



Maintaining Ethnic Culture Through Contemporary Museums:

The Transformative Journey of the 'Tai Yuan Samo Khae' in Phitsanulok, Thailand

Farung Mee-Udon

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand

Corresponding author. E-mail address: farungm@nu.ac.th

Received: 29 January 2025; Revised: 18 July 2025; Accepted: 23 July 2025; Available Online: 7 August 2025

Abstract

This study examines how the Tai Yuan communities in Samo Khae Subdistrict, Phitsanulok preserves its cultural heritage amid pressures from dominant cultures and globalization. It argues that despite their marginalized status, the Tai Yuan effectively sustain their traditions through adaptive, community-driven initiatives. Employing qualitative methods including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and participatory approach this study investigates the community's cultural transformation using the MUSEOPEN framework in contemporary museum settings. The findings indicate that the MUSEOPEN process promotes community engagement and intergenerational collaboration, leveraging both physical and digital platforms for cultural transmission. Digital media empowers the Tai Yuan to assert cultural agency, involve younger generations, and reshape public perceptions of their heritage. The study concludes that cultural resilience in the context of globalization depends not only on preservation, but also on innovation and inclusive community participation.

Keywords: Community Participation, Contemporary Museums, Ethnic Culture, Globalization, MUSEOPEN, Tai Yuan Samo Khae

Introduction

Marginalized minority groups are making efforts to protect their heritage in the face of dominant majority populations and increasing globalization are of great concern (Tanabe, 1991; Keyes, 1995; 1997; Appadurai, 2006; Dutta, 2019; Browning, 2019). Preserving ethnic identity has gained worldwide attention in social economic, academic and political circles. Appadurai (2006) examines how globalization influences minority communities across social, cultural, and political spheres. He highlights the shared concerns about the rights of cultural minorities within nation-states and the dynamics involving diverse cultural majorities. These debates often revolve around the fight for cultural rights, closely tied to issues of national citizenship and the broader sense of belonging (Appadurai, 2006).

Ethnic groups have employed a variety of strategies to preserve their cultural heritage. Recent findings indicate that one approach increasingly adopted by minority communities in various regions involves the use of museums as a means of cultural preservation. In particular, this strategy has evolved to include the development of online museums, which serve to both safeguard cultural traditions and extend their reach into more contemporary digital formats (Dutta, 2019; Fraser, 2020). Dutta (2019) points that the use of digital media for cultural preservation among indigenous communities in India requires the co-creation of a culturally inclusive digital environment. This approach, which integrates community-generated media and emphasizes community-driven design, is essential for ensuring long-term sustainability.

Existing literature emphasizes the roles of digital co-creation and community museums in cultural conservation, particularly in relation to identity and heritage preservation on a global scale (Cabrera, 2008; Henderson, 2003; Lin, 2010; Fraser, 2020). However, such research remains limited within the Thai context, revealing a significant gap in this research area. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the unique experiences and strategies of the Tai Yuan community in Samo Khae. It focuses on their use of both on-site and online community museums



as vital tools for asserting and safeguarding their ethnic identity. Specifically, the study explores the question: How do the Tai Yuan Samo Khae utilize community museums to preserve their identity amidst the challenges of cultural blending and globalization?

The Historical Canvas: Background and Context of Tai Yuan Samo Khae

The Tai Yuan Samo Khae community resides on the outskirts of Phitsanulok situated approximately 12 kilometers north of the city beyond the Indochina Intersection and toward Uttaradit Province. Originating from Ratchaburi, the migration to Phitsanulok a century ago was marked by a determined effort to maintain their distinctive identity. During King Rama I's reign (around B.E. 2347, A.D. 1804) some Tai Yuan groups had to relocate to Bangkok and Ratchaburi as Chiang Saen faced a conflict with Burma and was merged with the Siamese rule (Thubthun & Tantikul, 2017). An elderly Tai Yuan leader shed light on the arduous attempts to return to Chiang Saen reflecting both hope and hardships (Interviewed, June 4, 2022). However, the community did not return to their ancestral land and settled in Dong Pradok-Kromatun Village which is at present a part of Samo Khae Subdistrict in Phitsanulok Province (Figure 1). The province has good water resources and other factors suitable for agriculture. Tai Yuan villagers started spreading across Samo Khae Subdistrict and over the time formed various communities in Phitsanulok. This research is primarily focused on the Tai Yuan Club including members from four communities namely, Village No. 2 Ban Lad Bua Khao, Village No. 3 Ban Dong Pradok, Village No. 4 Ban Samo Khae, and Village No. 8 Ban Kromatun. These communities were among the earliest Tai Yuan settlers in the Samo Khae sub-district. Although the Tai Yuan have dispersed to other districts within Phitsanulok province, interview data consistently indicates that the strongest preservation of Tai Yuan identity remains concentrated within the Samo Khae sub-district.

