

Promoting Cultural Capital and Thai Teachers Respect Ceremony (Wai Khru) In Educational Institutions through the Concept of Localwisdomism

Worawut Phengphan

Faculty of Education, Burapha University, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed (1) to examine the values of the Thai Wai Khru tradition in educational institutions as perceived by upper secondary school students and (2) to identify guidelines for promoting cultural capital through the Wai Khru tradition based on a local wisdom-oriented educational approach. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 384 upper secondary school students in the 2025 academic year under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office Chonburi-Rayong, Thailand, selected through multi-stage sampling using Krejcie and Morgan's table. Qualitative data were obtained from 11 key informants, including basic education teachers and university lecturers with at least three years of experience in Wai Khru ceremonies, through online focus group discussions. The research instruments consisted of a questionnaire and a semi-structured focus group interview guide. The questionnaire demonstrated acceptable content validity (IOC = .84) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .84). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings indicated that (1) the overall perceived value of the Wai Khru tradition was at a high level. Among the value dimensions, social value was rated the highest, highlighting the role of the Wai Khru ceremony in fostering respectful teacher-student relationships, social cohesion, and a sense of unity within schools. Psychological, moral, aesthetic, religious, and intellectual values were also rated highly, reflecting the tradition's contribution to students' gratitude, emotional well-being, cultural appreciation, moral awareness, and lifelong learning orientation. Physical and economic values were perceived at moderate levels, as these aspects were less explicitly represented in the ritual practices. (2) the guidelines for promoting cultural capital through the Wai Khru tradition, emphasizing the integration of local wisdom into educational goals, school environments, curricula, teaching practices, learner development, and experiential, community-based learning. The findings underscore the significance of integrating traditional cultural practices into contemporary education to support holistic student development and cultural sustainability.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, Thai Teachers Respect Ceremony, Wai Khru, Thai Educational Philosophy, Localwisdomism,

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and rapid advances in digital technology have profoundly transformed youths' lifestyles, values, and learning patterns. These changes pose significant challenges to educational systems in developing learners' competencies while simultaneously preserving national identity and cultural values. Contemporary education, therefore, extends beyond the transmission of academic knowledge to emphasize the development of cultural capital, which serves as a fundamental foundation for shaping responsible and socially conscious individuals. Cultural capital is a form of social resource accumulated through learning processes, traditions, customs, and social institutions, playing a crucial role in identity formation, value transmission, and long-term human development (Bourdieu, 1986).

In the Thai context, traditions and cultural practices function as essential mechanisms for instilling values, beliefs, and moral principles among youth. Among these, the Wai Khru ceremony holds particular significance

as a ritual symbolizing gratitude, respect, and the close relationship between teachers and students, which has long been a cornerstone of the Thai educational system (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2018). Historically, the Wai Khru ceremony evolved from a personal act of reverence into an institutionalized practice within educational settings (Bamrunghai, 2022). However, amid contemporary social and educational changes, the ceremony in some schools has been reduced to a formal ritual aligned with administrative regulations or academic calendars, lacking meaningful integration with students' lived learning experiences. As a result, its deeper psychological, social, and cultural values may not be fully transmitted to learners (Wongwanich, 2023).

This situation highlights the need to reconsider and develop educational approaches that enable the Wai Khru tradition to remain meaningful in rapidly changing social contexts. Education grounded in local wisdom is therefore increasingly essential. Learning from local wisdom allows students to understand their cultural roots, history, and community ways of life, fostering pride in identity and resilience against cultural homogenization. Integrating local wisdom into education also enables students to innovate in ways suited to their local environments, supports cultural preservation, and contributes to sustainable local economic development (Phengphan, 2025).

The concept of Localwisdomism emphasizes integrating local knowledge, experiences, lifestyles, and values into education to create meaningful and contextually relevant learning. This approach views local communities not merely as physical resources but as rich reservoirs of cultural capital capable of supporting sustainable human development (Tuntirojanawong, 2017). Applying this concept to education provides a vital pathway for revitalizing and extending the cultural significance of the Wai Khru tradition. Schools, as key cultural spaces, play a critical role in transforming the Wai Khru ceremony from a symbolic ritual into a living learning platform that connects students with their cultural roots and strengthens cultural identity (Phengphan, 2025).

Accordingly, promoting cultural capital and the values of the Wai Khru tradition through the lens of localwisdomism can transform schools into spaces for learning, cultural continuity, and creative engagement. Such an approach aligns with UNESCO's vision of holistic education that fosters knowledge, morality, and cultural identity (UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, this research is significant in advancing understanding of how culturally grounded educational practices can preserve and reinterpret the Wai Khru tradition in ways that are meaningful, sustainable, and responsive to contemporary Thai society.

