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The results of the study indicates that the prominent characteristics of the traditional folk doctors in The People's Republic of Laos still utilize local knowledge continuously while curing the people in the community and have 13 good prominent characteristics that are fit to be traditional doctors that people respect; 1. Merciful, 2. Sacrificing, involved in 3. Constant learning, 4. Securing (defending) community forest, 5. Upholding rituals, possessing 6. Psychic powers, 7. Transmitting herbal remedy knowledge, 8. Have influence within the community, through achieving the 9. Respect and admiration of the people, 10. Self preservation through example, 11. Uphold the 5 Precepts of Buddhism.

**Keywords:** *characteristics, traditional folk doctors, austro-asiatic ethnic group.*

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THE PROMINENT CHARACTERISTICS OF AUSTRASIATIC TRADITIONAL FOLK DOCTORS IN THE LOWER KONG RIVER ETHNOGRAPHY

*Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:*



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**Suggestions.** The traditional folk doctors in The People's Republic of Laos should promote the knowledge and characteristics of traditional folk doctors from the community area to the regional level in the lower Kong River countries to firmly develop and sustain the traditional folk doctors knowledge for future generations.

**Keywords:** *characteristics, traditional folk doctors, austro-asiatic ethnic group.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Health issues and sickness from transmitted chronic diseases in the Austroasiatic ethnic group in the lower Kong river have a rising tendency every year and affecting the costs of health services to rise accordingly. Using traditional medicine and herbs developed in accordance to managing the health of the Austroasiatic ethnic group importantly

appropriate to the way of life, culture, traditions and beliefs. Traditional medicine is considered a tradition of looking after health and sickness of the people in the Austroasiatic ethnic group. By using knowledge of healing by experience and exercise from traditional doctors that have expertise important from life and culture (Saowanee Khulasomboon and co., 2007 : 11) Traditional folk Doctor is folk wisdom that has been with the Thai community for a long period of time. Traditional folk Doctor is collective knowledge from direct sources and formulas and is important for traditional medicine practice. Traditional folk doctors have various methods in practice such as Tree 1. root medicine doctors practice using herbal remedies. 2. Blowing Doctors use various blowing rituals. The more common ingredients are chewing lime and blowing, chewing garlic and blowing, chewing various leaves and blowing.

Blessed water Doctors use holy water to sprinkle over the areas that are unwell. 3. Tendon Doctors practice by using their thumb and index finger to press the sprained tendons or adjusting dislocated joints. 4. Monk Doctors are monks who have the ability to heal patients by sprinkling holy water and teaching chants before night sleep. Dance Worshipping the Spirits Doctor are mostly female practitioners who heal by performing ritual dancing accompanied by Lao reed mouthorgan. 5. Evil Doctor are sometimes called witch doctors from curing illness caused by ghosts and spirits. They are also called Blessing Doctors, Brahmin Doctors. 6. Midwife Doctor is responsible for overseeing childbirth and cleaning the infant.

Traditional folk doctors of the Austro-asiatic ethnic group in the lower Kong river are people who follow folk wisdom. They have suitable knowledge to care for health of their community and nearby regions. They emphasize traditional philosophy, knowledge, practices to maintain the health, cure diseases and sickness in accordance to traditions, culture and ways of life. Practices include usage of herbs, Thai spa massage, traditional cure for bones. Usage of Buddhist beliefs and rituals to maintain both personal body and mental health. Usage of Natural therapy obtained from collective, transmitted knowledge. Having observation, maintaining journals and study that has been passed on from one generation to the next. Extensive knowledge of thorough therapy is knowing the cause of the disease,

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knowledge of the disease, symptoms. Knowledge of medicine used to cure, their properties, methods to prepare them for use to determine the appropriate treatment for each disease.

The phenomenon that confirms the practice of traditional folk doctors is depicted on wall carvings in

Bayon Sanctuary (1113 A.D - 1150 A.D.) world heritage NakhonWat, Siem Reap, Cambodia. It is a depiction of the practice by traditional folk doctors of the Austroasiatic ethnic group (Kha Tribe) in the lower Mae Klong Basin as in Picture 1.



Source: (Thittayawadee Intarangkul, Photograph, 2014, May 17)

**Picture 1:** Ancient traditional folk doctors with attendants and patients which show respect and faith in the traditional folk doctors of NakhonWat Temple, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia.

