

The Establishment of Vientiane as the New Capital of the Lan Xang Kingdom in the Reign of King Xaysethathirath (1560-1571 A.D.)¹

Pamorn Pupiupa^a and Dararat Mattariganond^{ab*}

^a*Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Khon Kaen University
Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand*

^b*Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region
Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Khon Kaen University
Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand*

^{*}*Corresponding Author. Email: darmat@kku.ac.th*

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Abstract

This article examines the establishment of Vientiane as the new capital of the Lan Xang Kingdom during the reign of King Xaysethathirath or Xaysettha (1560-1571). Data were gathered through the historical approach from contemporaneous stele, chronicles, legends, maps, books, and research both in Thai and Lao. The article argues that favorable geographical conditions and networking power were the key factors in moving the capital to Vientiane in 1560. Vientiane was designated as a Buddhist center by King Xaysethathirath through a devoted temple building. Through the building of the Pha That Luang and preservation of the Emerald Buddha, Vientiane was symbolically made into a Buddhist center. Vientiane thus became important as both a power center and a new capital city that merged in people's minds.

Keywords: Vientiane, King Xaysethathirath, capital, Lan Xang, Laos

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Introduction

The Lan Xang Kingdom was unified by King Fa Ngum in 1353. The city of Luang Prabang, located on the left-hand side of the Khong River, served as the center of power. The kingdom shared its northern border with China and Vietnam, its eastern border with Vietnam, its southern border with Cambodia, and its western border with Burma and Siam. Many legends relate how King Fa Ngum during the early period of his kingship, moved his army down south from Luang Prabang, and successfully subjugated other city states, including Vientiane and Viang Kham, after which the former started to play an active role and grew in importance. In 1560, King Xaysethathirath transferred the kingdom's power center to the south and established Vientiane as the new capital. Consequently, many neighboring towns became significant. The reasons for the transference and how the new capital was established are the focus of this study.

Studies on Vientiane during this period include Sinthusa-ard (1997), Masuhara (2003), Phothisane and Phumachan (2008), Manotham (2009), and Subcommittee on Compilation and Writing History (2010). These Vientiane-related studies provide a broad picture of various aspects of the transfer of the capital and Vientiane's development. However, they do not provide a sufficiently clear picture of the reasons for the move.

The present study used the historical approach, analyzing Thai and Lao evidence, namely contemporaneous stone inscriptions, annals, maps, books and research. The presentation consists of four parts: (1) reasons for changing the capital city from Luang Prabang to Vientiane, (2) establishment of Vientiane as the capital city and construction of a new Buddhist center, (3) Vientiane's administrative territory, and (4) a conclusion.

Reasons for Changing the Capital City from Luang Prabang to Vientiane

Earlier studies of the movement of Lan Xang's capital city to Vientiane focused on four reasons. The first is that, geographically, the town of

Luang Prabang is narrow, and thus, not suitable for expansion. Luang Prabang is situated on the left side of the Khong River. In the city's northern area, the Khan River joins with the Khong River. Luang Prabang is surrounded by mountains and forests, making town expansion difficult. Vientiane, by contrast, is on a vast fertile plain, and thus, a more appropriate site for the capital. This point is emphasized in Wirawong (1997), Sinthusa-ard (1997), Phothisane and Phumachan (2008).

The second reason is the invasive power expansion of the kingdom of Pegu (Burma), as emphasized in Wirawong (1997), Sinthusa-ard (1997), Phothisane and Phumachan (2008) and Evans (2006). During the middle of the 16th century, Pegu expanded its power, threatening the stability of Lan Xang by its repeated attacks.

The third reason that is frequently mentioned concerns economic benefits from regional commercial growth. In the 16th century, the economy of Southeast Asia entered a period known as the Age of Commerce as the region became integrated into a global trading system, its states became more centralized, and its peoples adopted world-wide religions (Reid, 1988). This was a key factor for relocating the capital from the north down to Vientiane in the south as it could benefit from trade with the southern port states that were likely to be partners with the Lan Xang Kingdom, especially Ayutthaya and Cambodia. The work of Masuhara (2003) presented this issue.

