CHAPTER II

LUANG PRABANG'S LANDSCAPE AS PRODUCT OF CUTURAL LAYERS

Settled among the lush mountains, at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, Luang Prabang people have excellent constructed their city that has functioned as a holy place, the city of the hero-king, and the ancient capital of the Lan Xang kingdom turned modern-day world heritage site. Luang Prabang's urban landscape has been shaped by both traditional animist and Buddhist social organizations and within the natural resource and geographic bounds imposed by its exceptional location. In Luang Prabang city one can see houses built on wooden stilts along the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, and brick and mortar, land-based religious buildings, constructed on the highest points of the village.

The international architectural influences to vernacular buildings in the colonial period have melded the original composition with international architecture that formed the city's diverse skyline into a unique urban heritage blend.

To understand Luang Prabang's urban development, I put my attention toward how Luang Prabang's urban construction is intertwined Luang Prabang's traditional lifestyle, religious beliefs, culture and natural and geographical limits. Within this conceptualization, this chapter studies how Luang Prabang's landscape has evolved from landscape of the gods to the landscape of the hero-king, to the landscape of the royal capital city of the Lan Xang kingdom, and finally, to a world heritage site through the results of different social, economic, cultural and political influences. The study focuses from the pre-historic period, (AD757-1316) through the early history of Luang Prabang (1316-1893), the colonial and imperial period (1893-1945), the cold war period (1945-1975), the contemporary period and the country's liberation (1975 until the Lao government introduced the "*Chintanakan Mai*" policy in 1986), up until UNESCO recognizing Luang Prabang as a World Heritage Site in 1995.

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2.1 Location of Luang Prabang and its Characteristics

Luang Prabang is located at the heart of the northern part of Lao PDR. The province shares its border with Oudomxay province, to the east with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and Chiang Khuang province, to the south with Vientiane province and to the west with Sayaboury province. It is about 400 km north of Vientiane municipality. Its lowest altitude is 247m at the mouth of the Nam Khan River and reaches 1600m on Phou Khune mountaintop. Like other cities in the northern part of Lao PDR, rough forest mountains dominate Luang Prabang. From the total area of 2,026,6 km^2, there is 1,946,2 km^2 of agricultural and forest land, including 4,942 of primary forest land (Lao Government, 2005a).

The commune is a multi-ethnic minority with a total population of 410.414. These ethnic minority groups have a close relationship with the Lao Theung[1], which covers 46.5%, to Lao Lum, which covers 36,5% and to Lao Sung which covers 17% of the whole population in Luang Prabang province, settled in an area of 16.875 Km^2, with 24 people per square kilometer. The basic social organization is that the village is built according to geomorphic principles and has a sufficient economy based on rice and forest products. The significant place for settlement and resources for economic development are the Mekong River, Nam Ou, Nam Cheuang and Nam Khan rivers and the lands that lie along them, at the valley with the forest products.

However, Luang Prabang city has more importance than other districts in Luang Prabang province. It had functioned as the capital of the Lan Xang kingdom. It is located on the peninsula formed by the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers. It looks like the city has rivers as its Water canal. It has the Phousi mount in the center of the city, which forms a peninsula by changing the Nam Khan Waterway from it's perpendicular orientation to the Phousi mount, and the Mekong River to the other direction of the Mekong Waterway before flowing into the Mekong River.

The peninsula of Luang Prabang city is only one kilometer long and 250 meters wide, and surrounded by lush forest mountains as the city's moat. It stands on

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[1] Lao Theung, the Lao people who live in high land
- Lao Sung, , the Lao people who live in upland
- Lao Lum, , the Lao people who live in low land

elevated bedrock that prevents devastating floods, with sloping banks that are wonderfully fertile when the Waters make their seasonal retreat. There are accumulations of vernacular houses, colonial residences, administrative buildings, Chinese and Vietnamese front street shop houses, and temples, scattered along the two rivers, and on the foot of Phousi mount and at the down stream of the peninsula. Luang forests are a combination of thick forests and fruit forests. Luang Prabang is considered a city of the world, where there are many congested temples with various cultural arts and architectural styles. In Luang Prabang city, there are 62 villages with a total population of 51,163 and with an area of 3,160 square kilometers, holding 1,619 people per square kilometer. However, the majority of Luang Prabang's population is *Lao Lum.* Even though Luang has an agricultural economic base, Luang Prabang city is a communication and service center for the northern provinces of Lao PDR. Therefore, its significant economic activities are trade, service and farming (Lao Government, 2005c).

2.2 Historical Development of Luang Prabang and its Vicinity

2.2.1 The Founding of the City with Indigenous Lao Culture/Myth (757 – l 300)

The foundation of Luang Prabang was intricate and has many accounts, such as chronicles, legends, myths and a long written history. Therefore, Luang Prabang's landscape has both real life and mythical histories. These say much about how Luang Prabang's landscape has been developed and functions as heaven on earth and a royal city. Like Bangkok, Luang Prang is a town of different names. Some of those names found in historical manuscripts include: Muang Xua, Chiang Dong Chiang Thong, and Sisatanak. Today, Luang Prabang, or Muang Luang, is the title in everyday usage (Martin, 1996).

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Muang Xua is the city's oldest recorded name. Accounts of the city's founding,---which was found on *Bailan*, the palm leaf manuscripts of temple libraries; tell different versions of the cities founding. Some versions tell that Khun Lo, the oldest son of Khun Borom, who was associated with legend, founded Muang Xua. He

descended from Muang Then (Dian Bian Fu, northern Vietnam today) in the middle of the seventh century (Souneth, 1996).

Khun Boram's legend tells that in the site, there were three chiefs governing a brutal and unruly humanity. For their actions, a great deity (Phraya Theng) destroyed them with a flash flood. They then arrived in Heaven, offered the Phraya Theng their apologies and got permission to remain with him. After a certain amount of time the flood began to subside and the Earth appeared once more. The three Khuns appealed to be permitted to return to the Land. The Phraya Theng gave them a buffalo to help them till the soil. Three years later the buffalo died. From his nostrils grew an enormous gourd vine, out of which, the new human race gushed out. The part cut open with a hot poker yeilded relatively dark-skinned aboriginal peoples, and the lighter skinned Lao gushed from the cuts made with a chisel. He taught them how to build houses, and plant rice. They implemented proper rituals and behavior, and grew prosperous. As their population grew, chiefs no longer sufficed to rule them. The chief god sent his son, Khun Borom, to be the ruler of a certain group of the Lao people. Khun Borom ruled the Lao people, teaching them to use new tools and other arts. Khun Borom, then, sent his son, Khun Lo, to rule the kingdom of Muang Xua--now modern day Luang Prabang (Souneth, 2000).

Another version says that--accordance to an old legend--two holy men were renowned for their extraordinary powers. They arrived at the peninsula formed by the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, the present day site of old Luang Prabang. What first attracted them was a mountain that strongly resembled a mount of rice at the center of the peninsula currently known as Phousi. From the top of the mountain they could see a huge tree, Ton Thong, a flame tree with flowers and fruit located between the rivers and tip of the peninsula. All of these seduced them to decide to erect city here. They laid the foundational stones creating the boundaries for a settlement with the base of the Thon Thong tree as the northern limit. They then walked along the bank of the Mekong River to the south, where they found a stream called Nam Dong and set another stone there as the south limit of the city. They called the place Xieng Dong, Xieng Thong. After erecting the city, the two holy men called the fifteen guardian

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nagas from the union of the Nam Khan and Mekong rivers to ask for protection of the new site and the city was renamed Sisatanak (Martin, 1996).

Even though the event may not be true, the concept of myth still shapes the Luang Prabang's people's belief. In regard to the legend above, the history of Luang Prabang has long been a matter of discussion and a topic of research; the question of who held this land, where they were from, when and how Luang Prabang was founded in early history are still obscured for researchers. However, they got the common idea that the events recorded in *bailan* reflect concepts and memories that have shaped the Lao society and their everyday life. Scholars such as Gosling (1997) and Duncan (1990) expend the events through interviewing between real Lao livelihood strategies and myths, related to this space.

But more important than any historical information that the Lao myths and rites can provid is the crucial role they played in the establishment and perpetuation of Luang Prabang as the Royal City. Therefore, Khun Borom's legend could not be denied, Luang Prang's landscape evolved from a landscape of the gods to a landscape of the hero-king (Duncan, 1990). The legend was also encoded in the landscapes of royal capitals in South and South-east Asia. It entered into early history of Laos. Gosling (1997) illustrates that Lao people whose subsistence depended on the cultivation of wet rice, vegetables, and buffaloes that the 'Phraya Theng (deity) gave to use for tilling the land and also attests to the existence of paddy fields very clearly in Lao life. He further relates the traditional life of Lao people to environmental influences, as he asserts why Lao people used to live in wood and thatch huts built high off the ground on stilts at the valley of the mountain and along the river: it related to their original life and to protect inhabitants against flooding, disease, lightening and misfortune (Souneth, 2001 and Evans, 1996).

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Perceiving the foundations of Luang Prabang as a complex site for research, modern historians have attempted to tie the original lifestyle, culture and early settlement of Laotians together, in comparison to those of its neighboring countries. Sila Vilavong (2001) identifies the legend with the early history of Laos. According to him, Lao people began to move from Watershed sof the Nam Ou, where today is Tonkin, Northern Vietnam, headed by a prince, Khun Lo, downstream to the

confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, called Muang Xua, the original name of Luang Prabang. He took the opportunity in 698 A.D to take control of Muang Xua from Nan-chao. Khun Lo had been awarded the town by his father, Khun Borom, who is associated with the Lao legend of the creation Muang, which the Lao share with the Shan and other peoples of the region. Khun Lo established a dynasty whose fifteen rulers reigned over an independent Muang Xua for the better part of a century (Martin, 1996).

Tatsuo (2002), in his study, found that the original inhabitants of Laos were Austro-Asiatic peoples. He also illustrates that from at least as early as the eleventh century, for example, Luang Prabang had been in close touch with the powerful Khmer Empire that ruled the Angkor kingdom in what is modern-day Cambodia. And from the Khmer, the Lao learned of the ancient Indian religions, Hinduism, and Buddhism, whose beliefs sometimes slipped into their traditional mythology. Luang Prabang was sometimes identified with the Sri Lankan king of the gods. Khun Borom's descent to earth in formidable majesty was sometimes equated with cosmic ocean and the city of Sakra in the Tavantimsa heaven. Their god-like nature is the spirit of the forests, rivers and mountains. It is believed that these legends have been handed down from generation to generation, which have influenced the tales in various ways of villagers changing livelihood adaptations up to the present date. It was also used by the elders to teach succeeding generations about the collective personality of their society.

However, Phongsavat (2000) witnesses that the search does not only confine itself to the political origins of Laos but goes deeper as the language, traditions and culture of Lao people have many points of contact and similarity with Thailand. He further explores that from the earliest times, Laotian traders had great skill at river navigation, especially in the Mekong River. They used routes through the mountains as the most important river route was the Mekong and its tributaries. They exercised power over their neighbors, in circumstances where mountainous areas with sparse populations, through expanding and contracting spheres of influence in terms of the concept of *muang*. Furthermore, relations between political powers had also been expanded through warfare, marriage contracts, and commerce (Phongsavat, 2002).

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Some scholars relate Lao to its neighboring countries. According to Martin (1997) and Vathana (2006) the original Lao or Tai people moved from the region of southern China, between Yunnan and Guangxi provinces, along the Mekong River, the Irrawaday River, and the Chao Praya River to the south and mixed with other ethnic groups due to the extension of Han Chinese control. Until the first century CE the small principality Chiang Saen in northern of Thailand was founded. Tai people also moved to the valleys of northwest Vietnam. As the population increased Tai people were eventually spread widely from the Shan highlands across northern Thailand and into the upper Mekong basin, a region between contending Mandalas of Nanzhao in the south of china and the Mon and Khmer in mainland Southeast Asia. Vathana (2006) compares the common tropes of migration and racial continuity within Thailand. He purports that the Thai racial historiography upholds the story of the emergence and development of the Thai race during a huge migration process from the kingdom of Nanchao.

