

## Guideline for Conservation, Revitalization and Development of the Identity and Customs of the Kula Ethnic Group in Northeast Thailand

<sup>1</sup>Mingkwan Chonpairot, <sup>1</sup>Souneth Phothisane and <sup>2</sup>Phra Sutdhisansophon

<sup>1</sup>Research Institute of Northeastern Arts and Culture, Maha Sarakham University,  
Muang District, Maha Sarakham 44000, Thailand

<sup>2</sup>Mahamakut Buddhist University, Roi-et Campus, Muang District, Roi-et 45000, Thailand

**Abstract:** The Kula were traveling merchants, who came into Northeast Thailand from the Mon states and Shan states in Myanmar and from Northern Thailand. They conducted trade and traveled in caravans bringing with them goods and merchandise from their homeland, which included measuring scales, betel nut chewing tools, brass utensils, lamp, jewelry box, tobacco box, ear rings and necklaces. They traded and bought other merchandises along their travels such as cows, buffalo, spices and useful household items and tools. The Bowring treaty between Thailand and England added to the prosperity of the Kula trade and eventually large caravans of Kula merchants were frequent sites in Central and Northeastern Thailand. The Kula also brought with them traditions and customs such as a more lavish style of *Boon Khao Sak* festival and *Mongsoeng* Dance and Music to communities in Northeast Thailand. The Kula's knowledge in trading and journeys provided an important example and model for other groups such as Indian, Chinese and local Thai-Lao groups to follow. The end of the Bowring treaty brought an end to the large Kula caravans. Kula merchants still continued their trade but they were eventually replaced by modernization. Most of the Kula merchants ended their journeys in Northeast Thailand villages where they took wives and settled down. Most of them never returned home. Modernization and assimilation have caused many Kula culture and traditions to disappear. The Kula's cultural treasures and traditions have mostly been preserved successfully at the village of Ban Non Yai in the Province of Ubon Ratchathani.

**Key words:** Kula, ethnic, minority, Isan, Northeast Thailand, preservation, conservation

### INTRODUCTION

Northeast Thailand or Isan is a land rich in natural resources, history and the home of many ethnic groups. The majority of ethnic groups in Isan can be divided according to linguistics into 2 main groups. The largest are Thai-Lao ethnic groups, which consist of Lao Wieng, Lao Kao, Lao Puan, Lao Korat, Lao Song, Kalerng, Yo, Yoy, Saek and Thai Dum. The 2nd largest group is from the Mon-Khmer group which consists of Kui, So and Chaobon. There are also small groups of tribal Vietnamese and Kula ethnic groups. The Vietnamese groups migrated into Northeast Thailand during two periods. The first was when Indo-China was under French colonial rule and the second period was during world war 2 when Vietnamese migrants entered Northeast Thailand through the border along the Mekong River (Chantarasaka, 2002). The Kula ethnic groups entered Thailand from Northern Thailand and from Myanmar. The word Kula is a Myanmar word

meaning outsider or foreigner. The word Kula was first used to describe merchants who traveled from Bangladesh to trade in Myanmar and Thailand. As more and more people traveled to trade and seek fortune in Thailand, eventually all merchants or travelers from Myanmar and Northern Thailand were recognized by Northeast Thailand communities as Kula.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research aimed to examine the traditions and identities of the Kula ethnic group in Northeast Thailand, explore guidelines for conservation, revitalization and development of the traditions of the Kula ethnic group in Northeast Thailand. Data was collected from various villages in Northeast region of Thailand between April 2006 and September 2007 by using qualitative research methodology. Using interdisciplinary approach, including anthropology and biology, according to Phongphit (2001)

Phum Panya Chaoban Kap Kan Phatthana Chonnabot (Folk Wisdom and Rural Development, Phongphit, 2001).

