

Negotiating Changes to Maintain an Isan Ethnic Identity

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Abstract

Recent research studies have rarely discussed the flexibility and complexity of the depiction of Thai or Lao Isan identity and their ambiguity under global changes. This study looked at how Thai or Lao Isan people deal with ethnic identity constraints imposed by changes and navigate their way to find them. This research was based on an historical ethno-symbolist approach. The findings revealed that Thai, or Lao Isan, is ethnically Lao from Laos and culturally navigates the world in which their forefathers lived. In search of their ethnic identity, they deal with changes through mental processes and the practice of Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions, which serve as core values and the foundation for their spiritual stability. Symbolic representation in the form of visual art is also shown as proof of the attempt to preserve ethnic identity for diversity and as an insight into Thailand-Laos relations.

Keywords: Thai or Lao Isan; ethnic identity; Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions; symbolic representation

1. Introduction

In today's surroundings, which are changing on a global, regional, national, and local level, the topic of ethnic identity is particularly divisive. The current Thai society has changed significantly from the past as a result of the ongoing global dynamics that have swept into Thailand, and this shift has also had an impact on the different local cultures. It is interesting to find out how the change has affected the northeastern Thais, who are also called Thai Isan or Lao Isan and are known for having strong ethnic identities.

Thai Isan, referred to as "Lao Isan" by Hesse-Swain (2006), are Isan people with Lao ethnic origin who live in Thailand's northeast, where there are complex and frequently conflicting ideas about what it means to be Isan, Lao, or Thai. Depending on the situation's racial, political, economic, or family details, people in this region refer to themselves as Isan, Thai Isan, Lao Isan, Thai, or Lao. Researchers in a variety of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, the arts, humanities, media, management, international relations, and politics, are drawn to the issue of Isan ethno-regional identity. This is due to the complexities that connect important dualities with opposing ideas, such as Thai identity and Lao (Isan) identity. Their political, social, and cultural identities are always under attack, which is a problem (McCargo & Hongladarom, 2004). Language barriers, a discredited theory of race and ethnicity, and historical revisionism have given the appearance that "Thailand" is an ethnically and culturally homogenous nation (Streckfuss, 2012).

Outsiders and insiders whose perspectives cross cultural barriers develop and represent collective ideas and understandings of identity. One cannot help but wonder: How do Thai or Lao Isan negotiate with ethnic identity pressures imposed by the changes and navigate their way to maintain their own identity given the flexibility and diversity of the cultural depictions of Isan identity as well as the assumptions regarding their ambiguous ethnic identity under the influence of Thai, Lao, Western, regional, and global changes?

Rarely has this topic been covered in contemporary research papers. Therefore, this topic was examined in the current study. This study focused in particular on how Thai or Lao Isan people circumvent the construction of mainstream cultural identity. Then it gave proof of their attempts to preserve their identity in the face of changes, using visual art to reinforce literary form.

This paper's contents are divided into five sections. Part 1 (Introduction) describes the research problem, research gap, and study objectives. Part 2 (Literature Review) illustrates the prior study, research framework, and research question. Part 3 (Research Method) presents the research methodology and approach. Part 4 (Results of the Study) an overview of Isan origin is briefly described, along with the ways in which Thai Isan have attempted to maintain their ethnic identity in the face of change. Part 5 (Conclusion and Discussion of the Study) summarizes key findings, discusses the research findings in lien with the prior study, and pinpoints the study's limitations, limitations of the study and suggestions for future inquiry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Prior Study

Ethnic identity as defined by Chandra (2006) is a subset of identity categories whose membership is determined by characteristics related to or seen to be related to descent (described here simply as "descent-based attributes"). According to Berzonsky (1989), the three types of ethnic identity development are informative (analytical and exploratory), normative (heritage and host), and diffuse-avoidance (self-esteem, self-concept clarity and ethno-cultural identity conflict). Because identity changes over time, it is a complex subject with many variables. It is essential to provide the study's and the research framework's historical context. The literature review's topics include the formation of Thai or Lao Isan identity, struggles for identity, efforts to preserve Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity, and reconstruction of Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity in the face of change.

2.1.1 Development of Thai or Lao Isan identity

The Lao ethnic group "officially" vanished from Siam, now known as Thailand, in 1900. Local, regional, and national cultures all coexist in Laos. Keyes (1967) discovered ethno-regionalism in northeast Thailand following World War II. The regionalism that Draper et al. (2019) refers to as "Thai Lao" is resisted by Thai and Lao identities. The Lao cultural identity persisted despite the greatest efforts of Siam in the areas of administration, Lao language, religion, history, schools, and the Lao Buddhist Sangha.

