

The Way of Ber-Amas Kites: Local Information Management for the Restoration, Conservation, and Continuation in the Multicultural Context of Thailand's Southern Border Provinces

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Abstract

The Beramas Kite, also known as the “Golden Kite of the Malays,” is a traditional kite representing the identity of the Malay ethnic group in Thailand's southern border provinces. Its structure and patterns are influenced by Malay history but have been adapted to align with Islamic principles. This paper explores local information management strategies for restoring, conserving, and continuing the Ber-Amas kite tradition within the multicultural context of Thailand's southern border provinces. Through qualitative research with 30 key informants including local scholars, folk artists, cultural entrepreneurs, and government representatives, the study documents the historical evolution of the kite, establishes a digital cultural database, and examines activities that revitalize the tradition for younger generations. Findings reveal that the Ber-Amas kite serves as both a cultural symbol and a vehicle for community cohesion, economic development, and soft power. The establishment of the Yala International Kite Festival and the Tacit Knowledge Database for Regional Development at Yala Rajabhat University have played pivotal roles in preservation. The study concludes that collaborative engagement between folk artists, cultural entrepreneurs, educational institutions, and government agencies is essential for sustaining this intangible cultural heritage while generating sustainable economic opportunities for the community.

Keywords: Ber-amas kite, cultural heritage, local information management, southern Thailand, multicultural

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Introduction

The Beramas Kite, also known as the “Golden Kite of the Malays” (Weahami & Wairot, n.d.), is a traditional kite that represents the identity of the Malay ethnic group in Thailand's southern border provinces. Its structure and patterns are influenced by Malay history but have been adapted to align with Islamic principles, resulting in designs like the crescent moon kite and the Beramas Kite, which are still seen today. In the past, another kite known as the Beramas Kite existed, but it has disappeared from the lives of the people in the southern provinces for so long that its exact appearance is now unknown. References to this kite can be found in Mak Yong, a traditional performing art of the southern border region that blends dance, drama, music, and belief in spiritual healing. In the Mak Yong play *Dewa Muda*, a literary work rooted in Hindu-Brahmin beliefs that flourished in the Langkasuka Kingdom before the adoption of Islam, the Beramas Kite is described as the vehicle of Prince Dewa Muda in his journey to meet Princess Laddamas in heaven.

The kite was said to have a divine form, complete with arms and legs. The Beramas Kite was considered a noble kite exclusively for royalty. Kite-flying competitions involving the Beramas Kite were held as a post-harvest tradition during the era of the Seven Malay States, with each state's ruler being the first to fly the kite. Before launching the kite into the sky, a ritual was performed to apply gold to its head. This is why the kite is called Beramas (or Bermah), with “amas” (or “emas” in Standard Malay) meaning “gold” (Nittitham, 2015).

The primary purpose of flying the Beramas Kite was to predict the weather for the following agricultural season. Only after this ceremony were common people allowed to fly their kites freely. Initially, kite-making was influenced by Hindu-Brahmin traditions, resulting in a divine-like design with arms, legs, bracelets, necklaces, and full regalia. However, as Islam spread throughout the region, the kite's design was modified to align with Islamic teachings. The arms and legs were simplified — arms became bird-like wings, and the legs resembled a fish's tail — while floral patterns were added. The modern Beramas Kite consists of several key components: Main Wings (Piak Mae), Secondary Wings (Piak Luk), Arm Wings (Piak Khaen), Leg Wings (Piak Kha), Neck and Waist Wings (Piak Rat Kho & Piak Rat Eo), and Crest and Tassels (Hong & Phu).

A crossbar (Yak) creates a sound when the kite flies. Historically, crafting a Beramas Kite required seven skilled artisans, each specializing in different tasks: sourcing bamboo, shaping the bamboo, assembling the kite frame, attaching paper, drawing patterns, tying the kite strings (Sai Yu), and inspecting the final product. However, due to the difficulty of making this kite, the tradition of specialized artisans has faded, leaving only a handful of individuals capable of crafting the Beramas Kite entirely themselves.

