

RELATIONSHIPS, UNITY AND STRENGTH OF PAK NAM PHO'S TAONANG

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ABSTRACT

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This article was compiled to gather the basic knowledge and understanding of necessary information for designing creative works of visual arts from cultural studies related to the Chinese-Thai community in Pak Nam Pho district, Nakhon Sawan province, Thailand. Data were obtained from literature reviews together with field repositories by interviewing representatives of the successors in Chinese cultural activities. This article aims to research the process of recruiting, operating, and allocating positions for Pak Nam Pho's Taonang, a traditional organizing committee, during the Chinese New Year festival by interviewing members of the Taonang and a representative from the Chinese Cultural Association of Pak Nam Pho, one of the biggest Chinese communities in Thailand. The Taonang consists of people of different ages, genders, and occupations who are approachable representatives of society and collaborate respectfully with other organizations. The recruitment and selection system of Pak Nam Pho's Taonang committee does not limit the right of membership to only Chinese descendants or Chinese cultural successors, but rather, extends to Thai-Buddhists as well as other demographics in the Pak Nam Pho area. In short, each year, this system encourages diversity among Taonang members by shifting the processes of qualification away from racial requirements toward membership through spatial requirements, which has impacted how the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade adjusts itself with every generation of Pak Nam Pho members. It is not surprising that the event tends to develop gradually year by year, however, these are still relatively minor details, allowing ancient traditions to remain at the core.

Keywords: Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade; Taonang; Chinese-Thai descent; Chinese community; Pak Nam Pho; Nakhon Sawan; Chinese culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Thai society is a multicultural society which consists of people from different races and cultures. Thai-Chinese are an ethnic group that has a large population and are scattered over every part of Thailand. The Chinese in Thailand, Southeast Asia, and including southern Chinese in Yunnan, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan, may have traded, and migrated to the region since the Metal Age. Historical documents of both Thailand and China show that Thailand had contact and traded with China before the period of the Sukhothai Kingdom, including both those who were settlers and those who traveled back and forth. During the period of the

Ayutthaya Kingdom, more Chinese people began to migrate to Thailand (Kanokpongchai, 2007, p. 40). The commercial boom in the early Rattanakosin Era integrated the Chinese way of life (which was favored by Siam's elite) seamlessly into Thai society. The number of Chinese immigrants also increased due to social and economic changes in China. In addition to trading goods, doing labor, and working for the government, these Chinese also brought their unique cultural identity, especially ceremonial activities, and festivals.

Festivals are important to people's lives as they are the focal point of their beliefs that emerge in the form of rituals and merriment in society. To understand the meaning of festivals to people and the wider society, it is important to understand the role of festivals in the eye of the community. Whether it is the behavior of people who come to make merit, drink, eat, or play together, all behaviours are inextricably related.

The Chinese living in Thailand were a minority group, so when they came to live in Thailand, they grouped to form a neighborhood and lived by the culture they brought with them. When Chinese immigrants from many places came together, as new members of the Chinese community and being foreign to the locals, those who were unable to adapt to the social environment were left with the options to return home or migrate to a third country. This is why it was necessary to mix cultures in residential communities. Therefore, Chinese culture in Thailand is a mixed culture that exists only in Thailand and it is uniquely different from the wider Chinese culture in China (Suksamran, 1987, pp. 9–10). Even though Chinese people famously maintain their traditions, strictly unchanged, some adjustments are made to compromise with the social environment. They reduced the strictness of the traditional rituals in their locality to blend with both the other Chinese ethnic groups and Thai society which became a cultural pattern that most accept to live in harmony.

Chinese rituals are now widely known in Thailand. They have characteristics that integrate seamlessly with the Thai people's way of life. It is estimated that Thais of Chinese descent account for about one-third of the total Thai population (*Kon Thai kap Tessakan Trut-chin*, 2023). Throughout the past century, the descendants of Chinese people who settled in Thailand have played an important role in the integration of their ancestors' traditional customs and the Thai way of life into a contemporary lifestyle by conserving, inheriting, and passing on the ancient traditions strictly to the family and various associations for the next generation. At the same time, some details have been adapted to suit the social context, such as in joining local religious ceremonies. However, they still maintain the practices passed down from their grandparents' generation without causing conflicts with other local people, enabling them to become a harmonious part of society. This can be seen from the living Chinese communities that are still scattered in different regions of Thailand. Festivals and rituals of Chinese-Thais are widely held each year, and these festivals and rituals have been supported and promoted continuously by the government. Festivals have become grand cultural events to promote tourism, which is one of the main sources of incomes in Thailand, such as the Vegetarian Festival in Phuket, Chinese New Year at Yaowarat Road (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn presides over the opening ceremony every year) and the tradition of the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade¹ during the Chinese New Year in the Pak Nam Pho district of Nakhon Sawan province (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Pak Nam Pho's Chinese New Year Festival

