

Style and Symbolic of Culture in Art Motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist Architecture

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Abstract: This is a qualitative study observing 33 temples in Luang Prabang, Lao People's Democratic Republic targeting to investigate cultural styles and symbols engraved in art motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture. The research findings could be divided into 2 topics. Firstly, in aspects of art motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture, there were 3 subjects related to this. Subject 1 was the evolution of the motifs. They were influenced by Indian arts through Khmer, Lanna, Chinese and Siamese. The symbolic motifs of Luang Prabang were Krua Kan Dok Pakkood motif, Dok Bua Krua motif and Mon Tha Rob motif. The temple found to conserve most original traditions of arts was Xiang Thong temple, the prototype of Lan Xang arts. Subject 2 was the motif types able to classify due to the materials and characteristics. The materials of the motifs were wood carving, stucco, perforated gold flames and pearls. For the characteristics of the motifs, they were various such as plants and flowers, animals, utensils, nature, imaginative and abstract shapes.

Key words: Art motif, Buddhist architecture, style, symbolic of culture, imaginative

INTRODUCTION

Luang Prabang is located in Lao People's Democratic Republic, 200 km Northern of Vientiane with world heritage area of 250 m width and 1 km length.

The unique geography of Luang Prabang is where the Mekong River and the Khan River meet. Its location was suitable for dwelling of people in the past where the Khmer had resided until Khun Lo established the Lan Xang kingdom on the area (Tebsrimuang, 2011). People living in this area believe in the Phee Fa Phaya Taen and respect Naga as scripted in the myth of Khun Bo Rom. It says that 15 families of Naga living in different parts of Luang Prabang. Naga is a symbol of land potentate of Java, the original name of the city then changed to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong and eventually turned into Luang Prabang. The imagination associated with Naga had become the symbol of art patterns by locals until King Fahngum introduced Hinayana Buddhism into the area which had been deep-rooted in the Lan Xang kingdom. Since then, the Buddhism symbols have replaced the symbols of former belief. Luang Prabang as the capital city of Lan Xang kingdom had accumulated arts and cultures from different regimes until Vientiane was announced as the capital in 1560 by King Chaichetthathirat. Since then, Luang Prabang had nearly been forgotten from Lao history. For 144 years, there was no record of temple construction until the Lan Xang kingdom was

divided into 3 kingdoms. Luang Prabang then had once again the King: King Kingsaraj or King Thammakit Lan Xang Rom Kao. Later, in the age of King Suriyavong, the Lan Xam kingdom lost its independence to Siam in 1779. Since then, there was a number of temples built up and restored, both royal and public temples. The establishment of these temples reflected faith in people's Buddhism in Luang Prabang.

In 1887, the brigand Ho intruded into Luang Prabang and burnt down the entire area. The only place not destroyed was Xiang Thong temple. During the colonial period in 1893, the French ruled Lan Xang Kingdom replacing Siam and founded it as a residence of King Maha Chevit. During 1990-1995, UNESCO primarily observed the area of Luang Prabang in order to enlist it as "World Heritage City" and the best preserved city in South-East Asia. Eventually, in February 1998, Luang Prabang was officially announced as the World Heritage City. This has been influential to motif evolution of Luang Prabang.

Temple is a part of lives of people in Luang Prabang as they are essentially associated with temple. Due to the statement of Boonsurat (2012), "Temples in Luang Prabang play roles as spiritual center and educational institutions of the community. Names of villages and temples are likely similar and the temples are the centers of the communities." The temples in Luang Prabang are the part of making peace and harmony for

kingdom's administration. All Kings of Luang Prabang gave the patronage to build the temples in capital area. Some temples were central exhibitions of all arts particularly A-Ham (a term for "the central hall" of people in Luang Prabang). Artists or craftsmen had created arts on architecture of Buddhist temples to provide the next generations to study and sustainably inherit the cultures of Luang Prabang antecedents.

