



Ethnic Identity Construction Of Tai Koh Kong In Cambodia¹

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Abstract

This research paper aims to study the ethnic identity construction of TaiKoh Kong in Koh Kong Province, Cambodia. This study used the concept of ethnic identity to collect ethnographic data in three communities: Tropaing Rung and KohKapi in Koh Kong District, and PraekSvay in Khemarak`Phumin District, Koh Kong Province, Cambodia. A survey was applied for participant and non-participant observation in TaiKoh Kong people. The respondents were asked about their personal history, community history, beliefs, rituals and daily life in the community. The results showed that Tai Koh Kong people also present and construct their ethnic identity through language usage, cultural traditions, beliefs and rituals in everyday life and social memories. However, the conservation and construction of the ethnic identity is modified in accordance with the Cambodian political society, economy and culture which would be an interesting issue that needs to be studied to explore the ethnic identity of TaiKoh Kong.

Keywords: ethnic identity, ethnography, Tai Koh Kong

Introduction

At the end of the 13th century, Siam spread its political power into the land territory of South East Asia, and it was also the time when the Khmer Empire had lost its power to Siam. Later, Siam began to rule the northwest parts of Cambodia (Battambang, Sisophon better known as BanteayMeancheynow, and Siem Reap) for many years. In 1907, France and Siam signed a treaty in which Siam agreed to return the provinces of Battambang, Sisophon and Siem Reap to Cambodia. At the same time, Trat was handed to Siam in return. (Shcliesinger, 2011). From the reign of King Rama I to King Rama IV, Koh Kong was considered an important wall for the Siamese kingdom in the war against Vietnam, led by Chao Phraya Bodindecha, who was the commander in chief, and the people of Koh Kong

¹ This article is a part of a PhD dissertation titled "Language and Ethnic Identity of Tai Koh Kong in Cambodia". Mahasarakham University, Thailand

also joined the army to help fight the war (Kasamphonkool, 2013). In the reign of King Rama IV, Koh Kong was named "Patchanthakhiri Khet". But after Koh Kong returned to Cambodia back, Koh Kong was amalgamated as a province in Cambodia in 1959 with its main city, Khemarak Phumin.

The relationship between Thailand and Cambodia was in jeopardy, and diplomatic ties broke and were cut off several times. Consequently, the Cambodian government was strict with the Tai Koh Kong people by trying to make the Tai Koh Kong people become Cambodian as many as possible. Cambodia sent monks to various temples in Tai Koh Kong to lead a merit-making scheme and to feed the Tai Koh Kong people with anti-Thai propaganda. Cambodia also sent Khmer teachers to teach Khmer and French to children in that province. Thai language was strictly prohibited. Rules were put in practice to ban Thai speaking. Anyone found speaking Thai would be fined, and their punishments would be doubled if they were found speaking Thai for the second time. Therefore, Thai speaking people were terrified. (Yothaphirom, 2008). Tai Koh Kong people who lived in Koh Kong had to migrate to some parts of Trat province because of political tension between Thailand and Cambodia and Cambodian civil war like the Khmer Republic (1970-1975) and Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 to 1979. From the history of Koh Kong Province, it seems that Tai Koh Kong people have settled in Koh Kong for many generations. Even though France ceded Koh Kong province to Cambodia, this group of people have lived around the provincial capital of Koh Kong town and have settled on the islands (Schliesinger, 2011).

For this reason, the researcher is interested in studying the ethnic identity construction of Tai Koh Kong that are scattered in different areas of Koh Kong Province, and in finding out they maintain and construct their ethnic identity in Cambodia.

Objectives

To study is intended to explore how the Tai Koh Kong ethnic group of people construct their ethnic identity in Cambodia.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach with an ethnography in its methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). In qualitative research, the natural setting is seen as a direct source and key element for a study, and it is concerned with how things occur. A qualitative research design was chosen due to its nature which is to understand how Tai Koh Kong people construct their identity, and its focus on specific situations or people to its emphasis on words rather than numerical data (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative research studies provide contextual information and personal experiences to help researchers interpret the data in the sense that data constitutes culturally constructed knowledge (Mannik & McGarry, 2017). In short, qualitative methods can be used to "explore substantive areas about which little is known in order to gain novel understandings, and can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thoughts and emotions that are difficult to

