

Tai Loei Local Wisdom: The Phi Ta Khon Festival in Dansai District, Loei Province and Changes in the Modern Era

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Abstract

This research article aims to 1) study the local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon festival in Dansai District, Loei Province, and 2) study the changes in the local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon festival in Dansai District, Loei Province, in relation to modern-day transformations. The research area is Dansai Subdistrict, Dansai District, Loei Province. Qualitative tools include in-depth interviews, focus groups, and brainstorming workshops, with data analyzed using descriptive content analysis.

The research findings are as follows:

1. The study of the local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon festival in Dansai District, Loei Province:
 - 1.1) In the past, after the Phi Ta Khon festivities were completed, villagers would throw the masks into the Man River, believing it would cast away evil spirits; 1.2) to preserve and restore the Phi Ta Khon festival, the village leader (Phor Guan) would set the event date. The masks were made from local materials such as coconut leaves, and old sticky rice steamers were used for the mask's head. People who joined the event as spiritual devotees were usually the elderly; 1.3) in the past, knowledge was passed down orally by elders and local sages; 1.4) economically, the tradition was once limited to the local community and observed strictly for its ritual purposes; 1.5) efforts were made to preserve the tradition's authenticity due to strong beliefs in ancient rituals, even as new cultural elements emerged; 1.6) in the past, the event was performed with strict adherence to rituals, including the attire. The costumes were made from old monk robes and leftover clothes, maintaining a traditional lifestyle.
2. The changes in the local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon festival in Dansai District, Loei Province: in ancient times, the tradition was held to invite Phra Upakut (a revered Buddhist figure) to drive away evil spirits and to escort the arrival of Phra Vessantara to the city. A procession would carry the Phor Guan atop rockets, circling the temple three times. The Phi Ta Khon festivities started early in the morning, mostly centered at Wat Phon Chai. Changes in recent times include adjusting the event schedule to weekends to attract tourists. 2.1) The tradition has changed in belief; after the event, masks are now kept at home for reuse the following year; 2.2) efforts to preserve the tradition's uniqueness continue, with the event now being held over weekends. Spiritual devotion, such as ordination as lay practitioners, now attracts people of all ages. 2.3) Today, exhibitions on the Phi Ta Khon festival are organized in educational institutions, with promotion through various social media channels. Government

and private organizations also take part in the event's management. 2.4) Economically, with the involvement of public and private sectors, the tradition has become a source of income for the community. 2.5) There is a fusion of the tradition with modern culture, using technology and new media to promote the event, including live broadcasts on social media. 2.6) The tradition has adapted to modern societal changes. The government now manages the event, adding modern musical instruments and parade trucks to appeal to younger generations. The costumes of the Phi Ta Khon have been standardized with bright, vivid colors, transforming the event into a "Phi Ta Khon Party."

Keywords: Tai Loei Local Wisdom, Phi Ta Khon Festival, Modern Era, Instrument

Local wisdom is a valuable and essential resource for the development of society and culture in Thailand. It not only encompasses the knowledge and skills passed down within communities but also reflects the concepts and ways of life that demonstrate the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the environment. Local wisdom, unique to each area, is a knowledge resource that reflects the intelligent patterns of life within both individuals and society (Royal Institute Dictionary, 2011). Thailand's cultural and ethnic diversity has resulted in a wide range of local wisdom across different regions, such as the use of herbal medicine in traditional healing, designing homes suitable for the climate, preparing local cuisine, and preserving long-standing traditions. These practices strengthen communities and help them adapt to various changes. Local wisdom arises from accumulated learning, observation, and experimentation, passed down over generations to enable communities to live harmoniously with their environment and develop culturally through life experiences (Wisutthisanon, 2015; Wantrong, 2017). The application of this local knowledge to address social and environmental issues is evident in sustainable agriculture, natural resource conservation, and promoting tourism that respects local culture. In today's rapidly changing world, local wisdom remains crucial for fostering cultural understanding, pride in one's roots, and ensuring communities maintain valuable traditions while coexisting with global society sustainably. In Dansai District, Loei Province, the Phi Ta Khon Festival

is a prime example of how local wisdom is integrated into community life. (Upahat. 2013) For instance:

Masks: Phi Ta Khon masks are made from leftover coconut shells, carved to feature large curved noses resembling elephant trunks. The mask's headpiece is made from discarded sticky rice steamers, a traditional woven tool used in Isan cuisine. The masks are colorfully painted, with eye holes cut for visibility.

