

A Model of Pulpit Conservation and Revitalization Using Community Participation of Phu-Thai People in Northeast Thailand

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Abstract: Problem statement: This thesis aimed to examine the following issues of the pulpits: (1) background of the model and structure, (2) current conditions and problems of pulpit construction using participation of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand and (3) model of conservation or revitalization of pulpits by participation of Phu-thai people. **Approach:** Data were collected from documents and field study in the provinces of Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Kalasin and Amnat Charoen by survey, observation, interview, focused group discussion and workshop. **Results:** The results of thesis were presented by means of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand, their ancestors moved from the left bank of the Mekhong River. Most of them came from Mueang Bok and Mueang Wang towns. The model and structure of the pulpits are from beliefs in village pillar spirits in harmony with faith in Buddhism. The pulpits were constructed for use in performing religious affairs as the architectural symbol. They are single-pillar pulpits to be used in conventional and traditional festivals in each of the twelve lunar months. The current conditions and problems of single-pillar pulpit construction include most of the raw materials for pulpit construction are wood which is damage, lack of taking care of, wood diseases from mold and breaking, expansion, bending, lack of pulpit repairers and builders lacking transferring knowledge to next generation. The preaching hall shape has changed from wood to be high-shaped wood. For models of conservation and revitalization, all sectors must participate in conserving and revitalizing pulpits. These sectors are community leaders, informants, state sector, constructors, provincial sector and the community for pulpit conservation and revitalization according to the elements. The model of single-pillar pulpit structure has these structures: base or pillar is 140 cm from the floor. There are base to support or 4 nagas to support. Each naga is 140 cm long. The pulpit shape is in the shape of multisided lotus with 4 holes on the walls. There must be conservation of traditions and culture according to the traditions in each of the twelve lunar months of the year from all sectors in a concrete form. **Conclusion:** The results of this study can be used for pulpit conservation and revitalization to be in existence. To solve problems of decay and loss, there must be a committee for pulpit conservation and revitalization. All sectors must participate in utilization of pulpits which have cultural values of Phu-thai people in the future.

Key words: Conservation, revitalization, conservation model, revitalization model, participation, belief, pulpit

INTRODUCTION

No evidence shows clearly when pulpits were first originated. Pulpits are assured from the story of the Buddha and events in the period of the Buddha. That time a man, called Sotakiya, was carrying grass on both ends of the pole. When he came to an ashram, he knew it belonged to his ancestors. Sotakiya gave 8 handfuls of grass to the ashram which was the throne of the Buddha-to-be. On this throne the Buddha-to-be enlightened and preached. Perhaps this is the origin of

pulpit construction for the next period. Monks get on the pulpit and preach dharma at all places where people believe in Buddhism^[1]. Phu-thai people are an ethnic group. They also construct pulpits for monks to sit on and preach. At present, the method of pulpit construction has not been transferred. However, pulpits are still important to traditions and rituals and pulpits keep philosophy, beliefs and background of the Phu-thai ethnic group. Phu-thai pulpit has a single pillar with its lower end buried in the ground and its upper end coming up through the preaching hall floor. Around

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the pillar pretty patterns are carved in the pillar wood like the town pillar. There are 4 nagas that support the pillar and the pulpit base. Most of the pulpits look like the castle with a square shape. The wood is carved in the pattern of climbers or other patterns for decorating with color pieces of glass. The pulpit roofs are in the shape of castle roofs. Four pieces of wood used as fasteners around the pulpit and other parts of the pulpit are carved beautifully. The roofs are made of wood. The top of the roofs is pointed like the top of Mount Sumeru. On the front part is a ladder with ladder rails. Ladder cases and rails are also carved in naga shape with patterns around the ladder cases. There are the horse shape like Kanthaka Horse of Prince Sitthattha when he was going to be ordained.

Thus it is necessary to conserve and revitalize single-pillar pulpits of Phu-thai people to exist together with Buddhism. This will cause architectural heritages of Phu-thai people to be their children's heritages and other people will realize the value of specific identity of Phu-thai people. Purposes and objective: (1) background of the model and structure the pulpits, beliefs, traditions and rituals of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand, (2) current conditions and problems of pulpit construction of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand and (3) the model of pulpit conservation and revitalization using community participation of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research instruments were a survey form, structured and unstructured-interview forms, participant and nonparticipant observation forms, focused group discussion and workshop.

