

Research Article

Woven Textiles in the Ritual of Spirit Worship of the Tai Ethnic Group in the Mekong Basin

Pokkasina Chatthiphot^{*}, Nilobol Phuraya, Yanika Saensuriwong and Pannawadee Srikhao

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, Sakon Nakhon 47000, Thailand

Abstract

The objectives of this article are to: 1) examine the ritual of spirit worship among the Tai ethnic groups of Thailand and 2) analyze the role of woven textiles in these rituals, particularly among Tai communities residing in the Mekong Basin in northeastern Thailand. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 50 key informants, including folk healers, shamans, ritual participants, weavers, and members of communities that actively maintain and practice the traditions or rituals of spirit worship. Additionally, participant observations were conducted to gather firsthand data and insights. The study found that the ritual of spirit worship remains a vital and enduring tradition in Tai communities in Thailand. These rituals are typically performed during the third and fourth months of the Tai lunar calendar. Woven textiles play an indispensable role in the ceremonies, serving as essential components of the offering rite costumes. They reflect the hierarchical structure and the supernatural roles in the ritual, act as intermediaries between humans and mystical powers, serve as omens or symbols, and represent fertility and prosperity within the community.

Keywords: The Ritual of Spirit Worship, Woven Textiles, Tai Ethnic Groups

^{*} Corresponding author:

Pokkasina Chatthiphot E-mail: pokkasina@snru.ac.th

Received: 8 December 2023,

Revised: 18 January 2025,

Accepted: 20 January 2025

Introduction

The Isan social context is deeply rooted in traditional beliefs about animism. Over time, these beliefs merged with Buddhist perspectives, becoming an integral part of the traditions and ceremonies of most Isan people. Animism has been adapted to align with the villagers' way of life, worldview, and cosmology. It is common for them to associate supernatural beliefs with weather conditions that influence the success of agricultural yields each year. As a result, many Isan people perform rituals to honor animistic spirits, such as paying homage to Phi Tai, Phi Thaen, and worshipping spirits through ceremonies. They also revere Phi Na (Ta Haek), forest spirits, and ancestral spirits based on the belief that these entities ensure abundant harvests and bring good fortune. Such rituals are thought to foster familial happiness and well-being throughout the year. Consequently, belief in spirits and ghosts has remained deeply ingrained in Isan society, persisting strongly from the past to the present.

Objective

- 1) To study the rituals of spirit worship practiced by the Tai ethnic groups in Thailand.
- 2) To analyze the role of woven textiles in the spirit worship rituals of the Tai ethnic groups residing in the Mekong Basin in northeastern Thailand.

Methodology

This qualitative research focuses on gathering knowledge about woven textiles used in the spirit worship rituals of the Tai ethnic groups. The study applies the theory of folklore as a framework to analyze interdisciplinary data.

Research procedure

The research utilized field data collected through interviews and non-participant observation. Its objective was to explore villagers' behaviors and the ways in which they have inherited traditions and rituals that are deeply embedded in their way of life, culture, and society. The study specifically concentrated on the ritual of spirit worship and the role of woven textiles, which are intricately linked to the cultural practices of the Tai ethnic groups, as outlined below:

1) Collection of data

The researcher collected data from field studies conducted in villages where communities in Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, and Mukdahan produce indigo-dyed cloth. The specific villages included Ban Bungkhla, Ban Phonthong, and Ban Dontan. Non-participant observation and interviews with key informants were employed to gather comprehensive insights..

2) Observation

This study used non-participant observation to examine the physical areas within the communities involved in indigo-dye production, specifically Ban Bungkhla (Bueng Kan Province), Ban Phonthong (Nakhon Phanom Province), and Ban Dontan (Mukdahan Province). The observation focused on various aspects of the community lifestyle, such as indigo dyeing, weaving, and the creation of indigo-dyed textiles. These practices were analyzed in relation to their connection with ancestral worship beliefs.

3) Interview

The interviews were divided into three groups based on key informants:

Group 1: Intellectual villagers, mor-khwan (ritual specialists), monks, village headmen, and vice village headmen.

Group 2: Weavers, women's group leaders, and heads of village funds, with a focus on woven textiles.

