

Southern Laos People's Democratic Republic Tribal Sculptures: The Influence of Social and Economic Change on the Inheritance Process and Cultural Significance

Bancha Kuonsama khom^{a*}, Niyom Wongphong kham^b, Vichoke Mukdamanee^c

^aFaculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Mueang District, Khon Kaen Province,
Khon Kaen – 40002, Thailand;

^bFaculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Mueang District, Khon Kaen Province,
Khon Kaen – 40002, Thailand;

^cSilpakorn University, Wang Tha Phra, Phra Nakorn District, Bangkok Province, Bangkok– 10200, Thailand

*Corresponding authors: bankou@kku.ac.th

Abstract

This article is part of research entitled Southern Laos People's Democratic Republic Tribal Sculptures: Style, Wisdom and Aesthetic to Create a Contemporary Sculpture with the objectives of studying the influence of the social and economic changes of Southern Lao PDR on the inheritance and cultural significance. The research applied a qualitative method, consisting of the following qualitative research tools, survey, observation, and interviews with key and casual informants related to tribal sculptures. The following relevant research theory, concept, and field data were analyzed at a community and individual level, including the Structural Functionalism Theory by Emile Durkheim and the Social Practice Concept by Pierre Bourdieu.

The study revealed that migrations due to political and economic reasons influence the inheritance and definition of sculptures. In the era of the nation-state building, tribal sculpture of Southern Lao PDR was considered a cultural capital that helped preserve the collective consciousness of the tribe that migrated to a new area. The policy changes from the opening up of the country pushed the tribe to accept the sculptures as an economic capital. Therefore, the restoration and reproduction of tribal sculptures exhibit the cultural significance rooted in the traditionality of the group, as well as the identity given by the society, which includes 1) the traditional structure of the tribes and the construction of new communities on the new areas require a social anchor, which was the collective consciousness of “worshipping spirits”, and the inheritance process exhibit the collective consciousness, 2) Social structure from practice where the livelihood within the new economy is a “field” where the tribes learn and adjust the sculptures from containing the spiritual and monetary value to become an economic and symbolic capital that can be used as a power bargaining tool against the unjust cultural status of Lao that was ingrained in socialism. Therefore, studying the current status of the tribal sculptures in Southern Lao PDR will benefit the understanding of the complex cultural changes and diversities of the current Lao tribes.

Keywords: Southern Laos People's Democratic Republic, tribal sculpture, social and economic changes, structural functionalism, social actions

1. Introduction

Laos People's Democratic Republic has become a significant country due to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China since 2013 because ASEAN gained the role of a space for trade and political opportunity. Lao PDR used to rank as the country with the lowest income in Asia. However, the opening of the country during the New Imagination Era caused continuous foreign investment and drove the economy forward, influencing the social and economic changes in Lao (Zoltán Vörös & Pongkhao Somsack, 2020). "It was estimated that both domestic and international transportation and tourism will create a good impact on the overall economy", the statement showing the reliance of foreign investment for economic growth (Keith Barney, 2008). Nakata (2021) noticed that "this investment creates a challenge in the adaptation of Lao PDR in terms of benefit and sustainability at the social and cultural level. Grant Evans (2006) and Pinkaew Laungaramsri (2019) expressed concern about the social and cultural changes since the early 1990s, "the impacts from the changes due to the opening of the country caused this adaptation to be more complex since Lao PDR consists of diverse ethnic groups."

Lao PDR has a population of about 7.23 million people, consisting of many ethnic tribes and groups. "Lao people call themselves overall tribal groups, which can be divided into three main groups based on the location of their settlements, Lao Lum, Lao Theung, and Lao Soong. Before the official declaration by the Social Sciences Committee of Lao PDR in 1991, it was estimated that there were more than 68 subgroups, or what was known as tribes. "The tribes that speak the Tai family language consisted of 68 percent, Mon-Khmer family language 23 percent, Miao-Yao 6 percent, Burmese 2.8 percent, and Hor 0.7 percent (Mikusol, 2016).

"Lao PDR has been considered a land rich in various tribes, especially around the forests and highlands. Some tribes descend from the original groups of people who settled on the land. Currently, these groups have different traditions and cultures compared to the majority of the people in the country. These subgroups's traditions are so familiar that they believe themselves to be a descendant of the same ancestors (Duangphasee, 2008).

Anthropology and Archeology study found that the people in Lao PDR have a connection to the traditional tribal traditions, presumed to be the first group of people who settled into the Mekong area, especially the groups who speak the Mon-Khmer family language. "It is believed that these ethnic groups are the original people who first settled in Indochina. Currently, these groups of people might be the crucial key in providing the missing knowledge on the society and culture of people who were living in South East Asia in the pre-historic time. Apart from language, culture is one of the identities that can still be seen today (Khongwichit, 2007). "Most Mon-Khmer Lao ethnic groups living on the highlands in the Southern part of the country, such as the Bru, Taoi, Taliang, Laven, Katang, Katu, etc., make up 22 percent of the whole Lao population" (Trasuwan, 2012). Among the groups that use the Mon-Khmer language, 19 groups are Animism. They are also the traditional groups of people whom the Lao Lum people referred to as Kha, or slaves, the poorest groups of people in the Lao society (Mallika Ponggrarichat, 2001).

The Southern Lao People's Democratic Republic consists of five provinces, Savannakhet, Salavan, Champasak, Sekong, and Attapeu. The country covers an area of 65,865 square kilometers. It shares boundaries with the province of Khammuan to the north, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south, and Thailand to the west. On the eastern side, there are mountains and plateaus. "The culture is similar to that of the pre-historic era. The rituals, traditions, and livelihood are related to the belief that supernatural phenomena are caused by spirits or ghosts, which led to the rituals of worshipping nature and ancestors (Chaiprasertkul, 2011). "The form of local arts and crafts still maintain their traditional identity" (Sikka, 2009). The livelihood of the lower Lao people consisted of planting rice on the hillside, rotation farming, hunting, and collecting food from the forest. These people have skills in handicrafts and weaving. Their wisdom and practices that are considered their identity were house construction, music, and rituals. Their significant architecture is the "Hor Gwan" tower, which is the central structure of the villages used for performing ceremonies.

