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Traditional festivals: Development of tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources in the catchment watershed of Mekong River Basin in Thailand

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To investigate the developing tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources on traditional festival by local, centering and celebrating of communities and traditions in the Northeast traditional festivals' region in Maekong River Basin were purposed. Associations with celebration and may also provide entertainment, particularly to local communities of cultural heritage sources were linked of tourism routes. These celebrations offered belonging to religious, social, and geographical groups, cultural also seek to inform members of their traditions among families and self-social communities. Collection data approach to surveys, interviews, observations, and focus group discussions with a sample of 85 people who consisted of the key, casual, and general informant groups in Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen, and Yasothon Provinces to management and promotion with faithful and believable were administered. The original festival are to believable and sanctity of ancient people, practicing inheritance and inherit were admired. The Buddhist temple and religious ceremonies were participated, such as the Illuminated Boat Procession, Nakhonphanom; the Boat Processional Racing, Mukdahan; Bunkhunlan inheritance, Yasothon. As for the development of the tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources, according to the types of the trips and the requirements of the target tourist groups for 1-5 day trip, amazingly.

Key words: Traditional festivals, development of tourism routes, linking cultural heritage sources, the catchment watershed, Mekong river basin.

INTRODUCTION

Background of Northeast Region on tradition, festival and local culture of Thailand

Thailand is an enchanting Buddhist Kingdom with a unique past. As a more detailed background to holiday in Thailand, this aims to give further details on the Kingdom as a whole, and more specifically on the Northeast of the country. Isan (also written as Isan, Issan, Esan or Esarn) is the Northeast Region of Thailand. It is located on the Khorat Plateau, bordered by the Mekong River to the north and east, and by Cambodia to the South. To the West, it is separated from Northern and Central Thailand

by the Phetchabun mountain range (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2012).

Agriculture is the main economic activity, but due to the socio-economic conditions and hot, dry climate output lags behind that of other parts of the country. This is Thailand's poorest region. The main language of the region is Isan (which is similar to Laos), but Thai is also widespread and Khmer is spoken in the South. Most of the population is of Lao origin, but the region's incorporation into the modern Thai state has been largely successful. Prominent aspects of Isan culture include mor lam music, Muay Thai boxing, cock fighting and the food, in which sticky rice and chillies are prominent (Figure 1(a)).

Isan covers 62,000 square miles (160,000 square km). It is roughly coterminous with the Khorat Plateau, which tilts from the Phetchabun mountain range in the west of the region (the location of several national parks) down towards the Mekong River. The plateau consists of two main plains: the Southern Khorat plain is drained by the Mun and Chi rivers, while the Northern Sakon Nakhon plain is drained by the Loei and Songkhram rivers. The two planes are separated by the Phu Paan Mountains. The soil is mostly sandy, with substantial salt deposits (Figure 1(b)).

Isan's culture is predominantly Loa, and has much in common with that of the neighboring country of Laos. This affinity is shown in the regions' cuisine, dress, temple architecture, festival and art. The Buddhist temple (or Wat) is the major feature of most villages. These temples are used not only for religious ceremonies, but also for festivals and as assembly halls. They are mostly built in the Lao style, with less ornamentation than in Central Thailand. Lao style Buddha image is also prevalent. The people of Isan celebrate many traditional festivals, such as the Bun Bungfai Rocket Festival. This fertility rite, originating in pre-Buddhist times, is celebrated in a number of locations both in Isan and in Laos, but most vigorously and famously in Yasothon Province. Other Isan festivals are the Candle Festival, which mark the start of Vassa Ceremony in Ubon Ratchathani Province and other locations; the Silk Festival in Khon Kaen, which promotes local handicrafts; the Elephant Round-up in Surin; and the Bangfai Phayanak or Naga Fireballs of Nong Khai (Alpha Research Co, 2005). Thai Isan population is constituting approximately 40% of the total population of Thailand, most of those who follow Buddhism have been integrated into the dominant Theravada tradition, with only a negligible minority having retained Isan Buddhism. Thai Isan festival has retained the practice of the Thai Isan traditional religion, but despite being practiced freely, these religions have no official recognition, and their followers are counted as Theravada Buddhists in demographic figures. Also, many Thais and Isan practice their own Tai folk faiths (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2012).

The traditional dress of Isan is the sarong. Women's sarongs most often have an embroidered border at the hem, while men's are in a chequered pattern. Men also wear a *pakama*, a versatile length of cloth which can be used as a belt, money and document belt, as headwear for protection from the sun, as a hammock, or as a bathing garment. Isan is a centre for the production of Thai silk. The trade received a major boost in the post-war years, Thai silk was popularised among Westerners. One of the best-known types of Isan silk is *mut-mee*, which is tie-dyed to produce geometric patterns on the thread.

The Catchment Watershed of Mekong River Basin in Northeast Region of Thailand

The Mekong River is one of the world's great river systems, flowing 4,909 km through six countries: China, Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Viet Nam. The source of the river's great productivity is its seasonal variation in water level and the range of wetland habitats inundated. The Mekong River Basin's biodiversity is immense, even in comparison with other parts of tropical Asia. Its biodiversity is fundamental to the viability of natural resource-based rural livelihoods of a population of 60 million people living in the Lower Mekong Basin. The Mekong forms a large part of the border between Thailand and Laos to the north and east of Isan, while the south of the region borders on Cambodia. The Mekong's main Thai tributary is the Mun River, which rises in the Khao Yai National Park near Khorat and runs east, joining the Mekong in Ubon Ratchathani Province. The other main river in Isan is the Chi River, which flows through central Isan before turning south to meet the Mun in Sisaket Province. The smaller Loei and Songkhram rivers are also tributaries of the Mekong, the former flowing north through Loei province and the latter flowing east through Udon Thani, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom and Nong Khai Provinces, whereas the catchment basin of Mekong river watershed (Figure 1(c)) (Mekong River Commission for Sustainable Development, 2014).

The Mekong River Basin encompasses a vast range of geographic and climatic zones; as a result, it is endowed with diverse and abundant natural resources. The water irrigates large tracts of forest and wetlands that produce building materials, medicines and food and serve as habitats for thousands of species. The Basin contains many and varied wetlands that perform wide-ranging functions and sustain key social, economic and cultural values. Wetlands also play a vital role in supporting the livelihoods of local people, providing a productive environment for agriculture, aquaculture, capture fisheries, non-fish aquatic goods and tourism revenue. In addition, natural wetlands provide equally important indirect benefits, such as flood mitigation, water storage

(a) Northeast region of Thailand	(b) Part of Northeast or Isan region and main economic activities in Mekong River Basin	(c) Catchment Basin of Mekong River Watershed and Isan Festival in Makhong River
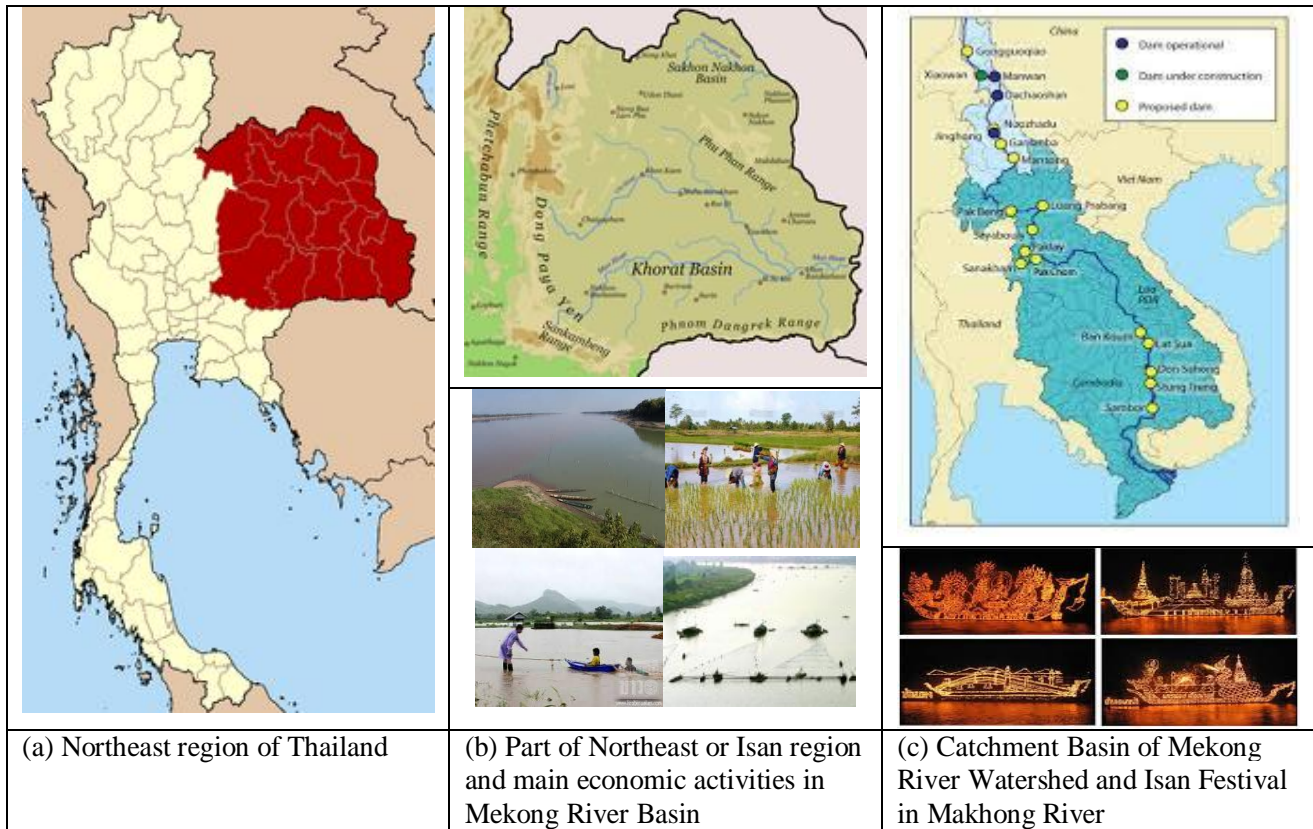
Figure 1. Maps of Northeast region of Thailand and Catchment Watershed of Mekong River Basin.