Group 3: Academic staff, officers from provincial and district community development departments, and provincial cultural officers. This group concentrated on the promotion of indigo-dyed textiles as cultural products of the respective provinces.

Results/Findings

Diverse People and Beliefs in the Mekong Community

The northeastern region of Thailand shares strong cultural ties with the Mekong Community, resulting in a rich and diverse cultural landscape. This region is predominantly influenced by the Thai-Lao cultural groups and various subcultures shaped by geographical factors. The population can be categorized into two linguistic groups: Tai-Kadai and Austroasiatic (Mon-Khmer sub-branch). The interaction between these groups has fostered a distinctive civilization, particularly evident in belief systems centered on spirits and animism (Vallibhotama, 2005).

The settlement patterns in the Isan region reflect human adaptation to environmental conditions. Abundant natural resources, such as salt and iron, historically attracted populations and facilitated production activities and resource exchanges. These dynamics contributed to the emergence of large prehistoric cities. By the 19th Buddhist century, the arrival of Lao communities in the Northeast led to overlapping settlements, some of which evolved into modern cities. For instance, Sakon Nakhon emerged from the former Nong Han Luang district, while Roi Et developed from the ancient city of Saket Nakhon.

The northeastern region has a deep historical legacy dating back to prehistoric times, with notable early civilizations concentrated in the Korat Basin in the southern part of the region. This area, primarily inhabited by the indigenous Mon-Khmer cultural group, particularly the Khmer Kui (Kha), saw significant changes starting in the 19th century, as the Tai-Lao cultural group began settling in areas such as the Sakon Nakhon Basin, Nong Khai, and Udon Thani provinces. By the 23rd Buddhist century, the Tai-Lao influence had extended into the Korat Basin.

Major migrations occurred during the reigns of King Rama I and King Rama III, particularly following the 1827 war with Chao Anouvong. These migrations brought large populations from the east bank of the Mekong River into the Isan region, leading to the widespread dispersal of the Tai-Lao cultural group. Indigenous peoples, often lacking written traditions, were scattered across various locations (Sujachaya, 2018). Villages near Tai-Lao communities gradually assimilated Lao cultural practices, including language and religion, while retaining elements of Khmer cultural influences.



Figure 1 Raising spirit and offering rites of the Tai people in the Mekong region
source: Researcher, 2023

The communities along the banks of the Mekong River in both Thailand and Laos continue to hold strong beliefs in spirits. Most people worship a wide range of spirits, including forest spirits, ancestral spirits, river spirits, water spirits, sky spirits, and the complex system of Phi Fa Phi Thaen. These spirits are believed to influence human lives, providing both benefits and punishments. Over time, worship ceremonies evolved, incorporating elements of Hindu-Brahmin beliefs through various forms of art, traditions, and architectural styles. With the introduction of Buddhism, these practices underwent further transformation. Buddhism profoundly influenced the Tai people of the Mekong region, shaping their cultural and spiritual identity while

also serving as a tool for governance. This influence is evident in the region's art, architecture, painting, sculpture, and literature, both oral and written.

The ritual of spirit worship of the Tai people

Many beliefs, traditions, and rituals continue to be practiced in Isan's local communities, particularly in the Mekong River Basin. Among these is the ritual of raising spirits (offering rites), which provides psychological encouragement and motivates individuals to live purposefully and pursue their endeavors successfully. Religious merit-making plays a central role in shaping lifestyles, cultures, traditions, and beliefs. Some of these practices express ethnicity and cultural homogeneity, while others serve as mechanisms to regulate behavior within society. These traditions foster harmony and happiness within communities. Historically, it was believed that spirits influenced the happiness or suffering experienced by individuals (Chapoo, 2013). The spirits revered in each locality vary depending on ethnicity and belief systems. These include master spirits believed to guide and protect, forest spirits revered for their power and wisdom, house spirits thought to bring prosperity, and ancestral spirits honored for their role in shaping family destinies. Ancestral spirits are believed to have the ability to bestow blessings or harm upon descendants, giving rise to traditions of offering sacrifices or performing rituals to appease them and ensure the well-being of future generations.



