

CREATING SOCIAL SPACE AND THE IMAGE OF A HOMOSEXUAL GROUP IN CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Chiang Mai University is the first regional university in Thailand which has been trusted for over 50 years. The number of students interested in studying is increasing and more diverse, respectively. There are more numbers of homosexual students every year and continuously. Homosexual students have developed the area and creating acceptance in other gender groups periodically. Ultimately, the homosexuals are able to live their lives in university and go to their careers confidently. This study aims to know and understand the pattern of creating social space, creating an image of a homosexual group in Chiang Mai University by using in-depth interviews and participant observations collected data from homosexuals and former Chiang Mai University students and university personnel staff. The study indicated the Integration of homosexual students in Chiang Mai University from the past to the present, creating a social space for their groups until can negotiate and play a strong social role in the university. They show the identity of a sexual through the creation of the network by putting together activities on campus to attract people outside of the group. Homosexual members use senior positions for raising the level of social space and create a strong image of factors affecting image creation. Homosexual groups created an image through verbal and nonverbal communication through interpersonal communication and activity creation for creating group image which gives both positive and negative results. As for the reflection of the image of homosexuals from the university personnel found consistency about the image of the homosexual group that has both positive and negative aspects. There is a construction of a strong image from generation to generation by using the power to create activities to support social spaces in the university. As for the negative image, it was found that physical violence was used. And the mind in doing activities that are outside the power and scope of management of the university Using impolite language and dress. In addition, niggas need social space to create acceptance after graduation which can be seen in building relationships in the workplace, cultural space in the activities of the university that are still returning to do activities for the juniors to keep on the way to construct an image.

Keywords: Creating social Space, image, homosexual group, verbal and nonverbal communication, group in the university

1. Introduction

Chiang Mai University is the first regional university in Thailand that has been well-known to Thai people and foreigners for over the past fifty years. The number of students who are interested in studying at the university is growing and becoming more diverse, continuously. That also applies to the number of homosexual students which is increasing every year, constantly. Chiang Mai University is a higher education community that has an area for a group of people who either students, lecturers, staff, to live altogether in a specific time. The group has created a bond with the place, established traditions, and shared mutual opinions and beliefs. They use public places and organizations together, and they are able to help each other in any activities until it is succeeded. And when we narrow down the people with the same characteristics, status, or same opinions and beliefs in Chiang Mai University, we found the group of people who represent themselves as homosexuals. The culture of establishing a group or creating a community of homosexual people, therefore, shall have some improvements that help to build the community, nurture their practices along with the timing of the university which has entered its 5th decade.

The beginning of the homosexual community in Thai society(Thai Transgender Alliance, 2015) is stated that the homosexual community is a group of people who were born and identified as male gender, but perceive themselves as the other. Their goal is to support homosexual people in Thai society to have a better quality of life and extend their network. Their purpose is to gather data and produce data set about knowledge in every aspect related to the people in society in order to help them develop their capabilities and campaigning to create mutual understanding about homosexual identity and right. Moreover, they also aim to participate in another civil society network.

It is obvious that the homosexual community is not different from other communities. They want to strengthen their own group. However, every community must starts from small size until it extends itself and turn into a big community with strength. In order to pursue that, they have to build a positive image first. Chiang Mai University, therefore, is one of the places for them to build their community with uniqueness and ability to portray their community image towards other people on the same social level. This is to help the society to acknowledge them and be more accepting of their community. That also applies to other genders' responses in the same society which has both positive and negative sides.

The homosexual community in Chiang Mai University might be another example of a homosexual community model in other universities in Thailand. It was found that there are only a few universities with a strong homosexual group that spent over 20 years of extending their community. The study of creating social space and their image in Chiang Mai University, therefore, aims to study the process of creating social space and its strength, since the beginning to the present time. Along with its development and acceptance from other genders, the image they built and how it appears to outsiders until they can live in the university and later pursue their career with confidence.

2. Methods

In this study, the research population refers to homosexuals and former Chiang Mai University students and university personnel staff. The process of random sampling can be divided into the following steps. By using in-depth interviews and participant observations.

Population

The population is homosexual students in Chiang Mai University since the beginning. There are 500 homosexuals students from 22 faculties and 1 college. When combined with former students, the total number is unclear. Therefore, the researcher has divided the population into two groups; (1) homosexual students who are currently studying at Chiang Mai University (2) homosexual students who are graduated from Chiang Mai University.