extract or learn about through other research methods” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Furthermore, ethnography was employed in this study. Ethnographic research studies are arguably linked to an understanding of events and social interactions within a specific cultural context (Prasad, 1997). An ethnographic study is usually conducted in a response to individual’s lives that are “socially and culturally highly fragmented and differentiated” (Knoblauch, 2005, p.1). This study aimed to examine how Tai Koh Kong people maintain and construct ethnic identity which is part of their culture. Therefore, an ethnographic study seems resonate well with the study’s objective as culture is viewed as an important concept to the development of ethnographic anthropology (Rashid, Caine & Goetz, 2015). More importantly, ethnography is best seen as an open-ended and non-linear process of education that leads to unexpected insights of a particular culture being studied (Mannik & McGarry, 2017). In essence, ethnography is a study through direct observation of the researched in their natural environment. The objective of this type of research is to gain insights into how the participants interact with things in their natural environment.

Both primary and secondary data was used in this study. The primary tools used by ethnographers are interviews, participant observations, and fieldwork to gain an in-depth understanding of their participant’s everyday environment and the social meanings attached with being part of a particular culture (Brewer, 2000). In this study, semi-structured interviewing and direct observation were used to collect primary data needed to answer the research question. The interviews were conducted in three ethnic communities. They are Koh Kapi, Praek Svay, and Tropaing Rung in Koh Kong Province. As an ethnographic inquiry requires the researcher to stay in the community under study in order to fully understand the participants’ individual lives, direct observations were also used to collect data. To support this, an ethnography is a response to an individual’s lives that are “socially and culturally highly fragmented and differentiated” (Knoblauch, 2005, p.1). However, this study still needed secondary data which came from printed documents relating to the study purpose as well.

For the processing to collect the data by observing, researcher went to stay at their community many times from 2017 to 2020. The observation, researcher focused on their daily life, job, culture and society in three communities. For the interviewing, researcher selected to talk with Tai people group by using Thai language and sometimes in Khmer. The Tai people are mostly older people that are selected because they were viewed as resource people who would provide expert knowledge about the issues relating to the construction of their ethnic identity. The data collected was analyzed manually, using a content analysis which is a technique for qualitative data analysis.

Literature Review

The research on identity, customs, culture and way of life of ethnic groups seems to rest on the work of anthropologists and sociologists. Most anthropologists look at identity through life, narratives, memories, customs, traditions, and culture. Similarly, sociologists examine identity through development, survival, power and social space. For instance, a study by Smutkupt and Kitiarsa (2001), which looked at the ethnic identity of the Tai Yuan in Sikhiew community, Thailand found that the narratives and memories of this ethnic people are

showed that economic, political and cultural forces from outside communities play a key role in creating or producing new ethnic meanings and adding more complexity to existing ethnic identities. Wittayaphak (2005) studied the identity of the Lao Phuan people or Thai Phuan. His study found that the construction of various infrastructures in the village in the era of development has resulted in a change in the way of life in the village and that change is caused by material, social and economics. Therefore, it is hard for them to maintain their historical identity in the villagers. Donsom (2012) studied ethnic identity of Vietnamese-Thais. Her study found that identity of Vietnamese-Thais is created and modified all the time due to social, economic and political changes in Thailand. When interacting with people from different ethnicities, the Vietnamese-Thai ethnic group in NakhonPhanom can communicate verbally in both Thai and Vietnamese languages. Moreover, they also keep their traditional Vietnamese dress (Ao Yao), Vietnamese food, village songs and historical consciousness of Vietnamese-Thai ethnic group there. Furthermore, this Vietnamese-Thai ethnic group is seen adapting their life to the changing situation and the social and economic context of Thailand.

From the views of anthropologists and sociologists who study history, background, tradition, languages and cultures, it is concluded that identity is determined by those elements. The characteristics of language usage of ethnic groups have not yet been studied and analyzed to reveal the distinctive features of their identity in any way. Therefore, this research study was conducted to how the ethnic group of Tai Koh Kong preserve and construct their identity.

Results and discussion

The researcher found that the Tai Kohkong people have maintained and constructed their identity through the language usage in daily life, tradition and culture, beliefs and rituals and social memories.

