

## Cultural Capital Transformation under Community Dynamics: A Case Study of Ban Saeng Pha, Thailand

Isares Sooksenee<sup>1</sup>, Niyom Wongpongkham<sup>2</sup>, Burin Plengdeesakul<sup>3</sup>, Kitisan Sriruksa<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>\*E-mail: [isares.s@kkumail.com](mailto:isares.s@kkumail.com)

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture, Fine Arts and Design Research,  
Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

Orcid ID: 0009-0006-7872-4430

<sup>2</sup>Email: [wniyoom@kku.ac.th](mailto:wniyoom@kku.ac.th)

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

Orcid ID: 0000-0003-3888-473X

<sup>3</sup>Email: [pburin@kku.ac.th](mailto:pburin@kku.ac.th)

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

Orcid ID: 0009-0000-8247-7037

<sup>4</sup>Email: [kitisri@kku.ac.th](mailto:kitisri@kku.ac.th)

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

Orcid ID: 0009-0002-1325-5371

---

### Abstract

This qualitative research was conducted with the objective of studying the factors influencing changes in cultural capital in Ban Saeng Pha, Loei Province, Thailand. The study examined both tangible and intangible cultural capital, including Wat Sri Pho Chai, sacred areas, traditions and rituals, beliefs, and life wisdom. Data were collected with in-depth interviews in which the target groups were the people who know, the people who practice and the people involved in the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha. The findings indicated that the changes in cultural capital in Ban Saeng Pha were predominantly driven by endogenous factors due to the practice of traditions and rituals continuously handed down by the people in the area by community leaders. This abrupt change has been influenced by cultural, social, and administrative elements collectively altering Wat Sri Pho Chai, sacred areas, and the traditions and rituals of the Flower Festival. Regarding exogenous factors, the changes were primarily influenced by political and administrative elements. The participation of administrative leaders in various traditional activities, coupled with policies aimed at stimulating the economy through the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha, led to sudden changes in Wat Sri Pho Chai, the flower parade tradition, and sacred areas. Interference from exogenous factors, including the acceptance and integration of foreign cultures, has led to gradual changes in the local cultural landscape. The change in the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha has primarily resulted from the continuous practice of traditions and rituals maintained by the local community under the guidance of its leaders. These changes, attributed to social and cultural factors, have been characterized as a gradual change.

Environmental factors play a significant role in changing cultural capital. Forest encroachment, forest concessions, changes in the forest area that is the headwaters, agricultural expansion that encroaches on the sacred forest area, and adjustments to the ritual routes within the forest due to topography. These have both physical and spiritual impacts on the continuation of rituals, beliefs, and cultural practices of the people of Ban Saeng Pha.

Keywords: factors, changing, cultural capital, natural environment, Ban Saeng Pha

---

Cultural capital is cultural heritage that has been passed down from the past to present and is divided into two aspects, namely, tangible and intangible. In Thailand, cultural capital is varied, particularly in the Mekong River basin area where shared cultural traditions are widespread. Social and cultural changes are constantly taking place, particularly the cultural changes of the Mekong River basin area which have occurred both suddenly and gradually with the spread of cultures from other places.

Located in Loei Province, Ban Saeng Pha is a village in a border area of Thailand that is adjacent to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which is an important cultural area in the central Mekong River Basin. In the past, people in the village respected and had strong beliefs in and worshipped ghosts. Every year, the villagers would make animal sacrifices as offerings to the ghosts or spirits until there was a full conversion to Buddhism about sometime in B.E. 2080 (1547). The local traditions and culture of the area were mainly influenced by the Lan Xang Kingdom, which fully worshipped Buddhism. The traditions, rituals and various beliefs were generally received from the Lan Xang Kingdom (Lao People's Democratic Republic). When this area fell under Thailand's rule, there was a blending of Thai and the previous Saeng Pha cultural traditions. Saeng Pha cultural tradition is considered outstanding cultural capital due to practices that have been passed down for very long time until they have become praised as outstanding cultural capital in Loei Province and invitations are always being extended to perform at several national events. Consequently, Ban Saeng Pha has gradually become more well-known and famous, which has resulted in control by government agencies and more visits by tourists in this with impact on some changes in traditions and culture from the past. The objective of this study is to investigate the endogenous and exogenous factors affecting the changes in the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha, Loei Province, Thailand.

## CULTURAL CAPITAL IN THE MEKONG BASIN OF THAILAND

Cultural capital can be defined as the knowledge, skills, and cultural assets accumulated by an individual or a group of people, institutions, and organizations, or even objects and artifacts undergoing repeated that are produced and reproduced, then transferred through constant learning and practice. Culture can be described as a set of tastes and preferences that distinguish different ways of thinking and serve as an essential factor in preserving the stability and normal operation of society. Throsby (2001) described cultural capital as comprising both tangible and intangible aspects. Tangible cultural capital consists of physical objects, buildings, and locations, whereas intangible cultural capital comprises ideas, beliefs, and values articulated through customs and traditions.

Cultural capital can be carried out by absorption into people where its effects are mental in the form of objects that might be cultural products and in the form of organizations and institutions. Cultural capital can be transferred or extended from economic capital with more or less change. Some of these things might not change suddenly but transform gradually due to long maintenance and retention. Thus, economic capital is like the foundation of changes in other types of capital in the same direction. Good cultural capital is accumulated over time and the retention of cultural value, which relies on time and economic capital in communities to maintain and transfer to new generations (Richardson, 1986).

In the case of the changes occurring in Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage city considered the origin of various cultures that have spread to many areas (Singyabuth, S., 2009), the people of Luang Prabang have connected their cultural practices with the unique geographic characteristics of their region. This has resulted in Luang Prabang being a shared living space between the people and cultural figures symbolizing sacredness. The reception of external influences into Luang Prabang has led the city to adapt itself to these external factors.

Historically, Luang Prabang experienced significant events, such as the uprising for independence led by Chao Anouvong and the arrival of Western powers like France seeking colonies. External powers began to play a crucial role in managing Luang Prabang's cultural capital. After breaking free from external

governance, Luang Prabang saw the potential in leveraging its cultural capital to boost its economy. The city uniquely preserves the lifestyle of Buddhist communities in harmony with its geographical setting.

With globalization, Luang Prabang has witnessed an influx of outsiders bringing foreign cultures. This global integration aims for profit, monetary power, and borderless monopolies, leading to a fusion of global and local cultures. The researcher poses questions about Luang Prabang: whether its status as a World Heritage city was established by locals or outsiders, whether its cultural capital built over millennia is now for a new era, and whether its long-standing lifestyle will turn into a museum or its sacred rituals become mere performances.

