



Silk threads, auspicious symbols on woven cloth of Lao Khrang people, Nakhon Pathom

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were to study 1) the wisdom of the Lao Khrang ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom, 2) the patterns on woven cloth of Lao Khrang in Nakhon Pathom, and 3) the auspicious symbols on the woven cloth of Lao Khrang people in Nakhon Pathom. Qualitative research is used in this study. The sample was selected using a specific method, i.e., the study of auspicious symbols on the ancient traditional woven cloth in Nakhon Pathom province, such as the woven fabric of the Phrong Maduea Subdistrict Municipality. The results of the study were as follows: 1) the wisdom of Lao Khrang Ethnic Group in weaving has been inherited since the immigrants from Laos to Nakhon Pathom. There is a community of Lao Khrang ethnic group that still maintains the art of weaving in ancient ways, preserving ancient fabric textiles, i.e., Ban Phrong Maduea community. They have woven silk and cotton into fabrics with discontinuous supplementary weft techniques. The woven cloth is used for two purposes: daily life, and Buddhist ceremony and tradition. Therefore, woven fabrics are not only beautiful with patterns and colors but there is also a characteristic identity showing the way of life, faith, belief, and traditions of the community. 2) The woven pattern imitates natural and geometric patterns. The technique of discontinuous supplementary weft is used to create various textiles by adding special weft threads for inserting up and down. There is a textile of weft lines with patterns of periodic textiles and it came in different patterns and colors. 3) The auspicious symbols of Lao Khrang people are the pattern woven into the fabric. The silk threads are woven in accordance with beliefs in Buddhist and agricultural society. The symbols represent auspiciousness and good luck, including patterns that indicate fertility and auspicious animals in Buddhajataka and legends, such as Naga, elephant, swan, and lion.

Keywords: wisdom, auspicious symbol, weaving, ethnic group, Lao Khrang

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1. Introduction

Lao Khrang ethnic group or Tai-Krang group is a cultural group in the Tai ethnic group that uses the Tai-Lao language. The group originally settled in the Mekong River Basin, Luang Prabang district and Huaphan province, Laos. Later, they migrated to settle in the Chao Phraya River basin caused by the war. Lao Khrang people currently live in the central region and the lower north provinces, e.g., Chainat, Uthai Thani, Suphan Buri, Nakhon Pathom, Phichit, Nakhon Sawan, Phitsanulok, and Kamphaeng Phet. It can be assumed that the first migration to the Chao Phraya River basin during the Thonburi era in the year of B.E.1778, by coming to settle in Saraburi and Bangkok (Sila Viravong, 1997: 147-151). When Vientiane and Champasak became colonies of Thailand, the Lan Xang Kingdom had belonged to the Kingdom of Thailand ever since (Suwimon Wankhrua and Chanida Tangtavonsirikun, 1993: 11-12). They later migrated to Thailand in B.E. 1791 during the reign of King Rama I and in B.E. 1815 during in the reign of King Rama 2, when the governor of Vientiane sent the Lao town of Phu Kang down to offer (Bung-on Piyabhan, 1996: 47-48). This time, His Highness allowed them to set up a community in Nakhon Chai Si. Later in the reign of King Rama V, authority has changed,

allowing Lao people from Phu Khang and those from other provinces, such as Luang Prabang and Vientiane, to migrate to other cities. Therefore, at present, Lao Khrang, Lao Wiang, and Lao Kao people can be found in areas other than Nakhon Chai Si, e.g, Chainat, Suphan Buri, Uthai Thani, Nakhon Sawan, Phichit and Kamphaeng Phet (Suwimon Wankhrua and Chanida Tangtavonsirikun, 1993: 14-16).

