



VOLUME 20 ISSUE 2

The International Journal of

# Critical Cultural Studies

---

## Flying Water Buffaloes and the Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Satun Province

TAWEESIN TUNGSENG AND THAWATCHAI SRIPORNNGAM

**EDITOR**

Asunción López-Varela, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Kortney Sutherland, Common Ground Research Networks, USA

**ADVISORY BOARD**

The New Directions in the Humanities Research Network recognizes the contribution of many in the evolution of the Research Network. The principal role of the Advisory Board has been, and is, to drive the overall intellectual direction of the Research Network. A full list of members can be found at <https://thehumanities.com/about/advisory-board>.

**PEER REVIEW**

Articles published in *The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* are peer reviewed using a two-way anonymous peer review model. Reviewers are active participants of the New Directions in the Humanities Research Network or a thematically related Research Network. The publisher, editors, reviewers, and authors all agree upon the following standards of expected ethical behavior, which are based on the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Codes of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines. More information can be found at: <https://thehumanities.com/journals/model>.

**ARTICLE SUBMISSION**

*The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* publishes biannually (June, December). To find out more about the submission process, please visit <https://thehumanities.com/journals/call-for-papers>.

**ABSTRACTING AND INDEXING**

For a full list of databases in which this journal is indexed, please visit <https://thehumanities.com/journals/collection>.

**RESEARCH NETWORK MEMBERSHIP**

Authors in *The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* are members of the New Directions in the Humanities Research Network or a thematically related Research Network. Members receive access to journal content. To find out more, please visit <https://thehumanities.com/about/become-a-member>.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**

*The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* is available in electronic and print formats. Subscribe to gain access to content from the current year and the entire backlist. Contact us at [cgscholar.com/cg\\_support](https://cgscholar.com/cg_support).

**ORDERING**

Single articles and issues are available from the journal bookstore at <https://cgscholar.com/bookstore>.

**HYBRID OPEN ACCESS**

*The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* is Hybrid Open Access, meaning authors can choose to make their articles open access. This allows their work to reach an even wider audience, broadening the dissemination of their research. To find out more, please visit <https://thehumanities.com/journals/hybrid-open-access>.

**DISCLAIMER**

The authors, editors, and publisher will not accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may have been made in this publication. The publisher makes no warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

**THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
CRITICAL CULTURAL STUDIES**

<https://thehumanities.com>

ISSN: 2327-0055 (Print)

ISSN: 2327-2376 (Online)

<https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0055/CGP> (Journal)

First published by Common Ground Research Networks in 2022  
University of Illinois Research Park  
60 Hazelwood Drive  
Champaign, IL 61820 USA  
Ph: +1-217-328-0405  
<https://cgnetworks.org>

*The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies*  
is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal.

**COPYRIGHT**

© 2022 (individual papers), the author(s)

© 2022 (selection and editorial matter),

Common Ground Research Networks

All rights reserved. Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism, or review, as permitted under the applicable copyright legislation, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the publisher. For permissions and other inquiries, please contact [cgscholar.com/cg\\_support](https://cgscholar.com/cg_support).



Common Ground Research Networks, a member of Crossref

# Flying Water Buffaloes and the Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Satun Province

Taweessin Tungseng,<sup>1</sup> Songkhla Rajabhat University, Thailand  
Thawatchai Sriporngam, Songkhla Rajabhat University, Thailand

*Abstract: This is a qualitative investigation to explore the value of buffalo kiting as an intangible cultural heritage for the local people of Satun Province, Thailand. Data was gathered from documentary review and field research in Satun. Twenty-five key informants involved in kiting in Satun provided information through in-depth interviews. The researchers also visited the area to conduct observations and hold focus group discussions. The results reveal that the value of buffalo kiting as an intangible cultural heritage is multifaceted and wide ranging. The most significant value of the kite culture recognized by local people was economic benefit, largely through an increase in cultural tourism opportunities.*

*Keywords: Buffalo Kite, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Kiting Culture, Value*

## Introduction

Kiting is an ancient pastime, having originated in Asia over 2,800 years ago (Desai 2010). The first kites were variously intended for sport, ceremonial use, and as everyday tools. These uses continue today in the form of competitions, festivals, and fishing, yet the shapes and designs of the kites have evolved from the simple paper-covered bamboo frames from which they originally descended (Barton and Dietrich 2009).

Satun Province, in Southern Thailand, has a particularly rich kiting culture and is famous for a specific type of kite that reflects the farming culture of the surrounding region. The province annually holds the International Kite Festival at Satun International Airport, which draws huge crowds and boosts tourism in the local area by attracting people to see the aptly named *wow kwai* (buffalo kite). The kite is shaped to resemble a grazing buffalo (Figure 1). In the past, the people of Satun Province lived a simple agricultural life, and the main occupations were rice farming and rubber plantations. At the end of the harvesting season (around February to April), the monsoon winds blew through the region from mainland Asia, and the wind direction was quite certain. Villagers in the south call this wind the “kite wind.” During these months, the villagers had finished rice farming, and the rubber trees were shedding their leaves. Given the extended free time, kite flying became a popular pastime for people in Satun Province and was enjoyed by people of all genders and ages in all wide-open spaces.

The kiting culture has now evolved and is distancing itself from its traditional origins. The kite is an attraction, and the original value of kiting as a recreational activity has been significantly reduced. Kites are now valuable as tradable commodities, and the culture is an economic asset. The authors embarked on this study to explore what value the buffalo kite, as intangible cultural heritage, holds for the people of Satun Province themselves and assess whether the apparent change in the significance of local kiting culture is accurate. This article shows that despite an obvious emphasis on economic value, the intangible cultural heritage of kiting for local people is multifaceted and a significant part of the local lifestyle.

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: Taweessin Tungseng, College of Innovation and Management, Songkhla Rajabhat University, Songkhla, 90000, Thailand. email: ttungseng350@gmail.com



Figure 1: Traditional Buffalo Kite of Satun Province, Thailand  
 Source: Satun, n.d.

