

Cultural Heritage and Local Society: A Caseload Study from Phrae Province, Northern Thailand

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Abstract

This article discusses cultural heritage from the viewpoint of local society. In doing so, the article presents a concept that is different from that created by the nation-state, or the heritage protection framework led by national governments. In Thailand, from the premodern period to the present, there has been an inherent value and a unique relationship between “cultural heritage” and the people, which has contributed to forming a unique worldview as part of people’s life. As a matter of course, these practitioners have been neither the ruling class of royalty and bureaucrats, nor the intelligentsia, but the general people – the “successor of local history” (Haga 329). Local heritage in Thailand has been an integral part of people’s lives and is interrelated with animistic beliefs and Theravada Buddhism, of which more than 90% of the population in Thailand follows, and therefore, continues to play an important role as people’s foothold in an increasingly fluid society.

In order to understand the relationship between cultural heritage and local communities, two questions are raised. Firstly, what does cultural heritage mean for people within their own communities, and what kind of connections can be identified? Secondly, is there any independent movement of local communities based on interpretations that differ from the central government? In accordance with

the issues, the article begins by summarizing the historical and cultural features of northern Thailand and then moves to examine a case study from Phrae province.

Keywords: local heritage in Thailand, historical and cultural features of northern Thailand, relationships between cultural heritage and local communities, conservation of cultural heritage

1. Overview of the Research Area

1.1 The Cultural Aspect of Northern Thailand

The northern area of present day Thailand was an independent political power for more than 400 years. Known as the Lan Na kingdom (1296-1774 AD), this area had its own established culture. Even after coming under the influence of the Thonburi kingdom (1768-1782 AD) from the central part of region at the end of the 18th century, the natural environment with mountain ranges and forests meant that contact with the outside world was limited until the 1920s when the railway extended to Chiang Mai, the capital of Lan Na. The Lan Na cultural area usually refers to the current provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampoon, Lampang, Nan, Payao, Phrae, Mae Hong Son in Thailand, and in a broad sense, a part of Tak province, the east coast of the Salween River in the west, the west bank of the Mekong River in the east, and Chiang Rung of the Sipsongpanna in the north (Ongsakul 13).

The Lan Na kingdom was established in the 13th century by King Mang Rai (reigning from 1261 to 1311 AD) and with the absorbing of the Mon kingdom of Hariphunchai (existing between 767/768 and 1291) in Lampoon province of present day Thailand, the foundation of Lan Na culture was complete. The Lan Na culture enjoyed a golden age of about 200 years stretching from King Mang Rai to King Tilokarat (from 1441 to 1487 AD), and developed its own cultural style. For example, the traditional houses in the north consist

of a wooden structure built on high-floors, in a style much like the central area, but the difference is that a V-shaped decoration, called *kalae*, is used in the upper part of the gabled roof. In addition, it is a feature to use wood carving on the lintel (called *ham yon*) at the top of the entrance of the bedroom as a talisman. Also, there are various other elements, such as lacquerware, textiles, handicrafts, including silverwork, a dialect called the Northern Thai language, and cuisine with influence from Burma and Laos. However, what should be noted more than these physical features is the method of recognizing space based on animistic beliefs.

In northern Thailand, people's daily world is in contact with the world of spirits. These are called *phi*, and human beings live in regular interaction with them. The area of the spirits corresponds to a segment of space in the human world. This segment can be substituted with the current administrative unit of *ban* [house], *muban* [village], *tambon* [sub-district], *amphoe* [district], *changwat* [province], or *muang* [city]. In addition, there are other categories of *wiang* and *chiang*, which are fortified small cities that are in various parts of northern Thailand. Local residents have long been familiar with the name *wiang*, therefore, many people prefer calling the city as *wiang* rather than the official name of *muang*. In this manner, *ban* and *muang* (or *wiang*) functioned as the basic constituent units of society before modern administrative divisions were introduced.