This paper aims to discuss the relationship of the Taonang with its community (the Chao Pho–Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade Tradition Organizing Committee), in carrying out traditional Chinese cultural activities. It studies the historical dimensions of overseas Chinese and Chinese-Thai communities by reviewing the relevant literature, especially in the area of the Pak Nam Pho Chinese-Thai community and the development

¹ Chao Pho-Chao Mae is a term used in Pak Nam Pho district, Nakhon Sawan province to describe local god and goddess who protect Pak Nam Pho's area.

of the community where the Taonang has played a role in cooperating with various agencies, both public, and private organizations. Data were also collected by visiting the community to interview representatives of the Taonang group and representatives of the Chinese Cultural Association in the Pak Nam Pho community to study connections between the recruitment process, the operations and filling of office positions, building relationships and acceptance, and the participation of the whole community as an important factor in promoting the community's cultural heritage to contemporary Thai society.

2. OVERSEAS CHINESE IN THAILAND

China and Southeast Asia have been in constant contact since ancient times. In the record of the diplomatic missions from Funan in the archives of the Qi Dynasty (Sathiensut, 1973, p. 224), the ancient kingdom of Thailand is recorded in the Song and Yuan Dynasty archives. There were tribute ambassadors from Xian (Siam), Loh Hok (Lawo) and a record of the Chinese nobles about the great ocean voyages to carry out political affairs with the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya Kingdoms during the Ming Dynasty (Sathiensut, 1973, p. 248). Chinese immigrants in the Sukhothai period were usually those who came from the south of the mainland such as Hokkien (Fujian or Funan), Cantonese, Hakka, Hainan, and Teochew. During the Ayutthaya period, several tributes were sent to the Chinese ambassadors. As a result, most of the immigrants from China during this period had knowledge about trade, maritime technology, and manufacturing technology, such as Sangkhalok (ceramic wares) production, which was an important export product at that time. These Chinese people came to trade, serve government, and some held positions and title. When Krung Thonburi was established, many Chinese people had already settled in Siam. During the Rattanakosin Era, trading with foreigners flourished. The Chinese wrist-tying tradition initiated during the reign of King Rama II demonstrated the importance of China as Siam's most important trading partner in the early Rattanakosin period. Chinese people in Siam were, therefore, exempt from the commoner system and could travel in and out of Siam easily. When Siam entered the Bowring Treaty in 1855, the demand for labor in the agricultural sector increased through the liberalization of trade. Since Siam had no discriminatory policies against the Chinese, as long as they paid taxes, they were allowed to travel throughout the kingdom. In addition, the war during the colonization period resulted in such a large number of Chinese people coming to work in Siam that it was said "the most important commodity in Chinese ships were Chinese passengers who came to trade and trade in labor" (Kanokpongchai, 2007, p. 67).

Chinese people who had commercial abilities were able to move up together within the Siamese elite in a short time. Since Thai people in those days did not like trading in various business sectors and working as agriculture laborers, including various types of craftsmen, these jobs all ended up being occupied by Chinese people (Songprasert, 2004, p. 394). There is no doubt that the evolution of Chinese communities in each region has different characteristics, dependent on factors such as the immigration of overseas Chinese from different regions, the different ethnic groups of overseas Chinese and the different periods when they immigrated. This resulted in different citizenship statuses and complicated the study which requires the study of historical aspects in conjunction with anthropological and sociocultural studies. The socioeconomic and political status of the overseas Chinese was in line with the national administration policies of each state. Luckily, the flexible policies of the Thai State in the 1940s–1990s played an important role in effectively dissolving differences between Chinese ethnic groups, for example, by regulating the Chinese school curriculum. Furthermore, a compromise was made by granting the right to keep their original citizenship and granting them Siamese citizenship, as well as allowing Chinese customs and traditions to be well-nurtured by applying various rituals following the traditions, culture, and beliefs of Theravada Buddhism. This process connected Chinese national groups and associations with government support. Moreover, it can be said that the process of cultural assimilation occurs through certain conditions that make cultural assimilation highly successful, such as ethnic similarities, religious similarities, and similar core beliefs. Being a citizen of a developing country during a period of modernization and marriage also played important roles. *Ung Di Kia: A Story of Overseas Chinese People* notes that:

It is common for Chinese immigrants to have more than one wife as long as they can nurture them by leaving one wife to take care of the parents and home affairs. The other wife, usually a local woman, takes care of overseas affairs. The Chinese in those days found and appreciated that having a Siamese wife gave them an advantage in trading. There are many records of Chinese-Thai marriages in the 19th century including the Chinese concubines who were the daughters of Chinese nobles and often featured in the Siamese dynasty's annals (Pan, 1997, pp. 255–256).

This contributed toward making Thailand almost the only country in Southeast Asia where overseas Chinese groups live in a society of de facto hybridity, and it could be summarized by the fact that Thailand has the highest overseas Chinese population of them all.



