

Structural Function and Symbolic Relationship found in the Local Wisdom of the Katu Tribe, Lao PDR

Pratak Koonthong^a, Preechawut Aphirathing^b, Kittisan Sriruksa^c,
^{a,b,c}Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University Nai-muang
subdistrict, Muang District, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand, Email:
kkk_rockers@hotmail.com, Preechawutap@kku.ac.th, kitisri@kku.ac.th

This article is part of a research work on ‘The Craft Of the Katu Tribe: Symbolic Shapes For The Design Of Contemporary Product’. The aim is to delve into patterns of the local wisdom used in crafts made by the Katu Tribe in Lao PDR. Qualitative research methodology was employed using several research instruments: field survey, observation, and interviews with stakeholders involved in craft making of Katu Tribe. After data collection, the data was analysed using Talcott Parsons (Talcott Parsons, 1949-1951) and Victor Turner (Victor Turner, 1969) theories. Research results reveal that Katu tribe’s crafts are currently created mostly for daily use. They are made out of beliefs and faith. Production processes and certain patterns found in the crafts have been systematically and structurally passed down from one generation to following generations. Accumulated experiences evolve into specialised skills, which are later developed, improved, and changed until certain forms and production techniques are conceived—rendering products that are unified in their use, beauty, and beliefs. Nevertheless, characteristics of each product may differ based on certain roles the craft makers are holding in the time the crafts are invented. The roles of the craft makers during the production process are systematically placed within the social system which relates to the social structure within the tribe. The production process is an invented detailed procedure which is applied systematically during the time the product is produced. The production process is undertaken according to a clear intention of the craft makers and function of the craft itself. These detailed procedures are considered ‘function’ or ‘action’—which is the essence that begets a developed system that later evolved into a social structure within the tribe. This is gradually formed through tribal craftsmanship, which is a phenomenon that is consistent with Talcott Parson's theory on structure and function and Victor Turner’s theory on symbolic relationship. This phenomenon which takes place within the tribe can be explained by

focusing one's aim on the factors affecting decision making within the social context in the community. Another important variable also instils inspiration within the community as well as brings about procedure, which later forms into a social system and characteristics of symbolic relationship of the social process that has been changed over the course of time as a way to find its best fit. All of the above points relate to the existence of the patterns of the local wisdom in producing and creating handicrafts of the Katu Tribe located in Lao PDR.

Key words: *Craft, Local Wisdom, Katu Tribe, Lao PDR.*

Introduction

Lao People's Democratic Republic is abundant with natural resources, religious belief, and invaluable ancient traditions. This is especially true for ethnic groups settling within the country. Lao PDR's government has conducted a survey and categorised these ethnic groups into three groups according to 'ethnology' introduced by 'Lao Front for National Construction' (LFNC). The first group is 'Lao Soong' (Highland Laos – translated). This group lives along the high ridges of the mountains in the Northern part of Laos. For example, E-gor tribe, Moo Ser tribe, Hmong tribe, Maew tribe, etc. The second group is 'Lao Terng' (Central Laos – translated). These tribal groups live on the mountains located in the central and southern part of Lao PDR. For instance, Katu tribe, Ta Oy tribe, La Wae (Bera) tribe, Ta Lieng tribe, etc. The third group is 'Lao Loom' (Lowland Laos) who live in the basin of the Mekong River where most of the population resides. The main occupations are growing cash crops (Ethnic Affairs Department, 2008).

Studies on and the naming of ethnic tribes in Lao PDR received wide interest from 1970 until 2006. Academic groups and Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC) introduced the summary result which is part of the research—using international standard—on the authentic condition of several ethnic groups and revealed that there are 49 ethnic groups in Lao PDR. Among these tribal groups, some can also be divided into many sub-divisional groups. However, based on the languages, the ethnic groups can be separated by the languages they use: Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Chinese-Tibetan, and Hmong-Eiw Mien. This is consistent with the suggestion given by the 'Pratan-kai-sorn Pom-wi-han' saying that these group should not be referred as 3 nations or 3 major tribes—Lao Toom, Lao Terng, Lao Soong, but rather, these groups ought to be called 'Laos' as one nation that composes of several tribal groups. The diversity of ethnic groups plays an important role in developing the country. It is the basis where inequality in economic and social can be remedied. It also enforces unity and equality between tribes and is enhancing harmony within the nation. The narrower the gap of inequality between tribes is, the more equal each tribe pertains to be, as stated in article 8 of Lao PDR's constitution: "*The State pursues the policy of promoting unity and equality among*

all ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have the right to protect, preserve and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation. All acts creating division and discrimination among ethnic groups are prohibited’.

