

## APPLYING MYTHICAL BELIEF TO PRODUCT MARKETING IN THAILAND

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the cultural significance of the Phaya Luang, a mythical creature worshipped by the Tai Lue people in Thailand, aiming to harness these beliefs to innovate and market new cultural products for heritage tourism. Employing qualitative methods, including document analysis, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and workshops, this research investigates the ancestral transmission of Phaya Luang beliefs through oral literature. It reveals the potential for these beliefs to inspire the creation of culturally relevant products, specifically satchel bags and yarn lanterns adorned with Phaya Luang motifs. These products cater to the community's needs, attract tourists and appeal to younger generations through contemporary design. The integration of traditional beliefs preserves cultural heritage and imbues the items with new meanings, particularly the promise of prosperity associated with Phaya Luang. This strategic use of traditional motifs in product development offers insights into effective heritage marketing, significantly enhancing both the cultural and economic value of community products and presenting a

successful model for the revitalisation of traditional beliefs in contemporary tourism and product design.

KEYWORDS: creative folklore • cultural product design • Phaya Luang • Tai Lue • tourism marketing

## INTRODUCTION

In modern Chiang Mai Province in Thailand, the most prominent examples of ethnic cultural preservation and development are the Tai Lue communities in the villages of Ban Luang Nuea and Ban Luang Tai in Doi Saket District. The Tai Lue are a Tai-speaking ethnic group originally from Sibsongpanna in southern China, known for their distinctive weaving, wooden architecture, and Buddhist traditions. Both Ban Luang Nuea and Ban Luang Tai communities have very similar foundations, having once been a single settlement, however their division by a national highway in the late 1980s led to the independent evolution of their distinctive cultural identities and emergence as tourist destinations. These communities have long been known for traditional hand-woven cotton fabrics and hosting various cultural activities that attract tourists from across the nation. Ban Luang Tai was the pioneer, but over the past decade, Ban Luang Nuea developed its own place in the market, establishing education hubs like the Tai Lue Learning Center to promote cultural knowledge. Historical landmarks and the presence of cultural entrepreneurs have also spurred rapid development. However, the Covid-19 pandemic severely impacted the local economy, and this has been exacerbated by traditional items that lacked innovative adaptation, leading to diminished tourist interest, unsold products, and decreased community income.

In response, researchers and community members collaborated to rejuvenate Tai Lue cultural products from Ban Luang Nuea, drawing inspiration from the mythical Phaya Luang (a legendary mythical creature worshipped by the Tai Lue people) to introduce innovation and modern appeal to their creations. The local belief in Phaya Luang can be traced back to the dragon lore of Chinese culture, and especially the Tai Lue inhabitants of the Sibsongpanna region. Upon settling in the Lanna region in Thailand, they shared the veneration of Phaya Luang with other Tai ethnic groups within Lanna, enriching the area's cultural mosaic (Simking 2017: 8). Intriguingly, the name Ban Luang Nuea directly incorporates Luang, underscoring a collective endeavour to embody this belief. While some community products have been inspired by the mythological serpent, the full potential of Phaya Luang as a creative muse remains untapped. The variation in complexity and detail among artists' renditions of Phaya Luang has led to designs that, while innovative, serve primarily as unique prototypes that are challenging to replicate on a broader scale. Consequently, these designs have struggled to effectively communicate broader social meanings, limiting their effect and the ability to use Phaya Luang's rich symbolism to foster a deeper connection with the community's cultural identity and heritage.

This initiative therefore aimed to enhance the aesthetic appeal of local products and imbue them with new meanings, thereby ensuring their cultural and conceptual relevance in the contemporary market. The approach sought to reinvigorate community income through a blend of tradition and innovation, highlighting the adaptive resil-

ience of the Tai Lue people. The research project explicitly aims to study the application of belief in Phaya Luang and its use in adding value to the community's cultural products, answering the following research question: How can the Tai Lue people's belief in Phaya Luang be applied to co-create new value and meaning in community cultural products for heritage tourism? This application of belief in new forms of presentation, new content, with new purposes is part of the concept of *creative belief*, a new idea in the field of belief anthropology.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Historical Background*

