

Process of Community Participation in Identity Communication of Thung Bangkhen, Thailand

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Abstract

This qualitative research study emphasized the implementation of community participation in searching, analyzing and exploring the identity of Thung Bangkhen or Bangkhen Field, Bangkok by adopting the Thailand 4.0 policy which underlines the development fostered by strengthening the internal economy. The study aimed at improving dissemination of the identity of Thung Bangkhen through community participation process. The informants of the study were divided into 2 groups, namely “the Bangkhen Field community members” and “the outsiders or non-community members”. As for the research process, at each step, knowledge exchange and community participation were practiced while collecting and synthesizing data in order to obtain information which was acceptable to the community members. The findings of the study reveal that the true identity of Thung Bangkhen is that this area was Siam’s bread basket where 2 Siamese kings, that is, King Rama VIII and King Rama IX spread rice seeds in person. This historic event should be widely publicized. Thus, the community members decided to host an event called “The Legend of Thung Bangkhen” in order to disseminate the true identity of the community. This event was successfully held with the cooperation amongst the researchers, the community members, and the outsiders who worked voluntarily according to their skills. To achieve the set goals required some contributing factors, namely community capital, transmission and ritualistic models of communication, appropriate media, as well as community participation process with which the community members and the insiders involved.

Keywords: Participation Action Research, Community Identity, Communication

Introduction

Development on the basis of and for the sake of national and local cultures is being restored and exploited for further potential benefits by adopting the key principles of the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan, namely the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, people-centered development, strong and self-reliant communities, and community participation. To develop community identity and to publicly communicate such identity is an important capital leading to achieving one of the development goals of the Twelfth Plan, that is, to encourage strong and self-reliant communities. To develop community identity and to communicate with the public such identity is an effective strategy designed to achieve one of the development goals of the Twelfth Plan, that is, to encourage strong and self-reliant communities.

Identity bonds with the social capital of communities. The prominent social capital of Thung Bangkok is as follows:

- 1) Economic capital is Yingcharoen Market, an old marketplace of Thung Bangkok. The market was officially opened on August 11, 1955. It currently covers an area of 48,000 m², and it is the largest market place in Bangkok District.
- 2) The outstanding cultural capital in Bangkok District is religious institutions such as Phrasimahathatworamahawihan Temple and educational institutions at several levels including kindergartens, compulsory schools, and vocational schools the 3 most important ones of which are Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Sripatum University, and Krirk University.
- 3) Symbolic capital is as follows: the Constitutional Defense Monument and Phrasiphithaktham Temple.
- 4) Social capital of Bangkok District lies in 77 communities instituted by Bangkok Metropolitan Administration within which there are Bangkok District Cultural Council and several clubs formed in order to do community activities.
- 5) Experience capital. A group of skillful local artists set up Saisema Puppet Foundation in a bid to keep alive Thai arts and promulgate contemporary art and folk art of each area so that the new generation, as well as foreigners have an ideal chance to learn about these arts.

To effectively develop identity communication requires willingness and a general consensus in the community, hence community participation process is needed in order to get shared meaning so that the community's identity can be passed on or disseminated in the same way. Moreover, identity communication requires various levels and types of communication including large-group communication, small-group communication, ritualistic model of communication and mass-communication according to occasions and proprieties.

Research Objectives

To improve dissemination of the identity of Thung Bangkok through community participation process.

Literature Review

All of the relevant research studies indicate that identity communication development requires communication as a tool which helps gaining the shared meaning of identity. The communication process needs to be gone through on a production - reproduction basis in order to pass on the identity from generation to generation. There are mainly 2 models of communication process, namely transmission model which aims at transmitting information from the sender to the receiver in a bid for persuasive communication and ritualistic model which intends to help getting the shared meaning between the sender and the receiver (Kaeothep, 2002).

The study of Yuping Mao and Yuxia Qian (2015) found that overseas Chinese professional in Western countries used social media in maintaining their social network and sustain their identity. They managed their multicultural identity through their usage of Facebook.

Roberts (2016) carried out a study entitled “It Takes a Rooted Village: Networked Resistance, Connected Communities, and Adaptive Responses to Forest Tenure Reform in Northern Thailand” and concluded that, in communication process, understanding the civic cultural, origin identity, and social cultural of local community is a significant solution for a successful community connection.

Kulthida Ratanakosol, Wiratep Pathumcharoenwattana and Parn Kimpee (2017) conducted a research study entitled “Development of a Learning Process for Creating Community Identity: Results from Rayong, Thailand”. The study employed the participatory action research method to identify 10-step learning process for creating community identity. Each step consisted of 24 learning activities involving concepts of Community Learning Process, Community Empowerment, Community Identity and Social Capital.