Tribal kinship has a close relationship. The houses were built right next to one another, with the "Hor Gwan", or "Gwan Ban" as the architectural symbol of the tribe. The Hor Gwan is unique in its location, and architectural form, built close to the ceremonial ground for the "Paeng Heet Ban" ceremony. The area and the ceremonies are closely connected to the belief in spirits and communities and consist of architectural aesthetics. The Hor Gwan was decorated

with carvings that express the aesthetic of Tribal Art, or Primitive Art, in other words, the “Tribal Sculpture” work. Other places where these tribal sculptures can be found are on ceremonial grounds related to death, which was the tribal cemetery ground. The caskets were decoratively carved along with other decorations around the grave. “The carvings consist of people, animals, or other beings based on their Animism belief, such as symbols of people who passed away. These sculptures would be placed in the crematory before the funeral. This ceremony was part of the ritual related to death, which has been the tribes’ belief since ancient times (Sikka, 2007).

Southern Lao PDR tribal sculpture has become part of the cultural studies of sub-ethnic groups in Lao society since each tribe separated itself from groups of people with mainstream religious beliefs, such as Brahmanism or Buddhism, which occurred at a later period. These societies grew into a kingdom around the 6th to 8th Buddhist Century and became most people within the upper social structure. While tribal sculptures are considered the objects of the marginalized people, the inheritance of the belief in creating sculptures can be traced back to ancient times. The sculptures express the belief in spirits, and supernatural powers while disguising myths showing the cosmology and the ability in imagination of the people in the past. These wisdoms helped guide the lives and the existence of the communities. The carved sculptures used in the rituals and as symbols are part of the anchor for people who called themselves “tribal people”.

Most past cultural studies on tribal groups were on languages and handicrafts, such as textiles and weaving machinery that had been systematically inherited. However, there are limited studies on the tribal sculptures since it was difficult to compile the data that had been constantly changing over a long time. The existing findings talk about the assumption of the evolution of ancient society used for social traditions and norms. Therefore, there are no clear studies of the tribal sculpture history. The social and cultural changes vaguely define the occurred meaning, the explanation is therefore based on the interpretation of the researcher. The current historians came to the same conclusion that “the past study of tribal arts still have discrepancies and fill of biases.”

The current culture of Lao PDR was facing challenges in the adaptation during the “New Imagination Era” since Southern Lao PDR was included in the development plan of the Emerald Triangle between Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia with the aid from South Korea and the Asian Development Bank. Tribal sculptures took part in supporting tourism and commercial products, affecting the dynamic of changes in various dynamics, consisting of the cultural dynamic and tribal wisdom. The inheritance of the ancient beliefs in creating the sculptures aligns with the worldview towards the livelihood that reflects the contribution of meanings to the sculptures and their relationship to the communities. This finding is in line with the study by Yves Goudineau (2003) who talked about “The significance in supporting and maintaining cultural diversities of the small ethnic groups in Laos, the challenges these groups have to face, including the loss of the traditional practice, languages, and wisdom due to modernity and globalization.”

Therefore, this article is part of the study of the diverse culture in Southern Lao PDR by analyzing the current relationship between the sculptures and the tribes, to provide an explanation of their links to the history and importance of the traditional culture and the new meaning created from the influence of the social and economic changes. The study of the inheritance process and the cultural significance of the Southern Lao tribal groups' sculptures was done through surveys and was accepted by the key and casual informants as a significant artwork of the Southern Lao tribes. The theories that were used as a framework for the analysis in the research consisted of the Structural-Functionalism theory by Emile Durkheim which can explain the social and cultural development plan, and the Practice concept by Pierre Bourdieu to help explain the existence of the sculptures. The social and cultural arts findings from the field study consisted of perspectives on local arts and the inheritors’ creation and narration of the materials, the creation techniques, and the attitudes of people outside of the culture who are related to or appreciate the aesthetics of the tribal sculptures, the identity of the sculptures, and the changes under globalization.

Under the changes in Southern Lao PDR and the world, the acquired knowledge will provide an understanding of the cultural roots in the Mekong Sub-region, the diverse aesthetic forms, and the aesthetical appreciation of the traditional tribal sculptures in Southern Lao PDR that will help create the inspiration that will lead to the interpretation that helps connects the traditional meaning and the meaning under the current context, as well as creating the

knowledge that will lead to the creation of contemporary sculptures, which is one way to inherit the wisdom and aesthetic in the artwork of the Mekong region.

2. Research project objective

To study the social and economic influence on the inheritance and the cultural significance of the tribal sculptures in Southern Lao PDR

3. Research Methodology

The article entitled “Southern Laos People’s Democratic Republic Tribal Sculptures: The Influence of Social and Economic Change on the Inheritance Process and Cultural Significance”, one part of the study entitled “Southern Laos People’s Democratic Republic Tribal Sculptures: Style, Wisdom and Aesthetic to Create a Contemporary Sculpture” used qualitative research method to collect the documentary and field data in Southern Laos, consisting of five provinces, Savannakhet, Salavan, Champasak, Sekong and Attapeu. The majority of the people in these provinces are tribal people. The study focused on the history and current status of the inheritance and the meaning contributing to sculptures. The target groups included the key informants, consisting of sculptors, tribe members, relevant officers, academics, and historians. The tools used for collecting data included surveys, observations, and interviews. The data were analyzed using the research framework that consisted of the Structural-Functionalism theory by Emile Durkheim and the Cultural Practice concept by Pierre Bourdieu. The data was presented using descriptive analysis.

4. Research Result

Southern Lao PDR consists of five provinces with a population of around 2,460,000. One-third of the whole population consists of 19 tribes, accounting for 39 percent of the total number of tribes. From the research, surveys, and interviews of past researchers in Southern Lao PDR, there are still eight areas with sculptures and sculptors, 1) Chong Mek, Thailand-Laos border 2) Pakse, Champasak 3) Pathoumphone, Champasak 4) Bachiang, Champasak 5) Tha Taeng, Sekong District, 6) Lamam, Salavan Province, 7) Dak Chang, Sekong Sub-district, and 8) Sa-Namxai, Attapeu Sub-district.

The study showed that the sculptures that are inherited and can be found currently are related to a significant historical factor, the migration of the tribal groups. The reasons for the migration that are directly related to the current status of the tribes include 1) escaping from the Indochina war, 2) the land management by the state during the Nation-State building, and 3) seeking economic opportunities during the open trade period.

