

Special Feature

Chiang Mai's

Intangible Cultural

Heritage: *Urban Revitalization &*

Cultural Identity in a Northern Thai City

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Abstract

Founded in 1296 CE, the walled city of Chiang Mai, Thailand was once the capital of the Lanna kingdom. In the sixteenth century, Chiang Mai's fortunes waned, and it became a tributary state under the Burmese. This was followed by its incorporation into the Thai nation-state in the twentieth century. One outcome of Chiang Mai's administrative integration into the Thai nation was the erosion of its distinctive cultural identity. Beginning in the 1980s, key local figures began to collaborate with communities and academic institutions to revitalize Chiang Mai's intangible cultural heritage, including its craft traditions, rituals, textiles, and dance performances. After tracing a brief history of Chiang Mai and the Lanna revitalization movement, this article analyzes two rituals – the Candle Lighting ritual and the Yor Suai Wai Sa Phraya Mangrai ritual – to illustrate how community-based organizations in Chiang Mai have worked together to restore the city's spirit of place, contributing to its resilience and sustainability.

Keywords: Chiang Mai, Intangible Cultural Heritage Revitalization, Urban Identity, Urban Resilience, Urban Sustainability, Ritual, Thailand

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Introduction

While heritage scholarship has long focused on the value of built heritage for urban identity, more recent studies have been seeking to understand how intangible culture contributes to the resilience and sustainability of urban communities. Defined in the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage as the “practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups, and sometimes individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage,” intangible heritage is expressed in oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge concerning nature and the universe, and crafts. At the 2019 Forum on Intangible Cultural Heritage in Urban Contexts, held in Bogota, Colombia, scholars, heritage experts, and urban community organizers from eight cities around the world came together to share insights about how intangible heritage fostered social cohesion among diverse urban populations and contributed to social, economic, and environmental sustainability. For instance, in the case of Kathmandu, Maharjan (2020) showed that traditional kinship-based ritual organizations called Guthi were instrumental in organizing an important annual festival called Yena Punhi in the wake of the 2015 earthquake that devastated the city. As Maharjan explains, organizing the ritual after the disaster was a way to strengthen community solidarity in the face of a crisis, thus “avoiding bad omens for the country and people (2002:23).” In another case study from Paris, Bony (2020) describes the work of an association called Île du Monde to inventory and document the diverse intangible living heritage of Paris’ many migrant communities, with the aim of promoting visibility and fostering a more inclusive urban society through social dialog between groups. Given the expansion of migrant communities throughout most of the world’s cities, such efforts to recognize “traveling” (Schep 2020:58) or “diasporic” intangible heritage are vital to nurturing peace and social cohesion.

Turning now to the case of Chiang Mai, this article aims to show that intangible cultural heritage has been essential to the city’s resilience and cultural continuity. Since its inception in the 13th century, Chiang Mai’s identity has been constituted through ritual practices and performances which propitiate the spirits of the city and the surrounding natural landscape. Through an examination of historical sources such as the Chiang Mai Chronicle (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1998), the first section of this article will demonstrate the central role that ritual and festive events played in the establishment and development of the city. From the sixteenth century onwards, Chiang Mai’s fortunes declined, and it became a tributary state under the Burmese. This article will show that once King Kawila reclaimed Chiang Mai from the Burmese in the 18th century, a key part of his restoration of Chiang Mai was the revival of intangible cultural heritage—particularly ritual practices associated with the founder’s spirit and the sacred mountain of Doi Suthep.

The article then turns to a discussion Chiang Mai’s incorporation into Siam, and finally its integration into the Thai nation-state. One consequence of Chiang Mai’s administrative incorporation into the Thai nation in the twentieth century was the erosion of its distinctive linguistic and cultural identity. Beginning in the 1980s, key local figures began to collaborate with communities and academic institutions

to revitalize Chiang Mai's intangible cultural heritage, including its craft traditions, rituals, textiles, and dance performances. After tracing a brief history of the Lanna revitalization movement, this article will present a case study of two more recent rituals—the Candle Lighting ritual and the Yor Suai Wai Sa Phraya Mangrai ritual—to illustrate how different actors and community-based organizations in Chiang Mai have worked together to restore the city's spirit of place in the face of the threats of overdevelopment and tourism. To conclude, this article argues that in all phases of Chiang Mai's history, intangible cultural heritage has been a vital source of community strength and continuity.

