

The Role of Food in the Musical Rites of the *Lanna* People of Northern Thailand¹

Bussakorn Binson²

Abstract

The *Lanna* region refers to an ancient kingdom of northern Thailand. Today, this region is comprised of *Phrae*, *Lamphun*, *Phayao*, *Mae Hong Son*, *Chang Mai*, *Chang Rai*, *Lamphang*, and *Nan* provinces. The body of the research shows that various types of food play very significant roles in the *Lanna* musician's ritual known as the *Wai Kru* ceremony. This article addresses the question of how food interacts with a people's belief system as manifested in the *Lanna Wai Kru* ceremonies. What follows is a brief description of the types of *Wai Krus*, after which is a discussion of the main foods that comprises the offerings. Additionally, a comparison with the role these foods play in other countries is presented.

¹ The scope of this article is a subset of the author's Ethnomusicological research which has extended into nearly all of Thailand's provinces and is supported by Thailand Research Fund and the Rachadapiseksompot Endowment Fund.

² Associate Professor, Department of Thai Music, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

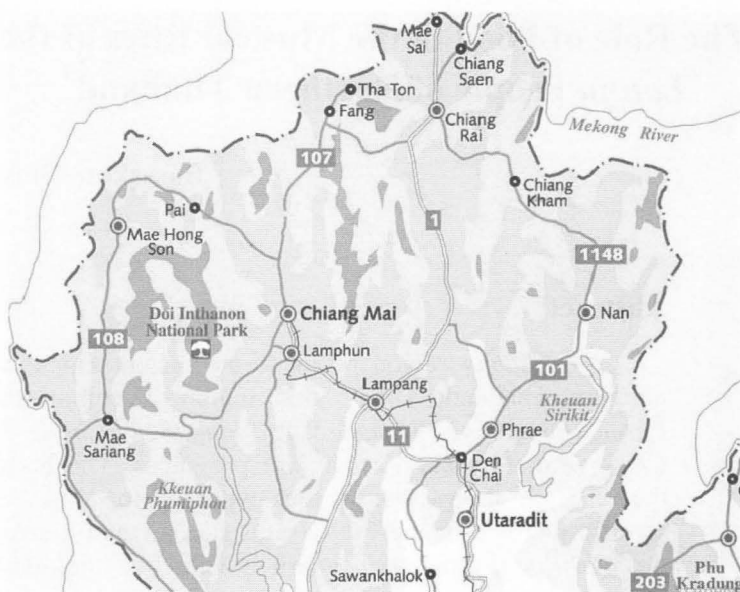


Figure 1: *Lanna* Region of Thailand

Lanna Musical Rites

The word ‘*wai*’ means to show respect and is the name of the everyday greeting gesture for those in Thai society. Whereas ‘*kru*’ means teacher and is similar in sound and meaning to the word ‘*guru*’ used in India.

The *Wai Kru* ceremony is comparable to the *Puja*, which is a religious ritual that Hindus perform daily, as well as on a variety of special occasions, to pray or show respect to God, spiritual entities, and Gurus.³ The word *Puja* sounds phonetically the same as a term in the *Lanna* dialect which means to show respect. There is also a set of big ritual drums known as a *Gong Puja*, which is played in order to pay respect to the Buddha in the *Lanna* region. These elements reflect the migration of cultural influences from India to Thailand.

³ “*Puja* (Hinduism),” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 13 Mar 2009 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Puja_\(Hinduism\)&oldid=311277069](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Puja_(Hinduism)&oldid=311277069)>.

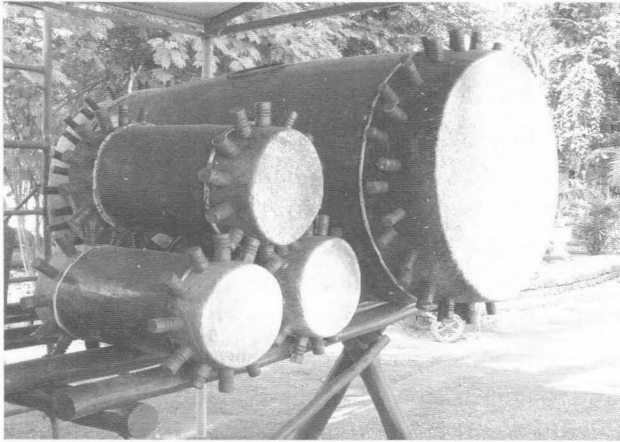


Figure 2: *Puja Drums*

There are three varieties of *Wai Kru* held:

1. The *Wai Kru* before the new music student commences the initial lesson with his/her selected teacher is called *Yok Kru*. Its aim is the expression of a student's humbleness towards their teacher.
2. The *Wai Kru* before each public performance known as *Yok Kan Tang*. This *Wai Kru* is where both the appreciation and homage to one's teacher is made, as well as a request to the music Gods to assist in assuring that there is a successful performance.
3. The annual New Year's celebration *Wai Kru* is named *Liang Kru*. (Several Asian countries celebrate New Year's during April 12-14.) At this time both current and past music teachers, in addition to the God's of music, are honored.