Packiaraj Arumugham (2017) undertook research entitled “Racism and Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model”. The paper suggested the use of Racial/ Cultural Identity Development model in understanding the stages of development the oppressed people experience as they struggle to understand themselves and the dominant culture. Sue and Sue (2006: 92) referred to the R/CID model as follows: the model defines five stages of development that oppressed people experience as they struggle to understand themselves in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness. The role social workers could play in improving relations between the racial minority culture and the dominant culture. They are mandated by the profession to be respectful of clients who belong to different racial background. The society without divides people can be a healthy society.

Nobparat Chaichana, Apichart Jai-aree, Prasong Tanpichai (2018) made a study entitled “Process of Mon Ethnic Identity Construction: A Case Study in Ban Wangka, Thailand”. The qualitative research aimed to investigate the process of Mon ethnic identity construction in Ban Wangka, Nong Lu Sub-district, Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province in the present context reflecting directly the phenomena in the Mon ethnic group. The ethnic boundary has been built through selection of cultural differences as symbols and making the past serve the present; for example, Mon style dress demonstrates that the ethnic groups reconstruct and apply it through cultural symbols under the changing conditions of interactions amongst different groups.

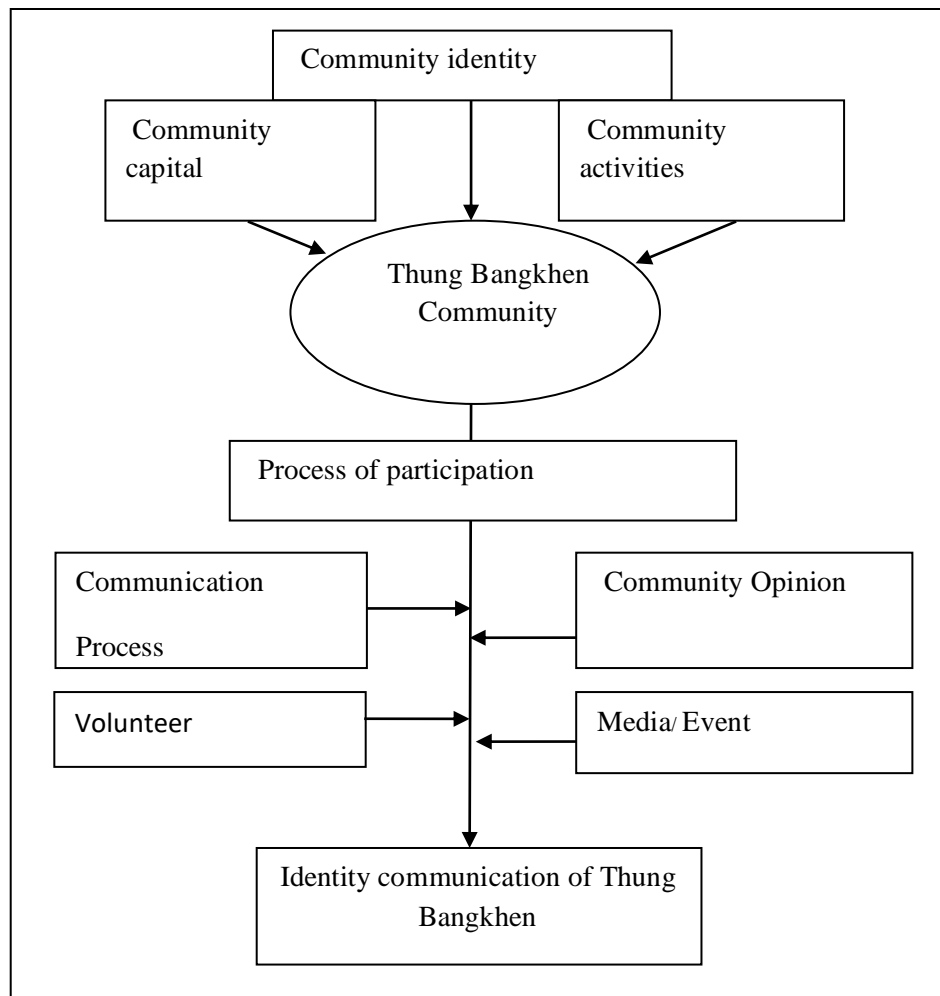
Also, Pisak Kalyanamitra (2018) did a study entitled “The Development of Social Capital in Pathum Thani Province towards Sustainable Development Based on Sufficiency Economy Philosophy”. After becoming Thailand’s national agenda, the social capital becomes significant for social institutions strengthening for locality to reach sustainability. The study founded that people in Pathum Thani have strong social cohesion and networks in knowledge capital and wisdom of the village philosophers and community-based and career-based leaders that are the starting point of social networks both within and outside the community emerging to daily living culture of each community and locality.

