

Chapter 1

Introduction of Culture

Asst.Prof.Chaweewan Suwannapha

Objectives of the Study

After studying the content in this chapter learners will be able to....

1. Tell the meaning of culture.
2. Tell the significance of culture.
3. Explain the ideas about culture.
4. Explain the background of culture.
5. Tell the elements of culture.
6. Explain the types of culture.
7. Understand the characteristics and duties of the culture.

Scope of the Content

- Introduction
- The meaning and significance of culture
- The concept and background of culture
- The elements of culture
- The types of culture
- The characteristics of culture
- The duty of culture

1.1 Introduction

Humans are living creatures but humans are different from other living creatures because they have the way of life which is different from animals such as they know how to make a living, build the house, invent the tool and utensil, including making plan in leading their life. All of these things are the cultures. Since human have the culture that makes them to be more sublime than animals and cleverer than any other animals.

The culture helps develop humans to be cleveres than all living creatures, making humans to more powerful than other kinds of animals, and controlling the nature marvelously. The element of humans that helps make the culture is the humans' brain which is full of quality much more than all living creatures and humans have a physical advantage, for example, hands and fingers which are suitable for working and inventing the utensils and equipment.

The culture has occurred from learning, creation, inheritance and transmission. Also, the culture has an occurrence, growth, change and deterioration which are the same as the lives of humans and animals but the conditions that occur and change or develop are from the actions of humans.

The culture is valuable and important for each nation. Humans have been separated to have their own nationalities because of the influence of the culture. So, the culture is the pattern of expression relating to the feeling, thinking and action of humans as the rules or behaviors that humans practice until becoming the tradition or the duty that will be followed and practiced by everyone in society. Culture can be both material and non-material. Therefore, in studying the human society, we have to study the culture because it will make us understand the humans' behavior in the society through their expressions.

1.2 The Meaning and Significance of Culture

1.2.1 The Meaning of Culture

The word “Thai : วัฒนธรรม, Thai pronunciation: [watthanadham]¹” is derived from Pali and Sanskrit. The word “Thai : วัฒนา, Thai pronunciation: [watthana], is derived from Pali word “Thai : ວັດທະນ, Thai pronunciation: [watthana]” is translated as *prosperity*. The word “Thai: ธรรม, Thai pronunciation : [dhamma]” is derived from Sanskrit word “Thai : धर्म, Thai pronunciation: [dharma] is translated as *goodness*.

The word “watthanadham”² is equal to “culture” in English which is derived from “Cultura” in Latin which means *husbandry* or *cultivation* that can be explained that humans are the persons who are cultivated or instilled for the prosperity.

Regarding Social Sciences, the culture has a broad meaning, which is concerned with the way of life of humans in society and the pattern in leading a life of humans, including the works that are made by humans, thinking, belief, value and a variety of knowledge etc.

The word “watthanadham”³ means “dhamma is the prosperity” or “dhamma brings about the prosperity”. This means that dhamma is movable. It is always changed but the change must move forward in the better way. The thing that is immovable and such a thing is not called “watthana” which is translated as “prosperity”. So, “watthanadham” or culture should be improved for being always suitable for the period of time.

Phraya AnumanRajadhon⁴ said that “watthanadham or culture” is the thing which is changed, improved or made by humans for the prosperity in the way of life of everyone that can be transmitted, emulated and imitated”.

¹ PuanphakaKurowat, **Arts and Thai Culture**, 3rd Edition, (Bangkok: Amorn Printing, 1996), p. 37

² A-non A- phaphirom, **ThaiSociety, Culture and Tradition**, (Bangkok: PraePithaya, 1976), p. 99

³ JamnongThongprasert, Adjunct Professor, **Thai Culture and Thai Language**, (Bangkok: Duangkaew, 1984), p. 2

⁴ Phraya AnumanRajadhon, **The Story ofCulture**, (Bangkok: Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, Mor, Por, Por)

Uthai Hiranto stated that “Culture is the social heritage which is inherited to be the property of humans in the present time and used for making a living and being the design of living, meaning that culture is the behavioral determinant of humans about their action, thinking and feeling, including knowing about what is good and what is bad. The meaning of culture does not focus just only on the person who works properly or is noble-minded but also includes everything that is made by humans and practiced traditionally.

