

The Concept of Culture: From the Perspective of The Western, Malay and Tamil Scholars.

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Abstract

Culture is one of the key elements and a valuable treasure of human life. This is because, it is deemed to be an important factor in order to distinguish humans from other lives in the universe especially animals. This research is conducted in order to reveal the concept of culture described by western, Malay and Tamil scholars. In an effort to find the definition of the term *culture*, the researcher found that there is a disparity between the western, Malay and Tamil scholars. Thus the researcher looked separately the view of western, Malay and Tamil scholars in order to see the relationship, strengths and weaknesses in the definition and concept of culture. So exposure and the analyzable concept of culture through this study will clarify the similarities and differences of opinion espoused by western, Malay and Tamil scholars in particular.

Keywords: culture, materialistic culture, thinking, behaviour, Tamil Culture

Introduction

Culture is said to consist of two branches of the thinking and behavior patterns of a group of people or community. Culture is a complex system of meaning and behavior to explain the way of life of a particular group or community. Bronislaw Malinowski states that, culture is the legacy that consists of goods, technical processes, ideas, habits and values that inherited as a cultural component. Materialistic culture is the knowledge about the production, handling, and use of items associated with moral values based on religion, ethics and regulations. Thus, the culture encompasses human thinking about the beliefs, values, knowledge, morality, language, art, law and behavioral patterns based on custom, habit and fashion (1967: 621).

Objectives of The Research

This research is conducted in order to reveal the concept of culture described by scholars ranging from Western, Malay and Tamil. In an effort to find the definition of the term *culture*, the researcher found that there is a disparity between the Western Malay and Tamil scholars. Thus the researcher looked separately their views in order to see the relationship, strengths and weaknesses in the definition and concept of

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culture. So exposure and the analyzable concept of culture through this study will clarify the similarities and differences of opinion espoused by scholars in particular.

The Concept of Culture

The word 'culture' in English is derived from the Latin which sounds as *Colere*, means about human lives that always function to protect, treat and do varieties of activities that can produce cultural action (Suwardi Endraswara, 2006:4). Many scholars contend that the term *culture* is something difficult to interpret and it has a broad sense. This clearly shows the meaning of the terminology and different cultures have different interpretations, particularly among Western, Malay and Tamil scholars.

The Concept of Culture by Western Scholars

Various interpretations forward by western scholars towards the term 'culture' according to their observation and study of their community. (Chris Barker, 2012: 39). Williams's viewpoint on 'culture' defines as it is among the most difficult terms defined in English which occurs difficulties in understanding the word culture (1976: 87). Edward B. Taylor, an anthropologist and a pioneer in the field of cultural definition, define culture in his book as,

'... Is the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (1958:1)

In this case Edward B. Taylor viewed *culture* as a complex that includes a variety of fields. However, this is considered the less precise meaning by other scholars as Edward B. Taylor does not show differences in social organizations and social institutions of the culture concept in general. Ralph Linton is a cultural sociologist explains *culture* is an order of learned behavior and is associated with a permanent requirement or function in a society that is shared in the community. (1947: 21).

A.L Kroeber insisted that the idea is considered as an important element in culture. The following statements reflect his opinion in his book, *The Nature Of Culture* as follows,

'... At any rate such human behavior as is influenced or conditioned by ideas of forms and in turn is engaged producing, maintaining or modifying them'

(1972:107)

A.L. Kroeber glance that, in any sort of situation human being influenced or directed by ideas the forms and turn to the creation, continuation and modification. The same statements are pointed out by Richard Kluckhohn that culture is an aspect of human life which is learned from the human as a result of belonging to a certain group of the same and the learned behavior that is shared with (Richard Kluckhohn, 1962: 25).

Although many scholars have explained in detail the concept of culture, but Kroeber and Kluckhohn written works are essential to get a better understanding of culture. In his book was listed more than 160 cultural characteristics of (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: 2-5) Suwardi Endraswara (2006: 4) that examines the efforts of Kroeber and Kluckhohn, summed up the concept of culture as follows:

- i. Culture as a whole part of human life which is entirely complex, including law, art, morals, customs, and other skills acquired by man as a unit of society.
- ii. Culture is seen as a heritage.
- iii. The normative nature of culture, which is considered as a means of cultural and human living arrangements, such as the ideals, values, and behavior.
- iv. Approached from the psychological aspect of culture, the culture as a measure of human adaptation to the surrounding environment.
- v. Culture is seen as a structure, which discuss the patterns and cultural organizations and functions.
- vi. Culture is seen as a result of acts or where cultural intelligence to distinguish between humans and animals.