However, Lao Khrang people who migrated to settle in Thailand brought their own culture, namely, languages, dresses, customs, rituals and beliefs. There was also a way of life that is tied to Buddhism, agriculture as a main occupation, belief in ghosts and ghost worshipping rituals. With such faith, things that are worshiped or offered, e.g., betel nuts, sweets, auspicious fruits such as coconuts, are considered sacred and auspicious. Moreover, there are other auspicious symbols that appear in the way of life of Lao Khrang people, namely, woven cloth. It is regarded as a unique identity and wisdom that has been passed down since the time they lived in Laos. The famous fabric of Lao Khrang is Pha Jok, where silk and cotton threads are inserted into the fabric to create textiles based on specific beliefs. The textiles that are beautifully woven onto the fabric arise from beliefs and faith in Buddhism. Additionally, there is an imitation of textile inspiring from nature (Saowanee Areechonchareon, 2013: 3-4) in the area, creating a silk mark as an auspicious symbol displayed fabric to bless for prosperity and

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good fortune.

From a review of research studies on textile weaving with auspicious symbols of Lao Khrang ethnic groups in Nakhon Pathom, there were researchers who studied Lao Khrang weaving, namely, Wirawan Chatbutra (2003), Anyaporn Thongborisut (2004), Nujira Rasamipaiboon (2006), Supit Sriphan (2008), Rujee Srisombut (2010), Songpol Tuanthes (2012), Saowanee Areechonchareon (2013), and Praepat Yodkaew (2020) (2018) (2016). These research papers study the wisdom of Lao Khrang ethnic group in various fields, especially the wisdom of weaving and textile weaving. Therefore, the researcher is interested in the study of silk threads, auspicious symbols on woven fabrics of Lao Khrang people, Nakhon Pathom Province as a framework for research studies on Lao Khrang culture and ethnicity, preserving culture and traditions of Lao Khrang people, and to promote innovative tourism in Nakhon Pathom.

2. Research Objectives

To study 1) wisdom of the Lao Khrang ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom, 2) textiles on Lao Khrang woven cloth in Nakhon Pathom, and 3) an auspicious symbol on the woven cloth of the Lao Khrang people in Nakhon Pathom.

3. Research Methods

The study was qualitative research in which the research data were selected in an ethnographic model (ethnographic research) by collecting document data relating to Lao Khrang ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom (documentary search) through interviews and observations. This aims to explain and interpret the culture of ethnic groups that shares the same culture. The research was conducted by which the researchers spent time observing and engaging with the target group according to the action plan set out in the research plan using a group discussion method (focus group discussion).

This research used an observation form, a group discussion form, and an interview form, constructed by the researcher based on related theories, concepts, research papers, and textbooks. Moreover, the researcher also consulted experts to develop appropriate research tools for data analysis as follows:

1. For interviews, basic data were summarized and categorized the individual statements to understand and explain relating to the topics studied.
2. For group conversations, group-level data were summarized and categorized to understand and explain the scope of study.
3. Data from observations and document synthesis were analyzed and interpreted, as well as summarized and explained according to the scope of study.
4. Data were analyzed according to classification and content according to the subject and scope of the study according to research objectives and validated by a triangular method.
5. Each category of information were collected and used to understand, interpret and explain according to the scope of study.
6. The results of the study were presented by analyzing the content in relation to the composition and conclusions of the

scope of study by descriptive method.

4. Research Results

The research results can be summarized as follows.

Part I: Lao Khrang ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom

One of the reasons for cultural diversity in Thailand is the result of immigration since ancient times. The various Lao ethnic groups that have migrated to Thailand since the early Rattanakosin period are Lao Phuan, Lao Chong, Lao Vieng, Laos Southern, and Lao Khrang. Each group has unique wisdom, customs, and traditions (Faculty of Education, 2014) and adopts different cultures, including respect human rights of others. Thus, various ethnic groups in Thailand can live, adapt themselves, and coexist happily in Thai society. The Lao Khrang is one of the Lao ethnic groups that once lived in Luang Prabang. Further information about this ethnic group in Laos is mentioned in the academic book "Lao-Tai Textiles: The Textiles of Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan". According to Cheesman, Lao Khrang is an ethnic group in Muang Phuan, based in the "Phu Kang" mountain range, claiming evidence of the ruins of 3 pagodas in the area built around 1345 (c. 1888). The group is referred in Laos as "Tai-Khang" and in Thailand as "Lao Khrang" (Cheesman, 2004: 283).

