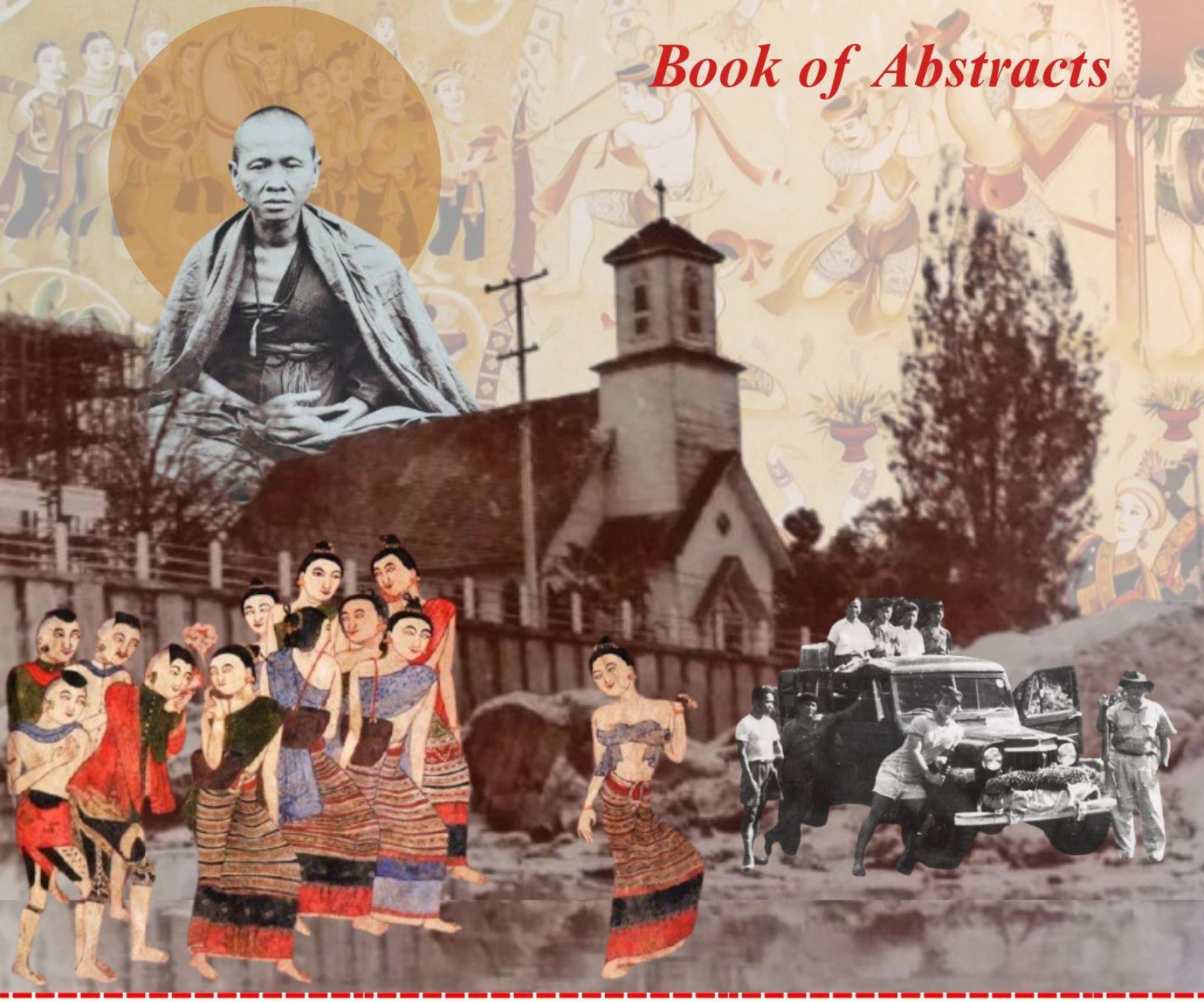
Lan Na and Beyond : Revisit, Emergence, and Creativity

August 29 – 30, 2025

Book of Abstracts



Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre
CRAS Centre for Research and Academic Services
Faculty of Social Sciences
ศูนย์วิจัยและบริการวิชาการ คณะสังคมศาสตร์
SOC FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, CMU
CMU CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY

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Hosted by Centre for Research and Academic Services (CRAS),
Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (public organization) (SAC)

Lan Na and Beyond : Revisit, Emergence, and Creativity

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Conference Organizers

Centre for Research and Academic Services (CRAS),
Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University

Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC)

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Contents

1. Purpose and Scope of the Conference

"Lan Na and Beyond," the International Conference on Lan Na Studies and research on northern Thailand and its neighboring countries, will be held on 29-30 August 2025 at Chiang Mai University. The conference invites panel proposals and individual papers related to five main topics: 1) Revisiting Lan Na, 2) Emerging Issues, 3) [New] Social Groups, 4) Connecting with Neighbors, and 5) Creative Lan Na.

The scope of each topic is outlined below:

1. *Revisiting Lan Na*

This topic seeks to review previous research on Lan Na and Northern Thailand, as well as neighboring countries. The goal is to reassess the current state of knowledge, identify gaps and myths, and address limitations in order to surpass existing barriers.

2. *Emerging Issues*

This topic addresses contemporary challenges, including environmental and climate change, health, globalization, development, innovation, urbanization, and issues of gender and sexuality.

3. *[New] Social Groups*

This topic focuses on issues related to immigrants, illicit Chinese business networks, capitalists at local, regional, and transnational levels, and external perceptions of Lan Na.

4. *Connecting with Neighbors*

This topic explores transborder trade, Lan Na's relationships with neighboring regions, inter-regional investment, and infrastructure policies.

5. *Creative Lan Na*

This topic covers academic issues such as contemporary media, arts and culture, architecture, Lan Na heritage, food, and tourism.

2. Conference presentation schedule

29 August 2025 at Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Time	Rooms	Presenter Names	Presentation Titles
09.00-11.00 AM	**Kruba Srivichai, Lan Na Buddhism and the Formation of Modern Thailand Keynote Speaker: Professor Katherine A. Bowie**		
11.00 AM-12.30 PM	**Revisiting Lan Na (Discussant: Kwanchewan Buadaeng)**		
	Auditorium A	Klemens Karlsson	Lan Na Buddhist Culture between National Borders
	Auditorium A	Roger Casas	Lanna Buddhism: A Reappraisal
12.30-13.30 PM	Lunch Break		
13.30-16.30 PM	**Old and Newcomers (Discussant: Chaiyan Rajchagool)**		
	Auditorium A	**Panel I**	**Foreign Missionaries in Lan Na and Beyond: Strategies, Self-Transformation and Legacy from the Cold War Era**
	Auditorium A	Kengkij Kitirianglarp	Footprints Across Centuries: The Young Legacy of Cross, Crown, and Creature
	Auditorium A	Sinae Hyun	Making an American's War: The Young Family's Mission in Lanna and Beyond during the Cold War
	Auditorium A	Prasit Leepreecha	Christian Conversion Strategies Among the Highlanders
	Auditorium A	Kwanchewan Buadaeng	Missionaries and Their Self-Transformation
	Emerging Issues (Discussant: Kanokwan Somsirivarangkool)		
	Auditorium B	Maya Dania	Spectral Mekong, Eco-Ghosted Waters: The Naga's Hauntology and More-Than-Human Futures in the Anthropocene
	Auditorium B	Reni Juwitasari	Living with Fire in the Pyrocene: A Case Study of Forest Fire in Wiang Kaen, Thailand
	Auditorium B	Shahinur Akter and Aranya Siriphon	Prevalence of diarrhea among under-five children and the influencing factors in southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh

30 August 2025 at Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Time	Rooms	Presenter Names	Presentation Titles
09.00-12.00 AM	Auditorium A	**Panel II**	**Sipsong Panna and Lan Na: Connections, mobilities and divergences (Discussant: Wasan Panyagaew)**
	Auditorium A	Sirui Dao	From Chiang Mai to Kiulungkiang: The American Presbyterians' Translation of the Tai Lue version of the New Testament
	Auditorium A	Wanjiao Yu	Female Aesthetic Labor, Cultural Heritage, and Ethnic Modernity: Tai Lue Businesswomen in Transnational Connectivity
	Auditorium A	Xiaoyan Long	Marginalizing Memories: Life Histories and Identities of the Diaspora Tai Lue People in Northern Thailand
	Creative Lan Na (Discussant: Tanet Charoenmuang)		
	Auditorium B	Pornpin Matungka	The Case Study of Promoting Culinary Tourism in Chiang Mai in Forms of Local Northern Thai Food Commodities for Supporting Local Traditional Heritage Cuisine and Tourism Sustainability
	Auditorium B	Jeffrey Moynihan	Urban taste: Khao soi and being "khon muang" in northern Thailand, past, present future
	Auditorium B	Noah Tanigawa	A (Waste) Crisis in Ecotourism? Understanding perceptions and power in Maekampong Village, Thailand
	Emerging Issues (Discussant: Tanet Charoenmuang)		
	Auditorium B	Alejandro Huete	Waste Reclaiming as an Act of Autonomy: Street Waste Reclaimers in Chiang Mai, Thailand
12.00-13.00 PM	Lunch Break		
13.00-15.30 PM	Auditorium A	**Panel III**	**Lan Na on the Edge (Discussant: Panitda Saiyarod)**
	Auditorium A	Simon Rowedder	Lan Na Through Chinese Eyes: Academic Inquiry and Cultural Imagination
	Auditorium A	Wasan Panyagaew	Transformation of Jinghong/Ching Hung, Part III
	Connecting with Neighbors (Discussant: Tanet Charoenmuang)		
	Auditorium B	Waraporn Ruangsri	Life history of People and Things on Salween River Basin

Time	Rooms	Presenter Names	Presentation Titles
	Old and Newcomers (Discussant: Tanet Charoenmuang)		
	Auditorium B	Petra Lemberger	From Bars to Books: Sex Entertainment, Higher Education, and the Social (Re-) Construction of Aging Masculinities in Chiang Mai
	Auditorium B	Urai Yangcheepsutjarit	Hmong Market in Kad Luang: Weaving Craft Economy and Ethnic Visibility in Contemporary Lanna
	Auditorium B	Salai Vanni Bawi	Burmese in Lanna Land: Mapping Cultural Identities in Chiang Mai's Urban Fabric
15.30-17.00 PM	**From Chiang Saen to Kengtung: Warfare, Borders, People, and the Making of Lan Na** **Keynote Speaker: Associate Professor Dr.Pinyapan Potjanalawan**		

3. Keynote Speeches

3.1 Kruba Srivichai, Lan Na Buddhism and the Formation of Modern Thailand

Keynote Speaker: Professor Dr. Katherine Ann Bowie

The Department of Anthropology & Center for Southeast Asian Studies,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Katherine Bowie is Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor Emerita in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is former President of the Association of Asian Studies. She received a BA with Distinction from Stanford University and her MA and PhD from the University of Chicago. She has served as Director of UW-Madison's Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Eisenhower Fellow to Thailand, Fulbright Scholar, President of the Midwest Conference of Asian Affairs, and multiple years on the organizing committees for the Council of Thai Studies (COTS).

Katherine Bowie's publications include Rituals of National Loyalty: An Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand (Columbia University Press, 1997); Voices from the Thai Countryside: The Necklace and Other Short Stories of Samruam Singh (University of Wisconsin Southeast Asia Series, 1998), and Of Beggars and Buddhas: The Politics of Humor in the Vessantara Jataka in Thailand. (University of Wisconsin Press, 2017) Her articles have appeared in such journals as American Anthropologist, American Ethnologist, Journal of Asian Studies and Comparative Studies in Society and History.

Katherine Bowie specializes in Thai and Lan Na studies. She has made significant academic contributions to political and historical anthropology, Buddhism, nation-state formation, peasant political movements, rural electoral politics, slavery, and more.

Her interest in Thai society began in the mid-1970s, when she worked as a research editor and freelance journalist in Bangkok, Thailand. In the 1980s, she deepened her engagement with anthropology by pursuing both her M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. The titles of her theses reflect her strong interest in northern Thailand:

M.A.: "In the Wake of the Lords: A Historical Perspective on the Role of Irrigation in the Political Economy of Northern Thailand."

Ph.D.: "Peasant Perspectives on the Political Economy of the Northern Thai Kingdom of Chiang Mai in the Nineteenth Century: Implications for the Understanding of Peasant Political Expression."

Since beginning her academic career as a lecturer at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, she has continuously published numerous research papers on northern Thailand. Below are some of Professor Bowie's research papers that have significantly contributed to Lan Na studies for nearly four decades:

Bowie, K. A. (1993). Cloth and the Fabric of Northern Thai Society in the Nineteenth Century: From Peasants in Cotton to Lords in Silks. *American Ethnologist*, *20*(1), pp. 138-158.

_____. (1997). *Rituals of National Loyalty: An Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand*. Columbia University Press.

_____. (2000). Ethnic Heterogeneity and Elephants in Nineteenth Century Lanna Statecraft. In A. Turton. (Ed.), *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States* (pp. 330-348). Curzon Press.

_____. (2006). Slavery in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand: Archival Anecdotes and Village Voices. In E. P. Durrenberger. (Ed.), *State Power and Culture in Thailand*, (pp. 100-138).Yale University Southeast Asia Monograph.

_____. (2007). Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: The Case of Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand. In J. Rigg. (Ed.), *Southeast Asian Development*. Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences Series. Routledge.

_____. (2008). Vote Buying and Village Outrage in an Election in Northern Thailand: Recent Legal Reforms in Historical Context. *Journal of Asian Studies*, *67*(2), pp. 469-511.

_____. (2010). Women's Suffrage in Thailand: A Southeast Asian Historiographical Challenge. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *52*(4), pp. 708-741.

_____. (2011). Polluted Identities: Ethnic Diversity and the Constitution of Northern Thai Beliefs on Gender. In V. Grabowsky. (Ed.), *Southeast Asian Historiography, Unravelling the Myths: Essays in Honour of Barend Jan Terweil* (pp. 112-127). River Books Press.

_____. (2014). Buddhism and Militarism in Northern Thailand: Solving the Puzzle of the Saint Khruubaa Srivichai. *Journal of Asian Studies*, *73*(3), pp. 711-732.

_____. (2017). Khruba Siwichai: The Charismatic Saint and the Northern Sangha. In P. Cohen. (Ed.), *Charismatic Monks of Lanna Buddhism*. NIAS and Silkworm Press.

_____. (2018). Wiwaathatoyaeng kiaw kap 'kamnyyt haeng panhaa' koranii Khruubaa Sriichai [The Origins of the Controversy over Khruubaa Sriwichai]. In W. Panyakaew & C. Lamniang. (Eds.), *Ramlyk 140 pii chaatkaan Khruubaa Sriwichai* [Commemorating the 140th Anniversary of the Birth of Khruba Srivichai], (S.Chaiwaan, Trans.), (pp. 147–158). Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Chiang Mai University.

_____. (2023). "Dating the First Arrest of Khruba Srivichai, the Saint of Northern Thailand." *Journal of the Siam Society*, *111*(1), pp. 1-22.

3.2 From Chiang Saen to Kengtung: Warfare, Borders, People, and the Making of Lan Na

Keynote Speaker: Associate Professor Dr. Pinyapan Potjanalawan

Department of Social Studies, Faculty of Education,
Lampang Rajabhat University

Pinyapan Potjanalawan is an associate professor of history who has conducted extensive research on Lan Na studies for more than two decades. His publications in Lan Na studies began in the mid-2000s, and since then he has consistently produced numerous academic works in this field.

In addition to his work on Lan Na, he has also undertaken significant research on social history and contemporary culture in Thailand. Some of his most recent books, with titles translated into English, include: Uniform, Hairstyle, Flagpole, Stick: A History of Discipline and Punishment in Thai Schools (2022); Hi-Way-Cracy: The Power of Roads and the Dynamics of Transportation in Thailand (2023a); House and Beauty: Tastes, Beauty, and Emotional Space of Thai Middle-Class Families (2023b); and Provinces in Thailand: Spatial Control, Knowledge, and Memories beyond Bangkok (2024).

His expertise in Lan Na studies spans a wide range of topics, including social spaces, a history of education, nation-state building, colonization, historiography, architecture, literature, arts, and more.

It is worth highlighting some of Pinyapan Potjanalawan's academic contributions. He earned his Ph.D. from the Department of History, Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University in 2019, with a dissertation titled "Becoming Payap Circle: A History of Siam's Power-Knowledge and Production of Space (1873–1932)." In addition to his dissertation, some of his notable publications include:

Potjanalawan, P. (Ed.). (2005). *Hukhing…hukhon lampang [Awareness…Knowing the Lampang People]*. The Research Project for Developing Public Life and Livable Local Area.

_____. (2013a). Thai-Lanna Lanna-Thai: Prawattisatniphon Sathapattayakam Lanna (Phutthasattawat thi 25-pho.so.2549 [Thai-Lanna: The Historiography of Lanna Architecture (20th century–2006)]. *NAJUA: History of Architecture and Thai Architecture, 10*, pp. 26-59. https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/NAJUA/article/view/10991

_____. (2013b). Prawattisatniphon khong kanriak chuemueang khelang wianglakon lae lampang [Historiography of Naming "Lampang" through Historical Documents] *Humanities and Social Sciences Review. 1*(1).

_____. (2014). *Kansuksa khwamplianplaeng lokkathat chao lanna nai wannakam tangtaeyuk fuenfu lanna thueng hetkan charachon taiyai [*The Study of Worldview Change of Lanna People in Literature from the Rattanakosin Era to the Tai Rebellion Incident (1882-1902 A.D.)]. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lampang Rajabhat University.

_____. (2016a). 100 Pi Rot Fai Siam Lampang-Krungthep: Prawatsat Sangkom Bon Joot Tat Kong Fueangfu Lae Kwam Sueam [100 Years of the Siam Railway Lampang-Bangkok Line: Social History at the Intersection of Boom and Decline]. *Silpa Watanatam [Art and Culture Magazine], 37*(6), pp. 144-161.

_____. (2016b). Philanthropy for royal merit: The making of cities in Siamese colonies, a case study of Payap Circle 1899-1932. In *Proceedings of the 24th International Conference of Historians of Asia (IAHA 2016) on Asian history, culture and environment: Vernacular and oriental paradigms*. Islamabad, Pakistan.

_____. (2016c). The Production of Colonial Space in Payap Circle by Siam's Knowledge of History and Archaeology. *Local Administration Journal, 10*(3), pp. 106-123.

_____. (2018). New Cities and the Penetration of Siamese Colonial Power into the Physical Space of Monthon Payap. *Journal of Mekong Societies, 14*(3), pp. 19-41.

_____. (2019). Kanphatthana lae attalak changwat yukroito songkhramyen nai thai [Provincial Development and Its Identity in the Cold War Era in Thailand. *Local Administration Journal*, 12(3), pp. 497-515. https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/colakkujournals/article/view/218480

Kannika, T., Khankham, T., & Potjanalawan, P. (2020). Phonlawat khong krueakhai sinlapawatthanatham nai lanpang: korani sueksa kueakhai khana wichitsin mahawitthayalai chiangmai [Dynamic of Art and Cultural Network Management in Lampang: Case Study the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University]. *RMUTL Journal of Business Administration and Liberal Arts, 8*(2), pp. 127-144. https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/balajhss/article/view/247720

Potjanalawan, P. (2020). Lanna thi phoengsang prawattisatsangkhom khong dindaen lum maenam chaophraya tonbon pho.so.2475-2557 [The Recently Constructed Lanna: The Social History of Upper Chao Phraya Basin (1932 - 2014 A.D.)]. *The Journal of the Thai Khadi Research Institute, 17*(2), pp. 109-144.

4. List of Participants

Academic Presenters

1. Alejandro Huete	(Chiang Mai University)
2. Aranya Siriphon	(Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
3. Jeffrey Moynihan	(Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
4. Kengkij Kitirianglarp	(Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
5. Klemens Karlsson	(Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Chiang Mai University)
6. Kwanchewan Buadaeng	(Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
7. Maya Dania	(Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
8. Noah Tanigawa	(Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Chiang Mai University)
9. Petra Lemberger	(Ph.D. Candidate, Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Chiang Mai University)
10. Pornpin Matungka	(Mahidol University)
11. Prasit Leepreecha	(Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences & Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
12. Reni Juwitasari	(Asian Research Center for International Development (ARCID), School of Social Innovation, Mae Fah Luang University)
13. Roger Casas	(Ph.D., independent researcher)
14. Salai Vanni Bawi	(Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University)
15. Simon Rowedder	(Assistant Professor, University of Passau)
16. Sinae Hyun	(Research Professor, Institute for East Asian Studies, Sogang University)
17. Sirui Dao	(Lecturer, Yunnan University)
18. Shahinur Akter	(Ph.D. Student, Faculty of Social Sciences (International Program), Chiang Mai University)
19. Urai Yangcheepsutjarit	(Social Science (International program), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
20. Wanjiao Yu	(Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)

21. Waraporn Ruangsri	(Associate Professor, Department of History, Chiang Mai University)
22. Wasan Panyagaew	(Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
23. Xiaoyan Long	(Professor, School of Ethnology and Sociology, Yunnan University)

Discussants

1. Chaiyan Rajchagool	(Associate Professor, independent scholar)
2. Kanokwan Somsirivarangkool	(Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
3. Kwanchewan Buadaeng	(Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
4. Panitda Saiyarod	(Lecturer, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)
5. Tanet Charoenmuang	(Professor, Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Chiang Mai University)
6. Wasan Panyagaew	(Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University)

5. Panels

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Kengkij Kitirianglarp	5.1.1 Footprints Across Centuries: The Young Legacy of Cross, Crown, and Creature
Sinae Hyun	5.1.2 Making an American's War: The Young Family's Mission in Lanna and Beyond during the Cold War
Prasit Leepreecha	5.1.3 Christian Conversion Strategies Among the Highlanders
Kwanchewan Buadaeng	5.1.4 Missionaries and Their Self-Transformation
Panel II	**Sipsong Panna and Lanna: Connections, mobilities and divergences (Xiaoyan Long: Chair of the Panel, Auditorium A)**
Sirui Dao	5.2.1 From Chiang Mai to Kiulungkiang: The American Presbyterians' Translation of the Tai Lue version of the New Testament
Wanjiao Yu	5.2.2 Female Aesthetic Labor, Cultural Heritage, and Ethnic Modernity: Tai Lue Businesswomen in Transnational Connectivity
Xiaoyan Long	5.2.3 Marginalizing Memories: Life Histories and Identities of the Diaspora Tai Lue People in Northern Thailand
Panel III	**Lan Na On the Edge (Simon Rowedder: Chair of the Panel, Auditorium A)**
Simon Rowedder	5.3.1 Lan Na Through Chinese Eyes: Academic Inquiry and Cultural Imagination
Wasan Panyagaew	5.3.2 Transformation of Jinghong/Ching Hung, Part III

5.1 Panel I: Foreign Missionaries in Lan Na and Beyond: Strategies, Self-Transformation and Legacy from the Cold War Era

Organizer of the Panel: Kwanchewan Buadaeng

This panel focuses on modern Christian missions, which were carried out by foreign missionaries in the highlands of Lan Na and beyond, from colonial times until the Cold War. Applying an anthropological approach, the panel attempts to understand the missionaries' lives, culture, beliefs, and practices from their perspective, as revealed through their autobiographies and photographs. Among many foreign missionaries, the Young family's accounts are extensive as their missions extend from the beginning of the 19th century to World War II and the Cold War, involving the family members of three generations. It is found that their missions intertwine with military operations and scientific exploration during this geopolitical transformation in Lan Na and beyond. The panel also proposes that different non-religious strategies have been used to gain converts from highland ethnic people. Finally, within a long period, they have learned the local language and culture and developed an attachment to the place and people. Then they have transformed themselves into different people from when they started.

5.1.1 Footprints Across Centuries: The Young Legacy of Cross, Crown, and Creature

Kengkij Kitirianglarp

Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Chiang Mai University

This article examines the Young family, American Baptist missionaries whose influence spanned three generations across Southeast Asia from the early to the late 20th century. Their missions evolved from Northern India to Lanna, revealing connections between colonial power, religion, and naturalism. Initially aligned with British imperial interests, they focused on evangelizing Lahu and Wa hill tribes rather than Buddhist Shan. As global politics shifted, they transformed from missionaries to military operatives during World War II and the Cold War, and finally to naturalists who founded Chiang Mai Zoo and discovered new species.

The Young family represents the integration of three forces shaping the modern world: colonial power, scientific naturalism, and Christianity. Their naturalist work was driven by political factors rather than mere personal interest, demonstrating how missionary activities, military operations, and scientific exploration became intertwined during a century of colonial expansion and geopolitical transformation in Southeast Asia. This case illustrates how American Baptist missions operated within systems of colonial modernity and unequal global power relations.

5.1.2 Making an American's War: The Young Family's Mission in Lanna and Beyond during the Cold War

Sinae Hyun

Research Professor, Institute for East Asian Studies,
Sogang University

As one of the most controversial American Protestant missionaries, the Young family has received mixed assessments of their work among the ethnic minorities between China and Southeast Asia. One critical element that has contributed to the mixed evaluation is the family's engagement in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations in the borderlands of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos during the Cold War. This presentation will focus on the relatively less-known figure of the family, Oliver Gordon Young, the author of the widely circulated monograph, The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand. Like his father and brother, Gordon served in the CIA in the 1950s before he published the monograph and moved to the newly established United States Operations Mission to Thailand in the early 1960s. Based in Chiang Mai in the 1950s and 1960s, he made numerous trips and tours in the border areas and stayed closely in touch with the Shan and Lahu peoples. Gordon Young's missions and consequently changing perception towards his work with the CIA in the 1950s in a way presaged the failure of the American-style Cold War in Southeast Asia. In particular, this presentation will delve into the CIA's perception of northern Thailand and its people, including the so-called "hill tribes" through the missions of Gordon Young, and discuss the impacts of their limited knowledge and abundant racial bias on the local people and society in making the Cold War America's own.

5.1.3 Christian Conversion Strategies Among the Highlanders

Prasit Leepreecha

Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences & Development,
Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University

Though a few western Christian missionaries had reached and converted the highland ethnic peoples in Lanna since the colonial time, the majority of them began to work with highland peoples since the early 1950s, due to their escape from China after the revolution in 1949. Most of the western missionaries had taken photos, while a few had published direct experiences based on their main aim of converting the target populations. It is my finding that Western Christian missionaries had used different strategies to win the conversion over local highland ethnic beliefs. Those include medical and spiritual service, hostel service for highland students, battling against local spirits, and development projects. Although Christianity has won over Highland ethnic beliefs, the long-term consequences of conversion have resulted in competition between different Christian denominations. Furthermore, Christianity has caused tensions against those who still follow traditional beliefs. My presentation is based on the existing publications and photos of Western Christian missionaries. In addition, I draw information from interviews and my personal experiences of being a student in a local Christian hostel and long-term observation.

5.1.4 Missionaries and Their Self-Transformation

Kwanchewan Buadaeng

Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Chiang Mai University

Most studies on Christian conversion in Southeast Asia describe how missionaries have carried out their missions, their success and failures. This paper, however, describes how they transform themselves into different kinds of people in specific local contexts. As the foreign missionaries and their descendants wrote more books on their life histories, we know more about their thoughts, their missions, i.e., and relationships with certain groups of people. I propose that while missionaries devote their whole life to converting the highlanders of Asia's borderlands, they also transform themselves into different types of people. The new languages they master, their understanding of and the close relationship with the local elites and ethnic people have gradually modified their specialization, beliefs, likes, and attachments. These transformations enable them to change their roles in the context of the Cold War to become different people than the missionaries, soldiers, development advisors, flora and fauna collectors, etc.

5.2 Panel II: Sipsong Panna and Lan Na: Connections, Mobilities and Divergences

Organizer of the Panel: Xiaoyan Long

According to legend, Chao Mangrai, the founder of Chiang Mai city and the first king of the Lanna kingdom, was the son of a Sipsong Panna princess. In the centuries that followed, the intimate links between the populations in both regions would continue to grow. While the relationship between Sipsong Panna and Lanna, dominated by religious and commercial exchange, was often peaceful and enlightening, it was also marked by war and violence, as when the Tai rulers of Lanna repopulated their lands with war captives from the north. Today, when direct flights connect Jinghong, the capital of Sipsong Panna, with Chiang Mai, the relationship between the sister's regions remains as strong as ever. Sipsong Panna people travel to northern Thailand as tourists, while citizens from this area in turn visit their cousins in China as well, and trade between both regions is thriving. But while commerce and exchange become ever more convenient, the culture divide between populations in both countries, influenced by the cultures and languages of their respective nation-states, is widening.