A Brief History of Chiang Mai and Its First Restoration in the Eighteenth Century

Founded in 1296 CE by King Mangrai, the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai is widely recognized and celebrated for its rich and distinctive cultural heritage. Chiang Mai, which means “the new city,” was built on an alluvial flood plain of the Ping River at the foot of the sacred mountain of Doi Suthep. With its ancient city walls, moats, and unique Lanna-style Buddhist monasteries, the built heritage of Chiang Mai still evokes the golden era of its history as the capital of the Lanna kingdom, which reached its zenith under King Tilokkarat (r. 1441-1487) in the fifteenth century, encompassing Northern Thailand and parts of present-day Laos, Myanmar, and Southern China.



Figure 1. Panoramic view of Chiang Mai City located on a flood plain of the Ping River. Source: Chiang Mai World Heritage Initiative Project, 2018.

While the distinct built heritage of Buddhist monasteries and brick ramparts are enduring features of the city which are still observable today, the Chiang Mai Chronicle tells us that Chiang Mai's founder, King Mangrai, was equally concerned about the ritual practices and propitiation of guardian spirits who would protect the city and ensure its wealth and abundance. Indeed, before beginning the construction of the city walls, King Mangrai appealed to the spirits of place. The Chiang Mai Chronicle tells us that the founders,

performed an offering ceremony consisting of three parts, /one for the auspicious site where they would found the city; a second one for the albino Mouse Spirit in the midst of the city; and the third one further divided into five parts for the five gates they would erect [...] The three kings had the sacrifice-officiants divided into six groups to petition all the heavenly spirits [devata] to come and protect the city at the auspicious site in the center of the city as well as the five gates, on that day (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1998:78).

In the sixteenth century, the Lanna kingdom weakened and fell to the invading Burmese. Over the course of two hundred years of occupation (1558-1775), Lanna was further fragmented by recurrent warfare and insurrections against the Burmese occupiers. In 1775, Lanna princes agreed to become vassals to the rulers of the Siamese kingdom to drive out the Burmese—a long process which took more than twenty years, during which time much of the populace of Chiang Mai fled or was forcibly resettled. One of the leaders in the revolt against the Burmese, Cao Kawila, became Chiang Mai's new king in 1782. As recounted in the Chiang Mai Chronicle, King Kawila restored the city by resettling populations and rebuilding its walls, forts, and Buddhist monasteries. The Chronicle also describes in detail the return of music, dance, festivities, and ceremonies to the city (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1998:262).



Figure 2. Portrait of Kawila. Source: Chiang Mai Art and Culture Centre, 2006.

It is significant to note that reclaiming the capital of Chiang Mai was not only a matter of driving out the invaders and repopulating the city. Rather, it involved reasserting the continuity of Chiang Mai by restoring both the material and intangible heritage that had been established by its founder and previous rulers. This is exemplified in a quote from the Chiang Mai Chronicle, which describes the renewal of cultural heritage undertaken by King Kawila.

Chiang Mai was now replete with walls, observation towers, fighting towers, and gate towers; and moats wide and deep and formidable with water and filled with profusely spreading white and red lotuses; and it had many temples flourishing; and the city was now replete with officers military/and civil, with chiefs and followers, and with a great population; and amply supplied with food and drink, with coconut and sugar palms, with betel and areca, with fruits, with rice in abundance; and in happiness there were entertainments and festivities, celebrations, music and singing, with all kinds of poetry, with stringed instruments and percussion;/with dancing, the music of orchestras, gongs oboes, khaen, gamelan, thalo and thiso music, phia music, phin, pan do drums, and conch-shell trumpets playing loudly and tumultuously day and night, banishing sadness and melancholy, in religious ceremonies (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1998:261-262).

