



# The Creation of Thai Contemporary Folk Dance based on Cultural Capital

## “Dance to Worship Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang People”

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### Abstract

**Background and Aims:** Elephant-keeping and religious traditions are part of the long-standing cultural identity of the Kuy Achiang ethnic community in Surin Province, Thailand. Worshipping Kru Pakamchang, which represents indigenous beliefs, social solidarity, and intangible cultural heritage, is one of the most important customs. Cultural conservation, community development, and creative tourism are all aided by the performing arts' preservation and revitalization of this custom. This study aims to (1) examine the wisdom and ritual practices associated with the worship of Kru Pakamchang, (2) design and create Thai contemporary folk-dance movements that represent the community's cultural capital and identity, and (3) perform and disseminate the dance to preserve cultural heritage and promote cultural tourism of the Kuy Achiang people.

**Methodology:** A mixed-methods study approach was employed, combining qualitative and action research. Data was gathered through focus groups, interviews, and documentary research with five cultural specialists, including monks, local scholars, and ritual experts. During action research workshops, 20 students and 30 community members collaborated to co-create dance moves, music, lyrics, and costumes. The data was examined using content analysis and participatory design methodologies.

**Results:** The worship of Kru Pakamchang, which represents protection, unification, and reverence for ancestral spirits, is an important part of the Kuy Achiang people's cultural and spiritual life, according to the study. The imaginative choreography, which combined Thai classical elements with the dance traditions of the Kuy, Lao, and Khmer people, was divided into three sections and seventeen movements. In addition to revitalizing intangible cultural heritage, the performance builds communal identity, encourages knowledge transmission between generations, and opens up potential for cultural tourism.

**Conclusion:** This study shows how indigenous rituals can be adapted into modern performing arts that promote sustainable development and community resilience while protecting intangible cultural heritage. Anthropology, humanities, and social sciences are all integrated in the "Dance to Worship Kru Pakamchang," which supports the Kuy Achiang community's creative economy and cultural preservation.

**Keywords:** Kru Pakamchang Ritual, Kuy Achiang Ethnic Group, Cultural Capital, Contemporary Folk Dance, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Community Identity, Creative Economy

### Introduction

The livelihood of the Kuy elephant herders' ethnic group in Surin Province is a local ethnic group that has been in the business of catching and raising elephants since the Ayutthaya period. The Kuy think that the spirit of the Pakam lives in the Pakam skin or the Pakam rope that is used to tie the elephant, which is made from cowhide or buffalo hide and vines (the word for vines in the Kuy language is Avalaprang), and is used to tie the elephant. The belief in the Pakam shrine. The Kuy elephant herders believe that the "Phi Pakam" is the spirit of the Phra Khru Pakam, the elephant doctor, the ancestor, and the dead relatives who will come together and reside in the Pakam rope. "Offering respect to the teacher of Pakam" is a sacred ceremony that the Kuy elephant herders must always carry out. Therefore, before the Kuy can do any work, whether elephant-related or not, they must first always carry out the Pakam spirit worship ceremony, such as training elephants, when an elephant is sick, when an elephant tusk is cut off, when taking the elephant to work in another place, after coming back from catching a wild elephant, when a daughter gets married, when a son becomes a monk, etc. (Sukthong, 2013; Sukthong et al., 2024)

Nonetheless, in the ritual of "paying homage to the teacher's shrine" and "paying homage to the ghost of the ghost," the role is still the main belief that can maintain the good morality of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group continuously, that is, by continuing to practice the rituals until they become an important cultural tradition that has been present with the community of the Kuy elephant-raising people in Surin Province, by using preserving and maintaining beliefs and practicing beliefs with humility, expressing respect and awe for the sacred power of the ancestral spirits, which shows the roots of the cultural wisdom

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of the Kuy elephant-raising people in Surin Province, which in ancient times was an important elephant-catching area of Thailand since the time of King Ekathat or King Boromracha III, the last king of Ayutthaya. The belief system of the ghost of the ghost reflects the story of the power system of the elders in the family lineage very well, that is, the transfer of power from the ancestral ghosts to the elders in the family lineage who are the leaders in the ritual of paying homage to the teacher of the elephant, including those who have the authority to order everything in the ritual (Chinnak, 1996; Kalyano., 2020; Sukthong et al., 2024). The beliefs of the group are related to the economy, society, values, use of community resources, and the role in participating in the community's rituals. Organizing the family, relatives, and descendants in the family line, as well as preserving the traditions and beliefs that exist in the community, while continuing to fulfill the needs of the community from the past until the present. From the interview with the community leaders (Wachara Boonprom and Lilawan Salangam, 2023, August 14: Interview), they wanted to develop and create interesting performances to be used for performing shows to increase income for the community and help people in the community feel proud. By bringing in the community culture, rituals, or important identities of important Kui ethnic groups, such as the ceremony of worshiping the elephant shrine, which will make the community believe, have a sense of preserving their homeland, and lead to the creation of the economy and further development of the community.

For this reason, the researcher is interested in the ritual to worship the shrine of the Kuy elephant-raising teacher to be used for study and to develop a set of performances based on cultural capital, which is the identity of the community. From fieldwork to collect data on cultural capital in performing arts of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group at the moral community of Ban Nong Bua, Tambon Krapho, Amphoe Tha Tum, Surin Province. It turns out that there is no performance at all related to dancing to worship Kru Pakamchang of the Kuy Achiang people. Only some performances in the ritual that are the wisdom of performing arts of the villagers in the community, such as "Ram Mud Mat" or "Ram Glamo" is a dance to worship Phra Kru Pakamchang, "Ram Klong Chang", which the villagers invented and performed at various important merit-making ceremonies held at the community, district and provincial levels to pass on the cultural traditions of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group at Ban Nong Bua, Tambon Krapho, Amphoe Tha Tum, Surin Province, and cultivate a sense of preserving the locality, gratitude, and respect to remember the kindness of ancestors, sacred objects, teachers and benefactors, both living and deceased. Development of performances from the ritual to worship the shrine of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group. Therefore, it reflects the cultural way of life between people and elephants. The researcher has integrated the dance moves in the style of local dance with the performing arts of the villagers and designed the dance moves to go along with gestures and gestures from the way of life of people and elephants to convey the spirit of the story of the way of life, beliefs and the rituals to worship the Pakamchang shrine, which are the important roots of cultural capital of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group in Surin Province. The creation of the performance set "Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang people" is an important guideline to create awareness of local conservation, leading to creative economic development for the community. It also creates jobs, generates income, maintains identity, culture, and wisdom, and improves the quality of life of the community sustainably. To further develop the value added in arts, culture and local wisdom, the researcher, as a lecturer at the tertiary level in the field of dance, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, therefore had the idea and inspiration to develop a performance set from the ritual to worship the Pakamchang shrine in the set "Dance to worship the Pakamchang shrine of Kuy Achiang people", with the aim of further developing the value added in arts, culture and local wisdom, and preserving and continuing. Publicize the ritual of paying homage to the shrine of the teacher Pakhamchang to create awareness about the ritual of paying homage to the shrine of the teacher Pakhamchang to the public, as well as to elevate the wisdom of the performing arts of the Kuy ethnic group of elephant keepers, leading to the creation of creative soft power that connects with the wisdom of performing arts. Towards the elevation of the community economy and culture to the consciousness of preserving the local area for the youth of the Kuy ethnic group of elephant keepers in Surin Province, so that they will continue to exist in the society and the country.



