

## **Role of Community Leaders on Sharing Local Knowledge of Silk Making in Thai Communities**

Suchada Namjaidee  
Faculty of Management Science,  
Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University

— *Review of* —  
**Integrative  
Business &  
Economics**  
— *Research* —

### **ABSTRACT**

The article explores the role of community leaders on the sharing of the knowledge and wisdom of making silk. The objective was to analyze the role of personal media on passing on the knowledge of wisdom of making silk in the community of Mueang Pak Sub-district, Pak Thong Chai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. The study was conducted using qualitative research through participatory observation, in-depth interview and group discussions as tools to collect data. Results revealed that in the community of Mueang Pak Sub-district, Pak Thong Chai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, community leaders were divided into two groups, the wisdom teachers and the owners of silk businesses. Both groups of leaders uses interpersonal communication and organizational communication as forms of communications. The roles of communications for the community leaders can be divided into 1) informants, 2) influencers and 3) educators. However, all share a common feature in playing the role of sharing the knowledge and wisdom of making silk. Members within the community that were free from doing agriculture will be drawn to produce silk. Moreover, community members also inspect activities in various places and applied the knowledge gained to produce silk in the community, host annual silk events, and establish the Nakhon Ratchasima Thai Silk Association. Both groups of leaders used personal media in sharing the knowledge and wisdom of making silk and specialized media in the dissemination of information, news and knowledge regarding wisdom of making silk, including brochures and posters, as well as host events and trainings.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Globalization causes information to spread throughout the world; people in every part of the world can receive information without border obstruction. This make changes in economy by improving competitiveness through knowledge-based economy, which refers to the economy that is driven by knowledge (Bawdin Wijarn, 2004: 33).

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many countries started to change their business investment bases and industries and rely on the knowledge-based economy, focusing on the importance of creating knowledge and the expertise of their organizations to be more economically competitive. This is an important foundation in lifting up the development level of the world. Thailand has also been affected by this change of the world society by which the knowledge-based economy has been emphasized. This can be seen by the transferring of knowledge which is the wisdom of people in the community in many ways. The Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh National Economic and Social Development plans explain that people are the center of the development,

while these plans emphasize the development for strong and balanced society through knowledge-base and learning society, using wisdoms as the base for development. Knowledge is seen as an asset of the society. Apart from that, the plans focus on building security for community economy by giving supports on how to use local wisdom knowledge and culture in creating values for the products, as well as to enhance human, social, and cultural assets. Moreover, the plans give emphasis on strengthening domestic economy using wisdoms, sciences, and technologies. The changing world system influences Thailand, causing Thai people to adapt and upgrade learning in order to survive the changes (Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board, 2001)

Therefore, to promote the production which comes from the community wisdom, there has to be the transfer of wisdom knowledge in order to exchange, distribute, and create new knowledge which has been created from the original wisdoms, as well as to encourage the use of labors and create jobs at different levels. For within a community, there has been the realization for the importance of the use of the existing wisdom knowledge while open to new knowledge from outside to strengthen the economic system of the community that leads to the production which is acceptable and compatible with other products.

A result of driving the sustainable community's economy in Thailand, one important evident in silk textile which proudly reflects the values of arts, culture, and wisdom of Thai people, as silk creates products which are valuable and known to the world, while making good income to the entrepreneurs. The wisdom in making silk has long been with the community in creating careers and making income for the community. More importantly, the transferring of wisdom knowledge has been passed through from generation to generation, with the development of new knowledge to create the wisdom knowledge from the original one. This results in the variety of new forms of silk products to continuously serve the needs of the customers, updating the silk fashion at all time. This improvement could not happen without the leaders in the community; particularly outstanding in this community are the wisdom teachers and the silk business owners who have the formats and roles in communicating and transferring wisdom knowledge of silk production until the present. This creates careers and income for the people in the community.

Regarding silk in the Northeastern Thailand, "Nakhon Ratchasima" is considered an important source of silk. In the past, the silk threads were produced in many households for everyday use, to give to relatives and to sell to the middlemen, which were called "Nay Hoi", who collected silk threads and sent to Ayutthaya province for sale. The silk was therefore called "Korat Silk", as silk was made for every class of people for their own use – from within the house of the provincial governor to the house of a normal person – all had silk making tools of their own. Initially, Korat people did not cultivate silk but bought the silk threads from other sources (Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province 2008: 46). At the present, Pak Thong Chai has become the most famous silk producer in Nakhon Ratchasima, with high quality silk products of tight textile, durable coloring and fabric, stable after washing, and look good when wearing. The transfer of wisdom knowledge could not happen without such knowledgeable people as the wisdom teachers and the silk business owners who transfer knowledge of Pak Thong Chai silk production for a long time until now. For this reason, the researcher realized the importance of the problems which may lead to the closure of the legend of Pak Thong Chai Silk Road if the community leaders, which include wisdom teachers and the silk

business owners, did not pay attention to the wisdoms of making the unique and outstanding silk. The researcher is interested in investigating the roles of community leaders and the transfer of wisdom knowledge in Muang Pak sub-district, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province in order to apply the study results in promoting the transfer of wisdom knowledge in silk production.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

To analyze the roles of personal media in transfer knowledge of community silk wisdom at Muang Pak sub-district, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province.