**Research area:** The 5 villages include the village of Ban Non Yai in the Province of Ubon Ratchathani, The village of *Ban Kudwah* and *Ban Kum Kee* Yang in the province of Kalasin, The village of Ban Bueng Kae, in the province of Yasothon and The village of Ban Fang in Roi-Et province. Since, most Kula's traditions and beliefs had been already assimilated to the mainstream culture. Few Kula villages were able to maintain their traditions. Only one Kula viillage, Ban Non Yai village in Ubon Ratchathani province still kept their Kula traditions than other villages. This village still maintained many Kula traditions and beliefs, such as festivals, food, handicrafts, goldsmith, environment, ceremonies and Mongsoeng music and dance. Therefore, Ban Non Yai village was the emphasizing area of the study. Data was analyzed by using Jane Ritchie's approach in her article, carrying out qualitative analysis, discussing on: data management, descriptive data, explanatory accounts and group-data analysis (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

## RESULTS

**Kula history:** Kula merchants conducted trade in Northeast Thailand and along the territories along the banks of the Mekong river. Their presence and existence in Northeast Thailand is recorded as early as the early 19th century during the reign of King Rama the IV (1851-1868). The earliest evidence of the Kula is recorded detailing the dispute between the *Tong Su* or Kula with the purchase of 577 cattle heads from the Governors of Roi-Et, Suwannapoom and Khon Kaen. The dispute occurred when the governors of these cities refused to handover the cattle. The Kula during that period were protected by the treaty with Britain, therefore, Bangkok acted as a mediator and gave the Kula their money back in the amount of 2,763.5 Baht and ordered the governors in Northeast Thailand to pay back Bangkok.

Kula merchants traveled in small and large caravans. Some of these caravans would consist of more than 100 people traveling in Ox carts, Horses and Elephants. Kula merchants would sell and buy many items during their travels such as Elephants, Ivory, Animal Horns, Antlers, Silk, Krabua or Water Buffalo, Firearms, Caskets, Cases, Knives, Swords, Textiles, Needles, Silver, Amulets, Ruby Rings, Necklaces, Brass goods and Kitchen utensils. Smaller groups of Kula would travel in groups of at least 5, 10 or 50 people and would be armed with knives, swords, firearms and sacred magical charms for protection. The Kula engaged in commerce differently

from the Chinese where they didn't establish themselves by setting up shops in communities but preferred to travel from destination to destination and rest along temples, jungles, prairie and forests along the way. Their presence in Northeast Thailand is such that the central plain in Northeast Thailand, which encompasses the modern provinces of Roi-Et, Maha Sarakham, Yasothon, Suring and Srisaket has been named as Thung Kula Ronghai or the plain of the crying Kula (Phumisak, 2003). Thung Kula Ronghai is a vast plain of grass and swamp. The plain was sparsely populated during the early 19th century and many caravans and individuals would enter the plain and find themselves lost. People living in the community had to erect wooden poles and plant trees to identify the routes to make navigation possible. The routes that the Kula traveled into Thailand can be divided into 5 routes. Route from Dong Paya Fai in Nakhon Ratchasima Province to Pak Prieu in Saraburi Province. Route from Dong Paya Klang in Nakorn Ratchasima Province through to the village of Sanam Chang in Lop Buri province. Route from Thako pass in Nakhon Ratchasima pass into Kabinburi District in Prachin Buri Province to Panatnikom district in Saraburi province to Phanam Sarakham province in Chachoengsao province with the final destination in the province of Nakhon Nayok in Eastern Thailand. Route from Martaban (Moattama), Moulmein (Mawlamyng) in Myanmar into Petchabun into Rahaeng District in Tak province. Route to Cambodia through the Jom Pass in Surin Province to Srisophon province in modern day Cambodia.

