

Restoring the Living Culture of Local Buddhist Heritage in Luang Prabang

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Abstract: Theravada Buddhism holds an important place among the residents of Luang Prabang, Laos. It is the source of a living culture in the UNESCO Heritage City with rapidly developing tourism. However, with the rise of urbanization and tourism, a large part of Luang Prabang's population moved to the suburbs, while the center has been filled by commerce. Although the state has made unremitting efforts to protect the appearance of the ancient city, this change led to changes in the city's organic social and cultural structure and seriously damaged the long-standing Buddhist rituals and Buddhist mentality of the local community. The decline of Buddhism in Luang Prabang, if no effective measures are taken to prevent it, will obviously lead to the decline of the city's cultural life. Preserving and promoting cultural heritage towards sustainable development, as set out by UNDP in 2015 is currently the focus of the city's tourism development; however, this policy is being applied and implemented unevenly. The replacement of Luang Prabang's traditional population structure and the new immigrants' lack of understanding of local Buddhist culture have put part of the city's living culture at risk of being faded or lost. This study combines literature

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analysis with field investigation to discuss the current status of Buddhist life in Luang Prabang, especially the morning Tak-bat (alms round) rituals, explore the challenges faced by local Buddhist traditions in the context of demographic changes, and provide scientific and practical basis for better and systematic protection and promotion of the city's authentic living culture.

Keywords: Luang Prabang, Buddhism, tourism, heritage, living culture

Introduction

The living culture of a community (or city) is the tangible and intangible value system created and maintained by the local community based on the continuity of its past and newly invented culture. As a UNESCO heritage ancient city, Luang Prabang's heritage culture is deeply embedded in every tangible object and intangible practice in the city, and contains a long cultural memory (see further Trankell 1999, 191-213). Every change in material objects or practices may lead to changes in the cultural structure and nature within the city.

Since 1995, the Lao government has been committed to promoting the protection and inheritance of the Luang Prabang World Cultural Heritage through the development of tourism and promoting its cultural value system to the world (see UNESCO World Heritage Convention). From the perspective of tourism-oriented culture studies, based on the definition of Trần Ngọc Thêm (2001) and the sustainable tourism perspective of UNESCO (2002), it can be understood that tourism culture is a system of socio-economic and ecological values created by tourism activities directly related to parties including government, local authorities/managers, tourist agents, local communities, and tourists. Heritage tourism must aim to protect the overall value system of the heritage itself, enhance economic opportunities for local residents, foster a lifelong learning mentality, and promote intergenerational inheritance and interpersonal/intercultural exchanges. The protection and promotion of heritage culture must be carried out at both the material and non-material aspects to ensure the normal evolution of the organic structure of a living community (city).

On October 1, 1994, the Resolution on culture in the reform period was passed at the 9th National Conference of the Central Executive Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, Series V. The conference determined the tasks of preserving and promoting cultural heritage values as follows:

“Preserve, restore, develop and use cultural heritage values in a reasonable and reasonable manner, first of all in architectural and artistic works”, archeology, sanctuary, important landmarks in terms of history, landscape, traditions and cultural identity of the nation to become a source of knowledge and a cultural tourist destination of the Nation...” (the 9th National Conference Document, 1994). According to the principles of UNESCO and the general understanding of heritage

scholars and state agencies in Laos, heritage protection refers to the protection and preservation of the inherent form of objects and phenomena. The protection of cultural heritage usually goes hand in hand with the introduction/promotion of the value of cultural heritage to the outside world, and any loss, change, transformation or deformation must be avoided in this process. These two tasks cannot be separated from each other, because preserving and promoting cultural heritage are always closely linked dialectically; they are two components of unity, mutuality, and mutual influence in the preservation of cultural assets. Only by successfully preserving cultural heritage can we promote cultural values, promoting is also the best way to preserve cultural heritage by keeping heritage value in the consciousness of the social community. For tangible and intangible cultural heritage values to be eligible for conservation and promotion, they need to satisfy two conditions. First, they must be considered quintessential, a true value that is inherited, transparent, and beyond doubt or debate. Second, they must contain the ability and potential to stand for a long time, to be valuable for many times (that is, to have long-term value) in the face of inevitable changes in the material and spiritual life of people, especially in the context of an extremely vibrant market economy and globalization process. Types of conservation include intact conservation and conservation on the basis of inheritance. Each type of conservation will have differences in the types of tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage.

It can be seen that the Lao Government's cultural heritage protection policy is comprehensive and consistent in both tangible and intangible cultural heritages. However, in reality, the authorities implementing that policy at the grassroots level are not truly creative, not well-organized, and uncomprehensive, often leading to low effectiveness. As a result, only part of the heritage (usually tangible objects) is protected and promoted. As far as local Buddhism is concerned, current policies focus on preserving and promoting the architectural and fine artistic beauty of pagodas/temples rather than Buddhist ideology, rituals and other religious practices. This unsystematic view has led to a dramatic change in Buddhist life in Luang Prabang over the past 30 years of tourism development.

Research literature and methodology

There is little research on the heritage value and heritage protection of Luang Prabang, Laos, especially under the perspective of cultural studies. On public forums, there are currently only a few discrete articles to generalize local history (including heritage sites) and this is considered a professional handbook for preserving tourism heritage of all industries. Outside Laos, There are some articles on the traditional

beauty, Buddhism, monuments, handicraft arts, and society of Luang Prabang, such as Zago (1972), Boutsavath and Chapelier (1973), Lacamp (1995), Sengsipaseut (1995), Gosling (1996), Condominas (1998), Bizot (2000), Yamaguchi, Takada, Ooka and Kawaguchi (2006), Heywood (2006), Holt (2009), etc., but these works do not explore the effectiveness and value of conservation and tourism promotion in maintaining Luang Prabang as a living ancient city. Some of the work has lagged behind, as the recent rise in tourism has brought new problems to Buddhist life in Luang Prabang.

Thanks to the results of various studies conducted in different regions of central and southern Vietnam, especially in the heritage city of Hoi An (such as Bui 2005; Ando et al 2015; Nguyễn 2018) and other towns of a similar nature (such as Nguyễn (2022) in Tây Ninh province, Huỳnh & Nguyễn (2024) in Biên Hòa (Đồng Nai province), and others), the authors of this study could draw on the experience of building the theoretical foundation and discourse analysis in the Luang Prabang case study. In general, research in Vietnam focuses in identifying natural and socio-cultural resources of local lands and communities to build up philosophy, cultural branding, tourism slogan and approaches to promote cultural tourism for the sake of both preserving and taking effects of local traditions (both tangible and intangible). Among the publications, we terribly take the case of Hoi An World Cultural Heritage City in the Central Vietnam as a counterpart for comparison in this research. Ando, Fukukawa, and Tomoda (2015, 379-389) pointed out that the preservation and tourism promotion of Hoi An Ancient City in Vietnam were carried out in four phases with three main characteristics, namely: (1) conservation fund is created by revenues of tourist ticket; (2) the regeneration of state-owned buildings has played leading roles for the conservation; and (3) professional organizations are responsible for both tangible and intangible cultural heritage conservation. According to our field observations, under state control, Hoi An Ancient City's businesses (mainly tourism services) are restricted to a certain proportion of the heritage city's central area, while stabilizing the heritage population to ensure the normal evolution of the living culture in the heritage quarter.

