

Weaving Heritage: Exploring the Role of Traditional Inabel Industry in Cultural Preservation among Bangar Townsfolk

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1303000122>

Received: 24 January 2026; Accepted: 29 January 2026; Published: 07 April 2026

ABSTRACT

Preservation of culture is vital in maintaining a community's identity and traditions. This study explores the role of traditional Inabel weaving in sustaining the rich cultural heritage of Bangar townsfolk in Ilocos Region and examines the difficulties faced by weavers in keeping their tradition alive. Inabel, a handwoven textile known for its intricate designs and durability, has been an essential part of Ilocano life for centuries. However, the increasing influence of modernization, globalization, and economic struggles has led to a decline in traditional weaving practices. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research investigates the historical and cultural significance of Inabel, the socio-economic challenges affecting its sustainability, and the various preservation efforts undertaken by local communities, government agencies, and cultural organizations. Data collection methods include key informant interviews (KII) with Inabel weavers, business owners, and cultural advocates, as well as site observations. Thematic analysis and triangulation were used. Findings reveal that traditional Inabel weaving continues to be an important symbol of Ilocano heritage, revealing the connection to ancestral roots, social cohesion, cultural identity, economic benefits, boosting local pride, and transmitter of culture. The industry faces significant obstacles such as the dwindling number of skilled artisans, lack of youth interest, and competition from mass-produced textiles. However, efforts such as government support, cultural tourism, product innovation, and international marketing have contributed to sustaining the craft. The study concludes that Inabel weaving remains a valuable cultural and economic asset, but interventions are necessary to ensure its long-term sustainability. Integrating Inabel weaving into educational programs, providing financial incentives for weavers, and strengthening marketing strategies to promote Inabel products globally through NGO and GOs are imperative to foster deeper appreciation of this traditional Inabel industry.

Index Terms- Inabel industry, cultural preservation, weaving heritage

INTRODUCTION

Inabel is a traditional handwoven textile deeply rooted in the cultural identity of the Ilocano people in Northern Philippines. For centuries, Inabel, also known as Abel Iloco, has been valued not only for its durability and beauty but also for the cultural stories embedded in its patterns, colors, and weaving techniques. These textiles are produced using wooden looms and indigenous materials, reflecting the craftsmanship and creativity passed down through generations. Historically, Inabel weaving served both functional and symbolic purposes providing clothing, blankets, and household items while also representing local customs, beliefs, and community pride. But, in recent years, the tradition of Inabel weaving has faced significant challenges. Modernization, mass-produced textiles, lack of interest among younger generations, and limited economic opportunities for weavers have contributed to the decline of this cultural practice. Many skilled weavers are aging, and younger community members often choose other careers, leading to the possible disappearance of the craft. Despite these challenges, local artisans and cultural advocates continue to promote Inabel through cultural fairs, fashion innovations, tourism, and community-based projects aimed at protecting and sustaining the Inabel industry.

Considering these circumstances, the preservation of Inabel weaving has become increasingly important. Studying how Inabel products contribute to cultural heritage preservation provides valuable insight into how

traditional crafts can survive in a rapidly changing society. This research seeks to understand the cultural significance of Inabel, document the experiences of local weavers, identify challenges affecting the continuity of the craft, and explore strategies that support its sustainability. By examining Inabel through a case study approach, the research highlights the essential role of traditional textiles in maintaining cultural identity and ensuring that future generations appreciate and continue this meaningful heritage.

Theoretical Framework

The Cultural Transmission theory is a fundamental concept in sociology that explores the processes by which culture, including values, beliefs, norms, and practices, is passed from one generation to the next. This theory is crucial for understanding how societies maintain continuity and how cultural changes occur over time. By examining the mechanisms of cultural transmission, sociologists can gain insights into the perpetuation of social structures and the evolution of cultural norms (Edwards, 2024). This theory focuses in cultural transmission throughout man's life. Socialization begins primarily with the family, the church, peer groups, schoolmates, community and the society. Primary socialization occurs in early childhood within the family, while secondary socialization takes place in later life stages through interactions with broader social institutions. The roots of cultural transmission theory can be traced back to early sociological thought. Emile Durkheim emphasized the role of social facts in shaping individual behavior. His work laid the groundwork for understanding how societal norms and values influence individual actions. Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness highlighted the shared beliefs and moral attitudes that operate as a unifying force within society.

