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Chosen traditions influencing tourism, policy-making, and curriculum in Lao People's Democratic Republic : a critical hermeneutic study in development

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CHOSEN TRADITIONS INFLUENCING TOURISM, POLICY-MAKING, AND CURRICULUM IN LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC: A CRITICAL HERMENEUTIC STUDY IN DEVELOPMENT

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Dissertation Abstract

Chosen Traditions Influencing Tourism, Policy-Making, And Curriculum In Lao People's Democratic Republic: A Critical Hermeneutic Study In Development

This study explored tourism as a way to retain chosen traditions while imagining new possibilities for future policy-making and curriculum for tourism programs and development studies in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The researcher held conversations with various leaders throughout the country to discuss in depth possible ways to aid Lao PDR's development efforts while retaining the best of traditions. The following broad questions served as the research directives: How will people's traditions change with the continuing influence of tourism? How will tourism as a medium for development influence policy-making? What curriculum needs to be developed for tourism in development studies in light of current policy? This study followed a data collection and data analysis protocol designed within the critical hermeneutic tradition (Herda 1999). Data were drawn from transcribed conversations, photographs, and videos taken throughout August and September 2009 throughout Lao PDR and analyzed using theory drawn from Paul Ricouer (1984, 1988, 1992), Richard Kearney (1988, 2003), and Jurgen Habermas (1975, 1981, 1984, 2004). The findings of the research fall into the sections of (1) tradition's roots, (2) education's consequences, and (3) ecotourism as future. The data concluded that these revered customs are of great importance to the

future of Laos as the country continues to grow economically and develop through tourism. The extreme poverty has dampened educational efforts because the very real need for survival supersedes the ability to send children to school. The future for Laos is one with ecotourism at its helm, thereby allowing for the possibility of responsible advancement. With ecotourism as the purported future, the infrastructure or lack of it must be addressed so that ecotourism can have a sustainable future. The following implications are addressed to the governmental leaders who have the authority to implement regulations and create policy. They include: (1) joining tradition's narratives with policy-making, (2) establishing curriculum for tourism guide programs working with the rural poor, (3) developing rural leadership with oversight by communities.

This dissertation was written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee. It has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor or Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent that of the candidate alone.

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This research is dedicated to my grandparents, Grandma and Grandpa Nelsen, who instilled into my family the value of working hard for one's goals; and to Pop-Pop and Gram, for teaching me the importance of dedication for a cause. I love you all.

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CHAPTER ONE
STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Introduction

Imagine waking up to the fresh mountain air every morning living your life as your family has for generations, gathering water, preparing meals together, working the fields. Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a country deeply rooted in tradition; they are a people who revere their land and customs. However, in Lao PDR, the generational way of living is becoming increasingly difficult due to on-going development. The majestic mountainsides that housed many ethnic minority groups now sadly display gaping holes from the slash and burn that has taken place in the name of development. While there is still magnificent natural beauty in remote areas throughout their land, the people now find themselves struggling both to retain their traditions and appropriate ways to bring much needed revenue into the country. The newest economic endeavor is tourism, which represents a double-edged sword that can produce much needed results or tear a nation apart.

Statement of Research Topic

This study explores tourism as a way to retain chosen traditions while imagining new possibilities for future policy-making and curriculum for tourism programs and development studies. I held conversations with various leaders throughout the country including the Ministry of Tourism, district leaders, village leaders, and locals. Together, we discussed in depth possible ways to aid Lao PDR's development efforts while

retaining the best of traditions. The following broad questions served as my research directives:

1) How will people's traditions change with the continuing influence of tourism?

2) How will tourism as a medium for development influence policy-making?

3) What curriculum needs to be developed for tourism in development studies in light of current policy?

The above directives are not necessarily presented in order to be answered. Rather, they present the overall research topic to the reader. This study used a critical hermeneutic orientation for data collection. Data analysis was drawn from transcribed conversations, photographs, and videos taken throughout Lao PDR.

Background on Research Topic

Developers have hooked onto the idea of tourism as a vehicle for bringing desperately needed money into the country (Yamauchi & Lee 1999; International Tourism 2006; United Nations Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization 2009). Tourists provide much needed economic stimulus to the country of Lao PDR (International Tourism 2006). This sounds like a viable situation all around; however, a closer consideration reveals potential problems for Lao PDR, its people, location, and history.

Lao PDR is located in the center of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It is the only Southeast Asian country without direct access to the sea. The Mekong River flows from the north to the south creating the border between Lao PDR and Thailand on the west and the border between Thailand and Cambodia on the south. The people of Lao PDR are composed of many ethnic minorities, many of whom live in the hills

throughout Lao PDR (Evans 1998, 2003; Osborne 2000). Lao PDR is surrounded by five other countries with most bringing in Westerners throughout the year, thus driving economic growth for their country (Lao National Tourism Administration 2006).

Map 1: Lao People's Democratic Republic

In 1990, after centuries of turmoil and isolation, Lao PDR officially opened their doors to the world, welcoming tourists (Singh 1997:32). It has since become an increasingly popular destination for Westerners looking for an unspoiled vacation location. Since 1990, tourism has continued to rise and soon may exploit the very

traditions that make Lao PDR special. By utilizing Kearney's (1988) idea of imagination, new possibilities may stem from all involved to help retain chosen traditions and yet advance the country economically and educationally.

Other countries in the Southeast Asia area are losing their traditions due to rising tourism as seen when visiting a place such as Siem Reap, Cambodia where many hotels with day spas have opened up for Westerners. Day spas are not a part of Cambodia's traditional heritage, but they are a way to advance the economy. Thus the fine line of promoting growth through tourism and retaining tradition becomes evident. The problem is two-fold: a lack of education for tourists on customary practices within the country and a lack of education among tourism officials and university students who are studying development and tourism about their role in balancing economic advancement with respect for cultural norms. Compounding these problems is the serious economic deprivation of much of the country, which puts pressure on policy-makers to find immediate solutions. Economic problems thus influence policy-makers who determine curriculum development for education of tourism and development studies, which in turn affects the ability of the people of Lao PDR to ensure their success when tourism comes into their village. Curriculum that introduces the importance of considering both economic growth and the preservation of tradition is essential, for Lao PDR has rich cultural heritage (Evans 2003), which informs the identity of the Lao people as well as acting as a draw for tourists contemplating a visit to the country.

Significance of Research Topic

For Westerners, experiencing other cultures provides new ways of seeing the world and its people. In *The Wake of Imagination*, Kearney (1988) presents imagination

as the foundation for developing new ideas, new possibilities, and new ways of being that are grounded in our past. Through utilizing our past within our present, our future is laid forth. Imagination comes from the past held in our memories. By reflecting on those memories, both good and bad through the lens of our present, it is possible to distinguish what was, what is, and what might be our future. For Lao PDR, part of their future as a country is becoming a tourist destination (Singh 1997; Lao Tourism Organisation 2005; Central Intelligence Agency 2009), effectively putting them on the map as a place to spend time and money. Tourism is one idea the administration of Lao PDR sees as a way for bringing the country out of desperate poverty and years of turmoil (Lao Tourism Organisation 2005; Lao National Tourism Administration 2006, 2009). By applying Kearney's notion of imagination to the conversations taking place about development within Lao, true possibilities lie ahead. Much work is needed to be done to empower people, many of whom have unimaginable pasts, so that they can move toward a future they appropriate; a future that does not have to be what always was, but can for the first time be what is possible.

Tourism today for the Lao is not all positive. While funds come into the country, the various people groups do not receive much from them (Lao National Tourism Administration 2006). Further, the tourism industry often promotes exploitation of the culture, especially those of the villagers who have no voice (Evans 1998). According to Evans (1998:133), the exploitation of culture that typically occurs with tourism includes intentionally modifying, expounding, or changing many of the historical traditions of Lao PDR and consequently can leave out parts of Lao history:

> But despite the grandiose claims now being made concerning the continuity of Lao "ancient" (*bohan)* traditions, either through deliberate political intervention, or through cultural attrition in the context of economic and social change, many things have either been lost or considerably modified. And so, what people now remember as "tradition" differs generationally, although a surprising number of younger people will tell you that in the old regime, they carried out the "traditions" properly, thereby conveying an understanding that something has been lost (italics in original).

Because traditions of the past have become so changed or lost, I anticipated that I might have difficulty conversing with people due to the different versions of traditional practices that are now part of the country. Yet, I found instead that it is conversations that allowed the imagination to awaken and traditions of the past to be spoken about and chosen, and for new ones to develop. As is discussed in Chapter Four, Ricoeur (1984:69) attests that our "tradition's paradigms" are bound to our imagination. The traditional past serves as a stepping stone for the Lao to imagine development for themselves. Part of the difficulty comes from development's past, which is rife with examples in which those who had the power to implement development established economic priorities with little regard for the broader needs of the people. Herda (1999:89-90) affirms this:

> For example, in the frantic drive to include the latest technology, or a more direct route to economic competitiveness, a developing nation in designing social or economic problems may ignore the critical importance of historical reflection and actual needs of local people. If traditions and culture were taken seriously and conversations were carried out with local people who are the technology and policy recipients, developers could come to understand with the recipients what part of their history is worth keeping, what parts need to be left behind, and which technologies are appropriate.

The voices of Lao leaders from various stratum of Lao society were key to conversations regarding the place and significance of tourism in their country. These perspectives were significant in helping to create appropriate recommendations for

curriculum in development studies and tourism programs, and perhaps, most importantly, in contributing to potential development policies.

Summary

Generational ways of life are no longer viable for the people of Lao PDR. A need exists for the retention of chosen tradition while implementing new tourism strategies. This goes along with the need for adult learning curriculum for development studies and for tourism education purposes as well as educational information for those choosing to visit Lao PDR. Through envisioning new possibilities, shared understanding among all may be reached and a bridge between tradition and tourism may be built through developed policy of Lao PDR.

Chapter One of this text describes the need for finding ways to bridge tourism and tradition. It also explains the focus of my research; exploring tourism as a way to preserve tradition while imagining new possibilities for a better future. Chapter Two provides background information about the various people groups that Westerners may see in Lao PDR and the tumultuous history that has brought them to today.

CHAPTER TWO
LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC BACKGROUND

Introduction

The people of Lao PDR have a rich history that has brought them to the present. Being landlocked by five other countries has helped form the landscape of Lao PDR and the development of the country. As tourism becomes more important to economically stimulate the country, this type of development changes the way of life for all of the people groups that make up Lao PDR. In order to fully understand the complexities of Lao PDR, the following background consists of the rich political history that helped shape the country, spanning the last years of French colonialism through today. Literature on Lao PDR is very limited and therefore, much of the background comes from Grant Evans, an anthropologist and researcher who has an extensive backdrop of expertise on Lao PDR.

Laotians of All Kinds

Lao PDR has a population of 6.2 million people consisting of 49 ethnic groups and their respective languages stemming from four main families (Lao National Tourism Administration 2006; United Nations, Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization 2009). Table 1 below is a matrix of the various families that make up current Lao PDR.

Four Main Families	Ethnic Groups
Lao-Tai 8 Ethnic Groups	Lao, Phouthai, Tai, Lue, Gnouane, Young, Saek, Thai Neua
Mon-Khmer 31 Ethnic Groups	Khmu, Pray, Singmou, Khom, Thene, Idou, Bid, Lamed, Samtao, Katang, Makong, Try, Trieng, Yeh, Brao, Harak, Katou, Oi,Krieng, Yrou, Souai, Gnaheune, Lavy, Kabkae, Khmer, Toum, Ngouane, Meuang, Kri, Ta-oi, Mlabri
Tibeto-Burmese 7 Ethnic Groups	Akha, Singsali, Lahou, Sila, Hayi, Lolo, Hor
Hmong-Loumien 2 Ethnic Groups	Hmong, Loumien (Yao)

Table 1: Main Family Groups in Lao PDR **Source: Lao National Tourism Administration**

Lao is the official language with French, English, Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese also being spoken. While Lao PDR represents great diversity amongst its people that is exceeded in its ecological diversity, including both animals and vegetation (Lao Tourism Organisation 2005). Having these numerous languages and people groups within Lao PDR adds to the difficulty of development. Because of the turbulent past for some of the people groups within Lao PDR, having legitimate development occur is complicated. Within the policy-making realm of the government, great care has to be used to create a legitimate political order. As early as 30 years ago, Michael Hudson (1977:389-90) explains, "if the population within given political boundaries is so deeply divided within itself on ethnic or class [or, for that matter, religious or clan] lines, or if the demands of a larger supranational community are compelling to some [significant] portion of it, then it is extremely difficult to develop a legitimate order." Valuing the rich amount of people groups must be of utmost importance as that is part of what makes Lao PDR prime for tourism as a medium of development.

French Colonial Rule

A sense of acceptance of all people groups helps create a legitimate order. Not too long ago an idea of nationalism came into play that stemmed from the French (Osborne 2000; Evans 2003:72-3). Under colonial rule, from 1893 to 1953, the French helped push a sense of national pride for the Lao (Osborne 2000), especially the Lao elite, through education and cultural exchange (Evans 2003:73). The Lao who were schooled were able to take the sense of French nationalism and then transfer that to their homeland. During that time, the people of Lao PDR saw nationalism occurring in neighboring countries such as Thailand, which had previously changed its country name

from Siam, to help promote nationalism (Evans 2003:73-4). For the Lao people, appropriating similar action represented a challenge due to the many languages and people groups that made up the country. The number of people in the elite group was small and many remained illiterate and ill-informed about what was happening within their country. This left the government to create policy based on the French model of nationalism, which did not work, primarily because of the lack of education in the country (Evans 1990, 2003).

During their time in Laos, France held the Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931 to inform the public about Indochina and the exhibition included other countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam. As Evans (2003:74) explains, "the images presented were ones that conformed to European ideas of national cultures, ideas that also found their way into tour guides as tourism to Indochina became increasingly important during these years." Thus the Lao sense of nationalism was influenced by the French ideals of culture, which in turn helped to transform traditions (Evans 1998:133). The French wanted to bring in Vietnamese to Lao PDR to help speed up economic development in the region; however, with Vietnamese nationalism strong, they also saw the need for the Lao to support themselves and create their own sense of nationalism.

French colonial rule was as protector and agitator. There were more schools created between 1940 and 1945 than had been in the past 40 years before colonial rule (Evans 2003:78). The French saw education as a way to help protect and move Lao PDR along in developing their country. At the close of this brief period, the Japanese defeated the Vichy French colonial regime throughout Indochina, thereby allowing Lao to first proclaim their independence on April 8, 1945 (Evans 2003:82; Pholsena 2006:1). This

defeat and Lao's proclamation of independence signaled the end of French colonial rule; however, for subsequent years there was much confusion and chaos as to who was in charge of leading the country (Osborne 2000; Pholsena 2006). The Lao would appeal to the Allies to oppose the return of French to Indochina, which was part of policy at the time of Franklin D. Roosevelt. However, Roosevelt died and the Vietnamese began to encroach on Lao PDR (Evans 2003:86-87), complicating Laos' needs. While tension between the Lao and Vietnamese was running high, the French and Lao struck an agreement in 1949 whereby the Lao gained more autonomy than before (Evans 2003:89). This time the French presence inside Lao PDR was agreed to be a temporary situation and in July 1949, sovereignty was won by the Royal Lao Government (RLG) with help from Vietnam (Evans 2003:92). Below is an accounting of the RLG's rise to power and subsequent demise.

The Royal Lao Government

The Lao people approached the RLG's assumption of power with optimism, but their enthusiasm waned as they began to feel the effects of intense poverty and subsequent involvement in the Cold War (Parker 1995). The Lao people approached the development of their country with enthusiasm, but it quickly proved difficult for a nation that was not adequately educated to take on this enormous task (Pholsena 2006:2). To raise capital for the country also proved difficult. In order to help alleviate this, opium crops soon began to sprout up, due to encouragement by the RLG to increase the production back to 1944 levels (Evans 2003:95). To help combat the poverty in the country, the United States poured financial aid into Lao PDR; however, the prosperity offered through opium production was publicly short lived because of the moral

objections held by the United States (Evans 2003:95-6). Lao peasants at the time were the main growers of opium. They often worked for other people groups with higher status. Combined with the lack of education and viable crops produced, another obstacle appeared for commercial development—the infrastructure of the country was poor, namely little roads and few means of communication (Singh 1997).

Also, the country was experiencing a quiet political aligning amongst the Lao people with those preferring neutralism on one extreme and those who supported communism on the other (Parker 1995; Evans 2003), which helped provide the United States with a way to denounce communism every chance they had. By now, Lao PDR was totally dependent on aid from the United States (Evans 2003:99; Pholsena 2006). This infuriated the communists within Lao PDR who understood that the political motivation behind the financial aid (Evans 2003:104) was tied to anti-Communist vigilance. Slowly infiltrating the country was the stronghold of communism with help from the Vietnamese and through a series of coups and counter-coups in the Lao capital, Vientiane, communism grew by making strides into RLG territory resulting in Lao PDR being thrown into the Vietnam War (Evans 1998, 2003; Pholsena 2006).

War and the Fall Into Communism

With war raging throughout Lao PDR and surrounding countries, the mid-1960s witnessed Lao PDR becoming one of the major exporters of gold. The gold was smuggled into Lao PDR from Vietnam. The Tet Offensive in 1968 squelched much of the gold export and in 1969 Singapore took over the gold exportation, which in effect destroyed gold as a source of revenue for the Lao people (Evans 2003:166) and continued

to further weaken the Lao economy. This helped set the stage for a perilous situation for the people of Laos.

On October 10, 1972 a draft peace agreement between North Vietnam and the United States was signed (Parker 1995; Osborne 2000; Evans 2003). Talks between the Lao Patriotic Front (NLHX) and the RLG began, and on October 21 a Lao PDR cease-fire agreement was signed between the United States and the Lao government (Evans 2003; Pholsena 2006). Part of the agreement was that foreign troops were to be withdrawn from Lao PDR within 60 days of the formation of the Provisional Government of National Union (Evans 2003:171); however, "there was never any attempt at verification of the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops, the 'secret Army' whose existence had never been officially acknowledged" (Evans 2003:171). Having the United States withdraw military support left a gap that became filled by the Pathet Lao (PL), or the Communists (Parker 1995). While the Lao people's fall in April 1975 to the Communists was a big defeat, it was not the only uprising happening in Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge on April 17, and Saigon to the North Vietnamese Army on April 30 (Evans 2003:172). Anti-American sentiments began to run high and large crowds met at the United States Embassy on May 9 with its leaders demanding the resignation of the ministers from the government (Parker 1995; Evans 2003:173). Communism was now the face of Laos.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

With the new regime in power in late 1975, many Lao began to flee their country for fear of retaliation by the PL. Many Chinese merchants and educated Lao also fled. By 1980, 10% of the population of Lao PDR had escaped (Evans 2003:177-8).

Beginning in mid-1975, numerous officers, soldiers, police, and high officials of the RLG were taken, "to 'seminar', which was the euphemism used for the prison camps" (Evans 2003:180). When the 'seminars' were initiated, many of the Lao went voluntarily; however, most never returned and those that did almost immediately fled as refugees. According to Evans (2003:180-1), even today

> there has never been any systematic study made of [the prison system], nor are there any reliable estimates of how many were interned. Suggested numbers of ranged from 10,000 to 40,000. The higher figure probably represents the number of ordinary soldiers and officials who underwent a short period of're-education' for several months and during periods of up to 15 years for others. Somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 however, were summarily executed or imprisoned until they died. None of these people was ever charged legally, thus in this extra-large prison system those interned had no rights.

The Hmong, who had helped the United States under the CIA fight at the Ho Chi Minh Trail, did not let up and continued fighting for several years after the RLG's collapse (Parker 1995). Many Hmong were massacred, and "had it been current back then, the term 'ethnic cleansing,' born from the holders of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, would no doubt have been used for Laos" (Evans 2003:184). The Hmong were in a precarious position because they were vehemently hated by the Vietnamese whom they had fought against in the war (Pholsena 2006:205-7). The Communists hated them for helping the United States, the economy was in crisis and unable to sustain the Hmong population that had previously been helped by USAID, and therefore, the Hmong could flee or die (Evans 2003:184-5). Even today, resentment within Lao PDR runs high against the Hmong.

Lao PDR was now a full Communist society. With the withdrawal of US Aid for International Development (USAID) and the fleeing of many Lao, the economy was on

the verge of full collapse. A series of situations in and surrounding Lao PDR at the time helped to further the decline of the economy, from a coup in Thailand in 1976 that put greater trade restrictions on Laos, to a drought also in 1976, to flooding in 1977 (Evans 2003:187). These factors helped Lao PDR sign a 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which formalized a commitment to prop each other up as both were hurting economically and recovering from a long drawn out war.

A notable difference for Lao PDR under communist rule was the attempt to economically change the country through agricultural collectivization, which failed. In the 1980s, market style reforms would begin (Evans 1990, 2003:195). This all came about around the same time three international shifts began to demand attention by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP):

> The first had been the intra-Communist crisis caused by the outbreak of war between the 'Red Brotherhood' of Vietnam and China and Democratic Kampuchea…The second was the recognition of the growing crisis in the heartland of European communism, reflected in the declining aid from Comecon sources over the 1980s, and their total collapse by 1989. The third was the startling economic boom in neighboring Thailand and Southeast Asia, a boom presided over by more or less authoritarian governments (Evans 2003:196-7).

In turn, thousands of detainees were released in December 1986, forty-five thousand Vietnamese combat troops were withdrawn from Lao PDR between 1988 and 1999, and new foreign investment laws were written to try and encourage Lao refugees to invest in the Lao economy (Evans 2003; Pholsena 2006). In August 1991, the Supreme People's Assembly adopted a final draft of the new constitution, which declared Lao People's Democratic Republic was, "'a

People's democratic state under the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party'" (Evans 2003:200), which it remains today.

Summary

Lao PDR has an unimaginable history. Yet, the people of Lao PDR remain gentle and kind. Through colonization to communist control of Lao PDR, the people remain faithful to their country and heritage. Chapter Three explores the literature on tourism, development, and rights of people within Lao PDR and other developing countries.

CHAPTER THREE
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The following is a review of the literature found on the topics of Tourism, Development in Today's World, and Government Bodies and Rights of Citizens that help to establish the context for tourism as a medium for development in Lao PDR. Aspects of critical hermeneutics are interspersed where appropriate, but critical hermeneutic theory on Tradition, Imagination, and Communicative Action for Policy-Making are discussed at length in Chapter Four.

Tourism

Tourism is multifaceted within the developing country of Lao PDR and how it influences policy only adds to the depth of the issue. Table 2 below shows how globalization in the form of tourism is beginning to affect Lao PDR with the most notable aspect being international tourism, which brings in US$173,000,000 and foreign direct investment, which brings in slightly more at US$187,400,000. These two components of globalization are responsible for more than 90% of Lao PDR's cash flow at 43% for international tourism and 47% for foreign direct investment. This translates to a situation in which foreigners have great control over the country because they affect the way funds are dispersed in tourism and development. Those who are investing in Lao PDR's financial market, either through direct investment or tourism, have the possibility to positively influence the development of all people groups by taking affirmative steps to direct the flow of their money. Doing so requires education and consideration.

Globalization and Tourism		
	Year	Latest data
International tourism, receipts (current US$)	2006	173,000,000
International tourism, number of arrivals	2006	842,000
Commercial banks and other lending, (current US$)	2006	14,900,000
Net financial flows, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (current US$)	2006	0
Merchandise trade (% of GDP)	2007	59
Private capital flows, total (current US$)	2001	23,900,000
Foreign direct investment, net inflows (current US$)	2006	187,400,000

Table 2: World Development Indicators for Lao PDR **Source: The World Bank**

The network of types of tourism is complex. From reviewing articles, reports, briefings, websites, and holding informal conversations, I focus on tourism that has a history of working, or at the very least, being tried in developing countries. For Lao PDR, finding literature focusing specifically on the country proved difficult; in fact, even finding extensive literature on Southeast Asia was complicated. Much of the literature on Lao PDR does not come from well known journals; rather, most comes from the Lao National Tourism Administration or one of their affiliates. I approached the review of tourism literature comprehensively as the frameworks used for tourism in developing countries share many of the same tenets. These include: (1) expanding tourism opportunities to those in rural areas; (2) providing education for those in the tourism industry, and (3) showing the overall need for strong organization and leadership to help bridge the people of developing countries, the government and policy-makers, and tourists (Singh 1997; Yamauchi & Lee 1999; World Tourism Organization 2001, 2006; Tuffin 2005; Lao National Tourism Administration 2006). The literature speaks of the need for responsible development in tourism along with the need for curriculum for educating both the public and students of tourism programs (Singh 1997; World Tourism

Organization 2001; Tuffin 2005). I have yet to come across any study that directly addresses these issues.

Tourism companies are major supporters of development in the countries in which they seek to open up businesses. In Lao PDR, the government allows foreign investment (Singh 1997; Central Intelligence Agency 2009). In the policy briefing paper, *The Tourism Industry and Poverty Reduction: A Business Primer*, Roe, Goodwin and Ashley (2002) discuss why poverty matters to tourism companies. They list four facts that corporations and investors need to keep in mind. They are: (1) tourism is based on stable operating environments within a destination; (2) tourism is vulnerable to instability in the international or local market; (3) tourism to poor destinations is growing; and 4) reviewing market trends has shown that consumers are increasingly more and more aware of socioeconomic issues (Roe, Goodwin, and Ashley 2002:1).

Currently Lao PDR is what the World Tourism Organization within the United Nations calls a pre-developing country (World Tourism Organization 2002). Stable operating environments are beginning to take shape within Lao PDR with the building of roads and improving infrastructure. Major concerns for many developing countries, including Lao PDR, are the effects of development actions on the environment and the people. Much is being done within Lao PDR to promote ecotourism as a way to bring tourists into the country (Lao National Tourism Administration 2006; World Tourism Organization 2006, 2007) and yet preserve their natural resources. According to Roe, Goodwin, and Ashley (2002:1-2), "there are a plethora of sustainable tourism and responsible tourism initiatives, but most have made much more progress on

environmental issues than socioeconomic ones," which hints at the struggles of various people groups who do not have access to Westerners.

The *Reviewing the Lao PDR Tourism Strategy 2006-2020* article notes that for the country of Lao PDR, tourism has contributed the following: first, tourism has directly generated foreign currency for the country. Secondly, tourism supports related investments such as travel, hotel, restaurant, transport, and souvenir businesses. Third, tourism creates employment for people in the service and production sectors, for instance, the export of raw materials. Finally, tourism contributes foreign-currency accumulations, facilitates domestic financial liquidity, and distributes income to rural remote areas (Lao National Tourism Administration 2006:1). When reviewing some of the statistics from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) website, understanding the uphill road Lao PDR faces becomes clear. According to CIA statistics, growth in Lao PDR averaged 6% between 1988 and 2008. However, Lao PDR is still a country with an underdeveloped infrastructure, especially in rural areas (Singh 1997; Evans 2003). There are no railroads, many of the roads are not paved, and telecommunications remains limited (Central Intelligence Agency 2009; Nation's Online 2009). Eighty percent of the total employment for people of Lao PDR comes from subsistence agriculture and only 20% from working in the industry and services sectors (Central Intelligence Agency 2009).

With the influx of tourism, it is likely the percentages above will shift—more will move from agriculture to the industry and service sectors as the need arises. Tourism brings both positive and negative influences. Prostitution, sex-slaves, human trafficking, and forced labor are but a few examples of the negative influence of tourism. From my personal experience visiting Lao PDR for the first time in May 2008 and again in 2009, I

consistently noticed in shops, restaurants, and inns bright neon signs addressing the child sex-slave and prostitution industries. In 2008, I was told by an Australian living and running a small guest house in Luang Prabang that the signs are a way for the businesses to band together to let Westerners know they do not support, but rather condemn sex-tourists. He also said that while the signs are a warning, they are also a way to confront an issue that the government of Lao PDR has been reluctant to address. This statement is supported by HumanTrafficking.org, a website devoted to combating human trafficking, especially in the form of sex-slaves and laborers. According to the website, the 2006 US Department of State Human Rights Report found, "Lao PDR is primarily a source but also a transit and destination country for human trafficking. Many Lao victims are recruited by local persons who have cross-border experience, but are not connected to any organized crime syndicates" (HumanTrafficking.org 2008). Part of the 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report found on HumanTrafficking.org (2008) lists pertinent data on trafficking:

> Thai authorities estimate that at least 180,000 undocumented Lao worked in Thailand. World Vision Lao PDR reported that 44% of parents do not know where their children are. Of children who returned home, half reported their experience was terrible, and 40% reported being locked up, and 13% report they were raped.

This problem is perpetuated in part because of the government's lackadaisical attitude towards human trafficking. In a recent study supported by the International Labour Organization, the Lao Government found that nearly 7% of households in three provinces of Lao PDR had family members working in Thailand. They also found that more than half of the population under the age of 20 move to fill unskilled jobs and become vulnerable to trafficking (International Labour Organization 2007). This issue is

of extreme importance not only for Lao PDR, but for the world. Prevention efforts are underway through the use of media; however, with much of Lao PDR not having the luxury of media, the effects of the efforts remain unknown. Image 1 below was taken at the Lao-Thai border crossing of a Thai advertisement showing a young woman being kidnapped and taken across the border. Advertisements such as this are becoming popular at border crossings to warn of one danger of tourism—the sex-slave industry. Tourism helps drive this industry because without sex-tourists money, the illicit businesses would be severely weakened.