In 2024 (B.E. 2567), Yala Province hosted the 1st Yala International Kite Festival, with 56 teams and a total of 1,333 kites participating. The event attracted 10,129 attendees, including visitors and tourists. The competition featured three categories: Best Aesthetic Kite, Most Creative Kite, and Highest-Flying Kite. In addition to the competition, the festival included exhibitions of the Beramas Kite and other traditional kites from both local and international cultures, kite-making demonstrations, craft and artisanal displays, creative dance performances, a cultural fashion show, and painting activities.

Figure 1
Beramas Kites Past



Note. From Rasmin (2015)

Figure 2
“Wao Burong Nibong” Traditional Version and Fancy Version



Problem Statement

Since 2013, the “Burung Nibong Kite” competition has been continuously organized in Yala Province as a means of enhancing the province's image as a peaceful and harmonious region (Community Development Office, Yala Province, 2021; Culture Yala, 2020; Yala Provincial Statistical Office, 2019). The event aligns with Yala's vision of peacebuilding through stimulating the local economy, promoting tourism, fostering public participation, and strengthening social cohesion. Typically, the competitions feature general kite types without a strong emphasis on creating a distinctive identity that reflects Yala's branding as the 'YALA BIRD CITY,' a regional economic and ecological hub known for its rich avian biodiversity (Satitpongsataporn, 2019; Yala Municipality Office, 2021).

Therefore, the “Burung Nibong Kite” has been conceptualized as a cultural symbol representing the diversity of bird species in urban Yala. This initiative connects local wisdom with modern creativity through accessible craftwork that engages all age groups. The researchers are interested in revitalizing local play culture as a means of elevating the creative

economy based on multicultural capital. The aim is to transform the “Burung Nibong Kite” into a cultural festival of Yala Province, thereby reinforcing the community's Soft Power and empowering cultural entrepreneurs to promote Yala as a creative and sustainable tourism destination.

Literature Review

In Southern Thailand, people enjoy flying kites for fun during the post-harvest season, which typically falls between February and April. Popular local kites include the crescent moon kite (Wao Wong Duean), buffalo kite (Wao Kwai), bird kite (Wao Nok), diamond kite (Wao Pak Pao), eel kite (Wao E-Lum), fish kite, chula kite (Wao La or Wao Chula), bamboo tube kite (Wao Krabok), and the Ber-amas kite. The most popular kites remain the bird kite, crescent moon kite, buffalo kite, and Ber-amas kite. Southern kite enthusiasts often use a bow-shaped frame (Thanook) to compete in generating the loudest and most melodious sound. Kites that stay airborne overnight are considered high-quality (Phit et al., 2012; Thai and International Kite Association, n.d.).

The Ber-amas kite originated from research into southern Thailand's kite legends. It resembles Malaysia's crescent moon kite, or Ber-amas/Wabule (wa = kite, bule = moon). However, the Ber-amas kite has a more complex structure with 21 frames, compared to only 7 on the crescent moon kite. The crescent moon kite is now officially recognized as Malaysia's cultural heritage. The kite's legacy is preserved by the “Rak Wao Yala” group from Ban Para Meetae, Mueang District, Yala Province. This group aims to pass on the kite-making traditions of the Malay community to younger generations. They preserve kites from the southern border provinces including the Ber-amas, Wao Bulan, Wao Kuba, Wao Kuching, Wao Yala Budi, and bird kites, acting as a kite museum for future generations.

Kite competitions in Yala help promote the province's peaceful image and align with its vision for prosperity and unity. During the 2017 Wao Nibong Festival, held from February 10–12 at Chang Puak Ceremony Ground, Yala City, the event attracted kite enthusiasts from the three southern border provinces. Over 1,300 high-flying kites were entered, with only about 600 selected to compete. In the 2019 Wao Nibong Festival, participants from five southern provinces and Malaysia joined, with 867 total entries including 12 international teams from Malaysia (Culture Yala, 2020).

