

The concept of driving the identity of the Tai Yai ethnic group to create sustainable strength in Mae Hong Son province

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Abstract

This qualitative research was conducted using in-depth interview methods and a small group discussion with monks, community philosophers, masters of rituals and traditions, and 60 leaders from 5 Tai Yai communities in Mae Hong Son Province. The research process was analyzed with the “FICES” (Faith Identity of Tai-Yai Community Education Sustainable) model. The objectives of this research were 1) to study the traditional identity of the Tai Yai ethnic group in Mae Hong Son province and 2) to find methods to promote the identity of the Shan ethnic group to be strong and sustainable. The results showed that Tai Yai ethnic communities in Mae Hong Son province have a unique identity that has been passed down over generations but has been adapted over time. The identity of the Tai Yai people can be classified as follows: (1) Traditional belief identity: The community believes in spirits. There are traditions and rituals to worship spirits, such as the community guardian spirits, the spirit of the ancestors, the spirit of the forest, etc. All types of spirits can benefit or be harmful to people. Therefore, sacrifice and offerings must be made annually. (2) Religious identity: The Tai Yai ethnic community greatly respects the faith in Buddhism and continually performs rituals and beliefs such as Shan ordination, end of Buddhist lent ceremony, etc. (3) Lifestyle identity: The Shan ethnic group lives a simple life, relies on farming activities, has a strong relationship with nature, and is hospitable, welcoming foreigners with good hospitality. In finding methods to promote the identity of the Tai Yai ethnic community to be strong and sustainable, it was found that the Tai Yai ethnic community has the potential to continually inherit and maintain the identity of traditional beliefs, religions, and lifestyles. It is transmitted to all groups of people within the community to continue to practice until the present time. These identities are promoted using the “FICES” model.

Keywords: Mae Hong Son Province, sustainable strength.

I. INTRODUCTION

Belief is the sum of the worldview that human beings have towards life, the world, and the universe. It is transmitted through the way of life, culture, traditions, and activities that are related to life from birth to death, whether it is beliefs about birth and death, occupational beliefs, belief in prophecy, beliefs about health, etc. This belief molds people in a community and society to express behaviors that become the distinctive identity of that people and group.

Identity is the unique qualitative distinction that appears in a person, community, or society. Identity is described from a creative and ideological perspective which appears only in that local community in a form that is the foundation of the community to be clearly distinguished and strongly passed on through generations. The identity of the local community is, therefore, beautiful, valuable, and is the root of local wisdom (Sasong, S. 2010).

The Tai Yai ethnic group has come to live in Mae Hong Son Province for more than 150 years. According to the evidence of "Jaray" or

local inspectors, who learned from the old Tai Yai people in Mae Hong Son Province and from studying the history of Mae Hong Son, it was revealed that the Tai Yai people who came to live in the city of Mae Hong Son immigrated from the northeast of Burma in the Salween River Basin or in the "Shan State" area such as Muang Mok Mai, Muang Nai, Muang Lan Ke, etc. The first migration started around the year 1831, which corresponds to the King Rama III of the Rattanakosin era.

Tai Yai people have come to live and grow seasonal crops in Mae Hong Son. After harvesting, they returned to Shan State. They kept doing this until around 1950, then immigrated to settle down at Ban Pang Mu, Pang Mu Subdistrict, Muang District, Mae Hong Son Province. Their main professions are cultivating crops and farming. In 1850, Chiang Mai Send Chao Kaew Muang to hunt and train wild elephants for use. Chao Kaew Muangma has gathered scattered Tai Yai people to live together in the area where the current city of Mae Hong Son is located. In 1874, the governor of Chiang Mai realized that Ban Mae Hong Son and Ban Pang Moo were already inhabited by many people that deserved to be promoted as a city. Therefore, it was established as a city of Mae Hong Son and gave the Tai Yai people the name "Chan Kaley" to be the first governor with the title of Phaya Singhanatracha and there were 3 other governors until the state administration system was changed to Mae Hong Son Province (Wittayasakphan, S. 2001). The Shan people in Mae Hong Son live according to their culture, traditions, religions, beliefs, and traditional way of life. which has always been the distinctive identity. The Shan people have a strict adherence to Buddhism. This Buddhist belief creates stability for the Tai Yai ethnic group with continual cultural and tradition inheritance.

The researcher, therefore, visited the Tai Yai ethnic community in Mae Hong Son Province to participate in the research, inheritance, preservation, and transfer of identity in terms of traditional beliefs, religion, and way of life. This is in order for the Tai Yai ethnic group to be aware of their roots with outstanding worldviews and perspectives and make the Tai Yai identity stable and sustainable.

