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### THE STYLES AND BELIEFS OF RITUAL STUFF IN LUANG PRABANG, LAO PDR

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#### ABSTRACT

The dissertation titled: The styles and beliefs of amulets in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR aimed to study the patterns and beliefs of amulets in Luang Prabang in Lao PDR, particularly in the fifth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh months (in Laos beliefs). The study was conducted with the qualitative by applying the concepts, and theoretical framework of Structural-functional and semiology theory then presented with the descriptive analysis. The study results indicated that the styles of the amulets had divided into five main perspectives: **a) Functional features**, which divided into three categories, i.e. 1) Amulets, 2) Scared, 3) Ritual items, **b) Material features** which divided into four categories i.e.1) Fresh item, 2) Processed item, 3) Durable item, and 4) Circulated item, **c) Structural features** which divided into three categories, i.e. 1) Single-unit, 2) Gathered unit, 3)Mixed unit, **d) Invented features** which divided into three categories, i.e. 1) Self-invented, 2) Co invented, 3) Purchased, **e)Artistry features** which divided into three categories, i.e. 1) Creation, 2) Neat, 3) Seamless composition.

The ritual styles resulted from beliefs through creating and practicing from generation to generation with experience and understanding. In terms of beliefs, the study categorized the beliefs into two stages: **a) Community's beliefs**: the beliefs about spirit, i.e. Tai and Pan ghost, Muang ghost or Ancestral spirits, Naga Beliefs, about Auspicious beliefs, **b) Social beliefs**: consisted of 1) Religious beliefs—Brahmanism and Buddhism, 2) Cosmology beliefs, and 3) Astrology beliefs. These beliefs were both tangible and present through ritual items, and the abstract form, which contained a single meaning and significant meaning which combined the complex beliefs and culture along with the changes in Luang Prabang society, resulted in a cultural variety in meanings and continuing the influence in the next generation.

## INTRODUCTION

The origin ritual item remains unclear as in the assumption beliefs that humans had developed and turned to be civilized and had the ritual ceremony. This assumption can link to the beliefs in Lao ethnic and the development of the styles and beliefs of the amulet in the past. Since the Lao ethnic had a long history, the Mekong river and the Laos ethnic had settled down in the Mekong river basin, as found in the Plain of Jars park in Xieng Khouang district, which reflected the greatest developed culture of the Lao in the north. A large stone jar assumed to be a funeral jar, as found a skeleton with bronze and iron utensils with diamonds, and the crop tied and wrapped by gold (Kham Champakaewmanee, 1980 as cited in Sunet Photisarn, 2015). Similarly, Sunet Photisarn (2015) noted that another historical trait of Lao was found in Pa Ko archaeological park, which aged around the 200-300 AD, at the rim of Nam Ngum river close to the Vientiane capital of Lao PDR, between the 2nd century BCE to the 3rd century AD, the discovery has found antique utensils made of metal and bronze, iron maker, woven fabric, pottery which indicated that human society had grouped along the riverside. In the funeral ceremony, the pottery and utensils had found in the tombs in a similar period but in different areas. Thus, it can summarize that the funeral is a ritual that represents the Mekong ancestors' spirits which traditionally influenced the Southeast beliefs before Buddhists and Brahmins from India. Therefore, the archaeological evidence in the prehistoric period had shown the importance of the tools as of the high value in the ritual ceremonies.

Before the establishment of the Lan Xang kingdom according to Khun Borom tale, there was a legend about the establishment of Luang Prabang which mentioned two hermits called Ammala and Yotika who stayed in the mountain called 'Phou Phalue Si' and 'Phou Suang' and turned to 'Phou Si' (Vongdala & Lattanasuvannaphon, 2016). All the hermits who were the origin of all the State City in the Mekhong region and lay the base for the cities around this area were from India (Photisan, 2015). Later in the reign of king Fah Khum as in the Lao Chronicle in Mahasila Veerawong (1953) staged that during the colonization before the construction of the kingdom, king Fah Ngum paid a visit from the North district to the Noi district as mentioned that

'...The kind had paid a visit outside the palace and conducted the ritual ceremony. He was delightful and then bestowed the name of the Noi district to the Kang Yao district...'