The relationship between the people and the area’s history started with the creation of the communities after the war was over and the changes in the government system in 1975. The tribe settlements consisted of both original and new members. The complexity of the migration included 1) new members where the state designated the land, 2) the original members who left and returned but did not get to live on their original land, and 3) original members (which account for a small number). The frequent and continuous migrations were due to factors such as the city growth or the agricultural land management policies and the construction of dams.

Significant tribal sculptures with evidence showing the connection with the migration of the tribes from their original settlement on the Bolaven Plateau and the small tribes scattered around the eastern border with Vietnam who migrated after the end of the Indochina war to settle on the lowland. **Therefore, the survey of the tribal sculptures does not have a direct path of migration. In rural communities or in tribes that still maintain their traditional livelihood, traditional tribal sculptures can still be found since the inheritance made its way to the new communities in the lowland area and their meanings have changed based on the social context of those areas.**

The study found that the areas are significant to the inheritance of the Southern Lao tribal sculptures. The areas where the sculptures still play a role within the tribal society and maintain their connection to the traditional culture are the Sekong and Champasak Provinces (Figure 1), where the sculptures can be divided into three groups.

1a Sculptures inherited through handicrafts in Pathoumphone district, Champasak province (Figure 3).

2a Sculptures that are preserved as an identity of Southern Laos in Champasak Museum (Figure 4).

3a Sculptures inherited through restoration at Don Gun Mai village, Tha Taeng, Sekong

(Figure 5).

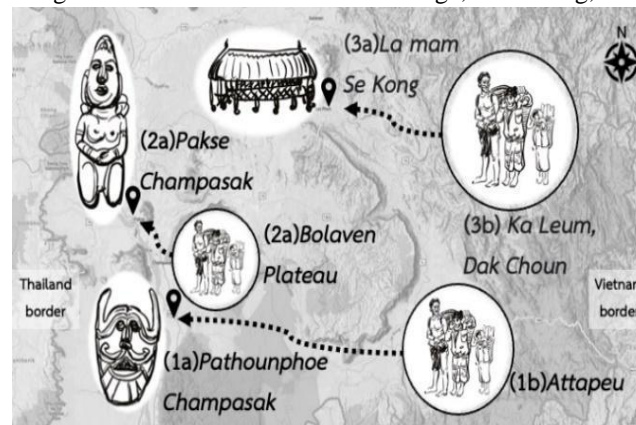


Figure 1. (1a) tribal sculptures, Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, production area for commercial tribal sculptures inherited by the tribes migrated from (1b) Paksong, Attapeu province. (2a) tribal sculptures in Pakse, Champasak museum, the sculptures preserved and inherited by the government offices. The sculptures were brought in from the communities in the Bolaven Plateau (2b). (3a) Sculptures of the Katu tribe, Don Gun Mai village, Sekong Province, used for decorating the Hor Gwan and for ceremonies, inherited by the tribes migrated from Kaleum and Dak Cheung city near the Vietnamese border (3b).

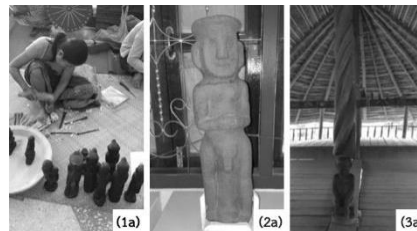


Figure 2. (1a) Tribal sculptures in Pathoumphone district inherited through commercial production. The sculptures tell a story of the daily lives of the tribal groups and are considered an identity of the Lao Theung people. (2a) tribal sculptures in Champasak museum, preserved as an antique. The sculptures tell stories of myths, beliefs, and values held by the tribal groups, and the significance of the tribes. (3a) Sculptures of the Katu tribe, Don Gun Mai village, inherited through the restoration by the newly settled communities. The sculptures represent the belief and ceremonial ground and are considered the pride of the tribe.



Figure 3. (1a) Tribal sculptures in the Pathoumphone district were highlighted on the posters for the “Lao Handicraft Festival of 2012” in Vientiane and the sculpture of a tribe member smoking and carrying an item on his shoulder is a representation of the tribe that is widely used at tourist sites in Lao PDR.



Figure 4. (2a) Tribal sculptures in Champasak museum, with disguised tribal myths based on the beliefs and values, such as the sculpture of a woman carrying three elephants, which communicates the tolerance of hardship and the hard work that women do.

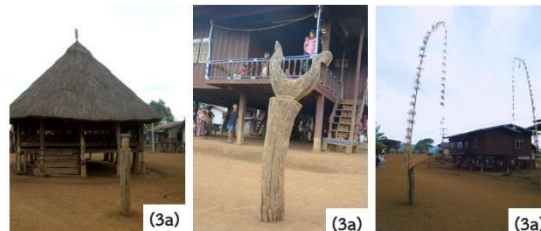


Figure 5. (3a) Sculptures by the Katu tribe in Don Gun Mai village which is part of the local ceremonies, including the sculptures both on the outside and the inside of the Hor Gwan, around the “Jara”, or the ceremonial ground for the “Paeng Heet” ceremony (feast for the spirit and auspiciousness for the community), the poles to tie buffalos called “Janeu” or “Lang” decoratively carved on a bamboo tree. After the villagers kill the buffalo with spears, they will cut the buffalo up on the Hor Gwan. Branches called “Tanoi” were put in as a boundary marker showing prohibited areas for outsiders.

(1a) Group, tribal sculptures inherited through commercialized handicrafts.

The handicrafts of Pathoumphone District, Champasak Province were inherited through the Alak, Ngae, and Ta-oi tribes that migrated from Paksong city. Mueang Sanamxai, Attapeu District (Figure 3). When foreigners got lost on the mountain and found the sculptures at the cemetery, they asked to buy them. However, the tribe members refused to sell them but made new ones for them instead. That was the starting point when the sculptures became products. Around 1992, the tribes saw that tourists were interested in the sculptures since they looked exotic and could help generate income. In addition, there were also demands from the tourist cities in Lao PDR, which caused the tribe members to start taking on the career of sculptors to sell them at different locations, such as the border area with Thailand, Vientiane, and Luang Phrabang. Skilled sculptors are Lao people who learned sculpting from the migrated tribe members who were from the Lao Lum group and had a cross-marriage with people from another tribe, as well as the new generations within the families. The forms were adjusted based on the buyers’ needs. For instance, popular forms (a tribe member going off to farming while carrying a basket and smoking, were created with the size and materials that are easy to transport. The materials were small dead trees since the state prohibited people from cutting down big trees. Decorative patterns or carvings were also added to furniture, such as on lamps. The material can be changed to stone depending on the needs of customers who run tourist sites. As for the community members, sculptures were made to be used in funerals, in which only the beliefs ingrained in the myths were passed on to other tribe members, which was to preserve the kinship tradition of their tribe and the belief that “Kwan”, or spirits, is an auspicious being and the tradition is no longer done for the deceased.