The Kula played a major role in providing goods and merchandise in Northeast Thailand. Northeast Thailand communities were provided with essential goods and tools and the Kula also made the exchange of goods between rural communities in the region possible. The Kula merchants also brought with them additional knowledge and practices in iron works, gold works, traditions and culture and the most prominent is their experience and expertise as traveling merchants. As the regional economy advanced and prospered, more and more local Northeast Thailand individuals slowly replaced Kula merchants and there was also increased competition from Chinese and Indian merchants. Modern roads and railways were being constructed linking Bangkok and the Province of Nakorn Ratchasima making goods and products easily available to Northeast Thailand. When the bowring treaty ended it brought an end to the large caravans of Kula merchants into Thailand. Small caravans of Kula merchants still continued to travel into Thailand up to the 20th century and many Kula descendants living in Northern Thailand still practice there tradition in roving trade with goods from Northern Thailand into Northeast

Thailand by bringing products such as pottery, ceramics and artificial flowers. The first generations of Kula merchants traveled into Northeast Thailand to trade and then separated and settled down in villages where they married. Only a small number of Kula merchants from Myanmar returned to their homeland but most made only a one way trip, never returning home. Many Kula traditions and customs have disappeared through the generations through assimilation with local Thai-Lao communities.

#### **Kula cultural identity**

**Kula language:** The language that Kula merchants used to communicate with others was not their original tongue. The language that they used was a mix and adaptation of the words spoken among Thai Yai or Dai ethnic groups living in the Shan states in North Eastern Myanmar and Northern Thailand. Many Kula's adapted their original languages to include Northern or Lanna and Kammuang words and phrases which were widely used along the borders in communities between Myanmar and Northern Thailand. When the Kula traveled into Northeast Thailand or Northeast Thailand their language was regarded and understood as a mix between Myanmar and Tai or Dai language.

**Kula clothing and cultural dress:** The majority of Kula merchants that traveled into Northeast Thailand were mostly male. And they were dressed very different from locals as described by their living relatives. Most of their attire was described as similar to the clothing of the people of Myanmar, Mon, Dai or Thai Yai and some dressed like Karieng or Karen tribes. Kula pants were mostly made from cotton and dyed in opaque colors. The pants were fashioned with wide breaches and length to the ankle or knee much like Chinese style shorts with ropes fastening the pants at the waist. Kula males also wore Sarong which is a Myanmar kilt fashioned in checkered patterns and dyed in dark colors. The length of the Sarong would vary according to each individual's preference. Male shirts were called *Sua Taek Bung*. *Sua Taek Bung* shirts were round collar shirts that were wide and made from a single piece of cloth joined and buttoned in the front. Fabric rings and knots were used as buttons. Most of Kula shirts were black, dark blue and white in color (Wongtaet, 2003).

**Kula hairstyles:** Kula males had 3 different types of hairstyles. Long hair which was bundled and tied at the center top of the head and wrapped or tied off with white cloth or turban. Regular short hair with a turban. Regular short hairstyle without a turban.

**Kula jewelry:** Most Kula merchants had their ears pierced and wore earrings called *Kajorn*. *Kajorn* earrings were made from silver and would have long stems with a large singular end ornament which were worn on both ear lobes. Regular earrings would only be worn on the left ear lobe.

**Kula shoes:** Most Kula did not wear shoes. Those that did wore simple sandals.

**Kula food:** Kula merchants ate regular rice and would always carry kitchen ware and utensils made from brass along with them on their travels. They mostly made and prepared their own meals and would eat among themselves because they had strict rules regarding proper food. Kula merchants do not eat meat from cows, ox or water buffalos. Their restraint from these meat products is that the animals provided labor and were the main merchandise of their trade. They would only make meals from animals that were still fresh and died of known causes. They would not eat dead frogs or fish that were lying in the jungle or found dead along paddy fields. Vegetables were consumed in many varieties and to what was available in the lands where they camped. The Kula's were experts in knowing which plants and wild vegetables were edible because they had to rely on the forest, land and natural resources that was available. They could expertly pick out what was edible and which types of plants were poisons. Tea consumed in place of water and was a regular event at their homes and on their travels. Liquor and alcohol was forbidden because Kula merchants practiced magic and sacred charms to protect them on their journeys. The Kula's sacred charms and magic would only be successful if they did not drink alcohol.