Since the 1970s, "Laoism," which serves as the focal point of ethno-regionalism in different regions of Thailand, has appeared in academic circles. The studies cover a variety of subjects, such as the inclusion of the Lao States in the Thai Kingdom (Breazeale, 1975), the verbal tonality between Lao Phuan and traditional Thai (Ar-romsuk, 1978), Lao Phuan people from Laos and Thailand are survivorship-minded people (Breazeale & Smuckarn, 1988),

Bun Kam Fa heritage of the Lao Phuan ethnic group in Thailand, in its dynamic (Aneksuk & Ruangkamnerd) (2010), Thai Phuan textiles in Ban Mi, Lopburi Province; Lao Phuan textiles in Hat Siao, Sukhothai Province; Lao Phuan textiles in Chieng Kwang, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Bunsom, 2017), northeast Thai-Lao people Thailand's involvement in Theravada politics and religion (Lefferts & Cate, 2012), Lao Puan ethnic community in Thailand management of its cultural resources (Tumad & Siritwong, 2017), the growth of Thai Puan people's unique dance arts and cultural identity in Ban Bung Khe, Nong

Saeng Subdistrict, Pakplee District, and Nakhon Nayok Province (Makpa, 2017), Phuan's phonetics and vocabulary in Nong Khai and Udon Thani, Thailand (Singsawat, 2017), and development principles for cultural tourism among Thai ethnic groups (Panupat et al. 2019).

2.1.2 Struggles for identity

Scholars from a variety of disciplines are currently attempting research on the resurrection of ethnic identity in northeast Thailand across a wide range of topics. Among these topics are reflections on the development of identities as Tai (Keyes, 1995), Theravada Thai-Lao Buddhism (Lefferts, 2017), common customs such as the Bun Phra Wet have been observed in almost all Thai-Lao villages. (Lefferts & Cate, 2012), The people of rural northeast Thailand and their aspirations for individuality, equality, and acceptance in the Isan narrative (Myers, 2005), the issues that Thailand's ethnic enclaves facing today in terms of history, identity, and resources (Wittayapak, 2003), examination of the khaen (also spelled khèn in Thai) in terms of its location, power, approval, and performance (Greenwood, 2016), Thailand's cultural citizenship and mobility (Mills, 2012), language, society, and political structure in the idiolects of Northeast Thailand (Alexander & McCargo, 2014), and Thai national identity in a wider setting (Farrelly, 2016).

Studies on identity conflicts can be found in many disparate academic disciplines. Among these disciplines are the rise of the Lao ethnic group in Thailand (Draper & Kamnuansilpa, 2018), language change, ethnolinguistic vitality, language policy planning, and linguistic landscape in relation to the preservation of Isan culture (Draper & Prasertsri, 2013), the ethnic identity and allegiance of Thai villagers in the northeast (Keyes, 1966), building up the idea of ethnic group and identity (Bentley, 1987), modifying what constitutes an ethnic group (Keyes, 1976), the traditional identification of societies from archaeological remains as the basis for historical reconstructions (Jones, 2002), establishing and removing racial borders (Wimmer, 2008), and the establishment of ethnic boundaries through networks, power, and institutions (Wimmer, 2013).

2.1.3 Attempts to maintain Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity

The formation of ethnic identity and the variety of methods by which ethnic identity and culture are created and reconstructed in various spheres of contemporary society are highlighted by several authors (e.g., Breazeale, 2012; Iijima, 2018). Politically, Ricks (2019) investigated the puzzling absence of ethnic-based political divisions in northeast Thailand. Even though ethnicity and political support are linked, little ethnic mobilization occurs. Because the government-approved Thai identity is generally acknowledged, ethnic mobilization is still at a low level. Even among Isan residents, who are among the country's most disadvantaged people, support for "Thai-ness" is still strong. Being classified as a Thai is, in the opinion of the vast majority of Thais, preferable to being categorized as a member of another ethnic group. This was demonstrated using data from extensive surveys and a number of interviews with individuals who identified themselves as Isanese. The findings demonstrate that the Thai government helped the Isan people develop a sense of national identity and that intense nationalism makes it difficult for many ethnic groups to coexist. When examining the Thai-Lao issue, Draper and Kamnuansilpa (2018) concentrated on the resurgence of Thailand's ethnic Lao minority and associated policy concerns. This study recommends reducing discrimination against Thai Lao.

The Lao Phuan ethnic group in Thailand has undergone ongoing dynamics and adaptation. Karapan and Susuwan's (2021), for example, focus on how their traditions have changed in response to shifting social and environmental variables. The main goal of this study was to research how the group's cultural practices are transmitted and to advance the

spread of genuine Phuan traditional knowledge. This was done by gaining an understanding of the factors that have influenced the group's dynamics and adaptation. The findings demonstrate that despite living in diverse parts of the world, the Phuan people have altered their culture in numerous ways that are comparable.

2.1.4 Reconstructing Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity in the era of change

With a thorough and critical synthesis of contemporary conceptions of ethnicity in the human sciences, several studies address the need for a reevaluation of how Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity is generated and recreated in contemporary society, as Mills (2012) noted that, in recent decades, rural Thai populations' geographical migration has increased and deepened. Because of this, many, if not the majority of people who reside in rural Thailand no longer fit the notion of rural life as stable, remote, and fundamentally different from the fast-paced modernity of metropolitan Thailand, or maybe they never did.

