

## TEPAK SIRIH: INTERPRETATION AND PERCEPTION IN MALAY WEDDING CUSTOMS

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### Abstract

The ingredients of a betel chew are usually kept in a special box or bowl used exclusively for betel chewing. *Tepak sirih* reflects the life and value of the Malay community especially on traditional customs and codes of conduct. It is obvious that *Tepak sirih* plays an important role in the everyday life of the Malays. However, as time passes, the importance of *Tepak sirih* is now only confined to ceremonial and traditional events and activities. Only decorated and embroidered *Tepak sirih* are used in ceremonies such as visit and observe (*adat merisik*), proposal (*adat meminang*) and engagement (*adat bertunang*). This study identifies and examines the role of *Tepak sirih* as a nonverbal communication in the marriage customs of the Malay community. This study was conducted at Kampung Seri Kedah, Sungai Leman, Sekinchan Selangor. The finding has shown that *Tepak sirih* used in a Malay wedding is seen as a symbol of opening of a conversation, symbol of asking, symbol of accepting, symbol of rejecting, and symbol of unity. *Tepak sirih* is placed in front of other items used in a wedding. In a Malay wedding, only *Tepak sirih bertekad* which is made from wood and embroidered is used. The interior of the *Tepak sirih* holds small globular covered boxes (*cembul*), a little cylindrical container for sliced areca nut, lime, gambier and cloves. All the *cembul* then must be placed according to the Malay customs. Furthermore, the Malay community believe that something bad may occur if the customs are not followed. In addition, arranging *cembul* in *tepak* is seen as a sign to educate the Malay community about the importance of following rules. During engagement (*adat bertunang*) *tepak sirih* plays is seen as a symbol of acceptance to live together and also promises. Engagement is a tie of promise of a man and a woman before they get married (*akad nikah*).

**Keywords:** *Tepak sirih*, customs, nonverbal communication.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Malay betel sets in come in three main forms. The first form is a round or polygonal open box known as *puan sirih* (Sheppard, 1972). According to Brownrigg (1992:39) *puan sirih* is related to the Thai *paan* or pedestral tray. The second form, possibly of Sumatran origin Brownrigg (1992:39), takes the form of a rectangular lidded box tapering inwards towards the tops. Sheppard (1972) found in his research that in Malay customs, rectangular style of Malay betel sets is known as *tepak sirih*. This type of betel set which is covered with gold embroidered red velvet (*tepak sirih bertekad*) is used in Malay wedding customs or ceremonies such as proposal (*meminang*), engagement and sitting-in-stage (*bersanding*). Another style of Malay betel set is an open either round or oval tray (*cerana*) tapering outwards towards the top and resting on small feet (Winstedt, 1969). However, the most common form is an open rectangular tray (*tempat sirih*) tapering outwards towards the top and resting on small feet (Brownrigg, 1992:39). The *tempat sirih* may be of silver, brass, wood, laquer or even tortoiseshell, and is around 25 cm long, 12.5 cm wide and 6 to 12 cm high. The interior partition creates a rectangular space for the betel cutter (*kacip*) and an L-shape for four silver or other metal receptacles containing the ingredients. Underneath the tray there is a drawer for the betel leaf. The *tempat sirih* is the first betel set among those described to have a betel cutter as an integral part.

A betel set is used to store the ingredients of a betel chew consist of a dark green fleshy betel leaf, lime, thin shaving of areca nut (known as *pinang* in Malay; scientific name is *Areca Catechu*; the areca nut palm), gambier (Scientific name is *Uncaria gambier*; decoction from the leaves of the gambier tree), clove and tobacco. A betel quid (*sepiak sirih*) consists of a dark green leaf, down the centre of which a very thin layer of slaked lime is spread with the forefinger. A thin shaving of areca nut and a fragment of gambier are placed together on the lime, and the leaf is folded inwards, first two sides, then the base and finally the pointed tip. This neat little packet is placed in the mouth and chewed slowly, and before long the saliva turns orange red

(the saliva turns orange red after the slaked lime has come in contact with the gambier). Tobacco does not form part of a betel quid, but some shreds may be rolled into a little ball and slipped under the upper lip to provide a change of flavour in the mouth, after a betel chew has been swallowed.