Image 1: Sex-Slave Warning
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

One way to combat the negative influences of tourism is through education. The country is slowly developing its infrastructure to be able to handle the increasing number of tourists; part of the needed infrastructure includes a need for tourism officials (Roe, Goodwin, & Ashley 2002; Lao National Tourism Administration 2006) to establish policy and related educational curriculum for those involved in tourism. The World Tourism Organization found in their report entitled, *Tourism and Poverty Alleviation Recommendations for Action* that the fastest growth rates for tourism are centered on Southeast Asia. The overall growth rate of people visiting lower to middle income countries between 1990 and 2001 was 97.5%, but in Laos, it was 36% (2004:7). According to the Lao National Tourism Administration in

2006, between the years 1990 to 2005, the number of tourists entering into Lao PDR increased at an average rate of 27.6% per year and tourism has been ranked as the number one sector for exports. The World Tourism Organization (2004) shows tourism makes up a large part of the world's growing service sector and accounts for over 30% of all service exports.

To understanding the complexity of the situation with tourism in Lao PDR requires looking at all levels of development occurring. The organizational structure of Lao PDR's Tourism Department has been changed to be more efficient and improve communication. In addition, the National Tourism Authority is working with different sections of the country and local leaders to plan and develop sites and projects in order to develop, protect, and invest in the local communities (Lao National Tourism Administration 2006:5; World Tourism Organization 2007). As of 2006, there were a total of 85 venture companies working in the tourism business in Lao PDR (Lao National Tourism Administration 2006:8). Presently, from those companies, there has been direct employment to 300,000 people within Lao PDR (Lao National Tourism Administration 2006:8). Management, implementation of tourism, regulations, and education for the tourism sector still needs updating to suit current trends in tourism (World Tourism Organization 2001; Lao National Tourism Administration 2006:8-10; International Tourism 2006).

The literature on Lao PDR repeatedly cites weaknesses within the tourism sector. First, as stated previously, infrastructure at all levels is not yet sufficient to meet the demand or quality tourists require (Singh 1997:32-3; Yamauchi and Lee 1999:6; Lao National Tourism Administration 2006). Second, there is still an imbalance with the

knowledge and understanding of the social public towards tourism. Also, as previously stated in the Background on Research Topic, the World Tourism Organization (2001:7; 2002:7) found a need for education for anyone working in tourism within the country, along with public awareness education on tourism for the villages and villagers. Third, tourism workers have not taken ownership of their jobs; they still await orders (Singh 1997; Tuffin 2005:178; Lao National Tourism Administration 2006:12). Fourth, coordination between the public and private sectors has not yet been integrated and there are no regulations to follow; each has its own way of doing things (Tuffin 2005:178; Lao National Tourism Administration 2006). Lastly, planning and development of tourism sites do not currently align with the consistent national policies with respects to ensuring that efforts are naturally, culturally, and historically in line with Lao customs along with being equally distributed throughout the country. This is especially important in remote provinces and rural areas where villagers in the tourism industry are mutually dependent on one another (Singh 1997; World Tourism Organization 2001; Tuffin 2005:177; Lao National Tourism Administration 2006:12-13; International Tourism 2006). Governments recognize "tourism is one of [a] few ways to actually participate in the global economy" (Mastney 2001:9), but note that benefits have generally failed to reach those "segments of… [populations]—such as the very poor" (Young 1973:3). Although Young (1973) recognized this situation several decades ago, this problem still remains in the current decade (Ashley, Roe, and Goodwin 2001).

In discussing strategies for the poor in terms of tourism, Ashley, Roe, and Goodwin (2001:2) in their report entitled, *Pro-Poor Tourism Strategies: Making Tourism*

Work for the Poor, A Review of Experience in 2001, discuss the need for what they call pro-poor tourism:

> Pro-poor tourism is defined as tourism that generates net benefits for the poor. Benefits may be economic, but they may also be social, environmental, or cultural. The definition says nothing about the distribution of benefits of tourism therefore, as long as poor people reap the benefits, tourism can be classified as 'pro-poor' (even if richer people benefit more than the poor people). Rather than explore the intricacies of defining 'net positive benefits', we focus on *strategies that enhance benefits to the poor* (italics in original).

Ashley, Roe, and Goodwin (2001) further explain that pro-poor tourism is a way to work at various levels within the industry to ensure the most poor are cared for. This approach to a developing country is one that may help take care of the most vulnerable of the country, especially in Lao PDR, a country that is itself fragile.

A notable issue found in the literature is the question of whether one brings in as many Westerners as possible as the Lao National Tourism Administration (2006) suggests, whether they adopt policy to bring in sustainable tourism, or whether they choose a combination of both (World Tourism Organization 2001, 2002:10). The concern with optimizing the overall benefits of tourism and minimizing potential problems rather than emphasizing the amount of tourism should be of utmost concern, especially in a pre-developing country such as Lao PDR. The following is a brief overview of literature on current development work throughout the global world, especially in poverty-stricken countries.

Development in Today's World

Development is an intricately woven maze of politics, economics, organization, leadership, and people that is supposed to work together to advance society, a country, the world. In 2000, leaders from 189 nations came up with the United Nation's

Millennium Development Goals to reach by 2015, which had eight goals, 18 targets, and 48 indicators to track the progress of the goal seeking (United Nations 2008). The goals are: (1) eradicate extreme hunger; (2) achieve universal primary education; (3) promote gender equality and empower women; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental sustainability; and (8) develop a global partnership for development (United Nations 2008). These are very lofty goals that the United Nations has set for the world. In reviewing the data on Lao PDR's success in reaching the goals, there is insufficient information for goals one, three, six, seven, and eight. However, goals two, four, and five are believed likely to be achieved by 2015 (United Nations 2008). The data on Lao PDR coming from the Millennium Goals aligns with Ashley, Roe, and Goodwin's (2001) call to focus on strategies to enhance benefits to the poor. This is further echoed by Herda (2007a:4) as she discusses the traditional roles of developers:

> Traditionally, we see developers in a role that values the application of information and knowledge which in turn promotes a mentality of planning, provision, and adjustment. However, this conventional idea of development, highly influenced by economic models, repeatedly demonstrates that the promises made by governments and funding agencies to end poverty and human suffering do not match the testimonies of the poor.

Those living in developing countries see what is happening on a day-to-day basis. Developers, including those countries who crafted the Millennium Goals, cannot know or understand the full scope of the problem when creating goals that have never been fulfilled. Whether these goals can be met or not remains to be seen; however, in the following review of the literature, I am specifically looking at tourism as a medium for

development through a critical hermeneutical lens. In utilizing critical hermeneutics, the researcher is put back into the equation as Herda (1999:89) states:

> Most importantly, in hermeneutic field-based research, the researcher needs to assume the stance that both the research participants and the researcher have the opportunity to see mistakes and wrong doings in their present and in their past. To document mistakes requires taking an ethical or moral position on an issue. The data do not speak for themselves. Our history and our present voices speak for us, and, thus, our language can either mask or reveal problems that traditionally have been skirted or left unspoken.

People are the most important consideration in sustainable development. However, several authors who write about development issues note a lack of attention to morals and ethics in contemporary discussions about development work (Escobar 1995; Herda 1999:89-92, 2007; Kaplan 2008; Schwenke 2009). This identified gap in the literature raises a question about how development works with people in mind. For this topic, I focus on literature from the mid-1990's and onward as there is a marked shift in the way development is being seen during that time.

In *Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development*, Kaplan (2008:2) asserts:

> Inappropriate institutions cause fragile states and…only by redesigning those institutions can dysfunctional places craft the commercial environments necessary to attract investment—without which no development can occur or be sustained—and jumpstart a self-sustaining cycle of growth.

To instigate development efforts, attention must be paid to the varying institutions that control the development of a country. Many institutions in developing countries, including Lao PDR, are run ineffectively due to a number of reasons, including lack of education, religion, ethnic differences within the country (Kaplan 2008), problems with infrastructure, politics (Kaplan 2008; Schwenke 2009), and lofty, unrealistic development

goals (Rist 2002; Herda 2007a). These create division within countries; however, these countries do not have to remain either divided or underdeveloped. Instead, "resolving the problems created by divided populations and weak—or in some cases almost nonexistent—formal governing bodies that most postcolonial states were born with requires far more creative approaches" (Kaplan 2008:32). For Lao PDR, a creative approach would include fully integrating tourism into society.

Schwenke (2009:3), an international development expert, supports Kaplan's argument, "society shapes us, and we shape society." As society, we are concerned with being objective when it comes to development through the often seen lens of economism. Society follows the notion that, "surrendering one's objectivity to confront poverty at a personal level is even counterproductive to our ability to find sustainable solutions" (Schwenke 2009:2). Because of this, Schwenke examined an ethical and moral stance on development, putting the face of the people back into the equation. Schwenke (2009:3) echoes Herda (2007a) by stating, "while the moral burden of those afflicted by poverty, poor governance, or conflict may be more acute than we as individuals can cope with, or effectively respond to, I am certain that ignoring or abstracting away the personal tragedies of poverty does nothing to diminish the moral burden." Years ago, far ahead of his time, Nyerere (1974:26) also understood this issue clearly when he wrote:

> For the truth is that development means the development of *people*. Roads, buildings, the increases in crop output, and other things of this nature, are not development; they are only tools of development… Development, which is not development of people, may be of interest to historians in the year 3000; it is relevant to the kind of future which is created (italics in original).

When development becomes personal and involves the very people being *developed*, freedom occurs (Nyerere 1974:27). The people who are in need will always

be there, and through the participatory hermeneutic inquiry, names will be added back into the equation, thus bringing a new dimension to the paradigm of development—the understanding of one another. This fits with Herda's (2007a:5) definition of development:

> Our working definition, or more accurately, our understanding, of development resides in a context in which people who live under compromised socioeconomic, political and personal conditions find ways to ameliorate the situation retaining their dignity and respect for self and the other.

When thinking about the *other* in development, a question rises about how development workers can fail to take into account the lives of the very people they are working to help. A focus on people rather than quantifiable outcomes arises naturally out of a consideration of morality and ethics; however, it is important to go beyond even a typically charitable view of aid, adopting instead, a living conversation with the other. In this context, development workers are not oriented toward helping others in a deficit situation in which the helper has the power and the helped person is a mere recipient. Instead, they see themselves as working together for true change of self and others through the medium of establishing new relationships that can then make use of imagination and conversation in development projects. Specifically, Herda (2007a:104) writes that

> …our concept of advocacy needs to move from the idea of a helping hand or representing someone else's voice to establishing interpersonal relationships that have an opportunity to result in new understandings of who one is, one's identity, on the part of both the local participants and the researcher or developer.

While the *other* is one half of the equation for development, "it is also important to realize that the world of local person alone is not sufficient for development—the

romanticized idea of leaving the culture of the local people intact is as unrealistic as the top-down approach of placing the locals in the world that they have had no part in creating" (Herda 2007a:12). Development steeped in morality and ethical behavior becomes possible through conversations held, relationships formed, and choices made for their own development when the value of the other, specifically, the various people groups of Lao PDR is realized. Through giving power back to the people to work on developing themselves and their land, not only does understanding of the other happen, but just as importantly, understanding of self. Kearney helps to further the notion of the importance of understanding the other that can be equally applied to moral development as Nyerere (1974), Herda (2004, 2007a, 2007b), Kaplan (2008), and Schwenke (2009) discuss. As Kearney speaks about the other, he discusses what he calls a prejudice called the 'ontology of Sameness' by Levinas and 'logocentrism' by Derrida. Kearney (2003:66-7) says

> …that justice demands a redressing of the balance so that as to arrive at a more ethical appreciation of otherness. Such appreciation reminds us that the human stranger before us always escapes our egological schemas and advisor efforts to treat him/her as a scapegoated 'alien' or, at best, an alter ego. Openness to the Other beyond the Same is called justice.

This directly aligns with Kaplan's definition of a fragile state as a country that is unable to administer their territories effectively (Kaplan 2008:5). Specifically, Kaplan (2008:11) defines a fragile state as, "any country highly unlikely to become prosperous and stable without first undergoing some form of institutional reengineering" and a country that is unlikely to be able to "cultivate the kind of state bodies that can manage an effective process of development." Lao PDR is currently in this state because of the lack of economic stimulus, infrastructure, education, and the number of poor (Yamauchi

& Lee 1999; Nation's Online 2009). In part because of the current problems described above, the cooperative approach to development as defined by Kearney (2003) and Herda (2007a) is not one that takes high priority. Nonetheless, Kaplan's concept of development as the "cure" (2008:8) meshes well with Nyerere's (1974:26) and Herda's (2007a:5) definitions, and fits in with Schwenke's (2009:3) moral stance by saying that development is

> [T]he process of transforming the system and how the members of society work together. Although education and healthcare can better prepare individuals to participate in development, a country's ability to advance is crucially tied to its citizen's ability to cooperate—both among themselves and in partnership with the state—in increasingly sophisticated ways.

In order to maintain and increase sophisticated ways of communicating with one another, mutual respect must occur. Since morality is not commonplace to development work, what becomes lost are the value systems that people of varying cultures hold dear (Nicholson-Lord 1997). Within the moral fabric of our lives, cultural values, religion, and personal values are contained and found to be a great part of the society's shared values. Morality is defined as "[A]n informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, and includes what are commonly known as moral rules, ideals, and virtues and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal" (Gert 1998:13). By including the moral dimension in development work, the society then has a sense of identity and purpose (Schwenke 2009:6). If the society has a set of shared values, they are better equipped to handle relationships with care and purpose (Kaplan 2008; Schwenke 2009). As Ricoeur (1988:236) states, "[W]ithout a view of the whole chain of events, one cannot form an idea of man." When society has a sense of their identity, their purpose, it is because the other has been recognized (Herda 2007a).

By having a sense of identity created through conversations and relationships with the other, the importance of people in moral development work is illuminated. Development ethicists argue that the moral aspect in development is as important as policy and scientific dimensions (Schwenke 2009:8). To take a look and question, reflect, challenge, and discuss ethics in development brings a set of new issues. Discussions of ethics challenge the status quo in development and have the potential to bring consideration of such challenges and, even more importantly, the potential for valuable change to the countries being developed. This is the case because these discussions may help expose immoral behavior associated with poverty, violence, and poor governance and thus bring forth the validity of the claims of injustice and immorality so that they are no longer ignored. Development workers are called to act ethically, to "…learn to listen and not only hear what is already assumed [because then] opportunities come into play to open new worlds" (Herda 2007b:23). Raising the critical issue of morality in development forces the question as to whose morality is to be used in development. Shared values in one group do not necessarily agree with the values in another group and those values may not coincide with the people working in the development of the country. The morals from the developers' side must be that of approaching development through an ethical lens, a selfless lens that puts the other before the development worker.

The notion of morality in development also may run counterproductive if the country being developed speaks from both sides, "[T]raditional societies, as commonly found in developing countries, formally hold an ambivalent position" (Schwenke 2009:121) in ethical considerations. An example of this is Lao PDR's battle against

human trafficking. This ambivalent stance opposed to communitarians, moral relativists who believe that it is the developing community that create and evolve their own morals based on culture, religion, tradition, and authority, or the universalists who maintain that all societies share a majority of "significant moral values" (Schwenke 2009:121) hinders development because when developing countries take an ambivalent stance, they create ethical chaos because the varying people groups may all have different notions of what is proper. The global world purports to value country leaders who take a universalist stance to accept all ethnicities, genders, and the human rights values shared by all (World Tourism Organization 2001, 2004; Kaplan 2008; Schwenke 2009). However, within individual countries, government leaders stray towards communitarian ethics (Schwenke 2009), which goes directly against the global proclamation.

Moral issues that development workers and policy-makers should face include consideration about whether they accept the universalists stance that all societies adopt a moral code that shares their values with all groups. The alternative is to give consideration to the communitarian values that have a tendency to maintain the status quo for cultural, traditional, authority structures, government (Schwenke 2009:129), and all roles in preservation of a society. For Habermas (2004:14), democratic constitutions must take a neutral stance when it comes to moral principles and if a state is not neutral, freedom is at risk. When a state follows the thoughts of the majority culture and does not regard the minority cultures living within, democracy is threatened. While Lao PDR is a democracy in name only, acceptance, understanding, and regard to the minority cultures can still occur. Minority cultures must be tolerant of the majority culture, too. One way to ensure there is tolerance on both parts comes from recognizing and maintaining the

rights of the country's citizens and government bodies and to create policies that reflect justice towards people.

Government Bodies and Rights' of Citizens

While policy is discussed in Chapter Four under Critical Hermeneutic Theory and Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, it is important to include literature on the importance of rights for citizens and their relationship with the governing bodies. Habermas (2004) outlines the history of the notion of tolerance for religious freedom in his article, *Religious Tolerance—The Pacemaker for Cultural Rights*. While Lao PDR does not have much religious freedom as they are still a communist country, the notion of tolerance as Habermas discusses remains important because in order for development to work, tolerance on all levels must be respected and maintained so that a relationship can develop among all parties involved and sustainable development can occur. Habermas' idea is supported by Kaplan (2008:31), who notes that "[O]nly a sustained and coherent program lasting generations, led by one outside power, and featuring significant foreign involvement in the management of governing bodies and security forces in large investments in education of local elites can hope to pay dividends."

Several decades ago, Nyerere (1974) realized from his own experience in governing a developing country while working in partnership with the citizens of his land, that development is a long-term process. Recent development writers (Herda 2007a, 2007b; Kaplan 2008; Schwenke 2009) acknowledge the same. Development within fragile states does not happen in a year, or a couple of years, but rather over a long span of time. Our thoughts develop over time as well. Habermas discusses the historical context of where and how the idea of tolerance came to be known and understood as it is

today. Since this was during the Reformation, it then took on a very constricted meaning with religious undertones—to be tolerant of religious minorities. In return, this opened the door for tolerance of other kinds, namely cultural, to be demanded as a right. Habermas points out that Rainer Forst contrasted the, "'[C]oncept of permission' issued by authorities who grant religious freedoms to the 'concept of respect' that concurs with our understanding of religious freedom as a civil right" (Forst as quoted in Habermas 2004:6). As long as Lao PDR remains communist, the country falls under the 'concept of permission' rather than the 'concept of respect.'

The concept of respect is reflected by people who are tolerant because they choose to be and not because the law says they have to be; respect and mutual understanding of the other may occur and a respect for all happens. This idea is supported by Ricoeur's ideas of understanding the other. He posits, "[U]nderstanding-even the understanding of another person in everyday life-is never direct intuition, but always a reconstruction" (Ricoeur 1984:97). Such understanding does not happen quickly and may take place in development when people at all levels participate in the overall process. The time element in development, particularly when understanding is sought among different others, is critical. Development takes energy, time, and many conversations in order to understand where the other is coming from (Herda 1999:62; 2007b:23).

Time is an important concept in development because it is our connection to our past, present, and future. Development does not occur solely in the present, but begins through a reconstruction of events from the past; a reconstruction that allows for the other to be tolerated, respected, and understood. Understanding ensues through filtering back

through time to piece together a narrative because in reconstructing a memory, parts are left out either through forgetting or by choice, which also adds to the understanding of the other. Habermas (2004:7) points out that there is, "[N]o inclusion without exclusion" when it comes to the notion of tolerance; he says, "[O]nly with a *universally convincing* delineation of the borderline, and this requires that all those involved *reciprocally* take the perspectives of the others, can toleration blunt the thorn of intolerance" (italics in original). By moving away from the differences in people and their lives, perspectives shift and a mutual understanding of the other occurs.

This creates a paradox—governments and other lawmakers purport to have tolerance for religions and other minority rights when speaking and writing laws for democracy, but if true tolerance is not carried out there is no mutually accorded democracy and therefore no tolerance as witnessed in Lao PDR. This can only be fully carried out when tolerance moves beyond pure religious freedoms onto the political, cultural, and civil sphere. For Habermas (2004:8), constitutional states must act to "…repel the animosity of existential enemies while avoiding any betrayal of its own principles." How this works in Lao PDR remains to be seen as there are still people being sought out for their involvement with the Vietnam War (Evans 1998). The very people deciding what to tolerate within a state must be careful to protect the limits of tolerance too. For tolerance to be recognized fully, Habermas (2004:9) says that a state must have "[A] democratic constitution that is understood as the project of realizing equal civil rights tolerates the resistance shown by dissidents who, even after all the legal channels have been exhausted, still insist on combating decisions that came about legitimately." All members of a democratic constitution must be able to have equal

rights and be accepted by all citizens before a community is seen as having tolerance. This is not the case today in Laos; however, early in his writings, Habermas (1975, 1979) argues for the position of what "is" today and what "ought" to be in the future, judging the present by what could be. It is this stance that can be assumed in Lao PDR, which is a country that is moving toward increasingly democratic principles. It is in this spirit that I pose a role that Habermas' ideas can play in considering what policies may come to reflect sustainable development in Lao PDR.

Summary

Through reviewing the literature on Tourism, Development, and Rights Government Bodies and Rights of Citizens, the complexities of tourism and the intricacies of responsible development are exposed, discussed, questioned, and critically thought about through the lens of a participatory hermeneutic inquiry. Chapter Four, The Research Process, moves beyond the literature and beginnings of participatory hermeneutic inquiry into a discussion of the guidelines that I used in conducting my research.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

This chapter presents the Theoretical Framework, details the Research Protocol, and reviews the Pilot Study. Chapter Four also provides the practical aspects of the study, including the Entrée to Research Site, Research Participants, Data Collection and Text Creation, Language and Translation, the Timeline, Personal Journal, and Data Analysis process. Questions that were used to guide my conversations are spelled out under the Research Categories and Conversation Questions section. Chapter Four also includes an explanation of the Background of the Researcher.

Theoretical Framework
Critical Hermeneutic Theory

The theoretical framework used for my research was field-based critical hermeneutics. A critical hermeneutic goal is:

> To create collaboratively a text that allows us to carry out the integrative act of reading, interpreting, and critiquing our understanding. This act is grounding for our actions. The medium of this collaborative act is language.… [The recorded text and social actions] allow us to recognize, challenge, and evaluate our worlds of action as well as to envision new, possible worlds. Objectivity comes when we distance ourselves from the text (Herda 1999:86).

As stated above, the text that served as my research data includes photographs and video. This helps create a visual text, which I used through the medium of language to record the social actions witnessed in Lao PDR and further the text created in collaboration. Analysis comes as the researcher puts herself into a "reflective and imaginary mode, thus opening new ways to think about the social problems…" (Herda 1999:87). I selected the categories of Tradition, Imagination, and Policy to aid the

creation of data text that yielded both an understanding of the past and possible new constructs for policy creation. The theory under girding this study was drawn from critical hermeneutic writers including Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas and Richard Kearney. To re-state the research, I explored through conversations with selected people of Lao PDR their remembered and chosen traditions, thoughts on tourism as one means of development for their country, and how those two notions meld together through imagination in order to influence curriculum for tourism programs and development studies. Moreover, I hope through this study to provide recommendations for policy-making so as to aid Lao PDR in becoming an economically viable country.

The following is a review of the theoretical constructs of imagination, tradition, and communicative action. I explain the components of the theories that assist in data analysis and weave examples of how they fit with the people and country of Lao PDR throughout.

Imagination

In Kearney's (1988) book, *The Wake of Imagination*, he put forth a sobering theory on postmodernism and its relation to imagination. Imagination in this book refers to "the image-making power of man" (Kearney 1988:15). The development of the technological image and the ability to make it continuously reproducible and marketable has infiltrated even our unconscious. Thus our reality becomes blended with non-reality, which in turn affects our imagination. Because of occurrences such as the development of telecommunications and globalization, education and literacy are thought to be affected in that the "*image*" is now a part of mainstream life rather than print as in the past (Kearney 1988:2) (italics in original). According to Kearney (1988:2), this is a part

of the reason why imagination is fleeting; the past had images coming after reality while in the present the opposite is true. Kearney (1988:14) states, "[T]he 'post' of postmodernity would seem to suggest that the human imagination has now become a post-man disseminating multiple images and signs which he himself has not created and over which he has no real control." While in the modern world, this seems drastic, for Lao PDR, the lack of development possibly allowed the imagination of the people to flow and become a vehicle for the retention of chosen traditions as tourism continues to grow.

Kearney (1988:2) posits there seems to be an almost indistinguishable blending between reality and the imaginary. He states that this is a part of why the creative human imagination is "under threat" (Kearney 1988:3). Imagination is no longer to help guide thoughts to God as the central aspect of our existence, but rather to aid in recreated expressions of self (Kearney 1988:11). Yet, it is this recreation that places the expression of the self in a precarious position. Kearney (1988:30) writes that

> [B]y collapsing the historical dimensions of time—recollection of time past and projection of time future—into an empty play of euphoric instants, postmodernism runs the risk of eclipsing the potential of human experience for *liberation*. It risks cultivating the ecstasy of self-annihilation by precluding the possibility of self-expression. And it risks abandoning the emancipatory practice of imagining *alternative* horizons of existence (remembered or anticipated) by renouncing the legitimacy of narrative coherence and identity—even as practiced here in our own telling of the story of imagination (italics in original).

When past and future is taken out, time becomes short bursts of instants. This may be seen in the government's changing of traditions; for example, Evans (1998:135) writes of the traditions that take place for New Year, "[O]ne thing is certain—*traditionally* [New Year] revolved around the king, and *traditionally* it went on for almost two weeks, not three official days now allocated to it on 13, 14, and 15 April"

(italics in original). Today the ceremonies say nothing of the king and changes to the traditional celebrations continue to be made, including the "…purification rites of the city previously conducted by parades of the king's elephants… [and] rites connected with minorities. But nothing has taken their place" (Evans 1998:135-6), thus further muddling the custom's waters. Revered rituals and traditions have simply disappeared or been modified to fit the whim of the government (Evans 1998:133-8).

When traditions are treated in a civilized manner, the idea of a person's experience of liberation—including the very identity of oneself—can be cut short (Kearney 1988:30). There is a loss of power in the human experience when lives' stories are put into neat little packages. People's imaginations are cut off when the experience of freedom or acknowledgement of history is removed from the picture. In this case, postmodernism may prevent full self-expression by humans because they have been cut off. In turn, Kearney (1988:30) argues that humans risk becoming involved with their own loss of awareness of individuality thus furthering the death of imagination. The notion of postmodernism may also help drive people away from imagining different futures by abandoning the authenticity of a human's logic and thought process along with their idea of their identity, which is part of the human liberation experience.

Abandoning one's identity, even philosophically, impairs the connection of life, the continuation of historical narratives, and does not ground itself in reality because it is narrowly focused on the new. By giving up the past in modernism and not allowing it to shape ourselves and our life, causes the connectedness to one another and to reality to become blurred because of the focus on the here and now. Further, every human shapes their identity by retelling the story of themselves (Kearney 1988:17). To fully recognize

what imagination is and its possibilities requires going back through time and projecting into the future of postmodernism. Through this mimetic process, imagination's genesis may be revealed and human's creative imagination could be defined and revived in the choosing of their traditions to present to visitors; creating policy for tourism programs; and developing curriculum for tourism programs for students, officials, and visitors. In the reviving of imagination, Kearney (1988:30) takes on the historical, creative power of the imagination:

> The creative power of imagination which biblical culture identified with Adamic man and Greek culture with Promethean or demiurgic man reaches its ultimate humanist conclusion with existentialist man. And the logical implication would seem to be that the human imagination will disappear as man himself disappears. The concept of imagination cannot, apparently, survive the postmodern age of deconstruction. It is slowly being erased, to adapt Foucault's vivid phrase, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.

In Plato's idea of a demiurgic man, God is *the* powerful force in which reality for the people of his time lived in. This shaped and refined people's imagination because they had to rely on their own thoughts of what they read, saw, experienced. However, with existentialism, self-existence is key and personal convictions and experiences are essential components; there is nothing new and reality is grounded and shaped by what is seen; the creative power of imagination flows to its end. Therefore, imagination must be redefined so as to not disappear (Kearney 1988:31).

By entering into the labyrinth of parody and play, imagination dispossesses itself of inherited certainties. At the very heart of the labyrinth, imagination explores possibilities of an*other* kind of *poiesis*—alternative modes of inventing alternative modes of existence (Kearney 1988:33) (italics in original). Through inventing alternative modes of existence, the people groups of Lao PDR have a chance for development to be fully

recognized as being by the people and for the people. Kearney (1988:15) wants to take the lessons learned and utilize the very basic notion of imagination that was defined in the beginning, "[T]he image-making power of man" to steer us into exploring and creating new images, thoughts, and existences that have not yet been tried, making the notion of imagination a way for Laotians to visualize possible futures. In visualizing possible futures, the traditional past of Lao PDR also plays a critical role. By allowing the traditions of the past to be remembered, the new possibilities that will be created become inextricably bound to the traditional past.

Tradition

Tradition is an integral part of the Lao people and was apparent while I researched in the country. From the traditional dress among villagers, foods I ate, houses people lived in, rich traditions were evident. Seeing such history and tradition engrained in Lao culture, witnessing the slash and burn, and observing the extreme poverty of the people was appalling yet enlightening—my researcher's eyes were opened wide. In this instance the disconnect between us, the Westerners, and them, the Lao was discovered. Many Laotians do not have supplies for the most basic needs. Still, despite my reaction to the economic poverty, I was indelibly impressed with the tangible presence of Laotian tradition and my experience traveling throughout the country helped me to realize the importance of tradition.

