

# The Invented Traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing – Phra Singh in Contemporary Thai Society

ประเพณีประดิษฐ์เกี่ยวกับพระพุทธสิหิงค์-พระสิงห์  
ในสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย<sup>1</sup>

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บทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของวิทยานิพนธ์ดุษฎีบัณฑิตเรื่อง "พระพุทธสิหิงค์-พระสิงห์: การสืบทอดและการสร้างสรรค์ตำนานเรื่องเล่าและประเพณีพิธีกรรมในบริบทสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย" ซึ่งได้รับการพิจารณาจากคณะกรรมการพิจารณาจริยธรรมการวิจัยในคน กลุ่มสหสถาบัน ชุดที่ 2 สังคมศาสตร์ มนุษยศาสตร์ และศิลปกรรมศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย ทั้งนี้ผู้วิจัยขอขอบคุณทุนอุดหนุนการศึกษาสำหรับนิสิตระดับปริญญาเอกและโทที่เข้าศึกษาในสาขาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับความเป็นไทย และทุนวิจัยวิบูลย์สวัสดิ์ แอนเดอร์สันด้วย

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## **Abstract**

This article aims at collecting invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing in contemporary Thai society as well as analyzing concepts that are laid underneath this traditional invention. Both written and fieldwork documents, together with online data, were gathered from October 2019 to June 2021 in Bangkok, Chiangmai, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Trang, Maehongson, and Samut Sakhon Provinces. Participant observation and informal interviews were mainly used along with related folklore methodologies, especially the concept of invented tradition.

It was found that among 14 traditions pertaining to Phra Buddha Sihing, 11 traditions were inherited and 3 of them were invented: 1) the “Auspicious Event of Thailand’s Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace” organized by the Office of National Museum, Fine Arts Department, 2) the “Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple, Chiangmai Province” created by chief monks of Wat Phra Sing Temple, and 3) the “Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon Temple, Trang Province” invented by the former provincial governor. These three invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing, the focus of the study, were established based on the two concepts of tradition invention: 1) to create new traditions based on old beliefs, and 2) to combine existing rituals into new ones. The study indicates the dynamics and roles of rituals, traditions, and customs within the context of contemporary society in Thailand.

**Keywords:** Phra Buddha Sihing, Phra Singh, invented tradition, folklore, Buddha image

## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อรวบรวมประเพณีประดิษฐ์เกี่ยวกับพระพุทธสิหิงค์ในบริบทสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย และวิเคราะห์วิธีคิดในการประดิษฐ์ประเพณีพิธีกรรมดังกล่าว ผู้วิจัยได้รวบรวมทั้งข้อมูลเอกสารและข้อมูลภาคสนาม ช่วงเดือนตุลาคม พ.ศ. 2562 ถึงเดือนมิถุนายน พ.ศ. 2564 ในกรุงเทพมหานคร เชียงใหม่ นครศรีธรรมราช ตรัง แม่ฮ่องสอน และสมุทรสาคร นอกจากนี้ ยังใช้ข้อมูลประเภทอื่นมาเป็นข้อมูลเสริมในการวิเคราะห์ เช่น ข้อมูลจากอินเทอร์เน็ต เอกสารหรือหนังสือที่มีการตีพิมพ์ และข้อมูลภาคสนามอื่น ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้อง ในการศึกษาค้นคว้าครั้งนี้ผู้วิจัยสำรวจข้อมูลและเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนามจากการสังเกตแบบมีส่วนร่วม และการสัมภาษณ์อย่างไม่เป็นทางการ โดยใช้แนวคิด “ประเพณีประดิษฐ์” เป็นแนวการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล

ผลการศึกษา พบว่า ประเพณีพิธีกรรมเกี่ยวกับพระพุทธสิหิงค์ที่ปรากฏในสังคมไทยปัจจุบันมี 14 ประเพณีพิธีกรรม เป็นประเพณีสืบทอดจำนวน 11 ประเพณีพิธีกรรม และเป็นประเพณีประดิษฐ์จำนวน 3 ประเพณีพิธีกรรม ได้แก่ กิจกรรมสักการะพระพุทธรูป ณ วังหน้าพระปฎิมาแห่งแผ่นดิน กรุงเทพมหานคร ประเพณียี่เป็ง จังหวัดเชียงใหม่ และ พิธีอธิษฐานจิตระลึกถึงพระพุทธสิหิงค์ จังหวัดตรัง บทความนี้ศึกษาเฉพาะประเพณีประดิษฐ์เท่านั้น โดยประเพณีประดิษฐ์เกี่ยวกับพระพุทธสิหิงค์มี “วิธีคิด” ในการประดิษฐ์ประเพณีอยู่ 2 ลักษณะ ได้แก่ การสร้างประเพณีใหม่บนฐานความเชื่อเดิม และการผสมหลายพิธีกรรมเข้าด้วยกัน การศึกษาประเพณีประดิษฐ์เกี่ยวกับพระพุทธสิหิงค์แสดงให้เห็นถึงพลวัตและบทบาทหน้าที่ของประเพณีพิธีกรรมในบริบทสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย

**คำสำคัญ:** พระพุทธสิหิงค์ พระสิงห์ ประเพณีประดิษฐ์ คติชนวิทยา  
พระพุทธรูป

## Introduction

“Phra Buddha Sihing” is one of the priceless Buddha images of Thailand, located as the principal Buddha image in Thai kingdoms - Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Sukhothai, Chiangmai, Chiangrai, Ayutthaya, and Bangkok. However, academics believe that there are three so-called images of Phra Buddha Sihing in Thailand, enshrined in Phutthaisawan Throne Hall in Bangkok National Museum, in Lai Kham Vihara of Wat Phra Sing Temple, Chiangmai Province, and in the Buddha Image Hall of Nakhon Sri Thammarat province.

At present, in the contexts of globalization and tourism, part of the Phra Buddha Sihing ritual is promoted for tourism in Bangkok, Chiangmai, and Nakhon Sri Thammarat, where the Buddha image of Phra Buddha Sihing is located, especially in a religious procession during the Songkran Festival so that people can pour water on the sacred image for auspicious worshipping.

According to the preliminary survey data and field data, there are some Buddha images with particular mythical legends and rituals in several areas of Thailand that are believed by the local folks as “the genuine Phra Buddha Sihing”. Therefore, it could be said that the so-called “Phra Buddha Sihing” or “Phra Sing” is a term for many Buddha images enshrined in different regions of Thailand.

Apart from the inherited traditions, there are newly-invented ritual performances discovered from the survey data and defined as “invented traditions”. According to Hobsbawm (1983, cited in Nathalang, 2019), the term “invented tradition” means any cultural practices which are “presented” or “perceived” as tradition, no matter how long those have been invented. Nathalang (2015) further explains that Hobsbawm’s (1983) definition indicates that “any traditions” could

be invented anywhere and anytime; similarly, many traditions have newly been created based on existing cultural roots so as to persuade people to believe that they have been inherited from the early days.

Additionally, the concept of “invented traditions” thereon can be applied to clarify how and how much the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing “utilize” Thai cultural and religious bases. The study on the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing can also serve as a record of contemporary Thai history and a reflection of social phenomena during the research period.

Correspondingly, the traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing are discussed in the article “New thoughts on “Phra Singh” of Chiang Mai” by Wichienkeo (2012) and the Master of Arts thesis entitled “An analysis of Sihinggkanidana in Lanna” of Amamedho (2011). The first study focuses on the loss of Chiangmai traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing, while the second one suggests that the original version of Phra Buddha Sihing Myth, the so-called Sihinga Nidana, was so influential to people’s beliefs and faiths that it gave rise to new traditions relevant to Phra Buddha Sihing.

Based on the literature review, there are traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing that have both been inherited and lost due to changes of socio-cultural contexts. However, most of the previous studies focused on inherited traditions, and the research on invented traditions has been limited. Therefore, this has become the focus of this research, and the idea of the invented tradition has been applied as the research framework.

## **Research Question**

How are the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing in present-day Thai society conceptually created?