Many types of food have been included in the offerings of the *Wai Kru* ceremony in order to give nourishment to the deceased teachers according to the beliefs of the *Lanna* musicians. They maintain that the food needs to be available for consumption by the teachers' spirit in the other world.

Even though those teachers have passed away, their knowledge is still used nowadays in many performances. Therefore, all musicians offer them food in order to show a sense of gratitude in return for their kindness in creating beautiful *Lanna* music for musician to make their living. They believe that their earnings are what their teachers gave them. Regarding this belief, they arrange a *Wai Kru* as a symbol of gratitude. 'Symbolism' here refers to a way of choosing representative symbols in line with an abstraction rather than the literal. Religion can be described as a language of concepts related to human spirituality where, hence, symbolism plays an important role.

Below is a discussion about the symbolism of the foods offered during the *Wai Kru* rites by traditional Thai musicians from the *Lanna* region of Northern Thailand. Additionally, some comparisons of how the same foods are used symbolically in other countries are discussed. For example, in many cultures the offering of food items is simply representative of the desire of never being in need of food in the future. In Russia, parents would present the bride with bread and salt, in the hopes that she will never want for food. The role of food items in the *Lanna Wai Kru* involves the needs of the musical spiritual entities, as well as the teachers, which will be discussed under each food item subheading. For clarification, the complete collection of both edible and non-edible offerings is known as *Kan Tang* and is typically comprised of the following edible and non-edible items: Incense sticks, candles and white flowers placed inside cones made from rolled banana leaves, coconut, bananas, rice, head(s) of a pig, chicken, whisky, *Som Poi* (sacred water of either acacia or turmeric), *bia* (shells), curry paste ingredients with a new cooking pot, betel nuts, panadus leaves, white cloth, red cloth, a sleeping mat and pillow.



Figure 3: *Kan Tang*

Edible Offerings

The followed descriptions and analysis will focus only on the edible offerings that are used in the *Wai Kru* Rites.

Coconut

The coconut is naturally very productive and grows easily in the *Lanna* region. With its known ability to provide ample fruit, it symbolizes fertility when used as an offering in the *Kan Tang*. It also represents the dissemination of knowledge, just like its easy growth and the spreading nature of the young coconut palms. The coconut itself contains a naturally clean and pure liquid inside its protective and thick, multilayered shell. It is a sign of respect to offer this pure coconut juice to one's teacher for when they are thirsty.

In the country of India, Phaya Anumanratchaton described the use of coconut juice in their offerings:

As Indian's believe, the coconut is a holy fruit and is called the fruit of fortune. It is a symbol of fertility. It is usually put on the shrine and given to the women who wish to have children. Whatever ritual they perform, the coconut seems to be indispensable....⁴

⁴ Phaya Anumanratchaton, *The Death* [การตาย] (Bangkok, Parppim Printing, 1988)148. (In Thai, translation by the author)

For Thais, in a tradition that is still used today, they believe in using the pure coconut water to wash a deceased person's face just prior to cremation. It is believed that coconut water should be used to wash away and remove the dirtiness or the sin of being human in preparing the spirit to go on to a better life. Robert Halliday wrote in a book titled "*Taliang*" that:

Coconut water has many layers of protection. It is so pure, it is different from the common water which is contaminated with sin. Coconut water can wash away the negative effects of the habit of sin. People usually use coconut water to wash the face of the deceased to symbolically cleanse away dirtiness by this real pure and clean liquid. It is comparable to the belief in one's ability to remove bad deeds by performing good ones. According to a Mon⁵ tradition, before lifting the corpse to make the final and greatest merit, they will beat a coconut to let its water splash and wash the top of the coffin.⁶

In India, the coconut is viewed as an auspicious representation of honor, good fortune and, consequently, wealth, traditionally presented to all Hindu deities. Therefore, it is frequently embellished with metal foils. Then, in similar symbolism to the *Lanna* beliefs, when the coconut is given to honor a person, it is done to symbolize their purity. Additionally, during a Hindu wedding, to portray a mother's womb, a coconut is set above a pot's opening. Similarly, coconuts are occasionally used as human skulls during Tantric activities; while fishermen of many religious followings offer them to the waters of their fishing grounds to assure 'fertile' catches. The characteristics of a coconut are that it is hard and tough on the outside and soft on the inside. This reflects the ideal student; one that is dedicated and determined in learning musical knowledge while at the same time remaining receptive to the teacher's instruction.

⁵ *Mon* is the name of a minority social group which was one the earliest migrant groups into Northern Thailand.

⁶ Quoted in Anumanratchatun 148.

