

Sacred Landscapes and Ritual Practices of the Thai Song Dam: A Cultural Study from Nong Prong subdistrict, Phetchaburi Province, Thailand

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Abstract

This study examines the spatial organization of ritual spaces and sacred sites within the Thai Song Dam community in Nong Prong Subdistrict, Thailand, focusing on how sacred landscapes are constructed, maintained, and transformed through ritual practices and everyday life. Employing a qualitative approach, the research integrates ethnographic fieldwork with spatial analysis, including field surveys, observations, and in-depth interviews with community members and local leaders. The findings show that ritual spaces are deeply embedded in residential areas, kinship structures, and social organization rather than being spatially distinct. Lineage-based ancestral shrines, typically located near village centers, serve as key ritual nodes that reinforce collective memory, kinship ties, and ethnic identity. Communal spaces, such as temples and community centers, function as shared ritual grounds during festivals, reflecting the integration of indigenous beliefs with Buddhism. From a ritual geography perspective, sacred landscapes are continuously produced through ritual performances and spatial practices that temporarily transform everyday spaces into sacred places. Moreover, these spaces adapt to ongoing social and cultural changes, highlighting the dynamic and evolving nature of sacred landscapes in Thai Song Dam communities.

Keywords: Sacred landscape, Ritual geography, Thai Song Dam, Cultural identity

Introduction

Space and ritual are fundamental dimensions for understanding the complex relationships among humans, culture, and the social landscape within the framework of cultural geography. Rather than being passive containers of human activities, spaces are socially produced, experienced, and imbued with meanings through everyday practices, cultural perceptions, and symbolic representations (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976; Supanan, 2011). Through these processes, certain places become culturally significant and are elevated to sacred status, functioning as symbolic centers of collective memory, identity, and social organization. The sacredness of these spaces does not derive solely from their physical attributes but emerges from repeated ritual performances, embodied practices, and narratives that continually reproduce their symbolic significance (Bosup & Thungsakul, 2023). In this sense,

sacred spaces are not fixed entities but dynamic landscapes shaped through ongoing interactions between cultural practices and spatial contexts. Within cultural geography, sacred landscapes have been conceptualized as culturally constructed spatial systems that reflect power relations, belief systems, and social structures (Kong, 2001; Stump, 2008). Ritual practices, in particular, play a crucial role in transforming ordinary spaces into sacred places, reinforcing social cohesion, and producing shared meanings. Rituals structure spatial behavior, define boundaries, and organize movement patterns, thereby contributing to the spatial ordering of communities. From this perspective, ritual geography provides a valuable lens for analyzing how ritual practices shape spatial organization, social relations, and cultural continuity within communities.

In Thailand, the Thai Song Dam (also known as Lao Song, Thai Song, Thai Dam or Tai Dam) communities in Phetchaburi Province represent one of the ethnic groups with a strong and enduring system of beliefs, rituals, and cultural practices, particularly those related to ancestor veneration. The Thai Song Dam are historically known for their distinctive cultural traditions, including spirit worship, household spirit rituals, ancestral ceremonies, and annual festivals that reinforce kinship ties and ethnic identity. Ritual practices such as the worship of ancestral spirits, household guardian spirits, and communal rites serve as key mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion, transmitting cultural knowledge, and reaffirming group identity across generations. These rituals are performed in specific spatial contexts, including ancestral shrines, spirit houses, sacred grounds, cemeteries, ceremonial routes, and communal spaces such as temples and village centers. These ritual spaces are deeply intertwined with everyday life, environmental settings, and social structures, forming a culturally embedded spatial system that shapes the lived experiences of community members (Dawnapa et al., 2025). Although Thai Song Dam communities have been widely studied in anthropological, ethnohistorical, and cultural ecological research, most existing studies focus on cultural practices, ethnic identity, language preservation, and socio-cultural transformations, rather than on the spatial organization of ritual practices. For example, Aramsuge (2022) examined language preservation among Thai Song Dam communities in Surat Thani Province, while Vorakitjo and Rakbida (2022) and Tongsakol (2010) analyzed ethnic identity maintenance and cultural continuity in various Thai Song Dam settlements. These studies provide important insights into cultural practices, social structures, and identity formation, yet they rarely conceptualize ritual spaces as an integrated spatial system or analyze how ritual practices are spatially organized, symbolically constructed, and transformed under contemporary socio-economic changes.

In addition, limited research has explored how ritual spaces influence village spatial organization, settlement patterns, and everyday spatial practices. The spatial distribution of ritual sites, such as ancestral shrines, temples, cemeteries, and ceremonial routes, is not random but reflects historical settlement processes,

kinship structures, and cultural norms. However, the spatial logic underlying the placement of ritual spaces and their relationships with residential areas, roads, and communal spaces remains underexplored in Thai Song Dam studies. Moreover, little attention has been given to generational differences in perceptions and engagements with ritual landscapes, particularly how younger generations reinterpret, negotiate, or transform ritual spaces in the context of modernization, education, and technological change. Understanding ritual spaces as culturally embedded spatial systems is particularly important in the context of spatial planning, heritage conservation, and sustainable community development. Sacred and ritual spaces often function as core elements of community identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. Ignoring the cultural dimensions of space in planning and development processes may lead to the erosion of cultural landscapes, loss of ritual knowledge, and weakening of community identity. Conversely, integrating cultural and spatial perspectives can contribute to more culturally sensitive planning approaches that respect local beliefs, traditions, and spatial practices. Therefore, the study of ritual geography and sacred spaces among ethnic communities represents a crucial area of knowledge for cultural heritage conservation, spatial planning, and sustainable development.

