

Acculturation of the Colonial Architecture of Champasak Province, Lao PDR¹

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Received: July 11, 2021

Revised: September 13, 2021

Accepted: October 21, 2021

Abstract

This article investigates the acculturation of the colonial architecture of Champasak province, Lao PDR using the qualitative research method. The results show that the French colonial-era style buildings created during the years 1893-1954 have had great influence on architecture in Champasak, resulting in European style architecture that has been adapted to suit the climate. French colonialists began to construct buildings to serve as administrative offices and houses for French administrators and families. All buildings were designed and supervised by the French; for public works, Vietnamese laborers were imported because they were skilled builders. Recently, Champasak province has been changing rapidly in terms of society, economics, politics, lifestyles, and architecture, making it the economic hub of southern Laos. The province is also home to people of different ethnic groups who came to settle and start businesses. The colonial buildings are still being used today with some changes made to suit the building's condition, the owner, and the people who influence society. Factors that contribute to acculturation of colonial architecture are geography, influence of the builders on building functions, and the efforts to develop the town of Pakse in Champasak province to become a city of trade and economics. Because Vat Phou, which has been designated as the UNESCO World Heritage Site, is located in the province, there are guidelines to be strictly followed; any form of building considered a part of cultural heritage that reflects history in the area must be conserved.

¹ This article is part of a Ph.D. thesis in Art and Cultural Research, entitled "Colonial Architecture in Champasak, Lao PDR: Acculturation to Design Media to Promote Cultural Tourism," Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand. The article received funding support from the Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region (CERP), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University.

Therefore, not much modification and renovation can be made to the conserved buildings. All factors mentioned above clearly reflect the acculturation phenomenon seen in the colonial architecture in Champasak.

Keywords: colonial architecture, background, Champasak province, acculturation

Introduction

In the late 1800s, Britain and France were keenly interested in establishing power in Southeast Asia. The states that are present-day Myanmar and Malaysia were colonized by the British Empire, while the French took Cambodia and Vietnam as its protectorates. The Franco-Siamese treaty signed on October 3, 1893 (Phengphrachan, 2008) resulted in the Kingdom of Siam ceding the east side of the Mekong, where Laos is located, to the French. Subsequently, the country borders were defined and political reform occurred. In 1904, some western parts of the Champasak kingdom, including its capital, came under control of the French (Stuart-Fox, 2015). After the French gained control of the entire east side of the Mekong, Laos did not receive much attention because the country was seen as an insignificant expansion of Vietnam, which was already ruled by the French. In addition, since Laos is bordered by Vietnam, China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia, its people are from various different ethnic groups, and were scattered throughout Laos during the colonial era. The French saw Laos as a land waiting to be exploited economically through French investment funds and Vietnamese labor (Stuart-Fox, 2015: 48); consequently, they brought Vietnamese people to Champasak province for military purposes, labor, and settlement. With Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians combined under the term, "Indochinese," diverse cultural movements were created in Champasak province.

The physical impact that was obvious during colonization was that the French were construction pioneers in Laos. They started constructing roads and buildings in the style they preferred. As the Lao were not skillful in construction, Vietnamese laborers whose families migrated to Laos for trade or those married to Laotians who had become

Lao citizens were employed to build government buildings, offices, houses, shops, and military forts (Singyabut, Pimsen, and Phonperm, 2010: 170). In Champasak province, wood had been used in traditional methods of construction because it was inexpensive and could be found locally. Once the French settled there, the influence of western architecture spread throughout the area. Many Vietnamese and Chinese resided and traded in Pakse, the main town of Champasak. Therefore, cultural diversity in the area contributed to the rise of colonial architecture in Champasak (Onmavong, 2016).

While there have been several research studies on the acculturation of colonial architecture in Laos, most of the focus has been on Luang Prabang because the city was designated a World Heritage Site (Vongvilay, 2015; Chaimanee, 2010).

