

Laos and Laotian- Americans

Dr. EunMi Cho

유은미

您恩美

eunmicho@csus.edu

California State University, Sacramento

History of Laos



➤ History of the Country, Laos

- They can trace their ancestry to the T'ai people, an ethnolinguistic group that migrated south from China beginning in the 6th century.

➤ Modern Laos

- 1945, Laotian prime minister, Prince Phetsarath declared Laos an independent kingdom and formed the group "Lao Issara" or "Free Lao."

History of Laos

➤ The United States troops in Laos

- In Laos, the united states provided tactical and economic support to the royal government.
- They withdrew in 1972 when the south Vietnam fell to the north in April 1975.
- Pathet Lao forces overthrew the Laotian government renaming the country the **Lao People's Democratic Republic** later that year.
- Thousands left the country to Thailand and other bordering countries but also the United States.

History of Laos

➤ **Laotians in the United States (immigration wave):**

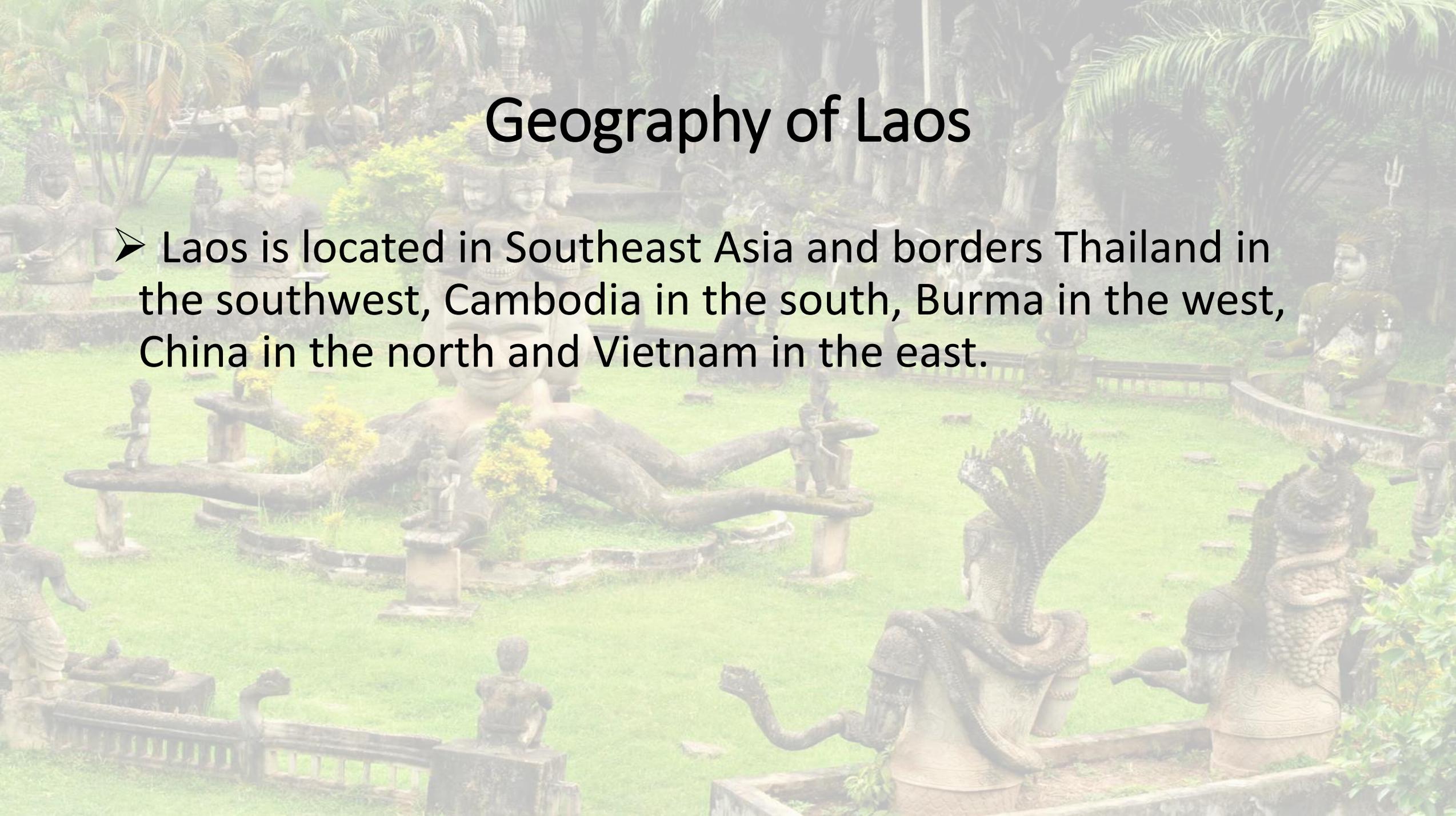
- Thousands of Laotians fled to the United States with the passage of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 by congress.
- Approximately 800 Laotian refugees were admitted into the United States in 1975 compared to other Southeast Asian groups like Vietnamese or Cambodians 1976, 10,000 refugees from Laos who fled to Thailand were admitted into the U.S. and increased in later years.