From the second half of the eighth century, the Khmers and Champa intervened in these affairs from southern Laos, maintaining their presence on the banks of the Mekong until 1070. Canthaphanit, the Khmer ruler, moved north to Muang Xua from Vientiane and seized Muang Xua. Canthaphanit and his son both had long reigns, during which they changed the name of Muang Xua to Xieng Dong Xieng Thong. The dynasty eventually had a word amongst a number of principalities. As a result, Khun Cuang, a warlike ruler, a Kammu tribesman, seized this occasion to conquer the territory of the warring principalities and ruled from around 1128 to 1169. Under Khun Cuang's rule, Muang Xua next became the Kingdom of Sisattanak, a name associated with the legend of the *naga* (a mythical snake or Water dragon) who was said to have dug the Mekong riverbed. At this time, Theravada Buddhism was subsumed by Mahayana Buddhism (Evans, 2003a).

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2.2.2 Luang Prabang in its Early History (1300-1893)

Like the people itself, Luang Prabang landscape has both real life and mythical histories which combined with architectural data architectural styles Luang Prabang, Khmer, Sukhothai, Lan Na and Ayuthaya. Before the introduction of

Theravada Buddhism, the landscape of Luang Prabang had vigorously been influenced by myth, especially the myth about the two holy men who demarcated Luang Prabang city. It was believed that the rocks and caverns along the two riverbanks were abodes of fifteen *nagas,* who controlled the stream of the Mekong and Khane rivers necessary for agricultural practice and sufficient Water use for their daily life and the steady food, which the Lao people depended for subsistence. On the top of Phousi Hill, lived their master who ruled that hill (Souneth, 2001). It is not surprising that, after the two holy men had demarcated boundaries, they called the fifteen *nagas* and admonished them to protect the new city. They then changed the city's name from Muang Xua to Chiang Dong-Chiang Thong. Their prophecy was that a monarchy city would be erected there. Locally, the peninsula itself looks like the *naga's* head (Reynolds, 1978).

Today at Luang Prabang, myth and history, the sacred and the secular are blended and fused. The evidence was found on Siamese stone at Sukhothai in 1292 that Luang Prabang, known by an earlier name as Muang Xua, was said to be the oldest recorded name in the Thai language. The stele is attributed to the reign of Sukhothai king Rama Khamheng (Griswold and Prasert, 1971, pp, 179-228). That does not mean that the myths did not influence the Luang Prabang landscape. At least, all muangs, including Luang Prabang, had been in close touch with the powerful Khmer Empire, which ruled over Angkor. From them, Luang Prabang ancestors had experienced ancient Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. Thus, Wat Sangkhalok located at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Dong stream,--where, according to the myth, the two holy men had lied out the southern foundation stone--is believed to be the earliest Buddhist site at Luang Prabang. Stone Buddha images with a long inscription were found near the Wat and witnesses say that the Wat was occupied by a rich Khmer settlement (Gosling, 1996). The images reflect Mahayana Buddhism and represent the Buddha seated beneath the seven-headed *naga,* who, according to Buddhist doctrine, guarded the Buddha just before his enlightenment. North from Wat Sangkhalok is Wat Tat Luang. However, when it was found it was still a mystery for researchers. Evidentially, the Khmer Buddhist images of the Wat were brought from Wat Sangkhalok. But far from any evidence, the foundation of the Wat was associated with myth. According to the myth, missionaries sent from India

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by the great Buddhist king, Asoka, known as the Si Dharma Asoka, founded the Wat in the third century BC. The Wat is located on an expensive open field, where annual ceremonies are held. Kings used the Wat as a site to blend Buddhist and pre-Buddhist rituals with royal traditions and the royal annual ceremony. Near to the east of Wat Tat Luang is a huge stone image founded in Sukhothai's bronze tradition of the late fourteenth century (Gosling, 1996).

From the middle of the fourteenth century, Luang Prabang's landscape had been considerably influenced by the new political powers and Theravada Buddhism. This period was seen as the beginning of the founding of the Tai states in the region (Peter and Sandra, 1999). As in 1253, when Kublai Khan, the grandson of Genghi Khan, attacked and captured the king of Nanzhao and moved further to the south to Pagan, the capital of the Burmese mandala and then destroyed that capital. The mongol army moved down the middle of the Mekong to invade the Khmer. By then, however, Khmer power was already waning. As a result of these two declining powers falling, Nanzhao from the north and Khmer from the south, it has been suggested that Mongol intervention may have been directly responsible for the rise of the first Tai mandalas of Lan Na. At the beginning of the 14th century, Tai-Siam Ayuthiya and Lan Xang were founded.

Fa Ngum, the first historically documented king of Lan Xang kingdom, took this important occasion conquering and united Lao *muangs* in 1353. He also attempted to promote his political power by introducing Theravada Buddhism from Angkor as a unifying element in the Kingdom of Lan Xang. Since then the landscape of Luang Prabang has been shifted to cover a wider political, social and religious sphere. By seeing Theravada Buddhism as an important tool for strengthening national and political power in Lan Xang, the sacred *Pra Bang* image of the Buddha, the Royal Holy Image, was brought to Muang Xua in 1358 from Angkor. King Fa Ngum strongly believed that the Pra Bang image could play a role as a protective power and played a significant role to both the capital and its inhabitants. A Buddhist and cultural mission, headed by *Pra Passaman* and several other respected Buddhist elderspossessing in-depth knowledge of Buddhist texts and astronomy as well as some scholars and artisans, were all sent in order to construct and ornament the

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Buddhist monasteries. It was heralded that the Luang Prabang landscape will be developed with various new construction and reconstruction of the Wats (Martin, 1983). The mission settled near the mouth of Huai Hop, one of the Mekong tributaries, north of Wat Sangkhalok, and where the footprint of Buddha was found. It is also believed that one of the city's fifteen naga guardians had lived on a rock near the confluence of the rivers, where Wat Keo was built in the Khmer architectural style to receive Khmer commissioners. At the same year, Wat Pasaman was built a little distance away from Wat Tat Luang in honor of *Pra Pasaman*. From the point of view of the king, Duncan (1990) argues whether the urbanscape was a cultural production or reproduction, and a contestation of political power of the king (Duncan, 1990). Eventually, by the end of Fa Ngum's reign in 1373, the successful adoption of Theravada Buddhism had not only contributed substantially to unification efforts and also to a significant role in advancing Buddhism and contributing to the creation of the settlement's charming Buddhist architectural legacy (Martin, 1982, and Wyatt, 1982).

During the period of Fa Ngum's succeeded king Oun-Hueun, also known as Sam Sen Tai (Lord of Three Hundred Thousand Tais), the landscape was seen as socially and culturally prosperous and as possessing military strength. During his reign, the construction of monasteries was undertaken in order to ensure Buddhist study and his political power (Peter and Sandra, 1999). The significant evidence, which can still be seen, is Wat Manolom. Wat Manolom, which encompasses the huge Sukhothai bronze traditional image, was constructed to enshrine Pra Bang when it first arrived to Luang Prabang. However, Pra Bang remained in Wat Manolom until 1513 (Denise, 2006). It is assumed that, at the time, there was no significant and valuable sanctuary, *sim*. Pra Bang was an element binding people, the king and those in the Buddhist monshood, into a cohesive structure, as powerful spirits must be saved in a significant and sacred place.

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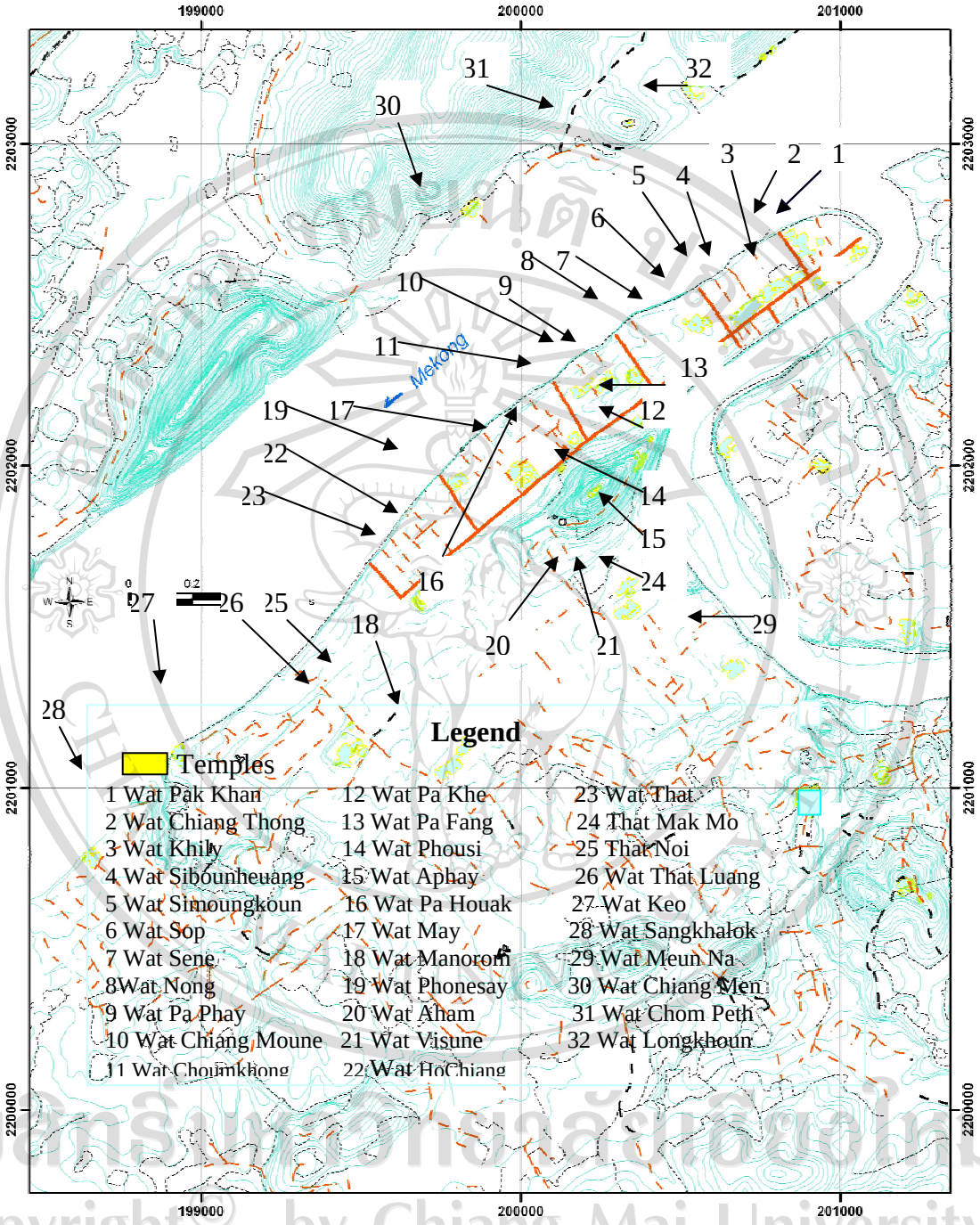


Figure 2.1 The Remained Temples in Nineteenth Century in Luang Prabang

(Source: National Geographic Department, 2007)

The importance of the urban landscape to the practice of kingship had focused on religious and political significance of the most powerful sacred images. Since Phraya Visun--an extremely religious ruler with a peaceful reign--proclaimed himself king in 1500, Luang Prabang's Landscape began to be influenced by the architecture

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and arts of its neighboring countries and had influenced their practices of spirit worship and ancestral worship. This was evident when he initiated Wat Visun to enshrine Pra Bang at the southeast edge of Phousi hill, where, according to the myth the two holy men had laid the city's foundation stone, and also the location of the rice fields of the two great deities and city protectors, Pu Nyeu and Nya Nyeu. The Wat, whose architecture was meant to symbolize the peace and unity of the Kingdom, was enhanced with Lan Na, Sukhothai and Ayuthaya architecture and art. In Visun's wall there is Tat Mak Moh, or Wat Asoke Pra Tat, a reliquary, whose shape is a rounded dome, stylistically more Indian than Lao. The Pra Bang was enshrined at Wat Visun from the time of its removal from Wat Manolom in 1513 until 1707 (Martin, 1996).