Pongsapit (1990) claimed that "Culture is a symbolic system" and Koser (1992) stated that George Herbert Mead is the creator of Symbolic Interactionism Theory. It explains that "The social arrangement and social interaction of people in societies are to use and to share meaning and symbols because humans form interaction. Humans know how to use symbol to create and enhance the cultural and social relationship and to inherit the cultures to the next generation." The history of Luang Prabang has suggested the symbolic system with the role to link people together and altered when the new potentate proposed a new symbol. The cultural symbols are abundantly present in religious buildings in the structural parts including interior and exterior ornaments.

Motif is one of architectural components. Different motifs are from primary patterns or key patterns that are rhythmically and systemically arranged. The patterns are coordinated and correlated with materials that the motifs are on. The motifs consent to the ornamentation to create beauty, excitement and to express the thought, belief, faith, love and happiness of the artists who created them. These motifs thus express the symbol of the way of life in community.

A French professor, Phillippe, Sterne has indicated the importance of the motifs to estimate the age of antiques and archaeological sites. It is compatible to approximate the age of Khmer, Cham and Indian arts (Leksukum, 1989). Motifs are indicative to art evolution of human race such as Kra Nok motif have evolved for >1000 years and it has become one of the symbols of Thai culture (Leksukum, 2010). Additionally, the motifs reflect the thoughts of the artist exhibited in patterns and cultural styles and symbols.

Objectives:

- To study the motif evolution of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture
- To study patterns and cultural styles and symbols present in art motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture

Research areas: The research areas to collect survey-based data were Buddhist architectures with motifs such as A-Ham, Ho Tri and Ho Wai of 33 temples in Luang Prabang.

The 30 temples inside the world heritage area, i.e., Mano Rom temple, Sob Sikkaram, Vichunraj temple, A-Phai temple, MuennaChompoo temple, Xiang Thong temple, Ho Siang temple, Xiang Man temple, Maha Tat temple, Saen temple, Nongsrikoonmuang temple, Pakkarn temple, Sriboonrueng temple, Sirimongkol temple, Paphai temple, Kiree temple, PonXaiXanaSongkram temple, Maisuvanpooma temple, Pafang temple, Ling Koon temple, Jom Pet temple, Tat Luang temple, A-Ham temple, Joom Kong temple, Pa Kae temple, Xiang Muan temple, Pa Ruak temple, pan Luang temple, Xiang Lek temple and Jom Sri temple.

The 3 temples outside the world heritage area, i.e., Pak-Ooh temple, Sri SawanTewalok temple and Kom Sela Sawat temple.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method was qualitative-based. The tools used were:

- Survey forms
- Non-structured interviews for key informants
- Focus group discussions for casual informants

The data assessment method was the data triangulation. The data analysis used was the indicative method and content analysis. The theory of human cultures and societies was also included in the analysis. The presentation was employed using the descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The types of art motifs: This could be included in three categories, i.e., evolution, types and pattern as follows.

The evolution of the art motifs: The important historical events of Luang Prabang influential to the evolution of art motifs are as follows.

In 1353, King Fangum established the Lan Xang kingdom and introduced Theravada Buddhism into Luang Prabang. The first temple was Pasamunt temple which was built with the art of Khmer.

In 1533, King Bhodi Sararat married Yodkamtip, a daughter of PhayaKesachettarat, King of Lanna Kingdom and Mahadewi Jiraprabha. After that, King Bhodi Sararat assigned a diplomat to invite the Tripitaka and royal monks from Chiang Mai and his son, Chaichettathirat as King of Chiang Mai and this was how the influence of Lanna arts came from.

In 1560, King Chaichettathirat moved the capital to Vientiane and Luang Prabang disappeared from Lao history for 143 years.

In 1703, Lan Xang kingdom was divided into 3 parts and Luang Prabang was governed by King Kitsaraj.

In 1779, all 3 parts of Lan Xang kingdom lost its independence to Siam. Since then, from the era of King Kitsaraj to the age under Siam, there were a number of temples built up and restored, both royal and public temples. The establishment of these temples reflected faith in people's Buddhism in Luang Prabang.