Lakshmi as the Hindu goddess of prosperity and wellness is frequently represented with coconuts and Hindus often use the cracking open of a coconut to recruit the blessings of the gods at the inception of a new activity to assure its successful completion. The coconut tree itself, according to traditional legends, is known as the 'Evergreen Wishing Tree', since a wish presented to a coconut tree seemed to be quickly granted.⁷

On the Island nation of Palu'e, their Hada religion and ceremonies deal with a central concept of heat and coolness. By this, they are referring to the belief that mistakes, all new things and actions against the Hada precepts create 'heat' along with the generalize accumulation of negative influences. Periodically, this build-up of detrimental heat needs to be cooled down by the ritualized offerings of coconut milk along with other foods and animal blood. However, by far, coconut milk is the most common and primary medium used for cooling.⁸

In a Javanese wedding, a half-ripe coconut is part of the *Tarub* decoration to exemplify the couple's love for each other, as well as embodying their ongoing commitment to care for loved ones.⁹

Bananas

The banana tree is also very productive, easily spawns younger plants and bears a lot of fruit so its use as a *Wai Kru* offering to one's teacher is to symbolize the flourishing and development of musical knowledge. During a Thai wedding ceremonial parade, there is always a banana tree included to help ensure the couple's procreative success. Currently, in today's modern society and tougher economic conditions where there is less desire for many children, the banana tree's

⁷ "Coconut," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 10 Apr 2009

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Coconut&oldid=312112023>>.

⁸ "Palu & apos;e: Religion and Expressive Culture," *World Culture Encyclopedia, East/Southeast Asia*, 8 Apr 2009 <<http://www.everyculture.com/East-Southeast-Asia/Palu-e-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>> .

⁹ "Preparing the Wedding," *Javanese Ceremonies, An Orientation to the Culture and Tradition of Java-Indonesia*, 10 Mar 2009

<http://users.skynet.be/dvran/E_preparation.htm>.

symbolic influence has been transformed to a more generalized wish for success for the newlyweds.

The ripe banana fruit along with the tree itself makes up the largest elements in the *Tarub* decorations of a Javanese wedding. Typically two trees with ripe bananas are used to convey that the husband will lead his family well and, since banana trees prosper in a diverse range of conditions, the hope is that the same will be true of this new couple. In the traditional *Sajen* offerings made before weddings and during the *Mitoni*'s ritual, both bananas and coconut are included among many other edible and symbolic items. The intention of the *Sajen* is two fold; to receive protection from evil spirits and as a blessing for one's ancestors.¹⁰

Raw Whole-grain Rice

Rice plays an important role in many of the rituals of Northern Thailand and especially in the *Wai Kru* where it is given as an offering to the music deities or spirits. As distant neighbors with historical influences, the people of India sprinkle rice that has been blessed upon the afflicted in the optimism of a cure. Furthermore, it is believed that this practice can drive away the evil spirits from the body of the sick. Phaya Anumanratchatton explained that:

Southern Indians gently drop grains of rice over the face and the mouth of the deceased. They do this as the corpse is on its way to the crematorium. Rice is thought not only to be food for its spirit, but can also provides absolute protection from evil to all of the participants. (Anthropos Vol. IV) When Tamils move the dead out of the house, they will scatter rice and small pieces of coconut pulp along the way as they walk....¹¹

For the Thai *Lanna* musicians, where the offering of rice in the *Wai Kru* serves in paying homage to their teacher, it was reported by the interviewees to be derived from other spiritual rituals where rice

¹⁰ "Preparing the Wedding, The Legend of this Ceremony and the Offerings," *Javanese Ceremonies, An Orientation to the Culture and Tradition of Java-Indonesia*, 9 Mar 2009 <http://users.skynet.be/dvran/M_sajen.htm>.

¹¹ Anumanratchatton 134.

was given, such as the rite called *Liang Phi*. The *Liang Phi* uses rice as one of the offerings to the spirit named *Phi Meng*, which means the spirits of the ancestors of each family. It is the belief of the *Lanna* people to make offerings to the *Phi Meng* spirit in order for it to protect everybody in the household. Moreover, an abundance of rice is symbolic of living comfortably, which is especially important to a performing artist without a routine position of employment. Some also believed that rice embodies the depiction of a happy life, while others thought the inclusion of rice was simply a hope for one to be well off with sufficient food and nutrition. So along these lines, it was heard that the inclusion of rice was done so that the teacher could keep it as a consumable if they happened to be hungry. However, what is important is that the rice be raw and unprocessed so that it still remains viable as a seed. The offering of raw whole-grain rice that could germinate and thrive in a waiting paddy field exemplifies and mirrors the status of the student being willing to develop and flourish in the musical field.

In Southeast Asian countries, rice is used in various types of rituals. In Indonesia, the tradition of throwing rice as part of a wedding ceremony originated in this region of the world and signifies having a full pantry or, in other words, plenty of food, not only just rice. So the newlywed couple is showered with thrown rice to ensure their life is prosperous and without want. In the Vietnamese wedding ceremony, rice is thrown together with flower petals or confetti to ensure fertility and the tying of tin cans to the couple's car is to scare away any evil spirits who might be jealous of their happiness.¹²

¹² "Vietnamese and Western Wedding Ceremonies," *Vietnam-Culture.com*, 10 Apr 2009 <<http://www.vietnam-culture.com/articles-100-29/Vietnamese-and-Western-wedding-ceremonies.aspx>>; "Country and Western Wedding Theme," *Do-It-101.com*, 10 Apr 2009 <<http://doit101.com/Crafts/westernwedding.html>>.