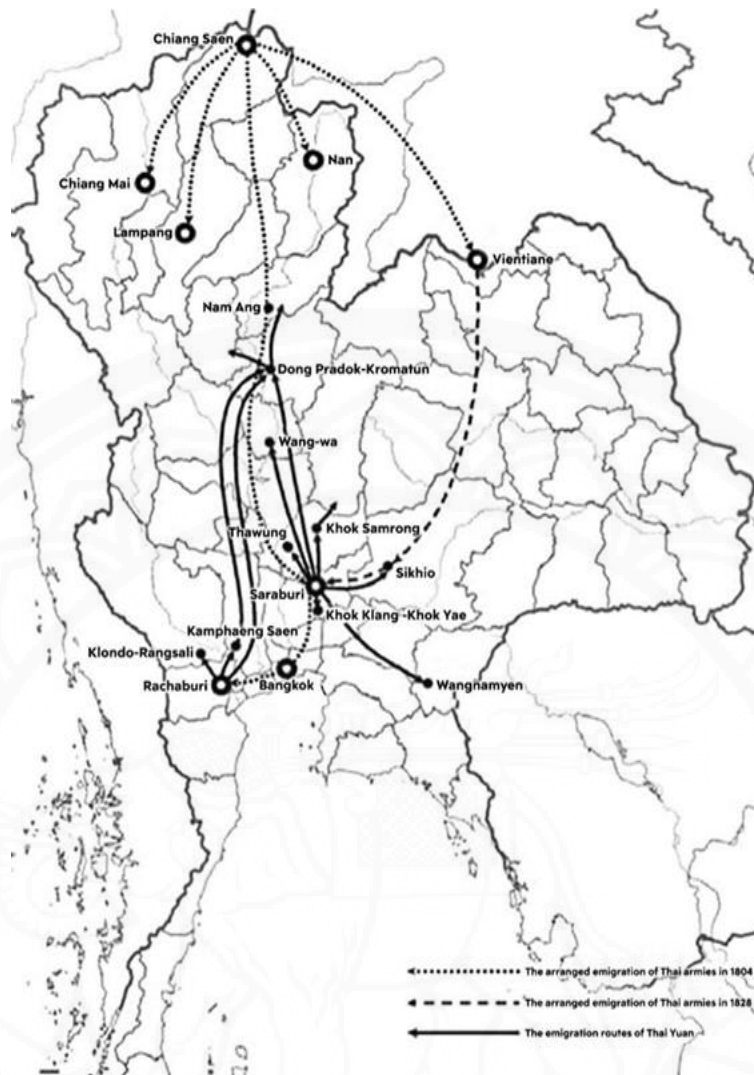


Figure 1 The Movement of Tai Yuan in the Past Before They Arrived at Dong Pradok-Kromatun Village.

(Translated from Lanna Prathet, 2022)

The primary occupation of the community members is agriculture whereas weaving and the production of bags, clothes, tablecloths and patterned handkerchiefs serve as a supplementary income source. The Tai Yuan community preserves their culture with observing traditions like ordination for men and the wearing of sarongs for women. Women still continue to weave distinct fabrics for special events and these traditions have been passed on for over a century through family socializations. Despite these efforts the community struggles to uphold their unique culture as many traditions faded away due to the blending with mainstream Thai culture. An example of this is that most of the younger generation do not speak the Lao or Kham Mueang language fearing being misidentified to be ‘Lao’ and not ‘Thai’. Songsiri (2004) notes that people in central Thailand often label all northern Lanna people as Lao, which oversimplifies and insults their diverse ethnic identities. Tai Yuan people typically identify as both Yuan Laotian and Thai citizens. A 60-year-old member of the community shares her concern about the fast disappearance of this unique culture underscoring how the people are very concerned about the loss of identity of the culture and the extent they are blending into overall Thai culture without maintaining their individual identity (Interviewed, July 4, 2022).

In response to these concerns, the Tai Yuan Samo Khae Club (established in 2004) and the Tai Yuan Cultural Learning Center (established in 2016) are two key initiatives led by Tai Yuan leaders to preserve their culture



with support from the Office of Cultural Affairs of Phitsanulok Province and the Samo Khae Subdistrict Administrative. These organizations function as key educational hubs for tourists and the popularity of them with tourists has been a proactive catalyst.

Despite various global challenges of global challenges, such as political unrest terrorism economic fluctuations and natural disasters since 2001 globalization has increased tourism growth and exposure to world cultures and how cultures have adapted to change. This upsurge in travel has facilitated cross-cultural interactions at local regional and global levels (World Tourism Organization, 1999). Tourists in pursuit of authenticity and unique cultural experiences have had a great influence on cultures with local and authentic cultural diversity making them significant draws in the tourism landscape. This has fostered cultural exchange through various channels including tourism and media such as advertisements (Richards, 2007). Concurrently, Thailand has actively promoted tourism exemplified by campaigns like Unseen Thailand in 2004 and Discover Thainess in 2016 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2016).

Despite engaging the older generation in club activities and an increase in global tourism, the younger Tai Yuan population remains largely disconnected from these efforts and reluctant to participate in club activities revealing a growing gap between generations (Interviewed, June 14, 2022). This research has studied the knowledge and traditions of Tai Yuan communities since the initial project in 2020 which highlighted rich cultural elements such as traditional costumes, loom weaving, wooden horses, wagons, and historical artifacts. However this finding may be, the storage methods used to gather and save these cultural aspects are outdated and unappealing to the younger generations. In 2022, the author secured a grant to create a modern learning center for young learners resulting in the Tai Yuan leaders renewing their commitment to cultural preservation.

