



# **Southeast Asian Case Study for the Development of a New International Tourism Intercultural Course: Laos and Thailand**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses how Southeast Asian people have come to live in today's situation, and it also refers to the changing role of their sacred religious places and historical monuments today. Tremendously rich diversity in ethnic groups, religions and cultures is found in all parts of Southeast Asian countries. From the past, people in this region have migrated from place to place and adapted themselves to political and relational changes. They have kept their own customs and beliefs up until today. Based on a literature review and fieldwork research, we have summarized the current situation of the people in the Mekong River Basin in Laos and Thailand. Based on the findings, in the final section of this paper, we will suggest what kind of educational program and field trip can be developed for a new International Tourism Intercultural Course.

## **Introduction**

Yuka INOUE

Southeast Asia is a culturally rich area with a long history. There are people not only on the plains but also there are a large number of different minority peoples living in the high mountains. In order to indicate its richness and cultural diversity, this paper discusses two points. In Part 1, it documents the historical background of how the

people in the Mekong River Basin immigrated and developed their rural territories. Interestingly, it shows that the so-called majority people in one region can be minority people in another region. With its rich cultural and ethnical diversity, the Mekong River Basin area has been recently working to cooperate for further economic and social development. In Part 2, the paper addresses the cultural and religious aspects of each society by

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referring to the initial outcomes of fieldwork conducted in late December 2010 in Laos and Thailand. It shows how deeply Buddhism has been embedded in both nations and how sacred places have also become tourist attractions now.

### Part 1. On the peoples in the Mekong River Basin

Nobuo SHIINO

The Mekong River is the longest river in Southeast Asia (1) and the 7<sup>th</sup> longest in Asia. Its estimated length is about 4900 km. This river runs from *Tanggula Shan* (唐古拉山) on the eastern Tibetan Plateau in China, and flows south as the *Láncāng Jiāng* (澜沧江 “Turbulent River”) across the *Hengduan Mountains* (横断山脉) in *Yunnan Province* (雲南省). Leaving China, it forms the border between Burma (Myanmar) and Laos, and then turns southeast to form the border of Laos with Thailand. It then runs east, then south through Laos and defines the Laos-Thailand border again, passing through the capital of Laos, Vientiane. Crossing into Cambodia, it flows by Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. It enters Vietnam before emptying into the South China Sea.

“The Mekong River” in English derives from “Mae Nam Khong”, a term of Lao-Thai origin. In the Lao-Thai terminology, the prefix “mae” means “mother”, and “nam” means “water”. Thus, Mae Nam Khong means Khong, Mother of Water. “Khong” is derived from the Sanskrit “ganga” meaning the Ganges. The Mekong River is referred to as the “River Khong” by Northern Thai and Laos peoples. It has many different names in local languages along the river.



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mekong>

Chinese, Tibetan, Burmese, Laotian (Lao), Thailer (Thai), Cambodian (Khmer), and Vietnamese (Kinh) (2) people as well as other ethnic minorities or minority groups live along the Mekong River in the Indochinese Peninsula. (3) These ethnic groups are descendants of immigrants who migrated downstream from Southern China along the Mekong River.

As far as Thailand is concerned, the Thai people are Thailand’s dominant ethnic group, but the state has a substantial number of ethnic minority groups such as hill-tribe ethnic groups or the highland peoples of northern Thailand. Though the term Thai people may refer to the population of Thailand in general—that is, Thailer—the Thai people are part of the larger *Tai* ethnolinguistic peoples found in Thailand and adjacent countries in Southeast Asia as well as southern China. Their language is the *Tai* language.

Linguistic studies suggested that the origin of the *Tai* people lies around the Chinese Province of *Guangxi* (广西壮族自治区) in which the *Zhuang* people (壮族) are now a majority. With political

and cultural pressures from the north during the Qin dynasty (秦朝), the Tai people migrated south in and around modern *Dien Bien Phu* in the present northern Vietnam. The Tai people later scattered all around continental Southeast Asia along the Mekong River. Large-scale Tai migrations from Yunnan Province and *Guangxi* in China into Southeast Asia took place between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries due to pressures from the fall of the kingdom of Nanzhao (南詔), the invasion of Genghis Khan's Mongol Empire, and the Yuan (元) dynasty's expansion in China.