Head of a Pig

The offering of a pig's head to the spirits of all deceased music teachers is found in the *Liang Kru* or what is known as the annual New Year's celebration *Wai Kru* of Central Thailand. The pig's head is part of the food offerings of the *Kan Tang* given to the spirits of the virtuous teachers who reside in heaven. This practice, over time, eventually found its way to the Northern and *Lanna* regions.



Figure 4: Offering the Head of a Pig in the *Liang Kru*

From the interviews with the Thai-Buddhist musicians from the Northern *Lanna* region who perform these rituals that include the heads of pigs, it was found that there are three factors related to its use. The first is that the more experienced master of ceremonies came originally from Central Thailand. The second is that its use indicates a degree of wealth that not all in the community could afford. While lastly, having institute support for the larger *Wai Kru*s, such as from the College of Dramatic Arts or Rajaphat University, increased the tendency to incorporate the use of a pig's head in the New Year's *Wai Kru*; otherwise, few artists will be found using it.

The head of a pig is also found amongst a large variety of foods in the Korean *Gosa* ritual to pay homage to the many household or business building gods. In the case of the latter, a prayer for one's

business prosperity is made as the pig is viewed as representing good luck. The Koreans believe that each structure has its own group of gods governing everything from the kitchen (*Jowang-sin*), ancestors (*Josang-sin*), births (*Samsin-sin*) and the house site itself (*Teoju-sin*). It is common for the host to place rolled paper money into the ears and nose of the pig.¹³

Chickens

Every local family offers a cooked whole chicken in the *Wai Kru* hosted by the ‘*Chang Saw*’ vocalists to honor their teacher. *Chang Saw* or ‘*Saw*’ for short is the name of a *Lanna* singing style that is typically accompanied by *Pi Jum* (wind instrument) and also nowadays included three instruments: the *salaw* (fiddle), *seung* (lute), and a drum.



Figure 5: The *Salaw Saw Seung* Ensemble

It was conveyed to the author that since chickens grow rapidly and the hens produce many eggs, the inclusion of chickens signifies a prosperous wisdom. Moreover, chickens are raised by nearly all households in the *Lanna* region and are considered an everyday food.

¹³ “Invitation to Korean Culture: Gosa, long-been-performed shamanistic rite,” *Chingusai Newsletter*, Vol 41, September 2002, 10 Apr 2009
<<http://english.daegu.go.kr/group02/chingusai/200209.htm>>.

Consequently, it appears in the *Kan Tang* of nearly all ceremonies as it is believed that the spirits would not acknowledge the rite without the inclusion of this everyday food item.

In other parts of the world the use of the chicken can be quite different. For example, the Black-Boned chicken in China and the Mayan cultures of Mexico and Central America is held as the main totem in the treatment of diseases attributed to supernatural causes.¹⁴

Alcohol

It was reported that the intention in offering alcohol as part of the *Wai Kru* ritual is for the spirits of the teachers to partake of it. Then, after ingestion when the spirit is amused, the performance will flow well and the audience will be pleased. If there was no alcohol provided in the *Wai Kru*, some artists reported that they believed the teacher would not be pleased and would be motivated to obstruct the performance in some manner.

From this researcher's direct observation of musicians, many artists drink alcohol while performing. They partake of the alcoholic beverage that was offered to their teacher's spirit during the *Wai Kru*. So one can surmise that there are three reasons alcohol has become a *Wai Kru* offering. One is that in the past, the teachers enjoyed alcoholic beverages when they were alive so that their students added it to the *Kan Tang* as an offering to make them happy after they had passed away. Second, the performers liked alcohol and the affects it had on their performance, such that they wanted to share it with all the spirits of music. A third more general theory is that alcohol has been paired with human ceremonies and celebrations, as well as given as a special gift for thousands of years. Consequently, it would be expected to be given as a gift to one's teacher or during a *Wai Kru*.

¹⁴ Carl Johannessen, "Distribution and Use of the Black-Boned and Black-Meated Chicken in Mexico and Guatemala," 8 Apr 2009
<<http://sites.maxwell.syr.edu/clag/yearbook1986/carl.pdf>>.

The *Lanna* vocalists or *Chang Saw(s)* reported that the alcohol left over from the *Wai Kru* helps them sing more fluently and with less inhibitions or obstacles. In their opinion, the *Wai Kru* alcohol is sacred and will help their performance be smooth and increase their self-confidence. They also believe it will make them more imaginative and active, greatly assisting their improvised passages resulting in a greatly improved performance.

It is interesting that for the artists in the *Lanna* region, the leader of the *Paad Gong* ensemble will sprinkle a few drops of alcohol on every musical instruments to ensure a stellar performance before drinking it. The *Paad Gong* is a percussion ensemble that consists of the following instruments: *ranaat ek*, *ranaat thum* (xylophones), *khong wong yai* (gong circle), *klong* (drum), *pi* (Thai oboe) and *ching* (a pair of small cymbals).