1. Language Usage in Daily life

Language and identity are ultimately inseparable, and the study of language and identity must understand who we are in our thoughts and that of others, and whom we have met, heard or read (Joseph, 2006:13-14). Thus, language expresses ethnic identity related to language as well. The results showed that naming a person and place, term of relatives, final particles, and time words, etc., would show the ethnic identity of TaiKoh Kong ethnic group living in Koh Kong Province, Cambodia.

1.1 Naming People

The naming of Tai Koh Kong people is one of the indexes presented and the construction of ethnic identity. There are many variations in naming children of Tai Koh Kong people in name's forms and words. For Thai naming form, a first position is First Name and then Family Name (First name + Family name). For example, ThiraphongSinghaphan, where the word "Thiraphong" is his first name and "Singhaphan" is the family name. For Cambodians, the first position is the family name and the second is first name (Family name + First Name). For instance, Kaew Chan, where "Kaew" is a family name and "Chan" is a first name.

According to the results of the study, in the past Tai Koh Kong people liked to use the structure of Thai naming form. But now the naming form has been modified to Cambodian and high rank of Tai Koh Kong people still use it. Tai Koh Kong people live in the community, most of whom call their names in a Thai form when talking in their daily life, but when they use it formally, they use their names in the Cambodian style. The researcher; for example, asked the name of a grandmother who lives in Praek Svay community. She replied "Jinda Fam" in Thai form, and then she immediately replied "Fam Jinda" in the Cambodian way. Currently, most of the Tai Koh Kong people have restructured their Thai names to the Cambodian name structure such as Kai Ploy Mani, Kai Uay, Kai Krung, Lek Lawan, Rai Tem, where the word "Kai, Lek, Rai" are the surname and "Uay, Krung, Lawan" are their name. Moreover, some Tai Koh Kong families have even given their members two names in both Thai and Cambodian names. For example, Thiraphong Singhaphan uses a Thai name's form, and Sai Thiraphong uses a Cambodian name's form. The use of terminology is one of the ways in which ethnic groups can be identified and attributed to the construction of the ethnic identity of an ethnic group by using words that are in the mother tongue or mixed with the official language. It is noticed the words that the Tai Koh Kong people have brought to name their children, they will see that most of them are using Thai words. But there may be a matter of adjusting the sound to the Khmer language. At the same time, Khmer words are used to combine names with Thai language. For the words used in Thai, most of them are used as family names. For example, Rung Phlamkasorn, Sopheak Kharit, Thiraphong Singhaphan, which is observed that "Phlamkasorn, khaarit, Singhaphan, Thiraphong" are Thai words and "Sopheak," is a Khmer word.

1.2 Names of places

Tai Koh Kong ethnic group name places in their community in two ways both in Thai and Khmer languages. Names of places in Thai occurs during conversations in the community including talking to people outside the community who could use Thai names. For example, people in the Praek Svay community call the names in Thai as "Khong Muang" /khɔŋmuaŋ²/ (in Thai standard is "Khlung Mamuang" /khɔŋma⁰muaŋ²/ and then call it in Khmer language as "Praek Svay" /præksvaaj/ while as Soathong (សោតុង means flagpole), called in Thai and "dong tung" called in Khmer etc.

1.3 Dialectal Words

Tai Koh Kong people use Thai language as their mother tongue for communication in the community. However, their Thai language use is different from the Thai standard language in terms of word and the final particles. In addition, there are some words that are influenced by both Khmer and Chinese languages. The dialects are terms of body, animals, relatives and time. The term of /ta⁰kɛɛ³/ in Tai Koh Kong means /rak³rɛɛ³/ (armpit) in Thai standard. The term of /ŋua⁰/ in Tai Koh Kong means /wua⁰/ (cow), /faaj⁰/ means /khwaaj⁰/ (buffalo) in Thai Standard. The term referring to relatives of Tai Koh Kong people use the words to call their relatives in Chinese. For example, "koŋ⁴" (grandfather), "ŋii⁴" (aunt), "kuu⁴" (uncle), "tia⁴" (father) "soo³" (sister in law) "kim⁴" (uncle or aunt in law) are Chinese words. Although the relatives of Tai Koh Kong people, are also called in

Thai language, some words have sound differently. For instance, the word /mɛɛ²/ (mother) is pronounced /mɛɛ³/, /jaaj⁰/(grandmother) in Tai Koh Kong are called /kɛɛ¹/ or /mɛɛ³kɛɛ¹/. But in this case, Tai Koh Kong speaking Khmer people will use Khmer language words such as /bɔɔŋ/ (elder brother/sister), /baʔoon/ (younger brother/sister), /mɛɛ/ (mother), /puk/(father), /taa/ (grandfather) and /jiaj/ (grandmother) etc.

