

**THE PERSISTENCE AND ROLE OF INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND
RITUALS IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND: A CASE STUDY AT MOO
BAN WAT LUANG, AMPHOE PHON PHISAI, CHANGWAT NONG KHAI**

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นายสาริต คະนิต : การดำรงอยู่และบทบาทของความเชื่อดั้งเดิมและพิธีกรรมในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของไทย: กรณีศึกษาที่หมู่บ้านวัดหลวง อำเภอโพธิ์ชัย จังหวัดหนองคาย (THE PERSISTENCE AND ROLE OF INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND RITUALS IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND: A CASE STUDY AT MOO BAN WAT LUANG, AMPHOE PHON PHISAI, CHANGWAT NONG KHAI) อ. ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: ศ.ดร.ศิวพร ณ ถลาง, 119 หน้า

วิทยานิพนธ์เล่มนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการดำรงอยู่และบทบาทของความเชื่อดั้งเดิมและพิธีกรรมในหมู่บ้านวัดหลวง อำเภอโพธิ์ชัย จังหวัดหนองคาย ภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทย วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ใช้วิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนามตั้งแต่เดือน มิถุนายน 2555 - มีนาคม 2556 ข้อมูลในการวิจัยได้มาจากทั้งเอกสาร การสังเกตอย่างมีส่วนร่วม และการสัมภาษณ์ผู้ประกอบพิธีกรรม บุคคลสำคัญในชุมชน และชาวบ้าน

ผลของการวิจัยได้จำแนกประเภทของความเชื่อดั้งเดิมและพิธีกรรมที่พบในหมู่บ้านวัดหลวง 4 ประเภท ได้แก่ ประการแรก ความเชื่อและพิธีกรรมเกี่ยวกับนาคตั้งปรากฏในงานลอยกระทง งานบั้งไฟพญานาคในวันที่ 15 ค่ำ เดือนสิบเอ็ด และงานบุญบั้งไฟในเดือน 6, ประการที่สอง ความเชื่อและพิธีกรรมเกี่ยวกับผีบรรพบุรุษของเจ้าแม่สองนาง เจ้าแม่ทองทิพย์ และเจ้าพ่อหนองเรือคำในเทศกาลแข่งเรือ, ประการที่สาม ความเชื่อและพิธีกรรมเกี่ยวกับผีอารักษ์ พระภูมิเจ้าที่ และ ประการที่สี่ ความเชื่อและพิธีกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้องกับขวัญ

ความเชื่อดั้งเดิมและพิธีกรรมเหล่านี้มีบทบาทสำคัญในหมู่บ้าน ประการแรก บทบาทในการอธิบายปรากฏการณ์ทางธรรมชาติต่างๆ ว่ามีที่มาจากอำนาจเหนือธรรมชาติ, ประการที่สอง บทบาททางด้านจิตใจที่ทำให้คนในหมู่บ้านมีความสุขทางจิตใจและเพิ่มความมั่นใจในชีวิต, ประการที่สาม บทบาททางด้านสังคม ทั้งการเป็นศูนย์รวมพลังของชาวบ้าน สืบสานประเพณีของชุมชน สร้างรายได้ให้ชาวบ้าน และมีอิทธิพลต่อการสร้างสรรค์งานศิลปะ นอกจากนี้ ผู้ประกอบพิธีกรรมยังมีบทบาทในการเป็นผู้นำชุมชนและมีส่วนในการอนุมัติและสนับสนุนโครงการต่างๆ ของชุมชน ดังนั้น จึงเห็นได้ชัดว่าความเชื่อดั้งเดิมและพิธีกรรมยังคงดำรงอยู่และมีบทบาทสำคัญในหมู่บ้านวัดหลวง อำเภอโพธิ์ชัย จังหวัดหนองคายในปัจจุบัน ข้อค้นพบในลักษณะดังกล่าวนี้ น่าจะพบได้ในหมู่บ้านอื่นๆ ในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทยด้วยเช่นกัน

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SARITH KHITH: THE PERSISTENCE AND ROLE OF INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND RITUALS IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND: A CASE STUDY AT MOO BAN WAT LUANG, AMPHOE PHON PHISAI, CHANGWAT NONG KHAI.
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This thesis aims to identify the persistence of indigenous beliefs and rituals and their roles in the Wat Laung village, Phon Phisai District, Nong Khai Province, Northeastern Thailand. The thesis uses qualitative research by conducting fieldwork from June, 2012-March, 2013. The data was obtained from documents and fieldwork by participant observation in the rituals and in-depth interview of the ritual practitioners and related people as the key informants.

Findings of the research reveal four kinds of indigenous beliefs and rituals. i.e., firstly, the belief in the Naga together with *Loi Krathong* festival and the Naga fireball festival held on the full moon day of the eleventh lunar month, also the rain-making rocket festival in the sixth lunar month; secondly, the beliefs and rituals concerning the ancestral spirits of *Chao Mae Song Nang*, *Chao Mae Thong Thip*, and *Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham*, also the ritual conducted together with the boat racing festival; thirdly, the belief in guardian spirits, *Phra Phum Chao Thi* with the daily offering ritual; and fourthly, the belief and ritual concerning *Khwan*.

The indigenous beliefs and rituals play significant roles in the village. Firstly, they play the cognitive role to explain the social phenomena and things by referring to supernatural being as agent. Secondly, they play the psychological role enhancing people to be peaceful at heart and more confident in life. Thirdly, they play the sociological roles in uniting the community, transmitting the village tradition, creating the income for the villagers when there are festivals held in the village, and inspiring the art creativity. The ritual practitioners also play the role as one of the community leaders, approving and supporting the community projects. Accordingly, it is then evident that the indigenous beliefs and rituals still persist and have significant roles in present day Wat Laung village, Phon Phisai District, Nong Khai Province. Such findings, to a certain extent, should be found in other villages in the northeastern region of Thailand as well.

Field of Study ...Thai Studies.... Student's Signature.....

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Importance of the Research Problem

Wat Luang Village, Phone Phisai District, Nong Khai Province is well-known for its Naga fireball festival which is the most popular festival held annually on the full moon night of the eleventh lunar month, which falls around October at the end of Buddhist rain retreat each year. Huge crowds assemble on the banks of the Mekong River in the compound of Wat Luang, popularly known as “Naga temple”.

In the Naga fire-ball festival, the eyes of the spectators in an enormous number, of 500,000 at last count, both local and international scanned the caramel hued water of this river during this month, for the fire balls that the god-like and mysterious *Phaya Nak* spit out from their mouths and fly up 10- 200 meters above the water to welcome Lord Buddha, who returns to earth after teaching his mother in *Tavatimsa* heaven (Lalana Sakchuwong, 2005: 7- 8). They are not going to be disappointed as they see such fire balls every year and this reinforces the belief in the existence of the Naga. This is an indigenous Thai Isan and Lao spirit belief. People maintain a strong faith and it is a significant religious event to pay respect to the river as a belief in natural and the belief in Naga.

Another ritual reflecting the belief in Naga is the rocket festival (*Bun Bang Fai*) held on June 12, 2012 to pay respect to *Thaen*, the sky god. The villagers believe that the rocket festival is important for their survival on earth because it acts as a channel of communication between them and the gods that control the sky, who have the power to either bring rain or drought to this locality. Rain is the essence of life or the giver of life as it enables the villagers to grow rice in the rain-fed fields and rice is the staple food for

them' (Ruth, 1996: 25- 28). This is also a festival reflecting spirit belief and Buddhism, the villagers believe that high up in the sky the spirits roam Heaven and live in peace with Buddha and his close followers. The Thai government is also involved in this festival as it gives financial support to the festival organizing committee to purchase the high velocity rockets that scream skywards and at the same time give the big bang sounds and these give thrills to the spectators. The villagers believe that when the rockets soared heavenwards they are sending messages to the almighty Sky God to open the flood gates of the sky and get the life-giving rain to fall on earth and so get the young rice shoots to grow well. (An interview with a deputy village headman of Wat Luang village on July 7, 2012.).

From my preliminary fieldwork, an important finding from a few visits to Wat Luang village is that the indigenous spirit beliefs and rituals are still persisting. I realized that although Northeastern Thai villagers are Buddhists, their spirit belief system remains strongly in the community. Not only they believe in, an indigenous belief, Naga but also many other kinds of spirits, e.g. ancestral spirits, territorial spirits, spirit of the house, nature spirit such as spirit of the sky, spirit of the field, spirit of the river, spirit of mountains, spirit of trees, city spirits, including the belief in *Khwan*.

Villagers seek and respect the spirits so that they can solve the wide range of matters associated with their wellbeing. They are still convinced that their involvement indigenous spirits can protect them against misfortunes. The ancestral spirit shrines can be found in the village, the small spirit houses can also be seen inside or beside their houses and almost everywhere in the village.

In Wat Luang village, I found out that there are various kinds of spirits, *Phi Ban-Phi Muang* or spirit which protect a village or a community, *Phi Moh Tham*, a spirit of departed religious man, and *Phi Chua*, a spirit of a departed member of the family.

In the village, there are also *Chao Mae Song Nang*, the spirits of the two high ranking women, the daughters of a Lao ruler who was a warrior of *Lanchang* Kingdom.

They are the villager ancestors, the first group of people who came to settle this village. Their spirits are believed to be the protectors of the villagers and their society against danger. Another spirit is *Chao Mae Thong Thib*, a spirit of a powerful high-ranking female warrior who overcame the enemies during a warfare in Dhonburi period (1766 - 1782). Her spirit was invited to reside in a shrine in *Wat Kong Krapan Chatri*, where Wat Laung village is adjacent to.

Besides, there is another powerful ancestor spirit, *Chaopor Nong Ruer Kham*, who was an ex-abbot of Nong Reur Kham monastery. (Nong Reur Kham village is adjacent to Wat Laung village on the left, it was separated from Wat Laung village 2002 due to the increasing number of villagers). (An interview with a deputy village headman of Nong Reur Kham village on July 8, 2012). When he was the abbot, he was so respected that after his death, villagers built a shrine for him; his spirit was invited to reside in the shrine by a ceremony.

Besides, the above mentioned sacred spirits, villagers also hold annual ritual to honor and appease to ancestral spirits around the tenth lunar month (around November) in the main Chao Mae Song Nang shrine on the bank of the Mekong River. This ritual is combined with the annual boat racing festival (*Bun Kheng Reur*), organized by the village headman and the festival organizing committee of Wat Laung village. In 2012, it was scheduled on the sixth of November after the Naga festival.

The other kind of indigenous belief is *Khwan*. Villagers believe that *Khwan* resides in human beings, animals, houses, vehicles and animate plants. For humans, *Khwan* leaves the body and absences at certain crises and it will return when we perform *Sukwan* ceremony. *Moh Khwan* is invited to perform the ceremony. He is a high-ranking or knowledgeable person in the village who able to speak several kind of *Sukwan* ceremonies. *Sukhwan* ceremony can be held any times in a year and month such as marriage, ordination, pregnancy, threshold ceremonies, ceremonies of re-integration, when suffering from prolonged illness, and dispelling bad luck to gain good luck called *Sia Krau* (Tambiah, 1970: 223- 227). *Sukhwan* ceremony held for animals died out

because no one using animals as vehicles in their agriculture field in this village but, instead they must make *Sukhwan* ceremony for their newly- bought vehicles before using them. They make offerings to *Khwan* called (*Pha Khwan*), there are different *Pha Kwan* for each *Khwan* ceremonies.

I also found that, in Wat Luang community, there are the fortune-tellers (*Moh Doo*), spirit mediums (*Cham or Tiam*), and *Moh Khwan* as the spirit practitioners. This category of people play an important role in the spirit belief system of this village. They act as intermediaries or brokers between the villagers and the spirits who reside and roam the locality. Three of them operate in this village and they hold spirit clinics for anyone who needs their services.

I had a long interview session with one of the spirit mediums. Lum, a 63 year old lady said that a spirit of a deceased man, who was once a powerful person, uses her as a messenger and also controls her. He would come to her on four specific days, Buddhist holy days of every month. During these days, she is possessed and take on the personality of this spirit. She chains smoke, talk like a man, swears like a trooper and drinks like a fish. Because he is a spirit, he possesses supernatural powers and so he is capable of doing good deeds to the people who come to his messenger, Lum, to seek assistance. She uses her master's supernatural powers to cure the sick and to help those who had offended other spirits. For the latter, she would tell them how they had offended the spirits and ask them to go to specific temples or shrines to give offerings to the spirits and most important of all to beg for forgiveness. She had enjoyed many successes during her nearly 30 years of ministering to her clients.

Lum is all out to help people as she felt that it is her duty to do so and she also feels that she is a messenger, tasked to relay messages from her spirit master to the people on earth. A concrete indication of her sincerity and generosity is that she has never accepted any payment for all her good deeds over the years. On the other hand, her role as a messenger to this spirit had brought tragedy to her life. She was married to three men. Two of them died and for the third marriage it ended in divorce. All these tragic

instances convinced her that her spirit master is very possessive and she is resigned to carrying out his orders until she leaves this world. Some previous year, in annual ritual of ancestral spirits day the spirit of *Chaophong Nong Reur Kham* possessed her so that the village headmen and common villagers had the opportunity to talk and make conversation with him in several aspects related to their daily lives.

Spirit practitioners are the spiritual advisors and doctors for villagers. I have found that before they start to do something in daily life villagers would pray and ask for permission or good luck from the spirits such as construction buildings, traveling far away or abroad, going to work outside the community, protection from illness, doing exam, asking for a baby, and lottery number and so on.

When villagers meet obstacles and any harmful situations, they come to pray at the shrines or to consult with the spirit mediums, either *Mho Doo*, *Moh Khwan* or *Cham*, who have high social status in their community. Spirit practitioners tend to find out a solution, as a result, villagers become more peaceful at heart and more confident in life.

Given such field data reported above, the indigenous beliefs and rituals in this village should be categorized and studied in detail. The roles of spirit practitioners and indigenous rituals should be analyzed how they play important roles for the villagers and the community. Understanding the significance of the village's spirit belief system would enhance the understanding Isan community in present day context.

1.2. Research Objectives

- 1). To identify the persisting indigenous beliefs and rituals in Moo Ban Wat Laung, Amphoe Phon Phisai, Changwat Nong Khai.
- 2). To analyze the roles of indigenous beliefs and rituals in this village.

1.3 Research Arguments

This research argues why indigenous beliefs and rituals such as guardian spirits, ancestral spirits, the belief in Naga and also the belief in Khwan still persist and function in present day Wat Laung Village, Phon Phisai District, Nong Khai Province?

1.4 Scope of study

1.4.1 Field Site

This research uses Wat Luang Village, Phon Phisai District, Nong Khai Province, as a case study. The village is well-known as “Naga town”. Wat Laung village is located right in front of Wat Laung monastery, also known as the temple of the Naga. At the North connected to Phon Phisai District which have Huay Laung canal as border line. At the West connected to Vientiane and Bolikhamxai province, Lao P.D.R. and Mekong River as natural border line. The village is adjacent to Ban Don Kong village at the East or opposite to the Nong Khai- Phon Phisai road. At the South connected to Ban Nong Reur Kham village and every one of them have their own government appointed village headmen (see figures 2.2- 1, 2 Map of Wat Luang village).

1.4.2 Time Scope and Length of Field Research

The field worker observed all data related to the rituals and roles of indigenous beliefs in a year especially all specific days of the months that the spirit ritual held in 2012. The length of stay in each ritual day was 2- 3 days at a time; the fieldworker moreover, would stay on 3- 4 days more to collect additional data. The research was conducted from June, 2012- March, 2013.

1.5. Research Methodology

1.5.1 Data collection:

First, at the initial stage, the data were collected through the participant observation of villager way of life and gather information by conversing with them in the Lao and Thai languages as semi-structured interview. The general characteristics of the village, how villagers sustain themselves, social structure, government administration of the village, and the religious activities of the people were noted down.

Later on, it was in-depth interview which aim at gathering information by lookout the people who hold a high-ranking position and influenced people in the village as the community's leader (village headmen) and the religious practitioners (Monks, nuns, festival organizers), *Moh Doo*, *Moh Khwan*, and spirit mediums *Tiam* as the key informants. They were asked the questions regarding their persistence indigenous beliefs, rituals and the roles, extent of beliefs, their fears, and the methods of appeasing the spirits.

1.5.2 Data Analysis:

All data collected were verified and examined by spiritual experts and spiritual practitioners in the village in order to be certain that they are corrected before processing in the final analysis by the researcher. In case of more information needed, the researcher carried out further interview with the informants or any participants who able to provide clear information so that research topic considered as a quality research.

1.6. Literature Review:

Other researchs carried out related to the research topics in the forms of theses categorized into two related topics as the followings:

1.6.1 The Research on Religion in Thailand

S.J. TAMBIAH, 1970, **Buddhism and the Sprit Cults in North- East Thailand**, researched on the indigenous beliefs and rituals of the north-east Thais and argued that indigenous beliefs and rituals in the areas are closely associated with Buddhism.

Seng Chan-ngam, 1977, **The Role of Religion in Current Thai Society**, discussed that Thai Art was influenced by religion. Wat and monk activities involve in the people daily life as a court, counselor, teacher, advisor, doctor, and Wat as a delightful place.

Kanako Ueno, 1999, **Temple of the Emerald Buuda: Reflections of the Complexity of the Religious System in Thai Society**, proposed that in Wat *Phra Kaeo* people' animistic views are always associated with Buddhism. The three religious element, Buddhism, Hindu, and animistic has totally related and incorporated to each other and practiced by all Thais especially educated in the urban areas of Thailand.

Other studies on traditional religious rituals. For example, Ruth Gerson, 1996, **Traditional Festival in Thailand**, has been argued that the villagers and townspeople involve in the traditional festivals. The festivals in the northeast and northeastern Thailand are more resistant than more to change. They symbolize important events in their heritage and are therefore observed and perpetuated annually.

6.1.2 The research on Indigenous beliefs in Thailand

There have been research on indigenous beliefs of the Naga in Thailand, Lalana Soakchuwong, 2005, **The Giving of Meaning and Reason for Existence of The Naga Fireballs Ritual in The Age of Globalization**, proposed that believing in Naga and its ritual in Phon Phisai District will continue in the long future according to the villagers,

who will continue to carry out their Buddhist rituals as culture and custom from their ancestors.

Mayoury and Pheuipanh Ngaosrivathana, 2009, **The Enduring Sacred Landscape of the Naga**, gave an account of the beliefs and invocation of the Naga in Laos as well as in northern and northeastern Thailand.

Sor Tham, 1998, **A Guidance to View the Naga Fireballs in Nong Khai Province**, provided the Naga phenomena in Phon Phisai District, Nong Khai Province.

Focusing on the studies of indigenous beliefs and ritual of the spirits in Thailand, Panupong Udomsilp, 2011, **Symbolism in the Chaomae Song Nang Ritual**, studied the spirit beliefs and rituals of Northeastern Thai, Mukdahan people who believe in Chaomae Song Nang as their ancestral spirits will take care and protect them from any misfortunes.

Peter A. Reichart and Pathawee Khongkhunthian, 2007, **The Spirit Houses of Thailand**, examined the spirit house and the role of worship and daily offering.

Sothep Sothornphech, 1968, **The Beliefs in Ancestral Spirit Among the Northeast Villages**, explained the important of spirit beliefs and how to organize its rituals.

Viggo Brun, 1993, **Protective Spirit and Mediums in Thailand**, studied on how spirits function in Thai contemporary society.

1.7. Significance of the Research

This research would provide a clearer perspective of the persistence and role of indigenous beliefs and rituals in the midst of social changes in present day context.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF WAT LUANG VILLAGE

This chapter will provide the historical, physical geography, social, and religious context of Wat Luang Village and its people.

2.1. Historical Context

In the past, the upper northeastern area of Thailand and Laos seems to be one territory. The Mekhong River is not an obstacle to the communication and relation of both populations. Most historical sources confirm such close connection with each other (Sor Tham, 1998: 15).

The first people of Wat Luang village who came to settle in the area were mainly the Phuan ethnic groups. These people were said to be the ancestors of the present-day Wat Luang villagers. According to the historical texts, around the 17th century the Phuan ethnic group from Xieng Khuang Province, northern Laos, migrated to settle on both sides of the mighty Mekong River because of the insecurity, internal divisions, and power struggles between three separate kingdoms: Luang Prabang in the northern part including Xien Khaung Province, Vientiane in the middle part, and Champasak in the southern part of Laos (Lonely Planet. Laos History, 2012: Online).