Figure 6: *Paad Gong* Ensemble

This practice is nearly identical to a Khmer influenced, musical ensemble version of the ritual of showing respect to one's teacher from the lower Northeastern provinces of Thailand. Musicians from these areas consider alcohol an essential offering in the pre-performance rite. They will sprinkle alcohol on their instruments periodically before and in a free moment during the performance. Musicians from these areas believe that alcohol empowers the musicians, while pleasing the spirits of the teachers. This, in turn, ensures that the concert will go well and satisfy the audience. Additionally, in the *Liang Kru* ritual the master of ceremonies will pour alcohol on the musical instruments and on every column in the

performing space while making sure it drips onto the ground. This latter point is to show respect to the Mother of the land and its guardian spirits, with the belief that they also like and revere alcohol and will protect the performer from any other bad spirits around the land.

The offering of alcohol is found in many countries. For instance, in Laos, they use alcohol in the April New Year's celebration. The Laotian elders drink alcohol on the third day of the New Year's festival when the family is joined by a *Morporn*, who is a highly respected member of the community who recites the appropriate prayers. He has a piece of string tied to his finger which is attached to the *Baci*, and so do other senior family members. *Baci* is a ceremonial arrangement of offerings and flowers. After the ceremony, the *Morporn* is offered whisky, which has been placed under the *Baci*. He always refuses at first, but finally accepts. It is then, in turn, offered to all the adults of the family. Then the ceremonial process of using the threads from the *Baci* is carried out where each person of the family, in turn, is tied around the arm and blessings are carried out. It is believed that for the blessings to work, the threads must be worn on the arm for three days. Afterwards, the *Baci* must be untied and not cut as this is held to be unlucky.¹⁵ Moving to Africa, alcohol is used in weddings as an offering to the gods to join in the celebration and wine is poured onto the ground.¹⁶

Sacred Water (*Som Poi*) with an Acacia or Turmeric Base

Acacia is a multi-use tree of which its leaves and young shoots are frequently added to Thai curry dishes. The shoots have a sour flavor, while one roasts its pods before eating them. One can also apply an ointment made from it for relief from mosquito bites or in order to nourish the skin.

¹⁵ "New Year Traditions: Lao New Year," *FatherTime's.Net*, 5 Apr 2009 <<http://www.fathertimes.net/laonewyear.htm>>.

¹⁶ "African American Wedding Traditions," *Wedding Connections*, 12 Apr 2009 <<http://www.weddingconnections.com/articles/traditionsafrican>>.



Figure 7: *Som Po* water

The way people use water infused with the essences of acacia in the *Wai Kru* rituals is by spraying the liquid on the instruments and the cone of betel nut rings and flowers with a bundle of flowers or long stiff blades of grass. Some dampen their head and face with this acacia water too. Additionally, acacia water is splashed over the participants in order to drive away any negative entities or energy.

Furthermore, according to their beliefs, the Northerners use the acacia water as a protectant to keep their skill and knowledge from deteriorating. From the *Lanna* people's experience using acacia and turmeric as a nourishing food and an effective ointment in their daily life, it was reported that is why it was also chosen to blend with the magical and superstitious beliefs of the *Wai Kru* rites. Its purpose in the *Wai Kru* is to increase and support the confidence of the worshipping participants.

When the *Wai Kru* has finished, the musicians will be showered with the water that has been infused with the left over acacia water in the same manner as monks. A bound collection of stems is dipped in the bowl and then flicked or whisked over the musicians sprinkling them with droplets. In the ritual, a large quantity of acacia and turmeric water is required. After a few liters of acacia or turmeric water have been prepared, some additional essence of a floral perfume is also added. The final step in preparation for use in the *Wai Kru* is

for the master of ceremonies to recite a phrase that infuses the water with special powers. These powers are believed to assist in both repelling any approaching evil entities, as well as chasing away existing ones. In the end, the students and all participants will be sprinkled with the 'holy water' (acacia) as a ritualized, purification bath. Additionally, some will be given to their sons and daughters for them to pour over the hands of the revered elders in the community while requesting a blessing in a special ceremony during the *Song Kran* holiday period.

Udom Rungreungsri wrote the following about the magical influences which are believed to be held in acacia water:

For the student to prepare acacia water for use in the honoring one's teacher *Wai Kru*, they first have to find seven acacia pods of which each has seven seeds. Moreover, each acacia tree cannot be close to water. This means the tree cannot be close enough for its shadow to be cast upon any body water whether it be a pond, lake creek, river or water well. Regardless of the time of day that alters the sun-shadow angle, at no time can the tree's shadow touch them. Another restriction is that its shadow cannot be cast upon a graveyard. In preparing the water, the acacia pods are roasted on a special outdoor fire.¹⁷

Seashells (*Cypraeidae* family, *Cypraea* genus)

