

*Thai Phuan Traditions in Globalization Era:
A Case Study of a Village in Chachoengsao Province*

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0210

The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2013

Official Conference Proceedings 2013

Abstract

The research objectives were to investigate the condition of Thai Phuan traditions in the current climate and to find out ways to revive and preserve their traditions. Qualitative methods for data collection and analysis were employed. The key informants were chosen through specific sampling. Data collection was used through specific sampling, participatory and non participatory observations, in-depth-interviews and focus group discussions. We divided these traditions into two main tracts: the traditional phenomena in their present situation and the means of reviving and preserving others. It was found that traditional rituals at Na Lao Bok Village, Chachoengsao province, could be classified into three categories, i.e., the preserved, the abandoned and the adapted ones. The preserved traditions that had been passed down were as follows: the Songkran Festival (water splashing), the Annual Temple Fair of *Luang Por Ta Yor* (the late abbot's statue), the House-guardian Ancestor Spirit Offering Ceremony, the Bung Alms giving Ceremony, New Year *Khanom Tien* Festival, the Buddha's Great Previous Life Sermon, the Ten Thousand Rice Lamp Ceremony and the *Kao Lam* Ceremony. The abandoned traditions consist of the *Mae Posob* (Goddess of Rice) Worship Ceremony and the *Kwan* welcoming Ceremony and the *Malai Muen Malai Saen* Sermon. Finally, the adapted traditions include Buddhist ordinations, wedding ceremonies and funeral ceremonies. In addition, Focus group discussion revealed that many sectors of village were responsible for reviving and preserving traditions.

Key words: Thai Phuan's Tradition, globalization era, house-guardian ancestor spirit offering ceremony, Chachoengsao.

Introduction

Thailand has a long history; in the interval there were many changes in the social, political, economic and other aspects of life. People of Thailand have been constituted by migration, both in peace and forced movements during wars. Thailand has become a multi-ethnic society. Each ethnic group has their tradition and culture which reflects their identity. The variety of tradition and culture indicates a cultural progression of society. Many ethnic groups in Thailand are major groups, and some are just minor ones but their traditions and culture are so identical such as Thai Phuan.

Thai Phuan groups are scattered around Thailand, there are many Thai Phuan domiciles at Bann Mi, Lop Buri; Pak Phli, Nakhon Nayok; Si Satchanalai, Sukhothai; Bann Phue, Udon Thani and Phanom Sarakham, Chachoengsao. Thai Phuan has had long inherit unique tradition and culture, even their dialect, beliefs and traditions are similar to Thai E-Sarn and Laotian but there are many differences, for example, in dialect, Phuan pronounce 'ai' as 'er', such as 'hai' (give) is pronounced as 'her'. In tradition, Phuan partake in the Boon Kham Fha ritual which has been traditionally performed in the third lunar month. In the ritual, Phuan bring unhusked rice to a temple and chant, and then they bring the rice to keep in their silo to bring good luck. The nationally celebrated Songkran New Years festival is slightly different too; in the early morning of the day, Phuan take part in a bathing ritual to clean their bodies and bring them a good luck.

Most of Phuan's traditions and rituals have been inherited through the generations. Most are rituals, which relate to Buddhism, the remaining is performed for their ancestors, spirits and sacred things. Details in the rituals differ by area but their main purposes are all the same – as ideas to hold on to, to be united and teach their descendants to be grateful and respect their ancestors (Duke, P. and Sarikaphuti, N. 1986, p.25). At present, most of their rituals have blended into Thai traditions and culture, some of their customs have been overwhelmed by modernization and changing society. The result is that many Phuan have disappeared and the remainings are some unique their beliefs.

Chachoengsao is a province that has many Thai Phuan settlements. Basic information yields that many Phuan traditions and culture have disappeared because of several reasons, i.e., their elders passed away, inappropriate processes to pass the tradition to descendant, and Phuan's youth have been devoured by modernization and do not appreciate the value of their tradition and culture (Suksamran, S., et.al. 1996, p.115). This study was conducted to gather information about present situation of Thai Phuan's tradition and culture, and factors that effect on their way of life. The information will be used to find ways to preserve the tradition and culture.

The objective of this study was aimed at gathering information about present situation of Thai Phuan's tradition and culture and to draw a guideline to revive and preserve the tradition and culture.