Development within Lao PDR cannot be fully realized without approaching traditions with respect and an understanding of their value. Herda (1999:90) supported this notion by discussing the roles of the researcher when she stated, "[W]e have to frame our current idea of science, economic development, research methodology, or whatever it

is we are investigating within the understanding of tradition, and put it at risk, to frame it in a critical perspective." The critical perspective helps to slow the researcher down from our own goals for research or development and recognize the importance of the other—the person we are working for. By development workers distinguishing their goals from those they work for, in this case the poor, and framing them in a critical perspective a sense of justice can be built upon to ensure a voice for all. Explaining the veracity behind a sense of justness, Ricoeur (1992: 197) writes, "[T]he *just,* it seems to me, faces in two directions: toward the *good*, with respect to which it marks the extension of interpersonal relationships to institutions; and toward the *legal*, the judicial system conferring upon the law coherence and the right of constraint" (italics in original). The Lao government would be served well to promote a sense of justness towards all their people groups as they may then begin to build on the interpersonal relationships needed to sustain long-term development, which then helps to advance sentiments of legitimacy because the other has been recognized as a full-fledged member in society. Promoting justness through recognition of the other's traditions and voices helps to further the idea of tourism as way of development for the Lao. When the other is accepted as a member of society, their voice can portray their desires and bring about true development.

Ricoeur (1984:105) attested that, "[A] discrete wisdom, opposed to the frenzy of events, can be discerned behind this respect for the extreme slowness of real changes." I learned to find wisdom even in my observation about the lack of basic necessities. Respect for tradition was but one argument. As Evans (1990, 1998, 2003) discussed, the culture of the Laotians is grounded in the respect for tradition and family. Great reverence is given to the ways of the past. When looking through the eyes of the Lao

people, the reasons that they lack the basic necessities become clearer. Their past ways of treating illness has not challenged them to imagine new ways. Medicine men are common still today and challenging these healers may be seen as going against tradition. The revered attitude of the temporal past helps not only keep traditions alive, but may be seen by some to hinder their growth as a people, especially when the government made revisions to traditional customs in an attempt to erase their past. This echoes Evans (1998:133) as quoted in Chapter One, "…and so, what people now remember as 'tradition' differs generationally, although a surprising number of younger people will tell you that in the old regime, they carried out the 'traditions' properly, thereby conveying an understanding that something has been lost." Keeping chosen traditions alive is a challenge for Laotians as the generational differences of traditions is apparent; however, the focus must be not on specific traditions, but the choice of traditions the people groups of Lao PDR make for their own community.

To bridge tradition and imagination, Ricoeur (1988:260) referred to the notion of prophecy, saying "[I]t is in this way, a narrative past, which is the past of the narrative voice, is assigned to this quasi-present." Within the quasi-present and given the reverence for tradition, imagining a new future with tourism proved to be difficult for some of the Lao, specifically the village leaders and villagers. Ricoeur (1984:69) also stated, "[T]he labor of imagination is not born from nothing. It is bound in one way or another to the tradition's paradigms." Our traditions help lead us to what we imagine and in turn, our imagination comes from our tradition's ways. Imagination is arduous as it works to produce change and imagine a new future, something that the people of Lao PDR must do to ensure their sustainability. Thinking about changing the paradigm of the

past into the possibility of the future, I found myself wanting to know what everyday Laotians thought.

To further my comprehension of what the Lao conveyed with my own prejudgments and understanding of Laos, Hans-Georg Gadamer's 1975 notion of *fusion of horizons* was utilized. In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer (1975) provides an argument that our past helps to lay forth our present through a continuously moving horizon in which we fuse our own beliefs with text in order to create a fusion of horizon for ourselves. Gadamer (1975:305) states:

> In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past… *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves* (italics in original).

The narratives that were presented by the conversations with the Lao helped to fuse my horizon of their traditions and future. In being able to give voice to the past, traditional ways may be examined using critical hermeneutical inquiry to look at the tension that exists in tradition's past and its place in the future. Ricoeur (1985:220) also furthers the notion of *fusion of horizons* so one does not impose "…upon ourselves the task of overcoming our tendency to assimilate the past too quickly to our own expected meanings." Through utilizing fusion of horizons with my interpretation of text, it helped me to begin to envision a new paradigm inclusive of a chosen future for the Lao people.

In shifting the paradigm to a chosen, possible future within Lao PDR, Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action helped further connect the ideas of tradition, imagination, tourism, and policy-making with the people of Lao PDR in a participatory

manner, so that choices could be made about how development may work in their country. While it is true that Lao PDR is communist, it has made significant efforts to enact the idea of community participation in several development projects (International Labour Office, Geneva 2000; Mekong Tourism Development Project 2002). These projects are highly localized and it was my hope to bring the act of participatory development not only to gain local views, but national views too. By creating a national voice, inclusive of the various people groups, the conversation I had with each of my participants becomes one for all people of Lao PDR.

Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action

Jürgen Habermas (1981, 1984) discusses in *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One and Volume 2* his ideas of communicative action by presenting and explaining three interrelated concerns: (1) developing and refining a notion of rationality, in which the subjectivistic and individualistic premise of modern philosophy and social theory no longer are tied; (2) creating a two-level concept of society that integrates the lifeworld and systems paradigms, which I will discuss below; and (3) using the notions above to frame a critical theory of modernity, which analyzes and explains a redirected idea of enlightenment. Habermas' work lends itself well for development, including working for human rights and minority groups because a great part of its aim is to reach understanding within a lifeworld. In developing the categorical framework and foundation of this social theory, Habermas shifted to viewing language-in-use, or speech. Habermas (1984:397) states:

> If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination is established through communication—and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement—then the

> reproduction of the species *also* requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality inherent in communicative action (italics in original).

Habermas describes this type of rationality as being goal-directed rather than directed through the subject's two basic relations with the object: representation and action. Moving toward goal-directed rationality, the communicative dimension of social action utilizes language as the basic medium for communication. Within communication, understanding is reached through agreement by the conversants (Habermas 1984:120), which leads to the definition of lifeworld. Habermas (1984:126) describes the lifeworld as "…the transcendental site where the speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements."

The organic nature in which Ricoeur (1984) discusses imagination and tradition as being connected through our past and leading to our future together, helps set the stage for Habermas' notion of communicative action as it integrates our lifeworlds, where our communication takes place. In my research, imagination and tradition were the focus of communicative action about possibilities for tourism as a process for development; this allowed communicative action to move towards policy-making in situations in which the conversants reached mutual understanding about what traditions were important to retain as a people group. From that understanding raises the possibility of creating policy that is inclusive of the people groups so that each citizen is treated with respect and voice is given to the other.

With language being the basic medium for communication, learning how to present ideas to my participants was important. In conversations within the lifeworld,

hierarchy does not matter; instead, the conversants' aim is to reach understanding. Bridging people's ideas with those of either local or national government agencies proved difficult, but through conversations and subsequent text analysis, policy-makers developed a better understanding of the people affected by development. Lao leaders at various levels of society who have conversations with the different people groups allow for the possibility of a lifeworld to open up. These conversations, in turn, may provide the possibility of generating dialogues that promote imagination in discussions on tradition, tourism and policy-making. The reason these kinds of conversations may prove to be highly useful in social designs and subsequent action is because within the lifeworld of each person, his or her cultural traditions are "coextensive with society" (Habermas 1984:148), which brings theory to bear on the everyday world of people. Moreover, because cultural traditions within a lifeworld have the same limits as in the larger social domain, this allows for social action through which development by the people of Lao PDR takes on importance, ensuring that people groups are tolerated and listened to regarding chosen traditions to present to Westerners along with developing curriculum for tourism programs.

The notion of tolerance discussed in Chapter Three helps mediate the lifeworld; specifically, Habermas (2004:7) says: "[O]nly with a *universally convincing* delineation of the borderline, and this requires that all those involved *reciprocally* take the perspectives of the others, can toleration blunt the thorn of intolerance" (italics in original). Responsible policy goes beyond tolerance at its basic level to imagination about a country where legitimate, equal rights, and acceptance of each people group's history, including the country's collective history, has a voice and freedom. Lao PDR is

a communist country and Habermas writes from within the concept of democracy. However, as previously indicated, the Lao government, in the spirit of giving voice to polity members, has allowed and encouraged participation in development projects that have taken place over the past several years. This participation has been supported in partnership with the Lao government by outside agencies such as the Asian Development Bank and The International Labour Office. It was within this social construct of local participation Habermas' work added significant value to my research.

People who traditionally had been voiceless were not mute when given the opportunity to participate with their ideas. For most, when it was shown that they matter and were allowed to voice their ideas, imagination filled their being. Ricoeur (1992), Kearney (2003) and Herda (2007a) indicate that this participation is one way to show people are cared for and respected. In other words, the other—in a relationship, in this case, between the local and national governments and the other as a community or village member— takes on significance rather than simply following fiats they had no role in developing.

Below is a diagram adapted from Habermas' (1984:127) model that may aid in understanding the notion of lifeworld. Following the diagram I delve deeper toward understanding the concept of communicative action by explaining Habermas' theory of communicative competence and how that relates to the people groups of Lao PDR.

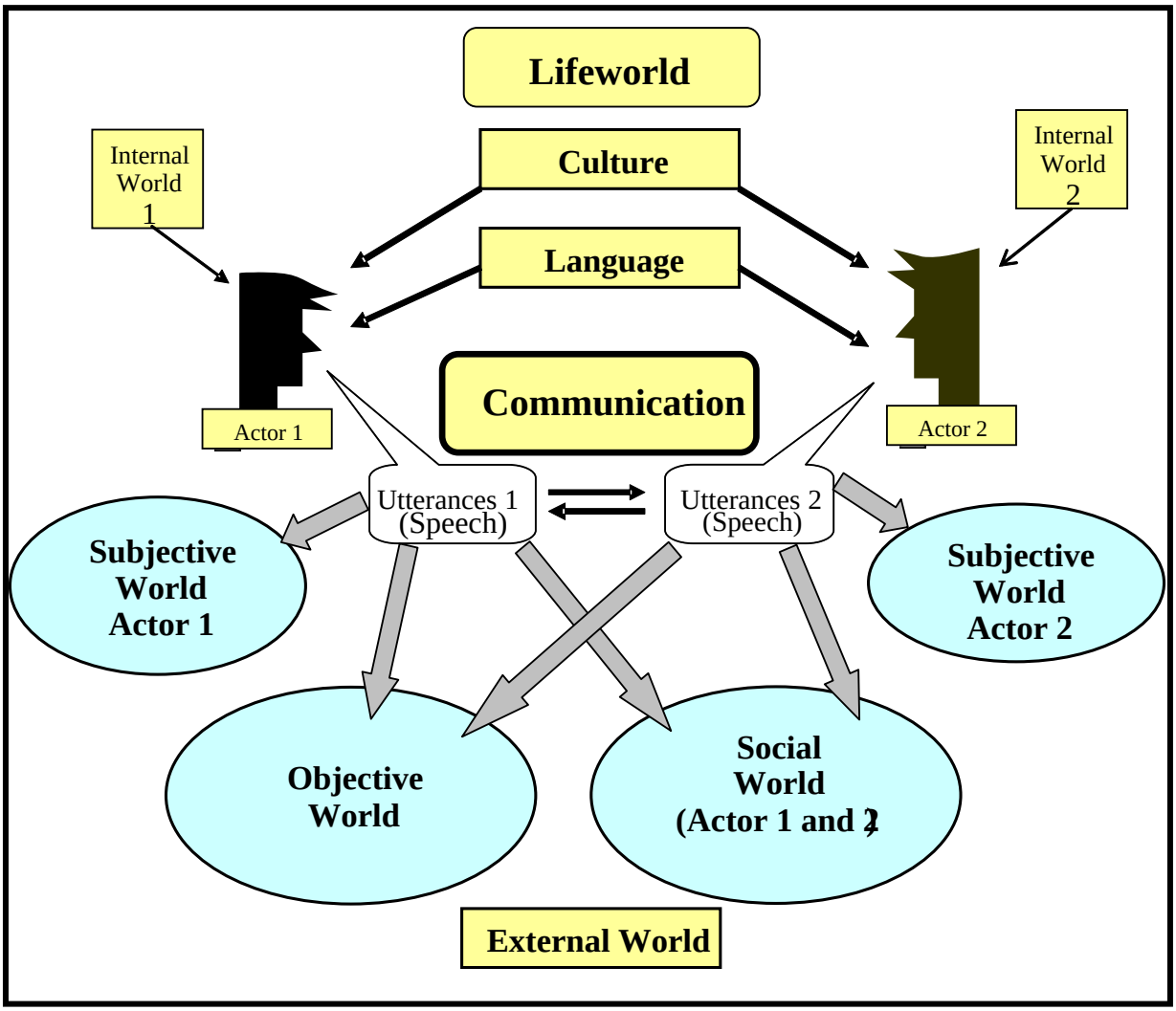

Diagram 1: Lifeworld of Habermas (1984) **Source: Laura Nelsen**

Communicative Competence

The theory of Communicative Competence goes beyond learning how to speak a language and creating grammatically correct sentences. When people speak, they relate to the world before them including other subjects, emotions, feelings, intentions, and desires. Within each of these aspects, claims are made concerning the validity of what was spoken (Habermas 1984:9). For Lao PDR, customary rules of the groups were followed, but the focus within the claims—the appropriateness or legitimacy of the conversation—was decided with respect to the shared values and *status quo* of the social

lifeworld. The experience Habermas (1984) sought in developing his idea of rationality is one of reaching understanding. Reaching understanding is, "at least two speaking and acting subjects understanding a linguistic expression in the same way" (Habermas 1984:307); this is called communicative competence.

Communicative competence begins with an orientation toward reaching a new understanding between two or more people. From the understanding new ideas flow, traditions are remembered, shared, chosen, and imagined. Tourism policy can be made from the levels of local village up to the nation because within communicative competence, the idea is the establishment of a relationship between people beginning with language. Within societies such as Lao PDR, language was the basis for agreement because "…worldviews are spread over the social structure as a whole and yet are tightly bound up with daily routines" (Habermas 1984:156) and "it reproduces itself as a whole in every single interaction" (Habermas 1984:157). From my visits, I was able to see how the people of Lao PDR fit in with Habermas' notions of communicative competence. I saw the Laotian people throughout the country engaged in daily routines that reflected the underlying currents of tradition. The reproduction of their lifeworld regenerated constantly because of this relationship between routine and tradition; yet, moving beyond these daily routines presented a challenge precisely because they represented the way of life for the majority of Laotians. However, through the use of Habermas' theory of communicative action and subsequently communicative competence, new paradigms were able to be sought within the conversations in order to further the development of Lao PDR. In order to fully realize how Habermas' theories work within the Lao

community, communicative competence must be connected with the notion of lifeworld, thus rounding out the theory.

Communicative competence and the nucleus of validity claims stem from various theories of meaning. Beginning in part with truth semantics as introduced by Frege, and then developed by early Wittgenstein to Davidson and Dummett (Habermas 1984:276), Bühler's theory of language then expanded on communicative competence through functions, which were connected with parts of analytic theory of meaning (Habermas 1984:277). These writers heavily influenced Habermas' work (Habermas 1984). Additionally, parts of two versions of Weber's theory of action helped to round out Habermas' idea (1984:279). For Habermas (1984), language is the foundation for relationship; within this context, conversations center on what he calls validity claims. Validity claims are at the heart of communicative rationality; they provide both conversants a way to respond to each other through questioning, testing, and accepting a statement's validity.

According to Habermas (1984), meaning is derived from a sentence in a conversation based on its truth conditions. In order to meet the truth conditions, a set of validity claims must be met. The validity claims Habermas (1984) set forth are: (1) comprehensibility; (2) sincerity; (3) truth; and (4) legitimacy. When these four validity claims are met, relationships may occur because an understanding has been reached. Comprehensibility is the most basic part of validity claims. For a conversation to occur, the people must be able to understand each other, either through speaking with another or using a translator. When a person makes a validity claim, part of it is internal, and part of it is external. The sincerity portion of validity claims takes place within a person, and the

truth portion is external in the world. To gain legitimacy in a relationship there must be shared values. Because shared values within Lao PDR villages are important (Evans 1998), it was helpful in reaching understanding between myself and the conversants. Shared values are responsible for actions and must be in place for any kind of work to commence. Within the space of legitimacy and shared values *our world* is created and communicative action occurs. Through conversations with the Lao people groups, taking into account the validity claims that Habermas set forth, ideas for development, such as how to utilize monies coming from Westerners within the villages, took place. Further, through utilizing validity claims and seeking communicative competence within the lifeworld, outcomes emerged for policy and curriculum development.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

The review of theoretical literature from Ricoeur, Kearney, and Habermas provides the base of the framework from which I pursued the topic of development and policy-making in research while focusing on the critical hermeneutic tradition. This framework took place as a participatory collaboration between researcher and research participants. I designed this research to learn and discuss development for Lao PDR through a different view than what was more commonly taking place, for development too often occurs without listening to the various people groups in the country and with little regard for local views on their country's policies and direction. Within the space of my research conversations, I spoke with those who participated about the concepts of tradition, imagination, and policy-making for Lao PDR and we reached new understandings.

The results of a recent pilot study on the topic of imagination and tradition proved useful in examining new ways for responsible development to occur in Lao PDR. The final portion of this Chapter describes the research protocol, the pilot study, and the preliminary findings that encouraged me to pursue this topic further.

Research Protocol

I adopted a collaborative research protocol that included both researcher and research participants in conversation. The research conversations took place in Lao PDR with people from various ethnicities, tourism officials, and tourism experts. The conversations had specific guidelines and focus, they were audio recorded and parts of the location were video taped, then transcribed and fixed as text. I analyzed the text with a focus on the categories and review of literature for meaning and to appropriate recommendations as a result of reading the texts and following the analysis steps described below.

Entrée to Research Site

A primary and initial research site was Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. In 1995, Luang Prabang was identified as a UNESCO World Heritage site (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization 2009). A secondary research site was Vientiane, which is the capital of Lao PDR. The research conversations took place between August 2009 and September 2009. As the research progressed, I determined more locations to visit in order to gather tourism information or visit with research conversation partners. In traveling to Lao PDR, I was able to observe, interact, participate in conversations, and visit many of the sites that had been identified as travel destinations in order to gather data. Please see Appendix A for the approval letter from IRB. My first goal was to meet

many different people that make up the country of Lao PDR in order to arrive at an accurate understanding as to what is the Laotian people actually feel important, as opposed to what government agencies may want to present to Westerners from abroad. My second goal was to converse about the needs of tourism officials for the future creation of policy-making and curriculum for tourism and development studies.

Research Categories and Conversation Questions

The following questions (Appendix B) were created from the categories as described in the theoretical framework section. The critical hermeneutic approach was used as a guide for the conversations as it created the collaborative text (Herda 1999:86) that I analyzed. The following guiding questions were used when conversing with my research participants. These questions were not meant to be answered but to encourage conversation. The questions were in two groups: the first group was directed to tourism officials and the second group to local leaders.

Group One:
Category I: Tradition

1. What traditions do you remember being important to your family through generations?
2. How have those traditions carried through to your life now?
3. As a citizen of Lao PDR, what do you feel is important for the country to retain in terms of traditions celebrated throughout the nation?

Category II: Imagination

1. Given the importance of tradition throughout your country, how do you see ethnic and Lao traditions working with tourism today?
2. Thinking about what is important to you and your family, what would you like to present to the world's tourists when they visit your country looking for cultural interests?
3. What would you want tourists to know when they come to visit your village, your town, your country?

Category III: Policy

1. What kind of policy do you believe would be fitting for tourism?
2. What should be included in tourism policy about the retention of chosen traditions?
3. What do you believe needs to be addressed in tourism development programs?

I reworded the research questions for translation to ensure appropriateness and understanding between researcher and research participants when needed. The following were questions that served as a guide for conversing with local village leaders:

Group Two:
Category I: Tradition

1. What traditions do you remember being important to your family?
2. What are some examples of traditions your family continues to observe?
3. What traditions do you feel are important for the country to keep?

Category II: Imagination

1. When tourists come to visit, what would you like them to learn about your culture?
2. What should tourists know about your country and culture before visiting Lao PDR?
3. Please describe a good future for your village.

Category III: Policy

1. What rules for tourism in Lao PDR would you like to see created?
2. What rules should be created to help retain parts of your traditions?
3. What do you believe needs to be looked at in programs that are being used to train tourism workers?

Research Participants

My research included 12 conversation partners comprised of national, district, and local leaders. Several of the research participants lived in remote areas and did not have regular access to telephones, internet, and mail service so I was unable to arrange meetings until arrival in Lao PDR. All conversations took place inside Lao PDR and with exception to one, with Mr. Ma Yang, were conducted primarily in English.

Conversation partners were identified with the help and guidance of Mr. Jay Thao and Mr. Juu Moua, whom I had met during my visit in May 2008. When possible, I contacted research participants by e-mail or phone with a description of the study followed by a letter of invitation (Appendix C) that included the guiding questions. There were two letters of invitation, one for tourism officials and another for local leaders. Research participants were also sent a letter of confirmation (Appendix D) that the conversation would first be audio recorded and then transcribed into a text that they would have an opportunity to edit before becoming data for analysis. Once conversations had been conducted, I sent the participants a thank you and follow-up email letter (Appendix E) to show appreciation for their participation in the research process. Email was used due to the remote nature of some conversants and to ensure the delivery of correspondence. The following section provides descriptions of each of my selected conversation partners.

Mr. Norakoun Tanseri

Mr. Tanseri is the managing director for Dok Champa Travel Company, LTD. He has been director there since the company's beginning in 2005. I met Mr. Tanseri in Vientiane at his place of business. He is Lao and lives in the city of Vientiane.

Ms. Da Somsath

Ms. Somsath is a travel agency manager for Haysoke Travel. We met at her business in Vientiane. She is newer to the tourism business and is working diligently to forge relationships with the rural poor before she introduces tourists to their villages. Ms. Somsath is the only female leader in Lao PDR I was able to converse with.

Mr. Vilikhan Xayana

Mr. Xayana was hired six weeks before I met him for the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA). He was a tour guide prior to coming to LNTA to work on their Lao 2020 project, which furthers the Millennium Development Goals as described in Chapter Three. He hopes to be a trainer or teacher for tourism studies at the University of Singapore at Sentosa Island.

Mr. Soukaseum Bodhisane

Mr. Bodhisane is the Vice-Chairman for the LNTA. He reports directly to the Chairman of LNTA and the Prime Minister. Mr. Bodhisane is Lao and speaks English, French, Lao, and some Hmong. I met him by chance when speaking with Mr. Xayana. He maintains a busy schedule by visiting the rural districts.

Mr. Juu Moua

I met Mr. Juu in May 2008 and subsequently chose my topic for research in part because of his passion for the rural poor and knowledge of development in Laos. Mr. Juu is currently a student in Thailand and he maintains a home in Luang Prabang. Mr. Juu is Hmong and lived in the highland mountains of Lao PDR as a child. He speaks and understands Lao, Hmong, Thai, Khmu, Vietnamese, and English. He was instrumental in arranging people for me to converse with while traveling through Laos.

Mr. Maikham Sawangchakkavane

Mr. Sawangchakkavane is a young Lao man working in the advertisement and marketing promotion department for the Sayaboury Provincial Tourism Department (SPTD), which reports to LNTA. Mr. Jay arranged a meeting with Mr.

Sawangchakkavane. I met him at the SPTD and had a conversation with him and Mr. Khong.

Mr. Boum Khong

Mr. Khong is Lao and works alongside Mr. Sawangchakkavane at the Sayaboury Provincial Tourism Department. He grew up in Sayaboury and is a staple in the development of projects bringing tourism to their province. He speaks Lao and English fluently.

Mr. Jay Thao

I met Mr. Jay through Mr. Juu and developed a strong relationship with him as he was my guide, translator, and research partner for two weeks. Mr. Jay is Hmong and speaks Hmong, Lao, and English. He works freelance for World Vision and is a guide for LNTA. Mr. Jay grew up alongside Mr. Juu in the mountains of Laos. He has dedicated his life's work for developing the poor, especially the Hmong in remote Laos.

Mr. Ma Yang

Mr. Yang is a district leader overseeing five villages in Lao PDR. I met him when we delivered a boat to a remote village along the Mekong. He came to meet us and supervise the donation. He is Hmong and reports directly to the Prime Minister's offices regarding the livelihood of his villages. Mr. Yang is a visionary, wanting to create meeting spaces within his villages for the village leaders to meet, plan, and develop together.

Mr. Dou Xong Mansourl

Mr. Dou is a Hmong freelance tour guide for a Swedish based company. He was one of the first four ecotourism guides when the country opened up to visitors in the

1990s. I met him through Mr. Jay, who is a former coworker of his. His village was one of the first to open up to tourism and Mr. Dou has subsequently reported to LNTA regarding problems and praises for the program in his home village.

Mr. Sengthome

Mr. Sengthome works for UNESCO and has for nine years. He has worked in multiple areas for UNESCO and currently is working on their dam project. He was instrumental in the creation and implementation of the successful Night Market in Luang Prabang. His focus though remains on the creation of sustainable policy for the marginalized in Laos.

Mr. Por Xiong

Mr. Xiong is a young Hmong man working for World Vision. He speaks Hmong, Lao, and English. Mr. Xiong is currently working on a sponsorship program for World Vision where he travels to remote parts of Lao PDR gathering information on the children he finds in order to work on satisfying their needs. My last conversation with Mr. Xiong was the culmination of my research conversations in Laos.

Data Collection and Text Creation

Data for this research study were collected through conversations between researcher and research participant. The conversations were audio recorded, videotaped, and transcribed to create a collaborative text of our conversation fixed in writing (Herda 1999:86, 97). After the conversation was transcribed, the transcription was sent to the participant to read, comment, clarify, and to provide time to review and reflect on the conversation (Herda 1999:87). I took responsibility for any changes the participant wanted to make to the text and if deemed necessary, to conduct a follow-up conversation

in response to the text before it became part of the final data collection. The aim of this type of data collection was not only to share in the conversation experience, but more importantly for both the researcher and the research participant to expand their knowledge and learning from each other as the "written text transcends its own conditions and opens itself to unlimited readings" (Herda 1999:87). The participant was exceptionally important as they were the co-creator of the text because, "what we say contains the seeds of what the said will be—the said being rescued in a text by the fixation of the saying" (Herda 1999:88). This was where the notion of imagination took on utmost importance as it was here where the Lao people began to unfold a "world of the text" (Ricoeur 1982:143).

Language and Translation

Many people in Lao PDR who work in education, tourism and policy spoke English. With these participants the conversation was in English, unless they requested the help of a translator. In conversations with local people, I employed the use of translators whom I had met during my previous trip and who understood the nature of my project.

Timeline

In order to create the "world of the text" (Ricoeur 1982:143), I spent a period of time in Lao PDR. The timeline for the research study began with data collection in August 2009 and was completed in September 2009. Text creation and analysis of the transcribed conversations, photographs, and video along with determining research implications occurred from mid-September through December of 2009. I will complete and submit the final dissertation in March 2010.

Personal Journal

An important source of data collection that I used when conducting the research study was a research journal (Herda 1999:98). As I explored my research topic throughout Lao PDR, I kept a personal journal in order to record observations, generate new ideas, and record reflections outside the formal data collection process (Appendix F). The personal journal adds an essential component to the data in that by keeping detailed notes and thoughts regarding conversations or experiences had while conducting research, the researcher is better equipped to reflect accurately on their own thoughts, prejudices, and opinions. In addition to helping preserve particular reflections, a personal journal is a means to keep clear records so that the researcher's voice can represent the collective narrative of all involved with the research when presenting and analyzing the data.

I took as much video and photographs as possible to help give a visual imprint of the countryside, people, and development that has occurred so far. I reviewed and analyzed the video and photographs using ideas from the following visual anthropologists, Margaret Mead (1901-1978), Gregory Bateson (1904-1980), and Rhoda Metraux (1914-2003), in conjunction with critical hermeneutics. I used visual anthropology for data collection and data analysis purposes because it had a consistent history (in the 1880s) of success as a research medium (Ruby 1996:1345). Visual anthropology also lent itself well to analysis through a critical hermeneutic perspective because one of the main tenets of critical hermeneutic participatory research is to reach understanding. When people from varying cultures meet and converse, entire backgrounds may be different; by having photographs and video available, understanding

of the other may be recognized because the interpretation of the written text has a context within the photographs and video.

My goal was to document new insights, views, and opinions as well as reach new understanding of both the research process and the theories of tradition, imagination, and communicative action through the lens of policy-making. I also utilized the personal journal that I kept during the research process as a source of informal data, which I then used with primary data gathered in fieldwork for analysis.

Data Analysis

Critical hermeneutic field-based research does not have a, "closed set of instructions, or steps that determines the way one *does* [research]. It is not so much a matter of *doing* hermeneutic participatory research as it is a way of *being* a researcher" (Herda 1999:93) (italics in original). According to Herda (1999:98), data analysis is an imaginative and creative act whereby the researcher appropriates a proposed world from the created text. I analyzed the texts from the research conversations to determine themes, along with placement within the selected categories for the study. Through this analysis, I also determined new meaning in light of the theoretical concepts by using quotes from the conversations, from my own observations, photographs, video, outside documented studies, and personal journal. I then drew implications on the topic that provides new insight and direction.

The following sequence help explain the process for analysis following a critical hermeneutic approach (Herda 1999:98-100):

- Data were collected through research conversations that I recorded and transcribed, and at times had translated, when the native language was other than English.

