

# Saphao: Lan Na Perception on a Journey Across the Ocean <sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

*Saphao* is a Lan Na word equivalent to the Central Thai *samphao* referring to a Chinese style ocean-going merchant ship or junk. There are many archaeological traces such as terracotta seals, medals and stucco motifs found in many sites in Thailand depicting the connection with India, the Jambūdvīpa, and Sri Lanka. Some of those present the journeys by one-mast vessels and also brigs. Several folk jatakas composed by Lan Na monks, as scholars, during the 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries A.D. referred to a journey made by *samphao* namely, Suwannasangaraja jātika and Chanthakataka jātika for example. Although the jātakas did not give any detailed description of the *samphao* and the journeys made by them, several Buddhist documents of several sects in Lan Na contain records of the trips made for the purpose of perpetuating Buddhism from its origin in Sri Lanka via such transportation as the *samphao*.

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The ‘crossing the great ocean’ conveys both the concrete and abstract meanings which include crossing over the *samsāra* or the process of life and death (birth, aging, sickness and death) transcending the *Lokīya*, the worldly and mundane, comforts to *Lokutara*, the supramundane or absence of such unpleasant conditions. Several objects of sacrifice dedicated to certain important *chedis* containing the Buddha relics in the Lan Na tradition include *saphao kham* (golden junk) which is also part of the sacrifice in certain Lan Na rites. In some Lan Na folk rites practiced for the merit dedicated to a woman who died in giving birth to a child it is required to have a model of *saphao* to carry all kinds of fishing equipment. This is to assist the dead woman who died soaking in blood and amniotic fluid to ride on it and get released to be born again. Part of the merit dedicating phase accompanying the rite says that may the merits gained from this rite be like a crystal and golden ship taking the unfortunate person to the next life.

This article aims to investigate the allusions to *saphao* in the various contexts of Lan Na society in the past, especially those related to Buddhist history, social history and its culture.

**Key Words:** *Saphao*; Jātaka; Paññāsa jātakas; Lan Na; Sri Lanka

“GATE GATE PĀRAGATE  
PĀRASAMGATE  
BODHI SVĀHA”

from  
THE HEART SUTRA

*Saphao* (read as “sa-pao”) is a word in the dialect of Lan Na - the area in the upper north of Thailand. The word refers to a Chinese ocean-going vessel in particular. It is the variation of the Central Thai word “*Samphao*” which refers to an ocean-going vessel of any nation or style. *Samphao* or junk became a symbol of trade across the ocean between Siam and other countries. King Rama III of the Chakri Dynasty (A.D. 1824-51) himself had a base of the *chedi* at Wat Yannawa in Bangkok made into the shape of *samphao* (Figure 1) lest future generations would not recognize or know what a *samphao* looked like.



**Figure 1** Wat Yannawa, New Road, Bangkok, behind the *Vihāra* is Chao Phraya River.

In the past there was a type of *jātakas* known as “Paññāsa *jātakas*” composed by some Lan Na scholars. The story involves a journey using a *saphao* as a means of transportation, for example Suwannasangkhara *jāta* and Chanthakata *jāta*. Some Lan Na rituals also called for the making of a *saphao* to be dedicated to a woman who died in childbirth. In this case the *saphao* must be five meters long and containing all kinds of fishing equipment. It is believed that in this way, it will release the soul of the dead woman from the unpleasant circumstance so that she can be reborn. A chant accompanying the offering of the *saphao* says, “May the merit made here be like a golden *saphao* taking the unfortunate person to the next life” (Buppha, 1999: 6705-07).

This article will explore the overall picture of *saphao* in various contexts of Lan Na society as related to archeology, history, literatures and ritual traditions.