Looking at the situation of different ethnic groups, but focusing on the Tai-speaking populations of Sipsong Panna and the ancient Lanna kingdom in present-day northern Thailand, this panel explores some of the diverse aspects informing the social, cultural and economic connections between both regions in the present day, from continuing religious exchanges, to the revival of cultural links between the Tai Lue in Sipsong Panna and those in northern Thailand, paying attention to the continuity of a broad cultural brotherhood, alive and well in spite of the homogenizing tendencies threatening it in the era of nation-states and globalization.

5.2.1 From Chiang Mai to Kiulungkiang: The American Presbyterians' Translation of the Tai Lue version of the New Testament

Sirui Dao

Lecturer,Yunnan University

In the 1890s, the American Presbyterian Lao Mission, founded in Chiang Mai in 1867, expressed their interests in the Tai people beyond the Siamese territory, i.e., British Burma, China, and French Indochina. After the closing of the Keng Tung Station in 1908, the Lao Mission relocated to a station in the Chinese territory of Kiulungkiang (Chiang Rung) in 1927. The American missionary Lyle Jerome Beebe was appointed to translate the New Testament into Tai Lue, which was printed as a whole in 1933. However, this translation was adapted from the Tai Yuan version translated by his colleagues Daniel McGilvary and Sophia Royce Bradley McGilvary. The connection between the Tai Lue and the Tai Yuan versions illustrates the Presbyterian missionaries' deeply-rooted beliefs that Tai Lue and Tai Yuan were literarily and orally identical.

5.2.2 Female Aesthetic Labor, Cultural Heritage, and Ethnic Modernity: Tai Lue Businesswomen in Transnational Connectivity

Wanjiao Yu

Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Chiang Mai University

This article explores transnational cultural heritage and its role in shaping ethnic modernity through the aesthetic labor of Tai Lue women in Xishuangbanna, Southwest China. This phenomenon aligns with a broader revitalization of traditional culture in China since the "Chinese Dream" concept was proposed in 2012. It addresses a gap in scholarship that has largely focused on men, often overlooking women's contributions to transnational interactions between Yunnan and Southeast Asia. Many Lue women in Xishuangbanna now engage in transnational trade, particularly importing handicrafts from Thailand. Through fieldwork and qualitative analysis, the study shows that material heritage from Tai communities in Southeast Asia helps envision ethnic revival and ethnic modernity among Tai Lue. Once in Xishuangbanna, these handicrafts are transformed by Lue businesswomen's aesthetic labor, preserving cultural ties to the transnational Tai community while resonating with local preferences and state expectations of being an ethnic minority. This process both reinforces their identities as Lue within the transnational Tai community and as Dai in the Chinese ethnic context.

5.2.3 Marginalizing Memories: Life Histories and Identities of the Diaspora Tai Lue People in Northern Thailand

Xiaoyan Long

Professor, School of Ethnology and Sociology,
Yunnan University

This study examines how historical memory is shaped, preserved, and transmitted across generations within the diaspora Tai Lue community in Northern Thailand. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Chiang Kham since 2010, it explores the interplay between dominant and marginalized narratives, emphasizing how individual experiences, circumstances, and emotions produce diverse interpretations of the same historical past. Often-overlooked marginalized individuals and narratives play a crucial role in this process, as their entanglement and negotiation ultimately shape what is recognized as "collective memory." Through case studies of community leaders, cultural practitioners, and ordinary villagers, this research investigates the influence of gender, emotions, and migration on historical memory and examines how transborder mobility shapes the Tai Lue's perceptions of their past. By analyzing these dynamics, the study contributes to broader discussions on diaspora identity, historical memory, and cultural preservation in Southeast Asian and transnational contexts. A short documentary film (15min) on the topic will be screened in conjunction with the presentations at this panel.

5.3 Panel III: Lan Na on the Edge

Organizer of the Panel: Simon Rowedder

The Upper Mekong Borderlands, covering areas of present northern Thailand, northern Laos, eastern Myanmar, and southern China (Yunnan province), have been historically strongly connected culturally, economically, and politically in a highly diverse ethno-linguistic environment. Now, the region is being mapped and imagined in the neoliberal language of economic opening-up, regional integration, and urban development. Historically, this is Lan Na on the edge. Most prominently articulated by the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation Program initiated by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), schemes of Economic Corridors, Special Economic Zones, large-scale infrastructure projects and newly designed border towns have been increasingly taken up by Chinese visions of modernity, development and connectivity, most visibly expressed by its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Bringing together three angles of ethnographies, from different local, national, and temporal contexts within this region, this panel explores these over time differently mapped spatial transformations and examines how they have been translated on the ground into local present, and memories of past, lifeworlds of borderland (im)mobility and urbanity. This long-term historical lens of mainly externally projected and locally lived connectivity in mainland Southeast Asia is important inasmuch as it is largely missing in recent studies on increasingly Chinese-backed infrastructures, which take China's BRI as the unquestionable starting and turning point of the region's path towards infrastructural development and modernity.

5.3.1 Lanna Through Chinese Eyes: Academic Inquiry and Cultural Imagination

Simon Rowedder

Assistant Professor, University of Passau

China's engagement with Lanna encompasses both scholarly research and popular imaginations shaped by the perception of historical, cultural, and economic ties. Academically, Chinese scholars explore Lanna's historical connections with Sipsongpanna (and Yunnan at large), linguistic and ethnic affinities, and shared religious traditions, contributing to growing bodies of Thai and Southeast Asian Studies in China. Beyond academia, Lanna is often romanticized in the public (especially digital) sphere through tourism advertisement and fictional and non-fictional media, depicting Lanna as an exotic and nostalgic space blending distinctive Thai and Chinese heritage traits. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has further amplified Chinese interest, framing the revitalization of Lanna's historical past within broader Sino-centric narratives of regional infrastructural connectivity and economic integration. This paper examines how academic studies and popular imaginations intersect, shaping China's evolving imaginations of Lanna in both the intellectual and public realm.

5.3.2 Transformation of Jinghong/Ching Hung, Part III

Wasan Panyagaew

Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Chiang Mai University

Chiang Hung/Jinghong, the capital city of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, People's Republic of China, has been rapidly expanded and developed as a new city, initially by the construction of a modern road. This, once the old border town of northern Tai states, historically, has for centuries positioned itself as a hub of long-distance trade, a 'terminal' of the borderlands of the upper Mekong. Changes in the past two decades, through the investment and development of city infrastructure, the modern road construction and housing area, particularly, are qualitatively different, I argue. Via modern infrastructure development, Jinghong city has been well connected to the outside world. The emergence of the modern transportation systems (the highways, the city roads, the airport, and recently the railway) has linked people in this city to other cities of China and the neighboring countries. The urbanisation of Jinghong has brought them modern mobility, the accelerated flows of people, commodities, capitals, and information, which in turn transform their experience and perception of places. In this paper, I examine a historical spatialization of Chiang Hung/Jinghong, through the construction of modern transportation, particularly the city road, and the consequences of this city road construction on the way of life of Dai minority people living in Jinghong. The ethnography provided in this paper is mostly drawn from my field research on Jinghong that started in the past two decades. Data from several fieldtrips I conducted on modern road construction, since 2010, will be added and discussed. The last field trip to Jinghong I conducted was in December 2024.

6. Individual Papers

Full Papers	
Author	**Title**
Maya Dania	6.1.1 Spectral Mekong, Eco-Ghosted Waters: The Naga's Hauntology and More-Than-Human Futures in the Anthropocene
Reni Juwitasari	6.1.2 Living with Fire in the Pyrocene: A Case Study of Forest Fire in Wiang Kaen, Thailand
Shahinur Akter and Aranya Siriphon	6.1.3 Prevalence of diarrhea among under-five children and the influencing factors in southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh
Waraporn Ruangsri	6.1.4 Life History of People and Things on the Salween River Basin
Petra Lemberger	6.1.5 From Bars to Books: Sex Entertainment, Higher Education, and the Social (Re-) Construction of Aging Masculinities in Chiang Mai
Abstracts	
Author	**Title**
Klemens Karlsson	6.2.1 Lan Na Buddhist Culture between National Borders
Roger Casas	6.2.2 “Lanna Buddhism”: A Reappraisal
Pornpin Matungka	6.2.3 The Case Study of Promoting Culinary Tourism in Chiang Mai in Forms of Local Northern Thai Food Commodities for Supporting Local Traditional Heritage Cuisine and Tourism Sustainability
Jeffrey Moynihan	6.2.4 Urban taste: Khao soi and being "khon muang" in northern Thailand, past, present future
Noah Tanigawa	6.2.5 A (Waste) Crisis in Ecotourism? Understanding perceptions and power in Maekampong Village, Thailand
Alejandro Huete	6.2.6 Waste Reclaiming as an Act of Autonomy: Street Waste Reclaimers in Chiang Mai, Thailand
Urai Yangcheepsutjarit	6.2.7 Hmong Market in Kad Luang: Weaving Craft Economy and Ethnic Visibility in Contemporary Lanna
Salai Vanni Bawi	6.2.8 Burmese in Lanna Land: Mapping Cultural Identities in Chiang Mai’s Urban Fabric

6.1 Full Papers

6.1.1 Spectral Mekong, Eco-Ghosted Waters: The Naga's Hauntology and More-Than-Human Futures in the Anthropocene

Maya Dania

Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University

Abstract

The Mekong is not just a river but a living assemblage of geopolitical struggles, traditional cosmologies, and multispecies entanglements. At the heart of its spectral ecology lies the Naga, a mythical serpent that embodies both ancestral protection and ecological memory. In contemporary discourse, the Naga persists as a spectral force, simultaneously embedded in local resistance practices and ontologically erased by development narratives that render the Mekong a mere energy corridor. This paper critically reconfigures the Mekong as a haunted river, where the spectral forces of the Naga and other suppressed ecologies actively resist the violent ontologies of hydropower capitalism and techno-modernity. Through an interdisciplinary engagement with Jacques Derrida's hauntology and Donna Haraway's "Making Kin" framework, this study conceptualizes the "Eco-Ghost" of the Mekong - a hauntological presence emerging from fragmented ecologies, spectral landscapes, and disrupted kinships. The Naga, in this formulation, operates as both a hauntological counterforce and a posthuman agent, disrupting hydro-modernity's attempt to discipline the river into a commodified flow. Chiang Khong, situated in Northern Thailand, serves as a critical site of multispecies entanglement, where relational ontologies persist through ritual practices, storytelling, and localized ecological knowledge, ensuring that the Naga's spectral agency remains an active force in resisting environmental dispossession. This paper argues for staying with the haunted trouble, recognizing the Mekong's future as an entangled, uncertain terrain where spectral histories refuse closure. The Naga's spectral presence does not merely signify mythic persistence. Instead, it articulates a counter-narrative to developmental violence, demonstrating that large-scale infrastructure projects do not simply transform landscapes. They produce ghosts, unresolved ecological and cultural tensions that linger, demand reckoning, and call for more-than-human solidarities in the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Naga, Mekong River, Chiang Khong, Eco-Ghost, the Anthropocene

Introduction

The Mekong River is undergoing one of the most rapid transformations in its history, primarily driven by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and regional hydroelectric development projects. As of 2023, 11 major dams have been built on the Mekong mainstream, with an additional 120 planned or completed on its tributaries (Mekong River Commission, 2023). The Xayaburi Dam, Laos' largest hydroelectric project, has significantly altered the Mekong's hydrological cycles, reducing sediment flow by nearly 50%, with profound impacts on downstream fisheries and agrarian economies (Piman et al., 2016). Projections suggest that the Mekong's annual fishery yield, valued at over $17 billion, could decline by 40-80% in the coming decades, destabilizing local food security and economic sustainability (Ziv et al., 2012). In Chiang Khong, these large-scale development projects have sparked local struggles over ecological survival, cultural loss, and the erosion of traditional knowledge. This article is grounded in these realities, exploring how communities cross these changes while resisting the forces that disrupt their way of life (Yong, 2022).

In Chiang Khong, the Mekong is not just an economic corridor. It is a sacred and relational entity deeply embedded in local cosmologies, ritual practices, and ecological wisdom. The center of this multispecies ontology is the Naga, a mythic serpent revered across Mekong societies as both a guardian of the river and an embodiment of its vitality. However, contemporary development discourses have systematically erased the Naga's ontological presence, reducing the Mekong to a hydroelectric corridor that is subordinated to capitalist and state-led modernization projects (Santasombat, 2011). Hence, this research engages Jacques Derrida's hauntology to conceptualize the Naga as a spectral counterforce, a presence that haunts hydro-capitalist imaginaries by resisting its erasure from local knowledge systems, anti-dam activism, and ecological narratives. Simultaneously, drawing on Haraway's "Making Kin," this study situates the Naga within a posthumanist multispecies framework, where the river's more-than-human inhabitants, such as migratory fish, sediment flows, and localized ecological networks, resist capitalist enclosure and demand alternative kinships beyond human exceptionalism.

Accordingly, this article introduces the concept of the "Eco-Ghost," a hauntological presence that emerges from fragmented ecologies, disrupted kinships, and ghosted traditional knowledge systems. This paper describes the Mekong River not just as a geographical entity but as a haunted, living assemblage shaped by hydrological rhythms, multispecies entanglements, and geopolitical struggles. Spanning six countries, including China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the river sustains over 70 million people who depend on its waters for fisheries, agriculture, and livelihoods (Mekong River Commission, 2023). However, in the Anthropocene, hydropower capitalism and large-scale infrastructural interventions have fractured the ecological integrity of rivers, disrupting sediment transport, biodiversity cycles, and the historical relationships between humans, more-than-humans, and the river itself (Grumbine et al., 2020). These transformations have rendered the Mekong a spectral river, a place where lost ecologies, disrupted water cycles, and displaced beings linger as hauntological presences that resist erasure. The river's spectrality manifests in the Mekong's vanishing flood pulses, declining fish stocks, and displaced communities, illustrating how hydropower capitalism produces not just infrastructural developments but also enduring ecological and cultural legacies.

By focusing on Chiang Khong in Northern Thailand as a site of hauntological resistance, this study explores how the Mekong's disrupted rhythms are understood through rituals, local ecological knowledge, and narratives of the Naga. Instead of being helpless in the face of environmental destruction, communities actively resist through rituals, storytelling, and grassroots activism, ensuring that the Naga's spectral presence continues to shape both cultural identity and ecological struggles. They keep the Naga alive not just as a spiritual guardian, but as an eco-ghost that resists erasure and embodies ecological memory, unsettling mainstream development narratives. Rather than fading into myth, the Naga haunts the river as a lingering force of resistance, a presence that is neither fully absent nor entirely present. Simultaneously, in Haraway's terms, the Naga enacts kin-making across time and species, threading together the disrupted multispecies relations of the Mekong. In this way, the Naga

functions not merely as a symbolic figure but as an active agent within socio-ecological struggles, shaping how communities adapt to environmental uncertainty.

This research employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, combining ethnographic fieldwork, discourse analysis, and hauntological inquiry to examine Naga's spectral presence in Chiang Khong's resistance to hydropower development. Fieldwork was conducted in Ban Haad Krai, where participant observation and in-depth interviews were carried out with local fishers, farmers, and spiritual practitioners to understand how ecological disruptions are experienced and interpreted. Engagement with Rak Chiang Khong, a local civil society organization (CSO), provided critical insights into grassroots activism, policy advocacy, and community-led resistance efforts against hydropower expansion. This included discussions with CSO members, local monks, and elders who actively invoke the Naga in rituals and narratives to sustain ecological memory and territorial claims over the river. Additionally, visits to Doi Mae Ya Mon Temple provided knowledge into the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the Naga's presence, revealing how Buddhist cosmology intersects with environmental struggles. By analyzing community narratives, policy documents, and ritual practices, this study examines how the Naga operates as an eco-ghost, a spectral force that resists erasure, mobilizes cultural identity, and challenges dominant hydro-capitalist frameworks shaping the Mekong's future.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology that integrates ethnographic fieldwork, hauntological analysis, and multispecies relational inquiry. Fieldwork was conducted between 2022 and 2024 in Chiang Khong, Northern Thailand, focusing on Ban Haad Krai and Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon, sites of ecological significance and ritual cosmology along the Mekong River. Data collection methods included participant observation, in-depth interviews with local elders, spiritual mediums, monks, and members of the Rak Chiang Khong civil society network. Ritual practices were observed during key seasonal festivals and offerings associated with the Naga. Discourse analysis was applied to chants, protest banners, oral histories, and narratives of riverine change. All participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the research and provided verbal consent before their participation. Anonymity has been maintained through the use of pseudonyms where requested. In light of the cultural and cosmological sensitivities surrounding Naga beliefs, the research was conducted with a commitment to respectful engagement, including informal consultations with spiritual practitioners. The study followed principles of relational accountability, recognizing that shared knowledge is not only intellectual property but also embedded in ethical, spiritual, and place-based responsibilities.

Spectrality, Hauntology, and the Politics of Ghosts

Hauntology, a term introduced by Jacques Derrida in Spectres of Marx (1993), reconfigures traditional understandings of ontology and being by foregrounding haunting as a central condition of existence. Unlike ontology, which seeks to define being in stable terms, hauntology embraces absence, spectral presence, and temporal disjunction. Derrida describes it as a logic of haunting, arguing that what is absent often exerts more power than what is materially present. This notion is particularly relevant in analyzing historical injustices, lingering traumas, and unresolved political struggles, where the specter of the past continues to shape the present.

A key aspect of hauntology is its disruption of linear time, replacing it with messianic time, a mode of time where an anticipated return always haunts presence. Derrida's hauntology also has an ethical dimension, calling for hospitality toward the spectral and recognition of what has been repressed or excluded. This moral imperative is tied to hauntological justice, where the spectral past demands recognition in the present rather than being erased through presentist or positivist ideologies. Additionally, hauntology critiques the desire for closure, resisting historical finality by insisting that certain unresolved forces, such as political, ecological, and cultural, continue to haunt the structures that attempt to suppress them.

Closely tied to hauntology is the concept of spectrality, which challenges the stability of reality and the materiality of presence. Jameson (1999) describes spectrality as a distortion of material reality, likening it to heat waves that make the world shimmer and appear unstable. The spectral does not demand a belief in ghosts in a supernatural sense; instead, it insists that the present is never entirely self-sufficient. It is always shaped by what came before, even if it remains invisible. This concept is crucial in examining historical traumas, marginalized voices, and lost ecological lifeworlds, as spectrality renders absence visible through its impact on the present. Derrida argues that the ghost, or the revenant, is not merely a figure of the past but a force that disrupts binaries such as self/other, presence/absence, life/death, and real/unreal. Unlike spirits, which are often associated with an afterlife, the specter has an ambiguous relationship with the body because it departs yet lingers, appearing again to unsettle the assumptions of closure and finality. This makes hauntology a crucial framework for analyzing incomplete revolutions, displaced communities, and ecological destruction, where certain forces persist despite their refusal to disappear entirely.

Hauntology was first articulated in Derrida's interview Spectrographies (1992) and later developed in Spectres of Marx (1993), where he critiques the premature dismissal of Marxism following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The "spectral turn" in the 1990s and early 2000s expanded hauntology into cultural studies, political theory, and anthropology, transforming the ghost from a symbol of superstition into a figure with analytical, ethical, and political significance. Despite its influence, hauntology has been subject to key critiques. Esther Peeren (2008) argues that Derrida universalizes the spectral condition, potentially erasing the agency of "living ghosts" or those who are socially marginalized but still present, such as political refugees and stateless populations. Similarly, Roger Luckhurst (2002) critiques the use of hauntology in literary studies, arguing that it is often over-applied to texts without engaging in a rigorous analysis of its political implications. Lewis (1996) criticizes Derrida's reliance on the term "specter" in The Communist Manifesto, arguing that it stems from a mistranslation that exaggerates the ghostly metaphor beyond Marx's original intent.

While hauntology has been extensively studied in literature, memory studies, and media theory, its potential in ecological studies and environmental politics remains underexplored. This article fills this gap by introducing "Eco-Ghost," a framework that applies hauntology to ecological destruction, the disappearance of species, and disrupted hydrological cycles. By examining the Mekong River and the spectral presence of the Naga, this study expands hauntology beyond its usual applications, demonstrating how lost ecosystems, broken kinships, and vanished riverine lifeworlds persist in refusing to disappear completely.

Making Kin and Posthuman Relationality

Donna Haraway's "Making Kin," introduced in Staying with the Trouble (2016), proposes an alternative to the destructive logics of the Anthropocene by emphasizing multispecies entanglements, relational ethics, and collective survival. Haraway rejects the idea that humans exist separately from the more-than-human world, arguing instead for kinship beyond biological lineage (a concept that demands accountability, responsibility, and co-survival in deeply entangled ecosystems). Her idea of "sympoiesis" or "making-with" rejects autopoietic, self-contained systems and instead insists that life is always co-constituted, interdependent, and reciprocal.

Making Kin is a radical critique of human exceptionalism, insisting that more-than-human beings, such as animals, plants, landscapes, and even non-biological entities, possess agency, relationality, and memory. Haraway's framework (2016) is handy for analyzing how local communities, more-than-human species, and disrupted ecosystems negotiate survival within extractive economies, such as hydropower capitalism's reconfiguration of the Mekong River and its spectral ecologies. This framework challenges dominant human-centered governance models, particularly in the context of environmental destruction, capitalist extraction, and techno-scientific interventions that sever human-nature relations. While Derrida's hauntology emphasizes the persistence of spectral presences, lost histories, and lingering injustices, it remains primarily focused on the return of what has been erased, the disruption of linear time, and the ethical imperative to attend to the absent yet

present past. In contrast, Haraway's "Making Kin" looks into a more-than-human perspective, expanding the hauntological argument beyond historical erasure to encompass material, ecological, and multispecies entanglements that shape both the present and the future.

This article argues that Hauntology and Making Kin together offer a powerful lens for understanding the contested ecologies of the Mekong River. While hauntology reveals how lost hydrological rhythms, displaced species, and erased Indigenous knowledge continue to "haunt" the Mekong, Making Kin shows how communities actively rework and reassemble these spectral traces into new multispecies alliances, kinships, and political resistances. In other words, hauntology exposes the ghostly absences created by hydropower development, and Making Kin proposes ways to live with, respond to, and politically mobilize these hauntings in the present.

Bringing Derrida and Haraway into dialogue, this study conceptualizes the Naga as both a hauntological and posthumanist force that unsettles the hydro-modernist reduction of the Mekong into a mere energy corridor. Through the lens of hauntology, the Naga operates as an "Eco-Ghost," refusing erasure, lingering as an absence that disrupts dominant narratives of progress. Yet, through the framework of Making Kin, the Naga is *more than just a ghost*. It is a relational actant, actively shaping human-river-mythic entanglements that sustain ecological knowledge, ritual practices, and community-led governance structures. The Naga is a spectral kin-maker, a force that both haunts and entangles communities in the ongoing struggle for ecological justice. While hydropower capitalism seeks to exorcise the Mekong's spectral rhythms, the Naga remains, refusing erasure, acting as both an Eco-Ghost and a posthuman kin-maker that binds humans, fish, sediment flows, and spiritual traditions into new forms of relational resistance.

Naga in Northern Thailand: Definitions, Origins, and Socio-Ecological Roles

The figure of the Naga occupies a profound place within Thai cosmology, environmental practice, and mythological landscapes. Broadly defined, the Naga refers to a serpent-like being deeply entwined with water, fertility, protection, and sovereignty. According to the Royal Institute Dictionary (RID) B.E. 2542 (1999), the Naga is described as a hooded snake or a snake with a crest (Royal Institute, 1999). Regional dictionaries, such as the Northeastern Thai Dictionary, expand this image, portraying the Naga as a giant snake imbued with mythical qualities, with Phraya Naga honored as the king of snakes. According to the Northeastern Thai Dictionary (Ministry of National Culture Office, 1983), the Naga is understood as a huge mythical serpent with a crest, often referred to as Phraya Naga, the king of snakes, whose presence is tied intrinsically to water and fertility. Drawing from ancient Sanskrit meanings, the term signifies a cobra, symbolizing majesty and sacred power (Sirisuk et al., 2015; Chumsai Na Ayutthaya, 1986). Across Tai-speaking communities, linguistic variations such as *Ngan, Ngua, Nam Ngu Ak-ngu,* and *Nam Ngum* echo the breadth of Naga worship between Thailand and Laos. In Northern Thailand's Chiang Saen Basin, local communities also refer to the Naga as *phi ngeuak*, the river spirit, underlining its enduring spiritual and ecological significance.

The global origins of serpent worship extend beyond Southeast Asia. Anthropological and religious studies highlight that veneration of serpent-like beings was widespread in ancient Egypt, Greece, Japan, and India (Chang, 2021). In particular, Indian mythology profoundly shaped Southeast Asian Naga traditions. In ancient Indian literature, the Naga is depicted as an oceanic guardian, a subterranean dweller bearing a jewel on its head, and often portrayed with multiple hoods (Eason, 2007). Within Dravidian cultural practices, serpents were revered as totemic ancestors, and a practice later absorbed into Brahmanism and early Buddhist thought (McEvilley, 1993). In Vedic cosmology, the Naga is associated with controlling cosmic waters, reflecting an intimate relationship with fertility, abundance, and disaster prevention. The Naga's frequent appearance under the feet of the Garuda in Hindu iconography, despite its subjugation, emphasizes the serpent's persistent immortality and sacred potency (Das, 2024)

The transmission of Naga imagery into Thailand represents both an importation and a reinvention of the Naga tradition. While its Indianized prototypes undeniably influenced Thai art and

mythology, indigenous serpent worship predated Indian contact, with archaeological evidence of serpent symbolism dating back 2,000–3,000 years in the Siam Peninsula (Higham, 2002). Excavations at sites such as Ban Chiang and Ban Kao have unearthed painted pottery and artifacts featuring serpent motifs, suggesting that local communities revered water serpents as creators, protectors, and destroyers long before the arrival of Brahmanism or Buddhism. In Northeastern Thailand, archaeological and folkloric records document three millennia of serpent veneration, particularly along the Mekong River, where the Naga remains central to cultural memory (Yos, 2011).

With the spread of Theravāda Buddhism, serpent worship was absorbed and transformed into a new form. Buddhist mythology reimagined Nagas as protectors of the Buddha. Iconography, such as the Pang Nak Prok, depicting the Buddha sheltered under the multi-hooded Naga Mucalinda, became pervasive in temple art (Swearer, 2010). Local myths also evolved, portraying Nagas not only as cosmic guardians but as shapeshifters, rainmakers, and warriors against evil forces. This dual incorporation, combining Buddhist and indigenous elements, produced a complex, layered Naga imagery, wherein Nagas are both cosmological beings and ancestral spirits tied to specific landscapes.

Jakkrit Sangkhamanee (2017) emphasizes that for the Thai and Lao communities, the Mekong is not merely a hydrological entity but an enchanted territory inhabited by mythical beings, with water engineering practices that even symbolically invoke the Naga. The Naga's subterranean world forms another powerful motif in riverine cosmology. Areas near Nong Khai and Udon Thani are believed to house the Nagas' underwater palace (wang badan), with sites like the Mekong Abyss considered portals to the serpentine underworld. Narratives collected by Pathom Hongsuwan (2011) recount how the Mekong's origin itself is attributed to the battle or intervention of Nagas, with rivers and sacred sites shaped by their movements. Sacred water festivals, such as the worship at That Phanom Stupa, utilize Mekong water in rituals invoking the Naga's guardianship (Hongsuwan, 2011). In Luang Prabang, canoe racing rituals along the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers involve offerings made directly to the Naga spirits to bless the realm and secure protection for the waters

In the urban landscape, the Naga's presence remains evident. Across Northeastern Thailand, Naga imagery proliferates in river promenades, public monuments, temple staircases, and streetlights. These representations are not merely decorative; they actively contribute to place identity and social cohesion, embodying a shared history of reverence for water and environmental stewardship. Recent scholarship even suggests that Naga symbolism in urban planning could support holistic, value-centered approaches to public health and well-being, reconnecting spiritual values with urban environmental design.