From a theoretical perspective, this study draws on three interrelated conceptual frameworks: Topophilia, local identity, and ritual geography. The concept of topophilia highlights emotional attachments, memories, and meanings associated with places, emphasizing that human–place relationships are shaped by lived experiences and cultural practices (Tuan, 1974, 1977). Local identity refers to the distinctive characteristics of places that are recognized and shared by community members, shaped through physical settings, cultural practices, and social interactions (Relph, 1976). Ritual geography provides a framework for analyzing how ritual practices produce, transform, and maintain sacred spaces and landscapes. By integrating these perspectives, this study conceptualizes ritual spaces not only as physical locations but as culturally constructed and emotionally meaningful spaces that are embedded within social and spatial systems. Within this integrated framework, sacred landscapes are understood as dynamic and relational, produced through the

interactions of beliefs, practices, spatial arrangements, and social relations. Ritual practices contribute to the production of sacred landscapes by defining sacred sites, organizing spatial movements, and reinforcing symbolic meanings. At the same time, sacred landscapes influence social organization, settlement patterns, and everyday spatial practices. This reciprocal relationship highlights the importance of analyzing ritual spaces and sacred landscapes through both ethnographic and spatial perspectives.

Based on these considerations, this research examines the ritual geography and sacred spaces of the Thai Song Dam community in Nong Prong Subdistrict, Khao Yoi District, Phetchaburi Province. The study aims to explore the spatial organization and distribution of ritual spaces and sacred sites and interpret the cultural meanings and symbolic significance of these spaces from community perspectives. In addition, the research seeks to develop ritual maps as culturally interpretive tools that integrate ethnographic knowledge with spatial representation, providing a basis for culturally informed conservation and sustainable management of sacred landscapes at the local level. By adopting a qualitative approach that integrates ethnography with spatial interpretation, this study contributes to the emerging field of ritual geography and cultural spatial studies in Southeast Asia. The findings are expected to advance theoretical discussions on sacred landscapes, place identity, and ritual spatiality, while also providing practical insights for cultural heritage conservation and community-based spatial planning. Through this research, sacred landscapes are conceptualized not as static heritage sites but as living cultural landscapes that are continually produced, negotiated, and transformed through everyday practices and ritual performances.

Objectives

1. To investigate the ritual spaces and sacred sites of the Thai Song Dam community in Nong Prong Subdistrict, Khao Yoi District, Phetchaburi Province.
2. To interpret the cultural meanings and Spatial Relationships of ritual spaces from the past to the present.

Literature reviews

The concept of Topophilia

The concept of *Topophilia* was developed by Tuan (1974) in *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Tuan defines topophilia as the emotional bonds, affection, memories, sense of belonging, and meanings that humans develop toward places. These attachments are not limited to symbolic interpretations but also emerge through physical, social, and cultural experiences. From this perspective, humans do not relate to space in a neutral or meaningless way; rather, emotional attachment is gradually formed through everyday practices, perceptions, and repeated interactions with a particular place. Such attachments arise from multiple dimensions, including accumulated experiences, shared memories within individuals and communities, aesthetic appreciation of landscapes and environments, and habitual use of space that fosters familiarity and psychological stability. In the context of ritual spaces, topophilia is not generated solely through ordinary habitation but is reinforced through the repeated performance of rituals. These ritual practices connect places with emotions, collective memories, and sacred meanings, thereby deepening the emotional significance of the space. The concept of topophilia is closely related to *sense of place*, *place attachment*, and *place identity*, and can be understood as an emotional foundation through which people come to value places before developing deeper symbolic or identity-based attachments (Tuan, 1977; Seamon & Sower, 2008). From the perspective of human geography, this concept emphasizes that place is not merely a physical location, but a space continuously shaped by meanings, values, and emotional experiences.

The concept of local identity

Local identity refers to the distinctive characteristics of a place that differentiate it from others and are collectively recognized, shared, and accepted by people within the community, forming a sense of pride and collective self-definition (Wisuttho & Phosing, 2022). Local identity is therefore not limited to physical attributes but emerges from social and cultural processes through which people assign meanings to their living spaces. Tuan (1977) argues that place acquires meaning only when human experiences, memories, and

emotional attachments are embedded within it, providing a fundamental basis for the formation of local identity. Similarly, Relph (1976) emphasizes that a sense of having one's own place lies at the core of local identity, while the loss of distinctive place characteristics through rootless development may lead to placelessness. Local identity is continuously constructed and reaffirmed through ritual practices, which make identity visible and embodied within specific spaces. This process can be understood through three main dimensions. The physical dimension relates to tangible features such as landscape, climate, built forms, sacred spaces, agricultural landscapes, and vernacular architecture, including Thai Song Dam houses, ritual grounds, and spirit houses, which give places a visible and recognizable character. The cultural dimension encompasses language, dress, rituals, belief systems, food, festivals, and local knowledge, all of which play a central role in sustaining community identity and are transmitted through ritual practices, creating continuity between generations and producing symbolic spaces. The social-psychological dimension involves feelings of belonging, local pride, emotional attachment, and affection toward place. This psychological dimension functions as a key mechanism enabling communities to preserve and protect their identity. Importantly, these ritual practices are not static but remain dynamic, continually adapting to social, economic, and generational changes.

