

Conservation and Promotion Model for Local Wisdom Related to Bai-Sri-Su-Kwan Traditions, Beliefs and Ceremonies in the Isan Region

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Abstract

Thai society is deeply affected by ancient spiritual beliefs. Although the current national religion is Buddhism, ancient Thailand was home to a number of sacred faith-systems, coupled with a strong belief in animism. This history has clearly led to a number of cultural traditions that are practiced in modern society. This research analyzes one such tradition, the bai-sri-su-kwan ritual of calling the spirit to the body. The study assesses the background history, current conditions of and problems with the ceremony and, from the results develops a conservation and promotion model for local wisdom concerning the custom. Implementation of the model developed during this investigation will significantly reduce the devastating effect that modern society is currently having on the inherited traditions and beliefs of Thai communities.

Keywords: conservation, promotion, development model, bai-sri-su-kwan, inheritance, local wisdom

1. Introduction

The role of Thai wisdom has started to be seen by governmental, private and community institutions as integral to the development of society. Research and its use in work procedures have increased. The cause of a role for local wisdom in these institutions and their development is because of the variety of local wisdom. The local wisdom offers a diversity of knowledge regarding the surrounding environment and way of life for people in society. Local Thai wisdom is thus related to all areas of society. The use of information resources and human resources that are part of the similar individual and communal identities of people in different areas helps to increase the levels of knowledge in order to overcome natural and social obstacles. This is necessary in everyday life and is referred to as folk or local wisdom. Local wisdom refers to the knowledge and abilities of local people that have been accumulated and disseminated as human potential or capability to solve problems, adapt, learn and transmit to future generations. It is the essence of the community.

The bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony (also baci) is a unique ceremony that is related to the lifestyle of Thai people, from birth to death. It is held in every important life-cycle activity, such as birth, 'one-month birthday', tonsure, status changes, ordination, marriage, illness, recovery, welcoming visitors and respecting the elderly. Aside from these, there are a number of occasions when the ceremony is related to animals or valuable items such as respecting cows, buffaloes, mulberry silkworms, rice, carts and homes. The bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony is an ancient ceremony of Thai people, which appears in each Thai group. The importance of the ceremony is that it encourages members of the community to come together and give one another mutual moral or spiritual support. It is a ceremony that the community uses to generate mental power to combat various difficulties together. Everybody helps and dedicates themselves to providing assistance (Natsupa, 1997, p.51). Such a varied and widespread usage causes the bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony to appear every month of the *heed-sip-song* (part of the Thai calendar), for example the first and third months have su-kwan ('calling of the soul') ceremonies for rice and the fifth month for the elderly. The customs and traditions of the Isan bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony are thus a part of Thai culture that can be used as a medium or tool for education to develop Thai people to a level of completeness or perfection and a Thai mental consciousness. Therefore, the lifestyle, thought, belief and faith in the customs of the bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony have value in the maintenance of society, notably residence, local

wisdom, community culture and transmission of development tools to people in the community (Pantawee, 2001, p.17). However, in present society, local beliefs in the soul and the bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony have merged with those of other communities to become one uniform state. This is at odds with development, importantly the development of education, economy, science and technology, causing the prominence of this culture to decrease and the local wisdom to disappear (Na Talang, 1997, p. 6). In the efforts to develop the country with firm foundations, culture is difficult to maintain. Given these problems, the researchers were interested in studying a conservation and promotion model for local wisdom related to bai-sri-su-kwan traditions, beliefs and ceremonies in the Isan Region. This interest was also due to the fact that the bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony is an original part of Isan community culture that should be studied and clearly understood to discover the value of local wisdom that has been accumulated in community culture, customs, beliefs and ceremonies. This can be adapted to correspond with original cultural foundations, combining new and old wisdom in order to solve problems and enable a self-sufficient lifestyle in current and future situations.

2. Research Aims

This research had three primary aims: a) to study the background and history of local wisdom related to bai-sri-su-kwan traditions, beliefs and ceremonies in the Isan Region; b) to study the current conditions of and problems with conservation and promotion of local wisdom related to bai-sri-su-kwan traditions, beliefs and ceremonies in the Isan Region; c) to develop a conservation and promotion model for local wisdom related to bai-sri-su-kwan traditions, beliefs and ceremonies in the Isan Region.

3. Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research. The sample population and study area were selected by a purposive sampling technique. The research area consisted of communities in Bandung Sub-District, Bandung District, Udon Thani Province, Wang Saeng Sub-district, Kae Dam District, Maha Sarakham Province and Ban Kao Sub-district, Dan Khun Thot District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. The total population was one-hundred and two people, comprised of eighteen key informants, fifty-four casual informants and thirty general informants. Data was collected by survey, participant and non-participant observation, structured and non-structured interview, focus group discussion and workshop. Data validation and verification was conducted using a triangulation method and the presentation of results is in the form of descriptive analysis.