There are 5 districts in Lao PDR, which are Sawannakhet District, Salawan District, Jampasak District, Segong District, and Attabue District. Within each district, the community leads a way of life that intertwines with agriculture and nature. Dialects used are distinct and unique between each tribe. Most worship spirits such as the spirits of their parents or ancestors. Tradition called ‘Kin Heet (Boon Kin Kwai) practiced by the tribes, as well as their taboos (Kalam), costumes, or embroideries are all distinguishable depending on the tribes and where the tribes settle. Nevertheless, they all specialise in craft making which usually relates to daily use objects; for example, delicately-made-weaving and basketry products. Such are the distinct characteristics of the ‘Lao Terng’ ethnic group residing in the highlands on the mountain.

Katu tribal group is one of the ‘Lao Terng’ ethnic groups that migrated and set their roots in Lao PDR for several hundred years now. Their history and origin are quite similar to other tribes that use the Mon-Khmer dialect. A number of academics presume that they migrated from South-Western India and the South of China. It is apparent that there are ethnic groups that still use Mon-Khmer dialect, which are the Moonda Tribe and the Kone Tribe.

Most of Katu tribe members take up Southern Laos—such as Muang Ka Luem, Daak Jeung, and Ta Taeng in Se Kong District, Lao Ngam in Salawan District, Pak Song and Ba Jieng Charoen Sook Natural Park in Jampasak District—as their permanent residence. Moreover, some of other Katu tribes also settled in Vietnam; for example, Guang Nam, Danang, Tueong Tien Hue. There around 17,024 Katu people living in Lao PDR of which 8,653 (0.4 % of the whole population in the country) are females. (2nd Statistical Information on the National Demographic Survey, 1995; Kaewmanee Wong et al, 2005)

Katu tribe are one of the ‘Lao Terng’ groups that lives in the highland over the mountains. Their social livelihood, traditions, and culture has been passing down from their ancestors. The way of life of these people depends on the natural resources, while they produce crafts to use it either as household utilities or sell it to tourists; for example, basketry, woven cloths, carved wooden objects, etc. Within the tribe, there stood a village hall ‘Hau Kwan’, a pillar of faith, where rituals are practiced. In the village, decorations are set up as well as sculptures and carved animal images that were made to resonate with the tribe’s moral concept, belief, faith, the bond towards their ancestors, and their belief in the power of natural surroundings. For this reason, the distinctive concrete characteristics of Katu crafts can be easily noticed. The handicrafts’ design is usually simple with the forms, patterns, colors taking after the pattern they are familiar to and consistent with the function of that particular object. Crafts

are sometimes, therefore, not made out of artistic aesthetics. Yet, it is undeniable that the objects possess sentimental value which can truly express who Katu people are (Nudang, 2015).

Khamluan Sulavan, Thongphet Kingsada and Nancy A. Costello (1996) explained about the tradition and livelihood of ancient Katu that Laos Katu tribe is related to Laos as are other tribes in Laos. It may appeared as a tribe around the same time Laos appeared as a nation. It is also part of the composition of the nation's evolution. Though the Katu population is not considered large, they are counted as Laos citizens. Historical legal documents designated that Katu people are Laos citizen living in the southern part of the country, while at the same time possess their own Heet or traditions and beliefs. Katu is a tribal group that is able to use natural resources in their daily lives whilst recognizing the value of nature. Katu people pass on to the youngsters belief in fortune-telling, astrology, legends about things of the earth and sky, and about influential days or months or years, including daily roles in Katu community.

After field study, the authors found that the production of Katu handicrafts today is mostly basketry products and woven cloths that are meant to be used in daily household. The production process and its features are acquired through accumulated experiences which gradually became a specialised skill. Their proficiency is usually passed on to them by ancestors from generation to generation in a very systematic manner. Such preciseness is then developed and improved until a perfect production process and feature is conceived—a production that is unified in its entirety whether in its function and aesthetic beauty. The products bear their distinctive qualities based on the roles and functions of the people in the tribe. The creation of the produced objects also correlates with tribal beliefs that use symbols through their craft works that are to be used collectively within the tribe.

