

## Conservation of Lao tradition and culture in Thachampa village

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**Abstract:** Thachampa village was founded in 1988 in Xaythany District, Vientiane Capital Province Lao PDR with 482 people. Most people migrated from many areas of the Lao PDR. In period of 1989-1993, villagers were in trouble situation, since agricultural lands were flooding in rainy seasons, insufficiencies of water in dry seasons, products of agriculture were damaged. Dug canal for paddy field from Ngum River was planned and constructed by farmers. Water was pumped by diesel machine. An irrigation canal project of plain along Ngum River was planned and constructed in 1998. After that rice and some vegetable cultivations are improved and livelihoods of farmers became better. The culture and tradition of Thachampa village were changed due to development in social economic areas likely in other parts of the Lao PDR. The change was a signal of lost in local culture and tradition. Therefore, orientation meeting workshop was held in June 2009 at the Faculty of Agriculture, National University of Laos, then the School activities in tradition-cultural conservation was conducted. A local cultural museum was constructed in 2010 which became a cultural center of the village.

**Key words:** Culture, tradition, conservation, local, museum.

### Introduction

Developments in sectors of agriculture, trade, industrial constructions, supermarkets, services, tourisms, post offices, communication are policies of Lao government to increase live level of Laotian. In the face of development, tradition and culture changed negatively. Lao tradition and culture are knowledge of Lao ancestors and important in the life of Laotians. Since tradition and culture make solidarity, friendships, happy, peaceful and prosperity among people. The tradition and culture also make people to conserve environments. Therefore, Lao government pays attention on traditional cultural conservations. This paper explains the activities of traditional and cultural conservations of Thachampa villagers to increase their live levels.

**Study area:** Thachampa is an Evacuated Village, founded in 1988 nearby Ngum River (Nam Ngum). It located in the zone of Hua Jiem Village Group, in the Northern of Xaythany District, Vientiane Capital Province, it is 28 km far from office of Xaythany District and 39 km far from Vientiane Capital City (Fig. 1). Thachampa bordered by Natan Village to the north, Hathviengkham to the east, Verntiene to the west and Somsamay to the south. Most people migrated from many areas of Lao PDR, especially from Northern Provinces of Lao PDR, especially from Houaphanh and Xiengkhouang Provinces, some from central province particular Vientiane.

Thachampa population is 482 people (259 men and 223 women), consisted of 7 ethnic groups such as *Taidam*, *Taidaeng*, *Phouan*, *Khmou*, *Hmong*, *Meugn* and *Moy*.

The ground road, electricity, irrigation system, 3 year-school, Local Cultural Museum are available in Thachampa. Total land area of the village is 161.78 ha of which 10 ha of building area, 69.43 ha of paddy field, 14 ha of gardens, 23 ha of pasture-fallow and natural fish ponds occupied areas of 1.5 ha.

Subsistence agriculture is sticky rice of local and improved variety, watermelon, yard long bean, papaya, galangals are cash crops. Cassava is the industrial crop of Thajampa extended by Chinese Cassava Flour Company located in Naxone Village of Pak Ngum District. Domestic animals are the cash income for child schooling, health and household expenses. The most dominant domestic animals are cows of 694 heads, and water buffalos of 87 heads, goats of 38 heads. However Thachampa also traditionally raises chickens and ducks of 1,603 and 400 heads, respectively for daily income and food. Friend animals are dogs of 98 heads.

