

CHAPTER ONE

The Colonial Encounter

If the formation of Laos as a modern nation-state is closely associated with developments in the twentieth century, the terms 'Laos' and 'Lao' have a much longer pedigree. Writing in the middle of the sixteenth century Portuguese historiographer João de Barros, for example, employed Lao as a collective term for the people living in a region north of Siam (then the Ayutthaya Kingdom) encompassing the kingdoms of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Lan Xang.¹ In general, the use of Lao/Laos with reference to a region encompassing what is today northern Thailand, northeastern Thailand and Laos can be found in both Western and Siamese texts produced in a period spanning approximately from the middle of the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century.² In line with this tradition Carl Bock's account of his expedition from Bangkok to Chiang Mai in 1881 was published with the subtitle 'Narrative of a journey of exploration through upper Siam and Lao', even though Bock never entered areas considered Lao today.³

The origins of these terms remain obscure. However, it seems likely, as Grant Evans has suggested, that Lao/Laos came to be used as a general category for referring to a region located beyond the Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya as a result of encounters with Western merchants and missionaries who 'trafficked in general categories, such as Siamese or Chinese' and demanded 'general descriptions of the people who lived beyond Ayutthaya'.⁴ In other words, the terms Lao/Laos were initially employed as a vaguely defined meta-

category or general names to describe a group of people constituting 'the other' as part of an Ayutthaya-centred 'us-them' dichotomy. Later, the same basic dichotomy was employed in the Bangkok period.

Predating the period of modern nation-states, the statecraft of nineteenth-century Siamese kings was not linked to the ideal that the political unit corresponded to an ethnic and culturally homogeneous population. Rather, the Siamese political unit was envisaged as a culturally diverse empire including the Lao as one of its subject populations. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the category Lao became increasingly problematic as the geo-bodies of Laos and Siam were coming into being and burgeoning nationalist thinking stipulated that political and national units must be congruent. Thus, from the turn of the twentieth century the Siamese elite set about to incorporate the Lao into the 'us' category in order to link the emerging geo-body with the idea of a cultural and ethnic homogeneous population. At the same time, a French colonial discourse aimed at consolidating and more clearly defining Lao/Laos as a classificatory category. The Lao were made manifest. They could be identified, classified, counted, measured and compared with other groups of people.

This chapter details how the French colonial discourse on Laos and the Lao in the pre-1893 period contributed vitally to defining and placing the Lao on a par with the Siamese in a racial order and how the French gave the terms Lao/Laos a more clearly defined and fixed meaning. It has to be noted that I am not concerned with the validity of race as a category for dividing humanity. Rather, I approach race as a social and cultural construct and my concern is how categories of race were applied on both sides in the colonial encounter. The chapter also considers how the territories east of the Mekong to become Laos constituted a contested space forming part of two conflicting spatial layouts – that of a larger French colonial space defined with reference to Vietnamese tributary rights, and that of a larger Siamese space defined with reference to Siamese tributary rights. Before dealing with these issues I will offer a brief historical backdrop providing a short account of first Siam's and later France's

interference in the Mekong region. For if the French were newcomers to the Mekong region in the second half of the nineteenth century, Siam had gradually expanded its suzerainty over the small kingdoms and principalities located in the territory that later became Laos since the end of the eighteenth century.

SIAM AND THE MEKONG REGION: INTERSTATE
RELATIONS IN THE PREMODERN PERIOD

The kingdoms of premodern Southeast Asia differed in some fundamental ways from the modern states that developed in the wake of the colonial confrontation. While the new states developed into centralised structures linked with a specific geographical region demarcated by fixed boundaries, the premodern kingdoms were unbound and overlapping structures based on hierarchical networks of personal loyalties among rulers. With reference to Indian political philosophy O.W. Wolters has shown how the system of power and interstate relations of the premodern period conforms to the so-called mandala conception of the state.⁵ A mandala does not refer to a geographical area with fixed boundaries or to state structures. It signifies rather a map of power relations between political centres. It was a tributary network comprising a political core surrounded by numerous political centres connected to the core by personal loyalties and kinship alliances. Within such a tributary network the political centres outside the core area were regarded as separate entities which enjoyed a high degree of independence as long as they remained loyal to the centre. This loyalty implied, for example, mobilising manpower on demand and not supporting forces from competing mandalas. Political centres outside the core area were often part of more than one mandala structure at the same time. Consequently, mandalas were overlapping structures due to overlapping tributary networks and they represented a highly fluid structure that expanded or contracted in accordance with the ability of the centre to keep the tributary states from breaking away to form an individual tributary network or to attract new tributary states. Wolters has applied this perception of power and interstate relations

to describe early Southeast Asian polities in general and specifically to the diplomatic dealings of King Naresuan of the Ayutthaya Kingdom.⁶ The mandala perception of interstate relations has also been applied to describe the Lao kingdoms in the Mekong region and Siam's interaction with these in the initial period of Siam's endeavours to expand its suzerainty over this region – a period spanning from the late 1770s until the early 1880s.⁷

Direct Siamese involvement in the territories east of the Mekong, which later became Laos, can be traced to the late eighteenth century. At that time, the Lan Xang Kingdom, which long had formed the centre of gravity for political power in the Mekong region, had been split into three rival kingdoms centred on Luang Phrabang, Vientiane and Champassack. Besides these three kingdoms located in the Mekong Valley, the geopolitical map of what was to become Laos was made up by smaller kingdoms like the Phuan Kingdom in Xiengkhuang and a group of smaller chiefdoms like Huaphan and Sipsong Chuthai situated between the Mekong Valley and the Annamese Cordillera. In the late 1770s, the three major kingdoms situated along the Mekong River became vassals of King Taksin's newly resurrected Siam. The paradigm of power and interstate relations of the premodern period guided Siamese suzerainty over these territories. This meant that the Lao vassals retained a significant measure of autonomy and Siamese intervention was expressed primarily through the naming of new rulers. The Lao vassals could consolidate and expand their own tributary networks, as well as be part of other tributary networks. During the rule (1804–28) of Chao Anou over Vientiane, for example, Vientiane paid tribute to Hue and in this period relations between Vientiane and Hue may have been just as close as relations between Vientiane and Bangkok.⁸

At that time Siam was also consolidating its position on the Khorat Plateau stretching out between the valleys of the Mekong River and the Chao Phraya River. Volker Grabowsky has studied the demographic development of this region and has pointed out that the amount of settlements on the Khorat Plateau increased markedly following the political conflicts that led to the disintegration of

Lan Xang.⁹ While these new settlements were initially dependencies of Vientiane and Champassack, many ceased to accept the overlordship of Vientiane and Champassack and established tributary relations with Siam via Khorat instead of one of the Lao political centres situated along the Mekong River. To further strengthen its control with manpower in this region, Siam initiated a Khorat-wide tattooing campaign in 1824. This reorganisation of tributary relationships on the Khorat Plateau, however, did not go unchallenged. Under the leadership of Chao Anou, troops from the kingdoms of Vientiane and Champassack attacked Khorat in 1827 in order to resettle people in the vicinity of Vientiane. The Siamese response was firm. The Lao troops were not only defeated but subsequently Vientiane was sacked. In the words of the official chronicler of the third Bangkok reign, the Siamese troops allowed only 'grass, water and the savage beasts to remain' in the area where Vientiane had been located previously.¹⁰

