

Multicultural Identity and Local Heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate and analyze data derived from literary, historical, and cultural evidence of Nakhon Sawan Province in various aspects, including its history, origins, ethnicity, and local foundational culture. The study seeks to foster understanding and awareness of the cultural identity about the local cultures based on Nakhon Sawan Province. It employs a qualitative descriptive - analytical approach based on documentary sources and relevant research studies.

The research findings reveal that Nakhon Sawan is a city with a long and continuous historical development, dating back to prehistoric settlements and gaining significance since the Sukhothai period. Geographically, Nakhon Sawan is located in the lower northern region of Thailand, characterized by fertile lowlands along the Chao Phraya River, which are highly suitable for settlement and agricultural activities. This advantageous geography has fostered the coexistence of diverse ethnic groups, including Thai, Chinese, Lao, Mon, Muslim, and Vietnamese communities, leading to cultural interaction and exchange within the province's historical and cultural landscape. The combination of geographical features and ethnic diversity has contributed to Nakhon Sawan's distinctive cultural plurality. The local cultures based on Nakhon Sawan Province can be categorized into six aspects that shows clearly multicultural identity and local heritage. Therefore, the local cultures based on Nakhon Sawan Province reflects the rich cultural diversity that has been harmoniously shaped along the Chao Phraya River, forming a distinctive multicultural identity that represents the province's unique cultural charm within Thailand.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Local Heritage, Identity, Local Cultures Based, Nakhon Sawan Province

Introduction

Nakhon Sawan is an ancient community located near the Pak Nam Pho, where the Ping and Nan Rivers converge to form the Chao Phraya River in Pak Nam Pho, Nakhon Sawan Province. The community has exhibited continuous urban and historical development since around the 18th Buddhist century (13th - 14th century CE) under the name "Mueang Phra Bang." It was governed by the Sukhothai royal court and served as a southern frontier town of the Sukhothai Kingdom, bordering

the Ayutthaya Kingdom. During the late reign of Phaya Nguā Nam Thum and the early reign of King Maha Thammaracha I (Lithai), the Sukhothai Kingdom began to weaken due to internal conflicts within the royal court. At the same time, King Ramathibodi I (U-Thong), the founder of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, sought to consolidate power and establish a new kingdom in 1350 CE (B.E. 1893) near the confluence of the Chao Phraya and Pa Sak Rivers. (Kasetsiri, 2005 : 18 - 20)

The historical and cultural background of Nakhon Sawan Province began to become clearly evident during the Sukhothai period and that reveals substantial evidence of its long-standing heritage, encompassing literary works, archaeological remains, historical records, stone inscriptions, as well as local legends and folktales. These sources clearly indicate that Nakhon Sawan is a region with a deeply local cultures based. Hinchiranan (1985) said that the ancient city of Chansen, which dates back to the Dvaravati period, and concluded that present-day Chansen, located in Takhli District, Nakhon Sawan Province, had undergone historical development since the Dvaravati era. The settlement is dated between the 11th and 16th Buddhist centuries (approximately the 6th to 11th centuries CE), overlapping to some extent with the Srivijaya artistic period.

Consideration of historical evidence reveals the background of Nakhon Sawan. However, the identity of Nakhon Sawan Province is also evident through literary evidence. Saisang (1985) discussed traditional folk medical literature, which provides knowledge related to healing and treatment. Such works appear in both oral and written forms. In addition, various literary compositions, such as Kap Hokhlong Chom Mueang Nakhon Sawan and Sang Thong, have also been found. Moreover, the province's local identity is reflected in its traditional folk performances expressed through songs such as Ten Kam Ram Khiao, Kiao Khao, and Cha Chao Phalom. These songs evolved into local folk plays and performances unique to Nakhon Sawan Province, portraying the way of life and everyday experiences of its people. Furthermore, these folk songs and performances have long served as a medium for entertainment and as a means of strengthening social bonds and communal relationships among local residents.

Based on the review of the historical and cultural contexts of Nakhon Sawan Province discussed above, it is evident that Nakhon Sawan has possessed a long-standing about the local cultures based. This shows ethnic diversity, which has led to rich cultural interactions within the area. This interplay of diverse ethnic groups has been a key contributing to the emergence of multifaceted cultural forms and creative cultural expressions.

From a review of the literature and related research on the local cultures of Nakhon Sawan Province, it is found that most existing studies primarily focus on descriptive explanations of specific dimensions, such as history, ethnicity, or particular local traditions. There remains a lack of holistic studies that comprehensively examine local cultures across multiple and integrated dimensions. Moreover, the majority of research on the local cultures of Nakhon Sawan Province has been conducted by Thai scholars and disseminated mainly in the Thai language. Publications related to

the local cultures of Nakhon Sawan Province in English are still very limited. Among those identified are as follows : Saengthong et al., (2025), and Singtuen & Phajuy (2020). That it can be seen that the review of the literature and related documents still lacks an international academic dimension.

Given these limitations, this research article represents an effort to investigate and compile various forms of local cultures in Nakhon Sawan Province, presenting and disseminating the findings in English in order to highlight the diversity of local identities and cultural heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province. Importantly, Nakhon Sawan Province is a geographical area whose physical and spatial characteristics have significantly contributed to its cultural and ethnic diversity. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the foundational local cultures of Nakhon Sawan Province in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of identities within the area.

Research Objectives

1. To study and analyze the history and origins of Nakhon Sawan Province in order to gain in-depth insights into the diversity of identities and cultures.
2. To analyze the multicultural identity and local cultural heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province as reflected in reliable evidence derived from scholarly literature, historical records, and diverse cultural dimensions.