Geography of Laos



Geography of Laos

- Laos is located in Southeast Asia and borders Thailand in the southwest, Cambodia in the south, Burma in the west, China in the north and Vietnam in the east.



Politics of Laos

- As a group, Laotian-Americans are very concerned about occurrences in their homeland and many would like to return but are unable to because of Lao's communist government.
- Laotian Americans have not yet become very active in American politics. At present, their first priority appears to be achieving economic independence.
- Laos has a one party socialist republic framework where only legal political party is the Lao People's Revolutionary Party.

Language

- A tonal language, so their language is determined by the tone or pitch at which it is spoken.
- **Vientiane**, is considered the standard Lao but there are other variations.
- Alphabet is phonetic; has 27 consonant symbols that are used for 21 consonant sounds.
- 38 vowel symbols representing 24 vowels

Interpersonal Relationships

- Many Laotian-American have retained the values **Buddhism**, which pervades every aspect of Laotian-American life.
- Relationships are the currency of business and social life in the Lao PDR. In order to get things done, personal contacts and familial relationships are drawn upon in all aspects of daily life. Very close family and tribal relationships, which they value above everything else. Obligation is used to establish a network that can be called upon in time of need.

Displays of Respect



- Expected of the children to respect their parents.
- The children to respect and care for their parents throughout their adult life.
- Most Laotian-Americans are Buddhist although many have converted to Protestant Christianity, especially in areas where there are small Laotian concentrations.

General Etiquette

- Showing anger or disappointment in public is inappropriate.
- It is rude to point directly at a person.
- When giving an object to someone, you should use two hands or the right hand.
- Talking in a loud voice is sometimes viewed as threatening.
- **Appointments may be delayed or not kept at all and this is acceptable in the Lao culture.**
- Friends may drop by without previous arrangements.
- You know you are too close if you see your Lao colleague backing off to a more comfortable distance.

Status, Role Prestige

Social Stratification

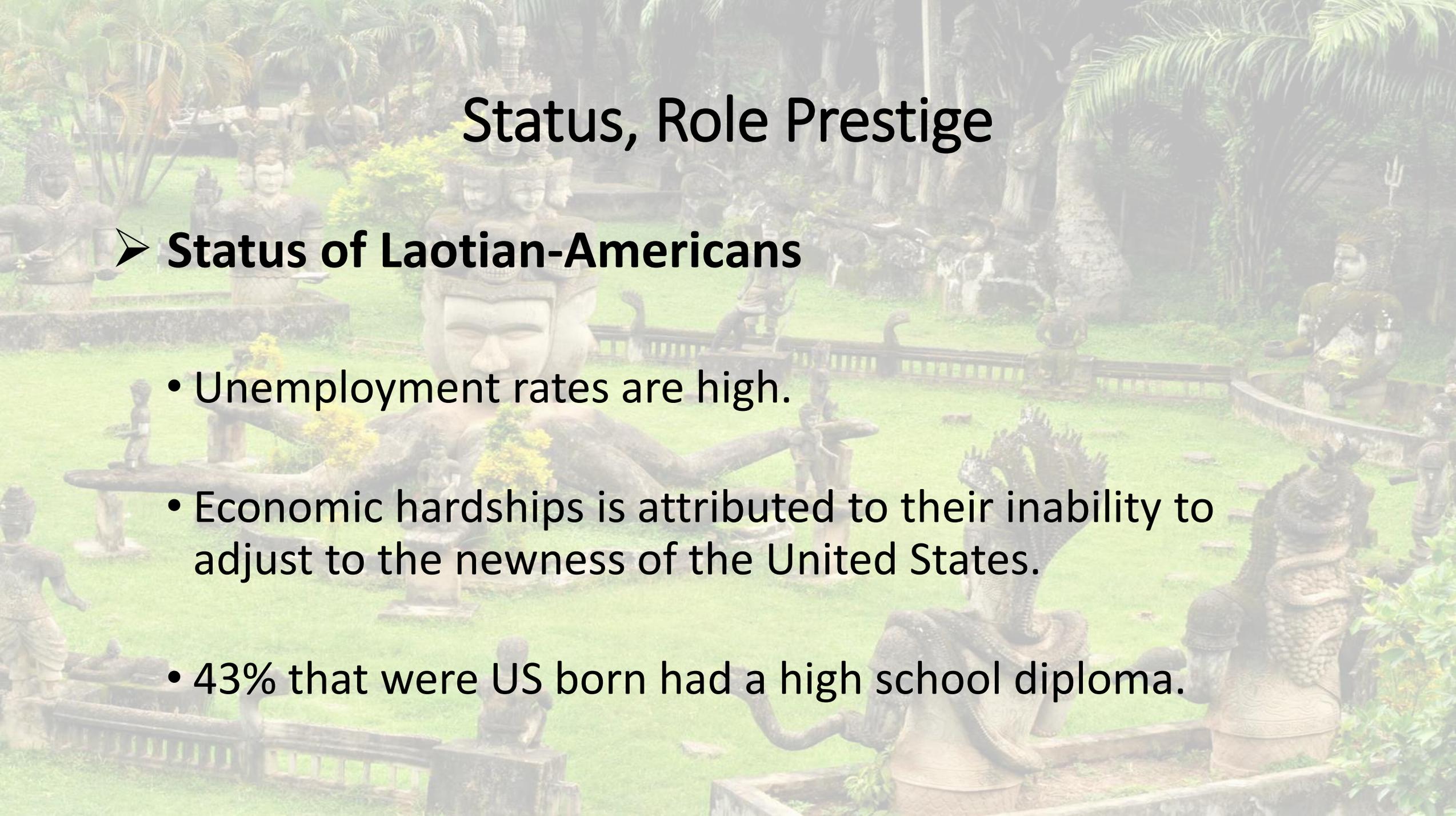
- Since the abolition of the aristocracy in 1975, there have been no hereditary caste like groups. Many members of the aristocracy fled after the revolution, as did members of the state-based elite, such as army generals, and capitalist and commercial traders, many of whom were Chinese or Vietnamese.
- The new elite was composed of the upper echelons of the communist state apparatus.