## **Objectives**

1. To collect field data on invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing in present-day society.
2. To analyze the underlying concepts of this traditional invention.

## **Research Methodology**

The data on the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing were gathered from written documents and field research from October 2019 to June 2021 in the provinces where the Buddha images named “Phra Buddha Sihing – Phra Sing” are located – Bangkok, Chiangmai, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Trang, Maehongson and Samut Sakhon. Additional data such as online information, books, or supplementary field data were used for analysis.

To collect the field data, participant observation and informal interviews were used with 13 key informants who were conversant with rituals of Phra Buddha Sihing image: 6 Buddhist monks (including the abbots), 3 community leaders/ritual performers, and 4 villagers in the communities where one of the so-called Phra Buddha Sihing is located. None of the fieldwork data collection methods affected folk beliefs or local ways of life.

## **Findings**

### **1. Invented Traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing – Phra Sing**

Both the inherited and newly created rituals and traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing in Thai society at present were cultivated from a

strong belief in the sacredness of this Buddha image. These cultural phenomena not only emphasize how important ancient traditions are in today's society but also inform that the recently-invented ones have some particular purposes and functions in the current context.

Based on the preliminary survey and field data results, 14 traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing were found - 11 inherited traditions which are mostly the water-pouring and yearly worshipping ceremonies and 3 invented ones. Only the collection of invented traditions is mentioned in this study.

1.1) The Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace is a cultural activity that has been yearly organized by the Office of National Museums, Fine Arts Department since 2011. During the New Year festival, some remarkable Buddha images are brought to Phutthaisawan Throne Hall in the Front Palace, where Phra Buddha Sihing is enshrined as the principal sculpture; the activity is set up for Thai people's sake of auspiciousness. Solely for this study, the ritual was observed in 2020. In that year the event took place from 25<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – 5<sup>th</sup> January 2020 under the main theme "Various Artistic Styles of the Ten Precious Buddha Images". In general, people came into the throne hall to pay respect and offer flowers or garlands to Phra Buddha Sihing before worshipping other temporarily-enshrined images, saw the exhibition, and so on.

1.2) The Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple, Chiangmai Province is organized by monks of the monastery themselves during the festive time of the 15<sup>th</sup> waxing moon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> northern-Thai lunar month called "Yi Peng". The fieldwork document thereof was primarily collected in 2017; the ritual was performed for two days on 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> of November, starting from preaching Phra Sing Myth (Sihinga-nidāna) along with offering covert cloth to the image before

lighting small candle pots around Lai Kham Vihara to worship Phra Sing image in the first day evening, while ending with the miniature ship-launching ritual called “Long Sapao” on the second night.

1.3) The Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon Temple, Trang Province, was invented by Mr.Dejrat Somsiri, the provincial governor at that time, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2016, in Wat Hua Thanon Temple, Tambon Na Phala, Amphoe Mueang Trang, Trang Province, to symbolically express people’s wishes to get the Buddha image, which has been stolen since 18<sup>th</sup> January 1983, back to the community. Today this ritual is performed every Buddhist holy day before offering food to monks. From the fieldwork observation on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020, people lighted the candles and incenses to pay homage to the replica of Phra Buddha Sihing, meditated for making their wishes to reclaim the Buddha image, and offered food to the monks.

From the foregoing, dates of the invention, together with inventors, of these three invented traditions can be precisely ascertained. Despite being recently established, all these traditions were built upon ancient cultural bases. Underlying concepts of the establishment of these traditions are discussed in the following section.

## 2. Concepts of How to Create the Invented Traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing

Differentiated by hidden cultural bases that can be noticed from how each ritual is performed, two of these three invented traditions were built upon the concept of creating new traditions based on old beliefs, and one was established by combining various ancient customs.

## 2.1) Creating New Traditions Based on Old Beliefs

To invent a new tradition requires old beliefs as cultural materials. Two traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing built upon this concept include the Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace and the Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon, Trang Province.