The tale confirmed the existence of the ritual ceremonies in the elite society before the Lan Xang kingdom's restoration. The ceremony was related to the belief of "kwan", which was the common culture of all the nations within the Southeast (Wongted, 2017), reflected the esteem welcome. When King Fah Ngum ascended the throne as the king in the Lan Xang kingdom in 1896. After taking up the throne for one year, he attacked Chiang Saen district to expand the territory to the Vientiane capital and held the Maha Phiti Chaiya Phisek ceremony. '... Organized seven days and nights, by killing 10 elephants, 1,000 cows, 2,000 buffaloes for the celebration ...' The main idea has represented the sacrifice by slaughtering animals for the ceremony in the ruling class, which

consumed many elephants, cows, and buffaloes. In addition, king Fah Ngum also provided a third address that

‘... When second months use for worshipping home to know bad or good. In three years, Chiang Dong and Chiang Thong would pay respect to obtained Than Fah, Than Kom, Than Sang, Than Thueng: Thao Nyer, Thao Lai, Ma Yha Ngam, Mae Mod, including the angels and guardians, etc. The Phu Khaoka, Ai Mah, Thao Kong stayed in Nong Lum Phu at Pha Luang. When he arrived safely, he would offer worship of the spirit and return to the motherland when it about time in the first month. The person who not believe the rule might be the rival. Therefore, please keep responded with this command it was the traditional customs...’

The passage mentioned of the worship of the related spirits, Phee Fah and Phee Tan, Phi Dum or ancestral spirits, Mahesak spirit of the city pillar, which is to be practiced as part of the Heet tradition (the tradition that had been practiced until people are familiar with it, cited in Buasawed, 2002) supporting the belief that king Fah Ngum and the people within the Lan Xang Kingdom held the traditional belief in spirits (Thammawat, n.d.) and practice the Heet, which Thammawat (n.d.) observed that in those chronocles, the reason for people held onto the belief in spirits reflected a kind of belief that functioned as a tool to govern the people in that period and to gather people together from the other province to show their loyalty. Later, Theravada Buddhism from Khmer had spread out resulted in the traditional combination between spirit, Brahmin, and Buddhism beliefs. In the reign of the king Phraya Bodhisalarat had invited the Tripitaka and the monks in Langavong from Lanna in 1527 and then abort the beliefs in Phee Fah Phee Than and demolished all the spiritual items and building and built a temple. The Buddhism temples were constructed and have continued to flourish until the reign of king Suriyawongsa Thammikarat and reached the most prosperous in 1641. When the king had been in peace, the king had continually maintained and changed Heet 12 in Buddhism (Sunet Photisarn, 2015). The Heet 12 consisted of the critical calendar and the ritual ceremony in Buddhism as follows. In the First month, asks the monks to enter the karma, Second makes Khun Khao, Third makes Khao Jee (Makha Bucha merit), Fourth makes Bun Pha Wade, Fifth make Monk statues watering, Sixth makes Fire rocket merit (Visakha Bucha), Eighth makes the begin of Buddhist Lent, Nineth makes Kha Pradubdin, Tenth makes Khao Salak (Khao Sak), elventhth makes the end of Buddhist Lent, Twelfth makes a worship to Phra That Si Tham Hai Sok.

In the post-government change (1893-1995) from a monarchy to a socialist democracy to a republic, the Buddhism in Luang Prabang is flexible, the numbers of temple has occurred such as Wat Xieng Thong along with the rose-colored worship hall located in the southeast of the temple sanctuary after the restoration in 1957 (Worralak Bunyasurat, 2012). The discovery had found that the stained glass had decorated on the outside wall showing the story of Thao Siew Sawat and way of life. The picture in the wall appeared the tray with pedestal and placed on the front between the villagers sitting around while pay respect to the altar, which stamped with a spire. There are images of people wearing god-like garments and Chada (crown) sit and use ritual item to pay for

worship. In December 1995, Luang Prabang was registered as a World Heritage site in temples and architecture, including culture, traditions, Heet 12 as the cultural strengths with the cooperation of government, private, and community sectors to encourage tourism. The changes resulted in the fifth month, the ninth month, and the eleventh month turn to be the merit festival of the year. In addition, this also provides an opportunity to unite both locals and tourists as communal and private rituals. In these events, there were various ritual items which interesting to study.

The style of ritual item had changed according to the beliefs and rituals of society and culture. In the past, the original style was found Lan Xang characterized from the household usage and advancement of technology, such as stone tools, metal tools, pottery, beads, woven fabric, and rice from post-apocalyptic beliefs and spiritualism. Later, the animals killing was found in sacrifice to celebrate victory. After that, the spread of Brahmin and Buddhism influenced the Lan Xang kingdom resulted in Heet 12 have appeared with the ritual items. This combination consisted of spiritual, Brahmin, and Buddhism beliefs in ritual items which in varies forms and corresponded meaning with the beliefs in India, Cambodia, and Thailand cultures. These beliefs had rooted in performing ceremonies and ritual items in Luang Prabang from generation to generation.