- The final transcription became a text of the conversation between researcher and the participant and was then fixed in written form. The major source of data for analysis stemmed from the transcriptions of conversations.

- I read all conversation transcriptions to help develop an overview of the topic and to appropriate a proposed world from the text. Exposure to the text allows a different perspective.

- I determined themes from the identification of significant statements within the research categories.

- I substantiated all themes and other important ideas with quotes from the conversation transcripts, supplemented with observational data, and supported with photographs or video. Participant's quotes remained as close as possible to the original language (Herda 1999:99).

- I examined themes to determine what they meant, through the lens of the framework of critical hermeneutics. I used the other sources of data—journal, photographs, video—to support the text and develop the themes.

- I provided additional opportunities for continued conversation and discussion with the research participants in order to make any changes or allow for new ideas to be discussed.

- I then created a setting for written discussion. I developed text from the discussion of groupings of themes and individual themes found within each category.

- I discussed the research topic at the theoretical level, basing this in critical hermeneutics.

- Implications from the written discussions provided deeper insight and possibly a new direction for the topic of the research study.

- I identified examples of my own learning experiences during the process, along with examples from the role the study played in my own life.

This study followed the above described process to provide new insights and potential directions that policy-makers and curriculum writers can use in tourism and development programs. I anticipated the themes of Tradition, Imagination, and Policy would be found woven throughout the interpretive, critical hermeneutic texts that were

created. These themes provided the depth and the framework to interpret tradition and tourism in development through a new lens.

Pilot Study

The following summarizes the pilot study that I conducted for this research project. It includes photographs taken while visiting Lao PDR in May 2008. Appendix G contains my journal transcript from the pilot study, which included my observations, thoughts, and Mr. Payee's story. The highlighted parts represent my initial feelings after rereading the transcript; those thoughts helped me discover the themes and categories that I used for my research.

Image 2: Mr. Payee Muas and His Wife in Their Home
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2008

Introduction

I conducted a pilot study in November 2008 to determine if the theoretical framework and research questions of my research topic were adequate to guide a conversation on the topic of tradition, imagination, and development. The original conversation for the pilot study was conducted in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, with Mr. Payee Muas, a local Hmong villager, father, and shaman. Mr. Payee is recognized as a shaman or a spiritual guide, which is a significant position of leadership among traditional leader groups. Details of the pilot study are described in the following section. Included throughout the details are photographs taken while

visiting Mr. Payee and his family, beginning with Image 2 of Mr. Payee and his wife on the porch outside their home.

Pilot Conversation Partner

In order to further my understanding on the topic of development and tradition in critical hermeneutic thinking, I used a conversation I had while exploring Lao PDR in May 2008. Luang Prabang is not Mr. Payee's hometown. He brought his family from the mountainside to try for a better life. Mr. Payee is the father of Mr. Juu, my translator who also was my tour guide while in Laos. Mr. Juu took me to his home to meet his family (Image 3). When I walked up, I was at first taken aback as my thoughts about Mr. Juu did not mesh with what I was witnessing. His home is about 15x15 feet and houses 15 people. It is made out of fronds and wood from local plants and trees and has a dirt floor. Rice was stacked six large bags deep at the entrance, leaving very little room to spread out. Mr. Payee sat at the entrance smoking local tobacco with his cousin, shy to shake my hand, but very polite nonetheless.

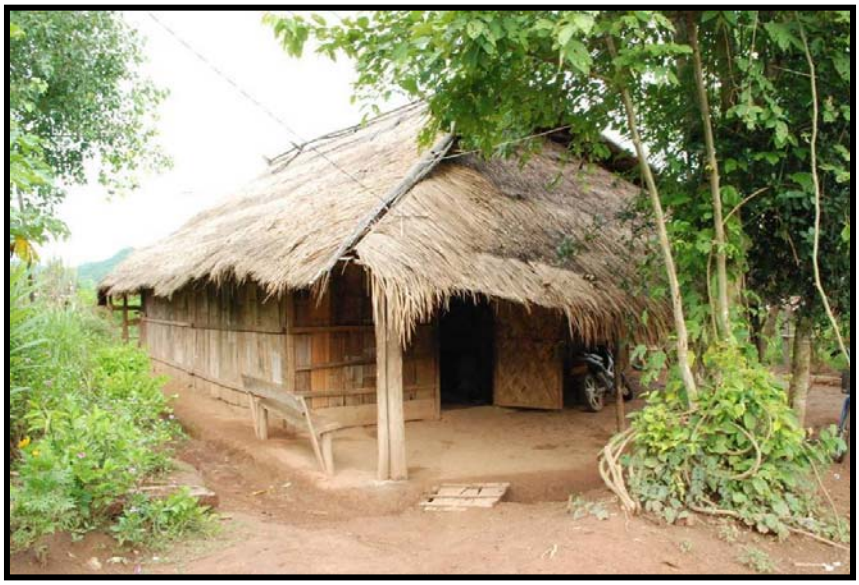

Image 3: Mr. Payee's Home Outside **Source: Laura Nelsen, 2008**

My conversation with Mr. Payee happened in the most natural way. Before Mr. Juu and I left, Mr. Payee asked if he could speak with me. He and I sat down next to each other and he began to speak. We spent close to an hour having a conversation that would in effect change my life forever. We were able to touch on the poverty in the country, his childhood, his family, and his thoughts on Westerners coming among other things. The transcription of the conversation, originally recorded from my journal that I had with Mr. Payee is available in Appendix G followed by the synthesis and analysis of the pilot study's data in Appendix H.

Image 4: Mr. Payee's Home Inside **Source: Laura Nelsen, 2008**

Pilot Study Analysis Summary

While sitting in the small home (Image 4) on a mattress piled high with blankets, listening to Mr. Payee speak, I admit feeling peculiar at first as I found myself sitting with the Western amenities such as the TV going and glaring fluorescent light twitching on and off as he spoke. Once the lights went out, Mr. Payee really opened up and began to speak of his horrific childhood being an orphan who did not belong to any clan. It was as if he transcended back in time with his memories and recalled to me what he wanted as a child, and how he so desperately still wants education for his children—so they may find good jobs and obtain a higher status in life. Mr. Juu, his son and my translator, later

told me he had never heard his dad speak of those things before. Mr. Payee is very saddened by the fact that he is not able to be the provider, but must rely on his son. He then turned to his adopted grandson and told him sternly to do well in school and to listen, with the passion in his voice communicating advice in a way that perhaps only an orphan could do.

My initial thoughts were, "wow, just because imagination comes for him now through his son, it comes nonetheless." He allowed himself to transcend time and recall what he had wished for his life. He lives for and loves his children. It was apparent, but he holds back still. Mr. Payee explained he is a shaman and has nothing to give me for listening to him, but he wishes me to return and then we shall eat together. The next time I am able to see him, I want to talk to him about tourism coming as a possibility for a better future and his thoughts on Korea, coming in with money to spend on development projects. Mr. Payee thanked me for helping his family (Image 5), but I was the one who gained this time, I saw the love among family when that is all there is to give.

Image 5: Some of Mr. Payee's Children and Grandchild
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2008

For the people in Lao PDR, reality blending with the imagination has not been a big problem because of the limited technology available to the everyday people. In listening to Mr. Payee speak, I realized this almost immediately. When I spoke with him

about his future and what he wants for his children, his response was, “education for my children and land for us to live on and farm.” Knowing he was speaking of the rubber tree farming that has taken hold of the mountains of Laos, I was instantly saddened. Here is a man who struggled all of his life. Little education, no family until he had his own, and back-breaking labor are part of his past.

It is because of Mr. Payee’s past that he does not imagine a future where anything is possible for him and his family (Image 5), other than joining many fellow Laotians in stripping the mountain through slash and burn and planting rubber trees and rice. We spoke of the rubber tree and rice planting and when I asked him what he thought of it, he replied with glistening eyes that he is saddened to see his mountains disappear with slash and burn, but does not know what else to do since he must take care of his family. He spoke of the family’s dependence on Mr. Juu to take care of them. Mr. Juu is the one who bought the land for them to live on, along with the hillside land they harvest. I thought my head was going to burst with emotion when I looked at him and he said, “[w]e struggle here. Life is hard and I wish it could be different.”

Mr. Payee appears to be partly living inside the past by speaking of what was and what can be. People must be able to foresee new futures for themselves, yet when individuals imagine this, the past seeps back. Kearney (1988:25) tells us that in order to fully recognize what imagination is and can be one must go back through time and also project into the future of postmodernism in that “[a] postmodern culture thus becomes one which attempts to portray what is without presuming to know what it is, to analyze reflexively where we are *now* without automatically deferring to a possible future or proclaiming the present to be an advance of the past.” Through time, if Mr. Payee were

to take in the notion that there are possibilities out there for him and not just his children, he would not automatically proclaim the present to be an advance of his past, but rather take in what he and his family have now and use that to imagine his future.

Kearney (1988) believes the narrative of a person continues to imagine a new way and in this new way, the world may become a different place. When all people involved relate to one another in new ways and make connections, narratives shift and new ways are seen. As Kearney posits, "…for it is perhaps in its tale of the self relating to the other, that we discover a golden thread which leads beyond the labyrinth" (1988:396). In our conversation, Mr. Payee sees the proverbial golden thread, but not for himself; rather, for his children if they are fortunate enough to have help with education. Mr. Payee spoke of his childhood as an orphan without a clan. Clans are the way that Hmong people recognize themselves within a family setting. If a person does not have a clan, they do not have a family. He described to me what his childhood was like trying to grow up without a clan. Mr. Payee had no one to take care of him. He lived among the animals in the jungle trying to find food and anyone who would give him some work. He described his childhood as depressing, lonely, and sad. In listening to him say this, my eyes overflowed with tears as I imagined the horrific things this man had endured until he was fortunate enough to meet his wife. With meeting his wife, he says he was filled with much joy; however, the extreme poverty continued with little relief. Children added to the burden of making a living.

As Ricoeur (1984:97) previously stated, "understanding—even the understanding of another person in everyday life—is never a direct intuition but always a reconstruction." Bringing to the table my understanding of life and its relation to me overshadowed my

experience at first. When talking with Mr. Payee, his experience of life too held one meaning for him with relation to his experience with me. Once we shared our stories about our families, traditions, and home-life a common understanding was constructed. Each of us took in what the other was saying and living, and from that constructed new meanings of the other. Our historical present combined and an understanding of each other was shared. In essence, a change of our being took effect and I was now ready to experience Lao PDR through someone else's eyes as our reconstruction of the other allowed for our conversations to come to life.

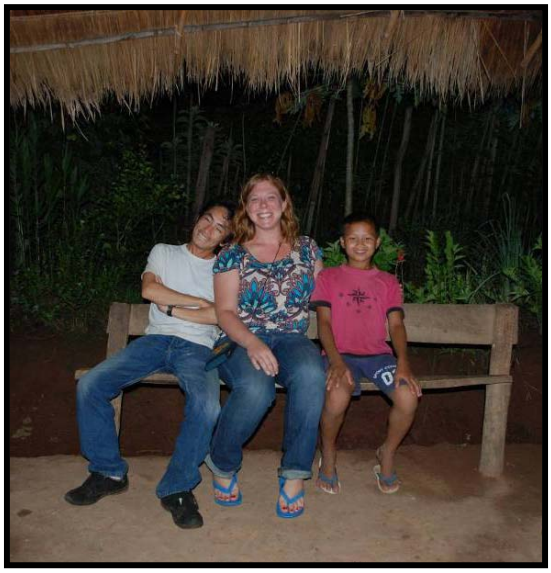

Image 6: Mr. Juu, Laura, and Mr. Juu's adopted son
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2008

Learning from the Pilot Study

A sense of urgency overwhelmed me when I looked back at the pictures taken while visiting Laos. Mr. Payee was but one story of the Lao people, and it was not a unique one. This conversation helped cement my commitment to working with the Lao people, using their traditions and imagination to help build a possible future. Tourism is not going away and therefore should be looked at as a potential vehicle used to carry the imagined future into solid reality.

The pilot study helped to confirm that the theoretical framework of tradition and imagination were worth investigating as a foundation for policy and curriculum for tourism in development. As a result of conducting a pilot study, new thinking about how to approach my dissertation arose. It included:

- Adding policy as my third category to study tourism as a medium for development.

- Including possible implications and recommendations for curriculum development in terms of tourism studies.

- Revising the title of my dissertation to *Chosen Traditions Influencing Tourism, Policy-making, and Curriculum in Lao PDR: A Critical Hermeneutic Study in Development*

This new thinking guided my approach to research for my dissertation by allowing my past educational experience to return and meld with my current studies.

Background of the Researcher

My undergraduate education from California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB) was dual focused in English and photography. I have my Multiple Subject and English Single Subject teaching credentials also from CSUSB. I continued my education by obtaining my Masters Degree in Education from Chapman University in Orange, California. My professional background is in the field of education where I have worked for the past 13 years in various capacities from classroom aide to teacher on special assignment. Currently, I am on sabbatical from being a teacher on assignment focusing on exemplary mathematics' teaching, along with conducting data analysis for schools going through the Program Improvement process. Under my general duties, I am responsible for working with teachers on how to teach the California Mathematics' standards to their students. In addition, I am in charge of Professional Development on using data from state testing and district benchmarks to inform their teaching. I also conduct parent education workshops on a weekly basis for parents of our children at school, and occasionally consult with Data Gurus, an educational consulting firm dedicated to raising student achievement.

Within my district, I have had the fortunate opportunity to work on developing curriculum for standards practice for the teachers. I have extensive experience in developing pacing guides, which have affected policies within our district regarding teaching standards and curriculum. I sit on numerous district committees including the curriculum committee whose primary responsibility is to review state policy and guidelines in order to translate that into proposed curriculum. Having this experience helped when it came to reviewing the data and analyzing it in relation to policy issues.

While my current career incorporates my degrees in English and education, my background in photography and video surround my personal life, especially in meeting new people and visiting new places. This study helped to blend my love for exploring the globe with my passion of education by allowing those three modes of expression: the text, photographs, and video, share the story of policy-making and development in Lao PDR. This journey also allowed for the inclusion of critical hermeneutics and the philosophies of Ricoeur, Kearney, and Habermas, which I believe to be the best fit for this type of research. Through studying critical hermeneutics, I have helped further develop my leadership capabilities and have recognized the importance of the *other* in my life.

Being a critical hermeneutic researcher, I have to be mindful of the underlying currents within countries and their people; the current that tells the voiceless other's story. I focused on asking myself, what understanding of the other's situation must I have in listening and conversing with the people I meet? The other has been the main reason why I choose to visit a country. Exploring the land, people, places that make it unique, I tried to have an experience that is genuine, memory-filled, and enjoyable. That

was what I was looking for when I chose to visit Lao PDR with Dr. Herda in May 2008. I was not expecting or necessarily wanting to visit a place that would become the focus of my life work. Moving through Lao PDR exploring, conversing, investigating everything I came in touch with fed my desire to do something big in the world. As I gathered my belongings to leave Lao PDR, I instinctually knew I had found a place that had so tenderly touched my soul; a place that would beckon me back, a people who I would dream about and think about constantly without knowing why I was doing so. The people of Lao PDR became engrained in my mind and heart so much that I envisioned and imagined others being able to visit and have similar experiences like I had; an experience that will leave the visitors not only with adventurous stories to relay, but a changed self, one that they take back and tell about. Lao PDR does not have to fall into grips of irresponsible tourists, a place where the sex industry becomes a big money-maker; it can become a place known for life-changing experiences when steeped in their chosen traditions. That is what I envisioned for Lao PDR, and that is why I chose to return to the mystical land that had captured my soul.

Summary

This research study was the first step toward an exploration and deeper interpretation of policy-making in a developing country. The study described the statement of the topic, background information of Lao PDR and their political history, and the critical hermeneutic foundations requisite to understanding the process and inquiry of the theories of Ricoeur, Kearney, and Habermas. Through conversations, we reached understanding and through communicative action we reached an agreement that led to new possibilities. The stated research process described the manner of inquiry for

participatory research. One of the main components of this research process was the transformation of researcher and all research participants willing to engage in conversation.

CHAPTER 5
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter Five serves as a sieve for primary data as photographs and texts from conversations and secondary data in the form of journal entries and researcher's notes meld with theory to tell a story of development through tourism within Lao PDR. Presented together, these data are viewed and analyzed through the lens of the categories of Tradition, Imagination, and Policy. Collectively, this research unveils a narrative of tourism as an approach for development as national, district, and local leaders shared their voices and lives in order to tell an amalgamated story of tradition and growth while envisioning a future filled with new possibilities for the Lao people. The narratives collected throughout the summer of 2009 revealed themes I then examined using theory as presented in Chapter Four, as well as my critical views based upon my research experiences. Themes that surface in the category of Tradition were The Other and Cultural Respect. For the category of Imagination, the theme to emerge was The Future. The category of Policy had the Importance of Regulations revealed. The following text lays forth the collected conversations in a narrative, beginning with Tradition, to present the data and show how tradition and imagination can work within Lao tourism policy in order to represent by a collective voice all of the Lao people.

Category I: Tradition

My research on tradition within Lao PDR began quite early and unexpectedly the morning after arrival when I awakened to the familiar buzzing and banging of development; in this case, another hotel being built next door even though it was 6:30am. This turned into a needed lesson on developing countries and work times: there are none.

By setting out on the town as a tourist proved to be eye-opening in many respects because there is great effort in Lao PDR to showcase traditions as a country and people to visitors, especially in the capitol, Vientiane. My first visit was to the Lao National Museum (Image 7) in Vientiane to get an overall picture of the history of Laos. As I wrote in my journal that day:

> [The museum] was sobering to go through and see pictures of what Americans did to the Lao people—things we would never see or talk about in American schools. To see from the other what their experience was gives me pause to think of history and how one sided it really is…[the museum] was their side of the story that was unfolded for people and everyone who was there…[I] got a glimpse of why the Lao are who they are today.

It was the hot season and the museum was housed in an old French Colonial government building that had not been recently updated. The museum itself held an eclectic mix of artifacts and information. Much of it is a reminder to visitors of how the Lao government views America's involvement with them prior, during, and after the Vietnam War. Phrases such as "American Imperialists," "Puppet government," and photos of war aftermath pocked the walls of the entire second floor, serving as a reminder to all that America and its ideals were not welcome. The museum visit gave me pause to think of the other and put their lives before my prejudices.

Image 7: Lao National Museum, Vientiane Source: Ben LaBelle, 2009

Leaving the museum, a bit befuddled and wary about what was next, our group set out for the Victory Bridge (Image 8), an enormous monument built after one in Paris. It was the location where the Pathet Lao (PL) took over and kingdom rule by the Royal Lao Government (RLG) ended. Today, it serves as a place for all Lao in Vientiane to come and spend a day with friends and family as it is surrounded by a park.

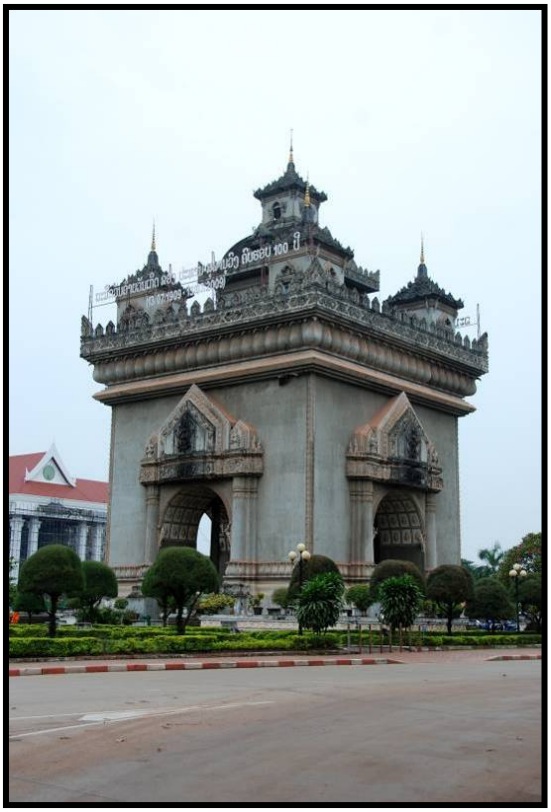

Image 8: Victory Gate Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

As a researcher who studied tourism, I took the opportunity to visit their Wats, or temples, and took a ride out to the hydroelectric dam. I later found that the dam was only half of the reason why I was asked to go. Mr. Juu had asked our Vientiane guide Mr. Chear Moua, to take my group to see the dam. His intention was to allow my van to get through a checkpoint and see a part of Lao PDR that most Westerners never have a chance to visit. This, and other similar experiences, allowed my imagination to open up so I could see Lao traditions as presented by the Lao themselves. This helped me as a researcher to be aware of how the Lao envision the tourists and how Westerners envision their own vacations.

Imagination allows tradition's importance to be understood, for it is within the traditions held close that imagination flows. The traditions of Lao PDR were discussed at length with conversants. Through talking about the traditions held dear to Laotians, their

imagination about their future was shown. Tradition in every form, from cooking to rituals for the living and dying, was abundant in every person I spoke with while traveling throughout the country. While some felt shy about sharing their imagined future, all were eager to share their favorite Lao traditions. Looking at the category of Tradition from a critical perspective allowed me to see in my conversations the overriding themes that portray tourism and tradition. The first theme to present itself was the significance of The Other and the second was the magnitude of Cultural Respect. These themes presented themselves early and framed my thoughts for the role of tradition inside tourism.

The Other

The importance of the other, in this case, the poor, within development work cannot be stressed enough. Within the frame of moral development as discussed in Chapter Three, development workers no longer work for *someone* to develop *them*, but work to develop a relationship through conversations in order to help bring about true change. Without the other in development, there is no long term progress taking place. This echoes Herda (2007a:12) from Chapter Three, "it is also important to realize that the world of local person alone is not sufficient for development—the romanticized idea of leaving the culture of the local people intact is as unrealistic as the top-down approach of placing the locals in the world that they have had no part in creating." Tourism by definition itself cannot be without a relationship between oneself and another. Thereby, the basis for my work within Lao PDR was to focus on the other, and building together through a collective narrative a just and imagined future for all of the people, as

expressed by their own voice. Arming myself with that thought, I made sure to hear the voices of the other whenever possible.

I felt a sense of justice for the often forgotten as I conducted research focusing on the other. This sense of justice as first discussed in Chapter Four, Ricoeur (1992:198) presents the case for the notion of justice in that a "sense of justice and injustice, it would be better to say here, for what we are first aware of is injustice: 'Unjust! What injustice!' we cry." It is in this sense of injustice for the other that development workers must push forth not with their own development ideals, but with a resolution and absolute concern for the other to move towards a sense of justice. This is because within the realm of justness, "the sense of injustice is not simply more poignant, but more perspicacious than the sense of justice, for justice, more often is lacking and injustice prevails. And people have a clearer vision of what is missing in human relations than of the right way to organize them" (Ricoeur 1992:198). When the other is recognized by the Lao government as the key to "human relations," space may be opened up to draw upon their knowledge and understanding of running the country. This knowledge and understanding helps to focus on what may be completed in the name of development.

I found that when a sense of justness and power was given back to the people I spoke with being developed through tourism, new possibilities steeped within their dearly-held traditions began to be revealed. For many, this represented the first time in their lives that someone asked them what they thought. All of the people I spoke with, from the national to the local level, were deeply concerned with what happens to the other with tourism becoming a mainstay throughout the country. The level of concern varied with the conversants; from a national standpoint, it appeared that they had less of a

concern for the long-term welfare of the poor because it felt there was an expectation that the poor be happy with whatever was given to them. This was especially evident after learning from Mr. Ma Yang, a district leader for the government, that the government is considering moving a people group I came into contact with that had already been forced at another time in a similar situation to move. According to national leaders, the movement of the people groups is taking place repeatedly in part because the people are then easier to visit by Westerners; however, speaking with many local leaders, it was revealed that by moving the people closer to the roads, they are easier to control. Mr. Yang stated that, "hopefully in the future they do not move the village again. I told the government to leave them here. Do not make them move, but let them get started with education and stay here to build their life." From this statement, it is clear that on the district and more local level, the concern for the poor weighed heavily on the minds of those I spoke with. In fact, concern for the other manifests as an overriding theme in nearly every conversation I had.

For example, as I walked into my first hotel in Vientiane, Lao PDR in summer 2009, there was a large sign posted at the entrance, serving as the motto for the hotel. It said:

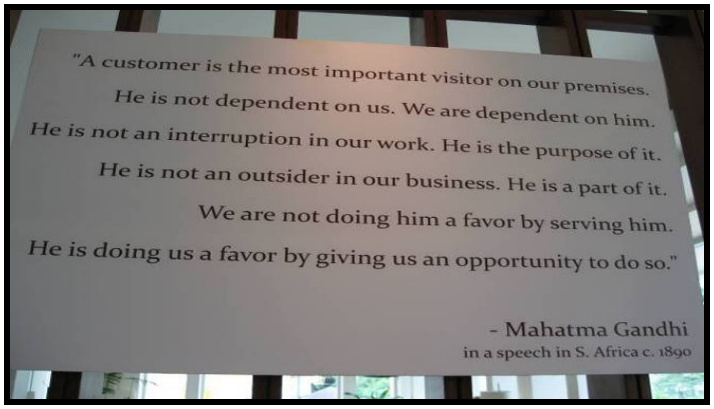

Image 9: Posted sign in hotel Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

The sign showed me that it was clear that some in Lao PDR recognized the imminent development coming to all of the country and knew that the funds for this development were coming mainly from tourism. That sign in particular also served as an entryway of sorts, drawing me into the delicate balance of researcher and tourist. It became one of the first pieces of data gathered that would serve as a basis for sharing my research experience, now palpably focused on the other. In this case, the other represents a people who have everything to gain and everything to lose because of their very existence. The following sub-theme of Culture Gets a Visit portrays the importance of the other through the narrative of development as tourism.

Culture Gets a Visit

My conversation partners immediately revealed a very heavy reliance on clan lines guiding daily life, especially within the Hmong culture exists. According to two of my Hmong partners, Mr. Juu Moua and Mr. Jay Thao, the Hmong follow traditional ways closely and reverently. I got a glimpse of what Mr. Juu meant by this when he and I had a detailed conversation regarding Hmong and Lao traditions and how to help the rural poor through tourism. I had prepared questions ahead of time and shared them with Mr. Juu earlier in the week and was now ready to hear what he had to say about his homeland and its future. With great anticipation, my recorder began and after a bit of nervous chatter—the kind that comes with the intensity of knowing something life-changing could stem from the exchange about to be had—our conversation began.

"Mr. Juu, I love hearing the stories like you just told me. But, does that worry you?" I asked referring to a short story he had just shared regarding traditional burial customs within Hmong clan lines and the possibility of those rituals fading once

development of the rural parts of Lao PDR occurs. Mr. Juu quickly explained that he is afraid of that happening, but then went on,

> I would like to bring [visitors] into the house. And, first, let them sit at the tables with the chairs around. Then, I start to explain where did it came from, and where do they live now, what do they believe. Then, I start to explain inside the house, what you give respect to, what is hanging on the wall, like the altar and the Shaman's altar and sister's altar and the grandparents spirit—they call ancestors to come inside of the house. Give respect to our ancestor. Like, now we have no grandfather. So, our grandfather lives up there.

"In the roof?" I interrupted as Mr. Juu began to weave a narrative of Lao's ancestors, history, respect, tradition, and education to build a sustainable future for the other. He continued, "Yeah, the roof of house. We have a tree when you arrive at my house, you will see a bamboo up on the roof, so we respect. So, children cannot touch, cannot play with bamboo like this." I had remembered seeing a bamboo pole, as portrayed in Image 10 below, in one of the huts I had visited earlier in the week. I had wondered what its purpose was when I was standing inside the house speaking with the owner, but at the time chose not to say anything about it.

Image 10: Ancestral Pole Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

After discussion of the pole, my fellow travelers enthusiastically agreed that seeing and hearing a story about the traditional huts and their symbolic importance within the clans would be of interest to visitors to places such as Lao PDR because the reason

for visiting a place such as this is to see the culture and livelihood of those living differently than us. Mr. Juu's partial account of what traditions he would like to share, thinking about my own experience, and the confirmation received from my group, in conjunction with the notion of tourism as a medium for development led me to ponder what is it that makes visiting a small hut interesting to others, in this case, the Westerner?

Tourists go on vacation for a variety of reasons. People in my group came in part because of my research, but when I specifically asked one about his motivations, he replied, "…[t]o see a part of the world and people who I can only dream about and see on television. That and to have fun and do things I couldn't do at home" (personal conversation with Christopher Pang-Gonzalez August 23,2009). Responses such as Chris' were not only repeated throughout my time in Laos, but bring about Ricoeur's (1992) notion of the "good life" as a way to explore the other's traditions within tourism. Ricoeur (1992:179) points out, "with respect to its content, the 'good life' is, for each of us, the nebulous of ideals and dreams of achievements with regard to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled." Westerners visiting Lao PDR have a chance to experience a pre-developing country in its earliest stages of welcoming people. In my own prejudices and expectations, I went to Lao PDR the first time to enjoy something new—to see new people, exotic lifestyles, and culture. It was an achievement for me, part of my aim toward Ricoeur's "good life."