They have the good relationships that accelerate the benefits of participating in activities for engagement creation. Moreover, the economic capital, natural resources and environment lead to strong community development.

Conceptual Framework

The researchers collected relevant factors and variables and established a conceptual framework. It was found that Thung Bangkhen has a high level of social capital which had not been publicly acknowledged and the community usually does some activities; for

instance, temple fairs and traditional events, but the community members hadn't ever gathered to research, achieve a consensus on the community's identity together, and communicate the identity similarly. Thus, the researchers set up the participatory communication process, held several meetings for exchanging and sharing ideas which involved some factors including the communication process, the community's views, community volunteers, and media such as special events, social media, and mass media. The results showed that, after the process, development of Thung Bangkhen's identity communication was fostered.



Research Methodology

Participants

The participants were divided into 2 groups as follows:

“The insiders or the locals of Thung Bangkhen community” were the key informants providing data relating to the community, tourist spots, history, culture, natural resources, etc. including local government officers who performed a crucial role in the community, local entrepreneurs and the locals or anyone involving the community; and

“The outsiders or the non-community members” included qualified experts, scholars, and specialists with a high level of knowledge who could provide valuable information regarding Bangkhen Field.

Methods

This study was carried out according to 6 steps as follows:

Step 1: Data collection was arranged by gathering information obtained from analyzing and synthesizing the relevant documents and research concerning identity concepts and theories. The collected data was used to establish frameworks. Documents and research as regards Thung Bangkhen were also analyzed and synthesized.

Step 2: Snowball sampling techniques was employed to explore needs of the community members. After identifying key informants of Thung Bangkhen, in-depth interviews would be held with the inside informants, which included representatives from government offices, entrepreneurs, community delegates and those who are involved with Thung Bangkhen, and the outside informants, which referred to experts, academicians and the people involved.

Step 3: Interpretive focus group discussions between the inside and outside informants were held to explore the community's identity, community capital and needs for communication channels to make the identity of Thung Bangkhen known.

Step 4: Interpretive focus group discussions on developing and forging the identity of Thung Bangkhen.

Step 5: The Data gained from steps 1-4 was analyzed and synthesized. The community participatory activities were then concluded, and the researchers hosted an event called "The Legend of Thung Bangkhen" which was an activity done in order to publicly communicate the Thung Bangkhen's identity.

Step 6: The data obtained from the study was provided for the community and the "The Legend of Thung Bangkhen" event was publicized online and through mass media.

Data collection

The researchers surveyed the relevant documents and held interviews adopting snowball sampling technique in order to obtain information and details about the key informants. The President of Phranakhon Rajabhat University was firstly interviewed; as he is a pioneer researcher who conducted a study entitled "A Study on the Traces of the Royal Visit of the Two Thai Kings for Spreading Rice Seeds at Thung Bangkhen". An interview was held with the director and officers of Bangkhen District office, and field interviews were conducted at tourist spots and temples in Bangkhen District. The interviews indicated that the places marking the identity of Thung Bangkhen are Phrasimahathatworamahawihan Temple, Yingcharoen Market and the Constitutional Defense Monument; and the history showing the community's identity is the royal visit of King Rama VIII and King Rama IX to spread rice seeds in Bangkhen Field on June 5, 1946. Most of the interviewees believed that this incident is still unknown amongst young generations and they would be proud of their community having learned about the identity.

Due to the results of the in-depth interviews, 3 group discussions were also held in order to find out and analyze the identity of Thung Bangkhen. The participants were representatives and delegates from organizations and groups in Thung Bangkhen community, namely Bangkhen District office, Love and Bond Club, Yingcharoen Market, Bangkhen Cultural Council, Office of Arts and Culture of Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkhen Metropolitan police station, Saisema Puppet Foundation, Thainiyomsongkroa School, Prachapibal School, Infantryman Department 11 Division 3 King's Guard, Bangkhen Local Museum, Thainiyomsongkroa School and Prachapibal School. Giving comments and proposing the identity of the community, the participants suggested an identity communication issue concerning the royal visit and proposed that an activity should be done as a memorial for the special incident. Thus, a consensus on setting up "The Legend of Thung Bangkhen" event emerged. The event took place on June 5, 2018. Although wreath offering ceremony is annually held on June 9 in remembrance of King Rama VIII, the community members insisted that the event should be occurred on June 5 as it was the day the Kings came to plant rice.