Yuth Sakdetyon said that “Culture includes thinking and every way of behavior that inherits through communication or transmission of symbol. It is not transmitted through the heredity. We understand the culture by the word and manner, for example, the bird knows about how to build the net through its heredity but humans know about how to build the house through their cultural transmission”.

The general meaning of culture and the concepts of some scholars can be brought to mix together and summarized as the following.

The culture has its meaning that covers everything and indicates the lifestyle of humans in the society. Humans have initiated in setting up discipline, rule, and procedure for practice, including creating a regulation and thinking system, belief, value, knowledge and technology. The tendency of changing is in a better way with an inherited evolution traditionally.

1.2.2 The Significance of Culture

Culture differentiates the humans from other animals in all respects. It makes a society to be orderly, traditional, happy and peaceful. It also brings the prosperity to society and develops the mind of people as well. The culture is the measurement and determinant of prosperity or deterioration of society. At the same time, the culture still determines the way of living of people in society. So, the culture has an influence on the living of people and the prosperity of the country. If any society has a good and suitable culture and such a society will be prosperous rapidly. On the contrary, if any society has a backward culture, pattern of bad behavior and improper value, such a society is difficult to flourish. At last, the nation will come to an end because of the cultural interference from other countries. Culture is the frame or pattern of living a life of people in society, bringing about everyone to have the tradition for

practice properly, also helping to reduce the impact or conflict, and lessening the disorder. A good culture helps make the prosperous society, for example, it brings about the discipline, diligence, frugality, patience and common interest to the society. There are varieties of cultures that can be summarized as the following.⁵

1. Culture helps solve the problem and meet the needs of humans. Humans can survive from the danger and overcome the nature because they create the culture for helping themselves.

2. Culture helps combine the members in society to become a unity. The society that has the same culture will give rise to a close relationship.

3. Culture is the identity of the country. The country that has the sublime culture will be highly praised and guaranteed as the strong country.

4. Culture is the behavioral determinant of humans in society and it helps support people to stay together happily. The culture is the standard that helps manage an order concerning the relationship of people in society.

5. Culture helps bring the prosperity to the country, especially, if the country has a good culture and people have the proper way in leading a life, clinging to the cause and effect in leading a life and being diligent, frugal, disciplined and so on, that society will be definitely prosperous.

Culture is the important factor in leading a life of humans. The culture helps to develop humans and society step by step endlessly. But it depends on the ability of humans in improving, receiving or creating the proper culture for use. If the culture is valuable and proper it helps a lot in bringing the prosperity to society. And the suitability of culture means bringing about the benefit for people in making a living in the society.

⁵ Narong Sengpracha, Sociology, (Bangkok: PhithakAksorn, 1996) pp. 19-20

1.3 The Concept and Background of Culture⁶

1.3.1 The Concept of Culture

After living beings occur in the world, if they want to survive they have to adapt themselves to the changing nature. The animals that cannot adapt themselves to such a nature they must die at last.

