

***The Cultural Heritage Architecture of Luang Prabang:  
The Role in Tourism and Preservation Sectors***

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**Abstract**

When Luang Prabang was announced by UNESCO in 1955 as a world heritage, the role of the cultural architecture of Luang Prabang was changed from the past. The preservation of cultural architecture of Luang Prabang, it has many sectors. The objective of the research is to explore 1) the role of the cultural architecture of Luang Prabang in tourism and 2) the preservation sectors and their role in cultural architecture preservation. The research studied by non-participation observation, notice the trace and interview key informants. The results of research, the role of the cultural architecture of Luang Prabang in tourism have 4 roles that are 1) the place for visitor to visit for experience with cultural in Luang Prabang 2) The place for daily life of people in Luang Prabang 3) the place to collect cultural objects and 4) the place for business to serve tourists. The preservation sectors and their role, they have 4 sectors. 1) The sector is government sector that has roles to control, to supervise about building renovation and to manage income from entrance fee that they get from tourists. 2) Education sectors, they have the role to educate the new generation of Laos for preservation system. 3) Traditional material industry sector they have a role to produce traditional material. The traditional material industry sector is the local industry. And 4) foreigner sectors such as an international organization or embassy of other countries. They have the role to support preservation cultural heritage architecture by funding and development program.

**Keywords:** Cultural management, Luang Prabang, Cultural tourism, Cultural Architecture

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## Introduction

Luang Prabang is the world heritage city which announced by UNESCO on 1955. Luang Prabang is the former capital of Laos which on the period of the kingdom of Lan Xang. Luang Prabang was established by the king name “Kun Lor” on around 757 C.E. When Laos became a French colony, Luang Prabang is also important as the main city of the northern part. From the historical context, Luang Prabang is a city which full of unique architecture. The architecture of Luang Prabang consists of traditional Laos and colonial style, which creates a beautiful city landscape. Nowadays, Luang Prabang is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Southeast Asia. Luang Prabang's architecture in the past was originally a place for living of Laos's people which create upon Lao traditional culture. When the city was announced to world heritage city, the contexts of a city change that influences the role of architecture change from the past. The conservation of architecture in Luang Prabang is importantly considered to preserve the identity of tourism. This study draws attention to these issues in order to understand the phenomenon.

The area of world heritage site of Luang Prabang is limited in the old town area, according to the map of the World Heritage Site of Luang Prabang that around 10 km<sup>2</sup>. The protected area, the department of world heritage Luang Prabang is divided into 4 zones that are a) ZPP-Ua (Preservation Zone) b) ZPP-Ub (Protection Zone) c) ZPP-N (Natural and Scenery Zone) and d) ZPP-M (Monasteries Zone)

