The Elements of Creative Culture in Thai Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Creative culture is a set of shared values reflected by an organization's behavior and attitude in the joint task of the people in the organization that promote creativity and innovation. This is a key factor for higher education institutions, in the development towards a creative university. This research aims to study the current situations, and to analyze creative cultural elements in Thai higher education institutions. It is a qualitative research, using open-ended questions for in-depth interviews, and the instrument and data were analyzed by content analysis from; books, articles, documents, websites and related research, from 1989 to 2012, with a total of 53 items. There are 3 sample groups: (1) Two senior executives from Thai higher education institutions, whose vision is to be creative universities; (2) Three academics/professors in the field of creative organization/innovation organization; (3) Six executives from organizations acknowledged by the 'Thailand's most innovative company award 2011', which are divided into two groups: service company and non-service company. The results revealed 7 elements of creative culture in Thai higher education institutions: (1) Creative policies and goals; (2) Creative environment; (3) Creative organizational structure; (4) Creative supporting system; (5) Creative human resource management; (6) Creative leadership; (7) Creative behavior and attitudes of people in the institutions.

Keywords: Creative Culture, Creative University, Creative Organization, Organizational culture

Introduction

Development of a new paradigm about creative economy is being swiftly expended in the current world. Governments of many countries all over the world have obtained the said aspect, in order to drive their economic systems, resulting from changed marketing and technological impulsion. Notion and culture have become key factors for production to build differences in various fields (Thailand Creative & Design Center, Office of Knowledge Management and Development, 2011). A creative economy is the concept of economic impulsion, based upon knowledge, education, creativity, and the use of intellectual property; linked with cultural foundations, social wisdom, and technology and innovation (Alongkorn Ponlabud, 2011). Creativity is an activity relating to thinking and imagination. It was built for the purposes of achieving accomplishments and gaining assets. Creativity is not only specified in art, but it is also a basis of progression in science, mathematics, technology, politics, business, and all fields of living (Ken Robison, 2011). Therefore, a creative economy is a new alternative of competition, and way above Thailand's ability of being competitive for sustainable development in the future.

The National Economic and Social Development Plan, 8th 9th and 10th, focused on the development of "humans", to be alert to globalization according to the philosophy of economic sufficiency, in order to support economic and social modification of the country, in the future. In addition, the National Economic and Social Development Plan 11th (2012-2016) has specified strategies and methods of country development, by determining "strategies of building a manufacturing base that firmly and equally promotes economic growth". It directly involves a creative economy. The key issue is to set the goal of industrial development of the country based upon the concept of creative industry. It focuses on the development of products and services which depend upon; a creative economy base, promotion of the use of creativity for value-added products and services, promotion and development of potential creative businesses; the development of an economic infrastructure and an environment of a creative economy, development of personnel to be able to respond to needs of production and service sectors, for both creative professions and entrepreneurs to create; promote studying and research, and deeply develop a creative economy and cultural capital (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2010), to promote education to prepare man power that can support a creative economy of the country, and to develop students to have creative skills. It is deemed to be a national education policy, as shown in the National Education Development Plan No. 8 (1997-2001). It aimed to specify the characteristics of seeking; knowledge, analyzing, having concepts, imagination, creativity, and the necessary ability and skills for living (Office of the National Education, 2001 and the National Education Act 1999). They greatly give importance for creativity by specifying learning, which means progressive creativity, and which also means that supplementing creativity in Section 7 obviously indicates that the integrated learning processes of; arts and culture, sports, wisdom, and science can all be fun and flexible, and for all sectors of society, including; individuals, family, community, religious institutions to all take part in arranging the teaching and learning (Section 12). The education arrangements can be divided into three models; formal education, non-formal education, and informal education (Section 15). It is believed that all these models can promote students to be able to use their full ability and develop themselves (Section 22); and that a teacher can stimulate them to build learning and creative processes for several subjects, in

terms of; science, art, culture, sport, and wisdom accordingly, including the creation of the research process to systematically develop the power of creation. Schooling is not only limited to the classroom, but also includes art galleries and museums as an important source of learning for students, as required (Section 25) (Rung Kaewdang, 2011).