Subsequent Siamese policies towards the territories east of the Mekong can be associated with an attempt to maintain these territories as a buffer zone – or 'overlapping margin' as Thongchai Winichakul has termed it – between Siam and Vietnam (or Dai Nam under the Nguyen).¹¹ This was done mainly through depopulation and allowing overlapping tributary networks. As a result, in the north Luang Phrabang continued to exist as part of an overlapping tributary network as a vassal of both Bangkok and Hue.¹² Furthermore, the position of Luang Phrabang as the centre for local tributary relations was strengthened. The tiny towns of the Huaphan states had formerly been vassals of both Vientiane and Hue. In the early 1830s a Siamese military expedition was sent to this region in order to secure the loyalty of local rulers there, who subsequently were made vassals of Luang Phrabang. The region of Sipsong Chuthai formed part of both Luang Phrabang and Hue tributary networks. The role played by Luang Phrabang – and therefore also Siam – in Sipsong Chuthai was, however, very limited, and by the 1850s Luang Phrabang no longer regarded it as a vassal. Contrary to this, Siam interfered directly in the Phuan state centred in the

strategically located Xiengkhuang-area. A radical depopulation of that area was undertaken by Siam in the 1820s–30s with the aim of evacuating the entire population. This policy was, however, not successful and from the 1850s Bangkok settled for a policy of dual Phuan suzerainty via Luang Phrabang to Bangkok on the one hand and to Hue on the other.¹³

Further to the south, the Kingdom of Vientiane ceased to exist after the destruction of the city of Vientiane in 1827–28, when the people who had formerly belonged to this kingdom were removed to territories west of the Mekong. In areas along the Mekong between Vientiane and Champassack a policy of depopulation was also pursued. In this region a Vietnamese influence emerged in the early 1830s, both in the Mekong valley itself, where, for example, a Vietnamese military camp was established opposite Nakhon Phanom in 1833, but especially in the three river basins of Banghian, Bangfai and Kadin. Siamese military campaigns were undertaken, burning towns and removing the population so that the Vietnamese troops in an attack on territories west of the Mekong should not be able to gain assistance and supplies from the local population. The aim of these campaigns was, as it was stated in an edict of King Nangklao (Rama III): ‘to cut completely the routes of the Vietnamese armies.’¹⁴ By the 1840s–50s this policy was abandoned and instead a situation emerged by which the towns east of the Mekong were officially regarded as non-existing and no attempts were made to build up any administration or buttress Siamese suzerainty. On the other hand, in practice the region was considered as an extension of the towns west of the Mekong and the elite from these towns collected taxes from the people inhabiting areas across the Mekong. This situation continued until the 1880s, when the territories to become the colonial state of Laos were defined as a Siamese space proper.

THE FRENCH AND THE MEKONG

French focus on the Mekong region initially followed in the wake of the French move into Cochinchina in the early 1860s.¹⁵ When the French Navy took possession of Saigon in 1862 they gained a long-

desired foothold on Vietnamese territory, a stepping stone to penetrating the Chinese markets from the south. Taking control over this small harbour city, however, was still a long way from establishing of a protectorate over the whole of Vietnam which had been the initial objective of the naval expedition. In order to legitimate a continued French presence in this new colonial possession, it was of utmost importance for the navy and members of the pro-expansionist segment in the political circles in Paris to prove the economic profitability of Saigon. In these endeavours it was inevitable that Saigon would invite comparison with the major entrepôts in the region, such as Singapore and Shanghai. At first glance, however, Saigon had really nothing to offer. Chasseloup-Laubat, a long-time Navy Minister and major supporter of French expansion in Indochina, put it this way:

It is clear that this town [Saigon] does not stand out as one of those essential ports of call on one of the world's great sea routes [. . .] However splendid the position of Saigon and Mytho, it must be acknowledged that these towns do not have the advantages that are offered by Singapore as a trading settlement, situated as it is at the far end of the Malacca Strait, the very entrance of the highway to China and Japan, or by Shanghai at the mouth of the Yangtse Kiang.¹⁶

It is in this context that French focus shifted towards Cambodia and the territories found north of Cambodia along the Mekong River. Together these territories formed part of a new geographical layout in which Saigon was designated a central position, promising unlimited economic opportunities for the French. This vision was based on the assumption that Saigon should become the nucleus of trade carried by the Mekong to and from Cambodia, the Lao territories flanking the river, and southwestern China. Paraphrasing Chasseloup-Laubat, the Mekong was to become the Yangtse Kiang and Saigon the Shanghai of Southeast Asia.

At that time, only limited knowledge existed about these areas and their economic potential, as the Mekong region up until the middle of the nineteenth century had been more or less terra incognita for European travellers. Notable exceptions are the Dutch

trader Van Wuysthoff, who had visited Vientiane in 1641–42 and the Jesuit missionary Giovanni Maria Leria, who stayed in Vientiane in 1642–48.¹⁷ Over two centuries passed before this region was again visited by Europeans – this time by the French explorer Henri Mouhot who travelled to Luang Phrabang in 1861, where he died the same year.¹⁸ Many of the Western accounts of Siam produced in the first half of the nineteenth century included information about the territories in the Mekong region. However, in the middle of the nineteenth century this information was of a ‘very imperfect and of fragmentary character’, as the British envoy John Bowring noted with reference to the state of Western knowledge about the ‘countries’ dependent on Siam – including territories in the Mekong region.¹⁹ This lack of knowledge is, as Thongchai Winichakul has pointed out, also reflected in Western maps of Siam dating from the same period. In these maps the great eastward bend of the Mekong River south of Luang Phrabang was not indicated, whereby the northeastern region of modern Thailand only appeared as a narrow strip of land.²⁰ The vision of a prosperous Saigon at the mouth of a lively trading river was therefore sustained by vivid expectations rather than by real knowledge of the navigability of the Mekong and of existing trade on this river.

A first move to secure the economic viability of Saigon and the French colonial enterprise in Indochina was taken in 1863 when a treaty was signed placing Cambodia under a French protectorate. Subsequently, in order to verify the expectations of the economic gains to be gained from the territories in the Mekong region, the so-called Mekong expedition was initiated in 1866 under the leadership of Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier. It was expected that this expedition would add credibility to the Saigon-Mekong-China vision by sailing up the Mekong investigating the navigability of the river and collect information about the unknown hinterland that spread out north of Cambodia. Although the expedition actually made it all the way to China, it meant the burial of the dream of the Mekong as an artery of trade. It was realised that the rapids at Khemmarat and the cataracts at Khon presented obstacles too great

to make the Mekong the desired commercial highway. As one of the members of the expedition explained soon after leaving Cambodia:

The truth began, at last, to force itself on the most sanguine among us. Steamers can never plough the Mekong, as they do the Amazon or the Mississippi; and Saigon can never be united to the western provinces of China by this immense river-way.²¹

The hope of attaining a river-way to China, however, was not completely abandoned. The expedition's report observed that the Red River 'promises to realise all the hopes and expectations which the Mekong destroyed.'²² In this way one vision was rejected while another was born. As mentioned above French interest in the Lao territories in the Mekong region in this early period of French colonial expansion in Indochina was primarily a function of the relevance of these areas to the economic viability of Saigon. Therefore, as the dream of the Mekong as the link between southern China and Saigon crumbled, the focus of the French Navy moved towards the northern parts of Vietnam where the Red River became the new hope for French access to the supposed riches of southern China. With this re-orientation of French focus, the Mekong region north of Cambodia slipped away from the agenda of French colonial expansion for the next decade.

THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER:
TWO CONFLICTING SPATIAL LAYOUTS

In the early 1880s French interest in the Mekong region was rekindled under the Third Republic. There are several reasons for this renewal of interest. First of all, it can be linked with a changing political environment in France. Following the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (1870–71) the new government in the Third Republic was faced with a strained economy caused by the loss of Alsace–Lorraine with its industries and mines, and by the huge war indemnity it had to pay. In this situation the government initially turned to internal restructuring and did not favour further French colonial expansion and increased colonial expenditures. By the end

of the 1870s, however, the government started supporting a renewed French colonial expansion for political and economic reasons. France was to regain its national prestige and strengthen its economy through overseas expansion. Colonial expansion in general was placed firmly on the political agenda, and thus French politicians now favoured the further expansion and consolidation of French colonial interest in the Mekong region. A second reason for the re-emergence of French interest in the region was that many French colonial administrators feared either that Siam would soon fall under British colonial rule or that the British would move first into the Chiang Mai region and subsequently into the upper Mekong region. Therefore, plans were made to put Luang Phrabang under French control in order to bar possible British expansion eastwards. In conformity with this view the French consul in Bangkok, Jules Harmand, characterised Luang Phrabang as 'the most significant strategic point in Eastern Indochina' in the early 1880s.²³ Third, since a French protectorate over Annam and Tonkin was established in 1884 the need to settle the frontier with Siam became an issue of utmost importance. But this renewal of French interest in the Mekong region raised the problem of Siam's relationship with the territories east of the Mekong.

I have earlier mentioned how Western accounts of Siam from the first half of the nineteenth century stressed the lack of information concerning the territories in the Mekong region. In general, however, Siam's suzerainty over the Lao-territories in the Mekong region had been acknowledged, as this region was perceived as one of the outer tributary layers or dependencies in a Siam-centred empire.²⁴ Not surprisingly, the issue of Siam's suzerainty in the Mekong region became a thorny issue when the French became interested in the region in the 1860s. It was addressed in connection with the signing of a Franco-Siamese treaty in 1867 whereby Siam acknowledged a French protectorate over Cambodia. While the Siamese were given a verbal assurance that they did not intend to extend their control over Laos, the French had all phrases implying formal French acknowledgement of Siamese suzerainty over the Lao territories along the Mekong removed from the text.²⁵ The same kind of ambivalence

to the issue of Siamese suzerainty over the Mekong region was also raised by Louis de Carné, who participated in the Mekong expedition as representative of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs. On the one hand, Carné noted that:

We had always refused to recognise the rights of the king of Siam over Laos, and, he himself, had besides, found it convenient, about that time, to say that he exercised a purely nominal sovereignty over that country, so that he could not with a good grace, formally shut us out of it.²⁶

On the other hand, Carné refers to the letter that the expedition had received from the Siamese king as the ‘magic talisman which opened every door to us’, and territories east of the Mekong – like Saravane and Atopeu – are called ‘Siamese provinces.’²⁷ It is also significant that according to the map produced by the expedition the limit for Siamese possessions in the east follows the Annamese Cordillera.²⁸

When the Mekong was put on the French colonial agenda again in the 1880s, the French challenged this perception of Siamese suzerainty. This change is illustrated in French-produced maps of the region from the 1880s. When a shortened version of the official report of the Mekong expedition was published in 1885, it included a map where Siamese suzerainty no longer extended east of the Mekong.²⁹ Likewise, a French-produced *Atlas Colonial* published the same year included a map in which the border of Siam runs along the Annamese Cordillera, while in another map the frontier is placed between the Mekong and the Annamese Cordillera with a legend explaining that this is a ‘unsettled frontier’ that should be moved to the Mekong.³⁰ A parliamentary report of 1855 had also underscored the need for a regulation of the frontiers between Siam and the French colonial possessions.³¹ A year later one of its authors – the future governor-general of Indochina, Jean Marie de Lanessan – observed in his book *L’expansion coloniale de la France* that the border between Siam and the French colonial empire should be pushed not only to the Mekong but beyond. In fact, he claimed that what is northeastern Thailand

today should be included in the French colonial empire as he identified the mountain range between the Mekong Basin and the Menam Basin as the 'natural limit of her [France] Indo-Chinese Empire on the side of Siam.'³² Although neither these maps, the parliamentary report or Lanessan's book were official documents, they reveal how a new notion of a French colonial space was in the making. By 1885 the Quai d'Orsay regarded the Mekong River as the future line of demarcation between Siam and the French colonial possessions.³³

From a Siamese point of view, however, European colonialism had unleashed the powerful weapon of modern geographical knowledge and introduced new ideas to the region about fixed borders and undivided suzerainties. As Thongchai Winichakul has shown amply, the Siamese elite was not a passive victim of an intruding Western colonialism and new forms of knowledge. Rather, they set out to transform the premodern system of dual suzerainty into modern territorial rights under the influence of the new forms of knowledge associated with the colonial powers. Therefore, from the early 1880s Siamese claims to the territories east of the Mekong were framed with reference to a new perception of geography and geopolitical space in which overlapping margins were no longer permissible. In this bid to define exclusive rights to territory and create a bounded Siamese space, mapping became an indispensable technology. As Thongchai Winichakul has put it:

Apparently they [the Siamese elite] realized that in order to counter the French claim, modern geography was the only geographical language the West would hear and only a modern map could make an argument.³⁴

In his birthday speech in 1884 the King of Siam announced that a geographical expedition would be sent to the territories east of the Mekong with the aim of drawing a map of the territories in the Mekong Basin up to the water-shed, which was regarded as 'the limit for our possessions where our authority is respected' and as a 'convenient and natural frontier.'³⁵ James McCarthy headed the Siamese mapping enterprise. Between 1884 and 1887 McCarthy led

several mapping expeditions to the territories east of the Mekong and in 1888 the first modern map was published. It projected a territorially bounded Siam incorporating all the territories that would subsequently become Laos.³⁶

However, the newly bounded Siam in the making did not only exist as a cartographic representation. In the Mekong region French travellers found border posts on the ground marking it out. In contemporary French publications reference is repeatedly made to how these border posts were kicked over by the French to erase this trace of a Siamese space running counter to French colonial designs.³⁷ At the same time a Siamese military and civil presence was built up in the contested region. In 1886, resident commissioners were sent to Luang Phrabang and to Xiengkhuang. Likewise, a postal map from 1886 proclaimed that the Royal Thai Post Offices would soon appear in the Luang Phrabang region signalling how this region was to be considered an integral part of a new modern Siam.³⁸

We can gain another insight into how a new Siamese space was emerging from a report written by a J. Taupin, who lived for several months in Ubon in 1887–88 to study the Lao language and collect information about the Khorat Plateau. Taupin notes that all local governors on the Khorat Plateau worked directly under resident Siamese commissioners and twice a year they made an oath of allegiance to the King of Siam in a local temple. Similar ceremonies had been conducted in the past. But what was new about this ceremony was that it was related to the King of Siam and not to a local ruler. At such occasions a photograph of the King was present in the temples and the governors heard lectures on what Taupin calls the political geography of Siam, and the greatness of the Siamese King was elucidated.³⁹ This praxis had also been institutionalised in localities east of the Mekong as local chiefs twice a year travelled to Ubon to take the oath of allegiance likewise before a portrait of the King of Siam.⁴⁰ On these occasions the east-bank chiefs received a betel-box decorated with portraits of the King and Queen of Siam. In general, royal photographs were distributed to frontier towns claimed by Siam and were displayed prominently in administrative centres in

the contested territories.⁴¹ In 1889 an oil painting of the Siamese King dressed in military uniform appeared in the hall of audience of the King of Luang, Phrabang signalling that the kingdom formed part of the Siamese space.⁴² In his recent book on the fashioning of the Siamese monarchy's modern image, Maurizio Peleggi has shown how the royal elite adopted photography as a medium reflecting modernity in its form and at the same time displaying a modern image of the royal elite in its modern sartorial ways.⁴³ Photographs and paintings of the King of Siam served also to demarcate the emerging geo-body of Siam on the ground. Yet another marker working to define the Siamese space on the ground was the red flag with a white elephant which was placed in front of the offices of the Siamese commissioners' offices in the contested territories. This flag later became the first national flag of Siam. To link a flag with Siamese territory, however, was in fact a new practice instigated during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.⁴⁴

