

***Exploring Traditional Culture From the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage:
Buddhist Temples of the Dai Park in Xishuangbanna and Chiang Mai Old City***

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Abstract

The Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna of China and the Thai people in northern Thailand are related to each other based on their ethnic origins and cultures. Therefore, their life aesthetics are very similar, especially with regard to the art of Buddhist temples. As the policies of the intangible cultural heritages of China and Thailand advocate localization, how do the Dai and Thai people interpret their traditional culture under a similar cultural context? This is the research problem of this study. The article is based on qualitative research, taking Buddhist temple art in the Dai Park of Xishuangbanna and Chiang Mai Old City as the research samples. The purpose of the study is to explore what is meant by “traditional culture” from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage. The results show that the artistic styles of the Buddhist temples in the Dai Park and Chiang Mai Old City are very similar, highlighting the shared culture among the Dai–Thai ethnic groups; however, they both claim that their local culture is a “traditional culture” that differs from other Tai cultures. This phenomenon not only reflects the national identities of the Dai and Thai people but also represents a change in the meaning of traditional culture, which has become a kind of local identity, leading to the definition of traditional culture being diversified.

Keywords: Xishuangbanna, Shared Culture, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Chiang Mai, Traditional Culture

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Introduction

Shared culture is a common cultural phenomenon in Southeast Asian countries. It is the result of the long-term separation and integration of various ethnic groups in Southeast Asia. Sujit Wongthes, a Thai historian, once summarized the ancient Southeast Asian cultures of the Buddhist era into 16 similar shared cultures (Wongthes, 2012: 2). The number of multi-country joint applications for UNESCO approval to the "Representative Lists of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" has continued to increase in recent years. This phenomenon not only shows that the transnational protection of shared culture is being increasingly recognized, but also implies that the definition of "traditional culture" is changing. Therefore, this study explored the connotation of the traditional culture for the Dai people in China and Thai people in Thailand, from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage.

Both these groups have had ethnic relations since ancient times, but have different ethnic names now. The Dai ethnic group is one of 56 ethnic groups in China. In the 1950s, through the policy of ethnic identification, the Baiyi who lived in Yunnan, were renamed the "The Dai ethnic group" (Editing group for the revised edition of a brief history of the Dai ethnic group 2009 : 206); whereas the Thai ethnic group in Thailand is the result of the "Thai-ization" policy during World War II. To shape national identity and eliminate ethnic differences, the Thai government implemented the "State Convention" which stated that all ethnic groups that resided in the Thai territory are part of the Thai ethnic group (Chang 2015: 102).

The origin of the Dai and Thai ethnic groups, including that of the Nanzhao royal family, was once hotly debated in the academic circles, resulting in the following three arguments: migration to the south, migration to the north and indigenous theory. The theory of the ethnic groups' southward migration is based on the origin of the Tai people, which means the Tai ethnic groups of the Dai, Thai, Shan and Lao, etc., and has received more support from research, such as the seven southward migrations advocated by W. C. Dodd (Dodd 1996), and the theory of migration of the Tai-Shan ethnic group by Shun-sheng Ling (Ling 1958). Ping He (2001) and others demonstrated that the ancient Tai people migrated to South China or Southwest China, and this was also recognized by the royal family of Thailand, who believed that their ancestors came from South China (Damrong Rajanubhab 1933: 12).

Additionally, both, the theory of northward migration and indigenous theory provide counter-evidence from the ethnological perspective. The northward migration theory maintains that the Thais have Malay ancestry, thus putting forward the hypothesis that they originated from the Indonesian archipelago and then migrated north from the Malay Peninsula. However, not many support this perspective because of insufficient evidence (cited from Chen 2005 : 1-6).

The indigenous theory was proposed in the 1960s by Chi Yudi, a Thai archaeologist, and Sut Saengwichian, a Thai anatomist. Yudi's research team found archaeological evidence which claimed that people lived on the land of Thailand since the Paleolithic Age. (Yudi 1967: 95). Additionally, Saengwichian also unearthed 37 Neolithic people in the Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi provinces. They found human skeletons identical to those of the modern people of Thailand, inferring that they might be the ancestors of the Thai people. The unearthed remains also prove that Thai people have been multiplying in Thailand since ancient times (Saengwichian 1974: 34-35).

