

An Alternative Model of Inheritance of Folk Belief with Folk Art in the Context of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Case Studies of the Local Deity Patrol in China and the Phi Khon Nam Ceremony in Thailand

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Abstract

This article is based on research examining the development of folk beliefs related to folk art in the context of intangible cultural heritage, while exploring an alternate model of inheritance based on discourse, collective memory, and aesthetics in everyday life. The research was based on two case studies: the local deity patrol in Gao Chun district, Jiangsu province, China; and the Phi Khon Nam celebrations in Tambon Nasao, Chiang Khan district, Loei province, Thailand. Qualitative research methods were used, including participant observation and in-depth interviews from 2016 to 2020 as well as follow-up fieldwork. The research found that folk beliefs as carried by folk art still have great vitality in daily life. This process is carried out through the internal driving force of aesthetic experiences by villagers and folk artisans that include both ethics and pragmatism in transforming collective memory. This is true even if authorized heritage discourse emphasizes only a small portion of intangible cultural heritage, and neglects the integrative relationship between folk beliefs and art carriers and their aesthetic value. Folk belief has been transformed into an aesthetic experience because it has become a dynamic and active existence in the process of modernization, and it deeply embodies the harmony between individuals and collectivity. This alternative conscious inheritance mode by the aesthetics of

everyday life operates beyond the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage at the governmental level.

Keywords: cross-cultural studies, folk belief with folk art, authorized heritage discourse, collective memory, aesthetics of everyday life

Introduction

Folk beliefs that are parts of intangible cultural heritage often interact closely with folk arts. They coexist and become indispensable parts of one another. Folk art is a special art form different from fine art, and its aestheticization is directly related to folk belief. In southeast China, the local deity patrol as the expression of a folk belief embodies a profound and complicated relationship with other forms of folk art through the perspective of rural culture. However, in modern society, the function of folk belief has become different from what it was in traditional society. Thus, the role of folk art in folk belief has been changing.

There are many examples of intangible cultural heritage around the world that cannot be preserved or protected by government efforts or scholarly discourse. Moreover, as modern science and technology are evolving quickly, a practical problem is how to develop and pass down this kind of folk belief with folk art as its carrier. Now, although there is a focus on folk belief or folk art, their innate relationship is seldom paid attention to in folk activities. Based on the relationship between folk belief and folk art, the question is whether or not the protective behavior of authority becomes the main driving force for the survival and inheritance of folk belief with folk art. Is there an internal driving force to promote this kind of folk belief and consciously develop it beyond the safeguarding behavior of authorities and the commercialism of tourism?

In the present study, the local deity patrol (shortened to PLD, Chinese: 出菩萨, Pinyin: Chū púsā) in China and the ceremony of Phi Khon Nam (shortened to PKN) in Thailand, are folk rituals in which wooden masks play a major role (Figure 1, 2). Both are closely concerned with the worship of the water element. The PLD expresses

people's determination to fight floods and disasters with the help of local deities, while the PKN is organized by farmers who pray for rain when they plant the paddy at the start of the rainy season. In the processions of both places are the medium between local villagers and spirits. This study examines the transformation of the PLD and PKN and explores an alternate model of inheritance based on the concepts of discourse, collective memory, and aesthetics in everyday life.

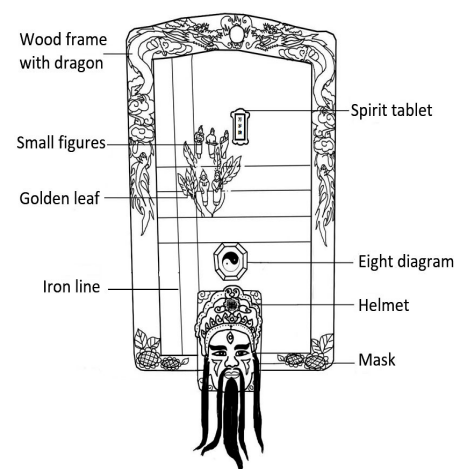


Figure 1 The sketch of Kueitou
Source: Author



Figure 2 The mask of Phi Khon nam
Source: Author

Literature Review

Under the backdrop of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, scholars have put forth theoretical discussions as well as historical, reflective, and suggestive explorations. Kurin (2004: 67) contends that many people do not know what 'intangible cultural heritage' means, while in the view of Kirshenblatt (2004: 58), people are not only objects of cultural preservation, but also subjects. They are cultural carriers and transmitters as well as agents in heritage enterprise itself. All heritage interventions, like the globalizing pressures they are trying to counteract,

