

Bank Kiln: Type and Process of Pottery in Southern Laos

Nattapong Prompongsaton¹

¹ Faculty of Architecture, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand

Correspondence: Nattapong Prompongsaton, Faculty of Architecture, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40000, Thailand. Tel: 66-81-632-3143. E-mail: nattapong-prompongsaton@hotmail.com

Received: November 10, 2014 Accepted: December 20, 2014 Online Published: January 14, 2015

doi:10.5539/ass.v11n4p348

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v11n4p348>

Abstract

This article investigates the process of pottery using kilns in Phakkaya village in Aadsapon city of Savannakhet province and in Tha Hin village in Samakkixai city of Attapeu province, Lao PDR. In these villages different kilns were used depending on the different geography it had. The process of pottery was similar among these two communities; however in Tha Hin village they used certain wood ash to coat the pottery while this wisdom was not known in Phakkaya village. The variety of pottery was similar, though the demands of certain product were not the same. Phakkaya was located in a rural area far from the city with inconvenient transportation and considered far from the urban city modernization; the emphasis of their pottery production was mainly ceramic household utensils and was distributed to nearby villages where most of the villagers were also *Phu Tai* people. In Tha Hin village, located on the main road to the major city of Attapeu province, this village was more developed and emphasized on producing ceramic whiskey jars to sell to other tribes living in the same province.

Keywords: Bank kiln, pottery, type and process, Attapeu, Savannakhet

1. Introduction

According to the historical evidences found from the discovery of clay pottery at the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khouang province (Thepsimoung, 2010), the 1,500-2,500 year old of three clay jars at Annmaa cave in Luang Prabang (Central Mekong Sub-Region Archaeology Research Project, 2013) and about 1,500 year old Lao Paago clay pots in Paak Ngum city of Vientiane that had about (Kallen, 2004), it led to the knowledge of that these areas in the northern and central regions of Lao PDR had produced clay pots and jars for a long time. Their type and process were also similar to those found in Ban Chiang in Udonthani province and in Nonnoktha of Naadee village in Khon Kaen province of Thailand. In addition, it was found in Ban Chiang archaeological site that some physical characteristic on ancient human skulls here were most similar to those of in Laos. (Nathapindhu, 2007). Based on the exploration by the Australian archaeologist jointly with Thailand Archaeology Division of Fine Arts Department, it was found that in the area of Si Satchanalai district in Sukhothai province and Nakhon Thai district in Pitsanulok province there were more than a thousand of ancient kilns. The archaeologists understood that it was the origin and center of the largest ceramic industry at that time. Following the examination along Yom River, both developed and under developed of old style kilns were found, included of more than 800 river bank kilns. By using the dating to find the years of these kilns, it was revealed that, in around 1107, a whole was dug from the river bank onto the earth, similar to the stomach of a pig, by having the oval across form to be used as the kiln. Later on during 1157-1257 the kiln's form changed: its ground was flat and smooth making it was easier for loading the wares. The new form's structure was clearly divided into chambers, such as firebox and firing chamber (Chantaree, 1999). This type of kiln had been used in the northeastern Thailand during the past twenty years and gradually disappeared, however it still has been used in Lao PDR at present. In this article it studies about the process, type and firing of pottery using kilns in southern Lao communities, including Phakkaya village in Savannakhet province and Tha Hin village in Attapeu province. The types of kilns are differed among these two villages, as well as the products that answer the needs of villagers in the areas.

2. River Bank Kiln Ceramic Producers in Phakkaya Viilage, Savannakhet Province

2.1 Phakkaya: Village's History and Pottery

The village was named after a vegetable called Phakkaya that used to abundantly grow around the community but it became decreasingly less now. In the north, the village is connected with Nong Doen village, with

Taaddoktaew in the south, with Nawangmon village on the east and on the west with Xaimoune village. The area covers more than 9,000 square kilometers with agricultural area of 160 hecta. The total household number is 106 and 92 families. The population is 516 people, consisted of 298 females and 218 males. The village's temple is called Xaiya temple. There are total 10 families producing ceramics as their additional occupation, and the number of potters has been decreased comparing to the past (Phamee Nanthanavon, village headman, interviewed on 2014/02/06).

In the history of pottery in this village, it was not clearly known where it had been inherited from. However, based on the history told through generations, the villagers in this village had been making pottery for longer than a hundred years since a villager from Pimai (Thailand) first travelled to this community. Some people said that this Pimai villager was a pupil who studied about pottery in Pimai district while some said he was a follower of Phu Tai ancestors. This person was skillful at pottery and found Phakkaya village where they were also doing ceramics, he then relocated to live and work in this village since then. This person had additionally taught the villagers about pottery and its techniques which have been passed on since then until now. The use of kilns in firing the ceramics has then been the traditional wisdom inherited until present (Tid Phueng Potira, 69 years, interviewed on 2014/02/06).

In the early 2009 a Japanese foundation called JICA came to do surveys and initiated a product development project for the villagers. This project took some of the villagers in Phakkaya village to study in Koh Kred in Nonthanuri province of Thailand where it was well-known for their long lasting handmade pottery. JICA in addition supported a budget for the villagers to construct their own above ground kiln similar to those of Koh Kred community in the village, together with the help of Thai academics and kiln specialists from Koh Kred. The construction of the above ground kiln was finished in 2011. In the beginning the villagers used this kind of kiln, however, due to its wall was higher their own traditional river bank kiln, firewood then was needed to add more than usual. Thus the villagers would rather use the river bank kilns (Sompong Kenvilai, 53 years, the head of Phakkaya Handicraft Group, interviewed on 2013/05/05).