Sample group

In order to choose the sample group, the researcher divided the sample into two groups as follows,

1. A group of homosexual people who are currently students or former students as they are part of creating a homosexual community in the university. This group includes 8 people which 6 people are former students, and 2 people are current students.

2. A group of people who acknowledge and reflect the image of the homosexual community. They are people in the university and staff; 5 people in total. The member of this group is divided by age into 4 ranges as follows; (1) 2 former students who are over 50 years old and work in administration level (2) 1 former student who is over 40 year old and works in operational level (3) 1 former student who is over 30 years old and (4) 1 former student who is under the age of 30.

The researcher uses a purposive sampling method in the sample group due to the sensitivity of the context as it not common in general conversation. Therefore, those who provide information tend to be careful and remain anonymous.

Research Tools

Research tools that are used in this research include an in-depth interview by setting the specific field of the interview to gain the required information with recorder and note-taking, participation observation by participating in their activities and follow up with the target group. The data also collected in the grid.

Data analysis and collection

To analyze the data, the researcher will both analyze the data and connect the matter points that received from the informants, along with participation observation, and data collecting from the interview. The data, afterward, will be gathered and presented in a descriptive presentation. The analyze methods can be divided as follows,

1. The researcher uses the concept of community and creating social space to explain the creation process and remain of a homosexual community in Chiang Mai University.

2. The researcher uses the concept of image perception to explain image building process of the homosexual group and homosexual community in Chiang Mai University

3. Results

The beginning of the homosexual group

The beginning of the homosexual group in Chiang Mai University comes from the idea which suggests that a group of people who have self –acceptance in the sense that differs from the general male gender. When they study in the same institute, the communication appears or a group is established with self-actualization and mutual purpose and ideology. They provide generosity, love, and friendship with one another. There is collaborative learning within the group in order to succeed in their mutual goal and purpose. It was quite hard at the beginning for them to gather themselves as a group publicly, due to the period of time around 1965-1975 was the time that Thai society did not accept homosexual gender because they still thought highly of female and male genders.

Thus, homosexual people needed to create their space in the university by revealing their talents to others in order to make people accept the difference. Being different is what society still doubts and does not accept the gender that is different from straight males and females. What the group can do to make people in the university realize their existence, is to show their talents that they probably get influenced by the western, which is the society that accepts homosexual people. The performances like Hollywood show, which includes singing and dancing, needs performers that are assertive. It is the reason why homosexual people perform better than straight girls. Due to the era of the 60s-70s, Thai society did not accept much of foreign media.

Apart from imitating performers in Hollywood show, a homosexual group in the university also has other role models who are performers in cabaret shows at entertainment venues such as Silom, Patpong in Bangkok in the 70s-80s. The show started to leak in the big cities such as Pattaya, Phuket, and Chiang Mai. That encourages the homosexual group in the university to form their team and perform in various events and activities for entertainment. In the previous time, the media industry had not fully grown and was not popular. People gained their happiness by getting out of their houses to a pub or bar or entertainment venues for pleasure. Having to see the new performances by homosexual people makes the performances become popular in Thai society. People are giving their responses towards it and later it creates jobs and money. This led to the beginning of the homosexual dancing group named “Rose paper”. The group aims to perform the show at nights as their careers for earning money. They are able to create jobs while keeping track of their studies. The “Rose Paper” focuses on gatherings of, so-called, pretty homosexuals (ones who look like women) before putting them in the crew to do the rehearsals and perform cabaret shows at hotels both in Chiang Mai and other provinces. The Rose Paper group members once they graduate, some of them head straight to be a full-time performer or actress in the big cities.

The Rose Paper which is the group of women-like homosexuals that are professional performers has shown that they are pretty and possess the capabilities as same as women. They

were not much focusing on creating clear acceptance within the university society. Until 1985-1995, there was a rise from a group called "Sunflower", which includes homosexuals from other provinces; Nan, Pha Yao, and Chiang Rai. They came together for the matter of the university's activities. The characteristic of the homosexual group in the next era is that they tend to perform within the university, from time to time, and there was not much acceptance to their group. Moreover, the leader of the group did not pay much attention to negotiation with the common genders and create more homosexual social space. Thus, the role of the Sunflower group was low and the group lasted for a quite short time.