Literature Review

1. The Concept of Culture / Cultural Heritage

The term “culture” derives from the Latin word *colo*, which means “to cultivate.” This does not refer to the act of tilling the soil but also implies nurturing, caring for, educating, and showing respect toward various aspects of life. Many thinkers in the 19th century believed that this distinction formed an essential foundation. During the 19th century, the notion of culture as cultivation expanded beyond its literal meaning to encompass abstract and idealistic dimensions representing the pursuit of human perfection and the ideal qualities necessary for social existence. (Duangwiset, 2015)

Raksrithong (2024) classified types of culture, which can be summarized as follows :

1. Classification based on the characteristics of culture : Culture can be divided into two types-Material Culture and Non-Material Culture. In some international cultural organizations, the terms Tangible Culture and Intangible Culture are more commonly used to describe these two categories respectively.

2. Classification based on cultural comparison : This refers to the interaction, exchange, and mutual acceptance between two or more cultures that coexist according to the roles and statuses of their respective cultural bearers. Such classifications include Major Culture and Subculture, Elite Culture and Folk Culture, Formal Culture and Vernacular Culture, or Urban Culture and Rural Culture, as well as Written Culture and Oral Culture.

If we consider the term “cultural heritage,” UNESCO (2018) defined that which societies inherit from the past, sustain in the present, and transmit to future generations, playing a vital role in shaping identity and ensuring cultural continuity for humanity.

Cultural heritage plays a significant role in society across multiple dimensions. First, it serves as a foundational basis for identity and collective consciousness within communities, fostering a sense of pride and cultural ownership. Second, cultural heritage functions as a source of historical and social learning, enabling a deeper understanding of human development and the relationships between people and their environment. Moreover, contemporary research indicates that cultural heritage is closely linked to sustainable development in economic, social, and cultural dimensions. In particular, it contributes to community participation, the promotion of cultural tourism, and the enhancement of people’s quality of life (Banda et al., 2024; Harrison, 2017; UNESCO, 2021)

In summary, cultural heritage constitutes a crucial element that reflects human identity, collective memory, and social values, encompassing both tangible and intangible forms. The concept of cultural heritage is of paramount importance to studies in the humanities and social sciences, as well as to the formulation of policies related to conservation, management, and sustainable development in contemporary society.

2. Theory Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism stands as a challenge to liberal democracy. In liberal democracies, all citizens should be treated equally under the law by abstracting the common identity of “citizen” from the real social, cultural, political, and economic positions and identities of real members of society. That leads to a tendency to homogenize the collective of citizens and assume a common political culture that all participate in. (Eagan, 2025)

A society characterized by cultural diversity encourages its members to become aware of the distinctive identities of different cultures. Each group seeks to define and affirm its own identity, while at the same time learning to understand other cultures and coexist with people from different backgrounds. In everyday life, individuals commonly encounter others whose cultural practices and values differ from their own. (Duangwiset, 2015)

In general, individuals tend to express cultural identity for political or economic purposes. However, the study by Laguerre (1984) found that Haitian immigrants who migrated to New York experienced discrimination and contempt from white populations who harbored hostility toward Black people. As a result, Haitians were compelled to construct a distinct identity to differentiate themselves from other Black groups. Consequently, in multicultural societies, different groups are often required to compete in order to assert and establish their own identities. (Duangwiset, 2015)

Therefore, Multiculturalism Theory provides a conceptual framework that emphasizes the equitable coexistence of multiple cultures within a single society. It focuses on the recognition of differences, respect for the identities of diverse groups, and the implementation of policy measures

to promote social diversity. As such, this concept constitutes a significant theoretical foundation in the fields of social sciences, political science, and cultural studies in the contemporary world.

3. The Concept of Identity

The term “identity” was previously translated as “uniqueness” which refers to the distinctive characteristics of a person or an object. The term “identification” is defined as the process by which an individual defines himself or herself, or one’s own identity, by adopting other persons or external entities as reference points (Kuwinpant, 2008 : 8) However, in the contemporary field of social sciences, this meaning has evolved. Theoretical trends in postmodernism have generated extensive questioning of traditional worldviews. Therefore, the term “identity” is considered more appropriate than “uniqueness” in conveying the current meaning of the concept of identity (Fuengfusakul, 2003 : 1)

Identity can be understood on two levels : personal identity and social identity. Leepreecha (2004 : 33 - 34) said that identity exists both at the individual level and collective identity shared within a group. At the individual level, a person may possess multiple identities, such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, social class, occupation, or religion. Then, collective identity is constructed based on shared characteristics among members of a group; however, such shared sameness also inherently defines itself in contrast to other groups, thereby shaping a distinctive sense of group identity.

A review of the concept of identity reveals that identity is an attempt to define who one is, how one is similar to and different from others, and that identity can exist at both the individual and social levels. This conceptual framework therefore serves as a useful approach for analyzing the characteristics of Nakhon Sawan Province, facilitating an understanding of the nature of its identity and how it is similar to or distinct from other cultures.

4. Documents and Research Related to Culture and Identity of Nakhon Sawan Province

The research entitled “Multicultural Identity and Local Heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand” aims to analyze the cultural diversity and cultural heritage evident in Nakhon Sawan Province. A review of documents and previous research related to the culture and identity of Nakhon Sawan Province reveals that most studies have been conducted as issue-based or thematic investigations rather than holistic analyses. From a preliminary review, the following documents and research studies relevant to this topic were identified such as Dararuang (2025), Saengthong (2025), Saengthong et al., (2025), Haycroft & Siribunsobh (2024), Jomyim et al., (2024), Saengthong (2016a), and Saengthong (2016b)

The foregoing discussion highlights a clear research gap. Most existing studies are issue-based investigations focusing on local aspects of Nakhon Sawan and are primarily authored by Thai scholars and published in the Thai language, without dissemination in English. This limitation may result in a lack of international visibility. Accordingly, the present study seeks to provide a

comprehensive analysis of historical development from the perspective of multicultural identity and cultural heritage in Nakhon Sawan Province. By presenting Nakhon Sawan's local culture in an English-language academic article, this research aims to enhance global accessibility and enable scholars worldwide to further explore and build upon this knowledge.

