

Comparative Study of Spiritual Beliefs in Tai Kuen Community, Kengtung, Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Maeta Community, Lampang, Thailand

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Abstract: Spiritual belief (in community gods) of Tai Kuen community, Kengtung, Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Maeta community, Lampang, Thailand. Spiritual beliefs and community gods reverence of Tai Kuen community, Kengtung, Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Maeta community, Lampang, Thailand are based on the community's need that these spirits and gods are believed to bring happiness and prosperity to the community through rituals, spiritual medium, political administration and economy that has been situated in livelihood of people in both cities. One common thing that people both in Kengtung and Maeta have is the tight relation with Buddhism integrated in the theistic beliefs in ghosts and spirits adopt from Hinduism and Buddhism. Both of them are similar in their rituals. These are the spiritual anchors for people in both cities to obey customs and traditions, e.g., beliefs, ethnicity and tribal religions originally from their ancestors that have been passed through generations from the past to the present.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the inspiration from the study of community guardians (Suabaan Suamuang): beliefs, rituals, social symbols and cultures of Tai Kuen, Republic of the Union of Myanmar that are concealed with local beliefs, this article "Comparative study of spiritual beliefs in Tai Kuen community, Kengtung, Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Maeta community, Lampang, Thailand was then particularly written. The concept of social principle is the reverence of ghosts or 'gods' which

widely exists in South East Asian region and surrounding countries, e.g., India, Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao and Malaysia. It is beyond the nature that is concretely unable to explain but expressed through traditional symbols and beliefs which can impose rituals and actions. As the results, this brings the communities concepts and traditions to develop and to govern the states. The beliefs in ghosts or gods are often expressed through rituals related to agriculture and symbols of all aspects concerned with prosperity. The ghosts or gods are the law of nature unable to be defined as exact situations but need

to have miracles or people's daily routine, praying, requesting or begging the concrete holly creations that are super natural such as worships of rivers, mountains and giant trees as the common social concept among people in South East Asian region. For instance, it is believed that there is a spirit in a living giant tree. The spirit can be positive or useful and negative or harmful to the community which is under conditions created by local people, i.e., there will be an occurrence of a certain situation, bad omen or disaster if the community disobeys those created regulations.

Research objectives:

- To study the concept of spiritual (community god) belief
- To study the spirit (community god) worshipping rituals
- To compare the similarities of concepts of spirit (community god) worshipping

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher employed the qualitative research methodology (descriptive) by using surveys, interviews and participatory observations in rituals, spiritual (community god) beliefs, symbols, etc. The research was conducted on beliefs and spirit worshipping which can link the past and present characteristics of the areas that preserve the identity of the local people. The rituals reflected traditions and ceremonies of the two cities, inheritance and spirit (community god) worshipping beliefs. The researcher compared the phenomena, beliefs and symbolic rituals in the spirit worshipping society and culture to provide fundamental, detailed data of the area according to the objectives. The methodology is as follows: methodology, population and main informants, data collection methods from the data sources in the area, document; literature and new concept review, research tool, data collection methods and data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Due to the survey in Kengtung, Kengtung and Lanna including Maeta have a decent number of Buddhist arts in common. They said "Kengtung is as if a photograph of Lanna 30-40 years ago." As evidences, both lands had been tightly related since the establishment of the cities in terms of multi-dimensional relations, e.g., politics, society, economy and beliefs. This was ceased during the 2nd world war as Kengtung was governed by Myanmar and internal political affairs in 1963 leading to national closure. Thus, Kengtung once used to be in contact with Thailand and surrounding countries had to be shut. Until late 1992, Myanmar government had a policy to allow foreigners to visit Kengtung for a few days. Later in 1997,

the road to Kengtung was constructed and finished in 2003. It was totally 30 years that Kengtung disconnected to outsiders. This long term national closure preserves the social originality. However, during the closure, there were occasional pilgrimages and religious ceremonies by people from Northern provinces of Thailand.

Maeta is a district located in the Basin of Jang River, Lampang province and 27 km from the Lampang city. Due to evidences in this basin, there had been a community, since, King Pra Muang Kaew (1495-1526). Assumingly, similar to Kengtung, the community received Ceylon Buddhism from Chaing Mai.

It can be said that due to the long relation between Kengtung and Lanna, therefore both of them are from common Lanna background. Besides, geographic features, economy, similar ethnicity, trading between two lands, cultural flows and similar languages that brings them closer, these are the evidences approving their similarity in cultures, rituals or local beliefs.