The fourth reason is the desire to control indigenous peoples and southern land. Vientiane was an important strategic point to control the Kha (a Mon-Khmer ethnic group) in particular, and their territory. This point appears in the works of Boonmatham (1984), Sinthusa-ard (1997) and Naressirikul (2011). While these points are all valid, we would like to propose two additional reasons for the move.

Significance of Geographical Conditions in Vientiane and Neighboring Areas

The first is the significance of geographical conditions. In short, Vientiane was the geographically appropriate area.



Figure 1 Morphological nature of Laos

Source: Ezilon maps (2018)

Vientiane and the towns in its vicinity are on flat land known as the Vientiane plain, which is one of the Khong basin's most fertile areas. The Khong River that flows beside Vientiane is like an aorta that continuously feeds Vientiane. The river plain has branch rivers and creeks. Their water flows into the Khong River and they are communication routes that have long been used for contacts and trading between communities and provinces. Geographical conditions

along both sides became more open at this time (Kunurat, 1987: 160). Therefore, both sides of the Khong River were suitable for settlements, and new communities emerged. All of the towns of Laos that had close relationships with Vientiane were situated at this Khong River lowland. These towns included Wiang Khuk, Pak Huai Luang, and Nakhon Phanom.

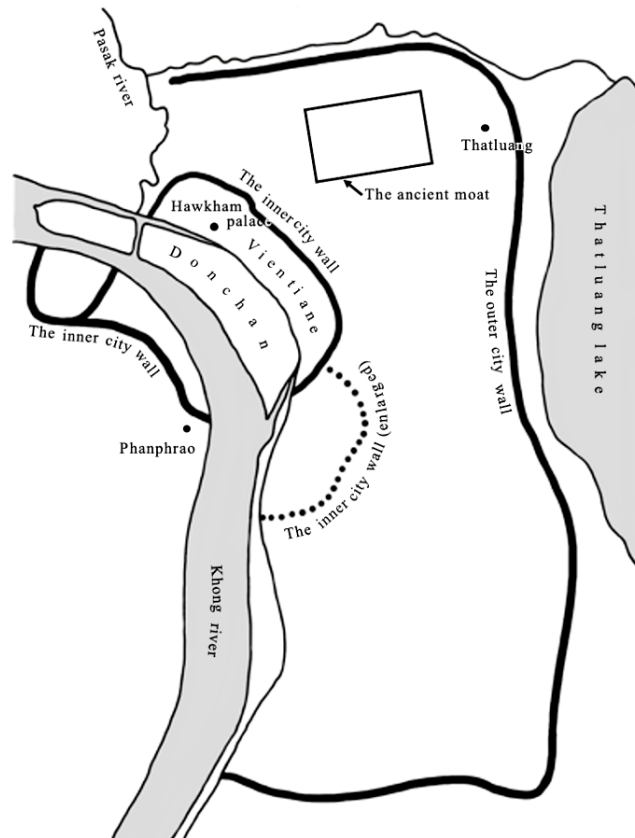


Figure 2 Mode of Vientiane area in the 16th-18th Centuries

Source: Developed from Manotham (2009: 19)

Moreover, the Vientiane area, including both sides of the Khong River, has an abundance of natural resources, including minerals and forest products. For example, copper is bountiful in the Sangkhom district of Nong Khai province situated on the right side of the Khong River, close to Vientiane, and evidence of smelting has been found. It is believed that this was an important production source. In addition, contacts could be made with outside kingdoms including Khmer, Sukhothai, Lanna, and southern China (Na Nakornphanom and Thamawat, 1998: 75-94). Other metals such as lead and zinc, used in bronze smelting, were found in Huai Nam Mong neighborhood, Tha Bo district, Nongkhai province, across the river from Vientiane. Traces of copper mining and metallurgy-related ancient materials were found in the Muang Wilaburi copper mining site area close to Se Pon town, Sawan Nakhet province, Lao PDR, south of Vientiane. They included copper ingots, molds for producing bronze objects, and bronze axes. This evidence shows possible existence here of both copper and bronze molding mines approximately 2000 years ago (Lertlum et al., 2015: 423-424). In addition, the land along both river banks contains gold. During the time of Lan Xang, there was an abundance of metals such as gold and bronze for the casting of Buddha images. Panning for gold along the Khong River has long been a common activity of the people of this region.