and wastewater treatment At this time, in the middle of the Mekong River, lights in various shapes from the floating boats can be seen from a long distance and this is considered as a significant symbol to uphold Buddhism. The event brings about happiness to all Buddhists while foreign visitors will enjoy watching a marvelous illuminated display (Mekong River Commission for Sustainable Development, 2014).

Tourism routes in Thailand

In terms of tourism in Thailand, among the reasons for the increase in tourism in the 1960s were the stable political atmosphere and the development of Bangkok as a crossroads of international air transport. Thailand was one of the first players in Asia to capitalize on this then-new trend (Ouyyanont, 2001), tourism is a major economic factor in the Kingdom of Thailand. In 2013 it is estimated that tourism directly contributed 9% (THB1 trillion) to Thailand's GDP. When including the indirect effects of tourism, it accounted for 20.2% (THB2.4 trillion) of Thailand's GDP. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) uses the slogan "Amazing Thailand" to promote Thailand internationally. In 2015, this was supplemented by a "Discover Thainess" campaign. Asian tourists primarily visit Thailand for Bangkok and the historical, natural, and cultural sights in its vicinity. Western tourists not only visit Bangkok and surroundings, but in addition many travel to the southern beaches and islands. The north is the chief destination for trekking and adventure travel with its diverse ethnic minority groups and forested mountains. The region hosting the fewest tourists is Isan in the northeast. To accommodate foreign visitors, the Thai government established a separate tourism police with offices in the major tourist areas and its own central emergency telephone number. Thailand has also plans on becoming the hub for Buddhist tourism in the region, especially in Isan region, whereas it ought to develop tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources on traditional festival for promoting on tourism has also grown significantly in the past decade (Tourist Police in Thailand, 2010).

Cultural heritage sources in Isan: Catchment Watershed of Maekong River Basin

Figure 1(a) shows the map of Northeast or Isan region is divided into 20 provinces, although the Southwestern

Province of Nakhon Ratchsima is considered by some to be more closely connected with Central Thailand. Focusing on Nakhon Phanom Province, is one of the neighboring provinces are borders of Laos. The province, in the Mekong River valley, is mostly plains. The provincial capital, once the center of the ancient Sri Kotrabun Kingdom, lies adjacent to the majestic Mekong River. The provincial seal shows the highly revered pagada of Phra That Phanom in That Phanom district. Originally constructed around 535 BC in Khmer style, it collapsed in 1675 and was rebuilt in Lao style. The provincial slogan is *the city of the revered Phrathat Phanom, cultural diversity, beautiful Phu Thai ladies, brilliant illuminated boat procession and picturesque Mekong River*. The lovely setting of the provincial capital is enhanced by the rugged beauty of the Jungle Mountains, because of this outstanding geographical feature.

PREVIOUS RESEARCHES

Many research papers have offered recommendations for responsible tourism and resort development, some have presented community participation in tourism development. This research focused on the development of festival tourism routes so research papers used for supporting the research findings should be concerned with the purposes of the research. These were all of the items; meanwhile these researches are reviewed as:

Kozak (2002) reported of his study in objectives were to determine on motivational differences existed between tourists from the same country visiting two different geographical destinations and across those from two different countries visiting the same destination. Findings demonstrated that some tourist motives differed between nationalities and place visited. Alhemoud (2003) gave definition of tourism on his research; tourism is an increasingly important area of services trade. Every foreign visitor who spends money at a tourist resort contributes to an improvement in the balance of payments of the country to which this resort/destination belongs. With the value of the oil industry fluctuating, and given the vast natural resources and beauty offered by the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, tourism services may well become a key GCC export factor. Finally, the researcher offered some recommendations pertaining to the marketing mix of the GCC tourism industry aimed at attracting the maximum number of foreign visitors, particularly during the festivals. Erik (2008) studied in the spirit possession festivals are of particular interest for tourism studies, since they are not staged specifically for tourism, but appeal to tourists for their 'exoticism.' Two spirit possession festivals in Thailand, differing considerably in their respective scope and in a Buddhist temple in Central Thailand are

compared, with respect to differences in the extent of their promotion, the status of foreign tourists, the tourists' conduct and their effect on the sustainability of the festivals. Ketsara et al. (2012) used the qualitative research; documentary with textbook and research in relate tourism, In-depth interview with aging tourists about tourism behavior and study the area around the Mae Moh mine about the potential for tourism. The results were to tourism destination should be added to facilitate for aging tourists example toilet for aging tourists and natural route surrounding area. The information has appropriate knowledge to become normal tourism destination as a learning tourism destination.

Phra Soravit Aphipanyo (Duangchai, 2013) studied in the model and process of buddhism-based tourism management in Southern Thailand: Value-oriented communication and integrated development, this result showed that the Buddhist tourism routes in the southern part of Thailand can be separated in to three main types: "Integration of Buddhist Moral Code" route: follow in footsteps of Sri Vichai's history inscription and visit "The Buddha's relics of the south"; Dharma traveling route; and Route of life and moral: morality path, tourist location of the community. Phirasant et al. (2014) developed the cultural tourism in the communities around Sukhothai Historical Park, Sukhothai Province reported on their study to the Participatory Development of Communities around Sukhothai Historical Park. The use of cultural community identity in basic structural and systematic development such as lodgings, restaurants, souvenir and hand craft shops, and the publication of local products and festivals that reflect local nature and the characteristics of people in surrounding communities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The researchers selected the areas whereas the great festivals are held yearly; the provinces of Nakhon Phanom, Mudahan, Yasoton, and Amnat Charoen Provinces have their own unique festivals so they were selected by means of a purposive sampling technique. The aims of this research were these:

1. To investigate the background of holding festivals in the water catchment of Mekong River Basin.
2. To investigate current situations and difficulties of holding festivals in water catchment of religion area at the catchment of the Mekong River Basin.
3. To develop the tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources in the Mekong River Basin.

METHODOLOGY

A method of the cultural qualitative research was used for this research, using the basic survey method, and to gather research data from both a document analysis and a field study. Participatory

and non-participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions were administered for searching findings throughout the research period in 1 year.

Research procedures

Using the cultural qualitative research with the field trip, basic survey, interview, and focus group discussion technique to collect data and check list, to provide the research objectives with the descriptive analysis were controlled of research procedure (Table 1).

The data were gathered from statements of the three purposive sampling areas in Nakhon Phanom, Mukdakhan, and Amnatcharean provinces whereas the economical link to the neighbor countries, such as; Laos PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam with the sample size that consisted of a group of key informants, a group of casual informants, and a group of general informants. A triangulation technique was used for sampling all data concerned and research administrations were presented meanwhile according to research aims of qualitative research methods a descriptive analysis.

Research instruments

The Basic Survey Recording Note

Using the Basic Survey Recording Note to search on the foundational comfortable and people interestingly of their local traditional culture and festival was recorded.

The Recording Observation

Researcher has searched the general community areas and took her to participate with the local community of their arrangement, management, enhancement, and supporting investment to participant and non-participant observation.

Interview Guide

Using the Interview Guide format to interview on the expert local wisdom, practicing personnel group for introducing historical background of their traditional festival to take the tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources in the Mekong basin areas with the structured interview and non-structured interview were administered.

The Focus Group Discussion

To plan the focus group discussion format to local people perception or opinion that it has been followed as the research framework on their traditional festival to take the tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources in the Mekong basin.

Research framework

The researchers conducted a research framework as the following,

Surveying feasible areas for researching.
Selecting the research areas.
Selecting the data concerned.
Operating a field study in each research area.
Gathering research data from all field studies.

Examining research data.
Analyzing and interpreting research data.
Presenting research results.
Reporting research results.