Status, Role Prestige

- Symbols of Social Stratification Before the revolution, some styles of dress and fabrics were reserved for the king and his court.
- Formal dress for all groups imitated courtly styles and included the same pot for men and the *sinh* skirt for woman.



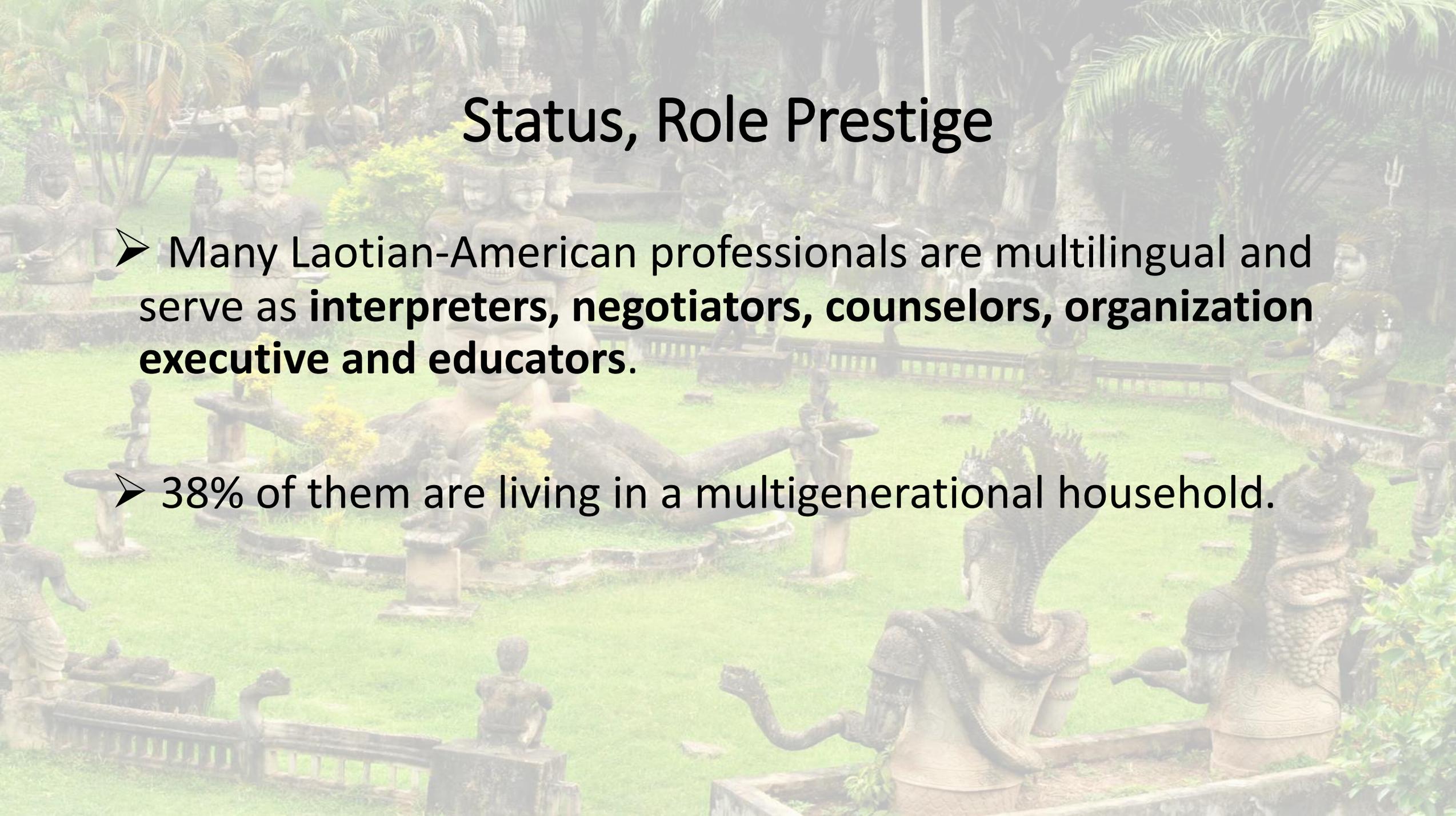
Status, Role Prestige



➤ Status of Laotian-Americans

- Unemployment rates are high.
- Economic hardships is attributed to their inability to adjust to the newness of the United States.
- 43% that were US born had a high school diploma.

Status, Role Prestige



- Many Laotian-American professionals are multilingual and serve as **interpreters, negotiators, counselors, organization executive and educators.**
- 38% of them are living in a multigenerational household.

