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Chiang Mai city's atmosphere (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai World Heritage Initiative Project)

# Conservation and Transmission of Local Wisdom Towards

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## Abstract

Chiang Mai, the second largest city in Thailand that is rich in effective resources, possesses a potential of great city development according to global development trends. Chiang Mai is not only well-known for its long historical contexts, but the city also has been accumulating its valuable cultural heritage from generation to generation, which recently has been shown as a significant factor for the development approach. Thanks to the potential of human resources, Chiang Mai has strengthened the intersectoral network between local organizations including the public sector, the private sector, academic institutes, and other related partnership, to develop a systematic working process and successful collaboration. The network has realized the importance of cultural assets conservation and development to achieve maximum benefit for the local people. It has prepared guidelines for cultural capitals which are compatible with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and also focuses on economic expansion by promoting the city at both national and international level.

Keywords : Chiang Mai, creative city, cultural capital, local wisdom, sustainable development, city development, collaboration

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People is sprinkling scented water on the important Buddha image of Chiang Mai in Songkran Festival (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)

Chiang Mai is rich in many resources including arts and cultures, cultural heritage sites, religious places, and important historical sites. Chiang Mai has had a long history since it was founded 724 years ago. It is also known as the land that combines various kinds of outstanding culture. Moreover, Chiang Mai is also rich in plentiful natural resources including charming mountainous topography and nice weather. All these resources certainly influence the beliefs, traditions, customs, rituals, and ways of life of local people. It can be said that Chiang Mai is one of the most popular tourist destinations at both national and global level, and welcomes a constant flow of numerous visitors all the time.

Nowadays, Chiang Mai is on its way to become a “Mega City” by improving on all aspects, including development of policies, physical characteristics of the city, and building effective infrastructures. Through these changes, the city aims to become the center of national and regional economy. The new developments also include transportation, alternative energy, and all types of communication system. New international airport construction, high-speed rail development, educational encouragement, and tourism development are highlighted in a value-added approach that will contribute to economic leverage, huge foreign investment, and also boosting employment in many different job sectors.

In addition to the future development strategies, Chiang Mai is also a city that is trying to conserve and maintain its valuable cultural heritage. In fact, the city has planned a platform since 2016 in order to integrate the “Body” (implied as the city) and the “Mind” (implied as spirit of local people and communities), with a belief that if these two things are separated, the city might grow ineffectively. The working process should be under the collaboration between all related sectors, and play an important role in cultural conservation and city development in the proper direction,

by preventing the reduction of cultural values. The public sector has roles in policy planning by giving priority to original contexts of the city and the ways of life. The private sector and the economic sector have also operated to support economic expansion which is compatible with the policy. It is really necessary that academic institutions, including universities, vocational colleges, and schools, play their roles by disseminating related knowledge and conducting research to support effective city development. Most importantly, local people from all communities in Chiang Mai are the significant driver for activities managed within the city, efficiently. This collaboration will foster the city to be developed in all aspects and to lean on its own cultural capital and resources in a sustainable way.

Even though Chiang Mai has increasingly improved in terms of physical characteristics and facilities, there still exist principal cultural capitals of the city that local people have forged to conserve and develop, such as historical sites, religious places, unique architectural buildings, art patterns, traditions, and various ethnic groups. The remarkable crafts and folk arts of Chiang Mai have been created from indigenous knowledge and creativity. Local materials from the surrounding areas have been applied to make their own masterpieces. The integration between special craftsman skills, local wisdom, and professional local material utilization, leads to valuable contributions, which have been accumulated from generation to generation. From past to present, the development of crafts and folk arts has given rise to a well-known industry that represents Chiang Mai today.

Chiang Mai has the arts and cultures that have enjoyed the maximum prosperity. These precious art and cultural resources of the city are still maintained as crucial cultural heritage, and local people are always proud to present them, despite the fact that some of these resources have worn out or changed over time. The potential of the cultural heritage has contributed to the city’s remarkable identity that is now widely recognized. The art and cultural resources also have been regarded as one of the strengths for sustainable and effective city development plan.