Since the beginning of the tempt from the Sunflower group trying to participate in university activities since 1997. That changes the formation of creating social space. The expanding is limited only within the university by performing their shows in university events, such as extracurricular events (CMU Train activity, Trekking activity, Cheer show, etc.), traditional or religious ceremonies (Lantern or Loy Kratong Festival, Songkran Festival, Visakha Puja Day, etc.) and local events (WEEN show, 4 provinces event, 5 social science faculties event, etc.). Seeing the homosexuals involved in the performance brings more courage to other hidden homosexuals to go public. Starting from 1 person, two, three, and becoming a formal group in order to represent themselves and gain more acceptance. That also creates more social space for them at Chiang Mai University.

In 1997, the role of the Sunflower group was decreased. There was a new group called WEEN CMU. They brought the purposes of the 2 former groups into the combination. WEEN CMU started about in 2000 by homosexual students in the Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Social Science and Faculty of Science. Their purpose is to establish the community for homosexuals in each faculty to meet and get to know each other. Besides, that time was the time that the Faculty of Fine Arts, the center of various kinds of arts, was initiated. Therefore the homosexual students have more opportunities to perform their shows and talents. There are now more various kinds of cultural performances that have been mixed with the performances of a homosexual group in Chiang Mai University.

According to the data, it was found that activity is the factor that indicates the relationship and way of life of the homosexuals bonding with the sense of belonging in Chiang Mai University. That reason descendants from generation to generation in order for the new members to continue the work of the former members. It leads to the increase of knowledge, skills, and talents for homosexuals. It also helps generate a sense of leadership and fellowship by doing activities. However, since the members of the group come from various faculties, there are some competitions within the group. They earn acceptance from the group by creating their every identity and uniqueness such as voice, clothes, and assertiveness in their talents. These factors will put that individual in the spotlight so seniors or former students will capture their shines and ask them to be part of their personal group. Before gaining acceptance, homosexuals have to go through some process to make it tangible. All these have been adjusted for creating the image of a solid right system for the group.

When the group of WEEN CMU has grown with more new members and become apparent to other students and university staff. WEEN CMU started to expand its space by providing events, casting performers for the university's activities. It helps strengthen WEEN CMU. They have their own freshmen initiative activities, completely separated from any faculty. The initiative activity is led by WEEN CMU senior students, continuously from generation to generation. They will settle the rules, disciplines, freshmen initiative activities and group activities.

The image of having 3 eras of homosexuals in Chiang Mai University, is the image of a group of people who share the same talents and want to create their space in the society by doing university activities. Nowadays, the homosexual community has developed into a self-government group. They have their own people, their own rules and their hierarchy. Their community has clear regulations, disciplines with also punishment procedures to those who act against the rule by warning, parole, and abandonment.

However, the homosexual community, with people of the same gender, is expanding. But they were never correctly established by university rule. They started from a group, gathering to do some activities for their own benefits and their surroundings. The existence of the homosexual community gives them social space to negotiate with others in the big society.

Process of creating an image in homosexual social space

Not only creating the space for the homosexual group reflects the existence of the group but also helps them to gain acceptance from others, as stated in the conclusion of the image creating process in the homosexual community.

1 . Homosexual students in Chiang Mai University use communication to create the image of their community to others. They use interpersonal communication in both friends and classmates. The messages always get through people both within and outside the group via spoken language and body language and various channels. They show people who they are by telling their stories. Certainly, communication includes both positive and negative sides. When it comes to communication with body language, it starts from when they are as a group they tend to draw attention from others such as using loud voice with each other, greeting with inappropriate language and scold at each other with a loud voice and strange behaviors. Gathering as a group and doing such behaviors has created a sign towards other people to pay attention to them. Besides, expressing their spoken language by using pronouns such as, I (in a girly way), sis, auntie, mother, that reflects the hierarchy in the group. Many homosexual students use "sis" to represent the seniority to those who used to be the leaders, presidents, or activity hosts, in order to show them respect as new members. In general women or men would not use such pronouns in their conversations.

2. The group has its own regulations and disciplines for members to follow over the past decades. They connect that by the freshmen initiative system, SOTUS system in the university. These regulations were made to create collaborative learning among members which will later create respect and allow everyone to live in the society happily. The regulations also prohibit members from violating or harming others. Furthermore, it helps the group to create a

systematic community that is easy to manage and does not cause any chaos in society or the homosexual community.