The concept of ritual geography

Ritual geography is a conceptual approach that examines the relationship between ritual practices and space, viewing rituals not merely as religious or cultural activities but as processes through which spaces are endowed with meaning at symbolic, social, and emotional levels. Through ritual practices, certain spaces are transformed into *sacred spaces* or places of particular significance for the community (Smith, 1992; Bell, 1997). Key components of ritual geography include several interrelated elements. First, '*sacred space*' emerges when rituals designate specific locations as spiritually or culturally significant, such as ritual grounds, spirit houses, ancestral shrines, or ceremonial procession routes. Through ritual use, these spaces shift from ordinary settings to places governed by rules, beliefs, and shared collective memories. Second,

'*meaning-making of place*' refers to the process through which space acquires meaning through human experience and emotional attachment. Rituals play a crucial role in this process, as repeated performances foster familiarity, emotional bonds, and a sense of identity associated with particular places. Third, '*ritual experience*' involves moments of spatial and temporal transition, during which participants temporarily step outside everyday life and enter a liminal symbolic state. In this sense, ritual spaces function as transitional spaces imbued with profound psychological and emotional significance. Fourth, '*identity construction*' occurs through collective ritual participation, which reflects and reinforces a shared sense of belonging and group identity. Ritual practices thus serve as mechanisms through which collective identity is created, affirmed, and reproduced.

Accordingly, the study of sacred spaces and ritual geography in the Thai Song Dam community is grounded in the integration of three key conceptual perspectives: Topophilia, local identity, and ritual geography. The concept of topophilia explains the emotional and experiential bonds that people develop with places through everyday life, shared memories, and repeated practices within the same spatial context. This perspective highlights that ritual spaces are not merely physical locations but are imbued with feelings, sacredness, and psychological value for community members. At the same time, the concept of local identity helps explain how communities use space and rituals as tools to construct, reaffirm, and transmit their collective identity through physical, cultural, and social-psychological dimensions. Rituals function as important arenas in which community identity becomes visible and embodied in real spaces. Ritual geography serves as the overarching analytical framework for examining the relationship between rituals and space, emphasizing rituals as processes that generate meaning, assign sacred status to places, and connect multiple locations into a dynamic sacred landscape. Within this framework, ritual spaces are understood as a spatial system characterized by repeated use, transitional moments, and the ongoing negotiation of meanings between traditional contexts and contemporary social conditions. The integration of these three concepts thus reveals that emotional attachment, identity, and ritual practices are deeply interconnected rather than separate phenomena,

collectively shaping the sacred landscape of the Thai Song Dam community as a living form of cultural heritage.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach integrated with spatial analysis, with an emphasis on cultural mapping to understand the ritual spatial system and sacred landscape of the community. The research focuses on collecting data related to beliefs, ritual practices, and sacred sites, and on analyzing the connections between ritual spaces, everyday life, and village land use. A spatial database was developed using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to produce ritual maps within the study area. The study area is the Thai Song Dam community in Nong Prong Subdistrict, Khao Yoi District, Phetchaburi Province, consisting of three villages: Ban Nong Chik, Ban Nong Prong, and Ban Nong Khe. Data collection involved a combination of document review and fieldwork, including site surveys and interviews with selected participants. The key informants included community leaders and local knowledge holders, as well as members of the younger

generation who are involved in community ritual practices. The research applied selected community study tools adapted from Chuengsatiansup et al. (2002), including walk- through mapping, analysis of community organizational structures, and the study of community history. These tools were used to support the creation of cultural maps that identify ritual spaces and sacred sites of the Thai Song Dam community in Nong Prong Subdistrict. Geo-coding techniques were employed to spatially locate ritual sites, followed by an interpretive analysis of the cultural meanings and transformations of ritual spaces from the past to the present. The analysis was guided by the concepts of topophilia, local identity, and ritual geography, which were used to examine both continuity and change in sacred spaces under contemporary social conditions. Through this integrated approach, the study aims to reveal how ritual spaces function as dynamic elements of the community’s cultural landscape. The research protocol was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee form Silpakorn University under Certificate of Approval No. COA 67.0820-053.