## Literature Review

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2003)

This “go-to” definition of intangible cultural heritage was created with the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Prior to the creation of the convention, there had been a wide-ranging body of work to protect cultural belief systems and practices associated with traditional lifestyle. This scholarship existed under various umbrellas, including community-based culture, customs, ethnography, folklore, oral heritage, and traditional culture (Kurin 2007). Governments began to recognize the importance of protecting ancient community traditions in the wake of World War II. A host of disparate initiatives were implemented to stave off the threat of modernization and ensure the continuation of distinct national identities (Kurin 2004). These efforts were made multilateral with the advent of UNESCO’s Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972 (Aikawa 2004). However, the degree of conservation was criticized as the threat of globalization to traditional cultures became more apparent at the approach of the millennium. Calls began to be made for more explicit protection of those intangible elements of culture that were most at risk of disappearance (Berryman 1994; Helu-Thaman 1993). In response, UNESCO introduced a series of conferences and a program called *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage* to emphasize the urgency of the need to confront problems facing traditional cultures. Well received globally, these efforts were upgraded to the current Convention in 2003 (Aikawa-Faure 2008).

### *Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage*

Although the Convention was unanimously accepted by member states of the United Nations, there was immediate concern in academic circles (Smith and Campbell 2017). Criticisms were directed at the potential implementation of the Convention (Lähdesmäki 2016; van Zanten 2004), human rights implications (Langfield, Logan, and Nic Craith 2009; Logan 2007), and,

especially, the confusing terminology (Munjeri 2009; Vecco 2010). Essentially, as Bakka (2015) explains, the phrase intangible cultural heritage must be treated as a whole and not split into individual components. The basic premise of the Convention is the safeguarding of living cultural practices and all material and immaterial elements associated with them. Although enshrining intangible cultural heritage policy in formal documentation was important, an arguably more significant reason for the success of the Convention was this shift in direction. Traditionally, the safeguarding of cultural practices was the domain of museums that sought to “emphasise the materiality of heritage work to render the intangible tangible” (Smith and Waterton 2008, 294). The implication of the new UNESCO definition was the empowerment of traditional communities and indigenous peoples, which contradicts accepted practices in many societies around the world (Beardslee 2016). Where previous attempts at conservation had been top-down, the new approach was bottom-up, encouraging community participation and emphasizing intangible cultural heritage as living culture (Kurin 2004). Almost two decades on, this shift is occasionally overlooked by community developers who continue to impose external values on conservation projects in indigenous societies (Karapan and Susuwan 2021). However, what is the value of intangible cultural heritage to these culture bearers?

Intangible cultural heritage can play an important role in boosting local, regional, and national economies, both directly (e.g., through job creation, financial support packages) and indirectly (e.g., through tourism promotion and increased markets) (Petronela 2016). In fact, intangible cultural heritage has become synonymous with tourist attractions in many areas worldwide, especially given the prepandemic boom of cultural tourism (Richards 2018). Research has tended to confirm financial benefits as the most significant considerations of local people when pursuing community development and inheritance projects (Shin 2010; Su et al. 2020). Findings from Capello, Cerisola, and Perucca (2020) indicate that these economic benefits are most rewarding when tangible and intangible heritage are combined. However, there remain concerns (primarily among older community members) about the rapid economic growth that cultural tourism brings and its consequent dilution of the intangible cultural heritage that facilitates it (Richards 2018; Shin 2010). Additional concerns regarding the tourism associated with intangible cultural heritage include authenticity (van Dijk and Kirk 2007; Zhu 2012) and sustainability (Loulanski and Loulanski 2011).

Aside from the economic discussions, intangible cultural heritage and its conservation promote awareness and understanding of local history that might otherwise be forgotten (Vong and Ung 2012). Equally, however, there are concerns that intangible cultural heritage managed “top-down” by the state can be misappropriated to promote national histories and false narratives that eventually lead to the assimilation of traditional societies into the dominant culture (Labadi 2013). Petronela (2016) argued that the intangible components of cultural heritage facilitate emotional attachment to a nation much more than tangible cultural heritage. Unlike a physical location with material existence in its own right, intangible cultural heritage exists only through the active transmission of its practitioners. It therefore relies entirely on collaboration and participation of specific cultural groups (Blake 2008). When properly managed by the local communities to whom it belongs, intangible cultural heritage retains a link with the living culture and identity of its bearers (Lenzerini 2011). This study aims to assess the perceived value of the buffalo kite as an intangible cultural heritage of local people.

### ***Kites as Intangible Cultural Heritage***

Very little research has been undertaken on traditional kites as intangible cultural heritage. Anh (2017) found that the kites of Vietnam’s Red River Delta help to safeguard local intangible cultural heritage. The study revealed that kite playing generates material and nonmaterial benefits for local people, including job creation, networking, and tourism. Kite-flying competitions in Malaysia have given a significant boost to local tourism, attracting hundreds of thousands of annual visitors (Zill 2019). Furthermore, local communities are strengthened with

a common identity and purpose linked to the production of kites. Zhang et al. (2021) conducted an investigation into factors influencing the promotion of kite culture as an intangible cultural heritage. Their study concluded that “policies, regulations and product characteristics are the fundamental elements” that ensure the effective conservation and recognition of particular cultural phenomena as intangible cultural heritage. The findings also indicate that the successful development of kite culture as an intangible cultural heritage is dependent on the culture remaining alive. These findings agree with the work by Karapan and Susuwan (2021), who stress the importance of continued cultural evolution.

Jian’s work (2013) on the traditional sports of China revealed that three factors are common to heritage pastimes: (1) they are associated with traditional customs; (2) they are created by the people; and (3) they represent traditional lifestyle. In fact, there are spiritual links to many of the kite festivals around the world. The Bali Kite Festival is an annual postharvest event to give thanks to God for a successful and bountiful crop (Wiarti 2017). The International Kite Festival in Gujarat, Uttarayan, historically serves a similar purpose to wake the gods from their winter hibernation and call in a bountiful farming season (Parvez 2020). Yet these origins and their associated symbolism are disappearing with the growing links to tourism and the distortion of the purpose of the festivals (Desai 2010). This study intends to ascertain whether similar patterns are present in Satun, Thailand.

