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Tourism and Tradition

in Chiang Mai

by

Jared Makana Kirkey

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and

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Thesis Advisor

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Introduction

Chiang Mai is a city at a crossroads, attempting to balance the benefits of tourism with the maintenance of its unique local lifestyle, culture, and customs. The regional capital of northern Thailand, it's role as a center for Lanna culture, trade and commerce, agricultural production, and traditional handicrafts makes it one of Thailand's more prominent cities and a popular tourist destination. In 2019, Chiang Mai took in nearly 11 million domestic and foreign tourists (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020). About 60% of these tourists were from other countries, and 30% of these tourists reportedly hailed from mainland China (TAT, 2020). As this number continues to grow, the impacts of tourism upon the city are being felt throughout. These impacts will be discussed later.

As a major tourist destination, Chiang Mai's major draw are its markets, elephants, artisans, and temples, also known as M.E.A.T. according to the New York Times (pictured right are Wat Chedi Luang, the Sunday Walking Street Market, and the Chiang Mai Elephant Jungle Sanctuary). The Night Bazaar and Sunday Walking Street markets are great places for tourists to purchase memorable souvenirs, fantastic food, while supporting local shopkeepers, food vendors, and craftsmen. The various elephant sanctuaries around Chiang Mai are also quite popular, many allowing visitors to feed and touch the animals up close. The city's artisans specialize in fine handicrafts, ranging from gold and silver jewelry, lacquer ware, baskets, woodcarving, pottery,



and textiles which can be purchased at the local markets. And finally, Chiang Mai's 13th and 14th century temples and monasteries in the old city and dotting the hillside, top the list as major tourist draws. Additionally, the city is brimming with modern attractions as well. Exhibitions show up the best Chiang Mai's art and design has to offer. A TEDx talk is held annually at the city's science center. New luxury hotels, fancy restaurants, and mega malls wrap up Chiang Mai's increasing cosmopolitan offerings.

This paper is an attempt to delve deeper into the relationship between tourism and culture in Chiang Mai. The push and pull of these forces is of particular interest. A determination of the balance, or lack thereof between them is to be made. On one side, tourism is beneficial for Chiang Mai's economy, and encourages the preservation of its unique culture. Tourist dollars support local businesses, and any further profits can be reinvested into the local economy. And because many of Chiang Mai's major tourist draws are its cultural attractions, its temples, famous handicrafts, Buddhist festivals, etc, their preservation seems commonsense. But sadly, this is not always the case. Oftentimes, tourist dollars are funnelled out of Chiang Mai as packaged tours, luxury hotels, and more of the like are increasingly owned and operated by non-Chiang Mai interests, including those from Bangkok and China. More important however, is that the tourism industry also negatively impacts Chiang Mai's cultural heritage. Rather than supporting the preservation of the city's cultural foundations, tourism oversees, to a certain extent, its loss. The cultural commodification process, by-products of which are hyper-places, and hyper-traditions, are the cause of this loss. The rest of this paper will include an examination of Chiang Mai, its past and present, its unique culture, and its relationship with tourism. The concepts of hyper-place and hyper-tradition, in addition to their connection to cultural

commodification will be established. With these concepts and background in mind, three aspects of Chiang Mai's cultural capital: its Buddhist festivals, its Lanna temples, and its traditional handicrafts will be studied. These case studies are titled: Themepark Festival, Hotel or Temple, and Shifting Handicraft Production. This will then be followed up with an analysis, next steps, and conclusion.

Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is located in northern Thailand, and is the capital of Chiang Mai Province (location pictured right). The name Chiang Mai means “New City” (Duongchan, 2007). Travel brochures and advertisements refer to it as “The Rose of the North” and “The Hidden Gem of Southeast Asia” (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020). Settled along the banks of the Ping River, it is about 80 miles from the border with Myanmar. One of Thailand's largest cities, Chiang Mai is the main economic center for the northern part of the country and the final destination for the northern railroad



(Romanos & Auffrey, 2002). Many of the 13th and 14th century temples and monasteries in the old section of the city, and the nearby Wat Phra Dhat Soi Suthep mountain top temple complex, believed to contain relics of the Buddha, are major tourist destinations to the area. Besides tourism, the economy of the area is based on agricultural production and on handicrafts, mainly traditional silverware, lacquerware, pottery, and woodcarving (Romanos & Auffrey, 2002).

Chiang Mai is the cultural center of Northern Thailand (Romanos & Auffrey, 2002). It was founded in 1296 by King Mengrai, ruler of the Lanna Kingdom. The city has experienced

both high achievement as capital of the Lanna Kingdom and near annihilation from the ravages of war (Duangchan, 2007). The city still preserves its ancient royal identity with great dignity. Traces of this heritage are present in the numerous ancient temples, also known as *wat*, the walls and fortification surrounding the old city, and other structures scattered around it.

As the capital of the Lanna Kingdom, Chiang Mai used its strategic position between the Kok and Ping river basins to become the economic and defensive center for the broad surrounding region containing several smaller towns. It became a major commercial hub with help from its dominance over the north-south trading route along the Ping River (Romanos & Auffrey, 2002). Additionally, the vast and fertile river valley provided by again the Ping River established the region as a significant center of agricultural production. The city was conquered by the Burmese in 1579 and they proceeded to rule over the city/region for the next two hundred years. Chiang Mai was then taken from the Burmese by the Siamese Thai in 1763. Under Siam, Chiang Mai was largely independent, but lost much of its prominence and entered a period of decline until modernization projects began in 1902 with the introduction of a rail system between the province and Bangkok. Chiang Mai was officially absorbed by Thailand to become one of the country's northern provinces in 1933. The city's many Buddhist temples and its quality handicrafts, including gold and silver jewelry, lacquer ware, baskets, woodcarving, pottery, and textiles, have since been able to attract visitors in greater numbers. And since 1982, the city has been designated by Thailand's regional development plans as a center for commerce and services in addition to tourism and handicrafts (Romanos & Auffrey, 2002).

Chiang Mai is home to the Lanna people. Also known as Tai Yuan, they comprise nearly 8 million people, or 12% of Thailand's total population (Selway, 2020). The Lanna identity is

deeply intertwined with the history and heritage of northern Thailand, and is centered within Chiang Mai. (Selway, 2020). This identity is maintained proudly, so much so that Chiang Mai is currently on the tentative list to become a UNESCO World Heritage city, reflecting the importance and uniqueness of its regional and local heritage (Easum, 2020). This is thanks in part to pushes from Creative Chiang Mai, a cooperative of academic, private, and government



sectors with the goal of promoting Chiang Mai's development and innovation (Creative Chiang Mai, 2014). Specifically, Chiang Mai's historic old city including its outer fortifications, moats, and canals (pictured left), in addition to the sacred Doi Suthep

mountain, the temple complex located there, and the surrounding Doi Suthep-Pui National Park area are the two components proposed to inscribe the city on UNESCO's World Heritage list as one property (Chiangmai Citylife, 2019). With UNESCO support, Chiang Mai will be better equipped to deal with the challenge of balancing the conservation of its living heritage with forging a path of sustainable development, of which tourism is a key piece.

Tourism

Chiang Mai is no stranger to travellers, but the growing influx of tourists to the city is a relatively recent development. This is especially true in the case of Chinese tourists.