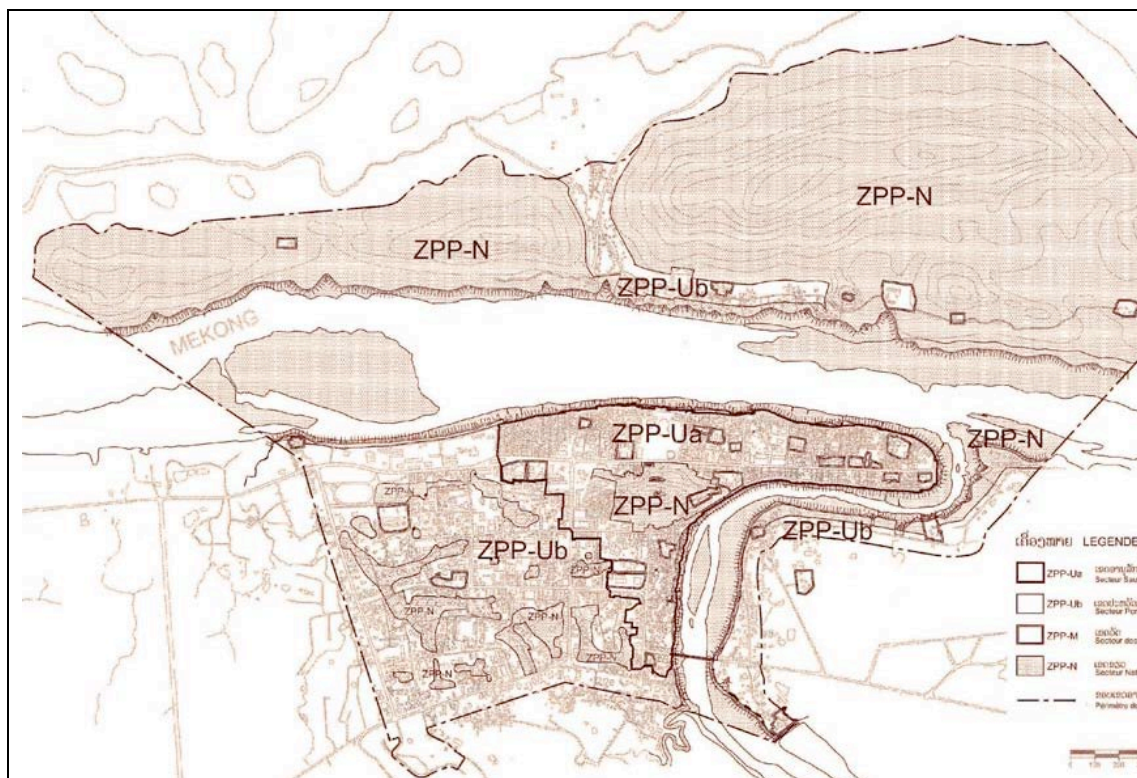


Figure 1: Zoning of protected area in Luang Prabang.

The architecture in the protected zone has been registered by the department of World Heritage Luang Prabang, there are 37 monasteries. However, all 37 monasteries are not the same age, because each temple was built at different times. The highlight temple of Luang Prabang and there is evidence about build time is Xing-Thong Temple. The Xing-Thong Temple was built in 1558 on the Chai Chetthathirat King period, so the temple is not less than 450 years old. There are 443 public buildings and dwellings registered for preservation. The public buildings and dwellings are scatter located in Luang Prabang old town. The conservation building is located densely on the main road of the city, namely Sisavangvong road, Khem Khong road and Kingkitsarath road.



Figure 2: Xing Thong temple the highlight destination in Luang Prabang.

### **Research Objective**

The objective of the research is to explore 1) the role of the cultural architecture of Luang Prabang in tourism and 2) The stakeholder and their role in cultural architecture preservation.

### **Research scope**

This research was collected data by field study at Luang Prabang on twice time in the period of December 2016 and June 2017. Each time in a field study, the researcher has stayed in Luang Prabang for about 5 days.

## **Research methodology**

The study was used as a qualitative method by field study at world heritage city, Luang Prabang, Lao People's Democratic Republic. The data collections were used as many tools to collect data such as:

- 1) Non-participant observations will be conducted during December 2016 and June 2017. The data will be collected for a period of 10 days.
- 2) Observation from the appearance in the field, between December 2016 and June 2017. The observation was used in digital cameras to collect traces.
- 3) Interview 10 key informant person that is government officer who is conservators, people who involved in conservation.

The data analysis process, the study was organized information from all tools. The study was analyzed and interpreted the data to summarize.

## **The role of the cultural architecture of Luang Prabang in tourism**

In the past, Luang Prabang's architecture played a role in the traditional way of Luang Prabang. When Luang Prabang was declared as a world heritage city, it resulted in changes in the way of life of people in Luang Prabang. The tourists from around the world pay more attention to Luang Prabang. And from that phenomenon, the cultural architecture of Luang Prabang, that has a new role from tourism such as;

- 1) The role as a place for visitors to visit and experience with the art of Luang Prabang. This issue is the direct role of cultural architecture, because of the architectural style that appears in Luang Prabang is unique and it is a different character from the architecture nearby such as Bangkok or Chiang Mai. These architectures are preserved by a good system so it leads to architectural value and uniqueness that attract to the attention of tourists.





Figure 3: Guide map for tourist show all destination in Luang Prabang.

2) The role as the place for activities according to people's culture or daily life in Luang Prabang. The cultural architecture of Luang Prabang, even though it is over 100 years old, but due to good care so it is still in use. The cultural architecture of Luang Prabang is still to use for daily life and according to the cultural way such as the monasteries, they still use for religious activities. The daily life and cultural activities, there is a good experience for tourist which to touch the authentic culture of Luang Prabang.