However, the regulations are effective only on freshmen. That leads to the negative result as some of the senior students or former students have informally established themselves as dictators or kangaroo courts. They would take action upon those who behave against the settled regulations or disciplines, without any conscience. Those who are being judged have to surrender or be tolerant towards that power as they are afraid to be abandoned from the group and remain with no friends. The negative image of senior members taking over the power and create judge processes and punishments on freshmen were never approved by the university. But the group still holds on to that and descendants from generation to generation, without paying any attention to the university.

3. Creating an outstanding image via media helps homosexual students to express their talents in a free way of thinking. Each activity that the researcher has had a chance to participate in shows the collaboration among the group. The activities can be either individual or group as faculty or faculty's student union. Having the mechanism to communicate through the activities also creates authority for them to negotiate with women and men.

Image of homosexuals from outsiders' perspectives

Apart from key informants about creating homosexual social space, there are also outsiders who acknowledge the existence of that space. They are former students and university staff. Everyone in the sample group gives mutual information that reflects the image of the homosexual community which the result can be divided into 2 groups; positive and negative. The supporting details are as follows,

1. Positive image

The perspective of former students and university staff who graduated from Chiang Mai University is agreeable. They have had an opportunity to work with homosexual students in the university and have given the positive reflection that can be divided into 4 major points as follow,

1.1 Positive and neutral attitudes towards homosexuals

Some of the former students do not recognize homosexual students as different people or ones who are uncommon. To them, homosexuals are normal people, normal students. Therefore, there is no disgust. They can work together normally. To remain together as a group, shows love within the group. If we see from the perspective that everyone is equal and has their own preferable gender, as long as they behave appropriately, respect rules and social manners, then they are one of those good people that has no different from normal ones.

1.2 Creating space from the homosexual group in Chiang Mai University

The nature of living creatures is to remain in a group. If students come from different provinces, they have their provincial student clubs to show their existence. They tend to

do activities together and giving love to each other. That helps society to proceed in doing any activities. The very strong group of homosexual students also show the same outstanding to others.

1.3 Outstanding characteristics of homosexuals at Chiang Mai University.

The image of homosexuals in Chiang Mai University is about the entertainers that can do better than women or men. They are often seen to be university student leaders with the image of homosexuals who dedicate to work and activities. They also possess the qualifications of outstanding work skills, management skills. They are very responsible and able to solve immediate problems in a short time. They are also the main mechanism of hosting the activities and other works to be seen by the whole university, Chiang Mai and the whole nation. They have also come with individual talents such as traditional dance, arts, handicrafts, Northern local arts, religious matters. Moreover, they can provide advice about fashion, clothing, and makeup. It is possible to say that they are being a role model for younger members.

1.4. The benefit gained from creating social space by homosexuals is strength.

The Homosexual group in the university is strong and they stick to each other. That might be the result of the freshmen initiative activities making them love each other. It seems like their love helps to create connections, and such connection does not end only within 4 years of studying but it extends after that towards careers. They can also provide each other with help when needed.

With their talents, it is common to see their role in university society. They have leading thoughts and good social skills which helps them to connect with other groups. They are university representatives to participate in activities or enroll in competitions on behalf of Chiang Mai University. Some of them are now university staff who brought fame to the university. Their group aims to create new things such as providing an event that gives benefits to publicity, etc.. These images are all positive sides that the sample group has reflected the value of the group in Chiang Mai University since the past to present.

2. Negative image

The perspectives of the sample group who have had social interaction and work with the homosexual group in Chiang Mai University that leans on the negative side can be divided into 2 major points as follows,

2.1. Their lack of disciplines, out of control and fearless to use their power

Even though the group is very strong and lasts for a long time, but their group is unofficial and not in control by the university. Therefore, the WEEN CMU activities are hidden from advisors who do not approve of them. The activities are not controlled by the university and do not follow the student disciplines because there are proves that indicate their violence on freshmen or new members, both physical and mental. These days, WEEN CMU has its own freshmen activities completely separated from the faculties. That directly affects on student

affairs staff, faculty board, dean, and staff who are responsible for student activities. It also affects the image of the university as a whole.

