



# Analysis of the Wrapping Culture of Ethnic Groups in Lopburi Province : A Case Study of Art Identity and Underlying Meaning

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## Abstract

The province of Lopburi has prehistorically been inhabited with civilization through the eras of Dhavaravadee, Lopburi, Ayutthaya, Rattanakosin up to present. Because of various migrations from wars, economy and politics, Lopburi have had many various cultures and traditions from different traits. The influential ethnic groups were Thai Phuan and Chinese.

This research aims to study wrapping culture of each influential ethnic group. Analyze art identity, and beauty of each ethnic group in Lopburi province. The research is conducted by monitoring the way of life, traditions, ceremonies, beliefs, wisdom and contextual changes of the social life of these ethnic groups. Two ethnic groups in Lopburi Province were observed : Thai Phuan group and the Chinese group were samples in this study.

The study has found that (1) every ethnic group in this study has its own art identity of wrapping culture and the Chinese group has most identity of art, (2) some wrapping culture has been lost from their way of life due to social, economic and politic changes, (3) some groups have preserved their wrapping cultures basically intact, i.e. the styles and materials used have not changed, (4) some wrapping cultures have deeper implied meanings such as those of the Kao Tom Mud's, Manuscripts' etc. (5) the art and beauty of wrapping depends on the shapes, materials, and forms, (6) the wrapping culture of every group is firmly involved with the way of life, traditions, ceremonies, and beliefs of that particular group. (7) Currently the wrapping tends to serve commercial purposes rather than a practical or traditional one. These observed groups develop their packaging with modern materials such as plastic, foam, and paper instead of using natural materials.

According to this analysis, the arts and beauty of wrapping is found more in geometric shapes than free styles. The beauty ratio comes from beliefs and theories of Thai golden section that may

have derived from the royal influences. At present, the wrapping form has been used in postmodern art in the sign social contracts such as wrapping the democracy monument and pagodas.

**Keywords :** Wrapping culture, Ethnic Groups, Art Identity, Implied Meanings

**Analysis of Lam Phuan Ethic Group’s Wrapping Culture**

In Lopburi Province, there is Lam Phuan group settling down in Amphur Bhan Mi (Bhan Mi District) and Amphur Kok Samrong. (Kok Samrong District). The people of Lam Phuan group living in Amphur Bhan Mi share similarity in their culture, with slight difference in detail.

There are two aspects considered as follows;

**1. Lam Phaun’s Wrapping Culture:** The way of life and wrapping culture of Lao Phaun ethnic group is, for example, wrapping foods in daily life, wrapping for offerings foods to agricultural spirit like Phe Ta Hak (farm ghost) that is the first time to run a rice farm of the year. Phaun people commonly wrap foods with easy-to-find local materials such as banana leaf as the main material used. They will not meticulously wrap things but only wrap for the preventive purpose. Cloth is occasionally used for wrapping such as for wrapping the newborn baby, or the scripture. Later, paper and plastic are other kinds of material used in wrapping culture.

**2. Art identity and Beauty:** Natural material like banana leaves is popular in the wrapping culture of Phuan people such as to use it, for instance, to wrap rice, pickled pork sausage, and Pla Somfak (sour fish and fermented rice) which is Phaun’s unique recipe. Despite having a small variety of wrapping material, Lao Phaun is the first name that pops up into the minds of Lopburi people when hearing of Pla Somfak. The beauty value of this wrapping culture can be claimed as the real simple local art of the villagers derived from the real daily life usage.

**Wrapping patterns found can be categorized as follows;**

**1. Pattern 1: Fold and bind with bamboo strips, robes, rubber, or pin with wood stick** such as wrapping Pla Somfak (preserved spicy, garlic fish), Khoatom Mat (bananas with sticky rice), rice, dessert and steamed fish with curry paste.



**2. Pattern 2: Wrap by roll** such as wrapping sweet corn with corn husk. The beauty value comes from the different materials used.



**3. Pattern 3: Roll and bind in the cloth itself** such as wrapping the newborn child.



**3. Underlying Meaning of Lam Phuan's Wrapping Culture:** Phaun people have a great tradition known as Bhun Praves Tes Mahachat (Mahachat Sermon) and there is also a tradition that the villagers will make Khaotom Mat to offer to monks and also give to the guests. This Khaotom Mat metaphorically conveys the solidarity of the community. Every year, villagers will visit and give these gifts to one another and also get them in return. For this reason, Khaotom Mat becomes the perfect symbol in bringing close relationship to villagers.