Hans George Berger describes and discusses the religious structure, practice and meaning of Lao Buddhist rituals in his book *Laos: Sacred Rituals of Luang Phrabang* (2000), in which the author emphasizes the antiquity and integrity of Lao Buddhist rituals. In his book *Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and Lao religious culture* (2009), John Clifford Holt also discusses in detail the nature, trends and impact of Buddhist activities in Luang Prabang in Chapter 4 (Commodities of the place: ritual expressions and the marketing of religious culture), as well as the life of monks, based on documentary analysis and anthropological field research. Through these two studies, we can systematically portray the Buddhist ritual life of the Buddhist community in Luang Prabang before and during the first wave of tourism, providing a reference for the ongoing study of Buddhist culture in the ancient city.

In his Master's thesis in political science, "How to improve the management, protection and promotion of world heritage values in Luang Prabang, Laos" (2014), Seng Kham presented the current status of management and protection of the World Heritage city of Luang Prabang in recent years, and stressed that in recent years, Luang Prabang's intangible cultural elements such as ancestor worship beliefs and the existing religion (Theravada Buddhism) have been successfully passed down from previous generations. The author argued that the main Buddhist ritual systems in Luang Prabang originated since the early 12th century, including the Tak-bat ritual, were "well preserved and promoted" these days.

Another Lao scholar, Seng Thong Lu Giang (2019) studied the impact of out-migration of indigenous peoples in the World Heritage city of Luang Prabang (taking the Xieng-thong Khi-ly community as an example) from a cultural perspective, stressed that the out-migration of indigenous people has had a certain impact on the protection of the intangible cultural heritage value of Luang Prabang. However, the author believed that this migration did not have a significant impact on the spiritual life of people after they left the village, because they still returned to participate in festivals. We observed that some people did return to central Luang Prabang for major Buddhist festivals, but the out-migration also had a significant impact on daily ritual activities at Luang Prabang temples.

In 2022, the Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Information, Culture and Tourism conducted a study on the Luang Prabang tourism market, and the results showed that the Tak-bat ritual plays a very important role in the development of the Luang Prabang cultural tourism. As many as 21% of domestic and foreign tourists chose to participate in the Tak-bat ritual when traveling to Luang Prabang. They enjoyed attending the ceremony and were impressed (compared to other tourist activities in Luang Prabang). Based on their findings, the study also proposed some specific solutions to "ensure that the tak-bat ritual continues according to the indigenous local traditions." From the above research results, we cannot deny the value of daily Buddhist rituals in promoting Lao culture through tourism activities; however, this issue needs to be studied and explored more deeply from a cultural perspective to ensure the organic structure and original significance of Luang Prabang's Buddhist tradition.

This research focuses on Luang Prabang as a case study, applying systems theory and cultural memory theory by Maurice Halbwachs (1980) in cultural studies as well as the UNESCO's perspective on cultural heritage in research. This research is to analyze and evaluate the current status of Luang Prabang Buddhist life through the case study of the daily Tak-bat ritual during the rise of tourism in the city, from which the authors analyse and discuss methodology and effectiveness of state-run heritage conservation and promotion in the present-day Luang Prabang. The initial premonition shows that, while the efforts of the Monument Management Board are being maximized, part of the cultural heritage, especially the local Buddhist mentality

and communal spiritual life, is gradually fading.

The data for this study mainly come from two sources: literature analysis and field survey. The literature used in the study included Lao domestic and international publications in the fields of religion, heritage management, anthropology, philosophy, and political science, focusing primarily on changes in Luang Prabang's traditional Buddhist culture and the effectiveness of the city's current conservation and promotion policies. The co-authors of this study work in cultural management offices and/or major in cultural studies and have conducted numerous field trips to Luang Prabang of Laos and similar towns/cities in Vietnam and Thailand, such as Hoi An and Hue (Vietnam) and Chiang Mai (Thailand). A total of 22 in-depth interviews were conducted in Luang Prabang in 2022 and 2023 (native Lao language and in English with local Lao translation), including 12 interviews with master monks (*bhikkhus*) from different temples in Luang Prabang, 7 interviews with local residents, and 3 interviews with the Luang Prabang Heritage Management Committee and the Provincial Department of Information, Culture and Tourism. The individual analysis and arguments in this study are the result of the co-authors' long-term observation and investigation in Luang Prabang.

The cultural history of Luang Prabang and the daily Tak-bat ritual

Luang Prabang's cultural history

The cultural heritage of the ancient capital of Luang Prabang is located in the central location of Luang Prabang province in the northwestern part of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). Previously, around the 12th-16th centuries, Luang Prabang served as the capital of the Lanexang Kingdom (the Kingdom of Million Elephants).

Luang Prabang Ancient Capital Cultural Heritage Area (Luang Prabang World Heritage City) has a total area of 774.06 m, located at 19, 53 latitude, 102, 18 longitude and borders six districts of Luang Prabang Province, namely Pak Ou and Pak Xeng districts in the north, Muong Nan district in the south, Xieng Ngan and Phon Xay districts in the east, and Chom Phet district in the west. The cultural heritage of the ancient capital of Luang Prabang is located in a valley, surrounded by mountains and is the meeting place of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, which Lao people often call "Mekhong" (ແມ່ຂອງ) and "Mekhan" (ແມ່ຄານ). In the entire Luang Prabang Cultural Heritage Management Quarter, there are 33 villages with a population of about 30,000 and 11 ethnic groups living together. Luang Prabang heritage families are selling their properties and moving out of the heritage area as the rise in tourism drives up housing prices and further depopulates the area. Businesses and agencies are taking over the bulk of the estate.

