



Received: 24 January 2024

Revised: 23 March 2024

Accepted: 24 March 2024

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS COMMUNITY STRENGTH: A CASE STUDY OF BAN NON HOM COMMUNITY, SAKON NAKHON, THAILAND

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(This article belongs to the Theme 2: Innovation and Social Sustainability)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the participation of cultural characteristics and the pattern of community development of the Non Hom community in Sakon Nakhon, Thailand. The study was qualitative, employing in-depth interviews to collect data from the sample group along with non-participant observation. Data were analyzed using content analysis, logical reasoning analysis, and inductive reasoning. The findings revealed that the Non Hom Subdistrict community is a Thai ethnic community that firmly preserves its cultural heritage, including language, dress, traditions, rituals, beliefs, and local wisdom. Challenges and adaptations in community development may arise in certain situations. Community development begins with a review of past strategies and a focus on preserving Thai culture through the institutions of family, education, and religious participation. The community development plan has emphasized community collaboration and learning, in addition to promoting self-reliance and participation as the way of life of the community. The collaborative partnership aims to enhance community members' learning, problem-solving, and improve community well-being through understanding community context and adaptation to achieve balanced development through community participation.

Keywords: Cultural Dimension, Community Culture, Community Strength

Citation Information: Chenprakhon, S. (2024). Cultural Development towards Community Strength: A Case Study of Ban Non Hom Community, Sakon Nakhon, Thailand. *Asian Crime and Society Review*, 11(1), 58-64. <https://doi.org/10.14456/acsr.2024.6>

Introduction

Culture encompasses both tangible and intangible creations of humanity. It refers to the collective behavioral patterns inherited from the past within a society. This cultural heritage has evolved over time, transmitted systematically to foster prosperity and stability within communities (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2016). Culture arises from the accumulation of experiences within a way of life, undergoing processes of selection, improvement, correction, and adaptation to maintain consistency and appropriateness within its environment. The emergence of culture can stem from social development, change, improvement, and flourishing, often through the inheritance of past cultural heritage. It may also result from the adoption of values and beliefs from other societies, without forsaking one's own identity. Furthermore, culture serves as a unifying force, fostering love and unity among people, thereby contributing to national security. Ultimately, culture is deemed the identity of a nation (The Fine Arts Department, 2009).

Culture is the manifestation of a people's history and heritage. It reflects the pride of local communities and nations, fostering a sense of unity while eliciting emotions such as love, jealousy, and appreciation. Moreover, it encompasses the knowledge and wisdom accumulated and transmitted across generations. This transmission occurs through various forms, including ideas, beliefs, traditions, and cultural practices. Phothiruk (2020) emphasized that culture permeates society, disseminates across generations, and fosters improvements in quality of life. As previously noted, culture serves as the bedrock of national security. Moreover, culture stands as a pivotal factor in shaping the identities of nations, social communities, and human races, serving as a testament to their origins and preserving their dignity. The inherent values of cultural heritage necessitate preservation for posterity (The Fine Arts Department, 2009).

Encouraging active participation is utilized for development, thereby bolstering the community, and meeting its needs while ensuring satisfaction. By embracing a shared cultural ethos, communities can cultivate sustainable resilience and strength (Chenprakhon, 2017). In the process of development, it is essential to recognize that every society possesses cultural capital in diverse forms. Development should not solely focus on modernization but should also prioritize the enhancement of cultural spaces, the reinforcement of civil society, the empowerment of community organizations, and the promotion of respect for the rights of diverse populations within a pluralistic society.

Therefore, integrating the cultural dimension into development efforts is not only a path to prosperity but also requires careful consideration of the appropriateness and context specific to each community and target society. The mission of the Non Hom Subdistrict Administrative Organization underscores the importance of preserving culture and wisdom. Such endeavors necessitate collaboration across various sectors, including local residents, community leaders, government agencies, and educational institutions. Together, they must actively engage in promoting and conserving the richness of community heritage and traditions.