According to the different political situations, the improvement inside the communities, Kengtung and Maeta was hence extremely different. Kengtung was governed by Myanmar and the country was closed for a decent time. Concepts of beliefs, Buddhism, cultures, traditions and rituals were slowly altered while Maeta was an open city. In Lampang, a sugar industry was growing. Maeta was one of the areas for cultivating sugar cane to supply the sugar production plant in Kohka, Lampang (around 1967-1987)². Later, the sugar cane cultivation was ceased and Maeta importance was decreased until the city was closed. Although the administration of the nation was not the same as Kengtung, the influx to Maeta was slightly decreasing. This turned to be positive to the community because community's traditions, customs, cultures and beliefs were still preserved. Even these were slightly changed but there were trances remained for studies.

This study was to compare the beliefs of spirits (community gods) between Tai Kuen community, Kengtung, Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Maeta community, Lampang, Thailand. It is partitioned into these following contexts; Geography and economic background, Populations or ethnic diversity, Traditions and Buddhist ceremonies and local beliefs in spirits.

Geography and economic background: Kengtung and Maeta are geographically situated in basin areas surrounded by mountains. Kengtung has Nongtung as a natural water source and Laab as an important river. Thus, it has no problem in water shortage for consumption and agriculture. Economy of Kengtung is based on the self-supporting agriculture, mainly cultivating rice and various household industries in the community for additional income e.g., potteries, knife making, silverwares, lacquer wares, textiles etc. Although,

Kengtung is currently as a center of administration in eastern Shan state and people from all cities in Shan are required to come to Kengtung in order to communicate with Myanmar but basic infrastructures are still insufficient to serve the needs of Kengtung people, i.e., Electricity is limited to time and instability. People need to have their own power generators. Water is from reservoir or underground. Their daily lives are very inconvenient. Thus, they have to help themselves. This is not different from Maeta community in the past. About 30, 40 years ago, infrastructures in Maeta was not sufficient, i.e., no electricity and running water. Maeta people had to bring water from community pond. Traveling was only on foot which was very tough to commute to people outside the community. Apart from this, there were books or scriptures from palm leaves made by monks in the temples and ordained males were able to study, read and write the Lanna alphabets 2.

Populations or ethnic diversity: Populations in Kengtung were mainly from other cities to settle in e.g., Tai Lue. Tai Nua from Xishuangbanna said that their ancestors were from Xishuangbanna during Mao Zedong because of communist turmoil in the city. The migration of people from different places has made Kengtung diverse in ethnics, e.g., Tai Kuen, Tai Lue, Myanmar, Tai Yai, Chinese, Pa Long, Mu Sur, Aka, Lua and Wa. Tai Kuen is the ethnic group who originally settled in this area. This diversity is also seen in Maeta where various ethnic groups are such as Tai Yuan, Tai Lue and Lua. However Maeta is less diverse than Kengtung and currently the community has become homogenous because of education, media, outfits and national admiration that everyone is Thai without a clear indication who is Lua or Thai unlike in Kengtung.

Traditions and Buddhist ceremonies: Human cultures and traditions originate from religions. Likewise, cultures, arts and traditions of Buddhist communities in Kengtung and Lanna, they are similar because Kengtung had adopted Buddhism and scriptures from Lanna. Rituals and customs of people in Kengtung were not too different to Maeta, e.g., sermon of Gautama Buddha as Vessantara, merit ceremonies for Buddhist Lent and end of the Lent, ordination etc. However there are some differences between these two communities, i.e., ceremonies in Kengtung are more detailed than Lanna, Maeta that some parts of the ceremonies are cut off in order to be more convenient.

For instance, Tan Kong Sai tradition which is to worship fire candles to expel bad luck, it is an annual ritual that Kengtung people have especially those who are Buddhist. In 1 year, they believe that people can be affected by supernatural things causing them or their family members illnesses. So this ritual is usually done by

families at Wat Prasing. A representative of the family is a leader of the ritual and all members of the family gather with a revering candle in the center. Kengtung people call this ritual “evil expel, Song-Ra-hu-la or 4-element expelling”. The ceremonial apparatuses or oblations are inside a tri-podded aedicule made of reed wood with 9-room bowl called Song Pab (sending pictures).