Chiang Mai Province, renowned for its rich multicultural tapestry, has been a melting pot of diverse ethnic groups since its establishment in 1296 by Phaya Mangrai (King Mangrai the Great, founder and first king of the Lanna Kingdom). Phaya Mangrai not only founded the city of Chiang Mai but also unified numerous smaller and larger entities into the Lanna Kingdom (1292–1899, at its height covering much of northern Thailand and parts of Laos and eastern Myanmar). The Tai Yuan people, a term commonly used to describe the dominant ethno-cultural group in the mountain valleys of north-central mainland Southeast Asia, constitute the majority of the region's population, having maintained historical and cultural ties with other Tai ethnic groups since the inception of Mangrai's dynasty (O'Connor 2000: 35–36; Easum 2023: 33–34). Nonetheless, Phaya Mangrai, whose mother was of Tai Lue ethnicity, had significant connections with the Tai Lue people (Sethakul 2000: 319–321). These connections facilitated the migration of the Tai Lue ethnic group to the Lanna region, particularly during Mangrai's reign (1259–1317) (Baker 2002: 15–16). However, the most substantial wave of migration occurred in 1774–1775 when the Lanna Kingdom regained independence from Burma, leading to a significant resettlement of people from various northern cities to the Lanna area, underscoring the historical depth of the region's ethnic diversity and cultural integration (Ongsakul 2018: 41; Leepreecha and Jantakad 2020: 4–5).

The Tai Lue have since established their presence across Thailand, predominantly within the northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Phayao, Chiang Rai, Lampang, Lamphun and Nan. Their significant migration is historically noted during periods of forced resettlement known as the era of 'gathering vegetables in a basket, gathering people in cities' between 1782 and 1810 (Nimmanhaeminda 1965; Grabowsky 2001). This period marked a strategic amalgamation of populations from smaller settlements into major urban centres. Nonetheless, certain Tai Lue communities, such as Ban Luang Nuea village, can point to evidence of even earlier settlements. This is illustrated by historical markers such as house pillar inscriptions dating back to 1389, suggesting a more deep-rooted presence in the region (Wyatt 2003: 65).

The Tai Lue people in Ban Luang Nuea community have continued to pass down their culture from generation to generation, with strong emphasis on their spoken language and traditional clothing. However, approximately 30 years ago, local people noted that the members of the community were not very aware of their own culture and often felt embarrassed to speak the Tai Lue language in public. Consequently, the

‘Preserving the Tai Lue Legend’ event was organised, which evolved into ‘Preserving the Tai Lue Legend Worldwide’ in Phayao Province, supported by local politicians at the time. This sparked interest in research on the ancestors, culture and history of the Tai Lue people in the community. This in turn led to increased confidence in preserving and strengthening Tai Lue cultural arts, culminating in the establishment of the Tai Lue Learning Center (Phrasa Buamali, personal communication, April 20, 2021).

### *Creative Folklore*

The concept of creative folklore in anthropology has evolved to encompass the dynamic adaptation of existing folklore to contemporary societal contexts, including tourism and the creative economy. This adaptation involves the innovative repurposing of folklore to create and reinterpret meanings within new social frameworks. Simon Bronner’s (2016: 17) analysis highlights several critical junctures in the development of a folklore discipline, notably challenges in the 1960s of integrating social practices and written artefacts with the notion of tradition and continuous production. Bronner (2021: 280–282) elucidates the pivotal role of the relationship between artefacts and their user groups, as identified by Charlotte Sophia Burne (1914), in defining folklore. This perspective shifts the focus from merely examining rituals and their products to understanding folklore as a relationship of learning, emphasising the transmission of tacit and informal knowledge that facilitates community participation. This practice-centred definition retains a keen consideration of context, thereby allowing folklore to illuminate the intricate relationship between iterative actions and the individuals generating these actions through the transmission and renegotiation of knowledge. Incorporating this into the broader understanding of creative folklore reveals how past phenomena have manifested through presentation in new forms, with new content and for new purposes (Na Thalang 2016: 121). This approach underscores the necessity of critically engaging with both ‘folk’ and ‘lore’ as mutually constitutive elements that delineate boundaries of membership and knowledge. It encourages a deeper examination of the community of knowledge (re)producers, their inventive practices in knowledge production, and the concept of knowledge transfer as a relational dynamic between folk and lore. Therefore, creative folklore is not just about the adaptation of folklore into new contexts but also about understanding these adaptations as part of a continuous process of cultural negotiation and meaning-making that is co-constructed by the community and its traditions (Starnes 2021: 229).

