Figure 13  The *Klone* boats in Chiang Mai. (Pradit 1999)

Figure 14  The *Kap-pli* boats in the Ping River, Chiang Mai. (Pradit 1999)
used to transport farm products or light stuff or for fishing in shallow rivers and canals. Another kind of smaller boat is the sala boat (or chala in Central Thai pronunciation). It is larger and faster than the kap-pli boat. It is also used for transporting farm products or fishing (Pradit 1999: 5737-40). Larger boats can be made the same way as kap-pli boats with a larger scale and not as round a bottom as that of the kap-pli kind. They can carry more load but required deeper water. They also have a curved roof in the middle or farther end.

Special care needs to be considered when building a ship to ensure auspicious or good characteristics as well as good fortune (Pradit Ibid: 5742). Large boats are called by their distinctive features and functions: thong chang, sado and scorpion tail, for instance. The scorpion-tail boat or ‘hang maengpong’, also called mae pa (Figure 15), was a popular kind to commute along the Ping River 100 years or so ago. The hang maengpong and sado boats are pushed by using a long pole; therefore their front sort of juts out and slightly upward to allow the operator to have a space to walk while pushing the pole to make the boat go forward.

**Figure 15** The scorpion-tail boat or ‘hang maengpong’ was a popular kind to commute along the Ping River 100 years or so ago. (The National Archives)
If it goes against the current, the one who pushes the pole must apply more energy and quickness and the *nai-hoi* or the leader of the freight has to make sure that the pole pushers get enough to eat more than the downstream trip.

Another significant document that provided a clear picture of the journey along the Ping River is the *The Diary of the Journey along the Ping River from Chiang Mai to Pak Nampho* by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1931). This is an account of the trip during February and March of A.D. 1931, according to the wish of King Rama V’s Royal Consort, Princess Dara Rasmi. It is an important document as the author intended to survey as many rapids on the route as possible. He classified all 49 rapids into 3 groups according to the level of difficulty to negotiate. The first group was considered ‘kaeng rai’ (the most dangerous) where large boats like *hang maengpong* or *mae pa* had to be tied and guided down the rapids. In the second one has to watch for underwater rocks. The third had a wider passage for boats to go through even if the current was strong.

The people’s way of life along the river was also described where there were two resting places, one at Ban Mud-ka of Doi Tao District, Chiang Mai and the other at Ban Tha around Ban Tak of Tak District.
These are the places to get the boats, food and the crews ready to tackle the rapids. Men came to be hired out to help in pulling the boats down or up the rapids as some extra hands were needed (Damrong Rajanubhab Ibid: 7-8) (Figure 16). A record of the trip along the Ping River was also made by Dr. Daniel McGilvary, an American doctor and missionary, in A.D.1866. It took them three full months to reach Chiang Mai and the most difficult time was around Hod and Tak territory, which took over one month by itself (Surasawasdi, 2000: 32).

**Lan Na Traditions and Rituals Related to the Saphao**

The Lan Na people have a strong belief about the saphao due to the influence of Buddhism from Sri Lanka and the jātakas. The tradition of a floating saphao has been popular and is still being performed today. Lampang is considered a province that has preserved its tradition of long saphao (floating the saphao), which is performed on the nights of the 15th waxing moon and the 1st waning moon of November known generally as “Loi Kratong” or candle-light festival. This is the tradition to pay homage to the Khongka or Ganges River according to the Brahman beliefs and to worship the Buddha’s footprints. It offers a chance to release one’s bad fortune and convey merit to the deceased relatives.

People of Lampang and Lan Na still believe that floating a boat-like float or saphao provides a means for the dead to cross over to another world or a vehicle to take one’s soul on a journey to the next life, crossing the water that divides the land of death and the human realm. Thus, came the custom of sending the soul as well as practical things to the ancestors (Srilao, 2008).

The well-known and popular saphao in Lampang are saphao nok, the bird-like float, and saphao ruae, the boat-like float. The first one is made from coconut shells cut in half and attached to basketry wings and tail then covered with colored paper. Another piece of coconut is cut into the bird’s head and neck. People of Lampang believe in floating a bird-like float or saphao to worship the white crow who gives birth to the five Buddhas as written in local Buddhist text. The latter, a boat-
like *saphao*, made of bamboo structured in boat form and decorated by colored paper. People believe that after death one who floated this kind of *saphao* will ride a huge ship across the river to another world. It also looks like a similar activity was found on the Spirit Ship decoration on Đông So’n drums. Both kinds of float or *saphao* should be load with the rice, banana, sugarcane, glutinous rice steamed in banana leaf, sugar, salt, tobacco, betel nut, flowers, incense, candles and images of animals, etc. It is believed that the devoted things are necessities for the next life of the death. We may interpret the *saphao* as a vehicle to take the deceased’s soul into the good after life. The water is an obstacle between earth and the underworld. The Lampang traditional floating has become an attraction for many tourists every year.

Observation reveals that this concept of crossing the ocean is passed on to the Lan Na funeral rites. Besides being a means to release the soul of a woman who died in childbirth as mentioned earlier, it is also a way to make merit for the dead. When a person dies, the soul will go to a spirit land where the soul still needs food, lodging and money for expenses before finding a way to cross the ocean to another world or universe. Two things that can carry one over the ocean are a duck and a *saphao*. So duck eggs will be packed in a bag along with food for the journey to the land of the spirits. The dead can ride on the duck whereas the *saphao* or boat can be sailed by the power of the wind to safely cross the ocean or any obstacles (Srilao Ibid).

Another Lan Na belief is that if one dreams of a deceased relative within three months of that person’s death, it means the person is in a suffering state and unable to be released to a new birth or life. Then the relative should make merit and dedicate it to the deceased one. The ritual is called *poi khaosang* and one of the items to be used is a model boat (*saphao*) (Figure 17) made of woven bamboo strips and covered with white cloth or paper in which all kinds of household utensils and food are placed. A monk will then be invited to the house to accept the sacrifice or offering. In addition, in the old time people of Lan Na also made golden and silver *saphaos* to be placed in a *chedi* or *stupa*
as an offering to ensure that when they died, they would be equipped with all those things to allow them to cross the great ocean. This is why one sometimes sees these items in some chedis of some golden sapphaos decorating the chedis such as the one at Phra That Haripunchai in Lamphun (Figure 18) and another one dedicated by a former ruler of Chiang Mai at Phra That Chomtong in Chiang Mai (Buppha Ibid: 6705) (Figure 19). Another special feature of Lan Na Buddha image is the Subduing Mara posture with it sitting on a saphao-like pedestal (Figure 20), which can be interpreted as crossing the great Samsāra to Nirvāṇa.

Saphao is also a symbol for the astrology of trading called “ruaek saphao” or auspicious moment junk. The study of Sarawut (2544: 108-9) found a similarity of Mon and Lan Na people in this astrology. The transliteration of astrological Mon text of Juan (2537: 128) mentioned a traditional junk astrology text that is similar to Lan Na texts; for example those of Wat Salamor in Ko Kha district,
Figure 18  Golden *saphao* decking out the Phra Thāt Haripunchai, Lamphun. (Author’s photograph)

Figure 19  A model of golden *saphao* dedicated by former ruler of Chiang Mai at Phra Thāt Chomtong, Chiang Mai. (Encyclopedia of Thai Culture: the Northern)