Figure 2: Overseas Chinese Descendants in Thailand, Who Are Given Thai Citizenship at Birth

Currently, overseas Chinese descendants in Thailand are granted Thai citizenship at birth (Figure 2). Most of them use their Thai surnames rather than their Chinese surnames and speak the Thai language fluently, making it almost impossible to distinguish them from Thai locals. These Chinese descendants are educated in the same schools as local children. They can build a career, own land, work in government services, and participate in politics with rights as well as being recognized as Thai people. In addition, the supreme head of the state high dynasty along with the head of government and high-ranking officials of the two countries visit each other frequently despite their differing political ideology and governance. It can be said that no country in Southeast Asia has more intimate and deep ties with the People's Republic of China than Thailand (Songprasert, 2004). This makes overseas Chinese in Thailand different from overseas Chinese in neighboring Southeast Asian nations due to the smooth integration of culture with local people, so there are few clashes between overseas Chinese and local communities.

3. CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN THAILAND AND THEIR CULTURAL INTEGRATION WITH LOCAL SOCIETY

Chinese people arrived in Thailand at different times. As they settled in Thailand, they grouped into neighborhoods. Originally, they consisted of people from similar hometowns, and there was a unique culture and language per specific group. Upon arrival in Thailand, groups, and associations were formed according to their ethnic groups and languages. Later, when more Chinese people immigrated to Thailand, the distances and long periods of being apart from relatives and their home nation brought about a psychological need to stick together as a community. This allowed them to perform rituals to address the feeling of being foreign and to preserve Chinese culture as practiced in their own country. Combining subcultures from different localities (Suksamran, 1987, p. 15), resulted in the integration of various language groups into a large Chinese community spread in many areas such as the Yaowarat community in Bangkok, the Chinese community in Mueang Phuket district and Chinese communities in Nakhon Sawan province (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Chinese-Thai Integration Performance in Pak Nam Pho's Chinese New Year Festival

Culture is a symbolic system created by humans who agree to use it as a medium for people to learn its meaning together. Therefore, its culture needs to be learned to pass it from one generation to the next. Although the culture in this Chinese community has been passed down for 3–4 generations, it does not mean that Chinese people in Thailand could inherit the culture wholesale since cultural change can be brought about by various factors. However, although the cultures have similar patterns, if the social conditions of each group are different, the culture of each group will not be the same either. This is because people who are close to each other and have certain agreements can easily adopt some aspects of culture from each other since aspects that are consistent with the traditional culture will be easier to integrate than those that conflict with the traditional culture. Although the Chinese people are fundamentally steadfast in maintaining the cohesion of their culture, when they come together, they are prepared to compromise with the social environment by reducing the strictness of the traditional rituals in their locality to blend with both other ethnic Chinese groups and the wider Thai society, which is a cultural practice that most of the society accept to live in harmony.

The tradition of philanthropy is one example of the cultural compromises of the overseas Chinese people with the local society; this is particularly evident among the successful overseas Chinese. Of course, the tradition of making merit is a very old activity in many Asian countries. Overseas Chinese people are ready to raise funds for donations to associations, temples, hospitals, schools, and rural areas in need. In other words, because they remember the hardships they had been through, they provide help to those who are more deprived than themselves, and this builds social recognition and reputation as wealthy people. Overseas Chinese people like those who do good deeds love to see people recognize their good deeds. The engraving of the name of the donor on various objects in temples was established with great pomp. Other than doing this to be recognized and respected as a successful businessman, overseas Chinese donations also have implications for caring and helping each other. This is the instinct of immigrants, which could also be seen when they raised funds to aid their home country in the 1930s. It is interesting that only a few decades later, placing names on donated items has become a common practice in the wider Thai society.

In almost every Chinese community, rituals are important activities that influence building strength and solidarity in the community and extend to society as a whole. Chinese beliefs and rituals have a mixture of what is reflected in various activities, especially in worship, which exhibits the concept of nature in Taoism teachings and Confucian teachings, especially on “virtue” and Mahayana Buddhism through festivals and rituals. The religious beliefs that Chinese people follow created many rituals according to their beliefs. Being a Chinese community member means that one’s personality is governed by cultural stereotypes. Every member will be involved in these relatively constant cycles. Festivals are said to be important to one’s life as a focal point of belief that emerges in the form of rituals and revelry in society. To understand the meaning of festivals to people and society, it is important to understand the role of festivals in the way of life of the people who gather in the community. Whether it is the behavior of people who come to make merit, drink, eat, or play together, all behaviors are inextricably related, and understanding these festivals is, therefore, an important guide to understand the cultural basis of Chinese people.

4. CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN PAK NAM PHO

Nakhon Sawan province has an area of 9,597 square kilometers with a population of 1,071,686, divided into 15 districts, 128 sub-districts, and 1,437 villages. The Chinese community in Nakhon Sawan is widely known as Pak Nam Pho. It is a group of people with a blend of Chinese cultures made up of local ethnic diversity. This is why there is a strong and interesting inherited tradition, especially the Chao Pho–Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade during the Chinese New Year festival that is held annually. It is an important cultural and tourism activity in the region with participation from many sectors, including people in the area, local agencies, and organizations and has full support from both the public and private sectors.