change the relationship between people and what they do. Smith (2006: 4) sees heritage as discourse. She argues that authorized heritage discourse (AHD) maps out the authority of expertise, through the ideas of ‘inheritance’ and patrimony. In another work, Smith (2011: 8) contends that all types of heritage are intangible, arguing that it seems quite artificial and makes little sense for scholars to try to separate the tangible from the intangible. According to this idea, intangible cultural heritage is “tangible” because it usually utilizes physical forms, patterns, construction, or other items to embody its spiritual characteristics. AHD still plays an important role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. In rural society, AHD usually refers to the discourse of local authorities or experts and scholars which is concerned with the form, organization, process, and aesthetics of intangible cultural heritage.

Intangible cultural heritage is closely related to aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places, and landscapes in which collective behaviors are embedded. Dewey (2005: 36) demonstrates that aesthetic experience is possible in every aspect of people’s daily lives through his discussion of “having an experience,” ranging from eating a meal or playing a game of chess to taking part in a political campaign. Kupfer (1984: 216) emphasizes that art is merely a part of human experience and that human experience possesses an “aesthetic” quality, which points to the direction of building a new form of living aesthetics based on everyday life. Foucault claims the aesthetics of existence are a solution to the shortcomings of modern society. He identifies “the key elements of attention to the details of the world around us, viewing the world from different perspectives, and the acknowledgment of aesthetics as a form of knowledge. Individuals should thus dedicate their lives to the art of living, which entails connecting aesthetic existence and the ethics of authenticity while overcoming the separation of art and everyday living (Liu and Carter, 2014: xv-xvi).

Many cultural traditions have long been related to the aesthetics of daily life. According to Witherspoon (1977: 151-178), in some cultural traditions, such as that of the Navajo, aesthetic considerations are thoroughly integrated into daily activities, like making things such

as tools. Moreover, Higgins (2005: 679-692) points out that in some Japanese and Chinese traditions with distinctive art-making experiences of painting, literature, theatre, and the like, aesthetic practices permeate people’s daily life in rural areas. Thus, the aesthetic experience often begins with people’s participation in folklore practice activities, such as the patrols, processions, and other ceremonies.

For the two projects of intangible cultural heritage mentioned above, Yang (2018) emphasizes only the existing status of the PLD as a case in China. In Thailand, scholars including Wichiranon (2016) and Chang (2018), pay more attention to the role and function of the PKN. Because of the local government’s subsequent intervention, tension has been generated between the authorities and residents in some similar ceremonies or festivals. Kaengjampa (2019: 170-93) believes that local people can use this policy by transforming similar heritage¹ into an activity to support tourism as a bargaining tool. They often associate these kinds of folk activities with tourism and seldom view the folk belief and folk art as a whole, or emphasize their internal relationship to the process of inheritance.

Although the PLD and PKN occur at different times and in different spaces, similar situations appear, such as the reposition of authorized heritage discourses, transformation and influence of collective memory, as well as the role and position of folk craftsmen. For these issues, integrated research involving form, spirit, process, relationship, and the public is important for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, through fieldwork in China and Thailand, the study sequentially takes a “people-oriented” approach in safeguarding

¹ In Loei province, Dan Chai district, there is another festival known as Phi Ta Khon, or Ghost Festival, similar to Phi Khon Nam. It is held in the sixth lunar month (Thai calendar), and involves music, dance, games, masks, fireworks and religious sermons. But there are some differences between the two festivals, especially in the origin of rituals and the form of the masks. Phi Ta Khon is strongly related to ritual telling of the Buddhist Vessantara Jataka. The mask is made of the sheaths or bottom part of thick palm leaf stems. Bamboo sticky rice steaming baskets are stitched onto the tops of the sheaths to make the top section of the mask, then decorated with large protruding noses, peering eyes and terrifying teeth. The origin of Phi Khon Nam is traced to the ancestral spirits, “Chao Pu” and buffalo spirits. The mask is carved from wood and painted with various colors and patterns.

intangible cultural heritage at present and attempts to make up for the deficiencies in the past.