## Methodology

This is a qualitative study aimed at discovering the value of buffalo kites as intangible cultural heritage in the eyes of the people of Satun Province. Data was gathered from document review (related websites, academic articles, news reports, and books) and field data.

The sample population was purposively selected and included the following individuals and groups: (1) the president of the Satun Kite Club; (2) 60 members of the Satun Kite Club; (3) 105 former winners, runners-up, or third-placed finishers in competitions held during the Satun International Kite Festival from 2013 to 2017; (4) 10 village buffalo kite craftsmen; (5) 5 former chairmen of Satun International Kite Festival from 2013 to 2017; (6) the director of the Satun Provincial Cultural Center; (7) 110 teachers of Satun Wittaya School; (8) 7 directors of educational institutes in the area of Satun Province that support the organization of the Satun International Kite Festival; (9) 5 teachers, instructors, show supervisors, or buffalo kite dance performers. From this group of people, 25 key informants were selected and divided into two groups. The first group comprised purposively selected individuals: the president of the Satun Kite Club, the five former chairpersons of Satun International Kite Festival, the director of the Satun Provincial Cultural Center, and the teacher responsible for the buffalo kite dance at Satun International Kite Festival. The second group was selected by a snowball sampling method and included two representatives of the Satun Kite Club, five former competition winners or runners-up, five local artisans, three teachers at Satun Wittaya School and two local education directors. This range of individuals was identified in order to obtain accurate information and cover all related groups in the study of the value of kite making as an intangible cultural heritage in Satun Province.

In the field, data was collected from in-depth interviews and observation. The interviews were formally structured, and respondents were asked questions about the historical, scientific, aesthetic, and social value of buffalo kites, as well as the authenticity and integrity of current culture. These topics were purposively selected on the basis of initial literature reviews on the value of intangible cultural heritage. The tools used to study the identity and value of kite-making wisdom in Satun Province consisted of an in-depth interview form and an observation form. The forms were created on the basis of relevant documents and research on intangible cultural heritage, as well as the aims of the investigation. Drafts of the interview and observation forms were presented to academic experts to assess their suitability and suggest improvements. Following amendments, the forms were then tested with informants not included

within the key informant sample. Appointments were then made with key informants, and their permission was sought (and unanimously given) for the interviews to be audio-recorded to facilitate retrospective data analysis.

Following data collection, the researchers reviewed audio recordings to listen to the interviews again and record any points missed during the original interviews. This data was combined with notes from observations and the live interviews and then categorized according to the aims of the investigation. The researchers extracted and analyzed content obtained from interviews and observations to identify key points or analytical statements consistent with the identity and values of kite making in Satun Province. These were then compiled into a description of the studied phenomenon with continuity, expansive descriptions, and comprehensive analysis of the given issues. Results were synthesized and taken to a focus group discussion with all informants to verify and validate the findings. These results are presented in what follows as a descriptive analysis.

## Results

The results of this study revealed that the identity and traditional knowledge of buffalo kite making in Satun Province are worthy of conservation because of the unique shape concepts and kite-making skills. The Satun buffalo kite integrates artistic and scientific concepts to reflect local farming lifestyle by taking the shape of a buffalo bent to eat grass. Intricate artisanship skills are then used to tie the kite until it floats in the sky. The knowledge and skills used to create the shapes have been passed down locally from generation to generation through word of mouth, apprenticeships, and observation. They are now well established and renowned traditions in Satun Province. Kite making is therefore part of the intangible cultural heritage of Satun Province.

### *Historical Value*

The historical value of the buffalo kite bears unique testimony to the style and wisdom of kite making practiced today. Traditional styles have been modified to perfect the design and aerodynamics of the kite, but the principal identity has been maintained: the shape always takes the form of a grazing buffalo. The historical value of the buffalo kite can be classified into three aspects: shape, materials, and purpose.

The buffalo kite was originally modified from the *Chula* kite, the *Dui Dui* kite, and the *Wongduan* kite. The main structure of the kite, comprising the top section and upper wing, closely resemble the *Chula* and *Dui Dui* kites, whereas the base portion and buffalo head have been inspired by the *Wongduan* kite (Figure 2). The crescent of the *Wongduan* has been altered to resemble the horns of a buffalo. The middle section of the lower wing of a buffalo kite is unique with respect to other Thai kites in that the bamboo frame is bent into the shape of a buffalo's head. As a result, the buffalo kite has a "distinctive and unique shape that is attractive to kite fliers and spectators alike" (interview with Satun Kite Club Member 2017). A yoke or bow is also attached to the head to make a loud noise while in the air, adding an even more distinctive character.

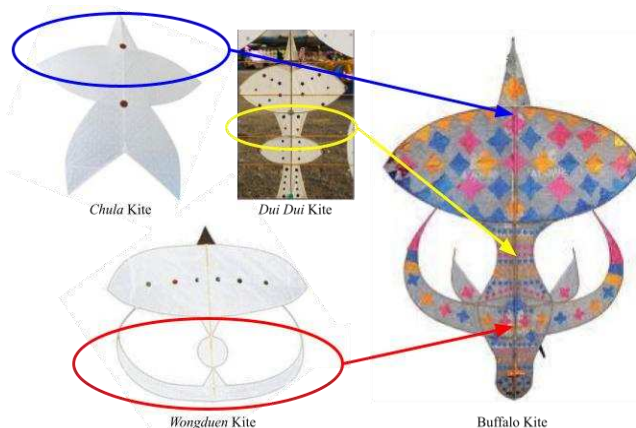


Figure 2: The Relationship between the Buffalo Kite Style and Other Traditional Thai Kites  
Source: Tungseeng et al. 2021

