PROTECTED SACREDNESS: A GROUNDED THEORY EXPLAINING TRADITIONAL HEALING PRACTICES IN THE NORTH OF THAILAND

Nutthaporn Panchakhan
Yongyouth Kaeuwtem
Walailuck Khantha
Panjan Imnum
Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Nakhon Lampang THAILAND

Abstract

A grounded theory methodology was used. To explain traditional healing practices in the North of Thailand. Twenty-one traditional healers (i.e., herbalist and mantra healers) in a northern Thai province were asked to tell of their practices. Through unstructured in-depth interviews, we generated data for constant comparative analysis leading to the development of categories. A theoretical code (i.e., governance) was used to integrate these categories into a grounded theory.

Results: “Protected sacredness” is a grounded theory developed to explain the traditional healing practices. According to this theory, traditional healing is regarded as a sacred practice. The theory outlines the purpose, foundational governing concepts, regulatory mechanisms, and processes of traditional healing. Sacredness, as the purpose of the mandate, denotes both the (sacred) practice standard and healing outcomes (i.e., effectiveness). Six concepts mandate foundational values for the protection of sacredness, namely, faith, benevolence, moral integrity, self-sufficiency, gratitude, and gender-appropriateness. These values guide the six regulatory mechanisms, namely, self-governing, relationships (healer-clients, pupil-master, traditional healing-conventional medicine), knowledge transmission and acquisition, experience accumulation and expertise, purification, and protection. These values and mechanisms govern a healing process. The protection of sacredness usually involves certain ceremonial acts and rites.

Conclusion: Thai traditional healing as a sacred practice is governed by values and mechanisms for the best interest of clients and the practice itself. Protected sacredness can be used as a framework to further our understanding and utilization of Thai traditional healing practices.

Keywords: Traditional healing, Thailand, grounded theory, sacredness

1 Financial support for this research is provided by Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Nakhon Lampang, Ministry of Public Health, THAILAND.
2 Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Nutthaporn Panchakhan at Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Nakhon Lampang THAILAND or at email: muinuttha16@gmail.com
Introduction

Communities in the northern provinces of Thailand have their own identity. Both the traditions, the cultures and the way of life, which are carried on and inherited by the older generations in the community. Gathering wisdom and through the development, use in accordance with life, environment and resources in the community like dressing, eating, building houses including health care and treatment. That give people in the community a healthy and strong. In addition to Thai medical wisdom will help promote good health. It also reduces the public health problem. By helping the government reduced the cost of medical treatment, import of medicines, overseas medical supplies and medical technology that are unnecessarily. Good result will happen only when people in the community or local apply the natural resources available in their own communities for the benefit of health care. Including dependence on the wisdom of the doctor transmitted from the ancestors to maximize health and prevent disease.

Health care in the dimension of humanity must take care to cover physical, mental, social and spiritual. However caring for traditional Healing is limited because of lack of successors, and the influence of modern medicine has covered every area, while service providers still lack understanding and does not take into account culture, beliefs in health care. Therefore, it is not possible to integrate current therapies with traditional healing together. So the gap of treatment, research is required to gather knowledge and practice in the treatment of traditional healing, which is Thai wisdom, to have the knowledge that leads to the reduction of the problem.

Research Questions

What are characteristics of Protected Sacredness: Traditional Healing Practices in the North of Thailand?

Purpose

To study Protected Sacredness: Traditional Healing Practices in the North of Thailand.

The Conceptual Framework

This research uses a conceptual framework based on System Theory. (Bertalanffy, L.v., 1968) which consists of three parts: Input, Process, and Output. Each section has a mutual relationship to achieve the goal and also has an environmental relationship. This will also affect the operation. Based on the feedback information, it is possible to determine which parts need to be modified.
**Input**
- Traditional healers (i.e., herbalist and mantra healers)
- The clients

**Process**
- Knowledge transmission and acquisition, -experience
- Accumulation and expertise, -purification, and protection.

**Outcome**
Values for the protection of sacredness

**Feedback**
The protection of sacredness usually involves certain ceremonial acts and rites.

---

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Protected Sacredness: A Grounded Theory Explaining Traditional Healing Practices in the North of Thailand**

**Method**

This research is qualitative research. Twenty-one traditional healers (i.e., herbalist and mantra healers) in a northern Thai province were asked to tell of their practices. Through unstructured in-depth interviews, that generated data for constant comparative analysis leading to the development of categories. A theoretical code (i.e., governance) was used to integrate these categories into a grounded theory.