Hongsuwan, P. (2016), studied the Mekong River as a stage for invented traditions in Isan to examine how the river has been represented and given meaning as a platform for such traditions in Mekong communities. The study focused on traditions practiced by the riverside communities in seven Isan provinces, categorizing them into five groups: 1) traditional customs, 2) Buddhist traditions, 3) nature conservation traditions, 4) cross-national relationship traditions, and 5) ethnic cultural tourism traditions. The research identified four methods: 1) borrowing traditions from other locales, 2) reviving old traditions, 3) preserving traditions, and 4) creating new traditions. These methods reflect the complex and diverse wisdom, knowledge, beliefs, and values of the Mekong communities, adapting old practices within new contexts, showcasing "Creative of Folklore" to present and define the Mekong River as a stage for invented traditions, involving cultural adaptation processes like diffusion, integration, domination, and new production within the context of Thai social changes.

The creation of social and economic returns from valuable and socially or collectively recognized cultural resources is more valuable and accepted by society or communities as concepts expanding beyond material wealth and possession. It also includes the intangible aspects of culture leading to social status. Bourdieu's framework (1986) and definition emphasized cultural resources and the creation of a collective identity within communities or groups. This framework emphasizes their critical role in the formation and dissemination of culture and the promotion of economic sustainability (Hack-Polay et al., 2023). In Thailand, cultural capital can be partly attributed to the influence of the Lan Xang culture in the upper Mekong River Basin, which grew vigorously during the 19th Buddhist century. This cultural heritage has spread throughout the central Mekong Basin in the form of historical sites, artifacts, artworks, and intangible elements such as beliefs, customs, traditions, and life wisdom. Watcharaporn (2020) conducted a study on managing the cultural capital of the lower northeastern region of Thailand and found that the social and cultural aspects of Thailand's lower northeastern region to continue to uphold the traditions set forth by the government sector for adherence to traditions every month as a means of maintaining Thai customs and traditions.

## **CULTURAL CAPITAL TRANSFORMATION OF BAN SAENG PHA, NA HAO DISTRICT, LOEI PROVINCE**

Ban Saeng Pha is located in Na Hao District, Loei Province. It is a place that has been influenced by the cultural diffusion of the Lan Xang Kingdom since 1547 AD. Based on the legend of the village's founding, as well as architectural evidence, customs, beliefs, and rituals, the area along the Houa River was historically the bordering area that connected the Ayutthaya Kingdom with the Lan Xang Kingdom. Even though this cultural influence once spread throughout the region, it is now separated by the river, which separates the territory into present-day Laos. The area is typically recognized by its artistic features created in the traditional Lan Xang style (Phuvijarn, W. 2008). Although the region has been divided by administrative boundaries, the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha continues to enhance the preservation of traditions through the community members who are regarded as the heritage custodians. This cultural capital has been inherited and preserved within the community for over 400 years. The development and preservation of Ban Saeng Pha's cultural heritage have been continuous. Factors contributing to these

changes over an extended period have brought about a combination and adaptation of old and new cultural aspects enabling the people to live together. This process brings together traditional and contemporary cultures, as well as urban and rural cultural practices, in a way that enhances improvement and progress while upholding coherence and unity. Apart from the factors influencing change by the custodians of culture themselves, external actors also play a vital role in promoting or changing cultural capital. This corresponds with national development strategies aimed at achieving stability, prosperity, and sustainability. To illustrate, Upper Northeast Region 1 (Udon Thani, Nong Khai, Nong Bua Lamphu, Loei) has a clear vision “to become a hub of economic development, identity tourism, and safe, environmentally friendly agriculture in the Mekong subregion. This vision has resulted in the enhancement and promotion of local cultural traditions and practices, increasing their visibility and recognition to meet economic expectations and accomplish broader awareness (Strategic Management Group for Upper Northeastern Region 1, 2021).

The core principles of Thailand's 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) are centered on driving the country's development towards stability, prosperity, and sustainability, based on the philosophy of sufficiency economy. This approach aims to enhance Thailand's competitiveness, elevate it to a high-income, developed nation status, and ensure that Thai people enjoy a good quality of life in a stable, equitable, and just society. The plan emphasizes economic resilience, social equity, and sustainable use of natural resources, aiming to achieve a balanced and inclusive development model.

Additionally, the National Reform Steering Assembly has proposed cultural reforms to shape a 20-year cultural strategy, with the objective of making Thailand an international hub for cultural and artistic exchange. The strategy aims to foster a positive image, strengthen international relations, and secure global recognition for Thai culture. This initiative is intended to promote a morally virtuous society characterized by kindness, harmony, and solidarity, while simultaneously boosting economic wealth through the creative and cultural industries. The focus is on developing a society with strong ethical standards, mutual care, and national unity.

As part of this national agenda, various cultural projects have been launched to stimulate the economy through cultural heritage. Ban Saeng Pha's cultural assets have been identified as one of the key targets for such initiatives. The Ministry of Culture aims to generate income from Ban Saeng Pha's cultural capital by promoting it as a unique tourist destination that highlights its civilization, history, culture, and traditions. The local administration of Ban Saeng Pha has been working to enhance identity-based tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion, emphasizing its unique cultural narratives along the tourism routes in the Upper Northeastern provinces, which offer convenient and safe transportation.

The strategic objective of this initiative is to increase tourism revenue for the province cluster, boost income for hotels, accommodations, and local communities, and ultimately enhance the overall economic potential of the country amid economic stagnation. This policy seeks to transform cultural traditions into economic drivers, leveraging Ban Saeng Pha's heritage to attract tourists and generate sustainable income for the region.

In line with these goals, Ban Saeng Pha's rich cultural heritage, including traditional festivals, historic temples, and unique local customs, are being promoted to attract both domestic and international tourists. The integration of cultural tourism with local economic activities is intended to create a multiplier effect that benefits the entire community. By showcasing Ban Saeng Pha's distinctive cultural identity, the initiative aims to draw visitors who are interested in experiencing authentic local traditions and contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage.

The cultural assets of Ban Saeng Pha, such as the ancient Wat Si Pho Chai and the unique tradition of the flower tree procession, are being highlighted in tourism promotions. These cultural elements provide a deep insight into the local way of life and the spiritual beliefs of the community. By promoting these

attractions, the government hopes to increase awareness and appreciation of Ban Saeng Pha's cultural heritage, while also providing economic benefits to the local population.

Furthermore, the local administration is focused on improving infrastructure and facilities to support cultural tourism. This includes upgrading transportation networks, enhancing accommodation options, and providing better services for tourists. The aim is to create a welcoming and comfortable environment for visitors, encouraging them to explore the cultural richness of Ban Saeng Pha and its surroundings.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

The transformation of cultural capital and Julian Steward's theory of cultural ecology discuss the similarities in historical development and the impact of the origin of civilizations, emphasizing the environment's role in shaping the ecological characteristics of cultures. Steward focuses on the evolutionary paths that develop in various environments, particularly in river valleys surrounded by arid lands. He emphasizes that the environment significantly influences the ecological traits, social and cultural changes, and the importance of comparative studies in cultural history regarding form, function, and sequence.