Sino-Chinese links have existed for more than a thousand years but private travel for the purposes of tourism is less than 25 years old (Walsh & Techavimol, 2006). Chinese have been travelling to Chiang Mai for centuries as merchants, migrant laborers, and as prospective wives (Walsh & Techavimol, 2006). Part of this history can be found in the various vintage Chinese shophouses scattered throughout the old city (Romanos & Auffrey, 2002). Chinese citizens have

come late to the tourism experience. This is largely because when the Chinese Communist Party seized power in 1949 the outward flow of people was prevented and overseas travel was not to resume until after the Open Door Policy was adopted three decades later, then it would be a number of years before middle class Chinese could afford to consider tourism (Walsh & Techavimol, 2006). Today, tourism from mainland China comprises nearly 30% of visitors to Chiang Mai (TAT, 2020).

Chiang Mai remained isolated to all but the most adventurous tourists until the close of the twentieth century. It had been badly damaged and largely abandoned by the time the Siamese took the city from the Burmans in 1763, settling into quiet obscurity. A rail line between Chiang Mai and Bangkok was completed in 1922, and the city's airport was founded the previous year (Romanos & Auffrey, 2006). These two developments certainly helped open Chiang Mai up a bit, but it really was not until the city's designation as a regional capital and development center that it received the investment, infrastructure, and advertising needed to jumpstart its tourism industry (Romanos & Auffrey, 2006). Chiang Mai was promoted as the "Rose of the North" and the "Hidden Gem of Southeast Asia (TAT, 2020). Tourism grew slowly at first, but as increasing numbers of tourists came to Chiang Mai each passing year, it could be a hidden gem no more. And now today, Chiang Mai is a major tourist destination as a city, a province, and as a launching point to explore the rest of Thailand's north, in addition to nearby Myanmar and Laos (Buranasomphob, 2007).

Benefits of Tourism

Tourism impacts Chiang Mai in both beneficial and problematic ways. Tourism is considered to be and is recommended as a viable approach for development (Duuangchan, 2007). This is because the initial inputs are relatively low, the return is medium to high, and this return can then be reinvested into the local economy, furthering the development initiative (Duuangchan, 2007). For example, Chiang Mai can utilize its already present cultural capital, such as its ancient temples and old city walls, canals, and other fortifications, to attract tourists. These tourists spend money on sightseeing, food, shelter, and shopping nearby. This money supports local businesses, food vendors, shop owners, and artisans. Temples can use the money gained from ticket sales to fund projects to repair and maintain themselves. Artisans, artists, and designers can use the money from souvenir purchases to continue their craft. Tourist spending ideally grows the local economy by creating a positive feedback loop (Duuangchan, 2007). Furthermore, one could suppose that tourism supports the preservation of the cultural foundations from which it draws its attractions (Adham, 2006), but this is not necessarily the case, more on this in the next section.

Problems with Tourism

On the flip side, there are several problems associated with tourism. It can lead to poorly regulated and rapid urbanization, resulting in the displacement of people, land, and ecology (Buranasomphob, 2007). Examples of this include tourist resorts built in ecological preserves or sacred sites. It can also lead to gentrification. As luxury hotels and high end restaurants move into areas, the cost of living quickly rises to match the influx of tourist infrastructure (Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2019). Additionally, tourist spending is not always reinvested into

the local economy, as in Chiang Mai oftentimes the money is instead funnelled out of the city since many of the businesses and establishments related to the tourism industry are owned and operated by interests outside of Chiang Mai (Duangchan, 2007).

Most importantly, tourism can contribute to a loss of culture. As I mentioned previously, one would assume that since tourism is drawn in part by cultural attractions and interactions (Adham, 2006), there would be an incentive for these cultural foundations to be carefully maintained, but this is not necessarily the case. Instead, tourism in Chiang Mai contributes to a certain extent, the loss of its cultural capital as it is transformed into economic capital for tourist consumption (Songkhla, 2006). Examining this process is the focus of the three case studies I have outlined. And central to understanding this dynamic are the concepts of cultural commodification, hyper-tradition, and hyper-place.

