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Chapter 14

Engaging Communities Through the Knowledge Transmission of Archaeological Heritage in Highland Pang Mapha, Northwest Thailand



Rasmi Shoocongdej

Abstract This chapter presents the importance of knowledge transmission as one of the most powerful tools for heritage management. This is done through the examination of Long Long Rak Coffin Cave in Pang Mapha, Mae Hong Son province, Northwest of Thailand. This research studies the complexity and time-continuity required of archaeological knowledge transmission processes. The study performs this through local schools and community outreach in order to create a sense of ownership for preserving the archaeological site representing the prehistoric log coffin culture that links the highland regional network between South China and Southeast Asia. Finally, I discuss tribal communities' embrace of archaeological knowledge for developing heritage tourism.

Keywords Community · Engagement · Knowledge · Transmission · Archaeological heritage · Tourism · Northwest Thailand

Introduction

Following in the steps of many parts of the world, Southeast Asian archaeology has become very important as an economic asset (Hitchcock et al. 2010). In Thailand, cultural heritage tourism has rapidly received attention and promotion from the Tourism Authority of Thailand and Designated Area for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA). At the same time, archaeology is also used to promote and empower the local community through community-based archaeology/tourism/museums for sustainable heritage management (Prishanchit 2005). However, the pattern common in many developing countries is that research results are quickly

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turned into new tourist attractions, which ignores the process of community participation in heritage. This hurried and flawed approach to proper heritage management threatens to affect the sustainability of these archaeological sites in the long term (Shoocongdej 2011a, b).

The integration of community-based archaeology and tourism has grown slowly in Thailand. The majority of such work within communities has focused on open-air sites and/or local museums (Natapitu 2007; Prishanchit 2005). These tools are powerful educational vehicles for local communities and visitors to learn about local history and appreciate local heritage. To improve the quality of information disseminated to the general public and tourists, engaging the community in research is a valuable first step. To achieve that, a two-way communication method of knowledge transmission plays an important role in archaeological heritage management by facilitating the emergence of a sense of belonging and place. However, creating a sense of belonging and ownership so that the sites are preserved in a sustainable way requires more than merely linking a local population to an archaeological site by location. It can be much more challenging when the current local population is not connected to that archaeological heritage through ancestry or historical events.

This chapter explores archaeological heritage management in an ethnically diverse area where the current local groups are not the descendant population and have no historical connection to the archaeological sites. I present an approach used in recent fieldwork on Long Long Rak Cave in Highland Pang Mapha, Mae Hong Son province, northwest Thailand to argue that the presence of a long-term continuous research in the area in conjunction with efforts to continuously and deliberately, at all stages, engage local inhabitants in a two-way transmission of archaeological knowledge and history can create a sense of ownership of archaeological heritage even if there is no hereditary relation.

Tham Lod Communities in Highland Pang Mapha

Pang Mapha is a mountainous area in Mae Hong Son province, along the border between Thailand and Myanmar. The inhabitants of this area consist of two groups as designated by the Thai government: the lowland “Thai” and the upland “hill tribe” minorities (Morton and Baird 2019). Most of the ethnic groups in northwestern Thailand migrated from South China and Myanmar (Young 1962). I will refer to the upland “hill tribe” minorities as “ethnic community(ies)/groups”. The ethnic community is comprised of six main ethnic groups, namely Shan, Karen, Lua, Lisu, Black and Red Lahu, and Hmong. Based on ethnographic research and oral histories in Highland Pang Mapha, most of these ethnic groups are not indigenous to this area. (Hoontrakul 2003, 2007).

Tham Lod is a village under administrative organization of Pang Mapha District with a predominantly ethnic Shan heritage. The Shan were the first ethnic group to come to Pang Mapha, approximately two hundred years ago (Phusahaad et al. 2003). The current population consists of two major groups: the first generation

holding Thai nationality and a more recent migrants lacking Thai nationality. A total population of 938 consists of 299 households. Their major occupations are agriculture, animal husbandry, and ecotourism centered on the famously attractive Tham Lod cave (Fig. 14.1) of Mae Hong Son. There are three major governmental structures in the community: a village school providing kindergarten to junior high school instruction, a community hospital, and Tham Lod Wildlife Conservation Development and Extension Station (hence forth Tham Lod Station). The archaeological evidence discussed here has been obtained over several excavation seasons at the Tham Lod village under the control of Tham Lod Station. There have been many important discoveries dating from prehistoric periods to the historical Lanna period. Importantly, the Tham Lod community is not a descendent population and enjoys no historical linkage to any of these archaeological sites or the Log Coffin Culture.