Cultural ecology research methods aim to analyze the relationship between the environment and culture, the cultural system of societies, and the adaptation of cultures to their environments. Studying cultural systems is crucial in determining the relationships and cultural ecology. The concept of cultural ecology involves studying the adaptation processes of societies under environmental influences, focusing on the evolution or changes resulting from societal adaptations.

This perspective views societies as dynamic and constantly changing, where transformations result from adaptations to the environment. The primary foundation of this adaptation process includes production technology, social structure, and the characteristics of the natural environment, which are key factors in determining the processes of change and adaptation in cultural societies.

The preservation and perpetuation of cultural capital involve adaptations and changes over time, resulting from lifestyles changes during the globalization era. Cultures from many regions develop and circulate in response to the trends of contemporary global development. Cultural changes occur as a result of diverse societies and cultures in each area attempting to develop and improve in time with the modern era. Moreover, the differences between the values of each religion are differences occurring as a result of each of those religions. The specific beliefs of each religion have been used as the media for teaching for the dissemination of the cultures of each respective group. There cultural dissemination in the modern era is inevitable (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Cultural change can arise from endogenous changes or exogenous changes driven by changes in political, governance, technological, economic, social, cultural, and natural contexts (Wankaew, 1994). The changes in the modern have occurred rapidly as a result of changes occurring in the movement from rural to urban areas, as well as the transitions from agriculture to commerce and from basic education to higher education. The use of higher technology facilitates families in living better lives. These trends have led to loss of the lifestyle, traditional and cultural heritages handed down for such a long time (Greenfield, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative research conducted from January 2022 to September 2023. The researcher applied the following methods for carrying out the study:

1. This research collected data from the target groups, who were the main informants for collecting field data and included three different groups as follows (Plengdeesakul, 2019):

1) The key informant group of 25 people was used for exploratory study through in-depth interviews about the history, traditions, arts, and local culture of Ban Saeng Pha, both past and present.

2) The casual informant group included individuals who organized cultural activities and followed traditions. Non-structured interviews were conducted with 13 people to gather information related to the village's history, lifestyle, and local culture.

3) The general informant group comprised the general public residing in Saeng Pha Subdistrict and tourists visiting Ban Saeng Pha. A convenience sampling method was employed together with structured interviews conducted with 10 people.

2. The research instruments used in this research were developed and assessed for reliability for use in data collection. They consisted of the following: 1) a basic survey for exploring the cultural capital existing in Ban Saeng Pha; 2) in-depth interviews for the key informant group; and non-structured interviews for the casual informant group to obtain general information about the village, its history, culture, traditions, beliefs, customs, lifestyle, and the roles of community members and to generate detailed insights from the key informant group.

3. To collect data, the researcher began selecting necessary information related to the traditions, culture, beliefs, and customs appearing in Ban Saeng Pha, based on the annual Heet traditions of the Isan people in Thailand for all 12 months of the year. The researcher collected data from documents, relevant research, and field data collection on both the tangible and intangible cultural capital existing in Ban Saeng Pha, including: 1) Wat Si Pho Chai; 2) sacred areas; 3) traditions and rituals, and beliefs and life wisdom.

4. Data triangulation was conducted to validate the data collected. This method included cross-checking data from different sources, including documents, observation results, and recorded interview outcomes, and data obtained from various sources.

5. In the data analysis of the factors contributing to the cultural capital changes in Ban Saeng Pha, the researcher classified by source into two types: 1) endogenous changes and 2) exogenous changes. These changes influenced the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha, which supported Julian H. Steward's theory of social and cultural evolution (Lazzat, Berdimuratova, 2023). The analysis examined the factors related to politics, governance, technology, economy, society, culture, and nature.

## RESULTS

According to the framework of endogenous and exogenous changes, the factors contributing to the cultural capital changes in Ban Saeng Pha involved the following cultural aspects: 1) Wat Si Pho Chai; 2) sacred areas; 3) traditions and rituals, and 4) beliefs and wisdom in daily life. The research findings were as follows:

### 1) Wat Sri Pho Chai

The construction of the temple began in 2090 BE (1547), during the reign of King Chao Chaiyachetthathirat Maha Raja of the Lan Xang Kingdom. The *ubosot* (ordination hall) was built in 2375 BE (1832). However, there is no clear documentary evidence of this construction. It is simply a story passed down from generation-to-generation. The changes in cultural capital were identified through searches of document, books, and interviews with key informants, starting from 2514 BE (1971) with a major renovation of the *ubosot*. The temple was originally named "Wat Pho Chai", which was a common name for temples of that era. In BE 2519 BE (1976), the temple was renamed "Wat Si Pho Chai" to avoid confusion with nearby temples.

Wat Sri Pho Chai houses ancient structures and artifacts that are several centuries old, contributing significantly to the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha. The ancient ordination hall, constructed by local artisans, exhibits artistic influences from Luang Prabang. Its roof is made of wooden planks, and the bricks and mortar used are made from finely ground seashells. The intricate wood carvings are created according to Buddhist beliefs.

The Tripitaka Hall, standing over 6 meters tall, was built in 1633 to store the Tripitaka chests. The bell tower and the charity buildings are all made of wood, a resource abundantly available due to the deep forest location of Ban Saeng Pha.

One of the most important ancient artifacts is the Phra Phet, a 5.5-inch bronze Buddha statue in the Maravijaya posture, seated in the diamond lotus position on a plain base. This artifact, from the Ayutthaya period, is considered a sacred object that serves as a spiritual anchor for the villagers.

Wat Si Pho Chai has gone through several renovations over time. Each renovation of the *ubosot* was influenced by the desire of the temple committee and the local community to preserve it (Figure 1). A significant turning point in the restoration efforts took place in 2514 BE (1971) when community leaders began carving wooden Buddha statues, which is marked a significant moment in the temple's renovations. The residents of Ban Saeng Pha learned about and shared the art of wood carving, allowing them to assist in repairing religious structures. The carving work was carried out within Wat Si Pho Chai and performed only on Buddhist holy days (Figure 2). One reason for the community's participation was their belief that no villagers would go out to farm in the fields on Buddhist holy days. Instead, they came to the temple to help with the repair and maintenance of religious places to make merit. The development of wood carving methods and their extensive adoption resulted in the restoration of the Tripitaka Hall in BE 2548 (2005), marking the beginning of using wood carving to decorate several buildings. Consequently, wood carving was used to decorate the bell tower, sermon hall, and other parts of the *ubosot*, demonstrating the community's efforts to improve and change their cultural capital.