At Na Luang temple (Muang Ma), the ceremony to extend the fate is needed to have the 4-podded aedicule with the 9-room bowl inside. In the bowl, there are raw bananas, unmilled rice, flowers, white flowers, steamed sticky rice in banana leaf, sweets, flag painted with angels (scripted with birthday spell), banana trunk, sugar cane and 4 colored candles. In the central room in the bowl, it is used to contain personal information, e.g., day, date, month and year of birth of the person who wants to expel the bad fortune.

This ritual in Lanna and Maeta called Soot Ton is to make merit for those who unnaturally passed away, e.g., accidents, being killed by animals and by giving birth. Their relatives will do this ritual for them to untie them from where they passed away to better world. During the ritual, red flags and sandy stupas are dedicated in 3-7 days after the death. There are 4 monks to lead the ritual. One red flag is pinned at the location where the death is with one major sandy stupa and 100 or 108 minor ones or equal to the age of the dead person then decorated with the flags on all of the stupas called one-hundred sandy stupas. Meanwhile, to bring sand to the temple has an auspicious meaning as well. Meatah people believe that bringing sand to the temple during Song Kran is a way of making merit because sand is heavy and the beads are numerously uncountable which refers to large amounts of merit made. Besides, it is to apologize that they brought the sand out of the temple as well. This sand compensation in Lanna and Maeta has a relation to a universal idea that is to protect the monastery, i.e., sand as the ocean around the temple shrine which is comparative to the mount Meru.

Among these traditions and rituals, the details might be different but the common principle is from the belief which has Buddhism as a driver, spirit center, faith empowerment and beliefs of Kengtung and Maeta people.

Local beliefs in spirits: Evidences related to spirit worshipping (community gods) in Kengtung are from these following terms:

- Person, e.g., spiritual medium, Kengtung cultural council or Ko Pa Ka Muang
- Rituals, e.g., fostering ceremony, fate extending ceremony, Sri Luang wood bathing ceremony
- Symbols, e.g., holly objects, ghost shrine (god shrine) or natural symbols such as big tree (Mai Muang tree), holly area and reservoir

Nature beliefs: Large water reservoirs in Kengtung are important parts of the city. Thus, there are 12 gods to protect all these 7 ponds in the community such as Nong Tung, Nong Kam or Nong Ngen etc. There are 12 city gates with protecting guardian gods, e.g.,^[1]. Big trees are also spiritually emphasized, e.g., a big tree at Jommon (Maimunag wood). Around these big trees, shrines of the spirits are always located with them. Reverence of the tree protecting spirits is a principle of guardian gods occurred in South East Asia, Mae Kong sub region or the northern part of Thailand. In this region, big trees are spiritually important. The big trees are essential to community's livelihood called Dong which is a group of naturally grown trees often found at the end of or the center of the village. There are usually shrines for the spirits to dwell in. The ritual to revere the spirits is annual. They are to guard and protect people in the community.

According to conceptual study, the belief of spirit (god) in the upper Northern region, Maeta, Lampang province has the concept and principle in people's livelihood and daily life. The symbols of this belief are expressed in nature, e.g., big trees, reservoirs, rivers, mountains, etc. integrated with abstract concepts that are not touchable and provable. They are concretely exhibited through facial expression, rituals, holly objects, e.g., revering images, shrines, spiritual medium into a person as a connector between a supernatural thing and human perception that needs for agricultural fertility, peace and stability of nature in community. This need is fundamental similarly to the belief in Kengtung. The religious rituals play important roles and homogenizes into a local belief becoming traditions that have been inherited until present days.

Regarding to the belief in big trees, dipterocarpus, Lungkon, teaks and Bodhi trees are particular for this. They are called Maiyang or Mai Muang wood in Doi Jommon. They are usually found as single standing one not in group or as a single Bodhi tree. In Maeta, Lampang province, the reverence of big trees is especially, associated with a group of big trees called Dong. The belief related to this is that there are spirits situating in the trees to protect Maeta. The trees are tied with colorful clothes and spiritual shrines are usually built at the area where the trees are. The ritual to worship the spirits is scheduled in an exact day, moth and year including the process defined by the medium. However in Kengtung, the revering date is not clearly indicated but the month without the medium or Mo Long (dwelled person). The spiritual worship is daily conducted especially on the 8th day of waning moon and the 15th day of waxing moon by local people through offering food to the shrines.

