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# Cultural intercourse of the Lao Vieng ethnic groups that reflects on the architectural style and the use of space in the Korat house

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## ABSTRACT

Lao Vieng ethnic groups were taken as prisoners of war to Nakhon Ratchasima in 1778, resulting in a continuous cultural intercourse with the Thai Korat people, especially in the construction of Korat house styles. Recent research has investigated residential housing and the use of space by the two groups of Lao Vieng—Laos Vieng Taku and Laos Vieng Japoh—who settled either close to or away from the center of administration. This article focuses on the comparison of the cultural intercourse of these two groups against the main cultural group which is reflected in the development of housing and the use of interior space. A study of architectural history is applied along with anthropology and sociology. The methodology includes housing surveys, case studies, and interviews with residents. Comparative analysis between the two groups aimed at studying the phenomena of cultural intercourse, including its contributing factors. The study findings show that in a historical context, both groups have maintained to some extent, aspects according to traditional Lao culture. However, the housing patterns of the Lao Vieng Japoh reflect more the adoption of the Korat house than the other, as the location of their community is closer to the administrative center and trade routes, and is surrounded by different cultural groups, especially the Thai Korat group, resulting in social interactions, cultural intercourse, and blending in with the mainstream culture at a greater level.

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## Introduction

The numbers of Korat houses is decreasing day by day due to continuous demolition and abandonment. Therefore, it is necessary to quickly study, explore, and collect information on the Korat house from various aspects to create a database that will help academics, architects, and the general public to understand and realize the value, as well as the importance of the Korat house, leading to preservation and further conservation before the

information is gone from memory. Based on information about the earlier studies of the Korat house by academics, [Tansuwanrat \(2002\)](#) studied the Korat house, focusing on the physical aspects and identities of the Korat House that had been most cited. [Veerapradit \(1999\)](#) studied the relationship of the Korat house with ways of life based on the humanities field. In general, these scholarly works did not study the integration of the humanities, social sciences, and architecture, especially the study of ethnicity that affects the characteristics of the house. This study focuses on the view of the Korat House using the cultural diversity of ethnic groups that affects the architectural style and cultural patterns of the cultural use of interior space. This is an integrated study that will broaden and clarify the existing knowledge base.

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Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province (Korat) is a prominent district for cultural intercourse between the Thai Korat group—the former residents and major cultural group with the Lao Vieng group—an ethnic group of the Kingdom of Lan Xang, who resided along the Mekong River on the Vientiane plain and were taken as prisoners of war to the Japho outpost (Pak Thong Chai District today) in 1778. After the war, the Lao Vieng dispersed into two groups—in Baan Japho and Taku districts (Figure 1)—and have been adapting to their area contexts ever since, as can be seen from house construction that follows the Korat house pattern, according to the main cultural groups. Modification of the house style of the Lao Vieng to the Korat pattern shows adaptation to the main culture. It shows social status to comply with the values of the Thai Korat for acceptance and to negotiate an identity that shows social rights and equality with interaction. “When the main culture interacts with the existing culture nearby both cultures can learn and understand one another. In the early stages, culture may be temporarily or culturally borrowed and then subsequently adopted as their own culture, while the less energetic groups are often blended into the more powerful ones.” (Pongsapit, 2006, p.15). According to this, “people with different cultural background borrowed or exchanged ‘rules of thumb’ about house building. This was an indigenous development which occurred according to social interaction between the pioneers, and the merits and pitfalls of their building practices and lifestyles.” (Lawrence, 1990, p. 253).

With preliminary observations on the differences in the architectural style and the use of interior space of the two Lao Vieng groups of Laos, such as size, roof truss, the

positions for doors and windows in the bedroom, the question arise of whether the differences in an area context and location near or far from the center of administration can affect the different levels of cultural intercourse of the Lao Vieng Japho and the Lao Vieng Taku with the main culture. This introduces the purpose of this study—to compare the cultural intercourse of the two Lao Vieng groups with the main cultural group as it is reflected in the construction of housing and the use of space, including contributing factors. Discussion based on the conceptual framework of cultural intercourse theory is applied, in accordance with the historical time of the case-study area, and considering every single variable that affects the architectural patterns and the use of interior space. The results will be important information to help identify ethnic characteristics and to perceive the existence of ethnic groups before they are forgotten and disappear, making it impossible for future research.

## Literature Review

### Comparison Between the Korat House and Lao Vieng House

Patterns of Korat and Lao Vieng houses are similar in some respects—a single storey, wooden house with a raised platform and a high gable roof. The house structure is a prefabricated system. In general, both groups have a similar layout with awareness of the sun's path. Obvious differences between the two groups of houses are. 1) **Structure of the main house with bedrooms:** The Korat house is unique in that the king post is vertically jointed on

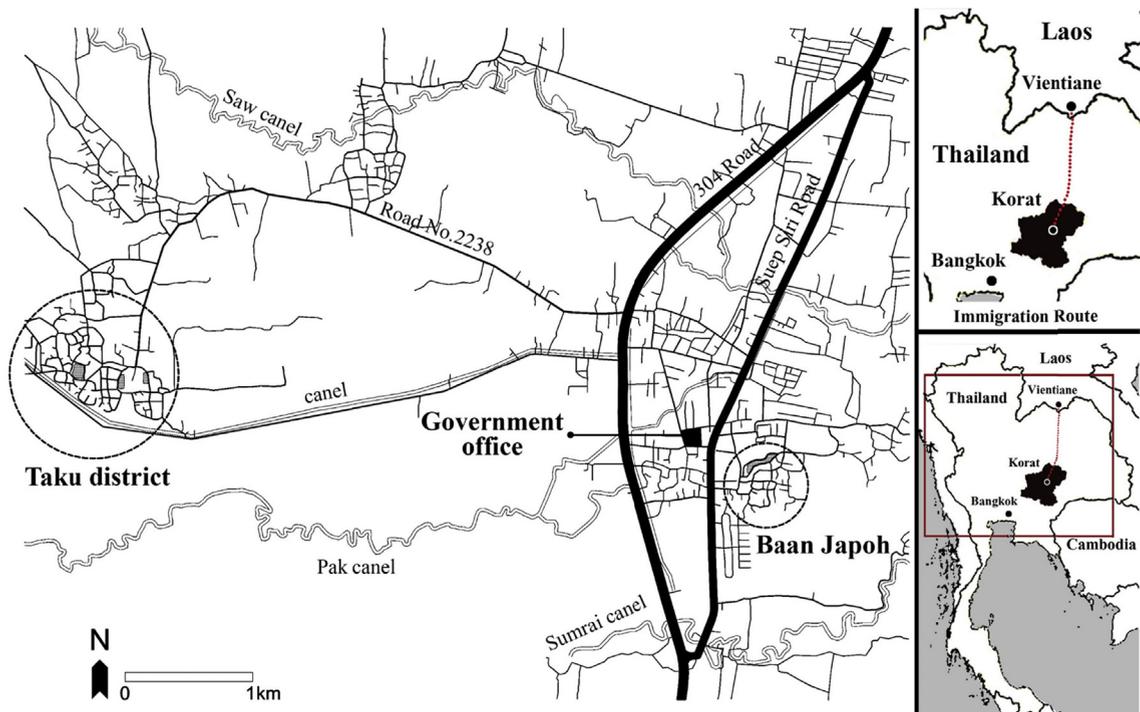


Figure 1 Immigration route and location of both communities

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