

**Multiculturalism of Ethnic Groups and Social Capital Potentiality:
Mon and Lao Vieng Ethnic group in Kaopra Valley, Nakhon Nayok, Thailand**

Vichian Puncreobutr*, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, St Theresa International University, Thailand

Email: vichian@stic.ac.th

* Corresponding Author

Wichai Sechalee, Ph.D.

Ongkarak Non-formal Education Center, Nakhon Nayok, Thailand

Received: 13/12/2024

Revised: 18/12/2024

Accepted: 21/12/2024

Abstract

Using a qualitative approach, this study aimed to investigate the ethnic groups in the Khaopra Valley, to examine the multicultural aspects of the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group in the Khaopra Valley, and their use of Social Capital Potentiality in the Khaopra Valley, Nakhon Nayok Province. The sample group consisted of people from the Khaopra sub-district, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province, local administrative organization executives, and education, tourism, and culture agency executives in Nakhon Nayok Province, totaling 76 primary informants. The selection of primary informants was done using the snowball technique. The researcher collected data in the community area through participatory observation, non-participatory observation, and in-depth interviews with the sample group. The results were then analyzed using content analysis techniques. Analysis of data found that 1) the ethnic groups of people living in the Khaopra Valley today are the Mon ethnic group, the Lao Vieng ethnic group, and the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group. 2) The multiculturalism of the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group in the Khaopra Valley is characterized by the integration of the cultures of the two ethnic groups, both in terms of food and lifestyle. 3) The Social Capital Potentiality of the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group consists of intellectual and cultural capital, the creation of a tourism identity, the local way of life of forest-edge communities, Mon-Lao traditions, and local cuisine, community-based tourism management, agricultural tourism, and the use of bicycle routes for tourism.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group, Social Capital Potentiality

1. Introduction

Nakhon Nayok is one of Thailand's provinces that has various ethnic groups, such as the Khom, Mon, Burmese, Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Lao, who have settled in different areas of the province (Saengpaew et al., 2024).

The relationship between the Lao ethnic group and the Thai ethnic group was recorded in the 12th-13th centuries AD, noting that in the northern part of present-day Thailand, three Tai tribes flourished equally and divided the area into three kingdoms: the Lan Xang Kingdom, the Lanna Kingdom, and the Sukhothai Kingdom (Srisuro, 1996).

As time went on, the Sukhothai Kingdom which at first called itself Tai before changing its name to Thai had different relationships with the Lan Xang Kingdom (now the area of Laos) and the Lanna Kingdom (now the upper northern region of Thailand, specifically Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, and Lampang). As a result, there were battles both inside and between kingdoms, as well as with other neighboring kingdoms like the Burmese monarchy and other

Western nations from different colonizations like France (Pitipat & Poolsuwan, 1999; Thinanont, 2002). Thus, beginning with the Sukhothai Kingdom, Lao ethnic groups migrated to Thailand over a variety of periods (Prachidromran, 1994; Leepanyaporn, 2020).

As for the Mon Kingdom, it was a kingdom in the southern part of the Burmese Kingdom. Since the ninth century, it has thrived. Later, when the Burmese Kingdom grew stronger, conflicts sprang out between the two kingdoms, with each taking turns being strong and weak. When the Mon Kingdom was weak and lost a war, people would move to Thailand at various points in time. During the early phases of migration into the Sukhothai Kingdom, the Mon people specifically settled in the western section of Sukhothai, turning it into a frontier town and commercial market. One of the Thai cities that later had a significant migrant inflow was Nakhon Nayok (Laohasirinadh, 1976).

When several Lao and Mon communities moved to Nakhon Nayok Province, they settled together in accordance with their groupings, preserving their ethnically distinctive way of life and adhering to their ancestors' traditions. Nonetheless, it was also discovered that certain ethnic groups made their homes in the surrounding areas (Nakhon Nayok 1996; Rueangchewin, 2015)

However, individuals have learned to adapt for survival as a result of the drastic and quick changes in the economy and society from the past to the present (Wattanasan, 2024). Ethnic groups who have relocated to the nearby area may also adapt for survival, which could lead to changes in certain aspects of their identities and the utilization of their Social Capital Potentiality (Rojsanga, 2019)

The researchers believe that studying the multiculturalism of nearby ethnic groups like those in the Khaopra Valley region, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province is crucial. Examining the phenomena among ethnic groups that continue to live in a multicultural society and the use of the community's Social Capital Potentiality are the goals of this study. Executives of local administrative organizations and administrators of governing bodies at all levels in the region are anticipated to gain from the study's findings, according to the researchers. Together with other pertinent organizations, including educational, religious, and cultural establishments, the data can be utilized to gain insight into preserving customs, cultures, and upholding the honorable identities of ethnic groups in the Khaopra Valley, Nakhon Nayok Province. It also sought to determine how to best utilize these ethnic groups' Social Capital Potentiality for the growth of local economies and the enhancement of community residents' quality of life.