Aside from the unfolding background of society and cultures from the past until present, the invented handiworks can also explain the roles of local wisdom applied in certain production processes—such role, per se, is systematic and relates to social structure in a society. This is especially true for Katu tribe in Lao PDR where the area is abundant in its location positioned in the highland of 'Bo La Wane' next to Southern Vietnam. Today, the features and creation of cultures through handiwork inventions in truly unique pieces of work still remain, enabling us to learn and study from. For this reason and its significance in the aforementioned, the authors became interested to investigate into the pattern or form of local wisdom used in producing handicrafts of Katu people in Lao PDR. Additionally, it is the authors's intention to see how such roles and duties would affect the social structure of Katu Tribe residing in Lao PDR.

Study Results

Current Conditions of Craft-Making in the Katu Tribe in Lao PDR

Katu, according to the tribe, means a house nestling beside high stream or waterfall (Tad). The word ‘Ka’ means ‘high’, while ‘Tu’ is used to refer to ‘fountainhead’ or ‘the crest of a stream’. Katu tribe today resides and lives most of their lives in the Southern part of Lao PDR.

The tribe is originally from South East Asia in the high plain on the mountain or ‘Bo La Wane’ high plain in Lao PDR. In the past, Katu people were nomads surviving on hunting and collecting wild fruits and vegetables. They didn’t do any farming as they kept on migrating from one mountain to the next. They sometimes engaged in mobile plantation—where they moved according to the condition of their plantation and geographical reason.

From the field survey, it is found that local wisdom in the livelihood of Katu people still deeply intertwines with nature. Their ways of life are simple. They worship spirits of ancestors, which later developed into a belief in supernatural power. Belief in spirits is a kind of faith which had been developed since the ancient era. It is the faith that evolved based on the changes of social structure and condition. Spirit houses are built to be the sanctuaries of the spirits they worship so that spirits would bestow blessings and protect the house owners as well as their communities. In building community and residence of Katu tribe, since Katu people would do activities collectively, it is necessary for them to construct a place where they can join together for such activities—this is called the town hall, and town halls are essential to the communities. The shape and form of the building are larger than regular houses and it’s usually decorated with colors and patterns that match with their faith such as the beliefs in spirits or ghosts, animals, houses, and their respect towards nature. Town halls are constructed in a rectangle shape with a tall open-spaced cellar on the ground floor. A thick roof made from leaves make the house durable to the weather condition. Each stilt is placed on a pile of rocks on the ground (not buried under the ground) and carved into shapes of people and animals. Inside, the house is adorned with animal and human figures, while floors are made out of wood. Outside, patterns in blue, white, and yellow triangles are drawn on the building’s rim. The reason why Katu decorated the town hall with animal and human figures is that man and animal have over time been bonded, whether the animals are raised as pets or hunted as prey for food. Whether or not it’s a mighty or mysterious animal, they all have some special meaning to the lives of Katu people.

The ways Katu people lead their lives highly depends on traditions which are usually based on their beliefs and moral precepts passed on from generation to generation through traditions and practiced rituals used in worshipping sacred subjects. Such sacred things surrounding the

place are recognized as either good or evil spirits. The good spirits will protect and sustain people, while the evil ones would cast curses on the community should bad behavior or actions take place. If the sacred subjects are worshipped or presented with offerings, those spirits would protect and cast out or alleviate evils things from happening. In the same light, as for the evil spirits, if a ritual is held to worship these sacred subjects, it is believed that bad things can also turn into good things. Therefore, each year, Kuta people would hold several rituals—both small and large since it is believed that this would bring peace and increase crops in the community. Tradition, belief, and culture held and practiced by Katu people are similar to that of the Mon-Khmer spoken tribes. This is especially true in the aspect of their belief in spirits or in Katu language as in ‘Yang’ and ‘Be-ra’, which can be in many forms as seen in their daily lives. There are both up and downsides regarding the faith held by Katu people; still, it’s the faith they’ve been holding on to from the past until today.

Structure, Duty, and Symbolic Relationship in the Local Wisdom of the Katu Tribe in Lao PDR

The form of local wisdom found in handicrafts made by Katu people that is essential to their daily household is basketry. Katu use locally available materials in the production process. Most of the basketry products are of male users. The shapes of the basketry products are categorized based on mainly the product’s function, and the size of the products vary from big-sized products to small ones depending on the purpose. The main materials used are bamboos and rattans, and the patterns of the products are designed based on the maker’s inspiration. Each craftsman has a unique way of expressing themselves through the shape and features of the product, which begins with the material selection and technique chosen based on the artist’s skill. One of the techniques used is the method that is meant to preserve bamboo or rattan by curing the bamboo or rattan with smoke to prevent the wood from being eaten by bugs as well as to strengthen it and to make the surface of the basketry products shiny. Another role of Katu’s basketry products is in their use during tribal rituals by conveying meaning of communication through basketry products. Forms and features of the products enable the persons partaking in the rituals to know whether particular families are suffering from illness or are celebrating something. Therefore, it can be said that handicraft works play an essential role in the livelihood of Katu tribe.