Nowhere is this entanglement more vivid than in Northern Thailand's Chiang Saen Basin, where Naga mythology actively shapes the social and ecological imagination. The most famous local myth recounts how a Naga destroyed the city of Yonok after its ruler fell into moral decay, a cautionary tale that intertwines environmental catastrophe with spiritual transgression. Here, the Naga is perceived as a protector against malevolent forces, a guardian of water systems, and a regulator of human relationships with land and rivers (Walker, 2012). Changes to the physical landscape, such as floods, river shifts, and land erosion, are commonly interpreted as manifestations of Naga will, necessitating ritualized permissions for construction, agriculture, and water usage. Ethnographic studies document that decisions about temple placement, urban planning, and village expansion often incorporate dreams, visions, and signs attributed to Naga intervention, shaping a mythscape where sacred geography and communal life are deeply entangled (McDaniel, 2011).

Ethnographic fieldwork by Piyawit Moonkham (2021) in the Chiang Saen Basin also reveals that the belief in the Naga as a protector of river resources profoundly influences how people build, farm, and organize rituals along the Mekong. Local communities seek the Nagas' permission before constructing houses and temples, with building orientations often aligned with the perceived movements of the serpent spirits (Moonkham, 2021). Rituals of worshipping the Naga are held annually to secure sufficient rainfall, linking agricultural prosperity directly to reverence for the river's guardian spirit. Spirit mediums interviewed in Chiang Saen villages affirm direct communication with

Nagas, seeking advice on weather patterns and community fortunes, demonstrating a continued human-Naga relationality mediated through ritual practice (Moonkham, 2021).

Naga narratives distinguish between Buddhist mythologies, where Nagas protect the Buddha and represent wealth, fertility, and enlightenment, and local folklore, where Nagas are sentient, emotive beings capable of anger, revenge, and miraculous interventions. In both traditions, however, the Naga acts as a mediator between human communities and the capricious forces of nature, particularly the vital and dangerous element of water. Crucially, the Naga's cultural function extends beyond mythology into the formation of communal identity. In Northeastern Thailand and Chiang Saen, belief in the Naga fosters a deep sense of interconnectedness with natural cycles, provides emotional resilience against environmental uncertainties, and strengthens community solidarity. (Williams & Ladwig, 2012) Ritual practices, such as rainmaking ceremonies, spirit offerings, and river blessing festivals, underscore how the spectral presence of the Naga structures both everyday life and extraordinary environmental events. The designation of the Naga as a national emblem of Thailand in 2022 further attests to its symbolic significance in nation-state building, international diplomacy, and contemporary identity politics.

Gaps and Contributions of This Research

While existing scholarship richly documents the mythological, archaeological, and cultural dimensions of the Naga, few studies interrogate its role through the lens of hauntology and posthumanist kin-making. The spectrality of the Naga, due to its unresolved and lingering presence in landscapes undergoing capitalist transformation, remains an underexplored theoretical site. Likewise, although Naga rituals continue to mediate human-river relations, little research has analyzed how these practices function as forms of ecological resistance against hydropower projects and developmental displacement.

Therefore, this article addresses these gaps by reframing the Naga as an Eco-Ghost, a spectral agent that resists erasure and insists on multispecies entanglement in the disrupted ecologies of the Mekong River. Through an engagement with Derrida's hauntology and Haraway's "Making Kin," it shows how the Naga's lingering presence in Chiang Khong communities is not a remnant of the past but an active force reconfiguring social, political, and ecological relations in the Anthropocene.

The Naga in Chiang Khong (Northern Thailand) Riverine Cosmology through Rituals, Festivals, and Riverine Life

The Naga, or *nak* in Thai, continues to hold a profound position within the cosmology of communities along the Mekong River, functioning as a river spirit (*phi ngeuak*) that shapes ecological practices, spiritual beliefs, and ritual activities (Moonkham, 2021). The Naga's relationship to water is not abstract. It is materialized through local rituals, architecture, and water management practices. Field research conducted in Chiang Khong uncovers how the Naga myth continues to shape community life actively. In-depth interviews with local villagers, monks, and members of Rak Chiang Khong, a civil society organization dedicated to protecting the Mekong, reveal that the Naga remains a living entity, one whose presence is continually negotiated through rituals, offerings, and landscape practices. Informants such as Mae Khwan, a spirit medium, emphasize that villagers still seek guidance from the Naga on weather patterns, agricultural timing, and river behavior (Moonkham, 2021). Phor Lah, a village elder, recounts taboos such as avoiding the consumption of eels, believed to be descendants of the Naga, showing how everyday dietary habits are linked to respect for the river spirit.

Likewise, in the cosmology of Chiang Khong, the Mekong River is not a product of abstract geological processes. It is the embodied memory of divine struggles, where serpent-beings of unimaginable power (the Nagas) carved their territorial claims into the land and waters. The river, in local imagination, is a material trace of mythic events, a cosmographic text still legible to those who know how to read it eddies, whirlpools, and bends. According to oral histories recorded among

villagers in Ban Haad Krai and elders in Chiang Khong town, the Mekong's serpentine form is the consequence of a great conflict between two powerful Nagas: Suthonakarat (*สุโธนาคาราช*) and Suwannakharat (*สุวรรณนาคราช*). Both Nagas, brothers born from the primeval waters (*มหาสมุทรดึกดำบรรพ์*, *maha samut deuk dam banpan*), desired dominion over the vast river valleys. Their rivalry escalated to such cosmic violence that it threatened the stability of the heavens and the earth. Phra In (*พระอินทร์*), the Vedic deity of cosmic order, intervened to prevent total ruin. He proposed a contest: whichever Naga could complete the creation of a river first would be granted dominion over the lands and beings connected to its waters.

Driven by ambition and impatience, Suthonakarat set to work furiously. Using his massive coils, he whipped, gouged, and sculpted the earth, tracing a river that twisted wildly, sometimes rushing, pooling, constantly bending unpredictably. His creation was the Mekong, a river full of sharp turns, eddies, and sudden depths. On the other side, Suwannakharat, more contemplative, created the straighter Mae Nam Nan (*แม่น้ำน่าน*), a river whose form reflects calm deliberation. Then, Suthonakarat completed his task first, and by cosmic decree, he was granted stewardship over the Mekong and its domains. As a sign of favor, Phra In entrusted him with the guardianship of the Pla Buk (*ปลาบึก*), the Giant Mekong Catfish, considered the most sacred among river creatures.

This myth not only explains the river's sinuous form but also encodes a moral geography. The Mekong's wildness, unpredictability, and simultaneous fecundity and danger are all read through the lens of Suthonakarat's passionate, turbulent nature. In contrast, the straighter Nan River reflects Suwannakharat's steadiness, valued differently in other regions. Field interviews reveal that these mythic distinctions are spatially mapped onto daily life. Fishermen describe the Mekong as "the river of fierce spirits" (*แม่น้ำแห่งวิญญาณดุ*, *Mae Nam haeng winyan du*), whereas tributaries like the Nan are seen as "calmer siblings." Agricultural practices, river crossings, and fishing techniques are all informed by this inherited knowledge of the river's temperament.

One of the most critical ritual sites where this mythic cosmology materializes is Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon (*วัดดอยแม่ยะมอน*), situated atop a small promontory overlooking a dangerous whirlpool (*น้ำวน*, *nam won*) on the Mekong. Here, at the convergence of three currents, the villagers believe the Naga hole (*โพรงนาค*, *phrong nak*) lies as the subterranean entrance to the Naga's underwater realm (*วังบาดาล*, *Wang Badan*). The local story recounts that long ago, the father Naga was trapped by human fishermen's nets (*อวนจับปลา*, *uan jap pla*). An older woman named Ya Mon (*ยายม่อน*), gathering wild mushrooms along the riverbank, found the suffering Naga. Rather than flee in fear, she freed him, an act of compassion that changed the course of human-Naga relations.

In gratitude, the Naga gifted her vegetables that transformed into golden leaves (*ผักทองกลายเป็นทองคำ*, *phak thong klai pen thongkham*) and revealed to her the secret of the underwater passage. At her request, he sealed the Naga hole to prevent further conflict between realms, ensuring that humans and Nagas would coexist peacefully but separately. Today, the site remains saturated with cosmological potency. No construction or alteration of the riverbank is undertaken near Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon without ritual permission (*ขอขมา*, *kho khama*). Spirit mediums (*ร่างทรง*, *rangsong*) are consulted; offerings of banana leaves, incense (*ธูป*, *thup*), and candles (*เทียน*, *thian*) are made to acknowledge the presence of unseen beings. Residents caution against swimming in the Mekong near the temple, particularly during the rainy season when currents are strongest. Accidents are interpreted not merely as natural mishaps but as signs of Naga displeasure (*ความไม่พอใจของนาค*, *khwam mai phochai khong nak*).

In this cosmology, the river itself is a text, a living archive where histories are inscribed in eddies, depths, whirlpools, and seasonal flows. Knowledge of the river's behavior is passed down through generations, such as a sudden change in water clarity being explained as the stirring of the Naga's body, unpredictable whirlpools being read as gates briefly opening to the underwater palaces, and dense fogs at dawn being interpreted as the Naga breathing. Thus, to move through the Mekong landscape is not only to navigate a physical environment but to traverse a layered mythscape (*ภูมิทัศน์แห่ง*

ตำนาน, *phum that haeng tamnan*) populated by memories of past struggles, alliances, and cosmic interventions.

Ethnographic observation shows how this mythic mapping affects practice. For example, fishermen in Ban Haad Krai select fishing grounds based on ancestral teachings about Naga territories, and farmers orient their rice paddies with respect to the river's seasonal moods, which are understood through the movements of serpent beings below. Even contemporary political protests against hydropower development reference the Naga. Signs at rallies declare: **"หยุดทำลายบ้านของพญานาค"** ("Stop Destroying the Home of Phaya Nak"), asserting that the river's violation is not merely ecological degradation but a cosmological crime. Through these stories, practices, and landscapes, the Naga is not a relic of a forgotten past but a living agent, a being whose presence demands ongoing ethical engagement.

Following scholars such as Marisol de la Cadena (2015) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004), it is clear that the world inhabited by the people of Chiang Khong is a "pluriverse" (Carvalho & Riquito, 2022), a world where multiple ontologies, human and more-than-human, coexist and shape each other. The Mekong is not only a river, but it is also an ancestral being. Fishing is not merely extraction, but also a form of negotiated reciprocity. In the same way, floods are not just disasters, but they are communications from unseen sovereignties. In this way, the Naga and the river together challenge modernist distinctions between myth and history, nature and society, and the secular and the sacred.

The material and spiritual landscape of Chiang Khong is punctuated by sacred sites that mediate the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. Among these, Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon stands out as a critical node, a cosmological infrastructure where myth, memory, and political ecology converge. More than a religious site, the temple is a threshold, a place where the boundaries between human worlds (โลกมนุษย์, *lok manut*) and Naga worlds (วังบาดาล, *Wang Badan*) thin, overlap, and blur. The siting of Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon was not arbitrary. Oral histories collected from senior monks (พระเถระ, *phra thera*) and local historians (นักประวัติศาสตร์ท้องถิ่น, *nak prawattisat thongthin*) explain that the temple was established after a series of dreams (ความฝัน, *khwam fan*) and omens (ลางบอกเหตุ, *lang bok het*) revealed the presence of a โพรงนาค (*phrong nak*) beneath the swirling Mekong currents. Villagers recount how, during an especially tumultuous flood season, strange phenomena were observed, such as water that boiled without visible cause, whirlpools that appeared and disappeared with uncanny rhythm, and unusual numbers of Pla Buk gathering near the riverbank. These signs were interpreted as communications from the Naga realm, demanding recognition, reverence, and careful engagement. Spirit mediums (ร่างทรง, *rangsong*) were consulted, and this was done through elaborate possession rituals. It was confirmed that the site was a gateway between worlds.

The temple was thus founded not merely for human worship but as an act of cosmopolitical negotiation, like a built structure affirming the human community's awareness of, and deference to, the invisible sovereignties animating the river. Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon's architecture materially encodes its cosmological purpose. The temple's naga staircases (บันไดนาค, *bandai nak*) are not decorative flourishes but ritual pathways, guiding pilgrims through a symbolic passage from the mundane to the sacred. Each carving along the balustrades, such as Nagas with multiple heads (นาคเจ็ดเศียร, *nak chet sian*), flames emanating from their mouths, evokes the power and omnipresence of riverine spirits. The temple's main viharn (วิหาร, *viharn*) faces the river directly, a deliberate orientation to maintain visual and energetic alignment with the Mekong. In the temple grounds, a small shrine (ศาลา, *sala*) explicitly dedicated to the Naga presides over the highest point. Offerings of lotus flowers (ดอกบัว, *dok bua*), incense, rice balls (ข้าวปั้น, *khao pan*), and small model boats (เรือจำลอง, *ruea jamlong*) are regularly left here, not only by monks and ritual practitioners but also by farmers, fishermen, and travelers.

The temple thus operates as a microcosm of the larger riverine cosmology: a space where architectural form, ritual practice, and ecological understanding converge to materialize ongoing

human-Naga relations. Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon is not a static monument but a site of continuous ritual activity. Key annual ceremonies (พิธีประจำปี, *phithi pracham pi*) reaffirm the community's relational obligations to the Naga and the river, for example:

1) Songkran Mekong Blessing (รดน้ำแม่น้ำโขง, *rot nam Mae Nam Khong*): During the Thai New Year, villagers perform water rituals not only among themselves but also to the river, asking forgiveness for offenses against the Naga. The act of pouring scented water (น้ำอบไทย, *nam op Thai*) into the river is both a gesture of renewal and a cosmological apology.
2) Lai Ruea Fai (ไหลเรือไฟ, *lai ruea fai*): A festival where illuminated boats float down the Mekong, carrying offerings and prayers to the Naga. This event symbolizes both gratitude for the river's generosity and the hope for continued protection.
3) Bai Sri Su Khwan for the River: Adapted from the traditional Bai Sri Su Khwan for humans, this ritual honors the *khwan* (life essence) of the river itself, recognizing the Mekong as a living being with moods, needs, and vulnerabilities.

Through these ritual acts, villagers enact cosmological politics, asserting that the river cannot be reduced to a mere "resource" and that it remains a living being that requires reciprocal care, attention, and respect. Moreover, the temple also functions as a center of social and political life. During my fieldwork, I observed how village meetings (ประชุมหมู่บ้าน, prachum muban) often took place under the shade of the temple's sala, following ritual offerings to the Naga shrine.

Environmental decisions, such as whether to allow new road constructions, riverbank modifications, or dredging projects, were debated not only in terms of human interest but also regarding potential Naga disapproval. Spirit mediums and monks are often consulted as intermediaries. For instance, before the local government initiated a riverbank stabilization project (โครงการป้องกันตลิ่ง, *khrongkan pongkan taling*), a formal ceremony was held at Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon to seek guidance. When an unusually severe whirlpool appeared afterward, some villagers interpreted it as a sign of the Naga's anger, leading to the project's suspension. In this way, cosmological beliefs actively shape infrastructure politics, guiding, constraining, and sometimes obstructing state-driven development agendas.

However, Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon has also become a site where emerging frictions between cosmology and capitalist development are negotiated. As environmental disruptions intensify, especially after the construction of the Xayaburi Dam, elders report a growing sense of spectral absence, characterized by fewer spontaneous whirlpools, declining sightings of Pla Buk, and more unpredictable water behavior. Some interpret these changes as signs that the Naga have withdrawn, angered by human arrogance, exhausted by extraction, and no longer willing to intercede. Others view these absences as a call to deepen ritual commitments and redouble efforts at spiritual renewal before the relational fabric tears irreparably. Thus, Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon today stands at a crossroads, a site of cosmological continuity but also one increasingly haunted by rupture, absence, and the pressing need for new forms of multispecies solidarity.

Everyday Kinship Practices with the Naga in Northern Thailand

In Chiang Khong, cosmological belief in the Naga is not confined to festival spectacles or extraordinary events. Instead, it is embedded in the rhythms of everyday life. Through daily practices such as fishing, farming, ritual offerings, and spirit consultations, the Naga remain a vital part of local riverine society and are continually invoked, negotiated with, and cared for. Kinship with the Naga is not only a symbolic belief, but it is also materially enacted through relational economies of respect, reciprocity, and ritual engagement that structure everyday interaction with the Mekong River.

Local understandings of the river emphasize that life in the Mekong basin is relational (มีชีวิตสัมพันธ์, *mi chiwit sampan*). The Mekong is affectionately referred to as Mae (แม่, meaning "Mother"),

highlighting the nurturing, life-giving properties attributed to the river. Similarly, the Naga is not imagined as a distant deity but rather as a kin-being (ญาติ, yat), intimately woven into the web of human and nonhuman relations. In field interviews, villagers consistently described the Naga using familial language, referring to it as "*Phaya Nak pen pheua rao*" ("The Naga is our kin") and "*Khun Phaya Nak song ao rak lae khwam aow an ma hai*" ("The Lord Naga grants us love and shelter"). This relational ontology reflects a cosmology that aligns closely with Haraway's (2016) call to "make kin" beyond human exceptionalism while also resonating with Derrida's (1993) hauntological insistence on the persistence of relational demands even amidst spectral absence.

One of the most visible practices of human-Naga kinship is the extension of the Bai Sri Su Khwan (พิธีบายศรีสู่ขวัญ) ceremony beyond the human domain. Traditionally intended to bind and restore the khwan (ขวัญ, spirit or life essence) of individuals, in Chiang Khong, it is adapted to honor the river,its fish, and its spirits. During the annual Pla Buk fishing season in Ban Haad Krai, fishermen gather at the riverbank to perform these rituals. They prepare elaborate bai sri trays (พานบายศรี, *phan bai sri*) woven from banana leaves and adorned with marigolds, jasmine, and candles. Recitations of chants (บทสวด, *bot suat)* invoke ancestral spirits, river beings, and particularly the Naga to bless the fishing season. Offerings such as sticky rice (ข้าวเหนียว, *khao niao*), boiled eggs (ไข่ต้ม, *khai tom*), and cooked Pla Buk are presented as symbolic gifts, emphasizing gratitude and humility before the face of unseen riverine forces. When a Pla Buk is caught, it is greeted as an honored guest (แขกผู้มีเกียรติ, *khaek phu mi kiat*). Fishermen ceremonially pour water over the fish's body, whisper prayers of gratitude, and often tie strands of sacred thread (ด้ายมงคล, *dai mongkhon*) around its fins. Thus, fishing becomes relational labor, and it is not an act of domination over nature but a negotiation between species guided by practices of respect, reciprocity, and care.

Similarly, direct communication with the Naga and other riverine spirits is not limited to ritual prayers. Spirit mediums (ร่างทรง, r*angsong*) act as crucial intermediaries between the human and more-than-human worlds. During ceremonies observed at Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon and in local shrines (ศาลปู่ตา, *san pu ta*), mediums, often women, entered trance states to channel messages from the Naga realm. Their trembling bodies and altered voices conveyed oracles, providing predictions about floods and droughts, warnings against disrespectful human actions, and guidance on the most suitable times for fishing or planting. In one powerful episode, Mae Chan (แม่จัน), a respected medium, warned that dredging operations upstream would "awaken the Naga's anger" (ปลุกความโกรธของพญานาค, *pluk khwam krot khong phaya nak*), risking ecological catastrophe. Such spirit communications are not dismissed as superstition; they are recognized as legitimate mechanisms for environmental governance, reaffirming that decisions about the river's use must involve consultation with unseen sovereignties.

Outside formal rituals, daily life in Chiang Khong reflects a constant engagement with the Naga through small but significant offerings, known as การถวาย (*kan thawai*). Early morning walks along the riverbanks reveal scenes of plates of cooked rice (ข้าวสุก, *khao suk*) discreetly left behind by fishermen, tiny banana-leaf boats floating down the currents carrying flower petals and candles, and marigold garlands placed on river stones believed to be Naga resting sites. These acts maintain what locals call "*khwam samphan di*" (ความสัมพันธ์ดี, good relations) with unseen beings. The well-being of the river is understood to be intimately linked to the human community's prosperity, such as good floods mean abundant harvests and peaceful waters mean social harmony. Offerings also serve as a kind of spiritual insurance (ประกันภัยทางวิญญาณ, *prakan phai thang winyan*), a continuous affirmation that human actions must respect the sovereignties that animate the riverine world.

Finally, practices of mourning (พิธีศพ, *phithi sop*) show the profound depth of human-Naga kinship. Upon death, elders' funerary rites often include symbolic offerings to the Mekong to acknowledge the deceased's journey across the thresholds of life and the river. In some cases, spirit mediums declare that a departed person has been "taken under the protection of Phaya Nak" (ได้รับการคุ้มครองจากพญานาค), ensuring safe passage into the afterlife. Cremation ashes (อัฐิ, *athi*) are sometimes

scattered into the Mekong, accompanied by solemn prayers to the Naga. In this cosmology, the river is not merely a physical environment but a living corridor between worlds, an entity that cradles life, mediates death, and sustains continuity between generations.

The *Haunting* Transformations: Dams, Disruptions, and the Withdrawal of the Naga

Over the past three decades, the Mekong has undergone profound ecological, social, and cosmological transformations driven by hydropower development, regional geopolitics, and capitalist modernization. The river that once coursed through the mythic arteries of the Chiang Khong landscape is no longer the same. For the people of Chiang Khong, these transformations are not merely experienced as economic losses or environmental damages. But they are felt as cosmological ruptures, manifesting most poignantly in the perceived withdrawal of the Naga.

The construction of large-scale dams upstream, beginning with Chinese projects on the Lancang and culminating in major endeavors like the Xayaburi Dam in Laos, has radically re-engineered the Mekong's seasonal flows. Where once the river rose and fell predictably with the monsoons, it now surges and recedes erratically, often independent of local rainfall. Sediment flows have been disrupted, nutrient cycles have been altered, and migratory fish pathways have been obstructed. For residents of Chiang Khong, these hydrological shifts are not abstract statistics but existential shocks that strike at the heart of their relational worlds. Ritual specialists, spirit mediums, and fishermen report that the river has become "เบา" (*bao*, "light") and "ว่างเปล่า" (*wang plao*, "empty"), meaning its energies diminished and its moods rendered unpredictable. As Phor Wichai, an elder fisherman from Ban Haad Krai, explained in a 2023 interview, the river no longer breathes as it used to. It is sick. The Naga is sleeping or has gone away. The water runs fast but without life." Such expressions articulate more than nostalgia. They reflect a hauntological condition (Derrida, 1993), where what once was vibrantly present now persists only as a palpable absence.

Within this altered hydrological reality, villagers perceive that the Naga is withdrawing. Whirlpools, once read as signs of the Naga's movement, have become rare. Seasonal Pla Buk migrations, once celebrated with ceremonies and offerings, have dwindled into silence. Local narratives describe the Naga as "เหนื่อยหน่าย" (*nueai nai*, "tired") with human greed over the damming and exploitation of the river, and "หลบซ่อน" (*lop son*, "hiding") from the violence inflicted upon its waters. In 2022, a spirit medium at Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon conveyed a powerful oracle, "The Naga no longer guards the river openly. It waits in shadow, watching to see if humans will remember their debts." Here, the spectralization of the Naga does not imply fading belief. Rather, it marks a shift from confident guardianship to haunted mourning, a relational wound that refuses closure. The Mekong itself has become what locals describe as a "spectral landscape" (ภูมิทัศน์แห่งภูต, *phum that haeng phut*), where absences loom as evidently as presences once did.

The collapse of traditional flood cycles, the disappearance of Pla Buk, and the erosion of ritual rhythms have provoked a profound sense of environmental grief. Villagers describe this grief as the loss of a conversation with the river. They no longer hear its seasonal "speech" through changing flows, interpreting fish behavior or water clarity as signs from unseen kin, and no longer feeling the dense, humming vitality that once permeated sacred sites. In ceremonies observed in 2023, monks at Wat Doi Mae Ya Mon introduced new prayers of atonement (บทสวดขอขมาต่อธรรมชาติ, *bot suat kho khama to thamachart*), explicitly acknowledging that environmental degradation stems not only from technical mismanagement but also from moral and relational failures. Thus, mourning encompasses not merely economic or ecological loss but the rupture of a multispecies cosmos, of kinships betrayed, ancestral rivers desacralized, and once-envisioned futures foreclosed.

In response to these ruptures, specific segments of Chiang Khong's communities have mobilized the Naga as a potent symbol of cosmopolitical resistance. The local movements prominently invoke the Naga in their campaigns against new dam projects. Slogans such as "คืนชีวิตให้แม่น้ำโขง คืนบ้านให้พญานาค" ("Return life to the Mekong, return home to the Naga") and "อย่าสร้างเขื่อนบนเส้นทางของพญานาค" ("Do

not build dams on the path of the Naga") frame hydropower development not as progress but as cosmological violence, a severing of ancient relational worlds. Protest rituals frequently involve Bai Sri offering at riverbanks, collective invocations of Phaya Nak, and the reinterpretation of Buddhist chants into calls for river justice. In these acts, the Naga transcends folkloric status. It becomes an eco-political agent, animating critiques of hydropower capitalism, sustaining communal memory, and inspiring visions of alternative, more-than-human solidarities.

As the Mekong continues to be reshaped by forces often beyond local control, its future remains radically uncertain. However, the withdrawal of the Naga is not necessarily final. Monks and spirit mediums suggest that acts of renewed respect, such as ritual offerings, riverbank restoration, and communal ceremonies, may entice the Naga's return. In this emergent vision, the Naga is no longer the invulnerable guardian of myth but a spectral companion, demanding that humans reimagine their place within an entangled, haunted riverine cosmos. Living with the haunted trouble of the Mekong demands more than technical management; it requires a haunted ethics, the courage to dwell among spectral presences, to mourn broken kinships without seeking premature closure, and to commit to acts of relational repair, even amid ecological ruins.

Tourism, Commodification, and the Politics of the Spectral

The spectral withdrawal of the Naga from the everyday fabric of Chiang Khong's cosmology coincides with the encroachment of another force, such as tourism. Over the past two decades, the figure of the Naga has been increasingly commodified, transformed from a sacred riverine being into a cultural asset marketed within Thailand's broader strategies of heritage tourism, regional branding, and nationalist spectacle. Naga has become entangled in the politics of visibility, economy, and memory, simultaneously celebrated, exploited, and mourned as sacred relations are subjected to the logic of capitalist circulation.

Perhaps the most prominent example of this transformation is the annual *Bung Fai Phaya Nak* (บั้งไฟพญานาค, Naga Fireball Festival), centered in Nong Khai province but reverberating across the Mekong borderlands, including Chiang Khong. Traditionally, the festival celebrates the mysterious fireballs that reportedly rise from the surface of the Mekong on the full moon night, marking the end of Buddhist Lent (ออกพรรษา, *Ok Phansa*). Locally venerated as signs of the Naga's homage to the Buddha, these fireballs have, in recent decades, been rebranded as a national tourism spectacle (การแสดงท่องเที่ยวระดับชาติ, *kan sadaeng thongthiao radap chat*). The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promotes the event as a "must-see mystical phenomenon," drawing thousands of domestic and international tourists each year. During the festival, riverbanks transform into bustling marketplaces lined with vendors selling Naga amulets (เครื่องรางพญานาค, *khrueang rang phaya nak*), bottles of "authentic" Mekong water, and souvenir t-shirts adorned with serpent imagery. Hotels double their prices, river cruises promise tourists "close encounters" with the Naga, and the spiritual experience is seamlessly repackaged into spectacle consumption. What was once a relational ritual becomes part of an entertainment economy where sacred presences are flattened into consumable images.

Among the villagers of Chiang Khong, reactions to the tourism boom are deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, many acknowledge the genuine economic opportunities that tourism brings, including new jobs, revitalized handicrafts, and increased visibility for local cultural practices. For communities facing economic pressures exacerbated by environmental decline and disruptions to traditional fisheries, tourism revenue provides a crucial supplementary income. On the other hand, elders, monks, and ritual specialists express deep unease at the transformations they witness. During fieldwork, a common refrain was the superficiality of tourist engagement. As one senior monk lamented, "They see the Naga, but they do not feel it." Ceremonies that once took place according to the river's rhythms are now shortened, rescheduled, or theatrically performed to accommodate tourist expectations. Sacred symbols are often appropriated for profit, with little reinvestment in ecological conservation or cultural revitalization. An elder fisherwoman captured the sentiment succinctly when she said, "The Naga once blessed the river because people respected it. Now it is sold like a toy."

