

The Development of Cultural Tourism through Tales and Beliefs: A Case Study of the Katu tribe in Laos PDR

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The aim of this article is to present a perspective about the development of cultural tourism through tales and beliefs. A case study of the Katu tribe in Laos PDR was based on non-participatory observation, non-structured interviews, and the study of related documents and research. From the study on the development of cultural tourism through tales and beliefs, it was learnt that the Katu tribe in the New Kandon village, Xekong province, Laos PDR, had passed down tales and beliefs related to the birth of humanity through the story of “Ya Mek and Ma Teuk” (male dog) from generation to generation. The reason for this was to pass on the history of their people as well as to express their relationship to their birthplace and living place. However, today, the telling of the tale has been passed on to outsiders, tourists, and researchers in response to the curiosity about those people of the village leader. The function of the tale and beliefs of the past had changed along with the context of society. The tale-telling was used to create tourism opportunities for the community, which was one way to increase both the monetary and non-monetary value of the culture, the society, and the economy, both at the local level and the national level.

Key words: *Tourism, Cultural tourism, Tale, Tribe, Laos PDR.*

Introduction

Tales, stories, and the beliefs were passed down in both written form and through word of mouth without any oral literature. This is one cultural value that is still continuously being passed down through generations within different groups in Mekong region countries such as

Thailand, Lao, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and China. Some of the tales and stories in these countries are connected or similar. Some details might be added or taken out over time and due to the context of different eras.

Some local tales might seem irrational to the reality of people from different cultures or outsiders. This goes along with the perspective of Vallipodom (2006) on the different historical contexts between people within a culture and people outside of the culture. Outsiders always focus on scientific proofs while insiders focus on believing that the stories are real. Therefore, outsiders often refer to these stories as tales. The existence of tales explain the livelihood of the people within the society that are from the same locality. They possess a love of the same land and are the same people. All of this forms a sense of territory that connects the geographical environment and the cultural landscape together.

Anan Ganjanapan (cited in Hongsuwan, 2011) states that tales are the products of imagination that were created by thoughts and beliefs based on one type of understanding, which is different from today's beliefs. Expressions through tales are mostly in the form of symbols, created by the characteristics of thoughts within a society. Therefore, in order to interpret symbolical tales, one needs to pay attention to the system of thoughts and values of the society at the time; similar to the grammatical structure of the media that helps with the understanding of the society. William Bascom (cited in Na Thalang, 2009) pointed out that the study of folklore also needs to pay attention to the social context of folklore. In other words, attention needs to be focused on the types of stories, the authors, the audiences, the time when the stories were told, and the place that the stories were told. These are all parts of the observation of the social context of folklore.

The Role of Tales and Beliefs and their Relationship to the Way of the Culture

The basis of the beliefs that mould together and create culture in countries within the Mekong region revolves around ghost spirits and ancient spirits that can be seen in both oral and written literatures. They were passed down, affecting the lives of the people within the area. This is in line with the opinion of Wongthet (2011), who states that the same kind of beliefs can be seen in Uranggadhat Nidana, creation myths, and the Khun-Bor-Lom myth. There are different characteristics of the tales concerning the relationship between the tales and the way of life. The tales can portray a way of life of the local people both in their livelihood, their social ways, the nature, the tales that explain the roles of men and women within the societies, the tales that portray beliefs in an ethical structure of the society for certain groups of people, and the tales that explain the phenomena that emerge from the beliefs. The latter include the world flood, which explains the history of a group of people and how that group came about. William Bascom states the four overall roles of tales: 1) explain the history and the reason for certain rituals, 2) function as education within the societies that still rely on

storytelling, 3) maintain the behaviour standard within the social norms, and 4) provide enjoyment and a way out for people with frustrations. At the same time, Na Thalang (2009) presents three functions for the tales: 1) folklore that explain the birth and the identity of certain groups and rituals; 2) the function of folklore that helps educate, train, and maintain the social behaviour standard; and 3) the function of tales as a way out for people who are feeling frustrated by social regulations. However, whether the functions are similar or different to the perspectives of both the insiders and the outsiders, it is the cultural beauty that is waiting to be connected and to reflect a different angle in the future.

