

IV. ICH Preliminary Field Survey

1. **Title:** ICH Preliminary Field survey of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

2. **Background**

Laotians have a long history through which their society and cultural heritage have grown. Today, the Lao PDR consists of seventeen provinces with forty-nine ethnic tribes. Each ethnic tribe has its own unique characteristics.

Vilabouly, located in the middle of Lao PDR, is one of the fifteen districts of Savannakhet Province. The area is made up of mountains, forests, streams, and rivers, and there is an abundance of natural resources, including various species of wildlife and mineral ores, such as gold and copper. Vilabouly has ancient roots, and residents have migrated to the area over many centuries. Vilabouly became known as a heroic district while the nation was fighting for national liberation and against imperialist invaders. Most people living in Vilabouly make up two major ethnic groups: Brou and Phou Tai, with 70 per cent of the population belonging to the Phou Tai ethnic tribe and the remaining 30 per cent to the Brou ethnic tribe.

The government of the Lao PDR, always having considered socio-economic development along with safeguarding cultural heritage, ratified the 2003 ICH Convention on 19 October 2009. Furthermore, to recognise the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, the Vilabouly District conducted a preliminary field survey that was funded by Lane Xang Minerals Company Limited.

The survey was divided into two phases.

Phase 1: Collecting data in ten Brue ethnic villages for one month. The collected information includes

- 1) local folktales
- 2) the art of singing local songs
- 3) traditional rituals

Phase 2: Collecting data in eleven Phou Tai ethnic villages for one month. The collected information includes

- 1) local folktales
- 2) courting poems
- 3) the art of singing local songs
- 4) traditional rituals

The intangible cultural heritage is manifested in the following domains.

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
- (b) performing arts
- (c) social practices, rituals, and festive events
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- (e) traditional craftsmanship

3. Purpose:

- To record the background history, wisdom and identity of the intellectual cultural heritage;
- To provide important database on intellectual cultural heritage
- To enhance the crucial role and the pride of the communities, groups, or individuals that own the intellectual cultural heritage.

- To promote and develop the rights of communities to conserve, perpetuate, restore, and safeguard the local and national intellectual cultural heritage.
- To implement the duties to become as a state party to UNESCO's conventions for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage.

4. Duration: May – December 2011

5. Venue: Angkham village, Vilabouly district, Savannakhet province.

6. Convenience in survey for surveying

- With the cooperation of the people and authorities of the Vilabouly District, the survey team was provided convenience in transferring information. People eagerly participated, and they were well received.

7. Problems and obstacles for surveying

- Villagers did not have comprehensive knowledge of ICH.
- Some people were not forthcoming with information.
- Some people requested high remuneration.
- Local language also became the barrier between the team and the villagers.
- The low-quality tools used in collecting the data did not yield satisfactory output.
- Since socio-economic problems still existed, negotiation for compensation was a main problem.

8. Challenges and basics for ICH safeguarding in the Lao PDR

- ICH safeguarding is new work.
- Social awareness and responsibility is still low. Work was done based on familiarity, and it caused negative effects on ICH.
- The organisation was not strong, and the number of technical staff was inadequate.
- Funds and technical knowledge were still limited.
- Legal acts were newly formed.

9. Required measurement for ICH safeguarding, development, and support

- Adopt general policy aiming to support and integrate ICH safeguarding and data collecting in a set strategic plan.
- Assign or form one or more organisations with proper capacity to undertake safeguarding activities.
- Support scientific research, technique, and skill.
- Approve appropriate legal measures.

10.Outcome

The Phou thay's history and origin are similar to other ethnic group of the Lao – Tai language group. They migrated from south China in the late 17th and early 18th century, following the Mekong, Salavan and Red rivers. The group that migrated into the red river area later broke up into two groups: Tai Dum and Tai Mour These two groups later settled in many places such as Saybangfai, Hinboun, Saynamnoy river and the Huaxanghai Mountain area.

