

PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF THE TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL VALUES OF THE THAI PEOPLE IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SON LA PROVINCE

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Son La is a mountainous province located in the Northwest of the country, currently inhabited by numerous ethnic minority communities. Among them, the Thai ethnic community constitutes the majority, with a long history of settlement in this region and many traditional cultural values contributing to the distinctiveness of Son La Province's culture. The culture of the Thai ethnic community has become the dominant cultural foundation, encompassing not only the Son La region but also extending throughout the Northwest region. Among these, the traditional festivals of the Thai ethnic group best exemplify the cultural characteristics of each ethnic group and represent potential for sustainable tourism development in Son La Province. This article focuses on introducing some remarkable spring festivals of the Thai ethnic group in Son La Province, assessing the current situation and proposing solutions to preserve and promote the values of traditional festivals in the cultural tourism development of Son La Province.

Keywords: *Preservation and promotion, Spring Festivals; Thai ethnic community; Tourism development; Son La province*

1. Introduction

Son La is a mountainous province located in the Northwest of the country, currently inhabited by 12 ethnic groups including Mong, Dao, Thai, Muong, Kinh, Khang, Tay, Chinese, Lao, Xinh Mun, Kho mu, La Ha. Among them, the Thai ethnic community constitutes approximately 54% of the total population and holds many traditional cultural values contributing to the distinctiveness of Son La Province's culture. As the majority ethnic group with a long history of settlement in this region, the culture of the Thai ethnic community has become the dominant cultural foundation, encompassing not only the Son La region but also extending throughout the Northwest region. Among these, the traditional festivals of the Thai people best exemplify the cultural characteristics of each ethnic group and represent potential for sustainable tourism development in Son La Province. This article focuses on introducing some prominent spring festivals of the Thai people in Son La Province, assessing the current situation and proposing solutions to preserve and promote the values of traditional festivals in the cultural tourism development of Son La Province.

2. Research overview

Throughout the history of Thai people's

development, their diverse and rich cultural values have been the subject of interest and research by numerous scholars. Some notable research works on the history, culture, economy and society of the Thai people in Vietnam include:

"*Understanding the Thai People in Vietnam*" (Trong, 2005), the author supplemented the introduction of the cultural history, economy, social beliefs and religions of the Thai people in Vietnam. This research employs a multidimensional approach with detailed analyses regarding the historical and cultural roots of the Thai people, intricately linking them with the historical and cultural roots of the Vietnamese people.

"*Thai Culture in Vietnam*" (Dat, 1995) which delved deeply into the culture of the Thai ethnic group within the common cultural roots of Southeast Asia. The relationship between Thai culture and the cultures of ethnic groups speaking the Mon-Khmer language in the Northwest, as well as some ethnic groups in Northern Vietnam, is significant. The characteristic features of Thai culture resemble a valley culture, representing a form of pre-industrial technical culture. The culture governs the society of the Thai people in Vietnam.

"*Documentation on the History and Society of the Thai Ethnic Group*" (Van, 1977) introduced

fundamental aspects of the history of the Thai ethnic group.

Additionally, many scholars have researched traditional festivals of ethnic minorities in general and specifically those of the Thai people as such as:

“Harvest Festivals of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam” (Dat, 1994) has introduced the key ceremonial rituals in the agricultural production cycle of ethnic groups in the Northwest, Northeast, and Central Highlands regions.

“Traditional Festivals of Ethnic Minorities in Northern Vietnam” (Luong, 2002) introduced some traditional festivals that vividly demonstrate the cultural identity of the ethnic minority communities in the Northern mountainous region.

“Traditional Festivals of the Thai People in the Northwest in the current period” (Hang, Giang, 2006) presented some typical traditional festivals of the Thai people in several mountainous provinces in the Northwest.

These research works have affirmed the distinctive cultural values of the Thai people and their remarkable traditional festivals. Developing on the findings of these research works, this article introduces some typical spring festivals of the Thai people in Son La province and evaluates the current situation of preserving and promoting the Thai spring festivals in the tourism development of Son La province.