The Tai Yuan culture has survived in Thailand over the last century despite the general tendency of minor cultures to merge into one single identity and the forces of globalization. However, there are significant challenges moving forward as the younger generation is not participating in the preservation of their culture. The MUSEOPEN initiative (Praicharnjit, 2015) is applied in this cultural community to determine if it is an effective strategy for both maintaining the culture and involving the community in its own cultural preservation.

Literature Review: Community Museum, MUSEOPEN, and Ethnic Identity Preservation

How can museums become active sites for cultural renewal rather than just repositories of the past? This question echoes the sentiments of George B. Goode, a pioneering museologist of the late 19th century, who boldly proclaimed that “the past museum must be set aside, reconstructed, transformed from a cemetery of bric-a-brac into a nursery of living thoughts” (Goode, 1889, p. 427). It is a challenge that not only confronts the Tai Yuan community but also resonates with museums more widely.

To address this challenge the author proposes applying the concept of MUSEOPEN (Praicharnjit, 2015) and its alignment with the broader discussions on maintaining ethnicity. This sets the stage for elucidating how ethnic groups navigate the challenges of globalization and underscores the potential of community museums as tools for preserving ethnicity.

A comprehensive review of museum literature highlights two significant aspects. Firstly, scholars acknowledge the critical concern of how museums are presented recognizing challenges posed by global changes to traditional structures. Despite their historical role as vital learning resources (Johnson, 2009) and contributors to community well-being, socio-economic development and sustainable development (International Council of Museums, 2023;



Galluccio & Giambona, 2024), evolving lifestyles require a shift in museum narrative presentation (Wilaikum et al., 2013; Sakhajun, 2015; Sarawasee, 2020).

Embracing contemporary platforms like online museums, particularly in foreign countries emerges as a recognized means to facilitate cultural conservation emphasizing the relevance of community museums in the digital era. Studies have explored museums' roles in constructing ethnic identities (Cabrera, 2008), ethnic tourism (Henderson, 2003; Fraser, 2020) and the preservation of ethnic communities and cultural heritage (Lin, 2010). Additionally, research indicates that online museums play a significant role in safeguarding the cultural heritage of various ethnic groups (Vermeulen & Pilcher, 2009; Johnson & Carneiro, 2014; Browning, 2019; Dutta, 2019).

The literature emphasizes a second crucial aspect of museum management, noting the effectiveness of community or local involvement in governance. Praicharnjit introduces the concept of MUSEOPEN (Praicharnjit, 2015), offering commentary on community-driven museum management strategies. This concept integrates the museum therapy process into community development, diverging from conventional management by empowering local communities to oversee their museums, and transforming them into tools for community development.

Expanding on the multifaceted role of community museums Praicharnjit (2015) and Walipodom (2016) highlight their contribution to community sustainable development. Villagers actively engage in museums fostering continuous collective learning and utilizing these institutions as valuable resources for community culture. The specificity of knowledge or objects presented in a museum can vary but community museums uniquely concentrate on tangible and intangible aspects of community culture (Praicharnjit, 2007), thereby holding significant potential for fostering community strength and identity.

Examining the role of community museums in addressing social challenges for older individuals in Thai rural areas, Praicharnjit (2015) suggests that these institutions provide vital social spaces and contribute to mental well-being. Through extensive work in promoting community museums in both the northern and central regions of Thailand, Praicharnjit found that these museums serve as essential tools for community development. MUSEOPEN, a framework for cultural heritage management, integrates the museum therapy process, imparting knowledge and wisdom. Implemented in local community museum development, this process empowers elderly community members to share their cultural insights with others, fostering a sense of fulfillment as they engage in preserving and managing cultural heritage. The museum becomes a space where generations converge for meaningful interactions, promoting mental health and enabling older individuals to showcase their abilities, share knowledge, and bridge generational and cultural divides within and beyond the community.

The examination of ethnicity concepts in contemporary Thai academia unveils a shift in perspectives regarding ethnic identity. Leepreecha (2014) highlights that these concepts are shaped by the theories of Western scholars including Barth (1969) and Cohen (1974). Initially, the prevalent "melting pot" concept emphasized cultural fusion in traditional industrial societies (Gill, 2000). During Thailand's early nation-building phase, ethnic groups were perceived as potential threats to national security leading to attempts to assimilate them into a unified Thainess (Yoko, 2006). Despite the perceived dilution of ethnicity individuals remain vigilant in protecting restoring and renewing their identities (Leepreecha, 2013).

Academic discussions on ethnic identity preservation can be approached in two main ways: One involves examining fading identities as discussed by Ivy (1995) who compares traditions with existing ones and the other approach involves the creation of new identities as explored by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) who highlight how identities are shaped by cultural influences and can evolve. They introduce the concept of "invented traditions",



revealing how ethnic identities are often constructed in response to societal changes. These seemingly historical traditions are contemporary constructs. In other words, certain cultures maintain their identity by embracing the creation of new traditions.