The shapes and patterns of the basketry products are the fruit of knowledge passed down from their ancestors while some are inspired by their creativity from the surrounding environment. For example, the pattern of a python which appears in their products is influenced by their belief in mysterious supernatural powers. For the Katu tribe, they perceive snakes as reptiles that reside both on land and in the water. Some of the snakes have poisonous venom which cannot be cured if one is bitten. For this reason, designs appear as decoration on the basketry products depicting and mimicking snakes’ scales, and in a sense are

used as warning or reminder and in some cases to cast out evil things while the Katu are collecting wild vegetables and fruit in the forest. Such is the local wisdom which has been accumulated since the past until present.

As for local wisdom found in weaving crafts or tribal costumes, Katu members who are females would engage in weaving activities every day in their free time or during the night after their days in the farms or after they finish all other activities. Katu women in Ban Don Han would take their time in sewing during the day in their pastime. It is noticeable that women in each house would use their own weaving machine or 'Kee Aew' that they made themselves to weave products they specialise in. For girls who just started to use 'Kee Aew', the weaving machine would be the small one. And once they grow up, they would begin to use a much larger weaving machine.

Identities in fabric weaving or 'Taam Hook' and creating a pattern all uses materials which are the products of Katu's local wisdom; for example, seasonally grown cotton which is made into threads and dyed with colors from natural products into whichever color they like. Charmeuse fabric woven by Katu tribe comes in any colour and size—short, long, small, large, wide, narrow—as the makers wish. For instance, 'Song charmeuse', 'Biang charmeuse', charmeuse used as hair rubber bands, blankets, headbands, waistbands, and charmeuse used as decorations to adorn themselves naturally. Charmeuse fabric in the aforementioned is sometimes called 'Gando fabric' in the language used by Katu people who live in 'Ban Huay Hoon' in Lao Ngam City, Salawan District. Villagers in Ban Huay Hoon inherited the local charmeuse weaving technique from their grandparents until the technique became the model for Katu people on how to weave charmeuse or 'Gando' fabric. For this, people in the tribe are able to work and acquire extra income for the village from weaving charmeuse. The fabrics, which are made into a variety of colors, have unique characteristics that one can easily identify with Katu tribe. Though charmeuses are also made by many other groups in different locations, none share the exact same qualities of charmeuse made by the Katu people in Huay Hoon. The used colors are from natural materials, while the fabrics are embroidered with pearls to brighten up the 'Gando' fabric. Charmeuse for sale are made in colors such as purple, light yellow, and green, which are the symbolic colors of the Katu people from Ban Huay Hoon, Lao Ngam City, Salawan District. The fabrics are also decorated with white beads—another distinct trait that one can clearly tell from that it is made by people of the Katu tribe.

In regard to male apparel, the tribe has its own traditional costumes. In the past, males usually wore a loincloth or 'Chang Kben'¹ covering the lower part of the body from the thighs to a man's waist (or Ka Tiew). Katu's loincloth or 'Katiew' are around 50 centimeters wide and 4

¹ 'Chang Kben' is worn as shorts or pants by wrapping it around the waist, stretching it away from the body, twisting the ends together then pulling the twisted fabric between the legs and tucking it in the back of the waist.

meters long. The reason why the cloth is so long is that the loincloth must be wrapped around the lower body. 'Tiew' or loincloths are men's wear; its unique qualification is that it is made from cotton dyed with red color alternated with a metallic color which will then be woven using detailed patterns.

In regard of female apparel, Katu women would wear short-sleeve shirts and women sarong or 'Pa Toong' in horizontal stripes. Sarong is normally worn in black, red, green, yellow strips and typically made from cotton which is woven by people in the community. Nevertheless, the fabric of which designs are in geometric patterns or flowers are mostly used as headbands which are sometimes decorated with some feathers or fur.

Clothes for special occasions are worn during an annual religious ceremony or 'Boon Jae Nong' as called by the tribe. The attire of the men during this time would mimic the tribe's ancient armor worn for battle. During the ceremony, there will also be dances, for instance the 'Kent Dance', 'Tow Dance', and 'Ngao Dance'. Together with the costumes, they would hold swords and shield, while singing, celebrating and dancing along the rhythm of 'gong²', these dances are the traditional dances of Katu tribe. This distinctive quality found in their performance is what usually draws interests from tourists, though the performance is originally meant to be the ritual held to worship their ancestors. Every year, there will be exchanges of culture—performance displaying the worshipping of the tribal ancestors—among Katu people from Ka Leum City and Dak City. The location where the performance will be held depends on opportunities as well as the suitability of time and place in the city where the performance is to be held.