**History and development of Thachampa Village:** Thachampa Village founded in 1988. After Lao National Revolution (LNR) in 1975, the policy of Lao P.D.R government was development of Social and Economies to improve livelihood or increase living standard of villagers (Chanpheng, 2010). In addition, the government of Lao P.D.R determined to eradicate extreme poverty and move beyond the category of least developed country by the year of 2020. The government encouraged villagers who practice shifting cultivation to adopt sedentary forms of agriculture. This policy emphasized decrease and forward to stop slash and burn cultivation. The aim is to reduce the area of steeper sloping land being use for crop production through the adoption of permanent crop and animal production and maintenance of forest to guarantee sufficiency of foods (Natal University of Laos, NAFRI and NAFES. 2005). In that time, Lao government especially Xaythany District Governor need to develop plain areas along Ngum River. Primarily, forty households of farmers (who evacuated during Lao war from Xiengkhouang and Houaphanh Provinces) migrated to Nong Ngon area from Phonthong, and Phon-gnang Villages, Vangvieng District, Vientiane Province. Nong



Fig. 1. Location of Thajampa Village

Ngon area was a plain area along Ngum River. The migrations of farmers were directed by Grandfathers named Pheuagn, Pengbong, and Pheng. At first, they had not any lands for agriculture since land areas still own by local villages. Therefore, they requested lands of 142 ha from Natan Village and 19 ha from Veurntene Village through Xaythany District Governor, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Vientiane Capital Provincial Governor. Thachampa village was considered from 20<sup>th</sup> May 1988 to 2<sup>nd</sup> June and named by *Xaythany District* (Chanpheng, 2010).

In period of 1989-1993, villagers was in trouble situation, because of agricultural lands were flooding in rainy season. Moreover, insufficiencies of water for agriculture in dry seasons, products of agriculture were damaged. Low yield of seed drill paddy field, letting farmers in insufficient foodstuff particularly rice. Therefore some households came back to previous villages, some moved to other villages, remaining only 27 households in the village. Therefore, Thachampa contacted Agricultural and Forestry Office of Xaythany District. Thereafter, dug canal for paddy field from Ngum River was planed and constructed by farmers. The canal was 500 m long, 3 m depth and 3 m wide, water was pumped by diesel machine. However, it was less usefulness and handed over back to Agricultural and Forestry Office of Xaythany District later. An Irrigation canal project of plain along Ngum River was planed and constructed in 1998. After that rice and some vegetable cultivation are improved and livelihood of farmers better. By that time, the electricity and ground road are available (Chanpheng, 2010).

Thachampa Village (2003) reported rice was 384 kg/person/year (in 2002). It increased 286 kg/person/year (90 kg/person/year in 1998). By the year 2009, semi-permanent houses were 34%, permanent houses were 50% (hut and simple wooden houses in 1998). Hundred percent of rice, vegetable and cash crop cultivations used machines of hand tractors, some electricity water pumps, rice threshing machines.

**Change in Culture of ethnic groups in the Lao PDR:** Lao P.D.R has at least officially 49 ethnic groups, of which were categorize 4 families of language. The Lao-

Tai language family contributed 8 ethnic groups; Mon-Khmer Language family contributed 32 ethnic groups; the chine-Tibet language family contributed 7 ethnic groups and the Hmong-Iew Mien language family contributed 2 ethnic groups. The ethnic groups of Lao P.D.R have a common culture. The Lao culture is harmonized and ultimate combination of all ethnic groups. The Lao spoken and written languages (national language) is a common language, however each ethnic group has and still preserves own dialect, customs, culture, tradition and life styles. The ethnic culture and tradition relate and difference in their agriculture, livelihood and agricultural tools (Department of Ethnic Affairs. 2008). Bounthein (2008) reported that the Lao culture and tradition changed due to social economic developments of three countries as Lao PDR, Thailand and China. Each country encourages on cooperation in these areas of development. The changing in culture and tradition will continuous in the future. Due to conveniences in transportations and communications, opening widely investment in industrial constructions, supermarkets, services, tourisms, post offices, communications. The communications provide factors of modern culture. The adoption of modern culture let to change in local culture, tradition, customs, beliefs, ceremonies, myths, needs, agriculture and livelihoods (young farmers from farm migrate to cities). The change of culture and tradition result in appearance of categories: 1) Adoption of modern implements; 2) Adoption of new religions; 3) Change in houses; 4) Change in wedding ceremonies; 5) Disappearance in ancient cultures and 6) Create new feeling and new livelihoods especially young generations.

