Cultures and Beliefs Influencing Practices of Southern Thai Folk Healers in Treating Stroke Patients

Chula Viriyabubpa¹, Urai Hatthakit², Sanan Subhadhirasakul³, Praneed Songwathana²
1 PhD student, Faculty of Nursing, Prince of Songkla University
2 Lecturer, Faculty of Nursing, Prince of Songkla University
3 Lecturer, Faculty of Traditional Thai Medicine, Prince of Songkla University

Abstract

This research focuses on the culture and beliefs that influence the practices of the folk healers in treating stroke patients in southern Thailand. It was conducted using Spradley’s ethnographic methods (1979). In-depth interviews and participant observations were the method of data collection. The participants were 10 folk healers who treating stroke patients from various communities in Thailand and other neighboring countries such Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia etc. Ethnographic analysis was used to describe the findings. Thai folk medicine is influenced by its’ deep-rooted belief of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and supernatural powers. Most rituals are also influenced by those beliefs especially Brahmanism such as paying respect to Jivaka Komarabhacca (the great teacher of Thai traditional medicine). The belief in moral and ethics influenced by the belief of Buddhism makes healers behave themselves in order to gain benefit from making merit. Treatment outcome is not only the result of the healer’s ability but also the patients’ negative karma. In the beliefs of supernatural powers, there is a requirement that healers who use sorcery for healing should behave themselves strictly within the scope of morality otherwise the sorcery, incantation and knowledge they possess would be deteriorated. Most folk healers believe in Kru Mhor (ancient teacher) and also have conducted many ceremonies and practices to show on this respect. They use incantation and the sacred to get rid of evil spirits, or to treat illness and combine the ritual and incantation to enhance willpower of patients. These beliefs have influenced the thinking and practice of folk healers both in daily life and pattern of healing. The findings in this study were used to increase understanding of Thai folk medicine in treating stroke and develop more appropriate health care service to support the needs of Thais as well as those from other countries.

Keywords: southern Thai Folk Medicine; stroke; folk healer; cultures, beliefs
**Introduction**

Stroke is highly prevalent worldwide. It is the third leading cause of mortality in the world, ranking behind heart disease and all forms of cancer (American Heart Association, 2010). In southern Thailand, stroke is also a leading cause of death and more long term disability with a prevalence rate of 299.2 and a mortality rate of 23.0 in 100,000 of the population (Bureau of Health Policy and Strategy, 2011). About two-thirds of people expected to experience a first stroke will suffer from an ischemic stroke. 27% of them will become largely dependent in daily activities (Khampolsiri et al., 2006).

Thai government policy on the promotion of the use of traditional medicine and medicinal plants began in the Fourth Health Development Plan (1977-1981) and has continued until today in the tenth National Economic and Social Development Plans (2012-2016) (Bureau of Policy and Strategy, 2012). The Department for Development of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine has the vision of developing Thai Folk Medicine (TFM) for Thais as part of the health care system, enhancing the potential of self dependency, and participation of community in healthcare. Emphasis is not on the business aspect but only on helping people. The concept of this institute is focused on population health and economic development of the nation. The concept looks at needs to develop knowledge, curricula, study processes, standards of health care service, herbal products, and laws to develop professionals who can serve and produce standard services and products. The concept needs to promote, protect, treat, and rehabilitate health problems (Chokevivat, 2003).

TFM is a health care system in Thailand which refers to non-conventional therapies developed based on local cultures, traditional knowledge, beliefs, and practices of ordinary people and differs from one area to another. Several surveys had shown that 30-65% of the population in each community have used the services of folk healers (Wichaiyo, 2003; Pongpetchdit & Thawalyawatanasakul, 2003; Hmuadthog & Sreerhing, 2006), while approximately 25.43% of all babies born in three provinces of southern Thailand; Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat; are delivered by traditional birth attendants (Theeraworn, 2003). There are some important factors that induce people still to receive treatment from folk healers. Incapable and unsatisfactory treatment by modern medicine is one factor that influences the patients to seek TFM (Kulsomboon & Adthasit, 2007). It also is convenient, easily accessible, affordable, and part of the patients’ culture. Moreover, trend of use is also found in the group of person that is interested in health promotion in accompany with the finding that poor health is a key factor in the decision to use this kind of therapy (Chirunthorn et al., 2006).