Yala's society can be divided into three cultural-linguistic communities: Malay-speaking Muslim communities, Thai-speaking Buddhist communities, and Chinese-speaking communities practicing Buddhism or Christianity. Though religious practices differ, peaceful coexistence is the norm. Community life typically centers around religious institutions like temples, mosques, or suraus, which serve as communal anchors. This cultural blending represents globalization's influence and is central to understanding the multicultural dynamics that shape kite traditions in the region.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research project in which the researcher employs purposive sampling to select key informants and utilizes focus group discussions to collect data. The research focuses on retrieving kite-related knowledge based on the multicultural heritage of Thailand's southern border provinces. The study is conducted in five phases: (1) investigating the history and origins of kites; (2) collecting data from local scholars and skilled kite artisans in the

southern border provinces; (3) recording and documenting kite-related information into a database; (4) establishing a “Burung Nibong Kite” database specific to the southern border provinces; and (5) registering the “Burung Nibong Kite” for copyright protection.

The key informants for cultural and traditional aspects include: 10 local youth from the region, 4 folk artists, 3 local scholars (kite artisans), 10 cultural entrepreneurs, and 3 representatives from government agencies, resulting in a total of 30 key informants. The selected informants must have a connection to the Beramas Kite or traditional Malay kites. The youth participants must actively engage in kite-related activities, including kite competitions, hands-on kite-making workshops, creative kite pattern design, and other kite contests held in Yala or nearby areas.

Findings

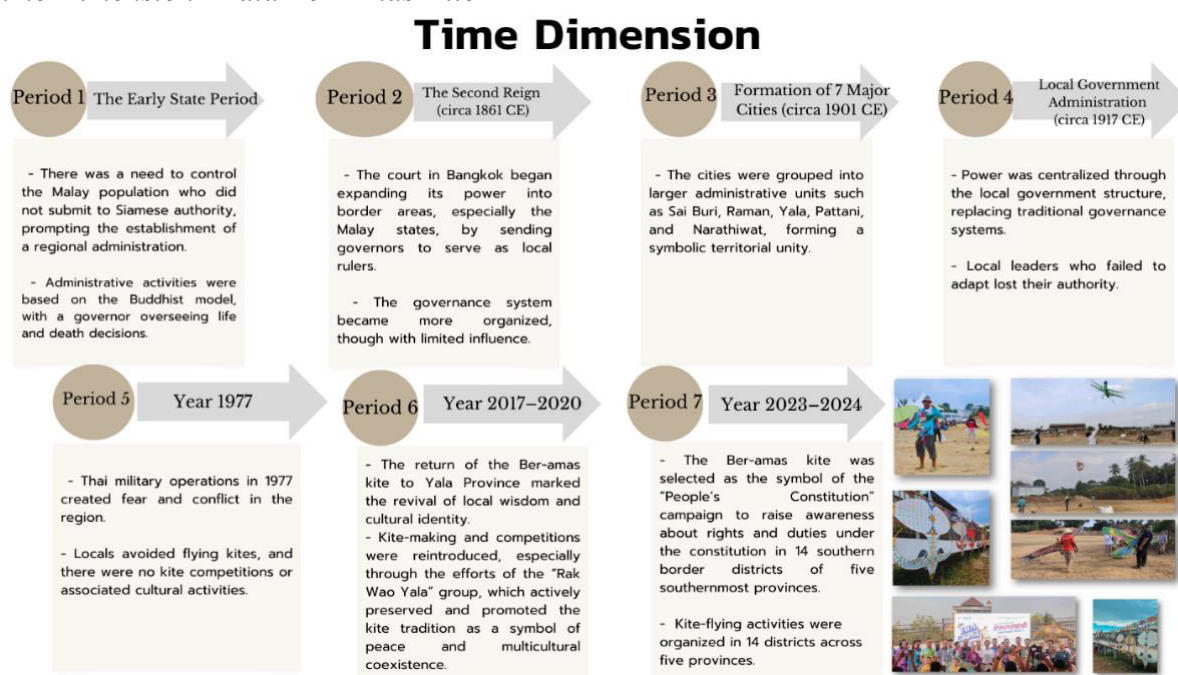
The researcher collected data through in-depth interviews and discussions with local scholars, traditional kite craftsmen, historical documents, and relevant cultural sites associated with kite flying in Yala Province and nearby areas.