In this manner, French expectations about including the east-bank territories in their colonial domain were countered in a most tangible way by the Siamese using an assorted compilation of military force, administrative arrangements, the map as an avatar of modern geographical knowledge, and the modern symbolism of the flag. The premodern system of multiple suzerainty and overlapping margins was giving way to notions of exclusive territorial sovereignty and modern territorial rights. For the French, a military confrontation as had taken place in Tonkin was one way of fulfilling their territorial ambitions. But for domestic political reasons the Quai d'Orsay did not support an occupation of the east-bank territories through the use of overt force throughout the second half of the 1880s.⁴⁵ Instead, as noted by Martin Stuart-Fox, the French response was twofold. One was gradually to increase the French presence in the east-bank territories through a number of expeditions, commercial agents, and military garrisons. Second, they sought evidence to support French claims to the east-bank territories which could then be used in negotiations with the Siamese government.⁴⁶ What the French were looking for was proof that could establish Vietnamese

historical tributary rights to the territory to the east of the Mekong – rights that the French claimed that they had taken over when a protectorate had been established over Annam.

To this end a Captain Luce was first commissioned in 1887 by the Quai d'Orsay to search for material to substantiate these claims in the royal archives in Hue. Later the task of the first Pavie expedition, 1886–89, was to 'gather information on the true conditions of these little known regions to provide us with the means to formulate arguments claiming ownership of them' – that is, with reference to Vietnamese claims.⁴⁷ The Siamese presence on the east-bank territories was to be countered with reference to Vietnamese historical rights to the same territory. McCarthy's map of 1888 of what was perceived as Siam's contemporary geopolitical layout was to be countered with historical maps showing the extent of a Vietnamese space encompassing not only the east bank of the Mekong, but also most of the Khorat Plateau, as a certain Professor Folliot argued in an article published in the journal *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indo-Chinoise* in 1889. The title of Folliot's article was the 'investigation of the ancient frontiers between Siam and Annam [...] and Siam's encroachment on Annamite territory'. This title illustrates nicely an important aspect of French colonial thinking on the territories east of the Mekong. First, the frontier in question was presented as a frontier between Siam and Annam, not between Siam and Laos. In other words, the French did not perceive the territories that would become Laos to constitute a separate political entity. Second, whereas the Siamese presence in these territories in the 1880s was a reality, it was linked to an illegitimate occupation of or to the encroachment (*empiétement*) on a Vietnamese space defined with reference to a notion of historical rights. In defining the extent of a historical Vietnamese Empire, Folliot refers to a map published by Bishop Taberd in 1838. This map depicts supposedly the extent of a Vietnamese Empire in the early nineteenth century encompassing Cambodia, the territories that became Laos, and great parts of the Khorat Plateau.⁴⁸ In 1892 a report from the Résident-Supérieur in Hue reached the desk of the Governor-General of Indochina de-

tory between the coastal areas of Annam and the Mekong River, and localities are primarily identified with Vietnamese names – exceptions being Luang Phrabang, Nong Khai, Phon Phisai, and Lakhon – while the Khorat Plateau is not included. (See Figure 1.) In fact, what we can observe here is how two contesting spatial layouts were in the making as both parts – Siam and France – adopted the same strategy: transforming premodern systems of dual suzerainty into modern territorial rights and states.

However, a diplomatic confrontation based on cartographic claims and historical documents on tributary relationships never developed, because the French decided to resort to force. In 1893 France sent gunboats up the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok and forced the King of Siam to sign a treaty whereby Siam relinquished all claims to the territories east of the Mekong. In this manner, the ‘Lao fate’ of the territories on the Mekong was decided outside the region itself. Siamese colonial expansion into the territories across the Mekong halted and the river became the border between Siam and the new colonial construct of Laos. In 1904 the French incorporated two territories west of the Mekong into Laos – one opposite Luang Phrabang and the other being Champassack.⁵⁰ In the treaty of 1893 between France and Siam we find no reference to tributary rights and no reference to ‘Laos’ as an entity. According to the treaty, the ceded territory was considered a geographical not a political entity. This was a logic that ran clearly against the idea of Laos as a separate Lao space. Yet in French colonial thinking on the Lao in the pre-1893 period we can also locate a discourse on race and history that laid the foundation for notions about a Lao cultural identity, something which occurred later when Laos came into existence as a French colonial state.

THE FRENCH COLONIAL DISCOURSE ON THE LAO:
NOTIONS OF RACE AND HISTORY

During the high tide of European colonial expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century, the logic of racial classifications provided what was seen as a scientific means to classify the people

encountered by the Europeans. Whereas race implies classification in accordance with biological characteristics, language and culture were in fact determining. In relation to the Siamese-Lao nexus, an overall classificatory grid emerged in which the Siamese/Thai and Lao were incorporated as different branches of an inclusive Thai race. This classification of the Siamese/Thai and Lao as members of the Thai race was linked primarily with linguistic communality as the Thai and Lao languages are closely related and are part of the overall Tai language family.

Focusing primarily on the period after Laos was established as a French colonial space in 1893, David Streckfuss has discussed how notions of race became an important ideological tool for French colonialists in the attempts to seize the 'Laotian' and 'Cambodian' portions of Siam and how the Siamese ruling elite creatively adapted racial thinking in delegitimising French claims. As I have discussed earlier, before 1893 notions of tributary rights – and not notions of race – loomed large in official French colonial thinking on the east-bank territories. Streckfuss mentions, however, that the French colonial discourse on the Lao in the pre-1893 period contributed to placing the Lao on the same footing as the Siamese within a racial hierarchy and thereby set the stage for the racial policies of the later period.⁵¹ Since Streckfuss focuses primarily on the period after 1893 he does not deal at length with this issue. In the following section, I will develop this aspect of Streckfuss' ideas looking at how the Lao and the Lao-Siamese nexus manifested themselves in the French colonial discourse in the period before 1893. In order to set the stage for this discussion it is worthwhile to start with examining John Crawfurd's early nineteenth century account of the Siamese Empire. This account offers a window into this process of demarcating racial differences and to how the Siamese-Lao distinction is articulated and consolidated.