## **3. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

The scope of the project covered sub-district headmen, village headmen, mayor of Muang Pak district municipality, and teachers.

Informal community leaders included wisdom teachers, community silk business owners in Muang Pak sub-district, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province who involved in transferring knowledge of silk making wisdom.

## **4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

From the review concepts, theories, and literature related to the community contexts of the roles of personal media and the knowledge transfer of silk making wisdom: the case study at Muang Pak sub-district, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province, the researcher has defined two main groups of community leaders as personal media, namely formal leaders such as sub-district headmen, village headmen, mayor of Muang Pak district municipality, and teachers, while the informal leader included wisdom teachers and silk business owners. These leaders were the main knowledge transformer of the silk making wisdom.

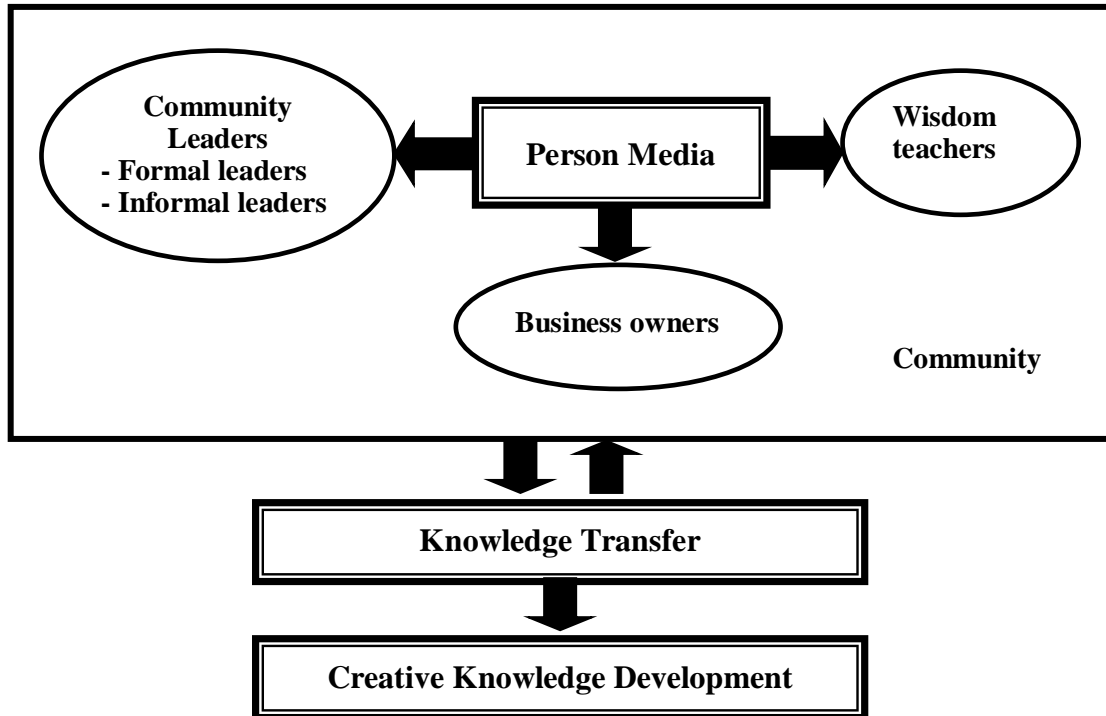
## **5. METHODOLOGY**

This study was a qualitative research, by which the researcher used the participatory observation method to create relationship with people in the community and collected detailed data as accurately as possible. The study areas were 17 communities in the Muang Pak sub-district, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province.

For data collection, the researcher used the observation together with interviews with various levels of informants, including wisdom teachers and silk business owners. The data were collected with in-depth interviews, focusing on the roles of community leaders in transferring knowledge on silk making wisdom. The researcher used the participatory observation method in order to observe lifestyles of silk making people in communities and silk making process, as well as community contexts and lifestyles of other people in the community. The data were confirmed by the wisdom teachers and the silk business owners in the focused group discussions. After that, the analyzed data were presented as the formats of community leader communication, the roles of community leaders, and media used by the leaders. The data were classified and analyzed by issues and summarized before making the

overall analysis according to the theoretical concepts, using the descriptive techniques.

