

Cultural Identity Formation Of Costumes In The Pageantry Of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival

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Abstract

This research article examines the cultural identity formation of costumes used in the pageantry of the Phrathatphanom Worship Festival. The study adopts a qualitative approach, gathering information from documents and field research through interviews, surveys, and observations with local experts, artisans, and community stakeholders. The analysis draws on theoretical frameworks from folklore, symbolic interactionism, semiotics, structural functionalism, and identity theory. Findings reveal that costumes, including clothing, headgear, and accessories worn during the procession, reflect the distinct cultural identity of the Phrathatphanom region. The creation of this identity is based on two key sources: oral traditions and written records such as the Urankanithan, as well as historical documentation including restoration chronicles and archival photographs. Four groups of indicators guide the design process: color, textile patterns, photographic evidence, and written documents. Each serves as a foundation for costume design that communicates cultural values and identity in a tangible and meaningful way.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Costume, Phrathatphanom Worship Festival Pageantry

1. INTRODUCTION

Phrathatphanom is an important stupa situated in the Mekong River basin and has long served as a spiritual center for both Thai and Lao peoples. The history of Phrathatphanom has been passed down through oral legends as well as written literature such as the "Urangkathat," both of which deeply influence local beliefs related to the region's history and other significant sites. The legend of Phrathatphanom exists in various versions, both oral and written, throughout the collective memory of people in the Mekong region (Witsapat Chaichuay, 2014). Furthermore, Phrathatphanom serves as a key Buddhist center at the sub-regional level, with major traditional religious festivals organized by Buddhist devotees from both banks of the Mekong River. One of the most significant of these is the Phrathatphanom Worship Festival, which has been held for generations.

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Currently, the festival is celebrated from the eighth waxing day to the first waning day of the third lunar month. The intentions behind worshipping Phrathatphanom are to commemorate the Buddha, to accumulate merit, to uphold enduring traditions, and to seek blessings or make vows (Phra Maha Boonnam Prokkhomo (Konman), 2017).

A particularly important ritual marks the opening of the festival: the invitation of Phra Upakhut from the “navel of the sea” (the Mekong River) to serve as the spiritual protector of the ceremony, ensuring its safety according to local beliefs. This involves a parade escorting Phra Upakhut and sacred offerings into the temple. The parade’s composition includes both traditional pageantry elements and newly created artistic features designed to enhance its beauty and grandeur. Thus, the pageantry plays a crucial role as a medium for expressing historical narratives, customs, rituals, and art and culture in a tangible form.

At present, the Phrathatphanom Worship Festival is depicted as a cultural city event characterized by a uniquely distinctive Pageantry, supported and promoted by both the public and private sectors. The festival is continually reproduced and highlighted as a marketing feature to showcase its cultural beauty. The rituals and Pageantry today are elaborately decorated, with many aspects being newly synthesized to reflect modern societal contexts. Local cultural tourism now significantly influences the community economy, and this approach has also impacted the sacred rituals of the festival, resulting in various changes to the ceremony of inviting Phra Upakhut. Government and private organizations have become increasingly involved with the aim of boosting tourism in Nakhon Phanom province (Siraporn Na Thalang, 2017). The city, with its rich art, culture, and traditions, markets itself as a cultural destination, attracting visitors through the creative presentation of cultural capital in the form of Pageantry. These Pageantry play an important communicative role by expressing meaning and cultural identity through costume—a key component that can vividly narrate the area's unique history and background and concretely convey abstract cultural narratives through the attire of Pageantry participants.

In the past, clothing was primarily used for bodily covering, but its significance has evolved over time according to historical events and contexts. Through the accumulation of civilizational values, attire has developed unique features that distinguish different ethnic groups and serve as markers of geographical identity. The dress of each ethnic group provides literary and historical evidence that guides our understanding of dress styles in various eras. Clothing further reflects the values, beliefs, and influences of governance, nation, and religion in specific contexts (Natchana Nuanyang, 2017). Stories are systematically interwoven through formats and concepts found in oral and written traditions, as well as historical accounts and photographs of Phrathatphanom, which give rise to a distinctive cultural identity in local dress, highlighting the unique socio-cultural characteristics of the Phrathatphanom area.