"House" is the smallest unit of space. One or a number of houses can gather together forming a residential lot that enshrines the same ancestor spirit, called *Phi Puña*. As with other regions of Thai society, kinship in northern Thailand is a fundamentally cognatic descent system, although the ancestor spirit is considered to belong to the maternal line (Takai 33-70). Apart from that, there is another spirit called *Chao Thi*, which is tied to residential land (Takai 33-70). In the village, which is an aggregate of houses/residences, the village's guardian spirit, *Chao Ban*, is enshrined in the village boundary forests. In the *muang*, a higher level spirit called *Chao Muang*, the *muang's* guardian spirit, is enshrined. Paddy fields, fields and hills spread outside the village and the city, and are places for supplying goods that are indispensable for people's workplaces and daily life. In such

spaces, there is a paddy spirit called *Chao Na* and a spirit of the earth, *Nang Thorani*, who has a universal existence (Kajiwara 147-170). On the other hand, forests (*pa*) are placed opposite the space created by humans. Whereas *muang* is a “civilized world” in the Thai concept, forests mean the land of the frontier where control from the governing power does not reach (Sunaga 107). Therefore, Thai people have differentiated the hill tribes who live in the mountainous regions from others by calling them *khon pa*, that means non-civilized.

An annual ceremony is held for the spirits that protect homes, villages and cities. By means of inviting the spirits and preparing a feast, humans show respect to the spirit and make wishes. Communication with the spirits is carried out through a medium. Because the power of spirit protection is limited within a certain area, it is not able to provide protection once one moves outside this space. In contrast, Buddhist spells have a universal power beyond a limited space. Therefore, travelers participate in the ceremony of placing a thread on the wrist in order to pray for safety and success and travel. They are literally wearing the universal power of the Buddha. Although the power of Buddhism is fundamentally a force of sanctity or goodness, the power of spirits can be both good and bad, but overall their value is neutral. On account of this, humans need to keep good relations with the spirits (Kajiwara 147-170).

In response to such animism, Prince Mongkut, who later became King Rama IV, tried to reform Buddhism through the creation of a new sect called Thammayut. This movement started in the 1830s and removed stories and interpretations added in earlier periods, reforming the content of the precepts and ceremonies (Ishii). It can be said that these reforms succeeded from a political point of view because successive royals have been ordained in the Thammayut sect. However, from a theological perspective, there has been less success as this has not yet managed to erase animist belief from Thai Buddhism. However, the introduction of “scientific” disciplines, such as archaeology and history, in association with modernization, have resulted in changes in the epistemological framework of the relationship between humans and things, be it direct or indirect (Byrne 3-14; Reynolds 1-41). Moreover, the modern education system in

Thailand has pushed this trend further. Today, various animistic rituals in local areas tend to be mainly obsolete. However, on the other hand, sometimes ceremonies are continued or revived if they have been triggered by some event. Hence, at present, it seems that animistic beliefs will continue into the future. In particular, in the field of cultural heritage, since animistic beliefs have a strong bearing on the recognition of cultural heritage, it is necessary to pay attention to them.

1.2 Phrae Province

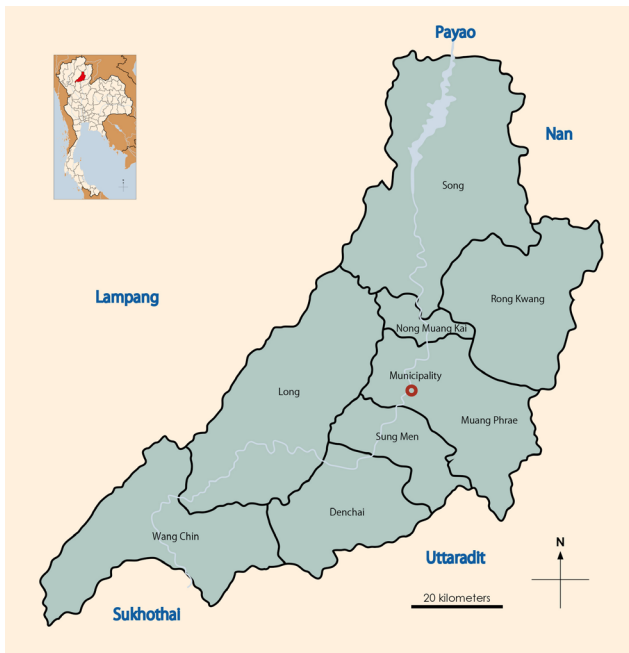


Fig. 1. *Phrae and Neighboring Provinces*

Phrae is a province in northern Thailand (see *Figure 1*). The province is bordered by Payao in the north, Sukhothai and Uttaradit to the south, Nan to the east and Lampang to the west. Within the province, there are 8 administrative districts, 78 sub-districts and 645 villages, with the Yom River flowing in a manner that traverses the