2.2 Pottery in Phakkaya Village

Location: the potters of Phakkaya village would use their house area to work. Mostly the houses of Lao people would be up-lifting wooden houses. The space under their houses would be used for many activities. Thus, the potters would use this area to make pottery. At Boonkian's house, he constructed walls under his house as to make pottery. He perfectly divided areas for four potters to work. There were areas for *Pin*, or hand wheels, depending on number of potters working and the waiting area for the shaped wares to be fired. The walls constructed under the house helped preventing the heat from sun light that changed throughout the day, as well as preventing from the rain that might be harmful to their wares waiting to be fired (Boonkian Chanatwong, 52 years, interviewed on 2014/02/06).



Figure 1. Boonkian's House (Left) using the space under the house in making pottery

Kilns were built in the creek called "Huay Pung" but the villagers called "*Hua Pee Baa*" because of the flow of the water would go into a different direction in higher water season whereas in dry season it would flow to an opposite direction. The above ground kiln similar to those of Koh Kred was constructed in the village public space behind the temple. The villagers would use this kiln to make pottery in dry season at around January to May every year which was the time after farming season.

In the past there were many village kilns since more families were making pottery. However, currently there has been only one kiln that the villagers would use and take care of together. When the kiln was broken, the villagers would help fix it. If the old kiln could not be used anymore they all would help construct a new one. The good quality kiln would normally last about 5-6 years depending on certain factors, such as the amount of water

flowing in the creek each year. If there were stones or rocks found while digging this would also decrease its usage.



Figure 2. (Left) Bank kiln in Huay Pung creek where the potters used in dry season (right) within the bank kiln

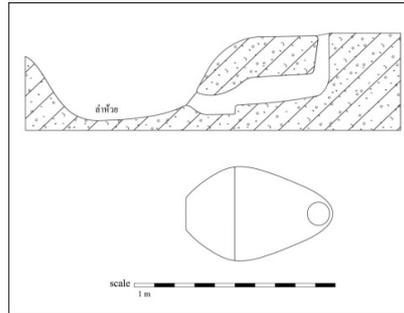


Figure 3. Sizing of Phakkaya’s bank kiln

2.3 Pottery Materials in Phakkaya Village

Clay Source: the clay used in making pottery in this village came from three different areas. However, the villagers did not have to buy them as they could find them within the community or ask from others.



Figure 4. (Left) Jar ceramic clay source in the land owned by Sompong (right) firewood used in the firing process

Firewood: The villagers did not have to buy the firewood as well. They could just find them in the village area from, such as, dead trees, their farming lands or ask from other villagers.

Tools:

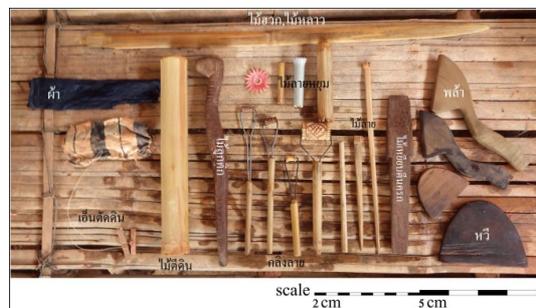


Figure 5. The tools used in making pottery owned by Boonkian

- 1) *Pin* or Hand wheel, possibly used with feet, made from wood
- 2) *Wii* made from a round triangle wooden plate
- 3) *Plaa* made from wood similar to *Wii* but with a handle
- 4) *Mai Lai* or design stick made from bamboo and used to make patterns and designs
- 5) *Mai Laem* or sharpened stick, used to determine sizes of the bottom and make patterns
- 6) *Mai Tee Din* or a stick made from bamboo used to press or form the bottoms
- 7) *Mai Look Kik* or a stick used to form the shape within the ware
- 8) *Mai Yian Teen Krok* or a square wooden that has one side similar to a chisel
- 9) A cloth used for rubbing or molding the jars
- 10) A string used to cut the clay or ware out from the hand wheel

2.4 Process of Pottery in Phakkaya Village

Clay Preparation: after digging up the clay, it requires to be dried through the sun for about 2-3 days. Then pound the dry clay in a rice mortar and winnow it through sand winnowing net to get rid of small rocks and rough dirt. The next step is soak the winnowed clay in big clay water jars or tanks and leave it for one night. In the morning mix the wet clay with some dry clay as it becomes sticky enough and ready for the molding process. The mixed clay should not be either too soft or hard.



Figure 6. Boonkian and his son pounding and winnowing the clay



Figure 7. (Left) the water jars used to prepare the clay (right) preparing the molding clay by hand kneading

Molding Process: Similar to other kind of ware molding with hand wheels the potters would place the wet clay on the wheel and use a stick to rub the clay into a sheet. Then they would roll the wheels and use sharpened stick to form and cut into the bottom part. After that, they would use another clay line prepared by other potter to form a cylinder shape until it has adequate height. *Plaa* and *Wii* would then be used to rub and smooth the ware while the other potter rolling the hand wheel so that they could get a perfect shape. When it comes to the top of the wares, wet cloth would be used to rub it. Once it is finished the potter would cut off the bottom and move it out from the hand wheel.