Behaviorist psychologists such as B.F. Skinner and John B. Watson worked in the early 1900s and studied on behavior and learning help advance knowledge of cultural transmission. They proposed that social learning processes are responsible for the acquisition of cultural norms and practices, and that conduct is learned through interactions with the environment. This viewpoint placed a strong emphasis on how imitation and reinforcement contribute to cultural transmission. Cultural transmission can happen through many ways such as language transmission, religion, or art. Learning from environment and society helps shape values, sense of self, and acceptable behaviors (Drew, 2023).

There are three types of cultural transmission. First is vertical transmission. This is done when culture is passed down from adults to children. The second type is horizontal transmission and this occurs when culture is transmitted between peers or comrades. The last type is oblique cultural transmission. This happens when culture is passed between individuals in different social circles. In this study, the passing of the Inabel craft to offsprings or townfolk is a glaring example of cultural transmission. Children of the parent weavers teach their children how to weave and make weaving techniques as well through the use of available materials at hand. This vertical transmission makes the younger generation aware and knowledgeable about the local Inabel industry which if sustained and enhanced, this can provide sustainable livelihood for the family and the family's future generation.

In Bangar, La Union located in Northern Luzon, Philippines, it is noted that the preservation of the weaving heritage of Bangar townfolk is occasionally reported. Some scholars from other nearby towns explored the essence of their respective industries like the vinegar industry, tobacco industry, mushroom cultivation, fishing and agriculture but missed to explore and determine how Bangar townfolk make their own livelihood.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the role of the traditional Inabel industry in the preservation of cultural heritage in Bangar, La Union, Philippines. It seeks to understand how the tradition of weaving shapes the identity of the community, supports local livelihoods, and faces modern challenges. Specifically, it aims to determine the significant roles of the traditional Inabel industry in the preservation of cultural heritage of the Bangar townfolk in Northern Philippines.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the efforts, challenges, and strategies involved in preserving Inabel weaving as part of Ilocano heritage. The case study approach was deemed appropriate because

it allowed an in-depth investigation of the subject by focusing on the lived experiences of weavers, cultural advocates, business owners, and government agencies engaged in Inabel preservation. In addition, the study integrated descriptive research methods to document and analyze the historical significance, traditional weaving techniques, market trends, and sustainability efforts related to Inabel production. The qualitative approach was essential in capturing the cultural and economic factors that influenced Inabel weaving in Bangar, La Union of northern Philippines.

Population and Sample

There are 14 purposively chosen participants in this qualitative investigation; 6 traditional Inabel weavers who were taught by parents/siblings and are practicing weavers for more than 10 years; 5 LGU officials, and 3 business owners/cultural designers who are known for their insights and advocacies on cultural heritage for the benefit of Bangar people. These informants possess awareness of the relevance of conserving the material and immaterial culture and the history of the people in the locality.

Data Gathering Instrument

To successfully assess the preservation of Inabel weaving in Bangar, La Union, the researchers employ multiple qualitative research instruments. Semi-structured interviews are conducted to obtain in-depth personal narratives from traditional weavers, cultural advocates, local government officials, and business owners or fashion designers who incorporate Inabel textiles. These interviews explore participants' insights on cultural preservation through Inabel weaving, their experiences, challenges, and the needed strategies sought in preserving the weaving tradition. Sample questions include inquiries about the historical and cultural significance of Inabel, the challenges and threats facing weavers today, and initiatives to encourage younger generations to continue the craft. All responses are recorded with consent and transcribed for thematic analysis. Likewise, observation is used to document the actual weaving process, the materials employed, and the artisans' work environment, providing insight into how traditional techniques are maintained or adapted. Observations focus on the loom setup, types of fabric and dyes, workspace conditions, interactions with customers, and the use of manual versus mechanized techniques. Signs of cultural transmission, such as mentorship and training of young weavers, are also noted.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission from the municipal mayor was sought by the researchers before data gathering. Before their interview, the informants signed an informed consent form after deliberating their part in the study and the data are collected through detailed field notes, photographs, and videos. Through KII, the informants shared their experiences and opinions on Inabel preservation. They mentioned topics such as factors contributing to the decline or growth of Inabel weaving, support from government and private sectors, and strategies to increase public appreciation. Responses are audio-recorded, and key themes are extracted for analysis. Document analysis is employed to review historical records, government policies, trade data, and previous research on Inabel weaving. Sources include government reports from agencies such as DTI and NCCA, local ordinances, archival documents on weaving history, academic studies, trade and market analysis reports, and marketing materials like brochures or online campaigns. Key findings from these documents are compared and triangulated with interviews and survey results for validation. Through these research instruments combined, the study reveals a wide-ranging understanding of the cultural, economic, and social dimensions of Inabel weaving, providing a holistic basis for evaluating cultural heritage and the corresponding preservation approaches.