4. Research Results

4.1 *The Background and History of Local Wisdom Related to Bai-Sri-Su-Kwan Traditions, Beliefs and Ceremonies in the Isan Region*

The *bun-koon-lan* ceremony disappeared over thirty years ago in each research area due to the fact that there are no yards for the thrashing of rice. In their place, machinery is used to complete the work required. In the past the bai-sri-su-kwan ritual was used as part of the *bun-koon-lan* ceremony to respect the rice. The ceremony was held during *duean-yi*, or January after the rice harvest. The *koon-lan* merit making ceremony was popularly held in yards near the rice fields. The ceremony involved placing bails of rice in the yard before thrashing. The *kad-da-laew* ritual was conducted first to 'lay down' the rice. After the rice had been thrashed, it would be collected in the yard before hoarding in the barn. While the rice was in the yard, monks would be invited to make a blessing and a *Maw-Su-Kwan* (a ceremonial leader) would conduct the su-kwan ritual to apologize to and thank the goddess of the rice paddy, *Pra-Mae-Posop*. The people would then help one another to place the rice into containers and carry it to individual barns, along with sacrificial objects that were used during the ceremony. In the past, around 1977, the end of the plough handle, scythe, thrashing stick and sarongs would have had to be red-tipped for the bai-sri-su-kwan rice ritual. The beliefs surrounding the *bun-koon-lan* ceremony were founded in the worship of the goddess of the rice paddy, *Pra-Mae-Posop* and they are a way to announce the rice harvest and tell the spirits that the rice would be moved to the barn for storage. The ceremony thus shows a belief in ghosts and spirits. For the performance of the bai-sri-su-kwan rice ritual there must be a *Maw-Su-Kwan*, ceremonial thread (as the ceremony is derived from the beliefs of the Brahman religion), an invitation to the monks to perform a sermon and holy water (as the ceremony is derived from the beliefs of the Buddhist religion).

The tradition of ordination is an ancient tradition that has been practiced since the Lord Buddha was ordained in order to combat suffering and is a national Buddhist tradition undertaken by all men over the age of twenty. One day before the ordination ceremony, a bai-sri-su-kwan ritual will be held in order to teach the importance of parents to the trainee monk. The ritual is partly to show the trainee monk how his parents took care of him and taught him to be a good person since his birth and partly to make him aware of the strict teachings of the *Vinaya* (set of regulations for Buddhists) that he must follow during his time as a monk so that his parents may receive

positive religious merit through his actions. It is believed that before the bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony the new monk must exchange robes and perform good deeds. They must also pour holy water as an extension of these deeds towards deceased relatives, which is part of the belief in spirits. During the practice of the bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony, there is a bai-sri *paan*, or tray upon which holy objects are placed in sacrifice, there is a *Maw-Su-Kwan* to guide the ceremony and ceremonial thread (as the ceremony is derived from the beliefs of the Brahman religion). Beliefs surrounding the background of trainee monks in the era of the lifetime of the lord Buddha hold that there was a Naga (a mythical serpent) that became a human to undergo the ordination ceremony. The creature came for one day. When it slept, its body was transformed back into the state of a serpent. A frightened monk came across the serpent and told the Lord Buddha. It was then declared that the Naga was not in a suitable state to continue with the ordination ceremony and it must leave its guise and position with the clergy to return as a Naga. The monk pitied the Naga and saw that its name remained in the history of Buddhism.

Marriage traditions in Northeastern Thailand (Isan) are known as '*gindong*', which means that the bride and groom will become members of the same family. In the past, until about ten years ago, the groom wore long trousers and a plain long-sleeved shirt. The bride wore a wrapped silk skirt and white shirt. Neither the bride nor groom wore make-up or styled their hair. Thai costumes were not rented. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* of the time would wear a *maw-hom* shirt (a short-sleeved, round-necked shirt without a lapel), sarong, and a *pa-kao-ma* (a piece of cloth draped over the shoulder). For those people attending the ceremony in the past, women would wear a wrapped sarong-skirt, neat shirt, a *pa-sabai* (cloth draped over the shoulder) or *pa-kao-ma*. At Bandund sub-district, monks are invited to recite a prayer for the bride and groom, in order to extend a blessing before their life together in the same household, provide fortune and prosperity, as well as recital of the *chaiyando* prayer. Monks are also invited to eat with the wedding party on the morning of the ceremony. Thus, the whole process is related to the Buddhist religion. However, in Wang Saeng Sub-district, there is no recital or blessing given by monks. The only beliefs on display are those shown by the bride and groom towards the spirits that they respect in order to receive blessings for their future life together in the same household. A ceremonial thread is used during the wedding ceremony (as the ceremony is derived from the beliefs of the Brahman religion).

In the past, people of Ban Kao Sub-district held bai-sri-su-kwan rituals in their homes for the elderly who were sick. By contrast, the people of Bandung and Wang-Saeng Sub-districts held rituals for sick people of all ages. These traditions have been inherited from generation to generation and are referred to as ongoing customs and practices. It is believed that sickness comes from the mind, which makes it necessary to seek treatment. This causes bai-sri-su-kwan rituals for sickness to have an effect on the mentality of the afflicted, instill goodness and energy, permit them to be happy and eat well again. When people come to tie ceremonial threads around their wrists, sick people feel contented and comfortable. The ceremony calls the soul to return to the body and is a belief surrounding spirits. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* is invited to lead the bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony. Ceremonial thread is used during the ceremony (as the ceremony is derived from the beliefs of the Brahman religion). There are no visible aspects of the Buddhist faith during the ceremony.