Most of the folklore data that appear in Thai scholarship are tales derived from various local stories that coexist with wider spiritual beliefs. For instance, the use of spirits in decorations for floats in a local Buddhist folk festival in Phu Ruea District, Loei Province, has been reinterpreted to symbolise protection from harm, wealth, good fortune, and prosperity (Phuangmanee et al. 2022: 79). Beliefs influence concepts, lifestyles and the way of life of people in a society (Cananurak 2007: 37). While some folklore scholars categorise belief as a type of mixed folklore data (Atthamesao 1992: 158), beliefs are related to customs and rituals that are practiced continuously in society. The belief in Phaya Luang of the Tai Lue community in Ban Luang Nuea village has also influenced the community’s way of life, apparent in the form of stories, and various forms of art,

especially when the community transformed into a cultural tourism community in the first two decades of the 21st century. This belief has been used as a distinct cultural identity, in addition to clothing, food and language. Using various types of folklore to create value as cultural capital involves perpetuating folklore in a new context in Thai society, reinventing, reproducing, adapting, extending and reinterpreting its meanings to create added value, or forming a local identity (Na Thalang 2016: 121). This concept of creative folklore is thus an apt way to frame the application of Phaya Luang belief in Ban Luang Nuea and enable the creation of new values and meanings when designing community products.

### *Marketing Cultural Heritage*

Marketing cultural heritage involves promoting and selling cultural assets to enhance tourism and generate economic benefits for local communities. Since 2001, Thailand has used the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) programme as a national template for community-based product development, training and branding to boost local incomes through tourism (Bejrananda 2023: 2). The initiative was launched in 2001 under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra as a local entrepreneurship stimulus programme. The project was adapted from a similar initiative in Japan that linked a specific locally-created product to a province for marketing and tourism promotion, claiming huge successes in supporting grassroots innovation and market access (Ponark and Ahmad 2025: 60). It has also provided significant impetus to the marketing of a national brand image for Thailand (Sukhabot 2015: 262–264). However, the policy has received some criticism for its top-down and one-size-fits-all approach (Bejrananda 2023: 17). The Phaya Luang product development effort in Ban Luang Nuea in this study can be seen as building on this OTOP legacy by applying cultural narratives to create distinct, place-based goods for heritage tourism, but doing so with the involvement of local communities from the outset. According to Amare Yaekob Chiriko (2020: 13), cultural resources, including traditions, beliefs, arts, and artefacts, can be transformed into tourism products through effective marketing strategies that highlight their uniqueness and appeal to both domestic and international tourists. Evidence-based case studies consistently conclude that tourists recognise cultural branding in local goods and the perceived value of these products is enhanced by cultural motifs (Su 2023: 230). However, the creation process for such items requires a deep understanding of the cultural assets and the ability to present them in a way that is authentic yet accessible to a broader audience (Arcos-Pumarola et al. 2023: 8).

Cultural heritage marketing emphasises the importance of storytelling and experience creation, which Mirna Karzen and Damir Demonja (2020: 664) argue is made resilient and inclusive through innovative approaches and participatory governance. By narrating the history, significance, and values embedded in cultural practices and artifacts, marketers can create compelling narratives that resonate with tourists seeking authentic and meaningful experiences. This approach aligns with Gianna Moscardo's (2020: 6) assertion that storytelling enhances the visitor experience by providing context and meaning, thereby deepening engagement with the destination. The integration of traditional beliefs into product design can preserve cultural identity and add value