In 1887, the Brigand Ho intruded in Luang Prabang and burnt down the entire area. The only place not destroyed was Xiang Thong temple.

In 1903, Lan Xang kingdom was colonized by the French. It was when temples were renovated. In 1975, the administrative system was changed into socialism.

In 1995, Luang Prabang was listed as a World Heritage city and a number of temples were restored and renovated. The temple found to preserve most original arts is Xiang Thong temple. It is a temple that has survived from various fires in Luang Prabang. The motifs on door panels in Wichun temple, A-Ham temple and Xiang Thong temple are the origin of traditional art and the restoration and renovation of temples in Luang Prabang are considered with its original tradition patterns.

As the results of information derived from the key informants, Tumaneevong Kadiyarat (interviewed on 11th August 2013) noted that art motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture are influenced by Chinese and Khmer and the symbolic motifs are Mon Tha Rob motif and KruaKanDok Pak Kood motif. Muen-On Panthong (interviewed on 10th August 2013) explained that art motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture initiated from surrounding nature and the unique one was Dok Bua Krua motif. Janda Suvannapan (interviewed on 9th August, 2013) commented that the unique art motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture included Dok Bua Krua motif and KruaKanDok Pak Kood motif.

The results obtained from the focus groups, the casual informants agreed that the art motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture are evolved from Buddhism and nature. The unique motif of this is KruaKanDok Pak Kood motif.

Dok Mon Tha Rob as scripted in the Tripitaka (1971) is a flower from heaven not existing in human world and it is shredded in particular occasions such as the days Lord Buddha was born, enlightened and passed away (nirvana), the day of 4 events and the day that Buddha delivered the first teachings to his fellows. Due to Tanmahapran (2012), there is a statement related to Dok

Mon Tha Rob in TraiBhumikatha (Sermon on the Three Worlds). "NanthawanPark has a number of golden-yellow Dok Mon Tha Rob with vibrant radius. Its petals are as large as umbrellas with the barn-sized leaves and pollens. The flowers were once fallen from the heaven to revere Buddha when he was born and passed away."

Meanwhile, DokBuaKrua was referred from the Tripitaka in the sections of the adoration merit with lotuses, the origin of the earth and the past lives of Buddha.

According to analysis using the idea and cultural diffusion theory by Franz Boas, it could be concluded that the motifs in Luang Prabang were affected by external prosperous cultures, Dvaravdi and Srikotraboon which diffused into the Meakong region where Luang Prabang is located. KraNok, DokBua and KruiChoeng motifs originally from India were adopted and modified by Khmer and they were clearly introduced into Luang Prabang via Khmer during the regime of King FahNgum.

Khmer's KraNok, DokBua and Krui Cheong motifs became KanDok, DokBuaKrua and SoiSa motifs of Luang Prabang, respectively. These motifs were present in all temples. Hindi god motifs were present in Vichun temple, A-Ham temple and Tat Luang temple. Nagan motif was visible in Sangkalok temple, Pak Ooh temple, Pa Ruak temple, Sirimongkol temple, Mai temple, Muen Na temple, Pa Kae temple, Xiang Thong temple and Maha Tat temple. Chinese motifs resulted from trading were also seen in all temples. Swastika motif existed in Xiang Man temple and Long Koon temple. Swan and dragon motifs were present in Joom Kong temple, Muen Na temple, Xiang Thong temple, Xiang Man temple, Maha Tat temple, Sirimongkol temple and Jom Pet temple. The influence from Lanna kingdom was initiated by the relationship between the two kingdoms. A motif of angel holding magic flowers was present in Xiang Thong temple, Mai temple, Saen temple, Pa Fang temple and JomSrilued temple. Mo Dok or Bu Ra Na Ka Ta motif existed in Xiang Thong temple, Mai temple, Saen temple, Pak Kan temple and Joom Kong temple. For Siamese motif due to the interaction of the two nations, Dok Put Tan motif was present in Long Koon temple, Sob Sikkaram temple, Sang KaLok temple, A-Pai temple, Ho Xiang temple, Muen Na Chompoo temple, Pa Ruak temple, Pan Luang temple and KomSelaSawat temple. A motif of gathering Chinese angels exists in Pa Pai temple, Long Koon temple, Ho Xiang temple, Pa Kae temple and Xiang Muan temple. A motif of gathering Western angels was seen in Pa Kae temple (Fig. 1-3).