## Objective

1. To study the wisdom of the ritual to worship the shrine of the Kuy Achiang people, Surin Province
2. To create and design dance moves based on cultural capital that are the identity of the Kuy Achiang people community, Surin Province
3. To perform the Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang people to conserve, continue, and disseminate the ritual and promote cultural tourism of the Kuy ethnic group that raises elephants, Surin Province
4. To study the integration of local wisdom with the development of community identity to promote cultural tourism, and to use innovative performances to promote cultural tourism for the community

## Literature Review

Beliefs, rituals, and customs of ethnic groups form the foundation of a community's cultural identity, influencing various aspects of economic and social dynamics as well as organizational structures (Hunn, 2000). They also serve as a vehicle for transmitting indigenous knowledge and as a mechanism for strengthening social cohesion and spirituality-essential components of human life that reflect cultural roots and value systems. For the Kuy A-Chiang community, the "Kru Pakam Chang Worship Ceremony" is not only regarded as a sacred ritual but also as a spiritual anchor and a form of cultural capital that can be leveraged for sustainable conservation and development. Its significance can be understood in multiple dimensions: (1) beliefs and rituals as indicators of identity and continuity of the group, (2) a mechanism for knowledge transmission, (3) a source of unity and social bonding, (4) empowerment of spiritual strength and stability, and (5) cultural capital for developing traditions and rituals into creative activities without diminishing their sacredness (Sukthong, 2013; Sukthong et al., 2024).

On the contrary, if to address such important for the economy parts of culture, the views, rituals, and customs of ethnic groups, similar to any nation community, form people's cultural identity and (from humanistic point of view) define worldviews, life attitude, and values. The dialectics of this cultural part with economy expresses the significance of tradition for economic activity and life management (Geertz, 1973; Sahlins, 1972). For instance, the tradition of tilling the land sets specific dates for planting and harvest, directs their resources, and influences their financial position (Hunn, 2000). In the ethnic social groups, views on the use of their resources, their proprietary and common use, affect trade routes, division of labor, economic system, and economic factors, as well as the dialectical interrelationship of economic and social factors in general (Sahlins, 1972).

Moving on to the influences on human relationships and conditions of living, the common beliefs, rituals, and traditions of the people determine the system of organization and values that create their identity. The rules for the distribution of labor and functions in society are determined by the rituals, rules of kinship, marriage, and social ties (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2001). Moral and normative regulation of human behavior in society, norms and standards, development of a common value identity of a group of people in a community, and its social and ecological consciousness are provided by the value sphere of religion, national consciousness, and worldview. By common values, such components of national consciousness and culture are called, which include the core of most people (Durkheim, 1912).

Resource use and management are also closely related to different ethnic groups' beliefs, rituals, and traditions, as they also depend on people's ecological perception, methods of adaptation, and environmental worldview. Within ethnic groups, strategies and practices of sustainable use and management of natural resources, environmental protection, and resource conservation are often influenced by indigenous ecological knowledge. Traditional ecological knowledge often exists in oral form as a system of beliefs, myths, and customary regulations, and is transmitted from generation to generation, in practice (Berkes, 1999). Restrictions, taboos on resources, and how to use them often have a regulatory function, sometimes reducing the extraction of natural resources and regulating the use of resources to ensure the long-term survival of species and natural ecosystems (Turner et al., 2008). Therefore, the transmission of the system of values and beliefs is of fundamental importance to any community and locality, as the transmission of the spirit, consciousness, ties, identity, and dignity of the people and the locality. Villagers have established



cultural mechanisms and tools for this transmission, and as far as possible, they are interested in the participation of children in the activities of the local people (Buasai, 2004).

**Creation of Folk Dance:** The concept of creating folk dance based on cultural capital involves studying and utilizing the cultural elements of a community as foundational knowledge in developing new forms of dance. The creation process requires careful consideration of key aspects: 1) Studying and thoroughly understanding the cultural capital related to folk dance. 2) Selecting and adapting appropriate cultural elements 3) Preserving the value and uniqueness of traditional culture 4) Innovating and communicating effectively through new.

In addition, the connections between beliefs, rituals, and customs include broader values of culture and processes of identity formation in ethnic groups, which extend beyond the social and economic areas. Rituals and rites of social and cultural life are very important. Cultural activities, festivals, and events are built around these rituals and rites. They are the culture-building space where people experience their identity, share it, conserve it, create it, pass it on, perform and showcase it to their children and grandchildren (Geertz, 1973). In addition to bringing together all the participants in these activities around a common identity, these traditional expressions play an important role in the survival and vitality of indigenous cultures in a constantly changing and evolving world (Smith, 2001).

**Creation of Folk Dance:** The concept of creating folk dance based on cultural capital involves studying and utilizing the cultural elements of a community as foundational knowledge in developing new forms of dance. The creation process requires careful consideration of key aspects: 1) Studying and thoroughly understanding the cultural capital related to folk dance. 2) Selecting and adapting appropriate cultural elements 3) Preserving the value and uniqueness of traditional culture 4) Innovating and communicating effectively through new. and creative performances that present meaningful concepts and narratives. The promotion of cultural tourism and the creation of added economic value in communities involves presenting and developing community cultural attractions to attract tourists to experience the local way of life, culture, and traditions. This process contributes to sustainable income generation and economic development for the community.

Conclusion, for a particular nation, its beliefs, rituals, and traditions are the fundamental elements of ethnic identity, which influence the economy, social ties, values, resources, and their use, as well as the system of social organization of the people. In a globalizing world, cultural diversity, sustainable development, and community resilience need to be promoted by considering the interaction between economic and social life, production systems, and culture.

