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## Damnoen Saduak Floating Market: The construction of floating market community identity from agricultural society to tourism community



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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aimed to investigate the construction of a floating market's community identity and its impact on the people of Damnoen Saduak community. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, informal conversations, and participatory and non-participatory observations of the interactions and activities in daily life at the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market. The 52 key informants were Damnoen Saduak Floating Market stakeholders: 1) 20 entrepreneurs, members of community and government officers, selected using a snowball technique, and 2) 32 tourists selected using an accidental sampling technique. The findings of this study indicated that the construction of the floating market's community identity contained many meanings. The meanings of three eras were: 1) the community of the local agriculturists' waterways roaming, 1868–1967, 2) the community of the local way of life floating market for tourism, 1967–1977, and 3) the community of floating market for intensive tourism, 1977–present. The impact of the floating market community identity on the people of Damnoen Saduak community was to form both positive and negative characteristics. The positive impacts included the occurrence of a floating market which became known to outsiders and the employment and monetization of community members. The negative impacts included the changes to the traditional lifestyle such as the change from a barter system to a trading system and the change in the types of relationship from generosity to competition.

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### Introduction

Tourism, one of the industrial models, has been recognized as being able to produce the highest income for a country. The more modern technology advances, the more the tourism industry plays an important role, since human beings want to learn new ideas and experience new things and environments (Chadchakhun, 2014). Thus, tourism has a significant role in Thai economic and social development. The government not only supports tourism public relations

for all tourist attractions, but also determines tourism promotion policies. In general, we can see the benefits of tourism to the country. But in the meantime, the recent tourism policies have mostly turned out to be one of the factors causing the more rapid dissolution of the cultural community. According to Eoseewong (1995), tourism in local communities has expanded and grown aimlessly. This has caused economic, social, and environmental problems, including the lack of good management planning and guidelines in sustainable tourism development. Thus, this aimless growth of local tourism led to questioning its effects on the community—the feedback of the villagers on community changes based on the identity they have built.

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Damnoen Saduak Floating Market is known as the most famous tourist attraction in Ratchaburi province; however, its roaming forms of transportation have changed from waterway to on land according to the progress of technology and economy. This is reflected in the new picture of the floating market community which is called a visual representative of the fact that it has changed from an agricultural community to a tourism community. This kind of phenomenon has affected the community in one way or another. This occurrence brought the researcher's attention to study and answer two questions: how to build an identity of the floating market community; and what are the effects of the identity building of the floating market community on Damnoen Saduak community members.

## Literature Review

The concept used in this research in order to explain the identity construction of floating market community is the concept of identity. Identity is created by the interaction of the people in the society. The identity can be changed. It is said that the formation of identity is a process throughout life. Modern sociology prioritizes identity as a product of the society which discriminates between individual identity and mutual social identity. The two identities are connected by the ritual (Saengthong, 2012). The ritual is a symbol that individuals create to reflect the mutual identity of the society. This is in agreement with Feungfusakul (2003) who stated that identity is a perimeter connecting the individual and society with the use of symbols of the expressions in all relations that occur. It also provides the meanings and changes the meaning of self. Thus, identity is divided into two overlapping levels: personal identity and social identity. The social identity consists of two parts: virtual identity and actual identity. With these aspects of identity, the people in the community are able to look at the identity of their community in a different way which may vary according to context and times. The identity can reflect its meaning to explain "how their community is" and "who they are in their community". This can associate the dimension of power relation or rights between themselves and others in the community. This aspect shows that they recognize their own righteousness (Jansomwong, 2001). Thus, the identity of the floating market community can be changed if the context and times change, especially when the identity in modern society is considered as being associated with the job and careers with the community base. The community members can accordingly specify their own identities in their community. The activities in the community can be carried out through the identity being constructed. Braham (2013) stated that identity has become more fluid. This is a result from social and cultural changes together with people and goods movement, especially the impact of world products and cultural matters, known in Hall's concept as the circuit of culture. The circuit of culture suggests that meanings are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes or practices. Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity. Thus, it is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and the differences between groups. Representation or a visual

representative of the fact is the production of meaning through languages. In representation, we use signs, organized into languages of different kinds, to communicate meaningfully with others (Hall, 1997). In other words, a visual representative of the fact reflects its identity.