Research Framework

This qualitative study analyzes about multicultural identity and local heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand through the examination and analysis of literary, historical, and cultural evidence. The research explores various dimensions, including the province's history, origins, ethnicity, and local cultural foundations that shows multicultural identity and local heritage. Therefore, the analytical framework integrates four dimensions for systematic analysis as follows :

1. Search and study literary, historical, and cultural data across various aspects of Nakhon Sawan Province.

2. Incorporation historical data and information on the province's origins and ethnic diversity as part of the analytical process.

3. Examination how literary, historical, and cultural evidence reflects about multicultural identity and local heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand. The criteria for classifying historical and local cultural data of Nakhon Sawan Province are based on the forms of cultural expression which can be categorized into six dimensions : 1) Religion, Belief Systems, and Ritual Practices, 2) Language and Literary Heritage, 3) Cuisine and Traditional Dress, 4) Arts, Handicrafts, and Local Craftsmanship, 5) Folk Games, Plays, and Performing Arts, and 6) Traditional Customs and Festivals.

4. Analyzation about multicultural identity and local heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand in order to promote awareness of its identity and local cultural heritage.

These four components constitute the analytical framework for examining multicultural identity and cultural heritage in Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand, as illustrated in Figure 1.

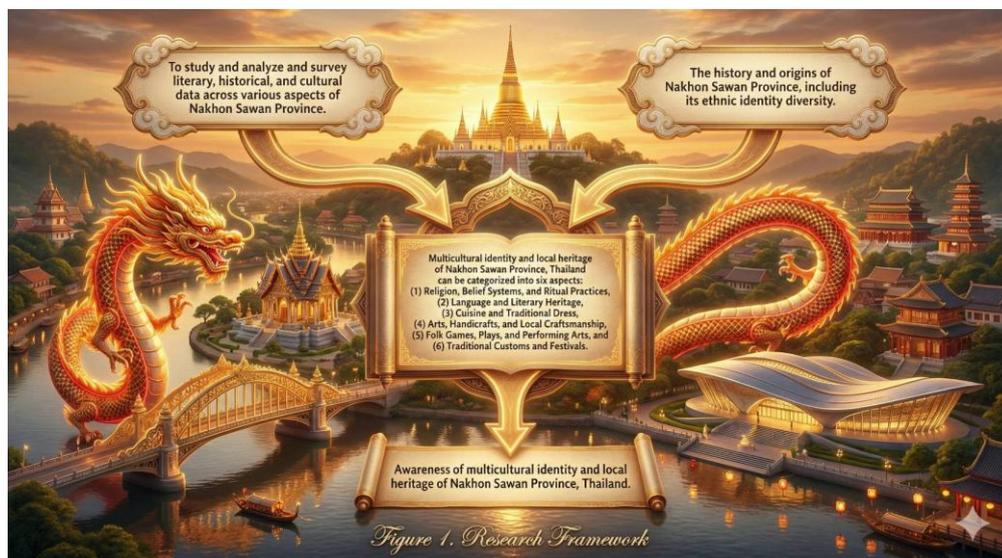


Figure 1. Research Framework

Research Methodology

1. Population and Sample

This study is qualitative research that focuses on analysis of literary, historical, and cultural evidence related to Nakhon Sawan Province, including its history, origins, ethnicity, multicultural identity and local heritages. Therefore, the primary rationale for employing a qualitative descriptive–analytical approach in this study is that it focuses on systematically explaining phenomena, situations, and social and cultural contexts. This approach facilitates the generation of knowledge and a deeper understanding of the diverse and varied social and cultural conditions of Nakhon Sawan Province, thereby providing a clearer representation of its distinctive provincial identity.

2. Research Instruments

1) Historical and cultural documents, literary sources, and other relevant materials, including research studies, academic articles, and reliable online information related to Nakhon Sawan Province, at both primary and secondary levels.

2) Structured four elements provide a comprehensive and comparative framework for analyzing the local foundational culture of Nakhon Sawan Province.

3. Data Collection

The data were collected between October 2024 and September 2025 and consist of four main types of materials, as follows : 1) Books 2) Research studies / Theses 3) Research articles / Academic papers, and 4) Reliable online information. In addition, other relevant documents were also included. Therefore, the criteria for selecting documentary sources used in this research are limited to documents published by credible sources and authoritative institutions, in order to ensure the highest possible quality of the research.

4. Qualitative Data Analysis

1) Search and collect information from various credible sources. The collected materials are then carefully reviewed multiple times in order to gain an overall including historical and cultural documents, literary sources, other related materials, research studies, academic articles, and reliable online information concerning the province, at both primary and secondary levels.

2) Assign codes or keywords to data with similar meanings, based on the conceptual framework and theories employed in the research. The related codes are then grouped into categories and further developed into main themes. The local foundational culture of Nakhon Sawan Province is explored in six aspects : 1) Religion, Belief Systems, and Ritual Practices, 2) Language and Literary Heritage, 3) Cuisine and Traditional Dress, 4) Arts, Handicrafts, and Local Craftsmanship, 5) Folk Games, Plays, and Performing Arts, and 6) Traditional Customs and Festivals.

3) Examination and analyze the origins and characteristics of Nakhon Sawan Province that reflect its multicultural identity and local heritages.

