

APPLICATION OF FOLKTALES TO CULTURAL TOURISM MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE CENTRAL ISAN PROVINCES OF THAILAND¹

Nittaya Wannakit ²

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาลักษณะการประยุกต์ใช้คติชนประเภทเรื่องเล่าพื้นบ้านเพื่อการจัดการการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรม รวมไปถึงศึกษาบทบาทและความสำคัญของการประยุกต์ใช้ข้อมูล

¹ การประยุกต์ใช้เรื่องเล่าพื้นบ้านเพื่อการจัดการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรม: กรณีศึกษาจังหวัดในเขตอีสานตอนกลางของประเทศไทย

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² (นิตยา วรรณกิตร์) Asst. Prof. Nittaya Wannakit, Ph.D. Service and Research Unit in Folklore, Philosophy, Religion and Local Wisdom and Lecturer at the Department of Thai and Oriental Languages, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mahasarakham University, Thailand.

คติชนดังกล่าวต่อการจัดการท่องเที่ยวในเขตจังหวัดภาคอีสานตอนกลางของประเทศไทย 4 จังหวัด ประกอบด้วย จังหวัดกาฬสินธุ์ ขอนแก่น มหาสารคาม และร้อยเอ็ด มโนทัศน์สำคัญในการศึกษาคือ เศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ (creative economy) คติชนสร้างสรรค์ (creative folklore) การท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรม (cultural tourism) และอัตลักษณ์ (identity)

Abstract

This article aims to investigate the application of folktales for cultural tourism management and the role and importance of this folklore data for tourism management in the Central Isan Provinces of Thailand, i.e. Kalasin, Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham and Roi Et. The key concepts used in this study include creative economy, creative folklore, cultural tourism and identity. The study revealed that most folktales used in tourism management were tales and local myths such as fairy tales, legends of the city, local tales and legends of heroes in the provinces. The application of folktales varied, including reinterpretation, reproduction and mixing to add the value of landmarks in the locality and local traditions, which could help to promote cultural tourism in the provinces.

In addition, it was found that key factors affecting the application of tales and local myths for cultural tourism management were the social context of globalization and the current situation of tourism in Thailand. Globalization brought up the

tourism business and tourism industry which entailed cultural changes in traditional society. As a result, communities had to adapt their traditions and lifestyle to satisfy tourists. Tales and local myths have become cultural capital that can be applied to create the identity of the province and used to promote cultural tourism among tourists from Thailand and other countries.

Introduction

Amidst the complicated mechanisms of globalization, there have been tremendous social and cultural changes in Thailand. One of the changes was commoditization of culture in tourism industry, a social movement aiming for the sake of materialism and global tourism. Such a process was observed in many levels, starting from local communities that pushed the trend of localism to promote cultural identity to government agencies that promote such identity.

Globalization and tourism are inseparably connected. Globalization brought up global tourism businesses and tourism industry that gathered people from all around the world. Tourism businesses and tourism industry have a strong influence on cultural and social changes. They are the cause of modifying traditions and way of life of cultural host to welcome visitors, resulting in the phenomenon of selling of cultures (Siraporn Na Thalang 2013: 9).

Since 1960, cultural and ethnic tourism has become more popular. Identity presentation under the context of national development has been demonstrated in

tourism, not to mention the process of choosing, restoring, and managing culture to meet tourism demand (Nittima Boonchaleaw 2009: 19-20). This phenomenon reflected how globalization caused by capitalism has led to cultural creativity in many commodities.

Folklore is the formal academic discipline devoted to the study of “Folklore”³. Folklore data are cultural and arts expressions with the distinguished means of oral transmission. There are many types of folklore: local tales (myths and tales), idioms, riddles, local shows and songs, tradition, beliefs, rituals, folklore objects such as woven, local food, wickerwork.

In the current context of Thailand, folklore data has been applied in a variety of ways. Siraporn Na Thalang (2013: 6-7, 34-35), labels this phenomenon “Creative Folklore”, meaning folklore which is recreated, reproduced, redefined and developed to add value, local or ethnic identity. For example, the Buddha Bathing Ceremony (Um Phra Dam Nam) in Phetchabun refers to a myth from the reign of King Mahathammaracha I (Siraporn Na Thalang 2013: 49-50). Tales or fables have been commoditized as holy entities, for instance, negrito’s image, negrito’s auspicious mask, the affluence conch, the Chindamanee spell from the local tale “Sungthong” (Sukanya Soodchaya 2013:

³ Folklore refers to cultural data of a group of people that circulate, are disseminated, and passed on according to the tradition defined by a certain group of people. Such a definition came from the key characteristics of the terms ‘folk’ and ‘lore’, which together they become a discipline (Nittaya Wannakit 2017: 16).