Data Analysis

The researchers' major task was coding data which means sifting through data and, as one notes recurring themes, patterns or concepts, labelling pieces of data to indicate what theme, pattern or concept they reflect (Neuman and Bueno, 2016). An open coding was done followed by second sweep of data. Using a team of coders was utilized and when themes or patterns were identified, the researchers sorted the data into categories which served as the answers to the research question. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview results. The researchers organized the narrative structures and concentrated on the individuals' overall tale or

experience. The core narratives were determined by the researchers to be the theme or solution to the sub-problems. The various field notes and recordings were transcribed by them. The recordings served as a useful addition to the researchers' insufficient field notes. It was crucial to label the data after transcription in order to place the same recurrent responses in the same column. After the responses were coded, the researchers found a trend. The researchers classified the data into themes in order to significantly address the particular issues after closely examining the patterns and noticing that the responses were all in the same column. The data was categorized, and then theme analysis was used. The frequency with which particular terms or ideas appear in the participants' responses was ascertained by the researchers. The repeated responses were categorized and used as themes, filling the entire set of responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study carefully explored the roles of traditional Inabel industry in preserving the cultural heritage of Bangar townfolk of Northern Philippines.

Illuminating the Cultural Identity through Designs, Patterns and Weaving Techniques

Inabel weaving plays a vital role in shaping and maintaining the cultural identity of Bangar, La Union. Respondents highlighted that the designs, patterns, and weaving techniques of Inabel reflect local history, beliefs, and traditions, reinforcing a sense of pride within the community. Elders and weavers noted that specific patterns carry symbolic meanings passed down through generations, which serve as visual representations of family lineage, social status, and communal values.

According to P2, "Bangar is world-famous for its blankets. The difference between our inabel here in Bangar compared to other places is that our inabel can adapt — when it's hot, it feels cool, and when it's cold, it feels warm. Also, we're the only ones who make blankets with original designs because we use indigenous weaving techniques. Our inabel exclusively differs from that of other woven mills like Vigan and Abra since they have their respective designs and patterns, too. We were taught by our parents how to make our fabrics with the designs taught and transmitted to them by their parents, too." The statements were confirmed by P5 saying, "Other people scrutinize the fabrics that they bought from us and they can tell whether the items are that from Bangar due to the embedded visible textile designs and patterns. Our parents and even our grandparents taught us weaving techniques to do these." In addition, P6 mentioned that "Our designs and patterns depict its origin which is Bangar. These products specifically point out our ingenuity, craftsmanship, tenacity, patience and hard work in making these traditional textile. We are thankful to our parents that they taught us how to live" These responses from the participants highlight that Bangar weavers craft their own cultural designs through their hard labor and perseverance. Their answers imply that they have their own genuine designs transmitted to them by their parents and grandparents. These further imply that such designs and patterns are transmitted from generation to generation and they showed respect and gratitude to their parents as mentors. It further manifests their well-preserved cultural identity. These findings support the notion presented in Lowenthal (1998) and Santiago (2015) that cultural heritage, such as traditional textiles, strengthens identity and continuity in the community.

Revealing the Connection to the Ancestral Roots

One owner of Inabel industry strongly remarked, "Through this craft, I always feel the sweet spirit and love of my ancestors giving me and my family opportunities to live, to grow and to succeed. With immense gratitude, I earnestly appreciate that I was able to learn the craft from them. As of the moment, I am now teaching likewise my daughters to make other traditional designs so that we could make more customers." It is then inferred that these traditional weavers trust their family members so much that they want to bequeath and transfer such weaving skill, and the designing skill to their children. The kinship becomes stronger and social cohesion is deeply rooted. By practicing Inabel weaving, the people of Bangar not only preserve a craft but also maintain a tangible connection to their ancestral roots.

The data support the study of Agoot (2025) highlighting how weaving is helping sustain the Ifugaos nearby the famous rice terraces. They make weaving as an alternative livelihood for farmers who are struggling to make

ends meet from the low-yielding ricefields. Weaving perfectly fits into Ifugao culture and provides a quicker source of income. This initiative not only supports the farmers financially but also helps maintain the terraces and preserve Ifugao traditions.

Economic Benefits of the Traditionally Woven Textiles

The study found that Inabel weaving provides significant livelihood opportunities for local weavers and contributes to the community's economy. Participants shared that income from the sale of handwoven textiles supports household needs, funds children's education, and supplements other sources of livelihood. Additionally, local tourism activities featuring Inabel products generate further economic benefits, as merchants and visitors purchase textiles and related crafts.

