

Malaysian siamese community



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Malaysian Siamese community is found in northern part of Malaysia. They are one of the minority groups that live as part of Bumiputera like Malays, Kadazan-Dusuns, Iban and Malaccan Portuguese. They have adopted with the culture and traditions in Malaysia. The Siamese community that can be found in northern states of Malaysia is Kedah Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis. Kedah and Kelantan is well-known with the border area to Thailand. The Siamese peoples are mostly Buddhist and some are Muslim.

The language that they use in their daily life is mostly the same dialect with the Malays but they also do speak Thai language among their communities. Malaysia Government have given their support to the Siamese in Malaysia as they will be treated as equal as the other Bumiputera. Although they live in Malaysia they are still practicing the same practice and religion as the Siamese in Thailand. One of the celebrations that they celebrate is Lai Khatong.

Although the celebration is celebrated throughout Thailand and certain parts of Laos and Burma, Malaysian Siamese still maintain their culture in Malaysia every full moon on the 12th month based on Thai-lunar calendar. This report is about the Siamese community, we gather the information about their history and culture, and focus on the official policies that promote the Siamese community. On one hand, we look at the aspect of bilingualism and language maintenance of the Siamese community. On the other hand, we focus on how politico-economic changes have affected people's attitude towards bilingualism.

History, Language and Culture History of Malaysia plays important roles in the existent of the Siamese people. In 1826 the Siam ended the agreement with East India Company, the essential clause of which provided for non-interference by Siam in Perak, Selangor, Kelantan, and Terengganu. The Siam threat of invasion in northern Malaya has not end until the Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1909, Siam reassigned it to Britain all the rights in the northern states. These Siamese peoples are actually origin from Thailand.

In the past, Thailand government during the Rattanakosin now known as Bangkok, showed a big influence towards the Malay states such as Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis and Terengganu. There are recognizes as Bumiputera like Malays, Kadazan-Dusuns, Iban and Malaccan Portuguese. Malaysia comprises various ethnics and races like Malays, Chinese, Indian, and also the other ethnics, including Siamese. The Siamese peoples are originally from Thailand and migrated to the northern part of Malaysia, because of few reasons such as looking for job, acquiring knowledge, and also the inter-marriage bonds with the local people.

It is believed that the most of the Siam community lives in Kelantan an Kedah, due to geographical factor where Kedah and Kelantan State is known with the border to Thailand. Malaysian Siamese people adhere to Buddhism and Islam. Most of Siamese are Buddhist. The predominant form of Buddhism is Theravada, which is centered around their place of worship called the Wat. There also exists a significant Muslim community. The Muslim community is following the Sunni Islam. They categorize as a minority group of Siamese that can found in Malaysia. The Malaysia Siam mostly inhabited in North Malaysia states because it is close to Thailand.

However they are mostly from South Thailand. We refer them as Siam, who speak Thai language or Siamese and who are Buddhist. They are historically resident of Malaysia for long time as a local Siamese. They would prefer to be called Malaysian Siamese or orang Siam, instead as Malaysian Thai. Most of these Siamese people lead their way of life similar to the Malays. The evident to the statement can be seen clearly especially among the Kelantanese Siams. One could not differentiate Malay or a Siamese if they have not heard they speak in their own language.

The only distinctive mark among them is their religion and language. Otherwise Malaysian Siamese are like Malays as they also speak fluent local Malay dialects. Malay culture has highly influenced their culture as they are living in Malaysia and they are exposed with the inter-marriage with the Malays. Most Malaysian Siamese people are Buddhists of the Theravada sect. Their place of worship is called the Wat. Each Wat has several monks administering it. The Buddhists Siamese do practices the same culture as Siamese in Thailand. They celebrate Loi Khatong.

Loi Khatong is a festival of celebration that happens on the evening, on the full moon on the 12th month in Thai lunar calendar it usually falls on November based on the western calendar. The meaning of Loi is 'to float', while krathong is usually refers to a lotus-shaped container which floats on the water. A small coin is sometimes included in the flower as an offering to the river spirits. On the night of the full moon, they launch their krathong on a river, canal or a pond, makes wish upon their release of the krathong. This festival may originate from an ancient ritual paying respect to the water spirits.