Costumes: Phi Ta Khon participants wear loose clothing to allow free movement. The costumes are made from various fabrics like cotton or mesh, often decorated with scraps of cloth sewn together. The fabric used is typically leftover or old pieces torn into small strips.

Accessories: The costumes are adorned with jewelry such as necklaces, earrings, and bracelets made from local materials like seeds, beads, mulberry paper, or metal.

Belts: Participants often tie their waist with rope or fabric, attaching bells that jingle as they move, adding excitement to their dances in rhythm with the music.

The Phi Ta Khon festival spans three days:

Day One: The ceremony begins in the early hours (3:00 – 5:00 AM), with the village elders, led by the Phor Guan and Nang Tiam, gathering to invite the revered Phra Upakut, believed to possess magical powers and to reside in the ocean, to protect the area along the Man River. The procession, carrying sacred items like knives, spears, umbrellas, and flower trays, marches to the riverbank, where offerings are made, and the procession returns to Phonchai

Temple for rituals to ward off evil. Firecrackers and gunshots mark the moment when the Phi Ta Khon spirits awaken and join the celebration.

Day Two: The procession simulates the journey of Phra Vessantara and Nang Matri entering the city, symbolized by Phonchai Temple. The procession is joined by villagers and numerous Phi Ta Khon spirits. Before sunset, those dressed as the "Big Phi Ta Khon" must discard their costumes into the Man River, symbolizing the casting away of misfortune, to begin anew the following year.

Day Three: Villagers gather at the temple to listen to the sermon on the 13 chapters of the Vessantara Jataka. It is believed that hearing the entire sermon in one day brings great merit and promises a meeting with the future Buddha, Phra Si Ariya Metteyya. The day also features a vibrant procession of Phi Ta Khon spirits, local music, and a ceremony to bless the community, though no further playful activities take place. Instead, it is a day of religious rituals dedicated to honoring ancestors and venerating sacred objects.

Types of Phi Ta Khon:

Big Phi Ta Khon: Larger-than-life figures made from bamboo frames, covered in cloth or paper, and decorated with locally sourced materials. These figures represent both male and female characteristics, including pronounced genital features, which are believed to symbolize fertility, a belief rooted in ancient traditions.



Figure 1 Big Phi Ta Khon

The Small Phi Ta Khon is a playful activity in which both men and women from the community can participate, although it is more commonly performed by men. This is because

the game involves energetic and mischievous movements. The costumes are similar to those worn by the Big Phi Ta Khon, with participants dressing in vibrant, eye-catching outfits. However, small Phi Ta Khon masks are made from the base of coconut palm stalks and sticky rice steamers. These materials are sewn together, with facial features drawn onto the mask, including a nose designed to resemble a ghost. The costumes are often made from sewn-together fabric scraps, either as separate shirts and pants or as a full-body outfit, ensuring the entire body is fully covered. Traditionally, the small Phi Ta Khon masks were crafted from old sticky rice steamers, with the headpiece attached to the base of a coconut stalk. The facial portion of the mask featured a short, human-like nose, made from softwood, and was painted using natural dyes. Unlike modern versions, the original masks were simple, with no prominent patterns, maintaining an eerie and mysterious appearance to evoke fear. (Masasai, 2015)



Figure 2 Small Phi Takhon

Phi Ta Khon Wisdom

Wisdom refers to the knowledge that stems from the abilities, experiences, and ingenuity of local people. It is the result of accumulated experiences passed down through learning processes, selection, development, and transmission from ancestors to the current generation, ensuring its utility in everyday life. This wisdom encompasses various aspects, including practical skills, cultural practices, and community traditions, contributing to the preservation and continuation of local heritage. (Ankiew, 2020)



Figure 3 Local wisdom making Phi Ta Khon mask from unused materials



Figure 4 Local wisdom making various types of Phi Ta Khon masks

Wisdom refers to the knowledge, thoughts, beliefs, abilities, and clarity that a group of people has developed from accumulated experiences in adapting to their natural, social, and cultural environments, which have been passed down and developed over time. Local wisdom has been tested in real life, through the passage of time, circumstances, and the changing contexts of the economy and society. However, it may be adapted to situations and continue to flourish and grow (Talang, 2003 ; Inta,2018)

stated that local wisdom refers to the knowledge and skills of specific individuals that allow them to live appropriately in their social and cultural conditions, as well as the geographical characteristics of each area, which have been inherited and passed down from generation to generation. (Bunyakanjana, 2014) mentioned that the nature of wisdom encompasses the knowledge, abilities, and skills of communities that arise from accumulated experiences through the process of learning, selection, adaptation, development, and transmission, in order to solve problems and develop the community's way of life in a balanced and appropriate way for the times.