It was king Phothisarath, who succeeded his father king Visun, who integrated the styles from the neighboring country's, Lan Na, Sukhothai and Ayuthaya, architecture to construct monasteries and appointed a group of envoys to ask king Muang Kes Klao of Chiang Mai to bring *Pra Trai Pidok*, the Buddhist doctrines, Buddhist scripture and Pra Saek Khan, a sacred Buddha image, from the court of Chiang Mai to Lan Xang. However during his reign, the urbanscape was seen as reproduction of political power, and when he reigned he prohibited animist sacrifices to the spirits and ordered the demolition of the city's most important shrine. Perceiving Buddhism as element binding the people together with the king and Buddhist monkhood and in order to guarantee his political power, he declared Buddhism as the national religion and ordered his subjects to abandon paganism. This extremely religious sovereign ordered the people to destroy shrines of deities, and replace them with Wat Aham, next to Wat Visun, which was built on the shrine of the deities. In the same year, Wat Sangkhalok, Wat Ubosoth and Wat Phou Muad were built on the ancient ritual sites (Lopetcharat, 2000).

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In 1546, after death of Phothisarath, his son Setthatirath, a prolific builder, ascended the throne and had strengthened relation with Lan Na, Sukhothai and Ayuthaya. During his reign, the Buddhist art reached its peak. From his neighbors, he had gained their architectural styles, which were blended into the Lao style. In 1548, Wat Tat, the town's finest stupa was built at the peninsula by King Setthathirath. Two years later, Wat Xieng Thong was built on the tip of the peninsula. The stairway of

the Wat, which led from the Mekong to the Wat itself, was used for royal ceremonies and for important foreign visitors who entered the city before being presented to the king. There have been many legends surrounding the origin of the temple. One of them was a humble Vientiane betel merchant named Chanthapanit who fulfilled the two holy men's prophecy by building a royal palace on the tip of the peninsula and becoming the first Chiang Dong-Chiang Tong king. He was told in a dream that he would be blessed with untold riches during his voyage upstream. He founded the city at the place where these riches appeared. The Wat was also said to be occupied by two nagas who inhabited the area at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers (Engelmann, 1997). Three years later, Burmese aggression expanded into external political circumstances. The King officially decided to move his capital to Vientiane, the center of the Lan Xang kingdom, where he believed he would be safe from Burmese attacks. Meanwhile, he remained in Pra Bang image, as the city guardian, in Luang Prabang. In response to these developments, Muang Xua's name was officially changed to Luang Prabang, Royal City of the Pra Bang, in honor of the sacred Pra Bang image. After its status as capital, Luang Prabang has since then seemed to go into something of a decline.

Since 1707, after death of king Souli Ngavongsa, there began decades of internal fighting for the throne leadning to numerous conflicts among many factions, rulers, and territories. This ultimately led to the eventual breakup of the Kingdom of Lan Xang into 3 areas: Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champassak. Luang Prabang again became the capital of the new kingdom of "Luang Prabang", and remained under the same name. As was often the case during periods of transition or aggression, significant Buddha images and magical powers became tools to demonstrate might and national unification. The sacred images would subsequently be snatched away or captured from weaker centers by those more powerful as the Pra Bang image was taken from Luang Prabang to Vientiane expediting the decline of Luang Prabang's status as a Royal City in the process (Denise, 2006). Such political development deteriorated all three rival kingdoms and prompted invaders from neighboring territories to meddle in their internal affairs as matters went from bad to worse. This time from its neighbor to the west, the Siamese, playing Luang Prabang and Vientiane against each other in order to control them both, provoked incessant

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warfare. The Siamese were able to capture, in its entirety, the former of Lan Xang kingdom by the end of the eighteenth century. Even though everything in Vientiane was destroyed by the Siamese during the war, Luang Prabang city could save itself from war as the kingdom went joined the Siamese side. There was no war with the Siamese and Luang Prabang could protect itself from Vientiane. Since then Luang Prabang's landscape has also been influenced by Siamese architecture as some temples have been newly constructed and newly restored in the Siamese style (Evans, 2003b).

Despite political unrest, by the middle of the 19th century there still remained numerous monasteries, which blended Khmer, Angkor, Sukhothai, Lan Na, Ayuthaya arts. These included Wat Mai; the royal temple; Wat Nong, Wat phone Say, Wat Sene, Wat Sybounheuang, Wat Tat Phousi, Wat Pa Huak, Wat Pa Khe, Wat Pa Fang and Wat Siputtabath. However, in 1887, many of these excellent Buddhist buildings--many built on wooden pillars with thatched roofs--were burned by Chinese Haw marauders in 1887 (Bassenne, 1995).

2.2.3 The Colonial Periods (1893-1945)

In the second half of the 19th century, the former Lan Xang kingdom was beset from several angles. A small kingdom such as Luang Prabang had to pay tributes to the kings in Bangkok in the far west, to southern China in the north and to Anam from the east, who was under pressure of Haw marauders and French colonialists from the north. Despite such deference, they were ultimately unable to find protection against the threat, and the Luang Prabang kingdom was only one amongst several separated kingdoms that still remained to the king with the magical powers, Buddhist images or a symbols of national unification (Whitmore, 1970). Earlier a mission (the colonial mission)was sent out, led by the French naturalist Henri Mouhot, where he re-discovered Angkor Wat and aroused great excitement in Europe's colonial powers. Seven years later, an official French mission led by Doudart de Lagree left Saigon, traveling up the Mekong to try and discover an inland commercial route to China. They came to Luang Prabang in 1868, as chronicled by a member of his party, Navy Lieutenant Francis Garnier (Delaporte and Carnier, 1998).

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In order to make their first colonial thrust into Indochina in 1862, the French army occupied the western provinces of Cochin China, today's South Vietnam, on the pretext of protecting the French missionaries. The following year, their protection in the area was extended towards Cambodia. Seeing Laos was under the control of its neighbors, Anam and Siam, the French left Laos be until after their conquest of Vietnam and Cambodia. However, the French set up their military outposts along the Annamite Mountains overlooking Laos, and decided to send troops to occupy the Plain of Jars in north-central Laos. Feeling the threat of the French military outposts set up along the Annamite Mountains, Siamese officials were dispatched to Luang Prabang to supervise the Kingdom's affairs. Following this, the French sent a warning note from Hanoi to Bangkok asking for joint supervision of the Luang Prabang Kingdom, claiming that Chiang Khouang was originally under the sovereignty of the Court of Hue, now a French protectorate. Siam agreed for France to post a vice-consult to Luang Prabang. August Pavie arrived in Luang Prabang in 1887 (Martin, 1982).

Perceiving the political complexity of the former Lan Xang kingdom, France took Luang Prabang as the main target to invade the former Lan Xang kingdom. The French especially targeted the king in order to construct its protectorate. France was able to establish its general consul in Luang Prabang. In order to control this former Lan Xang kingdom, France on the one hand, aroused Deo Van Tri, the yellow Banner Haw, to maraud Luang Prabang and invade the Siamese garrison in 1887. At that time, the city was not able to avoid destruction and it was seriously burned by the Haw. On the other hand, France played a role of rescuing king Ounkham, allowing him to escape from the Haw and to disperse the Haw as well. The French colonial mission, August Pavie, was in the city at the time of marauding. He had organized to rescue the king and to disperse Haw. The Haw attack gave him ample opportunity to claim that a French Protectorate would be advantageous to the kingdom (Maha Sila, 1964).

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At the international level, the French used the nineteenth century Luang Prabang tradition of paying tribute to Annam as a pretext for naturally extending their

"protection" of Vietnam to Luang Prabang, legitimizing the colonization process. The king expected that this arrangement was the signal for France to push Siam out of Laos's territory and to recreate something of a new Lao state as part of French Indochina. In 1893 French was able to sign a treaty with Siam. According to this treaty, all of Laos west of the Mekong was to be ceded to France while that along the east bank remained with Siam. 11 years later, French was able to modify the 1883 treaty with Siam. According to this modified treaty, certain regions west of the river on the North, nowadays Sayyabouri province, and in the South, as part of the east-bank of Champasak province, were added to France's control, giving Laos its present shape and size. Since 1905 the French could unify all the Lao principalities and kingdoms of Luang Prabang, Chiang Khouang, Vientiane and Champassak and put an end to incursions from Siam, Annam and Burma, calling their new protectorate 'Laos'. Under this French protectorate, Luang Prabang was as the royal capital with King Sisavang Vong. However, its colonial administrative center was established in Vientiane (Martin, 1997).

Even though the French were able to colonize Laos, there was little interest in securing and protecting the Kingdom except to create buffer zones against the expanding British influence from Burma toward the French protector states; Tokin and Annam. Like other Lao Muang, Luang Prabang never experienced economic progress like that which occurred in some of the Asian trading cities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Economic flux has always been dynamic but impoverished in this part of Asia and the absence of a sizeable foreign trade venue in Luang Prabang indicates the comparative lack of trade. Therefore Luang Prabang never became very important to the French economy. The only significant change from the French was the tax collection (Cousins and McCoy, 1970).

By seeing Luang Prabang as a geographical and economic difficulty with low population, the protectorate of Laos was somewhat overlooked for economic exploitation and was considered primarily as a territory of strategic interest. Despite the practical difficulties, the king acquired a reputation within the French colonial service as an oriental paradise with Luang Prabang as the pearl of this earthly heaven. Urban construction in Luang Prabang was a chance for France to take the opportunity to comfort the king by constructing him a new palace of paradise. This earned the

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king's gratitude and promised to allow his kingdom under the French's protectorate. It was then easy for France to redesign and reconstruct a new urban Laos (Kenneth, 1994).

However, it is argued that the urbanization process that began in Luang Prabang was a result of France wanting to reunite Laos under its French master as a tactic to interfere with Laos's affairs. Therefore, the urbanization process was aimed to try and please the king. The French hoped he would be the key person (Peter and Sandra, 1999). During the colonial period, the Luang Prabang landscape had considerably been impacted from the new political regime. The colonialists showed their power over Laos through class stratification and urban construction. By seeing the king as the main element of Laotian national unification under a French master, France did not introduce any catholic churching to Luang Prabang, because it would impinge on Buddhism as a national unifying religious element, along with the King. However, introducing brick and mortar to construct residential and administrative buildings was significant in that is signified the end of wood being only used for religious purposes, including for the kings palace. In addition, it was remarkable of class stratification between colonialists and other people (McCoy, 1970). Colonialists used brick and mortar to construct their residences, administrative buildings, king's palace, royal family residences and the aristocratic houses in a mix between traditional and modern western styles (Thongsa, nd).

Unlike the ancient context of urban planning, during the colonial period, colonial urban planning was seen through the lens of class stratification. During this period, Luang Prabang city was divided into two main parts: upstream and downstream. The upstream part ranged from the tip of the peninsula to the southern Phousi mountain foot. This part was inhabited by upper class peoples, including colonialists, kings, royal family members and aristocrats, while lesser classes used the upstream part.