**Kula medicine and medical practices:** The Kula used herbal, natural medicine and sacred charms and magic to cure and prevent them from the dangers of travel. Because of their occupation as traveling merchants, they had to develop the skills of herbal medicine and natural remedies which were passed down to them from their ancestors and from their leader. Sacred chants and magical powers were the alternative source of medical healing and protection. Their sacred magic and spells would be applied as either charms or tattoos.

**Kula knowledge in protection:** The journey of the Kula puts them directly up against natural and supernatural dangers. To protect themselves they carried knives, swords, lances and firearms. Tattoos were also used to ward off evil spirits and protect them from the dangers of

the wilderness, natural and supernatural enemies. Kula will have at least one sword and many will have several with handles made from silver, brass and ivory. The Kula hold their swords in high regards and they apply sacred charms to their swords. Everybody is forbidden to use or touch their swords. Tattoos would be imprinted on many parts of the body especially on the upper front leg, arms, chest, back and shoulder. Most of the tattoos were colored in black and some merchants tattoo their entire faces and on the back of their necks.

**Kula knowledge in commerce and trade:** The Kula traveled into Northeast Thailand to primarily trade. Eventually, they settled down and married local Northeast Thailand wives at their final destination. They conducted their trade in caravans ranging from a minimum of 5 up to the hundreds. Large caravans had many Kula crew members that provided protection and their leader was called *Nai Hoi*. The word *Nai Hoi* has been adopted in Northern and Northeastern Thailand meaning great leader or a person with the dominance of wealth and power having many subordinates. Kula trade and commerce already existed before King Rama the IV, but the earliest evidence of their existence in Thai annals is recorded in the year 1885, Kula merchants faced many obstacles in trading cows and water buffalos. Kula's trade of water buffalos were large and included thousands of ox's and buffalo's which required a large group to herd and protect the caravan and they often had trouble with local Thai governments in rural provinces. In 1856, the Bowring treaty between Thailand and Great Britain was drafted and made into law on April 5th 1856, which placed Kula merchants under the protection of Great Britain with foreign passports. Under the treaty, the Kula who were considered British nationals were eligible to conduct free trade and provided with protection throughout Thailand.

After the Bowring treaty was official, The Kula's commerce greatly prospered and expanded. There were no more problems in trade contracts and negotiations. Large caravans of buffalos, ox carts and wagons were regular sites in Northeast and Central Thailand. There were also smaller groups and small caravans traveling throughout Northeast Thailand. Most of these small caravans were made up of cows, ox, horses and wagons carrying loads and merchandise in large baskets made from bamboo, rattan or wicker palm. The ox's carrying the baskets were called *Koh Tang*. While horses were called *Mah Tang* and the weave baskets called *Katoh*. *Katoh* baskets were popular in many parts of Northeastern Thailand or Isan and were eventually called by different names in each of the provinces. These large baskets which were larger than weaved bamboo baskets of the Thai-Lao groups were

called *Kapoom* in Roi Et Province. They were known as *Katoh Guay* or *Guay* in Ubon Ratchatani Province. In Mukdahan they were called *Khong Guay*. The baskets were made in sizes according to the needs of the merchants which in most cases were large to very large baskets. These baskets would be loaded with merchandises and carried by animal labor or in wagons and carts. Kula's prospered from the Bowring treaty for a period of almost 70 years. Finally, the treaty ended in 1918 and ended the era of large caravans and massive herds of buffalo trading by the Kula. Small groups of Kula merchants still continued the trade but by that time most had already married and many settled in the villages that marked their final destination. Many Kula merchants turned to farming and agriculture practices while some still carried on the tradition of traveling trade in nearby provinces and territories. By the end of the apex of the Kula era, trading by means of ox carts, horses and buffalos was well identified with the Kula and the presence of the *Katoh* baskets had made their impact and remembered in Northeastern Thailand Society.