Methods of the study

This study was qualitative research, which used social science research methods for data collection and analysis.

1. Site Selection for study. The researcher chose Ban Na Lao Bok, Nong Yao sub-district, Phanom Sarakam District, Chachoengsao Province as the area of the study by setting up these criteria; a) it should be a Thai Phuan village settled for more than 100 years, b) the villagers comprised more than 80% of Thai Phuan, c) Thai Phuan rituals or traditions were still practicing in that particular village, and d) the villagers were enthusiastic and cooperative in giving information relating to the research.

2. The Preparation for the field work. The researcher went to explore and collect the basic information of that particular village from time to time and the villagers were enthusiastic, welcoming and cooperative about data collection.

3) Selecting information sources. In choosing the key informants, the researcher used purposive samplings by the following criteria, i.e., *a) the amount of key informants*; the researcher chose 10 villagers to be key informants of the research, of which those would be able to give enough information and the collected data from those would answer the research objectives. If the collected data did not cover the requirements the researcher might choose key informants greater than that amount to fulfill the research objectives, and *b) method for choosing key informants*; villagers who would be the key informants must have been settled down in that particular village continuously more than 20 years, those must be directly concerned or knowledgeable about the subject matter of the study (Thai Phuan traditions), and those were welcomed to support and give the information.

4) Collecting data; the researcher collected data for the research as much as possible through participatory and non-participatory observations, in-depth-interviews, and focus group discussion. Apart from this, the collection of relating documents was also taken.

5) Analyzing the data. The researcher analyzed the data through the following steps while field work was being done during data collection; a) took the data from tape recordings and confirmed that data, while words or sentences relating to subject matters of the research were reviewed; b) took the data from the first step for grouping in different contents, then checked its reliability from experts and re-checked again; and c) the researcher used coding and showed the data according to the research objectives, then summarized the contents or data from the interviews in each day, wrote the research contents and setting up suitable quotations to support subject matters of the research.

6) Checking the data; the researcher used triangulation for checking the reliabilities of the data. Apart from this, the researcher used content analysis from the data derived from in-depth-interviews.

7) Period of collecting data; the researcher collected the data during June 2009 to May 2011. In this research, whenever the villagers organized rituals or traditions in their village the researcher always took part in the activity.

Results and Discussion

Initially, Ban Na Loa Bok was a rural society, where most people were farmers. At the present time, the community has more infrastructures and changed to become a suburban area. So, the importance of agriculture decreased, people are varied in occupation and younger generations tended to go to work for the industrial sector in urban areas. Many people lease their land for rent. Most leasees are capitalist and they do agriculture with new

technologies, which replace original ones, and the cost increased. Relationships between community members have changed too, from the community that members support each other to working for a wage.

Their tradition has a lot of change. In the past, every member gave precedent to tradition but, because of change, many members, especially youth, had move to work in urban areas. The tradition that used to be the gathering of community member has become less important.

Technology has connected every community around the world together. It makes enormous change in every community, which has an effect on their tradition and culture. The change informs each individual and becomes a form of cultural navigation and, at last, affects social norms. The phenomenon can drive society to anomie, which causes many problems. In recent years, many foreign cultures have flooded into Thailand. Thais have received those cultures from media and the cyber world without carefulness. The effect has fallen on youth who are in the learning age, but they lack immunity and maturity. The problem, with other social factors, leads them to replace original culture with sub-cultures and, finally, develop to severe social problems. At present, drug abuse plagues some of Phuan society.

The phenomenon of globalization has pushed communities and threatens to submerge their identity or self-awareness. Moreover, it triggers change in relationships between relatives and friends from primary relationship to secondary relationship, which is lesser than previous years. The members of a community should be aware that new things do not mean better things and realized the value of their tradition and culture as their root and identity. At present, young Phuan have lost their identity; the clothes that they wear, the language to speak out in their traditional language.

The research finding was separated into two issues.

1. Present situation of Thai Phuan's tradition and culture. It was found that Thai Phuan traditions and culture of Ban Na Lua Bok, Nong Yoa, Phanom Sarakam, Chachoengsao province had changed according to globalization as shown in table 1.