The Phi Ta Khon festival in Dansai District, Loei Province, is a tradition that has stored significant interest from local residents and tourists, both domestic and international. The Phi Ta Khon festival is a unique local tradition of Dansai District, Loei Province, which has been carried on and preserved by the local community. Currently, the festival has undergone significant changes from its original form, with various formats of celebration. Therefore, the researcher is interested in studying the local wisdom of the Tai Loei people: the Phi Ta Khon festival of Dansai District, Loei Province, and its changes in the modern era.

Literature review

(Naonadee, 2018) described wisdom as the knowledge, beliefs, and abilities of local people, accumulated through long periods of experience and learning. It has a holistic nature and cultural value. Likewise, (Thongupakorn,2018) stated that wisdom is unique and arises from the community's ability to adapt and modify the surrounding natural environment for appropriate use, reflecting human intelligence in creativity, adaptation, and practical application. This knowledge is refined, accumulated, and passed down from generation to generation, becoming wisdom. In 2002, the Office of the National Education Commission cited a statement from His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the

Great: "...The people have knowledge. They have been working for many generations. They work well. They are clever. They know where agriculture should be done and where it should be preserved..." His Majesty recognized that local wisdom is something that villagers have long utilized for survival.

Characteristics of Local Wisdom (Nuangchalem, 2003) include:

1. **Accumulated and Systematic Knowledge:** Local wisdom is knowledge that has been accumulated and passed down systematically through social learning, based on direct experiences, oral transmission, and written records. It reflects the relationships between humans, nature, and the supernatural. Local people create knowledge from real-life experiences, enabling them to live in balance with nature and the environment.

2. **Dynamic Nature:** Local wisdom is dynamic and evolves with changing social and environmental conditions, as well as lifestyles. The creation and adaptation of wisdom ensure its continued relevance to the local context, making it a form of knowledge that never remains static.

Methods for Preserving Local Wisdom:

The importance of local wisdom, which may be lost over time due to the disconnect between past and present, lies in its role as an intellectual heritage that has been accumulated and passed down to the present day (Office of the National Education Commission, 2002). These methods include:

1. **Promoting Local Experts:** Encourage local experts to fully share their knowledge and provide them with opportunities to continuously improve their work to achieve quality and recognition. This will inspire local communities to take pride and have confidence in their heritage.

2. **Identifying Local Experts:** Seek out individuals with deep expertise in their fields. Since many locals are unfamiliar with self-promotion, government and related organizations should support them by creating

opportunities through selection, contests, or other means to publicize their achievements.

3. **Collecting Local Wisdom Data:** Collaborate with cultural centers, state and private organizations, and universities to gather accurate and detailed information on local wisdom across villages and districts. This data should then be published in various formats, including digital media, for widespread dissemination.

4. **Promoting Awareness:** Once prominent examples of local wisdom are selected, appropriate media should be used to raise awareness and encourage others to learn from this knowledge.

5. **Supporting Research:** Encourage research and study of local wisdom to deepen understanding and improve its application for future generations.

6. **Transmitting Local Wisdom to the Next Generation:** Efforts should be made to pass on this knowledge to younger generations, incorporating local wisdom into educational curricula. Collaboration between the public and private sectors is crucial in supporting the preservation and promotion of local wisdom, ensuring legal protections through copyrights and patents.

The Phi Ta Khon Tradition

Phi Ta Khon is a traditional folk performance that takes place during the "Bun Luang Festival," a major merit-making event for the people of Dansai. This festival blends several merit-making ceremonies, or "Heed" (traditional customs) of the Tai Lao culture. It includes the Bun Phawet (Vessantara Jataka) ceremony, Bun Bang Fai (Rocket Festival), and Bun Samha (cleansing and purification) (Chauboonmee, 2009). The event is held annually in June, with participants wearing grotesque masks and playfully teasing people on the streets or in the village to both frighten and amuse them at the same time (Chauboonmee, 2009). A key aspect of the festival involves attempting "to drag Phi Ta Khon into the temple," symbolizing that these masked figures, considered forest spirits or

demons, accompany Prince Vessantara (a former life of the Buddha) back to the city after completing his virtuous deeds in the forest, as described in the Vessantara Jataka of Buddhist literature. This process of leading the masked figures to join the procession mirrors the symbolic role of Phi Ta Khon in escorting Vessantara back into the city.