There are Thai descendants of Lao Khrang who migrated and settled in Nakhon Pathom from the Thonburi period until the reigns of King Rama II and Rama III. At present, they live in large numbers in 3 main districts, i.e., Phong Ma Duea Sub-district in Mueang district and Huai Duan Subdistrict, Don Ruak Subdistrict, and Lam Yee Subdistrict in Don Tum District. Especially Huai Duan Subdistrict, there are 7 villages with 99 percent of Lao Khrang residents. Most of Lao Khrang people believe in Buddhism and believe in ghosts. They are kind, gentle, peace-loving, and harmonious, with Buddhism and animism as their core anchors. At present, Lao Khrang people in Nakhon Pathom have settled and inherited their culture and beliefs since living in Laos from generation to generation and they can also maintain their identity in their ethnic group. Lao Khrang people live in an agricultural society where their way of life is influenced by Buddhism and supernatural beliefs, such as animism and superstitions. Such beliefs form the roles and duties of people in families and communities from birth to death. These things are considered to be the wisdom contained in the traditions and rituals of Lao Khrang people, especially the rituals related to life. There is a master spirit and an angel who plays an important role in building morale for the people. A shrine or a ghost hall is built in the community, which will be the center of the year or ghost party. Therefore, birth, ordination, marriage, sickness, and death are rituals connected to ghosts, and there is a prohibition inserted in the rituals. Animism reflects the need for an agricultural lifestyle related to water and fertility, such as opening a barn and rice blessing ceremony. In addition, during each month, villagers make merit at the temple according to their belief in Buddhism and worship the supernatural in order to be protected from the sacred (Kanchana Chansing, 2015; Mae Lat Subdistrict Administrative Organization: 24). Thai descendants of Lao Khrang have their own unique culture, language, dress, customs and rituals and beliefs



Figure 1: Naga and elephant patterns on Lao Khrang fabric.
From: <https://archive.sacit.or.th/handicraft/250>

which have been practiced for a long time. The language used is Lao Khrang, belonging to the Tai-Kadai language family. As for the dress of Lao Khrang descendant, fabrics are woven from natural fibers, such as cotton and silk. Techniques used in weaving are both discontinuous supplementary weft and weft ikat. Therefore, the fabric can be regarded as a distinctive identity of the Lao Khrang people since ancient times. Especially the Phasin Mudmee Tor Tin Jok, it is woven with a unique local fabric according to the ancient beliefs, i.e., the five-colored loincloth with a variety of patterns. Dyes are obtained from natural sources. For example, red is from shellac, indigo color is from indigo plant mixed with betel mortar, yellow is extracted from turmeric, and black is taken from ebony and gray (moss). Woven fabrics are not only for household use, but also for sale as supplemental income. Mulberry is grown, silkworms are cultivated, and cotton is grown as raw materials for weaving into clothes for use in daily life (Sitthichai Smanchat, 1998: 57). There are unique fabrics such as Khit cloth, Jok cloth, and Mudmee cloth. Cotton and silk woven fabrics are commonly used in religious ceremonies, e.g., Naga headscarves and scripture wraps. The woven fabrics used in daily life are, for example, sarong cloth, loincloth, pillows, and bags of snacks

Part II: Silk threads, threads on the woven cloth of Lao Khrang people, Nakhon Pathom province.

Silk thread is woven into a piece of cloth. Ancient Lao textile woven cloth originated from the weaving of yarn that indicates the way of life and spirit of the weaver. This is something that Lao people who migrated from Luang Prabang, 300-400 years ago, brought with them, namely, Tub Klai, Pha Tang, Sanam. Especially, Tin Din Daeng cloth that was woven by the life and spirit of the Lao people. Woven cloths are commonly used to wear in merit making or festivals where Lao Khrang girls love to wear red. In the past, Lao Khrang people used to weave silk or cotton sarongs to wear themselves. Cotton sarongs are used as workwear, while Tin Jok cloth is used in merit-making and wedding events. For the wedding, the bride has to weave mosquito nets, blankets, and pillowcases to use on the wedding day, where the groom must help the bride spin the thread at night. Lao Khrang people must have one red cloths with the most beautiful pattern. This cloth will be kept for covering after death, since Lao Khrang people believe that it will bring comfort in the next life. There is also a fabric weave in order to dedicate merits to those who have passed away.

