



LOCAL ARTISANS OF NAKHON: PHRA LAK AND THE ARTISAN LINEAGE IN NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, THAILAND

Sutira Chairuksa Ngernthaworn^{1*}, Managuard Singhapun², Watee Supsin¹, Orapin Bunsin²

¹Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University,
Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand

²Faculty of Management Sciences, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University,
Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand

*Corresponding author E-mail: Sutira_cha@nstru.ac.th

Received 27 August 2025; Revised 27 September 2025; Accepted 29 September 2025

Abstract

Background and Objectives: Nakhon Si Thammarat has a rich tradition of crafting Buddha images, particularly the silver repousse Phra Lak, which plays a central role in rituals and the Chak Phra procession. However, due to a shortage of artisans, the craft is in decline and faces the risk of disappearing if not preserved. The objectives of this study are to gather, organize, and examine knowledge concerning Phra Lak (Dragged Buddha Images) in Southern Thailand, with a focus on the artisan traditions of Nakhon Si Thammarat. The study also aims to apply this knowledge to the processes production and the creation of works within local artisan lineage, ensuring its transmission to future generations and promoting wider recognition of the tradition.

Methodology: This study was conducted using qualitative research combined with practical exercises. The study involved practical implementation through the actual creation of Phra Lak images and the training of new artisans. Data collection techniques included general and in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and both primary and secondary document analysis. These methods produced practical applications and reflective outcomes.

Main Results: The findings reveal that: 1) The Phra Lak images created by artisans of the Nakhon Si Thammarat are predominantly made of silver in the "Alms-Holding" posture. These images are crafted through a distinctive process involving carved wood covered with embossed silver sheets, decorated with gold and alloyed copper (Naak), and designed to be disassembled like traditional puppets. This meticulous and complex technique requires high expertise in both woodworking and metalwork. Today, such images can still be found in temples like Wat Chantharam, Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan, and the Phutthasihing Hall, though very few original artisans remain; 2) The creative application of Phra Lak knowledge resulted in three innovative art products, a table, a tray, and a wall installation, which demonstrated how traditional techniques could contribute to creative economic development and provide income-generating opportunities for artisans; 3) A training program successfully transferred knowledge to seven new artisans, contributing to the continuity



of this unique cultural heritage; and 4) Public dissemination was achieved through research exhibitions, displays of Phra Lak artworks, revival events of traditional Phra Lak ceremonies, and media publications.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This research falls under the category of applied Buddhism, promoting understanding of Buddhism, particularly through the transmission of the traditional Phra Lak creation techniques from the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage to younger generations. Promoting the Buddhist principles of compassion, understanding, and interdependence exemplifies cultural revitalization while nurturing harmony among religions and the development of Buddhist innovations that offer socio-economic solutions and generate communal value.

Conclusions: Buddhist art can sustain cultural identity, foster community pride, and create practical income opportunities through local wisdom, and foster interdependence, serving as a model for cultural revival and interfaith harmony. The Phra Lak craftsmanship of Nakhon Si Thammarat, which has long been admired for its intricate silver and gold artistry, now survives through the work of only a few remaining artisans. This research underscores the urgency of preserving the tradition. Strong support from both government and local communities, in funding, education, and policy, is essential for improving artisans' livelihoods, nurturing future generations, and ensuring the lasting continuity of this cultural heritage.

Keywords: Phra Lak, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Artisan Lineage, Artisans Craftsmanship Creative Economy

Introduction

Thai society has long been intertwined with Buddhism, which has become a foundational element of the nation's culture, ethics, and way of life (Supap, 1998). Local art across various regions in Thailand is deeply connected to Buddhist beliefs, resulting in the creation of artistic works that reflect religious values, faith, and spiritual aesthetics (Paijitsakong, 2004). Promoting peace and unity through shared cultural heritage, exemplified by Buddhist and Muslim artisans, fosters harmony, mutual respect, and non-violent social cohesion. These works, whether sculptures, paintings, or architectural structures such as Buddha statues, mural paintings, ordination halls (Ubosot), vihāras, stupas, and chedis, are regarded as invaluable cultural heritage. Historically, such strong religious and artistic traditions led to the emergence of highly skilled artisan groups throughout the country.

Nakhon Si Thammarat, a province with strong historical ties to Theravāda Buddhism, played a crucial role in the dissemination of Buddhist teachings in Thailand. Influenced by Indian and Sri Lankan Buddhism (Mosalinon, 2011), the province is home to Phra Borommathat Chedi, a prototype of Lankan-style stupas. It also boasts the highest number of temples in Southern Thailand, totaling 636 (National Statistical Office, 2022), and a long-standing tradition of crafting Buddha images. This artistic heritage reflects both the region's cultural prosperity and its profound devotion to Buddhism (Eoseewong, 2000). Evidence of this craftsmanship can be seen in unique bronze Buddha images housed in the Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum and at Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan. Notably, historical records indicate that the province's Buddha image production developed significantly



during the Ayutthaya period and has evolved into various forms such as silver-sheet Buddhas, gold-leaf Buddhas, and amulets.