4) Analyzation the identity and values expressed through the local culture multicultural identity and local heritages of Nakhon Sawan Province. Then, presented as the research results.

Results

Nakhon Sawan Province, or the community at the origin of the Chao Phraya River, is an area where the Chao Phraya River serves as the main waterway, playing a vital role in the livelihoods of its people. It is a settlement area for diverse ethnic groups - including Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, Mon, and Muslim communities who have established their homes and occupations in the region. This multicultural composition of the Chao Phraya River Basin community represents a society characterized by cultural plurality. The coexistence of these various ethnic groups, each with distinct ways of life, customs, traditions, beliefs, and religions, has contributed to the rich cultural diversity of the province. (Saengthong et al., 2025 : 983)

In the past, Nakhon Sawan Province developed as an urban community around the 18th Buddhist century (13th - 14th century CE) under the name Mueang Phra Bang and was under the rule of the Sukhothai Kingdom. It served as a southern frontier town of the Sukhothai polity, bordering the Ayutthaya Kingdom (Sankom, 2021 : 24) According to Na Nakhon (1985) inscriptions discovered within the Nakhon Sawan area provide significant evidence of the province's history. A total of nine inscriptions that have been found : one Dong Mae Nang Mueang brick inscription, one Khok Mai Den terracotta Buddha image inscription, four terracotta stupa or chedi inscriptions, and three stone inscriptions. Among these, the Wat Khao Kob inscription (Inscription No. 11) provides the clearest reference to Nakhon Sawan's ancient past.

Furthermore, during the Sukhothai period, the once-prosperous Dong Mae Nang Mueang were a city that had flourished since the 16th Buddhist century gradually declined in importance. Its significance shifted toward Lopburi, which became a major center of Khmer culture at the time. In this period, the city of Nakhon Sawan began to appear under the name "Mueang Phra Bang," replacing the declining Dong Mae Nang Mueang. Evidence of this can be found in several Sukhothai stone inscriptions that mention Mueang Phra Bang. For example, **Inscription No. 1** describes the vast territory under the rule of King Ramkhamhaeng, listing major southern cities as follows : *"...To the east lie Phra Bang, Phraek, Suphanburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Si Thammarat along the seacoast..."*

Similarly, **Inscription No. 8** recounts an episode during the reign of King Maha Thammaracha Lithai, who led his subjects from several cities within his domain including *Sara Luang, Song Khwae, Pak Yom, Phra Bang, Chakangrao, Suphannaphum, and Nakhon Phrachum* to pay homage to the Buddha's footprint at Mount Sumanakut in Sukhothai. In addition, **Inscription No. 3** records King Maha Thammaracha Lithai's construction of four Buddha footprints, one of which was located at : *"Phra Bat Nuea, on the summit of the mountain at Pak Phra Bang."* This sacred site still remains on

that same hill today, now known as Khao Kob (Committee on Documentation and Archives, Executive Committee for the Celebration of His Majesty the King's Jubilee, 1999 : 53)

From the above, it can be seen that Nakhon Sawan is an ancient city, believed to have been established during the Sukhothai period. It was mentioned in inscriptions under the name “Mueang Phra Bang” and served as an important frontier town from the Sukhothai period onward. The original city was located at the foot of Khao Khat (Mount Ruesi), extending to Wat Hua Mueang (Wat Nakhon Sawan), where remnants of earthen ramparts can still be found. Later, the city became known as Mueang Chon Tawan (the city facing the sun), as it was situated on the western bank of the Chao Phraya River and faced eastward toward the river, allowing sunlight to shine directly onto the city. Eventually, the name was changed to “Mueang Nakhon Sawan,” which has long been popularly known as “**Pak Nam Pho.**” (Office of Provincial Commercial Affairs Nakhonsawan, 2021) As for the origin of the name “Pak Nam Pho,” there are two prevailing hypotheses. The first suggests that it derives from “Pak Nam Phlo” (meaning “the mouth of the river where waters emerge”), referring to the confluence of the Ping, Yom, and Nan Rivers, which merge to form the source of the Chao Phraya River. The second hypothesis holds that the name comes from a large Bodhi tree (Pho tree) that once stood at the river mouth near Wat Pho, the current site of the Guan Yu Shrine, hence the name “Pak Nam Pho” (Saengthong, 2016a)

Due to the geographical suitability of Nakhon Sawan Province, which consists largely of fertile lowlands along the Chao Phraya River, people have long traveled by boat to settle and seek livelihoods both on land and water. Consequently, the province has become home to a highly diverse range of ethnic groups. In addition to the Thai population, there are five other prominent ethnic communities : Chinese, Lao, Mon, Muslim, and Vietnamese (Saengthong, 2016b) It can therefore be said that Nakhon Sawan Province exhibits remarkable ethnic diversity, which has contributed to the harmonious blending of various cultural traditions. The province stands as a multicultural community, where different ways of life have coexisted and integrated seamlessly. Hence, Nakhon Sawan represents a community rich in both historical and ethnic diversity, a characteristic that has persisted from the past to the present (Saengthong, 2016b : 1)

Multicultural Identity and Local Heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province

Multicultural identity and local heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province has been categorized according to the forms of cultural expression and that can be categorized into six aspects : (1) Religion, Belief Systems, and Ritual Practices, (2) Language and Literary Heritage, (3) Cuisine and Traditional Dress, (4) Arts, Handicrafts, and Local Craftsmanship, (5) Folk Games, Plays, and Performing Arts, and (6) Traditional Customs and Festivals. The research findings are as follows :