Based on the evidence presented by the indigenous theory, Wongthes stated that “Thai people do not come from anywhere.” This is a statement about strengthening nationalism, which advocates that the Thai people have been the main ethnic group living in Thailand since ancient times, and after a fusion of ethnic groups, they formed the “Thai people” in Thailand. He believes that the Thai people intermarried with the Mon, Khmer, Lao, Malay, and Chinese, which led to different degrees of cultural adaptation (Wongthes 1984, 1989).

The indigenous theory mentioned above corresponds to the theory of northward migration centered in China, and are supported by national ideologies. Therefore, under the leadership of the state, it is difficult to clearly identify the origin of the Dai and Thai ethnic groups. However, these groups have commonalities. While it might be difficult to determine the clan relationships during ancient times, modern data states that some branches of the Tai people migrated from southern China to the Indo-China Peninsula and can be categorized into different Tai ethnic groups, such as the Dai, Thai, Laos, Shan, etc. According to the above analysis, Dai and Thai have ethnic relations with each other.

The shared ethnic origin between the Dai and Thai people is evident in their shared culture, but the same conflicts with the spirit of traditional culture emphasized by the intangible cultural heritage. How can “traditional culture” in the context of shared culture of the Dai and Thai people be interpreted? This article attempts to answer this question.

The art of Buddhist temples in Xishuangbanna of the Yunnan and Chiang Mai provinces of northern Thailand are an important case study for the shared culture of the Dai and Thai people. Because they are ethnically and culturally related to each other, the Buddhist art in temples is very similar; however, they regard it as “traditional culture.” This kind of cultural struggle highlights ethnic boundaries on the one hand, and triggers speculation on the intangible cultural heritage on the other. Therefore, the study takes the Buddhist temples in Dai Park and Chiang Mai Old City as examples. The purpose of this research is to explore traditional culture from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage in the shared culture of Dai and Thai people.

This study uses qualitative research to focus on "traditional culture," compares the two aspects of its intangible cultural heritage law and practice, and explores the connotation of “traditional culture” among the Dai and Thai ethnic groups. The discussion proceeds as follows:

First, “traditional culture” is defined from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage laws of China and Thailand. Then, the intangible cultural heritage items of the Dai and Thai ethnic groups are compared.

Second, the Buddhist art in the temples of Dai Park located in Jinghong City, Xishuangbanna State of China and Chiang Mai Old City located in Chiang Mai City, Chiang Mai Province of Thailand, are taken as samples of intangible cultural heritage, for comparison and induction.

Prior to the discussion, it is necessary to explain the use of proper nouns. The term "traditional culture" expresses the relevant cultural heritage matters in China, while the term "local wisdom" (ภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่น) is used for the same in Thailand.

Research Methodology

The study's fieldwork sites are the Dai Park located in Jinghong City, Xishuangbanna State of China and Chiang Mai Old City located in Chiang Mai City, and the Chiang Mai Province of Thailand, both of which are representative areas of traditional culture. The Dai Park, established in 1999, is approximately 27 kilometers away from Jinghong City. It is currently the most ethnically characteristic and well-protected tourist attraction among the Dai villages in Xishuangbanna. Different from other scenic spots, this park is a Dai settlement. The reason why it can become a model for ethnic cultural and ecological villages is because of its proper management and cultural awareness of the villagers; hence, the Dai Park can not only preserve local culture, but also develop local tourism.

Regarding the Chiang Mai Old City, the Lanna Kingdom that advocates Buddhism, was established in the 13th century. Chiang Mai became the capital of this kingdom, and many important Buddhist temples were successively established. According to the statistics of the National Office of Buddhism of Thailand, the Chiang Mai Province ranks first in Northern Thailand for being home to the maximum number of Buddhist temples from various periods of the Lanna Kingdom. More than 60% of them built before the 17th century are preserved in Chiang Mai District (Chang 2017: 53). Therefore, the survey of Buddhist temples in Chiang Mai is representative. The study analyzes the Naga stairs, murals, and Buddhist banners from ten Buddhist temples—five each from the Dai Park and Chiang Mai Old City—to interpret the traditional culture of the Dai and Thai ethnic groups.