Current research builds upon these historical perspectives asserting that contemporary ethnic groups endure by constructing cultural meanings deeply rooted in their historical heritage. This endurance is attributed to the recognition that ethnic cultures rather than existing in isolation engage in continuous interaction with the host society (Leepreecha, 2014). For example, in the United States efforts to forge a homogeneous society have not led ethnic races to forsake their identity for mainstream culture. On the contrary, differences in identity persist as a strategic means of negotiating economic and social advantages (Leepreecha, 2014). This responsiveness of ethnic groups to the dominant culture involves the construction of ethnic identity within a national context shaped by nation-states and globalization. In alignment with this perspective, Smutkupt and Kitiarsa (2001) study of the Tai Yuan Sikhio in Nakhon Ratchasima province reveals a negotiation of ethnic identity with other ethnic groups resulting in a more diverse and complex identity. This negotiation process underscores the dynamic nature of ethnic identity in response to changing cultural landscapes.

Methods

The research on the Tai Yuan Samo Khae area originated from two projects, the initial one in 2020 explored the Tai Yuan culture while the following one in 2022 focused on attracting the younger generation and tourists to a community learning center. This research employs a qualitative methodology using Rapeepat et al. (2003) framework and participatory action research (Techaatik, 2023). Because this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic the number of participants was limited to fifteen. Using purposive sampling based on the principle of triangulation at least three individuals were invited from each generational group. Fifteen participants attended the meeting which were selected from three groups: Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), and Generation Y (born 1981–1996). Focused group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted according to the semi structured interview guideline, and, participant observation methods have been used to assess the cultural preservation efforts of the community. Data has been collected via formal meetings, informal interactions, center visits, and the author's engagement in community activities such as merit-making rituals. After data collection, interview transcripts were produced and systematically organized by thematic categories to align with the research objectives. The findings are presented using descriptive analysis.

The research began with a community meeting posing key questions: Are villagers interested in developing their learning center? If so, what aspects should be prioritized, who should be involved, and how should it be implemented? After extensive discussion, the community agreed to transform the learning center into a community museum with on-site and online platforms based on the generational perspective of past, present, and future the museum features three rooms.

A major challenge for the community was the need for community members to learn about organizing a museum and acquiring the confidence to establish the museum. To address this, Praicharnjit an expert in community cultural development and the MUSEOPEN process, was invited in June 2022 to provide guidance. He shared case studies from across Thailand that illustrated successful community museum development through local initiatives and self-reliance. Once community members felt prepared, a second workshop using the MUSEOPEN framework was conducted. In this session, the elderly shared cultural stories which were recorded by younger generations.



In September 2022, a design team from Naresuan University finalized the museum's design in collaboration with the community. This research was conducted prioritizing ethical considerations and receiving ethical clearance from Naresuan University on May 12, 2022 (project number P2-0442/2564). The project resulted in a contemporary museum preserving Tai Yuan culture.

Findings and Discussions: The “Chao Hao” Community Museum

As outlined in the research methodology section, the Tai Yuan community across generations has come together to strengthen their cultural heritage which has resulted in the creation of the “Chao Hao” Community Museum, meaning “Our Tai Yuan” village. This initiative exhibits their positive approach to community development, using museums to preserve and manage their rich culture. The physical platform of the Chao Hao Museum allows cultural immersion whereas the online one extends reach beyond borders. These two facets are keys to the cultural continuity with the MUSEOPEN process (Praicharnjit, 2015) allowing the elderly to share their narratives and display their artifacts on both platforms.

An On-site Platform

This platform caters to tourists with an interest in the community to physically visit the museum run by elderly villagers. The Tai Yuan Samo Khae community near Phitsanulok is typically a representation of urban society where younger generations migrate for work resulting in leaving the elderly behind, depending on their children, and also almost diminishing the tradition of passing on knowledge. The MUSEOPEN program (Praicharnjit, 2015) engages such elderly individuals using community museums to foster intergenerational bonds and pride. The on-site museum showcases a curated collection representing the past, present, and future. Naresuan University's architecture team has enhanced the museum design, creating an inviting learning space. Although budget constraints limited the exhibitions planned for three rooms, organizational efforts boosted pride in the Tai Yuan community. This shared pride led to hosting the first Tai-Yuan Confederation Committee meeting in 2023. Figure 2 summarizes the exhibitions.