1. Religion, Belief Systems, and Ritual Practices

Committee on Documentation and Archives, Executive Committee for the Celebration of His Majesty the King's Jubilee (1999 : 179 - 197)

summarized that Nakhon Sawan was a frontier city or an outer town during the Sukhothai period. Considering the temples in Nakhon Sawan Province that have been designated as royal temples, there were originally three such temples : 1) Wat Photharam, 2) Wat Nakhon Sawan, and 3) Wat Woranat Buppharam (Committee on Documentation and Archives, Executive Committee for the Celebration of His Majesty the King’s Jubilee, 1999 : 180) At present, an additional temple has been elevated to royal status : Wat Tak Fa (Nakhon Sawan Provincial Office of Buddhism, 2022) Specifically : *Wat Photharam* – a third-class royal temple located in the center of Pak Nam Pho Market. It is presumed to have been established before the Rattanakosin period. *Wat Nakhon Sawan* – a third-class royal temple originally named Wat Hua Mueang because travelers would pass this temple before entering the city. It was built around 1529 BE (1972 CE) and was historically used for the water blessing oath ceremony (Phibat Sata). *Wat Woranat Buppharam* – established during the Sukhothai period by Phraya Ban Mueang in dedication to his younger brother, Phraya Ram, who died during a war. The temple was formerly known as Wat Khao Kob and is also called Wat Pak Phra Bang. *Wat Tak Fa* – a third-class royal temple, which also functions as a center for Pali monastic education and Buddhist studies.

In terms of religious beliefs, the majority of people in Nakhon Sawan adhere to Buddhism, with temples and monks playing a central role in everyday life. Additionally, some residents follow the Catholic branch of Christianity, believing in a single God and the reality of life after death. There is also a portion of the population that practices Islam. A particularly prominent belief in Nakhon Sawan is Taoism, due to the significant Chinese community residing in the area. This is reflected concretely through the presence of Chinese shrines. Notably, there are eight well-known shrines in Nakhon Sawan : 1) Shrine of Chao Pho Thepharak 2) Shrine of Chao Mae Na Pha 3) Shrine of Tia Sien Si (Chao Pho Pak Khlong Shrine) 4) Shrine of Guan Yu (Bueng Tao Kong) 5) Shrine of Chao Mae Kaen Chan 6) Shrine of Chao Pho Lat Yao 7) Shrine of Chao Pho Kao Liao, and 8) Shrine of Chao Pho Chao Mae Chum Saeng. The existence of these shrines illustrates the harmonious integration of Taoist devotion with local folk beliefs.

2. Language and Literary Heritage

Committee on Documentation and Archives, Executive Committee for the Celebration of His Majesty the King’s Jubilee (1999 : 121 - 141) said that the local language of Nakhon Sawan is not distinctly defined as a regional dialect. The majority of residents use Central Thai, but there are groups that still speak their ethnic languages. These include Chinese languages such as Hokkien, Hainanese, and Teochew; Lao languages including Lao Song, Lao Wiang, Lao Khrang, Lao Ngiew, and Lao Phuan; and the Mon language. Mon speakers can be found in communities such as Ban Kaeng in Mueang Nakhon Sawan District and Bang Mafor in Krok Phra District, among others. In terms of inscriptions, the history and origins of the city of Nakhon Sawan are recorded in several epigraphic sources. These include the terracotta stupa inscriptions from Thap Chumphon City 1 and 2, the

terracotta Buddha image inscriptions from Wat Khok Mai Den, the Dong Mae Nang Mueang inscription, and the inscriptions at Wat Khao Kob (Na Nakhon, 1985 : 139 - 150)

Regarding legends and beliefs, Nakhon Sawan Province has several well-known local legends, including : 1) The Rolling Stone Hill Legend – It tells of the village of Khao Hin Kling in Phai Sali District, where two large stones are situated in the middle of a rice field. 2) The Chan Sen City Legend – Originally, the city was called Sam Saen, inhabited by 300,000 people. The city lord instructed each person to dig a handful of clay, resulting in the creation of a large pond, now known as Bueng Chan Sen. 3) The Khao Kob Legend – Today referred to as Wat Woranat Banphot, an ancient temple built during the Sukhothai period. The temple’s name derives from a man named Ta Kob, who donated the land for its construction. Other notable legends include the Dong Mae Nang Mueang Legend, the Khao Kaew Temple Legend, and the story of the Heavenly Temple Construction.

Regarding literature, Nakhon Sawan Province encompasses both oral literature and written literature. *Oral literature* includes various tales and stories, such as Noonoi Taeng Mo (Little Watermelon), Malang Aplak (The Ugly Insect), Luang Ta Thong Du Maen (Monk Thong Observes the River), and Ban Koei Chai / Dang Koei Chai, among others. *Written literature* appears in the form of local folk medical texts, including incantations and charms, such as Katha Pao Khae Roem (Incantation for Starting Healing), Katha Raksa To Nai Ta (Incantation for Eye Cataracts), and Katha Rok Phi Nai Thong (Incantation for Spirit-related Stomach Ailments), reflecting traditional knowledge and practices preserved in the community.