Sample

Using the research instruments to investigate with the sample of 85 local people who have been stakeholder in the research area, namely; the 25-government and private key informants, the 30 persons of the casual informant, and the 30-gernaral people who were households leaders, community leaders, monks, merchants, customers, tourists, tourism transportation, and etc., for giving the data to make the traditional festival of the tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources in the Mekong basin areas.

Data arrangement

Using data were described from previous research studies, data collection, and field study with the results of research instruments to separate and provide data which conform to research objectives, harmoniously. The satisfactory data were enough to approach and conclude with the triangular and methodological triangular procedures to arrangement data, believable and truly.

Importance of the research

These research results will benefit organizations where concern with a tourism affair. They can use them as information for developing their operations concerning tourism. Buddhist Festivals are always joyful occasions. Typically on a festival day, lay people will go the local temple or monastery and offer food to the monks and take the Five Precepts and listen to a Dharma talk. In the afternoon, they distribute food to the poor to make merit and in the evening join perhaps in a ceremony of circumambulation a stupa three times as a sign of respect to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. The day will conclude with evening chanting of the Buddha's teachings and meditation. Some holy days are specific to a particular Buddhist tradition or ethnic group. There are two aspects to take into consideration regarding Buddhist festivals: Most Buddhists, with the exception of the Japanese, use the Lunar Calendar and the dates of Buddhist festivals vary from country to country and between Buddhist traditions. There are so many Buddhist festivals; here are some of the more important ones.

RESULTS

A festival is a special occasion of feasting or celebration, usually with a religious focus. Aside from religion, and sometimes folk dance, another significant origin is agricultural. Food (and consequently agriculture) is so vital that many festivals are associated with harvest time. Religious commemoration and thanksgiving for good harvests are blended in events that take place in each month in Thailand, such as;

Traditional festivals and cerebrations are popular and famous in Isan local region, namely; *Songkran* (pronounced sohng-krahn) is the traditional Thai New Year, *Loy Krathong* (pronounced loy krah-tohng) is an ancient festival to honor and thank the water spirits for all

Table 1. Research procedure for developing the tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources in the Catchment Watershed of Mekong River Basin in Thailand.

Research objectives	Research procedures	Sampling group	Research instruments	Target and goal
	-Basic survey -Research selected area	-Nakhon Phanom Province -Mukdahan Province -Amnatcharoen Province	-Field strip -Survey	Research area framework
Background of traditional festival in water catchment of Mekong river basin	Observing and interviewing techniques	-Provincial tourism -Provincial culture -Chief executive of Provincial Administration Organization -District Culture -Mayer -Abbot -Folk wisdom -Local leader -Communities -Village headman -Village chief	-Observing form -Interviewing form	Historical background of traditional festival in water catchment of Mekong river basin
Recently property and problems of traditional festival	Observing and interviewing techniques	-Administrational Truism -Provincial tourism -Provincial culture -Chief executive of Provincial Administration Organization -District Culture -Mayer -Abbot -Folk wisdom -Local leader -Communities -Village headman -Village chief	-Observing form -Interviewing form	Collecting data of Recently property and problems of traditional festival
Development of Tourism Routes for Linking Cultural Heritage Sources in the Catchment Watershed of Mekong River Basin in Thailand	-Observation -Focus group discussion	-Administrational Truism -Provincial tourism -Provincial culture -Chief executive of Provincial Administration Organization -District Culture -Mayer -Abbot -Folk wisdom -Local leader -Communities -Village headman -Village chief	-Observing form -Focus group discussion form	Collecting data of Tourism Routes for Linking Cultural Heritage Sources in the Catchment Watershed of Mekong River Basin in Thailand

the water provided during the growing season. It is celebrated (usually in November) on the first full moon after the rice harvest. *Rocket Festival* is the liveliest festival in Isan, this festival's origin lies in the custom of firing rockets into the sky at the start of the rice-growing season to remind the sky god to send promised rain.

While Isan ought to have as many tourist attractions as to be have some of the most fun, quirky and interesting festivals, meanwhile find anywhere in Isan region, at which point of this research was to presume on some famous festivals are only organised in *"ISAN"* area. For example:

Lai Ruea Fai Festival　　Phra That Phanom　　Worshipping Festival　　Red Cross Fair

Figure 2. An atmosphere of Lai Ruea Fai Festival and The Red Cross Fair and Phra That Phanom Worshipping Festival, Nakhon Phanom Province.

Traditional Festival in Nakhon Phanom Province, *Phrathat Phanom Fair,* and the festival takes place in February or early March. The fair starts in the morning with Buddhist ceremonies which brings Phra Uppakhup from the bank of Mekong River to Phrathat Phanom Temple. Then there are worship ceremony of the Phrathat Phanom Stupa, traditional dances for revering the Stupa, local product sales, local games and entertainment at day and night. *Bun Phawet Festival*, Bun Phawet is a Buddhist ceremony to celebrate the return of Vetsandon, who was the previous life of The Lord Buddha. The festival is held for 3 days at the Somdech Phra Srinakarindra Park and Bueng Phalan Chai. There are a parade of Phra Ubbakhup around the town, 13 parades of Phrawet arranged by public and private organisations, light and sound presentation, cultural performances and a sermon of all chapters of the Maha Wetsandon Chadok in the Buddhist temple. *Lai Ruea Fai Festival* and the *Red Cross Fair*, Lai Ruea Fai or illuminated boat procession is the most famous celebration in Nakhon Phanom, This festival was originated from the belief in worshipping the Buddha's footprint marked on the bank of Nimmathanatee River when he returned to the earth after he ascended to heaven to sermonize his mother. People believe that all water ways can be linked together so they decorate illuminated boats for worshipping the Buddha's footprint. Nakhon Phanom people held the first festival on OK Phansa Day or the fifteenth waxing moon of the eleventh lunar month in 1983. As for the Red cross Fair of Nakhon Phanom Province that is held during late December to early January every year but it has been held together whit Lai Ruea Fai Festival since 2008. This is a nine day festival.

Phra That Phanom Worshipping Festival, This seven day festival takes place during the full moon period of the third lunar month, generally in late February or early March. The construction of Phra That Phanom is mentioned in the book called Tamnan Urangkathatu (Legent of The Lord Buddha's Breastbone Relic), depicting the Lord Buddha's visit to the Mekong River Basin and the later arrival of his breastbone relic. Phra That Phanom was constructed by 500 Arahants, led by Phra Maha Kasapa, eight years after Lord Bunddha'

passing, about the 6th century BC. It was initial in the shape of a four- sided kin and about 8-10 metres hight. About 500 BC., Phra That Phanom was restored and extended to be 24 metrse high. During the lan Chang period, it was restored gradually by several Lao monarchs and monks. The stupa became a square lotus shape in the style of lan Chang art and reach 43 metres high when it was restored from 1690 to 1692 by Phra Khru Luang Phonsamek, a monk from Vientiane. After that, Phra That Phranom was restored by the Siamese four times. On August 11, 1975, its tower collapsed after seven days of heavy downpour. Phra That Phanom was rebuilt from 1976 to 1978 with state subsidies and public donations, and the relic was re-enshrined in 1978. For centuries, Phra That Phanom has been a pilgrimage destination among Buddhists from all over Thailand and Laos. It is said that worshipping Phra That Phanom will bring joy and peace of mind and even rebirth in heaven after death. Thus, Phra That Phanom Worshipping Festival takes place as the annual merit-making for both Thai and Lao people. It is a nine day festival (Figure 2).

Traditional Festival in Mukdahan Province, therefore any time during the year is a good time to visit Mukdahan province. However, the festival would take up at the time when Mukdahan is into celebrations of some traditional festivals. *Ruam Phao Thai Mukdahan* and Makham wan Chai Khong, and Mukdahan Red Cross Fair held annually between 9–17 January in front of the city hall, the fair includes exhibitions, outlets of state departments. Activities include a precession using hundreds of people wearing costumes of tribes like Phu Thai, So, Yo, Kha, Kaloeng, and Kula ; a sweet tamarind contest ; the *Thida Phao Thai pageant* ; shops selling products of the province ; and local performances. *Bun Duean Hok or Bun Bang Fai Festival*, the celebration of the rocket festival is held annually on 10–12 May at Mu 1-3 of Amphoe Don Tan. *Boat Racing Festival*, the tradition has been handed down since ancient times. It is held annually, on the 13 – 15th days of the waxing moon of the 11th lunar month, in the Mekong River to mark the end of Buddhist Lent. Each year, numerous boats join the competition in both categories while people from Mukdahan and nearby provinces as well as Lao PDR pack the venue. Boats from Savannakhet also join the

Boat Racing Festival   Ruam Phao Thai   Thida Phao Thai Pageant

Figure 3. An atmosphere of Boat Racing Festival and Ruam Phao Thai Mudkahan or Thida Phao Thai Pageant in Mukdahan Red Cross Fair, Mukdahan Province.