Figure 4: The Nan River Basin in Pak Nam Pho

Pak Nam Pho, also known as Pak Nam Pho City is a community located in Mueang district, Nakhon Sawan which is rich in water resources. There are two theories on the origin of the name, Pak Nam Pho. According to the first theory, it is named according to the nature of the area where four rivers, namely, the Ping River, Wang River, Yom River and Nan River converge to form a river of two colors (Figure 4) and the estuary emerges as the origin of the Chao Phraya River. The second theory is that the name Pak Nam Pho came from the large Bodhi tree in Wat Pho at the mouth of the river which is currently located in the same area as the shrine of Guan Yu. Geographically, it is an estuary plain between the lower northern region and the upper central region in the province of Nakhon Sawan. This makes Pak Nam Pho an important city along the Nan River shipping routes as a trading center going by the name of “Commodity Junction” or “Middle State” in the economy during the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya to Rattanakosin periods. This was the case, especially after the Bowring Treaty in the reign of King Rama IV, which changed the economic life of communities in the Nan River basin by shifting from subsistence production to commercial production (Prommas & Sinthumal, 2017, pp. 62–77) and allowing economic groups, various capital groups and ethnic groups to play a significant role in the commercial community on the east bank of the Nan River.

Along the Nan River trade route to the Chao Phraya River, the merchant ships were usually owned by the Chinese, who often settled in Pak Nam Pho and established trade networks with the Chinese in Bangkok. Nakhon Sawan became a source of important goods such as rice and teak from the north to be sent to Bangkok. This trade route was at its most prosperous during the reign of King Rama VI and King Rama VII when trade expanded. The Pak Nam Pho area was bustling with houses, raft houses, markets, rice mills, lumber companies, sawmills and warehouses, causing an influx of Chinese people to engage in various occupations and trade in large numbers. These Chinese immigrants often made a living from trading and became middlemen in bringing finished goods from abroad and from Bangkok such as cigarettes, liquor, and engine parts to sell in Nakhon Sawan and nearby areas via boat. When the goods were sold out, they would take forest products, local products, and agricultural products back to Bangkok to sell. These Chinese people then moved to set up a community called the “Pak Nam Pho Market” on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, which was suitable for trading. Pak Nam Pho became an area with a large number of Chinese people living in it. Nakhon Sawan, at that time, had the third-largest Chinese population after Bangkok and Phuket.

Overseas Chinese who migrated to the Nakhon Sawan area were originally a group of Hainan and Teochew people who migrated to settle in Pak Nam Pho, Kao Liao, and Ban Maklua to trade in various consumer goods. The Hakka people (Hakka Chinese) and Cantonese often came to set up factories. There were three major trading centers, namely, Lao Market, Saphan Dam, and Tha Sud. After 1922, the railway was extended from Bangkok to Chiang Mai and the Asian Highway was built. Nakhon Sawan decreased in importance which resulted in economic stagnation. However, these Chinese people played an important role in economic development, especially in the production, and trade of rice in the lower northern region of Thailand. Chinese people, who held the values of accumulating capital and expanding trade, were an important mechanism in building an agricultural community that produced commercial rice and this area has become and continues to be an integral part of the rice trade.

5. ASSOCIATION AND SHRINE IN PAK NAM PHO

Chinese people in Pak Nam Pho, Nakhon Sawan are classified into five large groups, divided by ethnicity, language or spoken language. It is well-known that spoken language, in addition to being an important identity of each Chinese group, is also important in terms of social inclusion. In general, in Chinese society, there are associations, or clubs at the core. In Pak Nam Pho, there is a Spoken Language Association which is responsible for the harmonization of its national language group which was set up for members to help and support each other or for economic and cultural purposes, known as “Ngow-Sok” (or Wushu in Mandarin, which means a group of five). This consisted of the Teochew Chinese Association, which is the group with the largest population, followed by the Hainan Association of Chinese Hainan people, the Hokkien Chinese Association, the Kwong Siew Association of Cantonese Chinese and the Hakka Chinese Association, also known as the Hakka Chinese.

At present, Thai people of Chinese descent in Pak Nam Pho generally have a worldview and lifestyle that is almost no different from that of Thai people. They dress in Chinese style only for important festivals and ceremonies, such as Chinese New Year and weddings. These costumes often have a typical Chinese style like a cheongsam or Chinese-pattern shirt with red and gold accents rather than showing the identity of their national-language group. Although the early Chinese descendants used the language inherited from their ancestors to communicate in their group, most of the younger generation cannot speak Chinese. The second generation and almost all of the third and fourth generations of Thai people of Chinese descent use Thai as their primary language, both spoken, and written. Due to government policies in the 1950s–1960s, such as

sponsoring scholarships for Chinese children to study in Thai schools, Chinese school supervision, and the rapidly changing society of today, these Chinese children have had to adjust to fit into Thai society and create awareness as Thai citizens.