## Conceptual Framework

The reviewed studies elucidate that beliefs, rituals, and traditions are embedded in the cultural identity of ethnic groups, shaping their social systems, livelihood, and ecological relationships. For example, Hunn (2000) and Sahlins (1972) found that traditional practices influence livelihood activities and resource management, while Durkheim (1912) and Fernandez and Fernandez (2001) demonstrated how rituals define social roles, moral norms, and social cohesion in communities. In addition, Berkes (1999) and Turner et al. (2008) found that indigenous ecological knowledge embedded in cultural practices is crucial for sustainability and intergenerational survival. Furthermore, cultural activities, festivals, and ceremonies, as shown in Geertz (1973) and Smith (2001), are platforms for identity formation and cultural transmission, fostering community resilience in the face of modernization and globalization.

Based on the above finding, this study developed the conceptual framework that is composed of four main components. The four components are: (1) cultural elements, that is, beliefs, rituals, and traditions that provide cultural capital, (2) social elements, that is, community roles, norms, and collective identity, (3) ecological elements, that is, local wisdom in resource management and sustainability, and (4) transmission and innovation, that is, the ways of transforming the ritual into a performing art. Collectively, they will clarify how worshiping Kru Pakamchang ritual among Kuy Achiang people can be transformed into a contemporary folk dance to preserve intangible cultural heritage and enhance community identity. The conceptual framework will place the performance as a creation that could support cultural conservation, community development, and cultural tourism.



### Principles of the design process of performing arts

- Beliefs, rituals and traditions of the Kui ethnic group
- Cultural capital that is the identity of the Kuy Achiang community
- Principles of dance design, dance design process,
- Types of folk performances, performance elements,
- Dressing of actors or dancers
- Folk music, lyrics, melody

### Creative Design of the Performance; Dance to honor the elephant-headed teacher, Kuy Achiang people

- Study the wisdom of the ritual to worship the shrine of the Kuy Achiang people.
- Create and design dance moves based on the cultural capital that is the identity of the Kuy Achiang people community. (Lyrics, folk music, melody, dance moves, actors, costumes)
- Perform a dance to worship the Kuy Achiang people's elephant teacher to conserve, continue and disseminate the ritual and cultural way of life of the Kui ethnic group that raises elephants.
- Use performance innovations to promote cultural tourism for the community.

Figure 1: Research conceptual framework

## Methodology

This research is mixed-methods research using qualitative research and action research as follows:

1. Documentary research, books, research reports, meeting reports, photographs, theoretical concept documents on the wisdom of the ritual of paying homage to the shrine of the Kuy Achiang people, Surin Province, conservation, development, and transfer of knowledge, wisdom, and community quality of life.

2. Qualitative research, the research instruments are interview forms and focus group discussions. Data were collected from 5 specific target groups: Phra Khru Dr. Samuhhan Panyatharo, abbot of Wat Pa Achiang, local scholars, performing arts wisdom teachers, and village representatives. Data were collected using observation, interviews, and focus group discussions. Three experts reviewed the research instruments and submitted them to the research ethics committee. Data was analyzed using content analysis.

**Key Informant Interviews:** Five key informants were purposively selected: 1 local sage, 3 cultural masters (specializing in performance, music, and rituals), and 1 community leader. Data were collected through structured interviews and analyzed descriptively and thematically based on research framework topics, including beliefs, the origin and process of the Phra Kam worship ritual, Mud Mat Dance, Elephant Tethering Dance, and the ritual's cultural value.

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** Twenty-five participants were purposively selected, including 2 sages, 3 cultural masters (performance, music, ritual), 5 community leaders from five villages, and 15 local residents who had participated in the rituals. The researcher facilitated the discussions, summarized the key points, and conducted content analysis according to the defined research framework.

3. Action research with 30 specifically selected volunteer villagers and 20 students by providing workshops to provide knowledge and design creative performance sets and dance moves for dissemination. The specific selection method used an action process.

4. The research is based on the study of data through research procedures. After exploring the wisdom of the ritual of paying homage to the shrine of the Kuy Achiang people. The target group was determined: monks, local wise men, local wisdom, local wisdom teachers in performing arts, and village representatives, 5 people, to interview and discuss in a group. After that, the researcher brought the discovered data back to analyze the data and develop dance moves according to the performance elements, melody, music, lyrics, costumes, performance equipment, and use of space more accurately and clearly. In other words, the villagers used to listen to music from online media to accompany the performance. There was no band or live music during the performance. Therefore, the researcher brought a team of lecturers who are experts in folk music, Lecturer Chanawat Jonjohor and Lecturer Adisak Chomdee, lecturers in the Department of Music Education, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Surin Rajabhat University, to help design the melody and lyrics for the performance set "Dance to pay homage to the shrine of the Kuy Achiang people" to create a work that is unique to the community. The concept of designing the dance moves came from the ceremony to pay homage to the shrine of the Kuy Prakam Chang people, which the villagers perform every year. This is a

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cultural tradition of the Kuy elephant-raising community in Surin Province. The researcher used the principles of dance design from the performance experience, combined with inspiration, to disseminate and organize a seminar to transfer knowledge of the ritual to worship the shrine of the teacher Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang people through the performance set “Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang people”.

## Results

**1. The Indigenous Ritual Wisdom of the Kuy Achiang Spirit Shrine Ceremony for Elephant Mahouts.** Before each elephant caravan departs to capture wild elephants, the *elephant shamans* (*mo chang*) and *mahouts* (*ma chang*) must perform a ritual following these established steps:

**1.1 Ritual Offerings to the *Pa Kam* Shrine;** Before the scheduled departure date, each *kru ba yai* (chief spiritual teacher) will summon the *mo chang*, *ma chang*, and their entourage to assemble the elephant caravan. This includes preparing the *tamed elephants*, capture equipment, and food supplies. For each tamed elephant, the *mo chang* will ride on the elephant's neck, while the *ma chang* sits at the rear. The *mo chang* carefully selects *ma chang* who are both compatible and capable of assisting in the capture mission. The elephants' backs are padded with cowhide and the pounded bark of the *kradon* tree, over which a *tone* (a wooden saddle) is placed to carry supplies. Equipment is secured using rattan or *pa kam* ropes. Once the caravan is fully assembled, a sacrificial offering ceremony (*bong suang*) is performed in front of the *pa kam* shrine located at the residence of the *kru ba yai*. Participants in the ritual include the *kru ba yai* as the officiant, as well as other ritual specialists such as the *mo sadam*, *mo sadieng*, *mo ja*, and *ma chang*, along with the extended families of the *mo chang*. The tamed elephants are tethered nearby during the ceremony. Upon the conclusion of the ritual, the *mo chang* and their teams return to their respective homes. Those who have traveled from distant areas will camp along the forest edges near the village, awaiting the appointed departure date.