Research Objectives

- To examine the perceived values of the Thai Wai Khru tradition in educational institutions as perceived by upper secondary school students.
- To explore approaches for promoting the cultural capital of the Wai Khru tradition in schools through educational management based on the concept of localwisdomism.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design. The population consisted of upper secondary school students enrolled in the 2025 academic year under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office of Chonburi-Rayong. A quantitative sample of 384 students was selected using multi-stage sampling, with the sample size determined based on Krejcie and Morgan's table (1970). Key informants for the qualitative component included 11 teachers at the basic education level and university lecturers with at least three years of experience participating in Wai Khru ceremonies, selected through purposive sampling. Research instruments included a questionnaire comprising three sections: demographic information, a five-point Likert-scale assessment of Wai Khru values (24 items), and open-ended questions on related issues and suggestions. The questionnaire demonstrated content validity (IOC = .84) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .84). In addition, a semi-structured focus group discussion guide with six questions was validated by 11 experts. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis. Data collection was conducted in two phases: (1) a survey administered between June and November 2025, and (2) an online focus group discussion held on December 20, 2025.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

(1) Perceived Values of the Thai Wai Khru Tradition in Educational Institutions

The overall level of perceived value of the Wai Khru tradition was rated as high. Among the eight dimensions, social value received the highest mean score. This may be attributed to the role of the Wai Khru ceremony in fostering positive relationships between teachers and students, as well as in promoting an understanding of social roles, mutual respect, and appropriate social conduct. The ceremony thus functions as a social space that cultivates unity and social cohesion within educational institutions.

However, while this may be attributed to a shared sense of propriety, Thai expectations regarding teachers' roles and behavior are deeply rooted in spiritual and religious traditions originating from Buddhist monastic culture. These expectations find institutionalized expression in national observances such as Teachers' Day and in the rites of Wai Khru, and are embedded in the very lexicon used to describe student–teacher relationships in Thailand (Guffey & Kaewkaen, 2017). This finding is consistent with the role of educational institutions as key social institutions (Durkheim, 1956).

Psychological value reflects the significant role of the Wai Khru tradition in cultivating gratitude, respect, and students' sense of self-worth. Through symbolic expressions of reverence toward teachers as transmitters of knowledge—who are traditionally regarded as worthy of high respect—students experience emotional warmth, psychological stability, and positive attitudes toward learning (Bamrungthai, 2022). This aligns with Bloom's (1971) concept of affective domain development.

Character value may be explained by the role of the Wai Khru tradition in shaping desirable traits such as discipline, humility, politeness, and a sense of responsibility, which are regarded as essential characteristics of good citizenship in Thai society. This is consistent with educational goals emphasizing moral development alongside academic achievement (Tuntirojanawong, 2017).

Aesthetic value may stem from students' appreciation of the beauty inherent in the Wai Khru ceremony, including the preparation of floral trays, ritual objects, and the orderly sequence of traditional practices. These elements symbolize respect and gratitude toward teachers and contribute to students' emotional impressions and meaningful experiences during the ceremony (Bangchud, 2020). Such experiences support the internalization of artistic and cultural values and foster emotional sensitivity, which is fundamental to holistic human development (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2018).

Religious value reflects the ceremony's strong roots in Buddhist beliefs, emphasizing respect for benefactors, moral conduct, and reverence toward those deemed worthy of veneration. In Buddhism, honoring those deserving of respect is considered a virtuous practice (Lyan & Sasong, 2025), which contributes to students' moral consciousness and aligns with the role of religion in regulating social behavior (Phra Brahmaganabhorn, 2011).

Intellectual value may be attributed to the Wai Khru tradition's reinforcement of teachers' roles as sources of wisdom and guides in the learning process, encouraging students to recognize the importance of education and continuous knowledge acquisition. The Wai Khru ceremony in Thailand is widely regarded as a means of honoring teachers and facilitating the transmission and realization of traditional knowledge (Santos, 2017), which corresponds with the concept of lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2017).

Physical and economic values were perceived at relatively lower levels, as these dimensions are not directly emphasized within the Wai Khru ritual itself. Nevertheless, participation in preparatory activities—such as creating floral offerings and collaborating in group tasks—still promotes physical movement, systematic work processes, and resource awareness to some extent (Wongwanich, 2023). Moreover, the Wai Khru tradition holds potential for generating economic value through various forms of cultural, historical, festival-based, and heritage tourism (Meesomsak, 2022).

(2) The approaches to promoting the cultural capital of the Thai Wai Khru tradition in educational institutions through local wisdom-based education consist of the following components:

Educational Objectives : To should emphasize the integration of local knowledge and values into the learning process in order to enhance cultural capital and the values embedded in the Thai Wai Khru tradition. This reflects the need for education to foster holistic learner development, encompassing knowledge, competencies, and cultural identity. This approach is consistent with the view that the preservation of traditional knowledge has become increasingly important amid pressures to conform to Western models of science and rationalism. Santos and Giordano (2017) argue that the “realization of traditional knowledge” can be sustained through a harmonious integration of theory and practice, in which traditional practices—such as initiation rites, oral transmission, ritual performance, and the use of symbols—are balanced with modern forms of codification and information. Cultivating pride in one’s cultural roots enables students to develop into valuable human capital and a vital force for societal sustainability. Learner-centered education that is connected to local contexts allows students to transform knowledge into personal wisdom within a supportive learning environment (Tuntirojanawong, 2017).