*Tepak sirih bertekad* which is used in Malay wedding customs is a rectangular lidded box, about 25 cm long, 12.5 cm wide at the base, but a little narrower at the top, and about 6 cm high. These boxes have a metal tray which can be removed so that the rice can be stored under it. The tray is divided into five compartments: four of these are on one side of the tray and are occupied by small round boxes (chembul or cembul in Malay), 5 cm high. A nut slicer or betel cutter (*kacip* in Malay) and a few betel leaves occupy the other half of tray. The nut slicer looks like an ornate pair of nail scissors and often has handles shape like a mythical winged horse (*Kuda Semberani: Pengasus*). Three of the small boxes are spherical, standing on a rimmed base, and have rounded lids: the fourth box is cylindrical with a flat top and is a little shorter than the others. The first round box usually contains thin slices of areca nut; the second contains lime paste, the third gambier and the fourth shredded tobacco. Jasmanie (1956) defines *tepak sirih* as a special container, which has a partition made from gold, brass or wood carving to kept betel leave and the ingredients of betel chew. The materials used ranged from gold or silver to white metal, brass, fine grained wood or woven fibre.

In Malaysia, the tradition of chewing betel leaf may have begun before any foreign influences. The fact that betel leaf chewing became a popular leisure time pursuit during the glory days of the Malacca Sultanate clearly illustrates the fact that this diverse practise was a home grown activity. The Malay Annals describes an incident where a duel between Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat was halted mid-fight for the two opponents to recover from exhaustion. Hang Tuah chewed on a betel leaf bundle from Sultan Mahmud's betel box before he was ready to continue. As was with Jebat when he was severely wounded after being stabbed by Tuah, he asked for betel leaf and lime to eat.

“...at this request, the Admiral of the Fleet (*Laksamana*) prepared a betel leaf bundle for the wounded Hang Jebat who waggerly accepted this and chewed on it. Having finished eating the betel leaf, Hang Jebat asked for the bandages over his wounds to be loosened....” (Kassim Ahmad, 2008:367-368)

The tradition of betel, whether for consumption or its many other applications is an ancient cultural legacy, has been around in this region for what is assumed to be over 3000 years. It is used by all levels of society. It is very likely that eating betel originated from a remote Malay island of Indonesia and then spread to the rest of the Malay Archipelago before moving on to other continents through trade and commerce. This is based on a theory proposed by Mubin Sheppard (former Keeper of Public Records and Director of the National Museum) in his book 'Taman Indera: Royal Pleasure Ground. (1972:164). He says that Malay traders introduced the practice of chewing betel leaf to Indian, Arab and Filipino traders over a thousand years ago.

### 1.1 Rationale of study

This research was carried out in order to analyse the interpretation and perception of *tepak sirih* in Malay wedding customs. The researcher believes that this research will enable the community to realize the need for more research and local studies of Malay culture. Until now, no complete research material has been documented regarding the interpretation and perception towards *tepak sirih* in Malay wedding customs. There are literature revisions only in short articles and a few working papers which are too simple and considered as insignificant research. Lack on research portrays that Malay society itself is unconscious of their very own culture and a tradition which has been established since a long time ago.

### 1.2 Significance of study

*Tepak sirih* has a lot of significance to Malay community such as a symbol of social communication, friendship and accompanying gift in marriage ceremony. *Tepak sirih* reflects Malay life as a whole and the value placed by the Malay community upon traditional customs (*adat*) and codes of conduct, the offering of *tepak sirih* indicates the strong value placed upon the need to have respects for others and upon refined behaviour. The offering as well as the acceptance of *tepak sirih* has had a tremendous significance for both the giver and receiver while at the same time much of the time spent by the owner in the application of beauty and intricacy into the making of the whole *tepak sirih* to be presentable. Hence, it is clearly noted that each of the elements that goes into the making of *tepak sirih* has its own symbolic value.

The *tepak sirih* has traditionally found a place in almost every ceremonial institution of the Malays as well as social gatherings. It is obvious that *tepak sirih* plays an important role in the everyday life of the Malays. But as time passes, the importance of *tepak sirih* has been confined to ceremonial and traditional events and

activities. Even the *sirih* plants is quite rare and seldom seen growing in Malay compound and in modern Malay homes.