From the literature reviews, stroke is known as *Lom Ammapart* in TFM concept. Several studies have shown the evidence that TFM therapies can be beneficial for the management of *Lom Ammapart*. For example, the methods of pressure, pinching, or temporarily pressing on blood vessels, nerves, ligaments, and tendons can improve their functioning and arrangement by eliminating and preventing obstructive circulation (Keowngarm, 1995; Chinwanitcharoen et al., 2002; Chansongkhao, 2002). The study related to folk healers, in Phattalung province showed that the illness of six *Lom Ammapart* patients who were treated by using massage was improved. Patients could do daily routine like walking, speaking, eating, after they were treated by massage with herbal oil for 2-3 hours at a time (Nhootim et al., 2007). A study by Hattakit (1999) also showed the similar finding that two out of five patients were ameliorated from *Lom Ammapart*. Both of them were discharged from hospital and had a lot of improvement in terms of movement and motor power. Some patients perceived that TFM provide a slow progress but can heal the illness completely with no recurrences. In another study related to the treatment process of TFM, it was found that some *Lom Ammapart* patients chose folk treatment rather than modern medicine. They viewed folk
medicine as more efficient than modern medicine in treating Lom Ammapart. Another study related to health seeking behavior in Pattani also showed that the Lom Ammapart patients who received continual massage and herbal medicine improved rapidly within two weeks (Rakdee, 2003).

Southern Thailand is a peninsula with long coastlines on either side. Thus, the southern Thai folk wisdom has a variety of history, culture, beliefs, and traditions due to people connecting easily to outside trade and religions. Therefore, this wisdom has not only originated from the context of native southern Thais, but from other countries as well (The Division of Thai Indigenous Medicine, 2003). Since there is a value in southern Thai folk wisdom, the culture of Lom Ammapart healing practice is therefore of interest in this study. Currently, there are a few research studies about the advantage of TFM treatment on Lom Ammapart, but there is no research study related to beliefs and cultures in southern TFM that influence the practice of folk healers in treating this illness. Beliefs and cultures that influence the practice of folk healers were clarified to help health care professional gain a better understanding to integrate TFM in health care system. The knowledge can be used to guide TFM services in the community; for medical and public health education; and for planning to develop the folk health care service in southern Thailand not only for Thais but also for foreigners. In addition, people would acknowledge it as an alternative way for solving health problem aside from modern medicine.

**Aims and objectives**

This paper focuses on exploring and analyzing the cultures and beliefs influencing the practices of folk healers in treating Lom Ammapart patients in southern Thailand. It aimed to give an understanding of the practices of folk healers to develop the folk health care service. The question was “What are the cultures and beliefs influencing the practices of folk healer in treating Lom Ammapart patients?”

**Methods**

**Design:** An ethnographic method was employed in this study because it is a powerful method for understanding and learning from people’s experiences or way of life from the native point of view (Spradley, 1979). It enables the researcher to explore, analyze, and explain Thai folk healers’ and Lom Ammapart patients’ viewpoints, beliefs, cultures, social behavior, practices, and meaning of the recognition of the complexity of health and illness related to Lom Ammapart treatment under TFM.

**Participants:** Informants in this study consist of key informants and associated informants. Key informants are Thai folk healers. The inclusion criteria of Thai folk healers are: (1) having over ten years of experience as a healer of Lom Ammapart patients, (2) being well-known folk healers and remain providing folk medical services to Lom Ammapart patients everyday, (3) having their domicile in southern Thailand, and (4) being able to speak and understand Thai or southern Thai. Eight folk healers had traditional training with teachers whereas two folk healers did mainly self study. Associated informants are the Lom Ammapart patients, their family carers, the family members of the folk healers, the neighbors of the folk healers, nurses and other health providers such as health practitioners in hospital, or community health professionals. All of the informants were selected for appropriateness to the objectives of this study. In addition, information on Thai folk healers, Lom Ammapart and Lom Ammapart related issues, as well as socio-cultural issues related to community sectors were collected from secondary sources such as local health offices, public health centers and local newspapers.

**Data collection:** This ethnographic study typically employed data collection of qualitative methods including: (1) in-depth interviews; (2) participant observations; (3)
field note taking; and (4) audio-tape recording during field visits. Data were collected and analyzed by using twelve steps of Spradley’s method (1979) as a guidance.