The spiritual beliefs, the Brahmin beliefs in Buddhism way, and Heet 12 were the foundation belief in Lao society through a long period and tunned to be common rituals in Lao society in the present. The ritual items had been continuing play an important role in the Luang Prabang people as appeared in the everyday ceremony, including Heet 12 which Luang Prabang still believe and continue to their way of living. The ritual item was one of tools to understand the society, cultural roots, and beliefs which influence the way of life. As aforementioned background and significance, the researcher studied the styles and beliefs of ritual items in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR through the use of the “Tree Value” tool from the concept of Claude Levi-Strauss (Kaewthep, 2017) which stated that the culture consist of the part on the surface and the part that is underneath. The part on the surface, or above the ground, is the form. The [art underneath, pr the root underneath the ground, is the content, value, and meaning, to obtain knowledge and understanding in the form and the beliefs related to the sacrifices that helped promote harmony and cherish in the traditions of Luang Prabang people, including the ethnicities in the Mekong river.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

To study the styles of ritual item in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

To study the beliefs of ritual items in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research aimed to study of the styles and beliefs of ritual items in the ritual ceremonies and customs in Luang Prabang. The scope in this study consisted of Luang Prabang district during the merit festival in the fifth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh months which were important merit-making event in Lao PDR. The target group consisted of the key informants, from purposive sampling method,

i.e., the Academist, the Local wisdom, the Community leader. The casual informant was Dr. Porn, who invented the ritual items for Luang Prabang and the general informant consisted of the people who participated in the ritual. The research instruments were consisted of surveys, observations, and interviews forms. The data were collected, categorized, analyzed with the concept of Functional-structural and semiology theories, and presented with descriptive analysis.

### ***Study results***

This study aimed to study and analyse the research title named: the styles and beliefs of the ritual items in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. The study employed the data from four Heet (the traditional custom) and twelve ritual ceremonies: 1) the Fifth-month merit or New Year's merit, which had seven annual events in that periods, i.e., Thob Pra That, Loi Krathong Sia Kroa (Release the animals), Hae Wor (Nang Sang Khan), Wai Huen, Su Khwan, Hae Pra Bang, 2) the Ninth-month merit or Khao Pradab Din consisted of two important rituals ceremonies: Khao Pradab Din merit and Suang Huu, 3) the Eleventh-month merit or Buddhist Lent merit consisted of two rituals ceremonies: Lai Rue Fai merit and Loi Krathong merit, and 4) the Twelfth-month merit or Kathin merit. The results of this study were as follows.

### ***The Style of Ritual items in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR***

The study results indicated that the ritual items consisted of twelve types and twenty-seven styles. The study employed the theoretical framework of Structural-Functional, Material structure, and Artistry invention theories. The results from the analysis were as follows.

### ***Functional Features:***

the ritual item was the human-made equipment use to serve the moral and belief in rituals; therefore, it related to the emerged symbols, which divided into three types: a) Worship items, b) Sacrifice items, and c) Ceremonial item. The Worship items were found in nine types: 1) Wan Dokmai, 2) Khan Hah, 3) Khan Paed, 4) Khan Sibsong, 5) Khan Khoo Pee, 6) Khan Sibha, 7) Khan Roisao, 8) Khan Dokmai, and 9) Khan Mak Beng. The worship items represented the respect and faith of the person in ceremony to obtained acknowledgment and participation from the gods. The meaning of Khans were based on different functions, with order and significance symbols as the representative of individuality. The Sacrifice items were found four types and five styles, i.e. 1) Krathong in three types consisted of 1) Krathong Loi or Krathong Sadorkraw type, 2) Krathong Sam Jae type, and 3) Nine-channel Krathong type. The second type, i.e. 1) Wan Plu, 2) Wan Mak, and Type 3, was Khao Horpo. The sacrifice item was featured as the tributes for the spirits or god, which consisted of Food, Sweet, Fruits, Liqueur, Betel nuts and leaves, and Cigarettes, which were all-consuming item for humans. For the Ceremonial items, the study were seven types and thirteen styles as follows. 1) Baisri, 2) Thung (flag): a) Bee, b) the Twelve zodiac, c) the gods, and c) the birthday, 3) Incense, candles, Thung, and Saw, 4) Pra That Sai, 5) Ubang pot, 6) Water bowl or the holy water bowl, 7)

Thao Kabinlaphrom's head. The Ceremonial items has a complete meaning in terms of beliefs in the merit and traditions, which contained the specific functions. In addition, the ceremonies are found that it's made from different origins but used together in the same ritual which divided into two groups: a) Traditional ceremonial items from the traditional beliefs, namely Pra That Sai, Bee, and Ubang, and b) New ceremonial items from Thailand such as the Twelve zodiacs thungs, the Gods thungs, and the birthday thungs, and another one which originated from the Indian-Brahmin legends was the Thao Kabinlaphrom's head.