Bai-sri-su-kwan ceremonies for people returning home have occurred since the time of Vessantara (Vessandorn), a legendary prince. Jujaka (Chuchok), an old beggar, was in need of servants and asked for the children of the prince. A compassionate man, the prince gave over his son Jali (Chalee) and his daughter Kanha, who followed Jujaka through the forest to *Nakhon Si Pi* to live as his slaves. One day, the Gods caused the children to venture into the royal grounds and they were recognized by their grandfather, King Sanjaya (Sanchai). The king paid a large ransom to the beggar in return for his grandchildren. Upon return of the children, a celebration ceremony was held, including the ritual of bai-sri-su-kwan. The ceremony acted to hail the spirits from the forest into the capital city. On a separate occasion, the people of the city welcomed their prince Vessantara and his wife Maddi (Matree) back to the city in the same fashion. It is thus believed that this ceremony gives power and energy to those people who are changing location for purposes of residence or work. Aside from this, it is believed that the ceremony calls the soul to the body in preparation for travel or a safe journey and is thus a belief in spirits. The presentation of ceremonial threads to tie around wrists and the observance of auspicious occasions and times all show clear Brahman religious roots and there is no trace of Buddhism.

4.2 *The Current Conditions of and Problems with Conservation and Promotion of Local Wisdom Related to Bai-Sri-Su-Kwan Traditions, Beliefs and Ceremonies in the Isan Region*

4.2.1 Rice

It was found that the *bun-koon-lan* ceremony had disappeared in each of the three study areas, yet in Bandung Sub-district the ceremony has partly survived in the form of its replacement, the *Bun-Pratai-Kao-Bleuak* ceremony. The ceremony lasts three days, which are a day of preparation, a day of communal service and a day

offering food to monks. The ceremony is held during March and the exact time is chosen by the local community leader and the monks. Following the selection of the date, the community council will meet to discuss the procedure and tell their community members. On the day of preparation, the location is prepared, including the raising of tents, setting of chairs, cleaning of the temple area and the creation of Thai snacks. On the day of communal service, the temple council will delegate their work by creating members responsible for the rice account and monetary account. Female community members will help to prepare food and create the *bai-sri paan*. When the general community members come to the temple, they will make merit and donate to the temple in the form of food or money. At approximately five o'clock in the evening, the *bai-sri-su-kwan-kae-bleuak* ritual will begin, controlled by the *Maw-Su-Kwan*. The people attending the ceremony include the temple council members and local community members. The *bai-sri paan* will hold a number of items as offering to the spirits. For single-level *paan*, there will be *kae-dom-mad* (a Thai snack), a boiled egg, taro root, yam, a sarong, betel nut, tobacco, cooked rice, ceremonial thread and food inside a *pa-kae* (cloth) and a full glass of water. There is also a *paan-sai-maak-beng-kan-ha*, which contains five pairs of flowers and five small candles. After the ceremony has finished, the community members will serve small bags of un-milled rice to each person to add to the stores of their own barn. The reason for this is the belief that the addition of the communal rice to the stocks will cause current and future harvests to be plentiful. Some people will mix the un-milled rice with seed-rice for the following crop. In the evening the monks will recite the Buddha's mantra. The next morning, at around half past seven, the monks will seek alms around the temple hall and at about eight o'clock *Kae-Pratai* will be offered. Food will be presented to the monks and they will give *anumotana* (show their gratitude) and give blessings. The temple committee will announce the sale of rice in order to generate income for the temple accounts so that the temple committee may plan for future repairs and building work.

In Wang Saeng Sub-district, there is a *bai-sri-su-kwan* ritual held before the rice is stored, which is widely observed. The components of the ceremony include a *Maw-Su-Kwan* to lead the ceremony, participants (barn owners, relatives and community members), the offerings on the *paan* (*kae-dom-mad*, a boiled egg, taro root, yam, a small scythe, a ring, a mirror, a bracelet, a sarong, betel nut, tobacco leaf, silk cloth, a comb, perfume or scented liquid, necklace, the hair of an elder, cooked rice, ceremonial thread and food inside a *pa-kae* and a full glass of water. There is also a *paan-sai-maak-beng-kan-ha*, which contains five pairs of flowers, five small candles and rice whisky. On the day and time of the ceremony, the ritual will be held in the morning at about nine or ten o'clock. The ritual will be conducted as per instructions in a book. The procedure of the ceremony begins with the *Maw-Su-Kwan* entwining the ceremonial thread around the rice or barn. The three jewels (three Buddhist concepts of refuge detailed in a chant) are then recited and the angels are called. After the *bai-sri-su-kwan* starts, there will be a *mid-fai* (sprinkling of holy water) and in some communities the *Maw-Su-Kwan* will entwine the ceremonial thread around the barn a second time.

Beliefs held during the ceremonies are those relating to respect of the goddess of the rice paddy, *Pra-Mae-Posop*. They are used in both the *Bun-Pratai-Kae-Bleuak* ritual and the tradition of moving rice to the barn for storage. It is believed that the rituals show apology and gratitude to *Pra-Mae-Posop*, who helps the farmer reap the maximum amount of rice. It is also a way to ask that the rice stored in the barn lasts a long time. These are thus ceremonies that express beliefs in spirits. The *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony for rice uses ceremonial thread, a *bai-sri paan* and a *Maw-Su-Kwan*, which are all part of the Brahman religion. In the *Bun-Pratai-Kae-Bleuak* ceremony there is recital by monks and presentation of un-milled the monks. In some places, the monks give a blessing to the rice before it is stored in the barn. Although some communities do not use monks as part of the ceremony, Buddhist beliefs are used throughout.