Figure 2 Yao rituals or healing rites for treating diseases of the Tai people
source: Researcher, 2023

This study focuses specifically on the Yao Ritual, a psychological and spiritual practice aimed at restoring faith and morale within the same social and cultural context. The Yao Ritual remains widely practiced in communities across the Mekong River Basin. Its elements are integral in fostering mental strength, a sense of safety, and resilience. The ritual also encompasses practices associated with agricultural occupations, such as Mor Lam Yao, which involves ceremonial performances. Beliefs in spirits also act as a form of social control, encouraging adherence to customs and sustainable use of natural resources. Furthermore, the Yao Ritual is an essential aspect of Isan traditions, promoting social cohesion and strengthening community relationships.

Yao Rak Sa Rok (Healing rite)

The Yao ceremony is a healing and summoning ritual performed by folk healers to address chronic or incurable illnesses. It is based on the belief that illnesses may result from spirits' actions. Patients experiencing symptoms such as depression, delusions, or physical pain are encouraged to undergo Yao healing. The Yao healer acts as a mediator between the patient and the spirits believed to be causing the ailment. During the ritual, the healer uses spells to summon the Khwan (soul) back to the patient's body, beginning with an invocation of celestial and ancestral spirits to possess the healer temporarily. An assistant then interprets the spirits' messages to identify the cause of the illness or other abnormalities.

Clothing plays a symbolic role in the healing process, representing the Khwan or soul. Traditional woven textiles, such as shirts, sarongs, or silk garments, are integral to the ritual and replace the physical body as a focus for spirit-retrieval ceremonies (Interview with Thanwa Khamson, March 20, 2023).

The Yao Ritual originates from the worship of ancestral spirits and the practice of divination. It serves as a primary treatment for illnesses among the Tai people and also includes ceremonies for ancestor worship and spirit offerings. The ritual can be categorized into four types: Yao Rak Sa Rok (Healing Rite), Yao Khum Phi Ok, Yao Aou Hoop, and Yao Liang Phi (Offering Rite) (Nakhonchai, 1995). The Yao Ritual also incorporates musical elements, such as the Klon Lam melody performed by a Mo Yao (healer) and the Kan instrument, which provides rhythmic accompaniment. Through this method, the healer chants and prays to ancestral spirits, seeking their guidance and intervention in treating the patient's sickness (Itthiphon, 2015).

Yao Liang Phi Ritual (Offering rite)

The Yao ritual is performed annually between March and May to seek forgiveness and pay homage to the spirits that protect Mor Yao (Yao healers) and the community. This ritual is believed to ensure good health and shield the community from disasters and immoral influences. The Tai people refer to this annual spirit-raising ceremony as Yao Liang Phi, which involves showing reverence to Phi Thaen and invoking their power to cure illnesses.

The succession of Yao healers is maintained through familial inheritance, with the role passed down to descendants of deceased healers. Each year, a ritual is held to express gratitude to the spirits, offering a symbolic banquet to honor their protection.

This practice of spiritual worship continues to the present day. From the analysis above, it can be concluded that communities in the Mekong River Basin maintain a rich cultural tradition of disease treatment through rituals, particularly the Yao Ritual. Its primary purposes are to heal illnesses, honor protective spirits, and promote mental well-being and stability within the community.



Figure 3 Offering rites is an annual ritual in the Mekong communities
source: Researcher, 2023

Woven textile in the ritual of spirit worship of the Tai people

Woven textiles hold significant importance in the lives of the Tai people, serving both practical and symbolic purposes. Beyond their essential role in daily life, textiles are a means of cultural expression and communication, particularly in rituals and ceremonies. Tai ethnic groups often use woven textiles to convey messages, whether through the intricate motifs on fabrics used in Buddhist ceremonies or the creation of textiles believed to protect against malevolent spirits (Convey, 2017). Weaving is predominantly carried out by Tai-Thai women, who traditionally weave for daily use during their leisure time. The craft reflects the role

and responsibilities of women, serving as a representation of community culture from birth to death. Furthermore, woven textiles symbolize social status, with villagers commonly wearing fabrics like cotton, indigo-dyed textiles, or elaborately stitched garments.