*Kublai Khan* (a grandson of Genghis Khan) was the fifth Great Khan of the Mongol Empire and the founder of the Yuan dynasty in East Asia in 1271. By 1279, the Yuan forces had successfully annihilated the last resistance of the Southern Song (南宋) dynasty. Kublai became the first non-Chinese Emperor to conquer all China. In 1253, *Kublai* was ordered to attack *Yunnan*, and he asked the kingdom of Dali to submit. The Dali kingdom (Daliguo 大理国) in the *Yunnan* Province (4) of China was conquered by an invasion of the Mongol Empire in 1254. The Dali kingdom was the Tai people's kingdom. The extinction of the Dali kingdom prompted the Tai people's southward migrations. The Tais made inroads into northern Thailand, which had mountainous regions dotted with basins where they could establish small village communities to grow wet-rice.

The Tai people in the 13<sup>th</sup> century threatened the classical kingdoms in the Indochinese Peninsula such as Angkor of the Khmer Empire and then replaced them. The *Tai Yuan* people ruled most of Lan Na at Chiang Mai in northern Thailand by 1350, the *Tai Lao* people (5) established themselves in modern Laos, and the *Tai-*

*Shan* people (a Tai ethnic group) (6) inhabited the Shan Plateau and other parts of modern Myanmar by the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

The Tais settled on the fringes of the Indianized kingdoms of the Mon and Khmer Empire. The mixture of Indian and Austroasiatic peoples, philosophy, religion, language, culture and customs enriched the Tai people. They were caught in the Hindu-Khmer culture, from which developed the Thai culture. The Thai were called "Siam" by the Angkorians. Sometimes the Tai chiefdoms in the Chao Phraya valley were put under Angkorian control, but they were mostly independent. The Tai people had substantial populations in the Lop Buri region and in the lower North of Thailand by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. One can refer to the Tai state of the Chao Phraya River valley as Siam and the kingdom of Lan Xang as Laos.

The Tais from the north gradually settled along the Chao Phraya (Menam) River from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, coming into contact with the Khmer Empire. The Sukhothai kingdom of the Tai, which covered the entire Upper Chao Phraya valley, existed from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Modern historical studies show that Thai history began before Sukhothai, but the foundation of the Sukhothai kingdom was considered as the beginning of the Thai nation. The expansion of the Sukhothai kingdom made the Thai state a dominant power in Southeast Asia for the first time. The kingdom adopted Theravada Buddhism as the state religion. In 1378, armies from the Ayutthaya kingdom invaded and put Sukhothai under her tributary.

A new city-state known as *Ayutthaya*, founded by a descendant of *Chiang Mai's* Tais, emerged as the center of the growing Thai Empire in the 14<sup>th</sup>

century. The Ayutthaya Empire was inspired by the then Hindu-based Khmer Empire (Cambodia). In 1431, the Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya sacked the Khmer capital, Angkor, and became a new great power in mainland Southeast Asia. Angkor's influence eventually faded from the Chao Phraya River valley as Ayutthaya became a new great power. More Tais settled in Ayutthaya.

There are a wide variety of ethnic groups along the Mekong River and other rivers in the Indochinese Peninsula originating from Burma (Myanmar), Tibet and various provinces in China, all with various different customs, cultures and religions. Even the main groups can be sub-divided further. The peopling of ethnic groups in the Indochinese Peninsula took place through various southward migrations. The initial people who arrived from the Asian continental interior were displaced by successive movement, which has created a complex pattern of ethnic groups, cultures, languages, customs, religions and so on.

Many ethnic peoples who migrated southward into the Indochinese Peninsula from Southern China and Tibet, in the same way as the Tai and Lao people, temporarily settled in many places in the Mekong River Basin and the mountainous regions, one after another. While the Tai and Lao people moved on through the flat lands, other ethnic peoples separately went deep into mountainous regions on the way and have maintained their customs and culture since then. Many hill-tribe ethnic minority groups or highland ethnic minorities are scattered all over the remote border areas between northern *Thailand*, *Laos* and *Burma* (Myanmar). These areas are well-known for their thick forests and mountainous terrain. *Akha*, *Lahu*, *Karen*, *Hmong/Miao*, *Mien/Yao* and *Lisu* are the six major

hill tribe minority peoples within Thailand.

Some ethnic peoples from Southern China who migrated southward along the Mekong River into the Indochinese Peninsula and settled down on the plains – became major ethnic groups with hegemony in their settlements, while others who settled down in mountainous regions or highlands became ethnic minority groups in their settlements. There has long been political and cultural friction between ethnic majority groups with hegemony and ethnic minority groups in the Indochinese Peninsula. In the context of Mongolian/Chinese peoples vs. Tai peoples in the Dali kingdom, the Tai peoples were ethnic minorities, but in turn become major ethnic groups in the context of the Thai people vs. hill-tribe ethnic minority groups in Thailand. How are the highland ethnic minorities in the Mekong River Basin treated in the Indochinese Peninsula by the major ethnic groups?