**Interviewee Selection Criteria**

1) Is a traditional healers experienced in healing people in their own community. In the province of Lampang.

2) All people can communicate in Thai

3) Voluntary participation in the program Criteria for volunteering out of the study were psychiatric symptoms.

**Research Tools**

Unstructured in-depth interviews

**Quality – control tools**

The researcher introduced the in-depth interview questionnaire to three qualified qualification experts to review the consistency of the question. Then edit and improve upon suggestions before use.
Data collection and protection of sample rights

The researcher collected data as follows:

1. After the researcher submits the research proposal to the college ethics committee to consider the human rights issues of the interviewees. After the approval template the researcher reviewed the literature to use as a framework for interviews.

2. The researcher made a book to the district public health, to ask for permission to collect information.

3. After approval the researcher interviewed the interviewers, introduced the relationship builder to clarify the purpose of the study and describe the steps and how to collect data. This is the common intention of the researcher and the interviewees also ask for cooperation to collect information. The data provider has the right to cancel this study and have the right to know the results of the research after the research ends.

4. Data collection, the researcher was self-collected by interviewing traditional healers on appointment date. Recordings and voice recordings of interviewees are recorded by asking the interviewer, to be used to review and review the accuracy back later. The interview takes about 60 minutes to 90 minutes or when the data is saturated. The information obtained from the interview was taken 4 cassettes. It takes 3 months to collect data within June 2013 to August 2013.

5. Check the completeness and completeness of the information and prepare the information so that it is ready for analysis and presentation of the research results.

Data Analysis

Data generated for constant comparative analysis leading to the development of categories. A theoretical code (i.e., governance) was used to integrate these categories into a grounded theory.

Results

The wisdom has been inherited from ancestors; there is a record and knowledge transfer. The healing process requires inheritance to the child in the present age. But Modern medicine is the first physiotherapy to cure illness from illness. Secondary mental health care social and spiritual care, that few medical providers will pay attention and focus. Traditional therapy is another option, the medical service recipients take into account the traditions, social culture as well as supernatural beliefs and used to build, protect and maintain their own health with trust believe in wisdom. The sacred and successful healing of these sciences has come together. This research revealed that there are several important elements in the process of transferring wisdom and healing to the health of the community. In the transmission process is maintained the sacred, effective healing and lead to the selection of treatment services for people in the community.
The findings of this research:

1. The process of transferring wisdom to health care of the community of traditional physician in Lampang province as follows:

   1.1) The process of transferring wisdom through socialization. It has a hands-on process that teaches family members by parents. As grown up, it is learned through continuous interaction between people such as teachers, priests, philosophers, people, etc., or through groups such as occupational groups, community learning centers. As the way of life of people in the community were like relatives. This has resulted in an inheritance process. This is a natural way of transmitting and sometimes learning together. The process of broadcasting is informal. It connects people and society together, to give members a shared responsibility and commit to adhere to that cultural value and follow, based on the interview data. "Inherited from giving to the eldest son forever…"

   1.2) The process of transmitting by the learner, which is based on beliefs, faith, attention and study to maintain the holiness of healing, must be maintained in three main ways: 1) five moral behavior, to be moral person according to the rules prescribed. 2) train yourself as a specialist, initiate treatment for those who receive services and take notes and experience. And if the survivor is alive, he or she will have the opportunity to consult and seek further knowledge to gain experience and 3) protect the sacred sciences. It must be based on compassion, gratitude, beliefs, faith and sufficiency.

2. The healing process for community health care consists of:

2.1 Pre-treatment process

   2.1.1. The teacher worship, in which the healing process of traditional physician has a process of worship, is that of the successor of the teacher. The person selected by the person who is the traditional physician or the owner of that knowledge is chosen. Some will have a traditional physician’s rule that the successor must be the first son or if not the first son must be a son in the total number of children. According to interview data, "Inherited from giving to the eldest son forever" and most importantly, it must to be a priest before becoming a traditional physician. In addition, the ordination will affect the ability to read Lanna language in the notebook, because the worship is like exalting honor to the teachers with the knowledge. Therefore, the worship of the teacher must be worshiped by the teacher of the ancestors who have passed the subjects, there must be a notebook that records the knowledge and experience. It is like a textbook or a journal of the knowledge that is necessary to continue treatment.