2. Objectives of the research

- 1) To study the traditional identity of the Tai Yai ethnic group in Mae Hong Son province
- 2) To find the process of driving sustainable strength of Tai Yai ethnic identity.

3. Literature Review

Concept of identity: Identity is a distinctive qualitative that manifests in a person, community, or society. Each individual has a unique trait that manifests in the form of ideas or practices that are expressed to others through knowledge but not everyone will be able to show such a unique identity. Community or society contains its unique identity that is revealed to the public in the form of practices through local traditions and rituals. Identity is, therefore, the creation of a person or a society that aims to show others the perception of the differences between that person and society (Sasong, S. 2010).

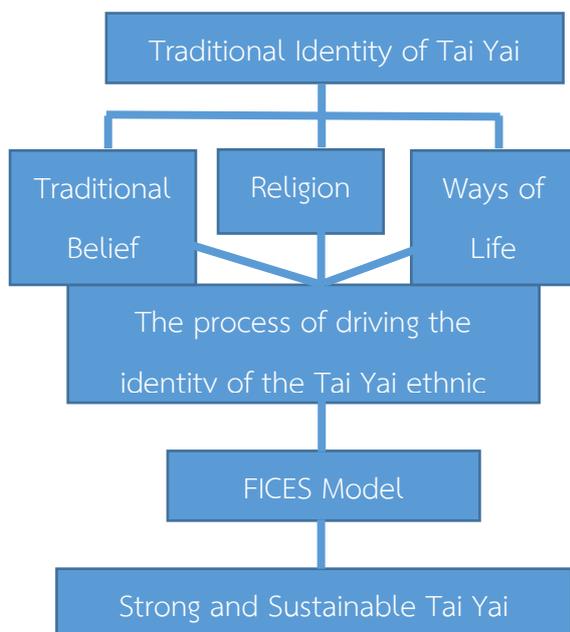
The concept of civil society: Civil society is a concept that aims to support the social sector or the people's sector to strengthen and balance society, known as a harmonious society. This must be developed to strengthen the community (Community Strengthening). Prawet Wasi has defined 'Civil Society' as a number of people who have a common purpose, ideals, or beliefs in certain matters. There is communication within the community or may be gathered in the community to create generosity within the community (Wasi, P. 1998).

Community Engagement Concept: Community Engagement is a process for people to get involved in the implementation of development, sharing ideas, making decisions, and solving their own problems (Erwin, W.1976). This engagement can be divided into 2 aspects: 1) participation from rational relevance by giving opportunities to society, organizations in the community, and people to have the main roles according to their rights. They have their duties to take part in the operation such as the decision-making, planning, co-operation, and accountability for impacts as well as support the operation to benefit the community according to the voluntary objectives. 2) Participation from the psychological involvement. It is the participation that is related to mental, emotion,

as well as the values of the people which direct themselves to participate, show creativity, take actions to achieve objectives. Those who take part will have a sense of responsibility for voluntary activities (Chakphisut, S. 2004).

Sasong, S. and Binprathan, A. (2018), Community Development in Identity and Beliefs for Sustainable Tourism Management of Pam Bok Community, Pai District, Mae Hong Son Province, proposed the idea of community-driven in the form of a committee to create distributed and clear management to have a responsibility group. It is not concentrated on a single community leader or a single group, has a monthly meeting to evaluate and drive the community to progress in all dimensions. The community has relationships, support, love, unity, bonding, respect senior system, and has local wisdom. There are people who are good at thinking and doing things that can see results in practice. The community has its own capital that can be self-reliant. There is a professional grouping to add value to wisdom to produce (processing) to reduce unemployment, generate income for the community in order to be free of debt, and society is driven happily on sustainability.

4. Research Framework



5. Research Methodology

This qualitative research used in-depth interviews and small group discussions which emphasize participatory action with the community (participatory action research). The research was conducted through 5 phases as follows:

Phase 1: Visit the research area to meet with community leaders to study the community context by discussing with villagers to find issues and design a data collection method by using in-depth interviews and small group discussions.

Phase 2: Data collection and analysis of research area which are 5 Tai Yai communities in Mae Hong Son province. The research area includes 2 Tai Yai communities in Pai district, 2 Tai Yai communities in Muang District, and one Tai Yai community in Khun Yuam district.

Phase 3: Interview, group discussion to analyze the potential of communities and explore Tai Yai identity, exchange ideas, opinions, and brainstorming to find proper methods to sustainably preserve Tai Yai identity.