In respect to wood carving handiwork of Katu Tribe in Ban Kandon, Ta Taeng City and the Se Gong District, this kind of artwork holds exquisite elements which are made by using the traditional tribal equipment in use since the ancient time; or as the tribe calls it 'Kwad Mai'. The beauty and delicacy appearing in these artistic works are symbols the tribe put their attention into making to decorate their religious shrine or church—'Hor Gwan' (the ghost hall). At the same time, through its roles and its correlated symbols, the artwork is also considered a kind of reminder to Katu tribe members to have respectful and good thoughts, live a moral life, be diligent, and not take advantage of each other. Another role of wooden carved handiworks is that they are made to pay respect to the death of the tribal people, where one would carve his/her own coffin. This action is based on the thought that burdens should not be weighed upon the host who holds the funeral once the person is dead, and therefore, each of them would build their own coffins with the design that can be inspired either from the artistic sense or from one's belief or faith.

² A gong is an East and Southeast Asian musical percussion instrument that takes the form of a flat, circular metal disc which is hit with a mallet.

From the said collected data, considering the production process of Katu tribe's craftwork through the precept of Talcott Parson's theory, it is evident that the forms of local wisdom the tribe invented are the actions—which correlate with individuals, society, and community—that depend on 5 variables or factors:

Relationship between 'users' and 'actors': from observation, it can be clearly seen that roles of the form of local wisdom take place between parties: actors or creators and receivers or users. Since both parties live in the same social setting, the actions that occur during the production process can, sometimes, be flexible as actions from both parties have to depend on each other; and is quite similar to relationships seen within family or kinship. The action is considered as a collective action within society. Aside from relationships within family, such roles also affect a wide range of people within the community. For example, preparation of 'Kin Kwai' festival, or merit-making 'Boon Ban' that is to be held annually which requires all kinds of handicrafts—such as basketry products made from rattan or bamboos that are used numerous during the festival. At times, one festival would require a lot of invested money and labour from many families; for instance, in the preparing of food for guests. Sometimes, preparing food also required basketry products used during the cooking process, such as baskets used in cooking sticky rice or other basketry utilities in making soups. Such is the relationship between people in the community that calls for labour from each family to help operate the festival in a very systematic manner.

Goals: Every person in the community is bound to take part in the production process of handicrafts. They all share the same goal that is to be the producers of handicraft products as their main occupations, whether it is the work is that of textile, basketry, or producing other hand-made products for their own daily survival. The making of handicrafts has intertwined even more deeply in the livelihood of Katu people than it was in the past where craft-making used to be only sideline jobs while most people farmed as their main occupation. As in the aforementioned, the goal in craft making is the tribe's most desired needs within its social structure. The objective of the said goal is to elevate one's life condition by earning income from the products made by using their local wisdom accumulated from the past and is to bring about life betterment and better acceptance from society.

Means: Local wisdom found in the production processes of any handicrafts consists of the same means, whether the actors are females or males. That is to say that women are responsible in textile while males are to create basketry products, build houses, collect wild vegetables and fruits, and hunt animals for food. Such means are signified as one's duty—a sub-element of the social structure—which will be defined by sex orientation of the users.

Situational Conditions: The definition of duties between males and females is a situation where both parties came to a mutual agreement—an action where compromising or privilege

exception are not allowed. The reason is because such is considered a set of rules which have been practiced long before by their ancestors and is a situational condition which occurred and continues to be so. This can be counted as ‘Chains Operatories’ of which existence is still apparent within the social structure.

Designation of Standardisation (such as norms, value, etc.): The designation of standardisation was done by free will and through a mutual consent among people in the tribe. All tribe members share the same mutual recognition. Therefore, most created handicrafts are considered priceless with respect to the history of the community, the tribe’s local wisdom, as well as the faith held by the tribe. Such are regarded as essential factors in the existence of the social structure.

From the 5 factors mentioned above, conditions which can convey the chosen decisions of the social action found in Katu tribe are consistent with Talcott Parsons’ theory, in that before a system can evolve into a structure, 5 factors need to be taken into consideration sequentially as in the following.

Actors with Different Backgrounds Entering a Social Relationship - This means that each individual in the community can adapt oneself to be able to work together in the creation and production process of different craftworks.