### 1.3 Problem statement

*Tepak sirih* have been used since 1000 years ago. Sheppard (1972) in his research during Malay wedding customs found *tepak sirih* has been used during engagement (*adat meminang*) and first night of wedding (*malam pertama*). In his work Sheppard explains the use of *tepak sirih* as a symbol to express the meaning behind the customs performer in both of these events (*meminang* and *malam pertama*). These symbol can be found during the entire ceremony is conducted. Furthermore Syed Alwi Alhady (1962 & 1986) and Amran Kasimin (2002) state that *tepak sirih* is placed in front of any other items during Malay weddings. They call *tepak sirih* as a *kepala adat*. The ceremony will not take place until the *tepak sirih* is ready. The Malay community believe that if the ceremony does not carry out *tepak sirih*, the people do not know the custom and they call this type of people as a *tidak tahu adat* (people who do not follow rules)

This study need to figure out why *tepak sirih* is so important and is part and parcel of the Malay wedding custom. The Malay community call people who do not bring the *tepak sirih* during the ceremony as *orang tidak tahu adat*. It could be a hidden meaning that the Malay community has a special bond with *tepak sirih*. So this study tried to gather as many information from custom experts such as *mak andam* (make-up person), custom performer and people from the older generation. The most important part is what exactly is the role of *tepak sirih* that it is so important in Malay weddings especially in engagement.

### 1.4 Research Objective

This study is to analyse an interpretation and perceptions of *tepak sirih* in the Malay wedding customs.

### 1.5 Research Methodology

Analysis from past literature was used to get the data. In this case secondary data are used as references and to retrieve information about the topic. This type of data includes previous studies, press releases, websites, magazine, published journals, handbooks and other related published materials.

Primary data such as in depth semi-structured interview, direct and personal interview were carried out in which respondents were probed to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, and attitude and personal feelings on the topic. The researcher had an opportunity to interview Mak Piah, 80 years old lady as a *Mak Andam* (make up person, customs practitioner), Arpah Abdul Manap, 60 years old and Haji Mat Zain, head village of Kampung Seri Kedah. The researcher also involved in a few wedding ceremonies which including an engagement custom to do an observation. The research was conducted on July and December 2012 at Kampung Seri Kedah, Sungai Leman, Sekinchan Selangor Malaysia. The village consisted of 400 hundreds people. Interviews were conducted during the ceremony and were recorded and transcribed. Thematic technique was used to gather the information.

### 1.6 Literature Review

Embroidered *tepak sirih* are used in to ask permission (*merisik*) and engagement Malay customs. Betel leaves and ingredients of betel chew such as areca nut, lime, clove, gambier and tobacco will arrange accordingly in a little cylindrical container called *cembul*. Sheppard (1972) in his worked found that the word for 'to ask in marriage' is *meminang* derived from *pinang* – areca nut. Sheppard (1972) analysis was similar with A. Samad Ahmad (1996) which stated in Malay Annals (*Sejarah Melayu*) – areca nut represented a man which is strong and braves same like areca nut tree, straight and tall. Furthermore A. Samad Said (1996) explained that King of Cham adopted son named Pau Gelang derived from bunch of areca nut leaf (*mayang pinang*). Pau Gelang was crowned as a new King of Champa after His majesty died. His Majesty Pau Gelang was very heroic king.

*Tepak sirih* to be carried out to the house of the girl's family together with the engagement ring and other gifts in the engagement ceremony. Throwback 'to ask permission' (*merisik*) was take part if a girl and man never knowing each other before. The ring may be placed in a separate receptacle or in a decorated betel bowl or tray, resting on a fan of betel leaves. Sheppard (1972) stated that *tepak sirih* also was placed next to *Qadi* in *akad nikah* (wedding vow) ceremony. Unfortunately Sheppard does not explain the function of *tepak sirih* to be placed next to *Qadi*. *Tepak sirih* also play an important role in a sitting-on-stage ceremony.

According to Sheppard (1972) *tepak sirih* is placed in front (centre) of the bride and groom. Usually *tepak sirih* from silver will be placed at the dais. It is no reason was stated by Sheppard (1972) why *tepak sirih* must be place or to be use in sitting-on-stage ceremony. Sheppard (1972)also explained in his research

*tepak sirih* was placed outside the bride and groom room (in the middle of the door of the room) on the first night. *Tepak sirih* is a medium in Malays culture as a communication tool to inform the virginity of the bride. If that first night the groom found that his wife is not virgin, he will turn the *tepak sirih* upside down in the next morning. All the action will take place instead of verbal communication. In Malay culture, they found that sometimes, actions can speak clearly rather than verbal communication (words).