Presently, The Phou Thay live in the central province, mostly in Nongbok, Mahaxay, Hinboun, and boualapa district of Khammuan province, plus they live in Pin, Sepone and Vilabouly district of Savannakhet province. Their population around twenty thousand people in Laos.

- Name and language.

Phou Thay has always been most common name of this group. They come from the words: Thay phou which has an obscure meaning of those who migrated along the mountain. Their language is an Astro-Tai language and is in the Tai – Kadai group. They do not have a written alphabet.

- Society, believe, ceremonies and myths.

The Pou Thay adopted Buddhism during their migration through Laos, Before this time they were followers of their own style of animism. However, they had combined Buddhism with some of their ancient animistic practices and beliefs.

They belief in some spirits of the area(phi muang) and the spirit of the village (phi ban). They also believe in other spirit such as spirit of the river and forest, They believe ancestral spirit can protect those in the household from harm.

Every Phou Thay village will have shamans, who are always female, These are call moi yau or phi fa. They are believed to have magical power allowing them to cure illnesses, After the harvest, the Phou Thay will sacrifice chicken, sticky rice, fruits and other items to the spirit of the rice.

Phou Thay family are basically nuclear, but with perhaps three generations living under one house. Men are monogamous and do not practice polygamy like other groups.

Phou Thay marriage is a complex affair, as when a girl marries, she must be cut off from her ancestral spirit and these take many ceremonies and sacrifice to perform correctly. When a young man in interested in a girl, he will give her a gift of money or cloth. Later a dowry must be paid to her family, which today about a half kilogram of silver, plus a buffalo, a pig, some sticky rice and some cash.

After marriage, the husband will move into the wife's house. He will be expected to work hard, carrying water, pounding rice, finding and picking firewood, searching for food and so on. Later couple were inherit this house or move into their own.

When the women is pregnant, there are certain taboos she must follow. Some of these include not eating banana flowers, horse, fatty meals, or the meat of the pregnant buffalo. Also, she may not nap during the day, nor her husband may not cut the neck of a domestic

animals for slaughter. These beliefs are to prevent the baby from being born deformed or seriously ill.

The baby will be born in the house. After birth, the mother will eat rice with ginger root for three days, then later progress to kitchen and other meats, this is to ensure the mother's strength.

Phou Thay cremate their dead, either at their village temple or outside the village. If the family has money, then a ceremony is held for three nights at the house of the deceased. Those who are younger than fifteen or died in accidents are buried. If an outsider dies in the village, then the deceased's family must sacrifice a buffalo to the village spirit.

-Village and house

Before building a new village or house, the villager will bury some rice seed in the spot they wish to build. If it germinates successfully, then they will proceed to build in that spot.

The Phou Thay live in small villages with houses on stilts, the walls of woven bamboo and roofs made of thatch. A ladder leads to a small porch.

The house is divided into two rooms, one is the living room with a small hearth for cooking, the other room is a small sleeping room. They will keep their animals under the house during the night.

- Costume

According to the Phou Thay in Laos. They no longer wear their traditional clothing, as they have sold their costumes to the Phou Thay in other places. Today Phou Thay women will wear a traditional sarong (phaa sin) that is black or dark blue with a long-sleeved vest. If there is a special occasion, then they will wear more colorful phaa sin with a wide sash that is red or white. Today, they wear little jewelry, but used to wear a lot of silver jewelry several generations ago.

For special occasions the males will wear wide blue trousers and short sleeved blue vest with red hems and fringes. For daily wear, they will wear commercial clothing bought from Lao traders. They will also be tattooed, but this is becoming less common.

-Agriculture and livelihood

The Phou Thay's main crop is glutinous rice, which is grown in wet paddies. They also grow vegetables, fruits, tobacco and some cotton. Animals they raise are buffalo, cow, poultry, dog and small horses. They also hunt small game and fish in the rivers. The women will weave phaa sin and other items. The men will make items from bamboo for trade. These include mats, baskets, fish traps and other household items.