In the past, kite making was simple in that mainly natural materials were used. Most were made from taut banana leaves or other large leaves, such as red rubber leaves. The procedure was uncomplicated. The leaves were dried, strung together, and fixed with a tail to be flown as a kite in the community. They were colloquially known as leaf kites. However, in view of the disadvantages with using natural materials, including low durability and the inability to be intricately decorated, the kite materials were modified. The frame was made of bamboo and rope, which could be bent into various forms as needed. The upper and lower wings were made from paper or rice paper. As a result, the construction became more complex but more durable and beautiful. Furthermore, the new materials permitted more creative designs. The buffalo kite was born in the imaginations of people in the local community who wanted to acknowledge the buffalo as an integral component of local lifestyle. The buffalo was traditionally used for plowing and as a vehicle. These important functions elevated the status of the animal in society. Artisans modified the kite frame into the shape of a buffalo eating grass. They also added an attachment to make a sound while the kite is flying, variously called a yoke, bridge, or bow. It is made of cylindrical bamboo, hollowed in the middle and attached to the kite frame at the head of the kite. When the wind passes through the yoke, it makes a loud sound, its length and pitch depending on the yoke-making technique. Currently, kites are becoming even more decoratively designed, and synthetic materials are being used more frequently, especially plastic for the frame and fabrics for the wings. These enable more beautiful and realistic designs that have allowed local artisans to enhance their reputation: “My kites get much more attention now than before. This is, of course, due to the growth of the festival and kite flying in Satun, but the newer materials and techniques have really helped” (interview with Local Buffalo Kite Craftsman 2017).

Kites were not created purely for recreation. They have always been associated with sport but, at times, were also used to ward away malevolent spirits, during warfare to measure distances when digging tunnels to attack the enemy, to bomb enemies, and for scientific study, weather observation, photography, and radio transmission. In ancient times, kite flying was intended as a sacrifice or to prophesize future events. During the Sukhothai period in Thailand, there was a Central Thai ceremony where Brahmins hoisted a kite to send sacrifices for good fortune or to predict weather conditions and seasons. During the Ayutthaya period, there is evidence of the use of kites for war, and kite-gambling competitions began for the first time. During the Rattanakosin period, the first kite competition rules appeared, which have been modified and continued into the present day, making the kite festival “a living descendant of Thai history” (interview with Satun Kite Club Chairman 2017). During different periods of history, kite makers responded to different objectives. The buffalo kite was created for play but was also to respect the buffalo as an important part of society.



### *Scientific Value*

Science is a key element in kite flying. The physics of wind power and aerodynamics is vital for all kite makers to understand, but creators must also consider the biology of the human body and the muscular system. The identity and scientific value of the buffalo kite culture can be presented in two aspects, learning about wind power and exercise.

All kites, including buffalo kites, are scientifically heavier than air and float in the air similarly to an airplane. During the cool season in Thailand, a northeastern wind blows from the land to the sea. Consequently, kite flying is popular in the northern and northeastern regions of the country from November to February. In the hot seasons, a southwestern wind blows from the sea onto the land (known as *Lom Tapao*). This creates the kite-flying season in the central, western, and southern regions, which lasts from February to April and is often referred to as the “kite wind.” Buffalo kites, as cultural kites of the south, are therefore flown during the hot season.

When playing alone, the flier must lay the kite flat on the ground and turn the kite head toward the player’s head at a distance of about 2 to 3 meters. They must then run with the string twitching in a light jerky rhythm so that the kite can adjust to the wind. When playing with two or more people, one person can perform the duty of “kite sender.” The kite sender, standing four to five meters away from the flier and hold the kite at a 45-degree angle, must hold the kite up, waiting for the rhythm of the wind and then send the kite into the sky when the wind bites. Simultaneously, the flier should twitch the twine until the kite rises. They can then control the kite by rhythmically twitching the twine. If the twine is jerked strongly, it will cause the kite to rise higher. The strength of pull should be lessened to lower the kite. The key components enabling a kite to float in the air are (1) air currents that are constantly moving parallel to the earth’s surface in one direction or another; (2) the area of the kite providing lifting force; (3) rope or thread to hold the kite and a cord that serves to adjust the angle of impact of the air with the area of the kite, causing lift and pressure.

Kite flying depends on the wind, which cannot be controlled. As one flier remarked, “The challenge and fun of kite flying is to control the kite when it hits the wind so that it can float as high and long as possible in the sky. This is what makes the sport educational for young people” (interview with Satun Kite Club Member). Scientifically speaking, the buffalo kite requires force from the weight of the kite, traction in the direction of the wind, and a lifting force in the opposite direction of the weight. The sum of these forces creates a resultant force that allows the kite to fly upward. The direction of this resultant force is in line with the kite string that extends from the neck. As the kite moves against the wind, it elevates, causing an angle of collision between the wind and the area of the kite. This makes the air above or behind the kite flow faster than below the kite. The air pressure is therefore reduced, causing a lifting force. Meanwhile, wind below or under the kite moves slower, causing high pressure. The flier must try to adjust this pressure so that it equals that at the top and pushes the kite upward.

According to local custom, to calculate the optimum weight of a buffalo kite for smooth flying, the craftsman must calculate the kite’s density ( $D$ ), which is equal to the total weight of the kite in kilograms (including the rope) ( $W$ ) divided by the wind-impact area in square meters, which is the area of paper on the kite ( $S$ ). Therefore, a kite weighing 200 grams (0.2 kg) with a surface area of  $1\text{ m}^2$  will have a density of 0.2. A kite density of 1 is suitable for windy conditions, of 0.5 is suitable for moderate winds, and of 0.2 for a soft wind. These calculations ensure the buffalo kite can float beautifully in the sky in a variety of conditions. The height and length of the drift depend on the wind, the proficiency of the flier, and the balance of the kite. This knowledge is extremely valuable, especially local teachers: “I can use the scientific principles of kite flying in Satun to teach my lessons. It provides practical opportunities for my students and also gives them a meaningful link to their local society to prove that science lives in the world around them” (interview with Satun Wittaya School Science Teacher 2017).

### *Aesthetic Value*

The buffalo kite reflects the way of life of the villagers of Satun Province, who are bound by agriculture and who respect the buffalo as an important feature of farming in the past. Currently, the buffalo kite has become part of the identity of Satun Province because of the fine artisanship and artwork. The processes of sharpening the wood, making the kite frame, tying the kite, and drawing patterns on the kite all require a high level of skill. The aesthetic value of kite heritage is visible in three aspects: the refinement of handicrafts, aesthetic beauty, and performance art.