There are 8 shrines of protective gods scattering though Kengtung, e.g., Gang Nong Kung as a reservoir god, Chao Luang Jen as a guardian god at the city gate and Sari Jaimuang as a forest god. At the spiritual shrines,

there are oblations and reverence images. In Kengtung, the images are often male and female with royal-like costumes and the names are clearly defined, e.g., Chao Saeng Tip and Chao Pah Pun. Meanwhile in Maeta, the images are not seen nor existed outside the shrines. The place that the spirit lives in is called Ho Chao Pobaan (shrine of the house god) who looks after the area. This type of the shrines is usually located at a jungle and the spirits in the shrines are called Chao Po Pubaan Nampuyam, Chao Po Baan Ponghosan or Chai Komue Lek (Iron-wrist god). At Baan Pa Tunluang, the tradition commonly held is a bathing ceremony. In Kengtung, it is called Songnam Ho Tewadamuang (ceremony to bathe the shrine of community god). During Songkran (New Year), this is named Rodnamdamhua Chao Pobaan (tradition to bathe the community god). At the ceremony, the spirit is invited to dwell in the medium before bathing but in Kengtung, no spiritual dwelling required. Molong who is a governmental officer (Kengtung's Kopaka) and villagers are the ceremonial runners at all of these 8 shrines.

In Kengtung, it is very diverse in ethnicities inside the community among the political alteration and religious changes. One thing that people have still been holding is the belief in community gods at different holly areas of the community guarded by Chaofa which is a god people pay respects and this is also integrated with new emerging cultures. The emphasis of this spiritual belief has become people's duty to hold and take actions in order to bring the prosperity. In Kengtung, there are 8 locations where the guardian gods situate in as follows. Shrines of forest protecting gods Sari Jaimuang, The shines are very important to Kengtung because there are Bodhi trees which are holly to the community. The guardian gods in the shrines are:

- Chao Saengdip (Chao Saengtip)
- Chao Pa Pun
- Chao Kamwai

The reverence ritual of Kengtung's community guardian gods and forest protecting gods Sari muang is usually held during Songkran in April and before Buddhist lent day. Kengtung people call this area where the shrines are Chao Saengdip shrine or Sari Muang shrine. Local people from each part of the community bring pork, fish, chicken, eggs and flowers to offer the gods on the date that Kopakamuang (Kengtung cultural council) indicates. At Chao Saengdip shrine, there is an important ritual of the city which is conducted after People Republic of Myanmar has governed the area. It is to bathe the Bodhi tree on Visaka day or Sari Jaimuang bathing ceremony led by governors and high-raking

governmental officers. The common convention of this ceremony is that the selected peoples are to bathe the Bodhi tree according to their date of birth and to stay at indicated position.

Myanmar government also imposes a policy to control this ceremony called Kachunyong Yesunpoi ceremony which must be conducted by Kopaka as the leader. It is the combination of spiritual belief and Buddhism at the same time. The important Buddhist day (Visaka day) is the day of bathing at 4 pm. Kengtung people also brings food, desserts and fruits to offer to the spirit. Likewise, the fate extension ritual is conduct. People participating in this ceremony bring canes to lean against the Bodhi tree which is similar to the ceremony in Lanna (northern Thailand).

Chao Luangkad (Chaofa shrine) is located in the area of Chaofa shrine. The revering ceremony of community god is on the 5th month and on a wanning day (Kaddee day). Chao Luangkad is a palce to preserve weapons of former Chaofa. At the day of the ritual, these weapons are used as a part of the ritual. In the past, Chaofa was a host to lead the ritual but presently, Kengtung community is also a co-host to conduct the reverence ceremony of the god called Chaolungkad.

Pong Nong Lai (southerly to the community) is a community god. The reverence ceremony is in April during Songkran. Currently, Pong Nong Lai shrine has an image inside as a symbol of a guardian.

Chaokang (Chaokang Nongtung) is located southerly to Nong Tung (Tung reservoir) and a god to protect the reservoir. Kengtung people highly respect this. Chaofa had to visit to practice the reverence himself on approximately the 3rd month or January (Kaddee day).

Chao Luangjen (Jen in Tai Keon means to protect)^[2] is located at the southern part of Kengtung. From a telling by Mae Buakam, 69 years old who lives in Ban Noino, she said "Ones are penalized or committed immortality or brought negative reputation to the community, they need to have other lives sacrificed to bring their own life in return. The hegemonic ceremony of Kengtung is called Poksaojennangmuang. Chaofa needed to practice this in order to govern the city. Presently, this ceremony does not exist but only Chao Luangjen reverence ceremony which is in the 8th month or before the Buddhist let day does."