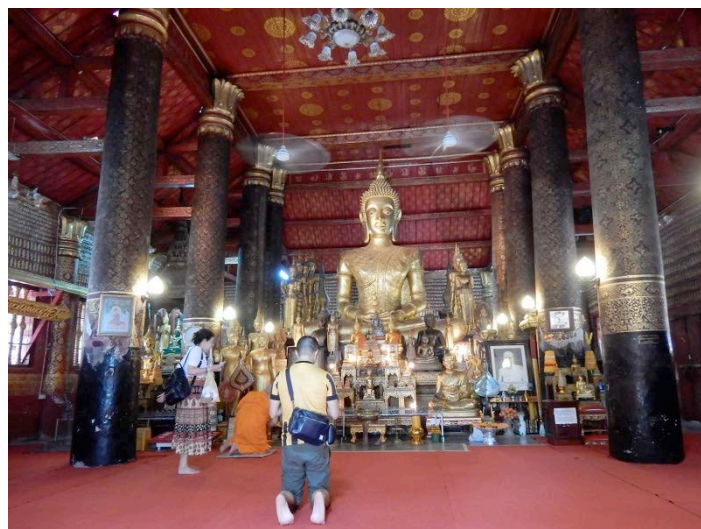


Figure 4: Tourist and their visiting at Mai Suvanpumara temple in Luang Prabang.

3) The role as the place to keep tangible cultural objects of Luang Prabang. Although some architecture is not being used according to the utility of the original function of a building, it is also used as a place to store important cultural objects of

Luang Prabang. The architecture that plays this role, the palace of the king, nowadays it has been transformed into National Museum of Luang Prabang. It is the important roles in the use of cultural architecture in tourism. Because of cultural objects in the past, when time goes on, it will be lost. Collecting in one place is a good way to preserve the heritage of the past to new generations to learn and to apply for the current lifestyle.



Figure 5: Tourist and their visiting at Mai Suvanpumara temple in Luang Prabang.

4)The role as the place to service in tourism business activities for tourist. The cultural architecture of the Luang Prabang has been preserved so they still have good condition. Investors and entrepreneurs have renovated these buildings to serve tourists such as restaurant, hostel, and spa. Visitors who visit Luang Prabang have the cultural atmosphere of Luang Prabang, but at the same time, it gets comfortable. At the time of building all architecture, the lifestyle and activities of those who use the building have characteristic as the traditional way of life. Nodaway, these buildings have been renovated to match the current lifestyle and tourism activities. As observed by the researchers, investors and entrepreneurs have tried to decorate these buildings in a colonial style; however, it can also provide services and comfort to tourists.



Figure 6: The cultural architecture in Luang Prabang was renovated for a modern restaurant.

The current state of cultural architecture has found that the role of these buildings is still used, but when tourism arrives in Luang Prabang, the role of these buildings has changed from the past. The original roles of these buildings were the residential, shops or religious places. But nowadays, for tourism, these buildings have been adapted, although traditional roles are still present, they play an increasingly important role.

### **The stakeholder and their role in cultural architecture preservation**

In preserving valuable architecture in Luang Prabang, there are many parties. Each sector has a different role, but also to support each of those architectures still remains and valuable. Based on the field data collected, the researchers found that there are sectors involved in preserving the architecture.

Government sector. The government sectors that play a role in preserving the unique architecture of Luang Prabang is composed of two divisions. First, that is Department of Luang Prabang World Heritage, DPL, which department is under Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism. And the second, the local government sector, that is Department of Information, Culture, and Tourism which department is under Luang Prabang city.

These two departments have clearly divided the role of maintaining the cultural architecture of Luang Prabang. This cultural architecture or registered architectures were published in a document called Inventory of protected heritage.





Figure 7: The Inventory of protected heritage

Department of Luang Prabang World Heritage and Department of Information, Culture, and Tourism have different roles and functions. The Department of Luang Prabang World Heritage will be responsible for seeking funds for the repair and conservation. In other roles of The DPL that supervise and approve the repair and construction of the building in accordance with the law to preserve the landscape and architectural condition, especially in preservation areas, to remain in good condition. The Department of Information, Culture, and Tourism have a role in construction to repair and supervise in craft and art of building.

In addition to the conservation, repair, and construction, the management of cultural sites in Luang Prabang is a role of the Department of Information, Culture, and Tourism. Management of ticket sales to earn money for a cultural site is a duty of the Department of Information, Culture, and Tourism. The tickets system is one ticket for one attraction and the admission fee for each place is not equal. Ticket sales are handled by people in the local community at the venue and deliver revenue to the department. Revenue from the sale of tickets will be used to pay for the maintenance of the building and to be the income of the local government.