Forest products, including plants and animals, can be found in the area's varied terrains, including the Khong River's branch river plains, mountainous areas, and highlands. In particular, shellac and frankincense are plentiful on the Phuphan mountain range, located on the right side of the Khong River. Such natural resources have been used for exchanging goods with other countries and as tribute.

Moreover, archeological evidence from Vientiane and the Khong riverbank reveals traces of technological development that had started in prehistoric periods (Songsiri, 2002: 23-28). In socio-cultural terms, in this area, Dvaravati, Khmer, and indigenous arts were blended, and a unique local style evolved (Chuvichean, 2014: 23-25).

In other words, in the succeeding era, local socio-cultural traits can be seen reflecting Lan Xang, Lanna and Ayuthaya cultural integration. Moreover, because of the cultural integration of diverse peoples, many aspects of material culture in Vientiane and nearby areas were different from those of the Luang Prabang area.

Vientiane and its vicinity were well prepared to become the new capital for all these reasons, and even if the capital had not been transferred by Lan Xang administrators, it might still have developed into a center of the middle Khong basin.

King Xaysethathirath and His Original Political Power Network

Xaysethathirath's original political power network has not received much attention in previous studies. Masuhara's work (2003) emphasized economic networks. However, an important question is this: if the capital is moved to a new area where the ruler has no political power network, how would he rule it? Stone inscriptions found in Vientiane and neighboring areas serve as evidence of power networks there. An example is the Wat Daen Muang inscription, found at Wat Patjantaburi in Wat Luang sub-district, Phonphisai district, Nong Khai province. Dated 1535, the inscription mentions the order of King Phothisarath, King of Lan Xang (reigned 1520-1547). In 1535, local royals and noblemen were asked to revive Buddhism in temples in Vientiane and to monitor monks, nuns, and Brahmins for their disciplinary strictness, while temple areas, gardens, rice fields and people were dedicated to temples (Srisam-ang, 2002: 83-84). This inscription reflects the relationships between the King of Lan Xang and local royal personages in the Vientiane area.

King Phothisarath (father of King Xaysethathirath) who ruled Luang Phrabang had built up power and relationships with other rulers in the Vientiane area since the time prior to King Xaysethathirath's reign (1548-1571). Afterward, at the time of King Xaysethathirath, many stone inscriptions mentioning his name were created in areas close to Vientiane (See Table 1).

Table 1 King Xaysethathirath's stone inscriptions prior to the establishment of Vientiane as a capital

No.	Name of inscription	Location of finding	Important substance	Year of inscription
1	Wat Phadungsuk Inscription	Wat Phadungsuk, Wat Luang sub-district, Phon Phisai district, Nong Khai province	The name, "Somdet Borom Bophit Phrachao Ton Pen Phra Chue Xaysethathirath Chao" appears as the one who donated land to Wat Si Suphan.	1551
2	Wat Chaiya Chettha, Inscription	Wat Xaysethathirath, Kuan Wan sub-district, Muang district, Nong Khai province	The statement, "Somdet Xaysethathirath donated land for the construction of a temple," appears.	1554
3	Wat Jommani, Inscription	Wat Jommani, Michai sub-district, Muang district, Nong Khai province	On side 1, the following statement appears, "The supreme, the arch-princess's overlord, ordered the town prince and princess to support religion at Wat Mani Settharam for 5,000 years."	1555
4	Wat Sikhun Muang Inscription	Wat Srikhun Muang, Nai Muang sub-district, Muang district, Nong Khai province	The name, "Somdet Borom Bophit Phrachao Ton Pen Chue Somdet Phra Xaysethathirath" appears as the one who donated land to the temple.	1560

Source: Compiled from the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (2018)

The stone inscriptions of King Xaysethathirath, found in nearby areas dating from prior to the establishment of Vientiane as the capital city, reflect his power building and continuing relationships with local rulers that had started since the time of his father. The moving of the capital city to Vientiane was trouble-free, as he had already built up power and had good relationships with local traditional powers.