The Phi Ta Khon tradition has been passed down through generations, rooted in the environment, history, beliefs, faith, and community ties to Buddhism. This enduring tradition reflects the cultural identity and heritage of the local people (Kanthang, Tanyapirom, Panthuphakorn, 2017). However, as society has rapidly evolved under the influence of globalization, the tradition has undergone changes to adapt to modern trends. The preservation of this traditional culture requires adjustments and transformation to fit with the times. This has led to the alteration of some customs and traditions, influenced by new societal values, the economy, politics, technology, and the adoption of new practices. As a result, old beliefs have slowly faded, and the true meaning of these customs has been distorted or diminished over time. This shift demonstrates the impact of modern society on the transformation of long-standing traditions, as the original cultural significance gradually loses its place in the evolving world.

Changes in the modern era

The creation of Phi Ta Khon has traditionally been simple and straightforward, reflecting the ways of thinking and beliefs of the local people. It showcases their faith, culture, and identity through folk art. Although Phi Ta Khon has been passed down from generation to generation, changes in time and thought processes have significantly impacted it. Influences such as global tourism trends, formal education, internet access, and competitive festivals have introduced new factors. As a result, this folk art form has had to adapt, evolving in response to environmental conditions and the expectations of outsiders,

especially tourists. To meet these new demands, modern artistic principles have been incorporated into Phi Ta Khon, transforming it into a captivating creative art form. This includes the use of vibrant, modern paints to decorate the masks in bright, eye-catching colors. The costumes, once simpler, are now elaborately tailored with flowing fabrics in various colors, designed with more care and attention to detail than in the past. These changes have made Phi Ta Khon visually stunning, unusual, and unique, influencing parade performances and village competitions (Kaengchampa, 2019); Teerapat Kamting & Pakpoom Sukcharoen, 2021; Sutthinun Sri-on, 2022). Even though creative Phi Ta Khon has been developed with new forms, colors, and modern materials, the creators still blend local cultural beliefs and inspirations into the design. This keeps the new artistic style grounded in the tradition of Dansai's local wisdom. However, the evolution and changes have also displaced some of the traditional folk art elements, pushing them out of the cultural space permanently. The new, creative Phi Ta Khon continues to captivate locals and tourists alike, offering a new aesthetic experience and allowing visitors to appreciate its artistic value. The transformation of Phi Ta Khon from a folk tradition into creative art shows how external and internal community factors have driven its evolution. This evolution, though, has also changed the original purpose of Phi Ta Khon, once a key part of the Bun Luang merit-making ceremony. The author aims to highlight the shift of Phi Ta Khon from traditional folk art to creative art.

Methodology

This research is qualitative and was conducted to answer the research objectives with the following data collection methods:

3.1 Study of local wisdom in the Phi Ta Khon tradition of Dansai District, Loei Province. The research was conducted to gather data by conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

3.1.1 In-depth interviews to study local wisdom in the Phi Ta Khon tradition in Dansai District, Loei Province, involving representatives from relevant agencies responsible for promoting local wisdom and traditions. This included 1 provincial cultural officer, 1 university administrator, 1 district officer, 2 university lecturers, 2 scholars, and 3 local wisdom experts—a total of 10 people (Saaty, 1970). All participants had experience and expertise in local wisdom and traditions at the provincial, higher education, educational district, and community levels.

3.1.2 Focus group discussions to conduct in-depth interviews on the local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon tradition in Dansai District, Loei Province, and its changes in modern times. The participants included 1 provincial cultural officer, 1 university president representative, 1 district officer, 1 school principal, 2 local wisdom teachers, 3 scholars, and 4 local wisdom experts—a total of 13 people (Morgan dl. 1998). These individuals had relevant experience in local wisdom and traditions at provincial, higher education, educational district, and community levels.