*The Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace* is the New Year occasion when people are invited to worship Phra Buddha Sihing, along with other precious Buddha images particularly selected each year. According to data from the National Archives of Thailand, to worship Phra Buddha Sihing on the festive time of New Year for the sake of auspiciousness has been inherited from the old days. In the past, Phra Buddha Sihing was brought to a public place where people were allowed to pay respect to on Songkran and New Year festivals by performing the water-pouring ritual. Bangkok Metropolitan Administration thereat took responsibility for the ceremony celebrated by many theatrical performances.

Based on the traditional perception, the great transmigration of the Sun to Aries (in April in approximate), namely Songkran, is generally regarded as Thai New Year. For this reason, in 1889 the New Year Day was officially changed to the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, thereafter the public New Year Celebration was firstly organized by the government in 1934 when Phra Buddha Sihing was brought to the Royal Ground for the water-pouring and gold leaf-covering rituals performed by ordinary people (Chotamra, 1979), as well as in 1935. The cultural

activity has been recorded in the picture from the National Archives of Thailand as shown below.

**Figure 1**

National Archives of Thailand



Note: The National Archives of Thailand (1935). Water-pouring Ritual to Pay Respect to Phra Buddha Sihing Image on 1935 New Year [Photograph]. The National Archives of Thailand. NAT-P004124

Even though the Thai New Year's Day has been changed to the 1<sup>st</sup> of January since 1940 by the government under Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram, Phra Buddha Sihing was brought to the public on New Year's Day as before. The historical document kept in the National Archives in Honour of H.M. Queen Sirikit, Trang Province, states that the 1941 New Year Celebration took place from 31<sup>st</sup> December 1940 – 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1941 on the Royal Ground where people were allowed to perform the ritual of pouring water over Phra Buddha Sihing and covering the image with gold leaf.

Moreover, firework displays were held and several theatrical performances were given to celebrate the image of Phra Buddha Sihing (Monthon Phuket, Monthon Phuket 1.02.1.13/30 C.E./1941).

Public installation of Phra Buddha Sihing, together with the worshipping rituals, on New Year Festival, was continually set up as mentioned in the documents from the National Archives of Thailand that the activity was annually organized from 1957 - 1963 ( Ministry of Interior, MOI 0201.2.1.28.3/10-23 C.E./1953-1962; Ministry of Interior, MOI 0201.2.1.28.3/24-34 C.E./1961-1964).

Although in 1964 this Buddha image was not brought out to the Royal Ground for the New Year bathing and gold leaf-covering rituals, the Putthaisawan Throne Hall, where Phra Buddha Sihing was enshrined, was publicly opened for people to pay respect to the Buddha image as stated in the document from the National Archives of Thailand, particularizing the revival of New Year Tradition (Ministry of Education, MOE .0701.48/116 C.E./1963). In 1967, Phra Buddha Sihing was brought out to the Royal Ground for public worship on New Year Festival again as shown in the Tourist Organization of Thailand (TOT) booklet, specifying that the New Year worshipping rituals of Phra Buddha Sihing were performed, along with a firework display, from the evening of 31<sup>st</sup> December to the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1967.

Even though today this significant Buddha image is no longer brought out to the Royal Ground on New Year Festival, the Bangkok National Museum has organized the cultural New Year occasion “*The Auspicious Event of Thailand’s Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace*” to invite people to pay

respect to Phra Buddha Sihing, together with some selected Buddha images each year, inside the Phutthaisawan Throne Hall since 2011.

Apart from the belief of the New Year Worship for the sake of auspiciousness, mythological relevance between Phra Buddha Sihing and King Ramkhamhaeng the Great narrated in the widely-believed version of Phra Buddha Sihing Myth named *Sihinga-nidāna*, is pointed out almost every year.

It can be understood from the above that the Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace is built upon the long-lasting belief of Phra Buddha Sihing in Thailand.

*Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon Temple, Trang Province* has been performed since the Phra Buddha Sihing image of this monastery was stolen in 1983. In other words, this ritual, performed by folks every Buddhist holy day before offering food to the monks, manifests local people's hope for the recovery of the stolen Buddha image.