Bia is the phonetic Thai name of many kinds of seashells in the *Cypraea* genus of the *Cypraeidae* family. In the past, the *Lanna* people used *bia* shells as a means for exchanging goods and services; in other words, it was a natural form of money. *Bia* were also given as one of the offerings of the *Kan Tang* during *Wai Kru*s in the areas around the town of Chang Mai. Originally, it was intended as symbolic payment of the student's tuition fee and some musicians still use the *bia* shells out of respect for this tradition. Even though now the

¹⁷ Udom Rungreungsri, "Showing Respect to Teacher Ceremony [ขึ้นตั้ง]," *Northern Thai Cultural Encyclopedia [สารานุกรมวัฒนธรรมไทยภาคเหนือ]* (Bangkok: Siam Press Management, 1999) 732-733 (In Thai, translation by the author)

use of the modern Thai *baht* currency predominates, the *bia* is still a significant symbol as one of the offerings, since it is intended to assist in supplying the needs of deceased teachers. The interviewees presented the view that the deceased teachers of early generations would likely have used the *bia* more than the *baht*. Therefore, the offering of *bia* shells continues as a recognition of the spirit of the elder music teachers.

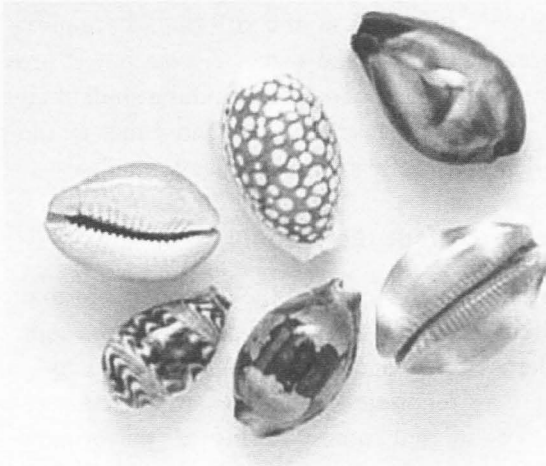


Figure 8: *Bia* Shells

Curry Paste Ingredients: Lemongrass, Galangal, Onions, Shallots, Garlic and Shrimp Paste

The purpose of making an offering of curry paste ingredients, which comprises the key flavoring ingredient in Thai curry dishes, is to provide nourishment for the teacher's spirit while traveling, just like the rice and other types of food that are provisions for the music teacher spirit's consumption.

These items represent the care and consideration on the part of the students in preparing one of the four requisites for their teacher, according to their traditional beliefs. The requisites are housing, food, clothing and medicine. These offerings and their preparation reflects the kindness of the students towards their teacher. Another purpose

for offering the four requisites to one's teacher is the belief that it will also make the givers themselves prosperous and comfortable, addressing their own needs for food and shelter.

Additionally, when considering the ingredients of curry paste, namely the galangal and lemongrass, they are viewed as positive symbols for the artist since these plants easily self-propagate and spread. It is hoped that the musician's life will match the exuberance growth of knowledge to match the characteristics of these plants. Since curry paste is included in the offering, it requires a pot to accompany it for cooking to take place. A new pot is provided as a new one is the purest form a pot can take and the student always wants to give good things to their teacher. It is feared that an old pot might be leaky, as well as spiritually and/or physically unclean.

Additional Beliefs About the Rituals

Many musicians believe that if they do not perform the *Wai Kru* rite to honor their teacher before each performance, some errors or personal problems will occur that will negatively affect the performance. It was reported that many artists had experienced a sudden illness or missed notes during a performance if they inadvertently neglected to perform a *Wai Kru* or did something wrong towards their teacher. Several cited getting a headache or they felt like a fishbone was stuck in their throat, as well as other illnesses that seemed resistant to treatment by a physician. However, when they eventually would resort to seeing a medicine man, it was reported that after he analyzed the situation, there had either been a mistake during the *Wai Kru* rite or some negative action was made towards their teacher. Nevertheless, they would then completely recover after they begged for forgiveness and acknowledged that a rule had been broken. Consequently, current artists are very careful in carrying out every process of the *Wai Kru* rite so that it firmly exists in its original form according to Thai *Lanna* wisdom and their traditional beliefs.

***Keud* (Prohibitions)**

From the interviews of the Northern *Lanna* artists there are also a few traditional prohibitions that were handed down with the three types of *Wai Krus* from their teacher. These prohibitions are known as '*keud*'.

Since these *keud* have been handed down from generation to generation, many artists cannot provide the exact explanations for them. For example, the *keud* dictates that performers are banned from eating anything at a funeral ceremony, unless they have been studying music for more than three years. Additionally, they are prohibited from eating seaweed, curries that contain squash, and banana stems, because ingesting these foods are believed to lessen their power as musicians. The tradition of *keud* indicates that if one breaks these rules, then they would become sick or something negative will happen to them. For instance, they might not be able to play their instrument well, their timing might be off or they would be unable to finger the desired notes.