Several Chinese families are still able to pass on their group language to their descendants by sending their children to study Mandarin Chinese. Although Thai people of Chinese descent in Pak Nam Pho have blended with the wider Thai society, they can still inherit cultural traditions from their ancestors and maintain the traditional way of life effectively. They can also reflect the cultural identity of the Chinese people systematically in the present. There are methods for conveying racial identity through various cultural activities whether it is food, language, dress, housing, beliefs, festivals, or related rituals.

Most Chinese immigrants originally came from Guangdong, Hainan, and Hokkien provinces where people practice Taoism. Therefore, Pun Tao Kong, a shrine, was built in the Pak Nam Pho area. Some important shrines are respected by both Thai people of Chinese descent and local people, such as Chao Pho-Mae Na, The Pha Shrine, which is located on a cliff by the Ping River near the northern part of Pak Nam Pho Market, and the Pho Thepharak-Chao Mae Thapthim Shrine which is located at the beginning of Chao Phraya River where the Ping and Nan Rivers meet. Although most Thai people of Chinese descent in later generations turned to Buddhism, they did not abandon the traditional beliefs of their ancestors. These Chinese-Thais still have mixed religious practices. That is to say, in addition to attending temples, making merit, and performing religious rituals in the Thai-Buddhist style, they also pay respect to the Chinese gods in the shrines. They also adhere to the belief of Taoism by carrying out the traditional Chinese rituals of arranging the table of ancestor worship offerings, worshiping gods, and celebrating important Chinese festivals such as the Chinese New Year, the Qingming Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, and the Yuanxiao Festival strictly as their ancestors did.

The two shrines mentioned above, hereinafter referred to collectively as “Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho”, play an important role as local sacred places. They are the center of reverence because it is believed that these shrines have miraculous plague-curing powers, can ward off illness, create auspiciousness, and inspire success for people in Pak Nam Pho. There is a local narrative that during outbreaks of cholera and smallpox, many people got sick and died because modern medicine was not widespread and public healthcare was not effective. The Pak Nam Pho people at that time, who believed in mystical and supernatural powers, turned to sacred things in conjunction with traditional Chinese medicine by bringing the ashes of “Hu” or the Chinese paper talisman (Figure 5) of the Chao Pho Thepharak² Shrine (Pun Thao Kong) (Figure 6) and mixing them with drinking water. It appeared that people miraculously recovered from the disease and the outbreak ended. Later, The Pak Nam Pho people paraded the image of Chao Pho-Chao Mae in the Thepharak Shrine around the market to bring good fortune to the lives of the people and their families. This gave birth to the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Chinese Deities Traditional Parade, held annually since 1917.



Figure 5: Hu



Figure 6: Thepharak Shrine, Pun Thao Kong and Chao Ma Thapthim

The sanctity of the famous Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Shrines has resulted in many activities related to beliefs, such as paying respect, worshiping for auspiciousness, showing faith and respect to the gods, and performing various Chinese sacred religious ceremonies for success or to ward off suffering and sickness. This continued until the accumulation of Chinese culture in terms of rituals finally created exchanges, links, and acceptance between Chinese-Thais, and local Thai communities in the Pak Nam Pho Market area. The Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade tradition is, therefore, a cultural activity that has been recognized,

² Chao Pho Tepharak means the guardian god. Chao Pho Thepharak shrine is one of the two main shrines that is the most worshipped in Pak Nam Pho district.

promoted and inherited as an example of the cultural heritage of Chinese-Thai people in Nakhon Sawan for over 100 years.

6. CHAO PHO-CHAO MAE PAK NAM PHO PARADE TRADITION

The Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade is a tradition that Thais of Chinese descent in Nakhon Sawan value every year and it is held during the Chinese New Year festival. In the beginning, it was intended to elicit prosperity by parading the statues of the gods, namely, Chao Pho Theparak, Chao Pho Guan Yu, and Chao Mae Thapthim, along various routes in the city for people to pay their respects, make wishes, ask for blessings in work and trade, dispel suffering, and express gratitude to the gods who protect the city. This was also set up to welcome the gods descending from heaven with parades on land and water. Because water transportation has deteriorated and transportation by land is more convenient, there are now only land parades. There are two parades in the Pak Nam Pho Market area, namely the Chusan Night Parade (3rd of the 1st month of the Chinese calendar) starting around 6 p.m. until 10 p.m., and the procession resumes around lunchtime on Chusi (the 4th of the 1st month of the Chinese calendar).

From visiting the subject community, one interviewee representing the organizing committee of the Chao Pho-Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade reported that the procession takes place at the shrine of Chao Pho-Mae Pak Nam Pho. Then, it moves along various routes in the city of Nakhon Sawan. The parade consists of a small procession which displays various types of Chinese performances such as the International Lion Show, which is an acrobatic dance of lions and dragons by the five Chinese language associations, each of which will bring performances unique to their native language culture (Figures 7–9). Included also are the Hokkien Lion troupe (Hokkien Der Yi Tang Lion Dance), the Guangdong Lion Show (Kuang Si Nakhon Sawan Association), the Beijing Lion Show, the Hakka Lion Show, the Hainan Tiger, and Golden Dragon Show, Hokkien Swan Dance Show, the Hainan Chinese Cup Dance performance and a performance of Eng Ko Pha Boo (108 heroes of Liang Shan).