Polished Actions of the Actors – These are the results of needs and desires which has been responded to through the acceptance towards social-cultural customs. This refers to the way how production processes and local wisdom used in the creation of handicrafts have been passed on to later generations within Katu tribe.

Reciprocal Actions - For example, roles, negotiation, and exchange would gradually turn into social foundation once actions of the actors are polished through their adaptation towards one another. In this regard, it is referred to the allocation of tasks in producing craftworks within the tribe.

Norm – Norms became a set of rules which direct actors how to adapt towards one another, while at the same time are slowly molded into the culture. In this case, it can be referred to the production process of the handicrafts which poses effects on the tribe’s culture. For instance, during the tribe’s annual religious festival, every household in the tribe would celebrate and enjoy themselves within the family and their surroundings. None would be allowed to talk negatively. Such has been practiced by the tribe until it is slowly molded into a distinct culture of the tribe.

Regulated Actions – In the end, norms will eventually regulate the reciprocal actions between actors in the tribe to create stability within the society. That is to say, it is because of such norms that the Katu Tribe still prevail today.

From the mentioned factors and 5 principles above, the phenomenon regarding the social structural traits and systematic function as well as social condition of Katu tribe in Lao PDR can be explained. The said structure and duty have long been inherited from their ancestors; it is what they received and has been passing on for many years that it became the major livelihood of the community. The tribe therefore possesses its distinctiveness and is different from other communities scattered around Lao PDR.

Discussion and Data Analysis

Social structure and symbolic relationships originate from duties held by people in the community, especially from the forms and local wisdom used in the creation of handicrafts. They are like sub-systems within the overall social or communal structure. Such functions or sub-systems are always dynamic. The sub-systems consist of both small and large units. An example of a small-unit is task allocation in producing craftworks—while women are doing textile, males would be responsible for creating basketry products. However, a large unit can be referred to reciprocal actions which are later evolved into institutes, systems, and eventually social systems that can be in any size. Talcott Parsons believes that in studying social structure, one needs to investigate into sub-systems which together form into social structure. The reason is that systematic formation of all these components can reflect the overall picture of a society. By doing so, one would be able to define a clear structure and explain the origin or background of that society (Talcott Parsons, 1937) by looking at phenomena through the lens of structural function theory. Through the said procedure, one may explain forms of local wisdom whether it occurs between actors or creators of handicrafts and receivers or users, or that both duties are held by the same individual in the society. Therefore, the reciprocal actions in handicraft production can sometimes be flexible since people are relying on one another for support as can be seen in kinship relationship and common practice within the society. The designation of such standard is done on free will and mutual agreement within the people in the tribe; it can be said that all members in the community share the same recognition. Most forms of craftworks are counted as valuable in terms the community's history, tribal local wisdom, as well as faiths held by the people. Such are important to the existence social structure, which is consistent with Talcott Parsons' functional structure theory (1949-1951) as cited in (Srisantisuk, 2009). Parsons believes that a society is a system that consists of parts that relate to each other and support one another. A consistent relationship of each part is the factor that can render 'equilibrium' within a social structure. In regard to social change, as Parsons proposed, it occurs from the destruction of 'equilibrium' which happens from the fraction found in the components of a society—

personality, organism, and culture. The cause may be factors from outside of the social system, such as encroachment of cultures, or internal factors, such as ‘strain’. The strain can be caused by incohesive operation of some or many units within the structure; for example, population change, technological change, etc. If one unit is changed, all other units will change as well. Such transformation can happen to some or all the units in the system.

Parsons also emphasized on the importance of culture, including belief or faith, norm, and value held by society. Within the social system, there is an important procedure that mobilizes the social system in a very systematic manner; or as Parsons calls it ‘institutionalisation’. ‘Institutionalisation’ means that individuals hold specific roles because of social norms. This shows that value, belief, and culture has consistently being absorbed into an individual’s personality system for a long period of time. Things that have been practiced by an individual in accord to his/her status and roles in the social system needs to be abided by value or concept and beliefs which hold people in the society together.