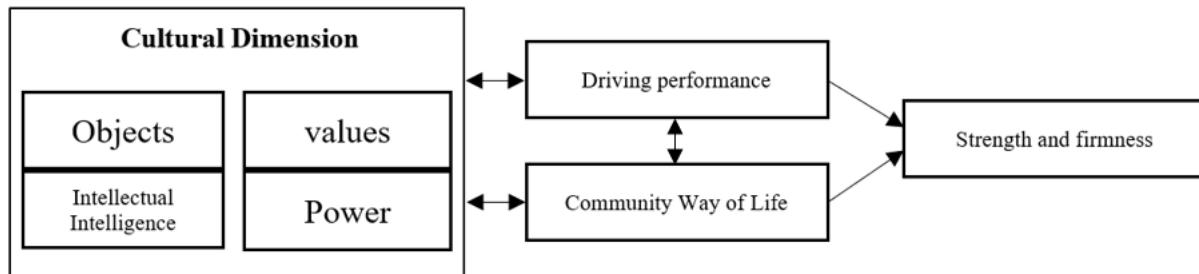
It is crucial for the younger generation to understand their cultural roots to ensure the continuity of their heritage. This requires the transfer and integration of cultural knowledge to the next generation, facilitated through cooperation between internal and external district organizations and public sectors. By aligning efforts and goals, these collaborative endeavors can efficiently and effectively achieve their objectives while ensuring the sustainability and inclusivity of cultural conservation efforts (Mahantarat, 2016).

Research Objectives

- 1) To study the distinctive cultural characteristics of the Ban Non Hom Community in Sakon Nakhon, Thailand.
- 2) To investigate the development patterns of the Ban Non Hom Community.
- 3) To analyze the cultural dimensions of community development towards a strong and resilient Ban Non Hom Community.

Conceptual Framework

Based on a review of prior research studies and literature reviews, the conceptual framework was developed as follows:



The research study focuses on the cultural issues within the community. In summary, the research approach comprises three main points: 1) development through the creation of community plans for community leaders, 2) short-term and long-term activities, and 3) support and cooperation from external agencies. Information gathered from documents, in-depth interviews, and non-participant observation was utilized to deepen understanding of the culture and values of the Ban Non Hom community. The researcher actively participated in community activities to gain insights and gather additional information during the data collection period. The research findings offer a clear depiction of community life and activities, with the researcher engaging in various community activities to observe and collect data using diverse techniques to enhance understanding of the community's cultural foundations. Additionally, individuals involved in community development, including government community developers and staff from development organizations, provided crucial information for the study.

Research Methods

Key informants were carefully selected for interviews from both formal and informal community leaders, as well as those engaged in the development of Ban Non Hom Community, located in Mueang District, Sakon Nakhon Province, Thailand. These informants were chosen based on their ability to provide valuable information and their willingness to participate. The total number of key informants amounted to 15 individuals, comprising 3 formal community leaders, 3 informal community leaders, 4 leaders of community activity groups, 4 local philosophers, and 1 community developer.

The criteria used to select data providers were as follows: 1) Official community leaders, who are appointed or elected at the village and sub-district level, including the president of the sub-district administrative organization, subdistrict headman, and village headman. 2) Informal community leaders, individuals who do not hold appointed positions within the government structure but exert influence on community sentiments, thoughts, and actions. This category includes (1) religious leaders, such as monks who play a vital role in preserving, transmitting, and applying culture for community development; (2) Spiritual leaders responsible for preserving and inheriting community rituals, including individuals like Dr. Tham and Dr. Yao; (3) Leaders of community activity groups involved in the development of the Ban Non Hom community; and (4) Local philosophers possessing expert knowledge of local wisdom. 3) Community developers, government officials responsible for driving community development and implementing government policies in the Ban Non Hom community. In-depth Interview Guidelines were followed throughout the process.