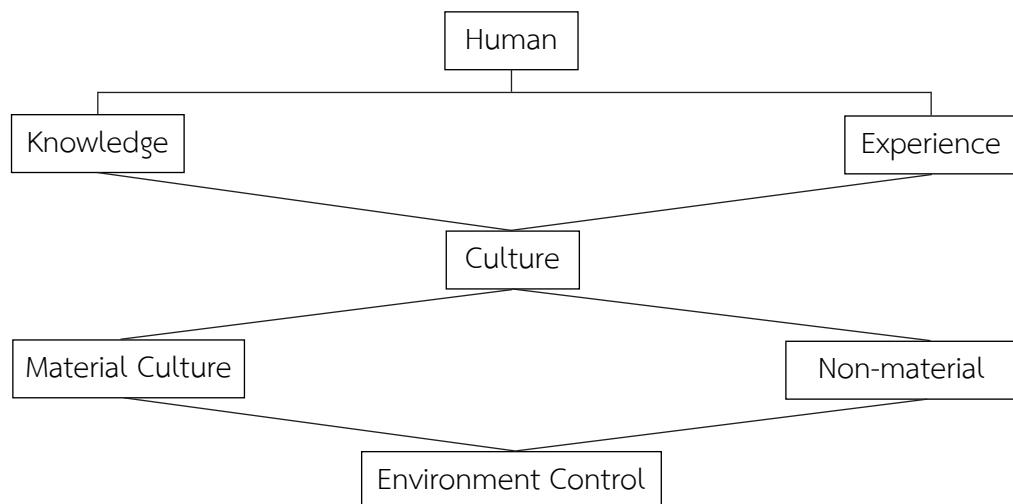
Humans can survive until now because of their special ability and special characteristics of humans are their wisdom and reasonable thinking that protect them from the nature and overcome the nature, for example, when facing the coldness, they can survive that is not because of their thick skin or long fur to protect them but it is because they have the ideas and know how to use the leaves and animal skins to cover their bodies.

Human culture began with simple matters such as in earning a living, when feeling hungry, they hunted animals or gathering forest products by using hands and physical power to catch animals or gather the fruits. Later, they gradually knew how to use the tools and techniques in earning a living. The first tool of humans was the stones that were used for smashing animals, cutting or digging up the root of tree. The stones that were used at the beginning might not be made sharp-pointed but used in a rough shape. Later, it might be because of an accidental cause, they came to know that the sharp-pointed stone had more quality. After that, they chose the stones with sharp-point. And then they knew how to sharpen the stones for being their tool in hunting the animals and for gathering the forest products. After that they gradually developed from the hand axe to be axe, spear and bow, etc. For the culture on other respects, the material called sled might be used or the material used for placing or dragging the materials comparing to the sled playing of children by using the dried leaves of the tree that were fallen down on which the children would use for sitting and took turn to drag the leaves alternately. Later, the vehicle was systematically developed to be the vehicle with the wheels such as cart that was dragged by animals and then it was developed to be carriage, car and so on.

⁶ ibid. pp. 28-31

Regarding the non-material culture, it should be developed, especially, when the numbers of humans have been increased, the order in living together has to be managed and also the criteria in living together have to be made such earning a living, living together as a family and society, belief and practice on religion, etc. In this matter, it is for making a good relationship among themselves. Otherwise, there will be no happiness, for example, if there is no any determination of the pattern and practical guideline concerning sexual relation and the relation between parents and children it will cause the confusion because children will not obey their parents. Son will have a sexual intercourse with his mother. Father may not look after his children. But if the standard of practical guideline is determined such as for man and woman if they want to have a sexual intercourse they have to marry. Man should have only one wife and stay together until death. It does not mean that he can have sex with any women as desired. Husband and wife must help to look after their children. After having a child, it is improper for them to leave their children,etc.

Humans create the culture for controlling natural and social environment in order to produce a good result in earning a living and the culture that is made by humans comes from a creative thinking that occurs from their experience and knowledge.



The first culture that was made by humans, if it could not help solve the problems and meet the needs of humans properly, would be improved more and more and it was the culture that occurred or previously existed. It would be the basis in developing the culture latterly.