Valued education toward students and society, in terms of creation, is beneficial for the development of the country in severe competition with global society at present. The tendency of educational change for practical results leads to concrete education, outcomes in the educational field, and creative output, as the new results from thought, wisdom, and the methods of such education; by changing education from a consumption system or others, into education for thinking, invention, and creation. It promotes students to have new thoughts, new ideas and creations in a society for creative outcome. They will not follow others, or consume too much, as per the previous crisis (Paitoon Sinlarat, 2006).

The impulsion of a creative economy to benefit Thai society, at a fundamental level, is essential for developing the mechanisms needed to drive the change for success. The mechanism of impulsion of a creative economy has to use the integration of five laterals; public sector, private sector, academic sector, civil society sector, and people sector. The important roles of the academic sector consist of scholars from higher institutions and independent scholars who drive the strategy of the country's development as a creative economic country, such as creating personals for; creation, modifying the schooling process for student of all fields to develop creative thinking, and the building of process for people's development, and supplementing the development of local identity into their creative products and services (Thitikorn Poonpattarachiwin, 2010). Therefore, higher education institutions should play an important role in producing creative thinking, to support the world of working in a creative economy era. Apart from researching the economic development in Thailand, in aiming to be a creative organization, or an innovative organization of a business organization, the study of creative culture in higher education institutions, the organizational culture, as reflected from the behavior and the attitudes of the workings of people in institutions, in order to promote development and creative innovation, is necessary. The institutions should specify strategies of operation, in accordance with the creative economic policies of the country. Although many higher education institutions in Thailand presently promote creative culture as the visions of the institution, such as; Bangkok University's vision is to be a creative university, Silapakorn University's vision is to be the leading creative university; then the higher education institutions still require strategies to strengthen creative culture in the institution, in order to modify and create a new organizational culture contributing to mutual learning and working creatively and sustainably. Therefore, this research focuses on studying the elements of a creative culture in the Thai higher education institutions, in order to study the need assessment and development of strategies for enhancing creative culture in Thai higher education institutions.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research, using content analysis of the creative culture theories from books, articles, documents, websites and related researches from 1989 to 2012, a total of 53 items; including interviews about the elements of a creative culture with the 11 executives of higher education institutions and private organizations. They consist of (1) 2 executives, such as chancellor or vice chancellor of higher education institutions in Thailand which have the vision of being creative universities; such as Silpakorn University and Bangkok University; (2) 3 scholars and experts on creative organization or innovation organization. The criterion of selection is that the person must have acknowledged academic performances in the forms of texts and books, or must be a trainer of trainings or a lecturer of seminars about creative organization or innovative organization and (3) 6 executives from creative organizations or innovative organizations. The criterion of selection is that they must come from the organizations which are winners of 'Thailand's Most Innovative Company Award 2011', jointly organized by the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy, Chulalongkorn University, and Bangkok Business Newspaper. These organizations have passed the selection process based on the evaluation by business people in each industry together with the judgment by savants, and they are divided into 3 non-service companies and 3 service companies, a total of 6 persons from 6 companies.

Tools and data analysis for the research was content analysis, to analyze data and documents, and in-depth interviews about the elements of a creative culture. With regards to the executives of a creative university, scholars or experts of creative organizations or innovation organizations, the executives of a creative organization or innovation organization analyzed data by using content analysis (Supang Chantawanit, 2009). Data of concepts and theories of a creative culture from sources, such as; books, articles, documents, websites and related local and overseas researches, were gathered along with the data from interviews with executives of universities, scholars or experts of creative organizations and executives of creative organizations, in order to obtain the elements of a creative culture in the higher education institutions in Thailand.

Results

The results from the research found that there are 7 important elements of a creative culture, in the higher education institutions, that link together, and they are significant factors to be creative universities as follows; (1) Creative Policies and Goals, (2) Creative Environment, (3) Creative Organizational Structure, (4) Creative Supporting System, (5) Creative Human Resource Management, (6) Creative Leadership (7) Creative Behaviors and Attitude of People in the Institutions.

1. Creative Policies and Goals and creative culture promotion found in the research that higher education institutions, which have visions to be creative universities, specified the word "Creative" in their philosophy or vision or mission or mutual values of the institution. They specified that the creativity of operations was the main strategy, and they target creativity with clear objectives, including; policies that promote, support, and motivate faculty teachers, personnel, and students to practice

their thinking methods, operations to develop new work in the institutions, and have the opportunity to express their creativity, such as projects of creative work contests or thinking innovation, etc.