Through these experiences, the people of Chiang Khong articulate how tourism exacerbates the spectralization of the sacred: the Naga becomes increasingly visible as an image while simultaneously vanishing as a living, relational presence.

The politics surrounding Naga tourism further reveal deeper tensions embedded in contemporary Chiang Khong society. Tensions between heritage preservation and commercialization, between communal ritual life and state-driven heritage branding, and between cosmological care and economic expediency. Ultimately, the commodification of the Naga points to a broader structural transformation: the shift from living cosmological entanglements to what might be termed spectral economies. In these economies, relational beings (such as spirits, ancestors, and rivers) are transformed into images, brands, and commodities, stripped of their complex webs of relational responsibility.

Yet even within these processes of spectralization, possibilities for kin-making and resistance persist. In recent years, some Chiang Khong communities have developed alternative tourism models that seek to revitalize rather than exploit riverine cosmology. These include river pilgrimages led by monks that emphasize environmental stewardship, storytelling tours that foreground living, multispecies cosmologies instead of spectacularized myths, and ceremonial reenactments designed not for entertainment but to invite respectful, participatory engagement with sacred landscapes. Such initiatives suggest that even amid commercialization, the Naga retains its power to haunt, challenge, and reorient human engagements with the Mekong. To "stay with the trouble" of the haunted river, following Haraway's (2016) invitation means not rejecting tourism outright but insisting on forms of encounter that acknowledge kinship, obligation, and spectral presence. In a time when rivers are dammed, spirits commodified, and ecologies destabilized, the refusal to reduce the Naga to mere tourism capital becomes a profound act of cosmopolitical resistance.

Conclusion: Living *with* Haunted Waterscapes

The Mekong River, as encountered in Chiang Khong, is not simply a body of water. The river is a haunted and haunting being, a living current where myth, memory, politics, and multispecies kinship converge. Through sustained ethnographic engagement with villagers, monks, fishermen, and spirit mediums, this study has traced how the Naga persists as both spectral and vital, simultaneously disrupted by modern hydropower development and reanimated through everyday practices of ritual, mourning, and resistance. Far from being relegated to the past, the Naga continues to inhabit the Mekong's troubled present, asserting spectral claims upon human responsibility, memory, and relational obligation.

The construction of dams and the transformations of riverine ecologies have not simply altered the hydrology of the Mekong. They have fractured cosmological orders, leaving spectral absences where vibrant presences once thrived. The withdrawal of the Naga, as evidenced by diminished whirlpools, disappearing Pla Buk migrations, and erratic water flow behaviors, signals more than ecological decline. It marks a profound rupture in relational worlds, severing the once-fluid kinship between humans, spirits, and riverine landscapes. In this disrupted ecology, the Mekong has become a haunted waterscape, where spectral presences loom over contemporary life, unsettling assumptions of control, mastery, and progress.

Yet even in the face of haunted ruination, the communities of Chiang Khong refuse total despair. Through practices such as the Bai Sri Su Khwan rituals for the river, daily offerings to the Mekong, spirit medium consultations, and ritual protests against dam construction, villagers enact new modes of multispecies kin-making. These practices affirm that despite the incursions of capitalist modernization, the river and the Naga continue to demand care, memory, and ethical entanglement. In the material and symbolic acts of feeding the river, invoking the spirits, and mourning the ecological loss, Chiang Khong's communities sustain a haunted politics of presence, reweaving fragile threads of kinship amid the ruins of developmental violence.

Drawing on Jacques Derrida's hauntology, this study has demonstrated how the Naga's lingering presence unsettles the linear narratives of progress and development that seek to erase

riverine cosmologies. The spectral insistence of the Naga forces an ethical acknowledgment: even in spectralized form, relational obligations endure and must be reckoned with. Donna Haraway's notion of "Making Kin" further deepens this insight, suggesting that amid ecological devastation, staying with the haunted trouble requires forging new alliances not only among humans but also across species, spirits, and damaged landscapes. Kinship is not merely inherited but must be continually remade through acts of care, responsibility, and imagination.

Thus, to live with the Mekong today is to live within a haunted waterscape. In this landscape, ghosts of past kinships demand recognition, where multispecies solidarities must be reimagined, and where mourning and hope coexist, intertwined like the currents of the river itself. In refusing to dismiss the Naga as either superstition or spectacle, the people of Chiang Khong offer a profound cosmopolitical lesson: relational worlds are fragile, haunted, and worthy of defense. They remind us that haunted waterscapes are not simply remnants of bygone cosmologies; they are living terrains where alternative futures can still be imagined and fought for.

In the age of the Anthropocene (and its capitalist corollaries), learning to live with haunted rivers may be one of the most urgent ethical and political tasks facing humanity. This study thus contributes not only to the ethnography of the Mekong but also to broader conversations in multispecies anthropology, political ecology, and hauntology. It demonstrates that spectral presences are not passive residues of the past but active agents shaping contemporary practices, inspiring political resistance, and demanding more capacious forms of kinship, mourning, and care. To honor the Mekong is to listen for the breathing of ghosts in the currents, to honor the Naga is to remember that even fractured worlds retain possibilities for relational repair.

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6.1.2 Living with Fire in the Pyrocene: A Case Study of Forest Fire in Wiang Kaen, Thailand

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Abstract

The Pyrocene era, marked by fire's pervasive influence on ecological and social systems, presents a critical lens for understanding the causes and consequences of forest fires. In Wiang Kaen, Thailand, forest fires are often framed as either unintended consequences of industrial activity or results of traditional land use practices by local communities. However, such narratives obscure the complex socio-environmental dynamics at play. This study examines the interplay between fire regimes, land-use changes, governance structures, and local knowledge of fire management practices. It shapes fire as either an inherently destructive force or an element of coexistence within socio-ecological systems through the lens of political ecology as the analytical framework. By using the qualitative case study method with five key informants based on purposive sampling from Wiang Kaen District, the study employed in-depth interviews, utilizing structured interviews and document analysis. It emphasizes the distinction between state-led fire policies and the lived experiences of communities that have coexisted with fire for generations. The results indicate that state-led fire policies leverage the banning of fire practices and encourage the establishment of monoculture plantations for economic reasons. In contrast, local knowledge of fire management reinforces fire practices to revive other multispecies in the forest for preservation purposes. This paper argues that environmental governance in the Pyrocene calls for adaptation in linking local knowledge with scientific and policy frameworks to foster sustainability and resilience rather than suppression.

Keywords: Pyrocene, Forest Fires, Environmental Governance, Political Ecology, Northern Thailand

Introduction

Fire has long served as a fundamental ecological process and cultural practice, profoundly shaping life on Earth by influencing the evolution of biota, the cycling of matter and energy, biodiversity status, and human health and well-being (Kelly et al., 2023). Historically, humans incorporated fire into their lives for cooking, warmth, hunting, agriculture, and habitat modification, demonstrating fire's foundational role in cultural evolution (Pyne, 2021). Humanity's interaction with fire evolved from utilizing 'the fire of nature' to the intensive burning of 'lithic landscapes,' or fossil fuels, leading to profound ecological consequences that mark the present era. Recognizing fire's centrality, Stephen Pyne (2021) proposes the concept of the Pyrocene, a term he uses to describe the current geospatial period where human manipulation of fire - both traditional and industrial - has fundamentally defined the ecological signature of Homo sapiens and continues to shape the Anthropocene (Thiago & Espindola, 2023). Within this Anthropocene framework, characterized by human-driven changes across Earth's hydro-geo-biosphere, a paradoxical pyric transition has occurred: landscape fires are increasingly suppressed, while fossil fuel combustion has risen exponentially (Kelly et al., 2023). This shift has intensified wildfire risks as human settlements encroach upon wildlands, with climate change further exacerbating fire dynamics through higher temperatures, prolonged droughts, and changing vegetation patterns (Pyne, 2021).

Alarmingly, human activities now account for the majority of wildfires globally, having surged by 13% between 2019 and 2020, with about 75% of wildfires caused by anthropogenic activities (Mishra, 2021). In South Asia, approximately 95% of forest fires are anthropogenic (Talukdar et al., 2024). Confronting this escalating crisis demands an urgent and fundamental rethinking of fire management paradigms, moving away from the dominant' fire exclusion' model - shaped by colonial, industrial, and technocratic legacies - which historically disregarded the ecological benefits of fire and systematically suppressed indigenous fire practices (Pasiecznik et al., 2022). Suppression strategies have often backfired, increasing fuel loads and setting the stage for catastrophic burns (Poduška & Stajić, 2024). Consequently, there has been a resurgence of interest in indigenous fire stewardship, prescribed burning, and patch mosaic burning, with traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) now recognized as crucial for sustainable fire governance (Pasiecznik et al., 2022). Case studies worldwide affirm that integrating local knowledge, scientific advances, community-based management, and participatory governance significantly strengthens fire resilience and ecological outcomes. In this context, the emergence of the Pyrocene challenges the conventional portrayal of fire as merely a hazard, emphasizing instead its active, structuring role in socio-ecological systems (Pyne, 2021). This perspective is especially urgent in Southeast Asia, where narratives of modernization and conservation increasingly obscure traditional relationships with fire.

In Wiang Kaen District, Chiang Rai Province, dominant state and conservation discourses depict fire either as a destructive byproduct of industrial expansion or as the outdated practice of marginalized rural communities. Yet, such binary framings obscure the nuanced realities: for local communities, fire remains a deliberate, knowledge-driven strategy to foster biodiversity, sustain multispecies relationships, and renew forest resources (Talukdar et al., 2024) The ongoing tension between official fire suppression policies and community fire practices reflects deeper struggles over environmental governance, knowledge legitimacy, and land politics, as modern policies impose top-down suppression while disregarding socio-cultural meanings and ecological functions of fire (Fernandes, 2021). These misalignments not only risk ecological degradation but also undermine community resilience. Thus, the significance of this research lies in its critical engagement with these governance tensions, offering an empirical investigation into how local knowledge systems and state-led environmental policies collide, co-evolve, and contest each other within the Pyrocene (Ashworth, 2023). By moving beyond simplistic narratives of "good" versus "bad" fire, this study contributes a relational understanding of fire governance that foregrounds local agency, ecological resilience, and multispecies sustainability.

Specifically, the research aims to critically explore pathways for integrating traditional fire knowledge into contemporary environmental governance frameworks that respond to the realities. To

achieve this objective, this study employs a qualitative case study methodology based on purposive sampling of five key informants from Wiang Kaen District who possess extensive ecological knowledge and practical fire management experience. Data collection through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, complemented by document analysis of governmental decrees, land-use plans, and conservation policies, enables a robust and situated analysis that highlights experiences, contestations, and power relations shaping fire governance (Humphrey, Gilson & Ziervogel, 2021). By doing so, this study not only provides a localized account of fire governance dynamics in Wiang Kaen but also offers a broader theoretical intervention into how societies might learn to coexist with, rather than eliminate, fire amid the turbulent landscapes of the Pyrocene, engaging the audience in stimulating intellectual discourse.

Literature Review

Research on forest fires in Southeast Asia often pivots around governance failures, industrial exploitation, or community mismanagement (Murdiyarso & Lebel, 2007; Fox et al., 2009). Yet, emerging studies on fire ecologies stress the necessity of contextualized, situated understandings of fire not merely as destruction, but as a relational element within socio-ecological systems (Morgan & Burr, 2024; Pyne, 2021). The Pyrocene, a conceptual framework primarily attributed to Stephen J. Pyne, offers a critical perspective for understanding the current era through humanity's profound and defining relationship with fire. Rather than viewing fire merely as a destructive force, Pyne (2021) repositions it as a primary ecological signature of Homo sapiens, suggesting that humanity's mastery and manipulation of fire - both traditional and industrial - have reshaped the Earth as profoundly as any geological force.

The Pyrocene concept spans a "long duration" perspective, using a longue durée methodology to trace the historical emergence of the "fire age," and categorizes humanity's interactions with fire into three types: first fire (natural fire), second fire (human-abetted fire such as traditional burning practices), and third fire (the combustion of fossil fuels that drove the Industrial Revolution) (Pyne, 2021). A central dynamic of the Pyrocene is the "pyric transition," where the suppression of landscape fires in some regions has coincided with the explosive increase of industrial combustion, leading to unintended consequences including heightened wildfire risks, climate instability, and ecological disruption (Pyne, 2021). The Pyrocene framework is significant because it relocates fire from the periphery to the center of environmental understanding, insisting that both industrial combustion and living landscape fires must be treated as core elements of Earth system dynamics (Thiago & Espindola, 2023). It highlights that humanity now faces an age of megafires, where naivety about fire's role is increasingly perilous (Turner, 2022). Moreover, the Pyrocene lens links fossil fuel emissions and biomass burning directly to broader environmental transformations, revealing combustion as both a tool of economic rationality and a threat to planetary stability (Cary, 2023).

Several debates emerge within the Pyrocene discourse, notably between contrasting narratives: the Promethean view of fire as technological power to be extracted and controlled, versus a relational view of fire as a companion species requiring stewardship rather than domination (Thiago & Espindola, 2023). Critical tensions also revolve around the contemporary imbalance of "too much bad fire, too little good fire, and too much combustion overall," highlighting the failure of fire suppression models that ignore the ecological necessity of fire (Thiago & Espindola, 2023). Furthermore, the Pyrocene critically interrogates how hegemonic economic rationality has territorialized fire practices, subordinating fire to production and power interests, thereby accelerating ecological degradation. The resulting "no-normal" state - an unpredictable and destabilized Earth system - challenges prior assumptions of equilibrium and demands a radical shift in fire governance (Dalby, 2017). Traditional fire suppression policies, by allowing fuel accumulation, have ironically increased the likelihood of catastrophic fires, suggesting that sustainable fire management must embrace fire's ecological roles rather than seek its total exclusion (Pfuner, 2020). In conclusion, the Pyrocene provides a vital, transformative framework for rethinking humanity's long-term engagement with fire, illuminating the unintended consequences of modern combustion practices, the deep entanglement of fire with socio-

economic power, and the urgent need to develop adaptive, ecologically grounded approaches to living within a fire-altered Earth system (Pfuner, 2020).

Forest fire management is a complex and evolving field that encompasses both the protection of forests from destructive fires and the deliberate use of fire to achieve ecological and land-use objectives (Pasiencznik et al., 2022). This dual role requires the integration of knowledge about fire regimes, ecological effects, values at risk, management costs, and technological capacities within broader frameworks of land-use planning (Pasiencznik et al., 2022). Fire management broadly includes prevention, detection, pre-suppression, suppression, and the strategic application of prescribed fire, all of which demand consideration of both fire ecology and the socio-cultural dimensions of human-fire relationships (Smith et al., 2018). Key approaches such as Integrated Fire Management (IFM) emphasize combining planned and natural fire regimes with the capabilities and involvement of local actors, while Community-Based Fire Management (CBFiM) gives substantial responsibility to local communities to define, implement, and often co-manage fire-related decisions alongside other stakeholders (Pfuner, 2020; Pasiencznik et al., 2022). Within this landscape, prescribed burning refers to scientifically informed, planned ignitions with specific ecological or management goals. In contrast, controlled or traditional burning reflects locally inherited practices often grounded in Indigenous ecological knowledge (Pfuner, 2020). These distinctions mirror broader debates in forest governance, particularly around the tension between fire suppression and fire's ecological roles.

Historically, fire exclusion policies rooted in colonial forestry and technocratic models have framed fire primarily as a destructive threat, yet growing scientific consensus now recognizes fire as a vital ecosystem process that, if excluded, may lead to fuel accumulation and more severe wildfires (Pfuner, 2020). Another critical debate lies in the power dynamics between top-down state control and community-based or Indigenous knowledge systems. While colonial and postcolonial fire management often criminalized Indigenous burning as reckless, recent scholarship highlights how these practices are ecologically sound, culturally embedded, and crucial for fire-resilient landscapes (Poduška & Stajić, 2024). Parallel concerns emerge around economic rationality in forest governance, which traditionally prioritizes timber and commercial assets while undervaluing fire's role in maintaining biodiversity, regulating water flows, and reducing carbon emissions (Cary, 2023). Furthermore, fire challenges the logic of territorial governance: its stochastic and transboundary behavior resists fixed political boundaries and exposes the fragility of state authority in fire-prone landscapes (Poduška & Stajić, 2024; Pasiencznik et al., 2022). In this context, modern fire regimes increasingly reflect a "no-normal" condition an unpredictable and unstable fire ecology driven by the suppression of beneficial burning, the intensification of fossil-fuel combustion, and climatic volatility (Cary, 2023). This raises urgent questions about whether current fire governance frameworks can deliver stability in an era defined by the Pyrocene's complex and often contradictory fire dynamics.

Political ecology further urges scholars to unpack how power relations, policies, and environmental narratives shape resource management outcomes (Robbins, 2012). Political ecology, emerging prominently in the 1980s, offers a critical framework for understanding environmental change by emphasizing the inextricable relationship between ecological processes and political economy (Cary, 2023). It challenges depoliticized accounts of environmental management by exposing how both state and non-state actors employ power dynamics, discourses, and territorial strategies to control people and regulate access to resources. In the context of landscape fire, political ecology treats fire not simply as an ecological phenomenon but as a deeply political force, inherently entangled with struggles over development, territorialization, and accumulation (Morgan & Burr, 2024). This perspective politicizes debates about fire management, recognizing that decisions about "ecological restoration" or "fire suppression" are also decisions about land use, sovereignty, and social justice, particularly in Indigenous territories where much ecological work unfolds (Cary, 2023). Recent political ecology scholarship increasingly integrates materiality, such as geophysical dynamism and the agency of nonhuman flows, as constitutive of political institutions and practices, reinforcing the idea that ecological and political systems co-produce each other (Morgan & Burr, 2024).

Several key debates emerge within the political ecology of fire. First, there is a tension between state-imposed fire management policies, often rooted in colonial suppression paradigms, and diverse local and Indigenous fire practices, highlighting conflicts between abstract territorial controlled and lived, relational landscapes (Cary, 2023). Second, technocratic solutions to fire management are contrasted with calls for integrated, pluralistic approaches that incorporate both scientific and traditional knowledge systems while genuinely empowering local actors (Poduška & Stajić, 2024). Third, debates arise around the inclusion of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). At the same time, there is a growing recognition of its value. Still, critical questions remain about whether TEK is incorporated in ways that respect Indigenous sovereignty or whether it is subsumed into Eurocentric frameworks that continue to marginalize Indigenous self-determination (Pasiencznik et al., 2022). Moreover, critiques highlight that some Anthropocenic framings, including the Pyrocene concept, risk universalizing human responsibility for fire regimes while obscuring the specific historical and ongoing marginalization of Indigenous peoples (Cary, 2023). Fourth, political ecology questions the narrow economic valuation of fire impacts, advocating for recognition of fire's ecological and social functions beyond mere calculations of economic loss (Poduška & Stajić, 2024). Fifth, despite evidence that fire exclusion has often increased wildfire risks by enabling fuel accumulation, state anti-burning policies persist political ecology attributes this persistence not merely to environmental goals but to deeper political rationalities concerned with controlling land, labor, and resources (Cary, 2023). Despite the growing recognition of fire as integral to many ecosystems' resilience, few empirical studies center on the lived experience of communities in Northern Thailand, particularly their traditional knowledge systems and contestations with state-driven fire governance. This study addresses this gap in Figure 1 below.

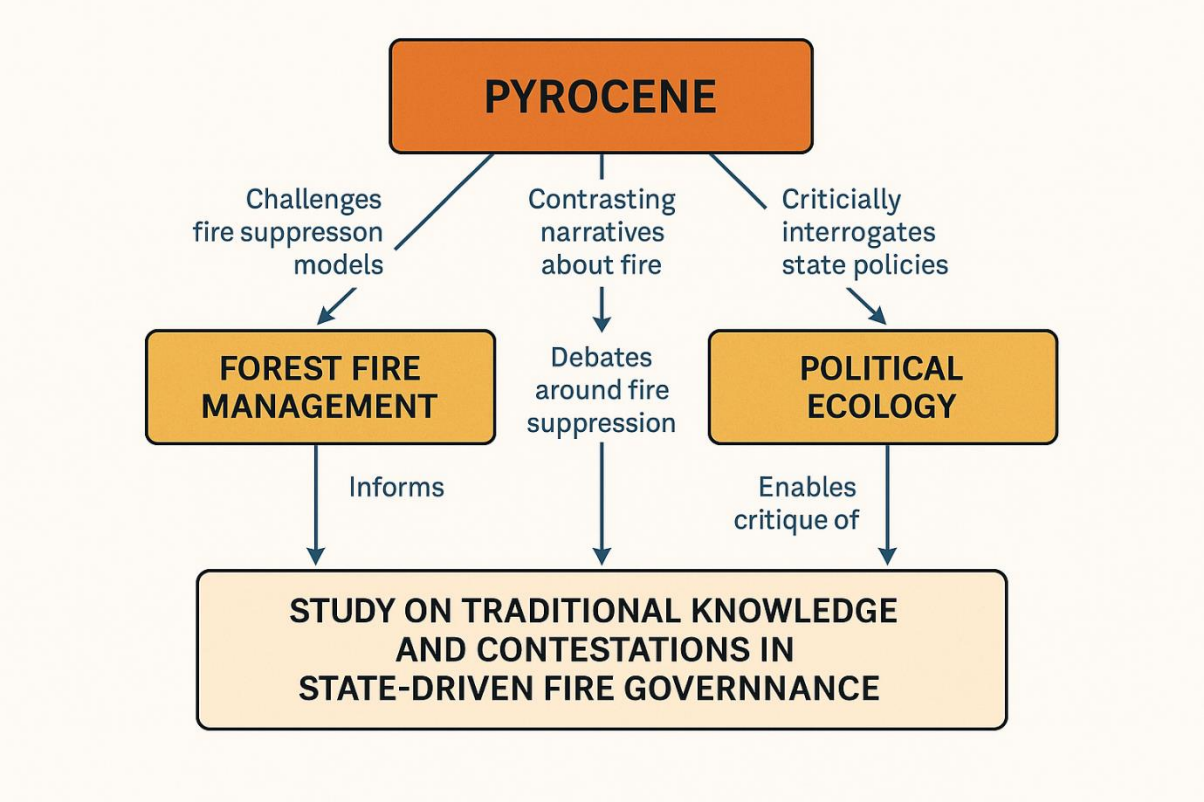

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the governance of forest fires in the context of the Pyrocene, focusing on Wiang Kaen District in Chiang Rai Province, Northern Thailand. This method was selected for its ability to capture the complexity of social

ecological interactions in specific contexts where the phenomenon of fire governance is deeply embedded in local landscapes and power structures (Yin, 2014). Wiang Kaen, located along the Mekong River and sharing a border with Laos, is a mountainous, ethnically diverse district marked by seasonal forest fires and contested land governance involving national parks, local administrative bodies, and conservation NGOs. Its socio-ecological setting, characterized by Tai Lue, Hmong, and Khmu communities reliant on both subsistence and commercial agriculture, makes it an ideal site to explore the tensions between traditional fire knowledge and state-imposed suppression regimes (Lebel et al., 2008).

Data were collected from five purposively selected key informants who each held extensive experiential knowledge of local fire practices and policy interactions. The sample included two village elders, one state forestry officer, one community leader, and one NGO facilitator of community-based fire programs. Participants were selected based on their active involvement in fire-related decision-making, having resided in Wiang Kaen for over ten years, and their willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews. Exclusion criteria ruled out transient residents, minors, and those lacking direct knowledge of fire governance. Data collection methods consisted of in-depth interviews and document analysis, with interviews conducted in Thai (with interpretation support). They focused on themes such as local fire conceptualizations, seasonal practices, policy impacts, and community-state interactions. Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes and was conducted in May 2023. Supplementary documents such as government decrees, forestry regulations, village development plans, and NGO training manuals were analyzed to triangulate findings and assess congruence between policy frameworks and lived experience (Bowen, 2009).

Data were coded and analyzed, following an inductive thematic analysis process aligned with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). This involved iterative coding, memo writing, and thematic refinement, with emphasis on identifying tensions around suppression, embedded coexistence practices, evolving fire regimes, and the territorial politics of fire. Ethical approval was obtained from Mae Fah Luang University's Ethics Review Committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities, and community leaders were engaged to ensure the research was contextually respectful and politically sensitive.

Findings

State-Led Fire Suppression and Monoculture Expansion

The findings from Wiang Kaen District reveal that national and provincial environmental governance predominantly frames fire as an existential threat to biodiversity, air quality, and economic stability, thereby justifying strict fire suppression measures such as blanket bans, aerial surveillance, and heavy penalties for burning activities. Interviewees consistently highlighted how these policies, delivered through top-down campaigns, failed to distinguish between uncontrolled wildfires and traditional, controlled burns, reinforcing a blanket prohibition on all fire use. As a local forestry official explained,

> *"The policy sees all fire as dangerous. Whether it is a small, controlled burn by villagers or a wildfire, the approach is the same: ban everything."*

Alongside these suppression efforts, state policies have encouraged the expansion of monoculture plantations, particularly rubber and eucalyptus, under the banners of "sustainable development" and "economic modernization." However, residents perceive these shifts as profoundly disruptive to forest ecosystems, as one village elder described,

> *"Before, we had many kinds of trees and herbs that could survive small fires. Now, the government plants only rubber trees. They burn easily and need a lot of water. Our forest is weaker now."*

The replacement of diverse forest cover with homogenous, fire-prone plantations has paradoxically heightened wildfire risks and weakened ecological resilience that was historically maintained through diversified agro-ecological systems. Furthermore, the criminalization of traditional fire practices has eroded intergenerational ecological knowledge, severing the community's ability to maintain balanced fire regimes. A community leader lamented,

> *"We know when and where to burn to help the forest grow. But now, we have to hide our knowledge because if the smoke rises, the authorities come with drones and punish us."*

This suppression of traditional fire stewardship has created a widening disconnection between ecological cycles and governance frameworks, reinforcing the perception among local communities that state interventions are ecologically uninformed and politically motivated.

In direct relation to the research objective—to critically explore pathways for integrating traditional fire knowledge into contemporary governance—the findings make clear that exclusionary fire suppression approaches are not only ineffective but ecologically harmful. Traditional fire practices, rooted in centuries of adaptation and stewardship, offer viable, community-based strategies for maintaining biodiversity, managing fuel loads, and enhancing fire resilience. As another elder succinctly put it,

> *"The forest knows fire. We know fire. It is only the law that does not know."*

Moving forward, pathways for integration should include the formal recognition of differentiated fire practices within national policy guidelines; the establishment of co-management agreements that empower communities to conduct prescribed seasonal burning under agreed conditions; the incorporation of traditional fire calendars and ecological indicators into risk management systems; and a fundamental shift in the language of policy from fire suppression toward fire stewardship. By pursuing these strategies, environmental governance can more effectively adapt to the complexities of the Pyrocene, positioning fire not as an enemy to be eradicated but as a dynamic ecological force to be understood, respected, and collaboratively managed.

Local Knowledge: Fire as a Tool for Ecological Revitalization

Contrary to the dominant state narrative that portrays fire as inherently destructive, local communities in Wiang Kaen District view fire as a cyclical, regenerative force essential for maintaining ecological balance. Traditional fire management practices, such as controlled undergrowth burning, are strategically employed to stimulate the growth of wild edibles, rejuvenate soil fertility, and promote multispecies coexistence. Informants repeatedly emphasized that fires are deliberately and carefully timed with seasonal rhythms, aligned with ecological indicators such as plant life cycles, soil moisture, and weather patterns. As one village elder explained,

> *"We burn after the cold season when the ground is still moist. The fire is soft and slow, not dangerous. It wakes up the forest, not destroys it."*

These practices demonstrate a sophisticated ecological understanding that contrasts sharply with state policies that treat all burning as indiscriminate harm. Local fire management reflects a multispecies ethics of care, where human activity is directed toward enhancing rather than degrading ecological relations. Another informant, a community herbalist, illustrated this by noting,

> *"After burning the dry grass, mushrooms and bamboo shoots come quickly. The animals return too. Fire is part of life, not death."*

Such observations reveal that traditional fire practices are deeply embedded within local cosmologies and livelihoods, intertwining cultural stewardship with ecological regeneration.