Firing Process: there were two sizes of firewood used in this process, including the large ones called “Fuun Ood” and the smaller ones called “Fuun Noi” for speeding the fire in the final period.

Before firing the potters would light a candle and incense and prepare a set of flower to thank the guardian spirit saying “we would like to ignite the fire to burn the clay. Please do not allow any sickness or bad things happen” and they then told the numbers of people who came together.

The firing process would normally start in the morning after laying the jars inside the kiln. They ignited the larger firewood first and always make sure it keeps firing. More firewood was continuously added for the rest of the night. At around 3 pm the next day, they would speed up the fire with smaller firewood for about another 4 hours, the firing process was then finished. Based on their experiences, the potters would observe from the flame coming out from kiln whether or not it needed more firewood or the process was done.



Figure 8. Boonkian molding a mortar

On the second day after the firing process the potters would open the kiln in order to let the air go through, and then they would start bring out the wares on the following days (day 3 and 4). All of their wares would be brought out by the 5th day.

2.5 Type of Pottery in Phakkaya Village

The types of pottery in Phakkaya village was traditional ones that emphasized on the use as food containers, such as whiskey jugs, preserved fish jugs with covers, small water tanks, frog containing tanks, fish tanks (to keep alive fish) for cooking, small bowls for chili pastes, and *Sa-oeng* or bowls (for chili pastes and foods of Phu Tai people).



Figure 9. (From left to right) preserved fish jug, small water tank, and small bowl all made by Boonkian

The kitchen utensils including varied sizes of mortar, *Ka-om* or the wide open top container used for making pickled vegetables or raw fish food.



Figure 10. (Left) small jugs made by Phamee (right) fish tank made by Sompong



Figure 11. (Clockwise) small water tank, *Ka-om*, mortar, and medium size jug all made by Phamee

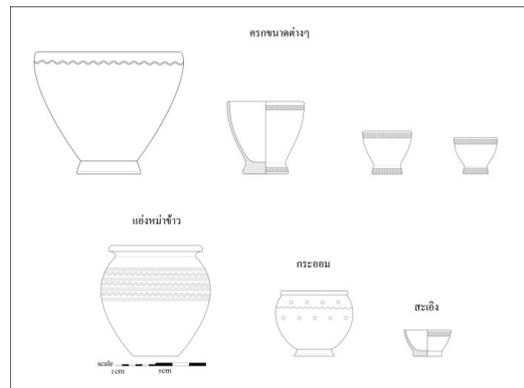


Figure 12. Sizing of mortar, small tank for rice soaking, and *Sa-oeng*

2.6 Pottery Distribution in Phakkaya Village

The pots and jars of the villagers was mostly distributed to others villagers in the nearby villages. It was considered a high market demand for their pottery since they could sell out all of their products no matter how much they produced. This might be due to the limited village's production capacity that they could produce only in the dry season.

3. Above Ground Kiln Ceramic Producers in Tha Hin Village, Savannakhet Province

3.1 Tha Hin: Village's History and Pottery

Tha Hin Village is located next to the main road that leads to the city of Samakkixai. Originally this village was on the opposite side of Sekong River it was moved to this current side and established as a village in 1913. Initially there were 18 families lived in this village. These families were from three different tribes, including *Lao Lum*, *Brao*, and *Oai*. The village is connected with Laad Yao Tai Village in the south, with Nontom Sivilai Village in the north, with Naixaithong Village in the east and with Tapaonthong Village in the west. Having Sekong River flowing through the village, the total area of this community is about 1,100 hecta and the total number of 189 households and population of 1,046 people.

Tha Hin Village started to produce ceramics in around 1974-1975 by an elder, namely Niam, who just passed away six years ago. Mr. Niam and Mr. Nuad were from *Oai* Tribe. They went to study about making ceramics from Mai Hin Laad Village where Lao Lum was living in. After marriage they then taught this knowledge to their younger generations in Tha Hin Village. While these two elders were in Mai Hin Laad Village where they no longer produced ceramics anymore, there were about 10 villagers studying together at that time. They constructed two kilns in which in the past were outside of the village area. However, right now the amount of land has been decreased so villages then constructed them in their living areas. A kiln in the old time would normally be used by 6-7 families (Boonyang Bawingchai, 46 years old, Headman of Tha Hin Village, interviewed on 2012/03/09).

Started to decrease in 2007, the highest number of villagers making pottery used to be about 30 households. However, during that prosperous time the villagers could make more money than now. Besides selling their products the villagers traded them with other goods from other people or villages. This was considered quite worthy (Janhom Siwongsa, former headman of Tha Hin Village, 50 years, interviewed on 2013/03/11).