There are some problems with the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ritual for rice during the *Bun-Pratai-Kae-Bleuak* traditions. In Bandung Sub-district, the items used as offerings are not complete. Female costume pieces are often missing, such as combs, mirrors, necklaces, rings and clothing. A male *pa-kae* is often used as a replacement for the missing female version. The ceremonies also omit the *mid-fai* stage or the splashing of holy water. This has an effect on the beliefs, holiness and faith in the ceremony and the *Maw-Su-Kwan*.

There were also problems found during the ceremonies at Wang Saeng Sub-district. There is an insufficient number of *Maw-Su-Kwan* in Wang Saeng sub-district to lead the ceremonies. This means that, on some occasions, the *Maw-Su-Kwan* must take the ceremonial thread of a number of different barns and collect them at the same point to perform a collective ceremony. This causes the culture of the community to change. If the ceremonies are held on the same day at the same time, the members of each household must attend to their own preparations and are unable to help people in other households. Aside from this, the days and times available for the ceremony are limited so the *Maw-Su-Kwan* may compromise by moving the ceremony to the afternoon. This causes the beliefs surrounding dates and times to change. The items used as offerings during the ceremony and

the procedure of the ceremony differ. This results in changes to the holiness and beliefs in the ceremony and the *Maw-Su-Kwan*.

4.2.2 Ordination

Ordination ceremonies remain popular in every area, as it is believed that the ceremony is a way of showing thanks and apology to one's parents. It is believed that this has a strong mental value and those that undertake the ceremony will feel good, contented and comfortable as a result. It is an opportunity for the trainee monk to recognize and listen to their parents, as well as apologizing to all people. The components of the ceremony include a *Maw-Su-Kwan* to lead the ceremony and participants (trainee monk, family of the trainee monk and members of the community). It is popular to use a two-level *paan bai-sri-su-kwan* and the items offered include, cooked rice, *kao-dom-mad*, boiled egg, two betel nuts, two tobacco leaves, candles, a leaf of the golden showering tree and of the great morinda tree, ceremonial thread and food in a *pa-kao*, and a full glass of water. There will also be a *paan-sai-maak-beng-kan-ha*, which contains five pairs of flowers, five candles, scented water or perfume for the *mid-fai* (although some people use rice whisky). There are also two large candles. However, at Ban Kao Sub-district, a *bai-sri-sam-yod* is popular. This involves a *paan-sai-maak-beng-kan-ha*, five *kruay* (cone-shaped decorations) and items for offering (two *kao-dom-mad*, bananas, *fak-bua* and *nang-led* Thai desserts, one coconut, a boiled egg and three *kruay*, twenty-four baht, *mawngleya* powder, talcum powder in a bowl or on a tray over a *pa-kao*, seven betel leaves, seven candles stood in a bowl of uncooked rice, ceremonial thread). The *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony for ordination is either held at the trainee monk's home or the hall of the temple. The time of the ceremony is decided by the trainee monk or the availability of the host. The ceremony follows the documented steps outlined in books and begins with the *Maw-Su-Kwan* entwining the ceremonial thread around the *paan*. This is followed by a prayer ceremony and recital of the three jewels, before the start of chanting. After this is the *mid-fai* stage. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will take the boiled egg and rice in hand and give them to the focal individual of the ceremony. Ceremonial thread is then tied around the wrists of this individual by the *Maw-Su-Kwan* while a script is recited. Next, the family members of the trainee monk will tie thread around the trainee monk's wrist. The beliefs in the ceremony include those surrounding spirits, which can be observed in the details of the procedures. The deities mentioned during the recitals include Indra, Brahma and local residential spirits before the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony pour holy water must be poured as an extension of good deeds towards deceased relatives, which is part of the belief in spirits. During the practice of the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony, there is a *bai-sri paan*, there is a *Maw-Su-Kwan* to guide the ceremony and ceremonial thread, which show the belief in both auspicious Brahman and auspicious Buddhist religious beliefs. These are accompanied by a ceremony in the temple following the guidelines outlined by the Lord Buddha, including extension of an invitation to monks, presentation of food to monks and presentation of the history of the trainee monk.

There are problems with the steps of the ceremonial procedure, beginning with the selection of a suitable date and time for the ceremony. Rather than selecting an auspicious point on the calendar, a date is selected according to its convenience. This can affect the community beliefs in the ceremony. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* does not popularly wear the traditional white uniform, merely selecting any polite outfit, which causes him to be indistinguishable from the general members of the community. There are some discrepancies concerning objects used as offerings in the ceremony and the steps of the ritual. These cause a loss of belief, holiness and faith in the ceremony and the *Maw-Su-Kwan*. There are also problems with the dress culture of younger members of the community, their behavior concerning the consumption of alcohol and their generally inappropriate attitude during the event. The geographical location of Ban Kao also causes problems. In its position on the border of Isan and Central Thailand, the place is home to people of both backgrounds. The problem arising is that the ceremonies do not strictly follow the procedures of either Thai or Isan customs and are instead a hybrid of the two. This causes a dilution of the culture. Alternatively, when the procedures are strictly followed, this means that some events are of traditional Thai origin and some of Isan origin, meaning that no two ceremonies are necessarily the same.