In addition, the written literature with poetic structures in Nakhon Sawan Province can be categorized as follows : 1) “Pra-kat Chaeng Nam” (Water Curse Declaration) : This literary piece is associated with the Si Satchapan water-taking ceremony in the provincial towns. It likely originated from the province’s tradition of having “Wat Thue Nam” (water-taking temples), which historically served as locations for administering the Phra Phiphatsatya oath. 2) “Nirat Mueang Narok” (Journey to Hell) : An autobiographical tale written by a novice monk. While meditating, he was invited by Yama, the Lord of Death, to visit the city of hell, where he witnessed various hellish creatures undergoing punishment. 3) “Sang Thong” : Nakhon Sawan Version : This story aligns with local legends of Nakhon Sawan, including Khao Nang Phanthurat, Khao Na Phra, and Khao Ti Kli, as recounted by Phra Kru Wisit Chariyawatt. It demonstrates the province’s authentic folk literature tradition. 4) “Kap Ho Khlong Chom Mueang Nakhon Sawan” (Poetic Composition Praising Nakhon Sawan) : Written by Pongpradit (1986) to introduce the province, this work describes its history, politics, and culture., and 5) “Khlong Nirat Nakhon Sawan” : Composed by Phra Si Mahosot in 1658 BE (A.D. 1615) during King Narai the Great’s visit, when the royal procession traveled via waterways to Nakhon Sawan to receive the white elephant named Chao Phraya Boromkachenchanthan. Additionally, Sungchot (2022) analyzed the content and local tourist locations mentioned in 76 folk songs related to Nakhon Sawan, such as Sao Suay Takli, Phop Rak Thi Tak Fa, Lam Nam Mae Pern, Rao Rak Nong Bua, and Kod Mae

Wong Phop Rak Thi Pak Nam Pho. In summary, these songs primarily depict themes of love, followed by descriptions of local resources, significant events and activities in Nakhon Sawan, lifestyle, beliefs, and traditional festivals.

3. Cuisine and Traditional Dress

Committee on Documentation and Archives, Executive Committee for the Celebration of His Majesty the King's Jubilee (1999 : 197 - 199) described the local culture of cuisine and clothing, noting that the province has maintained customs and traditions that have been followed consistently from the past to the present. Although some areas are inhabited by Chinese-Thai, Vietnamese-Thai, Phuan-Thai, and Lao Song (Black Lao) communities, the residents have been able to live harmoniously within a blended social and cultural environment. Changes in clothing reflecting modern trends became noticeable starting from the era of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram. The staple food of Nakhon Sawan residents is jasmine rice, similar to other central Thai communities, and meals were traditionally eaten while sitting in a circle. Today, with changes in housing and lifestyle, dining culture has increasingly adopted Western-style practices, such as eating at tables with spoons or forks. During the flood season, fish are salted and sun-dried, known as "Pla Kluay" (salted fish), or fish such as snakehead or catfish are mixed with curry paste to make fried fish cakes (Pla Het). For important Buddhist festivals, dishes like khanom jeen nam ya (fermented rice noodles with curry sauce) are commonly prepared. During the Sart festival, red sticky rice and krayasart (sweet sticky rice treats) are made. In Bang Maphu Subdistrict, Krogpra District, the Songkran festival features the traditional dish "Khao Chae" (rice soaked in iced jasmine water). Today, these foods have evolved along with changes in living conditions and societal circumstances.

4. Arts, Handicrafts, and Local Craftsmanship

Committee on Documentation and Archives, Executive Committee for the Celebration of His Majesty the King's Jubilee (1999 : 101 - 120) discussed local arts and craftsmanship that are prominently found within the province, which can be categorized into four main aspects : 1) Sculpture 2) Painting 3) Architecture, and 4) Handicrafts and Local Craftsmanship as follows :

4.1 Sculpture

Sculptures found in Nakhon Sawan date back to the period of Middle Indian Civilization (late 4th to mid 10th Buddhist century). Among the discoveries are ancient Roman-style terracotta lamps unearthed at Mueang Bon, Phayuha Khiri District. Another significant artifact from the Late Indian Civilization period (mid 10th to mid 11th Buddhist century) is an ivory comb, one side carved with the Eight Auspicious Symbols and a procession of horses, while the other depicts a hamsa (swan). This artifact, excavated from the ancient city of Chansen, Takhli District, is believed to be "the oldest comb in Siam," imported from India and estimated to be around 2,000 years old. Furthermore, sculptures from the Late Mon Civilization period (12th to early 14th Buddhist century) have also been discovered such as a set of four Buddha images in different postures unearthed at Mueang Thap

Chumphon, Nong Krat Subdistrict, Mueang Nakhon Sawan District. In addition, there are examples of sculptures from the Khmer cultural period, the Sukhothai period, and continuing through to the early Rattanakosin period and the present day.

4.2 Painting

Most of the mural paintings in Nakhon Sawan Province are now deteriorated. However, some remaining examples of late Ayutthaya period mural paintings can still be seen in the old ordination hall at Wat Koh Hong. Other notable mural works include those found in the pavilion of Wat Kriengkrai Klang, the ordination hall of Wat Bang Pramung, as well as the paintings on the sermon hall, vihara, and ordination hall of Wat Bang Mafor, among others.

4.3 Architecture

Architectural heritage from the Sukhothai period includes the chedi of Wat Woranat Banphot (Wat Khao Kop). Examples from the late Ayutthaya period include the old ordination hall of Wat Koh Hong, which is now in a highly deteriorated condition. Meanwhile, architectural works from the early Rattanakosin period to the present include the vihara of Wat Paknam Pho Nuea, constructed entirely of teakwood, and the sermon hall of Wat Phra Prang Luang, among others.

4.4 Handicrafts and Local Craftsmanship

The outstanding and renowned handicrafts and artisanal works of Nakhon Sawan Province include ivory carving, Buddha image casting, pottery, rattan mat weaving, traditional textile weaving, and long-boat crafting.