After the 1975 Communist takeover of the Lao kingdom and the Vietnamese capture the Phuan king, almost one in ten Lao escaped the city of Vientiane and Luang Prabang (Andrew and Justin, 2010: 49- 50). In 1983, the total population of ethnic minorities in Thailand was estimated at 415,000 such as the Lawa, Karen, Thai Lue, Kha Mu, Kha Htin, Yumbri, and including Phuan, (South-East Asia. Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand, 2012: Online).

The ethnic identity of Phuan includes traditional housing made of wood and bamboo on stilts, food based on sticky rice, agriculture based on rice farming. They are

Buddhist but spirit beliefs are also predominant in their religion, tradition and culture. Their language belongs to the Tai family which is close to Thai language spoken by Thai people in Thailand (Lao Lane Xang for Life. Laos People in Thailand, 2012: Online).

Until mid-nineteenth century the Phuan had a high degree of autonomy and this continued after the unification of Siam (Thailand) in 1873 as the new kingdom consolidated its hold in the south and the lowlands of the north. But this changed as the government exerted its control over the ethnic groups.

The Thai government made great efforts to elaborate the ethnic minorities into the Thai society. Hill tribes, during and after the Red Meo War from 1967 to 1973 were provided the Thai citizenship. At that time several ethnic groups became internal refugees so that the government established and provided schools, health care services and housing programs to those who were prepared to settle permanently. Phuan became Thai citizens and few still hold Thai Phuan status. That is why the percentage of this ethnic in the present day is very small amount 746. Roads were constructed in order to facilitate national integration. However, the roads have also opened up the areas to lowlanders and tourists who treat the Phuan ethnic people as curiosities (South-East Asia. Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand, 2012: Online).

Gradually, minorities peoples were being exposed to modern Thai and western culture and their own traditions and values were threatened such as their language in school was replaced by Thai language. It seems unlikely that the Phuan population could maintain their lifestyles in the face of such social change especially after French colonize Indochina and map the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia in the Franco- Siamese treaty in 1863. French defined the present Thailand boundary with its neighbours and coerced Siam to give up three provinces, Siem Reap, Battambang, and Sisophon to Cambodia, but French gave land to Thailand, 17 provinces include Nong Khai where Wat Luang village is to be Thai territory. From that time these areas known as Thai Isan. (Si Inthapati, Prayoth Mankongdee, and Wath Phisuthipan 1993: 167- 171). This event led these populations to become two separate nation- states, Lao People's Democratic

Republic and Thailand and each country established a distinct identity (Somporn Thepsita, 1998: 18)

It is probable that the majority of Phuan ethnic who become Thai living in the present day Wat Luang community will always prefer to live at higher and cooler elevations. They retain some degree of isolation and distinctiveness such as their belief system, culture, and custom according to the policy of human right, as a result the belief system of Buddhism with belief in spirits have been maintained.

At present, a Thai Phuan community is found in Mooban 333, Thanon Phisaisorndet, Tambon Chorm Phon, Amphoe Phon Phisai, Changwat Nong Khai, three kilometers from Wat Luang Village.



Figure 2.1- 1 Thai Phuan Community at Wat Chorm Nang temple

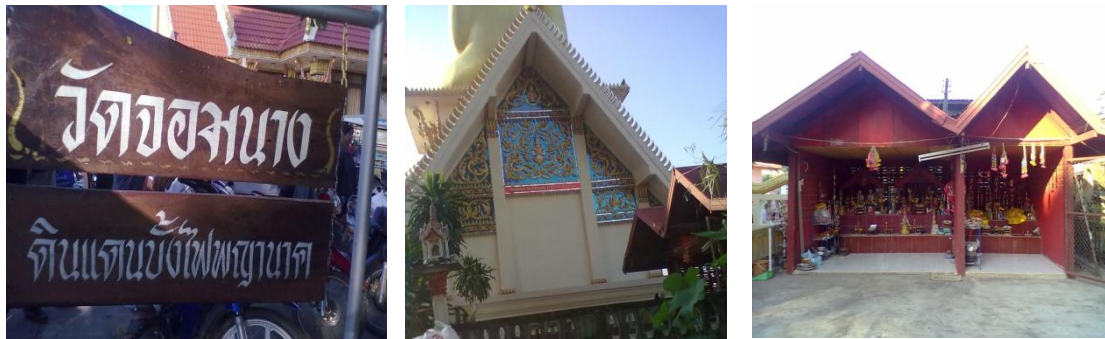
The establishment of Wat Luang village was in 1957 after the village clearly was in Thai territory. The first village headman was Mr. Mark Phunthamai followed by five village headmen and at the present time Mr. Phrachak Amphaipak is holding this position. By the year 1957, it was said that the village used to be a military camp and called *Bann Khai* or Camp village, when the war ended and because of popularity of its Naga and the powerful Luang Phor Phra Suk, a Buddha image in Wat Luang temple so

this village have changed officially to be called *Ban Wat Luang* until now (An interview with Mr. Phrachak Amphai Pak, Wat Luang village headman on July 7, 2012).

The village has its own temple called Wat Luang. Its compound is large and bounded by a fence with four big gateways for each direction. It was built around 1740 and had a story connection with Wat Chorm Nang temple where the main Chao Mae Song Nang shrine is. According to Phra Kru Siritham Phrakun, an abbot of Wat Chorm Nang monastery, a legend of Wat Luang has connection with Wat Chorm Nang temple. It was built in 1740 by a Thai man. While he was building the temple, there was a beautiful high ranking Lao lady, who migrated from Vientiane and built Wat Chorm Nang monastery located three kilometers north of the Wat Luang temple to make her merit. She and the villagers gathered together, dug the ground from the southern part of the village and brought the soil to build the temple. The area where the ground was dug became a lake which is called Nong Chorm Nang. Because of her beauty young Thai man fell in love with her and agreed to help and build a temple of Wat Chorm Nang. When this temple was completed the young man built his temple Wat Luang. In fact, the construction of Wat Luang monastery began before but it was completed after Wat Chorm Nang, as the young man always spent times to come to chat with her. Because she was a good model of womanly behavior and had done great deeds in building the monastery, the villagers then named the monastery Wat Chorm Nang (Temple of a Great Lady) until today.



Figures 2.1-2, 3 Wat Luang temple with Luang Phor Phra Suk stupa and museum



Figures 2.1-4- 6 Wat Chorm Nang temple with Chao Mae Song Nang's shrine

Wat Luang village has a strong connection with Luang Phor Phra Suk, a Laotian Buddha image, which is a symbol of Nong Khai Province. [An interview with Khun Mae Kong Pheng Keobun Trong, a nun (*Mae Chee in Thai*) in Wat Luang temple on July 6, 2012].

According to the nun, Luang Phor Phra Suk is one of the most three beautiful Laotian Buddha images and is believed to be the most sacred in the area. The Buddha image has interesting history. In 1562, during the reign of King Xaisetha Thirat, the King of Lao Lan Xang had three daughters namely Nang Suk, Nang Sem, and Nang Sai. The three daughters believed in Buddhism and asked their father to build Buddha images. It was trouble to gold melting for long time seven days and seven nights, but the gold was not dissolved. On the last and eighth day while monks and novices took a break to have midday meal, a nun in white dress appeared to help the work of pumping for the gold melting. This time people were surprised when they saw many nuns are pouring gold found the images. When finished middle meal, monks and people went down to see and found that the images were completely done, gold poured in three Buddha images and a nun moth disappeared. The people concluded that this was due to the power of serpent who believe in the Buddha to join in the building Buddha image.

In the next reign of Phaya Taksin, The King of Siam waged war with King Xaisetha Thirat which had Vientiane as the capital city. The armies of Siam invaded and took over Vientiane. Some of the precious things including the Emerald Buddha were carried off. During this period Laotian people fled from the war and moved around. This war led Phuan people to migrate from Xieng Khuang Province, Laos People Democratic Republic across the Mekong River and settle in the area around Wat Luang, Phon Phisai District, Nong Khai Province. (Andrew Burke, Justin Vaisutis, 2010: 31). During the war, a warrior Thama Thewawong, who was a Vientiane ruler and an alliance of King Xaisetha Thirat, and Vientiane people moved the three Buddha images to Chiang Kum town and installed them there. But when the war ended, they brought the images to establish at Wat Phon Chai in Vientiane town again (The legend of Phra Suk- Phra Sai. Nongkhai :2012, Pamphlet).

In 1827 King of Krongratanakosin, His majesty Phra Nang Klaow Chao Yu Hua (King Rama III) invaded over Anouvong, King of Vientiane who rebelled against Siam and took control over Vientiane, located on the right bank of the Mekong River (Sor Tham 1998:15-16). Phra Suk, Phra Serm, and Phra Sai were kept in Wat Phu Khao Khway Mountain, located in Vientiane Province, Laos. When Vientiane lost the war the Siamese or Thais moved these three Buddha images to Nong Khai by floating them along the waterway.

In the course of the floating caravan of Phra Suk, Phra Serm, and Phra Sai an amazing event appeared large storm. Big waves broke the floats. The seat of Phra Suk drowned remaining Phra Suk, Phra Serm, and Phra Sai that place is called “Werntan” Leave out mouth Chym River not far from the period of Mekong River. In establish caravan Phra Suk, Phra Serm, Phra Sai ties to float pass mouth Chym River. Suddenly Phra Suk was drowning again, people called that place “Wern Suk” This region has appeared the naga fireballs every year. People believe that Phra Suk is invited to the underground or Badan realm, where the Nagas live.



Figures 2.1- 6, 7, image painting in Wat Luang temple follow the legend of Luang Phor Phra Suk

In 1993, people organized a rite to propitiate the moral of Luang Phor Phra Suk who drowned in the Mekong River in Wat Luang Village, Phon Phisai District to rise up and gold melting replica Luang Pho Phra Suk at Wat Luang temple. In the stupa place Phra Suk replica has some water flowing from shaft all year. No reason, where water came from, the temple renovated the stupa and spent over 100,000 Thai Baht but the water still flowing. They said that it has a young serpent taking care of water so that the water drops all year.

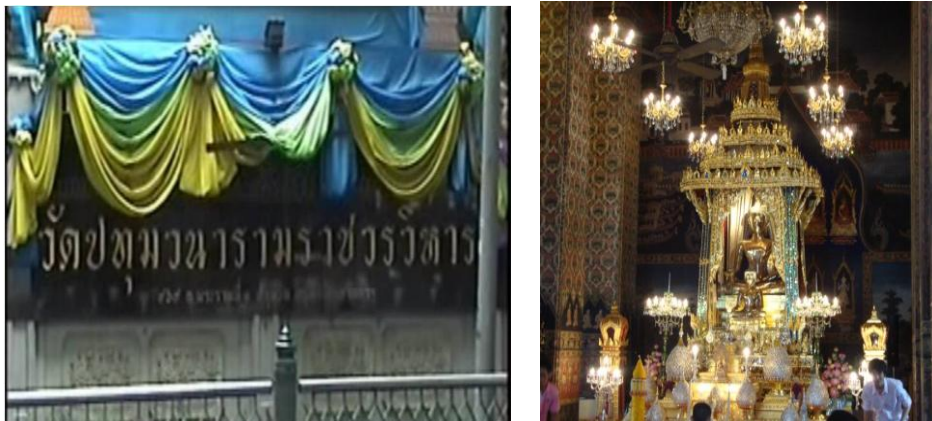


Figures 2.1- 8, 9 Phra Suk replica in Wat Luang temple



Figures 2.1-10, 11 The sacred water in the Phra Suk's stupa

The other images that have strong connection with this area are Phra Sai, who resides at Wat Pho Chai in Phon Phisai District and Phra Seum, who was invited to Bangkok, now resides at Wat Phra Thom Naram until this day.



Figures 2.1-12, 13 Phra Seum Buddha statue in Wat Phra Thom Naram, Bangkok

The mystery of these two Buddha images is that during the reign King Rama IV, give Khun Wararhani and Chao Mean, who are the alliance of the King invite Phra Sai and Phra Serm to Bangkok. The caravan of carts which transported Phra Serm and Phra Sai from Wat Ho Kong stopped at Wat Pho Chai and would not move on. Finally, Phra

Sai cart broke down. Although they changed a new cart but it still would not move. For the power of deity, angle and serpent performed miracle by holding on to Phra Sai so that it could be worshipped by Mekong basin Buddhists. Villagers agreed to place Phra Sai to Wat Pho Chai.

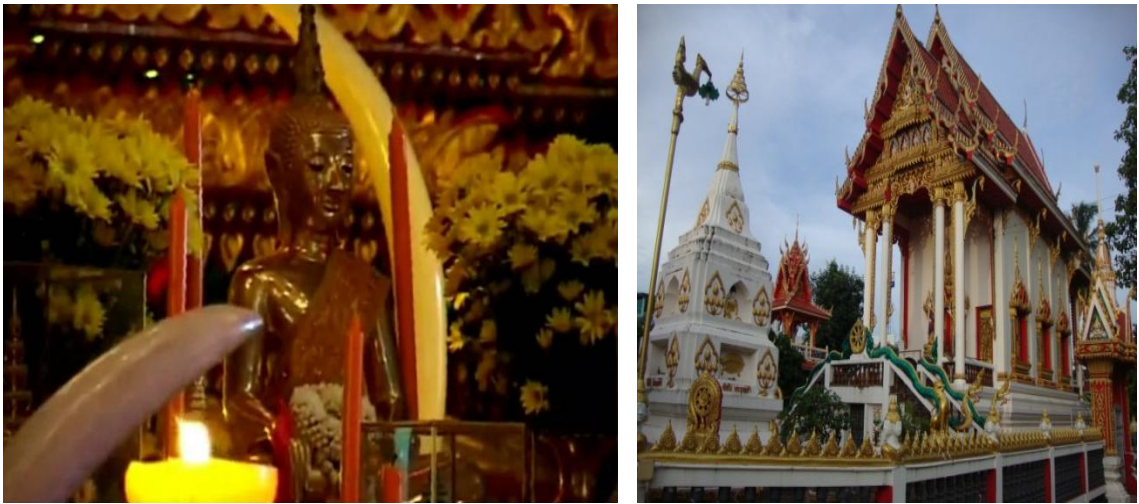
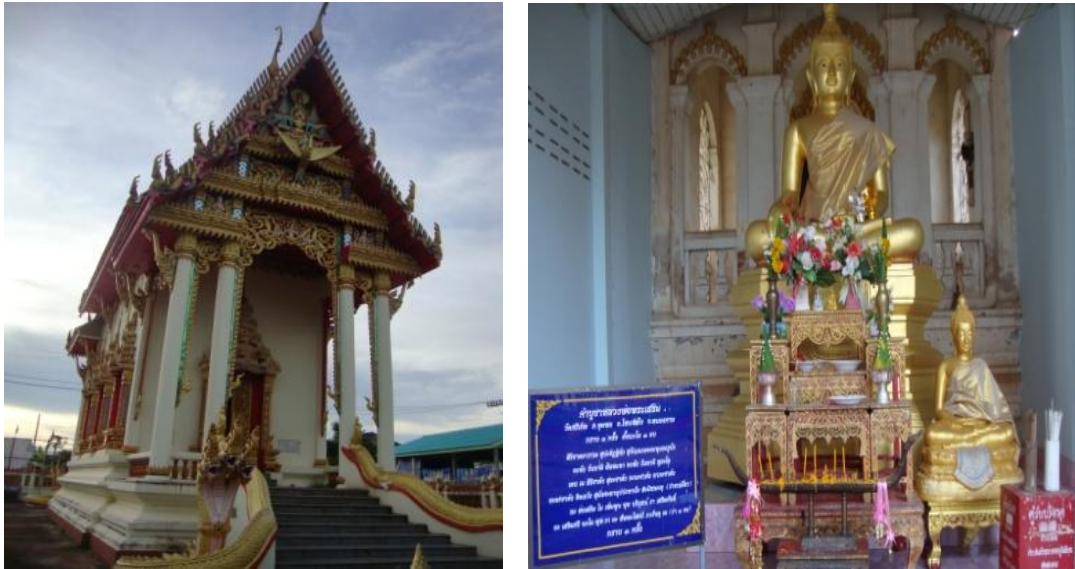


Figure 2.1-14, 15 Phra Sai Buddha statue in Wat Pho Chai

Local people also built a temple, Wat Sikert located in Phon Phisai and had Phra Seum replica to reside there. Nong Khai people fix celebrate of Phra Sai which hold to perform from the past until the present by fix Sonkran festival (Bun Pimai) to invite Phra Sai to get on the car and move around this area for people to worship and bath every year in the day of ceremony has a miracle of Phra Sai which has rain lightly all day. They believe that it is the miracle of holy deities and serpent together for participate acclaim Phra Sai (Pamphlet of Luang Phor Prasok history).



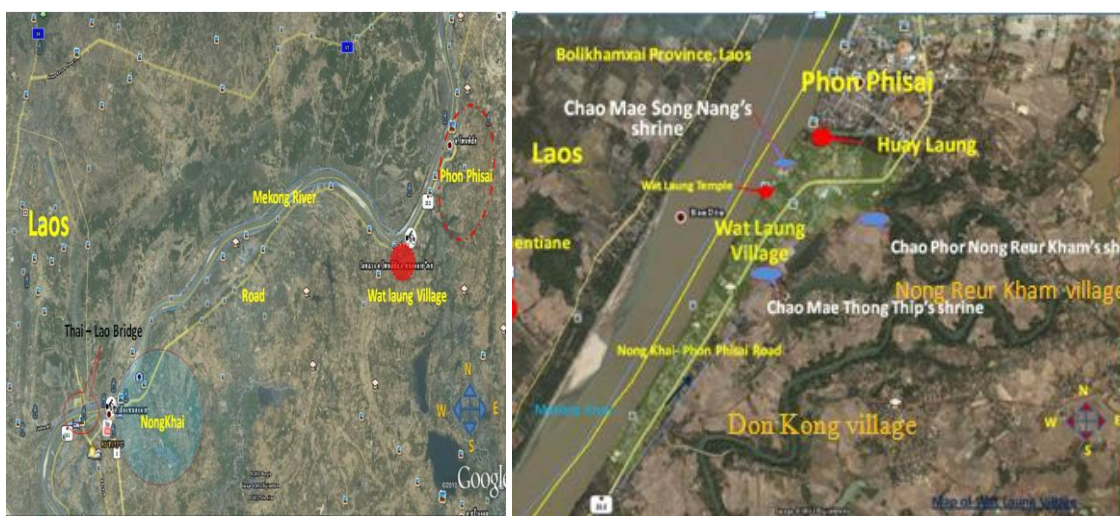
Figures2.1- 16, 17 Phra Seum replica in Wat Sikhert

2-2. Physical Geography

Wat Luang village is located in front of Wat Luang monastery, Phon Phisai District, Nong Khai Province, Northeastern Thailand. On the right hand side connect to Vientiane Capital and Bolikhamxai province, Lao People Democratic Republic and has the Mekong River as a natural border line. Its size is 1480 rai or 3. 7 kilometers square (1 Rai=40 meters square) divide into 300 Rai as housing land, 330 Rai agricultural land, 500 Rai as farmland, 100 Rai for general cultivated plants like vegetables and several fruit trees. And 200 Rai as the land for special agriculture where the water supply can reach (Wat Luang village census of 2011).

The village consists of spirit shrines, Chao Mae Song Nang, which was built on the bank of the Mekong River nearby that *Wat Luang* monastery at the Northwest of the village, but in generally most villages in northeastern Thailand has a shrine build in the center of the village or near by the road leading into the village.

Just a short distance from this village, on its right or opposite to the Nong Khai-Phon Phisai road connected to Ban Don Kong village, which has its own local monastery, Wat Khong Krapan Chatri and a shrine of Chao Mae Thong Thip near the front gate. At the left connected to Ban Nong Reur Kham village, (Nong Reur Kham village has just separated from Wat Laung village in 2002 because of the increasing number of villagers) which consists of a local monastery, Wat Nong Reur Kham and a sacred Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham shrine, every one of them have their own government appointed headman.



Nong Khai - Wat Luang 45 km

Figures 2.2-1, 2 Maps of Wat Luang village

The village lies along the Mekong River with a canal, Huy Luang (a stream of the Mekong River) as village border line. The houses of villagers are clustered along the Mekong River bank so that they can make use of water from the river and the land around the river which is the very important place for agriculture activities.

