

*Communication for Maintaining Ethnic Identity of the
Siamese- Malaysian Community in Malaysia*

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Abstract

This article explains that in the changing context of society the Siamese-Malaysian community can maintain their efficient community among the multi-cultural races. They have cultivated and built the awareness of historical context in order to construct the collective meaning of their ethnicity. They conserve cultural context that is the meaning and value of their national origin. The Siamese-Malaysian community employs a relational context, which is the strong involvement, of social relations with relatives and there is a communication context that promotes the community development with efficiency. According to the basic concept identity has several dimensions and they are dynamically changing with the situation and environmental context. The Siamese-Malaysian community reflects their identity based on race, nationalism and nation state in multiple-facets. This process depends on cultivating traditional media and the facilitation of the characteristics to relate and integrate new media that have the role of continuing to maintain the Thai identity in the Malayu land reflecting the civilization under globalization currents. Also, when using communication as an indicator, it reflects that Siamese-Malaysian identity is as citizens of Malaysia in economic and political dimensions, while their race identity is in religious and cultural dimensions. Therefore, it is because a multicultural society is not only accepting of the cultural differences but also it depends on adding a social space for ethnic groups. It can display a variety of their identities more smoothly and intricate separately. Siamese-Malaysian communities can coexist with the various ethnic groups in Malaysia with reconciliation.

Keywords: Communication, Identity, Ethnic, Culture, the Siamese-Malaysian, Malaysia

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Introduction

Thailand lost territory of the four states Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis to the British, in the reign of King Rama V. After this date the British granted independence to the Federation of Malaya which was officially backed in the year 1957. Therefore, it seems that Thailand did not only lose the land, but also lost the people who continue to live in such a state, which was transferred to the land as well. These people are called “People on land”, and who are under the administration of Malaya or Federation of Malaysia today.

Even today, Thai people in Malaysia, are defined in law as Malaysians and are called Siamese-Malaysian (Seam or Siam) but the existence of Siamese in Malaysia is considered a minority in Malaysia. In such cases, generally the culture of minorities may be absorbed into the other cultures with a loss of self-identity. On the other hand, Siamese-Malaysian in Malaysia manages to continue to maintain the identity of Thai culture existing prominently within the surroundings and context of another culture. Siamese-Malaysian in Malaysia have proved that although time has passed over the last 100 years Thai culture still remains among the differences in cultural diversity. It can inherit the values of humanity and dignity of the community, and can be very proud of them. It is interesting to study the reasons that Siamese-Malaysian in Malaysia who are regarded as only a minority community are able to show and retain their ethnic and cultural identities in another country.

Research Objectives

1. To study the pattern of communication in order to preserve the cultural identity of Siamese-Malaysian communities in Kedah state, Malaysia
2. To study the potential and role of personal media in the community in preserving the cultural identity of Siamese-Malaysian communities in the state of Kedah in Malaysia
3. To analyze the status and role of the ritual media in creating the pride of Siamese-Malaysian communities in the state of Kedah, Malaysia, as well as factors that affect the existence and changes of the status for the ritual media

Scope of Research

The scope of geographic area is a Siamese-Malaysian community who live in Plairamai (Titiakia) and Mai Son (Paya Mak Insun) villages, Pendang district, in the state of Kedah (Saiburi), Malaysia.

The scope of demographics is formal and informal leaders of the Siamese-Malaysian community in Plairamai and Mai Son villages. They work on the cultural activities which have been recognized and respected by the community of 14 people. There are 30 Siamese-Malaysians who participate in the cultural activities.

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative research using an in-depth interview technique. It can be

separated into two groups of interview respondents which are the 14 formal and informal leaders of Siamese-Malaysian community in cultural activities, and 30 Siamese-Malaysians. The observation technique was also used in participant observation, and analysis of relevant documents (Documentary Research).