2. Creative Environment of the institutions has space for appropriate operating or developing. It concludes that the maintenance of a clean and fresh environment, and beautiful landscape within the institution, develops the learning center to foster creative skills for faculty teachers, personnel, and students in the institution and additions, such as; libraries, innovation centers, art galleries, museums, student lounges, etc., supply sufficient equipment and facilities for operation, contributing to the creative thinking of people in the organization, and further additions, such as; computers, the internet, office equipment, etc., create an atmosphere within the institution which promotes creative thought, and where namely it is fun, relaxed, unhurried and not too inactive. Furthermore, the institution is a characteristic of the 'smart classroom'. Notebooks or mobile devices, such as a Tablet or Ipad, are prepared for students to support e-book or e-learning. A projector should be supported by WIFI, so that a professor can transfer data from a student's screen to a main monitor, immediately. It makes for effective discussions or presentations of opinion. There are three or four LCD screens to separate work for students, as a team. A classroom should be a relocated classroom, with tables or chairs can be arranged as per a professor's requirements; and an intelligent podium with a screen that can immediately record schooling. A professor can modify his schooling, or change his role to a facilitator or coach, and select digital contents in the form of e-Handouts (PDF, Power point, Documents), and simultaneously send to students in the classroom.

3. Creative Organizational Structure of the institution has the flat work structure, in the form of the board, or the project team without the structure of flat organization. Cross-function is promoted for persons who have different bases of cultures and traditions (Multiculturalism), and for personnel in the institution to have diverse perspectives and experiences, resulting in creative thought. The institution focuses on the related persons who maintain a relationship and realize the need of outside and inside stakeholders, in order to develop curriculums and schooling, within the institution. The executive promotes ongoing creative culture within the institution. Some institutions probably add another position of a chief creative officer to particularly control the creative development of the institutions.

4. Creative Supporting System probably applies information technology systems to timely access data, and to help operations and schooling. The computer center supports the clear internal communication system for all levels; from top to bottom and bottom to top, for communicating policies, make creative public relations in both words and conference, and through letters, notices, or the intranet system within the institution. The knowledge management system is provided to record good practice, and avoid mistakes which may occur during operation, so that personnel can access the system and study, including the supply of a 'community of practice', in order to brainstorm creative work. In addition, a risk control mechanism or risk management is built in, in order to reduce errors and concerns for creative operations and possible errors.

5. Creative Human Resource Management is built in, since the institution seeks for and selects; faculty teachers, personnel and students who have creational desires to study and work in the institution. For example, the selection of creative students is made by considering; their portfolios to receive the creative student scholarship, the selection of talented graduates or persons who have created work to work in the institution, and the promotion of personnel to work in an appropriate department, as a result of their aptitude and interests. The motivation of faculty teachers, personnel and students is built, creative ideas are produced, and they gain monetary, or non–monetary, rewards or incentives. Maintenance for qualified persons is conducted based upon such things as; performance evaluation, or free time to further work, and the development of creative skills for faculty teachers, personnel and students through training, teaching and activities.

6. Creative Leadership, the executive of the institution has visions, and promotes and participates in building a creative culture in the institution. Communication is clear to perceive visions, objectives, and strategies for personnel in the institution. The executive opens an opportunity for faculty teachers, personnel and students to express opinions with open-mindedness and flexibility of administration.