**Kula's arts and crafts:** Kula's arts were found in many forms mostly made of bronze, marble and wood. These arts and crafts were the Kula's original merchandise which they brought from their homeland. They included measuring scales, betel nut chewing tools, brass utensils, lamps, jewelry box, tobacco box, ear rings and necklaces. The money received from the sales of these goods was reinvested in local merchandise such as cattle, water buffalos and spices and other useful items.

#### **Kula's rituals and beliefs**

**Boon khao sahk:** *Boon Khao Sahk* is an annual Buddhist Thai tradition celebrated in September. Villagers will make offerings of food and meals to Monks. After receiving sermons and merit makings, the villagers will hang or place offerings of food on tree branches, bushes and under trees inside and outside temple grounds to provide offerings of food to wandering spirits that were released from the spirit world during the month of August. The Kula also celebrated the Boon Khao Sahk festival at their homelands and having settled down in Northeast Thailand embraced many Northeast Thailand traditions and customs. The Kula celebrate *Boon Khao Sahk* similar to Thai-Lao groups but there difference in such that: The Kula monks also provide sermons and merit makings directly to the food offerings. The Kula believe that spirits cannot go beyond the temple walls and therefore, the offerings must be made outside the sacred grounds. The offerings of foods come in many dishes and more abundant than Thai-Lao groups which was mainly rice,

eggs and fruits. The Kula foods would include meals that the deceased loved and ate regularly when they were alive. Besides food offerings, the Kula also placed items that were once used by their deceased relatives such as bowls, knives, swords and musical instruments.

**Mongsoeng music and dance:** Among all traditions and beliefs of The Kula, their music was very interesting in many aspects. Mongsoeng music and dance is an original Kula tradition that they brought with them. The Mongsoeng music and dance of the Kula survives only at the village of Bahn Non Yai in the province of Ubon Ratchatani which was brought by the Kula migration to the village in 1847. The music and dance has been incorporated into all the festivals and celebrations in their community, birthdays, weddings and also used to welcome important guests. The Funeral ritual ceremony is the only tradition that the Mongsoeng dance and music is not used in. The musical ensemble called *Wong Mong Soeng* consisted of many bossed drums of various sizes, two-headed drum, a gong and large hand and medium hand cymbals. The gong used in the performance must only come from Myanmar because the Kula believe that it sounds better than locally produced gongs because the gongs made from Myanmar have a higher quality brass. The original drum brought in 1847 has been long and ruined the new one used in modern times was purchased on the borders of Northern Thailand and Myanmar at the District of Tachilek in the Province of Chiang Rai in Northern Thailand. The Moengsoeng music is accompanied by a dance performed by female dancers dressed in Myanmar and Northern Thai dance dresses. The dance dress would consist of bright colored long sleeved shirts, scarf and sarong. The dancer's hairstyle would be tied atop of the head and adorned with a cluster of flowers which would dangle down from the top of the head down to the shoulders. The music and dance accompanies all celebrations and can be performed both stationary and as a parade. The duration of the performance can last for 10 min and sometimes for hours. During parade performances, the musicians will lead the parade with the dancers following behind. Other Kula dances such as the sword dance and *Fon Gerng Serng* dance have been discontinued but still remembered in photographs and writings.