This process involves presenting conceptual frameworks and procedures for creating identity, reflecting a sense of self and sameness among community members with common unique characteristics. These serve as indicators of individuality, society, community, ethnicity, language, local culture, and religion—traits not commonly found or universal in other societies but which can nevertheless develop and change over time (Chotika Sriprasert, 2011). The creation of identity is therefore a collaborative process, shaped by spatial and temporal (cultural and historical) contexts. Identity itself is defined and interpreted according to values, which need not be universal; such values may also derive from cultural diversity or the construction of subcultural identities, leading to the acceptance of social multiculturalism.

According to Hall and Du Gay (1996), identity is not an inherent or natural phenomenon, but rather is formed within culture at a specific moment in time. Culture itself is socially constructed (social construct), per the circuit of culture and identity formation model of Hall and Du Gay, and identity is not static or fixed. Instead, it is linked to the various positions that people choose or use as core components in identity construction (Nattakan Rattanaphan et al., 2015), and is instrumental for conveying local cultural distinctiveness through forms of dress.

Based on the aforementioned reasons and significance, this study aims to investigate the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival, in order to gain an understanding of how cultural identity is constructed through traditional attire.

2. Research Objective

To study the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study on the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival procession employed a qualitative research approach. The researcher collected data from relevant literature and previous research, as well as through fieldwork with a purposive sample of 20 key participants. The target groups were:

Key Informants (5 persons): Individuals knowledgeable in local customs, traditions, the history of the procession, and traditional costumes, including academics and local sages.

Casual Informants (10 persons): Individuals responsible for creating or participating in the costume making for the procession. General Informants (5 persons): Included monks, personnel from local administrative organizations, educators, and residents of the local area. The research tools comprised surveys, observation forms, structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. Once the data were collected, it was categorized and organized. Data triangulation was utilized to verify the validity of the information. The data were then analyzed using theories of folklore, symbolic interactionism, semiotics, structural functionalism, and identity theory, in order to offer conclusions and explanations consistent with the research objectives.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study of the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival, based on academic literature and interviews with key informants, practitioners, and relevant stakeholders, revealed the following: traditional costumes include garments, clothing, headpieces, and adornments worn on the body of participants in the Pageantry, all of which manifest the cultural identity of the Phrathatphanom area. The creation of cultural identity in costume was found to be composed of two main aspects: Cultural identity based on oral and written traditions: The initial phase traces back to the Buddhist era, leading to the establishment of the Phrathatphanom community, as described in the *Urangkanithan* (ancient chronicle) and other local beliefs passed down in written records. Cultural identity based on historical accounts: The second phase relates to historical records of the Phrathatphanom stupa itself, particularly concerning its restoration and historical photographs that document its evolution.

Analysis of Research Findings The analysis of the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival highlights how abstract elements of local cultural heritage—regarded as intangible cultural assets—have served as the foundational cultural capital for creative expression. Multiple factors contribute to ongoing changes in this process, including local stakeholders and national policy, which together have driven the festival Pageantry to become grander and more elaborate in response to evolving socio-cultural contexts. These influences, when combined with the creative and analytical input of the designers, provide the conceptual frameworks that dictate the specific elements representing the unique identity of the Phrathatphanom area. Indicators for constructing costume identity are as follows: Color: Represents beliefs embedded within the ritualistic use of colors in ceremonial costumes. Textile patterns: Serve as markers of geography and ethnicity, signifying local and ethnic identity. Photographic analysis: Involves comparative analysis of fashion trends across different eras, sourced from historical photographs. Written records: Direct interpretation of documented texts to decode and reinterpret cultural meanings. Through a knowledge management process, these elements are decoded and reinterpreted to create symbolic representations and convey the meaning of cultural identity within the region. The transformation of colors, textile patterns, photographic analysis,

and textual interpretation into costume designs serves as a tangible manifestation of local identity. Costumes thereby become mediums that vividly reflect and communicate the cultural narratives of Phrathatphanom—rooted in oral tradition, written accounts, and historical photography. The creation of cultural identity in the festival Pageantry thus follows the "Circuit of Culture" conceptualized by Hall and Gay, as illustrated in Figure 1.