In addition to information from these sources, the researchers would like to offer two additional recommendations. The first is the

importance of geographical conditions and resource factors. The second is the shifting of King Xaysethathirath's original power network.

Establishment of Vientiane as the Capital City and Construction of a New Buddhist Center

Having surveyed Lao chronicles, not much detail on King Xaysethathirath's establishment of Vientiane as the capital city was found. The sentence, "Then I sailed to Lan Xang, lived there and built Chanthaburi into the new capital," is an example of the lack of detail (Fine Arts Department, 2002: 33). However, because the capital was moved, Vientiane became the power center of Lan Xang. Diplomatic land demarcation contracts between the King of Krung Sri Ayutthaya and Lan Xang's King Xaysethathirath were recorded on the Wat Phrathat Srisongrak stone inscription. On side 1, in Lao Dharma letters is the name, "Muang Chanthaburi Sri Sattanaganahuta" (Phongsriphan, 2011: 31). The name is regarded as the new formal name of the capital.

At the new location, King Xaysethathirath's mission was to build up a sense of royal identity for Vientiane to be greater than other towns in the kingdom by making it the center of Buddhism that replicated the Buddhist universe and its moral order. This can be seen through temple building, devotion, and symbolic rituals. Vientiane was the center, surrounded by satellite towns. Through the construction of the town and important religious places, these beliefs and symbols were replicated. The construction of Phra That Luang and the establishment of the Emerald Buddha are examples. Details are as follows.

Temple Construction and Devotion

Table 1 lists King Xaysethathirath's stone inscriptions prior to the time that Vientiane became the capital, while Table 2 contains many more of his stone inscriptions that were found in Vientiane and neighboring areas after the capital was moved. The major part of stone inscription content relates to Buddhism, in particular, the construction of temples

and the donation of land to temples as well as King Xaysethathirath's support of Buddhism.

Table 2 King Xaysethathirath's post-Vientiane capitalization stone inscriptions

No.	Name of inscription	Location of finding	Important substance	Year of inscription
1	Phra That Si Song Rak Inscription	It is now at the Hall Phra Kaew Museum, Vientiane capital, Lao PDR.	The inscription shows an agreement between Lan Xang and Ayutthaya	1560
2	Wat Wiangkham Inscription (Rodboon, 1976: 58-60)	It is now at the Hall Phra Kaew Museum, Vientiane capital, Lao PDR.	This inscription contains the following text: "At Wat Wiangkham, Maha Sivala was ordained by Phra Sethathirath to be Maha Sangkharat Chao. The king donated land to this temple."	1561
3	Phra Sethathirath Inscription	It is now at the Hall Phra Kaew Museum, Vientiane capital, Lao PDR.	Phra Sethathirath referred to high-ranking monks by using royal terms	Not specified
4	Wat Tham Suwankhuha Inscription	Wat Tham Suwankhuha, Ban Khuha Phatthana, Nahi sub-district, Suwankhuha district, Nongbua Lamphu province	In the beginning of the inscription, the following statement appears, "I, Phra Sethathirath, ruler of Lan Xang Kingdom," offered the land.	1562
5	Wat Si Muang Inscription	Wat Si Muang, Nai Muaeng sub-district, Muaeng district, Nong Khai province	Contains the order by "Somdet Borom Bo Phit Phra Sethathirath" to construct Wat Sri Suwan Aram.	1566
6	Maha That Chao Chiang Mai Nabon Inscription (Srisam-ang, 2002: 121)	Wat Nong Bon, Vientiane capital, Lao PDR.	"I, King/Monk, Phra Sethathirath, donated rice fields, located in Vientiane, to the Nabon Chiang Mai Stupa as my father used to do."	1567

Source: Compiled from the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (2018).

From Tables 1 and 2, it can be seen that many stone inscriptions from King Xaysethathirath's time have been found, confirming his religious activities in the area. Construction of temples and offering of land generated moral authority to the new capital and created the image of a just king, which is an integral aspect of Buddhist kingship throughout Southeast Asia. This idea is connected both to the status of the Buddha who was born into a royal family, but chose to be an ascetic rather than a king. It is also related to the example set by the Indian King Ashoka, who ruled almost all of the Indian subcontinent from around 268 to 232 BCE and taught and practiced the Buddhist dharma by supporting generous public works for his people.

