

# Nongbouthong Tai Village

## The Weavers

### WHAT WE LEFT THE COMMUNITY

The weaving section of the Nongbouthong Tai community represents a potential model for home-based industry and preservation of Lao heritage. The Phaeng Mai Gallery in the village is already recognized by some travel guides and tour agencies as a place for visitors to observe the weaving process in a more traditional setting. To capture more of the tourist market, residents of the adjacent weaving village might undertake basic beautification projects, provide simple amenities for tourists, and develop relationships with tour agencies and hotels. Basic beautification projects could include cleaning the pond to eliminate noxious odors, creating signage to help visitors find the village, a map in the village indicating the independent weavers, a cafe, and a display area to showcase the silks. Tourists might enjoy simple amenities like soft drinks and

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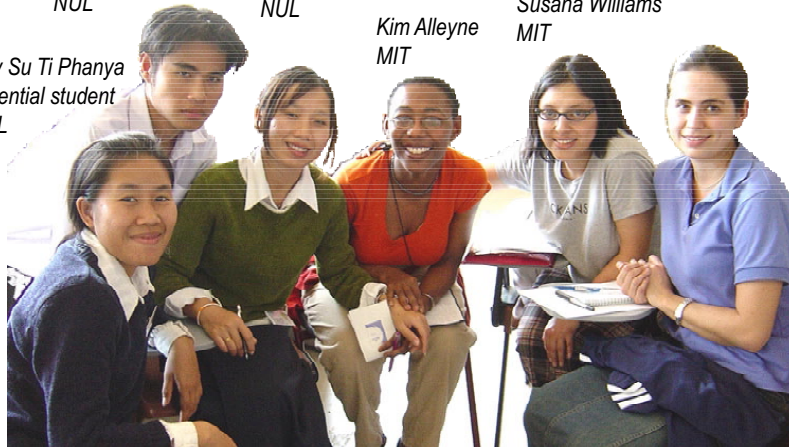
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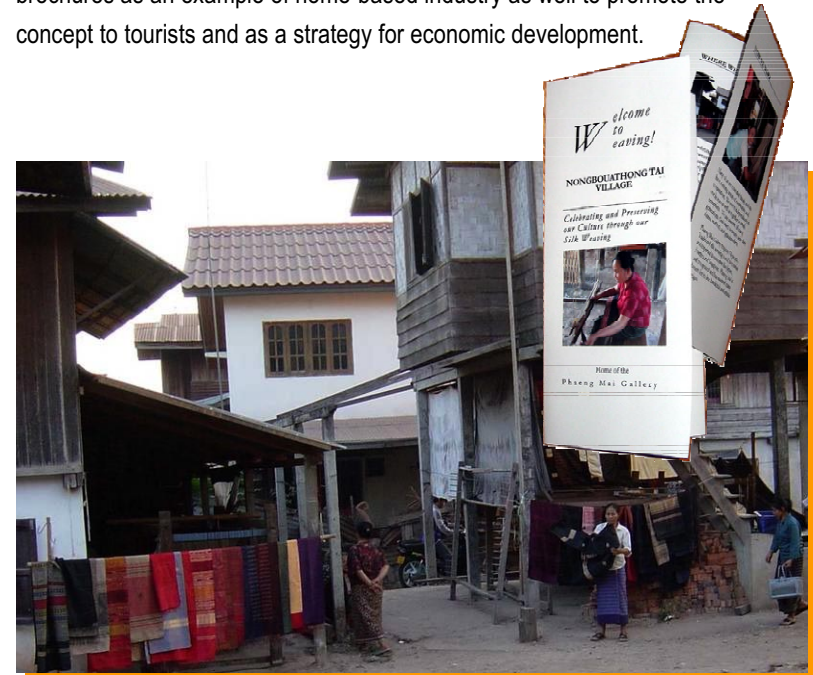
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snacks. Ideas for policy makers to consider include promoting Lao Handicrafts in international trade forums, cultural exhibitions and support for silk production to lower prices. For example, the government might support silk producing cooperatives.

In order to increase the market for the community's weaving and residents' earnings, we recommend the following in a broader marketing effort:

- 1) Basic beautification projects (i.e. pond trash clean up, signage, cafe, and display area). These could be carried out by the villagers themselves.
- 2) Marketing brochures/posters for tourists: A brochure example was left for the villagers to replicate in English and Lao. They could be distributed in hotels, tourist agencies and to tourists who come to the village. The independent weavers might pool funds to replicate them. The government could use the brochures as an example of home-based industry as well to promote the concept to tourists and as a strategy for economic development.



A courtyard within the village surrounded by weaving workshops. The weavers take advantage of the presence of visitors to display their products.

3) *Recommendations for promoting Lao handicrafts* – primarily targeted to the Lao Handicraft Group which supports economic development and cultural preservation. Suggestions include: promoting Lao handicrafts by showcasing the Village as a living museum, sponsoring national museum exhibitions and participating in international trade forums, support for family-based enterprise, expanding handicraft training, partnering with NGOs in microenterprise and supporting cooperative silk purchasing.

**THE COMMUNITY**

The weaving community of Nongbouathong Tai is located in the northeast section of Vientiane. The village is a 10 minute drive from the city center. It is less than 1 square mile (weaving section only). The population in numbers 160, of which 42 are men and 118 women. The total number of families is 30, with an average family size of 4-5.