The researcher used this concept as a framework to analyze and explain the construction of identity of the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community. This study is an open space for the members of the Damnoen Saduak community to describe themselves by presenting various community identities from their own viewpoints. In addition, it can reflect how the external transition affected the community way of life. It also reflects the symbols or meanings which are a visual representative of the fact of the floating market community for its community members' acknowledgment.

## Methods

The qualitative method was used in this study. The key informants of this study were two groups of stakeholders. The first one consisted of the entrepreneurs, members of the community, and government officers. They were the ones who possessed the information about Damnoen Saduak Floating Market and were involved or worked or lived in the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community, Damnoen Saduak district, Ratchaburi province, Thailand. Snowball sampling was used as a sampling technique according to the sampling criteria mentioned above. Samples of 20 key informants who were willing to participate were assigned to the first group. The second group was the tourists who visited Damnoen Saduak Floating Market irrespective of age or gender. They were selected using an accidental sampling technique and their willingness to provide the information in this research. In total, 32 tourists were selected for this study.

The data were collected using in-depth interviews and observations of the activities in daily life at Damnoen Saduak Floating Market. Qualitative content analysis was performed to analyze the collected data from in-depth interviews and observation. The data obtained from interviews and observations were grouped and categorized to explain the identities of the floating market community. Further, the data were interpreted carefully based on the meaning that all key informants provided.

## Results

Damnoen Saduak Floating Market is known as the first floating market in Thailand. It was also one of the well-known tourist attractions in the past. However, this study found that Damnoen Saduak Floating Market has changed quite a lot at present. A visual representative of the fact which represented its cultural production has changed according to social and economic prosperity. The matter of materialism has been brought into the floating market community. Thus, the findings of this research can be reported into two parts: the construction of the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community identity and its impacts on Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community members.

### Construction of Damnoen Saduak Floating Market Community Identity

The Floating Market community identity being constructed has several meanings. Considering the sequence of events from the accounts of the people involved and associated with the social and economic changes taking place in the community, the identity construction of Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community can be divided into three eras. During each era, the community identity has been changed according to the social and economic context. The meanings of the three eras are discussed below.

#### *Community of the Local Agriculturists' Waterway Roaming, 1868–1967*

The study found that the first step of the floating market community began with the canal dredging in 1866, in the reign of King Mongkut. The dredging which connected the waterways between the Tha Chin and Mae Klong Rivers used only human labor and went from the Tha Chin River to Khlong Bang Yang, Samut Sakhon province and from the Mae Klong River to Paak Klong Bang Nok Khwaek, Samut Songkhram. The water transport route passed through Damnoen Saduak district, Ratchaburi. King Chulalongkorn granted the name of this new canal as Klong Damnoen Saduak (Damnoen Saduak Canal). The canal opening ceremony was held on May 25, 1868. Klong Damnoen Saduak became the straightest and longest canal in the country. It has provided habitat and livelihood, and has been an economic source for the people in Damnoen Saduak who were mainly gardeners and as such their lives depended on the use of water in Damnoen Saduak and other small canals nearby. They brought their products, fruits and vegetables, from the orchards to the communities outside via these waterways and this way of product trading became known as a “floating market”. King Chulalongkorn took his unofficial royal voyage through this route to Damnoen Saduak. This emphasized a visual representative of the fact for being the community of the local agriculturists' waterways roaming. This became a discourse that leads to the Damnoen Saduak motto “The city of the historical two canals, King Chulalongkorn's unofficial royal voyage, sweet grapes tea, nice and kind villagers, overwhelming revenue

from plants, we love Damnoen Saduak Floating Market.” Such a discourse further emphasized the identity of this floating market community which was constructed to be the community of the local agriculturists' waterways roaming. The pictures of the crowded sellers rowing their boats and exchanging their products become a symbol of the community that represented Damnoen Saduak Floating Market identity in this era. This is reflected as follows:

*“Hundreds of boats ... what you have seen now were less than before. On those days, you didn't have to paddle the boats to move. You just grabbed other boats to pull your boats up and moved.”* (57 years old community member)

*“It's what they called a gangway, to walk across the canals from boats to boats.”* (government officer)

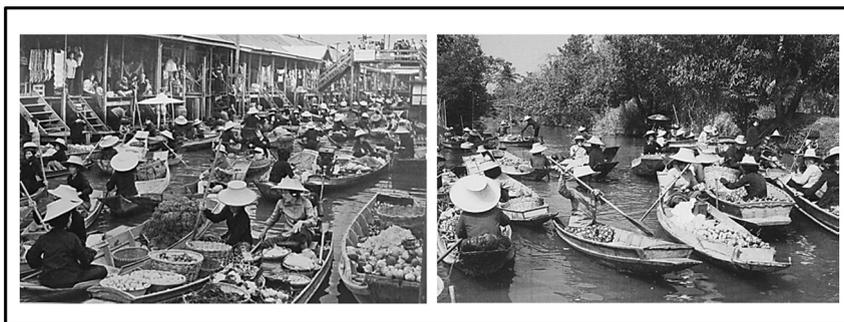
Moreover, the sellers who paddled the boats to sell their products exhibited their unique identity by wearing the same style of bamboo hat called a 'Ngop' and a long-sleeved dark shirt. This strengthened the identity of the community of the local agriculturists' waterways roaming (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, the social and economic changes created the identity of the floating market community as a well-known community center where its members were connected by waterway trading through the Damnoen Saduak Canal. The community members can exchange, trade, and reach each other more conveniently as is reflected in the following.

*“In the old days, the engine boat couldn't enter the canals. There were just the sellers rowed their boats to exchange their agricultural products. For example, they used barter system without trading just like the exchange of banana with pork or orange with morning glory. Afterward, forms of trading were happened to the community.”* (government officer)

*“In the early time, there was no pathway, no cars, but boating. You have to use only boats to go home. Each house will have the small steps as a pathway to get into the boat.”* (65 years old community member)

*“In the old time, the locals come out to trade. There was no foreigner. The simple folks come out to exchange and trade their fresh fruit and vegetables.”* (51 years old community member)



**Figure 1** Barter/trade of the community of the local agriculturists' waterways roaming  
Source: Sompama (2011)

It could be said that the changes in transportation infrastructure created by the government resulted in the Damnoen Saduak community's visual representative of the fact. The community signified the local agriculturists' waterways roaming. It was incorporated with the perception that the canal has special characteristics when compared with other canals since it was a man-made, not an artificial canal. Thus, the floating market community was recognized as a valuable cultural heritage. The community members also feel proud of their community.

*Community of the Local Way of Life Floating Market for Tourism, 1967–1977*

From the picture of the local agriculturists' waterways roaming in the first era, the community has become a symbol of charming appeal for people outside the community and one that these outsiders would like to experience. This ultimately led to the opening of the first tourist attraction called the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market in 1967. At that time, it referred to the one near the entrance to Lad Ratchaburi (Lad Plee) canal. With its identity construction in process, the Damnoen Saduak community became a local way of life with the floating market promoted for tourism. It started from word of mouth as people from outside the community who had never visited before then told others to come and explore the floating market community. This gradually developed to direct visits by tourists through tour companies. Meanwhile, the government was also promoting the area a tourist attraction with its interesting and outstanding identity, particularly the local way of life, which was different from city life. This resulted in a higher demand by both Thais and foreign tourists in order to experience the lifestyle they have never seen or known before.