The silk marks that appear in sarongs of Lao Khrang people

are unique. Lao Khrang sarongs are divided into 3 portions that are comparable to the organs of the human body: top, middle, and bottom. The top can come in any color but the bottom portion must be red. At present, there has been a change in weaving, that is, there is no top part and the bottom portion must be the same color as the sarong. The sarongs of Lao Khrang people are woven from silk, popularly in red. In addition, natural materials, e.g., flowers, leaves, and bark, are used to create colors, e.g., purple, green, pink, brown, and gray. Additionally, the meaning of each color is also defined, for example, white represents brightness, black represents darkness, green represents forest leaves, etc. The famous Lao Khrang fabric is Pha Jok. The original patterns are: Kankong pattern inspired by flower stalks bending down to the ground, Khuang pattern from cotton braid used as a storage device of cross thread obtained from spinning, pattern from the side of chipmunks' body, Khu Kut pattern inspired by a vegetable fern named Kood, bong pattern from creepers and vines inspired by mustaches and vegetable tops, such as gourds and pumpkins, characteristic flower patterns that come from looking up at the sky and seeing many stars, Naga pattern originated and imitated the Naga, and Kor pattern. The beam comes from a small mushroom that grows on the logs. Additionally a fig flower pattern is a newly invented pattern of the Phong Fig community that converted a district symbol into a fabric textile.

Part III: Auspicious symbols appearing in Lao Khrang woven cloth

An auspicious symbol is something that is destined to represent another thing which can be a picture, sign, or thing. Therefore, auspicious symbols refer to things established to represent auspicious meanings arising from beliefs, such as the belief that such things are symbols of goodness and bring success and good luck. The symbol, therefore, arises from a belief that has been practiced for a long time. Lao Khrang people are an ethnic group with a unique identity in weaving and dress in traditional woven cloth that has been passed down from generation to generation in Laos. Woven fabrics that are the unique identity of Lao Khrang people are Pha Khit, Pha Jok and Pha Mudmee, woven by both cotton and silk, and can be categorized by auspicious symbols appearing on patterns of woven fabrics as follows:

1. Auspicious symbols on woven cloth involved with Buddhist rituals

Belief and faith in Buddhism plays a role in the way of life

of Lao Khrang people, which can be divided into two parts, “make food” and “make alms”. Making alms is important to the way of life of Lao Khrang people in expressing their faith in Buddhism. The wisdom of the Lao Khrang people is weaving. In addition to weaving cloth for the benefit of their own and family life, there is also weaving “Textiles in Buddhism” for merit making. These woven fabrics of the Lao Khrang people are, such as, flag (Tung), Naga head cover, asana cloth, scripture cloth curtain, wall curtains attached to the pulpit, foot pillows, and little pillows, etc. (Sitthichai Smanchat, 1998: 57-58).

Naga Textile: Naga textile is a distinctive and unique symbol that is the same among the Lao and Thai ethnic groups along the banks of the Mekong River. “Naga” is a belief that originates from the snake worship cult based on the traditional beliefs of people since prehistoric times in Southeast Asia who have worshiped snakes for at least 3,000 years since the metal age (Pranee Wongthet, 2000: 226). Naga textile is an art found in artisans in the Northeastern region and Laos. The communities that settled on the banks of the Mekong, living and connecting with water, believed that Nagas were symbols of water and fertility. Apart from Naga textile, there are other animal textiles such as crocodile, Mak or Rao, Khai, and Naga images. It is said that King Rama VI described Mak as Rao (Sor Plainoi, 1989: 224) as an imaginary animal that guards sacred places (Vajaradhon Simking, 2017: 36). Lao Khrang has all large, medium, and small Nagas, beautifully woven with Naga head designs. Beliefs related to Naga patterns are assumed that “Naga” is a Buddhist symbol that appears in Jataka, a Buddhist legend that mentions the Naga transformed himself to be ordained and deposited his name in Buddhism. Therefore, being ordained as a monk will be called “Naga”. The Naga is therefore a symbol of faith that is firmly attached to Buddhism, appearing in Thai architecture as a symbol of Buddhism. In addition, Lao Khrang people who have ties to the Mekong River have a legend that the Naga is the builder of the country. Therefore, the Naga may refer to the Mekong River that stretches like a serpent representing the Mekong River Basin, the former hometown of the Lao Khrang people (Sitthichai Smanchat, 2019: 5).