In terms of Material feature, the ritual items were found in four categories: fresh, processed, durable, and circulated items as follows. The Fresh items considered as the sacrifice items and the worship items such as Banana leaf and spathe, flower, and auspicious trees. In the past, these item can be found only in local resulted in the banana leaves and flowers were indigenous items which colorful and variety of sizes such as Marigold, Frangipani, Jasmine, Amaranth or others in the community. The most preferred flowers were Marigold and Frangipani. In nowadays, these kinds of item can purchase from the market resulted in the colours of the sacrifice items not much diverse as in the past. The item materials in the present were different from in the past, such as using of metal wire to shape the form for sale and fast productions such as in Wan Dokmai, Khan Hah, Khan Paed, Khan Sibsong, Khan Khoo Pee, Khan Sibha, Khan Roisao, Khan Dokmai, Khan Mak Beng, and Baisri. The Sacrifice items: the items used banana leaves to make structures to put things such as Krathong Loi, Wan Plu, Wan Mhak, and Khao Hor Pong. Similar to the Krathongs Sam Jae and Krathongs Kao Chong used banana spathe as structure with banana leaves or bamboo. The sacrifice items were divided into two groups such as consuming product i.e. Rice, Food, Sweet, Fruits, Liqueur, Betel nuts and leaves, and cigarettes, while in specific products, i.e. Incense, Candles, etc Thung, Flowers, Fingernails, Hair, and Saliva based on each tradition. The processed items were found in ceremonial utensils, natural processed materials used only at once, such as paper, bamboo, rope. The Twelve zodiac thungs, the Gods thungs, and the birthday thungs. The durable items were the items which can be used for the next times. The complex and time-consuming material such as clay pot, Thao Kabinlaphrom's head made from paper and metal bowl from silver. The circulated items were the material which be used in other forms after complete the ceremony.

### ***Structural Features:***

the structural features were found in three types: Single, United, and Combined unit. The single unit grouped and combined from a single unit structure and based on the conical shaped: Wan Dokmai, Khao Har Po, and Sai Phra That. The cylindrical shape such as Krathong Loi, The Equilateral Triangular such as Krathong Sam Jae. The trapezoid shape consisted of the Wan Plu and Wan Mhak. The United structure such as the conical-shaped: Khan Hah, Khan Paed, and Khan Sibsong. The banana leaves folded in the same sized and placed next to the other to be the layers which the layer was based on the beliefs and traditions. The united structure was placed together with the metal bowls or stand alone with the square of the incense, candles, thungs in the ceremony. The

Combined structure created from the conical shaped Khan Hah, Khan Paed, Khan Sibsong, Khan Khoo Pee, Khan Sibha, Khan Roisao, Khan Dokmai, Khan Mak Beng, and Baisri. The structures were set as the main core of the conical-shaped. The outside layer also used conical-shaped for placing the flowers to be the layers. The Khan Khu Pee, Khan Sibha, and Khan Roisao were placed with tiny flowers while the Khan Dokmai, Khan Mak Beng, and Baisri stung the flowers on the banana leaves in the four-square area Krathongs Khao Chong.

### ***Invented Features:***

the invented features were found in 4 types: Self-invented, Co-invented, Community invented, and purchased items. These items were invented by families or in communities which depended on the ceremonies. The women were responsible for inventing, preparing, and learning from the elders in their own families or local wisdom. In contrast, the men were psychic for guiding and checking legitimacy in the process of the ceremony. Nowadays, you can buy or order offerings at the markets or stalls common in Luang Prabang. Nowadays, these items can find in the markets. The invention process begins with banana leaf and flowers, which available in the community, the banana leaves which vary of sizes and colors, including Marigold, Frangipani, Jasmine, Amaranth, or other local. The sacrifice items made from banana leaf cone-shaped structure, then add layers or decorate the flowers to be beautiful bowl of flowers with three flower stalks. Put the ingredients, such as incense, candles, paper with silver bowl or plate. In the form of self-invented, the sacrifice items were the bushes Waiheun, Baisri, Khao Hor Po, and Khao Pradab Din while the co-invented items consisted of Krathong Sam Jae Krathong Khao Chong. The purchased items were commonly bought during the festival, such as the Krathong Loi, Krathong Sia Kraw, Wan Plu, and Wan Mhak. The crafting method began with various shapes to create sacrifices positions and then prepare other ingredients such as food and edible item based on Heet 12. The Phra That Sai is a sand pile to form like Pagoda, the forms were not fixed format and imagination of the creators. The size depend on the members, such as small size was for single-built or big size for family built. The big size was a representative of the community which invented with specific skills such as the Kabinlaphrom's head which have to be selected. In addition, other rituals items were invented in the Lao PDR for commercial sale and imported from Thailand, such as the twelve zodiacs thungs, the Gods thungs, and the birthday thungs, Incense, candles, Ubang pot, and Water bowl or the holy water bowl.