Cultural Commodification, Hyper Tradition, and Hyper-Place

Cultural commodification is the process by which culture is commodified, or transformed into economic capital to be consumed by tourists (Songkhla, 2006). Two byproducts of this process are hyper-place and hyper-tradition. An example of hyper-place is the resort town of Kafr Al-Gouna in Egypt. A hyper-place is a place that mimics the form and style of an original place, but repurposes the structure towards other ends, such as tourism, and carries over none of the original's meaning or significance (Adham, 2006). In the case of Kafr Al-Gouna, the resort town was advertised as exemplifying the architectural traditions of ancient Egypt. But in truth, the town was constructed utilizing Nubian techniques, a culture quite distinct from that of ancient Egypt (Adham, 2006). Kafr Al-Gouna is a hyper-place because it has copied the form

and style of original Nubian architecture, but it has repurposed the place to represent ancient Egypt to dazzle and wow tourists. Hyper-tradition operates in a similar manner.

In discussion pertaining to cultural commodification, the island of Bali within the Indonesian archipelago can be considered an older sibling of sorts to Chiang Mai, as they share a number of similarities in their shared experiences with tourism. Like Chiang Mai, Bali is predominantly a cultural tourist destination, their respective natural attractions of breathtaking mountains and sandy beaches a close second of course. It's culture has been deeply influenced by a unique mix of Hindu, Javanese, Buddhist, and Balinese tradition (Indrianto, 2005). The distinct atmosphere of this Hindu society is central to the Bali tourist experience, not unlike that of Chiang Mai's own distinct Lanna culture. Much of Bali's infrastructure has been developed to serve tourism. Even though tourism represents an economic boon for Bali's economy, both the regional and national governments have realized that cultural commodification represents a threat because it may distort the Balinese culture that is so crucial to its tourism sector's success (Indrianto, 2005). The slogan that guides their action steps is "*tourism is for Bali, not Bali for tourism*" (Indrianto, 2005). This statement reflects the sentiment that the balance between tourism and culture needs to observe tourism supporting and preserving culture, not the other way around. Finding this balance, and looking at how cultural commodification affects it, is a key part of this project.

Case Studies

I have outlined three case studies in order to take a closer look at the nature of the balance between tourism and culture in Chiang Mai, in conversation with the concepts of cultural commodification, hyper-place, and hyper-tradition. They are titled *Lantern Festivals*, *Hotel or*

Temple, and Shifting Handicraft Production. The first case study delves into the *Loi Krathong* festival, and how tourism is changing how it is practiced. The second case study investigates how some hotels have co-opted the sacred architecture of temples. The third and final case study looks at how artisans are witnessing a trend of change in handicraft production. Some artisans are being forced to switch from traditional handmade production to machine and factory made just to meet tourist demand. While other artisans are finding themselves competing with knock-offs and inauthentic goods made outside of Chiang Mai but sold under the label of Lanna.

Case #1: Lantern Festivals

The *Loi Krathong* festival takes place on the twelfth month of the Lanna lunar calendar. It is celebrated by various cultures throughout Southeast Asia. For example in Myanmar it is called *Tazaungdaing* and in Cambodia it is known as *Bon Om Touk* (Romanos & Auffrey, 2002). The name *Loi Krathong* can be translated as “to float a basket”. It is traditionally a time for the Lanna people to give thanks to the river, in this



case the Ping river which flows through the city, by giving back (Duangchan, 2007). This is accomplished by creating a float, also known as a *krathong*, usually composed of plants, leaves, flowers, bread, and candles (pictured above).

These *krathongs* are then placed into the river to gently float away (pictured above). This practice connects back to ancient Hindu roots, as giving thanks to the river represents reverence and respect for the river’s guardian spirit or goddess

(Duangchan, 2007). In Chiang Mai this festival is largely celebrated within the old city along the banks of the Ping river, complete with parades, performances, beauty contests, and fireworks.