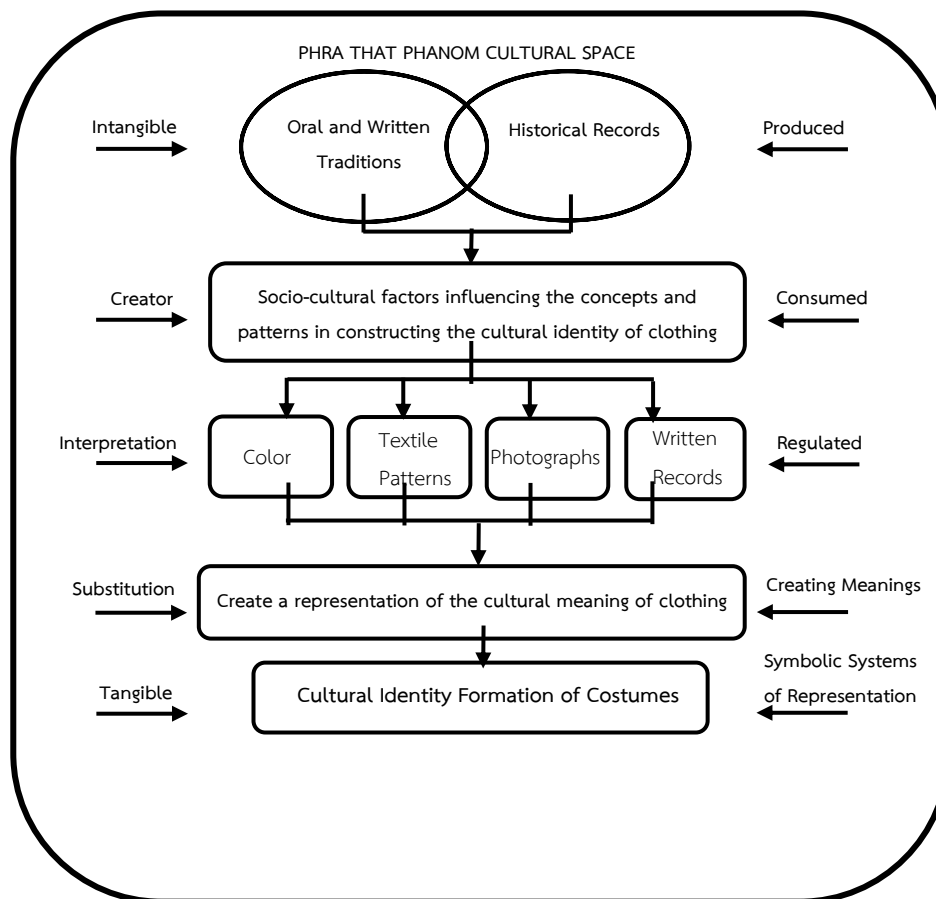


Figure 1 The Process of Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival

From the process of creating cultural identity through costumes in the pageantry of the Phrathatphanom Worship Festival, the indicators used to construct cultural identity in these costumes can be categorized into four groups as follows:

Group 1: Color, Color serves as an indicator of cultural identity in costumes. The interpretation is based on narratives found in the Urangkanithan and local records, with the shared aspect being the color of the sacred attire associated with the holy entities during actual ritual ceremonies. The color of the traditional flags (thung), offered as sacred offerings, is believed to represent holy entities and symbolize the ritual itself. These symbolic colors are thus chosen and incorporated into the design of garments, attire, body ornaments, and headpieces, creating a tangible representation of the unique cultural identity and beliefs of the Phrathatphanom area.



Figure 2 The Formation of Costume Identity through the Use of Color that come from beliefs

Group 2: Textile Patterns, Textile patterns serve as indicators of cultural identity in costume by referencing the distinctive characteristics of ethnic groups within the Austroasiatic language family, as well as place names found in the Urangkanithan and academic documents. The unique features of each ethnic group's traditional textiles are selected and incorporated into garments, clothing, body ornaments, and headpieces, thus serving as tangible representations of the specific socio-cultural narratives, and as indicators of the cultural identity of the Phrathatphanom area.