The official policies that promoting the Siamese language The Prime Minister of Malaysia Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said that the Siamese community in Malaysia now regarded as Bumiputera and will be looked after just like other Bumiputeras. Since the government announced that the Siamese community is one of the Bumiputeras of Malaysia, several policies are declared to protect and insure the rights of the Siamese community. These policies are not just protect the rights of the Siamese community, but also protect the culture and language of the Siamese in a certain degree. The numbers of the Siamese community of Malaysia is just around 60, 000.

Most of them are live in Penang, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Perak, Terengganu and Kuala Lumpur. They have their own language and own culture, but in some how, the Malaysian culture and Malay language influenced their culture and language. The new generation of the Siamese they are bilingual. Before, there were the group of people that lacking of caring from the government. They were considered as Thai people living in the Malaysia. Nowadays the government announced that they are the Bumiputeras and reviewed procedure to facilitate Malaysian Siamese to change race status from “ Thai” to “ Siamese”.

This policy is confirm that the Siamese has the same right as other citizens. In other words, the promotion of the status of the Siamese community, in some how, helping to promote their language and their culture. Another policy is the prime minster said that the Siamese is free to further develop their language and culture so as to ensure the Siamese’s heritage continued to be preserved. The Siamese language is selected in the schools to ensure

the Siamese community in Malaysia continues to master their mother tongue.

Even though the teaching of the Siamese language would not be carried out in all schools, but in areas with a high density of Siamese. Before the policy of re-introduced the Siamese language in the school, there were just only five Siamese teacher teaching the language and when they retired, no other teachers were selected to continue the teaching task. But now the government help to identify schools with high enrolment of Siamese students, and provide teachers expert in the language, to ensure a smooth teaching process.

And the government allocated financial allocation of RM620, 000 for the Siamese schools. This move will help to preserve the language of the Siamese community. As we know that the language presents the culture, selecting the Siamese language in the school is also a kind of way that to preserve the culture of the Siamese community. The social practice and language maintenance of Siamese in Malaysia Due to the many communities and the increase number of population of Siamese in Malaysia, mix marriage has been going on between the local Malaysians and the Siamese community.

Mix marriage means a marriage of two people from different races, religions or different cultures. The families of both partners in a mixed marriage often disapprove their marriage. How this affected the Siamese community is that their future offspring would have problems in using their mother tongue. For example, in a family where the father is Malay, and the mother is a Siamese,

the child might only know how to speak Malay only but don't know Siamese. For those partners in mixed marriage, it would be hard for them to express their feelings through the languages, as their mother tongues are different.

Despite the larger numbers of Malaysian people marrying a Siamese, the Siamese language could be ruled out as insignificant because of the low numbers of the people who actually speak the language. The Siamese language soon may face extinction since they are easily assimilated to local Malay community. How did the Siamese held their language together? Simple, ever wonder why most of the Siamese settlements are at north of Malaysia? It is because of geographical positioning, North Malaysia sits in between the borders of Thailand and where the Siamese communities are holed up.

Trades between the Malaysian Siamese and the Thai people would usually occur from time to time, thus forcing the Siamese to use their language in order to speak to the Thai people, also applies for the Malaysian locals since they too have language contact with the Thais. Another way for the Siamese to maintain their language is through Religion, as you may know, the culture of Siamese is deeply imbued with Theravada Buddhism, which is the official religion practiced by almost the entire population of the Siamese Community.

Much of the arts, painting, sculpture, architecture, dance and music, undergoes this influence and is serving traditional representations of Buddhism and its derivatives. Their holy book is written in their language for the use of sermons and praying, so as you can see, religion is something that

the Siamese really holds in to, and since their religion is written in their language, most probably they will continue to use it, despite it's economically low value in Malaysia. How politico-economic changes have affected people's attitude towards bilingualism relates to our topic Siamese

The Siamese have lived in the northern parts of Malaysia for hundreds of years, although some in the communities are recent migrants. Most Malaysian Siamese people lead a way of life similar to the Malays. This is evident especially among the Kelantan's Siam. The Siamese have the advantage of better education and a rich cultural tradition. They are more sophisticated in their method of struggle. They are socially and economically advanced with many of their young having gone to university and pursuing middle-class careers. The Siamese are mostly organized under the Malaysian Siamese association which has headquarters in Kedah.