by offering unique products that differentiate a destination in the competitive tourism market. B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore (2013: 23) suggest that consumers seek memorable experiences over tangible products. Their 'experience economy' necessitates the integration of storytelling into product design to fulfil this desire. For Venkat Ramaswamy and Kerimcan Ozcan (2018: 201) this is most effectively achieved through collaborative value creation between producers and consumers because it enhances authenticity through the involvement of local people. However, there are cautionary messages in some quarters. Scholars like Eric Cohen (1988: 371) warn that commodifying culture through storytelling can lead to 'staged authenticity', potentially eroding original cultural significance. This concept conflates practices designed to enhance the tourist experience with genuine traditional culture, so that experiences and items misleadingly claim to represent cultural heritage. Dean MacCannell (1973: 602) additionally found that tourist interactions with local communities (and by extension the deliberate creation of cultural products for the tourist market) can result in superficial cultural engagements, highlighting the need for genuine, organic, community-driven storytelling. Thus, a balance between cultural preservation and market demands is essential.

In the context of the Tai Lue community of Ban Luang Nuea, using the Phaya Luang myth presents an opportunity to market cultural heritage effectively, with consideration of these various warnings. The transformation of intangible cultural elements into tangible products adorned with Phaya Luang motifs aligns with the marketing strategies discussed by Chiriko (2020: 13). These products could serve as carriers of cultural narratives, allowing tourists to engage with community heritage on a personal level (Huang and Ghazali 2024: 67–68). Moreover, the adaptation of traditional designs to suit modern aesthetics caters to the evolving preferences of tourists, particularly younger generations who value both authenticity and contemporary style (Buffa 2015: 14042). This approach reflects the concept of cultural commodification, where cultural expressions are packaged and sold while maintaining their core significance (Coşkun 2021: 96). Commodification emerged in the late 20th century, drawing on Karl Marx's (2024 [1867]: 163) concept of commodity fetishism to describe the transformation of cultural expressions into marketable objects (Shepherd 2002: 186). This process often involves the reduction of multifaceted cultural practices into standardised commodities, prioritising profitability over the preservation of community values (Pratum et al. 2022: 3). Consequently, the approach used in the context of this study necessitates finding a balance between preservation and innovation.

Effective marketing of these cultural products requires a strategic blend of promotion, storytelling, and engagement with local people. Utilising digital platforms and social media can amplify the reach of these products, tapping into global markets and attracting tourists interested in cultural experiences. As Chiriko (2020: 13) notes, the success of marketing cultural heritage lies in the ability to create economically viable products that contribute to the preservation and appreciation of cultural identities.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative investigation that emphasises participatory action research (PAR). A PAR approach was adopted to mitigate the aforementioned criticisms directed at



the OTOP projects and to involve community members from the outset of the investigation. Field study was conducted among the Tai Lue community. The researchers identified two groups of informants: 1) a group of three key informants to collect data on the culture, beliefs, customs, and rituals of the people in the Ban Luang Nuea community, selected based on their background knowledge and experience in Tai Lue culture, beliefs and customs; and 2) a group of casual informants for group discussions and two participatory training workshops, with 16 people in one session and 15 people in another. These informants were recruited based on their skills in arts and crafts and their interest in product development. This research study was conducted from February 8, 2022, to February 7, 2023.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the casual informant group to answer questions through group discussions; whereas in-depth interviews allowed to inquire detailed information from key informants. Interviews and group discussions were recorded, alongside written notes and photographs. All respondents gave informed consent for their participation in the research and the use of the data they provided.

The researchers collected data on belief in Phaya Luang from academic documents to complement information gathered in the field. Additionally, focus group meetings were organised to collect data on community needs and potential through participatory processes. The data was analysed by means of typological analysis and analytical induction, and then used to design training workshop activities for interested villagers, focusing on applying belief in Phaya Luang to develop products. The researchers used content analysis to analyse belief in Phaya Luang, applying this when designing cultural products with community artisans.