2. Research Objectives:

2.1 To examine the ethnic groups residing in Nakhon Nayok Province's Khaopra Valley, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province

2.2 To investigate the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group's multiculturalism in Khaopra Valley, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province

2.3 To analyze how the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group uses their Social Capital Potentiality in the Khaopra Valley, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province

3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative. The sample group consisted of 76 primary informants, including representatives from the Khaopra sub-district, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province, executives from local administrative organizations, and representatives from Nakhon Nayok Province's educational, tourism, and cultural agencies. The snowball technique was used in the selection of the primary informants. Participatory observation, non-participatory observation, and in-depth interviews with the sample group were the methods used by the

researchers to gather data in the community. Analytical methods were then applied to the results.

The definitions of social capital by Jakobs (1961), Baker (1990), and Coleman (1999). The Office of Social Development and Quality of Life's (2003) concepts of social capital, and Maeban's (2020) research were all incorporated into the study of ethnic groups' social capital potential. It separated social capital into three categories: human capital, institutional capital, and wisdom and cultural capital.

After gathering data from July 2024 to October 2024, the researchers used content analysis techniques and phenomenological interpretation of behaviors and symbols to assess the data from the sample group before summarizing the findings of the study.

4. Research findings

According to the goals of the study, the researchers will present the findings in three sections: the study of the local ethnic groups, the study of multiculturalism among the local ethnic groups, and the study of the ethnic groups' Social Capital Potentiality and utilization. The following are the study's findings:

4.1 Ethnic studies of the people living in Khaopra Valley, Nakhon Nayok Province

Analysis of data from interviews, and both participatory and non-participatory observations revealed interesting issues, including the condition of the Khaopra Valley area and the ethnic groups of people in the area. This encompasses the ethnic groups of the past to those who currently reside there. Details of study results are as follows:

4.1.1 The condition of the Khaopra Valley area

The Khaopra Valley is located in Khao Phra sub-district, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province. It was originally a lowland forest with springs and seepage water (characterized by pools where water emerges from the ground and flows out like whirlpools), such as Wang Nam Thip (now known as Wang Ree) and Wang Toom. The adjacent complicated mountain ranges, including Durian Mountain, Khao Takhian, Khao Falamee, Khao Nern Makha, Khao Nern Makha, Khao Makha Thong, and Khao Daeng, have also produced waterfalls. Numerous canals, including the Huai Sai and Khao Takhian canals, originate from these mountains. This region used to be home to a wide variety of wild creatures.

The name "Khao Phra" was derived from two Buddhist ideas. In the first idea, monks lived in a mountain range, and people noticed a lot of them. Some of them remained there permanently and later built temples, while others lived there temporarily for ascetic purposes or to find peace to reflect in the wooded areas. Upon observing monks atop the mountain, the villagers gave this mountain range the name "Khao Phra." This idea is supported by many temples that have been discovered to be Thonburi in origin, including Wat Khao Phra, Wat Durian Mountain (formerly known as Wat Hua Khao), Wat Bu Yong, and Wat Somboon Samakkhi. (This final temple was created by combining three mountainside temples: Wat Khao Nam Sap, Wat Khao Nam Joan, and Wat Hin Das. They were then moved down to a location between the entrances of a complex canyon and renamed Wat Pak Chong Phu Khao Wong before it was changed to Wat Somboon Samakkhi and relocated again to the current site.

The second idea refers to a mountain range where a Buddha statue was found. This concept is a legend passed down through generations, stating that in the past, hunters living in the valley went into the forest to hunt on the mountain during the day. However, due to the dense and complex nature of the mountain, combined with their inexperience as they had just moved to the area, they got lost in the forest and had to spend the night there. Before sleeping, the hunter prayed to the Three Jewels for protection from wild animals or various dangers. After finishing the prayer, they found an object resembling a familiar stone nearby. Upon closer inspection, it turned out to be a Buddha statue, so they decided to sleep around it. In the morning, they prayed for a safe return to the village. They then tied a vine to the statue,

and with the other end, they tied more vines together to form a long rope-like chain, which they used to find their way out of the forest and reach the village successfully. Later, the villagers followed the vine chain to help carry the Buddha statue into the village, which is now the site of Wat Khao Phra.