This government concept of tourism reinforcement and reproduction was considered quite effective. The community members positively responded to the changes that occurred as they continuously brought their products from their orchards to sell to the tourists. Fortunately, their traditional ways of life still remained. Through their normal way of life, they brought their products out to the market early in the morning and paddled their boats back home when the products were all sold. Thus, in this era, the tourists' perception was that had to visit the floating market early in the morning. The crowded boats would disappear from the canal at noon. This was the charming identity of the floating market community in this second era as consistently reflected by the sellers and tourists.

*"When I was a teenager, I remember that we must come here very early in the morning otherwise we will not see anything. It's all natural; you don't have to do anything."* (63 years old Thai tourist)

*"In the old days, they live their way of folk life: easy and simple."* (64 years old Thai tourist)

*"When I was in the old Damnoen Saduak Floating Market, I paddled out of the orchard to sell these fruits around five o'clock ... they were sold out and I went back home before noon."* (68 years old seller)

Moreover, some sellers responded positively to the tourism by increasing their shipping services for the tourists to facilitate and create a good impression on visitors to come back to the market. *"There was a pedestrian at that time. Some foreign tourists came to purchase things but they felt not comfortable to carry or cross the boats. So the sellers paddled their boats to hand them to the tourists"*, 65 years old community member said.

It can be said that the government's tourism promotion resulted in a clearer and more formal visual representative of this floating market community since it brought social and economic changes into this floating market community. The community identity has accordingly been changed, from the identity of the community with a local way of life to the identity of a tourism community, through two ways. First, with the use of the canal as transporting and trading route, the relationship between the community members and the sellers changed into a relationship between the community members and the people outside the community. Second, with the use of its traditional identity, it provided a bridge for the visitors to walk across and to visit this floating market. A visual representative of the fact that reflects the identity of this floating market community in this second era is the picture of the sellers rowing their boats to trade their agricultural products to the tourists—both Thais and foreigners. This new identity became a key component of this new era—the use of the local way of life of the floating market community for tourism. However, the pictures of the crowded sellers rowing their boats and wearing a 'Ngop' and long-sleeved dark shirt in the first era remained the same symbol of the community that represented Damnoen Saduak Floating Market identity in the second era, even though it there were some differences as agricultural products became known as an 'important traded commodity' in this new era.

*Community of Floating Market for Intensive Tourism, 1977–Present*

One phenomenon that changed the picture of Damnoen Saduak Floating Market was the government building a road beside the Ton Khem canal, which meant that land transportation could now access the floating market community and the road has become a symbol to convey the meaning that the floating market could be reached by cars. The community members on the other bank, the bank of Ton Khem canal, have responded to the changes by changing their original agricultural career. They transformed their orchards into a tourism business area and built a new parking lot on the two sides of the Ton Khem canal. The owners of the land both developed their own businesses and let the people outside the community rent their lands to start their own tourism businesses. This new visual representative of the fact presents the new born aspect of the floating market community. They used the strategy to attract sellers who were in the early Damnoen Saduak area at Lad Plee canal entrance to move to this new area at Ton Khem canal. Finally this has become known as the current Damnoen Saduak Floating Market as the community members and government officers have reflected the changes in this third era.

*“The new market (meaning the floating market on Ton Khem canal) started at the end of 1977. A business man from Coliseum has come to rent the land at the corner of the market to sell the souvenirs. He owns an international tour business so he brings the tourists here. He will hire the sellers from Lad Plee canal to move to Ton Khem canal.” (65 years old community member)*

*“Traditional barter trading is the original way of life. People come to the community because they want to experience this traditional lifestyle. They come by cars, then, the roads are needed as well as the parking lots. When there are roads and cars, the sellers accordingly use cars to carry their products to sell on the boats. That's the turning point.” (government officer)*

The more convenient the land route is, the more visitors come to this floating market, resulting in tourists crowds at Khlong Ton Khem (Ton Khem canal), Damnoen Saduak Floating Market. Because of this, the sellers responded with a new tourism market by paddling their boats to the tourists themselves. The importance of the old floating market at Khlong Lad Plee (Lad Plee canal) has been fading. The people on the bank of Khlong Lad Plee have tried to revitalize this old floating market coming with the new name “Lao Tak Lak Floating Market”. This new name is the discourse that Lad Plee canal community created to convey the perception that “Lao Tak Lak Floating Market” is, indeed, the first and the oldest floating market community.