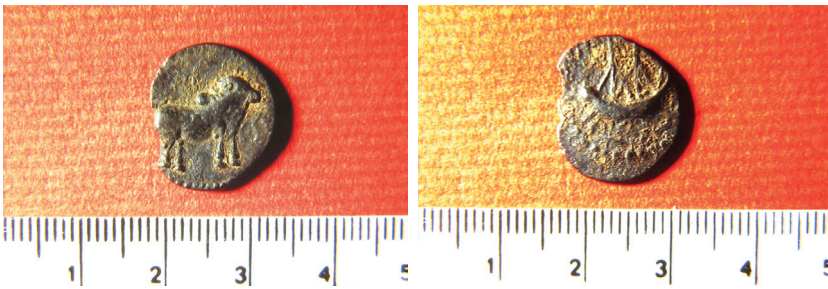
### **Connection between Jambūdvīpa and Southeast Asia**

A number of pieces of evidence discovered from several ancient communities in Thailand proved that there were trade connections by the sea with Indian merchants such as those in Nakhon Pathom in Central Thailand and those in Khuan Lukpat in Khlong Thom District, Krabi Province, in the south of Thailand. Several trading ports in the south of Thailand and the Malay Peninsula also shown that, there were goods transported by land from the west coast to the east coast (Suphadradis, 1979).

Archaeological evidence of terracotta seals, especially those found in the ancient city of Nakhon Pathom (Prapatsorn, 1999: 21), bear an image of a boat (Figure 2). They were single-mast sailing boats, boats with the support of ropes fore and aft and boats with large rudder and outriggers with some human figures on them. There was also a metal coin found at the archeological site at Khuan Lukpat (Mayuree, 1984: 137) with the image of a bull with a hump (Figure 3) while the other side of the coins bears the image of a boat (Figure 4) that looks like the boat on the terracotta seal of Nakhon Pathom. This boat with a double



**Figure 2** A single-mast sailing boat with outrigger on the terracotta seal, Nakhon Pathom National Museum. (Photo:Fine Arts Department)



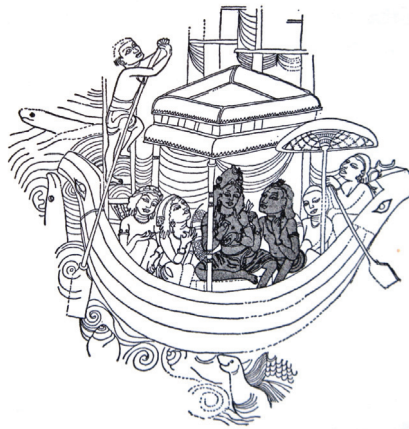
**Figures 3 and 4** A metal coin found in the archeological site at Khuan Lukpat, Khlong Thom, Krabi. (Author's photographs)

mast and no outrigger makes it more slender. Although the coin has no human figures, the support ropes fore and aft can be seen clearly.

There has been a significant study of Indian ancient ships by Dieter Schlingloff. In the article “Kalyānakārin’s Adventures: The Identification of an Ajanta Painting,” Schlingloff believes that the parallels to Indian ships are not to be sought in Indochina, but in the contemporary Roman ships (Schlingloff, 1976: 19). This hypothesis may have to be verified by archaeological evidences from Nakhon Pathom and Kuan Lukpat in Krabi Province. The study of Schlingloff verified

that the mural painting in cave no. 1 at Ajanta, once interpreted as Mahājanaka, is the Kalyānakārin story because there is only one story in Buddhist literature in which a blind man, whose eyes were put out by his brother on a voyage, is mentioned in connection with a shipwreck (Schlingloff Ibid: 6).

It also seems that his interpretation that Indian ships were never found in Indochina was confirmed too. Schlingloff's assessment came from the comparative study between Indian vessels in the painting in the cave no. 1 at Ajanta (Figure 5) and other sites from Andhra (Figure 6), 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., with the multiple masts sailing vessels in



**Figure 5** Voyage of Kalyānakārin and his evil brother, Cave No.1 Ajanta. (Schlingloff 1970)

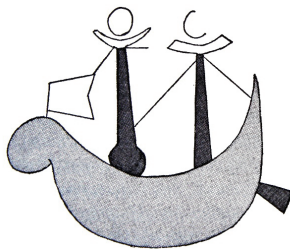


Fig. 5: Andhra, 2nd c.A.D.

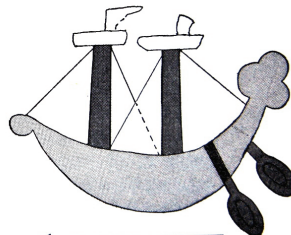


Fig. 6: Andhra, 2nd c.A.D.