The “Committee for Coordination on the Lower Mekong Basin” known as the Mekong Committee was established in 1957 on the recommendation of ECAFE (United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East) to develop *the Lower Mekong* for Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, which had become independent from France. Only a few short-term projects were implemented by the Committee, and no long-term projects prevailed. The Interim Mekong Committee was established in 1978 by the three riparians of Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. The organization was only able to implement a few small-scale projects, almost exclusively in Thailand. After the dramatic confrontation in 1992 between Thailand and Vietnam/Laos/Cambodia, the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) of six countries launched a pro-

gram of subregional economic cooperation (the GMS Program) in the same year, to enhance their economic relations, with assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The *Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin* was signed in 1995 by Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam in Chiang Rai, Thailand, which created the Mekong River Commission.

The Mekong River Commission (MRC), consisting of an intergovernmental body of six countries—Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Burma—was established again in 1996 to assist in the sustainable management and coordinated use of the Mekong’s resources for the mutual benefit of the countries and well-being of the people.

The MRC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has shifted from an ambitious project-oriented focus to an emphasis on “the livelihoods of the people in the Mekong region.” (7)

Some NGOs are trying to monitor the environmental and social problems resulting from development projects in the Mekong region. Mekong Watch (8) is one such NGO in Japan, which combines research and advocacy to address and prevent the negative environmental and social impacts of development planning to communities in the Mekong region. We also must take notice of what is happening to hill-tribe ethnic minorities in the Mekong River Basin in relation to these development projects from now on.

**Notes**

1) Countries in *Southeast Asia*

	(km <sup>2</sup> ) <sup>[11]</sup>	(/km <sup>2</sup> ) <sup>[12]</sup>	(2009) <sup>[12]</sup>	capita (2009) <sup>[12]</sup>		
 <u>Brunei</u>	5,765	428,000	70	10,405,000,000	\$25,386	<u>Bandar Seri Begawan</u>
 <u>Burma</u>	676,578	50,020,000	74	34,262,000,000	\$571	<u>Naypyidaw</u>
 <u>Cambodia</u>	181,035	14,805,000	82	10,871,000,000	\$768	<u>Phnom Penh</u>
 <u>Timor-Leste</u>	14,874	1,134,000	76	556,000,000	\$499	<u>Dili</u>
 <u>Indonesia</u>	1,904,569	240,271,522	126	539,377,000,000	\$2,329	<u>Jakarta</u>
 <u>Laos</u>	236,800	6,320,000	27	5,598,000,000	\$886	<u>Vientiane</u>
 <u>Malaysia</u>	329,847	28,318,000	83	192,955,000,000	\$7,525	<u>Kuala Lumpur</u>
 <u>Philippines</u>	299,764	91,983,000	307	161,196,000,000	\$1,748	<u>Manila</u>
 <u>Singapore</u>	710.2	5,076,700 <sup>[13]</sup>	7,023	182,231,000,000	\$36,379	<u>Singapore (Downtown Core)</u>
 <u>Thailand</u>	513,120	67,764,000	132	263,979,000,000	\$3,941	<u>Bangkok</u>
 <u>Vietnam</u>	331,210	88,069,000	265	93,164,000,000	\$1,068	<u>Hanoi</u>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast\\_Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia)

2) The Vietnamese people are an ethnic group originating from present-day northern Vietnam and southern China. They are the majority ethnic group of Vietnam, and are officially known as Kinh to distinguish them from other ethnic groups in Vietnam. The ancient Vietnamese people were first known simply as the Lac or Lac Viet.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_people)

Vietnam became independent from China in the 10th century. Successive dynasties expanded their territory on the edges of the Red River in the Tonkin Delta deeper into Southeast Asia. Vietnam expanded southward in a process known as “southward expansion”, and eventually conquered the kingdom of Champa in the Midlands in the 15th century. The Vietnamese Lords in the south expanded southern Vietnam into the Mekong Delta, and annexed the Khmer land in the Mekong Delta in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Such Vietnamese southward expansion took place nearly along the eastern coastline of Vietnam on the east side of the Annan (Mountains) on the border between Vietnam and Laos-Cambodia. The Annan Mountains are too high to cut across in order to go to the west side. The Annan Mountains are the cultural divide between Chinese/Confucian culture of Vietnam on the east side and Hindu/(Theravada)Buddhist culture of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand on the west side in the Indochinese Peninsula.

54 ethnic groups are recognized by the Vietnamese government, each with its own language, lifestyle, and cultural heritage. The largest ethnic groups are Kinh (Viet) 86.2%, Tay 1.9%, Tai Ethnic 1.7%, Muong 1.5%, Khmer Krom (Kho Me Crom) 1.4%, Hoa 1.1%, N?ng 1.1%, Hmong 1%, others 4.1% (1999 census).