Bun Bang Fai Lan Festival or Rocket Festival   Garland Festival

Figure 4. An atmosphere of Bun Bang Fai Lan Festival or Rocket Festival and Garland Festival at Ban Yard Fah, Yasothon Province.

races every year. Considering it is the meeting point for people across the two countries, Tourists will visit Mukadahan during early January or May seems to be most apt for business purposes. There are two major categories, speed racing for small, medium, and large boats that all participating boats are dug to have a round hull and will compete on a 3 kilometre-long distance on the Mekong River. Another category is the fantasy boat contest in which the racing boats are decorated, particularly at the figureheads. Thus, there are two major categories of prizes classified into the first, the second, and the third in each category (Figure 3).

Traditional Festival in Yasothon Province, the Garland Festival is held at Ban Yard Fah, Maha Chana Chai, Yasothon during Makha Pucha Day. Buddhists believe that on that day, the Lord Buddha comes back from heaven after preaching his mother and he is welcomed by angels with flowers and rice. This belief is turned into the tradition. The villagers make garlands from baked rice which will be shown in a parade and used for decorating the temple's pavilion. *Bun Bang Fai Lan Festival or Rocket Festival*, the convivial festival, indigenous to Isan region is held during on the second week of May on the purpose to create harmony amongst the residents and to appease gods for rains and prosperous food. The residents grouped up in team to build the bamboo rocket, which will be decorated and filled with niter. The shapes of the rocket vary but most of them are made into spraying-water naga. The festival also includes all-night music and dance performances, street parade of the rockets accompanied by music and dance and the launching of the rockets (Figure 4).

Bun Khun Lan Tradition, it is held around January every year in Lue Amnat District, Amnat Charoen Province, this tradition has been practiced for a long time, it aims to achieve good fortune and other virtues to the paddy fields in this province. After harvesting of rice completed, people will transport bunches of rice and rice seeds to the yard located in front of Lue Amnat District Office and pile them into a large beautiful heap to conduct Bai Sri Sut Khwan or rice blessing ceremony. Monks are invited to chant prayers. After the lunch is offered, the monks say amen and sprinkle holy water to the audience, the rice heap, buffaloes and oxen. Later the Bai Sri Sut Khwan can be conducted. After the Bai Sri Sut Khwan or the rice-blessing ceremony, the rice is loaded and stored in the rice barns. Each rice bran owner has to pick leaves of Golden Shower tree and Indian Mulberry and attach them to every pillar of the barn. It is believed to make the heaf of rice grow higher and higher. Lastly, welcome the presence of Khwan Khao (rice spirit) and goddess of Rice into the rice barn. This is a four day festival with Buddhist ceremony in daytime and entertainment in nighttime (Figure 5).

Phra Lao Thep Nimit Worshipping Festival this festival originated from the sanctity of the Buddha image called Phra Lao Thep Nimit that was built in 1720 in subduing Mara attitude decorated by gold leaves, this Buddha imaged was housed in the temple of Wat Phra Lao Thep Nimit, Phana District, Amnat Charoen Province as the

Bun Khun Lan Tradition   Lao Thep NimitWorshipping Festival

Figure 5. An atmosphere of Bun Khun Lan Tradition and Phra Lao Thep Nimit Worshipping Festival, Amnat Charoen Province.

| Candle Festival on the Asanha Pucha Tradition in the 8th month | Loy Kratong Festival in the 12th month | Bun Phawet Traditional Festival in the 4th month | Songkhran Traditional Festival in the 5th month |

Figure 6. All famous festivals mentioned in Isan region and throughout of Thailand festivals.

principal Buddha image. When it was housed in the temple, it has given virtues to people so people in Phana District have held a festival for thanking it since 1721 and up to now the festival is still held annually. It is a three day festival included both Buddhist activities and many kinds of entertainment.   The first day of festival begins on the fifteenth waxing moon of the third lunar month or the early of February every year.

Traditional Festival in Ubon Ratchathani Province, the *Ubon Ratchathani Candle Festival*, the festival is held around Asanha Pucha which is around the beginning of Buddhist Lent and features more than 60 pieces of candle work will be displayed in a parade around the town accompanied by traditional music and dance. The festival also includes the international candle-carving competition from various countries, performance from grand symphonic band, grand Thai classic theatrical Khon (classical Thai mask dance) performance as well as beauty pageant. The candles are carved a couple of days before the procession (Figure 6).

All festivals mentioned before are cultural heritage handed down through generations; they are originated by people who believe in the sanctities concerning Buddhism and hold them for gathering people to participate in Buddhist activities and many kinds of entertainment are faithfully. These festivals will be determined either by lunar or agricultural cycles or the calendar in use at the time. This phenomenon is consistent with Gerson (1996)

and Christian (2005) who noted that Buddhist religious festivals such as Esala Perahera are held in Sri Lanka and Thailand, including Hindu festivals such as holy are also determined by the lunar calendar as well as Bunson, Margaret (2009) noted that seasonal festivals, such as Beltane are determined by the solar and the lunar calendars and by the cycle of the seasons.   Govt of Arunachal Pradesh (2004) also noted that in the Alps, in autumn the return of the cattle from the mountain pastures to the stables in the valley is celebrated as Almabtrieb, the Chinese New Year is set by the lunar calendar, and Dree Festivals of The Appertans living in Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh is celebrated every year from July 4 to 7 by praying for a bumper crop harvest.

Current situations and difficulties of holding festivals in the Mekong River Basin reveal that in terms of people participation, almost all the people living in research areas rather participate in both Buddhist ceremonies and entertainment, including they like to help tourists to solve some problems. All festivals are held during cold season of Thailand which is compatible with a tourism time of

Thai and foreign tourists. After crop harvest is finished, Thai people get some income from selling their farm produce; they usually pay some for making merit and tourism. Most festival aim at persuading people to make merit together, providing them with entertainment, and perpetuating local traditions. People participating behavior
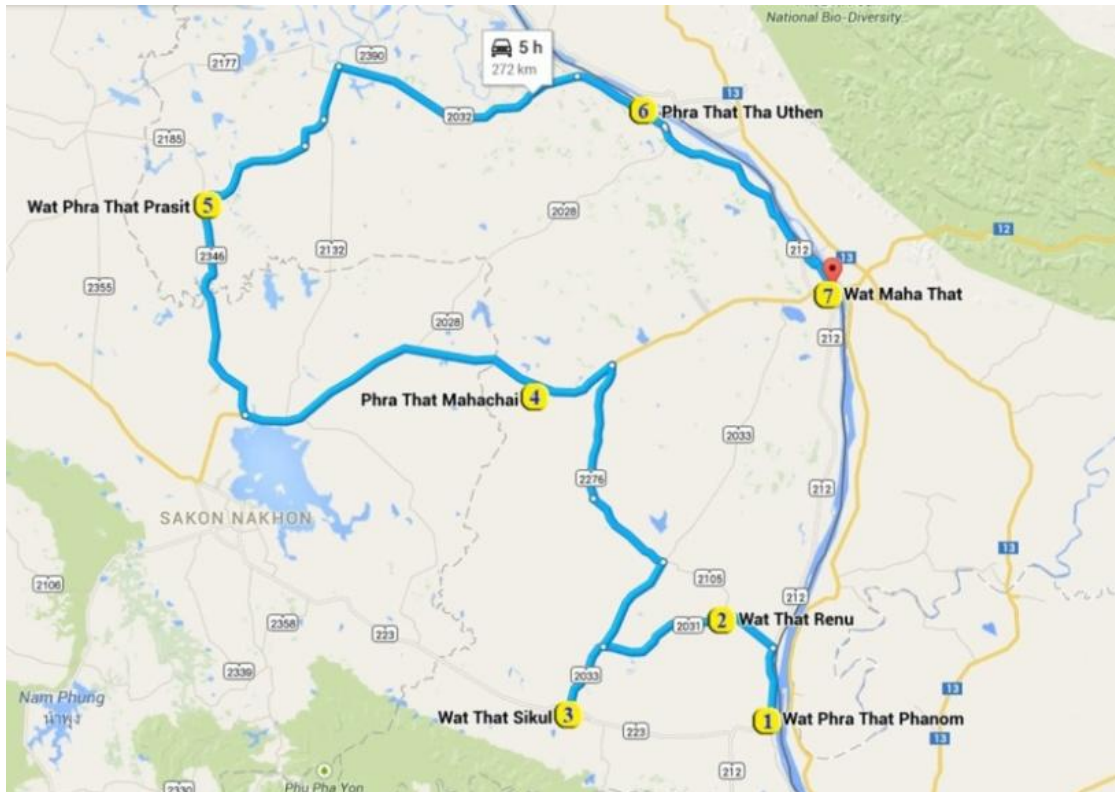
Figure 7. Some sample of all the samples classified as a type of a route for one day trip (a route for one day trip in Nakhon Phanom Province.

like this is consistent with research results of Muganda et al. (2013), Claiborne (2010), Ertuna and Kirbas (2012), Robinson and Picard (2006), Naipinit et al. (2013), and Reid (2003).