**Figure 6** Junk Boat drawing of Schlingloff from Andhra, 2<sup>nd</sup> century. (Schlingloff 1970)



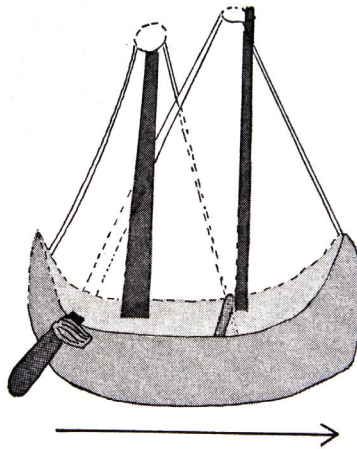
**Figure 7** The relief of multiple mast sailing vessel with outrigger at Borobudur. (Miksic 1990)

the Borobudur relief's (Miksic, 1990: 67-69) (Figure 7). Schlingloff said that apart from multiple masts, the Borobudur ships have nothing further in common with the Indian ships. A further contrast between the pictures of Indian and Borobudur ships lies in the latter being equipped with an outrigger, which is totally absent from all representations of Indian ships (Schlingloff Ibid: 19). It looks like the terracotta seal from Nakhon Pathom which show the vessel with the outrigger, could agree with Schlingloff's assumption.

According to this statement, the assumption of the Fine Arts Department that the vessel in the terracotta seal from Nakhon Pathom resembles those found in west Bengal in northeast India (Prapatsorn Ibid) (Figure 8) has to be reconsidered. On the contrary, the medal found at Kuan Lukpat with double masts has no outrigger. This can be explained by the fact that the Indian ships played a significant role only in the Indian Ocean and the Andaman Sea; that is from the west coast



**Figure 8** Terracotta seal found at West Bengal in Northern India.  
(Prapatsorn 1999)



**Figure 9** Sketch of a relief from Aurangabad in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.  
(Schlingloff 1970)

of Myanmar and the south of Thailand through the Malay Peninsula rather than in the Gulf of Siam and South China Sea. This vessel on the Khlong Thom coin with the ship that shows two-masts, whose masts are supported by support ropes fore-and-aft, are similar to that on the Andhra coins dating from the beginning of the Christian era as well as a relief from Aurangabad in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Schlingloff Ibid) (Figure 9).

### **Southeast Asia to Sri Lanka: Journey to Continue Buddhism**

There are so many Buddhist texts that refer to the visit of the Buddha in many places in Southeast Asia. Nearly all *Dhātu Cetiya*s give their own stories based on the Buddha's prophecy. In *Sangha and state in Burma*, Mendelson gave detail from a Burmese text that the Buddha visited Lower Burma by air with many hundreds of monks (Mendelson, 1975: 31).

A relationship with Sri Lanka is also reflected in a number of bronze sculptures from maritime Southeast Asia by the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Nandana and Leidy, 1994: 48) as well as in the legend of Buddha images such as the Legend of the Emerald Buddha. Hazra (1982: 1) affirmed that there are evidences from many sources, especially the *Culavamsa*, that from the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D., of all the Southeast Asian countries, Sri Lanka's relations with Burma were the closest.

However, the sea route connection should be with the Mon instead. We know that around the 16<sup>th</sup> century Pegu's shipyards at Martaban, Mottama in Burmese, were best placed for large stands of Burmese teak, supplied to many by the biggest junks for the merchants of Malacca, Melaka in Malay, and those of Southeast Asia (Reid, 1993: 42). The well known reliable source, the A.D. 1479 Kaḷyaṅsīmā Inscription, relates that 22 Mon theras from Pegu who sailed to Sri Lanka in A.D. 1476 were re-ordained in the Mahāvihāra ritual on a raft on the Kalyani River (Surasawasdi and Penth, 2007: 158). Beyond doubt, the journey from Southeast Asia to Sri Lanka in 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. was a usual activity.

Hazra also remarked that Siam, or Thailand, was the next important country with which Sri Lanka had a fair amount of cultural intercourse but not before the second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Hazra Ibid: 5). The important Thai source, the *Jinakālamālī*, which was written in Pāli by Ratanapañṇā thera, a native of Lan Na in the first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D., refers to Lan Na's contact with Sri Lanka in the reign of King Sam Fang Kaen of Chiang Mai (A.D. 1401-41). It presents valuable information relating to religious intercourse between

Sri Lanka and Thailand and the establishment of Sīhala Buddhism, the Sīhalaḅkikkhu sect or the new Sri Lankan sect, in Chiang Mai. Hazra also suggested that the main points of the *Jinakālamālī* relating to Thai's cultural relation with Sri Lanka are corroborated by the *Sāsanavamsa* (Hazra Ibid).