5. Folk Games, Plays, and Performing Arts

Nakhon Sawan Province is an area with cultural diversity, which has given rise to various of folk games and performances. These can be categorized into two main types : 1) Adult games and performances, and 2) Children’s games and activities. A summary of presentation as follows (Ketprathum, 1985 : 287 - 313; Wongthes, 1985 : 314 - 318; Committee on Documentation and Archives, Executive Committee for the Celebration of His Majesty the King’s Jubilee, 1999 : 141 - 178; Office of the Permanent Secretary for Culture, Ministry of Culture, 2021)

5.1 Adult Folk Games and Performances

Adult folk games and performances in Nakhon Sawan can be categorized into four main types: 1) Ram Thon (or Ruang) : This is a traditional folk dance genuinely practiced by villagers and is common in almost every village. Anyone can join the dance. In some areas, it is called Ruang Tee Bot or Ram Wong Prakop Bot. It is usually performed during festive occasions. Examples of songs performed in Ram Thon include Ka Khao, Chak Chuan Sao Ngam, and Dao Kiang Duean. 2) Ram Klong Yao (Long Drum Dance) : A renowned long drum troupe from Phayuha Khiri District is the Bo. Rung Rueang Sin troupe. They adapted dance movements from Likay performances and also created costumes inspired by Likay attire. This style is called the “Modified Long Drum Dance” (Klong Yao Prayot), first performed around 1957 (B.E. 2500). 3) Khao Phi Chuen Phi (Spirit Invocation Performance) :

Thai people traditionally believe that spirits inhabit all things, whether objects, household items, or animals. During major festivals such as Songkran, villagers perform playful imitations of these spirits, known as “inviting spirits.” Popular spirits in these performances include Phi Nang Kala, Phi Nang Khwai, Phi Nang Chang, and Phi Nang Sai, among others., and 4) Pati Pak or Call-and-Response Songs : This form involves men and women singing responsively, often in playful or flirtatious exchanges, requiring wit and improvisation. There are ten well-known songs in this category : Tae Kamra Khiao, Kiao Khao, Cha Chao Malom, Khlok Paeng, Sang Nak, Phitthan, Rabam Ban Rai, Dam Na, Phuang Malai Lo Ching Cha, and Rabam Wong. These performances reflect the creativity, social cohesion, and cultural richness of adult folk traditions in Nakhon Sawan.

5.2 Children’s Games

Children’s games in Nakhon Sawan are diverse, with a total of 46 documented activities. These include : 1) jumping rope, 2) egg-making, 3) kampan kapan, 4) ging kong kaew, 5) chicken legs stuck together, 6) selling watermelons, 7) riding horses to deliver goods to the city 8) Riding on the back and throwing tiles into the circle 9) Wagon-foot curve 10) Rubber jig 11) Hitting marbles 12) Walking on a stilt 13) Chicken fight 14) Talok-tak 15) Eye-toeing 16) Wheel 17) Tee-jab 18) Pandanus 19) Fish falling into the pan 20) Crab with legs 21) Frog blowing 22) Ghost hammering nails 23) Monk, child, tiger, chicken, moth 24) Banana stalk horse 25) Pedstump 26) Pick-up stick 27) Boom stick 28) Tank climber 29) Throw line 30) Eat leaves 31) Sing-ching-lak 32) Luk-chung 33) Coconut shell running 34) Running backward 35) Cow running 36) Stop-stop 37) Tiger crossing the stream 38) Rubber band 39) Pick-up stick 40) Mad dog 41) Dog fighting for meat 42) Lum Muang 43) In-Chan 44) E-Tak 45) E-Taek, and 46) Aspira.

6. Traditional Customs and Festivals

Traditional Customs and Festivals in Nakhon Sawan Province are highly diverse, reflecting the province’s ethnic plurality. There are 16 customs and festivals in the province. A summary is as follows 1) Chao Pho–Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Procession Festival 2) Boon Kam Fa Merit-Making Festival 3) Songkran Festival 4) Traditional Long Boat Racing 5) Khao Chae Merit-Making Ceremony 6) Boon Salak Phat Offering Festival 7) Tak Bat Thian Pho Candle Alms Offering Ceremony 8) Following the Royal Visit Route Festival 9) Loy Krathong Festival 10) Lantern Puppet Festival 11) Boon Bang Fai Rocket Festival 12) Khao Lam (Bamboo Sticky Rice) Burning Ceremony 13) Khao Jee (Grilled Rice) Merit-Making Ceremony 14) Boon Prathai Plueak Khao (Rice Husk Offering Festival) 15) Sao Pak Thong (Flagpole Installation Ceremony), and 16) Nang Maeo (Cat Parade) Festival. (Committee on Documentation and Archives, Executive Committee for the Celebration of His Majesty the King’s Jubilee, 1999; Office of the Permanent Secretary for Culture, Ministry of Culture, 2021; Nakhon Sawan Provincial Administrative Organization, n.d.-a; Nakhon Sawan Provincial Administrative Organization, n.d.-b).

The following are three prominent and well-known traditional customs and festivals of Nakhon Sawan Province : 1) Chao Pho–Chao Mae Pak Nam Pho Procession Festival, this is a traditional festival of the Chinese-Thai community, held to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The parade was first organized in 1932 (B.E. 2475) and has continued annually to the present day. The procession takes place on the 4th day of the first lunar month and features a golden dragon dance, lion dance, Eng Ko performance, a float of the Goddess Guanyin, and traditional Chinese musical ensembles. 2) Loy Krathong Festival, is distinctive compared to other regions, as the krathongs are made from coconut shells. This tradition is called the “Coconut Shell Loy Krathong” or the “Loy Krathong Sai Festival,” and it has been practiced since 1897 (B.E. 2440), and 3) Lantern Puppet Festival, the festival is held at the Golden Dragon Plaza in Suan Sawan Park to showcase the beauty of lantern art, promoting tourism and highlighting the identity of the local Chinese community. The festival features grand lantern sculptures, making it the most spectacular display of its kind in Northern Thailand.