Currently, although part of the Khaopra Valley area has been cleared and converted from forest land to residential and agricultural areas, much of its natural beauty still remains. The general landscape features wide, lush green rice fields interspersed with small and large peaks and a complex range of mountains. Some areas are home to reservoirs such as Huai Prue Reservoir and Sai Thong Reservoir, wildlife rescue centers, wildlife shelters, ancient Thai durian conservation centers, community forests, and eco-tourism areas in Khao Yai. There are small waterfalls during the rainy season, as well as resorts and homestays in the area.

Huai Prue Reservoir and Sai Thong Reservoir are small reservoirs with a capacity of a few million cubic meters, providing water year-round amidst the complex and beautiful natural mountains. Around the reservoirs, there are paved roads suitable for cycling or jogging to enjoy the scenery, and watching the sunrise in the morning and the sunset in the evening.

The Wildlife Rescue Center/Wildlife Sanctuary is located within the Khao Yai National Park, near the Huai Prue Reservoir in the Khao Phra sub-district. It is a center for the treatment, rescue, care, and rehabilitation of wild animals, including those seized from illegal activities, lost animals, animals returned to the wild, or animals that have recovered but cannot survive in the wild. The animals under care include bison, tigers, deer, raccoons, clouded leopards, giant monitor lizards, foxes, otters, squirrels, and various birds such as hornbills, owls, parrots, storks, mynas, and crows, among others.

The Thai Durian Conservation Center, located in Ban Hu Bluk, is a repository of over 50 ancient durian varieties, cultivated on a 30-rai area using new agricultural principles that yield natural produce without chemical use. It is part of the Phruksa Genetics for Food Security project, supported by the Health Promotion Foundation (HPF). Chulalongkorn University and the Biocultural Foundation have not only been able to preserve ancient durian varieties but have also successfully bred over 100 new durian varieties. For example, the "Laongfah" or "Morn Laongfah" variety produces durians that are odorless or have a mild scent unlike typical ripe durians, providing new options for a different consumer group.

Ban Nern Makha Community Forest is a small mountainous area covering 82 rai, recognized as a model community forest "People's Way, Forest's Way" of Nakhon Nayok Province. Due to its rich and diverse flora, the community members jointly strive to preserve, safeguard, and responsibly use the forest, making it a source of food for the villagers as well as a place for relaxation for the general public, accommodation and camping site for students, and a plant species learning center for educational institutions and tourists.

In the Khaopra Valley area, there are also several small waterfalls during the rainy season, leading to a large number of resorts and homestays in the area. For example, Khao Nam Joan Waterfall is a tall, multi-tiered waterfall that is very beautiful. During heavy rains, the waterfall can be clearly seen on the mountain. Sai Thong Waterfall is a small waterfall that has water almost all year round, surrounded by lush forest. Klong Ta-In Waterfall is a small waterfall that is the source of the Sai Thong Reservoir. It has several shallow pools where the water flows down from the cliff to the Sai Thong Waterfall. Along the way, there are homestays in the area for tourists to relax in a natural setting.

Therefore, the current state of the Khaopra Valley area includes residential areas, agricultural land, rice farming, fruit orchards, and agricultural gardens, as well as reservoirs and tourism areas. These consist of community forest gardens, Khao Yai National Park, and small waterfalls, which support the development of restaurants, coffee shops, and

various accommodations such as camping grounds, vacation homes, and resorts, all coexisting harmoniously.

4.1.2 Ethnic groups in the area

The area of the Khaopra Valley in the past was a lowland forest surrounded by numerous complex mountains. It had canals, springs, and various-sized water bodies throughout the year, making it a habitat for wild animals such as tigers, bears, buffaloes, monkeys, various bird species, and wild boars. As a result, there were not many people settling here, most of whom were Mon ethnic groups. Later, people from Laos migrated to areas not far from the Khaopra Valley, particularly the Lao Vieng ethnic group, who were skilled hunters, especially in hunting wild boars. They eventually settled among the original Mon people, leading to interactions and exchanges of goods between them. Today, three cultural identities of the local people can be found as follows:

4.1.3 Mon Ethnic Group

The Mon ethnic group is an ethnic group with a prosperous history in terms of economy, society, politics, and cultural traditions, surpassing any other ethnic groups in the regions of Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. It is believed that the Mon people who migrated to Thailand did so in two periods, namely between the years B.E. 2112-2131 (the reign of King Maha Thammaracha - the middle Ayutthaya period) from trade contacts, and in the year B.E. 2300 (the reign of King Borommakot - the late Ayutthaya period). Due to the defeat in the war with Burma, the Mon were annexed as part of Burma. Some Mon people migrated to Thailand and spread to various regions of Thailand.