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_ethnic\\_groups](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ethnic_groups)

### in Vietnam

3) Ethnic groups in Southeast Asia

Brunei: Malay (69%), Chinese (18%), Indigenous Bruneians (6%), Others (7%)

Cambodia: Khmer (94%), Chinese (4%), Vietnamese (1%), Others (mostly Chams) (1%)

East Timor: Tetun (10%), Mambae (8%), Makasae (8%), Tukudede (6%), Bunak (5%), Galoli (5%), Kemak (5%), Fataluku (3%), Baikeno (2%), Others (48%)

Indonesia: Javanese (45%), Sundanese (14%), Madurese (8%), Others (33%)

Laos: Lowland Lao (56%), Lao Theung (34%), Lao Soung (10%)

Malaysia: Malay and Orang Asli (60%), Chinese (30%), South Asian (7%), Others (3%)

Myanmar: Burman (68%), Shan (9%), Karen (6%), Rakhine (4%), Others (includes Chinese and South Asian) (13%)

Philippines: Filipino (80%), Chinese (10%), South Asian (5%), Europeans and Americans (3%), Arab (1%), Others (1%)

Singapore: Chinese (76%), Malay (15%), South Asian (7%), Others (2%)

Thailand: Thai (75%), Chinese (14%), Malay (4%), Khmer (3%), Others (4%)

Vietnam: Vietnamese (88%), Chinese (4%), Thai (2%), Others (6%)

<http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Southeast-Asia/id/1897099>

4) There are 25 different ethnic minorities (nearly half of China’s total 56 ethnic minority groups) in Yunnan Province, which makes it the most culturally diverse province in China. Yunnan has a population of more than 42 million people. Some 38% of the province’s population are members of

minorities, including the Yi (11%), Bai, Hani, Tai, Dai, Miao, Lisu, Hui, Lahu, Va, Nakhi, Yao, Tibetan, Jingpo, Blang, Pumi, Nu, Achang, Jinuo, Mongolian, Derung, Manchu, Shui, and Buyei. The threshold of five thousand is required to be awarded the official status of being present in the Province. Yunnan consists of 16 prefecture-level divisions. Among 8 autonomous prefectures is Xishuangbanna (Dai) 西双版纳傣族自治州 with a population of about 800,000. 傣族 (Daizu) are referred to as the Tai-Lu people.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yunnan>

5) The word Lao may be related to tribes known as the Ai lao people in Yunnan Province in China. Tribes descended from the Ali Lao included the Tai tribes who migrated to Southeast Asia. The Lao people in Laos refer to themselves as Tai or Tai Lao. The Lao people in Thailand are called Thai Isan by the Thais. In 2000, the Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC) revised its list of ethnic groups to include 49 ethnicities consisting of over 160 ethnic groups listed under 8 headings: Mon-Khmer, Palaungi, Khmuic, Tibeto-Burman, Hmong-Mien, Tai, Chinese, and Unclassified.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_ethnic\\_groups\\_in\\_Laos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ethnic_groups_in_Laos)

6) The Tai-Shan people are believed to have migrated from Yunnan in China. The Shan are descendants of the oldest branch of the Tai-Shan. The Tai-Shan who migrated to the south and now inhabit modern-day Laos and Thailand are known as Tai Noi (or Tai Nyai).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shan>

7) Mekong River Commission. "Mekong News: The newsletter of the Mekong River Commission, October?December 2001."

8) *Mekong Watch* <http://mekongwatch.org/english/>

## Part 2. The Culture of Buddhism and Beyond

Ippei WAKABAYASHI

### 2.1 Laos

#### (1) Religion

Laos is a socialist republic named "The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)." Socialists govern Laos. Yet Buddhism forms the basis of Laos society, which is mainly composed of farming communities.

Buddhism was the state religion of the pre-1975 Kingdom of Laos. As a matter of fact the Buddhist clergy (sangha) enjoys a semi-official status even under the officially secular social system of the new government. Buddhist monks are always invited in official state ceremonies, and in most cases, they are granted the privilege of the main seats of respect.

The figures of the 2005 census indicate,  
 Buddhist: 65%  
 Christian: 1.5%  
 Unspecified: 31.5%

People are often not sure what they are. They may see little or no trouble in occasional visits to church, and providing food and offerings to the monks in the Buddhist temple which is located at the center of almost every community (Robert Cooper, 2009). This is surprisingly similar to the Japanese religious situation.