### ***Artistry Features:***

The sacrifices are things made up of human beliefs, therefore it depends on the taste of the inventor, materials, and creativity, including the craftsmanship of folding, stacking, bending, and arrangement to have perfect size and shape under the limitations of the material. Along with values of the Luang Prabang people who embedded with the traditional, roots, and beauty through simple patterns of emotion in the color of the flowers.



**Figure 1** the ritual items in Luang Prabang

***The beliefs in ritual items in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR***

The beliefs in ritual items in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR were divided into two stages: Community beliefs and Society beliefs.

***The Spiritual Beliefs:***

This beliefs was the basis of traditional beliefs in the Luang Prabang area. The ritual items were used to summon or inform the spirit, the Guardians, and sacred things which usually consisted of food, liquor, chicken, cigarettes, Betel nuts for spirits in the local beliefs, such as Tai ghost, Thane ghost, Phee, Pu Ye, Nya Ye, or Phee Sue Muang, or Luang spirit which considered as a noble ancestor spirit. This spirit played an important role in the Phra Bang watering ceremony, the Fifth month merit represented as Luang Prabang people. The beliefs about ancestral spirits or relatives ghost who has passed away were maintained with the believed that their still protect their children, but if the children behaves inappropriately, they would angry and would make them sick. Thus, to apologize, the family's children have to prepare offerings, such as Khao Po as ritual items to the ancestors who have passed away, resulting in the ninth month merit.

***The Naga Beliefs:***

This beliefs related to Naga in the Ninth month merit ceremony and different from other areas in the Lao PDR as a result of the Ninth month is on the flooding season in Luang Prabang. The Naga symbolises fertility, which Luang Prabang people believed, and the Naga consisted of 15 clans as the guardians of the city. This area therefore is the sacred and important places of the Naga worshipping. In Luang Prabang, each temple, home, and community members will have sailing competition, before begin competition, the ritual items were prepared

i.e. Krathong Sam Jae and Krathong, Krathongs Khao Chong, Khan hah, Khan Paed, and Khan Sibsong, to respect the Naga and ask for allowance to conduct the ceremony.

### ***The Auspicious Beliefs:***

These beliefs appear in materials shape with symbolic creation to make the auspicious meaning to promote beliefs and become a society value. For example, the Banana leaf means the wealth, the marigold means prosperity, the Koson helps protect the people and create peace and happiness, and the Sompoi helps to expel bad things. Importantly, the banana leaf and flowers represent purity and unblemished from nature, which is suitable for ritual items.

### ***The Religious Beliefs:***

This beliefs had influenced from Brahmin beliefs. on the form and beliefs of the sacrifices, which has long existed in the Luang Prabang area, as depicted in Khun Borom's tales of the city establishment, from the two hermits who seized a mountain and named 'Phou Si' and the concept of comparing to Phi Thaen or Phi Fah, who are the gods in the heaven, and Thaen Luang have the same characteristics as Shiva (Viravong, 1974) and existed before Buddhism. The Brahmin concept also influenced the ritual items in two aspects, which is the origin of the mythological ritual items, namely the Kabinlaphrom, the Fifth month merit to support reproduction, while Nang Sang Khan aimed to the cherish festival and add the key point to the annual festival in each years. The Thao Kabinlaprommasri was based on the legend, thus created a Nang Sang Khan parade with the head of Thao Kabinlaphrom with the seven daughters. This symbolic use as reminiscent of the legend. The second point was the ritual items from Brahman such as the Shuang Hue and Soo Khwan ceremony, which believed that it was a bridge of relationship, while the Betel nuts had influenced from India.