(2a) Group, sculptures that were inherited by turning them into cultural artifacts.

The sculptures were preserved as an identity of Southern Laos at Champasak Museum. The sculptures were brought in from Banchiang city and installed at the museum in 1995 (Figure 4). The unique characteristic of the

artifacts displayed at the museum in Lao PDR is their historical roles during the Indochina War (which the Lao refers to as the American War). The area of Southern Lao was heavily attacked. The Lao government highly praised the story of the tribes that joined in the fight against the colonial nation and the creation of the nation-state of Lao PDR. The Lao officials had compiled many artifacts related to the Lao tribes in the Champasak Museum compared to other museums. The artifacts include weapons, uniforms, handicrafts, textiles, and sculptures. The effort to give recognition to the tribes was through providing knowledge on tribal sculptures, myths, stories, and values of the tribes in the past, such as praising tribal women, the creation of mankind, or the worshiping of snakes. The museum staff confirms that these artifacts can no longer be found anywhere else, even in remote tribal villages.

(3a) Group, sculptures inherited through restoration.

The decoration of How Gwan is part of the ritual in Don Gun Mai village, Tha Taeng, Sekong Province. The Katu tribe migrated from a rural mountain of Kaleum City during 1995 – 1996 (Figure 5). The building was constructed based on the idea of the community who wanted to restore the traditional tradition and identity. The construction was based on the donation of money and materials from the community members and built with whatever tools they were able to find, such as machetes and axes. The stories told through the sculptures were based on tribal stories and their memories of the Hor Gwan, such as the stories of the creation of the world (Pu Ya Mae Ya) or stories of their ancestors “Jao Kok Jao Lao”. The main sculptures consist of sculptures of people and animals based on their beliefs and environment. Some sculptures were made based on the preferences of the sculptors, such as a modern man wearing a suit. Today, the Katu Tribe’s Hor Gwan in Don Gun Mai village has become an important art and cultural tourist site for those visiting Southern Laos. Additionally, an annual ceremony such as “Paeng Heet” (a sacrifice to worship the village spirits) in front of How Gwan has gained a lot of attention from the tourists. The community still considers this ceremony an internal ceremony for the tribe and prohibits outsiders or tourists from participating since they believe it would bring bad luck and bad things could happen to the community members, except for some special guests. Currently, no more sculptures are being made in the communities since the sculptures at Hor Gwan were only part of the important event of village establishment.

5. Research Conclusion

The process of inheritance and the significance of the tribal sculptures in Southern Lao PDR is part of the reflection of the social and economic changes influenced by the long-accumulated geographical impacts, which include the traditional way of life of relying on the forest, settling in remote areas, and migrating due to political factors and needs to gain access to basic infrastructures.

The sculptures exist as artifacts related to individual beliefs and the tribal society that still believes in the traditional religion, which is Animism. The tribe members affirm their identity which is different from other tribes that also have animist beliefs, such as the Taryu, Dangkak, Alak, Triang, and Katu tribes, and identify themselves as neither the “Lao Lum” people nor “Buddhist”.

No matter where the Southern Lao people migrate to, they still maintain their beliefs, which help identify the tribes they descended from. The carving of the sculptures was to express their lineage, kinship, or relationship. **It cannot be concluded that every tribe creates sculptures. However, the tribe members consider “Roob Kwak”, or sculptures, as a unique culture of the Lao Theung people, which only exists in the south. Sculptures represent the tribes, which the members refer to as “Jao Kok Jao Lao”, which means the ancestors of all tribes.** Currently, there are only three groups that are inheriting and giving importance to the sculptures.

1) Sculptures of Pathoumphone City, Champasak Province. The inheritance was commercially done in the Champasak area. The tribal sculptures came together with the migration of families and the community of the Lao Theung group of Alak. In Pathoumphone, many tribes consist of a mixture of different types and are called “Ban Sap Pon”, meaning a village where there is more than one tribe living together, having cross-marriage between tribes, which could only be between the Lao Theung people or between the Lao Theung and the Lao Lum people. However, they still maintain a clear separation between their tribes. For instance, the husband and wife will specify clearly which tribe they belong to. **The passing on began with the Alak group, who migrated from Sanamxai City, Attapeu,**

and brought with them the tradition of carving sculptures to put at the cemetery for their deceased ancestors. Later, they carved the sculptures for the outsiders who were interested in having them. After villagers saw they could make income, they started learning from one another. Later, people who got married into the Lao Lum family also became sculptors. The stories related to the traditions and beliefs in fate were carved onto the sculptures. The size and the materials were adjusted according to the materials they could find and the needs of the buyers. Forms that are popular among tourists were also made.

2) Tribal sculptures in Champasak Museum. The sculptures were preserved as the identity of Southern Laos as a cultural highlight. The Southern part of Laos was considered as the area with low income. Champasak Province was included in the country's plan to combat poverty, which led to the policy of creating a city of trade and tourism to connect with Thailand. Therefore, many government agencies were built, including agencies related to the distribution of arts and culture. Champasak Museum accumulated artifacts that show the history of the area, including Khmer arts and cultural artifacts from different tribes, **as well as the tribal sculptures found on the Bolaven plateau. Government staff praised that "the Southern area of Laos is the land of tribes". The statement was an effort to highlight the unity of the various tribes in the Southern part, the area where the most official knowledge regarding the different tribes can be found. The museum also compiled artifacts that highlight the way of life of the tribes and provide knowledge regarding the beliefs, values, and myths of the tribes told through the sculptures.**