### Conceptual Framework



## 6. RESULTS

1. The communication formats of people in Muang Pak sub-district, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province.

### 1.1 Inter-personal communication

In Muang Pak sub-district, the people live scatter because the area covers 13 villages, while the silk entrepreneurs are in many areas on the two roadsides of the sub-district. At the entrance, there is a center for silk culture to that acts as a place for learning and transferring knowledge of silk in the forms of presentations and silk exhibitions for people from other places, especially the method of dyeing with natural coloring. People come in groups for learning and exchanging knowledge, especially silk makers from various provinces throughout Thailand. While giving presentation, the group communication is used for two-way communication between persons. The message senders and recipients can share opinions and give feedback at the same time.

For the communication within the community, people in Muang Pak sub-district had a special way of communication of “using local Korat dialect”. This creates the feeling of closeness and easy understanding. Additionally, both types of community leaders were locally born; therefore, they liked to use local language at all time in the face-to-face communication. They also made additional communication using telephone or mobile phone. The analysis of the communication formats of the people in Muang Pak community revealed a clear overall view of the people

regarding communication, leading to the explanation on the roles of community leaders and the transfer of wisdom knowledge on silk making.

### **1.2 Intra-organization communication**

The interviews revealed that people in Muang Pak community, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima founded an association called “Nakhon Ratchasima Thai Silk Association”, with the objective to be an organization that coordinates and operates the activities of people who grow mulberry and cultivate silk and people who produce and sell silk products in Nakhon Ratchasima area. This organization also provides information on craft business, industry, trading, and marketing on silk and silk-related products, in order to help coordinate the cooperation with the members and other organizations for the benefits of the members and the society as a whole. This also includes creating good relationships among silk thread producers, silk product developers and government sectors, state enterprises, and other organizations, making good connections between members involved in crafting, industry, trading, and the whole society. The association communicates with all the members throughout the year and holds at least four meetings a year to discuss on the management of the association, allowing the members to exchange new ideas among themselves. There were summaries of the operations in the past for the better improvement. They used formal, not the local dialect, in such meetings because the members consisted of people from outside the community who were honorable guests or silk experts. The meeting contents included issues on silk making such as the development of products for more modern styles, patterns, colors, at reasonable prices at the current economic status.

## **2. Roles of communication of community leaders.**

### **2.1 Sender**

Community leaders played roles as the sender who informs news from the government such as from Nakhon Ratchasima province, the Nakhon Ratchasima Provincial Administrative Organization, and Nakhon Ratchasima Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). These leaders dispersed news regularly and continuously. They informed information on social in the form of study trips on silk production to other communities in other provinces, for example, the study trip on silk production in Chaiyaphum and Sakon Nakhon, and on silk dyeing using natural colors in Ubon Ratchathani.

### **2.2 Educator**

People in Muang Pak sub-district had their careers in agriculture and produced silk for a very long time. Later, changes of the world situations affect the community. Therefore, the leaders became critical in taking roles in giving knowledge to the community and made people realize the importance of the silk making wisdom which they had for a long time and could be improved by making silk in a variety of patterns and products. This could make value added to the community, as well as create career from the existing wisdom until people in the community could help themselves and their family.

In transferring knowledge from the community leaders to the workers who worked with them, both the wisdom teachers and the silk business owners allowed the workers to exchange knowledge on how to create the original silk making wisdom into the design that serve the needs of the customers, while giving the people within

the community freedom to create the products by changing from using natural to chemical coloring which give more options on colors and product types, giving more choices to the customers by varying the products such as men's ware, neck ties, key rings, handkerchiefs, scarfs, bags, tissue boxes, as well as products used for interior decoration such as rooms and accommodation like hotels and resorts, etc.

### **2.3 Motivator**

The leaders of this community were born and have been brought up with silk making environments for a long time; therefore, when communicating with people in the community about silk, the leaders will try to motivate them to believe and follow what have been informed, told, and suggested regarding their career as silk makers that brings income to the community and the family. The leaders also give suggestions to people who come for advice on their silk production career and persuade them to join the community's activities related to silk textiles. Additionally, these leaders are trying to persuade people in the community who are the massage receivers have knowledge and understanding which lead to the acceptance of the local wisdom on silk making. This also includes the attempts to motivate the people to be hard-working on their career while attending all the community's activity related to silk making.

### **2.4 Communicant**

The leaders were local to the area and have been living with the silk-making environment since their childhood. They have seen people in the family and the community produce silk for long enough to absorb and learn by trials and errors until they become experts who know every single detail of every step in the silk making process. At the same time, the community leaders transfer their knowledge by training family members and their workers. They also give presentations to people of the same career from other communities of other provinces and give opportunities for questions and answers on every interested matter.