Phase 4: Collect all the data for analysis, categorize the Tai Yai identity, and establish guidelines for the process of driving strong and sustainable Tai Yai identity using the “FICES” model (Sasong, S, 2021).

Phase 5: Transferring research results to the community, presenting knowledge through academic articles in academic forums, or publishing in national/international journals.

Data Analysis

1) Secondary Data Analysis Use methods to analyze the content of concepts, theories, and related research papers to define a research conceptual framework and questionnaires in the interview

2) The primary data analysis was the in-depth interview and small group discussions together with the observation of activities to descriptively transcribe, analyze, and synthesize, write an analytical narrative, and write a complete research report.

6. Findings

The results of the research on the traditional identity of the Tai Yai ethnic groups in Mae Hong Son Province found that:

1) Traditional Beliefs

Tai Yai ethnic believes in spirits. There are traditions and rituals to worship spirits, such as the community guardian spirits, the spirit of the ancestors, the spirit of the forest, etc. The spirits can be classified into to type; 1) Good spirits which protect, take care of people, make people feel safe, and keep people away from disease and various unfortunate things. 2) Bad spirits will haunt people, cause fear, and may be life-threatening. The Tai Yai people are bound by their belief in spirits and perform various rituals in order for the good spirits to protect themselves, their families, and communities. The important spirit is the Village guardian spirit, which is considered a high spirit that has power over other ghosts The spirit is responsible for protecting, keeping villages and communities in peace and free from disasters, driving away evil from the community, and keeping people in the community away from all dangers. An ancestor ghost is a ghost caused by the death of an elderly person in the family. The spirit still circulates within the family in order to protect and take care of family members to stay peacefully. Therefore, there must be annual household worship. The Tai Yai people have established a Village Spirit House in every community and worshiped regularly during June-July. Villagers will bring sacrifices such as rice, boiled chicken, pig's head, snacks, liquor, fruits, flowers, etc. on trays and place them at the Village Spirit Shrine. Village shamans will summon the Village Guardian Spirit to receive the sacrifice and ask for its mercy and protection to the people in the community to experience happiness and prosperity. When people go out of the community, for example, to go to school, to work outside the village, or even if they want to succeed in anything, they will come to the Village Guardian Spirit to ask for the ease to the success.

Superstition is a distinctive identity of the Tai Yai ethnic group as well as other ethnic groups who live in the forest area. At present, many communities have performed rituals to worship ghosts and spirits for tourists, or those who want

to experience and learn their traditions and customs.

2) Religious identity

All 5 Tai Yai ethnic communities have strong faith in Buddhism although there is a traditional belief in animism. But the two beliefs can be blended together without conflict. For example, when performing Buddhist ceremonies Village guardian spirits will also be offered. With respect to Buddhism, the Tai Yai people have traditions and rituals related to Buddhism throughout the 12 months called "Yah Sii-Sib-Song". The important traditions are Shan Ordination, End of Buddhist Lent Ceremony, etc.

Belief in Buddhism that is mixed with traditional beliefs about ghosts is another distinctive identity of the Tai Yai people. Local philosophers have passed on this unique identity to members of the community and youth groups in order to continually demonstrate the identity of the Tai Yai people.

3) Ways of Life identity

The Tai Yai community believes that humans are tiny creatures in the universe. Humans should, therefore, respect supernatural and natural resources as well as be in harmony with nature and the environment not aiming to hurt destroy natural resources but having a way of life that has adapted to live with nature harmoniously. People rely on forests and water for their livelihood thus helping to conserve nature.

The traditions, rituals, and recreation activities of the Tai Yai people are in harmony with nature especially the mythical bird dancing, which show the flying gestures of Kinari (mythical bird of Himmapan forest) that are delicate, beautiful, reflecting the distinctive identity of the Tai Yai people.

The Tai Yai people have attire that is unique and in accordance with the nature with clearly separating the clothes between men and women. In terms of language, the Tai Yai people have their own spoken and written language. They communicate using their language in order to preserve to the next generations. The Tai Yai people have a simple way of eating with the main ingredients from homegrown vegetables and from the forest nearby. Therefore, some

plants are both medicinal herbs and food at the same time. The Tai Yai people build a simple house. Wood was used as the main material for construction especially bamboo that can be used to build almost every part of the house, from columns, beams, walls, etc. In addition to bamboo, Tai Yai people used teak and redwood to build houses. The roof of the house was thatched with timber leaves or grass which has a lifespan of about 5-7 years. Most houses are raised on stilts. The basement is used to store agricultural crops, firewood, or raise animals. Every area in the house is usable, reflecting the economy and simplicity of the Tai Yai people. At present, some communities have adapted the house construction to be more contemporary by using bricks, mortar, and steel as the main components of the construction. However, the community still preserves the style of the Tai Yai (Tai) house for the youth and interested people to study and learn.

