

Tai Dam Cultural Heritage: Knowledge Management and Information Transmission Dynamics in Loei Province, Thailand³

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Abstract

This research³⁴ investigates the dynamics of cultural heritage transmission and preservation within the Tai Dam community of Ban Na Pa Nad, Loei Province, Thailand, from a Library and Information Science (LIS) perspective. The study aims to 1) analyze the context of Tai Dam cultural heritage and its associated knowledge systems, and 2) develop sustainable approaches for its preservation and promotion by examining the community's information behaviors and knowledge management practices. Adopting a qualitative methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory workshops with key community informants. The findings were analyzed through the lens of Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model of knowledge creation. The research reveals five key domains of Tai Dam wisdom: historical and ancestral knowledge, language, traditional dress, beliefs and rituals, and craftsmanship. Furthermore, the study identifies the community's proactive efforts not merely to preserve their heritage, but to leverage it for identity affirmation, social recognition, and sustainable cultural tourism. Six strategic approaches for preservation were co-developed with the community, focusing on educational integration, creation of learning resources, intergenerational transmission, organization of traditional ceremonies, youth participation, and network building. This study contributes to the LIS field by mapping the flow of indigenous knowledge and proposing a community-centric framework for preserving intangible cultural heritage, offering tangible implications for information professionals in developing culturally sensitive information services and community archives.

Keywords: Tai Dam, Cultural Heritage, Knowledge Management, Information Transmission, Loei, Thailand

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มรดกวัฒนธรรมไทดำ: การจัดการความรู้และพลวัตการถ่ายทอดสารสนเทศในจังหวัดเลย³

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษากลไกการสืบทอดและการอนุรักษ์มรดกวัฒนธรรมในชุมชนชาวไทดำบ้านนาป่าหนาด จังหวัดเลย โดยประยุกต์ใช้มุมมองทางบรรณารักษศาสตร์และสารสนเทศศาสตร์ (LIS) การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) วิเคราะห์บริบทของมรดกวัฒนธรรมไทดำและระบบความรู้ที่เกี่ยวข้อง และ 2) เพื่อพัฒนาแนวทางที่ยั่งยืนในการอนุรักษ์และส่งเสริมมรดกวัฒนธรรมผ่านการศึกษาพฤติกรรมสารสนเทศและแนวปฏิบัติในการจัดการความรู้ของชุมชน งานวิจัยนี้ใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ เก็บข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การสนทนากลุ่ม และการประชุมเชิงปฏิบัติการแบบมีส่วนร่วมกับผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญในชุมชน และวิเคราะห์ผลโดยใช้แบบจำลองการสร้างความรู้ SECI Model ของ Nonaka และ Takeuchi เป็นกรอบในการวิเคราะห์ ผลการศึกษาพบว่าภูมิปัญญาของชาวไทดำประกอบด้วยองค์ความรู้สำคัญ 5 ด้าน ได้แก่ ความรู้ด้านประวัติศาสตร์และบรรพบุรุษ ภาษา การแต่งกาย ความเชื่อและพิธีกรรม และงานหัตถกรรม นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าชุมชนมีความพยายามเชิงรุกที่มีค่าใช้จ่ายเพื่อการอนุรักษ์มรดกเท่านั้น แต่ยังไม่ใช้มรดกวัฒนธรรมของชุมชนเพื่อยืนยันตัวตน เพื่อการยอมรับทางสังคม และการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมอย่างยั่งยืน ทั้งนี้ ได้ร่วมกับชุมชนเพื่อพัฒนาแนวทางเชิงยุทธศาสตร์ 6 ประการในการอนุรักษ์มรดกวัฒนธรรมชุมชน ซึ่งเน้นการบูรณาการกับการศึกษา การสร้างแหล่งเรียนรู้ทางการศึกษา การถ่ายทอดจากรุ่นสู่รุ่น การจัดประเพณีพิธีกรรม การมีส่วนร่วมของเยาวชน และการสร้างเครือข่าย งานวิจัยนี้มีส่วนสนับสนุนองค์ความรู้ทางบรรณารักษศาสตร์และสารสนเทศศาสตร์ ด้วยการจัดทำแผนผังการไหลเวียนขององค์ความรู้พื้นถิ่นและนำเสนอกรอบการทำงานที่ยึดชุมชนเป็นศูนย์กลางสำหรับการอนุรักษ์มรดกทางวัฒนธรรมที่จับต้องไม่ได้ ซึ่งนำไปสู่ข้อเสนอแนะเชิงปฏิบัติสำหรับนักสารสนเทศในการพัฒนาบริการสารสนเทศและหोजดหมายเหตุชุมชนที่มีความละเอียดอ่อนทางวัฒนธรรมต่อไป