Another example of the restoration of heritage by King Kawila was his reinstallation of the sacred pillar of the city, called the lak muang (Sanguan 1971, Tanabe 2000). Currently located at Wat Chedi Luang temple, the pillar is believed to contain the spirit of the city's founder, King Mangrai. The worship of a central pillar for fertility and protection was originally an animist practice of the indigenous Lawa people, a Mon-Khmer speaking group who occupied the region of Chiang Mai prior to the arrival of the Lanna kings, who were ethnically Thai. Lanna kings who came to rule in the region from the 13th century onwards adopted these indigenous Lawa beliefs and practices, transforming the pillar into a syncretic Hindu-Buddhist and animist symbol of their own political power and spiritual authority. Records show that the pillar of Chiang Mai was originally located at the compound of Wat Inthakhin, or Wat Sadue Mueang (the Navel of the City), but it was moved to Wat Chedi Luang by King Kawila circa 1800 as part of his restoration of Chiang Mai (Sanguan 1971:213). Since that time, annual rituals invoking the founder's spirit to ensure the continued well-being and prosperity of the city have been held at the Inthakhin Pillar, including elaborate offerings of food, flowers, candles, incense.

Yet another aspect of King Kawila's restoration was the city's relationship to the sacred mountain, Doi Suthep. According to the Chiang Mai Chronicle (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1998), Chiang Mai's founder, King Mangrai, chose the location for the "new city" first and foremost because of its proximity to the auspicious mountain of Doi Suthep. Doi Suthep is a watershed and the primary source of Chiang Mai's water supply. Water flowed from the mountain into the moated city and surrounding settlements via several tributaries and channels (Sarassawadee 2020). The beliefs and practices relating to Doi Suthep as a sacred mountain reflected a local understanding of its important role as the source of Chiang Mai's security and prosperity. Legends illustrate that local populations believed that Doi Suthep was inhabited by ancestral guardian spirits who protected the city's inhabitants and sustained its wealth and well-being (Swearer 2004, Tanabe 2000). The ritual complex relating to Doi Suthep mountain is syncretic, embodying both animist beliefs about the spirits of place and Theravada Buddhist beliefs. Annual rituals to appease the spirits of the mountain and religious pilgrimages to venerate the Buddha's relics at monasteries on the mountain can be broadly understood as a symbolic acknowledgement of the city's spiritual and material dependence on

Doi Suthep for its continuity, protection, and security. As Swearer (2004) states, “mountain and city are inextricably bound together and [...] their fates are mutually interdependent. This symbiosis depends on the fact that the mountain as a unique locus of the sacred, a special symbol of transcendence, is perceived as different from, yet essential to, the identity of the city (35).”

Thus, when King Kawila sought to restore Chiang Mai, he also sought to reaffirm the symbolic and material importance of Doi Suthep mountain, and the holy Buddha relic enshrined in a stupa by Chiang Mai's King Kue Na in 1383 CE. The Chiang Mai Chronicle tells us that in 1806, the king “made meritorious donations and built a vihara on the west side of Wat Doi Uesupabanphotagiri [Suthep] and erected a parasol at the holy reliquary of Suthep which he inaugurated and consecrated on the full-moon day of the sixth month, a Wednesday (21 February 1806) (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1998:257).” The king also built the main vihara on the east side of Doi Suthep mountain (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1998:260). These acts forged the connection between King Kawila and the sacred mountain, thus contributing to his legitimacy as ruler of Chiang Mai.

Through the first half of the 1800s, although formally under Siamese authority, King Kawila's successors were able to rule Chiang Mai semi-autonomously. This changed with the arrival of Western colonial interests in the region, specifically Britain and France. Seeking to protect their political and economic interests, King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910) of the Chakri dynasty of Siam introduced major administrative and legal reforms which brought Chiang Mai and other tributary states under control of the Bangkok government. These reforms impacted all aspects of society in Lanna, as the system of debt bondage and traditional slavery was abolished, leaving local rulers without their laborers and conscripts (Penth 2004:138). Beginning in the 1880s, the Bangkok court also began to send resident royal commissioners to the north to manage the integration of Chiang Mai into the central administration. In 1892, the provinces were brought directly under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, which introduced a hierarchical system of governance and taxation.¹

As the Thai historian Sarassawadee (2005) has shown, the incorporation of Lanna into Siam transformed the local culture and political economy. “Local customs dating back hundreds of years came to an end. Lan Na was no longer able to direct its own destiny (2005:179).” While King Chulalongkorn sought to introduce reforms gradually to avoid conflict, the changes nonetheless led to various instances of revolt and resistance. Sarassawadee mentions the case of Lanna nobility asking spirit mediums to contact local tutelary spirits to demand the repeal of taxes and reforms (2005:185). Another rebellion took place in 1902, when over six hundred residents of Chiang Mai gathered at the district office with weapons to protest labor conscription to build roads (ibid:206).