**1.2 The Ritual of Appeasing the *Pa Kam* Spirit (Sacred Rope) and Divination through a Chicken's Jawbone;** The *pa kam* hide or sacred rope (*cheuak bat*), used for capturing elephants during forest expeditions, is revered by *mo chang* (elephant shamans) and *ma chang* (mahouts) as a highly sacred object. It is believed to be inhabited by the spirits of ancestors, spiritual teachers (*kru ba*), and other divine entities. This object is usually inherited within specific families and never shared outside the lineage. The community holds the belief that the *phi pa kam* (spirit of the sacred rope) offers protection to all family members and domestic animals, and brings success in professional duties and wild elephant capture missions. Following the collective *pa kam* shrine ceremony at the residence of the *kru ba yai* (chief spiritual teacher), each *mo chang* and *ma chang* prepares a personal offering ceremony for the *phi pa kam* at their own household shrine. The offerings typically include: one boiled chicken, one bottle of white liquor, a pair of wax candles, a *khan five* (a set of five banana-leaf cones filled with flowers), two cigarettes, two pieces of *mak* (betel nut), a traditional meal set, black and red thread, a sarong, turmeric, and 12 baht in silver coins, among other ritual items. The *mo chang* then lights a candle and presents the offerings before the *pa kam* hide. After the offering is complete, a divination ritual is performed using a chicken's jawbone to predict auspiciousness and ensure spiritual protection.

**1.3 The *Pa Chi Mo* Ritual – The Elevation of a New Elephant Shaman;** The *pa chi mo* ritual (from the Kuy language, *pa chi* means “to elevate”) is a ceremonial rite to appoint a new *mo chang* from among the *ma chang* who have never participated in elephant capturing or who have only served as assistants. The purpose of the ritual is to formally elevate and authorize a new *mo chang* to take the position on the elephant's neck, replacing elders or retired *mo chang*. Three days before the scheduled departure, the *kru ba yai* (*kam luang pho*) and the elephant caravan will lead the *chao* (*tamed elephants*) to a meeting site outside the village called Chan Rom, a forested area. Each caravan arrives at the designated site based on the auspicious times determined for their respective groups. Once all caravans have gathered, the *kru ba yai* imposes a strict rule forbidding any contact with the outside world. If communication with people from the village is necessary, it must be conducted using the *phi pa kam* spirit language, not the everyday Kuy language. Violating this rule is considered a serious transgression that could result in misfortune or illness during the journey. At the ritual site, a simple ceremonial hut is built. Three ritual fires are lit, and all the *mo chang*



gather in a circle with the sacred rope (cheuak pa kam) placed at the center. The new mo chang candidate, dressed in traditional jong kraben (a wrapped lower garment), shirtless with a checkered pha khao ma cloth tied at the waist, must present the following offerings: a bag of mak and phlu (betel leaf), a bamboo container for mixing elephant dung with water, four pairs of khao tom (sticky rice wrapped in banana leaves), two sacred threads, one bottle of white liquor, five pairs of incense sticks and candles, five banana-leaf flower cones, one boiled chicken, one plate of uncooked rice, 1.50 baht in coins, and a branch from a cham tree (used to honor the spirit teachers).

The kru ba yai then conducts the ritual and recites the invocation to elevate the new shaman. On the designated departure day—usually considered auspicious if it falls on a Wednesday or Thursday, known as Wan Khru (Teachers' Day)—the departure time is set between 6:00 and 8:00 a.m. At the appointed hour, the kru ba yai blows the sa naeng klaw, a horn instrument made from cow or buffalo horn, producing a resounding signal that can travel 4–5 kilometers. This blast signals the commencement of the elephant caravan procession. Each caravan's size varies according to the season; some may include more than 100 chao to elephants and over 100 mo chang and ma chang. The caravan formation begins with the kru ba yai leading, followed by the caravan members. The right flank is occupied by the mo sadam and their attendants, and the left flank by the mo sadieng and their attendants.

## 2. Creative Choreography Based on Cultural Capital to Establish Community Identity

This project involves the creative design and development of a dance performance that embodies the unique cultural capital of the Kuy ethnic group in Achiang village, specifically drawing from the ritual knowledge of the phi pa kam spirit worship at the elephant shrine (san kru pa kam). The creative process consists of seven structured steps: 1) Defining the performance concept, 2) Designing and developing the dance movements, 3) Composing lyrics, melody, and music, 4) Designing costumes, 5) Selecting performers and conducting rehearsals, 6) Presenting the performance to experts and cultural scholars and 7) Publicly showcasing the performance on community platforms

The choreography is guided by four key principles of dance design: 1) Imagination and imitation of nature, to reflect harmony with the environment. 2) Thematic interpretation, integrating natural gestures from both human and elephant life. 3) Research and adaptation of traditional ritual movements, transforming them into a new, creative format. and 4) Observation of behaviors and gestures of ritual participants, to inform movement vocabulary that embodies the cultural identity of Kuy, Lao, and Khmer traditions- within the framework of southern and northern Isan folk dance.

The creative performance titled “Ram Buang Suang Kru Pa Kam Chang Chao Kuy Achiang” (The Ritual Dance Honoring the Elephant Spirit Master of the Kuy Achiang People) seeks to establish a distinctive community identity through structured, stylized movements. These are further interwoven with central Thai classical dance forms to create a new, codified dance sequence.

The dance is divided into three main segments and comprises 17 distinct movements:

Segment 1: The Kuy Achiang Bai Sri Procession Dance; 1) Invitation to Gather and 2) Blowing the Sanai Horn

Segment 2: Ritual Worship of the Elephant Shrine of the Kuy Achiang; 3) Offering to the Bai Sri Arrangement 4) Invoking the Kru Pa Kam Spirit 5) Paying Homage to the Kru Pa Kam 6) Worshipping the Ancestral Spirit Masters 7) The Elephant Life Dance – Reflecting Kuy Elephant Keepers’ Way of Life and 8) Supplication to the Spirit Teachers

Segment 3: Calling of the Spirit and Prayers for Auspiciousness, includes: 9) Calling the Spirit (Kwan), 10) Dispelling Evil Forces, 11) Invoking Good Fortune, 12) Exalting the Spirit Masters, 13) Unity and Harmony, 14) Joy and Festivity, 15) Expression of Happiness 16) Celebration and 17) Farewell to the Kru Pa Kam

This dance performance, “Ram Buang Suang Bucha San Pa Kam Chang Kuy Achiang”, aims to elevate the intangible cultural heritage of the Kuy elephant-keeping community through the art of performance. It highlights the cultural relationship between humans and elephants, as expressed through the ancestral rituals of shrine worship. The presentation employs the Bai Sri procession to reflect ritual participation in the worship of the San Kru Pa Kam Chang, a tradition that has been passed down for



generations. This sacred cultural practice, rooted in beliefs surrounding the human-elephant relationship, remains a vibrant part of the socio-cultural fabric of Kachasat Wittaya (Elephantology).