But does this apply to Laotians themselves, as they are the ones receiving the tourists, whether they want them there or not? Tourists have a choice to visit a place; locals have few alternatives should they not wish to interact with visitors. The poor living within Lao PDR would not have the same ideas of a "good life" when it comes to

that way we live in the Western world; however, many of the conversants indicated that they like their traditions and would be honored to share them with visitors as it is a part of their culture to be very hospitable. Still, the influence of tourism is becoming evident in the manner in which some of the Lao are changing their ways. Mr. Juu said that the Lao are "very nice people who have a heart of gold...In the mountains, even the poor, but when they eat on the way…you walk pass, they invite you." This sentiment was echoed by many including Mr. Boum Khong and Mr. Maikham Sawangchakkavane from the more rural Sayaboury Provincial Tourism office that "everybody is welcome" in Laos. With development, the definition of the "good life" for some Lao is beginning to change, from straight forward cultural assumptions to more undetermined expectations in which individuals make decisions and create options for themselves about how to act and what they want to do. As Mr. Juu continued with his comparison between people from the mountains verses city folk, "But, in the city, it's so different. If you're not their friend, they will never look at you." This response by Mr. Juu exemplified the frustration that many Lao share because their aim towards the "good life" has caused some to abandon the life lived in villages where all were friends and members of the same community. The aim of the "good life" goes beyond having good times; it is further explained by Ricoeur (1992:179) when he states:

> We would say that it is in unending work of interpretation applied to action and to oneself that we pursue the search for adequation between what seems to us to be best with regard to our life as a whole and the preferential choices that govern our practices… First, between our aim of a 'good life' and our particular choices a sort of hermeneutical circle is traced by virtue of the back-and-forth motion between the idea of the 'good life' and the most important decisions of our existence (career, loves, leisure, etc.).

The lives of the Lao people are changing quickly. Their aim for their own "good life" is taking on new dimensions with every new face seen and interacted with; at times this occurs not by their own choice, but by decisions made by their government. The Lao government is pushing ecotourism as a way to responsibly build up the economic foundation of the country. I had the opportunity to speak with the Vice-Chairman of Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA), Mr. Soukaseum Bodhisane, regarding the ecotourism campaign of Lao PDR and the traditions embedded within it. When I asked him what traditions LNTA would like to promote to visitors, it was interesting to hear him begin by saying that

> parents respect their children and their children must respect too. This is very important because in the organization also we have to respect each other. Respect is very important. So we try to educate our children at the family level to respect each other. About tourism, when we come to visit a country, our country, a village, the idea is to have the group minimum so they come again and tell their friends to come and visit our country so hospitality is very important.

Mr. Bodhisane led with an emphasis on respect for one another and how that is important for the family unit and explained how that translates into hospitality; however, he did not once bring up the poor of Lao PDR and how tourism could help them. I replied by saying, "this is one of the most hospitable countries I've ever been to. That is why love to come." Mr. Bodhisane laughed and explained, "[W]hat we would like to show tourists is ecotourism because we have real potential to do this rafting and kayaking elephant washing. They are very famous in Lao…Yes, we would like to develop our country, but progressively, so we can manage; otherwise, we lose our value system." Wanting to know more about his last statement, I shared parts of our value system in America and the consequence of being a newer nation and not having thousands of years to engrain

traditional ways into the people. Mr. Bodhisane agreed, "[Y]es. Right, I have seen it with other countries. They developed so fast that they lose a lot in it." With that exchange, our meeting ended abruptly. I wrote about the meeting in my journal later that day:

> It seems like there is going to be a repeating pattern on respect, and I wonder prematurely albeit, about the ethnic minorities in the villages and how much respect they get. I do think that the Vice Chairman holds a lot of respect for them, but I wonder about others in the government, if they see them the same way or rather just more trouble than they are worth at times. I think this as I have seen the way the government treats its people—the Hmong village force relocated. He also told me that they are trying to slowly develop Lao PDR rather than quickly like some countries that way they can do it responsibly, he also mentioned ecotourism is what LNTA is promoting so that Lao PDR can be shown off to people, but at the same time preserve the country as much as possible.

After rereading my journal, notes, and conversation with Mr. Bodhisane, it became clear that the focus of all development should stem from what those affected say about their dreams and future inside a developing country. This genesis is where their aim for the "good life" begins to be formed and subsequently expands. The idea of Ricoeur's "good life" within relationships opens a place to speak about the other being developed in Laos. Ricoeur (1992:192) posits:

> It is this search for equality in the midst of inequality, whether the latter results from particular cultural and political conditions, as in friendship between unequals, or whether it is constitutive of the initial positions of the self and the other in the dynamics of solicitude, as this defines the place of solicitude along the trajectory of ethics. To self-esteem, understood as a reflexive moment of the wish for the 'good life,' solicitude adds essentially the dimension of *lack*, the fact that we *need* friends; as a reaction to the effect of solicitude on self-esteem, the self perceives itself as another among others (italics in original).

It is clear that no one in Lao PDR want to lose their treasured culture and the traditions that shape their identity. Inequality stemming from cultural and political conditions throughout decades in Lao PDR has furthered the imbalance between rural

Laotians and those in the city. This inequality was evident and echoed in varying forms by many including tourism officials Mr. Dou Xong, a freelance guide and villager experiencing tourism in his community, Mr. Por Xiong a worker for World Vision, and Mr. Sengthome a UNESCO worker for the past nine years crucial in the implementation of policy within Luang Prabang. However, this inequality was explained most eloquently by Mr. Juu as he spoke about one group of rural poor living in Laos, the Yellow Leaf.

Through years of marginalization, the Yellow Leaf have become a people who have become so disconnected within Lao PDR that their very existence is threatened; their plight is the *lack* of solicitude Ricoeur (1992:192) refers to. Mr. Juu explained that they are a group of people who have, "lived in Lao PDR since the ancestors [were] in the jungle…they never had a village. They live in the jungle [and] keep moving, even now...There are seven families now. Seven families, but they are the same clan, they can't marry." A grave situation is facing parts of the rural poor—their very existence along with cherished traditions is being threatened because of who they are and where they live. The Yellow Leaf and other rural poor are easily misled in part due to the lack of education, which has helped lead to their threatened existence. However, they are not prepared for development in any form, participative or otherwise, because the basic necessities of their lives have not been satisfied. Those interested in helping must understand that authentic assistance knows that "the self perceives itself as another among others" (Ricoeur 1992:192) Opening the Self to the space that equality as Ricoeur (1992) described above gives a chance to step into the lives of the other. This chance for equality is borne because I esteem myself and the other because I do not regard to my prejudgments about the other. For many Lao seeking equality within the other is not of

priority because they too are also trying to make a daily living. This often translates into the most poor being taken advantage of. As Mr. Juu described, "before they used the bark of the trees to make their clothes. But, now they use the local. The local can borrow clothes for them and they can buy some. But, they don't know how to spend money…No, they don't know how to spend." I replied, "[T]hey just barter with whatever they have," to which Mr. Juu said, "like, if they have an animal. They go to the village, they change $10,000 Kip [about US $1.25], they are very happy. You know, they don't know how to spend." The rural poor are continuously taken advantage of because they simply do not know any better.

Through tourism, by working with the other, and realizing their voice should lead the call for development, Ricoeur's (1992) "good life" presents itself on the horizon, even though that horizon is at times far from actuality. If focusing Lao tourism on the other is as preeminent, as the government purports it to be, an ethical opportunity for all may be realized. Cultural ways of life continue to be challenged through development and at appropriate times may be laid to rest. The following theme of Cultural Respect explores tradition further in the context of changing times and moving forward with tourism as a medium for development.

Cultural Respect

Having respect for family and culture was the primary concern given by Mr. Bodhisane of LNTA. This resonates with what Grant Evans (1990, 1998, 2003) discussed in Chapter Four regarding the culture of Laotians being grounded in respect for tradition and especially the family. The development of the country has been stalled partially because of the lag in education. It was evident when visiting village schools that

the rural Lao do not have time to get an education because they are so focused on harvesting rice to live. Parents in these villages many times do not understand that the lives they wish to see for their children stem from education. Although one may come to an understanding, it is only half of the battle. Efforts to make education available within Lao PDR were evident while traveling through the country. The lack of appropriate buildings (Image 11) and materials hinder the efforts being made because there is no continued support due to lack of economic funding. Hindering the efforts is the fact that little is being done to protect the needs of the locals so they may appropriate their own future. When discussing students in schools, it was made clear that the schools follow more traditional schedules, rather than what works with the harvest season. This seemingly simple imposition of an outsiders schedule has helped to cause great disturbance within villages. The rural Lao must have rice to sustain themselves; having children in school instead of helping the farm brings great tension to the family, especially ones with many school age children.

Image 11: Village Schoolhouse
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

Through holding conversations with the other and recognizing this easily remedied situation, education while keeping hold of sustaining traditions, such as harvesting crops, is possible. The action to make the needed changes is difficult because the local people must draw from within to create the effort needed for long-term

sustainable change, even when they may not fully understand the full scope of why the changes are needed. The following sub-theme of Changing Times gives a portrayal of the transformation Lao PDR is currently experiencing.

Changing Times

Sustainable change creates new opportunities for all. For the Lao within the city limits of Luang Prabang and Vientiane, opportunity abounds at times. Arriving into Vientiane on August 7th for eight days, I witnessed the quickness of change coming to town. On the first day of research, I found a Shisedo make-up store being built. I later wrote about it in my journal, "[I] noticed on the walk home a Shisedo store being built near a day spa. It looked as if they are moving very quickly on the project, but this worries me a bit because of the speed—there are bamboo sticks holding up the façade and the men working on it don't even have shoes on half the time." This journal entry caused me to wonder what the standards were in town for construction, especially for foreign investors. Continuing to read my journal, looking for themes to emerge on tradition, I came across this later entry that triggered my memory about the end of the week in Vientiane and the progress of the store (Image 12),

> I [cannot] believe that I am looking at a finished store. In eight days, from beginning to end, I watched gaunt men with cigarettes hanging from the side of their mouth shout at one another and at some point erect a building. I don't know how they did it and I am a bit afraid of the building as it happened so fast. Everyone was surprised; I wonder how long the building will stand?

This was seen throughout my travels in Laos—building after building being raised in the name of development. It reminded me of a statement from Chapter Four in which Ricoeur (1984:105) speaks of the duel-sided nature of change, saying "a discrete wisdom, opposed to the frenzy of events, can be discerned behind this respect for the

extreme slowness of real changes." The building of a foreign store in Vientiane almost overnight is but one example of a frenzied event producing change and development. This seemed to go against what I was being told by LNTA, for Mr. Bodhisane had said that Lao PDR was focusing on ecotourism in steps, not developing quickly like surrounding countries. However, what was observed was the opposite because quick change acts like band aids; they cover the problems underlying the reasons why sustainable development is needed in the first place. Buildings being erected within a week cannot be anything but shoddy construction, problems like this only slow development in the end.

Image 12: Shisedo Store in Vientiane
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

Ricoeur's (1984:105) notion of change can also be viewed through the lens of effort. Carrying out research throughout Lao PDR in the heat of the summer gave evidence to how miserable it can be on some days, days filled with air so thick clothing stinks of the lingering scent of must from the laundry. This combined with the lethargy that rightfully comes from constant hard labor slows the possibility of change even more. I learned while driving with Mr. Jay back from a village meeting with leaders about the trouble he is having within his own family because of the desire and yet unwillingness to make complete change. In listening to this, the connection to bringing out the family's effort to

build themselves up was discovered. As we bumped along, Mr. Jay explained his younger brother

> …works for Big Brother Mouse, my right heart. Because he knows and gives me heart ache and make some problem a headache, but he follow all the good things I explain…But some of my younger brothers and sisters don't listen, like all today, they call me, '[A]re you coming back brother?' So today they are working, but before that they are not working. They know, '[O]h, my brother didn't come' so they stays days, but now I have his [help and] control. He controls and so when I arrive home, everything fine, no problem.

Mr. Jay is responsible for his entire family because of the cultural tradition that the eldest male takes care of his parents, male siblings, and unmarried female along with his own family. While Mr. Jay is an educated adult, his situation is but one example of tradition that has hindered some males from developing themselves through education. The family unit comes first and while that is fine, a push for the educational and economic development of the family by the family leader, as Mr. Jay has pushed his, has the possibility to become the catalyst needed to produce family change for the long-term. I asked Mr. Jay, "[H]ow do you get people to work even when you're gone?" He simply, yet eloquently continued, "activities and developing the family first before we develop the village." The frenzy that brings about the slowness of real change that Ricoeur (1984) spoke of previously can be guided from the family unit to help sustainable change begin. Mr. Jay agreed as he continued,

> I'm thinking if we improve the family, then when somebody comes to join, like one of my sister's friends, then they can look…and they take it home. So the first thing is to develop my family first, and then others. If we don't develop the family, and we develop another people then they say, '[W]hy does your family do like that?'

Mr. Jay has the foresight, most likely due to his high-school education, to prepare his family for the development he saw beginning in Laos. He knows and respects his

standing within the family unit; however, he also knows and sees daily the slowness for change because of the wariness and sometimes lack of effort to bring sustainable change because of what the other might think. I delved further with Mr. Jay to see how much he has thought about the issue, Mr. Jay replied,

> [C]ultural…tradition. I mean, you are poor, but you do something like the rich. So they say all you are very poor why does he do like the rich people? Before I take people and develop my people, my family should follow me first. And when we develop other people then they say, 'Oh that family works. That family follows the road.'

Wanting to change and being ready for change are two different ideas. Mr. Jay knows to focus on developing his family first because he has had experience with the slowness and intensity of change through his leadership with fellow tour guides. Mr. Jay was one of the first four tour guides in Laos; he was hired by a now defunct ecotourism company. By showing people his country, he has had the unique experience of seeing how hard it is to move a village from destituteness to a position of being self-sustaining.

This thought opens up the need to examine the traditions that demand cultural respect. Mr. Sengthome, a worker for UNESCO, spoke about development he has witnessed inside Luang Prabang. He said, "[Y]ou know, normally in Lao culture, the men they cannot sew, but now they work with the wife. Some of them say that, 'When we live in the mountains I have to control my family, when we live in the city, my wife controls us.'" Although given as a humorous statement, it highlights two important notions. First, change has come to the cities. The Night Market (Image 13) partially developed by Mr. Sengthome began in 2003 and has helped Lao living inside and outside the city limits become businessmen and women. Most of the stalls lining the market are run by Hmong women, who have a very special knack for embroidery. Many husbands

of the women are now working with them, learning how to sew because their wife's business brings in more money than farming.

This conversation with Mr. Sengthome reminded me of the other conversation I had with the two travel agents in Sayaboury. Mr. Maikham Sawangchakkavane and Mr. Boum Khong both made it clear that traditional ways need to be maintained within the home, but outside the home, cultural change is welcomed. When I pushed to see how much change is welcomed, I was surprised to hear them both speak of the want to keep their private lives as close to traditional Lao customs as possible and outwardly live like people in developed nations while following traditional customary rules. I asked, "Are there any rules that you think should be created to help keep tradition? Actual policy to keep the tradition? Do you have any rules?" Mr. Sawangchakkavane answered, "So, I heard in festivals they say it's not allowed, the women to wear the pants, they have to wear skirts to join the festival. I think it's good for Lao PDR also. And, they are not allowed, the woman, to wear the pants to go to the temples. I think its good." Wondering more about this, I asked, "So, those are part of policy, that is set. Has that always been or did they have to make that?" Mr. Sawangchakkavane replied, "[T]hey had to make that."

Image 13: Hmong Night Market **Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009**

This thought echoes that of Mr. Jay and Mr. Juu, which too surprised me. When I asked Mr. Jay about his wife's thoughts about him leaving and working as a guide, he said, "[S]he say nothing because in Hmong culture, woman should lower the man. For example, I told her we should marry and we agree, not love." This leftover ideal by a young Hmong man shows the struggle to come when development has taken a stronghold and such traditional ways become threatened. As the Lao develop further through tourism and eventual education, common gender inequalities guised as traditions will surface and demand attention from leaders. In order to bring sustaining change, ideals like this may need to be reshaped to bring about the equality Ricoeur (1992) spoke of above.

Certain aspects of Lao culture such as the unspoken hierarchy within ethnic groups living inside the country affects people's lives to the degree that some do not have a choice about where they live and others are given no compensation for their purchased land when the government wants to take it for development. These problems are not usually shared openly when Lao speak to people, but can be observed as they are longstanding cultural traditions that scream inequality on the part of the people and government. One different example that can be seen in Lao PDR and surrounding countries is the issue of lady boys, or men dressed as women, sometimes in the transition to fully becoming women. As I walked through Vientiane one night, one section of the Old Quarter was laden with lady boys looking for Westerners wanting to spend some money doing whatever the buyer wished. When I brought this up to Mr. Juu in a conversation about the loss of culture because of development, he became agitated and said,

> [S]ometimes, the government, they want to kill the culture because they want it for tourist. But, opposite of that, like now the way they bring Western culture. Before we had no gay, but now we have gay…But, one thing, we need to keep the culture. And, back to your question about changing culture, like, we talk about because of gay, yeah…Western, they change culture.

Mr. Juu's thoughts on the subject of homosexuality highlight the intense, underlying fear of change. The issues of lady boys and homosexuality are two distinct issues; however, both require involvement so that those living the culture can appropriate their own future as development brings about a change in identity.

All of the men above are educated and open to new ideas, but some of the facets of development still prove too much in too little time. In the transformation of identity through development, our character overlaps the unchanging part of our self, *idem*, and the changing side, *ipse*, almost indistinguishable from one another (Ricoeur 1992:122-23). One's *idem* is permanent from the beginning, it has to do with one's "gut"—the unchanging part—what will not change no matter what happens. The piece inside us that cannot nor will not do something is called integrity; it is the part that honors our word. The Lao's struggle in accepting moral changes to their culture that were not expected retain an inequality with the other as long as their integrity cannot reconcile other cultural values. How do the Lao reconcile what they find culturally acceptable or unacceptable within their lives as tourism continues to spread? Ricoeur (1992:123) explains that as people grow and mature, the morals and ethics learned help shape our character in terms of integrity. Life lessons help us to keep our word with integrity, but that is not enough. It is when we honor the other that true character can merge and the balance found within the narrative that houses our personal identity can grow. Whether lady boys leave or stay

in Lao PDR and whether women wear pants to festivals is not the issue. The issue lies in wanting to hold on to inconsistencies in development.

The inconsistencies of wanting to develop and yet wishing for the past to remain were further contradicted as I walked through a side street in Luang Prabang. I walked past the same store day by day, noticing the dresses and skirts hanging in the window and yet not quite seeing them. Then, one day as I looked at this pretty floral dress, strapless and flowing, it hit me that there is a lot of double talk within Laos. I had been previously told by many, including Ms. Da Somsath in Vientiane, that preservation of traditional ways is instrumental in Lao development. Then later speaking with Mr. Khong and Mr. Sawangchakkavane in Sayaboury, they stated that modesty is key; this was also repeated to me by Mr. Xayana from LNTA as he explained the policies of tourism within Lao PDR and the appropriate behavior expected of visitors. I look back to my one-sided litany that I recorded as I walked away from the store:

> It's not 100% the tourists that destroy the culture. I just thought they talk about people wanting to dress modestly, stuff like that, but they're selling it. They are selling their strapless dresses and stuff—right on the main street…That's a mixed message, if I ever heard one. They want people to dress modestly, [yet] they still are selling strapless stuff.

Time and time again I was told about how modesty is key and how the Lao want to cherish and show others how to cherish their traditions. Coming across the immodest clothing all over the place made me stand back and look at what other issues are being skirted around under the guise of development. Mixed messages too hinder responsible development because they add layers to culture and hide layers that need to be exposed. The following sub-theme of Moving Forward is an accounting of where Lao PDR is heading in the future.

Moving Forward

Certain aspects of tradition need to be revised within the paradigm of what is culturally accepted worldwide today. This is a strong statement, but considering what I witnessed when I arrived in the heart of Lao PDR for my research conversation with village leaders, it could not have been clearer that within the paradigm of traditional ways and the retention of them, certain cultural values must be challenged. I had already had some conversations and was ready to see what had happened in a village I had visited the previous year. I had spoken with rural village leaders about tradition and development through tourism in their areas along the Mekong. These conversations took place in areas so remote that they are found by word of mouth only; not even GPS touches these hidden people groups. This road trip had taken its toll and as I laid bumping in the van, we began to talk about what we had witnessed in the village when delivering meager supplies of vitamins, bandages, reading glasses, and a boat to get the children to school.

This village consisted of three different people groups, Hmong, Lao, and Khmu. They were groups who had never lived with each other before and were struggling to do so when I met with one of the village leaders and one district leader. The village had been resettled by the government to a more easily accessible place for officials and Westerners to get to—from the northern mountains to the banks of the Mekong. Villagers are now fraught with problems due to the changes in temperature and new exposure to diseases. Speaking with one of the three village leaders, and the district leader, Mr. Ma Yang**,** a Hmong man who is in charge of overseeing five villages in his area for the government, I learned a lot about the village's culture and how the hierarchy of the government's oversight of rural poor occurs.

Sitting across from one another, under the vigilant supervision of the villagers, I listened to the hopes and dreams steeped in tradition that came forth from the leader's mouth. This The intermixing of Lao, Hmong, and English with the background cacophony of women and children all speaking their native tongue cast a surreal feeling throughout as we sat, shared a meal of Laab—a Lao favorite in this case pork, boiled greens, and sticky rice along with homemade Lao Lao—also a Lao favorite made of grain alcohol. The absolute concern for the other was shown by every villager as represented by the district leader Mr. Yang when he described to me how he wished to see a new boat for one of his villages utilized:

> They will use for all the village. First reason they use for to transport the children to grade school or other schools also. [I] will try to explain to the village leaders to make them understand…And so second reason the village agree to transport rice or harvest so some family need not pay for another boat. That last one, also good for the people. When somebody in the village very sick. This was bad before this happen, now they can take people to the hospital if they get sick.

Mr. Yang's ideas for the usage of a new boat for a formerly boat-less village brought out his own sense of moral obligation to ensure proper handling of its use for all so all may continue to receive the developmental benefits of having transportation as described by Mr. Yang above. This display of absolute care on his part for all of the villagers is present because "it is finally on the ethical plane that the affection of the self by the other displays the specific features that belongs as much to the properly ethical plane as to the moral plane of obligation" (Ricoeur 1992:330). Mr. Yang understands that for tourism as a means for development to be successful and move his country forward, especially within the villages he represents, the level of moral obligation must rise within leaders and villagers alike, beginning with him. This moral plane of obligation that Ricoeur

speaks of is along the same lines of the ideas behind Schwenke's (2009) ideas of moral development, as presented in Chapter Three. A sense of ethical responsibility must exist on the behalf of the leaders, which then becomes an obligation for the ethical development of all Lao people groups because "the very definition of ethics that we have proposed—living well with and for others in just institutions—cannot be conceived without the project of living well being affected by solicitude, both that which is exerted and that which is received" (Ricoeur 1992:330). In a step towards moving the country forward developmentally, Lao government officials have employed the practice of dividing up remote areas into groups of three to five villages. The overall regions are to be led by district leaders such as Mr. Yang. Many of the rural villages visited had places built for schools, including the one where I met the district leader. When I had my research conversation with Mr. Yang, he told to me that his desire, as a government official working in rural development, was to have community meeting houses built for the purpose of meeting and discussing local issues. The idea is impressive and in many cases, the schoolhouses already built can serve the purpose described by that district official. Mr. Yang's idea to have systematic local discussions will do two things. First the local leader will be held in respect. Second, needed information will be exchanged. Such meetings may promote building positive relationships between the government and the poor so that eventually, cultural traditions to present to Westerners may be chosen and others left behind.

In order to discern what needs to let go of, depends on others. In this case the other lives their daily life steeped in long held traditions, which if allowed to imagine a future inclusive of their chosen traditions, may provide a wealth of legitimate information

for Lao development workers wishing to include a collective voice in developing their country. One role of tradition is to connect the past with the present as Ricoeur (1985:221) discusses when he writes:

> In this first respect, tradition, formally conceived of as traditionality, already constitutes a broadly significant phenomenon. It signifies that the temporal distance separating us from the past is not a dead interval but a transmission that is generative of meaning. Before being an inert deposit, tradition is an operation that can only make sense dialectically through the exchange between interpreted past in interpreting present.

Together through the exchange of language, our conversation transformed itself into one generating meaning because we were taking the time to review the past, traditional custom of clan lines, and interpreting it within the present. Such discussions may provide the opportunity to see which part of one's past is worth retaining and which part needs to be left behind. This argument Ricoeur makes can only make sense through the discussion of the past and the present.

Category II: Imagination

To imagine a future with responsible tourism, thoughts became dreams and eventually, dreams became possibility; possibility rooted in the future. The Future was an overriding theme found within the category of Imagination as I reviewed data from my visit in August. The theme was fleshed out from the culmination of conversations regarding tourism and imagination and highlights the strongest bonds between tradition, policy, and tourism. Two sub-themes to emerge from the data were Ecotourism as a Future and The Past Revisited. The idea of utilizing ecotourism to build Lao PDR was a common idea spoken about when tourism as development was the topic. All of those I spoke with echoed the notion of a better future because of ecotourism, responding mainly to the government's push for development of the country by slowly introducing the

outside world to the world of Lao PDR through using a more eco-friendly approach than surrounding countries have done. The second category of Imagination served as a vehicle for the conversations about tradition to transform into conversations surrounding policy for the future of tourism inside Laos. The following presents and analyzes the data and supporting evidence within the theme to show how imagination develops the future of tourism using theory from Ricoeur (1985, 1992) and Kearney (1988).

Their Future

Stepping back for a moment to place ourselves in the other's shoes brings us to a new level for conversing. By allowing my Self to remove my ideals for a Lao future and take the time to listen to the people and their leaders, the melding of old ideas for some with new ideas for all had a chance for full fruition. The future for Lao PDR lies behind a thinly veiled curtain, in the hands of few rather than the arms of all, potentially allowing disastrous consequences to occur. As discussed in Chapter Four, Kearney (1988:14) writes, "the 'post' of postmodernity would seem to suggest that the human imagination has now become a post-man disseminating multiple images and signs which he himself has not created and over which he has no real control." The category of Imagination in the context of Lao development through tourism reveals varying aspects of this statement by Kearney. Kearney presents the consequences of allowing reality to shape imagination and in the case of Lao PDR's development; a poignant example of this can be witnessed at the night market's souvenir stands for Westerners in all of the rows and shelves of *Chinese-made, authentic-Lao* handicrafts many times being sold by legitimate Lao businessmen selling authentic Lao crafts.

The example of Chinese-made handicrafts sold in the night market alongside authentic ones portrays the very reality that Kearney (1988:14) above warns against. Lao PDR is advancing slowly technologically compared to the Western world, which has reality blending and affecting imagination as Kearney (1988) discusses. It is because of this unique situation that Lao PDR holds a chance to implement their ideas of ecotourism and highlighting traditions as a way to develop the country. However, as more foreign business owners open companies, the reality that had distinctively remained foreign to Lao PDR is being introduced. This is because the Lao government officials and development workers presently do not have the economic means to stop or slow this type of development.

Returning to Lao PDR to research such a large part of their development plans left my mind reeling at times because of what I witnessed while trekking through the jungles. After a while and before I saw it coming, I was on the brink of disaster as I realized what I was seeing day in and day out was leaving me numb, so numb that it was becoming hard to stay focused on the other. I wrote about it in my journal as I traveled up Road 13 on August 16, 2009, "It is sad when I sit and watch yet another filthy, torn pants child walk down the dirt road and not think much of it until I realize, '[W]ow—that is ANOTHER child with torn pants walking down this bumpy so-called road.'" This thought led to my imagining further, "except when I think of the actual human being, the other, that my imagination can take over and envision where they are coming from—why their pants are torn, why they are not in school—they have no other pants, they have no school. This is just one more village that the government has forgotten or will get to sometime." This is the exact devastating consequence that Kearney (1988:2) writes

about when he posits there seems to be an almost indistinguishable blending between reality and the imaginary. The people's faces as witnessed in Image 14 below that I watched have been blurred by the passing in time and are now but memories; however, the stories left in their wake propel us all into the future.

My prejudgments as to what I would encounter while in Lao PDR were challenged as I whizzed by the people daily. Looking back at my thoughts, subsequent readings and conversations led me to come to my own "fusion of horizon" (Gadamer 1975) with the imagination of the poor and tourism. Ricoeur (1985:220) describes this notion further, saying that

Image 14: Children Walking on Roadside **Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009**

> between the absolute knowledge that would abolish every horizon and the idea of a multitude of incommensurable horizons we have to put the idea of a 'fusion of horizons,' which occurs every time we test our prejudgments in setting out to conquer some historical horizon, imposing upon ourselves the task of overcoming our tendency to assimilate the past too quickly to our own expected meanings.

The prejudgments I held when returning to Lao PDR clouded my being until they were laid out in front of my face. Challenging these prejudgments allowed me to fuse my horizon of Laos' historical past and slow down in realizing the future. I had expected to go in and be able to point out the problems of lack of infrastructure, money, corruption,

education, forced relocation—discuss them with conversants and in the end have a better understanding of their future with tourism, exactly what Ricoeur (1985:220) warned against. Instead, reading this quote while in Laos, and thinking about it allowed me to deeply change and let go of those pre-conceived notions and be open to the creation and fruition of new ones.