Research concept raised by Kroeber and Kluckhohn as above can be divided into two key categories, namely the category of realistic and idealistic category. The realistic method focuses on the observation of human behavior in order to understand the culture of a society, while idealistic method focuses on the concept of values, norms espoused by the community to understand the culture (Merwyn S. Garbarino, 1977:49). In conclusion, realistic method emphasizing an observational approach, while idealistic method prioritizing accurate analysis.

Another scholar who clarifies the concept of culture is George Foster (1953: 159-173), which explains the concept of culture has six characteristics as follows:

- i. Culture is something that can be learned and constantly changing and is not static.
- ii. Culture creates the discussion and debate in order to produce a clear definition which is good.
- iii. Every culture supports its own value system that highlighted by the implicit community (internal) in nature.
- iv. The concept of culture as a key platform for establishing friendly relations between the members of a society.

According to John. J. Macionis, culture is seen as beliefs, values, behavior and materialistic objects shared by a particular population. He divides culture into two which named as materialistic and non-material cultures. Culture refers to a man-made material that is not real and it is unclear which includes all objects created in the community such as buildings, art, tools, toys, print media and electronic media and other objects are decisive and visible, while the non-material culture encompasses the norms, rules and beliefs of a group of people (1987: 62).

Geertz Clifford in his book entitled *The Interpretation of Culture* explained views of Clyde Kluckhohn through his written work of *Mirror for Man* on definitions and interpretations of culture (1973: 4). According to Kluckhohn Clyde culture is,

- i. Comprehensive human way of life.
- ii. Social heritage derived by individuals from the group.
- iii. Summary of behavior.
- iv. Warehouse group learning.
- v. Network standard orientation of a recurring problem.
- vi. Regulatory mechanisms of normative behavior.
- vii. Network techniques to adapt to the external environment and with others.

Culture has strong ties with the community. In this case, Syed Ismail was furtive views of Malinowski. According to Malinowski, culture is the whole aspect of humanity in history, literature, political institutions, music, painting, philosophy and so on. He said the culture in general is a way of life or style of a society or nation that covers all daily activities in differentiating human and certain nations. In this case the culture is seen as a response to human needs (Syed Ismail, 2010:5). M. Sanger reveals views of Andreas Eppink which defines culture as a whole social values, social norms, knowledge, social structure, religion, intellectual and aesthetic values of that punctuate the communities (2011:14).

John Storey anthropologist explains Raymond Williams ideas on culture that offers three definitions of culture (1993: 2);

- i. Culture can be used to focus thoughts on a general process of intellectual development, spiritual and aesthetic values.
- ii. Culture is seen as a particular view of life from the society for a long time or batch.
- iii. Culture refers to the work practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.

The cultural learning process occurs through symbols which mean that symbols are important elements in the culture. Culture is learned and transmitted information from individual to individual from generation to generation through meaningful symbols. Almost all aspects of the culture known as the symbol moved from the older members of any community to new members. In this case the language is the most key symbols in the culture (HM. Johnson, 1960: 91-92). Without language human cannot be emitted or receive information symbolically and thus cannot be enriched or varied the culture.

As for K. Dennick-Brecht also, cultural accounted for the mindset that encompasses beliefs, value systems, knowledge, morality, language, art, law and behavior patterns which in turn refers to the customs, habits and fashions (2000: 38). Clifford Geertz noted that culture is also in the nature of interpretation. For Geertz, culture is also guiding the society to face the problems in life (1972: 24).

Based on the definitions of Western scholars, it can be concluded that cultural characteristics can be defined as follows:

- i. Culture is a complex union.
- ii. Culture is the way of life of a particular community that includes ways of thinking and patterns of behavior.
- iii. Culture is something that is learned and shared together.
- iv. Culture is inherited information. Language is an important symbol in the culture.

Thus, it is clear that the definition of culture by western scholars give a clear picture of the relationship between culture and thought of the community towards culture. However the views and opinions of local scholars and Tamil need to be analyzed before an overall conclusion can be made about the concept of culture.

The Concept Of Culture by Malay Scholars

The Malay scholars which refer to scholars from Malaysia and particularly from Malay field of research. According to them, culture is defined as the matters related to the sense and reason. The term *budaya* in Malay Language means culture, made up by two words, *budi* + *daya*. The term *budi* means, genuine and considered perfectly while *daya* was intended to be a reason, the way ideas and inventions (Rohana Yusof, 1966: 75). The word also connotes absolute fitness of a human mind and reason in order to address a problem and seek a solution to the problem. The word refers to the strength of its energy and power that is used to help generate thoughts to deal with a problem. If the solution is taken from the result of thought accepted by all members of society, it is becoming common practice and serves as a culture of life (Syed Ismail, 2010: 1-2).