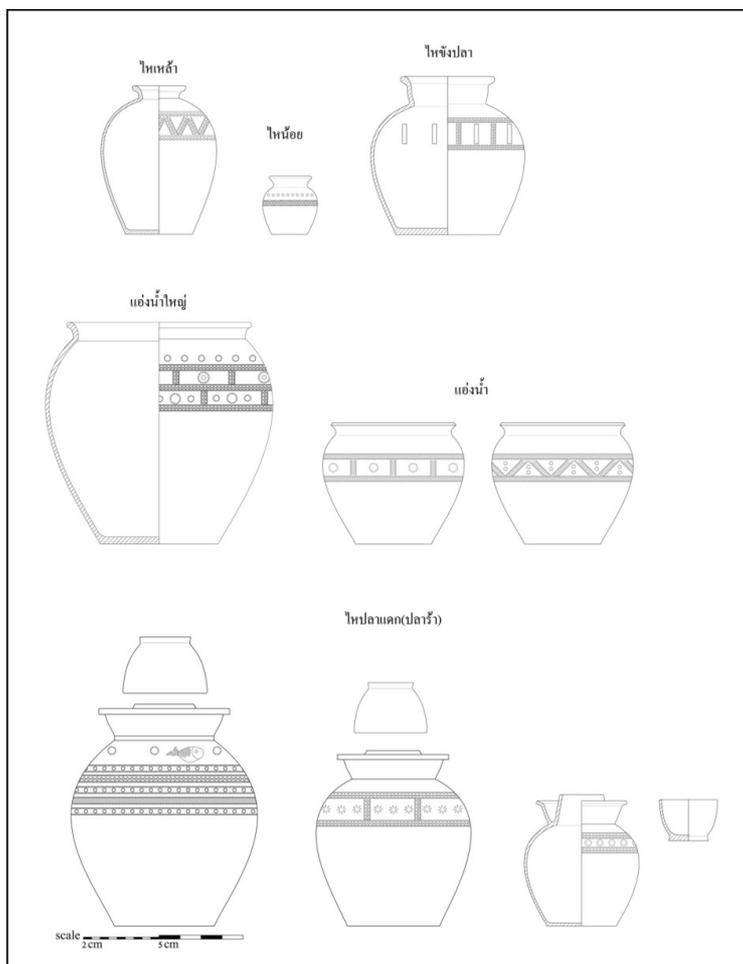


Figure 13. Sizing of household utensils in Phakkaya Village

3.2 The Beliefs Related to Pottery in the past among Tha Hin Potters

1) The belief on the selection of location to build the kiln: the potters would observe the soil in such area if it was adequately thick or not. If after they started to dig up the soil in order to construct the kiln and found some rocks, they would quit and move to other location because it was believed that this kind of soil would cause the kiln a short usage (Shippen, 2005). The selection of location to make the kiln was that there should not be any rocks on the soil surface and if the soil was not thick it was then unable to build the kiln. After finish digging up the kiln, the potters would examine the soil again by burning it without placing in any wares. The bad kilns would collapse due to it was a kind of soil that did not absorb water or was not the sticky soil type. If the location used to make the kiln consisted of rocks, when highly heated, the soil would expand and when it got cooler the soil would shrink. It then would result in the collapse of the kiln wall onto the wares when in use.

2) In the past women and other people were not allowed to go near the kiln during the firing process started right after putting in the wares. The food for the potters could be cooked in the area but it must be well separated and walled away from the kiln. For three days the potters should not be touched by their spouses as it was believed that it would make the pots within the kiln stick together. During the firing process the potters were prohibited to be arguing with anyone. They should be in a good state of mind. They were prohibited from jumping into the river. They must act calm and neat; not forbidding any general traditional prohibits and should be following the five basic precepts which were called “Kao Gam” in Laos.

3) The stoke hole must be facing out into the river or creek since the firewood would be transported by water into the river banks, thus it was easy to put them into the kiln and convenient for digging/making the kiln in this way.

4) In the past there was a rite conducted to pay homage to the kiln before making one. This ritual's offering was

included of a chicken, a cloth, 5 pairs of flowers and candles and 8 pairs of flowers and candles. To worship the kiln before the first firing process a chicken would be killed as an offering. The kiln's owner would lead the worship together saying "please come eat and help make the pottery look fine and not broken" or "don't let the pottery break, let the work succeed. Please protect and save the rest of the process" (Boonlai Chaityakit, interviewed on 2012/04/16). After that the offering would be set up there for 3-4 hours. However, this kind of kiln worship has not been currently practiced anymore.

5) For the jar with the cover to contain human cremated remains/ashes, however if not ordered, the potters would not make this kind of ceramic. In some houses if they had elders living with they would prepare this kind of jar beforehand. To keep the remains into the pagoda, the family would hold a merit event by making a wax castle and invite the Buddhist monks to do the chanting in this process. On the next morning, the family would give alms and make merit for the dead, and then it was done. During the Songkran festival, the family would hold a chanting for the remains, sometime this activity happened on the New Year's Day depending on the family and relatives' availability. At present, there have been other types of container used to contain the remains, such as glass bottle and plastic bottles, though in Tha Hin Village it was still common to used ceramic container. Janhom noted that the use of ceramic to contain the remains was better than any other kinds since it did not make a bad odor.

3.3 Pottery in Tha Hin Village

Puvon Sonpradit (Interviewed 2012/04/17), 58 years old, was presently the only one owner of a ceramic manufacture in Tha Hin Village since most of the villagers had stopped making pottery. Puvon hired three local potters to make the wares and prepare the clay in his house area while he would oversee the firing process which was considered as the most important step before finish. After that Puvon would hire a driver to go around with him to sell these ceramics in many villages. As the traditional beliefs towards making pottery had not been adhered to anymore, Puvon explained that he experimented by not following those prohibits somehow nothing bad ever happened, none of his wares broke. So he no longer held on to these forbids. In this village there are many potters living in but they did not make pottery anymore. Since Puvon started making pottery, after 4-5 years of many experiments, a governmental office came to support and promoted his products to be known by people in general. Right now Puvon could make pottery throughout the year, except in the rainy season the water flooded his silk so he could not work during this time.