As for current difficulties, there are a lot of difficulties which the organizers must solve them, especially the problems concerning facilities such as lack of toilets for crippled persons and the elderly, public toilets are not compatible with the quantity of participants and tourists, food shops are not compatible with the quantity of participants and tourists, the limitation of a space for parking lot, lack of the staff for taking care of participants and tourists, lack of security staff, lack of signs for guiding to sources of facilities, lack of accommodation where is located near the place of festival, the limitation of waste disposal results from a lack of waste disposing staff. Moreover many kinds of entertainment are performed in the nighttime so no attractions are offered to participants and tourists in the daytime. All difficulties need an efficient systematic management in order to solve them perfectly. This phenomenon is consistent with Bruner et al. (1998), Yaman and Mohd (2004), they suggested that all the stakeholders such as governments, tourism businesses, visitors, and communities should participate in tourism management in order to solve all difficulties concerned and lead all types of tourism into the

sustainable tourism.

In order to link cultural heritage sources in the Mekong River Basin together and develop the tourism routes according to the feasibility of the time of each trip such as a route for one day trip, a route for three day trip and a route of five day trip, Tourism Authority of Thailand and Ministry of Tourism and Sports cooperate with the three Provincial Offices of Tourism and Sports divided the tourism routes into three main types of tourism routes as follows (Figure 7).

1. A route for one day trip, this type of tourism route is focused on travelling in one province by using a linkage between a festival and cultural heritage sources or tourist attractions.
2. A route for three day trip, this type of tourism route is focused on travelling in one large province, travelling in two provinces by using a linkage between a festival in the main province and cultural heritage sources or tourist attractions located both in the main province and the neighboring province.
3. A route for five day trip, this type of tourism route is focused on travelling in two or three provinces by using a linkage between a festival in the main province and cultural heritage sources or tourist attractions located both in the main province and the other neighboring

Table 2. Some sample of all the samples classified as a type of a route for three day trip (a route for three day trip in Nakhon Phanom Province).

A route for three day trip in Nakhon Phanom Province		
The First Day	*The Second Day*	*The Third Day*
Wat Phra In Plaeng	Wat Phra That Phanom	Ho Chi min's House
Wat Klang	Wat Phra That Renu	Thai-Vietnamese Friendship Village
Wat Sri Thep Pradittharam	Wat phra That Sri Khun	The Museum of Thai- Vietnamese Friendship Village
Wat Pho Sri	Wat PhraMaha Chai	Indo Chinese Market
Wat Okat	Wat Phra That Prasit	
The Museum of Nakhon	Wat Phra That Tha Uthen	
Phanom Province	Wat Maha That	
St.Anna Catholic Church		

Table 3. Some sample of all the samples classified as a type of a route for five day trip (a route for five day trip from Nakhon Phanom to Mukdahan and Ubon Ratchathani).

A route for five day trip from Nakhon Phanom to Mukdahan and Ubon Ratchathani	
The First Day at Nakhon Phanom Province	Wat Phra That Phanom
	Wat Hua Wiang Rangsi
	Wat Sri Bun Rueang
	Wat Sri Mongkhon Tai
	Indo Chinese Market
The Second Day at Mukdahan Province	Wat Banphot Khiri
	Wat Buddho Dhamma Dharo
	Phra Mongkhon Ming Mueang Buddhist Sanctuary
	Wat Samran Niwes
	Wat Phra Sri Charoen
	Wat Bo Chanaeng
	Wat Amnat
	Wat Sri Pho Chai
The Third Day at Amnat Charoen Province	Wat Phra Lao Thep Nimit
	Wat Sutthi Kawas
	Wat Tham Saeng Phet
	Wat Phra That Nong Bua
The Fourth Day at Ubon Ratchathani Province	Wat Maha Wana Ram
	Wat Sri Ubon Rattana Ram
	Wat Suphattana Ram Wora Vihara
The Fifth Day at Mukdahan Province	Kaeng Ka Bao

provinces (Table 2).

All of tourism routes are classified by the linkage between festivals and cultural heritage sources as mentioned before (Table 3). Each province has its own tourism routes and has the linkage of tourism route with neighboring provinces. A route for one day trip, a route for three day trip, and a route for five day trip are the three main types of tourism routes which respond to requirements of the target tourist groups. This is consistent with Alexanda and Filo (2013), Maneenetr and Thanh (2014), Ling and Lew (2012), Rogers (2011), Rubicondo (2012), Gration et al. (2011), Deng (2011), Seon and Kyong (2011), Capp (2012), Backman et al. (2011), and Matthew (2009), they emphasized the important of cultural routes and their impacts, including they viewed that cultural routes played an important role as a source for new kind of tourism development.

Conclusion

The researchers view that festivals in each province can be used as a linkage of cultural tourism routes so developing the tourism routes for linking cultural heritage sources in the Mekong River Basin is possible.   The tourism routes in this research classified into the main three types are a route for one day trip, a route for three day trip, and a route for five day trip.   They are classified as the alternative ways which respond to the differences in requirements of the target tourist groups.   Some of research results may benefit organizations concerned in terms of tourism management and so on.

At times extremely fragile, intangible cultural heritage must be thoughtfully managed of traditional festivals if it is to survive in an increasingly globalised world and the policy of Thailand's promotion. True partnerships between communities and the tourism and heritage sectors can only occur if all sides develop a genuine appreciation for each other's aspirations and values of the tourism routs whereas local areas. As such, tourism interests need to acquire an awareness of cultural heritage management concepts, ideals and practices, while heritage managers must endeavour to comprehend the complex phenomenon of tourism and its modus operandi. Through mutual understanding, both can build on their shared interest in intangible cultural heritage, in close consultation with local communities which are the ultimate bearers of mankind's intangible cultural legacy.

In addition to the entertainment which they offer and the high profile which tourist give to the local artists, festivals also offer an opportunity to involve people in local development by focusing their attention on organising an intensively interesting activity. This kind of event helps to develop the image of the countryside while stimulating the enterprising qualities of the local people and increasing their willingness to participate in business ventures. The Traditional Festivals: Development of Tourism Routes for Linking Cultural Heritage Sources in the Catchment Water of Mekong River Basin in Thailand ought to be supporting various tourist pilot schemes; backing traditional popular festivals, traditional games, folk events. These tourism routes, which are sometimes combined with festive gastronomic events, are aimed at increasing the region's appeal and encouraging prolonged stays.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

China: The quest for identity

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The rhetoric material vs spiritual; West vs East in our historical present is more than ever a false problem, in a way that in a post-modern era where technology offers new definition of time and space, forcing human being to reconsider the role played in society, culture is a definition that shapes itself every day. As to say that the contraposition between civilization was a useful tool to describe a society until the past century, defining an identity by juxtaposition to the other, but today because of the process of homologation that reduces us all to an anonymous mass of consumer, defining the other is a quite more complex attempt and therefore the definition of self becomes a game to lose. The transition from Socialist China to Post-Socialist China is also the transition from the stability guaranteed by Chinese philosophy to the individualism offered by the logic of marketization. Over the sociological attempt to define the never resolved dynamic modernization-westernization, China places her quest for a new identity.

Key words: Confucianism, taoism, modernism, westernization, modernization, scar literature.

INTRODUCTION

To understand China and some behaviors that at Western eyes might seem sometimes quite naïve we should first have some understanding of Chinese history. Reviewing briefly only the past century we recognize that chaos is what defines better this bracket of time. First was the warlord period and the Nationalist effort to keep together a country where Chinese, Mongols, Manchus, Tibetan and Muslim had to live together. Then was the long war with Japan and the soon after civil war between CCP and GMD, the violent excess of the Maoist era with the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward and the utopia of the Cultural Revolution. It is on the ashes of this history that is based the Chinese quest for happiness, religion, justice, stability. A common theme linking the whole modern China (Chow, 1967; Cheng, 1990; Hsu, 1995;

Macfarquhar and Schoenhals, 2006; Ting, 2010) is the search for meaning; at stake is not the degree of Westernization China has undergone since European powers invaded Chinese soil, but a problem of identity. Man is a tragic being because he possesses consciousness, at least this is the message left in heritage by the existentialism. If we wanted to apply the definition to the Chinese contest, consciousness is not to be seen as the ideological contraposition East and West but the awareness that China, despite the evident economic grow, has not yet found a new identity since the transition to Post-Socialism. What this article wants to emphasize is the socio-anthropological phenomenon of a society floating above controversial ideologies. When at the end of the seventies Deng Xiaoping gave start to the

Table 1. Socio-anthropological differences between Chinese and Western civilization.