**Ethnic groups, cultures of Thachampa Village:** Thachampa is a village which is constituted by 7 ethnic groups such as *Taidam, Taidaeng, Phouan, Khmou, Hmong, Meugn, Moy*. Among these ethnic groups, 259 villagers believe i Buddhism (53.73%) and 218 do animism (46.27%). *Taidam, Taideng, Taimeuag and Phouan* are in the Lao-Tai language Family. The Khmou is in Mon-Khmer language family, Hmong is the Hmong-Iew Mien language family and *Moy* is in the Mon-Khmer language Family (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Thachampa ethnic group population

Ethnic groups	Households		Populations	
	Numbers	Percent	Numbers	Percent
Taidam	45	51.1	215	44.6
Taidieng	2	2.3	16	3.3
Taimeuagn	1	1.1	7	1.5
Taiphouan	30	34.1	188	39.0
Khmou	4	4.6	25	5.1
Moy	5	5.7	24	5.0
Hmong	1	1.1	7	1.5

Sources: Bountheing Sousawath, 2008 and data survey, 2010.

Taidam, Taideang not follow Buddhism, but instead practice animism. The most Tai animism, the household spirits are the most important spirits, as these spirits

represents the ancestors who have passed on. Families are the most important social unit, families will live together and the oldest mate will be the head of the household.

Some groups will practice polygamy, but that is less common today (Department of Ethnic Affairs, 2008).

Taimeuagn and Taiphouan followed Theravada Buddhism in practice and local animism. They believe spirits known as phi (Lao word), that reside in all things, such as the household, forests, river, sky, tree and their own and ancestors. Every village has a temple. The temple is center of the Lao culture and tradition. Each family or house will have son enter the monk-hood. The Lao (Phouan) have 12 customs, that means they will make merit (festival) in each month of the year. In general, Taimeuagn and Taiphouan people believe in Kwans which are body spirits of 32 Kwans in each person, and each is thought to be a guardian of a certain organ in the body. If this is seen as a problem, then a ceremony is performed to bring the kwans back (Department of Ethnic Affairs, 2008).

Thaidam, Taidaeng, Taimeuagn and Phouan lived in plain along rivers. They grow glutinous rice. They are also skilled at growing vegetables, such as sweet potato, cassava, Chinese cabbage, onion, garlic, chili, etc. They breed cows, buffalos, pig, dogs, and others. They also make handicrafts such as bamboo baskets and mats. The Taidam is well known for their weaving skills, with the worm making elegant tablecloths, phaasin and other items for sale.

Khmou, like other ethnic groups believe in spirits of house, water, forest and others. Each village must have at least one spiritual master to defeat the spirits. After the upland rice harvesting there will be festival (New Rice Festivals). The Khmou Generally practise slash and burn agriculture of upland rice. They also plant cassava, taro, maize, peanut and vegetable. They have some pigs, chickens, and hunting (Department of Ethnic Affairs, 2008).

Moy ethnic groups migrated from northern area of Vietnam settled in Done Village (Ban Done), in Xamneua

District Houaphanh Province. Moy believe animism, such as the spirits of ancestors, dead parents, the household, the village, the sky and water. Moy have many feast celebration during the year (New Year, Rain Asking for agriculture, the new rice sacrifices will be made during feast). Moy grow rice of wet paddy and slash and burn methods (Department of Ethnic Affairs, 2008).

Hmong lived in Laos since the middle of the nineteenth century, migrated from the Tibetan region through China entering Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. Hmong believe in animism or spirits of their dead parent, household, village, sky, forest and rivers. The Hmong practises mainly slash and burn cultivation of rice and maize. They also grow vegetables, cassava, taro. They are skilled at rearing of cattle, horse, goat, pigs and chickens. Women are skillful at knitting and embroidery of different style and patterns. They are well known for the elaborate and ornate embroidery and batik patterns (Department of Ethnic Affairs, 2008).