As mentioned before, Luang Prabang was once the ancient capital of the Lanexang Kingdom. In 1357, King Ferry Ma-ha-lad (ຈັຽຮັງມະຫາລາດ) unified various lands into a unified and independent kingdom, called Lanexang Kingdom. The King created conditions for the people of Lao tribes to build and develop their homeland associated with the development of spiritual life due to the profound influence of Theravada Buddhism. The Buddha's teachings strengthened strong faith; accordingly, temples and religious beliefs developed rapidly throughout the Kingdom. Among them, the city of Xieng-dong Xieng-thong (ຊຽງດົງ-ຊຽງທອງ) in the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Lanexang has become an important political and cultural center of the central Mekong region. And until 1650, King Xay-ya-sed Tha-thi-rad (ເຊຍາເສດຖາທິຣາດ) moved the capital to the present-day Vientiane city. He left behind the statue of Prabang which is a sacred ancient Buddha statue of the Buddhist group in Laos and from then on Xieng-dong Xieng-thong was replaced by the name Luang Prabang (ຫຼວງພຣະບາງ). After leaving the capital, ancient palaces and temples were still preserved in the form of a small kingdom in the north of Lanexang Kingdom (see further Stuart-Fox 1998; Vilavong 2001; Ladwig 2016). Until the 17th century, Lanexang collapsed and was dominated by Siam Kingdom (present-day Thailand), Luang Prabang and Champasac declared independence from Vientiane. Until 1983, the French Empire dominated Laos, they recognized the government of the King of Luang Prabang with autonomy in the North of Laos, under the direction of the French government. Thus, the architectural works of administrative agencies and houses in the center of Luang Prabang city are built according to French architecture, combining ancient religious architectural works with the ecological landscape. It is precisely thanks to this historical background that Luang Prabang has created a rich and unique cultural model in Laos. Luang Prabang was successfully registered by UNESCO as a World Cultural and Natural Heritage site on December 9, 1995. In 2004, UNESCO described it this way: "Luang Prabang's Buddhist temples are known throughout Southeast Asia for their distinctive style: tiered roofs and pillared porticos, embellished with ornamentation of the highest quality, including wood carvings, stucco moulding, dry fresco wall painting, lacquer work, and glass mosaic work" (UNESCO 2004, 24), while John C. Holt concluded that "Luang Phrabang is regarded as one of the best-preserved cities in Southeast Asia" (Holt 2009, 188).

The typical heritage on the ancient heritage list of Luang Prabang is the Chien temples built by kings of the Lanexang Kingdom around the 12th to 16th centuries such as Vixoun Temple (ວັດວິຊຸນ), Xieng-thong Temple (ວັດຊຽງທອງ), Saen Temple (ວັດເສນ), Phousy Temple (ວັດພະສີ), etc.. In total there are 35 temples on the heritage list and in addition there are French-era architectural works including 111 houses and antiques, including the Prabang statue. Spiritual and cultural activities of Luang Prabang are very rich, including Boun Pi-may Lao (Lao New Year), Boun Ok-phan-sa (Lantern Festival), Boat Racing Festival and Boun Tak-bat (ບຸນຕັກບາດ, Daily morning alms rounds ritual).

The daily morning Tak-bat ritual in Luang Prabang

Tak-bat ritual (ຕັກບາດ ຫຼື ບິນທະບາດ, Bin Tha-bat, or morning alms round ritual), according to the Tomayut Buddhism in Laos, is an important daily ritual and secular activity in the religious life of local Luang Prabang residents. In the early morning (usually before the sunrise), monks line up on the streets near the temple to practice “*bin tak-bat*” (in Indian Pali language: “*binlapatang*”, in which “*binla*” means “sticky rice” and “*patang*” means the alms bowl), blessing the participants and accepting their offerings. Participants are called to “*say-bat* (ໃສ່ບາດ)”, which means those who put offerings into the monks’ alms bowl with full respect and faith (see further Reynolds 1969, 78–89).

Tak-bat is a stable and significant Buddhist ritual in local Luang Prabang cultural life. According to Stanley Tambiah (1970), the ritual is performed through a system of symbols, including spoken language and/or formal practices, and is repeated regularly with the faithful participation of the ritual masters and members of the religious circle. *Tak-bat* ritual is thus a stabilized ceremony with an organic structure of Buddhist faith, monks, and participants with authentic faith and wholehearted respect. Nguyễn Văn Thoàn described:

“...After cooking, Lao women divide the glutinous rice and food into two parts: one part is used to offer to the monks during the *Tak-bat* ritual, and the other part is left for the family. They bring food to the street, line up in neat rows, respectfully wait for the monks to pass by. When the monks arrive, they must kneel, place their hands over their hearts, and bow. At this time, the monk opens the lid of the alm bowl. Participants respectfully raise the food and offerings (with both hands) to their foreheads and then place them into the bowls of each monk in turn. After the monks leave, the participants place one hand on their chest and with the other hand drop a few drops of water on the ground (dat-nam, ຢາດນ້ຳ), meaning that these drops of water carry their prayers to the Buddha so that the Buddha can witness their heart and wishes” (Nguyễn Văn Thoàn 2020, 109)

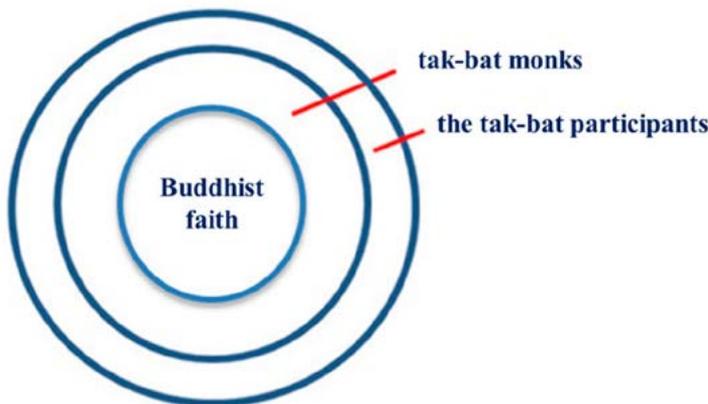
According to this author, Lao people are always happy after completing the *Tak-bat* ceremony because they have completed a meritorious task and more importantly, their offerings are accepted by the most prestigious people in the society - the monks (Nguyễn Văn Thoàn 2020, 110).

According to local Buddhist principles, monks are responsible for performing *Tak-bat* every day to complete their daily practice tasks and obtain daily food and supplies. Participants are required to wear appropriate clothing (usually local

traditional clothing), attend the ceremony and give alms to the monks with a pure heart and a desire to live a good life and contribute to the spread of the teachings. During the ceremony, young women are not allowed to show their faces to the monks (as to avoid the vibration of love between young monks and female devotees); instead, they bow their heads and use their hands to place food and other offerings into the alm bowls. Compared to other places in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia, “Tak-bat” in Luang Prabang is the most popular daily ritual among all the traditional native peoples of the city. Along with daily Tak-bat ritual, the Lao Buddhists also hold Tak-bat during important yearly festivals, such as Boun Pi-may Lao, Boun Phravet, Boun Ok-phan-sa, and Boun Tak-bat in local calendar (see further Berger 2000). Among them, Boun Phravet has been considered as “the grandest merit-making festival” in the Buddhist community of Luang Prabang (Zago 1972, 290– 297; Hayashi 2003, 121; Berger 2007; Holt 2009, 210-211; see further Tambiah 1970, 160; Khamlien 1997; Rasdavong 2006).