Materials and Methods

The research primarily used qualitative research methods, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, follow-up fieldwork, and return visits from 2016 to 2020. Questionnaires were also used as an auxiliary method.

The project conducted fieldwork in Daidong and Yongsong villages in Gubai town, Gao Chun district, Jiangsu province in China; and in Tambon (sub-district) Nasao, Chiang Khan district, Loei province in Thailand. The representative of folklore is the PLD² with the wood carving of Kueitou.³ The village holds a small-scale PLD ceremony once a year. Every few years, several villages hold a large-scale event that combines several varieties of folk arts.

Tambon Nasao has a population of 11,453 and is divided into 15 *moo* (หมู่บ้าน or villages). In the beginning, only *Moo* 1 held the PKN ceremony, which then expanded to *Moo* 7, 13, and 14. Subsequently, the sub-district administration wanted to expand the scale of the ceremony to increase tourism, so all of the villages joined the ceremony.

In China, interviews were administered to fifty participants of the PLD in Daidong and Yongsong (who also filled out the questionnaire), while in Thailand, twenty villagers as informants in Tambon Nasao were interviewed to explore their overall view of this kind of folk belief with folk art according to different ages, genders, and educational levels (Table 1). In-depth interviews were conducted in Gaocun district (in China) and Tambon Nasao (in Thailand), where the key informants were primarily government staff and folk craftsmen.

² The PLD as the main body of the local temple fair was said to commemorate the Cishan emperor who controlled floods in Han dynasty initially, and the Dongping emperor Zhang Xun in the Anshi Rebellion of the Tang dynasty in folk legend. Subsequently, people built temples for them in some regions of Gaocun district. Now other local deities, such as Erlang Shen, are part of the PLD.

³ The Kueitou is a combined woodcarving, consisting of a mask, helmet, and a wooden frame decorated with many small figures of heroes and golden wood leaves, about 90-100cm height, 60-80 cm width. It is carved from the poplar or camphor tree. In daily life, it is enshrined in the ancestral temple. When the PLD is held, villagers will select a special man to wear the Kueitou, incarnating as the local deity.

Table 1 Basic information about informants in PLD and PKN

Items	Total	Gender		Age					Educational level		
		Male	Female	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Over 60	Primary school	Middle school	College
PLD	50	24	26	10	19	8	5	8	8	39	3
PKN	20	8	12	4	6	5	2	3	0	19	1

Source: Author

Results and Discussion

Similarities and Differences between the PLD and PKN at Different Times and Spaces

Accidents or calamities in daily life cannot be fully predicted or eliminated. Faced with all kinds of difficulties and setbacks, people's spiritual needs often depend on folk beliefs that allow them to survive with confidence. In agricultural society, people's beliefs are related to arable land, harvest, and human reproduction. Therefore, folk beliefs have always been a necessary part of farmers' lives. From the perspective of cross-cultural studies, although the PLD and PKN as case studies exist in different times and spaces, their origins are similar and are derived from the worship of the water element in agrarian society, and their basic form and content are also homogenous and based on local characteristics (Table 2, Table 3).