3.4 Process of Pottery in Tha Hin Village



Figure 14. (Left) the preparation area of pounding and winnowing the clay through the sand net (right) the wares being dry inside the constructing house of Puvon



Figure 15. The kiln area next to Sekong River

Location: Puvon used his house area near the Sekong River to build the kiln. The preparation area used to pound, soak and mix the clay was also nearby, but under the three shades not a tenement. Close to the soaking and mixing area, the pounded clay would be packed in sacks and covered with plastic sheet to protect them from rain. The potters would mold the wares inside the under construction house of Puvon. When this house was finished the molding process might have to move. The molded wares then would be collected in a tenement that was once used to be a goat pen. The process of coating the wares with water would also happen here.

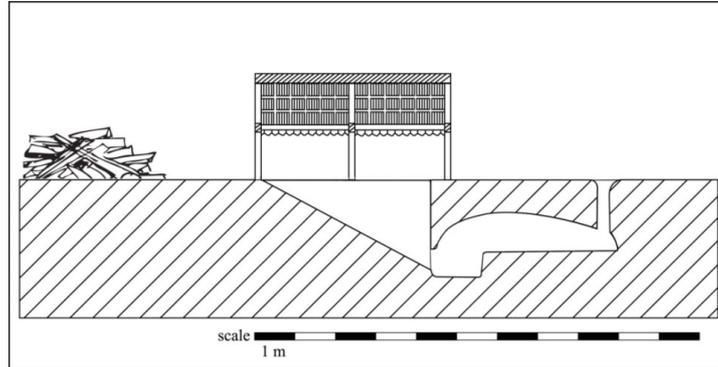


Figure 16. Sizing of the kiln in Tha Hin Village

3.5 Materials and Tools Used in the Process of Pottery

Materials: are consisted of the clay, firewood and ashes of Chuak tree for coating the wares

The clay source was about one kilometer away from Puvon's house. It was the land behind Hin Kao Village's bus stop that the Lao state allowed him to use the clay to make pottery for free. Puvon then would hire former potters or villagers to select, dig and pile up the clay so that he could transport them on a truck to his house. The firewood used in the firing process was bought from a nearby sawmill.



Figure 17. The clay on the land behind Tha Hin Village bus stop was dug up by villagers to be used to make pottery

As it would give the best coating, Puvon bought the ashes of Chuak tree from the villagers for 50,000 kip per one sack. The villagers usually found these ashes from the burned trees in the forest. Sometimes they found this kind of tree and burn it into ashes, or mix with other type, and then sell to Puvon.

3.5.1 Tools used in the pottery process



Figure 18. The tools used in the process of pottery (from left) cloth, Bang Diak, Mai Lia, and Wii or combs in various forms

- 1) *Pin* or hand wheel, currently made from iron
- 2) *Wii* or comb made from plastic with round triangle shape
- 3) *Mai Lai* or design stick used to make patterns on the wares and made from bamboo with one sharp side and three v-shaped forms on the other side.
- 4) Cloth or *Jia* (paper) of a cement sack, dipped in the water to rub and smooth the mouth of the jars
- 5) *Mai Tee Din* or a stick made from bamboo used to press and form the bottoms
- 6) *Bang Diak* or a bamboo flask used to press clay through the tube to make the convex clay lines

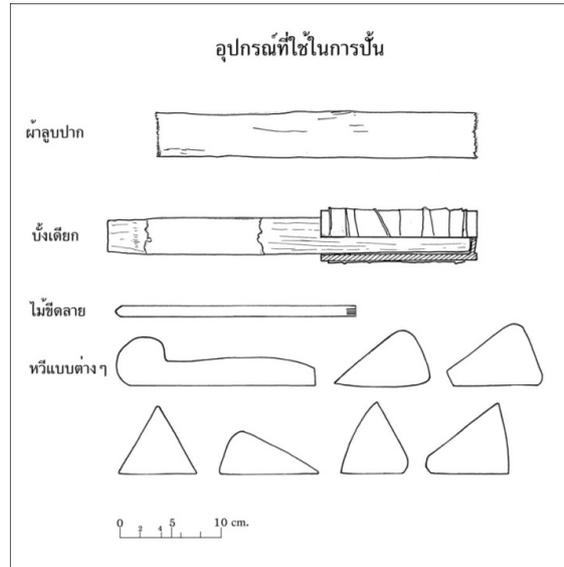


Figure 19. The sixing of the tools used int the process



Figure 20. The villager pounding the soil in a large mortar



Figure 21. The potter in Tha Hin Village stepping on the clay

Clay Preparation: the dry soil would be pounded by using the large mortar. Then the pounded clay would be winnowed through sand net and packed in sacks. Next the clay would be soaked in old iron oil tanks for one night. The soaked clay then would be mixed with some more dry soil above large plastic sheet. A person would step on and turn around the clay until it became sticky enough. When finished the mixed and sticky clay would be packed and covered under large plastic sheet preventing the humidity.

3.6 Molding the Jars Process

The molding process in this village was similar to of Phakkaya Village where they shaped the ware using *Pin* or hand wheel. The obvious differences between these two villages were that: in Phakkaya village the tools used were more various due to more variety of wares or products made while in Tha Hin Village the put an emphasis on making various sizes of jars. They also produced mortars, preserved fish and water tanks or jars. In one day the potters in Tha Hin could make about 50-70 small jars and about 20 large jars.