More interesting is animism in Laos. Animism believes that natural objects, such as hills, trees, large rocks or plots of land, are inhabited by spiritual entities or possess supernatural powers. The Buddhist Lao still harbor vestiges of these beliefs. Building structures and cultivating land are believed to displace the spirits and so an alterna-

tive home must be provided. An easily recognized example of animism among Buddhists is the practice of erecting a spirit house on a plot of land. Ordinarily found in a corner of a piece of property, a spirit house is the customary abode of the *jao bawn*, or spirit of the site, and resembles a miniature house or sometimes a model of Mount Meru, the Hindu Mount Olympus, atop a pedestal (Jeff Cranmer and Steven Martin, 2007).

A small shrine or Japanese *hokora* is just the above mentioned spirit house, which suggests Animism is a common culture in a wide area of East Asia.

## (2) Vientiane

We visited cultural spots in Vientiane on December 26 and 27, 2010. Cultural spots are more or less related to Buddhism in Laos.

### (2-1) Buddha Park

The park is located about 25 km southeast of downtown Vientiane on the Mekong River. The Mekong is the national border between Laos and Thailand. We can see Thailand's supermarket on the opposite shore of the river.

Buddha Park is just a collection of massive ferro-concrete sculptures, which was created under the direction of Louang Pou Bounleua Soullilat, a self-styled holy man who claimed to have been the disciple of a cave-dwelling Hindu hermit in Vietnam. Young people join their palms together in front of the sculptures. Buddha Park is an entertainment park and additionally a holy place for ordinary people in Laos.

### (2-2) That Louang (or Luang)

That Louang is the golden-spired Buddhist

stupa and Laotian national symbol. A stupa is a dome-shaped structure erected as a place of enshrinement for Buddha's remains. That Louang is always crowded with Laotians and visitors from around the world. The high-rising golden stupa is not only a symbol of the Buddhist religion but a symbol of Lao sovereignty even under the socialist regime. Its full official name, *Pha Chedi Lokajulamani*, means World-Precious Sacred Stupa, and an image of the main stupa appears on the national seal and in many other places, just like the Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia (Austin Bush et al., 2010).

The present building dates from the 1930s and is a reconstruction; the original That Louang is thought to have been built by King Setthathilat in the mid-sixteenth century, and it is his statue that is perched jauntily in front of the stupa (Jeff Cranmer and Steven Martin, 2007).

We visited That Louang around 3p.m., just when the golden-spired stupa was shining beautifully in the winter's afternoon sunlight. We found a naga guarding the stupa just like other Asian Buddhist temples. Naga is the Sanskrit word for a great snake. Typically many nagas guard Buddha in the sculptures, and they suggest an origin in Hinduism.

### (2-3) Patouxai

Patouxai is "The Arch of Triumph" in Vientiane, and it resembles the one in Paris. Yet it might be more than that because Patouxai is a kind of interesting mixture of politics, art, culture and even religion. Popularly known as *anusavali* (Lao for monument), this monument is situated in a roundabout at the end of Lane Xang Avenue. It was built in the late 1950s and donated by the US gov-

ernment to commemorate the Royal Lao Government. Therefore this monument indicates the early years of American involvement in Indochina and, after the revolution, the arch was given its current name and partially redecorated - some Hindu iconography symbolic of the defunct Lao monarchy was chipped away. Yet a ceiling is still adorned with reliefs of the Hindu deities - Rahu devouring the sun, Vishnu, Brahma, and Indra on Arivata, the three-headed elephant (Jeff Cranmer and Steven Martin, 2007).

A Laotian said the construction of this monument is unfinished and will be never completed.

#### (2-4) Lao National Museum

In the front garden of the museum we can see plumeria trees with hundreds of beautiful white national flowers of Laos. The revolutionary history of Laos is on display, and the best artifacts include a Buddha sculpture protected by a naga king, an Angkor period bronze, a linga, the most important symbol of Hinduism, made of sandstone (11th century), and the head of Vishnu made of sand stone in the Angkor Bayon style (12th century).

Another interesting display is the "Middle Mekong Archaeological Project," which insists that time is important because precious evidence is being lost day by day. International researchers are working together, including Laotian researcher Bounheuang Bouasisengpaseuth of the Vientiane Lao National Museum, Joyce White of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeological and Anthropology, and Korokot Boonlop of the Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, Bangkok. The world-famous precious sacred stupa in Pha That Louang, officially the "Pha Chedi Lokajulamani," is on display.

#### (2-5) Wat Sisaket

"Wat" means a Buddhist monastery. Wat Sisaket is the oldest wat in Vientiane, constructed by King Anouvong in 1818. The monastery was the site of a ceremony in which Lao lords and nobles swore an oath of loyalty to the king. Though the royalist government collapsed, we could find more than a hundred Buddha statues, most of them wearing the yellow or golden costumes of monks.