**Data analysis:** Ethnographic analysis was comprised of 4 steps: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and thematic analysis. Data collection and analysis were done simultaneously to gain understanding as the research progresses during fieldwork.

**The setting:** Songkhla province is one of fourteen provinces in southern Thailand. It has a lot of traditions in southern Thai culture. In this study, there are ten communities which were the residence of ten folk healers. These communities were located in seven districts of Songkhla province which are arranged in order of distance from the district of the researcher, namely; Narmhom, Khlonghoikong, Rattapuem, Kuanneang, Mueng, Singhanakorn, and Satingphra. All communities were similar in their environment.

**Results**

There were 3 main beliefs that were influencing the attitude and practice of folk healers in treating *Lom Ammapart* as well as their daily life practice namely; belief of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and supernatural powers.

1. **Belief of Buddhism**

All folk healers considered the assistance providing to the sick people in order to help relieve their suffering was a great way of merit making especially when the illness was successfully cured. They usually did not ask for treatment fees except for a small amount of money; 12 Baht was required to offer to *Kru Mhor* (ancient teacher). A donation may be given upon the patients’ satisfaction on the treatments and their financial status. Thus folk healer was not taken as an occupation for making a major income for living. However, it was enough to support themselves and their family. In fact the patients gained merit from the donation they made for the treatment as the healers would use some money to make merit through *Wai Kru* ceremony (a ceremony of showing respect to *Kru Mhor*) formally organized once a year.

“I don’t ask the patients for the money. There are many children, the aged and the poor people come to see me and say that they don’t have money. I encourage them to come as I don’t charge for the treatment. For those who can afford to pay some, they may do so based on their satisfaction of the treatments and their financial status. Some of them give me 100 Baht while others may give less or more than that. That is fine because it is a way to make merit. The money I receive from the patients, I use some to do merit and some for my own living.” (K7)

The merit possessed by the patient and healer can also contribute to the success of the treatments. This belief may be related to the belief of Karma (action) from previous life (in the past). The healer and patient might have a chance to do merit and karma together. These existing merit and good karma would bring the patient to meet the healer and enhance the treatment leading to a cure from the disease. On the other hand if the treatment failed, it was possibly caused by the insufficient merit or bad karma.

The folk healers believe that everyone has karma; both good and bad karmas. Karma in view of healers meant things done in the past and present. Fate is the effect of karma or bad action that one must gain those results. *Lom Ammapart* was considered illness of negative karma. Patients may have created negative karma and have to pay for it by being sick or they may have a Karmic debt from a former life and must pay for it with sickness.

In case of a failure treatment due to the existing karma and Karmic debts from previous life, the healer should know what was the cause and he then could help by begging the sacred powers or those who had been disturbed or injured by the patients with or without intention in the former life for forgiveness. Fate could be corrected by performing some rituals.
and providing offerings to the sacred powers and pay back the Karmic debt. Foods and sacrificial offering were usually offered to the sacred powers and Karmic debt owner through the monks. It was expected that this would help correct the bad fate which was the cause of the illness.

Many folk healers believed that they could eliminate bad fate by reciting incantations in order to dispel ill fortune before giving the treatments. The healers themselves also needed to protect themselves from being negatively affected by the bad fate of the patients when they were touching the patients carrying a bad fate. Therefore, healers must use incantations to protect themselves prior to massaging the patients.

The belief in merit and karma also strongly influence the daily life practice of the healers. All healers regularly made merit in their daily life by holding five precepts (Buddhist moral conduct) consisting of refrain from killing, from stealing others’ properties, from sexual misconduct, from telling lies, and from drinking liquor. In addition, they must do chanting and praying every night and ended with pouring ceremonial water as a sign of dedication of merit to the departed and enemies from a former life including their Kru Mhors.

2. Belief of Brahmanism

Folk treatments have employed many rituals as an important part of the treatments for Lom Ammapart. Most of the ritual have been influenced by Brahmanism such as paying respect to Jivaka Komarabhacca (the great teacher of Thai traditional medicine), annual Wai Kru Ceremony. Most healers had a ritual performance in every treatment process for example; Yok Kru, Krob Meau, Tang Khan, Sek Ya, and Sad Nam Sadoa Khroa.