Participant 1 shared, "Through this traditional weaving industry that I inherited from my parents, I earn an honest living; that is, I can provide the basic needs of my family. We can buy foods, medicine and other things needed to survive". Another participant, P4 answered, "Our Inabel industry helps us send our children to school, helping them to finish their elementary and secondary education and some of them finished their chosen degrees. These children of ours who became professionals helped us repair our house and live conveniently. My family continues to produce Inabel fabrics as it offers additional income." "As commodity, I sell these Inabel products to my friends and other people and through it, I gain profit that helped me provide my needs" was the statement of Participant 7. This means that some merchants buy Inabel products to sell to other towns and even other provinces which is a manifestation that the traditionally woven Inabel provide business ventures and opportunities not only to the weavers but to some business-oriented individuals. These findings affirm the studies of Rivera (2016) and Cruz (2017), confirming that traditional weaving offers both financial and cultural value, making it a sustainable source of income while simultaneously promoting heritage preservation.

Boosting Local Pride among Bangareños

A customer quips when asked about the relevance of the traditional Inabel, "The Inabel textile locally produced by the Bangareños is actually one of the favorites of the elite as they fashionably make such as their Filipiniana to be worn during special occasions like town fiesta, barangay festivities, family celebrations like wedding and reunions, and many more. People are becoming aware to use indigenous and localized designs making them attractive and pleasing during their festivities.

Transmitter of Culture

"The Inabel industry is quite a big proof that the ancestor's occupation has been learned and used by their children and grandchildren as means of livelihood while the Bangareños and other townfolk in adjacent towns and provinces continue to buy and use the Inabel products for their socialization, grooming and social acceptance", an elderly added. This implies that not only the Inabel textiles conserve the weaving heritage of the Bangareños but the industry itself being passed down from one generation to another generation lucidly shows that Inabel industry is a means of conserving the people's culture. Padiwan, et al. (2024) cited that festivals are transmitters of culture. With the showcased use and importance of the Inabel products, it could be deduced that the Inabel industry is a path to culturally preserve the weaving heritage of the Bangar folks.

Challenges of the Traditional Inabel Industry

The study also identified several challenges that may adversely affect the sustainability of the traditional Inabel weaving industry in Bangar. Aging weavers, limited interest among younger generations, the high cost of raw materials, and competition from commercially produced textiles were frequently cited as major obstacles. Some participants, P10, P11 and P12 noted that while some young people are willing to learn weaving, the craft is often seen as labor-intensive and less financially rewarding compared to other occupations. "When my child finished her course, she landed in another job making it impossible for a full time in the Inabel industry", remarked by P3. "Some children of ours are observed to have diminished interest in Inabel industry since they are attracted to other vocation and other career opportunities", she continued. But for P1, he divulged, "I admit that I am already old and can hardly see the threads, hence, my performance in making Inabel seemed

deteriorating. I do have children but they tread other careers. They were taught to make Inabel but they have their own lives now. So, I decided to train my niece and nephews so that they could make their own livelihood in the future”. “Sometimes”, quipped by P6, “other textile industries are showing and attracting customers with modern designs and beautiful patterns. They are quite competitive with their designs and marketing strategies. Many customers want new designs, new color combinations and new patterns which me and my workforce cannot provide. This is quite saddening and we are worried that we will totally lose our customers and worse... our occupation.” One participant, P2, said, “My concern these days is the exorbitant price of raw materials that we need in making Inabel products. As days pass by, the cost of everything increases every now and then. Even labor cost is continuously increasing. I could hardly bear the high cost of labor and raw materials needed to produce Inabel products. I hope the government can do something about this.” According to P3, “Actually, what I see as a problem is that no one is marking the blankets anymore putting their names on them. Only a few do that now, the ones who used to have already passed away. And no one wants to learn anymore because it is hard and somewhat complicated to do, especially the “kan-ay process” that is when they stretch or align the thread. Young people are not interested in doing that anymore. So if no younger generation picks it up, the blanket-making might stop altogether.”

These responses indicate that traditional Inabel industry is meeting challenges that could jeopardize its existence and even development as an industry. These findings reflect the challenges reported in Flores (2018), emphasizing the need for interventions to ensure the continuity of the craft. Modernization and shifting cultural priorities further compound these challenges, risking the potential loss of weaving skills and cultural knowledge if proactive measures are not taken.

Strategies to Conserve the Inabel Industry

To surmount the cited and given challenges, participants suggested several mechanisms or approaches to preserve and promote Inabel weaving industry in Bangar.