The usage of time words by the Tai Koh Kong people is similar to the standard Thai language, and there are a few peculiarities that characterize this group. It is noticed that there are some peculiarities of words that indicate different times from standard Thai and other dialects such as “baaj¹ nuŋ¹” (1 pm), “saam⁴ moon⁰ jen⁰” (3 pm), “cet¹ moon⁰ jen⁰” (7 pm), “pɛɛt¹ moon⁰ khuuun⁰” (8 pm), “kaw² moon⁰ khuuun⁰” (9 pm), “sip¹ moon⁰ khuuun⁰” (10 pm), “sip¹ ʔet¹ moon⁰ khuuun⁰” (11 pm) and “sip¹ sɔɔŋ⁴ moon⁰ khuuun⁰” (12 pm).

From observing and talking to the people of Tai Koh Kong, the final particles “kha³, krap³, jaa²” is rarely used, and most of them say less gender words of the final particles in Khmer. Thai-Kong people use the final particles that denote the speaker's status and situations when communicating with others. Those particles words such as “hen⁴ juu¹ mɛɛp³mɛɛp³” (saw in a moment), “waa² ŋan³ hɔʔ¹” (it's that), “cɔɔ⁰ kan⁰ kɔɔ⁰ puut² phaa⁰saa⁴ thaj⁰ than³ mot¹ kan⁰” (when meeting together, all speak Thai), “khɔɔŋ⁴ nuu⁴ kia³” (that's mine) for the ending “mɛɛp³mɛɛp³” (a moment), “. hɔʔ¹” (it's that), “kia³” (used what happened already), “than³ mot¹ kan⁰” (all of them) are the final particles that Tai Koh Kong people like to use in their daily life and are unique to the people of the Koh Kong area.

These of different words and the final particles between Thai and Khmer languages show that Tai Koh Kong ethnic group are different from Thai people in Thailand.

2. Traditions and culture of Tai Koh Kong ethnic group

Tai Koh Kong people have maintained and modified their cultural traditions to conform to the Cambodian society. Even though Cambodia and Thailand share the similar traditions and cultures, their practices may differ. Therefore, this study found that the ethnic Tai Koh Kong ethnic group reproduced and reconstructed their identity by adjusting and changing identity to adapt to Cambodia's cultural, economy and political context. Cultural symbols which have been used as a process for constructing Tai Koh Kong ethnic identity are as followed:

2.1 Ethnic identity through daily life

Tai Koh Kong ethnic group prefer cooking and eating at home. It was observed that most of types of food have special ingredients which include chili, such as chili paste, stir-fried curry, and tom yum. Furthermore, they also like to make sweet snacks such as yellow glutinous rice (ข้าวเหนียวเหลือง), stir-fried desserts (ขนมหวาน) and wet snacks (ขนมเปียก) and those are the desserts of the community. In the past, most of these desserts were made when various traditions and cultural events were held in the community. For example, in weddings, yellow glutinous rice was usually served. From a different angle, yellow glutinous rice shows the strong bond between people in the community. In the past, the preparation of such sweets in wedding ceremonies was clearly divided between the groom and the bride in which the groom's side was responsible for making stir-fry and wet snacks while

yellow glutinous rice was prepared by the bride side. But now the man has given it to the woman to help prepare all of them. Besides, yellow glutinous rice was used in weddings according to their tradition. Tai Koh Kongethnic group made this snack for trading in the community which has been practiced by people in the community for various events.

