

Klong yao and the Performance of Minority Identity in the Siamese Community of Perlis, Malaysia

Chayuti Tassanawongwara¹ & Hanafi Hussin²

^{1,2}Department of Southeast Asian Studies

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences &

²Institute of Ocean and Earth Sciences (IOES)

University of Malaya

e-mail: thought_badman@hotmail.com, hanafih@um.edu.my

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Abstract

The *klong yao* performance in the Siamese communities of Perlis was adopted from the Thai community in Central Thailand. Before this adoption, the ethnic consciousness of the Siamese communities was oriented towards a local variation of Thai-ness with similarities to southern Thai people in terms of linguistic and geopolitical references. After the *klong yao* was actively included in their cultural practices, the Siamese communities began to develop a representative identity that reinforced Central Thai cultural expressions. In this respect, the performance of *klong yao* reconstructs the identity of the Siamese communities in Perlis, Malaysia toward a Central Thai identity. The shift from a local and marginalised type of Siamese identity to a hegemonic and centralised Thai identity is observed with the choice to use *klong yao* as a representation of their identity during Malaysia's various occasions for showcasing cultural performances.

Keywords: identity, *klong yao*, performativity, representation, Siamese

Introduction

This article argues that the Siamese in Perlis, Malaysia selectively construct and represent their identity through the Central Thai *klong yao* performance genre. The cultural performance of *klong yao* in their communities constitutes an identity construction of 'Thai-ness' through their collective experience of performing,