**Figure 1**

*The Ubosot of Wat Si Pho Chai being used for traditional ceremonies while it is under repair*



**Figure 2**

*Wood carving to repair the chapel of Wat Sri Pho Chai*

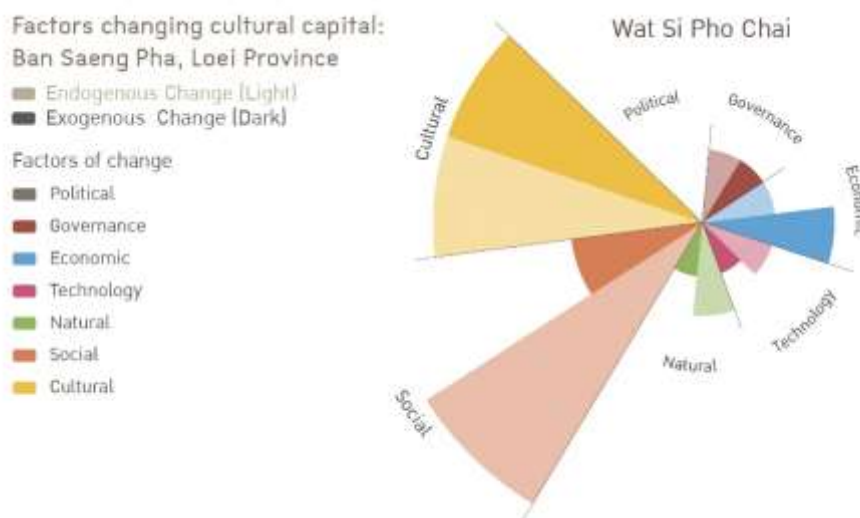




The factors contributing to the changes in the cultural capital of Wat Si Pho Chai have involved both endogenous and exogenous factors, primarily in the social and cultural aspects, with additional influences from the economic, natural, and political realms. These changes have been progressive, causing the temple's material advancement and ensuring that several religious sites are well-maintained, ready for normal use and enhanced beyond original condition. The change process has mainly involved the Wat Si Pho Chai management committee and the abbot, who persistently informed and involved the local community, thereby reflecting the traditional practices of Ban Saeng Pha. The factors influencing the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha, specifically Wat Si Pho Chai, are demonstrated in the following pie chart (Figure 3). It can be observed that the factors driving the transformation of the cultural capital of Wat Sri Pho Chai primarily stem from internal social and cultural elements. This highlights the significant impact of the internal social system of Ban Saeng Pha in facilitating changes. In contrast, external factors have not played a major role in social transformation. However, they have influenced cultural changes through policies introduced by central administrative leaders. These policies include providing funds for renovations, favoring Thai stylistic trends over the traditional Lan Xang kingdom's artistic styles.

**Figure 3**

*A pie chart showing the factors influencing the cultural change at Wat Si Pho Chai*



## 2) Factors Influencing Changes in Sacred Areas

Phra That Din Taen is a sacred site of great significance in the daily lives of the Ban Saeng Pha villagers. According to legend, the construction began in B.E. 2146 (1603) during the reign of King Pho Thisala Raj of the Lan Xang Kingdom. In the past, Ban Saeng Pha was under the rule of the Lan Xang Kingdom and a border area between the kingdoms of Lan Xang and Ayutthaya. King Pho Thisala Raj abolished the



ritual worship of the spirit house at Sab Dong, encouraging the people to fully convert to Buddhism. He spread this message to various towns and directed monks to travel to remote villages to teach the locals to abandon the practice of making animal sacrifices to spirits. As a result, Phra That Din Taen was built as a spiritual anchor replacing animism (Figure 4). The stupa was built from earth and soil was constantly added around it due to devotion, giving it the name “The Stupa That Would Never Be Finished,” as more soil would always be added, as long as people believe in Buddhism.

The use of soil as a sacred offering in the construction of the Phra That Din Tan represents a participatory approach to maintaining Buddhism. The initial construction of the stupa around 1603 was based on the idea that every villager must participate in its creation. A legend was crafted, stating that supernatural forces would harm those who did not contribute to the construction, instilling a sense of communal responsibility.

This culturally transmitted belief has ensured that the residents of Ban Saeng Pha continue to adhere strictly to Buddhist teachings. For example, on every Buddhist holy day and the day before, villagers refrain from killing animals. This practice originates from the vow made during the stupa's construction to cease animal sacrifices to spirits. Even cracking an egg for cooking is considered an act of killing and is avoided during these times.

**Figure 4**

*Phra That Din Tan*



The changes impacting Phra That Din Tan since ancient times are the result of endogenous factors, with social and cultural influences being the main contributors. Exogenous factors have been caused by the governance of local authorities in Na Haeo District who constructed a pavilion for religious ceremonies in front of Phra That Din Taen. This development prevented the traditional practice of adding stones or soil around the stupa (Figure 5). As the number of worshippers increased, the practice of adding materials could only be done on the rear side of the stupa. Consequently, Phra That Din Taen has evolved into a mountain range-like shape extending backward rather than retaining its original round form as shown in the following pie chart (Figure 6).

The changes occurring at Phra That Din Tan stem from two main factors: cultural and social aspects, driven by internal factors within Ban Saeng Pha. Culturally, some villagers continue to uphold their vows

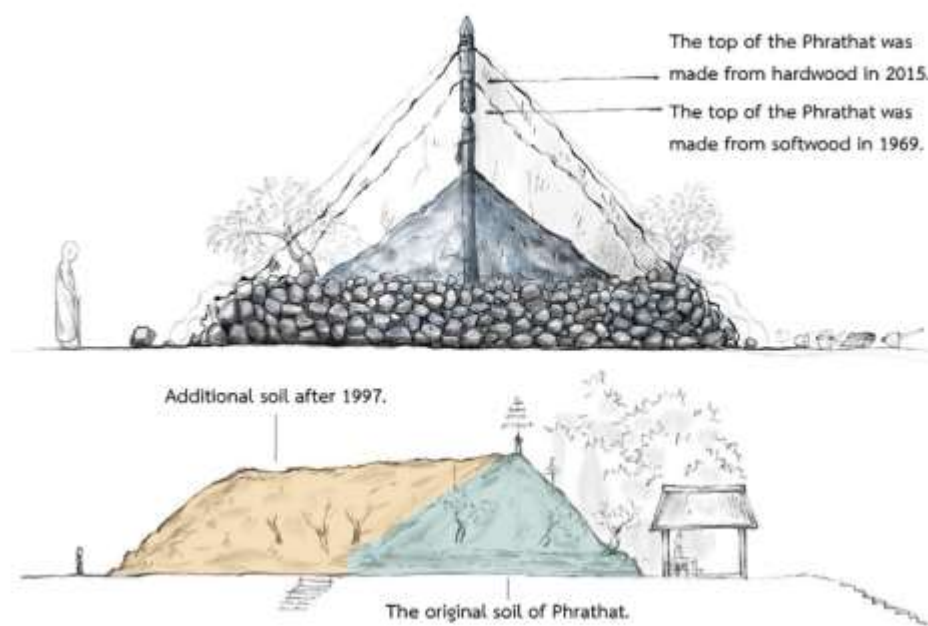
to the stupa based on Buddhist principles, while others come to worship the stupa to seek blessings for family success, using soil as an offering.