However, from research into the folk medicinal practices in the region, these food prohibitions might be explained by the belief that squash and banana stems block the absorption and the resulting effectiveness of oral medicines. Consequently, some believe a food that has this negative effect would also lessen the musicians' ability and the teacher's spirit could not overcome the deleterious effects of these foods.

Regarding the belief that a musician should not have a meal in the house where the dead is lying comes from a superstitious belief that the soul of the deceased might be hanging around and, if the artists partook of the food, they would then be inferior to the host. This would make the soul ill-content and motivated to affect the musician negatively in some manner. Conversely, if the artist does not eat anything, then there is no potential to offend the deceased soul.

Some artists believe the *keud* rules are only a general guideline for behaving well, since one's behavior is a reflection upon their teacher and the artist in no manner would want to offend their teacher. For example, one *keud* rule is a prohibition against drinking alcohol which at first, appears to contradict the earlier discussion of the *Chang*

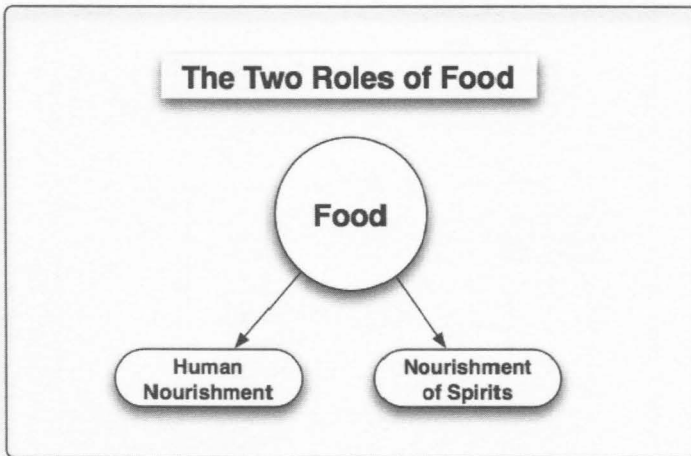
Saw vocalists that sip some of the alcohol offered as part of the *Kan Tang* during the pre-performance *Wai Kru*. As a result, some in the *Lanna* region reported that the *keud* was redefined to allow performers to drink some alcohol as long as it resulted in no negative behavior that would reflect disrespectfully upon one's teacher.

The *Lanna* region, as well the whole of Thailand, has a behavioral foundation in the teachings of the Buddha that places one's teacher in the position of the second highest in regard, after one's parents. Therefore, the reason for behaving well is to show respect to one's teacher. Buddhism also supports the concept that if one takes part in performing good deeds, its 'goodness' would eventually come back to the musician in the form of artistic success.

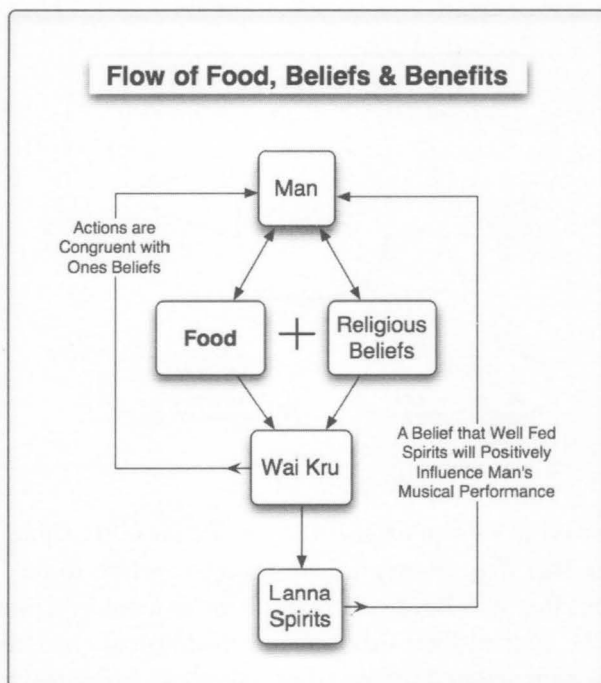
Discussion and Analysis

Human beings have used the same food that satisfies their everyday metabolic needs as an offering to their religion's spirits throughout the ages. Edible offerings have been found all around the world and vary accordingly to localized belief systems or religions. One society may use a different food item to represent the same theme found in another. While conversely, the same food may be used to characterize a completely different social value. Even though the foods and their meanings may differ, this pattern and the central role they play in sacred ceremonies of worship remain similar.

What one often finds is that the offering is what one desires to be continued in the future. For example, one offers rice to ensure that they will never go hungry or the fertile coconut to ensure a couple's fertility. On a more spiritual level, the offering of foods to the spirits to assuage their hunger and please them is so that in turn they will render future assistance or a layer of protective insurance. Some, however, view this as merely being comparable to one giving a metaphysical 'bribe'. The two roles of food can be portrayed below, where one addresses the bodily needs of humans and the other the nourishment of spiritual entities.