In addition, King Xaysethathirath also built relationships between governors and people and communities. The community's devotion was related to political power. For example, at the devotion boundary of Wat Si Chomphu Ong Tue (presently located at Nam Mong sub-district, Tha Bo district, Nong Khai province), an important Buddha image, Phrachao Ong Tue, was enshrined. Also, at this temple, there were 13 villages.² The villagers all were slaves of Phrachao Ong Tue, and thus, they had to pay tribute to the temple. This kind of offering served as the ruler's indirect control of the community (Saraya, 1994: 73), and also reflected the royal power of King Xaysethathirath that extended across to the right bank of the Khong River.

Temple construction, offerings, and maintenance of religious places in Vientiane and neighboring areas resulted in local people's acceptance. The new capital city became important as both a power center and a new capital city that merged in people's minds.

Construction of Phra That Luang: Phra That of the Town

Phra That Luang ("That Luang" in Lao) is Vientiane's most important and largest ancient chedi. According to the Urangkhatat legend, the Phra That Luang was built by King Chanthaburi Prasitsak in 236 A.D.

² The thirteen villages are namely Muang Wiangkuk, Ban Kong Nang, Ban Kam Phra, Ban Ki Nai Mo, Ban Pak Kho, Ban Phran Phrao, Ban Si Chiang Mai, Ban Nong Kung Yang Kham, Ban Nong Seng Si, Ban Sam Kha, Ban Tha Bo, Ban Phrao, and Ban Bo Otana.

(Wirawong, 2010: 7-12). Other sources say that it is even older, and was built during the time of King Asoka. However, it is likely that this Phra That was built during the time of King Xaysethathirath when the capital was moved from Luang Phrabang to Vientiane in 1566. That Luang stone inscription No. 1, located east of That Luang states, "...this stupa (reliquary), known as Lok Chulamani, was built by the great King Xaysethathirath..." (Rodboon, 1983: 85). This was consistent with words in the original version of the Lan Xang chronicles, as follows: "Having entered and lived in Chanthaburi town, King Xaysethathirath constructed a Maha Chedi covering the old That (reliquary) that had been constructed by Phraya Sri Tham Sokarath" (Fine Arts Department, 2002: 33). When the construction of this Phra That had been completed, it was named, "That Chedi Lok Chula Mani," while "That Luang Vientiane" was its common name. It was highly revered by the Lao people because this work of art and culture had been preserved and it held deep Buddhist meaning and is now considered one of the most important symbols of Laos.

Phra That Luang is a square-based, bell-shaped chedi. However, some of its forms are different from those of other chedis. It might have been the royal intention to make this chedi in a unique form because of the local Buddhist belief that a capital city is a symbolic replica of the Buddhist universe (Saising, 2012: 77). Therefore, the chedi which was the center of the city had to be modelled after the Chulamani Chedi in Tavatimsa heaven, where Indra dwells. This chedi is considered the center of the Buddhist universe as it is the place where Indra enshrined the hair relic of the Buddha.

The Emerald Buddha: A Revered Statue

There are many versions of the history of the Emerald Buddha, most of which are legendary. Originally, the Emerald Buddha was enshrined in Chiang Mai, the center of the Lanna Kingdom. During the reign of King Phothisarath (1520-1547), Lan Xang ruled the Lanna Kingdom and King Phothisarath moved the Emerald Buddha from Chiang Mai to Luang Prabang (Sattayanurak, 2004: 95) with his existing power and,

in accordance with traditional Buddhist ideas. After the death of King Phothisararath, King Xaysethathirath left Chiang Mai to rule Luang Phrabang. After moving the capital to Vientiane, he invited the Emerald Buddha to be enshrined at the new capital (Wirawong, 1997: 93). Having the Emerald Buddha as a revered statue reflected imperial ideology, which is the basis for the ideology of governing the kingdom (Sattayanurak, 2004: 98).