คำสำคัญ : ไทดำ; มรดกวัฒนธรรม; การจัดการความรู้; การถ่ายทอดสารสนเทศ; เลย; ประเทศไทย

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1. Introduction

The preservation of cultural heritage for ethnic minority groups is a critical global concern. In Thailand, numerous ethnic groups, such as the Tai Lue, Tai Song Dam, and Tai Dam, have migrated and established communities, each carrying a unique repository of intangible cultural heritage, including languages, traditions, and indigenous wisdom. The processes of globalization and social integration present both challenges and opportunities for these communities to maintain their distinct identities. Previous studies on these groups have often focused on anthropological descriptions or conservation from a cultural studies viewpoint. For instance, research has explored the conservation of weaving wisdom among the Thai Song Dam through participatory action research (Topanurakkun & Paiwithayasiritham, 2016) and the role of beliefs in the cultural assimilation of the Tai Lue (Utara & Rattanaungsikul, 2023). However, a significant gap exists in understanding these dynamics from a Library and Information Science (LIS) perspective, which can offer valuable frameworks for analyzing how cultural knowledge is generated, organized, sought, transmitted, and managed within a community.

This research addresses this gap by focusing on the Tai Dam ethnic community in Ban Na Pa Nad, Loei Province. This community, like many others, faces the challenge of transmitting its rich cultural heritage to younger generations amidst modern influences. This study moves beyond mere description to analyze the underlying information and knowledge management systems at play. It examines the community's information needs, their information-seeking behaviors related to cultural practices, and the informal and formal systems they employ for knowledge transmission. The research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how intangible heritage can be sustained by reframing preservation as an active process of community-based knowledge management.

2. Objectives

This paper is guided by the following research objectives:

- 1) To study the context and components of Tai Dam cultural heritage in the Ban Na Pa Nad community, identifying the key domains of their indigenous wisdom.
- 2) To analyze the processes of cultural transmission through the lens of information behavior and knowledge management theories.
- 3) To develop sustainable, community-driven approaches for the preservation and promotion of Tai Dam cultural heritage.

3. Theoretical Framework: The SECI Knowledge Management Model

To address the originality and analytical depth concerns raised by the LIS field, this study adopts the **SECI model of knowledge creation** by Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi (1995). This model is highly relevant as it explains how knowledge is created and managed through a dynamic conversion between two types of knowledge: **tacit knowledge** (personal, context-specific, and hard to formalize, such as skills and traditions) and **explicit knowledge** (codified, systematic, and easy to communicate, such as documents and databases). The model consists of four modes of knowledge conversion:

- **Socialization (Tacit to Tacit):** Knowledge is transferred through shared experiences, observation, imitation, and practice. In the Tai Dam context, this occurs when elders teach youth weaving or ritual procedures directly.
- **Externalization (Tacit to Explicit):** Tacit knowledge is articulated into explicit forms. This involves converting personal wisdom into comprehensible forms like written texts, diagrams, or documented procedures, such as creating exhibits for the local museum or writing down community history.
- **Combination (Explicit to Explicit):** Explicit knowledge is systemized and combined to create new knowledge. This involves organizing documented information, such as developing educational curricula from various historical sources or building a digital archive of cultural assets.
- **Internalization (Explicit to Tacit):** Individuals embody explicit knowledge, turning it into their own tacit knowledge through practice. This happens when a young person learns from a book or a video about a traditional ceremony and then actively participates, internalizing the process.

This framework allows for a systematic analysis of the community's activities not just as cultural events, but as a sophisticated, cyclical process of knowledge management that is crucial for heritage sustainability (see Figure 1).