**• History**

In 1985, the current residents moved to the weaving section of Nongbouatong Tai from the village of Sam Neua, Houaphan province, in the northeast of Laos. This area is traditionally known for many rare and traditional textile patterns. With little access to capital and formal education, these residents continued their traditional trade of *Tawhook* weaving (a form of weft weaving). Over time, other family members joined them as weavers.

**• Services and Infrastructure**

*Education:* The children in the community attend the Nongbouathong Tai Primary school located across the pond in the neighboring village.

*Recreation:* There is one cemented area located in the center that the children use as a court.

*Religion:* The community members attend Wat Nongbouathong Tai temple

*Businesses:* Community Stores (small scale vendors), Morning Market

*Housing:* There are traditional Lao (built upon stilts) and two-story concrete buildings.

*Sanitation:* Each family uses either a septic tank or latrine. Each family collects their trash in individual baskets that are collected every Friday.

*Electrification:* Phone Tong supplies the service.

*Water:* A local water supplier sells bottled water.

*Drainage:* There are open drainage channels that lead to an adjacent pond.



Entrance suggestions.



Entrance to the community from the main street.

• **Employment:**

Weaving is the main activity of the community. Many small independent weavers are clustered around the large Phaeng Mai Gallery. Other employment includes taxi services, construction, and selling food.

The Phaeng Mai Gallery employs 130 weavers (75 women, 55 men). The Gallery sells products in a shop on the premises as well as abroad. Located behind the Phaeng Mai Gallery are various smaller weaving enterprises. These businesses are owned by one community member who manages and provides the weaving materials and facilities. These independent



*Women start weaving at a very young age and their income constitutes a significant contribution to the household.*

weavers work at home using their own looms and materials. The majority sell products in the 'Morning Market' (downtown), earning between \$5-10 for each textile. Some weavers sell to the occasional tourist who visits the Gallery and the community.

**WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY**

• **Key issues:** identified through joint discussion:

- pond: flooding, sanitation problems
- pond: blocking road access
- density of houses
- lack of employment options for men
- limited market to sell weaving
- narrow roads, lack of infrastructure
- lack of sanitation infrastructure
- increasing prices of silk



*View from the road approaching the village. The pond is a key concern.*

• **Priorities**

The community was concerned about two key issues: the stagnant pond with blocked road access, and the lack of a market to sell their weavings. The team equally identified the pond and the lack of a market to sell weavings, but they considered the sanitation problems of the pond to be a key concern.

**PRESERVING OUR CULTURE**

We take great pride in our culture and traditional way of life. We hope that with our silk weaving we can not only showcase our heritage but also preserve our country's rich traditions. Lao weavers are recognized for unique designs and techniques that are centuries old.



**WHO WE ARE**

We are a traditional weaving community located in the northeast of the capital city of Vientiane. Approximately 30 families live in our village.

Many of us are of Lao-Lum ethnicity and have migrated along with our relatives from Sam Neua in the northern province of HouaPhan and from the Xieng Khuang province in search of better opportunities.

We have brought with us our renowned silk weaving designs and process.

**Visit Us!**

We are located minutes from the center of Vientiane. Just a tuk-tuk ride away!

Our Address:  
Nongbouathong Tai Road  
Sikottabong District  
Vientiane, Laos



with assistance of:  
Special Interests in Urban Settlements Workshop,  
National University of Laos and Massachusetts  
Institute of Technology  
January 2004

**W**elcome to weaving!

**NONGBOUATHONG TAI VILLAGE**

*Celebrating and Preserving our Culture through our Silk Weaving*



Home of the  
**Phaeng Mai Gallery**

**HOW WE WORK**



Many of us are extended family, and we have a strong sense of community and cooperation. We weave independently in our homes as well as together in small enterprises. We are weavers of many generations. Girls learn to weave with their sisters, mothers, and grandmothers.

Phaeng Mai Gallery employs 74 people. Traditional silk weaving is sold to tourists and exported to countries like Japan, America and Singapore. Phaeng Mai is well recognized and has received many honors for its fine handcraft and artistic designs.

**HOW WE WEAVE**

The silk weaving process is divided into three parts: dyeing, spinning, weaving. Some weavers devote themselves to one step within the process while others undertake each step on their own. A weaver can generally complete a beautiful weaving using high quality silk in 2-3 days. More complicated designs take longer.

Our traditional designs represent the weaving of northern Laos. We use unique designs and techniques passed down to us from our mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers.



Nongbouathong Tai is an urban village where silk weaving is still done in traditional Lao style, using hand-made looms and spinning equipment. Families of weavers work together to create beautiful silk scarves, shawls, skirts and wall hangings in vibrant colors.



Map of our weaving village



**THE MARKETING BROCHURE**

*Translated into Lao in addition to English. Distributed in hotels, tourist agencies and to tourists who come to the village.*

*See also related papers:*

- Kim Alleyne: SHORT STORIES AND LONG SKIRTS: FINDING CULTURE IN LAOS
- Erin Camarena: MIGRATION AND INFORMAL NETWORKS AS EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE STRATEGIES OF POVERTY REDUCTION
- Hiba Bou Akar: LOOKING BEYOND CELEBRATING HERITAGE: BAALBECK AND LUANG PRABANG - A STORY OF TWO WORLD HERITAGE SITES