Lao scholar Kham-bon Boun-nha-phon (2013) in *The Yearbook of Writers Association of Luang Prabang*, believes that Tak-bat is a secular activity in which Lao monks accept meals from local believers and is part of the monks’ daily life. Unlike Boun-nha-phon, we (the authors of this article) believe that the alms-giving ceremony is not just a secular activity of monks, but a ritual form that connects society with temples and Buddhism, which helps to maintain and promote people’s faith, thereby promoting the role and significance of Buddhism in social life. Therefore, those who participate in the Tak-bat ritual are an important and indispensable part of *the ritual circle*.

Figure 1. The tak-bat ritual circle/structure



Source: authors.

It can be said that the alms-round ritual is a two-way communication process that has been sanctified within the framework of the local Theravada Buddhist religious circle in Luang Prabang. Both “parties” in the exchange are organic parts of this circle of faith, among which monks are one of the three pillars of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), while participants are part of the ritual circle and also an organic part of *the ritual circle*. At this time, the participants is composed of many elements, including the image of Buddhist believers, the philosophical ideas of the Buddhist faith system, and the organic components of the Tak-bat ritual (emcees, ritual performers, sacrificial foods/offerings, ritual atmosphere, liminal and liminal-crossing mentality, etc. see Seligman and Weller 2012, cited in Nguyễn 2020); therefore, it is difficult for people outside the local religious community (businessmen, workers, tourists, etc.) to fully participate in religious Tak-bat almsgiving rituals as local residents do. For tourism workers, this can be part of the corporate mission (in exchange for wages - a pure civil society transaction); for tourists, it is a personal and psychological cultural resonance with the local population.

Applying the concept of Maurice Halbwachs (1980), the Tak-bat ritual in Luang Prabang is part of the local Buddhist cultural heritage of Laos. It not only reflects the historical and cultural memory of Luang Prabang ancestors, but also contains the local society’s outlook on life and religious activities. Protecting the authenticity of this ritual is also about preserving a living cultural resource for local communities.

Current status of the work of preserving and promoting Luang Prabang cultural heritage

The unsystematic work of the Luang Prabang Heritage Management Committee (LPHMC)

It can be seen that the heritage of the ancient capital of Luang Prabang is associated with Lao Buddhist tradition, in which intangible values are strongly expressed in Buddhist faith, ritual and other religious activities while tangible values are marked in architecture, sculptures, city landscape, food, clothing, transportation, earning for living, and daily life. Thanks to its long Buddhist tradition, Luang Prabang’s tangible and intangible cultures are intertwined and integrated with each other. Daily alms rounds ritual and other Buddhist activities help to affirm Buddhist beliefs in the community and bring people together in both religious/ritual circle and secular society. Therefore, any aspect (or area) of Luang Prabang culture faces unexpected changes, and the rest are likely to lose their mindset.

As a World Heritage City, Luang Prabang Ancient Town is managed, protected and promoted its value in tourism by the Luang Prabang Heritage Management Committee (LPHMC) in accordance with the National Cultural Heritage Law.

LPHMC carries out its tasks by coordinating with relevant ministries, organizations, authorities and businesses. According to *the Lao National Cultural Heritage Law* No. 44/SPhX of November 16, 2013 and the 1972 UNESCO Convention, as well as *Luang Prabang Province Cultural, Historical and Scenic Heritage Management Regulations and Manuals*, the conservation work has two important tasks, namely, (1) the preservation and (2) promotion of its values (especially in tourism). In general, the role of LPHMC meets the basic needs and principles of preserving and promoting heritage values; however, current management only pays more attention to certain aspects of heritage management works, namely, the preservation of ancient architecture and urban space and the promotion of tourism, and of course. On the intangible side, LPHMC places great emphasis on the Tak-bat ritual as a means of attracting tourists (rather than as a manifestation of the preservation of Luang Prabang's intangible heritage). They care about Buddhist festivals, see the festival system as part of Luang Prabang's cultural heritage, and will not interfere with festival activities (LPHMC Office interview document 2022), but they have not yet realised that the rapid growth in the number of tourists and the decline in the original population of Luang Prabang have brought about huge changes in the structure and nature of the festivals.

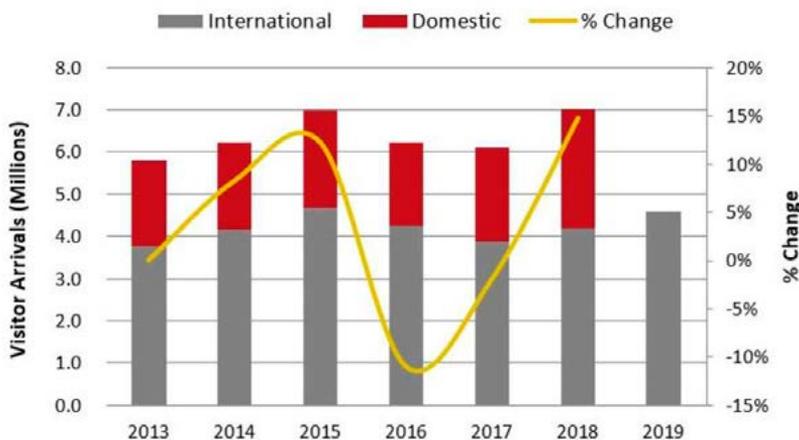
The boom in tourism services and the changing demographics of heritage areas

In fact, tourism has been booming since Luang Prabang was officially recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995 (UNESCO 2004; Holt 2009, 189). Ingrid Trankell (1999, 200) says: "Luang Prabang is promoted on the tourist market as a place of romanticism and royal mystique" (Trankell 1999, 200, cited in Holt 2009, 186-187). Although there are still many limitations, over the past 30 years, the recorded heritage has made certain achievements in preserving and promoting such as: (1) protecting and seizing the overall integrity of ancient heritage, making Luang Prabang a significant tourist destination in Lao PDR; (2) complying with UNESCO conventions and the Cultural Heritage Law of Laos to ensure the main goals; (3) strengthening heritage management capabilities through professional training and effective coordination (cooperation) with relevant units and improving the living conditions of urban residents in heritage areas; as a result, Luang Prabang's officials and residents are deeply aware of their responsibilities in protecting and promoting the value of world cultural heritage (see The Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Information, Culture and Tourism 2022; LPHMC Office interview document and on-site observation 2022).

From 1995 to 2023, Luang Prabang received around 9 million tourists, and tourism revenue accounted for approximately 45% of the province's total GDP. Chinese, American, Thai, and Vietnamese visitors rank at the top four groups of tourists arriving in Luang Prabang. In order to serve such a rapidly growing number of

visitors, the Luang Prabang Heritage Quarter has to strengthen its carrying capacity, which means that more and more heritage estates are converting their residential functions into hospitality venues, and more and more heritage population are moving out of the core area of the ancient city (data from on-site observations in 2022 and 2023, and in-depth interviews with five local residents in 2023).