Table 2 The basic situation of the PLD and PKN and the similarities between them

	Classification	Natural element	Related folk art	Form	Other folk art	Official		
						Support for craftsman	Function	Aesthetic
PLD	Folk belief	Flood (Water)	Wooden Kueitou	Patrol / parade	Folk music, martial arts, handicrafts, and meals	Not granted for the representative inheritors	Local identification, ethical norms, interpersonal relationships, harmony with nature	The beauty of folk art, aesthetic pleasure of the procession
PKN	Folk belief	Rain (Water)	Wooden mask of buffalo	Patrol / parade	Dance performances flower floats, folk music and food	No support from the local government		

Table 3 The basic situation of the PLD and PKN and the differences
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between them

	Dura- tion	Main deity	Subordinate deity/spirit	Spirit medium	The procession	Participation of local government
PLD	2 days	Cishan emperor / Dongping emperor	Erlang Shen other local deities	Common villagers	Patrol without flower floats	Not inscribed in the list of intangible cultural heritage. The government only carries out macro-regulation and supervises; avoids using excessive labor and funding.
PKN	3 days	Ancestor spirit (Chao Pu)	The cattle spirit/ Phaya Thaen	Chao Mae Nang Tiam	Procession with flower floats	In recent years, the local government has begun to support and participate in the ceremony to develop tourism.

Source: Author

The PLD in Gao Chun district of China slowly began to become revitalized in the late 1980s, in which “superstitious” elements were gradually removed and the ceremony was transformed into one of folk beliefs. Generally, the PLD is held on February 8th and July 24th (Chinese lunar calendar), but now it can be held before or after the Spring Festival. As for organizers of the PLD, they are from the senior villagers’ center (老人会) and the village council. At four or five o’clock in the morning of that day, they begin to bring offerings to worship the deity in the form of Kueitou that is enshrined in the hall of the ancestral temple. Then, the patrol begins, with a selected local villager being possessed by local deity, puts on the Kueitou and the Chinese traditional robe to join the parade. On the way to the patrol, the villagers set off firecrackers, beat gongs, and play local musical instruments. When the patrol returns to the ancestral temple, the Kueitou is taken off the villager possessed by the local deity, and placed on the incense burner table. Finally, the elder organizers and the staff members organize the villagers to share a meal together. From revitalization in the late 1980s until now, the PLD has retained the original procedures. However, the function and significance of the PLD have been mediated and transformed as this event continually adapts to modernization. From the description above, it can be seen that the procession or patrol becomes the main form of folk belief along with the show and performance of

folk art in the PLD in China.

The PKN in Thailand is a special tradition in Tambon Nasao. Three kinds of spiritual beliefs are combined in the ceremony as follows. The first is the worship of the ancestral spirits, “Chao Pu” (namely Chao Pu Jiramanop and Chao Pu Phanphiphop, who are brothers), and they usually are located in the shrine of Moo 1 of Tambon Nasao. The second is the belief in buffalo spirits. It is believed that they act as the guardians of Chao Pu when he communicates with the human world. The third is the worship of Phaya Thaen, (namely the rain god). Villagers in Isan often hold a ceremony to worship Phaya Thaen, asking for sufficient rain to fall on time. Annually the PKN is celebrated during the 1st-3rd of the waning days in the sixth lunar month (Thai calendar). Generally, the second day, which is called the “procession day,” is considered the most important day of the ceremony. The main activities include an offering: five sets of white gardenias and fire rockets of small size to offer to Chao Pu; a magnificent procession with Phi Khon Nam, dancing, and floats made of flowers ending at Wat Pho Si. Meanwhile, the households prepare food to welcome relatives who have come home from working or studying elsewhere, and acquaintances from other villages who come to visit and watch the procession.

Neglect of Aesthetic Value When the Authorized Heritage Discourse Elucidates PLD and PKN

In the context of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, two types of authoritative discourse play an important role in the development of folk belief with folk art as the carrier: the administrative authority discourse of local government, and the academic discourse of experts or scholars. Although their power of discourse cannot completely dominate the development of this kind of folklore, the positive or negative roles they play should not be ignored.