3.2 To study the changes in the local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon festival in Dansai District, Loei Province, in modern times, the research used in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and brainstorming sessions, detailed as follows:

3.2.1 In-depth interviews to study local wisdom in the Phi Ta Khon tradition in Dansai District, Loei Province, involving 1 provincial cultural officer, 1 university administrator, 1 district officer, 2 university lecturers, 2 scholars, and 3 local wisdom experts—a total of 10 people (Saaty, 2004). All had relevant expertise in local wisdom and traditions.

3.2.2 Focus group discussions to study changes in the local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon tradition in modern times. The participants included 1 provincial cultural officer, 1 university president representative, 1 district officer, 1 school principal, 2 local wisdom

teachers, 3 scholars, and 4 local wisdom experts—a total of 13 people (Morgan dl. 1998).

3.2.3 Brainstorming sessions on changes in the local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon tradition in Dansai District, Loei Province, and modern transformations. Participants included 1 current and 1 former provincial cultural officer, 1 former university president, 1 deputy university president, 2 university administrators, 1 district officer, 2 university lecturers, 1 former cultural director, 2 scholars, and 3 local wisdom experts—a total of 15 people (Supachokchai, 2014).

Research Instruments

1. The in-depth interview guide covered the following topics: (1) the history of the Phi Ta Khon tradition, (2) beliefs or legends related to Phi Ta Khon, (3) the elements and attire of the Phi Ta Khon tradition, and (4) changes in the tradition, based on Objective 2.

2. The focus group discussion guide addressed questions from Objective 1 and 2: (1) What do you think about the changes in the Phi Ta Khon tradition in modern times? (2) What aspects of the Phi Ta Khon tradition do you believe have changed?

3. The brainstorming session covered 6 key issues related to changes in local wisdom in the Phi Ta Khon tradition: 3.1) Changes in beliefs. 3.2) Conservation and restoration. 3.3) Education. 3.4) Economics. 3.5) Integration with modern culture. 3.6) Adaptation to social changes in the tradition.

Data Analysis

This research employs a qualitative approach through content analysis with a descriptive narrative method. Before conducting the analysis, the researcher ensures data reliability by using triangulation techniques in two aspects: data collection methods and sources.

Data Collection Methods

The research is divided into two phases as follows:

Phase 1: Study of the Current State of the Phi Ta Khon tradition

1. In-depth interviews were conducted with administrators involved in the history and local wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon tradition.

2. Focus group discussions were held on local wisdom related to the Phi Ta Khon tradition.

The data from these interviews and discussions were synthesized into a history and overview of the Phi Ta Khon tradition and local wisdom. The synthesized information was then presented to participants for further brainstorming.

Phase 2: Study of the Changes in Local Wisdom within the Phi Ta Khon tradition

1. Interviews regarding the changes in local wisdom were conducted with 10 representatives.

2. A focus group discussion with 13 representatives was organized to study the tradition.

3. A brainstorming session with 15 experts was held to gather opinions, using a mind map to examine the changes in local wisdom concerning the Phi Ta Khon tradition.

Results

The Phi Ta Khon festival, held in Dansai District, Loei Province, Thailand, is believed to bring good fortune to the village. It is thought that those who participate in the dance while wearing the masks will be relieved of suffering, free from illness, and will lead prosperous lives. The festival is typically held in June each year, lasting about three days: Day One: Known as "Wan Ruam" or "Home Day," the key ritual is the summoning of Phra Uppakut, a revered figure in Buddhist tradition. Day Two: The procession of Phra Vessantara entering the town (or the Phi Ta Khon parade), which is also known as "Phi Tam Khon" (ghost following humans), later becoming the term "Phi Ta Khon." Day Three: A day dedicated to listening to the 13 chapters of the Great Vessantara Jataka sermon. The scheduling of the event is determined by the Chao Por Kuan, a local spiritual leader, who is responsible for conducting the rituals. The Phi Ta

Khon tradition reflects the local wisdom of Dansai, symbolizing the relationships between people, nature, and the supernatural. A unique symbol of this tradition is the use of genital imagery, which signifies the union of heaven and earth, male and female, representing the fertility and abundance of life. This local wisdom has been passed down through generations, ensuring its continuity today. As the Phi Ta Khon tradition is unique to Dansai, it has been developed to enhance both its cultural and economic value. (Phoungmanee and Sriryparimar. 2023) The event has thus transformed the local cultural space, influenced by factors such as economy, society, and tourism. These have driven the preservation and adaptation of the tradition, allowing both locals and visitors to participate in and perpetuate the cultural heritage.