Figure 2. Number of tourists in Luang Prabang in 2013-2019



Source: Tourism Development Department, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism of Laos (see, Voellm & Wong 2020).

Besides the achievements that have been reported above, the ancient of Luang Prabang is currently facing the following problems, namely:

(1) The original Luang Prabang residents' massive out-migration and the breaking of the long-lasting religious circle

The rapid development of Luang Prabang's tourism industry, especially after the opening of the high-speed rail linking the Laos-China border to Vientiane in 2022, and the recovery of the tourism industry after the COVID-19 epidemic, has put Luang Prabang on overload warning. According to *Vientiane Times* (2024), the number of tourists visiting Luang Prabang jumps from 491,979 in 2022 to more than 1 million in 2023, and is expected to reach 1.7 million by 2024. The number of tourists by continent is not known; however, the number of Chinese tourists has increased rapidly in recent years due to the opening of the Laos-China high-speed railway system. There is no significant difference between tourists from different continents in experiencing Luang Prabang's cultural heritage and consuming services. Faced with the sudden increase in the number of tourists, the original tourism infrastructure (hotels, motels,

restaurants, etc.) is insufficient to meet the demand, resulting in tourism companies having to purchase or rent houses from residents in the old town to provide services. Housing prices in the city are rising rapidly; there are more money-making opportunities for the people of Luang Prabang in tourism services than ever before. As a result, a large part of Luang Prabang's 30,000 residents moved to surrounding areas, leaving the cultural heritage town in favor of the commercial sector and tourism services⁴. A female villager from Chumkhong Village said:

“At present, the morning alms rounds rituals have attracted more and more international tourists to Luang Prabang. Every morning, we can see tourists from Japan, the United States, France, UK, China, Thailand, Vietnam and other countries participating in [the activities]. We must protect the value of this excellent cultural heritage of Luang Prabang” (2023 in-depth interview in Luang Prabang).

In addition, urbanization problems also directly and seriously affect the protection of cultural heritage values. Traffic problems, people's livelihood problems, environmental pollution problems (air, water, noise...) are hurting the soul of the city of Luang Prabang every day. Many tourists intentionally or unintentionally damage cultural relics by touching, caressing, joking, or even destroying them, offending monks and indigenous people.

Seng Thong Lu Giang (2019) believes that although companies investing in Luang Prabang do not directly participate in sacrificial activities (i.e., morning alms rounds ritual), they actively donate material wealth to employees who participate in the sacrifices. Based on this fact, the author asserts that although many locals have moved to the suburbs, “the Xieng-thong Khi-ly quarter has basically preserved the old customs of Luang Prabang”. In fact, especially in 2022-2023, we see that everything has changed, including the form of the rituals. In principle, participating in the Takbat ritual is not a simple personal experience. It must be based on local Buddhist ideology and beliefs, rather than a simple obligation or responsibility. Today's alms rounds rituals likely look the same as before, but their nature and meaning have changed.

As mentioned earlier, the local residents of Luang Prabang are an integral part of the city's Buddhist living culture and together with the Three Jewels, they form the ritual/religious circle and heritage mentality of Luang Prabang. The town's Buddhist monks once played an important role in lifting the spirits of the local people and inspiring them to live with confidence and inspiration; the town's Buddhist monks

⁴ It is unclear how many local residents still live in the city center (especially the old quarter), but an LPHMC official told us the number is 50% in the early 2022. This number has dropped sharply in the past two years due to the tourism boom after the opening of the high-speed rail.

once played an important role in lifting the spirits of the local people and inspiring them to live with faith and inspiration, but now they are facing a sharp loss of authentic believers and a rise in unstructured tourists. B.V., a monk from San Temple, told us with tears in his eyes that there used to be 30 or 40 novices living in the temple, who relied on alms rounds ritual every morning to make a living. Now most residents have moved to the suburbs and there is no stable community, so most novices have moved to other temples outside Luang Prabang, leaving only 5 to 7 novices behind. Temples in tourist spots may have more novice monks because food supply is not a problem (see further Holt 2009, 198-200). Families often send their sons to nearby temples to become novice monks, and now that they are moving out of town, their sons will obviously move away as well. According to monk B.L. from Khily Temple, the monks in Luang Prabang are deeply attached to the local Buddhist life and they only serve full members of their long-lasting religious circle, not tourists (in-depth interview in 2022). However, in order to feed the five to seven novices in the temple, he had to accept the reality that his disciples would accept food from tourists⁵. Even so, his disciples tried their best, but he was not sure if they had enough food every day. Tourists usually get up very late; and those who get up early to participate in the morning alms rounds ritual often purchase sacrificial food and other items from industrial service agencies, so food quality and safety is an issue worthy of attention. He emphasized “Luang Prabang temples and monks are not a part of tourism industry”.

(2) The change in temple's social functions

Parts of temple life in Luang Prabang have changed due to the rise of tourism (i.e., the majority of participants in alms giving have changed from locals to tourists); however, what the monks are saddened by is that the function of the temple in community life has changed unexpectedly. The connection between temples, monks and communities has gradually weakened, and even been severed to some extent, and the role of rituals in the daily mental journey of residents has gradually disappeared. The indigenous people of Luang Prabang return to the old temple to participate in activities during important festivals. However, they are no longer the original “participants of the local Buddhist system” but “visiting participants”. Over time, many people will stop returning to their old homes, as their busy schedules only allow them to attend ceremonies at temples near their new homes. As a result, the old temples in downtown Luang Prabang have become “oases” in the local Buddhist heartland, while the government and tourism agencies try to promote them [the temples] as “gems” of Luang Prabang's heritage. Temples in the city center are no longer places for local residents to cultivate their character and revitalize society, but have become charitable

⁵ According to Holt (2009, 198), in the past the temple partly relied on offerings from visitors to sustain the daily food of the novices in low season.

institutions for poor immigrants (usually pagan ethnic minorities such as the Hmong and Khmu). These immigrants come to the temples to learn Lao language for work, not for religious purposes. Temples suddenly become “secular schools” and monks suddenly have to perform the duties of government and school teachers. It is a good thing that these temples provide spiritual support to poor pagan immigrants (a task the monks do not deny), but this is not the primary function of the Luang Prabang temples.