Tai Koh Kong people in today wear simple dresses that they buy from the market. The most popular clothes are short pants, jeans, multi-colored shirts and t-shirts, most of which are worn at home. Men like to release above and women like wearing pajamas because people in the community rarely go out to work outside. The Tai Koh Kong people, especially men, like to wear Buddha necklaces and women like to wear gold necklaces. The traditional dress of Tai Koh Kong for both women and men is a phaa sin (tube skirt). In the time past, both men and women loved to cut their hair short. (Schliesinger, 2009: 66). However, the economic and social changes have made people in the community work in factory. Therefore, the dress has to be modified from the original one. Some women like to wear pants, to have long hair or to have different hairstyles.

House designs in the Tai Koh Kong community have now changed considerably. The old houses built for a long time before and after the Khmer Rouge period are only single-story binding houses with basements used for storing various items. It can be seen clearly the nature of dividing the living space into three parts: the verandah in front, the kitchen, and the bedroom. At present, due to better economic conditions, Tai Koh Kong people have changed the materials and equipment to build houses by using cement and wood, which has arranged the basement to be high and arranged into rooms, and the top is wood that is still maintained the cladding style. However, the houses on the island have not changed much because the economic development is not as fast as on the island. Tai Koh Kong people still like to build traditional houses by integrating with the modern in terms of materials, equipment and styles of houses which pointed to the maintenance and modification of one's identity in accordance with the development of Cambodian society.

2.2 Ethnic identity through traditions

In the past, told by elders in the community of Tai Koh Kong people, the wedding ceremony of the Tai Koh Kong people could be divided into two main types: organizing a spirit offering ceremony and wedding ceremony. For organizing the spirit offering ceremony, it is held only one meal and the event is finished in the morning or in the evening depending on the host. In the case of the spirit offering ceremony of grandma Jinda Fam, 73 years old, is a Tai Koh Kong in Praeksvay community, she said, "Grandmother also offered spirits offerings, raising betel palm fruit to pay homage to spirits offerings. It's only two hours in the evening for a spirits offering. In the ceremony, there was boiled chicken, yellow glutinous rice (ข้าวเหนียวเหลือง), wet desserts (ขนมเปียก), stir-fried desserts (ขนมกวน), and Num Banh Chok (ขนมจีน means noodle) because of the spirits they took." There may be a mid-day party or a small evening when he organizes it with his family and friends in the community. However, the current wedding ceremonies have changed somehow due to the integration with some Khmer wedding ceremonies such as tying hands in money, hair cutting ceremonies, and a small party for guests, etc., The reasons for the change in the event is due to the modern day as husband and wife is not Tai Koh Kong or people in the

community. People outside the community have come into the community for work and economic reasons in that community, which is cross-ethnic marriage.

For the funeral of the Tai Koh Kong people, it is an important ceremony in the community. This event is usually held for several days at least 3 days due to waiting for relatives to attend the ceremony. Usually, the funeral of Tai Koh Kong people is usually held at temples which are different from Cambodian people that have funerals at home and wear white shirts to attend the ceremony. Most of the relatives and friends of the deceased who attend the event will wear black or white shirts with black ribbons which is a symbolic mourning for the deceased and condolences to the family of the funeral. After the funeral ceremony is completed, the Tai Koh Kong people have organized the event for 7 days and 100 days according to tradition from the beginning. It is noted that the funeral arrangements for the Tai Koh Kong people are in accordance with Buddhism, requiring monks to pray for the deceased. One more thing is that Tai Koh Kong community prefers cremation rather than burial. Every temple in Tai Koh Kong community has a crematorium, showing a different way of making funerals.

The study found that the Devo event (ตักบาตรเทโว) or the Alms Giving ceremony was organized by taking the form of organizing the event of Thai people in Trat province after the Khmer Rouge. Tai Koh Kong people took the method of organizing the Devo event to do in their community in order to get profit for supporting the temple. Before, there are 3 temples that organize this event, Koh Kapi Temple in Koh Kapi Sub-district, Wat Praek Svay or Khong Muang located in Stung Waeng Sub-district, and Wat Pak Khlong in Pak Khlong Sub-district. But at present, there is only one temple, Praek Svay which is held this event every year. Muang Pang is the abbot of Praek Svay temple said that "At Praek Svay temple, from the past to the present, this event will be held during the end of Buddhist Lent, which falls on the 15th day of the 11th lunar month". The principle of this event is to make merit, offer food to monks and give merit to those who have passed away. For organizing that event, the villagers prepared various dry goods such as garlic, dried fish, and noodles to offer to the monks at the temple. Today, participants are not just people in the community but here are also people outside the community attending the event making people in Koh Kong know more about this event.