Type of the motifs: According to the observation of the motif characteristics, motif construction and stories in

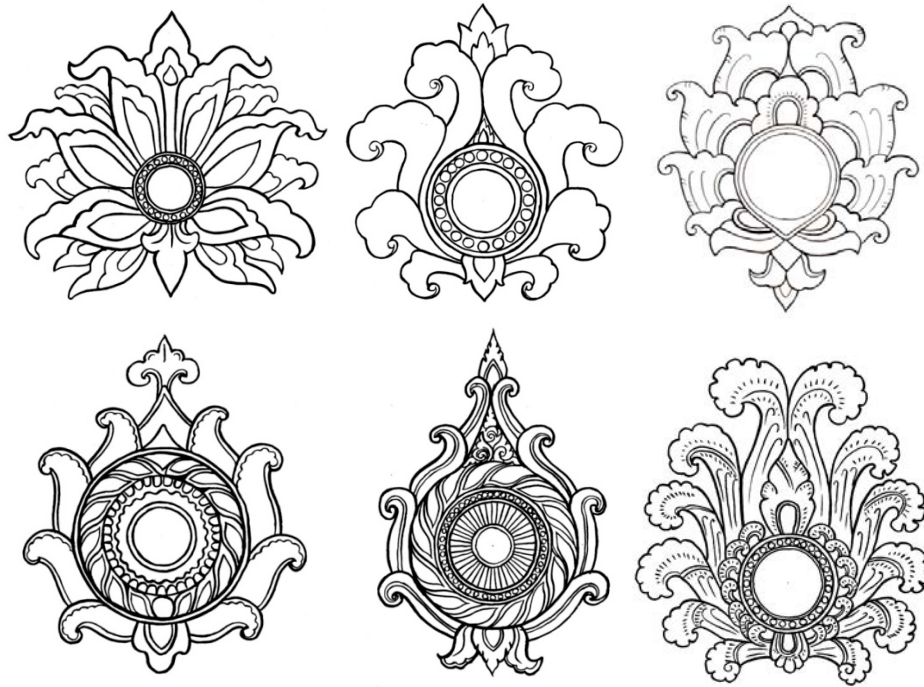


Fig. 1: DokMontha Rob motifs found in Xiang Thong temple, Sriboonrueng temple, Mai temple, Pa Fang temple and Saen temple