(3) Unexpected consequences of governmental measurements

A few years ago, Luang Prabang monks expressed their disappointment and expectations to the local government. The local government tried to solve this problem by stipulating that every business or service organization must send employees to perform the task of offering sacrifices to the monks every morning. In order to use the morning alms rounds ritual to promote the city’s tourism industry to domestic and foreign tourists, the Luang Prabang Information, Culture and Tourism Department coordinated with relevant departments to develop a promotion plan. The department has mapped out 17 routes for the monks’ morning alms rounds ritual and regulated participation by families and businesses to avoid duplication. It has also issued a code of conduct for international tourists participating in the ceremonies. However, not all tourists follow the rules. Many of them are dressed in different styles, some wear hats, some wear shorts, short shirts, sandals, shoes, colorful clothes, etc. They keep taking photos during the ceremony. According to the traditional customs of Luang Prabang, participants must wear white clothes when participating tak-bat rituals to show the purity of their souls. Monk X.S.B. said, “when many foreign guests come in, the temple becomes noisy and loses its solemn atmosphere. Some guests show disrespect to the Buddha statues and monks” (in-depth interview, 2022). Mrs. P.B. (64 years old, Luang Prabang resident, a tak-bat participant) told us that:

“Most of them [tourists] pay attention to taking photos as souvenirs and posting them on Facebook, Tik Tok, etc. Therefore, they often “run around” and “talk loudly,” losing the sacredness of the Tak-bat ceremony” (in-depth interview, 2022).

As a result, this not only failed to solve the problem, but also hurt the monks psychologically. The staffs of tourism and service units participate in the morning alms rounds ritual and offer sacrifices according to the assigned tasks (many of them are from other religions and are ethnic minorities who do not understand Luang Prabang Buddhism). They fulfill this responsibility in a soulless and ritual-free way (e.g., young women laugh and talk carefreely and show their face to the monks, tourists

take pictures freely and laugh heartily, etc.). In addition, due to lack of understanding and the convenience of the service, tourists put offerings of food, snacks, fruits and cash into the monks' unique traps, raising concerns about food safety and the monks' health. Some monks told us that some of the food was out of date, resulting in a shortage of food supplies. In ancient Luang Prabang, this was not a problem. Old Luang Prabang residents really respected and cared about the monks and novices; some of the novices were their own sons. Monk T.V.S. said it was "inappropriate" to allow businessmen to serve tourists directly as they believed the mentality of making money took precedence over their responsibility to the temple, but local authorities have not taken any steps to regulate the sellers of offerings and make them serve tourists more seriously and in accordance with Tak-bat tradition. He recommended:

"Someone has to guide them [the tourists] through the steps of preparation, how to dress, offerings, and how to present offerings. Offerings should follow tradition and consist mainly of sticky rice, not just cakes and fruits...." (In-depth interview in Luang Prabang, 2023)

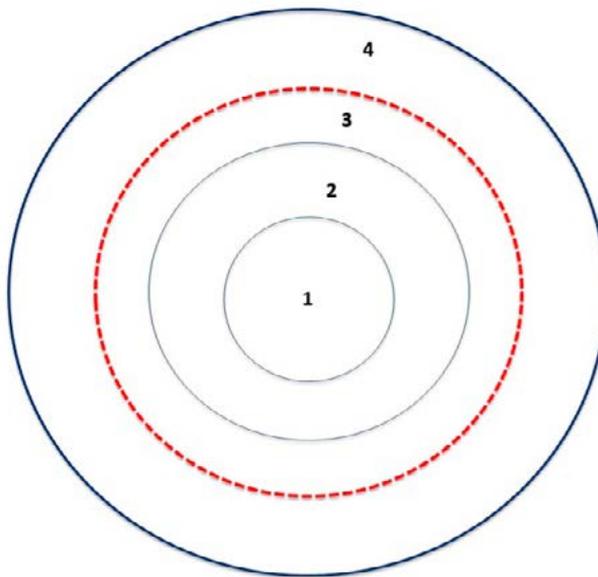
For many monks, going for morning alms rounds ritual on the street has become extremely burdensome because in the past they were the ones who represented Buddha to bless the people but now seem to have become "charity recipients" or "burden" for businesses and workers. Monk C. from Sibounheuang in Luang Prabang said that monks could facilitate tourism activities to help the people of Luang Prabang get rich, and believed that such sacrifices were also part of the temple's merits. But the reality is not like this. Usually only the business community can get rich from tourism; while former temple followers have now become low-level labourers in the old quarter where their ancestors lived for generations.

Decomposition of the structure of ritual/religious circle in morning tak-bat rituals

If, according to tradition, the inhabitants of Luang Prabang are indigenous people, then religious activities, including tak-bat rituals, are part of their daily life (living culture); their participation in the tak-bat rituals takes place entirely within the ritual circle (Buddhist faith, monks, tak-bat followers) and the religious circle (the temple institution and the whole Luang Prabang residents). Today, as most of Luang Prabang Old Quarter's residents have moved to the suburbs and other places, both the rituals and religious structures have been disintegrated (or deconstructed) to a certain extent, resulting in the shaking of the foundation of the indigenous religious life and the "soul" of Luang Prabang Buddhism. The "new residents" (businessmen and their families, tourist agents and workers) come from different cognitive and cultural backgrounds

and have different roles, statuses and missions in Luang Prabang's tourism industry. They cannot replace the local residents in the interaction and cultural "dialogue" with Luang Prabang ancestors and traditions during alms-rounds ceremonies. In fact, the "new residents" can be classified only in the circle of contact with rituals and faith, but not in the ritual circle and/or the religious circle at all. Of course, this assessment applies only to the current period. In the long run, if local authorities adopt appropriate solutions, the "new residents" will gradually become "authentic" in Luang Prabang, they will likely move from the circle of contact with rituals and faith to the core ritual and religious circles, or the ritual and religious circles will actively their scope, nature and structure to accommodate the newcomers.

Figure 3. Components of Buddhist community in Luang Prabang today



Notes: Circle 1: Buddhist Three Jewels (Buddha, dharma, sanghas); Circle 2: the ritual circle (Buddhist Three Jewels and the local tak-bat participants); Circle 3: Luang Prabang Buddhist circle (Buddhist Three Jewels and the traditional Luang Prabang residents); Circle 4: the circle of contact with Luang Prabang Buddhist rituals and faith. Source: authors.

Improving the effectiveness of protecting and promoting Luang Prabang's cultural heritage

The PESTE analysis

The effectiveness of the protection and promotion of UNESCO heritage sites must not only focus on the three pillars of UNESCO's values (economic, social and environmental), but also on the possible impacts of the current living environment, namely the PEST framework (political, economic, social and technological) conceptualized by social science scholars. In this study, we combine these two frameworks to establish the so-called *the PESTE analysis*. The PESTE analysis includes political policies, economic values, social and cultural values, technological drivers and environmental protection.

