

The Involvement of Community in the Management of Culture Knowledge: Perjud Yeerai Tradition of the Fishermen’s Community in Rawai Subdistrict, Phuket

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Abstract

This research was a qualitative form of research conducted by collecting data from documents and doing field research by interviewing those who can provide important information about the participation of activities to study the management of cultural knowledge of the “Perjud Yeerai” tradition amongst the fishermen’s community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket. The study found that Perjud Yeerai tradition is a ceremony for making offerings to and thanking ancestors for taking care of the Uraklawoy people, which is held annually on the 15th day of the 5th waxing moon. “Perjud” means cleaning and “Yeerai” means cemetery or grave. In addition, it is also a day for the gathering of relatives. The conservation of

passing on cultural knowledge of the “Perjud Yeerai” tradition of the fishermen’s community from generation to generation, which is disappearing or changing, is done by telling the new generation so that they know, showing them by example, teaching their children the about the tradition by word of mouth, taking the new generation to see the actual location of ancestors graves, participating in the event at an early age, and by contributing to the tradition of their community.

Keywords: fishermen’s community, generation to generation, knowledge management, local cultural, tradition

การมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนในการจัดการ ความรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม: ประเพณีเป่อจืดญี่ไไร้ ชุมชนชาวเล ตำบลราไวย์ จังหวัดภูเก็ต

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากเอกสารและการวิจัยภาคสนาม โดยการสัมภาษณ์ผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญ การมีส่วนร่วมในกิจกรรมเพื่อศึกษาการจัดการความรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม “ประเพณีเป่อจืดญี่ไไร้” โดยการมีส่วนร่วมในการจัดการความรู้ของชุมชนชาวเล ตำบลราไวย์ จังหวัดภูเก็ต ผลการศึกษา พบว่า ประเพณีเป่อจืดญี่ไไร้ เป็นพิธีเช่นไหว้และขอขอบคุณบรรพบุรุษที่คอยดูแลปกป้องให้อยู่สุขสบายของชาวอุรักลาไวย์ จัดขึ้นทุกวันขึ้น 15 ค่ำ เดือน 5 ของทุกปี โดยคำว่า “เป่อจืด” แปลว่าทำความสะอาด และ “ญี่ไไร้” แปลว่า สุสานหรือหลุมฝังศพ นอกจากนี้ ยังถือเป็นวันรวมญาติอีกด้วย ส่วนการ

อนุรักษ์ การถ่ายทอดองค์ความรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม
“ประเพณีเป่จืดญี่ไฉ่” ของชุมชนชาวเล จากฐานสู่ฐาน
ซึ่งค่อยๆ เลื่อนหาย เปลี่ยนแปลงไป ด้วยวิธีการบอก
ให้รู้ทำให้ดูเป็นตัวอย่าง สอนลูกหลานจากประเพณี
ที่สืบทอดกันมา โดยวิธีปากต่อปาก พามาดูสถานที่
จริง พาลูกหลานไปเข้าร่วมพิธีตั้งแต่อายุน้อย
และเข้ามามีส่วนร่วมกับประเพณีของชุมชนตัวเอง

คำสำคัญ: การจัดการความรู้, ฐานสู่ฐาน, ชุมชน
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Introduction

Culture is an indication of the difference of a person, group of people, or community. It is considered the heritage of a society since it is the passing on of knowledge from one generation to another, both directly and indirectly without interruption. Humans use language for passing on culture; therefore, language is a symbol for passing on local culture, which is an important fundamental of national culture because it shows lifestyles, ideas, beliefs, values, traditions, rituals, and the wisdom of a community. These are an indication of identity and reflect simple lifestyles that help with the development of the community to become a quality society by building morality and ethics as well as by maintaining culture and identity.

Thai society is like other societies, in that it does not stand still. There is a change all the time. Compared to other societies at the same level, we may say that the change is so fast that most people in the society could not adapt, causing cultural issues, especially local culture or wisdom which is lost or oblivious because it is not being paid attention to, passed on, or maintained by the owners of the culture. The cause may be because of several factors (Rawai Municipality, 2011).