Songkran Festival, or Jol Chnam Thmei, so called in Khmer, is an important tradition in the Tai Koh Kong community, which is an annual event where people join together to celebrate the new year. Songkran Festival takes place in April every year for a period of 3 days from the 13rd -15th or 14th -16th April. In the past, people would come to the temple to perform various folk games. The elders went to listen to the monks' prayers and to send merit to ancestors, grandparents, and those who have passed away. There is a bathing ceremony for Buddha images at the pavilion and later watering the elders in the Tai Koh Kong community were practiced. Interesting issues that may be different from Cambodian people is where the monks are watered by providing a place for the monks to be in a row next to the elder people in community. The villagers also water the hands of monks and elders. Organizing Songkran Festival is an event that builds relationships between people in the community and is an opportunity to get to know and lead to happiness together.

3. Beliefs in Community

Tai Koh Kong people have strictly respected Buddhism and ancestor spirits regularly. During the research period, the researcher noticed that in each community of Tai Koh Kong people, there is a temple to worship to the Lord Buddha. There is a community shrine. Moreover, in Koh Kong province there are also other religions such as Christianity and Islam respected by the Vietnamese and Cham people. The researcher will study only Buddhism and important spirits in the community as followed:

3.1 Beliefs in Buddhism

Tai Koh Kong people respect Theravada Buddhism and have strict adherence to Buddhism. Monks can chant both Thai and Khmer prayers from ancient times to the present. Temples in the community play a very important role for arranging customs, ceremonies and funeral. In addition, the temple is also a meeting place for both Tai Koh Kong and Cambodian people in the community to have love, unity, and understanding to each other. If the temple has an annual event, there will be an appointment to help with the temple work in order to gain profits for the monks' living and construction work in the temple. It can be said that Buddhism has also given the Tai Koh Kong people the opportunity to meet and express their common beliefs and religions meanwhile photographs of the Lord Buddha are set up to offer worship during Buddhist holy days and various ceremonies in the houses of the Tai Koh Kong people.

3.2 Beliefs in Spirits

The Tai Koh Kong people has greatly respected and venerated, named Pho Lin Dam (Black Tongue Father) and Yey Mao (Grandma Mao). **Pho Lin Dam** (พ่อลิ้นดำ). Pho Lin Dam is an important spirits in the Koh Kapi community or for the Tai Koh Kong people in Koh Kong province. The villagers in the community had great reverence for Pho Lin Dam above. Therefore, the villagers built a shrine of Pho Lin Dam on the foothills of Koh Kapi which shows the power and prestige and his holiness that gives good health to the villagers in the community. Here, the villagers always pay homage to Pho Lin Dam for happiness and success in catching fish, crabs and shrimp. Moreover, when going fishing and facing with obstacles or disasters such as big waves or storms, fishermen would ask Pho Lin Dam to help by not letting the boat sink or be fixed later, and when the fishermen were on this The wind would calm as requested. Although the history of Pho Lin Dam is not clearly documented in Koh Kapi but the history of Pho Lin Dam is in Songkhla Province, Thailand. Pho Lin Dam may have been influenced by Thailand.

Grandma Mao is another to be greatly respected and admired by both the Tai Koh Kong people and the Cambodian people especially people living along the sea in Kampot, Kampong Speu, Sihanouk and Koh Kong provinces. There are many grandma Mao's shrines in Cambodia, both long-established courts and newly built courts (Ang Julian, 2016). Interestingly, in Koh Kong, there are many Grand Maos' shrines. The worship is not only on land but also on islands, especially the fishermen who will have great respect and veneration. Therefore, Grandma Mao Shrine is an important place for offering sacrifices in order to do a lot of fishing and to ask for safety from navigation. This shows that Grandma Mao is highly regarded due to her power and sanctity. The Tai Koh Kong people especially the Koh Kapi community have greatly respected Grandma Mao's prestige. The villagers

respect the prestige and holiness no less than the Pho Lin Dam. Villagers pray to Grandma Mao for comfort and safety. The most important offerings to Grandma Mao are penis shaped stick which is according to the story that Grandma Mao still has a lot of sexual desires. However, this sacrificial offering looked disgusting, so people used bananas symbol about sex to pay homage instead.