Figure 3 The Formation of Costume Identity through the Use of Textile Patterns

Group 3: Photographs, Photographs are analyzed to compare different periods and eras of fashion, serving as indicators of cultural identity in costumes. By interpreting and comparing the timeframes—years (B.E.)—and the prevailing fashion styles depicted in photographs, along with correlating these to documented historical periods, the styles of dress that appear within the same era are identified and adopted as reference points. These features are incorporated into the design of garments, attire, body ornaments, and headpieces, thus providing tangible representations of the unique socio-cultural characteristics that indicate the cultural identity of the Phrathatphanom area.



Figure 4 The of Costume Identity through Comparative Analysis of Periods and Fashion Eras from Photographs

Group 4: Written Records, Direct textual analysis is employed to identify indicators of cultural identity in costume. Interpretations are made from both historical documents and written oral traditions. Geographic indicators are determined by interpreting textual references to city names and aligning them with actual geographic locations. The characteristic textiles of each locality are

identified and integrated into the design of garments, attire, body ornaments, and headpieces. This approach aims to represent each city's distinctiveness and to highlight the differences among localities, enabling costumes to communicate the unique socio-cultural narratives of the Phrathatphanom area. Ultimately, these costumes serve as tangible representations of the specific cultural identity and characteristics of the region.



Figure 5 The Formation of Costume Identity through the Analysis of Written Records

From the process of Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival, a conceptual model for constructing the cultural identity of costumes in the Pageantry can be derived, as shown in Figure 6.

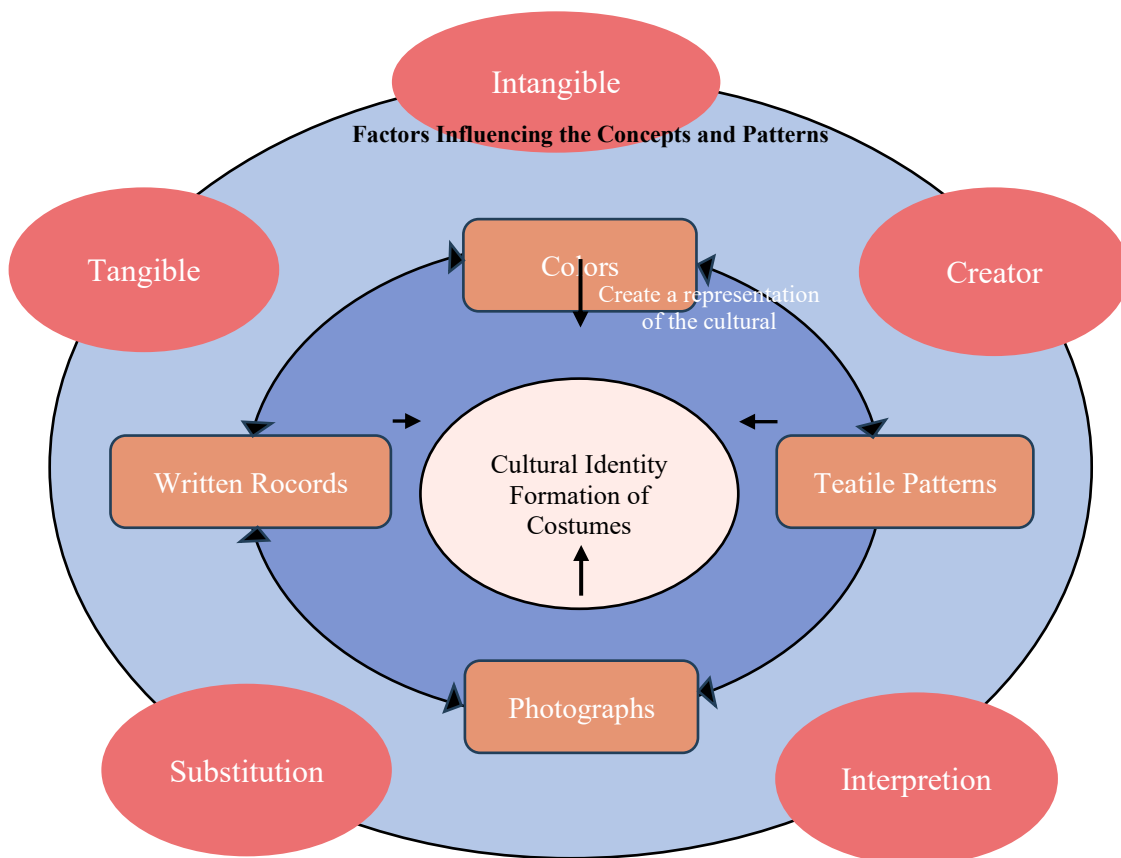


Figure 6 Conceptual Model of the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival Procession