There have been a number of studies on related topics. Buasaengthong (2011) examined French buildings conserved in the old inner-city walls of Vientiane, while Prommachan (2010) investigated French colonial architecture in the town of Champasak. However, a study about acculturation of colonial architecture in Champasak province is yet to be found. Works related to acculturation in architecture that are relevant to this study include research on buildings in Indonesia (Dyah and Zein, 2020; Purwanto and Titiek, 2017; Fransino, 2017). The results of these studies share with Champasak an aspect of architectural acculturation: the integration of other architectural styles into the local culture. Visually striking architectural elements were selected to blend with one another. As a result, a new style of architecture emerged. However, there has not been any research on acculturation in the Mekong countries, especially Laos.

To fill this gap, the present research project examined the origin and acculturation of colonial architecture in Champasak province, Lao PDR. Data were collected by reviewing records and literature related to the origin of the colonial architecture. Knowledge obtained from the review was used to form a database so that a basic survey during the fieldwork could be designed to acquire in-depth information about acculturation in Champasak province. The scope extends to the towns

of Champasak and Pakse. Data collected from field surveys and structured interviews were analyzed to identify the acculturation of colonial architecture. It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to knowledge that will be used to develop and conserve the colonial architecture in Champasak province so it can become valued and reflect the remarkable history, society, and lifestyles of the local people.

The Origin of Colonial Architecture in Champasak Province

According to historical records and related works, the town of Champasak broke away from Vientiane and became an independent city state in 1714. Similar to Luang Prabang and Vientiane, the Kingdom of Champasak extended to both sides of the Mekong, with the capital located on the west side of the river. When the western powers arrived in Indochina, the French took over the entire the east side of the Mekong and the east side of Champasak in 1893, but they had not yet claimed the west side because it was then controlled by the Kingdom of Siam (Mahasila Wirawong, 1997: 287). Later in 1904, France took control over the west side of the Mekong. All of Champasak came under French control.

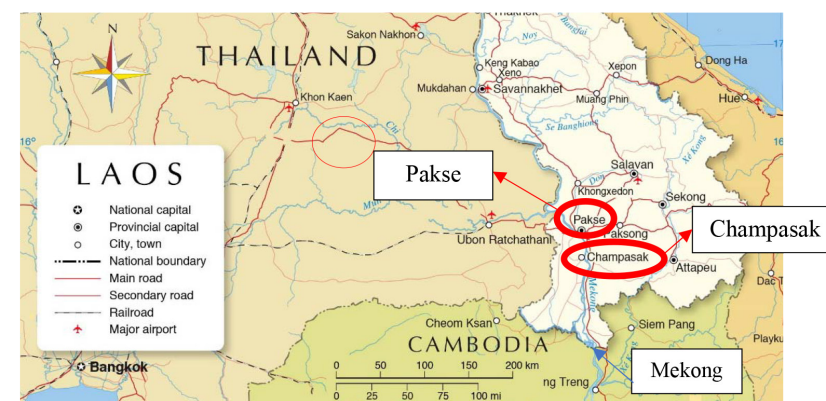


Figure 1 Map of Champasak province, with Pakse and Champasak as major towns located on both sides of the Mekong River

Since Pakse was in a prime location, the French realized its potential to become a hub of transportation both by land and water. The town eventually became an economic center and the capital of Champasak province (Singyabut, et al., 2010: 101), contributing to several changes in the province, especially construction of buildings and planning. The French continued to integrate their western architecture into the traditional Lao style, according to which buildings are built from locally found materials and are in alignment with waterways, beliefs, and the lifestyle of the Lao people. Colonial architecture has its own unique design, complexity, and construction materials (Mixay et al., 2004). Various types of buildings were constructed for French administrators, starting with the residence of the French governors and officials. Furthermore, government buildings, religious buildings, schools, and others continued to be constructed in the area. These were built in a colonial style which is strikingly beautiful and elegant. Arches are present at every corner of the building; the door and window facades are decorated using unusual techniques influenced by the west with the use of local wood. Thus, the architecture created during this colonial era was unique and modern (Prommachan, 2010: 2). Even though the colonial buildings in Champasak province were influenced by the western power that had modernized the area, the budget was not sufficient for construction and it was extremely challenging to build such French-colonial buildings as in other colonized cities, such as Hanoi, Phnom Penh, and Luang Prabang.