Log coffin sites in Mae Hong Son have often been referred to by the locals as “Phi Man cave” which the general public is particularly interested in. “Phi Man” is a Shan language term meaning “the appearance of a ghost.” It is a shared local belief of the Shan, Karen, and black Lahu that Phi Man spoke an unknown language that later became associated with the Log Coffin Culture of Pang Mapha (Shoocongdej 2019). This is of particular interest because it is so closely related to the local belief in the Shan spirit and the evidence is more tangible (coffins) than in other periods. Here, we also use the word “Phi Man” to represent the coffin cave of Long Long Rak.



Fig. 14.1 Mapping the Phi Man Long Long Rak cave. (Source: IHE Project. Used by permission)

“Long Long” refers to coated coffins. “Rak” refers to the lacquer (*Gluta usitata*), the resin used to seal the coffins (Shoocongdej 2020a). Long Long Rak coffin cave is an archaeological site located in a forest reserve area under Tham Lod Station (Fig. 14.1). This site is the first to reveal such extraordinary evidence of textiles, baskets, decorated strings, and weaving looms all of which are similar to the material cultures of groups currently living in the area, as well as other locations in northern Thailand and upland Southeast Asia more generally. This may represent a past indigenous knowledge that is directly related to modern groups in the region (Shoocongdej 2020b).

Tourism Developments at the Tham Lod Village

The general policy of Thailand’s tourism industry since the 1960s has been to promote the hill tribes of northern Thailand as cultural assets. The highlands of Mae Hong Son are best known by foreigner tourists for the trekking tours that focus on the authentic and exotic ethnic cultures of the region. In 1997, the Local Administration of Pang Mapha district created the slogan “*Phi Man (Spirit or Log Coffin) Land, the Land of a Hundred Caves, Spectacular Mountain Landscape, and Integrated Tribes*” for its tourism campaign. Importantly, my first project in the area, a cave exploration and data-based study of Mae Hong Son province (2001–2003) became an element of local tourism development policy (Dilokwanich 1999).

The initial tourism effort developed at the Tham Lod cave (Fig. 14.2) in Tham Lod village in 1987 has transformed Mae Hong Son into a significant eco and adventure destination tourism (Lortanavanit 2009: 151–156). Tham Lod is not only well-known for its cave formations but also for the log coffin remains. Tham Lod cave is legally controlled by Tham Lod Station—a government legal entity. However, while the Tham Lod communities have negotiated their tourism activities with the Tham Lod Station, the major income sources from lantern holding and bamboo rafting excursions in the Tham Lod cave is not fully under their control (Payadi 2000).

History of Archaeological Research in Highland Pang Mapha

Archaeological sites containing log coffins discovered in Pang Mapha have been known to the local communities and archeologists for several decades as Chester Gorman Spirit Cave (Gorman 1970). In the years since 1997 an increasing number of archaeological projects have been carried out in the area by Thai archaeologists and scientists (e.g., Dilokwanich 1999; Shoocongdej 2004, 2019) (Table 14.1).



Fig. 14.2 Tham Lod cave. (Source: <https://www.cavelodge.com>. Used by permission)

In the period 1998–2000, I first joined the Cave Exploration and Data-Based System in Mae Hong Son Province to document the sites in the local karst topography. Most of the survey sites had been destroyed by looters and animals. Since joining the Cave Exploration, I have excavated two key sites in Tham Lod village including Tham Lod rockshelter and Long Long Rak cave to establish and expand the chronology of the region (Fig. 14.3).

The Tham Lod rockshelter, located near the Tham Lod cave, represents the earliest settlement of modern humans in the area, dating from 32,000 to 2000 years ago. The site was used for seasonal habitation and was the location of a lithic workshop. During that same time period the site functioned as a cemetery containing the skeletal remains of at least four individuals, including most notably that of a woman who has come to be known as the “Tham Lod Woman” (Hayes et al. 2017; Pureepatpong 2007; Shoocongdej 2007).

For the log coffin sites dated 2300–1100 years ago there are no human remains included in the archaeological evidence found *in situ*, until the new discoveries at the Long Long Rak cave in 2015. Log Coffin Culture is a unique feature of mortuary practice found in highland Pang Mapha. This mortuary practice is found throughout Southeast Asia indicating a relationship between the peoples and cultures in South China and highland Pang Mapha in the past. This research thus places Tham Lod village in an international context (Shoocongdej 2019).