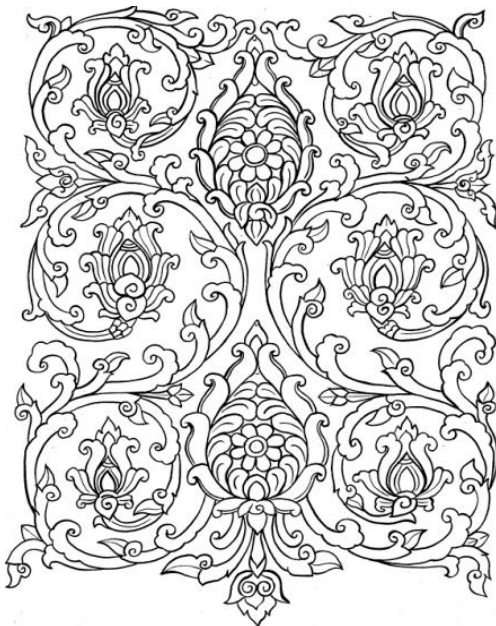


Fig. 2: DokBuaKrue motifs present in Maha Tat temple

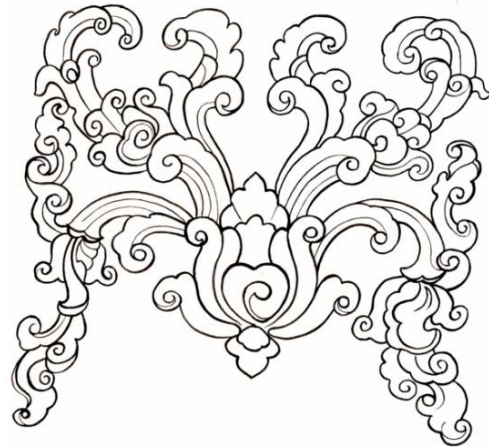


Fig. 3: KrueKanDok Pak Kood motif in Maha Tat temple

- Materials which were wood carving, stucco, perforated gold flames and pearls
- Characteristics of the motifs such as plants and flowers, animals, utensils, nature, imaginative and abstract shapes

each location of Buddhism architectures in Luang Prabang, the types of the motifs could be categorized using:

Motif pattern: Motifs present in different parts of A-Ham or the hall in each temple were relatively similar. Each architectural structure was unique in its motif pattern such

as gable, honeycomb stencils, doors, windows, arch, wall, ceiling, pillar and pedestal base. This could be the indicative patterns of Luang Prabang craftsmen. The motif patterns were: KanDok, Kra Jang, Krue, Pra Jam Yam, Kod, Wan Laen, Taek Lai, Kab, Na Kob, Dao-Tawen, SoiSa, Dok and Kob-Jae-Kan.

Cultural symbols in art motifs: The cultural symbols engraved in art motifs of Luang Prabang Buddhist architecture was analyzed using Bogardus' five lines of human thoughts, i.e., cosmos, philosophy, religion, myth, human life, natural world and society and culture could be concluded as follows.

Cosmos: Among people of Luang Prabang, it was a concept of hell and heaven. Prior to the Lan Xang Empire, the highest king was King Taen who lived in the heaven. Angels or spirits were the representatives of nature like a mountain as a giant and water as Naga. Once Buddhism has been prosperous in the area, the concept of Buddhist cosmos has been introduced until now. The concept of Buddhism cosmos or three worlds were exhibited in form of architectures. The internal chapel hall (A-Ham) was the place where the Buddha image was situated. It was a representative of Buddha in nirvana world beyond the heaven. The exterior of the hall portrayed the human world and nirvana world mediated with Himmavanta forest. Therefore, the entrance of A-Ham was usually decorated with motifs of forest, nature, Himmavanta animals on the door panels, arches or honeycomb stencils. The motifs were then correlated with the position of the chapel hall (A-Ham) and the concept of cosmos. The motifs of Himmavanta animals were present in Ki-Li temple, Xiang Man temple, PonXai temple, Xiang Thong temple, Pa Pai temple, Ma No Rom temple, Sangkalok temple, Nong temple, A-Ham temple, Pan Luang temple and Xiang Lek temple.

Philosophy, religion and myth: Artworks of Luang Prabang artists were created due to the Tripitaka, the stories of Buddha biography in his past life and allegories. The craftsmen of Luang Prabang were imported with philosophers skillful in the Tripitaka during the King FaNgum and King Bodhisarn eras. Naga myths and local tales of PraSuthonManorah and Xin Xia were also associated with Himmavanta tales. The motifs of Buddha biography were seen in Mano Rom temple, Maha Tat temple, Xiang Man temple, Nong temple, A-Ham temple, Joom Kong temple and revering hall of Xiang Thong temple. The motif of Buddha's past life were present in Pak Kan temple, Ho Xiang temple, Saen temple, Joon King temple, Ki Li temple, Sobsikkaram temple and revering hall

of Xiang Thong temple. The motifs of Vessantara were present in Mano Rom temple, Xiang Thong temple and Xiang Lek temple. The motifs of PraSuthonMahorah were portrayed in Maha Tat temple and Pon Xia temple. Xin Xia motifs were in Ho Xiang temple and Xiang Lek temple. For Naga motifs, they were visible in all temples.

Human life: The concept relating to this line of thought in Luang Prabang was affected by Buddhism and Indian cultures. It was to make the balance and merit in their lives. The motifs of Buddha path referred to the dispersal of Buddhism. The Swastika motif and the wheel of nature motif including the motifs of 108 auspicious things were seen in Sean temple and Chinese motifs were in all temples.