For the king, the invitation of such a sacred object to the new capital also propagated his social status and charisma. Political benefits between kingdoms were also expected (Naruepiti, 2017: 4). Therefore, the Emerald Buddha was not only a sacred object for adoration as part of Buddhist worship, but it also reflected the aura of King Xaysethathirath who was able to invite this important Buddha image to be stationed at the heart of the capital.

Vientiane's Administrative Territory

During the period of establishing Vientiane as a sacred power center, King Xaysethathirath's power boundaries can be seen through a study of the stone inscriptions created during his reign (Tables 1 and 2). Based on the sites where the inscriptions were found, the towns in which King Xaysethathirath had great power were discovered. These areas are the following: 1) Pak Huai Luang, 2) Wiang Khuk, 3) Wiang Kham, 4) communities in the Phu Phra Bat - Phu Phan Kham area, and 5) Dan Sai. These five areas were not far from the Vientiane power center. The importance of these towns is described below.

1. Pak Huai Luang is located in what is now Phon Phisai district, Nong Khai province, alongside the Khong River. This town is located at the junction of the communication routes between the major cities in the Khong basin. Through the Khong river routes, Vientiane and Luang Phrabang can be reached in the north, and Nakhon Phanom can be reached in the south. Through the Nam Ngum River, the Khong River can be crossed. Through the Huay Luang stream, the northeast interior could be reached. Pak Huai Luang was an important town before

the capital was transferred. The names of the rulers of Lan Xang who had adopted and supported Buddhism appear on many inscriptions, including Phraya Pak, as the town's governor. (Fine Arts Department, 1986: 322-326).

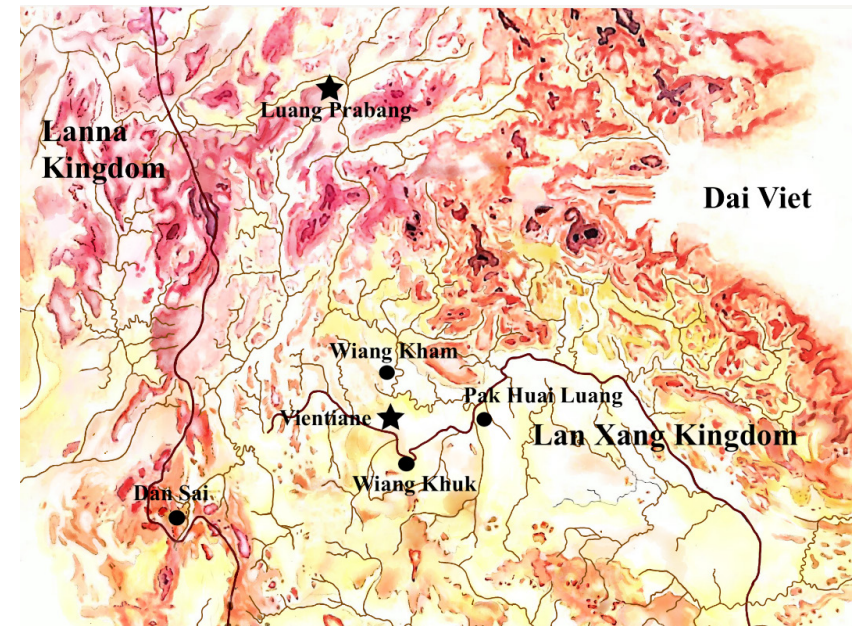


Figure 3 Map of important towns where stone inscriptions from the period of King Xaysethathirath were found

Source: Developed from Theerasasawat, et al. (1988)

At the time of Phraya Saen Surin Luechai, there is evidence that King Xaysethathirath's wife was Phraya Saen Surin Luechai's daughter (Champakeawmanee, 1996: 49), which indicates that Phraya Saen Surin Luechai had a close relationship with the Lan Xang dynasty since being in Luang Prabang. After the capital was moved to Vientiane, many temples were renovated. In addition, the son of King Xaysethathirath lived in Vientiane while it was being attacked repeatedly by the Burmese army. As for Phraya Saen Surin Luechai, he

inherited the power as King of the Lan Xang Kingdom. His royal name was King Sumangkhalā Aiyako Phothisat (the first period was 1571-1575, and the second period was 1580-1582). He reigned over both Vientiane and Mueang Pak Huai Luang (Punnotok, 1999: 2662).