In a storage room surrounded by a wooden fence, a handmade plate explains, "These broken pieces of the Buddha statues. They were destroyed by the war. These broken statues were found during excavation in the Vientiane City." Most of the statues had their heads cut off. The new conqueror often destroyed the old ruler's religious properties.

A five-to-six-meter-long naga hung down from the ceiling at Wat Sisaket. A naga is a snake-shaped guardian for the Buddha.

#### (3) Louang Phabang

We visited cultural spots in Louang Phabang on December 28 and 29, 2010. Louang Phabang is also known as Louang Prabang, a tiny mountain kingdom for more than a thousand years and designated a World Heritage site in 1995.

#### (3-1) The Pak Ou Buddha Caves

The Pak Ou Buddha Caves are located 25km north of the Louang Phabang city area. The caves have been used for centuries as a repository for old Buddha images that are no longer venerated on an altar. After the caves became a tourist attraction, the inhabitants of Louang Phabang began to give much thought to the caves, which is an interesting relationship between tourism and Buddhism.

We found many Laotian people visiting the

caves to pray to Buddha among the tourists. Many people donate Buddha statues inside the caves, and the caves are full of them.

### (3-2) Ban Xan Hay

Opposite the Buddha caves southwards across the Mekong is a famous village named “Ban Xan Hay” that made stoneware jars for a long time, and now produce liquor as a profitable business. Ban Xan Hay is now nicknamed “Whisky Village.”

In a small wat inside the village we discovered a wooden made linga type bell, about 2 meters high and 50 centimeters in diameter. The bell is hung from the ceiling of the bell ringing shelter, and there is a wooden hammer on the floor.

*Linga*, Sanskrit for “sign” or “distinguishing symbol” is also spelled lingam, and in Hinduism is the symbol of the god Shiva, worshipped as an emblem of generative power. The linga is the main object of worship in Shaivite temples and in private shrines throughout India. (“linga.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010.)

Lao Buddhism is deeply mixed with Hinduism as in other Southeast Asian countries under the cultural influence of India.

### (3-3) Wat Mai

South of the Royal Palace on Xiang Thong Road, Wat Mai is called land of the beautiful gold, a Laotian guide told us. Wat Mai dates from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, but the facade was created in the 1960s and restored in the 1990s. There was a Buddha statue guarded by seven nagas in the front garden of the monastery.

In Buddhism, nagas are often represented as

door guardians or, as in Tibet, as minor deities. The snake king Mucalinda, who sheltered the Buddha from rain for seven days while he was deep in meditation, is beautifully depicted in the 9th–13th century Mon-Khmer Buddhas of Siam and Cambodia. In Jainism, the Jaina Saviour (Tirthankara Pārśvanātha) is always shown with a canopy of snake hoods above his head. (“naga.” Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010.)

### (3-4) The Royal Palace Museum

The museum occupies a central location in the old city of Louang Phabang, and was the former Royal Palace.

The Palace was constructed in 1904 by the French and replaced an older, smaller palace of teak and rosewood. Among the gifts from foreign guests there is a Japanese silk shawl on display.

At the far end of the gallery to the right of the main entrance is a small, barred room that once served as the king’s personal shrine room. Here the Pha Bang, the most sacred Buddha image in Laos, is being kept until the completion of Haw Pha Bang, a temple in the eastern corner of the palace compound (Jeff Cranmer and Steven Martin, 2007).

### (3-5) The Floating Buddha

We visited a special photo exhibition “The Floating Buddha” in the Royal Palace Museum compound. In 2004 and 2005, the Louang Phabang Sangha held two meditation retreats for more than 500 young monks and novices - the first attempt in 30 years to revive this Lao tradition. Invited by the city’s abbots, Hans Georg Berger documented the

retreats as a continuation of his decade-long community art work with the monks of Louang Phabang. The exhibition collects a part of the art work.

Hans Georg Berger is a photographer and writer born in 1951 in Trier, Germany. He studied comparative religion and drama in Germany and the United States. Since 1988 he has produced a series of long-term photography projects involving world religions, including Theravada Buddhism in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos as well as Shiite in Iran (Hans Georg Berger, 2009).

### (3-6) Phou Si

The name Phou Si means "Sacred Hill", and it is the geographical and spiritual center of Louang Phabang city. Buddha statues for each day of the week are constructed on the hill. Everyone prays to the Buddha of the same day as his or her birthday.

The golden spires of That Chomsi at the summit of Phou Si offer a direct panorama of the Royal Palace, the Mekong River, the Nam Khan River, and Louang Phabang airport. The hill is a small scale version of Mount Meru, the sacred hill of the Hindu-Buddhist universe. There is a Buddhist school at the foot of the hill, which was constructed through donations including those of many Japanese donors.

