



Transforming traditional trade of the hand-woven textile community to digital trade: The case study of Tai Lue group at Toong Mork Village, Chiang Kham, Phayao, Thailand

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Abstract

Aim: This article aims to investigate how the community of hand-woven textiles has adapted its trade to the era of disruptive technology through social media.

Method: The investigations are grounded in a qualitative research approach by 1) reviewing multiple documents and literature on three aspects, namely the history of community enterprise, traditional trade, and digital trade, 2) the conceptual framework and theory of Technological Mediation, and 3) in-depth interviews via three channels: face-to-face, telephone, and social media (Line: chat application) and a site investigation approach to conduct the interviews.

Findings: This study's findings demonstrate the variety of textile patterns present in Tai Lue hand-woven culture, from the well-known Pak Wan to the lesser-known Koh pattern. Natural fabrics and those with an antique design are more costly than synthetic ones. To reach its target audience in Sibsongpanna, Southern China, the hand-woven textiles collective relies heavily on the digital trade process. After their first trip to Toong Mork with their tour guide, Sibsongpanna customers reached out to the group via social media using the Line Chat Application.

Implications/Novel Contribution: Studies comparing and summarizing the process trend of digital exchange in the digital age are of interest to the hand-woven textile community. In addition, how social media has altered the daily routines and worldviews of ethnic group are fascinating to investigate.

Keywords: Ethnic Group, Digital Trade, Digital Anthropology, Hand Woven Textile, Technological Mediation Theory

Received: 13 February 2019 / **Accepted:** 19 March 2019 / **Published:** 22 April 2019

INTRODUCTION

There is now a global consensus that we have entered the digital era. The changing demographics of a small city are just one example of how societal development can have far-reaching consequences. The activities of traditional societies, like the Tai Lue handwoven textiles community in Toong Mork, Chiang Kham, and Phayao, are reshaped due to the prevalence of digital technologies and their impact on human beings ontologies (Basoglu, 2017; Dyah, Apriliyadi, Saparita, & Abbas, 2017; Mungpattanasunthon, 2019).

The Tai Lue people are a historical group with a rich cultural heritage. The Tai Lue are an ethnic group that first settled in the southern Chinese province of Yunnan (also known as Sibsongpanna or Xishuangbanna) and then spread to the rest of the country, as well as neighboring countries like Myanmar, Laos, and northern Thailand. You'll find the greatest concentration of Tai Lue in Nan, Chiang Rai, and Phayao provinces in Thailand. Pinyin is used for Xishuangbanna only when referencing the prefecture's place in the People's Republic of China.

Pinyin form, with Romanized Tai, (Encyclopedia of World Cultures, 2019) used when the Tai societal unit is at stake. They may have moved away from one another, but they carried on cultural practices like hand weaving.

Phayao Province is located in northern Thailand, and one of its smaller villages is Toong Mork, known for its Tai Lue handwoven textiles. Most of the Tai Lue population in this village came from the province of Xishuangbanna, and most of them work in agriculture. Housewives in Tai Lue favor handwoven goods like sarongs, local shirts, and other clothing after the harvest season ends. Weavers sold usable family surplus on the local market or through a cooperative business.

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People interested in buying, selling, or commissioning Tai Lue handwoven textiles would traditionally have to travel to the area. The more advanced technologies are developed at the present time, the more luxuries are available to people. For business purposes, Tai Lue communicates with clients via social media, primarily the Line messaging app. Therefore, this study aims to demonstrate how the traditional hand woven-textile market has shifted to online commerce. Using Toong Mork Village, Chiang Kham, Phayao as a case study, this article demonstrates the breadth of the research field known as "Cultural relay and Identities of Tai Lue Hand-Woven Textile Group." In addition, this article's findings are noteworthy unintended outcomes of the research.