### ***The Buddhism Beliefs:***

The beliefs in Buddhism consisted of two categories: Materials creation and Appeared meaning. The Materials creation consisted of flowers, incense, and candles as well as various forms of Khans as in the Tripitaka, which emphasizes the importance of being special over common flowers to express determination through the intention and achieve beliefs in rituals ceremony such as Khan Hah, Khan Khoo, and Khan Mhak Beng. The Appeared meaning associated with the Buddha principles, such as Khan Hah refers to the five precepts while Khan Paed refers to the eight precepts. Khan Sibsong refers to the king or Naga, and Khan Si Sibhah refers to the person and is also related to the forty-five years of the Buddha's dissemination in Luang Prabang people as local Buddhism with Spiritism mixed. In spiritual beliefs in religious places represents a relationship with temples and monks. The belief in merit and sin was embedded in the Luang Prabang people, which illustrate the concept of merit, charity sacrifice.

### *The Cosmology Beliefs:*

This belief was about Khan as the ritual items such as Khan Koo Pi, Khan Si Sibhah, and Khan Roi Sao, Khan Dokmai, Khan Mhak Beng from the banana leaf structure, the pitched cones decorated with flowers like a Phra Sumen mountain which surrounded by Sattapboriphan mountains with the eight animals, namely, lion, cow, garuda, cat, elephant, tiger, snake, and rat, as appeared in the Khom tales, Sixty-three Inscribed palm leaf, with Dharma characters of the Pu Sangkasa & Nya Sangkasa in the content of the Mun Pathom Panna. Apisak Somin (1994) discussed the history of the universe that when there was nothing but the emptiness, it was called the four continents resulted in the born of the lord Buddha called Phra Pathama, the Buddha mixed with water and soil from the the Pu Sangkasa & Nya Sangkasa to be the first human in the world. At first, they both ate divine food without lust, but after eating rice the lust had occurred and got eight children. They eight kinds of animals to play with, namely lion, cow, garuda, cat, elephant, tiger, snake, and rat. Later, these animals were the vehicles of the Gods in each directions. In addition, Phra Pathama had wiped out his sweat and formed a Mount Phra Sumen, the octagon on Phra Sumen Mountain is the heaven, and beneath is hell.

### *The Astrology Beliefs:*

were found in ceremonial ritual items i.e. Pueng as the sacrificed Thungs (flags) in Thob Pra Sai in the Fifth month merit which consisted the images of lion, cow, garuda, cat, elephant, tiger, snake, and rat. This beliefs corresponded with the eight directive pets in Lao astrological at Wat Si Saket in Vientiane capital. At the present, the Pueng were used as a substitute for a person by counting them sequentially by the number of age of the dependents to predict the dependents of that year which reflected on finding a dependence on the mind by relying on the signs of animals to build readiness during the transitional years with the implications of beliefs by using in rituals, making animal shapes, predictions, guessing, as a trick for people to be cautious based on their beliefs. In addition, the Saw was one of the 108 Lanna astrological which use a paper to climb up the fiddle, use with a pair of Khan Pi, Khan Sood, Krathong Loi, Krathong Sam Jae, and Krathong Khao Chong which believe that the streak is like a flower came from heaven, including the the New Year's Day and the important faith in Heet 12 also employed the Lao astrology.

The beliefs found in the ritual items appeared in two ways: the concrete through the form of the ritual items and the abstract form in the meaning or symbolism embedded in the ritual items, which includes the ritual items with a single meaning and mixed beliefs between the beliefs of spirits, Brahmin, and Buddhism through the changing era of Luang Prabang's society and culture. Thus, creating various meanings since the meanings were created by the social interaction process and were categorized and changed according to the social situations (Blumer, H., cited in Chantawanit, 2012), the existed meaning would influence to the next generation.

## CONCLUSION

The study of the styles and belief of ritual stuff in Luang Phra Bang, Lao PDR, can be concluded as follows:

For the style of the ritual stuff in Luang Phra Bang, Lao PDR, out of the 14 types and 25 styles in four Heets and 12 rituals, the analysis from the five features shows that for the **function feature**, there are three styles, the worship items, the sacrificial items, and the ceremonial items. For the **materials feature**, the materials used in making the four groups of sacrificial stuff are fresh materials, processed materials, durable materials, and the recycle materials. For the **structural feature**, three geometric forms were found, single unit, combined unit, and overall structure. For the **invented feature**, there are three styles, individually invented, invented by the whole community, and purchased from the market. The **artistry feature** came from the creative ideas, the refinement of the creator in the folding, the cutting, and the perfect and symmetric structure in the traditional style, reflecting the pride in their own roots and the satisfactory in the simple forms.