In the fast-shifting global environment of today, attempts to create and reconstruct Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity include drawing and redrawing ethnic boundaries that are inherently ambiguous and complicated. According to Wimmer (2008), ethnic boundaries are formed through classificatory disputes and conversations among social field members. Whatever players will employ as an ethnic boundary-making technique depends on the institutional framework, power dynamics, and political networks in a field. In a subsequent study, Wimmer (2013) found that ethnic boundaries are influenced by networks, institutions, and power. Planning is necessary when drawing ethnic boundaries. The findings suggest the following methods for drawing ethnic boundaries: (1) changing an existing boundary by contesting the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories; (2) modifying an existing boundary by changing one's own position within a boundary system; (3) changing one's own position within a boundary system; and (4) emphasizing other, non-ethnic forms of belonging. These methods claim to be all-inclusive and to account for a wide range of historical and contemporary cases. It makes an effort to address the issue of how the literature is divided into several fields and subfields. Additionally, it establishes the foundation for a comparative model of how ethnic distinctions are drawn based on behavior.

Defining ethnic boundaries should be connected to ethnic dynamics in order to fully understand the long-term social and political processes that ethnicity undergoes. In order to understand different perspectives on ethnicity as a dynamically complicated form of identification and transformation over time, current studies have attempted to build up a new unity of the various fragmented fields of study of Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity in today's global changing context. Ethnic identity is best understood as a dynamic, ever-changing characteristic of both individual identity and group organization. This study investigated the ethnic identity of Thai or Lao Isan to gain insight into how they negotiate with the global changes in order to maintain their ethnic identity within the context of the study and the research question in the following section. Lao culture and identity persisted in Northeast Thailand.

2.2. Framework of the Study and Research Question

2.2.1 Framework of the study

The framework of this study can be photographically presented as shown in Figure 1.

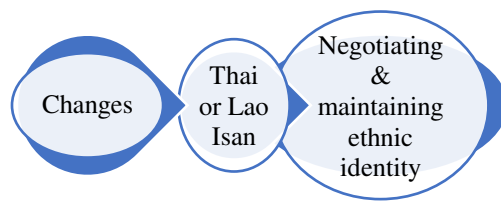


Figure 1 *Framework of the Study*

Figure 1 shows the study's framework. The identity of the Thai or Lao Isan peoples has been impacted by changes such as global socio-cultural dynamics. This study looked at how the Thai or Lao Isan people bargain with international forces in order to preserve their ethnic identity.

The research question was chosen as it is described in the following section in order to fulfill the study's objectives.

2.2.2 Research question

The following was chosen as the study question: How can Thai or Lao Isan people navigate the way to sustain their ethnic identity in the face of global dynamics? The following research methods were used in order to address the research question as shown in the next section.

3. Research Methods

Design of the Study

This study was qualitative since it examined the persistence of Thai or Lao Isan identity using a historical ethno-symbolist methodology. This method was purposefully chosen since the study examined in depth how Thai or Lao Isan people deal with global dynamics to preserve their ethnic identity, which called for meaningful data beneath the surface. So, for the purposes of this study, the qualitative technique seemed appropriate and adequate.

The data collection followed these three stages. Below are the specifics for each stage.

A field survey was the first step. To gather personal knowledge and background, the researcher and research assistants began by conducting a site survey to look for trends that would indicate the ethnic identity of the Thai Isan in multiple areas across different provinces. The survey of the locations of the communities of the target Isan ethnic groups aimed to learn more about their way of life. They hoped that by observing the various ways that each group lives, the researcher would be able to identify patterns that may be used to create works of art. It began with investigating the customs of the prehistoric Isan people, which have been upheld and constantly practiced from antiquity to the present. In order to draw patterns and insights about how the local Thai or Lao Isan people negotiated with dynamics and maintained their ethnic identity in their contemporary culture, the researcher conducted focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with key informants. The key informants were monks, spiritual leaders of the villages, ritual performers, local scholars, and philosophers of local wisdom.

A documentary analysis was the second step. Field surveys could be carried out within a specific timeframe. Gathering data of the ethnic identity of the Isan people was

conducted under time constraints. Knowledge of their way of life made up the majority of the information and not all key data could be collected during the survey. Additionally, there were no patterns or visuals that could be used to express the customs that define the locals' ethnic identity. The study of the socio-cultural setting and the past environment, therefore, drew from other sources, both printed and electronic, that are available in a variety of formats (such as photographs or paintings), in order to comprehend the issues holistically and insightfully because the contemporary social, cultural, and environmental settings differ significantly from the past.

The third step was creating the artwork, which was specifically chosen to show the patterns that mirrored the Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity. The researcher, who was born as Thai or Lao Isan and has spent his entire life in the area, carried out the artistic production process, which included selecting, filtering, improving, decreasing, and adding, notably in terms of the image's weight and mood.

Research Instruments

The study's data collection methods, which included site surveys, observation, focus groups, interviews, record keeping, document analysis, and the creation of artwork.