The Mon ethnic group that settled in Nakhon Nayok Province is a group of Mon who arrived during the period of B.E. 2112-2131. They settled in the areas of Khao Nang Buat (now Wat Khao Nang Buat), Tha Kradan (now Wat Tha Kradan), and spread to nearby areas. Currently, Mon people are found settling in Nakhon Nayok Province in the districts of Mueang, Ban Na, and Ongkharak. Therefore, the Mon ethnic group in the Khaopra Valley has been present since the Middle Ayutthaya period, with no other traces found except for stories passed down and the history or legends of various temples.

4.1.4 The Lao Vieng Ethnic Group

The Lao ethnic group is an ethnic group with a prosperous history in the past, specifically during the Lan Xang Kingdom era, which had a vast territory. Since the Lao people who migrated to Nakhon Nayok came from various cities of the Lan Xang Kingdom, there are several sub-ethnic groups within the Lao ethnic group. For example, those from the Phuan and Xiangkhouang cities are called Lao Phuan ethnic group, those from Luang Prabang who settled around Phu Khang Mountain are called Lao Kang or Lao Khrang ethnic group, and those from Vientiane are called Lao Vieng ethnic group, among others.

The Lao ethnic group that migrated to Nakhon Nayok Province occurred in various periods, eras, and times, both being forcibly brought in as war captives and migrating to escape war themselves. The Lao ethnic group that settled in the area in the Khaopra Valley, it is the Lao Vieng ethnic group that came to live in Nakhon Nayok around B.E. 2310-2315 (1767-177) because of the war. Most of this group of Lao Vieng people were skilled hunters, they initially came to hunt animals. Later, they settled in the valley, as evidenced from records of establishment of various temples in the valley, such as Wat Khao Phra founded in B.E. 2323, Wat Durian Mountain established in B.E. 2330, and Wat Buyong established in B.E. 2337.

Examples of community histories include "Khao Phra Community," which originated from a group of hunters who went into the forest to hunt animals and discovered a Buddha statue, leading to its enshrinement in the community and the establishment of Khao Phra Temple. For "Hua Khao Community" or Durian Mountain, it originated from a group of hunters who used the area as a lookout point when entering and exiting the forest, which was

a durian forest, leading to the establishment of Hua Khao Temple or Durian Mountain Temple. "Boo Yong Community" originated from a valley abundant with wild animals, especially wild boars. The local term for hunting wild boars was "Yong Moo" or "Moo Yong." As more people settled together, it became a community known as Moo Yong Community, and a temple named Wat Moo Yong was established. However, due to language erosion, the temple and community names eventually transformed into Wat Boo Yong in the present time.

4.1.5 The Mon-Lao Vieng Ethnic Group

Mon-Lao Vieng is an ethnic group that emerged from the interaction between two ethnic groups, as the original Mon ethnic group was peaceful, united, and self-sufficient, residing near water sources and engaging in rice and crop farming, while the newly arrived Lao Vieng ethnic group lived generously, settling at the forest's edge and engaging in hunting and gathering forest products. When they coexisted in the area, they interacted positively, exchanging goods and learning from each other, leading to harmonious coexistence.

From the interactions between groups, there was mutual acceptance of each other's cultures, leading to a multicultural society. This developed into interactions between ethnic groups that shared families and social way of life. Evidence of this can be found in stories passed down through generations and in customs, traditions, and foods that differ from those of the Mon ethnic group and the Lao Vieng ethnic group in other areas.

From the study, it can be said that currently, there are three ethnic groups with distinct cultural identities in the Khaopra Valley area: the Mon ethnic group, the Lao Vieng ethnic group, and the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group, found in various villages of Khaopra sub-district.

4.2 Multicultural study of the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group in Khaopra Valley, Nakhon Nayok Province

The multiculturalism found in the Khaopra Valley

The study results from both participatory and non-participatory observations, as well as in-depth interviews, reveal the coexistence of the Mon ethnic group and the Lao Vieng ethnic group in the Khaopra Valley area of Nakhon Nayok Province. This coexistence has been ongoing for over 200 years, living together in the same community without being separated into ethnic group communities, whether Mon or Lao Vieng. Although the community is currently divided into different villages, such as the old communities like Khao Phra (Wat Khao Phra), Durian Mountain (Wat Durian Mountain), Bu Yong (Wat Bu Yong), Pak Chong (Wat Somboon Samakkee), Wang Ree, Wang Toom, and the newly established communities like Ko Kra Chai, Ban Kham, and Kud Ta Khian, they still exhibit characteristics of living together in the same community. The cultures found are thus a multicultural characteristic that defines the people of the Khaopra Valley.