   2.1.2 Receiving the five aggregates Buddhism (five groups of personality), in the traditional healing is believed that the reception of five aggregates Buddhism is as a reception for the practice of 5 moral behavior, which is a requirement of holiness, some will be strict in their morals. According to interview data, "Succession will be chosen only for men who do not eat alcohol, do not smoke", should live in good faith, do not steal and do not quarrel with anyone. It is a way to increase the sacredness of one's self as it has been and to receive the knowledge of the learned person. In addition, the reception is like paying homage to the ancestors who convey knowledge,
it represents acceptance and succession, respectful worship and remembrance.

2.1.3 Ritual ‘khrop khrur’ (a ceremony where students pay respect to teachers). For the belief of the traditional physician, the ritual ‘khrop khrur’ is acceptance of disciple and in other words, the family will help to keep the cover from all dangers and find something good, it is a blessing to the self. It is a pledge to practice the rules or regulations that they have been entrusted with the sacred and if they do not behave as they have promised, and if they do not act or live as promised. It will be sick because they do not follow the prayer or promise it.

2.2 Process while healing. It is a process that traditional physician use to treat patients who come to ask help with illness. In case of receiving or inheriting traditional medicine to healing, the traditional physician must be prepared for both the cleanliness of the body for reliability when service is available. In addition, the person who performs the cure must either pray to the Lord or ask for the power of the teacher who transmitted it. Each treatment is not treated for just 1-2 days, but the appointment to see how good or not, if the symptoms do not improve. It will be recommended and forwarded to the treatment at another hospital or the current medical. It is the rule of those who heal that. If it does not heal or the symptoms do not improve, it must be recommended and directed to be treated in other places better. The main thing is healing the clients must follow the instructions before starting treatment. The clients must comply with the conditions. Otherwise, the treatment will not be sacred and will not work well. It creates conditions and clarifies the treatment, if the clients does not believe or follow the instructions, may cause ineffective treatment.

The individual's treatment pattern varies according to the belief that the ritual is inherited, from the interview showed that traditional physician can be divided 3 groups: 1) Herbalist, traditional physician healing of patients with health problems such as back pain, weakness, hemorrhoids, psoriasis, diuretic, laxative, and fever by herbal remedies are available locally. The treatment process begins with the introduction of the knowledge of herbs that are collected and distributed in sets for the treatment of illness in each category. The way to eat is eaten in the form of decoction and eats until the symptoms are cured. 2) Mantra healers, this traditional physician will focus on spiritual healing, beliefs in Gods or beliefs in spiritual beings. The treatment process focuses on asking the cause of the illness along with the treatment approach depending on the each patient's symptoms. 3) Blowing healer (Mor Pow), this group of traditional physician will treat patients with health problems related to fractures, body pains, itching along the body. Before blowing, clean the mouth by brushing, rinsing every time that start blowing, some traditional physician treat blown areas together with the use of local herbs, while healing, the traditional physician will say sacred words along with blowing with Lanna language.

2.3 After treatment for this process, it will be a tracking and evaluation process. The traditional physician will have different tracking and evaluation methods and it does not have a fixed format, some traditional physicians have been monitored by those who have received services. When symptoms improve or disappear, the disease returns with a thank you note. Interview data indicated that patients who received traditional healing have improved or
recovered from the disease were older age group, “I lost it and came back. I think, the younger brother, but I feel faith in sacred that he has”

Protected sacredness is developed to explain the traditional healing practices, regarded as a sacred practice. The grounded theory outlines, foundational governing concepts, regulatory mechanisms, and processes of traditional healing. Sacredness, as the purpose of the mandate, denotes both the (sacred) practice standard and healing outcomes. Six concepts mandate foundational values for the protection of sacredness, namely, faith, benevolence, moral integrity, self-sufficiency, gratitude, and gender-appropriateness. These values guide the six regulatory mechanisms, namely, self-governing, relationships (healer-clients, pupil-master, traditional healing-conventional medicine), knowledge transmission and acquisition, experience accumulation and expertise, purification, and protection. These values and mechanisms govern a healing process. The protection of sacredness usually involves certain ceremonial acts and rites. is in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Sacredness in Thai Traditional Healing Practices](image)