China	West
Tendency towards equilibrium	Tendency towards extremes
Nature	Machine
Stability as ultimate goal	Immortality as ultimate goal
Emphasis on collectivism (family, clan, dynasty)	Emphasis on individual
Unity as pervasive principle of the history	Differentiation as historical principle
Emphasis on the old	Emphasis on the new
Tendency to acceptance leads to despotism	Tendency to questioning leads to democracy

economic process of openness (开放) towards the world global market, the influence of western popular culture and consumerism that invaded China without being filtered by any ideological remark. On one hand, it brought inevitably the rise of an infant individualism, to be read as an attempt of cultural independence from the official line; on the other hand, it produced the loss of influence of traditional culture, to be read as the weathering of Chinese identity. Here lies the real issue: the replacement of the Chinese collectivist identity with a more individualist approach shaped a hybrid that seems to be not anymore Chinese, and yet quite far from being westernized. China became a simulacrum of her history. In order to better explain such a statement, let us first introduce the matrix of Chinese identity in contraposition with the western spirit, a contraposition which is sociological before than ontological. We will consider then the moral vacuum produced by the encounter with the age of capitalism which might help to understand better the political unawareness of modern Chinese literature, and finally we will consider the true challenges China has to face today to hold on to her residual self.

Chinese uniqueness

Due to clichés, juxtaposition and ideal type we could easily draw a map of socio-anthropological differences between Chinese and Western civilization (Table 1).

We need to open brief philosophical brackets to understand such a dichotomy. Confucianism, Taoism, Moism are the pillars on which is based ancient and, though confusing, modern China. Confucianism surely gave Chinese society a system of education and strict conventions of social etiquette but it is much more than this. It is the philosophy of social organization, of order, public education and practical knowledge; it is about rectifying people's conduct and behavior because a man who rectifies himself can rule his family; he will bring order to the State and peace to the world. The main purpose was to form an ethical stratum of intellectual who could lead the road for a right and durable government. Taoism was more concerned with the observation of nature and the discovery of its Way, or Tao, in order to

maintain peace. Human happiness, which is to be found in harmony, is achieved when men follow the social order which is hierarchy linked to the natural order of things. Mohism again, besides a message of universal love to be perpetuated between the citizens, would emphasize the oligarchical order of the State as only remedy against the proliferation of ideas which is synonymous of disorder. In this sense, while Western society relates itself to God and therefore the philosophical speculation is either a denial or a reaffirmation of metaphysical elements, Chinese society relates itself to the society itself, the philosophical speculation therefore never engages itself with metaphysic but social ethic, more realistic or practical in a way and yet much less systematic. Here lies one of the main differences between the two cultures. Christian theology divided time into past, present and future (historicity): such a conception of time forced western civilization to study nature in order to unveil the secret held by the mysterious future, and so they opened up the sky and they dug up the earth in order to compete with nature and enrich themselves with a promise of Heaven. On the other hand Asian civilization did not compete with nature for they never had a future to decode; the same divination is a practice used to adjust the present rather than the attempt to change coming events. Asians and China specifically, therefore did not challenge nature but rather accepted it. Buddhism, by introducing the idea of after-life, tried to introduce as well the concept of responsibility; hence the ability of planning the future and for men a chance to foresee themselves in it. But China did not accept it, because by not having a god to refer to, China has felt vulnerable in front of nature; thus China based the core of a civilization of the historical present (A temporal philosophy). Chinese language itself is luckily the best evidence to the theory: Chinese tense knows only the present; it has neither past nor future, unlike Latin languages. But it describes past and future by adding external preposition as to say that the flowing of time it exists and it is accepted only as a deviation from normality. Because China does not have the idea of future or responsibility, and because of fear, it did not try to fill the gap between man and nature; first, man and divine after. Capitalism did not happen; collectivism, socialism, communism were the obvious

Table 2. New philosophical approach between Chinese and Western civilization.

China	West
Inner	Outer
Simplicity	Structured
A-temporality	Historicity
Morality	Divine
Ideal-Utopia	Reality

outcomes. All this is to say that a philosophy gives a society what that society needs the most: Confucianism, Mencius, the Legalist, Buddhism, broadly speaking Chinese philosophy gave China stability, the idea of an equilibrium ruling men's destiny, a dialectic of opposition without synthesis (Taoism) and yet guaranteeing the balance of the universe while contemplating a resemblance of change. Collectivism and oligarchy are the intellectual justification that China established over the centuries to replace the lack of unity, warring states, civil wars that more often than not have violated and devastated Chinese land. Unlike Western culture who after having satisfied primary needs, having reached a satisfactory level of welfare quite early, had to cope with the awareness of being mortal, the liability of life where every second is not just one second but the last one. Western philosophy therefore did not offer stability; it offered immortality. Western society did believe in the promise made by Christianity, believed in the after-life, a glorious stage of peace and prosperity to be reached either by divine election or personal achievements. Being responsible of the historical present therefore helped the West not to fear nature and planning the future in accordance with it, more often rebelling to it. As Weber suggested the outcome might have been capitalism; more evident is a society tending very much towards its expectation for the uniqueness of a time that does not repeat shaped a civilization that lives only once, but it lives today and tomorrow. And yet China is changing. The transition from socialist China to post-socialist China, the impact of Western culture on the Chinese people has unleashed forces that involve a mastery of nature, a new understanding of man, society and man's role in it. Facing modernity has been until now a cultural breakdown; the coming in age of a new economy (capitalism) brought an absolute new philosophical approach (Table 2).

It might be clear by now the point being sustained; China has historically been a conservative nation; believing to be vulnerable before an unpredictable nature, China tried to stabilize it as much as possible. The 5000 years old cult for the ancestors, the family clans system, the dynasties, the bureaucratic apparatus, all in all the history of China is an attempt to create an organism which might be able to endure, repeating itself, rather than developing. The transition from a dynasty to another

one, from Confucius to Maoism, from Nationalism to Communism; it is always about one emerging conservatism taking over a dying conservatism, establishing a system able to give stability by its stagnancy. The very Chinese attitude towards money for instance, debt, saving, spending is a confirmation of this ideological understanding. A Chinese would buy gold not as jewelry but for its value against inflation (China is today the world's largest importers of gold). There is a story in China comparing the spending behavior of an American lady and a Chinese one. The American took a mortgage to buy a big house. When she dies she has no saving but a big house. The Chinese lady saved all her money to buy the house; when she is dying she has enough saving to buy the house. This thrifty behavior reveals the Chinese attitude towards the unpredictable, broadly speaking towards nature. Chinese oil paintings, more often than not, offer a description of a peaceful nature where men's presence is either absent or very small compared to the economy of the landscape, revealing Chinese fear, distrust of nature and its unpredictable plans. Thus the lack of religion and philosophical needs (search for stability) led China first towards conservatism and in a second stage to despotism. As already mentioned, in order to reach a steady existential dimension China gave up the very same idea of future, implanting a civilization on the historical present, delaying the coming in age of modern conceptualization of self-responsibility and progress. What happened in the past thirty years is that the economic growth and the magnet of materialism, having in order to be, has changed the Chinese consumption behavior, the thrifty attitude towards debt and spending. The tendency towards individualism, in this case, is described very well by the nowdays Chinese purchase of luxury goods, a hedonistic consumption stretching to gratification and pleasure which pretends to shape a more fashionable lifestyle. Western tendency is again entangled with the Chinese psychology where advertising wealth is the equivalent of advertising a social status, prestige, reputation, power. From a more sociological, and maybe personal, point of view, it is the whole society under attack, the Chinese cultural system whose emphasis is based on a consensual orientation, a mutual interaction, 关系(guanxi), 面子(mianzi), 人情(renqing), is today confronted by more individualistic approach, a perception of self which involves an inner search for meaning rather than the all community. A minority of Chine society seems to advert that the process of modernization should not go along with the more dangerous one of westernization. Back in 2006 a group of Ph.D. students publicized a petition calling on citizen to control their expenses for Christmas as an attempt to resist Western culture. In 2007 a Starbucks coffee in the Forbidden City was shut down after an online campaign led to preserve Chinese identity. There is a Chinese intelligentsia that is well aware of the risk of contamination, but the truth is that the rhetoric

material vs spiritual, West vs East, in our historical present is more than ever a false problem in a way that in a post-modern era where technology offers new definition of time and space, forcing human being to reconsider the role played in society, culture is a definition that shapes itself every day. What is China?

Identity is not a static factor that stands on its own; it shapes itself against the awareness of surrounding countries, it moves with technological and economic changes and it sticks to history even though we do not quite understand if history heads towards a goal or it moves in circle. However identity is not a metaphysical issue; it is very much related to the self-interpretation, the matrix of a society in spite of foreign influences and the borders of a state. Giving for good the assumption that Chinese matrix is slowly fading away, we might want to consider why in other western Eastern countries, sharing with China the same post socialist experience, the process of Westernization did not imply a recognition of Western order as much as it did in China? In a China that is becoming increasingly international, the process of acculturation is more about imitation of foreign models than expression of Chinese uniqueness. Why is that?