As the practice of offering soil increased with the growing responsibilities of families, the amount of soil accumulated rapidly. This created a social issue within Ban Saeng Pha, as the village committee had to manage the rising mound of soil that began encroaching on the surrounding area. To address this, the committee decided to remove some of the soil brought by villagers.

However, the excavation of soil from around the stupa led to conflicts with the villagers. The village head had to mediate and explain the necessity of the land adjustments around the stupa to ensure that the villagers understood the reasons behind the actions.

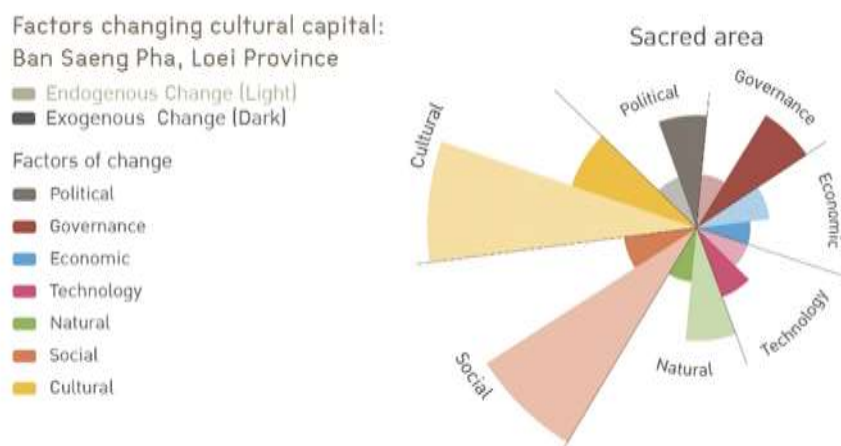
**Figure 5**

*The Changes in Phra That Din Tan*



**Figure 6**

*Pie Chart of the Factors Influencing the Cultural Change in Sacred Areas*



### 3) Factors Influencing the Changes in Traditions and Rites

The traditions and ceremonies in Ban Saeng Pha all originated in Buddhist ceremonies and local customs passed down from generation-to-generation by the villagers of Ban Saeng Pha. Important ceremonies comprised the Flower Tree Festival, the Vessantara Festival, the Phra That Din Tan Worship Ceremony, the Four Directions Stone Merit-Making Ceremony, and the Bamboo Candle Casting Ceremony.

The changes in the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha with reference to traditions and ceremonies were a result of both endogenous and exogenous factors. These changes have been primarily influenced by political and administrative factors, as well as economic, technological, natural, social, and cultural factors.

Concerning changes in the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha regarding traditions and ceremonies, the endogenous factors of change have mainly been caused by social and cultural factors. Socially, there was a shift in the form of religious ceremonies to include more detailed procedures. This was partly determined by Ban Saeng Pha's religious leaders, who determined or changed the nature of rites and ceremonies to suit current situations or times. Moreover, the sudden change of the Flower Tree Festival was caused by a decision made in B.E. 2530 (1987) to hold a contest for the best flower tree with a cash prize. This brought about significant changes in the design and decoration of the flower trees for more diverse and aesthetically pleasing displays. Consequently, the flower trees in Ban Saeng Pha, which often reach tens of meters in height, have become significantly different from those generally found in Loei Province (Figure 7). The Flower Tree Festival is one of the traditions included as a significant cultural identity of Loei Province.

**Figure 7**

*Frame of a Flower Tree in the Flower Tree Festival of Ban Saeng Pha.*





Changes in traditional practices due to exogenous factors have primarily been driven by political and administrative factors. Social, cultural, and tourism-related aspects have significantly influenced only part of the changes in cultural capital. In the political and administrative aspects, cultural practices have shifted on the issues of dates for important activities by deviating from previously observed dates. The involvement of administrative leaders in ceremonies has resulted in changes in the Flower Tree Festival, bringing about new procedures such as the opening ceremony, performances, and hosting administrative leaders from the government sector, which have become established customs over time.

Culturally, efforts have been made to make the Phra That Din Tan Worship Ceremony a tradition with local cultural significance suitable for inclusion in the province's cultural identity. However, as this tradition is exclusive to the beliefs of Ban Saeng Pha's villagers, the tradition is not suitable for promotion as a tradition to attract outside visitors. Tourism has affected cultural capital changes in the Flower Tree Festival of Ban Saeng Pha since B.E. 2556 (2013). With support from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in promoting the festival through various communication channels, the number of tourists visiting Ban Saeng Pha to experience the Flower Tree Festival has increased significantly (Figure 8).

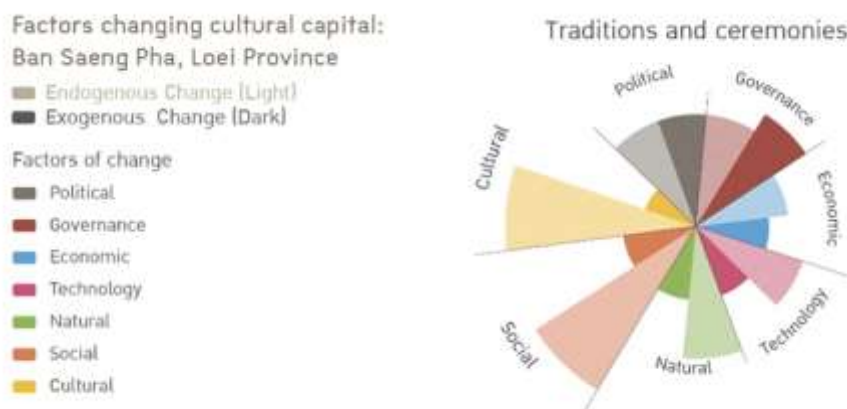
The influx of tourists to Ban Saeng Pha has both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, increased tourism boosts the local economy as hotels and resorts reach full occupancy, and local shops see higher sales. Culturally, the presence of tourists has helped spread awareness of the traditional flower tree procession, a cultural heritage, through various social media platforms, leading to a growing movement to preserve this tradition.

However, the negative impacts, primarily cultural, are significant. The traditional flower tree procession, originally a simple ceremony to honor Buddhism with full community participation, has transformed due to the influx of tourists and local officials. The ceremony now includes elaborate shows and an official opening, and tourists are allowed to participate in the procession. This change has marginalized the local villagers, reducing their active role in their own cultural event, and many villagers now feel excluded from the procession that they traditionally owned.

#### **Figure 8**

*Pie Chart of the Factors Influencing the Change in Traditions and Ceremonies*





#### 4) Factors Influencing the Changes in Beliefs and Life Wisdom

The beliefs and wisdom that are the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha originated from long-standing cultural practices rooted in faith in Buddhism and reverence for sacred and supernatural elements consistent with lifestyles closely linked with hunting livelihoods, forest living, and predominantly agricultural occupations. These intangible cultural capital changes resulted from both endogenous and exogenous political, administrative, natural, social, and cultural factors.