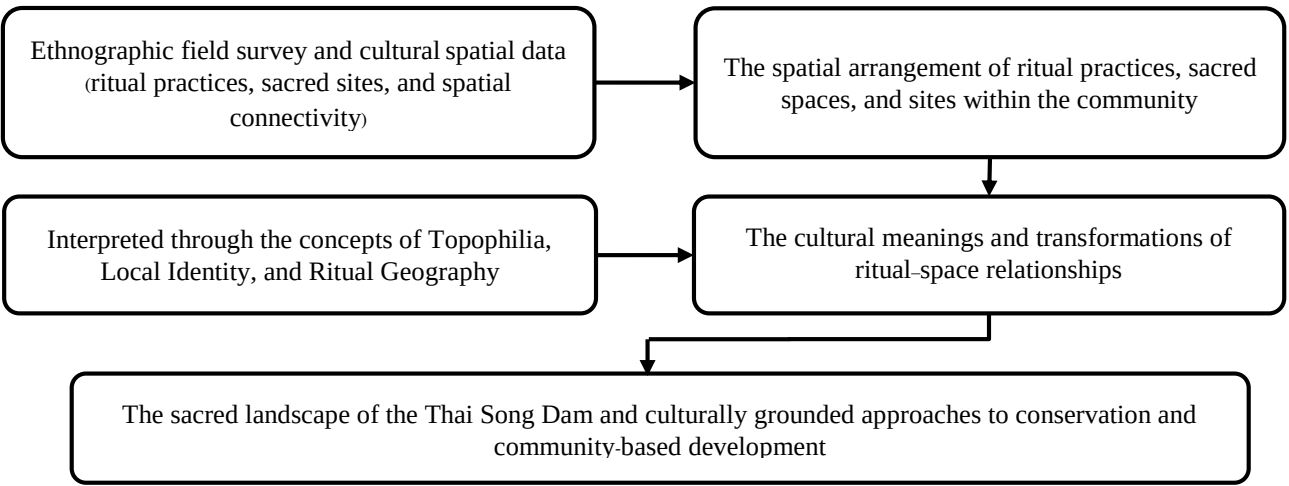


Figure 1 Conceptual framework
Source: Author (2026)

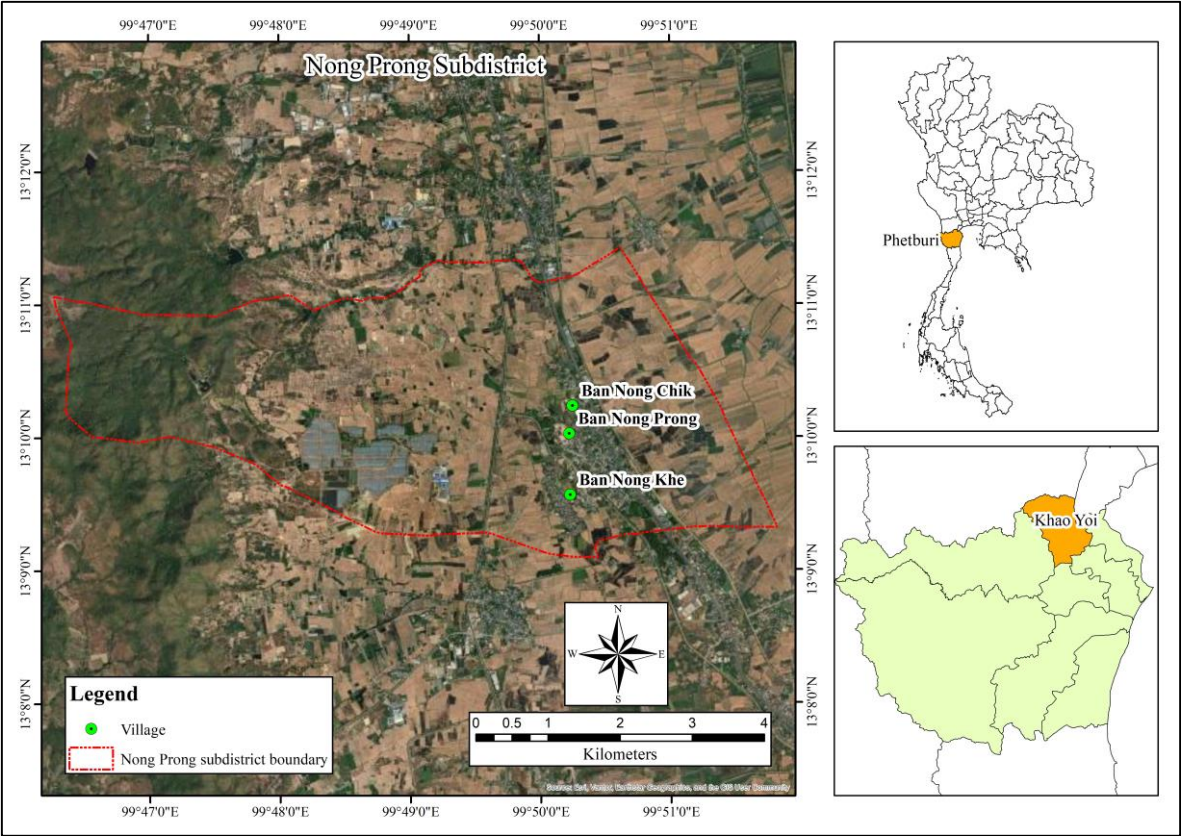


Figure 2 Study area of Nong Prong Subdistrict
Source: Author (2026)

Results

Spatial arrangement of ritual spaces and sacred sites

Based on field surveys using the tools of walk-through mapping, community organizational structure analysis, and community history, combined with focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, the study found that ritual spaces and sacred sites of the Thai Song

Dam community in Nong Prong subdistrict are spatially distributed within the traditional village setting. These spaces are closely associated with ancestral spirit beliefs, household spirit worship, ancestor veneration rituals, and communal areas used for annual ceremonial practices. The sacred community sites discovered can be summarized in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1 Location of the community’s sacred sites

ID	Name	Latitude, Longitude	Image	Description
1	Nong Chik Village Learning Center	13.170444, 99.837356		The Nong Chik Village Learning Center is a public space that was formerly an old cemetery used for the ritual known as Pa Haeo, which involved guiding the spirits of the deceased. In the present context, this area has been developed into a community learning center.