The Tai Koh Kong people respected Buddhism mainly. By following the Buddha's way of doing merit but not committing any sins. There is also belief in various shrines in their own communities, such as Pho Lin Dam and Grandma Mao, showing that Tai Koh Kong people have used their daily lives with beliefs and things beyond nature. Such beliefs have demonstrated the flexibility of the Tai Koh Kong people's ethnic identity regarding to their beliefs which is constantly modified according to socio-cultural especially the respect and admiration for Grandma Mao, whose power of sanctity and prestige has spread to other ethnic groups Not only Cambodians.

4. Social memories

From the study of Tai Koh Kong community, it was found that the Tai Koh Kong elders had good memories of the events that happened in the past. In the Sihanouk era (1955-1970), it was forbidden to speak Thai especially people in KohKong province. Most people speaking Thai are forced to speak Khmer instead, and if anyone doesn't do so, they will be punished. If anyone does not follow, it is a must to adjust the amount according to the number of words. To avoid being fined, some Tai Koh Kong people, especially the elder people didn't have to speak Khmer but use gesture instead in everyday communication. However, after the Khmer Rouge period until now Cambodian government has not banned Tai Koh Kong people speaking Thai in any way. Moreover, due to economic change Cambodia's political and society, the community in Koh Kong has been continuously developed which is an opportunity for outsiders especially people from Takeo and Kampot provinces to come to work in Koh Kong province. Regarding to the relationship of the community, Tai Koh Kong people can marry Cambodian people. For example, KaiUay, 49 years old, is a former sub-district chief of Tropeang Rung got Cambodian wife.

In addition, the economy in the Tai Koh Kong community has changed dramatically; especially in KohKapi community (Kapi Island). In the past KohKapi was a very progressive community and was famous for the province in terms of all business activities such as trading, exchanging goods and fishing. There are many boats coming to the port of KohKapi to other areas. In the past, KohKapi was a very well-known area. The connection between Koh Kong Province and the rest of Cambodia, such as Kampong Som (now Sihanouk Province), could be reached by boat not car. All ships come to dock at the KohKapi Pier and trade. KohKapi is also an area for both domestic and international trade, especially with Thailand. Other communities, such as Tropeang Rung, Ta Tai, etc., have brought various plants sailing boats to trade at KohKapi. For foreign trade, it is the result of fisheries such as fish, crabs, shrimp and other raw materials which are exported to Thailand and others. At that time, besides fishing, there is also a trade in mangrove charcoal. During Khmer Rouge, the economic base of KohKapi underwent a drastic change because people evacuated from KohKapi in order not to be caught and killed. They also entered Thailand because they could speak Thai and

had relatives there. Consequently, the economy of KohKapi during the Khmer Rouge was below zero which the island was left uninhabited, leaving few families. Even though after the Khmer Rouge the situation improved, most villagers did not dare to return to their homeland as being afraid of the Khmer Rouge's arrest. Today, KohKapi is no longer an important economic area as said in the community. The fishermen only trade to feed their families. KohKapi used to be an important economic area but had to be extinguished due to the internal wars of Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge period. At present, the main occupation of people in KohKapi community is fishing to feed the family only; it is not a business fishery that can make profit as before. This factor makes people in KohKapi less, and it needs developing in the future to build infrastructure in the community like other areas.

Conclusion

The research found that Tai Koh Kong ethnic group has presented and constructed their ethnic identity with the use of language in everyday life preserving and modifying cultural traditions, beliefs and rituals, as well as social memories of the past. It is also noticed that it is a mix of Cambodian cultural traditions, and attempts to be rebuilt, especially by bringing Devo ceremony held by Tai Koh Kong people every year. In addition to literary traditions, there are also stories of beliefs and rituals such as strict respect for Theravada Buddhism Beliefs with various shrines such as PhoLin Dam and Grandma Mao. Furthermore, the social memories in the past that make people remember and talk about the history of their ethnic until present. As the results, Tai Koh Kong people have adapted themselves to Cambodian society in terms of traditions, culture, beliefs and rituals as well as maintaining their identity through such activities.

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