The information gathered in the study can be categorized into 5 parts:

Part 1: Basic information on key informants includes, 1) gender, 2) age, 3) religion, 4) marital status, 5) education level, 6) occupation, 7) income, 8) period of residence in the community, 9) social status in the community, and 10) position held or training received.

Part 2: History of the community includes, 1) How did the history and legends of the community originate? and 2) What is the context of the community? It was categorized into: (1) physical and biological characteristics (2) economic characteristics (3) social characteristics (4) political and administrative characteristics.

Part 3: What are the important changes and developments of communities from the past to the present? Three cultural dimensions of the community were studied; they were 1) material culture, what are the characteristics of the following things in the community? (1) residence (2) dress (3) livelihood (4) source of livelihood learning (5) community market. 2) value culture, how do people in the community believe and practice the following things? (1) Beliefs (2) Values (3) Norms (4) Important traditions. 3) wisdom culture, what is classified as community wisdom within this community? (1) characteristics and origins of local wisdom (2) past and present uses (3) culture of power and social relations. and 4) power relations, what are the power structures in the community, both formal and informal? (1) kinship relationships, (2) acquiring and training leaders, (3) organizational networks and community activity groups.

Part 4: Community development patterns and processes includes, 1) What are the processes and methods drive development? 2) What are the important community development activities? 3) How does participation vary across community activities? 4) What is the nature of development and what were the outcomes? and 5) What problems and obstacles impede development efforts?.

Part 5: Community strengths includes, 1) What are the indicators and conditions that contribute to community strength, and what insights can be gleaned from them? and 2) How is the strength of the community related to the application of culture within the local area?.

Data from the interviews were recorded and analyzed with Content Analysis to categorize and explain details. Content was compared and analyzed to draw meaningful and logical conclusions. The analysis was linked with various concepts and theories to enhance deepen understanding. Describing, interpreting and summarizing were the final steps in order to ensure that the results were clear and reliable.

Research Results

It was found that the Ban Non Hom community was confident and had tried to preserve Thai culture in the modern era. Members of the community were friendly and supportive, with traditions and rituals being trusted. The community represented confidence and preserved Thai culture in the modern era. They took pride in their values and showed generosity towards their neighbors, taking good care of each other's well-being and strictly respecting each other in the community. Preserving culture in the Ban Non Hom community was considered successful, with three main factors playing important roles. The culture was transmitted through family members and knowledgeable people in the community, emphasizing the perseverance of the Thai language and culture. Teaching weaving skills was important in preserving local wisdom and endeavoring to assemble perfectly and sustainably. External agencies played a role in supporting education and development in the weaving industry, including promoting the dress and dancing of Thai people, which had become an interesting cultural tourist attraction. The community still maintained confidence and generosity in their way of life, unaffected by social changes.

For the community development model of Ban Non Hom community, it was found that the community development had an interesting pattern. It could be divided into three main types:

- 1) Development by making community plans for community leaders, which included both short-term and long-term activities, supported by external agencies to create a development plan focusing on self-reliance and effectively preserving local culture.
- 2) Through brainstorming and promoting participation in project implementation and effective project management, community members were involved in determining the details and management format of the activities.
- 3) Participation in project implementation was encouraged, allowing members of the community opportunities to participate in thinking, deciding, and working together in every step of the project or activity in the community.

Analyzing the integration of cultural dimensions of development into a strong community of Ban Non Hom community, it was found that cultural dimensions were integrated into community development. Focus on adjustment and thoughts for self-reliance were important, with community values emphasized and shared. Community development operations were driven by understanding the community context and adjusting the content accordingly to the principles of development along with preserving community culture, transmitted through the process of making a community plan covering various dimensions, with the integration of important cultural values.