3. Research method

The article uses an interdisciplinary approach in cultural researches, secondary document collection method, analysis and synthesis of secondary documents regarding the traditional festivals of the Thai people in Son La province. Developing upon the results of previous researches, the article analyzes the current situation of preservation and promotion of the Thai spring festivals and proposes solutions to conserve and promote the value of traditional festivals in the cultural tourism development of Son La province.

4. Research result

4.1. Some typical traditional festivals of the Thai people in Son La province

4.1.1. The Nang Han Temple Festival and the traditional boat racing on the Da River in Quynh Nhai district

Quynh Nhai is a mountainous district located in the northwest of Son La province, known for its unique traditional festivals such as the Head Washing Festival, Then Kin Pang Festival (pay gratitude to Heaven), Xip Xi Tet (Lunar July 14th

festival) and more. Among these, the Nang Han Temple Festival and the traditional boat racing on the Da River are the most prominent cultural festivals of the year. Local people believe that those skilled in rowing boats have the ability to conquer rivers and waters, bringing prosperity in their endeavors. Therefore, the residents frequently organize small-scale boat races. However, since 2011, Son La province has revitalized the Nang Han Temple Festival and organized boat racing on the Da River, turning it into a grand festival for the ethnic groups in the district.

The Nang Han Temple Festival and traditional boat racing on the Da River are usually organized on the 10th day of the Lunar New Year every year. This is an occasion for the Thai community, specifically the ethnic communities of Quynh Nhai district in general, to commemorate and express deep gratitude for the contributions of Nang Han and the ancestors who played a role in protecting their homeland and heritage in the past. Through the festival activities and boat racing on the Da River, efforts are made to enhance patriotism, love for the homeland and instill a spirit of readiness to stand up and defend the peace of their homeland for the younger generations. Moreover, the Nang Han Festival meets the spiritual and religious needs of the people of Quynh Nhai, who desire divine protection and blessings from the deities for a prosperous new year, abundant harvests, a happy and prosperous life. Additionally, the traditional boat racing festival on the Da River provides an opportunity for people to enjoy, socialize, preserve and promote the traditional cultural values of the ethnic communities. Therefore, every year, the Nang Han Festival and the boat racing activities on the Da River continue to attract the attention of thousands of tourists and local residents alike.

4.1.2. The festivals of the King Le Thai Tong Temple and the Ban Flower Festival in Son La City

The festivals of the King Le Thai Tong Temple and the Ban Flower Festival are two major events organized by the People’s Committee of Son La City, with a city-level scale, starting from 2015. These two festivals are held simultaneously from the 15th to the end of the 17th day of the first lunar month. The aim is to ensure solemnity in the ceremonies held at the King Le Thai Tong Temple area while creating a joyful atmosphere for the local people during the festival days. Various cultural and entertainment activities, traditional folk games are organized at the Ban Flower Festival to bring excitement and happiness to the community.

In the consciousness of the local people, the

historical site of the King Le Thai Tong Temple is considered a sacred cultural and spiritual destination. On full moon days, the first day of the lunar month, or during festivals, numerous Buddhist monks, followers and the general public gather here to offer incense, pray for peace and good fortune and admire the temple scenery. The organization of the King Le Thai Tong Temple Festival aims to honor the contributions of King Le Thai Tong and the people who played a role in the nation-building and defense in general, safeguarding the borderlands of the Northwest region in particular. This is an occasion for the people to revisit the revolutionary traditions for the citizens of various ethnic groups in Son La city, to uphold the tradition of remembering the source and igniting the pride of the ethnic groups and to inherit the patriotic legacy. Moreover, the festival contributes practically to serve the needs of enjoying the spiritual and cultural values, as well as the spiritual life of the people of different ethnic groups within and outside the province.

The festivals of the King Le Thai Tong Temple and the Ban Flower Festival are organized in a simple yet dignified manner. During the festivals, various folk cultural activities and traditional games are organized, attracting the enthusiastic participation of the masses, such as culinary contests, folk dancing, sports competitions, tug-of-war, sack racing, blindfolded stick dancing, spinning tops, and fishing competitions. The festivals contribute to preserving and promoting the traditional cultural values and strengthening the solidarity among the ethnic communities.

