

## Notion of Rice in Isan Local Literature

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### Abstract

Rice is an essential part of social growth in Southeast Asia including the lowlands around Mekong River which has been affirmed by the ancient evidence such as Baan Chiang Archeological Site in Udonthani, and None Nok Tha Archeological Site in Khon Kaen. Similarly, this fact was affirmed by a message on a B.E. 15<sup>th</sup> stone inscription at Ban Nonesang, Bungkae sub-district, Mahachaichana district, Yasothon province, mentioning that “King Somatitya intendedly encourages his people to grow rice around the lowland”, and it was often stated in stories, tales, legends, literatures in both written and oral modes. The examples of legendary literatures were Khun Burom, the legend of Rice Goddess, etc, and some of the jataka are Maha Chat, Phaya Kankark, Thao Jed Huad Jed Hai, Suprom Mokkha Mha Kao Hang, Kachanam, etc. More from instructional literatures and ancient laws were Phaya, Dharmada Sorn Loke, Ya Sorn Lhan, Chana Santha, Lhan Sorn Pung, Kam Kong Sorn Prai, Moon La Khud, Lung Sorn Lhan, Siaw Sawad, Indiyarn Sorn Luk, Kab Phra Mune, Tao Kam Sorn, Thammasat Boran, etc. Moreover, it was found that ritual literature e.g. Bot Su Kwan Khao and Tamra Promachat Horasart Isan mentioned rice variety, growing techniques, anti-animal yantra. These literature works were composed with passages that implied the local wisdom of rice. Besides the literature works, this region is called “the rice community” due to its favorable climate for rice which is the main crop for the local people. In fact, Isan region and the lowlands around Mekong River is the area where rice is very necessary for living, so a notion of rice has been inserted into every local activities and rituals as a motto “the field is full of rice and the jar is full of fermented fish” referring to sufficient food. This notion is also conveyed through the traditions throughout 12 months in a year. Apparently, sacrifices, worships, and blessing performed in every ceremony requires rice as the main course which can be made as drinks and snacks e.g. Satho, Kao Sarn, Kao Toktak, Kao Dum, Kao Dang, Kao Tom Mad, Kao Larm, Kao Poon, Kao Pard, Kao Mao, Kao Tib, etc. For these reasons, notion of rice presented in either literature or ceremony is the local people’s respect to fertility of nature reflecting their belief about God, economic system, and social class system.

**Key words:** rice, notion, Isan local literature

### 1. Introduction

Isan region and the lowlands around Mekong River were formed with a suitable geographical attributes for the growth of rice, a main crop for the life of the local people, so this area is a place where rice is highly necessary and influential for all people from different ethnics. It was also affirmed that notion of rice has been implied into the local way of life, belief and rituals as a motto “the field is full of rice and the jar is full of fermented fish” representing the real life of the local people living around Mekong lowlands with “sufficient fertility”. In fact, notion of rice has been inserted into all ceremonies in each month throughout a year (based on the lunar calendar) and some is directly engaged with rice such as Boon Koon Larn (the rice

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thanking ceremony in 2<sup>nd</sup> month), Boon Kao Jee (3<sup>rd</sup> month), Boon Maha Chat or Hae Kao Pan Kon (4<sup>th</sup> month), Boon Kao Pradab Din (mid-August), and Boon Kao Sak or Boon Kao Salak (10<sup>th</sup> month). Besides, some sacrifice and worship activities e.g. Bay Sri Soo Kwan (blessing ceremony) requires rice as the main course which can be made as drink and snack such as Satho, Kao Sarn, Kao Toktak, Kao Dum, Kao Dang, Kao Tom Mad, Kao Larm, Kao Poon, Kao Pard, Kao Mao, Kao Tib, etc.

For these reasons, rice is not only the main dish for the local people in this region but it means the local way of life and uniqueness of the place which assumingly covers all parts of the ASEAN since rice is a part of the culture and community of all ethics. The researcher is personally interested in notion of rice as many researchers and research papers previously studied on this notion. Differently, there has been a few numbers of research and study presenting about notion of rice in literature especially in written format. Therefore, the researcher purposively presented notion of rice through this study in order to clarify the local people's thinking process, belief, economic system, and social class through another perspective in literature. These literature works may not totally be unreliable but a set of thoughtful logics that should be better studied through the signs other than looking at the concept alone.

## 2. Rice in Archeological Evidence

Sujit Wongthes previously stated in a book "Kao Prai – Kao Jao Khong Chao Syam" that rice is a monocot plant in an *Oryza* genus of Gramineae family that grow well in tropical and temperate area on a range between a 53° N latitude and 35° S longitude and from the sea level up to 2,500 meters of height. Rice can be grown finely in acid soil with 3 to 10 pH or the alkaline soil with 0-1 pH. It also grows well in 30 – 40° C of temperature. In Thailand, the most ancient evidence of rice was discovered in Tham Pung Hung cave in Mae Hongson province. At that time, C.F. Gorman found rice seed that was assumed to be 3,000 - 5,000 B.C. The found seeds were similar to the seeds of sticky rice in *Javanica* genus and round-shaped rice in *Indica* genus. This evidence indicated that man knew how to grow rice since 3,000 – 5,000 B.C. Likewise, at the excavation on Baan Chiang site, Gorman found pieces of rice hulls blended with pottery soil which was assumed to be 3,000-3,500 B.C., close to the age of the rice hulls found at Tham Pung Hung cave. In the same vein, the rice hulls used with pottery soil was found at None Nok Tha site in Amphoe Phu Wiang, Khon Kaen province, and assumed to be 3,500 B.E. Furthermore, pieces of rice hulls were found on ironware and paintings so it affirmed that man learned to grow rice since then (Sujit Wongthes, 1988: 27-62).

Tayado Watabe, Tomoya Akihama, and Osama Kinoshita examined the rice hulls on pieces of ancient bricks from 108 ancient buildings and found that the before a period of 16<sup>th</sup> B.E. , round-short rice seeds were found the most followed by giant seeds. Meanwhile, slim seeds were slightly found in the northeast but not around Chao Phraya River lowlands. Indeed, round-short rice seeds were still found during a period between 16 – 20 B.E., whereas slim seeds were found more around the country. Number of giant seeds was gradually decreased. Later in a period of 20 – 23 B.E., round-short seeds were broadly found and number of slim seeds was rapidly increased in the central plain but fewer giant seeds were produced. Since 23 B.E., slim rice seeds were mostly found and grow in the central part; meanwhile, round - short and giant seeds were grown only in the north and northeast. It was assumed that round-short seeds were sticky rice that grows well on the lowlands and the giant seeds were sticky rice growing finely on the highland. The slim seeds were round-shaped rice. In Rattanakosin period, Thailand started exporting rice and round-shaped rice was grown broadly around the country, the central part and

northeast. Differently, when talking about rice as meal, it was found that people have it in different ways. That is, people in the central part and south popularly have round-shaped rice but the northern and northeastern people prefer sticky rice (Sujit Wongthes, 1988: 41-44).

