

Design Strategies to Communicate and Transfer the Value of Thai Traditional Wooden Crafts to Taiwanese Gen Z

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Abstract: Traditional wood carving in Thailand is a cultural heritage that holds a wealth of wisdom and knowledge from past generations. These wooden crafts are deeply intertwined with local history, customs, beliefs, and religion, and are often passed down through families and communities to honor and preserve traditions. However, with the challenges of transferring these values to younger generations and overseas cultures, it is crucial to find effective ways to communicate and transfer the value of these traditional crafts. This is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic when local traditional wood carving artisans have realized the importance of digital channels to reach young and overseas customers. Observations on Taiwanese Gen Z suggest that they have a keen interest in traditional cultural values, particularly those related to Asian culture. For example, an exhibition called "Ghosts and Hells - The underworld in Asian art" has been a popular attraction, offering a unique and captivating insight into supernatural beliefs and artistic representations of the afterlife in Asian cultures. This exhibition has been promoted on social media and has garnered a high level of public interest, showing that it is possible to promote traditional crafts to young people in Taiwan. As a result, the purpose of this research is to examine the value that Thai wood traditional carving provides and identify the communication preferences of Taiwanese Gen Z.

On the one hand, to understand the value of the local Thai wooden crafts, the research conducted a field trip in Chiangmai, the northern province of Thailand, visiting Baan Kiew Lae Noi Village, one of the oldest woods carving villages and conducting in-depth interviews with six local wooden crafts masters awarded by SACIT (The Support Arts and Crafts International Centre of Thailand). The master craftsmen showcased their working environments and carving principles, including the selection of wood and sketch drawings. Also visited was Baan Tawai Village, renowned as a trading area for wood carvings, where valuable insights into the communication and marketing models for wood carvings were gained through interactions with the owner of a local shop named 'Heritage Art.' Lastly, a visit was made to the Baan Jang Nak - A Museum of Elephant Wood Carvings, where a deeper understanding of the contextual story behind wood carving was gained. An interview with the second generation revealed the limitations and difficulties associated with displaying wood carvings. On the other hand, interviews with five creative individuals from Taiwan's Gen Z demographic were conducted to identify their preferred communication methods.

In conclusion, the importance of preserving and transferring the value of Thai traditional wood carving to future generations and other cultures cannot be overstated, as it holds a wealth of historical, artistic, and cultural knowledge that must be safeguarded. The findings from Taiwanese Gen Z emphasize the need to explore new and innovative ways, especially in the digital realm, to communicate the essence of cultural heritage. Therefore, the next step of research is to design a comprehensive and engaging concept that integrates compelling content and experience to convey the value of traditional Thai wood carving to the Taiwanese Gen Z audience. Through such initiatives, to bridge the communication gap between Thai traditional wood carving and Taiwanese Generation Z.

Keywords: *Cross-cultural communication, Design strategy, Digital media, Traditional value transfer, Thai traditional wood carving,*

1. Introduction

1.1. The Significance of Traditional Crafts in Thailand's Cultural and Creative Industries

Traditional crafts are a form of cultural heritage that includes various handicrafts and artisanal skills that are passed down from generation to generation within a specific community or cultural group. These crafts are often deeply rooted in local traditions and can be seen as expressions of cultural identity and values. As a country that is full of precious culture, Thailand cannot ignore the importance of soft power. Thailand's history as old Siam was characterized by grand ceremonies and intricate arts and crafts, which are steeped in tradition, as stated which have been a source of soft power for the country [1]. Soft power is linked to the concept of diplomacy or statecraft, and the idea that unrestrained power and brute force is counterproductive for cooperation. Thailand should promote or launch soft power studies widely in the country, particularly in systematic cultural export promotion [2].

This has led the Thai government to invest in the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural resources as part of its development strategies. Thailand has many creative industries that are unique and represent Thai culture. These industries are responsible for a major proportion of Thai exports [3]. According to Royal Thai Embassy, creative industries are a promising component of Thailand's economy and national development strategy [4]. To support the national economic and social development plan, the Thai government established the Office of Knowledge Management Development (OKMD) in 2004. OKMD in Thailand encompasses several institutions that offer learning resources, with the Thailand Creative and Design Centre (TCDC) being the most relevant to the creative industries [5].