2. Wiang Khuk is located in what is now known as Wiang Khuk sub-district, Muang district, Nong Khai province. The Khong River flows through the northern part of it. On the opposite side of the river in Lao PDR is Sai Fong. From the survey of Silapakorn Office 9 (Khon Kaen), in the Wiang Khuk area, 181 ancient sites have been found (Fine Arts Department, 2010: 506). Based on remaining archeological evidence, their age is assumed to be from the early 16th century onwards. In his record of traveling to Vientiane, Gerard van Wusthof, a Dutch merchant, mentioned Wiang Khuk as an economic center (Masuhara, 2003: 86-87). Wiang Khuk was also an outpost town that prevented enemies from entering Vientiane (Phothisane and Phumachan, 2008: 113-114).

Phra That Bang Phuan was also located in the Wiang Khuk area. At the base of the Buddha image that was found in the area of the main chedi, King Phothisararat is mentioned. The name of Phra That is referred to as “That Bang Phuan Phra Chedi Srisatta Maha Than” (Phaiboonsuwan, 1972: 60). This place is related to the concept of “*Satta Maha Sathan*,” the seven important places where the Buddha stayed after his enlightenment, and represents the Buddha’s attainment of nirvana. It is assumed that the builder of this temple was inspired by Wat Maha Photharam in Chiang Mai. Historical data show that visits of King Phothi Sararat and King Xaysethathirath to Chiang Mai coincided. Both kings went to Wat Maha Photharam and both ordered the construction of Satta Maha Sathan in their kingdoms. The construction was consistent with the context of transference of political and religious centers to Vientiane (Tingsanchali, 2012: 358). Phrathat Bang Phuan was considered to be within the boundary of the new capital, which was Vientiane, and had been patronized by many succeeding kings of Lan Xang.

3. Wiang Kham is located approximately 75 kilometers north of Vientiane and is connected with the Nam Ngum River. In 2002, an archaeological survey was made there and traces of several moats, city walls, deserted temples, and battlements were found (Karlstrom, 2009: 162-171). The invitation of the Phra Bang to Luang Phrabang from Cambodia was also recorded in Wiang Kham’s history. However, because of its miraculous power, the Phra Bang could not be moved to Luang Phrabang, where the Emerald Buddha was at that time, so it had to be established at Wiang Kham (Srisum-ang, 2002: 50). Wiang Kham also appeared in another historical document stating that military officers were ordered by Prince La Saen Trai Phuwanat (1486-1496) to invite King Wichun Rat, the royal younger brother, to hold the position of *saen muang* (a Lao conferred rank) in order to help rule the town. This evidence demonstrates the importance of Wiang Kham as comparable to a *muang luk luang* (a town governed by a king’s son or daughter) of Luang Phrabang because it was governed by the princes (Rodboon, 1976: 26). Afterwards, during the time of King Wichun Rat (1501-1520), the Phra Bang Buddha image was invited to be placed at Luang Phrabang (Wirawong, 1997: 75). The fact that it was at Wiang Kham for more than a hundred years reflects the importance of Wiang Kham as a prosperous Buddhist town in the Nam Ngum basin before the capital was relocated to Vientiane. Wiang Kham’s importance continued during the reign of King Xaysethathirath. The Wat Wiangkham Inscription states that Phra Xaysethathirath is said to have ordained “Maha Sivala as a Maha Sangkharatchao (highest ranked monk) at Wat Wiangkham” (see Table 2 and Rodboon, 1976: 58-60).

4. Communities in the Phu Phra Bat - Phu Phan Kham area. Phu Phra Bat is a sandstone mountainous area. It is in the Phu Phan Kham mountain range, located west of Udon Thani province in Thailand, which is not far from Vientiane. On Phu Phra Bat, rocks, sheds and cliffs of different shapes are generally found, and ancient remains are plentiful. In this area, Muang Phan is an important community. The town’s center is at the area of Ban Muang Phan and Ban Kaluem,

Muang Phan sub-district, Ban Phue district, Udon Thani province. The name, “Muang Phan,” appears on an early 19th century map written in the Lao language. It was located at the route on the way to Wiang Khuk (Sankom, 2016: 200). It has been surmised that Muang Phan’s administrative area covered Phu Phra Bat and the central Mae Khong basin areas, prior to the moving of the capital to Vientiane.