In seeking for the process of driving the identity of the Tai Yai ethnic group to be strong and sustainable, the researcher applied the identity-driven process with the "FICES" (Sustainable Education Community Identity of Tai-Yai Faith) model. The results showed that all five Tai Yai ethnic communities in Pai District, Muang District, and Khun Yuam District Mae Hong Son Province have distinctive identities in all 5 dimensions as follows: (1) Faith dimension: The community has traditional beliefs about ghosts and Buddhist beliefs that are harmoniously blended and have inherited traditions, regular rituals, as well as continually conveying to members of the community. (2) Identity of Tai-Yai: The community has traditional beliefs and a belief in Buddhism. There is a mix of cultures, traditions, ceremonies, and traditions. These rituals continued until they became a distinctive identity of the Tai Yai people which includes the identity of the faith, religious identity, and the identity of the way of life. (3) Community dimension: Community leaders, village philosophers, stakeholders, and a leader in traditions and rituals have jointly organized activities according to their beliefs every year. It is a village activity that unites the unity of people of all ages. Various committees were appointed for each activity to jointly manage in order to keep the activity run appropriately and do not contrary to traditions and customs. (4) Education dimension: Educational institutions together

with the community have transferred knowledge and local wisdom of Tai Yai ethnic, such as recreational activities and folk art performances to students to sustainably conserve and carry on the value of local wisdoms.

(5) Sustainability: Village philosophers and local wisdom teachers work together to preserve and convey the concept of beliefs, culture, traditions, rituals, and local wisdom that is the identity of Tai Yai to members of the community and youth groups. This includes sharing knowledge with those who are interested and tourists who come to study and learn about the Tai Yai way of life. This is another way to share the identity of Tai Yai to the public.

In driving community identity to be strong and sustainable, preserving the local way of life, culture, traditions, and rituals are important. Communities must work together in order to maintain their identity as well as to encourage youth to be aware of the roots of traditional Tai Yai culture. The communities should continually cooperate to pass on the identity to the younger generations.

7. Discussion

This study on the concept of driving the identity of the Tai Yai ethnic group to create sustainable strength in Mae Hong Son province is a qualitative research. Research instruments include in-depth interview and a small group discussion with monks, community philosophers, masters of rituals and traditions, and 60 leaders from 5 Tai Yai communities in Mae Hong Son Province. The research process was analyzed with the "FICES" (Faith Identity of Tai-Yai Community Education Sustainable) model. The results of the research showed that the Tai Yai ethnic firmly maintains and inherits their distinctive identity in terms of their traditional beliefs, religion, and way of life. This is consistent with the research of Sasong, S. and Binprathan, A. (2018), conducted research on the development of community potential in faith-based identities to manage sustainable tourism in Pambok village, Pai district, Mae Hong Son province. The results showed that the Pam Bok community has the original identity of the community in terms of (1) the identity of superstitious like ancestors' spirits, and the village spirit who strongly affects ways of life of villagers, (2) the identity of religion, culture, and

tradition which keep maintaining the strength of the community, and

(3) the identity of the nature-based way of life that relatively connects locals with the nature. The analysis of community potential in faith-based identities to manage sustainable tourism reveals that the Pambok community has the appropriate potential in preserving and transmitting the faiths and identities of superstitious, Buddhism, and way of life. Additionally, the community preserves and transfers faiths and ways of life to its upcoming generations in order to sustain the beliefs and practices. All of these contribute to community-based tourism in regard to the identity of the Tai Yai culture.

8. Suggestions

1) Suggestions for utilizing the research results

Guidelines for driving the identity of the Tai Yai ethnic should be presented to stakeholders and relevant agencies, such as the Tai Yai civil society network, provincial cultural office, provincial cultural council, and district cultural council including related organizations in order to jointly drive the identity of the Tai Yai ethnic group to be strong and sustainable.

2) Suggestions for further research

Research should be done on the establishing of a network of ethnic communities in Mae Hong Son Province in order to create a network of ethnic relations, community identity promotion network, multicultural society learning network, and ethnic community-based tourism management network in Mae Hong Son Province.

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