96-97) Naturally, folklores is a cultural expression that has been created, passed down and developed in a way that conforms to the social context of the moment. In addition, folklorists view creativity as a part of the lifestyle and culture of every community. What raises a question is however, that in the context of globalization, tourism and the creative economy, is folklore a stimulus generating creative folklores of various types designated by socio-economic factors which are not ordinary changes.

Due to the attraction of this phenomenon, in this article the concept of “creative folklore” will be used to study the means in which local tales are applied to tourism. Two main objectives are to study the adaptation of local tales in cultural tourism management and to study the role and significance of the adaptation of local tales to tourism and the creative economy. The study’s scope covers four provinces of central Isan, namely, Kalasin, Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham and Roi Et.

Key Concepts

This study involves four concepts: creative economy, creative folklore, cultural tourism and identity as follows:

Creative Economy

Creative economy is the concept of adding value to products or services in order to increase the socio-economic value required to meet consumer’s demand. Creative economy consists of two components: intellectual capital and creativity. Creative economy is a major

concept in economic flow and is based on education, creativity and intellectual property, which are, in turn, connected to cultural technology and modern innovation.

Piriya Phonpiroon (2013: 4-7) explains that the importance of any socio-economic system lies in establishing an “efficiency-driven and innovation-driven economy”. Elevating the economic status is, thus, essential to becoming a creative economy with creativity and new innovations feeding out into society, leading to a long-term economy. Therefore, creative economy is a process or an activity based on two major factors intellectual capital and adaptive skill that optimizes creativity (knowledge) for commercial purpose. Details of the two major factors are as follows:

- a) Intellectual Capital in the form of “former knowledge” or “new knowledge” which can be used for further development. Intellectual Capital originates from human capital (education, creativity training), cultural capital (such as Thai tradition) and social capital (custom and wisdom).
- b) Adaptive Skills, such as adapting intellectual capital to add concrete value to products and service. Therefore, the “Creative Economy” is made from the words economy and creative and for it to happen, both must occur. Should only creativity (knowledge) arise, creative economy will be

incomplete for creativity is not bound to yield any benefit to the creator. By merging knowledge with economy, the development of creativity advances to a different level where prices escalate and, eventually, value is added. The definition of creative economy coincides with the concept of innovation that is involved with the handling of new ideas.

Sukanya Soodchaya (2012: 217-240) wrote an article Creative Economy and Cultural Management, that asserted that creative economy is a new paradigm born in the 20th century from cooperation among creativity, culture, economics and technology. Its aim is to improve cultural capital or creative property and to agree with what Nisawan Pichdumrong (2010: 14) has designated as the principle of creative economy which adds value to products and services by merging technology and innovation with a diversity of cultural resources and the Thai lifestyle which are considered to be strengths.

It then cooperates with the agricultural, industrial and service sectors, to yield distinctive products with a unique identity, thus boosting their economic value. Puangkeaw Pornpipat (2010: 6) explains that Creative Economy is a prevailing word in the current situation and has caused many raised eyebrows. Nowadays there have been many definitions of creative economy that depend on usage and the economic context in each country or related organization.

In general, definitions of creative economy emphasize the concept of creating value from the assets brought into being by creativity to achieve development and elicit economic growth. As a result, a creative economy is an industry which consists of cultural products and arts, in the form of products and services.

According to UNCTAD or UNESCO, creative economy refers to a concept of development and economic growth based on knowledge and culture. In Thailand, the idea has been adapted by merging unique Thai culture and identity to add commercial value. To clarify, the definition used in this research is based on Puangkaew Pornpipat (2010: 6), who says “an economy driven concept on the basis of knowledge, education, creativity, and intellectual property which connects with cultural roots.”

Creative Folklore

Folklore is a discipline that studies the life style and culture of a group of people. They usually transfer their folklore via oral transmission passing from one generation to another generation. The transmission format should not be too formal or premeditated. Folklore usually has an unknown source a variety of presentations. Recently Thailand’s folklore circle has turned its attention to modern folklore and relevant new social phenomena and can be called the “dynamic folklore phenomenon in Thailand”⁴.

⁴ The outstanding event that marked the outset of the dynamic folklore phenomenon in

The “Creative Economy” paradigm rests upon economic development through value adding. The capital used is existing cultural capital, including the application of value systems, belief systems and folklore in modern society. However, “Creative Folklore” does not strictly conform to the idea of “Creative Economy”. It is used roughly for the dynamics of folklore, the transmission of folklore which changes from era to era (considered as creativity), cultural reproduction, invented tradition, applied folklore, cultural hybridization, popular culture, modern folklore in modern media and ethnic identity (Siraporn Na Thalang 2013: 6). The exciting part of folklore

Thailand was the research “Creative Folklore”: dynamic and its usage in modern Thai society’ by Siraporn Na Thalang et al., consisting of 14 projects (Siraporn Na Thalang. 2015: 261-262). The project was proposed to Thailand Research Fund (TRF) in order to assemble and categorize creative folklore, as well as to analyze and synthesize the adaptation method and to illustrate how Thais employ folklore in the current society.