3) Tribal sculptures at Don Gun Mai village, Tha Taeng, Sekong Province. The inheritance was done through the restoration of memories in the settlement of the Katu tribe in Don Gun Mai village, Tha Taeng, Sekong Province. The area was designated by the government for the different tribes that moved their whole village from Kaleum and Lamam cities since the Tha Taeng area has a road that can connect to many cities, which will be beneficial in transporting agricultural produce. **Since the villages were newly established, with the Lao policy of supporting the nation and the tribe's identity, the Katu tribe took this opportunity to restore their traditions and culture.** This opportunity included the creation of sculptures to decorate the Hor Gwan, a sacred area used for religious ceremonies, as well as the communal ground for the village to host different activities. **The carving was done based on the memory they have and on the description from the elders.** The model was taken from the sculptures that had been made since the Katu tribe was still living on the Ngoc Linh Mountain, Annam Mountain before Laos and Vietnam was clearly divided, as well as for each group to choose which country they wanted to belong to. **The sculptures are related to the rituals and beliefs, such as the origin of the tribe, representatives of benevolent spirits, animals existing as symbols in the tribal myth, or the respect towards nature and spirits. There are also sculptures made in various forms based on the preferences of the Hor Gwan builders** since members within the tribes helped with the building and carving, such as **animals in nature or carvings of people with the behaviors and costumes based on the experience of the sculptors.** The policies regarding the opening up of the countries attracted many tourists. The sculptures had then become the pride of the tribe members since the tribes in Lao PDR are regarded as groups of people who were able to maintain the identity of their tribes and their traditional culture.

6. Discussion of Research Results

Currently, Southern Lao PDR has gone through rapid changes from the government's policy of combatting poverty. As for the beneficial impacts and concerns, in the 1990s, significant adaptations can be seen. Agricultural sectors emphasized exporting produce, such as coffee, rubber, and cassava. The exportation rate increased in 2010 from foreign investments, for instance, the "Battery of ASEAN" project and exporting electricity. However, the tribes in the area still lack security from the constant migration due to the dam constructions and are still seeking farmland while the state was not able to provide enough land compared to the needs of the migrated tribes.

Historically, the tribal people within Lao PDR never had political negotiation power. A historical academic, Thepsrimuang (2013) provided the overall history of the tribes in Southern Lao PDR as follows, 1) 8,000 BC to the year 698, the first group of people settled in the Mekong region. There was a geological limitation and people maintained their livelihood by collecting food from the forest and hunting. There was no written language. 2) From

1776 to 1893, society grew during the Lan Xang Kingdom era, Buddhism became the main religion, local religious practices, and animistic rituals were prohibited, and objects related to the old beliefs were destroyed. 3) From 1353 – 1707, the ethnic groups came under the control of Siam and were conscripted as laborers and slaves, having to leave their families behind. 4) From 1893 to 1953, France came in and reaped the benefit from the forest. 5) From 1965 to 1975, Migration due to the Indochina War. People fled into the forest or joined in the war. 6) 1975, The transition to socialism, new settlements, and policies regarding the building of the nation-state. 7) 1989, the New Imagination policy, economic, globalization, and cultural changes.

Despite the influence of the social and economic changes, Southern Lao PDR still maintains a similar culture as the traditional one. The tribes still maintain their traditional beliefs, such as the tangible inheritance of sculptures and the intangible inheritance of significant culture regarding the sculptures. The current status of the tribal sculptures of Southern Lao PDR can be analyzed using the Structural-Functionalism theory by Emile Durkheim and the Social Practice Concept by Pierre Bourdieu as follows.

1. The Structural-Functionalism Theory by Emile Durkheim

Chantavanich (2022) and Ayuwat (2019) explain the concept by Emile Durkheim on the development pattern of human society that consists of steps of changes resulted from the Laws of Actions and Reaction, emphasizing the progress that helps maintain the society. Therefore, any action requires harmony from the social orders, Actions and reactions consist of a social dynamic of people within the society trying to find the point of balance.

Emile Durkheim (1893) was interested in social fact, divided into the structure that determines the order, creates rules and regulations, and forces that move the society, consisting of religion and culture. Both forces work in collaboration under the collective consciousness, which are the beliefs and feelings shared by the social members, helping them feel like a part of the society. The beliefs, myths, and the use of the same language as an anchor that holds the members of the society together and makes the society a reality. The tribal society in Southern Lao PDR consists of a structure that consists of rules agreed upon by the community and the forces, which is the worshipping of spirits, or Animism, satisfying the spirits, which also applies to outsiders who cannot claim that it is not their faith or that they do not know. The collective consciousness in the inheritance and cultural significance of the tribal sculptures that were studied in this paper consists of the following.

1.1 1a Group, tribal sculptures inherited through handicrafts in Pathoumphone city, Champasak Province.

Phothisane (2013) provided the following explanation for the religious development in Laos “Champasak area is an area that the Lao Lum people came to settle in. Temples were built based on Brahmanism and Buddhist beliefs starting in the 2nd Buddhist century with the center at Vet Phou, Champasak. The religious’ compromise of the mixed beliefs created an identity of the people in the Mekong region starting from the 5th Buddhist century. Buddhism reached its peak in the 12th Buddhist century which was the main religion of the elite groups of people. The mix between Animism and the belief in the gods (Phi Fah, Phi Taen) was the local people’s religion.” This explanation led to the assumption that the people who lived in the Champasak area were under the influence of the Khmer Kingdom and were the center for the diffusion of Brahmanism and Buddhism. The people who settled into this area are called the Lao Lum people. Important rivers consist of the Mekong River and the Sekong River. The migration of the Lao Theung people to Champasak was due to the tribal way of life that was co-independent through the exchanges of resources and necessary goods such as produce from the forest and the appliances from the lowland people. The tribes that lived further away slowly and continuously migrated closer to the plain land. The current tribal sculptures that have been inherited in Pathoumphone City were brought in after the Indochina Wars. The Alak tribe migrated from Sanamxay, Attapeu while bringing in their beliefs and culture. The main reasons for the migration were due to the living area and occupation, with the support from the government. The livelihood of the tribes still relies on the need for cultural space, such as the communal ground for important ceremonies such as funerals, which require that the body of the deceased be put into a casket and left at the cemetery as opposed to the Buddhist belief in which the bodies were incinerated. A small shelter with low stone walls would be built over the casket. Carved sculptures would be placed there by the family members as a remembrance and to signify the family

lineage. The sculptures did not represent the deceased as recorded in the past (Sikka, 2007). The existence of sculptures around the caskets represents the objects that were given by the families to show the status of the deceased and the family. The cemetery area of the tribes could be a forest area or a hill close to the village and act as a collective space for the expression of the collective consciousness, the existence, and the group's specific history.