### (3-7) Wat Xiangthong

This is the most historic and enchanting Buddhist monastery in Laos. The main temple or sim was built in 1560 by King Setthathilat.

The three-layered roof is a wonderful sight. Through it, Louang Phaban-style architecture was established. The temple was renovated in 1928. We

saw the remains of the Golden Tree, a holy linden tree that fell down in the backyard in 2008.

## 2. 2 Thailand

### (1) Religion

About 95% of Thai people are Theravada Buddhists, a branch of Buddhism that came from Sri Lanka during the Sukhothal period. The Theravada school is often called the southern school because it travelled from the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia, while Mahayana Buddhism was adopted throughout the northern regions of Nepal, Tibet, China and the rest of East Asia (China Williams et al., 2009).

Religion is alive and well in Thailand and colorful examples of daily worship can be found on nearly every corner. The traditional greeting is with a prayer-like palms-together gesture known as wai.

### (2) Ayuthaya

We visited Ayuthaya on December 30, 2010. Ayuthaya is a former Asian powerhouse that today offers fragmented evidence of its magnificent past.

Ayuthaya was the capital of Siam for 417 years, between 1350 and 1767, and had strong links to European and Asian countries including Japan and Ryukyu. At its peak it controlled an area larger than England and France combined. Its great reign abruptly ended in 1767 when the Burmese army attacked the city.

After the Burmese sacked the city there was a period of instability until General Taksin emerged and moved the capital to Bangkok. Ayuthaya continued as a provincial trading town while its ruins continued to crumble or be looted. The Thai Fine Arts Department began restoring the site in the 1950s, and it was designated a Unesco World

Heritage Site in 1991 (China Williams et al., 2009).

The above facts indicate that Thailand have been earnestly and strategically developing this cultural site to create a tourism industry.

#### (2-1) The Ayuthaya Historical Study Center

The center donated by the Japanese government displays the whole history of Ayuthaya to allow a complete overview of its heritage. The entrance panel says, "The Ayuthaya Historical Study Center was established on September 28, 1987, under a grant aid project fully supported by the government of Japan to celebrate His Majesty the King's sixteenth birthday as well as commemorate the centennial anniversary of friendship between Japan and Thailand."

Subject areas are as follows,

1. Ayuthaya as capital: displaying the prosperity of the Ayuthaya period.

We found that a huge temple complex in the city had been supporting trade and religious activities during the brilliant years of Ayuthaya.

2. Ayuthaya as an international port: covering Ayuthaya's international relations.

Its international relations are worldwide. Japan, Ryukyu, Pusan, Ning Po, Amoi, Malay, India, Persia and the Netherlands. We have to notice that Ryukyu, which is called Okinawa now, was an independent state and an international trade player.

3. Ayuthaya as the center of administrative power: covering the relationship between the king and his subjects and royal ceremonies.

4. Everyday life of the common people: covering the way of life, beliefs, religious rituals, mural paintings and folk culture.

5. Ayuthaya's relations with foreign powers

(Ayuthaya Historical Study Center, 2003).

#### (2-2) Wat Phra Si Sanphet

Wat Phra Si Sanphet was situated on the premises of the royal palace which had been established from the reign of King Ramathibodi I (1350 AD) to the reign of King Sam Phraya (1448 AD). Later, King Borommatralokanet ordered a temple to be built on the site to be utilized as a monastic area. Wat Phra Si Sanphet is the largest temple in Ayuthaya.

In 1499, a principal Viham (hall of worship) was built. The following year in 1500 AD King Ramathibodi II commanded the casting of a standing Buddha image 16 meters in height and covered with gold. After that time the ashes of members of royal families were placed in small chedis (stupas) constructed at the site. The view of the stupas is spectacular.

#### (2-3) Phra Mongkhonbophit

In 1610 King Songtham ordered the Buddha image known as Phra Mongkhobophit to be moved from the east to the west and commanded the construction of a mandapa (square roofed structure) to house the image of the Buddha.

In 1612 AD an order was carried out to level the earth in front of the Vihim so that cremations could take place there.

#### (2-4) Wat Mahathat

The construction of Wat Mahathat was begun during the reign of King Borommarachathirat I in 1374 AD, but was completed during the reign of King Ramesuan (1383-1395 AD).

The main prang (Khmer-style tower) collapsed during King Songtham's reign (1610-1628 AD).

Restoration work was completed in the reign of King Prasatthong (1630-1655 AD). During the restoration the height of the prang was considerably increased. The most famous part of the temple is a Buddha head embedded among a tree's maze of roots. The origin of this precious broken Buddha statue is unknown. Many sightseers use this point to take commemorative snapshots.

We saw more than a hundred Buddha statues whose heads were cut off by invaders, yet we discovered only a few heads amongst the ruins.