Loi Krathong is celebrated alongside the *Yi Peng* festival, which is unique to northern Thailand. *Yi Peng* means “a full moon day” and takes place under the light of the full moon during the second month of the Lanna lunar calendar, the same as the twelfth month of the Thai lunar calendar. Because both festivals occur in the same month, they are usually celebrated in tandem with one another (Duangchan, 2007). It is traditionally a time for families to spend time together, visit their elders, and go to temple, in addition to merit making. Making merit is important to Lanna Buddhist practice. It is considered to be a beneficial and protective force accumulated through good deeds, acts, and thoughts. It is also believed to bring good into one’s future, determine the quality of one’s next life, and contributes to one’s growth towards enlightenment (Duangchan, 2007). Further practices associated with *Yi Peng* are the hanging of lights and lanterns in the doorways of homes and the entrances of temples during this time.

A relatively new development to the *Loi Krathong* and *Yi Peng* festivities is the introduction of sky lanterns (pictured right). First introduced about twenty years ago, these floating lights of paper and



flame brilliantly light up the night sky in a breathtaking beautiful display and yet increasingly are becoming more and more problematic for the city (Coconuts Bangkok, 2019). Flights have to be limited or cancelled during the festivities because they represent a hazard to safe air travel. They create a smoky hazy that settles over the Chiang Mai river valley, polluting the air and making it difficult to breathe. They also can burn down trees, telephone cables, power lines, and houses in



the night, potentially harming people in the process (pictured left). This past year Chiang Mai's local government was debating whether or not to allow the lanterns in the at all before deciding to move forward with including them

in the end (Coconuts Bangkok, 2019).

Most importantly however, is the fact that the lanterns hold no cultural significance over the November festivals and are purely artificial fabrications for tourist consumption. They are a hyper-tradition, associated with the festivities but not a natural evolution of culture's ever present state of change (Klinkajorn, 2006). They are problematic because their inclusion endangers Chiang Mai's infrastructure, in addition to the safety of locals and tourists alike wishing to celebrate *Loi Krathong* and *Yi Peng*. Finally, the lantern's popularity as a purely artificial attraction with tourists overshadows and shifts their focus away from the original purposes of the festivals: giving back to the river and making merit. In this case cultural commodification has produced an entirely new tradition, a hyper-tradition, seen here in *Loi Krathong*'s sky lanterns.

Case #2: Hotel or Temple

Next, we will be taking a look at the Oriental Dhara Dhevi Hotel in Chiang Mai (pictured right). This hotel is another example of hyper-place, and is a product of cultural commodification (Tansukanun, 2006). The hotel's construction mimics the form and style of Lanna architecture. For example the style of the towers is reminiscent of a *chedi*, also known as a *stupa*, commonly found in



nearby temples such as Wat Suon Dok (pictured below) (Tansukanun, 2006). In this case the original place is the Lanna style temple, also known as a *wat*, and the hyper-place created out of mimicry of that original place is the Dhara Dhevi Hotel. Other hotels have followed this trend.



The Tamarind Village and Rachamankha Hotel seeks to create a tourist experience in an abode similar to that of the traditional Lanna house, albeit with every modern urban luxury available (Tansukanun, 2006). These structures are fascinating studies of cultural

commodification because it is so easy to see how the culture has been commodified. In these cases Lanna style temple and home architecture has been co-opted and implemented for use in the tourism sector (Tansukanun, 2006). Furthermore, the sacred nature of Lanna temple architecture is diminished in terms of its significance because it is reduced to being merely a decoration (Tansukanun, 2006). The Dhara Dhevi Hotel and its companions are hyper-places, much in the same way that the addition of the lanterns to *Loi Krathong* is a hyper-tradition. Culture is constantly in a state of flux, always changing with the times and the people that live within them (Adham, 2006). And yet these hyper-places are not a natural evolution of culture, but rather an artificial construction meant to serve the needs and wants of the tourist industry, not the Lanna people (Porananond, 2015). They are created in part to serve the tourist fantasy of experiencing the traditional Chiang Mai through architecture. These structures represent an image of Chiang Mai as conceptualized by and for the tourist, instead of from the perception of

the local populace (Porananond, 2015). More on these conceptualizations in the following and final case study.