Chao Fabung or Chao Bung (Nampung) is located at the entrance gate of Kengtung (at the car park in front of Kengtung). In the past, during winter, Chaofa and other servants often came to have a bath at Bonaam Pung (Hot spring water) and took this occasion to revere the spirit here. Presently, the date for revering Naampung god is not clearly defined like in the past. People can come due to their convenience. In some villages, this ritual is in winter to request for the agricultural fertility.

Chaosingdee is a god that Kengtung people invited from Myanmar located near Wat Mangkasa northerly to Kengtung. There is no annual reverence ceremony, tradition or exact schedule for this god.

Chaofa shrine is situated in front of Chao Luangkad at the Northern part of Kengtung. It is a pavilion (mandapa) to keep bone ash of former Kengtung leaders or kings, e.g., Chaofa Ratanakonkaew Inttalaeng, Chaofakongtai, Chaofa Gaemmuang and others. Kengtung people highly respect to this as the community god. The annual bathing ceremony for the shrine is during Songkran.

Apart from these 8 spiritual shrines, temples are also one of the important components to define the location of the community gods to situate in. In order to preserve the state of Kengtung and temples (guardian of temple), Buddhist symbols particularly temples are also assigned as the locations for the shrines, e.g., Pratatjomsri temple as water element, Pratatsaengmuang temple as earth element, Pratatjomthong as fire element and Pratatjomdoi as air element^[3]. In the past, Chaofa was a person who is in charge of them and conducted the reverence ceremony by himself at the schedule dates.

Pratatjomsri temple is located in the South of Kengtung. Formerly, this temple belonged to Tai Koen (Tai) people but now it is Tai Yai's. The temple guardian god is called by Kengtung people as Chaoroimuang or Chaodoimuang guarding Doijomsri. The shrines are outside the temple located easterly to the temple (on the left of the road to the temple entrance gate). There are 4 of them which are shrines of Chaosaengkao, Chaoluangmahasuwan, Chaigaomuang, Chaoroimuang. They are gods that protect the mountain (Doi), all trees on Doijomsri and Pratatjomsri (Jomsri stupa). The sacrifice ritual to revere the shrine is done 2 times. The first one is on the 4th month (in March, on the 15th day of waning or waxing moon) to make and dedicate merit (taanha) by offering food and desserts. The second time is on the 7th month in June (the 15th day of waning moon) by offering 1 pig and 2 chickens. At Chaosaengkao shrine, there is a spiritual medium (Molong) from Baan Buakkrok named Laan. The spiritual dwelling is annual during the sacrifice ritual on the 7th month (the 15th day of waning moon). In the past, the reverence ceremony was conducted together with the stupa bathing ceremony which was on the 4th month, March (the 15th day of waxing moon). Presently, Chaosaengkao shrine is moved to be located at the same area as Chaomahasuwan and Chaokoamuang shrines. Because of this, there is thus the second reverence^[4].

Chaosaengko shrine has a sitting image of the spirit with one knee up dressed in white without a particular costume. Inside the shrine, there are oblations-water

container, vases and flag bunch as the revering apparatuses placed on the altar. The door of the shrine is fully closed.

Chaoluangmahasuwan shrine has no image. It is noticeable that Makpoo leaves (cabbage palm leaves) are put in the vase which is similar to the alter in Lanna especially in Maeta, Lampang. The same leaves used as a revering oblation are also found in the vase on the alter. Chaoroimuang (doimuang) is a small shrine with one pole which is common to other ones. It is located between Chaosaengko and Chaokaomuang shrines.

Chaokaomuang shrine has 2 images, god and goddess with colorful clothes around them and headdress like warriors. Hands are holding swords. Inside the shrines, there are music instruments, water container, vase with cabbage palm leaves and tiger image to guard the shrine. Outside the temple, apart from images, there are shrines to guard big trees.

Pratatsaengmuang temple. The spirits are in the shrines located easterly to the temple (outside the temple).

Chaokaomaung shrine is in the north of the temple and on the left of the entrance under the big Bodhi tree. There are 3 spiritual images. One image is female holding a sword with scarf and white headband. Two of the images are male holding swords. Inside the shrine, there are 2 tigers. To revere these spirits, local people put the oblations in bags and hang them on images' hands.