Therefore, all six aspects collectively give rise to the multicultural identity of Nakhon Sawan Province, reflecting both individual and social identities formed through coexistence and interaction among diverse cultures. This identity is not rigidly bound to a single culture; rather, it emerges from processes of integration, negotiation, and mutual learning among different cultural groups within the same social context. Moreover, multicultural identity is inherently dynamic, as it continuously changes and adapts over time in response to social conditions such as migration, trade interactions, and cross-cultural communication. In this regard, the findings of this research are consistent with multiculturalism theory, which emphasizes the recognition of differences, equality, and respectful coexistence within societies characterized by ethnic, linguistic, and belief diversity.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

Nakhon Sawan Province has long been recognized as an ancient city, believed to have been established during the Sukhothai period. Its name appears in historical stone inscriptions under the designation “Mueang Phra Bang.” Subsequently, the city was renamed “Nakhon Sawan” for auspicious reasons and has been commonly known as “Pak Nam Pho.” Importantly, from a geographical perspective, Nakhon Sawan Province is characterized predominantly by low-lying river plains. Three major rivers, the Ping, Yom, and Nan, converge within this area to form the Chao Phraya River, which has played a crucial role in shaping the livelihoods and settlement patterns of local communities. This strategic geographical setting has attracted diverse ethnic groups to settle in the region over an extended period, including Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, Mon, and Muslim communities. Nakhon Sawan has evolved into a province marked by significant cultural diversity.

An analysis of the province’s historical significance and geographical characteristics reveals the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups within the same area. It can be concluded that Nakhon Sawan

Province reflects cultural pluralism in Thailand. The multicultural identity and local cultural heritage of Nakhon Sawan can be categorized into six principal dimensions : (1) Religion, Belief Systems, and Ritual Practices, (2) Language and Literary Heritage, (3) Cuisine and Traditional Dress, (4) Arts, Handicrafts, and Local Craftsmanship, (5) Folk Games, Plays, and Performing Arts, and (6) Traditional Customs and Festivals. Accordingly, the study and analysis of the province’s history, geographical context, and diversity of identities and ethnic groups constitute a fundamental basis for the formation and development of its local cultural identity. This process has fostered continuous cultural creativity, adaptation, and integration, ultimately shaping the distinctive local culture of Nakhon Sawan Province.

In summary, the multicultural identity of Nakhon Sawan can be attributed to four key factors : (1) ethnic diversity and patterns of settlement; (2) coexistence and cultural integration; (3) geographical, socio-economic, and environmental contexts; and (4) fluid and non-fixed identities. Consequently, the multicultural identity of Nakhon Sawan is characterized by the integration of diverse cultures that coexist in a mutually supportive manner, giving rise to a unique provincial identity that is both “diverse” and “unified.” This simultaneous interaction and convergence of cultures within Nakhon Sawan Province have produced a distinctive form of multiculturalism that may be referred to as the “multicultural identity of the upper Chao Phraya River communities.”

2. Research Discussion

The research entitled “Multicultural Identity and Local Heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand” demonstrates a clear alignment between its two research objectives. The study and analysis of the history and historical background of Nakhon Sawan Province provide an in-depth understanding of the diversity of identities and cultures, thereby enabling the clear identification of the six aspects of the province’s local cultural heritage.

The study of multicultural identity and local cultural heritage in Nakhon Sawan Province can be summarized into six key aspects. Collectively, these aspects indicate that the identity of the area is inherently multicultural, shaped through the participation and long-term coexistence of diverse ethnic groups and ways of life. This multicultural identity is continuously manifested through the integration of artistic expressions, language use, culinary practices, and traditions. Such manifestations clearly demonstrate their relationships and coherence with the concept of identity, theories of multicultural identity, and the concept of cultural heritage.

Research on local cultural heritage in Nakhon Sawan further demonstrates that cultural integration within various tourist destinations such as the hybrid forms of Thai and Chinese architecture and art that constitutes a clear and prominent example of the province’s multicultural identity. (Chailuksakul & Boonyananta, 2025) Furthermore, the revitalization of Thai–Chinese cultural identity in Nakhon Sawan demonstrates that the mobilization of Chinese cultural capital in the development of learning spaces, artistic expressions, and cultural tourism routes enables diverse cultural elements to coexist and be reinterpreted within contemporary contexts as forms of

multiculturalism. (Saengthong et al., 2025) At the same time, the development of products with shared identities and tourism routes grounded in community-based cultural practices contributes to enabling local communities to communicate and project their cultural heritage identities to external audiences in a sustainable manner. (Jomyim et al., 2024)

The researcher holds the view that the multicultural identity and cultural heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province should be understood as dynamic social and cultural processes that are constantly evolving, rather than as fixed or static structures. The identity of the area emerges from the interactions among diverse ethnic groups within a shared community context. At the same time, cultural heritage which both tangible and intangible, serves as a fundamental foundation for shaping, transmitting, and constructing shared meanings of multicultural identity within local society.

Regarding the limitations of this study, it was found that most research on Nakhon Sawan Province has been conducted by Thai scholars and published primarily in the Thai language, with limited dissemination in English. As a result, this study may lack references to international scholarship. Therefore, the researcher suggests that future studies on the identity and cultural heritage of Nakhon Sawan Province should emphasize understanding culture as a “living heritage” that reflects the interconnectedness of the past and the present.

Suggestion

1. Recommendations for the Application of Findings

1) findings of this research can be applied for the benefit of both public and private organizations working in areas related to communities, society, and culture, including tourism. They can also serve as a foundational basis for analyzing local identity and cultural diversity.

2) In-depth data were collected to gain a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the foundational local culture of Nakhon Sawan Province.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

1) Employ diverse theoretical and conceptual frameworks to study and analyze the history and culture of Nakhon Sawan Province, as well as other provinces across Thailand.

2) serves as an applied database that can be utilized for educational purposes in other disciplines, such as tourism studies, cultural area studies, and research on community identity.

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