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CONSULTATION ON

COMMUNICATION AND PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY:
PERSPECTIVES FROM INDOCHINA

COMMUNICATION and PRESERVATION
OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN LAOS

by Mr. Khamkhong Kongvongsa

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COMMUNICATION AND PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN LAOS

By Kham khong Kongvongsa

Rapid change of historic dimensions has been taking place in many countries in Asia and the Pacific in the last few decades. Economic development is bringing about an improved standard of living. A trend of democratization is giving people a greater voice in the management of their own affairs. At the same time, influence of the West, not only through movies and television, but also from exchange of visits and importation of Western products, is pouring into the land of Laos.

In this general mood of property and participation, there has been a growing concern about the potential erosion of indigenous cultural values and the loss of cultural identity.

As you know, Laos is a multi-ethnic nation of long history culture and customs. Since the establishment of the Lao people's Democratic Republic, Dec. 2nd 1975 the Party and government have put efforts towards the restoration, preservation and promotion of national culture and identity.

Satellite television has attracted software from across the world, especially from English speaking countries, to the doors of the Laos viewers who are also forced with new challenges of cultural invasion. This raises a number of questions about cultural future of ancient civilizations which are otherwise fairly stable and national identity.

Laos needs to raise the level of formal education in order to be able to participate fully in the processes of technological modernization and social-cultural development. Our education based in institutions, the non-formal or "distance learning" methods using the mail, radio, television and video will be further develop to enhance educational opportunities for broader segment of the people.

It is almost commonplace in developing countries, like Laos, that rural people are living and coping with several consequences of rapid social and cultural change. The intervention of each economy, modernization, and the diffusion of modern Western technology have impinged upon the traditional culture of these society and in turn created confrontation and conflicts.

The way of life of people and their economic, social, political and other institutions have changed rapidly. Individuals, groups and communities that are adoptive to change can maintain their advantage in the society, while those non-adoptive ones are facing mounting problems. This characterizes one form of conflict resulting from social and cultural change.

Another critical result of cultural change is many societies are losing their cultural identity. New and influential value systems have, in many cases, replace the old ones. Values that used to hold the social fabric together in a harmonious manner are changing. If they change in such ways as to create more conflicts and if conflict resolution mechanisms of a society can no longer perform their functions properly, cultural change may create harmful conditions.

If we are better understand the dynamics and consequences of cultural change in developing contemporary society, we may able to suggest something valuable for minimizing damaging effects.

In Laos, the government puts on highly priority the preservation task of national identity. Up to now the entire mass-media organizations belong to the party, state and collective bodies. This create a firm and unified mean for practicing communication activity in promoting in the Lao people of all ethics to safeguard their fine traditions, culture and identity.

Like in other countries, the Lao mass-media system, either printed or electronic ones, are having the duty to inform, educate and entertain their readers, listeners and viewers. In conformity with party and state policy, each mass-media product should reserve broader space including columns or programmes vis-à-vis our own culture. So far those columns in
the newspapers nad magazines as well as radio and TV programmes are widely interested by their receivers.

Though we have introduced a number of methods in mass communication with the aim of preserving national identity, but that not mean all the goal are succeeded. Today, everywhere in Laos, people have their own satellite TV receivers which can bring a very colorful and sophisticated cultural programmes into their own houses. Even foreign languages are still the main barrier for the complete understanding of the satellite programmes but a wide-range of, our young people have tried to adapt to a new way of life which is somehow reversed to our national identity.

What I have just mentioned above has become one of the most important problems to be considered by us who are working in different sectors of mass communication. It is hoped that the introduction of commercial activity, economic development, expanded educational opportunities, rural electrification, improved road and transportation facilities, increased mobility as well as mass-media network extension in LAOS will be carried out in conformity with the preservation of our fine national culture and identity and we also hope that cooperation in the field of culture among the countries in our region will help us to understand each other way of life, culture and identity.