1) Education sector. The education sector plays a role in preparing personnel for repairs and maintenance the unique architecture of Luang Prabang. Architects and craftsmen who will be involved in the repair are also important. Although there is a funding to repair if the lack of architects and craftsmen to repair it has an impact on the unique architectural value. Cultural architecture is a technique derived from the wisdom of the local people. Therefore, it cannot be taken from outside society. This differs from modern architecture by using universal construction techniques, which may be requested by architects or technicians from other sources. The researcher has been observing and interviewing the educational sector that produces architectural and artistic personnel in Luang Prabang that are Faculty of Architecture at Supanuwong University, Luang Prabang Folk Art College and Luang Prabang Technical and Vocational College.



By observations and interviews with faculty members in the Faculty of Architecture, Supanuwong University found that the Faculty of Architecture, Supanuwong University has 3 programs: 1) Architecture 2) Interior Architecture and 3) Construction management. The teaching of the Faculty of Architecture are a focus on the modern architecture, do not have the courses or teachings of the Lao traditional architecture. However, there are activities in teaching in some subjects that have benefited from the university's location in the world heritage site by learning about traditional Lao architecture such as drawing,

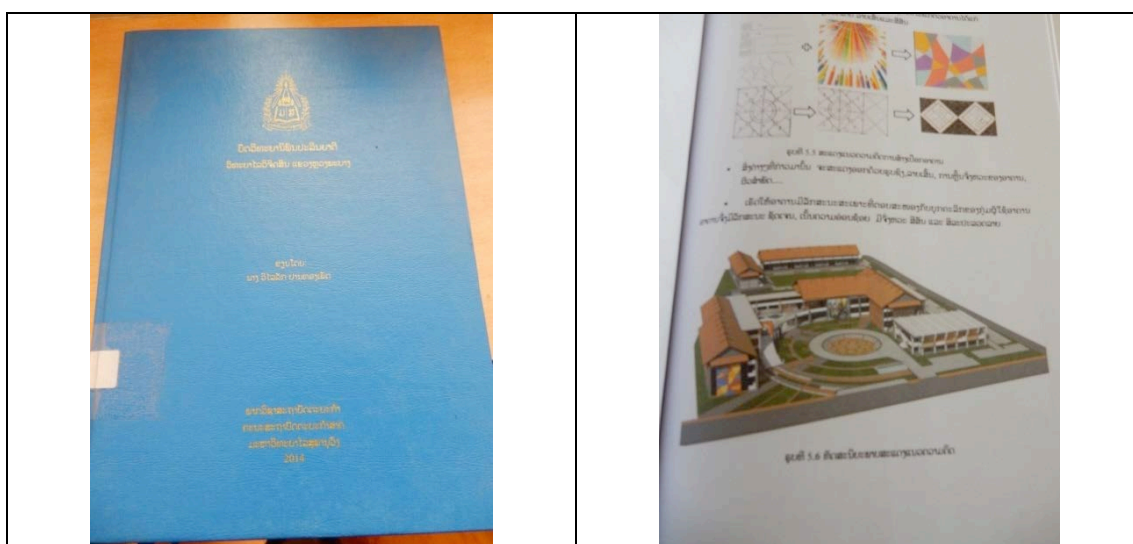


Figure 8: Thesis for graduates of Faculty of Architecture, Supanuwong University  
(Photo by Researcher 26 December 2016)

Art education, such as painting, sculpture, is also important in the conversation because graduated will become experts in the preservation of conservation architecture. The researcher observed at the Luang Prabang Folk Art College. It is taught at the undergraduate level and is taught in 3 fields: painting, sculpture, and print. Most of the work done by the students is a work of art in Laos, but using modern materials and techniques. For example, the paintings that students draw will reflect the way of life and the environment of Luang Prabang, especially the architecture, but the techniques used in the presentation will be oil or acrylic techniques. Sculpture works will create a traditional shape, such as the Buddha image, Naga, but using modern sculpting techniques. From interviews instructor in the Luang Prabang Folk Art College, students graduate from college work in part that involved in the repair and conservation of architectural and artistic tradition in Luang Prabang. Many graduates go to work in the field of handicrafts for sale to tourists.

Another college that offers vocational education to the new generation in Luang Prabang is the Luang Prabang Technical and Vocational College. is the Luang Prabang Technical and Vocational College offer undergraduate programs which programs are a concern with architecture and tourism are construction technique and tourism and hospitality.

From the field study, researchers have searched books and texts related to traditional architecture in Luang Prabang. The researcher found a book collecting architectural information about Luang Prabang, namely "Luang Phabang: an architectural journey".