The performance is structured into three main segments: Segment 1: The Bai Sri Procession Dance of Kuy Achiang. Segment 2: The Worship Ritual for the Elephant Shrine of Kuy Achiang. Segment 3: Spirit Calling and Blessings for Auspiciousness.

### Dance Segment 1: The Kuy Achiang Bai Sri Procession Dance

This segment of the performance depicts the ceremonial procession of the Bai Sri arrangement, an integral part of the Kuy Achiang ritual practice. It consists of two primary movements:

1. Invitation to Gather – A gesture representing the summoning of community members to unite in preparation for the ritual ceremony.

2. Blowing the Sanai Horn – A symbolic movement that imitates the act of blowing the traditional sanai horn, used to signal the commencement of the sacred procession.

(1) ▶ Invitation to Gather ▶ (2) Blowing the Sanai Horn ▶



Figure 2: Illustration of the Dance Sequence: The Kuy Achiang Bai Sri Procession Dance

Note: From Acharaporn Sukthong et al. (Photographed, March 31, 2023)

### Dance Segment 2: The Ritual Offering to the Kuy Achiang Elephant Spirit Shrine

This segment portrays the sacred ritual of worship and invocation at the Pa Kam Elephant Shrine of the Kuy Achiang community. The dance sequence includes the following movements:

3. Offering the Bai Sri Ritual Items – A movement symbolizing the act of presenting ritual offerings and the bai sri arrangement to the spirits.

4. Invoking the Spirit Teacher (Kru Pa Kam) – A gesture reenacting the ceremonial invitation to the ancestral teacher spirit of elephant capturing.

5. Paying Homage to Kru Pa Kam – A gesture of respect and reverence directed toward the spirit teacher.

6. Honoring Kru Pa Kam – A movement emphasizing devotion and spiritual submission.

7. The Graceful Movements of the Kuy Achiang Mahouts and Elephants – A stylized representation of the symbiotic way of life between mahouts and elephants in the Kuy tradition.

8. Pleading to Kru Pa Kam – A supplicatory dance gesture expressing earnest devotion and requests for protection and blessing.

(3) Offering the Bai Sri Ritual Items ▶ (4) Invoking the Spirit Teacher (Kru Pa Kam) ▶



(5) Paying Homage to Kru Pa Kam ▼



(6) Honoring Kru Pa Kam ▼



(7) The Movements of the Elephant in the Kuy Achiang Mahout's Way of Life ▼ (8) Connecting Gesture: Pleading and Worshiping Kru Pa Kam ▼



Figure 3: Illustration of the Dance Sequence: Ritual Offering to the Kuy Achiang Elephant Spirit Shrine  
 Note: From Acharaporn Sukthong and team (Photographed on March 31, 2023)

### Dance Segment 3: Calling the Spirit and Invoking Blessings for Auspiciousness

This segment includes the following movements: 9) Calling the Spirit, 10) Expelling Evil, 11) Invoking Auspiciousness, 12) Exalting Kru Pa Kam, 13) Unity and Harmony, 14) Joy and Merriment, 15) Rejoicing, 16) Celebration, 17) Farewell to Kru Pa Kam. The dance postures are explained in detail according to the process as follows:

#### (9) ▼ Calling the Spirit ▼



#### (10) ▼ Expelling Evil ▼



#### (11) ▼ Invoking Auspiciousness ▼



#### (12) ▼ Honoring the Kru Pakam ▼



#### Worshipping the Kru Pakam ▼

(13) ▼ Unity and Harmony Pose ▼



(14) ▼ Joyful and Festive Pose ▼



(15) ▼ Pose of Delight ▼



(16) ▼ Celebratory Pose ▼



(17) ▼ Farewell to the Pakam Master Pose ▼

Figure 4: Dance Poses for Calling the Spirit and Invoking Blessings for Auspiciousness

Note: From Acharaporn Sukthong et al. (Photographed on March 31, 2023)

Melody and Musical Notation: Kal Mor, Arranged by Chanawat Jonjorhor and Adisak Chomdee

Introduction: Sang Pi Khaen (traditional intro using Pi and Khaen instruments)

Verse 1: Tempo – "Attra Changwa 2 Chan" (Double-time rhythm)

Repeat 40 times

[Rest ---]		Rest -- Si		Rest -- La		Rest -- Do	
- - - Re Do	La Do Re Do	- - Re Do		La Do Re Do	- - Re Do	La Do Re Do	Low La Me Re Do
- La Do Re	- La Do Re	- La Do Re	- La Do Re	- - Do Me	- - Do Re	- - Do Me	- - Do Re

Ending Section: Slow down the tempo over the final 4 measures

-- Re Do	La Do Re Do	-- Re Do	La Do Re Do	-- Re Do	La Do Re Do	Low La Me Re Do	Low La Me Re Do
- La Do Re	- La Do Re	- La Do Re	- La Do Re				

Note [ - - - - ]: Indicates the opening phrase is played only once.

#### Occasions for Performance:

This music is performed during rituals for worshipping the Phakam Shrine of the Kuy Elephant Keepers of Ajieng, as well as in local traditional festivals and community auspicious events for entertainment and joy.

**3. Perform Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of conserving, continuing, and promoting the cultural way of life of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group,** to create awareness of the ritual of paying homage to the shrine of Kru Pakamchang to the public, as well as to enhance the wisdom of the performing arts of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group, resulting in creative power. It is performed on public stages in the community, cultural squares, such as the Boon Ruam Chiang (first trial), the Kru Pakamchang worship dance, the Kathin merit-making ceremony, and the King's Day. It is expanded to perform in schools in the area and nearby, such as Chang Boon School, Nong Bua School, and Ban Kapho School, to welcome 250 tourists. The Cultural Ethnic Group focuses on the Kuy have had the profession of raising elephants since ancient times. We divide into 5 clearer paragraphs to understand better, as follows.

#### 3.1 Reason why you perform the dances:

Kru Pakamchang is a spirit that is a god for the Kuy, so they worship Kru Pakamchang in front of Kru Pakamchang to show their value. Preservation of life. The Kuy in the past mainly raised elephants as their source of life, so this activity is to raise wisdom.

#### 3.2 Places / Special day to perform your dances:

Because this is not a private religious event, this is open to the public; all activities and dance performances are to promote it to the public, especially to outsiders, with the purpose of promoting knowledge to the public and communities. Make people outside of communities understand and be proud of their culture with elephants.