In 1821 the government of India dispatched John Crawfurd to the courts in Siam and Cochinchina. His mission was a diplomatic and trade one, but in many ways it was a fact-finding mission about the people inhabiting mainland Southeast Asia. From an overall

perspective Crawford's analysis of the population inhabiting the region between China and India is a tale of unity in diversity. On the one hand, leaving out the Vietnamese, Crawford classifies the people of this region as 'a distinct and peculiar family of the human race' as they are believed to display a high degree of affinity with regard to physical form, language, manners, institutions and religion.⁵² On the other hand, within this unity Crawford distinguishes between several groups of people which are distinct from each other: Siamese, Lao, Cambodians and Peguans. Crawford is not explicit about on what basis this demarcation is made within the overall racial unity he has proposed. Only with regard to language does he note:

The dialects of these nations bear each other a common resemblance in structure and in idiom. They have borrowed much from each other, yet appear radically distinct.⁵³

Along these lines, Crawford breaks up the Siamese Empire into various components. At the core is 'the proper country of the Siamese race' surrounded by the vassals of 'a large portion of Lao, a portion of Kamboja, and certain tributary Malay States'.⁵⁴ In the case of the Siamese and Khmers the racial constituted entities coinciding with political entities ('Kingdom of Siam' and 'Kamboja'). This is not the case with the Lao. Lao is purely an overall cultural-racial or geographical category split into various political centres, which are vassals of either Siam or Burma. The terminology employed by Crawford is not unequivocal. In some instances Crawford applies the term 'nations' to these subgroups while in other instances they are called 'race' or even tribes. In spite of this vagueness, Crawford's account of the Siamese Empire is one of a racial or cultural heterogeneous political structure in which the Lao and Siamese are distinguished from each other. The heterogeneity of the Siamese Empire becomes more apparent in a table quantifying each group of people making up the empire.⁵⁵

Another important feature of Crawford's account is the civilisational hierarchy he proposes. His hierarchy has two dimensions. First, there is an 'indigenous' versus Western distinction. The 'indigenous'

cultures and societies are ranked far lower than the Western equivalents. With reference to the Siamese language, Crawford notes that it 'possesses that species of redundancy which belongs to the dialects of many semi-barbarous nations, and which shows a long but not an useful cultivation.'⁵⁶ Likewise, Crawford classifies repeatedly the Siamese as a 'rude people' – that is, a 'rudimentary' people. With reference to the existence of historical texts, for example, he notes:

The Siamese are said to have some historical compositions; and it is probable that the dry chronology of their kings, and the leading events of their history for a few centuries, may be told by them with sufficient fidelity; but it cannot for a moment be imagined that they are capable, any more than other rude people, of writing a rational and connected narrative of their national history.⁵⁷

Second, Crawford proposes a hierarchy among the 'indigenous' people or races and here we are confronted with a civilisational hierarchy in which the Lao are ranked on a scale lower than that of the Siamese. This is evident in several ways. Although Crawford ranked the Siamese low in comparison with Western societies and culture, he regards the Siamese, together with the Burmans and Peguans, as the most civilised and the leading group in the area. In comparison, the Lao are identified as a 'secondary nation'. In addition, the Lao language is classified as a 'dialect of the Siamese language'.⁵⁸ Embedded in this notion is the idea of the Lao as being derivative of a Siamese standard and of a hierarchical ordering with the Siamese towering over them. Such an ordering of the Lao vis-à-vis the Siamese was apparently widely accepted at the time. In a book on Siam serialised in 1881 in the *Illustrated Library of Travel*, it is noted that it was common for some writers to characterise the Lao as 'a primitive stock of the Siamese'.⁵⁹ Likewise, James McCarthy noted how Lao was used as a term of contempt indicating the same kind of hierarchical ordering.⁶⁰

With regard to the multi-racial aspects, Crawford's description of the Siamese Empire was in conformity with contemporary Siamese perceptions of the geopolitical space. This perception, however, was bound to become problematic when confronted with Western notions of 'natural' political entities defined along racial or cultural

lines. If such notions were applied to the Siamese Empire, this could imply the deconstruction of the Empire into 'natural nations' that had potentially the right to self-rule outside the Siamese orbit. This comes through in a geographical memoir contemporary with Crawford's account of the Siamese Empire. The text was written by James Low and presented together with a map of Siam, Cambodia and Laos to the Government of Prince of Wales Island (Penang) in 1824.⁶¹ Larry Sternstein has analysed Low's map and the memoir and he has classified the memoir as a 'sloppy document comprising bits of information both factual and fanciful presented in an indifferent, if not negligent, fashion.'⁶² From a geographical point of view the memoir may therefore be rated as a mere historical curiosity. Nevertheless, the document provides a window into contemporary understandings of how to demarcate groups of people:

In venturing to mark out the limits we ought to assign to Siam as a Country essentially distinct from its neighbours, I have been greatly influenced, and indeed regulated, by two considerations of material importance. The first is the extent of Country throughout which the Thai or Siamese language is indigenous, the second, that in which tattooing the body is not practiced. By these [cultural characteristics] it may with some degree of confidence be shewn, how wide the original confines of Siam were, and how far it may be conjectured to have advanced beyond its *natural boundaries* [my emphasis]⁶³

Although Low does not develop this point further, the ideological framework for race politics in a crude form is obvious – that is, the argument that rule can only be legitimate when the rulers and the ruled share the same race or ethnicity.⁶⁴ However, if the Lao or Laos were to be 'liberated' from Siamese rule, the Lao had not only to be defined as a culturally distinct group but also had to be placed on a par with the Siamese in a civilisational hierarchy. Crawford's civilisational ordering had to be reshuffled. Nowhere can we see better this repositioning of the Lao in relation to the Siamese than in the knowledge on things Lao produced by the Mekong expedition of 1866–68.

In the words of one of the participants, this undertaking was aimed to get to 'know our neighbours of Laos better.'⁶⁵ This implied

collecting knowledge not only on trade and political relations, but also on physical and cultural characteristics of the Lao. The report contains a chapter dealing specifically with anthropological notes on the Lao, Siamese, Vietnamese and other groups of people encountered by the expedition. The chapter is written by Clovis Thorel – the expedition’s medical doctor – and in it we witness how the Lao are consolidated as a separate group with reference to the classificatory principles employed in physical anthropology at that time.⁶⁶ Thorel’s point of departure is the general classificatory scheme developed by Cuvier and later modified by Omalius d’Halloy in the end of the 1860s. According to this scheme humanity was divided into five races: white (corresponding to the Caucasian type), yellow (Mongolian type), brown (Ethiopian or Negro type), black and red. Following the scientific nomenclature of the day the overall racial categories are divided into branches (*rameaux*) and finally *tribus* and *sauvage* are employed with reference to hill-dwelling people with only a low degree of civilisation. In line with this conceptual layout, the people encountered by the expedition were classified as belonging to the yellow race – ‘not only because of their natural characteristics but also because of their civilisation and language.’⁶⁷ This overall category is further divided into six branches where the Lao and the Siamese appeared as two separate branches along with the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Burman and Chinese branches. Whereas the Lao and Siamese in this way were distinguished from each other in theory, the report repeatedly stresses how it was in practice very difficult to distinguish between them. However, within the logic of physical anthropology, the distinction between the Lao and Siamese is first and foremost carried out with reference to physical characteristics:

[. . .] what distinguishes this Mongol branch [the Lao] above all is the vertical elongation of the cranium, that appears oblong and not ovoid like the neighbours. It offers a perfect example of brachycephalic cranium, that makes their front less narrow and less receding at the top than is found with other members of the Mongolian [race]. We have to note that this brachycephalis is a characteristic of race and is not justified by any particular practice with regard to the heads of the children, as is the case with certain savages.⁶⁸

However, the distinction between race and branch breaks down throughout the report. For example, the term race is also employed with reference to branches of race in the rigid classificatory scheme. The Lao and Siamese, for example, are also termed the 'Lao race' and 'Siamese race'. In the same manner, the classificatory scheme is made further complicated as 'Thai race' – encompassing the Lao and Siamese – is employed as a subdivision of the yellow race.⁶⁹