### 1.7 Concept and Theoretical framework: marriage, customs, nonverbal communication

Marriage is important in the formation of the family which later formed a society in a village, district, State and country. In Islam, marriage is common and occurs *sunnatullah* in all Allah swt creation, whether in humans, animals and plants. It is a manner chosen by Allah swt as a way for His creation to flourish and happy their life.

Linton (1976:173), a member of the Western sociology define marriage as:

*"...marriage is Adat Perkahwinan socially recognized union between persons of opposite sex. Marriage and family are really distinct institutions and must be considered separately"*.

Linton in the above statement that marriage is consolidation between two people of the opposite sex. Based on marriage will create a relationship according to the rules of the spouses or physical bonding, the moral law between a man and a woman to the Latin perfect life that eventually formed a family. Marriage is a legal or a process known as custom in the Malay community. As Word of Allah in surah Al-Baqarah verse 187, which means "they (his wife) that the clothes you (husband) and you dress them.

According to Tamar Djaja (1980:49), marriage for men is one aspect of life which is to get a descent is good, to find peace and order, to release the desire to orgasm, to build and develop the world.

Marriage customs functions as a guide to behaviour in performing wedding ceremonies. The first criterion is priority to the religion. This is measured through their *akidah* and how they practise Islam. Do they keep the *solat*, their attitude, etc. This is based on this Hadith:

*"Apabila orang yang kamu redha agama dan akhlaknya datang meminang, hendaklah kamu kahwinkannya. Sekiranya kamu tidak melakukannya nescaya akan timbul fitnah dan kerosakan di atas muka bumi."* (Hadis Riwayat at-Tirmizi dalam kitab nikah, (no. 1080) daripada Abu Hatim al-Munzi)

The first marriage on this earth among men are between Adam a.s together – as recognised by the religions of revelation. This marriage occurred with a contact way allowed by Allah to both of them. It is a system of marriage that is compulsory for human to have their heirloom to become Caliph in this world as a temporary basis. As the word of Allah in the Surah Al-Baqarah verse 36: But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been. And We said, "Go down, [all of you], as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time."

Marriage customs functions as a guide to behave in performing wedding ceremonies. The first criterion is priority to their religion. Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) recommended Muslims to select those partners who are prioritise religion (Deen) and have good characters.

*"A woman may be married for four reasons: for her property, for her rank, for her beauty, and for her religion (and character), so marry the one who is best in the religion and character and prosper."* (Bukhari and Muslim). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) assured the bounty of Allah to those who wish to get married and live a pure and clean life. *"Three groups of people Allah obliged Himself to help them: Mujahid in the cause of Allah, a worker to pay his debt, and the one who wants to marry to live a chaste life."* (Tirmidhi).

Therefore, it is apparent to us that marriage is a natural habit as a necessity in the lives of humans and other creatures in the world. However every marriage has rules, laws and customs of its own. Thus, the Malay community makes marriage as a family bonding in the world and hereafter. The bond of the family is based on marriage done according to Islamic law and custom of the Malay community. Islamic law and customs are the main basis in shaping the Malay wedding. The process of the wedding must follow customary rules from the beginning until the end. Regulations set communication in the Malay community which are used during the process of the wedding. Each item involves custom made by order, from the beginning until the end, as in a Malay poem, *"Berbilang dari Esa, mengaji dari alif"*. The Malay community use poem to convey in their oral communication. The expressions used are sorted nicely including conveying meaning which is unpleasant to the listener. The Malay community uses these things in their daily lives, namely verbal communication and nonverbal communication to strengthen information delivery. For example

if the father-in-law wants to give advice to the son-in-law, the advice will be passed on to the children through phrases such as "scarcism as a gift". Nonverbal communication is important in the wedding process.

Non-verbal communication is the intercession of the emblems or symbols such as betel, kris, food, music, scent. Furthermore verbal and nonverbal communication is part the communication process. Knapp (2006) defines communication "as encompassing almost all of human communication except the spoken or written word". *Tepak sirih* is an object of verbal and nonverbal communication. Without either verbal or nonverbal communication in wedding customs, the interpretation and perception of *tepak sirih* do not have a meaning. As stated by Matsumoto, G.Frank, & Hyi Sung Hwang (2011) nonverbal communication have three function ie define, regulate and be the message. Malay community use a lots of symbols as a part of nonverbal communication in their wedding customs. Unfortunately this research only covered the interpretation and perception of *tepak sirih* in Malay wedding customs.