The Cultural Heritage Laws and Traditional Culture in China and Thailand

The Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China (2011, 中华人民共和国非物质文化遗产法) and the Promotion and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act, B.E. 2559 of Thailand (2016, ส่งเสริมและรักษามรดกภูมิปัญญาทางวัฒนธรรม พ.ศ. ๒๕๕๙) both emphasize on protecting traditional culture, which is of great significance to the liberation of cultural thought before economic the reform and opening up, and encouraging the development of multiculturalism.

1. Comparison of Intangible Cultural Heritage Laws

The Ministry of Culture of China implemented the “Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China” (ICH) in 2011 (China Intangible Cultural Heritage 2011), which has six chapters and 45 articles. The ICH is divided into six categories (Table 1). One the characteristics of the ICH is its division into the national and provincial lists, as well as setting up protected areas for overall regional protection, and the representative inheritors system (China Intangible Cultural Heritage 2011). In terms of the national intangible cultural heritage, five batches of the national list of ICH have been released since 2006, with a total of 3,610 items (China Intangible Cultural Heritage, date unknown).¹

Contrastingly, the Department of Cultural Promotion under the Ministry of Culture of Thailand is the competent authority for the administration of intangible cultural heritage. It has been collecting and archiving cultural heritage data since 2005, and implemented the “Promotion and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act, B.E. 2559” in 2016. The

¹ Statistics as of June 30, 2021.

Act has 26 articles, of which the intangible cultural heritage is classified into six categories in Article 4 (Office of the Council of State, 2016).

According to Table 1, Thailand's ICH classification method is similar to that of China. Notably, the Thai people follow Theravada Buddhism, so there is a category of "knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe," which includes Buddhist teachings and cosmic knowledge. Thailand has announced nine batches of its ICH national list, with 372 items from 2009 to 2019 (Intangible Cultural Heritage of Thailand 2023).

Table 1. ICH categories in China and Thailand

China	Thailand
Traditional oral literature and the language as a vehicle thereof	Folk literature and languages
Traditional fine arts, calligraphy, music, dance, drama, quyi and acrobatics	Performing arts
Traditional techniques, medicine and calendar	Traditional craftsmanship
Traditional rituals, festivals and other folk customs	Social practices, rituals and festive events
Traditional sports and entertainment	Folk games and sports
	Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
Other ICH	Other ICH

Reference source: China Intangible Cultural Heritage (2011), Office of the Council of State (2016)

The intangible cultural heritage laws of China and Thailand, both clearly stipulate the relevant organization and implementation measures of the central and local governments, with the purpose of preserving local traditions and developing multiculturalism. The two ICH Acts mentioned above have several commonalities in their promotion of traditional culture:

(1) **Encourage the inheritance of the intangible cultural heritage**

The "Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China" begins with a clear emphasis on inheriting and promoting the distinguished traditional culture of the Chinese nation, and states the urgency of rescuing intangible cultural heritage on the verge of extinction (China Intangible Cultural Heritage 2011, Article 1, 17). In order to encourage the inheritance of the intangible cultural heritage, the representative inheritors system was established to master and inherit the certain traditional cultural skills. Representative inheritors can apply for living allowances from the local people's government according to their own conditions, in order to maintain basic living expenses. Correspondingly, the representative inheritors must also carry out activities, such as the teaching of traditional culture skills, lectures, and creations, in accordance with the ICH law, and undertake this inheritance work (China Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2011, Articles 28, 29, 30, and 31).

Thailand's "Promotion and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act, B.E. 2559" also encourages traditional and unique cultures. For example, in the "social practices, rituals and festive events" category, it emphasizes the protection of local wisdom and encourages

communities and ethnic groups to preserve distinctive culture, including various rituals, customs and dialects, etc. (Office of the Council of State 2016, Article 4). Thus, the intangible cultural heritage laws of China and Thailand both emphasize the protection and promotion of cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation.