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Accordant to the French political administration, construction operations were directed from the civil works Service in Saigon and began in Luang Prabang after finishing the civil works Service in Saigon. This program of public works was undertaken, imposing a rectilinear pattern of roads and erecting many of the buildings

that today constitute the urban fabric of the city. Two ancient main roads--the ranges of which stretch along the edge of the peninsula of the Mekong river, Nam Khan river and others lying in the middle of peninsula--had been improved. Many alleys and lanes fell across these two roads connecting river ports to the market on the middle road, and dividing Luang Prabang's political administration into villages and units. The colonist constructed their administrative buildings, and the front street buildings, mainly on the middle road. The former colonial customhouse is located on the tip of peninsula and the French mansion is in Wat Chiang Thong. The first French school is in ban Wat Sene, the former royal meeting hall in Ban Watnong, the police station in Ban Chuoom Khong, on the west Phousi mount foot in ban Wat Mai, former royal palace is facing to Phousi hill, the former Prime Minister's resident and school principal's resident in ban Chiang Mouane. The post office residence is in Ban Pa Kham ear the base of Phousi Mount and the French Resident Superieure's house in Ban Wat That, while the Vietnamese shop houses are agglomerated along the main road from Ban Khily to Ban Chiang Mouane. The aristocratic residents, which are vernacular, western style, vernacular-western style or vernacular-Vietnamese style, are scattered are scattered in the peninsula and Wat Visun's quarter, south-east of Phousi Mount (Reynolds, 1978). Since colonialists, royal families and aristocrats, dominated the peninsula the nobility had extended their residences to the south, especially along the Mekong riverfront, where there were bigger homesteads. As a result, Luang Prabang city was divided into two: upstream and downstream; upper class and lesser class (Kremmer, 2003).

For this construction program, Vietnamese workers were imported and many remained afterwards, living permanently in the city and introducing their own architectural and decorative styles. Meanwhile Chinese traders hired these Vietnamese labors to construct their Chinese shop houses along the middle road of the peninsula. Today the town's urban structure is seen as an overlapping of two distinct patterns: the more informal Lao village, and the orthogonal colonial city. Colonialists had constructed new roads around the perimeter of the peninsula, along the Mekong and Nam khan riverfronts, and within various alleys perpendicular with the roads To form a grid. The road grid created street fronts, which gradually surrounded the traditional houses and enclosed them in quarters. These village houses remained

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hidden away behind the street facades of the French colonial city's right-angled network (Denise, 2006).

The French, taking control over Laos's territory, brought grateful feelings out of the Lao monarchy that its territory never owed another kingdom, not neither to Anam, Burma, nor to Siam. However, not all Laotians were satisfied with the French political administration in Laos. There were several internal liberation movements among the tribes which fought against French taxation and interference in tribal affairs. The national liberation movement of Lao Theung led by a Lao Theung chief, Ong Keo--a self-proclaimed *phou mii boun* and a merited man in the Bolovem Plateau in southern Laos--took place in 1901. The movement attracted wide support and was not effectively suppressed until 1907 when Ong Keo was finally killed. However, the anti-colonialist movement did flare up again when one of Ong Keo's lieutenants, Ong Kommadam survived and went on to become a Lao nationalist leader later that year. Later his surviving son, Sithone, joined the communist Pathet Lao in 1945. The two-year national liberation movement led by Tai tribes, Phokaduat in Phong Saly province, took place in 1914 and seven years later another national liberation movement led by Lao Sung chief, Chaufa Patchai, started with an uprising in Sam Neua (Cousins and McCoy, 2001).

The Second World War was seen as period of sharing power among France, Japan, and the king and the Lao Issara freedom movement, led by the Lao monarchy, Princes Savang Vathana, Pethsarath, Souvanna Phouma, and Souphanouvong. The French began losing control over Indochina in 1940 when France fell to Germany. However, it was a profound shock to Lao faith in France's ability to protect them. The greatest threat to Laos was now Siamese irredentism. In December 1940 Marshall Phibun's military regime in Bangkok attacked French Indochina with the covert assistance of the Japanese, claiming back Sayyabouri province, and in the South, in part of the right-bank of Champasak province, which had been part of French Laos since 1904. Instead of taking controls over all of Indochina after the invasion, Japan cosigned a joint commitment to the defense of Indochina with France. The fear of being left exposed to Thailand (as Phibun had renamed Siam) and Japan led to the formation of the first Lao nationalist organization--the Movement for National

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Renovation--in January 1941. It was led by Phetsarath and supported by local French officials, though not by the Vichy authorities in Hanoi. This group wrote the current Lao national anthem and designed the current Lao flag, while paradoxically pledging support for France. The commitment gave France a chance to continue flexing its administrative power in its protectorates, while the Japanese would commandeer all military facilities and economic resources. There conditions remained until the liberation from France in 1944, when the Japanese ruptured this commitment in March of 1945 after they imprisoned French troops and declared an end to French rule in Indochina (Martin, 1997).

The Japanese had extracted the power of France and the Lao king. However, the situation was quickly changed as the war drew to an end and Japanese forces were forced to withdraw from mainland Asia (Geoffray, 2005). After the surrender of the Japanese in August, Phetsarath announced the reunification of Luang Prabang and Champassak into one Laos, taking back Sayyabouri province, and, in the South, part of the eastern-bank of Champasak province from Siam, and also asked the Allied Powers to recognize its independence. However a handful of French officers managed to return to Luang Prabang and requested the King to dismiss Phetsarat, the former Viceroy. They then formed a resistance group with other young Lao nationalists known as Lao Issara, or the Free Lao movement. This group denounced all treaties with France, deposed the King for his continued submission to French rule and set up Phetsarat as head of a Provisional Government whose Defense Minister was Phetsarat's half-brother Prince Souphanouvong. In October 1945, they further signed a treaty of friendship and alliance with North Vietnam. However French troops re-occupied Laos in early 1946 after defeating some armed resistance units organized by the Lao Issara with North Vietnam's assistance. Phetsarat and his followers fled to Bangkok, Thailand where they set up a government in exile (Ackland, 1970).

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Supported by French, King Sisavang Vong and his son, the Crown Prince Savang Vathana, formed a new cabinet known as the Royal Lao Government. An agreement was signed in August 1946 merging the rest of Laos with Luang Prabang under King Sisavang Vong. A constitution was proclaimed in 1947 to give Laos a

parliamentary system of government with a popularly elected National Assembly. By July 1949 Laos was given the status of an independent state within the French Union. Prince Souvanna Phouma, Souphanouvong's half-brother and 25 other members of the Bangkok government in exile decided to compromise with the French and returned to Laos to join the Royal Lao Government. Phetsarat and Souphanouvong disagreed on this arrangement and remained in Thailand, preferring complete independence from France even at the expense of a shift to the left in order to fight the French with the support of Ho Chi Minh, the North Vietnam communist leader (McCoy, 1970).

2.2.4 The End of a Colony and Independence Period (1945-1975)

Peace was proved short lived for the new government, because, after the end of the Second World War, the cold war began. By seeing liberal movements under the Indochinese communist party[2], the Second World War alliance backed France to reoccupy Laos in 1946. In May 1946, France came back with military force to reoccupy Laos. The new government leaders escaped to Thailand and Vietnam, where they jointed with Viet Min, a communist movement in Vietnam (Ackland, 1970).

In 1950, Souphanouvong left Thailand for northeast Laos where he established a resistance government under the control of his newly formed left-wing political organization, the *Pathet Lao* (*PL*) or Lao State. To broaden support for his resistance activities, he formed alliances with North Vietnam and Cambodian liberation groups. With the help of North Vietnam troops and tribal leaders already in opposition to the Royal Lao Government, Souphanouvong was able to expand guerrilla activities along the entire border of Laos and Vietnam, from Phongsaly Province in the north to the Bolovens Plateau in the south. By that time, the independence movement throughout Indochina had sacked the French (Adams, 1970).

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In March 1953, under Vietminh support, LP was able to occupy Sam Neua province in northern Laos and made it henceforth the PL headquarters. The liberation movements into northern and southern Laos were stopped by December 1953. In the

[2] The Indochinese communist party was established in 1945. The party included the anti-colonialist movements from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

spring of 1954, however, PL moved west again, threatening the town of Luang Prabang to enlarge further their liberated zones in the north-east and other areas along the Mekong in Laos (Devillers, 1970). The French offered full independence to Laos in 1953, but PL regarded the new government as Western-dominated. The situation was made all the more possible by the battle of Dien Bien Phu, in North Vietnam, which called for France to commit its finest soldiers to defend a position far removed from Laos. The Viet Minh won this most decisive battle and did not, therefore, hesitate to continue their military involvement with the Pathet Lao in northeastern Laos in order to liberate all of Indochina from foreign domination.

Following the French defeat in Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, an international conference to end the First Indochina War was held in 1954 in Geneva, Switzerland, jointly chaired by Great Britain and the Soviet Union, and attended by the United States, China, Cambodia, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and Laos. Among other things, the Geneva agreements called for an end to hostilities in the Indochinese states, and gave the Royal Lao Government sovereignty over all of Laos. The Pathet Lao were, however, allowed temporary control of the two north-eastern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly, to be used for regrouping its forces pending its integration with the Royal Lao Government through general elections. All foreign troops were to be withdrawn from the country, except for a small French mission to assist the Royal Lao Government with its military training. A permanent International Control Commission consisting of Indian, Canadian and Polish representatives was created and charged with supervising the cease-fire and the neutrality of Laos. At the point of French withdrawal from Indo-china, the US started supplying the Royal Lao Government with army support.

For the Pathet Lao force, fighting would begin once more against a new foreign anti-communist movement and king, as the Americans resumed French occupation in order to continue the prevention of the spread of the communist movement in Indochina. The Geneva Conference of July 1954 transferred full independence to Laos, but did not settle the issue of who would rule. The Royal Lao Government ruled over a divided country from Vientiane, while PL ruled from the northeastern part of Laos. After becoming fully independent, Laos was seen as divided into three areas.

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PL was supported by the general Lao population and the Vietnamese anti-colonialist movement. Later the Soviet Union had close relation with Prince Souvana Phouma, neutralist. The Royal Lao Government of neutralist, Prince Souvana Phouma, was supported also by the general Lao population and The Royal Lao Government, consisting of pro-Americans and the South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). It was finalized by the general election, scheduled by the Geneva agreements for August 1955. The French withdrawal from Indochina after the Geneva cease-fire was seen to leave it and the rest of Southeast Asia unprotected against communist invasions. The US, therefore, stepped in by offering collective security through the formation of SEATO in September of 1954 with Britain, France, Thailand, Pakistan, The Philippines, Australia and New Zealand as members. The Treaty, signed in Manila, would guarantee South-East Asian countries a speedy SEATO and American intervention in the event of any military threat from China. After its foundation, a new cabinet was formed in November 1954 under Katay Don Sasorith, a SEATO supporter. This was followed by the opening of the United States Operation Mission in Vientiane on 1 January 1955, to channel American aid directly into Laos (Cousins and McCoy, 1970).

The 1955 general elections for national consolidation, without the involvement of the PL, showed a strong neutralist majority. Prince Souvanna Phouma, the neutralist leader, resumed office as Prime Minister in Vientiane. He again tried to negotiate with the newly formed PL Patriotic Front, or *Neo Lao Hak Sat*, pledging to work for national unity and friendly relations with all countries, including North Vietnam and other communist states. By November 1957, Souphanouvong agreed to transfer the two Northern provinces under his control to the Kingdom of Laos, in return for which he and other Pathet Lao members, Phoumi Vongvichit, were admitted as cabinet ministers in the Royal Lao Government (Adams, 1970).

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At the elections held in May 1958, the Neo Lao Hak Sat and its allies won a majority of seats. The US dissolved its new government. The US, on the one hand, formed a political pressure group: The Committee for the Defense of National Interest (CDNI) (Ackland, 1970). On the other hand, The US, in turn, stopped all payments to the Royal Lao Government--a hard blow to an economy that had come to rely so

heavily on American aid. In July, Souvanna Phouma lost a vote of confidence in the National Assembly and was forced to resign. He was succeeded by Phoui Sananikone, who formed a new cabinet with the support of CDNI members. The Pathet Lao were no longer represented in the new pro-American government.