### **Analysis of Chinese Group's Wrapping Culture**

In the past, a great number of Chinese people moved to Lopburi Province for a living. Talad Nhongtao (Nhongtao Market) was one of the places to see Chinese people earn for living.

Wrapping culture found in this market is somehow various according to the former selling occupation taken up by Chinese people.

There are two aspects considered as follows;

#### **1. Chinese Group's Wrapping Culture.**

Chinese people have a unique culture which is different from other ethnic groups, for instance, spoken language, dressing, culture and tradition. Chinese ethnic group's wrapping culture is somewhat related to commercial issue. There are two pharmacies in Nhongtao Market. Medicines will be packed in brown paper and wrapped with rope. The other places like butcher's and greengrocer's shop will wrap things with banana leaf or lotus leaf and bound with string made with banana tree. Chinese's wrapping style has a specific pattern of wrapping according to the shape and characteristic of the material such as pyramid-shaped dumpling. Pyramid-shaped dumpling (Ba Chang) would be wrapped with bamboo leaf imported from China which is somehow larger than Thai's and then bound with rope. Stuffed dough pyramid dessert (Khanom Tian) will be wrapped with fresh banana leaf while Khanom Keng (Chinese pastry in the shape of the basket) would be wrapped with dried banana leaf. Steamed sticky rice in syrup (Khaotom Namvoon) will be wrapped with bamboo leaf or banana leaf whereas Chinese herbal medicines in white cloth. These are the unchanging and unique patterns and materials used in the wrapping culture of Chinese people for a long time.

**2. Art Identity and Beauty.** Chinese's unique wrapping culture is numerous such as wrapping Khanom Tian, Khanom Keng, Ba Chang, Khaotom Ba Chang and Chinese herbal medicines. Chinese people place the importance on shape and material used in wrapping. The influential

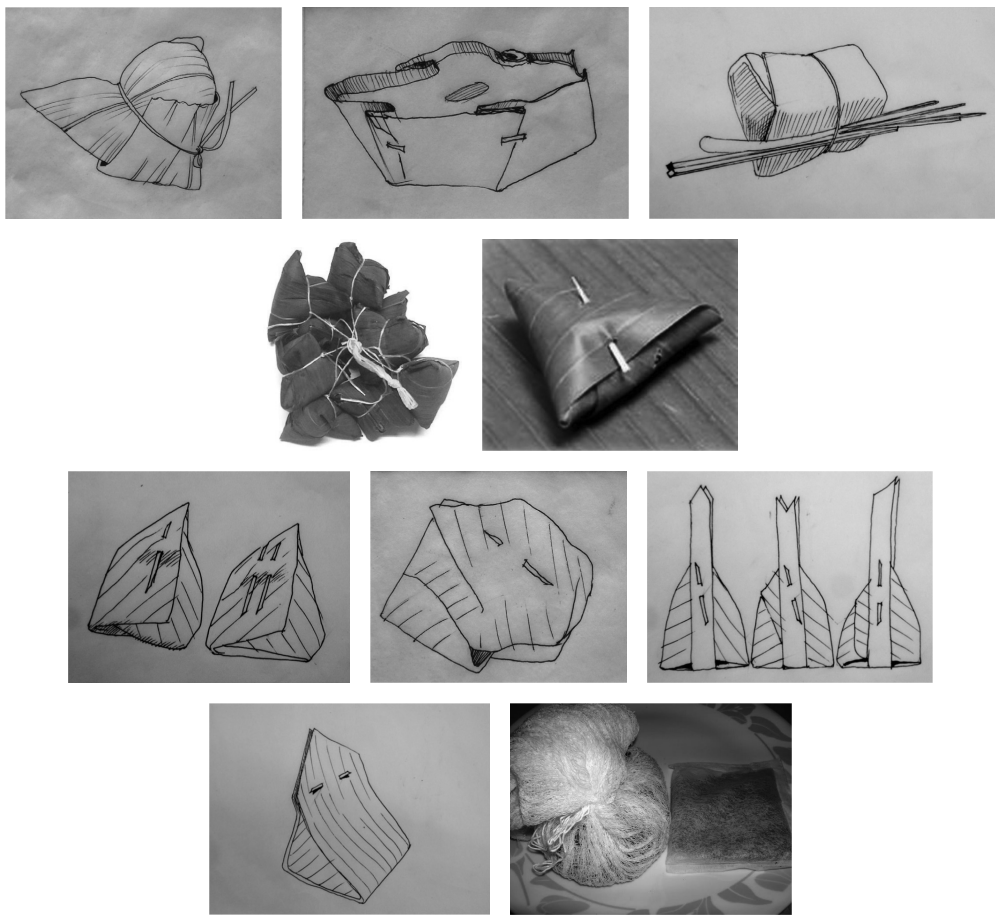
material from Mainland China which has never changed is Ba Chang and Khaotom Ba Chang wrapped by bamboo leaf. Bamboo leaf is concerned as the symbol of China. Many things are made of bamboo. Watercolor painting may consist of bamboo, mountain, Chinese music instruments like bamboo recorder, bamboo chopsticks and bamboo paintbrush. Thus, Chinese people bring bamboo leaf to wrap foods. Even though they immigrate to the other place for the commercial reason, they still use the original material, bamboo leaf. Another unique wrapping culture is Chinese herbal medicines wrapping paper. Paper bound with rope may remind us of those Chinese herbal medicines' package. If you have ever watched Chinese period movies, Chinese people may travel by horse or on foot