Study Objectives

This study investigates how, in the age of disruptive technology, the hand-woven textiles community's traditional trade morphed into today's social media trade. To achieve the research objectives mentioned above, two primary study questions can be addressed as follow:

1. What are the influence factors that affect on Tai Lue hand-woven textiles trade?
2. How and when did Tai Lue hand-woven textiles group start to use digital technologies such as social media to deal with the customer?

Significant of the Study

This research contributes by assessing the state of the Tai Lue hand-woven textiles' ontologies as they transition from analog to digital commerce.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Enterprise

The concept of community enterprise is based on both views between sufficiency economy and sustainable development. In 2005, the Community Enterprise Promotion Act, B.E. 2548 was announced. The Act supports and promotes community enterprises to achieve the goals that have been set (Parinyasutinun, 2017; Teophanitkit, 2014).

The enterprise is a small business that pays intension to the individual and social relations rather than seeing the holistic and emphasize on financial impact in the business as a macro organization (Bjerke, 2013).

The concept of community enterprise refers to a group of activities people in a community initiated from learning things related to their daily life without having to depend on complex production methods. The community is the owner of the business by share market and benefit with their members that join corporate with at least 30 members. They primarily aim only at the market in the community. The community enterprise is similar to community business particularly in selling and buying goods and services, and the link with community economy in terms of demand and supply between consumers and producers inside and outside the community. To summarise, community enterprise means one kind of social activity because it was assembled from the household producers with their local products. Community enterprise may divide to two steps (AL Khuja & Mohamed, 2016; Boonvut, 2017; Kharina. & Naully, 2018; Parinyasutinun, 2017):

- 1) Basic community enterprise such as daily products for consumption.
- 2) Advance community enterprise such as service that ready to open outside market. Tai Lue hand-woven textile group at Toong Mork is a basic community enterprise.

Traditional Trade

Traditionally, the product distribution channels have been designed to sell for customer in the same village at the community enterprise location and the weaver house. On the other side, the community enterprise concept was created to support the member to sell product for outside customers. Besides, the government also organise to promote a local product like hand-woven textile at the annually events for every district and province.

Digital Trade

In the 21st century, the digital economy reflected on several commerce and also encourages community enterprise to engage new modern trade. The concept of digital trade refers to the use of digital technologies to facilitate businesses without limiting it to just online sales or purchases (United Nations, 2016). Social networks,

such as Facebook, Line and Instagram have become a typical means of communication between businesses and consumers. In China, almost half of all online shopping is carried out on smartphones (El-Den, Adikhari, & Adikhari, 2017; Wilson, 2016). Sibsongpanna shoppers are living in Yunnan, the southern province of China. They use Line Chat Application to be a tool to contact and deal business with Tai Lue hand-woven textile group in Toong Mork village, Chiang Kham district, Phayao province, Thailand.

In conclusion, digital trade is a market that has business activities and dealing communication via digital channel such as 1) social media; Line Chat Application, Facebook, Instagram 2) internet web browser; online shopping website and shopping application.

METHODOLOGY

This research stands on qualitative research by in-depth interview with the member of hand-woven textile group at Toong Mork Village, Chiang Kham, Phayao, Thailand.

The investigations are based on qualitative research method by starting with 1) reviewing multiple documents and literatures on three aspects, that is, the history of community enterprise, traditional trade, and digital trade, 2) the conceptual framework and theory of Technological Mediation, and 3) in-depth interview with the semi-structure questions in 3 channels; face-to-face interview, telephone interview and social media interview (Line: chat application) and site investigation approach are adopted to conduct the community study and data analysis.

The participants reported the first in-depth interviews at the community by face-to-face method; second interview with the telephone called, and also lastly the member of hand-woven textile group participated the enquiries via social media such as Line Chat Application.

The sample group of this study is 10 participants from 40 members of hand-woven textile group at Toong Mork village, Chiang Kham District, Phayao Province, Thailand. They were weaving the textiles when the researcher went to collect data at the fieldwork.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research article is based on the theory of Technological Mediation that has been developed from Phenomenology approach to Postphenomenology approach. The main idea of this concept represent about roles of technology reshape human ontologies and to investigate the relations between technology and society (Mungpattanasunthon, 2019).