Natural world: Animals and vegetation were used to compose stories and became the symbol of human antecedents, fertility and god relations. Moreover, humans also created imaginary animals to be the representatives of beliefs such as dragon, Naga and Garuda which were seen in all temples.

Society and culture: The social and cultural concepts in symbolic motifs of Buddhism architecture in Luang Prabang composed of these following points.

Two issues of symbols derived from politics and administration.

Issue 1: The implication of the contention of beliefs among new coming governors in people of Luang Prabang, the social and cultural symbol of the motifs of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong prior to establishment of Luang Prabang had been related to nature. Naga and PrayaTaen were built as the imaginary symbols related to the nature that people at that time had difficulty understanding because there was the mysterious and unexplainable power until Buddhism was introduced into the area. Since then, the symbolic motifs were created and were as the tool to usurp beliefs from people in Luang Prabang. The contention was participated by new comers with compromising and absolute power. For instance, King FaNgum had created masked puppets, grandpa Yoe and grandma Yoe previously as servants of PrayaTaen and they were praised to be preventive spirits of the land and Buddhism. Meanwhile, King Bodhisarn commanded people to discard the belief of spirits and built Sankalok temple to cover the exit hole of Naga where the location of revering hall of PrayaTaen was. Moreover, the myth of King LiabLok was scripted which empowered PrayaSatta Naga and gorgon Kang He previously as local spirits and they turned to be the fellows of Buddha. These motif

symbols were visible in arts of Luang Prabang such as motif of three-headed elephants and Naga in Sankalok temple, Muen Na Chompoo temple, Mai temple, Pa Ruak temple, Jom Sri temple, Xiang Man temple and A-Pai temple. The motif of Narayana on Garuda above Naga was present in Chum temple, A-Ham temple, Xiang Thong temple and Pak Kan temple. Despite the belief contentions occurred in Luang Prabang, people had never discarded their antecedents' belief and were able to peacefully harmonize the former and new beliefs.

Issue 2: The idea of demigod King was adopted from Hindu. The motifs representing the demigod concept were Narayana on Garuda above Naga in Chum temple, A-Ham temple, Xiang Thong temple and Pak Kan temple, motifs of Indra on elephant and three-headed elephant under umbrellas. They were also the symbol of Lan Xang kingdom. These motifs were from the tale of Indra, i.e., Indra had immortal water from a flask which could revive the deaths. This flask was a symbol of Luang Prabang Kings. Therefore, the Kings were as if Indra (Hindi god) who could resurrect people's lives called by Laos as "God of Life". The three-headed elephant or Erawan was a vehicle of Indra. It was then used as a symbol of Luang Prabang royal families. This motif was exhibited in the triangular front of royal place, Pa Ruak temple, Muen Na Chompoo temple, Mai temple, Jom Sri temple, Xiang Man temple and A-Pai temple.

Various symbols initiated from racial expression

Chinese: Motifs belonged to Chinese were Dragon and Swan motifs in Joon Kong temple, motifs of Chinese gatekeepers in Xiang Muan temple, Pa Kae temple, Pa Pai temple, Long Koon temple and Ki Li temple, motifs of Chinese auspice on ceiling using gold flames seen in Maha Tat temple, Mano Rom temple, Sobsikkaram temple, Muen Na Chompoo temple, Xiang Thong temple, Xiang Man temple, Pak-Ooh temple, SiriMongkol temple, Long Koon temple, Joom Kong temple and Jom Pet temple.

Khmer: It was influenced by Hidi culture. In the age of King FahNgum, Theravada Buddhism was introduced in Luang Prabang as present on the door panels of Vichunnaraj temple with motifs of Hindi gods, Indra and Narayana. Similarly, A-Ham temple next to the Vichummaraj temple was also influenced by the signature of the craftsmen and Khmer motifs were present on the wall and ceiling of Saen temple with gold flamed Khmer goddess or Apsara, on the front gable of Pak Ooh temple with Kala faces and Maha Tat temple with Kala faces on triangular panel.