From Picture 1, shows traditional medical practice by traditional folk doctors. It is widely popular in both royal and common households. It has been passed on as a resource and folk wisdom by curing with philosophy, knowledge, and traditional practices that maintain care for health and cure diseases accordingly to traditions, rituals and way of life. The practices include the use of herbs, Thai spa massage, as well as for traditional cure for bones. Usage of Buddhism and rituals to maintain body health and mental health. Usage of Natural therapy obtained from collective, passed on knowledge.

In The People's Republic of Laos there is a Lao Theung Ethnic group in southern Laos such as KhaOi and KhaTu dwelling in large numbers in the Xe River basin and Bolaven Plateau in Pakse and Paksong, Champasak Province. The characteristics of Kha Tribe still strongly preserve beliefs, customs in way of life, culture and traditions. Especially the traditional folk doctors who have influence over mentality and how the family and community lead their life. Whether it may be beliefs towards a higher power, natural defining powers, rituals according to beliefs to create peace in their group, or looking after the health of the community such as taking care, cure of sickness of the people in the community. Traditional folk doctors are responsible for treating the sick even though we have made progress in medicine, have hospitals, clinical facilities that provide convenience more than before (ever). Traditional folk doctors are still many peoples choice of treatment. We might have heard the phrase *"I went to see the doctor but never got any better but then I went to see a Traditional folk doctor and was cured immediately."* The

experience and practice of medicine of traditional folk doctors is a treasure of wisdom that has high value in studying.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

To study the characteristics of traditional folk doctors of Kha tribe in The People's Republic of Laos.

## III. THE RESULTS

The results find that the characteristics of traditional folk doctors of Kha tribe in The People's Republic of Laos still use the knowledge passed on from their ancestors. They help in curing people in the community since the past until the present time. The traditional folk doctors of the Kha tribe are respected in (by) the community. A Traditional folk doctor has to have strong characteristics that are appropriate such as merciful, sacrifice, continuous learning, protecting community forest, uphold rituals, have psychic powers, pass down herbal folk knowledge, have influence over people in the community, are respected and revered, self preserve, uphold the 5 precepts and have mystical healing powers. Additionally good characteristics include leadership in community, set the example of self health preservation (look after oneself), Conserve traditional medical folk wisdom and care for community health as follows.

### a) The Kindness

The Kindness of Traditional folk doctor is a characteristic that should set an example for the villagers of persons concerned in caring for patients. They are friendly, wish well for others. Merciful without

particularity. Mercifulness comes from cultivating oneself in everyday life or being kind towards the next person and expanding to others in a wider range. As the saying *"Curing someone is like making good merits. Receive happiness from curing someone because they trust and revere in me"* (Sang Chanpeng, 2013, September 7). The of Traditional folk doctor should be merciful. Make patients revere and respect. In accord with Doctor PhaiKhumathong says with a happy expression *"People who come were troubled. After helping them I felt proud."* (PhaiKhumathong. 2013 September 21).

#### b) Sacrifice

Sacrifice is standard virtue of the of Traditional folk doctor. Sacrifice personal happiness for the community. In according to an interview *"Be able to help them from distress is satisfying enough. I don't think about the money"* (BieawKhumdeewai. 2013, June 22). Traditional folk doctors see that public benefits are important. Influencing the community to be happy, generous towards one another.

#### c) Constant Learning

Constant Learning is essential for traditional folk doctors. To search for new knowledge, constantly keeping up to date with the advancement of society and treatment of diseases. It is training oneself to always be skillful. Learning skills come from observation. Observing the surroundings or object of study. The duties of traditional folk doctors is up to the beliefs about health and affect health altering behaviour in preventing, curing, nursing and restoring health of the villagers. *"Nowadays people in the community have increased interest in massage. They organize association (clubs) and have doctor Chatwan come teach without any expenses"* (NoiThanepoon. 2012, May 26).

#### d) Protect Community Forest

To preserve and protect them for the next generation to insure long lasting benefits. Traditional folk doctors can find medical herbs from within the community forest. *"I am a Traditional folk Doctor (Massage Doctor). I also have a rice field. People come to me for massage almost every day. Every day after I bathe and have breakfast if I don't go to my rice field I go to the community Thai massage club. I make massage cream (medicine) and compress herbal ball."* (NoiThanepoon. 2012, May 26).