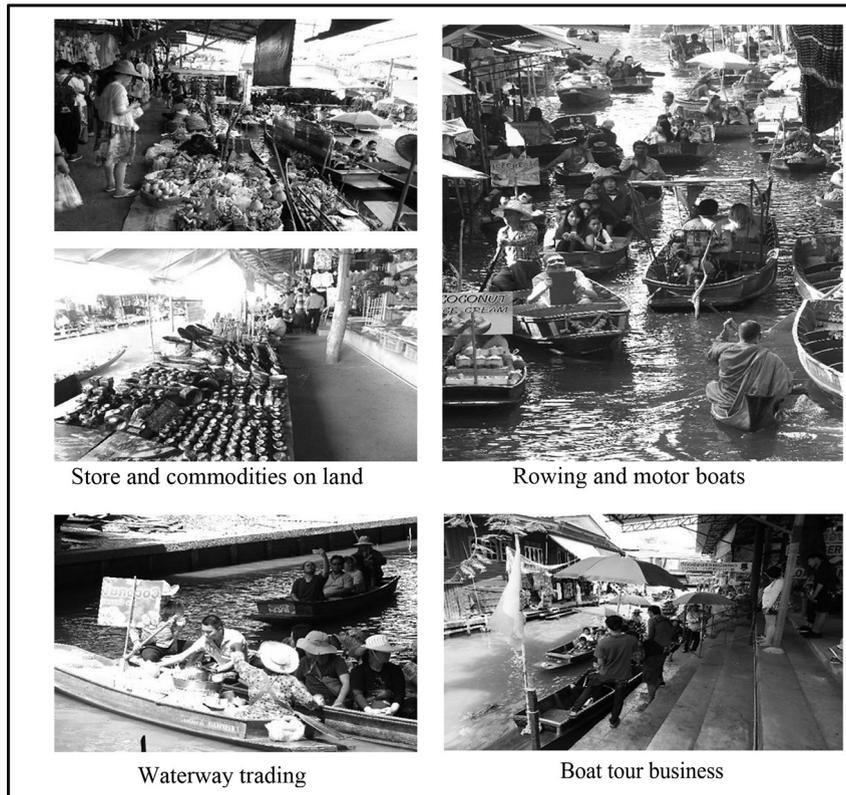
It reflected the identity of the old Damnoen Saduak Floating Market.

Although the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community members at Khlong Ton Khem have tried to retain the same identity of the floating market using boats for trading, the tide of tourism in this community has driven the people in the community and entrepreneurs to adjust to the new market community identity to meet the needs of the tour operators and the tourists. For example, motor boats are used to save time in exploring the market as shown in the community members' and the government officers' reflections.

*“There are foreign tourists. They need to save time. It's just like when we go overseas. We spend only 40 minutes or 1 hour at each place. It's the same. They need to save time so we use the motor boats.” (48 years old community member)*

*“Regarding cars, travelling, urgency, precipitated tourism, every agents are in a hurry.” (government officer)*

Moreover, people in the community that own land on either side of Klong Ton Khem have accepted the changes that the government brought to the community—modern transportation and the promotion of tourism. They created new business such as selling souvenirs, clothes, food, and snacks at shops on the land. The new styles of tour include a boat tour to visit the orchards nearby to experience the coconut sugar production process. This creates more variety for the tourism services (Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Current Damnoen Saduak Floating Market activities

The old floating market identity has transformed into a new tourism community identity. The floating market has finally become a new business community. Thus, the present Damnoen Saduak (Klong Ton Khem) Floating Market's visual representative of the fact reflects the greater competition among private business owners.