Lanna: The relationship between Luang Prabang and Lanna initiated in the age of King Sam Saen Tai and King Bodhi Sararaj. This caused the art and cultural flows. Temples with Lanna art were Xiang Thong temple and Xiang Man temple. It was also found that the motif of angels holding wonder flowers crafted with gold frame was on the wall of Xiang thong temple. This motif was similar to the motif in Jed Yod temple in Chiang Mai in terms of its characteristics and concept.

Puan: Motifs in Ki Li temple, Xiang Kwang was a peacock representing luck and prosperity of Tai Puan people.

Siamese: The Siamese motifs are Dok Put Tan motif present in Long Koon temple, Sob Sikkaram temple, Sang KaLok temple, A-Pai temple, Ho Xiang temple, Muen Na Chompoo temple, Pa Ruak temple, Pan Luang temple and KomSelaSawat temple. A motif of Chinese gatekeepers existed in Pa Pai temple, Long Koon temple, Ho Xiang temple, Pa Kae temple and Xiang Muan temple. A motif of western gatekeepers was present in Pa Kae temple.

CONCLUSION

As the results of types, the evolution of the motifs found in religious buildings in Luang Prabang was influenced by Indian arts through Khmer, Chinese, Lanna and Siamese arts. The motifs had been modified until they turned to be unique of Luang Prabang, KruaKanDok Pak Kood motif, DokBuaKrua motif and Montha Rob motif. The motif evolution was affected by religious transition, wars, guerrilla warfare, administrative alteration and restorations. The temple found to preserve most of the original arts was Xiang Thong temple. The original traditions were considered for restoring the temples. The motif types were classified due to the materials and characteristics. The materials of the motifs were wood carving, stucco, perforated gold flames and pearls. For the characteristics of the motifs, they were various such as plants and flowers, animals, utensils, nature, imaginative and abstract shapes. The motif patterns which were also diverse such as KanDok, Kra Jang, Krue, Pra Jam Yam, Kod, Wan Laen, Taek Lai, Kab, Na Kob, Dao-Tawen, Soi Sa, Dok and Kob-Jae-Kan.

The results of cultural symbols study suggested that they were based on 5 lines of human thoughts. Firstly, cosmos, it was related to the stories of Himmavanta forests in the three worlds. The Tripitaka and Buddhism imposed the coordinates and patterns of motif designs. The concepts of motifs involved in philosophy, religions and myths were inspired from the Tripitaka such as DokBuaKrua motif and Montha Rob motif. The Naga

myth was the common symbol of the society. Due to the human life concept, it was to make the balance and merit in their lives with Swastika motif and the wheel of nature motif including the motifs of 108 auspicious things. Natural world concept, it was related to animals and vegetation used to compose stories and became the symbol of antecedents, fertility and god relations. Moreover, humans also created imaginary animals to be the representatives of belief such as dragon, Naga and Garuda. For society and culture concepts, they were concerned with belief of demigod king, the contention among new coming governors of people's beliefs and different ethnic expressions, Chinese, Khmer, Puan and Siamese.

SUGGESTIONS

It is incredible that only in the area of 5 km², Luang Prabang stories are hidden to study. It is still believed that many arts and cultures in the area are still waiting to be discovered and researched. As the results of this study, it can be propagated into different research topics, e.g., basic research related to lined patterns derived from the motifs in each temple. Books or literatures should be published to introduce to the public like students, artists or people who are interested in to use, refer or inspire the artistic creativity and designs. This is also useful to tourists for their meaningful visits in Luang Prabang

because the motifs are able to link the meaning of belief, religion, culture and way of life of people in Luang Prabang together in form of ingeniously and skillfully created symbols of the antecedents.

Further research is encouraged to focus on the Tripitaka study to decode puzzles. However, this motif decoding in Luang Prabang is only the first pioneer, the puzzle solution work of the motif is ongoing targeting to decipher motif puzzles in the region of South East Asia.

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