From a recent research, we found that the Sīhalaḅkikkhu sect, led by Mahā Dhammagambhīra and Mahā Medhankara, was established at Wat Padaeng Luang in Chiang Mai in A.D. 1430, after they had been re-ordained in the Mahāvihāra Monastery in Sri Lanka in A.D. 1423 (Surasawasdi and Penth Ibid: 22). This Sīhalaḅkikkhu sect, or Wat Padaeng Sect as it was called, was strongly patronized by later kings in the Golden age of Lan Na, Tilok (A.D. 1441-87) and Phra Muang Kao (A.D. 1495-1526) (Sraswadee, 1996: 143 and 149). The other important sect in Lan Na at that time was the Wat Suan Dokmai Sect. This sect, also called the old Sri Lankan sect, came from Phra Udhumporn Bupbhā Mahāswāmī's Lankan-Mon sect at Thaton in Southern Burma. Sumana thera and Anomadassi who were the leaders of this sect was patronized by King Ku Na (A.D. 1355-85) and was installed in Wat Suan Dokmai in Chiang Mai.

According to the sources in the Archives of Lan Na Inscriptions, Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University, Srilao provided a list of monks in the Sri Lanka connection. Nevertheless, we could not specify which Sri Lankan sect they were part of. One of those inscriptions from Wat Rattanawarāram in Phayao Province, A.D. 1499, described 25 Maha theras, Mahāsāramanggla and Mahāsīsaddham kunwannarattanalanka for example, who brought Buddhism from Sri Lanka to Haripunchai (Sujit, 1995: 224-227). Other monks associated with the Sri Lankan sect were Mahāthera Suvanna; abbot of Wat Pasagnat, Mahāthera Luang; abbot of Wat Pa Ku Kae and Mahāthera Buddhakhosa; abbot of Wat Pa Ha (Pens and Srilao, unpublished).

### **Names of Cities of Jambūdvīpa in Paññāsa jātakas**

The jātakas are stories of the Buddha's past lives. One of the most extraordinary anthologies of jātakas is that preserved in Pāli, the textual language of Theravāda Buddhism (Skilling, 2008: 66). Texts belonging to the Pāli and Sinhalese tradition refer to 500, 547 or 550 stories of the Blessed One's past lives as a human, deity, or animal. One of the earliest sources of jātaka in Thailand was the series of slabs at Wat Si Chum, northwest of the ancient town of Sukhothai.

The Lan Na Buddhists adopted the jātakas from Sri Lanka as practiced by the Buddhists in other parts of Thailand, particularly the Vessantara jātaka which deals with the last past life of the Buddha in which he demonstrated the highest level of merit, the merit of giving (Wray, 1974: 109). However, several Lan Na monks also composed their own version of jātakas known as "Paññāsa jātakas" consisted of 50 stories. The jātakas of Lan Na had been popular in the neighboring lands with variations. For example, the Burmese version of the Paññāsa jātakas contains some Buddhist teaching written in Pāli with confidence while the Cambodian version written with more imagination (Niyada, 1980: 20-21). A number of scholars agree with Prince Damrong Rajanubhab who suggested that Paññāsa jātakas could have been written around A.D. 1450-1650 by a Buddhist monk from Chiang Mai (Damrong Rajanubhab, 1956: a ; Udom, 1999: 7077). However, some scholars suggest that they could have been composed in Haripunchai around A.D. 1265 (Niyada Ibid). The significance of the Paññāsa jātaka lies in that they reflect the values and attitude related to the naming of the cities in Jambūdvīpa, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