Marriage, Family and Kinship

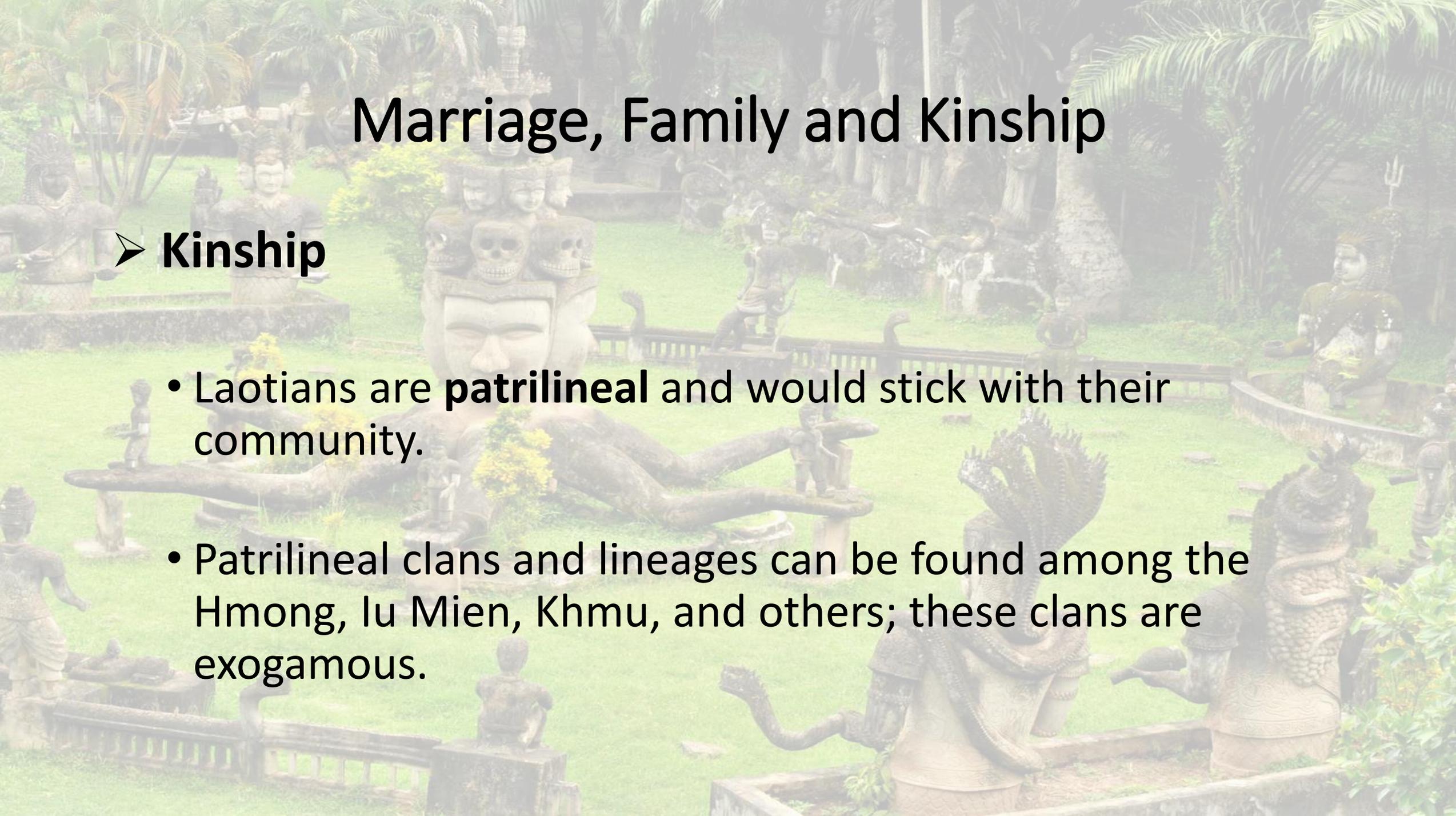
➤ Marriage

- Many Laotian-Americans **marry at an early age.**
- 47% of Laotians are married over the age of 18.

➤ Family

- They often live in close proximity to their extended family.
- **Extended families** have become more important to the Laotian-American for social and financial support.

Marriage, Family and Kinship



➤ Kinship

- Laotians are **patrilineal** and would stick with their community.
- Patrilineal clans and lineages can be found among the Hmong, Lu Mien, Khmu, and others; these clans are exogamous.

Gender Roles; Reproduction

- Men represent the family social affairs while women are responsible for running the household and controlling financial affairs of the family in traditional Laos.
- In **Buddhism**, men are the main religious leader as monks, while women can become nuns, it does not entail. Shamanism among Lao is usually a prerogative for women. In rural areas, there is no separation of tasks by gender, except for weaving, and among the Hmong, sewing. There is a tendency for women to be concerned with household chores and 'lighter' work.

Gender Roles; Reproduction

- Female employment is an important source of family income and it is common for Laotian-American women to work outside the home.
- Laotian-American society, men and women both share equal responsibility for completing household tasks.
- Laotian-American men almost always hold the official position of leadership in community organizations, women are also quite active in their communities and are often important (though usually unacknowledged) decision makers.

Childhood and Socialization

- Tradition Laotian medicine involves massages and herbal cures which has been rooted in the tradition since they are young.
- Even though traditional Lao medicine is used, the practice of mainstream western medicine is more common.
- Visit a community clinic.

Adolescence, Adulthood and Old Age