The first reason is to be found in Chinese soil. Taking 1911 as the starting point of China's modern national identity we easily distinguish two Chinas, one before the 1949, defined by the attempt to build a capitalist democratic republic (GMD) and another China, after 1949, characterized by the goal to establish a socialist country (CCP). The ideological gap between two different understanding of the world produced and historical rupture in terms of expectation of course and in terms of a common framework on which built up a state. The Western counter parts based unity on the solid idea of democracy but China had nothing to hold on to, therefore Chinese identity already weak was again under attack. The second reason is to be found in the overwhelming power of the Western invasion more in cultural terms than military. The West not only mined Chinese cultural stability but it pushed forward new intellectual directions which gave China a more structured thought which led to science and science, since May Fourth was seen as the spell to achieve progress. On this very fragile historical stage, whose ultimate goal until now is the market economy, China tried to unify again a land wounded for centuries by domestic and foreign invasion. Difficult is the process of unification when facing the overlapping of different cultural paradigm: economic (capitalism), philosophical (Confucianism), political (socialism). In fact the impression is that contemporary China before being able to find a new identity is fated to go through a process of fragmentation, Socialism with Chinese characteristic is a moment when values, consolidate understanding, literature, art, language, music, the amalgam of a whole civilization comes loose. What is next? Let us step back into history for a while. The predominant artistic style in China from the early 1930 was Socialist Realism, styled borrowed from Communist

Russia, based on Communist Utopia and class struggle. Soon after the establishment of the CCP the artistic radicalism called for a revolutionary realism-romanticism, a blend of realistic and romantic features where heroic images of the Great Leap forward were intended to inspire Chinese people with spirit of sacrifice. But what really happened was in fact an intellectual paralysis due to the restrictions the artists had to face in terms of content, style and themes. They were asked to create exemplary models to be emulated; they were told to write about socialist realism focusing on a progressive stage of a futuristic China (post-revolutionary) rather than a detailed analysis of present conditions (pre-revolutionary), life as it might be not as it is. When briefly given a moment of free speech[1], they clearly confessed that the total reality they were called to describe was actually empty, that the human element they were called to describe was only theory and that literature was reduced to human science. There were even authors who confessed not to have produced anything in the past years because reading their creation was a boring experience[2]. Back to the most recent China, it is true that we assist in the past one-two century to different waves of western influences into Chinese soil, starting with the Opium war, passing through the May Fourth movement; however it is only after 1978, when China embarked the four modernizations plan (Agriculture, Industry, National defense, science and technology) that Chinese past is seriously challenged proving ineffective the 1898 slogan 中学为体西学为用 (Chinese learning as fundamental structure, Western learning for practical use); for despite the effort to protect tradition and cultural heritage, western influences and values overshadowed Chinese resistance. The encounters with western literature, visual arts, cinema not only reduced the capacity of the state to control society but represented an un-precedent breakthrough, the liberation of thought in fact hints that artist besides serving the people and the party can wide their artistic creation to new ideas, concept and style. 1980 China, especially Beijing, is a country of cultural interaction, the movies of the sixth generation authors, ideology-free, by displaying a face of Chinese society, the floating population as contradiction of an irresponsible process of modernization, are a powerful example in such a sense. The eighties is a decade of significant cultural movement, art gallery, exhibition, critical thinking, Avant Guard, more in general it is the spirit of experimentation what flooded into China giving vent to contemporary art, literary experimentation borrowed from the west whose aim is the discovery of self. This is what we call the process of acculturation. However in China a similar process if on one hand is expression of individualism, on the other hand is erosion of tradition,

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[1] See the 'Let Hundred flowers bloom, let hundred schools content" campaign.
[2] Mu Fu-sheng, The Wilting of the Hundred Flowers, Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, New York, 1963

and here lies the real issue. The application of non-Chinese elements on Chinese contest produced an awkward hybrid: China celebrates Christmas without knowing what Christmas is, Chinese youths and to some extent Chinese society seem to know little about China; China seems not to have history, and yet global identities, brands, languages are soon embraced. Globalization is the cultural scapegoat used to explain intellectual negligence but we would not render justice to the history if we reduced the ideological confusion of today's China as the result of a dissolute progress of globalization. As soon as traditional China and the modern technological West met, it came clearly into view the idealist-conservative warning that by inventing machines able to alter the order between man and nature chaos was at hand. Chinese lack of identity today is therefore not the beginning of a process of fragmentation but the end, and with this consoling thought we shall move now back to the question raised before. What is China?

Ideological vacuum

The concerns with economic and politics are quite familiar to the West. There is a saying which goes: *In 1949, only socialism can save China; in 1979 only capitalism can save China; in 1989 only China can save socialism; in 2009 only China can save capitalism*, as to underline the role that China plays in world's market economy. However the analysis must be complemented by the reflection on social life and individuals. How did China respond to the institutional shift of the past decades and how did the redefinition of the moral landscape reshape the Chinese character? We shall start our discussion by saying that the development of the private sector in Chinese economy, by large the coming in age of capitalism, produced a divided self. Why is this? China did not come to terms yet with her most recent past, but at the moment rather than the past we shall focus on the future. Emotions and desire are not new to Chinese people, but in Maoist China they were controlled or at least stigmatized as improper for they would not adhere to the revolutionary cause. Scar Literature beautifully describes the dissolution of any privacy, be it an intimate behavior or a personal thought, into a public space which is always the political arena of those who criticize and those who are criticized.[3] The party-state shaped people's space and expression; everyday life was an endless cycle of work and study session, primary means of indoctrination. When in 1978 silenced emotions were finally unleashed (for academic purpose we take Deng Xiaoping reform as the starting off point), the greater openness increased artistic production as well as the rate of depression and other health issues such as alcoholism, drug addiction, sexually transmitted diseases,

domestic violence, gambling (Shu-mei, 2007). The retreat of the State from active involvement in shaping the economic life of the country opens up space for civil society; better said, the rise of a public sphere challenging the authority, which is as well the first step on the way to democracy. However the economic process of the past thirty years besides democratic and sociological issues is accompanied by a more subtle moral crisis which is the conflict between individualistic needs and values (the fact that everyone wants now to possess and consume more) and the Confucian tradition based on preordered social relations. More in general is the transition from a collective system of work to de-collectivization that untied a new society. The marketization of housing, education, medical care, forced everyone to be responsible for their own choice. The sociological implication for the loss of 饭票 (meal ticket) millions or urban workers eating together food supplied by the party state, recalls the idea of a mother country (China) that tends to control every single aspect of people life. When this came less China was called to invent a new identity. We assist millions of villagers moving from the countryside to the cities competing for the opportunities given by the private sector while enlarging the gap between rich and poor; youths looking for higher education, life aspiration pondering about happiness and freedom replaced the previous emphasis on self-sacrifice. China became the world's largest middle class society. What exactly happened is that by the late 1980 the monetary success became a new fetish; it is reflected on the fact that many had second jobs in order to provide for their new needs, material comfort and freedom. But the shift from a collective system of responsibility to an individualistic system of self-development brought as well new social phenomenon: sexual revolution, increase of depression, isolation, divorce, suicide (Shu-mei, 2007). The ethical change in China was not backed up by an outside authority. The Western world before any cultural change or secular movement was parachuted by the power of religion which somehow always pointed the way; Chinese contest had first in the family orientated system and then in Mao a background of morality to fall on. But in the new Chinese society the authority the individual can rely on is individual itself, which, we have seen, is a definition in progress. From here the ideological moral vacuum different tradition of scholars refer to, an evident disengagement from the historical present, whose victims feel the need to buy a new phone model every six months to satisfy their desire to belong somewhere. On a sociological base disillusionment, mistrust, detachments are the more evident traits of those characters in search of identity. We have talked about the transition from Socialist China to Post-Socialist China. Economic changes have always a social impact; the more relevant are the innovation the more dramatic are the effects, and more often than not is followed by an ideological break-down. This is a quite obvious statement that does not

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[3] See Lu Xinhua short story *The Scar*

help much to understand nowadays China. Sixth Generation authors and their movies represent probably the best attempt to describe the controversial changeover between two China, to some extent between two ideologies[4]. The euphoria of that part of Chinese society that more than others took advantages from the open door policy is sided by those who otherwise feel all the shame of an historical betrayal. Mao's mistake were blamed by Deng Xiaoping, one above all *to have produced an entire generation of mental cripples[5];* therefore the old generation, the very same that actively participate in the socialist construction, is now called to repudiate Mao's Cultural Revolution and what they worked for, the planned economy. But while doing so, the new economic agenda did not bring any good giving way to social issues such as unemployment, floating population, and criminality. The State discovers itself weak; it is not any longer able to protect its workers, declaring the bankrupt of state factory, forcing women to prostitution, rural workers into illicit business. The new policy not only enlarged the gap never really fulfilled between the intellectual class and the working class but the very same working class is reduced to a sub strata, a subaltern class that, if on one hand did not see the promise of egalitarianism fulfilled, on the other hand has to survive in the new shining city just built. The message launched by those underground movies is that on a sociological base of disillusionment and mistrust, the abandoned workers tried to make it in a way or another, detachment and criminality are the most evident result of a ruthless policy. But the silence of the old generation is the very same silence of the new one. Twenty-thirty years old youngster looking for a social definition have assisted the government's crackdown at Tiananmen. In addition to this, they grew up on a quite confusing cultural background; in fact we might as well define it as an overlapping of cultural paradigm. They are brought up with the Confucian ideal of filial piety, which means first and foremost respect for the others, and suddenly they found themselves living in a world that tolerate and advise individualism, competitiveness, auto-referential egoism. They are ask to fulfill duties that modernity denies, to have an identity in a world that changes every day, to be modern and traditional, conservative and liberal, to memorize Mao's speeches and embrace the opportunity offered by capitalism. All in all, once the socialist model has been sided by that of capitalist practices (accumulation, commodity exchange, impersonal relation) the cultural symbols previously shared were, in the turn of a few years, emptied of their significance before new significance could be found. It comes alone

that the social consequence of such dramatic cultural overdose it couldn't be but isolation and disintegration. An immense ideological vacuum is the prize to be paid to step into modernity even more acute if we think that the theoretical framework on which the western world based the condition for an individualistic society, a state with a strong democracy belief and welfare support, are still missing in China.