The belief in the ceremonial items in Luang Phra Bang, Lao PDR showed the belief in two levels. **The community beliefs**, which consist of the belief in spirits such as the Phi Tai and Phi Thaen, Phi Sua Muang, Phi Chua or the ancestral spirits, the belief in nagas, and the belief in auspiciousness. The social beliefs which are the religious beliefs such as the beliefs related to Brahmanism that brought about the ceremonial items according to those beliefs, such as the head of Kabillaphrom in the ceremonial parade for the fifth month which consist of the following ceremonial items: sacred strings, betel nuts and leaves, which came from the ceremonial items of India according to the beliefs in Brahmanism. The beliefs in Buddhism that consist of the materials for the creation such as flowers, incenses, and candles, put together in different styles, along with the meanings of the related Dhamma precepts, such as the five precepts and Khan Five, which symbolizes the 45 years that Buddha had been spreading his teachings. The concepts related to the merits and making merits, the concepts of cosmology for the ceremonial items in the form of Khan, which are Khan Pi Khoo, Khan Si Sip Ha, Khan Roi Sao, Khan Dok Mai, and Khan Mak Beng, which exist in the form of the structure and the elements. The drawings of the eight types of animals from the legend of Pu Sanka Sa and Ya Sanka Si and the beliefs in astrology, about how the right types of animals are similar to the image of the animals all the eight direction, similar to the astrological wheel and the belief in predicting the auspicious times to carry out certain ceremonies.

## DISCUSSION

From the study of the ritual items in Luang Prabang, the study results indicated that the ritual items were sign of a ritual performed in the form of a human invention. The study results indicated that the styles of the amulets had divided into five main perspectives: **Functional features** which divided into three categories i.e. 1) Amulets, 2) Scared items, and 3) Ritual items. The functional feature determined from the aim of the ritual different symbols and link to the meaning and turned to be the customs, **Material features** which divided into four categories i.e.1) Fresh item, 2) Processed item, 3) Durable item, and 4) and

Circulated item. These items responded the custom needs of people under the limitations of the development of technology and society, **Structural features** which divided into three categories i.e. 1) Single unit, 2) Gathered unit, and 3) Mixed unit, the structural feature was mostly found in the rituals items such as the cone shape, triangle, and other geometric shapes: cylinder, square, circle, and free shapes were made up of a single unit which grouped by sub-units and combined structures. The different structures resulted in a variety of the ritual item shapes for different purposes and convey different meanings. A single unit structure were geometrical shapes: conical, cylindrical, equilateral triangle. The trapezoidal shape was created to create a conventional loading area. The collective structure from the subunits was reusing a single unit shape for different meanings or expressing a status of importance. The combined structure was formed from the main structure as the core and had several sub-shapes, merging into one piece to form a new shape. All structure was made within the potential and limitations of the materials. The invention were found in four categories: **Invented features** which divided into four categories: Self-invented, Co-invented, Community representative, and Purchased. Since the invention originated from the person who was associated with the changing social and cultural conditions, resulted in the invention of the function had changed. **Artistry features** was the ritual item which made by human, therefore it dependent on the taste of the inventor individuality and the values which show pride in their roots and satisfied with beauty through simple way and not keen to change the items which different from the customs as they holds the truth rather than self-reliance.

In addition, the results illustrated in detail of the elements of the styles (symbol) appeared in the ritual items, which were linked to the meaning (symbol) as the relationship of the symbolism in form and meaning. The beliefs constitute the process of creating the ritual to complete the function and significance of the ritual. The beliefs described the patterns in the ritual items and communicating meaning through concrete and abstract which understood only by people in the same culture. This belief corresponded with the semiology or symbolic of Roland Barthes noted that the sign was a meaningful unit as the link of ideas with images. In modern society, human made signs to convey cultural meaning (Barthes, Roland 1915-1980 as cited in Supang Chantawanit, 2012). The style of the ritual items occurred form the sub-components together into a specific style which had different functions and different meaning. The styles had transmitted from generation to generation as it able to learn from experience with memory and understanding in the ritual and became to be the common in Luang Prabang people. Although social and technological changes made changes in some aspects, but they still serve as communication functions. The content and meaning of the ritual items can be maintained as before to meet the expectations in each society. Therefore, the study of the ritual item was a part of the cultural education as the foundation of the thoughts and identity through items.