This research found that architecture in Champasak province created during the colonial period features the symmetrically square structure of western architecture. Concrete columns, doors, and windows are in alignment with each other with hipped roofs called '*panya*'. This type of structure is present exclusively in the palace and government buildings, which are believed to have been designed by the French, but built by Vietnamese. Shophouses consisted of two stories; the first floor was reserved for business purposes while the second floor was for living accommodations. These buildings were mainly designed and constructed by Vietnamese assisted by Lao laborers. Therefore,

they look quite different from the western-style buildings designed by the French. Vietnamese buildings usually have vents, which are typically found in Chinese-influenced architecture. Its patterns are based on Chinese and Vietnamese beliefs, unlike the western ones that are full of elaborate details. The western-style patterns can be seen, for example, on the column decorated with the letters in stucco in front of the palace of Chao Ratsadanay in Champasak town. Obviously, these patterns are not authentically western. The stucco letter pattern consists of Lao and English languages (Figure 2) read as "เจ้าราชดำนัย พ.ศ. 2469, Chao Ratsadanay 1926." Western-style stucco patterns decorate the building's columns, making it stand out from other buildings in Champasak.



Figure 2 The palace of Chao Ratsadanay was built in 1926 and is decorated with stucco letters. The house is located in Baan Wat Tung in Champasak.

Regarding information of the architectural buildings during the colonial period, the majority of the colonial buildings in Champasak province were built from 1893 to 1953. There are 12 buildings, including the royal residences of Chao Ratsadanay and Chao Boun Oum, as well as government buildings, shophouses, and churches. They were built mainly of brick, with a symmetrical square shape, gable roofs, and *panya* roofs. There are three types of structures: single buildings, twin buildings, and shophouses. Single buildings often served as government offices during the French rule, while twin buildings and shophouses belonged mostly to Vietnamese and Chinese who migrated to Laos during the colonial period. The first floor of the building is made of concrete, while the second floor is built out of wooden materials. In the

town of Pakse, 68 colonial-style buildings built in the period of 1919-1944 have been identified. The majority are built of brick with a symmetrical square design and gable roofs. There are single buildings that were reserved for the government during the colonial period. Most shophouses were owned by Vietnamese and Chinese who were in the town for business purposes because these buildings do not require much construction time; they are space saving and more versatile than single buildings. In Pakse, the shophouses of the Vietnamese community are in the Baan Taluang area. Recently, the public sector has converted these shophouses into rental buildings for those wanting to run businesses or reside there. Therefore, the exterior decoration of the rental buildings changes according to whoever rents them. The Vietnamese buildings are clearly unique in terms of decorative stucco patterns at the front and sides of the buildings (Figure 3).

Town	Examples of colonial architecture in Champasak province (built during 1893-1953)		
	Houses	Government buildings	Shophouses
Champasak	 1926	 1960	 1952
Pakse	 1932	 1950	 1932

Figure 3 Examples of colonial architecture in the towns of Champasak and Pakse.

Acculturation of Colonial Architecture

Acculturation is due to a number of factors. In the process two different cultures lose their own identity while one of them also loses its

independence to another, as well as its sense of dignity (Wannasiri (Ponwatana), 1997). Champasak province shares borders with Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia and several important events took place in the area from time to time. Human resources were transferred to Champasak for a number of reasons: the Lan Xang Kingdom was at the peak of its power, being ruled by the Siamese Kingdom, being a French colony. During these critical times, Laos was ruled by the Kingdom of Laos and, at the same time, colonized by the French. Once Laos liberated itself to become Lao PDR, many Vietnamese and Chinese flocked in. The era of the New Economic Mechanism refers to the present time, after Lao PDR reopened the country to the world, resulting in the movement of people of different ethnicities to Champasak for businesses, economics, or travel. This movement has added diversity to Champasak's population especially in Pakse, the capital, and Champasak, the former capital. These people have their own sub-cultures, in other words, their specific behaviors differ according to the places they live which is part of a core culture. Cultures are not only divided by borders, but they can also be differentiated by gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, and academic context (Wannasiri (Ponwatana), 1997). Having several sub-cultures in a society enables people to learn how to live with each other regardless of cultural differences, and they can still maintain their own cultural identities.