Paññāsa jātakas generally relate the ordeals befalling the Blessed One while repaying for his bad deeds in past lives. Some stories relate a journey by *saphao* such as the Suwannasangaraja jātaka, the 6<sup>th</sup> on in the series. Schweisguth said that the famous classic Thai drama "Sang Thong," well known among the Thais in the central plains of Thailand may have been derived from this story (Niyada Ibid). In one

part, the Suwannasangaraja jātaka of Wat Sungmen version A.D. 1836, the Bodhisattva and his mother were put on a raft and were caught by a severe storm, causing them to be separated from each other. The mother drifted to *Matrat* while the Bodhisattva was taken on board a golden boat by a *naga* king to meet a hermit before going further to *Paranasi* where he was finally married to a princess and the story had a “happy ending” (Udom Ibid: 7077-83). It can be noted that the author had to use his imagination about the geography of Jambūdāvīpa and referred to several important cities by such names as *Madhras* in Southern India and *Benares* (Varanasi) on the Ganges River in Northern India.

Paññāsa Jātaka did not mention details of the *saphao* boat nor the ocean trip, but the *Tai Lue* mural painting on the Chanthakataka jātaka at the *vihāra* of Wat Nongbua in Nan Province, gives some pictures of the people’s perception of the Chinese-Western three-masted ships (Figure 10). There are also human figures of Chanthakataka as well as Devāthisanka riding on the *saphao* (Sone 2526: 103).



**Figure 10** Chanthakataka as well as Devāthisanka riding on the *saphao*, mural painting at Wat Nongbua, Nan. (Sone 2526)

The awareness of the people of Nan on western technology at that time can be observed from the picture of *saphao fai* or ‘steamboat’ seen in the mural painting of Wat Phumin in Nan City (Figure 11). This could be an influence from contact with some missionaries or people from Bangkok at that time. The shipwreck scene can be imagined from the mural paintings of the Mahājanaka jākata at many Wats or temples in Thailand, for example; the scene of shipwreck of Mahājanaka at Wat No, Suphanburi Province (Wray Ibid: 31-37 and pl. 6). Sometimes the Lan Na people’s perception of western technology can come as well from the Burmese artists who were engaged to paint the picture; for example the western *saphao fai* in the Mahājanaka jākata (Figure 12) at the *vihāra* of Wat Monpuyak in Mueang District of Lampang which is approximately 100 years old.

### **Boats and Ships in the Daily Life of the Lan Na People**

The topography of Lan Na, in Northern Thailand, is mainly highlands with mountains and rivers from North to South. The Ping, the Wang, the Yom and the Nan Rivers are the main rivers in the area. Boats and ships are actually used in everyday life of the people in every river basin from the past. The *Chiang Mai Chronicle* gave us a clear imagination about the way of life of those when it relates that, after the construction of Wiang Kum Kam in A.D. 1823-24, King Mangrai saw people of Chæ Chang of Chiang Rua District riding their boats upriver to the market or Kum Kam, with two or three boats sinking every day (Wyatt and Aroonrut, 1998: 35).

Nowadays, the boats used daily among the Lan Na are small ones to go along the rivers and canals. These boats can be grouped into two types: *Klone* boats (Figure 13) and *Kap-pli* boats (Figure 14). The former requires the technique which is hollowing out (*klone*) a whole tree trunk into a boat for 5-6 people or a small amount of goods; so it is mostly for personal use. The latter is made by putting some wooden boards together to form a boat and hold them together with the keel. The bottom part of the boat is round and is suitable for shallow water. It is



**Figure 11** *Saphao Fai* or ‘steamboat’ seen in the mural painting of Wat Phumin in Nan City. (Sone 2526)



**Figure 12** The western *saphao fai* from the Mahājanaka jātaka at Wat Monpuyak, Lampang, approximately 100 years old. (Author’s photograph)



**Figure 13** The *Klone* boats in Chiang Mai. (Pradit 1999)



**Figure 14** The *Kap-pli* boats in the Ping River, Chiang Mai. (Pradit 1999)

used to transport farm products or light stuff or for fishing in shallow rivers and canals. Another kind of smaller boat is the *sala* boat (or *chala* in Central Thai pronunciation). It is larger and faster than the *kap-pli* boat. It is also used for transporting farm products or fishing (Pradit 1999: 5737-40). Larger boats can be made the same way as *kap-pli* boats with a larger scale and not as round a bottom as that of the *kap-pli* kind. They can carry more load but required deeper water. They also have a curved roof in the middle or farther end.