When it comes to traditional crafts in Thailand, one cannot ignore One Tambon One Product (OTOP). It is another large-scale project aimed at promoting Thai craftsmanship and how Thailand has used its traditional crafts to promote its soft power under Creative Economy Agency (CEA), which was initiated in 2001. The OTOP project aims to promote and support the development of local products and handicrafts from various villages in Thailand. The project provides financial support, training, and marketing assistance to local producers, helping them to improve their products and develop their businesses. The OTOP project has helped to preserve and promote the traditional handicrafts of Thailand and has

contributed to the economic development of rural communities. Consequently, Thai OTOP producers have been stimulated and supported by the Thai government to continuously strengthen local communities such as giving modern knowledge and assisting Thai local products to be able to sell in both Thai and foreign markets via chain stores and outlets successfully [6].

It is evident that the Thai government places a significant emphasis on the importance of traditional crafts and actively supports their development and growth. The government has implemented various initiatives to promote and assist local producers in enhancing their craft products and expanding their market reach. These efforts contribute to the preservation and promotion of Thai traditional culture. Thus, the Thai government recognizes the value and potential of traditional crafts as a source of soft power and continues to prioritize their preservation and development.

1.2. Decline in Traditional Thai crafts

The decline of traditional Thai crafts is a multifaceted issue that has been ongoing for decades. Craftspeople in some isolated areas of northern and northeastern Thailand continue to use traditional techniques and designs, but some traditional crafts are in decline in certain provinces [7]. Several factors have contributed to this decline, including the rise of mass production, which has led to handicraft producers selling their products at lower prices than traditional crafts can compete with. In addition, changes in consumer lifestyles and needs have further shifted demand toward more modern and practical products [8] [9]. This has resulted in a loss of interest and appreciation for traditional crafts among younger generations who have grown up with a different set of values and expectations.

1.3. Challenge in Promoting and Transmission the Value of Thai Traditional Crafts

Even though the Thai government and other private institutes have established many craft-related museums and galleries such as The Queen's Gallery, Jim Thompson House Museum, Lanna Craft Wisdom Museum, and so on to educate young Thais or even foreigners to preserve the beauty and the value of traditional crafts but the traditional display media such as birthplace display, public cultural hall display, public tourist place display, and mass education display have limitations in promoting traditional crafts. These methods are often limited to

specific areas and lack information dissemination and exchange, resulting in people from other places being unfamiliar with local traditional crafts [10]. Additionally, the needs of the audience are diverse, and communication methods in a limited area may not fully meet their needs, leading to a lack of attention from young audiences. Providing easy access to traditional crafts is essential, and the general public should have the opportunity to witness artisans. Due to a lack of knowledge, many people may not be inclined to purchase traditional crafts unless they see them. By providing detailed information about the techniques, materials, usage, and the artisans themselves, people can gain a better understanding and appreciation of the works [11].

1.4. Gen Z's Consumer Behaviors

Generation Z (Gen Z) are the first digital natives, born between 1997 and 2012 [12]. According to the Taiwan Ministry of Interior, the total population of Taiwan was around 23.6 million [13]. Unlike any previous generation, Gen Z has been raised in a world where digital technology has always existed. This has resulted in them being extremely skilled and at ease with digital content and technology [14].

1.5. Cross-cultural communication initiatives in the context of Thai traditional crafts to Taiwanese Gen Z

One of the cases is Ghosts and Hells Exhibition - The underworld in Asian art was presented by Jacques Chirac in 2018, featuring traditional artifacts, artworks. The exhibition takes an insightful look at fears and imaginations of the unknown world in Asia over the centuries [15]. Featuring traditional artifacts, handicrafts and artworks, and the latest pop cultural works, the exhibition takes an insightful look at fears and imaginations of the unknown world in Asia over the centuries, including the ghost legends and paranormal stories in Japan, Thailand, and China [16]. In the exhibition room, not only the wooden dolls and masks of the Phi Ta Khon Festival (the Ghost Festival) but also the traditional Thai wooden crafts such as Kuman Thong are displayed. Many of the museumgoers skew young, and they appear excited to see one exhibit. It shows the possibility to promote Thai traditional crafts to the Taiwanese Gen Z population.