Nevertheless, Victor Turner (Victor Turner,1969) discloses his concept that social system composes of structure and activities. By this, social structure is a model or a custom that can last for a long time. Within it are people bonded by interactive relationships between human and human, or between human and their surroundings. Relationships between man to man compose of both acceptances and conflicts. But with a right systematic management, severity of conflicts can be alleviated to the point that people can still live together. Turner explained that actions between individuals stemmed from symbols. In that they interact with each other by using symbols. For this reason, humans don’t need to rely on instinct which can be expressed through their behaviours for one’s own subsistence. Humans, therefore, create a symbolic system and have to live in the ‘world of meaning’. This means that they need to interpret things which trigger their arousal and respond to it accordingly. However, development of ‘consciousness of self’ is also important in humans since it is the foundation of thoughts, action, and creation of a society. Those who do not know ‘oneself’ would not be able to respond and interact with others if a communication—which uses symbols and collective interpretation—is left out of the picture. If such is the case, social mobilisation would not have occurred. Therefore, humans are living in ‘the world of meaning’, which is important to the lives and the foundation of human interaction. Expressions through actions or interaction must be transmitted using a form of procedure that can be understood by all for them to grasp the meaning of certain situations. That way, they can evaluate, match a situation with meanings, and come to a decision with available response.

Therefore, symbolic relationship is a thing which can also connect to forms of design in handicraft made by Katu people. The reason is because handicraft making are reciprocal actions that render social order. Textile, basketry making, and wooden carving of Katu Tribe are parts of symbols which can be referred to activities within the society. They are symbols

which express meanings of situations through long traditional practices that eventually became a symbolic relationship in the society. All of the said reasons are originated from personalities, condition of the social structure, customs and tradition, percepts and beliefs, as well as social and economic conditions. All of which are abstract before being conveyed into a more concrete form according to the tribe's belief and practices, their understanding between craftworks and relationships of the past and present generations, whose relations are connected and inseparable.

From the said concepts of both sociologists, it can be found that both of them place much importance on the study that delves into the components of functional structure theory. While Parsons focuses on duty or action, Turner emphasizes on symbolic relationship or symbolic system. However, both of them do accepted that the theory must be composed of both components which gives each other supports. This is consistent with (Srisantisuk, 2009). who wrote in a social and cultural study textbook which backs Parsons' concept. The book stated that whether it's a social system or a social structure, such can only happen on 2 main conditions. The first condition is that the actors must be driven to do according to one's status and roles. The second condition, however, the social system needs to avoid conflicts or behaviors diverting from the society as a whole. The main variables which instill inspiration in making craftworks are as following:

1. Variable related to feeling of bonded or unbonded relationships: For examples, social system within kinship tends to possess more feelings or desire to transmit their local wisdom or body of knowledge to others. In contrast, in a social system whose members are not relatives, the relationship they have wouldn't possess the same feelings as people who are relatives do.
2. Variables related to specified (Specificity) or unspecified/diffused (Diffuseness) relationships: For example, relationship in a system whose members are not relatives will be in a specified relationship. However, for relationship found among kinship will be in a relationship with unspecified boundary, since relationship includes everything within the society.
3. Variables related to social unit with 'universal' (Universalism) or 'particular' (Particularism) actors: For example, typically, in the production or creation of handicraft, its form can be made into any design. However, most will be made with traditional style inherited from their ancestors. Such design is well-known among its people. In such case, the creation of the craftwork is considered universal. In the opposite, for a particularistic actor, handicrafts may be custom-made ones.
4. Variables concerning relations with 'inborn quality', 'inherited quality' or 'ascription': Examples of inherited quality are one's nationality, age, or sex, while ascription means actions which is a result of one's ability or certain actions, such as an act of passing on knowledge or local wisdom in making crafts from the ancestors.

5. Variables concerning ‘self-orientation’ or ‘collectivity orientation’: Such variables are most apparent in the actors. The actors may be respectable figures either in a small unit like family or in a bigger unit like community.

Aside from variables which depicts on interactive actions happened between members of the society, those actions are the main components of process which made up social system. The said processes are as follow.

Communication Process is used in the production process of handicraft. It is an important means in reciprocal actions.

Maintaining of Social Boundaries Process is the control used in keeping balance within the society. This can be seen when resources are used, such as resources from the forest and surrounding nature which needs to be shared.

Cultural, Social, and Personality-Related Processes are systems which provide each other supports, since the community share the same set of thought and skills used in producing handicrafts.

Social Controlling Process is used to prevent members of the community from violating its social norms. It is a mutual agreement which are based on one’s freewill. For example, utilization of resources or designation of holidays where people would have a break from producing handicrafts.

Social Polishing Process is a way members of a society used to convey their intentions to later generations. This can clearly be seen when local wisdom regarding handicraft production has been passing on from one to the next generations.

Social Transition Process happens when individuals accept value, belief, and are being grateful in personalities of the people partaking in the tribe’s handicraft production. This has later led to consistent consolidation of personality and cultural unit for a long period of time, until it eventually changed its status into institution of the community.