## **3. Media used by community leaders**

### **3.1 Personal media**

From the participatory observations and the in-depth interviews with community leaders, the researcher found that Muang Pak sub-district, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province was a local community which had simple lifestyles, living in the form of relatives, in Thai rural styles. The leaders, therefore, preferred to use the personal media as the channel for publicizing information to the recipients within the community. The details are as follows.

3.1.1 The word of mouth communication was an appropriate way communication for the context of this community because most people had their career of silk making which need to be at the working sites at all time, having little time for receiving media such as form televisions to develop their career. Therefore, the word of mouth method of communication using local dialect helped getting people closer together and promoted more understanding.

3.1.2 Sub-group communication was another way of communication frequently used by the community leaders. The observations revealed that people often met each other at local fairs related to silk making as well in festivals like New Year, Song Kran, Loy Kra Thong, trough to traditional occasions of ordination ceremony, wedding, temple fairs, and funeral. These events allowed people to talk

and announce news within the conversational groups and passed the news over to relatives at home.

### **3.2 Specific media**

Specific media that community leaders used for publicizing information, news, and wisdoms of silk making were leaflets, posters, and activities, as well as organizing seminar, depending on the topic to be publicized.

## **7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

From the study of the roles of community leaders in transferring knowledge on silk making wisdom in Thai contexts, it may be concluded that the Muang Pak sub-district community, Pak Thong Chai district, Nakhon Ratchasima province is outstanding for silk of the province for many years. Its silk products are famous and well-known in the province, in other provinces, and overseas. With the career of silk producer, this study investigated the roles of the leaders' communication and the transfer of knowledge on silk making wisdom.

The results from the in-depth interviews showed that the community had outstanding leaders which consisted of wisdom teachers and the silk business owners. Most of the leaders put the importance on inter-personal communication using local dialects with people in the community as the channel for publicizing news, information, and knowledge on silk. The local dialect was used because of its ease of use, natural, and easy to understand. The results supported Paul Lazarsfeld and Herbert Manzel (1960: 97), who stated that inter-personal communication is important in its friendliness and familiarity, which make the listener accept the ideas of the speaker more easily. Moreover, inter-personal communication can be used to exchange message directly and it is used in the case of sub-group discussions (Parama Satawatin. 2003: 35).

At the level of inter-personal communication, the study found that the community leaders had the role in informing news, information, and knowledge on silk making wisdom. The researcher also noticed that there was also information on other matters which were publicized through the inter-personal channel such as news from the government, general social news like ordination ceremony, wedding, and funeral of people in the community, as well as various types of merit events. Moreover, the leaders also played roles in giving knowledge about silk production in the form of training in many places which would be beneficial to the silk production where they used the face-to-face communication, allowing instant responses to any question from the message receivers. This was supported by Middlebrook (1974: 161-164) who explained that the community leaders as the message senders have influences on changing attitudes and behaviors of the receivers who were people within the community because of the credibility which resulted from the feeling of trustworthy the receiver have from the sender.

Rogers (1983: 84) claimed that leaders have higher social and economic status than other people in the society. The participatory observations revealed that community leaders at Muang Pak sub-district had some social status in that they were accepted by people in the community for their successful in using wisdom knowledge for their silk production career, making the living for their family as well as being determined and continuously practice on silk production. Therefore, the community leaders acted as the connector that links the people in the community together. Rogers (1983: 282) explained that the thought leaders could get access to many media more

than the followers and they are more internationalized. The participatory observations found that community leaders at Muang Pak sub-district community usually received the news before others, and spread the news further. The communication of the leaders aims at changing attitudes and behaviors of the people which are the receivers in the community. Orawan Pilun-Owad (1999: 96) stated that the objective of persuasion was to motivate and encourage people to realize the importance of something such as local wisdom. In this study, the message receivers, people in Muang Pak sub-district community, understood, agreed with, and followed their leaders in doing their career as silk producers. This was also supported by the study of Panyarat Wanthong and Pachanee Chechanya (2015) who studied the transfer of silk production wisdoms at Pratoon and found that the personal communication strategy played roles in persuading people to participate in the wisdom knowledge of silk production, while creating unity of the people in the community and formed a silk conservation group in the community. For the perceived attitude, knowledge, understanding, and behaviors of people at Pratoon village regarding the silk production wisdom, the in-depth interviews found that the community leaders used specific media in distributing information, news, and silk production wisdoms through leaflets, poster, and activities, as well as trainings. All issues in the publication were considered to be the media used in order to achieve the communication goals on transferring knowledge of the silk production wisdom to the people in the community. Katheleen Reardon (1991: 3) explained that “persuasion” consisted of two main parts. The first part usually contains prepared activities with clear intention. The second part of persuasion is the perception of the persuading person in the act to achieve his/her goal, which needs not to be very clear, but at certain level of the persuading’s intention to change other people’s behaviors.

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