## RESULTS

### *Belief in Phaya Luang among the Tai Lue*

This section addresses how the Phaya Luang belief is currently understood and transmitted within the Ban Luang Nuea community, laying the groundwork for application in product design. Interviews and focus group discussions in the community revealed that Phaya Luang (also known as Luang) belief originated from Chinese belief in dragons, known as *Long* in Mandarin and *Leng* in Hokkien. In Chinese belief system, dragons symbolise rain and fertility, making them an emblem of the Chinese emperor. This idea spread to nearby countries under Chinese influence, including Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Tibet, the Tai Lue people in Sibsongpanna and the Shan State in modern Myanmar (Simking 2017: 8). Local communities assume that the depiction of Phaya Luang in Lanna art was influenced by the Tai Lue, through Burmese art, during the period of Burmese rule over Lanna (1558–1775). The imagery appears in various forms of art, such as sculpture, wood carvings, plasterwork, and architecture (ibid.; Office of Cultural Promotion 2018).

In the Lanna language, *Luang Lhen Pha* means a serpent playing in the clouds, referring to the natural phenomenon of lightning in cloud clusters without thunder, likened to Phaya Luang swimming in the clouds. In around 2003–2004, the Lai Muang youth group in Chiang Mai Province, a traditional Lanna music and performing arts group,

created a performance titled “Luang Lhen Fha”. The performance combined various percussion instruments with wind instruments to create a lively rhythm, representing Phaya Luang’s movement in the clouds as imagined by the composer. In literature, Phaya Luang appears in various folk tales and writing, such as the story of Xiao Ngao Xiao Luo, a folktale from the Nan region in northern Thailand, or in traditional poetic comparisons of a woman’s beauty to Luang Lhen Fha. It also appears in the “Vessantara Jātaka” (Cowell and Rouse 1907) in the *Matri Kanth* (a canonical collection of stories narrating the Buddha’s past lives), where Phaya Luang patterns are mentioned in the description of one of the main character’s (Queen Matri’s) funeral pyres, and in the Dharmabot Pla Chon sermon, which describes the rainy season with frequent lightning due to Phaya Luang playing in the clouds. (Thai Cultural Encyclopaedia Foundation 1999)

Phaya Luang, in the belief of the Tai Lue and Lanna peoples, combines the characteristics of at least five different animals, a concept known as five elements (*Pancha Roob*) in Thai archaeology. This term often refers to fundamental concepts in various cultural, philosophical, or religious contexts in South and Southeast Asian traditions, which include the five basic elements of the universe (Sukkata 2020). In local art, Luang is closely associated with Naga (legendary serpents) and Makara (legendary sea creatures). Beyond the Lanna cultural area, the belief in Phaya Luang also appears in Laos and Isan (northeastern Thailand). The ancient Lao language refers to the Naga as Luang, and it appears in Isan literature, such as in the Sin Sai epic where the Naga maiden is called Nang Luang (Bamrungphak 2014: 83). Across the border in Myanmar, the closest equivalent to the Tai Lue Phaya Luang is the Pyinsarupa (a chimeric animal from Burmese mythology), which is commonly featured in traditional Burmese *hsaing waing* orchestras (traditional folk music ensembles) and is also the primary logo of Myanmar Airways International.

According to our fieldwork, belief in Phaya Luang has been passed down as part of a story in which Phaya Luang is an auspicious creature, a bringer of good fortune. If Phaya Luang flies in the sky, it will bring timely rain; if it is in the river, abundant water is assured. Phaya Luang is considered a sacred creature connecting humans to heaven, so those who do good deeds may see it. The appearance of Phaya Luang includes characteristics of more than five animals. Phrasa Buamali, the founder of the Tai Lue Learning Center composed the following poem about Phaya Luang:

The face like a buffalo, tusks and trunk like an elephant,  
Antlers majestic like a deer, gazing around.  
The body long like Naga and snakes, scales like a fish,  
Wings splendid like a swan, moving gracefully.  
Feet striding like a hawk soaring in the sky,  
Those who see this are blessed,  
Luang Lhen Fha, as told in the city of Luang.  
(Phrasa Buamali, personal communication, 2022)

In the poem, Phaya Luang is described as having characteristics of eight different animals. Each person’s imagination of Phaya Luang differs. In one cultural activity of the Ban Luang Nuea community’s craftsmen, a wooden doll of Phaya Luang was created, serving as a tangible prototype for the community’s interpretation of the figure.