Most of the houses in the village are built in half brick and half wood structures with two storeys. Some are wooden houses in traditional Thai style and quite a few are

brick houses some of the houses still have rice bran in front or beside them. They are built by having the front of the houses facing the main roads or walk ways (Soi). A few guest houses for tourists built in modern style and equipped with good facilities are found. This village has been promoted as a leading tourist destination because it has a well-known monastery, Wat Luang which has a sacred Luang Phor Phra Suk's stupa and this stupa has water seeping from its shaft all year as sacred water. This village is also an area where Naga fireballs always appear on the full moon night of the eleventh lunar month in the river. The abbot built ladders along the Mekong River bank near Wat Luang running down into the river to view the phenomena. These kinds of mysterious things can attract tourists who come not only during the end of the Buddhist lent but also on all occasion to visit Luang Phor Phra Suk's museum in this Wat, worship, pray and bring the holy water back home as lustral water. It was said that those who are ill or sick will be cured when they drink this water and it will generally provide good luck, wealthy, prosperity, and happiness.



Figures 2.2-3-8 The villagers' houses

In the village there is a big water-tower which 210 families are using its water and a few swamps as village's properties considered as the good water supplies. There is a highway with small public roads, a public school, Wat Luang and a private school, Santirak both are primary and secondary school, a bridge cross the canal as Thai standard infrastructure of national properties. One hundred per cent of the families (213 families) are having and using electricity. As a result almost all houses have a set of entertainment equipment such as cable televisions, VCD players, speakers, and even the poorest ones have a radio and a cell phone (Wat Luang village census of 2011).

Another character of this community is that it is a suburban village which is dealing well with modern society embedding of civilization. Just a short distance, one and a half kilometers from the heart of this village is Phon Phisai town, where built on the bank of the mighty Mekong River and have the good infrastructure showing that it had been in existence for a long time.

2.3. Socio- Cultural background

2.3.1 Religious context

Wat Luang village has its own temple, Wat Luang, where the Buddha image of Luang Phor Phra Suk resides in. In the middle of Wat Luang there is a great Buddha statue with 25 meters high facing the Mekong River in the West direction which also can view from far distance. This temple serves as a village center for religious and communal activities and also tourism site where Buddhists and general tourists come to visit, pray, worship, and ask for blessings especially on the end of Buddhist lent when lots of visitors come to view the Naga fire-ball phenomena.



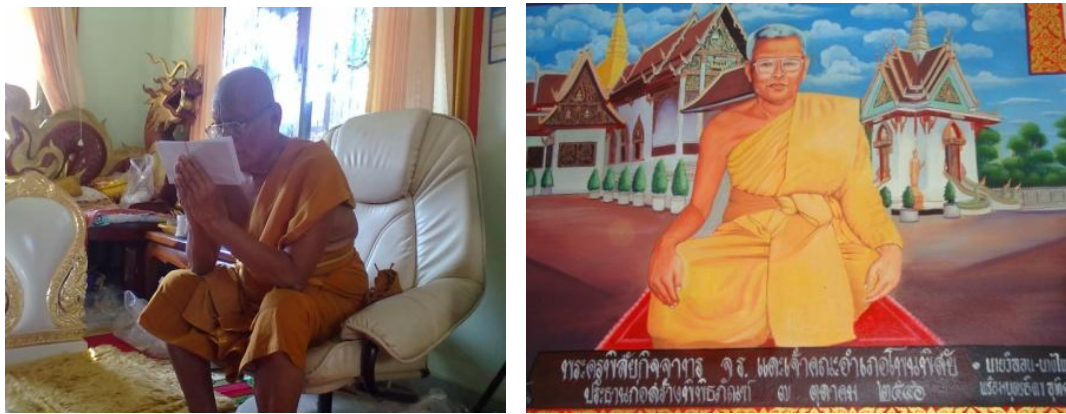
Figures 2.3.1-1, 2 Great Buddha statue in Wat Luang temple



Figures 2.3.1-3- 8 Religious activities in Wat Luang temple

At present, the temple also serves as the education center for monks. It teaches Dhamma and Pali to local monks. The current abbot is Phra Kru Phisaikidyathorn, the head monk of Phon Phisai District (Chao Kana Amphoe). Villagers still pay more respect

to the monks because they are important persons who undertake the roles as spiritual and community leaders. They are the consultants or advisors for the villagers to solve their problems in secular affairs, whether it be personal (on family and daily personal problem) or communal problems (in communal affairs). It is clear that villagers always ask for advice for problems involved in healing, fortunetelling, auspicious date to raise house pillars, hold a wedding, begin a journey, undertake a new job, and conduct the ceremonies or festival. Some villagers just go to seek comfort for their worries and concerns.



Figures 2.3.1-9, 10 Phra Kru Phisaikidyathorn, an abbot of Wat Luang temple

From my interviews with Phra Kru Phisaikidyathorn, an abbot and also the head monk of Phon Phisai District, and Khun Mae Kong Pheng Keobun Trong, a nun in Wat Luang temple on July 6, 2012 they have provided information about the religious tasks of the villagers. Indeed, they have carried out many rituals not only Buddhist rituals but also the rituals which combine with Hinduism and Animism organized over 12 months that are based on the lunar cycle. (called Heet Sib Song in the local dialect) some of these rituals are agricultural rituals, cultural festivals and community rituals.

The 12 month rituals or Heet Sib Song held at Wat Luang in 2012 were the following:

Month 1 (December), *Bun Khun Khao*, rice offering to the temple and offering ceremonies to appease Phi Mut, Phi Mor, Phi Far, Phi Than. It is held on a particular Buddhist holy days.

Month 2 (January), *Bun Khao Jii*, roasted rice ritual, roasted rice and the first fruits from the farms are brought as alms giving to the monks. These times Monks are invited to chant for good fortunes.

Month 3 (February), *Bun Maka Bucha*, making merit ceremony by listening to Dhamma preaching, receiving the five precepts, offer food to the monks and novices in the alms bowl, observe the Eight precepts, and candle light procession.

Month 4 (March), *Bun Prawes*, chanting Vessantara Jataka.

Month 5 (April), *Sangkran* rite, the Wat Luang villagers listen to the sermon and chanting of the monks in the monastery. Also they invite either monks or *Moh Khwan* to hold a *Khwan* ceremony, the white cotton threads (*sai sin*) are tied round his or her wrists, and also cover up their houses to the accompaniment of further benedictions. They make merit by alms giving to the monks, parents, grandparents and elderly people. Buddha images, monks and elderly people are paid respected by being washed or bathed. For instance Phra Sai, Buddha image is brought on a vehicle and driven around the areas for people to make donations for improvement of Buddhism in their communities as well as worshiping, bathing, and asking for blessings.

Month 6 (May), Rocket festival. A festival to honor sky gods which control the sky and have the power to either bring rain or drought to this locality and *Bun Visaka Bucha*, one of the most important days to celebrate the birth, the enlightenment, and the passing of the Buddha, which miraculously fall on the same month and date. Villagers gather together to perform the worship to recollect the wisdom, purity and compassion of the Lord Buddha,

Month 7 (June), *Bun Sam Ha*, making merit for Lak Ban Lak Meung spirits and all deities who control the earth. It seems that during this month on especially Buddhist holy days or Wan Phra, villagers bring the offering for the spirits such as spirit houses and ancestor spirits.

Month 8 (July), *Asalaha Bucha*. A remembrance of the Buddha's first sermon. The villagers especially elderly people gather together in the temple to make merit by offering foods to the monks and listening to Dhamma preaching.

Month 9 (August), *Khao Pansa*, a period of three lunar months during the rainy season. Monks are invited to stay in the local monastery to preach and chant the sermons, villagers gather together and offer beeswax candles and garments worn by monks, especially the bathing robes. Food as alms offering to the monks during these three months considered to gain more merit.

Month 10 (September), *Bun Khao Padapdin*, making merit for deceased relatives. In the early morning villagers place the rice in the garden or around for the ancestor or wandering spirits that exist on earth. They believe that their ancestors and wandering spirits will receive the merit or food when they present the items and food to the monks.

Month 11 (October), *Ohk Pansa*, *Loy Krathong*, Naga fire-ball festival, and Boar racing festival. A special day marking the end of the rainy season or the end of Buddhist Lent. Villagers gather together at the local temple for morning prayer and alms giving by offering food to the monks in the alms bowl, for Nagas are believed that they gather spit the fireballs from their mouth to welcome Lord Buddha, who return to earth after teaching his mother in *Tavatimsa* heaven. The boat racing festival is also held and aims to continue traditional custom and appease water deities. In the morning around ten o'clock of the November 6 I found the village headman, Mor Khwan, spirit practitioners, and several Wat Luang villagers performing a ritual to appease Choa Mae Song Nang and, Chao Mae Thong Thip, and Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham in the shrine of Chao Mae Song Nang in Wat Luang village before starting the boat race.

Month 12 (November), *Thot Kathin*, a Buddhist religious festival celebrated in pagoda to offer new robes to the monks. Other things such as kitchen equipment, financial contributions and building materials e.g. nails, handsaws and hammers are also presented to monks on this occasion. In 2012 Wat Luang temple held the ceremony on 28 November by Bangkokians and they had more than 300.000 Thai Baht as donation money to construct the temple. The Wat Luang villagers were also involved in this ceremony as they held a position of host.

Besides the existence of the rites throughout the year mentioned above, the villagers carried out the 14 roles (*Kong Sib Si*) as traditional practices between their friends, families, relatives, villagers and monks in their daily lives, but these roles seem less of interest. The roles are practiced by only a small number of the villagers especially the elderly people in the village. For the young people almost all of whom are now dealing well with modern society and are influenced by the modern world, it is said that these roles are out of date. However, they are taught by elderly as parents, grandparents, and teachers who maintain the roles that related to morality especially Buddhist precepts.

These traditional roles are:

- 1- All kinds of the fruits first picked from the farms or fields should be presented to the monks first.
- 2- Do not commit sin, abstain from false speech and taking what is not given. Do good deeds all the time.
- 3- Fence own house and especially monastery, build four shrines place each in one of the four directions as a place to give offering to all deities.
- 4- The feet must be washed before entering a house.
- 5- On every Buddhist holy days, flowers must be brought to decorate the house's gate, stairs, post, window, and also the kitchen that we use in daily life to do so will result in good fortune and happiness.
- 6- Before going to bed one must wash the feet and chests.

7- Wives must bring candles incense and flowers as the offering to bless husband and bring children to have a string tying ceremony over their wrist (*Phuk Khen*) from the monks on every Buddhist holyday or *Wan Phra*.

8- On the full moon day, give alms and invite the monks to chant at the houses to get merit and blessing.

9- When the monks come to collect alms, do not let the others wait for their turn and when giving alms do not wear shoes, hats, use umbrellas, carry a child in the arms or carry weapons.

10- When monks are required to remain in one particular temple (*Cham Pansa*), foods, and other items should be presented to them as alms giving.

11- When seeing a monk pass by sit down and pay respects by folding the two palms together above the chest before talking to him.

12- Show respect to the monks, elderly people and those who observe Buddhist precepts.

13- Do not keep the leftover food for the husband or offer to the monks. It is said in the next life one will have only bad things or be born in to hell.

14- Do not have sexual activities on the Buddhist holy days (*Uposot*), a day of *Khao Pansa*, *Ohk Pansa*, and New Years Day (*Wan Mahasongran*) because it is considered as a sin.

Data from my fieldwork reveals that both Thai and Laotian are adhering to popular Theravada Buddhism and indigenous spirit beliefs. The religious activities act as the connection between the Thai and Laostian people from the left and the right side of the Mekong River.

I found that the population of Wat Luang village still have some contacts, especially in terms of religious activities, with Lao people since the people on both sides of The Mekong River are like close relatives. For example, every year in annual boat racing festival to appease ancestral spirit (*Chao Mae Song Nang*) and to continue

traditional custom in Wat Luang village, several Laotians cross the Mekong River to join the festival as on the sixth November 2012. I met many Laotians and local Thai people during this boat race and some of them said that they have relatives and families in Phon Phisai District and Vientiane. They always come to participate in almost every festival and ceremonies held in Phon Phisai or in Laos because the requirement to cross the border is very simple (Phon Phisai border check piont). In cases of crossing without a passport, one can simply apply for a permit so that one can stay three days long on the Thai side, Nong Khai Province, and the same as the Lao side, Vientiane Province. Most of Wat Luang villagers also said that they have been in Laos particularly during major festivals and ceremonies such as That Luang festival and Lao New Year. Their purposes were to worship, to pray, to ask for good luck from the Lao Buddha images, or to visit their relatives. Wat Luang village headman said that in Mukdhahan province there are boats full of Laotian people who come to participate in the festival every year. In the previous five years, Laotians come to participate in Wat Luang village boat racing festival as well. However, Mr. Somsat Bourkorm, a festival organizer added that this year (2012) all oars used in the racing boats were rented from Laos. Furthermore, the other contacts between the people of the two areas are economic. Laotians always cross the border which it costs only five Thai Baht by boat. So Laotian people enjoy buying Thai products at low price in Thai- Lao friendship floating market that are opened every weekend.



Figures 2.3.1.1 -1, 2 Phon Phisai border check piont



Figures 2.3.1.1-3, 4 Thai- Lao friendship floating market

2.3.2 Population

There are 746 people, 341 males, 405 females in Wat Luang village. They all are Buddhists, who practice the spirit cult (Wat Luang village census of 2011). They hold merit-making ceremonies all year round. The daily worship to Buddhism can be found when the monks with shaved heads and orange-coloured robes walk the streets early in the morning engaged in Bindabath, the daily house to house alms food gathering.



Figures 2.3.2- 1, 2 The daily alms collecting in the morning

The most of the villagers were born in the villages as seventy-percent and the remaining twenty-percent were from the same Tambon, same district, and the other ten-percent were from elsewhere especially the male population who married Wat Luang

woman (An interview with Wat Luang village headman on July 8, 2012). They live in extended families, with two or more generations sharing one house or compound, and dine together sitting on mats on the floor with their sticky rice and main dishes shared by all.

All of them have the habit of wearing amulets on their neck and tying a sacred string on their wrists and especially the men have tattoos on their bodies. Some of them even have the neck full of the small Buddha images as pendants. In general, people wear small Buddha image in odd number either one, three, five or seven. These images can be made of ashes, gold, silver, bronze and other kinds of metal. People believe that wearing these things will provide protection, even bring peace, gain popularity, prosperity, and good luck. Some people say that as long as you have such items with you, the ghosts and evil spirits will keep their distance from you.



Figures 2.3.2-3, 4 The people tie sacred strings and wear Buddha pendants

Young people attend the local public school at Wat Luang, or a private school named Santirak. Schools at both places are the primary and secondary schools. After graduating from such schools they continue to study at high school and university level in the city. Several villagers have tertiary education or educated abroad, and few young boys

are the novices and receiving the education to study Buddhist scriptures in the temple. It is said that the education in the temple is less interesting comparing to the past few decades past when Buddhist temples provided the bulk of public education to boys who had entered the monastery. Male villagers less than twenty years of age are expected to become a monk to study and practice Dharma for a short period in their life which is usually between the time they finish school and start a career or marry. Villagers said the family earns great merit when one of its sons become a monk.



Figure 2.3.2-5 The private school in Wat Luang village

2.3.3 Occupation

Because Wat Luang village is also located in the tropical area and on the bank of the Mekong River so it is considered as a low land area enclosed by rice fields, rivers, and lakes. This geographic feature is very good for agriculture.

The majority of Wat Luang villagers concentrate on agriculture as sixty percent of them are farmers. They cultivate in low-land area near the rivers or lakes, there are 1180 Rai of farmlands. An average family owns about 5.6 Rai farmland. The farmers can transplant their rice for two times or three times by using short-time rice seeds due to enough water supplies even though there is drought in the area but it does not matter. On the banks of the rivers, the farmers plant vegetables, beans, sugar cane, corn, tobacco, flower, and other kinds of fruit trees (Wat Luang village census of 2011). Most of their

agricultural products were bought by the merchants from the urban or cities and some were brought to factories.

Eighteen percent of Wat Luang villagers are general laborers who work as blacksmiths, carpenters. Young people mainly work on road construction and are factory workers in urban centres or cities; this is their important source of money income. They usually return to the village during holidays or on special occasions such as traditional Thai New Year and Ork Phansa day. Ten per cent of the villagers who receive good education take various occupations such as state bureaucrats, teachers, officials in the governmental organizations, officers, employees of private companies, and nonorganizations. Five per cent are fishermen. In the past, fishing was a good occupation that could earn a lot of money for living due to plenty of fishes in the river, but nowadays this occupation is on a decline and becomes less interesting because fishes have decreased. Three percent of the villagers are businessmen/ businesswomen and few of them own small markets, restaurants, melting shops, and garages who operate from shophouse along the road. The other two percent hold other types of job such as fortune-teller and Moh Khwan (An interview with the Wat Luang village headman on July 8, 2012).

I also found a few guest houses with modern facilities. The popular one is Big Snake Guesthouse with a restaurant, swimming pool, satellite TV, airconditioned rooms, Mekong view, and hot water located next to Wat Luang temple at the north. Guest houses names are influenced by the presence of Naga in the village the other name is a small factory called Num Deum Phayanak, Phayanak pure drinking water located near the Huy Luang canal.



Figure 2.3.3-1 Guesthouse in Wat Luang village



Figure 2.3.3- 2 Phayanak pure drinking water factory in Wat Luang village

A furniture shop is also a special landmark of Wat Luang village, where various furniture and house- building materials like cement, bricks, stones, sand, timber, beds, chairs, ports and are on sale. It also has several kinds of spirit house for sale and said to be a good market which local and outsiders customers always need.

The feature of the village's belonging such as rice fields, rivers, swams, electricities, religious buildings, roads, schools and everyday activities of the villagers show the progress of community development and economical improvement from day to day. Most of the Wat Luang villagers make enough money to live well and no one in the village is jobless, an average income 65,269 Baht per person per year. (Wat Luang village census of 2011). The farmers live in their own houses, which are good by the Thai

standard; all of them have own transport, some have their own cars and even the poorer ones have motorcycles. Almost no one walks from place to place. In general, they are enjoying a higher standard of living than in previous decades.

2.3.4 Social Relations

The villagers cooperate well with each other. For example there is no need to issue invitation cards when there is a religious ceremony in a family, villagers will come to help each other with kindness of their heart after the news spreads, and actually every news is announced by village headman through the speakers that hang on the high posts every corners of the village as the village property.

Older people are involved in religious activities. They are being taken care by their children or grandchildren. Some of them devote their time serving the temples and monks in jobs, such as cleaning and cooking for the monks.

Villagers maintain the good cultures of relationships which the status and obligation are governed by social rank defined by age, wealth and position. The Thai terms *Phu Yai* (big person) and *Phu Noy* (little person) are well known. *Phu Yai* refers to those in the elder position and is used to describe the elderly, parents, grandparents, bosses, village headmen, and public officials. *Phu Noy* refers to people of junior status and younger persons who are supposed to show obedience and respect towards *Phu Yai* (China, Aaron, and Brett, 2011: 54- 55).

Whenever they meet each other, they have a greeting which a prayer like palms-together gesture and bend the head low in respect, which is known as *Wai*. A smile and a cheery *Sa wat dee krap* for male or *Sa wa dee ka* for female even the elderly persons might practice this gesture as their common custom when the younger persons greet them. The other Thai term *Pee* (elder sibling) and *Nong* (younger sibling) are useful and attractive words in their relationship even people unrelated by blood quickly establish

who is *Pee* and who is *Nong*. Also after they are helped or given the objects, the polite word *Khob Jai* and sometime *Khob Kun* (Thank you) will be often spoken from the faithful heart.

Wat Luang villagers look healthy being in modern time. While the social norm between sexes is changing, women have equal right to men and they are promoted to the high position in the community. The decades ago it was considered shameful for women to drink and smoke, and at a proper middle class party socializing would be segregated by sex, but today much of those taboos have been tossed out. Such changes enable Wat Luang villagers to lead different and meaningful live with confident (An interview Jar Chet, Wat Luang villager on November 7, 2012).