Currently, there are 30 fishermen communities distributed in six Andaman provinces with an estimated population of 10,000 people, consisting of Mokaan, Moklan, and Uraklawoy. After the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the story of the fishermen received greater awareness because of presentation by the media and organizations and foundations that help and work with these ethnic groups. The major problem for the fishermen is instability in the housing because at least 25 communities do not have title deeds despite having lived there for

more than 300 years. Another problem is the cemeteries and places to worship, which are normally located on the beaches, when there are newly announced tourism policies, they can cause an invasion of the cemeteries and the worship areas of the fishermen as they are taken to become tourist areas, meaning that some fishermen communities no longer have a beach to perform their ceremonies. What is obvious is that children and young fishermen do not have pride in their own culture. They do not show that they are fishermen for fear of being insulted by members of the surrounding society (Provincial Culture Office, Phuket, 2015).

On June 2, 2010, the cabinet approved a policy of restoring the livelihoods of fishermen according to the guideline of building special cultural areas for fishermen and authorized the relevant authorities the plan to act. This included housing security and allowing the fishermen to find resources on various islands.

"If the older generations are gone, a lot will change because younger generations do not consult the shamans or the elders. They do whatever they want to do. For this tradition, if the shamans are not strict, then it will all be lost. It is different from what the older generations did. This culture should be conserved. If we have 9 we keep 9. Don't add 10. But it's now held by the convenience of the new generation. It depends on how people act and their conscious mind. They should know what's right and what shouldn't be done. They should follow the correct rules and traditions. This is worrisome." (Wanpichai Sumninelump, 2015).

Information from an interview of a committee of fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict on April 5, 2015.

The fishermen's community of Rawai subdistrict, Phuket, faces a continual loss of identity because of the rapid changes of societies in this world. Therefore, the researcher wanted to study the management of cultural knowledge to conserve local culture for the local pride and to build the strength of the community's sustainably. In addition, Phuket is one of the provinces with the top reputations in tourism of the country. Mostly, it's marine tourism. However, Phuket also has history, culture, and traditions worth conserving for the next generation. This knowledge should be collected and preserved as it will be extremely beneficial to the community for its diverse culture and for the society of Phuket in the future.

Objectives of the Study

1) To study the cultural knowledge of the "Perjud Yeerai" tradition for the participation of the management of knowledge of the fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket.

2) To study the conservation and passing on of cultural knowledge of the "Perjud Yeerai" tradition from generation to generation amongst the fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket.

The Area of Study

The area of study was the fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket, which is the area that the Ministry of Culture proposed to be a special area for the passing on of the culture and tradition of all fishermen who live in the Andaman Sea (The Government Public Relations Department, 2012), by studying it between November 2014 and November 2015 (Siangtai Newspaper, 2011).

Research Methodology

For the study of documents, the researcher studied academic documents related to the involvement of communities in the management of cultural knowledge, community data, and data collection in the field and the techniques used for data collection included observation and in-depth interview. The procedure for data collection is as follows:

The population studied was fishermen who lived at the fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket and the samples were fishermen who lived at the fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket. The selection of sample was performed by purposive sampling of those who were willing to provide data about the "Perjud Yeerai" tradition.

1. The researcher collected qualitative data by going to the area and interviewing four fishermen who were willing to provide data about the "Perjud Yeerai" tradition including one leader of the fishermen's community, one shaman who performed ceremonies for them, and two people from the fishermen's community committees.

2. The study was performed by a participatory action research using storytelling as a tool of the study and exchanging knowledge while the researcher collected knowledge about the issues.

3. The data was collected, sorted, processed, and filtered.

4. The collected data was used to prepare a knowledge sharing forum that shows the data that has been sorted, classified, processed, filtered, and concluded for the fishermen community in the form of a video and report, and if the fishermen's community found that the data was incorrect, then there would be an exchange until none of the

participating people argued with the information and they all agreed with the data and story that would be later distributed in the form of a video.

The Result of the Study

From the study of the management of cultural knowledge of the “Perjud Yeerai” tradition of the fishermen’s community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket, by interviews and returns of data, the results are as follows:

1) The importance of “Perjud Yeerai” tradition

“Perjud Yeerai” tradition is that of making offerings and thanking ancestors who take care of the Uraklawoy people and is held annually on the 15th day of the 5th waxing moon. “Perjud” means cleaning and “Yeerai” means cemetery or grave. In addition, it’s also a day for the gathering of relatives. The Uraklawoy people who live at other places but have an ancestor buried at the cemetery in Rawai subdistrict would usually come to participate as well.