However, despite their ecological effectiveness, these practices are increasingly marginalized under current environmental governance frameworks, which continue to criminalize and suppress

traditional burning. Participants voiced concern that the erosion of traditional fire knowledge not only undermines local food security and biodiversity but also weakens the intergenerational transmission of environmental stewardship skills. One younger community member remarked,

> *"Our grandparents taught us how to use fire with respect. But now, the government says fire is illegal. Young people are confused. They fear using fire and forget the old ways."*

Linking directly to the research objective, these findings underscore that integrating traditional fire knowledge into contemporary environmental governance is not merely a matter of technical adjustment but requires a fundamental rethinking of how fire is conceptualized within policy frameworks. Traditional fire practices offer ecologically grounded, context-specific methods for managing fuel loads, enhancing biodiversity, and fostering climate resilience key needs in navigating the challenges of the Pyrocene. Pathways for integration should involve not only the legal recognition of traditional fire use but also the institutionalization of community-led fire management programs, co-designed with local experts, and anchored in seasonal ecological knowledge. Additionally, revising fire policy language to differentiate between destructive wildfires and regenerative cultural burning is essential to avoid further alienating local communities. As an elder, I succinctly concluded,

> *"We live with fire, not against it. The forest remembers. We remember. The law must remember, too."*

By embracing this relational and regenerative view of fire, environmental governance frameworks can evolve beyond suppression models, building partnerships that sustain both ecological and cultural resilience.

The Tension: Fire Governance in the Pyrocene

The findings reveal a fundamental tension between state-imposed fire suppression policies and local traditions of living with fire, exposing a critical misalignment in governance approaches within Wiang Kaen District. While current environmental frameworks continue to aspire toward creating “fire-free landscapes” by enforcing blanket bans and criminalizing any form of burning, local communities emphasize the necessity of “fire-managed landscapes” where selective, seasonal burning plays a vital role in sustaining biodiversity, agricultural productivity, and livelihoods. This tension encapsulates a broader crisis of governance in the Pyrocene, where top-down, technocratic control over fire collides with relational, context-specific ecological knowledge. As one community leader articulated,

> *“The government claims there is no fire at all. However, no fire means a lifeless land. When we burn carefully, new life returns. The animals, the herbs, the forest—they need fire too.”*

For local residents, fire is not simply a hazard to be eliminated, but an ecological and cultural process to be managed thoughtfully. Participants repeatedly emphasized that selective burning reduces dry biomass, opens habitat for diverse species, rejuvenates forest undergrowth, and aligns with long-standing seasonal calendars tied to environmental rhythms. A village elder highlighted this practice, explaining,

> *"We burn only small patches. After one or two years, the soil is rich again, and the forest feeds us. It’s a cycle we know and respect."*

Such nuanced understandings stand in stark contrast to policy frameworks that homogenize all fire as catastrophic, failing to differentiate between destructive wildfires and cultural burning practices that contribute to ecological resilience.

This tension underscores the urgent need to rethink fire governance models in light of the realities of the Pyrocene. In this era, human-fire relations are increasingly complex, unstable, and

ecologically consequential. The persistence of blanket suppression policies not only alienates local communities but also undermines potential strategies for adaptive fire management that could address rising risks of megafires, biodiversity loss, and degraded landscapes. As one NGO worker involved in community training programs noted,

> *"We are losing valuable knowledge. If the government continues to view all fire as the same, we will lose the tools we need to survive new climate challenges."*

In direct relation to the research objective, these findings affirm that meaningful integration of traditional fire knowledge into contemporary governance frameworks requires a paradigm shift from exclusion to collaboration, from suppression to stewardship. Pathways for integration include creating differentiated policy categories that recognize traditional, controlled burns as legitimate management tools; institutionalizing participatory fire planning processes where communities lead decisions on when, where, and how to burn; and developing hybrid governance models that blend scientific risk assessments with Indigenous and local seasonal knowledge systems. As another elder summarized,

> *"Fire is not the enemy. Forgetting how to use fire is the real danger."*

By aligning governance models with the lived ecological wisdom of fire-dependent communities, policymakers can foster more resilient, adaptive responses to the profound environmental challenges of the Pyrocene.

Discussion

This study significantly contributes by situating Wiang Kaen District within the broader discourse on governance challenges in the Pyrocene. It documents local communities' experiences with fire suppression regimes and challenges the simplistic binaries that depict fire as solely destructive or inherently beneficial, or that strictly differentiate Indigenous practices from "modern" governance models. Instead, fire is recognized as a relational actor that both influences and is influenced by socio-ecological dynamics, political institutions, and knowledge systems. These findings align with Pyne's (2021) view of the Pyrocene as a period marked by intensified, politicized human-fire interactions that are pivotal in planetary transformations. Central to the findings is the critique of governance models striving for "fire-free landscapes" through blanket bans, surveillance, and the criminalization of traditional practices. This aligns with critiques from political ecology that emphasize the imposition of disconnected technocratic solutions, lacking in localized ecological knowledge (Robbins, 2012). Fire suppression policies treat fire as a uniform threat, obscuring the distinction between devastating wildfires and carefully managed cultural burns, ultimately sidelining the adaptive practices that have historically supported forest ecosystems (Peet & Watts, 2004).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that suppression policies are accompanied by the promotion of monoculture plantations under the banner of "sustainable development," reinforcing economic rationalities at the expense of ecological resilience (Peluso & Lund, 2011). The replacement of biodiverse forests with fire-prone rubber and eucalyptus plantations increases wildfire risks and depletes natural regenerative capacities, exemplifying how industrial activities in the Pyrocene generate the very ecological instabilities they aim to control (Pyne, 2021). Against this backdrop, traditional fire management emerges from the testimonies of elders and community leaders as a sophisticated, adaptive practice rooted in a multispecies ethics of care (Tsing, 2015). Practices such as controlled undergrowth burning not only enhance biodiversity and rejuvenate soils but are central to food security and cultural vitality. However, these ecologically grounded practices are increasingly criminalized, with suppressionist regimes ironically creating conditions for larger, more destructive fires through unchecked fuel accumulation (Moritz et al., 2014).

Viewed through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study sharpens its critical insights further. Suppressing traditional fire practices undermines SDG 15 (Life on Land), which emphasizes the restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems (UN, 2015). Criminalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and excluding communities from governance

contradicts SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which calls for inclusive, participatory decision-making. Moreover, traditional fire stewardship directly contributes to SDG 13 (Climate Action) by reducing wildfire risks and promoting carbon-storing regrowth. In contrast, large, uncontrolled fires exacerbated by suppression lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions (Aiking & De Boer, 2023). Thus, integrating traditional fire knowledge into governance is not merely an issue of cultural preservation but a strategic necessity for climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development.

From a political ecology perspective, the marginalization of traditional fire knowledge is not a neutral policy oversight but a continuation of territorialization and dispossession, favoring monoculture economies and technocratic expertise at the expense of relational ecological stewardship (Peluso & Lund, 2011; Robbins, 2012). Fire becomes a terrain of struggle over sovereignty, knowledge, and access to resources, exposing the political foundations of environmental governance. Against this backdrop, the findings highlight urgent, actionable pathways: formally recognizing differentiated fire practices within national policies; establishing co-management regimes that empower local communities; incorporating seasonal ecological calendars into climate risk management; and shifting from a language of "fire suppression" to "fire stewardship." Achieving these transformations requires moving beyond tokenistic inclusion toward embedding local governance capacities into the heart of decision-making processes, aligning governance structures with the SDG framework's call for inclusive, context-sensitive climate action (UN, 2015).

Ultimately, this study bridges political ecology and fire ecology to offer a robust interdisciplinary framework for reimagining environmental governance in fire-prone landscapes. By highlighting the empirical realities of Wiang Kaen an often-overlooked site in Southeast Asian environmental discourse it demonstrates that traditional fire knowledge is not a relic of the past but an essential strategy for fostering ecological resilience and social justice in the Pyrocene. Building adaptive, justice-based governance systems that recognize fire as a regenerative force is essential not only for local survival but also for achieving broader global sustainability goals.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the governance challenges of living with fire in the Pyrocene by focusing on the case of Wiang Kaen District, Northern Thailand. Through centering the lived experiences of local communities and analyzing the tensions between traditional fire knowledge and state-led suppression policies, the research reveals that fire should not be understood merely as an ecological hazard, but as a dynamic, relational force embedded within socio-ecological systems. Traditional fire practices, far from being reckless or destructive, represent sophisticated forms of ecological stewardship that promote biodiversity, regenerate soil fertility, and sustain multispecies coexistence. However, the findings show that current governance models characterized by blanket fire bans, the criminalization of traditional burning practices, and the promotion of fire-prone monoculture plantations have inadvertently heightened ecological vulnerabilities rather than mitigating them. Theoretically, the study extends Pyne's (2021) concept of the Pyrocene by demonstrating how political ecology, territorialization, and asymmetries in knowledge production profoundly shape fire governance at local scales. It argues that suppressionist policies, driven by technocratic and economic rationalities, are misaligned with the complex, fire-adapted realities of landscapes like Wiang Kaen and, in doing so, undermine global resilience goals tied to the Sustainable Development Goals, notably SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Practically, the research identifies urgent pathways for rethinking fire governance, including the formal recognition of differentiated fire regimes, the institutionalization of community-led fire stewardship, the integration of Indigenous ecological calendars into risk management systems, and a fundamental shift in policy discourse from "fire suppression" toward "fire stewardship." Building governance frameworks that respect and integrate traditional knowledge is not merely a gesture of cultural preservation, but a strategic necessity for advancing ecological sustainability, climate resilience, and community empowerment in an increasingly unstable Pyrocene world. Ultimately, this study advances interdisciplinary debates in environmental governance by bridging

political ecology and fire ecology, challenging policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to move beyond exclusionary models and embrace relational, place-based strategies for living with fire. In doing so, it positions traditional fire knowledge not as a remnant of the past, but as a critical foundation for building more just, adaptive, and resilient futures in an era profoundly shaped by fire.

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6.1.3 Prevalence of diarrhea among under-five children and the influencing factors in southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Diarrhea continues to be one of the leading causes of childhood morbidity and mortality in developing nations such as Bangladesh and the borderlands of the Lanna region. This study aims to examine the prevalence of diarrhea among children under-five and identify the influencing factors in the southwestern coastal area of Bangladesh, a predominantly agriculture-based area similar to Lanna and Mainland Southeast Asia. The research was conducted in six villages of Dacope Upazila, located in the Khulna district of Bangladesh, using a survey-based approach. Data were collected from 348 randomly selected caregivers with at least one child aged 6 to 59 months. A semi-structured interview schedule was employed for data collection from July to October 2024. Bivariate and multivariate analyses were performed to identify the factors influencing diarrhea prevalence among children under--five. The findings revealed the diarrhea prevalence rate of 13.5% among children under-five in the southwestern coastal region. Regression analysis identified several significant factors associated with diarrhea prevalence, including the child's sex, family type, household vulnerability, and the availability of qualified doctors in the locality. Moreover, boys and children from highly vulnerable households had higher odds of suffering from diarrhea. Besides, children from nuclear families exhibited lower odds of having diarrhea. Interestingly, children living in communities with access to qualified doctors had higher odds of experiencing diarrhea. The study recommends targeted interventions to address household vulnerabilities by improving socioeconomic conditions, housing quality, and access to safe water and sanitation facilities to enhance children's health and well-being. Furthermore, infrastructural development is essential for providing access to quality healthcare services in geographically disadvantaged regions, particularly in borderlands with socioeconomic conditions similar to those in Bangladesh. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers in developing countries to design effective strategies for improving child health and well-being in socioeconomically comparable regions.

Keywords: Diarrhea; Prevalence; Influencing factors; Under-five children; Southwestern coastal region; Bangladesh.

Introduction

Globally, 4.9 million children under-five died, and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asia (SA) account for more than 80% of these deaths in 2022 (UNICEF, 2024; WHO, 2025). Diarrhea among children under-five is a central global public health issue (Paul, 2020) and ranks as the second leading cause of childhood morbidity and mortality in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Jubayer et al., 2022). Annually, 1.7 billion childhood diarrhea cases occur worldwide, with 0.44 million under-five children dying from diarrhea each year (WHO, 2024). Additionally, diarrhea accounts for over 90% of deaths among children under-five in LMICs (Demissie et al., 2021). Likewise, more than 88% of all deaths of children under-five in SSA and SA are linked to diarrhea (Demissie et al., 2021). Moreover, children under-five in LMICs experience diarrhea, on average, three times annually (Ghosh, Chakraborty, & Mog, 2021). It is evident that diarrhea is common in these nations as a result of polluted drinking water, inadequate sanitation facilities, and a lack of proper hygiene practices (Jubayer et al., 2022).

Bangladesh has a high annual rate of under-five child mortality, with 45 deaths per 1,000 live births, and is grappling with child morbidity (NIPORT, 2020). Similar to numerous LMICs, diarrhea remains a significant public health issue in Bangladesh, with cases of persistent diarrhea prevalent year-round (Hasan et al., 2021). According to the latest Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) data of 2022, 5% of the under-five children experienced diarrhea (National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) and ICF, 2024) and each year, approximately half a million children die due to diarrhea (Islam et al., 2022; NIPORT, 2020). The prevalence of diarrhea in Bangladesh is higher than in other Southeast Asian nations such as Malaysia, where the rate of diarrhea among children under-five stands at 4.4% (Aziz et al., 2018). In Thailand, the annual incidence of acute diarrhea among children aged 0–5 years showed a slight rise from 33.36 cases per 1,000 population in 2010 to an average of 33.79 cases per 1,000 population each year from 2015 to 2019 (Charoenwat et al., 2022). Nonetheless, diarrhea prevalence rates are significantly higher in several other Southeast Asian and SA countries, with Myanmar reporting a prevalence of 7.13% (Soe et al., 2024), Cambodia at 16.44% (Pisey, Banchonhattakit, & Laohasiriwong, 2020), Indonesia at 17.16% (Santika et al., 2020), India at 7.5% (Ramasubramani et al., 2025), Nepal at 10%, (Ministry of Health and Population [Nepal], N.E. & ICF, 2023), and Pakistan at 19% (NIPS & ICF, 2019). As outlined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, the target is to end the deaths of infants and children from preventable diseases, such as diarrhea, by the year 2030 (Girmay et al., 2023); thus, low- and middle-income nations must immediately address the burden of childhood diarrheal diseases.

Diarrheal diseases are influenced by multifaceted factors, including sociodemographic, behavioral, and environmental factors (Daffe et al., 2022). Previous studies from different settings documented various factors influencing diarrhea prevalence such as children of younger age (Islam et al., 2023; Owusu et al., 2024; Purnama, Wagatsuma, & Saito, 2025), male children (Girmay et al., 2023; Okorie et al., 2024), underweight children (Owusu et al., 2024; Sahiledengle et al., 2024), cesarean section delivery (Rahman & Hossain, 2022), lack of exclusive breast-feeding practice (Getahun & Adane, 2021; Sahiledengle et al., 2024), mothers' with no formal education (Okorie et al., 2024; Owusu et al., 2024), unsafe drinking water (Islam et al., 2023; Rahman & Hossain, 2022), unhygienic sanitation facility (Jubayer et al., 2022; Rahman & Hossain, 2022; Sahiledengle et al., 2024), mothers' poor handwashing practices (Jubayer et al., 2022; Sahiledengle et al., 2024), improper disposal of child's stools (Jubayer et al., 2022; Mernie, Kloos, & Adane, 2022), media exposure (Birhan et al., 2023; Mulatu et al., 2022), low level of family wealth (Kundu et al., 2022; Owusu et al., 2024; Rahman & Hossain, 2022), and place of residence (Atari, Mkandawire, & Lukou, 2023; Mohammed, 2024).

The health and livelihoods of the coastal communities in Bangladesh, particularly the poor, are repeatedly exacerbated by climate change and suffer from climate-induced illness (Iqbal, 2018). The younger age groups are more vulnerable to communicable diseases like diarrhea. The coastal people are more vulnerable compared to other areas due to their geographical location, which is more

prone to natural disasters and salinity intrusion, a higher incidence of poverty, a natural resource and agriculture-based economy, a lack of improved water and sanitation facilities, a lack of healthcare services, and so on. Coastal areas of Bangladesh, which are home to around 35 million individuals, over 30% are lacking resources (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011) with comparatively lower access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, with only 25.2% coverage reported in the central coastal zone, compared to mainland areas (Ahmed et al., 2021). Reduced social networks and inadequate access to WASH facilities, compounded by an increasing occurrence and intensity of natural disasters linked to climate change and limited healthcare access (Rafa, Jubayer, & Uddin, 2021), are key factors contributing to the heightened vulnerability of coastal households (Toufique & Yunus, 2013), which ultimately impacts the health and wellbeing of the children under-five.

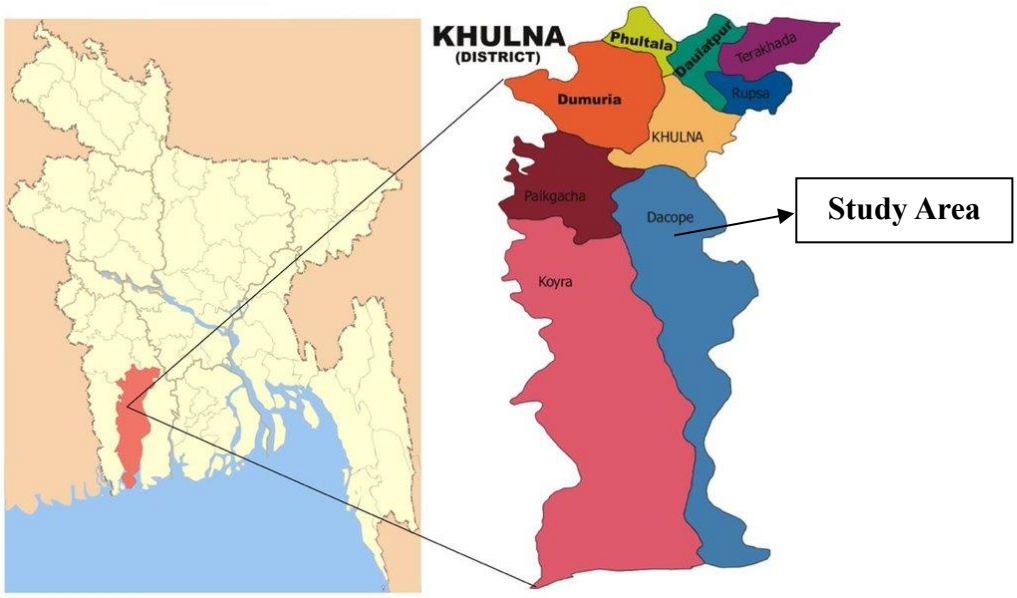
Though several studies have been conducted in Bangladesh, which combinedly focused on the prevalence of diarrhea, ARI, and fever among children under-five based on BDHS data (Islam et al., 2023; Khan & Islam, 2017; Kundu et al., 2022; Rahman & Hossain, 2022), and one study specifically focused on the relationship between WASH and diarrhea (Jubayer et al., 2022). To the best of the authors' knowledge, no community-based study has been conducted in the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh to unearth the diarrhea prevalence among children under-five, considering the influence of different personal, familial, household, and community-level factors influencing this disease prevalence. Moreover, a comprehensive examination of the influencing factors could highlight areas that require further research focus or where interventions could be most effective, along with formulating and implementing region-specific policies. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the prevalence of diarrhea among children and the influencing factors in the southwestern coastal area of Bangladesh.

Methods and Materials

Study site

The study was explanatory in nature and carried out in Dacope Upazila of Khulna district of Bangladesh, following a survey method. Dacope Upazila under Khulna district of Bangladesh has been selected for the study based on its proximity to the coast of the Bay of Bengal. This upazila consists of one municipality, 9 unions, mauzas, and 97 villages with a total population of 152,316 (Banglapedia, 2023). The study was conducted in six villages, with three villages selected from Pankhali union (Pankhali, Hoglabunia, and Katabunia villages) and three villages from Sutarkhali union (Sutarkhali, Nolian, and Kalabogi villages).

Khulna district has been chosen as the study area due to its representation of the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh, where the population faces significant vulnerabilities compared to other parts of the country. Besides, Khulna division had one of the highest percentages of households with unimproved sources of drinking water (43). In Khulna district, 32.1% of people lived below the poverty line (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Furthermore, water-borne diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, skin diseases, fevers, pneumonia are more prevalent among children in the coastal areas of Bangladesh due to its more proneness to flood and salinity as well as lack of access to safe water and poor hygiene practices (Abedin et al., 2019; Das, Chandra, & Saha, 2019).



Map 1 Study area (Dacope upazila of Khulna district)

Participants and sampling

In this study, participants were selected in line with the following inclusion and exclusion criteria: i) participants were the caregivers, such as mothers, fathers, grandparents or any person who take care of the children; ii) the age of the children were within 6 months to 59 months; iii) caregivers taking care of children aged less than 6 months and more than 59 months were excluded; iv) if the caregivers have more than one under-five children, then data have been collected about the youngest child in case of caregivers taking care of more one under-five child; and v) the caregivers had been living in the study area for at least 5 consecutive years.

A census was conducted at the household level to gather essential information about the population in the study area, while strictly following the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the participants. According to the census, the total population was 3650 caregivers in the study area. Using Cochran's (Cochran, 1977) random sampling formula, a sample of 348 caregivers was calculated with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Afterwards, we selected 58 participants from each village following a disproportionate stratified random sampling technique for equal representation of the selected six villages in the study area. To enhance fairness and promote randomization in participant selection, we randomly selected participants from the population list.

Data collection

A semi-structured interview schedule was followed to collect data from the participants. The interview schedule consisted of several sections focusing on the sociodemographic profile of caregivers and children, household information, household vulnerability context, asset ownership, access to water and sanitation facilities, and information about diarrhea prevalence. The quality of the data collection tool was evaluated and reviewed by the three experts to guarantee its content validity, and to evaluate the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) values for the interview schedule. The suggestions provided by the experts were considered and used to revise the data collection tool. Data were collected at the household level, and the first author collected the data from the field with the assistance of some trained data collectors through face-to-face interviews from July to October 2024 after getting the research ethics approval. Besides, we collected written informed consent from the respondents who participated in this study. The participants were assured that the collected data would be kept confidential and anonymous.

To effectively measure children's nutritional status, such as stunting, wasting, and undernutrition, we adopted a standardized anthropometric measurement tool, specifically height-measuring vertical scales and digital weighing machines. Our trained data collectors meticulously assessed each child's height, ensuring that the child's head, shoulders, buttocks, and heels were aligned with a flat surface. Besides, heights were recorded in centimeters and weight was measured in kilograms (kg) to maintain accuracy and facilitate comprehensive analysis.

Measures

Prevalence of diarrhea among under-five children

Diarrhea prevalence among children under-five in the study area was assessed by whether the child had three or more loose or watery stools per day, or blood in stools (Yes = 1 and No = 0) during the last 4 weeks preceding the survey, which is the outcome variable.

Socioeconomic information of the caregivers

Socioeconomic information of the caregivers includes caregivers' education (non-literate, primary [1-5], secondary [6-10], and higher education [≥ 11]), caregiver's occupation (Farming/fishing/fish cultivation, day labor, housewife, bamboo crafting, and others [Business/job/tailor etc.]), and caregivers monthly income (No income, < 5,000, and ≥ 5,000). Additionally, caregiver's media exposure was classified into yes = 1 (if the caregivers were exposed to any of using mobile, watching television, listening to the radio, and reading newspapers and magazines) and no = 0 (if the caregivers were not exposed to any of them).

Information of the under-five children

Children's age was measured in months and categorized into 6-12, 13-24, 25-36, 37-48, and 49-59 months, child sex into girl and boy, and birth order into 1, 2, and ≥ 3. In addition, the birth weight of the children was measured in kg and categorized in accordance with the WHO (WHO, 2004) recommended categories, e.g., underweight (< 2.5kg), normal weight (2.5 kg-3.9kg), and overweight (≥ 4kg). Besides, children's nutritional status was measured by three standard indices of physical growth, such as stunting (height-for-age), wasting (weight-for-height), and undernutrition (weight-for-age) (WHO, 2006). Therefore, stunting was categorized into normal height (Z-score is '0' to less than +2), moderately stunted (Z-score is below -2.0), and severely stunted (Z-score is below -3.0). Wasting status was classified into normal weight (Z-score is '0' to less than +2), moderately wasted (Z-score is below -2.0), and severely wasted (Z-score is below -3.0). Finally, undernutrition was grouped into normal weight (Z-score is '0' to less than +2), overweight (Z-score is above +2.0), moderately underweight (Z-score is below -2.0), and severely underweight (Z-score is below -3.0). Moreover, feeding frequency was categorized into ≤ 4 times, 5-6 times, and ≥ 7 times; exclusive breastfeeding practice in the early six months (No and Yes), and type of delivery (Caesarean and normal delivery).

Household information

Household information such as family type, (Extended and nuclear family), monthly income of the household head (BDT. < 10,000, 10,000-20,000, and > 20,000), sources of drinking water in the household (Improved [Deep tubewell/rainwater/purified water/bottled water] and not improved [Pond/canal/river/shallow tubewell]), sanitation facilities in the household (Unhygienic [Fixed katcha/hanging latrine beside water/open space/no fixed space] and hygienic [piped sewer systems/pit latrine/pit latrine with ring slab]). In addition, the household asset index consisted of 27 items used in BDHS (NIPORT, 2020), which was adopted in this study, and was measured on a dichotomized scale of yes = 1 and no = 0. Then, the household asset index was categorized into three groups: low (below the mean score of 6), moderate (6–10), and high (11–16). Besides, household vulnerability was assessed by using a modified version of an index developed by Hahn et al. (Hahn, Riederer, & Foster, 2009), which used: Socio-demographic profile, livelihood strategies, social networks, health, food,

water, as well as disasters, in order to calculate the household vulnerability of each village. The index consisted of 7 sub-components and a total of 23 statements with values ranging from 0 to 1. The total value of the index ranges from 2 to 17, and the average value is 10. Therefore, the household vulnerability index was categorized into low (below the mean score of 10), moderate (10-13), and high vulnerability (14-17).

Community-level factors

Community-level factors include place of residence (Pankhali, Hoglabunia, Katabunia, Sutarkhali, Nolian, and Kalabogi village), scarcity of safe drinking water in the community (No and Yes), distance of upazila health complex was measured in kilometers and categorized into < 10 km, 10-20 km, and > 20 km, availability of community healthcare center in the locality (Yes/No), and availability of a qualified doctor in the locality (Yes/No).

Data analysis

Data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) V.21. Percentage analysis was conducted to assess diarrhea prevalence among children under-five. Additionally, Pearson's $\chi 2$ test and Fisher's Exact test (when the cell count is less than 5) were conducted to assess the factors influencing diarrhea prevalence among children under-five using a $p < 0.10$ significance level. Moreover, the significant variables identified in bivariate analyses were used for conducting binary logistic regression analysis. The results of regression analysis were presented as the adjusted odds ratio (AOR) along with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) and a $p < 0.10$ significance level.

Results

Socioeconomic and demographic status of the respondents

Table 1 illustrates the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the respondents. Here, the respondents were the caregivers of the children under-five. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents were mothers (95.1%), followed by grandparents (2.6%) and fathers (2.3%) respectively. About 60% of the respondents were within the age group of 21 to 30 years, with most identifying as Muslim (81%). The highest of the respondents lived with their spouses (79%), while the remaining (21%) lived with relatives. More than half of the respondents had a secondary level of education (56.3%), while 28.4% had primary education, 12.1% had higher education, and 3.2% were non-literate. Regarding occupation, 83.1% of the respondents were housewives, while others were involved in charo weaving (bamboo crafting) (6.6%), other occupations (business/job/tailoring) (6.6%), farming, fishing, or fish cultivation (2%), and day labor (1.7%). Most of the respondents reported no income (82.8%), with the rest earning BDT ≥ 5,000 (10.1%) and BDT < 5,000 (7.2%) monthly. Most respondents (90.8%) had one child under-five, and the rest (9.2%) had two children in that age group.