The buffalo kite frame is created so that the lower wings of the kite look like the head of a buffalo bent to eat grass. Therefore, sharpening and bending the ripe bamboo into the shape of a buffalo's head is a craft that every kite maker must perform meticulously to create the kite frame. The process begins with the preparation of wood by cutting lengths of wood slightly longer than the desired size of the frame. These are then cut into ribs for the kite frame. Each rib varies in size, depending on its position on the kite. The wood is filed and sharpened evenly to create the head and tail. Any lengths that need bending or straightening are applied with vegetable oil and held over a source of light heat before being bent (or straightened) into shape. The bamboo that makes the wings and kite horns is proportional to the wood of the skeleton. When sharpening, the artisan must arrange the joints at the center of the kite and sharpen the center point of each strip to a taper. With tips softer than the base, the kite will hold up well in the wind. When the sharpening is complete, each horn must be measured and weighed to ensure both sides are of the same length and weight. The traditional method for doing this is to balance each horn on the index finger and affix equal weights to each end to gauge whether the horn is balanced. If there is a discrepancy, the artisans will make adjustments as required. The artisan will also test the hardness and curvature of the wood by placing the horns between his palms and pushing together. An increase in the curvature of one horn indicates that the wood is weaker than the other horn and must be modified. The wind strength will also determine the desired hardness of the wood used for the wing frame; that is, if the wind is weak, the wings must be soft, and if the wind is strong the wings should be hard. The number of ribs sharpened to form each section of the kite are backbone (1), wings (2), horns (2), ears (2), throat (2), nose (1), and tail (2). Once all the ribs have been sharpened, the kite frame is tied. The wings are attached to the frame first, and other components are affixed afterward. The artisan must make sure that the wood is tied straight, remains at the same level, and does not tilt to one side. The basic kite structure is tied using a Cleve Hitch knot, although different methods are available for different kites and by different artisans (Figures 3 and 4). On completion, the artisan tests the finished frame by lifting the kite up in two hands by the wings, tilting it upward at an angle of about 30 degrees, and judging the balance.

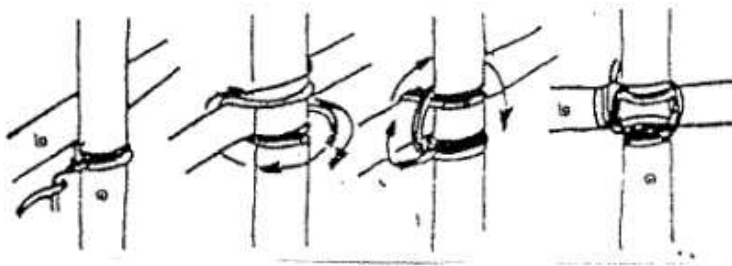


Figure 3: Method of Joining Two Pieces of Bamboo to Create the Kite Frame  
Source: Tungseng et al. 2021

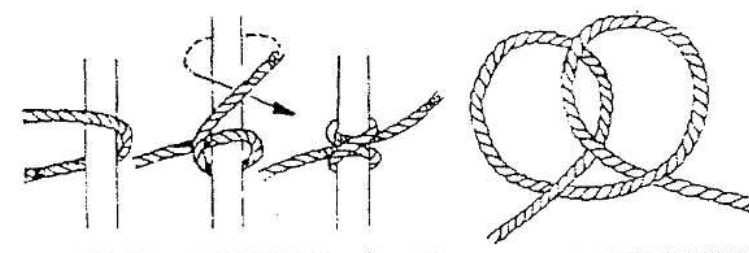


Figure 4: Cleve Hitch Knotting Technique Used to Tie the Kite Frame

Source: Tungseng et al. 2021

The aesthetic beauty of the buffalo kite derives from the paintings adorning the structure that convey the imagination of the artisan (Figure 5). The creators draw patterns on the kite to convey a story, perhaps the picture of a rice field to reflect local lifestyle or images that relate to current events. Most will include detailed patterns on the buffalo's head. These tend to be realistic and are blended with Thai patterns. However, the drawings are limited by the thinness of the paper coverings and hence call for a high level of skill. Consequently, the painters who produce the artwork for the kites are often not the individuals who construct the kite frame. This means that most kite makers often collaborate with a particular artist when creating the kites.



Figure 5: Example of the Intricate Artwork Adorning the Buffalo Kite

Source: Tungseng et al. 2021

In addition to drawing patterns or images on the kite, artists may choose to stick patterns on. This has become more popular with kite makers because it is much easier and does not require the same high-level and specific art skills. The most popular paper motif is the shape of a *Pikul* flower (*Mimusops elengi*—“Spanish Cherry”).

The final aspect of aesthetic value in the buffalo kite is the performance art seen in the buffalo kite dance show, an annual event held to open the Satun International Kite Competition and Festival. This is a creative dance movement inspired by the expression of the buffalo kite moving in the wind, which is beautiful, delicate, and fierce. Teacher Surachet Rakyot, a dance teacher at Satun Wittaya School, invented and created the dance. There are hundreds of backing performers, who are all female middle-school students at Satun Wittaya School, and seven female high school students who have the ability to lead the dance with a graceful appearance. From these seven students, one is selected as *Nang Phaya Kwai* (“Buffalo Queen”), the only person given the honor to wear a horned buffalo *chada* (crown). The other six performers act as the queen’s attendants. For Satun Wittaya School students, “the dancer chosen as the Buffalo Queen is considered the most beautiful girl in the school” (interview with Buffalo Kite Dance Teacher 2017). At present, the show has been adapted to suit current circumstances by reducing the number of performers and adjusting the composition and dance postures. As the buffalo kite dance teacher (interview 2017) laments, “The interest among younger people is dwindling in the face of modern entertainment.” However, the intention to convey buffalo kite identity through dance is maintained.