Sarassawadee (2005) notes that these rebellions prompted the ruling authorities in Bangkok to implement further reforms in the areas of education, infrastructure, public health, religion, and communication, with the aim of assimilating the Lanna people and forging national unity. The introduction of the central Thai

language in schools and as the official language of the government led to the stigmatization of the local Lanna script and language. Furthermore, the 1902 Sangha Administration Act brought formerly independent northern Buddhist monasteries under the national ecclesiastical structure. Rather than learning their own Lanna history and traditional knowledge in the local Buddhist monasteries, young people were required to learn central Thai history and customs in state schools.

Many forms of Lanna's intangible heritage were stigmatized and marginalized during this period, including oral narratives, textiles, and other local crafts, as well as rituals involving beliefs about the spirits (particularly spirit mediumship rites), which were viewed as primitive and backwards. Moreover, during the era of hyper-nationalism under Field Marshall Phibulsongkram (1938-1944 and 1948-1957), cultural policies prohibited traditional northern attire and tattoos in favor of a more modest attire considered to be appropriate and modern (Pear 2020). Taken together, by the mid-twentieth century, these government policies promoting national unity and cultural homogeneity had already eroded much of Lanna's distinctive cultural identity.

Those practices that did continue—such as the annual ceremony to worship the Inthakhin pillar mentioned above—were significantly modified, with animist elements downplayed or removed. For instance, for the Inthakhin ceremony, in the past, the ceremony was organized by the Chiang Mai court, which called upon local Lanna chiefs and the populace to join in preparing offerings and performances to venerate the city pillar. Sanguan (1971) explains that historically the ceremony also included animal sacrifice and spirit mediumship rites to foretell the future of the city, but these aspects were abolished at the turn of the 20th century. In the 1960s, organization of the ceremony was taken over by the municipal government, and the aspects dealing with spirit mediumship were relegated to a different time and ritual space, at the northeast corner of the old city wall, called Jaeng Sri Phum. As stated by Tanabe, “The Inthakhin cult was redefined as a display of municipal authority within the modern nation-state (2000:308).”

Chiang Mai's Second Restoration: Cultural Resistance and the 700th Anniversary of Lanna

As we saw above, during the early period of Chiang Mai's incorporation into the modern Thai nation-state, there were numerous instances of popular resistance to cultural assimilation. In addition, prolific local scholars such as Sanguan Chotisukharat sought to sustain local consciousness and pride of Lanna's unique cultural and historical identity through research and writing about Northern history and culture. Another prominent local citizen and activist, Mr. Kraisi Nimmanheimin, formed a network called Chomrom Lannakhadi (Lanna Studies group) and led a campaign to establish a regional university in the north, which could be an educational center of learning about Lanna culture.² Despite these early efforts, as the years went by, the socio-economic and educational reforms introduced by Bangkok had significant impacts and led to the erosion of Chiang Mai's language and culture among the broader populace.

As shown by Duongchan (2007), starting in the 1960s, the National and Economic Social Development Plans introduced major infrastructural and economic policies which transformed Chiang Mai's urban and social landscape. As part of the first economic plan, Chiang Mai was designated as a tourism destination, initiating the shift away from the agricultural sector to services. By the time of the fifth plan (1982-1986), the city was designated as the economic center for the northern region, leading to a massive influx of government investments in infrastructure. This was followed by a boom in property investment and business entrepreneurship, mostly by Thais from Bangkok.



Figure 3. The construction of Diamond Riverside Hotel in 1992, taken by Boonserm Satrapai. Source: Chiang Mai University, 2022.

It was during this economic boom period that local heritage revitalization and conservation initiatives began to gain momentum. One of the most important events was the local resistance movement against the building of a cable car up the sacred mountain of Doi Suthep in 1986, which was intended to encourage the commercial development of tourism. Scholars, citizens, students, and members of the Buddhist clergy protested the proposal, arguing that the cable car represented a violation of the sacred space and symbolism of the mountain in the hearts of Chiang Mai people (Swearer 2004:33; Duongchan 2007:363). As Duongchan notes, as part of their protest, monks and local citizens joined together in a Buddhist ritual at the Three Kings monument in the center of Chiang Mai, asserting the sacred status of the mountain and calling for the rejection of the cable car proposal. This was the first instance where ritual was used explicitly as a mechanism to unify the Chiang Mai populace in opposition to developments led by outsiders. Another example of ritual as resistance was the opposition to the construction of high-rise buildings near the Ping River. In this case, rituals to curse those who had built the structures were performed using the ashes of the deceased (Duongchan 2007:364).