Spirit Dance Ritual to sacrifice the important ancestors of Chiang Mai (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)







Perfect atmosphere of the Teacher Venerated Ceremony  
(photo courtesy of Wattana Techasuwanna (David Ryo))

Chiang Mai University, one of the famous academic institutions in the region, has always acknowledged the importance of art and cultural resources, particularly in Lanna area (northern part of Thailand), where the university is located. The university has established the Faculty of Fine Arts, in order to leverage the education related to diverse cultures and various types of art. The faculty also encourages all cultural activities which have been held throughout the years in Chiang Mai and in those neighboring provinces that have shared similar cultures. The faculty has forged to develop the curriculums that emphasize the conservation of arts and cultures, especially through the offered Bachelor's degree of Fine Arts (Program in Thai Art). The instruction purposely focuses on strong recognition of art and cultural resources in Lanna area, by passing on knowledge and building common understanding in all aspects. This program has provided many courses related to cultures and folk arts, which aim at supporting effective knowledge integration. For example, the Conservation of Fine Art course distributes a suitable platform for arts and archaeological materials conservation, and the Thai Art Project course emphasizes on the study of original art and cultural contexts, which can further be developed into in-depth research in the Individual Study course, in order to present creative contribution or innovation by collaborating knowledge, skills, and creativity. Moreover, the Faculty of Fine Arts has been providing Master's degree of Arts (Program in Art and Culture Management). This program focuses on cultural capital management, which is compatible with sustainable city development. The program has undertaken to empower the potential of specialists to engage in effective art and culture management and relevant businesses and industries.

Furthermore, the Faculty of Fine Arts has always been a main driver of local arts and cultures to foster cooperation between related sectors and encourage the city development plan by using its own art and cultural resources.

The aforementioned courses of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University, have contributed to the growth of numerous art and culture management specialists. These specialists have taken an important role in art and cultural expressions. "Arts Sprout," generally known as "Nho Silapa," is a group of alumni who graduated with the Bachelor's degree of Fine Arts (Program in Thai Art). The name conveys the main purpose of this group that aspires to work like the constantly blooming sprouts for arts and cultures from generation to generation. The group is especially in charge of local art and culture management. They always take part in relevant activities when arts and cultures are implemented into the city development plan. They also collect indigenous knowledge and local wisdom systematically, by taking notes, taking photos and videos, and using contemporary platforms, with which they often conduct in-depth research. The useful information has been disseminated to local people, which in turn leads to the recognition of their own valuable cultural capital. They are proud to transmit their cultures and willing to convey their identity to other general people from different cities. The group has forged to form a collaboration network between skillful artisans, communities, and specialists to revive their indigenous knowledge and assess their local resources to achieve maximum benefits.

As the main driver for art and cultural activities, successful transmission in art and culture management has been presented through notable annual activities, which are operated by the Faculty of Fine Arts. These activities have been providing a space for art and cultural knowledge distribution and expression, including artworks, traditions, rituals, traditional performances, and local music performances. The

Elaborate parade especially for the Teacher Venerated Ceremony  
with beautiful and creative materials to convey their respects towards teachers  
(photo courtesy of Wattana Techasuwanna (David Ryo))





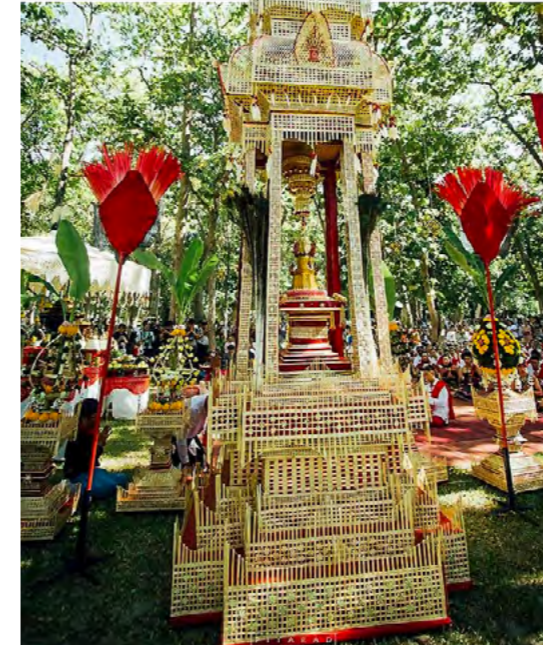


The parade of the Faculty of Fine Arts  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai University Student Union)

activities are also well-known for their knowledge integration and creativity. Examples of the activities will be described as follows:

The Teacher Venerated Ceremony has been held annually under the cooperation between Arts Sprout group and the Faculty of Fine Arts. The ceremony aims to convey respect towards teachers, who have been bestowing their knowledge and encouragement to students, including both the teachers who are still alive and those who passed away. People have a strong belief that taking great care of their teachers will lead to a prosperity of life. The ceremony reflects patterns of integration between knowledge, local wisdom, and tradition, which is a result of effective education supported by the university. Each year, one of the unique cultures will be selected as a theme of the ceremony. It is not necessary that the selected culture should only be Lanna cultures (northern part of Thailand's cultures)—it can be any interesting culture from the region. After the theme is mentioned, they will do literature reviews related to contexts of that culture in all aspects, including historical background, architectural style, artworks, and traditional costumes. The identity of the selected culture is developed to create materials used especially in the ceremony. Arts Sprout group and the Faculty of Fine Arts have been continuing to hold this auspicious ceremony, and transmitting it to the next generation since the establishment of the faculty. This remarkable art and cultural expression has been widely recognized by the general public, and has become a creative ritual welcoming a large number of participants every year.