Two challenges

Reading backwards the recent history of China it is evident that at certain moment of the historical continuum China found herself in a death end street: step into the world outside embracing a modernity far to be understood and simultaneously giving away to a process of cultural erosion, a conflict between the self and the other, tradition and modernity, which shaped the hybrid of today. It is with the first Opium war that China had to re-think her centralism, when then Encyclopedias of Geography were introduced, China saw herself transformed from being the world to be a part of it. The encounter with the West, a science and a technology far superior, shattered the previous demarcation between center and periphery, which means the demarcation between the self and the other, forcing China to reorganize itself into a new image. To better understand the process of cultural erosion and transformation China went through for the past centuries, it might be useful to refer to the Hegelian dialectic Master-Slave where the dynamic between the two ideal types is the essence of the process of recognition: the master emerges as master and the slave as slave only through the recognition of the other. Soon the interaction between thesis ad antithesis, subject and object, will lead to a new syntheses. The slave works with devotion and effort; he begins to shape products for the master through imitation applied to his own creativity and originality. He creates a world auto-sufficient and he realizes that the world around him was created by his own hands; thus the slave is no longer alienated from his own labor and achieves a new self-consciousness, while the master on the other hand has become entirely dependent on the products created by his slave. The master is enslaved by the labor of his slave. China has been, since the dramatic encounter with the west, hanging on a relation of dependency on her own territory, military oppressed, politically benched and culturally overshadowed. This is precisely why once the communist, read it as Mao, took power they isolated China from the rest of the word: it was the attempt to preserve a civilization by avoiding confrontation. Only when they realized that such a confrontation came to be unavoidable, only then China took consciousness of herself and through a process of imitation and creativity, the master-slave dynamic, began the shaping of her new identity. But the Chinese acculturation is of difficult understanding because it stands between definitions,

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[4] In the aftermath of Tiananmen 1989 an increasing number of underground directors labelled as Sixth Generation Authors, received a global attention for their production based on Italian neorealism and cinema verité, bringing on the screen marginalized individual and the all spectrum of social experience.

[5] http://edition.cnn.com/fyi/school.tools/profiles/deng.xiapong/index.story.html

tradition-modern, east-west, old-new, socialism-capitalism. Culture is much more than material modality of expressions; it is about moral and art, values and ethic, nothing that can be established overnight, nothing that can be abandoned in a day. The first challenge that China is facing today is to perform self-criticism in order to come to terms with her most recent past. Ting Ling[6] saw her husband being executed by the GMT. She herself was then arrested and imprisoned few times but underground she would continue writing and organizing mass movements of peasants, workers, students. After the People Republic of China was proclaimed she became one of the leading figures of the Communist literature movement. In *The Trial,* one of her most acclaimed pieces, she would have one of the peasants saying during the trial against the ex-landlord Chen, that *there would be no New China without the Communist party.* The short story, which is objectively artistically poor, *was* labeled as *author's mastery of artistic technique*, and yet it was not enough for her to avoid being labelled as rightist. After twenty seven meetings with more than a thousand of participants where she never admitted guilt, she was expelled from the party, sent to a farm first and then to jail for another twenty years. When in 1979 for the first time at 75 she appeared in public again; she was asked about the past. She indulgently laughed and said that people should look ahead. But, the future should never ignore the past. The categories known as China and Chinese are historically sedimented constructs; 5000 years of traditions is a daily heard slogan for those who live in China, but they are as well built on historical amnesia. Let us not bother; the past is a wide spread understanding of the present. And it takes us to the second challenge China has to face, which is the more intellectually delicate attempt to avoid an acritical westernization, because every time that western habits, costumes, ideas are taken for own consume, indirectly an assumption is made: the implicit acceptance that habit, costume or idea are better. Chinese modernization cannot afford to be confused with an uncontrolled westernization for it would fling China back again to the Master-Slave dynamic. However it must be said that the same vacuum, the same struggle for self-definition, self-determination was visible in East Europe just after the collapse of Soviet Union, it is the empty space between the state power retreat and people leap towards freedom. In this sense China is not an *unicum*, 思想危机 (ideological crisis) and 精神危机 (spiritual crisis) is a phase Europe has suffered at every turn of century, and every time it came out with a new subjectivity. Nowdays Chinese urban film makers' picture characters with humanist concern but politically unaware, being politically unaware in post-socialist China does not have the same negative connotation as it had in socialist China. In fact to some extent the political unawareness of

a big slice of Chinese population, might as well be one of the first traits of the new Chinese identity. According to Habermas and Marx the idea of civil society and therefore the public sphere is connected to the emergence of the bourgeoisie, the fact that China has today the biggest bourgeois class in the world would authorize us to say that China has at last found a new identity.

It is tempting but misleading. Western society based the concept of identity on the solid platform of truth. Truth has been simultaneously a religious understanding of human expectation, science able to explain man position in the universe and art expressed through beauty because the perfection of beauty reconnect man to the divine element he once had. But Chinese identity had none of it. Chinese virtues, identity, society could not possibly stand on a religious base for while in the western counterpart first came religion and then society and therefore Christianity shaped the whole civilization, religion belief in China came after society and therefore it never had the strength, the imprimatur to unify a country otherwise so vast and different. Science is a recent invention in China. It appeared at the end of the nineteen century, together with the Western powers and the idea of a materialist progress. Obviously it was opposed by the conservative wings, as contrary to nature and Chinese spiritual philosophy. Neither art nor beauty could represent an amalgam for the scattered Chinese identity for beauty in China is an imperfect concept that does not last, too liable, too weak. Art, by definition, pretends to be immortal; art is what remains once we are no more, but China had no time to look for perfection. China was engaged with the tragedy which fragmented, dispersed men's awareness, and men's critical thinking. Beauty, by large art, in China does not last because China burnt it down to produce in order to catch up with the European production; beauty in China was smashed and tore apart, silenced, treated as an impostor, a rightist, enemy of the masses. And because beauty could not console China, for it to survive it needed a more solid background, a frame to hold on to while dynasties, invaders, regimes would rapidly alternate. It is ideology. The cultural stage on which was based Chinese identity has always been ideology: first was Confucius to define the shape of what was moral and what was not, then was Maoism, read it as Communism to point out what is right and what is wrong. At last arrived capitalism to indicate the difference between success and failure, with a blend new of values and ethics. When it was only Confucianism or even Confucianism and Communism together, due to their common attitude towards order, the identity was somehow preserved; but with the appearance on the stage of the logic of marketization Chinese identity rapidly entered a phase of cultural schizophrenia. The process of modernization quite successfully hid the contradiction of a society where nowadays individualism and competition have to go along with respect and collectivism. Cultural chaos took finally the resemblance of peace. Clearly the

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[6] One of the most celebrated Chinese female authors, first awarded The Stalin Prize for Literature, the persecuted by the regime

ideological vacuum following the death of Mao plays a big part in the definition of a new identity because ideology is the imaginary representation of the world but now that ideology has slipped out of daily life there is a space yet to be filled. By what? Family? Association? Religion? But it seems unlikely that a faith of foreign origins might be able to help the construction of Chinese uniqueness, besides the repertoire of quantitative and qualitative images available today make difficult the development of predominant characters as the logic of capitalism goes along with concept of fragmentation, de-personalization, de-subjectivization. In spite of this, the exploration of subjectivity constitutes the bulk of contemporary art, literature, aesthetics, all aware of the humanist quest for Chinese's soul after for few decades it dissolved into the impersonality of the masses. External symbols, embracement of western symbols, commercial culture is the tool used to avoid the chaos opened by the ideological breakdown; they might as well represent the cultural bridge to a new cultural paradigm. Today, digging the soul of contemporary China is a transition bordering alienation and nihilism, an entanglement of values none of them valid enough to be followed as leading star, controversial messages where men and women are both victims of the commodity exchange policy, both looking for a new guide to the social totality.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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