7. Creative Behaviors and Attitudes of People in the Institutions is for an understanding of the visions, missions, objectives and purposes, giving importance to; creative & innovative ideas, having the bravery to express creative ideas and work development, preparing for changes, both internal and external, which impact the institution, creating new work and developing better working methods, having good relationships and cooperation, trusting the institution, and participating in workings and openings for new opinions or concepts.
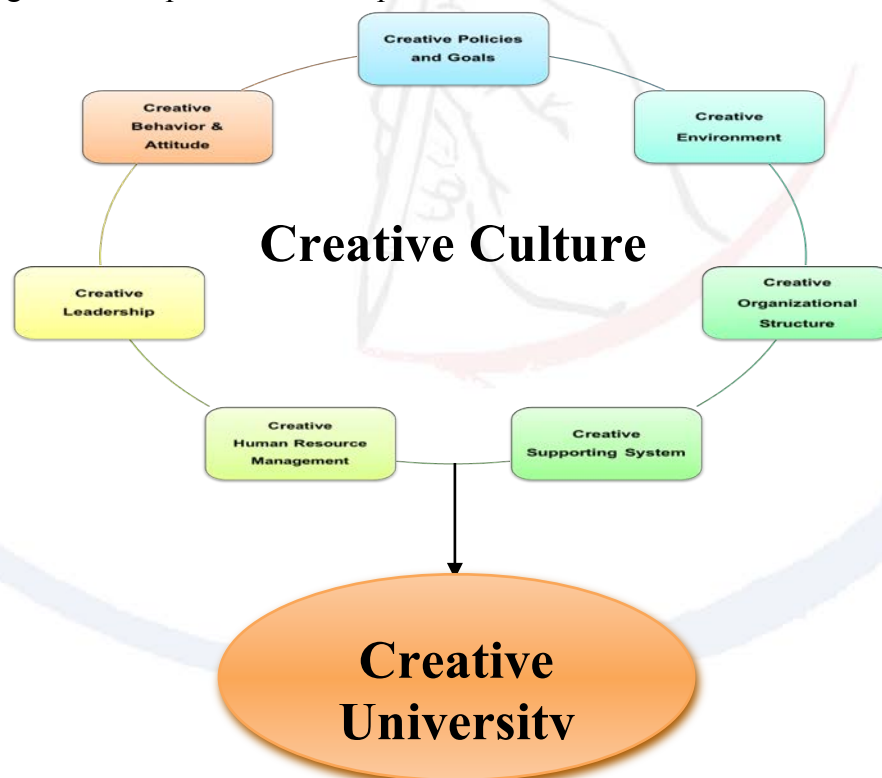

Figure1: The Elements of Creative Culture in Thai Higher Education Institutions

Discussion

The research results found that visions and policies of the executive is a major and important factor for building a creative culture in higher education institutions in Thailand. It conforms to the concept of Fernando Trias de Bas & Philip Kotler (2011) and Jonathan Feinstein (2011), who indicated that creative culture in an organization can emerge when it is driven or promoted from the executive to lower level employees in the organization, to build creativity in all parts of workings. The executive can build an organizational culture, so a key factor who contributes to the creative culture in the organization is the executive. Furthermore, determining creativity to main strategies of the institution, and the clear objective of creation within the institution, conforms to the concept of Christiansen, JA (2000), who indicated that the organization that will develop to become a creative organization or innovative organization has to focus on creation at all levels. Thus, the organization must have a long-term strategy relating to creativity or innovation, resulting in the promotion of organizational management, in order to create new ideas and allocate resources to build strategic innovation, which focuses on innovation. It leads to innovative ideas for personnel in the organization.

Creative Environment in the institution is a key factor to motivate creativity for faculty teachers, personnel and students. It conforms to the concept of Sombat Kusumawwalee (2009), who indicated that an organization which is a creative and innovative organization usually consists of a creative environment, for creativity in the organization, including the concept of Tidd, Bessant & Pavitt (2001) who indicated that a creative climate will motivate creative behavior of staff. What the organization should perform is to build a creative environment, such as; the development system; organizational structure, policy and communication processes, rewards system, admiration of training policies, an appropriate performance evaluation system, promotion for entrepreneurship, and a creative culture to support new ideas of staff.

Creative Organizational Structure from the document found that the flat organization will result in a creative culture of working (Jonathan Feinstein, 2011; Christiansen, 2000). However, the interview results of the executives of higher education institutions, the executives of creative and innovative organizations, and scholars in Thailand, found that the environment in Thailand is not appropriate for a flat organization, especially higher education institutions; since the environment of higher education institutions and private organizations have different administrations. Practically, higher education institutions in Thailand are flat organizations, and namely the commission is appointed to work together on many projects and to support cross-functions, and coordinate with the persons who have diverse perspectives. It results in creativity in the organization, in accordance with the concept of Fernando Trias de Bas & Philip Kotler (2011), who indicated that multiculturalism and cross-functions, coordination of staff in the organization who have different bases of experience, culture, and tradition will all lead to various ideas and creativity of work.