In general, the culture of the Mon ethnic group is characterized by their way of life, customs, traditions, language, attire, games, and beliefs. However, under the influence of change, it has been found that the Mon people in Nakhon Nayok, especially in the Khaopra Valley, can only maintain their Mon way of life to a certain extent. The aspects that the Mon people still retain their identity include the belief in ancestral spirits worship, the "Ram Phii" ritual, religious beliefs according to various festivals (such as merit-making during Songkran, entering and exiting the Buddhist Lent, where they make "Kalamae" and red sticky rice for merit-making), rice-related cultures (such as the "Khwan Khao" and "Ruean Khao" house rituals), and Mon food, especially "Khanom Jeen." (Khanom Jeen is a Mon word where "Khanom" means noodle, and "Jeen" means cooked. There is a story that Thai people saw Mon people making Khanom Jeen as food and asked what they were making. The Mon people heard "Are the noodles cooked?" and replied, "The noodles are cooked," which is "Khanom Jin." Over time, due to language distortion, it became "Khanom Jeen"). This includes both "Khanom

Jeen Nam Ya" and "Khanom Jeen Nam Prik," which do not use coconut milk as an ingredient, such as "Khanom Jeen Namya Yuak Kluai" and "Khanom Jeen Kaeng Kai." Additionally, other Mon dishes that can still be found include "Kaeng Liang," "Kaeng Som," and "Tod Man," which have their own unique flavors. As for the Mon language used in speaking, it is found to remain only in the form of chants or mantras used only in the "Ram Phii" ritual or ancestor worship.

Regarding the culture of the Lao Vieng ethnic group, the following significant identities can be observed: in terms of language, many Lao-Vieng words are still in use, such as "ta-wen" (sun), "pha-tong" (sarong), "gerb" (shoe), "song" (pants), "ka-laeng" (water bucket), "sao-mi-haeng" (rest to recover from fatigue), "si-pai-sai" (where are you going), etc. In terms of agricultural traditions, there are practices such as asking ancestors for land, the Haek Na ceremony, the Haek Dam ceremony, the Haek Kwai ceremony, the Plong Khao ceremony, the Koon Lan Khao merit-making ceremony, the Khwan Mae Posop ceremony, the Khao Lam merit-making event, and the Sart Duan Sip ceremony. In terms of beliefs, there are practices such as feeding the ancestral spirits and klaang baan merit making. In terms of local cuisine, there are dishes like "hoi-hom" (cyclophorid snails) steamed, grilled, or boiled, eaten with "nam-jim-jaew," boiled young bamboo shoots, "khanom-dok-din," etc. In terms of clothing, there is the wearing of "sin-tin-jok" skirts, which have patterns made from five colored threads, such as the "bua-khwam-bua-ngai" pattern, the "khrong-kho" pattern, the "khrong-khap" pattern, the "cho-tum" pattern, the "fan-pla" pattern, and the "naga" pattern, etc.

The culture and traditions found in the Khaopra Valley are a result of the fusion of Mon and Lao Vieng cultures. Some aspects can be distinctly identified as Lao Vieng culture, such as the spoken language, agricultural traditions, the Lao Sart festival (where sticky rice is offered), the house blessing ceremony, traditional clothing, and the wearing of sinh skirts. Lao Vieng local dishes include banana flower curry, stuffed chili peppers, and dishes made with fermented fish. On the other hand, some aspects can be identified as Mon culture, such as the rice blessing ceremony, the rice house ceremony, the use of Mon prayers and mantras in spirit dance rituals, the making of kalamae (a type of sweet), and red sticky rice offerings. Mon local dishes include khanom jeen with chicken curry, kaeng liang, kaeng som, and tod mun.

However, in terms of cuisine and way of life, several communities are unrecognizable as either Mon or Vieng Lao. It has been discovered that beliefs in worshiping ancestral spirits or making merit for ancestral spirits such as making merit at Phor Muensor's shrine, making merit during certain festivals, and making merit through particular foods have traits that combine or incorporate aspects of both cultures.

Wat Durian Mountain is home to the Shrine of Phor Muensor. Legend has it that Nai (Mr.) Sor, a soldier of King Naresuan the Great, assisted in restoring Ayutthaya's independence in B.E. 2127. Nakhon Nayok was then designated as a frontier city to the east, and Mr. Sor, Mr. Harn, and Mr. Man were tasked with protecting the city until B.E. 2130, when the Burmese army invaded Ayutthaya once more. The Burmese army was routed and forced to retire after the troops led Nai Sor, Nai Harn, and Nai Man went to war. Nai Sor received a promotion to "Muen Sor." As a tribute to his good deeds, the villagers erected a statue of him in the shrine at the head of Durian Mountain after he passed away. The shrine hosts yearly merit-making ceremonies. The rites were initially Mon since Muen Sor was said to have been Mon. However, employing both Mon and Lao Vieng ceremonies, all the groups in the Khaopra Valley now gather to offer merit at the shrine.