#### e) Rituals

Performing rituals or attending rituals is training people to know order, train discipline. Will lead people to uphold precepts. Rituals will better help the results of healing of traditional folk doctors. *"Broken bones, sprains, Hemorrhoids, Septicemia, Colon cancer, asthma, diabetes, healing broken bones we blow, use sesame oil and reattach the bones with magic. Check symptoms to choose the most suitable medicine for the bone."* (Ken Thongsai. 2013 September 25). Traditional

folk doctors use rituals in addition when curing patients to help increase the rate of success. But rituals are based on supernatural superstition than can cure depending on beliefs and faith of people in the community.

#### f) Psychic Powers

Have Psychic powers by strengthening the soul and Calm the soul to be tranquil state. Calmly analyze one's emotions without being immersed in the effects of the emotion. Traditional folk doctors prefer to use rituals and psychic powers to cure patients accompanying in tandem with the use of medicine and herbs. *"I am happy to learn this practice. it is far to go see a doctor. they come to me instead. When i see them smile after they are healed, I am happy."* (NattakitSawadtong. 2013 September 25) and *"Broken bones, sprains, Hemorrhoids, Septicemia, Colon cancer, asthma, diabetes, healing broken bones which we have blown on, use sesame oil and reattach the bones with magic. Check symptoms to choose the most suitable medicine for the bone."* (Ken Thongsai. 2013 September 25) traditional folk doctors that utilize psychic powers accompanying with medical treatment are usually those who are pure. They constantly strengthen their soul and psychic powers to positively increase the success of healing. This is in according to the beliefs and faith of people in the community. These rely on contact with supernatural powers such as powerful ghosts, holy entities etc.

#### g) Relaying knowledge of medical herbs

Passing down folk knowledge of traditional folk doctors is the passing on of collected knowledge from ancestors to their successors or people who were chosen through extensive selection to become the bearer of folk medical knowledge. To preserve folk knowledge of family and community onwards.

#### h) Influence over community behaviour

This is a main element of the traditional folk doctors towards activities continuously, by being example in life. To promote good health in body, soul, emotion and in community. Having proper behavior and setting a good example and having good results in healing others. traditional folk doctors are important in creating trust and reverence of the people in the community. Whatever the traditional folk Doctor does or invite the people to do, people will join. Traditional folk doctors have influence over the behaviour of the community whatever the activity would be. Should support the traditional folk doctors to be leaders in healthcare such as bringing traditional folk doctors to disseminate information and knowledge to leaders of the village to take care of their own health needs.

#### i) Respect and Faith

Respect and Faith is a factor that the villagers have towards traditional folk doctors. Setting a good



example, having moral standards, Being a leader in creating benefits for the community especially regarding health. Traditional folk doctors show the capability in health care in realization. They need time to receive acceptance from the community.

#### j) *Self Preservation*

Self Preservation is preparing oneself for taking care of oneself health. Preparation of medical instruments and the correct medicine. Including skills and basic knowledge in diagnosing their own sickness. Usually this preservation includes rituals and beliefs, traditional Thai medicine, passed on medicine remedies. The strong beliefs and trust in traditional medical doctors is a main factor in deciding behaviour of the people.

#### k) *The Five Precepts*

Traditional folk doctors will strictly uphold the five precepts in order to show respect to the teachers and to help in successfully curing the patients. Upholding the five precepts is part of maintaining spirit (soul heart). To be traditional folk doctor that is leader of community, he has to encourage the community to uphold the five precepts for everyone to have basic care of their own health.

#### l) *Alms and Pray*

Traditional folk doctors should strictly uphold Alms, Precepts and Pray. They make the Traditional folk Doctor have pure souls. Makes them think only positively. Refrain from being greedy. Makes those staying in the community demonstrate generosity towards one another. Makes taking care of health of people in community with generosity such as Traditional folk Doctor Don't emphasise on accumulating profits from healing. Even if they get nothing in return, they will still help willingly.

#### m) *Supernatural Power in Healing*

Supernatural power in healing is the belief and trust that the patients exhibit towards traditional folk doctors. Similar to treatment of that one would exhibit towards a relative. Some of the physical sickness can be cured by changing one's mindset. A lot of knowledge of Traditional folk Doctor is intangible. While they are curing patients, they continue to chant incantations. Authentic traditional folk doctors will focus on training their soul, upholding Buddhist precepts, Maintain a strict routine. A lot of these doctors chant while collecting herbs. When going into the forest to look for medical herbs they have to choose the timing, have special chants while they do so. When they pick herbs, they pray to their teachers to help ensure the herbs will help in the healing of patients. Traditional folk doctors utilize rituals to help heal and also make the patients have faith and be encouraged during the treatment which stimulates faster healing.

