

## INSIGHT INTO STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION AND REVITALIZING LOCAL VALUES UNDER GLOBALIZATION: THE ROLE OF THAI NITAN

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### ABSTRACT

A folktale, fairytale or traditional story is known as Nitan in Thailand. In the face of social and cultural changes the disappearance of Thai Nitan has amplified the weakening social cohesion and diminishing local values in Thailand. To some extent, this evaporation results in social disorganization and disintegration of community network. In this paper, we show how communities are found accessing our collection of Thai Nitan via mobile devices. The results demonstrate that our system improves opportunities for strengthening social cohesion and mutual understanding of local values via Thai Nitan. Thus it promotes a sense of belongings that revitalizes local values under globalization.

**Index Terms**— Thai Nitan, revitalization, local value, folktale, social cohesion, mobile application, globalization

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Many concepts of individual, family, religious and secular values are present in Nitan. Nitan customarily consists of tales handed down from generation to generation. It embodies local beliefs and ideas and reflect cultural heritage in the form of entertainment [1]. According to Penjore [9], Bhutanese folktales have great moral and social important that drawn from everyday's life experiences such as interactions with other people. On the other hand, there is also a tendency to separate a person from people. For example, an orphan character in folktales symbolize as being different from rest of society [4]. Hence, the folktale is one of vehicles to learn about our culture. Nitan keeps traditional stories alive, and rationalizes and sanctions accepted behaviors. Through Nitan, young children learn about local culture, the concepts and values to make sense of the society. Mostly, Thai Nitan is not recorded but is told through story-telling. Thus the availability of written forms of Nitan remains scarce. To face sharing challenges of Thai Nitan, the same community has to engage in a common interest [7]. It is also known as social capital. Most importantly, it shows evidence of measurable economic

payoff using social capital in terms of networks and social relations through cooperation [5]. For mutual benefits in our society, therefore, this project aims at strengthening the social cohesion of Thailand by collecting, maintaining and distributing Thai Nitan using information and communication technology. The study in Native American communities shows that the use of information and communication technology can strengthen their values and traditions [10]. By creating shared understanding amongst tribal members, communities develop the tribal media through their transitional means of communication medium.

The paper is organized as follow. We begin to identify problems, prepare objectives, develop strategies and put them into action. In the project initiation stage, we carry out surveys to identify current social problems relating to social cohesion and globalization, as well as to gauge the familiarity of Thai culture and Thai Nitan amongst the general public. With SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Treats) analysis, we analyze and identify the current social problems, and then investigate the role of Thai Nitan in the face of globalization. In addition, this project investigates the opportunities for social interactions and value exchange. The project initiation stage assists us in the second stage of the project, which is to prepare project objectives. The project objectives are derived from the problems that had been identified in the project initiation stage. Through preparing project objectives, we identify the various constructive ripple effects, and set them as secondary objectives. These primary and secondary objectives become the framework for developing strategies that put into action through the project implementation. The project final stage is our project development. It describes main ideas of the SWOT were used to guide the design of the Thai Nitan mobile service. We developed a mobile-based on prototype to relax availability of Thai Nitan. To resolve the poor recording and documentation of and lack of access to Thai Nitan, the research team conducts field trips and focus group meetings to collect Thai Nitan. After the questionnaires for surveys were sent out, Thai Nitan has been collected. Community workshops will be conducted to

develop a presentation and dissemination plan for the Nitán collections.

## 2. SURVEY

By the time we were ready to distribute the questionnaires, it became apparent that our research funds were still in padding process. As a result, for collecting data, we chose to mail to four different provinces (Mae Hong Son, Chonburi, Kanchanaburi and Prachuabkhirikhan) in Thailand. Then we have received only 40 copies. By following-up survey, we may send a new copy of the survey questionnaire with the following up letter. Sending a follow-up letter might be useful for us to increase return rates in mail survey but we have postponed for further study. Respondents are assured that their responses to the survey were anonymous. A research assistant delivers the questionnaire to the home of respondents and explains them our study. Then the questionnaire is left the respondent to complete, and the researcher picks it up later.