As a result of the consensus on holding “The Legend of Thung Bangkhen” event, objectives of the event were discussed and shown below:

- 1) To commemorate the royal visit to Thung Bangkhen;
- 2) To announce the historical and cultural learning sites in Bangkhen District; and
- 3) To preserve unity and express pride in the community.

Details on activities done in the event, media production for public relations, event’s schedule, press kit preparation, dress codes and other activities and preparations were also discussed. Event organizers of each activities were appointed including the worship rite, the paying respect to the Goddess of Rice rite, exhibitions, MCs, back stage performances and venue preparations such as boards and signs, tents, ears of paddy, lotus flowers and other kinds of flower, electricity supply, toilets, etc. The dress code for participants of this event was “1950’s theme”. These details were all approved at the meetings.

Data analysis

The community participation in Thung Bangkhen’s identity communication contributed to the cooperation amongst the community, the universities, and the local government offices which involve the community on a special event held to communicate the Thung Bangkhen’s identity, namely “The Legend of Thung Bangkhen” event.

“The Legend of Thung Bangkhen” event held on June 5, 2019 can be regarded as identity communication initiated by the community and for the community. The vibes of the event were vigorous; as there were approximately 500 participants of all ages who were also volunteers helping running the event according to their skills as follows:

Bangkhen locals, students, soldiers, and the staff members from Bangkhen District office cooperatively joined in preparing and cleaning up the event venue;

The people who witnessed the royal visit in 1946 and descendants of the people who attended the royal visit performed Thung Bangkhen Legend storytelling;

People joined in lotus petal folding more than 500 lotus flowers for the worship ceremony at the Statue of King Rama VIII;

Bangkhen Love and Bond Club members, leading the participants, voluntarily performed the Goddess of Rice worship rite and did traditional dancing. Also, Mae Sinuan, a famous folklore singer, gave glorifying verse recital dedicated to the Goddess of Rice;

The students from Thainiyomsongkroa School, Bankhlongbua School and Phranakhon Rajabhat University and the community members performed a musical show, and Saisema Puppet Foundation hosted a puppet show; and

A free flow of drinks and food were voluntarily provided throughout the event by some organizations as follows: Yingcharoen Market offered Thai desserts, steamed rice dumplings and drinking water; Bangkhen Cultural Council gave away snack boxes; Saphanmai Development Club offered shaved ice and bread with syrup; Phodhiwanasongkhro Religious Center offered noodle soup with pork; and Phranakhon Rajabhat University gave away fruits. It can be said that the community participation process brought about activities and coordination which was an enormous success, as well as cooperation amongst people and government offices in expressing opinions and taking action while the universities serving as a liaison for them. There was a change in types of communication from top-down communication to bottom-up communication and from vertical communication to horizon communication in order that the people and the government offices became familiar through collaborating on the event. Hence, the process of community participation in identity communication of Thung Bangkhen accomplished its objective of widely disseminating the community’s identity.

Results

The results of the study indicate that the process of community participation in forging Thung Bangkhen's identity initiate 7 communication phenomenon as follows:

The prominence of capital which the community focuses on: According to what we have mentioned about community capital, Thung Bangkhen is a potential area in various aspects including history, cultures, arts, food, souvenirs, natural resources, etc. The transport and other available facilities strongly support the development of the community towards tourist area. The memorable history of Thung Bangkhen lies in the royal visit of King Rama VIII and King Rama IX for rice planting on June 5 , 1 9 4 6 to the north area of Phrasimahathatworamahawihan Temple. According to a study conducted by Kasem Chamnandi et al. (2008), it indicates that the Kings arrived at the temple at 9 o'clock, went into the ordination hall to worship Phraphuttasihing Buddha Image, and proceeded to the field located in the north of the temple. 50 farmers demonstrated rice planting, and other 30 farmers then illustrated manual milling process. Later on, King Rama VIII went out of the pavilion to try spreading rice seeds onto the field. The farmers and locals who attended the royal visit found the King's action really impressive and regarded this incident as a glow of pride. Some even circulated their impression amongst their families.

Therefore, the fact that the meeting concluded with consensus on hosting "The Legend of Thung Bangkhen" event can be regarded as a sensational revelation concerning the royal visit at Thung Bangkhen in 1946. Transmission and ritualistic models of communication were used in order to attract interest, enhance understanding, and be willing to participate in the event. This is consistent with the research on social capital in Pathum Thani Province conducted by Pisak Kalyanamitra (2018). The results of the research showed that capital is a significant factor which contributes to the community's prosperous and sustainable development when the community capital is greatly appreciated and strongly emphasized.