Figure 22. (Left) the potters molding the Hi-plang or traditional whiskey jar (right) decorating jar with the convex clay lines made thru Bang Diak



Figure 23. Fresh molded Hi-plang (Brao traditional whiskey jar) and (left) details of convex clay lines on the jar

3.7 Coating Preparation and Process

The coating was made from ashes from Chuak tree, and sometimes might be mixed with other kind, such as Pradoo tree. To prepare the ashes, Puvon would hire the villagers to find them in the forest that was burned from wildfire or from the land where they fired this kind of tree for farming or from housing construction. Sometimes the villagers would then find the trees and burn them into ashes to sell.



Figure 24. Puvon coating Hi-plang jar

Once having the ashes ready, mix them with sticky rice juice (it could be white or black sticky rice) which was steamed and grinded into the juicy form (currently sticky rice power mixed with water could be replaced). Before mixing, the steamed sticky rice juice then was winnowed through sand net and it became the coating. To coat the wares, gently use a brush wiping it on the external surface and around the mouth of the jars, not the

inside. The potter would leave about a palm span from the ground uncoated in order to prevent the coating flowing down to the ware's bottom. The coating process took place only with the jars that would be placed near to the fire or flame in the kiln. The jars placed a bit further from the fire would be coated on their mouths only. Those located quite deeper within the kiln, or far from the flame, would not be coated since the coating would not absorb into the ware's surface. The full coated jars would look more beautiful and be sold at higher prices.

3.8 Firing Process

To prepare the wares for this process Puvon would manage it on his own. The first step was, after the previous firing, to clean the kiln by sweeping the entire remained husk out and check for anything might need to be fixed. Sometimes some parts of the kiln wall might collapse so it was necessary to keep them out and check if the kiln still could to be used. Then lay the paddy husk on the ground within the kiln or the area used to place the jars so their bottom would not touch the ground directly. After finish, lay the smaller size jars inside the kiln first and then followed by the larger ones that fit the height. The smaller size jars would also be placed in between the larger ones in order to save the firing space. In this process, it was essential to make sure that the coated wares were placed in the right position.



Figure 25. (Left) the wares prepared to be put into the kiln which were laid in the same position they would be inside (right) Puvon laying the wares inside the kiln by interiorly placing the non-coated ones

The firing process would take about 36 hours or 2 days and one night. After adding the wares into the kiln, on the next day at around 6 am Puvon would ignite the kiln. In the beginning he would start warming up this process by adding not much firewood so the heat could gently go through the kiln, then he would continue adding the firewood continuously. It was necessary to have a person to keep watching this process and adding the firewood into the kiln. They used long stick to push the firewood and manage the firing ones inside. However, it was also needed to leave some space for the air to flow through the kiln. In the evening of the same day more firewood would be added so it had stronger fire inside the kiln, small and large pieces of firewood would be alternately added. During the nighttime, two persons would take turn monitoring the kiln and resting. This process was considered the tiring one as it consumed a lot of time and needed labor to continuously work on until finish. After midnight more firewood would be added again at around 6 am in order to speed up the flame. Until 7 pm of the next day close to the finish, the potters would throw in coconut leaves chopped at the right time when the fire in the kiln started to decrease so this could be the last flame for the firing process. That was finish.



Figure 26. The potter adding the firewood into the kiln to speed up the flame

After finished the firing process one day, on the next day Puvon would slowly scoop the ashes out from the kiln. This process would normally take about three days due to the heat inside the kiln was still high and those ashes also still burned. To slowly scoop out the ashes helped protect the heat inside the kiln as well as to prevent the wares to break due to the rapid temperature change. On the 4th-5th day after the burning process, the wares would

be slowly moved out while the ones placed deep inside might still be heated so once they all got cooler they would be moved out.

3.9 Type of Pottery in Tha Hin Village

The products made by Puvon consisted of small jars, tubing jars, and traditional whiskey jars of Brao tribe, traditional whiskey jars of Lawae tribe, small water tanks and mortars.



Figure 27. (Left) traditional whiskey jar of Brao tribe half coated before burning (right) traditional whiskey jars of Lawae which none of them was coated so the price would be cheaper that the half coated ones



Figure 28. (Left) preserved fish tanks (right) medium and large water tanks selling in front of Puvon