ID	Name	Latitude, Longitude	Image	Description
2	Panthanom Museum	13.176091, 99.836007		The Panthanom Museum was established in 1996 through the initiative of Teacher Thanom Kongyimlamai, a native of the Thai Song Dam ethnic group. She collected objects and constructed a building to serve as a learning center and source for studying the culture and way of life of the Thai Song Dam people.
3	Wat Nong Prong	13.166513, 99.836082		It is an old temple that has been a part of the community for a long time, but the buildings within the temple have been continuously renovated. It serves as a central area for various community traditional activities.
4	Nong Khe Village Learning Center	13.159355, 99.837198		Originally, this area was a large community pond. Later, in 2005, it was filled in and transformed into a multi-purpose sports field. A learning center pavilion for the Tai Song Dam people of Ban Nong Khe was also built in 2012.
5	Nong Prong village's ancestral shrine	13.167780, 99.837385		It is a shrine for worshipping the spirits of the ancestors of the Nong Prong village community.
6	Nong Chik village's ancestral shrine	13.171020, 99.838375		It is a shrine for worshipping the spirits of the ancestors of the Nong Chik village community.
7	Nong Khe village's ancestral shrine	13.159071, 99.838510		It is a shrine for worshipping the spirits of the ancestors of the Nong Khe village community.

Field surveys and interviews with key informants reveal that ritual spaces and sacred sites within the Thai Song Dam community are located near the centers of the three villages and are closely associated with lineage-based spatial organization. This spatial pattern reflects the importance of lineage-related ritual spaces, alongside the use of Buddhist temples as shared venues for communal ritual practices. These spaces are deeply

connected to beliefs in household spirits and ancestral spirits, functioning as sites for offerings and ritual performances that reinforce family continuity and provide spiritual protection. The location of ritual spaces within the residential environment highlights the close relationship between ritual life and everyday practices. Lineage-based sacred sites, particularly ancestral shrines, are typically situated at specific locations within

the village that hold historical and symbolic significance. These sites serve as collective memory spaces where shared ancestry and ethnic identity are ritually reaffirmed through spatially grounded ceremonial practices. Their central positioning within the village emphasizes both their sacred status and their role as focal points of community life, while remaining accessible to community members.

Communal ritual spaces include open areas within temples or village learning centers that are used for

annual ceremonies and collective rituals. These spaces function as centers of social interaction and ritual participation, temporarily transforming everyday public spaces into sacred landscapes during ritual events. The repeated use of these communal spaces for ceremonial performances actively reshapes the spatial meanings of the village landscape, demonstrating how ritual practices dynamically reconfigure the relationship between space, belief, and community life.

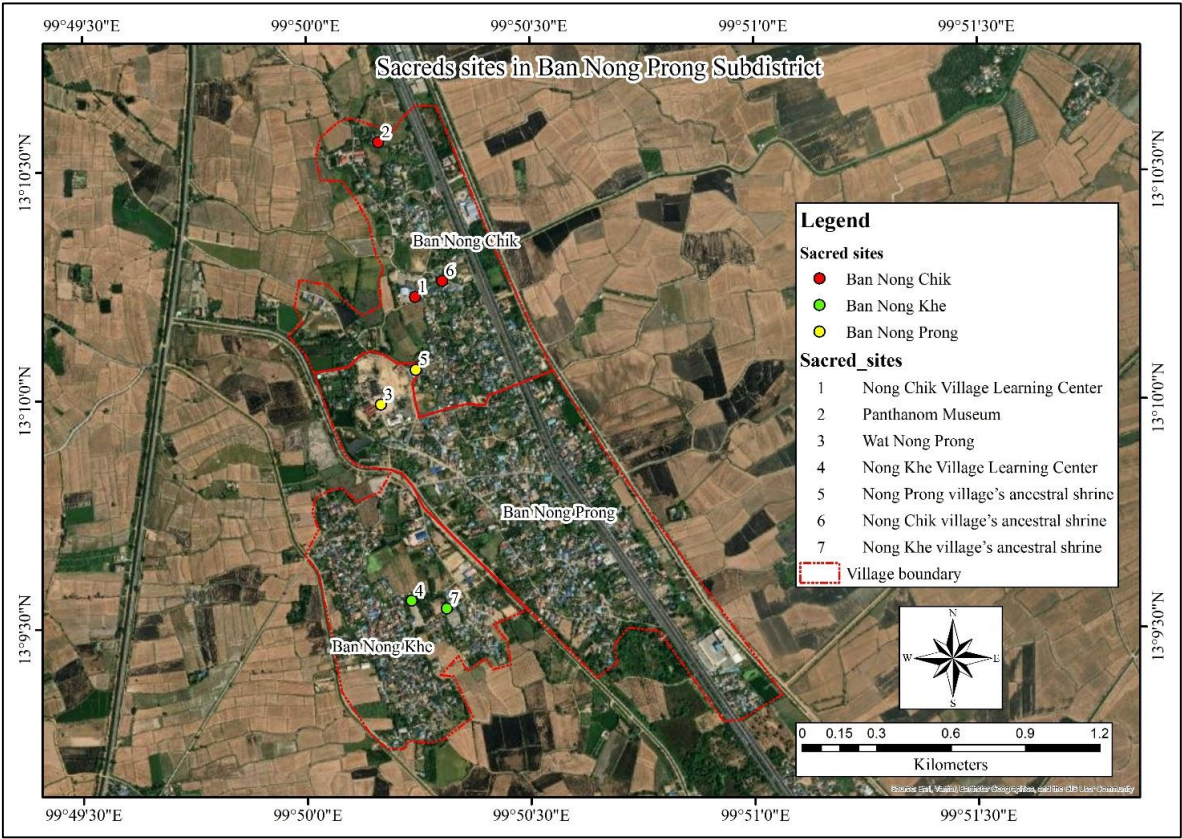


Figure 3 Spatial arrangement of ritual spaces and sacred sites in Nong Prong subdistrict
Source: Author (2026)