Chaohuai shrine (Chaodoi) is located in the north eastern part of Pratatsaengmuang temple and on the right of the temple entrance. This spirit is to guard the temple, river and mountains (Doi). The sacrifice ceremony with a buffalo to revere the spirit is annual. Local people can also bring any food to offer the spirit which is regularly conducted every the 15th day of the waxing moon. There is a spirit image holding a sword with scarf. The dress is different from others, i.e. the hat tip is funnel-shaped similar to the King's or Chaofa's crown. Inside the shrine, there are images of a horse and other small spirits on the wall. Local people offer the spirits in this shrine on the 15th day of waxing and waning moon.

Pratatjomdoi has the spirit to protect the stupa (Pratat) in the east of the shrine. The sitting images are male and female facing towards the stupa. This place also has a legend of a guarding spirit. In those days, there was a millionaire couple as the founder of this Jomdoi stupa. Chaofa ordered the villagers to build the city wall but this couple they disobey the command of Chaofa. Instead, they constructed the stupa. Once Chaofa heard of this, the couple was executed. Before the execution, they made a curse that Chaofa or any other Kengtung leaders were not allowed to visit and pay respect to this Jomdoi stupa. Another story, there was Chaofa struggling to come to the stupa but he could not because the elephant as his vehicle did not want to. Since, then, no Chaofa was able to reach the stupa. In the area of the stupa, there is a spiritual

shrine with the images of that wealthy couple. The villagers then praise the couple as the stupa guarding spirits. Pratatjomthing temple has the guardian spirit in the shrine located in the south of the temple and inside the temple without an image. Local people come to offer the spirit almost every day.

In Kengtung, there are the spiritual shrines inside the temple usually located in front of the temple hall. The shrine usually has 5 rooms to put the oblations. In some temples, there are shrines with human-sized images. In some temples, there is a shrine for Upagupta. The reverence with food and desserts is conducted every the 15th day of the waxing and waning moon.

The belief in temple guarding spirits in Pratatjomsri temple, Pratatsaengmuang temple, Pratatjomdoi temple, Pratatjorkam temple and other temples in Kengtung are very strong and the spirits are called Chaokaomuang and Chaohui Chaodoi because Kengtung is located in high land or "Jom". These are the spirits that guard rivers, reservoir and mountains where important Kengtung's stupas are located in. Chaokaomuang is a god who founded and built the temples on the mountains (Doi). In the shrines, spiritual icons are often male and female with warrior-like dress and they are usually located outside the temple but in some temples they are inside. The spiritual shrines have 5 rooms which are different from the shrine or temple-guarding shrine (Ho Peesuawat) in Maeta, Lampang province which is the shrine of the spirit of the late temple's abbot invited to protect the temple e.g. the shrines in Baan Miang temple and Baan Nakot. The shrines are usually inside the temples. In some temples, the spiritual or ghost shrine guarding the temple is called Gumpakana (giant) or Temple guardian (Arak Wat).

In Kengtung and Maeta, there are gods or spirits or ghosts that protect and preserve the monasteries. In temples in Kengtung and Maeta, Lampang province, there are traditions to revere the spirits or guardian gods with similar practice during the Pratat (stupa) bathing ceremony.

Apart from the temple guarding spirits in Kengtung and Maeta, there are spirits or gods protecting the villages or communities. Their dwelling places are called the shrines of house-protecting spirits. They are located at intersection of the entrance to the village or at the center of the community. Some are near local markets or public places which are spacious usually with big trees (Bodhi tree) to build the shrines and there are images dressed like King (Chaofa) to represent the spirit. The villagers bring food and desserts including oblations, e.g., flags, flowers, candles, joss sticks, water containers and vases to offer to the shrines almost every day.

Some of the shrines of community-protecting gods are built in fenced areas with multiple gods at the same shrines. The reverence is daily by local people with

oblations, e.g., bananas, coconuts, joss sticks and candles. In some shrines, there are also elephants and horse images as well as the oblations. In Kengtung, the spiritual shrines are found in all villages with reverence ceremony which is conducted depending on the schedule of each village. The shrines of house-protecting gods in Kengtung are not usually put inside the house. Maejuntip (Baan Jommon, 10th May 2013), 50 years old, a lacquerware maker said that "In Kengtung, the shrine is put in front of the house built with cement and there is an opening front door like a common spiritual shrine. Inside the shrine, there is no spirit image but with revering apparatuses, e.g., water container, vase and flag bunch. The offering with water and food is daily in the morning. Because I am a businesswoman making and selling lacquer wares, I believe that the spirits help us to have good business". This house protecting god is similar to the shrine of spiritual land in Maeta.