### ***Social Value***

Kite constructing was previously considered as an activity that improved family and community relations because most villagers taught their children to make their own kites. The most popular kites in Satun (and neighboring provinces) were the buffalo kites. According to legend, the invention of the buffalo kite emerged after the rice harvest because farmers recalled the buffalo’s influence on their lives. The buffalo kite was therefore created to symbolize the bond between the farmers and their buffaloes. The traditional knowledge was passed on from generation to generation and has become the provincial kite of Satun. Nowadays, it also symbolizes international kite competitions, which have traditionally been held in Satun Province for many years. Therefore, kite culture has helped build a strong image of society in regard to four aspects: heritage, family warmth, local unity, and networking. The original sentiments remain, although they do not seem to be as prominent as might be expected: “When they are free from work, the buffaloes take a break just like people. However, the buffalo cannot kite. Therefore, villagers invented buffalo kites to allow buffaloes to participate in activities during the rest period before returning to work in the next farming season” (interview with Local Buffalo Kite Artisan 2017). The creation of a buffalo kite requires the cooperation of people in the community who combine the knowledge of artisanship and fine arts together to create the perfect kite. It is a classic example of community members delegating duties according to their aptitude. The same is true for buffalo kite flying, because launching a kite into the sky usually requires at least two people.

### ***Economic Value***

In the past, buffalo kites were just a folk game for the enjoyment of villagers in Satun and nearby areas. In time, a tournament was held in Satun Province, hosted by the local education authority. The competition was very successful in attracting kite fliers from all over the province and encouraging the exchange of culture and knowledge. At subsequent events, other local government organizations and agencies have hosted a variety of activities aimed at stimulating the provincial economy. The competition has grown, and more than thirty-five countries were represented at the last International Kite Festival. The event also attracts tourists, who visit to admire the artistic beauty of the kites and colors in the sky. The spectacle attracts hundreds of thousands of people a year. The buffalo kite remains the big draw and it has become the symbol of the competition. Buffalo kites are therefore a proven tourist attraction that have helped build local network, provincial, national, and global networks of kite artisans and fliers.

Data collected from interviews with key informants showed that the identity of local kite making in Satun Province is an important resource for creative tourism. Each aspect of the cultural heritage of buffalo kite making is related and is managed at the festival, although interviewees were all keen to suggest improvements to the utilization of traditional knowledge that could further enhance the economic potential of the festival. These are as follows: (1) In terms of history, activities are arranged to encourage learning about the historical connections of buffalo kites and kites from different regions. Respondents felt that this could be expanded in the form of a museum for tourists to visit. (2) Scientific exhibitions encourage learning about wind, balance, and exercise. Respondents felt that these could be turned into permanent attractions in the province. (3) Aesthetic demonstrations are held to enable visitors at the festival to see how the kites are made and to participate in painting, constructing, and dance activities. Respondents felt that these could be expanded into local kite-making courses, broadly similar to cookery courses elsewhere. (4) Tourist activities are organized to teach visitors about the connections to the farming lifestyle and awareness of the merits of the buffalo. Respondents felt that this could be upgraded to a more tangible link connecting other permanent tourist attractions throughout the province. The values, cultural heritage, and identity of local traditional knowledge in kite making are used to organize creative tourism in Satun Province. All research respondents spoke extremely favorably of the impetus provided by the kite culture for the local economy, especially during the annual festival. Although economic benefits were cited as the weightiest consequence of the intangible cultural heritage of Satun's buffalo kites, it is clear that there are a wide variety of additional, nonmaterial benefits beyond financial gain.

## Discussion

Research by Zhang (2009) found that, although government sponsorship and promotion of traditional kite flying at the Weifang International Kite Festival in China lead to material economic benefits for local people, many culture bearers feel that their traditions are being exploited. This study did not encounter the same concerns from local people. In fact, those respondents who provided information for this study were overwhelmingly positive about the potential for the further development of cultural tourism in the region and the additional boost that would bring to the local economy. There was no apparent concern over the dilution or transformation of traditional culture, and respondents were keen to suggest ways in which the economic value of the intangible cultural heritage could be maximized. This is consistent with the findings of numerous other studies that emphasize economic value as an important benefit of intangible cultural heritage for local people (Shin 2010; Su et al. 2020). The results were surprising because there were no dissenting local voices on the commodification of the buffalo kite and its removal from traditional culture. A possible reason for this, and hence a limitation of the study, may have been the stakes that all respondents had in the success of Satun kiting, especially the International Kite Festival. It is important that any future studies on kiting in the region take a wider sample of opinions, including those from people with less involvement (and consequently less direct financial gain) in the promotion of intangible cultural heritage as a cultural tourist attraction. However, an equally plausible reason is that the Festival does not dilute the culture. Rather, the Satun International Kite Festival facilitates the continuation of traditional culture and provides a platform for artisans, fliers, and performers to display and disseminate the traditional kite culture of Satun.

The Satun International Kite Festival is, to a high degree, enabled by community participation. This is an important feature that ensures that the culture retains much of its authenticity and enables it to continue in a living form, both highlighted earlier in this article as important features of the success of intangible cultural heritage conservation (Beardslee 2016; Blake 2008; Karapan and Susuwan 2021; Kurin 2004). There is an interesting parallel between the buffalo kites flown in Satun and those flown 13,000 km away in Montana, USA. Both the

Buffalo Kite Festival at the First People's Buffalo Jump and the Satun International Kite Festival commemorate buffaloes (or bison) in the form of the kite. However, fierce criticism has been directed at the American festival (Hatley 2016) because the act of kite flying has nothing to do with the animal (and event) it is commemorating. Such accusations have not been directed at the buffalo kite fairs and competitions of Satun Province. Part of the reason for this must be the nature of community involvement (Lenzerini 2011). The festival in Montana was conceived by local government officials to commemorate a culture to whom they did not belong in a way that did not keep that culture alive. The Thai festival was established by the culture bearers in a way that continued the evolution of their heritage and commemorates traditional culture primarily through itself, the kite. Although there are additional practices, such as dances, exhibitions, and shows, the original cultural practice takes center stage.