Therefore, “Creative Folklore” is a word Siraporn Na Thalang invented for the above-mentioned research to go with “creative economy” which has been considered to be part of the national and global economic perspective since 2000. In *Creative Folklore: Introduction to Social Context and Relevant Ideas*, Siraporn Na Thalang (2013:7) explains the definition of creative folklore: a folklore which is recreated and transmitted under the Thailand’s current circumstance by adapting, improving, reinterpreting, redefining to add value or adhering local and ethnic identity. A few pieces of research have been conducted on this matter.

studies lies in how the folklore information transferred via culture has changed its original role and how and through what channel it has become adapted to the context of current Thai society, especially in the promotion of cultural tourism to create economic value for local communities.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is the kind of tourism which aims to provide tourists with cultural information related to the location they are visiting along with an insight into history, archaeology, language, lifestyle, attire, cuisine, beliefs, religion and customs. Typically, cultural tourism lets tourists immerse themselves in new experiences and allows them to appreciate the beauty of other cultures. What is more, tourists are free to learn the significance of the value, history and background of other cultures, not to mention the diversity of cultures in order to raise an awareness of equity, dignity and respect in terms of other cultures (Thanik Loedchanrit 2011: 164).

Cultural tourism has become famous nowadays because of the notion of improving cultural resources to become tourist attractions. Cultural resources can be categorized into two types: tangible or object resources such as historic sites, antiques and sustenance equipment and intangible or abstract resources such as language, rituals and performing arts (Chanan Wongpinak, et al. 2004: 2-3). However, cultural management does not concentrate solely on a particular type of resource or any specific ethnic group.

Cultural resources have many values and meanings at many levels, so this dynamic resource can have a new and different value in different social contexts or cultures (Thanik Loedchanrit 2011: 164-165).

Identity

The concept of identity was born along with the postmodern theory defining the shifting meaning of individualism. Identity involves conception, qualities, beliefs and expressions which one has to identity with in interactions revolving about “Who am I?” with others through self-assessment or peer evaluation. Identity requires self-awareness to differentiate between “I” and “Them”.

Identity is a specific feature representing the quality and ethnicity of oneself which constitutes confidence, value and dignity. The local identity of the group is derived from interaction among individuals and also share experiences. Members need to adjust to meet the demands of a community’s expectation, leading to rules, customs and tradition, which are passed down over generations and become local culture (Seksan Sansonpisoot 2003: 28) However, identity need not to be a single quality; a person or a group of people’s identity may have many qualities. Identity is not innate but society has created this idea, so, there must be a process of creating identity by either generating anew or adapting from other existing cultures to ours. When ethnic groups consistently adapt other identities, the old identities are weakened and new identities are invented. Therefore, identity does not have a fixed

definition. The transmission and production of a new identity can be shaped through changing periods and contexts (Chaladchai Ramitanon 1999: 76)

Identity can be examined in two dimensions. Accordingly, identity is individualism which connects with the social aspect. Society determines role, duties and the value system and specific entities such as parents, friends or spouses, which are symbolic aspects of these relationships, are expressed through a symbolic system. In another aspect, identity also largely deals with psychological and subjective aspects such as emotion and feelings, because human beings define themselves or the changing self- based on their relationship with the earth (Apinya Fuengsakul 2003: 5-6)

The concept of identity is of vital significance in this study as it clarifies the community’s thinking process for creating identity and the relationship between provinces when accepting or compromising identities. This article uses the keyword “identity” within the scope of conceptualization and representation via folklore information of different types in order to remind us that identity is a dynamic or ever-changing entity.

The concepts of creative economy, creative folklore, cultural tourism and identity are used in this study. Tales and local myths which are part of the cultural heritage have been applied for cultural tourism management in the context of the current society of Thailand in a significant way. The process of applying the original tales and local myths includes re-creation

and reproduction, thus possessing the traits of “creative folklore”, a new concept that has come with “creative economy”. In addition, the application of folklore for cultural tourism, according to the creative folklore concept, is closely related to the concept of identity. This is because the main objective of re-creating and producing all folklore data is to highlight and differentiate local identity, which can attract tourists to the area.

Scope of the Study

Scope of data

Data in this research was gathered from two sources: documentary research and fieldwork research. This data covered tales and local myths, knowledge about the study areas, the history of settlements, the history of the economy and culture, the social and cultural contexts and basic knowledge about the culture and ways of life.