Whatever the nomenclature employed, the important point is that the Lao were singled out from the Siamese with reference to the scientific discourse of the day. It therefore became possible to talk about Lao/Laos with much more confidence than ever before and part of the report can be read as an inventory of 'things Lao'. From the report also follows a civilisational hierarchy in which the Lao and the Siamese are placed at the same level. Here the main distinction delineated in the report is that between the equally rated civilisations in the river valleys and the lower standing of the 'wild' people inhabiting the mountains. However, in the areas visited, it was only in Luang Phrabang that the Mekong expedition encountered what was seen as a viable Lao civilisation. Therefore, Louis de Carné characterised the Lao as a 'decayed race', being of a 'lazy and slothful nature' and as 'indolent and hating work.'⁷⁰ Whereas such a characterisation of the Lao could have potentially ranked the Lao lower than the Siamese in a racial hierarchy this was not the view propagated in the official account of the expedition. Here the lack of dynamism in the Lao territories is not regarded as flaw in the Lao race. Rather, it is linked to an illegitimate Siamese oppression of the Lao. Thus, when comparing the relative dynamism of Luang Phrabang with the situation encountered in the Lao territories further south along the Mekong River, the background for the differences lies in the different political systems. While Luang Phrabang maintained a relatively independent standing vis-à-vis Siam, the other parts had been subjected to Siamese rule which has had a stifling influence due to suppression, economic monopolies and forced transactions.⁷¹ Although the contemporary relationship between the Lao and Siamese races was not a relationship between equals, an equal ranking in a racial

hierarchy is produced with reference to the past. In this rendering of the Lao past, the fate of the Lao is intimately linked to that of Vientiane – ‘*la celebre métropole du Laos*.’⁷² Thus, the Kingdom of Vientiane is presented as a kingdom that flourished already in the late fourteenth century and a fragmentary history of this kingdom is presented.⁷³ Vientiane is elevated to a symbol of the greatness and glory of the Lao in a distant past which later was destroyed by the Siamese who left ‘nothing existing of the Laotian nationality but a name, and to make of Vien-Chan [Vientiane], its principal centre, a mass of ruins.’⁷⁴ Chao Anou’s uprising is thus interpreted as a valiant attempt to liberate the Lao from Siamese expansion designed to include all the members of the Thai race in Siam. The destruction of Vientiane epitomises the essence of an unacceptable historical process of Siamese expansion into the Lao territories in the Mekong region:

[T]hus a flourishing capital has been annihilated in our own days, and an entire people has, in some sort, disappeared, without Europe ever having suspected such scenes of desolation – without even a solitary echo of this long cry having reached her.⁷⁵

Or, as it later was summarised succinctly by Taupin in his report to the Governor-General in Cochinchina:

One can conclude [...] that Laos, powerful in the first centuries of our era, thriving and flourishing in the sixteenth century, has seen its greatness decline rapidly and has ended up in a rank of slaves of its first cousin: Siam. The Lao people have no [notions about their] history, they do not possess any of the great historic traditions which can form the basis for patriotic feeling and the idea of nationality. Nevertheless, the instinct of race is not completely absent. It owns in this field a feeling intense enough, and its regrets expressed in the elegies about the ancient Vien-Chan resemble the lament of Jeremiah.⁷⁶

It is with reference to this historical projection that the French colonial expansion was viewed as a legitimate interference to undo the injustice done to an Asian ‘nation’ – the Lao. The early beginnings of a French colonial discourse on Laos and the Lao were com-

ing into being, where the survival of this ‘intelligent and gentle race’ is intimately linked with the French colonial project under the guise of the *mission civilisatrice*.⁷⁷ In that connection it is interesting to see how external influences are linked with a positive impact on Laos and the Lao. In the past, such an external influence is linked with a Chinese domination which later was eclipsed by the despotism of the Siamese or Burmese. In this way, an ideological framework for French intervention is established:

This domination [the Chinese], benevolent and wise, which stimulated production instead of weakening it, and increased the well-being and the vital strength of the subject population by raising it on the ladder of civilisation, bequeaths today to European powers a role which she [China] no longer is capable of fulfilling. [...] France cannot renounce the moral and civilising role which it is her responsibility [to play] in this gradual emancipation of these so interesting populations in the interior of Indo-China; she [France] must not forget that this emancipation is the express condition for the commercial freedom and franchises necessary for establishing profitable relations for our industry. The suzerainty of an Asiatic government always means monopoly, compulsory transactions, [and, as a consequence] motionlessness; [in comparison] European intervention in the nineteenth century means commercial freedom, progress and wealth.⁷⁸

The Pavie expeditions are also of central importance to the framing of French colonial expansion into the Mekong region and perceptions of the Lao past. In connection with the first expedition (1886–89) to Upper Laos, Pavie spent considerable time in Luang Phrabang in an attempt to establish a close relationship with the court and counter the Siamese presence. In that connection he was in Luang Phrabang in June 1887 when the town was sacked by marauding Ho – Chinese troops from southern China. During the attacks he helped save the King of Luang Phrabang from the troops. This event became crucial for the framing of French representations of the colonial enterprise in Laos. According to Pavie, it made the king declare that he would offer the kingdom as a gift to France and thereby became iconographic for representing French colonial expansion into Laos as a ‘conquest of hearts.’⁷⁹

Further, it is through Pavier that the Lao were given a written history based on indigenous chronicles handed over to him by the King of Luang Phrabang in 1887 after Pavier supposedly saved his life. These Lao chronicles were copied, translated and later published. With these in hand it was now possible to document a continuous Lao history stretching back to the middle of the fourteenth century. In the manuscript *Abrégé de l'histoire pays de Lan-Cchang, Hom-Khao* a myth of origins of the Lao is first presented. It is followed by a brief outline of the Kings of Lan Xang from when the kingdom was founded by King Fa Ngum in 1353 until the kingdom was divided into two parts in 1707. Only a few lines are subsequently devoted to the following fate of Vientiane, while the history of Luang Phrabang is followed up to 1836.⁸⁰ The same sense of a continuous history spanning almost five centuries is depicted in the manuscript *Chronologie de l'histoire de pays de Lan-Cchang, Hom-Khao*, where the chronological table itself spans the period from 1559 till 1845, while the introductory text links this period with that of the mythical past of King Borom.⁸¹ These chronicles brought the Lan Xang Kingdom out of the mists of time and made the history of Lan Xang synonymous with the history of the Lao in the Mekong valley. The brief outline of the history of the Lan Xang Kingdom that had been delineated around thirty years earlier in the official report of the Mekong expedition was substantiated. With reference to the Lan Xang Kingdom the Lao were placed as actors on the historical scene alongside with the Siamese kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. We have earlier seen how reference to historical Vietnamese tributary rights formed one strategy for the French to counter Siamese endeavours to incorporate territories east of the Mekong into Siam. Here we encounter the outline of another path whereby the Siamese presence is refuted by referring to past Lao splendour. In the words of Pavier:

What is revealed in them [the chronicles] about the relations with the neighbours: China, Annam, Burma and Siam is very suggestive as to what concerns this latter empire. [...]. Incontestably written fully in freedom, they [the chronicles] give a clearly negative note of

her [Siam's] pretensions. They say that of the four countries Siam is the only one to which Luang Phrabang never had to bow. They say that in ancient times Siam brought tribute to the kings of Lan-Chang [Xang]. [...] These findings have shown why the Siamese agents had desired to see me unaware of everything except the present about these territories.⁸²