Despite the obvious economic value, it is equally clear that the value of intangible cultural heritage for local people is multifaceted. Research respondents identified historical, scientific, aesthetic, and social significance of their culture as complementing the economic value created by its commodification. Actually, this knowledge is a further example of how value increases when tangible and intangible cultural heritage are combined, such as the knowledge of kite creation and the physical objects themselves (Capello, Cerisola, and Perucca 2020). The study proves Vong and Ung's (2012) assertion that the conservation of intangible cultural heritage promotes the awareness and understanding of local history that might otherwise be forgotten (Vong and Ung 2012). At present, the symbology of the buffalo kites remains, contradicting Desai's (2010) findings in India. However, there are early indications of a threat to the traditional culture. Despite being the cultural symbol, the buffalo kite shows are not always the biggest draw to the Festival, and visitors come instead to watch fighting kites, fast kites, or record-breaking kites. The diminishing interest among the youth is also a sign of decline. With a view to raising awareness of the buffalo kite culture and ensuring that the International Kite Festival maximizes the economic value of this intangible cultural heritage, the authors would like to echo suggestions made by respondents during focus group discussions.

## Recommendations

Research respondents felt that the diverse value of the intangible cultural heritage of buffalo kites should be showcased more prominently at the Satun International Kite Festival. The specific suggestions were as follows: (1) Create a permanent buffalo kite museum for tourists to visit—the authors would modify this as a kiting museum with buffalo kite culture in the local community as the primary focus. This would provide a more in-depth tourism experience and place the buffalo kite culture in the wider context of Thai kiting. It is recommended that local government agencies provide financial and logistical support to this initiative so that it can be in place for the next annual festival. The management of the museum could then gradually be transferred to local people, providing a further source of pride and income; (2) create permanent scientific attractions related to kiting and kite construction—the authors would encourage these as a feature within the museum proposed in point 1. This would create a more diverse tourist experience; (3) local kite-making courses should be established—the authors would recommend the addition of homestay accommodation facilities to such an initiative to ensure that the full cultural experience is transmitted. These would also need to be supported by local tourism agencies to provide the people of Satun with the expertise and skill sets necessary for the management of tourism homestay facilities. This could conceivably become a target for the next installation of the Satun International Kite Festival; (4) There should be more tangible links between other permanent tourist attractions throughout the province. This can be achieved in collaboration with local government organizations to ensure that Satun kite culture permeates tourism in the province. In this way, the kite culture itself will be able to impart value to the community on a year-round basis, not just when the winds are right.

## REFERENCES

- Aikawa, Noriko. 2004. "An Historical Overview of the Preparation of the UNESCO International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage." *Museum International* 56 (1–2): 137–149. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00468.x>.
- Aikawa-Faure, Noriko. 2008. "From the Proclamation of Masterpieces to the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage." In *Intangible Heritage*, edited by Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, 27–58. London: Routledge.
- Anh, Dang Thi Phuong. 2017. "The Relationship between Intangible Cultural Heritage and Community Development: A Case Study of Kite Playing in Vietnam's Red River Delta." *VNU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3 (2): 203–220. <http://journal.ussh.vnu.edu.vn/index.php/vjossh/article/view/202>.
- Bakka, Egil. 2015. "Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage—The Spirit and the Letter of the Law." *Musikk og Tradisjon* [Music and Tradition] 29 (1): 135–169. <http://ojs.novus.no/index.php/MOT/article/view/1225>.
- Barton, Gerry, and Stefan Dietrich. 2009. *This Ingenious and Singular Apparatus: Fishing Kites of the Indo-Pacific*. Heidelberg: Volkerkundemuseum vPST.
- Beardslee, Thomas. 2016. "Whom Does Heritage Empower, and Whom Does It Silence? Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Jemaa el Fnaa, Marrakech." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 22 (2): 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2015.1037333>.
- Berryman, Cathryn A. 1994. "Toward More Universal Protection of Intangible Cultural Property." *Journal of Intellectual Property Law* 1 (2): 293–333. <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=jipl>.
- Blake, Janet. 2008. "UNESCO's 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Implications of Community Involvement in 'Safeguarding.'" In *Intangible Heritage*, edited by Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, 59–87. London: Routledge.
- Capello, Roberta, Silvia Cerisola, and Giovanni Perucca. 2020. "Cultural Heritage, Creativity, and Local Development: A Scientific Research Program." In *Regeneration of the Built Environment from a Circular Economy Perspective*, edited by Stefano Della Torre, Sara Cattaneo, Camilla Lenzi, and Alessandra Zanelli, 11–20. Milan: Springer.
- Desai, Nikita. 2010. *A Different Freedom: Kite Flying in Western India; Culture and Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hatley, James. 2016. "Telling Stories in the Company of Buffalo: Wisdom, Fluency, and Rough Knowledge." *Environmental Philosophy* 13 (1): 105–122. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26169851>.
- Helu-Thaman, Konai. 1993. "Critical Issues in Cultural Conservation: A Pacific Island Perspective." *Historic Environment* 10 (2/3): 45–53. <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/ielapa.863573502072741>.
- Jian, Sun. 2013. "Living Transmission of Traditional Sport as Seen from Intangible Cultural Heritage—Taking Dragon Dance, Dragon Boating and Flying Kites for Example." *Journal of Nanjing Sport Institute (Social Science)* 27 (6): 18–23. [https://caod.oriprobe.com/articles/40843016/Living\\_Transmission\\_of\\_Traditional\\_Sport\\_as\\_Seen\\_f.htm](https://caod.oriprobe.com/articles/40843016/Living_Transmission_of_Traditional_Sport_as_Seen_f.htm).
- Karapan, Ratchapan, and Panot Susuwan. 2021. "Dynamics and Adaptation of the Phuan Ethnic Group in Thailand." *JATI—Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26 (1): 141–162. <https://doi.org/10.22452/jati.vol26no1.7>.
- Kurin, Richard. 2004. "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: A Critical Appraisal." *Museum International* 56 (1–2): 66–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00459.x>.