**Preservation guidelines for preservation and conservation of the cultural identities and traditions of the Kula ethnic group:** Research data has revealed that the preservation of The Kula cultural identity is only possible at the villages of Ban Non Yai in Ubon Ratchatani Province and at the village of Ban Fang in Roi

Et Province. Traditional customs of the Kula ethnic group is only possible at the village of Ban Non Yai. Ban Non Yai has the most potential because it has the most contributing factors towards a successful conservation and development. Most of the individuals in the community of Ban Non Yai are united, are enthusiastic and have available funding for developing and revitalizing historical structures, cultural treasures, traditional customs, occupancies and traditions. Contributing factors that Ban Non Yai has towards successful conservation and revitalization include,

The geographical factor of Ban Non Yai where the village is a large community linked by convenient transportation routes. The village is located 1 km from the state highway #23 and has modern roads to nearby villages. Roads are modern and safe to travel. Large vehicles can easily access the village which has a rich historic past. The village of Ban Non Yai is an ancient village with rich historical background. The village dates back to the dominant era of ancient Khmer and has numerous ancient Khmer architectures such as Temples, Barai pool, earthen walls and Naga bridge walkways. There also exist many ancient sources of smelting iron and earthen pottery factories. There is an ancient pond named *Nong Hua Kohn* where executions of *Pee Bahb Pee Boon* rebels were executed. *Nong Sang Chang* pond is still preserved where in the past it was used as a ground for raising elephants used by Kula merchants. Many archaeological artifacts such as Buddha statues, amulets, necklaces and rings have been discovered in the community and the village has 3 large temples which unites the community and continue the Buddhist faith. There also exists an ancient Kula cemetery which is still actively in service for more than 100 years.

The village of Ban Non Yai has an abundance of cultural artifacts such as tools, crafts and household items which have been preserved from generation to generation. Villagers have collected the artifacts and cultural treasures and have placed them in a temporary community museum at the forest monastery and at the local village elementary school museum.

Cultural customs and traditions in Buddhism, Brahminism and Kula customs are still practiced. Rituals and celebrations such as traditional Kula music and dance of Mongsoeng ensemble is still preserved and celebrated throughout the year.

Every individual in the community ranging from village leaders, Buddhist monks, village headmen, local philosophers, teachers, students and ordinary citizens of Ban Non Yai village all recognize the importance and have great respects to their cultural heritage. Village elders have provided the leadership and guidance to promoting

cultural traditions and current generations of Kula children are in support and actively participate in the village celebrations and festivals. Generations of Kula children who have prospered in their occupations have contributed money to buying land and providing funds to build a central community Kula museum.

Ban Non Yai has a continued village tradition of producing gold ornaments and jewelry since the past and the home industry is still prosperous. Gold products such as necklaces and rings are still made at Ban Non Yai and distributed to other communities. The household gold industry has good structural management and can be applied to other industries such as handicrafts and other cultural merchandise to promote tourism. Other commerce possibilities include the manufacturing of traditional goods and handicrafts and fortune telling. Commerce factors are highly potential at Ban Non Yai which can greatly contribute to the development and promotion of Ban Non Yai as an Eco tourism site and cultural village. It can also provide a model for other Kula communities to follow and take as an example to developing their own villages in promoting culture and tourism.

### CONCLUSION

To the people living in Northeast Thailand, The Kula were nomads who traveled throughout Northeast Thailand as well as in Laos and Cambodia. Written records of the Kula people are very rare. However, their name is remembered as the name of the vast plain covering five provinces in Northeast Thailand. This field is called Thung Kula Ronghai, meaning The Field of the Crying Kula. The Kula strongly believed in Buddhism and animism. Their appearances are tall with white-brown complexion. Their bodies were marked with tattoo designs, such as tiger, dragon or lizard. Their original homelands were in Northern Myanmar and Northern Thailand. They were adventuring merchants traveling throughout mainland Southeast Asia during 19th and early 20th centuries. They traveled on elephants, horses, oxcarts and on foot. They sold textiles, jewelries, cattle and other household utilities. Many Kula merchants married local women and settled down in Northeast Thailand or Isan. The largest numbers of Kula merchants settled down at the village of Ban Non Yai in the Province of Ubon Ratchatani. These Kula people had brought with them their traditions, beliefs, arts, music, Buddhist palm-leave manuscripts, building their own temple, their own musical instruments, songs and dances.