Based on documentary and field research, it can be concluded that the significant aspects of acculturation of the colonial architecture in Champasak province from the colonial period to present, are as follows: acculturation of western architecture into the geographical context to better suit the hot climate, the influence of skillful builders on colonial architecture, the development of Pakse into a hub of trade and economics as desired by the French colonists, and the fact that Champasak province was designated as a World Heritage Site. The factors of climate, and economic, social, and cultural changes as well as the influence of builders contribute to the uniqueness of architecture in Champasak province, the details of which will be discussed below.

1. Acculturation of architecture to suit the climate

Champasak province has three seasons: summer from February to April, the rainy season from May to October, and the cool season from November to January. This climate affected the construction of western-style buildings because the French had to alter the structure design and parts of the buildings to suit Laos's geographical context. Ventilation was included and materials were changed to suit the environment. Such construction changes have made buildings not only more comfortable to live in but also harmonious with the environment, while physical features remain in western style. Thus, the building is symmetrically squared, with its top is covered with *panya* roofs. Wall thickness is reduced to suit the hot climate. Vents and windows are added to facilitate air flow throughout the building (Figure 4). This integrated architecture indicates that even though people do not come from the same culture, they accept the differences as illustrated through the patterns and details of the buildings.



Figure 4 The patterns of western-style buildings are altered to suit the local climate by adding vents and windows to facilitate air flow

2. Influence of builders on colonial architecture

Atelier du Partimoine IRU – IPRAUS (2002) points that the construction of buildings in Laos is influenced by three main cultures: 1) Lao culture in terms of art, beauty, and function, which is often expressed through religious architecture and houses; 2) French architecture, the external value of which helps create to heritage and modern architecture as well as introduce architectural terms, construction techniques and materials to the locals; and 3) business culture brought

in by Chinese and Vietnamese who came to sell goods and live in Laos while their communities were formed. This cross-cultural interplay was central to the creation of the colonial architecture in Champasak, which combines building methods brought by the French colonization with migrant Vietnamese construction skills taught by their ancestors. Moreover, some Chinese influence is seen in Vietnamese architecture as Vietnam was formerly controlled by Chinese. When migrant Vietnamese laborers moved to Laos, they brought their techniques and skills and transferred them to their children. A cultural movement also occurred when builders were impressed with carved patterns and they tried to duplicate them using their own techniques, both Vietnamese and Laotian. The above factors were possibly caused by cultural movements (Raksawin, 2015) which explain the current condition of Champasak in which influences from other cultures impacted the construction of architectural buildings, portraying the community of multi-cultures living in harmony (Onmavong, 2016) as seen in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Pictures showing the development of traditional Lao architecture, Lao-French colonial architecture, Vietnamese-Chinese colonial architecture, and French colonial architecture in Champasak province.

At the time when the Lao gained independence from the French, the population of Champasak consisted of 62 percent Chinese, 23 percent Lao, and one percent of other ethnic groups. Most came for settlement, jobs, and businesses. The reason why Vietnamese outnumber other ethnicities is probably because of colonization. Just before the French occupied Champasak, many Laotians migrated to the area belonging to Siam, so the French brought in the Vietnamese to live in the area (Phothisane, 2015: 322). The French were the pioneers in constructing roads and buildings from the designs they preferred in their governed

area. Because Lao workers were not skillful in road and cement building construction, Vietnamese were entrusted to oversee the construction of buildings, houses, shops, and forts. Their families also migrated to Champasak for trade, or they married locals and became Lao citizens (Singyabut, et al., 2010: 170). Vietnamese and Chinese arrived in Laos during the years 1943-1968. They constructed buildings for the purpose of selling goods. Chinese and Vietnamese patterns were used in the construction (Figure 6). That is the reason why the architectural buildings in Champasak were influenced by the Vietnamese style. Moreover, the buildings incorporated some Chinese features because Vietnam borders China and the country had been under Chinese rule for decades (Wannasiri (Ponwatana), 1997: 55). Therefore, the influence of construction workers contributed to colonial architecture styles in Champasak.



Figure 6 Shophouses during the colonial period are believed to have been the dwellings of Vietnamese migrants. Decorative stucco and numbers are usually found in shophouses in the town of Pakse.