Special care needs to be considered when building a ship to ensure auspicious or good characteristics as well as good fortune (Pradit Ibid: 5742). Large boats are called by their distinctive features and functions: *thong chang*, *sado* and scorpion tail, for instance. The scorpion-tail boat or ‘hang maengpong’, also called *mae pa* (Figure 15), was a popular kind to commute along the Ping River 100 years or so ago. The *hang maengpong* and *sado* boats are pushed by using a long pole; therefore their front sort of juts out and slightly upward to allow the operator to have a space to walk while pushing the pole to make the boat go forward.



**Figure 15** The scorpion-tail boat or ‘*hang maengpong*’ was a popular kind to commute along the Ping River 100 years or so ago. (The National Archives)

If it goes against the current, the one who pushes the pole must apply more energy and quickness and the *nai-hoi* or the leader of the freight has to make sure that the pole pushers get enough to eat more than the downstream trip.

Another significant document that provided a clear picture of the journey along the Ping River is the *The Diary of the Journey along the Ping River from Chiang Mai to Pak Nampho* by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1931). This is an account of the trip during February and March of A.D. 1931, according to the wish of King Rama V's Royal Consort, Princess Dara Rasmi. It is an important document as the author intended to survey as many rapids on the route as possible. He classified all 49 rapids into 3 groups according to the level of difficulty to negotiate. The first group was considered 'kaeng rai' (the most dangerous) where large boats like *hang maengpong* or *mae pa* had to be tied and guided down the rapids. In the second one has to watch for underwater rocks. The third had a wider passage for boats to go through even if the current was strong.

The people's way of life along the river was also described where there were two resting places, one at Ban Mud-ka of Doi Tao District, Chiang Mai and the other at Ban Tha around Ban Tak of Tak District.



**Figure 16** Prince Damrong Rajanubhab's voyage in A.D. 1931. (The National Archives)

These are the places to get the boats, food and the crews ready to tackle the rapids. Men came to be hired out to help in pulling the boats down or up the rapids as some extra hands were needed (Damrong Rajanubhab Ibid: 7-8) (Figure 16). A record of the trip along the Ping River was also made by Dr. Daniel McGilvary, an American doctor and missionary, in A.D.1866. It took them three full months to reach Chiang Mai and the most difficult time was around Hod and Tak territory, which took over one month by itself (Surasawasdi, 2000: 32).

### **Lan Na Traditions and Rituals Related to the *Saphao***

The Lan Na people have a strong belief about the *saphao* due to the influence of Buddhism from Sri Lanka and the *jātakas*. The tradition of a floating *saphao* has been popular and is still being performed today. Lampang is considered a province that has preserved its tradition of *long saphao* (floating the *saphao*), which is performed on the nights of the 15<sup>th</sup> waxing moon and the 1<sup>st</sup> waning moon of November known generally as “Loi Kratong” or candle-light festival. This is the tradition to pay homage to the *Khongka* or Ganges River according to the Brahman beliefs and to worship the Buddha’s footprints. It offers a chance to release one’s bad fortune and convey merit to the deceased relatives.

People of Lampang and Lan Na still believe that floating a boat-like float or *saphao* provides a means for the dead to cross over to another world or a vehicle to take one’s soul on a journey to the next life, crossing the water that divides the land of death and the human realm. Thus, came the custom of sending the soul as well as practical things to the ancestors (Srilao, 2008).

The well-known and popular *saphao* in Lampang are *saphao nok*, the bird-like float, and *saphao ruae*, the boat-like float. The first one is made from coconut shells cut in half and attached to basketry wings and tail then covered with colored paper. Another piece of coconut is cut into the bird’s head and neck. People of Lampang believe in floating a bird-like float or *saphao* to worship the white crow who gives birth to the five Buddhas as written in local Buddhist text. The latter, a boat-

like *saphao*, made of bamboo structured in boat form and decorated by colored paper. People believe that after death one who floated this kind of *saphao* will ride a huge ship across the river to another world. It also looks like a similar activity was found on the Spirit Ship decoration on Đông So'n drums. Both kinds of float or *saphao* should be load with the rice, banana, sugarcane, glutinous rice steamed in banana leaf, sugar, salt, tobacco, betel nut, flowers, incense, candles and images of animals, etc. It is believed that the devoted things are necessities for the next life of the death. We may interpret the *saphao* as a vehicle to take the deceased's soul into the good after life. The water is an obstacle between earth and the underworld. The Lampang traditional floating has become an attraction for many tourists every year.