Endogenous changes have mainly been caused by social and cultural factors. Part of endogenous changes have been caused by changes in the administrative system in Ban Saeng Pha where village headmen lead religious and traditional activities along with controlling the rules and regulations that influence transfer of beliefs to the next generation out of belief in words or leadership in activities involving cultural capital in Ban Saeng Pha. In addition, population growth within the village and from migration by outside people, with different traditions from the people of Ban Saeng Pha, through marriage and purchases of land and structures for agriculture have caused choices to follow and not follow the lifestyles and beliefs of Ban Saeng Pha

Changes in cultural capital from exogenous factors have resulted from social, cultural, political, and administrative interference by outside parties. The changes in cultural capital can be attributed in part to migration by outside people who have their original beliefs and do not follow the beliefs of Ban Saeng Pha. The respect and offerings made by outside people are focused more on the quantity of the offerings than the ceremony (Figure 9), which has resulted in changes to the shape of Phra That Din Taen and affected political and administrative changes caused by expansion since 1985, when forestry concessions were granted on the Thai-Laos border. Public resistance to forestry concessions and the Ban Rom Klao dispute between the countries caused changes in beliefs concerning respect paid to the Four-Point Stone, which were sudden and caused the people of Ban Saeng Pha to have to change traditional ways and beliefs in performing cultural activities.

The influx of outsiders who either purchase land or marry locals and settle in Ban Saeng Pha has brought about cultural and lifestyle differences that contrast with the traditions of the original residents. These newcomers often do not adhere to the village's established practices and regulations, which were created to maintain harmony within the community. For instance, rules such as the prohibition of cutting certain types of trees for conservation purposes, the ban on working on Buddhist holy days to allow the forest and wildlife to thrive, and the equitable sharing of irrigation water for agriculture were all established and passed down through generations. However, some of the new residents might not fully understand or respect these practices, leading to disruptions in the communal living and traditional ways of life in Ban Saeng Pha.

**Figure 9**

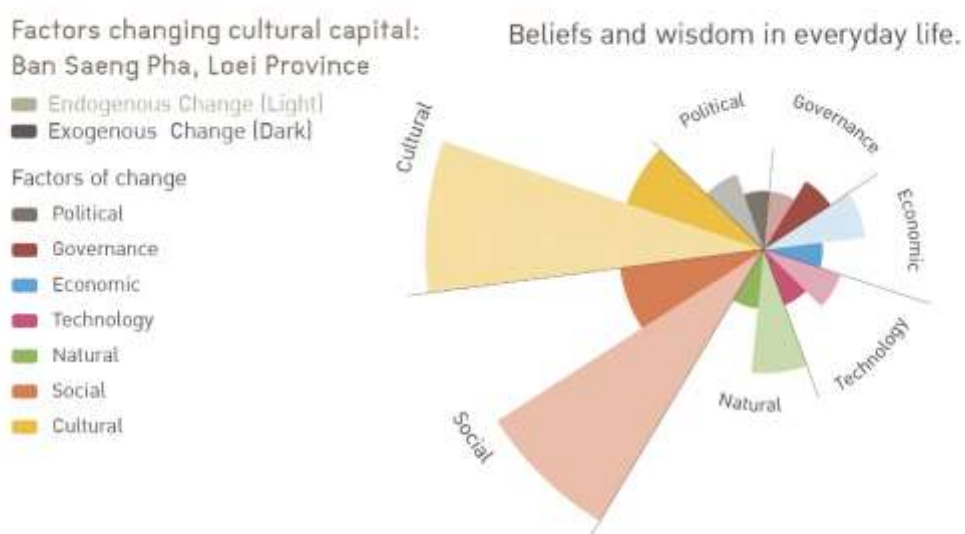
*People in the community believe that the Buddha image will protect the forest*



The traditional knowledge in Ban Saeng Pha primarily encompasses flower tree crafting, wood carving, irrigation methods, and animal husbandry. These fields of knowledge have undergone both sudden and gradual changes in cultural capital, mainly due to endogenous factors, including social factors due to population increases, the adoption of cultural practices, learning skills, and technology from outside the area to make the lifestyles of people in Ban Saeng Pha more convenient. These have caused traditional knowledge in various areas to change and cause certain knowledge to be lost or discontinued due to replacement by modern materials and technologies.

**Figure 10**

*A pie chart showing the factors influencing the change in beliefs and wisdom in daily life."*



## 5) Environmental Factors Affecting Cultural Capital

Environmental factors are important variables affecting changes in cultural capital in Ban Saeng Pha. Changes in the ecosystem in the Saeng Pha community, such as forest encroachment during 1986–1992 from the state's timber concession project and the threat from the Rom Klao War that occurred in the border area, resulted in villagers being unable to access sacred areas such as Hin Si Thit or Wang Tham Phra to perform traditional rituals continuously. This led to changes in rituals or the relocation of ritual points to preserve the forest. The establishment of Phu Suan Sai National Park helped conserve forest areas and water sources to some extent, but at the same time, it limited the community's use in some ways.

Changes in the area around the Phra That Din, where many stones are excavated each year, have caused the accumulation of piles of soil that have changed the landscape of the original sacred site. In addition, releasing pets into the headwater forest, which is a restricted area according to traditional beliefs, also reflects changes in thinking and lifestyles in the modern era. All of this indicates that the environment is not only a backdrop for culture, but also a part of the cultural system that affects change.

The sacredness of the headwater forest and Wang Tham Phra does not only have religious dimensions and beliefs, but also reflects the concept of cultural ecology that the community uses to control the behavior of using natural resources sustainably. Rituals that prohibit hunting on Buddhist holy days or cutting down certain types of trees have become mechanisms that help conserve biodiversity and maintain the ecological balance in sacred areas.

### CONCLUSION

The factors influencing changes in cultural capital include changes in cultural practices and lifestyle behaviors, including the behaviors of people in society due to changes in the social structure, organization, status, and roles within the community. These changes include gradual and abrupt changes caused by the endogenous and exogenous factors of the Ban Saeng Pha community, which stem from human adaptation to natural, economic, technological, political, social, and cultural conditions.

Changes in the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha have been ongoing since B.E. 2090 (1547) when the community converted from ghost worship to Buddhism. Thus, most traditions and customs follow Buddhist teachings. The changes in the cultural capital of Wat Sri Pho Chai have occurred mainly due to cultural and social factors. Buddhist monks who came to propagate Buddhism caused people to stop worshipping spirits and joined with villagers to build the temple and a place to hold relics of the Buddha in order to prevent people from returning to ghost/spirit worship. The community's faith in Buddhism and community requirements to regularly maintain religious sites on every significant Buddhist date caused religious sites to be modified and changed at the behest of community leaders who accepted leadership roles and proposed religious site development guidelines. Social endogenous factors of Ban Saeng Pha caused significant changes. The temple's oversight and management by community leaders, who have a monopoly on control and maintenance, have caused development and changes to take place since then.

