

# Communal Consciousness of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community: Conceptual Analysis, Perspective and Process through Songkran Tradition

Phramaha Mit Thitapañño<sup>1</sup>, Phrasophonphatthanabundit<sup>2</sup>, Phrakhrusudhikhambhirayana<sup>3</sup>, Jansiri Ployngam<sup>4</sup>, Niraj Ruangsarn<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Faculty of Buddhism, <sup>5</sup> Faculty of Education, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Khon Kaen Campus,

<sup>4</sup> Rajamangala University of Technology, Isan Khon Kaen

## ABSTRACT

The objectives of the research were: 1) to study the concept, history, perspective, relationships and process of communal consciousness through Songkran tradition; 2) to study social relationship and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community on Songkran tradition and 3) to analyze the process of building of communal consciousness and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community through the Songkran tradition. The research found that the concept, history, perspective, relationships and process of communal consciousness of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community established to create for peace in ASEAN society in order to have political stability and economic prosperity, social and cultural. The social relationship and culture of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community on Songkran tradition found that the relationship between human beings, the relationship between cultures must be relied in both sciences and Arts in order to strength and understanding each other. Process of building of communal consciousness of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community through the Songkran tradition found that it is the strength of love, reconciliation of family, community and country in order to make more strength. It was to create the national security through government policy to be determined a national holiday in order to make people have communal consciousness on Songkran tradition.

## Keywords

communal consciousness, ASEAN social community, Songkran Tradition, Thailand

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## Introduction

The history of the ASEAN Community is what we need to learn about the ethnic group to reflect the building of community, civic development, and civilization of human race. In each period, we have learned from the environments and natures as well as creativity to help the living and gathering as a group. Coexistence in the society and interaction with each other allow human beings to develop quality of life, ideas, and wisdom until they can invent or create facilities such as arts, traditions, and cultures. The transition of benefits is conveyed and continues improvement until it can be able to change the lives of humans and progress respectively. It is therefore, essential to learn history that reveals the fundamental values of races and human society [1].

Building a knowledge base on building of communal consciousness in history, society and culture of the ASEAN social community will help to open up the vision of ASEAN society for learning a diversity of cultures and ethnicities existing in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) [2]. It is essential to life of the people gathering in many major areas of the

world, as the effects of settlement and migration of multinational populations affect to civilization on the rivers, and lakes to make cultures, language families and ethnic families such as Tai-Lao-Khmer-Mon-Viet, ethnic family Malayu-Javanese. Cultural assimilation creates the ethnic state network together such as Tai-Lao-Khmer-Viet etc. [2]

Culture is another part of the relationship in ethnic groups such as building a relationship of belief and building a sense of responsibility in their own locality until comparative learning between their own localities and countries in the region [3]. This wider scope of knowledge and understanding will be essential foundation for peaceful coexistence in society both local and ASEAN region levels [1]. Thailand has also a diverse culture of countries and religions. Each country tends to have a multiculturalism that occurs among people but there is only one ASEAN culture in common that is 'Songkran tradition'. This tradition is considered to build good relations among ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam etc. The tradition is inherited from their ancestors until it is a unique belief and a way of life of people in society. Although it is

the almost same culture and belief, it is slightly different details in terms of performing the ritual and the social and cultural processes [4].

ASCC [2] aims to promote people to have characteristics of ASEAN citizenship in correspondence with the aims of ASCC such as human resource development, corporate social responsibility, personal differences respect and society, human rights, kindness, generosity, harmony and environmental protection while the cultural diversity, social differences, political governance and other differences

among ASEAN citizens enhance and build strength and competitiveness in various fields. These are opportunities to lead to confrontational situations and conflicts among people in the countries. Whenever citizens undermine the peace of being an ASEAN citizen, they must be patient in such situation. After that, it gradually finds the best solution to minimize a negative impact on each other in order to maintain friendship and unity. This leads to friendly solutions and interdependence, not a rivalry enemy.

Songkran festival is a new year celebration. It is a common tradition of Buddhists in Southeast Asia. It is not considered as a Thai tradition as many people understand. ASEAN countries such as Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia organize the same Songkran tradition. It is a beautiful activity, soft, generous and filled with an atmosphere of gratitude and respect to one another. It is a tradition to value relationship between human beings in society by using water as a medium for connecting people. It is not just a festival of water as some government agencies are working to build a unique selling point or to make money for their countries. It is far away from the original purpose of Songkran. In reality, Songkran has been practiced and passed down for a long time and it is very valuable to the practitioner, community and society.

Songkran is a tradition that builds generosity for environment because people help each other clean houses and belongings to welcome the coming new year with cheerfulness. Furthermore, people also help to clean up temples, public places and buildings. In addition, it is one of the important merit-making day for Buddhists by performing alms offering, offering food to monks, listening to sermons, practicing Dhamma and sprinkling water onto a Buddha images with the faith in making

merit bringing prosperity to life and prolonging Buddhism.