center of the province. The province's total area is 6,538.6 square kilometers, however, 60% of it is mountainous, and the forest coverage rate is the nation's seventh highest. Therefore, there are few plains suitable for agriculture and farmland is only about 16%. Although until the beginning of the 20th century the teak industry was a common business in northern Thailand, now logging is prohibited in order to protect the forests. At present, agriculture, wholesale and education related businesses are the main industries (Alpha Research). In 2015, the average household income was 21,796 baht per month. Since 2015, there has been a twice daily flight between Bangkok and Phrae. Before this, there was only one flight a day every second day. Moreover, the train station is far from the city center, so that driving is still the most convenient way to travel to Phrae.

The progress of tourism is quite moderate compared with Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and other neighboring provinces, such as Nan. Therefore, many unique wooden buildings commonly found in northern Thailand have been kept intact and are still continuously used as living spaces by people. In recent years, however, a full-scale tourism plan has been promoted by government agencies. In 2012, an office of the Tourism Authority of Thailand was opened at the entrance of the old city. Subsequently, in February 2015, the old city was certified as a conservation area as a historic cityscape. Additionally, in July 2015, Chiang Mai, the old capital of Lan Na, was registered in the tentative lists for the UNESCO World Heritage registration. It is believed that such a movement will encourage tourism promotion in Phrae even more than before.

1.3 Historic Environment

Evidence of early human activities in Phrae can be seen in the form of stone axes and stone artifacts that have been found in various places within the province.¹ However, because of a lack of budget and personnel, a full-scale archaeological excavation has not been conducted so far, and therefore, detailed archaeological information has not been obtained. Therefore, the clues to understanding the history of Phrae has been mainly from chronicles and stone monuments,

which leaves only faint ideas of the area's history. Moreover, the fact that most surviving records left in Phrae derive from temple histories is also a hindrance. This is because such accounts focus on the history of the temple and the origins of relics, and as a result, it is difficult to obtain the overall picture of the history of Phrae and understand precise chronologies.

For instance, according to the chronicle of Wat Luang temple in the old city, a person called Khun Luang Phol settled in Phrae in AD 828, accompanying residents from Chiang Saen. However, regarding the name "Phrae", a person named Phaya Phara, the lord of Muang Phonlarat, appeared in the chronicle of Phra That Lampang Luang, and also the names Muang Phonlarat or Muang Pon Nakhon have been identified from other chronicles, and for that reason it is considered that Muang Phonlarat gradually changed into the current name, Phrae (Ongsakul 47). In addition, people involved in the establishment of Muang Phrae remain unknown except for the fragmented information in these materials. However, the archaeological excavation of the city wall foundation in the old city carried out by the FAD has confirmed that the construction date is around the 11th century AD (Tunprawat 186).

In the local history compiled by the provincial office (Phrae Provincial Municipality 8), there are 24 archaeological sites listed that are assumed to have been built at the same period as the foundation of Muang Phrae. However, many of them are just folklore. Meanwhile, by means of an aerial photographic survey carried out throughout Thailand from 1973 to 1975, seven moated settlements were identified in Phrae (Supajanya and Vanasin). Further, the aerial photographic survey report provides geographical information indicating the location of the sites. In order to understand the current situation of the sites, a field survey was conducted in 2012. All sites that were mentioned in the report have been heavily used as cultivated land and residential areas, and therefore, several sites cannot be confirmed. When local residences around the sites were interviewed, most of them do not recognize the sites as archaeological remains, or they have heard such stories, but they do not know very well the significance of them.