The Lao were not only given a past; but they also possessed a written tradition symbolising a flourishing civilisation of the past. The written history was an important mark of civilisation vis-à-vis the Siamese. Lefèvre-Pontalis, a member of the Pavie expedition, summarised nicely the importance of these chronicles for the perception of the Lao in the following way:

Of course the Siamese have destroyed, smashed and carried away many things. But, by the fact that they acted as conquerors and sowed fear along their way [southwards], many things would escape them and would never belong to them. Not least of which was a desire for independence, for the [Siamese] never succeeded in smothering the memory of their past of the Laotian populations, nor did they [the Siamese] destroy the chronicles that celebrate it [the Lao past]. Not only did the members of the Pavie mission obtain very important [chronicles], but even in places where their disappearance seemed clear, they [the members of the Pavie mission] were able to certify their existence – 'All was burned', said the Siamese. Or even better: 'Those people are savages. How can you think that they actually have books?'⁸³

Massie, another member of the Pavie expedition and later (vice) consul in Luang Phrabang, put it this way:

What an error to treat the Laotians as savages! On the contrary, they are a civilised – very civilised – people, possessing their own language and writing, more than 3,000 years old, and an original literature. Education is found in all villages. Hundreds of years ago we were savages ourselves; and today, I do not know who deserves the most this epithet – our peasants or the Laotians. To have an idea about Luang Phrabang, move Athens of the antique time to Haiti and let it evolve in this environment.⁸⁴

In this way, the Lao were liberated from a subordinate position in relation to the Siamese. The key was the reference to the glory of a distant past. At the same time, however, they were placed in a new hierarchy subordinate to the Vietnamese. The east-bank territories were not only – as we saw in the last section – associated with Vietnamese tributary rights, but in the French colonial discourse the Vietnamese were closely associated with the French colonial project in the Lao territories. Thus, the Vietnamese are pictured as a sedulous race that can be turned into a catalyst bringing development and progress to the Lao territories. This is evoked by Carné when confronted with the village of Lakhon – Nakhon Phanom – on the banks of the Mekong, peopled by Vietnamese:

At the sight of this simple village, which was busy as an ant-hill, one could not but hope that Annamite emigration would be still more developed in Laos; for the Annamites would be like leaven in heavy dough, among the Laotians. Essentially similar in both their good and bad points, they would be most useful, and the leading instrument of our policy in these countries.⁸⁵

Or, as it is phrased in the concluding chapter of the account of the expedition compiled by Francis Garnier:

The Annamese [Vietnamese] have, following the example of the Chinese, been endowed with expansionist and colonising qualities of an excessively remarkable type. They took possession of the Delta of Cambodia only just at the beginning of this century and today this region is one of the best cultivated and most rich on the Chinese seas. Thus the pioneers are capable of taking the place of the settlers that we lack and extend our influence and commerce to the interior of the Indochinese peninsula.⁸⁶

While both the Siamese and Vietnamese were associated with expansionist capacities, in this colonial logic they were not linked with the same qualities. A set of polarities was set up whereby the Siamese were linked with an oppressive influence whereas the Vietnamese – by means of Chinese influences – were imbued with a ‘democratic spirit’ and individual initiative. The stifling influence of

the Siamese was to be countered with the industrious Vietnamese who would serve both 'the interests of France and of civilisation.'⁸⁷ The Vietnamese were thus presented as an integrated part of the French civilising mission that – in this specific case – aimed at liberating the Lao from their subordinate position in relation to the Siamese and help the Lao attain a more refined and developed position in the human hierarchy.

The same vision of the superiority of the Vietnamese was embedded in the writings of Jules Harmand, who travelled in the Mekong region in 1870s and later became French Minister in Bangkok.⁸⁸ In a short article published in an anthropological journal in 1875, Harmand delineated a hierarchy of races in Indochina. At the top of this hierarchy Harmand placed the Vietnamese. Although he knows that he may be labelled an uncritical 'annamitophile', for Harmand there is no doubt: despite the 'vices' and 'immorality' of the Vietnamese he recognises them as 'notably superior, as a nation, to their neighbours of Siam, Cambodia and Laos.'⁸⁹ Therefore, according to Harmand, the Vietnamese were to become the tool for French colonial expansion and it was this race that should be allowed to colonise the major part of Indochina.⁹⁰ He repeated the same view in an address to the Quai d'Orsay in 1892 when he pushed for French expansion into the Mekong region and he linked French colonial expansion into this region with the fulfilment of the historical destiny of this superior race with expansionist qualities.⁹¹ This position had already been set out by Le Myre de Vilers in 1881 in connection with the dream of reaching the 'rich provinces of the Upper Mekong' to form a vast Indochinese Empire as a substitute for the 'loss' of India. This project is associated with Vietnamese advisers whose:

[...] fathers conquered Ciampa [Champa]. Their race has spread to Cambodia and has already passed the rapids at Sambor. They are not surprised by our dreams. We only follow the traditions of this *nationalité conquérante*.⁹²

This chapter has focused on the racial and spatial aspects of the process that brought Laos into being as a territorial entity in the

late nineteenth century. Whereas the outcome of this process was to de-link Laos from the Siamese geo-body, the fate of Laos within the colonial space of Indochina was by no means given. The French colonial discourse on the Lao had outlined two possible trajectories. First, Laos could be turned into a de facto Vietnamese space perceived as a territory defined with reference to tributary rights and peopled by Vietnamese, who would pull the Lao out of their torpor or even replace them. Second, Laos could be turned into a Lao space perceived as a resurrection of the Lao kingdom – or kingdoms – of the past that the Siamese had destroyed so utterly. Within Indochina Laos was a contested space. In the following chapter we shall see how Laos also remained a contested space from a Thai perspective in the period after 1893.

NOTES

1. See Joaquim De Campos, 'Early Portuguese Accounts of Thailand', *Journal of the Siam Society*, 32:1, 1940, p. 9.
2. A general overview of early Western accounts dealing with Lao/Laos can be found in Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosrivathana, 'Early European Impressions of the Lao', in Mayoury Ngaosrivathana and Kennon Breazeale (eds), *Breaking New Ground in Lao History. Essays on the Seventh to Twentieth Centuries* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), pp. 95–149. For Thai usage of Lao/Laos in the early Bangkok period, see Thaveesilp Subwattana, "'Lao' nai thatsana khong thai samai ratanakosin' ['Lao' in the view of Thai rulers in the early Ratanakosin period], *Codmai Khao Sangkhomsat*, 11:1, 1988, pp. 104–121.
3. Carl Bock, *Temples and Elephants. The Narrative of a Journey of Exploration through Upper Siam and Lao* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1985 [1884]).
4. Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos: The Land In-Between* (Crow's Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), p. 22. For a possible genealogy, see Jit Pumisak, *Khwan pen ma khong kham sayam, thai, lao lae khom lae laksana thang sangkhom khong chue chon chat* [Origins of the words Siam, Thai, Lao and Khom and social characteristics of nationality names] (Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1981), pp. 579–611, or Michel Lorrillard, 'Les Chroniques Royales du Laos. Contribution à la connaissance historique des royaumes lao (1316–1887)' (PhD thesis, Paris: École des Hautes Études, 1995), pp. 329–338.
5. O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