In China, the authorities provide the organizational permission for intangible cultural heritage, especially those which are on the government’s list. There are three organizations for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Gao Chun district: the leading group,

which is composed of the leaders or principals in the district cultural bureau; the center for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, which consists of the staff working in the district cultural bureau or cultural development company; and the expert group, which is composed of retired staff members of the cultural bureau and other experts at several universities. They mainly give advice evaluating the local intangible inheritor and projects. The district government emphasizes safeguarding activities, inheritors, and the promotion of the folk significance of the PLD, but does not pay attention to the aesthetic value of the patrol with the Kueitou. Wang (aged 67), as the former director of the center, combined the advice of other experts and considered the PLD a spontaneous activity. Local people could understand and promote the great spirit of these deities that once changed the world when they joined the patrol and expressed their determination to fight floods and other disasters. Through the passing down of folklore, the tradition of flood control could remain alive in psychology and action. Thus, the folk activity was in harmony with life and nature (Wang, [Pseudonym], 2019, 2020). From the official perspective, the social significance of the PLD was strengthened in public understanding, but this did not address its aesthetic value in the villagers' daily life.

Some scholars focused on the folk craftsmen and tried to promote their works to the outside world. In China, a set of Kueitou and five masks of Wuchang spirits made by Huang (aged 73) were collected by the Museum of Anthropology at Yunnan University in 2006. Although scholars in the university introduced the masks' place of origin, they did not explain in detail the relationship between the PLD and Kueitou, the dynamic beauty of Kueitou, or the charming local identity of the PLD.

In Thailand, the local government has recently begun to participate in the PKN ceremony. In 2017, the local government intended to make some changes from previous years by holding an official opening ceremony with some high-ranking persons from various state agencies taking part to review the procession, including the head

of the administration organization of Tambon Nasao, representatives of the Udon Thani rice department, and the Loei branch of the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Apart from the magnificent group of Phi Khon Nam dancers, there were other four dance groups from 15 villages in the procession. The performance of each group was judged by a panel from Ban Mai school, and the judges' choices were based on various components, including the dance performances, the floats, the beauty of the masks, and costumes.

In July 2020, Sarasee (aged 42), as the spokesman of public relations in Tambon Nasao, explained that a large-scale PKN festival was held in the past two years, and the government provided financial support to increase its influence and popularity. In 2020, although the PKN was not held because of caution over the spread of COVID-19, the government combined it with other traditional festivals so that the supporting funds could be more effectively used and distributed, and it was also more conducive to protecting the preservation of these ceremonies (Sarasee [Pseudonym], 2020).

It should be mentioned that aesthetics is a form of discourse just as knowledge is discourse. Scholars have been participating in and improving the PKN from their own perspectives of aesthetics discourse. For the masks and robes used in the ceremony, scholars at some universities also did research and made an infographic design to reflect the aesthetic attributes of Phi Khon Nam. However, their information was not entirely accurate, and as a result, local people and craftsmen did not adopt their advice on how to improve the masks (Figure 3). Thamthip (aged 59) thought the pattern of the central region of Thailand that scholars used looked more beautiful and exquisite, but the color, shape, line, and symbol were not in harmony with the distinct tradition of Phi Khon Nam, and did not embody the local identity of Isan culture. Consequently, they continued using the previous traditional pattern to decorate the mask to represent their cultural identification (Thamthip [Pseudonym], 2020).



Figure 3 The pattern is designed by scholars in the left

Source: Author

According to these procedures for safeguarding and developing behavior, the local governments paid more attention to the procession and promoting tourism. The authorized discourse neglected the reality that the performance, artworks, and aesthetic value of the procession should be combined to embody the complex relationship between folk belief and folk art. They did not aim at the authenticity of the PLD or PKN, and ignored the fact that the authentic aesthetic experience might become an important factor in developing and passing down local identification to future generations.