An important archaeological source discovered in Phrae is the

Wat Ban Sanuk stone inscription. It was found in the premises of a primary school adjacent to Wang Chin district office in 1946 and is now kept in the Bangkok National Library. The inscription was deciphered by art historians Alexander Griswold and Prasert Na Nakorn. They dated it to 1339 AD, the second-oldest Thai language stone inscription after the King Ramkhamhaeng inscription (Griswold and Na Nakara 63-67). In addition, Griswold and Prasert pointed out the remarkable commonality with the King Ramkhamhaeng inscription based on the fact that Sukhothai style letters were found in the inscription. It was written in Pali and Thai and recorded the donation of a stupa and other offerings to the temple by a local ruler who controlled Muang Trock Salop² and Chaengun.

In contrast, the historian Hans Penth argued that the date of the Wat Ban Sanuk inscription was 1219 AD, which is about 70 years earlier than the King Ramkhamhaeng inscription. This caused controversy as the official history says that Thai letters were “invented” by King Ramkhamhaeng in 1283. By this logic, the Wat Ban Sanuk inscription needs to be placed later than that of King Ramkhamhaeng for historical consistency. However, it is clear that the inscription was made in the early period because it shares the distinctive writing system found in the King Ramkhamhaeng inscription. Penth derived the date of 1219 by applying the old calendar system used in northern Thailand to the date on the inscription (“The Date of the Wat Bang Sanuk Inscription” 10). There is not yet a consensus on this matter. However, the most important point here is the coexistence of societies which possessed a unique calendar system and the Thai alphabet at the time of King Ramkhamhaeng of the Sukhothai kingdom.

Following the discussion above, there is another regional story that has not been told in the official history. Sukhothai is officially regarded as the first kingdom in Thailand. However, it was in fact just one of many kingdoms at that time, and there was not only Tai language groups, but also various ethnic groups, such as Mon and Khmer, who also inhabited the central plains alongside Sukhothai. In addition, a diverse society in which goods, people and information were actively going back and forth through maritime trade routes that connected China, the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean

region was in existence. Wang Chin district, where the Wat Ban Sanuk inscription was excavated, is located approximately 100 kilometers north of Sukhothai province, connected through the Yom River. As a result, Muang Phrae may have evolved through commerce as a corridor connecting the Lan Na kingdom and Sukhothai. In fact, in the early period of Muang Phrae's history, it was under the influence of Sukhothai rather than Lan Na. With the decline of Sukhothai (in the early 14th century) and the rise of the Ayutthaya kingdom (in the mid-14th century), the Lan Na kingdom was presumably able to attain a superior position for the first time (Penth, *A Brief History* 50).

The Chiang Mai Chronicle stated that there was an invasion by Lan Na's King Phaya Khamfu in 1340 (Wyatt and Wichienkeo 63). However, this invasion ended in failure. About a hundred years later, in 1443, Muang Phrae lost its independence and pledged allegiance to King Tilokarat, who was the king during the heyday of the Lan Na kingdom. In the 16th century when Lan Na was under the control of Burma, Muang Phrae was absorbed together. In the 18th century, the northern region was exhausted by double taxation by both Burma and regional lords. This resulted in a rebellion. Furthermore, because Burma became a tributary of China's Qing dynasty after a ceasefire in 1769, the Lan Na kingdom succeeded in recapturing Chiang Mai in 1774, with support from King Thaksin of Thonburi. After that, Lan Na became a tributary of Thonburi and Muang Phrae also came under the jurisdiction of the central region.

Although Muang Phrae had been ruled by a lord with the title of Chao Luang for generations, King Chulalongkorn introduced the centralized governance system in 1897. This caused the loss of political power for this lord. When Muang Phrae was reorganized as a province, the lords became governors and government officials dispatched from Bangkok were placed as supervisors. However, when the Shang rebellion took place in Phrae in 1902, the lord was charged and convicted of secretly supporting the rebellion and as a result, Phrae has been under the direct control of the central government since then.