### 3. Rice in Literature

#### 3.1 Oral Literature

Stories, tales, legendary literature and oral literature implying notion of rice has been a highlight that many academics and scholars presented through academic articles and media. In this regard, the researcher gave some example to present notion of rice in oral literature “Tam Nan Khun Bulom e.g. people living along both sides of Mekong River believed that a buffalo can give birth to man through “Nam Tao Pung” (bottle gourd) growing on a dead buffalo’s nose after it had been sent down to the earth by Phraya Than. Similarly, there was a tale retold throughout lowlands along Chao Phraya River that there was a buffalo that teaches man to grow rice (Pantip Theeranet, Daily Matichon, Prachchuen, 29, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015: 14).

Sujit Wonthes wrote in “Kao” about dog (Year of the Dog) that it was a holy animal for the people in Suwannaphm Kingdom for 3,000 years and those people believed that dog was a sacred animal with 9 tails that brought the rice seeds down man on earth to grow and eat as food. It was also told by Chuang people in Longzhou, Guangxi that people in the past was fool and had no rice to eat since they neither knew nor had rice seeds. Once, there was a nine-tail dog went to heaven thinking of stealing the rice seeds. The dog dropped its nine tails on a pile of heaven rice so the rice seeds stuck on them. Suddenly, some angel saw and ran after the dog. The angel fought the dog with his weapon and cut off 8 tails of the dog. The dog return to the earth with only one tail left with some rice seeds on it. Since then man has had rice to eat as their food and were thankful to the dog (หมา ป็จจ เป็นสัตว์ศักดิ์สิทธิ์ ของคนในสุวรรณภูมิ เมื่อ 3,000 ปีมาแล้ว, Daily Matichon. January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006).

In addition, there was a tale directly telling a story of rice called “Nang Kosok (Isan) or Pra Ma Posop (Goddess of Rice) that Iam Thongdee had collected the details from local villagers in Baan Ampawan, Amphoe Maung, Khon Kaen province stating that “... *Nang Kosok was an angel, a wife of King Sakkathevarat who was reborn as rice as her wish with the help from Ta Fai hermit so rice was spread throughout the world. Rice seeds were alive as man and had wings so it could fly to everywhere like a bird. Rice seeds were as big as a watermelon. They had heart and emotion so they felt love and greed. Rice seeds could classify people. For good people, rice seeds would fly themselves into their stables. Man did not grow rice but only built their stables waiting for rice seeds. When the farming reason came, rice seeds would fill up the stables. Man had no need to beat rice seeds, but gently peeled them off for cooking. Once, there was a widow who could not finish building her stable on time and later entailed some chaos. Since she was wicked, she got mad at rice seeds and beat them angrily with her carrying pole. Rice seeds were shocked and flew away thinking that man was all cruel. Rice seeds felt slighted and moved to the woods on the mountain. They turn themselves into taro and wild yam so man had no rice to eat. Many men were starving and finally died. Once, a grandpa and grandma felt the bad sign so they decided to visit Ta Fai hermit in Himavanta Wood. They told the hermit everything so he felt sorry for man. The hermit was willing to get Nang Kosok back. When the hermit met Nan Kosok, he asked her to go back but she refused claiming that man was bad to her. The he hermit kept begging Nang Kosok and promised that when she returned this time, all man would treat her respectfully and thankfully. After hearing the hermit’s word, Nan Kosok held her breath to die*

*and was reborn as rice seeds. Finally, the hermit gave the rice seeds to the couple and told them to grow the seeds. From now on, man need to grow rice themselves and be thankful to Nang Kosok. To do any activities to the rice e.g. growing, harvesting, carrying, and beating, man must ask for her forgiveness first. After harvesting, man has to do the blessing ceremony to ask for forgiveness from Mother Earth, guardian angel, and farm guardian spirit before growing rice in the next season. That is, they must prepare four dishes of dessert, four trays of betel set, and four piece of cigarette, as an offering to Nang Kosok. This set of an offering must be prepared before doing any activities to rice. After all, man has to behave well to Nang Kosok. The grandpa and grandma promised the hermit and brought rice seeds back home. Since then the couple started growing the seeds and doing the ceremonies to the rice.*

### 3.2 Written Literature

Examples of written literature were legendary literature e.g. Tam Nan Phraya Indra, Khun Bulom, Phra Mae Posob (Goddess of Rice), etc; Jataka e.g. Maha Chat, Phraya Kan Kak (The Toad King), Tao Jed Huad Jed Hai (A king with seven rice streamers and seven jars), Suprom Mokka Mha Kao Hang (the nine-tale dog), Katchanam, etc; instructional literature and ancient law e.g. Phaya (local proverbial rhyme), Dharmada Sorn Loke, Ya Sorn Lhan (a grandma teaching her grandchild), Chana Santha, Lhan Sorn Pu (a grandchild teaching a grandpa), Kam Kong Sorn Prai (Kam Kong teaching the servants), Moon La Khud, Lung Sorn Lhan (an uncle teaching his grandchild), Siew Sawad, Indiyarn Sorn Luk (Indiyarn teaching his children), Kab Phra Munee (a Thai traditional poem), Tao Kam Sorn, Thammasat Boran (ancient dharma), etc; and ritual literature e.g. Bot Su Kwan Khao (rice blessing rhyme) and Tamra Promachat Horasart Isan (an Isan-local astrology book). These literature works mentioned information about rice e.g. rice variety, growing techniques, anti-animal yantra, and some passages implied the local wisdom of rice; therefore, this region is called “the rice community”. According to abovementioned, the researcher presented the sample passages to clarify notion of rice within the local way of life conveyed through the written literature works as follows.