Case #3: Handicraft Souvenirs

The final example I would like to look at is Chiang Mai's renowned handicraft sector. The city is well known for its wide range of craft works from silk and cotton to silver, wood, and lacquer (Chifos & Looye, 2002). It has long been considered an "artisan's town" populated with a variety of craftspeople who could meet the needs of a cultural and religious center backed by a powerful kingdom (Lubeigt, 1994). The artisans of Chiang Mai come from a lineage of the traditional craftspeople of the region, but now they increasingly serve the whims of the local and global tourist market (Chifos & Looye, 2002). Originally, most of the artisan's production was utilitarian in nature, but this is shifting towards products marketed as souvenirs and decorations. Production is seeing also movement from the homes to the factories as mass production and machine manufacturing are increasingly adopted in order to increase production yields and meet consumer demand, foregoing the often more labor intensive and expensive inputs of traditional production. Most importantly, there is pressure on artisans to mythologize their culture since so much of their market demand comes from tourists (Chifos & Looye, 2002). Products are being made to reflect Lanna culture as conceptualized by outsiders and reinterpreted by insiders. As the uniqueness and quality of these representations decline, their potential contribution to cultural identity and heritage preservation declines in turn (Chifos & Looye, 2002). This pressure towards producing a mythological culture is an example of hyper-tradition. In this case, the individuality and uniqueness of traditionally made handicrafts is being replaced by representations of how outsiders perceive of Lanna culture, rather than from within.

A progression of this trend can be observed at Chiang Mai's famous walking street markets in which the products sold are commonly commodified representations of Lanna culture, and some are not even produced in Chiang Mai (Tidtichumrernporn, 2010). The walking street market is a model borrowed from Bangkok in order to concentrate tourism into a single area to support local artisans, shopkeepers, and other vendors, while reducing pollution levels by closing down streets for only



pedestrian use during market times (pictured right) (Tidtichumrernporn, 2010). It is ironic, then, that a place intended to highlight Chiang Mai's culture and creativity of local artisans is being flooded with products made outside of the city and country (Tidtichumrernporn, 2010). Here we observe how cultural commodification produces cultural imitations. These imitations, a.k.a. hyper-traditions reflect a processed and idealized culture. This is problematic because in the process the value and appreciation for traditional production methods and authentic Lanna handicrafts is lost as tourists struggle to differentiate between knock offs and the real thing (Tidtichumrernporn, 2010). Additionally, artisans who are still using traditional production methods are facing tough competition from others who are not (Tidtichumrernpron, 2010).

Analysis

In the three case studies, we have witnessed cultural commodification in action and how hyper-places and hyper-traditions have been created as products of this process. Beautiful, albeit problematic lanterns have been added to the *Loi Krathong* festival. Sacred temple architecture has been co-opted for use in hotels. And traditional artisans are finding themselves competing with both tourist demand for souvenirs and cheaply made knock offs of their own products.

Part of this is to be expected from cultural tourism. This branch of tourism relies on tourists seeking out cultural experiences. Much like how ecological tourists come to Chiang Mai to experience its bountiful waterfalls, beautiful mountains, quaint farmlands, and of course it's elephants, cultural tourists come to Chiang Mai to experience its festivals, temples, markets, and artisans. It makes sense that Chiang Mai uses its rich cultural capital to grow its tourism industry, supporting its economy and funding further development projects.

But on the flip side, the tourism generated demands for cultural consumption has created a market of imitation and mimicry (Tansukanun, 2006). These hyper-places and hyper-traditions are problematic because they manufacture a culture that is artificial in nature and is not an accurate reflection of either traditional or today's Lanna culture (Tansukanun, 2006). In their mimicry, they diminish the significance of the original traditions and places (Porananond, 2015). Sacred temple architectural forms and style loses some of its significance when it is repurposed to decorate a hotel lobby. As poor imitations flood the handicraft artisan market, it becomes difficult to tell between what is real or not, reducing the originality and value of traditionally made handicrafts (Porananond, 2015).