In regard to *Lanna's* musical rites, the specific edible offerings given in the *Wai Kru* ceremonies are meant to return to one's teacher the goodness that was bestowed upon them as a student; specifically, providing the student their deep breadth of musical wisdom, transfer of skill and knowledge. Furthermore, with these offerings the student is both informing and requesting permission of one's deceased teacher and the music spirits to allow the performance to proceed. There is also an appeal made to them for their blessing and well-wishes for a successful performance. The flow chart below diagrams the role of food, religious beliefs and the benefits those offerings return to the musician.



As discussed throughout the above descriptions, food represents several core human needs as reflected in the types of foods that make up the *Kan Tang* in the *Lanna* musician's *Wai Kru* ceremonies. One core need is to honor deeply those that have given their best to you with respectful reciprocity. The student wants to give back to their teacher in the best manner as the teacher has given to them. The teacher has protected and tutored the student in the manner of a professional musician, as well as in the manner of an honorable member of society. The teacher has instilled a sense of confidence that allows the student to approach any musical tasks without hindrance or hesitation. The student knows that without fulfilling the *Wai Kru* rites none of the essence that comprises their musicianship would have been possible.

Conclusion

Although there are many other offerings given during the *Wai Kru*, food is one example of a worship offering that humans use to serve both their spiritual and nutritional needs. The ceremonial foods that have been given to the spirits are not at all wasted, but are later transformed from ‘spiritual supplements’ into nutritional ones for the participants to partake in after the ceremony has finished. This fact may have played a role historically in why food has been such an important item in the *Lanna* region’s *Wai Kru* rituals.

This article has described the role of food in conjunction with the *Wai Kru* rites of the *Lanna* musicians from Northern Thailand. The *Wai Kru* blends a combination of folk medicine and lore in conjunction with Buddhist influences. The role food plays is a dual one. One as a simple food for the human body and another as sustenance for nourishing human spiritual needs symbolized as offerings of appreciation to one’s teacher and mythical gods of the musical arts. These cultural customs have been carried down from one generation to the next since society elders are themselves respected by the young people in the community.

The edible offerings for the *Kan Tang* are locally produced and most are common items from daily life. However, with the knowledge of traditional beliefs, rules and values, they become strongly significant and spiritually meaningful. The process of rituals and prohibitions help impart good social values to the young student musicians and their community. The foods presented in the *Wai Kru* portray a strong cultural relationship in the reflection of the gratitude and respect between music students and their teachers. It also mirrors the respect the younger generation has held throughout the history of this region for its elders and their wisdom of the beautiful *Lanna* culture, so that it would be wise to preserve it well into Thailand’s future.

References

- “African American Wedding Traditions.” *Wedding Connections*. 12 Apr 2009 <<http://www.weddingconnections.com/articles/traditionsafrican>>.
- Anumanratchaton, Phraya. *The Death* [กโรตยา]. Bangkok, Parppim Printing, 1988. (In Thai)
- “Coconut.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 10 Apr 2009 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Coconut&oldid=312112023>>.
- “Country and Western Wedding Theme.” *Do-It-101.com*. 10 Apr 2009 <<http://doit101.com/Crafts/westernwedding.html>>.
- “Invitation to Korean Culture: Gosa, long-been-performed shamanistic rite.” *Chingusai Newsletter*, Vol 41, September 2002. 10 Apr 2009 <<http://english.daegu.go.kr/group02/chingusai/200209.htm>>.
- Johannessen, Carl. “Distribution and Use of the Black-Boned and Black-Meated Chicken in Mexico and Guatemala.” 8 Apr 2009 <<http://sites.maxwell.syr.edu/clag/yearbook1986/carl.pdf>>.
- “The Legend of this Ceremony and the Offerings.” *Javanese Ceremonies, An Orientation to the Culture and Tradition of Java-Indonesia*. 9 Mar 2009 <http://users.skynet.be/dvran/M_sajen.htm>.
- “New Year Traditions: Lao New Year.” *FatherTime's.Net*. 5 Apr 2009 <<http://www.fathertimes.net/laonewyear.htm>>.

“Palu & apos;e: Religion and Expressive Culture.” *World Culture Encyclopedia, East/Southeast Asia*. 8 Apr 2009

<<http://www.everyculture.com/East-Southeast-Asia/Palu-e-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>>.

“Preparing the Wedding.” *Javanese Ceremonies, An Orientation to the Culture and Tradition of Java-Indonesia*. 10 Mar 2009

<http://users.skynet.be/dvran/E_preparation.htm>.

“Puja (Hinduism).” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 13 Mar 2009

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Puja_\(Hinduism\)&oldid=311277069](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Puja_(Hinduism)&oldid=311277069)>.

Udom Rungreungsri. “Showing Respect to Teacher Ceremony [ขึ้นตั่ง].” *Northern Thai Cultural Encyclopedia [สารานุกรมวัฒนธรรมไทยภาคเหนือ]*. Bangkok: Siam Press Management, 1999. (In Thai)

“Vietnamese and Western Wedding Ceremonies.” *Vietnam-Culture.com*.

10 Apr 2009 <<http://www.vietnam-culture.com/articles-100-29/Vietnamese-and-Western-wedding-ceremonies.aspx>>.