Table 1. Socioeconomic and demographic status of the respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Relation of the respondents with children under-five (n=348)			
	Mother	331	95.1
	Grandparents	9	2.6
	Father	8	2.3
Age of the respondents			
	≤ 20	71	20.4
	21-30	210	60.3
	≥ 31	67	19.3
Religious status			
	Muslim	282	81.0
	Non-Muslim	66	19.0
Living arrangement			
	With spouse	275	79.0
	With relatives	73	21.0
Place of residence			
	Pankhali village	58	16.7
	Hoglabunia village	58	16.7
	Katabunia village	58	16.7
	Sutarkhali village	58	16.7
	Nolian village	58	16.7
	Kalabogi village	58	16.7
Education of the respondents			
	Non literate	11	3.2
	Primary	99	28.4
	Secondary	196	56.3
	Higher education	42	12.1
Occupation of the respondents			
	Farming/fishing/fish cultivation	7	2.0
	Day labor	6	1.7
	Housewife	289	83.1
	Bamboo crafting	23	6.6
	Others (Business/job/tailor)	23	6.6
Respondents' monthly income (in BDT)			
	No income	288	82.8
	< 5,000	25	7.2
	≥ 5,000	35	10.1
Number of under-five children			
	1	316	90.8
	2	32	9.2

Prevalence of diarrhea among under-five children

Table 2 shows the prevalence of diarrhea among children under 5 years in the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh. The diarrhea prevalence among children under-five was 13.5% whereas most of the children did not experience diarrheal illness (86.5%) in the study area.

Table 2. Prevalence of diarrhea among children under-five

Having diarrhea (n=348)		Frequency	Percentage (%)
	No	301	86.5
	Yes	47	13.5

Bivariate analyses of the factors influencing diarrhea prevalence among children under-five

Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine the relation of different personal, parental, household, and community-level factors with diarrhea prevalence among children under-five (Table 3). Results showed that diarrhea prevalence among children under-five was significantly related to children's age, sex, and undernutrition status, family type, household vulnerability, scarcity of drinking water in the community, distance of upazila health complex, and availability of a qualified doctor in the locality.

Table 3. Diarrhea prevalence and the associated factors (Bivariate analyses)

Variables		Having diarrhea		Test Value	*p* value
		No	Yes		
Children's age					
	6-12 months	48 (15.9)	8 (17.0)	9.517[b]	0.027**
	13-24 months	56 (18.6)	10 (21.3)		
	25-36 months	62 (20.6)	16 (34.0)		
	37-48 months	72 (23.9)	11 (23.4)		
	49-59 months	63 (20.9)	2 (4.3)		
Children's sex					
	Girl	145 (48.2)	15 (31.9)	4.326[a]	0.038**
	Boy	156 (51.8)	32 (68.1)		
Birth order					
	1	134 (44.5)	21 (44.7)	2.217 [b]	0.319
	2	125 (41.5)	23 (48.9)		
	≥ 3	42 (14.0)	3 (6.4)		
Birth weight					
	Underweight	50 (16.6)	5 (10.6)	2.116 [b]	0.374
	Normal weight	241 (80.1)	42 (89.4)		
	Overweight	10 (3.3)	0 (0.0)		
Stunting status					
	Normal height	33 (11.0)	3 (6.4)	2.840[b]	0.232
	Moderately stunted	104 (34.6)	12 (25.5)		
	Severely stunted	164 (54.5)	32 (68.1)		
Wasting status					
	Normal weight	129 (42.9)	21 (44.7)	4.510[b]	0.101
	Moderately wasted	118 (39.2)	23 (48.9)		
	Severely wasted	54 (17.9)	3 (6.4)		
Undernutrition status					
	Normal weight	29 (9.6)	5 (10.6)	8.908[b]	0.024**
	Overweight	5 (1.7)	3 (6.4)		
	Moderately underweight	186 (61.8)	20 (42.6)		
	Severely underweight	81 (26.9)	19 (40.4)		
Feeding frequency					
	≤ 4 times	157 (52.2)	30 (63.8)	3.758 [a]	0.153
	5-6 times	100 (33.2)	9 (19.1)		
	≥ 7 times	44 (14.6)	8 (17.0)		

Variables		Having diarrhea		Test Value	*p* value
		No	Yes		
Type of delivery					
	Caesarian	114 (37.9)	20 (42.6)	0.376 [a]	0.540
	Normal	187 (62.1)	27 (57.4)		
Exclusive breastfeeding practices					
	No	40 (13.3)	6 (12.8)	0.010[a]	0.922
	Yes	261 (86.7)	41 (87.2)		
Caregivers' education					
	Non literate	9 (3.0)	2 (4.3)	0.753[b]	1.249
	Primary	88 (29.2)	11 (23.4)		
	Secondary	167 (55.5)	29 (61.7)		
	Higher education	3 (12.3)	5 (10.6)		
Caregivers' occupation					
	Farming/fishing/fish cultivation	6 (2.0)	1 (2.1)	1.173[b]	0.911
	Day labor	5 (1.7)	1 (2.1)		
	Housewife	251 (83.4)	38 (80.9)		
	Bamboo crafting	19 (6.3)	4 (8.5)		
	Others	20 (6.6)	3 (6.4)		
Caregivers' monthly income (in BDT)					
	No income	251 (83.4)	37 (78.7)		
	< 5,000	23 (7.6)	2 (4.3)	3.106 [b]	0.182
	≥ 5,000	27 (9.0)	8 (17.0)		
Caregivers' exposure to mass media					
	No	127 (42.2)	20 (42.6)	0.002[a]	0.963
	Yes	174 (57.8)	27 (57.4)		
Family type					
	Extended family	154 (51.2)	31 (66.0)	3.574[a]	0.059*
	Nuclear family	147 (48.8)	16 (34.0)		
Monthly income of the household head (in BDT)					
	< 10,000	74 (24.6)	18 (38.3)		
	10,000-20,000	214 (71.1)	28 (59.6)	3.750 [b]	0.138
	> 20,000	13 (4.3)	1 (2.1)		
Household asset index					
	Low	157 (52.2)	25 (53.2)	0.065[b]	1.000
	Moderate	127 (42.2)	20 (42.6)		
	High	17 (5.6)	2 (4.3)		
Household vulnerability index					
	Low	130 (43.2)	14 (29.8)	18.899[a]	<0.001***
	Moderate	152 (50.5)	21 (44.7)		
	High	19 (6.3)	12 (25.5)		
Sources of water of the household					
	Improved	127 (42.2)	17 (36.2)	0.608[a]	0.436
	Not-improved	174 (57.8)	30 (63.8)		
Sanitation facility of the household					
	Unhygienic	204 (67.8)	34 (72.3)	0.392[a]	0.531
	Hygienic	97 (32.2)	13 (27.7)		

Variables		Having diarrhea		Test Value	*p* value
		No	Yes		
Place of residence					
	Pankhali village	51 (16.9)	7 (14.9)	7.920[b]	0.150
	Hoglabunia village	51 (16.9)	7 (14.9)		
	Katabunia village	49 (16.3)	9 (19.1)		
	Sutarkhali village	44 (14.6)	14 (29.8)		
	Nolian village	54 (17.9)	4 (8.5)		
	Kalabogi village	52 (17.3)	6 (12.8)		
Scarcity of safe drinking water in the community					
	No	70 (23.3)	5 (10.6)	3.828[a]	0.050**
	Yes	231 (76.7)	42 (89.4)		
Distance of upazila health complex					
	< 10 km	117 (38.9)	14 (29.8)	8.902[a]	0.012**
	10-20 km	83 (27.6)	23 (48.9)		
	> 20 km	101 (33.6)	10 (21.3)		
Availability of qualified doctor in the locality					
	No	295 (98.0)	43 (91.5)	4.478[b]	0.033**
	Yes	6 (2.0)	4 (8.5)		
Availability of community healthcare center					
	No	49 (16.3)	9 (19.1)	0.241[a]	0.623
	Yes	252 (83.7)	38 (80.9)		

[a] Chi-square test value [b] Fisher's Exact test value ***Significant at 1% level; [**]Significant at 5% level; [*]Significant at 10% level

Multivariate analyses of the predictors of diarrhea prevalence among under-five children

Binary logistic regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between outcome and exposure variables. Here, diarrhea prevalence among under-five children (Yes = 1 and No = 0) was the outcome variable. And among 25 variables in bivariate analyses, 8 were found statistically significant which were considered as the exposure variables such as child age, sex, undernutrition status, type of family, household vulnerability index, scarcity of safe drinking water in the community, distance of upazila health complex and availability of qualified doctor in the locality (see Table 4).

Results showed that diarrhea prevalence among children under-five was significantly associated with children's sex, family type, household vulnerability, and availability of a qualified doctor in the locality. Moreover, boys had 1.924 times higher odds of experiencing diarrhea (AOR = 1.924; 95% CI: 0.919 – 4.028; p = 0.083) compared to girls. Children from a nuclear family had 0.358 times lower odds of getting diarrhea (AOR = 0.358; 95% CI: 0.162 – 0.791; p = 0.011) than children from an extended family. Besides, children from higher vulnerable households had 4.872 times higher odds of experiencing diarrhea (AOR = 4.872; 95% CI: 1.669 – 14.223; p = 0.004) than children from lower vulnerable households. Interestingly, children living in the community where qualified doctors are available had 5.816 times higher odds of getting diarrhea (AOR = 5.816; 95% CI: 1.204 – 28.086; p = 0.028) than their counterparts.

Table 4. Diarrhea prevalence and its predictors among under-five children (Binary logistic regression analysis)

Predictors		Having diarrhea	
		AOR (95% CI)	***p* value**
Children's age			
	6-12 months (R)		
	13-24 months	1.333 (0.425-4.180)	0.622
	25-36 months	1.909 (0.651-5.594)	0.239
	37-48 months	1.593 (0.502-5.055)	0.429
	49-59 months	0.247 (0.045-1.365)	0.109
Children's sex			
	Girl (R)		
	Boy	1.924 (0.919-4.028)	0.083*
Undernutrition status			
	Normal weight (R)		
	Overweight	3.146 (0.396-25.021)	0.279
	Moderately underweight	0.563 (0.173-1.830)	0.340
	Severely underweight	1.335 (0.403-4.419)	0.637
Family type			
	Extended family (R)		
	Nuclear family	0.358 (0.162-0.791)	0.011**
Household vulnerability index			
	Low (R)		
	Moderate	1.103 (0.494-2.463)	0.811
	High	4.872 (1.669-14.223)	0.004***
Scarcity of safe drinking water in the community			
	No (R)		
	Yes	2.255 (0.780-6.514)	0.133
Distance of upazila health complex			
	< 10 km (R)		
	10-20 km	2.068 (0.850-5.031)	0.109
	> 20 km	0.655 (0.239-1.799)	0.412
Availability of qualified doctor in the locality			
	No (R)		
	Yes	5.816 (1.204-28.086)	0.028**

AOR=Adjusted odds ratio; CI=Confidence interval; R=Reference category; ***Significant at 1% level; **Significant at 5% level; *Significant at 10% level

Discussion

This study investigates the prevalence of diarrhea and the factors that influence it in children under-five in the southwestern coastal area of Bangladesh. Designing effective intervention techniques for lowering mortality and morbidity rates in this age group in Bangladesh, and for formulating and executing policies at both local and national levels to meet the target 3.2 of SDG 3, which is to end all preventable deaths among children under-five (UN, 2015), requires an understanding of the underlying factors influencing childhood diseases prevalence like diarrhea. Findings of the current study revealed that diarrhea prevalence among children under-five in the study area was 13.5% which is higher compared to the previous studies (around 5%) conducted in Bangladesh (Kundu et al., 2022; Rahman & Hossain, 2022) but lower compared to other developing countries including 22.5% in Pakistan

(Hasan & Richardson, 2017) and 29% in Ethiopia (Birhan et al., 2023). The higher prevalence of diarrhea in this study is due to the nature of the study area, as it has been conducted in the coastal region, which is highly prone to natural disasters like cyclones, storms, flooding, and so on. The limited availability of water, sanitation, and hygiene services in this region contributes to an increased incidence of communicable diseases, including diarrhea. Besides, the study acknowledges that the observed variations in diarrhea prevalence could be due to the variations in socioeconomic factors such as education and income, availability of healthcare, and even cultural practices related to hygiene and food preparation.

Results of regression analysis depicted that the sex of the children, type of family, household vulnerability, and availability of a qualified doctor in the locality were significantly associated with the diarrheal prevalence among children under-five. Furthermore, consistent with earlier studies conducted in Bangladesh (Choudhury et al., 2022; Dey et al., 2019; Kundu et al., 2022), Ethiopia (Girmay et al., 2023), and Nigeria (Okorie et al., 2024), we also found that male children had higher odds of having diarrhea compared to female children. The probable explanation could be societal norms and gender stereotypes that may contribute to this disparity (Akter, Rahman, & Razu), as male children tend to have a natural inclination to engage in outdoor play, leading to their exposure to infectious aerosols present in the environment (Savitha & Gopalakrishnan, 2018). Additionally, societal norms and cultural expectations might influence the availability of sanitation facilities, the level of exposure to environmental pollutants, and general hygiene practices based on gender (Azanaw et al., 2024).

We also found family type as a significant predictor of diarrheal prevalence among children under-five, and children from nuclear families had lower odds of experiencing diarrhea than children from extended families. This observation is supported by previous research conducted in Ethiopia (Agegnehu et al., 2019; Anteneh & Kumie, 2010; Girmay et al., 2023; Soboksa, 2021) and other developing countries (Pinzón-Rondón et al., 2015), which directed that children from households with more than 4 members had a higher risk of suffering from diarrheal diseases compared to those from households of four or fewer members, and economic disparities likely play a role in this variation. Besides, this relationship may stem from factors such as increased chances of disease spread in larger households, a greater likelihood of shared interactions with contaminated environments, and possibly more significant obstacles in maintaining effective hygiene standards. Furthermore, the resource strain experienced by larger families, which includes challenges in accessing clean water, adequate sanitation, and prompt medical attention, could lead to an increased vulnerability of children to diarrheal diseases (Azanaw et al., 2024).

The existing literature (Girmay et al., 2023; Rahman & Hossain, 2022; Soboksa, 2021) indicates that children from the poorest families face greater risks of developing diarrheal diseases compared to those from the wealthiest families. Therefore, households' economic status is associated with their level of vulnerability, and the current study has also demonstrated that children from highly vulnerable households had higher odds of having diarrhea than those from households with lower vulnerability. The possible explanation is that a strong correlation exists between household vulnerability, characterized by low socioeconomic status, insufficient sanitation, limited access to pure water, and inadequate hygiene practices, and a higher incidence of diarrhea in children; thus, households that are more vulnerable tend to encounter higher rates of childhood diarrhea. This finding could also be interpreted from an economic viewpoint, indicating that household poverty may play a crucial role in lower living standards, limited access to quality healthcare, and ongoing nutritional deficiencies (Iannotti et al., 2015). As a result, these conditions can contribute to adverse outcomes such as chronic malnutrition in children, weakened immune responses, and greater vulnerability to infectious diseases (Guerrant et al., 2013). Other reasons may be due to children from highly vulnerable households being more likely to consume unhygienic and low-quality foods available in the local market, which can lead to diarrheal illnesses.

Moreover, the availability of qualified doctors in the locality significantly influences diarrhea prevalence among children under-five. Similar to previous research (Akter, 2022; Zou et al., 2022), this study confirms that the preference for healthcare and treatment facilities can impact children's health and morbidity rates. Interestingly, children living in communities with accessible, qualified doctors exhibited higher odds of experiencing diarrhea compared to their peers. This finding aligns with another Bangladeshi study, which highlighted a notable association between access to healthcare facilities and childhood diarrhea (Mahumud et al., 2019). This could be attributed to the fact that diarrhea is a communicable disease that can be transmitted from person to person, and if treated promptly with appropriate medical care, it may lessen the overall incidence in a particular region. Nonetheless, access to better healthcare is a challenge in rural areas of the country due to long distances, a shortage of healthcare facilities, and transportation issues, which limit healthcare utilization in these regions (Zou et al., 2022). Therefore, the influence of the availability of qualified doctors within the community on diarrheal prevalence among children under-five has not yet been thoroughly examined and warrants further research for a better understanding.

Strengths and limitations

This community-based study will enrich the existing literature related to childhood diarrheal disease prevalence among children under-five in the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh and the influencing factors. Besides, the random selection of the respondents is more scientific and mitigates the question of selection bias of the participants. However, the key limitation of the study lies in the recall bias of the caregivers regarding child diseases. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of this study might limit the generalizability of the study findings across the country. Overall, the findings of this study might be helpful for policymakers to formulate and execute region-specific policies to combat communicable diseases like diarrhea among children under-five in geospatially disadvantaged regions, especially in the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh, as well as in other countries with similar traits.

Conclusion

The current study intends to investigate the diarrhea prevalence among children under-five and the influencing factors in the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh. Results indicated that diarrhea prevalence among children under-five was 13.5% and the sex of the children, type of family, household vulnerability, and availability of a qualified doctor in the locality were the significant influencing factors. The study suggests targeted interventions to address household vulnerabilities by improving socioeconomic conditions, housing quality, and access to safe water and sanitation facilities to enhance children's health and well-being. Furthermore, infrastructural development is essential for providing access to quality healthcare services in areas that are geographically disadvantaged, particularly in borderlands with socioeconomic conditions similar to those in Bangladesh. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers in developing countries to design effective strategies for improving child health and well-being in socioeconomically comparable regions. Lastly, further research is encouraged to employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches for a better understanding of the issue, leading to the implementation of region-specific policies to combat communicable diseases like diarrhea among children under five old.

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6.1.4 Life History of People and Things on the Salween River Basin[1]

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Abstract

This article aims to explore life writing through research methodologies in microhistory, which is part of a project to study travelling people and things in western Thailand's borderlands. Many people travelled with objects for communication and exchange, from the top of a mountain to the basin, within long-established communities. Some objects still carry memories and stories, such as Phang-Lang items placed on top of bullocks, whose sounds resemble the rhythmic movement of animals and people who collectively share their life histories. Moreover, this article focuses on the biographies of ethnic groups who have moved around the area, some of whom migrated from their hometowns for political reasons and others for economic reasons. The life histories of the Salween River Basin do not fit into the national grand narrative.

Keywords: Life history; Memory; Storytelling; Biography; Salween River

[1] This article is on the process in the project "Archaeology and History of Ethnic Groups along Salween River in Mae Hong Son Province", and this project is funded by the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT)

Introduction

The Salween River Basin is an extensive area along the western boundary of Lanna. A long time ago, Muang Youm and Muang Pai represented the final frontier of Lanna's authority, and until the end of the nineteenth century, it was part of Siam. Mae Hong Son became known as a frontier region because of its proximity to British colonies, and many teak traders operated there through foreign timber companies. There were famous lawsuits, cases of elephant theft, and cross-border criminal investigations. Official documents often detail conflicts or relationships between states, security forces, or customs duty stations.

Not only did people and goods move constantly across the border, but such mobility was an integral part of everyday life. Pilgrim Buddhist monks, peddlers, local residents, minority groups, and ethnic groups all took part in these movements.

This article focuses on life history through the mobility of people and objects, offering a new historical narrative. The concept of decolonial theory is applied retrospectively to explore borderland lives using a new approach. Microhistory serves as a method for working with biography and storytelling. Moreover, life history is extended to highlight the agency of things by creating stories around them.

Gosden and Marshall (1999, pp. 174-175), in "The Cultural Biography of Objects," argue that contexts beyond exchange create meanings and object biographies an important perspective for investigating the circumstances of objects when they were exchanged. The cultural and social life of things generates meaning and their biographies simultaneously.

The sources and documents for analysis are still being compiled, some from archival research and others from focus groups with participants. Mae Sam Laep, a small border town close to the Salween River, is a hub for cross-border workers. Many of them are undocumented (Bejarano, Juárez, Garcia, & Goldstein, 2019, pp. 78-79)[2], similar to people who once crossed the border seeking better opportunities. Their storytelling has created a new version of history that does not fit national narratives.

The objects known as Phang-Lang are preserved in the museums of Wat Chong Klang and Wat Chong Kham, temples built in Burmese style in the early nineteenth century.

Lastly, some of the issues discussed here may not yet form strong arguments; rather, they are preliminary explorations that may need further refinement. For example, identifying a single ethnic group along the border is problematic. New media and technology have altered networks, as have differences in education, generation, and gender. These factors provide new opportunities for research practice.

Why is it called life history?

This phenomenon raises deep questions about how we engage with the past and history. It is difficult to understand by simply collecting large amounts of information, especially since national archives have selective collections. The presence of ordinary people in these archives does not necessarily indicate social change.

Life history as a methodology emphasises agency in everyday life; someone or something is always travelling from one place to another. Even non-human entities, in the context of posthumanism

[2] Undocumented workers are termed people who are immigrants and do not have formal permission documents. Some applied ideas from "Undocumented Activist Theory and a Decolonial Methodology" (Bejarano, Juárez, Garcia, & Goldstein, 2019, pp. 78-79)

and the non-human turn, challenge us to reconsider the transformation of humans and non-humans—for example, in the era of the slave trade (Kopytoff, 1986, pp. 64-91).

Whitlock (2019, pp. 34-36), in "Objects and Things," supports N. Katherine Hayles's (1999) argument that thinking through new materialism does not mean the end of humanity. Whitlock invites us to find alternative forms of narration, such as refugee stories. Behrouz Boochani's autobiographical novel No Friend but the Mountains addresses refugee issues by weaving Kurdish and Pacific Indigenous knowledge. Boochani, a Kurdish Iranian refugee, disrupts mainstream narrative forms through ethnicity, philosophy, and unconventional knowledge (Whitlock, 2019, p. 38).

The biography of a person or object is thus a methodology for understanding life history. However, the meaning of biography depends on context, and its historical background is integral to historical methods (Gosden & Marshall, 1999, pp. 174-175). Some questions about objects lead narrators to excavate memories and retell their stories. These interactions become collaborative processes between the researcher and the narrator in creating meaning and investigating memory.

Historians often find that personal archives are essential, as national archives rarely preserve the biographies of ordinary people—yet such biographies are key to narrating life history.

Micro scale and practice

The methodology of life history relates to small-scale contexts, such as networks, media, and everyday practices. Increasingly, people use new media such as Facebook and chat platforms to maintain their networks.

Aimee Morrison (2019, pp. 41-44) provides important insights in "Social Media Life Writing: Online Lives at Scale, Up Close, and In Context." Social media consists of individual utterances produced by people with their authorship agendas, styles, goals, and audiences. Morrison's methodology highlights how data collection and organisation are intertwined with interpretation. Therefore, new media are crucial for understanding individual identity.

Microhistory challenges grand narratives - the so-called colonial legacy. The microhistory school emerged in the 1970s, about two decades after the Annales school. (Ruangsri, 2020, p. 379) The shift between theory and method encouraged revising colonial knowledge and contributed to subaltern studies. Historians have used microhistory to reconsider periodisation, going back to times before the Enlightenment.

Decolonial approaches create new research frameworks. Microhistory poses questions about whether it is possible to study ordinary people and how to work with historical subjects who left no memoirs, diaries, or records. Natalie Zemon Davis (1982), a leading microhistorian, demonstrated this in The Return of Martin Guerre, which examined a famous lawsuit in rural France. Davis investigated testimonies and local records to understand the life of Martin Guerre's wife.

Ultimately, microhistory does not necessarily reveal absolute truth, but it provides tools to explore alternative explanations (Ruangsri, 2020, pp. 373-416).

Archives and Autobiography

To study the biography of an influential Buddhist leader such as Khruba Srivichai and Katherine A. Bowie (2017, pp. 27-57) in The Charismatic Saint and the Northern Sangha critiques how the Northern Sangha differed from that in central Thailand, where religion and the Sangha were dominated by the monarchy. The Northern Sangha was closer to villages and commodities and more independent from the northern royalty.

Khruba Srivichai's followers included many ethnic groups, such as the Karen, Tai, and local people. Many protected him, fearing that Siam would punish him. Bowie (2017) highlights how

Khruba Srivichai's biography intersected with the process of Siam integrating Lanna into the modern state.

A similar case can be found in the Karen charismatic monk U Thuzana. Kwanchewan Buadaeng (2017, pp. 147-170), in "A Karen Charismatic Monk and Connectivity across the Thai-Myanmar Borderland," compares his following to that of Khruba Srivichai, as stories of charismatic monks were passed down. U Thuzana became a symbol of peace and hope, and the Karen army renamed itself the "Democratic Karen Benevolent Army" from its old name, the "Democratic Karen Buddhist Army" (DKBA).

These biographies of Khruba Srivichai and U Thuzana illustrate how life history intersects with ethnic networks and cross-border mobility.

Research-based biographies also draw on personal archives - collections of fragmented stories. It is possible to build new narratives from such fragments, including photographs, video clips, memoirs, amulets, personal items, and sermons, which link objects to biography in context.

Sinith Sittirak (2019, p. 1) exemplifies this in her study of Pornpet Meuansri, a farmer who fought for land rights for nearly four decades. Pornpet left behind extensive archives - petitions, diaries, letters, news clippings, court documents, and other records. Sinith questions how knowledge about women in Thai society has been produced, by whom, using what methods, and with what results. She critiques how Thai feminist bureaucrats constructed top-down discourses that stereotyped subaltern women (Sinith, 2019, pp. 4, 51-58).

Pornpet's decades-long struggle turned her life into both subject and object. Sinith asks, "Can the subaltern write?" and "How do we read their writing?" To answer these questions, she engages postcolonial theory, especially Edward Said's (1978) notion that knowledge is a form of power and violence, granting authority to its possessor.

This case underscores how studying individual biographies requires both research questions and materials. Even in the absence of personal records, it remains possible, as Davis (1982) has shown.

Mobility and contested border

The Salween River Basin lies along the Thai-Burma border. I have been conducting fieldwork in Mae Sam Laep, a small border town in Mae Hong Son, since 2024, after previously researching the area about a decade earlier.

My recent research questions are: How can we write life history as a collective individual biography? And how can we study the mobility of things?

In 2024, Busarin Lertchavalitsakul (2024) published On Security Management and Trade along the Border Areas between Mae Hong Son, Northern Thailand and Myanmar, which has helped me update my understanding of mobility issues, especially state policies on opening permanent customs checkpoints.

Mae Hong Son is known as a peaceful and culturally rich town, famous for the Shan and Tai festival Poy Sang Long. Yet, as Ferguson (2014, pp. 45-64) argues in "Rock Your Religion: Shan Buddhist Ritual and Stage-Show Revelry in a Contested Zone at the Thai-Burma Border," borderland life is far from peaceful. Ferguson examines how novice ordination rituals take on political meaning in contested contexts, where ritual one-upmanship becomes carnivalised and ideologically charged.

Pinkaew Laungaramsri (2014, 143-162) raises similar issues in "Contested Citizenship: Cards, Colors, and the Culture of Identification," showing how citizenship classification became a tool of state power, pushing many borderland residents into illegality.

Among various ethnic groups, the Shan differ from other refugees because they are not allowed to live legally in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, preventing them from applying

for third-country resettlement. Many Shan left their homeland for reasons beyond economics, yet the Thai government only acknowledges economic migration, ignoring political persecution and armed conflict (Kostin, 2016, 156-164).

My book Pack Bullock Trader in Mae Hong Son: Memory and Narration (Ruangsri, 2025) documents the memories of Shan traders, forming part of their life histories. Through these narratives, I encountered the Phang-Lang, objects carried on the bullock caravans. Former traders explained that Phang-Lang were believed to have gender, and their sounds could signify omens such as illness. These objects were also used in New Year rituals. Mae Hong Son has both long-established Shan villagers and newcomers (That, 2010).

Mobility around the border is complex and increasingly constrained by state contestation and ethnic armed conflicts. These conditions force people to migrate, seek refugee status, and fight for registration and citizenship.

Mae Sam Laep and the Salween River

Mae Sam Laep is home to Karen, Shan, and Burmese communities, most of whom are engaged in border economies as boat drivers, fishermen, shopkeepers, and porters. After the Karen National Union (KNU) occupied the right bank of the Salween, the KNU flag was raised along the border.

In the 1980s, Mae Sam Laep was a bustling centre where people sought work and income. Today, it has changed, partly due to conflicts between Buddhist and Christian Karen communities.

The Muslim population is significant. Many trace their histories from Bangladesh to Burma - first settling in Martaban, the capital of Mon State, then moving to Hpa-An, the capital of Karen State, before crossing to Mae Sam Laep.

One young Burmese Muslim woman, Venus, sells roti and mataba in a small shop, having inherited the skill from her father, who sold roti in Martaban. Although her sister works in Mahachai, Samut Sakhon, Venus chose to remain in her hometown. Her biography illustrates how identity is shaped in changing border contexts.