Garments used in significant traditions also differ by social class. Nobles or lords, for example, wore silk adorned with exquisite patterns. Thus, woven textiles and handicrafts mirror the social structure, cultural identity, and status of individuals and communities. The following discussion addresses two key aspects: the patterns and symbols of woven textiles in rituals and their role in the Yao Liang Phi (offering rite), which is detailed as follows:

Patterns of woven textile use in the ritual of spirit worship in Mekong River Basin communities

Woven textiles are vital components of spirit worship rituals among the Tai ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin. Their use in rituals varies according to the specific community context but consistently reflects beliefs about spirits and the interconnectedness of the community. First, Woven Textiles as Offerings

In spirit worship rituals, woven textiles are often presented as offerings to sacred entities or ancestral spirits: These offerings symbolize respect and gratitude. Rituals involving textiles are typically conducted with meticulous care, such as tying the fabric to house pillars or placing it on altars to ensure that spirits receive the offering and provide protection to the community. Second, Woven Textiles as Symbols: In some rituals, woven textiles symbolize the soul, representing well-being and freedom from illness. They are integral to soul-calling rituals, where textiles may be tied around the wrist or waved to ward off misfortune. These practices underscore the belief in the purifying and sacred power of textiles.

The characteristics of woven textiles used in the rituals of spirit worship among the Tai ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin communities reflect the interplay between beliefs, religions, and traditions. First, woven textiles are a tool for connecting with spirits, serving as a bridge between the human and spiritual realms. They are often offered to spirits as a gesture of respect and reverence for ancestral spirits. Second, woven textiles play a significant role in the ritual process. Their preparation is marked by meticulous craftsmanship, primarily undertaken by women in the community, as a demonstration of their dedication and respect for the spirits. In addition to being used as offerings, woven textiles are employed as clothing, protective items, and decorations for ritual spaces.

Finally, woven textiles symbolize community relationships. Their use in rituals conveys the interconnectedness between humans and spirits and underscores the unity among community members. Preparing woven textiles is often a communal activity that fosters relationships, particularly among groups of women who work together to create and wear these textiles during rituals.

As mentioned, the forms and characteristics of woven textiles in spirit worship rituals reflect the depth of cultural beliefs among the Tai ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin. These textiles are not merely ritual objects; they represent the intricate relationships between humans, spirits, and the community. Their significance lies in the continuation of cultural heritage and their role in bridging the past, present, and future.

Additionally, some Tai ethnic groups who have migrated to the Thai nation-state context maintain beliefs in ancestral spirits and the supernatural, which remain closely linked to woven textiles. These textiles are indispensable in ceremonies such as recalling a missing khwan (spirit), worshipping village spirits (phi ban), and venerating ancestor spirits (phi ruen). In these contexts, textiles and clothing serve as vital tools for "communication" between the material and spiritual worlds, emphasizing the preservation of cultural values and the maintenance of ethnic identity (Amantea, 2007).

Tangthawornsirikul (1998) highlights that the belief in spirits functions as a powerful force driving social processes. The relationship between spirits and humans is structured within social spaces defined by gender, kinship, and social norms, which are enacted and perpetuated through rituals, attire, and various prohibitions. These relationships significantly influence women's roles and learning processes, establishing women as the primary custodians of fabric production and the creators of textile-related artifacts. Femininity, motherhood, and nurturing qualities (raksa) are expressed through sarongs and woven fabrics, which become sources of social power for women.



Figure 4 The woven cloth in Yao ritual of community in the Mekong Basin
source: Researcher, 2023

Each ethnic group possesses unique characteristics and weaving patterns, shaped by their skills, preferences, raw materials, traditions, culture, and local beliefs. Among these, Mudmee cloth is a prominent feature of the Tai-Lao cultural group. In the Mekong River Basin communities, spanning from Loei Province to Ubon Ratchathani Province, Mudmee weaving techniques are commonly used in combination with indigo dyeing and natural dyes extracted from tree bark and leaves, creating vibrant and aesthetically pleasing colors. The primary raw materials for these textiles are cotton and silk.

The woven cloth of Mekong communities typically features intricate patterns and symbols, many of which have been named and passed down through generations. The Mudmee or ikat designs are a defining characteristic of these communities. The Mudmee patterns can generally be categorized into four types: animal motifs, plant motifs, utensil motifs, and miscellaneous motifs. Examples include Mee Nok, Mee Nak Chuchon, Mee Kruea Nak, Mee Dok Kaew, Mee Tum, Mee Kab, Mee Kong, and Mee Kho (Wanamas, 1991). New patterns have also been developed, such as Lai Kho Phra Thep and Lai Kho Fah Ying Siriwannawaree. These patterns and symbols are closely tied to the beliefs of the local population, often reflecting the surrounding landscape, flora, and fauna.