2) Format of activities of “Perjud Yeerai” tradition

The event is divided into two days, a day for cleaning the graves and a day for making offerings to the ancestors. The graves of the Uraklawoy people are different from graves elsewhere as the corpse is put into a coffin with belongings used when the deceased was alive such as a rice cooker, stove, bowl, plate, knife, basket, etc., so that the deceased can use the items in their next life. In addition, fake jewelry is also put into the coffin as well. Then, the coffin is beautifully covered with sand. There is also a roof for the grave because it’s believed that the deceased would feel like he/she is in a house when they were alive.



Figure 1: the graves of Uraklawoy people

On the day of cleaning the grave, family members will get rid of weeds and clean up the surrounding area. Sand from Rawai beach at the entrance to the cemetery is brought to beautifully decorate the graves. Beautiful flowers are placed in front of the grave. The containers of offerings are cleaned and a blanket is used to cover the sand on the grave. Every grave is labeled with the name, birthday, and date of death of the deceased and at the front of the grave, there will be a place for the offerings. On some graves, a beautiful platform is built. To clean the grave, each family will help clean it near the day of the ceremony, but it's mostly done one day before the date of the ceremony.



Figure 2-3: the villagers are carrying sand from the beach in front of the cemetery to decorate graves



Figure 4-5: family members get rid of weeds and clean up the surrounding area graves

The second day is the day for showing respect to the ancestors on the 15th day of the 5th waxing moon, an activity which will start at 8.00 a.m. Adults and children dressed in their best clothes at the cemetery. Everyone helps transport various kinds of equipment and a lot of food to the graves of their relatives, where incense is lit to invite the deceased to participate in the ceremony. The most important thing that the relatives of the deceased have to prepare is a set of areca nut and betel, which includes areca nut, betel, cigarette, and tobacco; one such set is prepared for each of the deceased.



Figure 6: the graves cleaned already



Figure 7: relatives are preparing food



Figure 8: relatives incense before putting food



Figure 9: food and the most important thing that the relatives of the deceased have to prepare is a set of areca nut and betel, which includes areca nut, betel, cigarette, and tobacco; one such set is prepared for each of the deceased

3) Food offering ceremony

After the family has prepared everything, the shaman is invited to come to the ceremony to invite the souls of the deceased to attend, one at a time.

Firstly, the shaman will sit in front of the grave where the food and dessert are placed and the relatives will sit in a circle around the food.



Figure 10: the shaman will sit in front of the grave

Secondly, the shaman will light a fire in the coal pot and sprinkle gum benzoin on top so that the aroma of the gum benzoin will be a medium of communication. If the relatives of the deceased don't do well or don't take care of the graves or don't keep their promises with the deceased, then the spirit will communicate with the shaman and tell him to tell the relatives. After lighting the coal pot, the shaman picks up and lights the cigarette and tobacco and fumigates them with smoke from the pot prior to placing them on a plate. He then lifts the plate over his head, murmurs a spell, and passes the coal pot to the relatives of the deceased in a circular motion three times so as to invite the soul of the deceased to join the feast through the smoke.

At the end of each round, the shaman will finish with a spell before passing the coal pot clockwise to the next relative. After completing the same procedure with everyone, the shaman will perform a ceremony to send the food to the spirit of the deceased. Everyone will touch the food that has been placed at the graveside.



Figure 11: the shaman will light a fire in the coal pot and sprinkle gum benzoin on top

Thirdly, when the ceremony is finished, everyone will rub their head so that the merit they send to the deceased will help them have a better life, free from any disease.



Figure 12: the shaman lifts the plate over his head, murmurs a spell, and passes the coal pot to the relatives of the deceased in a circular motion three times

Finally, the relatives of the deceased will bring another set of food that has been prepared to eat with the deceased. They can eat the offerings without having to wait for the incense to be fully burnt. However, they do need to rotate the plates of the offerings one round just if they are eating food after the spirit of the deceased. The villagers believe that eating the offerings is considered auspicious.



Figure 13: everyone will touch the food that has been placed at the graveside

After the shaman has finished calling the spirits from all the various graves to eat the offerings, there are various recreational activities such as the Rongngeng dance and Mana dance which the villagers perform together for the spirits of the deceased to see and to entertain them and the villagers who attend the ceremony. Moreover, the dancing also creates harmony and love among the villagers because many villagers of all ages including children and adults and men and women will come together to perform and have fun, often remaining at the cemetery until the evening.