(2) Develop multiculturalism

Protecting ancestral intangible cultural heritage is equivalent to practicing multicultural development. China's approach to promoting the intangible cultural heritage is "Government-led protection of intangible cultural heritage, followed by social participation." It stipulates that the leaders of people's governments at the county level need to incorporate the development of the intangible cultural heritage into urban planning, and allocates relevant funds for conservation, research, funding, and award purposes (China Intangible Cultural Heritage 2011, Article 25, 26).

Thailand's model is to set up the "Promotion and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act Committee" as the central competent authority, with a provincial committee in each province. The minister of culture and governors serve as the chairmen of the central and local committees, and are responsible for the national protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage. Their administrative teams manage the reviews, approvals, and announcements of the ICH list (Office of the Council of State 2016, Article 5, 10, 15, 16). This model of protecting intangible cultural heritage, from the central to local governments, effectively preserves the traditional culture of various places. To sum up, both China and Thailand have promoted the development of multiculturalism while promoting intangible cultural heritage.

(3) Create cultural property

Thailand's Ministry of Culture stated that the "Promotion and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act, B.E. 2559" was established to respond to world trends and develop culture to increase national income (The Department of Cultural Promotion 2013). Taking Article 26 of "Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China" as an example (China Intangible Cultural Heritage 2011, Article 26), in addition to stipulating the preservation of traditional culture, it also encourages overall regional protection, through establishing "the hometown of national folk culture and art" and "ethnic culture and ecological protection zone." This combines culture with sightseeing and promotes economic development.

Whether the poverty alleviation policy of China in recent years or the long-term development tourism policy of Thailand, the focus is on the protection and development of the intangible cultural heritage, because it is a national asset and contributes to the expansion of national and local economic incomes.

2. Interpretations of traditional culture

The core value of the intangible cultural heritage laws of China and Thailand is to protect traditional culture. Therefore, we examined the term "intangible cultural heritage" from the legislative content of both these laws, and then understood the interpretation of "traditional culture" in both countries. First, Article 2 of the "Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China," defines ICH as follows:

The term “intangible cultural heritage” (“ICH”) as mentioned in this Law shall refer to various traditional cultural manifestations which are handed down by the people of all nationalities from generation to generation and regarded as part of their cultural heritage, and objects and spaces relevant to traditional cultural manifestations.(Chinalawinfo Database 2011, Article 2)

Next, Article 3 of the “Promotion and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act, B.E. 2559” of Thailand also clarifies the definition of ICH:

The term “Intangible Cultural Heritage” means cultural knowledge, performances, behaviors or skills displayed by individuals, musical instruments or other materials, which is recognized by individuals, groups or communities and passed down from one generation to the next, and its content may also change due to the influences of environments. (Office of the Council of State 2016, Article 3, translated by the author)

The above definitions imply that intangible cultural heritage in China and Thailand are kinds of traditional culture "passed down from generation to generation" and has the highlight of the orthodoxy. Paradoxically, if we examine the national ICH of the Dai and Thai ethnic groups with a standard “passed down from generation to generation”, we will find that there are many ICH items common between them. Moreover, the traditional culture they advertise is not the real “tradition.”

The author lists the national ICH of Dai people in China and Thai people in Northern Thailand in Table 2; it is easy to find similarities between the two. The most obvious case is the Songkran Festival in China and Thailand; although they have local cultural significance, they are not necessarily unique.

Additionally, the intangible cultural heritage of the Dai people in Yunnan, including the “Peacock dance,” “Zhangha,” “Paper cutting,” and “Brocade” have similar folk customs in Northern Thailand. Similarly, folk customs, such as "Loy Krathong" and "Ceremony of worshiping rice spirit" of Northern Thailand can also be found among the Dai people. Table 2 lists few intangible cultural heritage that can truly be termed “traditional culture.” The slow-wheel pottery manufacturing skills of Xishuangbanna, Thai greeting etiquette, the Lanna sattapan, and Lanna lantern of Northern Thailand can be called “traditional culture.” However, these cultures are not unique. For example, Cambodia also has a greeting etiquette. In summary, defining traditional culture from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage has its limitations, especially for cross-border ethnic groups with shared cultures, like that of the Dai and Thai peoples’, as the traditional cultures identified by them are in conflict with the shared culture.