2.2 Power interaction, violence and mind control

The negative image of the homosexual community does not exist only in the WEEN CMU group but there are also homosexuals who resist the rules of WEEN CMU. They are homosexuals who are separately in various university activities as well such as homosexuals in Student Organization, homosexuals in the central club. They do not get along with the group of WEEN CMU and often have disagreements between them, sometimes follows by violent actions either physical or mental.

The distorted image of the group was always put in the vision of the university's board. Even though their positive image has created a positive side of the group but more importantly, going against the university regulations might cause a disadvantage to the university. The university's board sees that to develop activities by doing the new things is good but it should also follow the regulations and structure that the university has settled the fundamentals. They have given warnings from time to time because any actions that cause disadvantage to the university are also against the students' disciplines.

4. Discussions

According to the study of creating the social space and representation of a homosexual group in Chiang Mai University, it started from the gathering of people who wanted to express their talents to negotiate with common genders. A community idea explains that; a group or a community is the group of people who have a mutual way of thinking and behaviors that intend to do or create interaction among each other. For the homosexual group at Chiang Mai University, not only they form their own group but also create a specific space that has different power over groups of women or men. That increases their capability to negotiate with other groups in the university society.

According to their image, there are some mutual and highly agreeable points of the sample group that gives the key information. For the matter of image, considering both ones who create the image and ones who perceive it, it began from the attempt of homosexuals trying to express their outstanding talents to make an impression and draw attention from the opposite groups or the whole university, by creating entertainment activities. If the image seems positive, the reflection from others will be positive. They accept and see value in the group. But if the image represents aggressiveness and a bad influence to university society, then the opposite side will resist and trying to enforce the punishment on them according to their actions that do not follow the university's regulations

According to the idea of Henri Lefebvre (1991) in "The production of space", creating social space of homosexual group in the university is not only the geography gathering or physical space gathering, but it is also the space to confront with other kinds of power in the society. However, this specific gender has not been accepted in society, therefore there are still some hidden homosexuals that are afraid to be exposed. But with the brave assertiveness, the

performance activities that have been produced and reproduced in the Chiangmai area and within Chiang Mai University, the expression of homosexuals is more acceptable and allows them to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. This is because their performances have uniqueness, outstanding and creative by mixing various cultures. It is possible to say that these different and beautiful performances, common genders as women or men could not do it as good as homosexuals. The product of society and culture in each period of time has supported the expansion of homosexual social space at Chiang Mai University. Combined with technology, modernization and academic improvement in each generation of homosexual students, it becomes the social and political structure of the group by activities in Chiang Mai University society. Starting from their appearance that looks like the female gender, their assertiveness, clothes, and their show, it shows people that this group is capable of doing things that the society is not familiar with. More shows, more acceptance and more social space / social practice. The WEEN CMU shows the development of space expanding and competing for power between the homosexual group and the university's board and other groups in the university. The creation, the produce, and the reproducing process and their rule are all thought tools for controlling themselves. Therefore, it is opposed to the board by ignoring the university's regulations and effects on their concern.

The process of building a homosexual group in Chiang Mai University can be reflected as follows; the group tries to express their talents as personal elements in order to gain others' acceptance. Their communication, attitude, knowledge, social system and the mixed culture descendant to other groups by surroundings. Homosexuals at the beginning were judged their value by the society that did not accept other genders. They were pushed to reveal in order to gain acceptance. The communication channel they use is by people, performances, and other features until they reached to the digital era with the tool of social media.

The homosexual group in Chiang Mai University uses all 4 elements to create their image; (1) Perceptual Component (2) Cognitive Component from society, economics that requires income and makes their existence overcome the struggles of being homosexuals. Later when they realize the situation around them, the (3) Affective Component, takes place. Because they want to make the acceptance in society, they have to build love and understanding within the group. After that, the (4) Behavior Component happens. They aim to use their talents about performing to interact with the stimulus, which is the result of interaction between Perceptual Component and Affective Component which will be different according to each experience that each person has been through.

In the same way that the sample group has reflected about the homosexual image, it comes from the Perceptual Component. Then the Cognitive Component reflects on how they learn to work with homosexuals without exceptions, followed by Affective Component that a person feels about the group either in the positive or negative way and react by Behavior Component whether they want to resist the group.

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