

Ethnicity and community history related to active aging development at Sao Cha-ngok Subdistrict, Bangkla District, Chacheongsao Province, Thailand.

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Abstract

This research was aimed to develop a guideline for promoting a better health quality of elderly in Sao Cha-ngok Sub-district, Bangkla District, Chachoengsao Province, Thailand, while the quality of life in terms of the potentiality, value, and being active in participation of ageing in society, should be enhanced. The study mainly focused on the investigation of the effects of ethnicity, race, and community history on the elderly potentiality. Qualitative data were collected through field notes, interview, observation, local legend and related documents. The findings showed that ethnicity, race of Thai-Chinese people, and the community history in the aspects of society and economy were related to the elderly ways of life in Sao Cha-ngok Sub-district. It could be noted that these elderly were working in agriculture and commerce. They possessed lands and tried to keep them for their descendants. This was led to their unique community culture affecting their roles in society and culture. The elderly were usually join activities at temples, which were the center for their participation. The development of the elderly role was based on the same race and identity leading to “Sao Cha-ngok elderly group”, which the members shared the same cultural experience. The members were able to join activities, stayed healthy, with their stable minds.

Keywords: Ethnicity, community History, active aging.

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Introduction

From the phenomenon of Thailand's population structure change to aging society, several sectors of the country focus on preparing to cope with changing urgently. Both government and local agencies realize that need to take care of elderly including young people will be elderly caregivers as well. That is a challenging task because if it is ignored, it will become a social crisis.

Access of aging society leads to preparation in academic coping that offers various and appropriate choices such as proposing approaches for caring and developing elderly in order to be self-reliance and able to do things benefiting societies, families and communities. There is a link between elderly and their roles in terms of economics, politics, society and cultures. They not becomes only elderly being important and meaningful, but they are also defined through societies and cultures that they live as well.

However, problem recognitions of entering aging society with increasing elderly make a picture of anxieties relating quality of life and society, hiring, dependence, public health problems and maintaining elderly prestige and values. The elderly and increasing in their numbers are viewed being social problems impacts to social systems, elderly and business of the country.

The point of view mentioned above is not able to explain cultural society of elderly, particularly Thai community cultures in village level happening together with transferring urban culture changing into local communities. Therefore, in ethnic dimension, cultures of ethnic groups and ethnic existence influence perception, acceptance and treatment of elderly in communities. For this research, the researcher would like to show that cultures and ethnicity are a point in definition of aging affecting societies in each society that elderly are treated with different perception forms from central government policies. The policies apply business economic view as fundamental idea. They are presented through community historical dimension and ethnic identity with viewing through Thai-Chinese people's cultures in Sao-Cha-ngok Sub-district, Bangkla District, Chachoengsao province.

Objective

This paper aims to study community history, ethnic and Chinese cultures involved with definition of elderly meaning; affected quality of life including social role maintenance of active aging.

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative research methodology, in-depth interviews, participant and non-participant observations, focus group interviews and in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to get significant data concerning food cultural issues. The issues reveal that identity of Chinese ethnicity living in area of Bangpakong River. The results derived from informants are as follows:

The first group: the people providing information or the key informants are elderly who have knowledge concerning community fundamental in food cultural points and

people who have knowledge about local, social changing in issues of migrations, habitations and continuous changing of communities before and after social and economic changes such as formal and informal leaders.

The second group: The informants involving with communities are both formal and informal leaders in community organizational and individual levels by selecting people who live internal and external communities and have relation with communities in issues of Chinese cultures and elderly roles.

The third group: The informants concerning social and cultural changes with interview are local organization groups, government officers involving with cultural, social and economic development. The derived information is analyzed in order to showing connection in local development as government policies leading to change within communities.

Scope of study

Scope of the area

The researcher selects the area of Sao Cha-ngok Sub-district, Bangkok District, Chachoengsao Province with the reasons as follows: The area is significant in terms of Chinese migrations and the communities are located in the diverse cultural area with blending Chinese and Buddhist cultures.