ASEAN Community is an effort to unite the regional group of ASEAN countries into one identity with the slogan 'build ASEAN into a community of generosity and sharing, one vision, one identity, one community'. The main reason is to strengthen and increase bargaining power from a combined population of more than 600 million. This brings people in ASEAN countries to live under generosity concept, social welfare, social security and cultural security. For this reason, the researchers are interested in studying the importance of Songkran existing in ASCC in terms of its activities that build relationship among people in each country. The result of this study will create the communal consciousness among ASEAN people and to promote ASEAN culture as one.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are: (1) to study concepts, history, perspectives, relationships and processes of communal consciousness through Songkran tradition; (2) to study social relationship and ASCC on Songkran tradition; to analyze the process for building of communal consciousness and culture of ASCC.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Population

This research was carried out by means of the qualitative research method. The population included 9 key informants from three countries: Khon Kaen Province, Thailand (4); South of Laos, Pakse and Champasak Provinces (2); Phnom Penh Capital, Cambodia (4).

### Instruments

In this research, the in-depth interview is comprised of an interview form, an observation form, audio record and video record. The procedures of interview were as follows:

- 1) Study concepts, history, perspectives, relationship and processes for building of communal consciousness through the Songkran tradition in order to create the interview form.
- 2) Use the data derived from Step 1 to build the interview form.
- 3) Revise the interview form.

- 4) The revised interview form was sent to 5 experts to consider its suitability and accuracy of the content, language and consistency in question's issue.
- 5) Improve and revise the interview form according to the expert suggestions.

### Data Collection

The procedures of data collection:

- 1) The letter from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Khon Kaen Campus (MCUKK), was sent to population to get permission to collect the data.
- 2) Create good relation with key informants and target group, then discuss to create familiarity and inform the purpose of data collection.
- 3) Make an appointment to conduct the interview so that the target group could prepare documents and others involved in data collection.
- 4) Conducted data collection by using the interview form with key informants. In this process, the graduate students from MCUKK including Thai, Lao and Cambodian students assisted the interview as a coordinator by tape recording, note taking and interviewing.

### Data Analysis

1) The obtained data are interpreted by the descriptive analysis in order to describe concepts, history, perspectives, relationship and to build of communal consciousness through Songkran tradition. This is divided into three issues as follows: (1) process of building of communal consciousness and culture of ASCC through the Songkran tradition; (2) social relationship, culture of ASCC regarding the Songkran traditions; (3) analysis of the building process of communal consciousness and culture of ASCC through Songkran tradition.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The research results in concepts, history, perspective, relationship and building of communal consciousness through ASCC revealed that the foundation of ASEAN community was formerly aimed at building peace in the ASEAN region, to achieve political stability and development of economy, society, culture and international trade. ASEAN is seen in a trend of trade, it makes ASEAN turned to focus on the strength, expanding economic and intertrade. If

we look at issue of relations of the ASEAN community, it can be seen that the relationship for all is essential to learn about the history of ethnic groups, diversities regarding cultures, traditions and occupations. What is often seen on a regularity is disparity of income distribution in the society[5]. This disparity reflects economy, politics and culture in this region. The economic disparity, society and culture of ASEAN community still needs to systematically coordinate different boundaries.

In regards to the social relationship and culture of ASCC regarding Songkran, relationship of historical ethnic and culture, [6] the study found three countries area that have an ethnic history with overlapping disparity between nationality and ethnicity. This caused different beliefs and cultural identities. It could be noted that most cultures of the countries are similar to neighboring countries. More interestingly, ethnic and culture in each country had its own cultural identity which is often positively used, but the cultural identity of the borderline spreading group is often taken up negatively. To compare three countries, the main difference is the concepts describing behaviors and expressing racial atmosphere. This is because it occurs on the basis of incompatibility. What happened was the tribal people attempted to communicate and adjust a way to maintain a relationship within the same culture.

Intercultural relationship of ASCC needs to be linked to local cultures, societies, and nations. There are often conflicts and disparities within the cultures. This can be seen that the social conditions with more opportunities and readiness will be able to move ahead. A weak society has become a victim of a strong society. This causes dependence or attachment to appear in groups. If each group cannot use intelligence to think, analyze and distinguish, that group cannot manage and control their lives in a balanced system. After that, it will be unstable to living in the modern society. Any group that life is unrelated to physical, mental and spiritual needs, it leads to a cultural collapse. Furthermore, the relationship between humans needs to have sciences and arts to encourage and maintain relationship, mutual understanding, affection, loyalty and cooperation. These reflect a happy life among people. Therefore, social relation is both sciences and arts leading people to happiness. Therefore, ASEAN community is trying to unite the regional groups

of countries into one identity, with the slogan 'building ASEAN into a generous community and sharing, one vision, one identity, one community too'. It can be noted that this leads to the strength and increase of the bargaining power. It makes ASEAN with a combined population of more than 600 million people to build a cultural consciousness of the ASEAN socio-cultural community, to enable the people of each ASEAN country to live together under a hospitality society concept, good social welfare, social security and cultural security.