### 3.1 Rice in Isan Legendary Literature

The researcher purposively selected 4 pieces of legendary literatures with outstanding content to present notion of rice. The first piece was Legend of Phra Mae Posob (Wat Maha Chai Edition) with the same plot that Iam Thongdee had collected from the local villagers in Baan Ampawan, Amphoe Muang, Khon Kaen province. The sample verse was presented below.

*“...เจ้ารสี มาแบ่งพันธุ์ให้เป็นเข้ากำแลเข้าชาว เข้าเจ้าแลเข้าเหนียว เข้าเดือนเพื่อว่าจักปลูกไ้  
แลนา..นางโพสพก็บ่ชินวจา ท่านรสีได้นางก็แบ่งกาออกไว้ถวยทานให้แก่เจ้ารสี...”*

(Tamnan Nang Posob. piece 5: page. 1-2)

The composition reflected the origin of rice created by a hermit who asked for rice seeds from Nang Posob and share them to the people around the world. This was different from the legend of Phraya Indra where rice was blamed as the starting point of disaster and used to claim for the political advantages by good people to fight back an unfair governance, draught, and famine as mention in the verses below.

“...คันทว่าเขาบให้ทั้นใช้กินเปี้ยดอกเงินกับด้วยไฟไท คันทว่าเลี้ยงแล้วกับเอาแถมเหล่าเอามาเป็นของอาณาประโยชน์แห่งตนแลอัน ๑ ก็เล่าแต่ค่อยตัดความบ่ถัก ลางแห่งพลอยให้รำคราญแก่กัน คันทว่าได้เข้าของแห่งเขาแล้วก็ยินดีก็เอาไปสู้กันกินแล โทษอันนี้...ก็ผิตฮิตบ้านคองเมืองแลฝนตกแล ปถิระดูแลเดือน ๕ ฝนตกน้ำนอง เดือน ๑๑ เดือน ๑๒ ดับจึงได้เฮ็ดไฮ้ไถนา ข้าวตายค้ำกงกันแลคนทั้งหลายจักตาย อยากน้ำอยากข้าวก็มากนัก เพราะว่าท้าวพระยาบ่ชอบรสสาธรรมแลท้าวพระยาก็มาโฮมกันเอาเข้าของเงินค่าเก็บเอามาเป็นของตนจักวินาสจิบหาย...”

(Tamnan Phraya Indra. piece 1: page. 1-2)

Another two pieces were Legend of Urangkathat and Legend of Phra Chao Liab Lok in which the content discussed more about Buddhism and rice was only a part of a person's popularity creation and an image of people doing good deeds for their rebirth in a better next life as presented below.

“...เมื่อพระสัพพัญญูเจ้ามาสถิตภูภำพรำช่ำบอกให้วิสุกัมมเทวบุตร ควิตลายฮูปสัพพัญญูเจ้ายืนอยู่ในฮ่อมไม้รัง จึงรูปพญาตีโคตรบูรถือบาตรโอยคิงต่ำหัวลงน้อมถวายแก่สัพพัญญูเจ้าแล ควิตรูปภูภำพรำรูปพระเจ้านั่งฉั้นข้าวกับบาตร รูปเจ้าอาณนทฉั้นข้าวเหนือพดไม้ รูปพญาอินทร์ มือขวาถวายน้ำเต้าธัมมพก มือซ้ายนบ ควิตรูปฝูงนี้ไว้เทิน ด้านตะวันตกเพียงรูปมหาภักสสะปะหั้นแล...”

(Tamnan Urangkathat. pile 3: piece 12: page.2)

“...บัดนี้ จักกล่าวพระเจ้าเสียบโลกกัณฑ์หกสิบต่อ พอให้ญาติพี่น้องเห็นแจ้งฮ่อมนิทาน พระพุทธเจ้ายังอยู่ดอยหลวง เสด็จมาภิกขาจารทั่วคามบ้าน เขาก็ใส่บาตรพระพุทธเจ้าตามขอกหนทางมีลางเฮื่อนนอนตื่นสวายใส่บ่ทันพระพุทธเจ้า จึงได้ชื่อว่า “บ้านนอนหลับ” แท้ตะวันสวายก็บ่ตื่น มันก็ลุกนึ่งข้าวสวายใส่ใส่จ้งหัน แล้วจึงเสด็จสู่ห้องเสวยโภชนจ้งหัน เหนือดอยหลวงสั่งสอนข้าวบ้าน อันนี้เพื่อนกล่าวไว้เมืองกาสิ คนบ่ฟังความกันบ่เขาเถียงถ้อย จึงชื่อว่า “เมืองแล้ง” บ่มีคนน้อยใหญ่ ป่ยำแยงแยงพ้อบ้านเมืองซีแล้งโห่ง...”

(Tamnan Phra Chao Liab Lok. pile 3: piece 12: page.2)

In conclusion, the legendary literatures presented above were a reflection of different notions and ideology on rice. Legend of Phra Mae Posob reminded the readers that rice is important as food for their lives. On the other hand, Legend of Phraya Indra told a story where draught and famine were used for the people's political negotiation. Differently, Legend of Urangkathat and Phra Chao Liab Lok discussed Buddhism where rice was framed as an offering for personal rebirth in a better next life and should be given to the religion and monks, as the Lord Buddha's successor, for best advantage in return.

### 3.2 Rice in Jataka Literature

The 4 pieces of jataka literature were selected including “Suprom Mokka”, “Katchnam”, “Sangsilpachai”, and “Chantrakras-Suriyakras” that well mirrored different perspectives on rice which had been thoughtfully interpreted and presented as below.

First set of literature works presented perspective on farming such as the farmers their father's skull as an offer to the farm guardian spirits so their rice fields would be protected, fertilized, and profitable, the farmers turned their untidy and deserted land into the rice field, etc., as stated in the verses below.

“...จนว่าหัวพ่อหล่อน คือหมากน้ำเต้า ให้เอาไปเก็บเมี้ยนไว้ พอเถิงเดือนหกมาทำนา ให้เจ้าแก่หัวพ่อไปไว้	เหลือตายแต่กระดูก สังทับต่างกัน อัดแจบไผบเห็น จั่งค่อยเอามาไว้ หัวนาตกแต่งดีเทอญ
.... ท้าวก็หลิงแผ่นพื้น วางเชือกแล้ว เอาผดไม้ปักบัง	เห็นแจ้งไยนา เก็บหัวพ่อไว้หिनผา แล้วตัวคินเมื่อห้อง หิ้นแล้ว”

(Suprom Mokka: pp. 3-4)

The sample verses mirrored an ancient belief in the ancestor spirit in which local people used the skull of either man or animal to prevent the evil spirits and protect their descendants so they could live peacefully. Also, it was used to indicate their landmark and show off their power over the other ethics or wild animals.