The Artisans' Internal Driving Force to Create Authentic Beauty for the PLD and PKN

The people in the Gao Chun district retain their enthusiasm for the PLD which has directly influenced the revitalization of the carving of the Kueitou mask. A large number of folk artisans have formed a folkart foundation, popularized wood carving, and promoted the inheritance of

craftsmanship. Liu (aged 62) has carved the Kueitou and other wooden statues for more than 30 years. In the 1980s, he began to carve the Kueitou. His meticulous carving skill is admired by the villagers. During that period, Kueitou masks were in short supply, as his works were often ordered by the surrounding villages. He established a small wood carving factory in 2002 with more than 20 workers at the peak of development. As time went by, however, there were fewer orders for wood carvings because the Kueitou mask was only enshrined in the ancestral temple, and was not easily damaged, and consequently, his factory closed in 2008 (Liu [Pseudonym], 2019). Now, Liu has only four apprentices to make wood carvings and he works in his spare time to carve masks of Kueitou and the goddess Matus.

Although folk artisans did not pay attention to the governmental organization for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, and their skills and artwork have little chance of being sufficiently promoted, they continued to engage in woodcarving. In his motivation to make Kueitou masks, Liu felt that he gained happiness and a reputation in the creative process. He also admitted that the carvings supplemented his family's income (Liu [Pseudonym], 2019). Huang, another artisan, had a similar experience.

The representative inheritors receive a governmental reward at various levels in China.⁴ The official strategy creates competition among people wanting to be the inheritors that benefits only a small group of folk artisans. Liu and Huang still have not appeared on the list of representative inheritors of Gao Chun district in 2019. They both felt that if they were honored as representative inheritors, their craftsmanship would be recognized by the authorized discourse. Although they still have not received the honor, they continue to do their best to pass on the craft and create woodcarvings for the local people (Liu and Huang [Pseudonym], 2019).

⁴ Since 2016, the representative inheritor of national-level projects can get government funding of 20,000 RMB per year, the one at the provincial level can get 5,000 RMB, while the one at the municipal level (age 60 and above) can get 2,000 RMB as a living allowance in Nanjing.

In Tambon Nasao, there are four craftsmen who can make the masks. Only small differences between their works could be observed; for example, some craftsmen braided ropes with banana fibers or other fabrics, or cut some colorful strips of cloth, then hung them on the rope connecting the end point of the rattan horns that symbolize rain. They also decorated the rattan with some ribbon flowers to beautify them. Thamthip (aged 59) was good at making buffalo masks in Moo 14. More than 20 masks are hung on a wall in his house. As for the spirit costume, he said that in the past rags and old sheets were often cut into strips to adorn old T-shirts or robes, to symbolize the buffalo's coat. Now he likes making a new Phi Khon Nam robe for participants to wear comfortably (Thamthip [Pseudonym], 2020).

Some innovations have also appeared in the PKN dance routine based on the enthusiasm of local artisans. A retired teacher, Ta-Kom (aged 68), invented seven movements (Figure 4), as follows: inviting the buffalo's spirit out to attend the ceremony (Thai: ทำออกเหล่า), paying respect to Chao Pu (ทำครอบเจ้าปู่), performing merit-making (ทำบุญ), praying for rain (ทำขอฟ้าขอฝน), having fun splashing water (ทำเมฆน้ำซำตม), the buffalo's spirits gathering to return after having fun (ทำตอมเหล่ง), and bidding farewell to Chao Pu (ทำลาเลิก). Ta-Kom's inspiration was derived from the movements of Chao Mae Nang Tiam in the rituals (Ta-Kom [Pseudonym], 2020). He refined and simplified these movements, which have become fixed dance postures of Phi Khon Nam in recent years. During the interview, the creative motivation expressed by Thamthip and Ta-Kom resembled that of the Chinese folk artisans. They explained that they did not get any financial support from the local government, but they modified and refined the folk arts, hoping to perfect them (Thamthip and Ta-Kom [Pseudonym], 2020). These artistic innovations were based on the traditional local culture and retained the local identity, so that the transformation was easier for local people to accept, develop, and inherit in their daily lives.