Sculptures are demarcation markers of the area and symbolic expressions of the collective consciousness of new settlers. The acknowledgment of the area is the agreement of community members due to the lack of boundary lines, fences, or religious sites. The area would be left as a natural forest area without any agricultural practices and prohibited against outsiders with different beliefs. Family members would remember the location of the bodies of their family members. Other family members who passed away would be placed in the same area. Today, even though the caskets are not made of one whole tree due to the state's forest laws against cutting down big trees since they are more difficult to find. This necessity directly affects the traditional form of the ceremony. The tribe members transitioned from using carved caskets to cement caskets. The traditional practice of not burying the casket remains as an expression of the traditional religion.

The reason why "sculptures for funerals no longer exist" for the Alak tribe, the Lawen tribe, and the Nge tribe was explained by academics and tourism business experts that most knowledgeable people regarding traditional culture had passed away during the war. Therefore, it is possible that the sculptures at the cemeteries in Pathoumphone city from 1990 onwards were the last group of sculptures aimed at inheriting the "Heet Khlong" and creating the tribes' consciousness towards their ancestors before they were discovered by the Western tourists and gain attraction from outsiders. Thus, the reproduction as handicraft objects is the force driven by the economic system that caused the Lao Lum people who had cross-marry with people from other tribes and settle in Ban Beung village, Pathoumphone city. The restoration of the sculptures informs the outsiders of the "origin of the rituals", which cannot be specifically identified. The newer carved sculptures serve a new intangible purpose of being auspicious and helping with tourism growth. Consequently, the sculpture forms now tell stories of the livelihood of the tribe, such as smoking the Kok (smoking from a bamboo bong by the tribal women using sugarcane juice) or people going off to work in the fields. The current sculptures function as an identity of the tribe that helps outsiders remember them, which was also the starting point for the interest of the researcher in studying the worldview within the Southern tribal arts.

1.2 2a group, sculptures preserved as the identity of Southern Laos at Champasak Museum

Tribal arts in Champasak Museum, Champasak Province is the force that overlaps the political dimension from the state agencies. The state was concerned about the outside influence that came together with the opening of the country, especially the culture from countries with liberal political views. The National Council of Lao PDR (2006) organized a campaign on Lao traditional culture and included the tribal culture as part of the country's identity. The Lao constitution (Revised Edition) on May 6th, 2003, article 23 states that "The state will promote cultural preservation that was a beautiful heritage of the country and the tribes, as well as protect the cultural, historical, and natural legacy, restoring ancient artifacts and sites, as well as the cultural movement on the nation's identity."

The museums in Lao PDR that were built in different provinces, as well as the socialist country museum emphasize the fight, the actions of the invaders, and the cooperation of people within the country that led the country to independence. The creation of the collective consciousness that includes the Southern Laos tribes was a newly presented idea that did not exist in the past to create "collectiveness", "nation", and most importantly, Collective Nationalism. This phenomenon reflects the social division and inclusion that rely on the impacts on the political structure while the consciousness of the tribes is still based on ethnicity. The collective consciousness of the tribes has cultural structures. From the perspective of Emile Durkheim, structures are dynamic, therefore, they can expand based on the inclusion of the bigger structure for the order of the groups at the social, cultural, and political levels.

Thus, the Champasak Museum puts a lot of importance on the tribal culture of Southern Laos as a source of knowledge regarding the tribal myths and beliefs to maintain equality with the Lao Lum culture. A museum staff stated, "A huge collection of artifacts and handicrafts in the area was because this area used to be the land of tribes". The tribal people played an important role in driving away the Americans and the builders of the nation. The tribal

people's characteristics consist of patience and the distribution of roles within the communities, which was a value that should be upheld.

1.3 3a Group, tribal sculptures inherited through restoration at Don Gun Mai village, Tha Thaeng, Sekong Province.

The restoration of Hor Gwan, the center for the community members of the Katu tribe at Don Gun Mai village, Sekong Province, was based on the desire of the community members who decided to migrate from Kaleum City. The members want to preserve the traditional layout of their communities that used to be by hillsides, including building houses in a circle surrounding the Hor Gwan, or Gwan Ban. The principle for building a village with houses facing the Hor Gwan was for the members to look out for one another and a social structure pattern for the tribe's survival. In Sekong Province, there are approximately 13 tribes, most of whom migrated from Salavan Province, and the tribes that originally lived here, such as the Triang Tribe, Lawen Tribe, Suai Tribe, and Nge Tribe.

Other tribes that settled into the land provided by the state also built Hor Gwan according to the tradition only to align with the beliefs and Heet Khlong (changes in the form but the structure and function are still the same). Hor Gwan in other tribes are hardly differentiated from general houses since they are small. The only traditional characteristic that can be found is that they are built in the middle of the village. Some changes that can be seen include the fact that the houses now were built based on the area and not necessarily facing towards the Hor Gwan or built in a circular shape. The roof of the Hor Gwan which used to only be covered with grass (Soey leaves) now has added zinc without any decorations or sculptures. The function of the building is now showing the belief of the community in Animism. However, for the Katu tribe at Don Gun Mai village, there is still the need for the collective consciousness to connect themselves to the Katu tribes in Vietnam since the tribe descends from the ancient tribe that used to live on the Annam Mountain Range to the Quảng Nam plain. After the land division to become a nation-state, most of the Katu tribe ended up in Vietnam and was considered a flourishing tribe. The Katu tribe told their story of how they migrated from Vietnam to Lao PDR around 100 – 300 years ago. The Katu tribe in Laos calls themselves “Katu Tum” (Low Katu), living in more poverty and having less ability. The Katu tribe in Vietnam call themselves “Katu Soong” (High Katu), having more greatness and intelligence. From the Katu's narrative, the Katu tribe in Vietnam was more fortunate since the gods were helping them while the Katu in Laos had no god. When the Katu tribe in Don Gun Mai village built their Hor Gwan, they put their best effort into mimicking the Hor Gwan of Vietnam's Katu as much as possible, for instance, big Hor Gwan with traditional architecture and decorated with sculptures to beautifully tell their tribe's stories.