For the study, the researcher applies Technological Mediation Theory with the previous conceptual framework as the below diagram. The aim of this conceptual is to explore the social phenomena in term of the transformation between traditional trade to digital trade. These changing may explain by the influence of social media technologies have been reshaped the member of Toong Mork hand-woven textile group. Diagram1 The Conceptual Framework of Phemenenology and Postphenomenology approaches

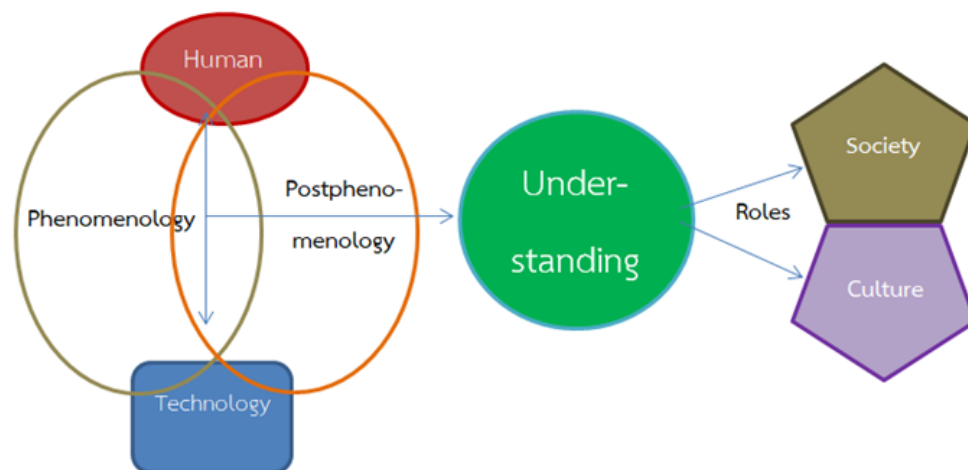


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of phemenenology and postphenomenology approaches (Mungpattanasunthon, 2019)

Assumption of the Study

The results of this study are assumes that social media such as Line Chat Application influences to reshape the member being such as their work activities. Therefore, the digital technology is the important key that transforms the traditional trade of Toong Mork hand-woven textile community to digital trade and in the future may transfer to e-commerce.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Toong Mork is a small village that was settled in Chiang Kham district, Phayao province, the North of Thailand. Previously, most of the population occupations are agriculturist and farmer. When out of harvest season, the housewives have been woven the local natural textiles such as clothes, scarf, bed cover and etc. The enterprise of Tai Lue hand-woven textiles community at Toong Mork village -was founded on November 9 in 1989 by the rural rehabilitation foundation. The organization has a project to restore ancient cotton to Chiang Kham community, and to earn more income and spend their beneficial free time. After that, the community development of Chiang Kham District and the chairman of the Toong Mork Housewife Group at that time, Mrs. Kamchon Jai-Kla, realized the importance of cotton swirling, and therefore they brought the materials to the Toong Mork Housewife Group and achieved satisfactory results. Later, the Department of Industrial Promotion Chiang Mai Province sent the specialist to give knowledge about the dyeing of cotton produced in cotton lines. The housewives was satisfies with the project. From this point they set up the Tai Lue hand-woven group. For the first time, there are 15 founding members and 5 weaving looms and were settled a group at the member's house. They invested 100 baht each; with the total fund 1,500 baht.

Every year, Toong Mork hand-woven textile group has more members and the weaving business was expanded, grew up by being supported both academically and materials from many agencies. The Tai Lue hand-woven textile group has been registered as Chiang Kham Agricultural Cooperative in 2003 and has received 3 product standards from the Department of Industrial Promotion, including Nam Lai (water flow) pattern, Jok pattern, and Yok Dok pattern. In addition, Tai Lue hand-woven culture has diversity of the textile pattern such as Pak Wan and Koh pattern. The ancient pattern has more expensive price than others and also natural fabrics have higher cost than synthetic fabrics.