The original Kula merchants died a long time ago. Only a small numbers of their sons and daughters are still alive. Most of the Kula cultural identity had been

assimilated into the main stream Thai-Lao culture. But several original Kula culture and traditions are still preserved and exists as artifacts in several communities that used to be home villages of the Kula people in the past. These artifacts include household utensils such as betel tray, betel tools, tobacco box, jewelry box, rice box, measuring scale, knife, sword and musical instruments. Original Kula traditions and beliefs include the traditions of *Boon Khao Sak* festival and the Mongsoeng music and dance. Little was known in the past about the provenance of the Kula people because they did not like to talk about their home lands to their off-springs or their neighbors. But in several communities the Kula where known to have come from Myanmar from the Mon states city of Martaban (Moattama), Moulmein (Mawlamying). It is now known that there were actually two groups of Kula. The first group of Kula was originally from the Mon state in Myanmar and ventured into Thailand to trade. The second groups were Kula's who left their homes in Northern Thailand to trade in Northeast Thailand to escape high taxes and other restrictions implemented on foreigners. The Kula's that came from Northern Thailand rarely talked about their past, kept it as much as a secret as possible and never traveled back home. The Kula's from the Mon state in Myanmar talked about their homelands and several traveled back home to Myanmar but eventually all of them returned and took Northeastern Thai wives and settled in Thailand.

Because of the impacts of globalization and materialism, many Kula traditions have gradually disappeared from most of the Kula communities in Northeast Thailand with the exception of the village of Ban Non Yai in Ubonratchatani. Many Kula communities have tried to revitalize their culture but the lack of funds and the participation and awareness of the community have been the main obstacles. Conservation methods and promoting of Kula culture has been most successful at the village of Ban Non Yai in the Province of Ubonratchatani Province. The off-springs of the Kula at the village of Ban Non Yai have actively preserved and have constantly been promoting their traditions and culture. The *Boon Khao Sahk* tradition is as much the same as was in the past when they came to the village in 1847. Mongsoeng music and dances in which the Kula brought with them are included in all the festivals and joyful events celebrated throughout the year with the exception of funerals. The village members in Ban Non Yai are implementing many activities and projects to preserve their traditions for the younger generation. They are projects to build a dedicated Kula Museum and a Center for Kula Studies and to establish Ban Non Yai Village as the Kula Cultural Village and ecotourism destination. The

village has many advantages and the possibility of success is high due to supporting factors of many cultural treasures, attractions and a healthy natural environment. These include gigantic trees, Kula Buddhist temple, Kula cemetery, old village site, Khmer archeological structures such as Barai ponds, Naga bridges and Sema Hin Stones, goldsmiths, Kula traditional food, Kula weapons, Kula utensils, Kula clothing and Kula mythologies. Their success is proof that conservation, revitalization and development has to be initiated and continued by the people within the community and that additional funding and support from government sector is needed for continued progress. The efforts and dedication of the village of Ban Non Yai is a model example of conserving and promoting cultural heritage.

#### **SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- District Municipality should apply the results of this research to bring development to local communities and promote local economy because every individual community already has their own individual cultural treasures and human resources.
- Rural educational institutions and schools should be conscious of the importance of local indigenous traditions and customs. Schools should unite in research and incorporate the promotion and study of local traditions and customs as a regular curriculum. Local programs will promote the cultivation and understanding of their cultural identity and good ancestral customs and tradition. The programs will enable youths and local citizens alike to be able to differentiate the advantages and dangers in modern society.

- The Tourism Authority of Thailand promotion of local tourism in rural communities by supporting research studies and programs with regional universities to survey the local traditions and customs of distinct rural communities. The research programs should also include objectives to find which communities can support eco tourism and whether the villages can be developed into cultural villages.
- The research study of Guideline for Conversation, Revitalization and Development of the Traditions of Kula Ethnic Group in Northeast Thailand can provide a basis for continued research of other Kula communities in The People's Democratic Republic of Laos and Cambodia.

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