Scope of area

The main areas that this research focuses on include four central Isan provinces: Kalasin, Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham and Roi Et. The rationale for grouping these provinces is based on the integrated strategic management of the Thai government.⁵ Central Isan is characterized

⁵ In grouping the provinces together, the government has considered economic and cultural potential. Key factors included creating opportunity and promoting collaboration between the state, private and public sectors in these provinces in order to

by its unique geography and culture. The provinces are located in the centre of the region and on the East-West Corridor. Speaking of cultures, specifically in relation to tourism, these four provinces are rich with cultural and natural attractions, such as ancient remains, antiques, museums, dams and national parks. These places have attracted many tourists. One of the strategies that these province have used was to highlight their cultural potential to develop tourism industry and services. What is interesting, from the researcher’s point of view, is how these provinces apply tales and local myths to promote tourism.

Previews Studies on Isan folklore

Past studies on Isan folklore can be divided into two groups according to the time frame and approach: compilation and collections of Isan literature and critical and theoretical approaches and studies of Isan literature.

reinforce competitiveness and collaborative problem-solving in a sustainable manner. As such, the author regards this grouping of provinces to be consistent with the research topic “creating the common identity of the province group”.

The four provinces located in the centre of northeastern Thailand have coined the term “Roi Kaen Sara Sin”. These words come from the front and back syllables of the provinces’ names to form a new identity as a group. The new term has been used to promote the economic and cultural activities of the group in activities such as cultural exhibitions, local medical wisdom events and local product sales.

Compilation and collection of Isan literature: Most of this literature was compiled before 1987. The purpose of these works was to collect works of Isan literature and make them known as local literature before categorizing and studying each genre. Some social aspects were also examined but only at the level of way of life or in the social reflections present in the text. One outstanding scholar is Juruwan Thammawat (1976) who studied the political views in the oral tradition of local Isan tales, folk songs, Phaya poetry, prayers to recall the spirit of courage and Mo Lam plays. The findings reveal that political views were expressed in two ways. Some political views were expressed through individual opinions while others were expressed guided by suggestions from government agencies or under the influence of the group that someone belonged to.

In addition, Jarubut Ruangsuwan (1977) examined the structure of Isan literatures and concluded that most works of Isan literature inherited their structure from local tales, Jataka tales and local poetry. Apart from the elaborate diction, Isan literature also served a didactic and informative purpose. Thawat Punnatok. (1979) categorized Isan literature into four genres: Buddhist literature, historical literature, didactic literature and tales. He also referred to the value and origin of each genre.

Critical and theoretical approaches and studies of Isan literature: Most of the studies in this group were conducted since 1987. The works usually examined a specific story or issue in terms of the

literary aspect, arts and orthography. Many critical theories such as Marxism, feminism and psychoanalysis were applied. Pichai Sriphuchai (1989) studied the characteristics of women in local Isan tales and found references to the value of physical beauty and inner beauty: for example, morality, gratitude and conformity to custom. Jaruwan Thammawat (2009) researched Isan versions of tales to explain the connection between their concepts and the Isan social context. Two concepts unearthed in this study were the mythical concept and the alternative concept. The essence of concepts demonstrates the human-nature relationship, the human-human relationship and the human-society relationship. Jarubut Ruangsuwan (2013) perused the story of Thao Pha Daeng – Nang Ai and found that its structure had come from the ancient Khmer culture. Therefore, the content of the story reflected the Khmer influence over early Isan settlements. The stories were filled with didacticism and moral teaching.

Results of the study

The result of the study on the application of folklore to cultural tourism management in central Isan provinces from the aspect of its method and its role in adapting folklore to tourism management and the creative economy can be summarized into two main topics. The first one is the viewpoint of folklore as cultural wisdom heritage being reproduced and redefined in the new context of cultural tourism. The second one is the convergence of local tales and other similar types of folklore in

the cultural tourism context. The details are as follows:

Local tales as cultural wisdom heritage: reproduction and redefinition in the cultural tourism context

The concept of cultural tourism involves the commodification of cultural resources into tourist attractions. Cultural attractions are divided into two types: tangible and intangible. In this case, local tales are regarded as one type of intangible cultural resource which the Department of Cultural Promotion has registered as Thailand's cultural heritage within the division of local literature, both written and unwritten.

The process of renewing and conserving tales as part of Thailand's cultural heritage began in 2009 when the Department of Cultural Promotion at the Ministry of Culture saw the importance of protecting the cultural heritage of the nation and the region. Thus, the registration of cultural heritage was implemented by a board of scholars who assembled relevant data that indicated Thai wisdom and ranged from primordial handicrafts to the performing arts. During 2010 – 2012, more cultural heritage was added to the registry in the form of social customs, rituals and festivals; this is not to mention the concepts of nature, the universe and the language in local literature which the board categorized into seven types: local stories, local myths, hymns or ritual prayers, local songs, idioms, riddles and books. Since 2010 up until 2015 there were, in total, 58 registries of cultural heritage (Siraporn Na Thalang 2013: 248-

249). Granted to be cultural wisdom heritage, folklore has been prevalent in many adaptations, at present ranging from a side story accompanying local products in order to add value to tourism management, which is the main topic that this article discusses.

The study of folklore application to cultural tourism management in central Isan provinces reveals its dominant features of reproduction and redefinition that are important devices for tourism management that conform to Thailand's policy and direction to boost Thai culture as a tourist attraction involving natural sightseeing and ancient remains. This convention is explicit in Khon Kaen where "Sin Sai" tales are retold to encourage cultural tourism.

Sin Sai is a local fantasy tale derived from the Buddhist jataka.⁶ It has been found that Sin Sai, more widely known as Sung Sin Chai⁷ (a transcription of the standard Thai language, Sin Sai once referring to the tale found in the Isan and Lao context while Sung Sin Chai represents the story from other areas), comes from the Mekong river area and is widely known throughout the

⁶ Jakata refers to Sung Sin Chai (in the tales whose content involves the former lives of Lord Buddha and have Bodhisattva portrayed as the main characters. Some local tales, already widely known, were adapted as Jataka. Some of them were invented anew while others were adapted in terms of the content and plot from Atthakathajataka or Panyasajataka to form a whole new story.

⁷ Sin Sai is transcribed according to the pronunciation of Isan and Lao people.

country and the neighbouring countries of Cambodia and Laos. Up in the Northern provinces, Sin Chai is narrated as Kao Sau literature for preaching and, partly, entertainment. Provinces in central Thailand prevail with roles as well as plays, for example, the civil play Sung Sin Chai, the Ayutthaya edition, the civil play Sung Sin Chai, the King Rama II edition and Prince Naris' Sung Sin Chai play (Thawat Punnothok 1982: 394). The southern region found the story inscribed on pulp paper scrolls (Koi or Bood) used for storytelling and Manorah rites (Narongrit Rawarin et al. 2014: 15-16). In north-eastern parts Sin Sai stories are seen on palm leaves with Tham script and Thai Noi script and mural paintings or "Hoop Taem"⁸ "on" Sim⁹ of various provinces, in, for instance, Loei, Ubon Ratchathani, Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham and Roi Et. Many hypotheses have been made about the background to this tale but still there is no clear evidence of the original author, background or the tale itself (Waraporn Tuna 2000: 26-34).

The reproduction and redefinition process of the Sin Sai tale initiated when the mural art of this tale was used, by Khon Kaen Municipality, to advertise "Sim", one of the precious tourist attractions in Khon Kaen which had gained popularity among Thais and foreign tourists. From surveys which the author conducted about the mural arts of four temples in Khon Kaen,

⁸ Hoop Taem or Roop Taem is Isan dialect, meaning fine arts, such as drawing or painting.

⁹ Sim is Isan dialect derived from "Seema" which means a territory or boundary for religious activity or in other words a chapel.

Wat Sanuanwaree Pataram, Wat Matchimwittayaram, Wat Srabuakeaw and Wat chaisri, three of them (Wat Sanuanwaree Pataram, Wat Srabuakeaw, Wat chaisri) depicted the Sin Sai tale. Wat Sanuanwaree Pataram contained mural art in perfect condition with the complete story starting from the reign of King Kutsarat over Pengchan city with eight wives. Of Patuma's sons one was born with a bow and a sword in each of his hands and was named Sin Sai while the other son was named Sung Thong and he held a conch. Chanta gave birth to Seeho who had an elephant head and lion's body. Sin Sai, Sung Thong and Seeho were accused of bringing misfortune to the kingdom. Both wives were cast out of the city but Indra, the Hindu god, conjured up a castle for them in which they could live in the forest. Then, the sons of the other six wives came across them and tricked them into going to find the lost aunt, Sumontha, who had been kidnapped by Kumbhakarna, a younger brother of Ravana. So many obstacles arose in this adventure but Sin Sai managed to overcome these impediments and brought back his aunt, Sumontha. Just when things seemed to be on the right track, the six sons found them, pushed them off a cliff, and stole Sumontha back. Sumontha revealed the truth to the king. After Indra had resurrected Sin Sai, the king punished the culprits and escorted Pathuma, Chanta, Sung Thong, Seeho and Sin Sai back to where a bequest was awaiting them.

When the advertisement of Sin Sai was circulated, people started to pay visits to Khon Kaen and the tale became the root of the city. Since 2007, the municipality has

been holding events with Sin Sai as the main attraction, emphasizing its cultural uniqueness and identity. Moreover, there was an attempt to use Sin Sai as representative of the province to promote desirable traits such as gratitude, audacity, honesty, sacrifice and sufficiency to instil these values into the new generation so that they would love their community, spread benevolence and create unity within the community in keeping with the town's development strategy that strives for unity and peace. The reproduction of this tale and its characters occurred in many adaptations, for example, lamp post sculptures along the main road, stage performances and academic talk sessions at many institutions. Every sector took part in promoting Sin Sai as part of its heritage. To illustrate, Sin Sai was adapted into songs with an upbeat rhythm called "Lum Sin Sai", naming streets, places and important locations after the name of the characters.

Using folklore to support cultural tourism in Thailand is in line with government policy. After local literature was registered in 2009, the Department of Cultural Promotion cooperated with the regional Office of Culture and funded projects and events for conserving, renewing and developing one's own local literature as part of the heritage of cultural wisdom. Funding support went into events such as cultural expositions, training for youngsters and programmes for registered folklore (Siraporn Na Thalang 2015: 250).

The following are samples of events that have already been held in Isan and other regions of Thailand: Phaya Kong and Phaya Pan legend in Nakhon Pathom; the

Phra Ruang legend in Sukhothai; Ceremonial dance poetry (Kaap Soeng Bungfai) in Yasothon; the Ta Mong Lai parable in Prachuap Kiri Kan; a boosting harvest song (Tum Kwan Kwai) in Krabi, as well as the local tale Sin Sai in Khon Khaen; the legend of Lord Mahachai in Maha Sarakham; the legend of Saket Nakhon (the old name of Roi Et); and the legend of Fa Daet Song Yang Town in Kalasin. These examples have been exhaustively explored in many studies.¹⁰



Picture 1 and 2 Sculptures of Sin Sai and Seeho on Lamp Posts in Khon Kaen

For central Isan provinces, similar events have been held in Khon Kaen where characters in the Sin Sai story appeared in religious ceremonies in the 3rd lunar month or Boon Kao Chi of Heet 12 Kong 14 belief in northeastern parts on every

¹⁰ See Areerat Nonsuwan 2012, Jarubut Ruangsuwan 2013, Thawat Punnotok 1979, Thawat Punnotok 1998, and Sukanya Soodchaya 1999.

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February and March, not to mention the use of their names in the school derby of northeastern local administration in 2008 under the name of “Sin Sai Games : the reflection of Khon Kaen Spirit”, selecting Seeho as the mascot of the event.

Another interesting example has been using heroes from myths to advertise their provinces as part of the heritage of cultural wisdom. From surveys, it was found that every province in central Isan revived the lore of the first ruler who founded the city whose stories coincided with other provinces. Details are elaborated in Table 1.

Table 1 Myths of the first rulers who founded central Isan provinces

Hero myth	Province
Phraya Chaisunthon (Lord Sompamit)	Kalasin
Phra Nakhon Siborirak (Pia Mueang Phaen)	Khon Kaen
Phra Charoen Ratchadet (Lord Mahachai (Kwad))	Maha Sarakham
Phra Khattiyawongsa (Ton)	Roi Et

We will be discussing the sample of cultural reproduction in Maha Sarakham whose first ruler was Lord Mahachai or Kwad. In the past, this name was only known within a small circle of local historians. Lord Mahachai was a skilful war commander who audaciously fended off the army of Chinese Haw at Vientiane and Luang Prabang, Laos. King Rama V, later, appointed him as Phra Charoen Ratchadet, the first ruler of Maha Sarakham. This story recently became

known to a wider public due to the 150th anniversary commemoration of Maha Sarakham in 2013-2014. The legend was resurrected to promote the event as was the building of a monument which now stands in the public park, together with the biography session and official ceremonies with the governor. The result was spectacular, when people came to know more about Lord Mahachai whose story was remembered by many; he fell off his horse after being assailed by his enemies but continued to fight and commanded his troops until victory was achieved.

Siraporn Na Thalang (2013: 242) explains that this policy followed the government policy of 1981 which funded communities to build a statue for a figure of the importance, usually revered hero or heroine. This factor helped spreading the word of the local folklore of each community and make it convenient for everyone to access.

Apart from the activities based on the government policy, public participation was found to be very active. Importantly, local communities adapted themselves to support the government’s ideas. Most communities were aware of and understood the importance of applying local tales for tourism management because they had foreseen the direct benefit for their communities. As an example, the author would like to discuss the findings from a field work study, based on the interview with Phra Khruboonchayakorn at Ban Sawathi Community, Mueang District, Khon Kaen Province.

Ban Sawathi Community is where Wat Chaisi (alternatively known as Wat Tai) is located. The ordination hall of this temple houses an image of Hoop Taem telling the story of Sin Sai, which is commonly known among the locals. The community adapted the tale to promote tourism in many ways. The key person was the cultural leader of the community, Phra Khru Boonchayakorn, the current superior monk of Wat Chai Si. He closely analyzed the Sin Sai tale and pioneered the linking of the tale to the cultural activities of the community: the Sin Sai story has been adapted into the Mo Lam play by school students and some landmarks in the community have been named after Sin Sai characters as have towns, for example; See Ho Road, Pengchan Road, Phraya Kumbhakarna Meeting Room of the sub-district municipality, See Ho Football League. Furthermore, Wat Chai Si has been promoted as a cultural learning centre. A folklore museum was built at this temple¹¹. Originally begun by the superior monk as the cultural leader of the community, the concept was expanded by the community members. Some villagers were trained to become tour guides to the Hoop Taem of Sin Sai stories. People in general and even young children can tell the story of Sin Sai quite well.

The above example clearly demonstrates that the community, as the owner of the culture, also sees the benefit, value and importance of local wisdom and heritage. The community members can make use of the knowledge and adapt it to serve

tourism. As a result of the adaptation, more tourists from various backgrounds have been attracted to the local area. This is different from when small groups of tourists or field study groups from schools visited the temple.

The convergence of local tales and other similar types of folklore in the cultural tourism context

The convergence of tales and other types of folklore, especially rituals, was an interesting feature in the folklore adaptation for cultural tourism management in four central Isan provinces. This convergence appeared in the form of integrating, promoting and benefitting from tour.

In all the case studies, the most widely used folklore to integrate with local tales and myths was “ritual” which is categorized into two groups; the founder’s heroic legend in the 12-month tradition.

The integration with the first group of ritual was found in every province for the legends of the founders were present in every province. In addition, there was the advertising to promote the history of the province’s foundation. The founder of Kalasin was *Phaya Chaisunthon* (Lord *Sompamit*); Khon Kaen has *Phra Nakhon Siborirak* (*Pia Mueang Phaen*), while Maha Sarakham has *Phra Charoen Ratchadet* (Lord *Mahachai* (*Kuad*)) and Roi Et has *Phra Khattiyawongsa* (*Ton*). What these myths share in common are the legends of the founders followed by commemoration rites expressing

¹¹ Interview .Phra Khruboonthayakorn ,6th April 2015.

reverence, pride in the provinces and gratitude.



Picture 3 Kalasin Governor chairing
“Kalasin 222 Years under H.M., the
King’s Prestige”, from 19th December,
2015 to 9th January, 2016

Details of the relationship between the legends of heroes and rituals are abundant. For example, the monument of Pia Mueang Phaen is situated in a yard near Kaen Nakhon Lake where rites of offering and paying homage to the rulers are observed during the Songkran holiday. Also in Maha Sarakham, the monument of Lord Mahachai was built near Nong Kha Park and was consecrated during the time of city’s 150th anniversary in August, 2015. In Kalasin, there is a dancing ceremony to worship Phraya Chaisunthon, the first ruler, at Phraya Chaisunthon Monument. The event was held in cooperation between government agencies and the private sector from 19th December, 2015 to 9th January, 2016. The purpose of this event was to commemorate the ancestors of the Kalasin people. At the same event, there were mini light and sound performances telling Kalasin

legends, firework shows, Isan drum exhibitions and Phu Thai dance along with a live Pong Lang band. In Roi Et, there is the annual ritual to pay homage to Chao Pho Mahesakdanuphap, the sacred spirit of the province. At this event, monks come to chant and people offer food to them. They also offer celebrations and dance shows to attract local people who identify themselves as descendants of the founder.

The second group. This group deals with **rituals of 12 month tradition** or Heet 12 according to Isan creed. The author would like to take the Boon Boek Fah ritual of Maha Sarakham, the 3rd Month Ritual or Boon Khao Chi of Khon Kaen and the Boon Phawet Ritual of Roi Et as examples.

The name of the ritual, “Boon Boek Fah” literally means “Opening the heaven” and originates from the old belief of Isan wisdom. This is the idea that the earth was precious, giving us a place to live and food to eat; so the northeasterners held this event to show gratitude to the earth. This ritual taught the locals to repay for whatever they received.

The field research revealed that the ceremony Boon Boek Fah in Maha Sarakham began in 1985 when a former chief of the Agricultural Extension Office, called Sai Sorathon, persuaded the people of Baek Village, Na Thong sub-district, Chiang Yuen District to revive the tradition of carrying manure to every field for nourishment. The result was superb since rice production rose by 50%. Later in 1986, the tradition expanded to Nong Son Village, Chiang Yuen District, which

did not only preserve the approach but also added the ritual of worshipping the mother earth goddess to the traditions of the village. After seeing the benefit of this event the Faculty of Mass Communications at Maha Sarakham University considered it to be the province's annual rite and proposed the "Boon Boek Fah Festival" to Sawai Pramane, the Governor, as an annual event in collaboration with the Red Cross. The Governor discussed the proposal with the revered Pra Ariyanuwat, the abbot of Mahachai temple, who agreed with the idea. However, the project was suspended when the governor was moved to Nakhon Ratchasima in 1987. A year later Jin Wipaklat, the new Governor, implemented the idea and designated the event as the annual festival of Maha Sarakham. The festival lasts for 7 days and 7 nights and has been conducted ever since on every 3rd day of the month of the 3rd waxing moon.