It is written jointly by several writers including Somsanouk Mixay, Pierre-Bernard Lafont and illustrates drawings by Francois Greck, Jean-Baptiste Lagier, and his team, published in 2004. The other book is a textbook to teach the pattern of art in Laos, it is a book called "Laos art of the first sector", which is a book that teaches Lao's ornament.

From the fielded study, the researcher found in the education sector of architectural and traditional arts preservation in Luang Prabang does not have a course that teaches traditional architecture and arts. However, the learners used the architectural and environment of the city to practice in drawing and painting.

- 1) Traditional construction material industry sector. Maintaining the unique architecture of Luang Prabang, maintenance funds, architects, and artisans are important, but one important aspect is traditional materials for repair. Most of the buildings and houses of Luang Prabang are constructed with the techniques of bricklaying and roofing with clay tiles. This is a unique feature that makes physical environment of Luang Prabang is unique. The researchers found that the source of these materials was produced outside of the Luang Prabang city area where located on the other side of the river bank. This brick factory has been producing brick, roofing and floor tiles for 30 years. The raw soil is the soil that is excavated from land in the factory itself, not from other areas. This brick factory was contacted by the Department of Luang Prabang World Heritage, DPL as a manufacturer of repair materials. But the factory owners have declined because of the inadequate production capacity.

In addition to interviewing the owner of the brick factory, the researcher has the opportunity to observe the traditional house repair project, its name Ruenchan resident. Ruenchan resident is a wooden house that is Laos's traditional style building. The age of natural wood is limited by the time of use and maintenance. The repairers use synthetic wood made from gypsum at some point in the house because of the rare natural wood and the cost of them.



Figure 9: The owner of the brick factory there was produced traditional material for traditional style building. (Photo by Researcher 11 June 2017)

In summary, the traditional construction materials industry sector is an important sector of supporting the preservation of preserved architecture. However, by social change and the change of way of people's lives in modern times, the traditional construction materials manufacturers are less and may be discontinued in the future. It will affect the conservation of the unique architecture of Luang Prabang in the future.

2) The international organization sector. The architectural preservation of the Luang Prabang could not be denied that was support by the foreign sector. This sector is an important part of supporting both funding and technical support to the World Heritage Sites of Luang Prabang. The researchers found that within the Luang Prabang World Heritage Site, there was a display of funding information from foreign agencies. The information in the display indicates the source of funds and the amount received. In addition to funding, international organizations have also established the training center for people who interested in enhancing knowledge and skills. Such as, UNESCO Training Center for Laotian Traditional Arts and Building Crafts Luang Prabang at Xieng Muan Temple that was established by UNESCO under The Cultural Survival Project Luangprabang. The project received a grant of \$ 150,000 from UNESCO in 2000-2007 and during 2016-2017, it received a grant of 45,000 USD from the World Education Lao to educate and rehabilitate artisanal skills in painting, carving, and casting.





Figure 10: Information board that displays about sponsored by the foreign sector.



Figure 11: UNESCO Training Center for Laotian Traditional Arts and Building Crafts Luang Prabang.

## Conclusion

The existence, preservation, and preservation of the identity of the World Heritage Site of Luang Prabang, Lao People's Democratic Republic, responds to tourism in globalization. Identity in the architecture of the past of Luang Prabang is clear and a major focus of Luang Prabang. Luang Prabang has been registered as a World Heritage Site because of the city has many ancient temples and houses, which are unique in colonial style. These valuable architectures have changed their roles from the role of the local religious or residential. The new roles of the valuable architectures are the place for tourism, the place to store cultural objects and the place of business to support tourism.

The sectors contribute to the existence of the cultural architecture identity of Luang Prabang are the government sector and the international organization sector. The government sectors play a role in regulating and controlling, as well as seeking fund and revenue management to be able to have money to maintain the cultural site. The foreign sector is quite important in supporting the process of preserving and

preserving the cultural identity of Luang Prabang either in form of funding either in monetary form or through various projects. Education is an important part of contributes a new generation who have skilled or knowledgeable people for conservation. Knowledge is considered part of the intangible cultural heritage. Traditional artistic and traditional construction techniques instruction can be regarded as the preservation of cultural heritage. In the city, there are no formal education programs taught in traditional arts to the new generation which will result in future they not have a new generation to know and to understand of traditional arts. However, the process of supporting and promoting the existence of the cultural identity of Luang Prabang, it has interesting styles and leads to important phenomena. The Luang Prabang is still able to maintain the cultural identity of them.

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