2.3.5 Community Health Services

The Wat Luang village has changed radically to accept the modern medical facilities. In the village, there is a small western medical service center which serves as a public health service in which a few number of village health volunteers holding a task of watching for outbreaks of diseases and spreading information about health problems as a means of controlling and preventing disease. Sometimes, they take a role of checking sickness of the villagers in non-serious illness cases but not in charge of curing. The villagers are advised to receive medical service in Phon Phisai District Hospital, where located in Phon Phisai about three kilometers from the Wat Luang village. The volunteers typically receive a few weeks of medical training in the cities before begin to work. It is said that they are supported a monthly stipend of about seven hundred Thai baht by the Thai government since last year (An interview with Wat Luang village headman on July 6, 2012).



Figure 2.3.5- 1 Wat Luang basic health care

However, in the village there are persistence of folk medicine services as the spirit practitioners, *Cham*, *Moh Doo*, and *Moh Khwan* who are holding spiritual clinic as traditional curing systems for those who need their services. It seems certain that even though the local villagers have adapted and accepted the modern medical service but they are still have confidence in the spirit practitioners for their skill confronting supernatural forces that allegedly cause illness and misfortune (Luoi, 1988: 437). In their work of curing illness, Wat Luang spirit practitioners are also open for people outside the village. Apart from going to receive modern medical facilities, villagers also always seek assistance from the spirit practitioners. *Moh Khwan* would provide ritual to comfort the people's minds and give the herbal medicines for patients. *Moh Doo* and *Tiam* would conduct the healing rituals concerning health problems cause by unseen being. They are said that the cure of especially mental illness is possibly success.



Figure 2.3.5- 2 A sign showing the direction to Mae Ramphai (*Moh Doo*)'s house

CHAPTER III

THE PERSISTENCE OF INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND RITUALS

IN WAT LUANG VILLAGE

The local villagers still carry on indigenous beliefs and rituals which are complementary and linked to Buddhist rituals. It is the religious syncretism of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and the worship of supernatural power. Such religious syncretism is reflected in traditions, celebration, and ritual held throughout the year.

Indigenous beliefs and rituals have long affected the villagers' world views. Such beliefs in Naga, ancestral spirits, guardian spirits, and also the belief in Khwan are always followed by spirit worship and ritual. Villagers believe in good spirits and evil spirits in nature. The good spirits such as spirit house (*Phi Ruan*), guardian spirits and ancestral spirits (*Phi Duhm or Phi Banpabuuroot*) whom are believed to be the guardian spirits that protect the villagers, livestock, and community from harm and repel evil spirits or wandering spirits such as *Phi Pohb*, *Phi Pao*, *Phi Krasue*, *Phi Prehd*, and *Phi*. (Phra Kru Pariyat Sarakan, Souneth Phothisare, and Terdchai Pantachai, 2009: 463- 464)

In the present day, Wat Luang society has changed and adopted modern concepts of modern world with modern science, as a result, it causes certain traditional beliefs and rituals disappeared and certain rituals are practiced differently from the past.

In this chapter I will identify and present four kinds of indigenous beliefs and rituals: beliefs and rituals of the Naga, ancestral spirits, guardian spirits, and Khwan.

3.1 Beliefs and Rituals of the Naga

3.1.1 Naga Belief

The belief and respect of the Naga or Phayanak are found along both sides of the Mekong River. Naga is a symbol of greatness, good fortune, good controller of the city and temple, and also a symbol of a water deity, sometimes it is said to be sky god and

demigod. They are objects of great reverence since it is believed that the Naga can bring fertility and prosperity to humans.



Figures 3.1.1-1, 2 Naga image in Wat Luang temple



Figure 3.1.1-3 Naga image in That Luang stupa park, Vientiane, the stupa's protector



Figures 3.1.1-4, 5 Naga image in Wat Thai temple, Phon Phisai

There are several sources of mythical legends concerning the Naga. First, a legend from southern India. The geographical area of southern India were covered by thick forests and mountains and there were several big snakes or serpents or Naga in Sanskrit which are the ferocious animal living there. Because the physical body of a snake has virulent poison, great prowess and excess of strength, as supernatural qualities so that Indians respect snakes as a kind of deity. This belief was spreaded over to Southeast Asia and called differently (Reung rao Thamnan Thilaokhan Phayanak, 2011, P: 3- 7).

There is also another view about the Naga such as in the legend of Laotian and northeast Thai origin stated that Nagas are the protectors of springs, wells and rivers. They are the nature spirits which can bring rain and thus fertility, but are also sometimes thought to cause disasters such as drought or floods. Nagas are also believed as demigod that may perform as human being. They tend to be very curious. According to traditions Nagas are only malevolent to humans when they are mistreated. They are susceptible to mankind's disrespectful actions in relation to the environment. They are also involved with rivers, seas, lakes, and wells and are generally regarded as guardians of treasure (Pathom Hongsuwan, 2011: 34- 36).

In Buddhism, it is said that the Naga is the protector of the Lord Buddha. In Buddhist art, the Naga is sometimes take a form as human being with a snake extending over his head. One Naga, in human form, intend to become a monk; when being told that such ordination was not allow, the Buddha told the Naga to ensure that it would be reborn like a man, so that it would able to become a monk. Nowadays, a man who is ordaining as a monk is asked with 8 questions that are the commitments of not being the obstacles to his monkhood. One of the 8 questions is “Are you a human being?”



Figure 3.1.1-6 Naga image in Buddhist painting at Wat Luang temple

In Hindu myth, the Nagas are believed to reside on Mount Sumeru, among the other minor deities, and in various parts of the human-inhabited earth. Some of them are water-dwellers which live in streams, others are earth-dwellers which live in underground caverns.

The Nagas are said to be the servants of Virupaksa (Pali: *Virupakkha*), one of the Four Heavenly Kings who guards the western direction. They play a role of guarding upon Mount *Sumeru* and protecting the devas of Trayastrimsa from attack by the Asuras.

One of the notable Nagas of Buddhist traditions is Mucalinda, who is the protector of the Lord Buddha. In the Vinaya Sutra (I, 3) the Buddha shortly after his enlightenment was meditating in a forest when a large storm happened. To comfort the Lord Buddha, a liberal Naga, King Mucalinda gave the shelter to the Lord Buddha by covering his head with his 7 snake heads. The Naga is also believed to be a rainbow or bridge that connect human to heaven realm.



Figure 3.1.1- 7 Naga image with 7 snake heads cover Buddha in Wat Luang temple

Along the Mekong riverine communities, there is a mythical legend about two chiefs of Naga named Phinthayonakhavattینگnak and Thanamunlanak, they were close friends, each had 5,000 followers and controlled half of the Nong Sae town. They helped and shared foods with each other in a good relationship. Once, they had an agreement that if one of their counterpart went hunting, and when getting the foods must bring to share a half of it to the other. They always took turn and practiced this way in order to live peacefully with each other for years. One day Thanamunlanak went hunting and caught an elephant then shared half to Phinthayonakhavattینگnak also brought its furs as an evidence. The days after, Thanamunlanak, leded the group for hunting that day they caught a porcupine then shared the porcupine's meat to Phinthayonakhavattینگnak but Phinthayonakhavattینگnak was unhappy by comparing of the quills that are bigger than the furs of elephant so that the porcupine might be bigger than the elephant, so wondered why he got a small bit of meat like that. Angrily Phinthayonakhavattینگ sent the meat of the porcupine back and said that "I do not need unfair sharing foods from unfaithful friend." Thanamunlanag, tried to explain the fact but Phinthayonakhavattینگnak still did not believe him. Finally, the war broke out.

It was said that the war lasted seven years; all of living things in all three realms. This news was known by Indra, the Vedic chief of deities, who came down to the earth and stoped them for the sake of the Inhabitants (Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosrivathana, 2009: 4). Indra chased the Naga and their followers away from their homeland of Nong Sae and had both chiefs of the Naga commented to digging one river connecting Nong Sae to the sea. Those who finished first would be rewarded with the golden Pa Beuk, a rare giant catfish measuring two metres in length and weighing more than one hundred kilograms to live in that river (Pathom Hongsuwan, 2011:35). To prevent the fighting, Indra supposed that Phayafai mountain is the wall and those who pass this mountain for the purpose to invade the other, they will be destroyed by the fire. After hearing Indra's commitment, frustrated Phinthayonakhavattینگ and the followers came out of Nong Sae and dug the river downward to the south with angrily digging so the result was a tortuous

river and called Mae Nam Kong or Mekong River till today (Reung rao Thamnan Thilaokhan Phayanak, 2011 : 20- 22).

The legend about Phra Suk, the Buddha image that had fallen down into the bottom of the Mekong River in Vernsuk, Nong Kong village, Phon Phisai District said that because of the respectfulness and loving-kindness of the Nagas to the Buddha. After hearing that the Buddha images were built in Lanxang town, Laos country, the Nagas, who reside in Badan realm or underground, transformed as a monk and asked in particular the Phrasuk Buddha image from the ruler of Lanxang to worship in Badan realm. It was believed that Naga always carry out the eight Buddhist precepts and never kill humans (Reung rao Thamnan Thilaokhan Phayanak, 2011: 32).



Figure 3.1.1-8 Phra Suk fall down into the bottom of the Mekong River

The length of the Mekong is more than 4,000 kilometres. Its water flow from the south China pass by Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The population who are living on the both sides of the Mekong River Thai- Lao, their activities are related with the waterway and rely on the water as good natural resources in their agricultural field, feeding livestock and themselves, transportation, tourism site, and even water ritual activities. Villagers believe that in the Mekong River, there is the persistence of Phayanak, Ngeuak or Serpant, the water deities resided in. So to be more peaceful and happy in their community they have to respect and appease the water deities by mean to participate in the rituals as traditional celebrations.

The Nagas or Phayanaks are well-known and believed by the Wat Luang villagers that they are the water deities with supernatural being which can bring the greatness, good fortunes, fertility, prosperity, and protection that why Nagas are a symbol or identity of their community as a slogan “หลวงพ่อกู้บ้าน สายธารแม่น้ำโขงจรจรใจ พระพุทธศาสนา ล้ำค่าประเพณี ถิ่นสตรีสองนาง อลังการบั้งไฟพญานาค” (Luang Poh Phra Suk is the village’s symbol, Mekong water bring the precious culture of Buddhism, The place of two ladies, Decorate with Naga Fireball).

Because the Naga is believed by expecially the people living along the Mekong River so its legend is widespreaded popularly. Frequently, the Naga is also portrayed by popular Thai media such as in the local Thai television soap opera Manee Sawat (มนี่สาว) on channel 3 is also portrayed the beliefs in the Naga base on its legend of which the Naga is believed to be the guardian of the Mekong River and said to be a liberal animal to the Lord Buddha, they undertake the Buddhist precepts strongly. During the end of Buddhist lent day they come up and shoot fireballs as offering to the Lord Buddha.

3.1.2 Naga Fireballs Festival (Bun Bang Fai Phaya Nak)

Every year in the particular date at the end of Buddhist long rainy season on the full moon night of the eleventh lunar month around October each year, as in 2012 it was on October 30 and also fell on the 15 full moon of the eleventh Laos lunar month. The local villagers and outsiders huge crowds assemble on the bank of the Mekong River in the compound of Wat Laung temple in a purpose to view the Naga fireball phenomenon called (*Bang Fai Phaya Nak*) and enjoy the night time when there were local and modern product available for shopping such as souvenirs, cloth, and so forth. It was said that the best sale products were T-shirts and souvenirs which have Naga pictures of its fireballs. Venders were selling foods and drinks all along the bank of the Mekong River starting from Wat Luang temple to Phon Phisai District, while several music bands were being

served with Music and Miss Naga World 2012 Contest were helped in Phon Phisai town. During the few day festival on the 28- 31 October, all of guest houses, hostels, and hotels were full. The traffic heavily congested at night, all most of their relatives came home to visit friends and families with happiness to participate, some people took this occasion to come to pray and pay homage to *Phra Suk*, at Wat Luang temple so that they will be blessed when they go back to the cities. All activities in the festival contribute toward merriment and relaxation from their hard works.



Figures 3.1.2- 1, 2 The people were waiting to view the Naga fireballs



Figures 3.1.2- 3- 5 The products which have Naga image

The local people still tend to strongly believe in the event as a work of the natural snakes called Naga with supernatural qualities firing the marvelous fireballs. There are many mythological stories told to support the beliefs. It was believed that Naga was an ally and body-guard of Lord Buddha. At the end of long rainy season, Lord Buddha are believed to returns to the earth from the heavens, so that the villagers gathered together bringing food as alms offering to the monks called *Tak Bat* ceremony in the morning. They received the precepts and listened to the chanting and preaching of the monks, in the evening around 6: 30 pm of October 30, they were invited to *Bong Soung* ceremony in the compound of Wat Luang temple to ask for blessing, respecting also asking Nagas to spit up the fireballs for those who were waiting to view. The spirit mediums were led the ceremony, they prayed by using local language and some times with a strange language that is believed to be the Naga language. The special fireboat which people built from banana tree and bamboo and decorated it with flowers, candles, lamps and lightings were floated. At night, the Naga comes out of his meditation and welcomeed Lord Buddha by firing flaming balls from his mouth as usual.



Figures 3.1.2- 6, 7 *Tak Bat* ceremony in Wat Luang temple



Figures 3.1.2- 8, 9 *Bong Soung* ceremony in Wat Luang temple

It is mysterious fireballs which come up from the Mekong River and seem very difficult to prove of the phenomenon whether how can it happen and why it happens only on the full moon night of the end of the Buddhist lent day even this day is different in each year. Other questions, why it happens only in the particular areas of Wat Luang, Phon Phisai District and areas nearby? Why do the fireball have no sound, no smoke, and don't fall down to earth?

Hundreds of colourful little fireballs, generally appear yellow-red and are of different sizes ranging from small scintillating sparkles of light to as large as basket ball sized flaming balls rise silently out of the river, flying upwards into the night sky until they disappear out of site about 30- 100 metres and some places up to 200 metres high above the water without sound, smook, and falling down to earth. The time is unpredictable in its occurrence and inexact but it might appear when the sun goes down. Some years it happens early around 6pm. actually, from around 9 pm. to 2 am.

The number of Fireballs however differs every time like from tens to thousands per night, in 2012 while I witnessed in the event in Wat Luang village, I saw a wonderful Naga fireball come up from the Mekong River in front of Wat Luang back gate at 10: 20 pm. villagers said that this year the number of the Naga fireballs are on decline comparing to the previous years, because the mediums who lead the *Bong Soung*

ceremony at early evening were invited from other provinces in doing so they are not pleased by the Nagas. Anyway, more fireballs appeared in a neighboring Ratanawapi District. According to English language local newspaper Bangkok Post, of WenesdayOctober 31, 2012, reported that up until 9: 30 pm. there were total 308 fireballs including 68 fireballs in Phon Phisai District. Some place happens just only one, another is 20, 50- 100 or much more in different speed, it is said that if it is happened nearby the shore it might be slow while in the middle of the river is faster.

The other character of the fireball is that if it happens in the areas of Wat Luang village, Phon Phisai District it might be orange colour, while in Keng Ahong, Norkham Commune, Bengkab District is green which different from common fireball and the visitors can see clearly. There are another specific areas where Naga fireball also have occurred as in front of Wat Thai temple, Wat Chorm Pun, around the mouth of Huoy Lung canal, where the stream of its water flow down to Mekong River, around Chorm Nang village of Phon Phisai District, and Nong Song of Nam Pe village, Nong Kong village of Ratanawapee District (Pamphlet of Naga legend, P: 9).

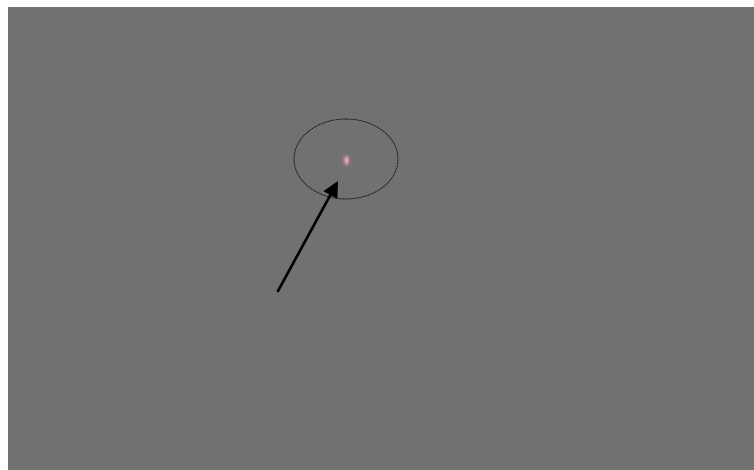


Figure 3.1.2-10 The feature of Naga fireball

The people from all around the country who have experienced in this phenomenon have different thinking. Some think that the fireballs would be men works while others think that it is the work of Naga. It is the Naga fireballs. However according to my observation, interviewing people, and participating in the festival, I can sum up that there are three groups of people as follows.

1, The young generation people who are dealing with modern technology believe that it is the result of a series of more natural occurrences. At this time of the year there is a more than usual amount of plant and animal life decomposing at the bottom of the river, emitting flammable natural gases as the sun beats down on the river. These gases are released by the gravitational pull of the moon and this is at its strongest when the moon is full.

2, Elderly people, they believe that Mekong River is the residence of Nagas, which are the water deities and have ability to perform themselves as they wish. The stream of Mekong River around the Phon Phisai District especially in front of Wat Thai, is the town of the Nagas where they can come out to human realm. On the full moon night of the eleventh month is the day that Buddha return to earth after teaching his mother in heaven. To welcome him, Nagas gather together fire the fireball to the sky that is called *Bang Fai Phayanak*. As not much known that the deepest water of the mighty Mekong River is called “*Sadeu Menuk khong*, the navel of Mekong River ” located in Keng Ahong, with 98 wa length or about 147 metres, it was measured by elderly villagers. In this area also there is an underground giant cave where the water flow through it and appears in the Laos shore at the back of Gnou mountain (mountain of serpent) (Reung rao Thamnan Thilaokhan Phayanak, 2011: 12).

3, The people with no opinion or explanation on the phenomena, they just see that the fireballs are from the Mekong River.

Keng Ahong where the deepest water point of the mighty Mekong River is, also called Naga town, where the older villagers sometimes saw things in the water look like

big serpent swim across Thai- Lao shore. It is told not only Naga festival but also other stories related to the spirits. Opposite to Keng Ahong there is a Buddha Pangsaiyat (reclining Buddha statue) and every of 15 full moon of the lunar month there is a ceremony to invite all of spirits and deities to ask for forgiveness and good luck. The local villagers when they come across this area, they always take up their palms- together (*Wai*) and pray for good fortunes, some people bring liquor, piper betel, betel nuts and cigars throw into the water when they travel by waterway or come across this place as offering to Naga, water deities and guardian spirits (*Choa Thi Chao Tha*).



Figure 3.1.2- 11 A kind of offering for *Choa Thi Chao Tha*

From interviews with the local elderly people who reside along the Mekong River of this area, they said that when they were young on the full moon night of eleventh month while they were fishing, they saw the fireballs come up from the water nearby them without sound. Sometimes several fireballs were seen at the same time and made them frighten so that they rowed the boat to the shore and backed home and called other people to see. The villagers noted and see this event from then until it become a common thing. *Luang Phor Suan Sokha Phum*, an abbot of Wat Kong Kraphan Chatri temple where connected to Wat Luang village also a former Wat Luang village head man told me that he has seen Naga fireballs since he was young. He also believes in the persistence

of the Nagas and spirits which we cannot see them in fact they are living around with us. If we study and practice the meditation more deeply we will see and make communication with them.

At first, the phenomenon was called *Bang Fai Phi*. Then because the word *Phi* is inauspicious for Buddhists while the event happens on the end of the Buddhist lent, which is the popular day of Buddhists so they changed from *Phi* to *Phayanak*; that in several Buddhist scriptures talking about the pure virtue of Naga to the Lord Buddha. And the other one is that villagers have the legends related to the Phayanak, and until they said that Phayanak is their great ancestors which reside in the *Badan* realms or underground of Mekong River. Nowadays, many of them use word Nak as their surname like Naksen, Nakvek and especially Phayanak is a symbol of their province, Nong Khai (Sor Tham, 1998:32- 34).



Figure 3.1.2-12 Naga symbol of Nong Khai town

In particular more than a decade, from 1994 after knowing that *Bang Fai Phayanak* appears every full moon of the eleventh lunar month, the end of Buddhist lent day, the Thai governors as same as festival organizers have supported this phenomenon to become an international festival or World Naga Fireball Festival. A Phon Phisai District governor, Mr. Somsak Boukhorm, 68 years old viewed that “from oral history of elderly villagers of the both banks of the Mekong told him that they saw the fireballs

every year since they were young so it has probably happened over two generations people or over a period 150 years. Local villagers gather together to watch the event every year as a usual and because it is mysterious so it is spreaded or told from mouth to mouth that the event just happen one time a year only. For those who have believed in the Naga legend will strongly believe and those who aren't they just want to experience themselves. Actually, the District authorities dare not to announce the festival because it happens by itself or it may disappear in the future which we cannot predict, but the people gather together increasingly from year to year to watch the Naga fireball festival by themselves without announcing.”