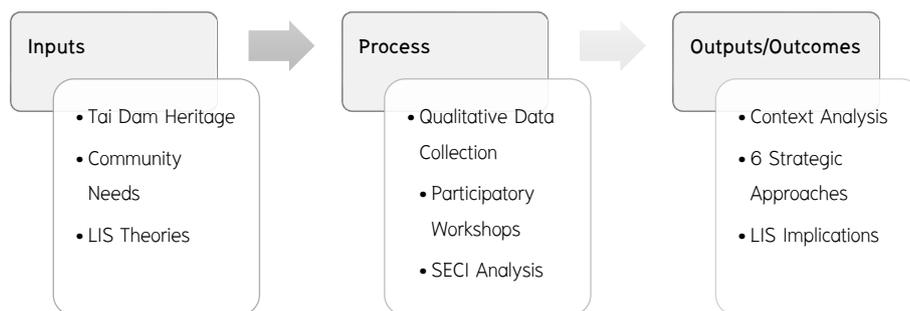


Figure 1. Conceptual Research Framework

4. Literature Review

This study is informed by scholarship in two primary areas: cultural heritage studies of ethnic groups in Thailand and core concepts from Library and Information Science (LIS).

While anthropological studies provide a rich foundation for understanding the cultural context of groups like the Tai Dam (e.g., migration history, rituals), LIS literature offers the tools to analyze the informational dynamics of heritage preservation. Key LIS concepts relevant to this study include indigenous knowledge management (IKM), community archives, and information behavior. Oyelude (2023) argues that indigenous knowledge preservation demonstrates cultural respect by recognizing these cultures as living and evolving communities. Cultural heritage institutions like libraries, archives, and museums serve as important gatekeepers who must responsibly preserve this knowledge while following proper protocols, embracing diversity, and respecting intellectual property rights to ensure it benefits future generations. Similarly, the concept of "community archives" emphasizes the role of communities in controlling their own documentary heritage, which directly relates to

the efforts in Ban Na Pa Nad to create their own museum and learning resources (Flinn, 2007).

Furthermore, understanding the "information behavior" of community members—how they seek, use, and share cultural information—is essential. This study connects the observable cultural practices of the Tai Dam to established LIS concepts of information needs and knowledge transmission, framing intergenerational learning as a form of situated information seeking. By integrating these LIS perspectives, the research aims to provide a novel analysis of the Tai Dam's efforts as a proactive information and knowledge management system.

5. Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodology grounded in community-based participatory research. This approach ensures that the research process is collaborative and that the outcomes are relevant and beneficial to the community itself.

5.1. Data Collection

A multi-faceted approach was used for data collection to ensure richness and validity. The primary methods included:

- **In-depth Interviews:** Conducted with 15 key informants, including community elders, cultural leaders, youth representatives, and local government officials, to gather detailed narratives on history, traditions, and preservation challenges.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Two focus groups were organized, one with elders and one with youth, to explore differing perspectives on cultural transmission and future aspirations.
- **Participatory Workshops:** A series of workshops were held with community members to collaboratively analyze the current situation and brainstorm strategies for sustainable preservation and promotion.

5.2. Research Tools

The central tool for the participatory workshops was a structured brainstorming session guided by six main themes. These themes were not arbitrarily chosen; they were developed based on a preliminary literature review of cultural heritage components and initial, informal consultations with community leaders to identify the most salient aspects of their cultural identity. The six themes were:

- 1) Integration of Tai Dam Culture in the Educational System
- 2) Creating Learning Resources for Conservation and Promotion
- 3) Intergenerational Cultural Transmission
- 4) Organization of Traditional Ceremonies and Rituals
- 5) Youth and Local Community Participation
- 6) Building Community and Network Capacity

5.3. Data Analysis

Data from interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and core concepts. The findings from the participatory workshops were synthesized and then critically analyzed through the four modes of the **SECI knowledge management model** to map the flow and transformation of cultural knowledge within the community (see Figure 2 for a summary of the research process).