Yok Kru Ceremony (a ceremony of showing respect to teacher) was required to request to be a trainee of their teacher (folk healer) following with Krob Meau Ceremony (a ceremony of giving oneself to be a student). Treatment process starts from Tang Khan Ceremony (a ceremony of showing respect to Kru Mhor) in which healers Kad Kru (asking for Kru Mhor to come in treating patients) and the treatment is then started. Sek Ya Ceremony (a ceremony of reciting incantation over herbs to be effective) must be done when giving medicine. Sad Nam Sadoa Khroa (a ritual to reduce misfortune) is required suppose patients have Khroa (misfortune).

2.1 Reciting Incantation

Incantation is considered an important element in all ceremonies. Most healers had many texts of incantations passed on them from their ancestors except for one healer who studied incantations by himself from ancient medicine textbooks. Incantations are different in each healing process.

There were various types of incantations such as self-protecting incantation, massage incantation, oil incantation, and herbal incantation. The self-protecting incantation was recited to protect the healer from receiving the disease, Khroa, or Kun Sai (black magic) from the patient while the massage, massage oil and herbal incantation were used to enhance the effect of treatment.

It is believed that reciting massage oil incantations renders the massage oil effective and able to heal the bodylines of the patients. The healers invoked Kru Mhor, angels and all sacred powers while blessing the oil. The expected outcome was to stimulate and elevate the embedded bodylines to its normal location. In addition, there was an incantation for relaxing and loosening the bodylines, for the blood to circulate in order to loosen the blocked bodylines thus resulting in a better circulation.

There were also many texts in using herbs. In preparing herbal medicines, for the healers who make their own herbal remedies, the incantation was used when collecting herbs in the forest to ask for forgiveness from the sacred powers dwelling in the herbal trees. It is believed that all entities; the mountains, the rivers, including the trees are possessed by guardian spirits. Thus proper and respectful actions are needed when interacting with these entities. Another specific incantation was also
required before boiling the herbal medicines for the effectiveness of the medicines.

Similarly, incantation was always needed with all items used in ritual performance for example, the betel leaves and nuts that were used to worship and teachers, ancestors, Jivaka Komarabhattra, angels, and sacred powers were asked to assist in the healing process. The healers then recite “Sek Ya” incantation by writing words in medicine prescription arranged for the patients in order for the medicine to be effective and better active. Some healers have an incantation before going to bed in order for them to prosper in their occupation and be capable in treating patients.

Incantation was considered as important as the massage and herbs. Without incantation, the massage and herbs would not be effective in treating the disease. Additionally, the healer would not be safe when treating the patient without the incantation.

“Massage alone is not effective. Incantation must also be used. It is a heart of healing and as important as massage and herbal medicine”. (K10)

2.2 Yok Kru Ceremony

Yok kru Ceremony is a tradition for entering the trainee hood for being a folk healer. It requires a formal acceptance by the teacher. Using the incantation brought from teachers without doing this ceremony would not result in successful healing because it is considered incorrect and viewed as taking knowledge from teachers without permission. This ceremony must be conducted on Thursday meaning a teacher day. Students will bring the betel leaves and nuts, joss stick, candles, flower, and 12 or 22 baht (Money to be given to Kru Mhor) to the healer in the first visit. After that, the healers would place the bowl before the shelter of Kru Mhor. The patients were asked to pray to invite him to help heal the illness.

“The patients who first come for a treatment should bring a set of offerings consisting of the betel leaves and nuts, joss stick, candles, flower, and 12 or 22 baht. If they don’t have the offerings, they may be just pay homage to Kru Mhor whom the healers respect and pray that Kru Mhor would help them to get well from anything”. (K9)

The joss sticks and candles were lit, and all names of Kru Mhors were called out to help curing the patients. Most healers believed that this activity was very important because the treatment required the power of Kru Mhor to guide the right treatment and enhance the effect of the treatment. The money was placed at the shelter of Kru Mhor until the patients were cured. However, new generations of healers

Before the beginning of studying medicine, the teacher would perform a Yok Kru Ceremony which means the healers become students who have teacher. Then they could start treating patients. After treating for a period of time until they are more experienced, teacher would perform Krob Meau Ceremony by tying white thread on the students’ wrist meaning the healers become professional healers completely.