There are two overlapping definitions of “wish-making” (*adhiṭhāna* in Pali). On one hand, the Buddhist term *adhiṭhāna* can be summed up as “resolution” (Phra Brahmaganabhorn, 2012). On the other hand, folk laypersons define the word as “wish-making for a certain success” (Kerdkaew, 2011), which is generally relevant to their belief.

A careful look into the purpose of this ritual reveals that the core of this wish-making activity is to beg Phra Buddha Sihing image itself to miraculously stimulate anyone who

presently possesses the image to return it to the community. The cultural activity, thus, is built upon the belief of wish-making power traditionally inherited in Thai society.

From the above, it is apparent that both traditions originated from the creation of new traditions based on the beliefs that exist in that culture.

## 2.2) Combining Ancient Customs to Create a New One

In general, an invented tradition can be set up by combining ancient customs. The Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple, Chiangmai Province is created by the same cultural method.

It is found from the study that the *Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple, Chiangmai Province* is “invented” by combining 3 ancient customs inherited among the Northern Thai – the preaching ritual, the candle-lighting ritual, and the miniature ship-launching ritual, despite the different purposes of ritual performance in general contexts of Lanna Society.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lunar month of the Northern Thai, namely Lanna, the grand preaching ceremony called “Tang Tham Luang” is asynchronously performed in each community/monastery. In general, the subject of preaching is Vessantata Jataka or “the Tale of Prince Vessantara, the Gautama Buddha-to-be”, but the topic is changed to the myth of Phra Sing by the monks of Wat Phra Sing Temple to cultivate strong faith toward the principal Buddha image of the monastery.

The pot candle-lighting ritual, on the other hand, is adapted from the significant olden-aged ritual of Lanna culture derived from the myth of the five Buddhas of this aeon: to light “crow clawed-candles” to worship “the Female White Crow” who is believed to be the mother of the five Buddha-to-be”. Despite having very little information about when and how this particular candle-lighting ritual was performed, a historical document entitled “The Devotion of Religious Slaves to Wat Phra Sing Monastery” (1630) informs that when the Lanna Kingdom was under Toungoo Dynasty approximately in 1647, the Karen slaves descending from ones whom Queen Anoja of Chiangmai devoted to the long-abandoned temple named Wat Pa Phai Luang, Ngao Village, were collected by the abbot of Wat Phra Sing (the Chief Monk of Lanna at that time) so that these people had to send an amount of oil to light the candles to worship Phra Sing. This indicates that the candle-lighting ritual for Phra Sing lasts a very long time.

Regarding the miniature ship-launching ritual called Long Sapao, Rupin (2001) said that it is performed after the Buddhist Lend period, mostly on the 15<sup>th</sup> waxing moon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lanna month, namely Yi Peng Day. The purpose of this ritual was changed by Wat Phra Sing Temple from making offerings to ancestors to removing bad luck and worshipping Phra Sing some years ago.

As has just been described before, Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple, Chiangmai Province, is adaptively invented from odds and ends of the details from Lanna traditions to become a new cultural rooted-corresponding ritual.

The table below gives details of the three invented traditions.

**Table 1**

Invented Traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing – Phra Sing in Present Day Thai Society

<b>Name</b>	<b>Year of Invention</b>	<b>Initiator (s)</b>	<b>Ritual Purpose</b>
The Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace	2011	Office of National Museum, Fine Arts Department	To allow people to pay respect to Thailand's remarkable Buddha images during the new year festival
Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple, Chiangmai Province	Circa 2007	Monks of Wat Phra Sing Temple	To pay respect to Phra Buddha Sihing during Yi Peng Festival
The Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha	2016	Mr. Dejrat Simsiri, the Provincial Governor	To reclaim the stolen Buddha image

<b>Name</b>	<b>Year of Invention</b>	<b>Initiator (s)</b>	<b>Ritual Purpose</b>
Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon Temple, Trang Province		(at that time)	

Table 1 indicates that all these invented traditions share some features: 1) the exact beginning date and 2) the inventors that can be identified, which are dissimilar to the inherited ones of which none of the two details are clear.