1.3.2 The Background of Culture

The culture of each society comes from different factors, such as the factor of biology, mind, society, environment and cultural dissemination. Overall, Thai cultures occurs from different factors as follows.⁷

1. The factor of biology is universal which gives rise to the humans' culture. If humans do not have an evolution as seen at the present time they may not be able to create the culture. Therefore, the biological evolution is a basic and very important factor. The amphibians can develop themselves until becoming primates who like to stay on the tree. After eating a good food, their weigh is increased and so it is not suitable for them to stay on the tree any more. Staying on the ground for a long time makes the primates stand up straight. The agility of arms and hands, quality of eyes located on the face, the brain with an excellent quality and the organ that produces the spoken language altogether play an important role in creating the development. The circle of life helps make the linkages that directly have an effect on the behavior, such as the belief on pregnant behavior and ritual, belief and behavior during pregnancy, other beliefs during delivery of baby and child naming which spend a long time. The entry to teenage, sickness, physical deterioration, death and long life in the circle of life of humans give rise to the cultural development.

2. The factor of environment on nature, geography, climate and natural resource that humans involve for earning a living can be found that humans along the mountain range, plain area, sea or humans on the tropical zone and coldness have the different cultures, such as building their shelters, seeking for food and costume, and the belief in nature, i.e. Eskimos staying at the frigid zone and ocean have the culture in building the shelter that is made from chunk of snow called 'Igloo'. Eskimos like to eat fresh

⁷ Asst.Prof.Wichien Rakkan, Culture and Behavior of Thai People. (Bangkok: O.S. Printing Houses, 1986), pp. 35-38.

blood as their food because it makes the body warm and, sometimes, they like to eat fat. They like to wear the thick clothes or wear the animal leathers. Regarding to some traditions, they may be different from other societies' such as borrowing other person's wife, getting rid of an old person to solve the starvation problem, ceremony of paying respect to the sea goddess for an abundance.

For Thailand, it is an alluvial plain which is full of water and canal. Thai people use the water from these canals for taking a bath, drinking and agriculture, etc. Therefore, when the rainy season comes, in the full moon day of November and December, usually at the end of October and the end of November which are the months that a large number of waters flow from the north of Thailand, Thai people will make Krathong (Traditionally made from joss sticks, candles and banana leaves) to float on the river in order to apologize the river and at the same time to beg the blessing from the river because people rely on this river for taking a bath, drinking and so on which is traditionally one of the beliefs of Thai people. Besides this, according to geography, Thai people are agriculturalists. The agricultural system brings about many other cultures, such as growing rice in the field, gathering forreaping rice, building a stilt house to protect them from reptiles.

3. With regard to the factor of mind. The body and mind are the dependent factors because they are related to each other. The consideration of the factor of mind can be categorized as the following.

3.1 Craving is from physical factor. This craving can lead to different types of behavior and if such a behavior become the pattern which is observed by people and continuously transmitted for many generations it will become the culture. The physical craving gives rise to the tradition of drinking and eating in society the same as people in other societies, for example, Thai people eat rice as the main food. Generally, Thai people take 3 meals a day, namely in morning, afternoon and evening. Drinking water is mainly from the rain which is stored in a small earthen jar with a small water bowl on its lid placed in front of the house for the drinking of the passers. It is the kindness of Thai people provided to strangers.

3.2 Craving for taking a rest. Humans struggle in helping themselves all the time so they need the time for taking a rest that creates the culture of taking a rest, for example, Magic Land at Chatuchak, sea at Bangsaen, Pattaya and Phuket, etc. Taking a rest by sleeping is very important because there are many traditions for sleeping of Thai people which are different from other countries', for example, when sleeping, they will not turn the head to western direction, chanting before going to bed to commemorate the virtues of the Buddha and chanting for their physical and mental happiness. At the present time, many daytime activities still exist and so when feeling tired they will not be so strict as in the past.