The analysis results of the beliefs this study indicated that the beliefs were divided into two stages: Community beliefs and Society beliefs, which show the structure of the Luang Prabang society as a foundation of social and cultural thinking from different origins. **The Community beliefs** raised from original

belief in the ignorance and fear of nature and thus became a belief about Spirits, Naga, and Auspiciousness which associated with society, culture, legends and places in Luang Prabang, which goes in line with Sipachai (2018). Who stated that the preparation of the appropriate ceremonial items are done according to the traditional geological, cultural, economic, and social environment, in designating the symbols to be related to the beliefs of their own group. This affect the types of ceremonial used in different ceremonies. The beliefs related to the spirits are included in the tales, legends, and the chronicles. It was believed that the spirits are the owner of different areas within Luang Phra Bang. This belief resulted in the identity construction of the ritual items which symbolized by local beliefs from spirits and Naga. The Naga beliefs in Luang Prabang were about the Fifth teen families of spirits and Nagas as the guarding in the areas and not matter what ceremony happens, the local people must ask permission and respect the place by performing rituals and with the ritual items. These beliefs resulted the local people afraid about do the wrong things because of the fears of the two mythical powers, which is in line with Sriraksa (2015) who stated that the naga symbols of Luang Phra Bang is related to the local beliefs, which was the way the people of Luang Phra Bang creating meaningful interactions with nature, people, and the social context. The Auspicious beliefs appeared in the materials used to make the ritual items as the beliefs in the auspicious would help to strengthen the symbolic meaning and promote the effect on the mind and turned to be society value in nowadays.

**The Society beliefs** resulted from the influencing and spreading beliefs from external societies and cultures through communication. The persistence of beliefs arises from the choice of acceptance and mixed with traditional beliefs to become their own styles of beliefs i.e. Religious beliefs: which consist of the Brahmanism beliefs, myth, ceremonies, and Brahman worship. The Buddhism beliefs were found in two aspects: the materials of the ritual items in the Tripitaka and the meaning in the ritual items related to the Five-percept principles. The Luang Prabang people had flexibly influenced the spread of Buddhism which mixed between Buddhism and spiritism through the time and the adaptation together. The Cosmological beliefs has appeared in Khan categories in the ritual items in the patterns of Phra Sumen peak which surrounded by Sattapboriphan Mountain and the eight animals from Pu Sangkasa & Nya Sangkasa tale. The Pu Sangkasa & Nya Sangkasa tale also mentioned about the universe beliefs which believed that the human had occurred at that time based on the Tai-Lao beliefs. These beliefs therefore related to Luang Prabang cosmology through the ritual items.

**The Astrology beliefs** depend on the images of the eight zodiac animals, similar to the astrological wheel, through the reflection the careful during the transition of the old into the New Year, including the auspiciousness used to calculate auspicious time. Especially, in the present, the Buddhism beliefs in Luang Prabang society has been cultivated for a long time and remains with established inheritance and practice processes. In addition, the beliefs also influenced to other beliefs, but they the people nature and culture can be harmonized, transmitted, and played a significant role in society. This beliefs had long passed on the spiritual life through social behavior as common heritage of Luang Prabang society. When understood the elements of both concrete and abstract

meaning of the ritual items, it might raise the understanding of culture and traditions in Luang Prabang. The beliefs corresponded with the Claude Levi-Strauss, as mentioned that 'the structure of every society must have a deep, hidden structure and a symbolic meaning hidden within it: opposition and deep structure' (Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1908-1990 as cited in Supang Chantawanich, 2012). The opposition of two beliefs determined the meaning in hidden meaning of the ritual items in Luang Prabang for a long time with the various contexts for fully understand the meanings or signs.

Hence, the Spiritual beliefs with Brahmin ceremony in Buddhism was a social and cultural trait which transmitted through the ritual items and flexible in the traditional beliefs to be able to coexist with the new ones, in Luang Prabang. The beliefs consistent with Talcott Parsons (Talcott Parsons, 1902-1979 as cited Supang Chantawanich, 2012) noted that society must maintained, radical or conservative styles of society. Similarly, in Luang Prabang's cultural and society, which has combined beliefs from different eras resulted in the ritual items overlapped many meanings but joined together in a specific way, including the usage of ritual items in the changing context to allow to practice in the Luang Prabang society.

## **RESEARCH SUGGESTION**

### ***Suggestions For Research Results***

To be a knowledge for the government sector or the community, which can be used as a knowledge base on the conservation and dissemination of culture in the Luang Prabang.

To obtain knowledge and understanding of the styles and beliefs in the ritual items in Luang Prabang for further benefit to encourages harmony and pride in the traditions and culture the Mekong river.

### ***Recommendations For Further Research***

The next study should include the ritual items in other ethnics in the Mekong region to compare the styles and beliefs. The next study should be a study for conservation and a method of inheritance through the belief styles to create a learning process for interested people in the future.

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