Around the same time that civil society networks were leading protest movements against unsustainable development, faculty at the Department of Fine Arts at Chiang Mai University (CMU) were beginning to study and revitalize Lanna intangible cultural heritage, including crafts such as textiles, folk music, lacquerware, and ritual traditions related to spirit of the city, such as the Inthakhin ceremony described earlier. Through the reinvention of elaborate annual ceremonies and traditions, the Department of Fine Arts contributed to the growing visibility and mainstream popularity of Lanna culture among both locals and tourists, while younger generations of students at CMU began to learn about and value their local culture and history.

Another major turning point in the revival of Chiang Mai's intangible cultural heritage was the 700-year anniversary of the founding of the city, which took place in 1996. For this event, the Chomrom Lannakhadi (Lanna Studies group) organized the revival of a ceremony to prolong the life of the city (*seub duang mueang*) based on historical records describing the ritual as it was performed during Chiang Mai's Golden Age (1445-1565 CE). They also spearheaded the recension of the Chiang Mai Chronicle and its translation into English, thus contributing to a wider understanding and appreciation of Lanna's history (Duongchan 2007:361).

In the years following the 700-year anniversary of Chiang Mai, numerous clubs, community organizations and networks dedicated to the study and revival of Lanna history and cultural heritage were established. One particularly important community-based network that developed during this period was the Lanna Wisdom School. Founded in 2000 by Chatchawan Thongdeelert as a center for the transmission and innovation of traditional Lanna crafts, performing arts and other forms of local knowledge, the Lanna Wisdom School has contributed to the revival of Lanna intangible heritage by organizing cultural activities and training thousands of youths (Kemasingki 2011).

In the next section, this article presents a discussion of two recent initiatives to revitalize Chiang Mai's intangible cultural heritage: the *Tham Phang Pa Teet Song Fah Huksa Muang* ritual and the *Yor Suai Wai Sa Phraya Mangrai* ritual.

Intangible Culture and Chiang Mai's Urban Revival: Examining the Role of City Rituals

As described in the previous section, from the 1960s onwards, Chiang Mai was incorporated into a system of national economic and social development plans which promoted urban development, tourism, and land use planning. Numerous mega-scale projects proposed by the central government during the 1980s prompted the formation of local opposition groups which sought to protect the city and the local environment from inappropriate and potentially damaging development projects. According to Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, these local opposition groups have continued to grow into a local civil society network aimed at protecting and conserving the unique character and history of Chiang Mai (Suwaree 2020:16). Today, this network includes academics from local universities, independent scholars, and civil society groups, who all collaborate to resist the state's development plans when necessary and to shape Chiang Mai's future (Suwaree et al. 2021).

Many aspects of local culture were negatively impacted by the rapid growth of tourism in Chiang Mai following the launch of the Amazing Thailand national policy in the late 1990s. For example, the growth of tourism led to the mass release of floating lanterns (called *khom fai* or *khom loi*) during the Loy Krathong or Full Moon Festival held in November. These lanterns created pollution and were a fire hazard to the local community. The growth of tourism also led to the emergence of late-night pubs and bars within Chiang Mai Old Town, which at that time did not have any clear regulations. In 2010, Saowakhon Sriboonreuang³ began to mobilize affected communities to file complaints with the municipality office, asking the authorities to manage inappropriate behavior and to assess the impact caused by the lanterns which caused damage and affected the safety of the community. One year later, local communities extended their civil society network of Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community, bringing together thirteen communities in the old city. The network concluded that sustainable solutions could not be found by demanding local authorities to fix the problems. Rather, the local network should lead by example by demonstrating Lanna identity and the correct observance of traditional culture.

