

6. Traditions, Rites and Beliefs

Swan and Centipede Parade Festival



The symbol of the Mon people is the hongsa, a mythological water bird that is often illustrated as a swan. It is normally used in religious ceremony.

The **centipede flag** basically represents Buddha's teaching and the claws of the centipede show that the Mon people will never be afraid of their enemies.

Supporting Bodhi Trees Tradition



Obviously, Bodhi trees are revered because the Buddha reached enlightenment sitting under a kind of Bodhi trees. Mon people consider that when they place Bamboo poles against the Bodhi trees, they are supporting their weight. This seems like they are uphold and supporting Buddhism. This tradition normally takes place annually in Songkran Festival during 13rd – 15th of April and 14th April is the main day.

Hae Nok – Hae Pla Parade Tradition (Releasing Fish and Birds during Songkran Festival)

From a legend in the past, there was an abbot who was an expert in astrology. One day, the abbot saw a novice with a sad face and looked completely unhappy. He then asked about the novice's birthday to see the horoscope. Unfortunately, it forecasted that the notice was going to die in two days. The abbot felt very pity for the novice. So, he allowed the unlucky novice to go back home to meet his family.

While walking past a field, the novice saw a school of fish in a swamp waiting for death. As it was summer, the water became dried. The novice generated the pity to save their lives by taking them to a canal then the novice went back home. After staying at home for an appropriate time, the novice returned back to the temple. When the abbot saw with surprise that the novice came back alive which was not as he had predicted. The abbot then curiously asked the novice what he had done when he went back home. The abbot suddenly knew that the novice was still alive because he made a merit by saving a school of fish. This news spread throughout the village. The villagers wished to gain the same virtue so they started to release fish to ward off bad luck. Whether it was influenced by this myth of the past or not, Mon people buy the fish alive and set them free (which later added to the release of birds) during the Songkran Festival. The releasing of fish and birds has become a tradition during the Songkran Festival of Mon ever since.

Beliefs of Mon People

Spiritual beliefs

Mon people strongly believe in spirits or ghosts, generically known as Phi (ผี). It is a belief that there are various kinds of ghost such as Phi Ma Praw, Phi Pha, Phi Krabokmaipai, Pho Ngoo, Phi Tao, Phi Kai and Phi Kao Neaw etc. For Mon Pak Lud (old group of Mon people), most of them believe in Pho Ngoo, Phi Tao, Phi Kai and Phi Kao Neaw.

The spiritual belief has been inherited from their ancestors. The one who is responsible for paying respect to spirits is the eldest son of Mon families. When it is the time for Rum Phi ceremony, the eldest son has to attend the ceremony and he is called “Ton Phi”. If the daughter is single, she can attend the ceremony too. But if she is married, she has to pay respect to spirits of her husband’s family. However, Rum Phi ceremony does not usually take place except for fulfilling one's vow or asking for forgiveness when someone violates the rules which can cause them misfortune.

Rum Phi ceremony is usually arranged in the fourth or sixth months during dry season, except on Buddhist holy day.