Scope of content

Context area

- Historical fundamental and ethnic groups
- Physical characteristics
- The relationship between people in communities and Bangpakong River

River

- Changes and impacts occur from the past to the present.

The elderly roles and importance in the communities.

- Community cultures indicate people's identity in Chinese communities that how they have a relationship with communities.
- How changing societies and cultures occurring affects existence of cultures and elderly in communities.

Research results

The Chinese ethnic: dimension of ethnicity and existence of community ways.

Thailand has a Thai-Chinese populations about 8 million people. Most of them are Teochew 56%, Hakka 16%, Hai-Lam 11%, Kwang-Tung 7%, Hok-Kian 7% and others 12% respectively. Each ethnic group has own identity differently such as Teochew is the biggest Chinese group settling down in the area around Chao-Phraya River and central region. They came from Fujian and Guangdong provinces to Siam since Ayutthaya period. Most of them were traders of rice shop and medicine. Some worked for government sector in the reign of King Thon Buri. Most of Teochew traders got a privilege; therefore, they were called Royal Chinese because the King of

Thon Buri has an ethnicity of Teochew as well. In Rattanakosin period, migration of Teochew people were more increased and there were a lot of Teochew people in Thailand. While another group immigrated to Thailand was Chinese Hakka; the most of them came from Guangdong province since 19th Century. They settled down at Songkla, Phuket, Ratchaburi and Kanjanaburi provinces. The most of them were expert in terms of animal leathers, mines and agricultures. They had agricultural skills, laborers, building, and invention of culture tools; and lived in an ecosystem area that could do agriculture because of being experts in field crops and horticultural crops when comparing with Teochew people. However, they were not good in trade.

However, Chinese people's evacuation in a very beginning age, a number of Chinese men settled down in Siam and then married Siamese women. This became value in those days. The children who were born from transnational marriage were called "Chinese descent". Nevertheless, the evacuation has changed in Ratanakosin Era. More Chinese women have moved to Siam leading to a decrease of transnational marriage.

Thai-Chinese descent in the first era who moved in Thailand held Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism. Later, Theravada Buddhism played a part in Chinese people belief derived from multiculturalism. Most of Thai-Chinese descent held traditional rituals based on Chinese belief and Theravada Buddhism. Chinese important events, for example, Chinese New Year, Moon Festival, and Ancestor Worship Ceremony, are greatly arranged in Phuket, Bangkok and other cities containing large Chinese communities.

Thai-Chinese people, however, worship their ancestors and deities and go to the temple like Thai people do. For funeral ceremony, they still practice in a customary way.

In the meanwhile, some Chinese Hor people in the north believe in Islam following their forebears. They have stronger relationship among members than those who are not Muslim. In Chiangmai, there are seven Chinese mosques. One of important mosques is Ban hor Mosque. Apart from Chinese Hor people, other groups of Chinese people also hold Islam.

Thai-Chinese culture is different from Singaporean and Malaysian-Chinese cultures in terms of religion. Singaporean and Malaysian- Chinese people change to believe in Christianity and speak Mandarin. Thai-Chinese people do not stick much in their own original cultures.

Community history: Thai-Chinese Being in Sao Cha-ngok Subdistrict.

Most of the villagers are Chinese. They immigrated to Sao Cha-ngok around 100 years ago. They spoke Chinese. After that, they communicated to more surrounding people until they were able to speak Thai. Originally, a group of Thais lived in the city and the group expanded after Chinese people moving.

The houses in Area 1 or Moo 1 called Ban Moo are tightly located near Bangpakong River Bank. Previously, this area was a market. It is now called Talad Ban Moo. For Area 2-6 or Moo 2-6, the houses are located separately based on the land ownership.

Sao Cha-ngok subdistrict has modern Chinese and Thai cultures. According to the community history, many Thai people who lived separately in the capital in B.E. 2544 moved to the community and form a large community. In B.E.2450, the community expanded because of more Chinese people moving to Sao Cha-ngok. From then, the ethnic identities of Sao Cha-ngok people have been mixed through marriage. In the age of changing in the community, transnational marriage was not an only factor of people's lifestyle changing. Instead, they still held their ways of life for living together in the community.