With this goal of modeling traditional Lanna culture in mind, in 2012, the Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community Network, together with the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, launched a local traditional event called *Tham Phang Pa Teet Song Fah Huksa Muang*, which translates as “candle-lighting on the full moon to protect our city.” The event was launched in collaboration with schools in the Chiang Mai Old City to light candles around the old city as a campaign to demonstrate traditional Lanna cultural practices during the Loy Krathong Festival and to refrain from releasing fire lanterns.



Figure 4. Tham Phang Pa Teet Song Fah Huksa Muang ritual in 2018. Source: Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community, 2018.

Following the success of the candle-lighting event, during the Lanna New Year or Songkran Festival in April 2013, the Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community Network launched the *Yor Suay Wai Sa Phaya Mangrai*, or “Paying Respects to King Mangrai” ritual as a method of demonstrating Lanna culture and continuing the campaign against inappropriate practices. In contrast to the rowdy events organized for tourists, this event showcased local traditional practices to celebrate the New Year, including offerings of food and a fingernail dance performance for the spirit of the city's founder, King Mangrai. The core idea was to revive local traditions and transmit local knowledge to younger generations by supporting the collaboration between the Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community Network, schools with Lanna wisdom programs, and the Chiang Mai Municipal Office.

The *Yor Suai Wai Sa Phaya Mangrai* event usually takes place over the course of two days, starting on April 11 as *Wan Da*, or the preparation day, when local communities and volunteers help prepare foods, make decorative ornaments, and practice fingernail dancing. *Wan Da* is the day that faithful community members come together to join in making merit through donating ingredients or offering their help to prepare ritual ornaments such as cutting traditional flags (called *tung*), making flower arrangements, and preparing ritual offerings from betel nut, bamboo, flowers, and beeswax.

The offerings for worship are also prepared on *Wan Da*, such as desserts made from rice flour, coconut, sugarcane, sesame, and vegetable oil wrapped with banana leaf. The process of preparing these items requires raw ingredients and manpower, and it relies on the cooperation between the elderly who act as instructors for the younger people and children who help with the process. *Wan Da* is very important in terms of the cooperation between various groups of people of different ages, as it fosters the organic intergenerational exchange and transmission of traditional knowledge. The Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community Network sees this importance and it is determined to organize the *Wan Da* event every year at the site of the former Chiang Mai City Hall. The location of the event is significant because the Chiang Mai City Hall now serves as the Chiang Mai Cultural Museum—a public area in the heart of Chiang Mai's Old City which embodies the history and political importance of the Lanna kingdom.



Figure 5. The *Yor Suai Wai Sa Phaya Mangrai* event. Source: Chiang Mai City Heritage Centre, 2022.

The *Yor Suay* ritual day takes place on April 12, which is believed to be the date that Chiang Mai was founded by King Mangrai. The placement of the offerings is determined by local ritual experts, who are themselves associated by lineage with the ancestral spirits of the city. These ritual experts play the important role of guiding the local community networks in traditional Lanna ritual practices.

The procession of dancers, musical instruments and ritual offerings from community representatives are prepared and presented to the local authorities who preside over the ritual. Each year, the procession route is designed differently as appropriate, usually starting from Chang Phueak in the north, which is considered as an auspicious direction, or starting from Tha Phae Gate in the east and passing through the old city axis. When the procession arrives at the Three Kings Monument, where the annual event takes place, there will be representatives from local authorities and community leaders waiting to receive the offerings. Local religious and ritual experts then begin the religious ceremonies which combine Lanna beliefs and Buddhism, such as poetry in the Lanna dialect and Dharma preaching. The ceremony is led by a local ritual specialist who was once ordained as a monk.

After the religious ceremony, participants place a flower bouquet made of banana leaf and domestic flowers. After the flower bouquet offering, there will be performances of Lanna arts, such as a Lanna drum performance, sword fighting, free hand dance, and a bird dance. The community network of Rak Lanna has been cooperating with the Lanna Wisdom School and Lanna performing arts groups throughout Chiang Mai to preserve and transfer knowledge of Lanna traditional performances to the new generation.

According to the secretary of the Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community Network, Saowakhon Sriboonreuang, both Yor Suay Wai Sa Phaya Mangrai and Tham Phang Pa Teet Song Fah Haksa Muang are reinvented rituals based on traditional beliefs and practices. Even though they are relatively new rituals, both events draw upon traditional Lanna beliefs and practices about the spirits of the city, but the communities created them with the aim of addressing current issues. The community faced many trials and errors in terms of ceremony management and ritual procedures, especially for the Yor Suay event that required preparation of offerings for the founding spirits of the city, which needed to be prepared differently from the spirits of ancestors of ordinary people.