The Hor Gwan's decorative sculptures had built the ideology of the Katu tribe, making the Hor Gwan a collective space that give pride to the community members and urging them to preserve their belief in Animism as the social force through the Pang Heet ceremony. The Katu tribe in Don Gun Mai village can preserve this traditional culture by continuously practicing this great ceremony more than any other tribe in Lao PDR.

2. Social Practice Concept by Pierre Bourdieu

Prasongbundit (2005) talked about the main concept of Pierre Bourdieu, which is the Practice Concept. The concept regards using the Structuralism Theory to analyze the actions of people within society by looking at the individuals' actions that are being controlled by the cultural logic created at a group-level structure. The agents are members of the group, and therefore, have the agency to represent the group. At the same time, the agents also have their individuality, which is the ability to choose whether to take or not take the actions, a role that changes or affects society. Each agent can choose to determine the action from the “field”, the reality of their daily lives, or the social regulations such as the laws, state policies, or the environment related to other cultural groups using the following capital, cultural capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital.

The changes in the Southern Lao PDR area caused the tribes to constantly adjust in the “field”. The existence of the tribes is conflicting within the Lao history both at the individual and social levels. The “Practice” that happened to the tribes occurred when the state pointed out the political issue regarding the acceptance and equality of every

ethnicity. However, political and economic factors have affected cultural identity and diversity, such as the education system that uses the Lao Lum language and Buddhist influence. These factors align with John Clifford Holt (2009) and Oliver Tappe (2011) who stated that “The restoration of the Buddhist culture in Laos has a connotation of civilized morality and disdain for Animism that is considered “backward” within the non-Buddhist small ethnic groups. The appreciation for the participation of the tribes in the revolution does not reflect any cultural process. On the other hand, the Lao Buddhist culture was being promoted. Different ethnic culture is only accepted as local arts and tourism resources.” Bourdieu’s framework shows that the state was the one who determined which culture should be oppressed or inherited. Therefore, cultural reproduction is a structure with pre-determined conditions. This phenomenon affects both the traditional way of life and the economic benefit of the tribes of Southern Lao PDR at the current time, such as tourism promotion and local products. However, there are aspects of the culture in which the impacts on the new generation of tribe members cannot be pre-determined. The social and economic influences and the existence of the tribal sculptures had adjusted themselves into capitals, allowing the inheritance with new cultural meanings. The “Field” for the confrontation between creativity and the expanded external cultural factors to the communities and society and the social practices that led to the accumulation of the cultural capital to create economic capital had created the following an inheritance process and cultural significance as follows.

2.1 1a Group. Tribal sculptures at Pathoumphone City, Champasak Province. The social and economic changes led to the inheritance through handicrafts.

Inheritance of commercial sculpture by the Taoi, Ngae, and Lao Lum tribes in Pathoumphone City (Figure 3) began from the need for the tourists to help create the trend that would lead to reproduction. The local sculptors started the production without knowing “What is the beauty that tourists see?” However, when the need came with the proposal to generate income, the external cultural factors that created economic benefits that were connected to the opening of the country caused the tribal sculptures to be included in the community capital.

In the original Pathoumphone City, most Lao Lum were agriculturists. The Lao Theung people who moved in worked as laborers on the farms of the Lao Lum people. With the trade development as the connecting point to the Thai border, the occupations started to become diverse. According to the report from the JICA Data Collection 2005 Survey on Economic Development for the Southern Region of Lao PDR (2012) that compiled the occupations of the Lao people, Pathoumphone City was one of the cities with poverty issues. There was an effort to adjust the needs of the communities that led to the motorcycle repair shops and many retail stores. Other ways to generate income began together with the established tourist sites and processed agricultural products. From the survey regarding the economic development in Southern Lao PDR, the main income of the people and communities in Ban Beung Village, Pathoumphone City, are wood and stone carvings, which provided more income compared to agricultural produce.

Before the market needs, the tradition of creating sculptures in Lao society was already declining. Even though people still believed in Animism, the sculptures created for the deceased showed their kinship, society also defined the meaning of the sculptures as the reflection of the sculptors as well. For example, wealthier families would choose to make a full-body sculpture while less wealthy families would only make masks. These funeral rituals became an economic burden and later disappeared.

Current sculptors are not directly related to the tribes but the newer generations from cross-marriages. Their relatives are the Lao Lum people and they learned carving from their distant relatives. These sculptors live in the same tribal communities and carve the sculptures for tourism businesses. Many historical academics and experts are still skeptical about the “authenticity” of these tribal sculptures.

Outsiders' expectation of authentic “tribes” is those that are not of mixed blood with the Lao Lum people and carve the sculptures for rituals. Nonetheless, the people of Pathoumphone and Champasak still choose to insist on the unity of their sculptors and their communities since they are the ones with the skill in the production and the starting point of how the tribal sculptures became well-known. In terms of distributing the wisdom regarding the tribal sculptures, they insist on their specific rights and believe that worshipping ancestors’ spirits is directly related to whether the sculptures are authentic or not. The creation of the sculptures to respond to the needs of tourist sites is a way of expressing the tribe’s livelihood. The reproduction of the sculptures functions to maintain the pure memory of

the diverse ethnicity in Lao society. They separated themselves from the Lao Lum people whom they believed to have better cultural capital in terms of occupation and education. The Lao Lum people who got married to the different Lao Theung tribes separated themselves from their Lao Lum families down another level, not being viewed as an inferior people (still Lao Lum) and not a superior group (still living in poverty). In the field of expression as a community, “Sap Pon Village” (a village with cross-marriage), the sculptors insist on being the Lao Lum people. However, in terms of the inheritance of the sculptures, they believe that there are no prohibitions or definitions that can deprive them of the creators of the tribal sculptures as long as they are still telling stories about the tribes and possess the skills in the creation no matter perspective the experts have in terms of the values in relationship to the nature of ancient artifacts. The transformation of sculptures that tell stories of the rituals to handicraft objects in the “field” of tribal sculptures that had moved to the city, being sculptors helped them to believe that they are the “practitioners” who define the current meanings of tribal sculptures. They are proud to be a part of the tribe in preserving the traditional culture that is on the verge of disappearing from the Mekong region.