Furthermore, the culture represented by these hyper-traditions and hyper-places often reflects Lanna culture as perceived by the outsider, the tourist, rather than the lived experience of the Lanna people (Tidtichumrernporn, 2010). These commodified spaces display the exotic Chiang Mai tourists want to see. Cultural tourists want an authentic cultural experience, but as long as they *perceive* that they are being delivered a rich and unique cultural experience, it does not matter whether it was really real or not (Tidtichumrernporn, 2010). As hotels take on the appearances of temples and as poor imitations crowd artisan markets the culture on display

becomes more about commodified outsider conceptions of culture rather than Lanna culture in and of itself. These hyper-places and hyper-tradition represent an imbalance in the partnership between tourism and Lanna culture in Chiang Mai because they take from but do not support the cultural foundations from which both tourism and Lanna culture is based.

Next Steps

I will close with three programs that I think are doing a good job of negotiating this complicated balance: These are Creative Chiang Mai, Monk for a Month, and Chiang Mai University's Agriculture Market. Creative Chiang Mai is a collective of members across education, private, and government sectors. Its mission is to promote growth, develop talent, and market Chiang Mai as a place for investment and business, all while ensuring that Chiang Mai's cultural heritage is preserved and sustainable development is upheld (CCM, 2020). They are responsible in large part for the push to place Chiang Mai on the list of prospective UNESCO World Heritage Cities. Creative Chiang Mai hosts TED Talks featuring local voices and innovators and connecting them with international opportunities, bringing previously untapped investment to Chiang Mai and fostering a thriving creative scene. This group has organized dozens of artists and architects to work together on a Lanna-style of architecture that balances modernity with tradition, notably without drawing from sacred temples for inspiration. (UNESCO, 2020).

There are also some fascinating Monk Chat and Monk for a Month programs run by monks at a couple of Chiang Mai's temples. One such Monk Chat program is held at *Wat Suon Dok* just off *Suthep*, one of the city's main roads, in which around ten monks discuss the intricacies of Buddhism with thirty to forty curious tourists for a two hour session (Schedneck,

2018). I have some friends who taught English to the monks at the *Wat Suon Dok* school and participated in this program. This program acts as a great bridge between Buddhism and tourists. Since many Western tourists will have had little to no previous experience with Buddhism and Buddhist cultures this program is a good place to start the conversation. Additionally, it helps introduce visitors to the intricacies and dynamics of specifically Lanna Buddhism, its beliefs, how it is practiced, and what makes it unique (Schedneck, 2018). Another similar program is the Monk for a Month program at *Wat Sri Boen Ruang* in Fang, Chiang Mai. The program provides the opportunity to ordain, live in a Lanna temple, and receive basic Buddhist teaching and meditation instruction, for a price of course. The program's participants remains low, with just a few foreigners staying for the full month, but this is to be expected since a month is a long time for a tourist to commit to remaining in one place, especially one devoid of most of the luxuries one would normally desire when travelling for pleasure (Schedneck, 2018). This opens up an interesting discussion about what kind of people this program wishes to attract. The abbot in charge of the program stated envisioning it to be a cultural exchange program of sorts (Schedneck, 2018). I find this program to be an admirable endeavour because it seeks to attract those tourists interested in learning more about the ways of Buddhism and Lanna culture, and in the process produces people with greater appreciation, understanding, and respects for both.