Site surveys

The purpose of the site surveys was to give the researcher the opportunity to hear directly from Thai or Lao Isan people about their religious and traditional customs, way of life, and beliefs in order to identify patterns of their ethnic identity.

Observation

The purpose of this observation was to gain an understanding of the religious and traditional customs, lifestyles, and beliefs of the Thai or Lao Isan people in order to understand their ethnic identity in its most fundamental forms. The researcher is a local who was born and raised in northeastern Thailand. He received his education in big cities. After graduation, he returned to the northeast. He had fifteen years of research experience, so he was qualified to be an observer to recognize and derive inherent knowledge about their ethnic identity due to their experience, expertise, and knowledge.

Focus group

These discussions aimed to gain an understanding of how the local Thai or Lao Isan people

Dealt with dynamics and upheld their ethnic identity in modern civilization. These discussions were held in support of the site surveys, which revealed insights from key informants about how the local Thai or Lao Isan people dealt with dynamics and preserved their ethnic identity in modern culture. Monks, village spiritual leaders, ritualists, local scholars, and local philosophers of local wisdom were among the most important sources of information.

Interviews

The goal of the interviews was to provide context for the focus group discussions. To elicit more insights and clarification of the information gleaned from the focus group talks, some key informants were interrogated.

Recording keeping

Recordkeeping had many different goals. Accurate data was recorded for content validity

Check in support of additional instruments for data elicitation (site surveys, observations, focus group discussions, and interviews). For a reliability assessment, the data from the various instruments were compared. Additionally, the reliability of this data was assessed by comparison with the findings of document analysis. All of them offered reliable proof that could be used to pinpoint their ethnicity and infer conclusions from the site surveys.

Document analysis

The goal of the document analysis was to contrast the findings of site surveys, observation,

Focus groups, interviews, and record-keeping with the opinions of scholars and previous research studies that were made available in both printed and electronic documents and media. This comparison might paint a clear and comprehensive picture.

Creation of artwork

The goal of this creation was to provide illustrations of the identity in the form of non-textual material printmaking artwork, as well as a textual report of the study's findings. The work was created by the researcher, who has 30 years of experience as an artist and art educator. The artwork depicted the patterns of Thai or Laotian ethnic identity.

Data Analysis and Validity Check

3.3.1 Data analysis

The study's conclusions were reached by transcribing, interpreting, comparing, and analyzing the qualitative data obtained from the aforementioned research tools. Artwork was made to show what the study found, which was the ethnic identity of the Thai Isan or Lao Isan.

3.3.2 Trustworthiness, validity, and reliability

The researcher adhered to these standards in order to produce reliable study results. Above all, the distinct data elicitation devices were created to yield consistent data in order to guarantee accurate outcomes. The surveys of numerous sites in various provinces in the northeastern region of Thailand were then carried out to assure credible results. The research strategy and procedure were then thoroughly outlined so that the job could be redone by a different researcher or evaluator to ensure reliable results. The conclusions of this study also relied on the opinions, experiences, skills, and knowledge of the key informants in order to guarantee verifiable outcomes. These were thoroughly examined (as outlined in each data elicitation tool) in order to obtain reliable data that would allow for the study's results. Last but not least, all the instruments attempted to provide results that could be used in another circumstance in a larger context of other individuals, places, and situations with similar methodologies. This was done to assure transferable outcomes.

4. Results of the Study

How can Thai or Lao Isan people navigate the way to sustain their ethnic identity in the face of global dynamics? This subject was addressed in the study results below.

4.1 A Brief Overview of Northeast Thailand

Geographically speaking, the largest region of Thailand is in the northeast, also known as Isan, Lao, and alternatively spelled Isaan, Isarn, Issarn, Issan, or Esarn. It is situated on the

the Khorat Plateau and is bordered by Laos, Thailand, the Mekong River, and Cambodia. To the west, it is divided from northern and central Thailand by the Phetchabun Mountains. The area in northeastern Thailand is made up of 20 provinces, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Map of Northeast Thailand (Chris, 2017, February 20)

Figure 2 depicts the northeast Thailand or Isan. Laos' neighbor is the area. The people of the Isan region are of Lao ethnicity, although they distinguish themselves from the Lao of Central Thailand and Laos by using the terms "Khon Isan" or "Thai Isan." The stigma attached to the Lao identity in Thai society is the main barrier to self-identification as Lao, according to scholars who have recently referred to them as Lao Isan or Thai Lao. Others, however, describe them as simply Lao (Draper et al., 2013).

Culturally, ethnic groups in the Northeast are descended from the same cultural predecessors, the same spoken language, and the same cultural traditions. A person's ethnic identity, which binds them to the world they inhabit, shapes ethnic traits that are forged by way of life and exposure to varied surroundings.

4.2 Negotiating Global Dynamics

Due to developments around the globe, the ethnic identity of Thai or Lao Isan has evolved nowadays. As a result, younger Thai Isan generations are rejecting the traditional culture of their ancestors.

“Communication and transportation improvements have a big effect on the area and the people who live there. At the same time, many young people are being persuaded to reject the traditional culture of our ancestors.” [Interviewees 1 and 2]

They began to second-guess their ethnic identity.