Figure 7: Lion Dance Performance



Figure 8: Dragon Dance Performance



Figure 9: Eng Ko Pha Performance

There is also a small procession showing Chinese cultural identity from various local departments, corporations, and shops. On average, about 3,000 people in the Nakhon Sawan area participate in various part

of the parades. For example, in the ceremonial parade of Guan Yin³, marching bands are from various schools, and there are drum processions, cloth banner parades, and fancy car parades from schools and universities in the Nakhon Sawan area. These include Phothisarn School, Lasalle Chotirawee School, Nakhon Sawan Rajabhat University, Chao Phraya University, Mahidol University, and Nakhon Sawan Suankularb Chiraprawat School. There is also a procession of little dragons, which is a dragon dance performance by students of the Nakhon Sawan Kindergarten. Every procession comes from the collective efforts of Pak Nam Pho people. Along the parade route, the streets are decorated with lantern puppets, signboards, lights, and various sculptures. Activities of Chinese cultural activities are displayed in shops and restaurants decorated with student art. Shrines are erected to replicate mythical gods. Chinese opera and concerts are carefully planned to be held in the area for 12 days of the Chinese New Year.

The Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade not only represents the culture, beliefs, and faith of Thai people of Chinese descent in Nakhon Sawan, it also affects the way of life of the community in many aspects (Dinfa, 2013, p. 48). Whether it is art, or culture, it fosters cooperation between local government organizations, government agencies, people in the Pak Nam Pho community and the residents of Nakhon Sawan. This municipality conserves and promotes folklore traditions such as traditional costumes, knowledge about food and cultural activities including Chinese opera, music and performances. The author interviewed representatives from a lion performance dance group in the Pak Nam Pho area and they stated that all the youths who participated in the various faculties were local Chinese descendants. "Most of them are primary and high schoolers. Some are working people. We have an announcement for applications. As long as they have a heart of faith in our group, in the shrine of Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho, the volunteers will come since they are bound to their ethnic art. These kinds of things are the same in every group whether the Beijing, Hokkien, Hakka, or Hainan."

In terms of the economy, the event plays a role in promoting income distribution among local merchants widely through tourism businesses, hotels, shops, and restaurants. This event helps make use of local resources to the utmost benefit by promoting local products, souvenirs, food, and handicrafts. In addition, the tradition of the procession has resulted in the development of strong community relations from the exchange of knowledge between various agencies involved in activities. These include hospitals, the municipalities, the police departments, the Provincial Public Relations Office, the Office of Tourism and Sports, the Shrine Foundation, the Chinese Language Association, local schools and universities, and department stores. The central organization that handles the event is "Taonang".

7. TAONANG: THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF CHAO PHO-CHAO MAE PAK NAM PHO PARADE

The term Taonang derives from the Teochew Chinese language. "Tao" means head and "Nang" means people. In the parade, therefore, Taonang describes the person who is the prow of the boat or the leader in organizing the parade. In Mandarin, it is called "lao ling," meaning one who is senior or who will serve as the mainstay of the activities of Chinese traditions. The word Taonang is, therefore, often used to refer to the organizing committee of festivals or traditional events in various Chinese communities in general. In Nakhon Sawan, it is used to describe a group of people who are on the organizing committee of the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade each year. Their main duty is to be responsible for the administration and coordination with government and private agencies both inside and outside Nakhon Sawan province, as well as merchants, people, associations, and organizations in the Pak Nam Pho community. The Taonang committee must hold a meeting to brainstorm opinions from all parties, present the policies and themes of the year's events to the community, and delegate responsibilities in organizing the event. This ensures that all parties can participate fully in organizing performances and parades, including being suppliers and allocating budgets. They also have to contact sponsors to organize events and training, and plan public relations to support activities for preserving and disseminating the culture regarding Chinese shrines and associations. Promoting the community as a source of knowledge about the Chao Pho-Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade is one of the duties discharged (Dinfa, 2013, p. 53), as well as supervising the fairs and various entertainment events in the tradition.

The Taonang group is also responsible for coordinating the activities at the shrine of Chao Pho-Mae Pak Nam Pho, overseeing other Chinese cultural activities, as well as planning Thai cultural activities in the Pak Nam Pho area throughout the year. This includes participating in activities that promote tourism and culture in Nakhon Sawan, from the selection of the fictional body of Guan Yin, the bathing ceremony, worshipping the

³ Guan Yin is considered as a goddess of compassion, known as Bodhisattva in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, which is dominant in Chinese-Thai tradition.

City Pillar Shrine, other activities of cultural associations, lion and dragon performance, the Hungry Ghost Festival and the Songkran Festival, to public events such as sports events and various contests in the Pak Nam Pho area.