In this case, many Malay scholars provide views on the definition of culture. Among them are Rohana Yusof, a Malay scholar in sociology who sees culture as the way of human life in the form of material and non-material. This contains all the material culture in the form of man-made objects and non-material covers the abstract human creations such as beliefs, customs, taboos and so on (2010: 77). He also concluded that the views of sociologists that culture even if it differs from one society to another, but it has the following features:

- i. **Changes**
Cultural change is a process in which portions of the cultural aspects of the experience modification from time to time and according to circumstances.
- ii. **Learned**
This means that all forms of behavior, customs, an example followed by individual communities are not from instinct, but each one has learned from the learning process.
- iii. **Shared**
Every culture is shared by a group of people. For example, language is a system of symbols used by members of the community to interact with each other.
- iv. **Having Integrative Value**
Generally, every nation is integrated by a common culture. For example, in a kind of favorite food is the culture in which these foods bring the community together.

Ismail Said in his study titled *Pengajian Sosial 2*, also agreed with Rohana Yusof, explaining that, culture is the order of the learned behavior that is shared within the community. She refers to culture as a partnership between the individual elements and shaping it into a cultural group and cultural divides into several components (2009: 63-64) such as:

i. Cognitive Component

Culture in the form of cognitive is an overall thinking in a community. Key elements include cognitive culture are symbols, language, and values; including knowledge and belief.

ii. Normative Component

Culture is an element in the form of normative social norms. Every culture contains rules that regulate the conduct of every member of society life situations. Social norms are standards of behavior that are shared by members of the community and are expected to comply.

iii. Materialistic Component

Material culture is in the form of concrete objects and physical objects such as shelter, things, including technology and how to use and present the idea in a concrete well as books and writing.

Aziz Deraman who produces research titled *Society and Culture: An Analysis of Cultural Development in Malaysia*, explaining culture as a way of life resulting from the accumulation of ideas, feelings, abstract values and artifacts bequeathed. This sense can be seen in his statement as follows:

“Culture is a way of life that is covering the whole way of life of a community in the collection of ideas and feelings, beliefs, symbols, values, and social forms and material objects object passed down from generation to generation”. (1974:7)

Aziz Deraman had emphasized on certain aspects of culture. Among them is that the system of ideas, feelings groups, community values and beliefs, symbols and material object creation certain people, other cultures relate to the concept of community heritage. According to Aziz Deraman, culture are all things that thought, made and owned as a community that covers the entire way of life (2003:2).

Abdul Latif Abu Bakar was divided into two forms of culture materialistic culture and non-materialistic culture. Materialistic culture includes equipment life (clothing, housing, household equipment, weapons, transportation, communication devices, musical instruments and so on). Non materialistic culture includes philosophy (aesthetics, ethics, logic, metaphysics, or premonition, general epistemology of legal history, etc.), Arts (art, music, dance, drama, theater and literature), customs (that connects with the culture conditions such as morality, the norms of society, ceremonies and rituals), language (including written and oral), beliefs (including ideology), technology, the economy, politics and education and so on. Besides that, the key element in the culture is change.

"The change is a process of modification of parts or aspects of culture that occurs from time to time. Slowest changes cultural called 'static' while the rapidly changing cultural called 'dynamics' " (Ting Chew Peh, 1997: 28)

Based on the definition of culture by Malay scholars, it can be concluded cultural characteristics as follows:

- i. Culture stressed the refinement and perfection in morality.
- ii. Culture is the way of life of a community that covers all the daily activities.
- iii. Culture is as a way of life in the form of material and non-material.
- iv. Culture is in a form of social unity at a time.
- v. Culture is said to be social heritage.

The Concept of Culture by Tamil Scholars

Tamil scholars are also having the dilemma in their efforts to provide an explanation about the culture. This is because the term culture known as '*panpadu*' in Tamil is not found in classical Tamil literature (A.K. Parantamanar, 2009: 169). The term '*panpadu*' introduced by D.K. Sitamparanar that relate to the activities of agriculture (A. Thacinamoorthy, 2005: 4). As how plowed land is always considered to be suitable for cultivation; the matured human being is also considered as a cultured man. Those who practice cultural values might have good character because of healthy mindset (S. Sambasivanar, 2007: 143). In this case only the term culture is closely related to human society and thus distinguishes humans with other livings (C. Baktavatsala Barati, 1990: 156).