Finally, there is a lesser known market that remains true to form and to its roots in regards to selling authentic, locally produced, and quality checked Lanna cultural products (Chiang Mai University, 2019). I highlight the agricultural market on the Chiang Mai University campus. It occurs on the first Thursday and Friday of every month. It is mainly a farmers market, but with more than food for sale. Seeds and decorative plants are available for purchase. Aside

from farm to table goods there are also street foods, smoothie vendors, and desert carts present. Traditional handicrafts make up a portion of this market as well. One can purchase finely handwoven cultural clothing pieces amidst dozens of other souvenirs for sale. And strict measures have been put into place to ensure product quality (Chiang Mai University, 2019). All the proceeds go directly to the local artisans, farmers, and other vendors there supporting their professions and livelihoods (Chiang Mai University, 2019). I think this is a good example of the concept of walking street markets operating according to plan. Lanna culture products are on full display and are for sale, but are not cheaply made nor are knock offs produced outside of Chiang Mai.

Conclusion

Chiang Mai is in the midst of a balancing act. Tourism makes for a significant portion of the city's economy. The foot traffic, tourist dollars, and investment the tourism industry provides is a major financial boon for Chiang Mai. The continued growth of this sector is certainly key to city plans for further growth and development. It is a city with rich cultural roots. Chiang Mai is a city and a province. It was once the seat of the powerful and influential Lanna kingdom, an identity still proudly maintained to this day. It was both back then and also today a regional economic and cultural capital for what is now northern Thailand. The city's Lanna heritage is felt throughout the city. Chiang Mai's walled fortifications and moats still guard the old city. Ancient temples remain in use today scattered throughout the city and the surrounding countryside. Unlike the largely historical sites of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya, Chiang Mai's rich history remains very much alive today in the Lanna people and the culture, customs, and traditions they practice to this day (UNESCO, 2019). And yet the city is not a time capsule, or a museum frozen in time,

Chiang Mai's culture, like all culture, is a vibrant and dynamic entity that changes with the people and the times they live in.

Over the course of this paper we have studied how Chiang Mai's culture has adapted to embrace tourism. It is a balancing act, weighing the benefits of tourism, the potential financial boon it provides, the name recognition, and investment while preserving the city's cultural foundations. From looking at the case studies, the current state of this balance is one of imbalance, with the tourism industry taking away more than it is giving back or supporting Chiang Mai and its cultural capital. The cultural commodification process has created various hyper-traditions and hyper-places which are in turn contributing, to a certain extent, a loss of culture. This is because these hyper-traditions and hyper-places diminish the significance and uniqueness from the original traditions and places from which they draw their inspiration in their imitation and mimicry. In the case of the *Loi Krathong* festival, the inclusion of the sky lanterns has had dangerous consequences, the worst of them being burning homes and potentially harming people in the process. In the case of the hotels, they have appropriated the forms and style of sacred Lanna temple architecture to furnish and decorate tourist structures to artificially construct an exotic experiences. And in the case of handicrafts, artisans are struggling to maintain their traditional methods amidst rising tourist demand and the market being flooded with poorly made imitations.

Tourism's insatiable appetite for cultural consumption drives the process of cultural commodification, which in turn leads to the creation of these hyper-places and hyper-traditions. These hyper-places and hyper-traditions are problematic to the maintenance of Chiang Mai's cultural capital because they wear away, reduce, and diminish it through imitation, mimicry, and

appropriation. I think that finding a better balance between the forces of tourism and culture in Chiang Mai is important to ensuring that the city can both reap the benefits of tourism for development in addition to maintaining and further adapting its beautiful and distinct Lanna culture. I have no broad recommendations to make as for how this better balance is to be achieved. I do however, find taking a few smaller steps, such as supporting the emergence of interesting programs like the Monk Chats and the Creative Chiang Mai movement that work to cross those bridges connecting visitors and tourists with Buddhism, Lanna culture, and Chiang Mai is beneficial. That would be a good start towards finding that better balance, which both ideally maximizes the benefits of tourism for development, while preserving the city's long history, rich heritage, and beautiful culture, for locals and tourists alike.

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