Figure 4 The Parade of Phi Khon Nam

Source: <https://www.sac.or.th/databases/rituals/en/detail.php?id=109>

From Disaster Prevention to Amusement: The Transformation from Collective Memory to Ethics-based Aesthetics

Connerton (2000: 5) points out that memory belongs not only to individuals, but there is also a kind of memory called “collective memory” or “social memory.” Collective memory changes with the times. When villagers appreciate the folk belief with folk art as a carrier in traditional society, pious faith blends with the artistic mentality of seeking beauty, and the proportion of faith is higher than aesthetic perception. Although ritual procedures of faith have still been preserved because of collective memory, this devout faith has also weakened as time goes on. More and more aesthetic experiences have been incorporated into folk beliefs.

In Daidong village, most of the villagers did not blindly believe that they could prevent floods by asking the local deity to drive away the evil spirits, so the Kueitou was not entirely a carrier of local deity that they worshiped and sacrificed. Thus, their roles and functions have

changed considerably from the past. Through questionnaires and interviews with villagers, changes in collective memory could be discerned. Sixteen percent of the informants focused on the local deity's function and ignored the Kueitou's beauty. Thirty-eight percent paid more attention to the deity than to mask's beauty, forty-six percent did not care about the function of the local deity, but they did believe that Kueitou gave people more aesthetic feelings now. Especially among people aged 31-40, about fifty-eight percent enjoyed the PLD and enjoyed more entertainment and aesthetic pleasure in such an atmosphere, while sixteen percent thought the PLD might exorcise evil, prevent calamities, and protect the village. Twenty-six percent agreed with both opinions.

Through the interviews of the villagers in Nasao sub-district in 2020, similar results emerged. All of the informants considered the buffalo mask to be closely related to the PKN ceremony and an important part of this kind of folklore. Eighty-five percent of them thought the activity of folk belief had begun to be transformed into folk entertainment, and they appreciated folk art and gained aesthetic enjoyment as participants and spectators joining the procession. But the informants (over the age of 50) thought the PKN ceremony still retained its useful and ethical functions based on the local culture, and they still hoped that it could exert its influence on pursuing good fortune and avoiding disasters nowadays.

Traditional folk rituals are important carriers of collective memory, which has an important integrational function in social groups. Originally, the purpose of the PLD and the PKN was to avoid natural disasters. Later, however, their functions and significance were transformed, with the entertainment element being absorbed into the collective memory and continuously strengthened in the present.

The Final Orientation of Aesthetic in Everyday Life beyond Safeguarding the Intangible Inheritance

During the fieldwork in Daidong and Yongsong villages, the villagers were more concerned that PLD should remain an active part in their

folklife rather than about it being inscribed on the list of intangible cultural heritage. Among the informants, only thirty-two percent understood that the Cishan temple fair (PLD) in Yaxi town had been inscribed on the list of the Nanjing municipality in 2007. Among them, about sixty-three percent thought the project did have a considerable impact on the PLD in their village because the PLD was a spontaneous activity of the villagers. One-fourth of them felt that the project only made other PLDs more feasible or legal, but that the PLD still depended on the strength of the villagers themselves. One-eighth of them had no opinion. As for the PKN, all of the informants thought the ceremony was still inherited consciously as a part of their lives, even if the local government would not support it financially.

In the beginning, the activities of PLD and PKN were full of the spirit of utilitarianism in content and form. The symbols embodied in Kueitou are often used to evade harmful spirits and pray for blessings, such as the Eight Diagrams, the pattern of two dragons playing with a pearl. Later, villagers viewed Kueitou not only as the carrier of the belief but as an artistic work full of vitality because their status changed from the three-dimensional static space to the longitudinal motion space in the patrol. Especially for the younger group (aged 21-40) in 2019, about forty-eight percent of them thought Kueitou would be inherited through the functional transformation towards the aesthetic value in their daily life along with the activities of folk belief in the future. As for the masks of PKN, the craftsmen paint them in red or black, draw an exaggerated mouth and eyes, and then decorate them with traditional patterns, such as waves, lotuses, and cloud patterns. For the PKN, seventy-five percent of the informants thought the villagers had begun to change towards the perception of aesthetics through the adjustment of the performance and its function in modern society.