The elections of April 1960 resulted in all 59 seats in the National Assembly going to right-wing candidates. This was followed by the arrest of Souphanouvong and his deputies but they subsequently escaped from jail a month later and went back to Sam Neua. Civil war resumed between The Royal Lao Government and PL. In the same year, a neutralist Lao army captain named Kong Le was dissatisfied with this pro-American stance. The situation further exacerbated military clashes between Neutralist-PL forces and The Royal Lao Government troops. The negotiations were between all three parties (leftist, neutralist and rightist) to form a neutralist coalition government to run through the years 1961 to 1964, but fell through when each party did not agree to join their militaries. Relations between the three groups deteriorated and military incidents went on the increase. The PL received large amounts of military aid and troops from North Vietnam while the anti-communist RLA was given substantial financial and material assistance from the United States. The PL and the Royal Lao Government each now controlled haft of the country, with Neutralist forces occupying small pockets of northern Laos.

From 1964, Laos entered a dirty war, since PL did not send their candidate for election. From then on, neutralists ruled the Royal Lao Government, but pro-US forces took control of the Royal Lao Government's military. As American bombing raids on Vietcong supply routes increased in early 1965, North Vietnam began using the Ho Chi Minh trail, linking North and South Vietnam through Laos. PL forces sought to extend their control over the areas along the Ho Chi Minh trail and in doing so clashed with RLA troops. American planes were then diverted to bomb the trail, but the bombing was soon extended to PL controlled areas in northern Laos, involving strikes at enemy supply routes and troop concentrations and offering close tactical air support for RLA troops during ground battles (Brantman, 1970). In this undeclared dirty war, the tonnage of bombs dropped by US bombers on the northern Lao

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provinces of Xieng Khuang, Sam Neua, the Phong Saly between the years 1964 and 1973 exceeded the entire tonnage dropped over Europe by all sides during World War II. It is estimated that US forces flew almost 600,000 sorties – the equivalent of one bombing run every eight minutes around the clock for nine years. This air assault was shrouded in secrecy, since, under the terms of the Geneva Accord of 1962, no foreign personnel were supposed to operate on Laotian territory. The Vietmin and the Chinese also violated Laos' neutrality with infantry divisions deployed in the north. In the early days of the bombing, American pilots, dressed in civilian clothing, flew old planes with Royal Lao markings; Thai and Hmong pilots were also trained to fly missions. In America, the US war efforts in Laos, which were, so far, hidden from the world, received wide coverage in the media, leading to many public protests and a US Senate Committee Inquiry in October 1969. In 1973, as the US began its strategic withdrawal from Vietnam, the Pathet Lao gained the upper hand, controlling most of the country's provinces. In 1975, with the fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh, opposition to the Pathet Lao crumbled. The Pathet Lao took Pakse, Champassak, Savannakhet, and finally Vientiane without opposition, establishing the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Burchett, 1970).

At the Indo-china war, Luang Prabang's landscape could probably have been saved. There were several reasons why Luang Prabang couldn't hide itself from war. Laos was only one kingdom that had it's royal city in a mountainous area with poor accessibility, far away from the capital city. The king himself played the role of neutralist who compromised conflicts between the American puppet government and PL. Furthermore, the city of Luang Prabang, under the American control from 1959-1975, was somehow different from several kings and French. Before the French, the king used Theravada Buddhism as a tool for national unification. While constructing its protectorate in Laos, France believed they had reunited Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champasak kingdoms to be one complete Royal Lao government--a political entity using the king's mandate and role under French direction and control. By contrast, during imperial period, America considered the separation of Laotians into different groups and aroused them to fight each other as par the imperial methods of interfering with the internal affairs of Laos. Therefore, the royal policy of unification

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of Lao under the name of the Royal Lao government had no meaning for America. The Pathet Lao force under the Lao People's Revolutionary Party,[3] which had grown steadily, also derived its own approach of national unification. Since America established its puppet government in Vientiane, the role and power of the king, as well as Luang Prabang city itself, was transformed into a new government. Luang Prabang city had been least developed, while the Royal palace played a role as the king's home. This is why many intellectuals who worked for the king moved to work in Vientiane, the capital city, and remained there as assets for their relatives to use. For other princes and intellectuals, they migrated to live abroad, mainly in France. Similarly, some who went to study for higher education abroad remained there , leaving their assets in Laos for their relatives (Vathana, 2006). The decline of their power was clearly seen through the New Year Festival. Previously, the princes and nobles--who had once so conspicuously paraded the streets in their royal insignia--had been replaced by constitutionally appointed officials. At the Wat Mai, where the Pra Bang was to be lustrated, the rites were performed not only by the king but by the country's prime minister and other important government dignitaries who had arrived from Vientiane for the ceremony. Since 1969 the rituals for the twelfth month have been performed at That Luang, the national monument in Vientiane. Extracting power from the king and placing it into the puppet government in Vientiane solved many conflicts as the king was no longer the single and undisputed leader of the nation but rather one among national leaders.

In order gain back his power under the policy of national unification during the period of declining power, the king attempted to play the role of mediator by solving conflicts between Pathet Lao force and the American puppet government. The towns itself had not developed much but were hardly damaged during the war, despite major battles being fought in other provinces. This is because while the American puppet government army was in Vientiane, the Pathet Lao force was in the northern part of Laos. To the north, Luang Prabang could be reached only by the Mekong River and along the bad conditions of earth road No 13. In order to thwart the

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[3] The Lao People's Revolutionary Party was separated from the Indochinese Communist Party in 1955, a year after Indochinese countries got their second independence from the French.

Vientiane army, the Pathet Lao force had destroyed the road. Due to isolating itself from fighting and by retaining the role of the king, the city was able to preserve its character. It remained a virtual magnet for both sides of the Vientiane and the Pathet Lao, sending delegations to Luang Prabang for discussion and negotiation.

2.2.5 Luang Prabang in Contemporary Periods (1975-1995)

The 1975 revolution overthrew the pro-American puppet government and abolished the monarchy. In its place was established the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao. PDR), and brought peace and stability to the country. Luang Prabang today is not a mere royal city, but it is one of 17 provinces of Lao PDR. It is remarkable to note the change of social and political power. However, this does not mean that the new government did not face any problems. The first thing that the new government was facing in the post-war period was post-war restoration. Secondly, due to the socialist countries that have supported the Lao liberation movement against foreign aggression, there was no chance of Laos steering the path of economic development anywhere except through socialism, especially modeled after the Soviet Union. Even though the government understood that there was no chance of a path to socialism via a working class revolution in a country like Laos, (which had no industrial working class, with 90% percent of the population as subsistence farmers) Therefore, the various economic development projects introduced by the government were based on subsistence agricultural economic development, begun from a family-run economic base. However, the cold war still continued, and the government opened up the country to economic relations only with other socialist countries (Vathana, 2006). Socialist relations of production had to be introduced, and this, in an agricultural country, meant primarily the collectivization of agriculture. All land was declared to be state property, and individual farms were merged into large-scale "co-operatives". The government had never had much active support in these areas, and the peasants felt no sense of gratitude to this policy and they engaged in passive resistance, including the slaughter of livestock, and many immigrated to Thailand.

To an extent, the economic development of the country was limited because the main trade partners were in East Europe, while its neighboring partners such as

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Vietnam and Cambodia were also in a period of post-war restoration. The country's situation went worsened when Thailand closed off all exports to Laos.

Due to the difficult socialist economic development and anti-government resistance, in mid 1979 the government--apparently at the urging of Soviet advisors who feared that the communist regime was on the point of collapse--announced a sudden reversal of policy. Kaysone showed himself to be a more flexible leader than many had expected. In his speech, he admitted that socialism was not possible for Laos via the working class, as many policy implementations had failed. He illustrated that the capitalist method of economic development would have to be restored if the economic decline of the country was to end and to avoid Laos being exploited by "enemies" of the regime. He also revealed the Chinese free-market reforms that laid the foundation for China's subsequent economic growth (Kaysone, 1986 and Mya, and Loong-Hoe, 1997).

The Soviet Union introduced the *Perestroika* policy in 1985 to open approved socialist countries to capitalism and to have their own right to free selection of their own way to development. A year later, Laos had introduced *Chintanacan Mai* Policy to open itself to the global markets of investment and tourism. It was not only remarkable as the end of economic centralization and collectivization, but also the state industrial ownership and property rights were opened to private companies, individuals and also to foreigners wanting to do business. Today Laos is a member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and is preparing to join the World Trade organization (Mya, Than and Loong-Hoe, 1997).

Worse than other cities after the country's liberation Luang Prabang faced heavily challenges of geographical domination, because most of the remaining land was dominated by mountains. Due to insufficiencies of arable land, about 60% of the population practices shifting cultivation (Luang Prabang provincial governmental report, 2005). Due to the lack of foreign trade, investment in Luang Prabang was isolated from outsiders by this geographical domination, and the Luang Prabang physical landscape was perceived as at least changed in the period of transition.

However, the landscape is seen as not being constant, as it is shaped in a landscape ideology, which is embodied in the political landscape. The government perceived the royal city and its monuments as representation of colonial domination

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and class feudalism. Within the politics of the new socialist regime, the feudal monuments were symbols of the “undeveloped” ideology of the exploiting classes, and therefore needed to suffer the same fate as those who had built it. The feudal monuments also represented the rise and fall of the Lan Xang kingdom, while colonial buildings represented foreign invasion and exploiting classes, which was politically indefensible to the new government, aiming at egalitarianism and socialism. In order to make Luang Prabang’s landscape valuable, the government, in its perspective, had changed the meaning of cultural ceremonies to meet the demands of the current political situation. The New Year’s celebration, for instance, used to be a royal ceremony relating to the fate of the kingdom, as demonstrated by the previous practices of divination for the year to come. Though there have been certain changes in the perception of New Year festival, since the king had abdicated the celebration of New Year festival in Luang Prabang is seen as recognition of Luang Prabang as the center for the official Buddhist religion (Martin, 1983).

Since 1986, Lao PDR has introduced *Nayobai Chintanakan Mai*, and the Lao government has attempted to make possible for Lao people ways dealing of with socio-economic difficulties and bad situations by opening the country to global markets, investments, and tourism. State ‘tourist development’ and ‘urban replanning’ have dramatically influenced the image and representation of Luang Prabang; the government has made large efforts to establish development strategies aiming to eradicate poverty, through many programs and projects. As a member of the Great Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Laos received loans from the Asian Development Bank for paving road No 13 North, from Vientiane, north through Luang Prabang. The Luang Prabang local airport has been upgraded to be an international airport. An electricity network, which transformed power directly from Nam Ngum dam in Vientiane province, had been constructed along with a water supply network. To add more cultural value, from the governmental perspective, All Luang Prabang images and perspectives have been represented. Now the New Years celebration in Luang Prabang is locally seen as part of the *moladok*, or cultural heritage, and the rituals serve to restructure social experiences and the social identity of the actors and participants in order to frame social memory. Similar to the Royal Palace, which is nowadays converted into the Luang Prabang Museum, allows visitors, mainly tourists,

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buy entrance ticket to observe or conduct their studies about the old royal city (Peleggi, 1996 and Ratnam, 1983). The perspective of this perceived royal city and its monuments as a representation of backward feudalism and the symbol of "undeveloped" ideology of the exploiting classes is now perceived by the new government in the form of heritage and tourist sites. The combination of varieties of Luang Prabang's authenticity, aesthetics, historical architectures, modest architectural features, and a mixture of local, Western, and Vietnamese architectural styles, along with the way of life of the multi-ethnic population of the residents and the inseparable link between its natural and man-made elements, is now perceived by the state as part of heritage (the state's cultural capital) and is placed under state power, and by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage site. Luang Prabang's landscape is also said to be the city of 15 legendary naga's families, the city of 65 castles or the Jewel city of Southeast Asia. Add to this, the outstanding natural setting of the city nestled in green forest mountains with its luxuriant greenery and bright flowers. The layout possesses a unique charm, dominated by the Phousi mount studded with remarkable monuments that cover the city between the Nam Khan and Mekong rivers. Consider also the fact that this is one of a very few East Asian towns (UNESCO, 2002b).