“...ไฮได้เผาไปแล้ว กุลิมาไถ เมื่อท้าวคิดฮ่ำแล้ว พอเมื่อฝนฮวายฮ่ำ สุพรหมโมกขาท้าว เข้าโคดถั่งงาบไฮ	แปนเป่าไฟลุ่ม ต่อไปเมื่อหน้า คินลู่เฮือนตน แผ่นดินในพื้น หาแนวเข้าปลูก ดีแล้วลิหว่านไถ”
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(Suprom Mokka: page 4)

“...เขาก็ป่าต้นไม้ เขี้ยวค่างาม ตั้งเป็นเจ็ดพันบ้าน ลาดเคื่องตั้ง	สร้างก่อแปงนา เกิดเป็นกอข้าว นิคมตามเมืองใหญ่ เสียบไว้แต่งแปง”
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(Katchanam: page 351)

The sample verses from “Suprom Mokka” and “Katchanam” were compared to explain how the local people explored and prepared their wasted land for an agricultural area. In this Suprom Mokka, a farmer explored and prepared the land alone for a family use affirming

his perspective of doing a simple agriculture to earn their living. This exploration procedure mainly required use of fire. Different detail was given in Kachanam explaining the land exploration at urban zone or “city building” which implied a perspective of macro agriculture to supply rice and crops to the people around the kingdom.

“พอกาลดูเข้า	สาละยี่เยวแก่
ท้าวก็เกี่ยวเข้าแล้ว	ยี่ให้หล่นดี
ท้าวเอาไปฝากพี่น้อง	ผู้เพิ่มมีคุณ
ทั้งถั่วงา	เข้าโคดหวานปิดต้ม

...	
ท้าวเอาหมากอีแดงน้ำเต้า	ในฮั่วไฮ่สวน
เข้าไปเมืองใหญ่กว้าง	แจกแบ่งผู้มีคุณ
ดอมตนไปคนเดียว	แบ่งปันยอให้”

(Suprom Mokka: page 5)

“หลังนั้นชื่อว่าวิสูตรกว้าง	เต็มผ่อพันเสา
ที่นั้นชุมชาวสนม	หมื่นนางเนาว่าหัน
ทันที่ฮวานๆด้าน	แดงแสงสีชาด
พื้นพุ่มห้อง	หินกล้าก่อตัน
หลังนั้นฉางใหญ่เมี้ยน	ทุกขอบคำแดง
เรียกชื่อพระคลังหลวงยัง	ยี่พอเพียงข้าว
หลังถันพูน	ฉางเงินยังยี่
ทุกขอบข้า	ขนน้อมส่วยสิน”

(Sangsilpachai: page 284)

The sample verses from Suprom Mokka and Sangsilpachai were given and compared to describe the local harvest procedure for both family and kingdom uses which were different. That is, Suprom Mokka depicted different growing procedures for family living that well indicating that a family agriculture gave fewer products but they were produced via various procedures. Some product was reserved to be traded with the neighbors for other products. More importantly, the fact that Suprom Mokka had provided his crops and plants to his promoters definitely affirmed a perspective of locally dependent economic system. In contrast, Sangsilpachai presented another perspective where rice was exclusively kept in the royal storehouse as valuable goods to be traded between the kingdoms or to supply the people and army during a war.

“...เถิงแดนท้าว	กาลสินครราช
สองแจ่มเจ้า	ผ่นฝ่ายฮีบผาย
แม่งหนึ่งเถิงแห่งห้อง	บ้านนอกคาม
สองนงค์แพง	ข้าวขอกินข้าว

พอประมาณแล้ว ลีลาวัระยาตร ไปนั้น”

(Chantrakras – Suriyakras. pile 1: piece 9: page 2)

The sample composition of “Chantrakras – Suriyakras” previously given perfectly told the character’s suffering from draught and famine and became a beggar to earn his living. At this point, burglar was one form of locally dependent economy and caused by several factors. The main factor was draught, climate, and shortage of foods so some people had to leave their home either moving to another place or drifting to nowhere.

It was notable that the protagonists in “Suprom Mokka”, “Kachanan”, and “Chantrakras-Suriyakras” were all common people living simply in a local community. These characters were normally poor, orphan, and positive-minded with angel, king, giant, and spirit as their supporters. On the contrary, the protagonist in Sangsilpachai was a child of the royal family raised under an urban culture, luxurious and well-ordered environment, huge palace and wealth. However, these characters had normally stayed in a high competitive environment before they was finally able to either defeat the enemies or get over obstruction.

### 3.3 Rice in Instructional Literature

The three pieces of instructional literature were given here including “Moon La Khud” (origin of taboo), “Dharmada Sorn Loke”, and “Phraya Kam Kong Sorn Prai” (King Kam Kong teaching the servants, in which notion of rice was discussed in 2 perspectives including ‘Belief’ e.g. Moon La Khud, Dharmada Sorn Loke, and ‘Value of Living’ i.e. “Phraya Kam Kong Sorn Prai” that mirrored different perspectives. The interpretation was presented as follows.

“...อัน ๑ คนทั้งหลายป่ควรกินนั้น  
ข้าวแห่งแม่หม้าย ๑ ข้าวแห่งแม่หมั้น ๑ ป่ควรแล  
ผู้ใดกินก็ผ่อนลักษณะทั้งมวลแล  
ประการ ๑ ข้าวอันทำข้าวบูชาพระเจ้าก็ป่ควรกินแล”

(Moon La Khud. Pile 12: page 2)

From its content, “Moon La Khud” mainly taught the readers to avoid breaking the taboo or “Khud” so they could live their life peacefully. In this regard, rice from a widow or sterile woman was considered taboo, which meant that being widow and sterile could be wickedness or a fruit of bad karma that those women committed in their previous life, so they became unfortunate or sterile in their current being. Local villagers commonly believed that these women were born with a bad luck that brought death to their husbands and forever bound to widowhood. In Isan, they called these women “Mae Hang” who were socially insulted and incomparable to other women who normally live with their families. Besides, a sterile woman was called “Mae Man” which meant she could not give birth to any child as a family descendant. This bad luck was a conflict to the social norm that having many children was very important as the human resource to the economic system and labor, especially the boys. With more boys, a community could be more resourceful to explore, expand, and prepare the land for more



agricultural zone so they could produce more crops. Still, a family with more girls was the luckiest since parents would be offered with a bride-price when their daughter was married to a son of another family. Then, both families had more members and got bigger. Especially, the marriage with patronization system, both families would have more and more members by having a so-called “Por Lam – Mae Lam” (supporter parents) who could be selected from the respectful, well-founded, and well-known elders in the community.