Methods for Defining Indicators to Construct Cultural Identity in Costumes by Creating Symbolic Representations from Four Groups: Group 1: Color – Symbolizing beliefs embodied in representations of sacred entities. Group 2: Textile Patterns – Reflecting the distinctiveness of various ethnic groups. Group 3: Photographs – Analyzing and comparing periods and fashion eras. Group 4: Written Records – Direct analysis and interpretation of textual sources. These indicators of cultural identity are integrated into costume designs, serving as tangible representations of the unique socio-cultural narratives and as markers of the cultural identity of the Phrathatphanom area.

5. CONCLUSION

From the study of the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival, based on the five eras of the Pageantry, it was found that the construction of cultural identity in costumes draws upon narratives from written and oral traditions such as the tale of the Three Princesses, the story of the Five Lords, and the Bang Jum legend. Historical records from restoration events—specifically, the first to the fourth renovations—and historical photographs of Phrathatphanom also serve as key sources for conceptualizing the creation of costume identity. These stories and records are transformed into tangible representations, allowing the costumes to communicate the unique narratives preserved within the oral and written histories of Phrathatphanom.

The process can be categorized into four groups: Costumes crafted using colors that symbolize sacred significances derived from shared social beliefs. Costumes created by selecting textile patterns that indicate geographic and ethnic identity. Costumes developed through analysis and comparison of years, eras, and prevailing fashions, as depicted in photographs. Costumes inspired by direct interpretation of written records. These distinctive features are interpreted and realized through the creative process of the designers, allowing the costumes to embody and portray the unique socio-cultural characteristics that are indicators of the cultural identity of Phrathatphanom That Phanom at specific times and places. This results in the establishment of a cultural identity within the costumes of the Phrathatphanom Worship Festival Pageantry.

6. DISCUSSION

The study of the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival revealed that the cultural identity of costume elements in the Pageantry is constructed across five distinct periods. Within these periods, narratives from both oral and written traditions—such as the story of the Three Princesses, the Five Lords, and the Bang Jum legend—were incorporated. In addition, historical chronicles from the first to the fourth restoration events and historical photographs of Phrathatphanom were utilized to conceptualize the creation of costume identity. These narratives and records serve as the basis for transforming abstract cultural concepts into tangible costume representations, effectively communicating the unique stories from both oral and written histories of Phrathatphanom. The findings from the study across these five periods indicate that the construction of cultural identity in the pageantry costumes can be categorized into four main groups of indicators, each guiding the creative concept for costume design as follows:

Group 1: Costumes are created using the colors of garments to symbolize sacredness, reflecting beliefs commonly shared within the community. This approach aligns with William Bascom's folkloristic theory, as articulated in "Four Functions of Folklore" (1965), which outlines the roles of folklore in explaining the origins and rationale for rituals, providing education within societies that use oral traditions, maintaining behavioral norms, offering enjoyment, and serving as an outlet for individual frustrations. Siriporn Na Thalang (2014) also discusses the role of folklore in describing the origins and identity of communities and their rituals. Community members use myths and legends to rationalize and explain rituals, where the legend represents the abstract aspect and the ritual embodies the tangible form, fostering a sense of unity and belonging. Thus, rituals act as mechanisms for constructing group identity.

In the cultural context of the Phrathatphanom community, there is a shared belief in the story of the Three Princesses, regarded as spiritual guardians and protectors. During spiritual rituals,

mediums dress in white and red, and offerings are made using white and red flags (Thong), symbolizing the Three Princesses. White and red serve as visible representations of the sacred, the unseen, and act as the focal point of collective spiritual faith. Consequently, these colors are pivotal in costume creation, serving as tangible images that communicate cultural identity within the festival pageantry.