The Katu tribe in the New Kandon Village, Xekong Province, Laos PDR

Laos PDR is one country within the Mekong region that has a long history of both social and cultural heritage. Its ethnic diversity is a value that is worth studying. Geographically, Laos can be separated into three regions: 1) mountainous areas in the northern part of the country; 2) highlands in the south-eastern part of the country up to the border of Cambodia, which consist of 3 highland areas: Meuang Puan Highland (Xiangkhouang Province), Nakai Highland, Khammouane province, and Bolovane highland (Southern Lao); and 3) flat land along the bank of the Mekong and other rivers. These areas are called the Vientiane Plain, Savannakhet Plain, and Champasak Plain (Kriang Kriphet, n.d.). Different ethnicities can be categorised into three groups: 1) the Lao Soung (highland Lao) are ethnic groups that live on high mountains in the northern part of Lao, such as the Akha, Muser, Hmong, Miao; 2) the Lao Thoeng (Higher upland Lao) include the Katu, Ta-oi, Lavae, Ta-liang; and 3) Lao Loum (Lowland Lao) are the tribes that live in the lowlands along the Mekong river and other rivers. These are the groups with the greatest populations (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2015). Laos has three regions: Northern Lao, Central Lao, and Southern Lao. It has seven provinces and one capital.

In southern Lao, the region consists of 5 provinces: Savannakhet province, Salavan Province, Champasak Province, Xékong Province, and Attapeu Province. The southern part of Laos has diverse ethnicities, cultures, traditions, beliefs, and local wisdom. Kriang Kriphet (2001) compiled the following information on Xekong province. Currently, there are four districts: Lamam District, which is where the main city is situated, Dakcheung District, Kaleum District, and Thateng District. The population consists of 3 main ethnic groups categorised by their ethnic languages: 1) The Lao Loum people use the Tai language family. Lao Loum only consist of three original villages: Phone village, Don Chan village, and Dan village. Even though the Lao Loum people have a lower population compared to other groups, they are a central part of the government and the culture. 2) Lao Thoeng use the Khmer language family, which consists of Ngae (Kriang), Katu, Tariew, Dakkung, and Ta Oy. This second group of people mostly live in Kaleum districts, except for Ta Riew and Dakkung. Lao Thoeng people speak the Bahnaric Languages of the Khmer language

family, which consist of Taliang, Yae, Harak, Kaseng, Lavy, Laven, and Xuay. Within Xuay groups, there are also two subgroups: Xuay Thateng and Xuay Yoktong. The Katu tribe has the largest population while Ta Rieng and Harak tribe have the second largest.

The Katu tribe can be categorised into 2 big groups: Katu Lao, living on the higher upland of southern Lao and Katu Viet, living in Vietnam (Kriang Kriphet, 2001). The Katu people in Laos are one of the many tribes that have been living in Laos for many centuries. The tribe lives on the higher upland, relying on nature and having abilities in basketry, weaving, and maintaining their livelihood through rotation rice planting in the mountains. These tribes have their own language and tradition (Theerasawat, 2000). From the observation and the interviews with Katu villagers in Kandon village, Xekong province, Laos PDR, the villages are quite small with most houses built close to one another. The houses have two stories. The second floor is built with wood while the first floor of some houses is left as an empty area for the family to relax, or has either wooden or cement walls. The roofs are built with tiles. From observation, only the roof of the Haw Kwan, or the village meeting halls, is built with thatch. Haw Kwans are mostly built in the middle of the village and are used for holding ceremonies.

Katu people also maintain their livelihood through hunting and collecting food from the forest. They don't focus on permanent farming since they often move their settlements. This goes in line with Kriang Kriphet's study that talks about the moving of the Katu settlements due to livelihood problems. The Lao government also encourages the Katu people to come down and live in the low land. For instance, New Kandon village migrated from the old Kandon village in Kaleum district in the past in search of an area that was more suitable for their livelihood. In addition, the Lao government also came up with a policy for developing the rural areas of Laos that are further away or are facing difficulties in their livelihood. The policy involve them moving closer to developed areas and having good access to transportation. However, the policy became one of the factors that changed the characteristics of the community and changed their way of life.