#### *Impact of Damnoen Saduak Identity on the Community*

The identity construction of the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community mentioned above has both negative and positive effects on the Damnoen Saduak community in each era as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the apparent effect of community tourism on economic development. At the same time, it was found that tourism has made changes to the community society in terms of lifestyle and relationships among community members that differ from the traditional ways. However, the charm of the way of life in the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community still remains—the use of rowing boats especially for trading agricultural products. By so doing, they can maintain their traditional way of life together with intensive tourism. The impact of identity that reflects the realities of today's floating market community has not reached a level that is destroying the traditional way of life.

#### **Discussion**

The study found that the floating market community identity has been constructed in three contexts in regard to the change of social and economic development in the community. The people in the community experienced and acknowledged a visual representative of the changes that occurred in each period. The experiences through their

interaction and awareness led to understanding its meaning. The people in the community can accordingly reflect the identity of their communities. As Piriyakarnnon (2015) stated, identity recognition and understanding can be seen through their experiences, their memory, or other visible and tangible things in that community. Things that can be easily seen in the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community are the sellers rowing their boats to sell their products in the canal.

The identity of the floating market community can clearly be seen through the relationships outside the community. That is, the government promotes Damnoen Saduak Floating Market as the main national and provincial tourist attraction in Ratchaburi. This emphasizes the recognition of society outside toward their waterway trading and roaming lifestyle as their community identity and outsiders are eager to experience this traditional lifestyle with their own eyes. Thus, the identity of this floating market community can be categorized into two levels that are aligned with one another. The first level is the personal identity reflected through the community members' behavior or role on a daily basis, that is, to take a boat ride both for trading and transportation. The second level is the social identity reflected through the community member' sense which occurs from the government promotion of tourism in their Damnoen Saduak community. They have attempted to save the former ways of life in the Damnoen Saduak community themselves as a selling point for tourism. It was an action based on their group membership. According to Feungfusakul (2003), identity is like the realm that connects the individual and the society through the use of symbols to exhibit the relationship. This has caused the split of its identity into two overlapping levels: the level of personal identity and the level of social identity.

**Table 1**  
Impacts of Damnoen Saduak community identity on its community

Floating market community identity	Positive impact	Negative impact
1. The community of the local agriculturists' waterways roaming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be the center of the trading linked the people in the community with the canals</li> <li>2. Create the picture of floating market in the community</li> <li>3. Retain the courtesy and camaraderie relationship—barter and bargain trading</li> </ol>	Lack of convenience—only one channel of transportation that is waterway roaming
2. The community of the local way of life floating market for tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create more incomes for the people in the community since the products distribution channel was not limited within the community but expanded to the people outside the community.</li> <li>2. Enrich the agricultural product as a key product to sell to the tourists.</li> </ol>	The trading took place whereas the barter system has faded.
3. The community of floating market for intensive tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create more income for the people in the community since the number of tourists who visit the floating market community has increased, especially foreigners</li> <li>2. People both in and outside the community appreciate the increased convenience with the variety of transportation.</li> <li>3. More employment and income distribution created for the floating market community and surrounding areas. Tourism networks expanded into the surrounding areas such as community orchards and coconut sugar production.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The traditional lifestyle has been changed as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The products from outside the community have been brought in to sell. The floating market community uniqueness decreased which will affect its identity in the future.</li> <li>- More tourist motor boats services affect the community environment.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. The community members' relationships become more competitive especially for major business owners.</li> </ol>