In rituals, these symbols hold sacred meanings, conveying ideas and expressions tied to the spiritual world. Patterns serve as an essential medium, creating distinct value and beauty in textiles while symbolizing cultural identity. They act as symbolic markers that evoke emotional responses and showcase the unique creativity of each community. Additionally, the creation of textile motifs reveals aspects of gender differentiation in cultural practices. Patterns and designs can be classified as masculine or feminine, reflecting traditional gender roles. For instance, men typically use Pha Khao Ma, sarongs, and trousers to represent masculinity, while women's sarongs emphasize femininity (Isan Arts and Culture Research Institute, Mahasarakham University, 2019).

Woven cloth used in ceremonies plays a significant role in both personal traditions and public rituals, particularly those associated with supernatural beliefs and Buddhist practices. In Buddhist rituals, woven textiles symbolize devotion and support for Buddhism. The creation of these textiles requires weavers to master various techniques, carefully select materials, and weave with dedication and a pure mind as an act of worship.

In spirit-raising practices, woven cloth serves as a medium to represent the spirit and morale of the afflicted. Furthermore, the cloth reflects the social status of the Yao healer and the spirits they summon. The symbolic importance of woven textiles in these contexts will be further explored in the following section.

The role of woven textiles in the Yao Liang Phi Ritual (Offering rite)

The Yao Liang Phi, or offering rite, is typically performed at the end of the third to the fourth month of the lunar calendar. Communities across the Mekong River Basin conduct this annual spirit-raising ritual during the post-harvest period and following the Tai-Lao New Year, which coincides with the barn-opening season (Khai Prato Lao). This practice is widespread in northeastern Thailand, particularly in the Sakon Nakhon Basin, encompassing provinces such as Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, and Mukdahan.

A key element of the ceremony is the Yao healer, whose role extends beyond participation to leadership and guidance. Among the ritual's significant elements, woven cloth plays a critical role, not only for its practical use but also as a symbol of spiritual and cultural significance. The colors and types of textiles used reflect both the beauty of craftsmanship and the ceremonial functions associated with spirits. Different cloth types and colors correspond to the roles, social statuses, and categories of spirits. For example, some Yao healers select silk or cotton textiles based on spiritual prophecies and the appearance of the spirit. The color red is traditionally associated with Phi Mae Kru spirits, as represented by the red headband worn by participants.

Headbands, in particular, hold cultural and functional significance. Historically, they were used to shield the wearer from the sun, rain, and insects while foraging in the forest. Local flowers, such as Inthawa (Cape Jasmine) and Salet (Hedychium coronarium), were often tucked into the headband. In the Yao Liang Phi ritual, the headband becomes a symbolic accessory representing life and status, deeply tied to the ritual's context and location.

The attire of the Yao healer is highly symbolic, serving to distinguish their role within the community. The healer's traditional outfit consists of a handwoven sarong (Sin Mee or Sin Mai), typically in black or blue, and a Mudmee silk shirt in matching colors. Additionally, a Sabai (shoulder cloth) may be included, often in white, red, or green. Headdresses are usually dark-colored, such as red or pink. Accessories such as bead necklaces, bracelets, and Sangwan (beaded chest ornaments) are essential elements of the healer's attire. Each item is carefully selected and prepared for use during the ritual, reflecting the meticulousness of the tradition. Participants in the ceremony also wear traditional Phu Tai clothing, which includes black or blue shirts, handwoven sarongs (predominantly sarong mee), and occasionally additional colors like red or green. The Phu Tai spirit ritual dress is distinctive, with participants fully dressed in traditional attire to accommodate the spirits believed to embody the participants during the ritual.

The clothing and decorations of spirits also vary according to their rank and nature. For instance, Phi Thaen, a high-ranking spirit, is adorned in elaborate and colorful costumes, often featuring bright hues such as white, red, blue, green, and yellow, complemented by Mudmee silk, Sabai, Sangwan, and fragrant flowers like Dok Lan Thom or Dok Champa (Apocynaceae). Conversely, Phi Nam, lower-ranking spirits, are dressed in green or white, while wild spirits are characterized by black garments with rips or patches.