In *Lao governmental policies*, as aforementioned, it is undoubtedly the fact that UNESCO principles are strictly complied with in central and local authorities' agenda. LPHMC and social science scholars conduct regular field surveys to provide scientific and practical basis for the formulation of rules and regulations to most effectively achieve the goals of protecting Luang Prabang's heritage and cultural traditions associated with the heritage, as well as the economic value obtained through tourism development (see Seng 2019; The Luang Prabang Provincial Department 2022). However, LPHMC and related organizations need to fully realize the organic interaction and simultaneous importance of the tangible and intangible aspects of Luang Prabang's heritage; any policy (i.e. heritage management, tourism development) must achieve both aspects within the same integrated structure. Focusing on just one aspect does not mean that 50% of the task is completed. In the long run, this unsystematic view will lead to the loss of the entire spirit and soul of the ancient city. Local authorities and LPHMC need to legally ensure that a certain percentage of indigenous Luang Prabang residents live, work, preserve traditions and create culture in the most natural and normal way, including the continuity and authenticity of tak-bat ceremonies. The government should also be mindful that temples, Buddhist beliefs, and the entire ritual system associated with temples need to be protected and the integrity of the long-lasting rituals and religious circles maintained. All stakeholders should avoid changing any component that would destroy the entire structure and lead to the loss of Luang Prabang's cultural soul. Concepts such as out-migration residents returning to the Luang Prabang's old quarter during major festivals, tourists being able to participate in tak-bat rituals in place of city residents, etc. need to be re-examined through the lens of cultural studies to ensure their integrity and substance.

For *the economic value* that tourism brings, local authorities and LPHMC need to ensure that profits are equally distributed among original Luang Prabang residents (the local creators of Luang Prabang culture), the business sector, and migrant workers.

The indigenous people of Luang Prabang play an important role in the normal operation and circulation of Luang Prabang culture, so they must be at the core of the work agenda and need to become co-owners of the tourism industry.

In *the socio-cultural sphere*, it is noteworthy that the people of the old town, the indigenous cultural co-creators of Luang Prabang, are currently marginalized in the local tourism economy. Based on our observations in 2022 and 2023, many of them are commuting back in the old quarter performing support service duties every day, such as transportation services (taxis, tuk-tuk, etc.), service staff of restaurants and hotels, free-lancers, and so on. Instead, Luang Prabang's "authentic culture" (such as food services, handicrafts, performing arts, etc.), is now performed by non-local workers and artists. To ensure that the cultural essence of Luang Prabang is properly reflected in the development of the heritage town and tourism economy, human agency (especially the creation and ownership of Luang Prabang culture by local residents) needs to be prioritized. In the long run, it is necessary to further promote contact, communication and the spread of cultural and creative experiences between original Luang Prabang residents and migrant workers to ensure that the cultural soul of Luang Prabang that attracts tourists is not corrupted or commercialized. Furthermore, the city should take appropriate measures to maintain and develop the organic relationship between the old residents of Luang Prabang (who now live in the suburban and newly-opened areas) and the original temples, especially during the annual festivals, to stabilize the city's true Buddhist mainstream⁶. The old residents should be encouraged to participate in the activities of their original temples, and their voices and rights (the co-ownership right) to shape the city's heritage tourism should be considered to ensure the normal development of Luang Prabang. In the process, Buddhist temple activities and ritual spaces associated with the long-standing beliefs of the local community need to be strictly protected to ensure the durability and stability of Luang Prabang society. On the other hand, the authorities should take stricter measures to protect Luang Prabang's traditional culture and provide tourists with travel brochures to encourage them to better adapt to and respect local culture, especially the Buddhist spirit.

Technological advances may bring both advantages and challenges to Luang Prabang, especially under the tourism services. High-tech engineering can help distant outsiders easily understand the beauty and value of Luang Prabang's heritage and inspire future visitors. Information technology can also improve on-site accessibility for tourists to various attractions and heritage values; the newly-launched high-speed rail linking the capital Vientiane and the Laos-China border could attract more tourists from different places to Luang Prabang. On the other hand, if local authorities fail to proactively disseminate information, free, unofficial public networks and social media may cause netizens to misunderstand the culture of Luang Prabang,

⁶ Due to Luang Prabang's small size, it is easy for the old residents to return to the original temples in the city center to participate in activities.

while photography and videography seriously undermine the sanctity of local temples and ceremonies. Convenient transportation has brought a large number of tourists to Luang Prabang, causing the city to face serious overload and damage risks. If the Luang Prabang Heritage City Management Committee and the local government don't pay enough attention to the intangible culture of the heritage city of Luang Prabang, new Buddhist styles from comparable cities (such as Vientiane, Laos and Chiang Mai, Thailand) and countries (such as Thailand, Cambodia, etc.) may one day dominate and replace the traditions of Luang Prabang someday.

Environmental issues have become a serious problem for the sustainable development of Luang Prabang. In the city center (old quarter), heavy traffic, air and noise pollution may damage the reputation of this quiet and elegant town, and the dam Nam Ou not far to the north, Luang Prabang, could inundate the city if seasonal flooding is not managed properly. In addition, under the pressure of urbanization and population growth (residents, tourists), Luang Prabang has been forced to cut down a large number of trees and reduce the forest area to build infrastructure and housing. This means that overheated tourism development will soon turn Luang Prabang into a metropolis and lose its traditional characteristics. Once Luang Prabang loses its identity, tourists will no longer have a compelling reason to visit the city.

There are some directions in which heritage value enhancement is not guaranteed in the direction of sustainable development. At present, more emphasis is placed on economic value, while material and cultural values should pay more attention to environmental protection to some extent. The living cultural resources and cultural social capital of local communities, especially temples and monks, are not properly valued.

Systematic identification, responsible use of Luang Prabang cultural memories and the building of reminder mechanism

UNESCO (2003) defines that *intangible cultural heritage* includes “The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”. Therefore, the preservation and promotion of Luang Prabang heritage must include practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills of local inhabitants, including Buddhist institutions and related rituals, in the work agenda. This kind of systematic understanding can simultaneously recognize, publicize and

educate residents and tourists so that they can fully and completely understand the entire value system of this ancient city. On this basis, the identification and protection of Luang Prabang's Buddhist cultural heritage, especially the alms rounds ritual, requires attention not only to its form of expression, but also to its core beliefs, philosophical concepts and the integrity of the entire structural components.

The culture of any community is a living culture, and the people of the community are constantly creating a culture that suits their real life background. The same is true for the people of Luang Prabang. Therefore, identifying and promoting the value of Luang Prabang's heritage also requires an updated and critical perspective to ensure that the city's cultural evolution is the most natural, healthy and correct, in line with the core principles of UNESCO heritage management. The traditions of the old quarter need to be strictly protected to provide conditions for the continuation of its authentic culture, while the rise of new urbanization and tourism should be placed outside of it. In this process, the rights of the indigenous people of Luang Prabang to express their own wishes, own their local cultural creations, and fairly enjoy the economic value brought by tourism activities are the basic principles to ensure the natural and sustainable flow of Luang Prabang's local culture. Heritage is created by people, and the fate of heritage lies in people [those who create heritage]; protecting heritage is therefore first and foremost about protecting the rights of local communities to live directly with, interact with and create heritage.

