount of aid rather than the kind of aid and the way in which it is administered may prove to be misleading. The author believes that Americans are capable of representing more than a technology and high standard of living.

2. Let us turn now from broad policy objectives to instrumental matters: the securing by our diplomatic and economic aid missions of certain types of information which have to date been rather consistently ignored. Aside from working with economists and to a lesser extent political scientists, our diplomats and technicians have generally avoided using services of specialists in the fields of sociology, anthropology, social psychology, agricultural economics, human geography and demography. Inquiries concerning basic information on Laos usually meet with the response that the data exists but that it is classified. More than one official admitted to the
writer that some reports were not correlated to give a meaningful over-all view nor were they generally available. USOM files are full of highway, river and airport surveys. No one seems to know how much cash income an average farmer has or how much rice he grows, the way in which a Buddhist temple is organized or what the characteristic features of Lao Buddhism are as opposed to the Thai or Cambodian versions. This neglect of cultural factors and concern with the mechanics of operating programs rather than with people and ideas seems to be a fairly deeply imbedded characteristic of many aspects of our aid program.

3. It is difficult to imagine an aid program pleasing to all parties concerned. There are hard working, well trained and conscientious Americans in Laos who do travel in the provinces. By and large the various Point Four assistance programs have been well received. Some sense of partnership does exist, particularly between American and Lao technicians. But a few positive achievements do not necessarily make for success in the overall program.

Most Lao government officials at the policy making level are in sympathy with our objectives, namely to preserve Lao independence and prevent Communist infiltration at the same time providing technical and economic assistance enabling the
government of Laos to eventually be self-supporting, capable of effectively governing her own people and providing them with some of the services deemed necessary in the contemporary world. To our detriment, however, we have failed to inspire a real sense of partnership for the achievement of these goals which we share. Many Lao elite seem to have the impression that our interests are those of only short term expediency. The points of view one hears so often in the United States to justify our military and economic aid programs are frequently anathema to the people for whom the aid is destined. An example of this approach is the idea that we primarily wish to deny to the Communists a strategic land, or, as more blatantly expressed by many disillusioned lower echelon American officials in Laos, "We are only renting real estate here." Is it surprising that such an attitude accompanied by the distribution of large sums of money often leads to cynical corruption and embezzlement on a large scale? Or as more than one high ranking Lao official declared, "Our foreign policy merits American assistance," with the implication that if this were not forthcoming the way might be opened to a change in their policy.

Our involvement in Laos and Southeast Asia is basically not a short range affair but a long term commitment. This factor needs to be stressed more in our dealings with countries
such as Laos. It is unlikely that this will be done as long as the need for long-range commitments is not accepted by either Congress or the public at large. This is not to imply that we should indefinitely continue our aid program to Laos on the same basis as we have for the past five years, that is, defacto support of the major part of the government budget in almost all areas and complete support in military matters. We should explore with the peoples of Laos ways in which dependence can be lessened and positive economic and social progress achieved. From the point of view of the American taxpayer this is also the cheaper way, as many observers have pointed out, but like many true economies this requires vision and imagination or what has been called enlightened self interest.

4. The evolution of a more positive American foreign policy in Laos and Southeast Asia generally, however, requires more than Congressional action combined with dedicated and imaginative leadership. It needs the modification of certain American cultural traits, which is something considerably more difficult. This raises the intriguing and broad philosophical question of the extent to which we are capable of consciously shaping our modes of behavior for the achievements of agreed-upon goals. Anthropologists and philosophers have wrestled with the problem without coming to any definite conclusion.
How would this relate to our aid program in Laos? Some of these patterns have been mentioned -- for example, the creation of a Little America in an alien cultural setting in terms of housing, food, office procedures, recreation and religion, to name some of the more important items. Is this so different from the behavior of French, Russian, Chinese, or British in similar situations? No, but there is a quantitative difference that has qualitative implications. The American standard of living is the costliest in the world. To duplicate the various types of appliances, processed foods and housing to which the average American is accustomed requires much more effort than to provide analogous conveniences for French, Russian, or British overseas communities. Our prodigious wealth, however, enables us to set up little Americas overseas and to provide a good portion of stateside conveniences. Some material accoutrements tend to be more heavily stressed in American culture, as anyone familiar with French plumbing or British household heating can readily observe. As we have already seen these material embellishments tend to create barriers between the Americans and the local population, even among the élite.

Two seemingly contradictory aspects of American culture which coexist, although not without conflict, tend to be stressed in the implementation of foreign aid program:
action and organization. Historically, America was a frontier land, and many elements of our national character can be traced through the types of society developed during the push Westward. One of these was an emphasis on action, sometimes for its own sake, as opposed to reflection and consideration of alternative causes of behavior. In addition to being a country developed as part of a pioneer settling of a vast land, America is a huge, complex nation-state, with one of the largest populations in the world and probably the most involved technology on earth.

The administrative apparatus of this entity has evolved at a rate even faster than that of the economy. This has been readily apparent even to those who have not read the little book by Professor Parkinson in which he maintains in a not entirely satirical manner that the number of administrative personnel increases regardless of the work to be performed. It is not my intention to maintain that this concept is applicable to agencies of the American government in Laos. What is important in this instance is that the administrative structure is a large and involved one which is in certain respects self-perpetuating. Many technicians in Laos have remarked on the increasing amount of time they have to spend in office work, conferences and the compiling of administrative reports. As has been mentioned, many officials in the American Embassy and
the aid mission have as their functions the logistic support or coordination of the other American personnel, plus committees, conferences, memos, proposals and programming which are part of American business and governmental culture, and it would be unrealistic to categorically state that they should or could be eliminated. Even though in certain short run aspects it might be said that a democratic bureaucracy operates less flexibly than a totalitarian one where the decision-making is more centralized, few Americans would want to arbitrarily abolish all of these procedures and make the process more authoritarian.

Significant in this connection is the apparent conflict between office procedures, often resentfully called red tape, and action or field work. These procedures do have the common characteristics of both relying on "action" in the broad sense to solve problems. Some observers have called this the optimism syndrome in American culture. All that is needed to solve a given situation is more personnel, more coordination, committees, money and more hard working dedicated people out in the provinces. The content of their activity appears to be less important. This is certainly true in the case of the American community in Laos, and whatever one might wish to say about them one cannot call them idle. Indeed, much of the criticism in this paper has revolved about the direction of their
energies rather than the lack of them.

The observations of a foreign scholar in a farming community in one of the western states of America may give us some insight into the situation in Laos. That investigator found that the local inhabitants seemed to divide human beings into three categories which she entitled Scenery, Machinery and People. In the first category were the Indians on a local reservation, whom the family might see and photograph on a Sunday drive; the second category were migrant farm laborers who had to be fed, housed and supervised not unlike the farmer's domestic animals; the farmer's neighbors, relatives and friends with whom he socialized and with whom his children attended school and church represented the third category. Although these concepts cannot be taken over completely into the Laos situation, both the scenery and machinery categories seem to have been applied by local Americans. Photographs and costumes of the mountain people and the Lao are much prized; similarly, the valley Lao are frequently regarded as living an idyllic life without cares, conflicts or tensions. They also tend to be regarded as objects of Communist subversion, charity, or community development programs which will either "destroy" the country or bring about its salvation.
Certainly various programs of action have been advocated here. Essential as these are, might we not wish for a bit more? As a Lao friend remarked about an American official, "Mr. X works very hard and we value his efforts, but we value even more a person who has time to smile and talk." Some people may feel that the Lao do little but the latter, but can we not learn from each other in an atmosphere of friendship? Let us regard the inhabitants of Laos as People.