“อัน ๑ ผีจักไปทางไกลใครสู่นิมิตอันฮ้ายอันดีตั้งนั้นให้ห่อข้าวเป็น ๓ ห่อ  
ข้าวเปลือก ห่อ ๑ ให้ใส่หมากถั่ว ห่อ ๑ ให้ใส่ถ่านไฟดำ(ห่อ ๑)  
แล้วให้อธิษฐานเอาไปไว้ให้กากิน  
ครั้งน้่ากากินจับห่อเข้าเปลือกนั้นคืนักแล  
ครั้งน้่า กากจับห่อหมากถั่วนั้นพอประมาณ  
ครั้งน้่ากากจับห่อถ่านไฟนั้นบตีแล”

(Moon La Khud. pile 15: pp. 1- 2)

Based on the abovementioned, the sample verses from “Moon La Khud” affirmed that the local people strongly believed in luck which as a positive outcome from some kind of supernatural power. Apparently, rice was a sign of luck so when a prophet cow ate rice during a ploughing ceremony, it meant a safe and successful journey.

“...ราชาให้ชุดอารามฮ้างเก่า กับทั้งพระธาตุม้างให้ชุดไว้ที่ควร  
ทั้งหมู่โพธิ์ครีตันตายยืนให้พันล่าว ชุดกันตันถมให้ฮาบเพียง  
แล้วให้เข้าไปสร้างปลุกเฮือนบ้านอยู่ เข้าจึงไปสร้างบ้านเฮือนพร้อมไชน่า  
แต่นั้นข้าเชือกพร้อมโพยพยาริโรคาอนตายถึงขอบเมืองพญาเจ้า  
โภยภัยเข้ามาถึงต่างๆลายอืดข้าวพร้อมตายเจ็บท้องแลปวดหัว...”

(Dharmada Sorn Loke. piece 5: pp. 1-2)

At the beginning of “Dharmada Sorn Loke”, it mentioned the local people’s belief and respect to nature in the ancestor’s instruction or “Heet Kao Kong Lang”. In case of breaking this instruction, the kingdom would be faced with a terrible disaster. It verse implied that after the kingdom had reached its peak, the people basically forgot about the past though abandoned temples, old pagodas, broken mandapas, and dead Bodhi trees were all a sign of the respectful Buddhism. If people invaded in and used the place to build their house, it meant they were insulting Buddhism and finally lost their spiritual anchor. Meanwhile, an ecological system and climate around the place could be changed and some disaster or disease might attack and destroy crops, rice, animals, and even the people themselves.

“จักเฮ็ด	ปลาบ่บั้ง	ประสงค์จำแจ้วบอง
	แกงลาบก้อยไล่เหร์	ใส่หมากนาวศรี
	แปงส้มปลาหม่าปลา	ห่อตองแปงบั้ง
	ส้มปลาน้อยปลาแล้	ลงไหปุงแต่ง
	กระเทียมหอมบัวข้าว	เจ้าเอย
		ดีแล้วใส่ภาช



ล.๑๕ น.๑ ว่า ถ้าแก้ว่าหมดท่อใดก็ให้ใช้ท่อนั้น อันหนึ่ง ผู้ใดปล่อยละ  
ข้างม่วงวักววยไว้ทั้งกลางวันกลางคืนมากินเข้าท่านทั้งกลางวันกลางคืน เจ้าเข้า  
บอกให้เลี้ยงให้รักษาเข้ามาก็ให้มาเบ็ง เจ้าสัตว์แจ่งแล้วสัตว์ก็ปล้ำเลี้ยงบรักษาเข้า  
นาบมาเบ็งยังมากินเข้าท่านถึงสองที่สามที ให้เจ้าโฮเจ้านาจับเอาสัตว์ให้ได้แล้ว  
ให้ใส่โทษเจ้าของสัตว์แล้ว จึงขึ้นสัตว์ให้เจ้าของ เข้าหมดท่อใดให้เจ้าสัตว์ใช้ท่อ  
นั้น ๆ

(Lak Kam Muang Roi-Et: a manuscript from National Library of Thailand)

The verses from “Lak Kam Muang Roi-Et” highlighted that social norm was an important rule to terminate conflicts amongst the people in the community. Also, rice was very significant so there were rules specifically engaged with rice. Most of those rules were more like social custom based on compromising, forgiving, as the compensation could be flexibly offered with different items e.g. money, cloth, chicken, liquor, etc.

### 3.5 Rice in Su Kwan (blessing), ceremony, and astrology literature

Four pieces of the literature work were selected as the sample including “Rice Blessing Rhyme in Bai Lan (a short palm-leave scripture) of Baan Don Yom”, “Rice Blessing Rhyme in a palm-leave scripture of Baan Sung Nern”, Tamra Plook Ruan (House Construction Manual), and “Samud Khoi Prommachat (Thai astrology pulp book made of pulp) of Wat Sri Chan Baan Or”. These literature works were classified into 2 groups including group 1: the comparison on a variety of rice and group 2: local belief in fortune, presage, and auspicious time based on cosmology. Some verses were given as follows.