Another woman, Jamee, recently graduated with a degree in political science but is unemployed because she lacks legal status. Despite her challenges, she hopes to work with a local organisation if she gains Thai citizenship.

Zakee, another Burmese Muslim shopkeeper, has family members in Chiang Mai's Chang Klan area, which has a Muslim community. Her shop, filled with Thai products, mainly serves Burmese-speaking customers. Despite global Muslim networks, Burmese Muslim women often face barriers to upward mobility.

Duangkamon Doncha-um (2016, pp. 221-226) notes that many undocumented Burmese Muslim women migrate for domestic work. One domestic worker stated, "I prefer to work for a company rather than a household because I feel like a worker, not a servant" (Doncha-um, 2016, p. 232). These stories highlight the everyday struggles of women as they negotiate for better lives.

Similar patterns are found in studies of undocumented migration, such as Bejarano et al. (2019, 78-79), who reflect on their collaborative research with undocumented people in the U.S. - Mexico borderlands, treating participants as full human beings rather than research objects.

Mae Sam Laep, like other border towns, exemplifies how mobility and survival tactics shape life histories.

Conclusion

This article has presented an alternative approach to understanding ordinary people in historical research. Biography serves as a key method for studying life history, applicable to both individuals and objects.

This research is ongoing and continues to undergo further study. Mae Hong Son continues to be a space of competing interests - funding agencies, government bodies, NGOs, smugglers, tourists - while leaving little room for undocumented migrants seeking to belong to the community.

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6.1.5 From Bars to Books: Sex Entertainment, Higher Education, and the Social (Re-) Construction of Aging Masculinities in Chiang Mai

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Abstract

This article explores how relationships between aging foreign men and Thai women working in the sex entertainment industry are reshaping access to higher education and redefining masculinity in a transnational context. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Chiang Mai's red-light district, "Loi Kroh Road," *Thanon Loi Khro* and relationships with participants that have developed since 2017, the study highlights how older Western men, often retired and socially marginalized in their home countries, find renewed meaning by supporting the education of their Thai partners or the children they help raise. This support often extends beyond financial assistance, enabling women or their children, especially daughters, to pursue university degrees and envision better futures for their families. In turn, these men reconstruct their sense of self in later life by taking on roles as caregivers, providers, and emotionally involved partners. Rather than reinforcing simplified narratives of exploitation or transactional intimacy, the article demonstrates how such relationships can facilitate intergenerational mobility and create space for new social possibilities. The "foreigner's wife" *mia farang* phenomenon has already brought significant change to rural areas, especially in Isan. As more women from similar backgrounds gain access to higher education, a new educated rural class may emerge with a stronger voice in Thai society. By drawing on theories of aging masculinities and transnational aging, this article reveals how relationships formed in stigmatized settings can challenge gender hierarchies, generate care, and contribute to broader social transformation.

Keywords: Transnational Aging, Aging Masculinities; Sex Entertainment; Retirement Migration; Chiang Mai

Introduction

Over the past five decades, Thailand has experienced significant demographic changes. People's life expectancy has increased, while birth rates have decreased, and the working-age population is shrinking. As families become smaller and the population ages, an increasing number of women pursue higher education and careers. With fewer children to support, families now invest more equally in the education of boys and girls, enabling more women to gain financial independence.

However, higher education remains difficult for low-income families due to high tuition costs and limited scholarship opportunities. This financial barrier has contributed to changes in the sex entertainment industry. Once dominated by less-educated rural women, it now encompasses a more diverse group, including university students (Lemberger, 2023; Ratchatathanarat & Wongcharoen, 2021). Many women work in this sector to fund their studies, or those of their children, while also supporting (extended) families. This highlights the intersection of basic financial needs and (higher) education in this sector.

At the same time, aging societies are a pressing issue in Europe, where retirees face high living costs and often inadequate health care or elderly care. Increasingly, they migrate to more affordable countries. Unlike the "snowbirds" of the past, who migrated only seasonally, today's elderly migrants are financially and socially independent, digitally connected, and often relocating permanently (Howard, 2008). This trend, known as "lifestyle migration," reflects the desire for a better quality of life in old age.

One aspect of this improved quality of life, particularly for men, is that these transnational moves offer renewed (sexual) intimacy (Bender & Schweppe, 2022; Horn, 2024; Horn & Schweppe, 2016; Vogler, 2015). In Thailand, many aging foreign men form relationships with women working in the sex entertainment industry, often meeting through bars, massage parlors, or increasingly online platforms (Lemberger, 2023).

The role of aging foreign men, in the context of Thailand's sex entertainment industry, has often been portrayed through simplified narratives that emphasize financial transactions and exploitation (e.g., Farley, 2004; Gerassi, 2015; Weitzer, 2007, 2023). However, these portrayals fail to capture the complexity of their relationships with Thai women and the societal dynamics at play.

Many scholars have already begun examining these relationships from various perspectives, identifying vulnerabilities and dependencies on both sides. These studies move beyond the simple narrative of "old white men" taking advantage of vulnerable young Thai women (e.g., Bender & Schweppe, 2022; Jaisuekun & Sunanta, 2024; Muangjan, 2018; Thompson et al., 2016, 2018). Here, financial support often extends to women's children and families, including funding education. In return, men receive emotional care, companionship, and a sense of belonging (Howard, 2008; Lemberger, 2023; Lemberger & Waters, 2022; Thompson et al., 2016).

This study argues that locations such as Chiang Mai enable aging Western men to redefine their masculinity by embracing caregiving and financial responsibilities. While economic support remains a key factor, examining the involvement of aging foreign men with Thai society requires a more critical approach, especially in caregiving, financial investment, and identity negotiation. Their presence in Thailand is influenced by various intersecting factors such as age, masculinity, higher education, and social mobility, which challenge traditional views of their roles.

Subsequently, they influence Thai family structures, particularly in terms of access to higher education. In doing so, they contribute to broader transformations in gender relations and intergenerational upward mobility.

Research Aim

This research aims to address the gap in understanding how aging foreign men involved with Thai women working in the sex entertainment industry (re-)construct their masculinity within this

transnational context. Understanding how these men navigate their aging masculinities, adapt to new roles in a foreign country, and participate in reshaping Thai family dynamics is crucial for a more comprehensive view of the sex entertainment industry's role within the larger socio-economic landscape.

Several questions guide this research: How do aging foreign men define their masculinity in a transnational context? How do Thai women in these relationships pursue their educational goals for themselves and their children? What drives aging foreign men to support the education of Thai women and their kids? How does this support influence family relationships and intergenerational mobility? In what ways do these relationships impact broader social changes in Thailand? How do cultural expectations of aging affect the roles these men take on?

This study aims to shed light on how cross-cultural relationships between aging Western men and Thai women in the sex industry are linked to broader social shifts. It examines how these ties, often beginning in informal settings, can lead to new roles and responsibilities, such as supporting a child's education or finding renewed purpose in later life. By focusing on everyday strategies and interactions, the research explores how these relationships reshape ideas of masculinity, aging, and family in contemporary Thailand.

Methodological Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design that combines ethnography, case studies, and life histories to examine the roles of aging foreign men and their involvement with Thai women working in the sex entertainment industry.

The ethnographic fieldwork (2022-2023, ongoing in 2025) was conducted in Chiang Mai's red-light district, specifically "Loi Kroh Road" *Thanon Loi Khro* (Thai: ถนนลอยเคราะห์), where I have built long-term relationships with women working at the venues and their male customers, mostly aging Western retirees. I have developed these relationships since moving to Thailand in 2017, which has allowed me to gain deeper insights into social dynamics, interactions, and their daily lives.

My participants included women working in sex entertainment venues in the "Loi Kroh Road" area. The women were between 21 and 60 years old, with educational backgrounds ranging from lower secondary to University Degrees[3]. Most customers of the venues in this area are "Western foreigners," *farang* (Thai: ฝรั่ง).

When referring to *farang*, aging foreign men or Western retirees, in this study, I refer to individuals aged sixty and older who have already retired. This aligns with the European Union's average retirement age of sixty-two (Fleck, 2023). The term "Western" refers to men from Western European countries, including France, Belgium, German-speaking countries, and the United Kingdom. They were chosen for their similar retirement and social security systems (Fleck, 2023). Additionally, I only selected Caucasian males, mainly because most customers frequenting "Loi Kroh Road" belong to this ethnicity.

This study focuses on men who have (partially) migrated to Chiang Mai, excluding tourists or similar groups. This allows for the comparison of men's post-retirement experiences and their roles in

[3] The Thai education system offers 12 years of free education, starting with 6 years of "primary education" *Prathom* (Thai: ประถม), followed by 6 years of "secondary education" *Mattayom* (Thai: มัธยม) divided into "lower secondary" *Matthayom 3* (Thai: มัธยม3) to "upper secondary" *Matthayom 6* (Thai: มัธยม6). Schooling begins at age 6, and while only 9 years are compulsory, all students are encouraged to complete the full 12 years. Higher education is available at both public and private institutions, with diploma and degree programs. The Thai higher education system currently enrolls 1,854,770 students. These are divided by degree type as follows: 12,349 students are pursuing a diploma, 1,686,384 are working toward a bachelor's degree, 131,576 are studying for a master's degree, and 24,461 are enrolled in doctoral programs. There are 78 public universities and 89 private institutions. 544,082 students attend autonomous universities, 1,035,537 are enrolled in public universities, 255,037 are in private universities or colleges, and 20,114 attend community colleges (*Ministry of Education*, 2023; *Thailand - ASEM Education*, 2021).

a transnational context. It further allows for observing how they navigate retirement life in Thailand and their interactions with women working in sex entertainment.

Instead of concentrating on fixed roles or scripted intentions, I focus on everyday choices, negotiations, and personal stories. My interest lies in how people, particularly older Western men, navigate intimacy, care, and recognition within a context shaped by economic exchange and cultural differences.

I write from a position of "in-betweenness." I am neither part of the sex entertainment industry nor completely removed from it. As a Western feminist researcher based in Thailand, I move between different worlds. I am influenced by feminist scholarship but stay grounded in local relationships, listening carefully to both men and women. My goal is not to speak on their behalf but to remain reflexive about how I understand and represent their experiences. This stance enables me to follow the stories people choose to share and to observe the development of relationships with empathy, curiosity, and critical awareness.

Like any ethnographic research, there are limitations. While I listened attentively to male participants, I am not a man myself, so some aspects of their emotional and gendered experiences inevitably remain outside my perspective. Stories played a central role in my methodology, but I knew participants often wanted to present themselves positively. I addressed this by verifying stories through observation and conversations with others in the same venues.

Focusing on Chiang Mai geographically means that the findings reflect a specific context, different from more commercial or tourist-driven sites like Pattaya or Bangkok. Still, this specificity helps illustrate how sex entertainment and related relationships can vary depending on local conditions.

Guided by the principle of "Do No Harm," I prioritized ethical standards throughout my research, particularly in protecting participants' privacy and maintaining confidentiality. All identifying attributes have been omitted. All participant names used in this article are pseudonyms, and only first names are given. Last names are intentionally omitted to protect confidentiality. Interviews, informal conversations, and fieldnotes are cited in-text by a pseudonymous first name along with the month and year of communication. Exact days are excluded, as they are not analytically relevant and could risk participant identifiability due to the close-knit nature of the research side. Informed consent was obtained verbally from all participants (recorded) and continually reconfirmed due to the formal and informal nature of the research period.

The conversation and interview language was English. I translated a few conversations with German-speaking men into English. These translations remain as close as possible to the speakers' original intent and expression. Where necessary, I have lightly edited grammar and phrasing for clarity and readability, while carefully preserving the original tone and meaning. To enhance clarity in the representation of participants' voices, their direct speech is set in italics.

The Chiang Mai University Research Ethics Committee (Full Board) reviewed and approved this research on June 13th, 2022; COA no. 041/65 and on January 24th, 2025; COA no. 043/68.

Theoretical Framework

This study occupies the intersection of aging studies, gender studies, and transnationalism. Therefore, it employs an intersectional approach to examine aging masculinities.

Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality to highlight the interplay of race and gender within systems of power. While intersectionality has been widely used in feminist theory to examine the interactions of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality, the aspect of age has remained less explored. Ignoring age as a crucial intersectional factor risks obscuring how aging men navigate shifting identities in later life, especially in transnational settings (Calasanti et al., 2006; Sandberg, 2011).

Therefore, I use the lens of "aging masculinities" to explore how aging foreign men in Thailand (re-)construct their gendered identities through interactions with local women (Jackson, 2018; Thompson Jr, 2018). Their masculinity is shaped by their status as retirees, their economic advantages, and their positioning as foreign men in a new social and cultural environment in Chiang Mai.

In our modern era, the broader context of aging societies affecting nations worldwide enables us to explore the societal changes impacting Thailand and Western nations more deeply. Here, the concept of "transnational aging", resulting from aging societies, provides a theoretical framework for exploring the relationship between Thai women and aging Western men and how this affects the (re-) construction of their masculinities (Horn, 2024; Horn & Schweppe, 2016, 2017). It offers a tool to explore individuals' strategies and adjustments to manage aging in environments that transcend national borders (Horn et al., 2013, p. 7).

As older Western men move to Thailand and engage with women in sex entertainment, it is important to recognize that their migration often relates to economic inequalities and different cultural expectations about masculinity, aging, and relationships.

Literature Review

The increasing involvement of older foreign men in Thailand is a significant yet often overlooked aspect of the country's demographic and social change. As Thailand faces the challenges of an aging population, these men, many of whom are in relationships with Thai women working in sex entertainment, contribute to household life in ways that alter how families are formed and supported. Their financial and emotional support, especially in funding children's education and maintaining household stability, reflects changing patterns of care, gender roles, and intergenerational responsibility.

Thailand's Aging Societies, Higher Education, and Women's Roles

Thailand officially became an aging society in 2001 when 10% of its population was over 60, rising to 20% by 2022. It is projected to become a super-aged society by 2031 (Jumnianpol et al., 2023, p. 162). This shift dates back to the 1960s, when the national family planning campaign, with the slogan "many children lead to poverty," *mi luk mak yakchon* (Thai: มีลูกมากยากจน), began promoting smaller families through mass media[4] (Kalwij, 2016; Nepomuceno, 1991; Prasartkul, 2012). The campaign successfully lowered the fertility rate from 6.3 children per woman in 1964 to 1.6 in 2016, with projections indicating a further drop to 1.3 by 2040. Annual births are expected to fall below 500,000 within 25 years (UNFPA, 2016, p. 16).

Today, decisions to have fewer children are influenced not only by economic factors but also by evolving values linked to globalization and modernity. Greater access to education, exposure to Western ideals, and enhanced opportunities contribute to more individualistic lifestyles (Solheim & Wachwithan, 2018, p. 64).

A central driver of this shift is the rising number of women pursuing higher education. University-educated women tend to delay marriage and childbearing, prioritizing their careers and financial independence (Chaijaroen & Panda, 2023; Kan & Lee, 2018). This mirrors global trends, especially in developed Asian nations, where highly educated women, often labeled "Gold Miss,"[5]

[4] A notable effort in this movement was Mechai Viravaidya's condom project, which gained widespread recognition for advocating condom use for contraception and promoting sexual health (Muthuta, 2021, p. 13). Mechai Viravaidya, a prominent social activist in Thailand, became widely known for his pioneering efforts in promoting the use of condoms, advocating for family planning, and raising awareness about HIV/AIDS. His initiatives played a key role in transforming public attitudes toward sexual health and contraception, making him a central figure in the country's efforts to address population growth and improve reproductive health education (see, e.g., *Mechai Viravaidya Foundation*, n.d.; *Population and Community Development Association (PDA)*, 2023).

[5] The term "Gold Miss" was originally coined in South Korea to describe single women who have achieved high levels of education and enjoy significant socioeconomic success. These women are often financially independent and choose to remain

remain single, childless, and financially independent. This stands in contrast to Western lifestyle patterns, where late marriage in women is more common (Paweenawat & Liao, 2019, p. 4).

For those women in Thailand who choose to have children, dual-income households are now the norm, placing caregiving responsibilities on elderly grandparents. These "skipped generation" households can be overwhelming for older caregivers who may lack the resources or knowledge to care for young children in a fast-changing world. (Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2020; Kodyee et al., 2024)

Still, the older generation is increasingly valuing education and, therefore, taking on the burden of (grand) child-rearing. Even when they might benefit more from their children entering the workforce early, many prioritize long-term gains through education, seeing it as a path to family stability and future support (Kodyee et al., 2024, p. 6). This belief in education as a tool for upward mobility leads families to invest heavily in their children's schooling, often incurring debt in the process (Wongmonta, 2023). Success in education is closely tied to expectations that children will support their parents in old age, reinforcing education as a collective family investment.

The broader consequences of this demographic and cultural transition are significant. Smaller family sizes and shifting priorities challenge traditional family structures that once depended on large, multigenerational households. Expectations that children, especially daughters, will care for their aging parents are increasingly strained in a society where women are more likely to pursue education, careers, and financial independence.

Transnational Aging and Aging Masculinities

The aging population is a growing concern globally, not just in Thailand. In Europe, those aged 65 and older are expected to make up nearly 30% of the population by 2050 (AGE, 2023). As state support declines, retirees increasingly rely on personal savings to cover living and healthcare expenses (Greenwald et al., 2017; Horn et al., 2015). With limited access to affordable formal care, family caregiving has become more essential. This places significant emotional and financial pressure on spouses and adult children (Barlund et al., 2021; Teixeira et al., 2020).

In response, many retirees seek more sustainable lifestyles abroad. Migration from the Global North to the Global South is rising, as retirees are drawn by lower living costs, better climates, and accessible healthcare (Howard, 2009; Savaş et al., 2023). Thailand, and especially Chiang Mai, has emerged as a favored retirement destination. In 2018 alone, more than 80,000 retirement visa applications were filed nationwide, with Chiang Mai estimated to host 10,000–20,000 retirees.[6] (Vogler, 2015)

Retirement migration is not a new phenomenon, but it has experienced significant growth since the 1970s, largely due to advancements in digital connectivity and the increasing affordability of travel. Increasingly, aging is no longer associated with withdrawal from active life and being stationary. Many older adults remain highly mobile, both domestically and internationally (Jackson, 2018, p. 172). Moreover, retirees are less (emotionally) dependent on immediate family, which allows them to detach from their home countries and relocate as part of a "modern life course" (Savaş et al., 2023, p. 235).

Despite these trends, aging research has long focused on "aging in place," overlooking the growing phenomenon of cross-border aging (Ciobanu et al., 2017). However, a shift is underway. Scholars are increasingly adopting transnational perspectives, showing how elderly migrants stay connected across national borders through digital communication, social networks, and periodic visits (Horn et al., 2013; Horn & Schweppe, 2016, 2017; Thang et al., 2012; Toyota & Xiang, 2012).

unmarried, challenging traditional expectations regarding marriage and gender roles in society. The concept highlights a shift in social norms, prioritizing personal achievement and career success over settling down.

[6] Obtaining exact and current figures remains difficult, as many retirees use different visa types, such as "medical" or "Family of Thai Nationals" or circumvent long-stay visas at all. (Sasiwongsaroj & Husa, 2022)

This shift has led to the concept of "transnational aging," defined as "the processes of organizing, shaping, and coping with life in old age in contexts which are no longer limited to the frame of a single nation-state" (Horn et al., 2013, p. 7). Aging migrants actively navigate overlapping legal, cultural, and social systems. They must "negotiate and bridge" these often conflicting worlds, reconnecting "what seemingly falls apart" (Horn & Schweppe, 2016, p. 5). Rather than passive dependents, they are active agents shaping their own lives. As Basch et al. (1994, p. 146) noted, these are the transnational sites where identities and strategies are constantly reformulated.

Within this context, "aging masculinities" offers a useful lens to explore how older men, especially those who retire abroad, redefine their identities in later life. Jackson (2018) and Thompson Jr. (2018) see this stage as an opportunity to re-imagine masculinity, as men navigate physical decline, loss of professional identity, and changing social roles. While they may still benefit from racial or gender privilege, aging men often fall outside hegemonic ideals of dominance and success that define hegemonic masculinities and would place them in subordinate positions (Connell, 1995; Torres, 2007).

Thompson Jr. (2018) and Hearn (2010) argue for moving beyond narrow models of hegemonic masculinity to better understand the agency, complexity, and contradictions that aging men face. In the Thai context, this includes their mobility, their engagement with sex entertainment, and sometimes their integration into Thai families and society.

Thai Family Structures and Aging Western Retirees

Thailand has long been shaped by traditional heteronormative family structures, where marriage and children are central. Couples often lived near extended family members, allowing for mutual support and caregiving. Marriage was seen not only as a union between individuals, but as one between families. This is captured in the phrase "marrying the family" *ttaengngan kap khropkhrua (Thai: แต่งงานกับครอบครัว),* which demonstrates an understanding of strong family bonds (McKenzie et al., 2021, p. 14).

Thai families are grounded in cultural values of collective responsibility and intergenerational care, with clearly defined family roles. Children, and especially daughters, are expected to care for aging parents in return for their upbringing, reflecting the notion of the "debt of gratitude," *bun khun* (Thai: บุญคุณ). Sons traditionally fulfill this partly through monastic service, while daughters are expected to provide ongoing material support and personal care (Knodel et al., 2013, p. 129; Mills, 1999, p.76).

Despite modern shifts, the role of the "mother" *mae* (Thai: แม่) remains highly respected. Many women, particularly in rural areas, still consider themselves responsible for their parents, children, husbands, and extended family (Jaisuekun & Sunanta, 2021; Knodel et al., 1997). The concept of "to take care" *dulae* (Thai: ดูแล) is a deeply embedded societal and cultural norm. It captures a daughter's moral duty to care for her family, especially aging parents (Lemberger, 2023; Lemberger & Waters, 2022). Multigenerational households remain common, and elder care continues to be family-based, with women at the center.

With the rise of transnational marriages and relationships, caregiving roles increasingly involve aging foreign men. Those lacking strong support in their home countries often turn to Thai partners for companionship and care in their later years (Bender & Schweppe, 2022). Known locally as the "foreigner's wife" *mia farang* (Thai: เมียฝรั่ง) phenomenon, these relationships offer financial security for Thai women while providing aging men with emotional, physical, and healthcare support.

Although financial support is often involved, these relationships are not always purely transactional. Many develop into loving partnerships, particularly as care becomes more relevant in later stages (Lafferty & Maher, 2020; Lapanun, 2012, 2018, 2019; Maher & Lafferty, 2014; Scuzzarello, 2020; Sunanta, 2009; Sunanta & Angeles, 2013).

While not all *mia farang* relationships are linked to sex entertainment, many begin in such venues across Thailand (Thompson et al., 2016, p. 54). Still, they often evolve beyond their origins, reflecting shifting ideas about family, love, and elder care in the context of transnational aging. This evolution is especially evident when exploring how these relationships intersect with women's pursuit of higher education and broader social change.

Empirical Data: The Intersection of Higher Education and Sex Entertainment

An unexpected connection between women's education and Thailand's aging society can be found in the country's sex entertainment industry.

My research in Chiang Mai revealed that a significant number of women working in sex entertainment are single mothers, driven by the need to support their families and children. Empower[7] estimates that 80% of sex workers are mothers, and over 40% are single mothers. A 2017 study by the same group revealed that, on average, each woman working in sex entertainment supports five family members (Duangdee, 2021; Empower Foundation, 2016). This aligns with my findings.

Most of the women in my study moved to Chiang Mai from rural areas of Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, or the Northeastern parts of Thailand. Their families mainly worked as farmers from traditional backgrounds, and their socio-economic status placed them in the lower to lower-middle class.

Traditional families, especially in rural areas, hold a clear sense of right and wrong, particularly concerning marriage and sexuality. These conservative values strongly disapprove of work in sex entertainment, viewing it as a source of shame for the family. Consequently, jobs in venues like bars or massage parlors on "Loi Kroh Road" carry a significant stigma and are seldom discussed openly with family members. Although the nature of their work is generally understood, it remains unspoken.

While traditional cultural expectations exist, families have adapted them to their own advantage. Today, families often negotiate the roles of the "good daughter" and her duties towards the family in what Lainez (2020) refers to as "relational packages." In these arrangements, families balance traditional responsibilities with financial needs to maintain family honor and financial stability. This includes accepting financial support from daughters involved in the sex entertainment industry. This reflects a broader, modern trend toward flexible family dynamics and negotiated roles (McKenzie et al., 2021).

With few exceptions, most women in my study did not share the details of their work with their parents or siblings, let alone inform extended family members. The most they would disclose was working as a "massage therapist" *maw nuat* (Thai: หมอนวด) in a parlor or as a cashier in a bar. Higher earnings were typically justified with explanations such as, "foreigners are different from Thai people; they give higher tips." This justification helped normalize their financial success in what might otherwise be considered modest-sounding jobs.

The pursuit of (higher) education

My research revealed that higher education in rural, lower-middle-class families remains largely inaccessible to women, particularly among older generations. Although many women in the study had at least an upper secondary education, and a few earned bachelor's degrees, higher education was typically prioritized for boys in their families.

Due to the high cost of (higher) education in Thailand, traditional families often do not value investing in girls' education. They believe that women will eventually marry and assume housewife

[7] A Thai organization, established in 1985 and largely run by sex workers, advocates for the decriminalization of sex work in Thailand, operating under the Western notion that "sex work is work." The group supports sex workers by offering legal, educational, and health-related assistance relevant to their profession in the sex entertainment industry.

roles. *Daeng* (Thai: แดง; meaning "Red"), a 28-year-old bar lady, said that her family supported her brother's university education instead of hers:

> *"He [her brother] was never good at school. I always had good grades, better than his. But he is a boy. My parents think he's more important.*"
> (Daeng, personal conversation, November 2022)

The idea that boys deserve more educational opportunities was common, with many women saying they worked in sex entertainment to help pay for their brothers' education, not their own. This situation reinforces traditional gender roles, where men are free to seek personal success while women are expected to maintain familial duties.

However, the approach differed in families with only daughters. These families often send at least one daughter to university, hoping that higher education will lead to better job opportunities and financial security for the family. *Som* (Thai: ส้ม; meaning "Orange"), a 30-year-old massage therapist, explained:

> *"They [the parents] think that if you have a university degree, you can earn a lot of money and get a better job. First, they pay for your education, and when they are old, you will have enough money to support them."*
> (Som, personal conversation, April 2025)

A shift is also emerging among younger generations. Many women in the age range of 21 to 35 who work in sex entertainment take pride in being able to finance their children's education, regardless of gender. They view it as a means of breaking the cycle of inequality. Mothers who were denied these opportunities often place great value on their daughters' education, as *Ploy* (Thai: พลอย; meaning "Gemstone"), a 29-year-old bar lady and mother of two daughters, highlighted:

> *"When I talk to them [her daughters] on the phone, I tell them to study hard and be the best in the class. They need to listen to my sister*[8] *and do their homework. My younger daughter always plays on the phone, watching TikTok, while she does her homework. I told my sister to take the phone away. School is important*."
> (Ploy, personal conversation, March 2025)

The importance of education is also reflected in a subtle yet meaningful linguistic change, where most mothers in my study referred to their children as "student," *nakrian* (Thai: นักเรียน), instead of using familial terms like "child" *dek* (Thai: เด็ก), "daughter" *luksao* (Thai: ลูกสาว), or "son" *lukchai* (Thai: ลูกชาย), or even their (nick) names. This change in language signals a broader societal emphasis on education and the rising importance of academic achievement as a source of pride and social mobility.

Not only (single) mothers, but a growing number of young women who are university students themselves, mostly in their early 20s, are now working in sex entertainment venues in Chiang Mai. The primary motivation is self-support. Despite receiving some financial assistance from their guardians, participants chose to work in sex entertainment venues to avoid being a burden, knowing their parents were not well off. For instance, *Aeppon* (Thai: แอปเปิ้ล; meaning "Apple"), a 22-year-old business study major, has worked in bars for more than two years to fund her university education. Her family background involved violence and drug abuse, so she decided to live with her grandparents instead. She said:

> *"I don't want my grandparents to worry about money. I'm strong, I can study and work.*"
> (Aeppon, personal conversation, July 2022)

[8] Her sister and mother in Isan are the guardians of her daughters.

Similarly, *Song* (Thai: สอง; meaning "Two"), a now 25-year-old teaching graduate, expressed discomfort in asking her father for money, even though he was willing to help.