The findings on to what extent these three newly created traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing are based on religious and cultural beliefs show that the long-lasting myths, beliefs, and rituals play important roles in the establishment of these traditions. These traditions not only serve people's psychological needs toward religion, but also build up secular power in the modern world e.g. to promote tourism and to negotiate with the government sectors, which will be discussed in the next section.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The findings on the underlying concepts of the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing can be discussed as follows.

### **1. Traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing – Phra Sing as the Invented Traditions**

The three invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing have been created under two concepts: creating new traditions based on old beliefs and combining ancient customs to create a new one. These two concepts can lead to the belief that the

invented traditions are the olden practices. These ideas are consistent with Hobsbawm's idea that traditional invention often relies on cultural and religious roots to convince people to believe in its "oldness" (Nathalang, 2015).

It is noticeable that all the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing have not been originally created by the local folks themselves, but by the government sectors – Bangkok National Museum, Fine Arts Department, to set up the "Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace" and the former provincial governor of Trang province to establish the "Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon Temple" and by the monastery - the "Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple" by the monks of Wat Phra Sing.

These three traditions were invented to serve different purposes. The purpose of the "Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace" is to invite people to pay respect to Phra Buddha Sihing on New Year Festival for auspiciousness. The "Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple in Chiang Mai was invented to allow people to pay respect to the Phra Buddha Sihing image on the Yi Peng Day, whereas the prime objective of the "Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon Temple" in Trang is to manifest Trang people's firm intention, as well as negotiation, to get the stolen Phra Buddha Sihing back.

However, a closer look at the purposes of these invented traditions suggests that each tradition of Phra Buddha Sihing can be regarded as a "political tool". The name "Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace" implies that the key centre of "the Kingdom of

Thailand” is “Bangkok”, where Phra Buddha Sihing and other “remarkable Buddha images of the Land” are located. The “Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple” was invented to benefit Chiang Mai’s tourism, which can bring Thailand’s economic stability, leading to improved state welfare and the well-being of the nation. The “Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon Temple” was utilized by the provincial governor at that time as “a political method” to rule people in his position with the responsibility to reclaim the remarkable Buddha image back to the province.

It is noticeable that all the traditions have underlying political purposes. This is consistent with Hobsbawm’s (1983, cited in Nathalang, 2019) idea that most of the invented traditions in modern society originate from state policies. In other words, the nation-state itself invents the traditions as a type of political discourse. These ideas, thereof, correspond to Hongsuwan’s (2015) suggestion – the principal purpose of inventing traditions inclines to profane needs than sacred objectives.

By employing the concept of invented traditions in the study of invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing, it was found that all traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing are based on “traditional” ways of belief and ritual practices. The myths of Phra Buddha Sihing, together with the beliefs in the Buddha image, are significantly hidden behind these invented traditions, as well.

## 2. Invented Traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing – Phra Sing as Creative Traditions

It is figured out from the research that the three invented traditions can be identified as creative traditions,

especially by Nathalang's (2019) definition that the term "creative tradition" thoroughly means both the olden traditions which have already been applied to be contemporarily presented and the recently-created ones with new practicing forms, contents, and purposes that are necessary for today's creative economy, tourism or global contexts.

All invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing can be "precisely dated" and the inventors can also be identified. Firstly, the "Auspicious Event of Thailand's Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace" was started in 2011 by the Bangkok National Museum under the supervision of Mrs. Somsuda Leeyawanich, the Director-General of Fine Arts Department, and Mr. Anant Choochot, the director of Bangkok National Museum at that time.

The "Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon Temple", secondly, is performed for the first time on May 1, 2016 in the temple where Phra Buddha Sihing was once located according to the "initiative idea" of Mr. Dejrat Somsiri, the former provincial governor.

Lastly, without knowing the exact date when the "Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple" was invented, the fieldwork data point out that this tradition was established approximately in 2007 in cooperation with Phra Dharmasiddhācārāya (Nu Thāvaro), the former abbot of Wat Phra Sing; Phra Devasiṅhavarācārāya, the abbot of Wat Phra Sing; and Phra Khru Palat La Amamedho, the assistant abbot of Wat Phra Sing.

