

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.