2.3 Tang Khan Ceremony

The participants of this ceremony are healers and patients. It was an activity conducted for the patients who first came to the folk healer to worship Kru Mhor. The new patients were required to bring a set of offerings in the bowl consisting of the betel leaves and nuts, joss stick, candles, flower, and 12 or 22 baht (Money to be given to Kru Mhor) to the healer in the first visit. After that, the healers would place the bowl before the shelter of Kru Mhor. The patients were asked to pray to invite him to help heal the illness.

“My teacher passed on knowledge to me and performed a Yok Kru Ceremony. I was accepted to be a student for the folk healer training when I was 15 years old. I was blessed to be successful in treating patients and I have been successful ever since. It took me a long time to complete the training. I started to offer the service when I was 25 years old. I felt the positive outcomes of treatment. I could join broken bones or heal other conditions”. (K7)
who did not obtain traditional training with teachers did not have this ceremony. It ended when the healers finished the treatment and the patients pay the treatment fee.

2.4 Wai Kru Ceremony

Wai Kru Ceremony is the ceremony to show respect to Kru Mhor. All processes in this ceremony except the belief of Kru Mhor are influenced by the belief of Brahmanism. It was performed every Thursday and once a year for the main Wai Kru Ceremony. The weekly Wai Kru Ceremony was conducted to end the treatment for those who have been cured. This ceremony was performed at the healer’s house. The purpose was to take the evil out of the patients after their recovering. It is believed that if the patients did not take part in this ceremony, patients will suffer some negative repercussions.

Annual Wai Kru Ceremony is conducted to express gratitude to the teachers and is an annual large merit making in order to pass on the merit to the teachers, ancestors and sacred powers. Folk healers believed that they would not be successful in life and bad things would occur to them resulting in sickness if they did not perform the ceremony. Furthermore, it was an opportunity for the patients who were cured from the treatment to show their gratitude to Kru Mhor who heal them. Most folk healers who obtained traditional training organized annual Wai Kru Ceremony once a year. The ceremony was held on Thursday only half day in the morning at the healer’s house.

The ceremony was started with a Buddhist ceremony by inviting 5 monks and offer money for making merit. Offering dedicated to the monk is presented after the monks finish their praying. After that, every participant makes a food offering to a monk, invite the monks to eat. Then Wai Kru Ceremony is done in which the healers perform the ceremony in front of the teachers’ pictures and speak out the patients’ names who do not join the ceremony but make merit with the teachers. Finally, Sad Nam Sadoo Khroa Ceremony was performed in which patients were sprinkled with holy water and the process ended when the healer’s hands were washed by patients.

The major source of financial support of the Wai Kru ceremony was from the donation of the patients. Healers often spend money they receive from patients and save for the whole year on Wai Kru Day. One part of this money is used to buy things for the ceremony and the other part is added to the merit making money given by the people who join the ceremony and contribute to the temple to dedicate the merit to Kru Mhor. Some healers keep the rest of the money as their annual income.

3. Belief of Supernatural Powers

Folk healers believe in supernatural powers like Kru Mhor and black magic. Healers who use sorcery must behave strictly in morality otherwise the treatments they provide will not be effective and the knowledge they possess will be deteriorated. Hence, some healers do not dare using sorcery because they fear they do not follow high moral principles and this may cause damage to the healers themselves.

3.1 Kru Mhor

Kru Mhor refers to a spirit of a deceased folk healer who used to be a teacher of the healers. He/she was a person who instructed the healers about moral principle and how to use incantations for the healing. Folk healers have their personal Kru Mhor. They may have only one Kru Mhor or many depending on the number of teachers the healers studied with. They may not obtain the training directly from all the teachers but these Kru Mhors are those who handed down their teachings to the next generation of folk healer because every Kru Mhor must also have his/her own Kru Mhor. Most of folk healers in the present study had many Kru Mhors because their ancestors were of healer families and the knowledge was transferred within the family. Kru Mhor therefore from the very generation to the present are accepted to pay homage to for favorable auspice and to show gratitude to for transferring the knowledge.
“My immediate teacher is my father. However my father was taught by 7 Kru Mhors who were his ancestors. I accept all of my father’s teachers to be mine because they all contributed to transfer the knowledge to me. So I have eight Kru Mhors including my father. I will also speak out their names when I pay homage to Kru Mhor”. (K5)

Healers must always show gratitude to their teachers for transferring them knowledge and believe that these actions would encourage Kru Mhor always to help them in healing the patients. Therefore, healers always pay homage to respect their teachers every morning prior to providing the service and before going to bed. The healers would pay homage and perform the Kruad Nam (pouring ceremonial water) to their teachers when they go to the temple or make a food offering to a monk on Buddhist observance day or holiday so their teachers will gain the benefit from their making merit. Some healers closed their clinic every Thursday in order to worship their teachers.