1.6. Objective of the Research

The objectives of this research were twofold. Firstly, it aimed to explore and document the content of traditional Thai wood carving crafts in Baan Kiew Lae Noi, focusing on the cultural aspects and the values that local craftsmen strived to convey to future generations. Through this exploration, the research sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the significance and richness of traditional Thai wood carving in Baan Kiew Lae Noi. Secondly, the research aimed to identify and analyze the existing communication gap between traditional Thai wooden crafts and the younger generation in Taiwan. By examining the preferences, knowledge, and perceptions of Taiwanese youth regarding traditional crafts, particularly wood carving, the research intended to shed light on the factors contributing to the disconnection between the older craftsmanship and the younger generation's interests.

In summary, this research sought to uncover the content, cultural significance, and values embedded in traditional Thai wood carving crafts in Baan Kiew Lae Noi while also investigating the communication gap that existed between these crafts and the younger generation in Taiwan.

2. Method

2.1. Methodology Design

This research used in-depth interviews as one of the research methods. Interview questions are primarily open-ended and lead to a discovery-oriented approach [17] to under to the perspective of Taiwanese Gen Z and Thai wood carving community.

The observation method is another method to observe and describe the behavior of a subject and it involves the basic technique of simply watching the phenomena until some hunch or insight is gained [18]. This method can provide valuable information that can strengthen data related to the development of wood carving art in the life of the Ban Kiew Lae Noi community. By gathering information from various sources, researchers can better understand the historical and cultural context of wood carving art in this community (Figure 1).

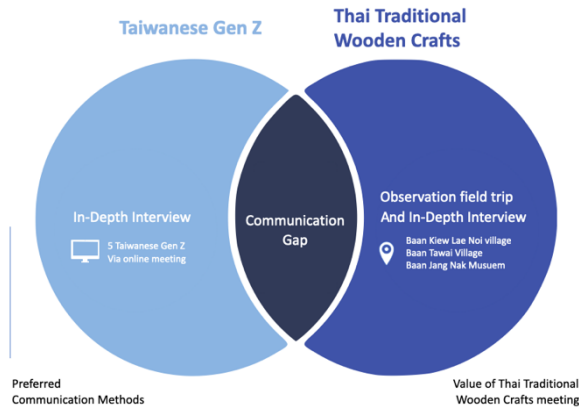


Figure 1. Methodology diagram

2.2. In-depth interview with Taiwanese Gen Z

To better understand the perceptions of the Z generation in Taiwan regarding traditional Thai crafts, a sample of Taiwanese Z generation was interviewed (See Table 1). The interview was designed to examine their knowledge of and interest in Thai traditional crafts and their preferred method of communication. The interview with 5 Taiwanese Gen Z focused on three aspects: Firstly, the relevance and popularity of Thai traditional wooden crafts among Taiwanese Gen Z; secondly, learning opportunities in traditional wooden crafts; and thirdly, the significance and impact of preserving Thai traditional wooden crafts to them.

Table 1. List of Taiwanese Gen Z interviewees

No.	Information	Age
A1	Design department part-time lecturer	27
A2	Design and marketing company co-owner	25
A3	Visual Designer	25
A4	Exhibition enthusiast	22
A5	Art school student	21

2.3. Observation field trip and In-depth interview with Thai Wood Carving Community

The purpose of this observation field trip and interview is to gain insights into the perspectives of 6 Thai traditional wood carving masters. Through the observation and interaction with the local craftsmen and to gain insights into their techniques, processes, and story. This is aimed to assess the value and importance of traditional Thai wooden crafts and the challenges associated with their preservation and promotion. This

research also conducted interviews with the owner of the Wood carving dealer in Baan Tawai Village and the Co-owner of the woodcarving museum in Chiang Mai to understand the perspectives of woodcarving sellers and displays (See Table 2).

The observation field trip and interview focus on the traditional Thai wood carving crafts of Baan Kiew Lae Noi village in Chiang Mai Province, which is considered the birthplace of carvings with its signature feature elephant carving. Moreover, some of the local craftsmen have been recognized by The Support Arts and Crafts International Centre of Thailand (SACIT).

Baan Tawai is the village not only houses over 600 businesses, all sustained on woodwork, but also acts as the center of commerce for a unique art form that represents the mingling cultures of Southeast Asia’s Golden Triangle [19]. Many foreign tourists like to visit northern Thailand to purchase wooden crafts when they visit, especially from Hong Kong and Taiwan [20]. This village has supported the local economic income and tourism for a long time. And Baan Jang Nak is the elephant carving museum founded in 1985 by Phet Wiriya and gave the name of the house Ban Chang Nak which means the house with a lot of elephants [21].