4.2.3 Marriage

At present, the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony for weddings at Ban Kao Sub-District is not practiced. However in Bandung and Wang Saeng sub-districts, each couple usually performs the ceremony because they believe that this will cause them to stay together forever. The components of the ceremony include a *Maw-Su-Kwan* and participants (the bride and groom, the best man and maid of honor, parents and other family members of the bride and groom and members of the community). It is popular to use a two-level *bai-sri paan* during the wedding ceremony, containing cooked rice, *kao-dom-mad*, a boiled egg, a necklace, a ring, a mirror, a bracelet, a blanket, a sarong, perfume or scented water, a banana, sugar cane, betel nut, tobacco leaf, a leaves from the

golden showering tree and the great morinda tree, ceremonial thread, food in a *pa-kae* and a full glass of water. There will also be another *paan-sai-maak-beng-kan-ha*, which will hold five pairs of flowers, five candles and water or rice whisky for the *mid-fai* procedure. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will select a suitable day for the ceremony by choosing an auspicious date. They will select an even-numbered month (according to the Thai lunar calendar) and a day from either the third or thirteenth day of the waning moon, which are referred to as *wan-hua-rieng-mon*. The best days are Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays because they are believed as the days when money and gold are found. Nine o'clock is a popular time for *Maw-Su-Kwan* to start the ceremony, which will finish no later than ten o'clock. The procedure is dictated by the instructions in a manual and, if monks are invited to bless the couple prior to the wedding, the steps of the marriage ceremony begin after the monks have finished their rituals, notable the *chayando* prayer. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will give the ceremonial thread to the bride and groom to hold. The groom will then light a candle on his right and the bride will light a candle on her left. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* then recites the three jewels. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will perform the *bae-thevada* (a Pali chant) before blessing the foreheads of the bride and groom. The chants and prayers will then follow the steps of the *bai-sri-su-kwan*. When the chants have finished, the *Maw-Su-Kwan* will lift the glass containing the (holy) water, take one flower to dip into the liquid and splash the bride, groom and their families while reciting a *mid-fai* blessing. The egg will be placed into the hands of the couple and the *Maw-Su-Kwan* will tie a piece of ceremonial thread around one wrist of each person (the bride and groom). Family members and respected people will then follow in tying more pieces of thread around the wrists of the bride and groom. The egg-shell is then removed (while still in the hands of the bride and groom) and the peeled egg is given to the *Maw-Su-Kwan* to cut using a strand of hair in order to interpret the prophecy within. An elder, usually a respected female in good health and of strong morality, will then feed some of the egg to the bride and groom. The egg will be fed to the groom using the right hand and to the female using the left. Following this, the bride and groom will feed one another with the remainder of the egg. In Bandung, monks are not used to give a blessing and only a *Maw-Su-Kwan* is invited to conduct the ceremony. This is different from Wang Saeng Sub-district, where monks give a blessing first.

Beliefs held during this ceremony are beliefs in spirits. The *bai-sri-su-kwan ceremony* is to call the soul of the bride and groom in order to tell them to stay together forever. During the ceremony, there is a *bai-sri paan* and a *Maw-Su-Kwan*, which are derived from the Brahman religion. In those cases where monks come to give a blessing prior to the wedding, the couple listen to the teachings and use them as a foundation for their marriage. The monks will give auspicious sentiment to the marriage and chant the *chayando*. The monks will be offered food before the wedding ceremony. These events display the prevalent beliefs of Buddhism.

As the *Maw-Su-Kwan* is required to be over sixty years of age and a complete individual, there are very few practitioners in each area. Sometimes it is necessary for a wedding party to appoint a *Maw-Su-Kwan* from another village, who the majority of the people at the wedding may not know. There are problems with the dress culture of the youth, particularly the suitability, politeness and punctiliousness of the outfits. Many members of the younger generations come only to socialize and the overall number of people attending the actual *bai-sri-su-kwan* service has declined. The only people who attend are the hosts and their close friends, while the majority of people will wait outside the service.

4.2.4 Sickness

In Ban Kao Sub-district, the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony for the sick is not popular. In Bandung Sub-district the ceremony is a little more popular with some members of the community, particularly the elderly. However, the majority of people in the younger generations do not use it. More popular for generating auspiciousness or fortune is a ritual called *Deng-Kae*, which is often used in place of *bai-sri-su-kwan* for the sick. However, in Wang Saeng Sub-district the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony remains popular among sick people of all age groups. The components of the ceremony are a *Maw-Su-Kwan* and participants (the sick person, the family of the sick person, friends and community members). It is popular to use a one or two leveled *paan*, containing a bowl of cooked rice, *kae-dom-mad*, a boiled egg, four bananas, Betel nut, a cigarette, tobacco leaf, a flower of the golden showering tree, ceremonial thread, food wrapped in a *pa-kae* and a full glass of water. There will also be a *paan-sai-maak-beng-kan-ha*, which will hold five pairs of flowers, five candles, an item of clothing from the sick person and a glass of water or rice whisky for the *mid-fai* process. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will be responsible for the selection of a suitably auspicious date for the ceremony by choosing a Wednesday or the day corresponding to the first day of sickness. The ceremony will be held in the evening or when it is dark at the home of the sick individual (if that is where the ailment was first felt) or another location (the place where the ailment was first caused). It is believed that when a person falls ill, part of their spirit will leave the body. If the ailment was caused in another location, the *Maw-Su-Kwan* will visit that place and capture the lost spirit. This