The Doi Suthep Trekking activity is an annual welcoming ceremony that takes the freshmen of Chiang Mai University to worship the important pagoda at Suthep Temple, one of the famous temples in Chiang Mai, which is generally known as “Wat Phra That Doi Suthep.” Every faculty will participate in this activity by decorating their own parades. This is how culture and creativity are transmitted through an



The Buddha image is placed in bamboo weaving castle which its pattern is influenced by basketry material culture  
(photo courtesy of Piyaard Taduk)



One of the important materials for worship the pagoda  
(photo courtesy of Chaliangpol Duenpen)

elaborate parade. Especially, the parade of the Faculty of Fine Arts is always stunning, and many people always look forward to seeing it. The special theme of the parade is also selected, and worship materials are well-designed and created. The parades of the Faculty of Fine Arts are praised as a pattern of traditional cultural expression, which stems from an effective integration between knowledge and creativity.

Furthermore, the Faculty of Fine Arts has always been operating to revive, continue, and disseminate knowledge and wisdom related to arts and cultures at all levels of local, national, and international stages. Cultural heritage has been fostered to be a significant part of city development. It is often compared as the taproot of a shade of tree for Chiang Mai.

The parade starts from front gate of the university and they keep walking around 14 km to Suthep Temple  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai University Student Union)







The freshmen of the Faculty of Fine Arts with their worship material  
(photo courtesy of IPLe Sculpture)

Creative city of UNESCO has been numerously mentioned in the last decade, particularly in terms of city development, since arts and cultures have been recognized as an important asset to support economic value added to the city. During the period of economic recovery in Europe at the end of last century, the concept of creative city was considered widely in Europe, and this was seen as a renewal of Renaissance. Even though Europe and Asia might have different contexts depending on their own physical characteristics, Asia also has had similar concepts. Many cities in Asia have forged to make a breakthrough in restrictions related to policy and resources, and to develop fundamental factors, which help provide a space for art and cultural production. They have shown similar directions to promote themselves to be creative cities, where arts and cultures are utilized as a mechanism for the improvement of economic system. Due to the expected goal, cities in Asia with their development plans could operate to become more sustainable.

Chiang Mai has managed to support and conserve traditional Lanna culture, and has always realized the importance of area improvement for all 25 districts in the province as well as their potentials. This eventually led to the initiative project to promote the city to become a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, with the collaboration between Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization and Chiang Mai University since 2014. Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization has responsibility in several aspects of city development such as economy, society, education, health promotion, career promotion, public utilities, resources, and local wisdom and tradition, which have been continued and transmitted to the following generations. To achieve maximum benefits for the local people, Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization has established three guidelines related to social capital and cultural capital as follows:

- 1) Supporting integrated working between local communities and related stakeholders to raise awareness and encourage participation in cultural activities including religious activities, the restoration of tradition, arts, cultures, and outstanding local wisdom, and also realizing the importance of ethnic groups;
- 2) Supporting the educational and social institutions for them to take an important role in the conservation, preservation, and transmission and development in related fields including religious heritage, arts and cultures, tradition, as well as the ancient architecture and historical sites in Chiang Mai; and
- 3) Supporting art and cultural knowledge management and disseminating it to the public, under the collaboration between stakeholders including the public sector, the private sector, and social organizations at both national and international levels, in order for Chiang Mai to become the creative city of art and culture.

Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization, Chiang Mai University, and related stakeholders have been collaborating to develop the city for almost seven years now, and have also been working as the member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network for three years. They have been supporting various cultural activities. The crafts and folk art of Chiang Mai have been presented in many national and international events through exhibitions, local cultural performances, and experiences exchanged in crafts and folk art. Moreover, they have been collecting all information related to local wisdom, folk art and craftsman skills.

The Division of Education Religion and Culture, which is under the supervision of Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization, has the responsibility to directly support and develop cooperating network for conservation and restoration of art, culture, religion, tradition, indigenous knowledge, and local history. Moreover, it also supports the studies or researches related to these fields. Since

Chiang Mai Crafts Fair 2019  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)







Foreign practitioners are enjoy decorating small Buddha image with colorful traditional pieces of mirror in Chiang Mai Crafts Fair 2019 (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)

2013, the Division of Education Religion and Culture has been collaborating with Chiang Mai University to implement the “Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Initiative Project,” and to encourage Chiang Mai to become a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network. The goal is to promote the city internationally, by applying its cultural capital and creativity as a driver for the development, under intersectoral cooperation between the public sector, the private sector, educational institutions, businesses, and all local communities in Chiang Mai. As the educational institution, Chiang Mai University has played an important role in the network to provide knowledge and useful suggestions, and also develop effective working strategies. Chiang Mai has been announced as a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2017, in the field of Crafts and Folk Art. Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization is recognized as the first provincial administrative organization in Thailand that has successfully promoted the city to become a creative city at

international level. Furthermore, the working team also has operated the “Action Plan Development for Conservation and Improvement of Historical Sites and Cultures in Chiang Mai Project according to World Heritage Approaches,” in order to develop conservation and improvement platforms especially for historical sites, arts, and cultures in Chiang Mai.

Since the beginning of the collaboration, the working team has been promoting various public supporting projects to encourage all activities related to art and culture, including hosting conferences and international folk art expositions, hosting national and international crafts exhibitions, providing workshops for craft design development, and developing Chiang Mai Creative City website to communicate their works and disseminate useful information. The exhibition “Chiang Mai: Creative City of UNESCO” distributed knowledge about local craftsman skills, local wisdoms, as well as exhibiting exceptional masterpieces made by local skillful artisans, in order to raise awareness among the public of valuable crafts in Chiang Mai. It also provided a space for new generation and vulnerable groups to share their knowledge, creativity, and innovation. The annual event “Chiang Mai Crafts Fair” which has been supporting public space for all local communities to display their elaborate crafts, and also for designers or young entrepreneurs to present their contemporary crafts with creative concept behind production, developed from original techniques and concepts. The event also has been a learning center for various kinds of craft and folk art workshop.

Apart from working for art and culture development inside the city, Chiang Mai has also empowered those provinces who are interested in fostering their own designated areas towards the UNESCO Creative Cities Network membership, such as Nan Province and U-thong ancient city, Suphan Buri Province. For instance, a meeting was held and participated by Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization, Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) from each province, and also the director of Office of Tourism Competitiveness, in order to

① Chiang Mai Crafts Fair 2018 (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)  
② Chiang Mai Crafts Fair 2018 (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)



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② Chiang Mai Crafts Fair 2019 (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)







Chiang Mai Crafts Fair 2019  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)



Indigo Tie Dye workshop  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)

disseminate knowledge, exchange experiences, suggest effective working process, and share creative city development goals of the city. Chiang Mai has also forged a synergy and strengthened relationship with many creative city members to share indigenous knowledge and innovative art and cultural expansion, and exchange best practices towards sustainable creative city, by participating in the events that have been held in other member cities, such as the “Phuket Chinese New Year and Old Phuket Town Festival” in Phuket, Thailand, the Creative City of Gastronomy, the “Adelaide Festival” in Adelaide, Australia, the Creative City of Music, and the “Human City Design Seoul” in Seoul, South Korea, the Creative City of Design.

Chiang Mai has learned from other member cities and has applied the concepts of creative city, experiences, and innovative development to leverage the city’s abilities. This has contributed to the creative manufacturing industry in terms of

local crafts. The industry supports the potential of people in craft communities to develop their products with creativity, while still maintaining the value of their own cultural capital. For example, Baan Tawai, located in Hang Dong district, is the biggest and well-known wood carving village in Chiang Mai. The creative development approaches employed here can lead to a large amount of orders that help generate more income directly for the local people. Bor Sang, located in San Kamphaeng district, is a village that has been creating umbrellas from traditional Saa paper (mulberry bark) for centuries. Since the umbrellas from Bor Sang village have been selected as one of OTOP products (One Sub-district, One Product or generally known as One Tambon, One Product), they have been very popular among Thai visitors and foreigners. Moreover, they also have been noticed as one of the symbols of Chiang Mai.

The working team from Chiang Mai is visiting Icheon city, South Korea  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)



Traditional pottery and gold leaf workshop  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)







Nan City of Crafts and Folk Art Initiative Project  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)



The 20th Phuket Chinese New Year and Old Phuket Town Festival  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)

Apart from the potential of local people who can develop their products to become the creative manufacturing industry, many related sectors have coordinated to play an important role to support the craft industry in Chiang Mai. The Industrial Promotion Center Region 1, a public sector, has forged to leverage local crafts towards contemporary lifestyle industry, to raise awareness, to maintain indigenous knowledge, and to promote wider participation in cultural life for the general public. The Industrial Promotion Center Region 1 also has fostered the product development to meet the needs of consumers, which is compatible with contemporary ways of life. Young designers or young entrepreneurs have been encouraged to create local crafts with new creative designs and innovations. “Chiang Mai Design Week” is an annual festival that has been held under the cooperation with design organizations, to present design innovations and new projects that cater to the needs of modern living. It also provides a space for conversation where people can get together

The XIII UNESCO Creative Cities Conference FABRIANO 2019  
(photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)



and share design knowledge, as local and international designers and creators are invited to take part in the creative culture and the potential of design. Moreover, the event will help build collaborative networks and expand the local and international business opportunities, which will then lead to a better working environment for creators and entrepreneurs in creative industries. Importantly, they further Chiang Mai’s development effort towards becoming a “Creative City” with deep art, cultural and artisan roots.

Spanning from the development efforts to leverage local crafts with cultural roots towards modern creative designs and innovations, from local production to creative industries and international business opportunities, it is clear that Chiang Mai has managed to promote its cultural capital to seek maximum benefits for local citizens and other different industries such as tourism industry. Arts and cultures of Chiang Mai have been used as an important engine for city development. Especially in terms of economic expansion, tourism industry in Chiang Mai has applied arts and cultures to attract tourists from all over the world to experience cultural activities in the city, and this has helped creating job opportunities and generating higher income for local people. The working process, under the cooperation between Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization, Chiang Mai University, and related stakeholders, has also focused on the implementation of the plan that is compatible with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to reduce social inequality, to address the risks of social polarization, the vulnerable groups and individuals, and to provide good health and well-being for all ages.

Even though Chiang Mai is operating to develop all types of infrastructures and physical characteristics to eventually become a mega city, it also gives priority to its cultural heritage as well as city development. Cultural heritage is local people’s identity that has been maintained and accumulated from generation to generation. The city development policies focus on the integrated working between “Body” (implied as the city) and “Mind” (implied as spirit of local people and communities), and are applied for effective growth of the city. This is a challenge of the development for all stakeholders including related sectors and the local





Example of product development in One Craft One Gold Project (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project)



Example of traditional Saa paper product development in One Craft One Gold Project (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai World Heritage Initiative Project)

communities. Although the city might grow increasingly according to global development trends, they are trying to enhance their own city and maintain their spirit at the same time.

“Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project” has been expanded from “Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Initiative Project,” after Chiang Mai has been announced as a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network, in the field of Crafts and Folk Art. Under the cooperation network led by Chiang Mai Provincial Administration Organization and Chiang Mai University, the project fosters cultural diversity conservation, and supports the transmission of local wisdom for youths and general public through cultural activities. The project has also been promoting

Local museum installation in Baan Tawai village (photo courtesy of Chiang Mai World Heritage Initiative Project)



creative cultural heritage expansion that provides opportunities for all people who engage in or earn their living in the cultural field. This has contributed to the creative industry that generates higher income and well-being status for its members, and has also led to improving the economic system of the city. As a result, Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art Project is one of significant factors that help support the balance between city development and the spirit of local people.

The Government of Thailand has been supporting the concepts of sustainable development. The working team and all stakeholders have developed an action plan that is compatible with these concepts, by giving priority to all community scales. The action plan encourages knowledge integration that helps achieve maximum benefits for the local people. Moreover, the way cultures are applied as a driver for creative city improvement is the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of UNESCO, the universal agenda for creating a more peaceful, prosperous, and equitable world. In the past, there were many restrictions for intersectoral collaboration within Chiang Mai, but the creative city policy of UNESCO can help mitigate these restrictions. The policy can also strengthen the collaboration network between all related sectors, since they have realized the importance of conserving cultural resources and creative development.

It is a great honor to be a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network that makes local people realize the importance of their own place, and this designation can also be used as a management mechanism for related contexts. Chiang Mai has had many opportunities to learn the different cultural heritage management approaches, by exchanging knowledge with other creative cities in the network, and applying them into its own development plan. Moreover, Chiang Mai has forged to empower other provinces in the country as well as international cities that are interested



in fostering themselves towards the membership. However, the most important thing is to maintain the standard and follow guidelines as a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network, by improving systematic working process, strengthening collaboration, integrating knowledge, and supporting potentials. Indeed, this is the way in which Chiang Mai can leverage itself to be a creative city that leans on its own cultural capital in sustainable ways.

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