#### 3.3 Art and creativity focus:

Kuy culture is concentrated on the arts, and it focuses on performing arts, through dance performances, traditional music, and elements of ritual activities. The idea is to connect cultural understanding and skills to the young people of today and to the public as a whole. This idea is inspiring to the community in general to practice and will also motivate the youth to look to the future. from the past to create new art and work

#### 3.4 Venue and Day to perform your dances:

On the days when the dance is performed, it is in the public area of the village square, and in addition to other events, this year the event was chosen on Boon Ruam Chiang, Kru Pakamchang worship dance, Kathin to make merit, and King's Birthday. Events are chosen based on their suitability for the villagers and for religious activities to ensure that the dance performance is in line with the lifestyle of the Kuy and also Thailand's national celebrations.

#### 3.5 Educational Places to present your dances and the number of tourists coming to see the dances:

Recently, the Kuy has introduced to Chang Boon School, Nong Bua School, and Ban Kapho School, and has invited them to watch our dance performance to ensure that they are aware of our culture and heritage in the future. Even though we are just opening our activities and performances to the public, there are still around 250 people in total. This has helped to bring more people to the community focused on culture and sustainability.

### **4. Integrating local wisdom with community identity development to promote cultural tourism, and using innovative performances to promote cultural tourism in the community**

#### **4.1 Social and cultural aspects**



Organizing joint activities within the community, such as dancing or other cultural activities, is an important opportunity for people in the community to meet, talk, and cooperate happily. This cooperation creates unity and reduces the gap between generations or groups of people with different ideas. These activities also create pride in the identity of the community, which is the foundation of sustainable development.

When villagers have more opportunities to gather, they form groups to establish organizations or networks, such as cultural conservation groups, folk dancing groups, or youth groups that continue the wisdom, which act as a knowledge transfer group and a center for coordinating community activities. These groups also help strengthen the role of people in the community, making them feel that they are involved and valuable.

The continuity of cultural activities in the community also leads to the absorption of traditional values and behaviors, such as dressing like the Kuy people, worshiping sacred objects, respecting elders, and being humble, which are the foundation of etiquette and ethics in the community. When the new generation adopts these things into their daily lives, it also results in a peaceful, kind, and truly livable community.

#### 4.2 Economic aspects

The cultural activities of the community are not just about continuing the local identity. But it has also become a source of tangible income for people in the community, especially hiring groups of villagers to perform in important events both inside and outside the area, such as the Kathin Elephant Festival, Thai Elephant Day, film exhibitions, or national stages such as the Thailand Creative Economy Forum (Thailand CEF). These performances not only generate direct income for the performers but also help build the image and reputation of the community on a broader scale.

In addition to income from performances, the community can also generate additional income from selling products linked to culture and beliefs, such as jewelry and amulets made from local materials such as ivory, elephant tails, or various sacred woods. These products are both traditional and contemporary in design, attracting both tourists and believers in traditional beliefs, which is the transformation of cultural heritage into economic capital.

Another important source of income is the production and distribution of Kuy identity costumes, both costumes for performing folk dances and costumes worn in important local ceremonies or activities. Government agencies and organizations often support the use of these costumes in organizing events, resulting in a large number of continuous orders, which is considered a distribution of income to households in the community. It also helps to preserve wisdom in sewing and designing patterns that reflect local identity with pride.

#### 4.3 Education

Students participating in performances at ceremonies is not only a way to train their artistic and cultural skills. But it is also an active learning process that allows youth to experience their cultural roots deeply. Participating in real activities, such as dancing in merit-making ceremonies or important ceremonies, makes them proud and aware of the value of their inherited cultural heritage.

When youth play a role in these activities, it is expanded to other schools and youth networks in the area, both through knowledge exchange, invitations to join activities, and communication through modern media such as video clips or social media posts. In addition, youth groups that may participate as spectators, such as groups who come to draw pictures or record events, are also inspired and can participate through dancing or other creative activities, making learning outside the classroom fun and lively.

As a result of participating in these cultural activities, there are strong relationships between youth and people in the community, including youth from outside the area who join. The atmosphere of cooperation and sharing makes the community an open source of learning, a space for creating understanding between ages and cultures, which has a positive effect on the development of "social education" and instills a sense of citizenship that is participatory for the community and society as a whole.





Figure 5: *Ritual Dance in Honor of the Kuy Elephant-Keeper Master (Ajieng) featuring the participation of students, youth, and community members.*

Note. From Atcharaporn Sukthong et al., photograph taken March 31, 2023.

#### 4.4 Innovation

Registering the copyright for the dance to honor the teachers of the elephants is a cultural innovation that is very important because it protects local wisdom from being copied or used without permission. It is also an announcement to the public that this dance form originated and is unique to the Kuy community, creating “cultural rights” that can be further developed into economic and tourism development in the future. In addition, the broadcasting of the dance performance of the Kru Pakam Chang through digital platforms such as YouTube is an innovation in communication and learning that allows the new generation and those who live far away to access local culture more conveniently, whether for education, entertainment, or inspiration to create other works. It also opens up new areas for publicizing local culture to the national and international levels. Creativity in using technology together with cultural conservation, such as video editing, audio recording, writing descriptions, or using captions to explain the meaning of dance moves, all reflect the development of cultural innovations that not only preserve the original but also expand the scope of culture to keep up with the times and can be effectively and interestingly passed on to the new generation.



Figure 6: The performance “Dance of Kuy Achiang” was performed at important events.

Note: From Acharaporn Sukthong et al. (Photographed on March 31, 2023)

Table 1: Integration of local wisdom with community identity development to promote cultural tourism.

Dimension	Integrating local wisdom with community identity	Promoting cultural tourism
Social-Cultural	Dance and cultural activities help create unity, reduce generation gaps, and promote pride in identity.	Cultural activities are a source of attraction for tourists and showcase local lifestyles.
Economic	Generate income from performances at important events and sell products with a local identity, such as jewelry and dance costumes.	Selling souvenirs and performing arts at events creates unique experiences for tourists.
Education	Students learn through hands-on activities, enhancing artistic skills and understanding of culture.	Youth play a role in presenting cultural heritage to visitors and passing on knowledge to the next generation.

Dimension	Integrating local wisdom with community identity	Promoting cultural tourism
Innovation	Register dance copyrights to protect culture and use technology to distribute via YouTube to expand results.	Using digital media as a tool for dissemination and creating new channels to promote community culture.