The Chao Hao (our Tai-Yuan)

Samo Khae Community Museum

Samo Khae Subdistrict, Muang, Phitsanulok

EXHIBITION

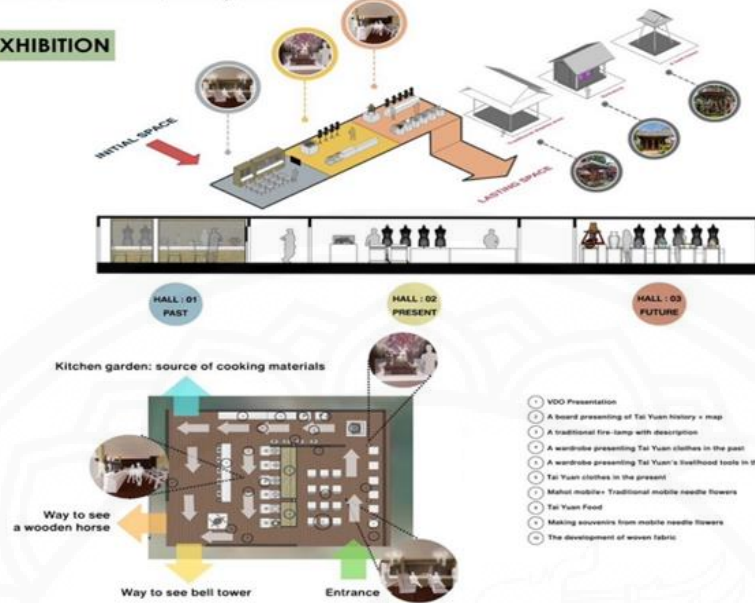


Figure 2 The Design of the Community Museum. (Translated from Sueakhlai, 2022)

The museum features three rooms representing the past, present, and future of Tai Yuan culture.

Room 1, “Tai Yuan Chama Kao” showcases the history of the culture exhibiting migration maps, traditional attires, and tools, highlighting gender-specific roles such as men making bamboo fishing baskets and women weaving those baskets.

Room 2, “Tai Yuan Ton Nee” showcases contemporary Tai Yuan culture through dress, food, and language.

It highlights the contrast between traditional sarongs made from natural cotton with modern-day sarongs made from synthetic cotton. As illustrated in Figure 3, the traditional cotton sarong, known as Sin Lae, is distinguished by its unique patterns and primarily black color, making it ideal for women working in farming. Tai Yuan attire also incorporates symbolic colors: red represents family ties and the Tai Yuan spirit, green signifies abundance, black denotes solidarity, and yellow or orange reflects Buddhist values.

Traditional dress resonates beyond local contexts. For instance, in 2016, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) featured two women in Tai Lue attire closely resembling Tai Yuan sarongs in its “Discover Thainess” campaign. This illustrates earlier efforts by the Thai state to incorporate ethnic minority identities, such as that of the Tai Yuan, into a singular national identity under the concept of “Thainess” (Yoko, 2006). In contrast, recent interpretations of Thainess have begun to embrace cultural diversity and multiculturalism, influenced by the evolving demands of tourism-driven economic policies.



Figure 3 Left: Tai Yuan Sarong or Sin Lue. (Author, 2022)

Right: Tai Lue Attire was used to Promote Tourism. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2016)

Room 3, “Tai Yuan Yan Phuk”, embodies the community’s future aspirations. The Ka Pong bell symbolizes generational continuity, and tourists are often encouraged to ring it to preserve the Tai Yuan ethnicity (Figure 4).



Figure 4 A Tourist is Ringing the Bell. (Author, 2022)

The symbolic performance of the Ka Pong establishes a meaningful connection among generations. Historically, the Tai Yuan community used the sounding of the Ka Pong to summon villagers for communal gatherings and collective action. Presently its sound serves as a cultural reminder and a symbolic message to future generations conveying that:

“This place still holds so many stories about culture and traditions that we’re trying to keep alive and pass down to children and grandchildren. It’s a shame that our grandchildren don’t speak the Tai Yuan language anymore, but at the very least, they should know that of Tai Yuan ethnicity.”

(Male, 75 Years old, Interviewed, June 4, 2022)

The dynamic maintenance of Tai Yuan ethnicity achieved through the adaptation of Tai Yuan culture resonates with Leepreecha (2014) and Smutkupt and Kitiarsa (2001) view of ethnicity as a cultural construct, shaped by social and cultural dynamics. The community’s cultural adaptability is illustrated in their use of language and design adaptations such as incorporating modern motifs into traditional patterns. This adaptability is evidenced in the Tai Yuan community’s language use where a fusion of modern Thai and English with the original Tai Yuan language becomes a strategic tool to navigate changing economic and social contexts. For example, in one



interview, a middle-aged woman referred to The Tai Yuan Samo Khae guiding principle as a ‘slogan’ in English, articulating the concept of ‘continuing spirituality abundance and religion’, instead of employing the equivalent Thai term or their own language.

The community’s deliberate shift from strict traditional fabric patterns to innovative designs demonstrates a nuanced strategy for cultural preservation. By incorporating symbolic motifs such as the peep flower or Indian Cork, the provincial symbol of Phitsanulok into Tai Yuan weaving, artisans fuse local identity with traditional craft. Although absent from historical patterns, the peep flower now signifies the integration of regional symbolism into customary practices. This aligns with Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1983) concept of “invented traditions” which explains how ethnic identities are shaped by cultural influences and can evolve.

A noteworthy pattern innovation emerges with the introduction of a horse motif inspired by the Tai-Yuan wood horse tradition, which transcends its original context during men’s ordination ceremonies. This dual-purpose adaptation creating souvenirs and attracting tourists underscores the community’s strategic response to contemporary demands while safeguarding cultural elements.