“Is our identity different now? How has it changed? How are we perceived by others? What's going on today? Does it accurately represent who we once were? What social and cultural developments does it reflect today?” [Interviewee 3]

On the one hand, the new generations' struggles to keep their identity in the face of change, as we'll see below, are caused by self-doubt about their ethnic identity.

“A conscious attempt to preserve our roots and ethnic identity in the context of globalization, which includes the resurgence of indigenous knowledge and culture.” [Interviewee 4]

Their knowledge motivates them to seek their ethnic identity through personal encounters and social contacts with the ethnic locals who have been largely unaffected by globalization processes. In fact, someone from the younger generation of Thai or Lao Isan said that people in Isan society have always wanted to learn more about the past.

“It is a mental process that generates a historical portrait of rural civilization that cannot be seen in day-to-day existence. The development of Isan ethnic identity is based on how the younger generations are involved in the community and how they express themselves in good times with our older generations.” [Interviewees 5 and 6]

The creation of representations that express patterns or ways of viewing the past in the form of objects, things, or locations, including pictograms or forms of the past, which are a physical manifestation of a worldview or a way of giving meaning to a human experience, is part of the awareness of local wisdom revival.

“It demonstrates the significance of thoughts and emotions in shaping the course of history. Reminiscing about the past is not just a voyage into the distant past in terms of the imagination and emotional aesthetics of modern people; it is also a mode of perception that enables us to consider or comprehend a previous era.” [Interviewees 7, 8 and 9]

A blend of traditional and modern cultures, whose essence is linked to the past and has its own root origin, constitutes the expression of Isan ethnic identity. A rural-friendly culture or the values of a peaceful, conflict-free life serve as the basis for one's spiritual stability.

“Our response to the lack of acculturation of urbanites to rural life is nostalgia, or a longing for the past. It is a sentiment that enables those who have never lived in the country to understand country living in the context of metropolitan culture and global dynamics. People without habits in rural societies have difficulties and pressures while adjusting to urban life because they are unhappy with the way things are and desire a more peaceful time in the past. Unfounded self-interest arises as a result of loneliness, even when surrounded by others. Community organizations began searching for spiritual stability, which is important to their lives, in the past as a result of social unrest and disintegration.” [Researchers' observation notes]

It is a notion of unity, tranquility, and the goodness of the past that has importance for society and for people's thoughts. It is a sentiment that gives life purpose. It is vital to investigate the sources of their spiritual stability as a result.

4.3 Navigating to the Past

There are two reasons to conduct site surveys in distinct locations. In order to identify patterns of their ethnic identity, one was to learn about Thai or Lao Isan religious and traditional practices, ways of life, and beliefs directly from the people. The other was to look for patterns that reflected the Thai Isan people's ethnic identity.

“We [the researchers] discovered that the residents in all of these locations live a life similar to that of their forefathers after visiting fifteen rural places in ten provinces. They continue to follow historical traditions like the practices of Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions.” [Researchers' observation notes]

The data from the focus groups and interviews corroborated the researchers' conclusion that the target populations share Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions, which the majority of them display in specific ways through their customs, beliefs, and way of life.

“The Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions are perhaps the most important symbolic legacies of our ethnic identity, influencing almost every aspect of life from birth to death.” [Focus groups 1-6]

The findings of site surveys and focus group discussions constantly show that locals connect to the traditions and values that have been passed down from their ancestors to subsequent generations in order to guide themselves to the past. They adhere to Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions and share their ancestors' religious convictions. They preserve their ethnic identity in this way.

4.4 Maintaining Isan Ethnic Identity

Heet 12 refers to the Buddhist teachings, beliefs, agricultural life, and spirits associated with the 12 lunar month tradition of Thai Isan or Lao Isan. It has been carried out since antiquity. Typically, the beginning of the first month of the year occurs near the end of December. Each month has its own standards for achieving financial success. The people hold the custom in high regard and have done it many times to show who they really are.

In the 1st lunar month, monks escape penance with “The Bun Khow Karma.” “Bun” means merit-making. Karma, in Hinduism and Buddhism, refers to a person's actions in this and prior lives which determine their future. It restores monks' bodies and minds. The monks will spend nine days in a restricted area, dependent on the region's availability.

“This ritual also honors the mother. Isan mothers must spend days on fire to recover after childbirth.” [Interviewee 10]

Heet 12 is a term used to describe the Buddhist doctrines, practices, agricultural way of life, and spirits connected to the Thai or Lao Isan calendar's 12 lunar months. It has been done since ancient times. The start of the first month of the year usually happens close to the end of December. The criteria for achieving financial success vary from month to month. The practice is highly valued by the people, who frequently engage in it to demonstrate their true selves.

With "The Bun Khow Karma," monks might skip their first lunar month of penance. Bun refers to accomplishment. In Buddhism and Hinduism, "karma" refers to a person's past and present deeds that shape their present and future. It heals the bodies and minds of the monks. Depending on what is available in the location, the monks will stay there for nine days.