Figures 3.1.2- 12, 13 World Naga Fireball Festival

When the Naga phenomena occurs, every local media such as televisions, radios, and newspapers always broadcast the event so that the local and outsiders get the news and come increasingly as big crowds gather to watch hundreds of glowing orbs mysteriously rise up out of the Mekong River and disappear into the full moon sky.

The festival forms an important part of their culture for the people on both sides of the river as Lalana Soakchuwong, proposed in his book “The Giving of Meaning and Reason for Existence of The Naga Fireballs Ritual in The Age of Globalization” that

believing in Naga and its ritual in Wat Luang village, Phon Phisai District will continue in the long future according to the villagers will continue to carry out their Buddhist rituals as culture and custom from their ancestors (Lalana Sakchuwong, 2005: 147-148).

3.1.3 *Loi Krathong* or *Lai Reur Fai* Festival

Loi Krathong festival of Wat Luang villagers took place on the evening of the full moon night of the eleventh lunar calendar that fell on October 30, 2012 after *Bong Soung* ceremony of the Naga fireball festival, at 7: 30 pm. In fact the Loi Krothong festival of Wat Luang village has been held since 1999 by the governors of Phon Phisai District and Tourism Authority of Thailand. They used the occasion to enhance their social prestige, as is customary in traditional Buddhist folk festivals. It was an important tradition of Isan people especially those who live in the provinces along the Mekong River at the end of Buddhist lent day.

It has been explained as a Brahmanistic related to festival for a long time ago by Thai Buddhists in Thailand to remember and ask for forgiveness from *Pra Mae Khongkha*, the goddess of the river who has provided the water for all creatures to use and drink. At the same time, it is to worship and honor the Lord Buddha, who is believed to come down from *Tavatimsa* heaven because there is a Buddhist story said that once, Buddha went to preach the *Dhamma* in the Naga Realm and before he came back, the Nagas asked for an object to prove and worship, so that Lord Buddha set foot on the sand of a shore of the river. From then Nagas gather together respect and worship the foot-print of the Buddha instead of Lord Buddha and the festival is believed to worship the foot-print of the Buddha (Sor Tham, 1998: 35).

Nowadays, the villagers float *Krathongs* and often blow lanterns in the festival. The beautiful *Krathongs* are made of such as banana leaves, banana trunks, coconut barks, paper, and etc. then decorate it leg sticking the candles, three incense stick, some flowers, and coins.



Figures 3.1.3-1, 2 *Krathongs*

To be more colorful, lighting boats and rafts are used. They are decorated with light in the pictures of Garuda, Kinary Bird, the mythical half bird half humam, and Naga and each prominently display the names of their major sponsors, generally the Communal Administrative Organization that appears clearly in a logo or a phrase of letters. They are called *Phra Tiep* and represented *Krathong*. The lanterns are made of color paper and torch to set smoke in lanterns to blow them in wind chill at night, we can see the light from lantern in the sky with the moon shining and stars glittering at night which is a very beautiful.



Figure 3.1.3- 3 *Phra Tiep*



Figure 3.1.3- 4 Blowing the lanterns in Wat Luang

Both items are the main objects in the festival to make a wish and float it in the river as a symbol to fly away misfortune and bad things. Apart from venerating the Buddha with light (the candle on the raft), the act of floating away the candle raft is also a symbolic of letting go of all one's grudges, anger and defilements, so that can start better life. The festival is meant as a time for making merit (Maha Khampuy Philavong , 2009, 112- 123).

3.1.4 Rocket Festival (*Bun Bangfai*)

The Rocket Festival is a ceremony of regional and traditional practiced throughout much of northeast Thailand and Laos. It is associated with the sky god, *Thaen* (*Thaen* or *Phya Thaen* is a spirit which rules the sky), and guardian spirits of the communities who take care of villagers. It is performed by numerous villages and municipalities near the beginning of the rainy season to pay respects and request them to confer prosperity, good health and to send rain at the right time of the year so that the villagers achieve the fertility of crops and vegetables. It is in fact primarily a rain- making ritual (Tambiah, 1970: 286).

The festival has associated with some earthy elements of Lao and Isan folklore of *Nang Ai*, *Phadaeng*, and *Phangkhi*. It was said that Nang Ai was the queen of the pageant, the most beautiful girl in the town and Phadang fell in love with her but must win a rocket festival tournament. Unfortunately, he becomes part of a love triangle because there was *Phangkhi* which has been fated by Karma with *Nang Ai*, at the past lives *Nang Ai* was a faithful and dutiful wife, because *Phangkhi* was an unfriendly with narrow mind to her so she prayed not be paired with him. It fell in their following lives, *Nang Ai* is reborn as the daughter of *Phraya Khom*, while *Phangki* is reborn as the son of *Phaya Nak* and he is not invited to a rocket festival tournament so there is more chance for *Phadand*, but during the competition the *Phadang's* rocket was fizzled so that his competitor, Nang Ai's uncle won. Her father, *Phaya Khom* calls the whole thing off. Once, *Pangkhi* took on a shape of a white squirrel to spy on Nang Ai, but she spies him and has him killed by her alliance. *Pangkhi's* meat magically transformed into 8,000 wagons and was eaten by Nang Ai and many of her followers, *Phaya Nak*, who is *Phangki's* father vows to punish to death for those who had eaten of the flesh of his son

A few days later, the lands are turned into a vast swamp as the worst disaster by the Naga and his watery myrmidons. Nagas personify waters running both above and below ground, and Nagas run amok are rivers in spate. Seeing so, Phadaeng flees the flood with *Nang Ai* on white stallion, but *Nang Ai* is swept off by a Naga's tail. *Phadaeng* escapes, but pines away for his lost love (Tambiah, 1970: 294- 296). Through this folklore, the villagers just carry out as traditional practiced from their ancestors, as we can see clearly in the rocket procession, the principal theme of *Hae Bangfai* there are the symbols of Nang Ai, Phadang, Phangki, and Naga. The rockets are richly decorated mounted on traditional decorated oxcarts, or modern floats. Many sport the heads of Nagas if equipped with water pumps and swivels, they are actually capable of spitting on spectators.

The other folklore that influenced the rocket festival as rain- making ceremony is that once, the Lord Buddha was in his Bodhisatta he was born as King of the Toads

Phaya Khang Khok reigned once Chumpho town. His sermons drew everyone, creatures and sky-dwellers alike, away from *Phaya Thaen*, the sky god. Angry Phaya Thaen withheld life-giving rains from the earth for seven years, seven months and seven days. Acting against the advice of the Toad King, Phaya Naga King of the Nagas and personification of the Mekong declared war on Phaya Thaen by bringing the stones and telling the termites to bring the ground to stick it together to be a stairs to heaven. It took three years to reach Thaen's town, then lead venomous scorpions and centipedes the armies of all animals as same as all living things to attack Phaya Thaen. The wage took seven year to get overcome Phaya Thaen the ordered him to let the rain fall down in the right season (Maha Khampuy Philavong, 2009, 266- 267). Rockets fired in the air at the end of the hot, dry season are not to threaten Phaya Thaen, but to serve as a reminder to him of his treaty obligations to open the flood gates of the sky and get the life-giving rain to fall on earth.

The local people believed that after completion of the ritual, the rain would come in a right time, they could grow their crops, the river would be in the spate during the monsoon season, they would enjoy the rocket festival and other local annual rituals, and they assured that the cycle could go on and on and forever.

Up until a few years ago, Wat Laung village held its own rocket festival. Nodaways, it is on declining interest in this festival. The deputy headman told me that the organizing committee called for a cessation because of gambling by some of the onlookers and fights broke out. To solve the gambling and open violence the local authorities decided to centralise such an annual event, but the villagers are participated with other villages. Recently, it is held within two days on June 11- 12, 2012 in Ban Napeng Ngai village, Phoe Phisai District about four kilometers north of Wat Luang village, all of Wat Luang villagers are invited to participate.



Figure 3.1.4-1 The local villagers participate in the Rocket festival

However, the festivals offer an excellent chance to make merriment before the hard work of agriculture begins; as well as enhancing communal prestige, and attracting and redistributing wealth as in any gift culture. The Thai government, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has helped promote this event. Some days before the ritual, there were the preparations when the money is collected from every household in the villages for buying black powder to make the rockets and related materials or things such to rent the music bands, Mor Lam Sing for merriment.

The rockets are made in the Wat by monks and villagers. It is generally made of pvc piping by standardizing their sizes and black powder charges (which contest rules require be compounded by the rocketeers, themselves) then they are stored in the Wat.



Figure 3.1.4- 2 Rockets

On the first day of the festival, every household prepares foods and drinks such as fermental rice noodles (*Kanom Chin* or *Kao Pun* in local language) and beer to welcome the invited guests who are their relatives and other villagers around. At night the Mor Lam Sing, a type of morlam that is very popular among the local Isan-Lao population perform all night and the locals have great fun. Outsiders have a hard time understanding the humour, which is often rather bawdy.

On the morning of the second day, villagers bring foods as alms offering to monks, follow by the parade of the rocket from the local Wat to the rocket launch platform where the rockets are fired in the rice field near by the village. The local spirit mediums and elderly people are leaded with the traditional dance and accompanying by musicians, typically with *Khaen*, *Gongs*, Lao-Isan *Klong Yao* (long drum), and an electric guitar, powered by an inverter and car batteries in a handcart that also mounts loudspeakers. Festivities also include cross-dressing, both cross-sex and cross-generational, and great quantities of alcohol. Perhaps the most popular beverage, both because it is cheaper than beer and has a higher, 40-percent alcohol content, is a neutral grain spirit called *Sura* but more generally known as *Lao* or *Lao Khao* (white alcohol in Thailand). *Sato*, a brewed rice beverage similar to Japanese sake may also be on offer;

sweet-flavored *Sato* may be as little as seven-percent alcohol, but it packs a surprising punch.

There are various sizes of rockets, competing in several categories. Larger categories are designated by the counting words for 1,000,000 (*Lan*), 100,000 (*Saen*) and 10,000 (*Meun*). *Bang Fai Lan* is the largest rocket that Lan in this context may be taken to mean extremely large as well as extremely expensive and seriously dangerous: Bang Fai Lan come in nine metres long and charged with 120 kg of black powder. These may reach altitudes reckoned in kilometers, and travel dozens of kilometers down range (loosely speaking, as they can go in any direction, including right through the crowd). Competing rockets are scored for apparent height, distance, and beauty of the vapor trail (*Ai*). A few include skyrocket pyrotechnics. These rockets don't go "boom" nor do they burst into colourful displays. Their only purpose is to rise as high as possible into the sky to appease some goddess and ensure a good rainfall.



Figures 3.1.4- 3, 4 The vapor trail of the rockets

At the afternoon of the second day, the rockets are sent one by one skywards with noisy music and cheers can be heard for each liftoff. The rocket that reaches the greatest height is declared the winner. The owner of this rocket dances and pushes for rewards

from the crowds. The owners of rockets that exploded or failed to fly are thrown in the mud.

Huge villagers assemble at the rocket launch platform where *Mor Lan Sing* is performed. In the place were stalls with food and drinks such as spicy papaya salad, beer, alcohol and other surprising punch. Vendors would sell balloons and other souvenirs. They all enjoyed drinking, singing, dancing, chatting all day until the midnight and considered the most merriment festival in the year. Whether or not their wishes are granted as they believe, the festival helps strengthen and promote harmony among the villagers, which will be needed when the new crop season begins. This is a love and unity of the local people as well.

3.2 Spirit Beliefs and Rituals

It is said that for Thai Buddhists who tend to reject popular Buddhism that is closely associated with such power of supernatural beings tied to Animism mixed with magic and superstition are not happy with the rural Thais especially northeastern Thai villagers. It was in the city where there were new ideas and the Thai city people became cynical towards the beliefs and ways of their country cousins. Those who became rich in the city wanted to discard the indigenous spirit belief system of their parents and grandparents. But, all these was just a kind of play acting, as deep down in their hearts and minds they were steeped in spirit beliefs, while the trappings of modernization was just a thin veneer.

Even though the modern science with new technology are well adopted, but Wat Luang villagers still have inherited beliefs in Brahman and spirits worship of the supernatural as a power in distributing favours and affliction to human being (Chaleo Manilerd, 1988: 65). Chaleo Manilerd, a Thai scholar and editor of a book “Thai Customs and Beliefs” argued that there are literally thousands of beliefs and superstitions in Thailand. The belief in spirits may be anchored on deities, spirits, witches, demons,

demigods, charm, black magic, amulets, incantation, spells, auspicious occasion, omens premonition and dreams.

Villagers believe and learn that the indigenous beliefs are sacred these beliefs remains strong in their community which involve with the three planes of existence as in Thai Traibhumi Cosmology, there are Heaven (powerful gods and angelic beings), Earth (all living things- humans and animals), and Hell (hell beings that pay retribution for their sins), these three planes have also profoundly inspired the people of these areas.

The spirit concepts involve a sense of agency and active interest in human affairs. The heaven, earth, and hell are also taken to imply reward and punishment in the afterlife. In this milieu villagers are always involved with spirit worship of supernatural. They still have a strong belief and fear the existence of spirits of the deceased which can be good and evil spirits. For example the ancestor spirits are believed to be the positive spirits who have the role of protecting and taking care of the villagers, their families, and their livestock from harm and repels evil spirit or wandering spirit from harming. Most of them claim to have seen at least one ghost and can recall a large number of ghost stories in vivid detail in local films, movies. Even Thai local television channel 5 also has broadcasted the program called *Kun Ut Phi* on every Wednesday night and *Ban Teuk Lek Lab* on Friday evening; these programs are very well- known and believed by the villagers.

There are oral theories saying that the ghosts will curse you if you sing a song while eating or your rice will be stolen if you make joke while eating. If you stand in the doorway, ghosts will enter your house, a ghost will be seen if you bend down and look between your legs. Kirsty Turner (Kay), a freelance writer proposed in her article Thai Superstitions and Beliefs that there are several explanation of superstitions which are particularly interesting such as: Your eyes will be swollen if you look at naked people, you will lose your finger if you throw money away, the moon contains a rabbit, bite your shoes before you wear them for the first time to prevent them from biting your feet, if you point at a rainbow, your finger will fall off, your child will become ugly if you taste food

with a large serving spoon, if you enter through the windows, bad luck will come to your house (Kirsty Turner. Thai Superstitions and Beliefs, 2012: Online). Some of these explanations are still practiced by the villagers especially the elderly.

Beside the indigenous beliefs and rituals of the Naga, and nature spirits of *Pra Mae Khongkha*, a water deity and *Thaen*, a spirit of sky above, the villagers also have anchored with the ancestral spirits of *Chao Mae Song Nang* (*Chao*= honorific, *Mae*= mother, *Song Nang*= two sisters), *Chao Mae Thong Thib* and *Chao Pho Nong Reur Kham* (*pho*= father), guardian spirits of *Phra Phum* or *Chao Thi* and Spirit house, and *Khwan*, spirit residing in human being, and animals and spirit that animate plant. I have found their cults anchored in the village based on such beliefs and most of them have combined with other element of religious in generally, Buddhism.

3.2.1 Ancestral spirits

The ancestral spirit shrines can be found in the Wat Luang village, there are various kinds of ancestral spirits, *Phi Ban- Phi Muang* or a spirit which protects a village or a community, *Phi Moh Tham*, a spirit of departed religious man, and *Phi Chua*, a spirit of a departed member of the family.

In the village there are three main spirit shrines. The one is the shrine of the powerful *Chao Mae Song Nang* spirit. It was built on the bank of the Mekong River near to *Wat Luang* monastery at the *Moo Thi 2* in the corner Northwest of its village, face to the west direction but generally most villages in northeastern Thailand build it in the center of the village or near by the road leading into the village.



Figures 3.2.1-1, 2 The shrine of Chao Mae Song Nang in the village

Another is *Chao Mae Thong Thib* shrine where located in *Moo Thi 1* of *Wat Kong Kraphan Chari* temple of *Don Kong village* opposite of *Wat Luang* village (The establishment of *Don Kong village* was separated from *Wat Luang* village in 2002 because of the increase in the population).



Figure 3.2.1-3 Chao Mae Thong Thib's shrine

The other is *Chaopor Nong Reur Kham* shrine located on the left hand side of *Wat Laung* village in *Nong Reur Kham* monastery, centre of *Moo Thi 15* of *Nong Reur*

Kham village. Even though *Chaopor Nong Reur Kham* is in *Nong Ruer Kham* village, *Wat Laung* villagers are still involved with him very much and indeed they organize an annual ritual by joining with *Chao Mae Song Nang* as one.



Figures 3.2.1-4, 5 The shrine of Chao Pho Nong Reur Kham with his statue

These three villages have separated from each other and named differently as *Wat Luang* village, *Don Kong* and *Nong Reur Kham* since 2002, but one thing still remain is *Moo Thi 1*, *Moo Thi 2*, and *Moo Thi 15*. From 2002 backwards they were one as a *Wat Luang* village which consists of these *three groups Mu Thi 1, 2 and 15*. The villagers of these three groups have anchored with these spirits and have been aware of the shrine since the past years. The annual ritual to appease the spirits have organized annually in the *Wat Luang* village by combine with boat racing festival.

According to the villagers beliefs in ancestral spirits are the spirits of the deceased fathers or great great mothers whose spirits still persist and protect the villagers and their society from danger. Because of not dealing well with the real histories the spirits which they believe as their protectors taking care of their village include general ancestor spirits, not specific on whose ancestors and what generations, but it seems clear that villagers in this village are more attached with *Chao Mae Song Nang*, (spirit of great mother), *Chao Mae Thong Thib*, and *Chao Phor* (spirit of great father) *Nong Reu Kham* spirit. Villagers

believe that they are sacred, that they are their ancestors who can protect villagers and their societies from harm.

3.2.1.1 Chao Mae Song Nang spirit

Chao Mae Song Nang are said to be the spirit of the two high ranking women who were the daughters of a Lao ruler, a warrior of Lanchang Kingdom. Wat Luang villagers believe that these people were their ancestors or the first group people who first came to settle their community (Panupong Udomsilp, 2011, 19: 73).

They are named *Nang Phim* and *Nang Pha*, because of the warfare during Dhonburi period, they and their people migrated to escape from wars by waterway from Vientiane to the south where now Mukdahan province passes by Huy Luang, Phon Phisai district to build a new city there. Nang Phim Nang Pha were traveling by boat on the Lam Num Khong. When they arrived at the pier of Wat Hai Sok, a big wave caused the boat to capsize and the two daughters drowned to death. A few months later, villagers heard a sound of women crying very often around this area. After consulting about this event with spirit mediums, people knew that the women they had heard crying were the spirits of Nang Phim and Nang Pha. Then Wat Luang villagers had built a shrine for them at the mouth of *Huy Laung* canal, on the basin of Mekong River in order to place the offering and annual ritual activities (An interview with village headman of Wat Luang village on July 7, 2012). The spirits were invited to be in the shrine by a big ceremony.

It seems that the villagers stick to the ancient beliefs along the Mekong River they strongly believe in the persistence of *Chao Mae Song Nang* spirits as a god or water deity called “Mermaid”. Mermaid, Snake and Serpent are basically the same thing. It is said that many people have died in the Mekong waterway every year and these accidental results are believed to be the unsatisfying of the water deities. To reduce the death of people in the mighty river they must appease *Chao Mae Song Nang* in order to maintain a peaceful society. It is appeared that beside *Chao Mae Song Nang* shrine in *Wat Luang* village, there are also several shrines along the both side of the Mekong River such as in

Wat Haisok, Nongkai District, Chorm Nang village of Phon Phisai District, and in front of Bengkab hospital of Bengkab District. Every year in each shrine there is an annual ritual to please them as water deities in order to comfort those who have works related to waterway.