Vaithiyalingam explain the term '*panpadu*' comes from the root word '*panpu*' which means nature, standard, natural, behavioral, beautiful, norms, goodness or color. He divides the concept of culture to the internal culture and external culture. Internal culture refers to love, honor, tradition, truth and so while the external culture consists of aspects of food, clothing, home and so on (1996: 1). This view is supported by S. Sambasivanar that the term '*panpadu*' associate with '*panpadutlital*' of making something better (2007: 143). This culture reflects the way of life that can be seen through the feelings, thoughts and mentality that are passed on from generation to generation (J. Arangka Samy, 2007: 1).

A.K. Parantamanar also explains the concept of culture based on '*panpadu*' term meaning repent, become more mature and better. This means someone who has a culture going through a good life. This occurs because the community is able to analyze and practice just the nature and character of possession as a result of thinking (2009 : 169-178). Community is continually improving itself in every way of the worldly and spiritual matters in order to have a highly regarded culture to lead a good lifestyle (K. Velusamy , 1987 : 58). G. R. Damodaran, reveal the interesting relationship between the term '*panpadu*' with the term '*culture*'. He stated that, 'it's interesting to note that's the word '*panpatu*' in Tamil and word '*culture*' in English imply the idea of cultivation. He felt that marked the culture as a development of body, mind and spirit in a balanced way (1980 : 69-76).

Thachinamoorthy in his study titled *Thamilar Nakarikannum Panpatum* uncover view of T.P. Meenachi Sundram. He defines culture as an important platform to get through a good lifestyle and ingesting tools, customs, belief systems, and religion become part of the cultural system. According to him, the culture of a nation can be reflected in the results of literature, language, art, life goals, political affiliation, status of women, educational institutions, etc. (A. Thachinamoorthy 2005:6). He divides human development to internal growth and external expansion. Human nature associated with internal development and progress as the creation associated with the development of external equipment. In short, he defines culture as a discipline, values, character, and a healthy way of life (2005:1).

Barati C. Baktavatsala defines culture as a form of life, adapted to the improvement of the situation in terms of thoughts, cultures, disciplines, and in the evolution of life. According to him, cultural terms can include the range and scope of such an area of a country, language and race a group of people, the size of an area, and the type of tribe (1990: 162-164). Such division explained that culture is a concept that can be divided by all. He added that the concept of culture is not simply includes literature, poetry, dance, music, religious, cultural and employment but should play a role as a complex human behavior control. Although the concept of culture is based on of a society, but it also can be reflected by the behavior of an individual (2011:18).

N. Deveneyan linking culture with a human heart and cultural view that greater mature form of life and function as a compiler or a form of life which has improved life. According to him the word 'culture' refers to the culture of the land and culture of the soul. Land plowed and repaired will be fertile ground and improved soul will be a mature soul (2000: 5). S. N. Kanthasamy also defines culture as an improved life by instilling moral values such as self-discipline, rules and good conduct on the senses and the soul (1997: 3).

Another Tamil scholar P. Kothandataman explains the concept of culture through his study titled *Aspect of the Tamil Culture*. He explained that the existence of culture is closely related to human existence. He added that if the human community uses the language diversity, the culture will also show diversity. However, culture is fundamental to the formation of the social life of the community. P. Kothandataman considers the culture earliest form of worship and religious way regarded as fundamental to the formation of cultural capital. He concluded that the culture having a higher level of cover habits, customs and manners. Therefore a systematic study of the culture should include daily lifestyle, customs, food habits, dress, beliefs, practice rituals, language and literature (1997: 12).

Based on the definition of Tamil scholars, cultural characteristics can be summarized as follows:

- i. Culture is an improved form of life spiritually and tailored to specific circumstances.
- ii. Culture is the internal developments related to heart and humanitarian qualities.
- iii. Culture is the soul of maturity comes with a range of values while understanding the character of its surrounding community.
- iv. Culture is something that is passed down from generation to generation down.

- V. Cultural shows the differences in terms of time, the National nationhood and national races.

Conclusion

Although culture is inherited, but it is continuously experiencing healthy changes and modifications. This is because culture is the essence of civilized human life (G. R. Damodaran, 1980: 75). According to Western, Malay and Tamil scholars view on culture, it can be concluded that culture refers to a way of life, including thoughts, views and value beliefs, and habits of a person in the face of a situation. Culture is the right form of society that will determine their behavior based on the shape of their thinking. As culture plays a big role in the development of a country it need be studied at all time.

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