Folk healers believe that Kru Mhor always play an important role in healing patients. Thus most of them perform worship to the Triple Gems and pay homage to Kru Mhor later prior to the beginning of healing process.

“I pay homage to the teachers for favorable auspice every morning. Sadoa Khroa Ceremony is done only for the first patient. Doing so is unnecessary for the second one because it is considered that this area has been covered by the sacred powers since the ceremony of the first patients done. I myself must do Sadao Khroa to prevent misfortune entering from the patients. By performing this ceremony, sacred powers are invited to protect bad evils”. (K5)

Healers must recall Kru Mhors by speaking out their names of every Kru Mhors to show their respect to Kru Mhors thoroughly. Names must be spoken out in order starting with the name of teacher who taught directly and follow with the names of Kru Mhors of the teacher. The folk healers pay respect and invited Kru Mhor and sacred powers to the healing places of the healers while recalling in order for them to help the healers to heal the patients and clear up the sickness. After recalling, healers feel the coming of Kru Mhor once they touch the patients because they feel they are more knowledgeable and have more ability. Healers believe that Kru Mhors come to help by entering the healers’ bodies while healing the patients and believe that patients recover because the skills of Kru Mhor and they are unable to heal without Kru Mhor. For those who have many Kru Mhors, Kru Mhors would take turn entering the body of healers in accordance with the treatment skill of Kru Mhor.

“Each Kru Mhor is responsible for a specific treatment. For example, the Kru Mhor who is skillful in massage will enter while I am massaging the patients. Another Kru Mhor who is skillful in using herbs will enter while I am healing with herbs. Some Kru Mhors are skillful in head massage or stomach massage only, so they will come over when these specific therapies are needed”. (K6)

3.2 Black Magic

There was a requirement that healers who heal using sorcery should behave themselves within the scope of those who have some special sacred powers in themselves otherwise the sorcery, incantation and knowledge they possess would be deteriorated. For example, the healers were not allowed to stay overnight in others’ house and were not allowed others to cross over or stay above their bodies. They are required to go to the temple every Buddhist observance day to perform a magical ceremony in order to drive out an evil spirit. Self-protecting incantation must be used in performing the ceremony in order to prevent the magic from entering the healers.

Healers believed that there were sacred powers covering the healing area. They perceived that they had the healing power only when they were treating the patients. The perceived healing power was transferred to them by the spirit of sacred power. Therefore
outside the service, the healers did not feel to have any healing power.

“I feel as if I became someone else while providing the treatment. It is amazing that I can heal every sickness using massage. I think that the healing power comes from the sacred powers, the spirit of my grandparents and teachers who were dwelling in this area and stay with me while I am healing patients”.

(K9)

The healing area especially in front of shelf-altar and shelf for worshiping teacher are like sacred places that the outsiders are not allowed to enter but passing by may be possible except for healers and patients who can enter to perform the chanting ceremony for the Buddha image and teachers. Those who are not sick should not enter this area because they may receive Khroa from patients.

At the altar of Kru Mhor, the picture of Kru Mhor was placed high above but below the shelf of the Buddha image. A piece of square white cloth was hanging above the picture of Kru Mhor that was believed to be a dwelling place for sacred spirits of ancestors or teachers. Some folk healers may use other symbols for healing such as ceremonial knife to put on the shelf for paying homage to teachers and mystic symbol at the angel’s forehead.

Furthermore, whatever used for healing and blessing was also considered sacred such as blessed massage oil, or blessed herbs would be sacred if it is on a high place that cannot be crossed and is mostly placed on the shelf for paying homage to Kru Mhor.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Folk medical system is a socio-cultural system. Most treatment processes of the folk healers in southern Thailand are related to the beliefs of religion, and spirits (Golomb, 1985). The belief of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and supernatural powers are 3 main principles that influence practices of the folk healers. According to Chokevivat (2003), the most reasonable evidences show that TFM is influenced by Brahmanism in the belief of ritual and supernatural powers. However, the foundation of philosophy, theory, and concept is possibly influenced by Buddhism such as cause and effect and the belief of natural power.