Results

In the context of social transformation, Siamese-Malaysian communities can exist as potential among another culture through four contexts which are: (1) to cultivate and generate awareness about the historical context; the members of the community thinking with regards to race and awareness in the community, (2) to jointly develop and maintain cultural context as costs that are meaningful and valuable as the progenitor of the race, (3) based on the relationship context to interact face to face, and with the social relations of kindred as a strong network, (4) and the context of communication which is a powerful tool to develop efficiency through a form of communication to preserve the cultural identity of the Siamese-Malaysian communities. The three communication patterns are (1) a communication for learning and cultural transmission which communicates through a personal media, folk media, mass media and communication networks, (2) a communication which creates the participation of the community through the public areas and specific medias, (3) and a communication to enhance the prestige of the community identity through ethnical culture, and communication media. The roles of these two media are: (1) the role of the personal media in the community that has potential as a tool for community empowerment, (2) the role of ritual media that reflects the independence of culture in the community in creating "Spirit Strengthening." which assists the community to survive with dignity, and identity as the following explains:

1. The pattern of communication for maintaining cultural identity of the community comprises of the communication for studying and transferring culture; it is face to face communication that is transferred by personal media, traditional media, mass media and communication networks. Next, the communication for promoting the participation of community; it is the style of knocking on the door and meeting and consulting together for ensuring the community's participation. That is the way of two-way flow and horizontal communication patterns. They communicate by passing public areas and specialized media and the last is the communication for enhancing identity and prestige of the community: it is the verbal and non-verbal communication which is communicated by passing on the culture of an ethnic group and many kinds of media.

2. "Communication Competence" and the role of community leader used "Strategic Communication", i.e. (1) communication strategy for informing information, (2) communication strategy for management, (3) communication strategy for brainstorming, (4) communication strategy for promoting participation, (5) communication strategy for faith establishment, (6) communication strategy for negotiation. The research found 3 emphatic "Tactic Communication Skills" of a community leader, i.e. (1) consulting skill, (2) convincing skill and (3) management skill. Moreover there are several roles of community leader, i.e. (1) educator, (2) counselor, (3) management planner, (4) conflict manager, (5) coordinator and (6) grooming new-generation leaders.

3. The community still keeps ordination ceremonies and paying respect to deceased ancestors' ceremony or Bun Duan Sib festival, which has serious rituals. In addition, the research found that traditional media like the ordination ceremony has influence: first, at the individual level, the ritual helped activate values and educational transferring. Secondly, at the relative level, the ritual added spiritual value, keeping and reinforcing the monkhood institution. Lastly, in the community level the ritual creates the relations and cultural experience of the ethnic group and creates the harmony of the community. Regarding the functions of the ritual, Bun Duan Sib festival, at the individual level, the ritual kept the beginning, inherited the spiritual belief and reflected the imagination. Second, at the relative level, the ritual helped relate between groups and is an enjoyable area among relatives. Lastly, at community level, the ritual had an effect on transferring the community wisdom, community empowerment, making the memories together and consolidating the collective memory and enhancing a community's identity. A study regarding factors, which influenced the survival of the ritual, identified beliefs, community leaders, lineage systems, the government's policy and the influence of mass media while factors that influenced the changing of the ritual are communication development and formal education.

Conclusion

The research of Communication for Maintaining Ethnic Identity of the Siamese-Malaysian Community in Malaysia is a qualitative research study, which focuses on communication patterns in order to preserve the cultural identity of Siamese-Malaysian communities in Kedah state, Malaysia, potential and the role of the personal media in the community, including the status and role of rituals media to strengthen community identity, the dignity of Siamese-Malaysian community in the state of Kedah in Malaysia, as well as factors that affect the existence and the status of the communication strategy.

In the study the researcher has found that the interesting issue is that "The potential for the existence of Siamese-Malaysian communities in Malaysia" requires the four contexts: historical context, cultural context, relationship context, and communication context, including the findings of the "Patterns of communication to maintain the cultural identity of Siamese-Malaysian communities in Malaysia". It also includes the findings on "Personal media's potential and role to preserve cultural identity and strengthen identity, and dignity of the community", and "rituals media's status and role to strengthen identity, and dignity of the community"

The future study will focus on the identity process / production of how Siamese-Malaysian communities were shaped. As a researcher, I believe in the power and role of communication. Therefore, I am interested in the building of identity process and "How did communication take part in the creation of identity?, What are interactions of Siamese-Malaysian communities in each area in terms of a pattern of communication among and between ethnic groups in the different contexts or situations?, How Siamese-Malaysian communities express their varieties of ethnic identities?". The results from the interaction of communication and culture in groups and with other ethnic groups leading to the Siamese-Malaysian community knowing about the meaning and value of identities in different characteristics can be used to analyses the dynamics construction of ethnic identity of Siamese-Malaysian in the

context of Malaysia.

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