Observation reveals that this concept of crossing the ocean is passed on to the Lan Na funeral rites. Besides being a means to release the soul of a woman who died in childbirth as mentioned earlier, it is also a way to make merit for the dead. When a person dies, the soul will go to a spirit land where the soul still needs food, lodging and money for expenses before finding a way to cross the ocean to another world or universe. Two things that can carry one over the ocean are a duck and a *saphao*. So duck eggs will be packed in a bag along with food for the journey to the land of the spirits. The dead can ride on the duck whereas the *saphao* or boat can be sailed by the power of the wind to safely cross the ocean or any obstacles (Srilao Ibid).

Another Lan Na belief is that if one dreams of a deceased relative within three months of that person's death, it means the person is in a suffering state and unable to be released to a new birth or life. Then the relative should make merit and dedicate it to the deceased one. The ritual is called *poi khao sang* and one of the items to be used is a model boat (*saphao*) (Figure 17) made of woven bamboo strips and covered with white cloth or paper in which all kinds of household utensils and food are placed. A monk will then be invited to the house to accept the sacrifice or offering. In addition, in the old time people of Lan Na also made golden and silver *saphaos* to be placed in a *chedi* or *stupa*



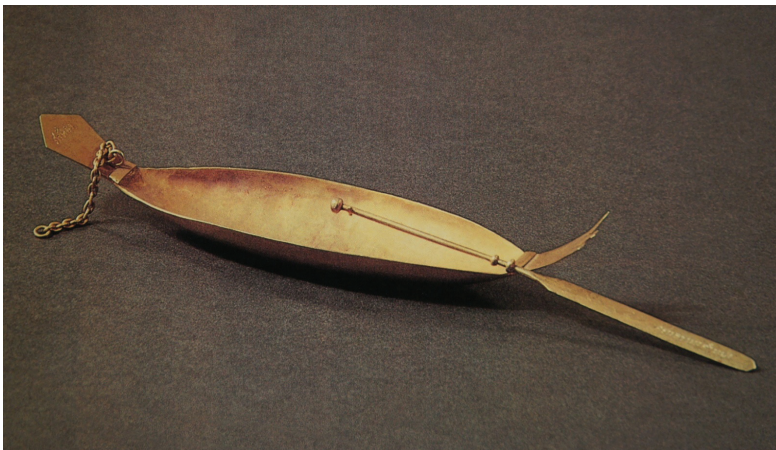
**Figure 17** Model boat in Lan Na ceremony called *poi khao sang* in which all kinds of household utensils and foods are placed. (Srilao's photograph)

as an offering to ensure that when they died, they would be equipped with all those things to allow them to cross the great ocean. This is why one sometimes sees these items in some *chedis* of some golden *saphaos* decorating the *chedis* such as the one at Phra Thāt Haripunchai in Lamphun (Figure 18) and another one dedicated by a former ruler of Chiang Mai at Phra Thāt Chomtong in Chiang Mai (Buppha Ibid: 6705) (Figure 19). Another special feature of Lan Na Buddha image is the Subduing Mara posture with it sitting on a *saphao*-like pedestal (Figure 20), which can be interpreted as crossing the great *Samsāra* to *Nirvāna*.

*Saphao* is also a symbol for the astrology of trading called “*ruaek saphao*” or auspicious moment junk. The study of Sarawut (2544: 108-9) found a similarity of Mon and Lan Na people in this astrology. The transliteration of astrological Mon text of Juan (2537: 128) mentioned a traditional junk astrology text that is similar to Lan Na texts; for example those of Wat Salamor in Ko Kha district,



**Figure 18** Golden *saphao* decking out the Phra Thāt Haripunchai, Lamphun. (Author's photograph)



**Figure 19** A model of golden *saphao* dedicated by former ruler of Chiang Mai at Phra Thāt Chomtong, Chiang Mai. (Encyclopedia of Thai Culture: the Northern)



Figure 20 *Sihing* Buddha image on the *saphao*-like pedestal, Lampang. (Srawut 2544)