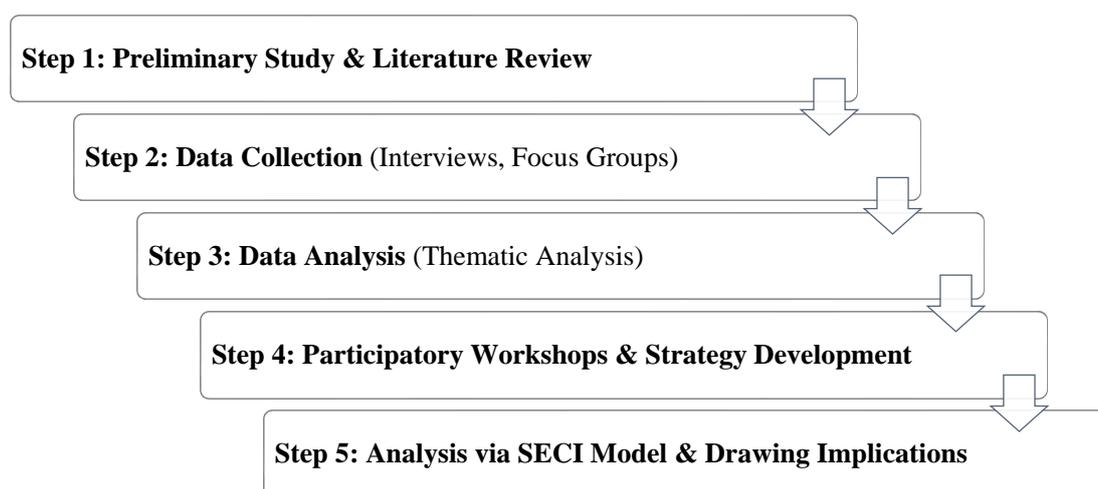


Figure 2. Research Process Flowchart

6. Research Findings

The research findings are presented in two main parts: the contextual background of Tai Dam cultural heritage and the strategic approaches developed for its preservation.

6.1. The Context of Tai Dam Cultural Heritage in Ban Na Pa Nad

The study identified the historical context of the Tai Dam people's migration and settlement in Ban Na Pa Nad, which is fundamental to their collective identity. Their cultural heritage was found to be a rich tapestry comprising five interconnected domains of wisdom:

- 1) **History and Ancestors:** A deep reverence for ancestral lineage and the community's migration story.
- 2) **Language:** The Tai Dam language is a cornerstone of their identity, though its use is declining among younger generations.
- 3) **Traditional Dress:** The intricate, hand-woven textiles, particularly the '*sin*' (*sarong*) for women, serve as a powerful visual marker of Tai Dam identity.
- 4) **Beliefs and Rituals:** A complex system of animist beliefs, centered on ancestor worship (*'phi ban phi mueang'*), which governs community life and is expressed through ceremonies like the annual '*Tum Hom*'.
- 5) **Craftsmanship:** Skills such as weaving, basketry, and traditional construction techniques.

6.2. Strategic Approaches for Preservation and Promotion

Through collaborative workshops, six key strategic approaches were formulated:

- 1) **Integration of Tai Dam Culture in the Educational System:** Developing local curricula for schools to teach Tai Dam history, language, and customs.
- 2) **Creating Learning Resources:** Establishing a community museum and developing both physical and digital materials (books, videos) to document and share cultural knowledge.
- 3) **Intergenerational Cultural Transmission:** Creating formal and informal opportunities for elders to mentor youth in traditional skills and knowledge.
- 4) **Organization of Traditional Ceremonies and Rituals:** Actively continuing and revitalizing key ceremonies, such as the '*Tum Hom*', as central events for cultural practice and community gathering.
- 5) **Youth and Local Community Participation:** Encouraging active involvement of youth in all cultural activities to foster a sense of ownership and pride.
- 6) **Building Community and Network Capacity:** Establishing networks with other Tai Dam communities and partnering with external organizations (government, private sector) for support and promotion.

7. Discussion: Analyzing Tai Dam Heritage through the SECI Knowledge Management Lens

This section moves beyond description to analyze the findings as a dynamic knowledge management system, using the SECI model as a framework (Figure 3). This reveals the community's sophisticated and proactive strategy for ensuring its cultural survival and vitality.