A prominent feature of Yao ritual attire is the red headband, particularly favored in ghost-feeding performances by Kaleong healers. According to Sangwien Inthaprom, the red headband is a universal element among Yao healers, signifying their enduring commitment to traditional customs. While sarongs and other garments may vary in color, the red headband remains a consistent and essential part of their attire. This dedication to preserving traditional dress, even among those who incorporate indigo clothing inspired by Isan folk culture, reflects the respect and significance afforded to this ritual practice (Interview with Sangwien Inthaprom, March 17, 2023).



Figure 5 The woven textiles in Yao ritual of the Tai people's
source: Researcher, 2023

Changing costumes or equipment during the ritual must be performed simultaneously by the entire group or as directed by the ritual leader, often referred to as the “teacher’s mother.” Yao healers, peasants/disciples, and other participants adjust their attire according to the spirits they impersonate during the ritual. For instance, if a Yao healer channels Phi Thaen, a male spirit, they may wear a sarong and Pha Khao Ma (a traditional loincloth), emit a distinctive pungent smell from smoking, and perform dances traditionally associated with men, even when occupying a woman’s body. Although such practices are increasingly rare in contemporary rituals, these customs persist as symbols of the Tai ethnic groups' authentic cultural identity.

The choice of clothing by Yao healers is deeply symbolic, reflecting the distinct identities of various ethnic groups. For example, some groups incorporate Mudmee silk and indigo-dyed textiles, showcasing their folk weaving heritage. While some Sakon Nakhon Basin and Mekong River Basin communities have yet to fully integrate the ritual of spirit-raising into cultural tourism, the spirit worship practices have begun to adapt to modernity. Fabrics are no longer strictly uniform; upper and lower garments can be interchanged, illustrating the evolving nature of Tai cultural traditions.

As previously noted, woven textiles hold a central role in the spirit worship rituals of the Tai ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin communities, serving as powerful symbols and tools for cultural communication. These textiles transcend their physical function, embodying beliefs about spirits, the interconnection between humans and nature, and the transmission of relationships between the living and the dead. In the rituals, woven textiles are used as offerings to show respect to ancestral spirits or protective deities, emphasizing the reverence inherent in Tai ceremonies.

The colors and patterns of these textiles carry profound meanings. For instance, red may represent vitality or act as a protective force against malevolent spirits, while intricate patterns serve as a means of communication with the spiritual realm. Offering woven textiles during the ritual is an act of gratitude and a prayer for prosperity, demonstrating the cultural significance of this practice.

Beyond their symbolic role, woven textiles play a significant social function in the community. They symbolize unity, as their production often involves collaborative efforts among villagers, particularly women, who are integral to the weaving process. This shared activity strengthens social bonds and fosters relationships within the community.

Culturally, the spirit worship ritual and its use of woven textiles reflect the unique identities of the Tai ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin. Each community contributes distinct patterns and techniques, preserving their cultural wisdom as a legacy for future generations. These practices emphasize the balance between the human and spiritual worlds, which is central to maintaining the cultural heritage of the region.

Conclusion

The culture of weaving is diverse across different countries and reflects the thoughts and creativity of the people engaged in this craft. Weaving has been represented in various cultural forms, including texts, sayings, teachings, riddles that test intelligence, and literary fiction. Doctrinal literature highlights the importance of woven textiles in defining roles and shaping costume culture, one of the four essential factors of human life. Each culture incorporates weaving practices, particularly in collections of woven textiles, which have evolved from household necessities into expressions of cultural identity at both individual and collective levels.

Woven cloth serves as a tool for fulfilling diverse social roles. In some communities, woven textiles are not only used for practical purposes but also drive the creative economy, generating income for local populations and serving as a foundation for economic strength in Mekong River Basin communities. Moreover, woven textiles are integral to rituals involving animism and supernatural powers, reflecting deep-seated beliefs and traditions.