In broaden concepts customs, it can be defined as encompassing way of life and culture in social, economic, political and religious beliefs. Custom is a rule traditional society stands in the revision of their lives. Customs does not have a document to follow. Tradition is something you learn from the previous generations in the community. It is provided through experience and individual in the community without much objection or inquiry. Many researchers earlier have given the definitions or meanings of the custom that can be concluded as a lifestyle that has become a norm. He and Josselin de Jong classify custom to six parts which are: (a) *Ancient custom*, (b) *Created Custom*, (c) *Inherited Lore*, (d) *Decisions of common accord*, (e) *Ancient law* that awaits ratification (f) *Decisions to be reached by later deliberation* (Hooker, 1970:3).

This concept is not limited to Muslim Malays only. According to Zainal Kling (2004), there have a broaden and in depth concept of custom which is recognised during the reign of the Netherlands in Indonesian. In addition, according to Hornby and Parnwell (1972), tradition is also the conduct and behavior that is accepted by a society. In addtion (Wan Abdul Kadir Wan Yusoff, 2000:68), tradition is a social rule that contains a code of ethics and morality based on social values. The view is then explained by (Noriati A.Rashid (2007:22) which discloses that the conduct of the community should meet the custom that has been found in the community practice. If the situation is not the case then the individual contrary views and opinions about all custom will be eliminated in a custom. Obviously a custom that is a custom that has obtained the consent of the whole society in the community.

Therefore, the concept of custom includes the whole way of life or culture of humans in nature real and also links human and cosmic environment symbolically and universally. Customs be human life, not only within the realm of norm, but it encompasses all beings such as animals and plants, as well as custom features are available in the natural environment such as the creation of movement natural, storm and lightning as well as everything in the Cosmos. It can be said that natural law are custom.

In a broader concept, communication occurs when the meaning or message conveyed through various ways and forms. This means that communication is not just explicit symbols but also embedded aspects, such as behavior, signs or symbols that carry meaning and meaning of these meaning have to be thoroughly interpreted. In this regard, communications categorized into two, which are verbal and nonverbal communication.

Furthermore Barker &Gaut (2001) define human communication as biologically and culturally based, complex, continuing, and interactive process in which two or more people us verbal and nonverbal symbols to shape, reinforce, or change one another's behaviours, either immediately or over time, for the purpose of satisfying their respective needs and, in turn, ensuring the survival of both the species and the individuals. This definition has been redefined from previous version which was developed by Barker (1984).

Knapp & Hall (2002) define communication generally has having both a verbal and nonverbal component. Whereas verbal communication often refers to the words we use in communication, nonverbal communication refers to communication that is produced by some means other than words (eye contact, body language, or vocal cues, for example). In which Argyle (1998) state that nonverbal behaviours have five primary functions : expression of emotion which is emotions are expresses mainly through the face, body, and voice; communication of Interpersonal attitudes that is the establishment and maintenance of relationships if often done through nonverbal signals (tone of voice, gaze, etc); accompany and support speech which is vocalization and nonverbal behaviours are synchronized with speech in conversation (nodding one's head or using phrases like "uh-huh" when another is talking; self-presentation which is presenting oneself to another through nonverbal attributes like appearance and rituals which is the use of greetings, handshakes or other rituals.

But then Seiler, Beall, & Mazer (2013) define nonverbal communication as all conduct, acts, or properties of an object (except word) which have messages with social meanings. This means that nonverbal communication involves all forms of conduct, objects, properties, message or symbol, part of words or the use of languages, either in the form of speech or writing. Nonverbal communication can be divided into several categories: communication involves the facial expression, gesture, body movement, *lirikan* points, physical properties, haptics, olfactics, proxemics and territoriality and artefacts.

To analyse the role of *tepak sirih* as a nonverbal communication in Malay engagement, the semiotic theory is applied. Semiotic in communication theory is a branch of linguistic and culture where both review about signs and symbol (including human being talk, write, sing, smell, body gestures, images, music, art and so on) in which human express feelings, thoughts, ideas and ideologies. It includes the study of how meaning is translated through a system of signs and symbols exist and understood during perception and interpretation of the situation that occurred. Semiotic analysis focuses on cultural and psychological patterns that underlie languages, arts and other cultural expressions that are used as tools for representing and interpreting a phenomenon. Among famous semioticians are Ferdinand de Saussure, 1857-1913 (the father of modern linguistics), Charles Sanders Peirce, 1839-1914 (the founder of the doctrine of pragmatism doctrine) and Ronald Barthers, 1915 -1980. There is an overlap between semiotics and communication, because both disciplines share many similar concepts such as sign, symbol, meaning, process of decoding, perception and interpretation, although the emphasis are different. Semiotic study is also used in a broad range of disciplines, including linguistic, art literature, anthropology, and sociology other than communication.