“This ceremony also pays tribute to mothers. Isan women must spend days in the flames to heal after giving birth.”[Interviewee 10]

"The Bun Khun Lan" is held in the second lunar month following rice threshing. By providing food to monks who prayed the previous evening, this practice earns rice merit. Those present are also fed. Later, holy water is sprinkled over the fields and heaps of rice in order to make the farmers happy and ensure that the sprouts grow well. Rice is then kept in storage.

"Some proprietors of rice fields perform the ritual for numerous Kwan Lao barns. Due to the family's financial circumstances, they are occasionally unable to make advances. [Interviewee 11]

"The Bun Khao Jee," which now recognizes Makha Bucha merit, happens on Makha Bucha Day in the third month.

"A steamed sticky rice ball is called a khao jee. We serve steamed sticky rice, top it with large duck eggs, salt, and Khao Jee, which is then spun till it becomes yellow using a fire-like skewer. We then take it to the shrine. Using Khao Jee, monks distribute alms in accordance with Buddha's prayers." [Interviewee 12]

The fourth-month event is known as "The Bun Phra Wet" or "Mahachat merit-making." Its main responsibility is to invite Phra Upakhut to be enshrined in the morning at Upakut Hall. Phra Vessantorn and Phra Nang Matsee arrive in the afternoon. At night, monks offer prayers to Buddha on the subject of Phra Malai's trip to Hell. The second day consists of sermons. Mahachat has been preached on a single day for generations.

"There are places where rice balls March. A thousand rice loaves are carried around the church three times and eight times along the flag arches" [Interviewee 13]

In the fifth month, Songkran, the New Year is celebrated. On April 13–14, countrywide, or on April 15 in select locales, this celebration is held. The main activities are bathing the Buddha image in the temple and caring for aging family members. Sand is brought inside the temple to be used in the construction of a sand pagoda, which is then worshiped during "Pai nao," a major Songkran festival event in some regions.

"Before Songkran, we do a flower parade around the house, build sand pagodas at each of the three crossroads in the hamlet, and display a flag on the porch." [Interviewee 14]

The ceremony known as "Bun Bang Fai" in the sixth lunar month asks the elves for rain. The people of the area can cultivate rice to its maximum potential and live in peace by visiting the City Pillar Shrine. Events associated with Bun Bang Fai include a procession, contests, and tambourine playing. The Naga ordination ceremony's final day was a fireball.

"Rocket fireballs occur every three years in some regions. You can only get merit on Visakha Bucha Day if you don't earn it during the rocket fireballs." [Interviewee 15]

Shamha is the seventh month's ritual. Shamha means washing or purifying. After constructing a ceremonial pavilion, the inhabitants may live without fear. Offerings for the Three Jewels include Saisin filament, holy water, cotton-tied wrists, alms offerings, gravel, sand, and bamboo poles with eight fingers.

"We feed the monks the following morning and continue the ritual for three nights. The Buddha was soaked by the offerings from yesterday. Seniors and residents joined arms. In the neighborhood, gravel Saisin, or the sacred thread, should be extended in eight directions so as to encircle the hamlet. Following the celebration, the locals cleaned up." [Interviewee 16]

Buddhist Lent is observed by monks and novices stationed at one temple for three months during the eighth lunar month. The waning moon of the eighth lunar month marks the

start of the ceremony, which lasts until the waxing moon of the eleventh lunar month. By providing food, robes, medication, candles, lamps, and oil to the monks, the villagers gain merit. A candle is presented. The monks at the temple received a massive wax candle that some communities had brought.

“Bun Khao Pradabdin” takes place in the ninth month. This is a memorial for a charity or a departed loved one. A rice dish called Khao Pradab Din that also includes betel nuts and cigarettes is sweet and delicious. Villagers deposit these items in little receptacles known as krathongs, which are placed on temple fences, trees, or the ground.

“On the fifteenth day of the waxing moon in the ninth lunar month, we place krathongs wherever they see fit. Incense and candles are burned to signal the imperial or subordinate person to receive the merit once the krathong is finished. Krathongs must be distributed before dawn because imps can only travel at night. By giving food to the monks, following the rules, paying attention to sermons, and dosing the dead with water in the morning, we can gain virtue.”[Interviewee 17]

In the tenth month, when Khaosak is rewarded, loved and esteemed relatives who have passed away are remembered. The occurrence takes place on the 15th day of the waxing moon in the 10th lunar month. People prepare meals for charity early in the day and give a second piece to novices and monks. For the novices or monks, attendees bring prepared food to the temple. Announce to departed relatives that they can come receive food and merits while lighting incense. Preaching and gravel offerings were common at funerals.

"We feed the field ghost, also known as "Phi Ta Haek" in Thai, so that it will guard the field against people and animals munching on saplings.”[Interviewee 18]

On the 15th day of the waxing moon of the 11th lunar month, the locals celebrate Buddhist Lent. Monks and novices get breakfast. In some locations, special Khao Thip offerings, precepts, sermons, and nightly lantern lighting occurs. "Milk rice" is utilized for worship in the countryside. Evening entertainment includes a boat race near the river. Laotians enjoy boat races during this season.