6. O.W. Wolters, 'Ayudhaya and the Rearward Part of the World', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 & 4, 1968, pp. 166–178. The applicability of these notions to the kingdom of Ayutthaya has further been discussed by Sunait Chutintaranond, "Mandala," "Segmentary State" and Politics of Centralization in Medieval Ayudhaya', *Journal of the Siam Society*, 78:1, 1990, pp. 89–100. It is the same notion of power relations that is embodied in the perception of the 'galactic polity' proposed by Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Backdrop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
7. See Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geobody of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994); Evans, *A Short History of Laos*.
8. Kennon Breazeale, 'The Integration of the Lao States into the Thai Kingdom' (PhD thesis, Oxford: University of Oxford, 1975), p. 6. For a general overview of the history of the Lan Xang Kingdom and the dynamics that led to its disintegration, see Martin Stuart-Fox, *The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng: Rise and Decline* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998).
9. Volker Grabowsky, 'The Isan up to its Integration into the Siamese State', in Volker Grabowsky (ed.), *Regions and National Integration in Thailand 1892–1992* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), pp. 107–129.
10. Quoted in Mayoury Ngaosyvathn and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Paths to Conflagration. Fifty Years of Diplomacy and Warfare in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, 1778–1828* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1998), p. 60. This book offers a modern Lao nationalist account of these events. For another interpretation see Evans, *A Short History*, p. 25. Evans offers an insightful and critical discussion of different interpretations of Chao Anou in Grant Evans, 'Different Paths: Lao Historiography in Historical Perspective', in Christopher E. Goscha and Søren Ivarsson (eds), *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the Crossroads* (NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, No. 32, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), pp. 97–110
11. Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, pp. 97–101.
12. Breazeale, 'The Integration of the Lao States', pp. 11–12.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 18. The campaigns undertaken to depopulate Phuan are dealt with in Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos* (Monograph Series, No. 31, New Haven: Yale University of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), pp. 9–22.
14. Breazeale, 'The Integration of the Lao States', p. 20.

15. A general account of French colonial policies in Indochina can be found in Martin Stuart-Fox, 'The French in Laos, 1887–1945', in Martin Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist Kingdom. The Making of Modern Laos* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1996), pp. 17–36. For a detailed study taking the political climate in France and its implications for the colonial policies in Indochina into account, see Patrick Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb. The French Threat to Siamese Independence, 1858–1907* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1995).
16. Quoted in Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, pp. 16–17.
17. Jean-Claude Lejosne (translation and comments), *Le journal de voyage de G. van Wuysthoff et de ses assistants au Laos, 1641–1642* (Metz: Centre de Documentation et d'Information sur le Laos, 1993). Giovanni Filippo de Marini, *A New and Interesting Description of the Lao Kingdom, 1642–1648* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998 [1666]).
18. Henri Mouhot, *Voyages dans les Royaumes de Siam de Cambodge et de Laos* (Genève: Éditions Olizane, 1989 [1868]).
19. John Bowring, *The Kingdom and the People of Siam* (Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969 [1857]), Vol. II, p. 1.
20. Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, p. 115. See for example 'Map of the Kingdom of Siam and Cochinchina' in John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967 [1828]), without page; or 'Map of Siam and the Adjacent Countries', in Frederick Arthur Neale, *Narrative of a Residence at the Capital of the Kingdom of Siam with a Description of the Manners, Customs, and Laws of the Modern Siamese* (Bangkok: White Lotus Co, without year [1852]), without page. For a series of historical maps of Siam, see Lucien Fournereau, 'Le Siam Ancien', *Annales du Musée Guimet*, 27, 1895, pp. 1–43.
21. Louis de Carné, *Travels on the Mekong, Cambodia, Laos and Yunnan. The Political and Trade Report of the Mekong Exploration Commission* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1995 [1872]), pp. 99–100.
22. Carné, *Travels on the Mekong*, p. 362.
23. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, p. 63.
24. See, for example, Neale, *Narrative of a Residence*, p. 67; or Bowring, *The Kingdom and the People of Siam*, Vol. I, p. 3.
25. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, pp. 28–29.
26. Carné, *Travels on the Mekong*, p. 35.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 88.

28. Ibid., without page. See also Malte-Brun's 'Carte du Royaume de Siam de la Cochinchine Française et du Royaume de Cambodge d'après les documents les plus récents, 1878' in Amédée Gréhan, *Le Royaume de Siam* (Paris: Challamelainé, 1878), without page.
29. Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 78.
30. The first map is 'Carte spéciale du Tong-King' and the second is 'Voies de pénétration en Chine', in H. Mager, *Atlas colonial* (Paris: Charles Bayle, 1885).
31. Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 78.
32. Quoted in Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East* (London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1895), pp. 469–470.
33. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, p. 81. This colonial space had actually been anticipated by the Catholic missions in Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina whose domains were limited by the Mekong in the west, see Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 88.
34. Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, p. 121.
35. Quoted in 'Consulat de France à Bangkok à Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Bangkok, le 4 octobre 1884', d. 13536, GGI, CAOM.
36. See James McCarthy, 'Siam', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 10:3, 1888, pp. 117–134.
37. See, for example, Charles Lemire, *Le Laos Annamite. Affaires Franco-Siamoises* (Paris: Augustin Challamel, 1894), pp. 19, 36, 70.
38. Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 98.
39. J. Taupin, 'Rapport à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général', *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, 2:3, 1889, pp. 83–84.
40. Lemire, *Le Laos Annamite*, pp. 41–43.
41. Breazeale, 'The Integration of the Lao States', p. 275.
42. 'Copie du journal du poste de Luang Prabang et de la mission d'étude pour la période le 27 mars à le 20 avril 1889, rédigé par Monsieur Massié', d. 14403, GGI, CAOM.
43. Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).
44. Snit and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, p. 98. For a discussion of the birth and politics of the Thai national flag, see Chanida Phromphayak Phueaksom, *Kan mueang nai prawatisat thong chat thai* [Politics in the history of the Thai national colours] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2003).
45. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, pp. 83–84.
46. Stuart-Fox, 'The French in Laos', p. 20.

47. In Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, p. 87.
48. Folliot, 'Examen des anciennes frontières entre le Siam et l'Annam, d'après la carte de Monseigneur Taberd, et des empiétements des Siamois sur le territoire Annamite', *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, 2, 1889, pp. 21–24. For information about Bishop Taberd's map, see Tam Quach-Langlet, 'La perception des frontières dans l'Ancien Viêt Nam à travers quelques cartes vietnamiennes et occidentales', in P.B. Lafont (ed.), *Les Frontières du Vietnam, Histoire des frontières de la Péninsule Indochinoise* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1989), p. 47, for the map itself see pp. 60–61.
49. 'Rapport à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général sur les territoires du Laos Annamite occupés par les Siamois, le 7 septembre 1892, No. 741', d. 14476, GGI, CAOM. See also 'Exposé des droits historiques de l'Annam sur le Laos central, le 1 juin 1893', d. 14488, GGI, CAOM.
50. A detailed account of the treaties demarcating the geographical outline of Laos can be found in Kennon Breazeale, 'Laos Mapped by Treaty and Decree, 1895–1907', in Mayoury and Breazeale (eds), *Breaking New Ground in Lao History*, pp. 297–336.
51. David Streckfuss, 'The Mixed Colonial Legacy in Siam: Origins of Thai Racialist Thought, 1890–1910', in Laurie J. Sears (ed.), *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honour of John R. W. Smail* (Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph No. 11, Madison: University of Wisconsin), 1993, p. 128.
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54. *Ibid.*, p. 436.
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60. James McCarthy, *Surveying and Exploring in Siam with Descriptions of Lao Dependencies and of Battles against the Chinese Haws* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994 [1900]), p. 155
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