To make sure that Luang Prabang heritage is legitimated by international organizations; in 1987 the Lao government ratified the World Heritage Conservation bill in 1972. Since 1989, the government has begun to encourage local institutions to contact international organizations and donors specializing in heritage conservation in order to create new heritage legislation. In 1994, 33 Wats and 111 buildings were inscribed as heritage buildings, which were also used as a basis for determining heritage protection zones and formed part of the supporting documentation submitted to UNESCO as a heritage listing. As Luang Prabang city is considered by UNESCO to be of outstanding cultural value to humanity, according to the convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage adopted in 1972, in December 1995, Luang Prabang was inscribed on UNESCO's world heritage list (UNESCO, 2002b).

The effect was to make Luang Prabang a city of particularly beautiful art, set in an exceptional environment. Therefore, many infrastructural improvement projects

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have been launched with international and internal funds and the monumental buildings have been reconstructed and decorated by individuals from local and foreign areas to meet the needs of tourist development. The next section explores this in more detail (UNESCO, 2004).

2.3 Cultural Ancient Context of Urban Construction and Planning

The social and ideological context of land use and resource management in Luang Prabang during ancient times was not associated immediately with mapping or the imposing of laws and regulations. Rather, it was seen as random, but embedded in geographical significance, beliefs, traditions, religion, lifestyle choices and environmental circumstances. Thus, outstanding achievements of cultural activities have evolved along this combination. This section explores how local people have constructed their heritage through long-term livelihood adaptations to their space, beliefs, and natural resources, until the point that UNESCO recognized it as world heritage site in December 1995.

It is difficult to understand the cultural ancient context of urban construction and planning without explaining their selection of the site for settlement. Lao's settlement has traditionally abided by the significance of their natural and man-made environment. Lao people believed that space for settlement was the key to the community's prosperity. They have also set the panorama in line with spatial relationships between forests, rivers, streams, peaks, and moving in balance with astrological relationships to predict the current or potential disorders in the spiritual powers (*Phi*) of a given space. Therefore, the building of the house is regarded as a significant task and needs to be done according these ancestors' house building techniques. Following this method of house building, the owner believes that they will have a good luck, health, happiness and prosperity (Phout, 2003). Thus the ancient city was developed around the natural physical layout, in accordance with the prominence of forests, mountain and water. Animism, Hinduism, Brahmanism, Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism beliefs have also influenced this development. As a result, religion has become a mixture of philosophical, mythical and supernatural elements, which are associated with certain traditional beliefs and

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ceremonies of peaceful-cohabitation, all of which deeply influence one's way of life. Denise (2006) also contends that both traditional raised wooden houses and masonry structures built on the ground exist in harmony in Luang Prabang and correspond to their respective water and land based backgrounds. The earlier water based culture influenced architecture that was harmonious and suitable for an environment in which rain and rivers dominated--while land based architecture, which included structures associated with religions or royal functions, were gradually adopted and came to be known as formal or classic styles (Denise, 2006).

In terms of traditional raised wooden houses, Clement-Charpentier (2003) substantiates that those built high on hardwood posts were traditional wooden houses, made with lightweight materials such as woven bamboo or wood, left open to the elements, with the first floor as the living space. The use of a raised house built with natural materials enhanced the ventilation to protect its inhabitants against flooding, disease, lightening and misfortune. The space beneath the raised floor provided security and a useful work and storage place. Roof frames were either made with terra cotta tiles or thatched with two Graminaceae grass species: either imperata cyclindrica or Vetiveria zizanoides. The traditional wooden houses built on posts high above the ground can still be seen throughout Laos.

The building process of the traditional wooden houses is complex and has more meaning than we can see with our eyes. Thus, each process of the traditional belief in building the houses--such as the selection of housing site, choosing the auspicious day to build, selection of material, direction of roof or entrance, stairs, the compound of the house and the date for beginning of constructing and moving into the newly built house--are important and needed careful attention (Clement-Charpentier, 2003).

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In terms of orientation of the roof and entrance, direction of the roof and entrance: at first, associates with astrology were consulted, then they included spiritual beliefs and their lives in accepted ways, with each structure possessing more meaning than is evident to the naked eye. Generally, the roof is not allowed to go against the direction of the sunshine, but should run in a parallel to it. The main entrance of the house should be located eastwards, because the east or rising sun is

regarded as an auspicious side. The bedroom should never face parallel with the roof, because this is the direction of death, and the sleeping person must lay perpendicular with death. However, people in different places differently consider what is the most important element, whether between physical conditions, astrology or spiritual beliefs. In Luang Prabang, the concept of construction of wooden houses has been shaped in environmental circumstances, construction plans and the people's everyday life (Clement-Charpentier, 2003). The most important things, effecting to the concept of wooden house construction in Luang Prabang, are the two rivers, the Mekong and Nam Khan, which are considered economic primary sources and as essences of spiritual power (*naga*). Therefore, the orientation of the roof and entrance plays less importance in Luang Prabang because the house façade faces to the river. This means that the roofs are not always parallel with the direction of the sunshine. Mrs. Peng Maharath, a Ban Watsene villager and one of my interviewees, who is 72 years old and a widow, told me:

> While the construction of traditional wooden houses was planned, from an exterior orientation perspective, the roof was positioned parallel to the river. Consequently, the facade of the house faces the river. Such a plan reflects local livelihood strategies. The construction plan plays a critical role as our economy is based on agriculture and the use of water for daily life. The interior of the house is divided into upper and lower parts. Internal orientation was based on the sleeping body whose placement, direction, and position of the head were of particular importance. Various circumstances have integrated local beliefs into the plan of a traditional wooden house determining the appropriate location, digging the holes for the posts, cutting trees for timber, raising the frame of the house, and choosing the appropriate day of lunar months for the beginning of building.
>
> (Peng Maharath, August 2006)

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The process for construction of traditional wooden houses is also intertwined with social relations and environmental circumstances. It is deeply concerned with the traditional rules and customs of the period of the relatively orderly layout of houses. In local daily life, local people respect *Head 12*, 12 orders, and *Kong 14*, 14 rules. Kiddeang (2006) studied Lao culture, and he emphasizes inhabitation along *Head* 12 and *Kong* 14. According to him, *Head* 12 means the order of what people should do for every month in a year, *Krong* 14 means 14 rules of livelihood activities, including

cultural beliefs, activities, and principles of social relations. According to him, these orders and rules are recognized as local law. In terms of construction of wooden house, in accordance with these orders and rules, Houmphane, who is a 69 year old Ban Watnong villager, told me during my field work about the local principles of wooden house construction and planning:

> Regarding to the traditional rules and customs, the head is the highest part of the body that people observe with religious and traditional precepts, while the foot is the lowest part of the body. In essence, a sleeping person, in accordance with ancient beliefs, points their head towards the south. One rule stipulates that the sleeping person should be parallel to the line of the beam of the house, which, in turn, has to be perpendicular with the river. In other words, the feet of the sleeping person have to be placed perpendicular to the line of the roof that is opposite the point from where the air is circulating around the room. Another rule stipulates that the feet are not being supposed to be placed toward the head of another person, because this rule is extended to adjacent houses. Neighbors place their feet opposite to their neighbors, resulting in the back of the houses facing perpendicular to the back of the nearest river house. The space between the houses must be free in order to provide air ventilation. It is still believed that humans and spirits are living together. Therefore, the space between the houses must be free for spirits to go back and forth. If not, spirits world make those who had disordered become ill or misfortunate. Furthermore, the house must not be higher than the temple. He who builds his house higher than a temple means that he has committed a sin.
>
> (Mr. Houmphane, July 2006)

This is similar to what Mouhot and a naturalist explorer and Navy Lieutenant Francis Garnier, in 1861 and 1868 respectively, had discovered Luang Prabang. According to them, the palace was conglomerated by an enormous array of houses, surrounded by sturdy fences and forming a rectangle. A large number of houses were located around the base of the Phousi mount and along the riverbanks, surrounded by fences, divided by various lanes, which connected the ports to the market at the main road of peninsula into parallel rows. At the feet of the rivers were rafts on which a number of houses were constructed, making up the city as a second town (see figure 2.3).

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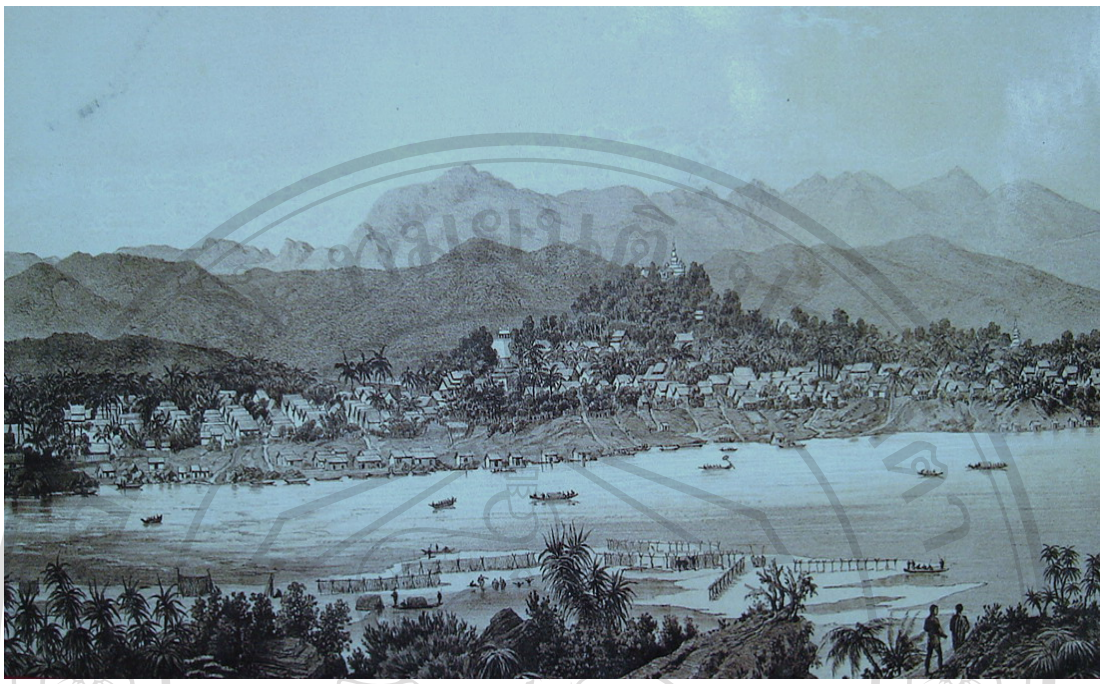


Figure 2.2 Luang Prabang Ancient Town as Seen Across the Mekong River

(Source: A Woodblock Print by Louis Delaporte, in Garner, 1873, Vol.2)

The significant components of the house are planted trees and spiritual houses. Traditionally, the spiritual house is located behind the house. The villagers believe that if auspicious trees were planted in their house compound they would not only bring fruit, cool weather in the dry season, and beauty, but they would also bring happiness, wealth and good luck for the owner as well. Therefore, choosing auspicious plants for the garden is an equally important task. There are large number of plants known as *Kham Khoun*, which means lucky. Jasmine is chosen for their fragrance and beauty, while coconut and banana are chosen as food ingredients mainly for preparing food to offer to monks and novices. Crotons are chosen for their name, which are associated with good fortune. A jack fruit, *Mak mee*, will always be planted in the back of the garden, since, *mee*, suggests the idea of support or wealth. Star Gooseberry, *Mak Jom*, on the other hand is grown in the front of the house, as, *Jom*, means admiration (Phout, 2003).