The interview content covered four aspects. Firstly, the cultural and historical origins of Baan Kiew Lae Noi. Secondly, existing communication strategies for preserving and promoting Thai traditional wooden crafts to the younger generation. Thirdly, the cross-cultural exchange in the Thai traditional wooden craft community. Lastly, perspectives on the preservation and inheritance for future generations.

Table 2. List of Wood Carving Community interviewees

No.	Information	Specialized
B1	Master artisan - Siwaporn	Elephant Carving
B2	Master artisan - Jane	Thai folklore, Elephant Carving
B3	Master artisan - Innsai	Elephant, Buffalo Carving
B4	Master artisan - Tawee	Elephant Carving
B5	Master artisan - Yuttanakon	Elephant, Furniture Carving
B6	Master artisan - Aek	Elephant stool Carving
C1	The owner of the woodcarving shop in Ban Tawai Village	Marketing
C2	Co-owner of Baan Jang Nak - the elephant carving museum	Display

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Taiwanese Gen Z Preferred communication methods

Preliminary findings indicate that while the Taiwanese Gen Z has some knowledge of and interest in Thai traditional crafts, most are unfamiliar with these traditional crafts and prefer new forms of wood carving products. However, there are some Taiwanese Gen Z who appreciate the beauty and value of Thai traditional crafts and are willing to purchase and use them in their daily lives. These people often have a deeper knowledge of the cultural significance and history of these crafts.

The popularity of traditional Thai crafts among Taiwanese Gen Z is limited, but there is a potential market for these crafts for those who have a deeper understanding of their cultural significance. To increase the visibility of these crafts among the Taiwanese. In addition, it may be necessary to adapt these crafts to the preferences of Gen Z in Taiwan through 1. New media, 2. interactive technology 3. immersive experiences.

3.1. Value of Thai Traditional Wooden Crafts

According to the interviews with the traditional wooden craftsmen from Baan Kiew Lae Noi village, it was pointed out that most of the local master artisans are getting old and not used to taking care of the new media. Therefore, not many people approach them from social media, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it has become apparent how important digital platforms are for promoting and attracting visitors. Although some craftsmen have started to learn and use Facebook and TikTok as a platform to promote and attract people, there is still a gap between their methods and the younger generation's habits. The older generation of craftsmen was mainly influenced by their families and the environment of the village, where most of the people were doing this industry. How they got approached by wooden crafts was more proactive. Compared to the younger generation, they have easier and faster mobility in terms of relocation and digital mobility, so the affection for the wooden village is lower. In terms of the value the craftsmen want to transfer to the next generation, it is important to note that the craftsmen emphasized the importance of "Inheritance", "The story of the village" and the "Elephant symbol" are also important values to transfer, as it is a source of inspiration and cultural significance that needs to be preserved. The owner of the woodcarving shop in Ban Tawai Village and Co-owner of Baan Jang Nak Museum proposed content,

unique woodcarving stories, and effective display to better connect with the younger generation.

To bridge this gap and attract the younger generation, the preliminary direction (Figure 2) essential is to adapt Thai traditional crafts through new media, interactive technology, and immersive experiences while emphasizing the cultural significance and values associated with these crafts.

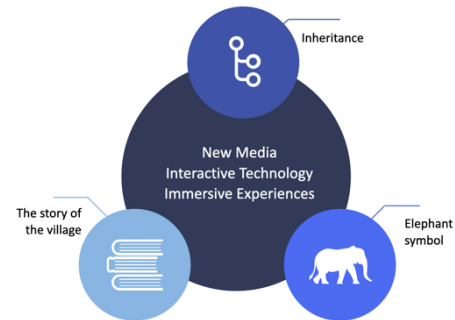


Figure 2. Preliminary direction

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, as Generation Z emerges as the largest consumer group, it is crucial for the Thai local traditional crafts community to recognize and tap into the potential market by understanding the digital communication preferences of Taiwanese Gen Z. This research highlights the existing gap between Taiwan and Thailand and suggests the utilization of new media and interactive immersive experiences that align with the behavioral patterns of Taiwanese Gen Z to effectively convey the value of traditional Thai wood carving (Figure 2).

The next phase of the research involves designing a captivating and inclusive concept that successfully communicates the significance of traditional Thai wood carving values to the younger generation in Taiwan. It aims to create engaging content and immersive experiences that bridge the communication divide between Thai traditional wood carving and the Taiwanese Gen Z audience, facilitating a better understanding and appreciation of the value.

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