3.2.1.2 Chao Mae Thong Thib

Chao Mae Thong Thib said to be a powerful spirit of the areas. According to my interviewing with *Luang Phor Suan Sokha Phum*, an abbot of Wat Kong Kraphan Chatri relate to the history of *Chao Mae Thong Thip* on the 29 October 2012, he told me that she was a military leader during early Krong Thonbury period. She migrated from Nong Khai to the south in a purpose to bring huge of gold to build the Buddha statues in the construction of Pasat Panum stupa in Nakorn Panom Province. Unfortunately, when she arrived at Wat Luang village she died of a disease. Because of her virtue in donating her property to Buddhist causes many miracles happened to the villagers after her death, villagers had built a shrine for her spirit with respect and named her *Chao Mae Thong Thip* (spirit of great mother of magical gold).

In 1999, there was a road construction from *Nong Khai to Phon Phisai*, while the constructors dug the ground around this area; a few Buddha images and pieces of gold were found and said to be her properties. A new shrine was built and devoted to her in Wat Krapan Chatri temple connected to Wat Luang village by a military officer from Petbury Province who was holding military task in Phon Phisai District as a offering after he got what he wishes of continue being the officer. The villagers considered *Chao Mae Thong Thip* as their ancestral spirit who can help and comfort their community.

3.2.1.3 Chaophor Nong Reur Kham spirit

According to Bhiku Anulak Thammavalo, a monk with 65 years of age staying in Nong Reur Kham monastery, the legend of *Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham* that *Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham* is *Moh Tham* or a spirit of departed religious man considered as an ancestral spirit with a high - ranking. He was an ex-abbot of Nong Reur Kham monastery

years ago, from the founding of *Wat Nong Reur Kham*. His name was *Luangphor Kham*. When he was in the temple, villagers often saw a golden boat floating in a small Lake in front of the temple. Then, there was someone who wanted the golden boat to be his personal property so that he tried to take the boat by using magical powers but he could not succeed and finally, he died a few days later. Several years later, *Luangphor Kham* died because of aging disease. After his death, the golden boat disappeared. Because of this the villagers greatly respected him and believed that his spirit still exists so that they have built a small shrine for him, the spirit was invited by ceremony to take up residence in the shrine and was named *Chaophor Nong Reur Kham*. Recently, because the old shrine was broken, a bigger shrine was constructed by villagers who willingly donated the money to build it and also invite him to reside in this new shrine as sacred site.

3.2.1.4 Ancestral Spirit Rituals

In the past, there were two annual rituals, a ritual worshiping *Chao Mae Song Nang* and boat racing ritual (*Bun Kheng Reur*) held separately to serve their dual objectives to honor, appease and respect their ancestral spirits above also to enjoy the excitement of the boat rowers, but at the present day due to the ancestral spirit beliefs are on decline which fewer practitioners and participants so villagers have organized the ritual by combining with the boat racing festival since around a decade ago (An interview with Wat Luang village head man on November 6, 2012).

The villagers hold an annual ritual on around the tenth lunar month or around November in front of the main *Chao Mae Song Nang* shrine on the bank of Mekong River as 2012 it was held on the sixth November after Naga festival by the village headmen and festival organizing committees of *Wat Laung* village.

At least two weeks before the ritual date, the elderly people and village headmen as ritual organizers had a meeting which generally held in *Wat Luang* temple to arrange and set up an exactly date. They applied to their District governmental and Province

governmental organizations for the budgets support at the same time the mediums have a duty to collect the money from the villagers and the amount of the money is up to the agreement of the villager and the ritual committees some year is 20 Thai Baht, another 30, and this year is 40 Baht per household. The Thai government, Provincial and Subdistrict Administration Organizations are also involved in this ritual as they gives the sum of 200,000 Thai Baht to the organizing committee to purchase the festival to enjoy the excitement of the boat rowers in order to enhance their communities (An interview, Kun Khinkanok Bour Sakun, Nong Reur Kham village headman, on the 6 November 2012).



Figures 3.2.1.4- 1, 2 The posters of announcement and invitation of the ritual organizers and supporters

The ritual was began around eight in the morning when there were ritual practitioners and participants, the village headmen of each village as village representatives, mediums and *Moh Khwan* gathered together and bring three sets of offerings, two sets are made to invite *Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham* and *Chao Mae Thong Thip* called *Khan Ha* which consists of five betel nuts, five betel leaf, five candles, five incenses, five flowers, and five fruits.

They placed one set in *Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham* shrine and one in *Chao Mae Thong Thip* shrine then pray to invite his and her spirit to participate in the ritual at the

Chao Mae Song Nang's shrine, this ceremony leaded by the mediums. The other set is called *Khan Paet* for inviting *Chao Mae Song Nang* too, it consists of eight betel nuts, eight betel leaf, eight candles, eight incenses, eight flowers, and eight fruits.

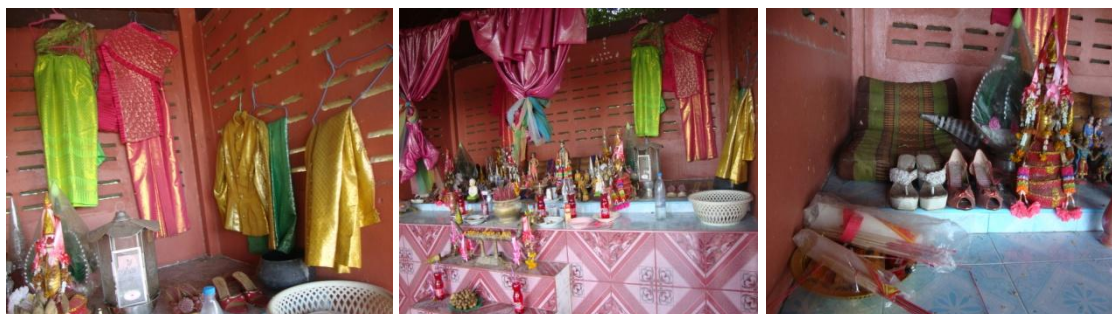


Figure3.2.1.4- 3 The offering as a part of *Khan Paet*

Besides these offering, a pair of boiled chickens, liquor, water, sticky rice, Chinese soft drinks in bottles and tins, fruits include the whole spectrum of tropical and imported fruits such as oranges, bananas, pomelo, longans, jackfruits, pineapple, rose apple, mangostreen, and apples, cigarettes, dessert, sweet drinks, a footed baisri tray, garland, and fragrant flowers also are presented. Sometimes in the common offering after villagers got succeeded with something e.g. being well from diseases, they offer includes garments, shoes and women cosmetics to the spirits.



Figures 3.2.1.4- 4- 6 The offerings use in annual ritual



Figures 3.2.1.4 - 7- 9 The other offerings for Chao Mae Song Nang

The sets of offering *Khan Ha* and *Khan Paet* are symbols of the religious precepts of the spirit mediums. It is said that the fact all of spirit mediums carry out their Buddhist precepts with taboos and obligations regarding maintenance of five and eight precepts such as abstaining from having meals at funerals, eating meat, and from having sex with their husbands on Buddhist Sabbath days. If they do so it will help purify their minds and to be ready for being possessed by the spirits (Panupong Udomsilp, 2011, 19: 81).

After raising the offerings to present the spirits, the participants and village headmen asked the spirit whether they please or not. After while the spirit mediums with *Mor Khwan* replied that they have received all of them. They seem doing the role-play as ancestral spirits because they answered sometime with strange and joke words or phrases. The village representatives and participants urged the spirits to provide them the peace and merriment in the boat racing ritual as same as rain in the right season, good harvest and prosperity for the community. Also several questions related to their daily lives were asked. For example the headman asked “Why have a lot of villagers gotten sick this year? A medium replied that because they lacked good relationships, committing bad deeds, which go against social norms and disrespecting me.” The participants also asked “How about the rainfall next year?” one of the medium replied “The rain in the coming year would be sufficient and the villagers would be happy.” They acted within about 15 minutes as the product buyers and the owners in order to ask for assistance to enhance and maintain their community with prosperity.



Figure 3.2.1.4-10 The practitioners perform the ritual

Then the boxes made of banana stalks that consists of three- colored sticky rice, liquor, sweets, few pieces of chicken meats and also chicken's liver and heart and the small banana leaf trays stick with flowers were placed around *Chao Mae Song Nang's* shrine and floated to present to those spirits who would come to take away the inauspiciousness and bad element from the community. These kind of offerings also said to present to ancestral spirit's disciples and followers whom unable to come to the ritual (An interview, Khun Pha Lum, on the 6 November 2012).



Figures 3.2.1.4- 11, 12 The offerings to float for spirits

At around ten in the morning, supposed that all ancestral spirits have eaten and full with enjoyable so that the rest of the foods especially chickens and liquor were taken and eaten by the spirit practitioners and participants as a custom to gain the good luck and good fortune.



Figures 3.2.1.4- 13, 14 The *Tiam, Mor Khwan*, village headmen, and participants enjoy eating

Then the boat racing ritual was held on the bank of the Mekong River of Wat Luang temple. The head of the Provincial Administration Organization (PAO), Mr. Yuthana Sitabut and the colleges, the head of Sub district Administration Organization (SAO) and Wat Luang village head men are the special guests in the opening ceremony. It is a traditional rite to honor the ancestral spirits and water deities, who have provided them sufficient natural resources as the rains and water of the Mekong River for their agricultural tasks (interview, Bunsad Bourkorm, festival committee on the 6 November 2012). Villagers have held as a transmission of cultural belief from their ancestors in which its history can be traced back at least to Ayatthaya period some 600 years ago when the festival organize by Royal Navy under the direct command of the King in a purpose to keep physically and mentally alert. It was held on the fourteenth day of the waxing moon in the eleventh lunar month and lasted until the first day of the waning moon of the same lunar month (Chaleo Manilerd 1988: 48).

Nowadays, Wat Luang villagers conduct an annual ritual to please the ancestral spirits particularly *Chao Mae song Nang* and Nagas, water deities, *Chao Phor Nong Reur*

Kham and *Chao Mae Thong Thip* as their village comforters (An interview with Wat Luang village head man on the 6 November 2012).



Figures 3.2.1.4- 15- 17 The villagers participate in Boat racing festival

All boats were from different villages. Some were from other District and province and before leaving for the competition they are blessed by a ritual of wire string tying ceremony tied cover up the boat head which decorated by flower garlands, candles and incenses lead by *Mor Khwan*. While a couple minutes before the match all boat men pray for peace and victory from the spirits above with the lighting candles and incenses on the boat's head. This festival is now also becomes a sport to enhance their physical bodies and to serve their dual objectives to honor their spirits and to enjoy the excitement of the boat rowers. This kind of ritual will not die out in the long future because it is involved and sponsored by the Thai government as it gives the sum of 200,000 Thai Baht to the organizing committee of Wat Luang village to purchase the festival which in 2012 there were 16 boats with total 192 oarsmen (a boat consist of 12 oarsmen) the championship award is 20,000 Baht followed by 15,000; 10,000, 8000 till 3000 Baht. At the same time the Thai government gave 250,000 baht with the King's Cup of the princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn award to the other long-tailed boat racing festival in Phon Phisai town held in compound Wat Thai temple which held on the 7 November 2012 follow the Wat Luang's boat racing ritual.



Figures 3.2.1.4- 18- 20 The princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and the Provincial Administration Organization involve in the festival

To make it more interesting, the event consists of merriment activities such as nearby Wat Luang temple at the south about 200 metres on the Mekong River bank, a *Mor Lam Sing* band of Isan singers was served. The vendors were selling the products, foods, and drinks while some local villagers and outsiders were charting, singing, drinking, and dancing until the evening 6 pm of the day. However, such selling and drinking alcohol or intoxicants were not allowed in the temple ground in order to maintain the religious temple policy. They have kept the local temple as a holy place to be a residence of secret Buddha images so that they come to worship and ask for blessing (An interview with Phra Kru Phisai Khidchathorn, an abbot of Wat Luang willage on the 6 November 2012).



Figures 3.2.1.4- 21, 22 The villagers enjoy in the ritual

A speech of Mr. Yuthana Sitabut, who is a representative of all Nong Khai people in the opening ceremony that the main purpose of festival is to inherit significant custom and cultural beliefs from their previous generations it helps strengthen love, unity and promote harmony among the villagers, helping villagers to have personal activities especially the youths away from using drugs.

3.3 Guardian Spirits Belief- *Phra Phum Chao Thi*

From my observation, Local villagers seem no contradiction in being Buddhists and practicing the spirit cult of guardian spirits. They would go to the temple, listen to the sermon, undertake Buddhist precepts and at the same time, they would freely seek and respect to the spirits so that they can solve the wide range of matters associated with their well-being. They convince that their involvement in this kind of spirits can protect them against any of life's misfortunes. Most of the times before leaving for far distance to work or do some things they have to pay respect to the spirit of the house (*Phi Ruan*) to ask for good luck and good fortune and in case of nobody taking care of their house, Phi Ruan is believed to govern (An interview, Jar Cheat, Wat Luang villager on November 7, 2012).

A miniature shrine housing the tutelary deity, known as a spirit house (*Phi Ruan*,) can be seen inside almost every house compound and everywhere in the village. It is an indigenous belief of the Thai especially the Northeast and the Northeastern Thai villagers that every household is looked after by the guardian spirit of the house. It is said that the hardship or misfortune considered to be a result of displeasure of the guardian spirits of the house, while having good luck or good health are a result of blessing from the guardian spirit of the house too. *Phra Phum Chao Thi* or *Phi Ruan* is believed by the local villagers as the guardian spirit of the house (Chaleo Manilerd, 1988: 72- 73).



Figures 3.3- 1-7 The Guardian spirits or spitie houses in house compound of the Wat Luang villagers

In generally, *Phra Phum* is the ruler of the place, the presiding spirit of the area. *Phra Phum* derives from the word *Bhumi*, which stands for earth in Pali and Sanskrit languages. *Chao Thi* means the owner of the land in Thai. *Phra Phum* is only one of the vast pantheon of spirit that rule the Thai universe. He belongs to the psychic realm the Thai designate as *Decha*, realm of chaos far from the safety of home, temple where potentially destructive power roam at will causing illness, loss, death, or harm.

Phra Phum is also believed to be the lord and the owner of the place so that accommodation would be provided when construction any kinds of buildings. It is said that *Phra Phum* or *Chao Thi* has looked after altogether nine subjects. All of them have to do with the land or things which stand on the land such as house, temple ground, wedding house, door and top of the stairs, barn, animal enclosure, orchard, threshing patch, and rice field (Chaleo Manilerd, 1988: 68). The residences of *Phra Phum* are found in a various range of designs. The finest one are miniature palaces in wood and cement that,

with their stepped roofs, gilded spires, mirror-encrusted facades and carefully carved doors and window-sills, resemble Buddhist temple. In Brahmanism, Phra Phum is believed to be the angelic level so that the residence is designed which has only one post, the symbolizes the *Khao Phra Sumeru*, the mountain on which Brahma is supposed to have his abode. In a regular one, the residences of Phra Phum are a ramshackle bamboo hut which has a basic structure and always the same feature consist of a room in which *Phra Phum* lives, a veranda, on which the daily offerings are placed. The people always elaborate the Phra Phum's residence by the level of its stand little higher than a person of an average height and are installed by conducting a ceremony to make the consecration of Phra Phum lead by a Brahmin priest at the astrologically auspicious time to invite the spirit to reside in the residence (Peter and Pathawee Khongkhunthian 2007: 1- 3).

3.3.1 Phra Phum Chao Thi or Spirit House Ritual

The ritual of the guardian spirit is practiced by the villagers at any time or daily, mostly in the early morning when a *wai* in devotion is performed. To worship Phra Phum Chao Thi or spirit house in such ways, they believe that he would be pleased and satisfied so that they would enhance fertility and prosperity for their household. At the present day, the ceremony of worshipping the spirit houses is more commonplace than formerly because villagers have more individualistic, healthier and so they spend more money on their spirit land. Most of them have installed a spirit house in their house compound.

Peter A. Reichart and Pathawee Khongkhunthian in their book *The Spirit House of Thailand* explained that worshipping of *Phra Phum* is very complicated due to the fact that he changes form monthly. The offerings must be adapted accordingly e.g *Phra Phum* will take on the shape of a large dragon (nakaraj) on December and January. He will be a large bird (khrut) on February and March, so the offerings during these months should be raw minced beef and spicy fish salad. He will turn to a giant (yak) on April and May, raw food also contain rice and whisky as an offering would be appropriated. He becomes an old man (Brahmin) During June and July so that a white cloth is deemed appropriate. He

will form as a lion (raja) during August and September, the raw food and a yellow cloth considered as preferable offerings. During October and November he will take on the shape of an elephant (chang) so that offerings should contain grass but no beef and raw food.

A Wat Luang Brahmin monk also told me that *Phra Phum* turns his head in various directions during the week. The worshipers should always be worshiped from the direction of his feet. If the worshipers worship him from his head direction is considered wrong direction, the bad luck will sometimes come to them. The direction of which *Phra Phum* will sleep during the week is: Sunday feet to the West, head to the East. Monday feet to the Northwest, head to the Southeast. Tuesday feet to the North, head to the South. Wednesday feet to the Northeast, head to the Southwest. Thursday feet to the East, head to the West. Friday feet to the Southwest, head to the Northwest, and Saturday feet to the South, head to the North.

He also explained that the front of the spirit house has to face a certain direction. To install the spirit house we also should know the social status of the owner. If the owner is a merchant, the Phra Phum's residence would face to the South direction, while the North is for a government official. The Northeast or Southeast for common people. The West for garden or rice field. The suitable or auspicious days on the 2nd, 4th, 6th and 11th day of the waning moon of the lunar calendar are said to be the auspicious occasion to conduct a ceremony of installing a spirit house.

Nodaway, villagers seem to have less understanding or on declining in the correct worship and offerings. They probably know that Phra Phum is the spirit of the land with supernatural being so that he is considered as a man- like being. However, they believe that when paying homage and making daily offerings they will be blessed. An excellent explanation of Peter and Pathawee Khongkhunthian of the offerings for Phra Phum is that the offerings for Phra Phum consists of water, Chinese tea and soft drinks in bottles and

tins a stew may be added, coconut milk, various fruits such as oranges, bananas, pomelo, jackfruit, pineapples, rose apples, mangostreen, and apples, sweets, chewing betel, small try of banana leaf, and cigars or cigarettes may also offered. For roasted pig heads, chicken or duck are said to be the offerings only offered on the special occasions, especially when a spirit house is to be installed.

To decorate the home of Phra Phum, flowers and garlands, real or artificial, are among the daily offerings: orchids, chrysanthemums, roses, and other. The standard offerings are candles and incenses. While food and drink must be offered regularly, *Phra Phum* has to have an entourage who live in his abode permanently. These are miniatures as attendants and servant such as horses, lions, cows, elephants, and other small animals which mostly made of acrylic are seen standing on the small terrace outside the spirit house. To entertain the spirit, great numbers of dancing girls which made of acrylic should be supplied.

Mrs. Jar Saroy Thong, a food vender of Jar Saroy Thong restaurant located in Wat Luang village about 70 meters North of Wat Luang temple told me that she spent 4,000 Thai Baht to install her spirit house after a dream of which there is someone want to build a house in her house compound, after consulting with Kun Mae Ramphai, a spirit doctor also a popular fortuneteller of Wat Luang willage nearby her house, then she was told that is the spirit of Phra Phum.

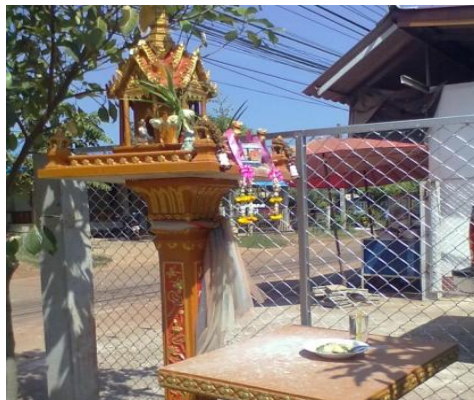


Figure 3.3.1-1 Mrs. Jar Saroy Thong's spirit house

She and her family members had invited a Wat Luang Brahmin priest (spirit doctor) Kun Long Bupha Bursakun to lead the ceremony. Her spirit house has placed in South corner of the house compound, where the house' shadow is not overlap follow the telling of spirit doctor. She was told to worship, pray and make daily offerings. She noted that after a spirit house had installed and making daily offerings, her family gained more good luck, health, happiness, wealth, and fortune.

3.4 *Khwan*

The concept of *Khwan* is very complex and is rather complicated in Thailand. A very strong folk belief among the ordinary villagers is that each and everyone on earth possesses the *Khwan*, which they all considered to be very important, so much, they believe, it is the essence of life.