Table 2. List of ICH of the Dai–Thai ethnic groups

Item Recorded time	National ICH of Dai people in China	National ICH of Thai people in Northern Thailand
2006	Peacock dance of the Dai people	
2006	Opera the Dai people	
2006	Zhangha of the Dai people	
2006	Paper cutting of the Dai people	
2006	Slow-wheel pottery manufacturing skills of the Dai people	
2006	Songkran Festival of Dai people in Xishuangbanna	
2008	Zhaoshutun and Nanmunuona	
2008	Brocade of the Dai people	
2008	Songkran Festival of the Dai people in Dehong	
2009		Lanna folk song
2011	Traditional medicine of the Dai people in Xishuangbanna	Songkran Festival
2011	Traditional medicine of the Dai people in Dehong	
2011		Loy Krathong
2011		Thai greeting etiquette
2011		Ceremony of worshiping rice spirit
2011		Traditional Thai house
2011		Banana stalk carving craft
2012		Lanna script
2012		Lanna sattapan
2012		Lanna lantern
2012		Lanna calendar

Reference source: China Intangible Cultural Heritage date unknown, The Department of Cultural Promotion 2019

Buddhist art of Temples in the Dai Park and Chiang Mai Old City

The intangible cultural heritage laws of China and Thailand expound on “traditional culture” and include the shared culture of the Dai and Thai people as ICH items of their countries. This reveals that the definition of “traditional culture” no longer emphasizes the original tradition. Instead, each region has its own interpretation of the similar shared culture, which changes the meaning of traditional culture from monism to pluralism. The next step is to examine the similarities between their intangible cultural heritages from an empirical

perspective. The study analyzes the Buddhist art of temples, such as Naga stairs, murals, and Buddhist banners, in the Dai Park and Chiang Mai Old City, which are all manifestations of merit-making of the Dai and Thai.

1. Naga stair

Naga is an important guardian of Theravada Buddhist temples, and its statues are often used to decorate these temples. Naga has many meanings in the cultures of the Dai and Thai ethnic groups; it is the guardian of the Triratna (the Three Jewels of Buddhism), a bridge between the human and heavenly realms, symbol of wealth, foundation of the building, and the auspicious orientation. Hence, Naga shapes are often seen in Buddhist temples, and the Naga stairs at the entrances are the most common.

The Naga shapes of the Dai Park and Chiang Mai Old City Buddhist temples (Figures 1–2) reveals that its basic structure is the shape of a big snake, with a crest, head, curved body shape, scales, beard, and tail; the changing structure appears in the pattern, crest, mouth shape, jewelry-wearing, claws, wings, and side appendages. This difference is because of the different imaginations of the artists of the two places.

The popular shape of the Naga in Chiang Mai is shown in Figure 1. The craftsman uses the unique Lanna painting pattern (ลายล้านนา) to express its texture, emphasizing the complicated pattern design and extremely detailed carving. In terms of the themes of expression, the Naga in Chiang Mai is often displayed in the form of the *mom khai nak* motif (มอมคายนาค), depicting the Naga emanating from another mythological animal's mouth. The motif is also uncommonly called “*mom om nak*” (มอมอมนาค), which means the Mom keeps the Naga in the mouth (Field note, November 11, 2015, interviewing Professor R. in The Buddhist University). Mom khai nak is an important feature of the Naga style in Chiang Mai.

Furthermore, the Tripitaka tells us that the Nagas wore *kaeo mani* (แก้วมณี) around their necks, which is also a feature of the Naga art design in Northern Thailand (Figure 3). The Naga stairs in Chiang Mai almost have a chest pattern. Different places have different explanations about whether this chest pattern represents *kaeo mani*. However, Northern Thailand artisans deliberately enhance the chest pattern design to make it bright and dazzling. The diamond-shaped chest pattern appears in most Naga stair works of Northern Thailand and resembles a bead on a cross, carved in the chest of the Naga. The center of most chest patterns is circular and embellished by colorful glass to increase its brightness.

Compared with Chiang Mai, the Naga artworks in the Dai Park have fewer characteristics. Apart from the shape of a big snake, a small number of works add the head horns, wings, and claws of the Chinese dragon image to the Naga, which is the biggest difference from the Naga style in Chiang Mai.