The above information indicates one of the characteristics of an invented tradition – its date of invention and its inventor can be clearly identified. Correspondingly, Nathalang (2015) defines the term “invented traditions” in Thai society as newly-created traditions having practicing forms, contents, and purposes which have “never been seen before” in “that particular area”. Invented traditions, herein, include traditions that have been applied from olden customs and have recently been built upon inherited beliefs. Importantly, it is possible to “identify the dates of invention”.

Since “creative traditions” belong to “creative folklore”, socio-cultural contexts that influence the invention of traditions should be considered as well.

The Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple, in other words, is performed under a tourism economic context. The ultimate aims of the ritual are not only to worship Phra Sing on the night of Yi Peng, but also to participate in tourism events organized by Chiangmai Municipality Office, the local administration sector that requests ones who take responsibility for tourist sites to set up cultural activities like candle-lighting, Vessantara Jakata preaching, krathong-launching, etc. to “entertain” tourists. For this reason, Wat Phra Sing Monastery created the pot candle-lighting ritual, which has become popular until now.

In addition to giving people the opportunity to pay respect to Phra Buddha Sihing for an auspicious new year, the Bangkok National Museum organizes the “Auspicious Event of Thailand’s Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace” to promote museum tourism during the New Year Vacation by exempting visitors to the museum from paying the entrance fee.

The preliminary data and field data show that both the “Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple” and the “Auspicious Event of Thailand’s Buddha Image Worship at the Front Palace” need a picturesque background for photoshoots, either with the candle lights or with the displayed Buddha images, so ones who take responsibility for each invented tradition have to keep in mind how to set up lighting for photoshoots.

In the information age, the Wish-making Ritual for the Reclaiming of Phra Buddha Sihing of Wat Hua Thanon is a symbolic action of the local folks to retrieve Phra Buddha Sihing that has been stolen since 1983. Mr. Dejrat Somsiri, the ritual initiator and the provincial governor at that time, raised the idea to the abbot of Wat Hua Thanon Temple together with the community leader that local people should show to those in possession of the stolen Buddha image and those in authority how this Buddha image is spiritually important to them and they still long for its return. On that first occasion, the provincial governor invited TV reporters and pressmen to broadcast the ritual performance and asked the folks to share the activity through online social media to send their collective will to the person who possesses the Buddha image and the authority in the country to see this ritual.

Capitalism and the creative economy affected the 2020 Yi Peng Ritual in Wat Phra Sing Temple. Its new interpretation displayed in the monastery’s online media is that the main purposes of the pot candle-lighting ritual are “to remove bad luck, increase personal wealth, enhance auspiciousness, and confirm ones’ success and prosperity, not merely to worship the Buddha image anymore. The realm of the objectives of the ritual extends from the sacred sphere to the real world of capitalism, somewhat by today’s creative economic impulse.

Concerning “creative folklore”, traditions and rituals are “cultural data” that can be reestablished based on existing religious beliefs for new purposes in today’s social context. This shows that social context is one of the key factors that contributes to the creation of new traditions in Thai society.

The results of the study show that the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing can be classified into the kingdom level and local level. Each of them has its particular process, elements, purposes, etc., but the key common feature of these rituals is their role in politics and governance in today’s social context.

In summary, the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing demonstrate the dynamics of traditions in today’s Thai society that can be adapted, applied, re-interpreted, or invented for different purposes in today’s changing socio-cultural contexts.

Based on the preliminary data and field data, it was found that the three invented traditions tend to be carried on until they become “permanently-inherited traditions” because “the concepts” of inventing these traditions are based on legends, beliefs, and rituals inherent in Thai culture and ways of life.

## **Recommendations**

### 1. Research recommendation

Thanks to the fact that the invented traditions of Phra Buddha Sihing originated from tourism and creative economy, these should be comparatively discussed with other similar-type cultural phenomena to build up further knowledge of contemporary Thai cultural dynamism.

## 2. Policy recommendation

Since the study reveals how the creative economy affects cultural dynamism on a large scale, it should be thoroughly considered by tourism organizations how to “preserve” local identities in the dynamistic world along with “building upon” creative culture from inherited cultural capitals.

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