Some traditions had been practiced and still remained through	Some traditions remained but had changed according to changed society	Some traditions were already lost
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Songkran Day and gold Luan Ta Yor. 2. Liang Phee Poo Ta Ban ritual (feeding ancestor spirits). 3. Tham Boon Klang Baan (household merit making). 4. Sart Phuan or Tak Bat Bung (Phuan's new year). 5. Thum Boon Hor Khao or Sart Khanom Thien (rice dessert making). 6. Thed Mahachati (listening to the sermon about Buddha's lives). 7. Hae Khao Phun Kon (Procession of rice offering to Buddha). 8. Khuen Khao Phao Khao Larm (Rice burning mountain festival). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Buddhism Ordination. 2. Marriage. 3. Cremation Ceremony. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Wai Phra Mae Pho Sob (pay respect to goddess of rice). 2. Suu Kwan Khao ritual. 3. Hae Nang Maew ritual. 4. Rub Kwan Dek (blessing for new borns). 5. Thet Malai Muen Malai San.

The following examples of ritual participation and observation are shown in figure 1.



Figure 1. Showing the activities of feeding house-guardian ancestor spirits.

2. Guide line to revive Thai Phuan's tradition and culture. Guidelines derived from focus group discussion were comprised of 7 sectors. These were that the **Household** should focus on making their members to realize the importance of Phuan's tradition and culture and their way of life, which had been inherited for a long time. **Society** should focus on cooperation to revive and inherit Phuan's tradition and culture. **Monasteries** should be the center of information. Also, monks should participate in embedding ideas about Phuan's tradition to members of society and support all activities. **Local Leaders** should give precedent to Phuan's tradition and culture and support their locality to correctly inherit and perform the rituals. In addition, they should publicize and promote their practices for tourism business. **Local Schools** should add content about Phuan's tradition and culture to their curriculum to make students realize the importance of their ancestor's tradition and culture. **Local Elders** should be promoted as 'gurus' to pass their knowledge to descendants, and the **Local Government** should act as a focal point to support and promote the tradition revival.

After all, progress and local prestige are depended on people. The people must preserve their traditions and culture because they were the way to unify their society to be strong and unique. The 7 sectors in revival and preservation the tradition and culture which mentioned before could be summarized as shown in figure 2.

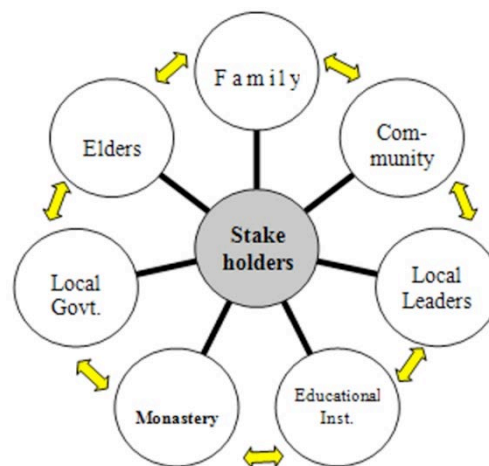


Figure 2: Showing participants in revival and preservation Thai Phuan's tradition and culture.

Suggestion

The study yield following suggestion;

1) Thai Phuan of Ban Na Lao Bok has a way of life that blends between modern and original life style. It can be said that their way of life has changed by various factors but they can preserve some unique tradition and culture as well.

2) At the present time, their way of life is affected by globalization. So they should be prepared to preserve the tradition and culture to survive through furious change.

3) Local knowledge should be promoted. Local organization should be urged to study and preserve their local knowledge.

4) Local leaders should have a role to implant Thai Phuan's value to realize the worth of their tradition and culture. So, it can be passed to next generation.

5) Thai Phuan should get economic support, open more job opportunities, which lead to more income. If they have enough income, migration rate will reduce and change in their way of life will be lesser.

6) Government should launch a policy that promotes local culture. It is the way to preserve as well as use the culture as tourism attraction, which will be sources of community income.

7) Encourage Thai Phuan to receive information from media, which makes them able to adapt to globalization era and live happily.

8) Suggestion for further study: A SWOT analysis should be carried out to acquire information about factors that affect to the revival and preservation of Thai Phuan's tradition and culture, which lead to survival of the tradition in globalization world.

Acknowledgement

I appreciate Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University for budget support. Thanks to Dr. Sathon Phookhong and Associate Prof. Kosol Saijai for valuable advices. Also grateful thanks to Prof. Somsak Pantuwatana and Mr. Ross Walker for editing and correcting the grammar. Special thanks for all information sources at Ban Na Lao Bok.

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