Regarding the factors of changes in the sacred areas of Ban Saeng Pha, namely Phra That Din Taen, the Four-Point Stone, the Chedi at the Head and End of the Village, the Wang Tham Phra Cave, and the headwater forest. These sacred areas were all connected to beliefs in the supernatural and Buddhism, these sacred sites were designated for used in performing religious rites over four hundred years previously at the same time as migration into the area. The changes in these sacred areas occurred gradually due to cultural and social factors caused by endogenous changes driven by community members, religious leaders, and village heads. These changes aimed to preserve and maintain the sacred areas, ensuring their continuous use. As a result, exogenous factors did not have much impact on changing this cultural capital. Part of the changes have been caused by population growth in the village. As the population has grown,



the increased demand for agricultural and residential land and, in some cases, expansion and possession of agricultural land, intruded into sacred areas preserved by the community as water sources or places for performing religious activities. Changes in social conditions have caused beliefs and respect for the supernatural to become less valued, causing many sacred areas to be intruded upon by community members themselves.

The factors of change in traditions and ceremonies have mainly been endogenous factors caused by cultural and social reasons within Ban Saeng Pha. These changes have been caused by the social structure with supervision of traditional activities by community leaders and religious leaders trusted and followed by villagers. Changes in community leaders in each era have caused changes in ideas or policies on the management of traditional activities. The exogenous factors of changes in traditions and religious rites stem from social, cultural, and political factors. The involvement of local government officials and administrative leaders in the community's traditions have brought about a shift in the order of religious rites with greater emphasis on administrative leaders and government agency leaders. Thus, the villagers, who are the custodians of the cultural capital have downgraded roles only to that of participants. The advent of project policies has provided budgetary support for organizing cultural and traditional activities with the aims of generating tourism and attracting tourists to the area, causing traditions and customs to be changed for consistency and support of tourists with the expectation of economic gains. Community members, who are the owners of the cultural capital, were not stakeholders in income generated from tourism. Traditional activities originated from traditions and customs practiced by the people of Ban Saeng Pha out of respect and faith in their own culture.

In the area of factors contributing to changes in beliefs and knowledge in daily life in Ban Saeng Pha, beliefs and knowledge in life that are the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha have been caused by cultural practices out of belief and faith in Buddhism, including reverence for the supernatural consistent with lifestyles in hunting livelihoods and lifestyles from living with the forest and from mainly working in agricultural occupations. Endogenous changes were mainly caused by social and cultural factors. Part of endogenous changes were caused by changes to the administrative system in Ban Saeng Pha where village headmen led religious and traditional activities along with controlling rules and regulations that influence transmission of beliefs to the next generation out of belief in words or leadership in activities involving cultural capital in Ban Saeng Pha. In addition, population increases within the village and from migration by outside people through marriage and purchases of land and structures for agricultural purposes who have different traditions from the people of Ban Saeng Pha caused choices to follow and not follow the lifestyles and beliefs of Ban Saeng Pha, such as by doing farm work on major and minor Buddhist holy days, non-adherence to beliefs about making offerings to Phra That Din Taen, avoiding the slaughter of large animals in Ban Saeng Pha, and avoiding cutting forbidden trees. Adherence or practices are not as strict as in the past. Changes in cultural capital from exogenous factors have resulted from social, cultural, political, and administrative interference by outside parties. Part of the cause of changes in cultural capital has stemmed from migration by outside people who have their original beliefs and do not follow the beliefs of Ban Saeng Pha.

The main traditional knowledge in Ban Saeng Pha encompass flower tree crafting, wood carving, irrigation methods, and animal husbandry. These areas of knowledge have undergone both sudden and gradual changes in cultural capital. The causes of these changes are mainly endogenous factors, which include social factors due to population growth, the adoption of cultural practices, learning skills, and technology from outside the area to make the lifestyles of people in Ban Saeng Pha more convenient. These have caused traditional knowledge in various areas to change and certain knowledge to be lost or discontinued due to replacement by modern materials and technologies.

In summary, the changes in the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha are more predominantly a result of endogenous factors rather than exogenous factors. These factors originated from cultural and social causes. Changes have been caused by socioeconomic changes from migration and the arrival of more

outsiders who rent and purchased land for living. The newly arrived people have continued to adhere to their own original culture without strictly changing or assimilating to the local traditions and culture of Ban Saeng Pha. In addition, local prosperity in terms of the economy, animal husbandry, and agricultural cultivation formerly emphasized subsistence farming. This changed to an emphasis on cultivation for sale because modern technological products and agricultural equipment were highly priced. Therefore, cultivation is focused on increasing agricultural production in order to generate more income. Moreover, community members have gradually had less interest, faith, and adherence to the beliefs, roles, and community identity of local traditions and culture.

## DISCUSSION

The cultural capital existing in Ban Saeng Pha is both unique tangible and intangible. The changes in this cultural capital have been influenced by certain factors that have brought about change. These cultural and lifestyle changes, including the behavioral changes of people in society, are due to social structure, social order, status, and roles that cause change. The changes occurring have included both gradual and sudden endogenous or exogenous changes and have mainly been caused by cultural and social factors. Political and administrative reasons are reinforcing factors of change, while economic, technological, and natural factors have caused gradual changes or adaptation based on outside reach into the area of Ban Saeng Pha. Julian H. Steward (1902-1972) described constant change as a dynamic process. Cultural change is an adaptive response to environments with technological changes bringing about cultural change in line with the social and administrative structure. Natural environmental conditions are the main conditions determining sociocultural changes and adaptive processes (Wansiri, 1997). According to Steward's concept, cultural adaptation to the environment has a significant influence on changes in cultural capital, such as forest ecosystems, water, and landscapes, which are both sources of resources and sacred areas. When ecological changes occur, especially from humans or natural disasters, cultural traditions must also adapt accordingly.

Exogenous changes to the cultural capital of the village have been caused by processes or procedures in certain traditions and customs imported by ruling-class outsiders in order to make certain traditions and customs consistent with practiced customs, resulting in the creation of "invented traditions" blended with the original traditions of Ban Saeng Pha. Eric Hobsbawm indicated that invented traditions in society originate largely from nation-state policies when states or organizations invent cultures and traditions to be consistent with political policies (Nathalang, 2016). Cultural capital is an important concept in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who showed educational inequality between the classes, while Herman G. van de Werfhorst (2009) argued against Bourdieu's theory on cultural change, stating that this theory is neither consistent nor covers migration and social lifestyle issues, which usually have multiple causes and are not limited to education. The abovementioned study has had no effects on attitude and values in inheriting cultural capital. Ordinarily, Southeast Asian families are economically and culturally diverse, including in terms of familial relationships, religion, ethnicity, and public government policies, all of which cause rapid changes potentially originating in historical and cultural factors that determine the rules of life for people in this region (Wei-Jun Jean Yeung, Sonalde Desai, and Gavin W. Jones, 2018). The arrival of outsiders caused only policy changes or changes in recommendations for adjustment or change of cultural capital. True changes have all been caused by the degree of significance given to the policies of outsiders by community leaders in each era in order to change in line with outside recommendations.