Building on this foundational understanding of local beliefs, local artisans translate Phaya Luang symbolism into tangible products. When the community aimed to modernise its cultural products while maintaining its cultural identity, they used Phaya Luang belief to design two types of product: a shoulder bag and a thread lampshade. Participants in group meetings and workshops jointly analysed various aspects of the Phaya Luang belief, such as its appearance, meaning, the appropriateness of using the figure in different contexts, the villagers' potential to design and produce cultural products, and their desire to develop products. The analysed data were then used to design products using the concept of creative folklore as a framework. A new design for the Phaya Luang was designed and agreed upon by the community (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Phaya Luang in the imagination of product designers and trainers as used on the project. Design by Mr Nat Taotong, an expert in product design, a 3D designer and presenter at the Yarn Lantern Workshop (2022).*

Initial discussions in the community found that the design of Phaya Luang patterns on shoulder bags should be modified to be more suitable for modern consumption. The new design decorating the bags used patched fabric scraps instead of embroidery. The newly designed Phaya Luang had a simple line pattern, reducing the detail of the original design and presented in a minimalist art style, popular among the younger generation and easier for tourists to recreate. The design retained the characteristics of the different animals comprising Phaya Luang, and added elements such as cloud shapes to depict Phaya Luang swimming in the clouds.

The fabric scraps were in pastel colours softened by blending them with white, which are popular among those of the younger generation who like minimalist art. Initially seen as a rural utility item, the bags became a modern product willingly used by the younger generation. Respondents reflected that the pastel-coloured, minimalist Phaya Luang patterned bags positively affected the community's income, developing the product not just for tourist activities but for broader sale (Phrasa Buamali, personal communication, April 20, 2021).

Thread lampshades had long been a traditional product in the community. Originally, these lampshades were only produced in spherical and heart shapes, similar to

those made in other parts of the country. The redesign of the thread lampshades, by decorating them with Phaya Luang belief motifs, created unique value, marking them as a distinctive product of the Ban Luang Nuea Tai Lue community (Photo 1).



Photo 1. Phaya Luang thread lampshades being made by local people at a practical training workshop on the development of Tai Lue products. Photo by the authors, May 12, 2022.

The concept for redesigning the thread lampshades was based on the *Khom Phad* style of the Lanna people, typically used in some religious ceremonies. *Khom Phad* has a rotatable element featuring a two-layer cylindrical structure with silver and gold paper cut into zodiac animal shapes decorating the inner layer. When a candle inside is lit, heat causes the inner mechanism to rotate and the light from the candle reflects off the animal-shaped paper casting shadows onto the outer layer (Thai Cultural Encyclopedia Foundation 1999). Developing the structure of the thread lampshades using the *Khom Phad* framework allowed for diverse uses, with the lamp either placed on the ground or hung as a decorative item. The decoration involved Phaya Luang patterns designed by artisans.

The newly designed thread lampshades have increased value as they incorporate the cultural identity of the community. In addition to their basic form these lampshades can also be used to decorate community spaces during special occasions and festivals. Their value to the community is enhanced as they are linked to beliefs and lifestyles.

Apart from the value created by incorporating Phaya Luang belief into the community's products, new meanings have also been created for both product types. Based on the original belief that those who do good deeds will see Phaya Luang, which brings good fortune and prosperity since it swims in the clouds, these patterns are associated with the sky, clouds, and the rain that nourishes crops. When Phaya Luang patterns are used in these products, new meanings are imbued. For instance, using a shoulder bag with a Phaya Luang patterns brings luck and a prosperous life to the user, or using a Phaya Luang patterned lampshade brings good fortune, wealth, and happiness to both the individual and the place illuminated by its light. The new meaning of the products is supported by storytelling about Phaya Luang according to Tai Lue beliefs. This involves compiling information about the belief, including the physical appearance of Phaya Luang as described in stories, the belief in the supernatural powers of Phaya Luang affecting human life, and the poem composed by Phrasa Buamali (above). This information is communicated through various media such as infographics, online marketing materials, or information included with the products.