During the Chinese New Year, a new organizing committee is recruited each year to replace the old committee after the Pak Nam Pho God-Goddess Parade. According to the interview with a former chairman of Taonang's committee, one of the recruiting processes is a ceremony supervised by the Shrine Foundation. A prospective Taonang member must be a member of the Pak Nam Pho Market community who is only selected from the list of donors who pay for the banners decorating the parade route. Those who are eligible to be on the list must donate 150 baht or more and can sign up only once, regardless of the number, and amount of donations. These names were compiled by the previous Taonang with the consent of the donors. After receiving the list, the Taonang is chosen by Poe divination (Figure 10) using a "Poáh-Poe," which is a split piece of wood, shaped like a cashew nut about the size of an adult's palm (Figure 11), in front of the god-goddess. Five names are picked at a time and the Poáh-Poe are thrown three times. There is a rule that in the first throw, the Poáh-Poe must fall on the ground in a "Shèngjiao" style, that is, one piece lies flat, and the other lies with the rounded part facing up. The second throw must have the same result as the first. For the third throw, the Poáh-Poe will have to fall on the floor in a "Nùjiao" style, that is, both pieces show their round side. If the result follows this accordingly, it is considered that the god and goddess have chosen this person to be one of his/her Taonang. This divination will continue until the list of 40 people in charge is complete, and the ceremony ends. This recruiting approach allows for a committee made up of members from a wide range of ethnic, gender, age, and occupational groups, resulting in a working group with wide ties in the community, including associations, organizations, and departments. The committee has a one-year term in office, starting after the Chinese New Year, which is still managed by the previous committee, until the end of the following year's Yuanxiao Festival. It is also stipulated that once a member is elected, that member will not be allowed to be a member of the Taonang for the next 5 years.



Figure 10: A Woman Practicing Poe Divination



Figure 11: A Poáh-Poe

Despite being from the same community, Taonang members are diverse regarding worldviews, age, education, status, occupation, gender, and social status. The experiences and concepts that have guided the events of tradition inevitably lead to different expectations and aspirations in organizing the event. Therefore, after being elected, the Chao Por-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade Committee must meet to elect the chairman of the festival and various parties from the 40 members. Being the leader of the group, the chairman must display leadership, be responsible, be reliable, and have vision, and experience in managing various activities, all of which must be evident to the members. These leaders must be able to contact and negotiate with leaders of other agencies and organizations and be able to solve immediate problems smoothly. This may include using their social status and influence, for example, being able to advance some parts of the budget for flexibility in work.

In addition, most members work in department stores and are businessmen. They can also be wealthy or successful people in the area, who tend to have high self-confidence. If there is more than one person with the necessary qualifications in a clan, their visions or policies will be presented in a competitive manner, whereby the meeting must pass an electoral vote by a majority to decide. As a result, the organization of the event each year has had conflicts regarding creativity in management. That is to say, the management and auditing departments were established in the organizing committee meeting (Nua-amnat & Brahmakappa, 2020, p. 66). Therefore, members of the committee are often chosen based on their educational background

and career to enable each member to use their knowledge, abilities, and expertise to carry out work following the plans and objectives of the working group.

8. GONG MA BO HO: STRENGTH OF FAITH, RELATIONSHIPS AND LOCALITY

Throughout the years, the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade has been widely supported by local government and agencies in the area. There has been a strategic plan for the development of the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade Festival (Figure 12). The conservation and promotion of arts and culture, traditions, and local wisdom are the main factors. There are plans to facilitate traffic during the Chinese New Year by installing more lighting and traffic light systems, taking care of the street environment, and managing natural resources to prevent and mitigate pollution from solid waste. In addition, the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade has a direct impact on the lives of members of the Pak Nam Pho community in terms of society and local arts and culture as a tradition that builds reputation both in the country and abroad.

This has resulted in collaboration between various agencies in conserving and continuing traditions, along with the participation of the public sector which has prepared a strategic plan for the development of the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade to preserve and promote arts and culture, traditions, and local wisdom together with tourism. The organizing committee of the event has the right to plan and operate (Dinfa, 2013, pp. 54–55) including organizing meetings to exchange knowledge in the organization of the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho tradition sponsored by Nakhon Sawan entities. These include external organizations such as marketing departments of companies, department stores, and large business operators who come to sponsor the Chinese New Year and the parade. The images of this tradition have been disseminated in various media such as television, radio, newspapers, and the social media channels of both government and private agencies.

A large-scale provincial event affects many people in various fields, including economy, society, and politics, acting in coordination with various agencies as well as merchants and local residents in disseminating the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade tradition. This makes the Taonang committee an important mechanism that promotes exchanges and links between Chinese-Thai people and other members of the local community. Overall, although the Pak Nam Pho community can be said to be mainly a large Chinese community, it is a multicultural society, that is, the community members are not only Chinese-Thai, but also Thai people who practice Buddhism and several Thai Muslims. One interviewee said: “Even though the majority of those organizing the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade are Chinese-Thai people, at the same time, other members of the community value the tradition, to the extent that in some years, some members of the Taonang committee came from Muslim families.”