Table 14.1 Chronology of research projects carried out in Pang Mapha, Mae Hong Son Province

Years	Projects
1998–2000	Cave Exploration and Data-Based System in Mae Hong Son Province
2001–2003	Highland Archaeology in Pang Mapha Phase I (HAPPI)
2003–2006	Highland Archaeology in Pang Mapha Phase II (HAPPII)
2007–2008	Archaeological Heritage Management at Tham Lod and Ban Rai Rockshelters (AHM)
2007–2008	Archaeology and Arts Project (AAP)
2007–2008	Archaeological Exploration and Sustainable Heritage Management in Pai-Pang Mapha-Khun Yuan Districts, Mae Hong Son Province Phase I (PPKI)
2009–2010	Archaeological Exploration and Sustainable Heritage Management in Pai-Pang Mapha-Khun Yuan, Mae Hong Son Province Phase II (PPKII)
2011–2012	Archaeological Exploration and Sustainable Heritage Management in Pai-Pang Mapha-Khun Yuan, Mae Hong Son Province Phase III (PPKIII)
2013–2016	Interaction between Human and Environments in Highland Pang Mapha (IHE)
2017–2021	Prehistoric Population and Cultural Dynamics in Highland Pang Mapha (PCD)

The Archaeological Management and Knowledge Transmission Processes

Through public outreach programs archaeologists have been properly introducing their research findings to local ethnic communities through village meetings and school visits. I have also published extensively in academic journals and popular magazines and have disseminated my research results through such diverse channels as public talks, professional conferences, and workshops. For the general audience and as promotional efforts, I have authored documentaries, country-wide television documentary presentations, and engage the team to set up internet websites and Facebook posts (Kantrasri 2016, 2020). This knowledge has also been disseminated through an explanatory story-telling program presented to tourists during their visits to the log coffins sites inside Tham Lod cave. Over several decades, the local people of Mae Hong Son province have gradually learned about and come to appreciate the archaeological discoveries in highland Pang Mapha brought to light through the excavation at Long Long Rak Cave.

The question naturally arises as to how to create the sense of place and belonging among the local community who live close to the sites. The sense of place involves a relationship between a people and a place highlighting the importance of everyday life and a sense of identity (Davis 2019; Hayden 1995). The sense of place can derive from short-term interaction between recent immigrants established

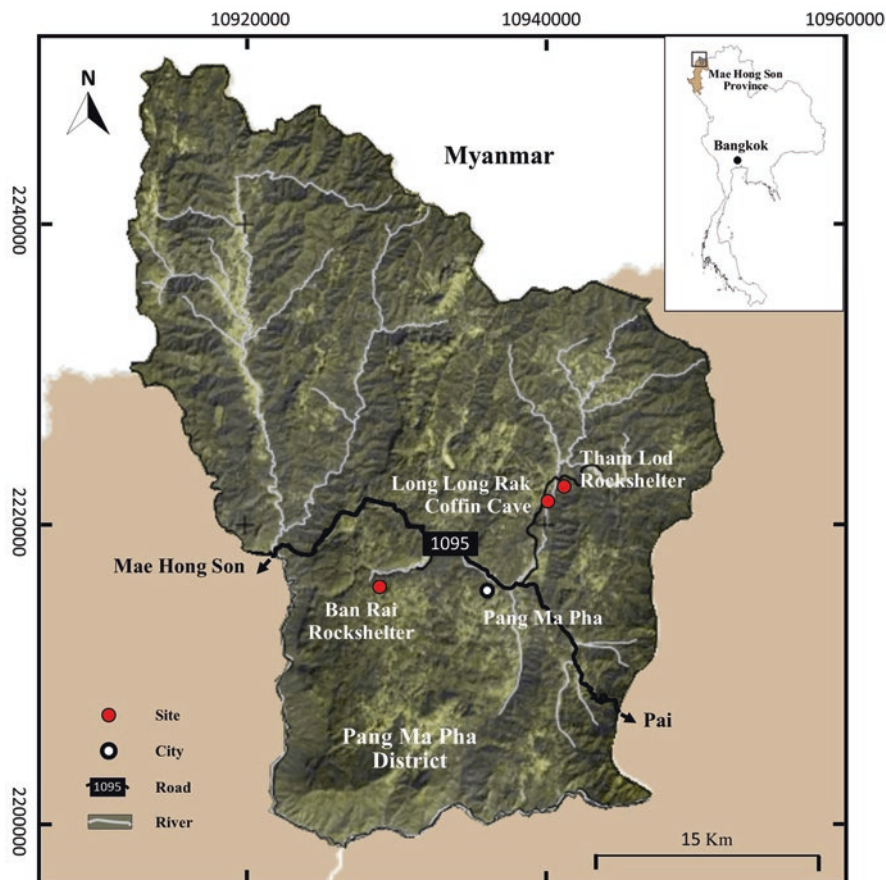


Fig. 14.3 Location of Tham Lod cave, Tham Lod rockshelter, and Phi Man Long Long Rak cave. (Source: IHE Project. Used by permission)

communities whether or not the latter has prior connection to the place it occupies (Wright 2015).