4.1.3. The “Het Cha” Festival of the White Thai people in Dong Sang commune, Moc Chau district

Moc Chau is the largest and most beautiful plateau in the northern mountainous region, with a cool climate all year round and the white Thai ethnic community accounting for about one-third of the total population in the district. Moc Chau hosts various festivals such as the Ban Flower Festival, the Het Cha Festival, the Cau Mua Festival (praying for a Fertile Crop), among others. Among them, the Het Cha Festival is a unique celebration of the white Thai people in Ang village, Dong Sang commune (Moc Chau district, Son La province), held annually on March 26th, at the foot of a banyan tree on a hill near the village center. The Het Cha Festival of the white Thai people signifies a thanksgiving ceremony for those who have been cured by traditional healers, a thanksgiving to heaven and earth, ancestors, river deities, mountain deities, and land spirits for helping humans sustain their lives, build solidarity, develop the village,

and pray for prosperity and favorable weather for abundant harvests.” (Son La province Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2013).

The Het Cha Festival consists of two parts: the ritual ceremony and the festival. The ritual ceremony is held at the Cultural House of Ang Village, next to the ancient banyan tree where the traditional healers perform their rituals. Offerings for the ceremony are prepared by the village elders and residents and typically include chickens, ducks, pigs, sticky rice, wine, ritual tools for exorcism, and, notably, offerings of Ban flowers and rice flowers, symbolizing the people’s aspirations for a prosperous, happy, and united life. The ceremony also serves to criticize negative behaviors and encourage positive aspects of life. The festival part usually features various entertainment activities and traditional cultural events that attract a large number of participants, such as drum competitions, traditional dances, cooking contests, sports competitions, and folk games like tug-of-war, toss, etc. The Het Cha Festival is a significant cultural activity that embodies the essence of the White Thai ethnic group in Ang Village, Dong Sang Commune, Moc Chau District. It is a spiritual ritual reflecting people’s beliefs in life and nature. Additionally, the festival demonstrates humanistic values by honoring traditional healers through ceremonies expressing gratitude for their role in curing illnesses for individuals, families and the community.

4.2. The current situation of preserving and promoting the traditional festival values of the Thai ethnic group in the tourism development of Son La province

Son La is a locality with abundant potential and advantages, both in terms of natural resources and culture for tourism development. It holds a strategic position at the center of the national tourism route from Hanoi to the Northwest provinces. In recent years, Party committees at all levels, especially the Standing Committee and the Provincial Party Executive Committee have shown deep and timely interest and determination in comprehensive leadership and direction of tasks to conserve and promote the culture of ethnic communities associated with the province’s tourism development. The Resolution of the 15th Provincial Party Congress identified three breakthrough stages, nine key task groups and central solutions. Among them, the field of Culture, Sports, and Tourism was identified with two key task groups, namely: “Continuing to develop an advanced cultural foundation, deeply rooted in ethnic identity, promoting the cultural values of Son La’s ethnic groups and the Northwest region,

building comprehensive human development. Making cultural development and human development as the core factors for socio-economic development. Linking economic development with effectively addressing social issues, improving and caring for, protecting and enhancing the quality of life of the people”; “Enhancing the synchronized implementation of tourism development solutions; ensuring professionalism, modernity and sustainable development; striving for tourism to truly become a spearhead economic sector by 2030. Promoting the attraction of investment resources to Moc Chau National Tourism Area, aiming to be recognized as a National Tourism Area by 2025, becoming one of the leading tourist destinations in the Midlands and Northern Mountainous regions. Planning to develop the tourism landscape around the Son La Hydropower Reservoir into a national tourism area. Strengthening promotion and advertising activities focused on key areas, linking tourism development with the Northwestern provinces and provinces in Northern Laos”. The Party Committee’s Executive Board of the Provincial People’s Committee has directed the Provincial People’s Committee to advise on the development of culture and tourism through various documents, including: Conclusion No. 335-KL/TU dated July 26th, 2021, of the Standing Committee of the Provincial Party Committee approving the Project “*Building and Developing Son La Culture and People for the period of 2020-2025, with orientation towards 2030 to meet the requirements of sustainable development*”; Plan No. 290/KH-UBND dated December 20th, 2021, on the implementation of the Project to build and develop Son La culture and people to meet the requirements of sustainable development for the period of 2020-2025, with orientation towards 2030; Plan No. 47/KH-UBND dated February 4th, 2021, on the implementation of Conclusion No. 76-KL/TW dated June 4th, 2020, of the 12th Central Party Committee on continuing to implement Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW of the 11th Central Party Committee on “*Building and developing Vietnamese culture and people to meet the requirements of sustainable national development*”; Resolution No. 17/2021/NQ-HDND dated November 19th, 2021 of the Provincial People’s Council stipulates the content and level of support for artists in Son La province with award-winning works at regional, national, and international levels; Resolution No. 38/2022/NQ-HDND dated July 14th, 2022, on amending the content of Resolution No. 43/2017/NQ-HDND dated March 15th, 2017, of the Provincial People’s Council on support levels for cultural