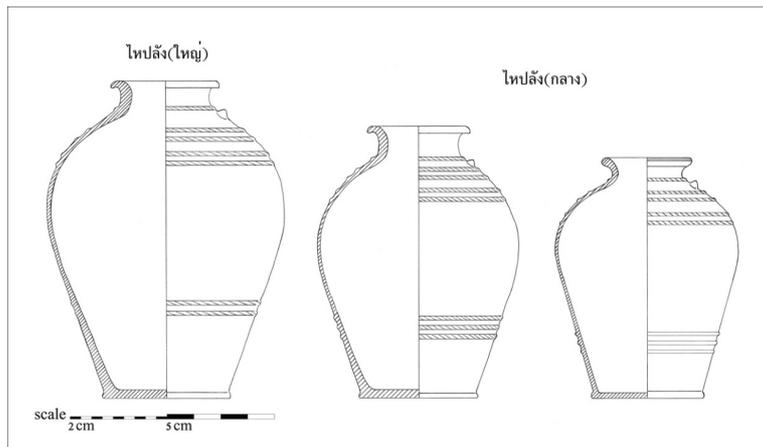


Figure 29. Sizing of large and medium traditional whiskey jars of Brao tribe

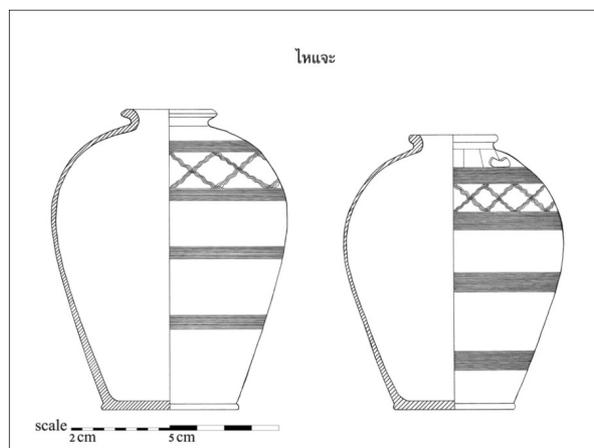


Figure 30. Sizing of traditional whiskey jars of Lawae tribe

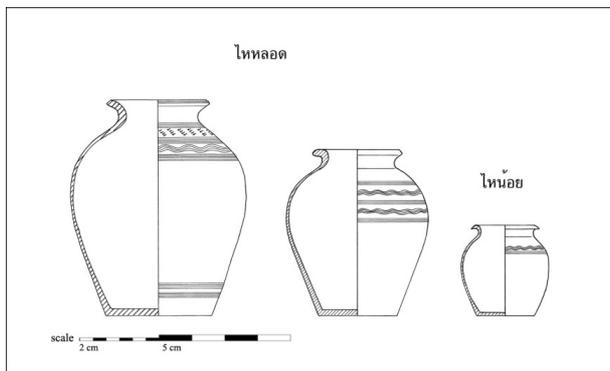


Figure 31. Sizing of two different sizes of tubing jars and small jars

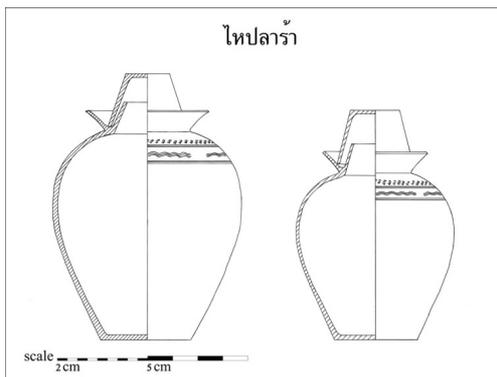


Figure 32. Sizing of two different sizes of preserved fish tanks

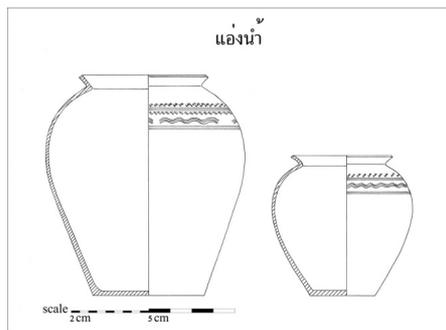


Figure 33. Sizing of two different sizes of water tanks

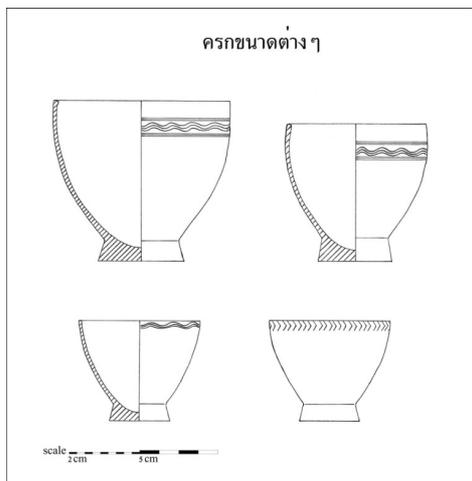


Figure 34. Sizing of various sizes of mortars

3.10 Management and Marketing



Figure 35. (Left) preparing the jars on to the motorcycle to sell (right) while getting on the ferry boat to cross Sekong River to sell the ceramics in Puwong city which was about 50 kilometers away

Puvon owned a ceramic store on the main road to Attapeu city and he also travelled to sell the goods in many villages within the province as many tribal villagers would like to buy them to ferment their traditional whiskeys. Puvon also delivered his products by calling orders. Sometimes he used his motorcycle to deliver the products to the nearby villages. After moving out the jars and other wares from the kiln, besides placing them at his store, Puvon would carry them on a pick-up truck and travel to sell in villages. As it generated costs and expenses while travelling like this, such as the gas and driver fees, the products were then the more expensive ones.



Figure 36. Brao tribe villagers selecting and buying the jars in Wangyang village of Puwong city Photograph taken in Wangyang Village 2013/03/26

The villagers would buy the jars that have natural colors and patterns. The traditional whiskey jars had their handles, or called ears, which in the past they used to have three handles. The tribes in Sanxai city liked to collect these jars as their treasure or as the family's jars used in the event of "Gin Add" or feast and used in various religious ceremonies. In the past the jars usually were not higher than 120 centimeters.