At festivals like Songkran, the beginning and the conclusion of Buddhist Lent, merit-making entails rituals including both savory and sweet foods, as well as offerings brought to the temple. Making merit for ancestral spirits on various occasions is one of these customs, which encompass both Mon and Lao Vieng styles.

Three categories can be used to describe the cultures and customs of the Khaopra Valley: Mon, Lao, and a combination of Mon and Lao. Consequently, it can be claimed that the valley demonstrates a Mon-Lao intercultural trait.

4.3 Utilization of Social Capital Potentiality of the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group in Khaopra Valley, Nakhon Nayok Province

Utilization of Social Capital Potentiality

The Social Capital Potentiality of the local population was clearly identified on multiple occasions by data analysis based on observations and interviews. This suggests that the Khaopra Valley community has the capacity for multicultural wisdom under the heading of "Local way of life of forest-edge communities, Mon-Lao traditions, local cuisine." Social capital-based activities have been planned for a long time, especially in the tourism industry.

The Khaopra Valley community uses its knowledge and cultural assets to promote tourism through Community-Based Tourism (CBT), which includes, among other things, agrotourism, bicycle tourism, nature tourism, community forest tourism, religious and cultural tourism, and more.

The social capital used in religious and cultural tourism includes the use of legends to draw visitors to study, honor, and pay respects to hallowed sites. Wat Durian Mountain, for instance, is also referred to by tourists as the Pink Temple (with the important Buddha statue of Phra Buddha Chinnarat replica, the pink five-headed Naga staircase, and the shrine of Phor Muen Sor); Wat Khao Phra (with the important Buddha statue of Phra Upakut); Wat Bu Yong (with a replica of the Buddha's footprint and a Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva hall); and Wat Somboon Samakkhi (with the important Buddha statue of Luang Phor Somboon Phoon Suk).

Historical tourism:

Historical tourism makes use of social capital by observing prehistoric artifacts at Wat Wan Tum (an archaeological museum containing artifacts like amulets, pottery, and Iron Age tools) and the Japanese military camp from World War II.

Tourism follows the trails of movies, series, or music videos, such as Wat Durian Mountain, which was one of the locations used in the movie "Once Upon a Time When the Moon Rises," and Huai Phru Reservoir, which has been used as a location for several series and music videos.

Bicycle tourism:

There are various routes to explore for bicycle tourism, including:

1) the route in the neighborhood close to Khao Yai National Park,

Ban Wang Ri

2) The cycling tourism route that combines cultural and communal lifestyles: Khao Phra, Durian Mountain, Japanese Military Road, Japanese Military Learning Center, Nature and Wildlife Study Center, Wat Somboon Samakkhi, and Huai Prue Reservoir

3) the Huai Prue Reservoir bicycle tourism route

4) the Sai Thong Reservoir bicycle tourism route

5) the Wang Ri Dahlia Garden bicycle tourism route

Nature-based tourism:

Small waterfalls like Khao Nam Joan Waterfall, Sai Thong Waterfall, and Klong Ta In Waterfall; reservoirs like Huai Prue Reservoir and Sai Thong Reservoir; and wildlife viewing, including gaurs, Indochinese tigers, deer, clouded leopards, foxes, and a variety of birds like hornbills and owls at wildlife rescue centers and sanctuaries are among the major attractions of nature-based tourism.

Community forest tourism:

The Ban Nern Maka community forest, a model community forest of "People's Way, Forest's Way" in Nakhon Nayok Province, is referred to as community forest tourism.

With a variety of plant species that provide food for the local population, a center for plant education, and a recreational space for visitors and the general public, the forest is abundant in biodiversity.

Agrotourism and agroforestry:

Agrotourism and agro-forestry includes organic farms and the Durian Conservation Center. More than 100 new crossbred durian types have been created for research and tourism, and the Thai Durian Conservation Center has gathered more than 50 historical durian species. The organic farms produce enormous crops without the use of pesticides, growing both Thai and foreign fruits such papayas, pineapples, bananas, and melons.

Travel to different educational centers:

Various learning centers are open to tourism, including historical sites of the Japanese military camp, plant species learning centers, nature and animal study centers, and the Baan Bu Yong Learning Center, which emphasizes organic farming, local agriculture, and indigenous jasmine rice, among others. There are two nature study paths in the environment and wildlife study center:

1) "Substitution...Towards Balance" examines how plant communities in moist deciduous and evergreen forests adjust to their surroundings. There are 1,680 meters of trekking distance.

2) The forest community that has adapted in mixed deciduous and dry evergreen forests is studied by the "Adaptation...Habitable Life" path. The 1,260-meter trekking distance on this trail includes some steep sections.