2. Living Heritage

2.1. Old City

The old city is located in Phrae district. It is surrounded by a moat and a single bank. It functions as the center of the administration where the provincial office, the district office, the court and the police station are located. At the same time, it is also a “living heritage site” in that the traditional communities coexist with the archaeological site and have inherited aspects of intangible heritage, such as customs, faith and knowledge passed down from generation to generation. Because the old city was the center of Muang Phrae, it is interspersed with traditional teak buildings built by the former rulers of Phrae and wealthy families. The local communities call the old city either Muang Phrae, Wiang Phrae or Wiang Kosai. The total area of the old city is nine square kilometers, and since it is in contact with the Yom River in the northwest, the city is regularly stricken by floods caused by heavy rain. The moat and the bank not only functioned as a defensive wall, but also as a barrier to protect the city from the flood and even worked to help discharge the water that would overflow into the city. However, due to the expansion of the city and the construction of a new road, the majority of the moat was filled in and as a result, its water-circulation function has disappeared.

Access to the old city is by the four gates, which were used for different purposes. Currently, there are no “gates” themselves left standing and they only exist as place names. According to a memorial book (King’s Celebration Board 79-80) that summarizes the culture and history of the province, the Pratu Chai gate located in the east of the city is the most prestigious among the four gates and was used only for soldiers heading for the battlefield or important guests. The Pratu Sritum gate is located in the west of the city, named after the Wat Sritum temple beside it. The Pratu Ling Ma gate is located in the northeast of the city where there was a place to hold horses for merchants. Nowadays, there is a new gate called Pratu Mai located right beside the Pratu Ling Ma gate and is used instead. The Pratu Ling Ma gate seems to be forgotten, but a small horse shrine is built in the place where the gate used to stand, quietly keeping its memory

alive. Finally, the Pratu Man gate, named “Devil’s Gate”, is located in the southwest of the city. The term *man* means cremation in the local dialect. The name is derived from that fact that this gate was used to carry executed prisoners to the graveyard.

The old city forms one administrative district and consists of seven villages named Hua Khuang, Srichum, Wat Luang, Pong Sunan, Pra Non, Pra Ruang and Sri Boon Ruang. Originally, the community of the old city was formed by the adherence called *sattha* centering on the temple in the village. Each temple had a powerful clan who carried out rituals as a hereditary role. However, in the present day, such practices are now obsolete, and therefore, the community celebrates on behalf of the family. Although the name of the village is derived from the name of the temple in the area, the community was reorganized into a village because of the decrease in households making up *sattha* and administrative circumstances. As a result, some households are incorporated into villages that have different names from the community they belong to. Because of these problems, the boundary of the village has changed several times. The communities carry out not only Buddhist ceremonies, but also rituals to worship guardian spirits every year. Moreover, each community was defined by specific occupations. Therefore, the communities represented not only religious groups, but also professional occupations.

Apart from the temples that are worshiped by the community, there is a representative temple of Phrae in the center of the city. The temple, called Wat Phrabat Ming Muang Worawihan, was founded in 1955 and is bound to the royal family. Close by Wat Phrabat Ming Muang Worawihan, the protective town pillar, called Lak Muang, is enshrined. Originally, there was no such tradition in existence in Phrae. Instead, a large Bodhi tree and stone inscription enshrined at the garden of Narirat School located near the pillar played this role. However, in 1992, the Hindu based national pillar ritual, which was mainly held in the central and southern parts of Thailand, was introduced by the Ministry of the Interior, and following that, a new pillar was created in the present place using an almond tree, which is the symbol of the province. These examples can be seen not only in Phrae, but also Chiang Mai; Sao Inthakin is the ceremony of worshipping the pillar

of Chiang Mai, which was formerly a spiritual ritual of the Lan Na kingdom to celebrate the legends of the town. The pillar appears in these legends and later it was revived as a Buddhist ceremony as part of the process of incorporating it into the nation-state.

In the old city, the ceremony of worshipping 31 spirits, including the guardian spirit of the city, Phi Muang, is held every three years. This used to be performed by the lord of the city, but nowadays descendants of the royal family who live in Pra None village have taken over the role and conduct the ceremony at their home. There are about 200 descendants living in every province and they come together at the time of the ceremony. Before the ceremony, three spirit mediums gather and ask the spirits about how to perform the ceremony. Although each medium communicates with the spirits, they do not know which spirits they can reach until the communication begins.