At this point, the tradition of recruiting the organizing committee through a divination method is an opportunity for all members of the community to participate and play a role in planning the event equally. This has resulted in the creation of a new board of directors with a diversity of members’ ages, genders, education, occupations, experience and worldviews, organizing the event through the networks and social connections of each board member. One interviewee explained: “Everyone helps. For example, the municipality will cooperate in the matter of technicians. There are workers ready to help. There is a tent. There are electric fans and tables for convenience. It is a tradition where people from the whole province come together to help each other. It is the work of the people of the whole province. Even though some were chosen to lead others, it does not mean that other community members have no duties. For example, if I am familiar with my community members, I will convince them to come and help. If another person knows any other members of the community, then he will also draw those men to help.”

Another important factor that connects the activity to the community is the concept of letting the gods and goddesses choose the person who will be the leader of the festival each year. This makes those who have been chosen enthusiastic and motivated to work fully. At the same time, others in the community are unbiased, respectful, and cooperative. The rule that one must be on hiatus for a period after they have finished their term of duty enables all committees and all parties elected by the gods and goddesses to have a firm determination. They dedicate themselves to upholding the tradition and to serve the gods and goddesses that they believe in, so that they will have an auspicious life. They are also ready to sacrifice personal interests to overcome various conflicts and deliver the festival to the best of their abilities. There is a phrase often used among the Taonang committee, “Gong Ma Bo Ho.” This means “I intend to do the best I can.” The gods and goddesses will be the inspiration for success and take care of the rest. One informant, representing the Taonang committee, said: “One year, there was a conflict during the Chinese New Year between the two sponsors regarding the list of event sponsors to be written on the wall of the shrine. As a result, there was an uncomfortable atmosphere during work between the two groups responsible for attracting those two sponsors. At the exact moment when the situation was tense, a fire broke out in the shrine grounds. People in the area agreed that it was a sign of

the gods and goddesses' dissatisfaction. They likely set the shrine on fire because of the quarrel. Therefore, the committee decided to remove these two groups of sponsors from supporting the event. As a result, this conflict was settled as the gods had helped the committee."



Figure 12: Lighting Decoration During the Parade Festival

9. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Pak Nam Pho's Taonang committee is an important mechanism for driving the social and cultural activities of the community. It is interesting to see the connection that coordinates the relationship and the common feelings experienced by each of the members of the Pak Nam Pho Nakhon Sawan community. As a model for the cultural activity management team, diversity is a key feature. Considering the process of reproducing these Chinese cultural activities in the Chinese-Thai community area, one would find that most of these Chinese-Thai communities have their own Taonang committee. However, in most Chinese-Thai communities, there will be characteristics of an ancient organization inherited by specific groups through traditional processes, which are related to traditional values, such as prestige, status, and seniority. Therefore, the committee positions are inherited by a particular group of the community, such as a family that is influential in the Chinese Association or a shrine's committee member. Meanwhile, the Taonang committee in the Pak Nam Pho area has a different structure from other Chinese communities, which is caused by two factors that encourage diversity. For example, there are processes of eligibility shifts from racial requirements to membership through spatial requirements. Also, the committee's recruiting procedure combines belief mechanisms with democratic processes by obtaining committee members through a process of belief and voting on the committee leaders after they present their vision, work plan, policies, and directions of activities. The resulting evocative discussions, which lead to development and improvement, encourage the community to cherish and be bound by traditional activities.

Considering the two factors mentioned above, it can be concluded that by evolving the framework, moving from ethnic to spatial, committee membership is not limited to people of Chinese descent. This process plays an important role in coordinating and connecting the tradition of the Chao Pho–Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade into associations or groups of other community members in the Pak Nam Pho area. This can be seen from the fact that Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims can also become members of the Taonang committee. This condition expands the boundaries of awareness about the value of traditions from the ethnic cultural heritage to the broader cultural heritage of the community. As everyone is a member of the same community, there will be a connection and participation in one way or another in this tradition, and the rotation of the organizing committee without being dependent on one particular group also creates an atmosphere of competition, comparing the performance of the organizing committees between the current and previous years. Thus, the traditional activities of the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade are flexible, modern, and ready to adapt to ongoing social changes. The result of both factors is that every year, the Taonang committee works hard to make the event in that year better than the previous year by overcoming the obstacles and problems from the past year. In addition, the success from previous years had been used as a new standard in the next event. As a result, the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade is likely to improve every year. This constructive conflict atmosphere is important for community members. Therefore, the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Parade is not an event of one individual or one group, but of everyone in Nakhon Sawan, in which all citizens can help and support. The processions and performances rely on a huge amount of people's energy. With all the details

in this traditional event, if the all the people of Nakhon Sawan did not cooperate, the event would not be well-organized and their plans and objectives would not be accomplished. The cooperation of the people of Nakhon Sawan in organizing the Chao Pho-Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Festival not only showcases the cultural heritage of Chinese-Thai people, or a representation of the beliefs and faith of a particular group of people, but has also become a proud symbol of the local art and culture of its citizens.

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