Elephants are auspicious and majestic symbols of leaders and seniority and are also related to the culture of beliefs about Nagas as evidenced in the legend of Singhanat Child. It is a story of Phra Chao Brahma that a large snake (Naga) transformed into a white elephant named Chang Phan Kham as a vehicle for both Phrao Phrom and Thao Hung or Khun Truong.

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Therefore, such auspicious symbols appear on the woven cloth used in Buddhist ceremonies, such as the pattern on the Songkran flag at Songkran festival or the robe of Laos, held in April every year. Lao Khrang people hold the tradition of parading the Songkran flags or the tradition of making off-season offering of robes and other needs, for example, in Mueang District at Phong Maduea Sub-district and in Don Tum District

at Lao Tao, Lam Yoe Tako Sung, Don Ruak, and Thung Phak Kut Sub-district, Nakhon Pathom. In the ceremony, the flags are weaved by a handiwork group of Lao Khrang women. The flags used in the procession are woven with auspicious symbols of Buddhism, such as Naga pattern, elephant pattern, and swan pattern.

2. Auspicious symbols related to life on woven textiles

Lao Khrang weaving is an important identity of Lao Khrang people. Lao Khrang woven fabrics are outstanding in color. For Lao Khrang sarong, the importance part is the lowest border. In the past, it was red because “red” was Lao Khrang’s color and became a symbol that appears on the Lao Khrang woven. According to the beliefs of Lao Khrang people, “red” is the color that represents their homeland and ancestors. Moreover, red color represents “the sun” as the ancestors of Lao Khrang people migrated from the east where the sun rises in the morning. In conclusion, Lao Khrang people believe in five main colors appearing on woven fabrics. Red symbolizes migration from the east, black symbolizes the origin of Lao Khrang people migrated from Luang Prabang (a fertile city), white represents the “race” that has faith in Buddhism, yellow symbolizes the “Champa Lao”—the flower that indicates the identity of Lao community, and green symbolizes the livelihood of Lao Khrang people who are bound by agriculture and nature.

In addition, the auspicious textiles on Lao Khrang fabrics indicated the symbols of beliefs that appeared in Lao Khrang legends and stories when they lived in Laos, as follows:

1. Naga or python textile: Naga is a textile that is popular among people in the Mekong River Basin. It is believed that Naga named Suwan Naga was the one who dug the Mekong River. People of the Mekong region, therefore, believe that Nagas are their ancestors, symbolizing water. Naga also represents fertility in agricultural society.

2. Leo textile: Leo is a noble animal that symbolizes power and grace, and represents respect and protection.

3. Swan textile: Swan is an auspicious animal in Brahmanism and Buddhism that is popularly displayed in arts in the region. It is believed that the swan is the vehicle of the Brahman gods, Brahma and Surasawati. Therefore, the swan symbolizes grace and paternal lineage. Lao Khrang people like to weave a pair of swans, believing that swans are high-ranking animals and have a duty to protect and care for the family’s well-being.

4. Elephant textile: Elephant is a noble and majestic animal alongside the monarch, representing greatness and dignity that conveys the connection to Buddhism or the representation of the King who takes care of people’s well-being.

5. Horse textile: Horses are agile and graceful creatures.

6. Kochasri textile: Kochasri is a cross between a lion and an elephant. Both lions and elephants are auspicious creatures in the Himmaman forest that are graceful and awe-inspiring. They represent grandeur and grace, also symbolize fathers and mothers who protect their children.

In addition to the above, there are also Lao Khrang woven fabrics inspired by nature, such as various flower textiles. For example, the Soi Sa pattern refers to flowers that grow around the area. The cooing pattern means walking on a winding path until tiring. The eggplant pattern refers to an eggplant that has been cut into 3 or 4 pieces. The pattern represents the monkey

vines. Marmot stripe refers to large bats and Lai Kho Noi means small mushrooms or scallop mushrooms. The royal pattern is represented by large vines and the bong pattern is represented by tangled vines. There are also other patterns of utensils, e.g., umbrella, hook, spider leg, hyena pattern, Pikun flower, Chan flower, Maengod tail, etc (Thirabhand Chancharearn. 2013: 10).