Spatial distribution of housing and ancestral shrines

The analysis of housing distribution and the locations of ancestral shrines, using housing distribution maps combined with Kernel Density Estimation (KDE), indicates that Thai Song Dam settlements in Nong Prong Subdistrict exhibit a clustered linear settlement pattern along road networks and topographic features. Each village shows a distinct housing density core, reflecting kinship structures and historical phases of settlement expansion. The clustering of houses around ancestral

shrines also varies among villages, as summarized below.

1. Nong Chik Village (Northern part of the study area)
- In Nong Chik Village, houses are densely clustered in the central part of the village and distributed along the main road network. The ancestral shrine (Pu-Ya Shrine) is located in the central area of the village, facing east, and situated within the core of the high-density residential cluster. This spatial configuration reflects the role of the ancestral shrine as both a

symbolic and spatial core of lineage groups, linking kinship networks and ritual activities at the household and sub-village levels.

2. Nong Prong Village (Central part of the community)

Nong Prong Village exhibits the highest housing density and a continuous settlement pattern along roads and lowland areas. The ancestral shrine is located in the northwestern part of the village, facing north, near the village center and the area with the highest residential density. This spatial arrangement highlights the role of ritual space as a focal point of collective memory and ethnic identity, serving as the primary site for lineage-based ritual practices.

3. Nong Khe Village (Southern part of the study area)

In Nong Khe Village, houses are clustered into smaller groups along roads and agricultural areas. The

ancestral shrine is located on the eastern side of the high-density residential cluster, facing south. This location reflects the importance of the ancestral shrine as a core element of the village's ritual landscape and kinship structure, despite the more dispersed settlement pattern compared to the other two villages.

Overall, the ancestral shrines in all three villages are located close to the centers of high-density residential areas, indicating that sacred spaces are not spatially separated from everyday life but are embedded within settlement structures and kinship systems. These shrines function as spatial anchors that connect social relationships, collective memory, and ritual practices. Through repeated ritual use and movement, the village landscape is continuously constructed as a living sacred landscape, where ordinary spaces are transformed into sacred places through every day and ceremonial practices.

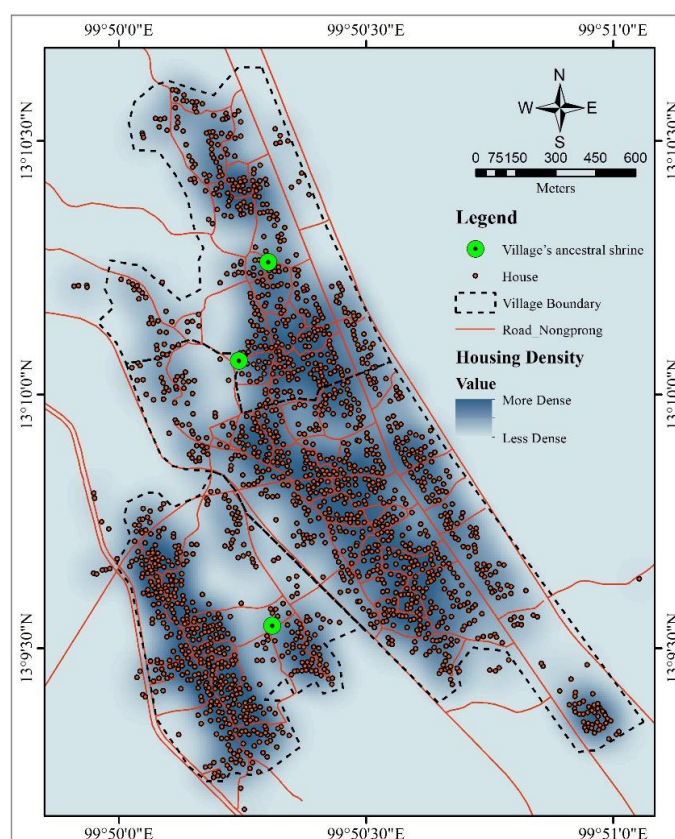


Figure 4 Spatial Distribution of Housing and Ancestral Shrines in Nong Prong subdistrict

Source: Author (2026)