2.2. Heritage Conservation Group: Luk Lan Muang Phrae

As a result of an archaeological excavation of the bank surrounding the old city by the Fine Arts Department (FAD) in 2003, the heritage conservation group “Luk Lan Muang Phrae (LLMP)” was formed. This occurred because the local communities believe that the bank protects the city from evil spirits and carries good luck. Therefore, the excavation was seen as the destruction of the bank by the local communities. Nevertheless, the excavation was carried out without prior notice to the local residents and consequently, it stimulated the need for awareness of local heritage. In order to protest the excavation, students, monks and the elderly who live in the old city participated in the protest. This led to a direct opportunity for the foundation of LLMP. However, the core members of the group had already been involved in several heritage activities, therefore, they made use of knowledge and experience to form a group. Organizing the protest movement and the revival of rituals for the bank for the first time in 100 years was smoothly organized because of the reasons above.

Currently, LLMP consists of members from various professions, such as artists, architects, self-employed, office workers, teachers,

journalists, farmers and monks. Most of them are in there 40s to 50s. About ten core members exist in LLMP and hold a meeting once a week to discuss action plans. LLMP is a volunteer group formed by people who are interested in their origins and history and people who feel that they may be able to do something, even though they are not experts. LLMP tends to be open and to have a quite loose bond among them so that the same members do not always join the activities and the total number of members is not fixed.

2.2. The Motivation of LLMP's Members to Cultural Heritage

What follows is an examination of the background and motivation of LLMP's members and what led them to get involved in the conservation of cultural heritage. The methodology used was a semi-structured interview. The attributes of the interviewee are listed below (Table 1).

Table 1: *Attributes of the Interviewees*

Interviewee W	Interviewee S	Interviewee P	Interviewee N
Male	Male	Female	Female
Age 56	Age47	Age 24	Age 40
Indigo dying-craftsperson	Architect/Artist	Logistic manager	Gallery/B&B owner

First, in order to clarify the connection between the members and cultural heritage, they were asked the following question: what are your memories of cultural heritage from your childhood? The answers are listed below, respectively:

Interviewee W: I think the first memories are Buddhist ceremonies. When I was little I went to a temple often with my parents and grandmother. When the ceremony was over, we prayed with a candle at the ubosat (ordination hall) in front of the viharn (teaching hall). Regarding my family business, I think that the first experience was probably about 13 years

old. When studying indigo dyeing by myself, interest has come up as “Oh, indigo dyeing is such thing”, and then I start understanding the meaning of the term “cultural heritage”.

Interviewee S: When I was a child, I joined various ceremonies with my parents and relatives such as weddings, funerals, priesthood and tambun bun. Through the experience, I learned what to do in that situation. In front of my house there were old houses including my relative’s house Wongburi House, so when I was little it was my playground and I always ate food around. No matter where I go, such a landscape is in my mind. Whenever I go to Bangkok to work, I feel nostalgic and want to come back here.

Interviewee P: I went to Sukhothai on a school trip. Then, I will imagine rituals such as offering to the spiritual house, which has been handed down by generations.

Interviewee N: I was born in Ayutthaya, my parents’ house was on the side of the Phra Mongkol Bopit Temple, which is next to the Ayutthaya site. So, I liked going to temples since I was a child. Also, because my family sold souvenirs in the archaeological park, I felt attached to temples, Buddha images and the site. In addition, I remember there was a museum within walking distance from my house. Later, my family moved to Chiang Mai. Chiang Mai is currently working towards the official registration of World Heritage, but I am concerned that the FAD might evict houses and shops where the communities live and destroy people’s way of life.

Both Interviewee W and S mentioned ceremonies as memories of cultural heritage. Interviewee P also conjured up an image of a ceremony, as well as Sukhothai where he was taken on a school trip. Interviewee N spent her childhood in Ayutthaya and moved to Phrae after she got married. Therefore, her memories are different from the other three interviewees. However, in each case, there is a positive experience from childhood that helps form a connection with cultural heritage and later raised interest in it. In order to transmit cultural heritage, experiential learning is the key to incorporate knowledge

and skills acquired through experience, deepen learning from its interpretation and lead to action (Igarashi 107-115). Moreover, it was found from Interviewee N's remark that the FAD, which is supposed to protect Thai cultural heritage, does not always have a good impression for the people, but rather is recognized as a cause of damage to cultural heritage.