## DISCUSSION

### *Methods of Applying Belief in Phaya Luang in Community Product Design*

Drawing on the myth that Tai Lue ancestors came from Sibsongpanna over six centuries ago, this new design process underscores how historical narratives continue to inform contemporary creativity. This abstract belief has been materialised into tangible Phaya Luang designs for decoration on shoulder bags, making them suitable for consumers of all ages without feeling outdated. For this research, hand-woven cotton dyed in light blue was chosen to represent the sky, the dwelling of Phaya Luang floating among the clouds. Moreover, the minimalist Phaya Luang line work was chosen to resonate with modern consumer values by stripping away ornamental excess and highlighting the core symbolic narrative. This simplicity fosters personal interpretation and emotional engagement, allowing users to project their own identities onto the motif while ensuring the design remains versatile. This approach exemplifies the effective transformation of intangible cultural heritage into tangible products, a key strategy in cultural heritage marketing as noted by Chiriko (2020: 13).

Additional consumer education about Phaya Luang might be needed through storytelling and infographics since the line and pattern techniques used here differ from the traditional weaving techniques. Tai Lue or other ethnic weaving patterns are often geometric due to the weaving technique. However, the Phaya Luang patterns on these bags are free-form, not bound by the traditional weaving wisdom of the Tai Lue. Each ethnic group creates patterns based on their worldview, and in Southeast Asian many ethnic groups use geometric shapes inspired by nature and lifestyle (Phiwongkur et al. 2019: 123). This adaptation also aligns with the need to cater to evolving tourist preferences, particularly among younger generations who seek products that blend authenticity with contemporary aesthetics (Karzen and Demonja 2020: 664). A comparable approach is seen among the Hmong communities of Luang Prabang city, where

traditional geometric motifs were similarly simplified to create contemporary products that appeal to younger tourists (Songsirisak et al. 2019: 20).

The thread lampshades were originally cylindrical or heart-shaped without any decoration. Collaborating with the villagers in the new design process embodied the co-creation model of value creation, enhancing authenticity and community engagement (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004: 9). New Phaya Luang patterns were simplified to represent various animal features (elephant trunks, fish tails, deer antlers, bird wings, or lion paws) in line drawings. Apart from providing light and beauty, the Phaya Luang patterned thread lampshades also create emotional value, offering warmth and hope due to the new meanings imbued in them. Creating new meanings for products can potentially increase revenue as doing so incorporates a distinct cultural identity that is different from similar products available elsewhere. A similar outcome was found when Chinese lanterns were reintroduced into the contemporary home (Lu 2024).

#### *Applying Belief in Phaya Luang to Create New Value and Meaning for Community Products*

Rooted in Lanna's 14th-century cultural exchanges under Phaya Mangrai, these value dimensions demonstrate how ancient beliefs can generate modern social, emotional, and epistemic benefits. The perceived value of a product, in this case both historical and cultural, is crucial for consumer behaviours when choosing to purchase a product or service. Studies on product value usually focus on quality and price. However, contemporary research on consumer perceived value has shifted to include emotional dimensions. Thus, the components of consumer-perceived value consist of functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value (Kimpakorn et al. 2019: 9–10; Chartprasert and Deedenkeeratisakul 2022: 31). Analysing the perceived value of the community's re-decorated shoulder bags and thread lampshades reveals several types of value. Social value is the most significant due to Phaya Luang's direct connection to the Tai Lue community. The presence of Phaya Luang on these products signifies them as distinct to the Ban Luang Nuea Tai Lue community, arising from the community's foundational beliefs. Epistemic value is also a key product of the new designs. These designs are innovative and likely to arouse consumer curiosity, leading to research and learning about Phaya Luang's history and meaning. This curiosity is supported through storytelling and infographics. This aligned with Pine and Gilmore's (2013: 23) experience economy framework, where consumers seek memorable experiences that engage them on an emotional and intellectual level.

Finally, the products convey emotional value. The Phaya Luang designs on these products evoke various emotions depending on individual experience and perception, such as liking minimalist style, feeling warmth, safety, and hope when using Phaya Luang-decorated thread lampshades, and community pride at seeing the respected Phaya Luang featured on products. Functional value and conditional value were not explicitly added through redesign of these two products.