The study of the processes of building of social consciousness and culture of ASCC through the Songkran revealed that the processes in all three countries are consistent in terms of meaning, approach and practice. ASCC is to raise awareness of the ASEAN community to be familiar with each other and responsible to the society. These often occur with learning; that must be used as a tool to help people show their talent by a process design. It makes people to learn in a good way through activities as follows:

- 1) Interpolating tradition which is personal accountability to be aware of the responsibility of civil tradition, provide opportunity for their citizens, educate about culture and environment to appreciate the tradition including the impact of their actions affecting their traditions;
- 2) Understanding a multicultural society, politics for participation of people and the process of social movements;
- 3) Sharing to build a sense of responsibility and activities for citizens to have public consciousness towards society and emphasize the problem and impacts in various fields, volunteer to set an example then persuade others to work together;
- 4) Process of building of social consciousness and politics is to realize the role of their duty and rights of humanity and citizenship of society at the community level, countries and world society;
- 5) Building consciousness of participation in expressing opinion is to encourage people to participate in activities and learning in politics, social leadership by being aware of the equality of diverse human beings.

Songkran tradition in the process of building of communal consciousness and culture of ASCC is an activity to be built for society, to build awareness of identity and social responsibility

together. Songkran is a process to promote solidarity, a movement that begins with the family and expands to communities and countries. Songkran in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia has determined as a New Year's Day. Another interesting thing is that it is synonymously called 'New Year's Day' in all three countries. These may be the influence of Buddhism [7]. In addition, it is also a day to express gratitude to the respected people. This activity allows people of all nations to express themselves to the person they respect, regardless of their religion. It is also a tool to strengthen the community's stability and reconciliation, not only in tourism but also as an activity that can be applied in cultural exchange and tradition. It can be said that it is a tradition that builds love without boundaries of gender, age and race. Songkran festival activities can be a tool for connecting the solidarity of people in the country and abroad. It is a pride for the people of ASEAN society as well.

## DISCUSSION

At the present, Songkran traditions in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia have changed as the valuable culture. Based on the data analysis, from the interview, all three countries show the public opinions towards Songkran in the same way. Songkran emphasizes promotion in terms of local area rather than providing good value.

Benefit to the security of the race: Songkran is a ritual or activity that takes place in a family member. Although this ritual or activity has changed to a wider society, it tends to change attitudes and faith. Also, it can bring in remembrance and gratitude to the deceased ancestors. Besides, it also builds unity in the community by watering and pouring the elders and wishes. It is to pay respect to the elders of the family by this activity in order to build the stability of the race.

Benefit to the security of community: Songkran can build the security in the community. Even if it does not reach 100% but it still works. This is because it is a universal tradition that can be accepted by every society. National and religious groups cannot be told to be any religion but it is a tradition according to government policy. For this reason, it is a universal activity for all races and community. It is known as Songkran and national tradition along community, village and city. It is an important tradition and national



tradition. And it is a tradition that builds people have consciousness, an important tradition that must be expressed.

Benefit to the security of Nation: Songkran can build people in the nation to have consciousness of the duty to be expressed, for example, civil servants show respect to the boss by giving gifts to get a wish on Songkran day. Organizations and communities express their gratitude to those they respect. In village level, people pay respect to governors, in family's level, children pay respect to parents, grandfather and grandmother etc.

Process to build through religion: religion is the anchor of the nation. Particularly, the doctrine of Buddhism teaches people to be optimistic. It is a teaching based on logic, not looking only at one's own society but the whole world as a system of relationship with factors in everything in nature. This nature is a system of relational factor. All things in the universe are related and dependence. Songkran is considered to have a historical relationship. Although it has a relationship with Buddhism, it does not make tradition unpopular because people believe what they respect.

Songkran Tradition: it is a New Year's Day of all races in Southeast Asia Buddhism such as Laos, Cambodia, Mon, Myanmar up to Lanka and Xishuangbanna in China too. It is an ancient tradition of the Southeast Asian ethnic group passed down from ancient time. It is originally known as 'Songkran Lunar + New Year tradition' meaning the traditions of New Year's Eve and welcoming the New Year. Surprisingly, the word "Songkran" is a Sanskrit word, whereas "Lunar" New Year is a Tamil word, translated as the end of the year. In the present day, the cultural values Songkran traditions in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia have been gradually transformed as tourism. The interview of people from three countries shows this idea in the same way.

## SUGGESTIONS

This presented paper focuses only one tradition that are similar in ASEAN countries. There are many traditions such as Bun-khaow Pradab-din (offering food to ghosts, relatives), Bun Caek-khaow (rice donation to the dead) in ASEAN countries. These traditions should be studied in the future. However, Songkran traditions still have many aspects to be studied such as traditions and religious beliefs. Songkran tradition is not related to any particular religion. In general, it is believed

that it belongs to all people, all nations and religions. When the history is studied, it was seen that it relates to religion and is influenced by religion. Therefore, the study of Songkran that focuses on religion beliefs should be carried out in the future.

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