(ล. ๔ น. ๒) ... แถนหลวงจึงใช้กูไปเฮ็ดนาฮ้าปอนฮวงข้าวก่อนหัวปี เป็นคดียิ่ง  
ก่อเมืองฟ้า กุจักกวัดแก่งผ้าเอ็นเฮียกเอาขวัญ ขวัญเอยมายเออ ศรี ๆ มื้อนี้แม่่นมื่อดี ปีนี้  
เป็นปีเฮาข้าจักเฮียกเอาขวัญข้าวมาเล่าแลมานา ตามภาสาดำหล้า ถอกข้าแม่่นข้าววังน  
ลำชันแม่่นข้าวหมากพอกดำนอก

(ล. ๕ น. ๑) แม่่นข้าวหมากเขีย เม็ดเจ็ยข้าวประหลาด เม็ดอาดแม่่นข้าวกะ  
แสนดอ เม็ดมันแข็งแม่่นข้าวจ้าว ถอกฟ้าวแม่่นข้าวดอ หอมสมพอแม่่นข้าวดำน้อย  
หอมค้อยๆ แม่่นข้าวเล็บมือนาง เปลือกบางแม่่นข้าวกำ อ่ำท่าแม่่นข้าวอิมฝนตกฮ้า  
มันงอกลูกแผ่อกแม่่นข้าวขาวหลวง ฮวงพวงแม่่นข้าวพัว เม็ดคั่วแม่่นข้าวกนเบีย

(ล. ๕ น. ๒) เพียงเจ็ยวงามข้าวหินซ้อน เม็ดอาดนั้นข้าวดอกจาง แดงฮุน  
ฮานแม่่นข้าวเล็บแฮด มาเออขวัญเฮย

(Su Kwan Kao in a palm-leave scripture of Baan Don Yom)

“ฮวงชันนั้นข้าวหมากกอก คำขอกนั้นข้าวหมากเขือ เม็ดเจ็ยข้าวป้องแ้ว  
แลแ้วง เป็นฮวงฮูข้าวปลาหลาด เม็ดอาดข้าวหมากโพ เม็ดไปข้าวชี้ข้าง ข้าวขวาง  
แลข้าวกะแสนดอ ฮวงแดงข้าวจ้าว แก่ฟ้าวนั้นข้าวดอ หอมสบพอข้าวดำน้อย หอมคี้  
ค้อยข้าวจอมนาง ฮวงบางข้าวเลือดแฮด เกี่ยวตากแดดป้องแซง เม็ดขาวแดงข้าว

ดอกไม้ อยู่เบื้องใต้ข้าวแดงหลวง เป็นฮวงข้าววงข้าง เม็ดขวางข้าวหมากเค็ง เม็ดเป่ง  
ข้าวปลาชีวเฮือง เม็ดเหลืองข้าวน้ำม้งว ข้าวกาบยางแลข้าวพั้ว ลำดั่วข้าวพิมลาย  
เม็ดดำข้าวกำ อำท่าซึกา ดังชาวซีข้าวหมากหึ่ง แข็งยั้งนั้นข้าวลอดเกียนเสียน(เสียน)ดู  
อาดกะตำ ผุงไทนาเข้าเลือกไว้ ก่าอยายใต้โคสาหิณะ มาเยอขวัญเฮย (ขวัญ)ข้าวเหนียว  
ไปตกเมืองล้านช้าง ก็ให้ม้างกันมาเมื่อวันนี้ ขวัญเจ้าไปตกเมืองหงสาวดีก็ให้มาเมื่อ  
วันนี้ ขวัญข้าวจ้าวไปตกเมืองห้อ(ฮ่อ) ก็ให้กอกกันมาเมื่อวันนี้”

(Su Kwan Kao in a palm-leave scripture of Baan Sung Nern)

Based on the comparative study on two literal styles of rice blessing literature, it was found that in the past, each variety of rice was named after its property and was recorded in the form of literature works or short palm-leave scriptures called “Lan Kom”. This also presented the perspective the ancient people had toward the names of the neighboring kingdoms where spirit of rice fell on such as Lan Chang, Hongsawadi, Haw, etc. Additionally, the people also believed in guardian angel that gave fertility to man or “lowland people” and assigned “Mor Sut” or a local ritualist to call back the spirit of rice as mentioned in a passage “แถบหลวงจึงใช้กูไปเฮ็ดนาฮ้างปอนฮวงข้าวก่อนหัวปี เป็นคดียิ่งก่อเมืองฟ้า กุจกกวัดแก่งผ้าเอ็นเฮียกเอาขวัญ”

“...ผิวว่าจกเอาไม้คไฟให้เอาไม้ดู(ประดู)เป็นแม่คไฟหนึ่งข้าวกินอยู่ดีแลฯ  
ไม้เปื่อยเป็นไม้คไฟมักต้องถักไซหนึ่งข้าวบูชาผีแล  
ไม้จิกไม้ฮัง(รัง)แก่นหมันหนึ่งข้าวเพื่อคนหลาย  
ไม้ทั้งมวลผุงนี้ดีแลฯ...”

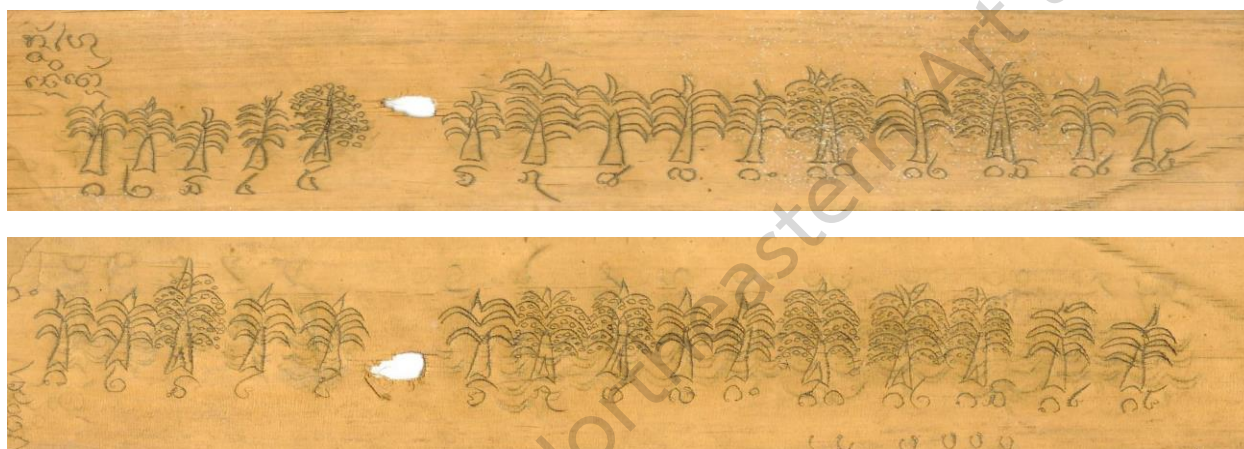
(Tamra Plook Ruan. pile 19: pp 1-2)

The verses from “Tamra Plook Ruan” described a perspective of ‘kitchen’ (Krau) where the people used for cooking and an essential part of a new house (Ruan) so it was called “Krau Ruan” or House and Kitchen. One house should be built with one kitchen though a family may have many members. Both small and big families should have one kitchen. On the other hands, a house with more than one kitchen was considered unsuitable. From the sample literature works, the local people carefully selected the wood from a tree with an auspicious name to build a so-called “Mae Kee Fai” which was the heart of kitchen believing it would bring in a good luck and happiness to the house.