A wide diversity of voluntary participant: when people learned about the objectives of "The Legend of Thung Bangkhen" event, that is, to widely disseminate the community's identity; there were participants from various sectors and organizations within and outside the community, namely Bangkhen District office, Bangkhen District Cultural Council, Yingcharoen Market, Office of Arts and Culture of Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkhen Metropolitan police station, Saisema Puppet Foundation, Infantryman Department 11 Division 3 King's Guard, volunteers at Bangkok Local Museum Bangkhen District, Thainiyomsongkroa School, Prachapibal School, Banbuamon School, Bankhlotbua School, Wat Trairattanaram School, Phodhiwanasongkhro Religious Center, Saphanmai Development Club, Love and Bond Club, Phetcharawut community, Iamphanit Community, South Development community and Well-being community. Furthermore, one participant even travelled from Uthai Thani Province to attend the event in particular. This is in agreement with the study undertaken by Roberts (2016) which found out that a communication process which improves understanding of one's own culture is a significant solution for a successful community connection.

Media and other communication channels: In this event, online social networks, namely LINE application and Facebook, were mainly used as main communication channels; the locals hence learned the news and joined in the event in all aspects as follows: some were both the consumers and participants; some were the producers who helped arrange and organize the event as per requests; and the media managers who were the community representatives discussed and planned each step of the event. This is consistent with the paper written by Yuping Mao and Yuxia Qian (2015) which employed Facebook to communicate and maintain the group's identity.

Confidence in people's potential for performing their duty: the heads of each department organizing the event worked totally hard and showed great responsibility. They constantly

reported the organizer team on progress via LINE application. This agrees to the research done by Packiaraj Arumugham (2017) which indicated that the fact that people with different jobs respect one another for their different duties without discrimination can build a nicer society.

Participation process promotion: 3 focus group discussions and small-group discussions in person or through were held by the event organizers. These meetings showed that all the team participated in promoting the participation process. In all of the staff groups, there were some volunteers responsible for a job they are good at; for example, some people voluntarily joined in lotus petal folding; some students were willing to hold exhibitions; the army brought decorative items for the venue; Bangkhen District Office took charge of trees and cleaning up the venue; Yingcharoen Market, Bangkhen Cultural Council, Saphanmai Development Club, and Phophawanasongkhro Religious Center provided food and drinks; and Bangkhen Love and Bond Club members voluntarily did traditional dancing concerning rice worship rite and invited Mae Sinuan to give glorifying verse recital dedicated to the Goddess of Rice. Additionally, the participants all dressed up according to the given dress code. This is consistent with the research conducted by Kulthida Ratanakosol, Wiratop Pathumcharoenwattana and Parn Kimpee (2017) which revealed that to establish a community's identity requires a process and procedure each step of which contains activities encouraging learning the identity together.

Democratic process which helps reach a consensus: in the first discussion, a mine of information on Thung Bangkhen were greatly exchanged; and finally the participants reached a consensus on holding the event on June 5, 2018 in remembrance of the royal visit, a rare occasion on which King Rama VIII and King Rama IX came together to Thung Bangkhen. As for communication process, the community chose to mainly adopt the ritualistic model, namely the worship ceremony at the Statue of King Rama VIII and paying respect to the Goddess of Rice rite.

Ritualistic media are outstanding; as they include numerous components. Thus, the participants could be responsible for different jobs and choose the jobs freely such as arranging the venue, holding the exhibitions, and setting the altar tables. These activities could hence attract many people to attend the event.

In addition, various types of media also supported the main ritualistic media, that is, personal media or the people who told their stories regarding Thung Bangkhen, performance media from the schools, universities and Saisema Puppet Foundation, exhibition media, and mass-media which included a scoop titled "Rueang Ni Mi Tamnan, or Legend Has It That" on a TV program called Thai Banthoeng broadcast on TPBS channel. This is in agreement with the study entitled "Mon Ethnic Identity Construction" carried out by Nobparat Chaichana, Apichart Jai-aree, Prasong Tanpichai (2018). The results of the study revealed that identity communication needs construction and reconstruction according with the time and the need of the community, that is, how the community wants to be recognized. In the case of the Mon, they would like to present themselves as "a Mon Body with a Thai Heart".

Conclusion

The development of identity communication will be successful thanks to several factors which support one another, namely community capital, various types of communication process including transmission and ritualistic models and the participation of people inside and outside the community. Each step of the process of community participation reflected the community's needs for identity establishment in order that the community could grow strong, secure and sustainable.

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