3.3 Craving to stay at an appropriate temperature. Humans do not want too much heat or coldness but, on the contrary, they want a proper temperature. So it brings about the tradition for humans to seek a proper temperature in building their shelters. In the past, Thai people liked to make their airy shelters in order to distribute the air. Later, it became the behavioral tradition in controlling the air for a proper ventilation such as building 'The pillar in a Thai-style house, usually open on four sides' (Thai: หอนั่ง, Thai pronunciation: [honang]) and corridor of high ranking person. Inside the house, there will be people who blow by using long-handed fan. At the present time, many kinds of electric fans and air-conditioners are used. Also, they like to go to stay at a place with comfortable temperature that makes their behavior of taking a vacation.

3.4 Natural craving on sex. Humans have a desire of sex which is the same as that of food and water. The natural instinct forces humans to have the sexual desire for the reproduction and lineage. Therefore, it brings about the idea in creating such a behavior, i.e. abstaining from sexual intercourse with their own father and mother.

3.5 Craving to get rid of the things in the body that are unwanted. Living beings have to eat and excrete the wastes from the body. Humans have their own cultures. The craving to excrete the wastes from the body such as feces, urine and other wastes and taking a bath to clean the body makes the behavior of excretion. In the former time, when going for feces, people called it as going to the field. Nowadays, they can invent the tools for building toilet and bathroom.

3.6 The factor on society and dissemination of the culture of Thai society has the same characteristics with other societies in the world about the creation of culture with 2 aspects e.g. firstly, it occurs from inventing new things which consist of material, culture and tradition, including belief. In this matter, it is for improving the way of life which is common for humans and secondly, it is the imitation of material and non-material culture that spreads into the country. After embracing it, we have to adapt it to our way of life. Imitating the pattern of the way of life from other cultures seems that it always appears in human society that has the relations with other societies directly or indirectly. For the direct way, people from other cultures come to get to know each other and exchange their opinions. For the indirect way, the communications are made through different media such as book, news, radio and so on.

1.4 The Elements of Culture

The elements of culture in general have 4 aspects as the following.⁸

1. Instrumental and Symbolic Object. It is the material culture that can be touched, i.e. house, school, road, costume, utensil and weapon, including the production of art working of humans and non-material things, i.e. language and symbol in communicating the meaning, calculation (number) and gauge.

2. Association or Organization. It means the group that has clearly an ordering arrangement or formal structure, standard, regulation, objective and operational method. It is the most important group in a complex society such as labor federation, boy scout, red cross, temple, United Nation Organization (the biggest organization), ASEAN Association, state sector, school, temple and family (the organization which is the smallest and closest to humans). In general, people gather to perform some activities according to their purpose which may be not very important e.g. An alumni association gathers to maintain the fame of school or it may be a very important matter such as gathering for protecting the country.

⁸ SupatraSuphap, *Sociology*, (Bangkok : Thai WattanaPanich, 1999), pp. 35-36.

3. Usage. It means the tradition which is generally accepted and shown in the form of different rituals such as wedding ceremony, house warming ceremony and cremation ritual are likely influenced from the religion in which is always involved, including dress ceremony and eating etiquette such as official dress or full dress uniform for state ceremonies.

4. Concept. It refers to belief, opinion, understanding, ideal and attitude. To accept what is right or what is wrong and what is proper or what is improper will depend on which norms will be used in deciding or measuring such as belief about the matter ‘You reap what you sow’.

1.5 The Types of Culture

Generally, the culture is divided into two main types as follows.⁹

1. Material culture. It is related to an invention and technology that are produced by humans such as construction, building, weapon, facility and so on.

2. Non-material culture. It means ideology, value, opinion, language, religious belief, tradition, political ideology, law, and the way of making and pattern of a living which are the abstract natures that can be seen.

The culture has been divided into 2 types as mentioned above. Some sociologists think that the opinion on the non-material culture is ambiguous. So the culture is divided into 3 types as the following.

1. Material culture. It is related to material and article that are made by humans for being used in society such as shelter, food, clothes and medicine.

2. Idea culture. It means the culture concerning feeling, thinking, attitude and belief such as the belief on reincarnation, law of action, fortune and mystery, legend, literature, proverb and idealism.