By letting go of ideals, the at-times tumultuous future of the Lao people became one with a collective voice. The sub-theme of The Past Revisited helps lay to rest certain aspects of their history, aspects that have at one time served their purpose, but for a future with tourism, no longer do. It was not easy to have conversations about what traditions need to be let go of in order to create a sustainable future. By laying out the past openly and honestly by a few, I was able to meld my ideas of their history, thereby allowing me to speak with the other about creating a future together. Through conversations regarding creating a future together as one Lao voice, the second sub-theme of Ecotourism as a Future was realized. All I spoke with had ideas regarding ecotourism is a future for Laos, but the most poignant came from the people working as guides and agents representing LNTA.

The Past Revisited

Lao PDR has been monetarily dependent on foreign aid and now they are building a future with tourism as their main way to advance economically. There are problems with this that trickle down to the most rural poor. As conversations continued, reasons why many of the rural poor have problems became clear—because of the mismanagement of funds and donations on the part of the government. My trip in summer 2008 revealed that many of the most rural Lao, who had been moved by the

government, are still living without malaria nets, clean water, or access to education. Returning in summer 2009 provided no better news for the rural poor. Corruption within the government partially stems from the hierarchical line based on ethnicity that has been perpetuated for centuries within Lao PDR and partly because officials in the government do not get paid enough, thereby helping to continue a present grounded in an illegitimate past. In the critical hermeneutic tradition, reasons such as the above may be recognized, claimed, and employed to transform their illegitimacy into space for a legitimate future grounded in a collective voice. The utilization of Imagination in my research conversations to address traditions helped to identify the past issues that have prevented development in Laos. This goes directly in line with what Kearney (1988:390) writes on imagination influencing a legitimate, chosen future in the postmodern era, "what is needed therefore is a critical hermeneutics capable of identifying the interest which motivate the interpretation of images in a given context." Through uncovering the motivations behind people's imagination, legitimacy may be gained because "the aim of such a hermeneutic is to discriminate between a liberating and incarcerating use of images, between those that dis-close and those that close off our relation to the other, those that democratize culture and those that mystify it, those that communicate and those that manipulate" (Kearney 1988:390). While in Laos, the level of corruption that jeopardizes the legitimacy wished for within the government was revealed to me more than once and explained best by the narrative Mr. Juu told me regarding what he does when he takes Westerners to remote, undeveloped areas of Laos.

Mr. Juu remembered, "[W]hen I take tourists to the remote area, out to the village," he would sometimes ask them, "if you are in this village or if you are in this

area, how you get your education?" And, the Westerners said, "'[H]mm, hmm…' you know, the tourists they have no idea." Mr. Juu has a thorough understanding of the rural poor plight within Lao PDR in part because he is Hmong-Lao himself and has experienced the suffering that so many Lao share. It is because of Mr. Juu's history and his education that he is able to work with the poor and with the government, becoming a potentially key player in the development of Laos. His formal education has allowed him to bring the outsider, here the Westerner, into places some never even knew existed. Mr. Juu continued on with his story,

> and, [Westerners] ask me, 'Why do [the poor] cut down the trees, for cultivation?' I say, I back the question to them, 'If you are the government what can you do? If you are poor what can you do? And now, about 70% is farmers and, the farmers need a place to plant rice. If no rice, we cannot live because we have no factories.

Mr. Juu has the ability to see what many do not. Being the eldest boy and growing up as a farmer's child now caring for his family through farming, he identifies with poverty. Mr. Juu also knows development as he is currently attending Loei Rajabat University in Thailand and interning at the Ministry of Social Work in Loei, Thailand. This unique background allowed him to see that responsibly bringing visitors into even the most foreign and remote parts of Lao PDR may be the stimulus needed by the people to create a sustainable future as Kearney (1988:390) presents because culture then can be democratized rather than mystified as the current situation maintains.

Mr. Juu continued, "if our country is developed—not compared to Thailand, its okay. But, it's good and it's bad. Good that we have nature. We still kill our culture, but we need to develop." I interjected, "I think education and basic health care." Mr. Juu added, "Education, healthcare, and running water. Running water for the village…And,

roads to the village, schools…" Speaking with Mr. Juu then was as if he were reliving all of the necessities in life he was deprived. Ricoeur (1985:208) would call this the "horizon of expectation," in which, "the term 'expectation' is broad enough to include hope and fear, what is wished for and what is chosen, rational calculations, curiosity—in short, every private or public manifestation aimed at the future. As with experience in relation to the present, expectation relative to the future is inscribed in the present." By growing up in poverty and becoming educated Mr. Juu sees the injustice on the poor daily. His education allows him to take his experiences of the past and through a "horizon of expectation," break the cyclical nature of experiences of the poor into creating an expectation, "toward breaking open of perspectives" because "in this sense, expectation cannot be derived from experience" (Ricoeur 1985:209). This is difficult to do because experience is a person's past and Lao PDR has a poor track record; however, liberation comes from the expectation that something can change, lives can move beyond the cyclical past, repeating generations of poverty and move forward, albeit slowly and with many disappointments along the way.

Becoming educated has frustrated Mr. Juu all the more because he has the knowledge to see and understand the difficulties of change. Mr. Juu continued,

> …it's very hard. Like, when I read a book from Rajabat University. It's the same as my thought, it was the same. If [you work with NGO], like people to people, [the poor] can receive. But, if you go through the government, with a small budget, if I am the boss, I sign and take the bid. You're the boss, when you sign, you take the bid. And then, when the real person arrives…there's a little bit left. That's the problem.

This thought of Mr. Juu's was also shared by Ms. Somsath when she articulated, "money is the one thing that people are looking for now. They have a lot to learn, to see more things and people develop." Mr. Juu and Ms. Somsath understood that being so

economically dependent on foreign aid for so many years and having few educated people has left Lao PDR with many officials with no real qualifications creating rules and policy. Skimming off the top has become so commonplace that it is not even viewed as an issue by those in office because of their own need for money. This is part of Laos' past and present. It is their choice, though, whether they will bring it into their future with tourism.

Mr. Juu's and Ms. Somsath's frustrations with corruption were also echoed by Mr. Dou Xong Mansourl, one of the first four tour guides that worked for the government in Laos, and currently is working as a freelance guide with a Swedish-based travel agency. Mr. Dou's "horizon of expectation" for the development within the small villages he takes groups to dealt with the corruptive attitudes of leaders and transformed those outlooks into legitimate, new experiences for Westerners and most importantly, the poor receiving visitors. Mr. Dou explained how illegitimate leaders feel justified in taking money for themselves, saying, "I mean some people realize they use corruption…So, that's why many people think about like that, 'Oh, it's not a big problem. Everyone they do, we do corruption around the world.'" It is because Mr. Dou understands this attitude that he is able to transform his experiences with corrupt officials into legitimate possibilities for development of the poor. Mr. Dou continued with his explanation of transforming leaders in villages, saying "[N]ow you can bring the tourists…people to the village. But, stay and share in every town [along the way]. And in this town you stay with this family—they give you accommodation to their house. But, next time change to overnight with another family." I said, "…so, you kind of want to see just one policy of…fairness?" Mr. Dou explained that he tried out his idea with a

group from Sweden and encountered much resistance from the village leader; however, through our conversation, I learned that the government does agree with him on changing family houses within the village so that all may monetarily benefit from the tourists rather than only the leader and his family. Mr. Dou remembered,

> I told [this idea] in the Lao National Tourism meeting…So, first, I overnight in the chief house. Make friends with them…And then next time I come and I overnight with another family. So, he knows that '…oh he will lose money because I will give money accommodation to another.' So I say to him, 'Oh, sorry I will not stay in your house because now all the travel agency mainly they do…overnight always with your house. But, I came from Swedish travel agency. We have very, very strong courtesy…[I tell the leader], 'I will come to your house first time, leave all money to you. Next time I will help another family. And next time the travel agency will help another family. Yeah, so we will share like that. Really I come finish to the last family then I will come to you again. So, please understand. So, he very sad… So, just him hate me and then I go around the village and they like me very much.

By changing the approach Mr. Dou had with the village leaders, he allowed them to become the heroes for the village. It must be noted that Dou's example is but one village where this has happened. As stated above, Mr. Dou has shared this with LNTA and it is one way currently being considered to help slow corruption within the local villages.

Resolutions are more complicated than these particular solutions. In Vientiane, Ms. Somsath and I discussed traditional values within Lao PDR and how it is losing customs and culture with more and more visitors to the country every year. I asked her for her thoughts on integrating tourism within the rural poor, asking, "[S]o, it is all about developing the relationship first and then?" Ms. Somsath replied,

> [I]t is not just jumping into [taking people to the poor] and of course there are many travel agencies around and some of them have been around a decade or so, they probably have a relationship with [the poor] already and there are more and more travel agencies in this day and everyone is going to. They know that people like to see villages, so they will say I will have this tour that you can visit those villages and you go in. They are not

> making things to the village's advantage and things like that. I am not looking for making my company do things too fast, but in the meantime, enjoying the process of keeping it up and knowing what is really good to visit in Laos.

By exploring her country first and taking a responsible attitude for growth and eventual integration of her company with the poor, Ms. Somsath is able to create a set of expectations based on other people's experiences with taking groups to visit villages. Ms Somsath is working on creating a lasting identity through the continual formation of her agency. She is careful to try not to take advantage of the poor as so many companies do. In slowly caring for the other in this manner, she is utilizing her imagination and belief system to carve the future. Ricoeur (1992: 127) explains this thought further,

> …two new concepts enter on stage here, imagination and belief. To *imagination* is attributed the faculty of moving easily from one experience to another if their difference is slight and gradual, and thus of transforming diversity into identity. *Belief* serves here as a relay, feeling in the deficiencies of the impression (italics in original).

Ms. Somsath's beliefs that she must build up her company responsibly before introducing tours to the poor is rooted in her imagination and past. By not being a part of the first groups to visit the rural poor, she is hoping to shape her experience with them to be responsible and to act without much damage.

There is a need and a struggle for change; it is occurring everywhere within Laos. The corruption, the poverty, the clamoring for visitors' money, and damaging cultural ways all help to slow down change irresponsibly. By changing the belief systems, beginning with all leaders, from the Prime Minister's office to the villages, imagination based on experience has the potential through a "horizon of expectation" to create a self-sustaining Lao PDR by the people and for the people. In creating a self-sustaining future together, the imagined future will become reality. Collectively Lao PDR has taken a

stand and stated they wish to see ecotourism throughout the country; together they have generated a "horizon of expectation" that includes all of the hopes, fears, and problems needed to be overcome. The following sub-theme of Ecotourism as a Future shares the common vision for a new Lao PDR through the conversations with locals and leaders alike. All have a vested interest in seeing their country become an ecotourism inspiration for the rest of the world.

Ecotourism as a Future

Revisiting the past brings hope for the future and speaking with many guides and seeing that they too are focused on the poor brings great relief. For many Lao, ecotourism is viewed as the *way of the future*, a savior of sorts. This line of thinking draws a fine line between progressive, sustainable development and catastrophic regression. Regression in development would occur because the divide between the poor and not, the educated and not, would become so great that revolt would eventually begin. At this point in Laos, progressive development is happening as foreigners come in and start businesses with little regulation. Without standard regulations soon; however, development will slow and different problems for Laos, including major loss to their traditions, will take hold. Lao PDR today is in the interim, development is witnessed daily in new places; however, the people are beginning to raise their voices to be heard. This creates within the "horizon of expectation" a movement of the imagination towards action. Ricoeur (1992:167) attests that

> …between the imagination that says, 'I can try anything' and the voice that says, 'Everything is possible but not everything is beneficial (understanding here, to others and to yourself),' a muted discord is sounded. It is in this discord that the act of promising transforms into a fragile concordance: 'I can try anything,' to be sure, but 'Here is where I stand!'

Through revisiting the past repeatedly with the Lao, especially the poor, recognition that they have a voice that tells them "I can try anything" is tantamount. Once that occurs within conversations, a glimmer of hope for a future becomes a realization that growth cannot include all of the cultural traditions of the soon to be past because the awareness of what is advantageous for the people and not the person takes hold as one recognizes that the self is responsible for the other.

Continuing the conversation with Mr. Dou, his own village had a chance to become part an ecotourism development project. They did not however, have a voice in the beginning. Instead, they created one together to help shape their development as opposed to sitting back and taking whatever happened to them. As he explained about his village's experience in the beginning, "[Y]eah, we are lucky we are here. Oh, beautiful, nice air. Oh, so natural." I asked, "[N]ow, how did your village like being some of the first to receive visitors? Was that hard on the people in your village when people starting coming to visit?" Mr. Dou continued,

> [T]hey feel okay. Now they got problem…First, [LNTA] said, 'Bring the tourists to overnight with their family.' And then it's good-bye in the morning [the farmers] going in the morning. They have to go to [farm], which is very far, walking one hour or one and a half. They have to get out four o'clock in the morning…and cooking for themselves breakfast and then feeding the animals. So, [the visitors] would have to prepare at four o'clock. At four o'clock it seems very…it's tough to the tourists. So, the national tourism said, 'Oh, now we will change the idea. We will get the house as a homestead in your village. Every tourist will come. They will stay over there and they have accommodation. So, this money you have to share to everyone.

Hearing Dou's village's story shows how the people were disregarded in the conversations regarding the project. They were asked to participate after the project was created. The people in the village recognized that having visitors inside their houses

would often not work because of their farming schedule. When they raised their voices to LNTA, the outsiders responded with a solution, but did not include the village in the conversation. There is discordance within this system of act-ask-react. If the people had been spoken with in the beginning, it may have become clear that the people were wary of their leader's trustworthiness. Mr. Dou continued, "but now they've got a problem because their chief from the village responsible the money from accommodation. Then he just put into the pocket instead of developing, helping them. So, now they got problem. I disagree for this idea." This is but another example of the corruption discussed above and shows how development is a give and take situation in conversing with the other, especially one heavily rooted in tradition. However, in conversations such as those, when you dream together the possibility of change steps into the room. It quietly waits to be discovered, unpeeled from the layers of imagination that called it forth.

This conversation with Mr. Dou leads into the tension between the historical past, present, and future. The voiceless other when given a chance would have been able to share with the government their ideas that a small house would work nicely, but the community needs to be involved with the handling of funds—not left for the leader alone. Workers for the government and NGOs shared that as development continues, the people are being listened to more and more. Whether that is the case remains to be seen, as it makes me wonder if lessons from poorly developed projects are being taken into account and changes being made on a fix-it basis instead of ask-first. Mr. Dou continued on about the trouble with the government's reaction to building a guest house for visitors, saying, "[S]o, how we improve the next step? And the tourists, they don't need to stay in the homestead in fact. If they want to stay lonely in the hotel in the house, they are not

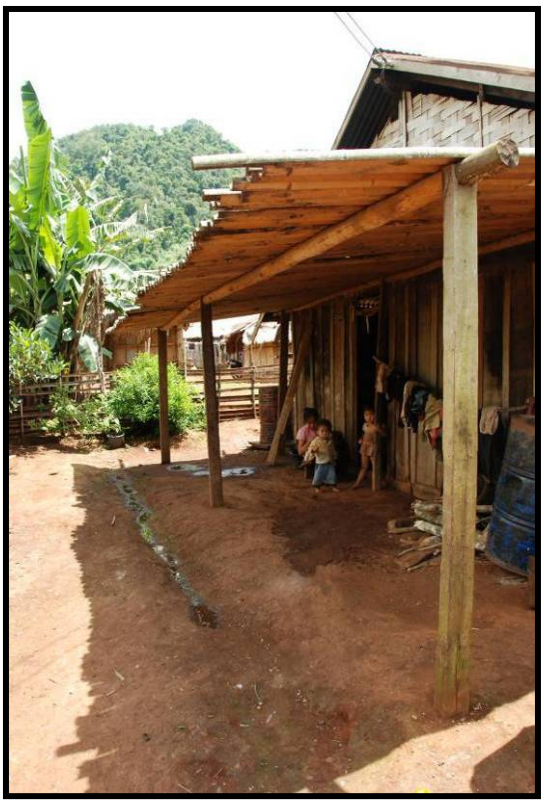

Image 15: Village Benefiting from Ecotourism
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

[going to] come to the village…It means this tourist they want to learn the traditional country." Mr. Dou has realized what the government has not recognized and because he understands this, he has a moral obligation (Ricoeur 1992:330), to critically analyze his own thoughts on development through tourism. As discussed above, Kearney (1988:390) states that through the use of imagination, legitimacy may be gained by discriminating between "those that democratize culture and those that mystify it, those that communicate and those that manipulate." Through this discrimination, traditions may be brought forth so that

> [I]magination undertakes a hermeneutic reading of its own genealogy: one which critically reassesses its own traditions, retells its own stories. Thus instead of conforming to the official censure of imagination in premodern thought, such a hermeneutic reading would brush this tradition against the grain, allowing repressed voices to speak out, neglected texts to get a hearing (Kearney 1988:390).

Mr. Dou recognizes that people willing to head out on an ecotourism trip understand, or have the capability to be forewarned, that they are heading out on a trek to rural parts of the country and were prepared to allow the "repressed voices to speak out, [and] neglected texts to get a hearing" (Kearney 1988:390). Mr. Dou has had a "fusion of horizon" with the future of the tourism industry because he understands the need for

those being developed to share, the need for the government to act, and the ecotourist to experience the wildlife.

Mr. Dou knows that the past cannot be assimilated as quickly as the government wishes. He also understands that the tension between the past and present will create the future. Ricoeur (1985:220) furthers the discussion of "fusion of horizons" when he states,

> [T]his notion of a fusion of horizons leads to the theme that finally what is at stake in the hermeneutics of historical consciousness is the tension between the horizon of the past and that of the present. In this way, the problem of the relation between past and present is set in a new light. The past is revealed to us through the projection of historical horizon that is both detached from the horizon in the present and taken up into and fused with it. This idea of the temporal horizon as something that is both projected and separate, distinguished and included, brings about the dialectizing of the idea of traditionality. At the same time, the concept of a fusion of horizons corrects what remains unilateral in the idea of being-affected by the past.

The "horizon of the past" for the Lao included many negative instances including some unfavorable cultural values, such as the discrepancy in how Lao women are treated in comparison to Western females. Understanding their place in history allows problems such as gender discrimination to become part of the past and set within a "temporal horizon" of the future because the past is now detached from the present's grip.

This idea takes me back to my conversation with Mr. Juu about lady boys and corruption. Moving our conversation forward, I asked Mr. Juu, "thinking about what is important to you and your family, what would you like to present the world's tourists when they visit your country looking for cultural interests?" He responded with a plan similar to the story Mr. Dou relayed about his village's tourism program, but the difference was Mr. Juu that began with the other, saying "…when [tourists] first arrive, I

bring them to the head man's house because we don't have bungalow yet…Then, relax, sit, and drink water. After I have assistant guy, so, I will let assistant guy to cook. Then, I will bring them and walk around the village and explain around." I interrupted, "[I]s the assistant guide from that village?" Mr. Juu replied,

> Yeah. After you show them around, tell them the history of the village and the culture. If I bring them to my village, I tell them and then I try to go into the house and let them know what it is—like I told you before, sunset door, sunrise door and, everything…I see the people that wear the clothes, like the elder. Like, my grandmother, yeah, she still uses her traditional clothes. I explain that for the lady, the suit is for the man. Like that. What do we eat? What do we do everyday? At night time, we do have activities to show. Like, the local people, they dress in traditional clothes. We clap hands, dance, like local traditional to show them, to make them interested.

Mr. Juu and others have realized that the Westerners coming to Lao PDR wanting an authentic experience would be interested in visiting remote communities. In Mr. Juu's narrative, his knowledge of the daily life within these communities has helped him imagine ecotourism's future surrounded by the poor and allowed him to formulate a plan steeped in the wishes of the poor receiving visitors. Mr. Juu continued,

> [Y]ou can tell [these visitors are] from a different [place]. In the morning, if they would like to see the real life, they can get up early and help the family to work, walk out to the stream. We don't have river, only stream. So, the top of the stream is thick, like a pond…get water, in the bamboo pipe into the basket and carry it back to home, very traditional. So, they can help with that. Or, if you want to see [animals] and dogs, free in the village. Tourists they would like to see, so, they feed dogs. They feed pigs, chickens. Yeah, if they want to do that, they can do. With the farmers, they work on the farm. How do they work? They do real work.

Mr. Juu's ideas have been relayed to Westerners and received with great acceptance, "[S]o, about 90%, they are very interested. Mostly Americans and French, English, Australia. They are all interested. But, for German, some of them, they're quite easy…So, that can help a lot. Tourism can help a lot." Being held back by some of the

past traditions has kept many Lao from taking responsibility for their own development. Inequality within ethnic groups and corruption within the government has left them without a strong voice to rise up and demand responsible change. In learning to release the bonds of the past by discussing them in the present as a way to the future, the traditional past can be chosen and taken into the future. Imagination does not need to be inclusive of all brand new ideas; rather, it makes sense to take the traditions of the past that help to further a positive future and incorporate them into a plan.

Ricoeur (1985:221) discusses the horizon of the present and in interpreting the past through the lens of the present, tradition finds its place in the future. Ricoeur (1985:221) writes, "the notion of tradition, taken in the sense of traditions, signifies that we are never in a position of being absolute innovators, but rather are always first of all in the situation of being heirs." By realizing this, plans for all-new ideas and a total turning away from traditional values can be checked and modified to be more inclusive of the cultural values within Laos. Mr. Juu's example of transforming a village so that it can effectively receive sustainable tourism has taken this notion of being an heir, rather than complete innovator and imagined a future for all.

Category III: Policy

Changing the paradigm of the traditional past with imagination into the possibility of the future finds its roots in the country's policies and training programs. As brought up in Chapter One, Lao PDR is Communist; however, it has worked significantly to make tourism development part of the entire country's development plans. The localized projects that incorporate participatory development and conversations with local leaders, national leaders, and foreign tourists revealed the importance of regulations. Regulations

are so imperative to the Lao that they publish the Dos & Don'ts (Image 16) for tourists in Lao PDR at certain tourist spots on signs, run the ad in Lao magazines, and print pamphlets to remind visitors that modesty is valued and to please follow their cultural rules. This theme of the Importance of Regulations helped create an all-encompassing voice for those representing the various people groups allowing for the conversations to become one for the people of Lao PDR and leading to the emergence of two sub-themes: Current Guidelines and Expectations for the Future.

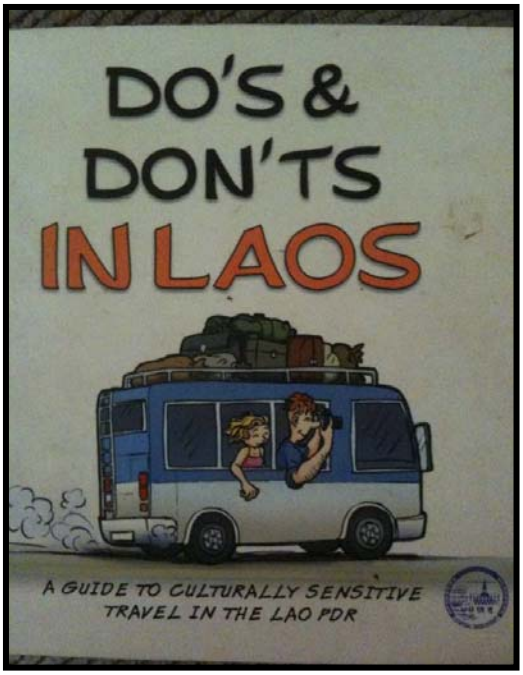

Image 16: Do's & Don'ts in Laos
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

Importance of Regulations

The importance of crafting quality infrastructure within the confines of a developing country cannot be stressed enough. Everyone I spoke with led me to believe they knew and understood the guidelines of LNTA for visitors coming into the country, which is logical since the travel agents and guides I conversed with all had jobs through the Lao National Tourism Administration. Reviewing my conversations with village and district leaders also showed the significance of regulations for tourism within their paradigm of living. While the rural poor do not hold a voice in the creation of tourism policy as it stands currently, they do have a vested interest in the outcomes of such policy. The sub-themes of Current Guidelines and Expectations for the Future are

grounded in the shared understanding of the importance of regulations in a developing economy.

Current Guidelines

Presently in Laos, policy does exist within the tourism administration regarding traditions and the poor. The extent that the policy authentically addresses the other in a long-term way remains to be seen. From what I witnessed and discussed in conversation, it is clear that while having policy gives the impression of significance, few understood the effect policy has and will have for the most vulnerable. The data gathered about policy address both what is currently in place as described by LNTA officials and what people would like to see in order to help the defenseless.

Current Lao policy purports to have the aim of retaining certain cultural traditions and while this pays lip-service, it does very little to preserve actual traditions. Habermas (1973:70) discusses the jeopardy this creates for the actual perpetuation of traditions, saying that

> in both cases appropriated cultural contents retain their imperative force, that is, they guarantee the continuity of a history through which individuals and groups can identify with themselves and with one another. A cultural tradition loses precisely this force as soon as it is objectivistically prepared and strategically employed. In both cases conditions for the reproduction of cultural traditions are damaged, and tradition is undermined.

Habermas' assertion that cultural traditions become damaged by the very girding of them gives an accurate picture of what my conversations described in regards to Lao PDR's tourism policy of showcasing cultural traditions in new ways. These ways include new innovations such as dinner houses (Image 17) serving traditional Lao cuisine showcasing

heavily rooted, yet mesmerizing cultural dances, displayed at times like a sideshow for visitors.

Take the example of Mr. Dou's village being the first to be a part of LNTA's rural village visitor project as discussed above in the category of Imagination. LNTA and the villagers were not coming to a mutual understanding as exposed in my conversation with Mr. Dou, therefore unable to achieve communicative competence within their shared lifeworld. After reviewing Habermas' (1984) four validity claims: comprehensibility, sincerity, truth, and legitimacy along with Diagram 1 of Lifeworld as presented in Chapter Four on page 48, including all necessary elements for communicative competence and subsequent communicative action to be reached, Mr. Dou's village and the government partially achieved the claims. There was comprehensibility between the village represented by Mr. Dou and the government; sincerity was portrayed mainly because the desire for the village to develop was shared by all. However, mutual understanding was not achieved in this instance because truth and legitimacy between the two speakers was not reached. The government and village wanted to see development, but in not listening to the villagers desires for their village,

Image 17: Kua Lao Restaurant and Dinner Show
Source: Laura Nelsen, 2009

their values no longer were shared thereby stopping communicative competence from being attained.

This primarily occurred between the two groups because of the traditional values of hierarchical deference given to leadership roles and the other, the poor. Furthering the divide in communicative competence is that with the traditional roles being followed between leader and follower, conversations were happenstance rather than commonplace, and if they happened, they were rarely implemented to the full benefit of the poor. This too could be seen through Mr. Dou's example of the evolving policy of tourist accommodations, which first housed tourists in homes, then built guest houses, which skirted the issue of waking visitors early rather than deal with the facts of rural Laotian life, to subsequently learning that most visitors do not truly care if they wake early if doing so represents an opportunity for a unique cultural experience. LNTA has helped perpetuate a village level problem of corruption on the part of some local leaders by not including all of those involved, including community members, in the conversation in the beginning.

Habermas' (1973:70) argument states that loss occurs when objectives of cultural interests are created and strategization on showcasing these values to the outsider is implemented. By creating a set of inauthentic opportunities to display *truth*, tradition's distinguishing characteristics are diminished and any meaning left remains stagnant. Over time, this would seemingly lead to the loss of traditions. As Evans (1988:135-6) spoke of in Chapter Four's discussion about the loss of traditions, "purification rites of the city previously conducted by parades of the king's elephants…[and] rites connected with minorities [have all but disappeared]. But nothing has taken their place."

Throughout the years, partly because of development in tourism, revered rituals and traditions have simply been written out or modified to fit the impulse of the government (Evans 1998:133-138).

The ability to erase someone else's cultural traditions, combined with the understanding of Habermas' (1973) examination of cultural loss as a crisis of legitimation, exposes the data raw and unrelenting for the Lao government and those wishing to make money on development from tourism. It unveils the question, how much does tradition really mean to the country's leaders? During a conversation with one LNTA official, Mr. Vilikhan Xayana, I asked him, "[H]ow will you work to help them, the ethnic minorities, keep their culture?" I continued, "Because, earlier I talked with a travel agent, a director of a travel agency, and I said, 'You know what always bothers me is…when the monks go for food, and now you see so many people taking pictures…" Mr. Xayana stopped my thought:

> You know for this we are to follow the policy of the government. If we have an idea that we want to have a photo of them, but we have to follow the policy. Because the government gives the policy and they can follow, then they can do it in the right way. For example, the policy provides or allows them to do something like they can make their products than they can sell their products to the tourists. And then they can show their culture and their traditions for example, the new year for example, this is very important because we can show our traditional customs we can show why we do something.

This was the overriding response when speaking with those representing the government, specifically, LNTA. When asked to see the policy, I was most times met with a smile and told it would be emailed to me, to date, it has not been. Policy was a term used by many, but understood fully by few. Though few dared to say so directly, most viewed policy as a set of rules imposed on them, created by people in power without full

communicative action in place with the poor or those affected by the imposed regulations.

The nature of Habermas' (1973:70-71) argument that places cultural loss in the case of strategizing and objectifying traditions, conversely leaves an opening for the de-strategizing and letting go of objectives. Habermas (1973:71) writes, "apparently, traditions can retain legitimizing force only as long as they are not torn out of interpretive systems that guarantee continuity and identity." With careful care, which will be discussed in the following sub-theme of Expectations for the Future, the Lao can find ways to decide how to share their traditional values that with the tourist. Before the future is discussed, the current situation must be laid out in the data.