Kriang Kriphet (2001) provides information on the history of the Katu people in Kandon village, Tha Teng, Laos PDR. Kandon village had already moved their settlement ten times and their current location is due to an eleventh resettlement. Originally, the Katu people didn't live in Kaleum, but in Phu Kong King, Dakkung district. There were many reasons for the resettlements: an epidemic killed many people; during the war, Katu people had to migrate into the forest; and they could not grow crops. Therefore, there might be a need to expand farmland as well as gain transportation routes between different provinces and villages. That was why the current area was selected. At first, the location of the new Kandon village was where the Lao Loum people lived. The Provincial office moved the village to be next to the main road and replaced it with the Katu people of Ban Kandon.

A study by Janthadara (2011) concerning the Katu people in Xekong province mentioned that in 2013, the government had declared Ban Kandon as a cultural village. This brought much pride to the villagers. The reasons for this declaration were many interesting cultural identities, such as the livelihood of the village, the characteristics of the houses, the costumes, the beliefs, the rituals and traditions, the language and literature, the music and performances, the handicrafts, the occupations, and the food. Later on, tourists from many countries came to visit, as well as many documentary makers who came to make documentaries on different aspects of the Katu people.

The Tales and the Beliefs of the Katu tribe in Kandon village, Xekong province, Laos PDR Through the Structural Functional Theory

Katu people possess their own tribal oral literature. None is written or recorded. The literature is passed down through word of mouth and consists of songs, stories, tales, and beliefs concerning the connection to the surrounding natural resources of the tribe. The people believe in ancestral spirits, souls, and supernatural beings. These supernatural beings consist of those that protect the people and those that could harm the people when someone commits wrongdoing by bringing about damage to the family and the community. Therefore, Katu people have different rituals to make sure that their community lives together peacefully.

In a field visit to New Kandon village, Xekong province, the head of the village, Wipad Saengmanee, showed local arts. These were woodcrafts; objects situated in the Haw Kwan of the village. In the past, the world was flooded. However, the water could not reach Phu Kratae and Phu Kong King. Two beings that survived the flood were a woman (Ya Mek), who was an orphan, and a male dog (Ma Teuk or Pu Ma). Ma Teuk helped Ya Mek in different ways and stayed as a loyal friend. Ya Mek told Ma Teuk that if Ma Teuk wanted Ya Mek as a wife, Ma Teuk needed to swim to Phu Kong King and bring the fire from there. Ma Teuk tried many times but never succeeded since the water always put the fire out. Eventually, Ma Teuk put the fire in the calabash, tied it around his neck and swam back. Ya Mek became Ma Teuk's wife. Their first born was a dog, their second born was a human, their third born was a dog, and their fourth born was human. One day, Ma Teuk, his son and his daughter went into the forest and did not return in the evening. Ya Mek went to look for them and only found her son and daughter. Ma Teuk was already dead. After that, the son and the daughter lived together as husband and wife, expanding the family up until today. Apart from the tale of the Katu people about the birth of humans, the head of the village also talked about the beliefs about other animals, such as owls, big snakes, monkeys, and cats.

When considering information on the tales and the beliefs of Katu people through the Structural Functional Theory of Talcott Parson (Chantavanich, 2011), to understand social structure, there needs to be a consideration of four basic functions: adaptation, goal



attainment, integration, and latency or pattern maintenance. In addition, the theory also talks about four related social action systems. These consist of the body system, physical environment system, personality system, social system, and cultural system. These systems need to work together to create clarity in understanding social structure and function when combining them with the four social sub-systems: economic system, political system, societal/community system, and fiduciary system.

An interview was conducted with the headman and deputy headman of Kandon village (Wipad Saengmanee and Petkum Konkon). An interview was also conducted with the director of the Xekong museum, Kumhoo Promsan (2019), who had talked about the tale of the ancestors of the tribe. It consisted of Ya Mek and Ma Teuk, the ancestors of the Katu tribe of Kandon village. The tale was been told within the families to let the children within the tribe know where they came from. Table 1 shows the sub-system within the society, the social action system, and the basic function of the Katu tribe in the past.

After the Katu people of Kandon village had migrated to New Kandon village, Xekong province, Laos PDR, the Katu people needed to adapt themselves to the new physical environment in order to maintain their livelihood. External factors included the government's need to develop the lives of the people and the nation's contribution to the changes through the creation of new functions for both the men and women of the Katu tribe. The cultural capital of the tribe is used to support the cultural tourism trend that can lead to the development of the economy. The social and cultural system of the Katu people also needs to change, as can be seen in Table 2. It shows the social sub-system, the current social action system and the basic social function of the Katu people.

Table 1

The social sub-system, the social action system, and the basic social function of the Katu tribe in the past

<p><i>When a community and society live together to create happiness, there needs to be something that protects the norms and maintains the culture. This led to the creation of tales and beliefs that were passed down in order to teach and inform the coexistence of people and the surrounding nature of the Katu people.</i></p>	<p><i>When there was a need in production and consumption, as well as the integration of the management of the roles of individuals, the sub-system of the society merged into a social system. The social system and the basic functions involved family life and the expansion of the society starting from Ya Mek's family.</i></p>
<p>Social action system: culture system</p> <p>Social sub-system: fiduciary system</p> <p>Basic function: latency or pattern maintenance (L)</p>	<p>Social action system: social system</p> <p>Social sub-system: societal/community system</p> <p>Basic function: integration (I)</p>
<p>Social action system: body and physical environment system</p> <p>Social sub-system: economic system</p> <p>Basic function: adaptation (A)</p>	<p>Social action system: personality system</p> <p>Social sub-system: political system</p> <p>Basic function: goals attention (G)</p>
<p><i>When life is faced with situations that prevent it from going on, there needs to be an adjustment. When the world is flooded, there is a need to survive, which leads to more awareness of production and consumption.</i></p>	<p><i>When life needs production for consumption, goals need to be created as well as the functions and the personality of the individual. This led to the creation of a political system to manage lives. This is the case when Ma Teuk floated on the water to get the fire from Phu Kong King and in the role of a wife for Ya Mek.</i></p>

Table 2

The social sub-system, the social action system, and the basic social function of the Katu tribe at present

<p><i>When society changes, the creation of happiness in society and culture have to change. The storytelling shows identity to outsiders (culture). The cultural tourism trend of the Katu people could become a key.</i></p>	<p><i>When there was a need in production and consumption, as well as the management of the roles of individuals, the sub-system of the society merged into a new social sub-system. The next step involved the integration of the community based in the economy.</i></p>
<p>Social action system: culture system</p> <p>Social sub-system: fiduciary system</p> <p>Basic function: latency or pattern maintenance (L)</p>	<p>Social action system: social system</p> <p>Social sub-system: societal/community system</p> <p>Basic function: integration (I)</p>
<p>Social action system: body and physical environment system</p> <p>Social sub-system: economic system</p> <p>Basic function: adaptation (A)</p>	<p>Social action system: personality system</p> <p>Social sub-system: political system</p> <p>Basic function: goals attention (G)</p>
<p><i>When life involves situations that prevent it from going on as normal, there needs to be an adjustment when relocating from an old settlement to a new one due to sicknesses, wars, or the fact that a traditional way of life can no longer address the needs of the Katu community.</i></p>	<p><i>When life needs production to be sufficient for consumption, there needs to be a migration and the creation of new goals. This led to the creation of the functions or the personality of the individuals and to the creation of a political system to manage the lives of the people. For instance, the women within the tribe need to weave for trading reasons apart from working in the fields and finding resources in the forest. Men, like the headman of the village, need to coordinate with the government to help to adjust the society of the tribe to fit in with the development of the country, such as in cultural tourism, where cultural capital is used for economic development.</i></p>



Cultural Tourism Opportunity through Tale and Beliefs of Katu Tribe, New Kandon village, Xekong Province, Laos PDR

Different forms of tourism in countries within ASEAN today have become an important factor in boosting and developing the economy at both the domestic and international level. This be seen in the tourism strategies of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2015), which had laid out a long-term strategy from 2016-2025. The main content of the plan states that in 2025, the ASEAN region would become a quality tourism destination that can present identity and diversity through the ASEAN experience. In addition, it will also develop responsible and balanced tourism that will help create good livelihoods for the people both in economic and social aspects.

There are many elements in this strategy. These include the direction of the strategy in terms of competition regarding being a single tourist destination that consists of different strategies. This may involve importance in marketing and public relations in the creation of various products related to tourism. It may also involve carrying out and expanding services and tourism facilities in ASEAN, carrying out and expanding collaborative networks and tourist destinations, and improving services in transportation. Another element involves creating tourism in ASEAN with sustainable participation from all parties that consists of different strategies, such as improving participation from local communities, the government, and the private sector within the value cycle of tourism. Other strategies include creating trust, putting more importance on the protection and the management of world heritage areas, and expanding responsibilities in the protection of the environment and the changing climate.

Laos PDR is a place with tourist sites that has potential due to its beautiful landscape, society, culture, and way of life. As for the tourism strategies in Laos PDR, the National Tourism Association has a mission in creating terms and regulations as well as determining the strategies related to tourism that go along with the National Economic Development Plan. In conclusion, the plan mentions the creation of the collaborative networks in the economy and culture with other countries. It also mentions support for the tourism industry, creation of a plan to publicise culture and tradition, preservation of the country's heritage, and development of the livelihoods of different groups of people. Additionally, the plan also mentions the importance of the ethnic groups within Laos PDR, which led to the creation of a policy to help develop different ethnic groups in order to build consciousness and the understanding of differences in terms of ethnicity and the history of the different tribes. It also lead to the development of the economy (cited in Janthadara, 2011). This direction is based on surveys and registering of tourist sites, as well as compiling information about tourist sites and prioritising whether they should controlled at a national or local level.

Apart from relying on surveys, organising information, registering tourist sites, and prioritising tourist sites, locals should consider determining a target group that is suitable for tourist sites as well. This includes considering the potential of an area for both tourists and excursionists. The World Tourism Organisation (Goeldner & Ritchie, cited in Sinlapaset, 2017) defines visitors as people who come and visit a location without permanently staying, being at the location less than twelve months, and having the motive of a visit to relax or conduct personal business. Furthermore, visitors are also categorised into two types: tourists and excursionists. Tourists are those who come and stay for at least twenty-four hours at the location while excursionists are those who visit the location for only one day or less than twenty-four hours and do not spend a night. After the survey, the organising of the information, the registration of the tourist sites, prioritising of the tourist sites, and the tourism plan should be laid out in forms that are suitable for the way of life of the local people.

Tourism can exist in many forms, and cultural tourism is one interesting form of tourism that contains both tangible and intangible forms of culture. Tangible forms of cultures include handicrafts, arts, architecture, and so forth. Intangible forms of tourism are defined by the World Tourist Organisation (UNWTO) in a book called a Summary Study on Tourism and Intangible Cultural Heritage (n.d.): “intangible cultural heritage is embodied in those practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills, as well as in associated objects and cultural spaces, that communities and individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. Transmitted through generations and constantly recreated, it provides humanity with a sense of identity and continuity”.

As for the components of cultural tourism, Bunlert Jittangwattana (cited in Jangjaicharoen, 2015) states that it should consist of three components: 1) Attractions: Each tourist site should have different attractions, such as beautiful natural landscapes, cultural values and ways of life, or other special tourist activities, such as performances or local food. 2) Accessibility: This is another important factor that allows tourists to travel to sites. This includes convenient and safe transportation routes and facilities for vehicles that do not destroy the landscape. 3) Amenities: These exist within tourist sites to help facilitate and create satisfaction for tourists. These components are in line with a study on tourism by Chanmuen et al. (2016). They studied sustainable tourism and suggest that there is a need for communities to lay out tourism strategies. This idea gives direction in developing tourism using the community's historical resources, stories, natural resources, food, ways of life, and culture and beliefs that can help generate income for the communities.

The study consists of 1) The identities of the tourist sites 2) Story-telling 3) the basic infrastructures and facilities 4) The quality and tourism standard, and 5) Tourists.

Based on primary observation and a survey about the Katu tribe in New Kandon village, Xekong province, Laos PDR (using the main three main components of cultural tourism and the study on the direction of tourism in the community), the following was found: 1) The tourist attractions of the Katu tribe in New Kandon village included the beautiful scenery surrounded by nature and the simple livelihood of the tribal people with a society and culture. The latter differs from the society and culture of the Lao Loum people in their architecture, arts, tales, beliefs, language, costumes, music, performances, and traditions. 2) Easy access to the tourist sites existed due to a route that is connected to the main road and close to other important sites. 3) There are facilities for tourism.

Since the area of the Katu tribe in the New Kandon village hasn't been developed into a systematic tourist site, some facilities are not provided to the tourists. The main facility that is currently available is the Haw Kwan, or the main hall, which is the area that compiles knowledge and provides knowledges to the tourists as well as the area to hold activities. The person who provides information about the tales, beliefs, and other knowledge of the community is the headman and the deputy headman of the village. A majority of the tourists are excursionists that come and visit the community without spending a night. It was also found that most of the tourists are students, professors, and both Thai and foreign male and female academics, as well as journalists and documentary makers that want to learn about the tribal way of life and culture in Laos PDR.

In terms of cultural resource management, a study by Jangjaicharoen (2015) is called Cultural Tourism Management: A Case Study of Ogimachi Community, Shirakawago Village, Gifu Prefecture, Japan. The study presents information on the Policy of Japan in 2007, "Tourism builds a country, tourism build a city." This regards the community in creating learning and development in the preservation and the management of resources for tourism that relates to historical culture and traditions. Japan used this policy as a tool to solve economic problems and aging society problems to bring about restoration to the local sector.

Some examples of different forms of cultural tourism are as follows: 1) tourism with local tour guides; 2) tourism that focuses on close experiences with the local livelihood; 3) the creation of a story according to literature, visiting important places that relate to well-known people, and arranging a tour following the famous works of literature and anime; and 4) presenting the charm and new perspective of a city. This kind of tourism requires skills and expertise in order to create added values, improve the image of a local area, and advertise to broad target groups. When considering the overall potential of the Katu tribe in Kandon village in comparison to the model of the Ogimachi community, the first thing that the local tour guide suggests to the tourists is the story of Ya Mek and Ma Teuk or the birth history of their tribe in Haw Kwan. This is also a way to give importance to their birth history concerning their beautiful geographical area and the beliefs that have been passed down



through generations. Even though most people in the country are Lao Loum people with different cultures, stories, and beliefs, they have not been able to merge in or take over the traditional tales of the tribe.

The legend that involves the cultural heritage of the tribe became the social heritage that interestingly reflects the respect for different ethnic groups and cultures in Laos PDR. Additionally, the tales are also an important part of the culture that can produce benefits both in terms of generating income and values to the community and the country.

Conclusion

The Katu tribe passed down the tale and the beliefs of the birth of humans, “Ya Mek and Me Teuk (male dog)”, to explain their lives and how the people within the society live together and how they are related to the environment and their settlement, creating consciousness and love for the tribe. To learn and understand the tale, there needs to be a focus on the culture, the characteristics of the beliefs, or the values of a particular society. This attains the symbols that are hidden within the main content and the context of the tales and beliefs as well as the society that the tales are being passed down to.

When tourism becomes the main factor in boosting the economy both at the local and national levels, bringing in culture and beliefs and merging them with the trend of interest in cultural tourism is an opportunity to increase the income and values of the culture. It also helps place more importance on the role of the tales and beliefs and the development and the challenges of the leadership roles within the community. It also indicates an opening to a diversity of culture within Laos PDR.

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