

Full Length Research Paper

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

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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 Lao, 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

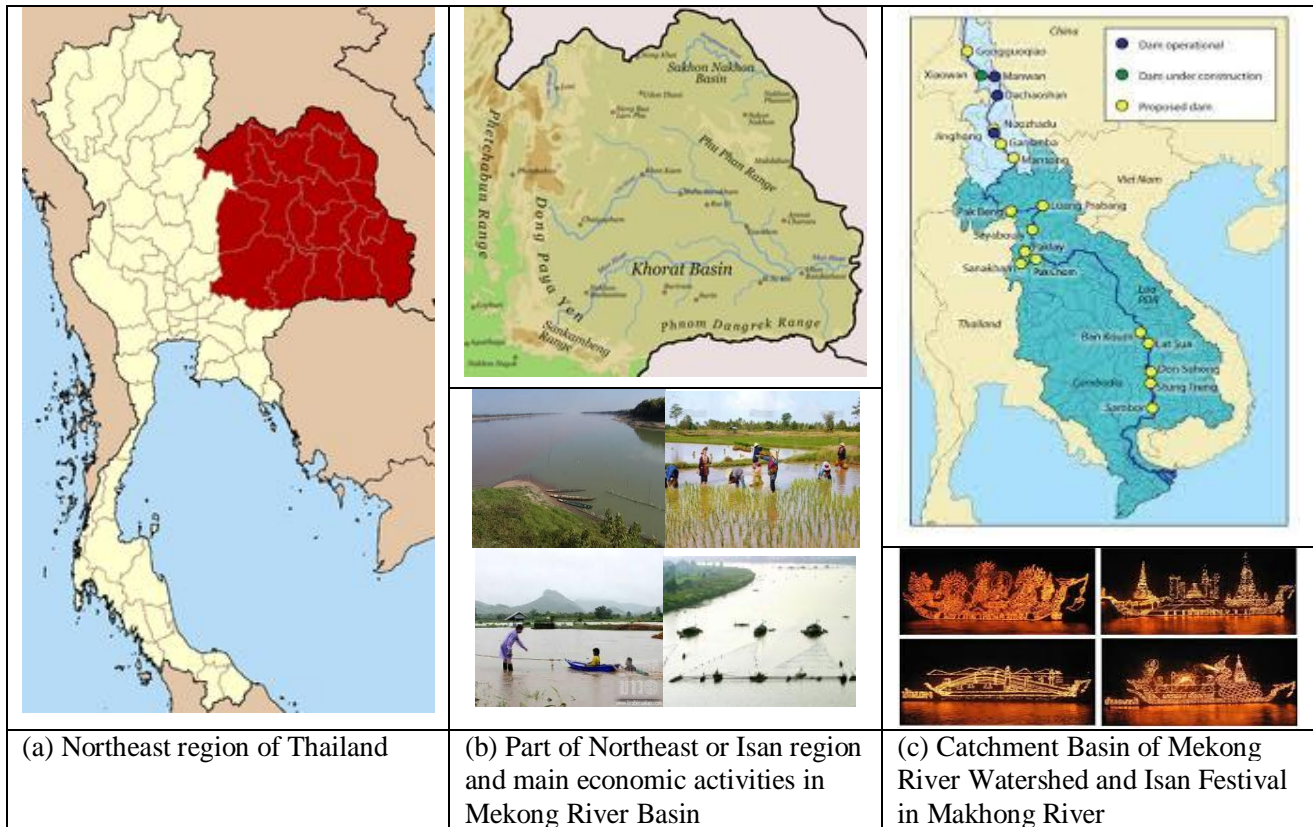


Figure 1. Maps of Northeast region of Thailand and Catchment Watershed of Mekong River Basin.

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 Ratchasima 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 pagoda 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, Mukdakhon, 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-generational 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 celebrations 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:



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 with 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 (Legend 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 Buddha's

passing, about the 6th century BC. It was initial in the shape of a four-sided stupa and about 8-10 metres high. About 500 BC., Phra That Phanom was restored and extended to be 24 metres 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 Phanom 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 procession 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



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



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

competitions are held every year. Considering it is the meeting point for people across the two countries, Tourists will visit Mukdahan 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 heap 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



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



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 Almbtrieb, the Chinese New Year is set by the lunar calendar, and Dree Festivals of The Appertains 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

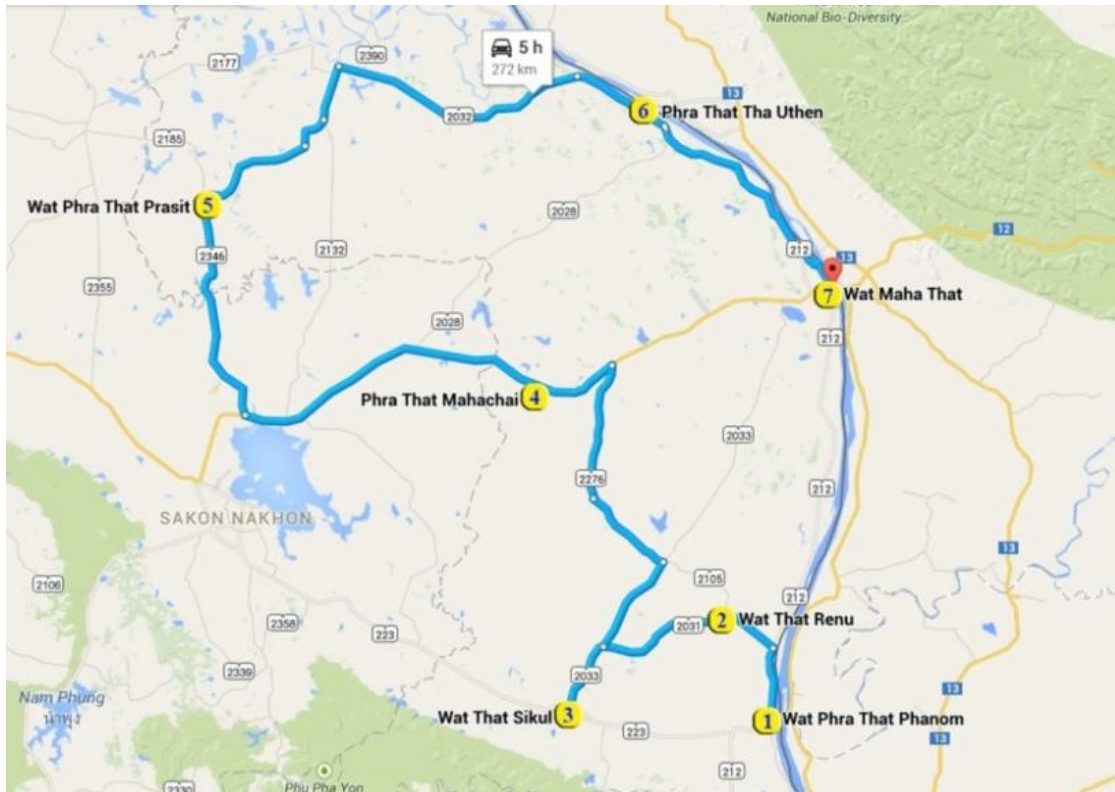


Figure 7. Some sample of all the samples classified as a type of a route for one day trip (a route for one day trip in Nakhon Phanom Province).

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		
<i>The First Day</i>	<i>The Second Day</i>	<i>The Third Day</i>
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 Phanom Province	Wat Phra That Tha Uthen	
St. Anna Catholic Church	Wat Maha That	

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
The Fourth Day at Ubon Ratchathani Province	Wat Phra That Nong Bua 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 routes 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 tourists 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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