Survey Questions	Percent of Respondents (%)
1. How often do you tell/read Thai stories to your children?	
None	23.25
1-2 / day	11.63
1-2 / week	39.53
1-2 / month	25.58
2. Do you think your children like to listen to Thai stories?	
Not sure	16.28
No, they absolutely do not	0
Yes, they can listen	32.56
Yes, they love it	51.16
3. Do you think telling Thai stories is good for your children?	
No, it is not good	0.00
Yes, it is ok	23.25
Yes, it is good	2.33
Yes, it is very good	74.42
4. Do you think all Thai stories have value to teach?	
No	0.00
Yes	100
5. Do you think all Thai stories have lesson to learn?	
No	0.00
Yes	100
6. How many Thai stories do you know?	
None	2.33
1-10	39.53
11-19	13.95
More than 20	44.19

What kinds of Thai stories do you know/tell to your children?	
Not sure	10.89
Loyalty	15.22
Morality	10.87
Ethics	4.35
Tradition	2.17
Respect	0.00
All above 2-6	56.50

**Table 1 Thai Nitán survey results in Thailand from May to July 2008**

Table 1 presents Thai Nitán survey results in Thailand that returned to us from May to July 2008. There are seven questions. According to our analysis, there are possible attitudes for Nitán but parents know a limited number of folktales. For example, most our respondents (89.11%) have answered that Thai stories have values to know and tell for our children. First, a total of 72.75% of our parents tell stories to our children. Secondly, none of our children hate to listening Nitán. Thirdly, most of our parents tend to agree that telling folktales are good for their children. Next question 4 and 5 imply that Thai stories have values to teach and are good lessons to learn. Responses to question 6 show that only, 2.33% of respondents do not know any Thai stories while 39.53% know 1-10 stories, 13.95% know 11-20 stories and 44.19% know more than 20. Finally, most respondents can identify values and lessons associated with Thai stories but only 10.89% respondents are not sure about it. In the case of this final question, we need a mechanism for identifying Nitán that presents different Thai values and lessons accordingly.

## 3. SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis is used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats involved in a Thai Nitán project. It provides a direction, and serves as a basis for the development of our system.

### 3.1 Strengths

A constructive ripple effect of this strong network of communities and information networks is the prevention of crime and juvenile delinquency. A large social network increases the capacity of community for informal surveillance and supervision. The networks within a children's family, school, and larger community have effects on his/her opportunities and choices, educational achievement, behavior and development. Hence, it helps to shape the children's values and interests. In micro perspective, strong family ties narrow the gaps between generations and improves the transferability of positive values.

A strong social cohesion allows people to identify themselves as part of the society. They would be able to recognize their role in the society and see themselves as agents of development. Also, they would learn to appreciate how, as individual member, they have benefited from the society. This enforces a sense of obligation to help others, and a willingness to contribute in functioning of the community and society. This can translate to cleaner public spaces and safer streets as people become responsible members of the society. In addition, there are strong links between social cohesion and subjective feelings of happiness. By establishing strong local and national communities and networks, we are able to gain happiness through our relationships with other people [6]. This is known as non-material culture that includes intangible creations such as beliefs, norms and values [3].

### 3.2 Weakness

In the face of globalization, world-wide connection is playing an increasingly important role. This project would try to negotiate between meeting our project objectives and the reality of globalization. To keep up with current trends and to improve accessibility, the Thai Nitán Collection will primarily be accessible through information technology. However, by doing so, some limitations to the Thai Nitán collection are anticipated.

One of our project objectives is to boost social interaction through usage of the collection. However, the ability to establish effective social interactions in the virtual world remains doubtful. As much as possible, the Thai Nitán collection would try to enhance interactions amongst users in the process of accessing it. As accessibility to the Thai Nitán collection is mainly through computers, individuals and families that have no access to them will be at disadvantage. To minimize this limitation, the project will;

- Provide open access to the collection of Thai Nitán;
- Provide opportunities for the materials to be printed and disseminated as printed materials;
- Incorporate a platform for community discussions and workshops;
- Enable it to be utilized as a learning tool during school curriculum or for after school programs;
- Enable it to be utilized as a learning tool during community workshops;
- Enable it to be utilized as a family activity;
- Promote Nitán for the old to share their knowledge with the young;
- Promote Nitán for the old and the young to share their knowledge.