2.2 The social practice where the tribal sculptures at Champasak Museum make Southern Lao PDR the land of the tribes.

Champasak Province has a border with Thailand. Thailand is its essential trading partner. The things that help generate income in Southern Laos are the product distribution area in Chong Mek, Ubonratchathani province, and Dao Ruang Market in Laos. Thai and foreign tourists, such as Japanese, Chinese, and Europeans all pass through this area, with Vat Phou and Khone Phapheng Waterfall as famous tourist sites of Southern Lao. With trades, tourists, hotels, and tourism services coming into Southern Laos, including car rental services and money exchange, the Southern Lao people migrated into the city to seek economic opportunities, causing Champasak to have the third biggest population in Lao PDR and the administrative and economic center of Southern Laos. The emergence of a cultural institution in this growing city is the “Museum of Heritage and History of Champasak”. This institution is necessary for creating a symbolic power according to the policies related to building up the nation, spreading the political ideology, and promoting Lao culture.

The “Practice”, or the role of the state in the importance of the tribal arts and culture is to connect the diverse ethnic groups and the restoration from people outside of the culture to create the close-knit nation-state and collective narration.

The “tribal sculpture field” in Champasak province relates to the role of the museum for reproduction. The people who reproduce do not need to belong to the tribes but someone who has the power to accumulate the resources and gather all the appliance that belongs to the tribes, such as jars, musical instruments, or weapons. According to the tribes’ practice, these items are the legacy given to people within the families, items that show the families’ social status, which are now registered as the museum’s properties to be preserved (before they are sold to collectors and hotels). The ownership was transferred to the state, although through good intentions, according to Bourdieu's concept, has unintentionally caused Symbolic Violence since the objects did not conform to the upholding of the tribes, which was to be kept in the community or hung on their walls. The symbolic violence also includes the stone sculptures which are rare to find and are now kept at the museum and no longer representing those specific tribes. However, the “fields” and the “practice” of the state officers and the willingness of the tribes made these sculptures a symbol of Southern Laos for political and economic benefits.

2.3 The social practice concept that exists in the restoration of tribal sculptures of the Katu tribe in Don Gun Mai Village reflects social and cultural equality.

Pierre Bourdieu’s emphasis on the role of the “field” as a social area that refines and creates a guideline for achieving the goals of individuals and society. After the Indochina War, before the migration, the settlements of the tribe were scattered throughout the wilderness. After the latest migration and settlement that showed more stability than previous migrations, the community members wanted to restore their traditional tribal rituals. The layout of their village created a symbolic capital that reflects the Katu tribe’s wisdom in Don Gun Mai Village. The community calls themselves the Low Katu (Katu who are struggling) but presents themselves through the “practice” in the Paeng Heet ceremony, the feast for the spirits by sacrificing buffaloes. Buffaloes have been considered valuable properties for

every tribe since ancient times. The status of each family is reflected by the number of buffaloes they provide for the dowry (marriage) as well as the status of the tribe based on the number of buffaloes being sacrificed. The Katu tribe has the largest and most continuous ceremonies out of all the tribes.

“Hor Gwan”, a big building of the Katu tribe, is decorated with sculptures that tell stories based on beliefs, sacred animals, animals in nature in the past, benevolent spirits, and the struggle of the tribe based on their traditional rituals. The ground in front of Hor Gwan is decorated with carved wooden poles to create a sacred ground where the members can lay down the rules and regulations for outsiders to follow, such as entering and leaving the village, restricted areas, time, and seasons where some rules need to be followed strictly. Even state officers will need permission from the tribe and if they fail to follow the rules, it will be considered as “Khalum” or offenses, which they will need to pay the “fine” according to the tradition (paying with chickens for a minor offense and buffaloes for major offenses or paying with money that equals to a buffalo)

This area has always been the destination for tourists and those interested in learning about tribal culture, even for shorter visits each day. Although the community does not receive any direct economic benefit from the visit, they gain a lot of interest from the state. In important rituals, the provincial officers are always invited to participate, which is a way to create a relationship under the political context that aligns with the condition of the area that changes from only the dependence on other tribes.

The social practice of the Katu tribe in Don Gun Mai Village includes the “strategies” of telling a long history of a group of people with animistic beliefs to communicate that “Our tribe is not an inferior tribe but is equal to other tribes.” The members show that they received the most participation from their community members. From the past conditions, the Katu tribe has no written language, they are a small ethnic group, and Katu in Vietnamese means “people who live in the forest”. However, the existence of the Katu tribe in the current Lao PDR proves that they are a tribe that is most flourishing in terms of wisdom.

Currently, the social and economic changes in Southern Lao PDR are approaching rapidly. Field experience reveals the reasons that help with the current existence of the sculptures. The inheritance of the sculpture is the restoration of the memory regarding the different Lao Theung tribes that migrated to the plain from the state policies and the adaptation of individuals and families within the tribe. The communities learned from their daily lives in the context of living together in modern Lao society. The “Practice” in the “Field” used their identity as a capital. From the cultural capital for the unity of their tribes to the economic capital, they determined a new definition of the tribal sculptures that no longer needed to serve the rituals and ceremonies, or needed to be carved only by the Lao Theung people but chose to preserve their stories regarding the worship of spirits, their beliefs, and values as a tribe. Additionally, they transformed the tribal sculptures into handicrafts to be a part of tourism support as an adaptation to the economy and the opening of the country of Lao PDR.

7. Research Recommendation

7.1 Recommendation in the application of the research results

The article entitled Southern Laos People’s Democratic Republic Tribal Sculptures: The Influence of Social and Economic Change on the Inheritance Process and Cultural Significance focused on studying the current status of the tribal sculptures, a community traditional art that changes its meaning and sub-cultural significance in a way that developing countries are facing. The research results can be applied as follows.

7.1.1 study the cultural change process of the tribes within the Mekong region through the arts and culture for the benefit of students and interested parties.

7.1.2 acts as a knowledge for the state agencies related to tribal culture and communities to be used in helping determine the policies related to the preservation and promotion of the arts and culture and cultural tourism in the new economic area within Southern Lao PDR

7.2 Suggestion for future research

7.2.1 There should be a study as a knowledge base in creating the state policies in restoring the traditions and culture in the tribal sculptures that relate to the livelihood and rituals based on the traditional beliefs of the tribes in the Mekong Region to preserve the diverse culture within Lao PDR.

7.2.2 There should be collaborative research with state agencies to gain in-depth and complete information. Although this research consisted of the preparation process of coordinating the state agencies, such as permissions for interviews, there were still limitations and issues related to the sensitivity in answering the questions and gaining access to the sources.

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