Figure 1: *Mom khai nak* motif, Wat Phrasingh, Chiang Mai old city.

Reference source: author unknown, age unknown, mixed material, photo by the author.



Figure 2: The naga shape, Wat Manjang, the Dai Park.

Reference source: author unknown, age unknown, mixed material, photo by the author.



Figure 3: The chest pattern of Naga, Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai old city

Reference source: author unknown, age unknown, mixed material, photo by the author.

2. Mural

The murals of the Dai and Thai people represent the core values of Theravada Buddhism, which conveys Buddhist teachings and guides the behavior of believers. Muralists, including monks, artists, and painters, draw them based on Buddhist teachings, local customs, and legends, and personal opinions on honoring Buddhist temples.

In Chiang Mai, the main theme of murals is the Ten Jataka Tales, which express the essence of stories in a form similar to comics. They include complicated wireframes and simple Thai

or Lanna texts around the paintings to state the general idea of the murals (Figure 4). Similar mural styles can also be seen in Xishuangbanna, for example, the Dai Park murals express Buddhist stories in the way of comic narration, and have written titles in Dai characters, which means, the paintings style of murals in the Dai Park is similar to that of Buddhist temples in Chiang Mai (Figure 5).

The difference between the murals of the two places is visible in themes and painting skills. The themes are different due to the local history and folk customs. In terms of painting techniques, the Lanna murals emphasize the complicated and delicate soft lines, which are naturally different from the rustic murals of the Dai Park.



Figure 4: The mural of Jataka story, Wat Tung Yu, Chiang Mai old city
Reference source: author unknown, age unknown, paint, photo by the author.



Figure 5: The mural of Jataka story, Wat Manchak, the Dai Park.
Reference source: author unknown, age unknown, paint, photo by the author.

3. Buddhist banner

The names of Buddhist banners vary from place to place, but both Lanna and Xishuangbanna are called “*tung*.” It is a long banner with different sizes, and is mainly used for praying and making merit. The Dai and Thai people believe that donating Buddha banners benefits their ancestors, families, and themselves, or rescues their ancestors and relatives in hell and allows them to go to heaven (Hall 2010: 2-4). Buddha banners have dozens of types and are used in different ways according to local customs, such as Buddhist festivals, local ceremonies, and funerals. The materials used to make the Buddha banners are diverse, for example, cloth, paper, wood, and metal. The patterns are based on what the artists have seen and learnt from Buddhist temples, folk stories, or other festival ceremonies (Apiwat 2004: 5).

The Buddhist temples in the Chiang Mai Old City and Dai Park both follow the custom of hanging Buddhist banners (Figure 6-7). Wooden and metal Buddhist banners are often seen in Chiang Mai, decorated with the twelve zodiac patterns. Since the Lanna people keep the custom of hanging the twelve zodiac signs, they are used to drawing them on Buddhist banners to bless the whole family (Hall 2010: 8). The Buddhist banners of the Dai people in Xishuangbanna are mostly presented in brocade. The Dai people believe that worshipping Buddha with brocade can accumulate merits for themselves or their families. The Buddhist banners of the Dai ethnic group have several colors and patterns, including animals, people, the twelve zodiac signs, palaces, and pagodas. This creates many beautiful models through the fluffy cotton thread.

Overall, the Buddhist banners in Chiang Mai Old City and Dai Park have the same cultural meaning, and are usually hung in Buddhist temples during the New Year and important festivals to solemnize the Buddhist halls. Moreover, the differences between the two are visible in their sizes, patterns, and materials.



Figure 6: Buddhist banner, Wat Mondom, Chiang Mai old city

Reference source: author unknown, age unknown, colored paper, photo by the author.

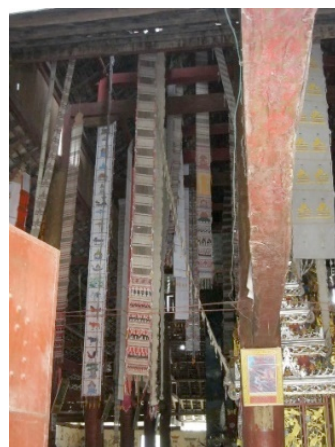


Figure 7: Buddhist banner, Wat Manjang, the Dai Park.