Another significant aspect integrated to Luang Prabang's landscape is the temple. Lopetchaarat (2000) spends his time studying the Buddhist community in Luang Prabang. According to him, Theravada Buddhism plays a significant role in

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Lao society and its political history. He also notes that Buddhism was the state religion of the Kingdom of Laos, and the organization of the Buddhist community of monks and novices, the clergy, paralleled the political hierarchy. Temples constitute their major compositional element. It is not their interesting architecture that gives them significance, but rather, the central role that they play in the life of the city and the environment they create. The Wat, as a land based building, built on the highest ground of the village, remains the focal point of each community's religion, medicine, education, and path to social balance. Thus the concept of keeping the temple as the focal point of each community's religion, medicine, education, and path to social balance was aiming to maintain social equality, where all children could receive education, all people could heal from sickness, and they only paid in troth. The architecture of the Theravada Buddhist Wat reflects its role as the meeting place of the monks and the community. He further explains that, prior to the establishment of secular schools, village boys received basic education from the monks at the Wat. Some temples in Luang Prabang still play this role. Thongman, abbot of Wat Sikhoudtabath in Luang Prabang explains:

> My temple is located on the northern foot of Phousi hill, the highest temple in Luang Prabang City. There are about 20 monks in my temple, most of them are from other districts. They want not only be a monk, but to learn, because there is one secondary school. My temple is also a meeting and a commonplace for villagers, when they have common activities such as preparing cultural ceremonies and for policy dissemination. Moreover, my temple is also a place for authorities who want to disseminate cultural heritage conservation regulations, and implementation principles of environmental management and how to cope with outsiders and tourists, in terms of traditional and cultural maintenance.
>
> (Source: Data collection during field work in 18, August 2006)

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Nearly every village in Luang Prabang has one or two wats. There must be various structures laid out according to a specified plan for it to be considered a true monastery. The first building to be constructed is a meditation and living quarter (*Kouti*). The next is a *Sala,* a meeting place or a public hall, where the monks receive offerings of food and read scriptures. The monastery should become a complete wat when it includes a stupa (*that)* containing relics of the Buddha, and a shelter protecting a traditional wooden boat, which is utilized for the annual boat races, and a

small pavilion that protects the drum, temple library, and school. Additionally, there must be a cistern, and a funerary stupa might also be located within a surrounding brick wall and an ornamental gate. Generally the largest and most elaborately ornamented structure, the congregation hall (*Sim),* is considered the most important building in the compound and it is where monks are ordained. Inside, at the far end, a large Buddha image is positioned on a dais. As a means of containing treasure sealed in its foundation, the *Sim* was the first architectural structure to utilize brick and mortar building materials and techniques.



Figure 2.3 Wat Chiang Thong, the Sixteenth Century Royal Temple, Luang Prabang Style

The various intricate and charming decorative elements have been designed for the wats with spiritual meaning and added significantly to their aesthetic appeal. Temples' roof final is decorated with metal device positioned at the center of the roof of the *Sim* known as a *Dok So Fa*, soaring into the sky, while its two ends are decorated with naga heads. Another characteristic is the *Dok Huang Pheung*, bee hive pattern, the panel of carved wood suggestive of the arched curve of a *naga's* body that hangs like a screen between the pillars of the front entrance. Furthermore, many of the

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carved and gilded wooden door panels are renowned for their remarkable ornamentation and complexity of the motifs which feature stylized and intertwined elements inspired by the natural world, mythical creatures, and scenes from the Buddha's life. Stenciled designs on a red or black background and ornamental motifs can also be found on many other elements and surfaces throughout the structures. The naga, a prevalent protective element, is commonly found on the corners of the roof and at entrances of the temple and entrance staircase of *sim*.

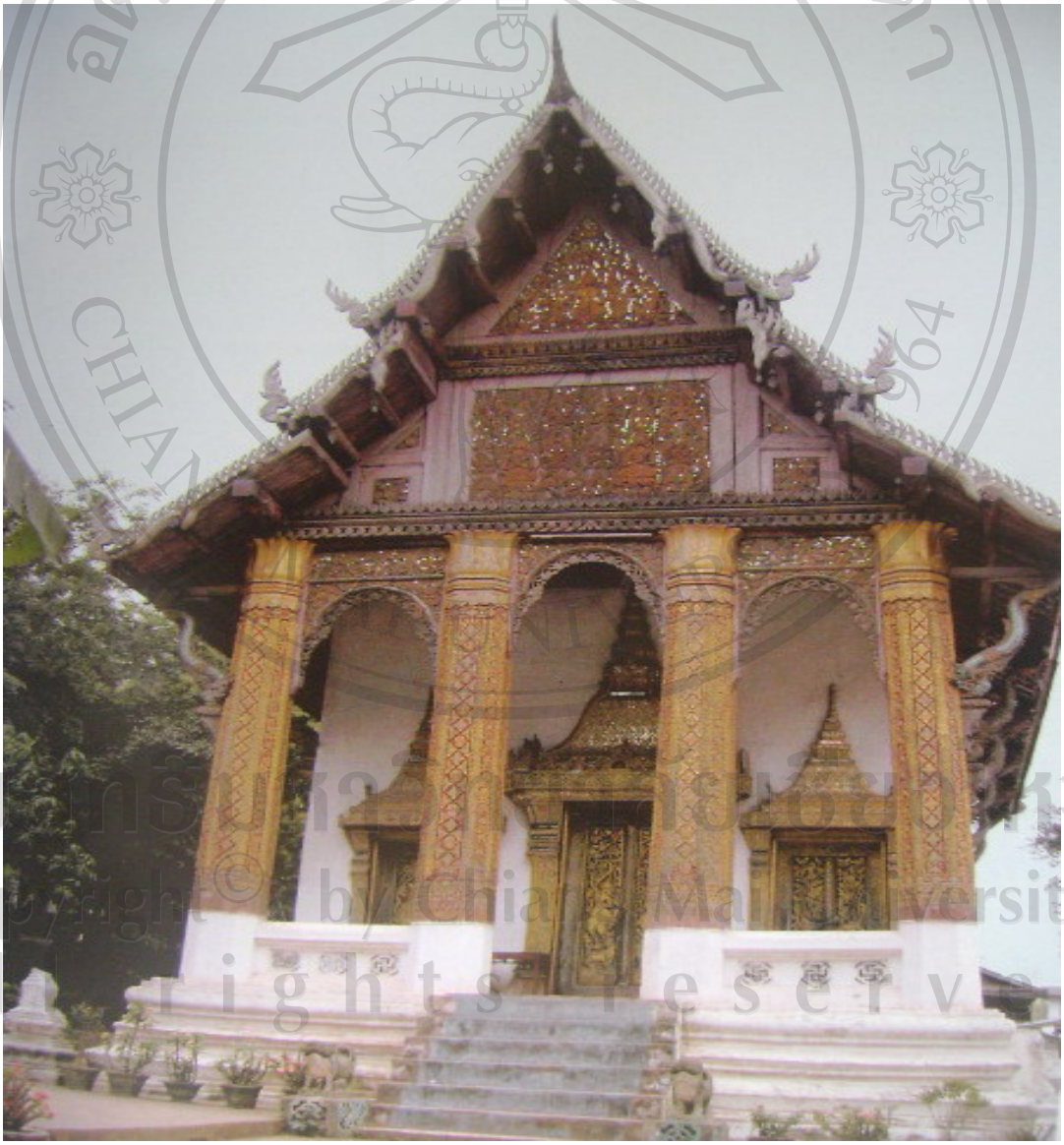


Figure 2.4 Wat Pa Khe, the Nineteenth Century Temple in Luang Prabang, Siamese Style

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Figure 2.5 Wat Loung Khoun, the Eighteen Century Temple, Chiang Xuang Style



Figure 2.6 Wat Mai, the Nineteenth Century Royal Temple, Luang Prabang Style

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The various intricate and charming decorative elements have been designed for the wat with spiritual meaning, and they add significantly to their aesthetic appeal. Temple roofs are decorated with metal devices positioned at the center of the roof of the *Sim* known as a *Dok So Fa,* soaring into the sky, while its two ends are decorated with naga heads. Another characteristic is the *Dok Huang Pheung,* a beehive pattern, and a panel of carved wood suggestive of the arched curve of a *naga's* body that hangs like a screen between the pillars of the front entrance. Furthermore, many of the carved and gilded wooden door panels are renowned for their remarkable ornamentation and complexity of the motifs which feature stylized and intertwined elements inspired by the natural world, mythical creatures, and scenes from the Buddha's life. Stenciled designs on a red or black background and ornamental motifs can also be found on many other elements and surfaces throughout the structures. The naga, a prevalent protective element, is commonly found on the corners of the roof and at entrances of the temple and entrance staircase of *sim*.

More significant than simply adding a decorative picture into a religious building, the naga has more meaning in the life of the city. The land along both the Mekong and Nam Khan riverbanks and its basin used to be sacred land and also used as agricultural land. It is believed in this area that there are dwellings of fifteen naga’s families, the mythical serpents, who controlled insufficient use of land and water resources, while the forestland such as Phou Thao Phou Nang and Phousi were sacred places. It is also still believed that Phousi is place of *Leusy*, holy men, and a powerful naga, who rules them. The sculpture of the naga, whether one headed or seven headed, can be seen throughout Luang Prabang, while the peninsula itself is perceived by local people as being the very head of a naga.

To sum up, as a result of the integration of belief, lifestyle, tradition, custom and the environmental circumstances of urban construction and random planning, the entire Luang Prabang ancient city was filled with a large number of wooden pillar houses and religious buildings, raised amidst green forest and located around the base of the Phousi mount temples, and along the riverbanks surrounded by high rectangular fences and aligned in parallel rows. The streets, bordered by the fences are large and very regular, crossing at right angles. In conclusion, the ancient environment was

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divided into four terraces from Phousi to the rivers. First, from the top of Phousi, is Phousi status, surrounded with toms and sculptures. Second, there are the temples mixed with vernacular houses and the royal wooden palace, ranging from the tip of peninsula down. Third, there are vernacular thatched houses along the riverbanks, and fourth, motionless rafts, on which a large number of huts lie along the foot of the riverbank.

2.4 Characteristics of Building and Landscape in Luang Prabang

During the colonial period, new political administrators had vigorously impacted the traditional land use rights and modes of social relations. Under the French, urban construction did not emphasize construction of temples to make merit as every king did previously. Instead, they emphasized construction that served their political and economic needs and aroused local people to cooperate with them. It was counted that there were 65 monasteries in the 18th century and were remained 43 monasteries in the 19th century and 34 monasteries in the early 20th century. As a result, the purpose of construction was considerably different from ancient times as in, for example, a concrete royal palace, customs house, post office or a hospital. From the ancient concept, brick, tile and mortar were rare and valuable, and therefore these materials were determined to be used not by rich or powerful people, but for temple construction.

During the French construction program (1909-1925), new techniques and architectural arts needed qualified labor that France hired from Vietnam after the civil work in Saigon. After completing the program, many imported workers were hired by wealthy local people and Chinese traders to build their street front shop houses. Many of them settled permanently in Luang Prabang, introducing their own architecture to build their houses. The integration of new techniques and architectural arts into Luang Prabang's traditional morphology shows a combination of different cultural influences in Luang Prabang city. Since then Lao, French, Chinese and Vietnamese architectural styles fused Luang Prabang's landscape within a specific location. This fusion can be identified as wooden houses, half-timbered houses, colonial administrative buildings, brick and wooden houses, brick and half-timbered houses, Lao colonial houses and Chinese shop houses.