The data highlights the complex challenge of preserving and transmitting cultural values across generations. Through activities like paper cutting, weaving and symbolic acts such as bell ringing the museum fosters a tangible connection to the enduring cultural legacy of the Tai Yuan people emphasizing active community engagement in preservation efforts.

Moreover, the museum serves as a vital platform for Tai Yuan Samo Khae to maintain their way of life and cultural identity in the modern world. Such resilience illustrates a deliberate adaptation process, aligning with Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1983) theory on how traditions are constructed and reinvented over time. The community’s ability to adapt to contemporary challenges underscores their dedication to preserving their cultural heritage.

This experience highlights the importance of dynamic approaches to cultural preservation, moving beyond static displays or historical narratives. By engaging community members in cultural activities and fostering intergenerational dialogue museums play a crucial role in ensuring the continuity and vitality of cultural traditions. However, effectively transmitting cultural values across generations necessitates the use of contemporary methods that are embraced by all age groups. Relying solely on traditional museums or presence in tourist areas may not suffice to attract visitors, whether Tai Yuan or non-Tai Yuan. Online communication is increasingly recognized as an effective method for preserving Tai Yuan identity particularly among the younger generation. The proposal made by the young aligns with the perspectives of museum scholars both domestic and international as discussed earlier in literature review section emphasizing the need for museums to transform their exhibits in a more creative and accessible manner to reach a broader audience.

An Online Platform

In response to the need for cultural preservation and bridging generational divides, the community adopted an online museum approach after the MUSEOPEN concept (Praicharnjit, 2015). This initiative fosters collaboration between villagers and the research team to extend Tai Yuan identity into the digital realm. The primary goal is to engage younger generations in the preservation of cultural heritage by integrating modern technology with traditional knowledge.

The online museum mirrors the physical museum, with rooms representing the past, present, and future. It can be accessed via the following link: <https://sites.google.com/nu.ac.th/thai-yuan2565/> or by searching in Thai for ‘พิพิธภัณฑ์ ไท ยวน-Tai Yuan museum’ and adding “online” in English.

Room 1 displays Tai Yuan's history with items like ancient Bailan palm leaf manuscripts containing Buddhist scriptures. The MUSEOPEN process enables elders to share the significance of Bailan culture encouraging intergenerational communication. This online museum significantly enhances accessibility for younger generations. A 21-year-old interviewee found learning about traditional Tai Yuan cultural wisdom and its historical narratives "exciting" and voiced her desire for wider appreciation of Tai Yuan culture:

"I want people who have never known Tai Yuan to come to know it and to be excited about Tai Yuan culture."

(Female, 21 Years old, Interviewed, June 14, 2022)

These results align with Dutta (2019), supporting the use of digital media for cultural preservation through community involvement to achieve long-term sustainability. This sustainability, in this context, implies attracting younger generations to carry on the work of their predecessors.

Room 2 highlights traditional Tai Yuan culture which focuses on men crafting wooden horses and women preserving local food, such as Khanom Luem Klue, a dessert born of hardship. With the establishment of the Tai Yuan Wooden Horse Club the younger generation's response to these traditions has been positive along with an increased interest in weaving. The Wooden Horse Club predominantly remains male while weaving has drawn both genders. The 2024 photo of the ordination ceremony for Tai Yuan men shows how this custom continues to flourish and warrants further promotion.



Figure 5 When a Tai Yuan Man is Ordained. (Chom Rom Khon Rak Ma Hae, 2024)

The stories demonstrate some traditions preserved and others evolving in Tai Yuan ethnicity, which has been passed down through generations. This adaptability highlights the community's ability to maintain their heritage while responding to economic and environmental challenges (Leepreecha, 2014; Smutkupt & Kitiarsa, 2001).

Room 3 features unique products like mobile needle flowers with small bells showcasing the significance of Tai Yuan Somo Khae for future generations. The online platform enhances tourism, initiates communication networks with other Tai Yuan groups, and provides product selling opportunities. A Wooden Horses Club member shared during an interview that sharing stories online generates additional income, emphasizing the role of cultural wisdom in supporting future generations.



“We can’t control anyone. Whether our young people will stick to Tai Yuan culture depends on whether Tai Yuan culture can help generate more income for the next generation. If it can then we, the Tai Yuan people, will survive.”

(Male, 35 Years old, Interviewed, June 14, 2022)

As tourism and product promotions highly depend on online platforms, many elders in this room avoided expressing their opinions. Rather than focusing on the online platforms they emphasized the necessity of preserving Tai Yuan traditions by the younger generation. The MUSEOPEN concept developed by Praicharnjit (2015) based on museum therapy guided the community in creating the museum which resulted in various key outcomes.

In the beginning, the younger generation showed little interest in preserving the Tai Yuan culture, but the intergenerational collaboration leading to the start of an online museum served both as a learning resource and a tourism tool generating income.