Local way of life and food consumption tourism:

The local lifestyle and food consumption tourism are two further examples of sustainable community development. Numerous villages and localities have seen the opening of restaurants with regular daily sales, sales just on weekends and public holidays, and sales during special tourism-promoting events. Rice noodles with curry, rice noodles with chili paste, tod mun (Thai fish cakes), kaeng liang (a soup), and kaeng som (sour curry) are the major dishes of Mon cuisine. Fish dishes, stuffed chili peppers, boiled young bamboo shoots, curry made from banana stalks, and other dishes that contain fermented fish are the principal Lao Vieng cuisine items. There are also cuisines that use local ingredients, like khao kaya ku dessert, dok din dessert, and steamed shrimp (which can be grilled or boiled) served with jaew dipping sauce. Tourist interest in these has increased, which benefits the town financially as well as promoting the local cuisine and way of life.

Community's multicultural tourism:

In terms of the community's multicultural tourism, which incorporates traditional events, it has been noted that few visitors take part in events like the Songkran festival, the Mahachat preaching tradition, and the community merit-making (Boon Klang Ban of Lao Vieng). At the moment, local tourism and traditional event planning are coordinated to enable tourists to savor regional food in the multicultural Mon-Lao Vieng community.

It can be said that the Social Capital Potentiality of the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group in the Khaopra Valley, Nakhon Nayok Province, has utilized their wisdom and multiculturalism, characterized by their identity as nature conservers and preservers of the Mon-Lao Vieng community's cultural heritage. They have managed this through community-based tourism (CBT), which has increased the community's income from various accommodations such as lodges, resorts, homestays, and camping sites. Income has also come from the produce of durian conservation gardens, organic farms, community organic agriculture, and community agricultural processing, as well as from various service businesses such as traditional Thai massage, local cuisine restaurants, modern restaurants, and large coffee shops that serve as numerous check-in points. Thus, the Social Capital Potentiality of the Khaopra Valley community has been successfully utilized.

5. Discussion

According to the study, "experiencing the local way of life of the forest-edge community, observing Mon-Lao customs, stopping by the local eatery" is a concept that utilizes social capital. This is in line with the findings of Saengpaew et al (2024), who studied The Social Capital Potentiality of the Lao Vieng Ethnic Group at Wat Yai Lao (Wat Yai Thakhinaram) Community in Nakhon Nayok Province, Thailand. They found that the Lao Vieng ethnic group has strong social capital and effectively uses their Social Capital Potentiality, including their locations, customs, lifestyles, and cuisine, to manage community-based tourism. This uses differentiation-creating tactics along with effective knowledge management to draw in both Thai and foreign tourists.

6. Summary

The following is a summary of the data analysis findings regarding the multiculturalism of the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group in Khaopra Valley, Nakhon Nayok, Thailand:

6.1 Research on ethnic groups in Khaopra Valley, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province

Khaopra Valley used to be a lowland forest with springs that spewed water out of the ground in the shape of whirlpools. The surrounding complex of high mountains also produced waterfalls, which served as the starting point for numerous canals. Consequently, the region became home to a wide variety of wild creatures. The Mon were the valley's first inhabitants, having come to work in agriculture. Subsequently, the Lao Vieng ethnic group arrived to hunt before settling and growing in number. Relationships between the ethnic groups developed as a result of their trade in produce and goods, and the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group emerged.

6.2 The Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group in Khaopra Valley, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province: a multicultural study

Some parts of Lao Vieng culture, some features of Mon culture, and a culture that blends characteristics of both ethnic groups are all part of the cultures of the ethnic communities that inhabit the Khaopra Valley. As a result, the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group now enjoys a multicultural culture with respect to food, customs, traditions, and way of life.

6.3 Making use of the Mon-Lao Vieng ethnic group's Social Capital Potentiality in the Khaopra Valley, Mueang District, Nakhon Nayok Province

Intellectual and cultural capital constitute the community's social capital. "The local way of life, the forest-edge community, Mon-Lao traditions, and local cuisine" is what the residents of the Khaopra Valley community have designated as their community capital. They consistently use this social capital to plan events, particularly in community-based tourism, which is founded on the idea of "experiencing the local way of life of the forest-edge community, observing Mon-Lao customs, stopping by the local eatery."

Community-based tourism management is implemented in various ways, such as religious and cultural tourism, historical tourism, film tourism, cycling tourism, nature tourism, community forest tourism, agricultural and agroforestry tourism, learning center tourism, local lifestyle tourism, local food tourism, and traditional festival tourism.