### 3.3 Opportunities

Thai Nitán Mobile Service (TNMS) will be presented as a bilingual collection and accessible online and offline. This would enable local and international readers to gain access

to Thai Nitán. When exploring Thai Nitán, readers can obtain information on the traditions and culture of the people, as well as geography of the regions where Thai Nitán takes place. As accessibility and exposure to Thai Nitán increases, the readers' understanding of and interest in Thai traditions, culture and language etc. will be boosted. This enhances mutual understanding of traditions and cultural differences. In addition, the online collection of TNMS will serve as a platform for readers to explore and gather other related information. It will provide external links for related topics that readers can navigate to them.

Through exploring Thai Nitán, readers can understand better about Thai traditions and culture. For local readers, common ground can be strengthened and they can identify themselves as part of the society. A strong sense of belonging can be fostered as community networks are formed. An effective community network increases the community's capacity for informal surveillance and can trigger positive ripple effects such as lower crime rates.

TNMS will be designed to be used in various environments such as schools, homes etc. In schools, the collection may be used as a teaching tool after school programs. This increases the quality and quantity of positive after school activities that students engage in. In addition it is an alternative activity to juvenile crime, violence and drug abuse. At home, parents can utilize the collection together with their children. Learning of traditional and cultural values through modern technology becomes a family activity. When exploring the collection, gaps between generations are narrowed. Family interaction is improved as quality time is spent together. This interaction promotes a dual-directional information exchange between generations as the opportunity arises for the old to share their knowledge on Nitán while the young shares theirs on IT.

Exploring TNMS and active participation in online forums and discussion boards will promote a sense of togetherness and enable readers to associate and identify themselves within the society. Social networks are established and opportunities for interaction are increased. As they form relationships with other people and develop a sense of belonging, they feel it necessary to contribute to the society which they are part of. As the readers feel accepted and recognized, they gain happiness through being appreciated as members of a community.

### 3.4 Threats

The process of globalization, supported by modern communication technologies, has increased cultural diversity in Thailand. As different cultures co-exist, building shared values is important. Social cohesion concerns tradition, cultural and religious differences and is a factor to political and social stability and economic development. Thus a strong social cohesion is vital for societies. This perspective is closely related to dominant cultural themes [2]. It implies that only ideas and values are fit into the existing culture are

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adapted in society. On the contrary, a weak social cohesion fails to hold the social infrastructure together. As social cohesion is under strain, concern grows about declining civic participation and the extent to which people can be brought and held together, creating close ties, common values and helping relationships which are important to a sustainable society. The result is a malfunctioned society that is mistrustful, tense and anxiety-haunted. In these communities, a weak social cohesion exacerbates existing social problems.

To stabilize above social tribulations, social cohesion needs to be strengthened. This is to build strong local and national communities and create networks that help the society to function. A socially cohesive community is characterized by trust and mutual support. In a socially cohesive society, people feel part of the society; family and relationships are strong; differences among people are respected; and people feel supported. This allows a sense of community to be developed. As socially cohesive communities are able to identify problems, prepare objectives, develop strategies and put them into action, they address their problems collectively to influence the conditions of their lives in a positive way. In turn, the socially cohesive communities will provide members opportunities to participate in the political, social and economic development and they can earn the benefit from it.

**4. RAPID PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT**

The major stages for the development process of the Thai Nitán Website are: Analysis, Design, Implementation and Testing.

**4.1 Analysis**

The Analysis phase concentrates on gathering information about the current and proposed system for Thai Nitán. It starts with preparing knowledge repository, followed by categorizing and facilitating the different sources of knowledge. We obtain our sources of knowledge from local experts. Our experts of Thai stories are mostly local people who know traditional stories. Then next step, we formulate and represents knowledge for inference engine. For this task, a decision table and production rules are used to express logical relationships and to identify set of conditions and actions. A set of conditions are lessons we teach from Thai Nitán. A set of actions are related to an expression and appearance as cartoon characters on the screen. As a decision table makes it easy to examine all possible conditions and the resulting actions. For instance, one Thai story may focus emphases on royalty as a main value of the lesson but other values are not significantly visible. In Table 2, the decision table records the conditions for lesson in the top left quadrant along with the ranges for the conditions in the top right quadrant. The bottom row of the table lists the actions taken. That is, the value rates that

applied based on the conditions. The following shows a list of lessons used for the decision making and production rules (in our case, value rates). Each column represents a certain type of Thai story. For example, Story 1 represents royalty, morality, ethics, fairness and respect of 11111 value rates. In general, every Thai story should have at least one or more lessons to learn. Otherwise, it can not be included the knowledge repository. In other words, ideally, every story includes a positive influence on children (most important reader).