The Phra Lak images of Nakhon Si Thammarat are silver-sheet Buddha statues created as objects of worship, lineage representations, and ceremonial icons for the Chak Phra festival, held on the first waning moon of the eleventh lunar month to mark the end of the Buddhist Lent (Sarem and Kaewsakul, 2022). These statues symbolize the Buddha's descent from Tāvātimsa Heaven. In Southern provinces such as Nakhon Si Thammarat, as well as in the Songkhla Lake Basin, Pak Phanang River Basin, and Tapee River Basin, the Chak Phra tradition involves elaborate processions that allow devotees to pay homage and participate in merit-making ceremonies (Phra Maha Thitiphong Chuchit, 2018).

The artisan tradition of Nakhon Si Thammarat is especially renowned for its excellence in creating Buddha statues and Phra Lak figures. The traditional method of crafting Phra Lak in this region is highly distinctive and complex, involving unique techniques passed down through generations. However, the original methods have largely vanished over the past fifty years. This research seeks to revive and preserve the ancient techniques of the Phra Lak creation specific to the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage. The goal is to recognize this local artistic legacy as a valuable cultural asset that deserves conservation and revitalization, while also ensuring its transmission to younger generations. Traditional techniques are urgent, and the risks are if preservation is not achieved. This would help strengthen the significance of the study.

The researchers recognize the importance of systematically collecting and documenting the body of knowledge related to the lineage of Phra Lak artisans in Nakhon Si Thammarat. It is essential to revive and transmit traditional techniques of Phra Lak craftsmanship to new generations of artisans in concrete and practical ways. Furthermore, cultural innovations should be developed by building upon local wisdom to create new value for traditional craftsmanship, while also enhancing sustainable career opportunities for young artisans and related communities. This process will help promote the local creative economy by adding value to the knowledge and products of Phra Lak craftsmanship, revitalizing Phra Lak as a prominent cultural symbol and unique identity of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to gather, organize, and examine knowledge concerning Phra Lak (Dragged Buddha Images) in Southern Thailand, with special attention to the artisan traditions of Nakhon Si Thammarat. The study also aims to apply this knowledge to the creation of artworks rooted in the local artisan lineage, ensuring its transmission to future generations and promoting wider recognition of the tradition.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative and documentary approaches, along with participatory action research. The methodology consisted of the following components:



1. Documentary Research: This phase involved the analysis and review of existing documents and literature related to Phra Lak and the traditional craftsmanship of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

2. Qualitative Research: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants selected according to the research objectives, categorized as follows:

2.1 Collection, database development, and analysis of knowledge regarding Phra Lak in Southern Thailand and the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage:

Primary informants: Local master artisans from Ten Essential Traditional Craftsmanship in Nakhon Si Thammarat, including: 1) Sculptors, 2) Wood smoothing artisan, 3) Wood carvers, 4) Turners and wood decorators, 5) Furniture makers, 6) Metal engraving and embossing artisan, 7) Goldsmiths, 8) Blacksmiths, 9) Silversmiths, and 10) General woodworkers 11 individuals in total. Additionally, 4 community sages (Phra Lak Artisans), heirs of the traditional Nakhon Si Thammarat craftsmanship lineage, were interviewed.

Secondary informants: 2 cultural custodians, 4 local abbots/monks, representatives from 2 temples, 3 committee members, and 10 local administrators.

2.2 For the application of traditional knowledge to the production and creative design of Phra Lak artworks:

Primary informants: 2 creative designers and 5 community sages with in-depth artisanal knowledge.

Secondary informants: 1 representative from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Provincial Commerce Office 1 hotel businessman, 2 representatives from community product development organizations.

2.3 Focus Group Discussions: A panel of 6 participants, including academics, traditional Buddha image artisans, and creative designers, was formed to provide feedback and insights on the research findings and practical implications.

3. Practical training: This phase involved hands-on activities including the actual creation of Phra Lak images, training workshops, and skill development sessions. These were organized for knowledge transmission to a new generation of artisans, seven apprentices in total, through practical engagement and guided mentorship.

Research Instruments

The study employed a variety of data collection tools to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research objectives. These included both general and in-depth interviews, using structured and unstructured formats, small group discussions, knowledge exchange forums, participant observation, and hands-on training workshops.

Data Collection Procedures

To obtain data aligned with the research objectives, the data collection process was divided into seven phases: 1) The first phase involved a research team meeting, which served as the initial stage for planning and coordination among the research team members; 2) Field Study and Field Survey = Site visits and data exploration in relevant local communities. By coordinating with community leaders and related parties to provide information; 3) Target Selection and Artisan



Lineage Mapping = Identification and compilation of artisan lineages in Nakhon Si Thammarat based on field data; 4) Artisan Mobilization for Buddha Image Creation = Collaborative activities involving local craftsmen to recreate Phra Lak images; 5) Creative Product Design = Development of artistic prototypes inspired by Phra Lak traditions; 6) Handson Training Workshops = Skill-based training for the younger generation of artisans from the Nakhon Si Thammarat lineage in traditional Buddhist art techniques; and 7) Academic Seminar and Cultural Exhibition = A scholarly forum on Phra Lak, knowledge exchange sessions, an exhibition, and a traditional celebration featuring Phra Lak art and performance. During the research process, local artisans contribute by creating the Buddha image, passing on their skills to the younger generation, and helping to organize discussion forums. At the same time, community leaders, local scholars, monks, and others share their ideas and suggestions for the creative design of the Buddha image or Phra Lak.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data obtained from documents, interviews, focus group discussions, knowledge exchange forums, observations, and practical workshops, both primary and secondary sources, were organized and categorized based on the research objectives. The phenomena were interpreted and verified for credibility, completeness, and accuracy using data triangulation techniques. Verification from multiple sources, such as different individuals, times, and locations, as well as cross-examination by multiple researchers to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings. Relationships among data sets were identified and conclusions were drawn. The research findings were presented through descriptive analysis, structured according to the research objectives, and supported by visual materials to enhance understanding.

Results and Discussion

Knowledge of Phra Lak and Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage

The Nakhon Si Thammarat artisanal lineage is renowned for its expertise in crafting Phra Lak, a type of Buddha image that has long held cultural and spiritual significance in the region. The crafting of Phra Lak reflects the community's deep-rooted Buddhist beliefs and is regarded as an important form of local art. Nakhon Si Thammarat is one of the earliest cities in Thailand to adopt and disseminate Buddhism (Sukkarakanchan, 2021), and its Buddha images bear similarities to the elegant and intricate styles of the Ayutthaya period. The Phra Lak typically depicts the Buddha in the alms-holding posture (Phra Pang Umpat) and other postures, such as the Subduing Mara Posture, meditation Buddha, and is commonly found in nearly every temple in the province because of its use in the Buddha-pulling or Chak Phra. These images are ceremonially paraded during the annual Chak Phra (Buddha-Pulling) festival held at the end of the Buddhist Lent. Historically, the ruling governors of Nakhon Si Thammarat have played a key role in sustaining and commissioning high-quality Phra Lak statues, a tradition that continued up to the last royal governor. In Southern Thailand, Phra Lak statues have been created using various materials, including wood, gold, silver, and bronze. A distinctive technique involves covering the carved wooden figures with precious materials such as gold leaf and silver sheets, an artistic hallmark of



the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage. These figures are often adorned with intricate headpieces (Therd) and decorative garments (Phra Phusa) that emphasize their sacred status. The creation of Phra Lak requires the collaborative efforts of highly skilled artisans from the "Chang Sip Mu," particularly the Chang Khreuang Thom (Niello Ware Artisans), who are prominent in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Today, traditional Phra Lak statues crafted with these ancient techniques can still be found in several temples throughout the region, serving as tangible evidence of this enduring cultural heritage.



Figure 1 An Ancient Silver-Sheathed Phra Lak Housed at Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province

In Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phra Lak statues are regarded with a reverence comparable to that of the revered Phra Phuttha Sihing image. According to the survey conducted in this study, several ancient Phra Lak statues are currently enshrined in temples within Mueang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, as shown in Figure 1. Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan houses the largest number, with six Phra Lak statues. This is followed by Wat Chantharam, which houses five. Other temples, including Wat Buranaram, Wat Sritawi, Wat Wang Tawangtok, and Wat Hua It, typically possess one or two statues each. Additionally, the Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum also preserves several Phra Lak figures, with a total count of no fewer than twenty statues across the province.

The creation of Phra Lak statues serves three primary purposes: As an offering of devotion to the Buddha (Buddha-Pūjā), as a sacred representation of a familial or artisan lineage, and as a central figure for installation on royal barges during the annual Chak Phra festival. Each statue requires several months to complete, highlighting the craftsmanship and religious devotion involved in the process.

The Chak Phra tradition, held on the first waning moon of the eleventh lunar month (The Day After the End of Buddhist Lent), features the ceremonial dragging of these statues through communities with great joy and festivity. As the statues are pulled, chants of "E-sā-la-phā! Hē-lō! Hē-lō!" fill the air, creating an atmosphere of unity and celebration. This vibrant tradition not only pays homage to the Buddha but also serves to strengthen communal bonds and express social harmony.

Through the investigation into the artisan lineages involved in the creation of Phra Lak statues in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, it was found that only one living descendant of the traditional Phra Lak craftsman lineage remains in the Wat Chantharam community. This individual is Mr. Sakchai Sinthurong (Known Locally as Chang Odd), a 69-year-old artisan who traces his heritage back to the "Sinthurong" lineage of craftsmanship. This lineage can be traced through multiple generations, beginning with his great-grandfather.

Although Mr. Sakchai still retains a high level of artisanal skill, he has not engaged in the crafting of Phra Lak statues for many years. The Sinthurong lineage is historically recognized as one of the prominent traditional artisan families in Nakhon Si Thammarat, based in the community surrounding Wat Chantharam in Mueang District. Their craftsmanship represents a valuable cultural legacy that is now on the verge of disappearing, underscoring the urgency of preservation and knowledge transmission efforts.

It was found that there were 11 individuals belonging to artisan lineages in Mueang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat (In the Year 2022), consisting of:

Table 1 Ten Essential Traditional Craftsmanship of Nakhon Si Thammarat

Ten Essential Traditional Craftsmanship of Nakhon Si Thammarat	Name-Surname/Age
1. Decorative Arts Artisan	Mr. Sakchai Sinthurong (Chang Odd), age 69
2. Buddhist Art Designer	Mr. Yodkrai Kanchanachai (Chang Boom), age 30
3. Prototype Sculpture Artisan	Mr. Yodkrai Kanchanachai (Chang Boom), age 30
4. Wood Smoothing Artisan	Mr. Santi Damkaew (Chang Ti), age 47
	Mr. Charoenrat Meelert (Chang Thum), age 29
5. Wood Carving Artisan	Mr. Pornchai Wattanawikkit (Chang Piak), age 67
6. Wood Turning and Decoration Artisan	Mr. Suchart Jamnonglak (Chang Bangchat), age 80
7. Metal Sheet Silver Rolling Artisan (Machine-Assisted)	Mr. Chanthip Thipyut (Chang Thip), age 56
8. Metal Forming Artisan and Assistant	Mr. Nopparuj Nukul (Chang Bangleem), age 66
	Police Lieutenant Colonel Kornchat Thonglim (Chang Charoen), age 61
9. Metal Engraving and Embossing Artisan	Mr. Nikom Nokaksorn (Chang Nikom), age 72
	Mr. Nopparuj Nukul (Chang Bangleem), age 66
10. Goldsmith	Mr. Wirat Amrit (Chang Wirat), age 65

The Traditional Process of Creating Phra Lak

The traditional method of creating Phra Lak by the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage has been neglected and left without continuation for more than 50 years. As a result, there are currently almost no artisans skilled in this traditional art form. The research team, therefore, investigated the lineage of Phra Lak artisans to revive this distinctive local art.



The creation of Phra Lak requires two main types of artisans: Woodworkers and metalworkers, using precious materials such as silver, gold, and naak (A Gold-Copper Alloy), in a delicate and refined production process as follows:

1. Buddha Image Design

The design process begins with the study of the physical characteristics (Phutthalakkhana) of Phra Lak images from various sources in Nakhon Si Thammarat. These references are used to sketch the full-scale physical structure and create a prototype sculpture as shown in Figures 2 and 3.



Figure 2 Sketching the Prototype Image at Full Scale



Figure 3 Prototype Sculpture Cast in Plate

2. Woodwork Process

The woodwork stage involves crafting the Buddha image before it is overlaid with silver and other materials.

2.1 Wood Selection

Golden jackfruit wood is commonly chosen because it is a softwood that is easy to carve and is also regarded as auspicious. The selected tree should have a diameter of approximately 50 centimeters.

2.2 Wood Smoothing and Turning

Wood smoothing refers to shaping the wood to the desired dimensions, typically resulting in a height of around 150 centimeters. Wood turning is the process of refining the smoothed wood by sanding and shaping it to achieve a balanced and symmetrical form. The limbs, arms, hands, legs, and feet, are turned separately. The head, face, and torso require additional care and craftsmanship.



2.3 Wood Carving

In this stage, a skilled woodcarver sculpts the prototype from the smoothed wood form, focusing specifically on the head, face, and torso. This carving process demands a high level of skill and precision, using specialized tools and techniques, as can be seen from Figures 4-5.



Figures 4

Figures 5

Figures 4-5 Carving Golden Jackfruit Wood to Form the Buddha Image

3. Metalwork

Metalwork is a delicate process used to overlay the carved wooden core of the Buddha image. The primary metal used in the overlay is silver, which is ordered in sheet form. These silver sheets are measured and sectioned appropriately, then polished to smooth the edges before applying them to the figure.

Steps in the Metalworking Process

Metalwork is applied after the woodwork has been completed, beginning with the lower part of the Buddha image. The fingers and toes are delicate details that require the highest level of craftsmanship, as they are intricate and refined. In Buddhist art, based on the characteristics of a great being, the fingers are long and evenly shaped. It is believed that if the fingers and toes are crafted perfectly, they bring auspiciousness and enhance the beauty of the entire Buddha image. The process includes the following components:

1. Thighs and Feet (Phra Phela and Phra Bat):

Sheets of silver are rolled into cylindrical forms and wrapped around the carved wooden parts.

2. Upper Arms, Arms, and Hands (Phra Paha, Phra Kon, and Phra Hat):

Silver is also used to cover the upper arms, arms, and hands. The length from the fingertips to the wrists is wrapped with cylindrical silver sheets approximately 1 centimeter in diameter. The thumb (Phra Angkuth) is slightly larger than the other fingers. The arms (Phra Paha) are bent forward in the alms-holding posture (Phra Pang Umpat), and thus consist of two separate parts: From the upper arm to the elbow, and from the elbow to the fingertips. All parts are joined together using heat.



3. Robe and Sash (Jiwon and Ratprakhot):

The robe at the back and front of the figure is overlaid with silver, while the sash, made of gold, wraps around the waist. The contrast between the gold sash and silver robe enhances the visual appeal.

4. Torso (Phra Worakaya):

The entire torso is covered with silver sheets both in front and back. Silver rivets, cast like nails, are used to securely attach the sheets to the inner wood, requiring great precision.

5. Neck (Phra So):

The neck is made of a 2-inch-wide silver sheet, forming the connection between the neck and the face.

6. Face (Phra Phak):

This is the most complex part. A pre-modeled facial mold is used to create a cast from a mixture of three metals: Silver, gold, and naak (A Gold-Copper Alloy), known as Sam Kasat (Three Kings), which gives the face a brighter and more refined appearance than silver alone. The hot metal is hammered into a mold to shape the face. The lips (Phra Oth) are given a slightly reddish hue based on the prototype and the preference of the commissioning patron.

7. Crown Cover and Hair (Phra Seun/Phra Sok):

Silver is used to cover the carved wooden head. Hair details (Phra Sok) are created by repoussé artisans using small round-headed chisels to emboss patterns from the inside of the silver cover.

8. Flame Crest (Phra Ketumala):

This pointed flame-like crest at the top of the head is crafted from a blend of three metals: Silver, gold, and naak forming what is called the Sam Kasat Ketumala, symbolizing the radiant aura above the Buddha's head.

9. Ears (Phra Kan):

Two repoussé silver sheets are used, with the front side embossed with grooves to define the ear structure, while the back remains plain. The two pieces are joined to form the ear shape in accordance with traditional Buddhist iconography.

10. Eyes (Phra Net):

This is a final decorative step after completing the face. The eyes consist of a white part made from mother-of-pearl and a black part made from onyx. A gemstone-setting technique is used to inlay the materials directly into the eye sockets on the silver surface.

In the metalworking process of Phra Lak creation, as can be seen from Figures 6-13, the use of "Chan" (Traditional Resin) is essential. This reflects ancient artisanal wisdom used to bond metal to wood. The method is known as "Kan-at Chan" (Resin Pressing Technique). Chan is made from the liver of stingrays, which is boiled down until it becomes a thick, viscous substance. Once the resin's consistency is confirmed to be suitable, it is used as an adhesive between the wooden core and the metal sheets, as well as at various seams, to ensure a firm and seamless attachment.



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

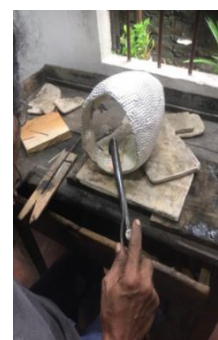


Figure 9

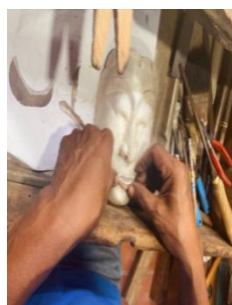


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

Figures 6-13 The Process of Creating Phra Lak by the Artisan Lineage of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province

One unique identity in the Phra Lak creation process by the artisan lineage of Nakhon Si Thammarat is the noticeable red color of the Buddha's lips (Phra Oth). This characteristic has raised questions as to why certain Phra Lak images feature red lips and whether these statues are specially crafted or possess a specific symbolic meaning.

According to the study, this feature is believed to derive from the concept of depicting the Buddha in a female form, a notion that likely originated from the fusion of Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions. Three underlying interpretations have been proposed:

1. As a gesture of reverence: The red lips symbolize the highest form of respect and veneration for female ancestors or matriarchs, reflecting the value of filial piety.
2. As a substitute for female ordination: Since women are not permitted to be ordained as monks in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, the creation of a Buddha image in a feminine form serves as a symbolic alternative.
3. As a reflection of merit-making roles: Historically, women were more likely than men to attend temple ceremonies and listen to Dhamma teachings regularly. They also frequently acted as sponsors or patrons (Yom Uppathak) in the commissioning of Buddha images. Thus, the resulting statues often bore facial features reminiscent of women, including red-colored lips.

In some cases, the Buddha image may even be named after its female patron. For example, at Wat Chantharam, there exists a statue known as Phra Lak Mae Phring (Mother



Phring's Phra Lak). Furthermore, the facial features of each statue vary depending on the artisan's skill, belief system, and the sponsor's faith and intention.

The Process of Creating Phra Lak-Inspired Artworks from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage

The creative process involved developing contemporary and functional art pieces by adapting distinctive elements from the traditional Phra Lak to produce works of both aesthetic and practical value. These pieces were designed for contemporary artistic and commercial purposes based on conceptual sketches and were presented for review by a joint committee.

The creative team held meetings to evaluate and select three initial prototype designs for further development. The selected works include:

Wall Art-decorative wall panel (As Shown in Figure 14)

Side Table-functional table (As Shown in Figure 15)

Tray-serving tray (As Shown in Figure 16).

The process began with design work, drawing inspiration from specific parts of the Phra Lak statues. This was followed by field surveys and the selection of appropriate materials such as wood, metal, and other components. The next steps included designing, planning, and executing the productions, such as metal joining and wood smoothing. Throughout the process, the team periodically reviewed and evaluated the progress of the artwork.



Figure 14 Wall Art Piece



Figure 15 Side Table Piece



Figure 16 Tray

Transmitting Knowledge of Phra Lak from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage to a New Generation of Artisans

As part of this initiative, knowledge related to Phra Lak was transferred by the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage at the Local Artisan Hall (Hor Chang Sin Thin Nakhon), Wat Chantharam, Tha Wang Subdistrict, Mueang Nakhon Si Thammarat District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. The program targeted interested individuals who participated in a hands-on training workshop titled "Phra Lak Artisan Training", which aimed to teach the fundamental processes and techniques for creating Phra Lak in the traditional style of the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan.

The training course lasted 8 days, totaling no fewer than 48 hours, and consisted of the following modules:

1. Introductory Training-6 hours, (3 Hours on Foundational Knowledge of Phra Lak and Its Proportions and Forms, and 3 Hours on Materials and Tools Used in Traditional Craftsmanship)
2. Basic Design and Line Engraving Practice-6 hours
3. Repoussé (Metal Embossing) Practice-18 hours
4. Mold Assembly and Metal Joining Practice-18 hours (9 Hours on Metal Joining Techniques, and 9 Hours on Assembly Techniques)



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20

Figures 17-20 Training Workshop Atmosphere

From Figures 17-20, it can be seen that this hands-on training workshop was organized to revive the traditional art of Phra Lak creation in accordance with ancient methods. The program began with a teacher-honoring ceremony (Wai Khru) to invoke auspiciousness, followed by theoretical instruction and practical training in various artisan skills, such as pattern drawing, repoussé (Metal Embossing), welding, and component assembly. Participants were given the opportunity to present their work and exchange knowledge with one another. As a result, seven new artisans gained knowledge and understanding of Phra Lak craftsmanship, as illustrated in Figure 21. This outcome marks a significant step toward the sustainable preservation and continuation of traditional artisanal wisdom in Nakhon Si Thammarat.



Figure 21 New-Generation Artisans who Completed the Training Program



Dissemination of Knowledge about Phra Lak from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage to the Public

The dissemination of knowledge about Phra Lak from the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage to the public was carried out through an exhibition titled "Phra Lak of Nakhon City." The exhibition included a presentation of research findings, a display of the Phra Lak Mae Yupa statue, and a ceremonial Phra Lak consecration to revive the traditional ritual. It also featured three creative artworks inspired by Phra Lak designs. An 8-minute documentary titled "Phra Lak of Nakhon City" was produced and published on social media via the Facebook pages of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, and Chang Sin Thin Nakhon (Local Artisan of Nakhon). An academic panel discussion titled "Local Artisans of Nakhon: Creative Economy Based on the Buddhist Way" was held alongside various cultural and creative economy activities to promote temple fair tourism in the new normal era. The event was called "The Wat Jan Temple Fair Festival" and took place at Wat Chantharam, Tha Wang Subdistrict, Mueang Nakhon Si Thammarat District, from June 16 to 20, 2022. Additionally, an e-book titled "Phra Lak: The Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage" Published to the public through online platforms, such as Matichon Online Facebook page: Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation and various other channels was produced and published for public access.

The artisan lineage of Nakhon Si Thammarat has produced artistic works passed down through generations, rooted in deep Buddhist faith. Among these, the creation of Buddha images, particularly Phra Lak, holds significant cultural value for the province. Phra Lak figures are distinguished by unique craftsmanship, such as carving from golden jackfruit wood and decorating with silver, gold, and naak (A Gold-Copper Alloy). These statues are constructed in a puppet-like form with detachable parts. Such works not only reflect the artistic excellence of master artisans but also serve as a powerful source of inspiration for younger generations to carry on the tradition. Moreover, Phra Lak functions as a cultural medium connecting artisans across religious backgrounds, including Muslim craftsmen who play important roles in the production process. This collaboration demonstrates communal harmony, unity, and shared spiritual devotion, enhancing the identity and cultural landscape of Nakhon Si Thammarat in terms of Buddhist art and local tradition, as noted by Parinyokul (2024). The production and artistic adaptation of Phra Lak-inspired works have resulted in three functional and contemporary pieces: A table, a tray, and wall art. These works represent a practical application of traditional techniques in modern and commercial contexts. They show potential for further development into sustainable economic opportunities, enabling new generations of artisans to earn a livelihood through ancient techniques such as repoussé (Metal Embossing), silver overlay, and wood carving. These techniques can be applied to decorative items for buildings, tourist sites, wall installations, jewelry, and functional art. This research also contributed to the public dissemination of Phra Lak-related knowledge. A research exhibition was held to present findings, showcase Phra Lak artworks, and revive traditional Phra Lak consecration ceremonies. Knowledge was further distributed through various media, including an e-book, documentary video, and Facebook pages, making it accessible to a wide audience.



The creation of traditional Phra Lak statues in the style of the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage represents an art form that has been preserved and continuously developed since ancient times. It reflects a deep reservoir of artisanal wisdom, closely aligned with historical evidence and rich cultural narratives. According to Kophattha (2013), Buddha images from the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage exhibit artistic characteristics that highlight the connection between Nakhon Si Thammarat and the Ayutthaya Kingdom during the 22nd-23rd Buddhist centuries and the early Rattanakosin period. This also aligns with Sriaram (2021), who stated that Buddha images are important, valuable, and have an influence on Thai society. According to Intharathep et al. (2017), this body of knowledge and craftsmanship, however, often resides solely in individuals and has not yet been systematically recorded or archived, placing it at risk of gradual disappearance over time. Therefore, it is crucial to actively promote the learning, transmission, celebration, and advancement of this local Buddhist artistic heritage, transforming it into a sustainable cultural foundation, a source of community pride, and a valuable form of cultural capital. This is in line with the needs of the Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture (2019). The creation of Phra Lak is thus not merely the production of religious art but also holds potential as a key mechanism for driving the creative economy and local economic development in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

At present, there are very few remaining artisan lineages involved in Buddha image creation in Nakhon Si Thammarat. However, when tracing back through the historical roots, it becomes evident that the Buddhist art traditions of the province were largely grounded in metalworking, particularly in silversmithing and niello craftsmanship, both of which are cultural hallmarks of Nakhon Si Thammarat. These artisans played a crucial role in the creation of Phra Lak, which stands as a highly valuable cultural and artistic heritage. Such an approach aligns with the SECI Model proposed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), which outlines a process for knowledge creation. In this case, the deeply embedded tacit knowledge of master artisans and the explicit knowledge of techniques and processes are passed on to younger generations through socialization. This is followed by externalization, whereby the internal knowledge of the older artisans is articulated and documented. The process continues with combination, wherein new models and creative innovations are developed, and finally internalization, in which the new generation absorbs and applies this knowledge, leading to the continuation and evolution of Buddhist artistic practices. This ensures that traditional craftsmanship becomes more widely recognized and applicable to contemporary artistic expressions. This concept is in accordance with Inpakdee and Suphakorn, (2016), who found that applying traditional Phra Lak patterns and techniques to product design helps meet modern consumer demands. By selecting appropriate materials and adapting patterns to suit practical use, artisans are able to enhance product value, create cultural significance, and generate income. It also corresponds with the findings of Thosata et al. (2020), who emphasized that the transmission of local wisdom involves transferring knowledge in a way that learners can understand and apply. This process often occurs naturally, outside of formal academic institutions, relying instead on intuitive social learning through imitation, observation, and generational inheritance within families and communities.



Therefore, the aforementioned process and techniques of Phra Lak creation can be further developed to generate sustainable economic income, enabling the younger generation to earn a living. This aligns with the work of Klangrit et al. (2025), which advocates for empowering youth to advance in their careers while achieving work-life balance. The use of traditional Buddhist artisan techniques, such as repoussé (Metal Embossing), silver overlay, and wood carving, can be creatively adapted into handcrafted works, decorative items for architectural spaces and tourist sites, including wall decorations (e.g., Wallpaper), jewelry, and utilitarian crafts. If a communication platform or intermediary were established to connect artisans with hotel and tourism businesses for pre-orders or commercial distribution, it could provide a viable source of income for local Buddhist artisans. These artisans, in turn, would likely be willing to carry on their local heritage. This perspective corresponds with the insights of Phra Maha Pongtharathit Kongsiang, & Buarapa (2015), who argued that Buddhism can play a vital role in economic development. This idea can also be analyzed through the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework, which evaluates the social value generated from an investment. The Phra Lak creation process requires time and the transmission of artisanal wisdom from master craftsmen. By developing derivative handcrafted products from traditional Phra Lak designs, local communities can foster new economic opportunities. Young artisans gain income from their craftsmanship, while contributing to the preservation and revival of indigenous knowledge and building pride in their cultural roots. Currently, the scarcity of traditional craftsmen in Nakhon Si Thammarat poses a challenge in properly restoring cultural artifacts such as antique tools and ornaments passed down through family lineages. If these skills are passed on to the next generation, they would prove invaluable in conserving and restoring traditional heritage to its original beauty. This would support the growth of a creative economy that relies on intergenerational cooperation for the revival of Buddhist art, bridging local economy, aesthetics, and civilization with both local and global histories. Such a movement could be likened to a Renaissance, a revival of art and knowledge, positioning Nakhon Si Thammarat as a future cultural beacon of Thai civilization.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

The creation of Phra Lak in Nakhon Si Thammarat is not merely a means of preserving ancient art but a foundation for developing a creative economy, shared cultural identity, and a modern system of knowledge transmission. It has the potential to elevate local artisanship, generate careers for the younger generation, and project the city's unique identity onto national and international stages. The key contributions of this study are as follows:

1. Revival and Development of Knowledge about Phra Lak as a Form of Buddhist Heritage

Phra Lak is not only a form of craftsmanship but also a religious medium that embodies continuous faith-based creativity in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

2. Integration of Local Wisdom with Modern Disciplines to Create Contemporary Products

Traditional techniques, such as repoussé (Metal Embossing), silver overlay, and wood carving, were reimagined into modern designs, including tables, trays, and wall art. These traditional skills can be extended into the creative industry, with applications in hotel décor, tourist attractions, and

handmade products. This transforms Phra Lak from a niche religious artifact into a commercially viable product in the creative economy.

3. Interfaith Participation in Buddhist Art
- It was discovered that local Muslim artisans also contribute to the creation of Phra Lak, and are recognized as "Master Craftsmen." This reflects the concept of "Art as a Path to Peace" and highlights the interconnection between art and a culture of peace.
4. Dissemination and Awareness through Contemporary Media
- Modern communication technologies have enabled wider outreach and engagement across diverse audiences, enhancing the accessibility and visibility of Phra Lak-related knowledge.
5. A Community-Based Model for Creative Economic Development Rooted in Culture
- The findings demonstrate the potential of local Buddhist art as cultural capital, capable of generating sustainable employment for younger generations as shown in Figure 22.

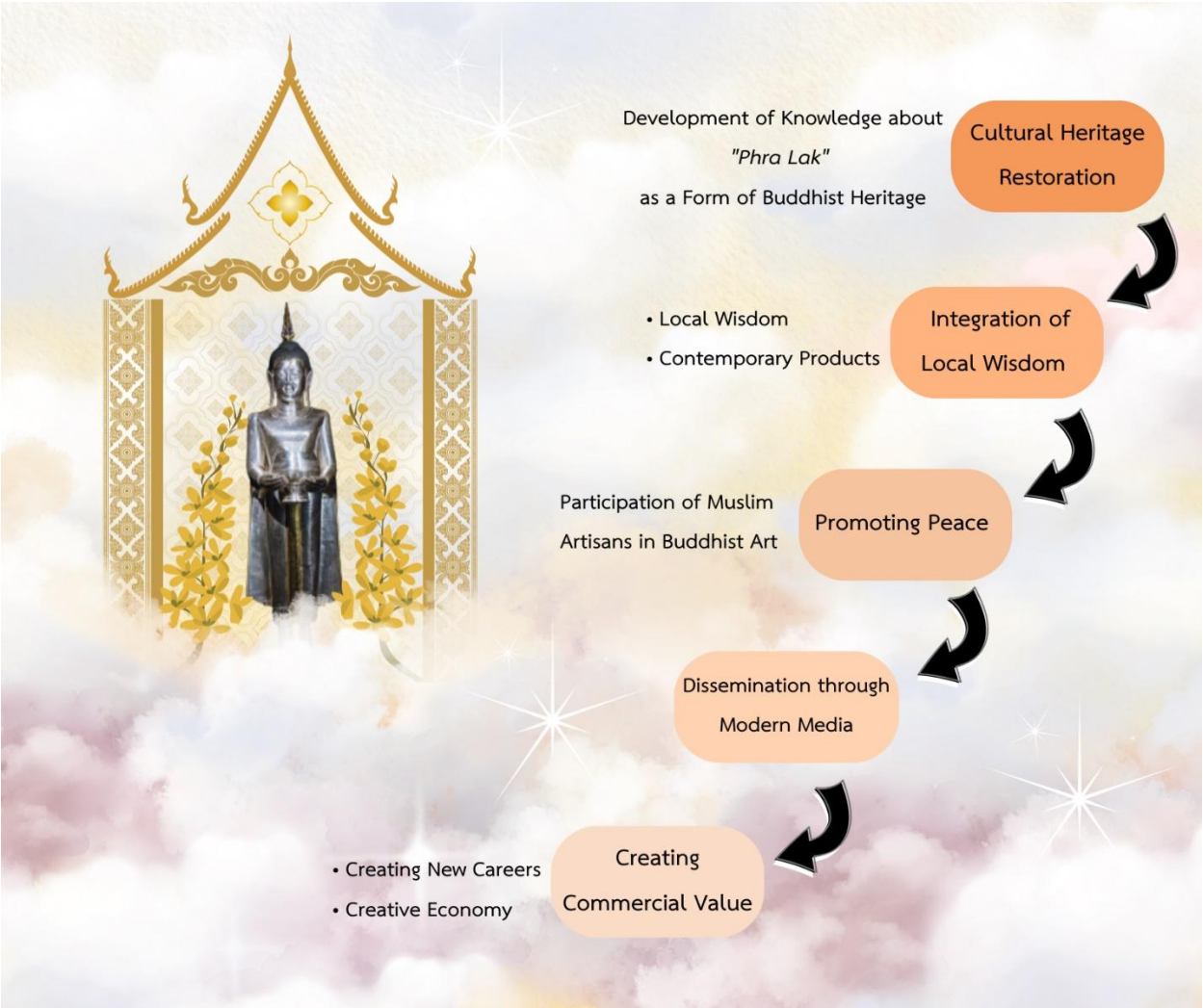


Figure 22 Framework for Developing "Phra Lak" into a Commercial Venture



Conclusions and Recommendations

The Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage has long been renowned for its refined artistic techniques, particularly in the creation of Buddha images and Phra Lak figures. These images are characterized by their exquisite silver overlay, decorated with gold and other precious materials. However, due to the highly specialized and intricate nature of the production process, only a few skilled artisans remain today. This research emphasizes the preservation and advancement of Phra Lak craftsmanship through documentation, artistic innovation, practical training, and public dissemination via exhibitions, cultural ceremonies, and digital platforms. The government has an important role in sharing knowledge and supporting local handicrafts, helping them grow into products that can generate income, while also promoting the skills and status of the next generation of artisans. Funding should also be directed toward improving artisans' quality of life, nurturing young talent, and establishing centers for ongoing art and cultural learning. On top of that, research can play a role in finding ways to enhance artisans' livelihoods further, develop effective marketing strategies, and expand creative techniques into diverse designs that meet the needs of both consumers and entrepreneurs. If society, especially leaders at the community, provincial, and national levels, recognizes the significance and value of this traditional knowledge and collaborates to formulate policies and strategies for its revival, development, and innovation, it can pave the way toward sustainable preservation. Establishing public platforms such as craft exhibitions and artisan showcases would allow for the dissemination of local wisdom and provide opportunities for younger generations to learn the methods and creative processes of this artistic tradition.

Acknowledgements

The research project "Local Artisans of Nakhon: Phra Lak in Southern Thailand from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage" was successfully completed through the collaboration and support of many individuals and organizations. The research team would like to express heartfelt gratitude to the artisans who devoted their time, energy, and craftsmanship to the creation of Phra Lak statues; To Wat Chantharam for generously providing the venue for project activities; And to the creative team whose contributions led to the production of valuable and meaningful works. Special thanks are extended to the supporting institutions, including: The Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, Thatcha Unit, Institute for Local Artisans, Chang Sin Thin Nakhon (Local Artisan of Nakhon), Nakhon Bor-Worn-Rat, College of Dramatic Arts, and Suan Mokkh Bangkok. In addition, the team also gratefully acknowledges the funding support from the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) under the fiscal year 2021, which made the success of this project possible.

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