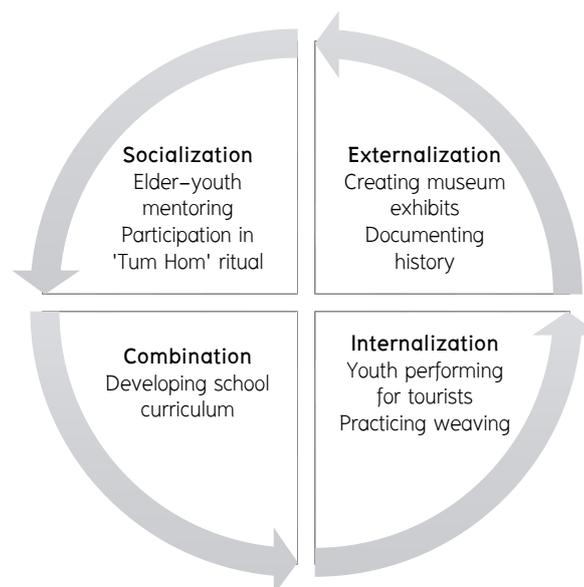


Figure 3. The SECI Knowledge Management Cycle in the Tai Dam Community

A key finding of this study is that the Tai Dam of Ban Na Pa Nad are not passive recipients of change; they are actively using their cultural heritage as a strategic asset. Their efforts are driven by a profound desire to establish their identity ('to have a presence') within the wider Thai society, to instill pride in their community, and to create sustainable economic opportunities through cultural tourism. The annual '*Tum Hom*' festival, for example, is not just a ritual; it is a platform for showcasing their culture to outsiders, including government officials, thereby gaining recognition and support. This conscious strategy can be understood as a complete knowledge creation cycle:

- **Socialization (Tacit to Tacit):** This is the traditional mode of knowledge transfer. It is embodied in the '*Tum Hom*' ceremony where youth observe and participate in rituals, learning respect for ancestors directly from elders. It is also seen when mothers teach daughters the tacit skills of weaving, passing on patterns and techniques through hands-on practice. This ensures the continuity of embodied, unspoken knowledge.

- **Externalization (Tacit to Explicit):** The community is actively converting its tacit knowledge into explicit forms. The creation of the Tai Dam Cultural Center and Museum is a prime example of externalization. Here, oral histories, ritual meanings, and the significance of textile patterns are documented and displayed for both community members and outsiders. This act of "showing the world" their unique dress and traditions is a deliberate articulation of their tacit cultural pride into an explicit, visible form.

- **Combination (Explicit to Explicit):** This phase involves systemizing explicit knowledge. The strategy to develop a local school curriculum is a clear example. It would require combining documented historical facts, linguistic knowledge, and information about rituals into a structured educational program. Furthermore, the act of networking with other Tai Dam communities to coordinate events and share resources is a form of knowledge combination, creating a stronger, more unified knowledge base across different locations.

- **Internalization (Explicit to Tacit):** The ultimate goal is for the younger generation to internalize this knowledge. When youth participate in cultural performances for tourists, they are not just acting. They are internalizing the songs, dances, and meanings, making the explicit knowledge part of their own identity. The income generated from tourism (e.g., performance tips, souvenir sales) provides a tangible incentive that reinforces the value of this knowledge, encouraging deeper internalization and practice. This completes the cycle, as these knowledgeable youths will eventually become the elders who pass on the culture through socialization.

8. Implications for Library and Information Science (LIS)

This study's findings offer significant and specific implications for LIS practice, moving beyond general recommendations for cultural preservation:

- **Framework for Community-Based Knowledge Management:** The application of the SECI model provides a practical framework for information professionals to understand and support knowledge management in indigenous communities. Librarians and archivists can act as facilitators, helping communities identify and navigate the four knowledge conversion processes.

- **Guidelines for Intangible Heritage Documentation:** The study highlights the need for best practices in documenting intangible heritage. LIS professionals can provide expertise in metadata creation, digital preservation techniques, and the development of culturally sensitive digital archives that respect community protocols and intellectual property.
- **Models for Community Learning Centers:** The Tai Dam's effort to create a museum and learning resources offers a model for libraries to re-envision their role. Public and academic libraries can partner with ethnic communities to establish dedicated spaces and co-develop collections that function as living community archives and learning hubs.
- **Strategies for Digital Preservation and Access:** Information professionals can assist in developing strategies to digitize and provide wider access to cultural knowledge (e.g., online language tutorials, virtual museum tours), which can both preserve the information and generate interest for cultural tourism, aligning with the community's goals.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

This research explored the transmission and learning dynamics of Tai Dam cultural heritage in Loei Province through a Library and Information Science lens. It found that the community employs a sophisticated, multi-faceted strategy that aligns closely with the principles of knowledge management. The Ban Na Pa Nad community's efforts represent a proactive model of using cultural heritage not only for preservation but also for strengthening social identity, fostering community pride, and creating sustainable development opportunities. The six co-developed strategies provide a roadmap for a community-led, sustainable approach to keeping their heritage alive and vibrant.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study to track the implementation and impact of the six strategies over time. Comparative studies with other Tai Dam communities or other ethnic groups in the region could also yield valuable insights into different models of cultural knowledge management. Finally, research into the development of specific digital platforms tailored to the information needs and behaviors of ethnic minority communities would be a significant contribution to the LIS field.

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