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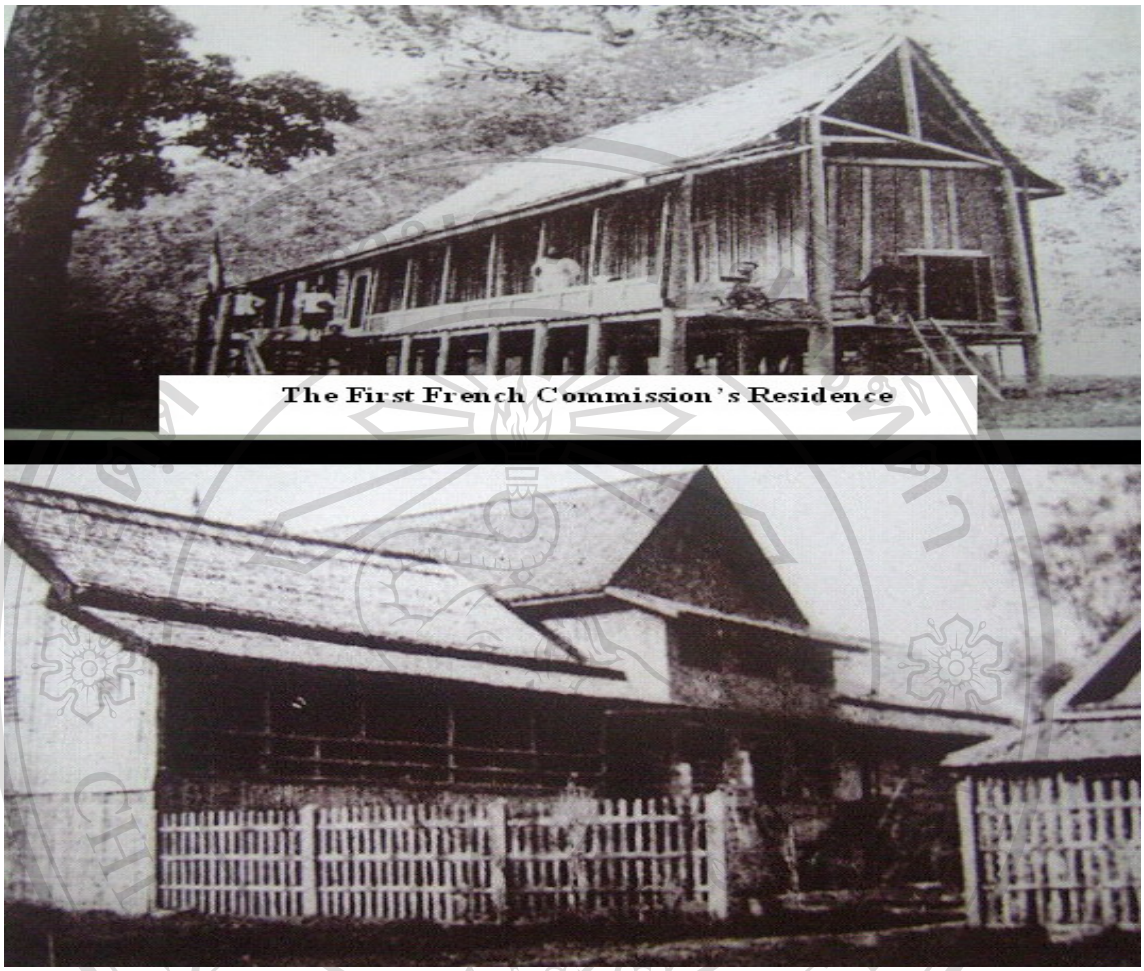


Figure 2.7 Traditional Wooden House Style Pre-colonial Era

(Source: From Pavie et al., Vol 2, 1886)



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Figure 2.8 Traditional Wooden House

Wooden houses are represented as traditional houses, built on pillars, which support the frame of the house. All are made from wood with a *Ngakha* or *Ngafek* thatched or terra coca roof. The underside of the house is left open as a working place

or used as storage, while the upstairs is a living area with the bedrooms and the kitchen located at the end of the house. The walls are made of planks, latticework or weaved bamboo panels. Wooden houses are often enclosed by street front colonial administrative buildings and Chinese shop houses.



Figure 2.9 Half-timber House



Figure 2.10 Colonial Administrative Building

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The half-timbered house uses the same structure as the traditional wooden houses, only the wall construction and materials used are different (see figure 2.9). The stilts are either wood or square-sectioned masonry. The weaved bamboo wall is covered on both external and internal sides by traditional wattle and daub that are often made from sand, lime and organic binding agents from trees. Half-timbered house can be seen throughout Luang Prabang city.

Colonial administrative buildings were constructed in brick masonry in the colonial style common throughout the region(see figure 2.10). Wood is used only for roof frames. However, some decoration is borrowed from religious temple architectural art. Most of the Colonial administrative buildings are located along the main road of the peninsula, and surrounded by thick brick wall with an open space, park and garden.

Brick and wooden houses follow the same structure of the traditional wooden houses, but the materials used are different. Since brick has been used for residential housing, brick encloses the ground floor of the traditional house. The upper part is wood. Only the upper floors have balconies running the length of the façade, protected by a wooden railing. The staircase is constructed ether in brick and masonry or wood.

Brick and half- timbered houses have been adapted from the mixed-technique construction and from collection of traditional half- timbered houses and colonial buildings by aristocrats. In terms of traditional techniques, walls are made from half-timbered logs. Large-scale openings are borrowed from colonial architectural elements. The house has two stories and no stilts *see figure 2.11).

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Figure 2.11 Brick and Wooden House



Figure 2.12 Brick and Half- timbered House

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Lao local houses are mostly private houses, built by French residents and wealthy Lao families, royal families and those who were supported by political rank and economic benefits from the French. The architectural style is melded with traditional Lao elements and the colonial influence is evident in the colonial construction techniques that are used. Significantly, these two-storey houses with vast interior spaces are built in brick and mortar, and decorated with traditional Lao styles. These houses are mostly located along the main road of the peninsula, and surrounded by thick brick wall. Generally, in the compound, there is yard with a garden in front and behind the house.



Figure 2.13 Colonial Building

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These are brick Street front Chinese Shop houses with vast openings built on a rectangular plan, with the ridge of the double-pitched roof parallel to the street. The house provides space for both commerce and living. They are almost two-story houses built in terraced rows with two to eight shops on the ground floors along Photisarath and Sakharine streets, the main roads on the peninsula. The upstairs is reserved as a living quarters. Being located along the main road as colonial and administrative house, such as the Lao colonial houses, Chinese shop houses are not

surrounded by wall and there is no yard or garden. The facade of the house looks like the wall itself and there is nearly no space between the houses.



Figure 2.14 Chinese Shop Houses



Figure 2.15 Luang Prabang City's Landscape

(Source: The Heritage House, 2005)

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Luang Prabang is an outstanding example of the fusion of traditional, Vietnamese and Chinese architectures and Lao urban structures with those built by the European colonial authorities in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Its unique, remarkably well-preserved townscape, illustrates a key stage in the blending of built and natural environments and three distinct traditions, including Chinese and Vietnamese architectures. Luang Prabang city has fulfilled the requirements to be an outstanding cultural value to humanity. Furthermore, it was the blend and link between rural and urban, royal and religious, sacred and secular, within a defined geographical area that UNESCO found as unique for the recognition as a world heritage site (UNESCO, 2002a).

According to the Conservation concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage, Luang Prabang city satisfies 3 of 6 criteria (II. IV. VI) for cultural properties:

- Criteria I: To represent a masterpiece of human creative genius
- Criteria II: exhibition and important interchange of human values over the span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture and technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design.
- Criteria III: to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization, which is living or which has disappeared
- Criteria IV: be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble, or landscape which illustrates a significant stage or stages in human history, and
- Criteria V: be an outstanding example of traditional human settlement or land use which is representative of a culture or cultures, especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.
- Criteria VI: to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria).

(UNESCO, 1999 and 2002b)

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Regarding the integration of new urban construction and planning to Luang Prabang's ancient landscape, many scholars argue that there have been pros and cons as far as the ideas concerning colonial construction. Vithaghasan (2005) thinks that French colonial-influenced structures are a more of a recent addition to the architectural landscape of Luang Prabang. Adapted for tropical conditions, the majority of these thick-walled public administration buildings and official residences were built using brick and stucco with pitched tile roofs and wooden shuttered windows. Gradually, neo-colonial structures that combined both traditional local elements and French influences appeared. There were merged together in a relatively harmonious manner with traditional wooden structures, these colonial and other foreign influenced structures, such as the Chinese inspired shop-houses, which are a combination of both commercial and residential premises, with shop on the ground floor while above are living quarters. These added yet another aesthetically interesting element to Luang Prabang's architectural heritage. Furthermore, stairways on the riverbanks weave a network across the peninsula, leading inland to alleys and lanes. Stairs decorated with naga dragons on each bank were dedicated to religious use, providing pilgrims with direct access to temples. Particularly, stairs were reserved for royal use, including the famous lion-guarded stairs outside Wat Chiang Thong, used to receive the king on coronation day. Commercial steps connected each village to the markets and river quays, with the largest leading to the morning market on the Mekong side, and the evening market on the Nam Khan side. This market no longer exists, but the route is still used by small traders. These descend to private gardens cultivated on the flood banks of the two rivers. The grid formed by all these transversal lanes reaches up to the peninsula slope, and from its highest point encompasses both rivers and their opposite bank with the holy stairs of the Phousi forming the center of the grid.

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However, some think that liberal use of brick, mortar and imported materials in the French construction programs for colonialist and its subordinates marked not only the end of Lao adherence to strict customs of construction, but also to social discrimination. France showed distinction between their dominant classes and the local people by this type and style of construction and location. The ruling classes were the first to receive the economic benefits that the new powers could offer as the

French sought to establish clients and urban centers to stabilize their position. The colonists also provided them land in the peninsula to build their residential houses. From the style and size of the houses can be gleaned how poor or how rich the owner was, which political ranks they had. It is also important to note that the construction of the first school in Luang Prabang for the royal family members and aristocrats is not the only change of Luang Prabang's physical landscape, but also marks a change in social constructions and relations. Timber was available locally and the quality of both materials and local carpentry were much appreciated by the French. Other local recourses included lime, sand, bricks and tiles. Most of the French architectural styles are located along the main road of the peninsula, where is considered as a significant place. After completion of the civil works project, many Vietnamese workers were hired by to build Chinese shop houses along the middle road in peninsula. Consequently, the cities general organization consists of two distinct zones: the peninsula between the two rivers, and the downstream area. The peninsula is the political and cultural heart of the city, a strip dominated by numerous Wats (the upper class). The downstream city, up to Wat Visun quarter, south east of the Phousi, has traditionally been the commercial area, home to the city's markets and a varied population of artisans and traders (the lower class).

In summary, this chapter has reviewed how Luang Prabang's ancient royal city has evolved through different political administrations. The local people have constructed, and conserved their royal city through these periods regarding local beliefs, region, traditional rules and customs, and environmental circumstances in natural harmonious ways, as proof that UNESCO can recognize it as a world heritage site. After Luang Prabang had been inscribed in UNESCO's list, Luang Prabang's landscape was perceived as tourist attraction. The government has introduced tourism promotion policies by encouraging the tourist sector, promoting local traditional products, and revitalizing cultural heritage with traditional ceremonies. Such interdependence of tourist development and cultural heritage conservation can support each other and develop in a synergistic way.

However, traditionally, Luang Prabang's economy is agricultural based, small service based, and business and trade occurs within Luang Prabang and with

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neighboring provinces and Vientiane. There was not much foreign investment. Moreover, there are a diversity of ethnic minorities, who each have different identities and ways of life, associated with their own livelihood strategies, assets and culture. They also rarely met with outsiders, especially foreigners, and therefore cultural heritage conservation and tourist development is quite a new thing for them. In regards to Luang Prabang's uniqueness, and the diversification and differentiation of Luang Prabang people, the next chapter examines which approach the Lao government and UNESCO sought to conserve Luang Prabang as a world heritage site and to promote tourist development.

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