The importance of generating a legitimate society with cultural traditions intact makes more precarious the comment from a travel agent in Vientiane, Mr. Norakoun Tanseri, who told me that he thought it was a good thing for people to take pictures of the monks as they went for alms. I asked him what he thought of people who take pictures of revered daily rituals in Lao PDR and was taken aback when he replied, "[T]aking picture is a common for tourist because they want something souvenir. But, some people might think that they impact the tradition. But, once in life, they come to see, so I think, I think it's okay." Mr. Tanseri shares the belief that many Westerners do—they are visiting and it doesn't hurt anyone; however, stepping into the shoes of the other gives a different perspective especially if those being photographed are simply conducting their daily rituals.

The daily ritual of monks processing for food has nothing to do with tourism, but has become a trap of sorts because of the nature of the experience. For as long as anyone

could remember, monks have lined up to get their daily meal from the locals. They process by with a bowl and the people put food inside. Tourists wanting to witness this ritual have begun to do many things such as line up with locals to feed them and photograph paparazzi-like the monks as they walk by. Any sort of reverence for the situation is gone. The dismissive attitude of Mr. Tanseri further undermines the idea of placing value on parts of tradition that have nothing to do with the visitor. Harkening back to this conversation within this narrative also leads to Kearney's (1988:30) reflection on how imagination is collapsed into a set of euphoric instances as discussed in Chapter Four that

> [R]ecollection of time past and projection of time future—into an empty play of euphoric instants, postmodernism runs the risk of eclipsing the potential of human experience for *liberation*…And it risks abandoning the emancipatory practice of imagining *alternative* horizons of existence (remembered or anticipated) by renouncing the legitimacy of narrative coherence and identity… (italics in original).

Lao officials such as Mr. Bodhisane, Vice-Chairman of LNTA, contend that progress with the poor is slow intentionally because they are working on ecotourism responsibly. By taking into account all of the narratives collected throughout Laos, from the district officials whose voices contributed to the data in the category of Tradition, to conversations with Mr. Juu regarding the future, to information received from many travel agents, advancement appears to be time-consuming more because of the exclusion of the voice of those-being-developed in the policy-making and development process. Kearney's (1988) idea above represents what is happening when responses such as Mr. Tanseri become commonplace, with concerns brushed off as they were when I discussed the comment with Mr. Xayana at LNTA. Tradition's imagination has been reduced as a means to a way to bring in visitors and advance as quickly economically as possible; yet

there are those whose deepest desire is to include the other so that "the emancipatory practice of imagining *alternative* horizons of existence" (Kearney 1988:30) is not discarded. The following sub-theme of Expectations for the Future continues the narrative for the other in terms of desire for policy.

Expectations for the Future

The give and take in conversations with the other tends to go back and forth, almost at times seemingly leading to nowhere. As discussed in Chapter Four, the "golden thread beyond the labyrinth" (Kearney 1988:396) draws the ebb and flow into the future through conversations with the other regarding development. Thinking about the metaphor of a labyrinth reminded me of the conversation with Mr. Juu, described in the Imagination category above. Mr. Juu's approach of inclusion and communication with the poor in tourism remains organic and by that nature capable of carrying tradition into the future legitimately as Habermas (1973:70) forewarned is the only way to be. Discussing loss of the human condition of imagination in the postmodern world, Kearney (1988:396) states that

> …to abandon this story would be to condemn ourselves to the circles of empty imitation which predominate today, to renounce all hope of imagining alternate forms of cultural and political practice. It is here and now, in the very darkness of the postmodern labyrinth that we must begin again to listen to the story of imagination.

This statement represents Lao PDR's current situation; however, the situation is not the expectations held by the Lao. Lao leaders do not lack for imagination; rather, they have a lack of interest in achieving ethical communicative competence to ensure the responsible development of the poor. Policy created around the give and take with the focus beyond the labyrinth is what will draw the Lao into the future responsibly.

Pro-poor policy, as discussed above in Chapter Three, has been created at least once inside Lao PDR and may be seen in the example of development from Mr. Sengthome as he described the Hmong Night Market he helped create. Mr. Sengthome discussed how hard it was for people moving to the city when rural life became too difficult, "I know it would be difficult for them and it's not good for the city for government to control them because they lived in the countryside before, but now they have to come to the city to live and to get a job. But, one thing is the night market." The Hmong night market has become a viable source of income for many Lao, namely the women as it is a daily chance for them to sell their wares to tourists. However, this example too shows the difficulty Habermas (1973:70) described of traditions becoming so thinned out they no longer hold cultural value because the regulations of the night market do not include provisions that handicrafts sold there are authentic. Comparing my own visits to the night market in May 2008 to August 2009 I personally witnessed the influx of Chinese replicated crafts being sold as authentic Lao items. Mr. Sengthome helped create a valuable way for Hmong to make money in Luang Prabang. Because of this earning capability, a responsibility exists on the part of those making policy inside Lao PDR to attempt to reach understanding, as presented in Chapter Four, with those receiving the benefits and consequences of the policy being created to try and ensure as legitimate policy as possible because within the lifeworld of each person, his or her cultural traditions are "coextensive with society" (Habermas 1984:148).

Conversations with the other, such as the ones I had that centered on policy, encountered a lot of give and take. According to Mr. Por Xiong, a Hmong working for World Vision in Laos, "for the tourism, it's good. It is really beginning to help the

people." The sentiment that tourism has had enough time to begin to take hold and ecotourism in particular has been implemented enough so that the poor are experiencing some of the effects was echoed by many in the tourism sector including national representatives Mr. Bodhisane, Mr. Sengthome, Mr. Yang and more local representatives Mr. Dou, Mr. Jay, and Mr. Juu. This led to a prime opportunity to address policy in tourism programs and the role that policy plays to address appropriate rates of growth for the development of Laos, as the Vice-Chairman maintained.

As began above, one conversation in particular centered on this very idea of policy, the poor, and the struggles with the issue. The conversation was with Mr. Sengthome regarding the increasing need for regulations inside Luang Prabang, a World Heritage Site. Towards the beginning of our conversation, I said that I wanted to speak about policy in Luang Prabang and right away Mr. Sengthome stated, "begin in current with story of no regulations." I asked, "[H]ow does UNESCO or anybody protect the people that are here and want to stay here, but they can't afford it? Is there anything right now to help them, or do they just have to leave?" Mr. Sengthome acknowledged, "[Y]es, in the past. But now the fund is finished to help them." While the details were unclear, it seems that there was a program to help out the local Lao living inside the World Heritage Site by giving low rent rates, but that funding has since run out and now the local people are leaving, many heading back outside of Luang Prabang into the jungle outskirts. Upset to hear this, I said, "[T]hat is difficult. Because foreigners have the money to come in and build whatever, but the people who have been here or who want to stay here, cannot. That is so unfair." The unfairness stems from the number of foreigners moving into Luang Prabang to begin businesses, which is causing rent to increase so that locals

are no longer able to afford to live there. Mr. Sengthome divulged that "[N]ow, we are planning a tax for foreigner."

Recognizing that a tax on foreigners is a viable way to bring in funds for local governance, I expressed agreement with the plan and Mr. Sengthome continued, "[T]hat would help. For example, maybe you'd have to pay $10US or $20US." This statement by Mr. Sengthome exposes the level of naiveté that many educated Lao possess because of the country's lack of economic stability. Furthering the conversation, Mr. Sengthome added, "I think first of all the Government should pay attention to the people and explain it to them why we have the Heritage Site. They have to make a Declaration or something like that. Like, 'Do not sell your land and do not go out.'" Understanding the difficulty of getting government to declare anything, I stated, "[T]hat's very hard," to which Mr. Sengthome replied, "[I]t's not difficult to do. You can do it….It's no hard. France or people from other countries, they stay here and Lao people they try to go home, and that's a problem for the culture." Mr. Sengthome, like many Lao I spoke with, believes that change can occur quickly within the government; however, the officials I spoke with stated the exact opposite.

The future for the Lao lies in its policy's steadfastness. Having policy that does not serve all members of society means little to the people and garners little long-term commitment. By creating steadfast policy with all Lao, the focus on the other becomes mainstay, thus allowing for ethical and sustainable development to take hold. For example, the town of Luang Prabang itself is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and with that title comes many rules and regulations that must be followed. This makes it difficult for many local Lao because they do not have the needed income to maintain the homes

and buildings within the city walls that is required to preserve the Heritage Site status. Many of the policies currently in place in Luang Prabang do not serve the most important members of the community—the local Lao. Our conversation, now including Mr. Jay, turned towards the future and how local leaders need to be taught to responsibly guide their villages and towns. Mr. Jay asked, "[I]f you are the leader, how can you protect? They have to understand and learn." Pausing and thinking of my own narrative as to why I visit Laos, I responded:

> I come for culture; I come to see how the people live. Why is this place so beautiful? Maybe half the people come like that, and the other half comes to drink cheap. But, how can it be preserved for the people living here? For people that want to come and experience culture, does the government have any ideas right now that you know of? Have they seen that in the future? I hope the Lao government is planning on kind of slowing things.

The focus on preserving cultural traditions and creating policy that is more inclusive of the Lao people is what will motivate Lao PDR to continue their quest for a sustainable future with ecotourism. By incorporating lessons learned from their past, tradition, and imagination with the other, Lao PDR has a chance to become a leader in responsible ecotourism. Whether culture or money will prevail as a desired value remains to be played out and is dependent on the inclusion of the other in creating policy. Getting to this point continues to be the struggle for the Lao because the other has been left out for so long. But as Habermas (1973:70) asserts, "cultural traditions have their own, conditions of reproduction. They remain 'living' as long as they take shape in an unplanned, nature-like manner, or are shaped with hermeneutic consciousness." Currently, there are plans in progress to institute quotas on restaurants, guest houses, and internet cafes inside the walls of Luang Prabang to help slow growth and preserve the

historic atmosphere; whether the policy generated helps to reverse stagnate traditions and create "living" ones instead remain to be seen.

Summary

Chapter Five presents the data and analyzes it according to under girding theory. The analysis is used to reconfigure the ideas of tradition inside of tourism as a medium for development utilizing the lens of imagination to further conversations and configure a future through policy aimed at protecting the vulnerable other. The research categories of Tradition, Imagination, and Policy were used to layout the data and guide the analysis of the themes collected through the narratives shared in my research.

The narrative of tradition's importance to the development of Lao PDR begins with the imagination. Through communicating with the other, we are drawn into the labyrinth Kearney (1988) spoke of previously. It is within this labyrinth that imagination explores possibilities, "of *another* kind of *poiesis*—alternative modes of inventing alternative modes of existence (Kearney 1988:33) (italics in original). The category of Imagination draws us further into the labyrinth towards inventing an alternative mode of existence for Laos. The people of Lao PDR are making strides in the area of tourism policy and yet are in great need of both reworking current policy and writing new policy to help protect the most vulnerable other. The current state of affair inside Lao PDR is one of try and try-again. This cycle perpetuates the plight of the poor because they are continuously left out of the conversations. Lao PDR has begun to construct a future, though whether it is sustainable remains to be seen. The people with whom I had the privilege of speaking while in Lao PDR are committed to creating a place inclusive of the other and welcoming to the outsider through responsible policy-making.

CHAPTER SIX
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our working definition, or more accurately, our understanding, of development resides in a context in which people who live under compromised socioeconomic, political and personal conditions find ways to ameliorate this situation, retain their dignity and respect for self and the other. The researcher who enters this context is not simply there to collect data, or carry out projects, but to be in relationship with local partners in learning what development path to create and act upon (Herda 2007a:5).

Introduction

Chapter Six begins with the Summary of the Research. The chapter continues with the Research Findings and Implications for Practice. It concludes with Personal Reflections from the Researcher including my reflection of the research topic and my experience as a researcher.

Summary of the Research

This research explores tourism as a way to retain chosen traditions while imagining new possibilities for policy-making. The categories of Tradition and Imagination are grounded in future tourism policy, which opens the possibility for the development of curriculum for tourism programs and development studies, a need that I discovered during the research process. Through conversations with national, district, and local leaders, I constructed the complex narrative of tradition, imagination, and their joint effect on the future of Lao PDR's policy. Conversation partners varied widely, including educated and uneducated government officials, educated and uneducated Hmong locals, and travel agents from a variety of locales.

Context for the research site of Lao PDR was presented through a thorough accounting of the history of the country's development story including politics and specific issues related to ethnic minority narratives. Lao PDR continues to be governed

by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, which came into power in 1975. Since their coming of power in Laos, development of the country stagnated at times and now often serves to disturb the lives of the Lao, especially the rural poor. Tourism research inside of the pre-developing country of Lao PDR ended up changing my life forever. Fully expecting to converse with people about chosen traditions and translating that into policy and further curriculum for training programs was not what took place primarily due to the lack of basic infrastructure encountered or not encountered.

This very real aspect of non-development inside the country has helped to put the proverbial cart before the horse in that the Lao government understands that their country is in desperate need of long-term development; yet, does not wish to fully recognize all of its members of society. Nor admit that while they purport to be developing slowly for the preservation of culture, they are in fact allowing foreign business owners to come in and destroy that which they are trying to protect. This sense of backwardness that came from my conversations and refusal to completely air their past has helped to slow the sustainable pro-poor development needed for the country. As Herda (1999:89) writes, "…the data do not speak for themselves. Our history and our present voices speak for us, and, thus, our language can either mask or reveal problems that traditionally have been skirted or left unspoken." The conversations had all revealed in some way or another a desire to work together collectively as a country—the idea of building up the poor and bringing education to the rural villages was spoken about by almost all conversants; however, without holding the conversations with each other, little will be done to effect these changes.

Admitting the undeniable and horrific past on the part of all Laotians may be a first step in bridging the communication gap that exists between the government and local leaders and the poor. Through employing the narratives of the past, and interpreting that past through the lens of the present, the traditional values chosen for the future may find their place. As discussed in Chapter Five, Ricoeur (1985:221) posits "the notion of tradition, taken in the sense of traditions, signifies that we are never in a position of being absolute innovators, but rather are always first of all in the situation of being heirs." For the Lao to develop Lao PDR as a viable and sustainable country for the future, the hierarchical, and in turn marginalizing, categorizing of people groups must be dropped. Instead, by focusing on the commonalities found in being Lao citizens with a vibrant past may help to portray Ricoeur's (1985:221) sense of being "heirs" as a rich-in-history yet ready-to-move-forward country with a common narrative and therefore identity.

If the Lao people are able to join together to work for the country's betterment rather than individual's, they have a chance to "retain legitimizing force only as long as they are not torn out of interpretive systems that guarantee continuity and identity" (Habermas 1973:71). The imaginations of some Lao have proved that care for the other does exist; for example, the night market as implemented by Mr. Sengthome from UNESCO or the fight for all of his fellow villagers with LNTA as Mr. Dou shared. Inside tourism as development, a number of traditions have been eliminated or changed and others that have nothing to do with tourism have been brought into the mix, such as the daily ritual of feeding the monks. It is well understood that with development comes good and bad on many levels. Exposure of harmful customs such as the ignoring of female lineage, which has in part led to the devastating consequence of loss of identity

are good issues to be uncovered as that way solutions may be worked on with those affected by them. It is good that development has brought more awareness to Laos. Prior to Lao officials opening their door to the country, and still persisting today, relatively little is known about the whole country and how the lack of development has hindered the people.

On the other hand, development brings undesirable effects too. Repeatedly conversants spoke about the wish for more modest dress. From well educated city dwellers to rural villagers, the message of modesty was very clear—they wanted it and did not like that dress was beginning to change, especially for the women. This aspect of Lao development is represented as undesirable not because of the issue, but because it was shared as being unwanted by all conversants. Laotians have work on their hands however because many of the foreign owned business shops and some locally owned contained numerous articles of clothing that would be deemed immodest or immoral by most Lao. This issue compounded with the fact that many Westerners do not understand this deep desire for modesty leaves work for LNTA and its representatives.

Adding to the undesired effects of tourism as development is the reality that the Lao cannot sustain themselves without foreign help. People who lived locally many times cannot live within the city limits because of rising rent prices. Others who had been forced to move by the government for future development may end up in the city with notions that they will be taken care of; however, as witnessed in conversations, that is rarely the case most times due to lack of funds.

Tourism is not leaving Lao PDR and how it will look in the end remains to be seen. Competing statements of promoting slow growth then witnessing the opposite

expose how far off Lao PDR is from Habermas' (1984) notions of mutual understanding and shared lifeworld. Through the continuation of girding policy on tradition in a manner that is truly unjust for those regulations are being written for, Lao PDR cannot develop as a fully legitimate society. It was clear from my conversations that the desire is there for policy that is inclusive of the other is the only way to advance Lao PDR. The following are the findings of my research.

Research Findings

The conversation narratives, text analysis, and findings of this research demonstrate the seriousness of discussions especially those with Mr. Juu, Mr. Jay, Mr. Sengthome, and Mr. Dou that centered on empowering the poor to choose traditions to share with visitors. Those conversations surrounding the poor led to conversations regarding working towards translating chosen traditions into effective policy, eventually leading to curriculum for tourism studies, which is necessary to surmount the constraints made by current efforts. The findings of the research fall into the sections of (1) tradition's roots, (2) education's consequences, and (3) ecotourism is a critical aspect of future Lao development.

1. Tradition's Roots Run Deep

Tradition transcends the boundaries of time. Enigma-like and elusive at times, its roots are heavily grounded in everything the Lao do. From following clan lines in the home to the hierarchical ethnic lineage followed country wide, traditional customs are engrained within the Lao. The data revealed that these revered customs are of great importance to the future of Lao PDR as the country continues to grow economically and develop through tourism.

While traditions are important, at times they must change, as long as said change occurs with the participation of those affected. For example, I found that Lao government officials have a responsibility to help phase out through education long-established practices that over time have been detrimental to the continuation of the people such as the practice of following the male lineage without concern to the female's. Through conversing about tradition, collective plans to authentically showcase Lao heritage were said to have been prepared, but were not witnessed. Future governance to protect valuable customs and ensure their continued representation through tourism is presently being discussed by economic stakeholders.

Examples of traditional customs being incorporated with existing tourism programs are growing. Including the greatest stakeholders is essential because they are the ones to benefit from development the most, thereby helping to raise the entire country economically and eventually creating an atmosphere of educational development for the sustained future.

2. Education's Consequence

The importance of education was revealed early in the research process. During the examination of Lao history, their struggle with education was shown. The Lao's education crisis begins prior to French Colonialism, increased during colonial days and subsequently plummeted after the withdrawal of the French and the Vietnam War. This has had devastating consequences on the Lao and their future.

Part of my research process was to discuss the need for curriculum in tourism training programs; yet, during the research conversations, I realized that Lao development in the tourism sector has many issues that must be dealt with before training

programs can have a possibility of success. Problems such as the need for educated, literate, multi-lingual Lao and the lack of infrastructure within the country were revealed. Curriculum cannot be fully developed until dilemmas such as these are brought out and publicly discussed.

The consequences of education are far reaching. Everywhere I researched, I witnessed devastating poverty. This extreme poverty has dampened educational efforts because the very real need for survival supersedes the ability to send children to school. The government must address the issue of lack of access to education; however, the assistance of foreign educators, families' support, and the trust of governance is needed alongside the support from the government or else the struggle will continue to no avail.

3. Ecotourism as a Future

The word ecotourism is found throughout the country and has come to mean anything related to tourism within their natural setting, such as elephant riding and nature hiking. As I traversed the countryside, it was an English word that every Lao knew. Attempting to bring traditional ways into their proposed future with tourism as a medium for development is a commendable act being tried by all in the tourism sector. The future for Lao PDR is one with ecotourism at its helm, thereby allowing for the possibility of responsible advancement. However, with ecotourism as their purported future, the infrastructure or lack of it must be dealt with so that ecotourism can have a sustainable future.

In looking at ecotourism as a future, I found that foreign business owners, while economically stimulating the country, may have their situation *too good*. Foreign businesses account for a large part of economic stimulus in Luang Prabang, Lao's

UNESCO World Heritage City, and currently see little regulation and no taxes. The Lao take pride in their modesty and make an attempt at sharing their cultural values with visitors. However, due to the lack of know-how, these cultural ways of being do not often reach the visitor, including foreign business owners, who may have little motivation to learn or adopt such values. With a future ripe for ecotourism as a mainstay, the foreign business owner is critical in the economic stimulus of towns and retention of locals as residences. However, Lao government officials must be diligent in their relationship with foreign business owners and ensure they are looking after the most vulnerable Lao before their own interests.

Implications for Practice

This research project has significant implications for leadership and policy-making. These implications for rural development, tourism policy, and curriculum development include (1) joining tradition's narratives with policy-making, (2) establishing curriculum for tourism guide programs working with the rural poor, (3) developing rural leadership with oversight by communities. The following implications are addressed to the governmental leaders who have the authority to implement regulations and create policy.

1. Unite Traditions' Narratives with Policy-Making

Policy-makers can integrate the other's narratives to help formulate legitimate and stable regulations for development through tourism. The narrative of the other used as a way to draw upon practiced traditions not only includes the often forgotten, but reveals a facet of the Lao narrative previously unheard—their cultural ways of life and authentic desires for their future. Policy may be fashioned utilizing the highlights of these

conversations with the poor and buy-in may then be greater. Sharing narratives with one another seeks meaning and helps to promote to the world that all people inside a country are valued, something many visitors worry about when exploring developing countries.

By feeling included and valued, the poor gain a stake in their future. In caring for one another, relationships are built and sustained. Policy fashioned around the narrative of the other's traditions for tourism also helps to advance the universalists' stance of acceptance, rather than the established communitarian practice of status quo. The formation of groups of community leaders to discuss current issues in development of their villages would, to the global world, help show the recognition of and admiration for a communist country that takes such important steps towards listening and including the poor.

With inclusion, the other is recognized as an individual with a separate voice within the collective. By allowing the other a voice, the collective voice opens wide, ripe for the imagined future to step into the present. As the imagined future is brought forth, policy can be shaped to include the traditional past and imagined future as declared by all Lao. This helps to further create a legitimate society capable of carving a sustained future.

2. Develop Curriculum for Tour Agencies and Tourism Guides

As the ecotourism sector continues to grow in Lao PDR, the need for curriculum for guide training programs remains. Developing curriculum to train future tourism guides would help to streamline their current process. The Lao National Tourism Administration has training programs in place, but they do not adequately address issues with tourism that are often overlooked. Curriculum for guide training serves many

purposes, including relationship building and bridging a link between the tourist, the country, and the people. For Lao PDR, the development of curriculum would present itself as a learning guide used by tourism officials to train guides beginning a new career.

The curriculum should focus on teaching tourism officials not only skills on taking groups out and sharing the country with them, but more importantly, that activities used are also carried over into their actual work with the people. The program has double meaning in that the activities would teach how to do something while taking into account the other, in this case, the visitor, and at the same time offer practice in leading others in situations that will come up while on tour. This proposed approach is different from others because it focuses on both participants and would teach guides how to build on a tour group's dynamics by pulling out the commonalities, focusing on those and relating that to their own country, self, and culture. Having a program such as this would help to retain the ethics of ecotourism.

3. Develop the Rural Leader

Due to the poverty devastating the country, rural leaders face the difficult task of leading their peers in seemingly never-ending fights for existence. This complex culturally rooted task of leadership in rural Lao PDR lends itself easily to corruption, not because of choice but out of necessity. Village leaders look to district leaders to be their voice when reporting to the national government. Additionally, the introduction of tourism as a medium for development has given rural leaders continuingly increasing power over their communities with the need for continued support through educational programs created to address the needs of the rural leaders. Additionally, the introduction of tourism as a medium for development has given rural leaders increasing power over

their communities. This leadership needs continued support through educational programs.

One of the ways for the Lao government to develop rural leadership is to provide monthly meetings within districts committed to genuine discussion. Government officials could present leadership education that includes all village leaders. Since most rural leaders have no formal education that is necessary for the development of the poor with tourism, this idea could potentially be far reaching in the name of development. One way to immediately implement monthly rural leader meetings would be to hold them in the village schoolhouse.

Suggestions for Future Research

Through the collective narrative that stemmed from my conversations, I found issues for future research. They include (1) the significance of cultural traditions in the future, (2) development of the rural poor, (3) understanding poverty in the development of pre-developing countries, and (4) the role of tourism inside pre-developing and developing countries.

1. Cultural Traditions Significance in the Future

Uncovering the cultural traditions held dear and repeatedly practiced in Lao culture revealed devastating news of inbreeding and corruption, all linked to historical practice. These practiced traditions hold great implications for the sustained future of the country.

2. Development of the Rural Poor

Although this research focused on tourism inside Lao PDR and included the poor, much of the research is focused on the Hmong, who due to their past relationships have

strained relations with Lao government. A broader understanding of the development of all rural poor would help further the narrative of tradition in development.

3. Understanding Lao Poverty

Poverty inside Lao PDR existed everywhere I visited. A largely uneducated population, devastating poverty, remoteness of citizens, lack of basic infrastructure, and devastating history combine to create a strain on Lao, which is represented by the sheer numbers of poor people. Examining this struggle through the various lenses of poverty would be interesting and useful for future development projects.

4. Tourism's Role in Pre-Developing and Developing Countries

Uncovering the effects of tourism on pre-developing and developing countries is tantamount to their long-term development. A more general understanding of tourism's role inside these countries may help create better policy towards the poor to help ensure their survival.

Personal Reflections from the Researcher

Permit me to recall my trip to Lao PDR the summer of 2009 to gather my research for my dissertation. It turned out to be a momentous, life-changing trip. Making our way from China through Vietnam and Singapore into the heart of Laos, I witnessed development at all stages. Seeing what development looked like in other countries helped to frame what I would be looking for inside Laos. Arriving in Lao PDR and setting out into the heart of the country on a 500 km dirt road, I realized that my ideas of development in Lao PDR were far off. In my May 2008 trip I had seen poverty while traveling throughout the country and thought I was ready to tackle the issue for my research. However, I soon discovered that I was not prepared and after much thought do

not know if I ever would have been fully prepared to see the level of destituteness the majority of Lao live in.

Traversing the countryside by using a route that Mr. Juu recommended brought me to *see* the country with new eyes. Had I understood the level of poverty when I visited in 2008, I would have focused more of my research on the poor. Being the only foreigner many times in the places I researched, the story of development through tourism took on a different position. Ecotourism is the stance the government and those living in the cities wish to see for the future of Laos. In some places inside the country, this phrase is known, but not understood. Coming upon village after village and seeing so many people in similarly dire situations left me reeling at times. As I wrote in my journal the day I experienced the blurred faces of the children, "Then and only then does my heart break. Riding these 500km is nothing for me—I can get a massage when I get to Luang Prabang if I choose—again, IF I CHOOSE, but where is the choice for these children? Last night while talking with Juu, it is as if my life work is being laid for me."

The people I was fortunate enough to converse with opened their hearts and homes to me time and time again. I found it overwhelming when someone who has no material possessions welcomes me into their home to show me around and explain their customs. While their imagination today rarely ventures to speak of a different future, many of the Lao I conversed with allowed themselves to be taken out of their comfort level of extreme respect for those in power, and in this context they shared their dreams. As this happened to me time and time again, my strength to continue my research was renewed. Writing in my journal the last day in Asia, I reflected that now "I can see that Lao PDR is in need of major development work in order for the tourism industry to

remain a viable option for sustaining the country economically…I must focus on what is possible as otherwise it will be no good for me to even write my dissertation." This last entry shows the incredible frustration and love I have developed while traveling the country.

This leads me to my final reflection of tradition's purpose inside of tourism. The role of tradition is engrained deeper than I thought inside of the Lao people. The erosion of their daily traditions as is occurring through some tourism efforts only furthers the plight of the poor. By taking a step back and reviewing current policy, necessary changes can be made to minimize the effect on the poor. I hope that this research contributes to the understanding of the role tradition and imagination play on the future policy-making of Lao PDR's tourism sector. Being drawn to this research as an explorer, my life has been forever changed. As I continue on my way in life, I will take my experiences from being a tourism researcher and approach places I plan to discover with a more open-mind and heart, for it is the voice of the elderly lady (Image 18) in one village who cried and beat her chest when I left as if to say, thank you, but it is not enough—for that was the moment in my life I stepped beyond the labyrinth.

Image 18: Hmong Lady and Researcher Source: Ben LaBelle, 2009

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Appendix A
IRB Approval Letter

April 6, 2009

Dear Ms. Nelsen:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #09-023). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research

Appendix B
Guiding Conversation Questions
Groups One and Two

Group One:

Category I: Tradition

1. What traditions do you remember being important to your family through generations?

2. How have those traditions carried through to your life now?

3. As a citizen of Lao PDR, what do you feel is important for the country to retain in terms of traditions celebrated throughout the nation?

Category II: Imagination

1. Given the importance of tradition throughout your country, how do you see ethnic and Lao traditions working with tourism today?

2. Thinking about what is important to you and your family, what would you like to present to the world's tourists when they visit your country looking for cultural interests?