In some communities, there are reservoirs where spirits protect such as Bo Namtip god at the entrance of Yang Kuang temple locally called Bo Nam-oi god. It is a pond important to Kengtung. The leader (Chao Fah) often brought water from this pond, Nam-oi to be a part of rituals because the taste of the water is sweeter than others. There is also a shrine constructed above Bodhi tree with male and female images inside. The ritual to revere the spirit is conducted in the 9th month (before Buddhist lent day). In the past, Chao Fah had to offer the Bo Nam-oi god and in the 8th month, there was a massive sacrifice ceremony with pork or chicken. It is the ritual that people in Kengtung annually do.

Apart from similar spiritual shrines, people in Kengtung and Maeta also concern about community protection. They bring auspicious leaves and make a holly invention called Talaew to pin or put in different places to prevent devils and illness to family members. Talaew is made up of leaves of cogon grass, scutch grass, jujube, guava, leaves or flowers of Maengkae tree and iron wood and Magiang leaves. They are bunched together as Talaew and put on a door of a house or a city gate twice a year. The replacement of Talaew is usually done on Songkran. When there is a funeral, once the dead body is removed off the house, these holly apparatuses are placed on the door sprinkled with holly water from Acacia extracts to prevent devils.

Medium of spirits: In Kengtung, a person who is a medium for the spirit to dwell is called Molong and in Maeta, it is called 'spiritual dwelling'. The spirit dwelling in the medium is called Jaosong or Makee. The concept related to this belief is similar in both communities. The person who is selected as the medium is the one with fragrant hair and well-behaved, often a lady. In Maeta,

Lampang, the spirit causes an illness to the dwelled medium which cannot be cured. The acceptance as the medium is the only way to cure the illness. In Kengtung, once the spiritual medium is certainly selected and turned to be unconscious, that medium needs to take part in an 'invitation ceremony' in order to let the spirit to dwell in the medium. In both Maeta and Kengtung, the spiritual dwelling into the medium is to help people or to foretell a bad omen of the communities and to suggest ways to solve in form of rituals, e.g., bad fortune expelling ritual. In Kengtung, it is called 'song paab (picture sending)' and bowl sending in Maeta. In these two rituals, a banana sheaf partitioned into 9 rooms and similar ritual apparatuses, e.g., fate extending sticks are used. When the ritual is finished, the sticks will be leaned against the Bodhi tree or placed in any temple where Bodhi tree is. This ritual means the support of their lives and family as well as Buddhism.

According to the interview in Kengtung, Mae Buakam^[5] said that the god selects a person with fragrant hair and invites that person to be a spiritual medium. Due to the study, there is a spiritual medium named Mrs Todanji, 75 year-old living in Baan Padaeng near Kengtung customs. She has been the spiritual medium for 40 year. She is Burmese from India. She moved to this place with her daughter who came to Kengtung for marriage. She is a medium for 37 spirits including Chaokaomuang. The house is made of clay. Southerly, there is a god shrine under a big tree. Inside the house, the bedroom has reverence shelves. On top of the bed, there are shelves for Buddha image and goddess (Gari) and reverence apparatuses underneath, e.g., flowers, candles, joss sticks, coconut, banana, cigarettes, sparking drinks and desserts. There is an assistant to help the medium when the medium is dwelled by the spirits or gods who come to help humans and turn bad luck to be good fortune and to expel evils. During the ritual, there is no dancing. This ritual is daily and on Saturday, the spiritual dwelling into the medium takes the whole day. There is a reverence shrine of community god who protects Kengtung called "shrine of house-protecting god." This shrine is a cement building with a dome-shaped roof and the holly object is situated inside the shrine, e.g., shrine s of house-protecting god at Baan Chinag Kum, Baan Noi Nau and Nam Bo Noi. In Maeta, it is called 'shrine of house ghost (Hau Pee Suea Baan). It is an uplifted wooden building without the holly object. The rituals to revere are similar. For instances, the oblation apparatuses for worshipping are composed of pork, chicken, coconuts and bananas. People in the communities often pray for healthiness or worthiness and others. If things that they requested for are successful, food and sweets are then sacrificed to the gods. Both in Kengtung and Maeta, Lampang, this

principle is from a common concept, i.e., local people's needs to have spirits to protect and guard them and bring them peace and happiness.