Endogenous change is a cultural process driven by people in the community with community leaders, religious leaders, and local people supporting and sustaining cultural capital through continuation of traditions and customs. These practices have made cultural capital resilient. Traditional beliefs and customs certainly have undergone changes in line with modern society. However, efforts have been made to preserve this cultural capital amidst the influence of globalization by making people in general gain awareness and become active in protecting and transferring their cultural heritage to future generations

(Chatiphod, 2019). Influence from outside environments and technological advancements on changes to the cultural capital of Ban Saeng Pha are clearly and tangibly visible in the way Ban Saeng Pha's traditions are utilized as unique selling points for provincial and national economic development strategies, predominantly through cultural tourism and support from external agencies in supporting communities in focusing on local aesthetics, customs, and traditions as selling points for tourists in order to advertise tourism in the province (Phoungmanee, 2016). As noted by Ausat et al. (2023), cultural capital is crucial to a creative economy, including the arrival of people from outside the area to live and farm in the community of Ban Saeng Pha. Essentially, new arrivals have their own cultural bases. Therefore, when entering the area of Ban Saeng Pha with cultural differences from the culture familiar to outside people, new arrivals need to adapt to assimilate into the society of Ban Saeng Pha. However, outside people are unable to follow every community rule such as requirements to not work, farm, and hunt on every Buddhist holy day of the month for the purpose of allowing wildlife to live and breed, which is the original idea of the community members of Ban Saeng Pha for conservation of natural resources because nearly every household in Ban Saeng Pha is engaged in hunting as a livelihood. In this age of commercial agricultural production with focus on production for sale at higher values, however, many rules considered to be significant cultural capital have faded due an aim to gain more agricultural production.

Ormsby and Bhagwat (2010) presented a description and analysis of the role of sacred forests in India, which is a natural resource management mechanism that is deeply rooted in the community. They pointed out that even though they are not under the state conservation system, sacred forests still exist firmly through religious beliefs, rituals, and cultural rules that are mutually accepted in local communities. This results in these areas effectively protecting biodiversity and embodying the identity, memory, and spirit of local people. The researchers suggest that such practices should be recognized and integrated into national and global environmental conservation policies, reflecting the deep-rooted relationship between humans and nature in local cultures and can truly lead to sustainable development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research showed the factors contributing to the changes in cultural capital, culture and traditions of Ban Saeng Pha, which had been passed down for hundreds of years. Additionally, the area is significant for its culture, which is used as the identity of Loei Province, Thailand. This study highlights the importance and roles of the local community in preserving and preserving this culture amidst constant changes in the world. When promoting tourism and the community economy, emphasis should be placed on allowing the community to play a primary decision-making and management planning role with consideration given to community needs and sustainability of the community's culture to to ensure continuity.

The community should be encouraged to develop environmental conservation plans in sacred areas alongside cultural heritage, such as planting community forests around the Phra That Din instead, or setting a no-logging zone in sacred areas used for rituals, in order to create sustainability in both the culture and the ecosystem of Ban Saeng Pha.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Mahasarakham University, Khon Kaen University, and all participants, who willingly participated in this study. This study is the dissertation for the Doctor of Philosophy in Culture at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University. The researcher received a scholarship from Mahasarakham University.

## REFERENCES

- Ausat, A., Bana, T., & Gadzali, S. (2023, 03/07). Basic Capital of Creative Economy: The Role of Intellectual, Social, Cultural, and Institutional Capital. *Apollo: Journal of Tourism and Business*, 1, 42-54. <https://doi.org/10.58905/apollo.v1i2.21>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The form of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (64-75). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Chatiphod, P. (2019). Phu Tai Katak from Mahaxay to Non Hom: A study of the social and cultural dynamics. *Mekong-Salween Civilization Studies Journal*, 10(2). <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jnuks/article/view/107467>
- Greenfield, P. M. (2016). Social change, cultural evolution, and human development. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 8, 84-92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.10.012>
- Hack-Polay, D., Rahman, M., & Bal, M. (2023). Beyond Cultural Instrumentality: Exploring the Concept of Total Diaspora Cultural Capital for Sustainability. *Sustainability*, 15(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15076238>
- Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (Eds.). (2012). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. E. (2000). Modernization, cultural change, and the persistence of traditional values. *American Sociological Review*, 65(1), 19-51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657288>
- Jantanukul, W., & Kenaphoom, S. (2020). The Socio-Cultural Capital Management in Lower Northeastern Region, Thailand. *European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine*, 7(8), 4290-4299.
- Nathalang, S. (2016). *Creative folklore: synthesis and theory*. Bangkok: Queen Sirindhorn Anthropology Center (Public organization).
- ORMSBY, A. A., & BHAGWAT, S. A. (2010). Sacred forests of India: a strong tradition of community-based natural resource management. *Environmental Conservation*, 37(3), 320-326. doi:10.1017/S0376892910000561
- Phoungmanee, T. (2016). A study process of identities in local change into arts and culture tourism site, Chiang Khan sub-district, Loei province. *Research and Development Journal, Loei Rajabhat University*, 11(36). 22-33. <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/researchjournal-lru/article/view/79444>
- Phuvijarn, W. (2008). Wat Pho Chai's mural painting, Ban Na-Phueng, Na Haeo District, Loei Province. *Research and Development Journal. Loei Rajabhat University*, 3(6).
- Plengdeesakul, B. (2019). *Research in Arts*. Khon Kaen University.
- Richardson, J. (1986). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 241-58.
- Stephenson, J. (2023). Cultural Change. In J. Stephenson (Ed.), *Culture and Sustainability: Exploring Stability and Transformation with the Cultures Framework* (pp. 125-151). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25515-1\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25515-1_6)
- Strategic Management Group for Upper Northeastern Region 1. (2021). *5-year provincial development plan (2018 - 2022), revised edition for the year 2021*. Ministry of Interior. Bangkok. <http://www.osmnortheast-n1.moi.go.th/>
- Throsby, C.D. (2001). *Economics and culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2010). Cultural capital: strengths, weaknesses and two advancements. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(2), 157-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690903539065>
- Wankaew, S. (1994). *Social and cultural changes in society and culture*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Wansiri, N. (1997). *Social and cultural anthropology*. Bangkok: Kasetsart University.
- Yeung, Wei-Jun & Desai, Sonalde & Jones, Gavin. (2018). Families in Southeast and South Asia. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 44. 469-495. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041124>

**Corresponding author:** Niyom Wongpongkham

**Email:** [wniyom@kku.ac.th](mailto:wniyom@kku.ac.th)