3. What would you want tourists to know when they come to visit your village, your town, your country?

Category III: Policy

1. What kind of policy do you believe would be fitting for tourism?

2. What should be included in tourism policy about the retention of chosen traditions?

3. What do you believe needs to be addressed in tourism development programs?

Group Two:

Category I: Tradition

1. What traditions do you remember being important to your family?

2. What are some examples of traditions your family continues to observe?

3. What traditions do you feel are important for the country to keep?

Category II: Imagination

1. When tourists come to visit, what would you like them to learn about your culture?

2. What should tourists know about your country and culture before visiting Lao PDR?

3. Please describe a good future for your village.

Category III: Policy

1. What rules for tourism in Lao PDR would you like to see created?

2. What rules should be created to help retain parts of your traditions?

3. What do you believe needs to be looked at in programs that are being used to train tourism workers?

Appendix C
University of San Francisco
Letter of Invitation and Research Questions
Group One: Tourism Officials and Educators

Date

Participants Name and Title
Company or Organization
Address

Dear Mr./Ms.:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an exploration of my dissertation topic. As you know my research will explore chosen traditions and tourism as a way to influence policy-making in development and curriculum for tourism education. My research will concentrate on the various ethnicities making up Lao PDR today. By engaging in conversations, I hope this research will have future implications for Lao PDR's policy on tourism and development along with curriculum for tourism and development studies in the Universities.

Your participation in this research is contingent upon your signing the consent form (you will retain a copy). By signing this form, you will be granting me permission to record (audio) and transcribe our conversation(s). You are also granting permission for your photographs, and video to be taken during our time spent together. Our conversation(s) will provide data for the analysis of the subject I have described. I will provide you with a copy of our transcribed conversation(s) for your review, comments, and editing. You may add to or delete any section of the conversation at that time. Once I have received your approval of the transcript, I will proceed with analyzing our conversation. Your name and affiliation, the data you have contributed, and the date(s) of our conversation will not be held confidential.

While the conversations and transcripts in this research are collaborative, the writing that comes from them will be my own product, which may include some of your edits. You therefore consent to forgo anonymity under these conditions. You acknowledge that you have been given complete and clear information about this research, and it is your option to make the decision at the outset about whether to participate or not. You may withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

Below you will find a series of proposed questions to guide and direct our conversation(s). My hope is our conversation will provide an opportunity for us both to reach new understandings.

1. What traditions do you remember being important to your family through generations?
2. How have those traditions carried through to your life now?

3. As a citizen of Lao PDR, what do you feel is important for the country to retain in terms of traditions celebrated throughout the nation?
4. Given the importance of tradition throughout your country, how do you see ethnic and Lao traditions working with tourism today?
4. Thinking about what is important to you and your family, what would you like to present to the world's tourists when they visit your country looking for cultural interests?
5. What would you want tourists to know when they come to visit your village, your town, your country?
6. What kind of policy do you believe would be fitting for tourism?
7. What should be included in tourism policy about the retention of chosen traditions?
8. What do you believe needs to be addressed in tourism development programs?

Thank you for your willingness to participate. Please call (909) 633-0816 or e-mail me at travelinlo77@gmail.com if you have further questions. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Laura M. Nelsen
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
Organization and Leadership

Group Two: Local Leaders

Date

Dear Mr./Ms.:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in speaking with me. As you know, I am researching how traditions and tourism work together in your country. I would like to talk with you about history and traditions of your country. I would also like to know what you think about tourism and tourists coming into Lao PDR.

In order for you to participate, I will need you to sign a consent form (you will get a copy). When you sign this form, you are giving me permission to audio record your voice and write down what we say. You are also giving me permission to take photographs and video of you and our surroundings when we speak.

I will give you a copy of our conversations for you to read and make any changes to. Once you say everything is right, I will then analyze our conversation. Your name and the data you contributed will not be confidential. The writing that comes from our conversations will be my own product and will not be anonymous. You have the choice to participate or not and may withdraw at any time without consequences.

Below you will find a series of questions that will guide and direct our conversation(s). My hope is our conversation will give an opportunity for us both to reach new understandings.

1. What traditions do you remember being important to your family?
2. What are some examples of traditions your family continues to observe?
3. What traditions do you feel are important for the country to keep?
4. When tourists come to visit, what would you like them to learn about your culture?
5. What should tourists know about your country and culture before visiting Lao PDR?
6. Please describe a good future for your village.
7. What rules for tourism in Lao PDR would you like to see created?
8. What rules should be created to help retain parts of your traditions?
9. What do you believe needs to be looked at in programs that are being used to train tourism workers?

Thank you for your willingness to participate. Please call (909) 633-0816 or e-mail me at travelinlo77@gmail.com if you have any questions. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Laura M. Nelsen
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
Organization and Leadership

Appendix D
University of San Francisco
Letter of Confirmation

Date

Participants Name and Title
Company or Organization
Address

Dear Mr./Ms.:

Thank you for the opportunity to get together with you and have a conversation exploring the topic of chosen traditions and tourism as a way to influence policy-making and curriculum for development studies. I am confirming our meeting on_____. Please let me know if you need to change our range date, time, or place

With your permission, I will audio recorder conversation, transcribe the conversation into a written text, take photographs and possibly video, and submit it to you for review and final approval. I plan to use quotes, together with other conversations, as part of the analysis. If you wish to change, revise, add, or delete anything from the text, just let me know. I look forward to her conversation. Your contribution to my dissertation is crucial to the research process, and I appreciate your help.

Again, I thank you for your generosity in volunteering your time and energy I look forward to meeting in conversing with you soon.

Sincerely,

Laura M. Nelsen
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
Organization and Leadership

E-Mail: travelinlo77@gmail.com
Telephone: (909) 633-0816

Appendix E
University of San Francisco
Thank You and Follow-Up Letter

Date

Participants Name and Title
Company or Organization
Address

Dear Mr./Ms.:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me on _____. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my research project and believe our conversation will be a valuable part of my dissertation. I realize how busy you are and appreciate the time, attention, and energy you have provided.

Attached is a copy of the transcribed conversation for you to review and approve. If you have requested, I have also included copies of photographs and videos taken during our conversation. This transcript will provide the basis for data analysis, which, in turn, will eventually be incorporated into an exploration of chosen traditions in tourism and their influence on policy-making in development and curriculum for tourism and development studies. As we discussed, data from this research are not confidential.

Please review the attached transcript and revise, add, delete anything you believe is appropriate. I will contact you in approximately two weeks to discuss any changes you have made.

Again thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Laura M. Nelsen
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
Organization and Leadership

E-Mail: travelinlo77@gmail.com
Telephone: (909) 633-0816

Appendix F
Select Personal Journal Entries

Saturday, August 8, 2009
Vientiane, Lao PDR
Day 2

Today I went out as a researcher posing as a tourist with Chear. It was really neat seeing all of the sites. Woke up to hammering and saws as another building is being built right outside our window. Not happy about that! Chear took me to the Lao National Museum. I paid 10,000K to get inside, which is the equivalent of $1.25 and hired an English speaking guide for $3 to walk us through the museum. Chear could not as he doesn't work for the museum. The museum was in an old Colonial building where the Special War was brought to a close—old French Colonial government offices. I learned a lot from touring the museum—it is huge—covers prehistoric Lao PDR through today. The guide, works for the museum giving tours—his English was very broken, but we managed to get through it. There were tons of items in the museum that have been found by archaeologists along with examples of dress by many of the ethnic minorities throughout Laos—was interesting to see a few of the minorities covered—Khmr, Khmu, Hmong were the ones we saw most things from. It was HOT in parts of the museum and I wonder if this museum were to go through a facelift and updating if it wouldn't be a wonderful draw for tourists. I think it would as it is a fabulous history of Lao PDR and is very thorough—it was like going through my background and watching it be pieced together with artifacts. No pictures were allowed though.

There was a very detailed part of the Special War through the fall to Communism. *It was sobering to go through and see pictures of what Americans did to the Lao people—things we would never see or talk about in American schools. To see from the other what*

their experience was gives me pause to think of history and how one sided it really is. Sad though—it is a part of our history that we are almost ashamed to speak about and why, I am not sure. I spoke with Chear about this and told him this is stuff we do not think of nor speak of in America. My mother was shocked to see things that her brother witnessed when he fought in the war. I learned that the people we "saved" and took to camps were the same people we then killed with chemicals—disgusting and shameful. I am feeling very upset with the people who control our history books for being so one sided. I would recommend a thorough cleaning and good promotion of the museum—it was their side of the story that was unfolded for people and everyone who was there (probably only 10 other people) got a glimpse of why the Lao are who they are today. Their story of takeover and struggle was portrayed. It was interesting to see that they still call that part of America's involvement with Lao PDR the American Imperialist and all of their soldiers, puppets—gives me new thoughts about Johnson and Nixon, two presidents I never knew much about except what I was taught in history along with a thorough account of how Lao PDR became Communist—the history of that is a reason why to see that museum alone.

After that, I took a tuktuk to the Monument (or after the PL came into power, Victory Bridge). Chear shared the history of that place too—Lao who were educated in France loved the Arc d'Triumph in Paris and came back to Lao PDR wanting to build one. They bought concrete from Thailand saying it was for the airport and instead built Monument. That was its name until the PL wanted to meet with the RLG. They told the RLG to come to the bridge without weapons so they did and 2,000 along with the King were confronted by the PL with weapons. The RLG could not do anything except

surrender or be slaughtered. They surrendered and hence the name Victory Bridge came to be by the PL along with Communism for Lao PDR and the end of kingdom rule. The place itself is gorgeous and to walk up inside the place is breathtaking—you can see all the way to the Mekong along with French government (now Parliament) buildings. I was taken aback by the souvenirs that were found on the various levels—sickening to an extent to see all of this Chinese junk there where so much important history occurred. Sad and something to take into account when I do my analysis. The building is in Lao style with Buddha everywhere all made out of concrete—the detail is great. However, it becomes a tourist trap once inside rather than an account of the history of the place. But it was apparent that tourism is what keeps the place open and income for the people selling there. I want to think more as to what would be a good solution for this—I will ask Chear what he thinks about it all. He would have something to say I am sure.

That is it for now—taking him to dinner later on tonight to a local joint. He named the place so it should be good. Last night's dinner was fabulous—and a local place not tourists. Live band singing American songs though—strange then it turned into a nightclub with American hip hop—even weirder! Must think more on this.

One more thing…I came back from dinner today and noticed on the walk home a Shisedo store being built near a day spa. It looked as if they are moving very quickly on the project, but this worries me a bit because of the speed—there are bamboo sticks holding up the façade and the men working on it don't even have shoes on half the time. It makes me wonder what the standards are in town for construction, especially for a foreign investor?

Monday, August 10, 2009
Vientiane, Lao PDR
Day 4

Today I woke up expecting to go and meet with one of the director's for Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA). We arrived at 9:30 and he was not there…but rather sick and asked us to return at 2. So we went instead to Champa Travel Agency and met with the managing director, Norakoun Tanseri. At first, I thought he was just a worker there as he was very casually dressed, then when Chear told me who he was, I was shocked. His English is excellent and he and I carried on the entire conversation without Chear's help at all. He explained a bit about how the guides get hired by his office and also throughout Laos. I asked him about tradition and he told me a bit about what he likes. I was shocked when he told me that he doesn't mind the tourists coming into the city and taking a lot of pictures of the monks getting food in the morning—something he brought up and I told him, wow I thought it would be the other way around as it really bothers me to see people being so blatant and almost rude. He told me, no tourists want a souvenir of sorts and that the picture taking is just that—they get to take it home and share with their family and friends and then hopefully others would want to come. I thought of this as a bit opportunistic and really disregarding the very thing that monks and Lao PDR portray to the world—respect. But I also see his point of view—I want pictures of the monks so I can show my friends and family what I experienced, but I try to do so in a discreet manner. I asked Chear about this later on in the tuktuk and he told me that he rather agreed with me that it almost lessens the sacredness of the daily ritual for the Laotians. He doesn't like it when the tourists get in the way—I think a good compromise is somehow getting tourists to possibly partake in the daily feeding by

almost forbidding photography and keeping a close eye on it and instead, helping them to purchase a small bit of food and showing them how to conduct the ritual with the local people. That way the monks get fed, money gets into Lao, and the ritual is respected on a much deeper level rather than a photo to show off—they now have a story to tell about the experience—my thoughts are people would want to come after that almost as much as a picture would make them—they can always buy a postcard later on then to commemorate the experience. I will ask Chear about this.

Later on in the day at 2, we went to LNTA and met with Mr. Bun, a man who spoke only Lao and French. He was kind of standoffish, but I think he just didn't feel good. He took my papers and after talking to Chear, left the room to take it to the Vice Chairman. Another man walked up and speaking excellent English, introduced himself as Vilikhan and told me he was to go study in America, but is now going to Sentosa Island in Singapore to do some tourism work there then can bring it back to Lao PDR and teach other guides. He has been at LNTA for 1 ½ months now and was a guide before that. All of the sudden, our conversation was stopped, right at the good part! He began to speak about policy and then we were told to go to the Vice Chairman's office on the 4th floor.

We climbed up the steps and me, sweating profusely, walked into this man's office. He is the topdog at LNTA and reports directly to the Prime Minister's office. He was very nice and told me he really liked my questions, but needed more time to really reflect and think about the answers to them and also wanted to share them with other workers at LNTA. I was confused but told him I could possibly return to Vientiane when he wanted me too. He said ok and to have Vilikhan help set it up for me with a man

named Salley. He then kind of reviewed my questions and spoke a bit about Lao culture and told me that the most important thing for any Lao is respect for each other and the land. *It seems like there is going to be a repeating pattern on respect, and I wonder prematurely albeit, about the ethnic minorities in the villages and how much respect they get. I do think that the Vice Chairman holds a lot of respect for them, but I wonder about others in the government, if they see them the same way or rather just more trouble than they are worth at times. I think this as I have seen the way the government treats its people—the Hmong village force relocated. He also told me that they are trying to slowly develop Lao PDR rather than quickly like some countries that way they can do it responsibly, he also mentioned ecotourism is what LNTA is promoting so that Lao PDR can be shown off to people, but at the same time preserve the country as much as possible.* I fully agreed with this statement. We then left with the understanding that I will return at some point soon. Tomorrow we go to meet another travel agent and we will see what they have to say…

Wednesday, August 12, 2009
Vientiane, Lao PDR
Day 6

This morning we had to get up way too early. We were up and ready to go at 8:30—hard when you go to bed so late. Chear hired a driver, Den, a little Lao lady to drive us to the hydroelectric dam that Lao built in the early 70s. It was a 2 ½ hour drive there and I slept most of the way in order to avoid car sickness. Bumpy roads! Once there, I learned from Chear that the dam only puts out roughly30% of its energy to Lao PDR and the rest to Thailand. Sad, but becoming the way to bring revenue—I also learned last night while watching Asia CNN that Lao PDR has now sold 15% of their

land to other countries for food production, which severely undercuts the people living on the land and takes away precious resources from Lao PDR and Laotians. Anyways, to get to the top of the dam, we had to take a dirt road through a small town, if you can call it that. The sad part I think is that driving to the place, we passed what would be the slums in America and here they are the so-called "middle-class." Bought crappy chips and Oreos filled with ants and hopped on a boat to take us out to the top of the dam. Now, this boat is on its last legs and will probably be used for another 30 years before it is laid to rest. After a rickety start, we got out on the water where I learned that we were actually going to visit the Boys Island and the Girls Island—the islands that held the prisoners who fought with the United States during the Secret War. The group was jovial, but I wasn't feeling it today—it hit me hard that where we were going was near Road 13, one of the roads used during the war and going to visit a place that has tortured so many souls. My mood was somber and quiet, the abject poverty that surrounds me is beginning to be overwhelming and then to see those places, where I can only imagine what happened and then float off to wonder what is still happening to people in those prisons today, just boggles my mind. I am researching portions of history that are not even allowed to be spoken of publicly inside Laos, and have not even been formally recognized as ever happening by the USA—this left me reeling at times because I was at a loss as to how to discuss a subject should it come up that is not even given credence to by those with power to change.

What really bugged me though was after the boat trip, where the land and water is actually gorgeous, we stopped at the sole restaurant at the town and proceeded to order as many things as possible. That too really got me going today. I kept thinking here we are

bordering on ridiculous with the amount of food we are eating every single day and having people watch us eat—I can only wonder what they were thinking about us. Paid our $30 for the meal—very expensive for this town and only shows how we flaunt the money we bring. Left and then proceeded to go through a town that has been closed off for many years—rough town where the police rule everything and everyone. Poor town, kids running around trying desperately to sell bamboo shoots to anyone who would buy them. One man pulled up on his motorbike and was immediately surrounded by 8 children all trying to sell the same thing to him.

When I got back, it was so nice to see that for us, Chear and Vong (Mr. Juu's brother) had set up a table with flowers and food and candles for a special ceremony. It was all done in Hmong as it is called a Basi ceremony—they wished me a safe and happy journey and told me how thankful they are that they have new family. It ended with both men tying white string on my hands and saying a prayer for the future—this was exactly what I needed today. The appreciation these men have is unbelievable—to call me family was so special. I know where they come from and I have heard the unimaginable stories that their family has endured so to hear that, it meant the world to me because that is just how I see them too.

On another note, as I walked somewhere today, I walked past the Shisedo building. The feeling that I cannot believe that I am looking at a finished store. In eight days, from beginning to end, I watched gaunt men with cigarettes hanging from the side of their mouth shout at one another and at some point erect a building. I don't know how they did it and I am a bit afraid of the building as it happened so fast. Everyone was surprised; I wonder how long the building will stand?

Sunday, August 16, 2009
Road 13 to Luang Prabang
Day 10

The Doors, "Road to Nowhere" is playing over and over in my mind only to change tunes at times to Michael Jackson's "Heal the World." I just left a Hmong village where we got out and walked and talked with Mr. Jay—one little Hmong woman came and asked what we were doing, but mostly gawking. They are better off than some as they live close to the road and easily monitored by the government. I need to ask Mr. Juu about who the government chooses to help and who they don't. He said last night that the government helps about 30% of the rural poor in Laos—sickening.

It is sad when I sit and watch yet another filthy, torn pants child walk down the dirt road and think not much of it until I realize, 'wow—that is ANOTHER child with torn pants walking down this bumpy so-called road.' It is the exact same thought, except when I think of the actual human being, the other, that my imagination can take over and envision where they are coming from—why their pants are torn, why they are not in school—they have no other pants, they have no school. This is just one more village that the government has forgotten or will get to sometime. *Then and only then does my heart break. Riding these 500km is nothing for me—I can get a massage when I get to Luang Prabang if I choose—again, IF I CHOOSE, but where is the choice for these children? Last night while talking with Juu, it is as if my life work is being laid for me.* We spoke if how to help those that the government will not even call some of the people in the jungle Lao citizens. Mr. Juu is so special to me and to know that he was once one of those young children walking with torn pants and dirty hair makes me feel like I can make

some kind of difference with those I come in contact with. How I am not sure, but as we journey into Lao PDR further and further, it will come. That I am sure of.

Thursday, September 10, 2009
Last Journal Entry
Day35

Left Asia today after a very nice wrap-up and relaxation weekend with my husband's Korean family. I met his cousins and uncle who own a medical equipment company and are interested in helping the government hospital in Lao PDR after I spoke with the older cousin. He was moved by my story and said when I go back in May 2010 to begin more development projects that he wants to meet me there and visit the hospital to see what they can do. Told him ok—as he has already been to India and other countries as such and completed development projects with them. He has the knowledge and know-how that Ben and I do not have. So nice to think that good help may be on the way for them.

Am still processing everything that has happened and will write again when I am home and back to my routine. For now, *I can see that Lao PDR is in need of MAJOR development work in order for the tourism industry to remain a viable option for sustaining the country economically.* Lack of quality education, roads, electricity, internet, supplies, plumbing, regulations, construction are all hindering what is possible for this country. *I must focus on what is possible as otherwise it will be no good for me to even write my dissertation.* I am a bit disheartened when I think of all of this together, but as I said, I am still processing. I think I need to look into some successful places like Bali and such for their development plans with tourism—Vietnam and Cambodia and even Thailand have problems with theirs. Deep down I know imagination will take over

and as long as the people are willing like they say they are, to change—the future will be bright. And possible.

Appendix G
Pilot Study Research Journal Transcript

May 30, 2008

Today I met with Mr. Payee, Mr. Juu's dad. Wow, how interesting and almost maddening at times. I am so frustrated that Mr. Juu worked so hard for his family and they are still in such poverty. It was interesting to meet his family and see where he goes home at night. His brother seemed nice enough, I would like to talk to him about his life and what he wants to do with it now that he is home from the monastery. Mr. Juu's dad was so interesting, I wish I was able to understand him for myself and not have to rely on Mr. Juu-- I think I lost some in the translation, but interesting nonetheless.

I was supposed to go earlier in the day to the house with Ellen and Ben, but there was a misunderstanding and I did not get to go. I was so upset, and Mr. Juu saw so he told me he would take me. We walked up to the front of the house, and Mr. Payee and an uncle were sitting outside smoking from a large pipe. His home is about fifteen by fifteen and houses close to 15 people. It is made out of fronds and wood from local plants and trees and has a dirt floor. We said hello and went inside. The house had dirt floors, fluorescent lights, rice stacked six bags high. The TV was sitting on top of the box that it came in, and so was the VCR. Bedrooms consisted of twin size stuffed mattresses with sheet surrounding the bed to form "walls." The kitchen was a separate small room from the rest of the house and I did not get to see it. There were no chairs in the house, except for a couple of short stools. There was a long bed like couch that I was invited to sit on to speak with Mr. Payee.

Mr. Payee came over and sat right next to me. In my western clumsiness, I held my hand out wanting to shake his hand. He bowed to me instead. Surprisingly, he sat

right beside me, which was nice as he is soft-spoken and it seemed chaotic in the room, although the only other noise came from the TV that about 15 people sat around on the floor. Mr. Juu told me the neighbors all come over to watch TV as that is the only one in the small community.

Interesting that all generations were surrounded at the TV spending time together—as young as three to the elderly. We don't do that much in America anymore…

Mr. Payee began to speak and what he first said to me will forever stay with me. He said, "I can't give you material things. I have none. But I can give you spiritual things. I am a Shaman."

This blew my mind. I didn't want anything to meet this family. Here he was worried about what he could give me in return for some support I am giving his son. When I asked Mr. Juu about this, he wanted me to know that it is customary to present people with something. That touched my heart deeper than many things ever have the tradition of presenting gifts even when one has nothing to give is so ingrained and so important to them, while in the United States, it is not a priority or custom.

He went on telling me about his childhood and how bad it was. He is Hmong and currently lives in Luang Prabang. This is not his hometown; he brought his family from the mountainside to try and have a better life. While listening to his childhood, I was uncomfortable than suddenly, the lights went out and we were left sitting in the dark. While in most conversations, this would be a detriment, in this instance it was like that was all that was needed to open up the space for a true conversation. Mr. Payee really opened up and began to speak of his terrifying childhood being an orphan with no clan. He had no last name, no home, no one to raise him. After he finished speaking, the lights

came back on and both our faces had tears streaming down our cheeks. The other people in the room kept an eye on me-- the foreigner crying in their home. But listening to him, it was like he went back in time with his memories and recalled to me what he wanted as a child, and how he so desperately still wants it for his children. Education is what he wants for his children so they may get a good job and higher status in life. He would like to see everyone successful at farming. Mr. Payee is very saddened by the fact that he is not able to be the provider, but must rely on his son so much. He then turned to his adopted grandson told him sternly to do well in school and to listen. We then spoke of the rubber tree in rice planting, and when I asked him about what he thought of it, he replied, that he is saddened to see as mountains disappear with slash and burn, but does not know what else to do since he must take care of his family. He talked of the family's dependence on Mr. Juu to take care of them and how bad he feels about it since he isn't the provider. Mr. Juu is the one who bought the land for them to live on, along with the hillside land they harvest. I thought my head was going to burst. When I looked at him and he said, "We struggle here. Life is hard and I wish it could be different."

This really opened up my thoughts in that I can see that this man has an imagination. He could envision things for his family, but not for himself. I asked him about it, but he shook his head-- unless comedian when I seen this coming summer. It was ironic that I was sitting there with a family and having Mr. Juu translate all of this to me. Mr. Juu , later told me he had never heard his dad speak of that before. The next time I am able to see him; I want to talk to him about tourism and his thoughts on Korea coming in. In the end, Mr. Payee thanked me for helping his family, but I was the one who gained this time. I saw the love between family when it is all there is to give.

Appendix H
Pilot Study Synthesis and Analysis

Synthesis of the Data

While sitting in the small home on a mattress piled high with blankets, listening to Mr. Payee speak was admittedly weird at first as I found myself sitting with the Western amenities such as the TV going and glaring fluorescent light twitching on and off as he spoke. Suddenly, as if to calm me, the lights went out and we sat in the dark, it was then that Mr. Payee really opened up and began to speak of his horrific childhood being an orphan with no clan. When he was done speaking of his childhood, the light flickered back on and both our faces shone with tears streaming down our cheeks. The children looked over uneasily, but Mr. Payee kept talking. It was as if he transcended back in time with his memories and recalled to me what he wanted as a child, and how he so desperately still wants it for his children—education so they may get a good job and higher status in life. It was ironic that I was sitting there with the family and having Mr. Juu translate all of this to me. Mr. Juu later told me he had never heard his dad speak of that before. Mr. Payee is very saddened by the fact that he is not able to be the provider, but must rely on his son so much. He then turned to his adopted grandson and told him sternly to do well in school and to listen--advice only a former orphan could give.

My initial thoughts were, “Wow just because imagination comes for him now through his son, it comes nonetheless.” He allowed himself to transcend time and recall what he had wished for his life. He lives and loves his children. It was apparent, but he holds back still. He explained he is a Shaman and has nothing to give me for listening to him, but he wishes me to return and then we shall eat together. The next time I am able to see him; I want to talk to him about tourism coming as a possibility for a better future and

his thoughts on Korea coming in. Mr. Payee thanked me for helping his family, but I was the one who gained this time, I saw the love between family when that is all there is to give.

For the people in Lao PDR reality blending with the imagination has not been a big problem because of the little technology available to the everyday people. In listening to Mr. Payee speak, I realized this almost immediately. When I spoke with him about his future and what he wants for his children, his response was, "education for my children and land for us to live on and farm." Knowing he was speaking of the rubber tree farming that has taken hold of the mountains of Laos, I was instantly saddened. Here is a man who struggled all of his life. Little education, no family until he had his own, and back-breaking labor are part of his past. Because of his past, he does not imagine a future where anything is possible for him and his family, other than joining many fellow Laotians in stripping the mountain through slash and burn and planting rubber trees and rice. We spoke of the rubber tree and rice planting and when I asked him what he thought of it, he replied with glistening eyes, that he is saddened to see his mountains disappear with slash and burn, but does not know what else to do since he must take care of his family. He spoke of the family's dependence on Mr. Juu (his son) to take care of them. Mr. Juu is the one who bought the land for them to live on, along with the hillside land they harvest. I thought my head was going to burst when I looked at him and he said, "We struggle here. Life is hard and I wish it could be different."

Analysis of the Data

While it is commendable that Mr. Payee is doing everything he can to save his family and provide for them, he does not yet see that life *is* for him and that should he

choose, he too can become educated and create a living that truly satisfies him. Mr. Payee appears to be living inside the past by speaking of what was and what can be because of other's doing so in the past. Imagination is tricky. One must be able to foresee a new future for themselves, yet when one imagines this, the past seeps back. Kearney (1988) tells us that in order to fully recognize what imagination is and can be one must go back through time and also project into the future of postmodernism. "A postmodern culture thus becomes one which attempts to portray what is without presuming to know what it is, to analyze reflexively where we are *now* without automatically deferring to a possible future or proclaiming the present to be an advance of the past" (Kearney 1988: 25). Through time, if Mr. Payee were to take in the notion that there are possibilities out there for him and not just his children, he would not automatically proclaim the present to be an advance of his past, but rather take in what he and his family have now and use that to imagine his future.

Kearney (1988) believes the narrative of a person continues to imagine a new way and in this new way, the world can become a different place than the labyrinth that people become stuck in. When all people involved relate to one another in new ways and make connections, narratives shift and new ways are seen. "For it is perhaps in its tale of the self relating to the other, that we discover a golden thread which leads beyond the labyrinth" (Kearney 1988: 396). In our conversation, Mr. Payee sees the proverbial golden thread, but not for himself; rather, for his children if they are fortunate enough to have help with education. Mr. Payee spoke of his childhood as an orphan without a clan. Clans are the way that Hmong people recognize themselves within a family setting. If a person does not have a clan, they do not have a family. He described to me what his

childhood was like trying to grow up without a clan. Mr. Payee had no one to take care of him. He lived among the animals in the jungle trying to find food and anyone who would give him some work. He described his childhood as depressing, lonely, and sad. In listening to him say this, my eyes overflowed with tears as I imagined the horrific things this man had endured until he was fortunate enough to meet his wife. With meeting his wife, he says he was filled with much joy; however, the extreme poverty continued with little relief. Children added to the burden of making a living.

As Ricoeur states, "Understanding—even the understanding of another person in everyday life—is never a direct intuition but always a reconstruction" (1984:97). Bringing to the table my understanding of life and its relation to me overshadowed my experience at first. When talking with Mr. Payee, his experience of life too held one meaning for him with relation to his experience with me. Once we shared our stories about our families, traditions, and home-life a common understanding was constructed. Each of us took in what the other was saying and living, and from that constructed new meanings of the other. Our historical present combined and an understanding of each other was shared. In essence, a change of our being took effect and I was now ready to experience Lao PDR through someone else's eyes as our reconstruction of the other person allowed for our conversations to become a text.