> *"I feel shy to ask him for more money. My Papa is a good man, but he doesn't understand city life. He thinks everything is cheap, just like in our village. I tell him, yes, and I go to work at the bar.*"
> (Song, interview, September 2022)

This sense of responsibility, paired with the cultural concept of *krengjai*[9] (Thai: เกรงใจ), often drives women to seek financial independence and work in the sex entertainment venues.

However, I noticed a difference in women working in sex entertainment for the sake of their family's well-being or children's education, and some within the younger generation. These young, often more highly educated women strive for a modern lifestyle. They want to travel, buy brand-name smartphones, wear stylish clothes or handbags, and dine at "proper" restaurants instead of food stalls. What begins as a way to pay for their education can turn into a cycle, as the appeal of fast money and luxury is hard to given up.

Still, most students view work in sex entertainment as a temporary way to finance their lives during their studies, often paired with a general curiosity to explore the industry. Many young women I encountered during my visits first came into contact with sex entertainment through social media or word of mouth. *Yim* (Thai: ยิ้ม; meaning "Smile") explained,

> *"I saw a friend on Facebook posting pictures of nice drinks at a bar, lots of dancing, and handsome foreigners (laughter). It looks like fun; I want to try it too. Throw a party every day and make some money."*
> (Yim, personal conversation, March 2025)

However, most university students preferred to work in massage parlors instead of bars. This option allows them to maintain the appearance of doing something respectable or "serious," while also supplementing their income through "special"[10] services.

Money was and still is the driving force for women to seek work in sex entertainment. The minimum wage in Chiang Mai province is currently 340 Baht (Ministry of Labor, 2025), which is hardly enough to support a family, as *Tao* (Thai: เต่า; meaning "Turtle"), described:

> *"I earned 12,000 Baht a month working in a factory. It was tough work. I had to work there every day. I had two days off per month. The work was incredibly hard. I started at 8:30 in the morning and finished around 8:30 or 9:00 in the evening. It was a very long day, and the money was not enough*."
> (Tao, interview, August 2022)

Those with more education could access better positions, earning up to 25,000 - 30,000 Baht. Yet, even that was not enough to support their families and children. *Suea* (Thai: เสือ; meaning "Tiger"), a 33-year-old bar lady with a BA, explained:

> *"I worked in a big factory [in Bangkok]. My job is in "QA and QC[11]," and I am responsible for checking all the products. The factory operates 24 hours a day, so they can contact you at any time to come and work. I worked six days a week; sometimes with overtime. My salary was around 25,000 Baht, not quite 30. But in Bangkok,*

[9] This concept does not exist in the English language. The term *kreng* (Thai: เกรง) can be translated as "fear, dread, or being in awe," while *jai* (Thai: ใจ) refers to the "mind, heart, or spirit." Together, *krengjai* literally means "awe of heart." This concept is deeply embedded in Thai culture and reflects how Thai society operates. It embodies being considerate and respectful while also expressing a reluctance to disturb, impose upon, or offend others.
[10] Special services here mean, sexual services common in massage parlors, such as "happy endings."
[11] Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Control (QC)

everything is so expensive: rent and food are really expensive. People can't stay there and work for a long time; they get sick of the work."
(Suea, interview, July 2022)

Therefore, working in sex entertainment provides women with an opportunity to break free from these economic constraints. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many women were able to earn between 50,000 and 70,000 Baht a month, as several women shared with me. This is especially true when women found "regular customers" who supported them beyond the sex entertainment venue.

Changing Norms

My study showed that many women entered sex entertainment with the hope of finding a long-term partner who could provide financial support, in line with traditional gender expectations. Nevertheless, exposure to different worldviews and experiences within this industry often led them to reevaluate these roles.

As women encountered men from different cultures and backgrounds and became intimate with them, their perceptions of gender, sexuality, and relationships began to shift. Many adopt a more egalitarian outlook, seeing themselves as equal partners rather than submissive figures in a patriarchal system. This change was particularly evident in their attitudes toward sexuality, where they embraced more sexual independence. (Lemberger, 2023)

This shift also affected communication within families, which are themselves evolving, with increased openness about sex, gender, and personal autonomy. Women often take on the responsibility of educating their children, especially daughters, about sexual health, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies. These are topics that Thai schools often overlook in their sex education classes. *Ploy* explained:

"We're women who know what can happen. We know about getting sick and how to get pregnant easily. I don't want my daughters to be like that. I teach them to use condoms. They can ask me anything. I will tell them."
(Ploy, personal conversation, March 2025)

This open dialogue marks a notable cultural shift from past generations' silence on such topics.

Additionally, the notion of *bun khun*, obligations towards parents, is also evolving. Many participants who felt pressured to support their parents financially do not wish their children to bear the same burden. Instead, they strive to provide their children with opportunities for higher education, enabling them to become self-sufficient.

These women also aspire to achieve independence in old age. They hope to reduce reliance on their children, either by marrying wealthy foreign men or by saving enough money from their work in the sex entertainment industry.

The role of Aing Foreign Men

Although many women aspire to marry or at least partner with foreign men, the reality is more complicated.

Not all foreign men are willing to marry again. All the men in my study had previous marriages with women from their cultural and national backgrounds. Many raised their children in "traditional" Western families, where the husband was the primary financial provider. The wife managed the household, cared for the children, and possibly contributed financially through part-time work. The separation from their wives and often from their children, as many lost contact with them after divorcing their mothers, left these men hesitant to enter new relationships or remarry.

The most common relationship constellation I encountered in sex entertainment venues was that of being a "sugar daddy" *pho namtan* (Thai: พ่อน้ำตาล), as well as that of a "regular customer" or a "friend" *phuean* (Thai: เพื่อน)[12].

For instance, Michel, an 82-year-old retiree living primarily in Chiang Mai, engages in multiple relationships with women from the "Loi Kroh Road" area. However, sexual encounters play a secondary, if not minor, role. He said:

> *"I'm an old man already. Sex is too much pressure [to perform]. I just love being with beautiful women here in the bars."*
> (Michel, interview, April 2025)

He enjoys visiting various bars, chatting with the women, and generously offering drinks or tips. Over time, he maintained several platonic and sexual relationships, financially supporting the women with up to 20,000 Baht per month. The amounts varied, depending on the duration and closeness of the relationship. He acted as a *pho namtan* in exchange for intimacy and companionship. But he was also a loyal *phuean* to many women, offering birthday gifts, chocolate, and regular tips. In return, women cooked for him, helped him set up his mobile phone, or brought small gifts from their hometowns.

Another example is Klaus, a 72-year-old who is fully retired in Chiang Mai. He enjoys visiting the bars in the area regularly, sometimes more, sometimes less. He still engages in sexual relationships, though his preference is for longer, more intimate connections; typically one woman at a time for several months or up to two years. He admitted:

> *"I like the variety, but I don't really like one-night stands. I want to get to know a woman, learn what she likes, and she will also learn what I like. It is more satisfying."*
> (Klaus, personal conversation, January 2025)

After these relationships end, Klaus usually remains in contact with the women and offers financial support on a situational basis:

> *"I am still very fond of most of the women I was with [sexually]. But after a while, it's over for me. As I said, I like the variety. But I'm still in contact with many of my ex-girlfriends, if you can call them that. I still like them a lot and visit them in their bars or massage parlors. If they have financial problems, I like to help them. Or sometimes they just want to talk when they have problems. I like that, too*."
> (Klaus, personal conversation, January 2025)

Women often describe men like Michel and Klaus as *khon jaidi* (Thai: คนใจดี), which means "a good person." While generosity and financial support are important, these men also show politeness, good manners, and a respectful attitude toward all women working in the venues. They are particularly valued for their reliability in "emergency" situations, such as paying for broken appliances or unexpected bills.

This "on-demand support" is especially crucial for women financing their children's education. School uniforms, supplies, transportation, and desks or devices for online learning often require extra money. Michel noted:

> *"It's truly nice; here you can help a lot with very little money. It feels good to see everyone happy.*"
> (Michel, interview, April 2025)

[12] The "sugar daddy" arrangements often involve monthly 'salaries', whereas the 'regular customers' often pay for each 'service. Both these relationships often involve sexual services, whereas 'friends' are mostly platonic and with men who were previously customers with sexual services.

Women, in return, gladly share pictures of their children with their 'gifts', providing a sense of involvement and appreciation.

Support also extends to women who are students themselves. Both Michel and Klaus helped young women with tuition, laptops, rent, and living costs during their bachelor's studies. Having a *pho namtam*, "regular customer," or *phuean* lightens the burden. Especially when women must attend university in the morning and work at night. A steady income makes a big difference during exam periods and in general.

Another relationship type, I witnessed, though less common, was marriage between aging foreign men and women working in sex entertainment. These often began during a holiday or an occasional trip to Chiang Mai. Edward, for instance, met his girlfriend *Tao* in a bar in "Loi Kroh Road" during a Southeast Asia trip, shortly after separating from his long-time wife:

> *"The last thing on my mind was getting to know a lady here in Thailand, but well, then I met Tao, and everything changed*."
> (Edward, personal conversation, January 2025)

Tao had worked in sex entertainment for over ten years. She has a 9-year-old son from a previous relationship. After Edward entered the picture, her financial burden eased significantly. She now owns a bar and no longer needs to go with customers:

> *"Now I can sleep well at night. I don't have a headache anymore because I think too much: where will I get money for school, or food, or rent? Now I am just happy and "feel comfortable" sabai sabai (Thai: สบาย ๆ).*"
> (Tao, personal conversation, February 2025)

Edward pays all living expenses and quickly moved in after his holiday. He became a stepfather to her son, often referred to as "foreigner's (step) child," *luk tit khong farang* (Thai: ลูกติดของฝรั่ง), taking over financial support and fatherly guidance towards his upbringing and schooling:

> *"In [his home country], I spend a lot on my children's education. But there was never a "thank you" or anything. Here, it's so different. Here, they're all so grateful. It's great. It makes me feel great."*

Edward added:

> *"When my children were young, I had to take on several jobs to afford our lifestyle. My children had everything: horses, expensive hobbies, summer holidays, and an excellent higher education. However, due to my job, I was away from home frequently. I missed a lot of time with them."*
> (Edward, personal conversation, January 2025)

Helmut, 72, is another example. He spends the European winters in Thailand and the rest of the year in his home country. He met his now wife *Mot* (Thai: มด; meaning "Ant") on "Loi Kroh Road" about ten years ago. They stayed in touch through messaging apps and met regularly in Chiang Mai during his "Men-only getaways." Over time, Helmut supported her and her two children financially, allowing both to graduate from university and find jobs in Bangkok. He and *Mot* married two years ago and now split their time between Europe and Thailand. *Mot* plans to become a citizen of Helmut's country, ensuring financial security after his death.

Among married women, foreign citizenship is often seen as a goal, not only for themselves but also for their children. *Suea,* for example, relocated to a Commonwealth country and plans to bring her son later, *Khek* (Thai: เค้ก; meaning "Cake"), who married a Western foreigner, told me:

> *"Once my son is old enough, I will bring him to [my husband's country] and he can finish his school there. I already have citizenship because I've lived here longer, which*

makes it easier for him to get it as well. If he obtains citizenship, I will immediately return to Thailand (laughter). I did everything for him, and now my son can take care of everything himself."

When asked what her husband would do if she moved back, she laughed:

"He can also take care of himself. Or he can come with me. Up to him."
(Khek, personal conversation, November 2024)

Her response may have been lighthearted, but it also touched on a deeper theme that ran throughout my fieldwork: the idea of "taking care." The Thai concept of *dulae* surfaced repeatedly, not just in financial or emotional terms, but in daily gestures of care that defined these relationships. Women often described their partners with pride:

"*He's a good man. He takes good care of me.*"
(Fieldnotes, March 2025)

At the same time, many aging foreign men appreciated being cared for in return. Small routines, such as meals made "not spicy" *mai phet* (Thai: ไม่เผ็ด), laundry done without asking, and thoughtful companionship, a steady rhythm of domestic life shaped around their needs, evoked a sense of familiarity and comfort. Having someone who would be there at the end of the day, who paid attention, and who does not leave when health, looks, energy, or even health begins to fade. As Helmut put it:

"My previous wife wouldn't have done what Mot does for me. She even lays my clothes on the bed, so I know what to wear. I never ask for this, but she does it. Maybe she doesn't like what I'm wearing (laughter). She takes really good care of me."
(Helmut, interview, March 2025)

Another retiree shared about his girlfriend:

"I have difficulties with my knees. She told me, 'Don't worry, I'll be with you when you're old. Even if you can't walk, I'll push your wheelchair.' No one ever said that to me before."
(Tom, personal conversation, April 2025)

For many, this kind of care stood in contrast to what they felt had been lost in their home countries. Relationships are shaped by the pressures of dual-income households, fast-paced work cultures, and growing emotional distance within families. Some spoke of marriages that had quietly unraveled over time, where intimacy gave way to routine, and mutual care was replaced by individual survival. In Thailand, *dulae* meant more than being helped with everyday tasks. It offered emotional closeness, recognition, and a sense of being needed in later life.

However, not all men wanted a fixed Thai partner. While a live-in girlfriend or wife offered consistent care and companionship, it also came with expectations, obligations, and, for some, a sense of lost freedom. Several men spoke about enjoying care but disliking the feeling of being managed or financially tied down.

For those seeking flexibility, the venues along "Loi Kroh Road" offered an alternative form of intimacy. Here, men could visit for a "happy massage," share drinks at a bar, or spend the evening with a young woman, without long-term commitments. Many noted that such ease and openness were impossible in their home countries. As Klaus put it:

"Flirting with young women in a bar in [homecountry] wouldn't be possible. The women would look at me like I was a creepy old man. It wouldn't work. And I wouldn't do it. It's not appropriate. Here in Chiang Mai, on Loi Kroh Road, it is okay. It's women's daily work."
(Klaus, interview, April 2025)

These everyday encounters on “Loi Kroh Road” and the relationships formed within highlight how aging foreign men actively reshape their masculinity and sense of belonging in a transnational context. This sets the stage for a broader discussion on how intimacy, care, and education intersect with social transformation in Thailand.

Transformation and (Re-) Construction?

While rooted in the everyday lives of aging foreign men in Chiang Mai, these personal arrangements highlight deeper changes in gender roles and family expectations. They invite closer examination of how such relationships shape care, education, and intergenerational responsibilities in modern Thailand.

The increasing number of educated women in Thailand presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, these women represent a newly empowered class that is reshaping society and challenging traditional gender roles. On the other hand, fewer women are having children, raising concerns about a declining working-age population and the need for elder care.

In this context, the *mia farang* phenomenon plays a key role. Aging Western men, often retired and single, form relationships with Thai women involved in sex entertainment through various arrangements, such as marriage, or *pho namtan,* or “regular customer” relationships. These men typically hold traditional ideas about gender, care, and provision, shaped by their backgrounds, where male breadwinning was the norm. While they may initially come to Thailand for (sexual) companionship, many end up supporting not only their Thai partners but also extended family members, including children from previous relationships.

These aging foreign men in Thailand are no longer defined by professional success or youthful virility. They evolve through the care they receive and the relationships they form, in which they feel valued and desired. At the same time, the financial support they provide sustains this dynamic. It allows them to reclaim a traditional sense of masculinity rooted in the role of the provider.

This also extends beyond romantic or sexual involvement. Many men take on responsibilities for women’s children, contributing to their upbringing and education. By adopting a paternal role, they further reinforce their masculinity, not just as providers but also as protectors and mentors. Even when not directly involved with the children, Thailand offers a space to challenge the invisibility they experience in their home countries and construct a new, yet familiar, version of manhood.

These relationships give aging men a renewed sense of purpose and a form of masculinity often lost with age. In Thailand, they can reconstruct their masculine identities alongside Thai partners and families. Their expectations often blend their own cultural values with what they perceive as traditional Thai norms. In many cases, older foreign men find common ground with rural Thai women, whose views of gender roles and family life resonate with their own.

At the same time, these men’s ability to provide financially sets them apart. Many have stable pensions or savings, allowing them to support women and their children in ways that local men often cannot. Their Western lifestyles, shaped by travel, life experience, and a sense of personal freedom, add another layer to this contrast. For the women they partner with, this combination often offers both security and opportunity. It also stands in contrast with their experience with Thai men, many of whom have abandoned them and their children. In this sense, foreign men may appear to embody both Western ideals and Thai values around responsibility, provision, and care.

The *mia farang* phenomenon has already transformed parts of Northeastern Thailand and is now spreading to urban areas. As more rural women gain access to education, often funded by foreign partners, Thai society may witness the emergence of a new, educated rural class. While rooted in economic support, this shift also challenges traditional gender norms, empowering women to redefine their roles within families and society.

However, the rise of women's higher education also posed a political challenge. More women, including those from lower- to lower-middle-class backgrounds and even those with ties to sex entertainment, are beginning to assert their rights and challenge patriarchal norms. This transformation is not only tied to economic and educational advancements but also disrupts traditional gender roles that have long shaped women's positions within families and society.

Thai society may undergo a broader transformation as women embrace more empowered roles within families and the workforce. Their increasing participation in the labor market enhances household incomes and fosters a culture of collaboration and shared responsibilities. This evolution presents new prospects for gender equality and challenges entrenched patriarchal norms, as women demand equal rights in both education and employment.

In this context, the pursuit of higher education becomes a crucial vehicle for social change. It enables women to redefine their identities and roles, contributing to the development of a more equitable society.

Yet, this also raises important questions about Thailand's aging society. As traditional caregiving expectations weaken, the country may face growing challenges in supporting its elderly population. One significant shift lies in how women now view their roles in relation to their parents and children. As women become more educated and empowered, many move away from the traditional concept of *bun khun.* They no longer expect their children to repay them for their care and sacrifice, as previous generations did. Instead, they strive to give their children better opportunities free from the burden of familial obligation.

This marks a significant departure from the cultural expectations that have long defined Thai family life. Still, systemic barriers remain. Public institutions are slow to adopt modern norms, and wage gaps persist despite rising education levels. Poverty and debt, especially in the North and Northeast, continue to force many families to prioritize short-term income over long-term education. Loans taken to fund schooling often create long-term financial strain for years to come.

Yet, there is hope. Daughters of women in sex entertainment could play a vital role in reshaping Thailand's future. Higher education can empower without erasing cultural values. Rather than imposing a Western model of family, it can strengthen Thailand's own tradition of kinship and care, creating a future that balances equity with cultural integrity.

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6.2 Abstracts

6.2.1 Lan Na Buddhist Culture between National Borders

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Lan Na was not just the eight provinces of today's Northern Thailand. It was a loosely connected cultural network that comprised several, more or less independent Tai mueang, principalities, or city-states. It also includes Chiang Tung in Myanmar and Chiang Rung in Sipsong Panna, Yunnan, China, and a part of northwestern Laos. For long, the Lan Na cultural area has been divided by national borders.

This paper questions what happens when a traditional religious culture becomes divided by national borders. A long and turbulent history, with wars, forced relocations, and hardships, separated Chiang Tung and Sipsong Panna from the rest of Lan Na. This became even more permanent during the colonial times when Chiang Tung became part of Burma, Sipsong Panna became a part of China, and the rest of Lan Na was incorporated with Siam/Thailand. This paper will discuss the transformation of Lan Na Buddhist culture, with special focus on Chiang Tung, Myanmar.

Officially, all monks in Chiang Tung belong to two of the nine recognized monastic orders of Myanmar. In practice, however, the Buddhist tradition in Chiang Tung is, more or less, independent and without official government control and can shortly be described as a decentralized sangha built on seniority with a local Buddhist calendar, and Buddhist literature and rituals in Pali and the local Khuen language written in the Tham script.

6.2.2 “Lanna Buddhism”: A Reappraisal

Roger Casas

Ph.D., independent researcher

It is believed that Buddhist scriptures first arrived in Sipsong Panna, in present-day Yunnan province (China), carried by monks from Chiang Mai, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries AD. Together with populations in what are today northern Thailand, Shan State in Myanmar, and northern Laos, the Tai Lue of Sipsong Panna became then part of “Lanna” or “Yuan” Buddhism, or, more accurately, of what scholar Akiko Iijima named the “cultural region of the Tham script manuscripts”, a somehow idiosyncratic practice whose nature and peculiarities remain arguably underexplored by specialists. Unlike that of northern Thailand, and due to a diverse historical trajectory, until recently Buddhism in Sipsong Panna has remained relatively (besides the violence suffered during the Maoist period) untouched by state action and socioeconomic modernization, and therefore “unreformed” and with a high degree of local autonomy. Despite currently going through a period of intense state intervention and of rapid social and cultural change, Buddhist practice in this region of southern China still retains some of the features supposedly characterizing “Lanna Buddhism”, the historically dominant tradition in the region.

This presentation offers a look at old “Lanna Buddhism” and its transformations under the centralizing force of the Thai nation-state, through a historical and ethnographic comparison between Buddhism in Sipsong Panna and northern Thailand. Beyond the conventional emphasis on doctrinal or textual commonalities, the resulting picture is one of divergent disciplinary practices and relations between religious specialists and the communities they belong to. The comparison between Sipsong Panna and “Lanna” also provides insights into the role that religion plays in nation-building, a role that explains apparent inter-regional differences in religious practice today.

6.2.3 The Case Study of Promoting Culinary Tourism in Chiang Mai in Forms of Local Northern Thai Food Commodities for Supporting Local Traditional Heritage Cuisine and Tourism Sustainability

Pornpin Matungka

Mahidol University

In this conference, I will present the case study of promoting culinary tourism in Chiang Mai, mainly in response to the groups of local northern Thai restaurants in Chiang Mai and the groups of local tourism organizations. Local northern Thai foods are represented for promoting culinary tourism and authenticity of local northern Thai culture and folkways, in terms of food commodities that can be seen in forms of local northern Thai restaurants and local food products in tourism activities. Local Northern Thai restaurants not only represent culinary culture through food dishes but also in other relevant visuals symbolizing Lanna cultural heritage, such as portraits, utensils, furniture, language usage, etc. As local tourism organizations in Chiang Mai mostly represent northern Thai culinary culture by setting food fairs as annual or occasional events to support tourists and organizing foodie tours as another set of platforms to see the folkways of Chiang Mai natives concerning Lanna culinary heritage and traditional food reproductions.

6.2.4 Urban taste: Khao soi and being "khon muang" in northern Thailand, past, present, future

Jeffrey Moynihan

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Khao soi has become the most popular and widely known culinary symbol of Chiang Mai and the North, but its history and origins are unclear and poorly understood. In this paper, I investigate, through the living memories of people involved in making and eating khao soi and in existing historical and cultural archives, how khao soi has been socially and politically constructed over time, with a specific focus on the context of Chiang Mai and northern Thailand. I argue that khao soi and the very "taste" for eating khao soi reflect the development of a new urban identity tied to performing modernity and showing status in Chiang Mai's past, and an important commodity and marker of development under the tourism-dependent economy of the North today. Utilizing the analysis of Professor Apiwat Ratanawaraha, I look at how khao soi is an important marker of and part of Thai society's process of becoming "totally urban," independent of geographical location, driven by connectivity, the transformative economic power of tourism, and new, urbanized patterns of trade and consumption.

6.2.5 A (Waste) Crisis in Ecotourism? Understanding perceptions and power in Maekampong Village, Thailand

Noah Tanigawa

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Thailand, undoubtedly one of the most popular tourist destinations in Southeast Asia, last saw almost 40 million international arrivals in 2019, up from 14 million ten years prior. While the number decreased dramatically as Thailand shut its borders to prevent the domestic spread of the virus, one can now see that the streets of Bangkok and Chiang Mai are slowly being filled with foreign visitors again. One form of tourism that has become popular in recent years is eco-tourism, with elephant parks, mountains, and indigenous villages luring a new demographic of tourists.

This paper aims to look at the social dimensions of waste crises in ecotourism enterprises. Taking the case of Maekampong Village in Northern Thailand, a model ecotourism destination popular among both domestic and international tourists, the paper demonstrates how differing perceptions of ecotourism practices and intra-village power imbalances ultimately lead to the emergence of a waste management crisis. Based on interviews with different stakeholders in the village's tourism economy, it offers a deeper insight into the social dynamics and consequences that this form of tourism can cause in smaller communities.

6.2.6 Waste Reclaiming as an Act of Autonomy: Street Waste Reclaimers in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Alejandro Huete

Chiang Mai University

Around the world, informal waste reclaimers head out into the streets in search of recyclables to earn an income and support their livelihood. They're generally viewed as some of the most precarious workers, being the most exploited group within the global recycling chain, and having no work safety standards, political representation, or social welfare. Until relatively recently, the informal recycling sector has been ignored in Thailand's national policy, while in the media, the practice of waste reclaiming is portrayed as an excellent way for low-income groups to earn a supplementary income, as well as contribute towards environmental sustainability and reducing government spending on waste management. Nevertheless, in general, waste reclaiming continues to be an occupation that faces extreme exploitation and marginalisation, in which the agency of the waste reclaimers themselves is generally unacknowledged. This work will attempt to fill in this gap, as not only do waste reclaimers acknowledge their economic exploitation and marginalisation, but they have developed embryonic forms of counter-hegemonies which emphasize their autonomy from formalized working conditions. Ultimately, these values align with Kathleen Millar's conception of 'forms of living,' referring to both their means of livelihood, as well as to their specific way of inhabiting the world.

6.2.7 Hmong Market in Kad Luang: Weaving Craft Economy and Ethnic Visibility in Contemporary Lanna

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This study seeks to understand how Hmong entrepreneurs established their businesses in Kad Luang, Chiang Mai's historic market, and how they contributed to the development of Northern Thailand's textile craft economy. It also examines whether and how their commercial presence in this space has led to their recognition as part of contemporary Lanna society. The findings reveal that after nearly five decades of trading Hmong textile crafts in Kad Luang, the largest local. This study seeks to understand how Hmong entrepreneurs established their businesses in Kad Luang, Chiang Mai's historic market, and how they contributed to the development of Northern Thailand's textile craft economy. It also examines whether and how their commercial presence in this space has led to their recognition as part of contemporary Lanna society. The findings reveal that after nearly five decades of trading Hmong textile crafts in Kad Luang, the largest local marketplace in Northern Thailand, Hmong entrepreneurs have successfully made their presence visible through the name "Hmong Market." Furthermore, the mural commemorating the 100th anniversary of Kad Luang depicts a Hmong woman holding her child, standing among hundreds of people of various social statuses and ethnicities, in front of the market's modern commercial buildings. Additionally, the market map now designates their trading area as "Hmong Lane." During the recent Chinatown Festival, Hmong identity was also made visible to the public alongside other ethnic groups contributing to contemporary Lanna. Furthermore, the unique Hmong textiles reinforce their ethnic identity in the public sphere. The presence of the Hmong in the marketplace, along with their economic activities and distinctive products, represents their ongoing effort to affirm their identity as an integral part of contemporary Lanna—a dominant cultural force in Northern Thailand—beyond simply making a living. This study is based on two primary sources: written materials, including books, news articles, documents, posters, and photographs, as well as fieldwork conducted occasionally between 2016 and 2022.

6.2.8 Burmese in Lanna Land: Mapping Cultural Identities in Chiang Mai's Urban Fabric

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Burmese culture integration into the historic Lanna Kingdom's capital, Chiang Mai, has contributed to the intricate cultural tapestry that is shaped through socio-economic interactions, historical legacies, and migration. This article investigates how Burmese communities participated and relocated in the urban space of Chiang Mai after the coup of Myanmar, specifically focusing on religious spaces, markets, culinary, and art traditions. The research focus is on legal businesses and Buddhist temples and their role in maintaining the culture while facing the city's changes. Also, the research looks at how Lanna's identity is operated in separatism and romanticism from the central Thai culture regarding accommodating or resisting Burmese culture. The ethnographic research showed, and the history told, that there is a complex relationship between the Lanna and Burmese communities, where each has a fluid cultural identity formed through the borders of Chiang Mai. The paper presents the everyday life and spatial practices of the Lanna and Burmese in the city, thus underscoring the dynamics of identity alteration and construction in a rapidly transforming city. Highlighting the complex interactions of merging Lanna and Burmese heritages suggests that Chiang Mai is not merely an enclave of transnational identity but a field of multi-dimensional negotiation of transcendent culture embedded within the notion of identity and belonging.

7. Subcommittee on Academic Activities

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