Cultural meanings and spatial relationships

Interviews with village elders from each village regarding the spatial arrangement of ritual spaces and

sacred sites reveal that each village utilizes its own community learning center as a venue for annual activities. Each community also conducts ancestral

worship rituals, or *Sen Ruen* ceremonies, on a yearly basis to express gratitude and reverence toward deceased ancestors. These rituals are officiated by a *Mo Sen* (ritual specialist). In contrast, Buddhist temples serve as shared communal spaces for all three villages, particularly during joint annual ceremonies, most notably the Thai Song Dam New Year celebrations held during the Songkran period. This spatial practice reflects a deeply embedded cultural system in which belief systems, social organization, and spatial practices are closely interconnected. Rather than existing as isolated sacred zones, ritual spaces are interwoven with residential areas, pathways, and communal spaces, forming a village-wide network of ritual and sacred landscapes. This spatial connectivity facilitates ritual movement, such as ceremonial processions and communal gatherings, thereby strengthening collective participation and shared cultural meanings. From the perspective of ritual geography, these spaces function as nodes within a sacred landscape that is continuously produced and reproduced through repeated ritual practices. The meanings attached to these spaces are sustained through ritual performances, oral narratives, and intergenerational transmission. At the same time, changes in social structure, economic conditions, and generational participation have influenced how certain ritual spaces are used, maintained, or symbolically interpreted in contemporary contexts. In recent times, some traditional beliefs and ritual practices have become diminished, transformed, or partially lost due to broader changes in environmental conditions, economic

development, political circumstances, education, and advances in medicine and technology. These transformations have contributed to shifts in ritual belief systems among the Thai Song Dam. Traditional practices inherited from earlier generations have increasingly been replaced or reconfigured within modern social contexts. Beliefs from surrounding societies, especially Buddhist beliefs integrated into the traditional belief systems of the Song Dam people, resulting in a blended belief system that shapes the contemporary way of life in Nong Phrong Subdistrict. While certain traditional beliefs continue to persist, others have undergone significant transformation. For example, burial practices have shifted from in-ground burial to cremation, altering funeral processions from ancestral cemeteries to Buddhist temples. Former cemetery areas have been repurposed into community learning centers, transforming previously sacred spaces associated with death into public communal spaces. Additionally, ritual procedures have been modified or simplified to align with present-day social conditions.

Overall, the spatial arrangement of ritual spaces and sacred sites demonstrates how the Thai Song Dam community constructs and sustains its sacred landscape through everyday practices and ritual performances. This dynamic relationship between ritual and space underscores the role of cultural beliefs in shaping spatial organization and provides important insights for culturally grounded conservation and community-based development.

Table 2 Summary of cultural meanings and spatial relationships in Thai Song Dam communities in Nong Prong subdistrict

Dimension	Description	Cultural & Spatial significance
Lineage-based ritual spaces	Annual ancestral worship (<i>Sen Ruen</i>) conducted within each village, officiated by <i>Mo Sen</i>	Reinforces kinship ties, ancestral continuity, and lineage identity
Community learning centers	Used as venues for annual rituals and communal activities	Demonstrates adaptive reuse of sacred spaces and integration of ritual into everyday life
Buddhist temples	Shared ritual spaces for joint ceremonies, especially during Songkran	Serve as inter-village connectors and sites of collective identity

Discussion

The research findings demonstrate that the spatial arrangement of ritual spaces and sacred sites within Thai Song Dam communities is not characterized by a rigid dichotomy between sacred and profane space. Instead, ritual spaces are deeply embedded within settlement structures, kinship systems, and everyday practices. This integration reflects a relational understanding of space, where meanings are continuously produced through lived experiences and social interactions rather than imposed through fixed spatial boundaries. Such findings resonate with Suphanan (2011), who emphasizes that everyday places are imbued with meanings that express community identity and social memory. The location of ancestral sacred spaces at or near the centers of villages highlights the foundational role of kinship and ancestor veneration in structuring social organization and ethnic identity among the Thai Song Dam. These ancestral shrines serve not only as ritual sites but also as symbolic centers of lineage-based social networks. From a spatial perspective, they operate as nodal points that anchor kinship relations, ritual practices, and collective memory within the village landscape. This spatial centrality reinforces the continuity of social structure across generations and provides a tangible framework through which ethnic identity is reproduced and expressed. Boonprajong et al. (2019) similarly argue that sacred spaces function as repositories of communal memory, where ancestral narratives and ritual practices contribute to the maintenance of cultural continuity.

In addition to lineage-based sacred spaces, the use of Buddhist temples as shared ritual spaces among the three villages reflects the expansion of sacred space from the clan level to the broader community scale. Particularly during the Thai Song Dam New Year celebrations in the Songkran period, temples become focal points for inter-village gatherings, collective rituals, and social interactions. This spatial expansion demonstrates the coexistence and integration of indigenous belief systems with Buddhism in a syncretic manner. Such syncretism is a common feature of cultural adaptation in Southeast Asian societies, where local animistic beliefs coexist with institutionalized religions. Akkhopañño and Arisumāli (2022) note that this integration allows communities to maintain core

cultural values while engaging with dominant religious frameworks, thereby ensuring cultural resilience in changing socio-cultural contexts. From the perspective of ritual geography, the interconnection between ritual spaces, residential areas, pathways, and communal spaces indicates that the sacred landscape of the Thai Song Dam is produced through spatial practices and ritual performances rather than through static territorial demarcations. Ritual processions, gatherings, and repeated ceremonial activities transform ordinary spaces into temporarily sacred places, highlighting the performative nature of sacredness. This finding aligns with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize sacred landscapes as processual and relational, rather than fixed and bounded entities. The work of Nualsang and Tepwongsirirat (2015) further supports this interpretation, arguing that the persistence of sacredness depends on socially negotiated rules, shared norms, and clearly defined ritual roles that structure how sacred spaces are produced and maintained. The integration of ritual spaces within everyday landscapes can also be interpreted through the concept of topophilia, which emphasizes emotional attachment and affective bonds between people and places (Tuan, 1977). In the Thai Song Dam context, repeated ritual practices, ancestral narratives, and daily interactions with sacred sites foster deep emotional connections to place. These affective relationships contribute to the formation of place identity and strengthen community cohesion. Sacred spaces, therefore, function not only as ritual venues but also as emotional anchors that sustain a sense of belonging and continuity.