and artistic activities of the community in Son La province; Decision No. 24/2021/QĐ-UBND dated September 29th, 2021, on the allowance for training, performance, participation in competitions, and carrying out political tasks for provincial and district-level community art teams in Son La province; Conclusion No. 94-KL/TU dated January 23rd, 2021, of the Provincial Party Committee’s Executive Committee on the development of tourism in Son La province until 2025, with orientation towards 2030; Plan No. 86/KH-UBND dated March 30th, 2021, on implementing Conclusion No. 94-KL/TU dated January 23rd, 2021, of the Provincial Party Committee’s Executive Committee on the development of tourism in Son La province until 2025, with orientation towards 2030; Decision No. 491/QĐ-UBND dated March 19th, 2021, of the People’s Committee of Son La province regarding the establishment of a Task Force to monitor and implement Conclusion 94-KL/TU dated January 23rd, 2021, of the Provincial Party Committee of Son La province on “Developing tourism in Son La province until 2025 and orientation towards 2030”, and Decision No. 507/QĐ-UBND dated March 24th, 2022, of the People’s Committee of Son La province on the restructuring of the Task Force to implement Conclusion No. 94-KL/TU dated January 23rd, 2021, of the Provincial Party Committee’s Executive Committee on “Developing tourism in Son La province until 2025 and orientation towards 2030”; Resolution No. 41/2022/NQ-HDND dated August 31st, 2022, of the Provincial People’s Council on Regulations on some policies to support tourism development in Son La province for the period of 2022-2026; Approval of 03 tourism development projects including: the project “Developing Moc Chau National Tourism Area to meet the recognition criteria by 2025”; the project “Orientation for developing the Son La Hydropower Reservoir Area into a National Tourism Area for the period of 2022-2030”; the project “Developing tourism in Quynh Nhai district into a provincial-level tourism area, for the period of 2021-2030”.

With the attention and investment from both the state and local authorities, many traditional cultural festivals of the ethnic communities in Son La province have been restored and undergone significant transformations. These festivals are regularly organized on a large scale, vibrant, and lively, vividly showcasing the distinctive cultural identity of the community. Festivals are often held in the spring, featuring traditional rituals and various folk games, thus attracting the participation of a large number of people. From 2021 to September

2023, the total number of tourists visiting Son La reached over 8 million, generating tourism revenue of over 8 trillion Vietnamese dong. It can be seen that in recent years, the tourism industry in Son La has developed rapidly and effectively, contributing to the socio-economic development of the province. The position of the tourism sector in the province's socio-economic development has been enhanced, with tourism development plans being formulated and implemented in line with the province's overall socio-economic development plans. Tourism infrastructure has been prioritized and invested in comprehensively, while efforts to attract investment have been intensified; Many prominent tourism products have been developed; the quality of tourism human resources and services has been gradually improved; tourism promotion and communication have made breakthroughs, yielding high efficiency for tourism development. The growth of the tourism industry has had a ripple effect on various other sectors and fields, leading to a structural transformation of the economy, contributing to poverty reduction, and improving the lives of local people. Step by step, Son La province is being developed into a tourism hub in the Northwest region.