**Discussion**

The result of this research is the conclusion of protected sacredness: a grounded theory explaining traditional healing practices in the north of Thailand as follows:

1) The process of transferring knowledge through socialization (Teacher: Socialization). It has a hands-on process that teaches family members by parents. As grown up, it was learned through the constant interaction of people such as teachers, priests, philosophers, people, etc. or through a group of people, such as professional groups, learning centers in the community. Because of the way people live in the community as relatives. This has resulted in an inherited inheritance process. This is a natural way of transmitting based on the narrative described as practical examples and sometimes learning together. The process of broadcasting is informal. It connects people and society together, to give members a shared responsibility and adhere to the cultural values. And follow as a result of the study conducted by Kamolporn Songmee (2000), the study of knowledge transfer in the use of herbs affecting biodiversity conservation and self-
reliance found that knowledge transfer through the use of local herbs. Inherited from family to kinship and extended to neighbors in the community and outside the community. It is relayed by telling each other, to learn and remember and try to practice it until the exchange of knowledge and experience within the community itself and extend to other communities.

2) The process of transmitting by the learner, which is based on beliefs, faith, attention (Learner: Faith & Attention) and study to maintain the holiness of healing, must be maintained in three main ways: 1) morality, 2) self-training, and 3) protection of the sacred sciences, it must be based on compassion, gratitude, beliefs, faith and sufficiency. It was found to be an important feature found in the male and female learners. Corresponding to the research results of Ongart Rattachai (1996), who studied the process of knowledge transfer of Thai Lue people, regarded the herbal treatment, it was found that acceptance of treatment required, confidence and faith in the inherent knowledge of the traditional healing.

In addition, six concepts mandate foundational values for the protection of sacredness, namely, faith, benevolence, moral integrity, self-sufficiency, gratitude, and gender-appropriateness. These values guide the six regulatory mechanisms, namely, self-governing, relationships (healer-clients, pupil-master, traditional healing - conventional medicine), knowledge transmission and acquisition, experience accumulation and expertise, purification, and protection. These values and mechanisms govern a healing process. The protection of sacredness usually involves certain ceremonial acts and rites.

The person who inherits most of them is male. The traditional physician will provide care to the general public. The healing is linked to religion, ritual, sacred words and sacredness. The treatment will use herbs mixed with the sacred words inherited from the ancestors, and there is a sacred process of worshiping the teacher. There are different inheritance. On the other hand, The female is a traditional physician who provides care for mothers and children, The treatment is part of the sacredness and faith that the service provider believes and trusts in the traditional physician that the process of transferring and curing Process for health care community by the traditional physician

![Figure 3: Process Transferring of Traditional Healing Practices](image)
Transferring wisdom and healing the sickness was a succession of teachers and experience, to adapt to the life, environment and resources in the community. It is used to treat people in the community with physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual. In addition, Thai traditional healing also promotes good health, reduce public health problems of the country and cost of medical treatment and import of medicines. Medical supplies and medical technology from foreign countries are unnecessary, diminished, and most importantly. It is a way of health care that molds and glorifies human beings.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This study gave an insight into the process and method of healing with folk wisdom. It is a process of inheritance that goes through a sacred process and has inheritance patterns that preserve the bond, to respect those who are considered teachers or broadcasters. There is a process of preserving a way of keeping in harmony with the lifestyle, beliefs and faith of the community, to have a healthy way of life that truly shapes and glorifies humanity. For the next study, we should study and find ways to develop or preserve traditional wisdom to maintain the continuity. Thai traditional healing as a sacred practice is governed by values and mechanisms for the best interest of clients and the practice itself. Protected sacredness can be used as a framework to further our understanding and utilization of Thai traditional healing practices.

**Acknowledgments**

We are much appreciated and thank for Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Nakhon Lampang to support this research. Many thanks to Dr. Thaworn Lorga, his suggestion enabled the researchers in conducting a grounded theory methodology. Finally, to whom it may concerns in the traditional healers.

**References**