**Culture and tradition conservation of Thachampa Village:** The culture and tradition of Thachampa Village changed due to development in social economic areas likely in other parts of the Lao PDR. Many things presented the change in culture and tradition as well as numbers and using of agricultural, cotton-silk weaving, fishing, and domestic tools decreased since 1998. Traditional agricultural tools were rare and could not find in the village. Local stories, songs, dances, sports or games were less or not in display. Many farmers could not display stories, song and dances. Young generations do not know the local sport or games, do not know how to make line from cotton and silk. These situations of change were signal of lost in local culture and tradition.



**Fig. 2.** School students showing their Culture and Tradition

**1. Orientation meeting workshop:** Under cooperation of Faculty of Agriculture; National University; PADETC (Laos) and Center for South East Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto University (Japan), Toyota Foundation, the Mutual Learning Traditional Cultural Project has been established. In order to succeed its goal, the orientation meeting-cum-workshop was held on the 16th June 2009 at the Faculty of

Agriculture, National University of Laos in Vientiane. The workshop was attended by 20 people from Xaythany Distric, PADETC Project, Faculty of Agriculture, Kyoto University. Thachampa governors also attended in that workshop. The workshop agreed in conservation of traditions and cultures in Thachampa and Dongbang Villages (Inthong, 2009).



**Fig. 3.** Museum under construction

**2. School activities in traditional cultural conservation :** From middle of 2009 to beginning of 2010, Faculty of Agriculture, PADETC and CSEAS conducted conservation of traditions and cultures in school of Thachampa including Dongbang Village, supported by the Toyota Foundation and Kyoto University's programs. The conservation was conducted in practice by students of KASIKONE ASA UNIT (Agricultural Volunteer). The conservation consisted of 3 activities: Schooling sanitary, Lao culture and tradition, song train, introduction farmer tools for livelihoods and finally tool using train. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2010 the contest was held in the Faculty of Agriculture, National University (Fig. 2)

**3. Local Cultural Museum in Thachampa Village:** Temple hall of Lao Village are the place where farmers meeting in. It is likely center of solidarity, center of tradition, culture and activity of the farmer. Since, there was no any club and temple in Thachampa Village. Faculty of Agriculture and Center for South East Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto University designed or planed construction of house for center activities of farmers. The house was named Local Cultural Museum (LCM) and it was modeled by Thachampa farmers (Fig. 3). The construction was under advices of Government Office, and Cultural Office of Xaythany District. It was also under advices of Dean of The Faculty of Agriculture, coordinated by team of Mutual Learning Traditional Cultural Project from Faculty of Agriculture. It was also cooperated and gave convenience by many institutions particularly PADETC and the neighbor villages. Construction started at the end of 2009 and completed on the 28th March 2010. The Local cultural museum construction spent budget of 7,156.88 US dollars in wich Toyota Foundation supported 6,000 US dollars, Thajampa village participated 1,156.88 US dollars (including electricity installation of 319.53 US dollars). The constructors were farmers of Thachapa, constructed 5 times (151 labours) equaled 381,07 US dollars.

The Local cultural Museum was constructed 2 stairs, up stair was traditional wooden model and cement ground stair. It was 6 x 9 m size. The up stair accomplished of 3

rooms: First room is meeting room of village government committee in the right in which traditional tools are to be displayed. Second room in mid position is library for school students, and third room is reading site, this site we can see natural view of Thachampa. The ground stair is used as office, meeting hall and a place where traditional cultural ceremony and agricultural product fair of the farmers. It means that this museum becomes a cultural center of the village.

The opening ceremony of Local cultural Museum was held on 18th June 2010, which around 115 people of Thachampa farmers attended.