However, the preservation and promotion of the cultural values of traditional spring festivals of the Thai ethnic group in the development of tourism in Son La province still face many limitations, not commensurate with the potential and advantages of the province. The awareness-raising work to highlight the importance of tourism in the province's socio-economic development has not received sufficient attention from the Party committees and local authorities in some areas. State management of tourism remains limited, with shortcomings and insufficient coordination between sectors. Additionally, tourism infrastructure is still lacking coherence, with transportation connections from national highways, provincial roads and internal district routes to tourism destinations facing many difficulties. The quality and effectiveness of tourism promotion and advertising are not yet high. Tourism services are still inadequate and weak, with small scales and limited variety in types and professionalism. The construction of tourism routes between destinations and tour packages is not well-coordinated, lacking linkage between tourist sites, leading to low efficiency. There is no recognized community tourism site and tourism souvenir products are not diverse, lacking connection with the cultural characteristics of the ethnic groups of Son La province.

5. Discussion

To efficiently exploit the potential and advantages of Son La province in general and the spring festivals of the Thai people in particular, in the sustainable tourism development, the provincial tourism sector needs to implement synchronized solutions such as:

Firthy, continuing to intensify propaganda and dissemination to enhance the awareness of Party committees, authorities, socio-political organizations and people at all levels about the position and role of tourism development in economic restructuring and improving people's lives.

Secondly, innovating tourism development mindset, enhancing society and community awareness of environmental protection responsibilities in tourism.

Fourthly, fostering awareness among residents, businesses, and communities in behaving politely, courteously and friendly towards tourists.

Fifthly, prioritize resources to implement digital transformation, applying smart tourism to effectively serve management, propaganda, promotion and tourism development.

Sixthly, intensify promotion activities, branding, and image building for Son La tourism; organize cultural tourism events within and outside the province, sports events to create highlights for media coverage, promotion and attraction of tourists.

Seventhly, develop diverse, unique and attractive tourism products to promote the traditional cultural values of ethnic communities for preservation and sustainable development.

Eighthly, develop the domestic and international tourism market in a professional and comprehensive manner.

6. Conclusion

Son La province boasts many potential and advantages, encompassing both natural conditions and strategic geographical location, alongside a rich cultural heritage that reflects the unique identity of its diverse ethnic communities. These favorable conditions position Son La as a promising destination for tourism development, contributing significantly to the socio-economic progress of the region. Tourism holds the potential to create employment opportunities, increase income for local residents, foster solidarity and friendship among communities, and open up numerous avenues for cooperation and investment in the tourism development.

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BẢO TỒN VÀ PHÁT HUY GIÁ TRỊ LỄ HỘI TRUYỀN THỐNG CỦA NGƯỜI THÁI TRONG PHÁT TRIỂN DU LỊCH TỈNH SƠN LA

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Sơn La là tỉnh miền núi nằm ở phía Tây Bắc của Tổ quốc, hiện có nhiều cộng đồng dân tộc thiểu số cùng sinh sống. Trong đó, cộng đồng người Thái là tộc người chiếm đa số cùng với lịch sử cư trú lâu đời ở vùng đất này và có nhiều giá trị văn hoá truyền thống góp phần làm nên nét riêng trong văn hoá của tỉnh Sơn La. Văn hoá của cộng đồng người Thái đã trở thành nền văn hoá chủ đạo, có tính chất bao trùm không chỉ đối với địa bàn Sơn La mà còn trải dài khắp miền Tây Bắc. Đặc biệt, những lễ hội truyền thống của người Thái đã thể hiện rõ nét nhất đặc trưng văn hoá của từng tộc người và là tiềm năng để phát triển bền vững du lịch tỉnh Sơn La. Bài viết tập trung giới thiệu về một số lễ hội mùa xuân đặc sắc của người Thái trên địa bàn tỉnh Sơn La, đánh giá thực trạng và đề xuất giải pháp bảo tồn và phát huy giá trị lễ hội truyền thống trong phát triển du lịch văn hoá của tỉnh Sơn La.

Từ khóa: Bảo tồn và phát huy; Lễ hội mùa xuân; Cộng đồng người Thái; Phát triển du lịch; tỉnh Sơn La.