Reflecting on the last ten years of ritual activities organized by the Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community Network, there are four important lessons learned about how the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage has contributed to Chiang Mai's urban renewal:

- 1) The revitalization of intangible heritage has strengthened local collaboration between sectors, including urban communities, educational agencies, academic networks, and local authorities, such as the Chiang Mai Municipality and Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization, which have provided support and funds since 2014.
- 2) The revitalization of Chiang Mai's intangible heritage has led to the transmission of cultural knowledge between urban and suburban areas. The most obvious indicator of increased transmission is the number of fingernail dancers which increased from 150 participants in 2014 to 850 people in 2019. Cultural transmission has been intergenerational, and the dance training program organized by Muang

Rak Chiang Mai Community Network includes eighteen groups of dancers across Chiang Mai ranging from 5 to 70 years old. Furthermore, through their participation in the preparation of offerings for the ceremonies and performances by local experts of Lanna culture at the Three Kings Monument, residents have had an opportunity to learn more about their own intangible heritage and to convey these cultural values to the public.

3) Funding and grant management has a clear management structure in the form of a network committee. Moreover, the transparent use of the budget contributes to a sense of shared ownership and trust regarding the use of funds.

4) The cultural events present an opportunity for innovations in crafts and local architectural design, applying local wisdom in the field of crafts to convey the meaning of Lanna culture differently each year. The community network of Muang Rak Chiang Mai works with designers and academics to work with handicraft artisans from various communities and to help support the local economy across Chiang Mai, such as wicker works from Mae Chaem District and pottery crafts from Hang Dong District.

In addition to these positive outcomes of ritual revival, there have also been significant challenges. One major issue has to do with the government support for community-based rituals. The process of securing government funding is quite complex, and moreover, it is unstable and inconsistent. This financial uncertainty leaves the community and network of organizers in a vulnerable position each year, as they frequently must make up budget shortages through fundraising or adapt activities according to a more limited budget. Despite this, the community organizers of the events are determined to hold the rituals every year, as they express Chiang Mai's community solidarity and commitment to sustain Lanna's distinctive intangible culture in the face of various threats.

Conclusion: Intangible Cultural Heritage as a Source of Chiang Mai's Urban Resilience & Revival

As this article has shown, intangible cultural heritage has been at the heart of Chiang Mai's urban identity and its resilience in the face of numerous threats. Since its establishment in the 13th century, Chiang Mai's identity has been reaffirmed through ritual practices and performances which propitiate the spirits of the city and the surrounding sacred natural landscape. Through a discussion of historical sources, the first section of this article demonstrated how ritual and festive events were part of the renewal of the city after a period of decline and occupation by the Burmese. When King Kawila reclaimed Chiang Mai from the Burmese in the 18th century, a key focus of his restoration of Chiang Mai was the revival of intangible cultural heritage—particularly rituals associated with the founder's spirit and the sacred mountain of Doi Suthep.

In the second section, we showed how Chiang Mai's incorporation into the modern Thai nation-state from the early 20th century onwards represented yet another threat to the city's continuity—that of cultural assimilation and political domina-

tion by the central Thai government in Bangkok. Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, government policies promoting national unity and cultural homogeneity had already eroded much of Lanna's distinctive cultural identity, in part by restricting the Chiang Mai dialect and disparaging ritual practices associated with the spirits of the city. Following the economic boom period of the 1980s, however, a local resistance movement began to take shape around protecting and revitalizing Chiang Mai's unique urban culture. To foster collective action among various local groups, the movement's leaders drew upon intangible cultural heritage, specifically the beliefs, performances, traditions, and ritual practices associated with the spirits of place and Chiang Mai's founder, King Mangrai. Today, this intangible cultural heritage continues to contribute to the resilience and continuity of Chiang Mai's urban identity.

Endnotes

- 1 The last vassal king of Chiang Mai was Cao Kaeo Naowarat, who passed away in 1939.
- 2 Chiang Mai University was officially established in 1964.
- 3 Saowakhon Sriboonreuang is a community organizer and Secretary of the Muang Rak Chiang Mai Community Network.

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