## Discussion

The study of Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of the Kuy Achiang people has the following issues for discussion:

1. Wisdom of rituals to pay homage to the shrine of the elephant master of Kuy Achiang people. Before the elephant caravan sets out to capture wild elephants each time, the elephant shaman and elephant master must perform rituals according to the following steps: 1.1) The ceremony to pay homage to the shrine of Pakam before the appointed date and time 1.2) The ceremony to pay homage to the spirit of Pakam (Pakam skin) and to divination with the chicken jawbone, Pakam skin or lasso rope used to capture elephants when capturing elephants and 1.3) The Pachi Mo ceremony is a ceremony to appoint a new elephant master (Pachi is a Kuy language that means to be promoted higher than before) which is the appointment of the elephant keeper or elephant master who has never gone out to capture or catch elephants or has only been in the position of the master. The purpose of this ritual is to add new elephant masters to have the right to sit on the elephant's neck instead of the old elephant master, who is old, or the elephant master who has stopped capturing elephants. The knowledge and wisdom of the Kuy Achiang people, the researcher has compiled it into books, pamphlets, infographics, and short training courses. Consistent with the research of Aupatumnarakorn (2011) on the conservation of local wisdom about Rammana dance in Chainat Province, it was found that it should be made into a local curriculum and included in the curriculum of educational institutions, searchable information should be put on the websites of related organizations, and published as books, videos, CDs to be distributed to interested people.

2. "Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang people" uses four dance movement design principles: 1) using the principles of imagination and imitation of nature; 2) using the principle of combining natural human gestures with elephants; 3) using the principle of studying dance movement forms in traditional ceremonies and redeveloping them; and 4) using the principle of observing the actions and roles of the participants in the Pakam Shrine worship ceremony. This is to design dance movements that blend the cultures of the Kuy, Lao, and Khmer ethnic groups, in line with the styles of southern Isan folk dance and northern Isan folk dance. Central Thai dance mothers are strung together to create new dance movements systematically to create an identity for the community in the performance set "Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang people", which is consistent with research that has created performance sets, such as Rasmitepnarong et al. (2021) research on creative dance sets such as "Khuha Phimuk Dance", a performance in the form of southern folk dance, adapted to convey the preparation of villagers who will go to worship the Buddha. And conveying the tradition of the procession of the monk's robe, expressing the happy gestures of the villagers. The performance uses adapted southern folk songs, emphasizing the combination of folk-dance postures and performing arts with the characteristics of the way of life, worship, respect, and homage to the Buddha image, consisting of dressing postures, applying powder, preparing postures, preparing flowers, paying homage, the procession of the robe, and gestures that convey the happiness and fun of the villagers, in line with the line formation. Using the dress of southern villagers in the Srivijaya period, adapted to a modern style, along with various accessories. Chinchat (2020) researched the beautiful flower dance. The creative team presented the performance format, strung together as a story to convey the way of life, living, and dressing of young Lanna women and the making of banana leaf cones with offerings of flowers, incense, and candles to be used as merit in worshiping the Lord Buddha, according to the folk beliefs of the Lanna people. Presenting a contemporary Lanna dance performance, which has highlighted the identity of the worship process according to the concept and belief in worshiping the spirit at the head of the Lanna people, through the performance by young Lanna women. Performing contemporary Lanna melodies with upbeat rhythms according to the concept.



3. Perform Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of to conserve, continue, and disseminate the cultural way of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group, to create awareness of the ritual to worship the shrine of Kru Pakamchang to the public, as well as to elevate the wisdom of the performing arts of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group, leading to the creation of creative power, by performing in a public community stage. This performance is a creative performance that reflects the identity of the local area, can be performed in local traditional events or on general occasions, and is useful and a model for those who are interested in studying, preserving, continuing, and disseminating the works of Isan local performing arts. Therefore, this research will create works for the community to continue, by cooperating with local agencies and the public sector, learning centers, and networks, leading to the creation of awareness of the ritual to worship the shrine of Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang, and to instill a sense of local conservation in the young Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group who have continuously existed in the local community. Consistent with the concept of local power by Buasai (2004) who stated that local communities will survive and grow with the basic elements of local power, including: Community resource base, social networks, knowledge systems, culture and beliefs, which will help strengthen the base, become capital or community potential to grow and develop into the strength and stability of the community. Consistent with the research of Sanamkhet and Kabchan (2022), Factors affecting the operation of community capital enhancement and development include local resources, the power of faith of people in the community, teamwork, creating a learning process, transferring knowledge through practice, and social networks.

4. Raising the value of community lifestyles and innovative performances to promote cultural tourism, to create added economic value, and to continue community culture. It was found that the Kuy elephant keeping community, especially in Ban Ta Klang, Surin Province, is outstanding in terms of its lifestyle identity that is connected to elephants in every dimension, including economics, society, spirit, and culture. The life of people and elephants is not just a professional relationship, but also reflects faith, beliefs, and local wisdom that has been passed down for generations. The important identity of the community is “the bond between people and elephants”. Bringing the identity of the elephant-keeping community to create an innovative performance is a strategy that can create tangible added value. Both in the economic dimension, which helps stimulate income for households in the community, and in the cultural dimension, which helps the transmission of spiritual values, beliefs, and traditional ways of life to exist in a more contemporary and easily understood form. This research has organized an exhibition and performance of the dance to honor the elephant-keeping teacher. This study indicates that the Kuy ethnic community of elephant keepers has strong cultural capital and can develop it into an innovative performance that reflects the identity of the community creatively. The combination of traditional wisdom and modern ideas not only promotes the preservation of local culture but also creates economic opportunities and fosters pride in the community's roots. Consistent with the research of Santajitto et al (2023) found that the Karen ethnic community has a community identity, cultural capital, and social geography that is appropriate for development into a cultural tourism destination. The community has jointly developed a guideline for developing community cultural products through 6 tourism activities and a guideline for developing community houses into clean, convenient, and safe homestays. But it still maintains its naturalness and the scent of Karen culture to support tourists through the networking process by community leaders to strengthen and sustainably adapt to the culture.

## New Knowledge

The research on the ritual to worship the shrine of the Kuy Achiang people's wisdom lets us know the ritual procedure. In addition, in order to preserve and promote the valuable cultural traditions for the community, the research team has designed and created dance moves on the basis of the cultural capital, which is the identity of the community. The performance format has 3 parts and is organized the Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang, conserve, continue, and disseminate the cultural traditions of the Kuy elephant-raising ethnic group. The result and impact from this research project, 1) Social and cultural dimensions: the knowledge and wisdom of Kuy elephant-raising teachers were gathered as information for the conservation and continuation of wisdom, collected and recorded into books, YouTube, and to make it look interesting. Groups and networks were formed, resulting in unity and a livable community. 2) Economic dimensions: This performance is a creative performance that reflects the cultural identity of the Kuy elephant-raising



ethnic group. People in the community have income from hiring them to perform at various events and have income from selling products and products. 3) Education: Students who participate in the rituals have expanded the results to other school/youth groups, fostering children and youth to join in learning. There is a good relationship between students, youth, people in the community, and outside the community. 4) Innovation: The copyright of Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of /U-Tube is registered to promote tourism as a channel to generate income for the community. This is an improvement in the quality of life of the community, as shown in Figure 6.