Summary: The spiritual (community god) concept and belief were based on the gratitude for the ancestors who brought prosperity to the family or even the community gods who established and initiated the community. Initiators were emphasized at religious places such as pagodas, sanctuaries. When an initiator passed away, a tower of worship would be built for such community or temple god. It is apparent that such concept and belief were employed in Kengtung and Maeta, Lampang Province, especially those related to the people who were of benefit to the community or respected by the community.

The rituals to express gratitude for spirits (community gods) had fixed schedules for the ceremony, the oblation involved decent items such as liquor, pig, buffalo and chicken. Kengtung and Maeta, Lampang Province shared the similar ritual procedures; in other words, the chosen animal to be given to the community god was a young buffalo having the horns at the same level as the ears without flaws on the tail. In the ritual, a deity medium would receive the oblation.

To compare the similarities of concept and belief related to community god worshiping in both Kengtung and Maeta, Lampang Province, the location of the spirit tower or shrine to the north of the village with dense forests in Kengtung was called "Doang", and in Maeta District, Lampang Province, it was called "Dong". Both sacred areas had prohibitions such as no deforestation, no animal hunting or harvesting. This similar concepts emphasized on individuals and areas which may be derived from the ancestor spirit worshiping culture of the local people e.g. Lua which was the original racial group residing in the north of Thailand and in the south of China. At present, they still cling to spirit (community god) worshiping rituals and beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Kengtung and Maeta are common in their roots that bring their culture similar to each other. The cultural flow is still ongoing due to continuous contacts in different aspects such as Buddhism, traditions, beliefs and livelihood. Even the relation between Kengtung and Maeta is changed through time, politics and economic factors, the feeling being the relative neighborhood has never ended.

In comparison with Maeta, Kengtung has specialty, i.e., the god shrines are located near the divine shrine (Ho Chaofa) and crystal temple (Wat Pragaew) and there is a big Sari tree as Kengtung's heart. These vividly

outstanding god shrines are the places where all of the Kengtung's guardian spirits are in. Formerly, the sacrifice ritual was done by the Kengtung leader (Chao Luang) during Songkran.

Particularly, the most concrete evidence is the respect for community guardians called house-protecting ghost by Meata people and shrine of house god by Kengtung people^[6]. They are situated at the trees of the community, e.g. Sari or Bodhi tree, banyan tree and other local holly trees. For instance, Ka Jao is a holly tree in Baan Pong, Maeta. Also, there is the shrine of the god at special areas in the communities, e.g., Jam-faan house guard ghost in Baan Na Faan or Jao Kang Nong Kung in Kengtung. Beside the holly tree, there are different sizes of the spiritual shrines where the community-protecting gods live in.

In both Kengtung and Maeta, local whisky, pig head, chicken, desserts and fruits are commonly sacrificed at the annual sacrifice depending on the local traditions what to be sacrificed. The usual occasion for this is often during Songkran, fate-extending day, lent day, out-of-tent day and other special occasions such as recovery from illness, successful examination etc.

Apart from that this local belief also occurs in temples in Kengtung and Maeta. In Kengtung, the ghost or god shrine is usually located in front of the temple and facing to the temple entrance but in Maeta, it is sometimes at the front of the temple, sometimes beside the temple and face towards the temple. When local people come to the temple to make merit, they will also worship the shrine through food offering. There are different traditions to sacrifice or revere the community guardian gods. It aims to request ancestors and holly spirits to protect the community and people from illness and disasters. Likewise, the rituals and traditions are to harmonize the community and to ensure the membership in both communities.

As above, spiritual and ghost beliefs in Kengtung and Maeta in Thailand are from communities' needs to bring happiness and prosperity to the communities through rituals, spiritual medium, political administration, trading and economy. The beliefs of spirits and ghost have been buried in livelihoods of people from both cities. One common thing that Meata and Kengtung have is that they are tightly associated with Buddhism which is nicely blended with spiritual and ghost beliefs and Hinduism. Buddhism in both communities is similar in its practices and is the spiritual center of the people to obey the local traditions due to the beliefs, ethnicities and tribal religions inherited from their ancestors. This will be passed to the next generations in the future and could possibly be changed due to current situations in Kengtung and Maeta, Lampang, Thailand.

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