## 2 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

*Tepak sirih* bertekad which is covered with gold embroidered red velvet is still used in wedding customs. The type of *tepak sirih* is still the same as what Sheppard (1972) mentions. It can be said that the Malay community in the area of the research still preserves and practices the customs that they have been taught since 1000 years ago. These research findings are similar to previous research such as Sheppard (1972).

Furthermore the meaning of using *tepak sirih* in wedding customs such as in proposal (*meminang*) and engagement ceremonies is still the same which is to start a conversation, to ask permission, to agree, to inform and to unite. As to inform for instance *tepak sirih* symbolises a formality of relationship between a man and a woman their marriage.

Engagement customs in Malay community in Kampung Seri Kedah, Sungai Leman, Sekinchan, Selangor were slightly similar to the engagement customs of the Malay community in other parts of Malaysia. They used nonverbal communication to inform the public that the couple was ready to get married according to the custom and soon would get married. The ceremony started with both parties (male and female representatives) taking their sit, placing *tepak sirih* in front of them (center), addressing a *salam* and reciting some verses to start a conversation. Representatives from the male's side brought a few items as gifts to accompany the *tepak sirih* and a ring for the engagement ceremony. Exchanging gifts from two side (male and female) was conducted after the representative of both party were satisfied with the discussion. The discussion during engagement ceremony was related to dowry, date of wedding ceremony, date and time of wedding ceremony and also the *mahar* (in Islam this is a compulsory gift from bride to groom).

Implicitly engagement customs symbolize that man and woman would become husband and wife within the period of time that was agreed in a ceremony. The engagement ceremony also informed the community that during that period of time they would have a wedding ceremony. This ceremony also informed the public that the man and woman were officially having a serious relationship. The ceremony also showed that Malay community accomplished things together and helped each other in their community. Rectangular shape of *tepak sirih* were used in the ceremony. Only *tepak sirih* covered with gold embroidered velvet during the ceremony. The ingredients of *tepak sirih* had to be place accordingly as figure 1 (below). The arrangement of the ingredients in *tepak sirih* symbolized the rules in the Malay community. Furthermore *tepak sirih* with the cembul symbolised a house in the engagement customs.

Fig. 1 : The sequence of cembul in *tepak sirih*

|      |           |  |      |              |         |  |         |      |
|------|-----------|--|------|--------------|---------|--|---------|------|
|      | 1         |  | 2    |              | 3       |  | 4       |      |
|      | Areca nut |  | lime |              | gambier |  | tobacco |      |
| Head |           |  |      |              |         |  |         | Tail |
|      |           |  |      | 6 Betel leaf |         |  |         |      |
|      | 5         |  |      |              |         |  | 7       |      |
|      | clove     |  |      |              |         |  | cutter  |      |

Source: Fieldwork, 2012, Kg Seri Kedah, Sg. Leman Sekinchan, Selangor

The contain of cembul in the tepak was areca nut, lime, gambier, tobacco, clove and betel leaves. All these must be put in correctly. These is the rule that customs practioner need to follow as in Malay proverbs say mengaji dari alif (learn from beginning). This also shows the uniqueness of the Malay community. Everything they do must follow the rules and regulations. *Tepak sirih* in engagement customs in Malay community played an important role to start a conversation, to agree, to accept or to reject as well as a symbol of nonverbal communication.

Although as time passes and the Malay community in the research area has been exposed to other popular culture, they remain *tepak sirih* as the most valuable item in the Malay wedding customs. This shows that Malays still believe and practice their customs according to what they have been taught from their grandmother or father.

### 3. CONCLUSION

*Tepak sirih* is still an important item in the engagement custom in the Malay communities until today. At this stage, is to get a certain answer whether the 'request' by the man is received by the woman. Communication (verbal and nonverbal) using *tepak sirih* as symbols is very harmony and done in order. This study has shown that each culture created by the society actually shows the harmonious nature of the people who created it.

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