The focus now shifts to the management of this new knowledge in the interaction between the human and environments in Highland Pang Mapha. This has been done since 2003 to the present. Prior to two recent projects, the previous ones have continued their activities, including disseminating archaeological knowledge and local history in the form of skills training according to the needs of the Tham Lod communities. This includes Thai-English guide training, homestay host training, and product design training. Other training efforts have focused on heritage management skills such as museum workshops and a children's workshop on detection of the past. Many generations of children and adults in the villages have participated in these activities (Shoocongdej 2004). Recent projects have trained children to serve as lantern-holding guides and bamboo rafting guides in the Tham Lod cave. Others

have become teachers at the village school and one became a research assistant in my archaeology project. It could be said that the villagers have accepted the importance of archaeological sites, although the technical details are not always thoroughly understood (Kantarasri 2020). But the continuation of research marginally adding to what they already know has given them new memories to add on to history.

The engagement methodology involved group discussions, participatory action research, and participant observations (Table 14.2). There are four components of the community involvement processes: dissemination of information, community consultation, community meetings, and consensus community decision making on the management plans (Fig. 14.4, Table 14.3). The project applies the participatory action research method to make the local communities aware of the significance of

Table 14.2 The knowledge transmission processes between 2013–2021

Years	Project	Community meetings	Workshops	Site visits	Media
2013–2016	IHE	3	4	13	27
2017–2021	PCD	5	4	10	29



Fig. 14.4 Research teams have regularly consulted and returned archeology knowledge to the community at the Tham Lod temple which is a respected community gathering place. (Source: PCD Project. Used by permission)

Table 14.3 Tham Lod community, school, government and private sector in PDC project involvement on the management of Long Long Rak Cave by the PDC project (Na Nongkai 2021)

Stakeholders	Processes (no.)	Groups	Activities
Tham Lod communities	1. Meetings (4) 2. In depth interview (9) 3. Focus groups (2) 4. Site visits (2) 5. Workshop (1) 6. Seminar (1)	a senior group a headman a village committee a rafting group a women's group a guide and lantern holding group a homestay group a tourism group a village pioneer group a local product group	1. Disseminating research result to community 2. Display a temporary exhibition at the meeting 3. Brain storming on the cave management 4. Site visits 5. Brain storming on community museum 6. Workshop on guide training 7. Seminar on local history
Ban Tham Lod school	1. In depth interview (4) 2. Site visits (1) 3. Meetings (4) 4. Study tour at the site (4) 5. Survey and design a nature and archaeological trail (1)	Teachers Junior high school students	1. Introduction of teachers and researchers 2. Brainstorming on local histories 3. An approach to develop the Long Long Rak cave as a learning center 4. A children English guide activity 5. Site survey and visit 6. An experimental design on Long Long Rak cave as an educational site
Tham Lod Station	1. In depth interview (2) 2. Focus group interview (2) 3. Site visits (1) 4. Survey and design a nature and archaeological trail (2)	a head of station and officers	1. Site visit and introduction to the Long Long Rak cave 2. Brainstorming on conservation of the cave and knowledge management 3. Survey and explore the trail from Tham Lod cave to Long Long Rak cave as a new nature and cultural trail 4. Brainstorming on exhibition of Long Long Rak cave at the center
Mae Hong Son chamber of commerce	Focus group interview (2) site visits (1)	President and members	1. Site visit and introduction to the Long Long Rak cave 2. Brainstorming on conservation of the cave and carrying the knowledge dissemination to the general public

archaeological sites and to promote a sense of co-ownership in protecting the archaeological sites. The potential long-term economic benefits also facilitate attention.

Principles of knowledge management have been transmitted regularly to Tham Lod village school, Ban Tham Lod communities, Tham Lod Station, and Mae Hong Son Chamber of Commerce groups. That process has included meetings, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, site visits, workshops, seminars, and surveys (Tables 14.2 and 14.3).

Discussion and Conclusions

The contemporary generations in the community have engaged with archaeological heritages in the Tham Lod village through their personal experiences and memory. The continued activities offered by the research projects foster a feeling of belonging that contributes to an overall sense of place. The archaeological heritage has bonded the past to the cultural heritage of these ethnic groups to the present.