and bring those herbal medicines together with them. This is the real image of Chinese people.

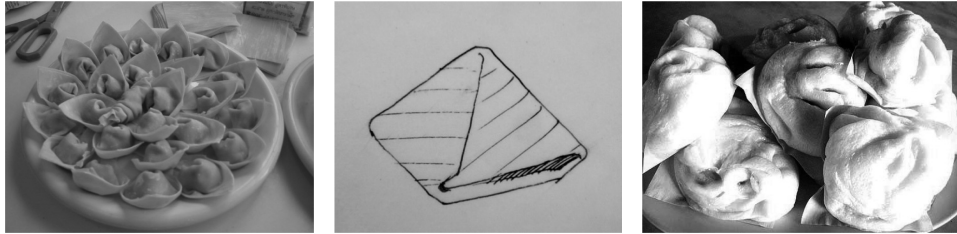
The beauty of Chinese wrapping culture comes from the unique triangular shape like in Khanom Tian, Ba Chan, Khaotom Namvoon. It is undeniably that it will immediately remind us of Chinese wrapping style once we take a look at them.

**Wrapping patterns found can be categorized as follows;**

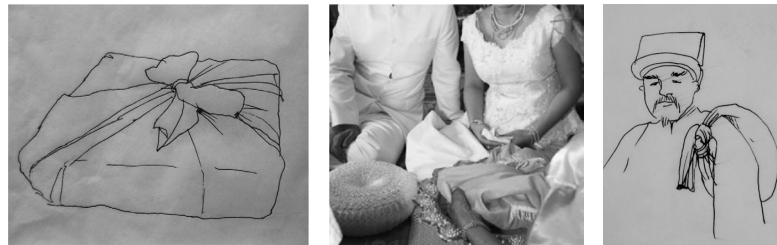
1. **Pattern 1: Fold and bind with bamboo strips, robes, rubber, or pin with wood stick** such as wrapping Ba Chang, Chinese herbal medicines, Khaotom Namvoon, dried noodle, Khanom Keng, steamed fish with curry paste and steamed Chinese herbal recipe.



**2. Pattern 2: Wrap and roll** such as wrapping Kanom Tian, dumpling, steamed bun. The beauty value comes from the pyramid, round, and oval shape. This is the unique characteristic of Chinese wrapping culture.

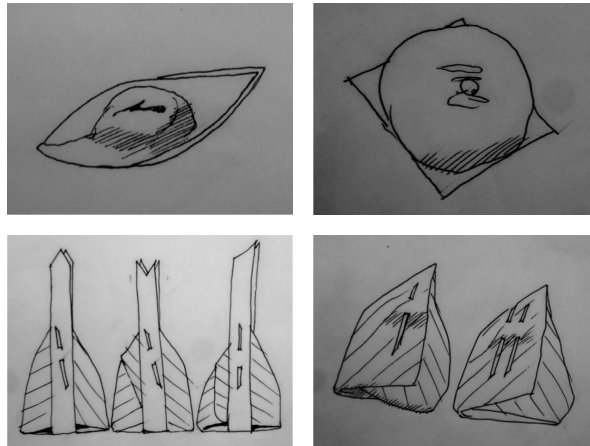


**3. Pattern 3: Roll and bind in the cloth itself** such as wrapping the dowry, things, or making a bag to carry on the shoulder in the square or round shape.