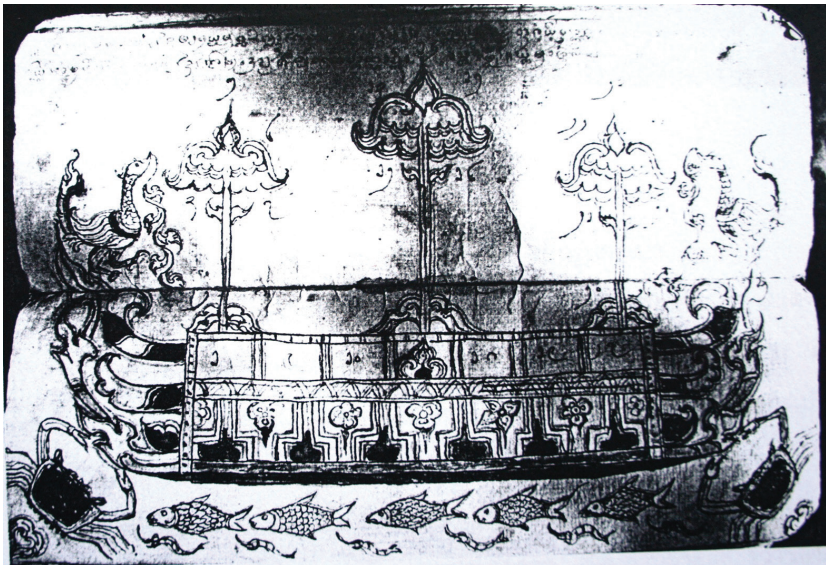
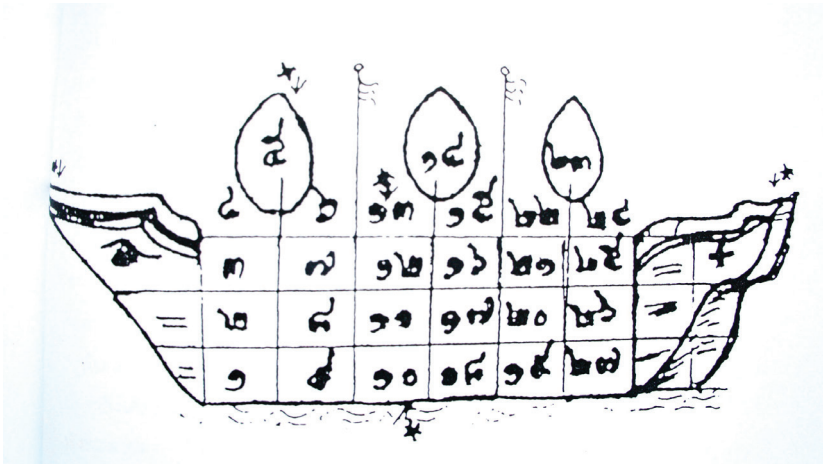


Figure 21 Junk boat-like sketch of *ruaek sapao* or auspicious moment junk, Wat Salamor, Lampang. (Srawut 2544)



**Figure 22** A sketch of *ruaek sapao* of Mon people. (Juan 2537)

Lampang province (Figure 21). The content and calculation of both similar texts talks about auspicious moments calculated from sets of number placed in a junk boat-like sketch (Figure 22). Those whose calculation matches up to the number of the vessel's front part will be propitious and rich the same as with back part. But the latter has to work harder. Those whose calculation matches up to the vessel's lower part will be propitious and rich and accomplished in trading. Those whose calculation matches up to the inside of the vessel will experience obstacles and danger. People who are deciding in their investment frequently depend on this kind of astrology. Nevertheless, the important content difference is that the Lan Na text also says how the obstacles can be overcome.

### **Conclusion**

It seems that Lan Na is far from the coast and has no trading activities related to the sea trade so they seem to lack an understanding about how to use *saphao* or to make a journey by sea. However, they have some traditions and concept related to the *saphao* or *samphao* which is derived from some experiences of some monks from Lan Na who travelled to Sri Lanka like others monks in Southeast Asia.

Together with these experiences they have the Buddhist teaching through the jātakas like Mahājanaka jātaka and other local jākatas based on some folk tales as referred to as Paññāsa jātaka like the jātakas of Suwannasangharaja and Chanthakataka as mentioned.

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