The development of the Ban Non Hom community involved integrating all aspects such as economy, society, culture, and the environment in balance. Using modern development principles through participatory planning with an emphasis on preserving local culture, integrating knowledge from outside and adapting appropriately. The results of development following this approach made Ban Non Hom community a model village for other communities to study and learn a lesson from Ban Non Hom District and apply to their own communities. The district had won many development awards, such as the "Stay Cool & Happy" award and the Royal Peacock Silk Product Award from the Queen Sirikit Institute of Sericulture, Her Majesty the Queen, and the Golden Headman Award from the Ministry of Interior in the previous year.

One important problem was the understanding of district members on new developments or projects initiated by community leaders. Some issues were not recognized and received cooperation from community members, and some government policies were not consistent with the way of life or the needs of the community. Some inheriting local wisdom would not be learned and continued as the new generation went to live elsewhere, potentially causing the community to lose its identity in the long run.

Several important suggestions were made to solve the problem. To develop understanding between leaders and villagers, government policy should support sustaining local culture according to the way of life and environment of the community. The state should be a supporter and mentor of the community, and communities should create activities that encourage youth or community members who work abroad to have the opportunity to come back and inherit the local wisdom of the community. Activities should focus on creating an environment filled with friendliness and promoting confidence in youth in the community to participate in creating and developing the community in a better direction for sustainability.

Conclusion and Discussion

The Ban Non Hom community boasts a unique culture characterized by strong family and kinship relationships. With a steadfast commitment to preserving local wisdom, the community actively engages in the transmission and implementation of cultural practices in daily life, seamlessly integrating them into their routines. This revival of traditions and self-development to adapt to societal changes is achieved through active participation, including the preservation of local arts and culture, and fostering mutual understanding and relationships within the

community. These endeavors not only instill happiness and pride among community members but also contribute to the prosperity of the community's values.

Drawing from past experiences in community development, the Ban Non Hom community has diligently reviewed lessons learned and adapted new ideas for progress. This adaptation is evident in the formulation of community plans and the utilization of the village community forum as a central decision-making platform. The outcome has been a diverse array of development projects and activities, with a focus on holistic approaches and active involvement of community members. Leadership stimulation and role modeling have played pivotal roles in sustaining this development trajectory.

Furthermore, the community has fostered connections among households, temples, schools, and established networks with external partners interested in their initiatives. This development model follows the theories of Kodkiri et al. (2023) and Rangmeesrisuk et al. (2023). It is widely acknowledged that community participation plays a pivotal role in development. This represents a shift in the development paradigm, empowering communities to engage more directly in their own progress rather than relying solely on state or government agencies. The integration of cultural dimensions into community development has been a cornerstone, fostering community engagement and participation in various stages, including ideation, implementation, and evaluation. Utilizing media, activities, and practical mechanisms as primary tools, the community has championed a cultural development model facilitated by community leaders. A robust learning process has been established through the creation of community learning resources and a display room showcasing the community's way of life.

Central to this approach is the promotion of learning activities within the community's core institutions, ensuring the seamless integration of cultural dimensions into development initiatives. This emphasis on learning and participation aligns harmoniously with the community's ethos and way of life, underlining the importance of adapting development goals towards self-reliance and applying value-based concepts to enrich communal values.

This development approach aligns with research conducted by Kaewthep (2009), Rangmeesrisuk et al. (2023), and Chenprakhon (2017), highlighting the significance of community participation in development. It signifies a shift in the development paradigm, empowering communities to play a more direct role in their self-development rather than relying solely on state or government agencies. The Ban Non Hom community has embraced this ethos, fostering development through active community participation, tailoring initiatives to suit their lifestyle, and emphasizing self-sufficiency while intricately integrating cultural dimensions, such as the preservation of local culture and values.

The community's efforts extend beyond mere festivities; they have established systematic and comprehensive frameworks for the management of local wisdom and knowledge, promoting a diverse range of cultures. To further facilitate learning and knowledge transfer within the community, it is imperative for the state and relevant agencies to support community development initiatives through a variety of cultural and educational activities and projects.

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Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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