In Sao Cha-ngok community, the beliefs in Chinese culture, Buddhism and ghosts are combined. Sao Cha-ngok people still remain Thai culture of living together which is derived from their ancestors. Furthermore, they also pay respect to their departed forebears.

Chinese immigrants in Sao Cha-ngok also rigidly maintain their Chinese cultures. They build wooden houses near Bangpakong River bank for convenient transportation and commerce. The establishment of vegetarian house in Ban Moo is a symbol of religion and culture belief of Chinese people.



Picture 1 : Sao Cha-ngok Chinese Shrine

In B.E. 2504, government policy affected local development and community lifestyle. The reason is that the government focused more on the export of agriculture products. Therefore, people in community turned to earn their lives through farming to support the government policy.

In B.E. 2540 of Bubble Economy, people are impacted by collapse economy. Some agriculturalists faced problems of product export causing them to have insufficient incomes. Some families are under their debt, therefore, they have to adjust themselves to present social conditions. Agriculturists in the communities decline because they work in industry outside communities. In addition, city expanding affects community people thinking in terms of earning more money. Although the people lifestyle has been changed, the conventional beliefs in cultures and ceremonies are unique and outstanding for Sao Cha-ngok community.

In Sao Cha-ngok community, food culture is a unique symbol of Chinese people from the past to the present because most of them are agriculturists, so they produce and sell agricultural products by themselves. The food culture represents nationality and race of local people. Therefore, the food culture of local people has more value in culture than ways of life. Chinese immigrants in Sao Cha-ngok Sub-district bring food

culture with them such as making tofu, one symbol of Chinese people, from soy bean and sweet rice or preserve rice which is transform agricultural products in order to increase food value.

The food culture is disseminated to people in community and those in neighboring communities. It is a part of Sao Cha-ngok people ways of life and rituals which embeds in local people like innate wisdoms and transfers from generation to another generation.

Conclusion: Chinese cultures in Sao Cha-ngok community and active aging

The study reveals that Thai-Chinese people in Sao Cha-ngok community carry on Chinese cultures continuously through rituals and local beliefs. The beliefs are blended between Buddhism and belief in ancestors also appearing constantly such as vegetarian festival, funeral etc... Those rituals are important benefaction existing in Chinese cultures through elderly power in managing and making the rituals. If considered that the rituals and beliefs affect potential of elderly and help elderly in community having roles in societies. They become leaders in doing religion activities because of getting knowledge from their ancestors. The process of transferring to offspring in community is done for young people can look, observe and follow in the future. Each ritual results elderly are accepted. Although the rituals do not occur all year and all genders and elderly don't have roles in communities, the happened things are to gather all elderly' roles participating in the rituals.



Picture 2 : Elderly person in Community Activities.

In addition, belief systems of ancestor spirit power of Thai-Chinese people are important part that keeps respect of elderly roles in Thai-Chinese new generation to remain. That social phenomenon reflects through the rituals e.g. vegetarian festival, observing the precepts, the ceremony of paying respect to deity. Those activities are cultural conditions of ethnicity resulting relationship between age groups of Thai-Chinese people in Sao Cha-ngok Sub-district closely. In addition, it results quality of elderly life in order to be accepted in soul aspect, respect, and an important person in family.

Chinese Hekka in Sao Cha-ngok Sub-district remains ethnic identity through agricultural knowledge. Consequently, Thai-Chinese people in Sao Cha-ngok Sub-district have a lot of farming lands for their descendants. The possession of a lot of heritages shows social power in family management in terms of making decisions

concerning religions, occupation and reservation of Sao Cha-ngok temple. Although elderly are not able to go anywhere, they are not abandoned which are different from elderly concept in literature.

However, people in Sao Cha-ngok Sub-district rely on social interaction through Chinese ethnic identity in order to manage group activities and look after each other e.g. welfare providing, health checking and assistance in funeral. These activities benefit active aging in order to have one of social roles as a group administrator and committee.

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