Furthermore, the spatial configuration of ritual spaces reflects broader processes of social and spatial production, as conceptualized by Lefebvre (1991). Ritual spaces represent representational spaces, where symbolic meanings, cultural values, and power relations are inscribed onto the landscape. The placement of ancestral shrines near village centers, for instance, symbolizes the centrality of lineage authority and ancestral power in social organization. Similarly, temples as communal ritual centers reflect the integration of state-supported religious institutions into local cultural landscapes. These spatial arrangements reveal how power, belief, and social hierarchy are embedded in spatial forms. However, the findings also

reveal the dynamic transformation of ritual spaces under contemporary social, economic, and cultural conditions. Advances in education, healthcare, technology, and increased exposure to external influences have contributed to the decline, modification, or reinterpretation of certain traditional beliefs and ritual practices. One prominent example is the transition from burial to cremation practices, which has altered funerary spatial practices and ritual routes. Funerary processions that once moved toward ancestral cemeteries are now redirected toward Buddhist temples, reflecting both religious change and practical considerations. This shift illustrates how modern institutions and infrastructural developments reshape ritual geographies. Another significant transformation is the redevelopment of former cemeteries into community learning centers. This spatial reconfiguration demonstrates how sacred spaces can be reinterpreted and repurposed in response to contemporary needs, without necessarily losing their symbolic significance. While cemeteries traditionally served as liminal spaces associated with death and ancestors, their transformation into learning centers reflects changing perceptions of space, death, and community functions. Such transformations suggest that sacredness is not inherent in physical locations but is socially constructed and continually renegotiated. These changes highlight the adaptive capacity of Thai Song Dam communities, where cultural practices are not static but evolve in response to social and environmental conditions. Rather than signaling the disappearance of sacred spaces, these transformations indicate processes of cultural translation and spatial negotiation, where traditional meanings are rearticulated within modern contexts. This dynamic process aligns with Massey's (2005) conceptualization of space as a product of interrelations, always under construction and subject to change.

The findings also have important implications for cultural conservation and community development. Recognizing ritual spaces as integral components of living cultural landscapes suggests that conservation strategies should go beyond preserving physical structures to include intangible cultural practices, social relations, and spatial meanings. Spatial planning and development initiatives should consider the symbolic and ritual significance of places to avoid disrupting culturally embedded spatial systems. For instance,

infrastructure development that disregards ancestral shrines or ritual pathways may undermine community cohesion and cultural continuity. Moreover, the integration of sacred spaces into everyday landscapes provides opportunities for culturally grounded development initiatives, such as cultural tourism, heritage education, and community-based spatial planning. Community learning centers located on former sacred grounds can serve as platforms for transmitting cultural knowledge, rituals, and spatial narratives to younger generations. Such initiatives can contribute to sustainable development while reinforcing cultural identity and spatial heritage. In summary, this study demonstrates that the sacred landscape of the Thai Song Dam is a living, dynamic, and relational spatial system produced through ritual practices, social relations, and everyday life. Sacred spaces function as spatial anchors of kinship, identity, and memory, while also being subject to continuous reinterpretation under modern influences. The interplay between continuity and change highlights the resilience of Thai Song Dam cultural landscapes and underscores the importance of integrating cultural meanings into spatial analysis, heritage conservation, and community development frameworks.

Conclusion

This study on the spatial arrangement of ritual spaces and sacred sites within the Thai Song Dam community in Nong Prong Subdistrict demonstrates that the community's sacred landscape is constructed and sustained through dynamic interactions among belief systems, ritual practices, and spatial organization. Lineage-based ritual spaces and communal areas such as temples and community learning centers serve as central nodes that connect social structures, collective memory, and ethnic identity. The findings further reveal that sacred spaces in the Thai Song Dam community are not static entities but are continuously transformed, adapted, and reinterpreted within the context of modern society. The integration of indigenous belief systems with Buddhism, along with the adaptive use of ritual spaces in response to contemporary economic conditions and lifestyles, reflects the community's capacity to preserve core cultural values while accommodating change.

Overall, this research affirms the critical role of cultural beliefs in shaping spatial organization and highlights the importance of recognizing ritual spaces as living landscapes. It suggests that approaches to community conservation and development should prioritize the cultural meanings embedded in ritual spaces as integral components of sustainable cultural landscapes. The study thus provides valuable spatial and cultural insights that can support culturally grounded strategies for the conservation of sacred landscapes and the sustainable development of Thai Song Dam communities in ways that respect their identity and ways of life.

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Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

Generative AI was used only for language refinement and reference formatting. It was not involved in idea generation, data analysis, interpretation, or content creation. All intellectual work and final interpretations were conducted by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the manuscript's accuracy and integrity.

CRedit author statement

Supharerk O-in: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing Original Draft, Reviewing and Editing.

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