3. Development of Pakse into a hub of business and economics

In the past, Pakse was a small inland fishing community located on the estuary of the Se Don River that leads to the Mekong River. The location of Pakse is suitable for plantations and fishing. The town also serves as the transportation hub for both land and water. Therefore, the French saw the opportunities and made Pakse the capital city and an economic hub in southern Laos. French economic policies led to investment in development projects and capitalism slowly began to

dominate the town's economic system. Foreign goods were imported through the Mekong River which connects the Se Don River and Street Number 13 (connecting Pakse with Saigon) so that transport could be done all year round. Therefore, Pakse was revived to serve as a hub of administration and business. There were modern buildings, hospitals, schools, power plants, water supplies, and markets in the city and they continued to expand (Phothisane, 2015: 30). In addition, the French had the policy to attract Chinese traders and skilled workers as well as Vietnamese to come to settle in the center of many towns, causing new settlers to outnumber the locals (Stuart-fox, 2015: 73). Nowadays Vietnamese living in the main area are engaged in almost every kind of business, from running restaurants to construction-related businesses. They usually live in their own communities. Guesthouses and construction businesses are run by Vietnamese. The heart of the city is where the French resided and the surrounding area would be reserved for Chinese and Vietnamese. Laotians lived a bit further than this.

Currently, many businesses in Pakse are managed by foreigners, such as Thais, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Koreans. The buildings that previously belonged to Vietnamese during the colonial period have been renovated and concessions were made to reconstruct buildings as well as roads. The colonial buildings, which are remarkable, have been recently used by the state for many purposes; many are used as state offices, hotels (Figure 7), and restaurants and some are set aside for residences. Recently, there have been efforts from Champasak to promote tourism, contributing to an increasing number of foreign visitors coming to the town to admire nature, experience the town's modern atmosphere or sightsee around the old town of Champasak.

Analysis of Building 1 - This shophouse has been renovated and turned into a hotel. Bright colors are used to make the building stand out, with yellow used as the main color. The interior of the building is renovated and redecorated for the current function. The old doors have been replaced with metal folding doors for convenience and to express modernity.

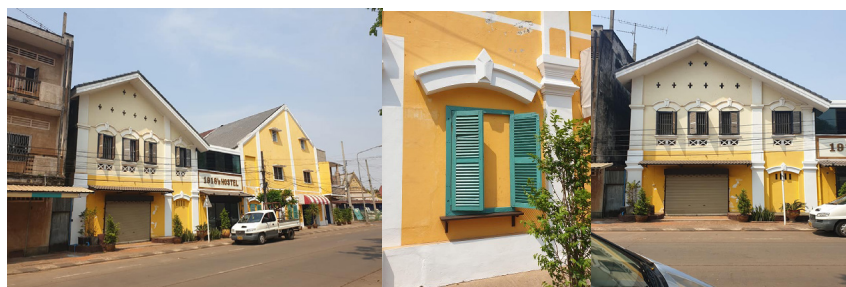


Figure 7 The old building built during the colonial era has been renovated and turned into a hotel named '1918's Hotel' in Pakse.

Champasak province has a policy of conserving such colonial buildings and houses for the young generation to study. However, some of these buildings need maintenance work and others have already been demolished. The maintenance includes replacement using modern materials, for example, metal or cement to build roofs and weather-tolerant canopies (Figure 8). Such changes reflect innovations which might be better than the old methods used at the time of construction.



Figure 8 Although some shophouses built during the colonial period have been modified, some colonial-style decorative patterns have been preserved.

4. Champasak as the location of the Vat Phou World Heritage Site

In the past, Champasak was one of the most prominent towns and is home to the famous Vat Phou, an ancient temple complex built

around the 13th century A.D. The town has remained the capital of Champasak province until these days. After Laos gained independence and officially became Lao PDR, the city continued to grow rapidly in terms of the number of local residents and tourists. While many colonial buildings have been either demolished or modified, those in Baan Muang Saen, Baan Wat Tung, Baan Wat Amat and Baan Panom Nue are still conserved because they are located in the area of Vat Phou, the UNESCO World Heritage Site.² Some buildings have been turned into shops and hotels. The colonial buildings at the Old Market, on the other hand, have not been changed much or replaced with new ones, so people can still imagine what the town, a former French colony, was like in the past. The grandeur and the value of colonial architecture have been well preserved under the World Heritage Project, impressing tourists, writers, and documentary producers from Thailand and other countries (Singyabut, 2010: 114). Historical values can be seen in these areas, and they can tell us stories about the past. Thus, these buildings are being preserved for young generations to study (Saengprachan, 2010).