**3. Underlying Meaning of Chinese Group's Wrapping Culture:** Chinese people will give the meaning to each item used in the rituals. They place importance on the red color as the color of good luck and also focuses things which indicate auspicious meanings, say, things that prolong life, create fruitful descendant, smooth business, things that bring powerful luck and so on. These underlying meanings are hidden with foods including Salapao wrapping (steamed bun). The word, 'Pao' means 'to wrap.' Thus, they use Salapao as the offering to mean 'wrap a good luck and money for the descendant.' The hidden meaning of wrapping dumpling is that to have prosperous money. Chinese people wrap dumpling

in order to make it look like gold. Chinese people in the present have also made Thai dessert. Therefore, they put some hidden meanings to them also. To illustrate, in wrapping sticky rice and egg custard, if there is white sticky rice inside, they will pin it with one toothpick, but pin it with two toothpicks if it is black sticky rice. If there is Khanom Saisai inside, they will make that toothpick a diagonal tip to demonstrate the sweets inside. If there is Khanom Fuk inside, they will make a triangular tip. If there is Khanom Gluay inside, they will make v-shaped tip. These are all symbols that villagers create as a mnemonic code to communicate among sellers.



## Discussion

Wrapping culture of each ethnic group in Lopburi Province conveys each unique identity with some differences or similarities. From the differences in local materials, beliefs, traditions, rituals and also changes in social context, the wrapping culture have been altered through time. However, some kinds of wrapping culture do not change both in materials and patterns used. This perfectly establishes identity for each ethnic group. The researcher has discussed the result of this study as follows;

1. These two ethnic groups; Lam Phuan and Chinese group have their own unique obvious wrapping style. Culture found is diverse in patterns, materials, and beliefs. In the past, wrapping culture of each ethnic group will use folk wisdom in finding the solution for wrapping, for example, use leaves found in the area, use cloth to wrap valuable belongings, foods and things. Conversely, the meticulous exquisite wrapping will be used for religious, ritual matters. The wrapping culture had dramatically changed the way of material and pattern used in this past 40-50 years. The growth and development of society and economy have an influence on the lifestyle. They acclimatize themselves to the new social change. Wrapping

culture found in every ethnic group that does not change in both material and pattern is to wrap dessert with banana leaf, to wrap steamed glutinous rice with banana leaf, palm leaf, sugar cane leaf, or reed leaf. These wrapping cultures involved with religious matter are not easily to be changed.

2. Each ethnic group has the hidden symbolic meaning in their own wrapping culture. Some wrapping culture in one ethnic group may convey love, congruity, warm, generosity, solidarity in community such as steamed glutinous rice wrapping. There are also many wrapping activities lying symbolic meaning or sign to create goodness or auspiciousness or harmony among family, society and nature. Some wrapping culture like wrapping foods, the villagers have established the sign into this culture.

3. Art and beauty of wrapping in each ethnic group in the past has its own unique pattern or the pattern may mainly rely on the usage. The beauty went simply as the local art. Then the beauty value cling to the Royal wrapping pattern which spread the influence and play the role of changing the villagers' simple wrapping beauty into the same standard. Art beauty was measured by Thai golden section and geometric shapes including square, triangle, pyramid and so

on. Presently, materials like plastic, foam, and paper have played a pivotal role in wrapping culture. Thus, the aesthetic beauty has changed its condition and becomes more commercial as seen that wrapping conveys advertising, attractiveness more than the product inside.

### Suggestion

The researcher has some suggestions about the research topic, wrapping culture, for further study. Since this study may not specify the scope of study to cover every social context and ethnic group in Thailand for time and financial limitation, to make a clearer overview of wrapping culture, the researcher has suggested the interesting issues and topics for further study to accomplish

more complete knowledge of wrapping culture as follows;

1. Wrapping culture of other ethnic groups in Thailand including Tai Yuan group, Tai Lue group, Lao Songdam, Suay, Kheg, Lao Krang, Moosur and so on.

2. Wrapping culture in each region, say, North, Central, Northeast, and South to study patterns, materials, similarities, differences, influences toward each other.

3. Wrapping culture of Thailand's neighboring countries including Lao, Cambodia, Burma, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

4. Wrapping culture of cultural influenced countries including Mainland China, Japan, America, Russia, England, France, and India.

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