Figure 14-15: Rongngeng dance and Mana dance for the spirits of the deceased to see and to entertain them

Perjud Yeerai tradition is a very important tradition of the Uraklawoy people. In addition to being a tradition that relatives gather to discuss, it's also a tradition that shows the gratefulness of the Uraklawoy people. Since the Uraklawoy people respect the spirits of the ancestors very much, and believe that life will be good or bad depending on how they behave and treat their ancestors, if they do well and take care of them well, their spirits will inspire the lives of their children to meet only good things and have prosperity.

4) Conservation of cultural knowledge of the “Perjud Yeerai” tradition of the fishermen’s community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket

The conservation and continuation of cultural knowledge of the fishermen’s community to their children or the next generation can be done in many ways, including teaching the children to learn about the tradition by telling them, showing them examples, teaching them the traditions that have been inherited by word of mouth from generation to generation, taking them to the actual locations, taking them to attend the ceremonies at an early age, and physically participating in the traditions of their community.

"I have never been possessive about magic and spells. At the ceremony, I never speak softly. I speak loudly for them all to hear and remember. I try to teach them and make them remember. It is not difficult, but they say it is. The offerings nowadays are easy to find. I can teach them without charging anything to pass on this tradition to the next generation (Jaroon Hardsaithong, 2015)."

Information from an interview of a shaman of fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict on April 5, 2015.

The management of cultural knowledge of the Perjud Yeerai tradition, which is a local culture of the fishermen's community that is fading away, can be remembered again through storytelling, staging the "Perjud Yeerai" ceremony, and returning the information to the community to emphasize the identity of all fishermen so that they remember what has been inherited from their ancestors in order to relay it to the next and future generation. In addition, it also helps to present the unique culture to outsiders or tourists to help them get to know and understand more about the Perjud Yeerai tradition so as to avoid losing the age-old customs, as well as to manage the cultural knowledge and other traditions of the fishermen's community later.

Discussions

The study of the involvement of the community in the management of cultural knowledge of the "Perjud Yeerai" tradition of the fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket found that the collection of cultural information of the tradition of the general fishermen cannot

tell the story sequentially and does not give the importance to tacit knowledge as evidence that can be presented as explicit knowledge or tangible knowledge. The conservation is particularly important for people who are concerned that the tradition will disappear when their lives end, and there are already very few of these people, just like the example of the words from an elder who is concerned about the tradition that is disappearing.

“Perjud Yeerai tradition is held only once a year.

No matter where we go, we often seek blessings from our ancestors and sacred things. I want everyone to know about this tradition of the Uraklawoy people and conserve it for the future generations forever.” This can be done by inviting the children to attend the ceremony to absorb and learn from direct experience (Gnim Dumrongkaset, 2015).

Information from an interview of a leader of fishermen's community in Rawai subdistrict on March 30, 2015.

Which is consistent with the results of a study about Knowledge Management on Local Culture of Tambol Aomkred, Pakkred District, Nonthaburi Province. The study found that the data on local culture and traditional wisdom are not being documented in print. Knowledge is passed on by word-of mouth and by demonstration, and must be memorized and mastered by the new generation. Thus, there are risk of errors in transmission of key knowledge and loss of information (Ngamnij Kullakan, 2014). One more of a study about Socio-economic

and cultural changes of the Sea Gypsies in Koh Lantao District, Krabi Province, the study found that the expansion of the commercial economy, state power, and tourism is the main cause of socio-economic and cultural changes of the community. Money has played a more important role in their lives. There is more cultural interaction with outsiders and the villagers are more materialistic. However, their common consciousness with their ancestors and a strong kinship relation has slowed their ethnic identity change (Yaowalak Srisuksai, 2002).

Suggestion

This study can provide knowledge about the Perjud Yeerai tradition, which is a local culture of the fishermen's community, to highlight the area of the community, promote its conservation for their descendants and publicize the identity, beliefs, and values of its cultural diversity to outsiders in order to further promote cultural tourism of the fishermen community in Rawai subdistrict, Phuket. There should be a study of the management of other cultural knowledge of other traditions that are important and should be conserved for the next generations in order that they realize what previous generations have built for them.

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