According to documents about construction regulations regarding the World Heritage Site by Fielden (1998, as cited in Prommachan, 2010), renovation, modification, or any changes made to any colonial buildings are allowed only with certain conditions. For example, maintenance must not cause damage to the original structure, especially designs of the roof, doors, windows, balconies, decorative materials, and other elements. The regulations also require the use of natural paints and wooden materials. Those who wish to construct or renovate a building are required to submit a request form at the Office of Public Works and Transport where consultation is provided, and a construction permit is issued by the officials. If there is an unauthorized change made to the building which violates the conservation regulations, the owner must take responsibility. Such regulations have made the city remain quite the same as in colonial times. Some buildings have been

² Vat Phou Champasak was registered as a cultural heritage site in 2001; the physical characteristics of the site correspond to religious concepts and its cultural landscape reflects city planning based upon the Hindu cosmology. Moreover, relevant cultural traces have been found in the area which demonstrate human creativity and elements of social structure, culture, lifestyle, economics, and governance (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/481/>, searched on 17 June 2021).

renovated using modern materials like cement, ceramic roofs, pipes, and modern architectural designs that most suit current users.

Analysis of Building 2 - The House of Chao Ratsadanay (Figure 9) formerly served as the residence of Chao Ratsadanay (Chao Boun Um), the ruler of Champasak during the French colonial period. The house was built in 1926. The current owner is Chaonang Sudachan na Champasak, the daughter of Chao Ratsadanay. The house is still used today. Decorative details, such as door facades and windows, indicate the owner's social power and status. Although the house was influenced by western architectural styles, it has been adjusted to suit the climate and local materials were used in its construction.

The house is still in excellent condition, with no damage to its structure, although some parts are worn out. Modern materials and construction methods were employed when repairs were made. The gable roofs in front of the house have been replaced with ceramics and materials available during the present time. Maintenance also includes repairing the damaged parts with cement (Figure 9). Despite the maintenance work, the architectural features of the house still stand out as they can be noticed on the decorative columns next to the door frames (Figure 10) which are western-style stucco, reflecting the status of the previous owner in the past. The exterior of the house remains in its previous condition following the conservation guidelines of UNESCO.



Figure 9 The front and side of the residence of Chao Ratsadanay in Champasak. Modern materials and designs are incorporated and vents have been added at the top of windows to facilitate air flow.



Figure 10 The heads of the decorative columns reflect valuable historic images, cultural acceptance, adjustment between the western and local style, and the use of cement, a modern material.

From the four points mentioned above, it can be concluded that acculturation of colonial architecture in Champasak province has been affected by the political and social contexts at different periods of time. Geography, economics, beliefs, and scientific and technological changes are the key factors that have required people to adjust and to accept those of different ethnicities in society. This phenomenon has been shown through architecture created to suit the users. Although the buildings remain in colonial style, they blend with other architectural styles very well, which is consistent with the statement by Sutthitham (2011) that reconstruction or alteration might cause some changes to the building's patterns or functions, but the architectural essence remains. Nowadays, despite the rising number of modern buildings in the area, the colonial buildings appear architecturally harmonious with the old ones.

Conclusion and Discussion

The results of the study show that western architecture in Champasak province was introduced by the French colonists. Western architecture was subtly adjusted to suit the hot climate, and locally-found materials were used in construction. Initially, western architecture was exclusively used in government buildings and residences of the French governors

and their families. The French architectural buildings feature cement columns and a symmetrical square shape unlike the Lao traditional style in which a building is lifted off the ground and built of wood and materials available in the area. The buildings dating from the colonial period were designed by the French, but constructed by Vietnamese and Laotians. The French brought Vietnamese to Champasak as construction laborers. When the Vietnamese saw job opportunities, they decided to migrate to Champasak for businesses and construction jobs.