Creative Supporting Systems For example, information technology systems, communication systems, knowledge management and risk management all help the teachers, personnel and students to teach, learn and operate smoothly and punctually. They also reduce fear of failure, which can happen during the operation, and they encourage the construction of a creative culture within higher education institutions. This finding is in accordance with the concept of Fernando Trias de Bas & Philip Kotler (2011), which indicated that fear is an obstacle to the formation of creativity in an organization's personnel. To solve this problem, the organization has to develop risk control mechanisms, which will help to lessen the personnel's fears of thinking and operating. Additionally, communication within the organization is another important tool for the change of organizational culture. The organization should inform all the staff about the major strategies and plans, so that the personnel can share the same goals. This idea is also in accordance with the opinion of Christiansen (2000), which specified that an organization or innovative organization should encourage and allow creative personnel to communicate and exchange new ideas. In this process, the organization should have an efficient data collection system, and should be capable of distributing and sharing information with the personnel, so that it receives essential information which is necessary for creativity and the creation of innovation, especially the exchange of ideas among creative experts from various divisions and departments.

Creative Human Resource Management Creative administration and personnel development is an important factor for the formation of a creative culture within higher education institutions, which is also in accordance with the idea of Christiansen (2000) and Higgins (1995), who pointed out that the employment of a creative or innovative organization will focus on the searching and hiring of creative personnel, since this type of organization requires that the employees have a wide range of experiences and backgrounds. This is because the employment of such personnel will allow the organization to have various kinds of employees, with different viewpoints, which can help to generate new ideas for the development of creative work. Also, the development of personnel within the organization is vital, in order to enhance their creativity, as this will enable the organization to follow its desired approach. Knowledge and skills are also indispensable for creativity. For this reason, training and developmental programs, as well as the indoctrination of learning habits among the personnel, must be paid attention to (Tidd, Bessant & Pavitt, 2001). Moreover, creative organizations usually nurture staff with high potential, by building an interesting environment, providing technologically advanced equipment, creating external motivation, like financial profits, and internal motivation, like challenge, independence, resources, group work, encouragement from supervisors and support from organization, as well as putting the right man on the right job (Amabile, T.M. ,1996).

Creative Leadership Leaders of creative organizations with broad visions, open minds and flexibility in administration, play an important role in the creation of a creative culture within higher education institutions. This finding is in accordance with the opinion of Eric Bryn (2009), who indicated that one of the factors of condition and culture which encourages creativity, is the management team that is open to new ideas for the development of work, and encourages creativity in the organization, at all levels from chief executives to organizational staff (Amabile, T.M., 1996). When an organization defines its new vision, the organization's leaders

are the main keys of the changes, as they have to communicate and create clear vision recognition (Tidd, Bessant & Pavitt, 2001). Additionally, this idea is also agreed by Higgins (1995), who said that organizational leaders, who are supportive of creativity or innovation, are the ones who; define vision and strategies, in order to reach the organization's goals, accept the errors of their personnel in some operations, administer by focusing on finding solutions, consider and decide about new opinions, enhance and distribute power, to encourage the personnel to participate in the creation of innovation. Besides, the executives must have the characteristics of the leaders of changes.

Creative Behaviors and Attitudes of People in the Institutions According to the results of the study, the courage to think, to operate and to express creativity, as well as the readiness for change, are creative behaviors. This finding is in accordance with the research by Decha Dechawatthanapaisan (2011), which demonstrated that a dare to risk and to operate is an important basic factor which leads to the creative behaviors of an organization's personnel. In addition, such a factor also influences the relationships between the feeling of fun in working, the readiness for changes and the creative behavior. Creativity and trust in the organization are essential factors for the construction of a creative culture in an organization (Fernando Trias de Bas & Philip Kotler, 2011). Nevertheless, according to the results from the study of documents, teamwork can bring about a variety of ideas and lead to creativity (Fernando Trias de Bas & Philip Kotler, 2011; Eric Bryn, 2009; Jonathan Feinstein, 2011; John Winsor, 2006). However, the results of the study from the interviews demonstrate that, in the context of Thai society, there is still kind consideration, especially towards senior people. Thus, when working as a team, if a senior staff member, or a person who plays an important role in group decisions, has the characteristic of idea domination or has power over team members who do not dare to express opposed opinions, creativity may not take place. Furthermore, a team with too many members may bring about excessive diversity in ideas, resulting in slower operation. Therefore, there should be a further study on the appropriate number of team members for the encouragement of creativity.