The Lao people believe in Kwans which are body spirits of 32 Kwans in each person. Kwans even are the basic of the culture of Lao and conducted in most ceremonies: Lao New Year, wedding, guest hosting or guest visiting, after getting sick. Kwans for guests were conducted in that ceremony, to thank for supported and participated in Lao culture conservation (Fig. 4). To extend Lao culture to new generation, the song and dance of school students were displayed (Somboun, 2010).

**4. Ceremony of Local Culture Conservation:** To continue conservation of local culture, an event of "Ceremony of Local Culture Conservation" was held in Thachampa Village on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2012

The ceremony of Local Culture Conservation was divided in three sections of opening, local spots, art-literature. In the opening ceremony, Mr. Inthong Somphou presented objective of Local Culture Conservation Ceremony, he said developments of infrastructure, industry, service, tourism and others resulting negative change in tradition-culture of Laos. The tradition and culture are implements of solidarities, living in peace and happiness, natural environment conservations. This ceremony is to remember some tradition-culture of farmers, to remember method of creation of solidarity, peace and happiness in among rural communities, to conserve tradition-culture in local remote area. It is also to create solidarities and happiness in among Thachampa farmers, farmers of neighbor villages, government officers, experts, merchants, local investment people.



Kwans even to Toyota foundation and others guest



Trying wrist and blessing by village leader

**Fig. 4.** Kwans event



**Fig. 5.** Yon Mak Khone



**Fig. 6.** Mak Le displaying



**Fig. 7.** Rope pulling



**Fig. 8.** Mak khang display



**Fig. 9.** Yon Mak Khone



**Fig. 10.** Display of local art-literatures (A) Kasikon-Asa songs, (B) Dances of Souliya School students, (C) Khmou song, (D) Dance of School students, (E) School students songs, (F) Kasikon-Asa dance, (G & H) Two songs of senior ethnic groups.

Lao Secretary Party of Thachampa presented report of cooperation development in Thachapa Village. He reported that Faculty of Agriculture cooperated in development Thachampa since the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2009 in which 4 projects worked in Thachampa: Local food Project, Mutual Learning Traditional Cultural Project, Big Jar Project of water conservation and Unlimited Veterinary Project. Under cooperation developments of 4 projects, some living aspects of farmers were improved. The cooperation of Faculty of Agriculture with Thachapa

Village was reported by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Oudom Phonekhampheng, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture. Finally Xaythany representative gave speech in the ceremony.

The local sports displayed after opening section consisted of 5 activities of Yon Mak Khone (Fig. 5), Mak Le (Fig. 6), rope pulling (Fig. 7), and Mak kang (Fig. 8). These local sports usually displayed in village spirit and other events of villages (Taidam, Phouan, Lao and Hmong) and

working on bamboo pieces of Thaidam and Khmou (Fig. 9).

Mak Khone is a cotton ball, made from cotton textiles. The cotton balls are displayed as games between girls and men or men and women (Yon mak Khone means throw Mak Khone). Mak Le is a kind of fruit. Some Mak Les are displayed as game between two women groups only. Mak Khang is a wooden toy. Mak Khangs are displayed as game between two man groups only.

The local art-literatures were focused in the ceremony. There were displayed 4 songs and 2 dances of School students, 3 songs and one dance of Kasikone asa, 2 dances of Souliya school students, one Khmou song of farmer and two songs of Taidam Ethnic group (Fig. 10).

### **Conclusion**

Thachampa is an evacuated and poverty prone village in Xaythany district. In policy, the Lao P.D.R government tries to eradicate extreme poverty by the year of 2020. Thachampa village has developed infrastructures, social-economic sectors. In terms of development, the culture and tradition of Thachampa Village changed. Therefore Thachampa village cooperate other institutions and pays attention on traditional cultural conservations. Under developments and traditional cultural conservations, lives of Thachampa villagers are better. They are sufficient rice consumption round year, sixty five percents of households have permanent houses, village is in peaceful condition. Thachampa village continues develop itself cooperates to

others institutions to develop social-economic sectors and continues conserve tradition and culture to increase level live and to become developed and peaceful village.

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