will then be taken to the sick person at the hospital or their home and the remainder of the ceremony (the tying of ceremonial thread around the wrist of the sick person) will continue. The prayers will follow the instructions detailed in manuals. The procedure will begin by the *Maw-Su-Kwan* instructing the sick person to sit facing a suitable auspicious point. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will sit opposite the sick person, with their parents sitting to the North, the family and participants surrounding them. The *bai-sri paan* and items for offering to the spirit will be with the group. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* and the affected person will sit in the center and the *Maw-Su-Kwan* will entwine the ceremonial thread around everybody. For the entire ceremony, the sick person will touch the *bai-sri paan* with their right hand and make a wish. The *Maw-Su-Kwan*, parents, family and other participants will touch the ceremonial thread and make a wish on behalf of the sick person. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will start the ceremony by lighting the candles and standing them on the *bai-sri-paan*. The items will be lifted on their tray five times, while the *Maw-Su-Kwan* recites the three jewels chant. After this, the *bao-thevada* chant will be performed until the ceremony is brought to a close. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will lift the glass of (holy) water, dip one pair of flowers into the water and sprinkle water over the sick person and their family members, while reciting a *mid-fai* blessing. Following this, the family members and respected people will tie ceremonial thread around the wrist of the sick person.

The beliefs during the ceremony are those related to spirits and the soul, along with belief that the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony is a way of telling the mind that we recognize its importance. There is a procedure for capturing the spirit at the place of the accident or infection. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* is invited to conduct the ceremony and there is the use of ceremonial thread, which are both derived from the Brahman religion. There is no evidence of Buddhist religious belief during the ceremony. In the present day, it is easy and convenient to travel to the hospital. This is very different from the past and is the reason why many young people choose to seek treatment solely at a hospital. If any form of ceremony is used, it is more popular to use the *Deng-Kae* procedure, which does not require the preparation of many items. People favor ceremonies that are held at the night, meaning that many people are unable to attend the ceremony. This causes members of the same community to be unfamiliar with one another and do less things together. Beliefs have begun to change regarding the ceremony and people now consider the *bai-sri paan* as unnecessary; merely the tying of ceremonial thread around the wrists of the sick person is sufficient. There is also an insufficient number of *Maw-Su-Kwan* in the village, causing long waiting times or use of *Maw-Su-Kwan* from other villages.

4.2.5 Departing and Returning Friends

Currently, it is very popular to hold a *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony for people departing from or returning to their homes in Bandung and Wang Saeng Sub-Districts, especially for those people leaving to become soldiers, leaving for foreign countries, returning after graduation or returning from abroad. This is because people believe the ceremony is a way of generating prosperity and fortune for the travelers. When the ceremony has been performed, people will feel contented and comfortable that there are no further dangers to be encountered. When the spirit has been called back to the body of the traveler, it is believed that the mission or adventure will be a success according to its aims. The components of the ceremony include a *Maw-Su-Kwan* and participants (the traveler calling their spirit, parents, families, teachers, friends and members of the community). For the *bai-sri paan*, it is popular to use one to three levels and the *paan* will contain cooked rice, *kao-dom-mad*, a boiled egg, a betel nut, tobacco, candles, leaves of the golden showering tree and the great marinda tree, four bananas, ceremonial thread, food wrapped in a *pa-kao* and a full glass of water. There will also be a *paan-sai-maak-beng-kan-ha*, which will hold five pairs of flowers, five candles and a glass of water for the *mid-fai* process. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will be the person who selects the date for the ceremony. The event will happen in the morning from about eight or nine o'clock until eleven o'clock. The home of the host will be used as the location for the ceremony, which will follow instruction in a manual. The procedure will begin when the *Maw-Su-Kwan* instructs the traveler to sit facing an auspicious point. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will sit opposite the traveler, the parents will sit to the North and the family members and other participants will sit around them. There will be a *bai-sri paan* and objects for offering. The traveler will sit in the middle. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will start the ceremony by lighting the candles and standing them on the *paan*. The sacrificial objects will then be lifted five times to the chants of the three jewels. Following this, the *bao-thevada* chant will be performed until the ceremony is closed. The *Maw-Su-Kwan* will lift the (holy) water and dip one pair of flowers into the liquid. The traveler and the participants will then be sprinkled while the *Maw-Su-Kwan* gives a *mid-fai* blessing. After this the family members and respected people will tie ceremonial thread around the wrist of the traveler. The spirit beliefs held during the ceremony are from the time of Prince Vessantara when spirits were called to the bodies of travelers. The faith in the ceremonial thread, auspicious times and use of a *Maw-Su-Kwan* show the origins of the ceremony in the Brahman religion. There are no aspects of Buddhism during the ceremony. There

are very few problems with the ceremony, only changing popularities among the locals regarding the use of ready-made *paan*.