Reference source: author unknown, age unknown, cotton thread, photo by the author.

As far as the Dai and Thai people are concerned, Buddhist art is an important part of their intangible cultural heritage. As seen in Table 3, Buddhist art, including the Naga stairs, murals, and Buddhist banners, of both the Dai Park and Chiang Mai Old City temples are similar, with the same cultural meaning and structures. The biggest difference between the

Buddhist art of the two places is in the techniques used, including the handicraft inheritance and usual media of the local artists, such as the “Lanna painting pattern,” which is a distinctive style of Northern Thailand. Thus as far as the design is related to lines or shapes, the artists of Chiang Mai almost use the Lanna painting pattern as their method of expression. Contrastingly, the art of Dai Park has no obvious local style, because the Buddhism of the Dai ethnic group in China was once interrupted by the Cultural Revolution, so the development of Buddhist art in Xishuangbanna was also relatively frustrated, and not as rich in resources as Chiang Mai.

Table 3. Comparison of Buddhist Art in the Dai Park and Chiang Mai Old City

Item	Naga stair		Mural		Buddhist banner	
Area	the Dai Park	Chiang Mai Old City	the Dai Park	Chiang Mai Old City	the Dai Park	Chiang Mai Old City
Technique	Amateur creation	Lanna painting pattern	Amateur creation	Lanna painting pattern	Brocade	Diversification
Structure	*The basic structure is the same. *There are differences in the design of themes and details		*Images narrative *Text title *Comic-like format		*Long banners *Arranged images * The twelve zodiac signs decorated	
Meaning	Triratna-protecting		Buddhism-promotion		Merit-making	

Reference Source: Collated by the author

Conclusion

In the context of the intangible cultural heritage of China and Thailand, this article discusses “traditional culture” and compares its legal and practical aspects.

The analysis reveals that first, as far as the law is concerned, the Dai and Thai people have a similar intangible cultural heritage under the shared culture. Both groups claim that their local culture is a “traditional culture,” which differs from other cultures of the Tai ethnic groups. This phenomenon shows that the definition of “traditional culture” no longer emphasizes the original tradition, and instead, each region has its own interpretation of the similar shared culture, which creates cultural diversity among the two ethnic groups.

Second, practically, the Buddhist art of temples in the Chiang Mai Old City and Dai Park is very similar, which proves that the Dai and Thai cultures share a commonality. The non-unique Buddhist art is a kind of “traditional culture” recognized by the Dai and Thai people, respectively. These definitions reflect their national identities and indicate that “traditional culture” has evolved into local identity, resulting in a more diverse definition of traditional culture.

In summary, this study established that the Dai and Thai ethnic groups endow their local culture with value and define it as their traditional culture. This is an operational process from traditional to local culture. Once localities interpret traditional culture themselves, their definitions diversify.

“Shared culture,” “traditional culture,” and “intangible cultural heritage” have mutually causal relationships. This is also the main reason for the similarities and differences in the Dai and Thai cultures. Their shared cultures are a social phenomenon caused by their geographical migration, and has an impact on the definition of traditional culture.

The highest goal of intangible cultural heritage law is adding national value. Therefore, redefining traditional culture to achieve the political purpose of intangible cultural heritage is a cultural strategy used by countries when dealing with the shared culture of cross-border ethnic groups. The same is true for China and Thailand. Defining the traditional culture through intangible cultural heritage can form the ethnic boundaries and shape their cultural brands and enhance cultural competition.

Under such an operation mode, a win-win result will promote cultural diversity; however this may also be because of improper business operations, with interests as the main consideration, which makes traditional culture more tourist-oriented and distant from life, but accelerates the decline of traditional culture.

The shared culture of the Dai and Thai ethnic groups is a social phenomenon that cannot be separated by ethnic identification. When the political situation in Southeast Asian countries becomes more free and open in the future, how will the shared culture of the Tai ethnic groups develop under national policies? Will it trend toward diversity and innovation? Or be driven to endangerment by the market? These issues are worthy of ongoing observation.

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