The characteristics of traditional folk doctors of Kha tribe in The People's Republic of Laos show that the traditional folk doctors still use folk knowledge in continuous treatment of the Health in the community. Traditional folk doctors will uphold in righteousness. They are respected and revered. They will be depended upon in every aspect in the community. They will have roles in the society as leaders of village traditions, conserve resources. Example of self-reliance in the community. Set an example in developing one's own health, such as maintaining proper eating habits, exercising, promotion of healthy behaviour etc. Other than setting a good example for the community, traditional folk doctors have a role in preserving medical folk wisdom and knowledge to continuously pass on from one generation to the next. To maintain medical folk knowledge to continue to play an important role in overseeing health of the community. Even though in this present day the villagers have increased options in maintaining their health, traditional folk doctors still play an important role in overseeing health of community.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The traditional folk doctors of the Kha tribe is an ethnic group that maintains good traditions since age-old times. It is an ethnic group that is peace-loving and friendly. They have customs and traditions that are unique to themselves. The Kha tribe traditional folk doctors also have medical folk knowledge in curing patients which combine beliefs and faith in supernatural powers to encourage miraculous healing of sicknesses. Additionally medical folk knowledge regarding curing can also act as a bridge connecting relationships of people in the community to tighten and strengthen the structure of the community tribe and can withstand the impact from the outside. The Kha ethnic group still upholds and strongly believes in the traditions and customs of their tribe. They cooperate together in community activities. They demonstrate unity within the group. They help one another, share with others, are harmonious and respect each other. The children respect and look up to their elders. They maintain relationships in families and especially medical folk knowledge. They pass on the teachings so that traditional folk doctors can acquire the methods and medicine recipes that have been passed down by their ancestors and teachers. We can still see traditional folk Medical Doctors use folk medical knowledge in curing patients in their community today. The traditional folk doctors have ideas and beliefs concerning the source of the sickness and diseases and the method of curing the sick within the community that are seeking help. The Traditional folk doctor's way of life strictly upholds the teachings of their mentor teachers and ancestors. They adhere to the teachings of righteousness. They are examples that the people look

up to and respect as philosophers of the community. They are those who villagers rely on.

There are thirteen outstanding characteristics of the traditional folk doctors of the Kha ethnic group in The People's Republic of Laos. They are merciful, willing to sacrifice, constantly learning, protecting and maintaining the community forest, upholding rituals, exhibiting psychic powers, inheriting herbal folk wisdom, having influence in the community, respected and revered, believers in self-preservation, upholders of the five Buddhist precepts, those who practice giving alms and praying and have supernatural powers in healing. Overall there are five distinct groups: 1) Other than the characteristics of being merciful, sacrificing, setting proper examples, constantly learning about the use of herbs and medicine and assuring that the community forest is protected. 2) Traditional folk doctors like to use rituals and psychic powers along with medicine or herbs in curing patients and passing down folk knowledge. 3) The respect and reverence towards traditional folk doctors is basic behaviour towards promoting health and helps the participants to learn self-medication. 4) Self-preservation along with traditional folk practices such as the five precepts, and uphold the use of alms giving, upholding precepts and prayer are the main important basic characteristics utilized for healing patients. 5) Using knowledge in the basic level and deeper levels. Also the traditional folk Doctor heals by utilizing rituals or magic.

Additionally traditional folk doctors maintain their roles in society as leaders of community traditions and customs, conserving resources. Promoting self reliance within the community. Setting an example in developing self reliance in promoting healthy choices such as choice of proper foods, of maintaining regular exercise or other health promoting efforts etc. Other than setting an example for the community, traditional folk doctors have a duty to preserve medical folk knowledge from generation to generation. Maintaining the medical folk knowledge of the traditional doctors will continue to remain important in curing sickness of people in the community even though in the present day the villagers have many different options available in choosing health care. The traditional folk doctors still have to have an important role in promoting communities health efforts.

#### *Suggestions*

1. The study of the prominent characteristics of the traditional folk doctors in The People's Republic of Laos is a study based on the Kha ethnic tribe only. There should be additional studies conducted on other ethnic groups in the sub-districts of the Kong river basin.
2. The study cannot factually explain the mystical powers that heal the patients. There should be new studies conducted in various fields for it to

become acceptable as a means of new age medical practice.

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