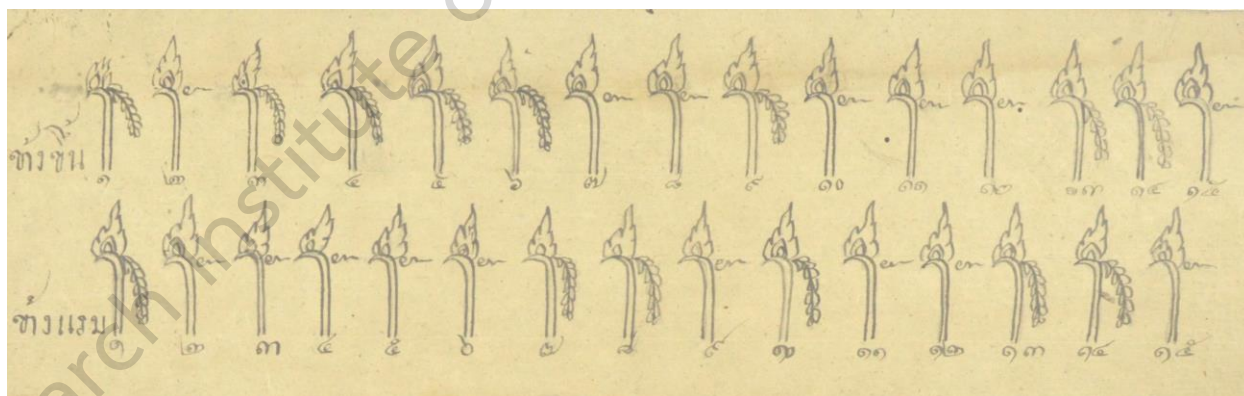
“...สิทธิการียะ เดือนขึ้นคำหนึ่ง ถ้าจะหว่านข้าวแลดำนานา  
อันมีต้นเปลามีดี มีต้นแลรวงจึงให้หว่าน ดำนานาเกิดดีแล ฯ  
สิทธิการียา เดือนขึ้นคำ ๑ ตกกล้าดีแล ๒ คำมีดี ๓ ๔ ๕ ๖ ดีแล ๗ ๘ คำมี  
ดี ๙ คำดีนักแล ๑๐ ๑๑ ๑๒ คำมีดีแล ๑๓ ๑๔ คำดีแล ๑๕ คำ มีดีดีแลฯ  
แรมคำ ๑ ดีแล ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ ๖ คำมีดีแล ๗ ๘ คำ ดีนักแล ๙ คำมีดี ๑๐  
คำดีแล ๑๑ ๑๒ คำมีดีแล ๑๓ ๑๔ คำดีนักแล ๑๕ คำมีดีเลย ฯ ถ้าผู้ใดจะทำนาให้  
ดูตำรานี้เกิด”

(Samud Khoi Prommachat. No. 001; Wat Sri Chan)

Tamra Promachat was a reflection of a belief in local cosmology and rice was a part of the season calendar because rice growing should be dependent to an appropriate period of time. This calendar had been made and edited several time before it was made as a simple diagram indicating the periods of waxing and waning moon that were suitable for the people to grow their fruitful rice and plants as illustrated in Figure 1 and 2. This was a psychological issue because the farmer's life in the past was mainly dependent to the climate. Likewise, "Na Pee" (in-season rice field) was likely the way-of-life calendar of the farmers that formed a community and culture which were presented in the form of either tradition or ceremony. This calendar was classified into 5 periods for different activities including 1) sacrificing, pleading, and foretelling; 2) cultivating; 3) maintaining; 4) harvesting; and 5) celebrating. Furthermore, the local people believed in "Yantra" or fabric amulet to protect their crop from rats and insects. Figure 3 presented the sample of rat-anti yantra.



**Figure 1: Sample Picture of Planting Period in Bai Lan Book Wat Issara Dham Wiwek (Short Palm Leaf Scripture) Based on Isan Astrology**



**Figure 2: Sample Painting Depicting a Scene When Farmers Sowing and Growing Rice in Samud Khoi Prommachat No. 001, Wat Sri Chan**



**Figure 3: sample of Rat-Anti Yantra**

#### **4. Rice: Thinking Process in Literature**

In this study, the notion of rice was taken from 16 pieces of literature works from 5 different styles including 1) four pieces of legendary literature i.e. Taam Nan Nang Posob, Tam nan Urangkathat, Tam Nan Phra Chao Liab Lok, and Tam Nan Phraya Indra; 2) four pieces of jataka literature i.e. Suprom Mokka, Kachanam, Sangsilpachai, and Chantrakras-Suriyakras; 3) three pieces of instructional literature i.e. Moon La Khud, Dharmada Sorn Loke, and Phraya Kam Kong Sorn Prai; 4) an ancient law literature i.e. Lak Kam Muang Roi-Et; and 5) four pieces of Su Kwan (blessing), ceremony, astrology literature i.e. Su Kwan of Baan Don Yom, Su Kwan of Baan Sung Nern, Tamra Plook Ruan, and Samud Khoi Prommachat of Wat Sri Chan. It was found that notion of rice in these literature works could be classified into three systems: 1) thought and belief; 2) economic system; and 3) social class system. Each was discussed below.

##### **4.1 Thought and Belief**

The sample literature works highlighted that rice was important as stable food for living. In Buddhist perspective in literature, rice was framed as an offering to be traded for a person's rebirth with a better life and it should be given as food to the Buddhist monks, as Lord Buddha's successor. Additionally, the local people strongly believed in the ancestor's spirit so they placed the skull of man or animal on the land to expel the evil spirits and to protect their children. It was also used as the landmark and item of power to scare the other ethics or animals.