Population and sample: The sample in the population from the provinces of Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Kalasin and Amnat Charoen of Thailand. Instruments: A note-book, a pencil, a pen a camera, a video camera, a measuring-tape compact and others.

Data analysis: The data analysis results were subsequently presented by means of a descriptive analysis.

RESULTS

- Knew the backgrounds of the model and structure of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand
- Knew the current conditions of pulpit construction of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand
- Knew the model of conservation and revitalization using community participation of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand

DISCUSSION

For the backgrounds of the model and structure of pulpits, beliefs, traditions and rituals of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand, the ancestors of these Phu-thai people moved from the left bank of the Mekhong River during 1824-1828 due to the wars. Most of them were taken to Thailand and some escaped from the wars. They settled down in northeast Thailand. Their chief occupation has been rice farming. They also earn their livings by upland-crop farming and gardening. Their occupations rely on other people among them^[2]. At present, Phu-thai people uphold conventions, traditions and customs of their own according to their original hit sip song (traditions to observe in each of the lunar months of the year). They follow their beliefs in Buddhism and animism which can reflect accumulation of indigenous knowledge to become conventions. What they can express as Phu-thai people's symbol are single-pilla pulpits originated from their beliefs in village pillar spirits and Buddhism to be more outstanding than other things in order to gather all of the 84,000 dharma khandha (sections of the Buddha's Teachings) and to unite people's minds to be unity in Buddhism to lead to nirvana^[3].

For the current conditions and problems of pulpit construction of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand, they firmly believe in Buddhism, animism, traditions and culture in different aspects. These things reflect their beliefs which they follow the traditions in each lunar month of the year. The current problems of pulpit construction include: the Phu-thai children do not realize the importance and values of single-pillar pulpits which are their own original architecture and new pulpit construction is limited. Preaching halls have changed their forms from wood to bricks. They lack wood as major material for pulpit construction due to deforestation for agriculture. Importantly, the government has determined national reserved forests. At present, ready-made pulpits are available at the market. Several Buddhists buy pulpits for the monasteries. They lack people with knowledge and skills in pulpit construction and repair. There is no transference of knowledge to new generation. This is the most important problem of single-pulpit construction. Most of Phu-thai young people change their occupations from farming to office work and company work. So young people hardly have time to make merits according to their original traditions.

For the model of pulpit conservation and revitalization using community participation of Phu-thai people in northeast Thailand and for culture, beliefs, traditions and rituals which Phu-thai people

practice, they successively follow their leaders and key informants concerning their own original conventions and traditions. Traditionally, Phu-thai people are honest, modest, patient and hard-working with unity. We can see their cooperation in religious practice and ritual performance in Buddhism. They participate in operation in cultural affairs, in utilization and doing what the community performs, particularly architectural symbol of the single-pillar pulpits which are mixed together between animism and Buddhism for upholding people's minds. These things have been transferred from their ancestors. They do not like collecting money and properties. Instead, they consume and donate their properties as alms and offerings at merit-making festivals. The committee for pulpit conservation and revitalization consists of (1) community leaders, (2) key informants and artists, (3) official sector including educational and (4) local cultural institutions, organizations and (5) the monastery. This committee must conserve and revitalize single-pilla pulpits. Each pulpit has the following components and structures: (1) base or pilla being 140 cm high, naga to support being 140 cm high, (2) the pulpit house or the body, (3) the roofs, (4) the ladder, (5) decorations with carved patterns in forms of plants, animals and stories of the Buddha.

CONCLUSION

Findings of the pulpit conservation and revitalization are all sectors must cooperate by having a committee for conservation and revitalization; everyone must cooperate; the committee members are from (1) community leaders, (2) key informants and artist, (3) official sector including educational and cultural institutions, (4) local organizations and (5) the monastery. The 5 parts of the pulpit structure model are: (1) 140 cm base or pillar with 140 cm nagas to support, (2) the pulpit house of the body, (3) roofs, (4) the ladder and (5) decorations. Those who will be able to conserve and revitalize the pulpit model and structure must be skilled artists by sending them to be trained from the institution or artists who are skilful in transferring knowledge and pulpit construction according to the structure with the model according to the components.

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