Khwan is also believed to reside in animal, house, vehicle and animate plants. For human, there is a total of thirty two separated khwan which correspond to different parts of the body, of which the head is of foremost. *Khwan* will leave the body and absence when a person meets certain crises, for example, during childbirth and accident. *Khwan* will be back when we perform *Sukhwan* ceremony which can be held in various occasions or anytimes throughout the year such as marriage, threshold ceremonies before starting an interprise, ordination, pregnancy, when suffering from prolonged illness,ceremonies of reintergration, and dispelling bad luck to gain good luck called *Sia Krau* (Tambiah 1970: 223- 226).

In a human body there is one strong khwan which is known as the *winyan*. It is fixed within the body until the person dies, which is when the winyan had slip out of the body. The *winyan* is less the focus of interest and rites in life, but is the essence which goes on to a new existence after death. The *winyan* would go to heaven or be reborn again, depending on what the life was like in lifetime. People said that if proper death

ceremony was not performed, the *Winyan* would become a wandering ghost. (An interview, Jar Chet, a Wat Luang villager on 7 November 2012).

Being sick or unwell is believed to be that the *Khwan* is not all within the body, therefore a *Sukhwan* ceremony must be conducted to recall the *Khwan* and is also a means of expressing goodwill, prosperity, and good luck, and naturally it involves with the mental state of happiness. *Khwan* ceremony can be held on any days throughout the year as it is meant to commemorate specific events in an individual's life. An expression that used in the ceremony is *hai yu de me reng* (confer good living and strength), *hai kam hai koon* (give prosperity), *hai sod hai sai* (give luck), *me chok me chai* (have luck), and *hai ram hai ruai* (give wealth). *Khwan* ceremony is performed by *Pham Khwan* or *Moh Khwan* (Tambiah 1970: 224). In Wat Luang village, Kun long Bupha Bursakun, a popular *Moh Khwan* who able to conduct several kinds of *Sukhwan* ceremonies is always invited. They make offerings to *Khwan* called (*Pha Khwan*), there are differences *Pha Khwan* up to each *Khwan* ceremonies. The sacred words use in *Sukhwan* ceremony are different such as in *Sukhwan* for marriage, the meaning of the words refers to give the couple a prosperous life together. The couple is also instructed about proper behavior towards each other and towards relatives (An interview, Bupha Bursakun, Wat Luang Moh Khwan on July 8, 2012).

3.4.1 Sukhwan Ceremony

Sukhwan ceremony is an indigenous ritual which performed predominantly in Thailand and Laos. It conducts generally around 8- 11a.m. in the morning. The *Pha khwan* is the main item required, the centerpiece, a metal bowl piled high with cones of banana leaves and flanked with marigold flowers, incense, candles, and white string (symbolizes purity). Around the base there is a variety of food and drink - rice cakes, sweet pastries, boiled chicken, liquor, eggs and sticky rice. Eggs and rice are the most symbolic of prosperity and fertility. The participants gather together in a circle around the *Pha khwan* which sits on a low circular table, and those closest have one hand touching

this table. For those farther away and cannot touch the center table, they would touch the person in front of them to capture the flow of good energy and show a state of togetherness.



Figures 3.4.1- 1- 3 The *Khwan* ceremony with its offerings of the villagers

The *Khwan* ceremony is led by *Moh Khwan*. It helps ease people's minds. *Moh Khwan* calls on the spirits to cease wandering and return to the bodies of those present. He then asks the *Khwan* to bring well-being and happiness and to share in the feast that will follow. Lighting the candles, he joins his hands in prayer and addresses the "spirits" in Pali, chanting for about ten minutes.

Then a white thread of silk or cotton is tied on the right hand wrist of the individual who is being wished for his well being and good luck and also around the wrists of all guests who assemble to wish a person. if there is a guest of honor, the person being honored has some symbolic food placed in the hand, while white cotton strings (*sai sin*) are tied round his or her wrists, to the accompaniment of further benedictions. For maximum effect, these thread must have three knots in them. Everyone bows their heads, their right hand raise up in the traditional prayer position and the left hand hands out to the tier, sometime tier place foods or fruits in to their left hand during tying and also the tier is offered a little liquor. All of the participants always take turn and tie each other and use the above expression of blessing. The *Moh Khawn* would take a few pieces of string

from the centerpiece, and rub the person's wrist, back and forth - the first motion, toward the wrist, is done to bring luck to the person. The second, away from the wrist, is to remove all bad things from the person. He then ties a white string around one wrist and then the other.

The thread is worn by an individual normally for a minimum of three days and is untied thereafter (thread is not be cut). Recommended practice is to allow the thread to fall off on its own especially for the vehicles that the strings always has small currency note tie up under the wheel.



Figure 3.4.1- 4 The sacred strings are tied under the wheel

In recent times the thread in yellow, red and black colours are also used representing particular occasion; red symbolizing bravery, yellow representing faith and black sharing a person's loss or grief. In the ceremony, a feast of food is offered to all guests accompany by music. The *Sukhwan* ceremony, apart from bringing good luck, good good health, and prosperity it also enhances friendship and love among the villagers in the village.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND RITUALS

From the villagers' perspective, the indigenous beliefs and rituals still have performed several positive values for the individuals and society. Throughout human history, it has been the dominant factor in determining human behavior. One question arises "Why the indigenous beliefs and ritual persist?" Of course, they influence on local villagers and daily life of the society which are to create prosperity for the livelihood of the community and enhance social integration. If not so it would be extinct, villagers would have other effects and other ways for their satisfying. The main purposes of indigenous rituals though different in practices and activities are emphasized on results in the current realm that is for humans to receive satisfaction. (Phra Kru Pariyat Sarakan, 2009: 1)

This is in accordance with anthropological explanation of the functions of religion as Bailey and Peoples (1999: 210- 213) proposed that there are three types of functions of religion; cognitive, psychological, and sociological functions.

I found that the indigenous spirit beliefs and rituals have played one of the most important roles in Thai village society and provide the cognitive, psychological and sociological role for Wat Luang villagers. Religious beliefs and rituals are invaluable heritage and also one of the fundamental traditions of the society that guarantee the serenity and security for the people.

In this chapter, using anthropological theory of functions of religion, I will then analyze the role of indigenous beliefs, practitioners, and rituals in Wat Luang village as having cognitive, psychological and sociological roles, respectively.

4.1 Cognitive Role of Indigenous Beliefs and Rituals

The cognitive role of indigenous beliefs is to explain the social phenomena by referring to supernatural being as agents. Bailey and Peoples argued that the beliefs help satisfy the uniquely human desire to understand and also provide acceptable world views and guidance for proper conducts around them such as the movement of the sun, moon, and star. The origin myths explain things like the creation of the sky, land, rivers, water; where people, animals and plants come from; and where people got their language, tools, and other custom and beliefs.

Due to the fact that the lives of most of the people are related to agriculture so that agriculture is the main occupations which rely on nature and environment for sustenance themselves. Therefore, the simple folks observe indigenous beliefs and perform rituals such as the annual rituals of rocket festival or Bang Fai ritual and ancestral spirit rituals of which have been practiced related to spirit worship of supernatural help forecast rain, water, and even their well being. And in addition, for the Bang Fai ritual helps explain the custom events through the local legends of *Nang Ai*, *Phadaeng*, and *Phangkhi* of which the villagers are aware that the Nagas can cause a vast swamp to flood. The Toad king legend has told the history of Lord Buddha, Bodhisatta, who once was born as King of the Toads and the existence of sky-dweller, the sky god who can cause drought and rain.

It is necessary to ensure that the harvest would be plentiful and community prosperous, whether or not their wishes are granted as they believe. The villagers would know that the beliefs and rituals as their common practice can help to presume natural events in the coming seasons such as rain, water and environment around them so that they will be able to adopt their tasks or activities of everyday life to be in the suitable situation.

Furthermore, the belief and ritual of ancestral spirits particularly Chao Mae Song Nang is used to explain the history of the community which are known as the villagers' ancestors or the first group people who first came to settle their community. With the

secret power of them as same as Chao Mae Thong Thib and Chao Poh Nong Reur Kham have been stated that they are the root and branch of villagers' rituals from the ancient times, of which when they sick or hardship it would be from unpleased of the spirits. To be well they would consult with spirit practitioners and make offerings to the specific spirits who are causing such hardships. The people aware that should not behave against or bother the spirits that always involve with the villagers' lives; if not so the hardships will come to them.

Believing and organizing annual Naga festival of the villagers have helped local people and outsiders to understand its phenomena. The villagers especially the elderly have believed that it is the work of the Naga. However, the belief and ritual of the Nagas explain and reflected a belief in relationship between the Lord Buddha and the Naga of which they have told the phenomena as the myths of the creation of the Mekong River.

A legend of the Laos and northeastern Thailand stated that Indra is a Buddhist deity who gave command to the two Nagas to compete of digging up the land to make a path to the ocean and the winner would be rewarded a giant catfish. It was said that the Naga who dig the Mekong River became the winner so nowadays; this also has been used to explain the existence of giant catfish in the Mekong River. This legend reflects the creation and the making the Mighty Mekong River through a Buddhist deity, Indra. The other said that "the Nagas are the Mekong River's guardians and well-known as *Phi Chao Num Chao Tha*" (Legend of Phra That Phanom) When the Lord Buddha came down to earth to teach *Dharma*, then Nagas had faith in Buddhism and volunteered to be the guardians of the all Buddhist places built along the Mekong River (Pathom Hongsuwan, 2011: 34- 36).

It is clear that the belief in supernaturalism and its ritual then help provide expectation rainfall and other coming of the natural phenomenon and explanation about the origin myths for the villagers as the causes to have the custom and traditional events of the local beliefs and rituals.

4.2 Psychological Role of Indigenous Beliefs and Rituals

Indigenous beliefs and rituals are considered to be one of the important roles which have provided psychological and spiritual security for villagers. They help the people cope with personal emotion to become more peaceful at heart and more confident in life.

In this discourse, villagers would solve and remove their anxiety and hardship of life related to time of trouble, stress, misfortunes, injustice, sickness, accidents, and deaths. Each trouble can be controlled by means of ritual. For instance when there is hardship or sickness, the people call the spirit practitioners to find out which spirit is angry and how it can be appeased. Then they follow their direction and set up a special ceremony. The people use this kind of practice to eradicate fear (Bailey and peoples 1999: 211- 212).

4.2.1 Reducing anxiety

In the present day situation, the numbers of mentally ill people are increasing because of their personal harmful problems, which go unsolved in the village as well as in Thai society causing them to use alcohol and drug or to commit suicide. Also a medical theory said that when people get stress so they sleepless, without sleeping and rest it causes several diseases such as blood pressure, heart attack, stomach ache, nervous, and so forth (An interview, abbot of Wat Luang Village on November 6, 2012).

To solve these problems, the villagers always believe and trust in the spirits by taking all kinds of their hardships to the spirit practitioners, e. g, *Cham or Khun Tiam, Moh Kwan, Moh Doo*, including village headman who sometimes involve in the rituals. These categories of people are undertaken the roles as the consultants, advisors or psychological doctors for the villagers to solve such problems in secular affairs, whether it be personal (on family and daily personal problem) or communal problems (in communal affairs). It is clear that villagers always asked for advice, for instance

concerning healing, fortune- telling, the request for counsel for auspicious date to raise house pillars, to hold a wedding, to undertake a new job, to begin a journey and so on. Villagers go to ask ritual practitioners to comfort their minds in order to escape from difficulties (An interview with Khun Mae Ramphai, a Moh Doo of Wat Luang village on October 31, 2012).

As a spirit practitioner, Kun Mae Lamphai, a popular Wat Luang fortuneteller (*Moh Doo*), who I had an interview with, she said that the spirits of deities use her as a messenger to perform good deed for those who had believed in and needed for help with not only the fortune- telling and curing of health problems of which cause by offended spirits, but various related to secular affairs, personal and social problems that probably in a way to develop the societies except any kinds of things which against with the social norm and harm other will be unsolved e.g asking for a divorce because of having a second husband or wife (An interview, Kun Mae Ramphai on October 31, 2012).

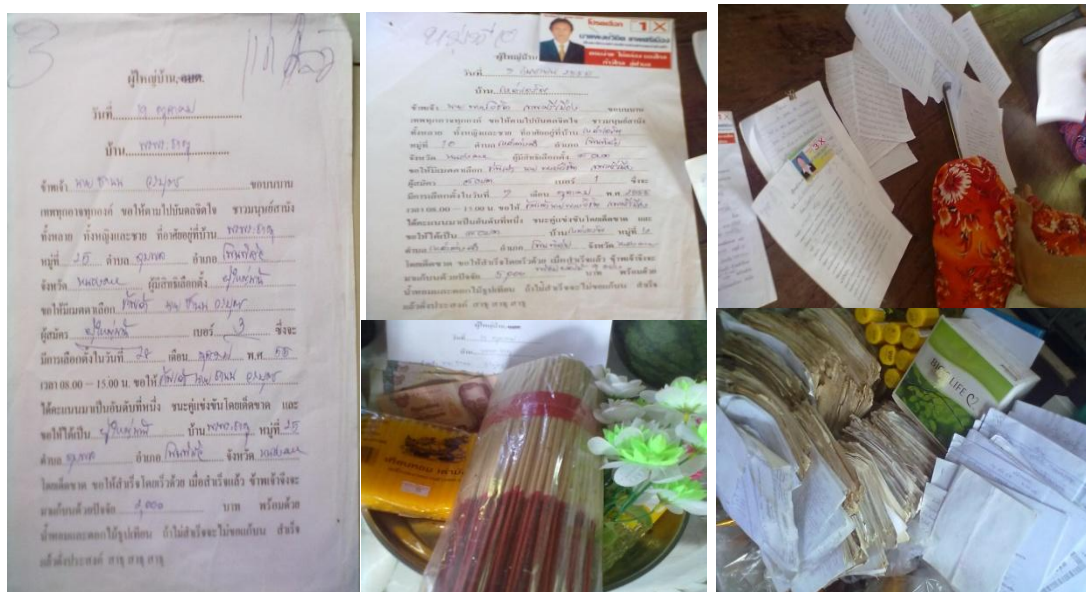


Figures 4.2 - 1- 3 Moh Doo and Tiam



Figures 4.2 – 4, 5 Local people representative come to seek assistance from Moh Doo

The persons who I meet during their seeking assistance from Kun Mae Lamphai are from villages nearby as the people representatives and common people, some of them brought compensational price as money, perfumes, candles, incenses, and flower garlands (*Kae Bun*) for the spirits who help them to win the village and communal election. They said that they have prayed and asked all the spirits to beat the people minds to select them as a people representative in the coming election. For instance, Mr. Chanun Vorabot, a village headman of Phorn Prathat Village, Moo 25, Tham Bun Chorm Pun, Amphoe Phone Phisai brought compensation things. While Mrs. Nupan Doung Ket, a villager of Touyang village, Phone Phisai district comes to have a fortunetelling because she plan to buy a tractor with the price 200,000 Thai Baht for her agricultural works (An interview with them on October 31, 2012).



Figures 4.2 - 6-10 Mr. Chanun Vorabot and other name list who brought compensational prices to *Moh Doo*



Figures 4.2 – 11-12 Mrs. Nupan Doung Ket comes to have a fortunetelling and consult with *Moh Doo*

Their concept is that powerful spirits and deities will take their sides, and protect them from any dangers if they practice the rituals as the ritual practitioners tell them to do so. Most of them say that we will be never harmed by the spirits if we hadn't bothered them. We will be supported and got more blessing from the spirits after practicing good deed, make merit and transfer to them with pure heart.

All of the indigenous beliefs and rituals have always enhanced a peaceful mind for the people. Indeed, the rite of the Naga, *Loi Krathong*, *Khwan* ceremony, and guardian rituals help ease people's minds as to keep mentally alert of love, fresh, pure, and repel misfortune and bad things all one's grudges, anger and defilements. It means to bring good Luck and good health, wealth fetching, Overcome all obstacles in life, good in business, smooth sailing in life, protection from harm and danger, good opportunity and successful in everything villagers do.

4.2.2 Providing Consolation Concerning Health Problems

Tiam or *Cham*, and *Moh Doo* are in fact "religious doctors" or healers. They play important role in the health system in the local communities. They perform their duties of preventing and exorcism of evil spirits in order to comfort the people's minds.

The villagers participate in such kind of rituals in their lives. Sickness is believed to be caused by unseen beings which can be anything from celestial beings, ancestral spirits, house spirits, wandering spirits or starving spirits, guardian spirit. *Tiam or Cham* is consulted to identify which spirit is angry and how to appease them. Then the offerings are made and offered to the specific shrine as the recommend of the *Tiam*.

Beside Kun Lum, a *Tiam*, who I had explained in the chapter I, I also had an observation regarding the role of the spirit practitioners with the fortune-teller, Kun Mae Lamphai, a 75 year old single woman, who said that she was a descendant of the deities in heaven. She has hold the tasks of healing and fortunetelling for more than 30 years and nowadays at least 15- 20 people come to seek assistance from her every day except Buddhist sabbath day. Amount this numbers 60 percent are local villagers. The various problems are also consulted.

Mrs. Noy, a merchandise vender nearby Wat Luang temple said that her sacred healing was miraculous efficacy. A few previous months, she used to consult Khun Mae Lamphai about her son's problems concerning why he is always ill and nonstop crying. Later on, she was told that the cause was because of her less love and less taking care of her son, so that she must bring the offering to Chao Mae Song Nang's shrine to beg for forgiveness and repentance. From then, her son has been cured and additionally she was dreamed about the numbers sticking in front of her room so she bought that number and finally, she won a lottery numbers sum more than 10,000 Baht (An interview on July 07, 2012).

The indigenous beliefs and rituals appear positively correlated with physical healths which appear to be able to cure the diseases cause by unseen being. At the same time, they provide spiritual and psychological consolation concerning such health, personal and social problems of the villagers.

4.3 Sociological Role of Indigenous Beliefs, Rituals and Practitioners

The indigenous beliefs and rituals through the spirit practitioners have been a powerful agency in society and perform many important social functions. Bailey and Peoples argued that a religion which has its principles and practices positively instill and maintain common values as a source of social cohesion and cooperation, to promote social integration, to enhance the sense of unity and reliance on the society's customs, lead to increased conformity to cultural norms, promises eternal reward for good deed and eternal damnation for bad deed.

Due to my observation in my fieldwork, I have found that the indigenous rituals also have certain sociological roles, such as enhancing village unity, transmitting village traditions, creating income for villagers, and inspiring art creativity, while spirit practitioners take the role of approval and enhancement community projects and concerning political direction for the villagers.

4.3.1 The Role of Indigenous Beliefs and Rituals

- Uniting the Community

In the sense of uniting the community, the indigenous belief and ritual has been the agency of social control providing a pattern for living and values. It helps young generation to become moral, disciplined citizens of the society.

Concerning the point that a community has the social roles and norms which its villagers must obey. It is believed that the spirits govern the villagers and that they will be punished if they behave against such social roles of security and norms. For instance in the last few years the villagers noted that there are many miracles happened, such as a man who stole a new motorcycle of a villager whose house located nearby Chao Mae Song Nang shrine was killed in an accident while he was riding away (An interview with Kun Long En, Wat Luang villager on July 07, 2012).

Villagers give local explanation referring to the indigenous beliefs “Those children who commit good deeds, bring good results, those who commit bad things, bring inappropriate results.” Another explanation, “Do not disparage if you don’t believe “ไม่เชื่ออย่าลบหลู่” These sayings caution the villagers not to commit bad things, and force or enable them to do good things in their daily lives. Last couple years, it was said that the spirits caused hardship for a man of the another villager who came to Wat Laung village pass by the shrine of Chao Mae Song Nang, this man just rushed into the shrine and said, “If you are strong enough let’s come to squeeze my testicles!” when he got up in the next morning his testicles were swollen so he went to consult with a spirit medium. Finally, he has to offer candles, incense, a bottle of wine, and a boiled chicken as the offerings to the spirits and beg for forgiveness, after this he disappeared from this village. It seems that the results happen either in the present time or later on (A telling of Kun pa Nupan, a Tiam of Wat Luang village on July 08, 2012).

It is clear that all of the indigenous principles related to supernatural and unseen beings always create fear and play an important role to social structure by providing a sense of morality, security and protection for the villagers of which especially the young people will never commit things that against the social roles and social norms as crime and delinquency. Thus, indigenous beliefs help maintain social conformity in the community.