Instructional literature mainly reminded the people not to break the taboo or "Khud", so they could live their life peacefully. People in the past believed that rice from a widow or sterile woman was a bad luck which was a belief in fortune and supernatural power. In contrast, rice was believed to be a sign of luck and if a prophet cow ate rice during a ploughing ceremony, it meant a safe and successful journey. They also respected nature and the ancestor's instruction called "Heet Kao Kong Lang", and if the people somehow broke the instruction, the kingdom would be drowning in a terrible disaster. Similarly, after the kingdom had reached its peak, the people basically forgot about the past. Temples, pagodas, mandapas, and Bodhi trees were left out and broken though those were all a sign of the respectful Buddhism. More importantly, either invading or using the ancient places for personal sake was referred to insulting Buddhism. So, those people would finally have nothing for their spiritual anchor; meanwhile; an ecological system and climate around the place could be changed and some disaster or disease might attack and destroy crops, rice, animals, and the people themselves. Some people believed that there was the guardian angel that provided fertility to man and assigned a local ritualist to call the spirit of rice back to the fields. In term of housing, "Tamra Plook Ruan" suggested that either small or big families should have only one kitchen since a house with more than one kitchen was like a bad luck. To keep their house peaceful, the people

carefully selected the wood from a tree with an auspicious name to build “Mae Kee Fai” or the heart of kitchen that would bring a good luck and happiness to the house.

Tamra Prommachat also highlighted a local belief in cosmology that rice was used as the season calendar because farming should be dependent to the seasons. This calendar was a diagram indicating the suitable waxing and waning moon periods for rice and plant growing. A term “Na Pee” (in-season rice field) was likely the way-of-life calendar of the farmers that formed a community and culture which were presented in the form of either tradition or ceremony. This calendar was classified into 5 periods for different activities including 1) sacrificing, pleading, and foretelling; 2) cultivating; 3) maintaining; 4) harvesting; and 5) celebrating. Moreover, there was a strong belief that “Yantra” or fabric amulet could be used to protect crops and products from rats and insects.

#### 4.2 Economic System

The literature works described the cultivation procedure for agricultural zone in which a farmer explored and prepared the land alone for a family use affirming his perspective of doing a simple agriculture to earn their living. This exploration procedure mainly required use of fire. Different detail was given in Kachanam explaining the land exploration at urban zone or “city building” which implied a perspective of macro agriculture to supply rice and crops to the people around the kingdom.

In Suprom Mokka described different growing procedures for family living that well indicating that a family agriculture gave fewer products but they were produced via various procedures. Some product was reserved to be traded with the neighbors for other products. Crops and plants were also offered the farmer’s the promoters definitely affirming a perspective of locally dependent economic system. In contrast, Sangsilpachai presented another perspective where rice was exclusively kept in the royal storehouse as valuable goods to be traded between the kingdoms or to supply the people and army during a war. In the same vein, “Chantrakras – Suriyakras” previously given perfectly presented the character’s suffering from draught and famine and became a beggar to earn his living. At this point, burglar was one form of locally dependent economy and caused by several factors. The main factor was draught, climate, and shortage of foods so some people had to leave their home either moving to another place or drifting to nowhere as the homeless. The draught and famine was also resulted from the war where people struggled and fought to claim the natural resource, show off their power to the nearby kingdom, or a fight for their desired woman as mentioned in the history.

In the past, people believed that having many children was good since they could have more labors to support the economic system. That is, a family with more boys could quickly explore, expand, and prepare the land for more agricultural zone with more crops and plants. Meanwhile, a family with more girls was the luckiest since more girls meant more bride-prices would be offered to the parents. After their daughter had been married into another family, both families had more members and got bigger. Especially, the marriage with patronization system, both families would have more and more members by having a so-called “Por Lam – Mae Lam” who could be selected from the respectful, well-founded, and well-known elders in the community.

In “Phraya Kam Kong” story, the content mirrored the cultural value of fresh-food eating and fish-dish preserving e.g. Jaw Bong, Som Pla, Mum Pla, Som Plan Noi, Pla Daek,

Pla Sae, Jaw Pong, etc. Normally, the local people were familiar with eat-with-hand culture and sticky rice was staple food sided with fish dishes and vegetable. People some time had meat dishes on some special occasions e.g. meat or pork served at the wedding ceremony or house warming which could be made with different styles. This claim was consistent to Tamra Plook Ruan that reflected notion of kitchen as a place for cooking that should be built one for a house though the family members were more.

After all, the instructional literature clearly reflected notion of rice in different perspectives such as belief in bad luck and fortune, respect to the nature and the ancestor's instruction, social inequality, patronization system, as well as food eating and preserving culture.

### 4.3 Social Class System

In a story of Tamnan Phraya Indra, rice was used to claim for the political advantages; meanwhile, the protagonists in "Suprom Mokka", "Kachanan", and "Chantrakrast-Suriyakras" were all common people living simply in a local community. These characters were normally poor, orphan, and positive-minded with angel, king, giant, and spirit as their supporters. Differently, the protagonist in Sangsilpachai was a child of the royal family raised under an urban culture, luxurious and well-ordered environment, huge palace and wealth. However, these characters had to be involved in a competition before defeat the enemies or get over obstruction by their power of good deeds.

In "Moon La Khud", it was stated that being widow and sterile could be wickedness or a fruit of bad karma that those women committed in their previous life, so they became unfortunate or sterile in their current being. Local villagers commonly believed that these women were born with a bad luck that brought death to their husbands and forever bound to widowhood. In Isan, they called these women "Mae Hang" who were socially insulted and incomparable to other women who normally live with their families. Besides, a sterile woman was called "Mae Man" which meant she could not give birth to any child as a family descendant. Meanwhile, "Lak Kam Muang Roi-Et" highlighted that social norm was an important rule to terminate the social conflicts. As rice was very significant, there were rules specifically engaged with rice in the form of social custom based on compromising, forgiving, as the compensation could be flexibly offered with different items e.g. money, cloth, chicken, liquor, etc.

## 5. Conclusion

Due to social evaluation of a modern society, some tradition, ceremony, and literature engaged with rice has been lost with times. With intensive economic situation, modern technology, and social complication, the society has completely become materialism whereas the people all have left behind their root. Hence, when they are faced with a crisis such as the regression of rice or agricultural products, people simply suffer since they have nothing to be their spiritual anchor that should remind them of reality. The cultural chain has been broken and the people completely forgot the origin of their ancestor that partly implied in the local ceremonies and literature works and passed along from generation to generation though a long history including the knowledge body and appreciation in art-created language. However, this could be an opportunity that the academic works to awake the society to understand more about the knowledge body that was presented through thought, concept, and signal interpretation which would be useful to empower the people of modern society to be the autonomous who truly know about their root and themselves in order to construct "the sustainable and secured society".



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