Changes in the Traditional Wisdom of the Phi Ta Khon Festival in Dan Sai District, Loei Province

1. Belief Aspect: The Phi Ta Khon festival originates from the belief in spirits that protect people and communities. Phi Ta Khon is seen as a symbol of communication between the human world and the spirit world. Traditionally, after the festival, the Phi Ta Khon masks are discarded into the Mun River as a way to release grief, sorrow, and negativity. However, nowadays, there has been a change. The masks can now be kept at home for decoration or reused in the following year. The local community takes great pride in their traditions, and this festival has become known both in Thailand and globally, fostering unity among the people. During the festival, those who work elsewhere often return to participate in this important event.

2. Conservation and Revival Aspect: In the past, Phi Ta Khon masks were simply decorated with basic patterns, and sticky rice steaming baskets were sewn together to create the head of the mask. Today, the masks are more elaborately decorated with bright and striking colors. This reflects the continuity of the artistic performances.

3. Educational Aspect: Exhibitions and activities related to the Phi Ta Khon tradition are held in educational institutions to help younger generations understand and appreciate the value of this tradition.

4. Economic Aspect: The Phi Ta Khon tradition provides the community with opportunities to generate income through the sale of souvenirs, local food, and organizing cultural tourism activities. Cultural tourism has attracted government support, enabling local communities to creatively incorporate their wisdom into the festival's parades, with competitions held between different localities.

5. Integration with Modern Culture: Modern technology and media have been integrated into promoting the festival, with live broadcasts on social media platforms. Technology such as drones and global live streams are now used in the festival, and content creators also help spread knowledge about the Phi Ta Khon culture and traditions.

6. Adaptation to Social Changes: To meet the interests of the younger generation, the Phi Ta Khon costumes have been modernized, with more unified and contemporary designs. Participants from each locality compete with increasingly elaborate fantasy costumes to stand out. Additionally, the Phi Ta Khon performers engage and entertain spectators with playful dances, willingly posing for photos with tourists.

Conclusion and discussion

5.1 Conclusion

The Phi Ta Khon festival in Dansai District, Loei Province, Thailand, is an event that combines "Bun Luang" (a major merit-making ceremony for the nobility), including the Pha Wet (Phra Vessantara) sermon, the Bun Bang Fai (rocket festival), and Bun Samha (a ritual for cleansing misfortunes), along with the playful Phi Ta Khon tradition. This long-practiced tradition is believed to drive away evil spirits and bring good fortune. Participants wear masks made from wood or natural materials, often featuring vibrant designs, and perform lively

activities such as dancing, storytelling, and cultural expressions, reflecting the beliefs and spirit of the community. People believe that Phi Ta Khon serves as a symbol of protection and exorcism, bringing prosperity to the community.

Local wisdom plays a crucial role in the Phi Ta Khon festival in various ways. These aspects are interwoven with local wisdom applied in the making of the masks, which are crafted from leftover local materials and adorned with colorful patterns and carvings. Additionally, agricultural products are processed and sold, particularly notable is the "Nam Phak Sathon" (Sathon leaf drink), made from local Sathon leaves in Dansai. This contributes to the spread of local culture and way of life to other communities, tourists, and the global audience, showcasing the local wisdom and adaptations of the community in Dansai District, Loei Province, Thailand. The changes and adaptations of local wisdom in the Phi Ta Khon tradition can be observed in six key areas: 1) Beliefs: The origin of the Phi Ta Khon tradition is rooted in the belief in spirits. Phi Ta Khon is considered a symbol of communication between the human world and the spirit world. In the past, after the festival, the costumes and masks were discarded in the Mun River to release sorrow. Today, however, the masks can be kept at home and reused for future years. 2) Preservation and Restoration: In the past, Phi Ta Khon masks were simply painted, with the head made from sticky rice steaming baskets sewn together. Nowadays, the masks are painted in more vivid and intricate designs. 3) Education: Exhibitions and presentations about the Phi Ta Khon tradition are organized in educational institutions to help younger generations understand and appreciate the value of this tradition. 4) Economy: The Phi Ta Khon tradition offers opportunities for the community to generate income through the sale of souvenirs, local foods, and tourism activities. Cultural tourism has been promoted, leading to government support for the community. 5) Integration with Modern Culture: Modern technology and media are used for the promotion

of the Phi Ta Khon tradition, including live broadcasts and content creation by creators, helping to spread awareness of the tradition globally. 7) Adaptation to Social Changes: To align with the interests of the younger generation, the Phi Ta Khon costumes have become more uniform and contemporary. Fantasy-style costumes are now commonly used, especially in competitions, to create a striking appearance. Additionally, Phi Ta Khon participants engage with the audience in fun, playful ways, willingly posing for photos with tourists.



