NOTE ON LAO SPELLING
AND PRONUNCIATION

This book follows a relatively standard approach to rendering Lao-language names and terms into English. A few explanations are helpful up front, however, for readers not familiar with Lao- or Thai-language transliteration.

The word Lao can be used as a noun or adjective, but more often appears as the latter, as in “Lao territory” or “Lao people.” If used as a noun, Lao refers to the language while Laos refers to the country.

A number of common place names (e.g., Vientiane and Luang Prabang) follow older French spellings rather than precise renderings of how they are pronounced in Lao (Vieng- chan, Luang Phabang). I use the conventional spellings throughout. I also split some longer place names into two words to help readers new to Lao geography; for example, Vieng Phoukha rather than Viengphoukha and Luang Namtha rather than Luangnamtha.

Lastly, a note on pronunciation. The letter h appears in many Lao words immediately after the letters k, p, and t. This stems from different but similar-sounding source letters in the Lao alphabet: the harder ṭ (k) vs. the softer, aspirated ṭ (kh), for instance. For the present purposes, however, this h should be regarded as silent. For example, the words Phoukha and Namtha should be pronounced with hard p and k sounds (Pou-ka) and hard t sounds (Nam-ta), respectively.