Group 2: Costumes are created by selecting specific textile patterns that serve as indicators of geography and ethnicity. This approach is consistent with the study by Thida Tanloet (2015), who explored the historical concept of the servants (*khao-okad*) of Phrathatphanom on both sides of the Mekong River. The study references the account of Bungchum, Nang Kong Dech-Udom of Ban Khok Kong, Muang Nong Bok, Khammouane Province, Lao PDR, who stated that “Bungchum” refers to the chief servant, originally residing at the foot of the mountains in Savannakhet Province near the Vietnam border, belonging to the Lao-Teng group but speaking the Phuthai dialect. Bungchum was believed to be the person responsible for Phrathatphanom—the chief temple servant and guardian of the keys—residing at Ban Tha Long and Ban Tha Thoeng near the Vietnam border. This evidences the settlement locations and ethnic groups, paralleling the way costumes in the Pageantry are conceptualized by interpreting written and oral histories concerning the Kha ethnic group.

The Kha are part of the Austroasiatic ethnolinguistic group, specifically the ancient Mon-Khmer branch, renowned for their unique weaving technique that creates distinctive patterns by tying the warp yarns, resulting in symbols of ethnic identity within their clothing. This practice aligns with George Herbert Mead’s theory of symbolic interactionism (1869–1931, cited in Komkrit Ritkajorn, 2019), which posits that social order is maintained through shared meanings and the use of common symbols. The patterns and techniques embedded in the garments become shared symbols that foster group cohesion and cultural identity.

Therefore, in the procession, the use of textiles with distinctive weaving techniques and patterns specific to these ethnic groups becomes tangible attire, symbolizing and communicating the cultural identity of the Phrathatphanom area through the festival pageantry costumes.

Group 3: Costume creation is achieved by analyzing and comparing photographic records in relation to the years, periods, and prevailing fashions of the time. This approach aligns with the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes (1915–1980), who stated that the meaning given to any image is not innately derived from what is seen. In other words, our interpretation of an image is not self-evident or naturally inherent; understanding is shaped by cultural and individual contexts, and interpretations may differ among viewers.

In the creation of cultural identity for costumes through the analysis of photographs, cultural meanings are interpreted and connected to what is visually represented. Historical photographs of Phrathatphanom vary in terms of the period and location in which they were captured. By examining and comparing the styles of dress depicted in these photographs—and utilizing the knowledge and expertise of designers—implicit cultural symbols and meanings embedded in the images can be identified and extracted. These are then transformed into tangible, visible costume forms that embody and communicate cultural identity within the festival pageantry.

Group 4: Costumes are created through direct interpretation of written records, such as the *Urang Kanitan* and the *Legend of Phrathatphanom* (special edition), which are oral traditions from the Phrathatphanom area that have been transcribed into text. This approach is in line with Claude Lévi-Strauss’s functional-structural theory (1960–1970), which posits that the study of cultural context can be undertaken through the study of language by decoding the language people use in order to understand social behavior. For instance, interpreting the place names and the names of the Five Lords in the *Urang Kanitan* involves decoding written names and matching them with actual geographic locations. The analysis extends to considering socio-cultural characteristics and the roles and importance of each city in the legend, which leads to the hypothetical characterization of legendary figures and the structure of the legend itself.

As Siriporn Na Thalang (2014) explains, the process of communicating and decoding the language of myths follows Lévi-Strauss’s idea that myths function as a kind of language. Decoding their

meaning entails linguistic analysis, considering the interrelations between words and names within the myth. For example, place names in the oral tradition of the Five Lords are interpreted to represent real cities, providing geographical indicators for costume design. The characteristics of the textiles specific to each locality are then used to construct costumes, differentiating each hypothetical character or city. In this way, the costumes become tangible representations of the Five Lords, visually communicating cultural identity within the pageantry.

From the study of the Cultural Identity Formation of Costumes in the Pageantry of Phrathatphanom Worship Festival, it was found that the indicators guiding the creative concept for costume design can be categorized into four groups. These indicators serve to construct the cultural identity of the costumes, which are then interpreted and decoded through knowledge management processes. This leads to the generation of cultural meaning, producing symbolic representations in the form of costumes that tangibly communicate the unique cultural identity of Phrathatphanom.