Photo from Loei book document 1990



Attires of modern Phi Ta Khon
Pharmacist Darin Jungpatanawadi

5.2 Discussion

Phi Ta Khon is a festival held in Dansai district, Loei province, Thailand. It is a tradition that takes place every year in June and lasts for about three days. The first day is called "Wan Ruam" or "Home Day," and features the Phi Ta Khon festival, which includes the "Berk Phra Upakhut" ritual. The second day is the parade of the Vessantara Jataka, also known as the Phi Ta Khon procession, which over time has come to be referred to as "Phi Ta Khon." The third day is dedicated to listening to the "13 Sermons of the

Great Vessantara Jataka." The schedule for the festival is set by the "Chao Pho Kuan," the spiritual leader of the Dan Sai community. Phi Ta Khon reflects the community's wisdom and cultural rituals, as highlighted by research from scholars like Phuengpracha (2014), Hongsuwan (2015), and Puangmanee (2023). The festival symbolizes key Buddhist rituals such as the procession of the Vessantara Jataka and the listening to sermons, all of which are believed to honor spirits and ensure timely rain. The highlight of the festival is the Phi Ta Khon performance, where participants dress as ghosts, wearing masks made from steamed sticky rice baskets and coconut husks, sewn together and painted in bright colors. The masks have two eye holes and long noses resembling elephant trunks. Costumes are made from scraps of cloth, and participants wear bells around their waists, making sounds as they walk. They also carry wooden weapons, often painted red at the tips for added visual impact. Mask-making, a key feature of the festival, reflects local craftsmanship, passed down through generations. This art form has helped promote Phi Ta Khon as a major tourist attraction, as noted by scholars like (Buasri. 1997) and (Upahat 2013).

The local wisdom of Dansai also extends to nutrition. For instance, "Pak Sathon juice," made from a local vegetable, has been incorporated into the festival's cuisine. Research by Samran (2009) shows that Pak Sathon juice can be used to create dishes like "Som Tam Pak Sathon" and chili paste, providing nutritional benefits. (Sakuljaitrong's. 2017) research found that extracts from Pak Sathon can help manage diabetes and lower blood lipids. Local wisdom is continuously tested and adapted to changing social, economic, and cultural contexts, as explained by scholars like (Ekkawit 2003 ; Inta.2018). This knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, with an understanding of how to live in balance with the environment. For instance, masks used in the Phi Ta Khon festival were traditionally blackened using soot from clay pots, but modern masks are now

brightly painted. The festival has also become a means of boosting the local economy, with hotels, homestays, and local produce, such as avocados, rambutans, and pineapples, being promoted.

Changes in the Phi Ta Khon tradition reflect broader societal shifts. Research by (Kantang, Tanyapirom, and Phanthupakorn, 2017) highlights how the festival has been adapted for preservation, while remaining relevant to modern times. The festival has also become a platform for cultural education, with exhibitions and events aimed at raising awareness among younger generations. Economically, the festival offers opportunities for local communities to earn income through selling souvenirs, local foods, and organizing tourism activities. The festival has gained recognition as a major cultural event, thanks in part to the promotion efforts of the Tourism Authority of Thailand since the 1980s, as researched by (Chaicharin, 2019). Technological advancements have also

influenced the festival. Live streaming on social media has increased its visibility, allowing more people to participate virtually, as discussed by (Thaiphosri and (Pirayasurawong 2024). Furthermore, changes in social expectations have led to adaptations in the costumes and overall presentation of the event. In summary, the Phi Ta Khon tradition has evolved to balance traditional wisdom with modern influences, making it a living cultural heritage that continues to thrive.

Suggestion

1. Research should be conducted on the traditions and cultures of other communities in Loei Province.
2. A small book about the Phi Ta Khon tradition should be created as a local learning resource for further dissemination.
3. An e-book version should be developed for wider distribution.

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