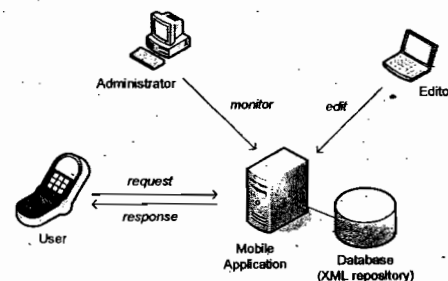
Lessons	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3	Story 4
Royalty	X	X	X	X
Morality	X	X		
Ethics	X	X	X	
Fairness	X	X	X	
Respect	X		X	X
Value Rates	11111	11110	10110	11100

**Table 2 Thai Nitán decision table**

In specific, our intension forwards categorized lesson is that, in our community, some areas have higher crime rates against children than any other areas. In this case, we can recommend the practitioners (parents or teachers) to spend more time for their young children using stories on that particular lesson. One research found that there is the critical maelstrom revolving in the folktale [8]. There should be a standard to reflect cultural authenticity, and to represent the culture of origin. In our opinion, when we focus on the folktale, we define what we want our children to read and know. Additionally, the practitioners can organize their face-to-face session with parents and their children so that more community-based on activities can be achieved. In a case of crime against elder people, the stories on respect can be told by a volunteer, ideally a local grandmother or grandfather, so that children naturally interact with elder people in a face-to-face session.

**4.2 Design**

The design phase involves a specification of components of the systems. This includes the design of database, network infrastructure and the content needs.



**Figure 1 Thai Nitán mobile-based application**

The system architecture is shown in Figure 1. The system responds when a user requests the mobile application on the server. Then the mobile application connects to a database that has the XML-based repository of Thai Nitán. As a response, one selected Nitán is sent back to the user. There are two additional functions for an administrator and an editor. The administrator monitors and maintains TNMS. The editor has a role to edit Nitán stories in Thai and English online. In this way, anyone can post their Nitán online then a team of computer graphic designers and editors work on the draft. Consequently, new Nitán will be published in the end. This design approach is important to promote Nitán, and to work with people in a community.

Figure 2 shows our use case diagram. Ovals describe the designation for a use-case along with the associated actors. The actors are connected to the use-case by arrows. The Arrows indicate association relationships. The actors are a computer administrator, editor and user. In TNMS, each actor (user of TNMS) is uniquely identified by their privileges and roles. For instance, authorization is not required when a normal user connects to the TNMS. Anyone can read Thai Nitán. On the other hands, both a computer administrator and an editor must login to the system. Notice the line with the triangle arrow connecting *the administrator* and *monitor software* and *Login* ovals. This means that the administrator monitors software (TNMS). Login is the functional requirement of the application for the administrator.

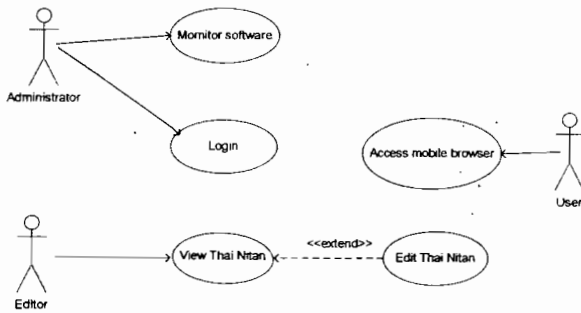


Figure 2 Thai Nitán Mobile-based service use-case diagram

4.3 Implementation

In the Implementation phase, the system is constructed for the Thai Nitán mobile-based service using WML (wireless markup language). This mobile-based application uses XML documents and XSLT to create an online Thai Nitán service. This is a read-only application that allows users to read the stories using their mobile devices via WAP (wireless application protocol). WAP is designed to access and services and information on wireless clients such as mobile phones. In order to demonstrate how the proposed system works, we will discuss it using our prototype. Firstly,