Conclusion

This paper explores the worldwide debate of adverse impacts of globalization on marginalized communities. It also emphasizes the increasing importance of ethnic identity in socio economic, political and academic contexts. The Tai Yuan Samo Khae community in Phitsanulok, Thailand makes strong efforts to safeguard their cultural heritage and traditions amid globalization and dominant cultural populations. Despite ongoing struggles for cultural rights, certain minority groups have utilized various methods to safeguard their identities (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Smutkupt & Kitiarsa, 2001; Henderson, 2003; Vermeylen & Pilcher, 2009; Leepreecha, 2014; Browning, 2019; Dutta, 2019; Fraser, 2020). The Tai Yuan Samo Khae community has defied geographical dispersal from their historical roots maintaining their vitality and cultural distinctiveness for over a century. Through initiatives such as the Tai Yuan Club and the Tai Yuan Cultural Learning Center, they have established their presence within more powerful majority populations collaborating with national and local authorities, academic institutions, and the tourism sector.

The community established the Chao Hao (our Tai Yuan village) Community Museum to respond to the adverse effects of cultural assimilation and globalization. The museum successfully engages younger generations as it blends tradition with technology. The MUSEOPEN initiative (Praicharnjit, 2015) allows the Tai Yuan community to facilitate knowledge sharing among generations resulting in stronger cultural identity.

The Chao Hao Museum, operating across both physical and digital platforms, provides accessible spaces for cultural engagement. The on-site museum fosters experiential learning and cultural immersion, while the online platform expands the reach of heritage preservation beyond geographic boundaries. The integration of digital tools has transformed cultural transmission. Creatively animated visuals and concise narratives effectively represent Tai Yuan identity, fostering intergenerational knowledge sharing and revitalizing cultural pride, especially among the younger generation. These strategies not only bridge generational gaps but also align with broader trends in digital heritage preservation, enhancing long-term sustainability by attracting youth participation.

This study underscores the role of community museums as essential tools for community development. Innovation, strong local solidarity and youth involvement are key factors in safeguarding Tai Yuan heritage in the digital age.



Policy Recommendations

1. Allocate funding and resources for community museums including staff and community training to maintain Tai Yuan's culture.
2. Leverage community museums to boost local tourism and economic development creating opportunities for income and empowering the community economically.
3. Encourage pride in cultural heritage through active participation in museum initiatives to ensure sustainability.
4. Promote intergenerational collaboration and partnerships with local agencies to secure long-term support for cultural efforts.
5. Expand networks across Thailand to enhance the visibility and impact of Tai Yuan culture.

Future Studies

1. Conduct a quantitative study on the efforts of the Tai Yuan community in maintaining their cultural heritage identifying key practices challenges and success factors.
2. Perform a comparative study on the MUSEOPEN concept's effectiveness across different Tai Yuan communities and other cultural groups.

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible by the support of the Tai Yuan people whose cooperation and patience during repeated data collection amid the COVID-19 pandemic were invaluable. I also thank my fellow scholars for their insightful suggestions and Naresuan University for funding.

References

- Appadurai, A. (2006). *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. USA.: Duke University Press.
- Barth, F. (1969). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Browning, Z. (2019). A Comparative Analysis: Legal and Historical Analysis of Protecting Indigenous Cultural Rights Involving Land Disputes in Japan, New Zealand, and Hawai'i. *Washington International Law Journal*, 28(1), 207–242.
- Cabrera, R. M. (2008). *Beyond Dust, Memories and Preservation: Roles of Ethnic Museums in Shaping Community Ethnic Identities* (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Illinois Chicago, Illinois, Chicago.
- Chom Rom Khon Rak Ma Hae. (2024, February 27). The Preservation of Tai Yuan Wooden Horse Club on Ordination Ceremony / Nak Procession Tradition, Klommatan Village. In *Facebook* [Image]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=780890757418301&set=pcb.780893420751368>
- Cohen, A. (1974). The Lesson of Ethnicity. In A. Cohen (Ed.), *Urban Ethnicity*. London: Tavistock Publications.



Dutta, U. (2019). Digital Preservation of Indigenous Culture and Narratives from the Global South: In Search of an Approach. *Humanities*, 8(2), 68. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h8020068>

Fraser, R. (2020). Cultural Heritage, Ethnic Tourism, and Minority-State Relations Amongst the Orochen in North-East China. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 26(2), 178–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2019.1620830>

Galluccio, C., & Giambona, F. (2024). Cultural Heritage and Economic Development: Measuring Sustainability Over Time. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 95, 101998. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seps.2024.101998>

Gill, R. (2000). Cities and Ethnicity: A Case of De-ethnicization or Re-ethnicization? *Sociological Bulletin*, 49(2), 211–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920000203>

Goode, G. B. (1889). The Museums of the Future. In *Report of the United States National Museum for the Year Ending, June 30, 1889* (pp. 427–445). Retrieved from <https://repository.si.edu/handle/10088/29955>

Henderson, J. (2003). Ethnic Heritage as a Tourist Attraction: the Peranakans of Singapore. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 9(1), 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1352725022000056613>

Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (Eds.). (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295636>

International Council of Museums. (2023). *Museums, Sustainability and Wellbeing*. Retrieved from <https://imd.icom.museum/past-editions/2023-museums-sustainability-and-wellbeing/>

Ivy, M. (1995). *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Johnson, A. (2009). *The Museum Educator's Manual: Educators Share Successful Techniques*. Edinburgh: AltaMira Press.