- **Adolescence:** they would live in close knit families.
- **Adulthood:** Either the children lived at home while attending school.
- **Old Age:** it was expected for the children to take care of the parents when they were older.

Laotians and Laotian-Americans and Disabilities

- Laos is heavily contaminated by unexploded ordnance with 80 million unexploded bombs still polluting the country.
- Since 1964, more than 50,000 victims had been killed by these bombs and left many people with disabilities.

Laotians and Laotian-Americans and Disabilities

➤ Laotian-Americans

- There is a transitional into a more American lifestyle and according to some, many believe that disabilities reflect natural, supernatural, personal and or social causes.
- **Some disorders are considered a gift from God or suffering cause by spiritual wrongdoing.**
- Some parents report that they have limited knowledge of the policies, procedures, practices, and organizational structures of special education and have cited that communication barriers are a factor to their involvement in their child's education; no research done.

Laotians and Laotian-Americans and Disabilities

➤ Laos-Americans continued...

- Negative stigmas and some believed that a disability may be caused by wrong doings in a previous life and that they may be affected as well.
- Children may be kept at home and not exposed to the public.

Services in California for Laotian-Americans

- Lao Family Community Empowerment in Stockton, CA
- Laotian Cultural and Research Center (LCRC)
- Lao Seri Association-Laotian Community Services
- Services from the U.S.: U.S. provide 6.5 million dollars to assist the estimate 70,000 people in the Lao PDR who report that they live with a disability.

Laotian in the U.S. Fact Sheet

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fact-sheet/asian-americans-laotians-in-the-u-s/>

<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/AAPI-Laotian-fastsheet.pdf>