Kathin Merit is in the 12th lunar month. Kathin merit offers robes to Buddhist Lent-completing monks. Kathin lasts from the first waning day of the 11th lunar month until the 15th of the 12th. For merit, the host must have reserved a temple before Buddhist Lent. The night before Kathin, a celebration is held. Kathin's body is paraded to the shrine the next day. After three rounds, they perform the Kathin robe offering rite with the monks.

In addition to Heet 12 customs, Kong 14 traditions are both a phrase and a practice. The act of running a country in accordance with its traditions. While “14” alludes to “14 traditions,” “Kong” refers to a “way” or “ways” in reference to regulations or practices. The fourteen norms that the King, monks, and common people must abide by are referred to as the “Kong 14 traditions.” The following is a summary of the rules.

“Tradition says that a country should be run by the King, who is also treated as the leader of the country.”[Interviewee 19]

However, superstitions and native beliefs in apparitions or ghosts have long influenced all facets of life in the northeastern part of Thailand. Even though Buddhist and Brahmin theories are used to spread belief in ghosts, apparitions, and superstitions, this belief

has not been lost or diminished. Thoughts about Brahmins, Buddhas, apparitions or ghosts, and superstitions coexist in a way that is unmistakably intertwined along the journey in a singular amalgam of diverse beliefs. There are still many ceremonies throughout the year known as the "Heet 12 traditions" for the observance of social traditions that are intertwined with the belief in ghosts, agricultural jobs associated with spiritual beliefs, the cure for disease, or rituals that make up for bad luck, bring a sense of mental stability, and worship rituals. Apparitions or ghosts are symbols of magical powers that are still very important in people's lives at all stages. A yearly event honoring the souls of ancestors and grandparents. These rituals show how local traditional beliefs and later-adopted

Mainstream perspectives can coexist in harmony. The researcher incorporated the traditions as patterns or themes in the paintings created, as indicated in the following section, because the people in all sites continued their forefathers' Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions, as well as their belief in apparitions.

4.5 Artistic Evidence of Maintaining Isan Ethnic Identity

The researcher produced a series of eight paintings to preserve Isan ethnic identity: figures 3–7 reflect Heet 12 customs, figure 8 illustrates the belief in apparitions, and figures 9–10 portray Kong 14 traditions.



Figure 3 *Staying in the Fire*

Figure 3 depicts the “Staying in the Fire” painting. It stands for conventional knowledge, which aims to put the mother's body back in balance after childbirth. Every postpartum woman visits the fire station, where she and her infant rest on a solitary wooden board next to the hearth while being wrapped in a basket. The woman is restricted from eating certain unhealthy foods during this period and is only permitted to consume rice with salt, which is supposed to replenish the salt her perspiration removes. The first ceremony of the Heet 12 traditions, "The Bun Khov Karma," in which monks spend nine days in a constrained area to heal their bodies and spirits, served as the design model for this picture. The new mother spends days in the fire, much like the monks do, to recover her body and mind after giving birth.



Figure 4 *Bun Phra Wet*

Figure 4 depicts the "Bun Phra Wet" painting. It is also known as the ritual for the fourth lunar month which honors the highest virtue—giving oneself up for the good and enjoyment of all people. Because of this, asceticism is practiced by the indigenous population as a ritual ceremony.



Figure 5 *Bun Khao Pradabdin*

Figure 5 depicts the “Bun Khao Pradabdin” painting. The image shows the ceremonial for the ninth month. Isan people participate in this traditional ceremony by placing rice, fish, savory food, fruits, betel nuts, and cigarettes in krathongs at the base of a huge tree, on the ground near a pagoda, or in a church. They do this with the intention of earning merit for the dead, as well as for the devil or the creatures of the underworld.



Figure 6 *Phi Ta Haek*

Figure 6 depicts the “Phi Ta Haek” painting. The design of this artwork was influenced by the Khaosak ceremony, which is held in the ninth month and honors Phi Ta Hak for the prosperity of their farming since Phi Ta Haek is thought to be the ghost of the rice fields and is thought to produce crop proliferation.



Figure 7 *Bun Kathin*

Figure 6 depicts the “Bun Kathin” painting. The villagers consider it to be of great value that they give the Buddha his robes at this 12th month rite. Kathin's body is three times paraded to the shrine in this painting. They then participate in the Kathin robe offering rite alongside the monks.



Figure 8 *Losing Luck*

Figure 8 depicts the “Losing Luck” painting. It was influenced by their apparitional beliefs. Ghosts and apparitions are still hugely significant to humans, especially the sick and suffering, because they are representations of magical powers. It is a sacrifice that links the chanting of good luck to the worship of the ghosts of fate by using a nine-chambered krathong, or a buoyant, ornamented basket. The patient is said to receive excellent health and fortune as well as having their bad luck disappear thanks to this offering.