School Characteristics: To should function simultaneously as centers of learning, cultural transmission, and cultural creation. Learning environments that reflect local values and the Thai Wai Khru tradition enable students to internalize cultural values through direct experience. Schools thus serve not merely as institutions for academic knowledge transmission but as cultural spaces that nurture morality, ethics, and Thai cultural identity. This perspective aligns with the concept of community-based schools, which emphasize community participation in learner development (Wongwanich, 2023). The integration of local wisdom into school and university management enriches educational values by embedding community culture, traditions, and indigenous knowledge into curricula, governance, and learning activities. Such integration not only preserves cultural identity but also shapes students’ character, adaptability, and sense of social responsibility. Ultimately, collaboration between community participation and local wisdom integration forms a critical foundation for a quality and contextually relevant education system deeply rooted in community life (Bandhesa et al., 2025).

Curriculum Characteristics: To should function as a “life-based curriculum” that integrates modern knowledge with local wisdom, enabling students to recognize the value of and creatively utilize local resources. Such a curriculum supports learners in developing skills to create employment, generate income, and contribute to sustainable community development across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This approach is consistent with studies demonstrating that incorporating local wisdom into curriculum design enhances students’ understanding of sustainable practices by linking global sustainability goals with local knowledge and practices. Educators and community leaders play a crucial role in bridging this gap, fostering learning experiences that are both relevant and contextually grounded. Collaboration between schools and local communities also promotes students’ sense of ownership and responsibility for sustainable development (Wahyuni et al., 2024).

Teacher Characteristics: Teachers serve as a key mechanism in promoting cultural capital and the values of the Thai Wai Khru tradition. They should embody professional commitment, faith in the teaching profession, and moral integrity, while acting as role models and cultural bridges between knowledge and learning. This role corresponds with the concept of teachers as cultural mediators who transmit values, meanings, and identities to learners (Giroux, 2011). Educators function as strategic agents of cultural value transformation through contextual, project-based, and culture-based learning approaches. Learning activities that incorporate folktales, traditional songs, and local traditions have been shown to strengthen students’ cultural identity and foster positive social behavior within schools and communities (Hiola & Muis, 2025).

Student Characteristics: To should possess strong cultural roots, humility, and a sense of gratitude, reflecting the goal of education to develop well-rounded individuals who excel not only academically but also morally and socially. Students who recognize the value of the Wai Khru tradition and the role of teachers in knowledge creation become essential human capital for sustaining national cultural capital and confidently presenting Thai identity at the global level (Bourdieu, 1986). The integration of local wisdom into character education has been shown to effectively strengthen cultural values, enhance social behavior, and increase environmental

awareness. Such integration contributes to the development of a generation with strong cultural identity, environmental responsibility, and social consciousness (Aura et al., 2023).

Teaching and Learning Characteristics: To should be locally grounded, interdisciplinary, and continuously practice-oriented to foster cognitive processes, emotional development, and lifelong learning skills. The design of learning activities that cultivate gratitude and encourage community participation through the home–temple–school model enhances meaningful learning and supports the sustainable development of desirable learner characteristics. This approach aligns with experiential learning and lifelong learning theories (Kolb, 1984). The integration of local cultural values through curricular integration, co-curricular activities, and school culture fosters meaningful and contextually relevant learning experiences. Local wisdom functions as cognitive scaffolding, enabling students to actively construct knowledge by connecting academic concepts with cultural experiences. Teachers’ roles shift toward facilitation and cultural mediation, while collaborative social interactions reinforce knowledge construction. This model has been shown to enhance students’ motivation and academic understanding (Fajri et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

Promoting the cultural capital of the Wai Khru tradition through education grounded in local wisdom highlights the necessity of holistic approaches encompassing educational objectives, school environments, curricula, teachers, learners, and instructional processes. This approach contributes both academically and practically by offering pathways for sustaining cultural traditions while developing culturally conscious and socially responsible learners capable of supporting Thailand’s sustainable future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educational authorities should establish policies supporting education grounded in local wisdom to systematically strengthen cultural capital and Wai Khru values.
- Schools should enhance their roles as cultural learning centers by fostering environments and activities that reflect local values and community participation.
- Curricula should integrate modern knowledge with local wisdom through interdisciplinary and experiential learning approaches.
- Teachers should be supported as cultural mediators who transmit values and professional ethics through culturally grounded pedagogy.
- Students should be developed as culturally rooted individuals characterized by gratitude, humility, and social responsibility, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to cultural continuity and sustainable development.

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