3. Norm culture. It is the matter of behaving or following the pattern that has been set by society whether it is the written or unwritten matter that can be divided into sub-types as follows.

⁹ SupatraSuphap, Sociology, (Bangkok: Thai WattanaPanich, 1999), p. 35.

3.1 Social culture. It is the culture related to behavior or social manner such as making a wai (paying respect by putting two palms together in front of the chest), checking hands, standing in row and wearing black clothes to attend the funerals.

3.2 Legal culture. It makes the discipline and rule to combine people to stay together in society happily.

3.3 Moral culture. It is used for making a living in society such as honesty, loving-kindness and generosity.

According to the National Culture Act, B.E. 2485 (1942), the culture has been divided into 4 types¹⁰ as the following.

1. Moral. It is the moral culture that is related to the principle in leading a life and it is mostly concerned with the mind and religion used for being the guideline in leading a life in society such as sacrifice, effort, frugality, gratitude, patience and doing a good deed receives a good result.

2. Legal. It is the legal culture as well as the tradition that has been accepted to be very important the same as the law in order to make people stay together happily in society.

3. Social. It is the social culture as well as the manner that is concerned with society such as the manner in eating and communicating with people in society.

4. Material. It is the material culture such as clothes, medicine, house, building, bridge, road, vehicle and computer.

According to UNESCO, The Office of the National Culture Commission has divided the culture into 5 branches that consist of the following.¹¹

1. Humanities. It is the culture concerning tradition, morals, ethics, religion, philosophy, history, archeology, etiquette, law, etc.

2. Liberal Arts. It is the culture concerning language, literature, music, dancing arts, fine arts, architecture, sculpture and painting, etc.

¹⁰ Narong Sengpracha, **Sociology**, (Bangkok: PhithakAksorn, 1996) pp. 19-20.

¹¹ Office of the National Economics and Social Development Council. Supplementary document for the seminar entitled “Cultural Capital and Wisdom Together With Value Added Creation and Economic and Social Value of the Country” at Rama Garden Hotel (Bangkok : 18th September, 2006).

3. Craftsman. It is the culture concerning embroidery, carving, weaving, basketry, lacquer ware making, silverware and gold plate making, flower arrangement, invention, pottery making, etc.

4. Domestic Arts. It is the culture concerning food, cooking, looking after a house, medicine, using medicine, nourishing children, and living together as a family, etc.

5. Sport and Entertainment. It is the culture concerning amusement, Thai boxing, sword play, sword and pole fighting, dove raising and folk plays that are regarded as the identity of Thai people indeed. Even though we imitate the other countries' culture but it is totally the same.

1.6 The Characteristics of Culture

Basically the nature of cultural characteristics will be the same as follows.¹²

1. The culture from learning. Naturally the culture cannot occur by itself or it is not the instinct but it is the overall result of humans' thinking that occurs from learning the nature and environment. Then humans utilize it for leading their lives. Besides learning from the nature, humans also learn from their own society, family, friend and other social institutes. The knowledge obtained from learning helps make humans to create their own culture.

2. The culture is the social heritage. The culture can be transmitted from generation to generation everlastingly. It is the common heritage that is transmitted from ancestors. In this regard, humans know about how to remember and study the past. Then they use the past to be beneficial for posterity. Besides, humans use spoken and written language to be the tool in transmitting an experience to each other, enabling humans to transmit the culture as the heritage to next generation.

3. The culture is the thing that everyone in society has to observe and follow. It makes people in society stay together happily. Setting the rule or making the regulation is for the persistence of society. Therefore, everyone in society has to observe and follow the rule and regulation.

¹² Theerasak Akkraboworn, Educational Activity: For Human Resource and Learning Society, (Bangkok: Kor. Pholphim, 2002), pp. 43-45.