Cultural Revival

A comprehensive study was conducted on local scholars and skilled kite craftsmen to explore the historical and cultural heritage of the southern border provinces. By utilizing local historical methodologies, the study aimed to understand the foundations of cultural capital. Efforts to revive local cultural heritage were implemented to ensure the transmission of traditions to younger generations. This included documenting the history of kite flying, its evolution, and strategies for managing cultural capital through collaboration with network partners. Additionally, an analysis of the historical transformation of the Ber-Amas kite in Yala Province was conducted to ensure sustainability and value enhancement.

Figure 3

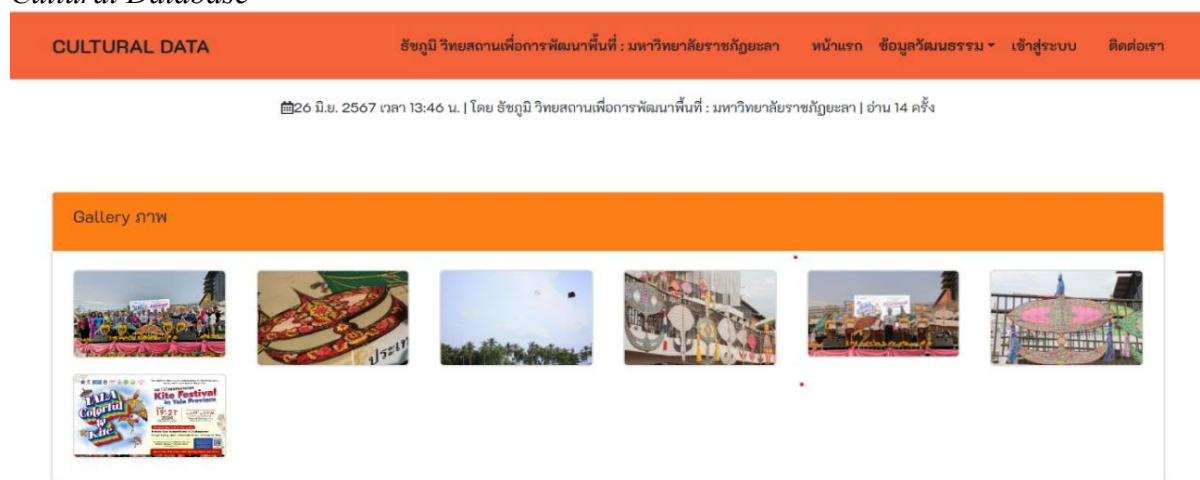
Time Dimension “Yala Ber-Amas Kite”



Conservation Efforts

A dedicated database on the “Ber-Amas Kite” was developed to serve as a cultural resource hub for Thailand's three southern border provinces. The project recorded kite-related data in an organized system and established the “Tacit Knowledge Database for Regional Development” at Yala Rajabhat University under the domain <https://culturaldata.pts.yru.ac.th/>. This platform functions as a comprehensive cultural database for the region and integrates cultural capital information into the CULTURAL MAP THAILAND system.

Figure 4
Cultural Database



Cultural Continuation

To promote the cultural legacy of Ber-Amas kites, various activities were organized, including an international kite competition, a creative performing arts showcase titled “Ber-Amas Sayassane,” and an exhibition highlighting the value of Ber-Amas kites as cultural products of the southern border region. Youth engagement was a key focus, encouraging young participants to explore the history of the Ber-Amas kite and integrate it into Yala Province's cultural festivals. The initiative also included design competitions for Burong Nibong kites, hands-on kite-making workshops, painting activities, and creating cultural souvenirs such as clothing and miniature kites.