Another important way of life of Lao Khrang people, that shows on the auspicious textiles, is the eating ceremony or marriage ceremony. The way of life appears on the textiles weaving, saffron wood, and the pattern of the groom's robes. Lao Khrang people believe in using saffron wood (cloth beam) for rolling the finished fabric from the standing line, which will be used as a beam for carrying the groom's party or Baisri, used to perform the ceremony to the bride and the groom. The textile on the groom's robes in the wedding ceremony which is the textile of the groom's garment. On the day of the wedding, the groom will wear "Pha Kheoy" which is a Mudmee cloth with "magenta" with a "green stripe" running along the edge of the cloth. This green color is likely modeled after the Indian Patola through the Khmer Mudmee textile. The auspicious symbols in Mudmee cloths are "Kho Nak" and "Khom" textile, which symbolizes fertility. It is a symbol of water, source of a new life. Kho Naga is the Krua, Kra, and Ruang textile, symbols of harmony. Naga is a symbol of water that brings moisture to the married life of newlyweds. As for "Khom textile", Khom or lantern is a symbol of happiness and light guiding life.

5. Conclusion

Silk thread is a fiber weaved as the fabric of Lao Khrang ethnic group who migrated to Nakhon Pathom Province. Ban Phrong Maduea, Nakhon Pathom, is a community that weaves ancient fabrics with auspicious patterns. They have faith in Buddhism and there are rituals to build faith and build morale to bring prosperity in life. Auspicious textiles that appear as silk marks on the fabric are popularly created for 2 types of uses: benefits for Buddhist merit and special occasion clothing, such as weddings, important events, and traditional events. Auspicious symbols are used to convey good meaning according to the beliefs of Lao Khrang people. They normally are considered auspicious in Buddhism such as Naga, elephant, swan, and lion patterns. Some symbols are auspicious for lifestyles, such as green and black colors refer to abundance. Especially red is a unique color of Lao Khrang. They believe red is the color of courage and the direction in which the sun shines in the Luang Prabang sky where they originally lived. However, these auspicious symbols of woven cloth are the wisdom of Lao Khrang people in the past. They believe that the auspicious symbols of silk threads woven on the fabric will bring sanctity causing prosperity, happiness, and fortune.

6. Discussion

The study showed that Lao Khrang communities, Phrong Maduea subdistrict, Nakhon Pathom is a community that has preserved and inherited ancient weaving. Auspicious textiles can be divided into 2 types: textiles related to Buddhism, such

as Naga pattern, elephant pattern, and swan pattern, and textiles arising from artificial nature in their way of life such as Pikul flower pattern and moon flower pattern. This is consistent with the research of Saowanee Areechonchareon, which discussed the woven fabrics of the Lao Khrang people, Ban Khok Mo, Uthai Thani, and mentioned about important textiles of sarong, i.e., Naga pattern and swan pattern. This is also consistent with Praepat Yodkaew, who studied the weaving wisdom of the Lao Khrang ethnic group, Ban Prong Maduea community, and said that the fabrics are silk and cotton. The technique of weaving in a discontinuous supplementary weft style is used to create various textiles. Woven fabrics are beautifully and uniquely hand-woven. The patterns represent the way of life, beliefs, customs, and traditions of their community. There are also woven textiles that consist of natural and geometric motifs.

7. Suggestions for Further Work

1. Study of woven fabric textiles that symbolize auspiciousness in new creative ways that can represent the identity of Lao Khrang ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom.
2. Study of the development of products from other Lao Khrang auspicious textiles, e.g., bags, hats, shoes, basketry, etc.
3. Study and analysis of the development of Lao Khrang auspicious fabric from local wisdom to innovative products.
4. A quantitative research study, for example, on user satisfaction of indigenous woven auspicious textiles in order to develop products and add cultural capital value to culture and serve as community products to support the development of innovative tourism in Lao Khrang ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom.

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