4. The culture is the satisfaction of mankind. It is the thing that humans select to observe or follow such as consumption, dress and building an appropriate shelter.

5. The culture can be integrated and adapted. Humans can adapt themselves to the culture of society and they can adapt an outside culture to be suitable for their own society. Besides, the culture is still an integration of all humans. Borrowing, absorption, cultivation of culture and the culture between locals or tribes occur from the need of humans.

6. The culture can come to an end or die. Humans create the culture for their own happiness. Therefore, the culture can be changed and maintained as long as people and society need it. The culture that humans and society do not want will come to an end which is called “dead culture”.

The characteristics of culture as mentioned earlier can be found that the culture is moveable, transmitted and changeable among the same group of people or among locals and ethics. The inheritance of culture among themselves is a creation of civilization of the world as a whole.

1.7 The Duty of Culture

The duty of culture is as follows.

1. The culture is the determinant of the institution’s pattern which has different characteristics for each society, e.g. Islam culture allows the man who has an ability to look after and render the justice to his wife. Man can have more than one wife but not more than 4 wives. The man is not allowed to have a sexual intercourse with man. For other religions, a man can have only one wife but there is no any prohibition for man to have a sexual intercourse with man. So, the pattern of family institution may be different.

2. The culture stipulates the behavior of humans. The culture will appear on an action of humans in society, e.g. The culture in greeting of Thai people is called ‘Sawaddee’ which is the same as ‘Hello’ in English. But the greeting of westerners uses ‘shaking hands’, Tibetans’ greeting uses ‘sticking the tongue out’ and Muslim’s greeting uses the word ‘Salam’.

3. The culture controls society and helps make society to have a discipline because the culture contains faith, belief, value, standard and remuneration in practice and punishment when committing offenses.

Summary

Culture means that everything has been made by humans. The culture can be seen in the humans' society, including language, equipment, utensil, custom, tradition, pattern in leading a life accepted by the society. Culture is the social heritage that has been inherited. Without the culture we are able to be born but we may be born as animals instead of being born as humans as seen in the present day. Culture is the social behavior. It is not the material culture. We never bring along the culture since first being born. We were born among cultures and have to learn more about the culture. The culture is the main fund and it is the valuable property preserved by our ancestors because it is a good way of life.

Questions

1. Describe elaborately the meaning of culture that you have studied.
2. Specify the significance of culture that influences on making a living.
3. Explain the concept and background of the culture reasonably.
4. Explain the elements of culture that you have studied elaborately.
5. Categorize the types of culture according to the attitude of at least one scholar.
6. Tell briefly about the characteristic of culture which is the identity of Thai people.
7. Explain the duty of culture that influences on making a living.

References

- Chamnong Thongprasert, Prof. Emeritus., **Thai Culture and Thai Language**. Bangkok: Duangkaew, 1984.
- Narong Sengpracha, **Sociology**. Bangkok: Thipaksorn, 1996.
- Theerasak Assawaboworn, **Educational Activity: For Human Resource and Learning Society**. Bangkok: Kor Pholphim, 2002.
- Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, **Matter of Culture**. Bangkok: Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, n.d.
- Phuangphaka Kurowat, **Art and Thai Culture**. Third Edition. Bangkok: Amorn Publishing, 1996.
- Warawut Suwannarit and Members, **Thai Ways**. Bangkok: Odian Store, 2003.
- Wichien Rakkan, Asst.Prof., **Culture and Behavior of Thai People**. Bangkok: O. S. Printing Houses, 1996.
- Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board.
Supplementary document for the seminar entitled “**Cultural Capital and Wisdom Together With the Value Added Creation and Economic and Social Value of the Country**” at Rama Garden Hotel. Bangkok: 18th September, 2006.
- Supatra Suphap, **Sociology**. Bangkok: Thai WattanaPanich, 1999.
- Anont Aphaphirom, **Cultural Society and Thai Tradition**. Bangkok: PraePittaya, 1976.