Vietnamese expertise in bricklaying and plastering can be traced to the fact that Vietnam was once under Chinese power and later a French colony. The skills of French, Chinese, and Vietnamese construction workers in creating Champasak's architecture have affected the construction methods, materials, techniques, as well as symbols used in colonial construction. After Pakse was made the capital of Champasak, there was an exponential growth in the economy, and improved transportation allowed people to travel around Champasak conveniently. Many buildings were built to serve a business culture; Vietnamese and Chinese built shophouses for selling goods as well as for living. According to the field research, the distinctive difference between the colonial buildings and the Vietnamese shophouses lies in the stucco patterns showing the influence of Vietnamese workers and symbols conveying Chinese meanings. These sub-cultures have merged to create a building to serve the user's purpose, and this finding is consistent with previous studies such as those by Onmavong (2016) and Jongrak (2016). Put simply, colonial architecture in Champasak province is an acculturation of western, Vietnamese, Lao, and Chinese cultures blended through the influence of the builders. The architecture during the colonial period allows us to see cultural differences of people of diverse ethnicities, whose knowledge and skills vary. It can also be noticed that people accept such differences so that architectural works are created to increase the well-being of users or residents who live in the buildings. This conforms with the research by Purwanto and Titiek (2017), which explored the architecture of the Chinese community in Lasem city in Java, Indonesia. There, Chinese and Java cultures have

contributed to architectural acculturation, particularly in terms of space layout and details. The functions of buildings as well as materials and decorations have been adjusted and integrated to suit the users. Therefore, Chinese and Javanese architecture is assimilated to create such distinctive characteristics.

These colonial buildings have been used continually since the colonial period until today, the era of the New Economic Mechanism, causing rapid developments in Champasak in terms of both society and culture. People of different ethnicities visiting the town for business and tourism contribute to the acculturation of colonial architecture, which demonstrates the city's cultural wealth, and continual developments respond to changes in politics, society, and the economy. The structure of most colonial buildings at the present time is still the same, but it has been improved for durability and some of the colors have been changed. New materials are used to decorate the inside and outside of the buildings in order to suit current users. The outstanding designs, the influence of builders, and the lifestyles of the users blend harmoniously. Alterations of the buildings, both interior and exterior, have been made to meet the cultural requirements of the users, but the buildings' originality can still be seen. This statement is consistent with Vongvilay (2015), discussing the influence of French architecture on Lao architecture. Modern materials and technologies were brought for construction, resulting in both similarities and differences of the building's features. Fransnino (2017) point out that colonial architecture is the result of cultural integration. Structures, designs, elements, and decorations are affected by distinctive features of certain types of architecture. Alternatively, they are affected by integration of two different designs which lead to new hybrid architecture existing in in Pakse. That is, Pakse is now a modern town with many people coming for travel and business. Some colonial buildings have been transformed into hotels and restaurants with a mixture of the modern and old designs.

In Champasak, however, alterations to colonial buildings are limited as the city is home to Vat Phou, a World Heritage Site, where conservation regulations are followed as strictly as they are in Luang Prabang, which is also a World Heritage Site. These regulations make

Pakse and Champasak unique. Acculturation of colonial architecture is caused by the diffusion of western cultures that are adjusted to suit the climate and people who migrated to these cities influence architecture through builders. These factors cause buildings to serve different purposes and they allow us to see sub-cultures hidden in certain features of the buildings. Examples are the Vietnamese and Chinese decorations which are mainly found in Baan Tha Luang in Pakse where Vietnamese and Chinese communities are located. These buildings are used today and have been transformed from living accommodations to coffee shops, clinics, and business offices where the first floor is for operating a business and the second floor is for residence.

Today Champasak and Pakse are major tourist destinations in southern Laos and the Mekong sub-region where the economy, society, and convenient transportation are connected to each other, contributing to the rising number of tourists each year. The colonial buildings have received a considerable amount of attention from Lao and foreign tourists, and have become a popular spot for taking photos because they reflect the image of Champasak that has changed from past to present. They also reflect how societies and cultures that are different from each other can blend together perfectly in the community.

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