Subsequently, they were asked the question what do they consider to be the problem in regards to the conservation of cultural heritage. The following answers were obtained:

Interviewee W: The problem is that the things the local communities consider as "cultural heritage" is not recognized as cultural heritage by the government. The way of life is never taught in schools and field trips. But if the way of life is not cultural heritage, it will be something else. Most people think of old places or objects when they hear cultural heritage, but in reality, such things are only a part of cultural heritage. Normally, people eat, sing and believe in something, not living with old places and objects. Nevertheless, little information or records about people's way of life are left. If we only focus on old things, we will overlook living people. If we pay attention to peoples' way of life, we might find important hints to support conservation.

Interviewee S: I think the problem is that cultural heritage is not taught at school and not being recorded. We learn cultural heritage through participation in ceremonies and festivals. But now, a lot of people work in big cities such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai, the opportunity for young people to join ceremonies with elders becomes scarce. Despite this situation, the school still does not teach cultural heritage. Speaking of teaching subjects, mathematics, science, social studies and history are the only things. Even if cultural heritage is taught in schools, it is taught only for exams, so the children will soon forget and do not think that it is important.

Interviewee P: Concerning the problems of cultural heritage, people's directions for reaching goals are different from each other and so it misses the original aim. For that reason, we

are seeking a compromise and then, everyone can participate in cultural heritage activities, but we have not realized it yet. There might not be a point where everyone can come to terms, but at least, we can find more points that is convincing to each other. I would like to participate in the conservation of cultural heritage and dissemination activities in any circumstances. In order to encourage awareness of cultural heritage, I want to invite my friends and share its importance. Also, I would like to write a good story for children. We are in an era when everything changes what we learn and see. First of all, I think that we should begin with knowing the city we are in.

Interviewee N: I think that the major problem lies in “people”. People do not participate in activities for cultural heritage. So, we are planning to spread activities from our own community. Next problem is government agencies. Their work is duplicated and there is a waste. Also, due to lack of budget and personnel, there is insufficient power to accomplish something.

On the whole, people’s lack of awareness of cultural heritage is a commonly mentioned problem. However, the reason behind it varies from an unrecognized value of cultural heritage, not being taught in schools, to different directions and aims. Although there are such differences, it can be seen that all interviewees participate in activities starting from what they can do so as to improve people’s awareness so that they can try and go in the same direction.

3. Conclusion: The Way of Local Heritage

This article has examined the meaning of cultural heritage in the local communities of Phrae. Focusing on the acceptance of cultural heritage, it is understood that cultural heritage consists of multiple layers, such as its value to religion, culture and academia. Each of these has developed its value as needed. It can be said that local heritage exists as a set of diversified meanings and values that are integrated into the lives of people. On the other hand, it is not possible to separate cultural heritage from people’s lives. Therefore, local heritage needs to change in response to changing times in order to survive. If local

heritage preserved in places that are not related to life or the concept of heritage is forcibly applied from the outside, the local heritage will become a mere facade and it will no longer be “living heritage”.

The circumstances by which cultural heritage came to be recognized is a relatively recent event in Thailand and most local communities are not familiar with what cultural heritage represents. Therefore, the most important thing now is to deepen the discussion on what is regarded as cultural heritage. A measure of value is necessary in order for it to be tied to people’s lives and social relations, and of course, it can be different from global values and national values. However, once the value can be accepted by local communities, local heritage can be maintained according to their ways and be able to respond to changes. In order for cultural heritage to succeed in staying alive, the consciousness of local communities is indispensable.

Notes

¹ For example, stone artefacts are found in the north of Song district and in the south of Long district (King’s Celebration Board 65-66), and also human skeletons accompanied with stone artefacts were excavated from Natong Village, Muang Phrae district (Tunprawat 192-93).

² The exact location of Trock Salope site has not been identified. However, considering the shape and location of other moated settlements scattered around Phrae, it is possible that the site was situated on the flat land between the Yom River and its tributary, the Huai Suak River where today there is a county office.

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