The abbot of Wat Luang temple argues that the belief system of the indigenous has more power to create the security and enhance the morality. “As we can see in the present day, villagers are involved in political movements, which get influence from the modern world. The affluent society, people just empower themselves, their concept in this age has changed. They turn to rely on materialism, physical desire, sex, taking alcohol or using narcotics, gambling, money is their god, nothing is for free, and the principal of virtue and sin as same as spirit belief are on a decline, especially among the

younger generation people and thugs, so that their morality and behavior are very low and there is often fighting, cheating and killing. Sometimes, to go out or traveling from place to another, it is not convenient and safe because it may occur robberies or rape out especially for female sex when doing journey at night time. This problem is believed to be an obstacle to community integration.” (An interview with abbot of Wat Luang temple on November 6, 2012.

The indigenous beliefs and rituals also have been used as apparatus to achieve of social integration. Through the role of the spirit practitioners that they have played an important role as examples of the benefit of doing good deeds which come as a source of social cohesion. All of them are elderly people whom have followed popular Buddhist religious precepts (*Kon Yu nai sin kin nai tham*) so they are well- known as the best examples of model behavior people in the society.

They are much more involved in educational system. The people are influenced and taught with the good moral behavior such as villagers should be honest and virtuous, children should obey their parents and elderly, should not tell lie, husband and wife should be faithful to each other and so forth.

They are the important people who provide the basics of religious teaching of virtue and sin, happiness and suffering, prosperity and degeneration, in order to improve people’s minds to behave to each other as good people knowing how to return a kindness to the ones who are full of beneficences with a kind heart, loving to give without expecting anything in return and make merit, to like peace and solve any problems by peaceful means, willing to forgive and easily forget the past, cheerful and enjoying only the life that lays before them.

For the indigenous rituals, it has clearly provided families and relatives a great opportunity to meet each other and do activities together in order to enhance the family’s happiness. It is found that the people who work in the cities always visit homes on such

dates of the cultural rituals especially during Naga fireball, Loi Krathong, Boat racing, and rocket festival.

Apart from strengthening the relationship among family members and villagers in Wat Luang, these rituals also have the role at international level between Thailand and Laos. Since the local villagers are said to be the descendants of Phuan ethnic group who migrated from Xieng Khuang Province, northern Laos, as a result, they have relatives on the both sides of the Mekong River and always come to participate in the local annual rituals. Rituals provide moral support and courage to the community against struggles and crisis. They play the role of controlling the behaviors of humanities and create collaboration and unity within the human group.

In sum, it can be seen that indigenous beliefs and rituals help reinforce the social values by which individuals control the action of self and others and through which the society is perpetuated cohesively and integrated.

- Transmitting Village Traditions

Another role of indigenous belief and ritual is to transmit the village tradition. The villagers still have their culture beliefs in indigenous belief which is a combination of the basic beliefs in Buddhism, Brahman and spirit of supernatural. These kinds of beliefs are reflected in the annual traditions, celebrations, and rituals held throughout the year mix or take turn with Buddhist rituals (Villagers tradition revolve around 12 months of the lunar calendar and called Heet Sib Song include indigenous rituals). Villagers live in growing culture since ancient times. All indigenous rituals are different in practical details but have a main purpose is to create prosperity for the livelihood to receive satisfaction of the community as a common thing in current realm. (Phrakru Pariyat Sarakan, 2009: 464).

The principles and practices of the belief systems enhance in community harmony. Because it is a cultural combination of the entire community inherited from

forefathers beliefs, who pioneered various ceremonies and those beliefs have been accepted and adopted by the new generations up until the present day (Phra Kru Pariyat Sarakan, 2009). The spirit practitioners are said to be the transferors of a good cultural belief from ancestors who believed in such beliefs that have always existed in harmony.

To trace back the ancient Thai custom and culture there is a stone of Chao Mae Song Nang statues at Hay Sok temple which said to be a relic left and it is very useful evidence for us to study related to the regional historical context. Besides being a valuable treasure, it is one of the most important historical evidences of Isan- Lao connections as well of which Wat Luang villagers were aware that they are also the descendant of Chao Mae Song Nang.



Figure 4.3.1-1 Chao Mae Song Nang statue at Hay Sok temple

- Creating Income for The Villagers

Anytime when there are festivals and ceremonies, spirit practitioners and village head men are the festival organizers of the community. The festivals attract both local and international tourists to come to visit or participate so the villagers earn income and benefits by selling the services and products. For example, during in particularly annual boat racing festival and Naga Fireball Festival, it was said to be the best selling time for various services and products such as transportation, accommodations, the local hotels,

guest houses, hostels, and the entertainment parks were full, while the clothing, T-shirts and souvenirs which have Naga symbols or Naga fireballs, drinks, and foods considered as the products which have the good demands (Also see figures 2.3.4-1 and 3.1.2- 3, 4, 5).

The spirit practitioners themselves such as *Moh Doo*, *Moh Khwan*, *Tiam* also would get the compensation from their performing the rituals or services. Some local villagers have works in the local Naga pure drinking water factory, Big Snake Guest House, and even Spirit House Shop by create spirit houses and sale, while the carpenters create the jobs of carving the images of the principles of the beliefs to decorate or in the work relate to the construction of the local temples.



Figures 4.3.1- 2, 3 The Local carpenters with coworkers carve the door for Wat Luang temple hall

It is an economic system that the villagers may get additional income from the rituals and beliefs. When they have better living with wealthy encourage them to become benevolent and have something make merit and help others as their poor and needy fellowmen. The rituals help promote tolerance and brotherhood in the community.

- Inspiring Art Creativity

Besides the mental and physical roles above, indigenous beliefs and rituals system has influenced strong inspiration for Thai art, as particularly architecture and painting. It is certain that every house especially traditional residential architecture consists of a spirit altar, a house compound might has a spirit house, rooflines are steeply pitched and often decorated at the corners or along the gables with motifs related to the Naga, which is a mythical serpent long believed to be a spiritual protector. Before the construction of buildings such as houses, department stores, hotels, shops, and so on, they have to consult with spirit practitioners or spirit mediums to make sure that such buildings are not unsatisfied by spirits. A ceremony is held to ask for permission and before using the buildings they also have to organize a white string tying ceremony. It is tied cover up the buildings for good luck, good fortune, prosperity and protecting bad spirits, but generally to appease the spirits and ask for blessing.



Figures 4.3.1-4-6 Spirit altar, spirit house as guardian spirit and the roof of Phra Suk museum in the village

In temple architecture of the local community as same as throughout Thailand have involved to the Naga which always consists of the Naga images represent temple guard and bodyguard of Buddha. It is reflected in images of Buddha meditation under a canopy of the seven-headed Naga and atop lotus pedestals some time Nagas are sculpted on the doors or windows of the hall in the temples.



Figures 4.3.1-7, 8 Wat Luang temple hall's doors and Buddha statue in Wat Luang village

The Chaophor Nong Reur Kham sculpture shows the co-existence between Buddhism and the ancestral spirits. It has designed and built stick with Buddha statue by means to worship him as same as worship Lord Buddha. It inspired the villagers to throw all their forces into the construction of the beautiful shrine located in Nong Reur Kham monastery as a symbol of supreme civilization and advancements of the community. It is said that to know how the development of regional people is to observing their local temples.



Figures 4.3.1- 9-11 Chao Pho Nong Reur Kham statue and his shrine

Due to the belief that the indigenous beliefs can protect people from harm, gain prosperity, good luck and good fortune so many of the villagers make and wear the pendants, and even tattoo which have the image of the Naga, the Chao Mae, and the Chao Poh. The pendants make of gold, ashes, bronze, silver, and other kinds of metals. The sacred strings also are tied on their wrists.

4.3.2 The Role of Spirit Practitioners

- Community leaders

Spirit practitioners in Wat Luang village hold an important role in political system by acting as community leaders. Somehow, they are made up from respectable elders that have experience, knowledge and honored by the communities. All of them are always elderly people and leaders. Some of them have been ordained as a priest before so that they have the religious concepts in their everyday practices to utilize good deed as a tool to create moral and courage the community.

The rituals, ceremonies, and celebration throughout the year are hosted by leaders of each of the beliefs as *Moh Khwan*, Brahmin will lead Brahnam ceremony (*Khwan ritual*). The government particularly Provincial, District, Communal, and village officers host Naga Fireballs and annual Boat Racing Festival. *Moh Doo and Tiam* will host spiritual rituals and ceremonies. It seems that they all are co-operated with each other to take the opportunities to claim and teach the villagers especially the young in order to make the unity, love and friendship away from quarrel and using drugs abuse and so forth.

It is believed that the good practitioners or leaders who hold their duty in the rituals must come from being a good person, good moral ethics, kind hearted and perform their duties without regards to reward or material in returns.

In this discourse, it is certain that the local political system of rural community is much more involved with the spirit practitioners in order to maintain the confidence and enhance the community.

Spirit practitioners also take a role as a court, in certain cases or arguments which could not be settled by the disputants would be taken to head men and *Moh Khwans* to judge. Generally the disputants were willing to obey the headmen or the *Moh Khwan's* judgment.

- Approving and Enhancing Community Projects

The community often creates new communal projects and take on the role of organizers such as construction of roads, religious buildings, reservoirs, forest and water conservation projects. In 2012 there is reconstruction of a road about 50 metres in the village so the village headman and *Moh Khwan* as the villager leaders approved and led the project. In the community there is a water management project called Huy Luang Project located in Donkong village connect to Wat Luang village. This project also was approved by them. It was said that the headmen and *Moh Khwan* are selected as the community's representatives to study in detail about the project with the belief that they will spread the benefit to the villagers (An interview with Mr. Nuthi Lawatphum, The village headman of Donkong village on 8 July 2012).



Figure 4.3.2- 1 Road reconstruction



Figures 4.3.2- 2, 3 Huy Luang water Project

In addition, the villagers sometimes are concerned or advised on political issues particularly at the time of a general election to select the headman of the village, commune, district, province, and a party. The villagers might select people representatives up to their recommending.

It shows that the spirit practitioners are taking on the roles of community leaders. The villagers always respect and believe their works and advices. With their leading most of the works are perfectly done.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary of the Research

This research aims to identify the persistence of indigenous beliefs and rituals and their roles in the Wat Laung village, Phon Phisai District, Nong Khai Province, Northeastern Thailand.

The thesis uses qualitative research by conducting fieldwork from June, 2012-March, 2013. The data was obtained from documents and fieldworks. The participant observation and the interview of the villagers are the major tools used in the research. The spirit practitioners (*Cham* or *Tiam*, *Moh Doo*, *Moh Khwan*), influenced people such as the community's leader (village headmen) and the religious practitioners (Monks, nun moths, festival organizers), are the key informants.

The present-day Wat Luang populations are Buddhists but they also perform rituals related to various kinds of spirits which complementary to Buddhist rituals. Their citizenship is Thai but ethnically speaking they are Phuan, who migrated from Xieng Khuang Province, northern Laos. Today, they still have some contacts with Laos people especially religious activities e.g the villagers cross the border to join That Luang and *Sangkran* festival in Laos, while Laotians come to join the Naga fireball festival and the boat racing festival in the village, and so forth. *Heet Sib Song*, the 12 month rituals based on the on lunar cycle are also carried out by the villagers. Furthermore, the 14 roles(*Kong Sib Si*), the traditional practices still influence on villagers' lives.

The research findings are the following:

5.1.1 The Persistence of Indigenous Beliefs and Rituals in Wat Luang Village

It is found that even though villagers dealing with modern world of modern science and technology, but their indigenous beliefs and rituals as customs and cultures in the community such as the belief in Naga, ancestral spirits, Guardian Spirits Belief- *Phra Phum Chao Thi*, and also the belief in Khwan are remained.

The Naga is believed to be the symbol of greatness, good fortunes, the protector, the creator and the guardian of the Mekong River and said to be a liberal animal to the Lord Buddha. Sometimes said to be the demigod or sky god and also a symbol of water deity which can bring prosperity and fertility to humans. Every year, at the end of Buddhist lent day, 15 full moon of the eleventh lunar month, the local people especially the elders gather together bring alms offering, receive Buddhist precepts, and listen to the Dharma preaching in the day time, while at early evening there is a *Bong Soung* ceremony to respect the Nagas and asks for blessing, also asking Nagas to spit up the fireballs as usual. The Nagas are believed to come up and shoot fireballs as offering to the Lord Buddha at night, this phenomena is became the annual World Naga Fireballs Festival that attract local people and outsiders to view.

To accompany the Naga Fireballs Festival, there is a rite of *Loi Krathong* festival which in a purpose to ask for forgiveness from *Pra Mae Khongkha*, and to worship the Buddha's foot-print. There are two items, the *Krathongs* are floated it in the river and the lanterns are blown up in the sky at night, a symbol to fly away bad things, misfortune, letting go of all one's grudges, anger and defilements.

The rocket festival is another ceremony that also reflects the belief in Naga. The ritual is involved with the sky god, *Thaen*, a spirit which rules the sky and guardian spirits of the communities who take care of villagers. It is performed to pay respect and confer prosperity, good health and to send rain at the right time of the year so that the villagers achieve the fertility of crops and vegetables.

It is also found that the villagers also believe in ancestral spirits of *Chao Mae Song Nang*, *Chao Mae Thong Thip*, and *Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham*, whom said to be sacred and can protect them from harm. They still hold annual ritual to appease and respect the ancestral spirits by combining with the boat racing festival. The ritual was organized and joint by the spirit practitioners and participants of which the mediums, *Moh Khwan*, and village headmen, must not absent. In the morning they brought three sets of offering, two sets called *Khan Ha* are made to invite *Chao Mae Thong Thip* and *Chao Phor Nong Reur Kham* to participate in the ritual at the *Chao Mae Song Nang's* shrine, and one set called *Khan Peat* for inviting *Chao Mae Song Nang* to the ritual.

After the ritual in the *Chao Mae Song Nang's* shrine finished, the boat racing begin on the bank of Mekong River of Wat Luang temple when the head of the Provincial Administration Organization (PAO), Mr. Yuthana Sitabut and the colleges, the head of Sub district Administration Organization (SAO) and Wat Luang village head men, who are the supporters are the special guests in the ceremony. The festival said to strengthen love, unity and promote harmony among the villagers.

Another indigenous belief is guardian spirits belief- *Phra Phum Chao Thi* which is believed the lord of the place the presiding of the area or the rightful owner of the place. The people believe that when they respect, pray, and make daily offering to *Phra Phrum* they will gain fertility and prosperity for their household. The offering to *Phra Phum* consists of consists of water, Chinese tea and soft drinks in bottles and tins, coconut milk, various fruits such as oranges, bananas, pineapples, and apples, sweets, chewing betel, small tray of banana leaf, and cigars or cigarettes may also offered.

The other kind of belief is *Khwan*, which is believed to reside in human being, animal, house, vehicle and animate plants. Each and everyone on earth possesses the *Khwan*, which they all considered to be very important, so much, they believe, it is the essence of life. However, they all fear that it can go astray or get lost, for example, during

childbirth. To get the soul back, the person could engage a ritual master to contact the wandering soul and call it to come back to reside in the person. The ritual is held in various occasions such as marriage, pregnancy, ordination, threshold ceremonies before starting an enterprise, ceremonies of reintegration, and when suffering from prolonged illness. They make *Pha Khwan* up to each *Khwan* ceremony, the main item required are a metal bowl piled high with cones of banana leaves and flanked with marigold flowers, white string, candles, and incense with a variety of food and drink - rice cakes, sweet pastries, boiled chicken, liquor, eggs and sticky rice. The belief helps ease people's minds and its ritual by a means of gaining good luck, and prosperity, naturally associated with the mental state of happiness. The white cotton strings are tied round his or her wrists by *Moh Khwan*, to the accompaniment of further benedictions.

5.1.2 The Role of Indigenous Beliefs and Rituals

Indigenous beliefs, rituals, and practitioners play significant roles in the village. They play cognitive, psychological and sociological roles for Wat Luang villagers.

- The cognitive role of indigenous beliefs and rituals is to explain the social phenomena, things and events around them by referring to supernatural beings as agents. Along the local origin myths help to understand things as the causes of having the custom and traditional events of the local beliefs and rituals.

- The psychological role of indigenous beliefs and rituals is analyzed as to help people to be peaceful at heart and more confident in life. The villagers would remove anxiety related to trouble, accidents, stress, injustice, misfortunes, sickness, and deaths after performing some kind of spirit rituals.

- The indigenous beliefs, rituals and practitioners are said to be one of an important agency providing sociological roles for the villagers. The beliefs and rituals help provide norms, social control mechanisms, unify the community, transmitting village tradition, creating income for the villagers, inspiring art creativity, and practitioners have

played as the role of community leaders, approving and enhancing the community projects. They are the essential parts of the social machinery provide morality and law, part of complex system by which the villagers are enable to live together in an orderly arrangement of social relations.

5.2 Discussion

The result of the study shows that the persistence of indigenous beliefs and rituals which have played valuable functions in today's rural and suburban villagers in the Northeastern Thailand. Such rituals co-exist with the rituals of Buddhism and Brahmanism. One can argue that even if the villagers have adapted to modern society, they have not abandoned the indigenous belief; its functions cited in this study show that it still persists and have a stranglehold on the villagers. This studying is congruent with Kanako Ueno, who concluded in her research, **Temple of the Emerald Buddha: Reflections of the Complexity of the Religious System in Thai Society** that the three religious elements, Buddhism, Hindu, and animism related and incorporated to each other and practiced by all Thais especially educated in the urban and rural (Kanako Ueno,1999: 125- 126).

Another view confirming my findings related the persistence of the belief and ritual of Naga was Lalana Soakchuwong, who argued in the book **The Giving of Meaning and Reason for Existence of The Naga Fireballs Ritual in The Age of Globalization** that the belief in Naga and its ritual in the village will continue in the long future according to the local villagers will continue to carry out their Buddhist rituals as culture and custom from their ancestors (Lalana Sakchuwong, 2005: 147-148).

I have agreed with viewpoints of Tambiah, an anthropologist, who stated in his book **Buddhism and the Sprit Cults in North- East Thailand** that indigenous belief are strongly associated with Buddhism (Tambiah, 1970: 377), but a point of his finding of which said that indigenous belief are found and practiced by among uneducated people in the suburban, rural or poor areas, towns, and cities is different from my result. In fact, the

indigenous beliefs and rituals are involved by all kinds of the people especially the rich and educated people in the community. For example, most of the rich are always conducted *Khwan* ritual several times during a year and in their house compound have the spirit houses for the guardian spirit belief- *Phra Phum Chao Ti*. The ritual in particularly, Naga, Boat Racing, and Rocket festival are supported the budgets and organized by educated people as the Thai government such as the Provincial Administration Organization, Subdistrict Administration Organization, and local people who are the influent persons in the community. In doing so, and because both, the beliefs and rituals had been co-existing with Buddhism as the state religion so indigenous beliefs and rituals will never die in the village as in other villages of Isan area as well. They will continue to do so for generations to come.

In sum, the research findings shows that the patterns of the persistence and role of indigenous beliefs and rituals are a part of the socialization process in the community setting. They have closely associated with the current field data of the village particularly in connection with its social structure, historical, economic, arty, political, and educational related to socio- cultural context of Wat Laung village. They have directly and indirectly benefited the villagers and community civilizations through the continued succession of rituals and cultural celebration. If we want to know about the social structures, indigenous beliefs and rituals should not be paid close attention and further study.

5.3 Contribution to Thai Studies

As this research is written in English, it will then be a reference document for foreigners who intend to study this related topic. I hope that the result of the research provides a clearer perspective of the persistence and role of indigenous beliefs and rituals in the midst of social changes in current present day context Wat Luang village, Phone Phisai distric, Nong Khai provine. Although this research is conducted in Wat Luang village, its findings should able to apply to other villages in the northeastern part of

Thailand as well. Although Lalana Soakchuwong, who also conducted fieldwork in this village, she focused only on the Naga Fireballs ritual, where my research study all indigenous beliefs and rituals in this village.

5.4 Suggestion for Further Research

There are many more aspects for those who are willing to study the Wat Luang village such as they may investigate the economic relation of Wat Luang villagers and Laotians in the opposite side of the Mekong River. While the comparative study or the influence of cultural aspect of language and culture of Laotians on the Wat Luang villagers are also a hot topic that helps us identify the differences or sameness of the two areas.

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Biography

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