4.3 A Conservation and Promotion Model for Local Wisdom Related to Bai-Sri-Su-Kwan Traditions, Beliefs and Ceremonies in the Isan Region

4.3.1 Conservation Model

Local institutions, such as sub-district organizations should gather the names of *Maw-Su-Kwan* for registration as District *Maw-Su-Kwan* and make the organization of ceremonies more convenient through ease of contact. The sub-district schools or local temples should be community centers for knowledge of *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony.

Restoration should be conducted by designing plans for development of community knowledge to give an opportunity to allow the members to share opinions, come to collective decisions, make plans together, proceed with the solving of problems and meet the needs of the community members. A community committee should be established to restore the customs, beliefs and ceremony by using traditional local culture as the foundations. This will promote cooperation among community members.

Organizations or institutions in the community that are centers of information should be developed to provide knowledge to the locals, perform better and foster the development of knowledge about *bai-sri-su-kwan* in the family by encouraging its continued transmission from father to son as a part of the cultural heritage of the community. Governmental institutions must connect to and work with private institutions, such as flower shops, which have knowledge and ability in the organization of *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremonies. The skill of making the *bai-sri-paan* should be developed, as well as information on the ceremony in textbooks and manuals. Technology, such as tapes and videos, must be used to improve wisdom. Aside from this, competitions must be arranged for both the creation of the *bai-sri paan* and the *Maw-Su-Kwan*, so to develop knowledge, skill and ability. Teachers in the professional and technology departments are important because they must develop the skill of students in working with banana leaves (wrapping and folding), which are an essential component of the *paan*. Alternatively, the teachers can play a part in the development of the ceremony by selecting other materials in place of the banana leaves and teaching students how to use them. The skill can be developed as part of a supplementary income and future job. Additionally, the teachers of social studies, religion, culture and Thai language must cooperate to improve pronunciation, correct prayer and chanting procedures and make the students more confident in their speaking abilities. This will develop the students to a position where they may be able to help and develop their own communities in the future.

There should be inheritance of the *bai-sri-su-kwan* traditions within the family. It is not necessary to follow a model for this inheritance but knowledge must be inserted into the everyday lives of the people so that the family members may see, help with, hear or listen to. The temple is a center for religious activities in the community and the monks must join, promote and support the increase of *bai-sri-su-kwan* activities, such as *bai-sri-su-kwan* for Buddha idols or images and for adult monks. The majority of people studying the body of knowledge in the community are novice Buddhist monks, who will be taught by the elders or teachers. Moreover knowledge should be inherited from skillful elderly *Maw-Su-Kwan* with much experience by younger practitioners and those with an interest. This will generate confidence and skill in the performance of ceremonies.

Responsible organizations, sub-district chiefs and village and community leaders should initiate activities to create community networks. Additionally, activities should be organized to create networks with other groups outside the community to come and create objects related to the *paan* and those items used by the *Maw-Su-Kwan*. This is a way to exchange ideas of the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony between communities. Competitions should also be arranged for families to compete at creating *paan*. Monks should also encourage the community members to attend the temple activities on important days, such as *Bun-Pratai-Kao-Bleuak* or activities related to the *bai-sri-su-kwan* including activities for other customs. Educational institutions, both government and private, must organize activities or programs and invite members of the local community with appropriate knowledge to come and teach and pass on their wisdom to students.

Responsible organizations in the local area should organize competitions for *Maw-Su-Kwan* and *bai-sri paan* in order to encourage skill, knowledge and ability. This is a way to inform and give an opportunity to local people to fully display their knowledge and ability. There would be prizes and certificates to encourage and give heart to the participants.

4.3.2 Promotion Model

The government must support the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony by using media and other methods for promoting it. Sub-district management organizations should identify and appoint a committee to take care of promotion and

hold the events according to customs. An official residence should be allocated for the *Maw-Su-Kwan* and the details of the customs should be noted in documents and on a website. This way, the locals within and outside of the community will know about and be able to contact official channels for the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony more conveniently. Regarding district and sub-district culture, responsible organizations should contact provincial universities to contribute their knowledge to a community journal, brochure or information leaflet. For various important, customary community events, responsible organizations in the local area must support the budget in order to create a community knowledge center or community library as a place for promotion and information concerning all types of local wisdom.

The private sector must support and use the media and various other methods to promote the *bai-sri-su-kwan*, including the use of different companies and shops within and outside the community to contribute to the budget. For various events concerning customs, beliefs and methods of the *bai-sri-su-kwan*, such as provision of food for people in the temples during the *Bun-Pratai-Kao-Bleuak* traditions, folk wisdom relating to the *Maw-Su-Kwan* should be emphasized. This is to be achieved when contacting the *Maw-Su-Kwan* for the ceremonies of marriage and ordination. Private schools must also host activities to invite local people with appropriate levels of expertise and wisdom to teach the process of making *paan*.