Johnson, M. A., & Carneiro, L. (2014). Communicating Visual Identities on Ethnic Museum Websites. *Visual Communication*, 13(3), 357–372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357214530066>

Keyes, C. F. (1995). Who are the Tai? Reflections on the Invention of Local, Ethnic and National Identities. In L. Romanucci-Ross, & G. A. De Vos (Eds.), *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict and Accommodation* (3th ed., pp. 136–160). Walnut Creek, CA.: AltaMira Press.

Keyes, C. F. (1997). Ethnic Groups, Ethnicity. In T. J. Barfield (Eds.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Anthropology* (pp. 152–154). Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers.

Lanna Prathet. (2022, March 22). Map Showing the New Settlement and Movement of the Yuan People in Central Thailand. In Facebook [Image]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/105618760947061/photos/a.105693897606214/501859611322972/?type=3>



Leepreecha, P. (2013). Multiculturalism from Below: The Movement of the Network of Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Groups in Thailand. *Journal of Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University*, 25(2), 59–106. Retrieved from <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jss/article/view/172921>

Leepreecha, P. (2014). Paradigms of Studies on Ethnicity. *Journal of Mekong Societies*, 10(3), 219–242. Retrieved from <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/mekongjournal/article/view/26780>

Lin, J. (2010). *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage and Community Life*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843017>

Praicharnjit, S. (2007). *Archaeological Resource Management in Community Development* (3rd ed.). Bangkok: Community Archaeology Book Project.

Praicharnjit, S. (2015). The Nursery Museum and the Sustainable Management of Local Community Cultural Heritage. *Journal of Ayutthaya Studies Institute*, 7(1), 1–39.

Rapeepat, A., Vaddhanaphuti, C., Pongsapich, A., Chantavanich, S., & Prachuabmoh, C. (2003). *Qualitative Research Handbook for Development* (4th ed.). Bangkok: Research and Development Institute, Khon Kaen University.

Richards, G. (Ed.). (2007). *Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives*. New York: Haworth Hospitality Press.

Sakhajun, C. (2015). *Development of Virtual Museum Design: Phutthamonthon Center of World Buddhism*. Nakhonprathom: Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin. Retrieved from <https://repository.rmutr.ac.th/handle/123456789/471>

Sarawasee, P. (2020, May 14). Stay Home, and Open a Museum in One Click. *Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre*. Retrieved from <https://db.sac.or.th/museum/article/84>

Smutkupt, S., & Kitiarsa, P. (2001). *Yuan Silhiew in the Ethnic Junctions: Narratives, Memories, and Identities of the Tai Yuan in Sikhiew District, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand*. Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand: The Thai Studies Anthropological Collection, Institute of Social Technology, Suranaree University of Technology. Retrieved from <http://sutir.sut.ac.th:8080/jspui/handle/123456789/2339>

Songsiri, W. (2004). Laos in Thailand: The Indistinct Ethnic Group. *Muang Boran Journal*, 30(2), 74–88.

Sueakhlai, S. (2022). *The Chao Hao (our Tai Yuan) Samo Khea Community Museum: A Community Museum Design*. Phitsanulok: Tai Yuan Club.

Tanabe, S. (1991). *Religious Traditions Among Tai Ethnic Groups: A Selected Bibliography*. Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Thailand: Ayutthaya Historical Study Centre.



Techaatik, S. (2023). Participatory Action Research. In *Contemporary Research Methodology for Social Science*. Khon Kaen: Khon Kaen University.

Thubthun, N., & Tantikul, C. (2017). The Movement Background of Chiang Saen Yuan People and the Settlement in the Central Part of Thailand. *Humanity and Social Science Journal, Ubon Ratchathani University*, 8(Special), 10–34. Retrieved from https://www.ubu.ac.th/web/files_up/08f2018032311064347.pdf

Tourism Authority of Thailand. (2016). *Annual Report 2016: Discover Thainess*. Retrieved from <https://www.tat.or.th/th/about-tat/annual-report>

Vermeulen, S., & Pilcher, J. (2009). Let the Objects Speak: Online Museums and Indigenous Cultural Heritage. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 4, 59–78. Retrieved from <https://www.ijih.org/volumes/article/47>

Walipodom, S. (2016, May 30). Local Museum: A Collaborative Learning Process. *Lek-Prapai Viriyahpant Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://lek-prapai.org/home/view.php?id=631>

Wilaikum, F., Warunyanugrai, S., & Panmeka, P. (2013). The Development of a Web Site for Phitsanulok Museum with Participatory Approaches. *Journal of Library and Information Srinakharinwirot University*, 6(2), 104–117. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.swu.ac.th/index.php/jlis/article/view/4101>

World Tourism Organization. (1999). *Tourism: 2020 Vision: Executive Summary Updated*. Retrieved from <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284403394?role=tab>

Yoko, H. (2006). Redefining “Otherness” from Northern Thailand, Introduction: Notes Towards Debating Multiculturalism in Thailand and Beyond. *Japanese Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 44(3), 283–294. https://doi.org/10.20495/tak.44.3_283