

Abstract

Title The Conflict between Socialism and Neutralism in Laos: The Liberated Zone's Plurality in the Most Peripheral Area of the Socialist Camp during the Détente Era (1945–1975)

Name Seitaro NAMBA

On December 2, 1975, the Kingdom of Laos was dismantled, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) was established. Subsequently, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP)—the Marxist-Leninist party—took power. However, the one-party system was not established at the time because there were politicians who were not LPRP members. Notably, some of the Neutralist Forces or the Patriotic Neutralist Forces took the seats of ministers. This paper analyzes the history of revolutionary movements of the LPRP, focusing on the relationship between the LPRP and other forces. The paper aims to reevaluate the situation of political plurality right after the Laotian Revolution. Accordingly, it explores the revolutionary history of the LPRP from the following perspectives.

The first perspective is that of “socialism and humans.” This paper analyzes the process of inclusion and exclusion employed by the LPRP, examining the process of conflict between three revolutionary lines. The first is the socialistic line, on which humans are divided into allies and enemies based on their social classes. The second is the patriotic line, on which some enemies are certified as provisional partners for carrying out patriotic challenges. The third is the neutralistic line, on which allies, enemies, and partners temporarily cooperate though the categories are maintained. The usual socialist movement can be described as a process of the conflict between socialism and patriotism. However, in Laos, a phenomenon that can be described as a practice of neutralism, such as the three coalition governments, was witnessed.

The second perspective is the political plurality of the Liberated Zone. During the revolutionary movement, the LPRP ruled the Liberated Zone in the Kingdom of Laos, and it expanded to cover two-thirds of the country. Although previous studies have presented the Liberated Zone as a one-party-ruled area of the LPRP, the Neutralist Forces or the Patriotic Neutralist Forces were in the area.

The third perspective is the socialist international relations and détente. In the socialist camp during the Cold War, political plurality tended to be suppressed by major powers such as the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China (PRC). As for Laos, the involvement

of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), which formed the “special relationship” with the LPRP, has been highlighted. This paper focuses on two points. First, when the LPRP was formed in 1955, détente had already begun. Second, the LPRP was the most peripheral socialist force, was minimally influenced by major socialist powers, and was under the DRV’s influence, which was also a peripheral state in the socialist camp.

This paper comprises 10 chapters—including the Introduction and the Conclusion—that are divided into three parts.

Part I analyzes the process involved in the Liberated Zone’s formation and expansion.

The force that formed the LPRP in March 1955 started its activities as the “Pathet Lao (PL)” in August 1950. However, the PL could not establish a Liberated Zone throughout the 1950s and kept moving around Laos or the DRV. Finally, the PL established a Liberated Zone in September 1960, but its territory was only in the province of Houaphan.

In early 1961, the Liberated Zone was expanded drastically. In the middle of 1960, the PL began to ally anti-US forces within the government of the Kingdom of Laos. In December 1960, when a military coup of pro-US forces (the Battle of Vientiane) occurred, the PL strengthened its anti-US cooperation with the Neutralist Forces and expanded the Liberated Zone. Consequently, the Liberated Zone became an area that the PL and the Neutralist Forces ruled together. This paper calls it the Patriotic Liberated Zone.

In the mid-1960s, the independence of the Neutralist Forces was enhanced. After the Patriotic Liberated Zone was formed, the gap between the PL and the Neutralist Forces gradually became apparent, and military conflicts occurred. Nevertheless, the PL attempted to keep the Patriotic Liberated Zone by negotiating with the Patriotic Neutralist Forces, which was leftist forces of the Neutralist Forces. Therefore, although the PL and the Patriotic Neutralist Forces formally continued to govern the Patriotic Liberated Zone together, they ruled their own areas in the zone.

Part II analyzes the process of the socialist construction in the late 1960s, which the PL had started in the one-party-ruled area of the Patriotic Liberated Zone. This paper refers to the area as the One-Party-Ruled Liberated Zone.

In 1965, the PL proposed the strategy to construct the One-Party-Ruled Liberated Zone as a state along the socialistic line. However, the PL substantially maintained the patriotic line. The PL stressed the socialistic line’s importance while emphasizing the need to recognize that the class society was not formed in the Liberated Zone. Thus, the PL placed emphasis on the task to divide humans into enemies and allies based on their classes but denied the necessity of doing so in Laos at the time.

To control the One-Party-Ruled Liberated Zone, the PL sought to share the socialist idea with the public. However, improving and expanding education in the multilingual mountainous region was necessary, which required a considerable period of time. Accordingly, the PL aimed to control the masses through armed force, which was supported by the DRV.

In the middle of 1966, the PL embarked on formulating and implementing an economic policy in the One-Party-Ruled Liberated Zone and adopted the DRV's socialist economic system, which was a centralized economic management system. However, the system was not suitable for the PL's Liberated Zone, which was located in a mountainous area with a poor traffic network. Therefore, the exchange of people and goods at the local level with the DRV was promoted. The PL attempted to compensate for the lack of unity in the Liberated Zone by strengthening the unity of Indochina.

Part III analyzes the process through which the Patriotic Liberated Zone was expanded to the entire country and the LPDR was established.

In May 1968, the DRV began peace talks with the US in Paris. Consequently, the PL was forced to change its revolutionary strategy and planned military action in the unliberated area. However, the DRV and the Soviet Union hesitated to support it. Therefore, the PL requested that PRC provide military assistance. Eventually, the PL received military support from the PRC and the DRV and liberated the province of Attapeu and Saravan in the early 1970s.

In 1973, when the coalition government was reestablished in the Kingdom of Laos, the PL rebuilt an anti-US alliance with the Patriotic Neutralist Forces. In particular, the presence of Khamouane Boupoua, one of the leaders of the partner forces and the secretary of state for the defense of the coalition government, was an added advantage. To augment its influence on the Ministry of Defense and the Royal Lao Army, the PL strengthened its partnership with Khamouane. Khamouane ruled in the northern area of the province of Phongsali; thus, the PL did not intervene in that area. Accordingly, the independence of the Patriotic Neutralist Forces was enhanced, and the impact of Saigon's liberation did not break the anti-US alliance in Laos. Even when the LPDR was established in the late 1975, the partnership between the PL and the Patriotic Neutralist Forces remained unbroken. Therefore, the Lao Revolution was not a socialist revolution but a patriotic revolution. In conclusion, political pluralism was maintained in the LPDR during its establishment.