The community must use the media and various other methods for promotion of the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony. The locals, including the village leader and sub-district chief, should cooperate to develop the community and encourage volunteers to make sacrifices for the good of cooperation. They should all have a role in the planning, evaluation and solving of all problems that occur in the community. Budget must be supported by responsible organizations in the community in order to create a broadcast hall at a location in the community to advertise the various events and distribute information to the locals relating to customs and various other events in the community. The local wisdom relating to the *Maw-Su-Kwan* and the creation of the *paan* must be provided for students to study in schools, the local committee should continuously take photographs of the traditions and ceremonies and compile them as evidence and examples of the various community to promote the customs and seek additional budget for use in the future.

4.3.3 Conclusion of the Conservation and Promotion Model for Local Wisdom Related to Bai-Sri-Su-Kwan Traditions, Beliefs and Ceremonies in the Isan Region

The model is made of three sections: a) creation of community networks; b) creation of knowledge; c) creation of local wisdom. The three sections can be elaborated further, as follows.

For the creation of community networks, meetings should be held in community groups to generate understanding of community networks, which includes local communities, schools, temples, government institutions (sub-district administration organization, sub-district and district culture organizations) and local private organizations (local firms, shops creating *paan* and arranging flowers, companies and private schools).

The creation of knowledge in the community specifically refers to accurate knowledge related to customs, beliefs and ceremonies relating to the *bai-sri-su-kwan*. This must derive from knowledge of history in Isan that has been handed down from generation to generation by ancestors and refers to the development of *bai-sri-su-kwan* over time. Local beliefs must be incorporated in all customs by acknowledging conviction in the spirit and the soul, Brahmanism and Buddhism. The *Maw-Su-Kwan*, local leaders, sub-district and district cultural organizations and other related people should be knowledgeable in all aspects of two important categories. The first is organization of ceremonies, which include organizers, participants, *bai-sri paan*, offerings, time and place and ceremony script. The second category is the steps and procedure of the ceremony, which include consultation, preparation, holding of the ceremony and celebration.

There are two forms of creation of local wisdom in the community. The first is a conservation model, which includes six stages: the collection of data, restoration, development, dissemination, support of activities, and creation of specialists. The second form is a promotion model which includes three bodies that must use the media and various other methods to promote local wisdom relating to customs, beliefs and ceremonies: the government sector, the private sector and the community.

5. Discussion

The customs of *bai-sri-su-kwan* in the three provinces studied in Northeastern Thailand have been inherited from ancestors and derive from beliefs in Brahmanism, Buddhism and spirits. People in Isan believe that the ceremony is for calling the spirit to the body. This ceremony is to express comfort or consolation and also pleasure or delight. This corresponds to the research of Jaroen Moonma (2009, p.199), which found that the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony in the Isan region has been developed from offerings in Brahman ideology. Nowadays,

the practices have incorporated Buddhist ideas that the Isan people received from India and the Brahman *Maw-Kwan*, who was a respected member of the community with knowledge about spirits and the soul. Participants in ceremonies included family members and the objectives of the ceremonies were to call the spirits to the bodies to increase confidence, protection and happiness.

There are many variations to the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony, including ceremonies for ordination, marriage, military service or promotion. There are also services for those people who are going to or returning from a job far from home or abroad. This corresponds to the research of Sompong Jitree (2002, p.141), which found that current Thai communities hold a variety of *bai-sri-su-kwan*, such as for ordination, youth monks, marriage, people working in a different area, sick people, village heads, committees, teachers, temples, buffaloes and rice. Ceremonies are also held on special occasions, such as welcoming important people or visitors to the community, the ordination ceremony for students entering the monkhood during their summer break and ceremonies for ill monks. These beautiful ceremonies are all performed and inherited in Thai communities. Chadtip Natsupa and Pornpilai Leudwicha (1996, p.11) found that the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ritual is unique when compared to other rituals relating the life cycle of Thai people.

In modern society technology changes fast, which causes customs, beliefs and ceremonies of the *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony to disappear. The new generation does not understand, is not interested in and does not see the importance of the ceremony. The culture of the modern era has caused the beautiful culture of the past to be neglect. People in the community do not have the awareness of local cultural education. Moreover, the amount of *Maw-Su-Kwan* is low. Jaroen Moonma (2009, p.197) found that the principal problem with the conservation and development of the *bai-sri-su-kwan* customs in Isan communities are the lack of people in the ceremonies. The people receiving the blessings, especially the youth, are not interested and do not see the importance of the ceremony. There is a lack of people to inherit knowledge regarding the ceremonial procedures and the making of *paan*. There is a lack of announcements to convince the people of the ceremony's importance and encourage them to participate. There is a lack of courses that generate genuine awareness in the ceremony. Young people are not interested in learning about local cultural art, which would help them see the value of their own culture.

Conservation of local folk wisdom regarding customs, beliefs and ceremony of *bai-sri-su-kwan* in Isan is a way to raise the awareness of people in the community regarding the value, meaning and importance of local wisdom. The promotion and support of traditional activities and culture creates awareness among people in the area of the need for conservation of local identity. The model is made of three sections: a) creation of community networks; b) creation of knowledge; c) creation of local wisdom. This corresponds to the research of Sompong Jitree (2002, p.132), which stated that the beliefs of religious ceremonies are mechanisms for creating social groups and create the symbols and identity of a group. This creates harmony within the group and roles within the collective actions of the society. The *bai-sri-su-kwan* ceremony Thai-Lue people therefore creates harmony in the family, friends and the local community.

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