The project further extended into digital platforms to promote kite festivals, enhance tourism, and generate sustainable income for Yala Province. By leveraging digital technology, cultural communities have emerged, expanding the reach of local traditions and creating new opportunities for innovation. Developing young talents in the region plays a crucial role in advancing and transforming cultural heritage into a form of Soft Power. This is achieved through collaborations with folk artists, cultural entrepreneurs, and government agencies to pass down knowledge across generations.

Figure 5
Opening Ceremony of the International Kite Competition



Figure 6
Kite Dance Performance “Ber-Amas Sayassane”



Figure 7
Practical Workshop on Creative Kite Pattern Design Using Computer Software for Souvenir Product Development



Figure 8*Knowledge Transfer on Souvenir Crafting From Kite Materials***Figure 9***Souvenir Product Development***Figure 10***Exhibition Activities in Bangkok*

Discussion

The study reveals the historical background of kites based on the cultural capital of Thailand's southern border provinces, comprising four key dimensions:

Cultural Beliefs and the Use of the Ber-amas Kite

The Ber-amas kite has roots connected to Islam and involves rituals that include making offerings to sacred beings before the kite is constructed. It is believed to be a high-status kite, traditionally reserved for nobles or individuals of high social standing. Beyond its role in divination, the Ber-amas kite was also used in wartime contexts. The name “Ber-amas” is derived from the Malay word *bergemas*, which connotes vibrancy or excitement in battle.

Connections to Folklore and Performing Arts

The Ber-amas kite is not only significant for its social and prophetic roles, but also holds symbolic meaning through its ties to local legends. In some tales, the kite represents the vehicle used to bring a son from heaven to earth — it is seen as a vessel to connect heaven and earth. The kite also appears in Mak Yong performances, a traditional Malay theater form in the southern border provinces, to represent the relationship between humans and the divine.

Cultural Preservation

Research indicates that the making of Ber-amas kites lacks sufficient support from government agencies, putting this important cultural practice at risk of disappearing. It is essential to promote and support the preservation of local traditions through government involvement. This could include integrating kite-making into school curricula and using online learning technologies to reach younger generations.

Impact on the Community

Collaborative kite-making not only promotes unity within the community but also creates employment and income opportunities through the production and sale of Ber-amas kites. Kite-flying functions as a meaningful ritual that fosters relationships and strengthens community bonds.

The study also reflects the dimension of Thai-Chinese cultural exchange through traditional kites, synthesized under six key aspects: (1) Identity and Wisdom — kites reflect the beliefs, way of life, and shared cultural symbols of Thailand and China; (2) Art and Craftsmanship — exchange of patterns, techniques, and local materials has fostered artistic diversity; (3) Transmission and Learning — workshops and hands-on learning among youth play a crucial role; (4) Festivals and Cultural Tourism — kite festivals serve as platforms for exchange between Thai and Chinese communities; (5) Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy — kites serve as a “symbolic language” connecting Thai-Chinese friendship; and (6) Building Collaborative Networks — establishing networks of youth, artists, and institutions between Thailand and China sustains cultural activities over the long term.

In conclusion, kites are not only an intangible cultural heritage of local communities in the southern border provinces of Thailand but also serve as a vital medium for building bridges of

friendship and mutual understanding between Thailand and China through diverse and in-depth cultural exchanges.

Conclusion

The study explored the cultural diversity of kite traditions in Thailand's southern border provinces by gathering insights from local scholars and kite craftsmen. A historical framework was employed to understand the evolution of kite flying and assess the key stakeholders in cultural heritage management. These efforts led to the establishment of the Yala International Kite Festival and the creation of an online learning platform documenting kite-related knowledge in the region. The database, hosted under https://pts.yru.ac.th/cultural_data, and the cultural mapping initiative, available at <https://culturalmapthailand.info/map>, serve as valuable resources for preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of Thailand's southern border provinces.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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