The association takes up issues affecting them and transmits them to the government through a Thai senator in the parliament. The community used to be known as ' Thais' but in the recent years, they have changed their self-designation to ' Siamese' because people were confused thinking that they were from Thailand. As this change has helped to solve the confusion, there are still other persisting confusions. For example, members of older generations are referred as ' Thais' on their national identity card while the younger generations are referred as ' Siamese' instead.

Many of these languages are spoken by larger numbers outside of Siamese. Most speakers of dialects and minority languages speak Malay as well, since it is the language used in schools and universities all across the kingdom.

Malay is an official language in Malaysia. Siamese living area is close to Thailand border. However Siamese people need to live have to learn to speak Malay language. Because they have to communicate with local people in them live, such as studying in school, shopping at supermarket, working at company. or instance a city of the northern part of Malaysia Penang. It is very close to Thailand especially Phuket Island. They had early trading and business interaction. Meanwhile, people who were from these two places needed to understand each other's language. They had cultural, trading and language exchange. Many people who were having Thai ethnic due to seeking the business opportunities, they moved to Penang and started settling down in there. Another problem relates to the issue of Bumiputera status.

The term was formulated after the formation of Malaysia in 1963 to include the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak, many of whom are non-muslim. This term became more important with the implementation of the new economic policy, especially when it comes to certain affirmative action schemes open only to Bumiputera. Because of their struggle, the Siamese community, although not accorded the same status, can participate in unit trust schemes run by National Equity Corporation. Just as non-muslim Bumiputera can become UMNO members, which is traditionally a party for Malays, the Siamese in Kedah and Perlis can do the same.

However this does not apply in Kelantan as UMNO has not opened its doors to Kelantan Siamese. Politico changes have affected people's attitude towards bilingualism, many of these languages are spoken by larger numbers outside of Siamese. There were several supports given by the

Malaysian government for the Siamese community. One form of support given by the government is that the Siamese community was given bumiputera privileges. Most Malaysian Siamese people lead a way of life similar to the Malays. This is evident especially among the Kelantanese Siams.

One could not differentiate Malay or Siamese if they are not heard speaking their own language. The only distinctive mark among them is their religion and language. Otherwise Malaysian Siamese are like Malays as they also speak fluent local Malay dialects. Another form of support given by the Malaysian government is that they gave financial support for the Siamese community to open a school for the Siamese children because the community still lags in education, with only a handful holding senior positions in the government and private sector.

Siamese students are still not accepted into University Teknologi Mara, other Mara-run institutions and local universities' matriculation programmes because government officials confuse the Siamese for Thai citizens. The school, built in 1996 with a RM300, 000 funding from the Barisan Nasional government, currently teaches the Thai language and culture to 150 Siamese children in the Pendang district, which is home to some 5, 000 Malaysians of Siamese descent. It is one of 38 Siamese community-run education facilities in Kedah.

Kelantan has 16 such schools and there are seven in Perlis, two in Perak and one in Kuala Lumpur. And government gradually start watching education of Siamese, we can see from that the government still have a positive attitude for the Siamese group, and the government hope the siamese group could

continue to develop their own culture and languages, and passed along. Of course for the Siamese group has attached importance to they mother language and education of mother tongue.

On the other hand, the progress of the permeation of Malay education and Islamization brought a considerable change to the life of Thai-speakers. The younger generations who can understand Thai are decreasing year by year. The understanding of the Thai character is difficult for younger generations, and it is said that the chance to use Thai Language have been decreasing more since the introduction of Malay education One more form of support given by the Malaysian government for the Siamese community is that the government has allowed their temple to be built in Malaysia.

Most Malaysian Siamese people are Buddhists of the Theravada sect. Their place of worship is called the Wat. Each Wat has several monks administering it. The Malaysian government has funded money so that the Siamese community could build their temple so that the Siamese people could continue with their religion. The allocations of Thai temples are mainly located at the northern states of Kedah, Kelantan, Penang and Perak. Actually religious reflect a nation`s language culture.