In April 2016, when the PLD began in Yongsong village (Figure 5), the procession marched along the field full of golden oilseed rape flowers under the blue sky, which displayed the traditional aesthetic concept of "nature and humans are one." In 2017, hundreds of local people dressed as Phi Khon Nam gathered in Ban Mai School,

joined the ceremony (Figure 4). They wore masks and costumes which were colorful and spectacular; vehicles were decorated with a variety of farm products and local basketry items. A bustling spectacle attracted villagers, photographers, and folk lovers in the PLD and PKN. They watched the parade and appreciated the exquisite wood carving and the dynamic beauty of the whole procession.



Figure 5 The patrol of Cishan Emperor

Source: Author

People may enter into the aesthetic dimension to let their lives become more colorful and meaningful. It would become the final goal if they would appreciate folk art in everyday life. This dimension makes aesthetics overlap with ethics. When Liu and Carter (2014: XV) mention the aesthetics of everyday life, they point out a dilemma originating in the “inherent tension between the traditional aesthetic experience and the typical aesthetic experience of everyday life.” The tension intends

to resolve the contradiction between the traditional aesthetic experience as “abstracted and disinterested” and the “active and ethical” features of ordinary experience. The activities of folk belief with folk art provide a display platform for folk art and reveal the beauty of the folk landscape for the villagers and spectators. The aesthetic emotions mixed with the psychology of belief become a special psychological activity and enable villagers to experience a unique aesthetic journey.

Conclusion

The governments of China and Thailand have introduced and issued various regulations and policies regarding intangible cultural heritage. In both cases, these are top-down processes that safeguard a small number of representative inheritors and projects of intangible cultural heritage, amounting to just a drop of water in the ocean as there are more intangible examples of cultural heritage in rural areas not yet listed for governmental support.

From the perspective of cross-cultural studies, it does not matter whether the PLD or the PKN ceremony exerts more power in integrating human resources and social resources than other beliefs because of the co-existing relationship between folk belief and folk art. The collective memory of each has been transformed from that of preventing disaster to entertaining the people. The villagers and others are willing to participate in folk activities. Therefore, folk beliefs with folk art as a carrier are transformed into aesthetic experiences. People have gradually integrated aesthetic attributes into the human experience via folk art. This kind of aesthetic experience as a form of knowledge acts as a solution to the unmet present in modern society. More importantly, this kind of belief with folk art becomes a powerful case for demonstrating that folk art forms a bridge between aesthetics and daily life and mediates the tension and conflict between the traditional aesthetic experience and ordinary experience. The internal driving force by which villagers pursue the aesthetic in everyday life makes this kind of folklore consciously develop. This is true even if

authorized heritage discourse as an external driving force emphasizes only a small part of intangible cultural heritage, or neglects the integrated relationship between folk belief and folk art, and does not address the authenticity of aesthetics.

Based on the transformation of interrelationship of folk belief and folk art, the aesthetic and entertainment attributes are strengthened in the PLD and PKN activities in order to reduce the villagers' anxieties and tensions regarding their livelihood. The cooperation and unity of local people are embodied and reflected in the PLD and PKN because of the interaction among family, neighbors, and outsiders, thereby unifying the community. Thus the social structure of the community becomes more compact, not more dispersed based on the aesthetic experience, than the beliefs in the past. Further, villagers can strengthen the local recognition of cultural identity, enhance the experience of community life, and maintain ethical norms, interpersonal relationships, and harmony with nature. Consequently, this kind of folklore still has great vitality in daily life in the process of adapting to modernization. It deeply embodies the integration of intangible and tangible cultural heritage, the harmony of individual and collectivity, and the reconciliation of habitus and habitat.

Aesthetics in everyday life in folk society, which is concerned with the concrete aesthetic experience closely mixed with ethics and utilitarianism, begins to become the final orientation of the development of the folk belief with folk art. It is expected as an alternative mode to keep the authenticity of folklore, local cultural identity, and aesthetic value in our daily life, and a kind of conscious inheritance of more intangible kinds of cultural heritage that do not yet receive support at the governmental level.

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