In addition, the government uses the identity of the floating market community's traditional way of life as a selling point which is consistent with the idea that today's tourists want to experience the traditional old days. Thus, the traditional identity including culture, traditional way of life, traditions, and food can be a selling point to attract the tourists (Chumpradit & Khunsri, 2007; Thongdee & Puacharoen, 2011). If the Damnoen Saduak community members can maintain their old lifestyle patterns and yet coexist with the new patterns in the present, a visual representative of the fact that is apparent to the people outside the community can then reflect both form and pattern of the identity in the same direction. In particular, if they have made a commitment to the identity of their own community, they can further maintain their traditional lifestyle patterns. As Turner (2013) argued, the greater the community commits to their identity, the more each person in the community performs their role to reflect the values and norms that exist in their communities. Otherwise, the traditional floating market community's identity will gradually fade—caused by the changes in the society outside. The new forms of tourism from outside will absolutely dominate. Trang (2015) found that the social contexts and the influences of the external cultural factors can possibly affect the formation and negotiation of identity.

However, the study regarding the identity construction of the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community is just a visual representative of the fact of only one community. The discourse of the identity development varies in each community. This variation depends on the factors that are involved and the context of each community. Paepdip (2013) stated that we can see the development of the identity discourse clearer if the community is large and there is a long-term process of identity construction. The factors of the identity construction will be different.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study found that the identity of the floating market community has been constructed through several meanings dependent upon the changes of social and economic development in the community. Thus, the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community does not have a fixed meaning or identity, but rather it depends on the standpoint of the actor who describes it, whether from the government, the community itself, or the people outside the community who get involved in the community. In this case, the three meanings of each era that the actor constructed are: 1) the community of the local agriculturists' waterways roaming (1868–1967), 2) the community of the local tourism floating market (1967–1977), and 3) the community of floating market for intensive tourism (1977–present). The symbol that combines all three meanings together is the community's traditional way of life: the use of boats to make a living (use a rowing boat as a shop to sell their products along the canal) and the use of boats to visit each other (use a rowing boat as a vehicle for traveling to the surrounding areas). A visual representative of the fact, that conveys the identity to conform to the changes from

both inside and outside the community, will be modified and added in each era.

Identity modifications or additions can happen in every community. However, it is important whether or not the people in the community have recognized and handled it with proper management. Positive or negative impacts which may affect the community identity will depend on how they manage their community. The Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community can be a case study indicating social and economic changes in the community resulting from people outside the community—the government and business people. The people in the community have to adjust themselves to keep pace with the changes that occur by creating something new to represent the new form of their tourism identity. However, the mutual awareness that the people in the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community must take into consideration its unique identity that is superior to other communities—the picture of rowing boat shops selling their products along the canal. This is the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community's visual representation of the fact which attracts people from outside the community to experience it. It is the foundation of its famous and well-known reputation to people outside the community. Therefore, people in the community, together with the stakeholders, should maintain this visual representative of the fact of their community by encouraging the awareness of entrepreneurs about the value of the rowing boats. These rowing boats can save both money and the environment as well as conserve the traditional lifestyle by representing its glamor and charm. Moreover, it can also retain their unique identity that differentiates them from many other emerging floating markets in Thailand.

In addition, the floating market community has apparently become one form of tourism business. Thus, it is important that the stakeholders should take the principles and application of sustainable tourism into account in their tourism business management. We should study the economical, cultural, social, and environmental dimensions. For example, we should study in detail employment and income creation; participation enhancement; and awareness creation toward the conservation of the environment and culture, together with the development of sustainable tourism regarding the principles of being environmentally friendly, community friendly, and tourists friendly. These principles will be taken into consideration to create the guidelines for floating market sustainable development. Following the guidelines requires both attention and application: The tourist's social security, such as entrepreneurs have a better service mind and better behavior in selling commodities. The value of Damnoen Saduak Floating Market, such as the rowing boats and waterway trading can be maintained in the floating market by the stakeholders. These sustainable development principles do not only apply to the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market community, but also to other floating market communities. If those communities accurately understand and accept these principles, each community can construct its own identity which will conform to the true identity of that community. They still can attract new and old groups of tourists to come and experience their unique

way of life. When the communities have their own distinctive and unique identities, they should also recognize the importance of and have pride in their own identities since that is the beginning of building a strong sense of community.

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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