Figure 2. Nam Lai (water flow) pattern



Figure 3. Pak Wan pattern

The community has been started using social media such as Line to contact and trade with the customer around 3-4 years ago or year 2015. The process of digital trade is the most convenience and popular for the hand-woven textiles group to contact with the customer especially who live in Sibsongpanna, Southern of China. Accordingly, Sibsongpanna customers have been contacted the group via social media channel with Line Chat Application after they traveled to Toong Mork for first time with tour guide. They satisfy with Toong Mork products, and then they have been continued to orders until now. They are the purchasers who have been ordered highest number of Tai Lue hand-woven textiles. Approximately 100 pieces of the short Salong were requested from Sibsongpanna customers per time per order.

The procedures to deal business between the Tai Lue hand-woven textile group and the customer are 1) the customers send the picture of textile pattern that they prefer the group weave 2) choose colour and the texture of textile between natural fabric and synthetic fabric 3) negotiate their satisfy price 4) the customer transfer bond for approximately 50% of the total price to the agent of the group 5) the agent, chairman of the group, transfer and share order to the member 6) member weave to order 7) the agent of the group send the picture of products to the customer 8) the customer transfer the rest of payment to the agent 9) the agent send the order via shipping. All the communication processes of trades are managed via Line Chat Application. The important key factor of Sibsongpanna customers has been selected Toong Mork village to be the supplier to produce hand-woven textile products is the colour of Tai Lue textile. Toong Mork not only weaves the original colour as Tai Lue styles; dark colour such as black and dark blue but also made to order like light colour as pink, green, purple, and light blue. By the fact, Sibsongpanna also has Tai Lue hand-woven textile products but they do not produce the light colour as Toong Mork made. Moreover, the original Tai Lue hand-woven textile in Sibsongpanna does have special techniques as Toong Mork Housewife Group do. For example, the ancient patterns; Jok and Yok Dok are the difficult techniques that rarely hand-woven group remains weave but Tai Lue people in Toong Mork village still conserve and teach to their household member. Besides, the Sibsongpanna customers require specific yarns like silver and gold tinsel to weave combine with the original one.

Consequently, the Sibsongpanna customers have been continuously ordered hand-woven textile from Toong Mork community enterprise via Line Chat Application.

Discussion

At the current, Digitalisation is the most impact on human ontologies and the relations between technologies and society. The changing of digital stream influences to hand-woven textile group especially transforming the pattern of trade from traditional trade to digital trade. These phenomena reshape the way of traditional life of Toong

Mork village. The community enterprise at Toong Mork is not an e-commerce yet. At this point, therefore the group has not change to digital trade as online market. However, there are in the situation of automatic transformation to the modern trade in the century of digital era by the demand of customers.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Recent day, digital technology is shaping the future of global trade and investment. One aspect of the adoption of digital technology by global exporters and importers is the purchase and sale of goods and services online, which is part of what is broadly understood as e-commerce (United Nations, 2016).

Although Toong Mork hand-woven textile group are not full transferred to online commerce, now, the group is becoming on the stage of transformation the mainstream of global trade. Both of traditional and digital trades are the significant channel for Tai Lue hand-woven textile group. Traditional trade is the main market to do business with local people, while digital trade is suitable for nation and global customers such as Sibsongpanna buyer.

Limitations of Study

There are some limitations needed to be noted as follow: The limitation is the results that was represented and discussed on this article are unexpected outcome. Therefore, it might need some fulfil the in-depth information about the process of trading such as 1) how often the agent from the hand-woven textile group contact the Sibsongpanna customers and 2) how different communication result between contact via face-to-face and Line Chat Application. These two interesting questions may need to set up for the future research.

Recommendations

For the future research, it is interested to study in the different area of hand-woven textile group in order to compare and summary the procedure pattern of digital trade in the digital era. Moreover, there are some fascinating to investigate or finding the impact of social media that have been reshaped the ethic group daily life and their ontologies.

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