Figure 9 *Kin Dong*

Figure 9 depicts the “Kin Dong” painting. A traditional Thai-Isan wedding feast known as Kin Dong marks the start of a new chapter in one's life. The purpose of this wedding is to pay tribute to the cord that has tied the couple throughout their prior lives. The rope also stands for the fusion of both families’ and ancestors' energies from this life and earlier incarnations.



Figure 10 *Gongphon*

Figure 10 depicts the “Gongphon” painting. The last homage to the deceased is a funeral pyre, or gongphon in Thai. The foundation of this ceremony is the idea that entering the afterlife is like “entering a house where food is accessible for all.” Monks carry out this chanting for the soul.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This part of the paper wraps up the research study, explains the results, and talks about the study's limits, effects, and suggestions for more research.

5.1 Conclusion

The study can be summarized as follows: Geographically speaking, Thailand's largest region is the northeast, which borders Laos. The people living in this area are Lao of Lao ethnicity and are considered to be of Lao identity. The ethnic groupings in the northeast are based on cultural practices passed down from their forefathers. The next generation's ethnic identification ties them to the society in which their ancestors once lived.

The new generation is connected to the past, their ancestors, their own root origin, and their rural warm culture as a foundation for their spiritual stability and an ideal of a peaceful, conflict-free, and meaningful life through mental processes (like self-questioning about their ethnic identification, awareness of the revival of local wisdom and culture, and a sense of nostalgia). Through the practice of Heet 12 and Kong 14 customs as well as regional beliefs that have been passed down from their ancestors, individuals travel to the past in quest of their ethnic identity. Additionally, the practice helps them to preserve their ethnic identity.

5.2 Discussion

In a number of respects, this work complements earlier studies. In terms of culture and society, this study has similar goals to those of past investigations into identity, such as those into the Lao Phuan of Thailand (Breazeale & Smuckarn, 1988; Panupat et al., 2019), but with a focus on Thai or Lao Isan.

Additional themes covered in earlier studies included Lao Phuan languages, symbolic textile designs, creative dancing arts, and the formation of cultural identity (Ar-romsuk, 1978; Singsawat, 2017). (Makpa, 2017). In contrast to prior studies, the current study emphasizes the Lao cultural legacies of Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions. The revival of ethnic identity in northeast Thailand has been highlighted in a number of earlier studies, including those on Buddhism (Lefferts, 2017), shared traditions (Lefferts & Cate, 2012), the Isan saga of rural northeast Thailand (Myers, 2005), history, identity, and resource struggles (Wittayapak, 2003), and performance (Greenwood, 2016). The resurrection of ethnic heritage derived from Buddhism (Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions) and apparitions indicate fights for ethnic identity in a changing world, which aligns this study with other studies in this field.

Prior studies have highlighted the return of the Lao ethnic group to Thailand (Draper & Kamnuansilpa, 2018; Bentley, 1987) from a variety of angles, including language change,

linguistic landscape, language policy planning, and ethnolinguistic vitality (Draper & Prasertsri, 2013; Keyes, 1966), as well as redefining ethnic group (Jones, 2002). In this study, the practice of Heet 12 and Kong 14 traditions is central to the resurgence of Isan ethnic identity. The current study examines internal elements as opposed to the preceding study, which relied on external factors (such as legislation, language, and social and environmental factors). The Thai or Lao Isan attempts in this study resulted from their internal processes (e.g., self-questioning, awareness, and nostalgia). In the isolation of city life, the new generation of Thai or Lao Isan people started to reflect on their unclear ethnic identity and the effects of global, regional, national, and local changes on their identity. As a result, they searched for spiritual stability in rural areas. They questioned their unclear ethnic identity and the effects that national, regional, local, and global developments had on it, which made them conscious of the resurgence of their ethnic identity and also made them feel nostalgic. According to earlier research, this mental process makes the resurgence of ethnic identity more resilient than outside forces.

Several researchers have highlighted the construction of ethnic identity through a variety

of processes, such as geographical migration (Mills, 2012), ethnic mobilization policy (Ricks, 2019; Draper & Kamnuansilpa, 2018), and adaptation of traditions in response to shifting social and environmental factors in an effort to preserve Thai or Lao Isan ethnic identity (e.g., Breazeale, 2012; Iijima, 2018). (Karapan & Susuwan, 2021). This study is the culmination of their nostalgia and memories of their past.

According to Karapan and Susuwan's report from the year 2021, the Phuan people all over the world have comparable cultural practices. In a similar vein, this study found that the Heet 12 and Kong 14 regions of Laos, which are across the Mekong River from Laos, are home to Thai or Lao Isan people who share the same cultural traditions and practices.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Time restrictions place limits on this investigation. Although the researcher was only able to view a portion of the twelve-month traditions, they were still able to use the data from at least eight months to make meaningful conclusions.

5.4 Suggestions for future inquiry

The results of this study shed light on how the Thai or Lao Isan in Thailand's northeast might preserve their ethnic identity in the face of change. This effort contributes to the safety of the human race and the ethnic diversity in this part of Thailand.

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