Community members were unanimous in their conclusions that the research has created new value for the products. Originally, the shoulder bags were primarily valued for their functionality, but decorating them with minimalist Phaya Luang art has

added a new form of value. Similarly, while the original thread lampshades were beautiful and provided illumination, they did not differ significantly from other community products. However, decorating them with Phaya Luang patterns gave them a unique cultural identity. Products having multiple value dimensions can also increase their monetary value, potentially driving the community economy in the future. By mitigating the problems of staged authenticity outlined by Cohen (1988: 371), the community's approach of integrating traditional beliefs into product design ensured that the cultural meanings were preserved and respected. This practice of assigning new meanings to redesigned products is an example of creative folklore.

### *The Importance of Storytelling in Creating Perception in Social Media*

Building on centuries of oral transmission, storytelling remains the bridge between Phaya Luang's historic resonance and contemporary audiences. In the current era, where social media plays a significant role in people's lives, the transmission of knowledge through media has adapted to suit the behaviour of readers, listeners and recipients. Moreover, the internet has opened up more opportunities for online marketing. Communication is crucial in making products or presentations interesting. This has led to the creation of storytelling that differs from traditional media writing for various reasons such as the type of media used, the diversity of readers and listeners, and the openness of social media. Storytelling is therefore a key knowledge management strategy that affects organisational efficiency (Prungpol 2017: 21). As Megan Boler and Elizabeth Davis (2020: 2) note, digital storytelling can amplify marginalised voices and offer inclusive narratives, making social media a powerful tool in heritage marketing. Nonetheless, there remains a challenge in controlling narratives across diverse stakeholders, especially in a tourism context where the 'corporation' represents a non-hierarchical conglomerate of social entities (Norlyk et al. 2014: 105). Thus, careful continued management of storytelling on social media will be essential to maintain continued authenticity and consistent messaging. Similarly, presenting beliefs and newly designed community products to a diverse audience requires consideration of cross-media storytelling principles. These principles involve integrating storytelling, marketing, and media production in a cohesive process. Cross-media storytelling should narrate a main story through several interrelated sub-stories, each complete in itself. It should consider different presentation techniques for various media types and the nature of each medium, reader or listener behaviour, and appropriate timing for media consumption. Stories are interconnected through the intentional communication of the creator and the participation of the audience leading to the main story evolving with the audience's experience and imagination (Chueasathaponsiri 2015: 59).

Creating stories about the Tai Lue belief in Phaya Luang, as reflected in newly innovated community products, aims to promote these products based on the belief in Phaya Luang of Ban Luang Nuea on online platforms such as Facebook and Line, targeting a younger audience. Infographics are produced to convey stories derived from community brainstorming and structured information. The content of these infographics is concise, narrating the history of the group and community, the belief in Phaya Luang, and the uniqueness of the innovated products based on community beliefs. Apart from



direct text communication, photos, illustrations and colourful infographics are used to attract the audience's attention. These stories and infographics reinforce the epistemic value of the products, conveying knowledge to consumers and stimulating community income through online marketing.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on the research findings, it is evident that developing community products based on local beliefs and stories not only elevates products by creating new values and meanings, but also supports tourism, benefiting the community's economy in the current social context. Yet, it is important to ensure that development is based on authentic folklore. Integrating Phaya Luang motifs can strengthen product differentiation, enhance cultural branding, and support sustainable community-led economic development. However, this study was confined to a single village context and used qualitative methods in its research approach. Therefore, future research should be conducted with broader sampling and by incorporating quantitative market analysis to supplement the findings. The potential and craftsmanship skills of the Tai Lue people in Ban Luang Nuea are diverse, such as their unique Tai Lue weaving using specific colours and patterns. Future research can explore the application of Phaya Luang belief in designing community textile patterns, with more specific studies like plotting graph techniques for designing patterns or studying the appropriateness of incorporating Phaya Luang belief into different types of textile and clothing. These applications would hopefully provide longer term sustainability and the preservation of this important cultural heritage.

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