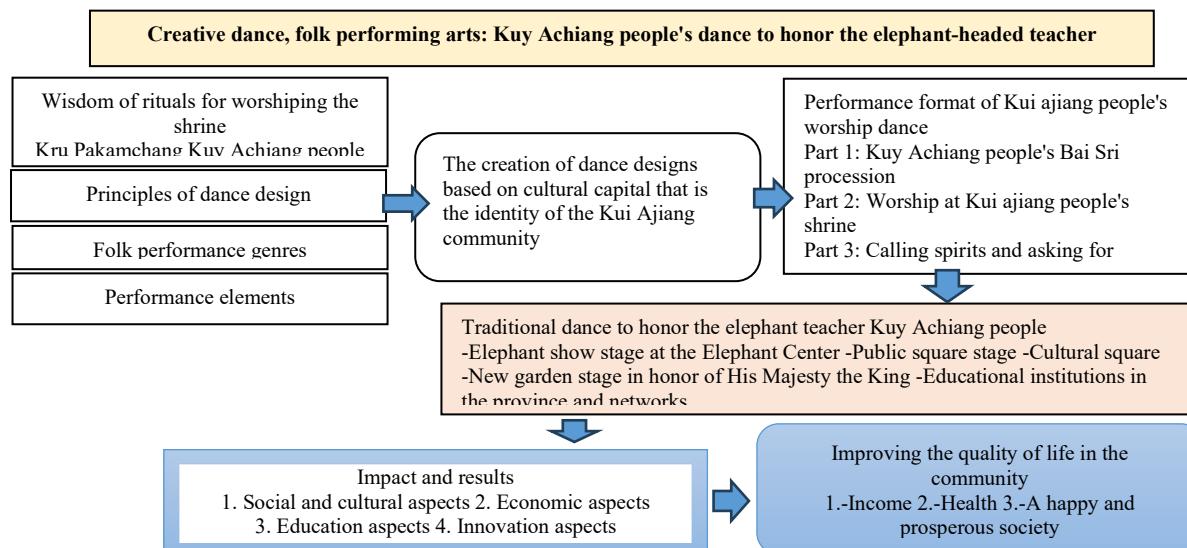


Figure 7: Creative Dance: “Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang people” for community quality of life

Note. From Sukthong et al (2023).

Guidelines for preserving ethnic cultures towards a creative economy by organizing cultural activities or spaces, relying on the cooperation of networks such as LAOs, educational institutions, elephant learning centers, and the Kuy Achiang people elephant community learning center, etc., to disseminate knowledge and wisdom into the integration of creative dances created by the research team and the community. There are performances of dances to worship the Kuy Achiang people's elephant teachers through merit-making festivals, cultural squares, cultural markets, and tourism routes (elephant learning centers, elephant community learning centers, Kuy Achiang people), organizing tourism packages, and exhibition booths to display shows. “Dance to worship Kru Pakamchang of Kuy Achiang people” is considered a soft power of creative dances towards a creative economy, which can improve the quality of life of the community, as shown in Figure 7.

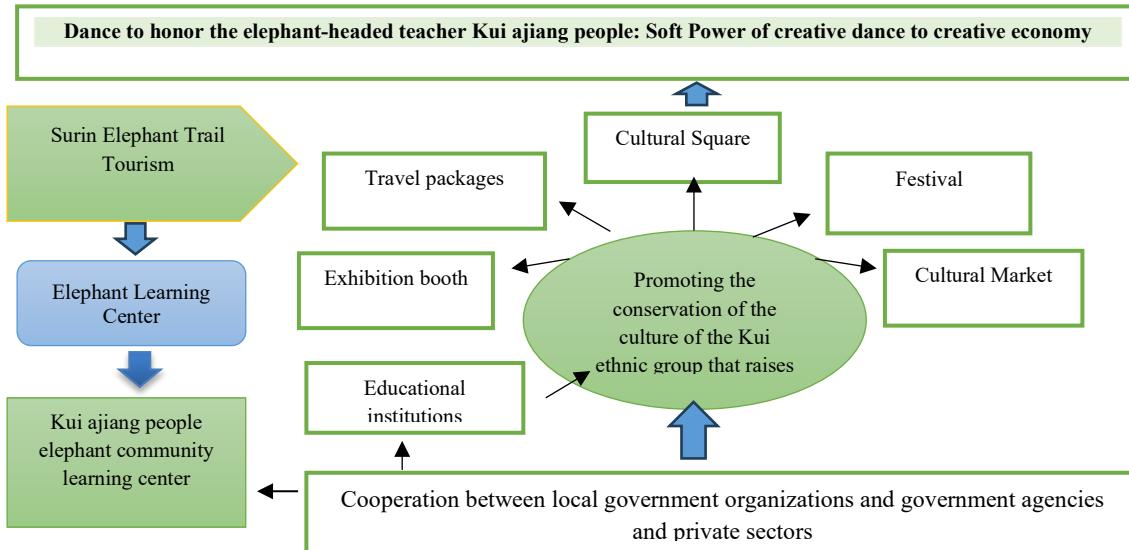


Figure 8: Guidelines for preserving ethnic culture towards a creative economy  
 Note. From Sukthong et al (2023)

## Recommendation

### Policy Recommendations

1. Government agencies, local administrative organisations, and cultural institutions need to establish policies that enable the preservation and revitalization of intangible cultural heritage, including ethnic rituals and performing arts.
2. Policies to encourage the integration of cultural heritage into community-based tourism and the creative economy should be in place, ensuring that cultural activities can provide a sustainable income for the local community.
3. Education policies need to incorporate indigenous knowledge and local cultural heritage (e.g., Kuy rituals, folk dances) into school curricula and extracurricular activities to reinforce cultural identity among the younger generation.

### Practice Recommendations

1. Community cultural groups should work with cultural experts, local schools, and tourism stakeholders to hold periodic performances, exhibitions, and workshops on “Dance to Worship Kru Pakamchang” to transmit culture and promote tourism
2. Community cultural groups should register intellectual property rights for creative dance performances to protect and preserve local wisdom and prevent cultural misappropriation.
3. Online platforms such as YouTube, social media, and cultural websites should be leveraged as innovative means to share performances, raise awareness, and reach national and international audiences

### Further Research Recommendations

1. Researching other rituals and intangible heritage practices of the Kuy and related ethnic groups.
2. Comparison between different ethnic communities in Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia to understand common elements, innovations, and best practices in cultural preservation.
3. Research on the economic benefits of these performances for community livelihoods and how intangible heritage can be integrated into a sustainable cultural tourism model.

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