The said processes, however, need to be done voluntarily. It also ought to possess value and belief which would lead to a common goal. Each situation will be the indicator how actors would behave. Roles and status of people which are actions done reciprocally and consistently. And later evolved into systems and social mobilisation that will be improved and changed to find its best fit, and possessing of the following qualities:

1. Social system are composed from relationships exist between different parts. For example, relationship of people in the family that produces craftworks. The interactive relationship

within the family which produces crafts, including relationship between the community and governmental units that provide supports and promotion occur consistently for a long time that it later formed into a system.

2. Social system tends to keep its social boundaries to prevent invasion or destruction brought by other systems. Such can be seen in an attempt in preserving and transmitting production process of craftworks through development and improvement of the tribe's local wisdom to strengthen tribal community, especially in craft making, which is the founded principle of the society. Should there be any change in part(s) of the system in handicraft production process, such as government's technological development—the tribal people did not refuse completely. People, on the other hand, accepted those they have been given and experiment it with their already existing local wisdom so as to survive or make some improvement.

4. Each system in the communities that produce handicraft is bound to maintain social balance. Should the community cannot sustain the system, its impact would affect social balance, which could lead the existing society to dissolve and become parts of other systems, or it may lead to changes in the system. However, the said phenomenon may be difficult to happen in a strong-craft-producing community in Lao PDR.

From the collected data, it can be summarized that Structural Function Theory (Talcott Parsons, 1949-1951) and Symbolic Relationship Theory (Victor Turner, 1969) presume that within a society are units or sub-systems which are a result of an action done by the actors' inspirations that drive him/her to act according to his/her status and roles in the social system. The social system then later formed and functions systematically. For a system to be developed into a structure, one needs to take into consideration key principles of the actions which are expressed through symbols so that the society can achieve its goal in being a desirable community. Local wisdom or traditional craft production process of the tribe relates to task allocation within a family in producing craftworks, which is a systematic sub-procedure. Since the allocation of tasks is done clearly, such sub-procedure/ duty/ action is the key that can help a system to be developed into a social structure in a society. Functional Structure Theory and Symbolic Relationship Theory can help explain such phenomenon which occur in a society based on the concept introduced by Parsons by focusing on 5 factors as in the aforementioned: 1) relationship between actors, 2) goals, 3) chosen action, 4) a situation in which actors act with a chosen action, and 5) determinant of norm. Such theories can continue to be adapted and applied in the craft production of the Katu tribe residing in Lao PDR.

Conclusion

Craftworks of Katu tribe have been produced since in the ancient era until today. Its feature, colours, patterns, and legend all reflect tribe's distinctive culture. Such craftworks have been



used and are very popular among the society, as can be seen through its importance and aesthetic beauty as well as its utility.

Katu tribe is a tribe which produces handiworks that is similar to other tribal groups using Mon-Khmer language in Lao PDR. Elements in the craft production process came from the traditional local wisdom and distinguish the body of knowledge. With such knowledge, they are able to make craft as their main occupations in earning income for their households. A traditional craftwork production process is carried out dynamically to respond to the use of the tribe's members or tourists' visits. One thing which points to their local wisdom and experience of the craft makers is pattern of their production process. Roles of people in the production process of handicraft would have systematic duties which relates to the social structure. Craft production processes in each family and their relatives are considered systematic sub-processes since there are clear allocations of tasks. The sub-processes then have helped the systems developed into the tribe's social structure. From the past until present, the handicraft production process still endures and is being carried out even in the time of the tribe's adaption in their livelihood, concepts, culture according to the social context at the time. Such needs cooperation from the people in the society, starting from the smallest unit from families to extended relationship in the bigger society that is the tribe.

Therefore, the study on forms of local wisdom used in the handicraft production process of the Katu Tribe in Lao PDR in its current condition where they still use traditional production process is important for the researcher to understand an evolvement of the production and identity of the Katu Tribe expressed through the craftwork. All of the above could be explained and gives some pride to people in the Katu Tribe of Lao PDR within the changing world in the present.



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List of Interviewees

- Katu Tribe, Ban Gan Don, Ta Taeng City, Salawan District: Mr. Wipad Saeng-manee, Mr. Vena Moon-jai-kaew
- Katu Tribe, Ban Huay Hoon, Lao Ngam City, Salawan District: Mrs. Sornsai Konkanang, Mr. Bong Pisidsai
- Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Salawan District: Somchai Oonjit
- Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Segong District: Sompon Sisalak
- Department of Picture Display and Artifacts, Segong District: Kamuk Saeng-salanyu