The Phu Phra Bat area and Nam Mong basin were, importantly, equipped with fertile natural resources. They were also located along the ancient transport route linking Vientiane with the towns on the southern side of the Phu Phan Kham mountain range and those located in the inner zones closer to the Chao Phraya basin area. Consequently, small communities emerged along resource sites and transportation routes (Sankom, 2016: 201). Nongbua Lamphu, an ancient community, is located nearby, south of the Phu Phan Kham mountain range. At the juncture of this area with the Phu Phan area is an important piece of evidence, the Sawan Khuha Cave Temple Inscription, created during the time of King Xaysethathirath. As written on the stone inscription, devotional communities were ordered by King Xaysethathirath to take care of the area Fine Arts Department, 1986: 303-304). Suwan Khuha is a holy and important cave where many stone inscriptions and art works of the Lan Xang period were discovered. It was also an important route linking the inner northeastern region with the Chao Phraya river kingdoms.

5. Dan Sai is located in the Phetchabun mountain range. The town is on a wide plain, while the three sides are surrounded by mountains. On its north, it is blocked by the Hueang stream. The river serves as the Thailand-Laos border. Dan Sai originated from the community’s devotion to religious location, Phra That Sri Song Rak. The significance of the area can be seen in the fact that Lan Xang and Ayuthaya made an agreement and constructed Phra That Sri Song Rak at the area believed to be the border between the two kingdoms. Phra That Sri Song Rak also served as the witness of an agreement between King Xaysethathirath of Lan Xang and King Mahachakapat of Krung Sri Ayutthaya. Construction of Phra That Sri Song Rak began in 1560 and was completed in 1563.

The agreement of the two kingdoms was recorded in detail on the Phra That Sri Song Rak stone inscription, and ceremonies were performed by the front palaces of both towns and the Sanghas of both sides (Phongsriphan, 2011: 21-22). A procession of the kings of both kingdoms reflected the significance of the rite and Dan Sai as an important town of the new capital, Vientiane. As written on the inscription, Dan Sai was the Lan Xang Kingdom’s check point or border town.

The above information reflects not only the importance of the administrative areas in this area, but also the transfer of the capital to Vientiane through the original power network, which was one of the key factors of the transfer.

Conclusion

In this study, the reasons for the transference of the capital from Luang Prabang to Vientiane included the following six points: (1) geographically, the town of Luang Prabang was narrow, and thus, was not suitable for expansion; (2) Pegu (Burma) had expanded its power and repeatedly invaded the northern part of Lan Xang, affecting its stability; (3) economic benefits could be gained from regional commercial growth at this time; (4) Vientiane was a strategically important area and the move was made to control the indigenous people, particularly the Kha, and the southern land; (5) the soil in Vientiane and neighboring areas was very fertile; (6) the capital’s relocation was connected to King Xaysethathirath’s old political power network.

As the new capital of the Lan Xang Kingdom, Vientiane was provided with royal status and privileges greater than those of other towns in the kingdom as it was constructed to become the center of Buddhism. There is also a belief that Vientiane is the symbolic center, or microcosm of the Buddhist universe and the most important city in the kingdom. This representative image is reflected from the construction of the Phra That Luang and the emergence of the Emerald Buddha in Vientiane.

After the establishment of the capital city and the transference of the power center to Vientiane, many neighboring areas became important, and these became zones that were under the king's governing power. They included: Muang Pak Huai Luang, Muang Wiang Khuk, communities in the Phu Phra Bat-Phu Phan Kham area, and Dan Sai town zone. They were religiously, politically, and economically important, as were some outpost and border towns. The territory was also important, as it reflected the reasons for moving the capital town to Vientiane. Transference was made through the power network or the area of original power.

In terms of recommendations for future research, historical and archeological areas of ancient towns along both sides of the Khong River or parallel towns, such as Vientiane – Sri Chiangmai, Sai Fong – Wiang Khuk, should be studied in joint projects by scholars on both sides of the river.

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