The utilization of the Social Capital Potentiality of ethnic groups in the Khaopra Valley through community-based tourism has increased the income of community members. This includes income from visits to various areas, accommodation, organic agricultural products from the community, agricultural product processing, and various service businesses within the community, such as traditional Thai massage services, local/indigenous food restaurants, as well as income from modern restaurants, large coffee shops, souvenir shops, and various check-in points in line with the digital tourism trend, which are abundant in the area.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations for applying the research findings

From the study, it was found that the people in the Khaopra Valley community can identify themselves as having social capital in terms of community identity with "community life along the forest edge, Mon-Lao traditions, and local cuisine" that are distinctive and have legends/stories passed down since ancient times, with tangible evidence still present today, **such as the Phor Muen So Shrine. Therefore, various levels of administrators, such as local** government officials and administrative agency executives, should collaborate with other tourism agencies to enhance the quality of community-based tourism towards a new tourism approach that targets specific groups more, such as Ecotourism, Green Tourism, Biotourism, Net Zero Tourism, Low Carbon Tourism, or Responsible Tourism. These are new global tourism trends that align with the national strategy for promoting green tourism and policies that create sustainability for tourism communities.

According to the study, the Khaopra Valley community earns money from a variety of service businesses, including local food restaurants and traditional Thai massage services, as well as from community-based tourism management, agricultural products and their processing, and resorts and lodgings, as well as from large coffee shops, souvenir shops, and various check-in points that follow the trend of digital tourism. In order to accommodate the needs of travelers of all ages and generations, particularly the growing number of retirees, local administrative executives may utilize this information in collaboration with other pertinent organizations, like the Tourism Office, to plan events and advertise package tourism, such as one-day and two-day trips. To meet the needs of tourists of all ages and generations, particularly retirees who are becoming more numerous, have high purchasing power, and are able to travel on both weekdays and weekends, local administrative executives may utilize this information in collaboration with other pertinent agencies, such as the Tourism Office, to plan events and promote package tourism, such as one-day and two-day trips. This will enhance the standard of living for local residents and have a favorable effect on economic development both nationally and locally.

7.2 Recommendations for further research

From the study, it was found that the cultures of the ethnic groups in the Khaopra Valley include the Mon culture, the Lao Vieng culture, and the Mon-Lao Vieng culture. However, this study is qualitative, based on observation and in-depth interviews. Therefore, to ensure confidence in applying the research results for further development, including tourism development, community development, and improving the quality of life for the community members, it is recommended to conduct studies using other methods, such as ethnographic research or historical research, to further validate the present findings.

References

- Baker, W. (1990). Market Networks and Corporate Behavior. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96(3), 589-623.
- Coleman, J. S. (1999). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 9(4), 95-120.
- Jakobs, J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Chicago: Random House.
- Laohasirinadh, P. (1976). *The relations among the Mon state, Burma, and Sukhodaya between the 13th - 14th century A.D.* Thesis for Master of Art in Oriental Epigraphy. Bangkok: Silpakorn University.
- Leepanyaporn, N. (2020). *The Study of Loa Khrang Ethnic Cultural Capital in The Dimesion of Cultural Tourism to Raise the Economy of Ban Thung Si Long Community, Don Tum District, Nakhon Pathom*. Thesis for Master of Art in Public Public and Private Management. Bangkok: Silpakorn University.
- Maeban, U. (2020). *Social Capital Management for Community Development in the form of Self-Help: A Case Study of Thailand, Upper Northern Areas*. Dissertation of Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration. Bangkok: Rangsit University.
- Office of Social Development and Quality of Life. (2003). *Social Capital*. Retrieved November 15, 2012.
From https://pattana-thai.nesdb.go.th/Knowledge_pdf/social_capital.pdf
- Pitipat, S. & Poolsuwan, S. (1999). *Lao Song: The Dynamics of the Cultural System over Two Centuries, in Society and Culture in Thailand*. Bangkok: Sirindhorn Anthropology Center.
- Prachidromran, J. (1994). *King Taksin the Great*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Saengpaew, K., Koowatthanasiri, K., Dhanesschaiyaku, U., Nawrin, R. & Koonawoot, S. (2024). The Social Capital Potentiality of the Lao Vieng Ethnic Group at Wat Yai Lao (Wat Yai Thakhinaram) Community in Nakhon Nayok Province, Thailand. *St. Theresa Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(1), 118-130.
- Srisuro, W. (1996). *Lanna Architecture: Issan, Lanna*. Khon Kaen: Khon Kaen University.
- Thinanont, S. (2002). *A Survey on Prime Architecture of Wats in Nakornnayok*. Research Report. Bangkok: Srinakharinwirot University.
- Wattanasan, B. (2024). Lesson Learned in Digital Disruption Age. *Wisdom Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 1(4), 62-71.