For many different reasons, part of the historical-cultural tradition / memories has been "broken" (Halbwachs 1992) or has not been saved and continued as part of the heritage. In other words, cultural tradition is a system of historical and cultural memories deposited in monuments, ancient architectural works, customs, festivals, etc; however, under the influence of the social environment (war, social ideology, social development needs, cultural trends of different periods, etc.), part of the memory has been forgotten or only silently exists in the common social flow. Without a suitable theoretical foundation to identify value, that "forgotten" block of cultural heritage is at risk of being eroded and lost over time.

Maurice Halbwachs (1980) believed that life produces knowledge, which is accumulated and transmitted in the form of signs (or symbols), from streets, houses, temples to ideological patterns, rituals, religious symbols, etc., to ensure the normal functioning of the community in harsh historical periods. "Cultural symbols play an important role in ritual, customs, language, literature, art and even daily life..." (Nguyễn 2020, 53). Therefore, Luang Prabang's "alms rounds" ceremony or any traditional customs and rituals contain important local cultural memory and history, through which local residents continue the communication process between each other and their ancestors.

In Seligman and Weller (2012)'s words, the tak-bat ritual in Luang Prabang is a ritualized form of "social transaction" through which people in the local community experience the "sacred liminal" together, promoting the expression of sincerity and

deep humanity, crossing boundaries and building a more harmonious society. This process has been going on for centuries and should continue. Studying the tak-bat ritual in Luang Prabang from this perspective allows us to observe and assess the real function of Buddhist rituals in establishing (or consolidating) the consciousness and moral and social norms of the ritual community (monks, believers). At the same time, by creating conditions for tourists to participate in the morning alms rounds rituals, it can also promote tourists' feelings and appreciation of Luang Prabang's cultural traditions and the emotional communication with its residents.

The cultural values embodied in heritage need to be crystallized into a system/group of artifacts (i.e. containing/connected to memory) with ongoing and effective reminder mechanism to maintain and promote them in contemporary life. The heritage of Luang Prabang itself, including the entire ancient city, palaces, temples, ancient living systems, Buddhist systems and related rituals, ancient cultural landscapes, etc., are themselves carriers of local historical and cultural memory. In the process of conservation and use, all parties concerned must build, maintain and promote an appropriate reminder mechanism to ensure that the heritage remains relevant. Reminder mechanisms can be understood as mechanisms that keep memory/recollection activities functioning, which are stored in heritage artefacts through which descendants can access and communicate with their ancestors, "experience" parts of past culture, and choose how to accept and fulfill the mission of maintaining the continuity of historical and cultural memory. The *reminder mechanism* is often concretized into festival activities, cultural-educational events, ritual practices, customs and local cultural stories that are preserved, evoked and practiced regularly as part of real life. Annual festivals in Luang Prabang (such as Boun Pi May Lao, Boun Ok Phan Sa, Boat Racing Festival, etc.), tak-bat rituals, various types of folk performing arts and artists, Luang Prabang's unique costumes, cuisine, handicraft arts, and architecture need to be researched and presented scientifically to the local community and tourists. A good reminder mechanism is always to pay attention to the heritage residents and their authentic culture at all times. Visitors to Luang Prabang will be captivated by the local traditional architecture and diverse cultural landscape, and will learn to interact with the contemporary local community and its past through rituals. As far as the current situation is concerned, the authentic structural culture of Luang Prabang and its normal continuity need to be included in the work agenda of local authorities and all stakeholders involved.

Conclusion

Despite the efforts of the Management Committee and responsible entities, the awareness of the protection of the cultural heritage of Luang Prabang Ancient City has not been fully developed so far due to insufficient attention paid to the co-creation and co-ownership of the Luang Prabang culture of the local residents. This

unsystematic understanding has led to policies that favor the preservation of ancient buildings and physical landscapes and the development of tourism. Due to the surge in migrant workers and the advancement of urbanization, many intangible cultural heritage legacies, including morning tak-bat rituals and other Buddhist activities, are in the process of deterioration. The decline of Buddhist life in Luang Prabang will inevitably cause a negative impact on tourism, thus breaking the traditional Lao mentality and reputation. To fully understand the heritage and systematically protect and promote the heritage values of Luang Prabang, we must focus on both the city's material heritage and living culture. Local communities must be at the heart of designing the tourism economic system of this heritage city because they are the creators and operators of local culture. The cultural traditions and local knowledge of the Luang Prabang local community will not only add value to the tourism economy, but will also play an important role in introducing authentic Lao culture to the outside world. The local residents with their rich life experience will also be able to adjust and adapt well to the emerging culture that has emerged with the development of tourism. While ensuring the normal evolution of Luang Prabang culture, they continue to use Buddhist traditions as a cultural bond and integrate people from all walks of life in the city. Local residents built the city and its culture, and they must be the ones to protect this heritage and continue to create and nourish its living culture. Without an authentic living culture, tourism in Luang Prabang cannot be sustainable.

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Фончањ Пенгфуван, Тхо Нгок Нгујен и Танг Куок Хуин

Обнова живе културе локалног будистичког наслеђа у Луанг Пхабангу

Сажетак: Тхеравада будизам заузима важно место међу становницима Луанг Пхабанга у Лаосу. Он представља извор живе културе у граду који је под заштитом УНЕСКО-а и који се брзо развија као туристичка дестинација. Међутим, са порастом урбанизације и туризма, велики део становништва Луанг Пхабанга преселио се у предграђа, док је центар града постао превасходно комерцијализован. Иако држава непрестано улаже напоре да заштити изглед древног града, ове промене су довеле до нарушавања органске друштвене и културне структуре града и озбиљно су оштетиле дугогодишње будистичке ритуале и менталитет локалне заједнице. Пад утицаја будизма у Луанг Пхабангу, уколико се не предузму ефикасне мере за његово очување, очигледно ће довести до опадања културног живота града. Очување и унапређење културног наслеђа у циљу одрживог развоја, како је постављено од стране UNDP-а 2015. године, тренутно је у фокусу туристичког развоја града; међутим, ова политика се примењује неуједначено. Замена традиционалне становничке структуре Луанг Пхабанга и недостатак разумевања локалне будистичке културе код нових досељеника довели су до тога да је део живе културе града у опасности да избледи или чак нестане. Овај рад комбинује анализу литературе и теренска истраживања у циљу испитивања тренутног статуса будистичког живота у Луанг Пхабангу, посебно јутарњих ритуала Так-бат (обред прикупљања милостиње) и како би се истражили изазови са којима се суочавају локалне будистичке традиције у контексту демографских промена, и обезбедила научна и практична основа за бољу и систематичнију заштиту и промоцију аутентичне живе културе града.

Кључне речи: Луанг Пхабанг, будизам, туризам, наслеђе, жива култура