According to P4, “To preserve the Inabel industry, I think seminar workshops are necessary and the Local Government Unit of Bangar must sustainably conduct training workshops among the youth, even to the Out-of-School youth, to preserve the industry. Another participant disclosed “As enshrined in the constitution, educators in the basic education should promote nationalism and love of one’s cultural heritage to the youth, so much so that an inclusive discussion of the importance of sustaining the Inabel industry in Bangar is relevant and imperative. Simple integration of the contextualized Inabel culture as part of Social Studies promotes deeper bond of the learner and their respective Inabel industry. The provision of capital outlay to enhance the industry is likewise highly necessary. The different involved entrepreneurs having the genuine craftsmanship must transmit such skill to their siblings or offspring and the latter has to improve or enhance the designs and patterns when possible. Without doing these, we can no longer compete with that of other woven fabric producers from neighboring towns like Vigan, Santiago and Abra.” “One more thing, the labor cost should be reasonable enough for the benefit of the entrepreneur and the traditional weaver”, added by P6. He added, “A manual showing how the Inabel products are produced should be properly documented. This is to ensure the preservation of the Inabel industry of Bangar. With a written brochure or manual, the Inabel industry and the corresponding craft will not be put to oblivion”.

“One way to preserve the Inabel industry is for the Non-government organizations (NGOs) or Government Organizations (GOs) like the Department of Trade and Industry to provide financial and technical support to the Inabel weavers. They should hold training programs and marketing workshops for the interested younger generations and conduct cultural fairs to showcase the crafted Inabel products. These ensure the sustainability and preservation of this industry”, P14 added. Other participant, P15 remarked, “The LGU of Bangar should recognize and reward the efforts of the involved culturally-inclined craftsmen so that they likewise sustain their support to the preservation of the traditional Inabel industry since this is vital in ensuring its sustainability”. The informant added, “The local Inabel weavers should use the social media as means of showcasing and selling their local textiles since not only local buyers are purchasing their Inabel products but even foreigners. The role of technology in making the designs, in selling the Inabel products locally as well as abroad and the use of e-commerce in marketing Inabel products are but essential to help boost the weavers’ economic status. The

weavers' meager income becomes higher as they are inclined to use technology in the production as well as in their marketing ventures".

These strategies align with Cruz (2017) and Rivera (2016), who emphasized the importance of community engagement, documentation, innovation, and government assistance in sustaining indigenous crafts. Implementing these measures can help maintain the cultural and economic significance of Inabel weaving for future generations. Further, Padiwan, et al. (2024) clearly elaborates that it is the duty of the State to promote cultural consciousness especially among the youth so they can have better understanding of the significance of preserving Filipino cultural heritage. Basic education specifically Araling Panlipunan subject encourages learners to manifest their patriotic acts and teachers have to do their part in honing their nationalistic spirit by emphasizing and motivating learners to learn the weaving skills and other life skills that they could use in the future. Likewise, Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers are capacitated to collaborate with the local government unit to introduce and teach to the ALS learners the art of weaving Inabel as they can use this as alternative source of income.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the conclusions: The Inabel weaving industry significantly contributes to the cultural identity of Bangar in Northern Philippines. The traditional patterns, designs, and weaving techniques serve as symbols of community heritage, linking the present generation to their ancestors and reinforcing local pride. Inabel weaving industry provides livelihood opportunities for local weavers and contributes to the community's income through the sale of products and cultural tourism. Sustaining the craft faces several challenges, including the aging population of skilled weavers, lack of interest among the youth, high production costs, and competition from machine-made textiles. Practical strategies such as training programs, cultural fairs, marketing initiatives, and support from the Local Government Unit, GOs and NGOs can help preserve and promote Inabel weaving industry for future generations. The Inabel weaving industry is both a cultural and economic resource that requires active preservation and community involvement. Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed: The Inabel weavers should continue practicing and transmitting weaving techniques and cultural knowledge to younger generations, while exploring innovative designs and marketing methods to enhance income and craft sustainability. The Local Government Unit (LGU) of Bangar should implement programs or workshops that provide financial support, materials, training, and platforms for promoting Inabel products and should conduct cultural events and tourism activities to showcase the craft. Further studies on the cultural and economic aspects of Inabel weaving should explore ways and other means to strengthen preservation strategies and community involvement. Future researchers may use this study as a reference for comparative research on indigenous crafts, cultural heritage preservation, and community-based livelihood programs, contributing to a broader understanding of traditional Filipino weaving.

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