Spirit-raising rituals, in particular, underscore the role of spiritualism and magical powers in many Mekong communities. These rituals offer comfort and encouragement, and the woven cloth used in such ceremonies plays a significant role in expressing cultural identity. For instance, woven textiles serve as symbols of the spirit and morale of patients, as well as indicators of the social and cultural status of individuals within the community.

In the Mekong River Basin, an area renowned for its rich cultural diversity and enduring beliefs, woven textiles are a vital component of the spirit worship rituals practiced by Tai ethnic groups. Weaving is not merely an artistic craft but also reflects the intricate connection between people's lifestyles and the sacredness of their rituals. These rituals often involve offerings to spirits or sacred objects, particularly in ceremonies related to ancestor worship or community-protecting spirits.

The choice of textiles, colors, and patterns in woven cloth signifies the respect and intent of those offering or using them. For example, the color red may symbolize vitality or protection, while specific patterns often embody the community's stories, history, and beliefs. In terms of social and cultural significance, weaving represents gender roles and relationships within the community. Women frequently take on the responsibility of weaving fabrics for rituals, showcasing their skills and vital roles in both the household and broader cultural practices.

The intergenerational transfer of weaving knowledge also underscores the preservation of cultural heritage and traditional beliefs. As such, woven textiles in the spirit worship rituals of the Tai ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin play an essential role in spirituality, society, and culture. They act as a bridge connecting individuals to their community, the sacred, and their ethnic identity. Preserving these woven textiles and their ritual meanings is vital for safeguarding the culture and beliefs that deeply influence the lives of people in this region.

Acknowledgement

This article is part of the research on the "Common Identity of Thai-Lao Mekong Basin Woven Textiles," supported by the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund Project for the 2022 research budget.

References

- Amantea F. (2007). *Dress and Identity among the Black Tai of Loei Province, Thailand* [Master's Thesis, Simon Fraser University].
- Chapoo, L. (2013). Ghost rite: Life supporter of Cambodia at Hua Samrong, Plaengyao District, Chachengsao Province. *Journal of Liberal Arts Maejo University*, 1(1), 106-125.
- Choomponla, D. (2006). *Buddhism Culture in the way of life in Thailand Mekong*. Center for the Promotion of National Strength on Moral Ethics and Values.
- Convey, S. (2017). Textiles and supernatural power: A Tai belief system. *Journal of Burma Studies, Northern Illinois University*, 21(2), 365-394.
- Itdhiphol, A. (2015). The usage of soul recalling from speech acts of Phu-Thai shamens in therapeutic ceremonies. *Journal of Humanities Naresuan University*, 12(2), 93-106.
- Nakhonchai, P. (1995). *The Yao rite of the Phu-Thai people in Tambon Non Yang, Amphoe Nong Sung, Mukdahan* [Master's thesis, Mahasarakham University].
- Sujachaya, S. (2018). Who is Isaan? What researchers should know. At the *National Faith Symposium on Telling legends and ethnicities in the Mekong Basin*. 11-12 February 2016, Maha Vajiralongkorn Auditorium Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University by the Viwat Thai International Studies Project for the Development of Thai Society (ZENITS) Institute of Thai Studies Chulalongkorn University and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University.
- Swasrath, N. (2019). Cultural geography: The Civilization Route and Connection of Buddhism in Mekong Region. *Journal of MCU Nakhondhat*, 6(10), 5717-5732.
- Tangtavonsirikun, C. (1998). *Symbolism of Lao textiles*. The Thailand Research Fund (TRF). The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences & Humanities Textbooks.
- The Research Institute of Northeastern Arts and Culture Mahasarakham University. (2019). *Patterns Textiles*. The Research Institute of Northeastern Arts and Culture Mahasarakham University.
- Vallibhotama, S. (2005). *Iron, "Revolutionary Metal" 2,500 years ago. Iron Age in Thailand: Technological and Social Development*. Matichon Press.
- Wannamas, S. (1991). *Isan Textile*. Odeon store Press.
- Wongsiriab, A. and Nonthapot, S. (2022). The Use and Transmission of Traditional Beliefs for Environmental Conservation in the Bueng Khong Long Wetland, Thailand. *Journal of Mekong Societies*, 18(1), 103-124.

Interview

- Khamsong, T. (2023, March 20). Personal communication [personal interview].
- Inthaprom, S. (2023, March 17). Personal communication [personal interview].