Tham Lod cave has served the community as a valuable source of income and village identity for many decades. The sense of belonging and sense of place are very strong in the local population. While the Tham Lod rockshelter and Long Long Rak cave were only recently discovered and studied by outside archaeologists, the Tham Lod community has enthusiastically embraced the new knowledge to better understand the sites and their history. The media, including social media, have played a significant role in transferring this knowledge. This exposure has facilitated greater community understanding of the value of the sites and made archaeology more relevant to the community in numerous ways.

First, a variety of forms of collective memory exist among Tham Lod villagers. Personal and collective memories are associated with growing awareness and appreciation of archaeological projects since 1998. The project teams have lived near the site and participated in traditional village activities for several years. Other memories relate to the excavations and the discovery of skeletal remains from Tham Lod rock shelter dating to 32,000 years ago making it the oldest site yet found in Mae Hong Son province. Tham Lod youth grow up in a globalized culture watching news on cable television and the internet, and through these media they have received regularly updated information concerning the Tham Lod woman (Fig. 14.5). Over the past five years new memories have been created through the news regularly presented by television, news articles, magazines, online magazines, podcasts, radio programming, and social media focused on the facial approximation of the 13,000-year-old Tham Lod woman (Fig. 14.6). Results recently were published in *Antiquity* (Hayes et al. 2017) and the story has been widely picked up and repeated by national and international media. The continuing discovery of exciting archaeological evidence from Long Long Rak cave is frequently reported as breaking news on national television in Thailand.



Fig. 14.5 A documentary of the 13,000-year-old Tham Lod woman appeared on national television in Thailand. (Source: Thai PBS <https://program.thaipbs.or.th/TherKaoRaoKrai/episodes/63128>, used by permission)

Fig. 14.6 A facial approximation of the 13,000-year-old Tham Lod woman. (Source: Hayes et al. 2017. Used by permission)



These collective memories create a self-identification of community members with the sites. For example, the Tham Lod Station published the picture and information about the Tham Lod cave and the woman for the general public. During and after the excavation at Long Long Rak cave, numerous members of Tham Lod community responded quite favorably to the experience of visits to the site and learning to appreciate the archaeological heritage.

Second, the news and social media have had a strong impact on sense of pride, place, and belonging by publicizing archaeological activities in local villages.

Previously, I found for several years that my own efforts at working on the issue of community engagement were not receiving enough attention. Perhaps the presented information was too academic and difficult for the community to understand. Also, not all villagers possess sufficient knowledge and reading skills, thereby resulting in a greater reliance on television and social media platforms. Regardless of the source, the acquisition of this new knowledge has had a positive impact that not only makes the Tham Lod villagers proud of their archaeological heritage but extends that pride to the people of Mae Hong Son and the Thai general public as well. It can be said that these publicly reported news stories repeated on social media have contributed even further to an increased sense of pride and self-esteem among the Tham Lod community.

A third positive outcome is the recognition of mutual benefits of Long Long Rak cave by a variety of stakeholders with a broad range of interests and ideas. The elders and the school authorities want to preserve and use the site as a learning center (Fig. 14.7). Villagers want to integrate the narrative of Tham Lod rockshelter and Long Long Rak cave into the village local museum development plan. The village headman, village committee, and Mae Hong Son tourism authority would like to develop the site as a new tourist destination. The Tham Lod Station suggests developing a connective trail linking the natural and archaeological heritage along a route from the Tham Lod cave to Long Long Rak cave. And finally, the Mae Hong Son Chamber of Commerce would like to conserve and protect the caves as local and national cultural heritage site, thereby enhancing their inherent tourist appeal.



Fig. 14.7 Students paying respect to the cave spirit on their visit to the Phi Man Long Long Rak cave. (Source: PCD project. Used by permission)

Hopefully such diverse ideas and goals will result in the creation of a sustainable plan to safeguard the sites in the future through sound cultural heritage management.

Finally, continued transmission of knowledge to the public will expand and strengthen the impact on local education institutions and economic development. The Tham Lod school, Tham Lod kindergarden school, Pang Mapha school, other agencies such as the Tham Lod Nature and Wildlife Education Center, and the Tham Lod Library, seek to employ archaeological knowledge in their educational programs for the benefit of future generations. For example, the schools have incorporated archaeological knowledge into the local history curriculum. The economic impact includes the utilization of this knowledge in interpreting archaeological sites and training local guides in an effort to generate increased revenues from tourism and the branding of local products.

In conclusion, the long-term involvement of archaeological knowledge transmission and social activities are keys to the successful construction of a sense of place and belonging, regardless of the presence or absence of true ancestral ties to archaeological sites in Tham Lod village. Knowledge dissemination and community engagement is a fundamental strategy in the creation of a storytelling narrative about archaeological and cultural heritages in an area where there is a conscious attempt to construct new identities linking community, place, and heritage.

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