#### (2-5) Japanese Village

The Japanese Village is one of the largest among foreign settlements. Nagamasa YAMADA is the most famous settler and leader.

The History Center at the Japanese Village commemorates many interesting historical events. One interesting display is the "Chronology of Historical Events in Siam/Thailand-Japan Relations. It states the following,

In August (1945), "The Great East Asian War" ended. The Thai government released a statement, nullifying the previous war declaration against Britain and the US. In September, Thailand was renamed Siam. Treaties and agreements with Japan were nullified.

Japanese people tend to forget the past. Yet Thai people remember the past as a meaningful fact to create the future together with their friends, even sharing mistaken decisions. Further, Thai people remember the names of their real friends. The History Center honors Yoneo ISHII for his invaluable contribution to Thailand-Japan friendship. A news article reports, "A group of col-

leagues, friends, students and admirers of the late Professor Ishii Yoneo in Thailand, led by historians Chalong Soontravanich and Charnvit Kasetsiri, will tomorrow hold a Buddhist service for him at the Bowonniwet Viharn Temple in Bangkok. The memorial service is in remembrance of his invaluable contributions to the study of history, society and culture of Thailand and Southeast Asia during the past five decades" (By The Nation, March 4, 2010).

#### 2.3 Conclusion

Some critics say that Japanese university students have little chance to learn about religions at school, home and in their community. Is this right? In fact they learn about religions unconsciously, because they experience many religious events throughout the year. Further, Inoue states,

There are rich Buddhism artefacts in Japan. Recently, seeing Buddhist sculptures has become popular among youngsters and easy reading books have been published. Introducing students to these trends will support their attempts to feel closer to sculptures. (Inoue, 2010: 61)

Inoue is right. Introducing students to these trends is important. We can introduce students to East Asia's culture of Buddhism, and good results will be expected.

Firstly, students can learn the living culture of Buddhism on a daily life basis. Second, students can experience cultural tourism based on Buddhism, and students can compare East Asian Buddhism with Japanese Buddhism to study the differences and the similarities. Third, students

can learn much about the importance of cultural factors in tourism. Fourth, students can learn the development of the tourism industry in Southeast Asia. Fifth, students can learn that tourism is a global business by knowing European tourists' style of enjoying things. Sixth and finally, students can learn the historical facts as a basis of the tourism industry.

## Concluding Remarks

Yuka INOUE

After the Second World War, Japanese public school education is said to have excluded religion from its new curriculum. However, religious education has become a key term in multicultural societies. For example in Britain (England and Wales), state-schools are required to teach religious education as part of the National Curriculum. This means that religious education is provided from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 (from 5 year olds to 12 year olds) in primary schools and for secondary state schools (Key Stages 3 and 4). Religious education is defined as a "(S)tatutory subject with non-statutory content" (QCDA website, 2011). The following is the abstract of religious education for Key Stage 2:

**Throughout key stage 2**, pupils learn about Christianity and at least two of the other principal religions, recognising the impact of religion and belief locally, nationally and globally. They make connections between differing aspects of religion and consider the different forms of religious expression. They consider the beliefs, teachings, practices and ways of life central to religion. They learn about sacred texts and other sources and consider their meanings. They begin to recognise diversity in reli-

gion, learning about similarities and differences both within and between religions and beliefs and the importance of dialogue between them. They extend the range and use of specialist vocabulary. They recognise the challenges involved in distinguishing between ideas of right and wrong, and valuing what is good and true. They communicate their ideas, recognising other people' s viewpoints. They consider their own beliefs and values and those of others in the light of their learning in religious education. (QCDA website, accessed in Feb, 2011)

This statement shows that learning about religion in schools is not for missionary work, but to teach pupils about religious and cultural diversity within the society they live in. As stated above, "recognising the impact of religion and belief locally, nationally and globally" is the key notion. Pupils are guided to recognize their own and other religious beliefs and to respect them. Studying religion is one way of recognising the cultural diversity in society.

In Japan, perhaps higher education will be most students' last opportunity to learn about religion and to enhance their understanding and respect toward various types of religions and cultures. Although the majority of Japanese people are said to be Buddhist, most students are not aware of the diverse types of Buddhism on a global scale.

In this respect, Southeast Asian countries give us a good example of how people live with different beliefs and in diverse social backgrounds today. Taking them to this region and having them observe and experience its religious and cultural practices will broaden their view towards religion and culture. Learning the historical background of

this region will help them recognise how people came to live today and the complex social issues behind them. Further discussion and research is required to create a systematic educational program based on this area. However, we believe that this paper will become a stepping stone for future curriculum development.

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#### Conclusion

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