Future Work

Future research should utilize the elements of a creative culture from this research, for the study of the needs assessment that enhance a creative culture within higher education institutions in Thailand, from the groups of Thai higher education institutions which provide creative industry courses in 15 branches, and are selected as creative academies. The result from the categorization of the needs assessment can be used for the development of strategies for enhancing creative culture in Thai higher education institutions. Such development will benefit the administration of Thai higher education institutions, which aim to become creative universities, and it will enable the operation of the institutions to be in line with the creative economic policies of the country, in the future.

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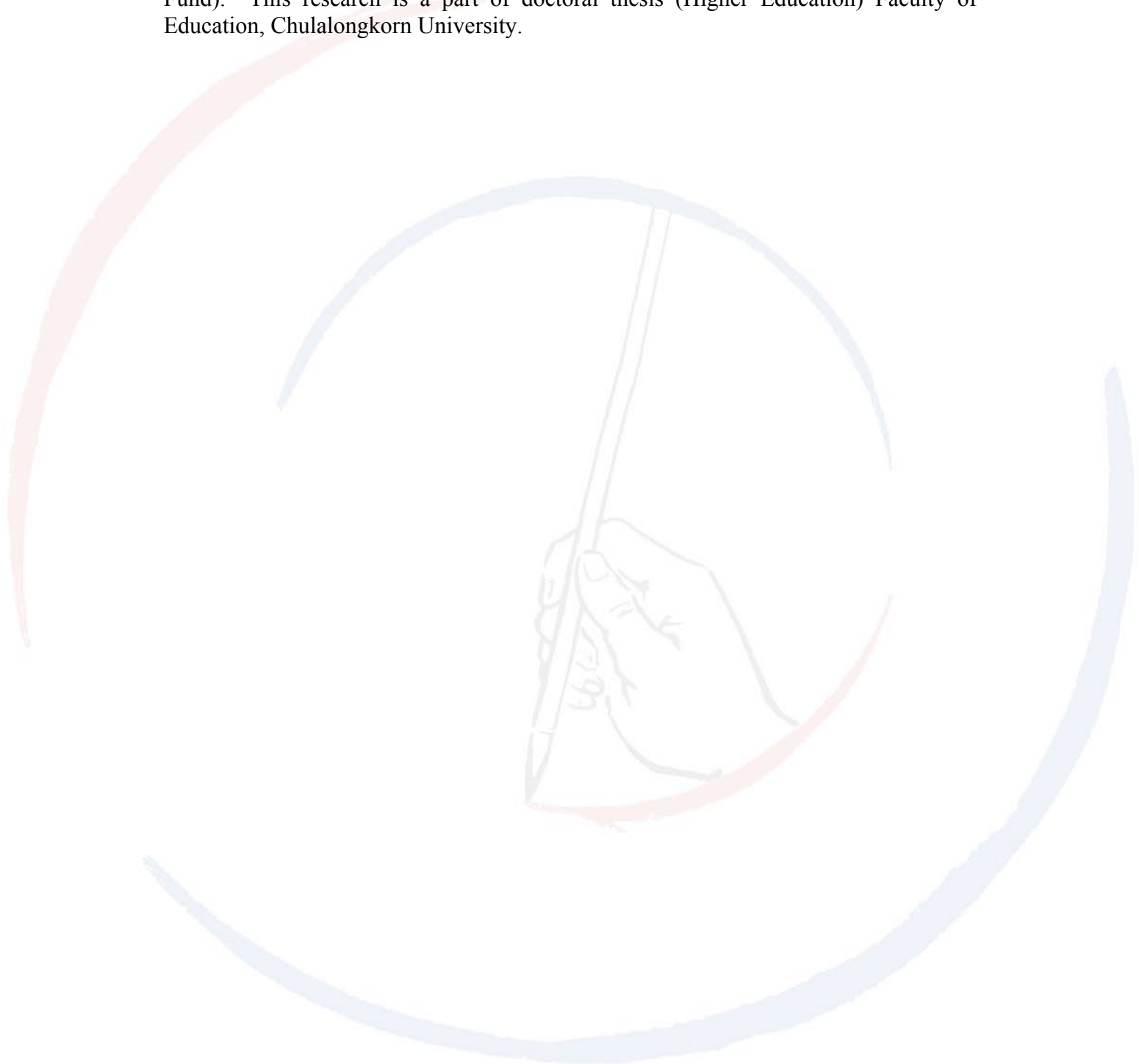
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