This process reflects the concept outlined by Hall and Gay (1996) as cited in Nattakarn Rattanapun et al. (2015), who explain that identity is not something naturally given or spontaneously formed, but rather is shaped within a cultural context at particular points in time. Culture itself is a social construct and is never fixed, but is instead part of what is called the “Circuit of Culture.” This circuit shows that identity is produced, consumed, and regulated within culture and that diverse meanings are continually generated through symbolic systems of representation. These systems relate to the various positions through which identities are selected or constructed.

This is consistent with the concept of representation, in that representation is a process of meaning-making—a semiotic operation. Similarly, interpretations of oral traditions, written records, and historical photographs—intangible sources—are influenced by the creator and are shaped into costume design through color, textile patterns, and photographic analysis. By substituting these elements with symbolic representations in costume form, they embody and communicate the narratives of Phrathatphanom’s oral histories and historical records. This enables the costumes to communicate the distinctive cultural stories and express the local cultural identity of Phrathatphanom as represented in the conceptual model for constructing cultural identity in the festival pageantry costumes.

7. Practical and Applied Implications

The findings of this study demonstrate that the cultural identity formation of costumes in the Phrathatphanom Worship Festival is deeply rooted in oral traditions, written records, historical photographs, and distinctive textile patterns. These elements, when combined, not only preserve intangible cultural heritage but also offer practical pathways for application in contemporary contexts. In particular, the “Circuit of Culture” framework (Hall & Du Gay, 1996) underscores the dynamic and socially constructed nature of identity, allowing for continuous reinterpretation of cultural symbols to meet modern demands. In the present era, integrating heritage preservation with technological innovation has become increasingly relevant. Digital tools such as high-resolution 3D scanning, computer-aided design (CAD), and digital textile printing provide opportunities to document and reproduce intricate costume details with precision, ensuring that symbolic elements identified in this research color schemes, textile motifs, and historical dress styles are archived and revitalized for future use (Koutsabasis, 2017). Moreover, immersive technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) can enhance the accessibility and experiential engagement of cultural heritage, allowing wider audiences to interact with virtual reconstructions of pageantry costumes and understand their symbolic meanings (Bekele et al., 2018). From an applied perspective, the synthesis of traditional craftsmanship with design science not only supports heritage conservation but also aligns with Thailand’s creative economy policy goals, which emphasize cultural tourism and soft power promotion (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2022). Such integration enables communities to generate economic value while safeguarding authenticity, positioning the Phrathatphanom pageantry as both a cultural asset and a driver of sustainable development.

8. Recommendations

The results of this study suggest several directions for practical application and future research. It is recommended that further investigation be conducted into the construction of costume identity in pageantry events in other regions, in order to develop distinctive pageantry for other traditional merit-making festivals. Such initiatives could serve as unique attractions for creative cultural tourism, aligning with the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023–2027), which identifies “Thailand as a destination for quality and sustainable tourism” and emphasizes the use of soft power to promote the image and popularity of Thai culture. In addition to traditional preservation methods, the integration of modern digital technologies such as high-resolution three-dimensional scanning, computer-aided design (CAD), and digital textile printing offers significant potential for documenting, preserving, and reproducing traditional costumes with a high degree of precision. These technologies allow for the accurate capture of intricate textile patterns, color schemes, and accessories derived from oral traditions, written records, historical photographs, and archival documentation. Furthermore, immersive technologies, including Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), could enhance the cultural tourism experience by enabling audiences to engage with virtual reconstructions of the costumes and better appreciate their symbolic meanings. The incorporation of these innovations into the costume creation process would bridge cultural heritage with applied science, supporting sustainable preservation while adding economic value through the creative industries.

Future research should also explore the creation of cultural identity in costume within the context of creative performing arts studies, examining how digital platforms and design technologies can be integrated into live performances, exhibitions, and educational programs to communicate intangible cultural heritage to diverse audiences. In addition, researchers could apply the findings of this study to investigate models and identity construction in other cultural domains, thereby expanding cultural knowledge and contributing to the development of cultural capital in various contexts. Comparative studies between traditional costume-making methods and technology-assisted reproduction may yield valuable insights into balancing authenticity with adaptation to modern needs. By linking cultural heritage with technological innovation, future research could contribute meaningfully to academic discourse, heritage management practices, and the promotion of sustainable cultural tourism.

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