- Kurin, Richard. 2007. "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Key Factors in Implementing the 2003 Convention." *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 2 (8): 9–20. <https://www.ijih.org/volumes/article/16>.
- Labadi, Sophia. 2013. *UNESCO, Cultural Heritage, and Outstanding Universal Value: Value-Based Analyses of the World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage Conventions*. Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Lähdesmäki, Tuuli. 2016. "Politics of Tangibility, Intangibility, and Place in the Making of a European Cultural Heritage in EU Heritage Policy." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 22 (10): 766–780. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2016.1212386>.
- Langfield, Michele, William Logan, and Máiréad Nic Craith, eds. 2009. *Cultural Diversity, Heritage and Human Rights: Intersections in Theory and Practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Lenzerini, Federico. 2011. "Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Living Culture of Peoples." *European Journal of International Law* 22 (1): 101–120. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chr006>.
- Logan, William S. 2007. "Closing Pandora's Box: Human Rights Conundrums in Cultural Heritage Protection." In *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, edited by Helaine Silverman and D. Fairchild Ruggles, 33–52. New York: Springer.
- Loulanski, Tolina, and Vesselin Loulanski. 2011. "The Sustainable Integration of Cultural Heritage and Tourism: A Meta-Study." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 19 (7): 837–862. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2011.553286>.
- Munjeri, Dawson. 2009. "Following the Length and Breadth of the Roots: Some Dimensions of Intangible Heritage." In *Intangible Heritage*, edited by Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, 131–150. London: Routledge.
- Parvez, Amjad. 2020. "Kites, Kite Flying and Kite Fighting in Punjab: Culture, Tradition and Basant." *South Asian Studies* 33 (1): 119–136. <http://111.68.103.26/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/3139>.
- Petronela, Tudorache. 2016. "The Importance of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Economy." *Procedia Economics and Finance* 39 (1): 731–736. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(16\)30271-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(16)30271-4).
- Richards, Greg. 2018. "Cultural Tourism: A Review of Recent Research and Trends." *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 36 (1): 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.03.005>.
- Satun. n.d. "International Kite Fair, Satun Province." Accessed 2021. <http://www.satun.go.th/travel/detail/8>.
- Shin, Youngsun. 2010. "Residents' Perceptions of the Impact of Cultural Tourism on Urban Development: The Case of Gwangju, Korea." *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* 15 (4): 405–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2010.520944>.
- Smith, Laurajane, and Emma Waterton. 2008. "The Envy of the World? Intangible Heritage in the United Kingdom." In *Intangible Heritage*, edited by Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, 289–302. London: Routledge.
- Smith, Laurajane, and Gary Campbell. 2017. "The Tautology of 'Intangible Values' and the Misrecognition of Intangible Cultural Heritage." *Heritage & Society* 10 (1): 26–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159032X.2017.1423225>.
- Su, Xinwei, Xi Li, Yanbin Wu, and Limei Yao. 2020. "How Is Intangible Cultural Heritage Valued in the Eyes of Inheritors? Scale Development and Validation." *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* 44 (5): 806–834. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348020914691>.
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). 2003. "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage." Accessed August 4, 2021. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.



- van Dijk, Pieter A., and Andrea Kirk. 2007. "Being Somebody Else: Emotional Labour and Emotional Dissonance in the Context of the Service Experience at a Heritage Tourism Site." *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 14 (2): 157–169. <https://doi.org/10.1375/jhtm.14.2.157>.
- van Zanten, Wim. 2004. "Constructing New Terminology for Intangible Cultural Heritage." *Museum International* 56 (1 & 2): 36–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00456.x>.
- Vecco, Marilena. 2010. "A Definition of Cultural Heritage: From the Tangible to the Intangible." *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 11 (1): 321–324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2010.01.006>.
- Vong, Louis Tze-Ngai, and Alberto Ung. 2012. "Exploring Critical Factors of Macau's Heritage Tourism: What Heritage Tourists Are Looking for When Visiting the City's Iconic Heritage Sites." *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* 17 (3): 231–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2011.625431>.
- Wiarti, Luh Yusni. 2017. "Exploring Local Communities Participation in Culture Heritage Event: The Case of Bali Kite Festival." Paper presented at the ASEAN Tourism Research Association Conference (ATRC) 2017, James Cook University, Singapore, 287–297. Selangor, Malaysia: ASEAN Tourism Research Association.
- Zhang, Ji-zhen. 2009. "Exploitation of Folk Sports Cultural Resources and the Development of Local Social Economy—Economic Benefit Analysis of Weifang International Kite Festival." *Journal of Shandong Institute of Physical Education and Sports* 25 (1): 13–15. [http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article\\_en/CJFDTOTAL-TIRE200902003.htm](http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTOTAL-TIRE200902003.htm).
- Zhang, Yi, Yuwen Huang, Xinyu Zhao, Jingxuan Li, Fulin Yin, and Lin Wang. 2021. "Research on the Influencing Factors of Kite Culture Inheritance Based on an Adversarial Interpretive Structure Modeling Method." *IEEE Access* 9 (1): 42140–42150. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2021.3065711>.
- Zhu, Yujie. 2012. "Performing Heritage: Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research* 39 (3): 1495–1513. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.04.003>.
- Zill, Dennis. 2019. "Pasir Gudang World Kite Festival 2019." Accessed August 4, 2021. <https://www.dennisgzill.com/pasir-gudang-world-kite-festival-2019>.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Taweessin Tungseng:** College of Innovation and Management, Songkhla Rajabhat University, Songkhla, Thailand

**Dr. Thawatchai Sripornngam:** College of Innovation and Management, Songkhla Rajabhat University, Songkhla, Thailand

***The International Journal of Critical Cultural***

***Studies*** is one of five thematically focused journals in the family of journals that support the New Directions in the Humanities Research Network—its journals, book imprint, conference, and online community.

Cultural Studies critically examines the social, political, and ideological conditions of cultural production and offers a wide canvas for the examination of media, identities, politics, and cultural expression. This journal is interdisciplinary in its scope, offering a wide canvas for the examination of the interactions of media, identities, politics, and epistemologies that underpin social action and cultural expression.

*The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal.