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Princess Dara Rasmi and the Establishment of Cultural Capital Foundations
Influencing the City Branding of Chiang Mai

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีจุดประสงค์ศึกษาความเชื่อมโยงระหว่างพระประวัติและพระราชกรณียกิจของพระราชชายา เจ้าดารารัศมีในการสร้างแบรนด์ของจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ เนื่องด้วยพระราชชายาฯ ทรงเป็นปูชนียบุคคลที่มีบทบาทในการอนุรักษ์และส่งเสริมมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมภาคเหนือ พระกรณียกิจทางด้านการอุปถัมภ์ศิลปะและพุทธศาสนามีส่วนสำคัญที่ทำให้จังหวัดเชียงใหม่พัฒนาจนเป็นแหล่งท่องเที่ยวทางวัฒนธรรมสำคัญของประเทศ ในครั้งนี้ บทความจะวิเคราะห์พระประวัติพระองค์โดยเน้นที่บทบาทในการอนุรักษ์และส่งเสริมมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมภาคเหนือและสร้างอัตลักษณ์วัฒนธรรมใหม่ที่นำเอาวัฒนธรรมสมัยใหม่เข้ามาผสมผสานกับของเดิม และอภิปรายแนวคิดกลยุทธ์ในการสร้างแบรนด์เมืองและการวางรากฐานทุนทางวัฒนธรรมของจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ โดยอาศัยเรื่องราวทางประวัติศาสตร์ วัฒนธรรม และประเพณีท้องถิ่นอันเนื่องมาจากพระกรณียกิจของพระราชชายาฯ เพื่อให้จังหวัดเชียงใหม่เป็นที่น่าดึงดูดของนักท่องเที่ยวทั้งชาวไทยและชาวต่างประเทศ จากบทความ สามารถอนุมานได้ว่า เรื่องราวของบุคคลสำคัญในประวัติศาสตร์สามารถนำมาพัฒนาเป็นอัต

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ลักษณะของเมืองในยุคปัจจุบันได้ โดยชี้ให้เห็นถึงบทบาทของพระราชชายา ในการกำหนดภูมิทัศน์ทางวัฒนธรรมและความเจริญทางเศรษฐกิจของจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ได้เป็นอย่างดี

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the relationship between Princess Dara Rasmi's legacy and the development of Chiang Mai's city branding. As a key figure in the preservation and promotion of Northern Thai heritage, her contributions to the arts and Buddhism are foundational to the city's status as a premier cultural tourism destination. The paper examines her life, detailing her efforts to maintain traditional practices while integrating modern elements, particularly through her patronage of local crafts and performing arts. It discusses the strategic concept of city branding and the establishment of cultural capital foundations, highlighting how Princess Dara Rasmi's legacy serves as a vital asset in enhancing Chiang Mai's appeal. By leveraging historical narratives, cultural institutions, and vibrant local traditions, the city's branding strategy successfully attracts both domestic and international visitors. The findings underscore the importance of historical figures in contemporary city branding, demonstrating how Princess Dara Rasmi's enduring influence continues to shape Chiang Mai's cultural landscape and economic vitality.

Keywords

Princess Dara Rasmi, Chiang Mai, Cultural Identity, City Branding, Cultural Tourism

Introduction

Chiang Mai, the largest city in northern Thailand, is a vibrant embodiment of the region's rich cultural heritage, captivating natural beauty, and dynamic local traditions. Esteemed as a premier tourist destination, Chiang Mai draws visitors eager to experience the unique blend of Lanna and Thai cultures that infuse its temples, markets, and daily life (World

Heritage Convention, 2015). With origins tracing back to the 13th century, the city boasts a deep cultural identity that continues to enchant both locals and travelers.

At the center of this cultural legacy is Princess Dara Rasmi, a pivotal figure in shaping Chiang Mai's artistic and cultural landscape. Her extensive patronage of the arts, dedication to preserving traditional practices, and establishment of significant cultural institutions have woven her influence into the very fabric of the city's identity. Princess Dara Rasmi's contributions extend beyond mere history; they are vital to Chiang Mai's branding as a leading cultural destination (Lertrit, 2000, 137-161; Lhakard, 2022, 178-188). Through her initiatives, a compelling narrative emphasizing the city's unique cultural assets has emerged, paving the way for its recognition on both national and international stages.

This exploration delves into Princess Dara Rasmi's life, her enduring legacy, and the broader implications of her contributions to Chiang Mai's city branding and cultural capital. The article unfolds by first examining the life and contributions of Princess Dara Rasmi, detailing her role as a cultural role model and her efforts to promote and preserve Northern Thai traditions. It then introduces the concept of city branding, explaining its significance and the components that contribute to a city's identity. Following this, the discussion shifts to the establishment of cultural capital foundations, highlighting how culture serves as a strategic asset in enhancing a city's brand. The focus then turns to how Princess Dara Rasmi's legacy has shaped Chiang Mai's city branding, with particular attention to her contributions to Buddhism and cultural exchange. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the enduring impact of Princess Dara Rasmi on Chiang Mai's cultural identity and its relevance in contemporary city branding.

By engaging with this article, readers will gain insights into how historical figures like Princess Dara Rasmi play a crucial role in shaping cultural landscapes and influencing modern city branding strategies.

Princess Dara Rasmi, Royal Consort of King Chulalongkorn of Siam

Princess Dara Rasmi, born in 1873 in Chiang Mai, was the daughter of Phra Chao Inthawichayanon, the seventh ruler of the Chiang Mai under the Thipayajak dynasty, and his chief queen, Mae Jao Thippagesorn. Originally named Chao Dara Rasmi, she travelled to Bangkok in 1886 with her father and subsequently became the wife of King Chulalongkorn of Siam (the former name of Thailand). In 1908, she was formally recognized as a member of the

royal family, receiving the title “Prarajajaya.” Following the death of her husband in 1910, she returned to Chiang Mai in 1914 with the permission of King Vajiravuth. Princess Dara Rasmi lived there until she died in 1933 at Koum Rin Kaew at the age of 60 (Ratana & Chaimuangchun, 2023, 51-72).

Since childhood, she was educated in the arts, literature, and traditional Lanna customs, developing a deep appreciation for the cultural heritage of her homeland (Fongkaew, 2017, 399-407). Upon her return to Chiang Mai after 24 years in Bangkok, Princess Dara Rasmi actively worked to promote and preserve the unique cultural heritage of the Lanna region. She also supported Buddhism and initiated a variety of projects aimed at improving the well-being of people in northern Thailand (Ratana & Chaimuangchun, 2023, 51-72).

Princess Dara Rasmi: Pioneering in Preserving Northern Traditions

Princess Dara Rasmi, engaged in a political effort to unify Chiang Mai with Siam, played a pivotal role in shaping both the national and local cultures of Northern Thailand. She was instrumental not only in enriching the broader Thai culture but also in preserving traditional Thai cultural elements (Lertrit, 2000, 137-161), especially during her return to Chiang Mai (Castro-Woodhouse, 2020). Furthermore, she modernized Northern Thailand’s cultural landscape by introducing new elements, such as innovative choreography for Northern Thai dance (Sriranda & Rotjanasuksomboon, 2020, 64-78; Chanlerd, 2022, 11-19) and music (Ratana & Chaimuangchun, 2023, 51-72), thereby shaping Chiang Mai’s contemporary cultural identity.

Princess Dara Rasmi: Bridging Thailand’s Central and Northern Cultures

Princess Dara Rasmi, from a young age, was familiar with the cultures of both the Central and Northern regions of Thailand, mastering their respective alphabets and traditions. She married King Chulalongkorn and had one child who unfortunately died prematurely. The Princess served as a symbol of unity between Siam and the Lanna region. This is evident in her official representation of Siam on several occasions, such as the 1906 reception of a princess from Saen Wee province, located near Lanna, and her 1908 visit to Chiang Mai (Chulalongkorn University, 2019). Even after her husband’s passing, she maintained strong connections with the royal families of both Chiang Mai and Bangkok, playing a vital role in efforts to preserve Lanna civilization.

After relocating to Bangkok as the royal consort of King Chulalongkorn, Princess Dara Rasmi maintained her Northern cultural practices, including traditional attire, cuisine, and dialect, despite her familiarity with Central Thai culture. Her presence in the Grand Palace facilitated cultural exchanges, particularly through gift-giving, introducing the Central region to Northern traditions. She also fostered the textile industry by creating and popularizing new patterns in traditional Northern weaving, notably the ‘Paa Yok Dok Lampoon’, which gained national recognition (Dara Rasmi Memorial Fund [ดาราธิมนิสรณ์], 2023). Additionally, her initiatives led to the inclusion of Northern dance in Thailand’s formal study of performative arts, following its showcase to King Rama VII in Chiang Mai (Sriranda & Rotjanasuksomboon, 2020, 64-78).

Princess Dara Rasmi: Championing Northern Thai Heritage Preservation

Princess Dara Rasmi spearheaded the creation of the Chronicle of Chiang Mai through meticulous research and extensive travel across the northern regions, including Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Rai, and areas near the Mekong River. Her work included archaeological studies of the Lanna Kingdom and comparative analyses of Lan Na and Siam chronicles. Additionally, she supported the development of the museum and central library at Payap (Ongsakul, 2022, 139-149), further contributing to the preservation and understanding of local history and culture.

She and her team undertook extensive travels to document her royal family’s lineage, culminating in the establishment of a dedicated cemetery at Wat Suan Dok. This cemetery gathered the remains of her ancestors and relatives, centralizing their final resting place to honor their legacy.

She championed the preservation of traditional music and dance. She played a variety of instruments, favoring the Jhake, and maintained a band at her residence to educate her court and other interested individuals in music and performance. She also employed professional musicians to provide training at the royal court, further supporting the cultural education of her people.

On special occasions, she arranged for dancers to perform. Additionally, her residence nurtured several notable musicians and music teachers, some of whom were her relatives. These individuals include Chao Sopha Pengpoum, Chao Khrua Gaew Na Chiang Mai, and

Thailand's national artist, Sompan Chotana, among others. This commitment helped foster a vibrant cultural scene within her court.

She played a significant role in reviving and popularizing traditional Northern textiles, particularly the “Sin Teen Jok” fabric. She gathered expert weavers at her residence to teach this craft to interested individuals. The production and quality of “Sin Teen Jok” fabric were closely overseen by the princess, ensuring the preservation and continuation of this cultural heritage.

As a devout Buddhist, she made substantial contributions to religious causes. She funded the renovation of several temples, including Wat Phrathat Sri Jomthong, and oversaw the construction of new buildings at Wat Chaiyamongkhon (Pa Kluai), Wat Keelek, and Vihara Phraborom Thaat Jomthong. Additionally, she donated land for temple use, including Wat Prathat Doi Suthep and Wat Paa Paeng. Her descendant, Chao Ladaakham, donated land from the Dhara Pirom Palace estate for the establishment of Dhara Pirom Temples.

Princess Dara Rasmi: Innovating and Preserving Local Traditions

Princess Dara Rasmi introduced elements from the central region to Chiang Mai, where she trained her court ladies in floral art, candle making, and fruit carving. She also brought performance and theatrical arts, including her own creations such as “Phra Lor,” “Suwannahong,” “Sao Khrua Faa,” and “I Nao,” adapting them to Northern tastes. Her studies in music and dance in Bangkok enabled her to standardize Northern-style dance, creating traditional performances like “Rabam Sor Sompot Chang Peuk” and “Fon Man Mui Xiang Ta.” She integrated central-style music into the North, fostering a shared musical heritage between Chiang Mai and the central region (Ratana & Chaimuangchun, 2023, 51-72).

Princess Dara Rasmi: Innovating Local Traditions

Princess Dara Rasmi introduced agricultural innovations to Chiang Mai, including crops like cauliflower, longan, mango, and grapes, which have since become part of the region's agricultural economy (Withetwittayanusart, 2007). She experimented with raising economic animals such as chickens, ducks, and silkworms. At her Darapirom residence, she developed Suan Chao Sabuy, an agricultural model garden, and another residence, Mon Jok Pok, as an agricultural station. She also introduced ornamental flowers, including roses, and frequently exchanged plants with other royals (Chulalongkorn University, 2019).

She supported education by patronizing schools that incorporated central and Western teaching methods, such as Mahaat Lek Luang School, Yupparat School, and Darawitayalai School (Chulalongkorn University, 2019). In later years, there were efforts to include a subject inspired by her life and works in the Darawitayalai School curriculum. Additionally, she established “Kad Luang,” a commercial center in Chiang Mai, on land that previously held the remains of deceased royals.

In conclusion, Princess Dara Rasmi has played a significant role in shaping Chiang Mai’s cultural identity. Many traditional practices in the northern region that are still observed today can be attributed to her contributions and legacy. Additionally, her efforts to introduce Western knowledge and practices were instrumental in modernizing the city and influencing its adoption of a more Westernized lifestyle.

Concept of City Branding

Branding is conceptualized as the strategic process of constructing a distinctive identity—comprising elements such as a name, logo, design, and message—that differentiates a product, service, organization, or city from its competitors (The American Marketing Association, 1960). This process is instrumental in fostering recognition, trust, and loyalty by effectively communicating unique attributes (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016, 357-372). The significance of branding lies in its ability to shape people perception and build credibility (Kladou et al., 2017, 426-435). Various branding strategies exist, including corporate, product, and service branding; however, geographical branding is particularly notable for its emphasis on leveraging local cultural, historical, and socio-economic characteristics to present cities or regions as attractive destinations for living, visiting, and investment (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016, 357).

City branding is a strategic approach to positioning and marketing a city to attract visitors, residents, and businesses (Kusumawati & Supriono, 2020, 219-223). It involves the deliberate creation and communication of a city's unique identity, values, and image to differentiate it from competitors and establish a strong, positive reputation (Insch, 2011, 8-14). Successful city branding can lead to increased tourism, investment, and economic development, as well as enhance a city's cultural vibrancy and quality of life for its inhabitants (Phetsuriya & Heath, 2021, 1-20).

Brand image and identity are crucial components of city branding, as they shape the perceptions and associations that people have about a city. A strong, distinctive brand image can help a city differentiate itself from competitors, attract visitors, residents, and businesses, and foster a sense of pride and belonging among its inhabitants (Insch, 2011, 8-14). By deliberately cultivating and communicating a city's unique attributes, values, and cultural heritage, city branding can enhance the city's reputation and make it a more appealing destination.

Effective city branding often involves the strategic use of cultural assets, such as historical landmarks, traditional arts and crafts, and local customs, to create a distinct and compelling brand identity (Kavaratzis, 2004, 58-73). This approach can help to preserve and promote a city's cultural heritage while also leveraging it as a key element of the city's brand.

The Establishment of Cultural Capital Foundations

Culture, a multifaceted concept within society, has been extensively analyzed by scholars including Williams, Hall, and Bourdieu. Williams (1958) classifies culture into three distinct realms: as an ongoing human development ("the Ideal"), as the product of intellectual and creative activities ("the Document"), and as a societal way of life. Hall (1997) contributes to this framework by describing culture as a circulating entity within society, acting as both a marker of identity and a wielder of power. Expanding on this, Bourdieu (1986) introduces the notion of cultural capital, subdividing it into three types: embodied (comprising skills and knowledge), objectified (consisting of physical artifacts), and institutionalized (encompassing recognized qualifications), all of which play pivotal roles in elevating an individual's social status.

The definition of "cultural capital" was further elaborated by Tsaousi (2014, 467-492), who define cultural capital as the accumulated cultural knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are valued in a particular social context. Cultural capital can take various forms, such as educational qualifications, artistic appreciation, or familiarity with cultural institutions and practices.

Culture has potentials to be strategic asset in city branding, capable of enhancing a city's identity and overall value. In the context of city branding, the establishment of cultural capital foundations involves the deliberate cultivation and promotion of a city's unique cultural assets, traditions, and heritage (Pasquotto, 2022, 108-117; Jin, 2021, 415-418). This can

include the preservation of historic landmarks, the support of local arts and crafts, and the development of cultural institutions and events (Pratt, 2013). By highlighting and leveraging these cultural resources, cities can create a distinctive brand identity that resonates with both residents and visitors. (Fongkaew, 2017, 399-407). City branding seeks not only to augment the city's image but also to attract visitors, improve the quality of life for residents, and stimulate economic growth, as discussed by Uca (2017, 1-22). Such strategies are crucial for refining both the perception and the actual conditions of urban spaces, thus making cities more appealing for living, visiting, and investment purposes.

Further, the unique cultural and architectural heritage of a city significantly contributes to its distinct identity, as noted by Jong and Lu (2022, 203-231). The economic benefits of a strong cultural brand include enhanced job creation, increased tourism revenue, and urban regeneration, highlighting culture's role as a marketable asset (Riza, 2015, 269-274).

However, the management of city branding must be approached with caution to prevent adverse effects such as homogenization, gentrification, and the marginalization of communities, as discussed by Ciuculescu and Luca (2020, 1-21). A balanced approach to cultivating cultural events and art is essential, not only to boost the city's economic value but also to maintain a competitive edge while avoiding the pitfalls of overbranding.

Princess Dara Rasmi's Legacy and the Shaping of Chiang Mai's City Branding

Chiang Mai's cultural identity is further enriched by Princess Dara Rasmi's significant contributions to Buddhism and agriculture, both of which play vital roles in the city's branding as a cultural tourism hub. As a devout Buddhist, she actively supported various religious causes, funding the renovation of temples such as Wat Phrathat Sri Jomthong and overseeing the construction of new buildings in other temples. Her efforts not only reinforced the spiritual landscape of Chiang Mai but also attracted visitors seeking to engage with its rich Buddhist heritage. For example, her contributions to Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep, one of the most revered temples in Thailand, are emblematic of her commitment to promoting religious and cultural tourism in the region.

In terms of agriculture, Princess Dara Rasmi introduced innovative farming practices and new crops, such as cauliflower and longan, which have become integral to the region's agricultural economy. Her creation of Suan Chao Sabuy, an agricultural model garden, exemplifies her vision of integrating traditional practices with modern agricultural techniques.

By fostering the cultivation of ornamental flowers and facilitating exchanges of plants with other royals, she contributed to the diversification of Chiang Mai's agricultural landscape, enhancing its appeal to tourists interested in local produce and crafts.

Moreover, this innovative approach has elevated agriculture beyond mere production—it has become a form of cultural capital. By intertwining traditional farming practices with contemporary methods, the region has not only preserved its heritage but also created a distinctive identity that resonates with both locals and visitors. This cultural capital, embodied in the unique agricultural practices and celebrated in landmarks like Suan Chao Sabuy, has laid the foundation for a powerful brand. It positions Chiang Mai as a destination where history and modernity coalesce, attracting cultural tourism and investment while reinforcing local pride and distinctiveness.

As of August 2024, Thailand attracted 23,567,850 tourists, with Chiang Mai welcoming 1,207,606 tourists in 2023, marking a 5.22% increase from 2022. Notably, Thai tourists comprised 68.9% of these visitors, while foreign tourists made up 31.1%, with a remarkable 31.43% increase in foreign tourists compared to the previous year (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2024). This growing international interest reflects the city's enhanced reputation as a cultural destination, a legacy that resonates with the efforts of Princess Dara Rasmi.

Chiang Mai generated significant revenue of 10,624.43 million THB in 2023, up 20.58% from 2022, with Thai tourists contributing 6,304.86 million THB and foreign tourists spending an impressive 4,319.57 million THB (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2024) highlighting the economic impact of cultural tourism. This revenue generation is bolstered by the flourishing arts and crafts scene closely tied to Princess Dara Rasmi's legacy, which draws visitors seeking authentic Lanna textiles and handcrafted products.

Princess Dara Rasmi's efforts to unify Chiang Mai with Siam and engage in cultural exchanges between the Central and Northern regions were crucial in shaping Northern Thailand's contemporary cultural identity (Lertrit, 2000; Castro-Woodhouse, 2020). Not only did she maintain Northern cultural practices, but she also introduced new elements that fostered the textile industry and promoted Northern dance within Thailand's formal arts education. Her creation of the Chronicle of Chiang Mai and support for local museums further contributed to the preservation and exploration of Northern Thai heritage.

Her influence is prominently featured in the Chiang Mai National Museum, which showcases her contributions to Lanna arts, textiles, and traditions. This institution allows

visitors to engage with the city's cultural landscape while understanding the historical significance of figures like Princess Dara Rasmi. Annual celebrations, such as the Lanna Songkran Festival, exemplify the vibrant cultural traditions she nurtured, drawing tourists who are eager to experience the region's rich heritage.

Post-pandemic trends indicate a shift in tourist preferences, with 37.8% opting to travel on weekends and leisure and dining tourism emerging as the most favored activities. This aligns with the strategic recommendations for enhancing tourism in Chiang Mai, such as developing tailored weekend tourism packages to cater to this demand and improving the experience for international visitors through diverse, high-quality services.

Furthermore, leveraging social media can significantly enhance Chiang Mai's city branding efforts. With platforms like Facebook and Instagram being primary sources of information for 77.8% of tourists (Madhyamapurush, 2022, 17-31), a strong social media presence can effectively showcase the city's cultural richness, local traditions, and tourism offerings. Engaging content, user-generated stories, and targeted advertisements can attract a broader audience and entice potential visitors by highlighting unique experiences that reflect both Princess Dara Rasmi's legacy and the vibrant cultural landscape of Chiang Mai.

Chiang Mai's branding strategy effectively leverages Princess Dara Rasmi's legacy, positioning the city as a premier destination for cultural tourism. By highlighting her contributions alongside the region's rich heritage, Chiang Mai has cultivated a distinctive identity that resonates with both domestic and international tourists. This strategic approach has been instrumental in attracting cultural tourists eager to explore the city's unique blend of tradition and modernity, thereby contributing significantly to the local economy.

By deeply integrating Princess Dara Rasmi's contributions into its branding campaigns, Chiang Mai has successfully carved out a unique identity as a cultural tourism hub (Xu, et al., 2020, 246-251; Phetsuriya & Heath, 2021, 1-20). This strategic approach differentiates Chiang Mai from other Thai cities that may focus more on natural landscapes or general attractions (Koh et al., 2020, 187-209). The extensive network of museums, art galleries, festivals, and artisanal initiatives that celebrate Princess Dara Rasmi's legacy reinforces the city's distinct identity. Visitors are drawn to the seamless blend of tradition and modernity, offering a multifaceted cultural experience that is difficult to replicate elsewhere. This differentiated branding strategy has elevated Chiang Mai's status as a leading cultural tourism destination,

attracting a steady influx of domestic and international visitors captivated by the city’s unique heritage and artistic offerings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Princess Dara Rasmi’s enduring legacy forms the cornerstone of Chiang Mai’s city brand by establishing a robust Cultural Capital Foundation that methodically integrates her multifaceted contributions in arts, religion, and agriculture into a cohesive narrative. As a prominent member of the Lanna royal family and through her union with King Chulalongkorn, she modernized traditional Thai arts—evident in the intricate textiles like the ‘Paa Yok Dok Lampoon’ and the flourishing of local dance—thereby reinforcing the region’s cultural identity. Simultaneously, her commitment to spiritual heritage is demonstrated through her pivotal role in renovating key Buddhist temples such as Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep, which enhanced the city’s religious landscape and attracted cultural tourism. Her innovative approach to agriculture, exemplified by the creation of Suan Chao Sabuy, seamlessly fused traditional practices with modern techniques, diversifying the local economy and enriching the cultural tapestry. Together, these integrated contributions not only underscore the symbiotic relationship between cultural capital and city branding but also position Chiang Mai as a vibrant destination that honors its historical legacy while embracing contemporary innovation.

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