The second example is the religious ceremony of the 3rd month or Boon Khao Chi (grilled sticky Rice) in Khon Kaen which is advertised so grandly every year as shown in Picture 4.

Picture 4 illustrates the advertisement for the religious ceremony of the 3rd month or Boon Khao Chi¹² held at Wat Chai Si in

¹² Khao Chi is a kind of food made from cooked sticky rice of a fistful sized spread with salt and/or egg and which is grilled on a stove until it looks golden brown. Boon Khao Chi is characterized by local people offering Khao Chi and other food to monks. Usually, Boon Khao Chi is observed at mid or end of the 3rd lunar month after Makha Bucha Day. That is why it is called the ceremony of the 3rd month.

Khon Kaen. In this advertisement, the main character from Sin Sai is used to name the event, literally translated as "Sin Sai, Boon Khao Chi, Isan ways of life" (สินไซบุญข้าวจี วิถีวัฒนธรรมอีสาน). In addition, Boon Khao Chi is one of the monthly traditions in Heet 12 which every community strictly observed. From the fact that Wat Chai Si used "Sin Sai" (สินไซ) as part of the event name it can be inferred that the organizers wanted their "Boon Khao Chi" (บุญข้าวจี) ritual to be outstanding and different from other Boon Khao Chi rituals in the northeastern region. Today, the Boon Khao Chi ritual at Wat Chai Si attracts a lot of Thais and foreign visitors.



Picture 4 Characters of the Sin Sai Tale to advertise the religious ceremony on the 3rd month or Boon Khao Chi (บุญข้าวจี) in 2016, Khon Kaen

Roi Et Province is the other province which observes the tradition of "Boon Phawet" or the ritual of the 4th month every year. Apart from merit making and Maha Jataka chanting, there are also grandiose processions telling the Jataka story that mimics the 13 chapters when

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Prince Vessantara, the last reincarnation of the lord Buddha before his enlightenment, was returning to the capital city. Once a big deal, Boon Phawet was brought back again in 1991, with the aim of promoting tourism in Roi Et Province.

Picture 5 is an example of the advertisement for the Boon Phawet of Roi Et in 2016. The advertisement relates the Jataka story of Vessantara and announces important activities in the event such as a procession, merit making and attending Maha Jataka chanting.



Picture 5 advertisement for Boon Phawet (บุญผะเหวด) or the 4th month ritual of Roi Et in 2016

This example of blending local tales and other folklore reflects the process of folklore adaptation in the cultural tourism context. The local attraction was chosen for its features. Even though some of the local attractions were of no historical significance originally, the attraction was created anew on the basis of responsibility and conscience towards the heritage of local wisdom. This component was then integrated with cultural and traditional tourism so that tourists could appreciate the local ways of life and belief while the community itself took part in the tourism. This approach appeared in many provinces throughout Thailand, for instance, Yasothon's Boon Bung Fai, Loei's Pee Ta

Khon parade, Saraburi's flower offerings to monks and Chiang Mai's Yee Peng Festival.

Summary

Local tales are the most diverse and broadest information of all folklore, displaying the art of the oral transmission of human experience which has been in existence ever since humans communicated with oral language. The transmission changed from oral to written for the sake of analysis and study implications. As oral transmission shares culture among a community, local tales are most widely adapted to modern globalized and capitalized tourism,

especially when government and private sector policy highlight local identity formation via products and tourism events. Local tales, thus, have been developed in many forms and have elevated their significance in modern Thai society.

Establishing local identity through local tales is regarded as a cultural reproduction which clearly demonstrates the dynamism of culture, especially in the case of publicizing local identity, the symbol of pride in one's own traditions and integrity. Most identities originate from shared experience and interaction among the members of society, shaping their conduct which conforms to social expectations. Because of the need to meet social demands, regulation was enforced and so were tradition and customs. All these are important components uniting a community and instituting the roots of a society. Modern identity changes rapidly as the lifestyle of people conforms to globalization which constantly exchanges information and culture and merges them together. Identity is now used to determine the similarities among the same group and to differentiate from others. It need not be a single entity; an identity can be composed of many qualities. Also, identity is a man-made notion that flows through the waves of change in the world as it is constituted and transmitted.

The presentation of identity of central Isan provinces through local tales, myths and rituals as discussed earlier reflects how they want to be perceived by others. This is a phenomenon in creative folklore that evolves and varies according to the social and cultural context; as Siraporn Na Thalung (2013: 51-52) says, identity and folklore are

closely connected. In a tradition based community, people define themselves or present their identity, group identity and ethnicity through folklore ranging from local tales, plays, dances, rites, food, wickerwork, costumes and utensils. All these form a mechanism separating "us" from "the others". As already clarified, identity always changes, depending on its owner's dynamics. In the past, defining ethnicity was obvious and easily defined, however complexity has grown in modern society in the context of tourism, creative economy and abroad. It has become a constructed identity or an invented identity in the current political, economic and social context.

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