4. Conclusion

Since around 700 years ago kilns had been used to make high temperature ceramics in southern Laos in the areas of Phakkaya Village of Savannakhet Province and in Tha Hin Village of Attapeu Province. The type and process of these communities were differed depending on the target group demands. Phakkaya Village, Addsapon City, was located in a rural area in the province of Savannakhet. The nearby villages were living Lao Lum people; however the majority of these villagers were Phu Tai whom livelihood was similar to of the Lao people in general. Most of the products made in this village were household utensils as they were necessary for a living. Those wares were consisted of food containers, consumption water containers, and food preparation utensils. As located away from the city and difficult to travel to, the roads were still unpaved and some villages still had no electricity. Thus, these products were still highly favored by the population in this community. Moreover, many families in this village continued to make pottery as an additional profession, as well as the younger generations had come to learn and inherit the knowledge.

In Tha Hin Villages, located on the main road leading to the city of Samakkixai, the major city of Attapeu Province, it was more convenient to travel to places. During the past decade, this area had been more developed as its province bordered with Vietnam and Cambodia. Currently, many Vietnamese investors had already come to

invest and operate businesses in this city even more as it was also a gateway of the three countries. From these developments, it resulted in products flooded into the city and common villagers were able to buy a variety of household utensils easily. The group of pottery makers then had increased alternative choices to work, and younger generations became more interested in occupying other jobs, such as the majority of them turned to work as construction laborers, finding items in the forest to sell, cutting timber. The province of Attapeu had been known well for its famous wooden handicrafts and good quality timber thus it led to the crease number of pottery makers, as well as the decrease of types of pottery. Forty years ago, started from two villagers who returned to the village with knowledge of making pottery, since then all most of the villagers in Tha Hin started to make jars and household ceramics. Right now there was only one family that still continued making pottery and there were only three potters remained in the village. Pottery in this village had been inherited from other community. In the beginning the potters here strictly followed the forbiddances, such as the beliefs on the kiln's spirit, rites and beliefs towards using kilns. However, these beliefs had disappeared when generations changed. The products produced mostly were whiskey jars as Attapeu province lived many tribes who still favored in using traditional whiskey jars. Besides using this kind of traditional whiskey jar to ferment whiskey for family's consumption or for any feast, it was also involved in many rites and beliefs. Moreover, these tribal villagers liked to collect beautiful jars as to represent their wealth. Thus traditional whiskey jars became the main products which were also the only type of product coated remarkably and sold at high prices. Throughout Attapeu Province highly lived various tribes, such as Lawae, Brao and Oai.

The process of pottery in Phakkaya Village was using river bank kiln which was built right by the creek. This type of kiln was more ancient than those in Tha Hin Village, the above ground type. However, it was also in accordance to the proper geography as in Phakkaya village in dry season the water in the creek got dry and at the same time the villagers were free from farming. So, they could fortunately make pottery and build a river bank kiln in the dry season. This was the livelihood and mode of production related to the nature. Even though there was Sekong River flowing through Tha Hin Village, the pottery makers could not build a river bank kiln next to the river since the water level was high throughout the year. Therefore they build a kiln nearby the river instead.

These two communities were considered as the local Lao handicraft learning sources as they involved the livelihood, and art and culture. It was anticipated that in the future the development and urban modernization would enter into these communities which would unfortunately impact the pottery makers and process of pottery, therefore, the state agencies and private organizations should put an emphasis on preparing these skillful potters to be ready for such coming changes, as well as to look for the sustainable development guidelines to support them, by significantly maintaining the identity and history of pottery inherited until present. Upon this opportunity it could lead to the tourist promotion that Lao PDR had always been presenting to other countries. The state could turn ceramics into the form cultural products, souvenirs and decors while maintaining the traditional production process as it was the identity of Lao pottery. This could create works and occupations to the Lao citizens, as well as the sustainable community development.

References

- Bawingchai, B., & Headman. (2012, March 9). *Age 46 years old Interview*.
- Central Mekong Sub-Region Archaeology Research Project. (2013). *Photograph Exhibition of Central Mekong Sub-Region Archaeology Research Project during 2010-2013*. January 31st-May 24th, 2013. Luang Prabang.
- Chaiyakit, B. (2012, April 16). *Age-Interview*.
- Chanatwong, B. (2014, February 26). *Age 52 years old Interview*.
- Chantaree, T. (1999). *Design and Production Technology of High Temperature Ceramic (Stoneware): Case Study in Nongkai, Nakhon Phanom, Ubonratchatane, Nakhonratchasima Provinces*. Faculty of Architecture, Khon Kaen University.
- Kallen, A. (2004). *And Though Flows the River, Archaeology and the Pasts of Loa Pako*. Appasala University. Sweden.
- Kenvilai, S., & Head of Phakkaya Village Handicraft Group. (2013, May 5). *Age 53 years old Interview*.
- Nanthanavon, P. (2014, February 6). *Age 52 years old Interview*.
- Nathapindhu, S. (2007). *Ban Chiang*. Bangkok: Office of National Museums, Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture.
- Potira, T. P. (2016, February 6). *Age 69 years old Interview*.

Shippen, M. (2005). *The Traditional Ceramics of South East Asia*. London: London. A&C Black (Publishers).

Sonpradit, P. (2012, April 17). Age 58 years old Interview.

Thepsimuang, B. (2010). *History of Lao Nation I Settlement and the Establishment of the Kingdom*. Bangkok: Sukkapabjai Publisher.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).