the user browses (inputs) a menu of TNMS. At this point, the user can choose a particular topic then the system presents a list of Thai folktales in a XML format. To display Nitán content on the mobile devices, these XML documents are transformed to a WML format by using XSLT (extensible stylesheet language transformations). A reason for this approach is that XML documents can be also converted to a number of other presentation formats such as traditional HTML (hypertext markup language) or XHTML (Extensible Hypertext Markup Language). Secondly, when a user connected to the Thai Nitán website, a XSLT-based application returns a WML page to the requesting browser (see Figure 3 *Main menu*). The WML page contains a story along with an animated cartoon character that represents value rates according to the lessons. (See Table 1). The first column shows a screenshot of the main menu. The second column shows the story 1 that describes a person to be heroic. Last column shows a person to be a martial art expert.

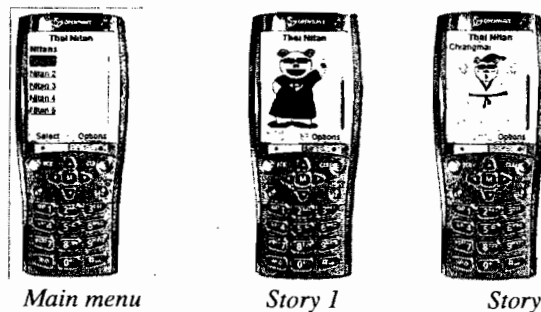


Figure 3 Examples of Thai Nitán mobile-based service

4.4 Evaluation

The evaluation phase undergoes changes as time progresses. These changes may be the result of changing in requirements or errors being detected in the system. To optimize loss of end user requirements, we decided to develop a mobile-based application as a pilot program. Further more, multimedia-based application will follow the formal prototype approach. According to our evaluation, simpler and user friendly interface is required for the mobile application. For the incoming web-based application, end users want more interactive approach rather than click-on-see approach. As a whole, this project is still an ongoing process that would have to involve continuing support for end users, updating of the contents (Thai Nitán) over time, and constant distribution of the Thai Nitán collection. For example, we had to restructure the contents of XML documents several times in order to get it right. There were a few optimization issues in terms of getting better network speed or getting better visual presentation such as pictures and text contents. On the other hands, offline services (workshop and seminar) have to organize for usefulness of our project.



Our primary challenge is to achieve the project goals and objectives in order to produce the intended project results. The secondary challenge is to optimize the resources we have to achieve the project goals and objectives. Thus our evaluation phase does not only focus on the technical specification of a system but also assess the concept of prototyping, and working with end users (parents and children). In other words, our prototype is a partial implementation of a design in the form of a working model. In this way, we can reduce a level of frustration in the system development. To incorporate the desired functionality into the final system, it is essential to determine the working model as efficiently as possible with developers and users. To minimize a possibility of project failure, workshops will be used with end users as a part of development process along with the evaluation process.

### 5. CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

The anticipated project result is an online and offline collection of Thai Nitan enhanced with bilingually in Thai and English. The collection will address the reader in his/her environment as a community member, as a student and as a member of a family. Information technology is used as modern means to provide proper recording and documentation while modern modes of communication is used to disseminate and improve access to the Thai Nitan collections.

Some constructive ripple effects of Thai Nitan project are: increasing the capacity of communities for informal surveillance and supervision that prevents crime and juvenile delinquency. In addition, it promotes a sense of belonging among people who are obligated to be responsible members of the society; and enhances interaction in social networks, thereby allowing people to gain happiness through their relationships with other people. Users of the project would have to explore the collection and utilize its features, both as an individual user and as a community member, to achieve the ripple effects.

Further research investigates the evaluation of the ripple effects of Thai Nitan along with enhanced graphics and interactive application that may include audio samples of stories and digital images and video clips. The multimedia has an important role in terms of the interaction between users and computer devices at the user interface. Because designing a usable Nitan mobile application is critical and necessary for our audiences. This kind of study is called computer human interaction. Further investigation thus focuses on the study of major phenomena surrounding users and our online services. In addition, a series of offline workshops will be organized locally. By utilizing Thai Nitan as a tool for parents and their children, parents can introduce Thai values from the stories to their children through family activities. Our intention is to supplement a gap in the interaction among people in the long term, especially those

people who have difficulties using information and communication technologies.

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