The folk healers always hold on Buddhism for morals and ethics. Khongthai (1997) mentioned that folk healers believe that Thai folk knowledge is subject to give both merit and demerit. If the healers do not follow the Buddhist doctrine, it will affect potency of prestige and power of them, efficiency of herbal recipe including the sacredness of incantations. In addition, a previous study reported that the folk healers must practice in professional ethics to gain trust and respect from their patients and other people. This regular practice makes them not to take advances from patients (Suwankhong et al., 2011). Not calling for payment is the example of result from this practice. According to the folk healers’ viewpoint, causes of diseases are also from karmic debts. Some illnesses cannot be cured by any method. This is because the disease is caused by the evil deeds of the patient from previous times (Paonil & Sringernyuang, 2002). Folk healers suggest the patients to do merit and to get rid of bad luck. Then, they will be back to normal condition again.

TFM is also based on the principles of Brahmanism which are always seen in the treatment process of folk healers in several communities. Some concepts of Brahmanism are a primary foundation of TFM such as the beliefs of supernatural power like God, the sacred, and the rite (Chokevivat, 2003). These beliefs influenced the paradigm and the way of practice in TFM. To proceed way of life, Brahmans emphasize the ritual performing such as begging prayer, praising prayer, and the worship because they believe that it will please God (Dokbuar, 2002). For example, before folk healers start treatment they usually pray for Jivaka Komarabhacca to help them in treating patients.

The influence by the belief of supernatural power, folk healers perform ceremonies in order to show respect to the
spirits (Nokkeow, 2006). It is a way to repay a kindness when the spirits protect the patients and keep them safe from disease and illness. Most southern Thai folk healers believe the story of Kru Mhor, so before treatment they will worship Kru Mhor and invoke their help for gaining the knowledge to treat patients (Suwankhong et al., 2011). The folk healers believed that they had Kru Mhor coexisting in their workplace to help them in treating Lom Ammapart patients. The Kru Mhors help the positive outcome of treatments and the healers feel that they cannot treat patients without Kru-Mhor. This was congruent with the previous study which found that the folk healers believed that when they treated patients there were Kru Mhor coming down to help them in treating patients as spirits (Nokkeow, 2006). In using black magic, the practices require that healers must strictly behave within the morality and scope of amulet possessor and the incantations must be gathered in order to maintain the stability of healers’ status (Assadodon, 2009).

In conclusion, the results of this study have implications for national health policy to promote traditional medicine as another choice beside modern medicine. The knowledge regarding Thai folk beliefs of health and illness will help everyone who is involved in this system to understand health practice of folk healers which result from these beliefs (Chuengsatiarsap, 2003). Since Lom Ammapart affects the entirety of a person’s being, seeking treatment through resources of health care has become a strategy used to improve well-being. Additional research is also needed to evaluate the use of TFM treatments in Lom Ammapart because they vary considerably across Thai culture groups and by location.

Recommendations
Currently, Thai folk medicine is still developed beneath the control of The Ministry of Public Health. Some frameworks are currently influenced by the scientific knowledge of modern medicine that may not be congruent with the local wisdom, beliefs and culture. Without understanding on these beliefs, it is difficult to integrate TFM in the medical system of the country. The results of this study have reflected on the beliefs and culture that influence the practices of the folk healers in treating stroke patients. It could be implied for national health policy that TFM must be promoted to be an alternative approach in treating stroke for tourism attraction apart from modern medicine.

References
Assadodon, S. (2009). Decrypting moral principles of Thai traditional practitioner. The subject of caravan to promote health by Thai Traditional Medicine, Folk Medicine, and Alternative Medicine.
Chirunthorn, R., Singpaiboonporn, N., Kamkwaew, J., Phudpad, B., & Uuisui, P. (2006). Assessment of patients’ satisfaction with Thai traditional medicine services: a case study. Department of Thai traditional medicine,


Theeraworn, S. (2003). *Traditional birth attendance’s role in the five southern border provinces of Thailand*. The institute of southern health research and development, the Faculty of Medicine, Prince of Songkla University.